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A History of West Coconut Grove from 1925: Slum Clearance, Concrete Monsters, and the Dichotomy of East and West Coconut Grove,

Alex Plasencia

Clemson University, plasencia.alex@gmail.com

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Abstract

The Bahamian settlers who arrived during the early history of South Florida experienced a similar environment to that of their homeland. The climate, terrain, and the lifestyle were comparable to the Bahamas. What differed from their homeland was the opportunity to find work. Many of these early settlers made their way to Key West before eventually coming to Coconut Grove for work. Unlike in other parts of the United States, black and whites in Coconut Grove had what can be described as a cordial relationship. It was in no way perfect, but people in Coconut Grove, regardless of race, worked together to establish the first settlement in South Florida.

Blacks and whites attended church services together for a period of time, and there was no mandated segregation. That all began to change with the annexation of Coconut Grove to Miami. Miami was a rapidly growing city, and in order to continue expanding, city leaders felt they had to incorporate the surrounding communities. After annexation in 1925, Coconut Grove slowly began to change, which was the first of several events that created the dichotomy of rich and poor between East and West Coconut Grove that is still visible today. The relationship between blacks and whites slowly deteriorated, and progress in the West Grove ended. The dichotomy that still exists between East and West Coconut Grove is one of economics, progress, and resources.

There has been little academic research conducted on Coconut Grove as a community. Most information must be pieced together through newspaper clippings and interviews. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a history of West Coconut Grove and
examine why the struggle of the black community has persisted in this neighborhood.

The argument can be made that no singular event caused the West Grove’s problems, but rather several events throughout the history of the West Grove. Such events include the annexation of Coconut Grove in 1925; the building of the “concrete monsters”, what becomes slum housing along Grand Avenue; subsequent housing issues; the rise of the drug trade in South Florida; and the loss of George Washington Carver High School. West Coconut Grove’s history also sheds light on the relatively overlooked dichotomy between East and West Coconut Grove. Because of this division, West Coconut Grove has experienced nearly sixty years with little progress.
Acknowledgments

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Thanks to the University of Miami Special Collections, where I spent countless days researching. To Chad Tingle, your film reminded me of why I took the challenge of writing the history of West Coconut Grove. Thanks to Alyssa Milanes for going through the tedious process of proofreading my final draft. Jackie Milanes and Maria Plasencia went out of their way to put me in contact with influential members of Coconut Grove. I would also like to thank Mrs. Thelma Anderson Gibson for graciously giving her time to be interviewed. Finally, a special thanks to my thesis committee for taking time out of your busy schedules to help guide me through this process. Thank you to my advisor Dr. James Burns.
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Chapter One- A Tale of Two Groves: Historical Background & Annexation

Miami is a remarkably diverse city, boasting a steady flow of immigrants throughout its history, particularly from the Caribbean. Today, Miami is known more for the Latino and Haitian immigrants that have become an integral and vibrant part of the community, but historically, the first to arrive from the Caribbean were the Bahamians. Black Bahamians began arriving in South Florida in the 1870s. Most of the original settlers later became farmhands or employees at the Bay View House in Coconut Grove. The Bay View House, later known as the Peacock Inn, was the first hotel in South Florida and was established in 1882 by English immigrants Charles Peacock and his wife Isabella.¹

The Peacocks went to Key West in search of workers as they saw a steady increase in clientele. The first employee to come and work at the Bay View House was Mariah Brown, who was originally from Eleuthera. The inn continued to grow and more workers were needed. Mariah convinced her relatives and friends to join her in Coconut Grove.² Other Bahamian immigrants worked for Commodore Ralph Middleton Monroe who convinced the Peacocks to settle in the wilderness of Coconut Grove.³ Commodore Monroe, originally from Staten Island, frequently vacationed in Coconut Grove before making South Florida his permanent residence.

¹ Miami Walking Tour: Coconut Grove, Dr. Paul George.
The Bahamians came to Coconut Grove for work, as was evidenced by John Wright, a Bahamian immigrant, who wrote, “Miami was a young Magic City where money could be ‘shaken from trees.’ Home-returning pilgrims told exaggerated tales of their fame and fortune in the ‘promised land.’” Such an ideal stemmed from the difficult circumstances in the Bahamas where jobs were hard to come by and Bahamians earned meager wages.

Through all the hardships that came with immigrating to a new country, the Bahamian settlers were particularly adept at maintaining their culture, which was an integral part of their identity. In her essay on West Coconut Grove, local South Florida historian Arva Moore Parks commented on the impact of Bahamians in Coconut Grove by saying, “They worked the difficult, rocky land, planting vegetables and tropical fruits in the coral-pocked flatlands and building simple, cool dwellings on the mangrove shores.” Their identity included the familiar foods such as sabadillas and pineapples, which they knew how to grow on the difficult South Florida terrain because it resembled that of the Bahama Islands. Historian Henry J. Wagner wrote, “Some of the settlers raised a few vegetables, the water from the comty [a root used to make starch] making the ground very rich and one could raise more than you could use with very little effort.”

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6 Wagner, Henry J., “Early Pioneers of South Florida.” (digitalcollections.fiu.edu).
The introduction of Bahamian produce was one of the ways Bahamians taught white settlers to farm in South Florida.

As more immigrants arrived from the Bahamas, a larger settlement was needed for this growing population in the Coconut Grove area. The Joseph Frow homestead was the most logical location as it was near the Peacock Inn and the homes of the white settlers for whom the majority of Bahamian settlers worked.\(^7\) Author Carita Swanson Vonk wrote that, “The white folks lived on Main Highway and the ‘colored’ lived on Charles Avenue behind the Grove Playhouse, where the E.W.F. Stirrup house still stands today.”\(^8\) Later, these areas were nicknamed Colored Town and White Town. When asked if these names affected residents, lifelong West Coconut Grove resident and activist Thelma Gibson responded,

O, very much so. It was a time when....you might have heard the terminology “know your place.” So we sort of knew our place and our place was in West Coconut Grove in Colored Town. It wasn’t as vibrant as White Town. They had the main stores in White Town. We had mom and pop stores. We had Publix market on Grand Ave., which was a meat market pretty much. And there was a mom and pop store on the corner of Hibiscus and Charles. There was one on Grand Ave. and one on Douglas Road.\(^9\)

\(^7\) Day, Jane, “Early Settlers”. Essay about early West Coconut Grove settlers obtained in the archives of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.


Today this section of Coconut Grove set aside for the Bahamian settlers on Charles Avenue is known as West Coconut Grove, whereas the section on the other side of Main Highway is known as East Coconut Grove. Both areas of the Grove have always personified a dichotomy, which continues to this day. The dichotomy that persists is one of prosperity versus poverty, progress versus stagnation, and a preserved community versus one that struggles to preserves its identity.

Evangelist Street was the name given to the road cleared to build homes for the Bahamian workers, but it has since been changed to Charles Avenue. This single street became the center of business for the Bahamian settlers in Coconut Grove by the early 1900s. As the population grew, so did the number of businesses. Some of the earliest businesses opened up inside the homes of the owners. Ebenezer Woodbury Franklin Stirrup, Sr. became the most successful black businessman in Coconut Grove. Stirrup owned a grocery store, bicycle repair shop, tailor shop, meat market, and dry goods store.

Not only was Stirrup a successful business man, he was also responsible for building many of the first homes on Evangelist Street, including his own. Stirrup migrated from the Bahamas to South Florida in 1888. Upon his arrival, he found work as a carpenter’s apprentice in Key West, where many Bahamians arrived first before heading north to Biscayne Bay. Not only did Stirrup learn to become a carpenter, but he also later worked in a pineapple field in South Dade. Through his years of hard work and business savvy, Stirrup eventually became a millionaire, owning a variety of properties in Coconut

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10 See Appendix 1A.
Grove. Taking advantage of past experiences, he used his carpentry skills to build his own home in Coconut Grove. Stirrup built his house from local Dade County Pine, which has since become a “relic.” By all accounts, Stirrup “created an impressive, yet understated, residence for his family. Mr. Stirrup lived in the house until his death in 1957, a total of 58 years.”

In the 1920s, the business district moved to County Road, which is a much larger street than the older Evangelist Street. The move to County Road demonstrates the increase in population and the subsequent need for a bigger market location within Coconut Grove. By 1920, the population in Miami had increased to 29,571, and the number of black Bahamians was 4,815, or 16.3 percent of the total population. Today, County Road is known as Grand Avenue and continues to be the location for most businesses in the West Grove. As Austin Cooper, a priest in the Episcopalian church, recalled, “Grand Avenue when I was growing up was much more prosperous than it is right now. Very few blacks owned businesses in this community in the late 50s and early 60s. But there were all kinds of businesses. There were several grocery stores, a drug store, the movie theatre was actually owned by a black family and still is owned by a black family, the Ace Theatre.” The Ace Theatre, located on Grand Avenue, was built in

11 Report of the City of Miami by Preservation Officer Sarah E. Eaton.
13 See Appendix 2A.
1925 and served as the local movie theatre for West Grove residents into the 1950s. The theatre was purchased in 1979 by Harvey Wallace. His death a year later left his plans unfinished and the theatre in the possession of his wife Dorothy and his daughter Denise. Decades have passed in the hopes that the theatre would reopen to the public. One way in which Dorothy and Denise hope to accomplish this is through its designation as a historic place, which would help in obtaining the funds (upwards of $2.3 million) to renovate.\(^{15}\)

Even with the seemingly rapid growth, Coconut Grove is often remembered by historians as being unique because the relationship between whites and blacks was vastly different from other portions of the country.

Certainly I used to hear the old people talk about the times when the Klan would parade through Coconut Grove. However, even then the community many times was protected by whites for whom they worked, who may have heard that the Klan was going to be parading in the Grove at certain times. They would tell their employees who lived in the Grove, so people were able to prepare for it.\(^{16}\)

Many of the white settlers came from the Northeastern United States and were abolitionists.\(^{17}\) They were also known as *Swell*, which was a name given to Northerners


\(^{17}\) Private conversation with South Florida historian, Arva Moore Parks. August 2010.
with money who settled down in South Florida. Unfamiliar with the terrain, Swells enlisted the help of Bahamians who were familiar with this type of geography.\textsuperscript{18}

This is not to say that there was absolute peace and harmony but rather that the relationship was cordial. Additionally, the community was significantly more harmonious than other biracial neighborhoods in the United States. Bahamian immigrant Rebecca Gibson Johnson recalls her early years in Coconut Grove by saying,

It was a beautiful ride into Miami. The road didn’t run the way it does now with Bayshore Drive running into Miami Avenue. It used to follow the water line. At that time, Miami Avenue followed the water line. It was beautiful; it went right through the hammocks. There were lots of birds. The Florida panther was there too- that was something that scared the boots off everyone. Mr. Stirrup used to sit on his porch with his legs crossed and just look at everybody go by. He used to say everyone was his brother or his sister. He would wave at everybody. Anything that happened over night was told to him. He didn’t have to go anywhere to hear what was going on. White and black people came.\textsuperscript{19}

Her journey began at a young age, but what she remembered was not a neighborhood torn apart by race relations. Her memory is that of a beautiful community filled with wild life, views of Biscayne Bay and a real sense of community among its inhabitants. The Coconut Grove she recalls is one where blacks and whites coexisted, seemingly

\textsuperscript{18} Johnson, Marlon & Tingle, Chad, \textit{West Coconut Grove: A Sense of Place} (2003).

uninfluenced by Jim Crow, anti-black laws primarily enforced primarily in the southern states from 1877 to the 1960s.

Another example of the unique relationship between blacks and whites that existed early-on were the religious services in the Grove. The services were originally integrated at Union Chapel. Today Union Chapel is known as Plymouth Congregational Church and remains a reminder of the past and the fact that Coconut Grove placed more emphasis on community than race. The church was first organized in 1897 by the more influential members of the Coconut Grove community. Among the original members was Solomon G. Merrick, a Congregationalist minister who had moved to the area from Duxbury, Massachusetts. His son, George E. Merrick later became a prominent real estate developer in South Florida. George E. Merrick is best known for developing Coral Gables, which is located directly across US 1 from Coconut Grove.20

While church services were integrated in the early years, the Bahamian community looked to continue maintaining its identity. They found the services to be lifeless, leading them eventually to form their own churches in West Coconut Grove, many which still stand today. Most Bahamians were Episcopalians, which is understandable given the colonial rule of England in the Bahamas for so many years. The Episcopal Church is still deeply rooted in the community and a source of continuity and identity.

Yet another source of identity for the Bahamian settlers were the shotgun houses that are still visible in portions of the West Grove. These shotgun houses were similar in design to those found in West Africa. Shotgun houses are common throughout the Caribbean, including the Bahamas, as they are affordable and can be built on small plots of land. The shotgun house also became popular in the American South with the arrival of Haitian immigrants to the Gulf Coast and in particular to New Orleans during the early 1800s. Shotgun houses have three elements, which are essential to its construction: they all must have doors at both ends, a front porch, and they must be one room wide and three rooms deep.\textsuperscript{21} Today, most of these houses are relics of a past that many residents hope to preserve.

Coconut Grove is a community rich in culture and history nestled in a small corner of Miami. This suburb offers one of the more puzzling aspects of Florida’s contemporary, urban history. Coconut Grove is often thought of as an affluent, arts-driven community with expensive waterfront real-estate and lavish hotels located where older homes once stood. This description is what most people think of as Coconut Grove, but in fact it only describes the Eastern portion of the community. The western portion of Coconut Grove--the Bahamian part-- exemplifies a striking disparity that has formed over time and has resulted in the creation of a community held hostage by poverty, high crime rates, and racial divisions. It is a community that cannot be forgotten about in Miami’s past, because its historical importance is pivotal to understanding the early history of

South Florida and the Bahamians who were one of the first people to settle in the area. The Bahamian settlers and their experience allow us to better understand the issues of race in South Florida during the era of Jim Crow and the problems that have come with slum removal. Slum removal has been one of the more important issues facing the West Grove over the years as community leaders work tirelessly to improve the area while at the same time trying to preserve what is left of its culture.

Any of the multitude of communities in Miami-Dade County could have been chosen for this study. Overtown, located just West of Downtown Miami, witnessed race riots in 1980 after the brutal murder of an African American, Arthur McDuffie, at the hands of four white police officers. He was a Marine Corps veteran who became an insurance salesman upon retirement from the military. Brutally beaten during a traffic stop in December of 1979, he subsequently died several days later from the injuries he sustained. The case went to trial in Tampa, where an all-white jury acquitted the officers in May 1980. The verdict triggered one of the fiercest riots in the history of the United States as Liberty City became engulfed in violence. Once the unrest settled down, eighteen people had died.

Little Havana is another neighborhood that could have been chosen, as it became a safe haven for Cuban refugees in 1980. This community forever changed Miami, both positively and negatively. With an already established Cuban community in Little Havana, the area became a natural location for refugees. The Mariel Boatlift was an

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22 *PBS. “Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Right Movement 1954-1985.”*
exodus from Cuba in 1980 from Mariel Harbor. An estimated 125,000 Cubans fled to Florida. The boatlift was a positive change by bringing hard working Cubans to Miami in search of political and economic freedom, but it also allowed Fidel Castro to empty the insane asylums and jails, resulting in a dramatic increase in crime. In any event, the influx of Cubans has dramatically changed Miami.\(^23\)

Although both of those topics are important, no influx of people has created the disproportion that formed in Coconut Grove, where the disparities between East and West can still be seen today. The late Yvonne Smith-McDonald, a leader in the community, remembered the first time she discovered the dichotomy between east and west:

In my early teens I did have one experience that I always like to tell people that opened my eyes to the disparities amongst the communities here. I lived on Williams Avenue and south of Franklin and Marler there’s this hedge of trees that divided the black community from the white community. I recall riding my bicycle down Hibiscus to the end of Marler and at the end of Marler was this hedge of trees, which you could see through. I rode my bike through there and on the other side there were all these big homes. I thought I was in another world. It was the first time I realized there were two different communities.\(^24\)

Smith-McDonald’s description is common throughout various sections of West Coconut Grove. On one side of the West Grove, the community is directly across the

\(^{23}\) Glass, Andrew. “Castro Launches Mariel Boatlift, April 20, 1980.”

street from Coral Gables, which is an upscale neighborhood in Miami. The rest of the West Grove is separated by hedges, like the one described by McDonald, which are artificial but effective barriers. These barriers also separate the West Grove from schools located in the East Grove.

For years, private schools such as Ransom Everglades gave their students every opportunity to succeed. Ransom Everglades was the brainchild of founder Paul C. Ransom, a lawyer from Buffalo, New York. At the behest of his physician, Ransom traveled south to South Florida on February 19, 1893.25 Ransom’s visit to the area turned into a three-day exploration of Biscayne Bay, the Miami River, and the Everglades. On the third day, he sailed to Coconut Grove and immediately became enamored with the area. He was then introduced to some of the area’s most influential settlers such as Commodore Ralph Munroe, the Peacocks, and Julia Tuttle.

Julia Tuttle lived near the bank of the Miami River on land that eventually became the city of Miami.26 By all accounts, during the early years of South Florida, she “was busy trying to convince Henry Flagler to extend his railroad to Miami. She undoubtedly waxed about her vision of Miami’s future.”27 The Great Freeze of 1894-1895, which destroyed crops across Florida as far south as Palm Beach and the southeastern United


27 Parks, Arva Moore, and Laura Pincus. *Honor and Excellence: A Century of Ransom Everglades School*. (22)
States, gave Tuttle a rare opportunity to convince Flagler to bring his Florida East Coast Railway to South Florida since the area was not affected by freezing temperatures.\textsuperscript{28} The Great Freeze damaged millions of boxes of Florida oranges, and the state lost an estimated $75 million in revenue. The loss was great, as the \textit{Florida Times-Union} noted,

\begin{quote}
A northeastern blizzard, which found its center in Pennsylvania, swept the east coast, and a northwestern blizzard, which swept down from the Dakotas coursed with equal violence upon our west and gulf coast, uniting or joining forces with an increased power, enveloped the entire peninsula...with chilling breath of ice king. Our bountiful and beautiful orange groves, pineapple plantation and vegetable farms...nothing escaped. The people, the land upon which they live, with their scorched and withered and, in many cases dead, orange trees alone remain.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Tuttle offered Flagler an estimated 320 acres of her land to develop a city that would eventually become Miami. One story about Julia Tuttle has her sending Flagler an orange blossom right after the Great Freeze as an incentive to continue his Florida East Coast Railway down to Biscayne Bay, where Coconut Grove was located. That may be myth, but her encouragement was genuine.

Tuttle, a brilliant entrepreneur in her own right, was also influential in convincing Paul Ransom of the potential in South Florida, so much so that Ransom purchased seven

\begin{footnotes}

\item[29] \textit{Florida Times-Union}, January 13, 1895.
\end{footnotes}
and a half acres of land owned by Commodore Monroe for $1300. Three years later in 1896, construction began on Pine Knot Camp, which was to become a boys-only camp. Ransom, seeing an opportunity to establish a unique learning environment, changed Pine Knot Camp’s name to the Adirondack-Florida School in 1903. The Adirondack-Florida School became the first “migratory” boarding school in the United States, with students spending Fall and Spring terms in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York and the winter months in the warmth of Coconut Grove.

After Paul C. Ransom’s death on January 30, 1907, his wife, Alice Ruth Ransom became the school’s leader. Local South Florida historian, Laura Pincus notes, “Alumni recall her formidable, yet gentle presence. With her tall, aristocratic appearance, Mrs. Ransom commanded the boys’ attention.” She hired qualified individuals to continue her late husband’s legacy starting with Levings Hooker Somers, a young Yale graduate who would assume the role of headmaster. As time passed, the school fell victim to financial difficulties following World War II. During the war, the Adirondack-Florida School closed and, upon reopening, struggled to bring in students. By 1949, school trustees decided to eliminate the migratory portion of the school and create a permanent

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32 Ibid.
campus in Coconut Grove. Although the school was drastically changing, trustees wanted to maintain its tradition, prompting them to rename it the Paul C. Ransom School.\textsuperscript{33}

Though it was difficult for alumni to see their alma mater change so drastically, there was no denying that focusing on one campus helped improve the overall standards of the school. Henry Anderson, a graduate of the Adirondack-Florida School, said, “In fact, much as it astounds me, boys actually pass their college entrance exams, and I remember in my day that I spent one whole summer cramming to get into college after leaving our Alma Mater.”\textsuperscript{34} The school’s progress was astonishing, but its transformation into its current incarnation was not complete. In 1974, a merger was completed between Ransom School and the nearby Everglades School for Girls. This merger created a coeducational institution, and the name of the school was changed to Ransom Everglades School in order to maintain the traditions of both schools.\textsuperscript{35}

Originally, students in the school came from mostly wealthy, northern backgrounds and many fell in the love with the area. After spending only a small amount of time in South Florida, students would urge their parents to come down to visit, and often times they ended by buying land.\textsuperscript{36} Today, Ransom Everglades boasts a diverse student population, state of the art facilities, excellent teachers, and a tradition of sending

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34} Ransom Everglades Archives, Interview with Mrs. Marie Swenson. November 21, 1977.

\textsuperscript{35} Parks, Arva Moore, and Laura Pincus. Honor and Excellence: A Century of Ransom Everglades School.

\textsuperscript{36} Interview with Dr. Paul George, Professor Miami-Dade College.
students to the best colleges and universities in the United States. The school also has the good fortune to be located next to Biscayne Bay, which is thriving with diverse ecosystems.\textsuperscript{37} Some of the science courses dealing with the local ecology have conducted class on a boat, giving students the “engaged” learning that Ransom Everglades believed was necessary for student success at all levels. This is just one example of the school’s exceptional quality and the education it offers its students.

Ransom, located in East Coconut Grove, is a reflection of the quality of life this half of the community has enjoyed since its inception. Historic landmarks are also well preserved in East Coconut Grove, as is seen in architectural jewels such as the Barnacle.\textsuperscript{38} Built in 1891, the Barnacle was home to one of the original pioneers of Coconut Grove, Commodore Ralph Middleton Munroe. The house and even the commodore’s sail boat, the \textit{Egret}, are kept in pristine condition as if untouched by time. Another well-preserved historic site is the First Coconut Grove School, the first school house in South Florida which still stands today, albeit in a different location.\textsuperscript{39} Upon entering the building, one can see the original desks, chalk board, and even a picture of President Grover Cleveland that have all been preserved. All this is testimony to the community’s pride and wealth.

Less than a mile west of the Coconut Grove coastline, however, the scenery quickly changes to one that has received much less attention. In this section of the Grove,

\textsuperscript{37} South Florida is home to many ecosystems that are available to students at Ransom Everglades such as, coral reefs, mangroves, hardwood hammocks, pineland, and seagrass.

\textsuperscript{38} See Appendix 3A, 3B, and 3C.

\textsuperscript{39} See Appendix 4A and 4B.
programs such as Breakthrough Collaborative Miami strive to provide academic enrichment for underserved students throughout the school year and especially in the summer months when students enter into a six week intensive program. Many of those students attending Breakthrough found themselves taking enrichment courses at the same substandard school they attended during the academic year. In this case, the school was F.S. Tucker Elementary School, where the Summer program operated for several years before moving to Ransom Everglades Middle School. The school is named for Frances S. Tucker who moved to Miami from Montgomery, Alabama and later became principal at George Washington Carver High School for 29 years.

The contrast between the two schools could not be more striking. Whereas Ransom is closed off with a fence made of coral rock and a guard house, F.S. Tucker is surrounded by a rusted, broken down, chain link fence and has bars on all its windows. The school has limited resources and oftentimes can not even provide proper air conditioning in its classrooms, which in the hot, humid climate of a Miami summer is a serious issue. The physical differences in the schools reflect the differences in the quality of education offered to students in the two areas.

Surrounding F.S. Tucker are some of the few remaining historical landmarks important to the Bahamian culture, which is still prevalent in this community. One such landmark, located directly in front of the school off of Douglas Road between Charles

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40 Ransom Everglades Middle School is located at the Everglades School for Girls campus only a few miles down the road from the upper school.
Avenue and Franklin Avenue, is the Charlotte Jane Memorial Cemetery. The Charlotte Jane Memorial Cemetery is the second cemetery in West Coconut Grove and was named in honor of E.W.F. Stirrup’s wife. The original cemetery, which lasted from 1904 to 1906, was located further east on Charles Avenue.

Upwards of 1200 people lie buried in the Charlotte Jane Memorial Cemetery, and when a member of the community passes away, their funeral becomes a community event, as stated by the Rev. Austin Cooper.

You will find that even today, a funeral is an occasion that you simply attend. It’s not like what happens out east. I saw this so many times. I had funerals in my parish where sometimes the church would be half-empty. People just didn’t see this as part of the community, which included them. It’s your loss so you deal with it the best way you can. That is not so with the black community in the Grove. Many times, it’s a very private kind of affair, but it’s something which draws out the entire community.

The cemetery is a product of Bahamian culture and stands out to most visitors because the white and silver graves are above ground, common in the Bahamas. Every year during the Miami Goombay Festival, a flamboyant celebration of Bahamian culture, the graves in the cemetery are painted silver or white.

41 See Appendix. 5A, 5B, 5C, and 5D.
43 Miami Walking Tour: Coconut Grove, Dr. Paul George.
The festival resembles the Junkanoo in the Bahamas, which originated in Africa. The festival is filled with music, food, a parade, and other festivities. In June 1996, the Goombay Festival was the largest black street festival in the United States. Approximately 400,000 people were estimated to be in attendance. By 2010, the attendance had dropped to a few hundred and expectations were that only 3,000 to 4,000 people would make their way to Grand Avenue. Part of the reason for the sharp decline is the dwindling number of residents with Bahamian roots. Another reason is the loss of sponsors who helped promote the event around Miami. Vincent Matthews, a frequent participant in the Goombay festival said to The Miami Herald, “It used to be hard to walk here -- you couldn't move without saying, 'Excuse me.' People used to come from all over the place to see this.” The festival is meant to be a celebration of the Bahamian culture that has been a part of Coconut Grove for over a century, but the dwindling numbers have many community members fearing that their Bahamian roots are being forgotten.

To the right of F.S. Tucker Elementary School are a few of the remaining shotgun houses in the Grove that once flourished as part of the Bahamian settlement. All of them are in decrepit shape and little has been done to reverse the effects of years of neglect. Out of the few shotgun houses still standing, it is believed that only a handful will be

45 Ibid.
preserved, including the homes of Mariah Brown and E.W.F. Stirrup. As is usually the case, the challenges facing preservation are simple matters of funding, and there are not enough resources to preserve all of the shotgun houses.

Being able to experience both sides of the Grove has influenced me profoundly and has helped shape my interest in its history. The lack of contemporary, academic research concerning the West Grove when compared to that of the East Grove is indicative of the way in which this neighborhood has been forgotten about as a part of Miami’s history. Moreover, recently, wealthy real-estate developers have been buying up property and building shopping areas in the West Grove in order to beautify the neighborhood; but in doing so, they are also pushing the West Grove to the brink of extinction and its residents to other communities.

Thelma Gibson has lived in the Grove since her birth in 1926. Gibson has witnessed a multitude of things that have changed in her community. In a candid conversation with the author, Gibson noted the high rise buildings that were built in the 1970s and 1980s. When asked about the impact these buildings had on the community, Gibson replied wistfully,

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46 Mariah Brown was one of the first black settlers to arrive in Coconut Grove. See Appendix 6A, 6B, & 6C.
Only that we don’t get the breeze off the water we used to get. When we were children we used to be able to open up our doors and our windows and we didn’t have to worry about air conditioning because we got the breeze from off the water. Once you got the high rises and all that construction, you don’t have that anymore.47

West Coconut Grove has been considered behind the times when it comes to the creature comforts taken for granted by others on a daily basis. Instead of air conditioning, most people in the West Grove simply opened their front and back door and allowed the breeze from off Biscayne Bay to fill their homes with the fresh air that one might have in the Bahamas. But it is not only a loss of natural air conditioning, but the loss of a large part of the Bahamian culture which makes the situation so disheartening. For even since becoming part of Miami in 1925, the people of West Grove have been in a constant struggle to preserve their community.

Miami’s attempts to incorporate Coconut Grove date back to World War I with the building of a naval air base in Coconut Grove’s Dinner Key. By 1919, Miami made a strong attempt to maintain the military presence in South Florida, but the residents of the Grove were able to stave off the outside influence. Grant Livingston, a local historian writes, “Boosters of the city of Miami, such as Everest G. Sewell, believed that the station should stay, and campaigned for its permanent location there, while Coconut

47 Private Interview with Mrs. Thelma Anderson Gibson March, 2010.
Grove Resident John Deering disagreed in a letter to his influential neighbor, William Jennings Bryan.48

Unfortunately for the Grove, however, Miami was expanding rapidly and aspired to become the largest city in Florida. Council members in Coconut Grove were assured by Miami’s Mayor C.D. Leffler that Miami was not currently interested in taking over the area.49 In 1923, Miami council members changed their minds regarding annexation and made their first attempt to incorporate Coconut Grove. The effort to annex was led by Roddy Burdine, who was a prominent Florida businessman. He served as the chairman of Burdines Department Store for twenty-five years. It was under his leadership that Burdines became a prominent chain in Florida. His father, William, had founded the store in 1896. Burdine believed, like many wealthy Miamians, “Should the city limits be extended by voters at annexation, Miami will be the largest city in the state.”50 It had become apparent that influential members of Miami wanted to create a “Greater Miami.” Despite Burdine’s effort, when the votes were counted, the citizens of Coconut Grove voted 155 to 42 against annexation. For the moment, annexation was no longer an issue as Miami withdrew from further discussions.51

50 George, Paul, Miami’s Merchant Prince: Roddey Burdine and the Burdine Department Store. unpublished manuscript, 133.
51 The city of Miami withdrew Ordinance 605, which was an ordinance put in place for the annexation of Coconut Grove as stated in the Minutes of the Coconut Grove Town Council meeting that took place on January 23, 1923.
The election results clearly demonstrated that a majority of Coconut Grove’s residents were opposed to becoming part of Miami. Nonetheless, annexation was inevitable. The 1920s were a prosperous time for the state of Florida. In 1920, the population of the state was estimated to be 967,470, and by 1925, that figure had risen thirty percent to 1,263,540.52 Furthermore, with the dramatic rise of the real estate market in Florida, real estate became a lucrative business, and Coconut Grove was a valuable commodity. As Arva Parks writes, “The little town of Coconut Grove was caught up in the excitement of the expansive boom. National attention was focused on the area when it was selected as the site for a Samoan village in the movie Where the Pavement Ends, starring Ramon Navarro and Alice Terry.”53 The 1923 election for mayor in Coconut Grove was the turning point for annexation as Alderman H. deB. Justison won a close election 171-134.54 Mayor Justison was not pro-annexation, but evidence shows that he was in no way opposed to the idea.

On September 2, 1925, Miami held an election to determine whether or not Coconut Grove, along with Silver Bluff, Allapattah, Little River, Buena Vista, and Lemon City, would be annexed.55 Most of the smaller cities were in favor of annexation to Miami, but Coconut Grove was still vehemently opposed.

52 Exploring Florida: Florida’s Land Boom, The University of South Florida.


55 Ibid.
Former Mayor Hugh Matheson prompted the city manager of Coconut Grove to place advertisements in the *Miami Herald* against annexation, demonstrating to all the true feelings of the majority of Groveites on the subject. William Sydow, city manager of Coconut Grove, also attempted an advertising campaign to convince citizens of Miami that the annexation of Coconut Grove was unjustified since the vast majority of Groveites were against such a proposition.\(^56\) One of the advertisements read,

> We are being forced into Miami against our wills by the use in this election of an unfair law passed twenty years ago and which has never been used: If 2/3 of voters in a territory are in favor the cities are joined...not, mind you, 2/3 of the votes in Coconut Grove, but 2/3 of ALL the votes cast in Miami and the territory to be annexed! Coconut Grove has not more than 240 votes against possibly 25,000 in Miami."\(^57\)

Unfortunately for the majority of Groveites, according to Florida law, the annexing city (in this case Miami) was also allowed to vote in the election, much to the dismay of Coconut Grove residents. They did not buy into the advertisements in the paper.

Once the votes were counted, ninety-seven percent of all the cities involved voted in favor of annexation.\(^58\) The towns of Little River, Buena Vista, and Allapattah all overwhelmingly supported becoming part of Miami. Eighty-one percent of Little River,


\(^{57}\) *The Miami Herald*, “Coconut Grove Lays its Cards on the Table”, August 31, 1925, 7-C.

eighty-two percent of Buena Vista, and eighty-three percent of Allapattah approved annexation. On the other hand, in Coconut Grove, only 13 percent voted in favor of annexation.\textsuperscript{59} Coconut Grove thus was forced to become part of Miami in 1925, and in the coming years, Groveites attempted to regain their independence. In the 1970s and 1990s, residents of Coconut Grove attempted to secede from Miami, but this attempt only expressed the same frustration as in 1925 when the significantly larger population of Miami voted against such actions.\textsuperscript{60} And with annexation began the decline of West Coconut Grove into decades of hardship.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
Chapter Two- Slum Clearance and the Concrete Monsters

Years passed, and the downward trend established during annexation continued into the 1940s. The need for new housing in West Coconut Grove became apparent. August 1944 was a telling time for West Coconut Grove as plans for improving housing were rejected. City commissioners voted against a proposed plan to develop fifty duplexes in the West Grove. The four commissioners present voted unanimously to prohibit the building of these residencies on a 20-acre tract of land. The commission stated that zoning based on race was unconstitutional. Additionally, there was no sense of urgency on the part of the commission because it believed that no blacks from the West Grove had ever applied for emergency housing and that those who had applied were white.

L.E. Thomas, a black attorney who was present at the hearing, commented on the plight of blacks in the West Grove by stating, “Hundreds of them have inadequate housing. They do not understand about filling out applications. I could get tenants for all the houses as soon as the foundations were started.” Miami, the city that voted for annexation against the will of Groveites, now subjected its black residents in the Grove to similar treatment found in Overtown. Many West Grove residents were sent to the federal housing office in order to complete the application for emergency housing but were informed that no housing was available. The commission stated that blacks were not

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61 “Vote 4 To 0 Against Grove Tract: Ruling By Planning Board is Reversed”, The Miami Herald, Aug. 16, 1944.

62 Ibid.
applying for emergency housing as the whites were, but in reality, they were being turned away from the application process.

Dewey Knight, an attorney representing the interest of white property owners in Coconut Grove, protested the expansion of the West Grove in order to build quality housing for workers. The protesting side argued that their property value would decrease by as much as fifty percent if their property was in close proximity to “negro property.” Knight argued that there was uncertainty with regards to the proposed housing extension in the Grove because it was not clear whether or not there was an “acute shortage of negro housing or a shortage of negroes who will work.” Protestors expressed doubt over whether blacks in West Coconut Grove actually worked, which would indicate a long term problem that could not be solved by the expansion of the West Grove. Once again, L.E. Thomas became the voice of reason and the singular black voice at the hearing. He responded to those who said they saw blacks doing nothing during the day by reminding the commissioners that this was their off time because many had few options for daytime employment and therefore had to find work in industries during the night.

Housing was just one of the issues facing West Coconut Grove after annexation. Attempts at improving West Coconut Grove had been challenging but successful in the late 1940s. The first significant changes began to take form in 1948. Father Theodore Gibson and Elizabeth Virrick were the two driving forces in the movement for change in the West Grove. Their conviction as well as their leadership led to the first significant

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63 Ibid.
changes in the West Grove in decades. Virrick aimed to improve living conditions and opportunities for blacks in West Coconut Grove. She first became heavily involved in the community in 1948 as she became a leader in various civic groups in order to make a positive impact on the community. Before their efforts, much of the West Grove lacked electricity or proper plumbing. Families had to “use outside ‘privies’ and water pumps.”

Virrick first met Gibson in 1948 when he came to speak at the Civic Club, a whites only club. His speech was filled with passion, but he focused particularly on convincing those who would listen that West Coconut Grove was in need of renewal. Fortunately for Father Gibson, Elizabeth Virrick was one of those people listening in the audience, and she later said that she felt he was speaking directly to her. Carita Swanson Vonk, author of Father Gibson’s biography writes, “She came to his office a day or two later and said, ‘Father, I heard you and I want to help.’ And so the two of them joined forces and started the first slum clearance league in Coconut Grove to try and help clean up. And they went before the city commission to get the ordinances that would pass to get running water and electricity to all the homes.”

Theodore Gibson was a visionary and a man who had the interest of his community at the forefront of his mind. Like the majority of West Coconut Grove residents, Gibson’s family had come from the Bahamas. He even spent a portion of his childhood with family in the Bahamas where he was exposed to the plight of blacks, who

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66 Private interview with Thelma Anderson Gibson, March 2010.
were the majority of the population but who had no political power. He witnessed countless atrocities later while in Miami. Historian Marvin Dunn writes, “From a young age, Gibson viewed the social and geographic barriers placed on his race as a moral wrong. He saw his best friend horse-whipped by the Ku Klux Klan on the streets of Miami. Gibson considered anything anyone did against blacks to be a personal affront.”

He later became the most important figure in the Civil Rights movement in Miami as the president of the Miami chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from 1954 to 1964 after being placed as a priest at Christ Episcopal Church.

As the president of the Miami chapter of the NAACP, Gibson was often a target of the Johns Committee. Charley Eugene Johns was the former governor of Florida and a member of the Florida State Senate from 1937 to 1966. The Johns Committee was a descendant of the McCarthy Committee and existed from 1956 to 1966. “It operated in much the same way as the McCarthy Committee did in Washington: by innuendo, public ridicule, and harassment of those targeted in the search for subversives.” The committee sought to obtain the names of NAACP members in Miami and asked Father Gibson to provide this information in what amounted to another communist witch hunt. When he

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69 Christ Episcopal is still regarded as the most influential church in West Coconut Grove. Serving the Episcopalian community for 108 years, Christ Episcopal is a very close knit church.

refused to give any names, he was arrested for contempt of the legislature. The actions taken by the Johns Committee also served as a way to intimidate NAACP members from continuing with the organization and to keep others from joining. Father Gibson stated, “A lot of people evidently thought we might be forced to give them up. This drove from the rank-and-file many who feared, with good reason, that exposure of their names would mean economic reprisals. If the committee is sincere about wanting to check on subversive affiliations of our members, it needs only to give us the names of its suspects. We’ll throw them out fast.”

Gibson made certain to maintain the integrity of the NAACP in Miami, which was gaining support from whites as well as blacks. For his efforts, Gibson was sentenced to six months imprisonment and a $1,200 fine. Gibson clearly stated in court that he was well within his rights as an American citizen not to disclose the list of NAACP members. He referenced the First Amendment, noting the unlawful act of interfering with a peaceful assembly. Gibson also mentioned the Fourteenth Amendment and its clause of equal protection under the law. The circuit court judge did not share Gibson’s interpretation of the law, but his ruling did not stop the Gibson’s crusade to reform Miami.

The partnership of Elizabeth Virrick and Father Gibson brought positive change to the community. Carita Vonk, author of Father Gibson’s biography, mentions one of his first meetings with Virrick. Elizabeth Virrick hosted twenty-four people at her home, including Father Gibson, and for several hours each member in attendance spoke on

71 Ibid.
behalf of county-wide participation in order to improve the conditions of the community. Vonk describes what happened next as nothing short of “electrifying”.72 “My people are living seven deep,” said Father Gibson. “If a pianist plays only white keys or only the black keys, you get discord. But if you play white and black keys, you get harmony.”73

Father Gibson was the last to speak. He believed that county-wide participation was not the answer because it would create half-hearted results. If positive changes were to truly come to the West Grove, he insisted, this would have to be handled on a local level in order to ensure the best results. The residents of the West Grove would not be afterthoughts but rather at the forefront of any change. Gibson’s approach was indicated in the advertisement for the first town hall meeting:

A penny for thoughts- Citizens for Coconut Grove and Vicinity- Here is your chance to say what you think, hear what others think and help get something done about the crowded, substandard, unsanitary conditions in the Coconut Grove colored section- How long are we going to close our eyes to this potential source of epidemics and menace to the health of every resident in this area? Let’s wait no longer for others to act. This is your invitation to an Old-Fashioned Town Meeting-to form the Coconut Grove Citizens Committee for Slum Clearance- August 30 at the American Legion Hall.74

73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
This message was posted throughout the community and succeeded in bringing 350 community members to the August 30 meeting.

In 1948, the Coconut Grove Citizens’ Committee for Slum Clearance emerged. The need for this was readily apparent to blacks and whites, for, as *The Miami Herald* noted, “There were some unpleasant slums to be cleared in the otherwise most pleasant residential area of Coconut Grove.”75 The committee was a non-profit, bi-racial organization consisting of thirteen members. People from all social backgrounds joined the committee, including physicians, lawyers, housewives, and a welfare worker. Elizabeth Virrick was elected chairman, and along with Father Gibson, they were able to begin making progress in the West Grove.

One of the first challenges the committee took on was to rid the neighborhood of privies and connect the area to city water.76 The issue was not that these privies were outside bathroom facilities, but the fact that they were built so close to the water pumps that families used for everyday life. Homes in West Coconut Grove were not connected to a water main. Each individual water pump was used by an estimated 20 to 25 homes, Yet they were greatly outnumbered by the nearly five hundred privies.77 East Coconut Grove had already acquired a water system, and most of its residents had septic tanks, running water, and proper bathrooms. On the other hand, West Coconut Grove continued to use


76 Privies are typically identified as small toilets that are located outside in the a small structure such as a shed.

the same well system, which contained contaminated water.\textsuperscript{78} At night the contents of the privies was collected by city trucks. The process was unpleasant as the contents often dripped out, and the smell permeated the air.\textsuperscript{79} These privies also attracted swarms of insects. Improving utilities in West Coconut Grove was a serious problem in need of a remedy. With the help of Father Gibson and Elizabeth Virrick, the West Grove saw improvements in its infrastructure by connecting the community to a sewage disposal system, which eliminated the use of privies.

Even with a commitment to improve West Coconut Grove’s infrastructure, progress was slow. The efforts of the Coconut Grove Citizens’ Committee for Slum Clearance continued in January 1949, when they were to meet with Miami City Commissioners. The meeting highlighted the committee’s desire to put a stop to construction for ninety days in order to ensure that the construction was in accordance with the overall plan for the community.\textsuperscript{80} The request followed Father Gibson’s proposal that the renewal of West Coconut Grove be handled on a local level to ensure that the task was not half-hearted. Residents of West Coconut Grove had a reputation for being particular about the appearance of the neighborhood. Oftentimes, however, developers had plans to build large buildings that did not fit with what local residents believed was the Bahamian feel of the community. Through the meeting with the Miami City Commissioners, a plan that the Coconut Grove Citizens’ Committee for Slum Clearance

\textsuperscript{78} Douglas, Marjory Stoneman, “Grove Slum Clearance Movement Reviewed”, Feb. 24, 1949
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} “Overall Plan for Grove Told by Slum Clearance Committee”, \textit{Riviera Times}, January 24, 1949
had for the West Grove was revealed. One goal outlined in the plan was to make it possible for residents to obtain loans to build their own homes rather than having large developments built, which would force upon the community an “influx of residents from other areas.” A survey around the same time indicated that such an influx would negatively affect a place already considered to be overburdened with only 4,000 black residents. Furthermore, the Coconut Grove Citizens’ Committee for Slum Clearance stated in their plan that all families in West Coconut Grove should have the opportunity to own a single-family home rather than live in a multi-family complex, as multi-family homes were considered a detriment to the community and likely to replicate what already existed in Overtown, Miami’s inner city neighborhood known as “Colored Town.”

Overtown originally began as an area to live for blacks working on Henry Flagler’s railroad as they were not allowed to live in white communities. As Miami grew, the majority of blacks called Overtown home, but like West Coconut Grove, Overtown was plagued with poor housing conditions. Former Miami Mayor, Perrine Palmer, was astonished by the decrepit state of Miami’s largest black neighborhood in a city that was barely fifty years old. In a speech, Perrine declared, “Even though Miami is the youngest of the metropolitain cities, it is already rotting at the core, like older ones.” Elizabeth Virrick developed her reputation as Miami’s slum fighter not only from her work in West Coconut Grove, but also in Overtown. One of her biggest challenges was putting a stop to

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81 Ibid.
faulty urban renewal programs that only served to benefit corrupt landowners and ignored community needs.83

Virrick and others argued that avoiding multi-family housing would promote pride in the home, community, and the people. The Coconut Grove Citizens’ Committee for Slum Clearance further believed that if West Grove residents were able to own their homes, it would also help alleviate some of the stress created from high rent. Many residents who rented often paid more than they could afford and in doing so had to sacrifice elsewhere in the daily budget. One example given by the Citizens’ Committee was that of a student who was not able to purchase a sufficient lunch because his family did not have enough money. Another example given in favor of allowing residents to own their own single-family homes was the existence of a 32-unit project that was built on Franklin Avenue. Only a month into its existence, the community already displayed the detrimental effects of what appeared to everyone to be a slum.

The ideas being espoused by the Coconut Grove Citizens’ Committee for Slum Clearance were considered to be a better way of renewing West Coconut Grove if they were given the chance to succeed. The Citizens’ Committee strongly believed that if multi-family homes and high rental costs were allowed to persist, those properties would eventually deteriorate beyond the point of recognition or revival.84 Moreover, the community at this time was willing to be behind the proposed plan, even though by

83 Ibid.

84 “Overall Plan for Grove Told by Slum Clearance Committee”, Riviera Times, January 24, 1949.
February 1949, the Citizens’ Committee was still fighting for re-zoning in order to make the necessary improvements.

The Citizens’ Committee helped to develop other groups such as the Sanitation Committee, which had the support of the Miami Health Department. The Sanitation Committee sought to control the rat population and see to the proper collection and disposal of garbage.\(^85\) A Loan Fund Committee was also established in order to assist the most destitute families in the community. The Legal Assistance Committee served as a place for citizens to receive legal advice, and the School Committee assisted with the school issues. Although improving the housing situation in the West Grove was of the utmost importance, the Citizens’ Committee was successful in responding to other needs in the community.

For all the positive momentum that the Coconut Grove Citizens’ Committee for Slum Clearance enjoyed early on, it was shortlived. As fervently as the Citizens’ Committee worked to renew the West Grove, their effort was in vain. By the end of the 1940s, the appearance of West Coconut Grove began to change drastically as single-family homes were torn down for public housing-- “concrete monsters”-- which still stand today.\(^86\) The West Grove’s continued growth was disturbing to residents as they witnessed single-family homes being torn down in favor of the “concrete monsters.” Absentee landlords owned most of these multi-family homes, which subsequently


diminished the sense of community enjoyed by West Grove residents and instead brought in what Arva Parks described as, “unwelcome criminal element.” Parks stated that, “Often the apartment dwellers did not share the proud heritage of the original Bahamian families and, as a result, they felt like outsiders.” 87 Families that were fortunate enough to prosper moved to Richmond Heights, which is a black community south of Coconut Grove. With the introduction of absentee landlords, a criminal element, and the loss of community leadership, Coconut Grove became the “hole in the doughnut.”88 The phrase “hole in the doughnut” accurately describes the plight of West Coconut Grove, which is a poverty-stricken community surrounded by wealth in areas such as Coral Gables and East Coconut Grove.

The building of multi-family homes disregarded the plea from the Citizens’ Committee, and these structures immediately changed the feeling of the West Grove from a vibrant Bahamian neighborhood to something similar to Overtown, a place where its residents had no say in running their community. The creation of these concrete monsters allowed landlords to dictate monthly rent as they tried “squeezing tremendous profits” from West Coconut Grove residents.89 Neglectful landlords did not keep a watchful eye over the multi-family residences and allowed a criminal element to move into the West Grove. Most of the outsiders who moved in did not share the unique Bahamian heritage


88 Private Interview with Chad Tingle. August 2010.

that was and remains an integral part of the West Grove. The landlords also allowed these structures to deteriorate and further diminish the appearance of West Coconut Grove. By May 1962, it was becoming increasingly evident that the change the Citizens’ Committee hoped for was yet to be realized.

The committee had not given up, however. The Miami Herald reported on the optimism for change, when the committee said, “Rest on our laurels? No, indeed! The only rest is the rest of the job to be done.” The rest of the job was still yet to be completed, and in November of 1969, the people of West Coconut Grove were struggling to preserve a sense of community and the pride they once had for their beloved home. Even trash became such an issue that it needed a campaign dubbed, “Clean-Up and Keep It Clean.” West Coconut Grove faced additional problems in the increase in burglaries that prompted shop keepers to begin locking their doors. The problems facing the West Grove accumulated with no end in sight.

In January 1970, the tone of revitalizing West Coconut Grove shifted dramatically to one of concern and criticism of the original plan for slum removal. By most accounts, the well intentioned slum clearance, which only saw moderate results, was no longer affective. Frederic Sherman, former editor at The Miami Herald, stated in an article, “Truth is that urban renewal is an out-of-date term and also a discredited one because it never worked the way it was intended. Urban renewal in its first 25 years was little more


than people removal.” According to Sherman, the majority of West Grove residents had little voice during the process of urban renewal taking place.

Similar actions were taken in the West Grove as in Overtown with regards to urban renewal. People outside of Coconut Grove saw the areas as similar simply because they were predominantly black neighborhoods. The conditions of a community vary depending on the people and thus require a specific plan of action. Unfortunately for West Coconut Grove, the situation was handled as it had been in other communities. Sherman compared the mismanagement of urban renewal to a doctor who prescribes medication without knowing the symptoms of the patient.

The struggle to remedy the housing issues in the West Grove began with finances. With barely enough money to purchase a house, there was nothing left over to maintain the neighborhood. Sherman believed, “As tough as it was to get that down payment together to buy a small cottage in the Grove, it has been even tougher for the black family to maintain the neighborhood.” The West Grove was in need of assistance from outside the community, and the Miami officials oftentimes simply looked the other way. Even with the calls for improvements to the community without housing developments, the city planning board in Miami made an effort to create a “100-family negro housing project.” Such a plan brought together West Grove residents who feared losing their community and subsequently creating another project in Miami similar to those found in

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93 Ibid.
Overtown. Frederic Sherman said, “The closure of those arteries also emerges as a symbol of a divided community. The black people want first a better neighborhood. They also want the symbolism of the ghetto demolished.” Sherman’s sentiment echoes that of Father Gibson and the community, which was that change must occur on a local level in order to assure the preservation of the West Grove and its heritage. In a show of solidarity, West Grove residents brought their complaints to the courtroom, clearly demonstrating their displeasure with the idea of demolishing their community without their consent. For the time being, West Coconut Grove was able to halt the construction of the housing project.

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Chapter Three- Education in Coconut Grove

Life in the West Grove was, according to locals, at one point something to behold with a strong sense of community that was second to none in South Florida. With such a closely-knit community, West Coconut Grove residents took ownership of the schools. Thelma Gibson, one of the more knowledgeable members of the community with regards to its history and current plight, remembers her time going to school by listing every single teacher she had during her days at the Coconut Grove Training School for Colored (later changed to Coconut Grove Training School) Coconut Grove Junior High School, and George Washington Carver High School.96 “My teachers were Mrs. Freeman, first grade. Mrs. Lillian Mazon, second grade, Ms. Jimmie Hampton Jones, third grade….Annie O’Ferral, 12th grade.”97

Gibson’s recall of the names of her teachers demonstrates the closeness of the community and how important schools were in the everyday life of West Coconut Grove. When asked if the loss of the high school was detrimental to the community, Gibson responded,

Of course. Yes indeed, because now are kids have to go across the tracks, what used to be a railroad that was here. Coral Gables is what we called across the railroad track and it’s in Coral Gables and now there was no high school for our kids in the Coconut Grove area, West Grove, so they have to go to Coral Gables

96 After George Washington Carver’s death in 1942, the schools changed their names in his honor. See Appendix 7A.

Senior High School. A lot of our kids go to South Miami or Coral Reef if they can get in. Normally they go to Ponce for middle school and Coral Gables for high school. So, Ponce is the middle school where kids go from Coconut Grove.98

Coral Gables was a drastic change for students in West Coconut Grove. One of the first planned cities in the United States, Coral Gables was the brainchild of George E. Merrick.99 Established in 1925, the area has always been known as an upscale neighborhood. Coral Gables boasts the largest tropical botanical garden in the continental United States, twenty-two manicured parks, thirty-three public tennis courts, two golf courses, and a spring-fed grotto swimming pool made of coral rock.100 Students from the West Grove attending public school, must now do so in a vastly different neighborhood.

George Washington Carver was the name given to the elementary, junior, and senior high schools in West Coconut Grove during the age of segregation. Local historian Arva Parks, who was closely connected to Carver from her teaching days, said, “George Washington Carver Elementary, Junior and Senior High Schools and the many churches were the linchpin and the continuing source of pride to those who called West Grove home.”101 Despite the negative connotations of segregation, Carver was an example of

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98 Private Interview with Mrs. Thelma Anderson Gibson March. 2010.

99 George Edgar Merrick was the founder and president of the Historical Association of South Florida. His planned city, Coral Gables, has been given the nickname, “The City Beautiful” and is home to the University of Miami.


success in the community that gave students a sense of place in an otherwise tumultuous era in American history.

Robert Simms, a former teacher and photographer at Carver from 1953 to 1967, gathered photos from his time at the school and had them preserved in the archives of the University of Miami under the name “Glory in the Grove.” The title of his collection speaks volumes about community identity and the positive impact the school had on all the residents of the West Grove. Simms felt that positive information regarding segregated schools would be reflected in his photograph collection. Through the photographs one can see the exuberance, traditions, and lifestyles of Carver students and the presence of the school in the community.102 By displaying these images to the public, Simms allowed a wider audience to see into the daily life of a segregated school.

Simms’s photo collection allows people into a world the details of which have all too often been forgotten. The pageantry of a homecoming float going down the streets of West Coconut Grove demonstrates school spirit, reminding us how a simple celebration like a homecoming parade brought a community together. Other photos show students involved in athletics, such as basketball, and with the marching band playing music in the community. “Glory in the Grove” reflects a time of pride in the community and the school as an institution that reflected their core values. Thus the closing of the school as a result of desegregation, while it demonstrates one the one had, significant social progress,

102 Simms, Robert. *Glory in the Grove: Positive Images of Life in Coconut Grove, Florida during the segregated era of the 1950s and 60s*. A publication of photographs from the Bob Simms Collection.
such progress came at the expense of a loss of an integral part of every day life in the community.

Desegregation of public schools in Miami-Dade County can be traced back to 1943 when the Dade County Public School System was challenged for unequal treatment of teachers. Hubert C. Reynolds became the catalyst for public school reform as he filed a lawsuit that brought into question the Dade County Public School System’s practice of unequal salary based on race. The public school system justified their actions because they believed white teachers were simply better than black teachers. Reynolds thus brought attention to a widely used practice of underpaying blacks in education based on a faulty rating system of teacher effectiveness. The school board claimed that the rating system showed white teachers as more effective and worthy of having a teaching contract, which was not given to black teachers. Federal judge John Holland ruled in favor of the Dade County Public School System.

The ruling outraged the community. Unhappy with the ruling and segregation in schools, Father Gibson and others sued the school board in 1956 (Gibson vs Dade County School Board.) Gibson wanted the Dade County School Board to desegregate public schools, contending that the parents’ 1955 petition to the school board, which sought to end segregation, had largely been ignored. Gibson felt it was necessary for all black


students in Miami to attend desegregated schools. Three years later in 1959, the court ruled in favor of Gibson and all those who joined in suing the school board. Desegregation was thus required of public schools in Dade County. Unfortunately, compliance was so slow that several years after the decision to integrate public schools, sixteen remained segregated until 1963.

Integration meant that students would attend school together regardless of race, but it also meant that black students from all over Miami would be bused to formerly white schools. The consequences fell entirely on the black community. Take George Washington Carver High School for example. Carver can trace its origins back to 1899 when it was founded by Dana A. Dorsey as a school for black children. With school desegregation Carver, a school that was so important to the community, closed in 1966. The school was converted into Carver Junior High and students attending high school would be bused to the more affluent neighborhood of Coral Gables. Coral Gables Senior High offered a better education and did become a fully integrated school. Yet ultimately West Coconut Grove lost their school. Arva Moore Parks recalls, “They got better a better library, better teachers, better everything; but that school [Carver] had been so important to them.”

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106 Dorsey was South Florida’s first black millionaire, but he is most remembered for his philanthropic work in the field of education. http://gwcm.dadeschools.net/history_of_the_school.htm.

Future generations of students no longer had to attend school separated by race, creating a better environment for education. Yet, in the short term, students who originally attended Carver Senior High were at the bottom of the proverbial food chain when they arrived at Coral Gables Senior High. Arva Moore Parks, who was involved in the desegregation process at Carver recalls, “They integrated Coral Gables High School and for many years Carver High’s leaders were not leaders at Coral Gable High School. They weren’t homecoming queen or president of the student council, which they had been at Carver.”108 By the 1987-1988 school year Carver had become a magnet school, which not only limited the number of students that could attend, but also busing in other middle school students from the surrounding neighborhoods. The creation of magnet schools was another method used to try to promote integration. Magnet schools attracted students from around Miami and in 1989, thirty-six of Florida’s seventy-five magnet programs were in Dade County.109 Carver Middle School undertook the challenge of integrating an International Studies program into its classes. Students from around Dade County now attend Carver and are offered Advanced Placement testing in either French, German, and Spanish.

Losing the school, however, took away not only the pride that citizens felt for their high school, but also the quality of education in the surrounding West Grove schools. By 1990, the ramifications of loosing Carver High were evident with staggering

108 Ibid.
statistics seen in the census of that same year. The census showed that in West Coconut Grove, nineteen percent of residents aged 25 years and older had received less than a 9th grade education. Thirty-one percent of residents had some high school education. Only twenty-six percent of West Grove residents graduated from high school and of that twenty-six percent only five percent graduated from college.\footnote{1990 Census of Population and Housing.}

Its no coincidence that with so few high school graduates, let alone college graduates, West Coconut Grove has traditionally had one of the highest poverty rates in South Florida. In 1990, less than twenty-five percent of residents living in East Coconut Grove lived below the poverty level. That same year West Coconut Grove saw portions of the community that were more than fifty percent below the poverty level.\footnote{City of Miami Planning, Building and Zoning Department, “1990 % Persons Below Poverty Level: Coconut Grove.”} Miami-Dade Public Schools receive funding based on property tax value and a community with such high levels of poverty cannot sustain value on property. What occurs is a disparaging cycle created by the inability to properly fund schools. The low funding also makes it difficult for necessary programs to be successful or even available. According to the census, “There is a need for after school programs; skill training program to maintain the cultural heritage of descendants of Bahamian immigrants.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Ransom Everglades, located in the East Grove, is the most prosperous school in the community and traditionally boasts a hundred percent graduation rate. While
education continued to struggle in the West Grove, the East Grove saw a rise in attendance as well as excellence at other private schools in Miami. With the desegregation of public schools in Dade County, the number of private schools increased. Approximately 94 percent of students attending private schools were white during the process of desegregation.\textsuperscript{113} The prosperity continued in the East Grove which was seen in the number of large homes and the obvious affluence of the community. While the West Grove lost its high school and its students were bused to Coral Gables, the East Grove schools prospered in their own community.

Chapter Four- Drug Abuse, Housing Issues Continue

Decades have passed, each holding a glimmer of hope for sustained progress to be made in West Coconut Grove. So often the improvement has a stacato affect on the community, with short bursts of progress that end just as quickly. Historically, it has always taken a group effort in West Coconut Grove to accomplish community goals. Father Gibson and Elizabeth Virrick worked together in an effort to eliminate the slums from the Grove. The most significant improvements in the West Grove came during the collaboration between Elizabeth Virrick and Father Theodore Gibson.

Since that change, nearly sixty years have passed with little development in the Grove. Former City of Miami Commissioner Johnny Winton said, “First of all, you’ve got to look at history. There’s two to three decade of zero development in the West Grove. No demand for development in the West Grove. Only plummiting values [real estate] for decade, after decade, after decade. By and large, the bad guys were in control of the West Grove.” The “bad guys” Winton refers to, are the drug dealers that brought various illegal substances to the area. One such substance was marijuana, which was sold in dime bags on a regular basis throughout West Coconut Grove. Television news reports were conducted showing cars driving down Grand Avenue late at night; the car would

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114 Johnson, Marlon & Tingle, Chad, West Coconut Grove: A Sense of Place (2003). Interview with former City of Miami Commissioner Johnny Winton.

115 A dime bag is a common term used to describe a $5 bag of marijuana.
slow down long enough to allow the drug dealer to run up to the car, hand over the bag, and grab the money. This became known as the “stop and shop.”  

These drug dealers made up part of the bad element that was brought into West Coconut Grove by the concrete monsters on Grand Avenue. The drug trade became so prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s that it caught the attention of filmmakers. The creators of the successful Cocaine Cowboys, a documentary telling the story of a lucrative drug trade in South Florida, said in an interview, “The West Grove neighborhood has been pretty dangerous turf for several decades, primarily because the crack cocaine trade flourished there. I’m not saying marijuana wasn’t prevalent, just that most would associate the neighborhood with crack dealers.”  

In 1980, Florida became the center of the cocaine drug trade in the United States. Along with New York and Los Angeles, Miami served as the gateway to Latin America and in particular the drug cartels in Colombia. Regardless of where the drugs were coming from, minority neighborhoods like West Coconut Grove were being torn apart as a result. In 1982, police in Miami found drug houses owned by Caribbean immigrants, which indicated the arrival of crack cocaine in South Florida. By 1985, Miami had become saturated with the drug.

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The increase in drug trafficking became nightly news in South Florida and even made national headlines. For instance, the November 23, 1981 issue of *Time* magazine pictured the state of Florida on the cover with the title, “Paradise Lost,” and that same year the FBI listed Miami as the nation’s most crime-ridden city, having seventy percent of the nation’s marijuana and cocaine coming through South Florida. Drugs were everywhere and West Coconut Grove was located in the middle of this turmoil. Today the streets of West Coconut Grove are filled with banners asking for help in bringing an end to drugs in the neighborhood. The banners promote a telephone number that residents may call if they find anyone dealing drugs.

Drugs have not been the only issue facing West Grove residents. Since the building of the multi-family housing along Grand Avenue, West Coconut Grove has faced significant housing issues. One of the major housing concerns has been dealing with absentee landlords, real estate developers, as well as residents moving out of Coconut Grove down to Richmond Heights in South Dade. In recent years there has been a group effort between the people of West Coconut Grove and various departments in the University of Miami to remedy the situation. The University of Miami’s involvement in the West Grove include the departments of history, architecture, education, communications, law, art, urban design, and psychology. These departments help form a partnership known as the Initiative for Urban and Social Ecology (INSUE).

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INUSE, spearheaded by Samina Quraeshi, made their presence felt in the community by taking a reasonable approach to rebuilding the area. Samina Quraeshi, the former project leader for INUSE stated, “Central to our [INUSE] approach is the idea that building and renovating livable communities happens through the conscious acts of design. By engaging families and residents with their environment, we can create places that people care about, take pride in, and fight to protect.”\(^{120}\) The department of history, led by Gregory Bush has collected oral histories from leaders in the community. The school of communication filmed aspects of everyday life. The art department examined the Gibson Charter School’s use of an arts-based curriculum. These are but a few examples of how collaboration between the community and academia have helped the community.

Unfortunately, like many times before, the progress has been slow and only superficial at best. By all accounts, there was great hope that the University of Miami would help stimulate progress in West Coconut Grove because the connection between a university and the community is important for progress. Nancy Cantor, former Chancellor at the University of Illinois, said at a conference, “We educate the next generation of leaders. We address important societal issues with discoveries that change our world. We preserve our cultural past while laying the groundwork for the future. And we experiment with ways of building community.”\(^{121}\) INUSE has served more as a way to educate

\(^{120}\) Ibid.

undergraduates rather than create lasting change. Despite the dozens of plans for revitalizing the neighborhood that have been announced, few have been completed.

The Bahamian Promenade was one such project that a decade late still has yet to be realized. Yvonne MacDonald, a native of the West Grove as well as president of the Coconut Grove Local Development Corporation, planned to have a group of abandoned shops with apartments above them renovated. It was her vision to see Grand Avenue brought back to life by bringing back businesses that had been lacking for years. The project was planned to be a collaboration with the City of Miami and the University of Miami in an effort to create a higher standard of living and stimulate business in West Coconut Grove.

Detailed plans were made for shops and residences, yet today none of these plans have been realized and little has changed on Grand Avenue. In an interview with Thelma Gibson, who has been heavily involved in many of the projects in West Coconut Grove, she mentioned the frustration of trying to bring plans to the area.

I have to tell you, I’ve seen so many plans for the Grand Avenue corridor and for what’s going to happen in the West Grove until two years ago when Peter Gardner and his group came with their plan. I was pleased with what they said they were going to do because they planned to build a park and build underground parking and build individual houses for rental, but no affordable housing. It was going to be more than a lot of people could afford. Then it began to move people out and

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they couldn’t afford to live here. Gentrification has certainly taken place. We never had white neighbors before, but now we do. They’re moving in wherever there is housing and it’s cheap. It’s changing.123

The threat of further gentrification and undesirable plans for development have helped bring the community closer together in recent years in order to preserve the Bahamian culture that is left in the neighborhood. The West Coconut Grove Homeowners and Tenants Association (HOATA) is an organization that holds community meetings once a month to seek solutions to the current housing concerns of the community. Yet residents rarely attended meetings. Only in recent years has that trend begun to improve. As Johnny Winton, the former City of Miami commissioner observed,

We’ve worked very closely with the West Coconut Grove Homeowners and Tenants Association, which when I got elected they were lucky if they had twenty members go to the board meetings. Now they’ll have seventy-five or a hundred people going to the board meetings. We’ve really tried to help empower the really hardworking, good families in the West Grove to take control of their neighborhood.124

The increase in participation within West Coconut Grove has helped the community keep away greedy developers, but often times news developers will enter the community in the hopes of maximizing profits.

123 Private interview with Mrs. Thelma Anderson Gibson.

In 2003 developers from the West Grove Development Corporation purchased land in West Coconut Grove and made plans to build several mixed-use condominiums. The plans indicated that there would be space for offices and businesses on the ground floor, a parking garage, and apartments above. The proposed apartments would be built along Grand Avenue and would attempt to maintain the Bahamian culture of West Coconut Grove. Unfortunately, as it turned out, the West Grove Development Corporation believed that maintaining Bahamian culture was painting buildings bright colors and naming them after islands such as Bimini and Nassau.

Uncertain of the impact these developers would have on the community, residents held several meetings to discuss the situation. In one of the gatherings, Cecelia Holloman, an urban renewal consultant, spoke about the dangers of allowing developers to build whatever they liked in West Coconut Grove.

Gentrification is when a community that has been low income and relatively depressed for a number of years, what we call disinvested, where people have walked away and left the community in poverty and despair. So now what happens is people want to change the community. People want to come in and build up the community. Now, there’s nothing wrong with that concept. What’s wrong with the concept is if it displaces people who live here because they are low income, because they are seniors, or because of their race. That is when gentrification is not acceptable.  

125 Ibid. Cecelia Holloman speaking at a meeting of West Coconut Grove homeowners and tenants.
Others in the community expressed similar concerns of developers displacing residents, partly because the apartments would be too expensive for most residents to invest in and that the structures built are far too tall for the area. The West Grove Development Corporation wanted to build structures that were twelve stories in height, but residents of the West Grove had their own idea of what they wanted to see in the community.

Historically, Coconut Grove has been a community of low-rise buildings and it was not until the 1970s when hotels, apartments, and office buildings were built along South Bayshore Drive that the East Grove drastically changed its appearance. According to Johnny Winton the, “community created their own vision as to what they wanted Grand Avenue to look like. There vision of Grand Avenue was to create a Bahamian village look.” As residents saw it, they wanted to maintain their cultural heritage as opposed to developers who were merely interested in turning a profit. This was, as Elizabeth Platter-Zyberk of the University of Miami School of Architecture pointed out, of particular importance to the residents.

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126 Ibid. Interview with former City of Miami Commissioner Johnny Winton.
The residents of Coconut Grove for years have effectively maintained Grand Avenue as a low scale commercial street by refusing to allow rezoning on the lots behind it. If you look around Miami what has happened, in places like Coral Way for instance, is generally developers come in and they rezone the lot in the back to get a property big enough to do a large commercial development. And the residents of Coconut Grove, for years and years, have understood that and refused to rezone the backs of the commercial lots. So they’ve maintained the residential character of the streets behind.127

Much like Thelma Gibson when she mentioned how the towers built on South Bayshore Drive had taken away the sea breeze she had enjoyed growing up in the West Grove, the residents now feared losing their sunlight because the proposed twelve story apartments would cast a shadow on Florida and Thomas Avenue.

At the meeting developers and landlords were given an opportunity to speak with the local homeowners and tenants and tried to bargain for the maximum height of the condominiums. West Grove residents made it clear that five stories would be allowed. Developers made the case that they were well within their rights to build twelve stories under the current zoning rules.128 The heated meeting is a microcosm of the struggles that have occurred in West Coconut Grove for several decades. The situation between the West Grove Development Corporation and the homeowners and tenants perpetuated the

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127 Ibid. Interview with Elizabeth Platter-Zyberk, University of Miami School of Architecture.

128 Ibid.
trend in West Coconut Grove of gentrification and displacement. Landlords who have
sold their property to developers want to make the largest profit possible, but at the same
time they are removing residents from their homes. With no place to go, many residents
fear they will have to move away from Coconut Grove because they are unable to afford
the high-priced condominiums. In an interview, long-time West Coconut Grove resident
Mrs. Phillips said,

I like some changes, but some changes are not good for everyone. They never will
be. We like something like a home life. That’s what this [West Coconut Grove]
was always about. That place on the corner, they’re calling it Bahama Paradise.
Now, how many of us can afford to live in that if we upstage? They can’t give me
enough money for my house. My house is paid for and I’m going to die there.129

Many other residents shared Mrs. Phillips’ sentiments and were concerned that the
change occurring in the West Grove would not be positive. In a small victory for West
Coconut Grove, the City of Miami Commission ruled in their favor and did not allow the
developers to build twelve stories. Today, Bahama Paradise has not been built, nor are
their plans for construction in the future.

Through out the struggle with the West Grove Development Corporation, Andy
Parrish, the president of Wind and Rain Properties, Inc., had been a source of relief for
many families in the area. Wind and Rain originally began as a community homebuilder
for first time homeowners. In recent years the company has branched out to help all West

129 Ibid. Interview with Mrs. Phillips.
Grove residents build affordable housing. At the time of his interview in 2003, Andy Parrish noted that Wind and Rain had built nearly eighteen homes in West Coconut Grove. Of even greater importance, Parrish, who resides in Coconut Grove, has had an understanding of what the community wanted. Wind and Rain has bought up properties and built affordable, single-family homes. The design of these homes has helped maintained some of the Bahamian identity that is so important to the West Grove by incorporating architectural styles from the shotgun houses. More importantly, affordable housing has helped restore some of the pride within the community. Sheryl Ogletree, a local resident who has expressed appreciation for Wind and Rain, said, “I filled the application out on a Tuesday and on Thursday Andy and his partner told me I was approved. I went into the office to talk to them, they told me how much I needed to give them. Two weeks later I had the keys. It didn’t make a difference to me the color of the house. It was going to be mine and I was going to be moving in. I knew what the feeling was to say ‘this is my house.’” With the help of Andy Parrish the community has been able to close the “hole in the doughnut.” Wind and Rain is an example of the progress that can be made in West Coconut Grove when maximizing profits is not the ultimate goal of a developer.

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130 Ibid. Interview with Andy Parrish. President of Wind and Rain Properties, Inc.

131 Ibid. Interview with Sheryl Ogletree.
Conclusion: The Hole in the Doughnut

West Coconut Grove is rarely mentioned outside of the community as if it was forgotten in the history of South Florida. Although it has not been a highly studied area, the Bahamian story in the West Grove is unique because their transition to South Florida was made easier by similar environments and their ability to maintain—at least initially—cordial relationship in Coconut Grove with white settlers created a sense of community regardless of race. There is no singular example that can explain why the West Grove has experienced decades with little progress, but the argument can be made that several events helped change the story in the Grove from one of community and pride to one of poverty and struggle.

The initial event that began the troubles in the West Grove was annexation. There was a time when blacks and whites attended church services together until Jim Crow reared its ugly head when Miami took control of the area in 1925. Miami was a rapidly growing city with aspirations of becoming a metropolis in the South. In order to reach that goal, Miami city leaders felt they had to incorporate the smaller, surrounding communities, which included Coconut Grove. After annexation Coconut Grove slowly began to change. The relationship between blacks and whites became mostly nonexistent and the West Grove suffered. If not for a flawed voting law that required two-thirds of all votes in order to annex, Coconut Grove might still be the peaceful settlement by the bay it once was.
Thus began the dichotomy of economics, progress, and resources between East and West Coconut Grove. The lack of stability in the West Grove allowed for greedy landlords and developers to buy up property and build multi-family housing that went against the wishes of West Grove residents. Housing issues became one of the events that has kept the West Grove from progress. Landlords would do little maintenance on their buildings and charged high rents to tenants, which brought with it a number of social problems, economic blight, and crime. The housing struggle, as in many urban areas, became a common theme in the history of West Coconut Grove as residents have used all their resources to prevent displacement or gentrification from occurring. When compared to the lack of issues facing East Coconut Grove, the dichotomy is even more staggering.

Most information regarding the West Grove has been pieced together through newspaper clippings and interviews with members of the community and others who have experienced the issues facing the area. These interviews shed light on other events that were detriments to the community such as the loss of George Washington Carver High School and the increase in drug trafficking. Several events contributed to the dichotomy between East and West Coconut Grove. Nonetheless, even through all the turmoil, the good people of West Coconut Grove continue to fight for their culture and neighborhood.
Appendix

1A. Evangelist Street is today known as Charles Avenue. Two important shotgun houses are located at the beginning of Charles: Mariah Brown and E.W.F. Stirrup. by Alex Plasencia

2A. The corner of Grand Avenue and Douglas Road. by Alex Plasencia
3A. The Barnacle was home to Commodore Ralph Middleton Munroe. It is one of many historic landmarks preserved in East Coconut Grove. by Alex Plasencia

3B. The Egret was the name given to Commodore Munroe’s boat. It too has been preserved. by Alex Plasencia
3C. This building is the boathouse that is on Munroe’s property. by Alex Plasencia

4A. The First Coconut Grove School is still maintained in pristine condition. by Alex Plasencia
4B. Upon entering the school, a hat rack is placed to the left. by Alex Plasencia

5A. Charlotte Jane Memorial Cemetery. by Alex Plasencia
5B. Notice how the graves are above ground, similar to those found in the Bahamas. by Alex Plasencia

5C. Many of the original Bahamian settlers are buried in the Charlotte Jane Memorial Cemetery. by Alex Plasencia
The Historic Coconut Grove Cemetery was first used as a graveyard for the Grove's Bahamian settlers in 1906. The community's original cemetery was a small lot opened by the city in 1904 on what is now the 3500 block of Charles Avenue. That site was judged by the town leaders to be too small to accommodate the needs of the growing population and the cemetery was moved to its present location. Because of the upset caused by moving the cemetery the "Coconut Grove Colored Cemetery Association" was formed to take over the responsibility for the yard. In 1913, five families purchased the property for $40.00 as trustees for the Association. These families were the Burrows, Higgs, Reddick, Ross and E.W.F. Strup families, all of whom were local civic leaders. Many of Coconut Grove's Bahamian pioneers are buried in this cemetery. Joseph Mayer, who owned the bicycle shop is buried here, as are Daniel Anderson, a Bahamian seaman and his wife Catherine who was one of the founders of Christ Episcopal Church. Captain John Sweeting, a successful developer and commercial fisherman, and his family are also here. Many more of the original settlers of the Grove may also rest in this cemetery in the numerous unmarked graves. Some of the markers in the cemetery are unique to South Florida. The twelve anthropomorphic or "head and shoulders" stones are found no where else in Dade County. They reflect the Bahamian background and rich African American culture of the neighborhood. Today the cemetery is still cared for by the Coconut Grove Cemetery Association and is recognized as an historic site.

SPONSORED BY THE COCONUT GROVE CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

5D. Plaque signifying the historical importance of this location. by Alex Plasencia
6A. Mariah Brown House. Currently no one lives in this home. by Alex Plasencia

6B. View of Mariah Brown’s house from the front. by Alex Plasencia
6C. E.W.F. Stirrup house that he built himself. The family no longer resides in this home. by Alex Plasencia

7A. Entrance to George Washington Carver Elementary and Junior High by Alex Plasencia
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