

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

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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.

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