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Liberty City

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Community Background Report

Liberty City

County
Miami-Dade

Boundaries
North: Northwest 79th Street
South: Northwest 36th Street
West: Northwest 19th Avenue
East: Northwest 7th Avenue

Community Type
Neighborhood

History

Liberty City is historic as the first black suburban neighborhood of the City of Miami. This neighborhood's name comes from the Liberty Square Housing Project, which was built in the late 1930s. Reverend John E. Culmer and the Greater Miami Negro Civic League championed the development of this housing project to relieve overcrowding in Overtown. Public concern over the spread of influenza, yellow fever and small pox outside of the boundaries of Overtown and the urge to move blacks away from the expanding central business district contributed to the push to build new housing for blacks. The President Roosevelt's Public Works Administration built the initial 34 apartment units on land between Northwest 62nd and 67th Streets along Northwest 14th Avenue. Unlike many housing units in Overtown, all of these apartments were equipped with indoor plumbing.

Liberty City is served by four Metrorail stations: the Northside Station on Northwest 79th Street, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Plaza Station on Northwest 62nd Street, Brownsville Station on Northwest 52nd Street and Earlington Heights Station on Northwest 41st Street. Currently, construction is underway to expand the Metrorail from the Earlington Heights Station to the new Miami Central Station.

Community Dynamics

Violence surrounded Liberty City shortly after the Liberty Square Housing Project was inaugurated, most coming from whites who feared their voting black neighbors. As blacks sought housing north of the housing project, whites reacted with violence to protect their all white neighborhoods. The neighborhood north of Liberty Square to Northwest 79th Street became integrated and then majority black by the early 1960s. In 1969, while the Republican National Convention was held at Miami Beach, riots erupted in Liberty City. National context can be used to explain this event as there were also riots in Chicago, Washington D.C. and San Francisco within months of the Liberty City riot. Locally, the police force was determined to enforce order in an underrepresented community where tempers were high. Years later Liberty City would be the origin of other riots stemming from racial tensions in the 1980s. The city of Miami reacted by commissioning offices to specifically address business, employment and housing issues in Liberty City and other black neighborhoods.

Demographic Highlights

In 2000 Liberty City was a neighborhood of 4.2 square miles with the following demographics:

- Approximately 23,000 persons reside in the area.
- 95% of the populace is Black.
- 43% of persons age 25 and over do not have a high school diploma.
- There is a high rate of unemployment at 20%.
- There is a low median family income of $22,500.

Business Landscape

Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (Northwest 54th Street and Northwest 7th Avenue) is an important cultural corridor running through Liberty City. Important commercial corridors in Liberty City are Northwest 54th and 79th Streets where they cross Northwest 7th and 17th Avenues. Each of these corridors has been prioritized by local business groups for development. A 2002 survey of businesses in the area identified several key issues of concern:

- A need for pride in the community, strong motivation to serve it and a feeling of wanting to empower the African-American community.
- Awareness of economic development organizations and desire for help from them.
- Belief that crime is not a serious problem, but that the area's image needs to be changed through beautification.
- 50-80% of clientele is local.

- Owners do not feel need for assistance with business skills except for getting grants and loans.
- Some owners would like help with marketing.

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