

The Origins and Early History of the Dade County Community Relations Board

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Now concluding its fifty-second year, the Dade County Community Relations Board has had a fascinating and sometimes controversial history. The CRB idea generally emerged in the postwar era in the context of a national discourse on race, ethnicity, and religion. The Dade County CRB's founders drew on an important set of ideas known at the time as the "human relations agenda"—ideas developed during World War II and shaped by social science research and conceptualization focused on countering racial prejudice and religious bigotry. In the postwar period, metropolitan Miami experienced a rising level of racial, ethnic, and religious strife. Although the nation's top tourist destination in 1950, the Miami area remained deeply southern in its racial attitudes and political culture. The Ku Klux Klan was riding high in the postwar years. Racial tension, street-level violence, arson, even dynamite bombs marked racially changing neighborhoods in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as African Americans began breaking out of the racially zoned areas that had kept them confined since the early years of the twentieth century. The large postwar Jewish migration to Miami from northern cities—8,000 Jews resided in metro Miami in 1940, rising to 140,000 in 1960—triggered overt anti-Semitism in hotels, clubs, housing, and employment, as well as synagogue and Hebrew school bombings. Not surprisingly, Miami entered the postwar era with no human relations tradition. However, some Miamians who thought deeply about such things believed in the promise of the human relations agenda to overcome racial conflict and create a new sense of civic unity. In the volatile 1960s, after more than a decade of intergroup and interracial groundwork, Miami religious leaders called for a permanent community forum to mediate group tensions.

Following this suggestion, in June 1963 the Dade County Commission established an official Community Relations Board (CRB) to serve, as they wrote, “as an escape valve for community pressures and as a mediator in community controversies.” The Dade County CRB was the first agency of its kind in the U.S. South, although little more than a year later the City of Tampa established a bi-racial Commission on Community Relations.¹

The chief architect of the Dade County CRB was Seymour Samet, a newcomer to South Florida in 1952. A World War II veteran, Samet was a human relations professional who had worked as assistant director of the Jewish Community Council of Essex County in Newark, New Jersey. Following a series of dynamite bombings in Miami in September, November, and December 1951, the national office of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) hired Samet to establish a southern regional office of the organization in South Florida. Samet’s assignment: to combat the religious and racial bigotry that lay behind the multiple attacks on Miami synagogues and Jewish schools, a Catholic church, and an apartment complex undergoing transition from white to black occupancy. Samet’s professional training and experience stemmed from the intergroup and human relations advocacy that began during World War II and that dominated liberal thinking on race relations in the postwar years.² So let’s begin there.

The Human Relations Agenda

The human relations agenda focused initially on the idea that people of different ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds could work together to achieve national unity during World War II and for the inevitable postwar social challenges. Race rioting in Detroit, New York City, and Los Angeles in 1943 alarmed the nation’s leaders and prompted a national war-time unity campaign promoting cooperation rather than conflict and competition among racial and ethnic groups. Thus, World War II and racial troubles at home stimulated efforts both to mediate racial and ethnic conflict and to celebrate, as historian Eric Foner has suggested, “the notion that the country’s strength lay in its diversity.” By the end of the war, more than 300 states, cities, and towns had established civic unity committees, human relations commissions, and the like to damp-

en racial conflict and mobilize interracial cooperation in support of the war effort.³

Many of these organizations persisted into the postwar period, now focusing mostly on improving race relations and ending various forms of discrimination in housing, education, employment, and public accommodations. Jewish, Catholic, and interdenominational religious groups added their voices and their influence to the national human relations/civil rights agenda. Jewish organizations especially, reacting to growing knowledge of the Holocaust in Europe, began developing strategies to curb anti-Semitism in the United States, while at the same time endorsing the emerging intergroup relations agenda. Beginning in 1944, a new national organization, the American Council on Race Relations, headed initially by former New Dealer and future Cabinet member Robert C. Weaver, sought to promote the scientific study of race relations, worked with local community organizations, and served as a clearing house for information on the human relations movement. The postwar era also witnessed publication of an enormous popular and social science literature—books, magazine articles, training manuals, textbooks, and the like on intergroup relations. These multiple and overlapping agencies, organizations, and literatures reflected a major thrust of postwar political ideology and social relations—the idea that a true democracy embraced diversity and tolerance and supported equal rights. Just about everywhere, except in the South, the nation's traditional racial climate was being challenged by an organizational network dedicated to intergroup cooperation and racial equality.⁴

Social scientists in several disciplines provided significant intellectual evidence and support for the human relations movement during and after the war. Anthropologists, especially the great Franz Boas, had already made a powerful case challenging the idea of inherent racial differences.⁵ The sociological profession was moving away from an earlier conflict model of race and ethnic relations and toward an intergroup relations model that conceded the importance of cooperation and ultimate assimilation to mainstream culture.⁶ In 1943, Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal published his two-volume, 1,500-page study of American race relations, *An American Dilemma*. This enormously influential book relentlessly dissected historic and contemporary patterns of racism and segregation in the United States, especially in the South.

Myrdal thought that his devastating racial expose would somehow prompt racial reform, but he offered only a vague, although optimistic, belief that commitment to basic American values of equality, justice, tolerance, equal opportunity, and fairness—what Myrdal called “The American Creed”—would eventually overcome the nation’s racist past and present. It was a hopeful but naive conclusion to a massive research project. Myrdal never explained how historically and structurally embedded racism might be overcome by a vague sense of idealism among the American people. Those American ideals had been part of the nation’s political culture since the Revolutionary era, yet segregation and racist practices persisted, most prominently in the South but elsewhere as well. Despite the enormity of the evidence unearthed by his research project, Myrdal never suggested that African Americans should get out in the streets and actively challenge segregation and discrimination—as soon happened with the modern civil rights movement; and he never forcefully argued that the federal government could make a difference—as it did with court decisions in the 1940s and 1950s and with civil rights legislation in the 1960s.⁷

Perhaps even more important than Myrdal, in the early 1940s university-based social psychologists initiated research seeking to understand the roots of prejudice, racial bias, and religious bigotry, such as anti-Semitism. The human relations agenda benefited enormously from the social psychologists’ emerging contact hypothesis—the concept that increased association and contact across racial, ethnic, or religious boundaries offered the most effective method of combatting prejudice and discrimination. During the 1940s and 1950s, contact theory was centrally linked with work of Harvard social psychologist Gordon W. Allport, and summarized in Allport’s 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*. Social psychologists such as Allport came to the conclusion that racial prejudice and religion bigotry stemmed, not from any structural or social explanation, but from individual ignorance, authoritarian personalities, and social distance from “the other.” Increased contact in various dimensions of life—school, church, neighborhood, workplace, the military, and cultural affairs—was advanced as the best method for eroding racism and bigotry. Myrdal naively hoped that the American Creed would somehow change deep patterns of belief and practice, but the social psychologists proposed ideas and policies that would bring people together. In the early 1940s, national Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish

Committee (AJC), the American Jewish Congress (AJCong), and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), alarmed by the vicious anti-Semitism of the Holocaust in World War II Europe, financially supported Allport's and other social psychologists' research on racial and religious prejudice.⁸

Allport and others refined the contact hypothesis over the years, identifying the optimal conditions for effective contact in schools, housing, workplaces, the military, and so on. How to apply and implement the contact hypothesis remained a vital idea for human relations professionals. Contact theory became part of their study and training throughout the postwar era.⁹ Contact theory also shaped the NAACP's legal strategy that led to the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing school segregation, *Brown v. Board of Education*. The black social psychologist Kenneth Clark incorporated ideas about racial contact into his research on the damaging effect of school segregation on black children. During World War II, Clark had worked with other social scientists on racial issues, and after the war he assisted on legal projects regarding schooling with the NAACP. Clark wrote the first draft of the social scientists' statement that accompanied the plaintiffs brief in the *Brown* case on school desegregation. Clark consulted with Allport and others on revisions, and ultimately more than two dozen social scientists signed the statement submitted to the Court. Clark's white and black doll study, although now recognized as weak social science, had the desired effect on the Warren Court.¹⁰ Few ideas or concepts in social psychology have been so extensively researched over the past half century as the contact hypothesis. Thus, by the time Seymour Samet arrived in Miami in 1952, the equal rights agenda and contact theory had shaped the training, outlook, and practice of human relations professionals across the nation.

Racial and Ethnic Divisions in 1950s Miami

Seymour Samet and other human relations professionals in Miami faced an enormous, almost impossible, task. Overcoming racial divisions and bringing people together posed severe challenges, given the huge demographic changes and community conflicts reshaping the postwar city. Metro Miami's population grew rapidly from 268,000 in 1940 to 935,000 in 1960, basically tripling in twenty years, mostly from migration from other cities and states. Jews and Italians came from New York and other eastern cities, blacks migrated from Georgia and South

Carolina for work in south Florida, Puerto Ricans from New York and San Juan found a favorable climate similar to home. Cuban exiles had just started their migration from Castro's 1959 revolution in Cuba; within a decade they had become Miami's largest ethnic group. All these newcomers found themselves in a racially segregated southern city dominated by white business and political elites. All competed in the struggle to find housing and jobs, build neighborhoods and communities, and defend the interest of their own group. Politics and culture divided Miami's white population as well—segregationist southerners faced off against more liberal northern migrants uncomfortable with traditional racial practices. Blacks, too, were divided between those born in Florida and southern states and black immigrants from the Bahamas, Jamaica, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The convergence of these multiple racial and demographic changes in the 1950s and early 1960s produced a tension-filled city on edge.

Division and hostility prevailed through the 1950s, but a few organizations such as the NAACP, the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) challenged racism and promoted the human relations/civil rights agenda. In April 1953, some "friends" warned the NCCJ that "you can't talk to Miami people about intergroup relations without grave risks." NCCJ activists ignored the warning. In the early 1950s, the University of Miami's Department of Human Relations worked with community organizations and offered college courses on intergroup relations (even though the University remained segregated). In the wake of the 1951 bombings, mentioned earlier, the Dade County Commission established a large, unwieldy, quasi-public, weakly funded Dade County Council on Community Relations (DCCCR), hoping to avert further racial violence. By the mid-1950s, the DCCCR worked primarily to ease tensions aroused by the *Brown* decision and to facilitate desegregation. In 1957, the Florida Council on Human Relations, a state affiliate of the racially liberal Southern Regional Council, moved its offices from Daytona Beach to Miami to better pursue school integration. Also in 1957, at the state level, Governor LeRoy Collins established the Governor's Commission on Race Relations (also known as the Fowler Committee), a moderate effort to resolve mounting racial tensions, especially in Miami. In 1960, Collins urged every community in Florida "to form its own biracial committee to resolve racial grievances." By this time the

Miami civil rights movement was entering its activist phase. The upstart Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) began a lunch-counter sit-in campaign in the spring of 1959, a year before the more celebrated student sit-ins of 1960 touched off a national movement. Thus, a relatively small network of racial liberals had emerged to assert, mostly tentatively and without much overall impact, the interracial ideals of “The American Creed” outlined by Mrydal and the interracial contact goals outlined by Allport and Clark. But there was more work to be done.¹¹

Seymour Samet and the Establishment of the CRB

Seymour Samet arrived in Miami in early 1952, having no experience in the South. He found a community of interest in the large and growing Jewish community in the Miami area and quickly helped launch the southern regional branch of the AJC. Samet had a B.A. in social science from Montclair State College in New Jersey. He volunteered for military service in 1941 and served four years, primarily in the Pacific theater. He worked briefly in private business after the war, but was drawn to community service and pursued graduate work in social science and human relations at Columbia University, the New School for Social Research, and Harvard University. Moving south, he continued graduate education at the University of Miami, completing a masters degree from the University of Miami’s new Department of Human Relations. He was thoroughly trained in the key elements of the human relations idea—both its intellectual foundations and its implementation in practice. During the Fifties, he articulated perhaps better than anyone else on the local scene the methods and goals of the postwar human relations agenda.¹²

As powerful forces for resistance and change rocked Miami in the 1950s, Samet emerged as a pivotal public figure promoting human rights and intergroup harmony. In addition to his full-time job leading the Miami AJC, he joined the DCCCR and worked through the agency’s committee system to get the Dade County school board moving on school desegregation. As early as 1954, Samet’s report, “Planning for Integration in Dade County Schools,” urged school officials to respond positively to the *Brown* decision and to “prepare public opinion” for integrated schools. The desegregation issue required intergroup training, he argued, with workshops for teachers and parents. When the school board failed to respond, the DCCCR held dozens of small neighborhood meet-

ings and “coffee” to discuss desegregation and ease parental concerns. Samet believed, as he wrote to the national AJC office in 1956, that the DCCCR was the most effective organization in South Florida working on integration issues. He urged the AJC to find ways of strengthening the organization through outside financial assistance.¹³

These efforts over several years typified Samet’s method: He described himself as an “enabler” [Samet’s wife Elaine called him the “prime mover”], a professional with intergroup skills who could diagnose community relations problems and inspire others to work for social change. He was engaged, he wrote of himself in 1962, in the task of “social engineering requiring the development of new patterns of thinking, new ways of behaving, new standards and new customs.” It was no easy task in postwar Miami. In several speeches in the late 1950s, Samet lamented the rise of what he called “the bigot element” in the South, feared that tensions would worsen, and urged cooperative efforts among human relations organizations to challenge the segregationist crowd. In 1957 and 1958, after the creation of Dade’s new metropolitan government, Samet began lobbying the metro commission to establish a more effective, official, and budgeted Human Relations Commission. Samet and Stuart Simon of the National Conference of Christians and Jews even submitted a draft ordinance for such an agency. The metro commission rejected this proposal, Samet wrote, because of “fear, squeamishness, and lack of understanding.”¹⁴

That first effort to create a CRB failed, but Samet persisted in his enabling work. In January 1963, Samet attended the first National Conference on Religion and Race, organized in Chicago by Catholic inter-racialists. The conference issued a “Statement of Conscience,” a national call for a cooperative effort among religious organizations against racial discrimination of any kind. On the eve of the Birmingham civil rights crusade, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered an inspirational speech at the Chicago conference. King also criticized churches and synagogues for lackluster effort on civil rights. Inspired, Samet returned to Miami with renewed determination. On behalf of the American Jewish Committee, he called a meeting of seven key Miami religious leaders, including Catholic Bishop Coleman F. Carroll, Episcopal Bishop James Duncan, two leading black preachers, Rev. Theodore Gibson and Rev. Edward Graham, and a few Jewish and Protestant leaders. The resulting dialogue produced a public statement by

Bishop Carroll confirming all the essential elements of the human relations/civil rights agenda. With the religious leaders lined up, Samet then organized a second meeting with Bishop Carroll, *Miami News* editor Bill Baggs, and a few Miami political heavyweights to, as he later wrote, “plan the political strategy which created Dade County’s official Community Relations Board.” Samet’s strategy worked, and on June 11, 1963, the Dade County Commission approved an ordinance establishing the county’s CRB. Bishop Carroll, a recent arrival from Pittsburgh and strong advocate of integration within the Catholic Church, presented the public face of the CRB advocates. Behind the scenes, however, Seymour Samet had provided the motive force from the beginning.¹⁵

Racial troubles were brewing in Miami in 1963, which explains why the metro commission acted so quickly on the CRB proposal this time. Unresolved conflicts from the 1950s—housing, schooling, jobs, public accommodations—carried over into the 1960s. The “radical right” stirred up discontent over plans for school desegregation. New controversies were heating up. Planned interstate expressway construction through downtown Miami targeted thousands of black homeowners and renters, but little had been done about relocation of those displaced. Throughout the early 1960s, blacks complained that newly arrived Cuban exiles were squeezing them out of the local job market. Black-Cuban tensions according to Samet in Congressional testimony in March 1963, were “smoldering beneath the surface.” At the very time the metro commission was considering the CRB ordinance, Miami blacks were boycotting the large Shell’s City Market in Liberty City, proclaiming “Don’t Buy Where Can’t Work.” While this battle was taking place in Miami, King’s Birmingham campaign, and the violence it provoked, was making national headlines and television news. As the *Jewish Floridian* newspaper put it in an August 1963 story on the origins of the CRB, “South Florida didn’t want a Birmingham in its midst, and so Dade County did something about it.”¹⁶

Reflecting the main ingredients of the human relations agenda, the County’s CRB ordinance laid out the structure, functions, and responsibilities of the new agency. The Board had eighteen voluntary, unpaid members appointed by the County Commission for staggered three-year terms and ostensibly representing the diverse populations of the Miami area. The CRB’s main function was “to foster mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect among all economic, social, religious and ethnic

groups in the County.” It also had broad authority to “act as conciliator in controversies involving community relations,” as well as to study “human relations” problems and develop appropriate community-education programs. The CRB could recommend new county ordinances to achieve its purposes, but it was clear that the CRB’s authority was “purely advisory, voluntary and persuasive.” Finally, the CRB ordinance empowered the County Commission to appoint a paid executive director qualified by “professional experience in the field of community relations.” Members appointed to the Board in 1963 included some of those involved in early planning of the agency—Bishop Carroll, Bishop Duncan, Bill Baggs, and Rabbi Joseph Narot, as well as some leading Miami bankers, businessmen, attorneys, and University of Miami president Henry King Stanford. Stanford had only recently arrived in Miami from Birmingham, where he had headed Birmingham Southern College and been deeply engaged in the Alabama city’s civil rights struggle. Oddly, though, for an agency dealing with urgent and controversial race relations matters, CRB appointees included only one black and one Cuban, giving the appearance of tokenism. Two months later, in August 1963, the County Commission appointed Seymour Samet as the CRB’s executive director, putting in charge the one person most responsible for the new agency. Samet agreed to take the position for one year while on a partial leave of absence from the AJC.¹⁷

Miami’s CRB in the Sixties

Samet began with a blank slate, a small staff, and a limited budget. His agency had huge challenges, yet little authority and a vague and unspecific mission. How to resolve a slew of long-simmering racial hostilities; how to achieve conciliation, tolerance, and mutual respect among contentious groups; how to insure equal opportunity in housing, schooling, and employment in a small agency with a minimal budget and no executive power or administrative authority? These were the problems Samet confronted. As in his previous assignment with the American Jewish Committee, Samet conceived his role first and foremost as an “enabler,” instigator, or motivator, one who could educate the public, inspire community involvement and community actors, and move public officials to action. Samet and the eighteen members of his board developed a strategy to achieve these broad goals by creating a commit-



One or two black shoppers are lost in the white crowd at Shell's, 1948. Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-14923.

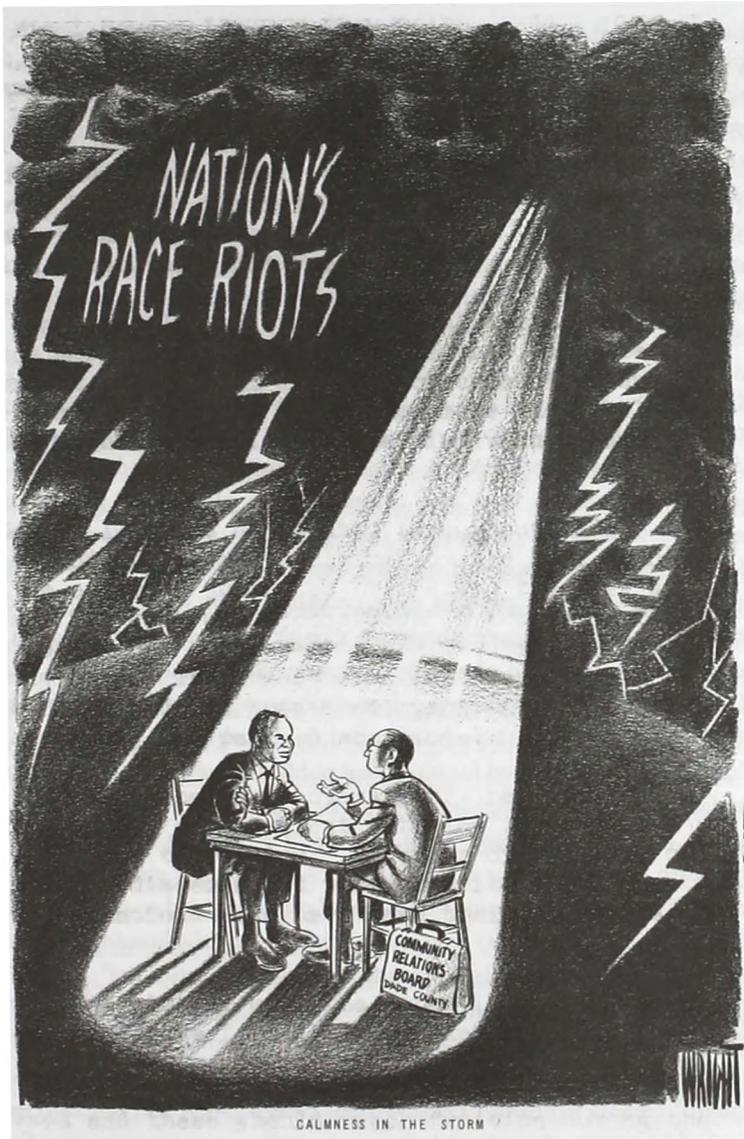
tee structure focused on what were perceived as the most pressing inter-group or community relations problems facing metropolitan Miami—committees on housing, education, employment, public accommodations, and police/community relations.¹⁸

CRB monthly minutes, annual reports, newspaper coverage, and other documentation over the course of the 1960s provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the CRB approach. A succession of meetings of the full board, committees and subcommittees, punctuated by monthly public forums, professional conferences, and numerous training institutes and seminars marked the CRB's busy first decade. CRB staff members met frequently with officials from city, county, and private agencies and boards. They heard and investigated complaints from individuals and groups. In the summer of 1963, the CRB resolved the black boycott at Shell's City Market and negotiated with the Greater Miami Hotel Association to eliminate discrimination in local hotels. From the beginning, however, the CRB had some internal tensions, with some members urging a greater degree of militancy. For example, the Reverend Theodore Gibson, an iconic figure in black Miami, urged more sustained action on school desegregation. In an interview with the *Miami Herald* in August 1963, Gibson stated: "I get a little provoked when white people tell me to be patient. ... Our rights are long overdue. You owe them to us. This is payday now." Despite its structural weaknesses, the CRB

got off to a good start in its first year. However, in mid-1964 at the end of his one-year term, Seymour Samet resigned as director to take a new position in the federal Community Relations Service (CRS), headed by former Florida Governor LeRoy Collins. In his new position as Chief Intergroup Relations Officer in the Office of Community Action, Samet had an opportunity to apply the principles of the human relations agenda on a national scale at a time of rising racial tension but also of great achievement. Samet did maintain his interest in what was happening in Miami, however. In 1966 and again in 1967 he wrote a CRS report on the Cuban Refugee problem in the city; later, Samet wrote an internal review of Dade County's grant application for Model Cities funding. Samet was replaced at the CRB by his assistant, Ben Sissal, who directed the Miami CRB until 1968.¹⁹

As noted, the CRB lacked any formal authority to take conclusive action, but pursued a mediating role. Following its charter, in the early 1960s the Board drafted several important ordinances for the County Commission's consideration. These included a local fair employment practices (FEPC) ordinance, a public accommodations ordinance, a fair housing ordinance, and minimum housing codes. Eventually, the County Commission approved these measures, and the CRB set up its own projects for implementation, such as its Equal Employment Opportunity Task Force. These efforts drew on the human relations agenda and began to reshape Dade County's racial landscape by the end of the decade.²⁰

The CRB interjected itself into various public controversies, always as the mediator, the negotiator, the public conscience, and the voice of reason. For example, the CRB education committee responded to complaints from black, middle-class Richmond Heights parents about building a new neighborhood elementary school that would have a completely black enrollment; instead, parents wanted the new school built in a nearby white neighborhood so that their children could attend an integrated school. By contrast, parents in the working-class, black community of Goulds in South Dade wanted to retain a black high school in their community rather than integrate their children in a more distant white high school. The CRB negotiated with the parents and the school board to achieve an amicable solution, in both cases meeting the demands of the parents.²¹



Political cartoon praising the CRB's role in keeping Miami race relations calm. Illustration from the *First Annual Report of the Metropolitan Dade County Community Relations Board ... for the year 1963-1964*. WTVJ Television Research Records, HistoryMiami.

The CRB public accommodations committee investigated complaints from the NAACP and CORE about hotel discrimination in upscale Bal Harbour and discrimination by a group of restaurants in a white section of Miami. Committee members met with the hotel and restaurant managers seeking resolution. The hotel decided to end its white only policy, but the restaurants' refusal was followed by public exposure and a CORE lawsuit. These examples illustrate the CRB method—investigation, quiet negotiation, and public censure. When those methods did not produce results, other agencies had to take action, as with the CORE litigation.²²

By far, the CRB's most challenging issues dealt with housing, employment, and police/community relations. The CRB's housing committee faced deeply entrenched problems of housing discrimination, complicated by historic neighborhood patterns based on local racial zoning. Housing issues were also complicated by the arrival of Cuban refugees, who settled primarily in the western portion of Miami and in Hialeah, thereby closing off housing opportunities for blacks in those areas. These housing patterns were complicated by the demolition of thousands of black housing units as a result of urban redevelopment, code enforcement, and especially expressway construction. In 1966 the CRB warned of the dangers of re-concentrating dislocated African Americans in what was now being called the "northwest transition area." Instead, the CRB pushed for integrated public housing and enforcement of fair housing legislation, but it was a hard sell in those troubled racial times. The CRB promoted "open housing," seeking, not very successfully, to get builders, bankers, mortgage brokers, and real estate leaders to commit to equal opportunity. CRB board members tried to persuade the Miami Housing Authority to cease building new public housing projects in black or transitional communities, urging "scatter-site" projects instead, hoping thereby to block emerging patterns of ghettoization. Complaints about "blockbusting" by real estate agents flooded the CRB, as whites fled older neighborhoods and blacks moved into new "second ghetto" areas in northwest Dade. School desegregation had much to do with this pattern of residential change, providing new opportunities for blockbusters.²³

The dislocation of an estimated 22,000 mostly African Americans as a result of urban redevelopment and expressway construction offered an

even more intractable problem. In 1956, the Florida State Road Department planned the route of the Interstate-95 urban expressway directly through the center of Overtown, the black housing district just northwest of Miami's downtown business district. Delays of various sorts put off expressway construction and the dislocation of black families for a decade, but by the mid-1960s thousands of black families, mostly renters, were seeking new homes. The *Miami Herald*, local Urban League officials, and various housing reformers pointed out the obvious problems soon after expressway plans were publicized in the late 1950s. As the *Herald* put the question in a 1957 headline, "What about the Negroes Uprooted by Expressway?" The *Herald* article went on to answer its own question: "Nobody seems to know. Nobody is doing any planning about it. ... So far as we know, no agency on either the state or local level has started to tackle the problem." Public officials neglected the relocation housing problem until the crisis hit ten years later in 1966. A concerted effort by various agencies kicked into gear, but by that time the blockbusters, slumlords, real estate speculators, and speculative builders had taken control and managed the expansion of Miami's second ghetto in northwest Dade County. Luther Brooks, who owned a rent collection agency, played a major role in the transition, providing rental housing in formerly white areas and even the moving vans in lieu of any official relocation assistance. The CRB had been urging action by public agencies, pushing for the creation of a relocation agency, for moving expenses from the state, and for fair or open housing in relocation areas. To prevent ghettoization, the CRB wanted relocatees distributed throughout the county regardless of race. They wanted better planning, improved public transit in relocation areas, and stronger building codes in new construction, and they opposed variances for higher densities in multiple-unit buildings. For the most part, all of these efforts failed. Despite Dade County's last-minute relocation program and local implementation of the Great Society's War on Poverty and Model Cities programs, by the end of the 1960s blacks in Miami had become more concentrated, ghettoized, in the sprawling Liberty City area of northwest Dade County.²⁴

The CRB's employment committee faced similar difficulties, problems largely beyond its control. The CRB's initial thrust on employment was to guarantee equal opportunity to jobs, thus the FEPC ordinance that the CRB drafted for the County Commission. There were some suc-

cesses. For instance, by March 1967 Shell's City Market, which integrated its workforce shortly after the CRB was established, now had a majority of black employees. Shell's president, Clarence Boiley, praised his African American employees and urged neighboring businesses to open the door to black workers. In May 1967, CRB established an Equal Employment Opportunity Task Force, successfully negotiating with many business and industrial leaders to integrate their work forces.²⁵

However, the key job issue for Miami's African American population stemmed from the massive immigration of Cuban exiles beginning in 1959 and intensifying through the 1960s. The sudden arrival of tens of thousands—and ultimately hundreds of thousands—of Cuban refugees had an immediate economic impact, especially on the local job market. Miami blacks complained to the CRB that Cubans began taking black jobs in the city's huge service economy and undermining prevailing local wage levels. Miami political leaders, union representatives, and black organization such as the Urban League expressed concerns to congressmen. Miami's black newspaper, the *Miami Times*, complained in 1966 that "The Cubans are taking over the business of Dade County." Donald W. Jones of the Miami NAACP warned in 1965 that the Cuban influx was "creating a powder keg that could blow at any moment."²⁶

The CRB had few powers, and controlling Cuban immigration was not one of them. The problem, of course, was that the civil rights movement in Miami coincided—or collided—with the Cuban exile migration. Miami blacks were angry that the kind of employment advances made in other cities had been short-circuited in Miami by immigration. Thus, the CRB was limited to keeping a lid on conflict through persuasion and promoting its ideology of diversity and tolerance. Some CRB Board members also argued that the hard-working Cubans were an asset to the community. That was a tough argument to make in black Miami in the 1960s. The CRB, pursuing contact theory in practice, moderated meetings between Miami's black and Cuban leaders, but with few positive outcomes. Miami's Spanish-language newspapers and talk radio programs contributed to "rumor mongering" and inter-ethnic tension. One such rumor in 1965 suggested that a train full of angry blacks from the Los Angeles black community of Watts was on the way to Miami to confront the Cubans. It was a farcical suggestion, and the CRB was reduced to combating rumors such as this one. The 1960s ended without resolu-

tion of the ethnic rivalry between Miami's blacks and Cubans, and some tension lingers on some fifty years later.²⁷

The CRB's police/community relations committee dealt with difficult issues, as well. Racial disturbances in other cities during the Sixties often, even usually, grew out of some sort of police confrontation in the black community. Police action, the CRB noted in 1965, often "triggered" urban riots. A race riot in Tampa in June 1967, stemmed from a police shooting during a burglary, but long-standing grievances in the city on housing, education, and recreation also helped set the stage for the outbreak of violence. A *Miami Herald* article on the Tampa riot asked, "could it happen here?" With considerable knowledge about riot causation from various post-riot studies, the CRB engaged with Dade County police chiefs to draft a "Police-Community Relations Policy Statement" that would govern police interaction with citizens. Eventually, in December 1966 all twenty-seven Dade County municipalities signed on to the agreement. The CRB also ran a police-community relations institute involving over 300 officers, and later helped organize neighborhood police advisory councils in some Dade County municipalities—all designed to stave off the known sources of racial trouble.²⁸

These efforts may have had a positive effect in some Dade communities, but not in the City of Miami. There, Police Chief Walter Headley held hard-line views about law enforcement and had little sympathy for community relations programs (even though his department had signed on to the CRB's policy statement). In December 1967, responding to an supposed "crime wave" in black Miami neighborhoods, Chief Headley announced a "get tough" policy against alleged criminals, including "stop and frisk" tactics and the use of police dogs and shotguns. "Community relations and all that sort of thing has failed," Headley told reporters. He followed that up by stating "when the looting starts the shooting starts." According to the CRB, Miami blacks generally believed that Headley's comments really meant "a war on people rather than a war on crime." National CORE director Floyd McKissick told reporters that Headley was "setting up the first Fascist state of Miami." Another black civic leader, Miami housing official Neal Adams, opined that "it wouldn't take much to touch off an insurrection."²⁹

Chief Headley's public statements about shooting looters and the failure of community relations alarmed the CRB Board. The CRB sent a

delegation to talk with Headley and followed up with a long letter to the chief explaining “the dangerous gap between what the chief said he meant by his ‘get tough’ speech and what many Negroes think he meant.” The CRB suggested that “a further clarification of his views would erase increasing tensions in the Negro community.” Headley claimed his comments were taken out of context. In response to the CRB request to clarify Miami police procedures, Headley sent a copy of the Miami Police Training Manual from 1967. The Manual conformed with the “Police-Community Relations Policy Statement” that Dade police chiefs and the CRB had approved in 1966. Headley never publicly disavowed his provocative statements. A few weeks after meeting with the CRB, Headley put out a statement that his “shotgun-dogs approach” had cut crime in Miami by 40 percent. A subsequent national report on Miami’s 1968 “civil disturbances” confirmed what everyone in Miami already knew: “Chief Headley did not believe that community relations programs with minority groups are a part of the law enforcement responsibility, and he made no attempt to establish systematic communications with the Miami black community.”³⁰

Racial disturbances marked the 1960s, from Watts and Harlem to Detroit, Newark, and dozens of other cities. Despite racial tensions and inter-ethnic conflict, Miami had seemed immune. Miami political leaders even congratulated each other on the fact that Miami had seemingly dodged the proverbial bullet. All that changed in August 1968, when Liberty City exploded in a brief rage of shooting and burning. The Republican National Convention was meeting in Miami Beach at the time. Black power political advocates were holding rallies in Miami, hoping to get national attention to local issues of poverty, housing, unemployment, and Chief Headley’s police practices. They were also pushing for more community control: “Black Control of the Black Ghetto,” was the slogan of the Vote Power movement in Miami. National civil rights leader Ralph Abernathy was in town with folks from the Washington Poor Peoples March, demonstrating outside the Republican convention. George Wallace had recently been in Miami giving segregationist speeches. On the evening of August 7, 1968, a Vote Power rally was underway in the heart of Liberty City in northwest Dade. Scheduled speakers Ralph Abernathy and Wilt Chamberlain had not arrived. Several hundred young blacks were milling around outside the Vote Power hall waiting for other scheduled speakers to arrive. Tensions were high, and some

young blacks began stoning cars in Liberty City after one auto with a Wallace bumper sticker drove through the neighborhood. When Miami police moved in with shotguns and tear gas, more rocks targeted the cops. Alerted to the violence, Abernathy and Florida Governor Claude Kirk left the Republican Convention and drove to Liberty City to calm the crowd. They promised to be back the next day for discussions with black leaders, but they never showed up. Instead, Governor Kirk sent 800 National Guard troops. The riot involved the firebombing of some Liberty City businesses, looting, sniper fire at police, and three dead black men. Kirk's guardsmen, along with hundreds of Dade County Public Safety officers, restored peace after three days.³¹

Riot post-mortems linked the 1968 disturbances to the long unresolved grievances of black Miami—housing, jobs, schools, recreation, and police behavior, especially—issues that the CRB had addressed but never fully resolved. This was the verdict of the *Miami Report* (1969) of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. It was also the conclusion of a riot study ordered by Florida state legislator Robert Graham in late 1968. Many in the white community were blind to living conditions in Overtown and Liberty City. For example, in July 1968, a television program on Miami station WTVJ reported that Dade's racial problem was "small and at times non-existent." The black weekly newspaper, *The Miami Times*, quickly responded in an editorial: "There are many, many wrongs which must be corrected before we can make a claim like that. And we are losing time in our fight to equalize and liberate the black man in Dade County. Unless sincere and honest efforts from all are evidenced in the next few months, we shudder to think what the consequences could be." The *Times* went on to conclude that Miamians "who came away from their TV sets with the thought that everything here is alright may be in for a rude awakening." *Miami Herald* city affairs reporter Juanita Greene made a similar statement in the wake of the August riot: "It is no surprise that we had the disturbances. It was to be expected. Things aren't that good here, really." Miami and Dade County black grievances had lingered for decades, despite the best efforts of the Community Relations Board. All that was needed was the "trigger" of police action in the ghetto.³²

Chief Headley's rejection of the community relations agenda had something to do with the riot, as well. The sprawling Liberty City community lay partly in the city of Miami and partly in unincorporated Dade

County. While Headley was getting tough on the blacks and denigrating community relations policies, Dade County Public Safety director Wilson Purdy embraced the CRB strategy. Purdy's department had established a dedicated community relations office, worked closely with neighborhood groups in the county's portion of Liberty City, and trained hundreds of officers in community relations theory and application. Post-riot analysis demonstrated that riot behavior occurred in the Miami portion of Liberty City, but not in that portion policed by the County. Miami's 1968 racial disturbance, especially the geographical distribution of riot activity, seemingly demonstrated that community relations made a difference, that the human relations agenda worked if accepted and applied by leaders of agencies that had power and decision-making authority.³³

The CRB faced its greatest challenge during the August 1968 disturbances. Ben Sissal had resigned as executive director in early 1968. He was replaced by his assistant, Robert Simms, a black civil rights activist from Arkansas who had also worked in the Model Cities program. Simms represented a new kind of community relations administrator—a new generation that knew little of the postwar human relations agenda and the importance of contact theory. Simms's training was acquired in civil rights marches and demonstrations, where conflict often produced desired results. In the CRB annual report for 1968-1969, Simms suggested an alternative point of view for what had happened in Miami. The city's black neighborhoods, Simms wrote, were "caught up in the disrupting tidal waves of the social revolution sweeping the nation." Many in metro Miami's black community sympathized with the emerging black power ideology of the mid-1960s, especially after the killing in April 1968 of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Despite his black power analysis, Simms and CRB board and staff member actively engaged people in the streets of Liberty City, seeking to calm the community and restore peace and order. In successive years, Simms worked hard to overcome the racial and ethnic barriers in Miami and Dade County.³⁴

Despite the setback of the 1968 riot, by the late 1960s the CRB had become an essential mediator in metropolitan Miami's increasingly complex racial and ethnic cauldron. As *Miami News* columnist Clarke Ash opined in October 1969, "The Dade County Community Relations Board is a crisis-oriented body, not by design but by necessity. After six years of putting out racial fires, it is beginning to wonder if the commu-

nity will ever stop playing with matches.” Henry King Stanford, the University of Miami president who chaired the CRB through the late Sixties, in an outgoing address to the Board, admitted that metropolitan Miami had qualities of dream and nightmare, but that the CRB had made considerable progress in promoting human relations under difficult circumstances. The last word, perhaps, should go to Seymour Samet. In 1972, Samet visited Miami and gave a pessimistic interview to a *Miami News* reporter: “The tone of the ‘70s in Miami, as in the rest of the country,” Samet suggested, “is one of division. People are being polarized in a way that is dangerous—black versus white, rich versus poor—and worst of all the coalition efforts of the ‘60s are not working.” Nevertheless, Samet remained persuaded that the CRB was “Miami’s most significant weapon.”³⁵

Conclusion

In its original conception, the Dade County CRB was a uniquely postwar phenomenon. Southern segregationists, including those in Miami, resisted any racial change, especially on key issues such as schooling, housing, and public accommodations. The human relations agenda, as it emerged from the domestic strife of World War II, offered a theory and a method of intergroup relations with the potential of bringing people of different backgrounds together. In Miami, Seymour Samet had the requisite experience and training in human relations, and he used those skills during the 1950s to promote peaceful desegregation of schools and to lobby local politicians for a permanent and official community relations board. His success in this mission, as well as his appointment to head the new agency, made it possible for Miami and Dade County to manage racial challenges of the Fifties and Sixties, as well as to achieve significant progress in the desegregation of the city.

But along the way, something had changed. The CRB concept that Samet had advanced for a decade before its creation in 1963 was based on the human relations agenda—overcoming prejudice, promoting intergroup contact, and bringing people together. However, by 1963, human relations had become community relations, a quite different concept focused on mediation of conflict, resolution of differences among groups, and, essentially, keeping people apart. The CRB charter of 1963 did include a statement that the new agency should make studies in the

field of human relations, but who had time for “studies” when the CRB was consumed with breaking down racial barriers and mediating ethnic conflict. Actually, the shift in emphasis from human relations to community relations was a natural consequence of changing times and the intractable ghetto problems of housing, low-income, and inequality. The theory and practice of human relations seemed less effective in a new urban world of black power, Cuban ethnocentrism, and race riots. Despite its shifting mission, which few recognized at the time, the CRB became an essential element in Miami’s civil rights movement in the Fifties and Sixties.

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