

Living in the Black Grove community is a high percentage of second- and third-generation families whose parents and grandparents came from the Bahamas and southern Georgia. The area has both a strong individuality and a unique potential for a new relationship with the adjoining white community of Coconut Grove. The trend is toward a coming together and mingling of the younger people of both races in the main thoroughfares and the large bayfront park of Coconut Grove.

Black Grove has a rich history. Until the 1920's its population was Bahamian. Most of the inhabitants came from Eleuthera, Cat Island, Abaco, Green Turtle Key, the Exumas and other out islands in the late 19th Century. These were the real pioneers in the development of Coral Gables. They were also fisherfolk who bought small plots of land, built their own homes, grew their own vegetables, and raised chickens, pigs and goats. At that time there was a remarkably congenial settlement of black and white in the small community south of Miami, and separate from it, called Coconut Grove.

During the boom time in South Florida, in the 1920's, there began a migration of blacks from southern Georgia. The influx of people into the small area coincided with the loss of autonomy by Coconut Grove. At this time Coral Gables passed an ordinance prohibiting black people from living within their city. Even though they worked in Coral Gables, more people were forced to move into Black Grove. City of Miami regulations were passed against farming and livestock, affecting the way of life of the people. More and more people were frozen into a small area with insufficient food and few jobs, bringing about a change from a black settlement to an area in which a people were confined.

Significant Problems

Living conditions in Black Grove have steadily worsened over the last decade, primarily because of an influx of migrant workers, from Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina, in search of a better life. The housing shortage in Miami has caused too many people to seek space in the already overcrowded apartment buildings. It is quite common for a family of 10 to live in a one-bedroom apartment where they must take turns sleeping, a practice called "hot beds". Someone is always taking his turn sleeping. Someone is always tired. A youth or a man who has no place to sleep on a hot summer night is out on the street. He is uncomfortable, irritable, with never enough rest. He is ready to go along with any foolishness and usually gets into trouble.

This community, and many others like it, are going through the same problems with the homesteaders and the migrants. The migrants feel they are not part of the community because of their low living standards and they are not accustomed to apartment living; and the homesteaders feel the many destructive pressures caused by the overcrowding.

Some of the leaders or interpreters of the area to the white establishment, only *appear* to defend the people. Instead of insisting on the housing codes being enforced, they say that people cannot be put out in the street, for political reasons. So they maintain and spiral a situation that only creates catastrophe for the neighborhood. More and more people who have no jobs nor means of support, crowd into these apartment buildings.

People who have jobs, who own their own homes, become the victims of those migrants who are deteriorating the



A family of 10 in a one-bedroom apartment must take turns sleeping.

traditional ways of life, who have disrupted the closely-knit sense of community. The crime in the area increases. Women are afraid to go out after dark, afraid of small boys who will snatch their pocketbooks, afraid of teenage boys on drugs who will do anything to get money, afraid also of the older, jobless men, the winos on the street. The street at night has become a place for violence.

This situation is unusual to other areas of 70 percent home ownership, especially single family dwellings. It could only happen in a black community. A deteriorating social, psychological, and economic situation has brought about blight. Yet the whole area is not deteriorated, though many parts of it are, especially the large-unit apartments. Located on the main axis of Grand Avenue and Douglas Road, they are a cancer of the spine. Overcrowded, inadequate, having no playgrounds, deteriorating from lack of upkeep by the landlords, they are the primary cause of the ills of the community. They have eroded the value of the area, a prerequisite for inviting speculation. This is the process for disrupting and moving out second and third generation families, so that developers can profit. BLACK GROVE, INC. wants to hold the community together, to protect the original residents.

It is the built-in fears and hostilities, conditioned by the attitudes of the oppressive majority society that have scarred and defaced the individuals and desensitized them to the ghetto streets and run-down housing. Black Grove has all the classic symptoms of a people *isolated* from the mainstream of society.

The severe problems crippling the community are job scarcity, underemployment, poverty, wide-spread use of drugs, substandard housing, inadequate plumbing, littered streets and too many people.

The people, once so peaceful, have become hostile. The situation is tense. Do the problems originate in Black Grove, in the prison camp of the ghetto? No. Their sources are outside. Who is responsible for the thrown brick or the stolen pocketbook? Is it the black boy? Or the white society? They who have put the hostility in his heart. They have thrown the brick at themselves because they have mutilated human dignity, the first requirement of men.