

Community Background Report

Dixie

County

Miami-Dade

Boundaries

North: Northwest 14th Street

South: Northwest 6th Street

West: Northwest 7th Avenue

East: Florida East Coast Railway

Community Type

Neighborhood

History

Dixie's boundaries encompass an area of 0.4 square miles, all of it within the area of Overtown, and just south of Dorsey Park. The approximate boundaries of Dixie Park are Northwest 14th Street on the north, the FEC railroad on the east, Northwest 6th Street on the south and Northwest 7th Avenue on the west. These boundaries are taken from City of Miami documents published in 1961, which list Lummus Park, Dixie Park, and Dorsey Park in the area now recognized as Overtown. References to the "Dixie" neighborhood have faded from usage, as with several other older areas of Miami. The neighborhood is longitudinally divided by Interstate 95 and its many access ramps.

Overtown is a neighborhood just northwest of Downtown Miami. Originally called Colored Town during the Jim Crow era of the late 19th through the mid-20th century, the area was once the preeminent and is the historic center for commerce in the black community in Miami and South Florida.

A part of the historic heart of Miami, it was designated as a "colored" neighborhood after the creation and incorporation of Miami in 1896. The incorporation of Miami as a city occurred at the insistence of Standard Oil and FEC railroad tycoon Henry Flagler, whose mostly black American railroad construction workers settled near what became Downtown Miami, just north of Flagler's Royal Palm Hotel on the Miami River. Owing to a substantive black population, 168 of the 362 men who voted for the creation of the city of Miami were counted as "colored," but the separate but equal segregation laws of the Deep South dictated the city designate the portion of the city, in this case, north and west of FEC railroad tracks, as "Colored Town." [2]

The second oldest continuously inhabited neighborhood of the Miami area after Coconut Grove, the area thrived as a center for commerce, primarily along Northwest Second Avenue. Home to the Lyric Theatre (completed in 1913) and other businesses, West Second Avenue served as the main street of the black community during an era which, up until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, barred black residents from entering middle and upper income white areas like Miami Beach and Coral Gables without "passes."^[3] During the Florida land boom of the 1920s, Overtown was home to one of the first black millionaires in the American South, D. A. Dorsey (who once owned Fisher Island), and the original Booker T. Washington High School, then the first high school educating black students south of Palm Beach.^[3] Community organizing and mobilization during the era, as such in actions of Reverend John Culmer, who advocated for better living conditions for lower class blacks living in abject squalor during the 1920s, led to the completion of Liberty Square in 1937 in what is now-called Liberty City. Northwest Second Avenue and the surrounding neighborhood, once-called the "Little Broadway" of the South,^[4] by the 1940s hosted hundreds of mostly black-owned businesses, ranging from libraries and social organizations to a hospital and popular nightclubs.

Popular with blacks and whites alike,^[5] Overtown was a center for nightly entertainment in Miami, comparable to Miami Beach, at its height post-World War II in the 1940s and 1950s. The area served as a place of rest and refuge for black mainstream entertainers such as Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Cab Calloway, Josephine Baker, Billie Holiday, and Nat King Cole who were not allowed to lodge at prominent venues where they performed like the Fontainebleau and the Eden Roc, where Overtown hotels like the Mary Elizabeth Hotel furnished to their needs. Further, many prominent black luminaries like W. E. B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson lodged and entertained in the neighborhood.^[6]

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Overtown's economic activity remained relatively stable, though steadily declining. Civil rights were increasingly recognized in Miami and Blacks were more comfortable moving to suburban neighborhoods (e.g., Liberty Square) further north and west of the city center because they offered less overcrowding. During the early 1960s, state highway engineers, planners and consultants routed Interstate 95 through Overtown, replacing densely settled land with massive transportation structures. Later, State Road 836 (the Dolphin Expressway) further divided the two parts of Overtown into four. The previous landmarks forming Overtown's boundaries were eclipsed in their significance and no longer acknowledged as relevant to neighborhood transition. The interchange of expressways, standing some thirty feet or more above ground and visible from miles away, became the most obvious structure defining Overtown.

The area became economically destitute and considered a "ghetto" as businesses closed and productivity stagnated in the neighborhood.^[8] Development was spurred in the area again in the late 1980s with the construction and completion of the Miami Arena and transit-oriented development surrounding the newly opened Overtown station.

Since the 1990s and 2000s, community gardens have been created, in addition to renovations to the historic Lyric Theatre and revitalization and gentrification efforts spurred both by the city of Miami and Miami-Dade County. Dr. Marvin Dunn ^[1] founded the original Roots in the City Overtown Community Garden, turning an "overgrown, littered lot into a flourishing garden"

maintained by Overtown residents and volunteers.[9][10][11] Roots in the City, a non-profit "dedicated to community development, jobs training, inner-city beautification, healthy eating initiatives, and community research" used the Community Gardens provide affordable fresh produce to low-income families, public school students, community agencies and homeless shelters.[12] and is also organizes an urban farmer's market.[13] These projects and other aspects of Overtown were featured in a short documentary The Ground under Overtown[2] centered on a multi-issue multi-racial community organizing created around Florida protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) with focused on environmental racism, critiques of so-called "Free trade" agreements like the FTAA, and positive community solutions such as permaculture. Anti-FTAA protesters at Dr. Dunn's invitation held a workshop on permaculture at the Overtown Community Garden and donated over 100 cherry trees to the Overtown community.[14]

Community Dynamics

According to U.S. 2010 Census and American Community Survey 2015 5-year data, Dixie has a population of 7,094, 73.68% of which are working age from 18 to 64. The average per capita income is \$38,548.89, which is higher than Miami-Dade County's average per capita income of \$28,823. The population is 40.72% Hispanic, and 59.28% non-Hispanic. Furthermore, 43.15% of the population is White (including Hispanic White), 48.18% is Black, and 8.67% Others. A non-English language is spoken by only 5.9% of the population. Regarding education level, 48.7% of the population has less than a high school education, which is slightly lower than Miami-Dade County's 48.86%. Foreign-born individuals make up 38.87% of the population, and 37.43% of the population are naturalized citizens, while 62.43% are not U.S. citizens. Of the foreign-born residents, 30.86% are from the Caribbean, and 32.43% are from South America.

Business Landscape

There are two public schools in Dixie, Booker T. Washington High School and Frederick Douglass Head Start Kindergarten. There are three City of Miami parks in Dixie, Athalie Range, Gibson Park, Henry Reeves Park, and Ninth Street Pedestrian Mall. The Lyric Theater and the D.A. Dorsey House are structures of historic and cultural importance located in Dixie. These buildings are between Northwest 8th and Northwest 9th Streets on Northwest 2nd and Northwest 3rd Avenues.

Dixie does not have a Neighborhood Enhancement Team of its own, but Overtown has one, based at the Overtown Shopping Center. In addition, Overtown has numerous neighborhood associations. The Overtown Community Oversight Board has the following mission statement: "The purpose of the OCOB is to encourage and support housing, job creation, economic and business development, educational opportunities and historic and cultural preservation and to provide written recommendations to the City Commission regarding activities, developments and improvements within, or substantially impacting the residents of the Overtown area. The Overtown NET Administrator serves as the supervisor of the OCOB liaison and assists with the dissemination of information throughout the Overtown community and provides access to

information to the liaison on everyday functions, community initiatives, construction projects and other quality of life matters to report back to the board members.”

Transportation

The main transportation artery in Dixie is Interstate 95, which dominates the landscape of much of the neighborhood. The other main road is Northwest 7th Avenue/US 441, which defines the western boundary of the neighborhood, running north and south. Miami-Dade Transit bus lines (#77, #277, and #211) run on Northwest 7th Avenue. Numerous other lines run throughout the neighborhood. The Historic Overtown/Lyric Theatre Station and the Miami Central Station offer Metrorail service within the southeast corner of the Overtown neighborhood. The City of Miami operates a free trolley service (the MIAOVT line), with 16 designated stops. An app is available for tracking the trolley.

Reference

- 1.) U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2010). Statistical File 3: block group # 120860036012, 120860037022, 120860037024, 120860034003, 120860034002, 120860037021, 120860034004, 120860037026, 120860034001, 120860037023. Miami-Dade County, Florida. Url: <http://www.census.gov>
- 2.) U.S. Bureau of the Census. American Community Survey, 2011-2015 5-Year Data Profile. Url: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/2015/>
- 3.) Wikipedia. Overtown (Miami), 2020. Url: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overtown_\(Miami\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overtown_(Miami))
- 4.) City of Miami. Overtown Community Oversight Board, 2020. Url: <https://www.miamigov.com/Government/Departments-Organizations/Neighborhood-Enhancement-Team-NET/Overtown-Community-Oversight-Board?BestBetMatch=overtown|d13b95b2-5146-4b00-9e3e-a80c73739a64|4f05f368-ecaa-4a93-b749-7ad6c4867c1f|en-US>
- 5.) City of Miami. Overtown NET at Overtown Shopping Center, 2020. Url: <https://www.miamigov.com/Government/Departments-Organizations/Neighborhood-Enhancement-Team-NET/NET-Offices/Overtown-NET-at-Overtown-Shopping-Center?BestBetMatch=overtown|d13b95b2-5146-4b00-9e3e-a80c73739a64|4f05f368-ecaa-4a93-b749-7ad6c4867c1f|en-US>
- 6.) City of Miami. Neighborhood Associations Overtown NET, 2020. Url: <https://www.miamigov.com/Government/Departments-Organizations/Neighborhood-Enhancement-Team-NET/Association-Overtown?BestBetMatch=overtown|d13b95b2-5146-4b00-9e3e-a80c73739a64|4f05f368-ecaa-4a93-b749-7ad6c4867c1f|en-US>
- 7.) Google Maps, 2020. Url: <https://www.google.com/maps/>
- 8.) Moovitapp.com. MIAOVT. City of Miami Trolley (Overtown), 2020. Url: https://moovitapp.com/index/en/public_transit-line-MIAOVT-Miami_FL-742-8797-476597-0