



4974

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse

other names/site number DA07015

2. Location

street & number 480 NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street  not for publication

city or town Miami  vicinity

state FL code \_\_\_\_\_ county Miami-Dade code \_\_\_\_\_ zip code 33101

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Alissa Lotane 12/13/19  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
  - See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

2.5.2020

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

**Name of related multiple property listings**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

"N/A"

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Correctional facility

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

No style

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Stucco

roof Asphalt

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Law

### Period of Significance

1950-1963

### Significant Dates

1950

### Significant Person

Lawson Edward Thomas

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Walter C. DeGarmo

#### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository

# \_\_\_\_\_

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 0.610

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1 1 7 5 7 9 9 3 3 2 8 5 2 0 3 3  
Zone Easting Northing  
2

3 Zone Easting Northing  
4

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Megan W. McDonald

organization Florida Division of Historical Resources date June 2019

street & number 550 South Bronough Street telephone 850-245-6365

city or town Tallahassee state FL zip code 32311

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Clear and descriptive photographs under separate cover. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Each photograph must be numbered in the order they are referenced in the manuscript, and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log.

Additional items

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency

street & number 819 NW 2nd Avenue, Third Floor telephone 305-679-6800

city or town Miami state FL zip code 33136

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Miami Black Police Precinct and  
Courthouse

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property

Miami-Dade, Florida

County and State

N/A

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### NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

#### SUMMARY

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is a masonry building located at 480 NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street in Miami, Florida. Constructed in 1950 to house Miami's black police force during the era of segregation, the precinct consists of a two story building along NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street, a one-story addition along NW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and one-story wing on the southeast portion of the building. The building was constructed using a poured concrete slab foundation, reinforced concrete walls covered with a smooth stucco finish, and a flat roof. The original 1950 building consisted of the two-story portion of the building along NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street and a perpendicular, one-story wing, thus creating an L-shaped building. An addition was constructed in 1957 along NW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, thus filling in the L-shape and creating a rectangular building plan. This alteration is considered historic, as it took place during the period of significance and was made in order to facilitate continued use of the structure as a police precinct and courthouse. Though the building lay largely vacant for over 40 years, a 2003 state historic preservation grant funded the renovation of the structure and accomplished much needed structural work, roof replacement, and overall rehabilitation of the structure. Though some of the building's historic features, including windows and doors, had been lost or deemed too deteriorated for preservation, they were replaced with historically compatible, in-kind materials and all renovation work followed the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation. Despite the changes that have taken place, the Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse retains sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

#### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

##### Setting

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is located in the city of Miami, in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Located in what is now called the Overtown neighborhood, the area was referred to as the "Central Negro District" at the time of the precinct's construction but had historically been known as "Colored Town." Much of the historic fabric of Overtown has been lost to urban renewal, highway construction and neglect over the past several decades and has been the target of revitalization efforts through the Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency since 1982.

The precinct property is approximately 0.61 acres in size, and is located on a corner lot. The property is bounded by NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street to the north, a parking lot and driveway to the east, the Jefferson Reaves Sr. Health Center complex to the south, and NW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the west. The property is located less than 200 feet from the I-95 overpass.

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N/A

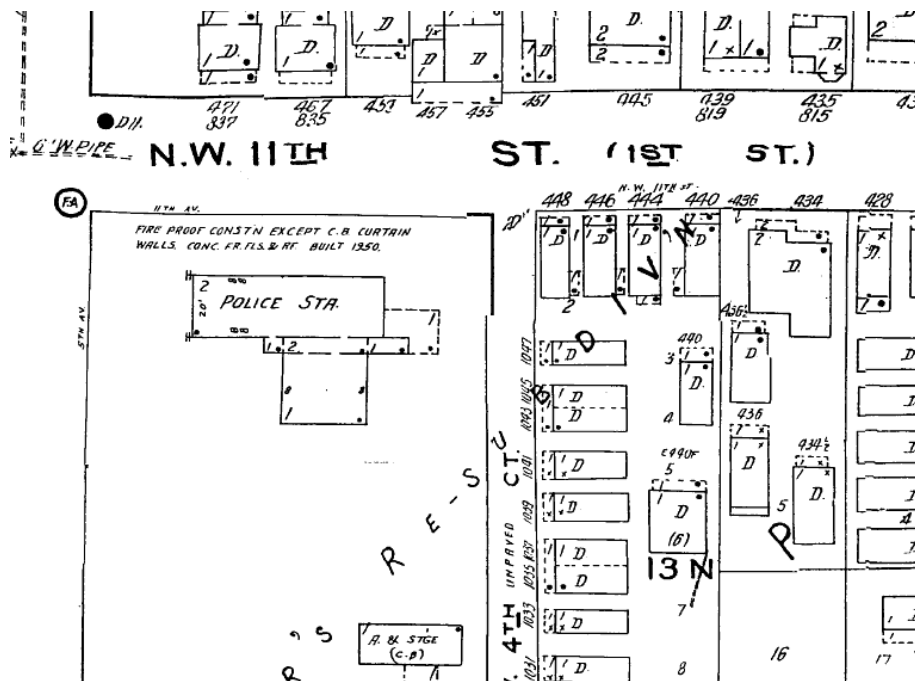
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The site features minimal landscaping, with a simple grass lawn on the north and west sides of the building and trees planted along the perimeter of the lot. A small, concrete retaining wall runs along the sidewalk to the north and west sides of the property, and a black, metal security fence surrounds both the precinct lot and the Health Center complex to the south.

Police Precinct Exterior

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is a two-story masonry building that can be broken down into three main parts: a two story section that fronts NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street, a one-story addition facing NW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and a one-story section on the southeast portion of the building. The building features a flat roof that utilizes built-up roofing materials (i.e. tar and gravel). Exterior walls of the precinct are comprised of concrete covered in smooth stucco that has been painted yellow and green.



1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing newly constructed Black Police Precinct. The 1957 addition would be constructed in the open, southwest portion of the building.

The northern façade of the building faces NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street. (Photo 1). The two-story, asymmetrical façade features a total of 14 windows, divided into seven bays and two rows (seven windows on each floor). The five easternmost bays are comprised of six-lite, metal frame jalousie windows, while the remaining two bays feature small glass windows with faux muntins. Black letter signage along the

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roofline reads “Black Police Precinct and Courthouse Museum” and similar lettering is used for the address numbers “480” at the easternmost part of the wall.

The eastern façade of the building faces a small parking lot and driveway and is characterized by a cantilevered roof that extends perpendicularly from the building and functions as a porte cochere and covered entrance. (Photo 2). A wheelchair ramp leading to a handicap accessible door is located along the southern wall of the covered entrance. A six-lite metal framed jalousie window is located near northernmost part of the wall along the first floor. On the second floor, there are four single-pane windows with faux muntin grids. The center two windows are square with 5x5 faux-lites, and the outer two windows are rectangular with 3x5 faux-lites. (Photo 3). The southern half of this elevation once housed the jail’s cellblocks and features three large glass windows that are covered with metal shutters. (Photo 4). A small overhang is located over the windows. The second story stairwell is also visible from this elevation, and is a small rectangular projection from the main two story block.

The southern (rear) elevation of the precinct faces additional parking and a portion of the driveway. (Photo 5). The one story section of this elevation can be split into two parts: the 1957 addition to the west and the original one-story section to the east. The addition features no doors or windows and is covered in smooth stucco. The eastern part of this elevation was a part of the original 1950 structure, and features a set of small, concrete steps leading to a metal and glass security door, and two large windows covered in metal shutters (Photo 6). A small overhang is located over the windows and a portion of the doorway. Though only visible from NW 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the southern elevation of the two story block features a large, rectangular window filled in with glass blocks on the western end of the wall. (Photo 7). Two, six-lite jalousie windows are located in the center of the wall, and a small rectangular projection (the eastern stairwell) sits atop the original, one story section of the building (stairwell visible in Photo 4).

The western elevation of the building faces NW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Photo 8). This façade is split into two parts: the original two story section of the building on the north end and the 1957 one-story addition on the south end. The two story portion of the wall is characterized by a covered entrance and a single six-lite jalousie window (Photo 9). A set of concrete steps leads to a pair of metal security doors, and a simple, rectangular projection provides coverage to the entryway. A replica “Police” sign protrudes from the northwest corner of the building, and is visible from this elevation. The one-story portion of the elevation features no windows or doors, and the stucco wall is devoid of ornament (Photo 10). A strip of metal runs along the roofline, and black letter signage along the top of the wall reads “City of Miami (Historic Negro) Black Police Precinct and Courthouse Museum.”

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### Police Precinct Interior

There are two entrances to the building on the eastern façade: the primary museum entrance is located beneath the porte cochere and a handicap accessible entrance is located on the southern wall of the porte cochere. The handicap accessible doorway opens to a small alcove, located just to the left of the reception area through an open doorway (Photo 11). The alcove also contains a restroom on the east wall (Photo 12), entrance to museum offices on the south wall, and entrance to the eastern stairwell on the west wall (Photo 13).

The primary entrance leads directly into the reception area where museum visitors can purchase tickets (Photos 14 and 15). This space was historically the booking desk where offenders were checked in, photographed, and fingerprinted and has been furnished with desks to convey this function. The reception room is characterized by two six-lite jalousie windows on the north wall and a large reception desk running the length of the room. A six-panel jalousie window is also located on the east wall, near the northeast corner of the room. A doorway to a small office is located on the west wall of the room, behind the desk. Black linoleum tiles cover the floor in front of the desk, while the floor behind the desk is carpeted. An open doorway on the west wall of the room leads down a hallway to an exhibit space (Photo 16). Photographs and information about the precinct are hung from the left (south) wall of the hallway, and entrances to an HVAC equipment room and small office are located on the right (north wall). The office features a drop ceiling, a six-panel jalousie window on the north wall, and carpeted flooring (Photo 17).

The hallway leads to an exhibit space that features framed photographs and cases of memorabilia from the Police Precinct. Historically, this was the rollcall room where officers donned their uniforms and completed administrative tasks. Fluorescent lighting fixtures hang horizontally from the ceiling in two rows, in addition to rows of spotlights along the east, west and south walls. Two, six-lite jalousie windows are located on the north wall (Photo 18). The west wall is bisected by an open doorway that leads to the western entrance hallway and stairwell of the police precinct (Photo 19). A room containing HVAC equipment is located near the northwestern corner of the room along the same wall. The south wall of the room contains a large doorway leading to a hallway (Photo 20). The hallway contains the entrance to the cellblocks (Photo 21) and a narrower hall that leads to a vending room and the museum activity room (Photo 22). Two reproduction jail cells are located in the northeast corner of the museum activity room and each cell features metal bunks and a toilet. (Photos 23 and 24).

Immediately south of the jail cells, the hall opens up into the museum activity room, which is a large, rectangular, open space (Photos 25 and 26). The room features a drop ceiling, tile floors, and two load-bearing pillars, one on either side of the room. The room can be converted into two sections with the use of folding accordion walls located on either side of the easternmost pillar (visible in Photo 25). No



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windows or doors are present on the eastern wall of the room. The southern wall features three, single paned windows, a metal and glass security door leading to the rear parking lot, and a solid wall with two storage closets. The western wall is characterized by a small elevated stage and audio visual equipment.

The eastern entrance of the Black Police Precinct opens into a hallway corridor and a stairwell to the second story courtroom (Photo 27). When the building was an active police precinct, a blind food vendor named Mr. Blue set up his vending stand at the bottom of the stairs, and the space was known as "Mr. Blue's Corner." The northern wall of the corridor features the elevator and a room housing electrical equipment. The eastern wall of the hallway leads to a museum room. An electrical room and a display case of police precinct memorabilia are located along the southern wall of the corridor, along the stairwell. The stairwell features three flights of stairs and three landings, and green painted metal railings run the length of stairwell (Photo 28). On the second floor of the stairwell, two rectangular glass block windows are located along top of the southern wall and a six-lite jalousie window is located on the western wall (Photos 29 and 30).

The courtroom is located on the second level of the two-story block (Photos 31 and 32). A pair of wood security doors lead from the western stairwell into the courtroom. Three sets of six-lite jalousie windows are located on the north wall of the room and two sets of jalousie windows are located on the south wall. Windows on the northern wall of this room overlook NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street and windows on the south overlook the parking lot and health center. The exposed sprinkler system hangs from the ceiling in addition to historically compatible reproduction light fixtures arranged in three rows of three. Floor covering consists of black linoleum flooring. Ten wooden benches are arranged in two rows of five, with a central aisle. An elevated, reproduction judges bench is located along the eastern wall of the room, and is flanked by wood security doors on either side. Both doors lead to a hallway located behind the east wall of the courtroom (behind the judge's bench).

The western wall of the hallway is featureless with the exception of two doors leading into the courtroom (Photos 33 and 34). The northernmost wall of the narrow hallway features half of a 6-lite jalousie window. (The other half of the window is visible upon entering the judge's chambers). The east wall of the hallway contains three wood doors. The northernmost door features a thin glass panel and leads to the judge's chambers. The central door contains HVAC equipment, and the southernmost door is used for janitorial storage. The southern end of the hallway leads to a perpendicular hall (Photo 35), where two restrooms and the entrance to the eastern stairwell are located. These two restrooms were formerly holding cells, which were converted during the 2003 renovation of the building to meet building code regulations. A small window with faux muntins is located on the eastern end of this hall. A door on the southern wall opens to a small vestibule (Photo 36), when then leads to the eastern stairwell (Photo 37). A small window with faux muntins is located on the eastern wall of the vestibule, and another window with faux muntins is located on the southern wall of the stairwell.

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The judge's chambers is a narrow, rectangular room (Photos 38 and 39). The north wall features one and a half sets of six-lite jalousie windows that overlook NW 11<sup>th</sup> Street. The east wall features a single rectangular window with faux muntins. The south wall is devoid of any windows or ornamental features, and the north wall features the single wood security door that leads into the hallway.

### ALTERATIONS

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse lay vacant for a period of nearly forty years following its closure in 1963. During this period, nearly all historic windows were lost or damaged. Though the 2003 renovation of the structure restored much of the building's exterior to its historic appearance, no historic windows were retained. However, historically compatible replacements were used, primarily jalousie windows. Though the historic jalousie windows were originally 10-lite jalousie, they were all replaced with 6-lite jalousie. Similarly, all exterior doors were replaced with historically compatible metal and glass security doors. Lastly, windows and doors that were located along the one-story addition on the west façade have been filled in.

Though historic floorplans are not available for the building, it appears to retain much of its original floorplan. Historic floor coverings were lost during the building's long period of vacancy and have been replaced with new floor coverings. Similarly, no historic light fixtures remained and were replaced during the renovation with historically compatible fixtures. Drop ceilings have been added in many of the first floor rooms.

### INTEGRITY

The Black Police Precinct and Courthouse conveys much of its historic appearance and is reflective of its historic use as a police precinct and courthouse. Located in a neighborhood that has lost much of its historic fabric to urban renewal, the precinct stands as one of a handful of historic buildings that remain in Overtown from the era of segregation. Though many of the buildings that originally surrounded the precinct have been lost and the construction of I-95 less than 200 feet from the building certainly changed the immediate setting of the precinct, it remains in its original location in an urban neighborhood. Although minor modifications were made to the exterior of the precinct over time, the precinct looks much as it did when it was originally constructed in 1950 and retains a high level of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

At the time of the 2003 renovation, the building had been vacant for nearly 40 years, during which time many of the interior finishes and fixtures were lost or too deteriorated to repair. However, significant efforts were made to replace light fixtures, doors, and flooring with historically compatible materials,

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and the interior of the building conveys its past function as a police precinct and courthouse. Despite lacking some of its historic materials, the interior of the precinct retains integrity of design, feeling, and association. When evaluated as a whole, the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse retains sufficient historic integrity for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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### SUMMARY

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is being proposed for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Black and Law. The period of significance extends from the building's date of construction in 1950 until 1963 when the building ceased to be used as a police precinct. The city of Miami appointed its first five black policemen in 1944 during the era of segregation. Tasked with the responsibility of patrolling the city's African American neighborhoods, the patrolmen were very successful in their efforts to curb criminal activities and make the streets a safer place. As a result of their success, the black police force rapidly expanded. In 1950, the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse was constructed to house the then nearly 50-man police force and to house a municipal courtroom for the hearing of cases involving black defendants. Though operated in a segregated capacity, the policing of black neighborhoods by black policemen was a significant improvement over the minimal patrols provided by the two white officers previously assigned to the "Central Negro District" (Overtown). In addition, the establishment of a black police force also gave dozens of men to the opportunity to acquire on-the-job experience as policemen, allowing many to quickly integrate the greater Miami police force upon the desegregation of city departments in 1963. The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse building stands as both a physical vestige of segregation and a reminder of the accomplishments of Miami's black community.

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is also being proposed at the local and state level for listing under Criterion B for its association with Lawson E. Thomas. Upon appointment as a judge at the Black Police Precinct in 1950, Thomas became the first African American judge in the South in the twentieth century. The period of significance for Criterion B extends from 1950-1961, encompassing Thomas' tenure as judge at the Black Police Precinct.

### HISTORIC CONTEXT

#### African American Community Development in Miami, Florida

Much of Miami's early development was due to the extension of the Florida East Coast Railway to the area in 1895. Prior to this, the Miami area was sparsely settled and largely undeveloped. As rumors circulated that Henry Flagler planned to extend the FEC to Miami, settlers began moving to the area in large numbers, many of whom were citrus farmers devastated by the freezes of 1894 and 1895. In addition to extending the railroad to Miami, Flagler made plans to construct a lavish resort: The Royal Palm Hotel. With Flagler's projects underway and a rapidly growing population, residents of the area met on July 28, 1896 and voted to incorporate the city of Miami.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Larry Wiggins, "The Birth of the City of Miami," *Tequesta*, Vol. 55, (1995), pages 5-38.

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The city's first black residents were African American laborers who arrived in 1896 to work on the Royal Palm Hotel.<sup>2</sup> While the hotel was under construction, white and black workers lived together on the grounds of the hotel. Once the project was completed, Flagler bought a tract of land specifically for black workers to build their own homes, located to the north and west of the Florida East Coast Railway tracks. For \$50, workers could purchase an uncleared 50 by 150-foot lot. Flagler also donated a plot of land for each religious denomination. The area quickly became known as "Colored Town."<sup>3</sup>

By 1905, 3,000 blacks (forty percent of Miami's entire population) resided in Colored Town. As Miami's population continued to grow during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so too did the black population, reaching 9,270 people by 1920, most of whom resided in Colored Town. Though African Americans represented thirty-one percent of Miami's total population, they were restricted to ten percent of Miami's total area. As the city's population expanded in subsequent decades, the amount of land available to blacks did not grow at a pace to meet the increased needs of the black population. As a result, extreme overcrowding took place in the city's black neighborhoods, exacerbating already insufficient city services such as sanitary provisions, road maintenance, public education, and policing.<sup>4</sup>

Largely due to restrictive clauses in Miami's early land deeds that prohibited the sale or manufacture of alcohol, a vice district developed in an unincorporated area along the city's northern outskirts. Known as "North Miami" the area was located just north of Colored Town, and was a constant source of frustration to Miami police. A "cleanup" effort spearheaded by Miami Sheriff Hardie led many of North Miami's saloons, houses of prostitution, and gambling dens to simply move into Colored Town.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the concentration of vice in Colored Town and the overpopulation of the area, the Miami Police Department only assigned two patrolmen to the area. Relations between white police officers and the African American community were strained, both due to the inherent lack of justice afforded to African Americans under Jim Crow segregation, and also due to local incidences of violence between black residents and white police officers. In 1920, Miami's Colored Board of Trade requested that a black police officer be hired, but their request was ignored.<sup>6</sup> Over the course of subsequent decades, calls for

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Bahamian immigrants had arrived earlier, settling outside of the original city limits in what is now known as Coconut Grove.

<sup>3</sup> George, Paul S. "Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930," Vol. 56, No. 4, (April 1978), pp.432-447; NDB Connolly, A World More Concrete, page 26.

<sup>4</sup> Chapman, Arthur Edward. "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami." PhD Dissertation, University of Miami, 1986, pages 12 and 30.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 16, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 32.

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black police officers would be repeated many times by members of both the black and white communities of Miami, to no avail.

### World War II Miami

Though there had been numerous calls for the hiring of black policemen throughout the course of Miami's history, it wasn't until World War II that the idea became a reality. As a direct result of the war, the Miami police department began to face an acute staff shortage as men left their positions for military service. In 1943, the department was short by seventy-three police officers and facing increased losses due to the military draft.<sup>7</sup>

During the same period, local newspapers declared a "Wave of Crime" taking place in the African American section of Miami. In the spring of 1942, a grand jury was assembled to study the situation, and "urged city officials to establish a negro precinct police headquarters and also urged that more men be assigned to police the densely populated negro areas."<sup>8</sup> Though the recommendations of the grand jury were initially ignored, newspapers and local residents continued to advocate for the creation of a black police precinct. In 1943, the Miami Herald publicly responded to the police department's manpower shortage by recommending that black policemen be hired to work in black neighborhoods. Many citizens pointed to the success of similar efforts elsewhere, such as the use of volunteer black policemen in Macon, Georgia.<sup>9</sup> World War II had also created greater opportunities for African American servicemen to work as military police. In 1943, a black USO director named Edward Graham returned to Miami after being stationed in Spartanburg, South Carolina. While in Spartanburg, Graham observed African American servicemen working as military police in a positive and successful manner. He shared these experiences with the local Admiral of the Miami Naval Training Base, and suggested that black Shore Patrols be used in the black neighborhoods of Miami.<sup>10</sup>

Members of the black community continued their decades long struggle to secure African American police officers to patrol the city's black neighborhoods during this period. A significant factor strengthened their lobbying efforts: in 1937 the Florida Poll Tax had been repealed, contributing to a drastic increase in the number of African Americans registered to vote (from 590 in 1936 to 7,307 in 1944). Because African Americans were now able to assert political power through their right to vote, and because it was widely believed that the black community voted as a "block," Miami politicians were now much more likely to consider the desires and requests of the black community.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 42-43.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Harris, "Wave of Crime Stresses Need of Substation," *The Miami News*, November 30, 1942, page 10.

<sup>9</sup> "Volunteer Negro Police Praised," *The Miami News*, February 25, 1943, page 6.

<sup>10</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 41-42

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 43-44.

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Members of the African American community, including Otis Mundy of the Negro Citizens Service League, vocalized their desire for the appointment of black police officers in the city's newspapers, pointing to the successful use of black police officers in other cities:

We know the usage of qualified Negro policemen to patrol this area is the only and certainly the most feasible solution to the problem. We do not make this assertion merely because we are Negroes and think that members of our race are deserving of such positions because we are taxpayers, but because the usage of Negro police in Negro districts in other cities has been a sociological blitzkrieg to crime and its origin in Negro districts...<sup>12</sup>

As political pressure continued to mount, Miami's city manager and chief of police authorized director of public safety, Don Rosenfelder, to explore the possibility of hiring black policemen. Rosenfelder corresponded with officials in several southern cities that had experience employing black police officers, and received overwhelmingly enthusiastic responses. "Without exception every reply was a hearty endorsement of the plan" recalled Rosenfelder.<sup>13</sup>

Convinced of the merits of hiring black police officers in Miami, Rosenfelder began working with the chief of police and local black leaders to identify prospective policemen. Rosenfelder would appoint the policemen utilizing a wartime emergency measure that allowed him to "appoint additional patrolmen and officers for temporary service in case of riot or emergency."<sup>14</sup> This meant that the first black policemen would not be hired through the civil service board like other city employees and would not be eligible for benefits.

### The First Five Black Patrolmen

In order to identify eligible recruits, Rosenfelder asked several local black leaders to nominate qualified candidates. Fifteen men were interviewed and five were ultimately selected: Moody Hall, Edward Kimball, Clyde Lee, John Milledge, and Ralph White.<sup>15</sup>

The men completed six weeks of training, conducted in complete secrecy at the Liberty City Community Center in order to avoid any interference by the public or the media. The men were sworn in on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944 in front of Dr. Ira P. Davis' office on Second Avenue, which would also serve as

<sup>12</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 42.

<sup>13</sup> Lee H. Callison, "Five Negroes Join Police Department," *The Miami News*, August 29, 1944, page 9.

<sup>14</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 45.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

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the first black police headquarters. Initially they worked only one shift: six pm to two am. The men were to be supervised by a white officer, Detective Sergeant R.W. Tanner.<sup>16</sup>



Photo Courtesy of The Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc.

*Swearing in of Miami's first five Black policemen, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944, in front of Dr. Ira P. Davis' dental office on Second Avenue. Dr. Davis' office also functioned as a temporary police headquarters for the first several months of its existence. Courtesy of the Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc.*

Though the appointment of black policemen was a significant achievement for Miami's African American population, it was accomplished during the era of segregation and therefore came with limitations. First, the patrolmen's authority extended only to the black neighborhoods and they could not arrest white citizens. Though a black patrolman could detain a white person who had committed a crime in a black neighborhood, he could only hold the person until a white police officer was available to arrest them and take them downtown. Second, the men were called "patrolmen" instead of police officers until the early 1960s, indicating a lower status than that of white policemen. Third, while the black patrolmen wore the same uniforms and used the same equipment as white police officers, they were not allowed to wear the uniform to and from work; rather, they had to change into the uniform at

<sup>16</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 45-46.



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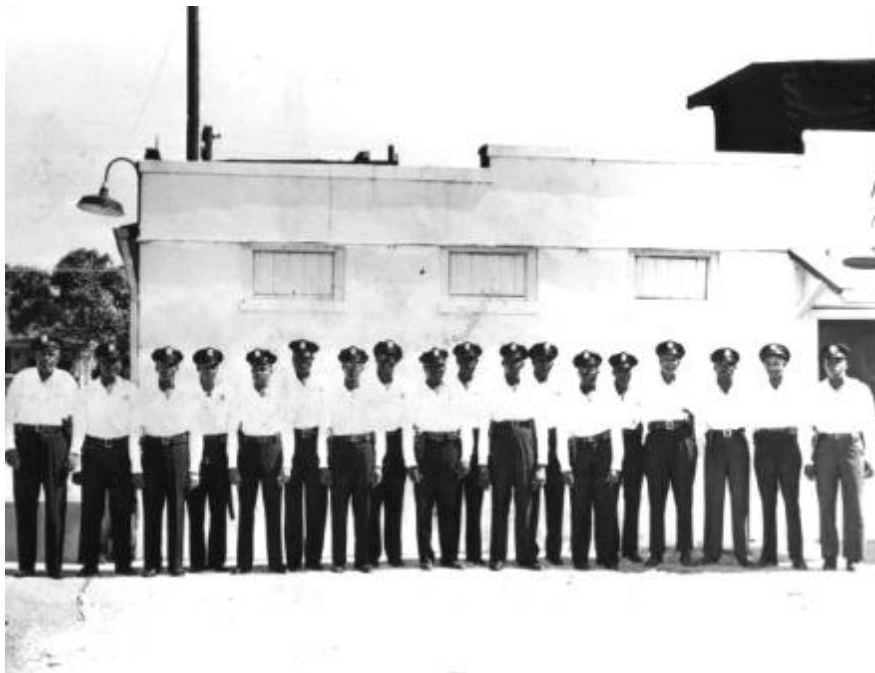
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the precinct headquarters. Despite these differences, the black patrolmen were paid the same salary (\$173.50 per month) as white officers.<sup>17</sup>

The patrolmen were instructed to “eliminate all overt manifestations of crime on the streets” in the Central Negro District (Liberty City and Overtown). Violence and gambling were primary concerns, and the patrolmen were directed to “clear the crowded sidewalks, stop all gambling and profanity, and to confiscate any weapon seen.”<sup>18</sup> The first five black patrolmen quickly proved their effectiveness and gained widespread support throughout the City of Miami. Numerous articles in the city’s newspapers detailed the arrests and fines obtained by the patrolmen and celebrated their successes.<sup>19</sup> In October of 1944, just one month after the appointment of the first five black patrolmen, six additional patrolmen were hired and the force moved to a new location. This second headquarters was the former gambling room of a pool hall, and was entered through a back alleyway on Second Avenue. This new precinct contained two detention cells, which was a significant improvement.<sup>20</sup>



1946 photo of Miami's Black patrolmen, likely standing in front of the second precinct location at the rear of 934 NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. Courtesy of the Florida Memory Project.

<sup>17</sup> Chapman, “The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami,” 47-48.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>19</sup> “Negro Police Bring in \$2,000 in Fines,” *Miami Herald*, October 4, 1944, page 2B; “Negro Policemen Net 127 Arrests,” *The Miami News*, October 4, 1944, page 11; “Negro Police Score 5 More,” *The Miami News*, September 8, 1944, page 13.

<sup>20</sup> Chapman, “The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami,” 48-9.

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Shortly after this move, the patrolmen were equipped with bicycles and a patrol car, and in March 1945 their jurisdiction was expanded beyond the Central Negro District to include the black areas of Coconut Grove. The force expanded to 15 patrolmen, and around the clock patrols now provided Miami's black neighborhoods twenty-four hours of police protection. At the end of the precinct's first year of operation, public safety director Don Rosenfeld stated that the black police precinct had "...proved itself far beyond expectations and has won a permanent place in Miami's Law enforcement picture."<sup>21</sup>

Since the first black patrolmen were hired under emergency provisions, they were not initially entitled to civil service status and received no retirement benefits. As the black patrolmen were not allowed to join the Police Benevolent Association, the Miami Colored Police Benevolence Association was founded to fill this void in 1946. After officer John Milledge was killed while on duty at a high school football game (the first black patrolmen to be killed in the line of duty) efforts were undertaken to give the black patrolmen civil status, which was achieved in March of 1947.<sup>22</sup>

Later that same year, Miami's black police force reached 20 patrolmen, more than any other southern city at that time. Other Florida cities, such as Fort Lauderdale, were also inspired to hire black policemen, and by 1947 Florida led all southern states with a total of 49 black police officers.<sup>23</sup>

As the number of patrolmen increased and the success of the force continued to be praised in Miami's newspapers, the need for a larger and better equipped station became apparent. "...a lack of space, lockers and the general dilapidated condition of the precinct station [made]...a new building imperative..."<sup>24</sup>



*John Milledge, one of the first five Black patrolmen in Miami. Milledge was also the first Black patrolmen to be killed while on duty. Courtesy of the Florida Memory Project.*

<sup>21</sup> Uguccioni, Ellen J and Sarah E. Eaton. Report of the City of Miami Preservation Officer to the Historic and Environmental Preservation Board on the Potential Designation of the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse as a Historic Site, 2002, page 8; Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 48-9.

<sup>22</sup> Uguccioni and Eaton, "Potential Designation of the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse as a Historic Site," 8; Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 51.

<sup>23</sup> "Miami Leads South in Negro Police," *The Miami News*, October 28, 1947, page 15; "Negro Police to be Provided," *The Miami News*, September 15, 1947, page 9.

<sup>24</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 53.

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### HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

#### Criterion A: The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is being proposed for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Black and Law.

#### Construction of the Black Precinct and Courthouse

In November of 1948, City Commissioner H. Leslie Quigg proposed the construction of a police station for the Black patrolmen. A city-owned lot at the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the former site of the City of Miami Street Cleaning Department, was identified for this new purpose.<sup>25</sup> Local architect Walter C. DeGarmo, who designed many of Miami's significant early buildings including the 1907 City Hall and 1916 McAllister Hotel, was selected to design the building.<sup>26</sup> Construction began on October



The Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc.

*Groundbreaking of the Black Police Precinct. Dr. Ira P. Davis, who was an early proponent of the black police, stands at center. Courtesy of the Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc.*

<sup>25</sup> Sanborn Map Company. Miami, Dade County, Florida. (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1921).

<sup>26</sup> Ugucioni and Eaton, "Potential Designation of the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse as a Historic Site," 9.



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25, 1949 and was completed after six months of construction. The new \$60,000 precinct was placed into service on May 1, 1950.<sup>27</sup>

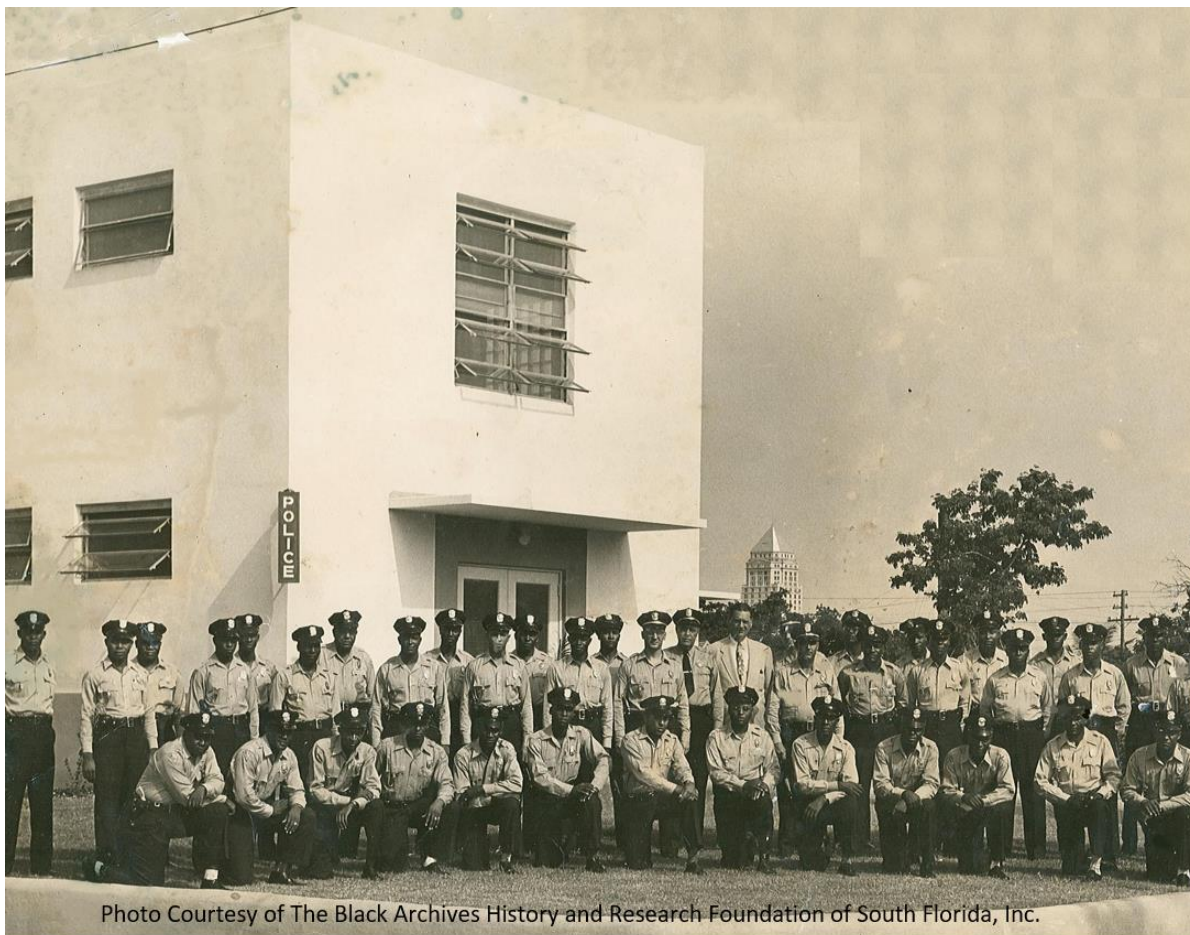


Photo Courtesy of The Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc.

*Undated photograph of Miami's Black police force in front of the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse. Courtesy of the Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc.*

By 1951, the new police precinct housed 46 police black patrolmen who patrolled the Central Negro District (Overtown and Liberty City) and the black neighborhoods of Coconut Grove using five patrol cars, a patrolwagon, bicycles, and walking beats. Twenty-four hour police protection was provided to the black neighborhoods of Miami, with patrolmen operating on a three shift schedule. Policemen used thirteen police call boxes scattered throughout the neighborhoods to communicate with the Precinct.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 52.

<sup>28</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 54.

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Though the black policemen now had a fully-equipped, modern police headquarters to conduct their work, they continued to face discrimination when it came to training opportunities. Black patrolmen were denied the opportunity to receive training from the Miami Police Academy up until 1951. Instead, rookie patrolmen received on the job training from experienced members of the force. Though the police academy began offering segregated courses on first aid to black patrolmen beginning in 1951, additional courses were few and far between.<sup>29</sup> Clarence Dickson would become the first black police officer to graduate from the Miami Police Academy in 1960, and later went on to become the city's first black police chief. As he recalled in a 2017 interview, though Dickson posed for the academy's class picture upon graduating, his face is absent from the photograph that hangs in the academy, today. He later learned that his white classmates were called back to retake the picture without him, demonstrating the overt discrimination and prejudice still pervading the Miami Police Department at the time. Recalling the incident later in life Dickson mused: "They had no idea that they were eliminating the first black police chief from that photograph."<sup>30</sup>

The new precinct not only housed the black police headquarters and detention cells, but also a courtroom. For several years, calls for the appointment of a black judge to preside over the cases of black perpetrators came from both the black and the white community. Though white judges in Miami were known to lay down heavy sentences for cases in which the victim was white and the perpetrator was black, many members of the African American community were aware of a pattern of leniency in cases regarding crimes committed by a black person against another black person. This leniency largely stemmed from the racist belief "that blacks were naturally disorderly and severely lacking in moral traits." Many in the black community believed that this leniency contributed to continued crime in black neighborhoods, and desired fair, unprejudiced rulings in court cases. Many felt that a black judge would be more likely to issue just rulings for black defendants.<sup>31</sup>

White members of Miami's city government advocated for the appointment of a black judge for more pragmatic reasons: in December of 1947, Judge Tonie Bandel called for the establishment of a "black court" to reduce the case load of the traffic court. The idea gained momentum in the following years, and in 1949, City Manager O.P. Hart requested that the City Commission provide funding for a court to try black offenders.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 57-58.

<sup>30</sup> Uguccione and Eaton, "Potential Designation of the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse as a Historic Site," 10.

<sup>31</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 68-70.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 70.

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### Criterion B: Judge Lawson Edward Thomas

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is also eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local and state level under Criterion B in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Black and Law for its association with Judge Lawson E. Thomas, who was the first black judge to be appointed in the South in the twentieth century.

In 1950, a veteran lawyer named Lawson Edward Thomas was selected to preside over the municipal court at the Miami Black Police Precinct. Born in Ocala, Florida, Thomas attended Florida A&M University and received his legal education at the University of Michigan.<sup>33</sup> He began practicing law in Miami in the 1930s, at a time when local custom limited black lawyers to legal work that did not involve their presence in the courtroom. In cases where a black attorney did need to appear in court, they would typically hire a white attorney to present their case in the courtroom. At the time of his first scheduled court appearance in November of 1937, Thomas ignored the advice of the Dade County Bar Association to hire a white attorney and showed up to the Miami municipal courtroom to present his case. Although initially threatened by the bailiff that if he did not sit in the back he would be thrown out the sixth-floor window, “Thomas went into the hallway, waited for the judge to take the bench, reentered the courtroom, and became Miami’s first black attorney to present his case at trial.”<sup>34</sup>

After breaking the color line in Miami’s courtrooms, Thomas went on to contribute to several significant civil rights lawsuits and protests in Florida during the 1940s. In 1945, Thomas helped to organize protests challenging the exclusion of blacks from Dade County beaches, which led to the designation of Virginia Key Beach for use by African Americans. In 1946, Thomas and Jacksonville lawyer S.D. McGill represented black parents in a case filed against the Broward County School Board. The school board had initiated a wartime practice of closing the black Dillard School during the winter months in order to make children available to work as bean pickers, while no white schools were closed during the same period. Thomas also filed the first teacher salary equalization cases in both Marion and Lake Counties in order to contest discriminatory salary practices for black teachers. Lastly, in 1946 Thomas served as *amicus curiae* in *State v. Wilson*, a lawsuit filed against Dade County for its efforts to zone the county along racial lines.<sup>35</sup>

As a prominent and well respected lawyer both in Miami and throughout the state of Florida, Thomas was an ideal choice for the city’s first black judge. Nominated by Mayor Robert L. Floyd, Thomas was

<sup>33</sup> “Experiment in Democracy Gets Under Way in Miami,” *The Miami News*, May 22, 1950, page 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ernesto Longa, “Lawson Edward Thomas and Miami’s Negro Municipal Court,” *St. Thomas Law Review*, Vol. 18, (January 2005), pages 125-138.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

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*Swearing in ceremony of Judge Lawson E. Thomas at the Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse. The Miami News May 22, 1950.*

unanimously approved by the City Commission in April of 1950.<sup>36</sup> A brief swearing-in ceremony was held on the morning of May 22, 1950, to which a number of prominent city officials and members of the black community attended. Local civic groups presented Judge Thomas with a desk set and an inscribed gavel.<sup>37</sup> While the occasion was certainly significant to the citizens of Miami, it was also a momentous occasion for the entire southern region: Thomas was the first black judge appointed in the South in over sixty years, and only the second black judge appointed in the South since Reconstruction.<sup>38</sup>

Though Thomas' appointment was viewed as a victory by many, there were leaders of the black community who felt that the establishment of a segregated court would only further entrench segregation in Miami. The branch of the municipal court at the Black Police Precinct was only permitted to handle cases involving black defendants arrested by black patrolmen, and the court was not permitted to hear

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> "Experiment in Democracy Gets Under Way in Miami," *The Miami News*, May 22, 1950, page 17.

<sup>38</sup> Judge James Dean of Key West was elected Monroe County judge in 1888, and is believed to be the first African American judge in the South since Reconstruction. However, Judge Dean's tenure was short lived, as he was wrongfully suspended eight months later by Florida Governor Francis Fleming after he was accused of issuing a marriage license to an allegedly interracial couple. "Judge James Dean of Key West." Florida Memory Project.

<https://www.floridamemory.com/blog/2018/02/21/judge-james-dean-of-key-west/>. Accessed 8/13/2019.

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cases involving a black person suspected of committing a crime against a white person. Thomas viewed the establishment of the black court as a temporary step on the path to integration:

[A]nything that gives the Negro a chance to participate in government is a foot in the door, even if on a somewhat segregated basis. The foot in the door is not the end in itself; it is merely a means to that end...Changes are coming fast, faster than most of us realize. Most of the South is going to wake up one morning and find segregation is gone. They won't know how it happened, but it will have vanished for good. I wouldn't have backed the court or taken the job if I thought it was going to be indefinite.<sup>39</sup>

Judge Thomas heard somewhere between eight and nine thousand cases per year at the negro municipal court. Cases were not only presided over by a black judge, but also a black bailiff and a black clerk. Common cases dealt with drunk and disorderly conduct, assault and battery, vagrancy, drunk and reckless driving, and gambling. Thomas earned a reputation for being a tough judge, particularly regarding cases where defendants carried a concealed weapon or were accused of a violent crime. He was known for using his position as an opportunity to educate members of the black community about the justice system and their legal rights. As Walter Pinkston of the Greater Miami Urban League described it: "Judge Thomas demand[s] that they be aware of their rights. The court is more than just that. It is a school—spreading the idea that they get a square deal when appearing before it. An educational process is taking place as a result of the court's operation."<sup>40</sup>

While racial epithets and condescending terms were commonly employed in many of Miami's courtrooms when addressing black defendants, they were not permitted in Judge Thomas' courtroom. Defendants were addressed with appropriate titles (i.e. "Mr." or "Mrs.") and derogatory terms such as "boy" were not allowed. Initially, white police officers and white lawyers believed that they would not have to appear in court before a black judge, but that myth was quickly dispelled. Similarly, Thomas "never had any difficulty" with white police officers and lawyers failing to use the title "Your Honor" during court proceedings.<sup>41</sup>

Though little to no information is available in regard to the decision, in December of 1961 "the Miami City Commission dropped Judge Thomas as its lone black judge and appointed Arthur Massey."<sup>42</sup> Judge Thomas left a lasting legacy on Miami's judiciary system, and the city's Lawson E. Thomas Courthouse Center is named in his honor.

<sup>39</sup> Chapman, "The History of the Black Police Force and Court in the City of Miami," 142.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>42</sup> Ernesto Longa, "Lawson Edward Thomas and Miami's Negro Municipal Court," *St. Thomas Law Review*, Vol. 18, (January 2005), pages 125-138.



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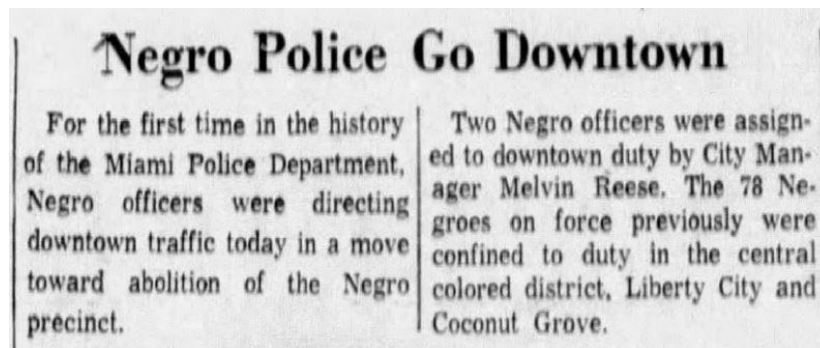
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### Historic Context: Integration of the Miami Police Force and Court System

In 1962, a survey of the Miami Police Department was conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police. The results of the survey highlighted the inherently expensive and inefficient nature of segregation: it was recommended that the Black Police Precinct be closed due to the high cost of maintaining a precinct only seven blocks from the city's main headquarters. As a result of the report, City Manager Melvin Reese did not include the Black Police Precinct in his 1963 budget for the city.<sup>43</sup>

On July 25, 1963, the Miami Police Department announced that the Black Police Precinct would be abolished. This announcement was made in conjunction with the proclamation that Miami's city buildings and recreational facilities would be desegregated.<sup>44</sup> The precinct's 78 black police officers were ordered to close the precinct's jail and report to Miami's downtown headquarters at 1145 NW 11th Street.<sup>45</sup> With the closure of the precinct, the black municipal court also closed its doors.



*News clipping from July 19, 1963. The Miami News.*

Black police officers faced discrimination and resistance to integration of the police force for many years. For several years after the closure of the precinct, black police officers were relegated to patrols of black neighborhoods, maintaining a somewhat segregated system of policing in Miami.<sup>46</sup> African American women would not be employed as police officers in Miami until Carolyn Clarke was hired in 1967. The city's few black judges would also face discrimination in their work for several more years

<sup>43</sup> "About Us." [https://historicalblackprecinct.org/about\\_us/history/](https://historicalblackprecinct.org/about_us/history/)

<sup>44</sup> Ernesto Longa, "Lawson Edward Thomas and Miami's Negro Municipal Court," *St. Thomas Law Review*, Vol. 18, (January 2005), pages 125-138.

<sup>45</sup> Uguccioni and Eaton, "Potential Designation of the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse as a Historic Site," 9.

<sup>46</sup> "Policemen Dislike Transfers," *The Miami News*, July 21, 1963, page 7; Morton Lucoff, "Bias Against Negro Police is Reported," *The Miami News*, January 24, 1967, page 3.

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and the courts would not be fully integrated until 1967, when a black judge heard a case involving a white defendant.<sup>47</sup>

Over time, however, Miami's black police officers would achieve full integration into the police force, in large part due to *United States v. City of Miami*, a lawsuit filed in 1975 to address the city's discriminatory hiring and promotional practices. The 1976 court decision led to a consent decree, in which the city agreed to provide for affirmative action in hiring and promotional practices. Nine years later, Clarence Dickson, a police officer who began his career at the segregated Black Police Precinct in 1960, became the city's first black Chief of Police.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Ernesto Longa, "Lawson Edward Thomas and Miami's Negro Municipal Court," *St. Thomas Law Review*, Vol. 18, (January 2005), pages 125-138.

<sup>48</sup> Nadege Green, "A Conversation with Miami's First Black Police Chief," May 24, 2017, accessed 7/8/2019, <https://www.wlrn.org/post/conversation-miamis-first-black-police-chief>.

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## GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary encompasses all of parcel (folio) 01-3136-081-0010 of the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser Office records. See map for more information.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the present day boundaries of the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse Museum property, owned by the Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency.

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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered in the order they are referenced in the manuscript, and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log.

Property Name: Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse  
City or Vicinity: Miami County: Miami-Dade State: FL  
Photographer: Max Imberman, Terrance Lorrant Date Photographed: 11/2017, 4/2018, 5/2019

### Description of photograph(s) and number, including description of view indicating direction of camera:

1. View of north façade, facing southwest
2. View of east façade, facing west
3. View of porte cochere, facing south
4. View of east façade, facing northwest
5. View of south façade, facing northeast
6. View of south façade, facing northeast
7. View of second story glass block windows, facing north
8. View of west façade, facing southeast
9. Close up of two story block, west façade, facing east
10. Close up of one story block, west façade, facing east
11. View of handicap accessible entrance alcove from main reception area, facing south
12. Interior view of handicap accessible entrance alcove
13. View of office entrance and stairwell entrance in handicap accessible entrance alcove
14. View of museum reception area, facing northwest
15. View of museum reception area, facing northeast
16. View of hallway, facing west
17. View of office, facing north
18. View of exhibit space, facing north
19. View of exhibit space, facing west
20. View of hallway, facing southwest
21. View of hallway and cellblock entrance, facing south
22. View of vending entrance and museum activity room entrance, facings outh
23. View of cellblocks, facing northeast
24. Interior view of cellblock, facing east
25. View of museum activity room, facing southeast
26. View of museum activity room, facing southwest
27. View of western entrance hallway and stairwell
28. View of western stairwell

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

Miami Black Police Precinct and  
Courthouse

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

Miami-Dade, FL

\_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number          Photos          Page   2  

- 29. View of glass block windows, facing southeast
- 30. View of top of western stairwell and windows, facing southwest
- 31. View of courtroom, facing east
- 32. View of courtroom, facing southwest
- 33. View of hallway behind courtroom, facing north
- 34. View of hallway behind courtroom, facing south
- 35. View of hallway with restrooms and stairwell entrance, facing east
- 36. Interior view of stairwell vestibule, facing east
- 37. Interior view of eastern stairwell, facing east
- 38. Interior view of judge's chambers, facing east
- 39. Interior view of judge's chambers, facing west



# Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse


480 Northwest 11th Street  
Miami, Miami-Dade County  
Florida 33136

Lat./Long. Coordinates:  
25.784201, -80.202855

UTM:  
17 R 579933 2852033

Datum: WGS84

## Legend

 Proposed NR Boundary

Date: 6/6/2019

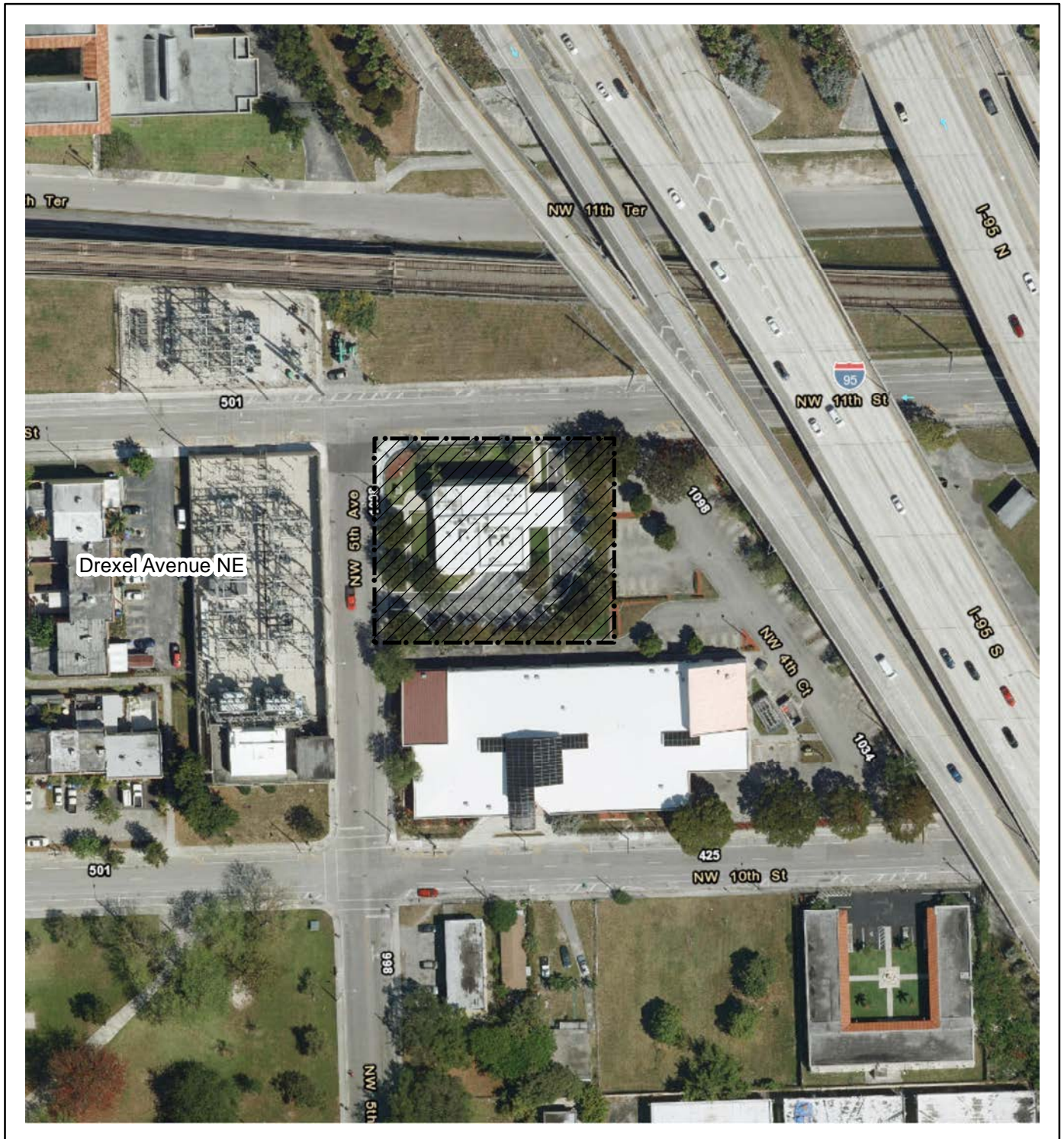
1:1,500



0 62.5 125 250  
Feet

0 15 30 60  
Meters

Basemap Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye,  
Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS,  
USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid,  
IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS  
User Community





# Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse


480 Northwest 11th Street  
Miami, Miami-Dade County  
Florida 33136

Lat./Long. Coordinates:  
25.784201, -80.202855

UTM:  
17 R 579933 2852033

Datum: WGS84

## Legend

 Proposed NR Boundary

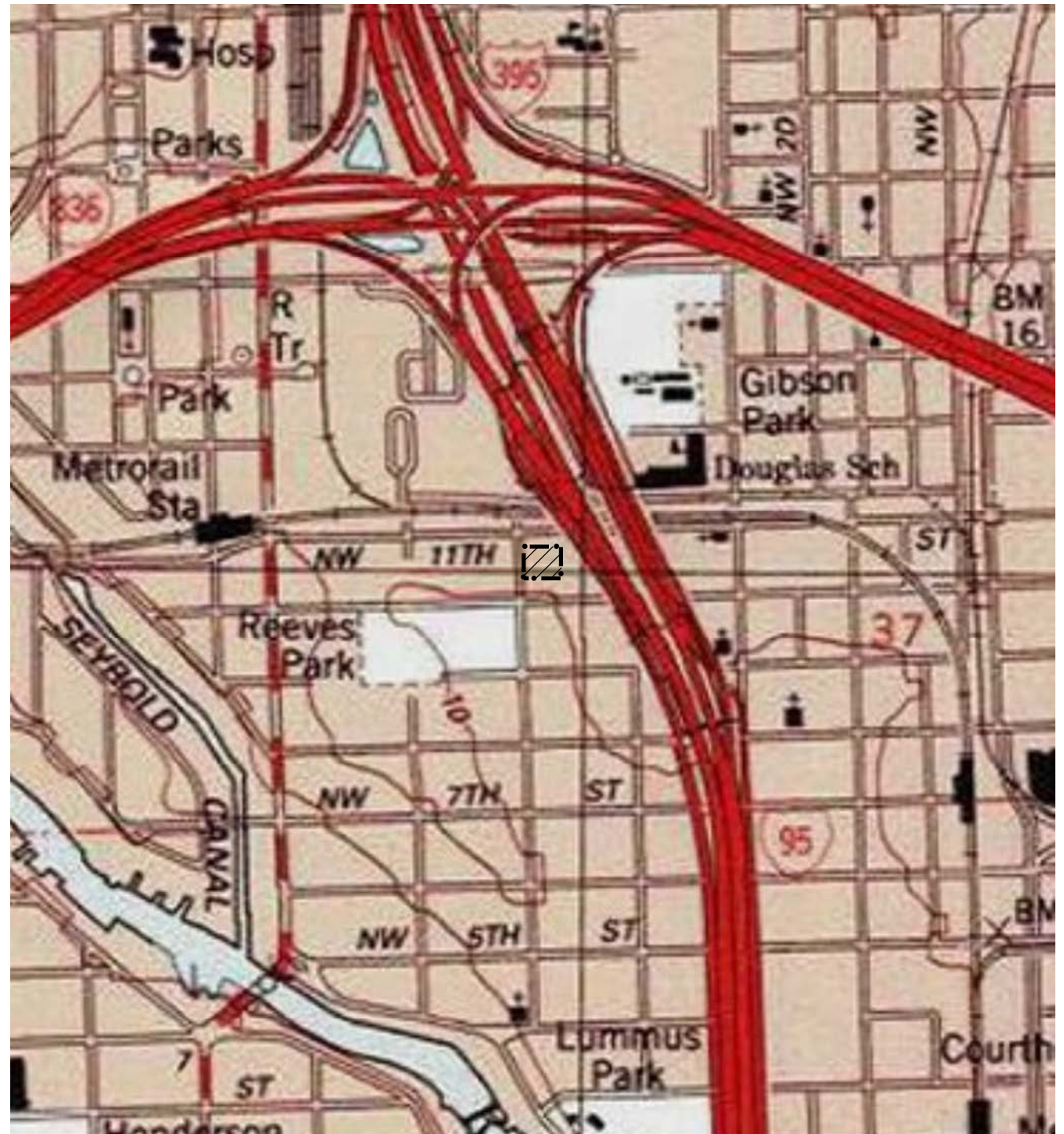
Date: 6/6/2019

1:10,000

0 425 850 1,700  
Feet

0 105 210 420  
Meters

Basemap Source: 2013 National  
Geographic Society, i-cubed





**BLACK POLICE PRECINCT**

**ADD**

**480**





City of Miami Black Police Patrol  
and Court House Museum  
400 NW 11 Street  
Miami, FL 33136  
**MUSEUM  
ENTRANCE**





480

480



WORLD'S BEST SERVICE







CITY OF MIAMI  
(Historic Negro)  
Black Police Precinct & Courthouse Museum  
480 N.W. 11<sup>th</sup> STREET







**CITY OF MIAMI  
(HISTORIC NEGRO)  
BLACK POLICE PRECINCT & COURTHOUSE MUSEUM**





**COURTHOUSE MUSEUM**

**POLICE**

**COURTHOUSE  
(HISTORIC MUSEUM)  
BLACK POLICE HISTORIC COURTHOUSE**



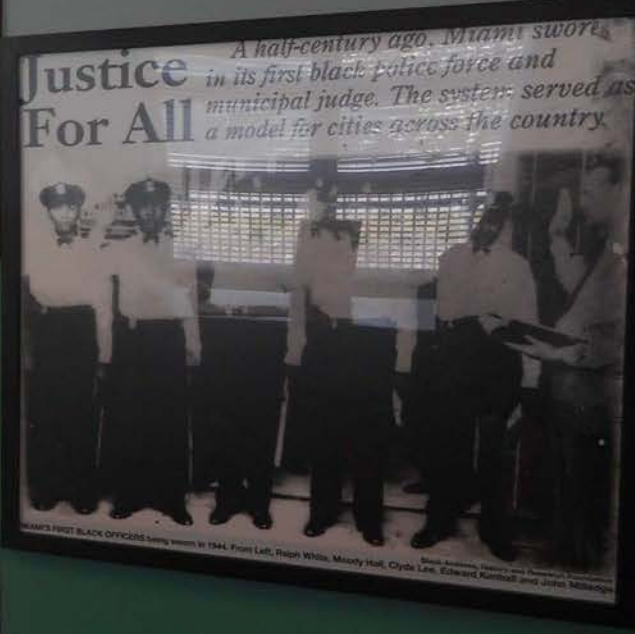




PHOTO

**CITY OF MIAMI**  
**(HISTORIC NEGRO)**  
**BLACK POLICE PRECINCT & COURTHOUSE**





MEN'S  
TOILET

  
DISABLED  
EXIT

FIRE  
ALARM







# WALL OF LEGENDS



NO  
PHOTOS  
PERMITTED  
IN THIS  
MUSEUM



PLEASE  
DO NOT  
SMOKE  
OR  
DRINK  
ALCOHOL  
IN THIS  
MUSEUM





EXIT

ADMISSION  
\$15.00 ea.

PLEASE  
DO NOT  
ENTER













BLACK POLICE PRECINCT  
AND  
COURT HOUSE MUSEUM

IN REMEMBRANCE

EXIT

A/C ROOM



THE FIRST BLACK POLICE OFFICER  
IN THE MIAMI POLICE ACADEMY  
OFFICER JACKSON



**<EXIT**

ROLL CALL ROOM  
& LOCKERS

**NO  
PHOTOS  
PERMITTED  
IN THIS  
MUSEUM**

**NO  
PHOTOS  
PERMITTED  
IN THIS  
MUSEUM**









VENDING

MUSEUM  
ACTIVITY  
ROOM





EXIT

JAIL CELLS

6'5"  
6'0"  
5'5"  
5'0"  
4'5"  
4'0"  
3'5"  
3'0"









HALL OF HONOR

HALL

THE MCFRA

Two portraits of men in suits are displayed at the top of the pillar. Below them are two columns of text, likely biographies or profiles of individuals. The text is partially obscured but appears to be organized into sections.

EXIT





City of Miami Historic Black Police District and Courthouse Museum

STAND ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS  
"Still Serving the Community"















A small plaque or inscription below the framed portrait.



EXIT















MEN'S  
TOILET

MEN'S TOILET

EXIT

STAIR HALL







RESTROOM

EXIT









UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 12/27/2019      Date of Pending List: 1/14/2020      Date of 16th Day: 1/29/2020      Date of 45th Day: 2/10/2020      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

- |                                       |  |   |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal       | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL            | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape       | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver       | <input type="checkbox"/> National        | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other        | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP             | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
|                                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CLG  |   |

Accept       Return       Reject      2/5/2020 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria

Reviewer Jim Gabbert / Barry Jurgensen      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275      Date 2-5-2020

DOCUMENTATION:      see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : No



## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT of STATE

**RON DESANTIS**  
Governor

**LAUREL M. LEE**  
Secretary of State

December 20, 2019

Joy Beasley, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places  
Mail Stop 7228  
1849 C St, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for the **Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse (FMSF#: 8DA07015) in Miami-Dade County**, to the National Register of Historic Places. The related materials (digital images, maps, and site plan) are included.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (850) 245-6364 if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ruben A. Acosta".

Ruben A. Acosta  
Supervisor, Survey & Registration  
Bureau of Historic Preservation

RAA/raa

Enclosures



**Miami  
FL**

**ADOPTED**  
Oct 10, 2019 9:00 AM

**Resolution  
R-19-0378**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE MIAMI CITY COMMISSION, WITH ATTACHMENT(S), RECOMMENDING TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD ITS APPROVAL OF THE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE'S NOMINATION TO ADD THE BLACK POLICE PRECINCT AND COURTHOUSE TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES AS IT MEETS THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA TO BE ADDED TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER; MAKING FINDINGS; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**

Information

**Department:** Department of Planning      **Sponsors:**  
**Category:** Other

Attachments

[Agenda Summary and Legislation](#)  
[6456 Exhibit A](#)  
[6456 HEPB Resolution No. 2002-54](#)

Financial Impact

N/A

Body/Legislation

WHEREAS, the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse, located at 480 Northwest 11 Street, Miami, Florida 33136, ("Black Police Precinct and Courthouse" or "Property") has been a locally protected historic resource since September 17, 2002, when it was designated by unanimous decision by the Historic and Environmental Preservation Board ("HEPB") via HEPB Resolution No. 2002-54; and

WHEREAS, in 2019, the State of Florida Historic Preservation Office ("State") prepared a nomination proposal, attached and incorporated as Exhibit "A," to add the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse to the National Register of Historic Places ("National Register"); and

WHEREAS, the State determined that the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as it meets National Register Criterion "A" since the Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Black and Law, and Criterion "B" since the Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past for its association with Judge Lawson E. Thomas, who was the first black judge to be appointed in the south in the twentieth century; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 23-5(b) of the Code of the City of Miami, as amended ("City Code"), the HEPB shall obtain a written recommendation from the City Commission and the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners as to whether a property should be nominated to the National Register; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 23-5(b) of the City Code, the HEPB shall give notice to the property owners at least thirty (30) days but not more than seventy-five (75) days prior to the HEPB meeting at which the nomination will be considered; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 23-5(c) of the City Code, the HEPB shall obtain comments from the public that shall be included in the report making a recommendation; objections to being listed in the National Register by the property owners must be notarized and filed with the Historic Preservation Office; and within



thirty (30) days after its meeting, the HEPB shall forward to the State its action on the nomination and the recommendations of the local officials; appropriate local officials, the property owner(s), and the applicant shall also be notified of the HEPB's actions; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 23-5(d) of the City Code, if the HEPB or local officials, or both, support the nomination, the State will schedule the nomination for consideration by the State review board for the National Register at its next regular meeting; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 23-5(d) of the City Code, if both the HEPB and the local officials recommend that a property not be nominated to the National Register, the State will take no further action on the nomination unless an appeal is filed with the State; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission, after reasonable opportunity for public comment, finds that the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse meets the eligibility criteria to be added to the National Register, as indicated in the State's Nomination Proposal attached and incorporated as Exhibit "A"; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF MIAMI, FLORIDA:


Section 1. The recitals and findings contained in the Preamble to this Resolution are adopted by reference and incorporated as if fully set forth in this Section.

Section 2. The City Commission recommends to HEPB approval of the State Historic Preservation Office's nomination to add the Black Police Precinct and Courthouse to the National Register of Historic Places as it meets the eligibility criteria.

Section 3. This Resolution shall become effective immediately upon its adoption and signature of the Mayor.[1]

[1] If the Mayor does not sign this Resolution, it shall become effective at the end of ten (10) calendar days from the date it was passed and adopted. If the Mayor vetoes this Resolution, it shall become effective immediately upon override of the veto by the City Commission.

## Meeting History

<b>Oct 10, 2019 9:00 AM</b>	<b>City Commission</b>	<b>Regular Meeting</b>	 <b>Draft</b>
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ADOPTED [UNANIMOUS]</b>		
<b>MOVER:</b>	Wifredo (Willy) Gort, Vice Chair, District One		
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Ken Russell, Chair, District Two		
<b>AYES:</b>	Ken Russell, Wifredo (Willy) Gort, Joe Carollo, Manolo Reyes, Keon Hardemon		

Select Language ▼

Powered by Google Translate



**Regulatory and Economic Resources Department**

**Office of Historic Preservation**

111 NW 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Mailbox 114 • 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Miami, Florida 33128  
T 305-375-4958

October 9, 2019

Dr. William E. Hopper, Chair  
Historic & Environmental Preservation Board  
Commission Chambers  
3500 Pan American Drive  
Miami, FL 33133

Re: Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse, National Register of Historic Places Nomination

Dear Chairman Hopper:

Pursuant to Miami-Dade County Ordinance 81-13, Chapter 16A-3.2, I offer the following recommendation on behalf of the County. Miami-Dade County recommends approval of the nomination of the Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse (DA07015) to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Miami Black Police Precinct and Courthouse is a significant historic resource that reflects an important era in Miami and the State of Florida's history. Its historic context and recent restoration make it a notable inclusion for the National Register of Historic Places. I appreciate you and the Historic & Environmental Preservation Board for taking the time to review the nomination, and for considering the County's recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah K. Cody".

Sarah K. Cody  
Historic Preservation Chief  
Miami-Dade County

Cc: Commissioner Audrey M. Edmonson, Miami-Dade County, District 3  
Mr. Ruben A. Acosta, Survey and Registration Supervisor, Florida Division of Historical Resources