

On black flight

Contributed by BRAD BENNETT
Last Updated Friday, 03 August 2007

I read with interest a recent story in The Miami Herald that said middle-class African Americans are fleeing Miami-Dade County in favor of, among other places, Broward County.

Certain areas of Broward – most notably Miramar and Pembroke Pines – have long been known for attracting large numbers of West Indians. But now it seems that our African-American brothers and sisters are joining them here, as well.

Of course, this is nothing new. The “brain drain’’ of middle-class blacks fleeing former strongholds of black communities in favor of suburban, traditionally white areas can be traced back to at least the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s.

That’s when business owners, doctors, lawyers, teachers and other professionals left segregated black communities in large numbers, when integration opened the doors for blacks to live in the same areas as whites.

This black flight improved the economic and social conditions for those of us who had the financial wherewithal to relocate into the suburbs, but no doubt widened the economic and social gap between poor blacks and everyone else.

The latest study from Florida International University’s Metropolitan Center only serves to underscore this point.

Concerns over affordable housing, job prospects and poor schools are cited in the study – commissioned by Metro Miami Action Plan – as the reason why middle-class blacks are currently leaving Miami-Dade.

The percentage of blacks living below the poverty line was unchanged since 1983, though unemployment more than doubled from 7.3 percent to 14.9 percent, according to the study.

And, for the first time, concerns over affordable housing surpassed education as the community’s most critical issue, according to the report.

“Miami-Dade is losing middle-class African Americans,’’ FIU political science Professor Dario Moreno, the study’s author, told The Miami Herald. “I was shocked that the numbers were so bad.’’

In a poll of 604 black Miami-Dade residents, more than 30 percent said they planned to leave Miami-Dade. Of those, about 40 percent held a college degree and earned between \$60,000 and \$80,000, the newspaper reported.

Now more than ever, those of us who have the wherewithal to choose where we want to live must reach back into the community that spawned us to help our brothers and sisters. Many of us are still struggling with poor housing, poor job prospects and poor schools.

Regardless of where we live, we must work together to help each other improve our condition as a whole.

BradBennett@BrowardTimes.com