

**A World More Concrete:  
Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida**

N. D. B. Connolly

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N. D. B. Connolly's *A World More Concrete* describes the creation, demise, and reconstruction of the racially segregated neighborhoods of Miami, Florida, from the 1890s through the 1960s. Some of the book covers familiar ground, describing the origins of housing segregation in a combination of real estate interests, zoning laws, eminent domain, and federal policies. Connolly, however, radically complicates this familiar history by reframing it as the result of a negotiated social relationship between white *and* black elites rather than the result of policies imposed by city planners, federal bureaucrats, block-busting realtors, and race-baiting politicians seeking to placate white homeowners. Connolly describes residential segregation as a phenomenon that "required repeated buy-in across the class and color spectrums," concluding that "people of every complexion made Jim Crow work" (4).

Miami's African American and West Indian ghettos were created and preserved by relationships among black and white landlords, an alliance Connolly describes as a "variation on colonialism" and that functioned as a "kind of indirect rule" (6). This (albeit unequal) alliance nurtured the formation of an interracial class of landlords united to protect both their rental incomes and their property values. In essence, black landlords and homeowners supported the right of white landlords to exploit their black tenants in order to gain "a modicum of defense against state officials looking to carry out their own racially inflected urban redevelopment projects" (10). Time and again, these landlords "used their political influence and legal resources to keep large-scale land use projects from claiming black homes" by opposing slum clearance and urban renewal projects from the 1930s through the 1960s (10). These forms of interracial collaboration narrowed the conception of citizenship to accommodate the interests of landlords, both black and white.

*A World More Concrete* begins with the establishment of Miami's Colored Town, which for decades was Miami's black ghetto. The rents paid by the black tenants in this neighborhood funneled wealth and power into the hands of the city's landlords. Black entrepreneurs with property in Colored Town founded the city's first chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League, committing themselves to racial uplift and helping to alleviate the poor health that beset Miami's impoverished black neighborhoods. Connolly, however, avoids the trap of conservative nostalgia for black life under Jim Crow and highlights the dismal conditions of Colored Town's housing stock. He goes on to describe the rigid boundaries of Miami's black community, which were enforced by white homeowners willing to use both violence and zoning laws to confine black Miamians within this ghetto. In the face of implacable white resistance, Miami's black leaders pushed "for a more equal 'separate but equal'" (41).

As the black property owners of Colored Town accommodated the limits imposed by Jim Crow, a dual paternalism emerged in which "white authoritarianism was permissible as long as white elites worked to minimize white terrorism." In exchange, these white elites conceded the right of black entrepreneurs "to represent their race as long as they maintained their commitment to enterprise and . . . pragmatic solutions to the 'Negro Problem'" (42). This compromise strengthened the colonial relationships that guaranteed black landlords

a measure of power but also reinforced the link between property and racial power that undergirded Jim Crow. Through the remainder of the book, Connolly traces the development of this relationship as it confronted the challenges posed by slum clearance and urban renewal programs between the 1930s and the 1960s.

During the early years of the New Deal, refugees poured into Miami after sharecroppers were kicked off the land by rural landlords who cashed in on the Agricultural Adjustment Act. With thousands of new black renters confined within the borders of Colored Town, capital investment in the neighborhood intensified. To maximize their profits, these landlords constructed hundreds of one-story wooden shotgun shacks built so close together there were as many as six hundred people living on a single acre of land (76). With unpaved streets and lack of sanitation, Colored Town became a deadly breeding ground for tuberculosis and other diseases of poverty. Additionally, the concentration of the city's vice trades in Miami's only black neighborhood fueled periodic calls to clear the black slums.

For landlords, however, the biggest threat to their bottom line was not the racialized moral outrage of white homeowners but the construction of low-cost public housing first made possible by New Deal funding from the Public Works Administration. Landlords' resistance to slum clearance in Miami meant that Liberty Square, South Florida's first housing project for black tenants, would not be built until 1936 and then only on vacant land miles away from Colored Town. When this new development was first conceived, black homeowners and landlords embraced it as a way to move poor black Miamians into housing that would both improve the health and morals of the black working class and maintain property values. However, as Liberty Square grew into Liberty City over the course of the 1940s and 1950s, it developed into a new black ghetto as Miami's real estate interests and city planners appropriated the new powers granted them by New Deal legislation to raze undesirable black neighborhoods and relocate the city's black population away from the increasingly valuable real estate near Colored Town. Facing expulsion from their homes, black tenants and property owners found allies among white landlords who sought to prevent the expansion of public housing. For a time, this alliance rescued some black neighborhoods from what Connolly terms "Jim Crow liberalism," but it also preserved the segregated and substandard housing stock to which black renters had long been relegated.

Finally, Connolly demonstrates how allied black and white landlords managed to preserve their control over the city's racially segregated housing stock during the 1950s and 1960s, when urban renewal had become inevitable. By the 1950s, with crucial assistance from the Federal Housing Authority, the city's landlords began to replace the decrepit wooden rental units that black tenants had lived in for decades with modern concrete buildings. As the environment became more concrete, so did the lines separating the lives of the city's black working class from the rest of Miami. Using newly expanded powers of eminent domain, the alliance between black and white landlords was now able to recast urban renewal as civil rights, "decoupling white supremacy from Jim Crow" and allowing "white power to survive without apartheid" (204).

This focus on African American compromises within the property relationships that undergirded Jim Crow offers a decidedly nonheroic narrative of civil rights. Rather than focus on the 1940s and 1950s as the "seedtime" (203) for the civil rights movement, Connolly focuses instead on the real limits of that struggle. *A World More Concrete* reveals what happens eight decades after Booker T. Washington famously defended a policy of accommodation to Jim Crow and urged black Americans to focus instead on accumulating wealth and property. Washington himself had appropriated an older dream of black prop-

erty ownership rooted in the failed Reconstruction-era promises of “40 acres and a mule.” Black property ownership had long served as a foundation for a more secure citizenship; however, investments in real estate—financial and cultural—encouraged black property owners to view poor black people not as allies but rather as threats to their property values. This radically narrowed the liberatory understandings of civil rights that had been introduced during both the first and second Reconstruction to a Washingtonian prosperity gospel linking wealth and race uplift.

Further complicating the heroic narrative of the black freedom struggle, many of these black property owners became nationally recognized civil rights leaders. M. Athalie Range, Miami’s first black city commissioner and an early champion of school integration, was widely regarded as a “civil rights giant” in south Florida. For those living in her dilapidated rental properties, she was simply a slumlord who refused to keep her units in good repair and who coerced her tenants into spending hundreds of their own dollars in order to repair Range’s apartment buildings (11–12). Miami’s most powerful black leaders were all landlords, as were national civil rights figures such as Mary McLeod Bethune and W. E. B. Du Bois, all of whom lived off the rents paid by black tenants (12). As these leaders defended black civil rights, they equated racial progress with property ownership within a capitalist order that abetted class stratification within black communities, thereby eliding more expansive understandings of civil rights.

Connolly’s focus on the enduring power of the social and property relationships at the heart of Jim Crow sheds new light on the unfulfilled economic promises of the civil rights movement. *A World More Concrete* demands that we reperiodize the long history of the black freedom struggle along different axes and provides a compelling measure of its success and shortcomings.

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### **Radical Unionism: The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism**

Ralph Darlington

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Revolutionary syndicalism, represented in North America by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), was an important part of a diverse Left that was on the rise in the first decades of the twentieth century. Importantly, the syndicalists did not only confront capitalists, they also challenged other radicals, offering a critique of traditional unions and leftist political parties and a distinct program for revolutionary change. Syndicalist history is not well known today, which is odd, because the movement’s anarchist, internationalist edge has a contemporary feel. Syndicalists celebrated unionism, but they also talked about the stultifying aspects of political parties, the perils of bureaucratic labor organizations, the efficacy of the general strike and direct action, the merits of democracy and local control, and the necessity of inclusiveness in building a movement for change. These issues remain relevant today, in an age where there is increasing wealth inequality and a troubled labor movement