The history of blacks in Southern Florida—particularly urban blacks—has been a largely neglected subject. Rich archival sources often found in other parts of the country tend not to be preserved in Southern Florida. Several explanations for this situation can be found, including the relatively recent settlement of the region, poor preservation methods exacerbated by a harsh climate, and discriminatory practices, that have placed a low priority on the collection and preservation of Afro-American historical material.

Oral histories provide an important means by which to begin to fill this incomplete historical record. Arthur Evans, Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Social Psychology at Florida Atlantic University and David Lee, a Professor of Geography at Florida Atlantic University, in *Pearl City: A Black Community Remembers* provide a useful historical and geographical study of Pearl City, a black community in Boca Raton, as it existed in the early part of this century.

Evans and Lee’s book is based primarily on 27 interviews conducted during 1984-85 with current or former community residents. The first eight chapters focus on recollections of members of the Pearl City community, dealing with topics such as migration, work, food and recreation, religion and education, medicine and health, relations with the white community, housing, and community traditions. The book’s two final chapters are largely interpretive, focusing on the historical, sociological and geographical foundations of the black experience in South Florida.

The information recovered by Evans and Lee from the interviews is often fascinating. In Chapter 2, “Making a Living,” for example, detailed descriptions of working as a bean picker are provided, including how work crews were organized, paid and treated by various local farmers. Chapter 3 provides descriptions of people hunting and living off the land. A detailed description of turtle hunting, for example, makes clear how important a food source turtles (while their numbers were still abundant)
were to many black Floridians. Recreational activities are described, such as box parties, (where women would make box suppers for men to buy that included a date with the cook) or necktie and apron parties (where a man would buy a tie that would match an apron worn by women to a community dinner). "Whoever got on a apron that match your tie, that's the person you had dinner with" (p. 45). In recovering this type of information, Evans and Lee have performed an important service, bringing to light work patterns, customs, and traditions that would otherwise be forgotten.

Subsequent chapters provide explorations of a similar nature. Of particular value is the fact that the data provided by the study are from the perspective of the individuals who experienced the history being recreated. The study does have a number of problems. *Pearl City* as a research study is unfortunately limited by its lack of specificity concerning who was actually interviewed, what period their recollections described, and how various individuals interviewed were connected to one another. The researchers, by collapsing the interviews to create individual topical areas, in many respects, have destroyed the individual voices of the interviewees. Often, in reading a passage, I did not know if it was a man or woman interviewee, or whether they were children in the 1920s, 1930s or 1940s. A footnote and coding system identifying individual quotes could have been used even if anonymity of those being interviewed was seen as important.

What is created that is useful for the reader is a gestalt, a general feeling or sense of the black community in Boca Raton. In providing this, the authors afford the reader a set of experiences and insights that are particularly valuable. It is here that the book makes its most valuable contribution.

The overview essays at the conclusion are thorough and provide important insights applicable to other urban settings in both the South and Southern Florida. Particularly useful are discussions of black migratory patterns in Southeastern Florida, and many of the causal factors and events that led to black settlement patterns in the region. A useful bibliography is also provided.
*Pearl City* is a valuable source for individuals interested in gaining a clearer sense of the development of an important black community in Southern Florida. It suggests the importance of undertaking comparative studies in other Florida urban centers such as Miami, Jacksonville and Tampa—ones that should be undertaken considering the limitations and insights provided by this work.