A wire fence separates the men from the women in the Miami Refugee camp. This is the only contact between the sexes officially.

Despair seems etched on the face of one of the Haitians as she sits on her cot inside the refugee center. Milk crates are used to hold her possessions.

Inside A Haitian Refugee Camp

As the Haitian "boat people" arrive in this country, they are hustled off to refugee camps while awaiting disposition of their cases. Dawn Magazine visited the camp just outside Miami, FL.

By Michael Patterson

The road to the Haitian refugee camp at Krome Avenue in Southwest Miami on the edge of the huge Everglades swamp is known as the Tamiami Trail. It is a long, winding road that begins in the city proper and stretches into the vastness of the wilderness.

The camp, which is about a half-mile from the road, is set back in dense undergrowth, its stark barrenness contrasting sharply with the tropical lushness of its surroundings.

Mosquitos, snakes and other creatures of the swamp abound in the surrounding wilderness, and Haitians complain of them routinely — to no avail.

Inside the wretched camp, a population that fluctuates between 700 and 1,300 refugees waits restlessly for the freedom that they hope will someday be granted to them, the freedom that drove them to leave their impoverished homeland in the dead of night to board rickety, ill-equipped sailboats for a journey of several hundred miles through the shark-infested waters between Haiti and Miami.

It is the refugee story of the decade. For the first time in the history of America, large numbers of black immigrants have flooded to our shores, fleeing inescapable poverty and a repressive political regime that punishes dissention with imprisonment, torture and death. But when these immigrants reach our shores, they are not welcomed with open arms like the Cubans and Indochinese.

Instead, they have been dragged off the beaches like floating debris, placed in refugee camps, and, later, shipped to Puerto Rico, New York, Montana and a host of other "federal detention facilities."

The Rev. Jean Juste, a tireless Haitian freedom fighter who runs the Haitian refugee center, the most outspoken and effective organization fighting for the rights of Haitian refugees, has described the treatment of Haitian refugees as "blatant racism" that must be stopped at all costs. "They are doing this to the Haitians simply because we are black," he insists.

"The U.S. is admitting 14,000 Indochinese refugees a month," Jean Juste added. "Two thousand Haitians is a drop in the bucket — that's nothing."

Jean Juste explained that Haitians were afraid to seek asylum in the United States 15 or 20 years ago because they were aware of the discrimination and bigotry that was common practice in America.

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Double-decker bunks with barely enough room between for a body to squeeze through are the accommodations in the male Haitians sleeping quarters.

Food line in the male quarters. The separation of the sexes continues at meal times. By ordinary standards the service primitive but nourishing fare is offered.

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