

# **Marketing the “Tropical Playground” Issues of Exclusion and Development in Miami’s Imagery<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Miami’s marketers have a long and successful history of creating and recreating imagery that draws visitors towards the ‘magic city’ or the ‘tropical playground’. This paper investigates Miami’s marketing from an historical perspective by examining the role and legacy of various discourses emanating from powerful city actors over the past century. The findings suggest that unequal, segregating and exclusive discourses have become so normalized within Miami’s marketing and political structure that change is becoming increasingly difficult as attitudes institutionalize further. Using a discourse analysis set around a framework of social exclusion and adverse incorporation, GIS analysis, and semi-structured interviews, this paper also examines the current spatial formation of the city with insights from leading figures in Miami’s marketing industry to suggest that the right to the city is still a distant dream for Miami’s othered neighborhoods and populations.

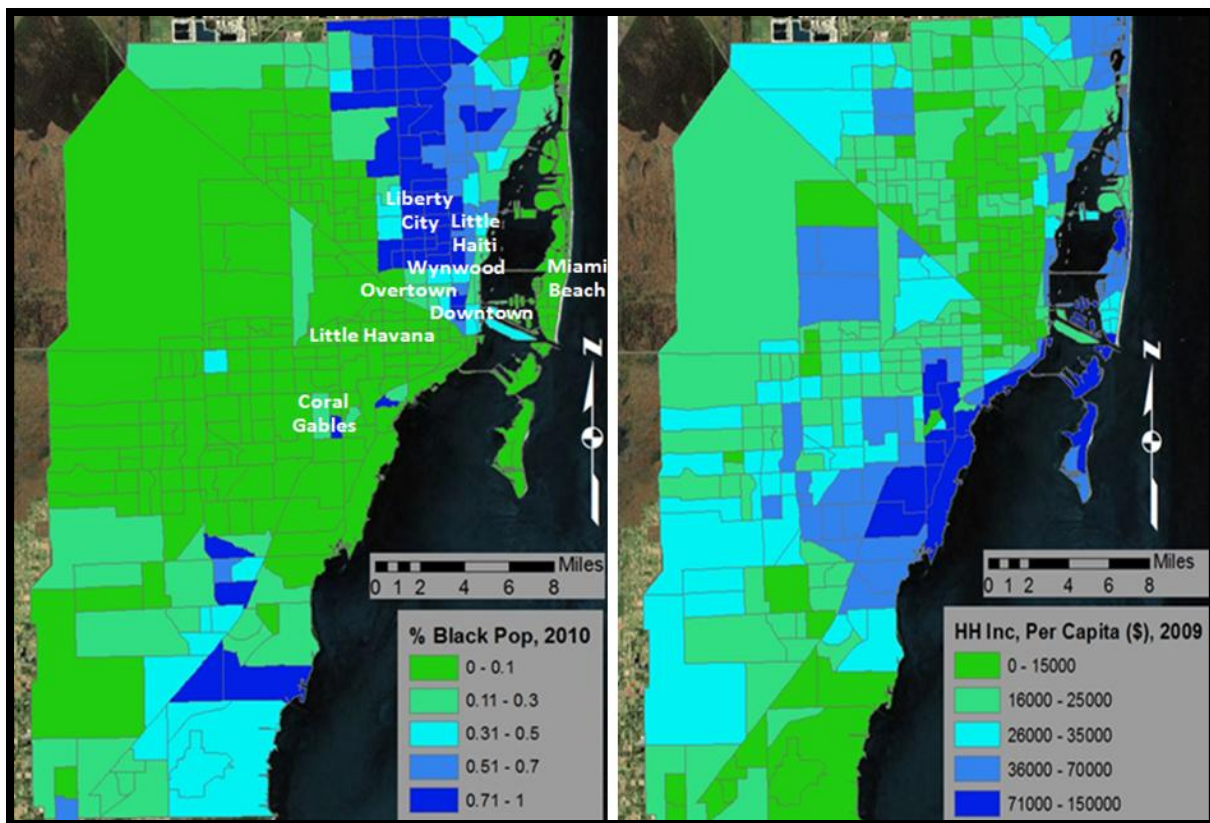
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<sup>1</sup> This paper presents portions of the author's master's thesis (Clery forthcoming). Please do not quote or use any of the material without the author's permission.

As Miami becomes increasingly influential in the globalized world, with ever more connections to Latin America, Europe, and the rest of the United States, the manner in which the city markets itself is central to the prolongation of any such success. Miami's various marketers have had a long (at least relative to the age of the city) and successful history of creating a desirable image(ry) for the city which has been central in its growth from little more than a swamp in the late nineteenth century (Miami Dade County's official population count in 1880 was 257) to, arguably, the most important economic and cultural hub of the Americas. (Nijman 2011) This imagery is crucial as what Miami portrays, who decides on this portrayal, and who stands to benefit from the portrayal are questions at the heart of this paper. In order to address these questions the historical effects and legacies of segregation will be spatially examined, together with a discourse analysis, in order to assess the extent to which Miami's marketers, politicians and planners exclude certain elements of the population from their marketing.

Miami's image as a 'tropical playground' has been manufactured, much like the city itself, to attract various forms of investment from throughout the United States and the world. The creation of such an image requires strong and successful marketing campaigns which, in turn, choose elements of the city to promote or ignore. When Alonso (2007) argues that the tropicalized ideal of Miami is less marketed than in the past he is not referring to the palm trees, the heat (neither the temperature nor the utilization of Miami's 'tropical' image in naming it's basketball team, the *Miami Heat*) or the beaches, but rather that "the working-class immigrants who give the city its contemporary 'tropical rhythm' – and on whose labor the tourism industry depends – are mostly left out of the image". (p.164) Miami's 'working-class immigrants' consist overwhelmingly of African Americans, Caribbean people and Latinos, who together have played a vital role in the city's creation and, according to the 2010 Census, constitute almost 85% of the

population today.<sup>1</sup> Such overarching racial classifications ignore however the high levels of variability and inequality that exist within any such grouping and that are hugely prevalent in Miami itself. This inequality led the United Nation's *State of the World's Cities Report 2008/9* to conclude that Miami, along with four other US cities, has "the highest levels of inequality in the country, similar to those of Abidjan, Nairobi, Buenos Aires and Santiago".<sup>2</sup> The report concludes that this inequality in Miami, as elsewhere in the United States, is predominantly determined by race, whereby "the life expectancy of African Americans in the United States is about the same as that of people living in China and some states of India, despite the fact that the United States is far richer than the other two countries".<sup>3</sup>



Figures 1 and 2- Miami-Dade County's Black Population as a Proportion of the Total Population, 2009 and Miami-Dade County's Income Per Capita (\$), 2009, respectively<sup>4</sup>

Figure 2 illustrates the vast inequalities that exist in Miami as census tracts around downtown with per capita incomes of less than \$15,000 neighbor coastline tracts with income per capita at over \$70,000. Figure 1 shows how this income inequality is strongly correlated to race with poverty clearly equating to the areas with the highest percentage of Blacks whilst, correspondingly, the wealthiest tracts have the lowest percentages of Blacks.

This racially influenced income distribution is nothing new to Miami as issues of inclusion and exclusion have historically played central roles in the city's formation. Harvey (1973) argues that "we must recognize that once a particular spatial form is created it tends to institutionalize and, in some respects, to determine the future development of social processes". (p.27) The institutionalization of segregation and/or differentiation can be seen as having become deeply ingrained into Miami's collective psyche so that separatism based upon ethnicity or skin color become conceived as the norm or somehow natural. Whilst politicians and city planners were central to the construction of segregation, marketers have played a central role in its continuation. This process has seen little recent change as influential marketers such as George Neary, Vice President of Cultural Tourism at the Greater Miami Conventions and Visitors Bureau (GMCVB) continue to normalize segregation through statements such as, "Black people live in Black neighborhoods [and] White people live in White neighborhoods... Miami [like] the United States was, and still is, a segregated [place]".<sup>5</sup>

Racial segregation has a long history in Miami, dating back to the turn of the last century, when Florida was implementing "an increasing array of laws that separated White and Black persons"<sup>6</sup> including the prohibition of intermarriage (up to the fourth generation) in 1885, segregated interstate train travel in 1887, and residential segregation in which "Black residents, irrespective of class or nativity, lived along the northern and southern boundaries of the city"

whilst “the city’s wealthiest residents...lived closest to Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, including Miami Beach and Coral Gables”.<sup>7</sup> These patterns are still clearly apparent based upon 2010’s population maps (see figure 1 and 2 above), however the roots of this segregation are complex and multifaceted and provide numerous instances of what Du Toit (2004), Hickey and Du Toit (2007), and Coplan (2009) term social exclusion and adverse incorporation.

The term social exclusion can be used as a tool to describe processes of marginalization and deprivation and will therefore be central to this analysis. Hickey and Du Toit (2007) describe how social exclusion can be considered as enriching prior conceptualizations of development analysis as “it can help contextualize poverty in social systems and structure... it contains an important focus on causality...[it] involves a clear awareness of the multidisciplinary of deprivation...[it] focuses on politics...[and] highlights the importance of politics and history”. (p.2-3) This form of analysis is essential in the case of Miami as not only is poverty in the city often misrepresented and underrepresented in much of the mainstream media and governmental documentation, but contextualized, multifaceted analyses regarding the multi-scalar role of political and historical marketing in the creation and prolongation of poverty and inequality in the city are rare. In order to examine Miami from this perspective let us now look back to the city’s formation and the marketing that, it will be argued, played a large part in the construction of the spatial and ideological creation of the city.

The early twentieth century saw a boom in tourism led by a concerted marketing effort which sold



Miami as the “Magic City”, a place where dreams and fortunes were made.<sup>8</sup> This campaign was primarily aimed at attracting developers willing to transform the swamp-like Miami Beach into

the “playground of nations” envisaged by early pioneers such as Carl Fisher, George Merrick or Glenn Curtiss. In this manner the city’s marketers created a very particular mythology which advertised Miami as a “tropical playground”<sup>9</sup> in which, almost magically, there was “practically no poverty, slums or tenement”.<sup>10</sup>

The reality was nothing of the sort however, as Dunn (1997) describes the appalling living standards which characterized much of the Black communities of the city;

“ramshackle houses sprang up along...unpaved streets. There was little or no running water and no indoor plumbing. Electricity, fast becoming commonplace in White residential areas, was practically unknown in Colored Town. Children and young adults died...at a high rate. Crime...thrived”. (p.164)

The exclusion of all these issues from the city’s marketing was soon aided by urban planners who helped put in place the infrastructure that enabled vacationers and wealthy locals alike to bypass ‘undesirable aspects’ of Miami in order to indulge in the ‘magical, tropical playground’. Specifically, urban planners denied Miami’s Black communities the zoning requirements of White areas such as indoor plumbing (outdated wagons travelled Black areas collecting human waste from latrines), limited housing density (twice as high in Black neighborhoods), and the promise of basic services such as paved roads, leading to the fact that by 1950, “Miami enjoyed the dubious honor of being the single most segregated city in the United States”.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most destructive infrastructure imposed by Miami’s planners was related to transportation, in which roads, railway lines and the related zoning were used with the specific intention of maintaining segregation and removing poverty from sight. By creating overpass routes which tunneled over and through Miami’s poorer areas, much of the city’s ‘poverty, slums or tenement’ were removed from most observers vision, thus fulfilling (visually at least) the imagery created by marketers decades earlier.

The overt desire to restrict and hide the Black population was illustrated by the comments of an urban planner named Michael Rose who explained that “continued areal expansion [of the Black population] might be hampered by the presence of physical obstacles to the north and west which might serve as effective racial boundaries”. (p.225-6) In this case, the ‘physical obstacles’ to which the planner was referring are roads and railway lines which functioned more like a knife than a barrier, decimating much of the Black community. Specifically, the building of interstates I-95 and I-375 through Overtown in the 1950s were a deliberate attempt to displace the Black population from the area in order to create more space for the downtown business district. This process was assisted by ‘urban renewal’ strategies that gave Black tenants less than one day’s notice before their homes were repossessed and destroyed. Mohl (1989) explains how the strategy worked very effectively as,

“the new expressway ripped through the center of Overtown, wiping out massive amounts of housing as well as Overtown’s main business district – the business and cultural heart of Black Miami. Some 40,000 Blacks made Overtown their home before the interstate came, but less than 10,000 now remain in an urban wasteland dominated by the expressway”. (p.75)

The legacy of the interstate lives on as the population of Overtown has continued to shrink and today contains fewer than 8,000 residents with a per capita income of under \$11,500 and only 41 business remain in the area compared to nearly 400 in 1950.<sup>12</sup>

The City of Miami stated in 2010 its belief in the principle of equity which they define in relation to public space in the city as the need to ensure that “[e]very resident should be able to enjoy the same quality of public facilities and services regardless of income, age, race, ability or geographic location”.<sup>13</sup> The particular landscape that the city are portraying here is far from the unequal realities of Miami hidden beneath the expressways and is based more on what Mitchell (1997) describes as “a particular way of seeing the world, one in which order and control over surroundings takes precedence over the messy realities of everyday life... [In this sense the]

landscape is a “scene” in which the propertied classes express “possession” of the land, and their control over the social relations within it”. (p.323) The historical control over the boundaries of racial communities, through infrastructural planning and implementation regarding the design and location of expressways, has combined to create a tunneling or confining effect that helps to promote an overly optimistic and misleading image of the city whilst also reducing, what Jiron (2010) describes as, “the possibilities of encounter and interaction, which are the essence of urban experience”. (p.77) Nijman (2011) expands upon this to explain how “[s]ocioeconomic inequality often implies segregation and a fragmented social structure, especially where economic inequality intersects with race and ethnicity. Being one of the most unequal metropolitan regions in the United States, as well, Miami is thus doubly challenged in its capacity to generate and maintain social capital”. (p.124)

Roads and railway lines were not alone in restricting or cutting Miami’s Black population as zoning laws were another often used tool to maintain and increase effective levels of segregation. The marketing of unequal zoning laws was often marketed however within the context of safety and protection. The Federal Housing Authority (1938) explained how “[o]ne of the best artificial means of providing protection from adverse influences is through the medium of appropriate and well-drawn zoning”.<sup>14</sup> In contemporary Miami, protection from such ‘adverse influences’ is still being negotiated so that, in 2002, Miami’s Housing Agency, together with \$35 million in government grants, set out to ‘renew’ a distressed part of Miami’s predominantly Black Liberty City neighborhood. The marketing of this project, ironically named Hope VI, was thus focused upon its potential for ‘urban renewal’ which, particularly given Miami’s aforementioned history of ‘urban renewal’ of Overtown in the fifties, led to widespread community skepticism. The agency’s initial aim, of demolishing public housing for 800 families



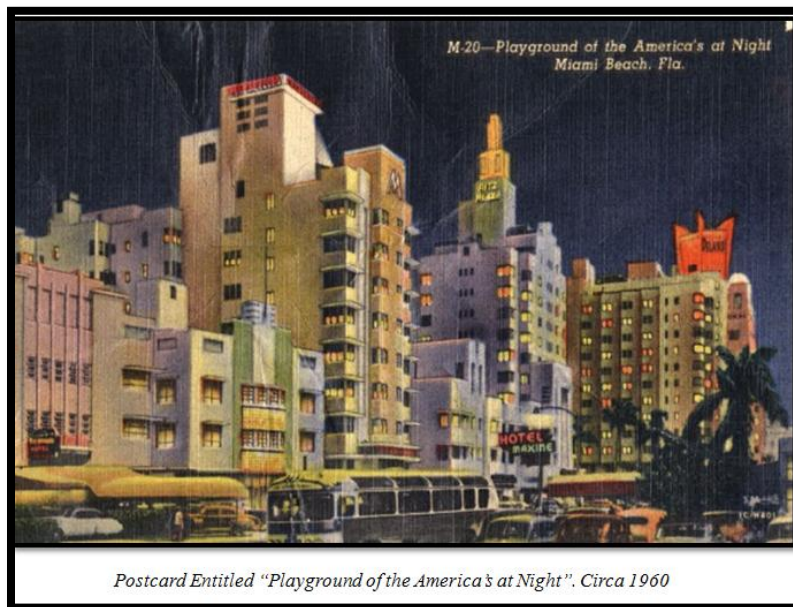
in order to rebuild only 411 houses, seems somewhat illogical in numerical terms. This project's neglect for the very people it was designed to serve was fully revealed however by the subsequent mismanagement of funds and overspending on architects, project managers, overheads and consultants which led to half the funds having been spent six years later, despite only three houses having been built in recompense for the 800 displaced families.<sup>15</sup>

At this point let us now examine a problematic issue surrounding an analysis of social exclusion, namely that poverty is often created by the adverse terms and conditions of people's inclusion into an unequal and dictating political or economic system, rather than just their exclusion from it. Shell-Weiss (2009) describes how social exclusion, through marketing omission, and adverse incorporation, through the unequal terms of access into Miami's economic system, have been central to the creation and longevity of Miami's contemporary image. She describes how, "[k]eeping Miami's façade aglow required not just marketing, but regular scrubbing and polishing. Yet these jobs paid little more than a pittance, leaving almost half of Miami's people – and especially women – of color 'cleaning and caring in the shadows of affluence'" (p.236) It must therefore be noted that not only exclusion, but also "inclusion can be problematic, disempowering or inequitable".<sup>16</sup>

The exclusion that Blacks faced during segregation in Miami was prevalent throughout society in that they were unable to use public parks, live in certain neighborhoods,



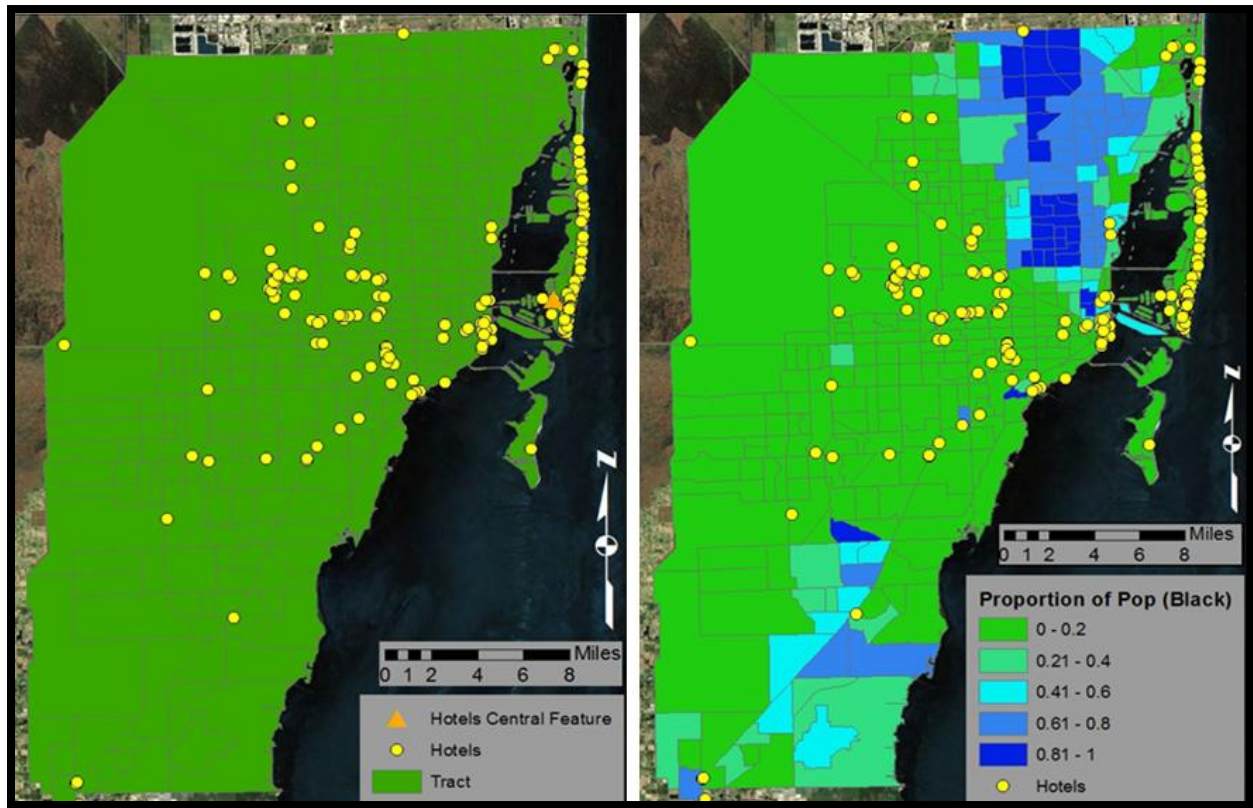
access multiple jobs, or join most labor unions, whilst schools were segregated and colleges were White only.<sup>17</sup> Desegregation, although lessening many aspects of social exclusion, did not bring about unanimously positive effects. Many Black-owned shops and businesses relied on the segregated system which forced Blacks to spend money in Black retailers and hence suffered from the change as Dunn (1997) describes how, “after the social restrictions on Blacks began to ease, some Blacks were taking their money elsewhere”. (p.156) The marketing that Miami’s White tourism industry was able to create around the 1950s was a central component of this shift as Black areas did not have the financial or governmental backing to compete with the glitz and glamour of Miami Beach’s marketing. This therefore brought about a massive decline in tourism amongst Black neighborhoods as “Black visitors from other cities, who used to flock to Colored Town, now in increasing numbers went to the Eden Roc Hotel or the Fountainbleau Hotel on Miami Beach”.<sup>18</sup>



This legacy, combined with the aforementioned tunneling effect of Miami’s specific landscaping and imagery, continues strongly in contemporary Miami. The location of the county’s hotels shows a distinct clustering on Miami Beach, illustrated

through the location of the central feature in Figure 3 below. Figure 4 offers a comparison between hotel locations and the proportion of Black residents in Miami (2010) and clearly

illustrates the lack, or complete absence, of tourism infrastructure, in terms of hotels, in mainly Black neighborhoods. The effects of desegregation, regarding the relocation of hotels away from Black areas and the role that marketing played within this process, therefore provide an example of adverse incorporation that continues to affect Miami to this day.



Figures 3 and 4 – Miami Dade County Hotel Locations and Central Feature and these Features in Relation to the Black Population.<sup>19</sup>

Miami's history has seen the city itself marketed in relation to issues far removed from the segregation and poverty that has existed for most of its past. Formal desegregation may have permitted the Black population political emancipation; however economic freedom continues to be a far-off dream for many, whilst waves of immigration have brought 'ethnic diversity' to Miami although this has done little to reduce exclusion and adverse incorporation.

The culture and creativity that Miami's immigrants brought with them are increasingly being considered traits or tools that cities can utilize in order to further economic and social development strategies.<sup>20</sup> In this manner, the expediency of culture and cultural expression is becoming acknowledged by theorists such as Newman and Smith (2000), "less as a socioeconomic practice that follows in the wake of urban life, but is regarded instead as the motor of the urban economy". (p.9) As globalized cities around the world compete for investment and tourism numbers, culture can serve as an important factor in the emergence of new nodes. Yudice (2003) explains how "[t]he role of culture in capital accumulation... is central to the processes of globalization", however which aspects of culture are included and excluded in these processes must be further examined. (p.192)

Since the late 1950s Miami's marketers have been taking advantage of its cultural background and geographical location to proclaim it '*the gateway to the Americas*', or the '*capital of Latin America*', in order to first attract and then maintain visitors and investment from throughout the Americas. Such successful marketing has helped shape tourism into Miami's largest industry, employing over 100,000 people in various sites including the city's 350 hotels which cater for the 12 million annual visitors (48% of which come from international destinations, with 66% of those coming from Latin America), who spend close to \$17 billion per annum in the local economy.<sup>21</sup> Such success in terms of capital, human and cultural flows led *AmericaEconomia*, South America's top business magazine, to state that Miami was "the best city for doing business with Latin America".<sup>22</sup>

Latin culture has been central in both Miami's emergence as a tourist haven and its growth into a 'world city'. The progression of Miami's entertainment industry provides an interesting illustration of the city's development from a regional node which connected the US to

some specific parts of Latin America, notably Cuba, in the 1980s, to a true 'world city' which today hosts the headquarters of MTV Latin America and Sony Latin America. (Yudice 2003)

The 1980s saw the creation of a new form of marketing the city surrounding what advertisers and promoters began referring to as the 'Miami sound'. This 'sound' was spearheaded by Gloria and Emilio Estefan's *Miami Sound Machine*, who mixed pop and salsa from US and Cuban musical cultures respectively, to wide international renown. This new cultural hybrid combined the historical flows of (musical) cultures coming into Miami from the rest of the US as well as from Cuba and Latin America and, in so doing, helped endow the city (at least to the rest of the world) with a new image based upon multiculturalism and diversity. Following the success of the *Miami Sound Machine* in the 1980s, the subsequent growth in Miami's music industry took advantage of the city's favorable geographical location between North America, Latin America and Europe (predominantly Spain), as well as its high population of bilingual and bicultural residents in order to provide it with a comparative advantage over its urban competitors, to ensure that Miami is today a global center in the production and distribution of Latin Music. (Nijman 2011) Free from the political insecurity which blighted many Latin American countries during this period, Miami was able to offer a uniquely diverse location and culture that appealed to many Latin America's companies and individuals alike. This subsequently attracted further interest and investment in the region from around Latin America as Miami became "seen as a haven of stability and opportunity, with its Latin culture as one of the city's greatest attractions".<sup>23</sup> This growth in Latin culture and cultural industries served a dual purpose as Yudice (2003) describes, "[o]n the one hand, they have a growing *market* value in Latin America, the United States, and elsewhere; on the other hand, they gain an extra political value as they are embraced by U.S. discourses of diversity and multiculturalism".(p.211)

Therefore, at the same time as Miami was booming with Latin American arrivals, it also utilized its culture (through exoticism and tropicalized multiculturalism discourses and imagery) to appeal to its North American and European visitors. However then, as now, “[t]he multiculturalism that is being showcased is not that of the poor or the working classes, but of the professionals and middle classes”.<sup>24</sup> The 1980s boom in musical culture was accompanied by the South Beach Art Deco district’s redevelopment which, importantly, was marketed to a global audience through the popular television show *Miami Vice* and therefore provided another example of the importance of culture in the city’s growth. Whilst the glamour of South Beach’s architecture provided an appealing backdrop to the show, it was also acting as a draw to millions of potential tourists and investors who became intrigued by Miami’s mix of cultures.

This influx of tourism and investment in the city saw Miami Beach especially become marketed as the center of the cultural renaissance, based around the Art Deco buildings that Barbara Capitman and her Miami Design Preservation League helped rejuvenate in the 1980s. The process of rejuvenation in the area was also accused by some of gentrification, as soaring real estate and rent prices pushed many residents out of the area. Ruth Glass, who coined the phrase gentrification in London in the 1960s, describes the inevitability of gentrification’s expansion following its introduction to an area when she explains how, “[o]nce this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is change.” (p. XVIII) In the context of Miami Beach this displacement of the working class away from the island can be seen as reinforcing earlier divisive spatial contexts by further accentuating, through omission rather than reduction, the marketers image(ry) of Miami as a place without ‘poverty, slums, tenement’.

More recently the Wynwood district of Miami has seen claims that a new shopping mall development named Midtown, as well as the recent boom in art galleries and installations in the area, is beginning the process of gentrification.<sup>25</sup> Harvey (2000) argues that exclusivity and middle-class consumption are necessarily embedded within contemporary cultural planning and that therefore gentrification and working-class displacement are the inevitable consequences. Amy Rosenberg, a local activist and the creator of a small non-profit entitled the Overtown Music Project, agrees that “gentrification is inevitable as in Miami gentrification is progress”. She also described her experiences of gentrification in Miami and in Wynwood in particular,

If you look at an area like Wynwood and you look at the demographics of that community and you see how people [developers] have gone into the community – outsiders – and they’ve said to the residents who own their homes – ‘let’s create an agreement whereby when you die I will get your home’. That actually happens, frequently, where people have had their homes sold out from under them and they have had to move elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

Wynwood’s developers have been largely successful in their marketing of the area, despite the recent economic crisis, through promoting their art and culture-based development initiatives. This has however coincided with claims that this development is based upon outsiders bringing culture to an area and thus pushing out local communities rather than including or utilizing local culture. The developer Tony Goldman, a central figure in the development of New York’s Soho in the 1970s and Miami’s own South Beach in the 1980s, has a clear vision for his project in Wynwood and has therefore bought up over 20 properties in the area as he explains, “if you are in it for the long term, then you have to make some adjustments... the big picture is, you maintain your Monopoly. That drives your vision”.<sup>27</sup> The monopolization of real estate with the specific aim of renting it to what Richard Florida (2002: 2005: 2008) described as the ‘creative class’, diminishes local community ownership and participation whilst increasing transitory rental agreements with outsiders, a process which (if the examples of Miami Beach and Soho can

be followed) will eventually raise the price of rent and push working class locals out. Although Goldman states that “the district *could* be redeveloped without displacing the surrounding Puerto Rican neighborhood” [emphasis mine], his current formulation of development is unlikely to do so as reports of Puerto Rican artists leaving are already beginning whilst the (potential displacement of the) Black community is very rarely mentioned.<sup>28</sup> Certainly priorities will differ markedly between developers like Goldman and the local population (who in Wynwood have a median household income of \$11,293.93) and therefore ‘community’ organizations such as Goldman’s *Wynwood Arts District Association* (comprised of art dealers, artists and curators) prioritize the promotion of visual arts above all other issues such as housing, employment or education that will instantly cause a rupture between locals and developers.<sup>29</sup> The Association does state commitment to “providing a clean, safe and enriching environment for pedestrians, *occupants* and *visitors*”<sup>30</sup> [emphasis mine] using the words *occupants* and *visitors*, rather than residents or locals, to stress a high level of transience and emphasize a commitment to the newly arrived over the existing population, a trait that has a long legacy in Miami. (Nijman 2011) Importantly, developers like Goldman or Lombardi are able to act remarkably like the aforementioned city planners of the 1950s and 1960s, (re)designing neighborhoods based upon economic models or criteria that may well exclude or damage local working-class populations but that gradually creates a polished and marketable product.

The City of Miami has recently chosen to focus considerably on polished and marketable products as they channel their funds into flagship projects in the downtown area of Miami, through the creation of mega-structures such as the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, the American Airlines Arena, and the Miami Dade Cultural Center, containing the Miami Art Museum [MAM] and the Historical Museum of Southern Florida as well as Miami-Dade



Public Library. This trend toward flagship projects sees no end in sight as a new \$220 million Museum Park is due to be completed in 2013 amid widespread criticism from prominent figures in Miami's art world, such as Martin Marguiles and Edouard Duval-Carrié (2010), who stated, "why are they building this massive museum [when]... the current museum [MAM] doesn't get 10% a day [of its capacity] to visit it. And this is the major cultural institution in this city!"<sup>31</sup> This lack of visitation is related to the fact that Miami's flagship projects (such as MAM and Museum Park) are often considered detached from the wider community and therefore exclude large sections of the population. Nijman (2011) explains how these flagships are "not part of any larger design but stand alone, dispersed and disconnected from the surrounding landscape. Miami, especially the downtown area, has become a city of projects rather than of comprehensive planning". (p. 199)

This trend toward flagship projects witnesses funds becoming spatially confined to one or two centralized locations rather than being distributed to the wider community so that although these sites are seen as catalysts for urban revitalization they may often serve to shift the poor further afield whilst attracting (or rather attempting to attract), what GMCVB Vice-President Rolando Aedo describes as, 'better heeled' clientele. Such strategies are by no means unique to Miami as Loukaitou-Sideris (2009) explains, "US cities have mostly tended to invest in cultural development strategies that rely on blockbuster events and centrally located facilities rather than on cultural production and programs in diverse city neighborhoods". (p. 5) This focus is desirable for many politicians and planners as 'flagship projects' function well in concealing poverty behind a veil of isolated and centralized superstructures. By (re)locating these projects close together the hope is that they will act as "a catalyst for the transformation of the district", and therefore, in Miami's case, "strengthening Greater Miami's momentum as an emerging

global capital”.<sup>32</sup> The new centralized location of MAM also aims to distance the structure from the negative marketing that the Miami-Dade Cultural Center has received regarding its clientele. The Rough Guide to Miami (2008) claim that “local bums tend to hang out here during the day”, (p.39) whilst Frommer’s claims that the Center is “home to many of those in downtown Miami’s homeless population, which makes it a bit off-putting”.<sup>33</sup> Not only is the language of these comments crude at best but, if true, they also assume that homeless people, or ‘bums’, educating themselves in a Cultural Center’s museums and libraries is somehow ‘off-putting’. This type of marketing directly implies that culture and education should be limited to just the ‘better heeled’ who, in turn, are ‘put off’ by populations less economically successful than themselves frequenting such establishments. This unequal perspective accentuates the historically prominent position that, “among [Miami’s] elite...there is a powerful urge to keep the poor and the ‘criminally inclined’ at some distance”.<sup>34</sup>

This elitist and exclusive perspective is also prominent within much of Miami contemporary tourism marketing. Gastón Alonso (2007) argues that the focus of Miami’s contemporary marketing to the global tourist specifically excludes Miami’s Black and Latino neighborhoods and concentrates instead upon shopping and architecture; “Rather than highlighting Miami’s Caribbean and Latino neighborhoods and cultures, they [Miami’s marketers] emphasize its ‘cosmopolitan sophistication’, modern downtown skyline, restored Art Deco hotels and world-class shopping centers”. (p.164) In order to examine this further we will now turn our attention to the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau’s (GMCVB), Miami’s largest and most influential marketing organization.

The Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau’s describe themselves as “a private, not-for-profit sales and marketing organization” who work with over 1,000 private businesses

and four local governments (Miami-Dade County, The City of Miami Beach, The City of Miami and the Village of Bal Harbour) with a mission of “attracting and encouraging individuals and organizations to visit Greater Miami and the Beaches”. They go on to reveal that they are in fact



GMCVB's Vacation Planner

a “private-public partnership” who claim to support “all community activities that enhance Greater Miami and the Beaches as an attractive and desirable place” [emphasis mine].<sup>35</sup> As we have seen Miami has a history of spatial favoritism in terms of what is considered ‘attractive’ or ‘desirable’. The GMCVB claim that they “market and promote all segments of the community” in their four main publications (the *Vacation Planner*; the *Meeting Planner*; the *Travel Planner*; and the *Delegates & Arrival Guide*).

An examination of the GMCVB’s *Vacation Planner* illustrates Alonso’s point as photographs depicting shopping and/or architecture feature in nearly a third of the planner’s photographs, making architecture and shopping the second and third most popular images, behind scenes of Miami’s beaches, whilst the only one photo in the whole 208 page publication related to Black and/or Latino culture in the city shows children dressed in bright tropical carnival attire. (see table right)

Type of Scene Primarily Depicted	Number of Pages Featuring Image (excluding private advertisements)
Beach	15
Architecture	14
Shopping	10
Entertainment	10
Food	6
Family	6
Luxury	5
Culture	4
Business	3
Nature	3
Various	2
Boating/Cruises	2
Total	80

The importance of tropicalized Miami for sales and marketing is also evident in the *Vacation Planner*'s section on accommodation, which they entitle 'Tropical Retreats'. The lack of imagery regarding Miami's "working class immigrants"<sup>36</sup> of multiple ethnicities may be surprising considering that over 57% of the city are of Latin American descent whilst 20.3% are Black, (a figure that includes many people of Caribbean descent) however this rich multiculturalism that exists in the city and was the basis for much of the city's growth and marketing in the 1980s and 1990s appears to be considered by the GMCVB much more troublesome to market and sell.<sup>37</sup> In the same publication, Miami's neighborhoods are split into South Miami-Dade, Coral Gables, Coconut Grove, Downtown, South Beach, Lincoln Road and Aventura, meaning that many of Miami's predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods were not considered important or attractive enough to warrant their own section and so are placed into a final section entitled 'Around Greater Miami'.

Within the 'Sightseeing and Tours' section of the *Vacation Planner* they explain that "local touring services explore the culture, history, architecture and ecology of this fascinating region" however, of the 21 tour operators listed in the section, only one lists Black history as an option and none mention Latino history, culture, or cultural tours in general.<sup>38</sup> African American culture is the most obvious omission from this section as the GMCVB chose to include "Little Havana, the center of Cuban culture; Wynwood, reflective of Puerto Rican heritage; and Homestead, with a large Mexican community" to which they add South Beach, Coconut Grove and the Design District, however areas such as Little Haiti, Overtown and Liberty City are excluded. When asked about the reasons for these omissions George Neary, the GMCVB's associate Vice President of Cultural Tourism, that "what's happening to the most underserved and underused areas is that, because they are so unsafe and difficult they are not attracting

development...The other problem is that so much [infrastructure] has been demolished.”<sup>39</sup> Mr. Aedo expanded upon Mr. Neary’s worry about crime levels and safety in some of Miami’s Black and Latino neighborhoods by expressing his belief that tourists and investors cannot be attracted to areas of high crime as there are few consumers, whilst crime will not be lessened without investments into improving living standards, employment levels and infrastructure, by explaining that “it is the chicken and the egg, you’re not going to get that first customer to show up if there is nothing there to offer”.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, despite significant investment into improving tourism infrastructure in Downtown Miami and Miami Beach, there is very little trickle down to Miami’s poorest areas. When asked if there was any way to counter this process and make Miami more inclusive, Mr. Neary replied, “No, because Black people live in Black neighborhoods [and] White people live in White neighborhoods... Miami and the United States was, and still is, a segregated country”. He went on to claim that this segregation was inevitable as “they [Black people] have never felt welcome in other parts of the community and that history is hard to break so they don’t leave...[whilst] White people in those [Black] areas are petrified so they don’t go.”

These pessimistic generalizations based around race and ethnicity, coming directly from major figures within Miami’s main marketing organization, reflects the difficulties that Miami’s historically othered neighborhoods face in terms of improving their wider reputation and attractiveness. Mr. Neary’s acceptance that the vicious cycle of historical segregation cannot be broken becomes in turn a self fulfilling prophesy as, if Miami’s primary marketers believe nothing can change the situation then this is likely to inhibit their willingness to try to increase inclusive marketing strategies in the city.

This sense of hopelessness, in regard to the promotion of Miami in a more equal manner, ignores however the highly political nature of the GMCVB. Mr. Aedo's admits that, "we [the GMCVB] have a challenging political environment. Even though we're a sales and marketing organization as it says on our mission statement, we are political. We are [political] because we receive funding from these governmental channels." The GMCVB serve 35 different cities in greater Miami and each city has a different Mayor, commissioners and councilmen that will be necessarily be looking to further their own area's agenda. The GMCVB receives most of its income through a resort tax that is added to sales tax on tourism expenditure bills such as in hotels and car rental companies. Given that the vast majority of Miami's tourism currently takes place on Miami Beach, it is clear that the GMCVB receive the majority of their income from this area, and therefore they have a vested interest in maintaining and expanding the image of Miami Beach in order to ensure their own survival and expansion.

Miami's marketers and publicists have been particularly successful at transforming many aspects (real and imagined) of the city into value for certain sections of the population. This paper has examined the historic terms of inclusion and exclusion within these transformations to assess the role which issues such as race, tourism and culture have played in this process, concluding that Black and Latino populations and cultures have often been ignored by city marketers. In this sense the historical legacy of segregation continues to hang heavy over the city as lines drawn a century ago, based upon race or ethnicity, continue to hold strong. The physical and psychological social exclusion of Blacks during segregation was prolonged by the terms of desegregation and hence led, through a lens of adverse incorporation, to the continuation of racial isolationism and distrust. It is important to note that within this process the physical formulations of segregation have been continually accompanied by the psychological

institutionalization of differentiation. This process of institutionalization can be seen as having been instigated around a century ago by the city's developers and their marketers and was highly related to the city's image(ry) in which Blacks were very much excluded. The creation of a city's image(ry) is a complex and multifaceted process that includes not only physical buildings, roads, parks, zoning and planning but also the city's marketing and publicity which, in Miami's case, is strongly centered around a particular notion of what is desirable or attractive to potential tourists and investors.

Miami's tourism industry has long focused upon the idea of a 'tropical paradise' in which issues of poverty, segregation and race are deliberately hidden beneath a façade of affluence and glamour so as not to unsettle tourism or potential investments. Through their silence, the tourism and marketing industries can be seen as central actors in the construction of Miami's inequality as the denial of 'poverty, slums or tenement' during segregation has been transformed and reproduced in Miami's contemporary marketing. As we have seen in the case of the GMCVB, their marketing largely ignores many of the Black and Latino areas of the city, preferring to focus on an elite formulation of Miami and its culture within a narrow geographical section centered around Miami Beach.

As we have seen, alongside the historical exclusion of Miami's Black communities from the city's marketing, recent critics such as Alonso (2007) claim that Latino culture is becoming increasingly ignored by Miami's tourism industry. From the Art Deco led reconstruction of South Beach, which helped facilitate the stylized images of *Miami Vice* or *CSI: Miami*, to the geographical location of the city as a crossroads between Europe, the United States and Latin America, that led numerous musicians to base themselves there, Miami's developers and marketers have highlighted popular culture as an integral part of its development. The

construction of such culture-led development has seen tourism rocket as Miami's marketers have created a *tropicalized* image of the city that appeals to tourists the world over and is only helped by the fact that musicians, television shows, and other cultural industries base themselves there. The *tropicalized* image that has been created is based upon a type of multiculturalism that unfortunately often serves to conceal the reality of Miami's neighborhood and class relations including the high rates of poverty and inequality amongst much of Miami's Black and Latino populations. Rather, in keeping with Miami's historic trend of excluding 'undesirable elements', "the discourse of multiculturalism, which can be found in the local government promotional documents and reports as well as those of the initiatives of new industries, is a means to put a positive spin on the unequally distributed new prosperity".<sup>41</sup>

Fundamental to any potential shift in this process is Harvey's idea of the right to the city and the terms by which he argues this right may come to pass. In order for any such process to begin, Harvey (2008) argues that, "the democratization of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the control which they have for so long been denied". In the context of Miami such a paradigm change would require a complete break from the historical norm in regard to methods and perspectives of development and progress, a shift that shows little sign of occurring as exclusion and gentrification continue to occur within Miami's very particular image(ry).



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- <sup>5</sup> Neary, G. (2010) from a personal interview.
- <sup>6</sup> Shell-Weiss (2009:53)
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- <sup>8</sup> Miami: The Magic City Figure comes from Bramson (2007).
- <sup>9</sup> Alonso in Rath (2007)
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