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A Micro-Sociology of an Emerging Global City: Miami[1]

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Abstract

This essay seeks to contribute to the contemporary literature on urbanization by focusing on the internal diversity existing in one emerging global city—Miami. We present first overall economic characteristics of this metropolitan area before discussing characteristics of three pairs of municipalities within it. These localities were deliberately selected to highlight contrasts and disparities in the history and present situation of specific places that tend to be ignored or bypassed in general descriptions of a given metropolitan area. A focus on these disparities provides a necessary tool to fully understand the dynamics of urbanization under contemporary capitalism.

Keywords: urbanization, globalization, spatial disparities

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Introduction

One of the most visible characteristics of cities is their internal diversity in physical, social, and economic terms. Compared to the relative uniformity of the countryside, what cities have to offer at first sight is a bewildering variety of environments and possibilities. A weary traveler having spent days immersed in the immense solitude of the Argentinian pampas is suddenly taken aback by the arrival of his or her train in Buenos Aires where every street offers a multitude of vistas and promises.

The diversity and complexity of cities increase in proportion to their physical and demographic size, as well as the number of activities that take place in them. During the course of history, some cities have been dominated by a single pursuit—military, political, economic, or religious—while others have encompassed a multiplicity of activities and functions. As the capitalist economic system has come to encompass the entire world, the urban centers from which it operates its multifaceted activities— financial, industrial, commercial, and cultural—have risen to positions of prominence relative to other cities and the hinterland. These areas feature a dense concentration of population, a heterogeneity of economic activities corresponding to their place in the global division of labor, and a multiplicity of social and cultural activities that eventually endow the place with their distinct identity.

For cities to rise to positions of prominence in the world system, numbers are not enough. Enormous agglomerations of people sharing a more or less similar condition of poverty and economic irrelevance do not qualify as significant, save for the possible threat that mass out-migrations from them may represent to better-off areas. Other smaller agglomerations that succeed in bringing to themselves significant industrial, commercial, and financial activities can rise rapidly to eventually become global centers. The example of Singapore is paradigmatic—rising from a primitive collection of fishing villages to a position of world prominence in its financial and commercial activities.

The contemporary literature on urbanization tends to concentrate on large cities, focusing on their growth trends, their principal industries, and the composition of their population. Cities are painted in broad strokes and compared to similar centers in the contemporary world or to those that preceded them in the course of history. An alternative school of urban studies has adopted a micro-lens, describing the history, present condition, and condition of particular groups in the city. Downtrodden ethnic or racial minorities have been a favored topic for these studies (Duneier 1992;2000; Fernandez-Kelly 2017; Goffman 2014).

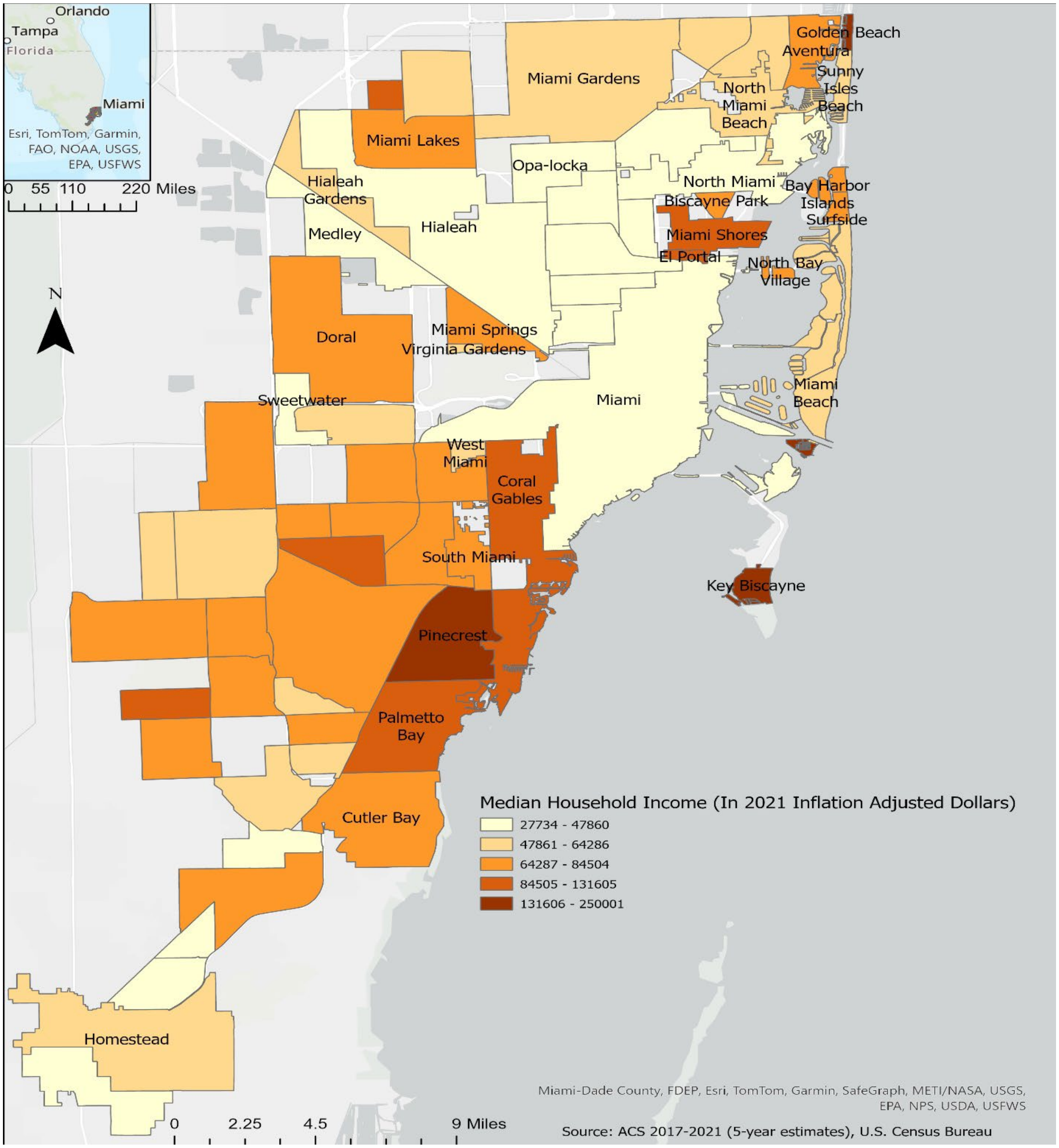
Seldom do we encounter research that focuses on a large city in its totality, encompassing its enclaves of luxury, everyday life, and poverty and describing in detail how different social classes and ethnic groups are distributed in space. Such exceptional studies have been conducted by scholars who have lived for long periods of time the city about which they write and thus know intimately. Robert Sampson's (2013) *Great American City* about the history and present condition of metropolitan Chicago and Sharon Zukin's (2010) *Naked City* about the physical and social transformation of New York during the last century are recent major examples.

During the last decades, Miami has risen in the global ranking of cities to become a hemispheric center, both financially and culturally. Several recent studies have described at length the history of Miami and its spectacular rise (Portes and Armory 2022; Allman 2013) They provide an account of the main economic and demographic forces transforming the city. Missing is the way in which specific areas have experienced this historical transformation. While scholarly and journalistic accounts have focused, for example, on the rise of the Brickell financial center or the line of skyscrapers fronting downtown and Miami Beach, they have said little about places like Florida City, Opa-Locka, or Miami Gardens—all inside the same metropolitan area.

The economic situation, ethno-racial composition, and recent social and political evolution of these places are quite different from commonly glowing descriptions of the transformation of Miami. An account of this diversity is necessary for a full understanding of this rising metropolis. We seek to contribute to this task by focusing on three contrasting pairs of localities that can shed light on the remarkable disparities found within the metropolis. The foci of our analysis is on the varying ethnic composition of the residents of these areas, including Cubans, other Hispanics, African Americans, and non-Hispanic Whites, as well as the distinct socioeconomic profiles of people living in Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Before doing so, a general overview of this metropolitan area is in order. Figures 1 and 2 present, respectively, the median household income and median home value per municipality in the Miami-Dade metropolitan area in 2021. Both figures tell essentially the same story: the enormous diversity in this urban landscape, with areas of wealth concentrated in the southeast, and middle- and working-class areas in Miami proper and the northeast. Miami-Dade County is a large metropolitan area where the population works, lives, and interacts on a daily basis, but the differences are still enormous. Few people go to the city of Opa-Locka or even know where it is; a few miles east, in Sunny Isles, the language of daily discourse is Russian because of the recent concentration of Russian émigrés there.

Figure 1: Miami Household Income, 2021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0 55 110 220 Miles
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Miami Gardens
Golden Beach
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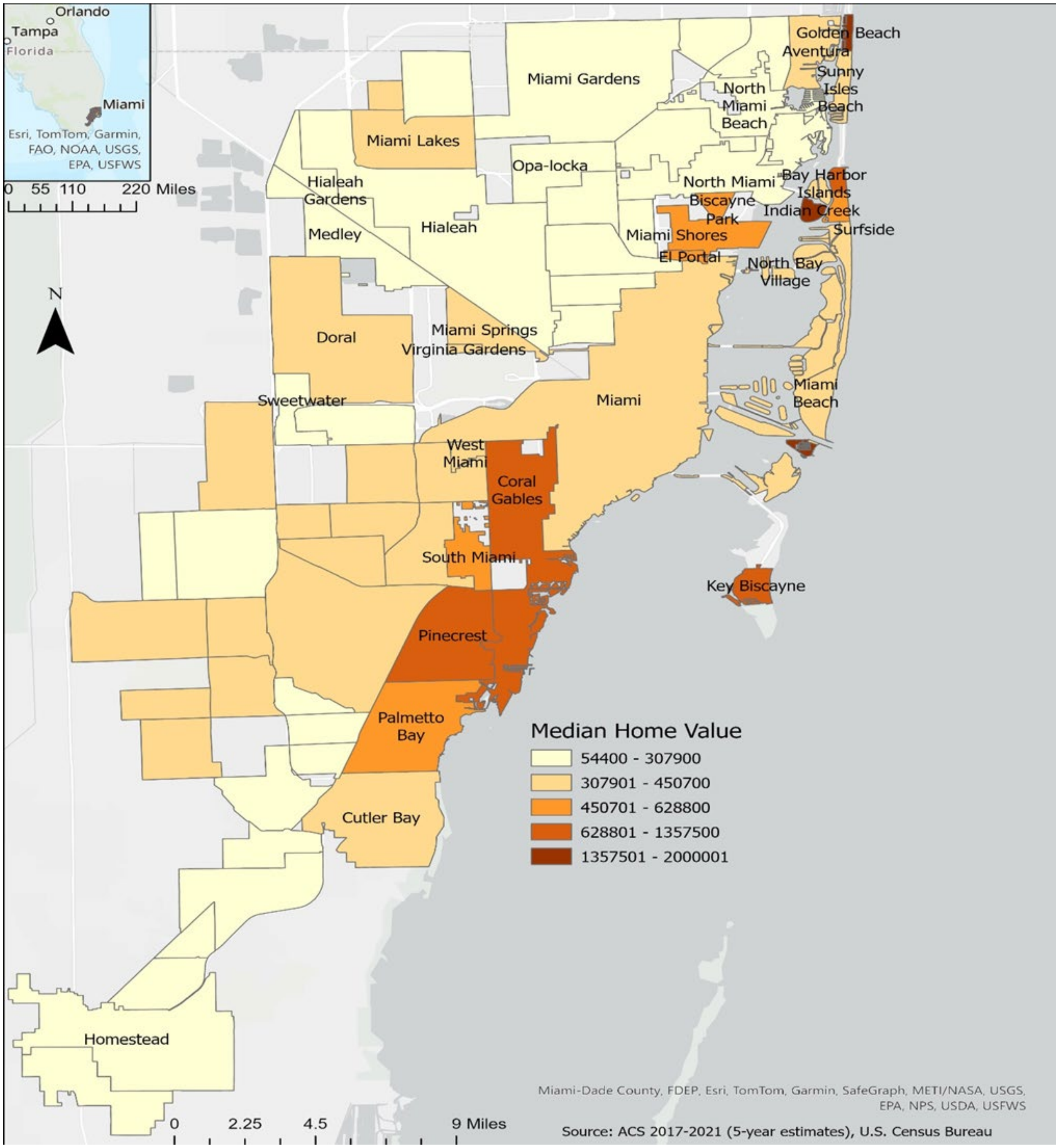
Sunny Isles Beach
North Miami Beach
Miami Lakes
Opa-locka
Hialeah Gardens
North Miami
Bay Harbor Islands
Surfside
Biscayne Park
Medley
Hialeah
Miami Shores
El Portal
North Bay Village
Doral
Miami Springs
Virginia Gardens
Sweetwater
Miami
Miami Beach
West Miami
Coral Gables
South Miami
Key Biscayne
Pinecrest
Palmetto Bay
Cutler Bay
Homestead
Median Household Income (In 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)
27734 - 47860
47861 - 64286
64287 - 84504
84505 - 131605
131606 - 250001
Miami-Dade County, FDEP, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS
0 2.25 4.5 9 Miles

Source: ACS 2017-2021 (5-year estimates), U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2: Miami Median Home Value, 2021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Bay Harbor Islands
Indian Creek
Surfside
Miami Shores
El Portal
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Doral
Miami Springs
Virginia Gardens
Sweetwater
Miami
Miami Beach
West Miami
Coral Gables
South Miami
Key Biscayne
Pinecrest
Palmetto Bay
Cutler Bay
Homestead
Median Home Value
54400 - 307900
307901 - 450700
450701 - 628800
628801 - 1357500
1357501 - 2000001
Miami-Dade County, FDEP, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS
0 2.25 4.5 9 Miles

Source: ACS 2017-2021 (5-year estimates), U.S. Census Bureau

Over 70 percent of the resident population has a bachelor's degree or higher in the cities of Coral Gables, Pinecrest, and Key Biscayne; over 50 percent in Doral. In the city of Miami, the figure drops to about 30 percent and in Hialeah to 20 percent. In the predominantly Black municipalities to the north of the county, the figure scarcely reaches 15 percent.

Municipalities offer a good handle to develop a micro-sociology of a given metropolitan area because they tend to be internally homogeneous and externally disparate. Like other global cities—established ones like New York and London, or emerging ones like Dubai and Singapore—, Miami is very unequal and possibly increasingly so as enclaves of wealth consolidate themselves and become progressively unaffordable for the rest of the population. Most Miami residents work downtown, in the Brickell banking center, or the hotels and luxury condominiums of Miami Beach, but they do not live there. To get to work and back, they must endure a grueling commute either by car or public transportation. The absence of a reliable, integrated public transit system makes this task all the more difficult. That absence represents one of the most pressing challenges confronting Miami as it pursues the goal of becoming an established global city.

Hialeah and Homestead

With 224,362 inhabitants, Hialeah is the second largest municipality in the metropolitan area. It is also the most Cuban; 95.8 percent of the population is classified as Hispanic or Latino, of which the vast majority (78.4 percent) is of Cuban origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021) The current mayor is Cuban, as are the majority of city commissioners and other high officials. Table 1 presents the major demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of present-day Hialeah.

Table 1. Socioeconomic Profile of Hialeah, FL, 2021

Total Population	224,362	Area (in miles)	21.58
Median Family Income (in 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)	$48,584	Mayor	Esteban Bovo

Race (Not Hispanic) and Ethnicity		
White Alone	6,288	2.8%
Black or African American Alone	1,410	0.6%

American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	11	0.0%
Asian Alone	1,146	0.5%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	4	0.0%
Some Other Race Alone	252	0.1%
Two or More Races	262	0.1%
Hispanic	214,989	95.8%

Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates) (SE), ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates), Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau.

A stroll around the city reveals certain distinct trends. City Hall is large and impressive with several public sculptures calling attention to the linkages of the city with Cuba. So do several of the public art objects adorning the Mylander Auditorium and Arts Center. The streets are generally clean and modest with a multitude of restaurants, coffee shops, groceries, and other small businesses lining both sides of main street—Palm Avenue (recently rebaptized Donald Trump Avenue). Residential areas are primarily one- or two-story modest chalets with a front porch in which one frequently finds two or three parked cars plus a boat. About one-fourth of front porches are adorned with this marine feature. It is commonly said that the definition of "middle class" in Hialeah is to own a boat plus one or two automobiles. In Hialeah's residential streets, one often finds roosters and hens moving about at their leisure.

The area has no luxury high-rises because the Miami "growth machine" does not envision the city as a place of residence for the well-to-do (Portes and Armory 2022). Instead, it is solidly working-class, housing a population going to work in wealthier parts of the metropolis or in the local informal economy. At $48,584, Hialeah had one of the lowest median family incomes in the area in 2021, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. But don't believe it: the city is the center of an informal economy with a multiplicity of ties with Cuba. In Hialeah, one can find auto-parts stores that sell repair equipment for Soviet-era Ladas and 1950s vintage American automobiles, all neatly packed in boxes ready for transport to the airport and then to Havana. Stores also sell you ready-to-travel packages containing Cuban school uniforms, books, pencils, and paper for use by children on the Island.6

It is difficult to exaggerate just how "Cuban" Hialeah is—folk-Cuban, that is. Upper- and middle-class Cuban families seldom show up there. But the botánicas—folk Cuban religious and medical stores—proliferate, selling potions against every ailment, including unrequited love. They sit next to the inevitable Cuban coffee shops featuring "midnight" sandwiches (medianoches) and the sweet syrupy expresso that is a national trademark. In 2021–23, nearly 425,000 Cubans crossed the southern border with Mexico and an undetermined number were admitted to the United States as asylum-seekers. Half or more headed for Miami. In other settings and other times, their arrival would have triggered a major urban crisis, but not in contemporary Miami. The family and community networks of Hialeah readily absorbed the newcomers and found them employment in low-paid service jobs and in the local informal economy (Portes and Bagwell

At the south end of the Miami metropolitan is the city of Homestead, with 78,885 inhabitants or about one-third of those in Hialeah. Table 2 describes its present demographic and economic characteristics. Size and geographic distance count, for one can scarcely find two more different cities in South Florida; no Cuban restaurants of any distinction exist in Homestead, and it is nearly impossible to find a good cup of expresso. The political leadership of the city is primarily White non-Hispanic and the population is majority Hispanic (65.4 percent), but Cubans are only 29.9 percent of the Hispanics. It is composed primarily of Mexicans (22.4 percent) and Central Americans (22.4 percent), many of whom are hired to labor in the surrounding fields (U.S. Census Bureau 2021; Fieldnotes April 2023).

Table 2. Socioeconomic Profile of Homestead, FL, 2021

Total Population	78,885	Area (in miles)	15.08
Median Family Income (in 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)	$51,797	Mayor	Steven D. Losner
Race (Not Hispanic) and Ethnicity			
White Alone	8,696	11.0%	
Black or African American Alone	16,089	20.4%	
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	140	0.2%	

Asian Alone	452	0.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	36	0.1%
Some Other Race Alone	201	0.3%
Two or More Races	1,712	2.2%
Hispanic	51,559	65.4%

Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates) (SE), ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates), Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau.

Homestead and adjacent Florida City are agricultural towns exporting winter vegetables to the rest of the nation. Fruits and vegetables are found in abundance in the area and are sold in a myriad of road stands. To produce them, farm owners have had to go long distances to find workers. Few Cubans are found bending in the fields. Instead, we hear distinct Mexican, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran accents among rural laborers in the fields around the city.

Agribusiness and the parallel role of Homestead as a dormitory city for office workers commuting to central Miami have paid off well economically. At $51,797, the median family income is about three thousand dollars higher than in Hialeah and above the figure for the entire metropolitan area (U.S. Census Bureau 2021). The prosperous character of the place is reflected in an impressive City Hall building and a surrounding park, larger and more architecturally complex than anything Hialeah has to offer, despite Homestead being just one-third the size.

But walk out of that park and the street scene is something to behold. No Cuban black beans or guava pastries anywhere, but plenty of Salvadoran pupusas (thick corn or rice tortillas) and Mexican tacos and enchiladas are served in large, well-appointed restaurants. Next to them, small Nicaraguan and Salvadoran stores sell a wide variety of disparate items, including wide-brimmed cowboy hats and mounting boots of the style commonly associated with Mexican rancheros; several pharmaceutical products never found in a Walgreens or CVS in Miami; and tickets for a bus line connecting Homestead directly with northern Mexican cities via New Orleans and Houston (fieldnotes March 2023).

The two or three blocks fronting the gleaming City Hall are a Third World scene with a compact mass of humanity shuffling in and out of these mini-stores. What most people look for there are money machines to remit their hard-earned dollars to spouses, children, and mothers back in Mexico and Central America. Homestead is thus double-faced: on the one hand, a prosperous US suburban town and, on the other, a migrant labor hub for people coming to till the fields for the benefit of northern consumers and south-of-the-border families in need.

Homestead and Hialeah are only a few miles apart and Spanish is the common street language in both of them. Otherwise, they inhabit different worlds. One is linked, as by an umbilical cord, to the communist island to the south; the other to far-away villages in rural Mexico and Central America, especially Guatemala. The populations of these cities seldom interact with each other and, if they did, they would have difficulty communicating because their accents and body languages are very different.

Opa-Locka and Miami Gardens

Like Hialeah, Opa-Locka was the creation of star aviator Glenn Curtiss who, in the early twentieth century, dreamed of both places as enclaves of luxury living for the rich from up north. Table 3 presents current statistics about the city. Curtiss was better at dreaming than at executing and both urban projects failed due to carelessness and lack of foresight. At least, Hialeah survived as an industrial town and place of residence for a southern White working class that, in due time, would be displaced by successive waves of refugees from Cuba. The destiny of Opa-Locka was even bleaker. Curtiss dreamed it as Arabian Nights fantasyland with a main street named Ali Baba Avenue and a City Hall and surrounding park designed in elaborate Moorish-revival style.

Table 3. Socioeconomic Profile of Opa-Locka, FL, 2021

Total Population	16,310	Area (in miles)	4.31
Median Family Income (in 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)	$35,822	Mayor	John H. Taylor Jr.
Race (Not Hispanic) and Ethnicity			
White Alone	536	3.3%	
Black or African American Alone	8,715	53.4%	
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	0	0.0%	
Asian Alone	0	0.0%	
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0	0.0%	

Some Other Race Alone	128	0.8%
Two or More Races	11	0.1%
Hispanic	6,920	42.4%

Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates) (SE), ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates), Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau.

Ali Baba Avenue, the Moorish City Hall, and adjacent park are still there, but all in a sad state of disrepair. Although the development was initially successful in attracting wealthy buyers from the north, Curtiss' inattention to detail and lack of tenacity allowed it to deteriorate rapidly. The original owners left and the city gradually became the place of residence for a poor Black population displaced from the central city. No business and no new residential development visited the area and Ali Baba, along with Sultan Avenue and Sesame Street, acquired the desolate empty look characteristic of ghettos elsewhere in the United States (Portes and Armory 2018; Fieldnotes March 2017; March 2023)

No supermarket or drugstore chain has set up a unit in Opa-Locka, where the only operating store is a Hispanic-owned supermarket next to a coin laundry. At $35,822, the median family income is the lowest in the metropolitan area. Compounding its poverty and desolation, the city features arguably one of the most corrupt municipal administrations in the metropolitan area. City Hall, now located in a nondescript office building away from the crumbling minarets, has been the target of repeated FBI probes. In 2016, the Florida state government was compelled to name an outside supervisor to administer the city (Merrett R. Stierheim). He quit after several months on the job, complaining that the inefficiency and level of corruption in the local administration were impossible to overcome (Allman 2013; Wikipedia).

Only a few blocks north of Opa-Locka is Miami Gardens. The two cities are majority Black and Black-ruled, but the differences could not be starker. Miami Gardens, at the extreme north of Dade County, is where the Black middle class has largely settled after abandoning Liberty City and other ghetto areas to the south. Table 4 presents summary statistics for the city. With a population of 111,706, Miami Gardens is the largest Black majority municipality in Florida, but it is not one of the poorest. Its median family income in 2021 was $56,368 or about $3,000 above the county figure.

About 10 percent of households have self-employment income, a figure comparable to the county average (U.S. Census Bureau 2021; Portes & Armory 2018).

Table 4. Socioeconomic Profile of Miami Gardens, FL,2021

Total Population	111,706	Area (in miles)	18.23
Median Family Income (in 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)	$56,368	Mayor	Rodney Harris
Race (Not Hispanic) and Ethnicity			
White Alone	2,505	2.2%	
Black or African American Alone	72,301	64.7%	
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	128	0.1%	
Asian Alone	726	0.7%	
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	7	0.0%	
Some Other Race Alone	231	0.2%	
Two or More Races	1,425	1.3%	
Hispanic	34,383	30.8%	

Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates) (SE), ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates), Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau.

The city's economy is anchored by three major institutions. Catholic St. Thomas University is an import from Havana, having been founded by the Augustinian order there. It has grown steadily since its move to Miami in 1961, featuring a large arbored campus and several professional schools. Historically Black Florida Memorial University has struggled with accreditation issues in recent years, but it seems on the path to consolidation and growth. Above all, the Hard Rock Stadium, home of the Miami Dolphins professional football team, is a steady source of income to the area.

The tall profile of the stadium, visible throughout the entire north of the metropolitan area, has been a lure to a series of other attractions, above all the Orange Bowl game in the spring and the recently introduced Formula 1 auto racing. A navigable channel carved out of Biscayne Bay allows well-heeled patrons to come by yacht and disembark right by their seats to witness the race (Portes and Armory 2018; Fieldnotes March 2023). The Hard Rock Stadium hosted the 2020 Super Bowl, the most watched event in the country, and will do so again in 2027.

Miami Gardens is an example of the fact that a Black-majority city need not be poor. African Americans own more than half of the businesses in the municipality; the mayor and most of the city council members are also Black (Wikipedia; Portes and Armory 2022 p. 39-40). While struggling with property crime and homicides, the vast majority of the city is relatively safe and the three major institutions that anchor it provide a reliable source of employment and stability, entirely absent from Opa-Locka.

Coral Gables and Doral

Unlike the failed developments of Hialeah and Opa-Locka, the one created by Solomon Merrick and his sons survived and prospered. Merrick's dream was Andalusian—a southern European playground by a body of water suitably baptized Biscayne Bay. A New England pastor, Merrick spared no efforts to bring this dream into reality: he and his children set out to create the fanciest residential area in the world and to top it with one of the best hotels and one of the finest educational institutions in the nation (Allman 2013 p. 21-23; Portes and Armory 2018 p. 34-36).

In due time, elegant tree-lined streets and boulevards appeared bearing Spanish names—Granada, Almeria, Sevilla, Galiano. The central avenue was baptized in honor of the Spanish conquistador—Juan Ponce de León. The Spanish sailor did not conquer or settle the area (he supposedly died in pursuit of the "Fountain of Youth"), but he left a lasting legacy behind. The hotel and the university were also built, and they still exist today. They are known as the Biltmore Hotel and the University of Miami (Allman 2013 p. 21-23; Portes and Armory 2018 p. 34-36; Fieldnotes March 2023). Table 5 presents summary statistics for Coral Gables.

The legacy of Merrick's success is the richest large municipality in the metropolitan area, which is also home to most of its elite. At $167,591 median family income, Coral Gables triples the county figure. Average house prices exceed a million dollars (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Penniless Cuban refugees arriving in the 1960s and 1970s drew some consolation upon learning the Spanish names of Coral Gables' streets and the existence of Ponce de Leon Boulevard. Most could not initially afford to live in the area but, as soon as they could, some did. Today, the majority of the city's population is Hispanic (57.1 percent), primarily Cuban (51.5 percent of the Hispanics), and Hispanic-owned businesses represent 46 percent of the total. Suitably, the city is topped by the tall, elegant tower of the Biltmore Hotel, a replica of the Giralda Tower in Seville (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021; Portes and Armory 2018 p. 34).

Table 5. Socioeconomic Profile of Coral Gables, FL, 2021

Total Population	49,269	Area (in miles)	12.93
Median Family Income (in 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)	$167,591	Mayor	Vince C. Lago

Race (Not Hispanic) and Ethnicity		
White Alone	16,794	34.1%
Black or African American Alone	1,663	3.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	10	0.0%
Asian Alone	1,517	3.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0	0.0%
Some Other Race Alone	244	0.5%
Two or More Races	885	1.8%
Hispanic	28,156	57.2%

Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates) (SE), ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates), Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau.

Coral Gables occupies a peculiar place in the property capitalists' map of the Miami metropolitan area. It is not only the most desirable residential place; it is also the area where many of the local movers and shakers, including property developers themselves, live. Unlike other areas in Miami-Dade, it is nearly impossible to produce differential rent by the simple expedient of tearing down what exists and putting new high-rise towers in its place. Any such attempt would be actively resisted by both the city government and its well-heeled and powerful residents. Impossible to put a baseball or a soccer stadium in Coral Gables (Portes and Armory 2018 p. 34).

The first feature one notices when entering the city of Doral is its open spaces and its newness. As late as the 1950s, it was just swampland. Later in the decade, a wealthy couple, Alfred and Doris Kaskel, purchased 2,400 acres in the area with the intention of building a large golf course. This they did, coupling it with a large hotel in Miami Beach. Tourists were ferried from the hotel to the golf course for a day's play (Wikipedia; Fieldnotes March 2023).

For years, Doral had little else around, except large warehouses because of the area's proximity to the international airport. Gradually, however, developers, in particular the Lennar Corporation, started building homes for aspiring young couples seeking lower prices and more space. The area became known as "Doral"—a take on the first names of the golf course builders, Doris and Albert. The name caught on and soon major corporations started moving there. These included the headquarters of Carnival Cruise Line, Univision, Ryder Corporation, and the Miami Herald.

Proximity to the airport was not only attractive to import-export businesses, but to new waves of migrants as well. Escaping increasing political instability in their country, wealthy and middle-class Venezuelans started purchasing the homes that Lennar and other developers were building. Closeness to the airport was a major plus to these newcomers as they kept commuting back to Venezuela in hopes that the political situation would turn in their favor. So many of those migrants came that they eventually were able to elect one of their own, Luigi Boria, as mayor of the city in 2012. The Venezuelan migrants kept clear of the working-class, predominantly Nicaraguan, city of Sweetwater to the South. They and other newcomers decidedly aimed to preserve the handsome residences and ample parks of Doral as a place of residence for the well-to-do (Fieldnotes March-April 2023) Table 6 presents summary statistics for this area.

Table 6. Socioeconomic Profile of Doral, FL, 2021

Total Population	73,126	Area (in miles)	13.83
Median Family Income (in 2021 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)	$78,711	Mayor	Christi Fraga
Race (Not Hispanic) and Ethnicity			
White Alone	8,692	11.9%	
Black or African American Alone	499	0.7%	
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	15	0.0%	
Asian Alone	1,955	2.7%	
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	23	0.0%	
Some Other Race Alone	229	0.3%	
Two or More Races	506	0.7%	
Hispanic	61,207	83.7%	

Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates) (SE), ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates), Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau.

Doral became a city only in 2003, being one of the newest in the metropolitan area and in all of Florida. By 2021, it had a population of 73,128 and a median family income of $78,711—considerably below Coral Gables but significantly above the metropolitan figure. Nearly 84 percent of the population is Hispanic, with Venezuelans (46.9 percent of Hispanics) and Colombians (15.1 percent) being the predominant nationalities (U.S. Census Bureau 2021).

The current mayor is Christi Fraga, a second-generation Cuban American; the other councilmembers are also Hispanic (of Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, and Dominican origin).

Cities have a way of reflecting their roots. Just as present-day Coral Gables mirrors the attention and care that its founders put in its design, so present-day Doral reflects its origin as a warehouse district and a golf course. The golf course is still there, now owned by Donald Trump, and its presence exercises a wide influence upon its surroundings. While Coral Gables is cozy and intimate in its tree-lined streets and boulevards, Doral is expansive and bold. It features an impressive City Hall, surrounded by a large park with several notable sculptures. Unlike the equally impressive municipal building in Homestead, Doral's City Hall and adjoining park

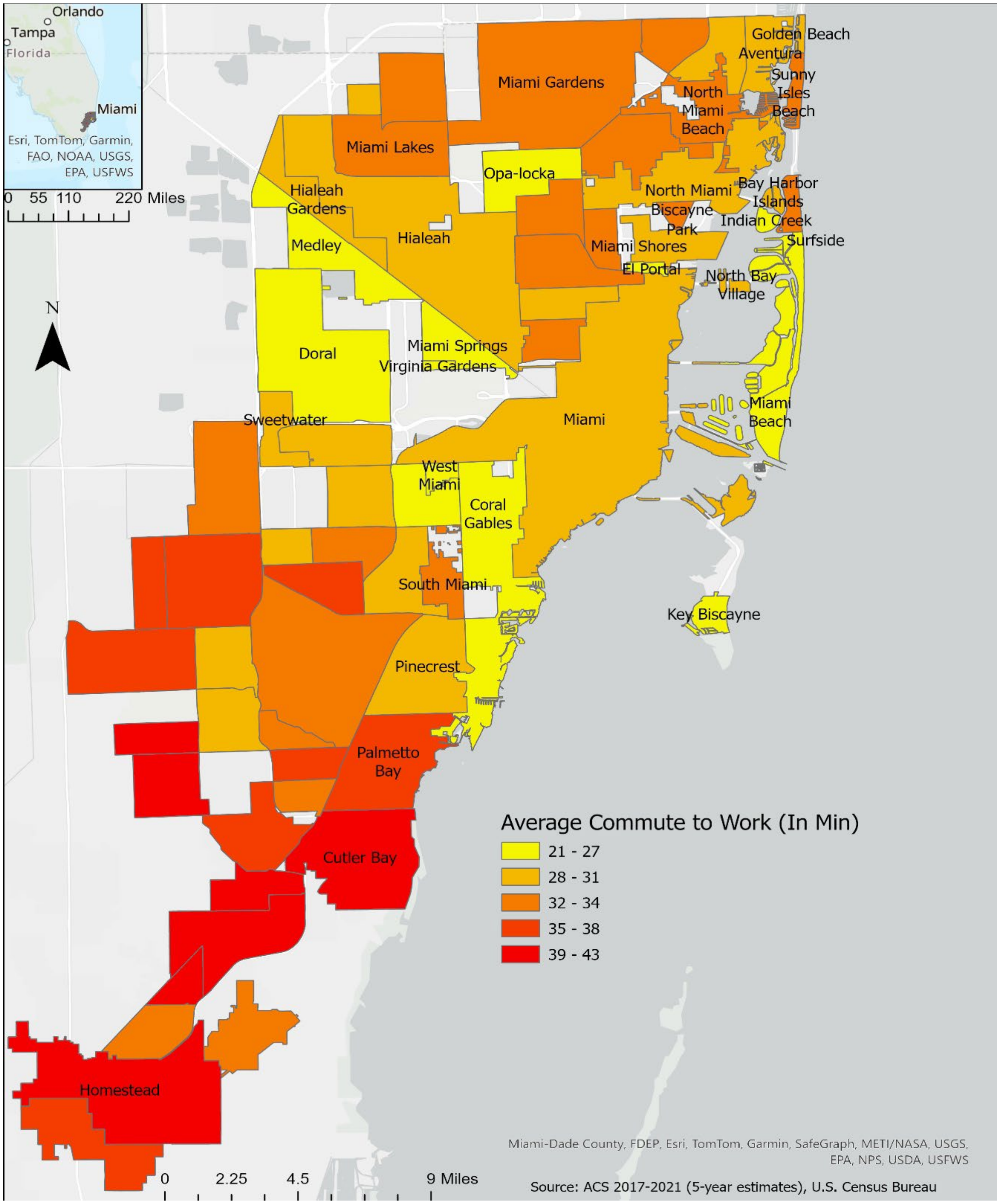
do not front a Third World-like bazaar. Instead, it faces the elegant new building of UHealth—the University of Miami medical system—and a luxury shopping area with several first-rate restaurants (Fieldnotes March 2023)

Doral and Coral Gables provide a counterpoint between the old and the new, the established and the up-and-coming. When the first Cuban exiles started arriving in the early 1960s, Coral Gables was already known as that Andalusian-tinged enclave of privilege while Doral was empty swampland. Now both are largely Hispanic and are governed by Cubans, albeit the people of Doral, including its young mayor, are part of a newer and still-striving generation.

Conclusion

Figure 3 presents evidence in support of the stark differences in the Miami metropolitan area, indicating the percentage of the population of adult workers in each municipality who must spend at least one hour commuting to work every day. The numbers compelled to do so in Coral Gables and Doral are minimal because most people live close to their places of work. The figure rises significantly for those living in unincorporated areas of the county to the extreme west and south, as well as for the population of Homestead and the poorer municipalities to the north—Hialeah, North Miami, and others.

Figure 3: Miami Average Commute to Work


Orlando
Tampa
Florida
Miami
Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA, USFWS
0 55 110 220 Miles
N
Golden Beach
Aventura
Sunny Isles Beach
North Miami Beach
Miami Gardens
Miami Lakes
Opa-locka
Hialeah Gardens
Hialeah
Medley
North Miami
Bay Harbor Islands
Biscayne Park
Indian Creek
Surfside
Miami Shores
El Portal
North Bay Village
Doral
Miami Springs
Virginia Gardens
Sweetwater
Miami
Miami Beach
West Miami
Coral Gables
South Miami
Key Biscayne
Pinecrest
Palmetto Bay
Cutler Bay
Homestead
Average Commute to Work (In Min)
🟨 21 - 27
🟧 28 - 31
🟧 32 - 34
🟥 35 - 38
🟥 39 - 43
0 2.25 4.5 9 Miles
Miami-Dade County, FDEP, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS

Source: ACS 2017-2021 (5-year estimates), U.S. Census Bureau

The figure maps perfectly upon those presented previously about wealth differentials in this metropolitan area. It also points to a key problem threatening the viability of life and work in Miami, as noted before. Unlike other emerging global cities like Dubai and Singapore, Miami has not yet managed to solve its public transportation problem.

All cities approaching the level of "global" face a progressive bifurcation between the well-heeled "knowledge classes" populating the high-end of the labor market and the work force performing the mostly manual tasks required for daily life in the city (Portes and Armory 2018) This population usually works downtown, in the hotels and luxury condominiums in Miami Beach, the Brickell financial center, and the institutions located in Coral Gables, including the University of Miami. However, they cannot afford to live there. The grinding commutes, mostly by car, illustrated by Figure 3, represent the natural outcome of this bifurcation.

As is true of other cities, crossing one street in Miami can take you into a different world. The extraordinarily expensive stores in the Miami Design District are adjacent to the impoverished neighborhood of Little Haiti. The chic and luxurious Coconut Grove area is separated by one avenue from the "Black Grove"—a poor neighborhood where descendants of the Bahamian workers imported at the end of the nineteenth century to build the city still concentrate (Portes and Armory 2018; George 1978; Redford 1970). As Miami continues to try to fulfill a destiny as "the capital of the Americas," the contrasting experiences and opportunities of its remarkably diverse population are worth studying. They stand as a vivid testimony of what global capitalism can do as it zeroes in on particular points of the planet for economic and social coordination of its activities spread worldwide. Documenting such differences represents a key priority for the study of urbanism in the twenty-first century.

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