

The Theatre of Public Space in Many Miamis

Gray Read, Draft 22 June 2005

The young city of Miami has always been modern. Born of the railroad and fed by the airlines, Miami was shaped by transportation systems that linked the city to distant destinations while dividing local neighborhoods. Miami has never had a single strong center or traditional public urban spaces such as plazas or town greens. Rather, the city was long divided into interdependent, yet spatially distinct cities defined by race, class and religion. By the 1960s, four large populations: white, black, Jewish and Cuban had built distinct sub-cities that constituted multiple Miamis adjacent to and dependent on one another. Each of these sub-cities developed a complete urban structure with a shopping district and an array of private clubs and hotels that served as public space. Their architectural identity relied not on monumental civic buildings but private structures or ephemeral images such as tourist advertisements.

By mid-century, WWII had so violently exposed the predations of racial supremacy that people in many countries were in the process of reconsidering both their own cultural identities and their prejudices toward others. As part of this soul-searching, the tone of cultural displays, such as traditional music and costumed ethnic dancing, shifted slightly. The 1930s modern fascination with the anthropological 'primitive' gave way to a more open celebration of folklore that many deemed honest and authentic. (Fig. 1)

Lessons of the war also emboldened minority groups to demand equal rights and to enjoy life on their own terms. Both the pain of discrimination and the pleasures of solidarity united communities in a florescence of cultural life. In Miami, postwar prosperity and a huge influx of population fed a building boom in several of Miami's separate cities. Communities built or adapted public spaces for events that asserted the group's cultural values and negotiated their place in the city, often using Miami's atmosphere of the tourist jingoism to do so. Behind the masks of performance, they could confront one another in playful earnest.



Fig. 1 South American Chorus girls dancing before a packed house at the Beachcomber Club, Miami, Jan 7, 1948 (Florida Memory Project, Department of Commerce collection. Image Number : c008861 DBCN : AAL-4598)

From its founding, Miami was divided racially (Fig. 2). Overtown, just north of the downtown, constituted a second city for black citizens who were segregated by law.¹ In the 1950s, many joined the national struggle for civil rights, specifically the right to full and equal use of all public facilities, including schools, beaches, busses and public buildings. After the Supreme Court struck down segregation law in 1954, black families gained the right to live elsewhere in the city, initiating a local migration that ultimately

¹ In 1950, blacks lived under oppressive Jim Crow legislation that restricted where they could live, what jobs they could have, where they could go.

sapped Overtown of wealth and population. In the moment however, Overtown was a vibrant center where cultural life flourished, particularly music, which enlivened both churches and nightclubs.

A third city coalesced in Miami Beach following WWII when a wave of tourists, retirees from New York, and young families augmented an existing neighborhood to establish Miami Beach as the Jewish city rivaling Brooklyn. Both young and old shared the recent losses of the war, which bound them to each other in a new place. Miami Beach also enjoyed an intense social life in synagogues, clubs, and large hotels marked by a flamboyant modernity in fashion, arts and architecture.

Following Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba in 1959, Cuban immigrants flooded Miami to introduce a forth, sizeable population with a distinct identity defined politically, socially and spatially. Families arriving from Cuba, already united by the bitter experience of leaving their homeland, organized immediately to oppose Castro's regime and to maintain their cultural identity. Most arrived with few resources but quickly adapted existing buildings to serve their needs, establishing a community within the fabric of the city.

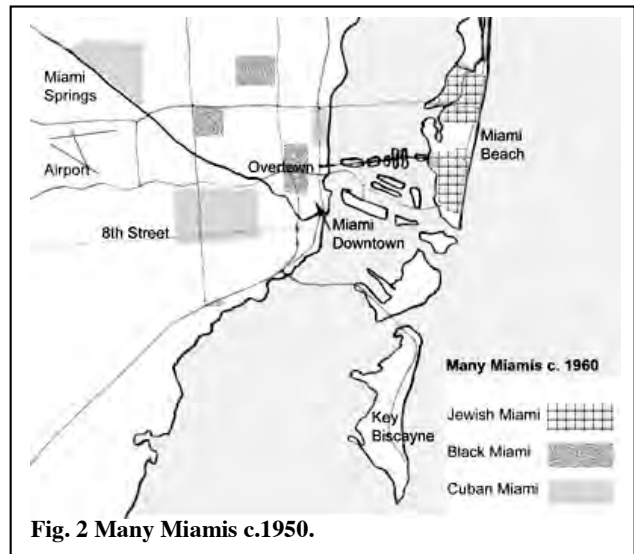


Fig. 2 Many Miamis c.1950.

After WWII, modern architects also sought to divide the city, yet their schemes were based not on race or social class but formal principles of functionalist zoning that isolated living, working, recreation, and transportation.² Plans for Miami's downtown, including The Magic City Plan of 1960 and a plan by Constantin Doxiadis in 1968 as well as schemes for Ball Point and Interama, shared the vision of an orderly mass society that overrode differences in race, class and culture. At least in principal, modernity promised a way out of the hierarchal bounds of social class that defined the city spatially. Black, white, Jewish, and Cuban populations variously embraced modernism to serve distinct visions of modern urban life, and many among them also moved to the suburbs, slowly draining the traditionally segregated centers.

In practice, modern ideas justified reconfiguring the city into a decentralized network of functionally defined areas, such as shopping centers and business districts surrounded by vast new suburbs. Public space was similarly redefined and new public projects were invariably located outside the urban core, even against the recommendations of architects and planners. Traditional urban plazas were included in all of the major planning proposals, yet none were built. Instead, the City of Miami completed a number of recreation facilities outside the downtown such as beaches, golf courses, stadiums,

² Congr s Internationale des Architects Moderns, a group of European architects including Le Corbusier who espoused modern cities zoned by function. See the

marinas and amphitheaters to serve tourists and new suburban residents, including a number of returning GIs and their families who had recently moved to Miami to enjoy the climate and a perceived freedom from social strictures. Each facility accommodated a specific sport or type of entertainment, and most were accessible only by car.

Four genres of events characterized public space in the modern city of Miami: spectacle, civic life, shopping and sport. All are types of performance that define places for those who act and those who watch. The drama revolves around who acts, who watches and how they relate to one another. For example, spectacles present the actions of a few people to a crowd who are separated by a clear threshold such as a proscenium arch (Fig. 6). On the other hand, civic life is reciprocal, people seeing each other and being seen in a public realm traditionally defined by a dignified architecture. A civic performance can be simply dressing nicely to go downtown, as most people did in the 50s and 60s. Shopping is a part of civic life that includes displays in shop windows as well as discussions and actions by shoppers so the show happens on both sides of the glass. Finally, sport is physical performance, whether anyone is watching or not. Architectural design sets up all of these situations, placing actors and spectators in strategic spatial relationships with one another. The architecture of Miami considered through the events that took place there, speak of both pleasure and pain among and between the city's several populations. A snapshot of the modern definition of public space and the tensions between Miami's several communities emerges in a set of Civil Rights demonstrations in the 1940s.

Prelude: Pleasure and Prejudice in the Modern City

From its founding, the resort city of Miami served tourists who came on vacation at a level of luxury often above what they enjoyed at home. Tourists ate, swam and lounged in surroundings designed so they would not see past the kitchen door, or into the working city. They came for a short time so neither became familiar with the local people nor concerned themselves with local social inequities. An exception proves the rule. Bobbi Graff from Detroit described this strange world when she arrived in 1946. "To the tourist, it was a fantasy land. But it was also a growing metropolis where segregation, discrimination and blatant racist terror were the law. To be a concerned human being was a challenge."³

Activists in the civil rights movement used the tourist role with effective irony. In 1947, Dade County opened Haulover Beach as a public park for white bathers. Almost immediately, a group of black ministers staged a 'wade in' demanding access (Fig. 3). Using the non-violent strategy of the NAACP, they came to the beach in swimsuits like any other tourist ready for a swim. That they were



Fig. 3. Stand off at a White Only Beach, (Florida Photographic collection)

³ Matilda "Bobbi" Graff, "The Historic Continuity of the Civil Rights Movement" in Raymond Mohl, *South of the South* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2004).p.77

denied simple enjoyment of the natural landscape made their argument with poignant precision.⁴

The city responded by opening beaches on Virginia Key for “colored” bathers only, while establishing Crandon Park on nearby Key Biscayne for whites, compounding modern functional separation with racial segregation. Virginia Beach and Crandon Park were almost identical in design - separate but equal - according to principles established by the United States Supreme Court in 1896. Each had a gatehouse, large parking areas, lifeguard stations, shade trees along the beach and picnic tables that made for a pleasant day’s outing. (Fig. 4)

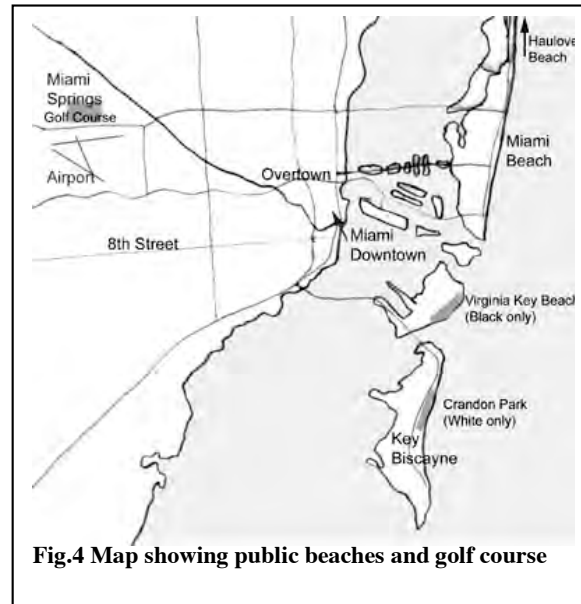


Fig.4 Map showing public beaches and golf course

This accommodation through duplicate construction reached a limit in 1949 when seven black golfers arrived to play on a public golf course at Miami Springs, again violating segregation laws. Among them were several caddies who played well and two lawyers, John Johnson and Grattan Graves, who didn’t. The course manager avoided a confrontation by allowing the party on the course but required that each have his own golf-bag. The next day, twelve black golfers turned up to play with bags, and the following day, fifty-two. In response, city commissioners offered to admit black players only on Mondays when the course was normally closed for maintenance. Johnson and Graves, leaders in the local Civil Rights movement, sued the City of Miami. Either the city must build a separate but equal golf course or must allow black golfers full access to the public facility. The suit moved through the courts until the NAACP argued the case on behalf of the golfers before the United States Supreme Court, albeit unsuccessfully.⁵ Only in 1953, was the course finally opened to black players for a week-long North-South tournament of the United Golf Association, a national Negro league.

Both the golfer’s demonstration and the wade-in used modern public space rhetorically to frame images for broadcast on the nightly news. Black golfers in the pastoral landscape of a gentlemanly sport juxtaposed places built for pleasure with racial discrimination to cast equality as a normal part of sportsmanship.

⁴ Beaches and swimming pools in particular raised fears of contagious disease following the polio epidemic of the 1930s. Segregationists drummed up suspicions that venereal disease was transmissible through water to support strict separation of bathing facilities. See Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997).

⁵ The case “Rice vs. Arnold,” was filed in 1949 and reached the Florida State Supreme Court. The city argued that the golf course would lose revenue and have to close if blacks had equal access and white players stayed away. The US Supreme Court upheld the lower court’s decision because segregation was still legal in Florida. Kirt Neilson, “In the Rough,” *Miami New Times*, Feb 24 - Mar 1 2000.

Implicitly, both golfers and bathers also embraced the modern promise of an escape from the hurly burly of the city, including its racial tensions. In demonstrations, they demanded that public space, wherever it was located, should remain truly public so that all citizens could step outside the bounds of the traditional city to enjoy a modern middle class life. By marshalling the modern language of sport and spectacle in public space, they challenged the segregated city.

The Spectacle: City of Attractions

Public space in modern cities is often defined as a place of spectacle, characterized by amphitheatres, stadia and media such as television where a mass audience watches a performance. The Magic City and Doxiadis Plans for example, centered on plazas with large amphitheatres designed for public spectacles. Although these projects were never built, Miami had long supported a series of private tourist attractions that each presented a spectacle to transient audiences. Seaquarium, Serpenterium, Parrot Jungle, Monkey Jungle, the Miccosukee Indian Village, the Marine Stadium, the Orange Bowl football stadium and the bandshell in Bayfront Park drew large crowds for events (Fig. 5). The proposed Interama was envisioned as Miami's ultimate attraction, like Disneyland, a series of entertainment pavilions linked by a futuristic monorail so thousands of visitors could be swept smoothly between displays and performances. Neither Interama nor its monorail ever got off the drawingboard, but the Miami Seaquarium built a sky-tram in the 1960s to carry visitors to performances in a geodesic dome. (Fig. 6)

The tourist spectacle presents a set of packaged images to an anonymous mass audience. Each of Miami's attractions scattered throughout the city centered on an amphitheatre where dolphins, parrots, water skiers, or musicians performed in shows of tropical exoticism, hamming it up for strangers (Fig. 7). Every day, the performances remained the same while an endless stream of visitors from elsewhere filled the audience.

In the 1950s and 60s, wintertime tourists, were increasingly joined by visitors from Europe and Latin America to make up culturally mixed audiences that added another element of exoticism to the event. As the barriers of segregation fell, black tourists also enjoyed the show (fig 8). Tourists in the



Fig. 5 Bandshell, Bayfront Park, entertains soldiers 1950, Walter DeGarmo. (Miami News archive "Parks-Dade-Bayfront Park - Bandshell (11"x14" file)



Fig. 6 Sky tram at Seaquarium, 1967 (Fla. Photo Collection Image Number: c671264)



Fig. 7 Miami Seaquarium show, 1958 (Department of Commerce collection Image Number: c029214 Florida Photographic collection at www.floridamemory.com)

stands watched from the distance of anonymity, able to see new things and engage others without risk. On a lark far from home where no one would recognize them, visitors were loosed from their habitual social roles to watch and mix with people from other cultures without risk.

Miami's multiple attractions, in conjunction with motels and restaurants located along highways, created a tourist landscape that defined one kind of public space as the complete freedom of anonymity. At its extreme, a family could arrive in Miami without a reservation and spend an entire vacation without engaging anyone that they were likely to see again. They could stay in a motel called "Voyager," "Wayfarer," or "Sahara," faraway oases for desert travelers (Fig. 9). By design, motel rooms opened directly to the parking lot so guests could come and go without traversing a lobby. Motels had few amenities and very little common space beyond the parking lot, at most a swimming pool overlooked by the rooms. From the motel, a family could make daily forays to attractions where they could watch performances from the safety of amphitheatre seats, sitting next to strangers.

Spectacles operate at the scale of a mass society, offering detachable images like movies that cross boundaries of culture. Attractions offered tourists the position of spectator that cloaked cultural differences so people from Michigan and Buenos Aires could share the same experience and talk about it with friends at home who would see the same performances when they visited Miami, perhaps years later. Tourist images were an export product, designed for cultural consumption elsewhere, therefore they had to be durable and reliable. No matter how absurd, images assumed the power of shared knowledge (Fig. 10). They were constructed architecturally for the camera so a family might take a snapshot of themselves in a scene with parrots or palm trees in the same way that they might appear in front of the Trevi fountain in Rome or the Statue of Liberty in New York on another trip.

While Miami's attractions captivated audiences by day, large Miami Beach hotels, notably Lapidus' Fontainebleau, offered another interpretation of modern spectacle by night. The Fontainebleau presented Broadway shows and Las Vegas style nightclub reviews in large auditoria that attracted diverse crowds, but primarily addressed Jewish tourists from New York. In the spirit of the time, these performances often played on cultural stereotypes, hovering between celebration, and parody. For example, the

Fig. 8
Black tourists at Parrot Jungle – Bass Museum



Fig. 9 Seven Seas Restaurant, Polevitzky, 1945



Fig. 10 Cockatoo at Parrot Jungle (Fla. Photo collection rc10127)



Fig. 11 "Ain't Misbehavin'" Eden Roc (Eden Roc Miami News Box 49 "Hotels and Motels")

Fontainebleau presented feather-bedecked dancers from Havana's Tropicana Club and an entirely black performance of "Ain't Misbehavin," a send-up of black culture (Fig. 11).

Shows appeared in lavish halls before audiences dressed for the occasion. They were major events attended by parties in the hotels' large dining rooms and reception halls where guests moved among gracious staircases, balconies, and luxurious furniture. (Fig. 12) In the crowd, people could see one another and be seen as if they played a role. Before the lights went down, spectators were already within the atmosphere of elegance and exoticism that carried into the performance.

Shows traveled, not the audience. The hotel was like a small city in which all luxuries were concentrated for guests positioned within the performance rather than watching from the outside. One guidebook promised "the sophistication of a metropolitan city of a million. Flash and excitement hold the spotlight, and when things are in full swing the island city more closely resembles a spangled revue than a wealthy resort."⁶ At an extreme, a family could spend their entire vacation on the grounds of a resort hotel. They could eat in the dining room, swim in the pool, shop in boutiques in the lobby, dance in the ballroom and watch the shows. (Fig. 13) Miami Beach hotels offered programs for kids, exercise classes, fashion shows and scuba diving excursions - a complete course in how to live the good life. In coming and going, guests might traverse the lobby a dozen times a day, until the place, the staff and some of the other guests became familiar. Families often returned to the same hotel year after year until retiring to Miami Beach was simply a longer visit. Hotels such as the Fontainebleau interpreted the modern spectacle as a total performance that invited guests to leave their work-a-day world behind and try out perhaps several different kinds of life.

In Lapidus' hotels, every surface is decorated to suggest a story, even stories inconsistent with one another. The atmosphere of narratives from other places and other people overrides any specific story, inviting guests to suspend disbelief. Lapidus wrote that a playful Aztec, or Azteckesque was preferable to real Aztec décor, suggesting that artifice itself opened to narrative. (Fig 14) Ultimately, the possibility of a story may be more compelling than the story itself. Similarly, the

Fig. 12 Woman on staircase in Lapidus, Hotel Americana, (Bass Museum)



Fig 13. Dancing at the Sovereign Hotel, 1950 (Fla. Photo Collection, Image Number: c013713)



Fig. 14 Lobby Americana Hotel, 1957 mixing references to the glass salon at Versailles with Mayan decorative patterns. (Department of Commerce collection. Author: Johnson, Francis P. Image Number c02631, Florida Photographic Collection)

⁶ Quoted in Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities* (NY: The Free Press, 1994), p.33.

shows presented in the hotels of Miami Beach seem to be an excuse for the real play, which took place in the public rooms outside the auditorium. Lapidus interpreted the modern dream of the arts unified into a complete environment by offering a fantasy of fragmented references full of potential.

A third interpretation of the modern spectacle characterized nightclub performances in Overtown. When black actors and musicians performed in Miami Beach hotels in the 1950s, they were not allowed to stay overnight. After the show, they crossed the causeway to stay at the Mary Elizabeth Hotel, the Rockland Palace or the Sir John Hotel in Overtown, or the Hampton House in Brownsville.⁷ Often, musicians such as Billy Holiday, Cab Calloway Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald performed in hotel ballrooms in Miami Beach then played again in similar hotel venues in Overtown such as the Mary Elizabeth's Zebra Lounge or in one of the many nearby jazz clubs, including the Cotton Club, Calypso Club, and the Harlem Square Club (figure 15). Music promoter Clyde Killen kept the bandstand at the Knight Beat lounge of the Sir John Hotel filled with acts such as Count Basie, The Ink Spots, and Aretha Franklin who played in black clubs nationally.⁸

Hotels and clubs were embedded in the urban structure of the black city, neither self-contained like the Fontainebleau, nor autonomous like a motel. Lounges and clubs set up a more intimate relationship between performers and audience than an amphitheatre, and served drink (fig. 16 & 17). The plan of the Knight Beat shows a bandstand at the end of the room and a large dance floor at the center surrounded by tables. The band performed on stage, but the real show was the dance, where guests performed for each other. Clubs in Overtown often disregarded segregation laws, attracting large racially mixed audiences that stayed late into the night, as long as the bands cared to play.



Fig. 15. Zebra Lounge, Mary Elizabeth Hotel, Overtown, 1950s. The decorative theme of the zebra, an African animal that is both black and white, played ironically on racial identity.



Fig. 16 Plan of Knight Beat club at Sir John Hotel. Tables on ground and balcony level surround the dance floor. VIP seating on dance floor and in "Golden Circle" opposite bandstand. (Clyde Killen collection, Black Archives)



Fig. 17 Rockland Palace Club (Clyde Killen Collection, Black Archives)

⁷ The Mary Elizabeth Hotel, the Rockland Palace, and the Sir John Hotel, all in Overtown, served black guests. Dunn, *Black Miami*.p.148. The Hampton House in Brownsville to the northwest was also a popular lodging for black visitors.

⁸ An archive of Clyde Killen's papers and photographs is held at the Black Archive in Miami.

From the 1930s into the 1960s, Overtown's thriving nightlife shaped a local, vernacular interpretation of hotel ballrooms. Clubs elaborated forms and decorative details in the same tongue-in cheek manner that Miami Beach hotels borrowed images from Aztec as well as European palaces. For example, the Zebra Lounge is decorated in the stripes of the African animal that is both black and white.

Community leader Ann Marie Adker described fancy dress balls at the Calypso Club presided over by the female impersonator, Princess Carlotta.⁹ "People would line up on the opposite side of the street to see who was going in," and what they were wearing in a spirit of fun that mirrored the elegant dances held at Miami Beach hotels. In Overtown, the ball was a local event for local people to enjoy, dancing for one another while the band played. In a similar spirit, residents of Overtown responded to white Miami's annual Orange Bowl Parade and football game with their own Coconut Festival (later the Orange Blossom Classic) staged on the same day, complete with a parade, a baseball game and a 'Coconut Queen.' (Fig. 18) In both cases, festivities in black Overtown adopted the form of events in white Miami with an edge of satire.

Civic Life: Seeing and being seen

Civic life is a public performance characterized by a reciprocal relationship between people, a conversation at an urban scale. Political demonstrations such as the golfer's stand or large gatherings to air an opinion are explicit expressions in the civic realm. However, café society, shopping, and cruising the strip are also part of the public life of a community. In Miami, the story of the Cuban community's search for public spaces reveals the dilemmas of local civic life.

Miami did not offer civic space in the tradition of plazas and public buildings. Biscayne Boulevard is one of the few gracious public ways, designed in part for the Orange Bowl Parade (Fig. 19). Similarly, Miami's civic buildings eschew traditional formal design to leave the city with few well-appointed ceremonial spaces and little official architectural



Fig. 18. Orange Blossom Classic Parade. In 1949, the Coconut Festival became the Orange Blossom Festival centered on a football game played by Florida A&M, the state's black college. In the 1960s, the black college league was merged into the National College Athletic Association leagues and the Orange Blossom Classic became a regular season game. The parade was absorbed into the Orange Bowl Parade on Biscayne Blvd. (Clyde Killen collection Black Archives)



Fig. 19 Orange Bowl Parade 1963-64 (Miami News 11" x 17" file)

⁹ Dunn, *Black Miami*.p.151

identity. Even Miami's city hall has little civic presence, occupying the old Panamerican Airlines Terminal on Biscayne Bay in Coconut Grove, a borrowed building well removed from the business center.

Many of the Cubans who arrived in Miami fleeing Castro's regime came from Havana. A classical city designed and built around public spaces such as the Parque Centrale, Malecon ocean promenade, and many stately government buildings. Daily life in Havana centers on numerous small plazas, boulevards, *paseos*, and streetside parks. Miami, however, could offer few parallel venues. Yet the Cuban community had strong opinions to express, both toward their home government and toward official policies of the United States, which required public expression. When they arrived, most Cubans had few resources and considered Miami a temporary refuge until they could return home, so rather than build they had to make-do with existing buildings and spaces. For example, the Cuban community had to find places for a series of civic events surrounding the return of prisoners taken during the ill-fated 1961 invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. Their spatial compromises illustrate the mismatch between their cultural definition of the public realm and the spaces Miami offered.



Figure 20. Cuban demonstration in Bayfront Park (Miami News box 28 "Cubans -Demonstrations pre-1974")



Fig. 21 Demonstration in Plaza de la Revolution, 1960s (Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami)

Fig. 22 – This one is hard. It exists in newsprint, but I cannot find the photo.

Following the disastrous campaign, in which Miami Cubans had invested heavily, both in money and men, the community repeatedly gathered in Bayfront Park to make their cause known, occupying the park as if it were an urban plaza (Figure 20). In March 1962, the Cuban Revolutionary Council, a unified dissident group, organized a sit-down strike demanding that Castro release prisoners taken at the Bay of Pigs. Council president José Miro Cardona spoke in the Bayfront Park bandshell before a large crowd of Cuban ex-patriots, demanding that the US government pressure Castro on behalf of the prisoners. After occupying the park for six days, demonstrators were finally removed by police who arrested 152 people.¹⁰ This public action specifically mirrored massive rallies in Havana that took place in the Plaza of the Revolution surrounded by government buildings (Fig. 21). In Miami however, Bayfront Park was the only public space in the downtown area both large enough and visible enough for an effective rally. The park was also adjacent to the Miami Daily News building known to the Cuban community as the "Freedom Tower" for it had served as a Refugee Center where they had been received by the US

¹⁰ "Police Arrest 152 Cubans in Bayfront Park," *The Miami Herald*, March 13 1962.

government on their arrival in Florida. In addition, the Hotel Miami Colonial, which had catered to Cuban tourists in happier days, faced the park.¹¹ Both the Freedom Tower and the hotel provided familiar landmarks that gave Bayfront Park an urban dignity and position that the Cuban community could read as a plaza even though it was designed as a pleasure garden.

In April 1962, injured prisoners were released and flown to Miami Airport where thousands greeted them on the tarmac (Fig. 22). They waved from the terminal building that overlooked the plane, transforming the airport into a ceremonial urban space. The terminal was already familiar to many Cubans both as their point of arrival and as a promenade. Many habitually went the airport for an evening stroll to see one another and pass the time, even if no one was traveling.¹² The airport provided air-conditioned public space, the planes offered something to watch, and other people went.

On Christmas Eve, 1,113 prisoners ransomed by the US government were flown to the Homestead Air Force base, then brought to meet their families at the Miami Dinner Key Auditorium in Coconut Grove, a converted seaplane hanger. Some officials spoke to the crowd, but an auditorium for spectacles was hardly appropriate for the main purpose of the event – people greeting one another. The personal, emotional, and civic nature of a public welcoming, which implies no separation between actors and audience, demanded an open and festive yet dignified setting in the city. The architecture of fixed seats facing a stage simply did not fit. Again, a plaza would have served the community better.

On December 29, President Kennedy came to Miami to honor the 2506 Brigade that had fought at the Bay of Pigs (Fig. 23). This presidential address was staged in the Orange Bowl football stadium, a large arena in an area where many Cubans had settled. The event, although well attended, was dwarfed by a sea of empty seats and isolated from the rest of the city. Again, the Cuban community compromised, accepting a space that could physically accommodate them but lacked the gravitas of urban space.



Fig. 23 President Kennedy addresses the 2605 Brigade Dec 29, 1962, after the release of prisoners taken at the Bay of Pigs. (Miami News Box 28 “Cubans – Bay of Pigs”)



Fig. 24. Calle Ocho, 1960s (Miami News box 28 “Cubans – Business & Industry”)

¹¹ Robert M. Levine and Moiss Asis, *Cuban Miami* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000). p.21

¹² Conversation with Miguel Bretos who emigrated from Cuba to Miami in the early 1960s. He remembers going to the airport just to walk around.

Finally, on January 1, 1963, José Cardona gave out US government checks of \$250 each to the released prisoners as a token for their service - from his home at 1034 Michigan Avenue in Miami Beach. A small Cuban enclave had found lodging in Miami Beach amidst a large Jewish community from the north. Indeed, a significant number of Cubans were Jewish. Dispensing checks from an apartment turned what could have been a public event into a private one, bringing the veterans across the causeway to a residential street that at that time was lined with small apartment buildings largely inhabited by the elderly.

When Cuban families arrived in Miami, they found housing and employment wherever they could. Many concentrated in an area centered on 8th Street that became known as “Little Havana,” while others settled in North Miami, Opa-locka, South Dade county and elsewhere. The federal government also started a resettlement program that distributed Cuban families around the country from Michigan to California.

In Little Havana, a section of 8th Street, “Calle Ocho” took shape as the commercial center of the community. There, Cuban entrepreneurs bought run-down buildings and started businesses that transformed one of Miami’s standard the four-lane streets with narrow sidewalks into a hybrid urban form in between an American strip shopping center and a Cuban shopping street (Figure 24). The first restaurant to open was the Hong Kong Cuban Chinese, followed by many others including El Centro Vasco, and La Carreta, which became venerable institutions of the community. When new restaurant buildings such as Versailles were built in the later 60s, they were set back from the street to create small paved patios served by a coffee bar.¹³ The business association also set aside an area at a corner in the center of commercial strip for Dominó Park, a patio with tables and chairs where retired men play the game overlooking the street. (fig.25) Further down Calle Ocho, a memorial to the martyrs of the Bay of Pigs graces the green center of an intersecting residential street. Together, these respites from the right-of-way carry a European and Latin American tradition of sociable streets punctuated by stopping places into an American strip where they met car dealerships and drive-in fast food joints.¹⁴



Fig. 25 Dominó Park on 8th Street, Miami (Greater Miami: Spirit of Cuban Enterprise Photo: Miguel Gonzalez-Pando)



Fig. 26 St. Lazerus Parade, 1974 (Miami News Cubans – Holidays)

¹³ Miguel Gonzalez-Pando, ed., *Greater Miami: Spirit of Cuban Enterprise* (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: Copperfield Publications, 1996). p.103.

¹⁴ Monica Ponce de Leon, "Calle Ocho," *Journal of Architectural Education*.

In the late 1960s in Cuba, Castro banned all religious festivities associated with Christmas, outraging the predominately Catholic community.¹⁵ In response, Cubans in Miami instituted a Three Kings Parade on Calle Ocho every January (Fig. 26). The Parade confirmed Calle Ocho as the symbolic center of Cuban Miami even as Cuban families abandoned the area for the suburbs.

Shopping: Display and Comment

Shopping is a particular kind of public encounter engaging objects on display that spark endless discussions of style, price, and desire. Shopping is theatrical twice. First, the display of objects in a shop window, on television, or in a catalog is a small, but intensely designed performance, starring the object for sale in a tableau that punctuates every store. Second, the shoppers contribute to the social life of the public realm through their presence, seeing others and being seen. In a tourist town, shopping is explicitly promoted as a form of leisure entertainment that was characterized in Florida by roadside orange stands and beachfront souvenir shops, one for the open highway, the other for the boardwalk. Miami's permanent population however required elegant stores and architectural surroundings.

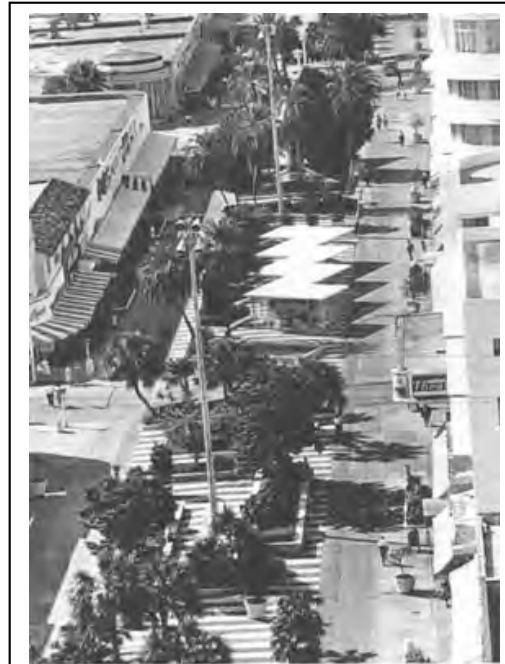


Fig. 27 Lincoln Road (Miami News box 61, "Lincoln Road")

Lincoln Road Mall and Dadeland Mall were built simultaneously in 1960, presenting different architectural interpretations of the modern experience of shopping in the city: for the well-to-do Jewish residents of Miami Beach and for the burgeoning middle class on the suburban mainland respectively (fig. 27). Both had similar shops: a Burdines department store anchoring a number of specialized boutiques. Both had a central promenade landscaped with tropical plants, flanked by shops, and accessible from large parking lots. Their location and design however betray significant differences.

Lincoln Road Mall was a renovation of an existing shopping street in Miami Beach that had languished commercially in competition with the new Bal Harbor Mall to the north. Architect Morris Lapidus lobbied hard to remove cars from Lincoln Road, presenting large graphics that proclaimed, "A car never bought a thing." He argued that pedestrians strolling a pleasant promenade were more likely to enter a store than drivers rushing by in cars. He won the day with a jaunty theatrical design centered on a series of cast concrete follies surrounded by lush tropical vegetation that separated the right-of-way into two pedestrian allées. The follies included a bandshell, shade structures, fountains, pools, and

¹⁵ Miguel Bretos noted that many Cubans had not been particularly observant Catholics when they lived in Havana. After they arrived in Miami however, they filled the local churches and parochial schools, particularly Sts. Peter and Paul, Il Gesu, and St. Patrick's.

a circular parterre raised to bench height. On either side, shop window displays are visible but the center of the show is the shopper, walking in a tropical esplanade that recalled Roberto Burle Marx's promenade along the Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro. Lapidus, who specialized in store design in his practice in New York, wrote that people-watching was as important to commerce as the things for sale.

Lincoln Road Mall retains its links with the city and includes non-commercial uses such as a church and a theatre. The pedestrian mall entrances at either end anchor significant intersections in the city at Washington Ave and Alton Road while intersecting streets carry traffic across the promenade to link shopping with the residential city. Each store was an independent property often owned by the shopkeeper, which paid a tax to the city for the street renovations. Overall, the choice to revive existing urban commerce rather than devote attention to a new structure reveals the urban sensibilities of the City of Miami Beach.

In contrast, Dadeland Mall, a post-war regional shopping center located at the intersection of Route 1 and the new Palmetto Expressway, served rapidly developing suburban Kendall.

Modeled on Victor Gruen's modern commercial centers, the mall isolated shopping from other activities in the existing center of Kendall (Figure 28). A press release asserted that Dadeland was designed for family shopping, "to give children room to romp away from all vehicles and allow parents to leisurely browse and competitive shop from store to store."¹⁶ The description emphasized shopping as an instrumental act of looking and buying, while any fun was to be had by children. The design placed shoppers in a landscaped promenade with shops on either side but without an equivalent to the Lincoln Road follies. The promenade was narrower than Lincoln Road so a shopper walked between shop window displays, a position that emphasized the spectacle of goods rather than people watching. It was enclosed for air-conditioning in 1969.

Following Gruen's proscription, Dadeland Mall serves the region rather than local residents, opening in the same year as the Palmetto Expressway.¹⁷ The mall was explicitly detached from the street grid and linked by spur roads to the expressway so the only access was by car. The mall also strictly separates vehicular from pedestrian traffic so the promenade runs from anchor store to anchor store without connecting to the city. The public space within is functionally specific – shopping only – and self-contained so it relies on other detached centers for the civic, spiritual and recreational aspects of life.



Fig. 28 Architect's rendering of Dadeland Mall, 1960. (Miami News, box 30 "Dadeland Shopping Center")

¹⁶ Keyes Company press release December 8, 1957. In WTVJ files, Historical Museum of South Florida.

¹⁷ See Victor Gruen, "Cityscape and Landscape," in *Architecture Culture 1943-1968*, ed. Joan Ockman (NY: Columbia Books Rizzoli, 1955 (1993)), 197.

Dadeland and much of the property surrounding it belonged to Arthur Vining Davis, an aluminum tycoon who saw profit to be made from Miami's growing population.¹⁸ Davis and the developer, the Keyes Company, owned the mall, so stores paid rent. The City of Miami zoned the land for commercial use and built access roads for the mall. This financial structure maintains ownership in few hands while casting both the stores and the public as mass consumers. In comparison with Lincoln Road Mall, the structure of ownership at Dadeland, as well as the design, shift emphasis toward profit rather than urban sociability. In fact, Dadeland has remained profitable, if not loved, over many years.

Public landscapes of sport and leisure

Sport casts the player as an actor even if they have no audience. Miami offered many landscapes for swimming, boating, and golf designed for a range of performances. For example, Miami Beach hotel landscapes often present sport as spontaneous theatre that invites everyone to take a turn, while the Everglades National Park defined a solitary experience of the outdoors, where one could hike or canoe unseen by others.

The beach of Miami Beach amidst hotels that catered to Jewish tourists developed a reputation for nouveau riche extravagance. Matrons in jewels, picnickers, and vendors in street clothes walking in the sand offended the sensibilities of Southern

Christian propriety to the point that the Anti-Defamation League issued a guide instructing Jewish tourists in acceptable beach etiquette (figure 29).¹⁹ By the 1950s, no one worried over such infractions since the Jewish community in Miami Beach had grown so large that it effectively absorbed the beach. Beaches, like the city, were segregated in increasingly fine social separations.²⁰ For example in the late 50s, below 7th Street Miami Beach was home to low-income hotel workers, many of Irish descent. From 7th to 15th Streets, the public park, known locally as bagel beach, was frequented by elderly Jewish émigrés who had moved from New York to live in small hotels that had been turned into retirement homes. Writer Isaac Singer marveled at the atmosphere of Old World Jewish Europe transported to the tropics.²¹ From 15th Street to 30th street,



Fig. 29. Beach scene (Photo: from *To the Golden Cities* credit: Acme UPI/Bettmann archive)



Fig. 30 Polevitzky diving platform. (Florida Photo collection c002774)

¹⁸ Frederic Sherman, "Dadeland Shopping Center," *Miami Herald*, November 8 1957. Davis owned 10,000 acres between Route 1 and Krome Avenue along the Snapper Creek Canal.

¹⁹ Moore, *To the Golden Cities*.p.35 and 87.

²⁰ .p.65

²¹ Isaac Bashevis Singer, *My Love Affair with Miami Beach*, ed. Richard Nagler (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

expensive hotels attracted wealthy 2nd generation Jews on vacation. From 30th to 40th street, a staid Gentile oasis known as Millionaire's Row remained. Above 40th Street to Surfside was a long-standing Jewish community of business owners and professionals who often criticized the flamboyant style of the beach hotels. Blacks were excluded entirely, prohibited from Miami Beach except for work until well into the 1960s.²² Each group in this striated social order maintained an almost autonomous world that overlapped with the others along the sand.

In Miami Beach, large hotels attempted to claim their beachfront as private property for their guests. By law, the beach was open to the public, linked to the city by streets, but hotels sought to channel access through their private lobbies and pool decks. In the 1950s, many large hotels built bulwarks out onto the beach blocking public access, particularly when beach erosion swept away the sand.²³ Hotel design focused attention on the pool deck rather than the beach so the ocean horizon became a backdrop for a designed environment. The Roney Palace, for example, left the beach so far below a raised pool deck that it is not visible from the hotel.

At the pool, diving was a sporting highlight that added an explicit element of performance to the leisure scene. Every pool had a springboard at the end like a stage, some designed with svelte lines to show off the curves of the divers (Fig. 30). The Roney Palace presents divers silhouetted against the horizon. At the south campus of Miami-Dade Junior College built in 1968 well inland, a tower for high dive accents a central plaza like a campanile, adding an



Fig. 31. Fontainebleau from above. The serpentine design defines beach and pool areas as arenas for people-watching (Miami News box 49 "Hotels and Motels" Photo George Hamilton)



Fig. 32 Triester, Virrick Park

²² Until 1965, blacks were required to carry employee identification and were not allowed to spend the night in the City of Miami Beach. "Looking Back at Being Black."

²³ Polly Redford, *Billion Dollar Sandbar* (NY: Dutton, 1970).253. Dutton notes that in 1947, Miami Beach City Council gave property owners along the beach an additional 75 feet of sand on which to build bulkheads. This effectively rendered the beach private property. By 1953, the ruling was reversed, but not before several hotels had built into the surf. A recent egregious example of property owners claiming public right of way cut Lincoln Road off from the water. Property owners hold titles that extend to the center of the right of way stating that they own the land but cannot build. Two oceanfront highrise hotels flanking Lincoln Road obeyed the letter of the law but fenced the property as a parking lot for guests only. This violation of the public realm has only recently been corrected.

athletic grace note to the general scene at the school. Likewise, water-skiers turned Biscayne Bay into a showground. On calm days, they offered those on the causeways something to watch.

In these urban sporting and leisure landscapes, people watched and were watched in turn, performing for each other in fun. The buildings and

landscape design provided an arena for sport linked with a place to watch so people could move easily from one to the other easily. The architecture established the scale of activity and framed a relationship between players and on-lookers. For example, the serpentine design of the Fontainebleau Hotel separates three distinct arenas in its loops, two at beachfront and one surrounding the pool (fig 31). On the beach side, deck chairs on two tiers of raised platforms form a gallery of spectators, while on the poolside, a raised deck focused on a diving platform overlooks French formal gardens designed to be seen from above. Sport, leisure, dining and every aspect of public activity in Miami Beach hotels defined luxury as the privilege of being well seen.



Fig. 33 Everglades Park (Fla Hist proj, bd113)

Elizabeth Virrick Park (1960), a community center in a section of Coconut Grove inhabited by many black Bahamian families is a flight of the imagination by Kenneth Treister. In a grove of live oaks, giant, multi-colored, concrete mushrooms sprout from the ground to shade picnic tables so children may gambol like sprites in the forest (Fig. 32). Virrick had helped the community to resist slum lords and build quality housing for one of the poorest neighborhoods in the country.²⁴ The fanciful design of the park frames outings such as family barbeques in an atmosphere of a woodsy elsewhere that offers release from the harsh world just outside.

These architectural presentations of people at leisure contrasts with sporting landscapes designed for solitary escape. Sightseeing and wilderness parks such as the Everglades define the desired position as a spectator who sees but is not seen. In the dominant society of white, Christian Miami, privilege was often measured by the range of private life and private space. A Miami News feature 'Futura' that envisioned futuristic technology expressed the sentiment well. More than once, the column invoked a dream house with glass made so inhabitants could look out but no one could see in.²⁵

Hikes in the woods, wilderness camping, and canoe trips are outdoor sports one engages alone or shares with an intimate group. No one watches (Fig. 33). Everglades National Park, established in 1947 and opened for tourism, was generally seen from an airboat,

²⁴ Both Raymond Mohl and Marvin Dunn describe the miserable conditions of two-story apartment buildings or 'concrete monsters' that were built by exploitative developers and leased to black families at exorbitant rates. See Mohl, "Making the Second Ghetto in Metropolitan Miami, 1940-1960." and Dunn, *Black Miami*.

²⁵ "Futura: Dream House," *Miami News*, July 18 1948.

although swamp walks and camping became increasingly popular. An interest in and study of South Florida's natural history had been sparked by the publication of Marjory Stoneman Douglas' *River of Grass* in the 1930s. By the 1960s, many modern architects designed buildings that embraced the natural landscape with open space that flowed continuously between inside and out. Landscape designers also included elements of the native landscape such as pines, cypress trees and bromeliads while preservationists fought to save the Big Cypress Swamp in the center of the South Florida peninsula from construction of a jetport.²⁶

In that fight, two broad visions of Miami clashed: one pictured a tropical city rooted in the unique natural characteristics of its locale, offering residents a sensual experience of the land. The other dreamed of a sparkling city that linked North and South America, where people could display their goods and themselves on the world stage. Both of these visions were modern in prospect, one suburban and the other urban, and they presented two distinct points of view. In the most general terms, the first framed scenes of open landscape for an audience that stood outside the picture, the other framed social scenes that included spectators as players.

Looking back over the types of performance in Miami's public space: spectacle, civic life, shopping and sport, the design of most modern architecture tended toward one point of view or the other. Encounters between the city's multiple communities also negotiated their point of view through their actions. For example, the black golfers stepped out of the city, assuming the position of a player who looks out across the broad landscape of the course. Of course, their action was a performance, designed to be seen, and their purpose to challenge social rules head to head. Conversely, Cuban demonstrators sought a civic stage where they could present their grievances publicly, but Miami offered the landscape of Bayfront Park.

Two Modern College Campuses

A clear articulation of these two visions is apparent in the design of college campuses that served different segments of Miami's population. In 1948, architects Marion Manley and Robert Law Weed drew a distinctly modern masterplan to expand the University of Miami in answer to immense demand from returning servicemen who could finance a college education under the GI bill.²⁷ Twenty years later, architects Peter Spillis and Hilario Candela of Ferendino, Pancoast & Assoc designed two outlying modern campuses for Miami-Dade Junior College, which was expanding rapidly to accommodate a growing population fueled by the sudden influx of immigrants from Cuba. Both plans detail



Fig. 34 University of Miami Master Plan, Manley, 1948 (Authenticity-DAAUM5)

²⁶ They finally succeeded in 1972, creating Big Cypress National Wilderness Area.

²⁷ The college served only white students. Black veterans could go to Florida A&M in Tallahassee

innovative complexes that can be read as alternate proposals for modern tropical urbanism – the first looking out toward a large landscape, the second creating a theatrical social space focused on people.

Manley and Weed merged local building types with the spatial sensibilities of international style modernism in the University of Miami masterplan to propose a The academic buildings reach into the land to define a tropical urbanism of air, light and greenery. Robert Law Weed had built public schools in Miami with long parallel buildings flanking courtyards to allow airflow through un-air conditioned classrooms. Manley and Weed's plan for University of Miami adopted the long classroom buildings but placed them far enough apart for a quadrangle-sized lawn between them, or perpendicular to one another without courtyards so they radiate into an open landscape. The latter layout recalled the iconic long walls of Mies van der Rohe that Manley had studied at Massachusetts Institute of Technology just the year before. In the University of Miami plan, classrooms offer distant views into a conceptually expansive space drawn as an open plain even though the campus was confined by city streets. (Fig. 34). Linear paths also radiate out from a central raised area and plaza so that views down all paths end in landscape rather than buildings. Paths accommodated people in motion, so they either walk together in conversation or encounter one another briefly in passing (Figure 35). The plan is anchored at the center by a tower described as a campanile in homage to Italian city squares, which seen from afar, rises above buildings and trees to accent a green landscape. Throughout the plan, buildings are independent of one another in open space; even the plaza drifts on a green ground.

The campus is divided by four main paths that designate four functional areas: residence halls, the academic center, athletic facilities, and a green area with the college chapel. This scheme mirrors three of the four functions of a modern city defined by Le Corbusier and the Congr s Internationale des Architectes Modernes: living, working, and recreation. The fourth, transportation,



Fig. 35 Paths in landscape of Univ. of Miami.



Fig. 36 Waterskiing on Campus Lake with spectators in Student Union Building. (Miami News box 94

links the other three. In the campus plan however, the fourth function in a green area is identified with the spiritual aspect of life.

Campus buildings frame a series of views either of picturesque landscape or distant activity. For example, the library is transparent and non-hierarchical, so all positions inside are equal in importance and equally visible. Photos of the library present a general scene of activity detached from the viewer. Likewise, the student center, which dramatically bridges a lake at the center of the plan, overlooks water, not the campus. A waterskiing performance casts the building as an amphitheatre (Figure 36). In general, University of Miami buildings offer two social situations: Casual meetings for conversations with friends as in the student center or walking along the paths and distant views of landscape or activity.

Miami Dade Junior College South Campus, built in 1968, presents a contrasting set of social spaces for an academic community in a modern interpretation of a traditional urban square. Hilario Candela designed the college around a central plaza that steps down in center like an amphitheatre. Buildings surrounding the plaza have deeply cantilevered upper floors to provide shade for extensive outside seating areas that position people so they see one another in public space. Large events such as graduation take place in the recessed center of the plaza so the crowd can watch from seats around the edge. Everyday however, the plaza is active, presenting several layers of activity arrayed along the steps from close to far, so a single glimpse might capture multiple overlapping scenes. At the highest level, a dive tower stages an occasional show. On campus, students may study or chat at tables outside and watch divers while keeping track of whoever might be coming or going (fig. 37).

The design recalls the urban plazas of Candela's native Havana, surrounded by arcades that shade the sidewalks and windows on upper floors that overlook the public space. The architectural staging is revealed in photos – not of generalized activity seen at



Fig. 37 High dive in distance overlooking plaza, (Miami News "MDCC" 1972 Photo Property of MDC)



Fig. 38 Univ of Miami (DUM 7)

a distance like University of Miami, but of specific people doing specific things, aware that they are seen in public space (Fig 38). Candela merged the theatrical tradition of the Cuban public square with Le Corbusier's beton brut and piloti to propose an urban modernism for the social as well as the climatic conditions of the Caribbean. At MDJC, many of the Cubans who arrived in Miami in the 1960s attended classes to learn both English and the skills they would need to compete economically. The architecture offered a familiar urban situation in which they were included in a community that some still regard with particular gratitude.

Conclusion

In mid-century Miami, at least four distinct cultural groups negotiated both access to and design of public space, interpreting modern architecture to suit their social habits. They built or adapted spaces for performance, civic life, shopping, and sport. Design of these public spaces presented people to each other, both within and between groups. Differences in architectural strategy centered on who or what was in the scene and who was outside the frame looking in.

Images of attractions, fashion, beach scenes, and sports that Miami projected for tourists cast the real experience of events into relief. Miami's tourist landscape of hotels and attractions played on the disjunction, casting an image like a stage set that had clear boundaries. Miami offered the pleasures of masquerade, so tourists could step into a scene to take a role, while maintaining an ironic stance as observer (Fig. 39). Watching oneself being watched in the role of an exotic other is part of the holiday experience that gave all of public life in Miami a self-conscious edge.



Fig. 39 "Nassau Night" at the Knight Beat Lounge, Sir John Hotel, Overtown. 1950s.

Political demonstrations staged during the civil rights movement and in response to events in Cuba pierced the veil of masquerade to reveal the bitter stresses of a divided city. They refused the roles that Miami offered, assumed new roles for themselves, demanding that the city renegotiate the social contract. Demonstrations used performance to change reality and willfully transform Miami from a resort town into a multi-cultural metropolis.

For Miami's black, Jewish and Cuban communities, the 1950s and 60s remain a moment of particular strength that emerged specifically in the design and use of public space. By the 1970s as families prospered, the immediate political forces that held each of these distinct Miamis together had begun to dissipate. Housing restrictions, racism and anti-

Semitism also eased, drawing many out of their separate neighborhoods into the fast-growing suburbs to the west.

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