

Historic and Contemporary Segregation

Today, the Miami area is one of the most segregated metro areas in the United States. According to a study in 2020, the Miami metro area is the 6th most segregated metro area in the United States (Othering and Belonging Institute, 2020). Miami has widespread racial segregation between Black and White people. In addition to this Miami also has high levels of segregation among other ethnic minorities that rarely exists in other U.S. cities. As part of the Jim Crow South, racial segregation was prevalent there since the area first had a significant Black population. Black residents of Miami were segregated into the same neighborhoods, forced into inferior properties, and segregated from most businesses as was the case with all U.S. cities in the south (RHDM,2020).

Railroad Shop and Coconut Grove were two of the neighborhoods where many Black people were segregated during the Jim Crow years (Banchin, 2020). The "Overtown" neighborhood, which mostly consisted of shacks and slum housing, was where most of Dade county's Black residents were settled when they arrived (Mohl, 2001, p. 320). Across the United States, redlining was used to segregate Black people from White people by assessing all Black neighborhoods as at risk for lending, and Miami was no different (Banchin, 2020). In addition to this, racial covenants, real estate codes, exclusionary zoning legislation, private discrimination, and violence from White people, enforced the segregation of Black and White communities throughout the 20th century in Miami (Martin, 1993; Massey & Denton, 1993; Seitles, 1998). In the 1930s, the Dade County Planning Board advocated for clearing slums, particularly Overtown (Banchin, 2020). As a part of this slum clearance, multiple prominent planning board members proposed to remove every single Black family from Miami's city limits (Mohl, 2001). The board wanted to allow White elites to expand the central business district into neighborhoods occupied by Black people. Overtown did not change much until about 1950s. However, following the slum clearance plan other Black districts, particularly Railroad Shop, experienced Black people being forced out for White people to move in (Banchin, 2020).

Miami



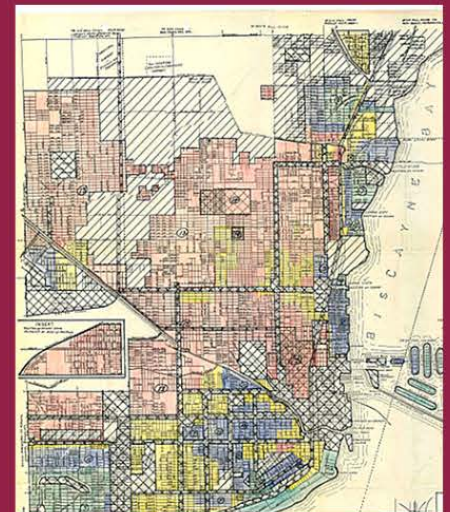
City of Miami.
Photo by Ana García Geng from Prexels.com



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Displacement

In 1937, the public housing project Liberty Square was opened. Many residents of Overtown and Miami's other Black neighborhoods were relocated or moved there, which was just outside the city limits at the time. Residents of a White neighborhood just to the east of Liberty Square demanded segregation. In 1939, the city commission decided to construct a six-foot-high wall separating Liberty Square from the White neighborhood (Banchin, 2020). This wall still stands today, although it no longer separates Black and White neighborhoods (Joseph, 2018). The Scott-Carver project was one of the largest projects in Florida. In 1999, after the condition of the project had deteriorated significantly, Dade County decided to demolish the project. This displaced all the 1,129 families who lived there. Ten years later the project's replacement was built, and during those years, the county lost track of over half of the families. In the end, a small percentage of the displaced families moved into the mixed-income apartments and townhouses that replaced the project. Today, gentrification maintains the high level of segregation in Miami in that, instead of being forced out of neighborhoods by government decisions, White people move to the neighborhood in high numbers while making the area unaffordable and hence forcing Black and Brown people out (Banchin, 2020).



Map of 1930's post-depression Miami neighborhoods
by Home Owners Loan Corporation from dsl.richmond.edu.

Miami also has high levels of ethnic segregation among the large groups of Hispanic immigrants such as Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans who reside in Miami. It was found that within these Hispanic immigrant groups there is also segregation between White and Black Hispanics in addition to Black and White people overall. Non-Hispanic Black people are much more segregated from White Hispanics than they are from Black Hispanics. The segregation of neighborhoods is just one part of how Black and White Hispanics have been treated differently. Many White Cubans have experienced high levels of wealth since immigrating to Miami, unlike Black Cubans and Black Puerto Ricans (Aja, 2016). Black immigrant groups like Puerto Ricans and Haitians have also experienced frequent gentrification which, for example in Little Haiti, maintains the segregation of Hispanic and non-Hispanic Whites from African Americans, Black Hispanics, and Haitians (Banchin, 2020; Aja, 2016). This difference in segregation of housing and wealth shows that while ethnic segregation is very prevalent in Miami, racial segregation is still more extreme in terms of wealth and housing (Aja, 2016).



Photo of the Miami Hispanic Cultural Arts Center from miamihispanicculturalartscenter.org.

Segregation Policies and Programs

Currently, Dade County plans to redevelop multiple public housing projects in the area including Liberty Square. In 2019, phase one of redeveloping Liberty Square began which includes building 640 new public housing units and replacing 709 units. However, gentrification has continued with no opposition from the municipal government. As of 2019, a plan was approved to build a nearly 18-acre, high-rise mini-city in the heart of Little Haiti. Many argue that this development would lead to the displacement of thousands of households in the area. The local governments and state-level government of the Miami metro region continue to prioritize the needs of developers who often don't reside in the area, over the region's communities (Banchin, 2020).

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