

and political and drug-related violence in Jamaica, its challenge to the dominance of creole multiracial nationalism has also generated a resurgence of crisis-oriented discourse. Nevertheless, modern blackness itself constitutes a crisis only for the maintenance of British colonial class and color hierarchies.

What the Jamaican case illustrates is that the context of anti-colonial struggle facilitated a hegemonic reorientation toward the nationalist state as the guarantor of increased democratic participation and as the symbol around which pride could be mobilized. In Jamaica, the multiracial harmony envisioned by mid-twentieth-century creole nationalists was upstaged, during the 1990s, by an unapologetic blackness. Urban sound system dances have stolen the limelight from rural Jamaicans' "folk" forms as Jamaican bodies—still racialized, still classed, still gendered—keep step with global time.

Hanging national development upon the hook of a creolized unity, then, is to chase a phantom. If the transcendent unity envisioned at independence has not fundamentally transformed colonial color, class, cultural and

gender hierarchies some forty years later, can we not give up the ghost? Modern blackness chiefly challenges the subordination of black people—politically, socially, economically, culturally—that was established during slavery, *persisted throughout* the creole nationalist era and has been *reestablished*, though in somewhat different ways, by globalization, privatization and structural adjustment policies.

Popular culture is not transcendently resistant, and both globalization and nationalism are clearly Janus-faced. On one hand, popular culture productions like dancehall have the potential to generate transformative visions and are spaces through which alternative norms are developed. On the other hand, by engaging, appropriating and resignifying dominant cultural—and to a degree political and economic—practices, poor and working-class Jamaicans have aspired to a modernity of their own making within the context of their own history. Rather than seeing this engagement as false consciousness, assimilation or passive acquiescence to the hegemony of neoliberal capitalist globalization, then, we must see it as laying claim to an as yet unfulfilled promise. ■

## Miami: Images of a Latinopolis

by George Yúdice

**B**ACK IN THE MID-1960S, WHEN I WAS APPLYING to colleges, the University of Miami had a reputation for majors in basket weaving and volleyball. Miami itself was known for its retirement communities, spring break beach parties and bargain vacationing. Back then if there was something definitely not associated with Miami, it was "culture." The city was perceived as lacking culture in three senses: the institutional one of museums, concert halls and the like; the more everyday sense of community cultures (ethnic cultures, cuisines, festivals, etc.); and the culture and creative industries (music recording, television, fashion, design).

This image has changed radically. Miami is now considered a "Hollywood East" or

"Hollywood Latin America," due in large part to the media and entertainment industries dedicated to Latin American and U.S. Latino markets. These provide the visuals and the soundtrack to the city's more economically and demographically based slogan: "Gateway of the Americas." To be sure, the change is much more than cosmetic; Miami is a "world city" in the mid-level company of cities like Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Geneva, Montreal, Shanghai, Taipei and Washington. Its inclusion in this category is due to the concentration of command-and-control headquarters for banks and transnational corporations and the concomitant critical mass of complementary advanced producer services—particularly accounting,

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## REPORT ON RACE, PART 3

advertising, banking and law.<sup>1</sup> Although these services are found in all cities, sociologist Saskia Sassen notes that only in advanced “postindustrial production sites” do we find the innovations in services that play “a specific role in the current phase of the world economy.”<sup>2</sup>

Its standing as a world city is also borne out by Miami-Dade’s ranking as fifth in the world among telecommunications centers, which enables it to be the gateway for 60% of all U.S. trade with Central America, 46% with the Caribbean and 27% with South America. In fact, Miami’s Free Trade Zone is the world’s largest privately owned and operated foreign trade zone, reflecting the increasing centrality of cities vis-à-vis nation-states in setting the terms of global trade.<sup>3</sup> Much of this economic activity takes place in the services sector, but it is important to recognize that this is a bifurcated sector, with the highly educated and well-paid professionals at one end and the miserably paid, working poor at the other end. The demographic transformation of Miami, particularly since the late 1980s, tends to be portrayed in this confusing image of the city. It is projected either as a city of successful Latin(o) American entrepreneurs, professionals and celebrities (e.g. Ricky Martin, Shakira, Julio Iglesias), or as a city of destitute immigrants, frequently bearing a Haitian face. Indeed, diaspora in Miami can be inflected in either direction, depending on the ideological aim of the projection. On the one hand it is celebrated as a successful multicultural Latino-infused culture that presumably wields power. On the other hand, the emphasis is on a critique of the power relations that relegate the majority to dire living and working conditions. (According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Miami was the poorest large U.S. city, with almost 28% of residents below the poverty line.)<sup>4</sup>

The confusion or contradiction implicit in the image of a city comprised of either affluent or destitute diasporic groups has material consequences as cities attempt to attract tourists and advanced producer industries. As in Bilbao, Spain, cities are boosting their image and seeking international recognition by commissioning remarkable iconic buildings and cultural/entertainment centers, and linking them to their business and natural amenities.<sup>5</sup> According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), tourism is the world’s largest employer and now accounts for 35% of global services exports.

It takes both ends of the spectrum—service professionals and workers—to support the image and tourism industries, yet projections of city life and ethno-racial belonging tend to be drawn exclusively from the upper level of service professionals. Absent from these glossy projected official representations are those who do the drab domestic

work, office maintenance or the intensive labor involved in restaurants and bars that nevertheless give urban life in prosperous areas their luster. In contrast to this luster, most academic writers on urban development and immigration in Miami chronicle ethno-racial strife among whites, Cubans, African-Americans and, more recently, Haitians. But whether we look to the image-spinning boosters of so-called creative cities or the academics and critical journalists who write about urban poverty, Miami’s diasporic communities remain the central protagonists of the story.

Sociologist Manuel Castells has argued that creative cities are those in which there are “life-giving” activities, adding that “alongside technological innovation, extraordinary levels of urban activity have mushroomed ... fortifying the social fabric of bars, restaurants, chance encounters on the street, etc. that give life to a place.” Enhancing the quality of life in this way enables a city to attract and retain the innovators indispensable to the new “creative economy.”<sup>6</sup> Talk of Latinos “giving life” to Miami is part of the multicultural rhetoric emanating from the press and image industries. The following excerpt about Miami from the July/August 2003 issue of *Hispanic Magazine* is emblematic:

This multicultural metropolis has got it all. A thriving Latino community, a strong job market, good schools, striking streetscapes, and a voice that’s loud and clear across the country.... More than 150 U.S. and multinational companies have their Latin American headquarters there.... There are also the posh beach sections nearby which have become home to movie stars, bikini models, and fashionistas. And, a group of chefs known as the Mango Gang started Miami’s New World Cuisine and a style of cooking filled with sultry savor.... There are countless Hispanic heritage festivals, film series where you can catch the work of the most recent Latin immigrants, museums, dance clubs, social events, Carnival in March, and enjoy other nights out. Whatever you want to call it—the new New York, the American Casablanca—it’s simply a city bursting with flavor.

The entertainment and tourism industries have become major players in Miami, and they are at the heart of these “life-giving” activities. Charles Landry, a leading authority on urban development and culture, writes: “Culture provides insight, and so [it] has many impacts; it is the prism through which urban development should be seen. The cultural industries, hotbeds of creativity, are significant



Filming of the Spanish-language television dance show "Caliente" in Miami Beach.

economic sectors in their own right and employ between 3-5 percent of the workforce in world cities such as London and New York or Milan and Berlin.<sup>7</sup>

Miami's cultural policies—both official and de facto—can be considered indicative of current writing on creative economies programs: culture breeds innovation, which, in turn, produces economic growth. This scenario was precisely the one sought by the city government of Miami Beach, which created a "Liaison for the Entertainment Industry" in its Economic Development Division, thus bridging culture and economics.<sup>8</sup> This office considers the arts, media and entertainment industries—especially music, television, Internet portals, fashion photography and arts institutions—as the major economic engines of Miami. Initially located in the city to take advantage of both Latin American and U.S. Latino markets, these industries have also amassed cohorts of cultural workers who have taken an interest in Miami itself and have begun to transform the city. This transformation is part of an internationalization rendering Miami a post-Cuban, post-Caribbean city. But this internationalization is problematic, because the enthusiastic fusion of U.S. multiculturalism with Latin American *mestizaje*, while more encompassing than the traditional U.S. racial order, nevertheless intensifies historical inequalities, especially of black immigrants.

The most enthusiastic advocate for urban revitalization on the basis of diversity is Richard Florida, who claims, in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, that diversity, like other natural and cultural amenities, attracts innovators who contribute to the production of intellectual property rights, improving the dynamism of these cities in the so-called new information, knowledge and experience

economies. "You cannot get a technologically innovative place unless it's open to weirdness, eccentricity and difference," writes Florida.<sup>9</sup> Workers presumably settle in cities that offer the highest-paying jobs in their fields, but according to Florida, creative-class workers look for more tolerant places and diverse populations in addition to well-paying jobs. Diversity—the code word for racial and cultural differences—plays a central role in this analysis. Florida notes the presence of large numbers of gays and bohemians in the so-called creative cities, a point frequently made about Miami. Their presence, Florida argues, suggests that open-minded and diverse communities are attractive to software engineers and entrepreneurs. Of course, while discerning a supposedly new class, Florida seems to neglect the class position of the "diverse" populations, who tend to get displaced as the "creative class" gentrifies areas that were historically lower-class communities.<sup>10</sup> This is a recurring, serious tension in the dynamics between creative cities and racialized minority populations.

WAVES OF GENTRIFICATION ARE WASHING OVER MIAMI'S poorest neighborhoods, precisely those where the service workers of "life giving" activities reside. According to a real estate newsletter, the midtown area, where these neighborhoods are clustered, began changing "as creative types in search of inexpensive space and a culturally rich environment began relocating to there from the trendy Design District over the last five years. . . . The area is becoming an enclave for independent film, video and post-production facilities as well as modeling agencies."<sup>11</sup> As it currently stands, median family income in these neighborhoods—Allapattah, East Little Havana, Liberty City, Little Haiti, Overtown and Wynwood—is not even high enough to afford a zero-bedroom apartment.<sup>12</sup>

The redevelopment plan for Overtown, for example, claims the neighborhood's decay will be transformed with attractive areas for reinvestment—a change that should be lauded. But planners cite rents that will require an income significantly higher than the median income of neighborhood residents. One report states that "workforce housing" projects "aimed at working-class people" will require an annual income of \$36,000, when the median yearly income in Overtown is \$14,161.<sup>13</sup> Given the difficulty of

REPORT ON RACE, PART 3

current residents in Overtown and elsewhere to generate the income for the cheapest apartments, it seems unlikely that they will be able to remain in an upgraded real estate market like the one depicted in the artistic renderings of developers.

The centerpiece of the Overtown Redevelopment Plan is the Promenade, where a bustling after-hours club scene has already taken root. The Plan describes the Promenade as a “24-hour environment where people can



Americans.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this is because of all the U.S. cities—indeed, of all the cities in the Americas—Miami is the only one from which a generalized international Latin identity is possible.

The internationalization of Latin identity is even taking place in the music industry, despite the fact that in many respects two music worlds continue to exist side by side, especially in their administrative aspects. On one side is the U.S. Latino (and the aspired-to crossover) market,

characterized mostly by Latin pop and salsa—Gloria Estefan, Jon Secada, Albita and a host of other Latino singers from elsewhere produced in Miami. On the other side is the Latin American market, which is largely managed out of Miami. But these two worlds do communicate and thus create an important source of hybridization between the North and the South, between Latinos and Latin Americans.

And together they are producing a range of international megastars like Ricky Martin, Shakira and Enrique Iglesias, in addition to mainstays like Julio Iglesias. Even the space and physical attributes of Miami have a

An artist's rendering of the Promenade envisioned by the Overtown Redevelopment Plan.

role in this transformation: its skyline, upscale areas, and beaches have become settings, just as they were for “Miami Vice” and the fashion photography industry. Similar to the already mentioned academic boosters of cultural revitalization, the Plan seeks to transform the area into a “celebrated place” of street culture, ethnicity, and artistic diversity. This vibrant street life is what makes city living attractive, exciting and decidedly different from a passive suburban lifestyle.”<sup>14</sup> The developers’ rendering of the Promenade makes quite evident the middle-class, largely white, albeit multiculturally decorated space. What is not clear is how people from Overtown, Little Haiti or Little Havana will be able to inhabit these spaces.

Analogous to the redevelopment plans of Miami’s poorer areas is the entertainment industry’s representations of “the good life” for Latin(o) Americans living in Miami: the expensive homes and cars, the shops, the nightlife and the glitz of it all. Viewers of talk shows like “Cristina” can see a parade of celebrities who live in Miami or spend time filming or recording in the city’s studios. Curiously, the poor on Spanish-language TV are elsewhere, in Peru, as in the talk show “Laura,” a Jerry Springer-esque carnival of hardship, tears and bad taste. But the humdrum world of work in Miami is absent on the TV screen and in the salsa hits or pop ballads. There is no trace of the everyday life of busing tables, sweeping floors, emptying bed pans, taking care of the middle class’ kids or delivering meals; no one is shown having to travel further and further to work each year as families get displaced from downtown to cheaper northern neighborhoods like North Miami and North Miami Beach.

As shown by the redevelopment plans and the entertainment industries, Miami claims to incorporate its heterogeneous populations, but there are considerable ethnic

**WHAT WE SEE IN MIAMI’S REDEVELOPMENT PLANS IS A physical, urban replication of the *telenovela*, the most cherished of TV genres among Latin Americans and Latinos. Although once the exclusive product of capital cities in Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, for the past five years telenovelas have been produced prolifically in Miami. As Daniel Mato convincingly argues, Miami has become a crucial site for the construction of a transnational Hispanicness, an almost necessary function as its media industries mediate between U.S. Latinos and Latin**

conflicts over access to jobs and bias in immigration policy. The tendency of culture—particularly, Latin culture—and economy to merge, embodied in the entertainment industry itself, provides the bicultural and bilingual professional class in Miami immense opportunities. But this transformation is likely to exacerbate the subordination of certain immigrant populations, such as Haitians and other non-Spanish speaking groups, particularly if they are black. Moreover, of the Cubans and Haitians who survive the harrowing journey to Miami's shores, only the former get to stay. The Elián González affair only heightened this difference, leading Haitians and many other observers to suspect racism at work.

A Caribbean Jonkonnu band parading through Ocean Drive in Miami.



THE MULTICULTURALISM BEING SHOWCASED IS NOT THAT OF the poor and working classes, but of the professionals and middle classes that get to enjoy the gentrification of the city. Some argue that Miami is adopting a typical Latin American discourse of “racial democracy,” whereby Latinness is inclusive of all races and classes except for blacks.<sup>16</sup> Contrary to denials by Cubans and Cuban-Americans that they harbor any racism or color prejudice, many scholars of race relations readily point to the fact that dark-skinned Cubans continue to occupy the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder in both Cuba and Miami.<sup>17</sup> An article published a few years ago on two immigrant friends from Cuba, one black and one white, detailed how they were each incorporated into separate communities based on their color. The story brought home the point that racial differentiation is greater in Miami than in Cuba, perhaps because of accommodation to the U.S. model of ethnic competition and identity politics.<sup>18</sup> Their story also belies the claims to color-blindness that abound among Latin Americans.

Latin American claims to color-blindness are founded on the myth of the racial “melting pot” or *mestizaje*. National identity in many Latin American countries since the late 1920s and early 1940s was premised on a cultural citizenship identified with a racially hybrid subject. Fernando Ortiz, Cuba’s best-known scholar of Afro-Cuban culture, advocated the abandonment of the concept of race in favor of the notion of “transculturation.”<sup>19</sup> In countries where this transculturated, *mestizo* identity was accepted by whites and most racially mixed people, blacks found it difficult to make claims for equal treatment on the basis of race and were often

accused of racism for even raising the issue. A Latin American equivalent of U.S. normative whiteness, *mestizaje* presumably included everyone as a member of the nation, but not necessarily as a beneficiary of the privileges of citizenship. It is for this reason that in the case of Miami, claims to citizenship based on culture, which have been prevalent in cultural studies, should be reconsidered. It is clear that the entertainment, tourism and redevelopment industries have absorbed and profited from this discourse of cultural citizenship. Despite all the developments in this latter area, it seems obvious that a more classic understanding of citizenship is needed, one that avoids the easy incorporation of multicultural celebration into exploitative labor practices and redevelopment schemes for the wealthy.

Many immigrants are willing to work for lower wages, even below the minimum wage, thus undermining the work of unions, like the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which has been waging an indefatigable campaign to strengthen the rights of condo workers in Miami. Ninety percent of these workers are Hispanic, with some Haitian and African-Americans.<sup>20</sup> These are the workers who will no longer be able to live in the neighborhoods they moved to when they arrived to Miami. It may seem like a stretch, but if the Ricky Martins of Miami could go off to Thailand to visit and comfort tsunami victims, he and his multicultural celebrity compatriots should be able to extend their solidarity to their nearby neighbors and fellow migrants who are suffering under the crudest forms of exploitation. They owe it to them—for as Castells, Florida and other promoters of creative cities explain, they provide the life of the party. ■

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**Miami: Images of a Latinopolis**

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