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FIVE THINGS WE LEARNED ON THE EMERGING CITY BIKE RIDE

Posted April 13, 2015 by Bethany Platanela

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Miami is an eclectic mix of different cultures, languages, foods, opinions, architectural styles, and colors. Even the smell of Little Havana is drastically different than that of South Beach. At any given point we can travel to Haiti, Cuba, or Argentina, without ever leaving the city.

Enter the Emerging New City Bike Tour, which aimed to highlight development projects in Coconut Grove and Little Havana, but was even more successful in showing outsiders a new insider's view of this vibrant city.

Group leader Brian Lemmerman reminds us that there is so much more to a city than what people initially see, saying, "So many different people with so many different stories, so many different circumstances, places, histories, we could spend our entire lives learning" the truth behind Miami.

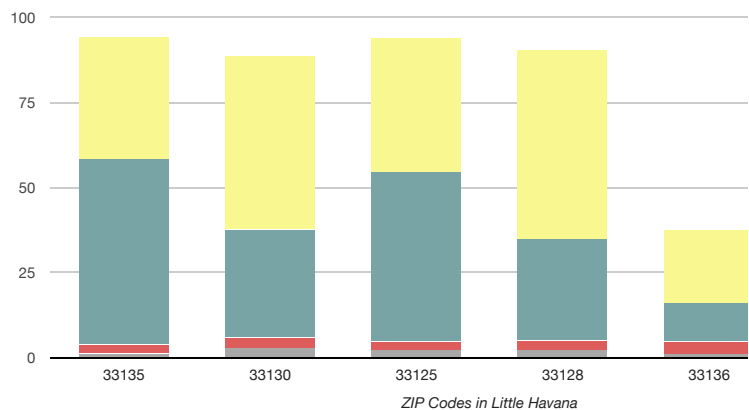
Almost 40 riders set out to learn more on Saturday afternoon. Starting at Bayfront Park, representatives from Celebrate Diversity Miami, The New Tropic, and Emerge Miami, as well as community-based partners from Coconut Grove's Collaborative Development Corp. and Little Havana Tours, led us through a fascinating journey of Miami's past and its future.

LITTLE HAVANA IS NO LONGER A CUBAN NEIGHBORHOOD AS MUCH AS IT IS A LATIN ENCLAVE.

While roughly 40 percent of Little Havana's inhabitants are of Cuban descent, the remainder of the population is now a mix of Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, and more recently, Mexican people. The neighborhood retains its Cuban influence despite the introduction of new cultures through Calle Ocho, the tourism and arts district. Cuban restaurants, Domino Park, Cuban Memorial Park, and the sacred Ceiba tree are well-known landmarks here. However, even what once was

a traditionally Cuban block party, the Calle Ocho Festival, is now more well known for its eclectic display of international flags, latin music, and various Central and South American dishes.

Hispanic identities in Little Havana Zip Codes



Source: *American Community Survey, 2013* (<http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>)

PROBLEMS AND PROMISE IN EAST LITTLE HAVANA

The Central American working class make up the bulk of the population east of Calle Ocho. With so little government aid and attention to this area, residents living in East Little Havana are suffering greatly. Slum lords and illegal dumping are two striking issues, tour guides said. The dumping has gotten so bad that one Miami resident documents the neglect through an Instagram account called *Sofas of Little Havana* (<https://instagram.com/SofasOfLittleHavana>). The photos track sofas and trash that are being left on the streets. On the bright side, new restaurants and art galleries are finding refuge in this part of town, bringing with them advocates for social change. The *6th Street Dance Studio* (<http://www.6th-streetdancestudio.org/#1>) in particular aims to battle “racism, sexism, classism, and all other forms of small mindedness” through art, music, and dance.

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MIAMI GIRL POWER STARTED WITH A MIGRANT FROM ELEUTHERA

The first African Bahamian woman to settle in Coconut Grove, Mariah Brown is also one of the first *women* to ever buy property in Miami. After migrating from Eleuthera to Key West in the 1880s in search of opportunity and better wages, Brown began her life in America as a washerwoman. It was here that she met Charles and Isabella Peacock, who offered her a job at their inn. Brown relocated with her three daughters to Coconut Grove, a traditionally Bahamian enclave. She worked in Peacock Inn and saved enough money to buy a small plot of land, upon which she built a house. The land cost her \$50. Today, [the house is still standing \(http://www.historicpreservationmiami.com/brown.html\)](http://www.historicpreservationmiami.com/brown.html), but in desperate need of restoration. Plans are in the works to revamp the house into a Bahamian history museum.

The Mariah Brown House in Coconut Grove. [Wikimedia Commons/AlexF \(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conch_house#/media/File:Mariah_Brown_House_Grand3298.jpg\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conch_house#/media/File:Mariah_Brown_House_Grand3298.jpg)

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND COMMUNITY INTERESTS COLLIDE?

Sure, the Mariah Brown house is a landmark. The street on which the house stands, Charles Avenue, is even considered a "historic corridor." So why are plans to restore and preserve the home so shaky?

While seemingly a good thing, current residents of Charles Avenue may not be able to afford the increase in property value that inevitably comes with historically preserved neighborhoods. That's why advocates chose to preserve only the corridor, and not the neighborhood. The Mariah Brown house sits on a plot of land that is not preserved, meaning the lobby for restoration funds has to start separately, and from scratch.

A MORE INCLUSIVE MODEL FOR REDEVELOPMENT.

A determined group of advocates for change, the [CDC in Coconut Grove \(http://www.cdc-florida.org/\)](http://www.cdc-florida.org/) has projects rolling forward to preserve neighborhood and respect its residents. From the Village West Housing project, a development of 30 single family homes to be built over 6 vacant lots, to revitalization of the Coconut Grove Playhouse, this nonprofit is working with community-based organizations, religious, and financial institutions to revitalize the area and attract new investment while ensuring that residents get new opportunities from redevelopment. They're working on an initiative to transform both private and public vacant lots into [Urban Edible gardens \(http://www.cdc-florida.org/urban-edible-gardens/\)](http://www.cdc-florida.org/urban-edible-gardens/) for residents. Recent success stories include the designation of Charles Avenue as a historic corridor, and the development of a Black Heritage historical tour.

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