

The Miami Times

Cyclists confront stigmas with ride through Black communities

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Bikers ride 12 miles, stopping through Overtown, Liberty City and Little Haiti, for Emerge Miami's 100th bike ride.

Bikers ride by a Liberty City bus-stop in a blur. Young men on the block stare blankly at the scene.

It's not every day that outsiders decisively visit some of Miami's most notable Black neighborhoods. But on a recent Saturday about 150 cyclists convened at Government Center in downtown Miami before going into Overtown, Liberty City and Little Haiti.

For many, it would be the first time they had ever stepped foot into these areas.

"The general analysis are they are all really dangerous – that's what the news said," said Hector Serratos, originally from Mexico, now a nine-year resident of Miami.

The bike tour was organized by a social group called Emerge Miami, which invited cyclists to its celebratory 100th bike ride through some of Miami's most misunderstood communities.

Adam Schachner, of Emerge Miami, said he chose a trip through Overtown, Liberty City and Little Haiti to inspire conversations.

"These are communities that are important for us as well. I'm looking forward to not just going on a bike ride but engaging in an ongoing dialogue," Schachner said.

He sent bikers off on a megaphone as a long wave of bicycles lined several lanes of Northeast First Avenue, moving up the downtown streets and into Overtown. Their bike tires were silent against the hum of the Metromover overhead.

OVERTOWN

Their first stop: Dana A. Dorsey Park, where Terrance Cribbs-Larrant, of the youth organization Urgent Inc., waited for them.

A mural of Negro-league baseball players towered over the cyclists who were welcomed onto the lawn of the park. The sun shined down equally on head and helmet and Cribbs-Larrant noted Overtown landmarks Lyric Theater, Jackson's Soul Food Restaurant, Moore's grocery and LJ's meat market. Then he declared visitors honorary Towners for life, encouraging them not to neglect Miami's communities.

"You've just become a historic part of Overtown," Cribbs-Larrant said. "Do not let society dictate onto our people that we are divided. We are together."

Biker Sherry White said it was great to find new restaurants to try and a cool mobile app called Dorsey Detector, in Overtown.

"It was neat to see the very beautiful parks that they've put in. I wasn't expecting that. I think that's really good for the community – and the artwork," White said.

LIBERTY CITY

Next up, was Liberty City. Riders nicked their kickstands and were off, wheels spinning past Allapattah and Brownsville to the neighborhood recently blasted on television and in newspaper headlines for a mass shooting involving teenagers. The incident in Liberty City didn't deter bikers, although the event was the main reason they were in the neighborhood.

Sebastian Rusk of Little Havana said he's tired of uneven media coverage of certain neighborhoods in Miami.

"Shootings happen in Kendall. Shootings happen in Coral Gables. Shootings happen in Gables by the Sea. Shootings unfortunately happen everywhere," said the life-time Miami resident. "So to single out or stereotype an area because of one happening in my opinion makes no sense. Not in 2014. Not ever really."

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