PEOPLE

Miami's changing. Where do you fit in?

LATEST UPDATE: JUNE 20, 2016
BY ROSHAN NEBHRAJANI

Richard Florida, who's made a career of thinking and writing about how to make cities more awesome, spends a lot of time thinking about Miami.

The globetrotter has chosen Toronto and Miami as his home bases, and in his latest study he drops knowledge about how Miami can be more creative and inclusive (read: not segregated by income or race) and how that boosts our economy. (Which, despite all the glitzy condos, is struggling.)

The gist of it is that Florida thinks Miami is at a turning point. His study — which you can read here or in the recaps by WLRN, Miami Herald, and the Miami New Times — lays out 10 opportunities to put it on the right track.

That left us with some questions about where we fit into that grand vision. What role can we play at a time of big change? Is Miami a city for millennials, young families, or retirees? (Or all three?) What happens to South Florida natives when the new yuppies (aka creatives) arrive? Why shouldn't we be high-tailing it to higher ground? We asked Florida to break it down.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Your report talks a lot about building a creative class, and how Miami in the last few years is shifting away from tourism, hospitality, transportation, and real estate development and is slowly diversifying — with industries like banking, media, arts, education, and technology.

While this is true, many creatives still seem to hit a ceiling, a point where they can't move up creatively and have to go elsewhere. ([We wrote about it here](#).) How can we remove this Miami ceiling, and make Miami a place where creatives are nurtured and want to stay?

I lived in Pittsburgh for 20 years, so I lived this every single day. When I taught at Carnegie Mellon, the best students would leave. We had an incredible music and drama program, and they would try to stay, but then they would leave. But you look at Pittsburgh now, and it's turning the corner. It takes time.

Miami has been a kind of intellectually backward place for a long time. I mean, we just have to be honest about that. The appeal used to be you came to have fun, go to the beach, go to nightclubs. It wasn't a place you could be seen as smart.

A couple things have happened since then.But look, no matter who you are, you're going to lose people to New York, L.A., and London. They're the world's magnets for creative industries.

A word I like isn't brain drain, it's brain circulation. Brain circulation through these great events like Art Basel, the Food and Wine Festival, and Emerge, that bring people here for a short time … Miami seems to get a real spin off of these events. The Food and Wine Festival helps build the food scene. Art Basel builds the arts and cultural scene.

One model I really like is the New World Symphony, I think it's brilliant. They decided they wanted to build a place for new classical music so they attract people on these fellowships, and they bring the best conductors, some of whom come for a number of years, some of whom only come for a month. But they all come to Miami. You circulate brains in and out which is the key to Miami's future.

But it's going to take time. It really does take a generation or two to turn around an economy.

Time can be a tough thing for people actually living through the growing pains. What advice do you have for young creatives who live here and love it, but sometimes feel frustrated by the bottleneck?

My advice is do what's best for you. I wrote a book called "Who's your city?" that says you need to pick a place that optimizes your life. In that book, I said you have three big moves:

1. You have a move that comes after college which positions you for success in your career but also your dating network and your friend groups.

2. You have a move that comes when you have kids, and you think about what's best for your family.
3. Then you have the move when you're an empty nester.

I think for any young person you have to think about what is the place that optimizes your career. Patience only gets you so far. Go to the place that awards you the most opportunity. But the great thing about brain circulation is that you're not stuck there. You get to pick again.

Our highest rate of mobility is in our mid-20s and then it goes straight down. A young person in their mid-20s is three to five times more likely than someone in their 50s to move. That means the places that attract young people in their 20s have an advantage.

Miami now is attracting people in their 30s and 40s who may have gone to New York, L.A., or London and are facing extraordinarily high housing costs. So, Miami now is beginning to see an influx of younger people who are at that family formation stage who say I can have a house — and it's not cheap here but it's way cheaper than New York, San Francisco, or L.A. — I can have a business, I can have a quality of life here. And it's warm and sunny.
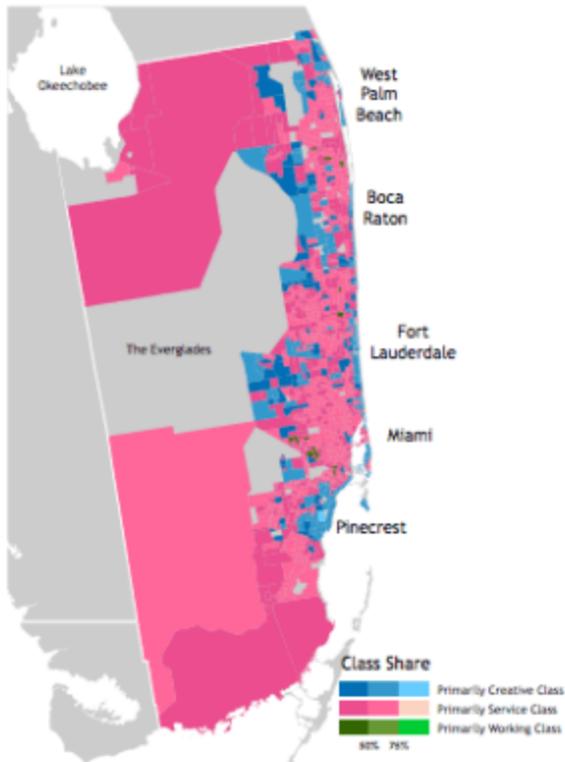
That's why I like the idea of brain circulation. We're not going to get everyone at every stage, Maybe we're still going to lose the best and the brightest of your generation but we can offer a lot of options for people to come here at different parts of their lives.

How do you get young people to connect to their city?

I asked Jane Jacobs [an author and urbanist who is best known for her book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," a hugely influential book about why cities fail or succeed], who was my mentor, and she said "You and I can't plan this Richard, ask them." So go to the university campuses tomorrow and ask: "What are the ways we can connect you, what are the things you'd like to see?" Organize the young professionals, millennials, and creatives and ask them. Identify that target groups and make sure they help inform those pathways.
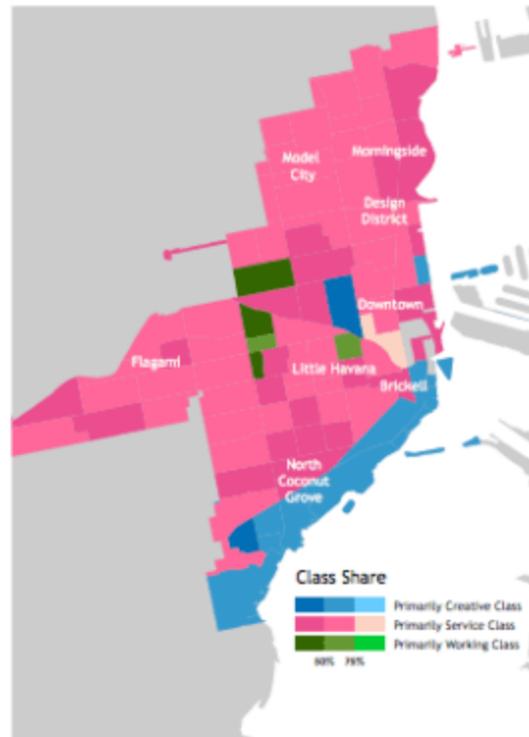
When we talk about economic development and business development, what do we do? We go out and talk about attracting and retaining good businesses. One of the cornerstones of my work is creating a people climate. We need talent and people attraction and retention. So how do you do that? You talk to the groups you want to attract and retain.
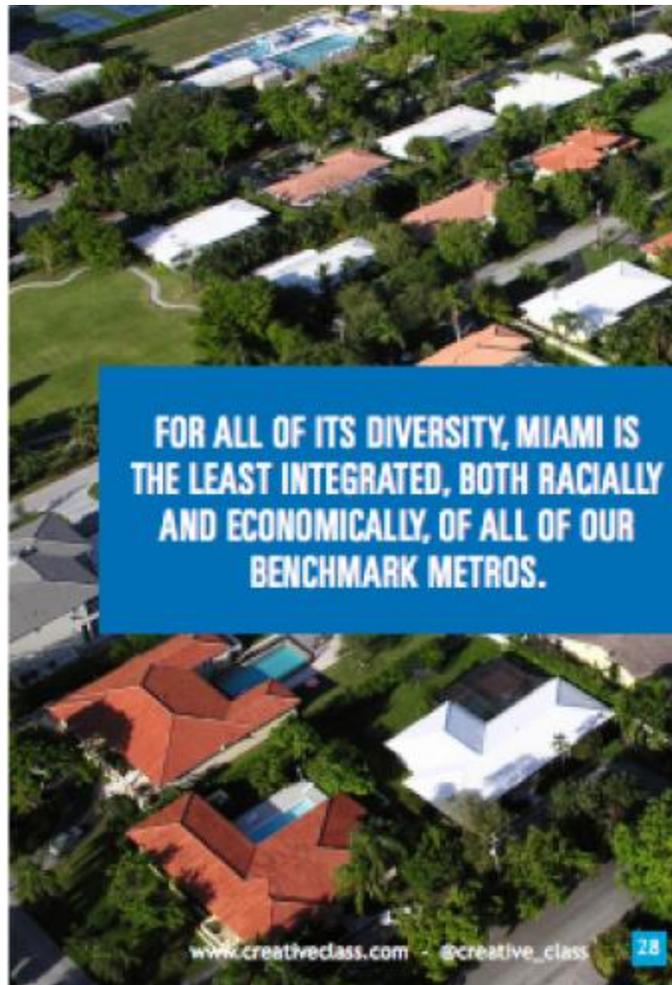
Figure 13: Greater Miami Divided

Lake Okeechobee

West Palm Beach

Boca Raton

The Everglades

Fort Lauderdale

Miami

Pinecrest

Class Share
Primarily Creative Class
Primarily Service Class
Primarily Working Class
60% 75%

Source: Martin Prosperity Institute 2015

Figure 14: City of Miami Divided

Model City

Morningside

Design District

Downtown

Flagami

Little Havana

Brickell

North Coconut Grove

Class Share
Primarily Creative Class
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creative class group   FIU

FOR ALL OF ITS DIVERSITY, MIAMI IS THE LEAST INTEGRATED, BOTH RACIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY, OF ALL OF OUR BENCHMARK METROS.

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If we attract and retain all of these new people, some people are bound to get pushed out. How do you grow a creative class without gentrifying and displacing?

Miami's already facing gentrification. Secondly, it's traffic congested. When a place is popular and people start flowing in where are they going to go? What happens when you have those two things together?

Miami still has a lot of space to build. There's a lot of buildings that can be renovated and a lot of space to create housing. We're not quite at the point of New York, San Francisco, or Boston.

We have to work with not just creative organizations or business organizations or the chamber, we need to work with community organizations now. How do we make sure that the community-based and community development organizations have a seat at the table? What we don't want is massive displacement of all of these groups that are going to be pushed aside as Miami becomes even more of an economic and creative city.

That's why we titled our report towards an *inclusive* and creative city. We need to be thinking now about affordable housing.

You've made the point that a lot of this change will take time. With sea level rise, time's not exactly on our side. The Miami we know today might be drastically different in a generation or two. How are your findings affected by that?

I'm not an expert on climate change, and sea level rise but I know the two cities in the world that are most at risk, because they're big cities with a lot of capital, are New York City and Miami.

If you look around the world, most great cities were coastal cities, because coastal cities were the centers of trade. They were places people migrated. So I don't think we're all going to go inland to cities that are protected. Look at where our population centers are, New York, Boston. I grew up in New York, did I ever think it would get hit by a hurricane? Never in my wildest dreams.

In L.A. and San Francisco there are risks of earthquakes and fire.

So we have amassed our populations in the United States and in the world in places where there's the highest risks, and we just have to work it out.

The cities most at risk are our most important and cities that need to mitigate at a global level. The thing that really bothers me in the United States, is that we haven't invested enough in our infrastructure. You see in in Miami, we haven't invested enough in transit, in high speed rail, in our bridges, in flood mitigation, and dealing with climate change. And that's something we need to do.

I don't think Miami's going to go away, I'm not a doom sayer. Miami's going to figure out a way to survive. Cities are resilient places. I know I'm not going anywhere.