


1945

Book review: Economic Pattern of a Resort Area

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BOOK REVIEWS

Miami: Economic Pattern of a Resort Area. By Reinhold Paul Wolff. University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, 1945. 172 p. charts and tables.

This is an interesting study of an interesting area. Probably no city has mushroomed into the attention of the American people, or even the world at large, more speedily than has Miami. Certainly none has been the subject of more fantastic and extravagant claims. Dr. Wolff, who is Associate Professor of Economics of the University of Miami, dissects this "glamour girl" with penetration and thoroughness, and the result is more arresting than the exaggerated version.

"The greatest asset of a frontier land is people South Florida is such a frontier land, still almost devoid of people". Yet Miami has been one of the fastest growing metropolitan districts in the United States. From 1920 to 1940 its population increased from 42,000 to 267,000. As this human tide rises-and there seems to be no way to stop it even if the inhabitants so desired-the problem of achieving and preserving a balanced community is paramount. Florida air and sunshine encourage the city to spread in all directions rather than coop its residents into "blocks of steel and cement". No hindrance is offered this expansion by a hinterland of settlement. Miami's enormous size, pinned on the southeastern seaboard, is without supporting back country.

The city has a distinctive social pattern. It is topheavy with proprietors and managers, salesmen, clerical help, and service workers. At the same time, laborers, farm workers, and operatives are scarce. Since Miami is the gateway of the great inter-

American area, the author believes that the forty million Caribbean people provide a potential labor reservoir of significance. Miami is a great sales area and distributing hub, not the least of whose salable goods is vacations for tourists. From this fact results the seasonal quality of economic life which tends to hamper its potentiality for industry and distorts price levels. The author points out ways of overcoming this hurdle ; the expansion of commercial aviation, both passenger and freight with its attendant services, inducements to residents to remain all-year in their homes, and the promotion of year-round occupations and businesses.

The resort character of Miami may be estimated in terms of its hotel and amusement industries, its service trade, and tremendous retail business. Retailing, real estate, and transportation, in the order named, account for the three largest items of income. Believe it or not, amusements provided only four percent of Dade county's revenue in 1940, the last prewar year. It is difficult to determine accurate figures for tourism because so much of it merges with the general population and makes use of the same services. "Visitor" includes all seasonal residents, travellers, and migrant labor. On this basis about 750,000 persons visited Miami in the year before the war, 1940. The number of arrivals is far less important, however, than the number of days they stay. This is estimated at ten days. The typical tourist family does not spend over ten dollars a day. Their dollar may be divided as follows : housing thirty percent, eating and drinking twenty-nine percent, amusement's ten percent, shopping ten percent, services eight percent, personal services eight percent, gasoline five percent.

The author refutes the assertion that Miami is a millionaires' haven. He supports his conclusion from income figures and home construction estimates. The lavish spending of the "upper ten", depicted in the Sunday supplements, he insists does not represent the real city.

Will Miami become a great port and industrial center? Its people are divided on the desirability of such a course and, besides, there are handicaps. For example, transportation is costly compared with other industrial areas, the port facilities need enlargement, labor is not numerous and raw materials are scarce. Today Miami's imports and exports are largely by air and are thus small in comparison with well established ports such as New Orleans and Houston; it is also the least industrialized metropolitan district of the United States. The writer contends that greater industrial growth will gradually take place, especially in light "smokeless" industries. He also has strong faith in the future inter-American prominence of the region.

Illustrating the text are a goodly number of excellent and arresting charts. An extensive appendix gives much additional statistical data. There might well have been more bibliographical references, inasmuch as a large part of the discussion is fairly technical. However, Professor Wolff has done a distinctive job. He has answered some questions and raised many others in the minds of his readers. He gives a more realistic view of Miami than is usually offered. Other cities in Florida would profit by similar investigations.

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