

Freedom Tower panel will showcase Miami's transformation as a global city

[BY SARAH MORENO](#)

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The panel "Miami, Becoming the Magic City", will focused on the transformation of the city of Miami and includes author Carlos Alberto Montaner, architect Raúl L. Rodríguez and CEO of The Related Group Jorge Pérez and Miami Herald's Pedro Portal. BY [PEDRO PORTAL](#)

When it was built in 1928, the 28-story Miami-Dade courthouse, where the gangster Al Capone once stood trial, was the tallest in downtown. Today, the Panorama Tower in Brickell is the city's tallest, ascending 85 stories.

What happened from 1928 to 2017, when the Panorama was completed, is part of a complex transformation that turned Miami into a global city with buildings designed by top architects such as I.M. Pei and Zaha Hadid.

But at the same time, Miami's foreign investors have made the city far too expensive for many of its residents, who are being displaced from "paradise."

The contributions of exiles and immigrants who have been arriving for the past 60 years, as well as the city's new economic reality, will be among the issues to be discussed at "Miami, Becoming the Magic City," a chat Thursday that will launch the series, Exile Today.

The conversations with community leaders in business, the arts, sciences and entertainment seek to add an interactive element to The Exile Experience, one of the three special collections housed in Miami Dade College's Freedom Tower.

That tower, built in 1925 by the architectural firm of Schultz and Weaver, was the home of Miami's first newspaper, the Miami News, and later the *refugio*, the first processing point for Cuban exiles who arrived in the 1960s. It is a U.S. National Historic Monument.

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/downtown-miami/article236838278.html>

Thursday's conversation about the impact of Cuban exiles on Miami will be moderated by Carlos Alberto Montaner, a well-known author who helped to select the panelists.

Among those on the panel: Jorge Pérez, developer, arts patron and philanthropist; architect Raul Rodríguez; and Miami Herald and Nuevo Herald photojournalist Pedro Portal.

"The transformation of Miami is constant, fast and in a way imperceptible," said Portal, who will present photos of Miami today and decades ago.

Natalia Crujeiras, director of cultural affairs at Miami Dade College, said the goal is to recognize the different groups who have helped establish Miami's cultural and political framework.

"The programming of The Exile Experience will be focused on Cuban exiles, but we don't want to ignore other diasporas. We want it to reflect the community where we live," she said.

Rodríguez, who arrived in the first wave of exiles, said Cubans played an important role in integrating the city, which six decades ago was segregated.

"The federal reforms that promoted desegregation in this country coincided with the arrival of the first Cuban exiles. We came from a society with prejudices, but not segregated according to the color of the skin," he said. "The first exiles belonged to Cuba's middle class, and transplanting it meant putting a fertile seed on new soil."

For Crujeiras, the panel will be a way to review the transformation of Miami from beach resort to a cosmopolitan city, and how exiles and immigrants have changed it over half a century.

"We will listen to stories of hard work and success by these people, but we also will see how the growth has a negative side, the displacement of people who can no longer pay their rent," she said.

IF YOU GO

Exile Today starts at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Freedom Tower, 600 Biscayne Blvd.



Natalia Crujeiras, executive director, cultural affairs for Miami Dade College. The college is launching Exile Today, an interdisciplinary lecture series that invites people to discuss the exile experience from a contemporary perspective. The first panel will be at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Freedom Tower, 600 Biscayne Blvd. PEDRO PORTAL PPORTAL@MIAMIHERALD.COM



View of Miami skyline. Miami Dade College is launching The Exile Experience, an interdisciplinary lecture series that invites people to discuss the exile experience from a contemporary perspective. The first panel discussion will be at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Freedom Tower, 600 Biscayne Blvd. PEDRO PORTAL PPORTAL@MIAMIHERALD.COM

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