

## **Citizen #1:**

Miami, a place once filled with palm trees, white sandy beaches, ritzy resorts and the aura of a tropical oasis. It was a place of extreme multiculturalism, fueled by its geographic location and the tourism industry that pumped billions into the local economy. As a kid, I remember to this day driving down South Beach, a place where you looked to the right and saw a football field worth of white sandy beach separating the street from the Atlantic Ocean. This view was classic Miami, a view that branded the city and made it such a distinguishable location. It was next to these beaches that high rise resorts were built, seemingly right on the beach. I will never forget these days, the days when Miami was the Miami portrayed on old television shows such as Miami Vice.

However, this was the old Miami. It is now 2040 and Miami has evolved. This evolution has been forced in light of global sea level rise, an epidemic that is destroying many coastal cities. In particular, Florida has been hit the hard. Floridian cities that dot the coast, such as Tampa and Jupiter are all facing catastrophic situations but the most noticeable is the “The Gateway to the Americas”, also known as Miami. Now surrounded by high sea walls, the classic Miami image is no more. I drive down South Beach to work now, and look to my right, only to see tall houses covering the views of the beach. Instead of hearing the laughter of children playing on the beach, seagulls squawking and vendors picking coconuts out of the trees, I smell and feel the ocean mist and hear the constant, ominous roar of the waves. This loss of pristine beach is directly correlated with the unprecedented financial hit our tourism industry has felt. These losses can be physically seen, as most of the “mom and pop” hotels Miami was oh so famous for are long gone. Many of the bars along South Beach, all of which were fueled by tourism are now either derelict or converted into some other type of business. Miami is not the same as it feels rather empty without a massive tourism industry. Many of my friends were tied to this sector and while a few are still employed within it, most were laid off with some finding new work and others leaving the area to start a new chapter in life. This is not the Miami I used to know.

As Miami evolved, so have its citizens. With the city surrounded by sea walls, we are protected from flooding in times of calm weather. However, with climate change, the weather has become rather unpredictable and the storms are of greater scale. The city is flooded all the time, even in the smallest of storms, preventing citizens from getting to work, essentially putting the city at a standstill. To make matters worse, the western part of the city, the side closest to mainland Florida, needs to be completely avoided in times of rough weather as the loss of natural buffers such as mangrove forests and marshes due to coastal development, erosion, and sea level rise have left it extremely vulnerable. This is why whenever it rains, I must carefully select my route.

The impact isn't just seen on a financial or city scale, it was also seen in the way us Miami citizens eat. With the rise in sea levels, the low lying Everglades and the surrounding areas have become almost completely swamped, decimating the local agriculture industry. About a century and a half ago, the people who settled this area built a massive network of farms on this

land and now, it seems as if nature is reclaiming it. Many of the crops grown in the Everglades helped feed not only Miami, but also the regions bordering it. These crops, such as oranges, tomatoes and corn were a staple, and kept local farmers markets and food stores stocked. Luckily, changes have been made using the dutch water management system and goods are being farmed again. I remember as a kid going to the local farmers market dotted with hundreds of stands with my parents, a place that displayed the agricultural might of the region, I missed it for a few years, but now it is mostly back.

While it may seem like the city has not been bracing for sea level rise, it has and some of its strategies have impacted the cleanliness of the city itself. In the 2010's, Miami's mayor introduced a bold program to mitigate the damage of sea level rise within the city (Letson, 2016). The plan was a three step solution, the first step consisting of building one-way flex valves for all the city's outfall pipes, allowing floodwater out but not back in. The second step consisted of the construction of pumps throughout the city, which would discharge all floodwaters into the surrounding bodies of water.

My Miami is in crisis. While I want it to revert back to the old days, I am afraid the city simply can't as the dials on Mother Nature's clock only move forward. Just like the city needs to learn to adapt, so must I as its citizen. I must learn to adapt to the flooding, as it is a common occurrence now. I must deal with the financial impact my city has been dealt, which means helping my friends and family who are struggling because of it. I must learn to cope with a new diet, a diet that is not as fresh or as Floridian as I might like. I must turn a blind eye to the remaining polluted beaches and the stench of the stormwater that is, what I like to say, 20% human junk. Sea level rise is real and even though man has created many new ways to help, it still has not completely stopped the wrath of mother nature.

## **Citizen #2:**

Miami is not what is used to be for sure. No longer are there busy streets with tourists looking for a sun tan, and a bustling nightlife. Now the Miami beaches are protected by a combination of natural and man-made barriers. Long ago, sea levels continued to rise causing flooding that damaged our beaches and way of living. I remember all the tourists flocking, causing destruction in their wake, now the tourist we get are more conscientious. I guess all of us are now. We finally woke up and decided that change needed to happen, that we could not get by using destructive behavior. Nature has been trying to claim back what we have taken, seemingly hostile towards humans. Yet, we have endured Nature's rising sea levels and warming climate. Miami is not going anywhere.

There is talk about moving out of the area, and unsurprisingly there is pushback against relocation. This is our home, we argue. "Where would we even really go?" The sentiment is against such an inconvenience. We have realized that we can build up and now all the structures are built prepared for higher sea levels. The houses are on stilt like structures and the beaches have been built up. There are dunes and raised high ways. Our transportation has improved greatly in the recent years. We now have a fast train connecting us to other major East Coast cities like Boston, New York and others. It has been very convenient for everyone. Most of our tourists now are from the East Coast who take this train down. Now no longer focused on sunning and clubbing, the tourists have evolved to be eco-tourists. Their interest in our local projects such as the reefs and mangroves. There is still impact felt by the tourists, but it has significantly decreased. People argue we are no longer like we used to be, the vacation spot. Yet, I see all these eco-tourists paying for guided tours through the mangroves, snorkeling in the reefs and trips alongside of our sandy dunes/beaches.

We have stricter laws on emissions and plastic use. We are trying to treat the Earth well, so that it may be kind in return. We still make mistakes; the sea levels are still rising although at a slower rate than before. We have changed the way we view our energy use. Now there is a feeling of collective effort in saving our coastal cities. Miami is just another example of a city adapting to nature. Miami now may not what it used to be, but I think its for the better. I do not miss certain things about old Miami, while still being nostalgic for the old beaches. I never thought change would be so difficult, but it is for the best. Miami is now the outdoors spot and I do not mind that.