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RETAIL

## Macy's Flagler flagship will close

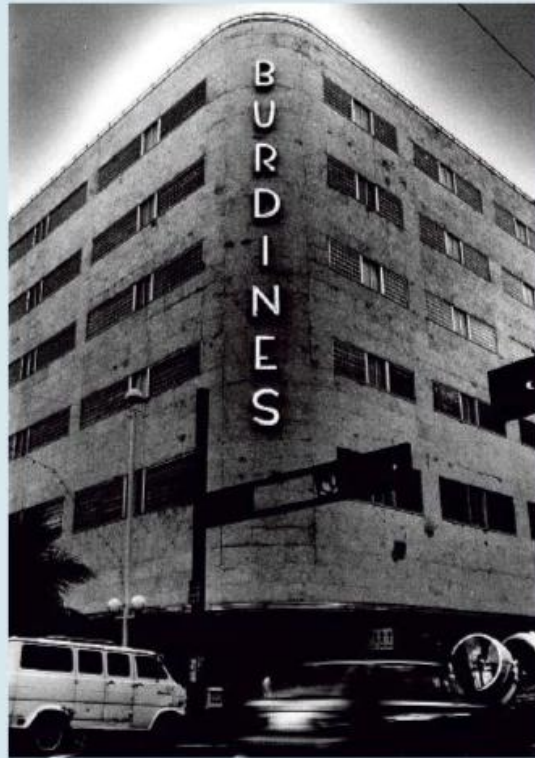
■ In a reflection of the challenges facing brick-and-mortar stores, Macy's announced Thursday that it will close its downtown Miami store. It is one of 11 Macy's that will close in early 2018.

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It watched Miami morph from outpost to urban center. It witnessed Marjory Stoneman Douglas signing her 1947 book, "The Everglades: River of Grass." For clergymen protesting segregation in the 1960s, it was the obvious high-profile place to make a stand.

Now, the downtown Miami Macy's — formerly Burdines, the homegrown department store whose history was entwined with the city's growth — is at the center of the retail transformation. But this time, the store won't survive.

On Thursday, Macy's announced that its



JOE RIMKUS JR. Miami Herald File Photo

Downtown Miami Burdines store is shown in this Nov. 11, 1988, file photo.

downtown Miami location, at 22 East Flagler St., will close as part of a restructuring that the department store chain began in 2016.

The historic store in downtown Miami will be one of 11 stores around the nation to close this year. In Florida, the Macy's store in Gainesville's Oaks Mall also will be closed. The others are in California, Indiana, Idaho, Michigan, Ohio and Vermont.

The 72,000-square-foot store on Monday will begin clearance sales that are expected to be

SEE MACY'S, 2A



The view of the Macy's exterior in downtown Miami.

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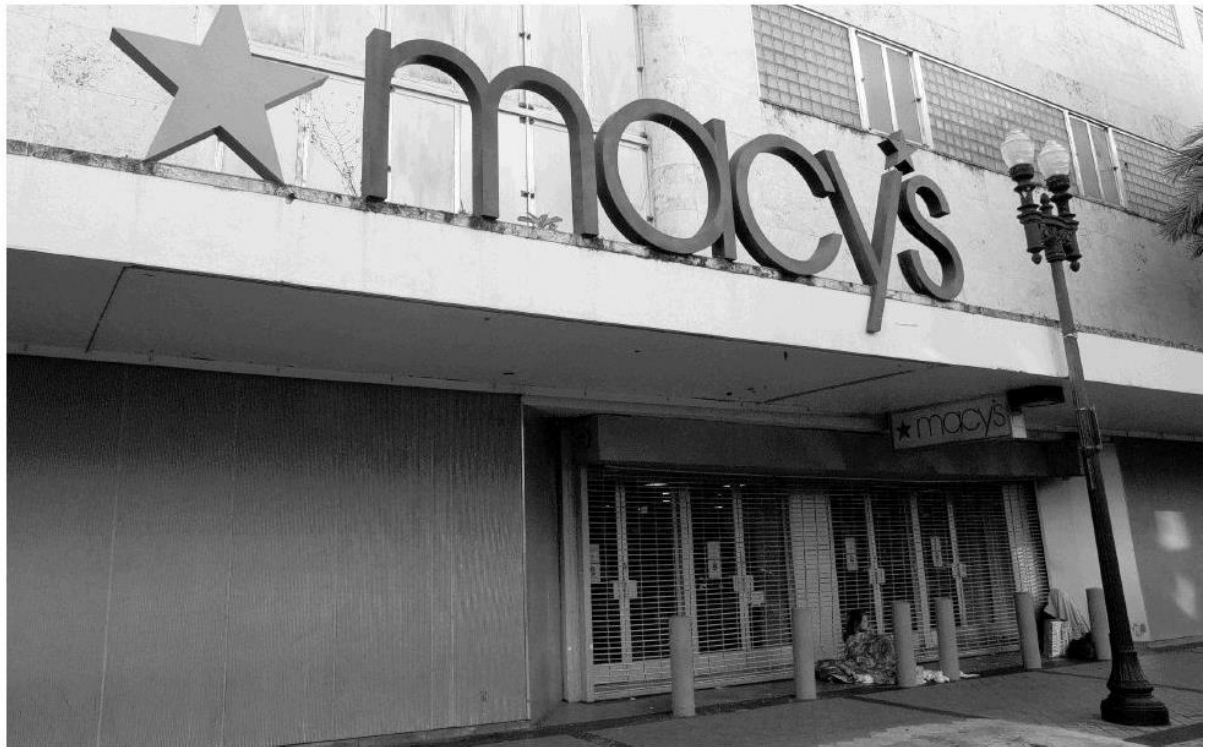
## MACY'S

completed by mid-March, Macy's said. A final closing date has not yet been announced.

Longtime Miamians first knew the store as the flagship for Burdines, which opened first as a trading post in 1898 before moving to downtown Miami in 1912. In 1956, Burdines joined the Federated Department Stores group; its name changed to Burdines-Macy's in 2004 and was shortened to Macy's a year later.

"It was a cornerstone building in downtown," said historian and author Arva Moore Parks. "I'm sure everybody that grew up with me is going to be unhappy. I hope we keep the building and figure out what to do with it."

Like other major retail chains, Macy's has struggled in an age when many consumers are choosing online shopping over going to a brick-and-mortar store. The retailer initially announced in August 2016 that it would be closing 100 stores to "ensure the optimal mix" of digital and physical footprints. Currently it operates more than 700 stores under the Macy's and Bloomingdale's brands.



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The Flagler Street Macy's was one of 11 store closings nationwide announced on Thursday.

not respond to requests for comment Thursday, when the region was being pelted by a winter storm.

The closure comes as downtown Miami is being reinvigorated with new condos, offices and restaurants. But the store's demise may actually prove to be a positive for the evolution of downtown Miami, said Zach Winkler, senior vice president of retail brokerage at JLL.

"Just because a store closes, it doesn't mean it's a negative move," Winkler said. "You look at the building today, it's kind of a fortress-type building with a small, minimal entrance. Now someone can take this building and put storefronts around the whole thing and really revitalize that whole area of downtown."

A move to redevelop the property into a shopping "experience" — the retail industry's favorite buzz word — with a more open facade and restaurants would be a natural follow to other recent developments in the downtown corridor, such as Brickell City Centre and the upcoming Miami Worldcenter project.

Macy's and Bloomingdale's originally signed on as anchor tenants at Miami Worldcenter before developers ditched plans for an enclosed mall in early 2016 in favor of an open-air shopping center. That shift led the two stores to drop out.

Still, the Flagler Street location may have a chance at a third life. The eastern blocks of Flagler Street are slated for a makeover as part of a

long-running project to create a more pedestrian-friendly road.

Alyce Robertson, executive director of the Miami Downtown Development Authority, said that after the city of Miami fired its first contractor and hired a second, the Flagler project is now on track to be completed in two years. With more sidewalk space, the updated Flagler Street could help the former Macy's building become a modern day shopping and dining destination.

That would harken back to the days of Burdines' Tea Room, the former store's popular lunch spot known for Snow Princess treats — creamy vanilla ice cream frozen in a cone shape that formed the gown for a ceramic princess who sat on top. (Boys got a clown counterpart.)

A contemporary iteration of the store, Robertson said, would cater to the changing demographics of downtown's now nearly 90,000 residents, many of them between the ages of 25 and 44 and who work in the area.

"I think that, 10 years ago, the closing of Macy's would have been a much different, more traumatic event," Robertson said. "But the way that downtown has grown ... we are more resilient to this move than we were 10 years ago."

#### PRESERVING HISTORY

But for those who grew up shopping at Burdines, and then Macy's, the news marks a significant passing.

Historian Parks remembers eating at the Tea Room after earning a good report card. Her first job

was selling \$3.36 handbags at Burdines in the late 1950s. She recalls modeling at the Tea Room — "in bathing suits and things like that" — and buying her first wedding dress at the store, too.

"The Florida Store," Burdines was founded by William Burdine, a retired Confederate army officer, and opened on Flagler Street in 1898 as W.M. Burdine and Sons before it was renamed Burdines. The current building dates to 1947.

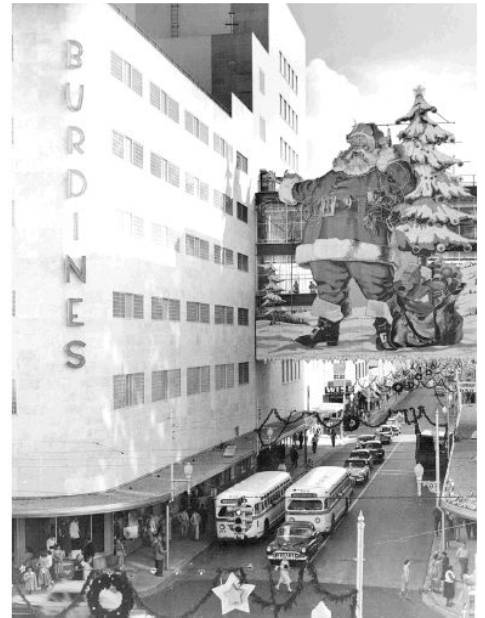
Its "Sunshine Fashions" debuted in the 1920s and 30s and helped sell the image of Miami as a tropical paradise. That reputation grew during World War II, after soldiers training in Miami Beach became fans of the resort and casual clothes.

The Federated Department Stores took over Burdines in a stock swap in 1956, opening the door for president Alfred Daniels to make a gutsy move.

He was credited with ending segregation at the Miami store by announcing in 1962 that Burdines "would no longer refuse service to black patrons in the dining facilities of the Miami and Miami Beach stores."

At the time, Florida's Jim Crow laws were firmly ensconced; it would be two more years before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed separate facilities for black and white customers.

By the time Federated changed its name to Macy's in 2005, the store's downtown location was feeling a pinch. Macy's Florida Chairwoman Julie Greiner told the Miami Herald in 2008 that the



Miami Herald File Photo

The facility housing the downtown Miami Burdines store, shown here on New Year's Day 1954, dates to 1947.

lack of "vibrancy and quality to the downtown retail environment" and the disrepair of Flagler Street could force Macy's to leave the area.

Macy's ultimately stayed. In 2013, it sold the property to Aetna Realty Group, signing a lease that would keep Macy's in that location for at least another five years. In other words, until 2018.

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez said he doesn't believe the Flagler project drew Macy's away from downtown.

"An institution like Macy's, which is a long-standing retailer, I don't think one project, no matter how inconvenient it is, really

changes their outlook on things," Suarez said in an interview.

Instead, Suarez views the sale as another part of downtown Miami's renaissance.

"Once it reaches that sort of mix of new tenants and the old tenants, and people that are starting to live there in great quantity, you are going to have another funky and unique and diverse neighborhood," Suarez said.

As for the Macy's building, he does have one wish, though: "I hope they find a way to preserve the history."

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With Thursday's announcement, Macy's has now revealed 81 of the total 100 stores slated for closure. Another 19 stores will be closed as leases or operating covenants expire, or as sale transactions are completed, the company said via a release. Since 2015, the retailer has shuttered 124 locations.

At the downtown Miami location, 105 employees will be affected. Macy's said it will try to, "wherever possible, ... place employees in good standing into open and available positions in a nearby store."

Macy's has an additional eight locations locally: Macy's Aventura, Dadeland, Miami Beach, Miami International, Southland, South Dade Furniture Gallery, The Falls and Westland.

#### 'DIFFICULT DECISION'

"While closing a store is always a difficult decision because of the impact on our customers, our associates and the community, Macy's is delighted to have served this community over the years," spokeswoman Jacqueline King said in a statement. "We deeply appreciate the loyalty of our customers and associates and remain committed to the greater Miami area."

It's still unknown what will happen to the downtown location. The site's owner, New York-based Aetna Realty Group, did