

**EXPANDING THE “EXILE MODEL”:
RACE, GENDER, RESETTLEMENT, AND
CUBAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY, 1959-1979**

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of CHERIS BREWER CURRENT find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Chair

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Abstract

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Scholarly writings on the first and second wave of Cuban refugees (1959-1979) rely too heavily on an “exile model” that presents Cubans as overtly political, highly educated, universally white, middle class, residents of Miami, and martyrs of Fidel Castro’s socialist revolution. While there is some truth in this model, scholars who utilize the model produced a limited and monolithic understanding of immigration and exile during this period. In this dissertation I seek to de-center the “Cuban exile model” by expanding current narratives on the Cuban refugees of the 1960s and 1970s.

This reassessment of the experiences and identities of first and second wave Cuban refugees begins with an examination of the Cuban Refugee Program’s role in developing and perpetuating the “exile model.” In addition to projecting overwhelmingly positive impressions of Cuban refugees, the Cuban Refugee Program also provided the refugees with financial and structural resources that ensured Cubans access to jobs and education needed to gain financial independence and some modicum of economic “success.” Additionally, I will focus on the gendered and racialized experiences of both

men and women in the West, Midwest, South and Northeast, regional areas that the “exile model” typically ignores. Finally, I will explore the changing dynamics of Cuban-American identity through biography, literary narratives, oral histories, and novels. As a new generation of Cuban-American authors are crafting fictional accounts of the first and second wave of Cuban refugees that provide a much needed challenges to the static “exile model.”

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INTRODUCTION

The widely popular Cuban “exile model” attests to a variety of exceptionalism that casts Cubans of the 1960s and 1970s as better than regular immigrants or other refugees. Thus the model presents Cubans as overtly political, highly educated, universally white, middle class, residents of Miami, and martyrs of Castro’s revolution. While there is some truth in these superlatives, especially among the earliest refugees, the US government, media and early scholars used the “exile model” as a set of umbrella terms applied to all Cubans of the 1960s and 1970s. Cuban American scholar Nancy Mirabal’s poses a theoretical challenge to traditional historiography on Cubans in the United States.¹ In her path-breaking essay, “‘Ser de Aquí’: Beyond the Cuban Exile Model,” she argues that the Cuban population in the US is now permanent and that this fact needs to be recognized by Cuban and Cuban American scholars. Since waiting for Castro’s death or fall from power has dominated Cuban American politics and United States foreign policy, the field of Cuban American Studies has failed to move beyond this “exile model.”²

Mirabal argues that this “waiting” for Castro’s fall from power remains a troubling artifact that, coupled with an extensive focus on the Cuban migration of the 1960’s and 1970’s, has produced an imbalance in the field. She further argues that a great deal of scholarship on this time period stresses the Cuban “success” story, a kind of

¹ Nancy Raquel Mirabal, “‘Ser de Aquí’: Beyond the Cuban Exile Model,” *Latino Studies* Vol. 1 (2003): 366-382.

² For more on post-1959 scholarship, see: Damian J. Fernandez, editor, *Cuban Studies Since the Revolution* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1992).

Cuban exceptionalism. Mirabal notes that, “Scholars pointed to various variables to cast the Cuban exile as “unique,” including the importance of social origins, the time of migration, the development of ethnic enclaves, and the existence of governmental programs like the Cuban Refugee Program of 1961 and the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966.”

While I agree with Mirabal’s critique of the Cuban “success” story and its dominance in Cuban historiography I disagree that it does not need further research. Instead, I concur with the Cuban scholars Rafael Prohías and Lourdes Casal who argue that the exile model and its major tenet of “success”:

- Has obscured for Cubans a realization of the realities of power in a complex, heterogeneous society where “ethnicity” is a fundamental fact of socio-political life
- Has been instrumental in helping to isolate Cubans from other minorities
- Has [desensitized] Cubans and the surrounding community to the hidden cost of the superficial story
- Has blinded Cubans and the surrounding community to the heterogeneity of the Cuban migration and has rendered invisible those who desperately need help³

Prohías and Casal aptly identify the flaws and risks repudiated in constructing an identity and history based on illusions of exceptionalism. Echoing their critique, this dissertation seeks to challenge the “exile model” by critically re-evaluating the Cuban influx of 1960s and 1970s in order to offer an alternative history to those presented in traditional studies. At the start of Castro’s revolution in 1959, the United States was already embroiled in the Cold War and was cognizant of the value of anti-communist refugees. As both sides constructed the Cold War as an ideological struggle, individuals who had escaped communist countries became tangible assets in largely rhetorical battles. An anti-

³ Rafael Prohías and Lourdes Casal, *The Cuban Minority in the US: Preliminary Report on Need Identification and Program Evaluation*, (Boca Raton, Florida: Florida Atlantic University, 1973), 7-8.

communist stance was not enough to warrant refugee status and preferential immigration policies, as there were worldwide anti-communist movements that did not receive refugee status. Unlike anti-communist dissidents in Asia, Africa and other countries in Latin America, the US government deemed Cubans desirable immigrants by pointing to the attributes maintained by the exile model.

The exile model may not have survived if so many Cubans had not embraced it.⁴ Building upon the glowing elements of the exile model and with nostalgic longing for their past, Cubans in the US collectively and individually constructed new narratives about their past and present. The power of these idealistic recollections allowed Cubans in the US to construct a *Cuba de Ayer* as a “lament for a pre-Castro Cuba that never really existed, a mythical Cuba where everyone had wealth, health and high culture, where there was no racism.”⁵ Faults in the personal memories of Cuba transmitted in exile are bitingly questioned in a joke which argues that if every Cuban exile who claims to have owned land in Cuba really did, the island would have to be the size of Brazil (or alternatively the size of the Soviet Union).⁶ These myths of pre-revolutionary life allowed Cuban exiles to position themselves as the architects and artifacts of a utopian civilization, who although wronged, are nonetheless endowed with the privileges of a formerly golden life.⁷ Conveniently, this pre-immigration narrative matched neatly with

⁴ María Cristina García, *Havana USA*, 111.

⁵ Flavio Risech, “Political and Cultural Cross Dressing: Negotiating a Second Generation Cuban-American Identity,” in *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba*, edited by Ruth Behar (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 62.

⁶ María Cristina García, *Havana USA*, 173

⁷ This point is particularly important as Cubans’ reification of the monolith is rooted in the exile experience and an anticipated return to Cuba. This proposed return requires that Cubans maintain and model a “true”

the “good immigrant” and exile model pushed by the US government and allowed first generation Cubans to craft a mythology that spoke to who they were both before and after exile.

In addition to explaining pre and post immigration identities, the exile model also fits the foreign policy motives of the US government and Cubans in the US. Cuban leadership in the US was particularly concerned with how Cubans were portrayed as negative press could allow Castro to mock their decisions to leave Cuba. Thus, embracing the exile model, and specifically the supposedly universal economic “success” that accompanied exile, endowed Cubans and the US government with a powerful source of anti-Castro propaganda. The importance of presenting life in the US as a universal success, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, became disturbingly apparent as some Cubans denounced studies that exposed negative aspects of Cuban communities. A seemingly benign 1974 study of Cuban population in the US headed by the Cuban sociologist Lourdes Casal revealed that some Cubans, specifically the elderly struggled to make ends meet. María de los Angeles Torres explains the fallout that ensued: “when their findings were publicized, they were accused of betraying their community because their concerns were with immigrant problems rather than the overthrow of the revolution.”⁸ This desire to cast life in the US as idyllic even led many Cubans to deny that they faced prejudice or racism, as “to admit that there was discrimination at all was

Cuban identity brought to the US by the refugees of the 1960’s and 1970’s, see: María Cristina García, *Havana USA*, 84.

⁸ María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*.

to give the communist Cuban regime ammunition against the United States and a way to ridicule those who left.”⁹

The Exile Model in Recent Scholarship

Over the last thirty years, a number of Cuban-American scholars have reified and levied partial challenges to the “exile model.” María Cristina García is among this later cohort, as her book *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* both challenges and reinforces various elements of the model. Written in the mid-1990s García’s book is one of the few longitudinal studies of a Cuban community, yet its focus on South Florida does reinforce a Miami normative Cuban American identity. García discusses the influx of first and second wave Cuban refugees and the creation of an exile identity as two separate entities, and by doing so disassociates the effects of US policies on the creation of a Cuban identity based on exceptionalism.

Despite this break, García’s focus on Miami, where adherents of the “exile model” are most vocal, allows her to aptly identify its strategic uses, “When the Cubans called themselves ‘exiles,’ it was a powerful political statement, a symbol of defiance that at the same time distinguished and isolated their experience from that of other immigrants.”¹⁰ Advancing this critique, García directly disputes the validity of the “success” story by including statistics and narratives that clearly show that many Cubans were and are not economic triumphs. Thus while García engages with some of the challenges inherent in an “exile model” centered identity, her primary concern is in relaying a conventional history of the Miami Cuban community.

⁹ Ibid, 85.

¹⁰ María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 84.

María de los Angeles Torres' book *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States* exposes the variety of political positions Cubans in the US occupy. Focusing on politics runs the risk of reaffirming the political activism implicit in the "exile model." Yet, Torres escapes this pitfall as her primary concerns are with assembling an inclusive political history and denouncing the hard-line politics, both of which are substantial challenges to the monolithic hard-line political identity implicit in the model. Throughout her political history Torres' continually engages and rebuts the major tenants of the exile model, specifically those that contradict her own experience as a resettled Cuban who was raised outside of Miami. Torres expresses the challenges of occupying a position that defies the mores of the monolith and the difficulties faced by those who reject an "exceptional identity," "Those of us raised outside of the enclave, and therefore more exposed to racism, were ostracized in Miami when we tried to discuss racism or raise our voices in support of the civil rights movement."¹¹ Thus Torres suggests that "exile model" is maintained primarily by the political leadership of Miami, and not necessarily by the majority of Cubans in the US.

In contrast, Sylvia Pedraza in her book *Political and Economic Migrants in America: Cubans and Mexicans* identifies the US government intervention as the driving force behind the economic "success" purported by the model. In this comparative analysis of Cuban and Mexican populations in the US, Pedraza notes that despite both groups racial status as Latinos US policy provided the groups with unequal realities. While Torres notes that Cubans faced discrimination despite the buffer of proactive US policy, Pedraza maintains that legal status, education, and countless other pro-Cuban US

¹¹ María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 197.

policies enabled Cubans to achieve the structural assimilation that has been denied to other Latino/as. For those who assume that US policy always follows the will of the public this lack of congruence might be perceived as problematic, arguably US policy inevitably provided Cuban refugees with opportunities that would have been near to impossible to achieve as regular immigrants, but policy could not erase the presence of discrimination that many Cubans undoubtedly received in Miami and throughout the country. Pedraza's focus on the influence of policy in determining Cubans "success" in the US centers the Cuban Refugee Program as vital to understanding the post-'59 migration, consequently the program deserves serious consideration.¹²

Like Pedraza, Alejandro Portes and Robert Bach in their book, *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States* do not dispute the collective economic success of first and second wave Cubans.¹³ Yet, they do not attribute Cubans relative wealth to the US government's intervention, but instead suggest that the high concentration of Cubans in Miami created an enclave that encouraged entrepreneurship, collective employment and higher earnings. Portes and Bach's acceptance of Cuban success is bolstered by the 1970 census which indicates that Cubans earned more than all other Latino groups, but less than white workers. While these figures are not disputed, Portes and Bach's methodology is flawed as they assume that the economic gains experienced by Cubans was the result of personal or group attributes like education,

¹² Silvia Pedraz-Bailey, *Political and Economic Migrants in America: Cubans and Mexican*, (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1985).

¹³ Alejandro Portes and Robert Bach, *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

class status, as well as English skills and not the substantial financial assistance provided by the federal government.

This reaffirmation of Cubans' exceptionalism as the ultimate determinants of economic gains is echoed by Lisandro Perez in *Immigrant Economic Adjustment and Family Organization: The Cuban Success Story Reexamined*.¹⁴ Despite the subtitle of this article, Portes does not dispute the "success" story, but rather what produced the economic gains. Unlike Portes and Bach, Perez argues that the Cuban family unit contributed the most to economic mobility. Perez points out that the large scale workforce participation of Cuban women provided families with dual incomes and that extended family members provided childcare for free or low cost by. Perez correctly critiques the lack of family level studies of Cubans during this period, yet like many other discussions of the economic adjustment of Cubans, his work does not fully engage with the structural forces (particularly those from the state) that collectively allowed Cubans to earn more than other Latino/as.

Expanding the "Exile Model"

Over the last twenty years a growing body of scholarship by María Cristina García, María de los Angeles Torres, Sylvia Pedraza, Nancy Mirabal and other Cuban-American scholars has challenged the "exile model." Despite their work, the exile model endures as mainstream American and many Cubans themselves buy into the myth. There are several means of de-centering the exile model; Nancy Mirabal proposes the exploration of pre-1959 communities as a means of expanding narratives on Cubans in

¹⁴Lisandro Pérez, "Immigrant Economic Adjustment and Family Organization: The Cuban Success Story Reexamined," *International Migration Review*, 20:1, 1986.

the US. Shifting the focus away from first and second wave refugees who immigrated during the 1960s and 1970s is an effective means of escaping discussions of exile.

In this dissertation I seek to de-center the “Cuban exile model” by expanding current narratives on the Cuban refugees of the 1960s and 1970s. To do so I will examine the involvement of the United States government in the lives of Cuban refugees during their early years in exile. Additionally, I will focus on the gendered and racialized experiences of both men and women and second-generation Cuban Americans in the West, Midwest, South and Northeast, regional areas that the “exile model” typically ignores. Finally, I will explore the changing dynamics of Cuban American identity through biography, literary narratives, oral histories, and novels.

The exceptional aspects of the Cuban arrivals of the 1960’s and 1970’s primarily lie in the US’s response to the refugees. Arguably, more than with any other Latino or refugee group, the US government played a crucial role in the acceptance, reception, and assistance of Cuban refugees. Providing Cubans with entrance was but one aspect of the US government’s policies directed at incoming Cubans during the 1960’s and 1970’s. In addition to providing legal status to over 600,000 Cubans, US policy also provided the refugees with a comprehensive assistance program –the Cuban Refugee Program– which met the immediate and long-term needs of the exiles. The Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) provided financial and material assistance, education, and resettlement opportunities to displaced and destitute refugees. The CRP provided more than a billion dollars in aid over a twenty year period; both the size and scope of the program made both public and political support of the refugees central to its continuance. To assure a political and

public mandate, the CRP, along with national media outlets, instituted and carried out a pro-Cuban publicity campaign.

Post-1959 Cubans arrived in the US during a period of race-based restrictive immigration policies that favored European entrants, thus the CPR's public relations campaign sought to portray Cubans as "good immigrants" that were racially and socially desirable. Given the racialized nature of immigration during the period, the CRP and the US media presented the refugees as white and middle class. While many of earliest Cuban refugees matched Americans understanding of whiteness, this is not true of many of the latter refugees. I use Omi and Winant's concept of "racial formation" that unveils the State's role in racializing various groups for particular political and social ends. The State strategically racialized Cuban refugees as white in order to secure their acceptance as encouraging immigration formed the cornerstone of US foreign policy towards Cuba after the Bay of Pigs.¹⁵

The CRP impacted almost every aspect of refugee life as the program provided food, monthly assistant checks, medical coverage, jobs, housing and relocation to various points across the US. Resettlement remains the most under-considered aspect of the CRP; this gap is troubling as the mandatory relocation of Cubans is the most intrusive policy instituted by the program. The CRP used positive descriptions contained in the exile model to convince thousands of Americans to serve as financial and social sponsors for resettled Cuban refugees. Sponsors and local communities responded to resettled Cubans in a variety of ways that ultimately made some relocations permanent while other Cubans left their placements as soon as they earned enough money to be independent. Those who

¹⁵ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

remained resettled formed active Cuban communities in traditional Cuban centers like New York City and remote rural locals like Colfax, Washington.

In order to fully explore the CRP's role in constructing and perpetuating ideas of Cuban exceptionalism, a substantial number of primary sources from the government agency will be used. While many of the CRP's publications no longer exist, almost a decade worth of monthly publications entitled *Resettlement Re-Cap* provide rich examples of the US governments evolving narratives on Cuban refugees. As the CRP's publications, many of early studies, and a number of subsequent works focus on the exceptionalism of the "exile model," locating sources that include perspectives and experiences ignored or excluded by the narrow confines of the model is difficult. Nonetheless counter-accounts do exist in biographies, academic studies, newspaper articles, and the oral histories of Cubans, thus these sources will be used to contest and complicate the "official" understanding of the period purported by the CRP.

Given my belief that the US government needs to be central to any discussion of Cuban refugees during the 1960s and 1970s, the first three chapters examine the role of the CRP in introducing the Cuban refugees to the US populace, providing for the resettlement of over half of the period's entrants, and subsequently creating Cuban communities across the US. Chapter 1 will explore the development of the "exile model" as a political and social tool of the US government. This is an important place to start, as it provides the reader with a strong understanding of the national attention directed at the Cuban refugees and the strategic ideological functions that accompanied the acceptance of anti-communists refugees during the Cold War.

Chapter 2 focuses on the mechanisms of resettlement. The resettlement of Cubans out of Miami was a central goal of the CRP as relieving the economic, political, and social pressures caused by a sizeable influx of Cubans threatened the continuation of refugees acceptance. The resettlement of Cuban refugees relied upon the sponsorship of individuals and groups who could provide for the social and economic transition of relocated Cubans, thus the CRP used romanticized depictions of Cuban refugees to recruit these sponsors. In order to recruit sponsors from across the US and encourage refugees to resettle, the CRP published a series of publications aimed at each population that collectively presented relocation as an overwhelmingly positive experience. These glowing accounts of resettlement, provide a limited understanding of resettlement, thus the testimonies of various Cuban refugees will be included in order to complicate the CRP's narratives.

Chapter 3 will follow the development of Cuban resettlement communities across the US. Non-Miami Cuban communities remain understudied, nonetheless some city specific studies exist on a smattering of communities. This chapter presents a regional historiography of these studies that is augmented by a variety of primary sources. While many of these communities composed of relocated Cuban were short lived, others remain active to this day and profess a variety of perspectives and experiences unknown in Miami.

Chapter 4 and 5 explore the how the identities and roles of Cuban men and women changed in varying degrees once in the US. The "exile model" is technically un-gendered, yet the "genderless" studies produced by the model, tend to stress the experiences of upper-class men who served as the "mouthpiece" of the community.

Accordingly the experiences of women and working-class individuals of both genders were effectively erased. Reexamining the early years of exile, through the experiences of both Cuban men and women, allows for a dynamic understanding of how gender impacted the immigration experience.

Chapter 4 examines how Cuban women adapted to life in the US. While there are a number of studies on Cuban women, these histories are excluded from general studies of Cubans in the US. Thus, the presence and contributions of Cuban women remain sidelined from mainstream understandings of Cubans during the 1960s and 1970s. This chapter will contextualize the changes Cuban women encountered in the US by providing a background of pre-immigration gendered expectations in Cuba. This will be followed by a discussion of the workplace and domestic shifts that Cuban women experienced as they changed to meet the needs of their families and the expectations of their communities. In contrast with the studies on Cuban women, Cuban men dominate most “non-gendered” studies of Cubans yet scholars have not seriously considered how the self-conceptualizations of Cuban men changed vis-à-vis life and work in the US. Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of pre-immigration masculinity, and traces that shifts that men made as immigration, a loss of class status, and the changing needs of their families compelled men to alter their constructions of an ideal masculine model.

Lastly, Chapter 6 focuses on Cuban-American literature, as fictional accounts of life in the US represent the most compelling and accessible challenges to the “exile model.” Rejecting the identity claimed by adherents of the model, the novels of Cristina García, Achy Obejas, and Eduardo Santiago present characters and narratives that present a diversity of race, class, gender, sexuality, and politics rarely seen in academic or

popular writings on Cubans of the 1960s and 1970s. The expansions that these Cuban-American novelist pioneer, provide an encouraging glimpse at the direction the field of Cuban and Cuban-American studies can pursue.

CHAPTER ONE

Normalizing Cuban Refugees: Representations of Whiteness and Anti-Communism during the Cold War

The Bay of Pigs debacle in April 1961 and the equally disastrous Missile Crisis in October 1962 left the US in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis Cuba. Without a successful foreign policy for Cuba, the US wholeheartedly embraced the only Cuba-based policy that appeared to be working – the acceptance of Cuban refugees. While the acceptance of refugees may not appear to be a natural component of foreign policy, the political climate of the Cold War and the reliance on a battle of ideologies endowed anti-communist refugees with inherent value. As one US Congressman put it, “Every refugee who comes out [of Cuba] is a vote for our society and a vote against their society.”¹⁶ Politically motivated, the government believed that the cost of underwriting a mass migration was justified as a strategic facet of its Cold War policies. The US’s unflinching commitment to the Cuban anti-communist refugees did not end with the provision of asylum, but instead was extended to include ample assistance –through the creation of the Cuban Refugee Program– and pro-refugee publicity.

Cubans themselves complicated their use as anti-communist “freedom fighters.” The rapid political and ideological changes that followed the revolution created a wide range of “political exiles” that united only in their exile. Cuban refugees occupied a variety of socioeconomic, racial, and political positions. Shifts in the social and ideological makeup of the refugees were the natural outgrowth of the revolution as it “has

¹⁶ Felix Roberto Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the US, 1959-1995*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), 33.

meant different things at different times, the demographic composition of the refugee community has also been changing”.¹⁷ For instance, changes in the employment and by extension class background of the refugees is apparent if you compare the number of professionals in 1962 (31%), with 1966 (21%), and again with 1967 (18%).¹⁸

Consequently, Cuban exiles neither represent a singular homogeneous group nor do they necessarily imitate a sample of Cuba’s various classes or its multiracial society as a whole. Nonetheless, the US conceptualized and represented Cubans as a homogenous group, universally anti-communist and socially desirable.

Relying on dominant characteristics of the earliest Cuban refugees, the US government and, by extension, the popular press lauded the arrival of the white, well educated, anti-communist, upper class elite of Cuba. While these generalizations might be true of the refugees who left Cuba shortly after the revolution, great variations in race, class and politics occurred during the 1960’s and 1970’s. Though the US perceived Cubans’ flight from Cuba as the ultimate declaration of an anti-communist position, this presumption was not accurate, for Cubans held a multiplicity of political positions, and the vast majority of Cubans could be identified as anti-Castro, not necessarily anti-communist. While this might seem to be a matter of semantics, there is actually a substantial difference, as the former includes a broad range of political beliefs including

¹⁷ Richard R. Fagen, Richard A Brody, and Thomas J. O’Leary, *Cubans in Exile: Disaffection and the Revolution*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), 17.

In order to make sense of the flow of refugees from Cuba during the 1960’s and 1970’s scholars of Cuban immigration devised multiple divisions, that match the refugees’ means of entrance and/or their dominate characteristics. The first wave of Cuban immigration began with the start of the revolution in January 1959 and continues until either the end of direct flights between the US in 1963 or with the start of the Freedom Flights in 1965. The second wave is dominated by the US funded Freedom Flights (1965-1973) which brought over 300,000 refugees to the US, but at times discussions of this wave also includes all pre-Mariel Cubans who left Cuba by way of a second country or by boat during the 1970’s.

¹⁸ Ibid, 115.

pro-communism or pro-revolution Cubans who became disenchanted with Castro.¹⁹

The importance of “racialization” and “whiteness” during the 1950s and 1960s cannot be underestimated, yet it has not been adequately addressed in refugee scholarship.²⁰ Mary Dudziak’s *Cold War Civil Rights* clearly articulates the saliency of race during the Cold War and the US’s desire to appear as having no “race problem”.²¹ Thus while the US could have articulated the acceptance of Cuban refugees as a progressive step towards ending or at least complicating the United States’ racial divide, domestically Americans constructed Cubans as white refugees. Drawing from George Lipsitz’s discussion on mid-twentieth century concepts of whiteness, the US never overtly labeled Cuban refugees as white; rather, in avoiding overt discussions of race and presenting Cubans as “good immigrants” the refugees were left racially “unmarked”.²² The US government positioned Cubans into the United States’ “racialized social system” at an elevated point that placed them above “bad immigrants”.²³ The importance of race in immigration law and immigrant acceptance is addressed by George Sanchez and Mae

¹⁹ It is difficult to gauge why refugees left Cuba and what their political leanings were as there is little documentation. Given the political climate and immigration laws which barred communist from immigrating it is unlikely that pro-communism, anti-Castro Cubans would disclose their political beliefs to US officials or academics. Richard Fagen administered questionnaires to a group male of refugees at the CRP in 1963. He asked the Cuban men why they choose to leave Cuba and they responded in the following ways: Imprisonment (8%), Threat or Fear of Imprisonment (12%), Harassment and Persecution (10%), Loss of Jobs, Possessions or sources of Income (6%), Took Exception to the Government Activities (20%), Took Exception to Communism (17%), Other Experiences of Self or Family (10%), Experiences of Person(s) or Group(s) other than Self or Family (4%) (Fagen, 1968, 90)

²⁰ Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America’s Half Open Door, 1945 to the Present*, (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

²¹ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Right: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²² George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

²³ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

Ngai but not applied towards refugee groups.²⁴ While this paper draws upon the above scholarship, it represents an important deviation as it marks the confluence of Whiteness Studies, Critical Race Theory and Refugee Studies in the exploration of Cuban refugee acceptance.

In this chapter I will demonstrate that the identities and representations of refugees are central in refugee acceptance and that during the Cold War era, all refugee groups granted asylum universally held an anti-communist stance and some claim to whiteness. In order to ensure that the US populace would continue to support their acceptance, the Cuban Refugee Program, with assistance from popular print media effectively produced a homogenous representation of Cuban refugees as white, upper class and anti-communist. By examining popular media and government publications of the period, I will illustrate how a government agency and the popular media simplified and manipulated the identities and political positions of Cuban refugees to meet American norms of “good immigrants” and acceptable refugees.

Post-WWII Refugees – “Whiteness” and the “Good Immigrant”

The acceptance of Cuban refugees after Castro’s revolution in 1959 marked the third sizeable group of refugees admitted to the United States. Refugee policies represent a crack in the closed-door immigration policies that dominated the first half of the twentieth century that virtually excluded people of color from immigrating to the United States. The creation of refugee policy is a post-World War II phenomenon that provided select groups a preferential immigration status. In order to secure entry, these

²⁴ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); George Sanchez, “Race, Nation, and Culture in Recent Immigration Studies,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 18:4, Summer 1999, 66-85.

groups had to meet certain criteria. While these measures were not fixed, Cubans and the other major entrants from the period – those displaced by WWII and the Hungarian freedom fighters – fit within the United States’ understanding of “good immigrants.” In order to acquire this intangible and preferential status, accepted refugees conformed to the racial and ideological norms of mid-twentieth century America, as they were predominantly white and professed an anti-communist stance. Accordingly, refugees reflected the confluence of foreign and domestic policy in that aiding political refugees allowed the United States an unexpected way of undermining communism by making Americans out of groups fleeing leftist governments. As Loescher and Scanlan expertly surmise in their book *Calculated Kindness*:

Since 1945, [and up to the 1980’s] well over 90 percent of those admitted to the United States have fled communist countries... Guided for a generation by the view that ‘each refugee from the Soviet orbit represents a failure of the Communist system’ successive administrations have sought to induce more defections and have consistently sought to transform each new arrival into a symbolic or literal “freedom fighter”.²⁵

Thus, it is clear that individuals fleeing communism were considered most deserving of all displaced peoples, as the asylum granted to these groups fit within the foreign policy goals of the period.

Cold War era refugees – displaced Europeans, Hungarians and Cubans – were universally positioned as groups that maintained certain racial traits that would allow them to assimilate quickly into “good” Americans. Who could become “good” Americans was under continual debate and was a direct reflection of the US’s political, economic, and social climate. The maintenance of immigration policies based on nation quotas – a system that was constructed to protect America from immigrants of color–

²⁵ Loescher and Scanlan, xviii.

professed the US's continual support of whiteness as a prime aspect of Americaness.²⁶ Additionally, the US's increasing involvement in Cold War politics made the US especially sympathetic toward immigrants fleeing communism, as accepting anti-communist groups bolstered its political position by providing the US with individuals who could profess to the evils of a tangible "red threat."

Given this commitment to refugees who could demonstrate a certain degree of "Americaness," it is impossible to divorce discussions of desirable refugees from issues of domestic relations, nationality, class status and racialization. Pro-refugee advocates attempted to "sell" incoming refugees to policy makers and the public, a difficult task given the Operation Wetback campaign and the nativist immigration climate that dominated the period.²⁷ In contrast to the "wetbacks" and other "bad immigrants" of the period the US government only pursued Cuban refugees as they could be manipulated to fit a national ideal of "whiteness" and "Americaness". Thus in order to fend off widespread objections the entrance of Cuban refugees was parsed in Cold War rhetoric that stressed their desirable social, ideological, and racialized class traits.

It is difficult to discuss refugee policy without first addressing immigration policies, as similar political and economic forces intrinsically shaped both. The

²⁶ Ngai, 7-9

Ngai argues that national origins systems were racialized by giving preference to Northern and Western European groups and restricting groups from Southern and Eastern Europe. At one point these groups were considered a racial threat and a Communist menace, especially those from Eastern Europe and in particular Jews. The once exception was the uninterrupted entry of Mexican immigrants from south of the border.

²⁷ One example of a mid-twentieth century anti-immigrant policy was the US's "Operation Wetback." Instigated in 1954, "Operation Wetback" set out to repatriate thousands of undocumented Mexicans. While one might argue that this was a war against "illegal" immigration, the clearly racist and anti-Mexican terms in which the operation was conceptualized and carried out point to more sinister origins. For more on "Operation Wetback" see, Juan Ramon García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980)

Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 and the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act drastically restricted entrants by capping the number of immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Europe, but not from the Western Hemisphere.²⁸ These national quotas were based on the population of the US at the time and purposefully overvalued immigrants from Northern and Western Europe; this is evident in the 1952 legislation which designated 70% of all visas to immigrants from England, Ireland, and Germany.²⁹ In this era of restrictions, refugee policies generally mark a liberalization of immigration law that allowed for exceptions to preexisting country quotas. Unlike immigration laws enacted by Congress, refugee policies were left at the discretion of the U.S. President. Despite the allowance of more visas, potential refugee groups were still held to the same standards as “regular” immigrants, as accepted refugees remained largely within the country’s racialized understanding of Americanness. Given this adherence to maintaining a homogeneous America, refugee groups must have some claim to whiteness following the tumultuous deliberations surrounding the entrance of Jewish and Hungarian refugees after WWII.³⁰

The policies developed for the Cuban refugees, while situation-specific, are an outgrowth of other policies developed for post-WWII refugees. At the end of WWII, over 8 million people were left displaced. These refugees, paired with mounting Cold War fears, made the economic and political stability of Europe a priority and US intervention unavoidable. Equally unavoidable was a nativist political atmosphere that disputed the

²⁸ This conscious lapse technically allowed for an unlimited migration from the Americas. North and South America were not excluded because of racial desirability; rather the Western Hemisphere was omitted from the national quota system, to appease many capitalists in the southwest who supported unrestricted migration from Mexico. See Ngai, 23.

²⁹ Alicia J. Campi, “The McCarran-Walter Act: A Contradictory Legacy on Race, Quotas, and Ideology,” Washington, D.C.: American Immigration Law Foundation, 2004.

³⁰ Carl J. Bon Tempo, “Americans at the Gate: The Politics of American Refugee Policy, 1952-1980” (PhD diss., Department of History, University of Virginia, 2004), 54.

admittance of Jewish refugees. Consequently, refugee advocates chose to “seek to build broad public and congressional support by consciously downplaying the special nature of Jewish claims, subordinating them to more general concerns about the fate of the displaced persons populations as a whole”³¹

Functioning within the racialized framework that was embedded in the national quota system, discussions of immigration and refugee policies focused on immigrants that conformed to the US’s national identity. Spurred by the eugenics movement and social Darwinism, most Americans believed in the immutability of race: “Americans, in other words could not be made or forged; either a person had the genetic background to be an American or he did not”.³² Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, eugenics garnered broad American support, convincing many Americans that:

the various forms of social degeneracy – feeble-mindedness, insanity, crime, epilepsy, tuberculosis, alcoholism, dependency – were rooted in racial degeneracy. Thus the best social policy was based not on their care...but on their elimination from society. With respect to immigrants, this meant passing a law banning “degenerate” groups.³³

A continued commitment to white immigrants was not as openly discussed in the 1950s as it was earlier in the century. Instead, public discussions of race were imbedded in complex sociologically-based discussions that stress assimilability and anti-communism. In avoiding overt discussions of racial desirability, policy makers reinforced a racial hierarchy in immigrant and refugee acceptance. The act of replacing race discussions with assimilation discussions did nothing to alter the nation’s fixation

³¹ Loescher and Scanlan, 9

³² Bon Tempo, 31.

³³ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 105.

with whiteness.³⁴ The US's continued preference for white immigrants reasserted itself in the passing of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which maintained the racialized quota system originally instituted in 1924.

In addition to maintaining the quota system, the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act also mandated the exclusion of individuals who held viewpoints that were deemed un-American. Not surprisingly, political undesirables were not only anarchists, but the law also extended previous definitions to include those suspected of sustaining ties of holding sympathy for communist causes. Built upon previous legislation, the 1952 law also tightened the definition of Americanness to exclude homosexuals, who were legally defined as and lumped in with “persons affected with psychopathic personalities.” Although barring immigrants because of their sexuality was not a new practice, the legislative reification allowed for a closer monitoring of immigrants and fed into the institutionalization of a mandated understanding of Americanness and un-Americaness.³⁵ The 1952 immigration legislation clearly articulated the US's ideas of desirable and undesirable immigrants, making hegemonic heterosexuality, whiteness and an anti-communism key to any groups claim for asylum.³⁶ While these criteria may not have

³⁴ On whiteness see:

Ngai, Chapter six- The Cold War Chinese Immigration Crisis and the Confession Cases, 202-224.
George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*.
David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (London: Verso Books, 1999)

³⁵ Lionel Cantu and Eithne Luibheid, ed. *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship and Border Crossings*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Bill Ong Hing, *Defending America Through Immigration Policy*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

³⁶ The 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (McWarren-Walter Act) removed explicit language of race in provisions of both immigration and naturalization, substituting “national” origin with “the right of a person to become a naturalized citizen of the United States shall not be denied or abridged because of race and sex.” However this act introduced two new sexual categories: Homosexuality and adultery. These new categories were used to deny eligibility to citizenship. On the codification of sexuality and adultery in immigration, see: Siobhan Somerville, “Sexual Aliens and the Racialized State” A Queer Reading of the

been universally fulfilled by all refugees, perceptions of the group ultimately trumped individual deviations. These issues arise in the period's discussions of potential refugee groups and in the conversations of pro-refugee policy makers given the task of convincing the American public of the attractiveness of the accepted groups. In order to provide asylum and gain public mandate the U.S. government stressed the desirable social, ideological, and racialized traits of Cuban refugees.³⁷

Refugees as Cold War Foreign Policy

As the social climate dictated the desirability of whiteness, the political climate valued refugees fleeing communist countries. Whiteness and an anticommunist stance became indispensable traits needed to garner public support for any refugee group, as the US provided refugee policies only to groups that reflected the US's dominant understanding of desirable racialized and ideological identities. Consequently, desirable refugees not only had to demonstrate their ability/willingness to assimilate but also ascribe to an "American" ideology of anti-communism.³⁸

The debates surrounding the acceptance of the Hungarian refugees demonstrated the continued importance of formulating refugee policy in accordance with domestic and international concerns. In the fall of 1956, a civilian-led movement temporarily overthrew the increasingly leftist Hungarian government; this revolution did not go unnoticed in the US. On the contrary, "during the height of the uprising, the American television audience had been provided with same-day coverage of students hurling paved

1952 U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act" in *Queer Migrations* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005). See also Timothy Randazo "Social and Legal Barriers: Sexual Orientation and Asylum in the United States" in the same volume.

³⁷ Bon Tempo, 318-338

³⁸ Loescher and Scanlan, 73

stones and Molotov cocktails at Soviet tanks.”³⁹ These images provided pro-immigrant factions of the US with tangible examples of individuals literally fighting a communist threat. Consequently, the plight of Hungary’s “freedom fighters” became a national interest, and an empathetic public willingly supported the government’s acceptance of Hungarian refugees.

Accepting the Hungarian refugees served the US’s foreign agenda in numerous ways. As discussed earlier, providing fleeing “freedom fighters” with asylum in a democracy bolstered the US’s own ideological stance while simultaneously undermining Russia’s position. This was especially true in the case of the Hungarians as the US increasingly looked for creative ways of undermining communism on a global scale. The United States was hesitant to provide arms or openly show its support for the Hungarians for fear of overstepping the balance that dictated Cold War skirmishes. The geopolitical location of Hungary –at the doorstep of Russia– made a military intercession as had happened in Guatemala in 1954 a near impossibility. Consequently, the acceptance of refugees coupled with humanitarian aid became the keystones of this ideological battle.

The large numbers of displaced Hungarians warranted a speedy response. Although the US ultimately accepted that largest number of Hungarians, it was not alone in offering aid. Rather, almost every Western European country, Canada and a number of Latin American nations provided asylum to the refugees.⁴⁰ Accepting refugees as an executive directive was completely within the authority set down in the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which allowed the Attorney General to temporarily admit any individual “on

³⁹ Ibid, 52.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 52.

an emergency basis if the admission served the public interest.”⁴¹ Altogether the US provided 30,000 Hungarians refuge; the sheer number of refugees accepted and recent studies suggest that a substantial number of these refugees were not legitimate “freedom fighters” who had actively taken part in the short-lived revolution. Rather, many in this exodus merely sought a better political, social and economic reality and readily took advantage of an opportunity to get out of Hungary and gain acceptance to a Western country.⁴² Despite the variety of motivations, the US universally referred and related to the Hungarian refugees as anticommunist refugees.

Allowing for the entrance of Cuban refugees proved easier as it was facilitated by the lack of quotas on the region. As noted earlier, the immigration quota system adopted in 1924 and renewed in 1952 did not restrict the number of visas available to the Americas, and this exception technically allowed an unlimited number of Cubans to enter the US.⁴³ Holding the door open to Cuban exiles fit within the Pan-American *laissez faire* immigration policies and was in keeping with the intent of the US’s anticommunist activities in Latin America.⁴⁴ As with the case of Hungarian refugees, the acceptance of

⁴¹ Bon Tempo, 182.

⁴² Loescher and Scanlan, 50-51.

⁴³ Keeping the Americas open to immigration echoed the US’s hemispheric policies – the Monroe Doctrine, Roosevelt Corollary and Dollar Diplomacy among others. These policies promoted a certain Pan-Americanism, and while they effectively granted the US dominion over the Americas, they also provided a precedent for Western Hemisphere exceptionalism. In addition to these earlier Pan-American policies, the institution of Herbert Hoover’s and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor policy attempted to rectify some of the US’s transgressions. Despite this policy change the US’s role in Latin America and specifically Cuba remained questionable, as economic neo-imperialism, political strong arming and intermittent military intervention inevitably continued. Nonetheless, this relatively “liberal” moment in US-Latin American policy facilitated the acceptance of Cuban immigrants.

⁴⁴ Ngai, 254-258.

For more on US immigration policies, see: David Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992)

Cubans was seen as a key aspect of Cold War foreign policy as the US expected their admittance to aggravate Castro and Russia while also maintaining the US's commitment to "ideological" warfare. In addition to serving as political collateral, accepting refugees positioned the US as a humanitarian state and universal refuge for those seeking freedom.⁴⁵ While in reality, the US selectively chose only those groups which could fundamentally benefit the US, the sheer number of Cubans refugees provided the US with physical reminders of their commitment to "freedom."

Cubans in the American Cultural Imagination

The acceptance of displaced Jews and Hungarians solidified a model that Cubans would be positioned to fulfill. Despite the continuance of procedures that proved successful for other refugee groups, the US's response to Cuban refugees was unique given Cuba's political, geographical and historical relationship to the United States. Scholars routinely invoke particulars such as proximity, while generally overlooking exceptionalities such as the neo-colonial status of US-Cuban relations are generally overlooked. Similarly, little has been made of the acceptance of Cuban refugees as the first wave of refugees from the third world. This is a weighty omission, since the consideration of any Latin American group is remarkable given US's relations to the region and the political and ethnic qualities that were needed to garner broad US support.

Communist countries are traditionally deemed second world, yet early refugees from Cuba were undoubtedly leaving a country that was perceived as both economically

Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

⁴⁵ Masud-Piloto, 32- 34.

and racially inferior, and were certainly not considered European as was true of the two previous groups. Rather the US constructed Cuba as a geographic and symbolical third world space. This sentiment is echoed by Stuart Hall in “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” as he outlines the construction of “the Rest” he notes, “It condenses a number of different characteristics into one picture. It calls up in our mind’s eye – it represents in verbal and visual language—a composite picture of what different societies, cultures, peoples, and places are like. It functions as part of a language, a ‘system of representation.’”⁴⁶ Thus conceptualizing of the refugees as desirable necessitated a shift in paradigms that fundamentally altered American perceptions of who Cubans were and what they represented.

While the acceptance of Cuban refugees marked a number of significant deviations, the US government and the media alike ignored those differences and instead chose to construct Cubans as the newest “freedom fighters” and ideal Americans. These dual concepts proved useful for both the entrance and integration of Cubans into the US, as mainstream discussions of Cubans stressed the commonalities that Cubans and Americans shared. Constructing a national understanding of who the Cuban refugees were was not as difficult as one might assume. The prolonged historical contact between the US and Cuba provided Americans an “imagined intimacy” that resembled the ways in which Americans constructed an understanding of Hawaii.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” *Formations of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

⁴⁷ Adria Imada, “Hawaiians on Tour: Hula Circuits Through the American Empire,” *American Quarterly* 56:1, 2004, 135.

The widespread consumption of Cuban music, dance and variety shows during the same period produced an “imagined intimacy” with the US’s favorite neo-colonial holding.⁴⁸ The booming tourist industry in Cuba provided middle-class Americans direct contact with a destination and populace that was advertised as “So close yet so foreign” and thus compounded mid-twentieth century American understanding of Cuba.⁴⁹ The popularity of Cuba and all things Cuban reached an unprecedented height after WWII.⁵⁰ Arguably these political, social, and economic ties allowed Cubans a substantive knowledge of the US and conversely allowed Americans some knowledge of Cubans. Similarly the popularity of Cuban musicians, Hollywood stars, boxers, and baseball players in North America caused Cuba to loom large in the imaginations of many Americas.⁵¹ We might recognize Ricky Ricardo/Desi Arnez as a stylized bandleader and relic of the fifties; yet his wealth, exotic Otherness and even his masculinity came to

⁴⁸ This process of “imagining” Hawai’i is discussed by Adria Imada in her study of hula on the mainland during the first part of the 20th century. Imada discusses the popularity of hula shows and demonstrates that numerous Hawai’ian clubs and traveling troops provided the mainland with an “imagined intimacy” with Hawai’i. Through the consumption of Hula shows, mainland Americans constructed an understanding of what Hawai’i was and who Hawai’ians were. These understandings of Hawai’ian identity were far from accurate, as performers were predominately mixed-race and conformed to ideas of white beauty while also maintaining a touch of the “exotic.” Nonetheless, the authenticity of the hula performers was never questioned, rather by virtue of attending these shows.

⁴⁹ This slogan appeared on posters and postcards produced by the Cuban Tourist Commission during the 1920’s.

⁵⁰ Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), 90.

Pérez notes that “Advances in transportation and telecommunications brought the United States much closer to Cubans, and vice versa... Regular scheduled passenger ships service increased. Air travel expanded. Within months of the end of World War II Pan American World Airways augmented its flights between Havana and Miami scheduling as many as twenty-eight flights daily.” (207)

⁵¹ Lisa Brock and Digna Castaneda Fuertes, *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans Before the Cuban Revolution*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1998).

define American understanding of Cubans.⁵² While American understandings of Cubans was more than likely based on distortions and misassumptions, it did allow many in the US some context for understanding the future refugees.⁵³

**“The Cream of the Nation”:
Representing Cuban Refugees’ Whiteness and Class Status⁵⁴**

In order to better understand how representations of Cuban refugees were constructed, I will examine both popular magazines and government publications as both, either implicitly or explicitly, functioned as pro-Cuban refugee propaganda. A comprehensive sample of articles from popular magazines was located by searching the database Readers Guide Retrospective with the search terms “Cuban” and “Cuban refugee.” This sample includes articles written throughout the 1960’s, as this period provides an understanding of how Cubans were “introduced” to the American public and represented as they settled into life in the US. While features in popular print media sources like *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Reader’s Digest*, *Life*, *Ebony*, *Seventeen*, and *US News and World Reports* undoubtedly constituted Americans’ primary means of accessing information on the refugees, the Cuban Refugee Program’s official publications also constituted a legitimate source of information for many Americans. The Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) began its formal public relations campaign concurrent with the genesis of the program in 1961. Building upon the early work of popular magazines and national

⁵² It is clear that the Cuban American model that is prevalent in both public and academic discussions of Cubans is rooted in the perceived identity of the post-1959 exiles and stresses whiteness and financial success as the essentialized identity. See: Mirabal, “‘Ser de Aquí,’ 366-382.

⁵³ Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity Nationality and Culture*, (New York: The Ecco Press, 1999), Chapter 3.

⁵⁴ James Nathan Miller, “Opportunity or Disaster—The Challenge of Cuba’s Exiles,” *Readers Digest*, December 1962, 20.

newspaper articles, the CRP created a monthly newsletter *Resettlement Re-Cap* that began circulating in 1962, a series of informative pamphlets, and two documentaries “Freedom—Si” and “Flight to Freedom.”⁵⁵ Unfortunately, both films and some of the CRP’s pamphlets are no longer available, but the issues of *Resettlement Re-Caps* survived. These will be analyzed as they constitute the most complete measure of the government agency’s concerted effort to undertake a public relations campaign that fundamentally eased the acceptance of Cuban refugees.⁵⁶

America’s obsession with everything Cuban gave the media a context in which the Cuban revolution and subsequent flow of refugees could be discussed. Americans pre-1959 knowledge of Cubans was undoubtedly an advantage, yet it also produced a number of challenges. As the US government attempted to construct Cubans as “good immigrants” and dispel a potential debate on the racial fitness of incoming refugees, the US had to counter the fact that most Americans recognized that Cuba was a multiracial nation. Whether as vacationers, consumers of Cuban music or fans of Cuban athletes, it is undeniable that Americans knew of many black and mulatto Cubans. Moreover many Americans did not travel to Cuban solely because of its beaches and casinos, but expressly to meet and mingle with the “exotic” Latin American “other.”

⁵⁵The CRP also produced a Spanish language monthly newspaper directed at the refugees themselves, a smattering of these issues can be located in the Cuban Refugee Center (Juan Clark) Collection held by the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami (HC0218).

⁵⁶ There is no comprehensive source for government publications of Cuban refugees. A collection of *Resettlement Re-Cap* covering the dates August 1962-August 1969 are located in the Cuban Refugee Center (Juan Clark) Collection held by the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami (CHC0218). It is unclear if this set of *Re-Cap*’s is complete as there is no notation on when the monthly publications began or ended. Additionally, a random sample of *Resettlement Re-Cap* –the CRP’s monthly publications– are located amongst the program’s records at the National Archives II. On the US government’s desire to “sell” Cuban refugees, see: *Bon Tempo*, 319-329.

Despite many Americans' knowledge of multiracial Cuba, the task of "whitening" the Cuban refugees was made easier by the demographics of the initial refugees who were predominately white and upper-class. While racial segregation was not legislated in Cuba, racism did exist where one's social and economic opportunities were directly tied to one's skin color.⁵⁷

The majority of "early" refugees who arrived in the US from 1959-1962 were former Batista officials who fled following the revolution and wealthy individuals who had the most economic holdings to lose, as the country nationalized. Afro-Cubans, on the other hand, were among those most unlikely to immigrate as the revolution's promise to champion racial equality indeed encouraged many Afro-Cubans to remain in Cuba throughout the 1960's. Thus the first wave of immigrants were predominately white, educated, and by in large upper or middle-class.⁵⁸ While the class and racialized characteristics of Cuban refugees shifted over time, public discourse continued to stress the "good" qualities of the early refugees and universally labeled Cubans as desirables. Countless newspaper and magazine articles touted the refugees' educational attainment, anti-communist stance, class, and whiteness of Cubans in the US. This need to explain which Cubans were coming to the US is apparent in a 1967 article in *Readers Digest* which explained:

The Cubans who hated life under communism enough to leave behind all their possessions and start a new life in the foreign country were the solid, educated, professional backbone of Cuba: teachers, lawyers, engineers, owners of businesses. In the

⁵⁷ Pedraza-Bailey, 31.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 31-32

On Latin American racial systems and pigmentocracy, See: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Karen S. Glover, "'We Are All Americans': The Latin Americanization of Race Relations in the United States," in *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity*, edited by Maria Krysan and Amanda E. Lewis, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2004).

early waves, for instance, there were 1,800 doctors –25 percent of the Cuban medical profession.⁵⁹

Articles like this solidified a monolithic identity while simultaneously assuring the US public that, in the eloquent words of *Newsweek*, the Cubans are “OK”.⁶⁰

The US government was financially and politically invested in ensuring that the US populace embraced the Cuban refugees, as a backlash against the refugees would undermine the US’s desired position as the ultimate utopian refuge for all seeking freedom.⁶¹ The US government’s active participation with Cuban refugees began in 1961 when President Eisenhower labeled Castro “red” and made Cubans eligible for money earmarked for communist refugees.⁶² Administered by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare the CRP maintained offices in Washington D.C. and downtown Miami. Individuals who had experience working with refugee groups, and many Cuban refugees worked as staff for the CRP.⁶³ While the Cuban Refugee Program’s primary function was to provide incoming refugees with assistance and resettlement opportunities, the existence of the program and its success relied upon public mandate. Accordingly, the US preemptively constructed a public relations campaign administered

⁵⁹ Miller, 20.

⁶⁰ -----, “They’re OK,” *Newsweek*, 4 December 1961, 59.

⁶¹ A backlash was feared as the loss of populace and political support could end the acceptance and financial assistance extended to Cuban refugees.

⁶² F.V.W. Jones, “Money to Aid 30,000 in Miami: Ike Releases Million to Aid Cuban Exiles: US Labels Fidel ‘Red’ – Officially,” *The Miami Herald*, 3 December 1960, 1A.

⁶³ The director and the management of the CRP were American citizens, while the rest of the staff was filled by the Cuban refugees themselves. In addition to the government employees, the offices housed representatives from the four private agencies --Catholic Relief Service, Church World Services, United HIAS Service, and International Rescue Committee-- that managed the resettlement of the refugees. A discussion of the staff dynamics can be found in John Charles Mayer, “Women Without Men: Selected Attitudes of Some Cuban Refugees,” (MA thesis, University of Florida, 1966).

by the Public Affairs Office of the CRP, which adeptly crafted a unified understanding of the incoming refugees. Depictions of refugees in CRP publications and in the national media alike were crafted by refugee advocates and the staff of the Cuban Refugee Program and served the dual purposes of easing the refugee's transition into the US and gaining broad support for refugee assistance.⁶⁴

The CRP molded information made for television films, co-authored articles in popular magazines and even controlled the scripts of radio programs on the resettlement program.⁶⁵ One such radio transcript read as follows:

Europe has its Berlin Wall...American has the Straights of Florida...Both are scenes of desperate escapes from freedom...From the oppressions of Cuba the open boats keep coming...When an outboard motor failed on a recent run toward safety, an ingenious Cuban carved a gasket from his rubber heel...to assure survival of the six lives on board...Nearly 5,000 men, women, children have reached Florida in these fragile craft, arriving with nothing but prayers of thankfulness for refuge in freedom...These people need sponsors, jobs...Write for 'Sponsor' information...Cuban Refugee Center, Miami.⁶⁶

Much in the same way that refugee narratives were crafted, the images that accompanied individual stories promoted an idealized representation of the refugees. The CRP illustrated many of its publications with pictures of refugee women or children, quelling the country's longstanding racial and economic fears of the immigrant "invasion." This focus is not unusual; rather, as immigration historian Roger Daniels noted, "the stress on

⁶⁴ This support took many forms. As with previous refugee groups and unlike "regular" immigrants, all incoming Cuban refugees received comprehensive resettlement and aid packages. The CRP managed the resettlement effort which was directly undertaken by church based organizations. In order to resettle refugees, sponsors needed to be located. Sponsors were generally individuals or church groups who would volunteer to provide temporary financial assistance and work for refugees as they transitioned into communities across the US. Thus, the CRP's public relations campaign was also used to secure sponsors and facilitate resettlement.

⁶⁵ Bon Tempo, 323.

⁶⁶ "Are You Hearing Radio Announcements About the Cuban Refugee Program?," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, July 1964, 4.

females is typical of immigrant/refugee iconography”.⁶⁷ For example, one of the CRP’s pamphlet directed at attracting refugee sponsors featured three white blond Cuban children and one female flight attendant (See Figure1). This publication fused the disarming images of women and children with an idealized version of the refugees’ phenotypical makeup. The photo’s caption reads, “Cuban Refugees are grateful for helping hands in this land of freedom—To Guide them toward the opportunities for which they are qualified.” In pairing the photo of the children with a reminder of the refugees’ desirable education and middle to upper class status produces an overwhelmingly sympathetic and pro-Cuban effect. Unlike the CRP’s internal publications, many of the national stories focused on highly educated male refugees. One *Life* magazine article illustrated with a two page image of a classroom full of refugee doctors training for recertification.⁶⁸

Cuban refugees of black descent are almost universally absent from all the period’s publications. A review of print media from the period reveals only one photo of an Afro-Cuban refugee. The photo appears in a feature story in *Ebony*. Its strategic placement in an African American magazine and not a mainstream magazine is notable as its presence did little to alter white-Americans’ understanding of the refugees’ demographics.⁶⁹ An under representation of Afro-Cubans is also apparent in *Resettlement Re-Cap* where there are very few pictures of black Cubans amongst the numerous individuals pictured or featured in the monthly newsletter. One of these photographs

⁶⁷ Daniels, 196.

⁶⁸ -----, “An Uneasy Life in An Alien Land,” *Life*, 14 April 1961, 30-33.

⁶⁹ Allan Morrison, “Miami’s Cuban Refugee Crisis: Invasion of 100,000 Exiles Creates Grave Problems for Hard-pressed Negro Laborers,” *Ebony*, June 1963, 96-104.

Figure 1. Pamphlet Published As Part of the Cuban Refugee Program's Public Relations Campaign

A Rewarding Project For U. S. Communities —

YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO HELP WORTHY CUBANS HELP THEMSELVES

— AND TO AID THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM EVERYWHERE —



Photo: Albert Coxa, Miami (A Cuban Refugee)

... "Where's Auntie . . . Where are Mama's friends who were to meet me?"

... A lollipop diverts a Cuban child in a tense moment before relatives are located, after his arrival at the Miami airport.

... The wide-eyed boy is one of thousands of children sent by parents to relatives who have already fled to the United States . . . The parents plan to follow . . . Then all the family will be free from the teachings and restrictions of Cuba's communist regime.

How To Plan Your Sponsorship of Cuban Refugees

Ask full resettlement information from: J. Arthur Lazell, Deputy Director for Resettlement, Cuban Refugee Center, Freedom Tower, Miami 32, Florida.

NOTE:

(a) Refugee transportation costs to your city are paid by the U. S.

(b) There is now a "transition allowance" of \$100 for families receiving public assistance in Miami who go to other cities. (For individuals, \$80.)

(c) Should unforeseen complications develop in the resettlement, U. S.-financed assistance, including medical care, is provided in the resettlement community at no cost to the sponsor.

Sponsors And Jobs Are Needed For

... courageous men, women, children who have fled their communist-controlled homeland

... individuals and families eager to earn their living in freedom . . . to regain their self-confidence, dignity, and pride in accomplishment

... people who have retained in adversity a delightful sense of humor, but who need job opportunities to restore the smiles with which they faced their own sunny world . . . before tyranny took over

CUBAN REFUGEES ARE GRATEFUL FOR HELPING HANDS IN THIS LAND OF FREEDOM — TO GUIDE THEM TOWARD THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WHICH THEY ARE QUALIFIED.



Photo: Courting MIAMI HERALD

... Not all who flee Cuba come by fast plane . . . These weary children were in a small boat that slipped past armed guards, then had motor trouble enroute to the Florida coast . . . Sickened by the sea and lack of rations, two families and their children were rescued by the U. S. Coast Guard and brought safely to Miami . . . Nearly 50 persons every week risk their lives in small craft escapes to freedom.

Sponsor Cuban Refugees . . . FULFILL THEIR FAITH IN FREEDOM

CUBAN REFUGEE CENTER, Freedom Tower, MIAMI 32, FLORIDA

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE — SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

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appears without commentary and features an Afro-Cuban little girl in a crowd of Cuban children learning English.⁷¹ In contrast, a second photo is a portrait of an Afro-Cuban

⁷⁰“Sponsor Cuban Refugees...Fulfill Their Faith in Freedom,” 23 March 1962, (Miami, FL: Cuban Refugee Center), 3. Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 12, Master Sub Files –CR 15, National Archives II.

family (composed of a mother, father and two young boys) accompanied by a half page article that detailed their escape from Cuba, their work history, and resettlement to Palantine, Illinois. This family marked the 15,000 settled by Church World Services, and was featured accordingly. This photo and article follow a format common in the *Re-Cap's*; other than the photo, the only marker of race in the article is one line which states “the Guevara case is significant since it is a sponsorship by a white congregation of a Cuban Negro Family”.⁷² The general absence of Afro-Cubans from narratives on Cuban refugees can be explained by statistical studies of incoming refugees. Afro-Cubans were under represented as the revolution’s promise to champion racial equality indeed encouraged many black Cubans to remain in Cuba throughout the 1960’s.⁷³ Nonetheless by 1970, 3% of refugees were Afro-Cuban and by 1973 over half of Cuba’s Chinese population, constituting around 16,000 individuals, had immigrated to the US. Hence, given that the percentage of Chinese and Afro-Cubans who immigrated during this period was relatively low, the erasure of Chinese and Afro-Cubans in the print media is not surprising.

The representation of Cuban refugees was not only manipulated to reflect the racialized preferences of the period but also the dominant values of hard work and individualism. Various print, film, and radio formats universally presented refugees as democracy-loving, family orientated, hardworking people who were wholeheartedly in search of a better life for themselves and their children. Illuminating the upper and

⁷¹ “English Spoken Here –A Word or Two, So Far,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, August 1967, 1.

⁷² “Church World Service Resettles 15,000the Refugee; Ranks First in Proportion of Caseload Placed,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, May 1965, 2.

⁷³ Alejandro De La Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

middleclass backgrounds of the earliest refugees, aligned with the “good immigrant” model that the CRP emphasized; this stress on class status was specifically meant to assure the US populace that the refugees could not only support themselves, and thus escape dependency, but could contribute to the economic success of the nation as a whole. A *Newsweek* article described Cuban refugees as:

well-educated, well-mannered, business and profession people from the middle and upper income brackets; people of character, too, cheerfully undertaking the most menial of unaccustomed labor rather than continue to accept relief. (Many, in fact, have returned their relief checks after finding work. Repayments, as of this week, were flowing into the Miami Cuban Refugee Center at the rate of \$10,000 a month).⁷⁴

In addition to lauding the positive aspects of Cuban identity, reports also clearly articulated who Cubans were not. Comparing Cubans to the influx of Eastern European immigrants at the turn of the century, a *Reader's Digest* article clearly positioned Cubans as more desirable:

But a huddled mass? Not these people. There are no stooped shoulders, no babushka-over-the-head resignation here. Their self respect is a quiet, unspoken, physical part of them. Their backs are straight and there is nothing in their eyes that ask for sympathy.⁷⁵

Presumably, this troubling reference to babushkas was meant to both malign Eastern European immigrants and promote Cubans as ethnically, racially and economically superior. Positioning Cubans as racially more desirable than European immigrants is ironic given the US's long held preference for immigrants from Europe. The expansion of whiteness in post-WWII America to include Euro-Americans and the “othering” of

⁷⁴ -----, “The Agonizing Wait – Then the Hard Realities Of a Refugee’s Life,” *Newsweek*. 28 August 1961, 23-27.

⁷⁵ Miller, 70.

While the title of this article might appear to contain anti-Cuban sentiments, the sub headline clearly articulates a pro-Cuban agenda and clarifies the seemingly muddy politics of the headline:

“The story of a remarkable group of refugees, of the heartwarming treatment they have received in Miami, and of the tragic explosion that may soon occur unless we all offer a helping hand.”

third world peoples has traditionally placed Cubans and Latin Americans as non-white.⁷⁶ Accordingly, this shift that promoted Cubans from othered bodies to hyper-desirable is reflected in other articles. One such feature in *Newsweek* entitled “Refugee Eggheads” stressed the academic achievements of Cuban refugees while also demonstrating their advantageous class backgrounds.⁷⁷ The article paints an overwhelmingly positive picture of Cuban refugees and focused on one refugee, Maurice Haggiag, who was a former French teacher and read Balzac when not working in a gas station in Miami. While Mr. Haggiag’s interest in French literature is used as evidence of his refinement and upper-class background the racialized contradictions involved in promoting Cubans as racially ideal are also evident. Haggiag is described as a “swarthy intellectual”.⁷⁸ Additionally, “Refugee Egghead” goes on to note that as of February 1961 most former professors had been unable to find work in US universities, yet “one professor went to Shaw University, a Negro institution in North Carolina.” This point might indicate that while the government and popular media sources collectively positioned Cuban refugees as racially desirable and as economic assets, refugees who both believed themselves to be white by

⁷⁶ On whiteness, see: Melissa E. Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn’t What it Used To Be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).
On the expansion of Whiteness in the US, see:
Mary C Waters, “Optional Ethnicities: for Whites Only?,” in *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*, ed. Silvia Pedraza and Rubn G. Rumbaut., (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996).

⁷⁷ -----, “Refugee Eggheads,” *Newsweek*, 27 February 1961, 58.

⁷⁸ The term swarthy was used against immigrants from southern Europe, especially Italian immigrants who were deemed as “racially undesirable” upon arrival, but nevertheless possessed the privileges of “whiteness.” For discussion of twentieth century immigrants and whiteness, see: Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival : Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Cuban standards and by the US government might have been racialized as non-white in a variety of social interactions.⁷⁹

Representing Cuban Refugees' as Anti-Communists

The predominant genre of refugee reports highlighted the desirable qualities of Cubans through human interest stories that focused on happily resettled refugees. Centering public relations efforts on individual refugees, the CRP effectively allowed the refugees to “sell” themselves, with individual experiences and attributes coming to represent the universal Cuban refugee. One typical refugee narrative was provided by an exile from Hudson, North Carolina:

...I feel happy to be here, as a professor of Spanish, algebra and astronomy in the High School, where I am receiving the greatest kindness and help... The whole community gave us a warm welcome and is very kind to us. The people have made us forget the troubles we had in Cuba under the regime of terror... Even more, they have made us forget our lonesomeness and homesickness.⁸⁰

This refugee and many others stress that Cuban refugees were employed, involved in their communities, and grateful for the opportunity to leave Cuba—which was undoubtedly read as an anti-communist stance. CRP newsletters echoed the refugee narratives, one bulletin titled “Sponsor Cuban Refugees... Fulfill Their Faith in Freedom” reprinted a pro-refugee story originally published in the Akron, Ohio newspaper. Entitled “Room For More,” the article evokes the Statue of Liberty and Cold War rhetoric to garner public support, explaining, “as we see it, there assuredly IS room in the United

⁷⁹ The schizophrenic relationships between self-identification, representation, and individual experiences have not been adequately addressed in the case of Cuban refugees. These issues are touched upon by María de los Angeles Torres, as she explores the ways in which the Cuban refugees were racialized as “non-white” despite their self-imposed understanding of their own whiteness. For more on this topic, see: Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*.

⁸⁰“Sponsor Cuban Refugees... Fulfill Their Faith in Freedom,” 3.

States for all the Cuban families that want to resettle in this country temporarily –until Castro and Communism are ousted and it is safe to return to Cuba—or permanently.”⁸¹

The group’s status as refugees centered on their supposedly universal anticommunist stance and stressed their status as political refugees, and not the comparatively less popular economic immigrants. The Cubans’ refugee status reminded the public of the group’s flight from communism and reinforced American’s belief in their position in the ongoing Cold War. Due to the nature of revolution, footage of refugees engaged in anti-communist actions was rare. As one CRP official compared the Cubans to the Hungarians, the lack of physical evidence of the refugees’ politics become clear: “In Budapest, at least we had tanks in the streets. In Miami we have nothing but 100,000 Cubans.”⁸² In order to make the plight of Cuban refugees “real”, the CRP’s publicity campaign regularly engaged the public with heroic escape tales of daring and idealistic refugees who put their lives on the line to ensure their asylum in a democratic nation. Articles featured in *Reader’s Digest* epitomize melodramatic Cold War adventure stories; references to communism permeated “Carnage off Key West” which literally compared the refugees’ escape across the Florida Straights to East Germans breaking through the Berlin Wall. “Carnage off Key West” sensationalizes the horrific tales of Cubans’ boat journey to the US, noting that “it has become commonplace to track down 16- or 18-foot craft packed with 18 or 20 refugees –all dead—their bodies riddled with bullets from Castro’s wolf pack or his planes.”⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid, 3.

⁸² -----, “Refugee Resettlement.” *Newsweek*, 26 February 1962, 58.

⁸³ Henry J. Taylor, “Carnage off Key West,” *Readers Digest*, April 1965, 131-132.

Despite the politically charged atmosphere of the sixties and continual references to communism, most articles on individual refugees did not dwell on the political positions of the refugees. Instead they stressed universal love of democracy over vague discussions of communism, without unearthing the varied and murky politics of the refugee community. Stressing thematic discussions of freedom fit within the CRP's discourse. After 1963 the US provided Cubans entrance on the Freedom Flights, and temporarily housed them at the Freedom House before they ultimately received assistance and resettlement at the Freedom Tower. As noted above, Cubans occupied a myriad of political positions. Yet these ranges of political beliefs were virtually erased by broad discussions of freedom. While the meaning of freedom might be a vague and individually defined concept, in the context of the Cold War freedom was universally interpreted to mean anti-communist.

American Reactions in Black and White

Despite the CRP's pro-Cuban publicity campaign there were isolated cases of anti-Cuban reactions that challenged the totalizing vision of the white, anticommunist Cuban refugee subject. Similar to anti-immigrant backlashes, Americans rejected Cubans for a variety of reasons – because of their racial and cultural difference, foreign language, dependence on welfare, and job competition. Nativist reactions against Cubans were not limited to white Americans. African Americans also voiced their discontent with the incoming refugees. Unlike the protests of many white Americans, African Americans' rooted their concerns in material reality, as they perceived incoming Cubans as threatening their livelihoods.

Cleveland, Ohio was the site of one such anti-Cuban backlash. In 1962, Cleveland was chosen by Church World Services, as the first city to receive a large group of refugees.⁸⁴ In response to slow resettlement rates the CRP hoped to move away from resettling a few individuals or families towards resettling Cubans in large numbers. At the genesis of this new policy, one of the participating agencies hoped that “the Cleveland experiment will be successful and popular.”⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the Cleveland resettlement plans were not met with universal support. White protestors met the refugees as they arrived in Ohio. One angered Cleveland resident lashed out using traditional nativist rhetoric. He stated, “Some of you people and pastors ought to help our own people who are walking the streets looking for a job or something to eat instead of getting these [Cuban] refugees homes and jobs. Charity begins at home. Let’s wake up.”⁸⁶ These feelings might have been exacerbated by a sizeable unemployed population and the apparent lack of previously secured jobs for the resettled Cubans. In fact, a week after the Cubans had arrived in Cleveland, the CRP was still approaching employers in hopes of procuring jobs for the refugees.⁸⁷

Three months later, some of the Cleveland-based Cuban refugees still had not located work or permanent housing. Altogether 85 refugees were resettled in the month of February. A newly-formed local group, Cleveland Cuban Refugee Resettlement Committee, orchestrated their accommodations and support. Individuals in Cleveland

⁸⁴ While the CRP oversaw all refugee relief work, the actual resettlements were orchestrated by a group of religious voluntary organizations (VOLGAs). Their role in the resettlement will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

⁸⁵ -----, “Refugee Resettlement.”58.

⁸⁶ -----, “Cleveland Aid to Cubans Stirs Fury,” *The New York Times*. 25 February 1962, 38.

⁸⁷ -----, “Cubans Resettled,” *The New York Times*, 4 March 1962, E7.

noted that a lack of English skills limited the number of jobs available to the refugees. Even though the CRP offered English language instruction for resettled Cubans, in Cleveland their language and cultural differences marked their “foreignness.” Additionally, a number of the problems faced by the Cleveland refugees appeared to be based in the Cleveland Committee’s lack of experience and forethought. One organizer noted that “it might have been better to bring in only two or three families at a time rather than such a large group.”⁸⁸ The anti-Cuban sentiment in Cleveland did not dissipate. Cuban-American scholar Maria de los Angeles Torres relates her own experiences as a child in 1963:

Cleveland proved difficult to me in another way. The cold and the racism were severe. The incident I remember most clearly occurred the day after Kennedy was assassinated. By this time, my two first cousins had come to live with us. Every morning we would walk two blocks to catch the school bus. The kids on the block started following us and yelling at us that we had killed Kennedy. Their taunts grew louder as we got on the bus. “You dirty Cubans, You dirty Cubans, You killed our President.” I screamed back that we weren’t that kind of Cubans, that we had fled the island. But the geographic and political boundaries which had so restructured our entire lives and redefined our realities meant little to those who only saw “dirty Cubans.” The next day, we found our bicycles smashed and so my father gave us a lesson in self-defense.⁸⁹

This anti-Cuban sentiment was undeniably tied to the period’s political and economic climate and compounded by perceived racial and language differences that positioned the Cubans as undesirable in the minds of white Cleveland residents. Opposition to Cuban refugees was not limited to Cleveland, Ohio. John P. Snyder, mayor of York, Pennsylvania went on a tirade at a city council meeting, denouncing Cuban refugees: “I don’t think that those people are patriots.” This outburst was apparently the outcome of

⁸⁸ Damon Stetson, “Cleveland Finds Cubans Adapting: Exile Group Getting Settled With Permanent Jobs,” *The New York Times*, 27 May 1962, 42.

⁸⁹ Maria de los Angeles Torres, “Beyond the Rupture,” in *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba*, ed. Ruth Behar, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 27-28.

voluntary agencies soliciting the city as a potential resettlement location. Snyder cited that the unemployment rate in York made assisting the refugees impossible; ironically the unemployment rate in York was the fourth lowest in the state, indicating that Snyder's reaction might have had little to do with the actual availability of jobs and more to do with anti-Cuban sentiments.⁹⁰

The reactions from white residents in Cleveland and York, Pennsylvania challenged the common notion that all Cuban refugees were “patriots” or “freedom fighters” and also questioned the government assistance the refugees received. Unlike white Americans' perceived fears, the anti-Cuban reactions of Miami's black populations were more deeply rooted in their unequal access to jobs, housing, and education. By 1963, the influx of 100,000 Cuban refugees into Miami affected the whole city, but because Cuban refugees and black Americans competed for the same low cost housing and unskilled jobs, tensions grew between Miami's black community and the growing Cuban population. One of Miami's black leaders, James W. Whitehead, commented on the situation:

In addition to having special classes set up for their children in Miami public schools, the Cubans get equal treatment with whites in the city hospitals. They enjoy every privilege in Miami that whites enjoy and which are often denied to Negroes. The only reason I can see why Miami Negroes have not been given the same consideration in the integration of the school system as the Cubans is mainly color. Practically all of the Cuban refugees are white.⁹¹

Afro-Cubans also received all of the benefits available to Cuban refugees, and African-Americans in Miami “watched in disbelief as Cuban black and mulatto children attended ‘white schools,’ prompting one local minister to write that ‘the American Negro could

⁹⁰ -----, “York, Pa. Mayor Opposes Resettling Cubans There,” *The New York Times*, 26 May 1962, 17.

⁹¹ Morrison, 99.

solve the school integration problem by teaching his children to speak Spanish.””⁹²

Tensions between African Americans and Cuban Americans continued into the 1980s when new waves of refugees and immigrants transformed Miami’s economic, political and cultural makeup.⁹³

Conclusion

The representation of Cuban refugees in popular print media and government documents represent a concerted effort to mold a populace into a model of “American” norms. The public relations effort of the CRP during the 1960’s represents a situation in which Cuban bodies from a third world space were normalized, or de-othered, in order to make their presence in the US palatable, if not desirable. The appealing representation of Cuban refugees proved effective in that public and political mandates resulted in 665,069 refugees entering the US by 1977, along with the allocation of over 1.4 billion dollars to facilitate the entrance, assistance, and resettlement of refugees to communities across the nation.⁹⁴ Yet, while the CRP’s goals were universally met, the monolithic representation of Cuban refugees as “good immigrants” and “freedom fighters” may not have proven beneficial at the local level for all Cubans. As I have shown earlier some resettled Cubans faced a backlash among white and black Americans that revealed the limitations of CRP’s national publicity efforts. Take for example the resettlement experience of one refugee who worked as a high school teacher in Bluffton, Indiana. She recalled:

⁹² García, *Havana USA*, 29.

⁹³ Alex Stepick, Guillermo Grenier, Max Castro and Marvin Dunn, *This Land Is Our Land: Immigrants and Power in Miami*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁹⁴ Brad Whorton, “The Transformation of Refugee Policy: Race, Welfare, and American Political Culture, 1959-1997.” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Kansas, 1997)

We found that the children in town were really curious about our family, the Cuban family that arrived in town...I was invited to all of the kids' houses in town—to see what I looked like, I imagine. They helped me to learn English. They would come to our house the first week that we were there to see what we were eating, if we wore shoes, if we knew how to use the phone, and if there was anything we needed.⁹⁵

So while this refugee was seen as racially and economically “fit” to teach in an American school during the 1960’s, it is also apparent that white Americans who expected Cubans to fulfill their imagined understanding of the “Other” exoticized she and her family. The racialized discourses of the Cold War, coupled with variations in social location, produced a broad array of experiences for Cuban refugees as they negotiated their individual identities vis-à-vis hegemonic representations of Cubans in mainstream America. The reconciliation between the representation of refugees and individual identities was undoubtedly difficult for many refugees, yet the success of the CRP public relations campaign cannot be denied. In projecting an overwhelmingly positive representation of Cuban refugees, the US government by way of the CRP and popular print sources diminished the anti-Cuban backlashes at the local level by rendering – however imperfectly– Cubans as a “normalized” and legitimate presence in the American imagination.⁹⁶

This project to construct Cubans as racially, politically and economically desirable might be seen as an isolated historical event, if not for the fact that the Cuban

⁹⁵ Sofia Rodríguez, “A Touch of Magic: Oral History,” in *The Road Well Traveled: Three Generations of Cuban American Women*, ed. Terry Doran Janet Satterfield, and Chris Stade (Newton, MA: WEEA Publishing Center, 1988) 77.

⁹⁶ One might argue that part of the appeal of Cuban refugees was that they were seen as “temporary” refugees who would return to Cuba after the fall of Castro. Despite the temporary nature of their presence, all public discussions of the refugees reinforce their legitimized presence in the US, thus providing the refugees with a greater claim to cultural citizenship than other Latino groups in the US. On cultural citizenship, see: Renato Resoldo, “Cultural Citizenship in San Jose, California,” *Polar* 17, 1994; Aihwa Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States,” in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 37, no. 5, December 1996.

refugee community embraced this representation and codified it as an essentialized Cuban-exile identity. The roots of what has become Cuban-American identity are intrinsically tied to these representations, although “the creation of such identities has little foundation in pre-existing sociological reality, in which circumstances it usually involves what has been termed ‘the invention of tradition.’”⁹⁷ Thus, as ethnic identity in the US is constructed in relation to a racialized social system tied to economic and political power, Cuban refugees had an unusual “advantage” as they were socially elevated and provided with a desirable representation on which they could construct their collective identity. Given their designation as upper-middle class, well educated, and hard working, the dominant Cuban-American identity was forged to reflect and reproduce these positive attributes into a monolithic identity and has provided Cubans with unusual access to citizenship, education, economic and political power. All Cubans did not ascribe or conform to this idealized Latino “Model Minority” identity, yet this model remained unquestioned at the national level until the Mariel influx of 1980 and to this day continues to be popular in national discourse and among many Cubans.

⁹⁷ John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1992) 53.

CHAPTER TWO

“You Are But Hours Away From Miami”⁹⁸: Resettlement Policies and Refugee Experiences with Relocation

“Well, we didn’t know where we were going
but we knew we were going to go all together”
- Alicia Bower⁹⁹

As with previous refugee groups and unlike “regular” immigrants, all incoming Cuban refugees received comprehensive resettlement and aid packages. In contrast to previous refugee groups, Cubans did not enter the US by way of a second country or refugee camp but instead migrated directly from Cuba to the US. Although not all Cubans immigrated through Miami, the city became the initial point of entry for many because of the sheer number of flights offered and a general familiarity with the city that had been developed by the constant exchange of tourists between Miami and the island. The uncertain nature of exile and US policy towards Latin America caused many Cubans to believe that their stays in the US would be temporary. This is especially true for those who arrived during first couple of years after the Cuban Revolution. The following example illustrates how one refugee actually conceptualized her exile as a vacation:

Our vacation is beginning. But what will we do in Miami is a question that we ask ourselves over and over again. But it’s not important. All the days will pass quickly and in an opening and in the blink of an eye, we will have returned. These are our thoughts as we cruise the famous ninety miles and soon we touch down in the city of Miami, cradle of tourist. And here we arrive, as new tourist awaiting our prompt return. We look

⁹⁸ Albert K. Trout, US Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapes, *Cuban Refugee Problem*, 87th Congress, First Session, 13 December 1961, (Washington DC: United States Government Press, 1962), in Carlos E. Cortés, *Cuban Refugee Program*, (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 129.

⁹⁹ Alicia Bower included in her mother’s oral history interview. Sofia Rodríguez, “A Touch of Magic: Oral History,” 77.

for a place where we can settle ourselves. Difficult? Going to Miami Beach has been our dream during every one of our summer vacations. To rent houses there requires one-year contracts. They are crazy. Who is going to rent a house for one year when we are going to return in three months? The best is a hotel.¹⁰⁰

While this underestimation of Castro and the Revolution's longevity is now laughable, the belief in a temporary refugee population undoubtedly facilitated the continuation of an open refugee policy and the influx of refugees into Miami.¹⁰¹ This belief in a temporary exile made resettlement unnecessary in the eyes of the first wave of post revolution immigrants and the US government alike.¹⁰² Thus the US government did not consider relocation or formal assistance until the exile gained some sense of permanency and the concentration of Cubans in South Florida required intervention. By 1961, both criteria were met as the population of Cubans in Miami swelled and the failed Bay of Pigs invasion indicated that the exile might be longer than both the US government and Cuban refugees anticipated, consequently the US responded with the creation of the Cuban Refugee Program.

The sheer number of immigrants that settled in Miami created a unique socio-economic situation in which immigrants struggled to locate adequate affordable housing and competed with other minority groups to secure scarce low-wage jobs. Limited resources, coupled with the success of previous refugee relocation programs, caused the government to consider redistributing Cuban refugees throughout the US as a preferred method of relieving the stress in Miami while best assisting the immigrants and simultaneously ensuring that the new refugees would assimilate into American society.

¹⁰⁰ Caroline Berringer-Lopez, *Cuban-Jewish Journeys: Searching for Identity, Home, and History in Miami*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 19-21.

¹⁰¹ Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, 79.

¹⁰² The first wave of Cuban refugees generally refers to individuals who entered the US from 1959-1962

The centrality of resettlement in the US's developing policy for Cuban refugees cannot be under-emphasized; the US government earmarked the first financial aid package to Cuban refugees for resettlement.¹⁰³ Thus, the US government's desire to get Cubans out of Miami trumped the immediate financial and material needs of Cuban. Federal aid increased greatly when the US created the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) and placed it under the auspices of the government agency Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), and secured an annual budget through the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962.¹⁰⁴ The ambitious program set out to ameliorate the economic and social effects of displacement by offering a broad range of social services, effectively providing for the immediate needs of refugees while simultaneously insuring an individual's long-term economic viability. According to María Cristina García, as "funds were provided not only for resettlement but for monthly relief checks, health services, job training, adult educational opportunities, and surplus food distribution (canned meat, powdered eggs and milk, cheese, and oatmeal, among other food products)."¹⁰⁵

Resettlement was always a priority for the CRP, yet the advent of the Freedom Flights in 1965, which brought twice daily flights from Havana to Miami, made the relocation of Cubans out of Miami key to the continuation of the CRP and the acceptance of additional Cuban refugees. The Freedom Flights, also known as the "Relative to Relative Airlift," is a fitting description as Congress legislated the 1965 policy in conjunction with the 1965 Immigration Act, which favored family reunification of

¹⁰³ F.V.W. Jones, 1A.

¹⁰⁴ John F. Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," *International Migration Review*, Vol.1 No.2. Spring 1967, 46-57.

¹⁰⁵ García, *Havana USA*, 22-23

immigrants.¹⁰⁶ President Lyndon Johnson signed the 1965 immigration act at Ellis Island, and released \$12,600,000 for the flights and remarked specifically on the place of Cuban refugees in the legislation: “Our first concern will be with those Cubans who have been separated from their children and their parents and their husbands and their wives and that are now in this country. Our next concern is with those who are imprisoned for political reasons.”¹⁰⁷

Under this new system, both the US and Cuba composed a list of “acceptable” refugees. In the US, Cubans could request to put their relatives on this list, similar to the requests made in the earlier “visa wavers.” The Swiss embassy enabled this process and exchanged lists between Cuba and the US. In order to secure entry an individual would need to appear on both the Cuban and the American list. Once a person could be identified on both lists, the US would arrange and pay for their transportation. The US’s financial commitment to provide transportation was not unprecedented as both the displaced European Jews and Hungarians received similar transportation fee waivers. The marked difference in the Cuban case comes down to the sheer number of Cubans for whom the US willingly provided free flights. These “Freedom Flights” for the newest

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 38-43.

The Freedom Flights began in December of 1965 while the 1965 Immigration Act was signed into law in October of that same year, see:

John F. Thomas, “As First Anniversary of US Airlift Approaches, Cuban Refugee Program Director Views Progress in Resettlement, and Action Needed in the Year Ahead,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, November 1966, 1.

An article in *Resettlement Re-Cap* discussed the progress of the Freedom Flights, and noted that by the end of 1966 most “Priority A” family members, “Parents of unmarried Children under 21, spouses, unmarried children under 21, brothers and sisters under 21, and other relatives in Cuba of persons now in the US who reside in the same households as the Priority A relatives, when inclusion of them is required by humanitarian concerns.” Thus the acceptance of “Priority B” (all other family not listed as Priority A) family members began in 1967.

¹⁰⁷ Lyndon Johnson, “Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York October 3, 1965,” LBJ Library, online archive: <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/Johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/651003.asp>

“freedom fighters” continued from 1965 to 1973 with only a few temporary interruptions, bringing 297,318 Cubans to the US.¹⁰⁸

The resettlement of the first wave of Cuban refugees, coupled with the second wave of Freedom Flight refugees, meant that the majority of Cubans who emigrated during the 1960’s and early 1970’s lived outside of Miami for some period of time. Almost 300,000 Cuban refugees resettled through the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) and with the assistance of private agencies. Narratives of resettled Cubans in the US rarely extend beyond Miami. This is surprising given the CRP’s compulsory relocation of Cubans outside of Miami indelibly altered the distribution of Cubans in the US and produced a wide variety of experiences. These resettlement narratives are important as they provide some understanding of how Cubans coped with both immigration and internal migration. Moreover, analyzing these refugee narratives will reveal both the benefits and challenges that resettlement produced.

One of the few sources of information on the resettlement process and how Cubans coped with relocation is available in the CRP’s publications. Beginning in 1962 and running into the early 1970’s, *Resettlement Re-cap* was a monthly newsletter that reported on the goings-on of Cubans across the US. Published in English, *Resettlement Re-cap* was tailored to appeal to potential sponsors; consequently the newsletter is filled with romanticized resettlement narratives and statistics that demonstrate the success of resettlement policies. Conversely, *Oportunidades* was written in Spanish and served to orientate refugees to various elements of the CRP. Additionally, *Oportunidades* contains numerous resettlement narratives which were undoubtedly meant to encourage other

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Boswell and James Curtis, *The Cuban American Experience: Culture, Images and Perspectives*, (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allaheld Publishers, 1984), 48.

refugees to consider relocation. The wealth of resettlement narratives contained in these publications are a great resource on refugee resettlement, yet they must be treated with some skepticism as editors in the CRP public relations office only selected stories that could function as pro-resettlement propaganda. Accordingly, it is important to examine non-CRP narratives to counter and expand upon romanticized narratives inside the *Resettlement Re-cap* and *Oportunidades*.

Apart from these CRP publications, journalists, sponsors, and academics also wrote many stories about Cuban resettlement. In order to situate Cubans within their own resettlement experiences this chapter will include the voices of resettled Cuban refugees. These first person accounts, whether included in newspapers, national publications, *Resettlement Re-Cap*, academic studies, or biographies, appear in this section in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of resettlement. These accounts are important as they reveal how much agency the refugees exercised in deciding when and where to relocate to. Moreover, they illuminate the resettlement mechanisms used in various locations, thereby providing an understanding of what happened as these refugees transferred out of the auspice of the CRP and into the care of a variety of church groups and local organizations.

“Stopping Spot on Route to Resettlement”¹⁰⁹ - Cuban Resettlement Policy

Upon arriving in the US, the CRP and local charities encouraged Cubans to register at the Cuban Refugee Center located in downtown Miami and to access the services provided by the government and the private agencies. Knowledge of the

¹⁰⁹ “Stopping Spot on Route to Resettlement,” *Resettlement Re-cap*, December 1996, 3.

assistance available at the CRP, combined with the desperate situation that many refugees experienced, compelled many to access the program, and 70% of adult Cuban refugees received some kind of aid from the CRP.¹¹⁰ At the Cuban Refugee Center (CRC), social workers interviewed refugees at registration and required them to disclose their dependants, place of residence, and employment status. Based on these criteria, staff calculated a monthly financial benefit for refugees who needed financial assistance – primarily the unemployed – and granted refugees a maximum of \$60 a month for a single person and \$100 for a family.¹¹¹ After their intake interviews, refugees were passed along to the volunteer agencies that maintained offices at the center.

While the Cuban Refugee Program was ultimately responsible for ensuring the well being of Cuban refugees, the private agencies- Catholic Relief Service, Church World Services, United HIAS Service, and International Rescue Committee actually carried out resettlement. Collectively the government referred to these volunteer agencies as VOLAGs. These agencies were instrumental in the assistance efforts since many had experience in resettling displaced Europeans and Hungarian refugees. The CRP's decision to offer a hybrid approach toward Cuban assistance was based on the voluntary agencies' experience with aiding refugee groups and the government's history of offering structural support and financial aid.

¹¹⁰ Brad Whorton, "The Transformation of Refugee Policy," 37.

¹¹¹ "How The US Cuban Refugee Program Operates." July 1967, Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 12, File Cuban Refugee, National Archives II, 18.

Figure 2. Family Intake Interview at the Cuban Refugee Center



Even though the circumstances surrounding the Cuban refugees differed, the national contacts that the VOLGAs had made them attractive allies. From the onset, the CRP funded the transportation and provided a transition stipend to the refugees, while the VOLGAs decided where the refugees would resettle and what preparations would be made in preparation for their arrival.¹¹² The structure of the four participating agencies – the Catholic Relief Service, the protestant Church World Services, the Jewish United HIAS Service, and the independent International Rescue Committee –dictated their

¹¹² These grants matched the monthly allowance offered by the CRP, thus individuals received a one time transitional grant of \$60 and families received \$100. This stipend coupled with the free first month's rent that was provided by sponsors eased the economic stress that accompanied a move. Oregon SPWC Staff Manual, "Eligibility Provisions for Public Assistance- Cuban Refugee Program," 20 April, 1967, Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 10. State File Oregon. National Archive II, 1-2.

approaches to resettlement. The religious nature of three of the four voluntary agencies meant that many of the refugees chose to work with the agency that best matched their own religious identity. The large number of catholic Cuban refugees meant that the National Catholic Welfare Conference and its resettlement agency, Catholic Relief Services, was the most active.

The religious voluntary agencies utilized the preexisting structure of their denominations to find potential locations for resettlement, by soliciting relocation opportunities through churches, parishes, and synagogues. The International Rescue Committee functioned as a non-religious service and used a range of contacts to procure support from various organizations across the country.¹¹³ The voluntary agencies used the information refugees provided upon registering at the CRC to match individuals with resettlement opportunities. After registering with the center and choosing a VOLGA to work with, Cubans waited in Miami, many obtaining jobs and housing as the VOLGAs formulated resettlement opportunities that matched the refugees' needs and work experiences.

In 1961, 59% of unemployed refugees who solicited the CRP for job placement services were willing to go wherever jobs were located.¹¹⁴ Despite a stated interest in

¹¹³ Julia Vadala Taft, David S. North, and David A. Ford, *Refugee Resettlement in the US: Time for a New Focus*. (Washington DC: New TrascCentury Foundation, 1979), 85-87.

¹¹⁴ Voorhees, Tracy. "Report to the President of the United States on the Cuban Refugee Problem." January 8, 1961. (Washington D. C.: United States Government Printing Office), 9.

Figure 3. Geographic Distribution of Resettlement as of December 31, 1965¹¹⁵

State	Number of Refugees	State	Number of Refugees
Alabama	255	Nevada	540
Alaska	1	New Hampshire	93
Arizona	136	New Jersey	12,830
Arkansas	55	New Mexico	289
California	9,915	New York	26,794
Colorado	937	North Carolina	441
Connecticut	1,193	North Dakota	41
Delaware	175	Ohio	1,257
D. of Columbia	1,115	Oklahoma	386
Florida	1,736	Oregon	481
Georgia	881	Pennsylvania	2,052
Hawaii	26	Rhode Island	219
Idaho	4	South Carolina	173
Illinois	5,061	South Dakota	48
Indiana	798	Tennessee	334
Iowa	363	Texas	2,720
Kansas	563	Utah	13
Kentucky	196	Vermont	38
Louisiana	1,852	Virginia	1,109
Maine	18	Washington	221
Maryland	626	West Virginia	108
Massachusetts	3,351	Wisconsin	421
Michigan	1,048	Wyoming	
Minnesota	311		
Mississippi	91	Other Locations	
Missouri	773	Puerto Rico	10,113
Montana	140	Virgin Islands	25
Nebraska	288	Foreign Counties	825
		Total	93,292

relocating, the logistics and reality of organizing the resettlement project and convincing refugees to leave Miami proved easier said than done. The physical, psychological, and

¹¹⁵ “Cuban Refugee Program: Geographic Distribution of Resettlement As of December, 31 1965.” 31 December 1965, Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 12, File CR 18-1, National Archives II, 1.

economic effects of displacement made many Cubans uneasy about another move and the prospect of unfamiliar surroundings and cultural isolation remained unsettling to some.¹¹⁶ In 1961, the *Miami Herald* reported that “Resettlement is not always as easy as it may sound. Thirteen thousand Cuban families already have turned down opportunities to leave the Miami area.”¹¹⁷ To encourage resettlement, the government offered Cubans access to the same need-based services available in Miami, and eventually promised Cubans –upon the demise of the revolution– free transportation back to Cuba. When these incentives failed to increase the rate of resettlement, the CRP crafted a policy change that allowed them to revoke refugees’ financial assistance upon the rejection of a “reasonable” resettlement offer.

This coercive move was meant to increase the number of Cubans resettlement, however, refugee advocates in Miami and Washington DC rallied against forced relocation. Senator Philip A. Hart, Michigan (D), oversaw sub-committee meetings on the Cuban refugees and echoed the opinion of many closely tied to the CRP, stating, “Compulsory resettlement might be a short-term answer in Miami community pressures, but it has objectionable long term implications – it smacks of the box-car.”¹¹⁸ Evoking the box-cars, an emblem of Nazi Germany’s death camps, effectively ended a discussion of refugee camps as the CRP was cognoscente of the problems attached to accepting a group in the name of democracy only to intern them in box-cars or camps. Ultimately, the

¹¹⁶US Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapes, *Cuban Refugee Problem*, 87th Congress, First Session, 6, 7, and 13 December 1961, (Washington DC: United States Government Press, 1962), 7.

¹¹⁷ Richard Spong, “120,000 have Come Here Since 1959: A History of US Relief for Cuban Exiles,” *Miami Herald*, 2 December 1961, 6A.

¹¹⁸ John Underwood, “Authorities Rallying To Defense of Cubans,” *Miami Herald*, 8 December 1961, 1C.

mandatory resettlement remained allowing the program to avoid the creation of refugee camps. It is unclear how actively the CRP enforced the mandatory resettlement rule. Shortly after resettlement was made compulsory the Assistant Director of the CRP, J. Arthur Lazell, discussed the change and suggested that the CRP not use coercive means to encourage relocation and downplayed the effects of this policy change: “Resettlement is mostly voluntary, there are no screws applied. Taking a hard-line stand, the government announced several months ago that aid would be cut off to any refugee who refuses to be relocated. But thus far...only a dozen Cubans have been affected.”¹¹⁹ While the government typified the resettlement policy as “mostly voluntary” there was nonetheless a coercive element in the process as financial benefits were connected to compliance. One Cuban refugee explained the process in the following way: “[At the CRP] they only gave us two choices where we could get aid. We could either move to Louisiana or Oregon. So we chose Louisiana.”¹²⁰ Thus the state and the various voluntary agencies played a substantial role in constraining refugee decisions about resettlement locations.

To increase the rate of resettlement, the CRP adopted additional policy changes that altered the arrival and processing of the second wave of refugees.¹²¹ With the start of the Freedom Flights, the CRP implemented a systematic process that allowed the

¹¹⁹ Dom Bonafede, “Cubans Meeting Greater Assistance: Our Refugee Problem Easing Off,” *Miami Herald*, 8 January 1962, 1B.

¹²⁰ Marina Mayen Kahn, “Immigration: Problems of Assimilation and Acculturation of Latins in New Orleans” (MS thesis, University of New Orleans, 1977), 76.

¹²¹ The second wave of Cuban refugees spans the length of the Freedom Flights, beginning in 1965 and ending in 1973. While there was no formal means of transportation between the US and Cuba after the end of the Freedom Flights, there were additional entrants. Thus all refugees who entered later in the 1970’s can also be considered second wave refugees.

program and the voluntary agencies to serve the two planeloads of refugees that arrived each day. The government instituted a satellite registration and information center at Opa Locka Airport, just north of Miami. This center performed many of the services that the CRP provided to new refugees –namely registration and medical exams. One new aspect of the process was the government-run Freedom House at Miami International Airport. This building functioned as a temporary motel for refugees who could easily board a plane and resettle directly with their sponsors or family members across the country. Seventy percent of new refugees stayed at the Freedom House while they awaited resettlement; the other 30% of refugees were released directly to family members in the Miami area. These new policy changes proved effective as resettlement rates climbed; by 1966, 76% of the 40,822 incoming refugees were relocated.¹²²

Because of the extensive publicity surrounding Cuban refugees, what had begun as Miami's refugee "problem" turned into a "welcoming event" in which many individuals and groups across the US were willing to meet and assist incoming Cuban refugees. Despite the press coverage, most Americans maintained a limited or skewed understanding of the refugees. One *Resettlement Re-cap* published a refugee's impression of the Americans' knowledge about Cubans. This refugee in Colorado explained that "Many Americans did not know what to expect of Cubans, being unaware of their color, education, abilities, morals, or opinions."¹²³ The American public's narrow understanding of Cubans produced some troubling notions and images of the exotic "other" discussed in the previous chapter. Of course there were also some heartfelt and well-intentioned acts

¹²² "Resettlement Re-Cap" October 1966, Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 12, RG 363, Master Sub File, CR 15 National, Archive II, 4.

¹²³ "Resettled Cuban Puts OK On Relocation Program," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, January 1966, 2.

Figure 4. Resettled Refugees by State, as of December 1972¹²⁴

State	Number of Refugees	State	Number of Refugees
Alabama	415	Montana	152
Alaska	1	Nebraska	480
Arizona	234	Nevada	1,603
Arkansas	82	New Hampshire	142
California	39,223	New Jersey	58,791
Colorado	1,379	New Mexico	451
Connecticut	3,863	New York	80,483
Delaware	365	North Carolina	855
D. of Columbia	2,322	North Dakota	46
Florida ¹²⁵	12,626	Ohio	2,357
Georgia	2,366	Oklahoma	562
Hawaii	30	Oregon	1,105
Idaho	12	Pennsylvania	3,833
Illinois	22,243	Rhode Island	505
Indiana	1,681	South Carolina	304
Iowa	569	South Dakota	55
Kansas	1,022	Tennessee	593
Kentucky	361	Texas	5,353
Louisiana	8,269	Utah	15
Maine	32	Vermont	94
Maryland	1,803	Virginia	2,097
Massachusetts	8,184	Washington	431
Michigan	2,801	West Virginia	164
Minnesota	538	Wisconsin	698
Mississippi	110	Wyoming	19
Missouri	1,279		
		Total	272,293

of benevolence. The CRP and the VOLGAs also developed various strategies to encourage nationwide support for resettlement. Soliciting assistance from groups and individuals across the US, the voluntary agencies and the CRP sought to attract potential sponsors through internal publications and public media outlets. The voluntary agencies

¹²⁴ Prohías and Casal, 111.

¹²⁵The resettlement numbers for Florida denote the number of refugees relocated to non-Miami locations.

also directly approached state and local governments, and compelled them to serve as sponsors.

The CRP and the individual voluntary agencies developed numerous means of attracting sponsors. The lack of a singular approach did not seem to have hindered the resettlement program, but it did undoubtedly produce a variety of resettlement experiences. To secure sponsors, the CRP itself proposed a wide array of programs including a chain letter system deemed the “Help one, Tell one” program that “would ask 35 local services to help resettle one family each, and to write five counterpart organizations elsewhere in the country, asking them to do the same.” Always conscious of the nation’s perception of the refugees and the CRP, the official who announced the program stressed that “the project was not aimed ‘at getting the Cubans out of here,’ but at enabling the refugees to retain their dignity and self respect by becoming self supporting.”¹²⁶ The assistance provided by sponsors was intended to extend well beyond the invitation to relocate, and as the CRP outlined a potential sponsor should prepare themselves because:

...the obligation includes temporary housing and support, including a month’s rent, utilities, housekeeping items, and a moderate supply of food. Also necessary will be the arrangements for job interviews, help in becoming acquainted with the community, the churches, the schools, local customs, encouragement to study English, and friendly visits during the period of adjustment.¹²⁷

As *Resettlement Re-Cap* was directed towards potential sponsors, the monthly publication provided a wealth of information on how individuals could help in the resettlement effort. One such article dissuaded potential sponsors from directly contacting

¹²⁶ Juanita Greene, “New Steps Taken to Resettle Exiles: Chain Letters Proposed,” *Miami Herald*, 20 December 1961, 1B. The project was announced by Arthur Lazell, deputy director of the Cuban Refugee Center.

¹²⁷ Sponsor Cuban Refugees...Fulfill Their Faith in Freedom,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, March 1966, 4.

the CRP; instead, it explained, “To consult about sponsoring Cuban refugees, or to place on record job opportunities for them, contact in your own community, and representatives of the Volunteer Resettlement Agencies”.¹²⁸

One *Resettlement Re-Cap* outlined the process behind convincing a church congregation to sponsor and prepare for a Cuban refugee family. This extended discussion is interesting as it illustrates how many individuals and factors a resettlement offer hinged on, as well as the preconceived notions of the sponsor and the sponsorship process. The resettlement efforts of the St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Akron, Ohio began with a visit from a CRP official, Dr. Stuart G. Cole, who informed the church’s women’s group and church board about CRP’s need for sponsors. Upon approval from both church bodies the minister, Rev. Van Doren, approached the church congregation. He recalled:

In 10 minutes I was expected to sell the idea that Dr. Cole presented in two hours! Well, it worked. The congregation said yes. Two days later I was notified that we would meet the family of Antonio Barrera (sent from Church World Services, Cuban Refugee Center) in just 10 days. There followed the most feverish, exciting, frustrating, agonizing, but beautiful, 10 days in the history of the parish. I have never seen such a response. In that brief time we acquired an apartment, furniture, items from pots and pans to band aids clothing and food.¹²⁹

The church lined up a job for Mr. Barrera that matched his previous occupation as an owner of a dry cleaners in Cuba. Rev. Van Doren added that, “His [Barrera] employer told me: ‘When you asked me to employ a Spanish-speaking young man I thought that I was doing you a favor. Now that he has worked for me for a week I know that you are

¹²⁸ “How to Take Helpful Action in the Cuban Refugee Program – and Where,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, January 1967, 3. The emphasis is the CRP’s and not mine. The numerous job offers and request for refugees with certain skills present in the CRP’s records suggest that many Americans were not aware of these procedures. Curiously one of the most common job offers found in the CRP records are for cigar makers.

¹²⁹ “Congregation Said “Yes” –Then Speeded Preparations for Refugees,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, February 1967, 1-3.

doing me a favor’.”¹³⁰ While working with Mr. Barrera quelled this employer’s initial prejudice, it is likely that sponsors across the US held similar sentiments.

The VOLGAs made some effort to resettle the refugees in groups. This policy proved desirable for the CRP as it provided the relocated refugees with a readymade community and consolidated transportation logistics. Conversely, acquiring numerous sponsors, housing, and potential jobs for a large group of refugees could be difficult. Even though resettling Cubans in groups would make quick work of the relocation efforts, the Cleveland resettlement project, discussed in the previous chapter, illustrates some of the problems connected to group resettlement.

Despite these challenges, VOLGAs pursued group resettlement. One of the religious agencies, Church World Services, began a resettlement campaign in 1962 that actively tried to resettle twenty-five Cuban families. The Church Word Service director of immigration James MacCracken noted that “If 1,000 American cities and towns would accept the responsibility for 1,000 such chartered flights the entire resettlement job could be accomplished.”¹³¹ This proposed resettlement plan heartened some refugees like Darío Miguel García who volunteered to take part because as he put it, “I want to go anywhere I can raise my family...I don’t want to be a millionaire or anything. What I need is stability – a job in which to stay, a place to live, a chance to educate my children under better circumstances.”¹³² This refugees sanguine attitude towards resettlement, was possibly

¹³⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹³¹ -----, “Refugee Resettlement.”58.

¹³² Ibid, 58.

precipitated by the lack of jobs in Miami and the difficulties inherent in trying to support a family on a CRP assistance check.

Whether because of changes in resettlement policy or stepped up public relations efforts, there was a marked increase in the resettlement rate towards the end of the 1960's and early 1970's. The increase is immediately evident if one compares Figure 3 to Figure 4; both charts present the geographic distribution of relocated refugees by state. In the seven years that elapsed between 1965 and 1972 the number of resettled refugees tripled from 93,292 to 272,293. This increase can also be attributed the presence of small but growing Cuban communities composed of earlier resettled refugees, as one Church World Service worker reasoned:

Before these people were often afraid to go off by themselves to another city where they might not find anyone who could speak their language or where their children could not go to school. Now they can go with other Cubans, and the various agencies in the host cities will help them find jobs and a place to live. That's all they want.

A CRP publication from 1970 proudly proclaimed the resettlement rate of Freedom Flight Cubans (1965-1975) as 73.3% of all arrivals.¹³³ Although the number of resettled refugees considerably increased, the distribution followed similar patterns with states with large urban centers –such as New York City, Chicago, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles– receiving the largest number of refugees. The draw of city living was not surprising as a third of the first and second wave refugees came from urban settings in Cuba. Urban cities accepted the largest numbers of refugees in part because of their long history as centers of immigrant and refugee populations.¹³⁴ Thus it is not surprising that the post-'59 resettlement mirrored earlier Cuban settlement patterns with the refugees

¹³³ "The Score," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, April 1970, 2.

¹³⁴ Fagen et al., 23.

augmenting the population of earlier Cuban communities in New Orleans, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.¹³⁵

Continual displacement and financial insecurities plagued many during the early years of exile. Nonetheless, the CRP's assistance provided the refugees with opportunities which, if not available, would have made survival very difficult if not impossible. For the refugees, receiving financial assistance and gaining some degree of independence were intertwined. The lack of jobs in Miami, coupled with pressures from the CRP, and the presence of friends and family in various locations across the country made resettlement both necessary, and for some, an attractive option. Consequently, almost 300,000 of the first and second wave refugees relocated outside of the Miami area.

Resettlement Re-cap and Oportunidades

The CRP used *Oportunidades* and *Resettlement Re-cap* for different target audiences. The ways in which each newsletter portrayed resettlement varied in subtle and not so subtle ways. One typical resettlement narrative in *Resettlement Re-cap* featured a smiling Cuban family who quickly found jobs and became happy members of the local church and community. These romanticized images and stories of resettlement appeared in every issue of *Re-cap*. The first issue included quotes from resettled Cubans such as "I started working the day after we arrived here. My wife is promised a job teaching Spanish" and "I see here good friendship, happy people wishing to help us

¹³⁵Maria Cristina García, "Un Legado de la Guerra Hispano-Americana: La Emigración Cubana a Estados Unidos," in *Los últimos Días del Comienzo: Ensayos Sobre la Guerra Hispano-Cubana-Estadounidense*, ed. Benigno E. Aguirre (Santiago de Chile: RiL Editores, 2000), 113.

Figure 5. A Typical Story from Resettlement Re-Cap



"It's a far cry from his former job as a Havana real estate executive, but Cuban refugee Angel Fernandez is not too proud to get his sleeves dirty," reports the ARIZONA DAILY STAR, Tucson, concerning this family. Nor are other members of his family, shown busy in a Tucson restaurant. Mr. Fernandez does yard work days, washes dishes nights. Like many another refugee, he looks forward to work more suited to his experience, when his English improves. (Photo Courtesy ARIZONA DAILY STAR.)

Cubans. This place is happy for us to live."¹³⁶ The editors of *Re-cap* paired feature stories that focused on specific families with photos that illustrate the refugees' new resettled lives. Stories of resettled families centered on work or home-life (See Figure 5), and featured refugees showing off their comfortable living conditions, economic and social well-being. For example, Figure 5 shows Mr. Angel. Fernandez transformation from a real estate executive to blue collar worker (this stoic riches-to-rags story is another common trope of *Re-Cap*). Although Fernandez secured a job he experienced a

¹³⁶ "A Resettled Refugee Writes," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, August 1962, 2.

substantial loss of class status in the US, yet the story and image reveals nothing about his reaction to this or the low wages and working conditions that accompanied blue-collar work.

I am not questioning the legitimacy of the *Re-Cap* narratives, as I do believe that the resettled refugees were relieved to have a permanent residence, secure jobs, and the assistance of sponsors in the area. Yet, these stories reveal only romanticized versions of resettlement neglecting the negative and darker aspects that inevitably accompanied relocation. These stories focus on the refugees on their good days, highlighting professional or educational achievements or highlighting the day that they arrived in new locations. In *Resettlement Re-Cap's* defense, the magazine was not concerned with chronicling the resettlement experiences of refugees, but instead with recruiting more sponsors.

The CRP's public relations branch also peppered the Spanish language publication *Oportunidades* with similar stories of resettlement, yet the focus of many of their stories is a comparison of life in Miami to life in resettled places. One *Oportunidades* article featured a resettled family in Oregon with the following title "En Miami...en la Calle – En Portland...en su Hogar" or "In Miami...in the Street – In Portland...in their Home."¹³⁷ Portraying the family before resettlement as homeless is something of an overstatement, yet the theatrics of this comparison fits seamlessly with the dominant narrative of *Oportunidades*. This distinction between life in and out of Miami continues in cartoons contained in *Oportunidades*. The most elaborate of these cartoons stretched over two pages and contains a series of images of impoverished and

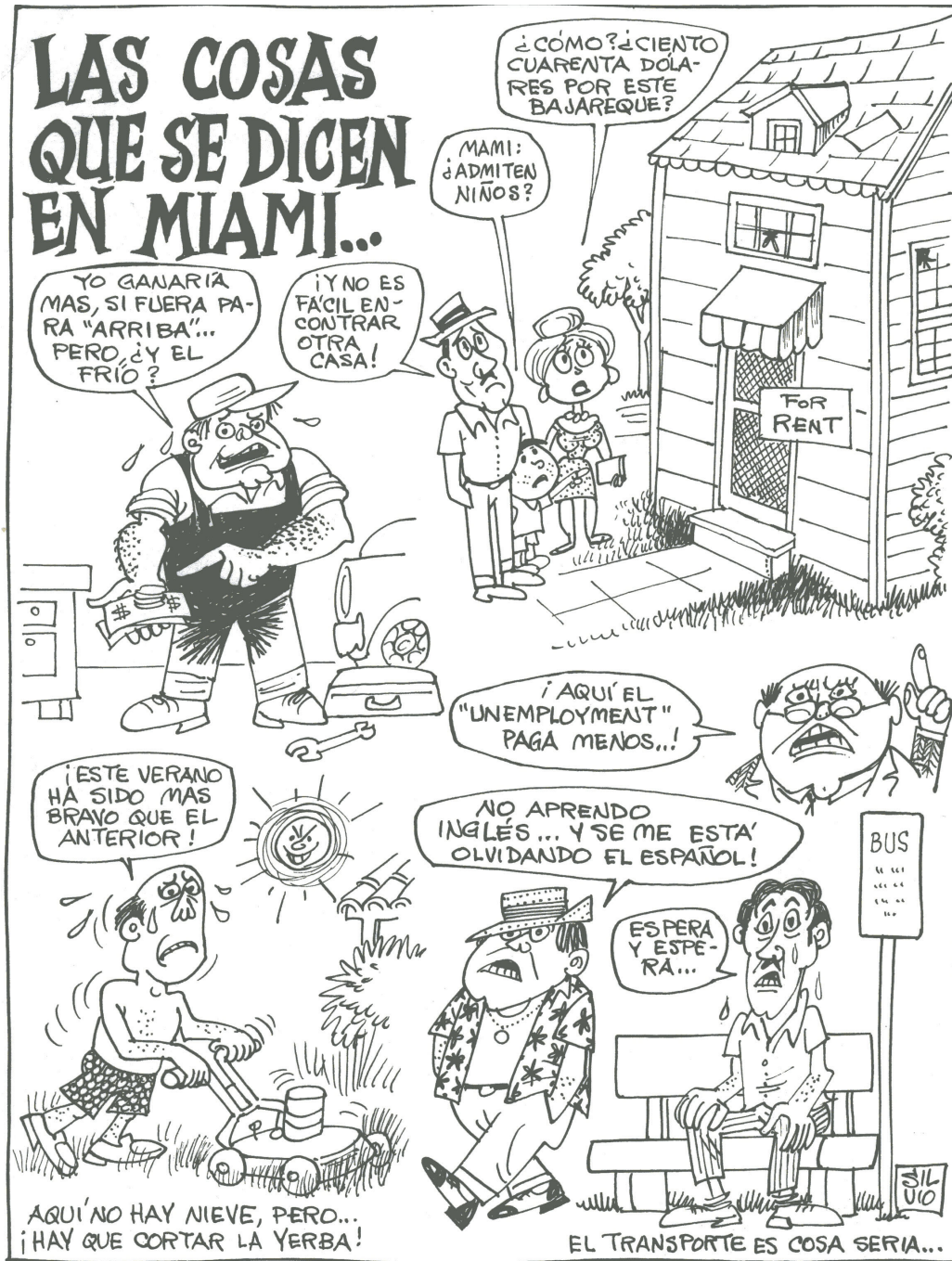
¹³⁷ "En Miami...en la Calle – En Portland...en su Hogar," *Oportunidades*, April 1968, 1.

Figure 6. "What the Cuban Tourists Say," *Oportunidades* August 1969¹³⁸



¹³⁸ "Lo Que Dicen Los "Turistas" Cubanos...", *Oportunidades*, August 1969, 5-6.

Figure 7.
 "The Things That Are Said in Miami," *Oportunidades* August 1969¹³⁹



Suplemento de OPORTUNIDADES

¹³⁹ "Los Cosas Que Se Dicen En Miami," *Oportunidades*, August 1969, 5-6.

downtrodden refugees in Miami contrasted by resettled refugees (deemed *turistas* in this cartoon) enjoying steady employment, reasonable rent, and the resources needed to take vacations (see Figure 6 and 7).¹⁴⁰ The depictions of Cubans in these two cartoons produce a telling gendered story. The cartoon on Miami focuses on unsuccessful male breadwinners, and is dominated by stressed, underpaid, dirty working class men who are discontent with their situation. Only one family appears in the Miami cartoon, the mother is the only woman pictured in this cartoon, and she is not positioned as an active participant, but instead a victim of high rental rates and landlords who exclude children. In contrast, the cartoon on resettled refugees features intact families and working women, and even positions one woman as the ubiquitous preserver of culture at a Cuban holiday celebration. Collectively these cartoons coupled with the stories and pictures in *Oportunidades* clearly articulated the goals of the CRP and provide idealized depictions of life after resettlement.

The refugee resettlement stories published by the CPR came from a variety of sources –newspaper articles, individual refugees and exile groups. This method of data collection meant that some cities attracted no mention while others appeared on a monthly basis; the inclusion of any given story was not tied to how many refugees resided in that area but rather the story itself.¹⁴¹ Some groups and individuals voluntarily

¹⁴⁰ All of the cartoons in *Oportunidades* are simply signed Silvio. I believe that they are all the work of Silvio Fontanillas, the Cuban refugee cartoonist who worked for the weekly Cuban political humor magazine *Zig-Zag* before the revolution. Once in Miami Fontanillas founded *El Nuevo Zig-Zag* .

¹⁴¹ As a result there is a wealth of entries on small towns with small Cuban populations; while it is impossible to fully deduct how information was chosen for publication, it is likely that someone within these communities frequently sent information about the Cubans there back to the CRP.

sent stories to the CRP, and the program concurrently the solicited information. In a letter to an exile group, Mario Barrera a member of the CRP's publishing branch says:

...the national director of Cuban Refugees, is interested in what you can tell us about... the activities, initiatives, and achievements of the Cuban refugees who reside in diverse areas of the United States. ...for example, was anyone who has been promoted to an outstanding professional, scientific, or civic position, or has anyone reached a high degree of economic independence, through their own personal effort, by establishing a business or industry.

These leading questions make it clear that the public relations arm of the CRP was not concerned with the struggles or failures of the refugees, but more concerned with "promotion" of individual and collective triumphs.

The experience of Olga Caturla de la Maza demonstrates how the CRP collected information from resettled refugees. Catholic Charities resettled Olga Caturla de la Maza to Albuquerque, New Mexico in December 1961.¹⁴² She received a job teaching at a Catholic school. In March 1962 the Cuban Refugee Program contacted Mrs. De la Maza to find out about her resettlement experience:

We are pleased to have been of service in your resettlement. We trust that it will be so successful, through your efforts, that it will lead to many more sponsors and opportunities in your community for Cuban refugees. Where you are now located, you represent all Cubans who have fled from political oppression in your homeland. Your advancement in your work, among your acquaintances, in the community in general, will help you and all free Cubans – particularly those yet to be resettled. After you read this letter and think about these points, I hope you will write me about your experiences and your hopes for the future... Please tell me about your job and the cooperation that has been extended to you.¹⁴³

This letter makes the CRP's desire to manipulate refugee narratives to serve as pro-refugee propaganda glaringly apparent. Additionally, the letter served to "remind" the

¹⁴² Margaret L. Paris, *Embracing America: A Cuban Exile Comes of Age*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002). Mrs. de la Maza's resettlement destination was relatively clear since her three daughters had immigrated and were resettled through the Unaccompanied Children's program, and had located a job for their mother at the Catholic school that they were attending.

¹⁴³ Paris, 65-66.

refugees of their special status in the US, that their individual experiences (and behavior) directly impacted all Cubans, and that they have an obligation to the US government. The government's expectations for the refugees were implicit, but painfully obvious to Mrs. De la Maza, who wrote a response but never mailed it because, as her daughter's biographer disclosed "she didn't want to go on the record as being so negative." Nonetheless, her daughter kept the letter and it appears in her daughter's book,

Embracing America: A Cuban Exile Comes of Age. Mrs. De la Maza wrote:

I have tried in every moment to be worthy of your kind efforts to resettle me; worthy to represent the free Cubans, we political, exiled people, searching for a democratic country where our children could be raised in democratic codes of life, according with the principles that allow men, as alienable rights, the right of life, the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

... You asked my first impression of my home and surroundings. Sir, the Catholic Welfare commissioned the lady whose home my daughter had been living, to rent a home for me. I still live [in], but it hasn't seemed a home to me [for] any moment...

By the 21st [of] Jan. I tried to move to a better apartment, just two blocks from my work, only renting for seventy-five dollars, gas included and with two nice bedrooms, carpeted with front and back doors, shower and bath, a good heating system. But one of my sponsors came here and prevented me, [saying] that if I persisted in moving I would make it "difficult for myself and for the rest of Cubans here." So I had to remain here. She reminded me also I was here by her kind help, finding me a job, "because Cubans were not welcomed [sic] here." When she left, I cried and felt so sorry that I wished I had never come here where we were so unwelcomed [sic].

I don't know if it is because I have worked without any rest, day in, day out from 6:30 am to 3 pm and sometimes have to wash all our clothes, sheets, and towels by hand, but I feel so tired, so discouraged!¹⁴⁴

Mrs. de la Maza's letter is significant as she indicates that despite the assistance of the CRP and the support of a local sponsor life was far from easy. Thus, Mrs. de la Maza provides a counter narrative that is absent in mainstream and CRP publications that prefer to stress "success stories" of happily-resettled Cubans that dominated CRP publications.

One exile describes his life in Staunton, Virginia:

I am working as a Junior Physician in a state mental institution...I am happy here with my family and have gained many friends. Everyone has treated me with kindness –

¹⁴⁴ Paris, 65-66.

physicians, nurses, attendants, the employers, and the people in this city, which is small, but I feel as if I were in paradise... I love the United States and I am ready to serve the country in what-ever way I can.¹⁴⁵

Without questioning the authenticity of this exile's experience, it is important to critically probe the testimonies, images, and stories included in the CRP publications. While different perspectives existed, the CRP's publication, national magazines, and local papers promoted resettlement by positioning the refugees as "good and happy immigrants." These public relation projects situated the refugees as victims of Castro's revolution who required financial assistance –not because of laziness or other attributes connected to "undesirable" immigrants or welfare abusers– but because of a lack of jobs in the Miami area.

Refugees Discuss Resettlement

Despite the overtly idealized portrays of resettlement that dominate *Resettlement Re-Cap*, the periodical does offer some first personal accounts of resettlement. The CRP publishers edited these accounts, yet they do offer a glimpse of how the refugees experienced relocation. The testimonies in *Resettlement Re-Cap* are made more valuable because of the lack of oral histories on the resettlement process. There are a surprisingly small number of biographies or autobiographies written by first generation immigrants who were adults when they came to the United States . Children of first-generation refugees, who arrived as children and young adults, record the bulk of first person accounts of immigration and resettlements. These narratives produced by child immigrants provide dynamic evidence of the challenges these children and their parents experienced building lives in the US. As many of these writers were quite young when

¹⁴⁵“Sponsor Cuban Refugees...Fulfill Their Faith in Freedom, 3.

they came to the US, many do not recall the details of their resettlement, thus there are not a large number of resettlement experiences recorded in memoirs. There are rare exceptions, as noted above in the Olga Caturla de la Maza testimony relayed by her daughter's Elena Maza, which are important as they provide an array of perspectives and experiences absent in the CRP's publications. This section will rely upon these biographies as well as narratives in *Resettlement Re-Cap* and the abbreviated stories on resettlement recorded in national publications, local newspapers, and a limited number of academic studies that include oral histories.

Narratives on resettlement generally highlight specific moments of the relocation experience, or in the case of Sofia Rodriguez, neatly condensed in the following way:

When we arrived in Miami, my husband and I went to the refugee center. We completed the applications and looked for work. He was a lawyer and I was a teacher. They called us after some time, and they said that there was an opportunity in Bluffton, Indiana. There was a church that wanted to sponsor a Cuban family and a high school that needed a Spanish teacher. There was our opportunity, even though we didn't know where Bluffton, Indiana, was. We had heard of the Indianapolis 500 and located Bluffton two fingers above the Indianapolis map.¹⁴⁶

Many Cubans repeated the experience of not having any knowledge of where exactly the federal government would resettle them. An adventurous spirit and/or the serious lack of jobs in Miami spurred refugees to accept resettlement opportunities in remote locations across the country. Teodoro Simón explained his move to Kansas, "I went to the government refugee center and learned that they had an opening on a flight of Cubans leaving the next day for Wichita. I said okay, went home, found Wichita on the map and packed my bags."¹⁴⁷ At some point the Cuban Refugee Center or one of the VOLGAs

¹⁴⁶Sofía Rodríguez, "A Touch of Magic: Oral History," 77.

¹⁴⁷ Miller, 20.

obtained a wall-sized map, as pictures of refugees or CRP staff pointing out their future destinations appear in *Re-Cap*.

The CRP and VOLGAs deemed some refugee families as difficult to resettle because of medical problems or the size of the family. Although most Cuban families were relatively small and the difficult exit procedures from Cuba fractured many extended families, large families, either with numerous children or extended family members, did manage to resettle intact.¹⁴⁸ One of the few locations that specialized in resettling large families was Portland, Oregon, where the twelve member Enriquez family was sent. Mrs. Enriquez recalls the process:

My husband filed for resettlement as soon as he knew about wonderful program...Being a generous-sized Catholic family (10 children) we waited 14 months in Miami. It seemed every city was afraid to run our risk! But our lucky day arrived, marking the start of a new, full, rich life...My husband began work after arriving...He is now with an accounting firm and very happy. I have enjoyed working at my former profession, teaching Spanish in a high school. In the summer I work sewing for a women's dress firm.¹⁴⁹

As the CRP directly tied benefits to the acceptance of resettlement opportunities, the government agency had ultimate control over whether or not a refugee would be resettled. Yet the presence of a large number of pro-refugee staff meant that some flexibility was possible in the assignment and acceptance of resettlement opportunities. This is apparent in Andrew Rodriguez's story as he recalled when a CRP official make the following offer to his wife: "Mrs. Rodriguez, there's an opportunity for relocation in Las Vegas, and I wonder if you'd be interested? Otherwise there are hundreds waiting to

¹⁴⁸ On the low fertility of Cuban women, See: Douglas Guark, "Sources of Ethnic Fertility Differences: An Examination of Five Minority Groups," *Social Science Quarterly*, 59, 1987, 295-310.

¹⁴⁹ "The Happiest Family in the Northwest," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, September 1963, 1.

settle in that city. I honestly think that it's a horrible place to raise a family, but I am supposed to tell you anyway."¹⁵⁰

This informal refusal of a resettlement opportunity did not cause the CRP to discontinue Rodriguez's contact from the center, as he later accepted another offer to Colorado upon the recommendation of his case worker. Andrew and Margarita flew to Denver with their small child and were met at the airport by a family from the St. Mark Lutheran Church. After the constant financial uncertainty and difficulty finding housing in Miami, Andrew expressed the relief that accompanied their arrival at a home provided by the church:

The modest living room appears to have been decorated by Mother Goose and furnished by Baby Bear. Ahead of the small kitchen a dinette table stands with a vase full of fresh zinnias and two place settings on top. On my left there's a closet stocked with brooms, a vacuum cleaner, detergents, dusters, and lots of rags and on my right another one full of linens, towels, tablecloths, napkins, aprons, blankets, and so on... The only thing missing in the entire house is a flickering neon sign saying: Welcome home!¹⁵¹

Despite the generosity of their sponsors, and the material goods in their new home, life in Colorado was not totally enchanted as Andrew needed to work three jobs to support his family. Yet for the Rodriguezs, the sense of community offered by various members of their sponsoring church, along with financial assistance, eased their economic difficulties. The Rodriguezs were so thankful for the assistance offered by members of the St. Mark Lutheran Church that they choose to overlook their Catholic background and regularly attended the Lutheran Church.

Another Cuban family resettled to Quincy, Illinois by a Christian Church offered a similar story. Mrs. Marcos wrote the following to friends in Miami:

¹⁵⁰ Andrew J. Rodriguez, *Adios, Havana: A Memoir*, (Denver: Outskirts Press, 2005).

¹⁵¹ Rodriguez, 230-231.

We were met by 10 persons of the church, all kind and charming... Our living room is furnished, including a TV and beautiful lamps. Kitchen and dining room are well equipped and there is a lovely patio. Also we have a clothes washer, telephone and heater... We are most comfortable, thanks to the kind people who make every effort to understand our needs. Lino (her husband) is working at the church and I plan to do work at a laundry when the children start school.¹⁵²

Interestingly, their suburban home's contents appear in both of the above narrative. It seems as though leaving Cuba with minimal possessions only to face temporary housing in Miami made lamps and kitchen appliances much more meaningful. Acquiring material goods also fed into pre-revolutionary Cuba's booming consumer culture, which looked to the US to model and produce desirable goods.¹⁵³ The importance of materialistic acquisitions in both countries is also evident when Andrew Rodriguez recognizes the appliance in his new Colorado kitchen as "a nostalgic reminder of my childhood years, in front of me stands the same kind of G.E. refrigerator my family had when I was a kid."¹⁵⁴

The family-based sponsorship that was common after the start of the Freedom Flights meant that many early refugees became responsible for the subsequent arrival of family members. One extreme case of Cuban refugees sponsoring their family was recorded in Indianapolis, where a family who arrived shortly after the revolution was remarkably able to relocate 41 family members to Indiana.¹⁵⁵ Jose Antoni Tagel's resettlement narrative illustrates a refugee's desire for family reunification, and hints at the economic stresses a refugee underwent as he attempted to provide for an extended

¹⁵² "Midwest Welcome For Cuban Refugee Family Brings Happy Report from 'A Quiet Town' in Illinois," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, September 1967, 1. It is not clear how Mrs. Marcos' letter which is noted as having been sent to friends was ultimately published in *Re-Cap*.

¹⁵³ For more on Cuban consumption of American goods, see: Pérez, *Becoming Cuban*.

¹⁵⁴ Rodriguez, 230.

¹⁵⁵ "A Friend of Refugees in Indianapolis Are Doesn't Know of Any Cuban Who Has 'Gone Backwards'," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, March 1967, 1.

family network. Working first in Miami and then in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Tagel's commitment to aiding his family was evident in his testimony:

I remained in Miami working very, very hard in different places –as a porter, a busboy, a waiter, as a salesman, even as a sailor for a Florida steamship company—for only one reason, to save the money for bringing the rest of my family. And I am one of the luckiest Cubans that came to this country, because I brought my mother, my three sisters, all my nieces and nephews, my brother in law. I also brought one of my best friends with his wife and daughter. I brought them all to Grand Rapids. And I am still fighting to bring so many other Cubans...”¹⁵⁶

The CRP compelled incoming refugees, who were fortunate enough to have family members who could serve as sponsors, to join their family members and resettle to locations they may have not chosen on their own. A Cuban-Jewish woman who relocated to Philadelphia because her family was there chided her brother about his settlement choice: “I said to my brother, couldn't you land in Florida? Some place warm? He says, ‘I couldn't.’”¹⁵⁷

In addition to the adult sponsors who facilitated the resettlement efforts, the presence of Peter Pan/Pedro Pan children across the US also helped disperse incoming Cuban refugees. Over fourteen-thousand Pedro Pan/Peter Pan children arrived in the US during the early 1960's; their entrance was the result of a mass exodus spurred by parents' growing concerns about communist indoctrination and forced military service.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ US Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapes, *Cuban Refugee Problem*, 87th Congress, Second Session, 3 and 4 December 1962, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1963), 376.

¹⁵⁷ Rosa Goldstein, “Oral History,” *The Latinos Project Oral Histories The Historical Society of Pennsylvania with the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies*, February 6, 2003, 13.

¹⁵⁸ For more on Pedro Pan, See: Yvonne M. Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14,048 Cuban Children*, (NEW YORK: RoutledgeRutledge, 1999); Victor Andres Triay, *Fleeing Castro: Operation Pedro Pan and the Cuban Children's Program*, (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1998); María de los Angeles Torres, *The Lost Apple: Operation Pedro Pan, Cuban Children in the US and the Promise of a Better Future*, (Boston: Beacon Press, August 2003).

The Pedro Pan children spent prolonged periods of time away from their parents and other siblings. Despite the trauma of these separations and bad placements in foster homes or orphanages, many of these children stayed in the program until they were eighteen years old and then sponsored their own families. Other children, who were too young to serve as sponsors, commonly stayed put and were joined later by their parents who were given sponsorship in the same city. A Portland newspaper article featured a seventeen year-old Pedro Pan youth, Omar Maden, whose after-school job as a cook allowed him to save money in anticipation of his parents arrival. Though they were still in Cuba, Maden's anticipation was evident in his plans: "My mother and father want very badly to come to Portland, and I am sure that they will find work here, Dad is a good mechanic and Mother is a beautician and seamstress. I'm keeping an eye out for a house where my parents and I will live."¹⁵⁹ The stress of being a child sponsor did not end with financial assistance, as knowledge of English and American norms positioned many children to act as a liaison between the family and the outside world. As one mother explained, "Felix has learned to speak English very well and acts as my interpreter."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ "Young Cuban Labors to Fly Parents Out," *The Oregonian*, 15 November 1964, 8M. This article was written during the period when there were no direct flights between the US and Cuba, so Maden is saving money to buy his parents plane tickets into the US by way of a second country. This means of entrance is not uncommon both before and after the Freedom Flights when that only means of getting to the US was by way of a second country or by boat. All water arrivals were granted refugee status, while some entrants from second countries also had their status adjusted to refugees despite the fact that they entered the US on some type of visa. Being recognized as a refugee was an advantage as it qualified individuals for financial and material benefits from the CRP. A subsequent *Oregonian* article in December 1965 noted that Maden's parents arrived in Portland, their entrance coincided with the start of the Freedom Flights, thus this is most likely how they made it into the US. "Cuban Refugees Arrive For Portland Reunions," 26 *The Oregonian*, December 1965, 53.

¹⁶⁰ "Cuban Mother Sees Son After Three-Year Delay," *The Oregonian*, 23 December 1965, 6M.

Conclusion

The amount of time sponsors put into the preparations and continued contact with the refugees affected whether or not the resettlement remained permanent. Andrew and Margarita Rodriguez were fortunate to be matched with sponsors who provided financial assistance and social acceptance; as a result the Rodriguezs stayed in their new community where they maintained a friendship with their original sponsors.¹⁶¹ Certainly, all refugees were not content with their resettlement, either because of a lack of jobs, remote location, cultural isolation, unwelcoming neighbors, or a desire to be near friends and family. A desire to move again was clearly evident in the records of the CRP, which reveal that many refugees resettled or relocated themselves after their initial relocation. A 1965 New Jersey audit of refugees in the state revealed that of the 125 Cubans who had contact with the welfare agency, 39 self-resettled from other places across the country, and of those who were formally resettled by the VOLGAs 51 were resettled multiple times (two individuals were resettled five times).¹⁶²

CRP's resettlement policy was partially successful. The resettlement of the majority of Cuban refugees outside of Miami fulfilled the goals set out by both the CRP and the VOLGAs, with 66.3% or 296,806 of the 447,795 Cubans registered at the CRP resettled.¹⁶³ Whether or not relocated Cubans considered their resettlement beneficial varied greatly. The majority of refugees were unquestionably grateful for jobs and work, but it is improbable that all refugees were content with their resettlement. This is

¹⁶¹ Rodriguez, 251.

¹⁶² Administrative Review of the CRP, "Local Agency Administration," 1965, Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 10. State File New Jersey. Nation Archive II, 16.

¹⁶³ Masud-Piloto, 53.

apparent in the above account which reveals that the CRP resettled some Cubans multiple times. The temporal nature of some of the relocations is apparent in a study of the geographic distribution of Cubans which estimated that up to 12% (35,000) of resettled Cubans returned to Miami by 1972.¹⁶⁴ This study went on to estimate the amount of money spent and subsequently “wasted” on each Cuban who returned to Miami at 5 million dollars. The return of a sizable group of relocated Cubans to Miami questions both the “success” of the CRP’s resettlement policy and the experiences of relocated Cubans who left their various placements for Miami.

¹⁶⁴ Prohías and Casal, *The Cuban Minority*, 117-119.

CHAPTER THREE

CubaNation: Cuban Communities Across the United States

To immigrate is like being born again. It is a rebirth of experience, small social revolution...Both birth and migration produce a series of reactions and adjustments, leading to a new, transformed identity, since the old is never destroyed and the new, always with traces of the old, actually is an extension of it...You do not cease to be what you were. You simply broaden your horizons by becoming something new.
 -Dr Rolando A Rodriquez, resettled to Kansas City, MO¹⁶⁵

On the fortieth anniversary of the first Freedom Flight, the *Miami Herald* marked the occasion with an article highlighting the passengers who arrived on the initial flight to the US. The Freedom Flights began in 1965 as a joint effort between the US and Cuba.¹⁶⁶ This unlikely partnership formed as both parties found the migration of Cuban refugees as mutually beneficiary: while Castro was anxious to be rid of “enemies” of the revolution the US was particularly happy to accept democracy-seeking refugees during the Cold War.

The *Miami Herald* article focuses on five families who arrived on the preliminary flight. The experiences of these five families provide good illustrations of the settlement choices available to incoming refugees. While all of the Freedom Flights landed in Miami, the city was not the final destination for many refugees. Rather the US government, by means of the Cuban Refugee Program, strongly encouraged newly arrived refugees to consider resettlement in other parts of the country. Two of the five families discussed in the article were formally resettled to New York and Chicago, another moved to New York to be reunited with family, and the last two families

¹⁶⁵ “Out Of The New Cuban-Flavored ‘Mesting-Pot’ –What?,” Resettlement Re-cap, June 1969, 4.

¹⁶⁶ García, *Havana USA*, 38-43.

remained in South Florida. These families' settlement options are in keeping with the choices made by incoming Cubans in 1965, as 60% of all refugees resettled out of Miami.¹⁶⁷

This high rate of resettlement was not easily achieved. Some refugees were undoubtedly eager to relocate outside of Miami as it meant being reunited with family and friends. Concurrently, the physical, psychological, and economic effects of displacement made many Cubans uneasy about another move. The prospect of unfamiliar surroundings, and cultural isolation remained unsettling.¹⁶⁸ Despite the reluctance of many Cubans, the majority did resettle as part of the program and their experiences may offer new ways of conceptualizing Cuban American identities.

The lack of research on non-Miami communities is discussed by Carlos A. Toledo who notes that “[t]here is little about Cubans who have settled throughout other cities and towns in America and have had to adapt in perhaps very different ways than those living in an ethnic community.”¹⁶⁹ This point is important as it marks one of the few critiques of the enclave-centered research that focused exclusively on Cuban Miami and to a lesser extent New Jersey. However, the few narratives on non-Miami Cuban experiences that exist do suggest that resettlement permanently impacted refugees. Rolando A. Rodriguez was resettled to Kansas City, MO, for instance, and expressed the effects of relocation in the following way:

¹⁶⁷ “The Score,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, December 1965, 4.

¹⁶⁸ US Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapes, *Cuban Refugee Problem*, 87th Congress, First Session, 6, 7, and 13 December 1961, (Washington DC: United States Government Press, 1962), 7.

¹⁶⁹ Carlos Alberto Toledo, “*Fabricando Recuerdos/Making Memories: A Qualitative Exploration of First-Generation Cuban Women Immigrants’ Perceptions of their Experiences in the United States*,” (PhD diss, University of Georgia, 2001), 22.

Perhaps some distance in time and space from Miami has given some of us a wider perspective –one that might be valuable to others. I can say that when you throw yourself into a new world you feel an intense cross-cultural impact, characterized by a mixture of opposites: happiness and sadness, hope and despair, love and hate, optimism and pessimism.¹⁷⁰

Rodriguez’s narrative points to how relocating outside Miami offered a wider perspective on what it means to be Cuban American. Accordingly, tracing the histories of numerous non-Miami Cubans in rural and urban communities across the US will undoubtedly produce a new understanding of what it means to be Cuban in the US.

While scholarship on pre-1959 Cuban communities across the United States continues to grow, the same cannot be said of communities that grew out of the post-1959 migration. This is surprising given that some of the earliest studies of Cubans were conducted outside of Miami mostly journal articles, biographies, master’s thesis and dissertations began highlighting specific Cuban refugee communities.¹⁷¹ Unfortunately the majority of these works are unpublished and relatively obscure. Since the early 1980s very little has been recorded about the lives of resettled refugees, nonetheless some scholarship does exist. The quality and focus of these studies varies greatly, consequently it is difficult to fully gauge any given aspect of resettlement across the country or in any given region.

Research that focuses on specific Latino groups (ie. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans etc) traditionally centers on specific geographic locations with New York being

¹⁷⁰ “Out of the New Cuban-Flavored ‘Melting Pot’ –What?,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, June 1969, 4.

¹⁷¹ Some of these early studies were conducted by social scientists. These included Margaret Boone, “The Social Structure of a Low-Density Cultural Group: Cubans in Washington D.C.” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 54, 2 (April 1976-1977), 103-109; David Williamson, “Adaptations to Socio-Cultural Change: Working Class Cubans in New Orleans,” *Caribbean Studies*, 16, 3 (October-July, 1982), 217-27; James Stevenson, “Cuban Americans: New Urban Class” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Wayne State University, 1973). Many more of these early studies are cited throughout this chapter.

the focus of Puerto Rican Studies,¹⁷² the southwest border the focus of Mexican/Chicano Studies,¹⁷³ and Miami as the center of Cuban studies. In recent years a concerted effort to expand both Puerto Rican and Mexican/Chicano studies beyond the “traditional” locales has revealed a wealth of studies on communities across the country. Unfortunately the same movement is yet to occur in Cuban/Cuban-American studies. Thus it is important to question why diverse locations and settlements of Cubans and Cuban Americans remain under-considered.

A comprehensive survey on non-Miami communities does not exist, yet information on pan-US communities is available by way of periodicals published by the CRP –*Resettlement Re-cap* and *Oportunidades*. Thus these sources represent a rich source for researchers seeking to excavate histories of these non-Miami communities. This chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive review of all location-specific studies on Cuban refugee communities, rather it is meant to reveal specific concentrations of knowledge on various locations or regions. A state-by-state discussion of Cuban communities would be the best way of demonstrating a national Cuban presence, yet

¹⁷² For non-traditional location studies on Puerto Ricans see: Frank Bonilla, “From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies” *The International Migration Review*, 36:1, 2002, 263-264; Wilfredo Cruz, *Puerto Rican Chicago* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005). Gina Perez, *The Near Northwest Side Story*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2004); Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2001); Carmen Teresa Whalen, *El Viaje: Puerto Ricans of Philadelphia*, (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006); Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez Hernández, *The Puerto Rican Diaspora*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2005); Ana Y. Ramos Zayas, *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003)

¹⁷³ For non-traditional location studies on Mexicans and Chicanos see: Nicholas De Genova, *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and Illegality in Mexican Chicago* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke Univ. Press, 2005); Jennifer Hirsch, *A Courtship after Marriage: Sexuality and Love in Mexican Transnational Families* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: UC Press, 2003); Jerry Garcia and Gilberto Garcia, *Community, Memory and Activism: Mexican Labor and Migration in the Pacific Northwest* (East Lansing, Michigan: Julian Samora Institute, 2005); Robert Courtney Smith, *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: UC Press, 2006); Dionicio Nodin Valdes, *Barrios Nortenos: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000)

given the geographic gaps in the scholarship, a state focused analysis is practically impossible. Thus, in order to parse existing scholarship into manageable segments and exert the existence of Cuban communities in various areas, I will use a regional approach. Accordingly, this project discuss individual Cuban communities by grouping them into five regions- the Northeast, the South, the Midwest, the West, and Puerto Rico. The information provided in location-specific studies will augment stories and anecdotes included in the CRP publications as a means of integrating various types of knowledge and providing the most complete picture of life in these non-Miami communities.

Asserting a National Presence: Regional Demographics and Individual Communities

The vast majority of Cuban refugees entered the United States and resettled across the nation during the 1960's, thus the 1970 Census provides the first national measure of growing Cuban communities. The census reported that as of 1970, 544,600 individuals of Cuban origin resided in the US; this number includes refugees as well as pre-1959 Cuban immigrants thus it is difficult to gauge exactly what segment of this figure represented refugees.¹⁷⁴ Some understanding of the size of the refugee population can be gathered from the CRP; as of March 1970 the CRP reported that 367, 813 refugees reported to the CRP, yet their figures are also unrepresentative as they only include refugees who registered for assistance.¹⁷⁵ Despite the discrepancies, one can assume that refugees made

¹⁷⁴ US Census Bureau, "Subject Reports: Persons of Spanish Surname, Table 1: Persons of Spanish Origin by Sex and Urban and Rural Residence: 1970," June 1973.

¹⁷⁵ "The Score: Cuban Refugee Program," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, April 1970, 3.

up the vast majority of Cubans across the US as the 1960 census recorded only 124,416 individuals of Cuban birth or parentage.¹⁷⁶

The 1970 census was quickly followed by the 1973 Cuban Minority Study conducted by the Cuban sociologists Rafael Prohías and Lourdes Casal. They initiated the study because of concerns over the lack of demographic information on Cubans in the United States, additionally they believed that the 1970's census underestimated the number of Cubans.¹⁷⁷ In comparing the 1970 census data on Cubans in the US with immigration records Casal and Prohías concluded that the US census 9.3% of Cuban's were not counted in the 1970 census. They attributed these incongruities to the census' general underestimation of urban minority population, additionally the multiple immigration statuses that Cubans maintained seemingly stumped census officials and ultimately produced inaccurate numbers. Accordingly, the "Cuban Minority in the US" accounted for discrepancies in the methodology used by the 1970 census and projected the total Cuban population in the US as 10% higher than the census or 612, 646.¹⁷⁸ The Cuban Minority Study also ranked the states by the size of the Cuban population with the ten following states maintaining the largest number of Cubans: Florida (246,179), New York (97,256), New Jersey (67,481), California (47,447), Illinois (19,365), Texas (7,391), Louisiana (6,506), Massachusetts (5,802), Connecticut (4,985), and Pennsylvania (4,872).¹⁷⁹ As these numbers demonstrate, nearly half of all Cubans resided in just five states, with all other states reporting much smaller populations. The impact of these

¹⁷⁶ Prohías and Casal, 12.

¹⁷⁷ Prohías and Casal, 1-11.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 37-40.

resettlement rates is obvious when you look at the increase in Cuban populations by 1977, for instance California experienced a growth of 1269%, Texas 870%, and New Jersey 749%.¹⁸⁰ These concentrations were also noteworthy as all of the above states contained large cities and as of 1970, 98% of all Cubans lived in urban areas.¹⁸¹

Existing scholarship on Cuban communities is far from uniform, yet this project makes a concerted effort to focus on at least two locations within any given region in order to allow some understanding of how communities within the same region compare or differ. Thus, the following discussions on Cuban communities will be divided into five regions: the Northeast (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont,), the South (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia), the Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin), the West (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming), and finally Puerto Rico. While all regional divisions are artificial, the boundaries that I have adopted follow the regional definitions set out by the US census and roughly follow commonly held understandings of regional sets.

¹⁸⁰ Taft et al., 87.

¹⁸¹ US Census Bureau, "Subject Reports: Persons of Spanish Surname, Table 1: Persons of Spanish Origin by Sex and Urban and Rural Residence: 1970"

Figure 8. 1970 Cuban Population and Resettlement Figures by State¹⁸²

State	Persons of Cuban Origin, 1970	Resettled Refugees, 1970	State	Persons of Cuban Origin, 1970	Resettled Refugees, 1970
Alabama	680	399	Montana	33	152
Alaska	56	1	Nebraska	608	469
Arizona	505	226	Nevada	1,306	1,464
Arkansas	86	81	New Hampshire	195	141
California	47,699	34,816	New Jersey	71,233	50,816
Colorado	945	1,348	New Mexico	418	440
Connecticut	5,772	3,424	New York	98,479	73,849
Delaware	483	359	North Carolina	1,330	828
D. of Columbia	902	2,223	North Dakota	7	46
Florida ¹⁸³	252,520	10,663	Ohio	3,593	2,275
Georgia	3,816	2,174	Oklahoma	352	530
Hawaii	235	30	Oregon	689	1,001
Idaho	73	12	Pennsylvania	5,195	3,598
Illinois	19,649	19,754	Rhode Island	516	473
Indiana	1,690	1,524	South Carolina	860	274
Iowa	382	545	South Dakota	--	55
Kansas	796	976	Tennessee	894	569
Kentucky	556	4261	Texas	7,749	4,969
Louisiana	6,711	7,286	Utah	116	15
Maine	223	29	Vermont	7	94
Maryland	4,931	1,623	Virginia	4,479	2,097
Massachusetts	6,915	7,369	Washington	570	408
Michigan	3,231	3,231	West Virginia	110	164
Minnesota	765	526	Wisconsin	787	677
Mississippi	241	110	Wyoming	--	18
Missouri	1,131	1,227	Puerto Rico	10,113	19,103 ¹⁸⁴
			Totals	560,519	244,852

¹⁸² Prohías and Casal, 113.¹⁸³The resettlement numbers for Florida denote the number of refugees relocated to non-Miami locations.¹⁸⁴ An accurate count of the number of Cubans resettled to Puerto Rico as of 1970 is not available. The closest count was recorded in December 1968, thus this figure is an underestimation of the number of Cubans who were resettled by 1970. "Resettlement Figures by State," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, March 1969, 4.

Cubans in the Northeast¹⁸⁵

According to the 1970 census there were over 175, 000 Cuban individuals in the northeast;¹⁸⁶ the CRP estimated in 1970 that 155,927 of these individuals were resettled refugees.¹⁸⁷ The Northeast attracted a larger concentration of Cuban refugees than any other region. This might seem counterintuitive as climate is quoted as a major factor in what compelled Cubans to remain in or move to Miami. Yet, settling in the Northeast conforms to pre-revolution settlement patterns and typical residential patterns for immigrants with large populations of resettled refugees living in New York City, New Jersey and the Boston Area.

New York

According to the 1970 census 95,240 Cubans lived in Manhattan; of this number it is unclear how many individuals were refugees and how many were residents of New York City before the revolution.¹⁸⁸ In 1970, the Cuban Refugee Center reported that 73,849 refugees resettled to the state of New York, thus the boroughs surrounding New York City as well as the rest of the state supported a much larger Cuban population.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ For more on Cubans in the Northeast, see: Rosemary Santana Cooney and Maria Alina Contreras, "Residential Patterns of Social Register Cubans: A Study of Miami, San Juan, and New York SMSAs," *Cuban Studies* 8, 1978. 33-49; Eleanor Rogg, *The Assimilation of Cuban Exiles: The Role of Community and Class* (New York: Aberdeen Press, 1974); Eleanor Rogg and Rosemary Santana Cooney, *Adaptation and Adjustment of Cubans: West New York, N.J.* (New York: Fordham University Hispanic Research Center, 1980); Lisa Maya Knauer, "Eating in Cuban," in *Mambo Montage the Latinization of New York*, Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila, editors, (New York: Columbia University Press: 2001.

¹⁸⁶ US Census Bureau, "Subject Reports: Persons of Spanish Surname, Table 1: Persons of Spanish Origin by Sex and Urban and Rural Residence: 1970," June 1973.

¹⁸⁷ Prohías and Casal, 111.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 45

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 111.

New York sustained the second largest Cuban population; this fact is not surprising as the state maintains a long history of attracting immigrant labor. As early as 1962, New York manufacturers recruited refugees from the CRP to work in clothing factories.¹⁹⁰ The promise of training courses and a stable income compelled many untrained and professional refugees to accept a variety of manufacturing jobs in New York.¹⁹¹ As with manufactures, the state of New York actively pursued Cuban refugees by exempting them from the citizenship requirements tied to state jobs. As a result, many Cuban refugees were recruited to work for state medical or social services programs offered by the state. In lifting the citizenship requirements, New York opened up many previously unavailable positions to unemployed refugees.¹⁹² As a result of the policy change 35 Cuban social workers and 96 “social investigators” found jobs with the NYC Department of Welfare.¹⁹³

Out of the total number of Cubans living in New York City in 1970, approximately 54% lived in one neighborhood –Washington Heights-Inwood.¹⁹⁴ The Washington Heights neighborhood is examined in an uncommon report compiled by high

¹⁹⁰ “Attention Manufactures,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, September 1962, 1.

¹⁹¹ “Clothing Firm Employs Refugees, Donates Men’s Wear, Aids Training Course,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, February 1963, 2.

¹⁹² Paul Crowell, “City Acts to Give Hard-To-Fill Jobs to Available Refugees,” *The New York Times*, 28 May 1962, 1A.

¹⁹³ Sophie Wojciechowski, Consultant for the American Council for Émigrés on the Social Work Project, “Social Work Project- American Council for Émigrés in the Professions, Inc,” 21 December 1964, Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 10, State File New York, National Archive II, 1-4. “Four Professional Training Courses,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, October 1963, 4. The CRP was staffed by over 100 refugees; consequently there was a sizeable population of refugees who had had some training in the field of social work through their work with the program. Accordingly, American Council for Émigrés in the Professions in New York City, transferred that work experience into credit and provided additional training sessions that would allow individuals to receive college degrees or certifications in social work

¹⁹⁴ Prohías and Casal, 250.

school students in an anthropology workshop at the Brooklyn Children's Museum.¹⁹⁵

While their methodology was problematic, the students did compile a wide range of observations on the refugees that are absent in traditional academic studies. For instance, the students concluded that the refugees lived on a limited income, and noted that Cubans are more likely to put coins in the offering basket at church than dollars. Cuban's class status is a major focus throughout the report. It concludes that New York Cubans made between three and five thousand dollars annually, while Puerto Ricans in the same neighborhood earned five to ten thousand a year. These findings contrast both the students and the community's understandings of the local Latino population, as the report stated:

Although economically the Puerto Ricans tend to have the highest economic standing, followed by the Dominicans, and lastly the Cubans, the members of the community as a whole usually placed the Cubans at the top of the Spanish group... Many people felt this because, as refugees, the Cubans came to the United States for political, rather than economic reasons.¹⁹⁶

A discussion of the financial struggles that the refugees experienced is somewhat unusual during this period as an ever increasing body of work discussed the "economic success" of Cubans. Even after formal contact with the CRP ended, refugees continued to access public and private assistance. The Catholic Cuban Refugee Center, a branch of Catholic Charities in New York City, located jobs for 400-500 refugees each month and provided a variety of other forms of assistance.¹⁹⁷ Ill or impoverished Cuban refugees could apply for public assistance through local welfare offices. State welfare offices would either pass

¹⁹⁵ Michael Cohn, editor, *The Cuban Community of Washington Heights in New York City*, (Brooklyn, NY: The Brooklyn Children's Museum, 1967)

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁹⁷ "Catholic Refugee Centers Assist All Comers," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, December 1963, 4.

the bill on to the CRP or directly provide assistance, as was the case for refugees who gained citizenship, through programs like welfare and Medicaid. Because Cubans could access aid from a variety of sources, it is difficult to gauge how many individuals sought out assistance after resettlement. In 1972 55,100 resettled refugees received financial benefits from through the CRP and of this number “California, New Jersey, and New York account for 80% of all Cuban refugees receiving public assistance outside of Miami.”¹⁹⁸

New Jersey

Most states with large Cuban populations supported one central Cuban community, as was the case in New York where 96% of Cubans live in Manhattan. New Jersey supported three sizable Cuban communities –Jersey City/Union City/West New York (39,268), Newark (20,659), and Patterson/Clifton/Passaic (6,183). The West New York/Union City community is noteworthy as it is the largest in New Jersey and marks the highest concentration of Cubans outside of Miami. Because of its size, West New York/Union City is depicted as the second Cuban enclave in the US and nicknamed “Havana on the Hudson.” Despite the size of the West New York/Union City community it has not attracted a great deal of academic inquiry, especially in recent years as the bulk of research on the population was completed in the 1970’s.

Like New York, the availability of factory jobs and the growing Cuban community in New Jersey made it a popular destination for resettled refugees. Employers’ recruitment efforts coupled with the refugees’ willingness to accept any

¹⁹⁸ Prohías and Casal, 81.

available jobs spurred the growth of Cuban employment in New Jersey. One example of a Cuban dominated workplace is found at the Englewood Hospital where 42 of the 44 members of the maintenance crew were Cuban, the staff included “a former law professor, a trumpeter in a Cuban orchestra, a former mayor, a perfume salesman, a bank teller, and a mortician.”¹⁹⁹ Most refugees experienced a downturn in their social and economic status, yet the presence of large Cuban communities in New Jersey provided an extensive social network and safety net that was not available in smaller Cuban settlements.²⁰⁰

Over 55% of all Cuban women in the US worked outside of the home; Cuban women in New Jersey worked in larger percentages with 59.4% taking part in the workforce.²⁰¹ One 1979 study on Cuban women in New Jersey revealed that Cuban women from Hudson County revealed their strong beliefs about the importance of work. This study concluded that Cuban women believed their work was necessary for the economic survival and recovery of their families.²⁰² Yet when many of the same women were interviewed ten years later, the women revealed that work was no longer required for survival but instead functioned as the means of achieving personal fulfillment. As one woman put it:

¹⁹⁹ “Cubans Run a New Jersey Hospital- Maintenance Wise- ,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, February 1965, 4.

²⁰⁰ Eleanor Rogg, *The Assimilation of Cuban Exiles; the Role of Community and Class*, (New York, Aberdeen Press, 1974); Eleanor Rogg and Rosemary Santana Cooney, *Adaptation and Adjustment of Cubans, West New York, New Jersey*, (Bronx, N.Y. : Hispanic Research Center, Fordham University, 1980); Eleanor Rogg, “The Occupational Adjustment of Cuban refugees in the West New York, New Jersey Area,” (Ph. D. Fordham University, 1970).

²⁰¹ Yolanda Prieto, “Cuban Women in the US Labor Force: Perspectives on the Nature of Change,” *Cuban Studies*, 17: 1987, 79.

²⁰² Yolanda Prieto, *Women, Work, and Change: The Case of Cuban Women in the US*, (Erie, Pennsylvania: Northwestern Pennsylvania Institute for Latin American Studies, 1979).

You know work gives color to life. In Cuba, it was not common that women worked, although I was a teacher myself. But things have changed here. Most Cuban women work and are very active. I am not saying all of these nice things about work because I have a nice job. I worked in a factory many years ago when I came to the United States I still would say that work, no matter what kind, is good for a human being.²⁰³

Thus women's work began as an economic necessity, but over time the women and the community at large accepted their place in the workforce as a permanent feature of their families and their neighborhoods.

Early in their exile, work and economic survival dominated the lives of most refugees, but the sizeable Cuban population in New Jersey ensured that the refugees could partake in leisure and social activities with fellow refugees. Moreover the large communities in New Jersey allowed refugees to engage in activities and groups that matched their interest, for instance a sewing circle was created by the Grace Episcopal Church of Union City, New Jersey as "a means of promoting friendship among the woman who came from various parts of Cuba and never knew one another until they reached the United States and resettled to the same area."²⁰⁴ Cubans in New Jersey could also learn more about Cubans in the area through at least 26 periodicals published across the state.²⁰⁵ These periodicals varied from semi-regular political newsletters to literary magazines and weekly newspapers tailored for Cuban and other Latin American readers. These Spanish language newspapers provided news about Cuba, advertisements of local Latino businesses, and a wealth of information about the social accomplishments of local

²⁰³ Yolanda Prieto, "Cuban Women in New Jersey: Gender Relations and Change," in *Seeking Common Ground: Multidisciplinary studies of Immigrant Women in the United States*, by Donna Gabaccia (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992), 189.

²⁰⁴ "Cuban Women Sew for Episcopal Church Christmas Bazaar 'Real Need is Met in Working Together,'" *Resettlement Re-Cap*, November 1967, 4

²⁰⁵ Many of these publications are held in the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami. These exile publications are currently being transferred to microfilm so that more researchers can access them.

Cubans. The Union City bi-weekly *El Especial* focused on news about the local Cuban community, recording anniversaries, first communions, and the meetings of various Cuban associations.²⁰⁶

Cubans in the South²⁰⁷

Because of the large concentration of Cubans in Miami, the South ranks as the region with the largest Cuban population at 286,700 in 1970. When you exclude Cubans in Miami and instead focus on resettled refugees, the Cuban population in the South decreases to 38,610 with the majority relocated within Florida (10,663). Those Cubans who settled in the South in substantial numbers did so following pre-1959 established patterns, with sizeable communities in Tampa (14,643), New Orleans (5,211), and Washington D.C. (6,957). All other large refugee communities in the South were restricted to large cities: Dallas (2,097), Houston (2,692), and Atlanta (2,614).²⁰⁸ The overwhelmingly urban nature of Cuban resettlement is in part due to traditional immigrant settlement patterns which favor cities, yet the influence of resettlement sponsors and the CRP cannot be underestimated. As resettlement relied upon the resources offered

²⁰⁶ *El Especial*, (West New York, NJ: El Especial, 1975-1977).

²⁰⁷ Again, this discussion of Cubans in the South is not exhaustive. Additionally, studies on Cubans in the South include: Ann Burton Kirkley, "Atlanta's Ethnic Population: An Examination of Cuban Immigrants" (MA Thesis, Georgia State University, 1975); Alan Garboos, "A Descriptive Study of the Cuban Refugee Resettlement in Kentucky," (MSW thesis, University of Louisville, 1967); Margaret Boone, *Capital Cubans: Refugee Adaptation in Washington, D.C.*, (New York : AMS Press, 1989); Margaret Boone, "Thirty-Year Retrospective on the Adjustment of Cuban Refugee Women," in *Reconstructing Lives, Recapturing Meaning: Refugee Identity, Gender, and Culture Change*, Linda A. Camino and Ruth M Krulfeld ed., (Basel, Switzerland: Gordon and Breach Pub, 1994); David Williamson, "Cognitive Complexity and Adaptation to Socio-cultural Change: the Case of the Cuban Refugees in New Orleans," (Thesis, Tulane University, 1973); Andrés Alvarez, "Religious affiliation and cultural assimilation of Cuban refugees in New Orleans" (MA thesis, Tulane University, 1973).

²⁰⁸ Prohías and Casal, 37-43. These figures are drawn from the 1970 Census thus these figures reflect all Cubans in these locations and not only resettled refugees.

by cities and church bodies, larger cities maintained the resources needed to accept and support more refugees.

Georgia

By 1970 Georgia had received 2,174 refugees. While this is not a significant number as compared to other states in the in the South and across the country, there is a growing body of research on Cuban communities in Atlanta and Milledgeville.²⁰⁹ The Milledgeville, GA community is of particular interest because the city's state hospital recruited around 80 families to work and live at the facility.²¹⁰ Such a high concentration of Cubans in a rural town is remarkable and made even more so by the hospital housing which provided the refugees with an instant community. Cubans in Milledgeville faced some resistance from locals who feared that "this will become another Miami."²¹¹ Despite such sentiments the Milledgeville community flourished with the founding a Cuban social club and the creation of Spanish, Cuban history and culture classes for children of resettled families.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 113.

²¹⁰ Toledo, 152.

²¹¹ The first study on the Milledgeville community was a master's thesis completed in 1967 by Ronald W. Brockett, "Acculturation and Perceived Prejudice in a Cuban Refugee Community," (MA Thesis, University of Georgia, 1967). In this study, Brockett sets out to gauge both the refugees' acculturation and the town's reaction to the large influx of Cubans by completing interviews with the refugees. This study and the hypothesis possessed the potential to provide a wealth of knowledge about life in Milledgeville, yet this study excludes content from the interviews and instead uses complex statistical calculations to measure Cubans experiences. Consequently, the voices and happenings at the Milledgeville community are obscured. Some details on the lives and happenings in Milledgeville can be gleaned from Brockett's introduction.

One Cuban resident, “Gloria”, discussed why she was attracted that to Milledgeville.²¹² Gloria and her family initially resettled to Birmingham, Alabama where she and her husband worked as doctors and considered themselves fortunate because they were “living the life of millionaires, in comparison to other exiles.”²¹³ Despite their economic success in Alabama, Gloria and her family chose to move to Milledgeville in order to live among other Cubans. Gloria recalled that in Milledgeville, ““We lived a life like in Cuba...My daughters had the same aspects of life as those they would have had in Cuba. They had a teenage life distinct from Americans...it was something very Latino.”” Gloria’s testimony revealed that for some refugees, forming social and cultural network trumped a desire for economic success. Carlos Toledo, in his study of Georgia Cubans, described the uniqueness of the Milledgeville community in the following way:

Over the years, the Cuban community in Milledgeville began to decrease, especially as children went off to school and/or married, and many others moved to the nearby Atlanta. Nonetheless, Milledgeville was an interesting historical phenomenon as this small Southern town witnessed a dramatic migration of a culture so distinct from their own. As expected, the two cultures did however often interact as was the case with Gloria’s eldest daughter, Carla, who had the first Cuban-American wedding in Milledgeville.²¹⁴

Atlanta is the focus of some of the newest study of Cubans outside of Miami. Atlanta lacked the “small town” intimacy of Milledgeville, as Cuban refugees lived in various suburban neighborhoods scattered throughout the city so they had to work harder to develop some sense of community.²¹⁵ The post-1959 Cuban population is significant in Atlanta as it constituted the largest Latino group in the city throughout the 1960’s and

²¹² Toledo uses pseudonyms through his work.

²¹³ Ibid, 151.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 169.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 208.

1970's.²¹⁶ Moreover, the arrival of Cubans is significant as it prepared the city for later waves of Latinos as it compelled the city to hire a bilingual staff and educators who could meet the needs of the sizeable Cuban population.

The earliest Cuban organization in Atlanta, the Cuban Freedom Committee (CFC), originated in 1962 when a coalition of white Americans and Cubans in the area set out to create a group that provided mutual support and a space for social gatherings. The Cuban Freedom Committee sponsored the February 1963 joint observance of George Washington's birthday and the "Grito de Baire" (or start of the War of Independence) that attracted more than 100 families. The CFC was concerned with American perceptions of Cubans and used this celebration to build interethnic relations and educate the larger community about Cuban culture. Cubans also viewed these events as opportunities to build social networks. One refugee recalled: "At that time people got to know each other well, even though these meetings were sporadic. People got to know each other and talk to them and they would call each other when there was a meeting or something else going on."²¹⁷

By the 1970's Cubans in Atlanta formed other social groups with political agendas, including the issue of Spanish usage in various governmental services. Through these organizations, Cubans successfully lobbied for the hiring of bilingual staff members in schools, social service positions, and the police force. Additionally, they created

²¹⁶ Charlotte A. Bayala, "Cuban Refugees in Atlanta: 1950-1980," (MA thesis, history, University of Georgia, 2006), 66. Bayala estimates that as of 1966 there were around 2,500 Cubans in Atlanta.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 59-60.

English classes and lobbied for business clauses in the city that ensured that Cubans could not be discriminated against or taken advantage of by local landlords.²¹⁸

Louisiana

Unlike many cities in the South, New Orleans, because of its port, geographic location, and longstanding historic ties with Cuba and maintained a sizeable Cuban community before 1959. In fact the proximity of New Orleans to Cuba positioned the city as the home of a proposed second Cuban Refugee Center.²¹⁹ Although the plans never came to fruition, because of budgetary and social concerns, New Orleans did attract a substantial number of Cubans (5,211).²²⁰ This influx of Cuban refugees was in part due to the large Catholic population in the city which provided the material and manpower needed to accept large numbers of refugees. The New Orleans parish created the Catholic Cuban Center (CCC) which served as the local counterpart of the CRP, the CCC provided incoming refugees with resettlement packages as well as offering long-term help to Cubans in the city. One refugee in New Orleans describes the services provided by the CCC upon their arrival in the city:

When we first came here we went to the [Catholic] Cuban Refugee Center. There we were also very well attended. We didn't have a house. Nothing. So they set us up in a motel where we were well fed and cared for. Later, they found us a house on Mexico Street. The government paid the rent and we were given about \$188.00 a month. The rent was cheap and the food... was also cheap. I lived there for about eight months until my husband found a job.²²¹

²¹⁸ Ibid, 71.

²¹⁹ Paper, Social Security Administration, March 1, 1962, "SSA Staff Paper- Considerations Involved in Establishing a Second Cuban Refugee Center in New Orleans, Louisiana," folder, Health Education and Welfare, RG235, John F. Kennedy Library.

²²⁰ Prohías and Casal, 40.

²²¹ Kahn, 54-55. The government assistance that this refugee refers to appears to be the result of her husband's temporary disability.

The CCC in New Orleans provided a social and economic safety net for refugees in the area and was widely recognized as the location to go to if services were needed.

English language courses were common in cities with a growing Cuban population, with church groups or other charities providing instruction.. In 1969 the New Orleans chapter of the Red Cross began offering courses to incoming refugees who wished to strengthen their English skills.²²² Beginning language classes ten years after the start of exile may seem like a late response on New Orleans' part, yet a study on language usage in the city revealed that over 73% of refugees in 1960 had some understanding of English while this figure drops to under 4% by 1967.²²³ Accordingly, the genesis of the Red Crosses English program occurred when the need for such services was greatest.

Cubans in the Midwest²²⁴

Except for the Chicago area (18,699), the Midwest did not draw a substantial number of Cuban refugees (31,305).²²⁵ Those who did resettle in the Midwest, but outside of Chicago, did so primarily because of educational retraining programs like the one in Kansas, where a teacher training program and teaching jobs attracted some Cuban

²²² "Red Cross Chapter in New Orleans Provides English Courses for Cubans," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, March 1969, 2.

²²³ Manuel Carballo, "A Socio-psychological Study of Acculturation and Assimilation of Cubans in New Orleans" (MA Thesis, Tulane University, 1970), 110.

²²⁴ For more on Cubans in the Mid-West, see: Cecilia M Reidy, "The Experiences and Problems of Some Cuban Refugees," (MA thesis, Chicago State College, 1969)

²²⁵ Prohías and Casal, 38 and 113.

refugees.²²⁶ Smaller refugee communities were spread out across the Midwest, because of this geographic diffusion Cubans had to work hard to develop local and regional social connections. Cities like Cleveland and Columbus supported local Cuban organizations and newsletters, and a regional group called *Federacion Cubana de Medio Oeste* (Midwest Cuban Federation) was founded to bring together different local organizations from Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois.²²⁷

Illinois

A number of local religious and Latino organizations –Immigrants’ Service League, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Cuban Association, and Casa Central– directed resettlement logistics in Chicago. These organizations assumed responsibility of incoming refugees by providing temporary housing, job opportunities and some sense of local support.²²⁸ The inclusion of Casa Central, a pan-Latino social service center, is noteworthy as it marks a rare instance in which a non-Cuban Latino agency provided direct assistance with resettlement.²²⁹ Chicago did not possess a sizeable Cuban population before the arrival of the refugees, thus it is remarkable that the Cuban Association of

²²⁶“Kansas Offers Training Opportunity at Teacher’s College,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, March 1964, 3.

²²⁷ It is interesting that the regional newsletter produced by the Midwest Cuban federation contains content in both English and Spanish, while the local publications are exclusively written in Spanish. “Newsletter,” 15 December 1970, (Kentucky: Midwest Cuban Federation). Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami; “Circulo Cubano de Denver,” 22 April 1970, (Denver: Circulo Cubano de Denver). Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami; “Circulo Cubano de Cleveland: Boletín Informativo,” September 1971, (Cleveland: Circulo Cubano de Cleveland). Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami; “NotiCuba,” September 1970, (Columbus, Ohio: Circulo Cubano de Columbus). Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

²²⁸ Marta I Kollmann de Curutchet, “Localization of the Mexican and Cuban population of Chicago,” (Thesis, University of Chicago, 1967), 80.

²²⁹ “Rev. Daniel Alvarez Helps Cubans in Chicago,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, November 1968, 4. The Casa Central’s connection to the Cuban community appears to have originated through the agency’s director who worked pastured in Cuba before the revolution. The article suggests that Alvarez is Cuban, but his nationality is not clear.

Chicago was able to organize and actively assist in resettlement by 1964. The Cuban Association collaborated with the Catholic Relief Services to produce a “Welcome to Chicago” informational booklet that contained information about public transit, medical care, churches, and how to contact various service providers. The “Welcome to Chicago” pamphlet was not free from group-imposed coercion, as the guide chided:

Remember, each Cuban represents all Cubans... Therefore, please have in mind certain rules, including being on time for job interviews and being correctly dressed. Always have the proper documents. We cannot expect others to help us if we are not willing to help ourselves and to help each other. This is the best way to place Cubans in the highest esteem.²³⁰

Although these admonishments were probably meant to be helpful some incoming refugees could consider them belittling.

The resettlement agencies in Chicago found housing for many of the refugees in the northern parts of the city, where they chose neighborhoods that offered affordable housing in diverse ethnic neighborhoods. The agencies purposefully scattered the refugees across a variety of neighborhoods to guarantee that Cubans would not dominate any given area, in doing so they ensured that the refugees would not become an “undesirable minority group.”²³¹ Mirroring the concerns of the CRP, this local appendage was preoccupied with public perceptions of the refugees. As a result, Cubans in Chicago did not represent the majority of any given neighborhood, but instead lived amongst ethnic Europeans, Asians, and in some cases other Latinos. Despite the intentions of local sponsors, Cuban refugees had their own agendas, and many chose to move to the suburbs and distance themselves from urban ethnic neighborhoods once they gained financial and

²³⁰ “ ‘Welcome to Chicago’ Kit Brings Helpful Information to Cubans,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, March 1964, 4.

²³¹ Gerald William Ropka, “The Evolving Residential Pattern of the Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban Population in the City of Chicago,” (Thesis, Michigan State University, 1973), 157.

social stability. This out-migration was well underway by the early 1970's and acted to further disperse the Cuban population in the Chicago area.²³²

Indiana

The only academic writing on Indiana is an unpublished paper by Rafael Prohías. As of 1971 the CRP resettled 1,673 Cubans to Indiana, despite the small population the state was featured prominently in *Resettlement Re-cap*. It is unclear why this disproportionate coverage of Indiana occurred, but as the publications relied upon individuals sending stories to the CRP, the frequency could be the result of one prolific individual. The intimacy that the CRP had with the Indianapolis Cubans was not limited to stories in *Re-cap*; rather a Cuban employee of the CRP spoke at a gathering of the Asociación de Cubanos de Indiana. The CRP coverage of Cubans in Indiana began with the first resettlement flights to Indianapolis, which declared the city's excitement over the incoming refugees: "Church groups will help them through the difficult period of adjustment...They will become...excellent additions to the community...Hoosier hospitality has provided a wonderfully friendly greeting."²³³

Coverage of Cubans in Indiana increased with the creation of the Teacher Training Project at Indiana State in Terre Haute. The program provided Cuban professions with the training needed to earn teaching degrees and jobs teaching Spanish in Indiana public high schools.²³⁴ Coverage of the teacher retraining program included

²³² Ibid, 158-159.

²³³ "Indianapolis Times," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, November 1962, 2.

²³⁴ "Cuban Refugee Help Meet Indiana Teacher Shortage Indianapolis, Indiana Star" *Resettlement Re-Cap*, February 1964, 4.

pictures showing the home life of a couple enrolled in the program who sat at the kitchen table with their daughters where parents and children alike worked on their individual homework assignments.²³⁵ Coverage of the Cubans in the teaching program did not end with graduation; rather *Resettlement Re-Cap* followed individuals after they found employment.²³⁶

The *Re-Cap* coverage of Indiana reveals general details about the training program but does not produce a full understanding of the Cuban community in the state. The parents of Cuban author Achy Obejas took part in the program, and she wrote about Indiana experience:

...my parents signed up for the program designed to assimilate Cuban professionals into American society. It was in Terra Haute, Indiana. So the family got transported to the Midwest. The landscape changed dramatically. I found myself in fields of corn, surrounded by lots of people who didn't understand us, while we didn't understand them. I spent six to eight months not uttering a word because I was in a classroom where it was forbidden to speak Spanish, and, obviously, I couldn't yet speak English. I was afraid of being made fun of if I spoke en ingles. So I made a decision: I wouldn't speak English until I could do so without an accent.²³⁷

Thus, in Obejas' case the glowing narratives of the teaching program in the CRP did not match her own experience, suggesting that a great deal about Indiana Cubans remains untold.

Cubans in the West²³⁸

²³⁵ "Back -to-School Scenes in Indiana," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, March 1964, 4.

²³⁶ "First Member of Indiana Training Group Begins Teaching of Spanish Brazil, Indiana," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, April 1964, 5; "From Lawyer to Grocer to Fisherman to Teacher," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, May 1965, 4; "Husband Wife Teaching Team Elkhart, Indiana at Mishawaka and Wakarusa," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, July 1965, 2.

²³⁷ Obejas, Achy, "Interview with Ilan Stavans" by Ilan Stavans in *Days of Awe*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

²³⁸ For more on Cubans in the West, see:

In 1970, 52,645 Cubans lived in the West, 39,931 of these individuals were counted as resettled refugees.²³⁹ Eighty-seven percent of resettled refugees in the West settled in California alone (34,816). Within the state of California 37,006 Cubans lived in the Los Angeles area; other sizable communities in the state include Anaheim/Santa Ana/Garden Grove (2,028) and San Francisco/Oakland (3,644). Five of the western states (Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming) all accepted between 1 and 33 refugees, marking some of the smallest Cuban presences in the US with each state below .04% of the national Cuban population. Again, these figures are not surprising given these states are overwhelmingly rural and Cuban resettlement was a predominately urban phenomena. Despite the relatively small numbers of Cubans in western states, Colorado maintained around a thousand Cubans. The Circulo Cubano de Denver produced a series of newsletters that included a variety of articles, social pages, and editorials by Denver Cubans. This publication attempted to build networks and maintain active communities through social groups and local notices.

Nevada

The Cuban community of Las Vegas provides an interesting example of how employment influenced resettlement patterns. Like so many cities across the US, Las Vegas had a small Cuban population before the revolution which blossomed to around

Richard Dellenback, "Oregon's Cuban-American Community: From Revolution to Assimilation," (MA thesis, History, Portland State University, 1990);
Karol Roccena Ortiz, "Accounts of Desperate Times: Six Cuban Refugee Life Histories," (PhD dissertation, Social Science, University of California Irvine, 1983).

²³⁹ Prohías and Casal, 113.

1,700 at the end of the 1970's.²⁴⁰ The Cuban community's origins can be traced to the city's casino ties with Havana, Cuba. As former casino employees became refugees they parlayed their unique job skills into jobs in the growing casinos of Las Vegas.

As with other post-'59 Cuban communities, Cubans in Las Vegas created a social club –El Circulo Cubano de Las Vegas– as a means of maintaining elements of culture while simultaneously meeting the needs of incoming refugees. Unlike social clubs in other locations, the members of El Circulo Cubano de Las Vegas extended their interest beyond the Cuban community and joined with other Latinos to create an integrated pan-Latino political and economic agenda. Collectively, Cubans and other Latinos in the area founded the Latin Chamber of Commerce of Nevada in 1976. Despite the pan-Latino political alliances, Cubans who arrived in the 1960's and 1970's did not live in neighborhoods with many other Latinos. This division occurred because of class differences and not intentional segregation as Cuban families who arrived during the 1970's made an average of \$15,982 a year while their Mexican counterparts earned \$12,538.²⁴¹ The substantial difference in pay is due in part to the employment options made available to the highly trained, highly skilled, and predominantly bilingual Cubans who earned good money as card dealers or in other positions in the casinos.

California

²⁴⁰William Clayson, "Cubans in Las Vegas: Ethnic Identity, Success, and Urban Life in the Late Twentieth Century," Nevada Historical Society Quarterly, 38: 1995, 1-18.
There were an estimated 245 Cubans in Las Vegas before 1960.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 6.

The amount of planning that preceded the acceptance of Cuban refugees varied greatly from location to location: in Los Angeles the resettlement process was carefully planned and executed.²⁴² In Los Angeles there was a concerted effort to make the refugees feel welcomed and simultaneously foster assimilation:

Would-be neighbors were encouraged to make the new neighbors feel a part of the total community, rather than through their neglect cause Cubans to retreat. Concentrations of refugees in any one are of Los Angeles County was avoided in order to aid Cubans in community assimilation.²⁴³

This purposeful diffusion of refugees is an interesting point, as demographic studies reveal that within most cities Cubans did not reside in high concentrations. While many sponsors dispersed the refugees as a means of encouraging assimilation and lessening local resistance to the newcomers, Cuban settlement patterns were also altered and constructed by Cubans who made subsequent local and national moves. Settlement in Los Angeles was dictated by what Vincent Gil calls “loving coercion,” as he explains it, a geographic enclave was not created but instead a “social enclave” based on an extensive social network of individuals and businesses.²⁴⁴ Those in the study reported that they interact with other Cubans weekly and that over 70% of their friends were Cubans, this suggest that despite the geographic divide, Cubans in Los Angeles routinely interacted with other Cubans.

The importance of Cuban social clubs in Los Angeles cannot be underestimated, as these social clubs fostered important social, political and economic connections.

Whereas only one club would exist in many smaller communities, the Cubans of Los

²⁴² Vincent Edward Gil, “The Personal Adjustment and Acculturation of Cuban Immigrants in Los Angeles,” (Dissertation, University Of California, Las Angeles, 1976).

²⁴³ Ibid, 59.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 82.

Angeles formed multiple clubs. As in Miami and New Jersey the large Cuban population in Los Angeles supported a variety of clubs focused upon regionalism with eight municipio clubs drawing a moderate number of members.²⁴⁵ Additionally the refugees founded a number of mutual aid societies, sports clubs, culture clubs, professional clubs, religious organizations, and a senior citizen's group by the mid-1970s.²⁴⁶ A study on refugee satisfaction in the Los Angeles area found that participation in a social club did provide Cubans with a common forum, yet tensions existed within these organizations.²⁴⁷ The Los Angeles community could also access information about other Cubans through two daily newspapers –*La Prensa de Los Angeles* and *20 de Mayo*– as well as two weekly newspapers –*Periódico Patria* and *La Opinión*– which collectively had a circulation of 40,000. Additionally, Cubans funded one of the local TV stations and a local Cuban personality hosted a weekly radio show.

Cubans in Puerto Rico²⁴⁸

Puerto Rico's commonwealth status combined with the substantial number of Cuban refugees the island accepted makes it a noteworthy community to discuss. Unlike so many of the Cuban communities discussed above, there a recent published book on the Cuban population in Puerto Rico. José Cobas and Jorge Duany's *Cubans in Puerto Rico:*

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 110.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 109-116.

²⁴⁷ María Abalo, "An Analysis of a Selected Los Angeles Cuban Refugee Population's Perception Towards Life Satisfaction Within the United States," (MSW thesis, Social Work, San Diego State University, 1976); 46.

²⁴⁸ For more on Cubans in Puerto Rico see: Cooney Contreras, "Residential Patterns of Social Register Cubans," 33-49.

Ethnic Economy and Cultural Identity examines the roots of the Cuban community and the impact that Cubans had on Puerto Rico.²⁴⁹ The Cuban exodus occurred concurrently with substantial economic change in Puerto Rico. *Operation Bootstrap*, the United State's hurried and heavy-handed economic development of Puerto Rico, needed entrepreneurs and managers to direct and develop industries on the island. Thus the CRP and the Puerto Rican government encouraged Cubans who could contribute to the economy to settle on the island.

The economic opportunities, in addition to the linguistic and historical similarities between Cuba and Puerto Rico, made Puerto Rico an attractive resettlement location for many Cuban refugees. In 1960 there were just over 500 Cubans in Puerto Rico; yet by 1971 the figure had ballooned to 30,410 with the majority living in San Juan.²⁵⁰ Thus as is true on the mainland, the majority of Cubans in Puerto Rico settled in urban areas. This sizeable influx produced mixed reactions in Puerto Rico, where many feared that Cubans would displace Puerto Rican workers. On the mainland, the majority of Cuban refugees worked as unskilled labors, the same is not true in Puerto Rico where most Cubans occupied white collar jobs.²⁵¹ The effect of Cuban refugees on Puerto Rican workers is not entirely clear; what is apparent is that the refugees' attitudes towards life in Puerto Rico aggravated concern over the influx of Cubans. A Cuban exile writer explained the refugees' relationship with Puerto Rican society in the following way: "Cuban exiles [in

²⁴⁹ José Cobas and Jorge Duany, *Cubans in Puerto Rico: Ethnic Economy and Cultural Identity*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997).

²⁵⁰ Cobas and Duany, 41.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 53. As of 1970, over 58% of Cubans in Puerto Rico worked in Trade, Finance, Public Administration, or Professional Services. In contrast, more than 56% of Cubans on the mainland worked in the Service Industry, as Craftsmen, Foremen, Operators, or in Transportation. US Census Bureau, "Subject Reports: Persons of Spanish Surname, Table 8: Employment Characteristics of Persons of Spanish Origin 14 Years Old and Over by Age and Urban and Rural Residence: 1970," June 1973.

Puerto Rico], besides consciously identifying themselves as strangers, have unconsciously put themselves on the same level with [Puerto Rico's] white and rich elite (blanquitos y riquitios).”²⁵² Understandably, this did not win Cubans widespread support in Puerto Rico but instead led to increased Cuban-Puerto Rican conflict during 1970's when Puerto Rico experienced an economic downturn. This political and social angst did not dissipate and, as a result, over 3,000 Cubans relocated to Miami. Surprisingly, the avidly pro-Cuban *Resettlement Re-cap* mentioned and quickly dismissed the turbulent atmosphere in Puerto Rico, arguing, “Any resentment of them [the Cubans] has been toned down by reason of new jobs created by Cuban businesses for Puerto Ricans.”²⁵³

The conflict did not abate Cuban economic gains, as studies from the 1960's on suggest that Cubans earn more, are better educated, and occupy better jobs than any other group on the island. Household earnings illustrate the gap between Cuban and Puerto Rican employment, as of 1979 Cuban homes maintained incomes that averaged \$12,280 yearly as compared to Puerto Ricans who made \$5,348.²⁵⁴ Cobas and Duany argue that the substantial economic gap between Puerto Ricans and Cubans widened as Cubans began open small businesses and dominating select business sectors including trade and the service industry.

A variety of social clubs were active in Puerto Rico. The largest Circulo Cubano de Puerto Rico or Casa Cuba was founded in the 1950's by Cubans living in San Juan. The Casa Cuba's pre-revolution roots provided incoming refugees with a cultural and social center. The list of social and recreational activities common at the center –squash,

²⁵² Cobas and Duany, 44.

²⁵³ “ Puerto Rico Benefits from Cuban Exile Initiative,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, May 1969, 4.

²⁵⁴ Cobas and Duany, 50.

crew, debutant balls, beauty pageants— suggest that the Casa Cuba functioned primarily as a country club for the increasingly wealthy Cubans. Gaining membership to the club required two recommendations in addition to a public vetting process. Once accepted, individuals had to pay an entrance fee in addition to monthly dues. These requirements ensured that members would be largely upper and middleclass. This classism was unusual among exile social clubs on the mainland as the majority accepted all refugees; this exclusivity was the result of a large Cuban colony which permitted community members to selectively choose who to allow into a social club whereas in smaller communities all Cubans were admitted in an effort to form any sense of a collective.

Conclusion

The above city and state focused studies are far from complete and represent but the start of research on Cuban communities across the US. These location specific studies do provide snapshots, however incomplete, into the developing Cuban communities across the US. They are important as they form the basis of much needed future work on the importance of geographic location and social context.

While generalizations about these communities should be avoided, there are some commonalities that appear in a number of locations. One such common thread is the existence of Cuban social clubs that provided incoming Cubans with some sense of community. These clubs also provided a venue for the growth of social cohesion in cities where the Cuban population was dispersed in the intercity and the suburbs. The final, and nearly universal, feature shared by all Cubans in the US was an urban lifestyle as over 98% of Cubans lived in cities in what the US census described as urban residences. Some

credit this occurrence to Cuban's familiarity with an urban lifestyle; others cite the propensity for immigrants to settle in cities. While both of these certainly contributed to a preference for living in cities, one cannot discount the role of the CRP in arranging resettlement with organizations, cities, and individuals in metropolitan settings. It is unlikely that the CRP specifically wanted to send Cubans to cities across the US; rather refugees were sent where resources could be consolidated and arrangements made to care for the greatest number of refugees.

Today, more than forty-five years after the start of the resettlement program, the survival of these nation-wide Cuban communities varies greatly. As suggested in the previous chapter, many resettlements were not permanent. Cultural isolation, racism, employment opportunities, the temporary nature of relocating for educational purposes and an indeterminate number of other factors compelled or "pushed" Cubans to leave their resettlement placements.²⁵⁵ A remnant of resettled Cubans remains in nearly all locations, yet the populations have dwindled substantially over time. Some cities like Philadelphia and Atlanta retain a sense of community, as Cuban clubs foster group cohesion despite the cultural ambivalence felt by some of the second and third generation.²⁵⁶ Conversely a collective identity has diminished in Portland, where ideological divisions and other personal concerns rendered a community invisible despite the presence of over 1,300 Cubans.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Research on the internal migration of Cuban refugees has focused more on what "pulled" them to Miami and not on why they left their resettlement locations.

²⁵⁶ For more on the Cuban Club of Atlanta, see: Charlotte A. Bayala's "Cuban Refugees in Atlanta: 1950-1980" and Carlos Alberto Toledo's, "*Fabricando Recuerdos/Making Memories.*" Details of the Philadelphia community can be found in the oral history of Rosa Golstein.

²⁵⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000

Figure 9. Cuban out Migration in Total Numbers²⁵⁸

Region	Total Out Migration	Migration to Miami
	Number	Number
New Jersey Urban Core	15,877	9,006
New Jersey Suburban	3,888	1,376
New York City	12,211	4,880
New York Suburban	3,934	1,098
Boston	1,521	534
Philadelphia	1,287	294
Washington, DC	1,504	403
Chicago	3,550	1,714
Los Angeles	9,066	3,918
Southern California	2,462	472
Northern California	1,402	324
Las Vegas	498	212
Dallas-Ft. Worth	889	198
Houston	2,096	796
New Orleans	1,667	695
Atlanta	1,537	492
North Florida	2,146	781
Central Florida	4,907	1,836
South Florida	5,140	2,752
Miami	21,231 ²⁵⁹	NA
Elsewhere in the US	12,491	3,995

The vast majority of Cubans who left their resettlement placements returned to Miami. Beginning in the late 1960's, Cubans gained economic security and consequently could determine where they themselves wanted to live, independent from the auspice of the CRP. The rate of Cubans returning to Miami increased over time; a 1978 *Miami*

There is a growing interest in recapturing a Cuban community in Portland led by a second-generation Cuban who operates the city's only Cuban restaurant and performs as part of a local Son band.

²⁵⁸ Kevin E. McHugh, Ines M. Miyares, and Emily H. Skop, "The Magnetism of Miami: Segmented Paths in Cuban Migration," *Geographical Review*, 87:4, 1997, 504-519.

²⁵⁹ Most Cubans who left Miami did not move far, instead most settled in other parts of Florida, namely neighboring Broward County.

Herald survey estimated that 40% of Cubans in Dade County spent some time outside of Miami.²⁶⁰ Most Cubans questioned about their return to Miami cited the climate, a desire to live amongst other Cubans, and friends and family as their primary motivators. A local newspaper article quoted a Cuban living in New Jersey about his impending departure, and his perspective explains the out-migration of Cubans from the state:

New Jersey is getting more expensive all the time... There's not much left of the Cuban community here, not compared to what I saw up to the 1980s. You ask What happened to so-and-so? and you hear He left, she left. In Miami there are more job opportunities, and it's cheaper. The Cuban community is all around, I feel like I'm in Cuba there, like I'm home.²⁶¹

The shift towards Miami is apparent in Table 9, which shows the internal migration of Cubans from 1985 to 1990.²⁶² In recent decades, the influx of non-Miami Cubans coincided with the retirement of many first and second wave refugees, who in moving to Florida follow in the clichéd path of countless other elderly Americans. Yet the retirement of Cubans to Miami bears cultural significance as moving to Miami allows older Cubans “the illusion that they're living in Cuba.”²⁶³ A study on the “Magnetism of Miami” outlines that those most likely to return to Miami include older native-born

²⁶⁰ Boswell and Curtis, 66-67.

²⁶¹ Llorente, Elizabeth, “N.J. Cubans Moving On ; Other State Beckon with Jobs, Retirement,” *The Record*, Bergen County, N.J, 1 March 2002, A.01

²⁶² All of these studies use the US census to gain demographic data about Cubans. Thus those Cubans counted in this study include both the pre-1959 immigrants and Mariel refugees; consequently this is not a true measure of resettled refugees. Yet, as the nearly 500,000 Cuban refugees of the 1960's and 1970's compose a much larger segment of Cubans in the US than the 125,000 Mariel Cubans, one can assume that most of the Cubans tracked are first or second wave refugees.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, A.01.

Cubans, the under educated, and poor who are drawn to the enclave that provides vulnerable Cubans “the highest levels of economic, social, and cultural support.”²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴Kevin E. McHugh, et al, 515.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cuban Women in Transition: Negotiating Exile, Work and Family in the United States

“When I came to the United States, I was already forty-eight years old. It is hard to change at that age because all your life you’ve been living and raised in another culture and then you come to a new one. But we have no choice. If you are going to live in a place, you have to do what they do in that place.” - Irma de Leon²⁶⁵

If you were to ask my grandmother where she was from, her response would be both prompt and simple – “I’m American.” While she has been an American citizen for well over sixty years, her self-identification is not wholly accurate. Born in Mantanzas, Cuba, Elisa Acebal Rivera immigrated to the US in 1923 as a small child and settled with her family in Lake Worth, Florida. Like so many immigrants who arrived in the US during the first half of the twentieth century, the allure of Americanization, coupled with the pressures of being the only Cuban family in their town and having some claim to whiteness, provided my grandmother with both the means and motivation to forge a new “American” identity in the US. Her transformation was substantial if not complete; she mastered English in one year, later married a white American man from Mississippi, gave all of her children American names (Randy, Amanda, Sallieann, and Susan), and refused to teach her children Spanish.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Irma de Leon, “Fifteen at Sixty Nine: Oral History,” in *The Road Well Traveled: Three Generations of Cuban American Women*, 68. This book is notable as it is composed of 12 oral histories collected from three generations of Cuban Women.

²⁶⁶ Despite her desire to become “just American” my grandmother’s Americanization efforts are far from complete, rather her Cubanness is something that she has maintained at home and with her family. At 85 she is still fully fluent in Spanish, is utterly devoted to her large Cuban/American family, and has transmitted (probably unknowingly) an extensive amount of Cuban culture to her children and grandchildren.

Unlike my grandmother, Cuban women arriving in the US after 1959 had very different experiences and options available to them as they negotiated their individual and collective identities in the US. Cuban women who arrived the 1960s and 1970s arrived at an important moment in US history, as the post WW-II era brought an expansion of “American” identity to include white ethnic immigrants. Additionally, the civil rights movements of the period forged the possibility of new identities that allowed for hyphenated identities. No longer forced to choose between being Cuban or American, the large number of Cuban women who immigrated during the 1960’s and 1970’s maintained their “Cubanness” while also adopting aspects of American gender roles and culture.

Although scholars have begun to examine how women’s migration is different from that of their fellow countrymen, most studies on immigration remain un-gendered. This gender “neutrality” promotes a faulted –but popular notion– of a singular masculine migration experience.²⁶⁷ To better understand the dynamics of exile and the various experiences of all Cuban refugees, gender must be considered as Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo noted “is not simply a variable to be measured, but a set of social relations that organize immigration patterns.”²⁶⁸ For Cuban women exile held multiple transitions; thus survival and adaptation to the US required many to negotiate substantial shifts in lifestyles, work and social practices.

²⁶⁷ On gender and immigration, see: Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, ed. *Gender and U.S. Immigration: Contemporary Trends* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 1999; Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender & Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1994).

²⁶⁸ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions Mexican Experiences of Immigration*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press) 1994, 3.

In many ways, the changes that Cuban women experienced in the US began well before exile, as the US's increasing cultural and economic influence on the island had effectively begun to reconfigure gender norms and ideas about femininity. Most incoming refugees also experienced substantial downward mobility, for collectively Cuban refugees who arrived in the US before 1980 did not reflect the class demographics of pre-Revolutionary Cuba. Instead most of the refugees who arrived during the 1960s were part of the burgeoning middle class, with a smaller population having been decidedly wealthy; while working class refugees became more prevalent during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, many still held middle class aspirations. Cuban refugee women conceptualized themselves as middle class, modern-sophisticates yet by virtue of their exile and lack of social and economic resources they were temporarily transformed into welfare recipients and low-wage earners.²⁶⁹ Both their own pasts and the dynamic social changes occurring in the US in the 1960s and 1970s informed the arrival and transitions of first and second wave Cuban refugee women. As increasing numbers of middle-class American women entered the job market for the first time, most Cuban refugee women also entered the workforce with over 55% occupying full time jobs by 1980.²⁷⁰ In negotiating all of these changes, Cuban refugee women had to define, as individuals and members of communities, what it meant to be Cuban women in the United States.

²⁶⁹ Unlike other immigrant middle-class women who experience long term downward mobility upon arrival, Cuban women were unique in their access to job training and education through the Cuban Refugee Program. Thus while they were temporarily dependant on the state, this access to government assistance provided many Cuban refugees with the means to eventually regain their middle class status. On the economic decline of other middle class women immigrants, see: Donna Gabaccia *From the Other Side*, Chapter Seven: Middle Class Immigrants.

²⁷⁰ Prieto, "Cuban Women in the US Labor Force," 74.

These shifts from Spanish colonialism to American hegemony, from Cuba to the US, from the middle class to welfare recipients, from the home to the workforce, and from Cuban to Cuban-American produced a multitude of experiences that were fundamentally different from the experiences of Cuban refugee men.²⁷¹ Undoubtedly, individual Cuban refugees underwent a wide array of experiences that were shaped by their race, class, gender, and geographic location. Yet, the multiplicity of transitions and experiences undertaken by Cuban refugee women has not yet been adequately addressed, and generally remains obscured.

Focusing on the transitions that Cuban women underwent provides both a dynamic and segmented approach that echoes Cuban refugee women's understanding of their own experiences. One refugee woman described these transitions in terms of stages noting, "First there was the 'surviving stage.' I said, 'This is temporary.' I had a dream of going back... Second was 'realizing that you're not going back.' Third was saying 'I am here.'"²⁷² Echoing this segmented approach to immigration and identity formation, this chapter will use primary and secondary data to examine the experiences of Cuban refugee women at different moments: as Cuban women in Cuba, as Cuban refugees in the US, and as the mothers of Cuban-American children. These three moments are important as they shed light on what the lives of Cuban refugee women were like before they arrived in the US, the changes that occurred as a result of exile, and their role in the formation of a Cuban-American identity.

²⁷¹ I am using Cuban refugee women here to refer to women who were adults when they arrived in the US, and Cuban-American to refer to individuals who were children when they arrived or were born in the US.

²⁷² Boone, "Thirty-Year Retrospective on the Adjustment of Cuban Refugee Women," 198.

Cuban Women in the Pre-Revolutionary Period

Like many immigrants from Latin America, Cubans by virtue of intimate and prolonged contact with the US, knew a great deal about life in the US before Castro's Revolution. As the US's power in the region increased, it came to regard Cuba as a possible territorial extension, and as early as 1823 John Adams stated, "The annexation of Cuba to our federal republic will be indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the Union itself."²⁷³ While the US failed to politically secure the island during the nineteenth century, it did impose an economic form of imperialism by slowly usurping large tracts of land and building Cuba's infrastructure. As the US's financial control increased in Cuba, so did its ability to influence the emerging Cuban culture. Cuba's ruling class shared close ties with the US and became increasingly Americanized. As I discuss below, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, wealthy Cubans focused their attention northward, conforming to America's cultural norms, educating their children in the US, and in some cases obtaining dual citizenship.

Just as the Spanish-American War altered Puerto Rican and Filipino identity, the war fundamentally altered US-Cuban foreign relations and Cuban identity. At the end of the war of 1898, the US used the Platt Amendment to maintain its presence on the island and insure the continuance of its nineteenth century economic dominion. The war-torn island offered many opportunities for American investors. Consequently, a rush of foreign interest further cemented the US's economic control of Cuba. In 1904, one investor commented that "[n]owhere else in the world are there such chances for success as for the man of moderate means, as well as the capitalist, as Cuba offers today...I

²⁷³ As quoted in: Juan Gonzales, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 59.

advise the capitalist to invest in Cuba, and seriously suggest to the young and ambitious man to go to Cuba and cast his fortune with those on the island.”²⁷⁴

This economic presence also held social consequences; eager to throw off the binds of Spain’s colonial legacy, Cubans pursued the adoption of American ways of doing things. Wealthy Cubans adopted baseball and boxing, celebrated Thanksgiving, sang “Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer,” followed US parenting guides, and avidly consumed American goods and movies.²⁷⁵ Despite this desire to effectively decolonize and distance themselves from all things Spanish, the adoption of American customs did not equal a rejection of colonialism but merely a change in metropole. The US’s economic and political domination thus gave way to a social hegemony that altered “patterns of socialization, modalities of public communication and language, canons of style and self-representation, religion and recreation, no less than dress and demeanor, taste and toys, were swayed—often decisively—by North American practices and conventions.”²⁷⁶ These negotiations in culture are evident as Cuban women began to reject certain tenants of traditional “Spanish” gender norms, and choose to employ a strategy of acculturation that allowed them to adopt certain aspects of American mass culture while discarding others in pre-revolutionary Cuba. However, the presence of “new” gender models from the US did not mean a total dismissal of Cuban ideas about

²⁷⁴ Quoted in: Pérez., *Cuba and the United States*, 118.

²⁷⁵ Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, Chapter 6.

“In 1950 the Duncan Yo-Yo Company dispatched a delegation of yo-yo champions on a promotional tour of the island. Los Reyes Magos toy store advertised ‘clinics’ for children wanting to master the yo-yo. In the 1950s the hula hoop appeared... The popularity of these new products was itself and indicator of the extent to which the iconography of North American popular culture had seized hold of the Cuban imagination. The merchandise traded on the celebrity of US film and television personalities and could assume name recognition. Cuban boys and girls could pretend to be Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, and Dale Evans.” 364-365

²⁷⁶ Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 11.

femininity; rather individuals negotiated hybrid gender identities that shared from both traditional and American notions of proper gendered behavior. The widespread adoption of bobbed hair in Cuba during the 1920s, as in the United States, might appear to be a trivial cultural adaptation. Yet, Cuban women embraced bobbed hair as a political statement; one Cuban woman remembered her mother's new hair cut and noted "It makes Mother look years and years younger, independent somehow, even if at first it shocked and troubled because of its extremely modernized appearance."²⁷⁷ In adopting bobbed hair Cuban women were able to express a desire for gender liberation, but for the majority of Cuban women these stylistic changes were not matched with dramatic changes in their daily realities as most Cuban women maintained traditional roles as wives and mothers.

The rise of consumerism in Cuba mirrored the US as middle-class citizens in both locations became sophisticated consumers of the same American goods.²⁷⁸ One only has to conjure up an image of Havana streets today lined with American cars from the 1950's to understand how prevalent American goods were before the Revolution. As in the US, women in Cuba became the primary consumers of American material goods, driving the market and duplicating the style and modes of middle class America. The popularity of American films and the wide availability of American fashion provided Cuban women with new and beguiling means of self expression. As they emulated American television and movie stars, Cuban women increasingly adopted behaviors that countered traditional norms of femininity:

Middle-class women took up smoking in public as a statement of fashion and freedom. Many earned their own money. Women of "respectable" families went out

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 319.

unaccompanied to shops, to movie theaters, to nightclubs. The modern middle-class woman increasingly traveled by automobile, a potent symbol and source of independence and mobility. Indeed, advertisers and automobile dealers [many American] frequently pictured women as drivers, often accompanied by male passengers, thereby creating visual images of female independence.²⁷⁹

As indicated by this quote, Cuban gender roles had traditionally mandated restrictive controls on women's bodies and regulated their movements in public. While gender ideals do not always match practice, Cuba's Iberian model expressed the following tenants on femininity:

- Woman, because of her physical and consequent intellectual weakness, should not need not work outside the home to be educated beyond a certain degree of literacy and competence in domestic tasks.
- Woman, because of her essential asexuality, is sexually pure and thus morally superior to men. However, because of her essential physical weakness, she is vulnerable to male predation.²⁸⁰

Ultimately, pre-Revolutionary Cuban society deemed women dependent –by virtue of their supposed weakness and purity— rendering male protection a necessity and the sequestering women's bodies in the home desirable. This produced “the notion that good women stayed home (*la casa*) and bad women worked outside (*la calle*).”²⁸¹ Thus, for upper and middle class women in pre-Revolutionary Cuba, venturing outside of the home without a chaperone or entering the workforce marked a notable change in what had been deemed acceptable feminine behaviors.

As Cuban women consumed American goods and pop culture their concepts of themselves undoubtedly shifted.²⁸² Much has been made of the “Iberian” model of gender

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 316.

²⁸⁰ Polly Fortier Harrison, “Changes in Feminine Role: An Exploratory Study in the Cuban Context,” (MA Thesis, Catholic University, 1974), 51.

²⁸¹ Yolanda Prieto, “Cuban Women in New Jersey,” 186.

²⁸² This emulation of the American middle class has not been adequately addressed in the scholarship on Cuban women in the US.

norms imposed by Spanish colonizers that dictated a women's place as in the home; however, while American economic and cultural influence did not displace traditional gender norms, fifty years of US hegemony undoubtedly produced a shift in gender roles. The dynamic cultural and economic changes that took place in Cuba throughout the first half of the twentieth century are in part responsible for the substantial rate of employment among Cuban women refugees. Lisandro Pérez notes that "conditions in pre-Revolutionary Cuba such as modernization and changing sex-role orientations might have evolved sufficiently in Cuba to permit the type of female employment that apparently predominates today in the US Cuban community."²⁸³

Class and race dictated the workforce participation of women in Cuba before the revolution. While upper-class and many middle-class women had a limited pre-immigration work history, poor, working class and Afro-Cuban women worked outside of the home in large numbers. Cuba had not legislated segregation or racism, yet race was a class determinant as the majority of Afro-Cubans were poorer than their white counterparts. As early as 1889 the Cuban census documented that 74.4% of all working women were black with most working as domestics or in the service sector.²⁸⁴ The Constitution of 1940, which provide women with "some of the most advanced labor legislation in the hemisphere"²⁸⁵ also legislated the protection of women's and provided that married women could control their own wages.²⁸⁶ Despite this legal protection and

²⁸³ Lisandro Pérez, "Cuban Women in the US Labor Force: A Commentary," *Cuban Studies* 18, 159-164.

²⁸⁴ Prieto, "Cuban Women in New Jersey," 186.

²⁸⁵ Harrison, 74.

²⁸⁶ Angela Cristina Lavernia, "The Cuban Assistance Program: A Study of Mother's Reaction to Training for Independence," (MSW thesis, Barry College of Social Work, 1968), 27.

the necessity of work for poor Cuban women, compared to other Latin American countries Cuba maintained the lowest level of workforce participation with only 13% of Cuban women working in 1959.²⁸⁷ Also, compared to women in the US (38% were employed in 1960) the rate of Cuban women in the workforce before the revolution was strikingly low.²⁸⁸

In spite of their low workforce participation, middle class Cuban women began to enter the workforce during the 1950's, as white-collar jobs connected to US businesses in Cuba became more prevalent. Along with the US cultural influences discussed earlier, the decrease in economic opportunities also led to changes in beliefs about sex-roles in Cuba. Much like in the US, the introduction of middle-class Cuban women into the workplace had begun as “‘instrumental’ employment designed to further the family’s economic position. The birth rate was relatively low, the middle sectors were large and growing, a large proportion of the population lived in urban areas, and consumption levels were high.”²⁸⁹ Many Cuban women ceased working upon marriage, yet this was not a universal practice as some women chose to remain in the workforce after marriage. Sofía Rodríguez who worked as a private school principal while raising three daughters with her lawyer husband, illustrates this choice. Describing her choice to work after marriage and the birth of her children, Ms. Rodríguez notes:

²⁸⁷ Prieto, “Women in the US Labor Force,” 74 and Prieto, “Cuban Women in New Jersey,” 187.

²⁸⁸ Kristin E. Smith and Amara Bachu, “Women's Labor Force Attachment Patterns and Maternity Leave: A Review of the Literature,” Population Division Working Paper No. 32 (Washington, D.C.: Population Division U.S. Bureau of the Census), January 1999. See figure: Women's Labor Force Participation and Business Cycles: 1940-1997.

²⁸⁹ Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Lisandro Pérez, “Cuba: The Demography of Revolution,” *Population Bulletin* 36:1, April 1981.

I chose my particular field of study because I always enjoyed grammar work and I was always intrigued by the use of symbols and words as a means of communication with people. The determination to pursue my goals came from an inner drive, my conviction that we are here not only to simply live. In education I felt I could fulfill my desire to serve others. I also wanted to give my daughters the best example I could possibly give.²⁹⁰

Ms. Rodríguez's experience was far from common, yet it does indicate that Cuban women could increasingly choose to pursue a career outside of the home.²⁹¹ The pre-immigration work experience of Ms. Rodríguez and other Cuban "working women" provided them with skills that could be translated into careers in the US.

Cuban Women and the CRP

Because so many Cuban refugees arrived in the US without financial resources or a social network, most incoming refugees were compelled to seek assistance from the US government.²⁹² The restrictions Castro imposed on what Cubans could take with them became increasingly stringent over time and eventually the Cuban government limited luggage to a change or two of clothing. As one refugee woman attests, "When I came I had not a penny. They don't let us bring not even a penny, nothing. I had two dresses, but I knew very well that I had to work here so it was not a surprise for me."²⁹³ Consequently accessing assistance or securing a job became necessary for survival.

²⁹⁰ . Sofía Rodríguez, "A Touch of Magic: Oral History," 76.

²⁹¹ Yolanda Prieto suggests that the figures on pre-revolutionary workforce participation might be low. In discussing women in her studies she notes that "the assumption that few Cuban women did not work outside the home (or for pay) may have been more of a myth than a reality, especially in the decade following the revolution. It is quite possible that many salaried women were not counted by the census as part of the labor force. Some of the occupations that sample members reported (such as working as a seamstress) could have been carried out at home. Prieto, *Cuban Women in the US Labor Force*, 81.

²⁹² Early on, many Cubans leaving the island managed to take money and other forms of capital with them and were able to support themselves –if only temporarily– in their exile.

²⁹³ Irma de Leon, "Fifteen at Sixty Nine: Oral History," 64.

The sizeable population of destitute refugees and an inadequate response from the private sector made accessing assistance from the Cuban refugee Program necessary for most refugees. The ambitious program set out to ameliorate the economic and social effects of displacement by offering a broad range of social services, effectively providing for the immediate needs of refugees while simultaneously insuring an individual's long-term economic viability. These central goals of the Cuban Refugee Program's gave individuals and families a means of survival, which became the program's initial function. By 1963 over 75% of incoming refugees had registered at the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP), indicating that while the program was not mandatory, the majority of Cubans did have some contact with and need for the program.²⁹⁴ The CRP provided the primary means of assistance in the form of monthly checks intended to temporarily support refugees as they looked for jobs; as mentioned earlier, an individual could secure a maximum monthly payment of \$60 and a family could receive \$100 a month.

The payments provided for Cuban refugees were substantially more than the welfare payments available to American citizens who qualified for assistance. However, the funds did not necessarily meet all of the refugees' needs. Relatively inexpensive lodging was available in the form of apartments, motels, and boarding houses, but even the cheapest accommodations cost around \$75 a month and left a refugee family with \$25 to meet all of their needs in any given month.²⁹⁵ One refugee relays the difficulties her mother faced as she attempted to provide for herself and her youngest daughter:

²⁹⁴ Fagen, et al, 17.

²⁹⁵ Jose Miró Cardona, US Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapes, *Cuban Refugee Problem*, 87th Congress, First Session, 6, 7, and 13 December 1961, (Washington DC: United States Government Press, 1962), 4.

My mother left Cuba with almost nothing. She did what all the Cubans who left did. They went to the Catholic Charities organization and were given so much to live on per month. Because my mother had my sister with her, she was getting one hundred dollars per month. They had to pay all of their expenses out of that. She found a cheap hotel room. The problem was that they couldn't cook there, so they had to buy their meals elsewhere. She put Celia in the parochial school in the area, where she got a free breakfast and lunch. My mother had budgeted exactly one dollar for the evening meal. She would go to Walgreen's and get the one-dollar blue-plate special; she would let Cecilia eat most of it since she was the child. My mother was never a thin woman; by the time she came to Albuquerque, she was the thinnest I'd ever seen her. She was literally starving. She went every day to an agency to see if there were any jobs, but she never found one.²⁹⁶

The economic viability of families headed by single-parents was severely restricted, as they lacked the income of an additional bread winner. Furthermore, gender also impacted a refugee's capacity to earn a living as the majority of female workers earned substantially less than their male counterparts. To augment substandard paychecks and sustain an individual's well being, indigent refugees could receive additional material assistance by accessing food and medical care from the CRP. Refugees who qualified for welfare payments could supplement their checks with surplus commodity allowance. Florida's Welfare Department administered this program and the CRP funded it; in all 60% of refugees received food from the CRP.²⁹⁷

As the sixties progressed, the sex ratio of refugees became increasingly feminized, as Castro restricted the migration of military aged men and immigration policy made split family units more common. By 1967, the CRP had pinpointed Cuban mothers with young children as a group who needed special assistance in locating work. While refugees with various handicaps could be trained to work in various fields,

²⁹⁶ Paris, 6. The subject of this biography Elena Maza Borkland relays her mother's experiences as a recently arrived refugee in Miami 1961.

²⁹⁷ Taft, et.al.,75.

according to the CRP, “women with small children and elderly individuals... seemed to have very little employment potential.”²⁹⁸ The CRP responded to this “problem of dependency” by instituting the *Aprénda y Supérese* (Training for Independence) program.²⁹⁹ The program was conceptualized as a vocational training course that offered courses specifically tailored to meet the needs of untrained single Cuban mothers. The *Aprénda y Supérese* program began in 1967 and the CRP referred women to the program. Once regard to the program, the CRP made attendance compulsory and tied benefits to the attendance and completion of the program.³⁰⁰

Aprénda y Supérese’s main purpose was to find work for mothers. Encouraging mothers to seek employment reflected a relatively new shift in welfare philosophy. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, social workers –and by extension government assistance programs— encouraged mothers on assistance to remain at home.³⁰¹ This view shifted when social workers’ concerns about the well being of families and the US government’s concerns about “dependent” women coalesced during the post-WWII discussions on working mothers, and both factions proposed that mothers should be encouraged to enter the job market. Echoing the growing acceptance of women’s labor, social workers and the Aid to Dependant Children program began to

²⁹⁸ US Department of Health Education and Welfare, “Training for Independence A New Approach to the Problems of Dependency,” US Cuban Refugee Program Social and Rehabilitation Service, 1986, p5.

²⁹⁹ The term “Problem of Dependency” relies on gendered language that invokes ideas of women’s dependence on their husbands, men and the state.

³⁰⁰ Additionally, at the start of the program the refugee woman was required to sign a contract that stated that she would accept resettlement opportunities that might develop as a result of her training. This obligation to accept resettlement became a requirement for all refugees in the mid-1960’s.

³⁰¹ On women and the welfare state in the early 20th century, see Linda Gordon ed., *Women, the State and the Welfare*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

encourage mothers on welfare to work.³⁰² As one social worker explained the function of employment:

A mother may get a release from the emotional strains and worries at home; get perspective on her problems...The mother may get direct emotional satisfaction on the job in being liked and wanted by the employer and fellow employees, and in having healthy companionships.³⁰³

While the presence of mothers in the workforce became more accepted, the types of jobs deemed “acceptable” for women did not undergo a similar liberalization. Vocational courses made available through *Aprénda y Supérese* clearly articulated the gender and class based ideas of the period. Women in the program could choose from the following courses as they prepared to enter the job market: sewing, clerical skills, nursing, and domestic work. The program offered English classes, provided free daycare and in some instances housekeepers who maintained the houses of participating refugees. Cuban refugee women, some of whom were graduates of the program, staffed both the daycare and housekeeping.³⁰⁴ Enrollment in the program was not ideal for many women, however, as family obligations usurped attendance; one mother noted that “I think that it should not be mandatory because it is necessary to recognize the reasons why it is so difficult for many of us to come.” This mother’s testimony reflects the struggles that refugee women encountered on a daily basis as they negotiated many difficult choices that forced many to choose between their families and survival. This mother’s discontentment with the program was not a singular occurrence; rather, many respondents

³⁰² Laura Curran, “Social Worker’s Revised Materialism: Mothers, Workers, and Welfare in the Early Cold War America, 1946-1963,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 17.1 (2005) 112-136.

³⁰³ Alice Mertz, “Working Mothers in the Aid to Dependent Children Program,” *Public Welfare* 10: 3, 1952, 66.

³⁰⁴ Lavernia, 30-32.

Figure 10. Cuban Women in an *Aprenda y Supérese* Class



echoed similar sentiments.³⁰⁵ Despite their discontent, the CRP and the US department of Health, Education and Welfare considered the program to be a success and in 1968 modeled the revamped Aid to Families with Dependant Children after *Aprenda y Supérese*.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ An understanding of the relationship between Cuban women and the *Aprenda y Supérese* can be recovered from the MSW thesis “The Cuban Assistance Program: A Study of Mother’s Reaction to Training for Independence” by Angela Cristina Lavernia. Her thesis is a product of social science training during the 1960’s, accordingly she provides a thorough discussion of the programs structure but utilizes a quantitative tool that erases the majority of the Cuban women’s’ voices. Nonetheless she does include a limited number of excerpts from interviews with Cuban women enrolled in the program that provide some understanding of how the refugee women accessed the program.

³⁰⁶ García, *Havana USA*, 42.

In Search of a New Jobs

In addition to receiving emergency assistance in the form of financial, medical, and food subsidies, the CRP also provided a broad range of services intended to ensure that Cuban men and women could secure employment.³⁰⁷ This attempt to provide Cubans with the best way of life possible, considering the financial and psychological trauma they had experienced, began with a comprehensive language program. Various private parties in Miami and in growing Cuban enclaves across the country provided some low cost or free services. The CRP's focused its services on Miami's refugees. In 1961, an estimated two-thirds of the refugees had some limited understanding of English and one-third were proficient.³⁰⁸ The sizeable number of refugees who had at least some understanding of English should not be surprising, as many of the early upper-class refugees went to schools that included English classes or in some instances attended US universities. As one Cuban refugee woman notes:

The basic grammar that I know, I learned in Cuba when I was in college. But of course when you come here it is a different story. It's hard to keep a conversation going, and you have to work really hard to get that. A lot of expressions you only get when you live in a place where they talk the language.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ It is clear the CRP was invested in finding both Cuban men and women work, as self-sufficiency was the goal of the program. What is not fully known is whether or not gendered notions of labor affected the types of jobs made available to individuals. There are examples of Cuban refugee women performing jobs that were not considered typical "women's work," for instance the clinic connected to the CRP was administered by a female Cuban doctor.

³⁰⁸ Voorhees, 9.

³⁰⁹ Benita Núñez, "A Place of Her Own: Oral History" in *The Road Well Traveled: Three Generations of Cuban American Women.*, 85.

As this refugee woman attests, a rudimentary knowledge of English was an undeniable asset, yet the challenges of translating English lessons learned in school into conversations was far from easy.

In addition to English classes the CRP also provided a range of vocational programs that trained the refugees in trades which they could in turn use to secure employment. Various unions like Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, attracted by the prospect of a readily available workforce and possible union members, offered vocational training.³¹⁰ Many of these union jobs were connected to Miami's growing garment industry and provided numerous jobs to unemployed Cuban refugee women. Coupled with these vocational training opportunities were a number of professional training or re-training programs, administered by colleges and universities, that were intended to convert a refugee's past work experience into an American degree or certification. Neither the federal government nor its individual states universally recognized many foreign degrees and in cases where degrees were declared valid, certification and licensing prescribed some additional training or exams. Cuban men and women alike experienced a loss of their work status upon arrival in the US, as a lack of English proficiency severely limited many employment options. Consequently, many Cubans accepted jobs below their qualifications. Refugee woman Irma de Leon, worked as a teacher, lawyer and judge before immigrating to the US in 1962 with her young daughter. Upon arriving in the US, she worked as a babysitter, a maid, as a sewing

³¹⁰ García, *Havana USA*, 36. This same union was later changed to the Amalgamated Clothing & Textile Workers Union.

machine operator in a garment factory, as a lab technician, and social worker.³¹¹

Reflecting on the changes in her work, Ms. de Leon noted that:

I cooked the lunch for them and ironed, washed the clothes and everything. I was real happy with that job, very, very happy, Yes, I was a lawyer, a judge, in Cuba but here I couldn't do that and so I was very fortunate that I could work and earn money. I have no hard feelings... I don't want anything for nothing, and even if I had to work very hard as a maid, I was grateful.³¹²

Universities across the US provided refugees with the opportunity to translate their Cuban degrees into American degrees with programs built to accommodate doctors, teachers, dentists, social workers, pharmacists and other professionals. While it is difficult to gauge how many refugee women participated in these college courses, the records of the CRP reveal that refugee women enrolled in all available programs with high concentrations in the pharmacist program.³¹³ The loss of one's college credentials undoubtedly compounded the countless losses associated with exile; many Cubans pursued opportunities to reclaim their previous occupations. Of all professions, Cuban lawyers had the most difficulty revalidating their degrees in the US as their Cuban law degrees were based on the Napoleonic legal system and they were required to undergo a complete retraining to practice law in the US. Ms. de Leon, who had been a judge in Cuba, attempted to regain her occupation in the US:

For two years I went to Gainesville[FL], driving 260 miles every Saturday morning. We left at six o'clock and spent all day studying. We had [a] test every three months and finally had a graduation. During that time I was also working at my full-time job in the lab and was by that time sixty years old...In Cuba we have essay exams, but here it's multiple-choice. So the answers are very close—there were about three answers that you

³¹¹ On the brain drain among immigrants and refugees from Latin America, see: Carlos Cortes, *The Latin American Brain Drain to the United States*, (New York: Arno 1980).

³¹² Irma de Leon, "Fifteen at Sixty Nine: Oral History," 66.

³¹³ Series of correspondences, "Pharmacist Project- American Pharmaceutical Association,:" October 1967, Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 12, RG 363, Master Sub File, CR 15 National, Archive II.

would think were true; that's very hard to decide. The barrier of language made it even harder, because if you don't know the real meanings of a single word, you can get mixed up in the answer.³¹⁴

Ms. de Leon ultimately did not pass the bar exam. Her experiences were not unusual as she notes that of the 200 individuals in her recertification class, 180 passed the classes and only 3 passed the bar.

Regardless of previous work experience or educations, Cuban refugee women worked in large numbers in the US as their labor secured their own and in many cases their family's survival. The type of work refugee women undertook was not necessarily the direct product of previous training or educations, yet over time women who had completed degrees in Cuba could find work as professionals, either in their field or as Spanish teachers. A need for Spanish teachers in high schools across the US coupled with numerous educated refugees made the job a "natural" match. One example was Dr. Mirta R. Vega, taught for the Dade County school system for over thirty years, yet her first years of teaching were far from easy:

Despite all the positive evaluations I received, there were days, during the first months of teaching, when I honestly thought I would never make it. The anxiety was horrible. It was just so difficult to get up in front of a class of American children and try to teach them in a language that wasn't your own. To this day, whenever I drive by one of those schools where I first taught, the feelings of anxiety rush back... Personally, I never experienced any rejection by the other teachers. In fact, most were very supportive. But I could tell that some did not like the situation. At first, whenever I walked into the faculty room, everyone would stop talking. You could tell that they had been talking about Cubans. I knew that I had been accepted when I could walk into the faculty room and everyone continued talking.³¹⁵

Thus as Cuban women were able to secure work as professionals, the nature of their political, racial, and gendered statuses effectively "othered" them from native white

³¹⁴ Irma de Leon, "Fifteen at Sixty Nine: Oral History," 67.

³¹⁵ García., *Havana USA*, 217. García notes that Dr. Vega subsequently became a public school administrator, received her PhD and crafted a bi-lingual education program that was instituted by the state of Florida and across the US.

populations.³¹⁶ This relationship between American perspectives and refugee women is apparent in a *U.S News and World Reports* article “A Cuban Success Story—in the United States,” which discussed a broad range of individuals who had been able to resume their careers in the US and included a discussion of a “lady architect.” The author of the article clearly positions Silvia Maceyra as the “lady architect,” as both a success and a deviation from typical understandings of women and work. As the article explains she had received a degree in architecture at the University of Havana and now worked as an associate in a Washington D.C. architectural firm.³¹⁷

The experiences of these highly educated middle and upper-class women dominate current studies of refugee women from this period. This phenomenon is not original to the study of Cuban refugee women; rather, most gender histories focus on bourgeois and elite women as there is much more material on their experiences. This is true in the case of Cuban women as much of what is known about these early years of exile is gleaned from a limited number of oral histories and popular publications that tend to focus on “notable” women whose experience lay beyond the common experience. While the experiences of these women are important they do not necessarily produce a good understanding of the majority of Cuban refugee woman.

Many Cuban women did not have the formal educations, English skills or work experience needed to secure “good” jobs in the US and thus were compelled to accept a myriad of blue-collar jobs available for “unskilled labor” or that provided on the job

³¹⁶ For more on U.S. perceptions of Cubans, see: Cathy Duke, “The Idea of Race: The Cultural Impact of American Intervention in Cuba.” in Blanca Silvestrini ed. *Politics, Society and Culture in the Caribbean*, (Rio Piedras: University of Puerto Rico Press, 1983).

³¹⁷ -----, “A Cuban Success Story—in the United States,” *U.S News and World Reports*, March 20, 1967, 104-106.

training. For example, Benita Núñez, worked in a Western Electric factory before she entered a beauty school program and ultimately opened a successful beauty shop. Mrs. Núñez notes that the success of her business is in part due to the support of her extended family and her husband's involvement:

My husband does the cleaning of the shop, helps me with the supplies, everything I need. So we don't look at it that I am the one that is a businesswoman or the important one in the house; we work together... If my husband goes into another business, it will be very hard for me. If you are both so involved in business, then you don't have so much time for the family, which is very important too.

Aware of the numerous unemployed Cubans in the US, many Americans solicited refugee workers from agencies assisting the Cubans. Reflecting the needs of the booming American middle class and their understanding of the racial, classed, and gendered conceptions of labor, the US populace placed many requests for domestics. Agencies working with the refugees noted that filling these positions was difficult as many refugee women had families that they could not leave for live-in domestic work, were without transportation, did not speak English, and in many cases were not accustomed to domestic work as they had employed domestics themselves in Cuba.³¹⁸ Other "unskilled" Cuban refugee women sought out vocational training programs in order to secure better work opportunities.

While the ins and outs of Cuban women's daily life remain obscured, statistical data from the US census and individual studies clearly articulate that the majority of Cuban women worked. The 1970 census noted that 55.1 percent of Cuban women in the

³¹⁸ Juanita Green, "Most Won't Leave Families: Exiles Refuse Domestic Jobs," *Miami Herald*, December, 15 1960, 4C. Additionally, many of these requests for domestic workers were clearly hoping that they could exploit the refugee women by offering them room and board but little or no pay. In addition to the reasons listed above, Cuban women may have seen domestic work as racialized labor associated with Black women and chose to distance themselves from the occupation as a way of exerting or maintaining their whiteness.

US worked. This figure is remarkable for a number of reasons, as it far exceeds the percentage of white, Latina, and black Americans in the workforce and nearly tripled the percentage of Cuban women working (18.3%) in 1970 in post-revolutionary Cuba.³¹⁹ The Cuban revolution set out to revolutionize gender norms through the creation of the “New Man” and the “New Woman.” The “New Woman” was meant to liberalize gender norms, specifically as they related to work. The “New Woman” was in part a response to workforce shortage, and encouraged women in Cuba to work outside of the home in large numbers and to pursue traditionally male occupations. Thus, in relationship to work, the impact of the Cuban revolution on the creation of the “New Woman” appears to have been more effective in the US than in Cuba.³²⁰

Studies on the “success” of Cuban refugees indicate that in many cases financial security was the result of shifts in refugee families. Housing shortage coupled with low pay made multigenerational living and working arrangements a necessity. Accordingly, it was not unusual for three generations of one family to share a house or apartment and for all adults to work outside of the home, with the exception of one grandparent who served as a caregiver for any children.³²¹ Extended family units effectively provided Cuban women with the ability to work outside the home; this is in part reflected in the 1980 Census which indicates that Cuban women were more likely to work full-time than all

³¹⁹ Prieto, “Cuban Women in the US Labor Force,” 74.

³²⁰ Ibid, 74.

³²¹ María Cristina García, “Adapting to the Exile: Cuban Women in the United States, 1959-1973”, *Latino Studies Journal*, Vol.2, 1991, 17-33.

other women and the full-time workforce participation of married Cuban women was 10% higher than that of other Latinas and American women.³²²

The benefit of the family unit was not universally available to all Cuban women as many families were divided by complicated immigration procedures and shifts in US-Cuban politics that restricted some family members from immigrating. Consequently the early years of exile were especially difficult for single mothers who attempted to provide for their family on one salary and without the support of an extended family. In many ways, the challenges that many women faced during the early years of exile have been virtually erased as many of the available sources are drawn from popular magazines, newspapers, and CRP publications. Collectively, these served the explicit function of encouraging the continued acceptance of Cuban refugees by convincing the US public that the refugees were self-sufficient if not outright economic “successes.” Consequently, “positive” stories that exalt the work ethic or pre-revolutionary educations of refugee women, without truly discussing what their daily lives were like, dominate the narrative on the early workforce participation of women.

Raising Cuban-American Children

As Cuban women struggled to survive the early years of exile, they also effectively constructed examples of what it meant to be Cuban women in the US. Work, which may have originally been about financial survival and reclaiming a middle class status, became a permanent option for many first-generation women who continued to work after it had ceased to be a necessity. One refugee woman discussed her decision to

³²² Lisandro Pérez, “Immigrant Economic Adjustment and Family Organization: The Cuban Success Story Reexamined,” *International Migration Review*, 20:1, 1986, 12.

retain her job: “I am an elementary school teacher. Even though my husband has a business I want to continue working. I think it would be inconsiderate on my part to stay home while he works.”³²³ Beyond an uneasiness with being dependent on their husbands, Cuban women recognized that work provided them with some degree of financial and personal independence. As one woman put it, “A woman needs to work. She feels better and more in control of herself. She does not have to ask her husband for money. It seems to me that if a woman has a job she is given more respect by her husband and her children.”³²⁴

First generation Cuban refugee women may not have actually become or identified as Cuban-American, yet they did forge a means of being Cuban women in the US and unequivocally influenced their children’s construction of a Cuban-American identity. Polly Fortier Harrison conducted a study on changes in the “feminine role” of Cuban refugee women and noted that as a result of exile, workforce participation, and US culture Cuban women had different expectations on household duties and parenting. The Cuban women interviewed in this study encouraged and were encouraged by their husbands’ increasing participation in the home:

All of the women were most approving of other Cuban males they knew, related by blood or marriage who had ‘adapted themselves’ and were helping a great deal around the house, whether or not their wives worked. One male relative, said an informant, had married an American woman who had “shaped him up”.³²⁵

³²³This interview was conducted by Yolanda Prieto and is included in “Cuban Women in New Jersey,” 187-188. The respondent is identified as a “Married white woman, 40 years old, middle-class with university education in Cuba, from Las Villas”

³²⁴ Prieto, “Cuban Women in New Jersey,” 190.

³²⁵ Harrison, 122-123.

An egalitarian division of labor might have been an ideal that all Cuban women agreed upon, yet like in other American households, practices varied greatly. Harrison relays the experience of a “working wife”:

...although she would have liked still more assistance, noted appreciately (sic) that her husband helped with the grocery shopping and shared the responsibilities connected with child rearing as he had not done in Cuba. She was also grateful that he continued to handle the finances (‘a big headache’) as he had in Cuba. She observed that not helping out was ‘a bad custom’ (mala costumbre) some men had nonetheless managed to bring from Cuba.³²⁶

Although equality within the household may not have been acquired, the testimonies of a number of Cuban women indicate that either because they worked outside of the home or because of the influences of mainstream American culture, Cuban men became more likely to share in household chores and parenting.

Life in the US also altered mothers’ expectations of their children and their means of parenting as they raised the first generation of post-1959 Cuban-Americans.³²⁷

Mothers recognized that their children were permanently altered by exile and intermittently resisted, acquiesced, and negotiated their own expectations with the desires of their children. One mother recognized that American expectations for men and husbands were different, and reminded her son that “in this country you’ll have to know how to cook. If you join the army or live by yourself, you’ll have to cook. If you get married, you’ll have to help your wife. It’s different here from Cuba.”³²⁸ Cuban mothers did not appear to have a problem with mandating the redefinition of male gender roles;

³²⁶ Harrison, 122.

³²⁷ While this description might appear to be overly specific, it is an important designation as there were Cuban-American communities in the US before 1959, who had articulated their identity in many different ways.

³²⁸ Harrison, 124.

they had a much more schizophrenic relationship with changes in their daughters' gender roles and their expressions of sexuality.

Cuban mothers mandated that their daughters maintain a dichotomy in which high levels of education and full workforce participation were encouraged while "traditional" gender roles and a repression of sexuality were simultaneously demanded. Clearly they expected that their daughters would reflect the "new" model that they had forged in the US, as "traditional" spouses and "liberated" workers. Cuban-American women did follow their mothers into the workplace; given their mothers' ability to maintain both a family and a career daughters were not forced to choose one over the other. Conforming to their mothers ideals about sex proved more difficult as daughters attempted to adapt to their American peer groups. One mother, a former lawyer in Cuba, relays the conflict she and her daughter experienced over dating:

In Cuba the girls never date the boys alone, they always have a chaperone, and this is something that is inside us, our way of thinking. I was real afraid, but I understood that I had to let her go because she was living here and she had to adjust, too... Sometimes there was a conflict, but I tried.³²⁹

Despite Cuban daughters' continual challenge of their mothers' sexual mores, many Cuban mothers remained committed to ensuring their daughter's sexual "purity," but as one open-minded mother conceded, "The sexual revolution is not a question of Cuba or the US, it is a question of these times. I am the one who has to change."³³⁰

Conclusion

³²⁹ Irma de Leon, "Fifteen at Sixty Nine: Oral History," 69.

³³⁰ Prieto, "Cuban Women in New Jersey," 197.

The emotional toll of being torn from one's country, the financial burden of arriving in a new country penniless, and coming to terms with life in a new country was undoubtedly difficult at both an individual and collective level. The lives and personal narratives of Cuban women who survived these transitions and forged new realities in the US are rich. Although some research on Cuban women does exist, more research on first and second generation women is needed. Additionally, existing research projects and oral histories alike reveal only broad narratives that fixate on the "successes" of notable Cuban women or, more broadly, on the lives of elite refugee women. Thus, little is known about Cuban refugee women marginalized by virtue of their class, race, politics, or lack of education.

What is clear is that as a result of exile, workforce participation, and American influences, Cuban women's identities were fundamentally altered during the 1960s and 1970s. These changes did not occur overnight, but in reflecting upon the changes that occurred in their lives, Cuban refugee women are able to divide their life experiences into separate epochs that are defined by significant life changes that they underwent. Future research that strengthens our understanding of these transitions will provide both a better understanding of Cuban refugee women and a much more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Cuban-American experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

Cuban Men in the US: Shifts in Masculinities

Janet (interviewer): Give me your definition of machismo.

Armando: My definition –let me explain you, I don't speak English very well, but I try. In my opinion machismo is a valiant man, a man that likes to fight, fight for anybody for anything. He has the only orders; he [sic] no accept the different orders, just his orders. This is machismo.

Irma: No this is not my definition of machismo [laughs]. He wants to put this in a different way, but machismo, I understand, is the Latin American man; he always wants to do his will, and his will has to be over the wife, the children, or anything. And he is the king of the house, he is the chief he is proud of that, and everyone has to do what he wants.³³¹

As this exchange illustrates, machismo is a contested concept, not only in academia but also within family units. When asked to define machismo, husband and wife (Armando and Irma), who immigrated to the US from Cuba in 1962, produced different descriptions of machismo. The variations in their definitions are in part the result of their different gender ideologies and the shifting nature of masculinity in exile.

This chapter examines the construction of masculinities by Cuban refugee men who left Cuba from the early 1960s to the 1970s. Using the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” I will examine the changing forms of masculinity among Cuban men before emigration and at work and home in the US.³³² I borrow R.W. Connell’s definition of “hegemonic masculinity” that views women as potential sexual objects for men, while men are negated as sexual objects for men, thus heterosexuality and homophobia are central features of the concept. It is not only men benefiting from the dominance of

³³¹ Irma de Leon, “Fifteen at Sixty Nine: Oral History,” 73-74.

³³² R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1987); R.W. Connell, “The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History,” *Theory and Society*, 22:5, 1993, 597-623. For a critique of the concept see R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” *Gender and Society* v. 19, n. 6 (December 2005) 829-859.

women, but also control of men through dominant forms of “masculinity” at the expense of subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity thus ensures the continuation of patriarchy by subverting other forms of masculinity and femininities.³³³ In relation to Cuban refugees, hegemonic masculinity allows us to understand the idealized models in Cuba that formed the basis of Cuban men’s pre-immigration masculinities. Moreover, understanding the relationship between Cuban and American hegemonic masculinities helps to illuminate the shifts in masculinities that occurred in exile as Cuban men entered US social systems and ultimately negotiated how to be Cuban men in the US. As was true before immigrating, Cubans in the US did not develop a singular masculine identity, but instead multiple, often overlapping and competing masculinities that were produced by an array of social variants. The refugees’ class, race, sexuality, contact with Americans, year of departure from Cuba, and experiences in exile impacted the formation of Cuban masculinities in the US, as gender is an active and ever evolving process that is constructed by social hierarchies and relations.

Informed by the growing field of feminist studies, the first books on masculinity and men’s lives as social phenomena appeared in the mid 1970’s.³³⁴ This relatively young field began as Cuban refugee immigration slowed to a trickle; accordingly, the first generation of research that examined refugees of the 1960’s and 1970’s did not critically engage with what it meant to be Cuban men exiled in the US. In contrast, the growth of Women’s Studies programs during the 1970’s initiated a set of studies on Cuban women that sought to rectify the earlier non-gendered studies of the 1960’s and 1970’s.

³³³ Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, “Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique,” *Theory and Society*, 30: 3, 2001, 337-361

³³⁴ Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner, *Men’s Lives*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1989).

Unfortunately, this growth in female-centered studies of first and second wave Cuban refugees was not complimented with studies on Cuban men and masculinity.

The lack of academic studies that focus on Cuban men and masculinity poses a problem. Nevertheless, information can be gathered from *Resettlement Re-caps*, general works on Cuban refugees, Cuban refugee women, and gay Cuban men. Studies on Cuban refugees generally center on and reflect the experiences of Cuban men; despite this over representation of men (that provides useful statistical data) these works do little to enrich our understanding of how masculinity affected and was affected by exile. These studies are not interested in gender but instead focus on the “universal” manhood. In the field of Cuban and Cuban American studies, research that focus on gender and the refugees from the 1960’s and 1970’s exclusively examine the experiences of Cuban women. While these studies, and more like them are necessary, researchers also have to consider how Cuban refugee men’s experiences differed from their female compatriots.³³⁵

Studies on Cuban women provide an understanding of how the transition from Cuba to the United States affected women, their families and to some extent their fathers, husbands, and sons. While masculinity was not the focus of these works on Cuban women, there are a substantial number of references to familial relations that provide glimpses of how Cuban women gauged Cuban men’s adaptations in exile. However valuable the observations and judgment of these Cuban women are they fall short of

³³⁵ Most of the major monographs on Cubans and Cuban Americans do not focus on gender, including: García, *Havana USA*; Torres, *In The Land of Mirrors*; Pedraza-Bailey, *Political and Economic Migrants in the America*; and Boswell and Curtis, *The Cuban American Experience*. In contrast there is a body of work on Cuban women, see: García, “Adapting to the Exile: Cuban Women in the United States, 1959-1973;” Pérez, “Immigrant Economic Adjustment and Family Organization;” Prieto, “Cuban Women in New Jersey;” Prieto, “Cuban Women in the US Labor Force.

actual narratives from Cuban refugee men themselves.³³⁶ There are a few exceptions where Cuban men share their stories in interviews of their wives or mothers. These joint interviews impacted the responses of both participants, yet they provide rare insights and a partial understanding of how Cuban men experienced exile. There is one exception, a 1979 study of working class Cuban men in Chicago focuses on sex roles. This study offers glimpses of Cuban masculinity through interviews with Cuban men. The refugees included in this study were all very recent immigrants (many were only in the US for a few days), thus their positions better represent pre-immigration beliefs than ideas that were constructed by and in exile

Construction of Masculinities in Cuba

All too often, examinations of Latino masculinity fixate on machismo as an exotic peculiarity of Latin American cultures.³³⁷ In the West, white masculinity is seen as a function of society and struggles for power. In contrast, this same gaze has traditionally positioned machismo—in academic and popular culture—as a cultural malfunction. The product of cultural specifics, machismo is not seen as a structural phenomena but instead as the result of colonialism and prejudice that has positioned “machismo as a compensation for feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness.”³³⁸ Despite the widespread vilification of Latino masculinity in American popular culture and early academic

³³⁶ Geoffrey E. Fox, “Working Class Émigrés from Cuba,” (Palo Alto: R & E Research Associates, Inc., 1979)

³³⁷ For examples of cultural based studies of masculinity, see: Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*, (New York: Basic Books, 1959); Alfredo Mirandé, *Hombres Y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*, (Westview Press, Colorado, 1997).

³³⁸ Maxine Baca Zinn, “Gender and Ethnicity Among Chicanos,” *Frontiers, A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol.5, No.2 (1980).

writings, some scholars are critically questioning these “common sense” understandings of machismo.³³⁹ Because source material on Cuban refugees, and specifically Cuban men, is so scarce it is necessary to rely upon these pan-Latino studies on masculinity to provide the theoretical underpinnings for this chapter.

The majority of studies of masculinity in Latin America center in Mexico, Central America and South America with a few focusing on the Caribbean basin.³⁴⁰ As is the case throughout Latin America and North America, Cuban masculinity was modeled on Western upper-class ideals of manhood. In Cuba, Spanish colonialism and US imperialism imposed these models, although Cuban men mediated these ideals themselves. The logic of Cuban masculinities was based upon and regulated by societal structures (class, race, gender, sexuality) which were constructed by historical occurrences unique to Cuba. Accordingly, Cuban culture, and more specifically ideas on masculinity, did not originate in a vacuum but instead resulted from Spanish colonialism, African slavery, Chinese immigration, and American imperialism. Despite the multiplicity of cultural influences, not all Cubans universally embraced them. Instead the Cuban elite embraced an idealized hegemonic Cuban masculinity that complied with Spanish and American norms and stood in defiance of African and Chinese influences,

³³⁹ For examples of critical Latino Masculinity studies that challenge the “cultural” model, see: Lionel Cantú, “Enter Hombres/Between Men: Latino Masculinities and Homosexualities,” in Peter Nardi ed., *Gay Masculinities*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. 2000); Matthew C. Guttman, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Michael A. Messner, “Gender Displays and Men’s Power: The ‘New Man’ and the Mexican Immigrant Man,” in *Theorizing Masculinities*. eds. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.

³⁴⁰ For more on Latin American Masculinities, see: Matthew Gutman, ed., *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Rafael Ramirez, *What it Means To be a Man: Reflections on Puerto Rican Masculinity* (Rutgers University Press, 1999); Roger Lancaster, *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (University of California Press, 1992).

effectively “othering” the presence and validity of non-white influences. Thus, Cubans defined masculinity in rigid racial terms.³⁴¹

José Martí in his landmark essay on Latin American and Cuban identity, *Nuestra America*, expresses the racial and cultural exclusion that typified the construction of Latin American colonial culture:

We were a masquerader in English breeches, Parisian vest, North America jacket, and Spanish cap. The Indian hovered near us in silence, and went off to hills to baptize his children. The Negro was seeing pouring out the songs of his heart at night, alone and unrecognized among the rivers and wild animals. The peasant, the creator, turned in blind indignation against the disdainful city, against his own child. As for us, we were nothing but epaulets and professors' gown in countries that came into the world wearing hemp sandals and headbands.³⁴²

In his study of masculinity in Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century, Ethan Simonowitz highlights the importance of the wars for independence in re-defining colonial modes. Simonowitz argues that because Cuban nationalism was forged by the hyper-masculine nature of warfare, *cubanidad* was constructed in purely masculine terms that both resisted the influence of Spanish colonialism and US occupation while reifying both. Thus, following the War of 1898, a hegemonic form of Cuban masculinity hinged upon hyper-nationalism that attempted, but failed to fully, escape the influences of foreign intrusion.

Hegemonic masculinity was not the only model or manifestation of masculinity in Cuba, rather individuals and groups who were excluded from the dominant ideal of masculinity because they did not conform to the race, class, or sexuality markers effectively crafted their own subversive form of masculinities. Explaining how these

³⁴¹ Ethan Simonowitz “Intimate Practices: Masculinity, Female Sexuality and the Struggle for Cuba Libre, 1888-1915 (MA Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2004).

³⁴² José Martí, “Nuestra America, January 1, 1891,” in *Selected Writings*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002).

various masculinities interacted in Mexico, Steve Stern argues that a system of “ranked masculinities” emerged as:

A process of social affirmation and degradation buttressed the power, honor and masculinity of elite men by defining superior masculinity in terms most accessible to the elites, and by placing subaltern men in structural positions of femininity vis-à-vis their superiors and by subjecting subaltern men to open taunts of their manhood.³⁴³

Stressing the structural functions of Cuban masculinity in his discussion of homosexuality in Cuba before the revolution, Ian Lumsden argues that Cuban society “allotted men economic power, custody of their families, and sexual domination over women...One reason wives were not allowed to work outside the house was that their labor reflected poorly on their husband’s ability to provide for them.”³⁴⁴ Thus, before the revolution the hegemonic form of Cuban masculinity positioned Cuban men as “breadwinners” who provided the majority if not all of their families’ income.

United States political and economic intervention in Cuba throughout the first half of the twentieth century; coupled with the alignment of many upper and middle class Cubans with American business, meant that the US exerted a great deal of cultural influence on the island. Castro’s Revolution triggered widespread changes in gender relations, as Lumsden states: “the machismo of its revolutionary culture, particularly that of its leader, has to be related to Cuba’s long struggle to free itself from its domination by the Colossus of the North.”³⁴⁵ Thus the Revolution’s gender ideology offered an alternative to those imposed by the US. In his letter entitled “Socialism and Man,” Che

³⁴³ Steven J Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Men, Women, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 167.

³⁴⁴ Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 37-39.

³⁴⁵ Lumsden, 29.

Guevara outlined the birth of the “New Man” and “New Woman” in Cuba as a shift from the excess imported from the US:

By reacting against the human being of the 19th century we have relapsed into the decadence of the 20th century. It is not a very grave error, but we must overcome it lest we leave open the door for revisionism. The great multitudes continue to develop. The new ideas are gaining a good momentum within society.³⁴⁶

As a revolutionary leader in the Cuban Revolution Che Guevara constructed a distinct form of “masculine nationalism”³⁴⁷ The gendered changes that the revolution produced, namely the increasing employment of Cuban women outside the home, had little effect on the earliest refugees who fled before these policies were fully implemented; in contrast, Cuban men who emigrated during the late 1960’s and 1970’s witnessed an influx of women in education and a broad range of occupations. In 1967 a young Cuban expressed the catch-22 that men in Cuba experienced: “The changes have been traumatic for Cuban men...The hard thing is that they cannot legitimately oppose the changes. A woman who goes to work or on guard duty is doing it for the Revolution. The men would have to be counter-Revolutionaries to oppose it.”³⁴⁸ Cuban men who witnessed these changes and fled Cuba as second-wave refugees, either because of objections to the changing roles of women or for other reasons, brought with them much more complicated understanding of gender and work. This point is expressed by one thirty-four year old male Cuban factory worker who immigrated during the late 1960’s:

³⁴⁶ Che Guevara, “Socialism and the Man in Cuba,” in *The Che Reader*, (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 2005).

³⁴⁷ See chapter 3 of Maria Josefina Saldana-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

³⁴⁸ Elizabeth Sutherland, *The Youngest Revolution: A Personal Report on Cuba*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1969), 14.

Because they have too much freedom, single women as well as married. They have too much freedom because there the woman does whatever she pleases. So when the man arrives and tells her, “No, you do such-and-such.... Everything is in her favor, the laws are in her favor. “So you have no business demanding anything of me, because I govern myself,” she says, and before it wasn’t like that. Before the woman there was dependant on her husband and today she’s not. She doesn’t depend on her husband due to that there are many jobs in the fields, and nobody wants to work! Then just imagine, women are going to work.³⁴⁹

This man’s anxiety about the threat of women’s employment and subsequent independence was not universally held by Cuban men. Nonetheless, this narrative shows how the Cuban Revolution’s gender revolution forced this refugee man to grapple with the concept of women working outside of the home. The narrative also reveals male concerns about the future of masculinity under a new Cuban society forged by the Revolution.

The Shock of Exile

Academic studies on the first wave of Cuban refugees commonly state that the earliest refugees left because “they had the most to lose” as the Revolution nationalized their businesses and homes.³⁵⁰ This phrase also suggests that wealthy Cuban men suffered most because of the land seizures and economic restrictions that followed the start of the Revolution threatened their economic well being and by extension their masculine identities. Wealthy land owners undoubtedly suffered the greatest economic losses under the Revolution, yet there were a series of other social, economic, and emotional events that refugees carried with them into exile.³⁵¹ One study conducted in the

³⁴⁹ Fox, 87.

³⁵⁰For examples of this refrain, see: García, *Havana USA*, 13; Masud-Piloto, 33.

³⁵¹ Despite the apparent psychological issues some first and second wave Cubans experienced, there is very little written on the topic. In contrast, there are a number of studies that focus on the mental health of the

early 1960's surveyed 400 Cuban men in Miami and found that 15% of the men spent some time in Cuban jails before leaving the island.³⁵² Those who were fortunate enough to escape imprisonment experienced other forms of psychological distress because of the revolution. Between 1959 and 1973 the first and second wave of Cuban immigrants experienced a myriad of social and political changes in Cuba that resulted in a variety of reasons for leaving. No period of Cuban immigration is homogenous, yet there are specific motivations tied to changes that occurred in Cuba. For example, E. F. Kuntz commented on the importance of timing and "vintage" in understanding the refugee experience:

It is this date which among refugees resulting from opposing currents will link him to members of his own 'vintage', and will be the proof of his *bona fides*. The events and dates leading up to his departure are indelibly engraved in the memory of the political refugee, and while understandably he would feel affinity to those who had chosen to escape from the same situation as his own.³⁵³

Studies on Cuban political differences in exile suggest that by and large refugees managed to avoid discussions of pre-immigration political alliances by emphasizing their shared dismissal of the revolution.³⁵⁴ Nonetheless the issue of "vintage" is relevant to Cuban refugees as the amount of time Cubans lived under the revolution impacted their personal experiences and their transition into the US. All post-'59 and pre-Mariel refugees are generally conceptualized and treated as a homogenous group, yet this

Marielitos and a whole field of study dedicated to the mental health of Vietnamese refugees. While the emphasis on mental health issues of the Vietnamese and Marielitos might be attributed to an expansion of psychology to include issues of immigration and culture, it is interesting that both the Vietnamese and Marielitos were constructed as "problem" refugees while first and second wave Cubans were lauded as ideal immigrants.

³⁵² Fagen, 79.

³⁵³ E.F. Kuntz, "The Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement," *International Migration Review* 7:2, 1973, 125-146

³⁵⁴ See: Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*; García, *Havana USA*

anecdote illustrates the variety of perspectives held by first and second wave Cuban refugees. Novelist Eduardo Santiago relays how his father's emotional reaction to exile was the result of his personal investment in the revolution:

The men in my family lived lives of shame; most of them had helped bring Fidel Castro to power only to be betrayed and humiliated by him. You may disagree, but that's the way they saw it, and it caused them to be distant, or depressed, or drunk. The men also found it more difficult to form an intimate group. When I listened to them I heard nothing... The men had more trouble expressing their feelings, so they suffered a strange rigidity that permeated the rest of their lives. They disappeared into television and silence.³⁵⁵

Thus in order to cope with the losses and changes that accompanied exile, many Cuban men adopted a masculine identity that was typified by a silence and detachment. Other Cuban authors echo this introspective detachment when they express their fathers' responses to exile. Reflecting on his father's first days in the US Elías Miguel Muñoz reveals:

I saw him cry for the first time after our arrival in Los Angeles. My image of the impassive macho was banished temporarily and that of a weak, vulnerable being emerged. He'd cry about anything: a word, a gesture, a song. His siblings' letters made him weep profusely. He got home every day bedraggled and greasy after assembling thousands of parts at the *factoría*. Papi began to look sickly, wilted.³⁵⁶

Rather consciously or not, Muñoz expresses his father's depression as a crisis of masculinity, and employs terms like "wilted" and "sickly" to convey the emasculation that accompanied arrival into a new country. Talking about their feelings was not common among Cuban men; instead many chose a silent introspective retreat that allowed them to cope with leaving Cuba and adapting to life in the United States. The

³⁵⁵ Eduardo Santiago, "Interview," in *Tomorrow They will Kiss*, (New York, Back Bay Books, 2006), 8.

³⁵⁶ Elías Miguel Muñoz, "From the Land of Machos: Journey to Oz with my Father," in Ray González, *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront Their Manhood*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 26.

author of a study of Cuban women in exile relays a Cuban woman's reflections of her introverted husband, stating:

[He was]The kind of man who held back a great deal, and as she said, "probably suffered a great deal in his life" because of that. "He never said anything or wrote anything," she said. "He never said I'm sad, or I'm happy. Nothing." Margarita also mentioned that Ricardo drank a lot. The drinking was something that was especially stressful for their daughter, Clara Maria, who according to Margarita resented her father's drinking. She even wrote Margarita a letter once describing her father as "a shadow that passed through the house."³⁵⁷

This is not to say that all Cuban men had a difficult time adapting to life in exile; one Cuban woman said of her husband:

My husband was a man who, by nature, was very adaptable. He was a man who could close the door and leave everything else behind...and he could go forth whichever way he could. To him, in reality, I don't know if it was easier or his personality helped him accept it better³⁵⁸

This example of adaptation is more desirable than men who turned to silence or drinking to cope with exile, yet the emotional detachment inherent in this quote is yet another example of a masculine behavior that other Cuban men adopted. While exile impacted Cuban men in different ways than it did Cuban women, it is impossible to make essentialized proclamations on which gender was most effected by immigration and life in the US.

Seeking Work in the US

Despite the trauma of exile and displacement, Cuban women experienced some degree of social mobility with their entrance into the job market. Both Cuban men and women who worked outside of the home before immigrating suffered a loss of job status

³⁵⁷ Toledo, 101.

³⁵⁸ Toledo, 124

in exile, yet as only 19% of Cuban women worked in Cuba the number of women who experienced a loss in occupational status was numerically small as compared to their male counterparts.³⁵⁹ Conversely, Cuban men experienced a higher degree of downward job mobility that impacted the way they conceptualized of their masculine identity and, the way their male peers and family members viewed them. A 1968 study that surveyed more than 500 refugees from across the US revealed that 31% of the men and women performed white collar jobs in Cuba, but the rates of white collar employment dropped to 18% for men and 7% women once in the US.³⁶⁰

Cuban men who immigrated with a strong understanding of American culture and industry were better equipped to acculturate to American society. Moreover, Cuban men who worked for American businesses in Cuba or attended American schools maintained substantial economic advantage, as many assumed jobs once in the US vis-à-vis the companies they worked for or connections they acquired in college. One man was featured in the Cuban Refugee program's (CRP) newsletter *Resettlement Re-Cap*, the article outlined the advantages and challenges inherent in starting work in the US:

Salesman, American Style, is the new work of A.B. Deschappelles. He was a salesman for the Glidden Company, Cleveland, Ohio, in Cuba and has been trained in Cleveland, learning about new products and how to adjust to US sales ways. His adjustment is aided by the fact that he attended college in this country³⁶¹

In addition to the connections made through American companies in Cuba, Cubans who acquired American degrees before immigrating were also privileged as their degrees were

³⁵⁹ Prieto, *Cuban Women in New Jersey*, 197.

³⁶⁰ Michael G. Wenk, "Adjustment and Assimilation the Cuban Refugee Experience," *International Migration Review* 3:1, 1968, 40.

³⁶¹ " 'Everyone Has Been Helpful' Is Report from Refugees As They Tackle Jobs In New Locations," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, February 1963, 4.

universally recognized as valid. In contrast, neither the United States federal government nor many individual states recognized foreign degrees. In cases where the government or employers declared degrees valid, certification and licensing prescribed some additional training or exams. A *Newsweek* magazine article, titled “Refugee Eggheads” highlighted the number of professionals without credentials within the exile community. This article noted that “In Miami last week, some 700 émigrés from the Cuban academic world, including 400 Havana University professors, were working as stevedores, gardeners, janitors – practically any occupation except the one for which they were trained.”³⁶²

Once in the US the majority of male refugees obtained jobs that were far below their qualifications:

After trying to sell Cuban foodstuffs at a roadside stand near Miami, operate a grocery, and fish for lobster off the Bahamas, Edgardo de Cartula, a lawyer, is doing something that he feels qualified for and likes to do – teach young people, at Calumet Township High School, near Hammond, Indiana ³⁶³

As this quote suggests the road to economic and social recovery was a difficult and meandering process that provided some, but not all Cuban men, with the ability to assume pre-immigration professional levels. The CRP offered a broad range of educational opportunities designed to offer Cuban refugees the greatest chance of regaining their professional careers and “breadwinner” masculine identity. As the earliest refugees were by and large the most educated, the first wave refugees were most likely to take advantage of the degree adjustment programs which transformed Cuban degrees, through education and recertification processes, into American degrees. Additionally, while these professional adjustment programs placed no restrictions on the gender of the

³⁶²-----, “Refugee Eggheads,” *Newsweek*, . 27 February 1961, 58.

³⁶³ “From Lawyer to Grocer to Fisherman to Teacher,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, May 1965, 4.

participants, they overwhelmingly served Cuban men as they retained the highest number of professional degrees in Cuba.

In order to allow Cuban men to regain their masculine identity as “bread winners,” the CRP solicited colleges across the US to aid in the recertification process. Professional retraining began in 1961 with the creation of the University of Miami’s Post Graduate Medical Program for Cuban Refugees. The vast majority of Cuban doctors were male; a 1953 study on occupation and gender in Cuba reported that 87% of physicians were male, thus this program overwhelmingly served Cuban men.³⁶⁴ The CRP subsequently assumed the financial responsibility and provided the university with a grant, but at its inception private bio-medical companies like Eli Lilly, Upjohn and Meade Johnson and the professional organization the American College of Surgeons provided partial funding.³⁶⁵ The Post Graduate Medical Program proved successful and by 1967 had licensed almost 1,500 Cuban physicians in 38 states plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia to practice medicine.³⁶⁶

A 1964 review of the Post Graduate Medical Program for Cuban Refugees found that the program had effectively allowed 85 percent of participants to practice medicine at a training cost of only \$300 per person.³⁶⁷ Despite the availability of this and other doctor retraining programs, most Cuban men did not enter the programs immediately

³⁶⁴ Harrison, 79.

³⁶⁵ García, 26.

³⁶⁶ Rafael A. Peñalcer, Director of International Medical Education at the University of Miami, to All Concerned, “Medical Licensure Statistics—Cuban Refugee Physicians,” 17 July 1968 Records of Health, Education, and Welfare, RG 363, Carton 12, File Cuban Refugee, National Archive II.

³⁶⁷ Taft et al., 17.

upon arrival as economic survival and language barriers barred them from attending school:

Dr. M, a well-known surgeon in Cuba, entered the US some time in the fall of 1962. His initial employment upon resettlement was as a janitor and general custodian of a local hospital. Within months, he became an x-ray technician and within one year he became a male nurse. During this time he acquired a greater facility for the English language, and as a consequence was able to study part-time at the hospital's medical school. In the early part of 1967 he passed the required state medical boards. At the present time he is fully accredited physician earning well in excess of \$20,000.³⁶⁸

As this job history suggests, regaining pre-immigration employment proved to be a difficult and long-term process for many men. The series of jobs this refugee occupied provided a variety of income levels and for a period of time placed him in a traditionally female job as a nurse; unfortunately this brief narrative does not provide a full understanding of how this Cuban refugee coped with such transitions. What is clear is that this Cuban man did regain his occupation and a salary comparable to the average income of American doctors (\$21,104 in 1967).³⁶⁹ This professional recovery took 5 years to complete and marks a financial rarity as the average family (not individual) income for Cubans in 1969 was \$8,529.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Wenk, 40-41.

³⁶⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Income in 1967 of Persons in the United States, Table 6- Occupation of Longest Occupation in 1967- Civilian Workers 14 Years Old and Over With Earnings by Total Money Earnings in 1967, for the United States," published June 30, 1969, <<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/popscan/p60-060.pdf>>

³⁷⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, "Persons of Spanish Surnames- Table 10- Family Income and Poverty Status in 1969 of Families With Heads of Spanish Origin by Urban and Rural Residence: 1970," published June 1973.

Figure 11: A CRP sponsored English Class³⁷¹



Retraining programs were not the only college opportunities available to male refugees. The government provided additional scholarships to traditional and non-traditional male students. Interest free student loans of up to \$1,000 were made available in 1960-1961; in the name of parity the CRP changed the loans in 1963 to match the opportunities available to citizens – 3% loans repayable within 10 years of graduation.³⁷² Between 1962 and 1976 the US spent \$34 million dollars on just over 16,000 refugee students. One loan recipient, Dr. Juan Clark, stressed the importance of the aid and concluded that without the program “the college education of many would have been

³⁷¹ The gender imbalance in this picture reflects that this course was accessed primarily by Cuban men.

³⁷² Whorton, 76.

severely compromised or impossible,” as it was for the majority of non-Cuban Latinos who did not have access to this program.³⁷³

Despite these educational opportunities the vast majority of Cuban refugees, regardless of gender, did not hold professional jobs. Moreover, professional retraining programs did not serve most refugees; in 1961, when asked about their employment history in Cuba, 31% of refugees considered themselves professionals whereas by 1967 only 18% self designated as “professional, semiprofessional, and managerial”.³⁷⁴ Thus 69% of refugees in 1961 and 82% in 1967 worked as laborers, clerks, sales persons, farmers, or in the service industry before immigrating. The number of non-professional Cuban refugees is startling as the media and the CRP alike fixated on the refugee elite, producing an unbalanced understanding of Cuban refugees that essentially erased the work history and class positions of the majority of entrants. A study of West New York, New Jersey revealed that as of the early 1970’s 68% of formerly middle class and 82% of upper class Cubans experienced a loss in occupational status.³⁷⁵

Regardless of their pre-immigration employment, only 13% of Cuban men worked as professionals and 7% as managers or administrators. In contrast 57% of refugee men worked blue collar jobs as craftsmen, foremen, operators or in the service industry.³⁷⁶ Because many Cubans with professional degrees worked in blue collar jobs, and the influx of a substantial number of working class refugees during the Freedom

³⁷³ Pedraza-Bailey, 51.

³⁷⁴ Fagen, 115.

³⁷⁵ Rogg, *The Assimilation of Cuban Exiles*, 106-107
Only the poorest Cubans surveyed experienced no downward mobility in the US.

³⁷⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “Persons of Spanish Surnames- Table 8- Employment Characteristics of Persons of Spanish Origin 14 Years Old and Over by Urban and Rural Residence: 1970,” published June 1973.

Flights, Cuban men in the US forged an identity based upon labor and providing for their families.³⁷⁷ Thus while working class Cuban men were cognizant of both American and Cuban hegemonic masculine ideals, by virtue of their class standing, many Cuban men could not comply with upper-class gender norms that stressed mental and not physical exertion.

Escaping Dependency

In the US, dependency upon the state is typically considered feminine. There is virtually no research on how men in the US relate to the welfare system and the stigma of male dependency.³⁷⁸ Nonetheless, refugee narratives suggest that reliance upon the state for income or other assistance bothered some Cuban refugee men. This discomfort with receiving government assistance was multifaceted as their loss of class status threatened the masculine identity of upper and middle class Cuban men. Simultaneously, the Cuban refugee's exodus from a socialist country where the State was played an ever-increasing role in providing for the basic needs, served as the impetus for leaving as they immigrated with the express desire to be free of any government reliance. This desire to escape government intrusion is obvious in Cuban-American author Gustavo Pérez-Firmat testimony about his father's feelings towards government aid:

It was a point of pride with my father that he never sought or received assistance from the Cuban Refugee Center. Since we had many friends who received more food than the needed [from the CRP], however, my mother's cupboards were always filled with

³⁷⁷ Fox, 82-83. This study of working class Cubans revealed that the most important attribute a man could possess is a focus on work.

³⁷⁸ There are a few studies on masculinity and the welfare system, including Keith Pringle's book *Men, Masculinities and Social Welfare*, (New York: Routledge, 1995) This book, like others that focus on masculinity and welfare, is primarily concerned with how male social workers function in the system and not how male clients relate to receiving welfare

powdered milk, Spam, cement-tough blocks of American cheese, and other army-surplus delicacies.³⁷⁹

It is unclear if most Cuban men felt the same about governmental aid, but what is clear is that the majority of Cubans were compelled to visit and access some form of assistance from the CRP. Both governmental and national publications record the relief that some Cuban men felt once they could again support themselves. One entry in *Resettlement Re-cap* mapped a refugee man's reaction to his new job "I am pleased not being a public burden to the US.' Going to work at Quick Motors, Inc., Mr. Castillo reports getting \$80 the first week he was there, and soon after \$92 a week, 'so you see I have progressed'"³⁸⁰ This quote clearly illustrates this man's relief at gaining self-sufficiency, but the inclusion of this pro-employment testimony in a government publication clearly serves the CRP's "good immigrant" model and also promotes a "breadwinner" masculine ideology.

Another example of a man escaping dependency echoes these sentiments:

I am experiencing one of the happiest times of my life since I left Cuba...and I have been through the most diversified experience a man can conceive...the reason for my happiness is that after long months of waiting I have found a job in my former field of work as an airline pilot. Therefore I ask you to discontinue the financial aid that I receive from the Center [CRP]...Now I can be useful to your country, not a burden to your government which has been so generous to us.³⁸¹

As the government agency filtered the content of these publications for the expressed purpose of persuading refugees to resettle or encouraging the American populace to serve as sponsors for incoming refugees, it is important to question what narratives the CRP

³⁷⁹ Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Next Year in Cuba, A Cubano's Coming of Age in America*, (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995), 40.

³⁸⁰ "Is Happily Resettled in Auto Mechanic's Job," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, May 1963, 4.

³⁸¹ "Finds Opportunity In His Field Of Work: Asks Aid To Be Discontinued," *Resettlement Re-Cap*, September 1963, 3

excluded. It is clear that the CRP felt that these stories of men finding work and fulfilling their “breadwinner” role were useful as they are common throughout *Resettlement Recap* and *Oportunidades*. Another type of “breadwinner” narrative the CRP’s publications and mainstream magazines featured Cuban men who paid the government back for the assistance they received. According to an article in *Newsweek*, as early as 1961, refugees were sending the CRP around \$10,000 month.³⁸²

Even after resettlement, many Cuban families required government assistance. This was true in Portland, OR where, whether because of a lack of job skills, availability of jobs, prejudice of potential employers, or lack of English knowledge some Cubans remained unemployed for a prolonged period of time. A Portland newspaper article focused on reported on the unemployed Cuban men in the city, lamenting the underproduction of the male refugees: “For some men used to working hard on farms and other laboring jobs, the biggest thing the day holds for them is walking to the school-grounds to pick up their children after classes.”³⁸³ The city provided these families with financial assistance, yet the newspaper article articulated the men’s uneasiness with dependence: “Their only complaint rises from idleness, the inability to provide for their families on their own.”³⁸⁴ One refugee summed up his discontent with Cuban reliance upon government assistance in a newsletter from the Cuban Circulo de Denver: “We all know that it was not possible to reconstruct our lives and support our families living on US government aid. Further, we know that living on this aid is not the aspiration of any

³⁸² “The Agonizing Wait—Then the Hard Realities of A Refugee Life,” *Newsweek*, 28 August 1961, 23-27.

³⁸³ Robert Olmos, “English Poses Awesome Barrier to Cuban Refugees in Portland,” *The Oregonian*, 28 January, 1963, 13.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

Cuban who wishes to get ahead and to achieve better conditions.”³⁸⁵ His denouncement of dependency is telling as suggest that Cubans in Denver felt stigmatized by the government assistance the received.

Restructuring Gender Relations in the Home

As noted in the previous chapter, one of the most dramatic changes that Cuban families underwent during exile was the mass participation of Cuban women in the US workforce. The workforce participation of Cuban women required that both Cuban refugee men and women reconsider their gender roles. A small number of studies of first and second wave Cuban women revealed that refugee women entered the workforce out of economic necessity, but also but retained their jobs after the economic crisis as gender roles expanded to include work as normative.

Ironically, as Cuban women in the United States entered the workforce for the first time, women in Cuba did the same. Castro’s revolution advocated equality for women as one of its major goals, thus Cuban women began working outside of the home in the early 1960’s in order to gain social parity and to contribute to the economic success of the country. Like the United States, the entrance of Cuban women into the workforce (in Cuba) did not ensure household work would be shared equally by men and women. Recognizing that Cuban women worked a full day only to go home to work as second shift (*sobrecargo*), the Cuban government mandated that child rearing and household chores should be shared through the institution of the Household Code in 1974, which states, “Men still exist, in many cases calling themselves revolutionaries, who nonetheless allow the entire weight of domestic duties fall on their own wives and

³⁸⁵ “Resettled Cuban puts OK on Relocation Program,” *Resettlement Re-Cap*, January 1966, 2.

mothers.”³⁸⁶ The sheer presence of this legislation suggested that in Cuba men, despite women’s work outside of the home, did not take part in household chores in large numbers.

In the US, it is not clear what percentage of Cuban men participated in housework and child rearing, yet a small number of narratives suggest that some Cuban men did share in some aspects of childrearing and housekeeping. An increase in male participation in household chores, as a result of immigration and women’s employment outside of the home, is illustrated by a Cuban man who remarked on the changes in his role:

How could I help but take part? I couldn’t watch my wife come home after a day at the hotel (as a domestic) and expect her to cook, bathe the children, put them to bed, etc. I don’t go out to the club as often as I did when I was working alone...Do I cook? (Laughs) Well, I try sometimes. (Wife interrupts) “He makes *perros calientes* (hot dogs). “He’s turned *Americano*.”³⁸⁷

The variety and amount of tasks this Cuban man undertook is rare amongst Cubans’ narratives on the division of labor in the home. The involvement of men in a variety of jobs considered “women’s work” in Cuba is common in discussions on home-life, yet the bulk of these narratives suggest that Cuban men assumed responsibility for a limited number of tasks. For instance, in writing about his own father, the Cuban writer Elías Miguel Muñoz relays the depression his father experienced upon arriving in the US and the joy his father found in shopping:

Few chores made him happier than grocery shopping. Such joy to have enough money to buy steaks, all the rice and beans you want, the fancy sauces, coffee, cheese and rich desserts. No rationing. No shortages. A blissful abundance of every imaginable product. He’d come home from the market loaded up with American goodies for his family:

³⁸⁶ Marjorie King, “Cuba’s Attack on Women’s Second Shift, 1974-1976,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 4:1/2, 1977, 106-119; Margaret Randall, *Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later*, (Brooklyn: Smyrna Press, 1981), 104.

³⁸⁷ Gil, 98.

cottage cheese with pineapple, my mother's weakness; ham, a mythical meat; soda crackers; one box per person; glazed donuts, a delicious gringo pastry; Coca-Cola, a sweet, purifying potion; and cornflakes (can't grow up to be a true American without them).³⁸⁸

For this Cuban man, providing his family with food marked independence from Cuba and more specifically from depending on US government, thus grocery shopping seemingly took on a certain masculine overtones as he gained the ability to be the literal breadwinner. Cubans who fled the island shortly after the Revolution did not fully experience the social, political, and economic changes that followed, and as is true in this case, they did not experience the food shortages and fiscal limitations that prompted this refugee's emotive reaction to grocery shopping in the US.

The most consistent change in the division of labor in the home cited in studies of the Cuban women during the early years of exile is the increasing role of fathers in childrearing.³⁸⁹ Speaking about the changes in household responsibilities men undertook in the US, one researcher recorded the thoughts of a working mother who said that:

...although she would have liked more assistance, noted appreciately [sic] that her husband helped with grocery shopping and shared the responsibilities connected with childrearing as he had not done in Cuba...She observed that not helping out was "a bad custom" (mala costumbre) some men had nonetheless managed to bring from Cuba.³⁹⁰

While some Cuban women received more help from their husbands than they had in Cuba; the majority of women both worked and completed the majority of household tasks

³⁸⁸ Muñoz, 26.

³⁸⁹ Joseph Dominic Gibboney, "Stability and Change in Components of Parental Role Among Cubans Refugees," (DSW dissertation, Sociology, The Catholic University of America, 1967).

³⁹⁰ Harrison, 122.

as “the family role adopted by the employed Cuban women appears to be the familiar ‘supermom’ patterns adding employment to their traditional responsibilities.”³⁹¹

Despite the minimal changes made to the division of labor within the home, the economic contributions of Cuban women affected familial dynamics. Studies of other Latino families in the US suggest that women’s labor outside of the home can provide women with a more egalitarian relationship with their spouses. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo writes about the segmented shifts in spousal relations that allow for the retention of traditional beliefs and behaviors while other liberalizations occur. For instance, Hondagneu-Sotelo’s study of Mexican immigrants in her book *Gendered Transitions* revealed that:

Despite the traditional division of labor, when these families were faced with major decisions –such as whom to seek for legal help, whether or not to move to another town, or the decision to lend money or make a major purchase– spouses seemed to exert equal authority.³⁹²

It is unclear if the same changes occurred in Cuban families since more research is needed to fully examine the home-life and spousal relations of Cuban refugees. Scholars of Cuban women in the US suggest that working outside of the home allowed Cuban women “independence and power, it also strained marriages; many men felt threatened by these non-traditional relationships.” As a result Cuban women maintained the highest divorce rate in the US in 1980 at 9.3% as compared to 7.3% amongst the general population.³⁹³

³⁹¹ Myra Marx Ferree, “Employment Without Liberations: Cuban Women in the United States,” *Social Science Quarterly*, 60:1, 1979, 48.

³⁹² Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions Mexican Experiences of Immigration*, 125.

³⁹³ García, “Adapting to the Exile,” 31.

Conclusion

Irma, the wife quoted in the opening exchange on masculinity, continued her critique of Cuban masculinity:

Irma: You know, machismo, in another sense –the Latin American man, he considers that doing housework is humiliating for him. Oh, he will never wash dishes, that is something that he can't do, he never wants to clean anything, he can't. Sometimes I have gone to our daughter's house and when I come home all the dishes are there...I always say "Okay, if there is another life, if there is reincarnation, I will never marry again a Latin American man. I will marry an American man, they help the women"

Armando: She is joking [laughter], She is joking,

Irma: No,no,no I am telling the truth. I am telling the truth.³⁹⁴

Despite her condemnation of Latin American men, and specifically her husband, Armando and Irma were married for over forty-four years at the time of this interview. This suggests that despite her discontent she enabled her husband to retain his traditional views on household labor. Many early refugees remained vigilant about retaining their pre-revolutionary identities; although this task was impossible given their presence in the US, drastic alterations to gender roles could be constructed as threats to their Cubanness.

Because so little is known about the lives of Cuban men who arrived in the US during the 1960's and 1970's it is difficult to gauge how they reconfigured masculinities in response to immigration and experiences in the US. Either because of a loss of job status or a pre-immigration blue-collar background, the majority of Cuban refugee men became part of the working class. Accordingly, hard work and the acceptance of low status jobs were cast as noble responses to the financial burden of life in the US.

³⁹⁴ Irma de Leon, "Fifteen at Sixty Nine: Oral History,"73-74.

CHAPTER SIX

Cuban-American Literature: Re-defining *Cubanía*

Although all writing is political, the nearly fifty year standoff with Castro makes writing about Cuba intrinsically charged. Maintaining a hard-line anti-Castro position is important to a small, but vocal Cuban minority in Miami, who project their position upon Cuban communities and the US populace alike. Articulated in black and white terms, a dichotomy inherent in Cold War nomenclature, one is either towing the “official” anti-Castro line or not –one of “us” or one of “them.” Second-generation Cuban-American authors are not immune from this gauge, as members of the Miami Cuban community read their work in order to determine the authors’ political positions and subsequently endorse or condemn their work. Cuban-American author Achy Obejas relays the rejection she experienced when she attempted to read her first book, *We Came All the Way From Cuba So That You Could Dress Like This*, at a supposedly liberal Miami bookstore owned by her grandmother’s friends:

At first, when we called them up to book a reading they were very excited and happy. Then they got the book. The first book is a collection of seven short stories and only one deals with Cubanness. It's not especially political in the sense of taking a strong position, but of course, that's exactly the point. You're expected to take a strong position and the fact that I didn't deal with Fidel and Cuba as principal points of departure really rattled them. They cancelled the reading.

Initially, I assumed that they canceled the reading because of the gay subject matter and that maybe they were trying to not embarrass my grandmother. So I called them up and said, "Is it the gay thing?" And they said “Oh, no no no, we don't care about the gay thing, it's that lack of the Fidel hate thing”³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ Kris Kleindienst, “The Clash of Cuban American Cultures,” *GCN : Gay Community News*, 23:1, 1997, 10.

The rejection of Obejas, and other Cuban American authors who refute or avoid hard-line politics is a gate keeping tool that ensures that voices and identities that do not mesh with the hegemonic Cuban or Cuban-American identity are excluded. Cuban-American author Cristina García was similarly ostracized by conservative Cubans in Miami when she moved to the city as an adult:

[I] met the Cuban community for the first time. It was a shock, really it was. I felt extremely alienated. I was given a tremendously hard time by my peers and family. They frequently called me a communist and attached all kinds of ridiculous labels to me just because I was registered Democrat.³⁹⁶

In labeling García a communist these Cubans effectively “othered” her, I would argue, not only because of her voting record, but also because she is a second generation Cuban American raised outside of Miami who formed a Cuban-American identity that clashes with the essentialized political stance inherent in the exile model. That some members of the Miami community conceptualized of García as an outsider is clear in an *El Nuevo Herald* article that questions her Cubanness/Cubanía:

a child from Queens who grew up in Brooklyn Heights, where the *bodegas* on the corners look like Arab markets. She couldn't get the thick and sweet Cuban coffee on her corner. She didn't celebrate José Martí's birthday. There isn't a local radio station that defends the cause. Nowadays, García, at 33 years of age, lives in Los Angeles. Her husband, half Japanese and half Jewish, doesn't speak any Spanish. She is the most North American of the Cuban writers.³⁹⁷

Short of completely denouncing García's claim to being Cuban this author does suggest that she is too assimilated and positions García's upbringing, choice of spouse, and

³⁹⁶ Cristina García “‘...And There Is Only My Imagination Where Our History Should Be’: Interview with Christina García,” by Irada H. López in *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba*, edited by Ruth Behar (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 104-105.

³⁹⁷ Elinor Burkett, "Revelación literaria cubanoamericana viene hoy a Gables," *El Nuevo Herald*, 18 March 1992: 3B, quoted and translated by Lori Ween, in “Translational Backformations: Authenticity and Language In Cuban American Literature,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, 40:2, 2003, 127-141

current location in Los Angeles as incongruities that detract from an imagined Miami-based Cuban identity.

As noted in previous chapters, a singular essentialized Cuban identity does not exist, yet many Americans and Cubans alike believe that there is *a* Cuban monolith based on the exile model. Narratives that reify the exile model might have remained unchecked if not for the critical work of second-generation Cubans and the arrival of subsequent waves of Cuban refugees who together questioned the first-generation's nostalgia-based identity and histories.³⁹⁸ Critical of a static identity based in myths of the nostalgic past, second-generation Cuban academics and authors grappled with reconfiguring Cuban-American narratives. Cubans who immigrated as children or were born shortly after arrival in the US comprise the second-generation.³⁹⁹ By virtue of being raised and educated in the US many second-generation (but not all) Cubans identify as both Cuban and American; this hyphenated or hybrid identity allows Cuba-American authors to simultaneously grapple with life in the US and the impact of Cuba on their identities.

Critiques of the exile model are fully developed in the fiction written by Cuban-Americans. Second generation authors are effectively expanding on the exile model as

³⁹⁸ The Mariel and Balsero arrivals in combination with the dialogues of the 1970's compelled some Cubans to question whose version of Cubanness was most "authentic" and there by challenge a monolithic identity. For more on the effects of post-1970's Cubans ability to disrupt the nostalgia based on false recollections, see: María Cristina García, *Havana USA*; Nancy Mirabal, "Ser de Aquí"; and María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*.

³⁹⁹ At times, a distinction within the second-generation is made with Cuban children born before the departure classified the one-and-a-half generation, despite the popularity of this term, most of the Cubans included in the 1.5 generation did not immigrate with well developed memories of Cuba thus the blanket term second-generation will be used through this chapter. The "one-and-a-half" generation is a favorite term of Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, but the term was coined by the Cuban sociologist Rubén Rumbart in his study of Indochinese refugees. Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen*; Rubén Rumbart, "The Agony of Exile: A Study of the Migration and Adaptation of Indochinese Refugee Adults and Children," in *Refugee Children: Theory, Research, and Services*, edited by Fredrick Ahearn Jr. and Jean L. Athey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 61.

“they incorporate absented histories and attempt to fill in the gaps created by nostalgia and myopia.”⁴⁰⁰ This is not meant to suggest that all Cuban-American authors are concerned with transcending traditional narratives on first and second wave Cubans. As the expansion of traditional narratives on Cuban refugees of the 1960’s and 1970’s is at the heart of this dissertation, I will focus on Cuban-American authors who also decenter the exile model through their literary works.

In order to best understand where Cuban-American literature has arrived today, I will examine the writings of Cristina Garcia, Achy Obejas, and Eduardo Santiago.⁴⁰¹ Celebrated and critiqued by Cubans and the US populace alike, scholars of Latino literature recognize the works of Cristina Garcia and Achy Obejas as key texts of the expanding Cuban-American cannon. Not as well known, by virtue of his recent entry into the national literary scene, Eduardo Santiago is also has produced fiction the echoes the sentiments of Obejas and Garcia while redefining the focus of Cuban-American fiction. As Cubans’ presence in the US has been and is conceptualized by many as a sojourn, analyses of Cuban-American literature have divided fictional work in to two camps – exile literature and ethnic or Latino literature. These authors resists such simplistic divisions as they write from the US as Cuban/Latino authors who vacillate between discussions of life in the US and Cuba.

⁴⁰⁰ Rafael Miguel Montes, *Generational Traumas in Contemporary Cuban-American Literature*, (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2006), 24.

⁴⁰¹ There is a substantial body of Cuban-American literature to choose from. Beginning in the 1970’s, as a result of the civil rights movement, Cuban-American authors capitalized on growing interest in “minority” cultural productions and penned numerous plays, poems, novels and anthologies. Most of these works were published by small presses and a limited circulation. Cuban-American literature garnered a much bigger audience as a result of the Latino literature boom of the 1990’s, as large publishing houses, Cubans, other Latinos, and mainstream Americans sought to better understand Cuban life in the US. For more on the origins of Cuba-American literature, see: John S. Christie, *Latino Fiction and the Modernist Imagination: Literature of the Borderlands*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), xi; María Cristina García, *Havana USA*, 172.

Without their own recollections of Cuba and its history, disconcerted by the conceptualizations that their parents' generation projected, and in search of their own Cuban identity vis-à-vis their life in the US, many Cuban-Americans set out to decipher new ways of being Cuban in the US. The dual tactics of identifying the roots of an identity and re-exerting counter identities rely on Michelle Foucault's notions of power and countering dominant knowledge.⁴⁰² García, Obejas, and Santiago embrace Foucault's use of counter-histories, as what they write "introduces and produces discontinuities, [as] Knowledge...does not function as understanding, but as cutting as an affirmation of division."⁴⁰³ Thus while all of their novels do not evoke comprehensive versions of the past, they do expose the faults in static nostalgic based traditional narratives on what Cuban was and is.⁴⁰⁴ The production of counter narratives is difficult, and is made more so for second-generation Cuban-American authors as doing so means that they have to challenge their parents' (and in some cases their community's) version of the past.⁴⁰⁵

The construction of Cuban histories, specifically those shaped by the revolution interest all three –Garcia, Obejas, and Santiago. This focus on the effects of the Revolution are by no means unusual, especially among Cuban and Cuban American writers, and their desire to record histories that resist the shortsightedness of nostalgia by developing narratives that do not align with the exile model or conservative Cubans' version of the last fifty years. That said, each author uses various devices and

⁴⁰²For more on Foucault, see: Michel Foucault. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald Bouchard, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

⁴⁰³ Dalia Judovitz, "Review of *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* by Michel Foucault" *Modern Language Notes*, 93:4, 1978, 756.

⁴⁰⁴ Paul Rabinow .ed., *Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, 4.

⁴⁰⁵ Montes, 82.

perspectives to build these alternative narratives that counter and reinterpret the first generation's experiences to reflect upon and build a past and present that denies conventions. Using a broad range of characters and stylistic tropes all three authors effectively rearticulate pre-revolutionary life, and in doing so resist nostalgia by reconstructing alternative histories of life before emigration that reflect both the negative and mundane aspects of life in Cuba. What follows is not a reading of the individual novels of Garcia, Obejas and Santaigo, but instead a discussion of how their bodies of work challenge the notion of a Cuban monolithic exile identity.

Multiple readings of all three authors could (and have) been written, yet in this chapter my primary concern is how these three authors' projects align with my own. This is not because of my inflated ego, but instead a desire to demonstrate that these second generation authors have in fact considered the work left undone by "academia." Their work points to the possibilities of what Cuban and Cuban-American studies could be, as a field less concerned with the almost five decade long face-off with Castro and instead focused on the realities of Cuban and Cuban-American life in the US.⁴⁰⁶ This is not to say that studies on Cuba need to end, but that up to this point studies on Cubans in the US have existed as a minor amendment to Cuban Studies, a field whose major concern is reflecting upon both what happened in Cuba and what will occur after Castro.

⁴⁰⁶ This policy of waiting for change in Cuba is continually critiqued by the Cuban sociologist Max Castro, "What is clear, however, after the multiple instances of Castro's "demise," is how frustrating and futile it is for an entire group, a whole city, a nation to live for or to base its policy on a death watch, a death wish, wishful thinking." Max Castro, "Waiting for Castro's death," *The Miami Herald*, 3 July 2001. Max Castro was a regular columnist for *The Miami Herald*, but lost his job because of his rejection of hard-line Cuban perspectives.

Cristina García- Family and Foreign Policy

Cristina García's clearly articulates that her thematic and fictional concerns mirror her own personal development: "The point for me is that there is no one Cuban exile. I am out here in California and may not fit in anywhere, but I am Cuban too. I think I am trying to stake out a broader territory."⁴⁰⁷ This desire to expand conventional understandings of Cubans in the US is at the heart of García's work and is apparent in all of her novels as she constructs complex familial portraits that defy stereotyping. A focus on the family is by no means unusual among Cuban-American literature, yet the centrality of family and not community rings true for García, who gathered her own identity from her immediate family in New York and not a larger Cuban community:

For me being Cuban was very much a family affair. My life was bifurcated in a sense. At home I felt very Cuban and that identity was very much instilled in me...On the other hand, this Cuban identity wasn't that relevant as I moved through the rest of my life...I went to high school in Manhattan and all my classmates were Irish and Italian. I knew virtually no other Cubans except for cousins, and a couple of Puerto Ricans.⁴⁰⁸

In her novels, García juxtaposes her own insular family-centric understandings of Cuban identity against the unlikely counterweight of foreign policy. García is not concerned with political events themselves but instead with their effects upon the family and the personal trajectories they produce. García's upbringing, receiving a master's degree in International Studies, and working as head of the Latin American bureau for *Time* magazine allowed her to investigate the effects of global politics on family dynamics.

⁴⁰⁷ Cristina García, "At Home on the Page: An interview with Cristina García," in *Latina Self-Portraits: Interviews with Contemporary Women Writers*, ed. Juanita Heredia and, Bridget Kevane, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).

⁴⁰⁸ Cristina García "...And There Is Only," 103.

The effects of transnational politics on families is a concept that has not drawn serious academic inquiry until quite recently, yet beginning in the early 1990's García's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) and subsequent novels *The Agüero Sisters* (1997), and *Monkey Hunting* (2003) fully engaged with the theme.⁴⁰⁹ These books contain nuanced portraits of transnational families living in both the US and Cuba (and China in *Monkey Hunting*). The fluidity of national boundaries is a common reprise of Latino Studies where scholars have identified the various ways that Latinos in the US retain various connections with their homelands. Exerting transnational connections with Cuba is more difficult as building "bridges to Cuba" carries particular political overtones as remittances, letters and phone calls to the island are generally accepted, while direct travel to Cuba remains a controversial issue for many Cubans and Cuban-Americans.⁴¹⁰ In contrast her characters, even the avidly anti-Castro Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban*, return to Cuba without hesitation.

In *Dreaming in Cuban* and the *The Agüero Sisters*, set respectively in the 1970's and 1990's, family members in Cuba and the US undergo multiple interchanges that temporarily transport Cubans in the US back to the island and permanently shift Cubans

⁴⁰⁹Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban*, (New York: Ballentine Books, 1992); Cristina García, *The Agüero Sisters*, (New York: Ballentine Books, 1997); Cristina García, *Monkey Hunting*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2003).

Although *Monkey Hunting* also explores a transnational family in Cuba, China, Vietnam and the US it differs greatly from García's first two books, very little of the book deals with what it means to be Cuban-American as much of the book is set in Cuba and Asia alternatively. Because of these deviations, *Monkey Hunting* will not be included to the same extent that *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters* will.

García's fourth book, *A Handbook to Luck*, is forthcoming. It is unclear if the theme of family is reprised in this novel, but early reviews of the book reveal that the book is set against international barriers, with characters in Cuba, El Salvador, Tehran, and the US.

⁴¹⁰ The phrase Bridges to Cuba is popularized by the anthology of the same name. Coined by Ruth Behar the phrase suggest a physical and intellectual connection with the island pioneered by the second-generation who are willing to choose to unite with the Cuban populace despite political differences.

from the island to the US. The finality of the revolutionary Cubans departures is compounded by the ordeals they undergo to get out of Cuba. In *The Agüero Sisters*, Reina, who is politically ambivalent, secures an exit visa by staging a five day protest that comes to a close when El Líder gives her personal permission to leave.⁴¹¹ Reina's daughter Dulce's exit is not as fortuitous. Declaring that "Sex is the only thing that they can't ration in Havana," Dulce like many young Cubans uses her body to first marry a Spaniard and move to Madrid and then sleep with various men in Spain to earn a plane ticket to the US.⁴¹² Well aware of the triumphs and failures of the revolution, Reina and Dulce leave with informed consent and adapt to life unencumbered by nostalgia.

When physical travel is not possible, these fractured families, divided by voluntary and involuntary migration, effectively retain connections despite impossible circumstances. These links are apparent in *Dreaming in Cuban* when Celia in Cuba and her granddaughter Pilar in New York are able to communicate literally and figuratively despite the fact that formal travel between the two countries was impossible. García explores the connections that tie families together despite physical divide through non-linear narratives that allow family members separated by time and place to exert themselves in chorus with their kin:

The legitimate lines of information dissemination are as unpredictable as the individuals who become subject to them; instead of presenting her subjects as ideological products of a particular storyline developed and dispersed by a single "state," her characters consistently challenge the notion of a national monolith.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹García, *The Agüero Sisters*, 102-103. García uses the title El Líder in both of her books for a fictionalized version of Castro that she is able to manipulate and insert as needed.

⁴¹²Ibid, 51,

⁴¹³David T. Mitchell, "National Families and Familial Nations: Communista Americans in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 15:1, 1996, 55

The fluidity with which characters transcend national boundaries allows for the creation of an unlikely transnational discourse that is independent of divisions imposed by politics and geography. García's projection of a placeless united Cuban family/populace may be idealistic, yet it aligns well with many Cuban-Americans' understandings of themselves as Cubans with little or no physical contact with the island itself. Through her alter ego Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban*, García interrogates what it means to be Cuban-American. For Pilar and García alike, a physical return to the island was needed to fully connect with their transnational families and to better understand the island itself. Yet, returning to Cuba does not cause them to root their identities in the physical confines of island, but instead to recognize that their hybrid identity resists the black and white dichotomy of either here or there. For Pilar there is peace in recognizing this ambiguity, as she ultimately decides to return to the US; doing so is not a rejection of her Cuban-self but instead a recognition that with the death of grandmother she is left without family in Cuba; moreover the fact that she was raised in the US makes it her chosen, if not "natural," home.

The transnational narratives that García forges are made more unusual as she uses both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters* to reconstruct the past with a woman-centered narrative that hinges on matriarchal relationships.⁴¹⁴ While men appear in both of these books, García conveniently sidelines them from the heart of the narrative by sending them to Czechoslovakia and Spain in *Dreaming in Cuban* or sentencing them to

⁴¹⁴ Maribel Ortiz-Márquez, "From Third World Politics to First World Practices: Contemporary Latina Writers in the United States." In Bishnupriya Ghosh, Brinda Bose, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds. *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*. New York, NY: Garland, 1997: 227-44.

death for hyper-masculine revolutionary acts in *The Agüero Sisters*.⁴¹⁵ Her woman-centered world is not a utopia; rather, despite the tenacious connections that keep the women together, maternal rejection plagues the characters in *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*. This rejection by the mother(land) positions the children as the victim of the mother's choices; virtually powerless, the daughters must strive to maintain connections with their mother or cope without them. Returning to García's own story, this loss of mother/country is particularly applicable as she, like so many second-generation writers, is haunted by the fact that they themselves did not choose to leave Cuba. Instead, like the abandoned daughters in *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*, García is forced to "deal" with what history and the choices of her parents have produced.

García views her own work as a Cuban-American feminist project that challenges

Traditional history, the way it has been written, interpreted and recorded, obviates women and the evolution of home, family, and society, and basically becomes a recording of battles and wars and dubious accomplishments of men...I was trying to excavate new turf, to look at the costs of individuals, families, and relationships among women of public events such as the revolution.⁴¹⁶

The work of García and other Cuban-American feminist authors is important as a critique of patriarchy. García's young, radicalized women Dulce, in *The Agüero Sisters*, and Pilar, in *Dreaming in Cuban*, articulate that being a Cuban or Cuban American woman does not hinge on reifying vintage gender norms from the 1950's.⁴¹⁷ Pilar's visit to Miami, where

⁴¹⁵ In *Dreaming in Cuban* the men in Celia's life ultimately abandon her. Her lover Gustavo moves to Spain, her husband chooses exile in the US, and her son is sent to Czechoslovakia. The husbands and lovers of *The Agüero Sisters* are also pushed to the background of the novel and both of Constanca's husbands die and Reina's lover, and the father of Dulce, also dies.

⁴¹⁶Cristina García "...And There Is Only," 107

⁴¹⁷ For more on some Cuban's desire to maintain traditional gender norms, see: Javier A. Fernández, "'The Girl is Born to be a Mother. The Boy is Born to be a Gentleman': Gender and National Identity in a Cuban Exile Cultural Organization, 1962-1974," (MA, University of Georgia, 2004).

she encounters the gender divide in her family that relocates the women to the kitchen and the men to leisure, clearly articulates a condemnation of static gendered behavior. While the men are cast as fools, the women are indicted as enablers by Pilar: “When he’s conscious my grandfather is a blustery caballero who insists that even his wife call him ‘Don Guillermo.’” Unable or unwilling to defy the wishes of the men in the family, the women are “Locked in the kitchen, and duty bound to domesticity ...how best to please and coddle nine men seems a dialogue in which Pilar cannot participate.”⁴¹⁸

Exerting a woman-centered reality that stresses the connections that draw Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straights together may not seem unusual to non-Cuban readers, yet the revolutionary challenges that these themes exert on the static exile model are substantial. García effectively reinterprets what it means to be Cuban, yet creating new models of Cubaness has garnered her numerous critiques that dismiss her position as inauthentic. One such review by Hillel Italie argues “*Dreaming in Cuban* isn't about reviving memories; it's about inventing them. García has never seen a woman on a porch looking out through binoculars. No one fantasized to her about Castro on a divan. Her memories of Cuba are limited to the two weeks she spent there in 1984.”⁴¹⁹ This dismissal suggests that in order to write about Cuba, one has to be steeped in exile memories, yet García’s focus on Cubans in the US and in modern Cuba fundamentally resists this construct.

Despite accusations of a “lack of authenticity,” Garcia’s work challenges the exile model by exerting that Cubans exist as part of a transnational community. Whether

⁴¹⁸ Montes, 47-48

⁴¹⁹ Italie, Hillel. “Books and Authors: Imagining Cuba,” *Associated Press: BC Cycle*, 10 April 1992.

through direct travel, phone calls, or merely dreaming about the island, Cubans are not only connected to nostalgic memories of pre-1959 Cuba but also the current realities of contemporary life, revealing the tenacious connections that hold Cubans in both countries together. Moreover, as male-dominated politics construct and reify the exile model, García's identification as a Cuban-American feminist and her use of characters that reflect these beliefs is ground-breaking.

Achy Obejas- Countering Nostalgia

Achy Obejas' pronouncement "The idea, to which I wholeheartedly subscribe, is that reality, real life, is already so awe inspiring that we don't really need to invent much more to be truly amazing" was her vocal denouncement of magical realism. Yet, her interest in reality is not only a stylistic preference; instead Obejas' fiction is intent on exploring historical and contemporary truths. For Obejas, and her characters, this is not just an existential quest, but also a desire to better understand their Cuban-American identities by confronting their family's past and the realities of pre and post revolutionary Cuba.

As a journalist turned author and poet, Obejas is concerned with liberating Cuban and Cuban-Americans from encumbrances of nostalgia:

For Obejas's Cuban-American characters, exile is a false memory, or rather a fixed set of false memories that constitute a dangerous and ultimately destructive mirage. The reader cannot help but root for the protagonists who consciously set out to clear a path out of the mirage and into the historical consciousness as the community acts in concert to weave the web of false memories tighter around the transgressor, excluding all but the mutually agreed upon version.⁴²⁰

⁴²⁰ Pamela Maria Smorkaloff, *Cuban Writers on and off the Island: Contemporary Narrative Fiction*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999).

This rejection of nostalgia in search of a “true” version of the past permeates her collection of short stories *We Came All the Way From Cuba So That You Could Dress Like This* (1994), and two novels, *Memory Mambo* (1996) and *Days of Awe* (2001).⁴²¹

Obejas’ characters confront the root of exile myths by challenging parental descriptions of why they left Cuba and offering counter-narratives that defy romanticism. In the title short story from *We Came All the Way From Cuba So That You Could Dress Like This*, Obejas weaves a disjointed but comprehensive recollection of one young woman’s immigration experience, starting with her family’s exit from Cuba as a young girl. The exposition of this piece gives the reader snippets of this woman’s life, including a confrontation with her father:

We left Cuba so you could dress like this? My father will ask over my mother’s shoulder....And for the first and only time in my life, I’ll say, Look, you did not come for me, you came for you; you came because all your rich clients were leaving, and you were going to wind up as a cashier in your father’s hardware store if you didn’t leave, okay?⁴²²

More than teenage rebellion or intergenerational conflict, this young woman’s retort questions the source of her family’s exile identity by revealing a much less heroic version of their departure. While Miami remains a hotbed of nostalgic remembering, the power of collective (false) exile consciousness is also maintained by the families of outside of the enclave. Obejas outlines the centrality of memories in cultural retention for her own family in Indiana,:

My brother and I grew up in the Midwest, in a little town where there were no other Cubans at the time. So it became an even fiercer endeavor for my family to hold on to

⁴²¹ Achy Obejas, *We Came All the Way From Cuba So That You Could Dress Like This*, (Pittsburgh: Cleiss Press, 1994); Achy Obejas, *Memory Mambo*, (Pittsburgh: Cleiss Press, 1996); Achy Obejas, *Days of Awe*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

⁴²²Obejas, *We Came...*, 121.

memories of Cuba. We were in a constant recall mode. Memories became a way of defining who we really were.⁴²³

Thus, while Obejas recognizes the importance of memories, she and her protagonist are critical about what knowledge these memories transmit. Juani, the protagonist in *Memory Mambo*, reveals the mythical dimensions that exile memory can take on if left unchecked. Juani's father, Alberto claims to have invented duct-tape and has used the last twenty years of exile to hone a story of the creation and loss of his formula. Revealed in an outburst Alberto proclaims:

“The CIA, Jimmy, the CIA!” my father screamed. He was standing up now, hoisting his pants with is free hand, drinking and pacing. “They stole the formula! You know what happened when I got to the United States? The first thing that I see in a hardware store window in Miami? Duck tape, that’s what.”⁴²⁴

Juani's critical appraisal of her family's pre-immigration history does not end with her father. Instead, she charges, her mother Xiomara's racial hysteria and a love of democracy, is what compelled the family to leave Cuba. Dismissing the exile vision of Cuba as a racial utopia, Juani exposes her mother's desire to climb Cuba's racial hierarchy by marrying up:

My father, after all, is green-eyed and very light skinned. For my mother –Xiomara Ruiz Y Garcia, *a café con leche mulata* from Guanabacoa– marrying a guy this pale was a big deal... When she saw my father...she was sure that their kids would be colorless and beautiful.⁴²⁵

Xiomara's personal *blanqueamiento* project did not end with her own marriage, instead she hoped to isolate her own children from Afro-Cubans; thus, “We had to get to the United States, which was close by and chock full of frog-eyed white people such as Joe

⁴²³Jorjet Harper, “Dancing to a Different Beat: An Interview with Achy Obejas,” *Lambda Book Report*. 5: 3, 1996, 1.

⁴²⁴Obejas, *Memory Mambo*, 29.

⁴²⁵Ibid, 32.

Namath and President Ford.”⁴²⁶ Juani’s mocking dismissal of both of her parents’ justifications for leaving Cuba positions her as a dissenter within her own family, while she remains an active part of the family “in this house of nostalgia and fear, of time warps and trivia, I’m the only one I know about for sure”⁴²⁷

Obejas revisits this quest to locate a truthful history that can lay open the roots of Cuban identity in her second novel *Days of Awe*. In this novel, the protagonist Ale San José attempts to better understand her own hybrid identity as a Cuban-American woman with secret or Crypto-Cuban ancestry.⁴²⁸ Her desire to recover her history leads Ale to make multiple visits to Cuba. Her prolonged contact with Cuba and her Cuban fictitious kin allows her to engage with the current state of the island and craft a Cuban identity that is as connected with the contemporary island as it is with her parents’ recollections.⁴²⁹ Returning to Cuba also provides Ale with a privileged position from which she can compare exile to Cuba; the terse but fitting “Havana and Miami are nothing alike” is not merely a comparison of geography but also a coded dismissal of exile Miami.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 35. Blanqueamiento, or whitening, was a nineteenth-century policy adopted by many Latin American countries. Countries that adopted the policy were concerned by the large number of Native or black populations and encourage an influx of white immigrants from North American and Europe in hopes of “whitening” their nations’ populace.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, 79.

⁴²⁸ Crypto-Judism can in part be traced back to the expulsion of Jews during the Spanish Inquisition. Obejas offers up a variety of explanations as to how Jews arrived in Cuba, including that the native Cubans were the lost tribe of Israel, that the first Jews arrived with Columbus, or that they were part of a migration of the early 19th century. *Days of Awe*, 332-341.

⁴²⁹ Ale travels to Cuba in 1987 and again in 1997, these two visits separated by a decade allow Ale to understand the effects of Soviet support and the resulting “special period” that produced extreme shortages on the island.

⁴³⁰ Obejas, *Days of Awe*, 94.

Obejas' protagonists demand complete transparency, thus sexuality is yet another element of identity that they addressed with open frankness. While Ale in *Days of Awe* is candid about her desire for both men and women she encounters, her bisexuality is an extension of the bi-cultural, bilingual, and bi-religious identity that refuses to conform to any one faction. The forthrightness with which Obejas discusses sexuality is most apparent in *Memory Mambo*. Juani describes her sexual awakening: "The first boy my sister Nena kissed was my cousin Manolito. And the first girl I kissed was my cousin Pauli."⁴³¹ In aligning her first kiss with her sister's, Juani refuses to cast her desire for women as deviant. While totally open about her own sexuality, Juani's girlfriend Gina resists being called a lesbian, disgusted but unwilling to express herself out loud, Juani fumes internally:

It's not like I'm an activist. It's not as though I am out there carrying signs and smashing windows for gay rights, or any other cause, for that matter. For me, being out is a simple matter of convenience: I just don't have the patience, or maybe the brains, to lie, to dodge the truth, to try to make people think I'm something else.⁴³²

Like Juani, Obejas is openly gay and aligns herself with a tradition of gay Cuban writers like Reinaldo Arenas: "I knew Reinaldo; I met him and we talked almost telepathically. He was very important to me." There are a number of well known gay Cuban male writers, but Obejas is one of the few vocal Cuban-American lesbians. Thus, while there are muffled discussions and literary descriptions of what it means to be a gay Cuban or Cuban-American man (as was true of Pedro on the *Real World* San Francisco), the dynamics of being an out lesbian are rarely acknowledged by Cuban communities in the US. Obejas embraces uncharted territory in creating an out Cuban-American lesbian

⁴³¹ Obejas, *Memory Mambo*, 12.

⁴³² *Ibid*, 78.

character; aware of the political and cultural territory she has pioneered she does not make sexuality a point of alienation:

A lot of lesbian literature that I've seen in the last few years reflects a very insular community-to put it in less kind words, a very ghettoizing community. In *Memory Mambo*, Juani doesn't just function in the world as a lesbian. Mostly she functions in the world of her family. Her community is her family. This is typical of many Latinas.⁴³³

Instead, she positions her lesbian characters as community insiders who are actively involved with their families.

By virtue of frank discussion of sexuality and rejection of nostalgia, Obejas transgresses many supposedly universal norms of the exile model. In crafting second generation characters who refuse to blindly accept their parents' recollections, Obejas gives voice to many of the misgivings her generation have with their parents' relationship with Cuba. Moreover, Obejas is effectively expanding the male dominated field of gay Cuban literature by presenting a variety of lesbian characters who differ greatly from the gay male archetypes.

Eduardo Santiago –Immigrant Survival

Eduardo Santiago's first novel, *Tomorrow They Will Kiss*, is an homage to his mother and aunts who spent their early years in the US working at a Mattel factory.⁴³⁴ Santiago left Cuba as a boy during the 1970's with his family, migrating first to Madrid before ultimately settling in Los Angeles.⁴³⁵ Although a second-generation author, his focus on the first-generation marks a deviation from Obejas and García. Santiago's mediation on life shortly after migration means that his book is not as concerned with

⁴³³ Kleindienst, 10.

⁴³⁴ Eduardo Santiago, *Tomorrow They Will Kiss*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2006).

⁴³⁵ Eduardo Santiago, "Interview," by LiteratureChick, https://www.literaturechick.com/Author_Focus.html

identity as much as it is with survival. Santiago's concentration on the first generation is not a wholly new project, yet his critical gaze rests on the personal turmoil and economic stress that accompanied exile, and challenges the middle-class bias of the Cuban "success story." Of all three authors, Santiago's work most closely aligns itself with ethnic or immigrant literature as it rarely rests on the exceptionalism of exile, opting instead to trace refugees' early life in the US and the birth of Cuban community in New Jersey.

Santiago's concentration on forging a new life in the US is also a marked departure from Obejas and García, who write primarily about the second-generation's reconciliation with Cuba and their own identity. Santiago's characters reflect upon life in Cuba through flashbacks dominated by piercing gossip that discloses the connections amongst individuals who knew, but did not like each other, before emigrating. Three women who were childhood friends from a small town in Cuba narrate the novel. The protagonist, Graciela, is the town spectacle, who refuses to conform to the expectations of others and as a result alienates the conventional Imperio and Caridad.⁴³⁶ Thrown together by exile, which subverts individual animosities, any familiar face takes on a comforting significance in the cultural isolation of New Jersey. Reflecting on their bonds, Graciela divulges, "My relationship with the ladies in the van was a strange one. They weren't exactly my friends, and I wouldn't trust them, particularly Imperio and Caridad, to take a dog out for a pee. But in a world full of foreigners, all we had was each other."

Graciela, Imperio, Caridad, and three other Cuban women ride to work together and spend long days side-by-side assembling dolls. This decidedly unglamorous job

⁴³⁶ As a teenager Graciela's transgressions include wearing her skirts tighter, heels higher, and make-up bolder than everyone else. As a young adult she seduces the former principal in a *Lolita* like episode, subsequently takes a lover, and is eventually divorces her husband once they are in the US.

provides “little salaries that barely covered rent, food, and the monthly payments to Crazy Manny’s for our television sets.”⁴³⁷ Poor and with Christmas approaching, some of the Cuban women at the factory begin to steal doll parts in order to piece together toys for their children, yet their plans fail and the dolls remain incomplete as Cuban workers were not allowed to access or assemble the doll heads. This pitiful sub-plot reveals a fundamentally different reality than the one championed by the economic “success” of the exile model.

The women are so deeply rooted in their current conditions in New Jersey that they are unwilling to indulge in romantic musing on pre-revolutionary or even critiques of the revolution. Raquel, one of the Cuba women in the factory, has a husband in a Cuban prison and consequently bemoans conditions on the island. When Raquel tries to talk about power outages in Cuba, the unsympathetic Imperio barrages her, exclaiming, “Why don’t you get a really long extension cord and run it back to your house in Cuba? Por Dios, mujer, you could bite it between your teeth and dog-paddle back. It’s only ninety miles from Key West.” Santiago uses the character of Raquel to denounce a host of hard-line exile political stances. Over the course of the book, Raquel physically and emotionally deteriorates; curious about her rapid decline the other women joke that she has joined the radical paramilitary group Alpha 66: “It wouldn’t surprise me one bit...If anyone is unnaturally attached to Cuba, it’s Raquel...but the militant type she is not, and she never pushes any pamphlets on us. You now how pamphlet-happy those freedom fighters are.”⁴³⁸ This mocking dismissal of hyper-political Cubans strategically

⁴³⁷ Santiago, *Tomorrow They Will Kiss*, 14.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*, 179. Alpha 66 is one of a number of Cuban groups who trained (and continue to train) for an eventual invasion of Cuba.

undermines the freedom fighter label that the US government and many Cubans used to identify anti-Castro politics.

As Santiago is unwilling to sugar coat the past, he also acknowledges the racial and cultural force that position Cubans, as the newest immigrants, at the bottom of the community pecking order. Imperio's husband Mario remarks on the absence of white Americans in their neighborhood:

All I see are judíos, negros, and italianos, viejos...the Jews own all the businesses, the blacks are enslaved in factories or getting drunk at the corner, and the Italians won't have anything to do with us. Their skin is the same color as ours but they treat us like negros.⁴³⁹

Far from the "good immigrants" in their daily lives, these women are at the bottom of their racialized workplace:

Us Cubans, we work alongside black ladies who keep to themselves, Puerto Ricans who refused to speak in Spanish to us, and some white stringy-haired girls so skinny they looked like they'd blow over if you whistled at them. They knew the rules and accepted them.

The Cuban characters are not without their own prejudices, especially in relation to the black residents of New Jersey. When a protest begins, presumably part of the Civil Rights movement, Caridad editorializes "all that business with los negros in Newark had me nervous. All those sirens and helicopters!"⁴⁴⁰ When prejudice did not infringe on cross-cultural interactions, a lack of English skills limited the Cuban women's capacity to communicate with others. The majority of the Cuban women were so ashamed of their broken English that they avoided speaking to non-Cubans. In contrast, the shameless Graciella pursued many conversations, yet she too was bothered by her limited English, especially when she began dating her American boss Mr. O'Reilly: "My English was so

⁴³⁹ Ibid, 70.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 262.

limited that looking and being looked at was all that we had. We talked to each other like Tarzan and Juana.”⁴⁴¹

Santiago’s tragicomedy reveals the bleakness of early exile and the fortitude that Cubans exerted in order to make ends meet and maintain some sense of community. Far from “successes,” his characters are blatant examples of the poverty, racism, and cultural isolation that defined many Cubans exile. Santiago writes an alternative version of the 1960’s that rejects the reality presented in the exile model, thus reconfiguring the start of exile and presenting characters that defy expectations is a marked departure. As much of the critiques levied at the second generation characters’ of Obejas and García argue that their rejection of the exile model is the result of intergenerational conflict, or youthful rebellion. Shifting his focus toward adult relationships and not familial interactions, Santiago crafts an array first generation characters that resist the confines of the model, and in doing so suggests that the model never maintained universal adherence.

Conclusion

Cuban-American literature marks a dialogue with the exile model. Although deeply flawed, the model resists total dismissal as, like many serotypes or essentialized identities, there is some truth in it. Moreover, as some academics and Cubans have adhered to the model for almost fifty years, it is part of an expanding story on Cuban historiography. García, Obejas, and Santiago all prove that while the model remains part of Cuban communities, there are numerous ways to de-center it and express dynamic ways of being Cuban in the US.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 183.

It is difficult to gauge the roots of these three authors' defiance but I believe that something can be attributed to the fact that all three spent most of their lives outside of Miami.⁴⁴² As García from New York, Obejas from Indiana, and Santiago from Los Angeles they attest to the presence of non-Miami Cubans and suggest that these communities might allow for a range of identities and beliefs prohibited by stringent supporters of the exile model. Rejecting hyper-political narratives favored in Miami, all three also position themselves as moderate or apolitical. Santiago even refutes the political reasoning that many Cubans from the first and second wave (including his parents) claim as the reason they left, and instead he asserts that most Cubans originated from the period are economic immigrants:

It's no secret that the middle class like *things*, they life *stuff*. So we came here where things and stuff are plentiful. It is my opinion that if it had not been for the embargo on this end, and the nationalization of property on that end, my family would have stayed and grumbled about the system the way Republicans in this country grumble about a Democrat in the White House and vice versa.⁴⁴³

Collectively, all three authors are well-versed in the institutions and rhetorical markers of Cuban life in the US and refuse to engage in their uncritical reification. Instead they tenaciously meditate the presence of the exile model and present a host of alternative models. Ideally this expansion will be replicated in future academic studies. Yet the freedom of literature, like comedy, allows for dissent that may not be accepted in other arenas.

⁴⁴² Santiago spent summers with an aunt in Miami as a child and now has family living in Miami. As a result he occasionally claims both Miami and Los Angeles.

⁴⁴³ Santiago, "Interview," 7.

CONCLUSION

I just received a call for papers for the seventh Conference on Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, sponsored by Florida International University in Miami. Organizers chose “Cuba 2008: The Uncertain Contours of Continuity and Change” as the thematic focus on the gathering. Although this is a fitting topic for a conference on Cuba, the total disregard for Cuban life in the US, is troubling since it is the only major conference for scholars of Cuban-American studies. Although scholars who argue that “Ser de Aquí” should have a forum, the draw of “Cuba de Ayer” remains powerful. Consequently, the field of Cuban-American studies remains small and challenges to the “exile model” have developed slowly.

The CRP’s role in developing and perpetuating the “exile model” was substantial, as the program mediated the public’s understanding of the refugees by projecting overwhelmingly positive images of Cubans that over-emphasized their whiteness, middle-class backgrounds, and anti-communist positions. Moreover the CRP provided the refugees with financial and structural resources that ensured Cubans access to jobs and education needed to gain financial independence and some modicum of economic “success.” In contrast, the CRP’s role in creating thousands of Cuban communities across the US defies the Miami-centric logic of the model.

These non-Miami communities are fertile locations for scholars hoping to better understand the variety on the political and social identities that Cubans and Cuban Americans occupy. The impact of geographic location on politics is evident when one considers that political affiliations of the six Cuban or Cuban-Americans currently

serving in Congress, where four representatives from Florida identify as Republicans and the two members from New Jersey as Democrats. This example does not speak to the myriad of personal and community variations that exist outside of Miami, yet the testimonies of non-Miami Cubans suggest that life outside of the enclave produces a broad array of identities and affiliations. In an interview with the Cuban-American Achy Obejas discusses the pan-Latino communities that exist in Chicago where, “In a Mexican restaurant, the jukebox will have Celia Cruz and Tito Puente. In a Cuban restaurant the waitress –who is probably Nicaraguan– brings tortilla chips on the table. The collage is inescapable” indicating the exceptionalism and separatism intrinsic to the exile model is not universal.⁴⁴⁴

Similarly, the variations inherent in the different experiences of Cuban men and Cuban women defy a monolithic exile identity. The immigration and adaptation process was undoubtedly difficult, yet Cubans’ substantial knowledge of American culture allowed Cuban men and women some understanding of how to navigate through life and work in the US. Acknowledging the impact of American culture on pre-revolutionary Cuba challenges the authenticity of nostalgia based identities that claim to re-produce an unsullied version of *Cubanía*, free of communist indoctrination or altered by life in the US.

Lastly, Cuban-American novelists are producing productive examples of how to engage and expand upon the “exile model.” García, Obejas, and Santiago’s uneasiness with the tenants of the model are palatable, yet they all deftly acknowledge that mainstream America and Cubans’ adherence to the model is now part of the narrative on

⁴⁴⁴ Achy Obejas, “Interview with Ilan Stavans,” by Ilan Stavans in *Days of Awe*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

Cuban life in the US. Thus while a total rejection of the “exile model” is tempting it is also impossible as artifacts of the model are deeply entwined with Cuban and Cuban-American identities and scholarship.

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