

FROM REFUGEES TO MODEL MINORITIES: CUBAN-AMERICANS AND THE
MEDIA IN MIAMI,
1960 – 1970.

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ABSTRACT

JEANINE NAVARRETE: From Refugees to Model Minorities: Cuban-Americans and the Media in Miami, 1960 – 1970.
(Under the direction of Zaragosa Vargas)

This thesis analyzes the emergence of competing ideological narratives about the Cuban community in Miami in the period from 1960 to 1970 in two major sources of print media, the *Miami News* and the *Miami Herald*, and nationally circulated periodicals ranging from the *Saturday Evening Post* to *U.S. News & World Report*. National periodicals reflected the public relations campaign undertaken by the Cuban Refugee Program and USIA, and printed celebratory stories about the economic and social assimilation of Cuban Americans that cast them as a “model minority” and counterpoint to the perceived breakdown of American values and the excesses of the Cold War establishment that culminated in the late 1960s. Conversely, in the Miami press, the growing Cuban exile community caused frequent panic about the city’s cyclically depressed economy, the labor unrest that exacerbated racial tensions, and the challenge posed to Anglo cultural and racial hegemony by non-English speakers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I.	Introduction: Race and Politics on the American Riviera.....	1
II.	“A National Opportunity”: Anticommunism and the Politics of Loyalty.....	12
III.	From Refugees to Residents: Assimilation and Employment.....	31
IV.	Conclusion.....	40
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	43

I. Introduction: Race and Politics on the American Riviera

Testifying before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Refugees in December of 1961, Dade County commissioner Arthur Patten warned that Miami residents “feared the changing complexion of the City of Miami.” Worse still, the “large influx of Cuban refugees presents a threat to the local balance of power, particularly if they are thinking of voting.”¹ Patten’s testimony would prove to be uncannily prescient. Five years later in 1966, the federal government passed the Cuban Adjustment Act, expediting the process of acquiring citizenship for refugees; in 1985 the citizens of Miami elected its first Cuban born mayor, its “complexion” irrevocably changed. The ascent of Cubans like Miami Mayor Xavier Suarez from refugees to policy makers in less than a generation is just one example of the many success stories that make up the larger origin myth of the Cuban community in Miami.

The “Cuban success story” as it was touted in newspapers and magazines from the earliest days of exile is still invoked as a shorthand for explaining how Cubans singlehandedly transformed Miami from a sleepy resort town to the Gateway of the Americas while assimilating themselves to a set of traditional middle class American values that celebrated hard work, patriotism, and entrepreneurship. In her seminal essay “Ser de Aqui,” historian Nancy Mirabal challenges the “over riding interest in the Cuban Success Story” that for too long has informed the historiography of Cuban migration the

¹ U.S. Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees, Hearing, December 6, 7, 13, 1961, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1962.

United States.² Mirabal does not explain how such a pervasive trope emerged or why it has remained popular both among Cuban Americans and the mainstream American public. This paper will show that the success of the Cuban exile community in Miami was more a product of the public relations campaigns of the Cuban Refugee Program and the federal government than it was an indication of the experiences of Cubans in Miami. A close study of local and national press coverage of Cuban refugees reveals that despite the triumphant editorials about Cuban middle class assimilation, the experiences of Cubans who settled in Miami in the first ten years of exile were characterized by limited occupational mobility, racial tension, and a struggle for political inclusion in Miami's white power elite.³

² Nancy Raquel Mirabal. "'Ser De Aqui': Beyond the Cuban Exile Model," *Latino Studies* 1, no. 3 (2003): p. 371.

³ There are few historical studies of the Cuban-American community in Miami; indeed, most academic works on the subject have come from the fields of sociology and political science. The most comprehensive historical monograph on the subject to date, Maria Christina Garcia's *Havana USA* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) argues that Cubans in Miami were able to create a thriving ethnic enclave through a network of culturally specific clubs, organizations, and businesses that attempted to replicate aspects of pre-revolutionary culture and life in Cuba. Garcia's work is ground breaking for its analysis of the development of specific cultural practices in exile, but focuses primarily on the experiences of middle and upper middle class exiles in the 60s, and only briefly touches on later waves of immigration in 1980 and 1994. Despite this, nearly all subsequent studies on Miami, Cuban-Americans, or ethnic relations in South Florida, have referenced Garcia's work. Felix Masud-Piloto's *From Welcomed Exile to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the U.S., 1959-1995*. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995) offers a comprehensive history of the political and legislative factors that shaped each subsequent wave of post-revolutionary Cuban immigration, but does not consider the experience of exile itself. More recently, historian Nancy Raquel Mirabal, in her essay "'Ser De Aqui': Beyond the Cuban Exile Model" (*Latino Studies* 1.3, November 2003) has called for a reconsideration of Cuban immigration to the United States and an end to the "Miami monolith" that privileges post-revolutionary Cuban immigration and the myth of the Cuban success story over any other account of Cuban presence in the U.S. Despite Mirabal's claim that the Cuban immigrant narrative is dominated by Miami, there are few compelling historical studies of the development of Miami or South Florida at all, even with the recent onslaught of "Sunbelt Studies" chronicling the political rise of the suburban South. One notable exception, *Coming to Miami: A Social History* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009) by labor historian, Melanie Shell-Weiss, chronicles the rise of Miami from a frontier town in the late 19th century to its rapid internationalization in early 21st century. Shell-Weiss characterizes Miami as the site of multiple overlapping migratory patterns and she examines how competing groups of migrants from within the United States and from the Caribbean and Latin America, have shaped the city's development. Shell-Weiss provides a useful context to consider Miami's Cuban-American enclave in respect to its interaction with other ethnic group as well as within a larger historical narrative of migration and transnational exchange in the region that spans nearly a century.

Although Commissioner Patten characterized Miami as only beginning to change, Miami had already been in a state of social and economic flux since World War II, and the city had been a hub of migration and tourism between the Caribbean and the United States since at least the early twentieth century. Yet modernity truly came to the city in the form of the U.S. Army's use of Miami Beach as a training center for troops being deployed to Europe during WWII, and the city's insular Southern social structure was slowly pried open by the presence of the federal government and the waves of GIs and then by other migrants who came to the city in the post-war years. In the immediate postwar period, two minority groups began to migrate in large numbers to the city: Jewish Americans and Puerto Ricans, whose experiences would in many ways, set the stage for the city's handling of the Cuban refugee influx that started much later in 1960.

Civic culture in Miami, like most cities of its size in the South, was dominated by a stalwart Protestant Anglo establishment, which faced the first challenge to its authority and its enforcement of white supremacy from the growth of Miami's Jewish community in the years immediately following the war. Like Cubans a decade later, Jews first came to Miami as tourists, reveling in Miami Beach's cottage industry of hotels and restaurants catering to Jewish tourists from New York and Chicago. Seeking an escape from the intergenerational constraints of northern urban neighborhoods, and lured by balmy weather and economic opportunity in Miami's booming agricultural production and service/tourist economies, Jewish Americans migrated to the city in vast numbers. They followed a general migration pattern from the old industrial North to the booming

Sunbelt, settling predominantly in Miami and Los Angeles.⁴ As the city grew in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Jews settled as permanent residents, opening businesses, schools, synagogues, and transforming the island of Miami Beach into a Jewish enclave. Jewish Americans who migrated to Miami were predominantly middle class and came to the city with significant financial and occupational resources, but the community nonetheless faced strong resistance with respect to participating in local politics. Miami was hegemonically Protestant; not even the city's Catholic population was large enough to garner its own diocese until 1958.⁵ Although Jews were perceived as "white," they faced discrimination in schools and in local politics, as well as violent anti-Semitic intimidation from the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizen's Councils, including bombs and arson to synagogues and religious schools to maintain so as to white political power.

The "Cuban problem" that Arthur Patten testified about was not the first time Miami had experienced an influx of Spanish speaking migrants. Between 1945 and 1953, the Puerto Rican community in Miami grew rapidly, as Puerto Rican men and women migrated to the city as part of *Operación Manos a la Obra* (Operation Bootstrap) and provided a steady labor source for the area's agriculture and the city's burgeoning garment manufacturing industries. Much like the reception of Cuban immigration, the Miami establishment initially welcomed the small number of wealthy Puerto Rican families who invested in the area buying large tracts of farmland and urban rental properties. However, as the demography of the Puerto Rican migration shifted with the

⁴ For an extensive history of the Jewish community in Miami please see Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 28-29.

⁵ Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, p. 26.

implementation of Operation Bootstrap and the Puerto Rican community became more widely comprised of working class laborers, the discourse reversed. Puerto Rican workers who joined the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) were accused of rabble rousing and being involved in subversive communist activity. Puerto Ricans confounded Miami's racial status quo by moving into areas that had previously been for blacks only, while white observers feared the "potentially explosive" effect of this new group in the maintenance of segregation by blurring traditional black/white racial distinctions.⁶

Prior to the Puerto Rican migration, Miami's racial makeup was starkly black and white. Although the city had a relatively smaller African-American population (14%) than most Southern cities of comparable size, Miami's black population was growing in the post-war era. African Americans from other parts of the South were attracted by jobs in agricultural production, construction, and domestic jobs that supported the hotel industry.⁷ However, keeping Miami attractive to tourists and investment meant that the city government and Chamber of Commerce together did everything in their power to keep the city center reserved for high end service industries catering to tourists, and maintain segregation of public facilities, especially those catering to white tourists.⁸

Ambitious urban planning projects operating under the auspices of slum clearance forced African Americans into the fringes of the city, to growing "colored towns" outside the

⁶ Melanie Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami: A Social History*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), pp. 143-145.

⁷ For an in-depth account of Miami's African American communities in the 20th century please see Nathan Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (forthcoming, University of Chicago Press).

⁸ Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, p.133.

city limits with few zoning protections, paved roads, or homes with indoor plumbing. African Americans in essence were forced to live in apartheid-like “all-Negro” zones outside the Greater Miami city limits. When Puerto-Rican farm and garment workers posed the first challenge to the city's traditional white/black hegemonic line in the late 1940s, city government responded by segregating Puerto-Ricans into the neighborhoods abandoned by African-Americans, who in turn had been forced into the so-called “colored towns”.⁹

Miami in the 1950s by all accounts was a city starkly divided by race. In the broader political context of McCarthyism and massive resistance to early civil rights legislation, the state government of Florida created the Florida Legislative Investigative Committee (FLIC) in 1956. FLIC (or the “Johns Committee” as it would be commonly known after its founder state Senator Charley Eugene Johns) was created to investigate the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Urban League for alleged criminal activity and political subversion.¹⁰ Over the nine years of its existence, however, the investigative reach of the state sponsored agency extended far beyond its original target. The committee investigated “homosexual teachers, indecent literature and pornography, liberal professors, and student peace and civil rights groups.” Any challenge to the postwar consensus on matters of race, gender, sexuality and patriarchy were suspect. Despite Dade County’s relative independence from state interference in local politics because of the enactment of a home rule amendment to the state constitution in 1954, the Johns Committee undertook several investigations in the

⁹ Ibid, p. 149.

¹⁰ Stacey Braukman, *Communists and Perverts under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956-1965* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012), p.3.

county with the cooperation of local government into the suspected seditious activities of a variety of organizations, such as the American Jewish Congress, locals of the ILGWU, the Dade County chapters of the NAACP, and the Urban League.¹¹

State sponsored investigations were not the only source of anti-communist activism and massive resistance to civil rights in South Florida. Referred to jokingly by journalists in Tallahassee as the “anteroom to fascism,” Dade County had one of the most active chapters of the John Birch Society outside of California. Founded in Belmont, Massachusetts in 1959 by former candy manufacturer Robert A. Welch Jr., the John Birch Society was a grassroots anticommunist activist organization. Birchers, as their members were known, believed that communism was rampant in the United States and that communist agents had manipulated the civil rights movement, infiltrated the National Council of Churches, and controlled the United Nations. Local chapters followed the central office’s directives and circulated ultra conservative periodicals, held educational seminars, engaged in letter writing campaigns and petition drives -- all intended to raise awareness of the imminent threat of communism in the United States.¹² The Miami chapter of the organization boasted nearly half of the state’s membership and was active well into the mid 1960s.¹³

As noted, Miami had long been a nexus of migration and travel from points north and south since it’s founding in 1896, and the city had developed a social and economic relationship with the Caribbean -- Cuba in particular -- beginning in the early twentieth

¹¹ Braukman, *Communists and Perverts under the Palms*, pp. 3-6.

¹² Robert A. Goldberg, *Grassroots Resistance: Social Movements in Twentieth Century America* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1991), p. 124.

¹³ Goldberg, *Grassroots Resistance*, p. 131.

century. The city's complex relationship with Cuba began around 1920 with the inaugural voyage of the first direct cruise service between Havana and Miami of the Havana American Steamship Corporation.¹⁴ Miami had long capitalized on its proximity to the Caribbean; selling itself to North American tourists as a subtropical and exotic destination with a Latin feel they could visit within American borders. Even much of Miami's architecture was inspired by the Spanish colonial styles of the West Indies and Cuba, with Spanish street names to match.¹⁵ Cuban tourists frequently visited Miami, and Cuba was likewise a very popular travel destination for Americans.

Travel between Miami and Cuba grew exponentially in the late 1940s and 1950s. Enabled by proximity and by the expansion in flight service of Pan American and Cubana Airlines, and cheap hotel accommodations in the vacant summer months, a "semi-permanent colony" of Cuban tourists became a fixture of the life and economy of Miami.¹⁶ In the off season, when the northern snowbirds returned to the Midwest heartland or New York, Miami's economy was supplemented by middle class Cubans, making yearly or monthly trips to Miami to shop for consumer goods that were exorbitantly taxed in Cuba. They shopped in stores such as Burdine's, Miami's most elegant department store. Located in the middle of downtown Miami on Flagler Street, Burdine's was beautifully decorated and known for its custom-made resort wear, its men's only "executive grille," and an ice cream parlor popular with generations of

¹⁴ For an in depth study of the cultural, social and economic relationship between Havana and Miami from the 1920s to 1959, please see Louis A. Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 432-444.

¹⁵ Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, p. 433.

¹⁶ Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), p. 100.

Miami's privileged children for its Snow Princess ice cream dessert. Founded by a retired Confederate officer as an Indian trading post in 1898, it embodied Miami's transformation in just 50 years from a swampy frontier to a genteel resort area. As the Cuban economic and political climate took an even deeper downturn in the waning years of the regime of Fulgencio Batista and a revolutionary insurrection fomented, many of the wealthy tourists who had been semi-permanent residents or even recreational visitors became permanent, purchasing homes and investing their savings in the comparative safety of American banks. Indeed, between 1955 and 1956 alone the number of immigrants from Cuba to South Florida went from 9,294 to 14,953.¹⁷

Miami may have been primed for the mass migration of the early 1960s by its long relationship with Cuba and Cuban tourism, but as the drama of exile unfolded in the wake of the triumph of the revolution, the discourse about their place in Miami was irrevocably reversed as anger and resentment against Cubans developed. Miami comfortably capitalized on its Latin American appearance, and on Cuban tourists, but at its core it remained a city deeply stratified by racial and ethnic conflict. Although post-revolutionary migrants joined existing Cuban communities in Tampa, New Jersey (Newark and Union City), New York City, and Chicago, the image of the Cuban exile in Miami -- clannish, loyal to the Spanish language and Cuban culture, politically unified, white, and economically successful had the greatest influence on mythologizing the Cuban success story.¹⁸ The notion of wholesale Cuban success is wrong for it assumes

¹⁷ Felix Roberto Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the U.S., 1959-1995* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), p. 16.

¹⁸ Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration," *International Migration Review*, Vol. 19, issue 1 (Spring 1985), p. 19. Chris Girard and Guillermo Grenier, "Insulating an Ideology: The

that the Miami that Cubans entered in 1960, 1961, and 1962 was a vacuum that they dominated easily when clearly the reality was far more complex. Economic and political mobility remained constrained to middle and upper class Cubans for much of the 1960s and 1970s. Meanwhile, the majority of Cuban Americans were working class, struggling for better wages and working conditions in Miami's garment industry and service sector economies. Miami's Anglo establishment threw down the gauntlet to the growing Cuban presence early on and negative stereotypes and fears of Cubans taking over Miami became firmly embedded in the local discourse. As a result, social integration with the Anglo community was limited and remains so to the present day.¹⁹

Competing ideological narratives emerged about Miami's Cuban immigrants in this period: a national narrative that celebrated Cuban assimilation and lamented the plight of refugees, and a local narrative in which Cubans were scapegoated for exacerbating unemployment and racial tensions in Miami. Utilizing a comparative framework, I will focus on two major sources of print media, local daily newspapers, the *Miami News* and the *Miami Herald*, and nationally circulated periodicals ranging from the *Saturday Evening Post* to *U.S. News & World Report*. Both sources reveal that interest in the "Cuban problem," as referred to by the *Miami Herald*, was first due to a sudden increase in Cuban migration. Thus in 1961, 1965-66, and to a lesser extent from 1969 to 1974, the number of stories printed about Cuban exiles corresponds directly to increases in immigration at several historical moments: immediately preceding the

Enclave Effect on South Florida's Cuban Americans," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 30 (September 2008), pp. 530-543.

¹⁹ Susan Eckstein, "Cuban Émigrés and the American Dream," *Perspectives on Politics*, No. 4 (June 2006): p. 299.

breakdown of United States diplomatic relations with the new Castro government in 1961; the beginning of the Camarioca boatlift in 1965; and intermittently during the steady immigration of the daily “Freedom Flights” that lasted between 1965 and 1974 bringing a quarter of a million exiles to the U.S. In Miami, Cubans were often invisible to the local press, that is, unless they were arriving in large numbers. On a whole, the Cuban émigrés received less weekly press coverage than high school football.

Secondly, comparison of these two narratives reveals the discontinuities between the nationally circulated periodical stories that reflected the public relations campaign undertaken by the Cuban Refugee Program and the United States Information Agency, and local coverage of the exile community by the major Miami newspapers. The national press consistently focused on triumphant stories that celebrated the economic and social assimilation of Cuban Americans that cast them in the narrative of the “model minority.” In the 1960s, their embrace of middle class American values of hard work and entrepreneurialism was presented as a counterpoint to the perceived breakdown of American values as the nation turned its attention to racial inequalities and the excesses of the Cold War establishment, namely the unwinnable war in Vietnam. The local press in Miami presented a radically different reality. In Miami, the growing Cuban exile community caused frequent panic regarding the city’s cyclically depressed economy, the labor unrest that exacerbated racial tensions, and the challenge they posed to unquestioned Anglo cultural hegemony by non-English speakers. The full vehement backlash against Cubans would not come until the 1980s in the wake of the Mariel boatlift that brought the sudden influx of 125,000 Cubans to the city. Its roots, however, were established two decades earlier in how the Anglo-dominated press dealt with the

first two waves of respectable Cuban exiles. This long lasting, unresolved inequality and conflict between Miami's Cuban and Anglo communities had its origins in this early period.

II. “A National Opportunity”: Anti-communism and the Politics of Loyalty

Miami at midcentury had come to be known in Florida as a particularly repressive municipality in which the city government wielded a combination of “anticommunism, racism, and corruption” to uphold the power and profits of the white establishment.²⁰ Despite the city’s comfortable economic partnership and its embrace of virulent anticommunism, the backlash was swift against the Cuban refugees (no longer coveted middle class tourists) who began arriving in large numbers in 1960. In the first two years following the Cuban revolution, the American government had a relatively relaxed immigration policy that allowed Cubans to enter the United States through the normal consular channels through commercial flights. During this period approximately 125,000 Cubans arrived in the United States, with between 40,000 and 90,000 Cubans settling in Florida. This comparatively lax approach to immigration policy can be attributed to the long history of political affinity and geographic proximity between the two nations, but more importantly to the extensive involvement of the U.S. government and the Central Intelligence Agency in organizing counterrevolutionary guerilla movements in Cuba with exiles. Additionally, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations both persisted in characterizing fleeing Cubans not as immigrants but as exiles, who entered the United States only temporarily and were united in a common goal of returning to Cuba as quickly as possible. Although much of Cuba’s professional class arrived in this first wave of exiles, most arrived in Miami with few resources or cash, and without relatives or

²⁰ Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, p. 150.

business contacts to support themselves and all were ineligible for the scant social service benefits available through Dade County or the state of Florida. There were few job opportunities as unemployment in Florida hovered near 7%, higher than the national average, and affordable housing was in short supply. The Dade County school system and local charitable organizations were ill prepared to deal with the influx of nearly 500 to 1000 immigrants who arrived in Miami weekly during this time.²¹

Not surprisingly, immediately following the 1959 Cuban revolution the Eisenhower administration began to receive complaints from Florida's congressional delegation about the stress the influx Cuban refugees placed on schools and public services. In November 1960, Eisenhower dispatched Tracy Voorhees, the New York lawyer and former chairman of the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief, to Miami to assess the extent of the refugee problem. Shortly thereafter the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center was opened and although much of the relief burden still fell to the *Centro Hispano Católico* and the Protestant Latin Refugee Center, these organizations could not adequately service the accelerating diaspora alone. In January 1961, newly inaugurated President John F. Kennedy established the Cuban Refugee Program (hereafter referred to as the CRP) via the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to provide welfare services and resettlement programs to Cubans entering the United States. Kennedy remained committed to the CRP. The program aligned well with his interest in extending anti-communist foreign policy throughout Latin America, and his political identity as an anticommunist Cold Warrior committed to counterinsurgency. His personal identity as the descendant of immigrants that he expounded upon in his

²¹ Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half Open Door* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), pp. 61- 63.

classic essay *Nation of Immigrants* was also a factor in his call for immigration reform. Kennedy controlled foreign policy through the White House and remained directly involved in Cuban exile political activities and the oversight of the CRP for the duration of his presidency.²²

The Cuban Refugee Program encompassed welfare services, job training, health services, and an extensive public relations program to build support for Cuban resettlement and affirm the “American commitment to refugees.”²³ The CRP undertook this charge by mobilizing an extensive public relations campaign that targeted newspapers, radio, magazines and trade journals, in addition to providing press releases to state governments that would hopefully encourage resettlement opportunities. These early publicity campaigns stressed the identity of Cubans as victims of the tyranny of communism, as well as a politically unified group that was overwhelmingly committed to fighting communism in Cuba.

Interest in the Cuban revolutionary cause had been a mainstay of the American press since at least 1957. Despite the shift in governmental discourse in 1960-61 about Cuba because of conflicts between the new revolutionary government and American business interests on the island, there remained a persistent interest in Cuba from the New Left, and black freedom movement activists that the CRP and the USIA sought to

²² For further discussion of the Cuban Refugee Program and similar initiatives see Maria Cristina Garcia, *Havana, USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in Miami, 1959-1994* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994), pp. 20-21; Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*, pp. 49-50; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 240, 249.

²³ Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 121.

counterbalance.²⁴ Within the budding New Left, the Socialist Workers' Party helped found the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, which peaked in popularity immediately prior to the Bay of Pigs confrontation. The organization made Cuba the political cause of choice on American college campuses and attracted thousands of supporters to protests denouncing the American supported Bay of Pigs invasion. Fair Play for Cuba organized trips to the island to offer Americans an opportunity to witness the triumph of the Revolution firsthand. Cuba also became a subject of interest to black nationalist political activists, such as Harold Cruse, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), John Henrik Clarke, and Robert F. Williams. Williams in particular wrote positively and extensively about the Cuban revolution in the *Crusader*. Through his connections to the Socialist Workers Party and Fair Play for Cuba Committee, Williams led an African American delegation to Cuba in 1960, and wrote and lectured extensively on the "sense of freedom" from racial injustice he experienced on the trip.²⁵ But as the New Left became more politically radical and their foreign policy interests shifted from Cuba to Vietnam, their perspective on Cuba was replaced with the federal government's more hegemonic anti-Castro, anti-communist frame that shaped coverage of the exile community in Miami. Likewise, the Black Power, Chicano, and Puerto Rican movements also became more radicalized by the Third World liberation struggles taking place in the Americas, Southeast Asia, and

²⁴ Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 222. See also, Diane Carol Fujino, *Heartbeat of Struggle: The Revolutionary Life of Yori Kochiyama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 168; Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 255. On the Chicano and Puerto Rican Left, see George Mariscal, *Brown Eyed Children of the Sun: lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005) and Andres Torres et al, *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

²⁵ Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, pp. 237, 224.

Africa, and their views became less and less a part of the mainstream political discourse on Cuba.

Thus this shift in national discourse provided the space for the CRP's counternarrative of assimilated middle class Cuban identity to emerge in the national press. The stories of Cuban assimilation that began appearing in *Reader's Digest*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and other national periodicals marked a turning point in the previous mainstream coverage of the Cuban Revolution. Paralleling the diplomatic break with Cuba, stories about Cuban exiles fleeing the revolutionary government were markedly different from prior news coverage. Cuba itself receded from attention as periodicals focused on the success narratives of Cuban exile assimilation unfolding on American soil. Preoccupation with exile stories reveal the extent to which the United States Information Agency (USIA), headed by prominent news commentator Edward Murrow from 1960 to 1964 under the auspices of the CRP, created a counternarrative to the years of breathless and supportive coverage of the 26th of July Movement and Fidel Castro as its charismatic rebel leader.²⁶

The extensive publicity campaign orchestrated by the CRP included 4,000 mailings sent to daily newspapers and syndicated columnists, public relations firms, and scripts of questions for politicians sent to TV and radio broadcasters. Relying on broad generalizations, these stories ignored the complexities of the political and social situation

²⁶ For an extensive account of the birth of the New Left and American interest in the Cuban Revolution, see Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left* (New York: Verso, 1993). On the note of Murrow as director of the USIA see Nicholas J. Cull, "The Man Who Invented Truth': The Tenure of Edward R. Murrow as Director of the United States Information Agency during the Kennedy Years," *Cold War History*, Vol. 4, 1 (2003), pp. 23-48.

in Cuba and, more importantly, the complex personal histories of the Cubans arriving in the United States, many of whom had been initially supportive of Castro and the 26 Julio Movement. By focusing on dramatic tales of escape by sea and boat, the American reader was left to conclude that all Cubans who came to the United States were victims of communist repression and violence and therefore uniformly anticommunist.²⁷ As Maria de Los Angeles Torres argues, Cuban émigrés were politically incorporated into the United States for symbolic and political utility for national security interests. The Cuban exile community, she argues, became a willing and unwilling victim of the larger state policies of the U.S.²⁸ A generalized political identity persists to this day; Cuban Americans are perceived as a monolithic group of right wing zealots despite evidence showing that the Cuban American voting bloc is more diverse, embracing a broad ideological spectrum ranging from dialogue with Cuba to support for civil rights and other social issues.

Echoing the politically unified, anticommunist stance presented in the CRP's sponsored press releases and editorials, the *Miami Herald* nonetheless presented a more nuanced view of the complexities of exile politics. Starting with the first wave of exiles (1959-1960), the political views of Cuban exiles were the frequent subject of local press coverage. Usually appearing in tandem with a development in diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba, the local press presented Cuban exiles as a politically fragmented group who were divided over a variety of political issues related to the "Cuba

²⁷ Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate*, pp. 124-125.

²⁸ Maria de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 182-185.

question.” Anglo critics portrayed Cuban exiles as frequently squabbling among themselves over plans for governance on the island in the wake of Castro’s inevitable fall. In an early article, urban affairs columnist Juanita Greene for the *Miami Herald* portrayed this political fragmentation as detrimental to assimilation and creating an atmosphere of conspiratorial intrigue within the community: “There is no Cuban refugee community as such. There are hundreds of separate refugee units. Their dislike for each other is only exceeded by their hatred of Castro.”²⁹ Greene, who would later testify on the Cuban exile situation before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary in 1963, helpfully broke down the divisions within the community for observers into three major categories: “the Batista Group,” “former Castro supporters,” and “businessmen, professional men...and simple folk” or those who were not politically engaged or affiliated. Greene portrays each group in economic and political terms. Batista supporters came to the United States with money, Castro supporters left because “they couldn’t get their hands in the pork barrel,” and the acceptable and assimilable ‘simple folk’ left the island when their “finances” or “freedoms” were disturbed. Notwithstanding the rabid anti-communism of the Miami city government prior to the arrival of the refugees, Anglos still viewed Cuban political activity with suspicion. The thought of groups of exiles “renting large houses” as meeting spaces for counterrevolutionary groups was almost as threatening as the thought of communism itself.³⁰ The ideal refugee was one who fled Cuba as the innocent victim of state persecution and tried to assimilate to the national

²⁹ Juanita Greene, “Wide Political Gaps, Money, Divide Cuba’s Exiles,” *Miami Herald*, December 3, 1960, 1A.

³⁰ Juanita Greene, “Wide Political Gaps, Money, Divide Cuba’s Exiles.”

melting pot by learning English and finding acceptable employment, rather than spending their days unemployed and rabble rousing.³¹

National periodical coverage of Cubans in the workforce presents a remarkably different picture than the tense and hard scrabble world of Miami's working class rendered in the *Miami Herald* and *Miami News*. Labor: where Cubans would work, which jobs they should fill, and how much they should be paid were often the foremost concerns for both working-class Anglo and black residents of Miami-Dade. This concern is reflected in local news coverage of the initial 1960 influx of refugees, of the 1965 Camarioca boatlift, and the subsequent program of airlifts or freedom flights that lasted through the early 1970s. The labor question was also the driving force behind the move for enforced resettlement of Cuban refugees outside South Florida that eventually culminated in a federal resettlement initiative to augment the resettlement programs run by the Catholic Church and the International Rescue Committee.

In many ways, the reception of Puerto Ricans in the 1940s by Floridians served as an early template for the first wave of Cubans likewise arriving penniless in the early 1960s. Blue collar Anglos and blacks alike feared that this new desperate population of unskilled Spanish-speaking workers would be willing to work for lower wages and poorer conditions. "If it wasn't for the Cubans, I could get a decent job;" Harry Howze, an Anglo taxi driver, indignantly complained to the *Miami Herald* in late 1960 in light of the swelling numbers of Cuban refugees.³² The institution of the Cuban Refugee Program

³¹ Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 155-156.

³² Juanita Greene, "Jobless Citizens Resent Cuban Hires," *Miami Herald*, December 2, 1960, 4B.

provided relief in the amount of \$100 a month to unemployed or underemployed households who had limited or no assets.³³ This only exacerbated Anglo and black fears that refugees were enjoying welfare benefits at the expense of local residents. Working class Miamians claimed that the implementation of these relatively paltry refugee benefits allowed exiles to work for less than minimum wage. These anxieties were not without basis in reality; in 1960 Miami was in the throes of an acute economic slump, and according to the Florida State Employment Office, approximately 20,500 “American born citizens” a week were seeking employment in the area.³⁴

This early debate had damaging ramifications for the relationship between the black and emerging Cuban communities.³⁵ Meanwhile, Anglo Miami seemed to care little if the nation’s immigration policies towards Cuban refugees were undermining black socioeconomic progress. In a *Miami Herald* article titled “Cubans Take Our Jobs, Negroes Claim,” Juanita Greene investigated the source of black “griping” about the rising rate of unemployment in the city’s black neighborhoods. Greene flippantly dismisses the complaints as based in “misinformation” and rumor that “circulates” through black neighborhoods. Even when she conceded that occasionally Cubans were hired over African Americans for unskilled work, it was out of some displaced “quasi-patriotic” reason since “they [Anglos] consider it a slap against Castro,” not racism.³⁶ In

³³ Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate*, p. 121.

³⁴ Juanita Greene, “Jobless Citizens Resent Cuban Hires.”

³⁵ On the influx of immigrants as detrimental to African Americans and other low-wage earners, including immigrant workers themselves, see Stephen Steinberg, “Immigration, African Americans, and Race Discourse,” *New Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 1-19.

³⁶ Juanita Greene, “Exiles Take Our Jobs, Negroes Claim,” *Miami Herald*, October 18, 1961, 1B.

fact, the practice of hiring Cubans in positions once held by blacks was pervasive between 1961 and 1962 when the article was published, especially in the garment factories. The garment shops within the Miami city boundaries were being closed and reopened in the neighboring municipality of Hialeah where labor practices were less stringent. Black employees, who often held lower paying positions as pressers or cutters in the shops to begin with, were not invited to work in the newly re-opened non-unionized shops; they were not even notified of the shop's closure and relocation.³⁷ Thus, in addition to the special attention paid by the federal authorities to Cubans, local labor practices increased tensions between blacks and Cubans in the first years of migration. Anglo employers and city politicians were dismissive of black concerns and capitalized on this rancor as they leveraged one vulnerable community against the other.

The conflict over labor remained pervasive enough that the *Miami Herald* published a series of articles over the next two years that served only to clear the "misinformation" circulating about the work of the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center and the stipulations Cubans were required to adhere to in order to claim their refugee relief subsidy.³⁸ City context plays an important role in how concerned local residents are about immigration. Miami's newspress highlighted how the economic instability of the area shaped the treatment and reception of immigrants and spoke as well to the lack of public assistance for Miami-Dade's residents. As Ms. Barefield of the Miami Welfare Planning Committee perceptively remarked in a 1961 interview with *The Miami Herald*,

³⁷ Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, p. 179.

³⁸ Dom Bonafede, and Juanita Greene, "Jobless Blame Woes on Cuban Refugees," *Miami Herald*, October 16, 1961, 1B.

“the whole community would have taken this situation better if our own needy were more adequately cared for.”³⁹

As the federal government stepped up federal aid for refugees via the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center, resentment regarding Cuban political activity cooled, and Cuban exiles were frequently polled for their predictions about the fate of the Castro regime. In the swirl of rumors and hearsay that preceded the botched Bay of Pigs exile invasion in 1961, the local press took exile political proclivities seriously. Two years after Fidel Castro marched triumphantly into Santiago, Cuba, Dom Bonafede of the *Miami Herald* polled local “counterrevolutionary leaders” as to their predictions for how and when the Castro regime would fall. In an article dramatically titled “Blood to Drench Castro’s Fall, Foes Allege,” various well known exile leaders (including Orlando Bosch who would later be arrested for his involvement in terrorist plots against the Cuban government) predicted that Castro would not “last more than six months” before the country would be torn apart by a “civil war with great bloodshed” and a provisional government would be installed with the aid of the Organization of American States.⁴⁰ Featured prominently in the national section of the *Miami Herald*, this poll suggested that a segment of Miami Anglos valued the political savvy of the exile community and perceived them as being, at the very least, well informed about diplomatic relations with Cuba.

The political value of Cuban exiles was not lost on Miami, and by 1961 it was evident that the city was beginning to take notice. This insider information became more

³⁹ Dom Bonafede and Juanita Greene. “Jobless Blame Woes on Cuban Refugees.”

⁴⁰ Dom Bonafede, “Blood to Drench Castro’s Fall,” *Miami Herald*, January 1, 1961, 1A.

valuable and more publishable as the diplomatic crisis over the fate of Cuba unfolded. This poll published verbatim the quotes taken from various male exiles, and featured little commentary from the column's bylined author. This is also an unusual early example of direct quotes from exiles. Columns by other writers often paraphrased or made more general references to exiles but rarely published quotes verbatim with a name, as Bomafede did in this example.

The first widely distributed national CRP editorial about Cuban refugees, "Refugees from Castroland" appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1962. Painting a picture of Cubans as "victims of Communism's inhumanity to man," the CRP emphasized the few Cubans who in this earlier wave hazarded the Florida Straits in small boats, despite the fact that the vast majority of Cubans arrived to Miami in the relative comfort of commercial flights.⁴¹ The process of registration and relocation was outlined in explicit detail, as if to reassure readers that there would not be a new and restless minority group swarming one of the most popular tourist destinations in the United States. The ideological weight of Cuban refugees was emphasized multiple times: "the way we treat Cuban refugees may be as important as anything we do in Latin America."⁴² The emphasis of the Cuban refugee crisis as a potential case study and opportunity for the United States to demonstrate its ideological superiority and to contribute to the fight against the spread of Leftist regimes in Latin America resonates throughout the national press coverage of this period. Although later articles focused on the economic success of

⁴¹ Editorial, "Our Refugees From Castroland," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 16, 1962, p. 74.

⁴² Editorial, "Our Refugees From Castroland."

Cubans (as discussed in the next section), this success was depicted as a uniquely American brand of capitalist triumphalism.

An article in *Newsweek* titled “Iowa Sí!” published in 1963 establishes a similar narrative. Focusing on the resettlement of one Cuban family in Grinnell, Iowa, the short piece begins in Havana in the “dark and dank cell” of Vincent Rangel, and takes the reader on his journey to the wholesome cornfields of Iowa.⁴³ Rangel escaped imprisonment in Cuba and was resettled through the CRP in Iowa to work as a high school Spanish teacher. He is portrayed as an example of the successful assimilation the CRP could provide. Like most national news stories in this early period, *Newsweek* emphasized refugees who had been successfully and “joyfully” resettled and who were well received by their communities. The town of Grinnell received the Rangels with open arms: providing community support and resources to help the Latino family accommodate to their new home.⁴⁴ By emphasizing resettled Cubans, the CRP and the complicit national press redirected attention from the unfolding resistance to the growing Cuban population in South Florida and focused instead on how quietly and seamlessly Cubans fit into middle class American communities across the United States.

Miamians were initially acquiescent about the influx of federal money following the official break of diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba in 1961. Their satisfaction with the federal and local government’s approach to the “Cuban problem” was short lived, however. In March 1963, a tense public meeting brought together U.S.

⁴³ Editorial, “Iowa Sí!” *Newsweek*, August 16, 1963, p.75.

⁴⁴ Editorial, “Iowa Sí!”

representatives Dante Fascell and Claude Pepper, Miami Mayor Robert King High, and a group of irate Miami residents. The crowd jeered and booed when Mayor High, who had been publicly supportive of the Cuban Refugee Program from its earliest inception, took the stage to defend the city's role in supporting exiles and distributing aid. High was a divisive figure in Miami politics, known for his progressive views, support of civil rights, and boosterism for economic and commercial partnerships between Miami and Latin America. High even led an American delegation to Cuba that attempted to rehabilitate tourist relations between the United States and the Castro government in 1959.⁴⁵ High pushed the crowd to be "proud" of the city's good treatment of refugees.⁴⁶

While Robert King High, Dante Fascell, and Claude Pepper tried to push the positive spin on the refugee influx, all remarking that federal aid was a "two way street" that had pumped nearly 80 million dollars in federal aid into Miami's depressed economy, the crowd remained indifferent. The attendees only clapped when State Attorney General Richard Gerstein stated that Cuban "Spanish speaking drivers" made up a disproportionate number of traffic citations. A similarly xenophobic reaction greeted County Manager Irving Macnair's accusation that refugees had cost the Dade County government nearly \$500,000 in medical fees at Jackson Memorial Hospital alone.⁴⁷ Noticeably absent from the proceedings were representatives from the Cuban refugee community itself. Rep. Fascell and Rep. Pepper characterized the only solution to the problem as "resettlement and federal aid." Fascell, Pepper and Mayor High were acutely

⁴⁵ Faith High Barney, *Integrity is the Issue: Campaign Life with Robert King High* (Miami: E.A. Seeman Publishing, 1971), pp. 35-37.

⁴⁶ Juanita Greene, "Anti-Exile Boos Fly at Mayor," *Miami Herald*, March 16, 1963, 1B.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

aware of the boon to the local economy that federal money piped through the city provided, as long as the Cuban Refugee Program required all incoming refugees to be processed through Miami in order to receive aid or employment placement. In coverage of this town hall hearing by Juanita Greene of the *Miami Herald*, the disparity in opinion between upper level local officials with national ties and the low level county officials and populace at large is apparent. Upper level officials seemed to be more sensitive to the financial benefits to Miami in its role as the site of such a well-funded and politically sound federal program. Officials more tied to the local community and a small local constituency, such as the county manager and commissioners, reflected the anger and anxiety of their constituents.

Writing in 1965 in his weekly column in the *Miami Herald*, columnist Jack Roberts reflected on the accusation that exiles were taking advantage of the United States for the financial aid offered by the CRP instead of truly seeking political asylum. He admitted that “the majority of Cubans entering Miami have made good citizens [and] that they work hard and...have contributed to our economic prosperity.”⁴⁸ However, the issue of economic versus political motivation colored Roberts characterization of Cubans. Those who entered the U.S. for political reasons were considered virtuous and worthy of aid and protection, but those Cubans who emigrated for purely economic reasons were suspect and less deserving of protection under America’s “bountiful economic umbrella.” Roberts’ opinions represented a subtle shift in the local news media’s perception of Cubans who arrived after the first waves of Cubans deemed more “respectable.” The

⁴⁸ Jack Roberts, “Our Refuge,” *Miami News*, November 22, 1965, 1B.

local press while generally accepting of the Camarioca refugees was nonetheless suspicious of their motives. Local logic followed that only Cubans seeking political freedom were worthy of economic prosperity. The discourse on what compelled people to emigrate was certainly not new in the United States; indeed, starting with the passage of the amendments to the Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1965, would shape the public discourse about Cuban immigration both within the Cuban community and in Miami. The later a Cuban exile came to the United States the more closely their motivations for leaving would be examined, and the more suspect their political loyalty to the U.S seemed to be.

Anger over the presence of Cuban refugees in Miami resurged in 1965 when the Camarioca boatlift brought several thousand refugees into Miami in small boats and rafts. This followed Fidel Castro's announcement that on October 10 any Cubans wishing to leave Cuban could do so from the Port of Camarioca. The port remained opened until it was closed on November 15 due to seasonal bad weather. In 1965, the *Miami Herald* ran a series of news editorials and stories that captured, on the one hand, the anger of Miamians at the prospect of more refugees, and, on the other, the pragmatic view of local officials and the *Miami Herald* editorial board that portrayed Miami's acceptance of Cubans as patriotic and fulfilling the American commitment to the containment of communism in the Americas. Although the *Miami Herald* tried to strike a neutral tone in its editorial pieces, explicitly anti-Cuban pieces appeared frequently in the local section of the Metro edition as local sentiment shifted against the Cuban arrivals. Negative images continued plaguing the Cuban immigrant discourse, and Cubans continued to be targets of nativist suspicion.

With widespread rumors of upwards of 150,000 refugees preparing to cross the Florida Straits destined for Key West, the *Miami Herald* published an article that voiced the worst fears of South Florida residents about the latest wave of Cuban entrants.⁴⁹ On October 17, 1965, the *Miami Herald* published an article by reporter Sterling Slappey based on interviews with a group of women from the town of Marathon in the Florida Keys. Like previous articles that addressed the overall effects of massive exodus, the article captured the concerns of Floridians regarding jobs and welfare. The women angrily asserted that when a Cuban arrived on shore, “he asks where the welfare office is...you don’t hear him asking where the employment office is.” Another Marathon woman, apparently aware of the mounting resentment of Miami’s blacks who blamed Cubans for their unemployment plight, predicted a new round of “racial troubles” caused by Cubans who “when they do go to work, take over many of the jobs Negroes would have.”irate Marathon residents seemed less willing to accept the Cold War rhetoric about providing shelter to those fleeing communist tyranny. Instead, they perceived the acceptance of refugees as “Castro...making fools of all of us, shoving all these people he wants to get rid of. Well, we don’t want them in Florida either.”⁵⁰

Public exasperation over the issue of Cuban refugees resulted in a growing sentiment that the matter was the responsibility of the federal government alone. The following day the *Herald* ran a less colorful editorial directed at the federal government with a set of eight “Guidelines for Refugees.” Echoing the testimony given by

⁴⁹ For a history of the Camarioca boatlift see Dennis L. Noble, “Lessons Unlearned: The Camarioca Boatlift,” *Naval History Magazine*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (August 2003): pp. 44-49. Also see Sheila Croucher, *Imagining Miami* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), p. 67.

⁵⁰ Sterling Slappey, “Feeling Grows Against Refugee Influx.” *Miami Herald*, October 17, 1965, 6A

Representative Dante B. Fascell before the House of Representatives earlier that week, the *Miami Herald* invoked patriotic identity -- that the United States should not treat Cuban refugees better than American citizens even if the refugee question was one “vested with the national interest” and that the federal government should act accordingly to ensure the protection of the citizens of Miami from the “burden” of another wave of exiles. The *Miami Herald* called repeatedly for assurance that Miami “should only be an entry and relocation point” and that the “rate of entry...should not exceed the rate of relocation.” Despite extensive evidence that Cubans in these early waves of immigration had few problems with law enforcement, the *Miami Herald* expressed fears of potential unrest. In addition to this airing of fears of Cuban refugees as a potential threat to Miami’s economy and culture the editorial board of the *Miami Herald* took the opportunity to imply that Cubans were criminals. Two of its eight points suggested that the government actively “security screen” refugees and provide “necessary and personnel and equipment...to enforce the laws and safeguard the security of the U.S.” Notwithstanding these references that played on the worst fears of Miamians, the newspaper concluded by reemphasizing the importance of providing refuge to Cubans so the United States could “remain firm in its determination to rid the Western Hemisphere of communism and to allow the people of Cuba to restore a democratic government.”⁵¹

Invoking American notions of political loyalty seemed to be a losing proposition for Cubans in Miami. In the earliest years of exile their virulent opposition to the Castro regime was perceived as overwrought and extreme. As the prospect of returning to Cuba became less realistic, their political loyalty to the United States was questioned when they

⁵¹ Editorial, “Guidelines for Refugees.” *Miami Herald*, October 18, 1965, 6A.

accepted and later demanded jobs and relief assistance. Subsequent waves of exiles became subject to accusations of political disloyalty because they were perceived by South Floridians as emigrating for solely economic reasons, which were considered less virtuous than the motivations of their earlier counterparts, who were more politically engaged.

In the improved racial climate made possible by the Civil Rights Movement, the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 (Hart-Cellar Act) and then the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 fundamentally changed the legal residency and citizenship status of Cubans in Miami. The Hart-Cellar Act was a breakthrough piece of bipartisan legislation passed by the Johnson administration that intended to replace the 1920s national origins quota system with a new unbiased immigration policy that would nonetheless still favor immigrants from Europe. Yet, the policy contributed to the arrival of nearly 23 million immigrants mainly from Latin America and Asia. They became the beneficiaries not only of American citizenship but of the also newly passed civil rights legislation that was intended to provide equal housing, employment, and other opportunities to recently enfranchised African Americans.⁵² In many respects, Cubans were the first minority immigrant group in this nexus. This confluence of immigration and affirmative action has gone largely unnoticed by historians, but the effects on Miami's Cuban community were felt almost immediately.

⁵² Hugh Davis Graham, "The Great Society's Civil Rights Legacy: Continuity 1, Discontinuity 3," in *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, ed. Sidney M. Milkis et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), pp. 369-371. Roger Daniels, *Immigration and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2010), p. 155.

III. From Refugees to Residents: Assimilation and Employment

In the second half of the 1960s, Cubans newly christened as Cuban Americans, remained the subject of interest and speculation by the American media. It now would characterize Cubans as a “model minority” and tout the Cuban community in Miami as embodying the promises of the Great Society. Federal assistance to Cubans was not as important in this narrative; rather, what was emphasized was the intrinsic “hardworking” nature of Cubans and their embrace of middle class American values. In Miami, the Cuban community remained subject to palpable anxiety about a racially segmented labor market, a declining tourist economy, and the confluence of affirmative action and citizenship. Despite stories of Cuban middle class assimilation, Cubans in Miami clearly remained culturally isolated and economically constrained. Stories of Cuban success only served to mask the issues that working class Cubans faced.

Concerns over the effect of Cuban immigration on the Miami labor market once again surfaced as the number of migrants spiked in October 1965 with the beginnings of the Camarioca boatlift. Most outspoken were local labor and civil rights leaders. Edward Stephenson, head of the Dade County Federation of Labor in 1965, asked: “Will our working citizens find again that their jobs are being taken by outsiders willing to work for cut rate wages?”⁵³ Dr. J.O. Brown, president of the Miami chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), echoed Stephenson, claiming that Miami did not have sufficient

⁵³ Juanita Greene, “Miami Fears Effects of Cuban Influx.” *Miami Herald*, October 5, 1965, 1A, 5A.

public or housing facilities for an estimated wave of 50,000 to 250,000 Cubans.⁵⁴ Tempering the preemptive outrage from labor and civil rights interests, editorials appeared in the *Miami Herald* and the *Miami News* that heralded the oncoming Cuban exodus as yet another episode in America's great history of accepting immigrants fleeing oppression. Using the language first employed by the federal government in its public relations campaign on behalf of the CRP and the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center, Bill Barry of the *Miami News* dismissed concern about immigration as the "great American fear" and the anxiety about job loss, and the invading Spanish speaking Cubans as "self-righteous."⁵⁵ In the same edition, *Miami News* reporter Jack Roberts recounted an episode of Cuban militiamen harassing and firing on Cubans trying to flee via the boatlift exiting the Port of Camarioca. Roberts emphasized the hypocrisy and deceit of the Castro regime as justification for the growing exile presence in the United States. Roberts' emphasized the larger political and symbolic values of the boatlift, a perspective that was largely absent in the generally more pragmatic local pieces that appeared in the *Miami News*.⁵⁶

Two years after the Camarioca wave of exiles first arrived via boatlift the "Freedom Flights" commenced and lasted until 1973. The newcomers who spoke a different language sparked fear, hostility, and indignation about stressed social services and overtaxed local school systems. A call went out again to the federal government to deal with the mounting economic and social problems caused by Cuban refugees in Miami. Once again in October 1967, the *Miami Herald* editorial board implored the

⁵⁴ Juanita Greene, "Miami Fears Effects of Cuban Influx."

⁵⁵ Bill Barry, "Nation of Immigrants," *Miami News*, October 10, 1965, 1A, 10A.

⁵⁶ Jack Roberts, "Our Refuge," *Miami News*, November 22, 1963, 1B.

federal government to renew its commitment to funding the CRP, “lest Washington forget our refugees.”⁵⁷ The *Herald* juxtaposed the “obligation to liberty that must be paid by all people of this country” in committing to eradicating communism with Miami’s overtaxed county healthcare program at Jackson Memorial Hospital and the Dade County Schools that could barely keep up with the “new Cuban enrollment of 300 [students] a month.” Local periodicals paid less and less lip service to the political idealism of the CRP, ultimately focusing on the troublesome aspects of dealing with a constantly growing refugee population that once more angered Miamians who thought the city was catering to Cubans at the expense of others.

The presence of Cubans began to be felt almost immediately in the limited job market. Coverage of a Miami lobstermen’s strike in 1966 does much to reveal the tensions between Cubans and Anglos in South Florida’s working class communities that were largely absent or underrepresented by both local and national papers who preferred to focus coverage on Cubans in middle class occupations and professions. The conflict initially arose between fisheries and independent lobster fishermen represented by the Florida Lobstermen’s Association (FLA), on the first day of the nine month spiny lobster fishing season, August 1, 1966. The FLA wanted to increase the standard price at which the fisheries purchased lobster from 40 cents to 50 cents a pound. Fisheries on the Miami River, especially the “Big 4” fisheries of Superior Fish Co., East Coast Seafood, Florida Caribbean Fisheries, and National Fisheries, who were the largest customers in South Florida, claimed they had a glut of off-season frozen lobster imported from Latin America which justified the lower wholesale price. The Florida Lobsterman’s

⁵⁷ Editorial, “Lest Washington Forget About Our Refugees,” *Miami Herald*, October 27, 1967. 6A.

Association responded by calling for a grounding of all lobster boats between Miami and Key West.⁵⁸ However, most of the rancor in the press coverage of the conflict was not directed at the fisheries who refused to purchase the local catch but rather at the Cuban lobster fishermen who did not participate in the strike and continued to sell their catch at 40 cents. The perception of Cubans among Anglo South Floridians had become negative and a major point of this resentment was government-sponsored benefits for Cubans. “Walter Dietel of Hialeah, a fisherman for seven years, blamed the troubles on exile fisherman who can afford to sell for 40 cents a pound because, he said, they also receive government aid.”⁵⁹ The striking fishermen also accused their exile counterparts of cutting the traps of rival lobstermen (the gravest sin in the spiny lobster industry) and having unregistered boats.

Based on the available coverage of the strike in the *Miami News*, it seems that the Cuban fishermen were not represented by the Anglo dominated FLA. The establishment of the Association of Cuban Fishermen in the previous year to provide bargaining power and grants for improvement of equipment indicates that Cubans may have been barred from membership in the all Anglo FLA.⁶⁰ Ultimately, the blame for driving down prices was on the fisheries that purchased imported lobster and purchased local lobster from unregistered boats. The Cuban fishermen became the scapegoats in a conflict caused by competition from imported seafood and exacerbated by an ethnically divided local

⁵⁸ Frank Murray, “Lobstermen Go On Strike Here: Exiles Still Sell For Old Price,” *Miami News*, August 1, 1966. 1A.

⁵⁹ Frank Murray, “Threats in Lobster Strike,” *Miami News*, August 2, 1966, 6B.

⁶⁰ “Association of Cuban Fishermen,” March 17, 1965, CHC 0218 - Series I - Box 2 - Folder 30, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

fishing industry. After a four day strike, the fishermen represented by the FLA, freelance Cuban fisherman, and fishermen in the Bahamas, reached an agreement and accepted the fifty cents per pound price, despite taking a nickel cut per pound from the previous season.⁶¹

Following the passage of the Cuban Adjustment Act in 1966, a new crop of success stories about Cuban Americans abounded in national periodicals that depicted them not as victims of communist repression but as idealized models of the American Dream. A multipage story in *Fortune Magazine* published in October 1966 lauded “enlightened government policy” that had aided Cubans’ natural “energy, ability, and exemplary conduct” that allowed them to achieve almost instant middle class status in a matter of years or months.⁶² The article reflected a shift in national coverage of Cubans from a political asset to an economic asset. Cuban contributions to banking, manufacturing, and medicine became major themes that were repeated over and over in these interest stories. As the foreign policy headlines turned from the Caribbean to Southeast Asia with the expansion of American involvement in Vietnam, continued Cuban immigration was justified as an economic *and* political boon to the United States, as the U.S. government once more used the Cuban success story as a propaganda tool.

Fortune Magazine emphasized the “amazing” economic mobility of Cubans, and their refusal to accept welfare despite admittedly being aided by federal programs that provided financial relief and job placement. However, all of the “amazing Cuban émigrés” that *Fortune* highlighted came to the United States from Cuba’s educated upper

⁶¹ Jim Buchanan, “It’s down to sea for lobster again,” *Miami Herald*, August 5, 1966, 2B.

⁶² “Those Amazing Cuban Émigrés,” *Fortune Magazine*, October 1966, p. 148.

and middle classes. For example, Eugene Ramos and David Egozi, the owners of the Suave Shoe Corporation showcased in several national articles about Miami's Cuban exiles, smuggled \$50,000 in capital from a prior business in Cuba and used it as startup capital for a business venture in Miami.⁶³ *Fortune* focused mostly on Cuban immigrants who had been successfully resettled, such as attorney Luis Padilla. Padilla had been a legal advisor to the Cuban government before emigrating to the United States. After washing dishes in a Miami restaurant, he and his wife were "reluctantly" resettled to St. Paul, Minnesota through the CRP. Interviewed several years later while employed as a legal adviser to the 3M Corporation in St. Paul, Padilla remarked he "wouldn't leave [St. Paul] for anything."⁶⁴ The *Fortune* article does not make any mention of working class Cubans, whether resettled or living in Miami. Nor did national news stories cover the experiences of working Cuban women. *Fortune* only mentions two, an upper class Cuban woman who became an interior designer after settling in New York, and a middle class woman who decided to take vocational courses in bookkeeping and became a clerk in a Boston insurance firm. However, the reader is reminded that traditional gender roles are still enforced within the immigrant community, even if some women did work: "Just as in Havana, her sister won't let Pilar and her fiancé go out unaccompanied."⁶⁵ In general, nationally circulated stories about Cubans reinforced the themes of traditional family values, industriousness, assimilation, and middle class achievement that the CRP

⁶³ "Those Amazing Cuban Émigrés." *Fortune*, October 1966, p. 148.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 146.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 148.

originally highlighted in its public relations campaign in 1961 and 1962 for Cuban resettlement.

In 1971, an editorial in *Business Week* joined the chorus celebrating Miami's new "affluent middle class" of Cubans and their "innumerable" rags-to-riches stories, confirming their meteoric rise up the economic ladder faster than any other American ethnic groups. "Almost overnight they have emerged from the deprived refugee state and moved in the middle class, skipping lightly over – or never even touching – the lowest rung of the economic ladder that was the necessary first step for the Irish, the Jews, the Italians, and others."⁶⁶ Surprisingly however, the article devotes significant space to discussing the economic tension between African Americans and Cubans in Miami. *Business Week* characterized the two groups as vying for the resources and favor of the Anglo city government and county commission, rather than being in direct confrontation. Robert Sims, the county community relations director and informal spokesman for Miami's black community compared the problem of persistent black poverty and unemployment in Miami to that of an "underdeveloped nation...looking to the developed nation, in this instance the white people, for help."⁶⁷ Sims added that "Cubans have received a greater response." Miami Mayor Stephen Clark was markedly ambivalent in his comments about tensions between the two communities and insisted that problems were being "created by certain elements," but that if there was going to be a problem it would have happened "eight years ago" in the wake of the first arrivals.

⁶⁶ "How the Immigrants made it in Miami," *Business Week*, May 1971, p. 88.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 89.

The *Business Week* article was unusually perceptive in presenting a city that while extolling itself as a model of assimilation and ethnic alliances was actually deeply segregated. The lack of engagement with the issue of racial tension and inequity by city officials, while certainly not as explicitly racist as the urban planning initiatives of their early 1950s predecessors, nonetheless indicates a policy of benign neglect, in which the African American community with few resources or political power was largely ignored, while the Cubans, newly ascendant because of their enfranchisement in 1966 and federally funded through CRP programs, became a politically desirous voting bloc courted by elected officials.

Maintaining the narrative that appeared in many periodicals, a 1971 editorial in *U.S. News and World Report* excluded the issue of racial tensions caused by employment in Miami. Instead, the article celebrated the professional accomplishments of Cuban American doctors, lawyers, and bankers like Carlos Arboleya, (who appeared in several of these special interest stories in the late 1960s and early 1970s) president of Fidelity National Bank in South Miami. The article emphasized that Cubans had been “scattered widely” and despite their high concentration in South Florida the area has greatly benefited from this “bilingual pool of talent.”⁶⁸ The themes of cultural and economic assimilation were underscored – Cubans have done well because of “a lack of rapport with other Spanish speaking persons...the Cubans seem to identify more with the 'Anglos.’”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ “Flight from Cuba -- Castro’s Loss Is U.S. Gain,” *U.S. News & World Report*, May 31, 1971, p. 74.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 77.

National magazine and newspaper pieces about the Cuban entrance into the American middle class achieved only a few short years after emigration belie the stark reality of Cuban economic mobility in the 1960s and 1970s. Two studies by Florida International University economists Raul Moncarz and Antonio Jorge, in 1978 and 1987, found that when occupational data collected by a University of Miami survey of incoming Cuban refugees in 1966 was compared to data collected by the U.S. Department of Commerce through 1980, there was "no indication of significant upward movement in occupational status at the group level since 1959."⁷⁰ Overall, these two Cuban-American economists found that the occupational status of the majority of the Cuban community remained stubbornly "bipolar" during this twenty year period. Twenty-two percent of the group was concentrated in administrative, managerial, and professional positions, while the next occupational group was larger totaling forty-five percent of the population and was comprised of service workers and operative laborers.⁷¹ Thus, only a small percentage of Cubans were able to maintain their professional occupational status as the rest of the Cuban community in Miami fell into the ranks of semi-skilled and unskilled workers, a status that was below the skill and prestige of occupations many had held in Cuba. Far from the "innumerable rags to riches stories" celebrated by *Business Week* and *Fortune*, the stagnant economic and occupational mobility of Cubans in Miami during this period represented a significant loss of human capital and skilled labor for the community. Like Nancy Mirabal, Moncarz and Jorge

⁷⁰ Antonio Jorge and Raul Moncarz, "The Golden Cage - Cubans in Miami*," *International Migration* 25 (September 1987): p. 278. See also, Table I "Occupational Distribution of Cuban Immigrants Upon Arrival to the United States Compared to the Cuban Population in 1953" found in Pedraza Bailey, "Cuba's Exiles," p. 13.

⁷¹ Jorge and Moncarz, "The Golden Cage," p. 279.

indict the exaltation of Cuban success stories of individuals like David Egozi and Carlos Arboleya as the reason for the misperception of Cubans as a uniformly affluent minority group.

IV. Conclusion

The narrative of Cuban American identity presented by the national press -- that ignored the economic and social conditions of the majority of Cubans in Miami during this period -- reveals the extent to which the federal government's portrayal of Cubans as middle class and politically unified was an artificial construction. The Cuban success stories touted by the Cuban Refugee Program became staples of the Cuban refugee experience in America. They were political tool that made the financial support and political acceptance of the Cuban exile community palatable to the average American by adopting a "just like us" narrative that celebrated Cubans as patriotic, hardworking, and family oriented. Cuban refugees also served the foreign policy goals of the United States between the years 1960 and 1965, and the "Cuban success story" was oriented towards a vast Cold War political discourse that celebrated the triumph of American capitalism and attempted to undermine the Cuban revolution by actively destabilizing it. Cuban émigrés served an important symbolic function in legitimizing American Cold War foreign policy. After the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 and the shift of Cold War political discourse to Southeast Asia, the "Cuban success story" took on a more economic slant that revered Cuban contributions to American business and commerce in spite of a climate of economic downturn, urban decline, and deindustrialization.

The artificiality of this narrative becomes stark in comparison to the coverage by the local Miami press of the Cuban community in the same period. The Cuban community became a flashpoint for controversies over political loyalty, racial

assimilation, union decline, urban poverty and unemployment. In Miami's service and light manufacturing economy, Cubans became the new source of cheap, mobile and easily manipulated labor for Anglo business owners. It provided employers the dual benefit of preventing blacks from accessing jobs in integrated workplaces while allowing the employer to justify their hiring practices as emanating from a deep anti-communist patriotic sentiment. The overall economic status of Miami's Cuban community remained static for the entirety of the 1960s. A small percentage of Cuban professionals and business people did find success, but the majority of Cuban refugees toiled in working class service and light manufacturing positions, often below the occupational status they held in Cuba.

Careful consideration of the origins of the Cuban American success story forces us to reconsider their position within the historiography of Latino migration to the United States. The assumption that Cubans were somehow a model minority because their upward mobility was impressive, relative to the dire economic and social stagnation of the African American and Puerto Rican communities in Miami and the Latino community in the U.S. as a whole obscures the experiences of working class and laboring Cubans, who continue to comprise the majority of the community. The model minority tag has also isolated Cubans from other minority groups, and prevented the creation of long standing ethnic alliances in Miami. The relative upward mobility of Cubans, which can be at least partially attributed to the largesse of the federally funded CRP, did not endear them to the Anglo power structure in Miami, either. Thus at the end of the 1960s, Cuban Americans were frequently caught in the middle of an emerging racial and social

hierarchy that emerged in Miami, with Cubans as a buffer group between Anglos and African Americans and unable to truly assimilate with either.

Yet despite the obvious discontinuity between the federal government's fictive Cuban experience and the real Cuban experience in Miami, it is not immediately clear why the Cuban success story has remained such a pervasive myth, even to the present day. This is an area that requires further study. One can speculate that Cubans quickly realized that their special state-sponsored status afforded them a level of privilege that none of Miami's other maligned minority groups were given (much to the chagrin of the white power elite). Cubans internalized and promulgated the master success narrative as a survival strategy that facilitated a shared sense of purpose and culture in an immigrant community that was actually quite politically, socioeconomically, and racially diverse.

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