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ABSTRACT

(Under the direction of Zaragosa Vargas)

Miami as a global city in the South provides an important window into understanding the intersection of immigration, civil rights, and Latino political identity during the demographic and political rise of the Sunbelt in the 1960s and 1970s. Local politics in Miami functioned as a microcosm where Latinos vied for power and recognition and as the first institutional point of contact for Cubans becoming new citizens. Focusing primarily on Cuban and other Latino involvement with local government in this critical period, I argue that both as voters and politicians, Cubans in Miami articulated a unique construction of American citizenship that accommodated their biculturalism. Emboldened by the Cuban Adjustment Act, which allowed them to maintain dual citizenship, Miami Cubans not only demanded language accommodations in county services, but expected local political candidates to be well versed in foreign affairs and sensitive to the geopolitics of the Caribbean. Far from the inevitability of demographic change, this dissertation argues that in Miami, Latino political power on Latino terms evolved through the work of Cuban and Puerto Rican civic leaders, progressive diversity policies at the municipal and county level, and widespread voter mobilization enabled by the Voting Rights Act Amendment of 1975. Cubans became adept at strategic alliance building with white and African American politicians and at
successfully lobbying the progressive and internationally oriented county government for services catering to immigrants and Spanish-speakers.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would have not have been possible without my adviser and mentor on this intellectual journey, Zaragosa Vargas. Without Zaragosa’s patience and guidance, I am certain I would not have made it this far. Likewise, I would like to thank Ben Waterhouse for all of his writing advice and his sense of humor in the face of the inanities of academia. I am especially indebted to Joel Hebert and fellow Floridian Sarah McNamara for their editorial feedback and thoughtful commentary on this work. Perhaps a local study of municipal government is a strange love letter to my hometown, but here it is. After finishing this project, I find myself more appreciative than ever for the sacrifices my grandparents and parents made to survive *el exilio* and for the trick of fate that dropped us in America’s ethnic boiling pot. This work is for them.

My research took me on an incredibly rich foray into the archives that was made possible by the University of Miami Cuban Heritage Graduate Fellowship, the Wellesley College Katherine Preyer Fellowship in History and an Institute for the Study of the Americas Mellon Dissertation Grant. More so, I am greatly indebted to former Mayor Maurice Ferré who gave me unrestricted access to his personal collection of correspondence and papers, and many hours of his time discussing campaign strategy and county politics with me. Maria Estorino Dooling served as my mentor and intellectual sounding board while I was in residence at the University of Miami, and she graciously introduced me to Dr. Aida Levitan, Demetrio Perez Jr., and Commissioner Xavier Suárez for the purposes of collecting interviews.
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<tr>
<td>CAA</td>
<td>Cuban Adjustment Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAMACOL</td>
<td>Latin Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Cuban Coordinating Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Citizens of Dade United</td>
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<tr>
<td>CETA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Education and Training Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRB</td>
<td>Community Relations Board</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Cuban Refugee Center</td>
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<td>CRP</td>
<td>Cuban Refugee Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLIC</td>
<td>Florida Legislative Investigative Committee</td>
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<td>HEW</td>
<td>Health, Education, and Welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILGWU</td>
<td>International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>INCA</td>
<td>Information Council of the Americas</td>
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<tr>
<td>INS</td>
<td>Immigration and Naturalization Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAACP</td>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEDA</td>
<td>National Economic Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>OLA</td>
<td>Office of Latin Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>SABER</td>
<td>Spanish American Basic Education and Rehabilitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SALAD</td>
<td>Spanish American League Against Discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWUA</td>
<td>Textile Workers Union of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>VRA</td>
<td>Voting Rights Act</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Where Havana Vanities Come to Dust

“It galls a Miami resident, particularly the older ones, to see familiar places being replaced by Cuban places…God help us when they get a political hold, which I’m sure they’re trying to do,” wrote Mrs. Mildred Reynolds to Florida Governor Reubin O.D. Askew in 1971. In her letter, Mrs. Reynolds unwittingly identified a crucial shift in political power and ethnic relations underway in South Florida. The everyday lives of white Miamians were forever altered as the traditional social order was upended by steady arrival of Cubans into Miami. To Mildred Reynolds and others like her, Miami appeared no longer recognizable. She was right -- Miami did not look, sound, or smell the same as it had ten years before. Condominiums underwritten by Cuban American bankers replaced the Mediterranean revival villas along Brickell Avenue. Spanish could be heard in executive dining rooms, on golf courses and in classrooms. The aroma of roasted pork wafted from Cuban restaurants that lined 8th Street from downtown Miami to Coral Gables. Political transformation, on the other hand, happened invisibly--behind the closed doors of City Hall on Dinner Key, in the living rooms of a small network of Latino professionals and at the meetings of Cuban social clubs.¹

¹ Mildred Reynolds to Governor Reubin O’D. Askew, Miami, Fl., June 28, 1971, Box 1 – Folder 7, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library and Melanie Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 206; Shell-Weiss characterizes Miami as the site of multiple overlapping migratory labor patterns and she examines how competing groups of migrants from within the United States and from the Caribbean and Latin America, shaped the city’s development. Shell-Weiss’s study often broadly generalizes at the expense of delving into the complex political and social relationships between Anglos, Jewish Americans, Cubans, African-
Mildred Reynold’s observation would prove to be uncannily prescient. Forty-five years later, Miami is home to the third largest Latino population in the United States. A multiethnic and multiracial Board of County Commissioners comprised of eight Latinos, two African Americans, a Haitian American, and a Jewish American governs Miami-Dade County. Ballots, signage, and commission meetings are translated into Spanish and Haitian Creole. Far from the inevitability of demographic change, this dissertation argues that Latino political power on Latino terms evolved through the work of Cuban and Puerto Rican civic leaders, progressive diversity policies at the municipal and county level, and widespread voter mobilization enabled by the Voting Rights Act Amendment of 1975. Cubans became adept at strategic alliance building with white and African American politicians, such as Democratic Congressmen Dante Fascell and Commissioner Reverend Theodore Gibson, and at successfully lobbying the progressive and internationally oriented county government for services catering to immigrants and Spanish-speakers.

But how did Latinos in Miami gain political hold of local government? And why did Miamians like Mildred Reynolds find this political transformation so frustrating? Despite Miami’s contemporary ascendance as the economic and migratory nexus of Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States, few historians have studied this immigrant-dominated city, and even fewer have examined how Latinos captured electoral and political power in South Florida. Historian Nancy Raquel Mirabal 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 Americans, Bahamians and others who struggled to build communities and find their niche in the critical years of the city’s development.
Cuban success story over any other account of Cuban presence in the United States. However, Mirabal fails to acknowledge that aside from Maria Cristina Garcia’s groundbreaking *Havana, USA* and more recently, N.D.B. Connolly’s *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of the Jim Crow South* and Chanelle Rose’s *The Struggle for Black Freedom in Miami*, there exist almost no comprehensive historical accounts of Miami’s history, and certainly none which take into account its unique political structure.²

The historiographies of the Sunbelt and the New South, especially Matthew Lassiter’s *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* and Kevin Kruse’s *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* have been instrumental to my understanding of how Cubans articulated their rights to county services as homeowners and taxpayers. The same political discourse about taxpayers and homeowner’s rights was integral to the growth of the reactionary English Only referendum movement in Miami. Although the issues of desegregation and immigration seem superficially divergent, they both became powerful catalysts for grassroots organizing intended to resist changes to racial hierarchies and federal intervention in local communities. As native Miamians perceived their jobs and neighborhoods as being threatened by the federal resettlement of Cubans to South Florida, so did Charlotte homeowners in Lassiter’s study feel threatened by state mandates to bus their children to urban schools in adherence with federal desegregation. White activists in Charlotte and

Atlanta who resisted busing articulated their cause in terms of homeowner’s rights. English Only activists in Miami wielded an analogous discourse about the sanctity of American culture represented by the English language, and the rights of native-born citizens to employment ahead of refugees or immigrants. Ironically, Cuban immigrants in Miami often used the same language to describe themselves as taxpayers when lobbying the county government for language accommodation and other services.³

My dissertation “Cubans vote Cuban: Latino Identity and Local Politics in Miami, Florida, 1965-1985” seeks to reorient the historiography of Cubans in Miami and of Miami itself away from the notion that the city Cuban exiles encountered in 1959 was somehow a vacuum. To the contrary, the city that Cubans encountered was in the throes of major governmental reform, racial strife, political upheaval and booming population growth. Miami’s evolving racial, cultural, and political landscape was the foundation for Latino political mobilization based on strategic alliance building between Cuban civic leaders like Bernardo Benes and white politicians like Democratic Congressman Claude Pepper, while the structure and autonomy of the new Metro Dade government provided opportunities for minorities to be appointed to office. The rapid demographic change of Miami’s population and a renewed interest in white ethnic identity provided a historical antecedent for the popularity of the reactionary English Only political movement that emerged in 1980.⁴


⁴ However, political scientists and sociologists have done a great deal of work on Miami, especially in regards to Cuban political identity, see: Guillermo Grenier and Alex Stepick III eds., Miami now! Immigration, Ethnicity and Social Change, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992); Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick III, City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Louise Lamphere, Alex Stepick and Guillermo Grenier eds., Newcomers in the Workplace: Immigrants and the Restructuring of the U.S. Economy (Philadelphia: Temple University
American Riviera or Gateway to the Americas?

Jewish Americans, African Americans, and Puerto Ricans during Miami’s population boom after World War II created the precedent for the local treatment of Cuban immigrants in the early 1960s. The aforementioned groups, individually or in coalitions, began to make inroads in challenging Miami’s Anglo dominated city government and the Cold War red baiting of the Florida Legislative Investigative Committee at the height of the segregation era in the late 1950s. The unique city-county structure of Miami’s metropolitan government adopted in 1957 allowed a robust city politics relatively independent from state oversight to emerge.

Miami had been a hub of migration and tourism between the Caribbean and the United States since at least the early twentieth century, but the city was in a state of social and economic flux after World War II. During the war years, the U.S. Army used Miami Beach as a training center for American troops being deployed to Europe. Miami’s insular Southern social structure was slowly pried open by the establishment of wartime military installations that ushered in the tourist boom as returning soldiers, war workers, and tourists who eventually sought permanent residence in Miami. In the immediate postwar period, two minority groups began to migrate in large numbers to the city: Jewish Americans and Puerto Ricans. Their experiences in many ways set the stage for the city’s handling of the influx of Cuban refugees that began in 1960, when almost 1,700

Cuban refugees arrived weekly before the brief halt of commercial flights during the Cuban Missile in 1962.\(^5\)

Like most urban centers in the South, a stalwart Anglo Protestant establishment dominated Miami’s civic life. This white political establishment faced the first challenge to its authority and its enforcement of white supremacy from the growing Jewish enclave on Miami Beach. Like Cubans a decade later, Jews from the northeast and Chicago first came to Miami as tourists, reveling in Miami Beach’s cottage industry of hotels and restaurants that catered to them. Many sought an escape from the intergenerational constraints of northern urban neighborhoods. Lured by balmy weather and economic opportunity in Miami’s booming service and tourist economies, Jewish Americans migrated to the city in vast numbers. Following a general migration pattern from the old industrial North to the emergent Sunbelt, over seventy percent of Jews who left the northeast settled in Miami and Miami Beach.\(^6\)

As the city grew in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Jews settled as permanent residents primarily on the island of Miami Beach where they opened business and established schools and synagogues. Though the Jewish migrants were predominantly middle class and came to Miami with significant financial and occupational resources, the emerging community nonetheless faced strong resistance with respect to their participation in local politics. Miami was hegemonically Protestant; not even the city’s


Catholic population was large enough to claim its own diocese until 1958. Although Jews were perceived as white, they faced widespread discrimination that at times was realized as violent anti-Semitic intimidation from the Ku Klux Klan and its adjunct the White Citizen’s Councils. Bombings and arson to synagogues and religious schools became commonplace so as to maintain white political power.  

Miami in its early decades was a seasonal tourist destination with a large workforce concentrated in the service sector. After World War II, Miami developed a diverse economy, ranging from agriculture to garment manufacturing. Metropolitan Miami’s population grew from 495,000 in 1950 to 935,000 by 1965. Non-Latino whites comprised the majority of these newcomers; only about five percent of Dade County was Latino in 1960. However, between 1945 and 1953 the Puerto Rican community in Miami grew rapidly. Much like the reception of initial Cuban immigration, the Miami establishment initially welcomed the small number of wealthy Puerto Rican families who invested in the area by buying large tracts of farmland and urban rental properties. Then, the demography of the Puerto Rican migration shifted with the implementation of Operación Manos a la Obra, or Operation Bootstrap, and Puerto Rican men and women migrated to the city and provided a steady labor source for the area’s agriculture and the city’s burgeoning garment manufacturing industries. As the Puerto Rican community became more working class in composition, the discourse reversed. Puerto Ricans recruited by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) and the Textile

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Workers Union of America (TWUA) for membership were accused of rabble rousing and of being involved in subversive communist activity. Puerto Ricans moreover confounded Miami’s racial status quo by moving into predominantly black areas of the city, alarming white observers who feared the “potentially explosive” effect of this new group in the maintenance of segregation by blurring traditional black/white racial distinctions.8

Prior to the Puerto Rican migration, Miami’s racial composition was starkly black and white. Although the city had a relatively small African American population compared to most Southern cities of comparable size, Miami’s black population grew steadily in the post-war years. African Americans from other parts of the South and Afro-Caribbean migrants from the Bahamas and the West Indies were attracted by jobs in area agricultural production, construction, and in the hotel and entertainment industry. However, to keep Miami attractive to tourists and investment meant that the city government and Chamber of Commerce together did everything in their power to maintain segregation and keep the city center reserved for high end service industries catering to tourists.9

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Ambitious urban planning projects operating under the auspices of slum clearance kept Miami white. This forced African Americans to the fringes of Miami, outside the city limits with few zoning protections, paved roads, or homes with indoor plumbing. The largest of these, northwest of the downtown, became known first as “Colored Town” and then the “Central Negro District.” As Connolly and other historians have argued, slum clearance broke up black neighborhoods and moved black residents further from each other. When Puerto Rican farm and garment workers posed the first challenge to the city’s traditional black/white dichotomy line in the late 1940s, the city government responded by segregating Puerto Ricans into the neighborhoods abandoned by African Americans forced into the apartheid-like “all-Negro” zones.10

In many respects, Miami in the 1950s was a Deep South 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 in 1956 created the Florida Legislative Investigative Committee (FLIC). FLIC, or the Johns Committee as it would be commonly known after its founder state Senator Charley Eugene Johns, was created to investigate potentially subversive groups such as the Florida chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League for alleged criminal activity and political subversion. Over the nine years of its existence, however, the investigative reach of FLIC extended beyond its original target. The committee investigated “homosexual teachers, indecent literature and pornography, liberal

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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 the 1956 Home Rule Amendment to the state constitution, the Johns Committee undertook several investigations in the county with the cooperation of local government into the suspected communist activities of a variety of organizations, such as the American Jewish Congress, locals of the ILGWU, in addition to the Dade County chapters of the NAACP and the Urban League. Unsurprisingly, all of these groups had ethnically and racially diverse membership.

State sponsored investigations were not the only source of anti-communist and anti-civil rights activism in South Florida. Referred to jokingly by The Nation as the “anteroom to fascism,” Dade County had one of the most active chapters of the John Birch Society outside of California. 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. The Miami chapter of the John Birch Society boasted nearly half of the state’s membership and was active well into the mid 1960s.


12 Braukman, Communists and Perverts under the Palms, 3-6.

13 Founded in Belmont, Massachusetts in 1959 by former candy manufacturer Robert A. Welch Jr., the John Birch Society was a grassroots anticommunist activist organization. For an examination of the John
Miami’s unique position as the de facto resort capital of the United States masked the more virulently anti-black, anti-Semitic, and anti-Latino policies of the local government and racist attitudes of the city’s white residents. City officials had to find new ways to uphold Jim Crow while espousing the Southern progressivism that made the city appealing to Northerners. As Chanelle Rose has argued, a “more fluid taxonomy of race” altered the standard black white color line as Miami’s tourist economy grew to encompass not only American visitors, but Spanish speaking tourists from the Caribbean and Latin America as well. The preoccupation with maintaining Miami’s “Pan-American” image meant that local elites were often more receptive to multicultural or Latino focused policies, than they were to actual racial integration.¹⁴

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 century. Cubans had been migrating abroad, particularly to the United States and Europe, in large numbers since at least the outbreak of the Ten Years War (1868-1878). By some estimates there were nearly 100,000 Cubans living abroad by 1869. The most populous and politically active of these communities in the United States were in Key West and Tampa, Florida, and to a lesser extent New York City, Philadelphia, and New Orleans. The majority of these early Spanish-speaking immigrants from middle and working class

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backgrounds came to work in the cigar factories of Florida established by Cuban proprietors like Vicente Martínez Ybor avoiding American import tariffs.\textsuperscript{15}

These immigrants thus established the first patterns of migration that linked Cuba to the United States. Florida, which offered ease of geographical proximity as well as a climate comparable to Cuba, became the nexus of Cuban migration. This trend continued unabated. The cigar-making communities were strongholds for radical political activism, and after the failure of the Ten Years War they provided much of the political and financial support for Jose Martí’s Cuban Revolutionary Party in the 1890s. These early communities set a precedent for Cuban immigrant enclaves with a continued financial and political stake in their country of origin, \textit{la patria}. Even after Cuba achieved independence from Spain in 1898, many of the immigrants who had once been eagerly waiting to return to the homeland chose to remain in the United States, reluctant to return to a country economically devastated by nearly thirty years of continuous armed struggle. Migration to Florida did not end with independence, as Cuba’s political system cycled through one president after another, members and leaders of ousted regimes would find themselves seeking refuge across the Florida Straits.\textsuperscript{16}

Miami’s complex relationship with Cuba began around 1920 with the inaugural voyage of the first direct cruise service between Havana and Miami by the Havana American Steamship Corporation. Miami had long capitalized on its proximity to the Caribbean; promoting itself to North American tourists as a subtropical and exotic destination with a Latin feel they could visit within American borders. Indeed, as Louis


\textsuperscript{16} Masud-Piloto, \textit{From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants}, 7-10.
A. Pérez notes: “Miami was transformed by the Cuban presence. From its very beginnings the city appropriated Cuba as pretension and panache.” Even much of Miami’s architecture was inspired by the Spanish colonial styles of Cuba and the West Indies, with Spanish street names to match. Cuban tourists frequently visited Miami, and Cuba was likewise a very popular travel destination for Americans.¹⁷

Postwar Miami emerged as the nation’s largest air travel hub for international passengers and along with the advent of air conditioning and other quality of life accouterments that go toward beating the tropical heat and insects, the city developed a year round tourism industry. Increased numbers of vacationers from the Caribbean arrived during the late 1950s. Most of these well-to-do visitors hailed from Cuba, who experienced Miami as an extension of home. Travel between Miami and Cuba grew exponentially in the late 1940s and 1950s. The expansion in flight service of Pan American, which chose Miami, as it’s American hub, and the relatively inexpensive hotel accommodations available in the vacant summer months, drove the city’s growth as an international resort mecca.¹⁸

A “semi-permanent colony” of Cuban tourists became a fixture of the social and economic of Miami. In the off season, when the northern snowbirds returned to the Midwest or to New York, Miami’s economy was supplemented by 150,000 Spanish-speaking visitors, making yearly or monthly trips to Miami to enjoy its beaches, hotels, restaurants and to shop for consumer goods that were exorbitantly taxed in Cuba. The


¹⁸ Peréz, On Becoming Cuban, 433, 444.
tourists shopped in stores such as Burdine’s, Miami’s most elegant department store known for its custom-made swimwear. Located on Flagler Street and founded by a retired Confederate officer as a Seminole trading post in 1898, Burdine’s embodied Miami’s transformation in just 50 years from a swampy frontier to a genteel resort area. As one might expect, Miami city officials and businesses became even more invested in promoting Miami as an ethnically diverse and progressive city to boost this bonanza of international trade.¹⁹

As the Cuban economic and political climate took an even deeper downturn in the waning years of the regime of Fulgencio Batista (1952-1959) and a revolutionary insurrection fomented, many of the wealthy Cuban tourists who had been semi-permanent residents or recreational visitors became permanent residents of the city. They purchased homes and invested their savings in the comparative safety of American banks. Indeed, between 1955 and 1956 alone the number of immigrants from Cuba to South Florida increased over 150 percent. The social and political repression of Batista’s dictatorship, an atrophying Cuban economy, a rising cost of living, and rampant unemployment were all factors that contributed to this increase in Cuban migration to Florida.²⁰

As January 1, 1959 dawned, the political tide in Cuba changed once again, with strikingly different consequences for the cycle of political exile and emigration that defined Cuban life. Nearly 500 Batistanos seeking political asylum settled in Miami

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²⁰ Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*, 16; Maria de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, 43.
ushering in what would later be known as the first wave of self-imposed Cuban exiles, a period that lasted from 1959 to 1962. With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, and the subsequent steady consolidation of power by the new revolutionary government, the deposed followers of the Batista government fled Cuba to the United States. Other governmental and economic elites and their families soon followed.

Three waves of Cubans followed, dwarfing in size the first wave by bringing nearly 1,000,000 Cubans to the United States over a period of less than thirty years. The second wave lasted from 1965 to 1973 and commenced with the chaotic Camarioca Boatlift and Vuelos de la Libertad or “Freedom Flights.” Facilitated by the U.S. and Cuban governments, the Freedom Flights brought the largest number of immigrants of any of the waves, a group drawn from Cuba’s petite bourgeoisie and working classes. In 1980, the third wave of migration, known as the Mariel Boatlift, brought approximately 125,000 immigrants to the United States in flotillas facilitated by Cuban exiles in Miami. The majority of Marielitos had truly experienced communism on the island and were considered economic migrants.21

Government (Reform) in the Sunshine

Governmental reform in Dade County and the creation of the Metro Dade system in 1957 directly effected the political participation by minorities in local government, especially because municipal and county government was where the largest share of Latino local representation was found. The flowering of Latino political strength in Miami took place within the intersection of ethnic based civic organizations and broader political developments. In order to appreciate the multitude of constraints faced by the Latino and African American politicians and voters in Miami it is critical to discuss the unique nature of the Metro Dade government and its relationship to widespread governmental reform in Florida.

Described by Gary Mormino as Florida’s “Big Bang,” Florida was undergoing a shift in its social, political and economic structure in the 1950s. The development of air conditioning, the expansion of the interstate highway system, and advances in civil engineering accelerated the national demographic shift to the Sunbelt, making the state an attractive destination for millions of tourists and new residents. The influx of new residents from the Northeast and Midwest pushed the state further away culturally from its Deep South neighbors, and threatened Florida’s adherence to Jim Crow into the 1960s. As a result, a political battle in the state legislature ensued over apportionment and representation that pitted the traditional rural seat of power in North Florida with the growing urban centers in South Florida, and in doing so, brought into conflict the Old South with the new Sunbelt.²²

²² Gordon E. Harvey, The Politics of Trust: Reubin Askew and Florida in the 1970s (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), 6-8. Florida’s political transformation in the 1950s gained significant attention in the last decade from historians and political scientists interested in the development of “Sunbelt” politics, but still remains understudied. See also: Gary Mormino, Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social
Before the adoption of the Home Rule Amendment on November 6, 1956, the state legislature in Tallahassee enforced numerous constraints on municipal and county governance in Dade County. A state budget commission appointed by the Governor prepared the annual Dade County budget and held veto power over the creation of any county agency or office. State legislators from small, rural northern counties known as the “Porkchop Gang,” with little interest or sympathy for the needs of residents in growing urban areas like Miami and Tampa, controlled the Florida Senate and House. Senate and house seats were apportioned on the basis of county boundaries, not on population; for example, a state senator from a tiny northern county such as Alachua could represent as few as 25,000 people, while the senator from Dade represented more than 700,000. The same problem held true with state representatives. Not surprisingly, reapportionment gained few allies beyond interests in Miami and Tampa. The two urban areas combined accounted for nearly half percent of the state’s population but only eight percent of its legislative representation.  

As apportionment lost what little steam it had in the state legislature, Dade County’s expenditures continued to balloon as a result of its burgeoning population. Between 1950 and 1957, Dade’s governmental expenditures increased by nearly 43 percent per capita. County officials had no influence over the county budget and therefore no recourse to meet the expanding need for government services, other than increasing property, cigarette, and utility taxes. The City of Miami found itself in likewise dire

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23 Colburn, From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans, 21-23.
financial straits. During the 1920s land speculation boom, Miami annexed large swaths of unincorporated land and over extended itself through high per capita bonded indebtedness. When the South Florida real estate market collapsed in 1926, Miami’s tax base all but evaporated. The city’s bond rating remained low for the next thirty years, and the city government deferred capital improvement projects for decades in order to shore up its financial base. The city lacked strong leadership and residents were eager to pass along municipal expenditures to another governing body.\(^{24}\)

In light of this growing financial crisis, the state legislature and Miami’s political leadership saw home rule as a compromise in the absence of reapportionment. If Dade County could not have adequate political representation in Tallahassee, it could at least have more control over its own affairs. As a result of the passage of the Home Rule Amendment, Dade County underwent a phase of administrative and financial reform that changed its relationship with the state legislation as well as the structure of county government. The Home Rule Amendment provided the constitutional basis for the reorganization of government in Dade County, and it gave the residents of Dade County a free hand in redesigning their system of governance. Tallahassee empowered the county government to abolish, consolidate, or create municipalities as they saw fit. The County Commission, as well, could create new taxing districts and other governmental units without state oversight. However, the County still faced financial constraints; under Home Rule, Dade County could only levy taxes as “might be authorized by general law.”

Likewise, Dade could not utilize state revenue designated for municipalities for the growing unincorporated areas of the county.\textsuperscript{25}

It was then set to the Dade County Charter Board to create a new county charter for approval by the county electorate. The Charter Board, comprised of city officials and led by W.C. Herrell of the Dade League of Municipalities, immediately resolved not to abolish any of the existing municipalities or threaten their autonomy. Instead, the Charter Board moved to implement a two-tiered or metropolitan federal system of governance by which responsibility would be shared between the county and the municipalities for the delivery of services.\textsuperscript{26}

Led by a board of commissioners, Dade County retained area-wide powers over Miami International Airport and functioned as the exclusive local government for the unincorporated areas of Dade County. The Charter Board proposed a weak mayor form of county government with a board of thirteen commissioners. County Commissioners, one from each of the five districts, would be elected at large in a non-partisan countywide election. Voters of each district would then elect an additional County Commissioner to represent their district. Municipalities with over 60,000 residents (Miami, Miami Beach, Edward Sofen, \textit{The Miami Metropolitan Experiment} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 61-62; Richard Langendorf, \textit{Metropolitan Federalism}, 4:10-4:18.

\textsuperscript{26} The extent to which Miami-Dade County is actually a “true” two-tiered or a metropolitan federalism government is debatable. These terms are used interchangeably to describe the system of governance, hence the “Metropolitan Dade County” and “Metro Dade” nomenclature used for the county government. Locals residing within incorporated municipalities may perceive the government as two-tiered, but for residents living in unincorporated areas, it is more realistically a one-tiered government. Federalism would suggest that the county tier is just a representative body of officials drawn from the lower level, but given the county’s responsibilities for servicing unincorporated Dade and independent entities such as Miami International Airport and the Port of Miami, that is not accurate either. Urban planners and political scientists argue that ultimately, what makes Miami’s governance structure unique is the nature of intergovernmental cooperation and responsibility sharing between the county and municipal units. Thus, these terms are used interchangeably to describe the system of governance. Richard Langendorf, \textit{Metropolitan Federalism}, 5:41-5:43.
and Hialeah) would elect their own commissioner to the board. Like the County Commissioners, the Dade County Mayor would be elected at large in a non-partisan race and then would appoint a County Manager to oversee the day-to-day administrative functions of county services. In 1964, in light of the growing population, Miami residents approved a new county districting plan that created eight residential districts, each with one commission seat to be elected at large.27

The move towards metropolitan governance would have mixed consequences for Miami’s growing Latino and African-American communities in the 1960s and 1970s, although ultimately Metro would be integral to increasing minority representation at the local and state level. There was no record keeping of Latino voting at the county or municipal level until 1973, but African American voters in Miami overwhelming voted against the passage of the Home Rule Amendment in 1956 and the Metro Dade Charter in 1957. Black community leaders feared that a strong county government would dilute their political power in the City of Miami. With most of Miami’s African American residents concentrated in the City of Miami, consolidation and abolishment of the municipalities would have done exactly that. However, consolidation never took hold and the municipalities retained their autonomy. Furthermore, the professionalization of county government that occurred during Metro’s implementation reduced what some African Americans described as a “redneck” political culture within the county agencies. However, it was by virtue of numbers and the extreme social and demographic changes

27 Edward Sofen, The Miami Metropolitan Experiment, 94-98. The Dade County charter was challenged regularly in the courts between 1957 and 1970, primarily on property taxation and municipality redistricting issues. The following cases were among the most significant: Dade County v. Mercury Radio Service, 134 So. 2d 791 (Florida 1961); Miami Shores Village v. Dade County Commissioners, 12 Fla. Supp. 168, 179-180 (Dade Circuit Court 1958); Miami Shores Village v. Cowart, 108 So. 2d 486, 471 (Florida 1958); C.L. Dressel, et al v. Dade County, 224 So. 2d 716, (Florida 1969); Dade County v. A.R. Brautigam, et al., 224 So. 2d 688, 629-93 (Florida 1969).
experienced in Miami that minority representation on the county commission was accomplished to a limited degree without the advantage of single member district elections.  

The municipal and county commissions’ power to appoint commissioners when vacancies arose would provide a path to political office for minorities in Miami. The municipal commissions, which under the Metro Charter maintained a great deal of autonomy in electing commissioners and council members, were the first to appoint minority commissioners in great numbers. In 1965, Mayor Robert King High appointed M. Athalie Range to a vacancy on the Miami City Commission and in 1967 Range won election as an incumbent in a citywide vote. Mayor King enthusiastically supported the increasingly ethnic and “Latinized” character of Miami. Probably no other official better understood the importance of maintaining the City of Miami’s progressive image to secure its reputation as an international tourist destination. In 1968 and 1972, Reverend Theodore Gibson and Reverend Edward Graham secured seats on the City of Miami and Metro Dade County Commissions respectively, also through the practice of appointment. Both Gibson and Graham were then elected as incumbents. It was not a coincidence that as of 1976, Commissioner Graham was the only black county official in the entire state. Latinos very soon would be seen everywhere in local politics, because the same appointment and election practice would place Latinos such as Maurice Ferré and Jorge

Valdes into office and the autonomous municipal commissions would become proving
grounds for new minority leadership.29

My study is organized chronologically around three pivotal moments in the rise of
a Latino majority local government in Miami that correlate to three key pieces of federal
and local legislation: the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, allowing any Cuban who lived
in the U.S. to become a permanent resident, the 1973 Dade County Bilingual and
Bicultural Resolution, that declared the county officially bilingual and bicultural, and the
1980 Dade County Anti Bilingual Ordinance, passed in reaction to the Mariel boatlift in
the spring of 1980. Chapter One spans the years from 1965 to 1973, roughly from the
passage of the Cuban Adjustment Act to the election of Maurice Ferré, Miami’s first
Latino mayor. This chapter examines the influence of local politicians and the Cuban
independent press in shaping the discourse around U.S. citizenship, and also considers
why Cubans rejected assimilation for biculturalism. Chapter Two focuses on the period
from 1965-1978, and uses the 1973 Dade County Bilingual and Bicultural Resolution and
the activism of Cuban civic leader Bernardo Benes as a lens to examine the work of
Cuban political and professional networks in fostering Latino friendly county policies
and grooming a new generation of Latino political leadership. Chapter Three chronicles
the period from 1980 to 1985. It explores the brief and tumultuous emergence of
reactionary anti-Latino and anti-bilingual activist Emmy Shafer and her battles with the

Cuban advocacy group Spanish American League Against Discrimination (SALAD) and

29 Rose, “Tourism and the Hispanicization of Race in Jim Crow Miami,” 739-40; Faith High Barneby,
*Integrity is the Issue: Campaign Life with Robert King High* (Miami: E.A. Seeman Publishing, 1971), 35-
37 and 134. A funeral home owner, landlord, and black civic leader, M. Athalie Range was the first African
American woman to serve on a Florida gubernatorial administration, as Secretary of Community Affairs
under Governor Askew in 1971. For an exploration of Range’s controversial influence in shaping the
development of the African American community and shaping race relations in Miami during this period,
the Dade County Board of County Commissioners over Miami’s future as a minority majority urban center. The study concludes with the election of Miami’s first Cuban born mayor and the repeal of the Anti-Bilingual Ordinance.

I argue that Cubans and other Latinos in Miami through their involvement with local government in this critical period, both as voters and politicians, articulated a unique construction of American citizenship that accommodated their biculturalism. Emboldened by the Cuban Adjustment Act, which allowed them to maintain dual citizenship, Miami’s Cuban Americans not only demanded language accommodations in county services, but expected local political candidates to be well versed in foreign affairs and sensitive to the geopolitics of the Caribbean. Local politics in Miami functioned as a microcosm where Latinos vied for power and recognition and as the first institutional point of contact for Cubans becoming new citizens. Miami as a global city in the South provides an important window into understanding the intersection of immigration, civil rights, and Latino political identity during the demographic and political rise of the Sunbelt in the 1960s and 1970s.
CHAPTER I: THE ROAD TO CITY HALL

“To stay away from the polls is bad. Look what happened to us in Cuba.” – Olga Reyes, Miami resident.

Introduction

In a darkened studio at the WTVJ 4 television studios City of Miami Mayor Maurice A. Ferré and former City of Miami Commissioner Manolo Reboso sat across from one another at a conference table. Between them WTVJ’s veteran anchor Ralph Renick moderated the “Road to City Hall.” It was November 1981 and the televised mayoral debate had devolved into a bitter run-off between the two Latino businessmen and former city hall colleagues. Ferré and Reboso were both elected into office in 1973 and they became, respectively, the first Puerto Rican mayor and Cuban American elected to public office in Florida history. Now, eight years later they sat across from each other as political rivals. Ferré, himself accused of pandering to Cubans in 1973, blasted Reboso for pandering to Cubans, remarking that “I wouldn’t advertise in Spanish differently than my campaign slogans in English. I wouldn’t go around inciting people to vote Cuban. I think in this country we shouldn’t be voting Catholic, Jewish, Black, Cuban, white or anything else… the mayor’s office should be open to everyone.”

This debate between Reboso and Ferré was the first televised mayoral debate in Miami’s history. Ralph Renick was considered a pioneer of progressive television journalism and he read a daily editorial on-air that reflected on Florida politics and social issues. The Road to City Hall. WTVJ-4 Miami, October 7, 1981. From Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archives at Miami Dade College, File WC01198; “Cuban Non-Coup,” Economist, November 14, 1981, 32-33; Paul G. Ashdown, “WTVJ’s Miami Crime War: A Television Crusade,” Florida Historical Quarterly 58, April 1980: 422-437.
In 1981 Miami, “a mayor that represents all the people” meant a Latino mayor. In less than a decade, Latinos had gone from being only 5 percent of registered voters to holding key positions in Miami’s municipal government and on the Metro Dade Board of County Commissioners. The road from the Cuban Adjustment Act in 1966 to city hall in 1981 was long and fraught with contentious questions about citizenship, assimilation, and governance as Cuban exiles and their children made efforts to secure their place in American life.  

This chapter argues that local politicians and the Cuban press played an integral role in shaping the development of a Cuban American electorate in Miami between the years 1966 and 1980. The Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA) was slow to be accepted by the Cubans who hoped for a return to a liberated Cuba, and attainment of U.S. citizenship remained controversial until the suspension of the Freedom Flights in 1973. Moreover, Cubans rejected full assimilation in favor of biculturalism – which allowed them to maintain their allegiance to Cuba while claiming new political ties to the United States. First, I consider the role of Florida legislators such as Democratic Congressman Dante Fascell in the passage of the CAA in 1966 as a means of increasing federal funding and employment opportunities for Cubans. Subsequently, as Cubans moved towards the American political mainstream, Cuban political journalism shaped discourse about naturalization and citizenship. The Cuban community’s tilt towards liberalism in local politics, tempered by an ironclad anti-communist stance towards American foreign policy, was born of the CAA and the influence of Democratic party politics in Miami.

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Finally, the rise of Maurice Ferré, Miami’s first Latino mayor, cemented a new bilingual and bicultural political order in Miami.

**Creating Temporary American Citizens**

In 1959, as the first wave of post-Revolutionary Cuban refugees arrived in Miami, federal immigration reform was at an impasse. The 1950s were a period of intense national debate over immigration and the possible abolishment of the quota system, a debate largely shaped by the European refugee crisis and the Cold War. American’s foreign policy considerations thus fostered the liberalization of the nation’s immigration policy as it shifted toward the containment of communism. The destabilization and collapse of a series of pro-American regimes in the Caribbean and Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s led to significant changes in federal policy towards refugees and immigrants. As the United States began to accept refugees from communist regimes, Cubans were the first in these “third world” waves of migration that forced the U.S. government to revamp the nation’s traditionally European-oriented immigration policies.\(^\text{32}\)

The surge of Cuban refugees arriving in Miami forced county politicians and local legislators to act as intermediaries, assuaging the frustrations of non-Latino residents without alienating a new political base and, after 1963, a source of federal revenue.

Public discourse about the nature and extent of Cuban assimilation and involvement in

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American civic life prior to the passage of the CAA encompassed many of the issues that would shape ethnic politics in Miami in the subsequent twenty years.

As early as 1961, the question of status normalization and residency for the growing Cuban refugee community became a subject of consternation for Cubans and Anglo Miamians alike. Capitol Hill insiders were not the only ones concerned about the immigration status of Cubans. Cuban journalists in Miami published editorials pondering the moral dilemma of pursuing naturalization in light of the island still “enslaved” by communism and the Castro regime. Amid an economic recession, Anglo and African American Miamians criticized the federal government’s initial lack of aid for Cubans as a burden on fiscally strapped Dade County, and then alleged that the subsequent creation of the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) was unwarranted favoritism.

Democratic Congressman Dante B. Fascell was a fervent opponent of Fidel Castro, and one of the earliest and most important local supporters of the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) and status normalization for Cubans. Admired by Floridians for his ability to direct federal monies to projects he favored, his support ensured the CRP’s longevity into the 1980s, and he often interceded on behalf of the Cuban community at town hall meetings and in correspondence with constituents. The son of Italian immigrants, Fascell was elected to Florida’s 4th Congressional District in 1955. At the time, his district encompassed nearly all of Greater Miami and a portion of the Florida Keys. The congressman distinguished himself almost immediately among Southern Democrats in Congress by refusing to sign the 1956 Southern Manifesto criticizing the racial integration of public facilities. One of the first congressional candidates in Miami to openly court the black vote, Fascell dismissed the Southern Manifesto as a “piece of
chest thumping.” Despite criticism from his white constituents, Fascell maintained his commitment to representing a district that was perhaps one of the most diverse in the South – a patchwork of Northern carpetbaggers and snowbirds, white native born Floridians (Crackers), black Bahamians, Puerto Rican garment and agricultural workers, and a smattering of Cubans who had absconded during the decades of political repression during Machado and Batista regimes.\(^{33}\)

As the number of Cubans settling in the 4\(^{th}\) Congressional District grew exponentially between 1960 and 1963, so did the angry letters from constituents concerned about immigration, and unemployment in Miami. With every new wave of Cuban refugees, the “native” citizens of Miami chanted the same litany of complaints: the Cubans don’t speak *our* language; they don’t share *our* religion, *our* values, or *our* race; and they threaten our jobs. The arrival of Cubans triggered an outpouring of nativism that led many Miamians to pressure their elected officials to halt the flow of immigrants. Writing in 1963, Carl Walden of Miami Shores, demanded to know: “Why doesn’t the immigration quota limit the amount of Cubans allowed to enter?” Another resident from Cutler Ridge, a rural area in South Dade, wrote that he feared that there were “10 Cubans waiting [sic] for my job.” These complaints reflected a commonly held belief, especially acute in a period of economic recession, that the influx of Cubans was hurting Miami’s workers.\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) Carl R. Walden to Hon. Dante B. Fascell, Miami, Fl., 15 July 1963, Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1952; Willie Ben Tarver to Dante B. Fascell, Miami, Fl., 21 June 1963, Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1952.
Unwilling to stoke the fires of nativism, Fascell attempted to offset these demands by responding with promises to “continue to urge our government to…accelerate the program for the resettlement of Cuban refugees outside of Florida.” Fascell knew that resettlement was an empty promise. Even as immigration from Cuba all but ground to a halt in 1962 after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Cuban families that had been successfully resettled out of state often found their way back to Miami once they had saved enough money to do so. Once these families were no longer dependent on aid from the CRP there was little the federal government could do to prevent them from moving back to Miami, the center of Cuban life in the United States.  

Despite the oft-repeated promise of resettlement, criticisms of the Cuban community continued to devolve into foul-mouthed nativist rhetoric. William Jones wrote, “Miami…has now become a Havana slum, raucous and crowded. Why don’t Central and South America open their doors to these people whose culture is so similar to theirs?” When a rumor swirled through the city in July 1963 that a further 100,000 Cubans were preparing to arrive, Fascell received another rush of complaints. “That’s all we need now. Shuttling another quarter to half million of this Cuban crap to Dade County.”

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36 William Jones to Representative William Cramer, Miami, Fl., 26 July 1963, Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1952; Jim Burdett to Dante B. Fascell, Miami, Fl., 5 July 1963, Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1952.
Congressman Fascell lobbied hard to extend Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) funding for processing Cuban refugees in Miami and to relieve the financial burden placed on county agencies and local charitable organizations to provide for their reception, processing and resettlement. Constituents were almost unilaterally against any sort of aid beyond resettlement arrangements, especially monetary aid. Many Miamians interpreted federal relief for Cubans as a free handout that encouraged laziness and reckless spending. “These people are working and not reporting it. They are getting allotments and free food and handouts everywhere…I personally saw Cubans in a jewelry store buying gifts which I could not buy.” Some even felt that aid from private sources and charities was excessive. John Gerheim, self professed “Taxpayer and Voter,” another 4th District resident, wanted to know why “preferential treatment” was given to a group of young Cuban men enlisted in the Army, who were allowed to return home for Christmas, when his son had to “pay his own transportation home for Xmas [sic].” Similar disdain was extended to the exchange of 1,110 political prisoners captured by Castro’s forces during the ill fated Bay of Pigs for 62 million dollars or what Gerheim considered to be the “U.S. government paying blackmail to Castro.”

Fascell was in an impossible position, caught between the demands of his constituents and his responsibility as a congressional representative to lobby for aid. Thus he was forced repeatedly to explain to the residents of his congressional district why Cubans were being afforded certain privileges that no one else could access. Offering permanent residency to Cubans seemed to be a solution that could simultaneously open

37 Louise E. King to Senator Kenneth Hart, Miami Springs, Fl., 12 Jan 1963, Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1952; John W. Gerheim to Hon. Dante B. Fascell, 31 December 1962, Miami, Fl., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1952.
up more avenues to federal aid, and make Cubans eligible for a wider variety of employment in order to wean them from refugee assistance.

By late 1965, county and municipal leaders acknowledged the permanence of the Cuban exodus to Miami. With the initiation of the Freedom Flights that year, Congressman Fascell, Congressman Claude Pepper and Mayor Robert King High joined with other state, county, and federal officials to create the Task Force on Cuban Refugees. The task force brought together politicians, county administrators, the Catholic Diocese of Miami, and the National Council of Churches to solve problems related to the Cuban migration and assess federal interagency efforts to deal with the refugees. The Task Force certainly reflected an unusually concerted federal-local effort to aid the community. However, what was most significant about the Task Force meeting in October 1965 was, first, its call for federal legislation allowing Cuban refugees to attain permanent residency status (in spite of local antagonism towards Cubans) and, second, the inclusion of the Cuban Coordinating Committee (CCC). The latter was one of the earliest groups to articulate Cuban demands for permanent residency and local political recognition.  

At a three-day long meeting held at the DuPont Hotel in downtown Miami, forty individuals representing the Catholic Church, African American civil rights organizations and county, state, and federal agencies met to discuss the future of Cuban refugees in Miami. With the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization (Hart-Cellar) Act of 1965 on October 3 less than a month behind them, it seemed likely that a change in the parolee

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38 “Agenda: Task Force on Cuban Refugees - Meeting of City, County, State, and Federal Officials,” 1 November 1965, Miami, Fla., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 2025.
status of most Cuban refugees was imminent. Although interagency meetings like this had taken place with some regularity since 1961, this was the first that prominently featured Cubans. The Cuban Coordinating Committee left behind few paper records, but we know they gave the concluding statement at the Task Force on Cuban Refugees meeting on November 1, 1965.

Prior to the assembly of the Task Force, the CCC circulated an eight-point memorandum that established some of its major grievances with the status of Cuban refugees in Florida. Primarily focusing on their economic importance in Miami, the major points of the memo would become the bedrock of a new discourse around the role of Cubans in Miami’s economic and political life. Rather than dwelling on the dependence of many Cubans on federal refugee benefits, the CCC portrayed Cubans in Miami as breadwinners, taxpayers, and homeowners who deserved recognition and rights as permanent residents, even as they awaited the possibility of return to Cuba.  

The CCC described themselves as “a group composed of representatives of Cuban exiles” striving to ensure good relations between federal and local agencies and working for positive community relations between Cubans and other Miami residents. Addressing the prevailing public opinion of many Anglos in Miami towards Cubans, the CCC undermined the “unfounded talk of the tax burden” created by Cuban use of Dade County services. The CCC argued that Cubans had in fact been a huge economic blessing for Miami bringing “millions in federal money…investments made by wealthy Cuban

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39 Pedro G. Mendive (Cuban Coordinating Committee) to Seymour Samet (Community Relations Service), 31 October 1965, Miami Fla., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 2025.
exiles,” and “the Cuban as client and customer” to Miami businesses. Cubans had purchased homes and in doing so had become direct taxpayers to the county.  

The CCC argued that with federal subsidies Cubans were able to contribute to Dade's economy. They established businesses --- stores, cafeterias, and nightclubs that created the commercial strip of Calle Ocho that became the heart of “Little Havana” and a popular tourist attraction for visitors to Miami. Cubans had “provided the City and Miami Beach with a bilingual Latin American environment which had enhanced the tourist attraction of both cities.” Thanks to the establishment of Cuban businesses and stores, Miami had become “the true gateway to Latin America.” The CCC turned the argument of those who hoped to preserve Miami’s Old Florida past on its head, and insisted that the citizens of Miami should really be thanking Cubans for making the city an exotic tropical tourist destination. This argument would carry through the next fifteen years of political debate about the assimilation of Cubans into Miami’s local government. When bilingualism became a municipal policy issue in the early 1970s, proponents of bilingual education and county services would make the same economic argument.

Ironically, it was the protestations of South Florida constituents and lawmakers about the need for federal funding for Cuban refugees that led to status normalization, producing within a decade the creation of a large enfranchised Latino population in Miami. After the successful passage of Johnson’s immigration reform legislation in 1965, congressional Florida legislators brought the question of status normalization for Cubans

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40 Pedro G. Mendive (Cuban Coordinating Committee) to Seymour Samet (Community Relations Service), 31 October 1965, Miami Fla., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 2025.

41 Pedro G. Mendive (Cuban Coordinating Committee) to Seymour Samet (Community Relations Service), 31 October 1965, Miami Fla., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 2025.
to the fore. Discussions of status normalization had circulated since the early 1960s, but President Johnson tabled the issue in favor of seeking a consensus in support of broad immigration reform. Status normalization was simply the creation of a program that would allow refugee/parolees seek permanent residency and eventually, citizenship.

HEW Secretary John W. Gardner argued for status normalization as a means for dealing with the increasing antagonism from state and local officials in South Florida who felt that the federal government had left them with too much of the cost of Cuban settlement and refugee welfare programs. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 indicated that the Johnson administration was trying to extend federal funding and social welfare programs that could, in theory, benefit Cubans and provide additional funding state and municipal agencies in Florida. This was a concerted effort by the Johnson Administration to reduce racial and political tension in Florida. However, many of these programs required beneficiaries to be permanent residents in order to participate. Lack of permanent resident status also barred Cubans from most public sector employment, and from applying for state licenses for professions ranging from cosmetology to dentistry.42

With the encouragement of state officials in Florida and CRP administrators, Congress passed the Cuban Status Adjustment Act in 1966 with little resistance. However, two obstacles impeded its implementation. First, President Johnson and Undersecretary of State George Ball initially feared that the American public would interpret the passage of the CAA as tacit acceptance of the Castro regime. The Johnson Administration knew that HEW would have to sell and promote status normalization, as

it did with the Cuban Refugee Program, to the public as part of the larger anti-communist foreign policy, and as a means of undermining Castro’s government by aiding Cubans who exemplified the best of American values. Advocates of the CAA such as Senator Ted Kennedy reiterated the unique qualities of Cubans such as adherence to traditional family values, hard work, and fervent resistance to communism that were the cornerstone of the original CRP’s publicity campaign.\(^{43}\)

The option of citizenship presented a second obstacle to Congress accepting the CAA: what would happen to Cubans who became permanent residents or citizens if returning to a post-Castro Cuba became a reality? From the beginning of the post-Revolutionary Cuban migration, the U.S. government assured Cubans and the American public that refugees would be able to return to Cuba immediately after the fall of the Castro regime. This promise not only kept hope of a return alive for Cubans but also stoked Cuban exile efforts to undermine the Castro regime from Miami. From the federal government’s perspective, it eased the resistance to the refugee population by characterizing the migration as strictly temporary.\(^{44}\)

Ultimately, Congressional representatives and federal administrators did not have an issue with granting American citizenship to refugees and allowing them to maintain Cuban citizenship while at the same time allowing for the possibility of their return to Cuba. Explaining the rationale of the legislation, Undersecretary Ball stated in a congressional hearing: “I think we should give them the option of being able to live in this land as good citizens…even though some of them will ultimately return.” The final

\(^{43}\) Bon Tempo, Americans at the Gate, 129.

\(^{44}\) Bon Tempo, Americans at the Gate, 130-1.
legislation stated that Cuban refugees who entered the United States after January 1, 1959, as parolees or visa overstays, could apply to be permanent residents. The CAA allowed Cubans to count up to 30 months of their time in the States towards the five-year residency requirement for citizenship. This greatly expedited the citizenship process and cut time towards citizenship by half for some refugees. American citizenship had never been formulated in such a manner -- no other immigrant group had been given the freedom to define their loyalty simultaneously to the United States and to their country of origin.45

“Elections? What for?”

The passage of the CAA created a crisis of conscience among Cubans over the political and cultural implications of obtaining permanent residency and, ultimately, American citizenship. This created a divide between Cubans who sought a return to Cuba from those who wanted to stay in the United States while retaining their Cuban citizenship and those wanting to acquire a new national identity as U.S. citizens. This identity crisis was most apparent among the more ardently anti-Castro elements of the Cuban community in Miami. *Patria* (Native Land), one of the earliest and most popular *periodiquitos* (little newspapers) and the voice of the *Batistianos* (pro-Batista faction) in exile politics, initially decried the passage of the CAA as a betrayal of Cuba by the federal government and a betrayal of the cause of liberation by any exile that sought citizenship. *Patria’s* editorial board roundly criticized any Cuban who even considered

45 Historian Carl Bon Tempo argues that this was a “stunning formulation of American citizenship” and that “no other previous refugee or immigrant group had been granted…such leeway in defining their loyalties.” He argues that this was largely due to the proximity of Cuba to the United States, the long relationship between the two countries, and the belief by both many in the Cuban community and in the Johnson administration, that the collapse of the Castro regime was imminent. See: Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate*, 131.
pursuing citizenship by asking rhetorically: “Why would we abandon Cuban citizenship when we aspire to liberate the homeland?”

However, Cuban readers who hoped status normalization would be a means to economic stability did not accept Patria’s resolutely anti-residency stance. In November 1966, only a few short months after their scathing critique of the CAA, Patria published a lengthy editorial on the merits of securing residency. In response to numerous letters from readers angered by the residency debate, staff writer Alberto Rodriguez argued pragmatically “becoming a U.S. resident does not mean you are no longer Cuban, or that you are betraying the cause…and it does have its advantages.” However, Rodriguez refused to go any further on the matter of seeking citizenship -- in his opinion it would be a betrayal of one’s Cuban heritage and a betrayal of the greater cause of a free Cuba. “You abandon being Cuban when you seek other citizenship and take the oath of naturalization.”

Patria’s stance now set the limit at seeking full citizenship, but it was forced to acknowledge that residency provided many of the employment and tax benefits of citizenship without an outright abandonment or betrayal of Cuban nationality. Rodriguez also made the case that as a permanent resident, Cubans could still collect some refugee benefits and use the medical services of the Cuban Refugee Center, which they might not be able to do as citizens. Similarly, as the Cuban community became more permanently

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46 Patria was first published in 1959 by Ernesto Montaner and Armando Garcia Sifredo, as a platform to celebrate the achievements of the Batista regime and the “Cuba of yesterday.” During its first years of existence it was supported financially by Fulgencio Batista himself. Eventually, the paper became financially solvent through advertising revenue from Cuban-owned businesses and services. Garcia, Havana, USA, 100; Editorial, “Cambiarnos de Ciudadanía es Traicionar a Cuba,” Patria, 12 August 1966, 1.

settled, residency meant Cuban homeowners could seek Federal Housing Administration loans and insurance and receive breaks on county property taxes.\textsuperscript{48}

Rodriguez’s article reveals the conflict that many Cubans faced in the mid-1960s, and the challenges for aspiring Latino politicians as they mounted their first campaigns in the late 1960s and early 1970s. How would they reconcile the realities of day-to-day life in the U.S. with a commitment to the political and ideological struggle of liberating Cuba from the Castro regime? In 1966, at the height of the Freedom Flights and the escalation of the war in Vietnam, Cuba remained at the center of Cold War foreign policy. As 

\textit{Patria}'s dismissive view towards seeking citizenship shows, for many Cubans there was a powerful hope of return. Yet, the liminal status of refugee-parolee granted by the President Johnson left many exiles in legal limbo, unable to obtain public employment, buy a home, or apply for credit. \textit{Patria}'s hedging was a tacit acknowledgment of this conflict between pragmatism and ideological commitment. Supporting residency offered a compromise.\textsuperscript{49}

Fear of cultural assimilation or Americanization, especially of Cuban children, formed an integral component of the Cuban discourse around attaining U.S. citizenship. In the eyes of those committed fully to the liberation of the homeland, residency offered temporary economic and professional benefits, but assimilating culturally offered none at all. In a 1966 column, the editorial board of \textit{Patria} explained that the mere idea of assimilation was “terrifying” for a number of reasons. Foremost, they argued that assimilation was the greatest enemy of the Cuban nationalist project, because it


\textsuperscript{49} Armando Garcia Sifredo, “Por Favor, No Nos Asimilen,” \textit{Patria}, 13 January 1967, 1.
undermined the “transience” of the Cuban community in Miami. Cubans were in Miami solely because of the “fact of Communism,” and assimilation would suggest that, not only were they in the United States by choice, but because of the inherent superiority of American society and culture over Cuban culture. Miami was a “world of abundance” but Cubans had to ground themselves in the hope of return, and remember that the “comforts” and temptations of the United States could never replace a liberated Cuba. This rejection of assimilation hints at the contradictions between the historically troubled relationship between the United States and Cuba, and the dependence of Cuban exiles on the American government for aid.  

For many Cubans the shift towards involvement in American politics was slow and tempered by cynicism. *Zig Zag Libre*, the Miami reboot of the famed Cuban satirical magazine under the direction of José Manuel Rosada, frequently criticized of the hypocrisy of both local and national politicians. Illustrator and satirical cartoonist Silvio Fontainillas published humorous caricatures of world leaders ranging from Mao to Nixon, as well as vignettes depicting the mundane frustrations of exile life in Miami. The magazine remained non-partisan and became popular for its ability to make light of any political faction or conflict in the Cuban community. By 1966, *Zig Zag Libre* boasted a paid circulation of 30,000 subscribers.  

Three months before the 1968 Presidential Election, *Zig Zag Libre’s* cover depicted a dismal scene. On the right, Miami’s Art Deco skyline and palm trees were festooned with campaign banners promoting Nixon, Humphrey, Rockefeller, and

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51 Garcia, *Havana, USA*, 104.
Wallace, the front-runners for the presidency. An elephant shaped balloon with the letters G-O-P floated above the city. Across a narrow body of water, a Cuban man dressed in the guajiro (peasant) garb of straw hat, guayabera (linen shirt) and tattered pants raised his arms in distress. Barefoot and shackled to a ball and chain painted with the Soviet hammer and sickle, the guajiro was a sharp contrast to the glamour and frippery of Miami in election season. Silvio made the gulf between Miami and Havana seem insurmountable, and just as the caption reads, he forced readers to ask themselves: “Elections? What for?”


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52 Silvio, “¿Elecciones Para Que?” Illustration, Zig-Zag Libre, 10 August 1968. From the University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection and García, Havana USA, 104.

53 Silvio, “¿Elecciones Para Que?” Illustration, Zig-Zag Libre, 10 August 1968. From the University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection and García, Havana USA, 104.
Silvio’s weekly comic strip *Cosas de Nuestro Exilio* expressed the frustration of maintaining a cultural and political connection to Cuba while living in the United States. In Silvio’s satirical version of Miami, Cuban children spoke back to their parents in English, or worse Spanglish, the hybrid language combining words and idioms from Spanish and English that represented a new Cuban American identity. Cubans on the island, who had been proud to call themselves “anti-imperialist revolutionaries” in 1960, now wrote their relations in Miami begging that they apply for citizenship so they could secure a place on the Freedom Flights.  

**Image 2. Cosas de Nuestro Exilio Cartoon**

Despite their hesitancy to assimilate, Cubans were quick to criticize the federal government for dragging its heels in its efforts to process Cuban residency applications.

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54 Silvio, “Cosas de Nuestro Exilio - No. 313,” Illustration, 6 July 1968, *Zig Zag Libre*. From the University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection.

55 Silvio, “Cosas de Nuestro Exilio - No. 313,” Illustration, 6 July 1968, *Zig Zag Libre*. From the University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection.
The Johnson Administration and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) promised to open offices in Miami solely to service Cuban applicants when Congress passed the CAA in 1966. The INS scheduled the offices to open in January 1967, but by the end of the month construction plans had stalled resulting in eligible Cubans unable to have their applications processed. In the wake of the CAA’s announcement, a wave of residency-eligible Cubans purchased homes in the hopes that the INS would process their applications quickly enough to secure a homestead tax exemption by April. Instead, they found a shuttered application office. *Patria*’s editorial board blamed the delay on the government’s “lack of funds” and noted that Cubans were deeply “anxious” about the financial repercussions of not being able to seek residency in a timely manner.⁵⁶

The CAA empowered Cubans to became economically independent and economically invested in Miami, whether through home buying or the creation of small businesses, and as a result they became more interested in local politics. In the year following the passage of the CAA and the increase in Cuban home-ownership in Miami, discourse in the *periodiquitos* about Cuban political participation in the United States began to shift away from a hardline on cultural assimilation. The political establishment in Miami, led by bilingual Mayor Robert King High, attuned themselves more closely to Cuban special interests.

On January 6, 1967, Mayor High proclaimed the “Day of the Freedom Fighters” in the City of Miami in honor of Cubans past and present striving for the liberation of their homeland. The celebrations included a special event held at Dinner Key Auditorium in conjunction with the Information Council of the Americas (INCA), an anti-communist

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organization dedicated to containing and fighting communism and supporting free trade in the Western Hemisphere, especially Latin America. Founded by public relations wizard Edward Butler and historian of conservatism Lee Edwards, INCA organized informational lectures, released publications, made documentary films and lobbied against the spread of communism, while seeking support from liberal as well as conservative anti-communists. On “Day of the Freedom Fighters,” the City of Miami hosted a showing and reception for INCA’s latest production Hitler in Havana. The lurid propaganda film ominously equated Castro with Hitler and blamed the Cuban leader for Kennedy’s death. Hitler in Havana contained previously unseen footage of the early days of the Castro regime, smuggled into the United States by anti-Castro refugees, including scenes of the Bay of Pigs invasion and its aftermath.

Events such as “Day of the Freedom Fighters” were indicative of how over the next decade local politicians used a two-pronged strategy to pique Cuban interest in voting: (1) extoll the untapped electoral power of Cubans and (2) promise a continued effort to defeat communism on the island. Newly elected democratic State Senator Richard Bernard “Dick” Stone visited Patria in 1967 to thank the Cuban periodical and the Cuban people of South Florida for their support in his successful campaign. Stone, the former Miami City Attorney under Mayor King High gave a short but stirring speech about the importance of the Latino vote: “The Cubans registered to vote in Florida

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constitute a large and decisive electoral force…and that force will be even greater when they realize that they could be the determining factor [in future elections].” 58

Stone thanked the newspaper for their endorsement, and promised to represent the interests of the Cuban people “with the dignity they deserve” in Tallahassee. Stone closed his speech with the promise to “honor [his] word to inform the Senate of the danger only 90 miles away of communism in Cuba.” Stone’s image as a Cold Warrior Democrat would serve him well, and the people of Florida elected him to the U.S. Senate in 1975. Stone’s promise would echo for years to come, as it became the rhetorical device of choice for any non-Latino politician campaigning in Cuban districts be it for city councilman or President of the United States and regardless of party affiliation. 59

The Road to City Hall

In 1967, a young Puerto Rican elected to the Florida State Legislature would build on the political momentum started by Robert King High and serve as the template for the generation of Latino politicians who followed him and usher in an era of Latinized political culture. Maurice Ferré embodied the perfect bicultural, bilingual candidate – educated in the United States, but with deep political and economic interests in Puerto Rico. Ferré assimilated to American life but oriented still oriented himself towards the geopolitics of the Caribbean; a version of American citizenship that would appeal deeply to the growing Cuban middle class.

In 1966, Maurice Ferré was a “vibrant and charmingly Latin” newcomer in the South Florida business and political elite. The scion of an influential Puerto Rican-Cuban


family based in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Ferré was only 28 when he was elected company president by the stakeholders of Maule Industries, a Puerto Rico-based concrete and building materials conglomerate. The Maule construction materials empire spread outwards from Puerto Rico to encompass concrete production, glass works, and iron works facilities in Florida, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. The Ferré Family became major real estate holders in South Florida, purchasing over 7000 acres of undeveloped land on the fringes of Dade County and several blocks of hotels and office buildings in Downtown Miami.

A half-hearted engineering student at best, Ferré became involved in the movement for Puerto Rican statehood during his time at the University of Miami. Ferré described his uncle, Luis A. Ferré, as Puerto Rico’s “Abraham Lincoln, a perennial candidate [who] always lost.” Nonetheless, Maurice cut his political teeth on Luis A. Ferré’s failed gubernatorial campaigns in 1956, 1960, and 1964. The cause of Puerto Rican statehood and his uncle’s long and tumultuous career were the inspiration of Maurice’s decision to pursue a run for office in Florida. Construction, real estate, and tourism were the drivers of Miami’s economy, and Ferré held significant interests in all

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60 The Ferré family made its first fortune in construction materials with Puerto Rico Iron Works, at one point, the largest iron foundry in the Caribbean. Ferré’s father purchased a controlling stake in Maule Industries, a concrete outlet, in the 1940’s and developed a method for packaging concrete aggregate for ocean shipping. The Southeast was in the midst of a simultaneous post-war construction boom and concrete shortage, a combination that was especially acute in Florida. Maule Industries made a fortune throughout the 1950s and 1960s, by supplying the concrete that built South Florida’s suburbs, shopping centers, and schools. Maurice Ferré, in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014.

three, but aside from his appointment on the Downtown Development Authority, real political influence in Miami remained elusive to him.62

After a failed bid for the state senate in 1966, Ferré mounted a successful bilingual campaign for Representative (District 91) to the Florida State Legislature the following year. Running unopposed on a generic platform, Ferré emphasized his experience at Maule, his interest in the welfare of children and the elderly, and his advocacy for the creation of a state consumer protection agency. For Ferré, his legislative experience was a stepping-stone; he admitted that he “went to Tallahassee to learn how politics works,” not because he intended to pursue a career in the state legislature.63

A stint in the legislature was a rite of passage for Miami politicians. Ferré’s incoming class included future governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham. Ferré, however, lasted less than a term in Tallahassee, and he did little to distinguish himself from his peers while he was there. His only achievement was to support the passage of a bill that would force companies contracted to build state roads to purchase all of their cement and construction materials from Florida vendors. Political self-interest motivated Ferre’s backing of the legislation. The new legislation would be detrimental to Maule, which sourced its cement for Florida projects from Puerto Rico, and would be forced to spend an additional $500,000 purchasing cement from local suppliers to complete a number of state building project. Ferré’s business interests and political ambitions often clashed in his pursuit of public office; whether this first accomplishment was the hallmark of a

62 Maurice Ferré, in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014. The DDA is an autonomous agency of the City of Miami. Comprised of public appointees and downtown property owners and residents, the DDA facilitates business development, planning and capital improvements.

63 Campaign Advertisement, “Elect Maurice Ferré – State Representative (Dist. 91),” [ca. 1966], Miami, Fl., Personal Collection of Maurice Ferré; Maurice Ferré, in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014.
selfless politician, or a performance of his virtues as a public servant for the benefit of voters remains a mystery. Claiming the difficulties of overseeing Maule’s operations from the state capitol, Ferré returned to Miami in March 1967 and set his sights on gaining a seat on the City of Miami commission.  

Ferré’s brief term in the Florida House cemented his reputation as a rising star in local politics. As fate would have it, on August 30, 1967, Mayor of Miami Robert King High died of a heart attack at age 43. Vice-Mayor Stephen P. Clark succeeded the late Mayor King High, leaving a city commissioner’s seat vacant. Clark, himself the owner of a large construction company, temporarily appointed Ferré to the City Commission until the city held elections in November. Appointments to vacant City Commission seats at this time were the primary means by which minorities were incorporated into Miami’s political institutions. The City of Miami’s first African-American commissioners, Reverend Theodore Gibson and Athalie Range, were both appointed to empty seats and subsequently elected. Although he was a former state legislator and member of the Downtown Development Authority, Ferré’s appointment was no different.

In September 1967, Ferré declared his intent to run for the commissioner’s seat in the regular city election. His 1966 state legislature campaign ads in *Diario Las Americas* and the Cuban *periodiquitos* raised his profile considerably in the Cuban community. Ferré would now have to push hard for the support of the few registered Cuban voters in his extensive campaign for the commissioner’s seat. In trying to ingratiate himself with

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Cubans his courtship of the *periodiquitos* proved to be an uphill battle. He set his sights first on the popular Latino owned and operated *Diario Las Americas*, a daily Spanish language newspaper read by Cubans in Miami and all over Florida. A few days before the election, on November 2, 1967, *Diario Las Americas* published a special editorial written by Ferré entitled “My Grandfather Was Also Exiled.” Ferré recounted the life story of his grandfather, Antonio Ferré-Bacallao’s plight as a young Cuban *Mambí* rebel soldier, who fought valiantly against the Spanish between 1895 and 1898 in the Cuban War of Independence, and escaped to Puerto Rico to avoid imprisonment. Ferré-Bacallao fell in love with a Puerto Rican girl, but still returned to Cuba after the War of Independence. Realizing the devastation on the island left him with few opportunities for a livelihood, he returned to Puerto Rico to marry and raise a family. Ferré used his grandfather as a metaphor for the strength and adaptation of the Cuban diaspora in Miami, and as a reminder that there was hope in the great devastation of exile from one’s homeland. He praised the political contributions and economic influence of Cubans in Miami, reminding the reader that the efforts of “Cubans…have given birth to more than 500 businesses and changed this city into a bilingual urban center.”

In a community still internally divided about the prospect of citizenship and the dangers of assimilation, the extreme factions of the Cuban community predictably viewed Ferré’s campaign with utter skepticism, and quickly branded him a shameless panderer. For this vocal minority, bilingualism and an effective city commission were far less

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66 *Diario Las Americas* was the most widely circulated Spanish language newspaper in Miami, but it was not Cuban-owned. Horacio Aguirre, a Latino of Nicaraguan parentage who settled in Miami from New Orleans, founded the paper in 1953. Aguirre billed the paper as “Pan-American” and circulated it widely by airmail throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. Coincidentally, Ferré’s son José Luis married Aguirre’s daughter, Helen Albertina, in 1979.

pressing issues than the immediate liberation of Cuba. Many had left family and friends behind to succumb to poverty and injustice. This fact was a main driver behind their political activities in the United States. Writing two weeks later in *El Nacionalista*, journalist and anti-Castro activist Felipe Rivero asked, “What has Mr. Maurice Ferré done for Cubans? What have Mr. Maurice Ferré’s millions of dollars done to solve the problem of an enslaved Cuba, in the last nine years of terror?”  

Rivero had a right to ask this question. The ideological chieftain of the Cuban Nationalist movement, Rivero spent 19 months in Cuban prisons for his involvement in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Although Ferré’s work as a commissioner would have absolutely no bearing on U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba, there was nonetheless an expectation that as a Latino candidate, he be engaged in Cuban activism. Rivero even went so far as to question why, if the Cuban cause so moved Ferré, had he not volunteered to join *Brigada 2506* in the Bay of Pigs and “[fought] alongside the two Puerto Ricans who were there on April 17, 1961.”

Certainly, *El Nacionalista* was not the only Cuban media outlet available to Ferré. The political aspirant had many Cuban organizations supportive of his campaign. In these early years of his political career, Ferré gained the most support from the culturally oriented Cuban social clubs, especially the regionally themed *municipios* (hometown clubs), and their newspapers. As Maria Cristina García has argued, *municipios* were incredibly important institutions for the preservation of Cuban traditions and cultural practices in exile. Formed by individuals and families from particular towns and cities in

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Cuba, the *municipios* became an integral part of any local politician’s courtship of ethnic interest groups to build their own political base. A whirlwind tour of Miami’s ethnic interests could include attending services at St. Sophia’s Greek Orthodox Church on Coral Way, shaking hands in the Bahamian neighborhood along Grand Avenue, or giving a speech during the weekly schnitzel dinner at the German American Social Club.\(^{70}\)

In November 1967, a few days before the election, Ferré gave the keynote speech at the Municipio de Matanzas en Exilio’s annual “Día del Matancero Ausente” (Day of the Absent Matanzan). Matanzas held special significance in the Cuban exile community. The province was a stronghold of post-revolutionary opposition to the Castro regime. The yearly highlight of the municipio’s programming, the festivities began with a mass in honor of Saint Carlos of Borromeo, the patron saint of Matanzas, followed by dinner and a lengthy roster of speeches held in the Saint John Bosco Catholic Church reception hall. Ferré delivered a moving speech that reiterated his campaign editorial about his Cuban grandfather, who had been born and raised in Matanzas, and to whom he “was forever indebted for his spiritual connection to the Cuban colony.” The club members applauded the speech warmly and it was later glowingly reviewed by club president Demetrio Pérez, Jr., who praised Ferré’s emotive delivery in the club newspaper a few weeks later.\(^{71}\)

Regardless of his standing in the Cuban community, it was not the Cuban vote that secured Ferré’s election in 1967. Dade County did not maintain records of Spanish-speaking voters and the percentage at that time remained negligible. Ferré, on the other


hand, did extremely well in Miami’s African-American precincts and among Anglo voters. Bloc voting by African Americans essentially secured the election for Ferré. He became the first Latino elected to the Miami City Commission, although the election of Athalie Range, the first black woman elected to any municipal commission in the state, overshadowed Ferré’s achievement. Ferré nonetheless maintained a high profile in Miami’s growing Latino community. As a result, Latin American trade relations would be his major political crusade as commissioner.  

**The Only Hispanic Politician of any Consequence in Miami**

Although City Commissioner was a non-partisan office, Ferré was deeply involved in the Dade Democratic Party. In 1968, Lawrence O’Brien, who directed Vice President Hubert Humphrey’s presidential campaign, appointed Ferré to head the Florida Committee to Elect Hubert Humphrey for President. Ferré used the position to revamp the Democratic Party’s image among Latinos. Perhaps reluctant to assimilate culturally, Cubans were demanding more recognition from their elected representatives -- on Cuban terms. They were frustrated with the Johnson Administration’s policies towards Cuba which offered neither an overt nor covert military solution as did Kennedy’s controversial policies. Instead, Johnson confined the administration to enforcing economic sanctions. As one of Silvio’s cartoons, a disgruntled middle-aged man, scowled and remarked, “Not one candidate says anything about Fidel!”

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Once again, Ferré relied on Diario Las Americas to publish a pithy editorial reflecting on the Democratic Party’s history from Jackson to Humphrey, arguing that Latinos should unite to support the political party that had always been on the right side of history. He emphasized Democratic administrations interventions in Latin America and argued they supported democratic regimes in Latin America, most recently though the Organization of American States, while Republican administrations had “decorated dictators in Latin America…had cynically accepted the tyranny of communism in Cuba…and not only recognized, but helped finance a communist regime in Bolivia.”

However, the National Committee to Elect Hubert Humphrey and the Florida Democratic Party were completely uninterested in Ferré’s stumping in the Latino and Cuban press in Miami. Cuban voters only held majorities in the Hialeah and Little Havana precincts, but not in any of Dade County’s 27 other municipalities. O’Brien instructed Ferré to “target Nixon” and devote 100 percent of funds and volunteers to undermine Nixon’s appeal in South Florida. O’Brien’s instructions baffled Ferré, who recalled, “It was my opinion that nobody in Florida, nobody in Miami, liked Richard Nixon.” Humphrey was polling a comfortable lead in Dade County. Perhaps George Wallace, running for the American Independent Party and gaining momentum in Alabama and Louisiana, seemed a more realistic threat.

 Nonetheless, Ferré saw the campaign as an opportunity to create a “Hispanic political machine.” He earned considerable influence within the Dade Democratic Party.

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75 Maurice Ferré, in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014.
as the major financer of the get-out-the-vote canvassing and volunteer operations and by donating meeting space and rooms in his father’s hotels in Downtown Miami, the McAllister and the Columbus, to serve as the headquarters of South Florida for Humphrey. Going “against instructions,” he also used the campaign offices as a base for recruiting and briefing a small group of Cuban “shock troops” he planned to dispatch into Cuban and Puerto Rican working-class neighborhoods.\footnote{Maurice Ferré, in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014.}

Ferré’s shock troops were a small group of educated young Cuban professionals: Manolo Reboso, an engineer and aspiring commissioner, Alfredo Durán, a Bay of Pigs veteran and lawyer, and Demetrio Pérez, Jr., a private school teacher and publisher of *El Matancero Libre*, prominent among them. The Cuban volunteers were on a dual mission: to encourage eligible Cubans to apply for citizenship and register to vote and to undermine George Wallace’s appeal in Cuban and Puerto Rican working class neighborhoods like Hialeah. The canvassing operation became an “uphill battle,” to say the least. Going door-to-door, Ferré recalled they encountered “Cubans that were all going back to Cuba…none of them had any idea of staying.” The operation “never really had any feet,” in his opinion, and it was difficult to get any Cuban interest in the Humphrey campaign at all.\footnote{Maurice Ferré, in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014.}

Ferré’s prediction that Wallace would win Florida proved wrong. Richard Nixon’s campaign in Florida was successful and he won the state. Democratic Nominee Humphrey carried Dade and Monroe Counties by a wide margin. George Wallace, the leading national opponent of President Johnson’s Civil Rights Act won the majority of
Florida’s rural counties. The combined Wallace/Nixon conservative vote comprised 70 percent of Florida’s electorate. In 1968, racial and social conservatism trumped Democratic liberalism in Florida.\(^\text{78}\)

Ferré still emerged victorious from the campaign. His organizing efforts earned the attention of Reubin O.D. Askew, speaker of the Florida State Legislature. In 1969, Askew asked Ferré to serve as his running mate and lieutenant governor for the 1970 Florida Gubernatorial campaign. Ferré turned Askew down, again pleading the difficulty of running Maule from Tallahassee and uprooting his family. Still, Ferré considered himself part of a progressive political moment in the South and a golden age in Florida politics that would put Democrats Askew and Bob Graham in the governor’s office.\(^\text{79}\)

Ferré’s political prospects were on the rise as the 1970 race for county mayor loomed and his place as the “only Hispanic politician of any consequence in Miami” gained national and international attention. A few months before he declared his intent to run for Dade County Mayor, Venezuela’s largest newspaper *El Mundo*, described Ferré as “the Hispanic candidate most likely to win…and become the first Latino mayor of Miami.” Ferré believed that the City of Miami Commission had prepared him to govern a larger body, and that he was ready to serve the people of the entire county, instead of just a single municipality.\(^\text{80}\)

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But for all the excitement, Ferré’s campaign for Dade County mayor was ultimately unsuccessful. It was a tight race, but Ferré lost in the run-off to Miami Mayor Steve Clark, and Ferré returned to Maule Industries to “lick his wounds.” Ferré abandoned his seat on the City of Miami commission and devoted himself fulltime to Maule, which was expanding rapidly in Florida’s construction boom. By 1973, fate again conspired to pull him back into politics. In April, Miami Mayor David Kennedy was indicted on bribery conspiracy charges during a federal investigation of political corruption in Dade County. Following the Florida state statute on municipal officials under indictment, Governor Askew suspended Kennedy, and forced the City of Miami Commission to find an interim mayor.

Ferré recalled the frank phone call he received in April from the disgraced Kennedy, “Would you like to be mayor? I’m going to be indicted. I’m going to step down for three months so I can clear my name.” Kennedy summoned Ferré for a meeting with Manolo Reboso, appointed by Kennedy to fill a vacancy, the only other Latino on the commission. Reboso pledged his support in the appointment hearing. The three men knew the interim appointment would be preceded by a long day of political infighting. Kennedy’s suspension and the specter of Watergate weighed heavily on the Commission. Commissioner Rose Gordon attempted to block the appointment on the grounds that Maule’s ongoing civil litigation with the IRS over alleged non-payment of $25 million in back taxes would put more scrutiny on the Commission. Gordon requested that the

81 See Chapter 3 for a full explication of this important, though unsuccessful, campaign. Ian Glass, “Ferré the Politician and Ferré the Man…,” Miami News, 14 May 1973, 12A
appointment be put off until a report on Ferré’s legal difficulties could be prepared. There was also concern among the commissioners that Maule’s cement and heavy equipment contracts with the City of Miami and Dade County posed a potential conflict of interest for Ferré. In response, he promised to block any new municipal contracts with Maule while he was interim mayor. His appointment as acting mayor of Miami passed 3-1. “I have never done anything to shame me or my family,” Ferré said after being sworn in.83

Ferré settled into the mayoral role instantaneously. Labeled by the press as “Miami’s millionaire mayor,” he refused the position’s annual salary of $7,500. He began the daily commission meeting promptly at 9 a.m. and clashed with the less than prompt City Manager Melvin Reese within minutes of taking his seat in the City Council chambers on his first day in office, “Mr. Reese! It is 9 a.m. I said we would start at 9 a.m. and so we will!” Yet a cloud of suspicion hung over the new mayor. Ferré took the City Commission’s apprehension surrounding his appointment in stride, telling the Miami News, “Nobody wants to believe me when I say I just want to be involved in Miami politics. I think I can be of service to the community…But people are so suspicious and untrusting these days because of things like wiretapping and Watergate.”84

Ferré’s prior political experience as a state legislator insulated him from much criticism during his short three-month tenure as interim mayor. He aggressively promoted the Downtown Development Authority, fostered new confidence in Miami’s politicians and took a stand against “the decay of decency in government.” In August, David Kennedy’s bribery charges were dropped on the basis of insufficient evidence and


84 Ian Glass, “Ferré the Politician and Ferré the Man…,” Miami News, 14 May 1973, 12A.
Governor Askew reinstated him as Mayor of Miami. Ferré was once again out of political office, but he had gained the visibility and attention he needed to mount a successful campaign, this time for City of Miami mayor. Unsurprisingly, Kennedy decided to retire and not run for re-election, and in September Ferré announced his candidacy for the city’s highest office.85

The 1973 City of Miami election was the first in history to see the successful candidacy of two Latinos, Maurice Ferré and Manolo Reboso. Ferré at last had the opportunity and the votes to mount a highly effective bilingual campaign that brought unprecedented numbers of Latinos to the polls. His campaign strategy was a combination of a traditionally liberal stance on social welfare issues and an unrelenting emphasis on his connections to Cuba and the Caribbean, a strategy time and again would prove successful in local, state, and national campaigns with the Cuban American electorate. He utilized the organizing experience he had gained in the Humphrey campaign six years before but now with a much smaller geographic area with two of Dade County’s Latino majority districts to canvass.

Demography was also on Ferré’s side. In 1973, 370,000 Cubans resided in South Florida. Of these, about 70,000 or 20 percent, had become U.S. citizens. In October, the Latin League of Voters, a bipartisan voter education organization, reported that Miami Latinos, especially Cubans and Puerto Ricans, were registering to vote, volunteering as voter registrars, and serving as campaign managers in unprecedented numbers. The League of Latin Voters had two offices in the City of Miami: one in Little Havana, the largest Cuban neighborhood in Miami, and one in Wynwood, the city’s largest Puerto

85 Milt Sosin and Louis Salome, “Kennedy Reinstated as Mayor of Miami,” Miami News, 16 August 1973, 1A; Maurice Ferré, in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014.
Rican neighborhood. Each office processed a record 60 to 70 new registrations a week in the months leading up to the 1973 election. Leo Moriffi, the League Registrar observed that Latinos “were registering at the rate of four Republicans to one Democrat in May…but now it’s the other way around.” Although the mayoral election was non-partisan, the boost in Democratic Party registrations was likewise a boost for Ferré, who was publicly associated with the Florida Democratic Party.86

Ferré aggressively campaigned in the Cuban press and sought endorsements from Cuban newspapers and organizations. He emphasized his grandfather’s Cuban heritage, as he had in his 1967 State Legislature campaign, and made known his sensitivity to the foreign policy concerns of Cubans. However, he faced competition: Evelio S. Estrella, the perennial Cuban candidate who ran for a variety of local Miami offices and stalwart of the Cuban right wing establishment, and Gloria Calhoun, wife of Dade County commissioner Mike Calhoun, running on a zoning liberalization platform. Ferré received an early and key endorsement from Patria editor Armando Ruz. Ruz described the hopeful mayor as a man of “deep spiritual values” who was “faithful to the Cuban community” and employed a great number of Cubans in his businesses, when others would not. Ferré’s campaign purchased more advertising space in Patria than any other candidate. In addition to political advertisements, Ferré, determined to take his message to the Latino community, ran commemorative messages on behalf of Maule Industries celebrating the Grito de Yara and the birthday of Jose Martí.87


The field in the mayoral race was crowded, but Ferré emerged as the clear front-runner and the “handpicked” successor to David Kennedy. He was not, however, the only Latino on the ballot. Evelio Estrella, a Cuban insurance salesman, had run unsuccessfully for City of Miami Commissioner in 1967 and 1971. Estrella ran his campaign advertisements solely in Spanish and only canvassed in Latino majority precincts. It is unclear whether this was a campaign strategy to mobilize the Latino voter that is choosing an “ethnic” versus a “mainstream” strategy, or simply the result of Estrella’s own inability to speak English. Estrella did not receive any endorsements from the major

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English or Spanish-language newspapers, nor from key unions or special interest groups. He received only one endorsement from one of the lower circulation Spanish newspapers in Miami, *America Libre*. 89

Image 4. *Miami News* front page features Ferré Campaign Billboard with Misspelling. 90

Instead, *La Semana* and *Diario Las Americas* ignored Estrella’s candidacy altogether in favor of publishing editorials that emphasized Ferré’s Cuban ancestry and his involvement in Cuban professional and social organizations. Ferré was applauded in


90 Charles Trainor, “Well, at least ‘Miami’ is spelled right,” *Miami News*, October 5, 1973, 1A
Patria for “the enthusiasm his candidacy had awakened in this important sector of the community,” and for his work in bringing together leaders from the Cuban and African American communities. Ferré and Manolo Reboso also secured a key endorsement from a coalition of 300 African American civic and union leaders, led by Dade County School Board Member William Turner and Commissioner Theodore Gibson, including the entire Miami chapter of the Urban League and the Miami Local of the Longshoreman’s Union. This indicated that Ferré had artfully created a formula for political success in racially and ethnically divided Miami. 91

Ferré’s main challenger in the six-way 1973 mayoral race was Gloria Calhoun, who implemented a similar bilingual and tri-ethnic campaign strategy. Calhoun’s campaign manager was Cuban lawyer Miguel “Mike” Suarez, who had previously worked for Dade County mayoral candidate Jack Orr. Resorting to red baiting to cast suspicion on the Ferré family name, Suarez arranged for Calhoun to appear on WQBA La Fabulosa, where she accused Ferré’s uncle, the former Governor of Puerto Rico, of being a communist. Suarez also arranged for interviews with the periodiquitos to push Calhoun’s campaign promise to increase diversity in municipal hiring and appointments to reflect Miami’s Latino population. In an interview with Alerta conducted by Suarez himself, Calhoun claimed to have “a hundred Cubans working” on her campaign and she promised to include “prominent figures from the Latino community in the permanent government…and to name Cubans to the “most important city agencies.” Calhoun again emphasized her anti-communist political stance, her “respect” for the Cubans in Miami

and she promised to be a “voice in favor of the cause of a free Cuba.” Ferré’s campaign also had to endure overtly racial attacks. Describing his campaign strategy for Calhoun bluntly, Suarez told a reporter “Let’s face it. It is going to be Miss Blue Eyes and Blonde Hair against the Spic.”

Ferré dismissed Calhoun’s courtship of the Latino community as pure tokenism. He accused Calhoun of colluding with her County Commissioner husband to use the office of the mayor to reduce the City of Miami’s fiscal and administrative independence from Metro Dade County, and in doing so reduce the services available to the municipality’s poor black and Latino residents. Ferré frequently compared Calhoun to Edith Bunker, the naïve and deferential blonde housewife to Archie’s racist patriarch on All in the Family. Calhoun responded in kind with a healthy dose of Watergate paranoia: she suggested that Mayor David Kennedy was the puppet master of Ferré’s campaign, having personally anointed Ferré as his successor. As one attack advertisement read, “I, Gloria Calhoun, challenge M. Ferré to make public how David Kennedy was instrumental in securing Ferré’s appointment as interim mayor…what is your real political goal?”

Ferré and Manolo Reboso, the two major Latino candidates in the race, bore the brunt of Calhoun’s accusations of corruption and collusion with Kennedy. Calhoun argued that Ferré was essentially an incumbent because he had been interim mayor, and that Reboso, appointed by Kennedy to fill an empty commission seat in 1970, was also

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93 McDermott, “Dade Officials Fear Distrust May Deter Voters,” and Gloria Calhoun for Mayor of Miami, “The Issue is Secrecy,” Advertisement, Miami Herald, 26 October 1973, 7D.
part of Kennedy’s political machine. Despite the accusations of political cronyism, both Ferré and Rebozo secured endorsements from the *Miami Herald*, *Miami News*, and the *Miami Times*, the latter South Florida’s largest African American independent newspaper.  

The day before the election Spanish language newspapers in Miami implored their readers to head to the polls. *Patria* -- the newspaper that had once questioned whether Cubans should even attain residency, much less citizenship -- now beseeched Cubans to cast their ballot for Maurice Ferré. Editor Armando Sifredo emotionally explained the significance of Ferré’s candidacy by drawing attention to his ethnicity, “By voting for Maurice Ferré, we are enabling a Latino to become mayor. Somebody who is the same as us, in language, in religion, and in custom would occupy the highest office in Miami.” The historic nature of Ferré’s candidacy provided an extra incentive for Sifredo to hype his ethnicity. The *Patria* editor argued that a decisive vote for Ferré, without a run-off, would be a powerful symbol against Anglos in Miami who wanted Cubans and “the Hispanic influence in Miami to be absorbed into the county.” Exercising the vote was a means to undermine the totalitarianism of the Castro regime, as it was the “most powerful weapon [citizens of] free countries had.” *Diario las Americas* voiced their endorsement with equal enthusiasm, describing Ferré as a visionary beholden to no political machine, who would preserve the independence of the City of Miami to serve its residents directly and without county interference. Editor Alfredo Torres likewise called attention to Ferré’s ethnicity. Torres emphasized the new political consciousness and

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civic duty of Cubans and reminded his readers “in politics Cubans are no longer unconscious or apathetic...and our Cuban votes should go to Ferré.”

Conclusion

It was midnight on Election Day November 6, 1973, and the mood at Ferré campaign headquarters at 2727 Coral Way was upbeat. Ferré secured the election without a run off and with a plurality over his six opponents in all 82 districts. Yet it remained a closely contested election. Runner-up Gloria Calhoun refused to concede and accused Ferré of corruption, but Ferré’s victory was clear: he received 16,580 votes to Calhoun’s 5609. Manolo Reboso, the Bay of Pigs veteran and engineer, also secured a two-year term on the City of Miami commission, largely on the coattails of Ferré’s bilingual voter mobilization. Election day polling by the Miami Herald revealed strong ethnic voting patterns at work in Miami; Ferré gained his widest margins in Latino precincts followed by the majority black precincts.

The efforts of the Ferré campaign and the Latin League of Voters, in addition to the steady increase in naturalization rates among Cubans, had led to a record turnout among Latino voters, nearly double the number of Latino voters turned out for the 1973 city elections as had for the 1971 city elections. Extensive outreach efforts by the candidates brought them into contact with tens of thousands of Latinos from all walks of life, like Ofelia Lebatard, a Winn-Dixie supermarket cashier and newly naturalized American citizen. She described casting a vote for the first time in 25 years, “It was a thrill to vote again. It is a sacred right everyone should exercise.” Indeed, many of

Miami’s Latino voters viewed Maurice Ferré’s election as mayor as the moment in which Latinos finally became integrated into Miami’s political institutions.96

Ferré’s election in 1973 marked the birth of a Latino political machine and the birth of the Cuban-American voting bloc in Miami. Mayor Ferré would remain in power, with little opposition, for twelve more years. He was re-elected six times and his office withstood the Mariel Boatlift, the McDuffie Riot, and at one point, the highest murder rate in the country.

CHAPTER II: THE COUNTY THAT SPEAKS YOUR LANGUAGE

“What was so unusual about Spanish in Miami was not that it was so often spoken, but that it was so often heard.” – Joan Didion, Miami.

Introduction

Stocky and redheaded, Bernardo Benes stood out in the audience at the Dade County Board of Commissioners’ meeting on April 16, 1973. The commissioners’ meeting was unusually packed. Onlookers hovered in the aisles and lined the back of the room to watch Dade County become the first municipality in the United States with two official languages. Benes stood near the speaker’s podium, watching as years of activism came to fruition. In honor of his work, the commission anointed him as unofficial master of ceremonies and he concluded the roster of speakers briefing commissioners prior to the vote. As he concluded his statements he remarked: “Today is a beautiful day for Dade County and especially the 350,000 Spanish speaking people here…you are going to make official what is already a fact of life, that Dade County is already a bicultural county.” 97

When the resolution reached the first five out of eight votes necessary for passage, the county hall erupted noisily, and the standing room only audience of Cuban and Puerto Rican community leaders and residents broke out spontaneously in “extraordinary” applause. Commissioner Harvey Ruvin answered the roll call “si” instead of yes. Three more commissioners passed the resolution for a unanimous decision and, once again, the

97 Sam Jacobs, “Passed by Dade,” Miami Herald, 17 April 1973, 3-B.
assembled observers jumped to their feet and applauded thunderously, giving the commissioners a standing ovation.

Miami’s biculturalism and bilingualism may have been a “fact of life” to some, but the city was exceptional in its embrace of diversity policies, affirmative action, and bilingualism in local government during the 1970s. 1973 marked the turning point in the relationship between the local government and the growing Cuban community. The City of Miami elected its first Latino mayor. The Dade County Elections Board embarked on a highly successful voter registration effort. The Metro Dade Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution proclaiming Dade County “bilingual and bicultural” and designed an ambitious range of programming that would integrate Spanish speakers into county affairs, and rebrand Miami as the new capital of the Caribbean.

These local electoral and policy victories were the result of two major factors. First, the transformation of previously held conceptions of race and ethnicity in which the assimilationist vision of the 1960s gave way to the multiculturalism of the 1970s, marked by the passage of the 1975 Voting Rights Act Amendment. Secondly, the local activism of civic-minded members of the Cuban professional class, Bernardo Benes prominent among them, on behalf of the expansion of political representation for Cubans and other Latinos in Miami. With the wide support of grassroots organizations that ran the gamut from ILGWU locals to municipios, Benes and his social circle functioned as intermediaries between the federal government and municipal politicians. They pushed the notion of Cuban bilingualism and biculturalism as a positive good that would ultimately bolster the city’s image as a center for tourism and international business. This

98 Jacobs, “Passed by Dade,” Miami Herald, 3-B.
confluence of federal and municipal reform resulted in the transformation of Miami’s local government and political culture in the span of only a decade.

This chapter will use Bernardo Benes’s public life as a vehicle to understand the transformation of political culture in Miami in the 1970s, and to illustrate the first broad shift in ethnic politics nationally from assimilation to multiculturalism. First, I consider his cultivation of a large network of political and business allies, and his relationships with prominent figures in the Democratic Party as an engine to promote the enfranchisement and political recognition of the Cuban community in Miami. Then, I examine Benes’s involvement in several key local campaigns as examples of his call for and support of Latino political leadership. The chapter concludes with the passage of the 1973 Bilingual Bicultural Resolution, the centerpiece of Benes’s activism, and the nadir of the Dade County government’s acceptance of a rising Latino political class.

The Voting Rights Act Comes to Dade County

Historians of twentieth century liberalism have argued that in the 1970s the discourse around racial justice and civil rights shifted from an emphasis on racial integration and assimilation to the celebration of multiculturalism and diversity. In critical years following WWII, policy making and social activism had largely been informed by liberal universalism: “a belief in the fundamental united and sameness of all humanity.” Progressive Americans, such as members of the American Council on Race Relations, embraced racial liberalism and rejected the notion of inherent differences between racial and ethnic groups as prejudiced and misinformed. Given this paradigm,
the 1950s and 1960s call for racial integration was the logical progression in the development of a more inclusive American democracy.  

The civil rights movement did much to surmount the barriers of racial discrimination in American civic and public life. Under federal and state mandates, public facilities, educational and political institutions were finally opened to African-Americans. The federal government developed a number of progressive legal and employment programs to end legal segregation. Between 1966 and 1979, the budget of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission grew from $3 million to $111 million. The black middle class grew and the citizens of Cleveland elected Carl Stokes as the first black mayor of a major U.S. city. However, as the U.S. economy slowed in the early 1970s, it became apparent to black activists that many of economic and social gains of African-Americans were contingent on the largesse and interest of the federal government. In the late 1970s, affirmative action became synonymous with “reverse discrimination” as working class whites began to resent programs, such as hiring quotas, serving minorities. In a series of landmark decisions, the Supreme Court struck down affirmative action in university admissions and public school busing. Black

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neighborhoods and schools remained segregated and underfunded; true racial justice remained elusive.\textsuperscript{100}

Influential brown and black intellectuals began to question the integrationist project. Albert Murray, Amiri Baraka, and Harold Cruse critiqued the progress of civil rights, and posed the question: “Who is being integrated into what?” What were the implications of assimilating into white culture? What did the acceptance of whiteness as the cultural ideal mean for “newly racially conscious minorities”? These questions would have serious implications not only for blacks, but also for Latinos and Asian Americans in their quest for political recognition and access to institutions of power. As a result, Chicano cultural nationalists and their counterparts among American Indians and Asian Americans gained a greater voice in the early 1970s, by rejecting “conventional reform politics” and instead focusing their efforts on anti-assimilationist agendas.\textsuperscript{101}

This left policymakers to question if it was possible to preserve numerous racial and ethnic heritages and still share the same polity. These policies still intended to increase representation of minorities, but not because they needed to be subsumed, rather because racial and cultural difference was a positive good in mainstream institutions. Johnson’s Immigration Reform Act of 1965 had ushered in a new era of immigration. The demographic change that had transformed Miami from a sleepy resort town to the “Gateway to the Americas,” was visible in other American cities, too; refugees from Vietnam settled in large numbers in New Orleans, Louisiana and Orange County, California. Korean immigrants became prominent business owners in Chicago and the


\textsuperscript{101} Schulman, \textit{The Seventies}, 64-65; Gerstle, \textit{American Crucible}, 327-331.
Pico Union district of Los Angeles. Policymakers embraced some of these demographic shifts – and slowly, “diversity” supplanted “assimilation” as the driving force behind affirmative action and civil rights legislation and programs.¹⁰²

In this context, it is crucial to consider the role of federal reform and expansion of enfranchisement to Latinos and other minorities via the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965, before exploring the evolution of multiculturalism within Dade County’s government. Intended to address electoral discrimination against blacks in the South, the VRA curtailed state and local election officials from conducting elections without oversight, and authorized the U.S. Attorney General to oversee changes in local election laws and to appoint election monitors. However, the first iteration of the VRA failed to eliminate the barriers to voting that existed for Asian Americans, Hispanics, American Indians and other “language minorities,” except for a concession that banned literacy tests for five years, but only directly addressed Puerto Ricans or “persons educated in American-flag schools in which the prominent classroom language was other than English.” ¹⁰³

The limitation of the VRA in enfranchising language minorities was more immediately evident in Miami than anywhere else, simply because the demographics of the voting public in Dade County were changing at an unprecedented pace. Between

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1970 and 1975 the percentage Dade County constituents with citizenship increased from 12 percent of the “Spanish American” (or Latino) population to 32 percent. Lacking federal provisions for bilingual election materials, Miami polling places were often scenes of confusion, as new citizens with limited or non-existent English skills attempted to vote for the first time.104

Writing to Congressman Dante Fascell in 1971, Maria Hrywniak, a bilingual constituent, expressed her frustration at a scene she witnessed at a polling place in Homestead, a rural municipality in Southern Dade County. “Last year I have [sic] the experience to watch a young Cuban man using his pencil in a sample ballot that another Cuban couple had…I turned around and told him that this was illegal [sic] that by electoral laws you shouldn’t talk at all.” Hrywniak suggested that the Dade County Elections Board hire bilingual inspectors to supervise future elections, because “it is very important for everyone to know for what and for whom they are voting.” Representative Fascell responded and promised he would try to recruit some “Spanish speaking individuals who would be interested in serving at the polls in some official capacity.” Cubans had settled in nearly every precinct in Dade County; the geographic and manpower challenges of administering a countywide election, alone made this an impossible task to undertake without the cooperation of the Dade County Board of Elections and some form of federal intervention.105

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104 Spanish-American was the classification used by the Dade County Elections Board to designate persons of Latino descent born outside of the United States. This term was in use in county elections materials until ca. 1980; Joseph Malone – Assistant Dade County Supervisor of Elections, Spanish Americans in Electoral Process, Dade County, Fl., 1976, Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1844.

105 Maria D. Hrywniak to Hon. Dante B. Fascell, Homestead, Fl., 21 October 1971, Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1838; Hon. Dante B. Fascell
In 1975, Congress moved to extend the VRA’s provisions from banning electoral discrimination solely based on race to discrimination based on language. Following the literacy test ban in 1970, bilingual voting had been implemented piecemeal in some local elections in the Southwest with little success. In Arizona, a number of counties provided interpreters for Navajo speakers, but only at a few polling places and not at every election. Likewise, counties in California provided Spanish language ballots in some Latino/Chicano majority precincts in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the Spanish ballots had voting instructions only in English.\(^ {106}\)

The failure of local election oversight that occurred in Arizona and California indicated to Congress that eliminating the literacy requirement was not enough. In a series of VRA reauthorization hearings, the House and Senate Judiciary Committees heard extensive testimony from citizens and activists alike who argued that the dearth of basic public educational opportunities in Latino, Asian American, and Native American communities resulted in widespread English illiteracy, and as a result, disenfranchisement.

In response, Congress prescribed “other remedial devices” to allow these groups to participate in the electoral process. Foremost among them was bilingual voting implemented through the use of bilingual ballots and interpreters at all polling places.\(^ {107}\)

The 1975 VRA amendments established guidelines, or “eligibility formulas,” that would determine when localities would be mandated to provide language assistance. If a single

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\(^ {106}\) Trasvina, “Bilingual Ballots: Their History and a Look Forward,” 260.

language minority accounted for more than five percent of a jurisdiction’s voting age citizens and the English literacy rate was below the national average, or the jurisdiction conducted the 1972 election solely in English and had attracted less than 50 percent of potential voters, then Congress required written voter materials and oral assistance be made available in non-English languages.108

As a result, Dade County was designated a Title I jurisdiction, requiring federal oversight and enforcement of bilingual election procedures. After the passage of the Bilingual and Bicultural Ordinance of 1973, Dade County began offering bilingual voter materials and ballots upon request in county elections, but municipal elections remained single language until 1975. The Dade County Elections Board, under the leadership of Joyce Dieffenderfer, took an active role in providing a number of new special services including voter education, personnel training and registration procedures, with successful results. Their aggressive registration efforts led to unprecedented numbers of new Latino voters in 1975 and 1976. In a two-year span the number of registered Latino voters grew from 58 percent to 75 percent of Latino citizens. Aside from the unprecedented increase in voter registration of 17 percent, this percentage is particularly significant when compared to the population of Dade County as a whole. In 1976, only 64.5 percent of the eligible voting age population of Dade County was registered to vote, compared to 75 percent of eligible voting age Latinos.109

108 Trasvina, “Bilingual Ballots: Their History and a Look Forward,” 261; “Bilingual Voting Was Overdue,” Miami News, August 9, 1975, 10A.

Joseph Malone, Assistant Supervisor of Elections for Dade County, explained how the county targeted new Latino citizens for registration almost immediately after naturalization. Malone oversaw a cadre of county registrars who were sent to naturalization ceremonies armed with registration paperwork to encourage new citizens to register to vote immediately after the ceremony. In a massive Bicentennial themed ceremony held on July 4, 1976, a record 7000 new citizens, about 79 percent of them Cuban, were naturalized in Dade County. Through Malone’s organizing efforts, 5000 of these new citizens were successfully registered to vote by a Dade County Elections Board registrar before they left the naturalization ceremony that day.\(^{110}\)

Despite significant growth in Dade County voting power during this period Latinos remained a numerical minority. By the 1976 general election, Latinos comprised only 11.8 percent of the total Dade County voter roll. However, new election procedures and aggressive voter registration had an immediate impact on municipal elections. Latinos may have been only 11.8 percent of the county roll, but they held voter majorities in a number of key districts: Hialeah, Westchester, Flagami, Wynwood, and Little Havana. Hialeah and Sweetwater were incorporated municipalities, and the Latino majority was already evident in the election of Cuban municipal commissioners like Jorge Valdes. Flagami, Wynwood, and Little Havana were significant neighborhoods because they comprised a large segment of the incorporated City of Miami, the largest of Dade County’s municipalities. Between 1973 and 1975, Latino voters had a higher than average turn-out in municipal elections as well as the presidential primary (or “Florida

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presidential preference”). In the November 4, 1975 City of Miami municipal election all the high turnout precincts (30 percent or above turn out) were Latino majority precincts. The Presidential Preference election held on March 9, 1976 had an average Latino voter turn out of 59 percent, with Latino majority Little Havana, Precinct 658, showing one of the highest turnouts in the entire county with 68 percent.\footnote{Joseph Malone - Assistant Dade County Supervisor of Elections, \textit{Spanish Americans in Electoral Process}, Miami Fla., 1976, Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, University of Miami Library Special Collections, Box 1844.}

However, Dade County was not the norm. Most Title I jurisdictions had local election officials who were less than willing to comply with the amendments, and implementation problems were rampant nationally. This was partially the result of indifference of many white election officials to the enfranchisement of Asian Americans and Latinos, and antagonism towards federal intervention in state and local elections. Congress broadly construed the amendments, but neither they nor the U.S. Department of Justice provided extensive federal monitoring or federal training of election officials. With little federal funding or direct oversight attached to the aforementioned amendments, there was no incentive for local governments to extend voter registration drives to minority communities or to publicize the new laws. As a result, it took several years for the amendments to result in an increased number of minority voters at the polls. Despite these challenges, the amendments were extended in 1982, and eventually jurisdictions with large minority populations developed responsible, cost-effective, measures for running bilingual elections.\footnote{For example, Los Angeles spent less than 2 percent of its total election costs on bilingual assistance by 1983. Trasvina, “Bilingual Ballots: Their History and a Look Forward,” 262.}
Bernardo Benes and the Development of Municipal – Federal Political Networks

Federal policy and voter registration drives were not enough to increase Cuban and Latino representation in local government, or to make Dade County embrace bilingual and bicultural Cuban. Cuban civic activists, Bernardo Benes foremost among them, were both the originators and beneficiaries of the emerging diversity-friendly policies in Miami’s local government. Benes and his allies, like their counterparts in in Texas and California, demanded that the language and culture of Latinos in Miami be respected and upheld by county and municipal government. This reveals a consistent foregrounding of cultural nationalism in attaining political recognition and empowerment for Latinos that transcended geography, country of origin and socioeconomic class.

Benes was Vice-President of Washington Federal Savings & Loan on Miami Beach, one of a handful of Cuban bank executives in Miami, and was active in the Sephardic Jewish community, Cuban professional organizations and the Florida Democratic Party. He was an astute power broker who leveraged his connections across ethnic and religious lines throughout the county, on behalf of numerous political or social causes related to the plight of Cuban community in Miami. Benes was the linchpin of a network of civic minded and politically ambitious Latino and Jewish American bankers, lawyers, economists, and real estate developers who would rise to prominence in county and city politics and in the Florida Democratic Party.113

Benes’s story of exile was a familiar one for many Cubans in Miami. Benes was born in Matanzas, Cuba in 1934, to Jewish parents who emigrated to the island from Russia and Lithuania in the 1920s. His father owned one of Cuba’s largest garment

113 Bernardo Benes, interview by Julio Estorino, Luis J. Botifoll Oral History Project, video, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
manufacturing facilities, and the family enjoyed a position of relative prosperity until the 1959 Revolution. In 1960, Benes fled to Miami temporarily leaving his wife and infant daughter behind, and abandoning a successful career as a lawyer and public accountant. In explaining his attraction to community activism, Benes recalled the feeling of uprootedness, alienation, and loneliness of exile he experienced almost immediately upon landing at Miami International Airport: “It was a terrible day, of terrible anguish, to not have anybody, to not be able to communicate with anybody, to have left everything: family, education...”\textsuperscript{114}

In December 1965, reacting to the undocumented flow of Cubans to South Florida during the Camarioca Boatlift, President Lyndon Johnson announced the commencement of the Freedom Flights. Benes approached Marshall Weiss, director of the Cuban Refugee Center (CRC), about creating a program to provide support to refugees at the airport. Weiss suggested creating a cafeteria where CRC volunteers could greet new arrivals and assist the thousands of Cubans arriving weekly. Benes was tasked with raising the funds and finding volunteers for the project. The program was a success and lasted until the Freedom Flights were terminated on April 6, 1973, having brought 300,000 Cubans to the United States. Benes’s monumental undertaking and work with the CRC attracted the attention of the United Way of Greater Miami, and he was “recruited” as their point person for Cuban related community projects.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{114} Bernardo Benes, interview by Julio Estorino, \textit{Luis J. Botifoll Oral History Project}, video, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.

\textsuperscript{115} Bernardo Benes, interview by Julio Estorino, \textit{Luis J. Botifoll Oral History Project}, video, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
The United Way was just the beginning. Benes’s position as a reform minded pillar of the community led to his role as the Cuban voice in the Florida Democratic Party. In 1968, the core of the Hubert Humphrey presidential campaign in South Florida was comprised of Benes, Maurice Ferré, and Arthur Courshon. Benes and City of Miami commissioner Maurice Ferré were among the few Latinos who organized fundraising events and providing logistical and financial support to the Hubert Humphrey campaign in South Florida. Courshon was the founder of Washington Federal Savings & Loan, the bank that employed Benes as a vice president.

A Jewish WWII veteran, banker, and pioneer of condominium development in Miami Beach, Courshon, like Benes, was known for his civic engagement in elite social and political organizations in Miami and Miami Beach. Courshon rose to prominence in the party as co-chair of Kennedy’s campaign in Florida in 1960, and despite Kennedy’s loss of the state to Nixon in the election, Courshon established himself as the most effective fundraiser for the Democrats in Florida. Courshon was the consummate political insider who never ran for political office himself, serving as Chairman of the Democratic Party National Finance Committee. Courshon was a lifelong friend and confidante to both Congressman Claude Pepper and State Senator Jack D. Gordon, who was also a banker at Washington Federal Savings & Loan. In 1968, Courshon recognized Benes’s unique position as one of the handful of influential Spanish-speaking Cubans in the Democratic Party, and relied on his friend heavily to garner support and speak on behalf of the Humphrey campaign at local fundraisers and rallies in the months leading up to the election.116

Benes’s work for the Humphrey campaign did not go unnoticed by insiders in the national Democratic Party. The Democratic National Committee was very slowly beginning to acknowledge the political potential of Cubans in South Florida. In September 1968, Benes was tapped to escort Norman Stark Paul, Under Secretary of the Air Force and a representative of Vice President Humphrey, at a political rally on Cuban issues. The rally comprised a series of lectures by representatives sent by the three major presidential candidates, Humphrey, Nixon, and third party candidate Wallace, followed by a Catholic mass. Paul sent Vice President Humphrey a detailed rundown of the rally, and he lauded Benes as being “of tremendous assistance” during the event and his stay in Miami. The success of the event itself was a different matter altogether. Paul described the turnout, as “disappointing” and he seemed unimpressed with the speeches of the other representatives. In his account, Paul remarked that Governor George C. Wallace’s spokesman was a “real red-neck” and a “complete bore,” and that the Nixon man said “virtually nothing” at all.  

However, Paul immediately recognized the ignorance of his own party to the untapped voting potential of Cubans in Miami, especially in comparison to the overtures of the Nixon campaign: “…Nixon forces are working hard on Spanish-speaking communities, Cuban and otherwise…committees are being formed etc.” Paul advised Humphrey to address the “Cuban situation,” and prevent Cubans from feeling as if “their cause is gathering dust in some State Department file.” Paul’s letter reveals the extent to which the National Democratic Committee failed to develop a political base among Cubans and others Latinos in the 1960s, despite “get out the vote” efforts in Florida,

117 Norman Stark Paul to Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, Washington D.C., 12 September 1968, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
Texas, and California. Republican hopes to attract the Latino vote proved credible, as Latino Democrats were growing dissatisfied with their treatment by a Democratic Party unwilling to address their concerns. Paul clearly identified the concerns of Cuban voters specifically: a desire to be acknowledged as new citizens whose interest in Cuba was fundamentally American and part of a national commitment to eradicating communist threats worldwide, rather than a “forgotten” special interest case overshadowed by Vietnam.  

Congressman Claude Pepper also came to rely on Benes as his most ardent Cuban constituent, and as an inside connection to the Cuban community. The two men would collaborate on community projects and correspond extensively until Pepper’s death in 1989. In 1967, fresh off his successful reelection the previous November, Pepper enlisted Benes to write editorials and biographical pieces, intended for publication in the Cuban periodiquitos, which emphasized Pepper’s ongoing commitment to fighting the Cold War and bringing freedom to Cuba. Benes used his social position and clout in the business community to mount a letter writing and direct mail campaign to key Cuban social organizations on Pepper’s behalf. In 1967, he sent Jorge Esteva, secretary of the Cuban Lions Club in Exile (Leones Cubanos en Exilio), a packet of materials on Pepper, including a short biography in Spanish, a signed photograph, and a copy of Pepper’s motion before Congress to acknowledge the continued efforts of the United States to undermine the Castro regime. 

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118 Norman Stark Paul to Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, Washington D.C., 12 September 1968, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.

119 Jorge Esteva to Bernardo Benes, Miami Beach, 30 October 1967, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
In 1968, Benes drafted a Western Union Telegram celebrating the centennial of the *Grito de Yara* on Pepper’s behalf that was sent to Dr. José Vidañas, president of the Rotary Club of Cuba in Exile (*Club Rotario de Cuba en Exilio*). Greeting Vidañas on what is considered the birthday of Cuba’s first war of independence from Spain, the telegram proclaimed: “...with the efforts of all, we will soon see the free and democratic Cuba Martí and Céspedes dreamed of.”

Benes interceded frequently on Pepper’s behalf, and his correspondence indicates the extent to which Benes made sure that local Cuban leaders knew Pepper was their champion in Washington and a “longtime supporter of free immigration.” To his professional network of Cuban businessmen, Benes circulated copies of congressional press releases that ranged from extolling Pepper’s appointment of a young Cuban North Miami High School graduate to the U.S. Air Force Academy, to announcing Pepper’s sponsorship of a Small Business Administration lease guarantee grant to a Cuban shopping center being built in Little Havana. Benes also aided Pepper in his correspondence with Cuban parolee constituents seeking congressional intercession with the Department of State for visas, especially for family members still in Cuba or exiled abroad.

In a series of correspondence between Pepper, the U.S. Ambassador to Spain, and Benes, Pepper sought Benes’s advice on the case of Delfina Roig, a Cuban woman whose

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120 Representative Claude Pepper to Dr. Jorge Vidaña, Miami, 9 October 1968, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.

121 For Release from the Office of Representative Claude Pepper of Florida, Washington DC, 1 July 1968, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library; For Release from the Office of Representative Claude Pepper of Florida, Washington DC, 21 February 1968, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library; For Release from the Office of Representative Claude Pepper of Florida, Washington DC, 21 June 1967, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
husband was exiled in Spain while she and her children were struggling to get by on a small Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) pension in Miami. By providing Benes with copies of letters from Cuban families petitioning for visas or naturalization and soliciting feedback on handling sensitive cases, it is clear that Pepper’s office wanted to showcase the Congressman’s active involvement in rescuing political refugees.122

The working relationship between Representative Pepper and Benes in the late 1960s complicates contemporary notions of Cuban aversion to the Democratic Party. Rather, partisanship had little effect on how Cubans in Miami interacted with their elected representatives on the state and local level. In 1962, Pepper was elected to the newly created 3rd district, which encompassed downtown Miami and Miami Beach. Pepper was midway through a long and storied career in which he had served both as a U.S. Senator and then as a U.S. Congressman representing Miami. The 3rd district had a growing Cuban population that was liberal on domestic policy issues, but remained conservative on Cold War foreign policy. Pepper began his political career as a liberal New Dealer and staunch ally of Roosevelt, and then survived red baiting accusations of communist sympathy in the early 1950s to represent the rapidly growing 3rd district.123

Attuned to his newly enfranchised Cuban constituency, Pepper remained a stalwart Cold Warrior and took any opportunity to lambast Fidel Castro as a Soviet puppet and praise the patriotism of Cuban exiles on the congressional floor. Long before most of his Cuban constituents could cast a vote, he published Spanish campaign ads in

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122 Representative Claude Pepper to Delfina Roig, Miami, 18 January 1973, Bernardo Benes, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library; Ambassador Horacio Rivero to Representative Claude Pepper, Washington DC, 9 January 1973, Bernardo Benes, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.

the periodiquitos, and actively courted Cuban and Latino voters in his district through his engagement of Cuban community organizations and social clubs, his support of the Cuban Refugee Program, and his hard line on communism in Latin America. Pepper relished his status as a prominent foe of the Castro regime. He forwarded to Benes an amusing transcript of a CIA intercepted Cuban radio broadcast that criticized his blind allegiance to the “Cuban counterrevolutionaries” residing in Florida and his “ridiculous ignorance” of foreign policy for calling for “direct aggression” to be launched against Cuba.124

**Ferré for County Mayor 1970**

Benes built a network of state and national power brokers interested in the growth of a politically active Cuban community in Miami. He also drew support and built alliances through his involvement in campaigns for municipal office. Keenly aware of the necessity of empowering Cuban voters and would-be voters through local elections, in 1970 Benes became involved in the mayoral campaign of Maurice Ferré.

In the weeks before the run-off to the 1970 election race between Maurice Ferré and City of Miami Mayor Steve Clark for the position of Metro Dade County Mayor, Benes published a stump speech in Spanish on behalf of Ferré. In it he extolled the importance of voting in local elections and encouraged Cubans to head to the polls. Benes identified language as the primary obstacle to Cuban political participation and access to county services Cubans were entitled to as U.S. taxpayers. These two issues became central to Benes’s creation of the Bilingual and Bicultural Resolution. Benes connected the issue of

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124 John S. Warner, CIA Legislative Counsel, to Representative Claude Pepper, Washington DC, 20 October 1967, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
language directly to the election, although bilingual services were not a major platform issue for either candidate.  


County elections were non-partisan, but Ferré was well known in the community as a Democrat, and Benes worried it could rankle Cuban voters more partial to

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125 Bernardo Benes, “AL VOTAR…”, 17 November 1970, Miami Beach, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.

Republican foreign policy stances on Cuba. Reflecting these fears, Benes encouraged Cubans to overlook partisanship in supporting local candidates. He encouraged Cubans to instead consider who could do the most good for the day-to-day functioning of Dade County and offer the most to Cubans living in Miami: “The problem of la Patria won’t be resolved by the Commissioners of Hialeah or any other city…so, which candidates are interested in the 100,000 Cubans who live in Dade County and don’t speak English?” Benes acknowledged a pervasive mindset among many Cubans in Miami that the return to Cuba was imminent, and correctly suspected that this accounted for much of the Cuban apathy toward local politics.127

Instead of crushing the hope of return, Benes reminded them that regardless of their citizenship or interest in casting a vote, they were taxpayers entitled to county services and the attention of public servants as long as they resided in Miami. This tactic allowed Cuban voters to be invested in local politics without necessarily sacrificing their allegiance to the political cause of a free Cuba. Benes countered a discourse that remained pervasive -- especially among the more extreme factions of the independent Cuban press in Miami -- which characterized the attainment of naturalization and assimilation as tantamount to betrayal of the Cuban nationalist project. Rather than engage directly with this discourse, Benes correctly drew attention to many of the more immediate concerns of Cubans such as access to affordable healthcare, and bilingual emergency and county administrative services that were determined by local government.

Benes was not alone in his crusade to get Cubans to the poll in the Ferré campaign. Alfredo Durán, the Bay of Pigs veteran and rising star in both Dade County

127 Bernardo Benes, “AL VOTAR…”, 17 November 1970, Miami Beach, Fla., Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
politics and the Florida Democratic Party, led the Latin American Committee to Elect Maurice Ferré. Durán’s committee and dozens of canvassers devoted themselves to getting out the vote in Miami’s Cuban and Puerto Rican neighborhoods, recruiting campaign volunteers, and increasing Ferré’s visibility as the candidate who cared about Latinos. The Latin American committee arranged appearances and interviews on WQBA “La Cubanisima,” the most popular Spanish language radio station in South Florida. They established offices and call centers in the key Cuban majority districts of Little Havana, Westchester, and Hialeah. The Latin American Committee scheduled Spanish-speaking volunteers to telephone canvas on key dates immediately before Election Day to remind residents to vote and to arrange transportation to the polls if needed.128

Durán emphasized Ferré’s Latino identity to sell him as a candidate to Cubans. In a Spanish direct mailing sent to Cuban households, Durán described Ferré as “a man who speaks our language, knows our problems, and has taken the charge to serve our community.” The Latin American Committee was not only interested in addressing the specific needs of Latinos, but in emphasizing the symbolic power of electing a Spanish speaking Latino official. They described their mission as “an essential proposition: to elect a Latin American mayor.” For his part, Benes wielded his connections to the Jewish community in Miami to form the Committee of Jewish Cubans to Elect Maurice Ferré, and organized a direct mailing campaign to Jewish families in Miami and Miami Beach. In a Spanish mailer to recruit new members, Benes and ten other eminent Cuban Jewish professionals promised a “dynamic and aggressive” new mayor who would resolve Dade

128 Latin Americans for Ferré Committee Memo to Bernardo Benes, October 1970, Miami Beach, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library; Dr. Bernardo Benes to El Comite de Hebreos Cubanos en Miami, October 20, 1970, Miami, Fla., Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
County’s “biggest problems.” The Cuban Jewish Committee also encouraged interested parties not eligible to vote to take part and encourage friends and family members with citizenship to vote for Ferré on their behalf.\(^{129}\)

However, Ferré’s viability as a general candidate still rested largely on his ability to mobilize all of Dade’s ethnic interest groups, and the support of mainstream journalists. The *Miami Herald* endorsed Ferré, but merely as the only remotely viable candidate in a thin field. Ferré described the endorsement editorial as “90 percent about Steve Clark, and then…a small slap in the back for Maurice Ferré.” Clark entered the race late in September, and ran on a pro-developer, pro-construction platform that capitalized largely on his status as a “card carrying member of the carpenters union,” and on Miami’s booming real estate market. The two emerged as the immediate front-runners, and their “bloody battle” played out in the local press, and during city of Miami commission meetings were they frequently butted heads in the months leading up to the election.\(^{130}\)

Ferré admitted that he knew the moment Clark entered the race that in terms of “racial and class politics” he was doomed. Ferré’s campaign strategy relied heavily on winning the support of each of Miami’s distinct ethnic voting blocs. Ferré described the various constituencies as such: “It’s about personalities and people…the Polish Club, the German American Club, the Greek vote, the Jewish vote…and then of course all these senior citizens…and then labor was very important.” Ferré, Benes, and Durán tried to

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\(^{129}\) Alfredo Durán on behalf of Latin Americans for Ferré Committee, October 1970, Miami, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.

\(^{130}\) Maurice Ferré in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014.
outmaneuver Clark by devoting significant time to getting out the Latino vote, though Dade still lacked a significant Latino voting bloc.  

On Election Day, neither Ferré nor Clark secured the majority needed to win outright, and the election went to a hotly contested run-off. Ferré was interviewed on WQBA on November 15; in a last ditch appeal to Cuban voters before the run-off vote. In a series of questions scripted by Durán, Benes, and the Latin American Committee, the issues at stake for Latino voters were not so different from those that defined any county mayoral campaign: inefficient trash collection, a dearth of affordable housing, construction of a new county hospital, and the consolidation of county and municipal governments. However, the interview concluded with a series of pointed questions that clearly addressed the Latino experience in Miami: how will county officials offer services to the 100,000 people in Dade County who don’t speak English? How will the county promote intercultural exchange between Anglos and Hispanics? Ferré’s campaign placed the issue of county language services and Anglo-Latin relations at the forefront of the campaign, and gave a sense of urgency to the plight of a growing non-English speaking population who were completely cut off from county services and local political life.

The County That Speaks Your Language

Ferré lost the 1970 election to City of Miami mayor Steve Clark, but Benes continued to use the campaign’s momentum to advance bilingualism as a local political issue. On May 6, 1971, Benes appeared before the Community Relations Board (CRB) on behalf of the Greater Miami Coalition to discuss bilingualism before a racially diverse

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131 Maurice Ferré in discussion with the author, 2 October 2014.

132 Latin Americans for Ferré, Questions for WQBA, 15 November 1970, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
board of community leaders and activists. The CRB was a progressive outgrowth of the county government. Established in 1962 it mediated local race relations, served as an intermediary between civil rights groups and local government, and advised the Board of County Commissioners. Drawing on evidence from surveys conducted by the Greater Miami Coalition, Benes took the CRB to task for what he identified as a “hostile attitude based on prejudice” toward Latinos among county agency employees and a general need for “attitudinal change” in the community.133

Benes devoted most of his speech to identifying the projects and bilingual community services that had been created to serve the Spanish speaking community without the CRB or county support. Benes ran down the seventeen-point list that described the coalition building efforts of the Spanish Speaking Committee of the Great Miami Coalition. The Committee was created to increase Cuban and other Latino representation in the public and private sector and to increase Latino representation on the advisory boards of County agencies.

The programs the Committee created ranged from the creation of Cuban Parent Teacher Associations with Dade County Schools, to organizing groups of Spanish speaking social workers, to the implementation of Spanish-speaking telephone operators and staff at Southern Bell. In his successful letter writing campaign to the Vice President of Southern Bell, Benes wrote that the lack of Spanish speaking staff and operators not only limited access to phone service but created a “poor image” of the company to the nearly 300,000 Spanish speaking customers Southern Bell provided service to in Dade County alone. The Spanish-Speaking Committee had also collaborated extensively with

133 Bernardo Benes Speech to the Dade County Community Relations Board. Miami, 6 May 1971, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
the Dade County Board of Public Instruction to create a series of cultural education workshops intended to introduce Anglos and African Americans to their Cuban neighbors.  

Benes made it clear that efforts to increase the recognition and accommodation of Spanish speakers in Dade County were too often being left to Cuban groups and activists alone. More importantly, these small victories were doing little to combat the larger problem of community intolerance for Latinos, especially Cubans. He recommended that the CRB undertake a number of programs to make itself more accessible to the Latino community. Benes criticized the CRB for not employing a full-time Spanish-speaking staff member in its office nor having Latino representation on the board. Benes’s suggestions were not as concrete as many of his other recommendations to local organizations, but clearly he felt that the CRB offered an opportunity to change “hearts and minds” in creating a local climate of acceptance towards Spanish-speaking Dade residents.

Benes wanted the CRB to host “rap sessions” or town halls where Anglos and Latinos would have the opportunity to discuss community issues and form positive relationships in a neutral environment. The necessity of these community forums reflects the pervasiveness of residential segregation in Miami, which contributed to ethnic tensions between native Anglos, Latinos, and African Americans. Although not referred to in this CRB forum explicitly, the problem of de facto residential segregation is an

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134 Bernardo Benes to Lawrence B. Sheffey, Miami Beach, 23 February 1971, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.

135 Bernardo Benes Speech to the Dade County Community Relations Board, Miami, 6 May 1971, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
undercurrent in Benes’s dealings with the CRB, and was a major issue the CRB attempted to address from its founding.

In 1971, Benes found another ally in Italian-American Congressman Dante Fascell. Like Claude Pepper, Fascell was a devout Cold Warrior who sponsored legislation to strengthen the Cuban trade embargo and increase federal aid for Cuban refugees during his membership on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. In light of the inroads the Republican Party was making in Miami’s Latino communities, Fascell and Benes forged a bond over their shared frustration at the Democratic Party’s lack of interest in cultivating a Latino voting bloc in South Florida. The Nixon Administration was aggressively courting the Latino vote with programs like the National Economic Development Agency (NEDA), established by Vice President Spiro Agnew as an outgrowth of the Small Business Administration, which supported Latinos creating their own small businesses. In personal correspondence with Benes, Fascell expressed his disappointment with the Florida Democratic Committee’s half-hearted efforts to register new Cuban voters: “Neither the County nor State Committees [are] able to amount any significant continuing campaign…just to have some kind of an effort going, I undertook to write each person who became a citizen…”

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137 Dante B. Fascell to Dr. Bernardo Benes, 19 May 1972, Washington, D.C., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1838.
Benes was even more critical of the State Democratic Committee’s floundering outreach strategy: “While the Republican Party has been active in seeking the support of the Cuban-American in Dade County, the Democratic Party doesn’t show any sign of being alive!”  

Benes shared a rumor that a group of Cuban Republicans recruited by President Nixon’s re-election committee had raised the “astronomic” sum of $800,000, while local Democrats were incapable of even finding Cubans to pass out literature and register voters at naturalization ceremonies. Benes encouraged Fascell to seek out the support of Durán and political maverick Reboso, two other prominent Cuban Democrats, and to work harder at promoting young Cuban Democrats instead of building alliances with Cuban Republicans, simply in the service of tokenism. Fascell agreed that Cubans needed to be placed in more visible positions by Democratic Party leadership, in order to cultivate better ties with the community, but he acknowledged that such tactics “were no substitute for a well-organized, highly visible [national] Democratic Party effort.”

Fascell received a similar warning from Mayer Finkel, the business manager of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) office in Miami: that the Democratic Party was not paying enough attention to the fastest growing segment of Miami’s electorate, in contrast to the Republican Party’s push for the Latino vote. The garment industry in Miami was comprised almost entirely of Cuban and Puerto Rican women piece-workers. Finkel passed along a leaflet given to him by one of his union members that Republican Party representatives were passing out at naturalization ceremonies.

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138 Dr. Bernardo Benes to Dante B. Fascell, 8 May 1972, Miami Beach, Fl., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1838.

139 Dante B. Fascell to Dr. Bernardo Benes, 19 May 1972, Washington, D.C., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1838.
ceremonies. The simple mimeographed leaflet was written in Spanish and entreated new citizens to “participate in the selection of your governing officials, and make your opinion count in the regulation of taxes, the interests of the community and the busing of children to schools far from their homes.”

The ILGWU, part of the AFL-CIO, was at the center of the dwindling labor establishment in Miami, but even as their numbers shrunk they staunchly allied themselves to the Democratic Party. Finkel suggested on behalf of the ILGWU that “the Democratic Party set up the same sort of committees to help these new citizens…” and to make sure they were properly informed of the Democratic political platform. Democrats were failing abysmally in tailoring their message to Miami’s growing Latino population. Fascell was aware of this and offered Finkel the same response he offered Benes--that his efforts had been stymied by a lack of interest at the state and national level of the Democratic Party, and that there was little else he could do but gather his own information for campaigning purposes and reach out individually to new citizens in his district.

Beginning in 1971, Benes and Congressman Fascell began to assess the stability and change in the basic Democratic Party commitments of Miami Cuban voters in order to fully gauge the political potential of this rapidly growing Latino community, including those who were citizens but remained unregistered and did not vote. Congressman Fascell contacted urban demographers and geographers studying the growing Cuban

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140 Mayer Finkel to Hon. Dante B. Fascell, 10 July 1972, Miami, Fl., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections, University of Miami Library, Box 1838.

141 Dante B. Fascell to Mayer Finkel, 18 July 1972, Miami, Fl., Dante B. Fascell Congressional Papers, Special Collections University of Miami Library, Box 1838.
community in Miami in order to better understand how to campaign effectively in Florida’s rapidly changing 12th district. In April 1971, Fascell obtained a copy of *The Projected Impact of Cuban Settlement on Voting Pattern in Metropolitan Miami, Florida*, co-authored by Robert C. Mings and Paul Salter. The Democratic Representative’s track record in Cuban districts contradicted the study’s prediction that the Cuban voter “will turn Miami from a liberal stronghold to a source of conservative strength.”

More useful to Fascell, Mings and Salter identified two types of Cuban voters: “the exile type” and “the immigrant type.” The former expected to return to Cuba and was uninterested in naturalization, while the latter was “more realistic” and had begun to look at Miami as their permanent home. The “immigrant types” were the constituents that Fascell needed to target, according to the geographers. Fascell thanked Salter and Mings effusively for “filling an obvious void in political intelligence.” Durability of party identification in determining voter choice was of great import to Fascell and Benes, and the article as a “cause for concern” for Miami Democrats, whom Fascell felt needed to do more in addressing the problems of the Cuban community and reconciling “prevailing attitudes with [the] party…”

Led by Benes, the Spanish Speaking Committee independently conducted a survey of the 26 Dade County Boards and discovered that Latinos were only represented on eight boards. Of those eight, only two boards, the Zoning Appeals Board and the

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Transportation Advisory Committee, had more than one Latino member. Benes circulated the letter to every Metro Dade County Commissioner and included a copy of the survey’s findings. To supplement the survey, Benes commissioned Biscayne College economics professor Dr. Antonio Jorge to write a policy paper on the relationship between county services and bilingualism.144

Specifically, Benes wanted to determine what efforts had been undertaken to facilitate access to county programs and services for limited English proficiency and non-English speaking residents. Benes also wanted to ascertain if County employees were fluent in any languages other than Spanish and exhibited sensitivity towards the culture of Latino residents. Jorge and Benes intended the policy paper for members of the Coalition and for circulation to commissioners interested in how implementation of a language as well as an affirmative action program could make county services and employment more inclusive. This did not mean assigning County employee volunteers as in-house interpreters, one of the ways by which government agencies often circumvented hiring Latinos.145

Jorge’s findings confirmed Benes’s fears. In a letter accompanying the survey sent to Dade County Mayor Jack B. Orr in 1972, Benes decried the “disturbing” fact that Latinos were significantly underrepresented in all the county’s many agencies. Jorge framed the issue of county agencies servicing ethnic groups as part of a larger political discourse about the nature of cultural pluralism in the United States: “Are we striving

144 In 1961, American Augustinian Friars expelled from Cuba after the confiscation of the Universidad Católica de Santo Tomás de Villanueva by the Castro regime founded Biscayne College in Miami. Biscayne came under the sponsorship of the Archdiocese of Miami in 1984 and with the attainment of university level accreditation was renamed St. Thomas University in 1988.

145 Dr. Antonio Jorge to Members of Ad Hoc Spanish Speaking Committee, Miami, ca. October 1972, Bernardo Benes, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
towards total assimilation…or are we laboring for cultural identity and uniqueness…?”

The Biscayne College professor argued there were fundamentally two types of bilingual services the county could offer. On the one hand, it could merely offer bilingual services, such as training emergency response staff to respond to calls in Spanish, or provide publications such as county permit applications in Spanish. Alternatively, however, a fully bilingual and bicultural County office would deliver the services and “tailor” them in terms of the cultural needs of the target communities.¹⁴⁶

On April 16, 1973, Benes’s tireless efforts came to fruition. The Dade County Board of Commissioners heeded his call and Miami became the only city in the United States with two official languages: the result of a county resolution that formally acknowledged the cultural place and permanence of Spanish-speaking Latinos in Dade County.¹⁴⁷

The Board of County Commissioners, with a single black commissioner and no Latino commissioners, passed the Bilingual and Bicultural Resolution of 1973 unanimously. Among those assembled were Bernardo Benes, Armando Lacasa of the

¹⁴⁶ Bernardo Benes to the Honorable John B. Orr, 18 October 1972, Miami FL, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library; Dr. Antonio Jorge to Members of Ad Hoc Spanish Speaking Committee, Miami, ca. October 1972, Bernardo Benes, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.

¹⁴⁷ Full text of the resolution: “WHEREAS, the history of Dade County has been beneficially and inextricably lined interlaced with that of our Spanish-speaking population and WHEREAS, a large and growing percentage of the population of Dade County is of Spanish origin; and WHEREAS, Dade County is legally, morally and historically obligated to aid our Spanish-speaking population in achieving the goals they have traveled so very far to share; and WHEREAS, it is the welcome responsibility of Dade County to aid the Spanish-speaking community in their efforts to enter more easily the mainstream American way of life; WHEREAS, the Spanish-speaking population of Dade County, many of whom have retained the culture and language of their native lands, encounter special difficulties in communicating with governmental agencies and officials; and WHEREAS, our Spanish-speaking population has earned, through its ever increasing share of the tax burden, and active participation in community affairs, the right to be serviced and heard at all levels of government; and WHEREAS, Dade County has a need to expand its communications with the Spanish-speaking segment of its population in order to promote a mutually prosperous interchange of ideas as well as a closer affinity with these citizens.” April 16, 1973, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection.
Manpower Training Agency, Alfredo Durán, and Luis Sabines, President of the Latin Chamber of Commerce (CAMACOL). These individuals along with other Latino community leaders were invited to testify before the Commission on the resolution’s importance for nearly 350,000 local Spanish speakers. Their testimony proved to be a resounding success in justifying their position on behalf of Miami’s Latinos.148

Image 6. Caricature of 1972-1973 Metro-Dade Board of County Commissioners 149

However, the County Commission that passed the resolution had no idea what implementation of such a broad policy would actually entail. In an interview about the roll out of the groundbreaking legislation with the Los Angeles Times, Dade County Mayor Jack Orr stated flippantly, “I really don’t know…but we’ll most certainly have all street and office signs printed in English and Spanish…” Orr’s candor revealed the disconnect between the county’s intentions and the realities of serving nearly 350,000 Latino residents, predominantly Cuban, without alienating racially biased Anglo

148 Diario Las Américas, “Por Unanimad se Aprobo Declarar a Dade Bilingüe,” 17 April 1973, 1, 17.

149 Bernardo Benes kept this caricature clipped from the Miami News with the drafts of his correspondence to the Commission about the Bilingual Resolution; Miami News Caricature of County Commission in 1973.
constituents. Orr’s flippant remark did not go unnoticed. Once more, *Miami Herald* Editor in Chief Don Shoemaker used the paper’s opinion and editorial pages to attack the values and cultures of Miami’s Latinos. The day following the resolution’s passage, the *Herald* published a short but pithy editorial criticizing the County Commissioners for passing legislation that “could prove costly in taxpayer’s money and county cohesiveness.” Shoemaker took aim at the commission’s public recognition of Miami’s Latinos, suggesting that the resolution served only to “belabor the obvious by translating the de facto situation into a de jure situation.” Shoemaker’s commentary confirmed a common view among Miami Anglos: Cubans and other Latinos could be tolerated as neighbors, or as colleagues, but not as a threat to the political order as it existed.  

Shoemaker’s editorial did not go unnoticed for it once again demonstrated the insensitivity of many Miamians to the causes and interests of the Cuban community. Outraged, Benes immediately wrote a reply to Shoemaker, addressing his “concerns” in a multi-point memo on Washington Federal Savings and Loan stationery. Benes emphasized that the resolution would serve primarily to “change the attitude of some people in Dade County who are supposed to be servicing the total community…”

Benes’s thinly veiled jab was the first of four points that answered the editorial’s budgetary concerns. Assuming his role as an influential local banker, Benes went on to frame the resolution as a source of revenue, emphasizing it could increase the “business potential” of U.S. firms hoping to use Miami as a stepping-stone to commercial

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151 Bernardo Benes to Don Shoemaker, 18 April 1973, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.
opportunities in Latin America. Clearly, Benes’s response to Shoemaker was a strategic choice that emphasized the economic potential of bilingualism. It was difficult to deny the centrality of tourism to Miami’s economy, and if offering more services in Spanish meant more tourists, bilingualism potentially could become a source of additional revenue for the county, and the resolution would be more palatable to the predominantly Anglo business community. Nonetheless, with the passage of the resolution Benes and leaders of Cuban social organizations won a victory in the ongoing battle for power between Miami’s white elite and the rapidly growing Latino community.

**The Implementation of a Bilingual and Bicultural Dade County**

Beginning in May 1973, the momentum of creating a new bilingual and bicultural local government shifted from Cuban pressure group activism to the County Commissioners tasked with developing the programming to carry out its mandate. Benes remained a central figure in local civic issues and politics, but once the resolution passed he shifted his attention to maintaining a Latino voter base for the Florida Democratic Party and later working with the Carter administration on immigration reform, and less to petitioning the county commission.

With the resolution in place, the County prioritized bilingual employment programs (“Employment and Service Programs”), communication and signage improvements (“Communications Program”), and public relations and business/tourism development in Latin America (“Economic Development and Tourism Industries”)

County Manager Ray Goode compiled a report for the Bilingual and Bicultural Task Force that outlined the major areas to be targeted by the program. The task force was as a

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152 Memorandum by Ray Goode on Bilingual and Bicultural Task Force, Miami, 8 August 1973, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.
precursor to the Office of Latin Affairs, and broadly concerned itself with only the three major areas. The Task Force was made up of five members, all county employees, and reported directly to the Board of County Commissioners and Mayor Orr. Jorge Guerra, Emilio Caballero, and Salvador Lew were newly naturalized Cuban refugees employed in Human Resources Administration. María Casellas, from the Department of Public Employment, represented Puerto Rican interests, and Fernando Pro from the South Dade Government Center, was the Mexican American representative.153

In a city where migration consistently outpaced policy and legislation, everybody anticipated that a formal County resolution would facilitate the earmark of funds and the creation of County employee training programs and offices to effectively provide public services to Cuban and other Spanish-speaking residents on a day-to-day basis. Language training for County emergency and hospital employees, bilingual signage, bilingual forms and permit applications had long been demanded by Cuban community leaders and community activists, as well as the County’s multi-ethnic Community Relations Board.

Indeed, the resolution eventually did provide for these basic needs and also an assortment of new public relations programs that would connect ordinary Cuban residents to their County Commissioners and civil servants. And, it implemented a marketing and advertising strategy to develop a new identity for Miami as a tourist destination friendly to free-spending Latin American visitors. The resolution was couched in the language of a client – provider relationship. Thereby, the Cuban community had finally earned “the right to be serviced and heard” because of their new status as American citizens and their contributions to the local economy as taxpayers and consumers. Businesses and

153 Memorandum by Ray Goode on Bilingual and Bicultural Task Force, Miami, 8 August 1973, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.
politicians sought Cubans as clients and as voters, without acknowledging realignment in local power relations or the cultural hegemony of English speaking Anglos in the area.\footnote{Max Castro, “The Politics of Language in Miami,” in \textit{Miami Now! Immigration, Ethnicity and Social Change}, ed. Guillermo Grenier and Alex Stepick III (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 115.}

In 1973, Latinos made up only 8 percent of county employees but 20 percent of county residents. Utilizing current employees saved the County the initial cost of new hires and, in theory, would provide role models for new Latino and minority county employees brought in under the Resolution’s affirmative action push. The county also sought to augment the existing employment training programs SABER and EMPLEO by seeking additional federal and state funding on their behalf as another means to train future Latino public service employees. On January 29, 1973, in a precursor to the passage of the resolution, and under pressure from activists like Benes and Dr. Antonio Jorge, the Dade County Personnel Department abolished the written English test for 100 different government positions, and appointed a minority job counselor. A Cuban community activist, Ray Muniz, was tasked with pre-screening Spanish speaking applicants, and then forwarding their applications to the appropriate hiring personnel.\footnote{Memorandum to Mayor and Commissioners from County Manager Ray Goode, Miami, 29 May 1973, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts; Press Release from the Office of the Metro Dade County Manager, Miami, 29 January 1973, Bernardo Benes Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Library.}

Managerial and administrative positions still required the English exam, however, and Spanish-speaking applicants were limited to jobs as clerks or typists, as well as building trades and laborer positions. One of the Task Force’s first activities was to inventory available employment opportunities for Latinos in county offices. It discovered that Latinos were a very small percentage of county employees in administrative and managerial positions, and only marginally better represented at the lower levels as
transportation workers, janitorial staff, etc. And of the public office holders in the county, only two were Latino, City of Miami Mayor Maurice Ferré and City of Miami Commissioner Manolo Reboso. Both positions were appointed.

The County relied heavily on non-profit and government efforts to provide job training and evaluation of employment opportunities for Latinos seeking public employment. SABER (Spanish American Basic Education and Rehabilitation) was particularly successful in this partnership. Created in 1971, SABER relied on a combination of grants from the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center and the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to provide referral services for Spanish speaking residents seeking county services or employment. SABER evaluated manpower-training needs in the Cuban community and provided training and workshops for Spanish speakers seeking county employment. Comprised mainly of former Cuban Refugee Program officials like lawyer Armando Lacasa, SABER was criticized for its success at securing a number of large federal grants totaling nearly $2 million between 1972 and 1973. However, federal monies remained a fixture of county affirmative action efforts, and organizations like SABER were the county’s first point of contact for Latinos seeking public employment.¹⁵⁶

With Cuban led organizations making progress in providing job training, the County Commission next set its sight on extending the communications program to public safety agencies such as the Dade County Fire Department and Jackson Memorial Hospital. Jackson was the county’s primary public medical facility, and addressing the role of the language barrier in providing adequate care received considerable attention as

¹⁵⁶ Roberto Fabricio, “SABER Manages to Get Hefty Slice of Federal Pie,” Miami Herald, 1 October 1973, 3-B.
a local public health crisis. Jackson’s lack of bilingual medical and administrative employees made the hospital a frequent target of criticism and derision in the Cuban press and from the Community Relations Board.

As early as 1961, Spanish-speaking patients frequently complained of receiving subpar care or being ignored altogether by medical and nursing staff. Patients were forced to rely on family members or passerby for help translating intake paperwork, diagnoses and even basic instructions from medical staff. To deal with this problem, the Task Force immediately established six bilingual “Complaint Officers” who would be available to handle telephone inquiries and walk-ins at the hospital round the clock. Additionally, the hospital began to offer basic Spanish language training to its medical staff, and actively recruit bilingual doctors and nurses as new hires. Public display signs also fell under the aggressive communications program, and the county devoted funding to placing new signage in Spanish throughout county facilities and public offices. Additionally, any booklets, informational pamphlets, and forms published by Dade County would be translated into Spanish.\(^{157}\)

Under the third prong of the Task Force’s implementation scheme, the county mounted an ambitious plan to use the resolution and its newfound acceptance of Miami’s latinidad as a platform for a major economic and tourism development campaign, and to cultivate business ties between Miami and Latin America. In May 1973, Commissioner Harvey Ruvin, a veteran of county politics, suggested that Dade County open its own consular-style offices in Latin America, and provided a list of Latin American consuls in Miami who might be interested in pursuing a partnership as a means to boost tourism,

\(^{157}\) Memorandum to Mayor and Commissioners from County Manager Ray Goode, Miami, 29 May 1973, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.
business interests, “clean industry,” and advance Miami’s internationalized image abroad. Concerns about the county’s image as “Latin friendly” was not limited to tourism. The Task Force also provided funds for the creation of a Hispanic Heritage Week that publicly honor the city’s Latino heritage and would provide new opportunities for Latino focused business development in Miami.\textsuperscript{158}

The County Commission outlined a four-part plan for Hispanic Heritage Week that relied heavily on building relationships with CAMACOL, the Spanish Consul in Miami, and the consular offices of eighteen Latin American countries. The offices would be given opportunities to participate in Hispanic Heritage Week and other cultural events, in exchange for opportunities for Dade County to advertise itself abroad. Likewise, the county planned an advertising campaign with the Metro Publicity and Tourism Department, themed around celebrating the passage of the ordinance. Airlines, cruise lines, and shipping companies would be invited to create bilingual themed advertisements to promote themselves and, by proxy, Miami in Spain, Latin America and the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{159}

The County Commission envisioned a more active Office of Latin Affairs (OLA) that would expand the scope of the resolution beyond affirmative action and communications, to develop a successfully media policy and encompass a major public relations and tourism development campaign. In 1977, the County undertook a major search to appoint a new Director of Latin Affairs. The new position would involve both

\textsuperscript{158} Memorandum to Mayor and Commissioners from County Manager Ray Goode, 29 May 1973, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.

\textsuperscript{159} Memorandum to Mayor and Commissioners from County Manager Ray Goode, Miami, 29 May 1973, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.
administrative duties such as overseeing Hispanic Heritage Week, and coordinating federal grants for Latino employment training as well as a public relations component. As the visibility of the OLA grew, the county needed an effective spokesperson that could handle all inquiries from the public and the press.

Dr. Aida Levitan was the young Academic Dean of Latin Affairs at Biscayne College when she saw the ad for Director of Latin Affairs position in the classifieds of the *Miami Herald*. Levitan immigrated to Miami Beach from Cuba as a teenager, and like Bernardo Benes and others of the Cuban professional class, she had managed to scale the professional ladder to become the youngest dean at Biscayne College. The latter was no small accomplishment for a Latina. Prior to her position at Biscayne, she oversaw the implementation of *Operation Buen Besino* (Good Neighbor) in the City of Miami Police Department between 1974 and 1975. The program was intended to train police officers in cultural sensitivity and tolerance towards the Latino community and to communicate effectively with Latino citizens on the job. The program also provided remedial education to minority police candidates brought in to the academy under court ordered integration.160

Levitan was interested in returning to public service when she saw the ad. “You could see the Cuban community just beginning to assert itself politically,” Levitan recalled, “but the community was totally ignorant about what was going on in county government.” With the Bilingual Bicultural Resolution in place, Levitan envisioned herself as a public facing liaison between the Latino community and the government. She studied every publication the League of Women Voters produced on Metro Dade County

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160 Dr. Aida Levitan in discussion with the author, 8 November 2014.
and “moved everyone [she] knew” to get an interview for the Latin Affairs job. When she finally sat before the hiring committee, led by County Manager Merrett Stierheim and Assistant County Manager Dewey Knight, the administrators were stunned by her knowledge of arcane county legislation and policy. They immediately offered her the position.

Image 7. Aida Levitan, Director of the Metro Dade Office of Latin Affairs.161

Blonde, gregarious, and impeccably dressed, Levitan immediately began to make contact with the local television and radio stations to build interest and enthusiasm for the work of the OLA, while overseeing a number of federal programs run out of her office. She was the public face that the County had been unable to find as it shuffled internal candidates in and out of the position between 1974 and 1977. It may have been Benes’s

161 Pamphlet, Metro Dade Latin Affairs, 1979, Office of the County Manager/Communications and Oficina de Asuntos Latinoamericanos, Bernardo Benes Papers, Box 38, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection.
vision that made the Bilingual and Bicultural Resolution a reality, but it was Levitan’s charismatic personality and public relations acumen that made the work of the OLA visible and relevant to a wide audience. Predictably, not everyone in Miami was thrilled with the multicultural, pro-Latino county programming of the OLA. At a time of economic and political struggle for control of Miami, anti-Cuban sentiment was at its peak. Anonymous bomb threats were called-in to Levitan’s office at the Metro-Dade Building on Flagler Street with weekly regularity during Levitan’s first year as director. Levitan remained undeterred in her commitment to the work of OLA. She relied on many of the federal connections that Benes had forged and conferred with Senator Lawton Chiles and Congressman Pepper about funding opportunities for Metro Dade’s CETA (Comprehensive Education and Training Act) programs for Latinos, and the licensure program for Cuban professionals seeking work in the United States.162

Hispanic Heritage Week was the only annual public event, “a tiny little celebration,” hosted by the Office of Latin Affairs. Before Levitan’s appointment, the festival had relied on county and state grants to fund the celebration’s limited offerings. Upon a suggestion from a well-known financial adviser and local philanthropist, Fred Berens, Levitan began to promote the event’s sponsorship to local corporations such as Eastern Airlines interested in penetrating the Hispanic consumer market and raising their profile with Latinos. By 1980, Levitan had raised almost $300,000 in sponsorship funds, and Hispanic Heritage Week became the Hispanic Heritage Festival. The new month-long event drew thousands of locals to programs like “Discovery of the Americas Day”

162 Dr. Aida Levitan in discussion with the author, 8 November 2014; Miguel A. Torre, La Lucha for Cuba: Religion and Politics on the Streets of Miami (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 25.
which commemorated the Spanish exploration of Florida, and the “Market of the Americas,” which featured vendors from all over the Spanish-speaking world.\footnote{Dr. Aida Levitan in discussion with the author, 8 November 2014.}

The shift to include business development under the auspices of the OLA was a shrewd one. Latinos in Miami were becoming naturalized, registering to vote, and entering the middle class in ever-greater numbers. The problems of U.S. citizenship and assimilation became less pressing. Thus, Cuban organizations and County agencies could begin developing Latino-serving business partnerships and Latino entrepreneurship through free enterprise focused programs. As Bernardo Benes and the County Commission had envisioned, Miami’s bilingual and bicultural citizenry provided a wealth of new opportunities for municipal economic development through international business partnerships and the creation of a tourist sector that catered primarily to Latin America, Spain and the Caribbean.

**Conclusion**

In the years after the passage of the 1973 Bilingual and Bicultural Resolution, Bernardo Benes turned his attention from domestic affairs to diplomatic ones. In 1976, Benes became part of the inner circle of the Carter Administration, thanks to his work on behalf of President Carter’s campaign in South Florida. In 1977, Benes was approached by Ricardo De La Espriella, the vice-president of Panama, whom Benes had become friendly with while doing contract work in Panama for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). De La Espriella encouraged Benes to take his family on a vacation to Panama. Benes had close ties to the country through his work with the USAID and the United Way and out of a sense of personal obligation he
accepted De La Espriella’s invitation. On the trip, Benes was approached by a number of high-level Cuban intelligence officials interested in Benes’s connections to the White House, and in the possibility of opening a diplomatic dialogue with the United States. The diplomatic negotiations led by Benes and held in Cuba and Panama in the following months resulted in the release of 2000 political prisoners from Cuba to their families in exile. However, many in the Cuban community saw Benes’s role as a mediator in el diálogo as akin to treason, and the man who had once been the self-described “first token Cuban in Miami” became a social and political outcast. Derided in the exile press as a stooge for the Castro regime, picketers lined up outside his office at Continental National Bank. Benes continued to be active in Democratic Party politics and in banking, but in Miami his stature and the memory of his activism on behalf of the Cuban community was largely forgotten or erased from public memory.164

However, the legacy of Benes’s work is clear. The 1973 Bilingual and Bicultural Resolution subverted an ages old notion that immigrant culture is inevitably subsumed by the English language and American culture in the process of assimilation, and moreover that immigrant status should be synonymous with lack of political, economic, and cultural power. By the mid-1970s the cultural and political hegemony that Anglos held in Miami began to dissipate. As bilingualism and biculturalism became more than just a resolution or a mandate for county services and lived reality in Miami meant navigating a visibility multilingual and multiethnic urban landscape, Anglos became publicly less tolerant of the so-called “latinization” of the city.

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Significantly, the rapid demographic change in Miami wrought by the Cuban Revolution, occurred simultaneously as African Americans in Miami achieved limited political and economic gains through the civil rights legislation and the passage of federal civil rights and voting rights legislation in the 1960s. Whites in South Florida were confronted not only with a politically and economically ascendant Cuban population. Black Miamians were elected to both the City of Miami and Dade County Commissions, the Dade County School Board and Dade County School Superintendent’s Office, and as County Manager.  

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CHAPTER III: A CITY UNDER SIEGE

“What is United States culture? After all, Florida was discovered by Ponce de Leon and certainly Spanish was spoken here long before English.” – Murray Greenberg, Dade Assistant County Attorney, 1981.

Introduction

The plume of black smoke from the Norton Tire Company fire could be seen from I-95. As night fell on Saturday May 18, 1980 the acrid smell of burning tires drifted through Liberty City, Miami’s largest black neighborhood. That afternoon at 2:36pm, the 48-day trial of four police officers charged with bludgeoning black insurance salesman and Liberty City resident, Arthur McDuffie, to death came to an end. After two hours of deliberation, the all white, all male, Tampa jury found the four officers not guilty and acquitted them of all charges. Former Officer Alex Marrero, accused of being the ringleader who dealt the fatal blows to the back of McDuffie’s skull with a Kel-lite nightstick, openly wept in relief in the courtroom. His fellow officers, Michael Watts, Sgt. Ira Diggs, Sgt. Herbert Evans Jr., followed suit. In the gallery, Arthur McDuffie’s mother, Eula Belle McDuffie, stifled a scream and staggered out of the courtroom where she collapsed in the hallway. “They’re guilty! They’re guilty! They’re guilty! God will take care of them now.”

Despite the protestations of Dade County State Attorney Janet Reno, The trial was moved from Miami to Tampa early in the jury selection process. The defense argued that

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166 Gene Miller and Joe Oglesby, “Four Policemen Acquitted of all McDuffie Charges,” Miami Herald, 18 May 1980, 1A.
the officers would never receive a fair trial in Miami, and Circuit Judge Lenore Nesbin feared the trial would draw angry crowds of protestors to the courthouse or worse yet, that an unpopular verdict would incite a race riot. Moving the trial to another city could not stop the daily television and radio updates of the trial’s progress. On Friday May 17, 1980 the verdict from Tampa was reported instantaneously; a special bulletin interrupted regular programming on local radio and television in Miami. In Liberty City, a small crowd of 80 had gathered in African Square Park to listen to Public Safety Director Bobby Jones, who was scheduled to discuss improving relations between police and the African American community. News of the verdict percolated in the crowd of frustrated onlookers, while Jones gave his speech without a single mention of McDuffie. A local resident remarked ominously to a reporter, “with all that has happened with the Cubans and Haitians, we did not need that [the verdict]...there are going to be some terrible repercussions behind this.” Jones, unperturbed by the visibly tense crowd, told the Miami Herald that he did not predict any violence.

The crowd moved from African Square to Liberty City’s main thoroughfare at 62nd Street or a few blocks away on N.W. 12th Avenue at the Metro Public Safety Department Headquarters. At both points the crowd picked up onlookers and their numbers swelled. Teenagers threw rocks and bottles at passing white motorists, while others lit fires in trashcans along the street. At the PSD Headquarters, the crowd grew from perhaps eighty to a couple thousand by 9pm. The protestors broke down the door and rushed the building. In a span of three hours the deadliest riot in Miami’s history had begun, and the chaos would not relent for three days.167

April and May were tumultuous months in Miami. Every morning the *Miami Herald* reported new arrivals of refugees from Cuba and Haiti to Key West, and the McDuffie Trial unfolded nightly on the evening news. The day before the McDuffie verdict devastated Miami’s black community, an overloaded boat on route from Mariel to Key West sunk in the Florida Straits. The *Olo Yumi* was overloaded with passengers when it sunk and fourteen Cuban refugees and the skipper drowned before the U.S. Coast Guard located the vessel and rescued the remaining passengers. The *Herald* described Miami as a “city under siege,” and local events seemed to reflect a national mood of despair. As refugees washed on shore in Key West and Liberty City self-immolated, in affluent Coral Gables a nascent conservative movement was brewing.

In 1980, Miami was the birthplace of an anti-immigrant conservative movement known as English-Only and later, U.S. English. Loosely connected to the conservative political movement that would usher in the Reagan administration, English-Only supporters sought to restore Miami to its “Old Florida” roots. Mariel and McDuffie were worst nightmares realized: racial tensions and immigration gone horrifically awry. These political crises were perfect opportunities for the English Only movement to advance its cause. English Only built on the local long simmering resentment to the Cuban Refugee Program and Latinos in Miami that had previously only manifested itself in constituent letters, editorials, and town hall meetings.
English Only also arose in response to the rapid demographic changes in South Florida between 1960 and 1980. As one Dade resident explained in a 1981 survey: “it’s the numbers that give them this foothold…and there isn’t anything we can do about it.”

English-Only activists may have rallied against the “Cuban take-over,” Miami had become the number one destination for all immigrants to the United States, especially immigrants from Latin American and the Caribbean. Ironically, while conservative activists claimed that Spanish speakers were turning Miami into a third world “cultural ghetto” devoid of traditional American values, Cuban visibility in mainstream

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institutions, Cuban voter registration and Cuban economic prosperity in Miami was at its peak.  

In the post Civil Rights milieu of mainstream American politics, it was not socially acceptable to organize around the overt exclusion of certain racial or ethnic groups. The English Only movement replaced race with language as a means of defining inclusion and exclusion. Race was perceived as an immutable quality, but language was a choice. Non-Hispanic whites in South Florida fixated on language as the primary symbol for the erosion of American values and the loss of the old Florida. In the face of rapid demographic change, language politics served as an opportunity to maintain group identity and define the cultural borders of the community. Choosing to speak English or refusing to engage with Spanish speakers became an act of “everyday resistance.” Speaking English in a Latino dominated public space staked a claim to power based on a native white identity, which may have been eroded locally but still held meaning in mainstream America.

Led by conservative activist Emmy Shafer, Citizens of Dade United’s (CDU) anti-bilingual crusade tapped into the strength of white ethnic politics that had been a central feature of Richard Nixon’s political pandering to the white working class. White ethnics also identified as “PIGS – Poles, Italians, Greeks and Slavs,” emerged as self

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aware interest group in the early 1970s, and were the bulk of Nixon’s “Silent Majority.” These second and third generation descendants of European immigrants were disillusioned with the civil rights movement and alienated by the radical elements of the Democratic Party. Ethnic political activity and ethnic lobbying existed throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but in the 1970s and 1980s these cultural identities took on new political meaning in the face of a number of civil rights movements after World War II. Ethnic neighborhoods gave way to suburbs, intermarriage eroded linguistic ties, and attendance in religious institutions plummeted. In cities, ethnic difference was also diminished by the prevalence of racial segregation. The law distinguished between only black and white. However, the homogeneity of post-war consumer culture led some Americans to return to their European cultural heritage as a source of authenticity and connection to the past. While in a large part this revival was performative, it had very real political and social consequences. White ethnicity “reflected the insecurity of Americans, especially those whose parents were working class European immigrants, and whose hold on the middle class status was precarious.”

Language politics in Miami functioned as a vehicle for claims to white privilege in an historical moment when asserting status based on race was politically and socially unacceptable, just as embracing white ethnic identity was a means to assert citizenship rights in the post-affirmative action era. The English Only movement in South Florida, comprised largely of lower middle class or working class European descended or European immigrants from Germany and Russia, was a direct inheritor of the political

interests and discursive language of the white ethnic revival. This chapter will argue that much like the white ethnic revival that preceded it, the English Only or Anti-Bilingual movement achieved “token” attention from elected officials and policy makers, and limited policy recognition. Careful consideration of the interactions and relationships between local politicians, county administrators, and local civic organizations in the aftermath of the 1980 Anti-Bilingual Ordinance reveal the last gasps of white political hegemony in South Florida, and the rocky transition to a local government increasingly administered by and for Latino voters.

**County Question #2: Emmy Shafer and Citizens of Dade United**

Emmy Shafer emerged on the local scene in the miserable summer of 1980. In the wake of the Mariel Boatlift, and the McDuffie Riots, Shafer captivated the attention of the local press with her petition drive for a referendum to outlaw the use of Spanish in county business, and to overturn the 1973 Bilingual and Bicultural Resolution. Little is known about Shafer before she arrived in Miami, other than she was born Alexandra Emmy Wiendmuller, in Rustov, Russia in 1935. Shafer developed a personal mythology in which she fashioned herself the “ultimate immigrant.” Six months after she arrived in the United States, she spoke fluent English. Six months after that she was ready to take the oath of citizenship, and she was so overcome with emotion during the citizenship ceremony, that she fainted during the pledge allegiance. The *Miami Herald* described her as “the perfect choice to lead the flag waving masses.”

Shafer’s folksy delivery and political message steeped in nostalgia appealed directly to the resentments of Miami Anglos feeling besieged by racial violence and the unending waves of Latin immigration. Shafer’s simple battle cry was that “the American people would like to have their community back the way it was!” Shafer singlehandedly ran the petition drive and secured the 26,213 signatures necessary to get her referendum on the November 4, 1980 ballot under the auspices of Citizens of Dade United (CDU). Shafer created the organization with the help of one other woman, her vice president Marion Plunske. Plunske initially supported the cause simply by providing Shafer with office space and telephone, and then later accompanied Shafer on radio interviews and to public speaking engagements before civic audiences.  

Shafer’s referendum campaign was unusual in its use of relatively low-cost campaigning tactics. There were no newspaper advertisements, television spots, or billboards. Shafer’s media appearances were limited to radio and newspaper interviews. The referendum gained traction primarily through word of mouth, as even local civic organizations lent little outright support. The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce and League of Women Voters, who usually took strong and public sides on local issues, refused to take a stance on the referendum. The League of Women Voters refused to publicly support the referendum because they felt the specific language was obscure, but they made clear that this stance did not necessarily mean they supported or opposed the issue of official bilingualism in Dade County. Annie Ackerman, a veteran civic activist and organizer on behalf of county issues, also steered clear of offering her support to CDU, although she privately opposed the referendum. Ackerman was fearful that the

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175 Fredric Tasker, “Anti-Bilingualism Effort – Bigotry or Unity?,” Miami Herald, 2 November 1980, 1B; “Woman Starts Drive to Abolish Bilingual Programs in Miami,” St. Petersburg Times, 29 July 1980, 2B.
referendum would antagonize voters she was trying to recruit for the 1980 Carter campaign.\textsuperscript{176}

The \textit{Miami Herald}, which had been intermittently critical of the Cuban community’s involvement in anti-communist activity and politics, published a strongly worded editorial prior to Election Day warning voters of the repercussions of the English Only referendum. The editorial board of the \textit{Herald} took a position similar to the county commissioners who opposed the referendum. Beyond the moral questionability of legislating cultural practices, the referendum posed a serious threat to Miami’s tourist sector. Limiting funding for translation, signage, and services to accommodate foreign tourists would create an inhospitable environment for the scores of tourists, business travelers, and foreign investors, who powered Miami’s economy, and were its “most promising source of economic growth.” Echoing Bernardo Benes and other Cuban civic activists, the \textit{Herald} argued that the referendum placed an undue burden on the neediest members of the community, predominantly the elderly, whose access to county emergency and medical services would be curtailed by the referendum.\textsuperscript{177}

Cuban organizations were not afraid of antagonizing voters and came out swinging against Shafer’s referendum. Efforts to organize against the referendum were led by SALAD’s Eduardo Padrón. Padrón acknowledged that the efforts against the referendum might be a “lost cause” but that his organization was going to work until the polls closed to educate voters on the repercussions on the ordinance. The racial subtext of the ordinance was not lost on Cuban activists either. John Diaz of United Cuban

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  \item \textsuperscript{176} Fredric Tasker, “Anti-Bilingualism Effort – Bigotry or Unity?,” \textit{Miami Herald}, 2 November 1980, 1B.
  \item \textsuperscript{177} Miami Herald Editorial Board, “Language Ordinance is Wrong,” \textit{Miami Herald}, 1 November 1980, 6A.
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Americans of Dade accused Shafer of “trying to sell hatred by selling the American flag.” Padrón pointed out that the referendum while claiming to promote unity between Dade’s ethnic groups would only encourage “full recognition of the racism that exists in Dade County…and make the Cuban community more united and more militant.” Other prominent Cuban community leaders like Miami Dade College Professor Manuel Mendoza characterized the referendum as an attempt to force a certain mode of “one way assimilation” on Cubans, which was in direct conflict with the desire of Cubans and other Latinos who wished to “preserve a lot of [our] traditions even as we Americanize.” Mendoza’s characterization reflects most acutely what was at stake for each group on either side of the referendum: for Anglos, a means for Cubans to fully assimilate and submit to American mainstream cultural norms, and for Cubans and other Latinos, a desire to assimilate, but on their own terms.\textsuperscript{178}

It is not a coincidence that the referendum appeared in a year that was a watershed in Miami’s demographic and political transformation. In 1980, for the first time the percentage of Latinos (41 percent) and non-Latin whites (43 percent) were nearly equitable. By the end of the Mariel Boatlift, the scales would tip towards making Dade County a minority majority area. However, Latinos still remained a 25 percent minority of registered voters, and no Latino candidate had been elected in a countywide election. However, the municipal commissions of the City of Miami and the City of Hialeah each had a majority of Latino commissioners.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{178} Fredric Tasker, “Anti-Bilingualism Effort – Bigotry or Unity?” \textit{Miami Herald}, 2 November 1980, 2B.

\textsuperscript{179} Fredric Tasker, “Anti-Bilingualism Effort – Bigotry or Unity?,” \textit{Miami Herald}, 2 November 1980, 2B.
The 1980 race for the 14th Congressional District provides an excellent example of the slow pace of political transformation in South Florida. Maurice Ferré had captured the mayoral office in the City of Miami in 1973, but a Latino congressman remained elusive. In a repeat of the 1976 race for the 14th, Cuban real estate salesman Evelio Estrella faced Claude Pepper, the “grand old man of Florida politics.” In 1976, Pepper beat Estrella handily with a 73-27 majority. Undeterred by his prior loss, Estrella hoped to capitalize on the Republican momentum generated by the Reagan campaign and the heavy Latino turnout predicted because of the English Only referendum. Pepper, on the other hand, was so confident that he would win the district he had held since 1962 that he did not bother to even campaign in Miami the last week before Election Day. Choosing instead to devote his time to stumping on behalf of President Carter in Connecticut.  

Pepper’s confidence was not without reason. Estrella barely spoke a word of English, but he was convinced that he could capture the district and its 70,000 Cuban residents because he was Cuban. A self-funded perennial candidate, Estrella had run unsuccessfully in 1967, 1971, and 1973 for Mayor of Miami, county commissioner, and municipal commissioner. A deeply conservative Republican who named his youngest son Richard Nixon Estrella in honor of the former president, Estrella’s inability to speak English limited his ability to gain traction with conservative Christian groups organizing in South Florida, such as the Parents Political Action Committee. The Dade County Republican Party distanced itself from Estrella and excluded him from a Republican

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180 George Stein, “Confident Pepper Passes Up Campaign Trail,” Miami Herald, 1 November 1980, 3B.
Party mailer that featured all the other Republican candidates for local congressional races.¹⁸¹

On November 4, 1980, Dade County voters approved the new ordinance with a 60 percent majority. Almost immediately resistance emerged from two major interest groups: the Metro-Dade Commission and Cuban civic groups led by SALAD. The new policy presented a host of problems for the Dade County Commission, who over the course of seven years had developed extensive programming and publications to serve the Spanish speaking community. The language of the ordinance was at once vague and expansive, leaving considerable room for interpretation.

Image 9. Full Text of the Anti-Bilingual Referendum. ¹⁸²

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¹⁸¹ George Stein, “Confident Pepper Passes Up Campaign Trail,” Miami Herald, 1 November 1980, 3B.

¹⁸² Anti-Bilingual Ordinance, M.R. Stierheim to All Department Directors, November 5, 1980, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.
The day after the ordinance’s passage, County Manager Merrett Stierheim released a copy of the new ordinance to the head of every county department with explicit instructions to immediately suspend any expenditure of county funds on printing new materials in Spanish, and suspend pending Spanish language programming. Stierheim instructed his department heads that the only exceptions to the new ordinance were for emergency materials or communications, or for publications and programs funded exclusively through federal and state sources. He also instructed them to avoid any public comment on the new ordinance, while he enlisted the aid of the Dade County Attorney Robert Ginsburg, and Assistant County Attorney Murray Greenberg to investigate the legality and precedent of the new ordinance, and to parse through the onslaught of questions from department heads as to what could and could not be translated into Spanish.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Memorandum to Mayor and Commissioners from County Manager M.R. Steirheim, 5 November 1980, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.
Stierheim’s instructions were met with incredulity and confusion from agency administrators. Correspondence between Stierheim and the heads of county agencies reveals that the original 1973 resolution had actually been cost and labor effective in terms of providing services for Spanish speakers efficiently. Likewise, the efficacy of the county’s affirmative action efforts in the early 1970s meant that even without county funds to explicitly serve Latinos, there were enough bilingual employees scattered throughout county agencies to somewhat handle inquiries in Spanish.

A.D. Moore, director of the county’s solid waste collection division, responded to Stierheim’s instructions by noting that while his agency felt the new ordinance would “hamper (the) ability to communicate” with Spanish speaking citizens, 22 percent of his administrative personnel were bilingual and could at least handle phone inquiries. Some agency directors were confused as to whether they could address or handle Spanish

\[\text{Image 10. Emmy Shafer Serves Champagne on Election Night.}^{184}\]

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language inquiries at all. Reginald Walters, Director of Planning, inquired as to whether his employees could use “non-English languages in responding to direct oral or telephone inquiries” and whether his planning reports could even make reference to specific community services that might be required by Cubans or Haitians.185

As confusion from county agency administrators mounted, it became clear that the commission needed to enlist legal counsel to interpret the vague wording of the ordinance. County employees and administrators were uncertain how the ordinance would change their day-to-day operations, and which violations of the ordinance would incite the wrath of the hyper vigilant members of Citizens for Dade United. Sensing an impending battle, Stierheim and County Mayor Steve Clark, relied on Robert Ginsburg and Murray Greenberg, in the Dade County Attorney’s Office, to interpret the nuances of the ordinance and provide a primer for agency administrators struggling to advise their employees. Greenberg was tasked with handling all public and press inquiries about the ordinance.

Shafer, CDU and the referendum were wildly unpopular with the commission, county administrators, and many local civic leaders; by allowing Greenberg to act as the sole county spokesperson on the ordinance, Stierheim headed off the possibility of a public relations nightmare. In an interview with the Palm Beach Post about the ordinance, Greenberg remained neutral on its racial dimensions, only conceding that the ordinance’s language was “all embracing and legally confusing.” Others were not so

185 Memorandum to County Manager M.R. Stierheim from A.D. Moore – Director of Solid Waste Collection, 7 November 1980, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts. Memorandum to County Manager M.R. Stierheim from Colin Morrissey – Director of Environmental Resources Management, 7 November 1980, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.
diplomatic. Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh, director of social services for the Catholic diocese of Miami, described the successful referendum simply as “a racist vote.” A county official speaking under the condition of anonymity to the *Post*, described the vote as disastrous for Miami’s Latin American reliant tourist industry and retail trade: “these people might kill the goose that lays the golden eggs!”\(^\text{186}\)

In the 1970s, influenced by federal affirmative action and diversity programs, Metro Dade shifted towards a policy of bilingualism and biculturalism in dealing with Miami’s growing Latino constituency. They registered new Cuban citizens to vote en masse and offered programming to help Latino immigrants adapt to life in Miami. County officials decided that a Spanish speaking population would only enhance Miami’s appeal as a tourist destination and marketed the city as such. Thus, the outraged reaction of county officials to the ordinance revealed a profound disconnect between Anglo constituents’ nostalgic views of the old Miami and the local government’s vision for Miami as a “Gateway to the Americas” that would shape the ordinance’s enforcement and facilitate its quick decline in popularity.

The ordinance indicated a disturbing polarization in ethnic relations, but potentially presented a “great awakening” of the Cuban community to the realities of local social attitudes and an opportunity to galvanize a stronger group consciousness. Many Cuban civic groups like SALAD saw the ordinance as a double-edged sword. African-American leaders were publicly critical of the 1980 ordinance’s passage, and a solid majority of black voters had opposed the ordinance, with 56 percent voting against its passage, compared to their Anglo counterparts who opposed at a rate of only 29 percent. Coalition building between African Americans and Cubans on the Dade County School Board, evident in the election of Paul Cejas earlier in 1980, led Padrón and others

187 Metropolitan Dade County Public Works Department, Mosquito Control Division, Public Service Announcement, “Ayude! A Eliminar Los Mosquitos/Help Eliminate Mosquitos,” ND ca. 1980; Enclosed in Memorandum from Dennis I. Carter, Assistant County Manager to William M. Powell, Director of Public Works Department, November 10, 1980, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.
to hope that ordinance could be the beginning of a stronger Latin-Black coalition in local
government.\textsuperscript{188}

The day following the passage of the ordinance, SALAD filed a federal lawsuit
challenging the constitutionality of the ordinance. Their initial attempt to get the
referendum blocked from the ballot on the basis of discrimination had failed; the federal
suit offered a second chance at countering CDU. With the public support of Paul Rich,
Chief Assistant U.S. attorney for Civil Rights, SALAD argued that the ordinance violated
the 14\textsuperscript{th} amendment’s guarantee of equal protection under the law. The ordinance proved
to be a publicity boon for SALAD, the largest organization advocating for the interests of
Latinos in Miami. SALAD was comprised of young, liberal Cuban professionals and led
by Eduardo Padrón, an economist and a vice president of Miami Dade Community
College’s downtown campus. Described by one of its members as a “kind of NAACP for
Hispanics,” SALAD distinguished itself from other Cuban civic and political
organizations by advocating for a new exile identity that neither fixated upon the memory
of Cuba nor “surrender[ed] their identity, their ideals, their culture.”\textsuperscript{189}

SALAD was founded in 1974 by Javier Bray, but began to gain momentum after
their widely publicized criticism and legal work against the 1980 Anti-Bilingual
Ordinance. Bray’s background seems to have much to do with the group’s radically
different approach to citizenship. Bray was Cuban, but born in the U.S. and then raised in
Matanzas. His family returned to the U.S. when Bray was in his twenties. Bray spent his
early career working for USAID and the Asian American Free Labor Institute, but did not

\textsuperscript{188} “Miami Language Issue Continues to Boil,” \textit{Sarasota-Herald Tribune}, 4 January 1981, 15-A, and

\textsuperscript{189} Liz Balmaseda, “Tossing Power with Pride,” \textit{Miami Herald}, 31 January 1981, 1C.
settle in Miami until 1973, when work on a federal study of Latino high school attrition brought him to the city. Bray was “shocked” at what he described as the deferential and “apologetic” attitude many Cubans in Miami had towards Americans. Bray organized SALAD to bring together a coalition of rising young professionals interested in addressing discrimination, and moving Hispanic issues away from the “exile talk” that dominated most Cuban and Hispanic organizations. SALAD would serve as a space to groom new leaders who would be placed in positions of power: “democracy…listens to money, power, status, and persistence.”\textsuperscript{190}

Although SALAD did not gain significant media attention until the passage of English Only, the civil rights organization successfully leveraged its network to place its members in prominent positions in county and city government during the late 1970s. In 1978, Governor Reubin Askew appointed SALAD board member and lawyer Mario Goderich to a judicial seat on Dade County’s 11th Circuit. Goderich was the first Cuban to serve as a Dade County Circuit Court judge. Two years later, SALAD successfully petitioned Governor Bob Graham for the appointment of SALAD director and accountant Paul Cejas to a vacancy on the Dade County School Board. Cejas was subsequently elected to the Dade County School Board in November 1980, making him the first Latino to win a countywide election. Sergio Pereira joined SALAD in 1976, and under the tutelage of then director Paul Cejas, Pereira rose in the ranks of the Metro Dade Government. Pereira was appointed Assistant County Manager by Mayor Stephen Clark in 1980 and became the highest-ranking Latino employee in county government. Pereira’s success as Assistant County Manager gained federal attention. He was

\textsuperscript{190} Balmaseda, “Tossing Power with Pride,” 1C.
appointed Special Coordinator to the White House for the Cuban Refugee Program
during the Mariel Boatlift. 191

SALAD’s efficacy was not only in the strength of its members but also in its
organizational structure and public image. SALAD’s board consciously distanced itself
from “loud-mouth” exile groups that organized primarily around American foreign policy
in Cuba, by emphasizing their “rational and almost ridiculously academic” strategy of
combating discrimination by grooming Latinos for public office. The group shied away
from public protests and sit-ins, and instead focused their energy on developing Latino
political and professional leadership. SALAD’s non-confrontational style and emphasis
on gaining entry into political office was part of a larger trend in Latino political
organizing which historian Louis DeSipio noted emerged in the 1970s in the wake of the
success of the 1960 Viva Kennedy! Campaign to get out the vote for John F. Kennedy in
Latino communities. 192

SALAD’s strategy became clear in its decision to engage the English Only
ordinance through the court-system rather than in direct confrontation with Emmy Shafer
and CDU, whom SALAD dismissed as “hatemongers spreading hysteria.” Its first major
project as a group in 1974 was to compile a study of discrimination against Latino
students in Dade County public schools. Their findings were published in an unsigned
newsletter, Informe, distributed to community leaders and local newspapers. 193 From the
organization’s inception, the board of directors did not allow a single member to emerge

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191 Balmaseda, “Tossing Power with Pride,” 1C.


193 Liz Balmaseda, “Tossing Power with Pride,” 1C.
as the de-facto spokesperson or public face of the group. Decisions were made holistically and directors never served more than two years. SALAD hoped to attract a “new kind of Latin”: their ideal member was educated, professionally respected, interested in community activism, and conscious of Latino issues. In many respects, SALAD was instrumental in advancing the notion of the “bicultural” Cuban-American citizen -- a middle class professional engaged in local issues, “defying the melting pot cliché”, but still deeply self-identified with their immigrant roots.194

English Only may have been a failure in Cuban-Anglo relations for SALAD and its milieu, but it provided an opportunity for the organization to expand and increase its visibility. In tandem with the aftermath of the Mariel Boatlift, English Only provided a consciousness raising experience for the white-collar board members of SALAD. As a result, the board decided to hire a full-time executive director, Manny Diaz, and expand its lobbying efforts to include refugee relief. Post-English Only Ordinance limitations of county funding for Latino serving organizations forced SALAD to build new alliances in the community. They invited Willy Bormelo, architect and director of the Little Havana Development Authority and the Kiwanis Club of Little Havana to join the SALAD board. In 1981, SALAD worked with the United Way of Greater Miami, and Miami Dade Community College to submit a $10.9 million federal grant for funds to offer citizenship and language education classes to Haitian and Cuban refugees. These new alliances show how the passage of the ordinance galvanized the efforts of fledgling Latino civic organizations to pool resources and talent, because the county was legally hindered in its effort to support Latino immigrants and Cuban and Haitian refugees. Ironically, the

public outcry swirling around the English Only referendum only strengthened SALAD by forcing the group to become unified and self-sufficient. 195

**Enforcing English**

On December 18, 1980, the County Attorney’s office reached a consensus and delivered a report to the County Commissioners and County Manager Stierheim on how to interpret the new ordinance. Ginsburg and Murray found that the ordinance’s “broad and general terms” gave County Commissioners and County Agencies a great deal of leeway in interpreting what could and could not be funded. The first major provision of the ordinance, that county funds could not be used for the “purpose of utilizing any language other than English or from promoting any culture other than that of the United States,” seemed to be its most prohibitive aspect. However, the vague terminology actually gave the Dade County Attorney’s Office the precedent to interpret what counted as “promotion” of foreign culture over “United States culture.”

What exactly was United States culture? In the County attorney’s interpretation, the many cultural activities that the county supported, ranging from Israeli Jubilee, Hispanic Heritage Week, Bahamian Goombay Festival, were representative of American culture, because they celebrated the experiences of Americans of foreign descent living in Miami. Citizens of Dade United did not offer a monolithic definition of the boundaries of “U.S. culture” in their writing of the ordinance, and in doing so left it open to a wide range of interpretation of what exactly, “culture” meant. Greenberg and Ginsburg

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interpreted culture to be the “composite of the historical experiences and ways of living of the people of the United States…not unitary in concept, but multifaceted.”

As discussed previously, by 1980 there was already a perceptible shift happening within the Cuban community in regards to cultural identification. The end of the Freedom Flights in 1973 forced many Cubans to accept the permanence of their settlement in the United States. Between 1971 and 1980, Cubans in Miami sought naturalization and registered to vote in record numbers. Cubans began to accept and celebrate a new bicultural identity that paired American citizenship with the preservation of Spanish and Cuban cultural practices. However, it was this biculturalism, rather than complete assimilation, that Shafer and CDU found unacceptable.

Unruffled by the outrage surrounding the ordinance, Emmy Shafer continued her crusade against bilingualism and immigration, first in another appearance before the Dade County Commission and then in public speaking appearances and interviews with the national press. Basking in the success of the English Only Ordinance, Shafer appeared before the Board of County Commissioner in January 1981 to request the repeal of the 1973 Bilingual and Bicultural Resolution, and the dissolution of the Office of Latin Affairs. Neither was explicitly abolished in her writing of the 1980 ordinance, although many of the OLA’s activities were severely curtailed by the new limitations on county funding for Latino serving programs. Only two commissioners, Harvey Ruvin and Beverly Phillips, remained on the commission from the 1973 board, and Shafer was


hopeful that the momentum from November would move Ruvin and Phillips to repeal. However, Shafer seemed unaware how unpopular her referendum had been with the commissioners and county employees. Ruvin was dismissive of Shafer’s demands, “I wonder if she understands that really the resolution has been eliminated.” Stierheim likewise was taciturn on the matter, only commenting that he would refuse to close the Office of Latin Affairs short of an explicit vote from the board to do so.198

In the press, Shafer fashioned herself as a vigilant protector American culture and the sanctity of the English language. In a 1981 interview with the Chicago Tribune, she described her daily life under the protection of a police unit, two personal bodyguards, and the .38 caliber revolver she kept on her nightstand. Shafer claimed she needed the protection from the Miami Latinos who sent her death threats and hate mail daily. Undeterred by alleged harassment, or by her failure to abolish the Office of Latin Affairs, Shafer worked tirelessly on two new petition drives: to deport all Cubans with criminal records to Cuba, and to ban the display of Cuban flags on American soil. Shafer was hopeful that the conservative insurgency that swept the Republican Party back into office in 1980 would prove beneficial to her cause: “Maybe now with Reagan as President we can go back to being America again.”199

Shafer and Marion Bonsignore, CDU’s new vice-president, were less enthusiastic about the county government’s halfhearted support of the ordinance, and took it upon themselves to personally oversee its enforcement. In a constant stream of correspondence to County Manager Stierheim and the County Commission, Shafer and Bonsignore

198 Morton Lucoff, “Drive to Erase All of Bilingual Law,” Miami News, 13 January 1981, 5A.

reported any violations they personally witnessed or violations CDU members reported to their headquarters.

The English Only Ordinance could do little to hinder the soft cultural activities of the county, but it had serious repercussions for the logistical improvements county agencies enacted over the seven years since the 1973 resolution. New bilingual signage, publications, and translation services for meetings and hearings took the hardest hit in funding. Ginsburg and Greenberg found that the ordinance prohibition on “hearings, meetings, and publications in a language other than English” could only be circumvented in cases where state or federal law required translation, such as elections. However, if translation services were funded and provided by state or federal agencies, though not necessarily required by law, than those services would be permissible under the ordinance.  

Ultimately, county administrators were expected to use the report as a framework within to exercise their best judgment. Often, there were still questions of interpretation that found their way back to the county attorney’s office. In July 1981, Stierheim requested Ginsburg’s aid in resolving whether the Dade County Fire Department could print bilingual fire prevention and safety guides, and distribute bilingual materials already in its possession from federal safety agencies. Stierheim also asked for guidance as to whether a new rapid transit system, in planning stages by the Dade County Transit Authority, would be allowed to have bilingual directional signage. Ginsburg advised the county manager that the use of county funds would be prohibited for both programs

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under the ordinance, unless they could be justified under the ordinance’s provision for emergency services.  

Image 12. DCPS Bilingual School Walking Route Map.  

The public was interested in the county attorney’s findings, as well. After the report’s release in December, Greenberg emphasized the limitations of the ordinance in

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202 This is an example of a bilingual county publication permitted under the English Only ordinance. The map was permitted because while it was printed by the Metro Dade Department of Traffic and Transportation, the ordinance did not have the power to restrict the activities and state-derived funding of Dade County Public Schools, who operated with complete independence from Metro Dade. Dade County Public Schools in cooperation with the Metropolitan Dade County Department of Traffic and Transportation, Public Service Announcement, “Safe Route to School/Ruta Mas Segura Para Llegar a la Escuela – Pharr Elementary School,” ND ca. 1981; Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts.
the press, stressing that emergency services and ballots, areas regulated by federal law, would remain unchanged by the ordinance. Existing bilingual signage would remain in place. Public schools, administered by a budgeting authority independent of Metro Dade, would be free to continue offering bilingual educational programs and instruction to their students. Latino leaders remained unsatisfied by the county attorney office’s loose interpretation of the ordinance. SALAD persisted with its motion in federal court to have the ordinance thrown out. City of Miami Mayor Maurice Ferré described race relations as “the worst I’ve seen.” Former City Commissioner and Vice Mayor of Miami Manolo Reboso shared the sentiments of many in the Cuban business community that bilingualism was an “asset to the community, especially in international trade,” and that Anglos were the ones who needed to adapt to a new globally oriented economy, not Cubans.203

The ordinance wrought unintended consequences for the agenda of the Office of Latin Affairs (OLA), which until that point considered organizing Hispanic Heritage Week and translating county documents its primary duties. The ordinance strictly curtailed county expenditures on programs that engaged in “foreign culture promotion” or translation. Instead, in January 1981 the OLA refocused its efforts on providing citizenship education and voter registration workshops for Cubans and other Latinos. The ordinance did not prohibit funding to education programs. Ironically, the number of voter registration programs and civic education classes offered by the county and local organizations increased as a direct result of the ordinance, as administrators were forced to reroute funds to different types of programming. The weekly hour-long courses were

held in two different community centers near Cuban neighborhoods, and lasted three months in order to comprehensively prepare permanent residences for the citizenship test. The courses covered the U.S. Constitution, the American governmental system, and the fundamentals of the citizenship application process.²⁰⁴

By May 1981, the OLA was facing a series of lay-offs and resignations as a result of funding cuts under the anti-bilingual ordinance. Director Aida Levitan, disheartened by the collapse in funding for the OLA, resigned to head the public relations and trade development office for the City of Miami. Interim Director Carmen Rosada, brought in as Levitan’s replacement, also subsequently resigned to pursue her spiritual calling at a Little Havana church. Fifty employees staffing the Comprehensive Employment Training Act outreach offices were laid off because of budget cuts. Decimated but still standing, the five remaining OLA administrators expanded the U.S. citizenship education program to four additional community centers, and set up a simultaneous broadcast of the courses on Spanish-language Channel 23, and continued to devote their limited resources to voter education and registration drives.²⁰⁵

As 1981 drew to a close, Dade County Mayor Steve Clark convened a committee of local civic leaders to reflect on the ordinance’s first year and determine if the ordinance required further amendment in a series of public hearings. Lester Freeman, Vice President of Southeast First National Bank, oversaw a small group of local business leaders, commissioners, school board members, and other prominent community members as chair of the Bilingual Ordinance Review Committee. Commissioner Jorge

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(George) Valdes was instrumental in initiating an ordinance amendment. Valdes was a Cuban public relations executive who began a career in local politics first as a city councilman of Sweetwater, a municipality of Dade County. In 1978 he was elected mayor of Sweetwater, becoming the first Cuban-born mayor of an American city. In 1981, Valdes became the first Latino to serve on the Metro-Dade Commission when he was appointed by Mayor Clark to fill a vacancy.206

Upon entering office, Valdes drafted a number of amendments to the Anti-Bilingual Ordinance. The amendments would allow the county to provide emergency service information (such as hurricane evacuation guides), and medical translation services in Spanish and Creole for elderly Latino and Haitian residents who could not be expected to learn English.207

The Dade County Commission assembled the Bilingual Task Force in part to address Valdes’s suggestions for amending the ordinance, and to discuss whether it should be considered for another vote. Mayor Clark appointed a diverse, albeit politically unremarkable, group that included Carlos Arboleya, a prominent Cuban banker and Boy Scout troop leader, Athalie Range, the African-American former county commissioner and state secretary of community affairs, and Patricia Keller, a CDU representative and anti-bilingual activist. Mayor Clark also solicited input from Dr. José Aybar de Soto, director of the Florida State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, whom he invited to make a statement at the Committee’s town hall meeting. In his statement on behalf of the State

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206 Valdes alternately went by Jorge, his given name, and the Anglicized version, George, throughout his political career. As the lone Latino commissioner on the county commission, he often introduced himself with his signature greeting: “My name is Jorge. Call me George.”

Commission, Dr. Aybar de Soto came down harshly on the ordinance: he stated unequivocally that the ordinance had only worsened ethnic relations in Miami, and contributed to growing racial polarization in Southern Florida.  

The Bilingual Task Force determined that the ordinance denied basic services to a large portion of the county’s most needy residents, especially the elderly, who struggled the most with the language barrier. Administrators at Jackson Memorial Hospital, the county’s only public medical facility, experienced tremendous difficulty in adhering to the ordinance’s strict wording on providing bilingual documentation and medical advice to Spanish speaking patients. In terms of the local economy, the ordinance created barriers to effective operation of the tourist industry, primarily by limiting Metro’s ability to spend county money on foreign language advertisements and promotions in Europe or Latin America. Finally, the Commission called for a full repeal of the ordinance, deeming it as only creating an exacerbation of “ill will” and a “decrease in [tourist] revenue to Metro.”

The Ordinance Review Committee / Bilingual Task Force drew considerable interest from county constituents, who called and wrote in to the Mayor’s Office to offer their support or criticism. John T. Cox, a “non-Latin white” residing in North Miami, wrote a lengthy letter to Mayor Clark offering his perspective on the damage the ordinance had done to Miami’s place as a center for Latin American business. Cox dismissed Citizens of Dade United as a splinter group “provincial in their outlook” who

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208 Jose M. Aybar de Soto to Lester M. Freeman, Miami Fl., 14 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.

209 Jose M. Aybar de Soto to Lester M. Freeman, Miami Fl., 14 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.
stood in the way of Miami’s development as an international center for trade and tourism. Letters from constituents who supported the English Only ordinance and Shafer’s own correspondence with county officials reveals a grassroots movement that relied heavily on the discourse of the “culture wars” to rally support. Harvey Abramson, a local trial lawyer, wrote to the commission in support of the ordinance and CDU’s efforts to preserve English. Abramson compared Dade County to Quebec, the Canadian province perpetually on the verge of splitting from the mother country over language, religion, and culture, and sarcastically asked Mayor Clark: “Certainly no member of the county commission would like to have Dade County move for separation from the rest of the country…?”

Shafer was outraged by the county’s presumption to appoint a Bilingual Task Force/Ordinance Review Committee without her explicit approval of each committee member and at the county’s inclusion of five Latinos on the committee of twelve, who formed a minority. The ordinance review was just the start of a multi-year battle between Shafer and the Metro-Dade Commission. Between 1981 and 1985, Shafer repeatedly petitioned the Metro-Dade Commission on behalf of her own ordinance. She investigated language violations and “illegalities,” and locked horns with the commissioners and county manager on the correct interpretation of the ordinance’s opaque wording. Indeed, Shafer became a one-woman enforcer of cultural assimilation, making sure that Latin

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210 John T. Cox to Hon. Stephen P. Clark, Miami Fl., 11 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts; Harvey S. Abramson to Hon. Stephen P. Clark, Miami Fl., 18 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.
immigrants became “AMERICANIZED, by LEARNING & SPEAKING the ENGLISH LANGUAGE & AMERICAN CULTURE.”

On October 1, 1981, Shafer met with Greenberg and Commissioner Valdes to discuss the amendment of the ordinance. Along with several unnamed CDU members, Shafer listened to Valdes’s plan to amend the ordinance to allow for medical translation services at Jackson Memorial Hospital’s four county medical facilities. Shafer had long been critical of the county’s implementation of translators for patients at the over-burdened public hospital, a centerpiece of the original 1973 Bilingual Bicultural Resolution and work of the Office of Latin Affairs. Shafer described Jackson Memorial as the institutional embodiment of the “over-Latinazation of the once-Americanized Dade County.” Shafer accused Stierheim and the Public Health Trust of directly violating the 1980 ordinance by knowingly “permitting the practice of VOODOO on Haitians & SANTERIA on Cubans as patients” at the hospital. Shafer also demanded the closure of Jackson Memorial’s Hispanic International Relations Office. The office existed not to service local Hispanics but to accommodate the hospital’s growing medical tourism business, which drew well-to-do patients from Latin America and the Caribbean seeking treatment in the United States.

Shafer and CDU undertook their own investigation into translation services being offered at Jackson, and through a Florida Public Records Act request they discovered that the hospital had spent $318,157.44 in local funds on translation services in 1981. The

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211 Emmy Shafer to County Manager Merrett Stierheim, CODU Memo #504, Coral Gables Fl. 14 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.

212 Emmy Shafer to County Manager Merrett Stierheim, CODU Memo #504, Coral Gables Fl. 14 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts
figure accounted for the yearly cost of “20 interpreters, plus uniforms and supplies, operating 3 shifts, 24 hours a day.” Enraged, Shafer argued not only was this service a violation of the 1980 ordinance because it drew upon county funds to employ translators, but because Commissioners Clara Oesterle, Beverly Phillips, and Ruth Shack were ex-officio board members of the Public Health Trust, which ran Jackson Memorial, there was a “legal conflict of interest since these same commissioners vote on these matters.”

Beyond her accusations of corruption and conflicts of interest, Shafer constructed her argument in terms of “reverse discrimination”--if the hospitals in Miami Beach did not offer Yiddish translators to their Jewish American patients, why should the county hospital be offering that service to Cuban and Haitian patients? What Shafer and her supporters refused to acknowledge was that there were many thousands more Cuban and Haitian patients than Jewish American patients. What need did the hospital have for translators if any hospital employee could call 911 in an emergency situation and reach a bilingual operator? Especially, if 911 was the only county funded translation service that the 1980 ordinance had permitted.

The hysteria that made CDU and Emmy Shafer politically relevant ebbed in 1982. It soon became apparent to Metro-Dade that despite their efforts at appeasement, Shafer’s entire political mission rested on wishing away the demographic and political changes that had already occurred and, hoping that Cubans could be induced to assimilate quickly.

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213 Emmy Shafer to County Manager Merrett Stierheim, CODU Memo #503, Coral Gables Fl. 14 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts

214 Emmy Shafer to County Manager Merrett Stierheim, CODU Memo #505, Coral Gables Fl. 14 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts
and completely, just as she claimed “all other immigrants had done.” At the conclusion of a lengthy memorandum to County Manager Stierheim, she summed up the consequences for the “longtime Dade County residents” CDU ostensibly represented being “inundated with SPANISH language & CUBAN CULTURE.” White Miamians needed to be protected from “gross REVERSE DISCRIMINATION…by rejecting Americans for jobs by the thousands just because they do not speak SPANISH…plus being made to feel like a foreigner in your own country!” Cubans needed to be made into “true Americans” by being forced to speak English, and “falling into the AMERICAN MAINSTREAM.” In February 1982, Metro-Dade tried to appease CDU by encouraging Commissioner Valdes’s to withdraw his call for amendment referendum to the ordinance. Valdes acquiesced, explaining that after meeting with CDU and careful consideration he felt that to revive the referendum at the polls “would only polarize this community even more.”

Stierheim too began to disengage from Shafer’s non-stop correspondence and badgering. He responded to Shafer’s claims about corruption and voodoo at Jackson Memorial Hospital, and misuse of county funds to perpetuate “gross reverse discrimination,” in a series of tersely worded and numbered memos. Explaining carefully how county funds were used properly in each of the instances she claimed malfeasance by the Commission and negligence of the Anti-Bilingual Ordinance’s implementation, Stierheim informed Shafer that Jackson Memorial did in fact serve patients with “differing religious beliefs” as law required them to, although he had no evidence to

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215Emmy Shafer to County Manager Merrett Stierheim, CODU Memo #505, Coral Gables Fl. 14 January 1982, Office of Latin Affairs, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts; Commissioner Jorge Valdes to Hon. Mayor Stephen Clark and Members of the Board of County Commissioners, “Re: Amendments to the Anti-Bilingual Ordinance,” Miami Fl, 12 February 1982, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.
substantiate her claims that voodoo and Santeria rituals were being practiced openly on
the wards. Likewise, the hospital did use some taxpayer funds to provide translators, but
because the Florida State medical licensure board and the Joint Commission on
Accreditation of Hospitals standards--state and national agencies respectively--required
“that patients understand procedures undertaken on their behalf” the hospital had to
provide translation services to maintain their accreditation. Just as the county elections
board had to provide ballots in Spanish or Creole to meet federal standards; the hospital
was governed by federal and state regulations, an exception that superseded the local
ordinance.²¹⁶

Cubans and other Latinos may have felt that their world was bicultural, and that
the racial tensions of 1980 were far behind them, but the reactionary activists who
organized politically around these issues felt otherwise. Even as the English Only
movement lost steam in Dade County some local activists attempted to generate national
interest in English Only. Patricia Keller, CDU vice president and president of the
Allapattah Community Association, expressed “the mood of many whites” in a special
New York Times report on Miami’s racial problems. Keller described a vast political
conspiracy at work in Miami, in which the federal government and local politicians were
in cahoots in an effort to “Cubanize, Latinize, the city and get rid of Americans
here…[They are] hell bent on destroying the city with their tremendous grab to get
refugees and more government money.” In addition to her interest in language legislation,
Keller was involved in zoning and community issues effecting inner city residents,

²¹⁶ County Manager Merrett Stierheim to Emmy Shafer, Re: CODU Memo #504, Miami Fl., 24 February
1982, Office of Latin Affairs Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts; County Manager Merrett
Stierheim to Emmy Shafer, Re: CODU Memo #505, Miami Fla. 19 February 1982, Office of Latin Affairs
Files, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.
making her an unlikely ally to African American community activists. Howard Gary, the first black city manager of Miami, echoed Keller’s concerns about where federal funding and programming was going: “This community has failed to share its economic well-being with the Liberty City’s and Overtown’s of Miami.”


Despite feeble attempts to ally themselves with African-American community organizations, CDU continued to lose political traction within the county, especially as Latino political representation increased in the mid-1980s. Shafer found herself at an impasse, as the commissioners relied heavily on state and federal laws to protect as many

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217 Liberty City and Overtown were the two largest historically black neighborhoods in Dade County at the time. Reginald Stuart, “Economic Trouble of Miami’s Blacks is Major Issue Facing Prospering City,” The New York Times, 19 January 1983.

bilingual services as possible. In a bid to re-capture public attention, Shafer set her sights lower. She tried to petition the county about the possibility of Spanish signage being introduced at the county financed Dade Metro-Zoo. In June 1984, the Miami Herald reported that Robyn and Bart Greene and the Little Havana Kiwanis Club had offered the Metro-Dade Parks Department $3000 to add bilingual signage to the Metro-Zoo, primarily as a tourism incentive. Because the project would be funded with private monies, Asst. County Attorney Greenberg suggested to the Herald that legally the county could implement the signage. Shafer, neither a lawyer nor a commissioner, immediately took the offense: “I am advising you Mr. Murray Greenberg that you have made an incorrect legal interpretation of the ordinance…I am advising you not to put up any signs in Spanish.” Shafer’s demands went unanswered.219

In September, Commissioner Valdes renewed his proposal to amend the English Only Ordinance, but this time with the support of the Board of Commissioners and the County Attorney’s office. The new amendments were put to the board for a vote in a public hearing on October 16. The amended ordinance would allow the county to provide healthcare information in different languages, produce promotional tourist materials in Spanish, and provide non-emergency literature on hurricane preparedness and medical services in Spanish and Creole. The amendments would also allow the Metrorail and Metro-Dade Transportation Authority more leeway in posting informational signage.

The amended ordinance passed on October 16, but not without resistance from both Cuban groups and CDU. After the public hearing adjourned on October 16, SALAD chairman Manny Diaz promised Cubans “we will not stop until the law is repealed and

219 Emmy Shafer to Asst. County Attorney Murray Greenberg et al., CODU Memo #701, Coral Gables Fl. 2 July 1984, Office of Latin Affairs, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.
taken off the books.” The amended ordinance was still seen by Latinos as “an insult and offensive.” Also present at the public hearing, Mark Benson, CDU’s new vice-president, demanded an Ethnic Relations Board to mediate racially charged community problems.\(^{220}\)

After being excluded from the selection process for the Bilingual Task Force in 1981, CDU only agreed to cooperate with the amendment under the condition that the Board of Commissioners would follow a strict set of guidelines on the selection of the new Ethnic Relations Board. New members could not be “county employees, politicians, or political office holders, Chamber of Commerce persons, news media or religious officials.” Wilma Cook, an unaffiliated supporter of the ordinance present at the hearing described the revisions and CDU’s cooperation with the amendment process as an “insult to U.S. taxpayers...it appears that Castro and Duvalier have taken Dade County without a shot!”\(^{221}\)

After three months of silence from county officials, Shafer may have begun to believe that Duvalier and Castro had indeed taken the Metro-Dade Government. Undeterred, she continued petitioning Stierheim about the assemblage of the Ethnic Relations Board and the finer points of the amendment. By late January, the group had yet to meet or go through a member selection process.\(^{222}\)

\(^{220}\) Associated Press, “Exemptions Approved in Dade County Anti-Bilingual Ordinance,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 17 October 1984, 11B.

\(^{221}\) Associated Press, “Exemptions Approved in Dade County Anti-Bilingual Ordinance,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 17 October 1984, 11B.

\(^{222}\) Emmy Shafer to County Manager Merrett Stierheim, CODU Memo #1-85, Coral Gables Fl., 5 January 1985, Office of Latin Affairs, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.
After five unanswered letters, Shafer resorted to threatening Stierheim to rescind CDU’s cooperation with the amendments. “All we received were many cancelled appointments, stalling tactics and broken promises…hereby were are advising you that all Oct. 16, 1984 Amendment Agreements are VOID and CANCELLED.” Shafer was under the impression that the Board of Commissioners needed CDU’s approval to pass the amendment, when in fact the group was included in the public hearing merely as a courtesy to the originators of the first referendum and to avoid stirring up negative publicity.  

All the evidence suggests that Commissioner Valdes’s amendment would have passed with or without CDU’s cooperation or support. Shafer’s letter held no force of law, only the commission’s unanimous vote did. Shafer’s hysterical tone finally caught Stierheim’s attention and he responded informing her that her recently ousted vice-president Mark Benson had cancelled two meetings with county officials. Clearly, Shafer was not only losing political relevance, but also control of her own organization. Exasperated, Stierheim reminded her “these amendments cannot be voided or cancelled by unilateral action of your organization.” Ignoring Stierheim’s response, Shafer disseminated a press release in another attempt to raise interest in the county’s non-compliance with CDU’s demands, reminding Miamians that “legal promises should have been kept!” The press release received no coverage from the local press and no acknowledgment from the Metro-Dade Commission or Stierheim.

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223 Emmy Shafer to County Manager Merrett Stierheim, CODU Memo #3-85, Coral Gables Fl., 21 January 1985, Office of Latin Affairs, Box 05-335, Dade County Clerk of Courts.

Conclusion

The Anti-Bilingual Ordinance was no match for social and demographic changes wrought by Mariel. Between 1983 and 1985, the U.S. English movement spread nationally but lost considerable traction in Miami. English Only activists hoped that legislating language would force Cubans to Americanize and dissuade other Latinos from immigrating to South Florida. By 1983, more Cubans and Latinos were living in Miami and speaking Spanish in the home and the workplace than ever before.

In a major marketing research study conducted by Strategy Research Corporation in 1982 and 1983, pollsters found that Mariel made “Latins more Latin.” The survey found a number of significant demographic and socioeconomic shifts occurring with the Latino community just in the three years between the release of the study and the preliminary 1980 U.S. Census. In terms of language, between 1980 and 1983 the number of Latinos who stated they only spoke Spanish at home increased from 75.6 percent to 89.2 percent. In the same three-year period the number of Latinos in Dade, Broward (Ft. Lauderdale), and Monroe (the Florida Keys) counties increased by nearly 200,000, compared to the number registered in the 1980 Census. Undermining the fear of many Anglos in the area that Mariel refugees would become a permanently jobless underclass, the survey found that the unemployment rate among South Florida Latinos was 8.3 percent, lower than the national average. Likewise, the average number of people per Latino household also decreased between 1980 and 1983, as Mariel refugees became economically independent and established their own households. Far from becoming assimilated in the typical notion of the word but still integrating into mainstream life,

Cubans and Latinos in Miami were living in a “bicultural but by no means polarized community.”

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CHAPTER IV: EPILOGUE

On September 16, 1984 Americans tuned into a brand new police series premiering on NBC at 10 PM. Set to a barrage of New Wave electronica, *Miami Vice* was beamed into millions of living rooms. Speed boats, flamingos, Jai Alai (a Basque sport transplanted from Cuba), the Atlantis Condominium (designed by the Latino owned architecture firm Arquitectonica), and the sparkling white façade of El Banco Industrial de Venezuela raced across the screen like a newsreel travelogue on amphetamines. On a street corner in South Beach, Detective Sonny Crocket watched a group of black and Latino teenagers breakdance. Miami was the modern day American Casablanca, a multicultural “Barbary Coast” for the Reagan years. Like so many Miamians, the main characters were transplants, two sharply dressed detectives: a New York Afro-Puerto Rican and a blonde former football hero from northern Florida. The police chief? A grim-faced Cuban, of course. In *Miami Vice*, the hierarchy of the Miami Police Department functioned as a reflection of local power structure writ large. But as has become clear in Miami’s history, the glossy image that the city sells often masks an altogether different reality.

By the time *Miami Vice* became NBC’s breakout hit of 1984, it seemed that Cubans had finally gained a foothold in the adopted homeland, and more importantly in local politics. Miami was weathering the Reagan Recession remarkably well as the center of trade and banking for Latin America. In the Metro-Dade Commission, Commissioner Valdes’s amendment to the English Only ordinance had quashed much of the English
Only movement’s momentum. Mayor Maurice Ferré held onto office for another year after two hard fought campaigns in 1981 and 1983, and was joined by Cubans Armando Lacasa and Demetrio Perez, Jr. on the City of Miami commission.

Cubans, and to a lesser extent African-Americans and Haitians, were registering to vote and running for political office in greater numbers than ever before, but their political power remained diluted at the county level. The structure of Metro government no longer seemed to serve and represent the expanding minority population. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Metro-Dade system of appointments and municipal autonomy enabled the rise of Miami’s first Latino and black politicians, but the continued existence of the at large election system meant that the ethnic and racial makeup of the Metro Commission had ceased to accurately represent the diversity of the county. Latinos and African-Americans were dissatisfied by the tokenism of one or two minority commissioners, and called unsuccessfully for a referendum to revise the Metro-Dade Charter in 1982 and 1984.

Miami in the mid-1980s not only grew in terms of population; real estate development, fueled by foreign investment, radically altered the geography of the city. New suburbs such as Kendall, Miami Lakes, and Cutler Ridge, sprang up in unincorporated areas that had once been agricultural fields or swamp land to the far west of the downtown city center and Miami Beach. Lured by the promise of newly constructed housing and schools, upwardly mobile Cubans (and affluent Nicaraguans, Haitians, and Colombians fleeing political instability) and white Miamians abandoned Little Havana and West Miami for the promise of suburban life at the edge of the

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Everglades. In these unincorporated areas of the county, municipal politics held little meaning. Latino suburbanites looked to the Metro Commission to provide the representation they had experienced in the incorporated municipalities, and found they were being offered little.

For Maurice Ferré, the rapidly changing political landscape would have disastrous consequences. The City of Miami grew more Cuban with every passing day. Ferré’s hold on the office rested on a delicate balance between the African American residents of Overtown, the affluent Anglos of Brickell, working class Cubans and Puerto Ricans in Little Havana and Wynwood. But by 1984, three of the five city commissioners were Cuban, and the population was almost 60 percent Cuban. After barely scraping past Cuban candidates Manolo Rebozo and Xavier Suárez in 1981 and 1983, Ferré called for a racially and ethnically “balanced city commission” in 1984 and attempted to build interest in a municipal charter revision that would transition to a strong mayor style of governance. Ferré’s pleas fell flat and came across as political self-preservation rather than a call for true racial harmony. 227

The 1985 City of Miami mayoral race exposed the fragility of the Latino political coalition that Ferré constructed in the 1970s. Ferré lost considerable black political support in 1984 when he fired the city’s first black City Manager, Howard Gary, over allegations that Gary was involved in business dealings with a local bank suspected of money laundering. To make matters worse, the election had the most diverse field of mayoral candidates to date: Dr. Marvin Dunn, a black community activist and tenured

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professor at Florida International University, Raul Masvidal, a Cuban banker and Bay of Pigs veteran, and Xavier Suárez, a young Cuban lawyer.

Suárez, the dark horse second place contender in the 1983 race, posed the greatest threat to Ferré’s candidacy. The son of engineers, Suárez fled Cuba with his family as a child and grew up in Washington, D.C. An exceptional student, Suárez attended Villanova and Harvard Law School, and moved to Miami to practice law. Suárez spoke perfect unaccented English and his sober, even dour, demeanor offered a counterpoint to Ferré’s image as “Miami’s millionaire mayor.” But in almost every other respect, Suárez’s candidacy operated on a template created by Ferré during his 1970 and 1973 campaigns. Moving fluidly between black prayer breakfasts in Overtown, luncheons at the Cuban municipios, and cocktails at the Tiger Bay Club in the affluent Bay Heights neighborhood, Suárez used the same ethnic bloc campaigning strategies that had kept Ferré in office for 12 years. Suárez also ran in the same Florida Democratic Party circles as Ferré, while maintaining a public commitment to President Reagan’s anti-communist foreign policy platform.228

However, Suárez had a powerful Cuban exile story that Ferré could only gesture to when recounting his grandfather’s experience in the Cuban War of Independence. For Cubans in the City of Miami, Suárez was the candidate that they had been waiting for, the ideal bilingual and bicultural Cuban exile, with an elite American education to boot. Suárez lacked Ferré’s extensive network of contacts in the local real estate and construction industries, and failed to secure an endorsement from the Latin Builders Association, who continued to support Ferré. Suárez secured significant campaign

228 Commissioner Xavier Suarez, in discussion with the author, 22 April 2014.
contributions, including the financial support of Norman Braman, the Florida billionaire who thirty years later helped Marco Rubio ascend to the U.S. Senate. All over Little Havana, banners and lawn signs appeared bearing the slogan: “CUBANO VOTA CUBANO.” Cubans vote Cuban. In response, Ferré warned of a “Cuban takeover;” a city commission dominated by Cubans uninterested in serving the black or white communities. Lacking black or Cuban support, his campaign message came across as racially divisive and desperate. For the first time in 12 years, Ferré failed to make the run-off and Xavier Suárez became the City of Miami’s first Cuban-born Mayor.229 “Cuban takeover” proved to be an empty threat, and Suárez accommodated both the black community and the dwindling white establishment. Cuban voters, on the other hand, were frustrated by the lack of services the City of Miami could offer them. As one veteran lobbyist observed in 1987, “The ones who wanted a Cuban mayor have gotten one and they see that it doesn’t do them much good. The game is now at the county level.” As the municipalities became controlled by single ethnic group blocs, Latino politicians and civic activists trained their sights on reforming the county election structure in order to build minority political representation at every level of local government.

On August 26, 1986, Maurice Ferré and Xavier Suárez joined ten other bipartisan plaintiffs led by State Senator Carrie Meek in a class action lawsuit filed against Metropolitan Dade County in the United States District Court (Southern District of Florida) alleging that the at-large electoral structure for County Commissioners violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by diluting black and Latino voting power. U.S. District

Judge Kenneth Rystamp threw out the suit in 1988. In 1990, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated the suit, and Dade County requested a Supreme Court review of the appellate decision.\textsuperscript{230}

The appeals court found that Ryskamp had erroneously applied the 1986 *Thornburg v. Gingles* decision by ruling that the Latino and black defendants failed to satisfied the third prong of the *Gingles* test for a voting dilution claim, by failing to “show the existence of a Non-Hispanic white majority that usually defeated the election of the minority’s preferred candidate.” Ryskamp ruled that Hispanic and black candidates failed to be elected because their constituents failed to successfully register to vote. The appeals court found that although Non-Latino whites did not constitute a majority, when paired with the politically cohesive black community the two groups formed a majority which usually denied Latinos the opportunity to elect their candidate.\textsuperscript{231}

In August 1992, U.S. District Judge Donald Graham ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and ordered that the county replace the at large system with 13 new districts, in which residents cast ballots only for the commissioners in their districts. In his ruling, Judge Graham pointed out that since 1964 not a single black candidate for County Commissioner had won without first being appointed. Likewise, only two Latinos had served on the Metro Commission: the first, Jorge Valdes by appointment and the second, Alex Penelas, by at-large election. Each new district was comprised of about 150,000 residents. The first election in the new district system yielded a record 90 candidates on the ballot for the various districts. The new crop of candidates ranged from political

\textsuperscript{230}“Court Won’t Block Dade Election Suit,” *Gainesville Sun*, March 5, 1991, 9B.

stalwarts like Maurice Ferré, to George Milhet, a Cuban real estate broker making his second bid for a commission seat. He first ran thirty years prior in 1964, shortly after attaining his American citizenship.\textsuperscript{232}

On April 20, 1993 the new Metro Commission was elected. The board finally represented Miami’s diverse population and was comprised of six Latinos, four African Americans, and three Anglos. One month later, they gathered to consider the fate of the English Only Ordinance. Citizens of Dade United, an anemic version of the earlier organization, and U.S. English lobbied the commission to uphold the ordinance. U.S. English field director Christopher Doss warned that repealing English Only would turn Miami into an “apartheid enclave for Cubano culture and language.” Maurice Ferré, the newly elected Commissioner of District 7, received hundreds of phone calls and letters from constituents, labor leaders, business owners and local journalists about the ordinance. The \textit{Miami Herald}, led by columnist Carl Hiaasen, and the \textit{Miami News} called for the ordinance’s repeal.\textsuperscript{233}

On May 17, 1993 the freshly elected Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to repeal the English Only Ordinance. A new generation of Latino commissioners, led by Miguel Diaz de la Portilla and Alex Penelas, denounced the ordinance. “It is a hate ordinance that serves absolutely no purpose,” Diaz de la Portilla told reporters. Metro-Dade Chairman of the Board of Commissioners Arthur Teele Jr., hailed the repeal as new day for race relations in Miami, “Dade County has entered an era of racial understanding and tolerance.” Citizens of Dade United and U.S. English refused

\textsuperscript{232} Maya Bell, “90 Run on Historic Dade Ballot,” \textit{Orlando Sentinel}, March 15, 1993, 1B.

\textsuperscript{233} Larry Rohter, “Repeal is Likely for ‘English Only’ Policy in Miami,” \textit{New York Times}, May 14, 1993;
to accept the repeal quietly. Patricia Keller, formerly of CDU, described the repeal as “obscene.” CDU Vice President, Enos Schera threatened to use the repeal as the basis for a federal lawsuit, “It is very, very, unequal to use county money and re-disburse that to Spanish people.” Immediately after the repeal, Citizens of Dade United filed a lawsuit against the Metro Board of Commissioners alleging that the commission had no authority to repeal the ordinance. In August 1993, Circuit Judge Peter Capua ruled that the commissioners had acted properly and within their rights to repeal the ordinance. Citizens of Dade United did not offer a public response.234

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AFTERWORD

The strides that Latinos in Miami have made in creating a local government that serves the needs of immigrants and minorities are often obscured by Miami’s continued prominence as a tourist mecca. Recently, the *New York Times* ran a feature on the city in its travel section. The title exclaimed: “In Miami, Cuban Culture, No Passport Required.” Writer Colleen Creamer revisited her American hometown, in search of the Havana her father had visited as young naval officer in the 1940s and 1950s. What she claimed to find was a satisfying facsimile of Cuban culture, a memory of “Old Havana” conveniently located on a single commercial strip in Miami. Blissfully ignorant of the rest of the city, Creamer fixates on her “authentic musical experience” at the Hoy Como Ayer lounge, and her perfect Cuban *medianoches* sandwich. The piece reflects a strange historical amnesia about Miami’s long relationship with Cuba and the Caribbean that began before 1959, and a blissful ignorance of the role that Cubans themselves and the local government have in fostering exactly the sort of “no passport required” travel experience she praises.

But as this project has shown, the city is far more than a resort town and has grown into not only the most economically and politically powerful city in Florida, but arguably the political and economic capital of the Caribbean and Latin America. Miami has much more to offer historians and political observers who are interested in what a Latino-majority American population might be. Perhaps it is comforting for travel writers to think Miami exists only for freshly rolled cigars and fried plantains, but what makes
Miami compelling is not that it is a poor man’s Havana, but that it is something entirely different. It is a truly minority dominated American city, where through years of activism and policymaking, Latinos created a globalized immigrant city that catered not only to tourists, but to immigrants, foreign investors, and multinational corporations. For better or worse, Miami was one of the first major American cities to bind its fate completely to the new global economy.

As the voting public and political future in the United States becomes increasingly Latino, the experiences of Cubans in Miami can offer valuable lessons on the role federal and municipal governments and agencies can have in empowering their minority constituents. During the mid 1960s, Cubans in Miami rejected traditional notions of assimilation in favor of a version of American citizenship that allowed them to embrace both their Cuban heritage and American civic life. They were enabled by the Cuban Adjustment Act and in Miami, by a local government that saw a bilingual and bicultural population as an asset to the tourist trade and to foreign investment in the local economy. Cubans are labeled a “model minority” for their unusually high socioeconomic status and education levels compared to other Latinos and to African Americans, but the model minority tag obscures the extent to which government aid and progressive municipal employment and education programs enabled Cubans in Miami to become “taxpayers and homeowners” and to participate in a local economy that ultimately viewed them as valuable workers, rather than undesirable migrants.

Partisan politics in Miami also reveal a great deal about what a Latino majority electorate could look like in the next fifty years. For a brief moment in 2015, it seemed as if a son of Miami would inherit the Earth, or perhaps just the Republican presidential
nomination. U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, former West Miami City Commissioner and protégé of Governor Jeb Bush, established his campaign headquarters on Capitol Hill and hit the campaign trail. Rubio, although the product of many of the traditional Latino political networks in Miami, surged into office on the wave of the Tea Party, and perhaps hoped to recapture that energy with a presidential run after only one term in the Senate. However, as his presidential campaign imploded in the face of Donald Trump’s unexpected popularity and nativist political platform, Florida lobbyists and fundraisers have been left to wonder what will become of their party in the state. Rubio, whose presidential platform originally emphasized his immigrant story and conservative values, has doubled down on the xenophobia en vogue in the Republican Party and is using his lame duck term to pass a bill dismantling the CAA and ending refugee benefits for Cuban immigrants, whom he claims “steal $700 million a year from taxpayers.”

In light of normalized diplomatic relations and possible regime change in Cuba, reconsideration of the Cuban Adjustment Act and refugee status for Cubans will likely happen in the very near future. What is certain is that employing the nativist rhetoric that once drove Cubans to register to vote and demand the right to be heard from their legislators, will do little to endear Rubio and other Republican candidates to the growing number of Latino voters in Florida and elsewhere. If anything, Democrats and Republicans alike in search of a solution to comprehensive immigration reform should look to the CAA and local immigration services programs in Miami as a model for fostering economic independence, political participation, and civic engagement in immigrant communities.
In his historic speech to the Cuban people given at the Gran Teatro de la Habana in April, U.S. President Barack Obama remarked, “In the United States we have a clear monument to what the Cuban people can build: its called Miami.” But as often is the case, truth is stranger than political pandering. In many respects, contemporary Miami is the multicultural and multilingual urban center that Cuban and other Latino politicians envisioned, but it is also a testament to the power of interethnic political alliance building and to the longevity of Miami’s “Pan-American” appeal to tourists and immigrants.
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