



## Cubans in the United States

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Natives of Cuba have resided in territories that are now part of the United States since the 1560s, starting with the foundation of San Agustín, Florida. The Cuban presence grew during the nineteenth century and expanded dramatically in the twentieth. This essay offers an overview of Cubans in the United States during the last two centuries by focusing on several specific themes that have been the subject of some research. The migration story is examined first in relation to the economic and political forces that have tied Cuba closely to the United States for over one hundred and fifty years. This is followed by a survey of the Cuban communities that formed during the last two centuries. A specific look at migration and the economic foundations of the communities reveals certain elements in common over time, but also some very radical differences. The commonalities provide a basis for developing a historically cohesive Cuban-American story, but differences also point to the diversity of experience among Cubans in the United States. These commonalities and differences are most effectively observed through the complex interplay of exile, immigrant and ethnic identities, which the essay highlights in three chronologically organized sections. Finally, an overview of the history of Cubans in the United States must account for the specific contributions of Cuban women and Cubans of color.\*

### Cuban Immigration to the United States

Cuban familiarity with what became the United States began during the Seven Years' War, with the British conquest of Havana in 1762. During the ten-month British occupation, Cubans came into contact with soldiers, merchants and traders from Britain's North American colonies. This short occupation had a great impact as Cubans discovered the benefits of commercial relationships outside the Spanish empire. After that time, many North Americans visited and

lived in Cuba but many more Cubans moved north to the United States where, despite a very different way of life, they usually managed to establish a livelihood without forfeiting a clear attachment to their Cuban identity (Louis Pérez 1990, 1-9).

As the economic and commercial relationships between the Island and the United States expanded during the first half of the century, about one thousand Cubans moved to such cities as New Orleans, Philadelphia and New York. Professionals and merchants arrived to take advantage of opportunities opened by the expanding economic ties between Cuba and the United States. Others went north to go to school. Some stayed but those that returned had an overall positive impression of the United States; notions that, once transmitted to their countrymen, peaked Cuban curiosity about the north. The most visible immigrants, however, were the political exiles who arrived in considerable numbers at the end of the 1840s. So impressed were many Cubans with the United States that numerous dissatisfied political exiles, opposing Spain's colonial system, worked for the Island's annexation to the United States. This came to naught, of course, and by the end of the 1850s many of these exiles had reconciled with Spain and returned home. During the second half of the century, changing economic and political conditions in Cuba as well as evolving economic ties with the United States intensified migration to the traditional destinations of New Orleans, Philadelphia and New York. They arrived in some cases for expressly economic purposes, but increasingly they left home for political reasons as Cubans engaged in their thirty-year struggle (1868-1898) to break from Spain. Surges in immigration occurred particularly during the disruptions of the Ten Years' War (1868-1878) and the Independence War (1895-1898) (Poyo 1989, 1-51).

At the same time, the growth of the cigar industry in Florida, Louisiana and New York attracted Cubans of

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**Castillo de San Marcos, St. Augustine, Florida.**

working-class and multiracial backgrounds. Beginning in the 1860s protectionist tariff policies in the United States fostered the growth of the cigar industry. Spiraling import tariffs on cigars and relatively low duties on tobacco leaf enabled entrepreneurs to create a genuinely Cuban industry within the United States, which attracted cigar workers from Havana and western Cuba. While these tariffs slowed Cuban cigar exports during the 1870s and 1880s, the McKinley Tariff of 1890 made cigar shipments to the United States virtually prohibitive. The United States-based Cuban cigar factories enjoyed a distinct edge which they maintained until after 1915 when consumer preferences for cigarettes and changes in production techniques altered the industry (Stubbs 15-27).

Furthermore, a variety of social and economic developments in Cuba also contributed to migration north. The Ten Years' War weakened sugar production during the 1870s. Destruction of sugar plantations in Cuba and the growing beet sugar industry in Europe led to reduced exports and loss of markets. These troubles were compounded by decreasing sugar prices of the mid-1880s. During this time Cuba fell into a depression

that took its toll on the cigar industry. Tobacco workers moved to Key West, Tampa and New York in search of work (Louis Pérez 1988, 129-55).

Other factors also pushed Cuban workers north. Spanish immigrant workers enjoyed preferential treatment in the cigar labor market from the late 1880s through the first decade of the twentieth century. Spaniards owned and managed many of the factories in Cuba and hired their own countrymen. Labor strife also kept workers on the move. Militant labor ideologies, including anarchism and Marxism, appeared in Cuba during 1880s-1920s leading to frequent confrontations and disruptions in work. During strikes Cuban workers often moved to cigar centers in the United States. Finally, the penetration of the United States tobacco trust at the turn of the century led to further displacement of the Cuban industry to Florida where workers followed in record numbers (Stubbs 22-34; Poyo 1991).

This accelerated migration did not last long into the twentieth century. Mechanization of the North American cigar industry and shifts in fundamental market demand for cigars produced by changes in consumer preferences for cigarettes reduced migratory pressures.

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### The old city gates of St. Augustine, Florida.

This process culminated in the obsolescence of hand rolled cigars for mass markets, which slowed the migration of cigar workers to the United States after 1930 (Stubbs 35-42; Evans). During 1921-1930, about 16,000 Cubans immigrated to the United States, but this declined to a little more than 9,000 during the next decade (1931-1940) (U. S. INS, "Historical Immigration Statistics by County of Last Residence"). Migrations from Cuba to the United States between 1865-1940 responded to the socioeconomic dynamic that converted Cuba from a cigar-manufacturing center to a net exporter of tobacco leaf.

The decline in immigration was a temporary phenomenon however. The immediate post-depression era brought a resurgence of Cuban migration to the United States as a result of a new set of factors not connected with cigar markets but rather with the evolving general economic and political relationship between Cuba and the United States. The relationship that set these forces in motion originated with the North American occupation of Cuba in 1898 which laid the Island open to United States domination. The Platt Amendment ensured almost unlimited United

States access in Cuba, which North American interests used to gain a foothold in the Cuban economy. Cubans found it difficult to reestablish their economic position in the face of foreign competition and influence, and by the 1940s and 1950s the Island had become even more intimately linked to the North American economy. Despite one of the highest per capita incomes in Latin America, Cuba suffered from a poor distribution of resources, a relatively high cost of living and a large underemployed labor force. The economic difficulties were aggravated by Cuba's political situation during the same two decades. Political violence during the 1940s gave way in 1952 to a coup d'etat by former president and military strongman Fulgencio Batista. Through intimidation and violence, and with de facto support from the United States government, Batista maintained tight control of Cuba while taking little action to check the Island's economic deterioration (Louis Pérez 1990, 113-237).

One way some Cubans avoided the economic and political crises of the 1940s and 1950s was to do what others had done previously: emigrate. Most immigrants that arrived after the Great Depression traveled to New York and, increasingly, to Miami. During 1941-1950, some 26,000 Cubans arrived in the United States. The increase continued into the 1950s as almost 79,000 immigrated from 1951 to 1960 ("Historical Immigration Statistics"). This evidence suggests that Cuba's economic relationship with the United States, like that of Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and other Latin American nations, would have produced a stable and increasing migratory stream across the Straits of Florida. And indeed, a radical increase did take place beginning in the 1960s, but for reasons entirely different from the previous decade.

On January 1, 1959, the Cuban dictator Batista fled Cuba in the face of rapidly rising opposition against his government. He left a power vacuum that was shortly filled by guerrilla leader Fidel Castro Ruz who quickly moved to transform Cuba into a communist nation. By 1961, Castro had declared Cuba a Marxist-Leninist State and the accompanying radical socioeconomic transformations resulted in a migratory process that by 1990 had sent at least one million Cubans to the United States.

Migration to the United States after 1959 involved different combinations of political and economic forces that resulted in a diverse immigrant population. With the triumph of the Cuban revolution these forces became very strong indeed. Cubans associated with the Batista government were the first to leave. Cuba's socioeconomic elite followed, as the new government under Castro initiated the nationalization of the economy and Cuban-United States relations entered a

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**Fidel Castro.**

period of crisis. From 1959 to 1962, some 215,000 Cubans departed for the United States, but the numbers decreased dramatically when the 1963 missile crisis disrupted the flow. With the closing of direct travel between Cuba and its North American neighbor, only 56,000 managed to arrive in the United States during the next three years, mostly through third countries.

By the mid-1960s, economic difficulties in Cuba increased migratory pressures. The revolution spread to all sectors of the economy, leaving few economic resources in private hands. At the same time, socialist experimentation, particularly in attempting to replace material with moral incentives, led to the virtual collapse of the Cuban economy by the end of the decade. This economic dilemma contributed to the government's decision to reopen the doors to emigration in September 1965. Authorities announced that Cubans with relatives in North America could depart by boat from the port of Camarioca in the province of Matanzas. Cubans in Florida traveled in vessels across the straits of Florida to pick up their relatives, but the difficulties involved in such an operation led to an agreement between the United States and Cuba to

allow the exodus to proceed by air. From October, 1965, through April, 1973, some 302,000 persons arrived to the United States from the Island. At the same time, special arrangements allowed Cubans in Spain to emigrate to the United States. In 1969, however, the Cuban government ceased issuing exit visas and in 1973 discontinued flights altogether. The number of Cuban immigrants declined dramatically with only 10,000 to 14,000 political prisoners arriving under special agreements over the next seven years.

By the end of the 1960s, the Cuban government recognized the need to turn away from its haphazard economic policies and embraced the Soviet Union's model of centralized planning. While economic conditions improved during the 1970s, pressures to emigrate continued unabated as thousands of Cubans became tired of continual shortages and political intolerance. In 1978, a thaw in United States-Cuban relations led to a dialogue between the exile communities and the government of Cuba which resulted in an agreement between Cuban and North American authorities to allow Cuban exiles to visit family on the Island. One apparent unexpected side effect of these interactions was a rise in expectations among Cubans on the Island regarding opportunities in the United States.

Frustrations in Cuba finally came to a head during April, 1980, when over 10,000 people sought asylum in the Peruvian Embassy in Havana. The Cuban government then announced that individuals wanting to leave Cuba would be free to do so through the Port of Mariel. Cubans in the United States immediately formed a flotilla of boats, yachts and other vessels, and set out to transport them to Key West after President Jimmy Carter publicly declared that the United States would "provide an open heart and open arms for the tens of thousands of refugees seeking freedom from Communist domination." During the next five months 125,000 Cubans arrived in the United States (Masud-Piloto; Pedraza-Bailey 1985b; Portes and Bach). During the rest of the 1980s Cuban migration to the United States remained modest, building slowly toward the end of the decade as the changing political landscape in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union led to economic crisis in Cuba by 1989 and 1990. Further shortages on the Island led to an increase in escapes and defections. Migration from Cuba to the United States continues and will no doubt take on new characteristics as international political realities bring about change on the Island.

**Cuban Communities in the United States**

The earliest integrated Cuban communities in the United States emerged in the nineteenth century as a

result of both the rise of the North American hand-rolled cigar industry and Cuba's economic and political problems. Although Cubans arrived and lived in the United States prior to the Civil War, they did not generally reside in distinct communities. Instead, they lived scattered primarily in New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah, Philadelphia and New York. The first defined communities, with distinct leaders, institutions, and economic traditions, reflecting the class and racial composition of Cuban cities, appeared in the 1870s. By the middle of that decade an estimated 12,000 Cubans lived in the United States; some 4,000 in New York; 3,000 in New Orleans; 2,000 in Key West; and perhaps another 2,500 in Jacksonville, Savannah, Washington, Boston and Galveston.

During the 1870s a broad cross section of Cuba's urban population took hold in New York, including members of Havana's creole elite, middle-class entrepreneurs and professionals, and a significant multiracial working class employed in the tobacco factories. After the Ten Years' War in 1878, many middle-class Cubans returned home while workers arrived to the United States in greater numbers. During the 1880s, the Cuban population probably fluctuated between 2,000 and 3,000, but increased with the outbreak of the independence war in 1895.

Key West also became an important destination for Cuban emigrés with the outbreak of the Ten Years' War and the rise of that town's cigar industry. In 1885, about 5,000 Cubans lived in Key West and they quickly gave the town a national reputation for its anti-Spanish political agitation and high-quality Cuban cigars. That year almost 100 Key West cigar factories of various sizes employed some 3,000 workers. At the end of the 1880s, Key West produced some 100 million cigars annually. In 1880, 79 percent of Cubans fourteen years of age and over worked in the cigar factories. Of these, some 18 percent were of color and 9 percent were women. The other 21 percent of working Cubans included unskilled laborers, service workers, artisans and professionals. Cuban social structure in Key West reflected a wide variety of occupations, but it was an overwhelmingly working-class community that relied heavily on the cigar industry (Poyo 1989; Lisandro Pérez 1985).

The second major Cuban center appeared in the Tampa Bay area beginning in 1886 when several cigar factories inaugurated production in Ybor City, a new company town established on Tampa's outskirts. The new tobacco center attracted factories from Key West, New York, Philadelphia and other places. Cuban workers soon followed. In the early 1890s, Ybor City's successes encouraged a local entrepreneur to found another company town known as West Tampa, which

also attracted cigar workers. Eventually, Tampa incorporated Ybor City and West Tampa. During its first decade as a manufacturing center, Tampa and its adjacent towns grew from less than 1,000 inhabitants to almost 20,000, and it supplanted Key West as the primary producer of Cuban cigars in the United States. By 1927, Tampa's 159 cigar factories employed some 13,000 workers and produced 504 million cigars annually. The same as Key West, Tampa's Cuban community, with its a multiracial working-class population, depended heavily on the cigar trade for their livelihood (Ingalls; Mormino and Pozzetta; Lisandro Pérez 1983; Luis Pérez 1978; Steffy).

The Cuban communities in New York, Key West, Tampa, and New Orleans developed separate identities, leaders and institutions, and through the 1920s they all operated within the context of the cigar industry labor market. Cuban families usually had economic and social ties in more than one community, and connections with Havana were often strong since political disturbances, strikes and economic cycles produced considerable movement in both directions across the Straits of Florida. Indeed, for many Cubans, Key West and Tampa were mere extensions of Havana, but the decline of the Cuban handmade cigar industry after World War I altered migration and residence patterns.

During the 1930s the traditional working-class communities of Key West and Tampa lost a great deal of their dynamism. The cigar industry fell on hard times and many Cubans left these cities in search of work. Some returned to Cuba, but many went north, especially to New York, which again became the most important Cuban center in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1943, for example, out of a total of about 22,000 Cubans registered as resident aliens, just over 11,000 lived in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania while a little more than 7,000 settled in Florida (U. S. INS, "Registered Aliens Born in Cuba Classified by State of Residence, June 30, 1943"). While the largest United States-born Cuban population still resided in Florida, the majority of Cuban immigrants now lived in the northeast of the United States.

Cuban residential patterns in the United States changed again with the radical political transformations on the Island and the mass exodus after 1959. Florida reemerged as the most important settlement area for Cubans, with Miami replacing Key West and Tampa as the primary destination. By 1980, the Miami metropolitan area, which included cities such as Hialeah, Sweetwater and Miami Beach, contained almost 600,000 Cubans. The displacement from Cuba to Miami of many social classes, including a strong middle class,

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**Cuban refugees arriving in Miami, 1967. (Courtesy of the *Texas Catholic Herald*.)**

produced a dynamic enclave economy that literally transformed the city.

Cubans in Miami created a strongly integrated, ethnically enclosed economy that provided considerable opportunities for exiles during the 1960s-1980s. Many of the Cubans of the first exile wave in the early 1960s brought with them the education, values and skills necessary to take advantage of the North American economic system. Moreover, many brought the required capital or gained access to it through federal and private business loans in the United States. Cubans translated these opportunities into a diverse set of economic enterprises that expanded rapidly enough to provide employment for subsequent exile waves (Portes and Back 200-39).

By 1980 Cubans were involved in the whole range of activities within Miami. In that year Cubans owned more than 18,000 businesses in Dade County. They also accounted for 25,000 garment workers, 3,500 doctors, over 500 lawyers and about half of the aircraft repair and maintenance labor force in Dade County. There were 16 Cuban presidents of banks and some

250 vice-presidents. Cubans owned over 60 new and used car dealerships, about 500 supermarkets and some 250 drugstores. Cubans also played a central role in establishing Miami as a financial and commercial center for Latin America (Boswell and Curtis).

Most Cubans did not achieve their goals without considerable personal and family sacrifice however. Initially, Cuban exiles experienced clear downward social mobility. Most took any available job to maintain their families. Eventually many professionals regained their lost economic status by learning English and undergoing professional relicensing in order to practice their trades in the United States. Exiles also found employment outside their Cuban enclaves. Perhaps as many as half found work within the Anglo-American dominated economy.

Despite the emergence of Miami as the largest Cuban community in the United States, large numbers of Cubans did continue to settle in the northeast, mostly in New Jersey and New York. They especially established a presence in Union City and the city of West New York, two New Jersey towns on the Hudson River across from New York City. A traditional immigrant city, West New York was heavily Italian and German when Cubans began arriving in the early 1960s. Attracted by employment opportunities in blue collar jobs, especially light industry, warehousing and transportation, the Cuban population of the city grew rapidly. By 1970, a little more than one-third of West New York's total population of 40,666 was Cuban and

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**Cuban senior citizens playing dominoes in Miami. (Courtesy of the *Texas Catholic Herald*.)**

by 1980 the Union City-West New York area had incorporated about 100,000 Cubans.

As was the case in Miami, most Cubans in West New York and Union City who arrived during the 1960s experienced a substantial decline in their occupational status. Primarily of middle- and lower middle-class backgrounds, Cuban arrivals to the area faced tremendous uncertainties in the job market and generally entered semi-skilled jobs in factories or shops. During the 1970s, however, almost half improved their occupational position, especially those who had worked in higher status jobs in Cuba before emigrating. During the decade, the proportion of Cuban immigrants holding white collar jobs doubled.

Cubans in the two cities also managed to establish coherent ethnic communities. Most Cubans who arrived in West New York came from the provinces of Havana and Las Villas. In fact, about 85 percent settled in West New York because they had close friends or family in the area, which promoted strong community ties. Spanish language newspapers catering specifically to Cubans appeared in both cities by the late 1960s.

Besides showing the full array of occupations within the community, these newspapers also revealed the emergence of social clubs and intricate social networks (Rogg; Rogg and Santana Cooney; Prieto).

Cubans also settled in other cities as a result of the United States government's Cuban Refugee Program which facilitated the adjustment of Cubans to life in the United States. As the influx of Cubans began to overwhelm south Florida, the program sponsored the relocation of immigrants to other areas. By 1980, some 30,000 Cubans lived in Los Angeles; 24,000 in Chicago; 13,000 in Boston; 10,000 in Atlanta; 8,000 in Washington, D.C.; 5,000 in Dallas-Fort Worth; and 2,000 in New Orleans (Pedraza-Bailey 40-43; Boswell and Curtis 66).

As a whole, the Cuban communities that formed as a result of the post-1959 migrations fared relatively well economically. Their median family incomes surpassed other Hispanic groups although they did not reach the income levels of Anglo-American society. This economic success resulted from a variety of factors including the demographic characteristics of the

In Houston, Cubans celebrating the patron saint Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre, 1986. (Photo by Curtis Dowell. Courtesy of the *Texas Catholic Herald*.)

migratory flows, the active support for Cubans by the United States government as a result of their refugee status, the benefits of Miami's enclave economy and the successes of Cuban women in entering the labor market and contributing substantially to family incomes (Lisandro Pérez 1986).

## Cuban Exiles in the Nineteenth Century

The process of Cuban involvement with United States society has been realized through the interplay of exile, immigrant, and ethnic identities. During the last two centuries Cubans more often than not left their homeland reluctantly and usually with the intention of returning. As exiles they brought with them an acute awareness of the political and socioeconomic realities of the Island and the specific circumstances of their departure. The exile character of much of the Cuban experience in the United States, with its accompanying high levels of political consciousness, played a central role in forming community identity and defining the nature of Cuban integration into North American society. At the same time, however, despite a great reluctance to leave behind their cultural identity and accept integration, Cubans did not remain aloof to the ideological, political, socioeconomic and cultural life in the United States. They adjusted, adapted, and participated in the processes that made them immigrants and ethnic North Americans.

During the nineteenth century most Cubans entered the United States with a strongly defined opposition to Spanish colonial rule. Not all Cubans arrived in the United States as political exiles during the nineteenth century, but it was the exiles that usually dominated the public agenda. In working to destroy Spanish rule, Cubans created an enduring exile mentality. The creation and perpetuation of an exile consciousness was as natural as it was purposeful. Of course, the very act of fleeing Cuba to avoid political persecution, imprisonment or death, provided the basis for establishing communities with an exile consciousness. But beyond that, highly motivated political leaders, convinced of the justness of their views about Cuba, took the lead in organizing the communities, not to facilitate integration into a new society but instead to perpetuate an "exile" perspective.

The creation of community organizations with control over media perpetuated the exile agenda. A classic example of an exile organization in the nineteenth century was the Instituto San Carlos in Key West. Founded in 1871 as a mutual aid society, educational facility and social club, San Carlos also became the most important exile center in support of Cuba's separation from Spain. San Carlos' membership provided

moral and financial support to dozens of nationalist organizers who passed through Key West during the final thirty years of the century. Cubans also organized formal political movements to offer alternatives to the existing regime on the Island. In 1876, for example, Cubans in New York organized the Partido Independiente Radical that offered a vision of a united Caribbean basin. The Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC), founded in 1892 by the exiled activist leader José Martí, envisioned a democratic Cuba based on social justice and racial harmony.

The media played a crucial role in maintaining and expanding community focus on Cuba. During the nineteenth century newspapers served broad community interests to be sure, but they published primarily to further Cuban separatism. The first exile newspaper was Father Félix Varela's *El Habanero* (The Havanan), which appeared in Philadelphia and New York during the 1820s. Dedicated to an independent Cuba, this was the first of many. During the remainder of the century newspaper titles offered a poignant reflection of the exiles' fundamental concern: *El Eco de Cuba* (1850s), *El Filibustero* (1850s), *El Porvenir* (The Future, 1860s), *La Voz de América* (1860s), *La Revolución* (1870s), *La Independencia* (1870s), *El Republicano* (1870s), *El Yara* (1880s-1890s), *El Separatista* (1880s), *Cuba* (1890s) and *Patria* (1890s).

These exile organizations and media produced an activist emigré population. During the late 1840s through the 1850s, exiles in New York and New Orleans organized filibustering expeditions to Cuba

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José Martí.

and, when these were unsuccessful, encouraged the United States to purchase the Island. The outbreak of the Civil War ended all such activities, but they reappeared after the conflict. In the meantime, insurgents in Cuba initiated the first war against Spain in 1868, which the communities in the United States immediately supported. Expeditions departed for Cuba with soldiers, arms and munitions, but lack of unity among exiles undermined their effectiveness. After ten years of continual guerrilla war, the insurgent forces finally signed a pact in 1878 and temporary calm returned to Cuba. The exile centers however continued to oppose Spanish rule, and throughout the 1880s former rebel leaders with the financial support of the Cuban centers in the United States regularly attempted to organize expeditions to initiate a new war of independence. Finally, in 1895, exile leader José Martí managed to unite the communities under the PRC and helped to launch a new war that culminated in United States intervention in 1898. After thirty years of exile activism, Cuba became free of Spanish rule, but Cubans now had to contend with North American control and influence.

While Cubans in the United States collaborated in efforts to dislodge Spain, they were far from united on the ideological front. Perhaps the most influential, though not exclusive, ideological tradition for most of the century was liberalism. Most emigré leaders viewed the United States as the model liberal republic which they aspired to reproduce in their homeland. Many thought that North American representative democracy and a classic or modified *laissez-faire* economic system could be imported to Cuba and guaranteed through a close association with the United States. Indeed they looked to the United States for continuity and stability. The political agenda of influential community leaders, most of whom historically advocated either outright annexation of Cuba to the United States or an independent republic closely associated with the United States, reflected these views.

Cuba's annexation to the United States was firmly rooted in Cuban thinking during the first half of the nineteenth century and remained strong through the 1870s. By the 1880s and 1890s annexationism had lost widespread acceptance in the exile centers even among its strongest supporters, the white creole elites. A nationalist perspective that called for an independent liberal republic replaced the outdated annexationist view, though many liberal nationalists shared the annexationists' fear that absolute independence might produce leaders not committed to liberalism. As a result many advocates of independence also hoped for a close relationship with the United States that would ensure their liberal visions.

If white middle-class Cubans usually supported liberal ideals, Cubans of working-class backgrounds and those of color provided the primary constituency for more popular visions of an independent Cuba. During the 1880s and 1890s immigrating tobacco workers brought with them, socialist, and communist ideals that challenged the traditional liberalism of their middle-class compatriots. In fact, radical ideals deeply influenced exile nationalist thought, which was reflected in the ideological formulations of the exile leader José Martí. During 1887-1895, Martí enunciated a nationalist philosophy that called for an absolutely independent Cuba based on social justice and racial harmony, which clearly drew its inspiration from the socioeconomic concerns of his working-class and Afro-Cuban compatriots. Martí's popular nationalism, in effect, blended traditional nationalist concerns with the socioeconomic issues involving the daily struggles of Florida's working-class communities (Poyo 1989).

## From Exiles to Immigrants and Ethnics

Despite their deep commitment to an exile perspective that promoted change in their homeland, Cubans in the United States also underwent a process of adjustment and integration into North American society. Reflected in the labor struggles, politics and changing identities of Cuban cigar workers, these processes began almost as soon as Cubans arrived in Key West during the 1870s but took root in the early twentieth century.

Cuban workers arriving in the United States during the late nineteenth century brought with them an activist tradition that they utilized in their new home. By the end of the 1870s, workers in Key West had organized a tobacco workers' union and workers in Tampa and New York followed suit in the 1880s. Anarchist thinking influenced these unions by the mid-1880s, resulting in increased militancy and confrontations between workers and their nationalist leaders. During the early 1890s, Martí's popular nationalism persuaded the radicals to moderate their local activism until Cuba gained its freedom from Spain. For the most part, Cuban workers accepted the necessity of compromise on this front, but with the end of the war and the departure of the nationalist leaders for Cuba local concerns became their primary consideration (Poyo 1986).

Working-class leaders filled the political vacuum left by departing exiles and shifted attention to social and economic problems in their communities. Cuban radicals in Tampa participated almost immediately in reorganizing the community. In July, 1899, some 4,000 tobacco workers went out on strike and within a

month had forced management to concede to all their demands. This marked for Tampa the beginning of three decades of continual confrontations between management and labor which produced a highly conscious working-class community imbued with radical ideals and a strong sense of class and ethnic solidarity. Cubans in Tampa had left behind their exile identity and carved out a new place for themselves as immigrants and ethnics (Mormino and Pozzetta 97-174).

Cuban involvement in local politics also reflected the process of integration into North American society. Cubans first became involved in United States party politics in Key West during the 1870s. Among the thousands of Cubans who arrived during that decade, tobacco workers and political exiles together formed an important voting block within the community. A distinct minority party before the 1870s, the Republican Party recruited Cubans and, with African-Americans and black immigrants from Barbados, created an alliance that offset the traditional majority Democratic party controlled by Key West's Anglo-American southern white population. Cubans cooperated with the Republicans but under the condition that the party support the Cuban war of independence raging on the Island. Republican politicians agreed and sealed their coalition by giving Cubans positions as justices of the peace, county clerks and other public offices. In 1876, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes y Castillo, son of the Cuban insurgent leader, became mayor of Key West, and thus the first Cuban elected to public office in the United States. During the next twenty years, numerous Cubans held offices as city aldermen and state legislators, as well as other local positions in Key West and Tampa. While many Cubans remained loyal to the Republican Party until the end of the century, a general movement into the Democratic party began after 1876 when it became the dominant party in Florida. Cuban support for the Democratic Party continued through the 1950s (Poyo 1977; Rivero Muñoz).

Other experiences in Tampa and Key West helped along the process of refocusing from an exile to an immigrant identity. The end of the Cuban war of independence removed the factors that had traditionally sustained nationalist fervor. The separatist press ceased to exist, patriot clubs disbanded and the romanticism associated with the desire for self-rule in Cuba declined as the political realities of the Cuban republic caused disillusionment among many. The veterans of expatriation wrote books and memoirs to recount their ordeal and transmit nationalist feelings to the next generation, but personal experience in their adopted land and not the reminiscences of the elders now formed their identity. By the 1920s, the first and second generation of Cubans in Key West found themselves having to lecture

a new generation regarding the merits of the *patria*. "To place the motherland in second position, to repudiate it, forget it is a felony and treason," wrote one son and grandson of nationalist leaders (Alpizar Poyo). Despite their efforts, however, they failed to inculcate the same nationalist intensity into their children.

At the same time, greater contact with United States society accelerated the process of "de-Cubanization." A Cuban-American writer from Tampa, José Yglesias, told a poignant story reflecting the forces at work. The central historical figure for Cubans in the United States was Martí. "He was a simple, great man," Yglesias' grandfather had told him often. "Before I started grammar school," Yglesias noted, "I used to think that everyone knew José Martí [but] Martí's name was not mentioned in junior high or in high school either, and one of the things I learned in school was that there were many things you were expected to forget" (60). In Key West similar processes changed Cuban identity. A 1930s WPA report on San Carlos Institute noted that "the most significant thing about San Carlos at the present is that its students are taught to be good Cuban-Americans—to become Americanized and yet to maintain their cultural identity as Cubans and Spanish-speaking people. They are taught to be proud of their race, language, and culture." But the report also noted that "San Carlos cannot compete with the public schools in moulding the present generation of Cuban children in Key West. For the public schools are intent upon a program of complete Americanization; their only concern with Cuban culture is to obliterate it entirely" (Works Progress Administration, Key West, Florida, "Instituto San Carlos").

In the end, however, the most powerful factor in ensuring acculturation to North American ways was the decline of the cigar industry, which destroyed the traditional framework of the original communities. The causes that eventually undermined the hand-rolled cigar industry in Tampa, for example, began in the decade of 1910, developed in the 1920s and became manifest during the Depression. Changing tastes and mechanization eliminated jobs, forcing tobacco workers to return to Cuba or to find work in environments where social solidarity was of little importance. The educating and unifying role of the *lectura*, a practice adopted from Cuban cigar factories in the 1870s which allowed workers to hire individuals to read to them while they labored, was lost in 1931 when the cigar manufacturers abolished the tradition despite a bitter strike over the issue. Finally, the economic crisis in tobacco loosened the traditionally close ties between the Cuban center in Tampa and Havana. United States-based unions with conservative ideologies increasingly displaced the radical labor organizations

that had traditionally set the agenda for Cuban workers in Florida. The disruption of traditional employment patterns and, thus, processes of ideological socialization, in addition to the inevitable effects of public school education on longstanding value systems, led to a dissipation of the radical culture that had influenced tobacco workers in Key West, New York and Tampa for two generations (Ingalls; Mormino and Pozzetta).

By the end of the 1930s, the traditional Cuban communities had begun in earnest the arduous process of assimilation into North American life, but with the onset of World War II new migratory patterns brought new Cuban immigrants to New York, Miami and other cities. Most came in search of work, fleeing the economic and political difficulties facing Cuba during the 1940s and 1950s. The lack of information regarding Cubans in the United States during this period makes generalizations about their activities difficult, but it may at least be stated that through entertainment and sports, particularly music, dance and baseball, this generation of immigrants gave Cubans a national visibility for the first time. The popularity of Cuban music in the post-World War II era provided many jobs in the United States for Cuban entertainers. The broader story of Cubans in the United States during this period has yet to be documented (see Oscar Hijuelos *Our House in the Last World* and *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*).

During the first six decades of the twentieth century, then, Cubans in the United States embraced an immigrant identity and began down the road toward finding their place within the North American ethnic experience. While Cuban attachments to their homeland remained strong, and the sporadic political activities of exiles agitating against one regime or another over the years reminded them of the volatile situation on the Island, their primary activities shifted from exile politics in the late nineteenth century to finding their place within North American life.

### Resurgence of an Exile Identity

During the 1950s, events in Cuba set the stage for a new transformation in Cuban migratory patterns to the United States. Immigrants again became exiles. The migrations precipitated by Batista's overthrow in 1959 initiated a new process of Cuban community formation and transformation in the United States, the elements of which were very similar to what had occurred almost one hundred years earlier. Like their nineteenth-century counterparts, the one million Cubans in Miami, Union City and West New York, among others, defined themselves as exiles. Virtually all Cubans of all ideological positions who left the Island after 1959

shared one point in common: a desire to see the communist government in Cuba destroyed. At the same time, Cubans also initiated the process of adjustment to a new society. By the 1970s, for example, Cubans increasingly used their political awareness to enter United States politics, through which they not only advanced their concerns regarding Cuba but also defended their interests as immigrants.

Cubans entering the United States after 1959 established and developed their new communities as exile centers. Community organizations and media focused their energies on the homeland, which contributed to ensuring an exile identity. Among the earliest and most important organizations in promoting Cuban cultural awareness were the Cuban Municipalities in Exile. On arriving in the United States, Cubans established organizations and named them for the municipios, or townships, where they had lived on the Island. An umbrella organization gave them a loose association. The municipios operated as mutual aid societies and played an important role in keeping Cuba as the primary emigré agenda (García 1990).

Cubans also formed clearly defined political organizations, initially with the support of the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Furthermore, the United States promoted and supported activities during 1960-1962 that culminated in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. But Cubans also formed their own groups that reflected the diversity of political thinking within their communities. Organizations included an association of Bay of Pigs veterans, the Cuban Revolutionary Party (Auténtico), a Christian Democratic Party and a Social Democratic Party. These organizations promoted a Cuban expatriate political identity, independent of the United States political system, designed to eventually return to Cuba. Most of these political organizations embraced some version of the Constitution of 1940 as the basis for their political design. The constitution was a classic document of liberal democracy which guaranteed popularly elected governments, with a President, Senate and House of Representatives chosen for four-year terms, freedom of press and religion and the right of peaceful assembly (*El Nuevo Herald* 1989-1990). A minority opinion also emerged perhaps most visibly represented by the Brigada Antonio Maceo. Founded in the 1970s by young Cubans who arrived in the United States as children and who wanted to reestablish ties with their homeland, the Brigada offered a sympathetic view of the Cuban revolution and promoted political diversity in the exile communities (Azicri).

The exile media reflected the political heterogeneity even among the anti-communist groups. Hundreds of exile newspapers, newsletters, magazines, radio and television stations aided in political recruitment and

promoting anti-communism. The newspapers *El Diario de las Américas* and *La Patria*, for example, offered the conservative views of Cuba's expatriate elite. *Réplica* (Response) became a mouthpiece for liberalism and in its early years identified with social democratic ideals. In later years the *Miami Herald* in Spanish and its successor, *El Nuevo Herald*, gave voice to diverse moderate political elements within the Miami community (de Varona 1987).

Throughout the 1960s, the exile organizations and media gave strong support to those interested in armed struggle and the violent overthrow of the Cuban government. Virtually all political newspapers supported the activities of "grupos de acción" (action groups) dedicated to establishing guerrilla operations on the Island. In Miami, newspapers such as *Réplica*, *La Patria*, *La Verdad* and *Girón*, routinely opened their columns to different clandestine groups that announced plans to launch expeditions and initiate warfare in Cuba. The newspapers *Guerra* in West New York, *La Crónica* in Union City, and *Vanguardia* in New York City similarly expressed sympathy for these groups and cooperated fully in communicating their ideas to the Cuban communities. These initial plans to invade Cuba shifted to clearly terrorist actions in the late 1960s after the Cuban government consolidated its position. Viewed by themselves and the exile communities as patriots struggling to free their homeland from communist and Soviet domination, these organizations maintained sufficient support to continue operations through the 1980s.

At the same time that Cubans created the organizations, media and political agenda to promote their exile identity, processes of adjustment brought change and differing perspectives about how best to advance their political interests. Indeed, many Cubans recognized the need to adapt their political culture to North American life. While "armed struggle" offered the communities evidence of an ongoing opposition to the Cuban government, the strategy was largely symbolic in its effectiveness and offered no real hope of changing the political situation in Cuba. After 1962, Cubans began to recognize the futility of such efforts to defeat the Cuban government militarily and concluded that a return to Cuba in the near future would not be likely.

They turned their attention to finding their place within North American society. The process of adaptation involved a decision to reject a fundamental tenet of the "grupos de acción": that Cubans should remain aloof to North American society and focus exclusively on Cuba. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the clandestine groups called on Cubans to maintain an exile identity and reject becoming immigrants. As immigrants they would lose their Cuban identity and com-

mitment to freeing the island from communist rule. In 1969, one nationalist newspaper noted that "the immigrants are everywhere. They are involved in business, in banking and the press. When elections are held they take sides and with great pride proclaim that Cubans are an electoral force and that in the future there will be a Cuban mayor or congressman." Cubans, the newspaper claimed, were suffering from a crisis in values and commitment to the homeland (*La Verdad* 2 December 1969). But, as had been the case in the 1920s, personal experience, not the admonitions of the nationalist activists, was the major factor in determining identity. Cubans began in earnest to engage in North American society. If the 1960s was primarily the decade of exile politics aimed at returning to Cuba, the next decade was a time of acceptance of their new society, adaptation, the emergence of ethnic communities. Cuban involvement within the United States political system provided one example.

During the early 1970s, there was a substantial increase in the number of Cubans choosing naturalization, and many began to get involved with the local politics of the Miami area. Their rate of naturalizations, low during the 1960s, became consistently among the highest for United States ethnic groups through the next two decades. Furthermore, voter participation increased dramatically. Cubans did not abandon their concern about their homeland, but they did modify their strategies. While the idea of violently overthrowing the Castro government was a relevant issue, and much of the rhetoric along those lines remained, Cubans clearly shifted their energies to seeking political empowerment within the society as a basis for defending themselves as immigrants and for creating greater pressures on Castro.

This new attitude brought results rather quickly. A Cuban for the first time gained election to Hialeah's city council. The next year a Cuban won election as mayor of Sweetwater, the first Cuban elected to such a position in Florida since the late nineteenth century. By 1981, the election of Cubans to Dade County's 27 municipal governments had become routine, and in 1985 the first Cuban was elected mayor of the City of Miami, the largest of Dade County's municipalities. During 1982, Cubans made their growing power evident in state politics by electing three Cubans to the Florida legislature. Six years later this grew to ten. Furthermore, in 1989, for the first time a Cuban gained election to the United States Congress representing Florida's 18th Congressional District. Similar trends emerged in New Jersey. During the late 1980s, Cubans achieved office as commissioners on the city councils of Union City and West New York. In time Cuban mayors were elected in both cities.

Cuban success in electoral politics came under the auspices of the Republican Party, the party of preference for most Cubans. Despite the fact that Cuba's political culture of the 1940s and 1950s probably reflected more closely Democratic than Republican ideology, Cubans in the United States gravitated to the Republican Party in reaction to communism. Cubans perceived that Republicans took a harder line against communism, particularly in the late 1970s, but it is also probable that the thousands of small entrepreneurs within the Cuban-American communities felt more comfortable with Republicanism than with New Deal Liberal Democratic ideology. That is not to say Cubans remained exclusively Republican. In 1990, about seventeen percent of Cubans in Dade County registered as Democrats. It is probable that as the process of integration into North American society continues, and new generations of Cubans leave behind their exile identity, the Democratic Party will attract more Cubans to its ranks.

Cuban involvement in United States politics did not signal an abandonment of exile consciousness but did alter its expression. Cubans used their newly found, ethnically defined political power to promote agendas related directly to Cuba. Their emergence as influential actors within the political system coincided with Ronald Reagan's presidency and hard-line politics toward communist nations during the 1980s. Seeing Cubans in the United States as an obvious political ally, Reagan extended his support to the exile cause and promoted Cuban-American organizations, particularly the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF).

Founded in 1980, CANF represented a new generation of Cubans who discarded armed action as a primary strategy in favor of lobbying the United States government and promoting exile perspectives on the international scene. As a lobby, CANF published pamphlets, sponsored conferences, testified in congressional hearings, established the Political Action Committee and generally learned to operate within the United States political system to promote their anti-Castroism. Other Cuban organizations with differing plans and smaller constituencies did the same. The Cuban-American Committee, for example, used a similar approach to offer a more liberal perspective and argue for the normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States.

Cubans of many political perspectives in the United States continue to view themselves as exiles and maintain a firm allegiance to their culture of origin. Nevertheless, like the Cuban communities earlier in the century, they are finding their identity as Cuban Americans. In addition to the political adjustments Cubans have made, their exposure to North American culture,

educational system, mass media, labor markets and society in general are, as in the past, in innumerable ways contributing to changing exiles to immigrants and ethnics. Furthermore, a new generation of Cubans born in the United States has come of age and reflects more clearly the emergence of a distinct Cuban-American identity (García 1990; Leyva de Varona).

## **Cuban Women and Cubans of Color**

Throughout the diverse periods of migration and adjustment to the United States all Cubans contended with the complexities involved in balancing exile and immigrant identities, but gender and race contributed to the diversity of life experiences within the Cuban-American communities. On arriving in the United States Cuban women contributed to community formation and participated in the political and socioeconomic issues of their new homeland in ways different from men. Cubans of color also confronted North American society from a different perspective. The sharp distinction among races within United States society affected their migration and residential patterns, their economic possibilities, their involvement in politics and their relations with their white compatriots.

Whether in the labor market or at home, Cuban women have always participated in the political, economic and social life of their communities. The percentage of Cuban women working outside the home for wages varied over time but always reflected the general historical tendency to increase. Historically Cuban women living in the United States entered the labor market in higher proportions than they did in Cuba. In 1899, for example, only 8.8 percent of women in Cuba worked outside the home. But two decades earlier, Cuban women already represented almost 9 percent of workers in Key West factories. By 1890, women comprised up to one-quarter of all cigar makers in some Tampa factories. During the first half of the twentieth century, the number of women in the Florida cigar factories increased, especially after mechanization of the industry resulted in the recruitment of women to the low-paying unskilled jobs produced by new technologies. After the Cuban revolution in 1959, the percentage of women in the labor market increased dramatically, as did their variety of employment. In the early 1950s, about 13 percent of women in Cuba worked outside the home, mostly in teaching, clerical work, domestic service and factories. By 1970, however, some 50 percent of Cuban women in the United States worked for wages outside the home, which increased to 55 percent by 1980. Initially, exile women found low-skilled jobs and often found employment more easily than men. They worked in light

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**An award ceremony of the National Association of Cuban-American Women, 1979. (Courtesy of the *Texas Catholic Herald*.)**

industry, garment trades, manufacturing, in restaurants, as domestics, as seamstresses and in countless other jobs. Many professional women managed to adapt their careers to the United States economy and many went to universities and entered new professions, where they are well represented today.

Cuban women played a central role in the political life of their communities. From the 1870s to the 1930s, most women still worked at home and through volunteerism influenced dramatically the political and social life within their communities. Very shortly after the establishment of the first emigré juntas in New York and Key West in 1869, women formed their own associations to promote the revolutionary effort. In New York, Emilia Casanova de Villaverde, for example, established the first women's association, Liga de Hijas de Cuba (League of Daughters of Cuba). In Key West, women organized the Casa Cubana and the San Carlos school to promote Cuban culture and identity. Additional clubs were formed in Key West and later in Tampa. They became a mainstay of local revolutionary activities. Most women active in these clubs dedicated

countless hours to the nationalist cause. Besides contributing time, they hosted visiting political leaders, organized parades, banquets, raffles, picnics and collected contributions for specific projects. The contributions of women to the revolutionary fervor and organization that eventually inspired the war against Spain has not yet been fully appreciated.

Women also provided a great deal of moral and material support for labor struggles in defense of their communities. Not only did women tobacco workers lend unconditional support to the frequent strike actions that shook Tampa's cigar industry during the 1890s-1930s, but housewives provided crucial backing for strike actions. During such moments, women opened their homes to displaced families, as husbands looked for work in other cities. The home became the domain of women and children whose solidarity and sharing of resources gave strength to individuals and the collective. Women also left their homes to raise money, serve on strike committees, help organize soup kitchens and participate in protest demonstrations. Together, women who worked in the factories and

those who stayed at home contributed to promoting an exile consciousness and an immigrant ethics of family and community (Estrade; Hewitt 1985, 1987).

After 1959, Cuban women entered the labor markets in much larger numbers and through economic empowerment exerted even greater influence in their communities than their sisters earlier in the century. Despite the radically changed, more conservative context within Cuban communities after 1959, women maintained a similar activist spirit in building new exile and immigrant centers. Their contributions to the exile cause were similar to those of the late nineteenth century. While women did not emerge as the primary exile political leaders or formally belong to the organizations established by men, they did establish their own agendas. Despite very different class, racial and ideological characteristics, like their sisters in the late nineteenth century, Cuban women provided much of the crucial daily preparations needed for particular events. They participated in demonstrations, organized letter-writing campaigns, produced anti-Castro literature and led boycotts against British and Spanish goods to protest trade agreements. They also formed political organizations such as the Unión de Mujeres, the Cruzada Femenina Cubana, and the Movimiento Femenino Anticomunista de Cuba. Finally, exile women promoted cultural events in their communities aimed at maintaining an exile point of view.

In addition to their deep commitment to exile politics, women also played an important role in aiding their communities to adjust to the new society. On arriving in the United States, women, particularly of middle- and upper-class backgrounds, immediately confronted new values and attitudes that changed them and their families. Pre-revolutionary Cuban society had generally discouraged women's full participation in economic and political life. In the United States, however, economic necessity encouraged greater participation in the labor market, which led to greater political and social activism among women. Younger women, particularly the college educated, challenged the traditional values of Cuban society in exile. Many embraced the values of the Civil Rights Movement and Feminism, joined political groups on the right and left and let their positions be known.

One social organization in Miami, the Cuban Woman's Club, founded in 1969 reflected the changing role of women within their communities. Modeled after middle-class women's clubs in pre-revolutionary Cuba, the Cuban Woman's Club at first limited their activities to social and cultural events such as luncheons, lectures, art exhibits and literary contests. As women became involved in work, politics and social activism, the club promoted their specific interests. Their limited

interests gave way to a broader series of community concerns that included issues of adjustment within North American society. Bilingual education, politics and voting, women's rights, salaries, and workplace issues became common topics of concern and discussion within the club. Furthermore, the club ceased being exclusive and recruited a wider membership across nationalities, professions and educational backgrounds. Perhaps the most visible symbol of the changed role of Cuban women in their immigrant communities was the election of Ileana Ros-Lehtinen as the first Cuban elected to a congressional seat in the federal Congress (Ferree; Prieto; García 1989).

For some Cubans, race determined their course of adjustment to North American society. Afro-Cubans always represented a small fragment of the total Cuban immigrant community. The African based population in Cuba fluctuated between 40 and 27 percent of the total population from the 1850s to the 1950s, but the migration flows of Cubans north did not reflect these proportions. During the late nineteenth century, Cubans of color probably accounted for between 15

**Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the first elected Cuban-American Congresswoman.**

and 20 percent of the Cuban immigrant population. According to some estimates, this declined to about 10 percent early in the twentieth century, but probably increased again in the immediate post-World War II era only to again decline after 1959. One estimate is that blacks and mulattos constituted only 6 percent of Cubans in the United States several years after the revolution, though this proportion increased with the Mariel Boatlift of 1980 which included between 20 to 50 percent Cubans of color. These estimates of the number of Afro-Cubans in the United States must be viewed with caution since racial identity among Cubans contains as much a cultural as a physiological dimension. Unlike in the United States, Cuban cultural tradition had always allowed mulattos a social space and the ability to gravitate toward a white identity. Therefore, some Cubans of color within the immigrant community defined themselves as whites, despite their clear African characteristics. Recognizing the difficulties inherent in identifying as blacks, many mulattos embraced a white cultural identity.

Nevertheless, Cubans of color were clearly under-represented in the migratory streams, which may be accounted for in several ways. First, Afro-Cubans were included in the bulk of the Island's less fortunate economic classes and thus lacked the resources needed for the journey. More specifically, however, their marginal place within Cuban society precluded their participation in politics in the same way as whites. Exile movements led by whites did not attract Afro-Cubans sufficiently to induce their migration in the same proportions. The relationship between politics, race and migration especially stood out after 1959 since Cuban revolutionary ideology emphasized racial equality in Cuba and continually pointed out the racist nature of North American society. Moreover, the evolving politics of race in revolutionary Cuba ensured that Cubans of color who asked for exit visas faced greater obstacles and hostility from government officials than did whites. Finally, North American migration policy gave first priority to Cubans with family already in the United States. This policy gave white Cubans wanting to leave the Island an advantage over Cubans of color.

Just as race influenced the number of Cubans departing the Island, it also affected settlement patterns among Cubans in the United States. During the nineteenth century, most Afro-Cubans lived in Key West and Tampa and worked in the cigar factories. After the turn of the century, however, Cubans of color tended to congregate in New York and New Jersey as they moved north from Florida and Cuba during 1890s-1930s. To a large extent, this shift in migration resulted from changing economic conditions that affected Afro and White Cubans alike. But the migration of Cubans

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**Pavlina Pedreso, an Afro-Cuban activist for Cuban independence from Spain.**

of color from Florida also owed a great deal to the evolving racial situation in the North American South and within the Cuban communities themselves. Refusing to accept the evolving racial laws that required segregation, at least 50 percent of Tampa's Afro-Cuban population migrated to New York where they worked in restaurants, hotels and in the sweat shops of the garment district. After World War II more Cubans of color arrived in New York City directly from the Island. Many musicians, entertainers and baseball players came, as did many others. Highly represented in the Cuban leather and shoe industry, many Cubans of color entered these trades in New York City when the Cuban industry declined during the 1940s and 1950s. Cubans of color who arrived after 1959 also tended to concentrate in the northeast, partially because of their perception of racism in the North American South, but also because of racism within the heavily white, middle-class Cuban community in Miami.

Race always operated as an agent of separation within Cuban communities. The first identifiable Afro-Cuban community in the United States was formed in

Key West during 1870-1900. Cubans of color always represented a distinct social group within the community, with their own leaders and institutions. They shared a sense of community apart from their white compatriots and, while they belonged to white Cuban institutions, they also felt a need for their own socio-educational organizations. During the 1870s in Key West, an Afro-Cuban institution called Colegio Unificación (Unification School) appeared. During the following decade, Sociedad El Progreso served as the Afro-Cuban community's central institution. Blacks and mulattos in Tampa and New York also established predominantly black organizations during the late 1880s and early 1890s. After the turn of the century, however, the social climate that allowed Afro-Cubans to enjoy their own institutions without exclusion from the broader Cuban community changed with the emergence of the Florida's Jim Crow Laws of racial segregation. Formally barred from white Cuban clubs, Afro-Cubans formed their own. The most important was Tampa's Unión Martí-Maceo. Rejection by their white compatriots led Afro-Cubans to establish contacts with other peoples of color. In Tampa many Afro-Cubans linked themselves to the African-American community. Those Cubans of color who moved to the northeast interacted with other Caribbean people of African descent, including Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. While Afro-Cubans tended to maintain their Cuban identity and cultures, they also contributed to the beginnings of "Hispanic" neighborhoods in New York City. The racial dynamics within the Cuban communities did not change significantly after 1959. Those Afro-Cubans who settled in Miami with their white compatriots often faced racism directly, and like Cubans earlier in the century, partially escaped the racist attitudes of the white Cuban community by embracing African Americans and other Afro-Hispanics of the Caribbean (Greenbaum; Aguirre; Dixon 1982, 1984, 1986).

Despite the tensions between races, Afro-Cubans always participated in the politics and socioeconomic struggles of the Cuban communities while advancing their own interests. While they supported the separatist movement against Spain and helped organize the Cuban immigrant labor unions in Florida and New York, they usually insisted that white Cubans be sensitive to race issues. At the same time, they struggled with the racial issues of the day within North American society. One example is Rafael Serra, an important Afro-Cuban leader in New York who worked closely with José Martí in 1888-1895. Later, Serra involved himself in the politics of race in the United States and, as with many North American blacks, made the transition from following the conservative ideas of Booker T.

Washington to embracing a black nationalist perspective. Since the Cuban revolution, Cubans of color have also participated in Cuban community affairs, as exiles and immigrants, and have continued to struggle with their special race-related problems within North American as well as Cuban-American society. In 1989, Afro-Cubans in Miami established the Asociación Afro-Cubana to preserve the cultural heritage of black Cubans. Over one hundred years after the first Afro-Cuban communities formed in Key West, Tampa and New York, Cubans of color continue to point to the same fundamental dilemma of their experience. As one Miami Afro-Cuban noted in 1990, "We live in three cultures. We live in the Anglo-Saxon culture, the Cuban culture and the black American culture. We are under pressure because we are Cuban and we are also black" (*The Miami Times* 15 November 1990).

## Conclusion

Cubans have resided in the United States for almost two centuries, and their presence has been characterized by a great deal of diversity and some elements of commonality that provide the basis for an integrated approach to the Cuban-American experience. Since the 1820s Cuban migration patterns to the United States changed often and Cuban-American communities revealed significantly different political and socioeconomic characteristics. The radical working-class Cubans in Florida during the late nineteenth century contrasted dramatically with conservative, middle-class Cubans in many North American communities after 1960. But at the same time, certain themes played a constant role in providing some unity to the experience. The exile identity and nationalism, for example, always offered an important frame of reference for most Cubans in the United States, whether speaking of tobacco workers in 1870 or displaced professionals in 1970. This means that, initially, Cuban-American community life more often than not organized to effect political and socioeconomic change in the homeland. Furthermore, Cuban-American communities contended with the process of adjusting their exile agenda to the realities of everyday life in the United States. This involved accommodations in political culture, individual and family values, economic aspirations and Cuban cultural expressions generally. These accommodations were also apparent in gender and racial issues. Cuban women helped build exile communities and acted as important agents in the transition of those communities into immigrant and ethnic enclaves. Cubans of color in the United States for over one hundred years negotiated the difficult racial currents within their own communities as well as in the society at large. Their

struggle as people of color and as Cubans within a society that often resented both designations gave them a special set of issues to confront.



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