



Adaptation and Identity Formation in the Cuban American Community: Reflections and Considerations

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ABSTRACT. This essay takes a comparative look at the migrant experiences of Cuban Americans, e.g., those who arrived before 1980, those after 1980, and the second-generation Cuban Americans. It also takes a critical look at the various, often divergent, claims to Cuban national identity in the United States as well as the various ideological, political, economic, and social roots of these claims. It explores the mechanisms and evaluative criteria with which identity is expressed, and attempts to identify particular groups associated with one claim or another for illustrative purposes. The aim is to show the transformation of the conception of identity among members of the Cuban American community, the factors behind this transformation, and the underlying implications of this transformation on the dominant theories of assimilation, pluralism, and multiculturalism. Observations drawn from this study would necessarily be related—critically—to the larger theoretical literature on these themes in the United States, particularly on issues pertaining to immigration policies, socioeconomic adaptation, and political participation. The contributions of existing empirical and analytical studies on the Cuban American migrant community would be assessed and classified in terms of their respective theoretical and conceptual perspectives. Governmental sources would be used whenever appropriate, particularly statistical information and applicable laws and policies affecting the Cuban American community.

KEYWORDS. Cuban American · identity · assimilation · pluralism · multiculturalism

INTRODUCTION

The search for a Cuban American identity is a challenging task. Claims and counterclaims by one group or another are complicated by a variety of political, ideological, social, and generational differences and/or factors that compel the attention of anyone wishing to understand the nature of this identity. Yet a definition, or redefinition as the case may be, of Cuban American identity in the context of a multicultural society such as the United States (US) is imperative not only at the

psychological or emotional level but also at the political and administrative levels as the process of allocating scarce goods and services in society becomes subject to more intense pressures by disparate and competing social groups wanting a greater share of these.

The focus on Cuban Americans may be understandable in light of the contentious nature—both ideologically and politically—in which the bulk of membership of this migrant community was formed at the height of the Cold War. Studies show that the 1959 Cuban Revolution provided the conditions leading to the exodus, in the two decades that followed, of Cubans into the representative successive layers of the Cuban immigrant community. These migrants ranged from the most affluent who were most directly and adversely affected by the ascension of a revolutionary government in Cuba in 1959; to the poorest elements who constituted a significant part of the Mariel boatlift, which brought more than 125,000 Cubans into Florida shores in 1980 (Perez 1986a, 126-27); and, most recently, to the mix of *balseros* (rafters) who arrived in Florida shores during the first half of the 1990s, forcing a reassessment of the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act, which offered a preferential treatment to Cuban immigrants, and the adoption of the “wet-foot/dry-foot” policy by the Clinton administration following several rounds of negotiations with the Cuban government between 1995 and 1996.

Yet another reason for this attention is the emerging consensus among many observers that Cuban American influence in US domestic politics is at a crossroads, punctuated by a number of events including the presumed political coming-of-age of second-generation Cuban Americans and the factionalism within what has been the most potent Cuban American lobbying organization thus far—the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF)—compounded by the death of its leader, Jorge Mas Canosa, in November 1997. Despite hard-line congressional actions—e.g., enactment of the Helms-Burton Act, and the Cuba Democracy Act in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War—and the collapse of the former Soviet Union presumably designed to hasten the demise of the Castro regime, several developments (e.g., the easing of restrictions on travel and remittances to Cuba announced by US President Bill Clinton¹ and the Pope’s visit to Cuba² [both occurring in January 1999], followed by “baseball diplomacy” featuring the Baltimore Orioles’ exhibition game with the Cuban national team in March of the same year) appeared to augur positively toward the long-term relaxation of tensions in Cuban-American relations, or so it

seemed until the assumption into the presidency of George W. Bush in 2000 but more dramatically since 9/11. Beholden to the state of Florida—particularly to the vast number of Cuban American voters and to his brother, Governor Jeb Bush during the presidential election of that year—President Bush has adopted more stringent rules toward Cuba, affecting even the ability of Cuban Americans to remit money to relatives in Cuba, and narrowing the classifications of those allowed to travel there.

CUBAN MIGRATORY PATTERNS: HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS

As alluded to above, the bulk of persons in the US of Cuban origin arrived in the two decades after 1959. Before this period, the US became a prime destination among Cuba's economic, political, and intellectual elites. In fact, the period between 1896 and 1910 saw a heightened rate of migration among these sectors into the US, understandably so because this period corresponded "to the Spanish-Cuban-American war, the first US administration of Cuba, the first Cuban government, and the second US administration of the island. It was a period characterized, successively, by strife and turmoil, direct US influence, and political and economic instability and uncertainties" (Perez 1986a, 127). Post-World War II immigration intensified as more Cubans fled the Batista dictatorship. Nonetheless, Cuban émigrés to the United States up to 1959 totaled no more than seventy thousand—a meager number compared to the succeeding decades.

The period between 1959 and 1980 was characterized by heightened Cold War-induced tensions between Cuba and the US. A rapid succession of events—including the nationalization of foreign assets by Cuba's revolutionary government, the failed attempt with the Eisenhower administration at settling compensation for expropriated US corporate assets, the Bay of Pigs invasion and the subsequent break in diplomatic relations in January 1961, and the dramatic Cuban missile crisis in October 1962—all provided the context in which some two hundred thousand Cubans fled their homeland during those initial years. This was facilitated by the continuance of commercial flights despite the diplomatic impasse, between Havana and Miami, encouraged, no less, by the immediate granting of a refugee status by the US government to anyone fleeing Cuba. In 1965, as a precursor to

Table 1. Cuban population in the United States, 2004

	Total population	% of Cuban population in the US	% of Hispanic population in the US	% of US population
Cuban foreign born	912,686	63.0	2.3	0.3
Entered before 1980	431,429	29.8	1.1	0.2
Entered 1980 to 1990	171,798	11.9	0.4	0.1
Entered after 1990	309,459	21.4	0.8	0.1
Cuban native born	535,998	37.0	1.3	0.2
Total	1,448,684	100.0	3.6	0.5

Source: Pew Hispanic Center 2006.

the massive Mariel boatlift in 1980, the Cuban government agreed to allow the orderly departure of a combined total of 265,500 persons by boat from the port of Camarioca and by air to the Miami-Fort Lauderdale region lasting until about 1973. Historians refer to these as the “freedom flights.” In 1966, the US Congress passed the Cuban Adjustment Act, which was essentially designed, as critics argue, to “destabilize the Cuban society, to discredit its political model, to deprive Cuba of its human capital and to lay the foundations for the creation of counterrevolutionary movements in charge of perpetrating terrorist and aggressive actions against a people determined to build a new country” (Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006).

For a six-month period in 1980, a spurt of emigration resulted once again from pressures on the Cuban government to allow the exit from Cuba of more than 125,000 persons. These immigrants came to be referred to as *marielitos*, after the Cuban port of Mariel from where the bulk of them departed. As it turned out, among their ranks was a good number of mentally disabled patients and representatives of prison population released from Cuba’s penitentiaries and mental institutions presumably by the Castro government so that, as one observer described it, the Castro government could “put one over the US” at a time when the US government was preoccupied with the hostage crisis in Iran. While these categories constituted less than 3 percent of the total marielito emigrants, this threat was overblown by the media, and government paranoia was reflected in subsequent policies. By November 1987, the US and Cuban governments had finalized an agreement for the deportation back to Cuba of some 2,500 of these persons being held in several federal detention centers, principally at Atlanta, Georgia, and Oakdale, Louisiana.³

Table 2. Cuban citizenship status, 2004

	Citizens (%)	Non-citizens (%)
Cuban foreign-born	60	40
Entered before 1980	90	10
Entered between 1980 and 1990	60	40
Entered after 1990	18	82
Non-Cuban Hispanic foreign-born	26	74
Non-Hispanic White foreign-born	56	44
All other foreign-born	53	47
Total foreign-born	42	58

Source: Pew Hispanic Center 2006.

Insofar as the class origin of these immigrants is concerned, the metaphorical peeling off of layers of Cuban society during each of the various phases of migration is commonly referred to by many observers. Thus, the years between 1959 and the early 1970s saw the departure from Cuba of predominantly middle- to upper-class persons, e.g., landlords, skilled professionals, and entrepreneurial managers. Their flight from Cuba was characterized as much more comfortable than that of their later counterparts. As a statement from the Cuban National Assembly states, in criticizing the US motive in enacting the Cuban Adjustment Act, “Those who arrived in the United States on that date, or in the years immediately following, in the early 1960s, did not do so on flimsy, makeshift vessels. Actually, they left on luxury yachts, private airplanes or regularly scheduled flights, which traveled directly to and from Cuba until the Yankee authorities banned them at the end of 1962, as part of the economic war against our country” (Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000). Not surprisingly, these sectors would feel most adversely affected by the enactment of agricultural and economic reform policies—particularly land redistribution and the nationalization of industries—under socialist guidelines promulgated by Cuba’s new revolutionary government. These emigrants’ relative success in adaptation into life in the US served as a basis for the common impression—albeit with some exaggeration—that Cuban Americans are much better situated than their counterparts in the larger Hispanic community, and that, further, Cuban emigration—encouraged by existing US laws—has been not only socially and economically selective but also ideologically driven. Table 2 lends substance to this observation as it shows the high rate of citizenship status (60 percent) being conferred to Cuban foreign-born after a brief period of residency in which they are placed on a “fast track” ahead of

comparable entrants (26 percent) from other Spanish-speaking Caribbean or Central American countries.

The Cuban Adjustment Act, as amended in 1999, for example, contains the following provision:

That, notwithstanding the provisions of section 245(c) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (subsec. (c) of this section), the status of any alien who is a native or citizen of Cuba and who has been admitted or paroled into the United States subsequent to January 1st, 1959 and has been physically present in the United States for at least one year, may be adjusted by the Attorney General, in his discretion and under such regulations as he may prescribe, to that of an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence if the alien makes an application for such adjustment, and the alien is eligible to receive an immigrant visa and is admissible to the United States for permanent residence. (Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999)

Thus, it was hardly surprising that early emigrants represented the upper crust of Cuban society who, along with foreign-based corporate interests, controlled up to 80 percent of Cuba's agricultural land. It was predictable, further, that the persistence of this policy in subsequent decades would have the effect—as in fact it did—of encouraging not merely those from the privileged strata of Cuban society but also those from the less-privileged ones to aspire to leave Cuba not for political reasons but, rather, for economic ones. In fact, the wave of Cuban migrants during the mid-1990s—referred to popularly in the media as the *balseros*, named after the often makeshift wooden boats they used—constituted the second-largest bulk of migrants from Cuba to the United States after the 1959 revolution. Among these *balseros* was a young boy named Elian Gonzalez whose ordeal of survival in crossing the treacherous open sea from Cuba to the US waters the dominant exile community in southern Florida had wanted to use to dramatize its hostility to the Cuban government.

But these kinds of disorderly and risky travel are the predictable outcomes of existing US policies, according to the Cuban government. As the Cuban National Assembly lamented in a proclamation in the year 2000 deploring the aforementioned Act:

By extending the Act to apply indefinitely into the future, after having severed diplomatic relations, suspended the granting of visas and eliminated the possibilities of traveling normally between the two countries, the only goal pursued was that of encouraging Cubans to attempt to migrate

illegally by sea, with all the dangers involved. For many years, those that did so could count on the active cooperation of the US authorities and Coast Guard Service, which systematically and regularly picked up travelers from the sea near Cuba and transported them to American territory. Others, unfortunately, lost their lives when they were not lucky enough to come across US naval units en route. Both, those who made it and those who did not, have been shamelessly used by the empire for the anti-Cuban propaganda on which billions of dollars have been spent over the last four decades. (Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000)

It is also worth pointing out that, as studies cited in succeeding sections below bear out, this Act stands out among many specific policies and regulations by the US government pertaining to immigration as being largely responsible for discriminatory treatment against non-Cuban immigrants and refugees who leave their respective countries for the same or similar reasons. This Act, in effect, singles out Cubans who leave their homeland for preferential treatment. Historically, the US government has claimed that these Cubans, albeit impacted by hardships in Cuban society driven by no other than the mean-spirited US embargo itself, “escaped” from Cuba and into the waiting and generous arms of the US eager to offer them a new lease on life.

PROFILES IN ADAPTATION

The integration of Cuban emigrants into US society has been the subject of numerous studies. One could claim that more studies abound on the Cuban American community than on any other immigrant community in the US, certainly more than other members of the Hispanic community. In addition to studies done by various federal government agencies, these studies are, of course, supplied with a steady and regular stream of data from the US Bureau of Census. These studies have offered a bounty of theoretical and methodological approaches with the end in view of helping the readership understand the issues and problems attendant to Cuban American immigration.

The conventional wisdom

Along these lines, some conventional theories, e.g., segmented labor-market theory and assimilation theory, have postulated—and continue to postulate albeit with some subsequent modification in their respective basic presuppositions—that immigrant economic mobility depends on integration into the primary labor market, which offers

rewards to human capital and depends, further, on occupational skills, experience, and professional qualifications. They also postulate that the process of immigrant adaptation follows a linear pattern in that immigrants move from their narrow ethnic community into the wider society. Thus, from this perspective, Cubans from the earlier waves of migration have been assumed to have economically and socially adapted better than their later counterparts or, for that matter, their counterparts in the rest of the Hispanic community, not necessarily because of their ethnicity but, rather, because they brought with them occupational and entrepreneurial skills and other credentials that they needed to succeed on their own and to compete in society at large.⁴

In a study comparing Cuban with Haitian immigrants, Cubans have been found to be more positively integrated into this primary labor market whereas the Haitians, lacking the same attributes, have dispersed into secondary or informal employment or have remained in a status of unemployment altogether, depending for sustenance on assistance coming from either the federal or state levels (Portes and Stepick 1985, 493-594).

In a similar earlier study comparing Cuban and black American economies in the Miami area, it was also confirmed that the Cubans' more advantageous position vis-à-vis the blacks was directly attributable to the role played by highly interdependent industries outside the context of majority industry. The black businesses, on the other hand, were weakly interdependent in the context of majority industry. In their research, Wilson and Martin (1982) write that while the black community is the older of the two and that the Cuban business community did not begin to flourish until the early 1960s, by 1972 there were 2,463 Cuban-owned firms compared with 1,530 black-owned firms. "Total Cuban receipts were \$270 million while total receipts for black-owned businesses were only \$75 million.... Clearly Cuban business, with average receipts of \$110,000 per firm, became more prosperous than black business, with average receipts of \$49,000 per firm, during a single decade" (Wilson and Martin 1982, 135-60).

Anomaly in the conventional wisdom: The role of the enclave

The above perspective, however, is inadequate in its ability to account for the successful integration of a large number of later Cuban immigrants, such as those that constituted the bulk of the *marielitos*, who came ashore with not much more than the shirt on their backs on what the media dubbed the "Freedom Flotilla." As a matter of fact,

Cuban immigrants since the early 1970s increasingly came to represent the sociodemographic profile of Cuba's population. If the postulates of the above theoretical perspectives are to be held valid, then one is forced to assume that these poorer later immigrants do not stand an easy chance of being integrated into US society and economy. At this juncture, Portes, Clark, and Lopez (1981) intervene in the discourse to clarify the apparent anomaly.⁵ In so doing, they introduce their notion of "modes of incorporation" in the context of an "ethnic enclave." These modes of incorporation are "an expression of the dynamic interaction of both the structural features of labor demand in the US economy and the active organization of immigrant groups in carrying out their labor-market positions" (Tienda 1987, 1002-4). Portes, Clark, and Lopez (1981) articulate the point that the outcome of immigrant economic adjustment is predicted most strongly by the structural characteristics of that sector of the economy in which the immigrants are employed, and that these characteristics are best manifested in an enclave situation.

The insertion by Portes, Clark, and Lopez (1981) of the concept of enclave into the debate occurs in the context of a broadening consensus in the scholarly community focusing on various migrant ethnic and nationality groups. This scholarly community has been united in its desire to understand how these new members adapt to and develop a stable if not flourishing economic presence in their respective host communities. Some notable contributions by this scholarly community include those by Simmel (1950), with his conceptualization of entrepreneurs as "strangers"; Light (1972), with his comparative study of the patterns of behavior by Chinese, Japanese, and Black entrepreneurs; and Bonacich and Modell (1980) in their reconstruction of Japanese entrepreneurial history in California.

Of these studies, there emerged two competing explanations: (1) the so-called middleman minority theory propounded by Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) and Bonacich and Modell (1980); and (2) the enclave theory advocated by Portes, Clark and Lopez (1981).⁶ Both of these theories share some general assumptions: (1) level of discrimination—linguistic, educational, etc.—as having a constraining effect to access to economic opportunities and the labor market; (2) the resort to new or small enterprises requiring little capitalization, thus incurring little loss in case of failure; and (3) the significance of the overall "opportunity structure" in the host community in predetermining the final outcome of the immigrant struggle to survive or adapt (Butler and Greene 1997).

Table 3. Cuban median household income, 2004

	Income (USD)
Cuban foreign born	33,800
Entered before 1980	38,000
Entered between 1980 and 1990	30,000
Entered after 1990	33,000
Cuban native born	50,000
All Cubans	37,700
Non-Cuban Hispanics	35,600
Non-Hispanic Whites	48,074

Source: Pew Hispanic Center 2006.

If income may be used both as a gauge in determining the rate of success of the Cuban American community in comparison to other Spanish-speaking communities in the US and as a result of the Cuban American adaptation patterns, then one could say for certain, as table 3 above shows, that the Cuban American community enjoys a relative advantage for the year 2004 with USD 37,700 median income for all Cubans and USD 50,000 for Cuban native born (i.e., second-generation Cuban Americans), in comparison to USD 35,600 for their non-Cuban Hispanic counterparts.

In either of the above theories, there is also the additional assumption inspired by the folk story of Horatio Alger rising from rags to riches. While true to a certain extent, there is extant evidence demonstrable by both theories of the failures of many members of migrant ethnic communities at various stages in their struggle. That having been said, it is notable that the middleman minority theory departs from the enclave theory in that the former is concerned largely with “the development of enterprises throughout the metropolitan area; there is no concern paid to where enterprises are located” (Butler and Greene 1997). As the term suggests, studies concentrate on how ethnic groups arrive at a geographic location where they are a “recognizable minority,” and where, further, they find that they are “denied jobs in the primary labor market” (Greene and Owen 2004). In order for them to survive, they play the role they are most fit to play under the circumstances, i.e., as middlemen in the movement of goods and services. What has accounted principally for the success of these middlemen has been their trading expertise such as that possessed by the Jewish merchants in nineteenth-century France, the Chinese in Malaysia, and the Lebanese in West Africa. But more important is the sense of solidarity among them as well as the nonlegal but nonetheless

“enforceable trust” between them and their clients (Greene and Owen 2004).

Obviously, the situation of the minority middleman is wholly different from that of an enclave, which has been variously described as consisting of self-employed, self-sustaining, and self-reliant immigrant entrepreneurs with the ability to create economic opportunities for others within an extensive division of labor. It is further described as being geographically concentrated in self-sustained and self-reliant community situated within a large metropolitan area. A further refinement is offered by Portes and associates as they describe an enclave as “a concentration of ethnic firms in physical space—generally a metropolitan area—that employ a significant proportion of workers from the same minority” (Portes and Jensen 1992, 418). Portes and associates also sought to revise a theoretical perspective that has prevailed since the late 1970s with the publication of Michael J. Piore’s *Birds of Passage*. In this book, Piore (1979) has posited that both the immigrant and the native born similarly encountered a two-tiered labor market. Accordingly, “this market consisted of a primary segment characterized by a selection criteria based largely on credentials and education, clear rules governing pay and performance, and formal channels of career advancement. In contrast stood the secondary segment, where ethnicity and nativity status were important selection criteria, there were few opportunities for advancement, and pay- and productivity-were relatively low” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 1997). Under Piore’s (1979) formulation, immigrants would almost perpetually find themselves in the secondary segment, surviving only by their willingness to receive low—even exploitative—wages. It is further assumed by this formulation that the border between the two segments is largely impermeable, leaving little possibility for the secondary segment workers to move up into the primary segment.

Portes and associates, however, take exception to these assumptions, arguing that within an enclave immigrants do find a path for upward mobility. Lending empirical substance to the view that “immigrant communities take care of their own,” Portes and associates have found that compatriots who owned businesses not only provided the new entrants apprenticeships that eventually enabled them to own businesses; they also made broadly available an environment that sustained what they refer to as “social capital,” in effect, anticipating the critique—and acknowledging the validity of the alternate explanation—offered by Lisandro Perez (1986b) discussed in the next section.

With this perspective on an enclave and its variation, Portes and his associates apparently view the limitations of the middleman minority theory as inapplicable to the Cuban American immigrant experience. Accordingly, as the enclave theory acknowledges, the most successful Cuban Americans are found in three large metropolitan areas: the Miami-Fort Lauderdale region in Florida, the greater New York area in New York and east central New Jersey, and the metropolitan area of Los Angeles, California. Altogether, these metropolitan regions account for more than three-fourths of all Cuban Americans while the remaining fourth have fanned out to other metropolitan centers across the US.⁷ Of the three metropolitan regions, the Miami-Fort Lauderdale region holds the lion's share of Cuban Americans, containing slightly more than twice those present in the New York-Los Angeles regions combined (or 65 percent of all Cuban Americans).

These enclaves are more than just ethnic neighborhoods. They have served—and continue to serve—as the principal mode of incorporating newer immigrants, e.g., the *marielitos*, who were willing and able to take the worst jobs that the domestic (US) working class would rather not take. A tour of duty at these worst jobs then became a passport toward better and higher-paying jobs in ethnic firms, or toward self-employment. In an article, Jensen and Portes (1992) confirm that members of the Cuban enclave have a higher return on their human capital, which increased their probability of becoming self-employed. Accordingly, self-employment has, in turn, been found to have “a significant and positive effect on earnings among Cuban men living in Miami ... and a negative and insignificant effect among those living elsewhere” (Jensen and Portes 1992, 411-14).

There is a downside, however, to these enclaves. Often the price these immigrants pay for the level of income and status that they attain within the structure of the enclave is more instructive of the intersection of class and ethnicity than a cause for celebration. Portes and another associate, Robert L. Bach, in their highly praised book *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, explain the symbiotic but exploitative relationship within an enclave economy: “The viability of its modest firms often depends upon the extraction of long hours of labor for low pay. When labor requirements exceed the level that the owner himself and his immediate family can provide, others must be

hired. In the absence of state protection, the requirement of above-average hours for lower wages cannot be simply imposed" (Portes and Bach 1985).

Enforcement agencies can readily side with immigrants who defect from such conditions against their politically powerless employers. The objective difficulty then consists in how to extract maximum effort from immigrant workers without encouraging them to leave and join the open labor market; in other words, "how to persuade them to accept their own exploitation" (Portes and Bach 1985, 342-43). Portes and Bach (1985) further explain that immigrant capitalists resolve this dilemma by appealing to "common national origin" in which "ethnicities suffuse an otherwise 'bare' class relationship with a sense of collective purpose in contrast to the outside" (342-43). What makes this arrangement reminiscent of the reciprocity of a feudal-like relationship is the obligation accepted by the immigrant capitalists to reserve for their migrant compatriots supervisory or any position that may become available in their firms, to train them in some skills in preparation for eventual self-employment—these in exchange for their acceptance of their self-exploitation.

Variation of the enclave theory

While not disputing the validity of the enclave hypothesis promoted by Portes and his associates, another observer of the Cuban American scene, Lisandro Perez (1986b), comments that "there are community-level explanations that are structural in nature and inspired by the dual-labor-market theory, in which the emphasis is on the role of the established ethnic enclave in facilitating the adjustment of more recent Cuban immigrants."⁸ Perez (1986b) further contends that existing studies, e.g., those by Portes and associates, largely ignore the role of family organization by failing to consider a household-level type of analysis. An emphasis on the role of family organization, Perez (1986) believes, would lead to greater understanding of a "wide range of phenomena, including the socioeconomic selectivity of migration, female labor-force participation, and immigrant adjustment" (8). Subsequently, in the analysis of his data, Perez (1986) has found specific features of the Cuban family that facilitate economic adjustment, namely: high rate of female labor-force participation, in which Cuban women find themselves not just employed, but employed full-time and year-round; low fertility, in which the rate for Cuban Americans is substantially below that of other Hispanic communities and that of the

total rate for the US; and the importance of the three-generation family in which the elderly continues to make economic contributions. Here it is paradoxical that, as Perez (1986b) implies, the role of kinship ties in helping perpetuate an exploitative relationship is also a source of refuge and comfort—at least momentarily, until an opportunity to break out of this cycle finally comes along sooner or later.

THE SEARCH FOR POLITICAL IDENTITY

The preceding section looked at a number of theoretical perspectives that help illuminate the pattern of socioeconomic adaptation on the part of the Cuban American community. This section will consider some empirical data, along with their theoretical implications, that help explain the pattern of political adaptation by this community. While one may disagree with the meanings and implications of Cuban migration into the US and the data on subsequent socioeconomic adaptation by the Cuban migrants, one can hardly dispute the observation that the Cuban American community has made its presence felt in US domestic politics.

In no other foreign-policy area has this presence been of greater significance than in the formulation of US policy toward Cuba in the last forty years. In fact, conventional textbooks in any introductory course in international relations routinely admit the significance of domestic political forces that help shape and, in some cases, predetermine a country's foreign policy (Fearon 1998). Insofar as US foreign policy is concerned, this is true with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in an obvious acknowledgement of the role of the Jewish lobby (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006); and this is certainly true as well with regard to Cuba, again in recognition of the dominant role of the largely Miami-based Cuban American community. This community's influence has served to nurture for nearly half a century now a hostile US foreign policy toward Cuba, and has made right-wing conservative, predominantly Republican, US politicians the darling of the Cuban Americans who have made it their lifelong objective to someday overthrow the regime of Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro and replace it with a government more to the liking of the US. In fact, it is this objective that is at the core of what has been aptly referred to as the Cuban American "exile ideology" (Grenier 2006).

As will be elaborated on below, this conservative bent by Cuban Americans has made them distinct from their fellow Hispanics, e.g., Mexicans, Guatemalans, or even Puerto Ricans, who tend to be less

conservative in foreign-policy issues and who would more likely than not side with liberal and/or progressive causes, particularly those concerning political, civil, and human rights issues.⁹ In the 2006 National Survey of Latinos conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, 28 percent of Cuban respondents identified themselves as Republicans, which is more than the Mexicans (15 percent), the Puerto Ricans (11 percent), and Central and South Americans (7 percent). Twenty percent of the Cuban respondents identified themselves as Democrats, less than the Puerto Ricans (50 percent) and Mexicans, Central and South Americans (29 percent) (Pew Hispanic Center 2006).

The apparent aloofness of Cuban Americans vis-à-vis other Hispanics may also be a function of their higher levels of education and income. As of 1989, the Cuban American median household income was USD 27,890.00 while that of other Hispanics was USD 21,922.00. The nationwide median household income for the same year was USD 28,905.00, which shows that the Cuban American median income was not that far behind that of the average US citizen. For updated 2004 comparative data, please refer to table 3.

While one may readily assume that these are definite determinants in the formation of a Cuban American identity, the reality is actually much more complex, which leads one to be more cautious in identifying the elements that constitute a Cuban American identity. Enough evidence suggests that this identity, while it may have been coherent in the early years following 1959, is gradually evolving. The coherence of the old one—based mainly on common memory of exile and suffering—is gradually being replaced by a new one that admits of pragmatism and the possibility of “constructive engagement” with the Castro government. Nonetheless, the emerging identity is taking various forms at the same time that it is confronted by a number of constraints, the sources of which will be discussed next.

It is postulated here that the formation of a coherent Cuban American identity in the immediate future is hampered by a combination of objective and subjective factors, some of which have historical roots while others are a product of contemporary prevailing socioeconomic, cultural, and political realities, both domestically and internationally. For purposes of this essay, the following factors shall be offered as having a significant bearing on the ultimate definition or, for that matter, redefinition, of Cuban American identity: the exile-immigrant dichotomy, the rise of second-generation Cuban Americans, and the class background of newer Cuban immigrants.

The exile-immigrant dichotomy

One of the questions asked eventually by every Cuban upon arrival in the US is whether he or she would remain an exile with the ultimate intention of someday returning to Cuba, or become a naturalized US citizen as an immigrant. After the 1959 Cuban revolution, the Cubans that formed part of the exodus fleeing real or imagined political persecution by the Castro regime were granted by the US government almost immediately the status of political refugee through a cumulative series of ad hoc regulations and stipulations. These were finally systematized and formalized with the enactment of the Cuban Adjustment Act in 1966. For such a status to be granted, the US government in effect was in pursuit of its Cold War aim of isolating Cuba as an ideological adversary, asserting that the refugees were a product of a presumed totalitarian regime in Havana. The refugee status allowed the Cubans to stay in the US to the extent that they believed a repressive regime in Cuba remained in power. The status, in turn, allowed them housing, living, and employment assistance and, upon eligibility, the opportunity to apply for naturalization.

In fact Cuban Americans have taken advantage of this privileged status. The Cuban enclave in Florida, where most Cuban Americans live, features a thriving immigrant economy that is the envy of the non-Cuban Hispanic and black communities. That success is replicated in various other parts of the US where there is a sizeable Cuban American presence, e.g., the New York-New Jersey region, and the Los Angeles, California, area. But despite this apparent success, the unresolved question about whether to remain a political refugee or become a US citizen continues to hang in the minds of many Cuban Americans.

It has been a common assumption that Cuban Americans, particularly those who arrived in the early 1960s, would want to return to Cuba and refuse the opportunity to immigrate. In support of this assumption were a number of reasonable factors including the close geographic proximity (about 90 miles) between Florida and Cuba, and the expectation that the US government would assist and hasten their return. Many Cuban Americans see their sojourn in the US as a temporary one. What they were building, as one observer puts it, "was not so much a place they could call their own so much as a place that would stand in for the Cuba they had lost, an alternate Havana whose deepest function was to help these Cubans resist the blandishments of assimilation and give them a civic context in which they could preserve their exile status" (Rieff 1995, 80). Not surprisingly, it is this group

that is most stubborn about keeping the embargo against Cuba. In a comparison of attitudes toward the embargo among those that arrived (1) between 1965 and 1973, and (2) between 1990 and 1995, Grenier (2006) found that 78 percent of the respondents from the 1965 to 1973 cohort were most uncompromising about keeping the embargo, while 59 percent of them oppose even a dialogue with the Cuban government. As Grenier (2006) explains, "A key element of any exile consciousness is the fact that the members of the community were forced out of their country; emigration was not a choice, as with so many other immigrants, but a survival strategy allowing them to live and fight another day. Seen in this light, emigration is part of an enduring conflict."

While much romanticism is attached to the notion of return, objective reality suggests a different trend. In a study by Portes and Mozo (1985), it has been found out that the rate of naturalization for Cuban Americans has been comparable to if not faster than that of the rest of Latin Americans, including Mexicans. Portes and Mozo (1985) explain that whatever the factual basis of the above-cited assumption is, the trend in the 1970s has been toward rapid naturalization, which is made possible, in part, by the eligibility for naturalization of those who arrived in the 1960s and who applied for citizenship as soon as they became eligible. And, as some surveys show, if the Castro government were overthrown, and given the chance to return to Cuba, only one in four Cuban Americans would actually return to Cuba (*The Economist*, April 25, 1998).¹⁰

Interpreting this trend, Portes and Mozo (1985) write: "For most Cubans, leaving their country represented a decision of nearly irreversible consequences. In the absence of a credible chance of return, contingent on the overthrow of the Castro government, Cuban refugees faced the prospect of permanent resettlement in the United States. In all appearance, this prospect weighed more heavily than the lingering hopes of return, leading to high rates of naturalization among early exile cohorts" (41).

With the empirical data herein presented, one is led to believe that the dichotomy between the statuses of the exile and the immigrant may be a spurious one. If this is so, one wonders how the myth of eventual return is perpetuated with the consequent designation of those who give up their Cuban citizenship as lacking in patriotism and validating, in effect, the policies of the Castro government. It is suggested here that the perpetuation of this myth serves the political interest of the most

virulent critics of Cuban President Fidel Castro in the US as an instrument to rally public opinion and to keep in tow congressional support for the maintenance of the stringent policies toward Cuba that have been in place for more than forty years now. The opportunism of these critics is apparent in their having taken advantage of citizenship opportunities at the same time that they have kept a tight rein on the Cuban immigrant community in their vitriolic anti-Castro rhetoric. This tight rein is particularly evident in the lack of tolerance—to the point of irrationality—toward views that may diverge from the dominant exile ideological paradigm. Again, as Grenier (2006) explains: “Those inside or outside the community who voice views that are ‘soft’ or conciliatory with respect to Castro, or who take a less-than-militant stance in opposition to Cuba’s regime, are usually subjected to criticism and scorn, their position belittled and their motives questioned. Liberals, the ‘liberal press,’ most Democrats, pacifists, leftists, academics, intellectuals, ‘dialoguers,’ and socialists are favorite targets.” Thus, it appears that so long as the myth of eventual return is maintained, which, in turn, perpetuates the false dichotomy between exiles and immigrants, this will continue to have a blurring effect on any definition of Cuban American identity.

The political coming-of-age of second-generation Cuban Americans

Interviewed by a reporter from the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* in Florida on the occasion of the publication in 1996 of her book *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida 1959-1994*, Maria Christina Garcia spoke of her upbringing in the Cuban exile community in southern Florida: “My generation grew up with a very strong sense of identity, a very strong sense of self. This community of exiles passed that on to their kids” (Beard 1996).

In her book, Garcia (1996) describes how the maintenance of a sense of *cubanidad* was central to the parental duty to inculcate in the child “those customs, values and traditions ... associated with being Cuban” (83). Garcia (1996) further attests that the early immigrants (of the early 1960s) whose children were born subsequent to their arrival in the US, or who brought with them small children were concerned that their children would learn about and be proud of their Cuban heritage and history as well as the Spanish language. To help accomplish these goals, the Cuban exiles supported the establishment of schools and churches that would inculcate the values of *cubanidad*. The Cuban community in southern Florida, for instance, has developed an

extensive private school system designed specifically for the inculcation of these values. Moreover, the role of the family was constantly being affirmed. For instance, Lisandro Perez (1986b), in his work, cites three interrelated features of the Cuban family that has facilitated adjustment: a high rate of female-labor participation, low fertility, and the salience of a three-generation family in which even the elderly makes no small economic contribution (11). In another instance, Mark F. Peterson (1995) confirms that the development of a very high degree of entrepreneurial success in the Cuban American community is due in large measure to the motives, abilities, and resources nurtured and influenced by “family-linked aspirations and role models” (1193).

While the influence of the family and other supporting institutions, e.g., schools and churches, on the child was strong, there is evidence that suggests that children of first-generation Cuban Americans have asserted their own identity as they reach adulthood. This trend is evident as well among Cuban Americans who arrived in the United States before they were ten years of age. Collectively referred to in scholarly literature as “second generation,” this group is gradually and steadily making its presence felt. Numbers bear this out: in 1980, almost four out of five Cuban Americans were born abroad; ten years later, however, the ratio has changed to three out of four (Boswell 1994).

Ironically, one of the major factors cited as responsible for the apparent “coming-of-age” of second-generation Cuban Americans is education, initially presumed to have been nurtured at an early age in the form of *cubanidad* (Cuban identity). In one study, using data collected from the Latino National Political Survey (LNPS), the assumption is verified that education and political attitudes and behavior are positively correlated. More specifically, the assumption that “people with more years of education tend to be more politically active, possess higher levels of social capital, and demonstrate greater levels of tolerance” is investigated as to its validity.¹¹ Setting aside for the moment the private-public dichotomy of education, the findings in this study confirm the validity of the above assumption, i.e., higher education leads to higher level of political participation, greater social capital through involvement in civic groups, and greater scale of tolerance of diversity (Greene, Giammo, and Mellow 1998).

The implications of this finding on the long-standing ideological, political, and social cohesiveness of the Cuban American community are both interesting and far-reaching. On all these fronts (i.e., ideological,

political, and social), one can presume with a high degree of confidence that there will continue to emerge greater diversity and divergence, if not outright disagreement on the meaning of Cubanhood or, more specifically, of Cuban American identity among members of the Cuban American community.

Using the same dataset from the LNPS cited above, Kevin Hill and Dario Moreno (1996) further confirm the growing wedge between the older- and the second-generation Cuban Americans. This wedge is all the more significant as it becomes apparent in the political arena. While it is still true that Cuban Americans across generations are heavily (i.e., more than 70 percent) anti-communist, anti-Castro, and pro-Republican Party, Hill and Moreno (1996) hypothesize that “second-generation Cubans will more closely resemble the general political profile of the general US population (non-Latin whites) than older first-generation Cubans. Specifically we expect younger Cuban Americans who did not experience the triple traumas of the Cuban Revolution, an often treacherous journey across the Straits of Florida, and exile in the United States to have significantly different political attitudes than their parents’ generation”¹² (175-93).

A number of salient factors account for this. First, as already highlighted in the Peterson (1995) study cited above, second-generation Cuban Americans have a higher level of educational attainment than their older counterparts and, in fact, higher than other Hispanic groups, e.g., Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and central Americans. Second, in terms of income, the same dataset reveals that 55.1 percent of second-generation Cuban Americans have an annual income above USD 30,000.00 as opposed to 44.1 percent among white Americans. Third, second-generation Cuban Americans tend to have a greater pan-ethnic identification (i.e., they identify themselves as part of the larger Hispanic or Latino migrant community in the US) than do their older counterparts. In the LNPS survey, 27.7 percent of the second-generation Cuban Americans surveyed identified themselves as either Hispanic or Latino in contrast to a mere 5.8 percent of the older respondents who preferred to be called “Cuban” rather than being lost in the more universal but abstract designation.

In terms of the level of political activity, Hill and Moreno (1996) found evidence that Cuban Americans who arrived in the US at age ten or younger have a significantly higher level of political participation than their numerically more superior older counterparts. Thus, comparatively, the second-generation Cuban Americans—who have

spent most if not all of their lives in the US—engage in political activities 0.84 percent more than their older counterparts, a significant percentage of whom have spent many years abroad before arriving in the US.

In terms of the issue of trust in government, Hill and Moreno (1996) point out that evidence also bears out the assumption that, while a disproportionate percentage of the older Cubans expect the federal government to “do what is right,” second-generation Cuban Americans are either much more cynical or distrusting of this government.

In terms of political party identification, Hill and Moreno (1996) testify that a declining trend in identification with the Republican is discernible as one moves from those respondents who immigrated to the US at age ten or older (75.7 percent) to those who arrived at age ten or younger (61.3 percent) to those who were born in the US (48.5 percent). Concomitantly, a discernible rise in Democratic Party affiliation or identification is also evident. But on a more general plane, Cuban American party identification now more closely approximates than ever the “normal” or average percentage rate of identification of the US public in general. Yet, there is still something to be said about the dominance of the earlier cohort of immigrants that have constructed not only an elaborate enclave economy but also because they have become, as Susan Eckstein (2004) admits, “adept lobbyists, moneyed and well organized” particularly as they have skillfully leveraged their dominant presence in Florida in presidential politics. Eckstein (2004) continues: “Florida commands the fourth largest number of electoral college votes and it is a ‘swing state.’ Therefore, both parties pander to the Cuban American vote.”

Furthermore, in the post-Elian Gonzalez and post-9/11 episodes, there appears to be a discernible digging-of-heels, so to speak, on the part of the hard-line Cuban Americans. The full extent to which this may affect, or even reverse, the trend toward a loosening of the Republican stranglehold among the Cuban Americans is yet to be determined. Nonetheless, in a 2004 survey conducted jointly by the Institute for Public Opinion Research and the Cuban Research Institute, both affiliated with the Florida International University in Gainesville, Florida (henceforth referred to as the IPOR/CRI Survey), it is revealed, as table 4 shows, that party affiliation among 68.5 percent of the respondents remains with the Republican Party, while only 17.6 percent of respondents identify with the Democratic Party.

Table 4. Party identification of Cuban Americans

Party	Frequency	Percent	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Republican	726	40.1	68.5	68.5
Democrat	187	10.3	17.6	86.1
Independent	137	7.6	12.9	99.0
Other, Specify	10	0.6	1.0	100.0
Total	1060	58.5	100.0	
Don't Know/No Response	53	2.9		
System	699	38.6		
Total	752	41.5		

Source: Institute for Public Opinion Research and Cuban Research Institute 2004.

Finally, on the issue of establishing diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba, Hill and Moreno (1996) point out that length of residency in the US serves again as a predictor of attitudes, though not a very strong one this time. Despite the fact that 73.4 percent of all respondents adamantly oppose the establishment of diplomatic relations, 76.6 percent of respondents who arrived in the US at age eleven or older have registered opposition, whereas this idea is least opposed by those who arrived in the US at age ten or younger, with 58.9 percent. Interestingly, 63.9 percent of respondents who were born in the US oppose diplomatic normalization. Hill and Moreno (1996) explain that while length of residency may not be a reliable predictor of attitude toward the issue of normalization, they point out that party identification and age may be more reliable explanatory variables. Thus, the older the respondent is, the greater the opposition to normalization and, as support for the Republican Party increases, support for diplomatic recognition of the Castro regime declines.

Bearing out the Hill and Moreno (1996) study is the 2004 IPOR/CRI Survey cited earlier. As table 5 shows, on the questions of reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba, those who adamantly oppose the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries outnumber those who favor, by a ratio of nearly 3:2.

The pattern of dominant Republican Party identification very well predicts the type of policy that would emerge out of the current White House leadership. The administration of Republican President George W. Bush has taken a number of not-so-subtle steps to mollify Florida's Cuban American constituency following their grave disappointment when the previous Clinton administration decided to reunite Elian

Table 5. Cuban American's opinion on restoring diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States

Position	Frequency	Percent	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Favor	708	39.1	42.7	42.7
Oppose	949	52.4	57.3	100.0
Total	1657	91.5	100.0	
Don't Know/No Response	154	8.5		
Total	1811	100.0		

Source: Institute for Public Opinion Research and Cuban Research Institute 2004.

Gonzales with his father back in Cuba. These steps include, but are not limited to (1) a full-court press to frustrate the appeal of the so-called Cuban Five for a retrial after the Atlanta Appeals Court has rendered a ruling that the trial in Miami—with all its implications—was a “fair” one; (2) the obstinate refusal to extradite an admitted Cuban terrorist, Luis Posada Carilles, after he escaped from a Venezuelan jail following a conviction and sentencing for his leading role in the planning and execution of the bombing of Cubana de Aviacion airline that resulted in the death of seventy-three passengers and crew members from various nations; and (3) the formalization of a plan for a “regime change” in Cuba through the establishment of a blatantly open and US-financed conspiratorial group euphemistically called the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. This Commission then submitted a “Plan for Transition in Cuba,” which seeks to interfere in Cuba’s domestic politics, and undermine and subvert Cuba’s political system. One of the goals—aided by an additional USD 29 million to the existing USD 7 million—is the undermining of Cuba’s “succession strategy” in the event of the demise of Cuban President Castro. In its executive summary, the Commission’s report states: “The United States rejects the continuation of a communist dictatorship in Cuba, and this Commission recommends measures to focus pressure and attention to the ruling elite so that succession by this elite or any one of its individuals is seen as what it would be: an impediment to a democratic and free Cuba” (Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba 2006). Such an advocacy for regime change towards unfriendly governments has been the hallmark of US foreign policy during the Cold War but not as galling as a display of imperial hubris as during the current neoconservative regime of President Bush (Bauzon 2006).

The socioeconomic gap between the older and the more recent immigrants

The popular perception that the Cuban migrant community in the US is a cut above the rest of other—particularly Hispanic—communities in terms of economic attainment has some basis in fact. This is alluded to in a discussion of the Cuban economic profile in the earlier section of this essay. This fact, however, has concealed another matter that has avoided the kind of attention and scrutiny that have been paid to the more fortunate—if not more affluent—segment of the Cuban American community. This pertains to the growing socioeconomic gap within this community. This phenomenon, is having—and will predictably continue to have—an impact on the cohesiveness of this community as it challenges some established notions about the nature of adaptation into US society.

Some studies that directly or indirectly bear on this phenomenon are worth noting. In a study by Portes and Bach (1985), the careers of a sampling of refugee men that arrived in the early 1960s were tracked in terms of types of occupation and income received. While noting that there was a strong labor-force participation among them, including a sizable proportion that became self-employed, the sampled refugees were earning an average of USD 413.00 per month in 1973-74 period, compared to slightly twice that amount, USD 869.00, in 1979. However, if inflation is taken into account, the apparent gain is not as impressive in that the 1979 earnings had not yet exceeded one-and-a-half times the 1973 figures. By 1979, 91 percent of the sampled men worked in non-union jobs mostly owned by fellow Cubans, highlighting the pivotal role played by the enclave labor market.¹³ While the sampled men were fairly optimistic in 1976 about their prospects in fulfilling their occupational aspirations, by 1979 a significant proportion of them (34.5 percent) no longer expected to fulfill their aspirations. In fact, by this time, Portes and Bach (1985) generalize that “in sum, Cuban refugees collectively experienced a substantial initial decline in their occupational status” (196). They attribute this to the nature of incorporation into the enclave economy. Thus, Portes and Bach (1985) contend, chances for incorporation are greater “among refugees who became part of the Cuban enclave in Miami or those who found employment in the primary sector. Workers confined to the secondary labor market did not find their path of advancement completely blocked, but their occupational and income attainment was determined by a different set of factors” (1985, 237).

While socioeconomic disparity may not have been as glaring among the so-called Golden Exiles (a term used to refer collectively to the immigrants of the early 1960s), a much more evident difference in class stratification is observable in the Cuban American community once the *marielitos* of the 1980s and the *balseros* of the 1990s are taken into account. This difference is what leads to what McHugh, Miyares, and Skop (1997) refer to as “segmented paths” in the pattern of Cuban migration characterized by, among others, the return of the immigrants—following a few years of relocation to and employment in other parts of the US—to the Miami, Florida, metropolitan area. As their thesis states, “The geography of migration and settlement is an especially refined lens for viewing pathways of adaptation and adjustment among Cubans” (McHugh, Miyares, and Skop 1997, 504-19).

The segmented path model discussed by McHugh, Miyares, and Skop (1997) is then used to inquire into the phenomenon of the underclass in the Cuban American community. As McHugh, Miyares, and Skop (1997) explain, contrary to popular notion, “a large proportion of Cubans are in the working class, and many within the Cuban community are poor. Poverty picks up among children and especially among older Cubans, who post high poverty rates both in and outside Miami” (506). This apparent paradox within the Cuban community is explained by Stepick and Grenier (1993) in the following fashion: “Poverty within the Cuban community is less widespread than in other US Latin communities because economic success is more common and because family networks are capable of assisting those in need. But when these resources are insufficient, those in need are less willing to recognize and publicly address the problems of poverty within it.”

In their research, McHugh, Miyares, and Skop (1997) find that immigration by Cubans into the Miami area between 1985 and 1990 from across the US amounted to 35,776. Out-migration from Miami mostly to other parts of Florida during the same period totaled 21,231. Streams of Miami-bound migration originate mostly from the urban and suburban sectors of the New York-New Jersey region, Los Angeles, and Chicago. But what is more interesting is the type of migrants returning to Miami.

McHugh, Miyares, and Skop (1997) further reveal that (1) migration is greater among Cuban natives than among US-born Cubans even though migration among the latter is also substantial; (2) the rate of movement to Miami is fastest among elderly Cubans, particularly

those over sixty years of age; and (3) the rate of movement is greatest among so called disadvantaged groups, e.g., those with less than high-school education and economically impoverished. To illustrate this, McHugh, Miyares, and Skop (1997) point out that “an amazing 200 per 1,000 are Cubans living in poverty in the New Jersey urban core. Interestingly, we see that impoverished Cubans residing in suburban New Jersey are also moving to Miami at a very high velocity (162 per 1,000), followed by Los Angeles (147 per 1,000) and Chicago (127 per 1,000)” (515).

A discussion on the emerging socioeconomic gap within the Cuban American community would not be complete without a consideration of the status of the marielitos. Scholars generally agree that the mass migration of Cubans from the port of Mariel to the southern shores of Florida from April to September 1980 has helped engender a strong anti-Hispanic sentiment among some quarters in the US population. Much of this sentiment has, in turn, been nurtured by the belief that the marielitos collectively represent a “moral epidemic” in which “the customary migratory behaviors of the Cuban people were redefined as “deviant” and that “the resulting deviant identities were magnified by means of official policies and programs, and official acts were legitimized by the mass media” (Aguirre, Saenz, and James 1997; Aguirre 1994).

As this collective image of the marielitos gained currency, it became difficult for them to find employment. They were shunned and feared by just about everybody. The Atlanta mayor, in 1981, expressed concern over the impending release of marielitos then being held at a federal detention facility in that city. Two years later, in Santa Clara, California, a job-program designed for marielitos was abandoned; and, in 1981, the mayor of Selma, Alabama, declared them to be “misfits that nobody will take.”¹⁴ In 1983, in perhaps the most blatant form of discrimination against the marielitos yet, the Miami Beach City Commission approved an ordinance giving the police the authority to inspect the homes of Miami Beach residents wanting to sponsor a marielito out of the detention centers. Even reaction from among the Cuban community in southern Florida was disappointing. “Despite the community’s show of support for the Marielitos at the beginning of the crisis,” write Aguirre, Saenz, and James (1997), “very soon political and cultural differences surfaced. Most Cubans in the United States sympathize with the Republican Party. During the Mariel crisis, their ethnic loyalties conflicted with their political loyalties, for the

crisis was used by then-presidential candidate Ronald Reagan to discredit President Carter's administration. It became clear to members of the Cuban American community that the Marielitos were very different from them racially and socioeconomically" (494).

A quick look at the profile of the marielitos may help shed light on the discrimination that has been shown them. Typically, the marielitos' proficiency in English is lower than that of pre-1980 immigrants: only 27.8 percent of the former as compared to 43.9 percent of the latter. Of the marielitos, only 35.3 percent and 5.5 percent completed high school and college, respectively. In contrast, 63.5 percent and 20 percent of pre-1980 immigrants finished high school and college, respectively. Further, marielitos are more likely to be unemployed (11.2 percent), to be on a job hunt (21.3 percent), and below the poverty line (26.9 percent). Consequently, their income-earning capacity is lower than that of US-born Cubans. In 1989, for instance, their median household income was USD 25,000 as compared to USD 39,989 for pre-1980 immigrants. Their median personal income, on the other hand, was on USD 12,000 for the same year, in comparison to the USD 13,000 earned by their pre-1980 counterparts.

What is clear from this information is that, whether one admits it or not, a caste-like formation has loomed within the Cuban American community. The advent of the marielitos, to which is attached the stigma of being "undesirables," has, figuratively speaking, closed the circle that was started by the Golden Exiles. It can now be said with confidence that the Cuban American population now more closely resembles than ever before the profile of the population in Cuba itself.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion clarifies the issues and problems involved in the definition or redefinition of identity in the Cuban American community. The Cuban migratory pattern into the US is discussed, and a profile of the Cuban American is provided. It is suggested in this essay that both the migratory pattern and the current profile indicate the difficulties involved in the search for this identity. In more ways than one, the Cuban American immigrant experience has helped modify conventional theories about assimilation and adaptation of immigrant communities in the US, and has compelled the formulation of US immigration policy—driven by ideology—that has served, and

continues to serve, the unique requirements of this community over and above those of other immigrant communities.

Nonetheless, there has been a discernible erosion of consensus within the Cuban American community with regard to a number of issues. This erosion results from at least three different countercurrents: (1) the opposing tendencies among older and more recent Cuban American immigrants of retaining the exile status, on the one hand, and of becoming a naturalized US citizen, on the other; (2) the looming generational conflict between the older-generation migrants, on one hand, and their children, i.e., the second-generation, on the other; and (3) the widening class differences between the more socially and economically successful strata of the Cuban American community, with which the older migrants are identified, on the one hand, and the emerging underclass to which a significant portion of the newer immigrants have fallen, on the other.

Until these differences are resolved, it may be expected in the foreseeable future that the Cuban American community will grow more diverse and disparate, affecting its cohesiveness. This can be anticipated to affect as well as the substance of political debate among the emergent groups wishing to have a share (in some cases, a greater share) of the political goods. With diminished cohesiveness, this community is less able to influence the course of US policy as the older generation of migrants used to. The growing moderation could be attributed in large measure to the rising influence of second-generation Cuban Americans. While more bridges will have to be built between Cuban Americans and the Hispanic community as a whole, the Cuban American community will continue to maintain its lead in economic attainment and the enclave system that sustains it, retain its largely conservative character, and nurse its bitterness toward the regime that continues to rule over what many still regard as their homeland. ❀

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NOTES

1. President Bill Clinton's January 5, 1999, remarks may be found at the US State Department website, www.state.gov/www/region/ara/us_cuba_index.html.
2. Comments Max Castro, professor of sociology at the University of Miami's North-South Center, regarding the implications of the papal visit, that if the Cuban church is strengthened, that may lead to the creation of "a greater balance of social forces and more space for pluralism." Please see Mireya Navarro, "How Cubans in Florida View Pope's Visit," *New York Times*, <http://search.nytimes.com/search/daily/bin/fastweb?getdoc+site+site29414+6+wAAA+%22Cuban/>.
3. For an account of the riots that may have been partly caused by the manner in which the agreement was announced, see Nacci 3-12. The psychiatric condition of many of these refugees has been the subject of attention. See, for examples, Boxer and Garvey 1985 and Portes, Kyle, and Eaton 1992.
4. This view is shared by Arboyleya 1985, Boswell and Curtis 1984, and Card 1990.
5. See, for examples, Portes, Clark, and Lopez 1981; Portes and Jensen 1989; Portes 1981, Portes and Manning 1986, and Wilson and Portes 1980.
6. Portes and his associates have been joined by other groups of scholars in recognizing the explanatory utility of the enclave theory. These include the following: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 1997; Carlos A. Forment 1989; and Maude Toussaint-Comeau and Sherrie L.W. Rhine 2000.
7. These include Boston, Massachusetts; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans, Louisiana; Chicago, Illinois; Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, Texas; and the San Francisco-Oakland region in northern California.
8. Please see Perez 1986b. Another study that places premium on the role of the family in generating motives, abilities, and resources toward entrepreneurship is Peterson 1995.
9. This has been borne out by a 1992 survey of the Latino National Political Survey in which over half of the respondents identified themselves as "conservatives" in comparison to 39.3 percent of Mexican respondents. However, political conservatism is also found to be more prevalent among older Cuban Americans. For details, see de la Garza et al., 1992.
10. Please see also de la Garza et al. 1992, 43-45.
11. This assumption is shared by mainstream scholarly works, including the following: Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Putnam 1993, and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995.
12. For a comparative study of second-generation migrant experiences, please see Portes 1996, and Portes and Rumbaut 2001. Both works have been highly critically praised, consolidating in particular Alejandro Portes's status as the premier authority on the subject at hand.

13. The nefarious effects of the enclave economy on the workers are a common theme among some works, including the following: Bonacich 1987, and Sanders and Nee 1987. For a critical response to these works, see Portes and Jensen 1989.
14. As quoted in Aguirre, Saenz, and James 1997, 494.

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