ABSTRACT


This study explores the major factors contributing to the exodus of the Cuban middle class from 1961 to 1968. For the purpose of this study, the heterogeneous middle class is broken up into middle-class students, professionals, and businessmen. Each of these groups had slightly different values and motivations, yet large percentages of each left Cuba as the revolution radicalized, changing economic, political and social life for all Cubans. In explaining this phenomenon, this paper follows the relationship between Cuba and the United States, focusing particularly on the conflictive dialogue that emerged between Fidel Castro and the US presidents of the 1960’s. In addition, the role of each government in facilitating the exodus must be considered, necessitating attention to US special treatment toward Cuban immigrants. Ultimately, this study asserts that various radicalizations in revolutionary Cuba from the declaration of socialism in April 1961 to the final revolutionary offensive of 1968 pushed the middle class to the United States. Unlike the middles classes of 1940s Costa Rica and Guatemala, they chose to leave in order to retain their standard of living rather than to sacrifice in order for the lower classes to benefit.
Casualties of a Radicalizing Cuban Revolution:  
Middle-Class Opposition and Exile,  
1961-1968

by
Catherine Lynn Loiacano

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

History

Raleigh, North Carolina

26 March 2010

APPROVED BY:

Richard W. Slatta
Committee Chair

Nancy Mitchell

Jorge Mari
DEDICATION

I am dedicating this thesis to my mother, Karen Corless, and the love of my life, John Rodgers.

Mom- You have always stood by me in my academic adventures, no matter how often I altered my path. You have been a constant source of strength and support. I owe much of my success and my own strengths to your influences on my life.

John- You have been such an amazing help getting me through the process of this thesis. Whether helping me with my research or computer difficulties, or simply keeping me focused or, at times, forcing me to relax, you have been there. I could never have done it without you!

I love you both!!
BIOGRAPHY

My interest in Latin American history started as a child. My parents and I vacationed often in Mexico and throughout Latin America, and I developed a love for the culture and language of the region. As a History major during my undergraduate years at the University of Texas at Austin I took two courses on Cuban history and immediately became fascinated with the rich history of the country and its people. I have enjoyed researching the Cuban exodus for this thesis and hope to continue studying Latin American history throughout my career as a scholar.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of many who helped me conduct my research and complete this thesis. The guidance and suggestions of the archivists at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland whose guidance and suggestions led me to several documents invaluable for researching this thesis, and for that I am ever grateful.

In addition, I wish to thank two professors who have guided me in advancing as a scholar during my years at North Carolina State University. As teachers, we hope to make a lasting impression on those we teach and to impart bits of knowledge and life experience to our students; that is what Professors Nancy Mitchell and Richard Slatta have done for me.

To Nancy Mitchell: Your guidance and support in helping me develop and improve my writing and research skills have been most appreciated and helpful. Your courses gave me a sincere interest in foreign policy that I hope has translated through this thesis. Thank you!

To Richard Slatta: You have been an unforgettable teacher, academic advisor, and friend. Your support has helped me through many trying periods during my graduate career and your guidance in growing as a student and instructor has made a lasting impact on me. I owe much of the success of this thesis to your valuable feedback and suggestions.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** ........................................................................................................ 1  
Who Were the Middle-Class Cubans? ................................................................. 2  
Periodization of the Middle-Class Exodus ..................................................... 4  
Conversations Between the Cuban and US Governments ............................... 5

**CHAPTER 1: THE DOWNFALL OF THE CUBAN REPUBLIC, 1933-1958** .......... 10  
The Roosevelt Era: 1933-1945 ......................................................................... 11  
The Truman Era: 1945-1953 .......................................................................... 14  
The Eisenhower Era: 1953-1961 .................................................................. 18  
U.S. Investments in Cuba ................................................................................... 21  
Outlook on Eve of Revolution ......................................................................... 23  
References ........................................................................................................... 27

**CHAPTER 2: AS THE REVOLUTION TRIUMPHS IN CUBA, JANUARY 1959** ...... 31  
Fidel Castro and the M26: July 1953- January 1959 .................................... 32  
The New Revolutionary Government ................................................................. 34  
Cubans Hail the Arrival of San Fidel ................................................................ 35  
Middle-Class Hopes for Cuba’s Future .............................................................. 39  
References ........................................................................................................... 43

**CHAPTER 3: REFORMS, ECONOMIC WARFARE AND MIDDLE-CLASS CUBANS,**  
1959-1968 .......................................................................................................... 45  
Economic Reforms and Capitalist Ambitions .................................................... 46  
Gradual Shift Toward a Socialist Cuba ............................................................... 48  
Economic Warfare Threatens Middle-Class Position ..................................... 50  
References ........................................................................................................... 55

**CHAPTER 4: IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT ALIENATED DEMOCRATIC MIDDLE CLASS**  
.................................................................................................................................... 57  
Loss of Moderate, Middle-Class Leadership, 1959-1960 ............................. 58  
Democracy Abandoned, Marxism Embraced, 1959-1961 ............................. 61  
Middle-Class Future Threatened ....................................................................... 64  
References ........................................................................................................... 68

**CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS THREATEN MIDDLE-CLASS VALUES**  
.................................................................................................................................... 70  
Non-Violent Class Warfare ............................................................................... 72  
The Cuban Family ............................................................................................. 74  
Cuban Individualism ......................................................................................... 76
Introduction: Understanding the Middle Class Exodus

Between 1961 and 1968, hundreds of thousands of middle-class Cuban families and individuals fled the Cuban revolution and sought refuge in the United States. They left because the revolution, which they originally believed stood for the very values their families lived by, had shifted so radically that it eliminated their place in Cuban politics, economy and society. Refusing to sacrifice their societal privileges for the advancement of the exploited masses, many middle-class Cubans left with hopes of one day returning to their homes and establishing democracy in Cuba. They remain in the United States to this day—no longer exiles, but permanent fixtures in the US political scene and economy.

Historians studying the exodus often leave the middle class out or haphazardly force them into the first wave of exodus from 1959 to 1962 as the latter portion of the larger upper-class exodus. More interest exists concerning the exodus of elites from the time the rebels entered Havana on New Years Day of 1959— as seen in Mario Puzo’s The Godfather: Part II— to the 1961 failure of the United States to liberate the Cubans and remove Castro from power. More intrigue arose from the infamous Mariel Boatlift of 1980 that involved average Cubans along with society’s “undesirables” as Castro loaded the boats with the mentally handicapped, homosexuals, and criminals— as seen in Oliver Stone’s Scarface. Most Americans today remember watching on television the stories of the rafters in the late 1980s and early 90s who risked their lives to escape communist Cuba
and come to the United States. Yet the story of the hundreds of thousands of middle-class Cubans who entered the United States throughout the 1960s and 1970s has been largely ignored, both by Hollywood and historians.

**Who Were the Middle-Class Cubans?**

Several distinctions existed among the Cuban middle class at the time of the 1959 Cuban revolution. The class consisted of primarily white, urban families. These families, unlike the middle class in the United States at the time, had servants, multiple homes and frequently vacationed in the United States. Most women of the middle class did not work outside the home, in accordance with the dominant *machismo* culture in Cuba that demanded the man be the primary provider for the family. Middle-class Cubans were also primarily university-educated. The group discussed in this thesis will therefore include university students as a unique segment of the Cuban middle class. Professional men, including doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, and bankers, among others, made up the wealthy group of middle-class professionals. Middle-class businessmen, factory owners and members of upper management – many of them employed by United States corporations of mafia-owned “sin industries” — made up the third group of Cuba’s middle class.

Ideological differences existed among the various segments of the middle class, which influenced the degree to which the revolutionary reforms of the 1960s affected the individual Cuban or family. For example, middle-class students strongly related to the idealistic goals of the revolution that hoped to raise up the impoverished classes
and fight the imperialist influences that dominated Cuba. Many of these Cubans became fully integrated in the revolution, while some, however idealistic, refused to embrace communism and left as communists took over the universities. In contrast, middle-class professionals had established themselves in Cuban society. Many of these men had families to support and careers to protect. Middle-class professionals initially financially supported the revolution against Batista and comprised the political leadership of the revolutionary government. However, their democratic and capitalist values were deeply-engrained to the point that they could not accept the radicalization of revolutionary reforms in the 1960s. Finally, conservative business owners and managers owed their livelihoods to the island’s economic ties with the United States. They supported any government whose policy guaranteed continued economic relations with US industry. When early reforms and eventually the 1968 revolutionary offensive eliminated US influence and private industry, these members of the middle class often chose exile.

These classifications do not suggest that members from each group could not have sacrificed their class values and embraced the social aims of the revolution, as did members of the middle classes in Costa Rica and Guatemala in their revolutions of the 1940s. Indeed, many Cubans from the former middle classes remain in Cuba today, actively supporting the revolution. Also, the role of the policies of the United States in facilitating and expediting the exodus must not be overlooked. In Nicaragua in the 1970s, the United States, having learned its lesson in Cuba, did not impose restrictions
that caused the Sandinistas to radicalize. The Nicaraguan middle classes therefore never felt the effects of the radical reforms that forced the exodus of the Cuban middle class a decade earlier. The actions of the United States toward the Castro government that led to the economic embargo and termination of diplomatic relations by 1961 ultimately created an environment that necessitated radical reform by the Castro government. The middle class directly suffered as a result of such radicalizations.

**Periodization of the Middle-Class Exodus**

This study examines the Cuban middle class, its involvement in the revolution, and its exodus from April 1961 through the final revolutionary offensive of 1968. The periodization of the Cuban exodus varies among scholars depending on their focus. For example, a historian interested in the role of the United States in the exodus considers April 1961 significant due to the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Authors like myself focus on April 1961 as the month Castro first publicly announced the socialist nature of the revolution. This constituted a significant threat to the political and social values of the Cuban middle class. Our focus will be on those events and reforms that directly affected the values of the middle-class families, prompting their decision to leave.

Before the announcement of socialism in the Cuban government, the exodus involved mainly elites and former officials from the government of Fulgencio Batista, called *Batistianos*. Once Castro declared his communist sympathies, middle-class Cubans began to fear a dramatic shift in their society away from the democracy the revolutionary government had promised them and for which they had fought. Their
exodus began shortly after. Indeed, members of the middle class continued— and continue to this day— to seek refuge in Miami. Also, my thesis does not suggest that this period exclusively witnessed an exodus of the middle class, as many incoming refugees in the 1960s came from rural Cuba and the working classes as well. For the purpose of this study, however, the final revolutionary offensive of 1968 was the last shift that uniquely affected the middle class during the period when they composed the vast majority of exiles entering the United States. The Mariel Boatlift of 1980 marked the end of a Diaspora dominated by privileged, urban Cubans.

**Conversations Between the Cuban and US Governments**

The relationship between Cuba and the United States government constitutes a major element in understanding events leading to the exodus. Indeed, the policies of Washington and Havana often show a direct cause and effect pattern, as Castro and the various U.S. presidents engaged in dialogue through actions and policies meant to punish or influence the other. In the 1960s, these conversations between the two powers frequently placed the middle class in a diplomatic crossfire. Tied to Cuba as their country, and the United States due to economic relations, the middle class directly felt the impact of the disintegrating Cuban-US relationship after the revolution.

United States policy wooed many members of the middle class to Miami during the 1960s with the promise of overthrowing the Castro government that US policymakers insisted "betrayed" the revolution. Yet as the Bay of Pigs failure and the Cuban Missile Crisis damaged hope for the counterrevolution, policy shifted quickly
away from Cuba, which became seen as a lost cause. The middle class thus found itself dually betrayed, and unable to return to their homes or families left in Cuba. The United States’ abandonment of the counterrevolution by the mid-1960s ultimately contributed to the permanence of the middle-class Cubans’ experiences in exile. Many resigned themselves to life in the United States, establishing Cuban communities throughout the country, primarily in Miami-Dade County, and focused their collective political influence on ensuring the continuation of economic and political pressures on the communist government in Cuba.

In examining the experiences of the Cuban middle class in the revolution and exodus, this paper will evaluate the position of the middle class in pre-1959 Cuba (Chapter 1), its initial support of the revolution (Chapter 2), and the various revolutionary reforms that led middle-class Cubans to choose exile (Chapters 3-5). No single event could cause such a large number of families to leave their homes and abandon their country. Therefore, the examination of specific economic, political and social reforms that directly challenged or destroyed the basis of middle-class life in Cuba will explain the reason many chose to leave.

Each group from the middle class would have experienced the radicalization of the revolution and reforms differently. Therefore, certain reforms had little effect on some individuals while directly causing the rapid exodus of others. Certain periods of middle class exodus occurred due to the joint efforts of the Cuban and US governments,
such as Operation Pedro Pan and the Freedom Flights (described in Chapter 6). Times of random exodus also occurred due to the experiences of individual families. For each of the episodes of middle class exodus, whether organized or random, a variety of factors facilitated or hindered the revolution due to the policies of the Cuban and United States governments. The “push” and “pull” factors contributing to the middle-class exodus are significant for the purpose of analysis. But the eagerness of the United States to accept Cubans who wished to flee communist Cuba, as explained in Chapter 7, should not be seen as a definitive pull factor, as leaving one’s country is a difficult decision that would not be made simply because another nation was willing to welcome exiles.

My research will demonstrate that the economic, political and social reforms of the 1960s drastically affected the middle classes to the extent that it forced them to abandon their traditional class values or abandon their homes. The establishment of a Cuban community-in-exile in Miami-Dade County supports this claim. Cuban Americans created a virtual second Cuba on US soil, based not on a Cuban reality, but the highly-mythologized pre-1959 Cuba promoted by the exiles of the 1960s. The Cuban middle class created in exile the society they desired in Cuba that was disallowed by the revolutionary government.

This thesis addresses several historic silences and omissions in the historiography of the Cuban exodus. The historiography of 1950s Cuba includes the development and dissatisfaction of the Cuban middle class, yet specific attention to
middle-class Cubans practically disappears with the advent of the revolution. In *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (University of Georgia Press, 1990), historian Louis A. Pérez examines the ties of the 1950s Cuban middle class with United States interests in Cuba and explains their resentment of a Cuban government and economy that did not allow them equal privileges and opportunities as their North American counterparts. The text acknowledges a wave of middle class exodus in the early 1960s, yet Pérez does not offer many specific correlations between the reforms, middle-class values, and the exodus, leaving many unanswered questions concerning the story of the middle-class exiles.

While many historians have grappled with widespread dissatisfaction, the exodus and the subsequent formation of a community in exile, the middle class has not yet received adequate attention. Silvia Pedraza and Maria Cristina García examined the various waves of the exodus in their respective works, *Political Disaffection and Cuba’s Revolution and Exodus* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (University of California Press, 1996). Neither acknowledges the unique circumstances of the middle class that facilitated the migration of such a large percentage of educated, middle-class Cubans in the decade following the triumph of the revolution. Their research focused instead on specific phases of the revolution or United States policy, thereby ignoring class-based interests, and focusing on the exodus of the *batistianos* or the Mariel Boatlift. Similarly, in *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (University of Texas Press, 1994),
historian Gustavo Pérez Firmat outlines the evolution of Cuban-American culture and assimilation into the mainstream United States, but does not provide adequate background of the circumstances leading to the exile, many of which directly relate to the plight of the Cuban middle class in the 1960s. The research of these historians has enriched our understanding of a significant exodus that has shaped United States policy and the course of the Cuban revolution, but it has also left important questions unanswered.

The purpose of this thesis is to address a historically overlooked group and their impact on events in Cuba and the United States. By first examining the history of Cuban-US economic and diplomatic relations, I will outline the conditions that led to the formation of the privileged Cuban middle class. In addition, I will develop the initial goals of the Cuban revolution and the reasons for middle-class support and participation in the new revolutionary government. Finally, this thesis will explain specific economic, political, and social reforms of the revolutionary government and how they specifically targeted and threatened middle-class values and desires. In conclusion, my research will suggest that the Cuban middle class was unwilling to forgo their personal ambitions for political participation, economic well-being and influence in a democratic and capitalist society for the sake of Cuban sovereignty and the greater good. Throughout the 1960s, they entered the United States with the full support of the United States government, but as a direct result of the aforementioned revolutionary reforms.
Chapter 1:
The Downfall of the Cuban Republic, 1933-1958

Following the overthrow of Gerardo Machado (1924-1933) in the 1933 Revolution, Cuba entered a period British historian Hugh Thomas named the Age of Democracy (1934-1952).\(^1\) Whether Thomas intended this title to be ironic, or was simply a victim of the tendency of the United States to ignore the real hardships of the Cuban people, referring to this period as “democratic” is absurd. While elections and the formation of a new constitution created the guise of democracy, the actions of the Cuban government proved otherwise. A 1951 State Department Policy Statement on Cuba admits: “The prevalence of what is graft and corruption by US standards as a traditional feature of Cuban administrations is a factor which must be noted.”\(^2\) The island underwent a series of provisional presidents and leaders throughout the 1930’s, culminating with the election in 1940 of Fulgencio Batista, whose Sergeant’s Revolt had facilitated Machado’s overthrow. The presidency changed hands three more times by the mid-1950s, with the election of Auténtico leaders Ramón Grau San Martín in 1944 and Carlos Prío Socarrás in 1948, and finally with the Batista coup before the 1952 elections.

Throughout these years, United States influence remained an unchanging aspect of Cuban politics, be it from Washington or one of the many US-owned corporations operating on the island. Indeed, the very presence of these corporations facilitated the development of Cuba’s large middle class. By the end of the 1950s the large Cuban
middle class enjoyed social privileges such as university educations, access to private beaches and clubs, multiple homes and servants, and frequent family vacations to the United States. Yet a continued lack of political influence in Cuba left middle-class Cubans frustrated and looking for change. A change, they hoped, Fidel Castro and the new revolutionary government would offer them in 1959.

**The Roosevelt Era: 1933-1945**

During the Great Depression and World War II, the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt had mixed policies toward Latin America. In March 1933, Roosevelt enacted the Good Neighbor Policy, a departure from former United States policy of military intervention, to promote more peaceful relations with Latin American governments. According to foreign policy specialist Stephen Rabe, “From 1933 to 1945, with its Good Neighbor Policy, the United States renounced the right of intervention in Latin America but expected Latin Americans to accept US leadership.”³ For Cuba, the policy shift meant an end to the paternalistic Platt Amendment—a remnant of the early days of the Cuban Republic—finally terminated in 1934.⁴ The Good Neighbor Policy led to a series of contradictions concerning US-European versus US-Latin American relations. While FDR castigated the dictators of Europe, he ignored the brutal dictatorships of men like Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina in the Dominican Republic. Historian Raymond Pulley points out: “The price of security for American interests in the Caribbean was extremely high. By supporting the Trujillo regime the Roosevelt administration pursued a clearly contradictory policy toward world dictatorship.”⁵ The
Roosevelt Administration clearly valued Latin American leaders who guaranteed stability and protected United States financial assets. Throughout Latin America, middle-class reformers expressed great resentment toward Roosevelt’s continued embrace of Latin American dictators for the sake of hemispheric defense.6

As World War II continued in Europe, the implications of the Good Neighbor Policy could be seen throughout Latin America. To build global defenses and security, Roosevelt began the Lend-Lease program in April 1941. In Latin America, the program involved Argentina, Peru, Cuba, Colombia, Bolivia, and Uruguay, among others. The bill provided “assistance to be granted by the government of the United States to the other American Republics in building up their own defense resources.”7 US-Cuban relations during this period thrived. President Batista called for a declaration of war against Japan immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Batista also allowed the United States military to build airfields and utilize strategic Cuban ports throughout the war.8

Besides wartime cooperation, “[the United States] government undertook to assist Cuba in diversification of its agriculture by the purchase of exportable surpluses of peanuts, corn, beans and rice, and by sending new farm machinery.”9 Including the significant sugar quota, US agricultural investments in Cuba by 1946 totaled $227 million.10 Though plagued by wartime shortages of fuel and equipment, Cuba experienced economic progress in the war years due primarily to US investments in Cuban industries.

Outwardly, it appeared that democracy in Cuba also saw progress during this
period. In 1940, President Batista drafted a new, progressive Constitution that guaranteed equality before the law, personal freedoms of speech and press, separation of church and state, the right to peaceful assembly, the promotion of education, and labor laws. The Constitution enabled the Cuban government to create the façade of democracy while continuing to exploit the Cuban people and failing to address their grievances. Indeed, these same provisions existed in the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution in periods of slavery, gender discrimination, racism, and lack of equal rights for homosexuals. Similarly in Cuba, the Constitution effectively appeased the United States, while providing little benefit to the Cuban people. This absence of civil rights ultimately facilitated the emergence of opposition leaders like Fidel Castro. In a speech commemorating the second anniversary of the revolution, Castro said, “[t]here would have been no revolution if there had not been so much injustice among our people.”

In 1944, US Ambassador Spruille Braden closely monitored the presidential election in Cuba. Ever the paternalistic neighbor, the United States still questioned the ability of Cubans to make wise political choices. Washington saw the election of liberal opposition leader Ramón Grau San Martín as “a long step forward toward real democracy in Cuba,” further speculating that, “a strong pro-democratic government at Havana can wield important influence in holding the diplomatic front now formed against fascism in Argentina.” Here again, the United States embraced a leader who ensured hemispheric protection of United States interests. As the transition from
Roosevelt to Harry Truman took place in 1945, the main priority was rebuilding Europe. Cuba, for now, was quiet.

The Truman Era, 1945-1953

Ending the war, rebuilding Europe, and containing the threat of global communist expansion monopolized Truman’s attention as he entered office in spring of 1945. As the president focused on Europe and Japan, he assigned his Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, Spruille Braden, to oversee events in Latin America. The first significant incident involving Latin America during the Truman Administration was the 1948 civil war in Costa Rica, in which a group of young intellectuals and an armed opposition rose up against a government they accused of nepotism and corruption. The war involved a class struggle between the peasantry and urban workers versus an “agro export bourgeoisie.” As seen in Cuba a decade later, a rapidly-expanding middle sector, frustrated by lack of social and political advancement, found themselves at the center of the conflict in Costa Rica. Rather than examining causes of Latin American social tension, however, Braden’s team focused on the threat this conflict posed to the investments of Boston-based United Fruit Company (UFCO) and sought whichever solution best protected American investments. Like Roosevelt before him, Truman failed to concern himself with the people of Latin America, maintaining imperialistic, pro-business policies, regardless of the social implications throughout Latin America.

Perhaps the only issue that concerned Truman more than protecting North
American investments in Latin America was preventing the spread of communism throughout the hemisphere. Stephen Rabe explained, “US policy makers believed that they needed a safe “backyard” in the Western Hemisphere so that they could give full attention to defeating the Soviet Union and communism in Europe and Asia.” To promote hemispheric defenses, the United States and Latin America signed two important pieces of legislation at the end of the 1940s: the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (the Rio Treaty), and the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS). In search of Cold War allies, the Administration enacted the Military Assistance program in 1950, offering financial and military aid to nations—in Latin America and Southeast Asia specifically—at risk of communist intervention.

In September 1947, the nineteen signatories of the Rio Treaty, “desirous of consolidating and strengthening their relations of friendship and good neighborliness,” vowed to “prevent and repel threats and acts of aggression against any of the countries of America.” The following April, twenty-one nations met in Bogota, Colombia to sign the charter forming the Organization of American States. The goal of the OAS: “to achieve an order of peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their collaboration, and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their independence.”

For the United States, the Rio Treaty and the OAS meant increased protection from potential communist influence. Having already “lost” China to Mao in 1949, Truman refused to allow communism to reach his doorstep. Following the advice of
George F Kennan’s February 1946 “long telegram” on the containment of communism, Truman embraced anti-communist leaders like Trujillo, Somoza and Batista. The communist threat came to a spearhead with the Jacobo Arbenz government in Guatemala. President Truman originally believed that Arbenz, with the support of his army, would safeguard Guatemala from communist influences. The Guatemalan leader soon disproved Truman’s theory.

In 1951, the United States and thirteen Latin American leaders signed the Mutual Security Act, in which Washington agreed to provide Latin American governments with military training and equipment to safeguard the region from communism. Unfortunately, like the aid given by the Roosevelt Administration under Lend-Lease, (and later, through Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress), Truman’s administration ignored the negative repercussions of programs that enabled Latin American dictators to use American training, funding, and equipment to repress their people. By the end of Truman’s presidency, this agreement succeeded primarily in garnering more resentment towards the United States among the people of Latin America.

Three presidents ruled Cuba during Truman’s time in office: Grau, Prío and Batista. Though Roosevelt supported President Grau, the Truman Administration quickly became concerned with his failure to take a hard line against the Communist Party in Cuba (PSP). According to the US embassy in Havana, an active PSP in Cuba threatened an inevitable link between Havana and Moscow that Truman was
determined to avoid. In 1948, Cubans elected Auténtico leader Carlos Prío. Like Grau before him, Prío allied himself with student leaders and promised to uphold the ideals of the 1933 revolution. Yet, as president, Prío had “ill-managed” policies, ultimately leading to a return to the gangsterismo and corruption he had promised to end. From a US point of view, however, United States-Cuban relations flourished during the Prío years. The Cuban president acted as the good US puppet, following the orders and desires of Washington and North American industry. Indeed, a Department of State Policy Paper on Cuba issued 11 January 1951 admits:

Our objectives with particular reference to Cuba are to:

1) Obtain the maximum support of the Cuban government and people and their collaboration in the defense of the Western Hemisphere and those areas vital to such defense (with particular reference to preserving the United States Naval Base at Guantanamo).
2) Assist in the development of a healthy Cuban economy
3) Promote mutually advantageous trade and other commercial relations between the United States and Cuba
4) Encourage full observance by the Cuban government of its international commitments and
5) Strengthen the traditional bonds of friendship between the Cuban government and people and the government and people of the United States.

Despite the somewhat idealistic nature of the fifth objective, the well being of the Cuban people is absent from this document, as are any stipulations concerning the desired method of rule by Cuban leaders. As long as the Cuban leader satisfied these objectives, Washington would be content.

In March 1952, before the scheduled presidential elections, Fulgencio Batista returned to Havana, took over the Presidential Palace, suspended constitutional
guarantees, and regained power in Cuba. Washington did not appear overly concerned with the coup, claiming, “[t]he Cubans get the kind of government they deserve, and until they learn discipline and sacrifice and not to regard government as an institution merely to deal out privileges and favors, the kind of thing that happened on March 10 will continue to happen.” 28 Within hours, the American embassy in Cuba notified Washington: “Batista has sent word to Ambassador Beaulac that he wants to cooperate with the United States and will respect Cuba’s international obligations.” 29 Truman’s Administration also believed that the new Batista Administration would be vehemently anti-communist, a welcome trait in any Latin American leader. 30 With his attention focused on Korea and the US presidential election, this appeared an adequate situation for Truman. He recognized the Batista government later that month.

Internal tensions in Cuba rose dramatically after the 1952 coup. During his second time as president, Batista exhibited all the characteristics of a Latin American dictator: greed, corruption, and repression. In 1957 he suspended constitutional rights in Cuba for 45 days (the maximum period allowed by the Constitution) a total of six times. 31 A strong opposition to Batista soon emerged that would grow in number and influence throughout the remainder of the decade, culminating in the realization of Truman’s fear: a communist government only 90 miles from United States soil.

**The Eisenhower Era: 1953-1961**

Dwight D. Eisenhower did not know a democratic—actual or feigned—Cuba during his years in office. Much like his predecessors, Eisenhower viewed Latin
American dictators like Manuel Odría of Peru, Marcos Pérez Jiménez of Venezuela, Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, the Somozas in Nicaragua, and Fulgencio Batista in Cuba as vital to protecting the region against communists. Eisenhower worked with the Batista government to secure the US-friendly dictator’s position of power and protect United States interests on the island. Through the United States-Cuba Military Assistance Program (1950-1958), the United States government provided Batista with weapons—airplanes, tanks, machinery, and training—to strengthen Cuba’s defenses against communists. The successful 1954 coup in Guatemala that overthrew President Jacobo Arbenz, engineered by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), reinforced Eisenhower’s sense of “geographic fatalism” and complacency.

Internal tensions in ran high Cuba during the final years of the 1950s. While the Cuban economy did not flourish during these years, the island remained the fifth foreign buyer in the American market, and American investments in the island’s natural resources, including sugar and the Nicaro nickel mines in the Oriente province and tourism in Havana, were substantial. In total, 1958 United States investments in Cuban agriculture, petroleum, mining, manufacturing, public utilities and trade reached $1,001,000,000.

The 26 July 1953 attack on the Moncada army barracks by Fidel Castro and a group of armed revolutionaries made public Cuba’s “active and well-financed” opposition. By 1955, the opposition consisted of several groups: former members of
the Prio government operating from exile in the United States; student groups—primarily middle-class Cubans—from Havana and Santiago, upset by Batista’s betrayal of the 1940 constitution; the less active Auténtico opposition led by Grau; the Ortodoxo opposition led by followers of the late Eddie Chibas; as well as opposition from labor groups and the communist party. State Department documents at this time seldom mention Fidel Castro and his men, recovering in Mexico from the failed attack at Moncada and planning their next invasion aboard the Granma (December 1956). Indeed, opposition to the dictator was widespread. The remaining supporters of Batista included the army, the elites, members of his cabinet, and United States investors. Presidents Eisenhower and Batista remained watchful of this growing opposition that threatened the current United States-Cuba status quo. Eisenhower feared the “‘anti-dictator’ vogue that [had] established itself in the Caribbean during the last eight of ten years” would find its way to Cuba.

As the opposition grew, so did resentment towards United States involvement with Batista and other Latin American dictators. Such outrage is understandable considering the fact that Batista used weapons intended for hemispheric security to quell insurrections and repress people within Cuba. Washington was concerned that a revolution in Cuba might embarrass the Administration and welcome communism. A 1955 dispatch to Washington from Ambassador Gardner in Havana reveals such fears: “Distress, unrest, disturbance, or revolution would give the communists excellent opportunities to advance their divisive, destructive propaganda, carry on their work of
conversion, and seize leadership of aroused or disoriented labor, liberal, intellectual, and student groups." With a communist Cuba on the horizon in the event of a revolution, and no viable alternative to Batista in sight, the Eisenhower Administration maintained its support of the Cuban leader to the very end, granting the opposition the sole concession of terminating the MAP program until Batista restored constitutional guarantees. The United States admitted its disapproval of Batista’s dictatorial methods with the termination of arms sales, but had no choice but to support their ally against internal opposition for the sake of protecting US interests until a suitable alternative arose in Cuba.

**US Investments in Cuba**

After the repeal of the Platt Amendment in March 1934, if any “special relationship” existed between Cuba and the United States, it was undoubtedly due to the significant investment of North American companies and the United States government in the island’s many lucrative industries and the strategic importance of the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay. Corporations like UFCO operated throughout the “Banana Republics,” bringing huge profits annually from agriculture. Cuba offered opportunities in agriculture, mining, development and industrialization and tourism. While these economic endeavors between the United States and Cuba primarily profited North Americans, they also resulted in development on the island and the subsequent formation of a relatively large—by Latin American standards—middle class. Indeed, Cuba’s middle class can only be examined as a product of this economic
relationship with the United States, as many owed their livelihood and raised social status to the foreign-owned or mafia-run corporations.

The involvement of the mafia must be considered when analyzing the development of the thriving tourist industry in Havana. Since its first endeavors with bootlegging in Cuba in the 1920’s during Prohibition, the mafia saw Cuba as a potential haven for illegal activity and profit. During the 40’s and 50’s, men like Charles “Lucky” Luciano, Albert Anastasia, Myer Lansky and Santo Traficante came to Havana, wanting “a piece of the pie.” (In his 1974 film The Godfather: Part II, Francis Ford Coppola takes this euphemism quite literally, depicting the mafiosos meeting in Havana’s Hotel Nacional dividing pieces of a Cuba cake amongst themselves.) The men of the Havana Mob opened casinos, hotels, nightclubs, restaurants, banks and financial institutions. By the 1950s, Havana became “the playground of American tourists.” For each of these new tourist industries, mafia and corporate investors required employees. While North Americans controlled the executive positions, many Cubans received management positions and greater exposure to capitalist ventures, further fueling the growth of the middle class.

For Washington, the protection of North American investments remained a primary concern during insurrections in Latin America. In 1944, investments of corporations like UFCO in Guatemala reached $93 million. Post-World War II investments throughout Latin America skyrocketed. In 1947, Sears department stores opened their first Latin American location in Mexico, with the imperialist mindset of
instilling “democratization through consumption.” The insurrection in Cuba in the late 1950s hit North American investments hard. From January to September 1958, losses due to rebel activity reached $2.25 million, $1.5 million due to losses in the spring sugar harvest alone. Castro and his guerillas threatened the pocketbooks of very powerful interests, forcing the Eisenhower Administration to take action.

**Outlook on the Eve of Revolution**

Though Cuba desperately needed revolutionary societal changes by the late 1950s, few could agree on the extent or content of the necessary reforms. In fact, recollections of 1950s Cuba frequently seem to depict two entirely different worlds. This is largely due to the vast differences in Cuban society in the 1950s. In the countryside, approximately 200,000 families lived without stable employment, subject to the boom and bust cycles— the *zafra* and *tiempo muerto*— indicative of any monocultural society. In a country with a population of 6 million, 1.2 million Cubans were unemployed in 1955. A class of wealthy Cuban capitalists, mainly members of Batista’s entourage, lived in the cities, their wealth tied to the President and North American corporations. There also existed a substantial urban proletariat. Finally, Cuba’s middle class consisted of primarily those with University degrees, professional or technical careers such as teachers, administrators, civil servants, bankers, businessmen and merchants. Of these middle-class Cubans, nearly 150,000 were employed by United States industries operating in Havana, working as managers, clerks, technicians, accountants, and attorneys. For every strata of Cuban society
there exists a distinctly different view of 1950s Cuba. Yet United States policymakers tended to ignore the rural poverty and resentment in Cuba, focusing instead on affluent urban sectors like Havana.

For former Cuban elites now in exile or tourists who visited Havana, the late 1950s were “the Glory Days of the Republic.” They recall elegant buildings, lavish parties, lights, and entertainment. Compounded by their resentment of Castro, they tend to ignore the society’s ills under Batista. During a visit to Cuba in 1958, Senator Allen Ellender (D, La.) wrote of his encounters with Cubans in Havana:

Many stated that Batista has done a good job, even if there were graft. There is much physical evidence of an improving economy over the last four or five years. It is contended by some, and I am inclined to agree, that Cuba has never been so prosperous as she now is. Cuba had a balanced budget until this year, when arms were purchased at a very high price to maintain internal security.52

Ultimately, the ignorance of privileged Cubans about the environment around them in the late 1950s kept them from forming a united opposition to the Castro movement. A 1956 telegram from Ambassador Gardner to the State Department revealed: “People enjoying high-level prosperity for Cuba and in general politically apathetic.”53 Those who suffered during this period, however, were anything but apathetic.

Cuban peasants or those who lived in the countryside remember the 1950s as a time of repression and humiliation. While many opposed to Castro’s reforms continue to stress the high standard of living in Cuba compared to the rest of Latin America, historians and critics are quick to point out the weakness of such arguments. Philip Foner stressed that, “to say that Cuba before the Revolution had one of the highest per
capita incomes in Latin America is to say very little indeed.” He offered statistics from a study conducted by the anti-Castro Agrupación Catolica Universitaria de Habana that, before Castro, less than five percent of the population had meat, eggs, fish, or bread in their diet. Also, less than five percent of all Cubans had access to indoor toilets or running water.54 These people were eager for change, and embraced the reforms the Castro government later brought them.

Middle-class assessments of 1950s Cuba are more complicated. Though they enjoyed a social status higher than that of the majority of Cubans, they still felt unsatisfied. According to historian Louis A. Pérez, “middle-class Cubans in the 1950s perceived their standard of living to be in decline as they fell behind income advances in the United States.”55 These Cubans soon became frustrated by the economic stagnation in Havana. Furthermore, the university background of the middle class instilled in them distinct political consciences.56 Ambassador Gardner explained,

The Cuban student is romantic and absorbed with politics as any in Latin America, but in addition because of the leading role the University of Havana played in the overthrow of the Machado regime, he feels a special duty to interest himself in the preservation of Cuban democracy.57

The rampant corruption and incompetent political leaders in Cuba since 1933 frustrated, embarrassed, and angered middle-class Cubans. Yet government positions in Havana were filled with Batista’s upper-class comrades; political decisions were made by the elite and for their benefit. The middle class had no place in their country’s government. When Fidel Castro spoke to his fellow Cubans in 1961 proclaiming, “I am a middle-class man with middle-class ideas,”58 they thought their
time had come.


5 Pulley, 31.


7 810.24/130, RG 59. Department of State Memo of Conversation: Lend-Lease Bill. 28 April 1941. NARA II.

8 740.0011 P.W./767, RG 59. Telegram # 195: Ambassador George Messersmith, Havana to Secretary of State Cordell Hull. 8 December 1941. NARA II.

9 837.61/103, RG 59. “Cuban Agricultural Diversification.” 10 April 1944. NARA II.


12 Fidel Castro, Speech at Civic Plaza, 3 January 1961. University of Texas Austin, Castro Speech Database.


14 810.20 Defense/9-2144, RG 59. “Postwar use of Cuban Airbases.” 4 October 1944. NARA II.

15 Schoultz, 40.


17 Rabe, 51.


20 Rabe, 51.


22 Schoultz, 59.

23 837.00 B/7-1847, RG 59. Dispatch # 4177. Communist Movement in Cuba. 18 July 1947. NARA II.

24 Thomas, 762, and 737.00/3-1152, RG 59. Despatch # 1472. 11 March 1952. NARA II.

25 Schoultz, 46.

26 611.37/1-1151, RG 59. Department of State Policy Statement: Cuba. 11 January 1951. NARA II.

27 Yet these considerations would not enter into bilateral agreements until the 1970s with dominant human rights rhetoric.

28 F.W. 737.00/3-1152, RG 59. Wellman Memo on Batista Coup. 17 March 1952. NARA II.

29 737.00/3-1052, RG 59. Batista Coup d’Etat in Cuba. 10 March 1952. NARA II.

30 611.37/3-2452, RG 59. Secretary Acheson Memo to President Truman. 24 March 1952. NARA II.

31 737.00/12-1557, RG 59. R. Rubottom to Secretary of State “Arms Sales to Cuba.” 17 January 1958. NARA II.

32 McPherson, 35.


34 Pérez, 219.


37 739.00/9-2357, RG 59. Telegram 172. Ambassador Smith to State Department. 23 September 1957. NARA II.

38 737.00/9-1357, RG 59. Telegram 153. Ambassador Smith to State Department. 13 September 1957. NARA II.


40 737.00/12-1557, RG 59. Rubottom to Secretary of State. Arms Sales to Cuba. 17 January 1958. NARA II.

41 Pérez, 244.


44 English, 13.

45 “Declassified: Godfathers of Havana.”

46 Gleijeses, 86.

47 McPherson, 17.

48 737.00/10-1058, RG 59. Weiland to Rubottom Office Memo: Property Losses Suffered by US Firms in Cuba from Rebel Activity. 10 October 1958. NARA II.


50 Thomas, 1108-1112.

51 Pérez, 244.

*In reference to the arms purchases, Batista was forced to purchase arms from foreign governments when Eisenhower terminated the MAP program. The “internal security” refers to Batista’s use of such weapons against internal opposition to his government.

53 737.00/10-1656, RG 59. Gardner Telegram 177. 16 October 1956. NARA II.


55 Pérez, 230.


58 Thomas, 1057.
Chapter 2:
As the Revolution Triumphs in Cuba, January 1959

In his autobiography, *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy*, middle-class exile author Carlos Eire recalled Fidel Castro's arrival in Havana after Batista fled Cuba in January 1959:

Fidel came down from the mountains a few days later, swept down like an avenging angel burning with white-hot envy, frothing at the mouth. Beelzebub, Herod, and the seven-headed beast of the apocalypse, rolled into one, a big fat smoldering cigar wedged between his seething lips, hell-bent on imposing his will on everyone. Hell-bent on ensuring there would be no king but he, no thoughts but his.¹

This description of the revolution's victory through the eyes of an exile omits very important facts; primarily, that the Cuban revolution initially had tremendous widespread support. Another exile author, Achy Obejas, admitted in her fictional novel *Memory Mambo*, “[i]n every Cuban family there is... no matter how much it may be denied, at least one person who at one time ardently supported Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution.”²

The initial support for Castro came as a result of many important factors: a need for change after decades of corruption and graft in the Cuban government, a desire to break the economic chains tying Cuba to the United States, the need for racial and socioeconomic equality in the city and the countryside, and, of course, the powerful appeal of Fidel Castro himself. Cuban-born Carlos García—who immigrated to the United States before the 1959 revolution—explained the desires of the Cuban people,
All Cuba wants is the right to be considered free and sovereign like any other nation; to have the right to choose their system of government; to have the right to have commercial and diplomatic relations with whoever they choose. If this happens to go against the interests of the big monopolies of the United States, that’s a problem that they have to solve themselves.3

While the revolution offered the promise of a brighter future for all Cubans, especially the impoverished campesinos, the middle class saw the new Cuba as a perfect opportunity for its foray into increased economic and political participation and a new place in Cuban society.

**Fidel Castro and the M26: July 1953-January 1959**

Working his way from modest backgrounds as a Spanish immigrant to a wealthy planter in the Oriente, Fidel’s father amassed enough wealth to send his sons to private primary school and later to the University.4 Castro’s background, therefore, was that of a middle-class Cuban. Politically active since his days at the University of Havana, Fidel Castro initially attempted to bring about change in Cuba through democratic processes. Fichu Menocal, a Cuban woman whose brothers attended Law School with Fidel, recalled: “At that time...student leaders had stature, no? Like political leaders but at University level. Even then you could tell [Fidel] was anxious to be a leader and he had charisma.”5 Fidel finished law school, joined the Ortodoxo party, and ran for local office. The corruption and injustice of the Cuban political system, however, disallowed his successful entry into Cuban politics. After the Batista coup in 1952, Fidel Castro, the young lawyer, went to the Cuban courts and, as he recalled, “presented a writ denouncing the crimes and asking that Fulgencio Batista and his seventeen accomplices
be sentenced to one hundred and eight years in jail” according to the codes of the 1940 Constitution. His demands went unanswered. This event ultimately “undermined any... belief he held that constitutional methods could lead to political and social change.” Frustrated by endemic corruption, Fidel Castro sought other means to bring about change.

On 26 July 1953, 25-year-old Castro and a group of 86 armed Cubans attempted to take over the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba. The attack was unsuccessful, yet Castro’s now infamous History Will Absolve Me speech during the trial that followed his capture remains an invaluable insight into the early goals of the revolutionaries. He declared, “The problems of the Republic can be solved only if we dedicate ourselves to fight for that Republic with the same energy, honesty and patriotism our liberators had when they created it.” Upon being released from prison in May 1955, Fidel traveled to Mexico to continue his fight, stopping first in the United States to raise funds and gather supporters. Carlos García recalled:

When he came here, Fidel, and he got a rally at the Palm Garden—I'm talking about [October] 1955, on his way to Mexico—we were selling bonds, selling [26 July] bonds. We held a big rally and Fidel spoke. And all of us who were against Batista, of different beliefs, we were there helping Fidel, this young man with a hope to get rid of the dictator.

Three years later, after another failed attack and a lengthy campaign in the Sierra Maestra, the dreams of the revolutionaries were finally realized. The battle at Santa Clara in December 1958 marked the turning point of the revolution. On New Year’s Eve, the rebels entered Havana, Batista fled the country, and Castro began his infamous
march toward Havana.

**The New Revolutionary Government**

Though Fidel Castro eventually became synonymous with the revolution, he did not lead the revolutionary government in 1959. Instead, in the provisional capital of Santiago de Cuba, Fidel swore in Manuel Urrutia Lleo as Cuba’s new president. According to a January 3 *New York Times* article, “Dr. Urrutia was a highly-regarded, non-controversial, middle-class Cuban, reported to be very anti-communist and positively friendly toward the United States.”\(^{11}\) The United States government clearly found Urrutia’s appointment satisfactory, as they recognized the revolutionary government on January 5.\(^{12}\)

The cabinet members of the provisional government shared similar characteristics with Urrutia. The men, most of them members of the M26 or Ortodoxo party, consisted of several lawyers, economists, engineers, doctors—all middle-class professions.\(^{13}\) The appointment of a middle-class cabinet represented a significant break from the past. Previously in Cuba, “the middle class grew considerably and played an important part in the economic life in the country, but seldom had a role in politics.”\(^{14}\) With the new Cabinet the middle class had the opportunity to voice its opinions, promote its family and economic values, work to eliminate in Cuba the inequalities that plagued Latin American countries, and restore the Constitution of 1940 for which it fought.

With the support of Cuban revolutionary hero Fidel Castro, the new government
outlined a new path for Cuba. Indeed, Castro admitted in his 1953 speech, “[r]evolutionaries must proclaim their ideas courageously, define their principles and express their intentions so that no one is deceived, neither friend nor foe.” For the new Cuban leadership, these intentions included addressing many of the same grievances outlined by Fidel six years earlier, including unemployment, disparities in rent and wages, land issues, and debt. Other issues Fidel spoke of applied directly to the middle class, as he mentioned,

- Thirty thousand teachers and professors who are so devoted, dedicated and necessary to the better destiny of our future generations and who are so badly treated and paid.
- Twenty thousand small businessmen weighted down by debts, ruined by the crisis and harangued by a plague of filibusters and venal officials.
- Ten thousand young professionals: doctors, engineers, lawyers, veterinarians, school teachers, dentists, pharmacists, newspapermen, painters, sculptors, etc., who come from school with their degrees, anxious to work and full of hope, only to find themselves at a dead end with all doors closed, and where no ear hears their clamor or supplication.

By providing a detailed account of the problems facing the Cuban people, the government gave Cubans an equal stake in the success of the revolution. This list provided an appealing path for former victims of exploitation in the countryside and idealistic middle-class Cubans—though it was decidedly undesirable for the elites and North American businessmen, former supporters of Batista.

Cubans Hail the Arrival of San Fidel

The Cuban leadership “drew upon vast support across the island that, certainly initially, cut across racial categories and transcended class and generational lines in both the cities and the countryside.” María Antonio Carillo, a Cuban woman from
Cienfuegos, recalled: “In the region I came from everybody supported the revolution. Many peasants and workers on small farms in the area rose up and fought in the armed struggle against Batista.” As word of Batista’s resignation spread through Havana, thousands of Cubans flooded the streets in celebration. Exile author Román de la Campa spoke of the atmosphere in Havana:

   The festive atmosphere at the harbor was unforgettable...hundreds of young barbudos [bearded ones] celebrating all over the place...On the way home we saw people of all ages and social classes jumping with joy in the streets as if it was New Year’s Eve. An unruly nation was celebrating the end of a repressive dictatorship and the triumph of a revolutionary struggle that many Cubans knew little about. It felt as if we were in the midst of a political carnival.

Americans in Havana, it appears, were the only people not celebrating the victory of the revolution. On January 3rd a ferry boat called the City of Havana rushed 508 nervous American tourists to safety in Miami. However, the ferry returned to Havana with 500 Cubans who had been living in exile in the United States, eager to return home and join the celebration. Many of these returning Cubans had financially supported Castro’s movement during their campaign in the Sierra Maestra.

   Much of this support came as a result of Fidel Castro’s effective campaigning and media propaganda from his days in the Sierra Maestra. In his biography of Castro, Sebastian Balfour claimed that Castro’s success “owed as much to his imaginative use of mass media as to the guerilla campaign. Through the radio and the newspapers he had attracted widespread admiration for his courage and patriotism.” Castro gained support from various opposition movements, local peasantry, and wealthy financial contributors throughout the Era of Revolutionary Violence (1953-1958).
A key moment in the consolidation of the opposition occurred with the signing of the Caracas Pact in July 1958, which symbolized the unification of all groups opposed to Batista, not including the Communist party (PSP). This enabled Castro to gain support and funding from Cubans who sympathized with the other movements, including sugar mill owners and sugar farmers, cattle ranchers, bankers, and industrialists. Castro recognized that the various opposition movements represented different groups of Cubans, each with entirely different concerns for Cuba’s future. Former politicos like Carlos Prío—at that point operating from exile in Miami—desired a return to political prominence. The challenge to North Americans attracted nationalistic middle-class students and professionals, but worried middle-class businessmen with vested interests in North American investments on the island. Cuban students, following the revolutionary vogue of mid-20th century Latin America, demanded social reforms, a return to democratic government, and a political voice. Castro’s campaigns addressed the needs of each of these groups.

By calling for a general strike immediately following Batista’s departure until Urrutia took office, Castro gave non-Caracas Pact signatories, primarily the PSP and Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), an opportunity for revolutionary participation. Though the revolutionary government was not socialist, by allowing political participation of the communist party it consolidated more popular support for the revolution and honored democratic principles. To enable complete support of his cause, Castro made sure that every Cuban, regardless of background, felt he had a place
in the new Cuba. The ultimate propagandist, Fidel Castro made Cubans, especially the Cuban middle class, feel like he stood for their values and shared their backgrounds.

Perhaps the most effective method employed by Castro to achieve widespread support was the promotion of nationalism and *patria*. Historian Louis A. Pérez highlighted the significance of the battle call of the revolution: “The imperative of *patria* offered very few choices: ‘*¡patria o muerte!*’”25 Through the promotion of Cuban nationalism, the government secured the unity of the Cuban people behind a single cause, love and protection of their nation.

Hand-in-hand with the nationalistic tone of revolutionary Cuba came a surge of anti-Yankee sentiments. Speaking nearly two decades later with the head of the Cuban Interest Section during the Carter Administration, Wayne Smith, Castro admitted: “I came to power with some preconceived ideas about the US and about Cuba’s relationship with her...The US had dominated us too long. The Cuban revolution was determined to end that domination.”26 The Cuban people, like many throughout Latin America, held much hostility toward Washington, and celebrated this challenge. Cuban woman and supporter of the revolution, Naty Revuelta, explained in a 1999 interview, “[w]e, the Cuban people, resented being governed by the force of cannons, bayonets, and rifles. We resisted being told what to do by the paternalistic US administration that supported Batista.”27 In referring to the Cuban people as a single group, Revuelta revealed the unifying power of national pride and a common enemy. Yet, without discounting Cuban resentment of policies of former US administrations, Cuban-
American Carlos García stressed that this does not denote a universal dislike of the American people among Cubans. He insisted, “by nature, Cubans are not enemies of the American people. On the contrary, we feel great admiration for the Americans. They are hard-working people, very modest, very honest, they work like nobody works.”

From the statements of Revuelta and García, it appears that Cuban resentments toward North America in 1959 did not extend to Joe Six-Pack, but exclusively to Uncle Sam. At this point, however, the future of Cuba’s relationship with the United States remained undetermined.

**Middle-Class Hopes for Cuba’s Future**

Typical of the Latin American middle-class mindset as seen in Guatemala in 1944 and the 1948 civil war in Costa Rica, middle-class Cubans supported government action to bring about social change. In the goals of Fidel Castro and the revolutionaries, they at last saw an opportunity to enact such changes. Octavio, a middle-class Cuban who belonged to the Federation of University Students (FEU) as an engineering student at the University of Havana recalled, “[m]y feeling at that time was that only a civil war would eliminate the dictatorship in Cuba.” Octavio joined the M26 shortly after the *Granma* landing in 1956, and became the provincial commissioner in Santiago de Cuba after the victory of the revolution.

The idealistic middle-class youth, many of them members of the student movement and urban underground during the revolution, hoped to promote justice and equality in the new Cuba. Herbert Matthews said of Latin America’s students, “the
students are well aware of the social and economic injustices of Latin American life and they rebel idealistically against them.” So powerful was the message of the revolutionaries, in fact, that it transcended borders, reaching the middle-class youth of the United States. In his travel narrative on Cuba, C. Peter Ripley recalled:

> The Cuban Revolution was perfect for us. We studied it and quoted it, we fantasized it and romanticized it. It was not our own, but it was of our time. It had unfolded before us, on television and in the newspapers. We read the words and saw the images. And we learned that it was advanced by students, artists, writers, the middle class itself—the sort of people we knew, the sort we were. In the Cuban Revolution, history gave us hope in the form of a powerful lesson: people like us could change a nation.

His words emphasized the powerful way the educated and idealistic middle class throughout the Americas related to the cause of the revolution. The desires of the youths and professionals of the middle class varied dramatically from the middle-class businessmen. Idealistic, university-educated students and professionals strongly related to Castro’s visions for the social future of Cuba, where as the capitalistic and conservative businessmen desired a continuation of the economic status quo.

The older generations of the middle class had more practical reasons for supporting the revolution. Many middle-class professionals embraced the prospect of economic sovereignty and the opportunity to lend their voices to the political machinery in Havana. Additionally, unlike middle-class students, these Cubans had careers, families, and significant investments in the democratic way of life. Fidel’s words concerning obstacles to middle-class progress during his 1953 *History Will Absolve Me* speech deeply affected these people. They supported the path of the
revolution until it became obvious that democracy had been abandoned and their children’s futures threatened.

On the causes for middle-class resentment of the United States, Julia Sweig stated, “It was precisely the unfulfilled aspirations for material well-being, efficiency, and progress unleashed by the North American consumption ethic that fed popular support for the revolutionary struggle... ironically contributing to a growing nationalist and vaguely anti-American impulse.”32 While Cuban businessmen owed their entry into a middle-class social status to the presence of US investments, they had hit a glass ceiling in the mid-1950s that prevented them from further advancement into positions reserved for elites and North Americans. In a challenge to US imperialism, many found an opportunity to assert their sovereignty and elevated status in Cuban society. For this reason, many middle-class businessmen remained on the island for several years, until the 1968 final revolutionary offensive eliminated all remnants of the capitalist society they once knew.

Ultimately, despite ideological differences, the revolution’s victory in January 1959 excited middle-class Cubans of all ages and backgrounds. They embraced Castro and looked forward to a brighter future as a group. Castro, it appeared, embraced them in return. Yet in the early days of January 1959, as the island joined together in celebration, New York Times reporter Herbert Matthews recalled Cuban history and urged cautious optimism:
What the Cuban republic has thus far lacked is honest, efficient government. Those who fought against General Batista believed that they fought for liberty, democracy and decent government. It remains for the coming months to prove whether they, like their fathers who fought against Machado, have fought in vain, or whether a new era is really beginning for Cuba.

Just as the older generations fought against Machado during their student days, the middle class of the late 1950s believed they had won. They saw a bright future for themselves and their families. Castro and the Cuban leadership, they believed, promised to protect their interests and promote their values. For many members of the Cuban middle class, however, these promises would soon be betrayed.
García's comments here appear linked to residual resentments of the Platt Amendment (1901-1934) and the collusion of Washington and corrupt Cuban politicians throughout the 30s, 40s and 50s.


5 Gedolf, 9.


7 Balfour, 31.

8 It is from this event that the M26 (26th of July Movement) took their name.

9 Castro, 40.

10 Gedolf, 195.


13 737.13/1-1959, RG 59. Dispatch # 748. “New Cuban Cabinet; Individual Affiliations and Backgrounds; Groups Represented.” Chargé d’Affaires ad Interim Daniel M Braddock to Department of State. 19 January 1959. NARA II.


15 Castro, 34.

16 Castro, 34.

18 Judy Maloof, ed. and trans, *Voices of Resistance: Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 64.


21 Balfour, 61. Fidel’s use of the media included meeting with reporters—See Fidel’s interviews with *New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews from February 1957, and use of the clandestine *Radio Rebelde* broadcasting rebel activities throughout the island.


23 Balfour, 56-58.


25 Pérez, 16.


27 Maloof, 44.

28 Gedolf, 193.


Chapter 3: 
Reforms, Economic Warfare and Middle-Class Cubans, 1959-1968

Shortly after gaining power, the new revolutionary government of Cuba set out to reform the economy. Adhering to the grievances outlined by Fidel Castro in his *History Will Absolve Me* speech, initial reforms addressed problems including unemployment, low wages, debt, rent, and land reform. Castro argued, “Cuba could easily provide for a population three times as great as it now has, so there is no excuse for the abject poverty of a single one of its inhabitants.”¹ In 1959, the Cuban people agreed. According to historian Alfred Padula, “many of Castro’s early reforms did not arouse overwhelming concern because they had honorable precedents in Cuban history.”² By linking economic reforms with Cuban history and sovereignty, insisting that after hundreds of years of colonialism and imperialism Cuba would now be the master of her own destiny, the period of economic reforms began with widespread popular support.

As months passed, however, the socialist foundation of many reforms became evident. Private ownership and capitalist ventures came under attack. The government of Cuba eradicated all United States interests on the island following a period of economic warfare during which the United States instituted an economic embargo on the island. With each of these events, the economic future of middle-class businessmen became less promising. By the end of the 1960s, they faced a choice between sacrificing the way of life they had fought for in 1959, or abandoning their
country to pursue a capitalist future for their families.

**Economic Reforms and Capitalist Ambitions**

In accordance with typical Latin American revolutionary style, the government of Cuba instituted the Agrarian Reform Act on 17 May 1959. Designed to eliminate class disparity and enable peasant land ownership, the act provided that excessive land ownership would be “subject to expropriations and distribution among peasants” with minimal, if any, compensation. The land reform had little impact on the middle class, as they primarily resided in urban areas. Those affected most deeply by these initial actions included the wealthy and privileged rural landowners, remnants of the old Cuban elite. By February 1960, government seizures of land, houses, properties and possessions of former Batista supporters in Oriente province alone reached approximately 15 million dollars.

While also dedicated to raising the status and quality of life of less fortunate Cubans, urban reforms attracted significantly more negative attention from the middle class. Middle-class Cuban exile Román de la Campa explained aspects of the reforms that directly affected his family: “The revolution was turning radically socialist, which meant that private property rights came under threat—not only those protecting large holdings of US corporations and their Cuban representatives, but multiple-home ownership as well.” Since middle-class Cuban families often had multiple homes, rental property and servants—living standards more closely associated with the elites than popular classes—these reforms directly threatened their status. As the reforms
later extended to urban private property and the properties of North American
corporations—with whom the Cuban middle class had a long-standing relationship—
middle-class Cubans became skeptical of the future of capitalism on the island. Shortly
after the revolutionary victory, R. Hart Phillips, the New York Times’ “man in Havana”
for 23 years, commented:

[Castro] has declared he wishes to make Cuba a country without rich or poor—
all middle class. But the middle class is seriously affected by drastic rent
reductions, lowering of land values and forced sale of vacant lots. Many persons
with modest savings who invested in land find they are stripped of their
possessions and eliminated as a class.6

Such early urban reforms spurred discontent among businessmen, a sentiment that
steadily increased throughout the remainder of the decade.

Indeed, widespread support waned gradually as middle-class Cubans noticed the
distinct “class bias” of the reforms favoring the popular classes.7 Havana resident Fichu
Menocal recalled:

Slowly people lost this or things were nationalized or they were confiscated...
Because one day you had a business and it was nationalized. Up to that moment
you were all for the well-being of humanity and for all these poetic things, but
then somebody stepped on your corns, and you started shouting: ahhhh!
And...you started screaming, “Unfair, those people are communists,” and, well,
out goes idealism and then of course you had to rush to the states.8

Like many Cubans who chose to stay on the island, Menocal accused those who left of
being unwilling to sacrifice personal wealth for the good of the nation. Early economic
measures constituted a sufficient threat to facilitate the exodus of the remaining old
elites and Batistianos; middle-class Cubans, however, would not give up their hopes of a
role in the new Cuba so easily. Only once the economic reforms made life for middle-
class Cubans impossible did they consider leaving their beloved homeland.

**Gradual Shift Toward a Socialist Cuba**

Government control over private sectors gradually increased throughout the 1960s. The Industrialization Drive from 1959 to 1963 involved the gradual collectivization of the means of production and redistribution of the national income, a process that “antagonized the managerial class.”

As economic reforms continued, the elimination and control of private property increased. Che Guevara, head of the National Bank of Cuba until leaving Cuba in April 1965, promoted collectivization of agriculture and a planned economy—socialist measures that worried the capitalist middle class. Exile Eduardo Machado recalled of this period, “Agriculture was collectivized, private property was expropriated, and when the banks were taken over by Che Guevara, the new head of finance, it was clear that Fidel’s revolution was not for us.”

In a March 1960 speech, Guevara admitted the economic struggle would be long and difficult, aimed at eliminating monopolies and regaining Cuban control over the economy. Such actions necessarily attacked North American corporate activities in Cuba, thereby threatening the livelihood of many middle-class businessmen.

By May 1961, the revolutionary government controlled eighty percent of Cuban industry. As shortages and rationing occurred, remaining private merchants could no longer adequately stock their stores, and had to buy supplies from the government at a fixed price, with fixed profits, and fixed wages for employees. These circumstances forced hundreds of small private merchants—primarily middle-class Cubans—out of
business. A shop owner in Camagüey told R. Hart Phillips, “Yankee imperialism may be a bad thing but when we had Yankee imperialism I had plenty of things to sell. Now I have nothing to sell and I can’t make a living.” Later that summer, Castro declared the planned confiscation of all cash savings of over ten thousand pesos, to extend to private citizens and businesses alike. He insisted that the act would impact no more than three thousand Cubans. The middle-class interpreted this as a direct attack. Later, when the government nationalized the hotels and casinos in 1962, thousands of Cubans in that sector of the tourist industry lost their jobs as the “Havana Mafia” fled the island.

The elimination of the “sin industry” in urban Cuba, involving gambling, drugs and prostitution, represented a crusade of the Cuban government against remnants of imperialism that compromised Cuban integrity and morality. While many supported the eradication of such criminal and immoral enterprises, the middle class saw their way of life further affected by a campaign that eliminated a significant middle-class revenue source and their rich nightlife.

Discontent rose steadily as a result of these reforms directed at middle-class businessmen and heightened with increasing shortages due to the US economic blockade and the subsequent economic devastation following Hurricane Flora in October 1963. In the aftermath of Flora, the Cuban government abandoned economic diversification and industrialization and returned its focus to agricultural production, calling for the Second Agrarian Reform of 1963. For the remainder of the 1960s, the Cuban economy experienced “a gradual and slow shift in the balance between the
private and state sectors in favor of the latter,”¹⁸ thereby further alienating middle-class businessmen.

Over time, the reforms had definite, negative impacts on middle-class Cubans. While the early efforts to promote economic equality proved an inconvenience to many property owners and businessmen, later government actions all but eliminated potential for capitalist activity in the Cuban economy. Gerardo, a salesman from Havana, recalled,

After the Revolution there was constant surveillance over all private businesses...[After 1963] I was kept under stricter observation because the government knew that anyone with his own business was not in favor of their prohibiting free enterprise.¹⁹

When Castro launched the Final Revolutionary Offensive in 1968, middle-class Cubans had no doubt that there was no future for capitalist men in Cuba. Historian Silvia Pedraza explained, “[t]his wave...included people who scarcely minded the economic and political change the revolution wrought in 1960, the agrarian reform or nationalization of American industry, but whom the 1968 “revolutionary offensive” dispossessed and offended.”²⁰ After nearly a decade of economic reforms, the 1968 revolutionary offensive left no doubt that Cuba had become a full Socialist state.

**Economic Warfare Threatens Middle-Class Position**

The economic reforms not only impacted the livelihood of upper- and middle-class Cubans, but also United States corporations and investors operating on the island. In January 1960, one year after the revolutionary victory, Secretary of State Christian Herter admitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “United States relations
with the GOC [Government of Cuba] have steadily deteriorated and show little prospect of improvement as long as the present group remains in power.”\textsuperscript{21} The revolutionary reforms had threatened North American properties and investments in rural and urban Cuba, and the United States government needed to protect the interests of the investors. To facilitate the overthrow of the Cuban government, the Eisenhower Administration devised a program of economic warfare. An April 1960 memo from L.D. Mallory to Roy Rubottom suggested:

The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship...the principal item in our economic quiver would be flexible authority in the sugar legislation.\textsuperscript{22}

Following this mindset, President Eisenhower suspended the Cuban sugar quota in July 1960. Indeed, in considering any action regarding economic policy toward Cuba, US government officials asked one essential question: “Would it make things more difficult for Castro?”\textsuperscript{23}

Following the suspension of the sugar quota, Castro retaliated by nationalizing all remaining US-owned properties in Cuba in August 1960. The first Declaration of Havana in September, a several-hour tirade against Yankee Imperialism and United States influence in Cuba, further antagonized Washington. In October 1960, the United States government declared an economic embargo on Cuba, stating:

Accompanying its words with actions, the Government of Cuba has instituted a series of arbitrary, illegal and discriminating economic measures which have injured thousands of American citizens and have drastically altered the hitherto mutually beneficial pattern of trade between the US and Cuba.\textsuperscript{24}
The embargo extended to all items except non-subsidized foodstuffs, medicines, and medical supplies, and eventually caused shortages that forced many middle-class storeowners out of business. Ironically, according to historian Jules Benjamin, the actions of the Eisenhower Administration in 1960 ultimately legitimized the actions of the Castro government, becoming “the basis for Cuban charges of economic warfare [and] serving to justify and accelerate the confiscation of US property.” With this powerful propaganda weapon in his arsenal, Castro cleverly insisted: you are either with us or against us; a revolutionary or a gusano [worm].

The series of confiscations and nationalization further reduced the standard of living of middle-class Cubans, who soon realized they were a part of the US influence Castro wished to eradicate from society. In 1964, a young jazz guitarist in Havana told a New York Times reporter, “some administrators seem to have the idea that anything that smells of the United States goes against the revolution.” Any elements of Cuban society associated with the United States and capitalism, particularly middle-class businessmen, soon felt the weight of this campaign. When Castro revealed the Final Revolutionary Offensive in March 1968 he proclaimed,

There is a need during these years for work above everything. This also means putting an end to whatever manifestations remain of exploitation in our country. That is why we are proceeding to the nationalization...of all types of private businesses left in the country.

This final offensive also represented an all-out attack on the remnants of the “sin industries”—gambling, bars, prostitution—in Cuba, which Castro insisted “contribute to parasitism.” For middle-class professionals, the choice was clear: abandon capitalism
or abandon Cuba.

In a March 1962 speech, Fidel Castro highlighted the “successes” of the economic reforms:

There were a whole series of accomplishments, which began with a series of laws that benefitted the people. All the laws benefitted: the reduction in telephone rates, the cancellation of the corrupt contracts which the companies had obtained under the protection of the tyranny, the urban reform laws, the rent laws...then there were the agrarian reform laws; then the laws nationalizing foreign businesses and later the laws nationalizing large businesses. These became milestones marking the course of the revolution, marking the advance of the revolution, of the people.30

While these reforms facilitated the advancement of lower-class Cubans, they created the opposite effect for the middle class—those who had desired an increased position in Cuban society after the revolution and instead faced a drastic reduction in their standard of living and social status. This class-based economic assault, strengthened by political and social changes, ultimately necessitated the exodus of a significant portion of Cuba’s middle class, especially middle-class businessmen.

Those who remained on the island viewed those who fled due to economic changes as unpatriotic and materialistic. Cuban woman Naty Revuelta explained,

Before the revolution I had everything I needed and desired...therefore I can’t tell you that my life was personally improved by the revolution. In fact, since then my life has been nothing except incessant hard work; I feel as if all I have done is work...But I always knew that happiness does not depend on material possessions; rather, it is a state of mind and has to do with being true to one’s own beliefs and principles.31

Her statement reveals the deeply personal reasons behind why some stayed while
others left. The values of the urban middle class and their families relied heavily on a capitalist, democratic society. Unwilling to sacrifice such a future for their families regardless of the suggested moral imperative to one’s homeland, these Cubans left the island during the course of the 1960s.


3 837.10/5-1959, RG 59. Ambassador Bonsal to Secretary of State. Telegram 399. 19 May 1959. NARA II.


11 737.00/3-2160, RG 59. Ambassador Bonsal to Sec of State. Telegram 2463. 21 March 1960. NARA II.


16 Geldof, 26.


21 110.11/HE/1-2160, RG 59. “Secretary’s Appearance Before Senate Foreign Relations Committee,” Talking Paper. 21 January 1960. NARA II.

22 737.00/4-660, RG 59. Memo for Mr. Rubottom from L.D. Mallory. 6 April 1960. NARA II.


29 Fidel Castro, Havana Speech, 16 March 1968. University of Texas at Austin, Castro Speech Database.


Chapter 4: Ideological Shift Alienates Democratic Middle Class

No evidence exists that incontrovertibly proves Fidel Castro was a communist in 1959. According to a 1961 State Department document:

> It is not clear whether Dr. Castro intended from the start to betray his pledges of a free and democratic Cuba, to deliver his country to the Sino-Soviet bloc, and to mount an attack on the inter-American system; or whether he made his original pledges in all sincerity but, on assuming his new responsibilities, found himself increasingly dependent on ruthless men around him with clear ideas and the disciplined organization to carry those ideas into action.¹

Though Raúl Castro belonged to a communist student group at the University of Havana, Fidel’s ideology prior to the 1960s had been decidedly more moderate. During his 1959 visit to Washington, DC, Castro assured his North American hosts,

> I am not a communist, nor do I believe in communism...In Cuba, we have revolutionary power...We could have repressed everyone, but we have instead allowed freedom of expression, religious freedom, and human rights...Our ideals are called humanism.²

While Castro initially denied communist sympathies, he could not ignore the Cuban communists who publically offered their support in defense of the revolution. In May 1959, Cuban Communist Party leader Blas Roca declared of the party, “[w]e are the first line of defense of the revolution against the reaction and counterrevolutionary activities inspired by North American imperialism.”³ Following the Bay of Pigs incident, Castro welcomed such protection. By 1961, with both economic and diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States severed, Castro desperately needed internal and foreign assistance. Cuban communists and the Soviet Union presented the best possible
solution for economic and political problems and to guarantee Castro’s position in Cuba.

This shift from a relationship with the democratic capitalistic United States to the Marxist socialist Soviet Union threatened the role of the middle class in Cuban society. Middle-class Cubans with ties to the United States and a strong democratic ideology became associated with elements of society Castro labeled counterrevolutionary. Indeed, a January 1961 CIA report revealed:

[Castro’s] dictatorial methods, his political meddling in other countries, and his close collaboration with world communism have progressively alienated moderates who initially felt that Castro, with all his crudeness, was bringing a long needed social revolution to Cuba. ⁴

The middle class—students and professionals in particular—supported the initial aims of social reform and the restoration of democracy, but became convinced after the April 1961 Bay of Pigs debacle that the future they hoped for would not occur. They witnessed the purge of middle-class political leaders and the institution of socialist reforms, and eventually became the targets of a government crusade against anti-communist elements of Cuban society. By spring 1961 the middle class not only lost their elevated social status, but also any sense of personal safety or security. Many gave up hope for a future on the island.

**Loss of Moderate, Middle-Class Leadership, 1959-1960**

In an April 1960 survey of one thousand Havana residents, 7 percent of the respondents feared a shift to communism in Cuba, and only 2 percent suspected a failure to hold elections. ⁵ Castro promised the Cuban people humanism and democracy—albeit a democracy dedicated to elevating the status of the historically
exploited Cuban masses. In a May 1960 speech, Castro described the character of Cuban democracy:

Democracy is where the majority governs. Democracy is that form of government in which the majority is taken into account. Democracy is that form of government in which the majority are defended. Democracy is that form of government that guarantees to man not just the right to think freely but the right to know how to think, the right to know how to write what he thinks, the right to know how to read what is thought by others. Democracy guarantees not only the right to bread and the right to work but also the right to culture and the right to be taken into account within society. Therefore, this is democracy. The Cuban revolution is democracy.  

Based on these professed goals, idealistic middle-class Cuban students and professionals through 1960 supported the humanistic, democratic Cuban revolution. Though economic dissatisfaction existed among middle-class businessmen at this point, their concerns were not yet ideological.

While Castro did not publicly admit socialist ambitions until 1961, those closest to him had suspicions much earlier. As early as mid-January 1959, Ambassador Earl Smith in Havana informed the Secretary of State of unrest within the Government of Cuba: “An air of frustration and increasing disillusionment is apparent among several responsible people either associated with the government or originally favorably disposed to it.” Early losses of moderate leaders included many of the original middle-class cabinet members, but also military leadership, many former members of Fidel Castro’s 26 of July Movement (M26), who feared the direction of the revolution.

In reaction to communist suspicions, disillusioned leaders could choose between publicly voicing discontent, resigning, or leaving the island. After fleeing the island in
July 1959, Major Pedro Luis Díaz Lanz, former M26 pilot, complained about Fidel: “He said we were going to bring back the constitution, have democracy, have freedom, have elections. What have we got now? Most of us are not communists, but he has given the communists control of the country.”

Later that month, Fidel Castro resigned from his government position citing ideological differences with President Urrutia. After overwhelming public upheaval, Urrutia resigned his presidency and Castro returned, accusing Urrutia, like Díaz Lanz, of anti-communism and counterrevolutionary sentiments.

The purge of the opposition continued. In October 1959, Major Huber Matos, widely popular M26 leader from the days in the Sierra Maestra, resigned from his position in Camagüey citing communist influence in the revolution. Castro publicly castigated Matos. “He accused him of being a traitor, conspirator, bad revolutionary who tried to spring revolt in Camagüey, seize that province, and move on to other provinces.” Castro quickly sent revolutionary hero Camilo Cienfuegos to arrest Matos. Mysteriously, Cienfuegos’s plane never returned from the mission. Castro declared him dead in a three-hour speech to commemorate the fallen hero and his fight against traitors to the revolution. Matos, on the other hand, would remain in a Cuban prison for nearly two decades.

Following each of these events, Castro assured the Cuban people that the absent leaders threatened the success of their revolution; that they were counterrevolutionaries, pawns of the Yankee imperialists. After Osvaldo Doritos
Torrado assumed the presidency following Urrutia’s resignation in July 1959, Ambassador Philip Bonsal wrote, “[a]s political maneuver to rid himself of uncooperative associate [Urrutia], Castro’s tactic was a complete success.”12 As the popular moderate leaders lost their positions of power due to resignation, imprisonment or exile, Castro effectively consolidated power in the Cuban government. With any possible political threat eliminated after the removal of Matos and Cienfuegos, the Castro brothers and Guevara could now determine the course of the revolution. While startled by the sudden loss of the moderate leadership, most middle-class Cubans in 1959 remained confident that the charismatic Castro would fulfill his democratic promises.

**Democracy Abandoned, Marxism Embraced, 1959-1961**

Revolutionary supporters in January 1959 had believed the government intended to restore democracy, the 1940 Constitution, and personal freedoms in accordance with the platform of the M26. Political reforms and ideological shifts soon revealed the futility of these hopes. Octavio, an former student from Santiago de Cuba, recalled,

> What began to disturb me very much was that I did not see the democratic procedures I had been hoping for. I strongly objected to the government’s imposing its choice on us without assemblies for discussion or genuine congresses of delegates.13

While Castro’s rhetoric could divert the attention of the people from the dramatic loss of moderate officials, it could not mask the failure of the government to fulfill any of its democratic promises relevant to middle-class interests such as free elections. The
middle class searched in vain for any indication of a future for their families in Cuba.

In addition to postponing elections and failing to observe the 1940 Constitution, Castro curtailed personal freedoms on the island to prevent both public and private criticism of the revolution. This ultimately resulted in the nationalization of many Cuban newspapers and television stations either associated with the United States or opposed to communism. In January 1960, Jorge Zayas, publisher of *Avance* (Cuban newspaper nationalized in January 1960), left Cuba due to a lack of journalistic freedom. He insisted Castro was, “interested in being allowed to keep up his fantastic brainwashing of Cubans through a government chain of ten newspapers plus many television and radio shows.”

Popular television commentator and former friend of Fidel, Luis Conte Aguero, left that March, labeled a traitor and Yankee lackey by the revolution. Upon reaching Miami, he said, “Since the truth cannot be told in Cuba, I shall tell it outside of Cuba.” Similarly, *New York Times* journalist R. Hart Phillips left Havana in May 1961 stating, “[t]his correspondent has just left Cuba after more than 30 years’ residence because it is no longer possible to send dispatches out of Cuba telling of true conditions there.”

The middle class recognized this restriction of freedoms as indicative of repressive dictatorships from Cuban history. Like those who had recently fled the island, they began to suspect Castro had no intention of honoring his promises of a free and democratic Cuba. Before being nationalized in May 1960— along with all remaining media sources opposed to the revolution — capitalist newspaper *Diario de la Marina*
urged the government to resist communism and “promote adherence to the principles of social justice, national sovereignty and morality in public customs that inspired the Cuban revolution.” These Cubans saw communists as the antithesis of everything their revolution stood for: justice, peace, democracy, family values and capitalism.

Repercussions of socialist activities affected Cuban relations with the other American republics as well as creating internal dissatisfaction. Castro publicly broke with the Organization of American States in August 1960, accusing the organization of imperialist sympathies. The Cuban leader continued his campaign against the United States. In a 3 January 1961 speech, Castro told a Havana crowd, “[a] group of CIA men in the guise of diplomats have been directing terrorism here. But the revolutionary government has ordered that in 48 hours the US Embassy should not have a single official more than we have in Washington, that is, eleven.” Later that day, as a final act of the Eisenhower Administration, diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States terminated as Secretary Herter responded to the Cuban demand that the US reduce embassy personnel. His memo to Cuba's Carlos Olvidares stated:

This unwarranted action by the government of Cuba places crippling limitations on the ability of the United States to carry on its normal diplomatic and consular functions. It would consequently appear that it is designed to achieve an effective termination of diplomatic and consular relations between the Government of Cuba and the Government of the United States. Accordingly, the Government of the United States hereby formally notifies the Government of Cuba of the termination of such relations.

In April 1961, the Kennedy State Department further insisted that the Castro alliance with international communism threatened the security of the hemisphere, adding that
the September 1960 Declaration of Havana constituted a direct threat to the OAS. Pressured by the United States, the OAS officially expelled Cuba with the support of all member nations except Mexico. As the Government of Cuba distanced itself from the United States and American nations, its reliance on Soviet aid grew, thereby increasing middle-class skepticism over their future in Cuba.

Immediately following the Cuban victory over the counterrevolutionaries at the Bay of Pigs on 17 April 1961, Castro declared what middle-class Cubans had long feared: Cuba had a socialist revolution. For many, this justified immediate departure from the island. A former Havana reporter explained, “I decided to leave Cuba because the absurd failure of the invasion at Playa Girón [Bay of Pigs] showed me that the situation in Cuba had reached the point where the communist domination of my country would last for at least two more years.” Indeed, the socialization of Cuba continued. In a July 1961 speech commemorating the Moncada attack, Fidel announced plans for a single-party socialist state in Cuba. That December, he added, “I am a Marxist-Leninist, and will be Marxist-Leninist until the last day of my life.” With that, the dream of a democratic Cuba after decades of corruption and rigged elections died. Those middle-class Cubans who opted to remain on the island had to choose between full communist revolutionary integration or risk constant surveillance, harassment or imprisonment.

**Middle-Class Future Threatened**

For anti-communist, middle-class Cubans, daily life in Cuba became treacherous.
As in the public condemnations of Urrutia and Matos, the government insisted that any expression of anti-communism be equated with counterrevolutionary activity, labeling the counterrevolutionaries *gusanos* [worms]. In an April 1960 press conference, Secretary Herter addressed the issue of anti-communism in Cuba:

> With regard to the communist side of the picture, there is one very disturbing development that is taking place in Cuba, and that is that anti-communism is now being made synonymous with anti-revolution, and that those who express concern about communist influence are now being accused of being anti-revolution and anti-Castro. And this is obviously an effort to stop any anti-communist criticism that might arise within the country itself.\(^\text{25}\)

This ardent hostility toward anti-communism prevented middle-class Cubans from expressing political discontent. In the eyes of the revolutionary government, any suggestion that the course of the revolution had been compromised equaled treason.

José Pardo Llada, a Cuban radio commentator sympathetic to Castro, clarified that, “[although] not all the anti-communists are traitors, all traitors are anti-communists.”\(^\text{26}\)

The middle class had become traitors to a government they did not want.

As the socialist path of the revolution became evident, many moderate Cubans expressed a feeling of betrayal aimed at Fidel Castro. Upon entering exile in 1964, Castro’s sister Juana stated, “I find it most difficult to speak against members of my family, even against Fidel, but he has betrayed the Cuban revolution that many of us lived and died for.”\(^\text{27}\) According to historian Silvia Pedraza, within four years “the republic so many fought to restore was completely vanquished.”\(^\text{28}\) This claim, however, conforms more to the popular exile myth of pre-1959 Cuba than the reality of a Cuban past that never knew a real republic or democracy. Middle-class Cubans, in reality,
hoped for a first opportunity to create a democratic Cuban polity controlled by Cubans like themselves. This desire for power in a new Cuban government was the dominant goal of the middle class.

Life in Cuba became increasingly bleak for those not fully integrated in the revolution in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs incident. A concerned Castro ordered a wave of arrests, approximately 200,000 in the first month alone. According to R. Hart Phillips, “the mass arrests have terrorized the people of the island. The arrests were directed almost entirely at the property-owning middle class and professionals.”

A former shop owner from Havana confirmed this claim, explaining:

Having never been involved in politics, living always for my work, being respected by everybody, considered always to be a hardworking man and a decent person without political motivations, I was imprisoned on the 17th of April 1961, and from that time on I was persecuted constantly.

Attacks extended to all levels of middle-class Cubans, businessmen, professionals and students alike. In 1965, the University of Havana began a purge of non-communist students to “rid the entire student body of enemies of the regime.” By December 1966, a New York Times article suggested the Isle of Pines prison held as many as ten thousand political prisoners. Unlike the economic reforms that impacted primarily those middle-class Cubans in the work force, the ideological shift affected all those unwilling to adopt communism.

The extent of middle-class discontent over the gradual shift of the revolution towards socialism and ultimately Marxism owed much to the group’s historical ties to
the United States and democratic values. Yet some underwent a change in values due to various personal reasons. Nationalist Cubans, many of them members of the former middle class, dedicated to anti-imperialism and Cuban sovereignty, welcomed the elimination of Yankee influence in Cuba and embraced socialism and Soviet aid as a means of elevating Cuba. “Soviet Union,” a 1964 poem by popular Cuban revolutionary poet Nicolás Guillén, exposed the sentiments of many of those Cubans who supported Cuban-Soviet relations:

Soviet Union, when bitter winds blew down from a funereal North, the executioner gave the screw a final turn, and the great implacable torturer started in to burn to soles of our feet that we might say, “All right, Washington, raise us to your level”; that we might say what we would never say—that we might say what we would never say— there rose your hearty voice, your grand voice from the factory, farm, school, and shop. With ours it shouted, “No!” Thus we marched together and free against an enemy we two will defeat.33

The shift to communism may have disaffected many of the remaining Cubans of privilege, including the middle class, but the revolution maintained widespread support among those sectors that delighted in the rejection of US influence in Cuba. These Cubans supported Castro and the revolution, and Castro embraced them in return.


7 RG 59. Telegram 851. Ambassador Smith to Secretary. 19 January 1959. NARA II.


9 RG 59. Telegram 162. Ambassador Bonsal to Secretary of State. 18 July 1959. NARA II.

10 RG 59. Telegram 886. Ambassador Bonsal to Secretary Herter. 21 October 1959. NARA II.

11 RG 59. Telegram 1100. Bonsal to Secretary. 13 November 1959. NARA II.

12 RG 59. Telegram 163. Ambassador Bonsal to Secretary of State. 18 July 1959. NARA II.


19 Fidel Castro, Speech Havana, 3 Jan 1961. Univeristy of Texas at Austin, Castro Speech Database.


28 Pedraza, 114.


30 Fagen, 79.


Chapter 5: 
Social Transformations Threaten Middle-Class Values

The Cuban revolutionary government promoted social, racial, and economic equality.\(^1\) The middle class supported this social reform plan initially with the assumption that it would not diminish their social status. They hoped the program would ultimately eliminate the old Cuban elites who historically prevented middle-class political influence. However, social reforms radicalized as opposition to the revolutionary government grew and Fidel Castro became wary of his own future. He called upon the masses, whose support he earned through reforms benefiting their families, to protect the revolution against *contrarrevolucionarios y vendepatrias* [counterrevolutionaries and country sellouts] who would have Cuba return to a state of subjugation under the Yankee imperialists. This attack directly targeted not only remaining old elites, but also the middle class, a group with servants and leisure time, that Castro claimed had the opportunity and financial resources to launch a campaign against the government.\(^2\) Thus began the practice of dedicated revolutionaries informing on their fellow Cubans. Castro soon had “spies” on every corner.

When combined with the economic and political changes that occurred under the revolution, social transformations stripped the middle class of their status, livelihood, and lifestyle. In 1961, author Ernst Halperin insisted, “it is not only the property rights of the independent businessmen, but the entire way of life of the Cuban middle class that is being destroyed.”\(^3\) Middle-class Cubans saw their families and
cultural values under attack due to the series of class-based reforms that alienated the middle class from their country and failed to provide them with the voice they had hoped to gain with the revolution. This process particularly affected middle-class men, who objected to the loss of control in their private homes. Historian Ian Lumsdell insisted, “At the outset of the Cuban revolution, machismo was deeply ingrained [in Cuban society].” He suggested, “[Cuban] gender roles were clearly identified and differentiated,”4 explaining the dissatisfaction of many Cuban males as social transformations resulted in elevated status for Cuban women and government control over Cuban children.

Commenting on the impact of social reforms on the middle-class lifestyle, Havana resident Fichu Menocal stated, “I think the people that left the island left because they loved their way of life better than their country.”5 The actions of middle-class Cubans who left their country rather than to stay and support societal reforms that would promote the greater good could certainly be interpreted, by some, as selfish. Yet this mentality suggests that Cubans must prioritize nationalism over personal values. Indeed, while many strongly nationalistic Cubans from the former middle class remained on the island, a large portion that refused to sacrifice personal privilege for the greater good—middle-class professionals, businessmen and students alike—chose exile when they realized life in revolutionary Cuba would contradict their personal economic, political and family values.6
Non-Violent Class Warfare

The focus on elevating the rural Cuban peasantry originated in the 1953 *History Will Absolve Me* speech by Fidel Castro. Castro told his judges:

Cuba is above all an agricultural state, its population is largely rural. The city depends on these rural areas. The rural people won the independence. The greatness and prosperity of our country depends on a healthy and vigorous rural population that loves the land and knows how to cultivate it, within the framework of a state that protects and provides for them.\(^7\)

Certainly, the government implemented many reforms and programs that benefitted lower-class and rural Cubans, thereby raising their standard of living. Such acts included opening schools, promoting education, opening medical clinics, land reform, the opening of formerly private beaches and resorts and the elimination of graft, among others.\(^8\) Class tensions arose within Cuban society. The middle class saw no reforms benefitting their own families, while lower-class Cubans feared the former allies of the North Americans would try to rob them of their newly acquired privileges.

While many among the middle class tolerated or admired the government’s dedication to eliminate gross poverty, they did not initially realize this would necessarily result in a decline in their social status. In March 1959, Castro proclaimed: “Within a short time we will have reduced the rich to the middle class and elevated the poor to the level of what today is called the middle class.”\(^9\) But members of the middle class began to sense their status would suffer as well. Exile author Carlos Eire recalled a conversation with his family’s maid after the revolution, revealing the fears of many middle-class families: “Pretty soon you are going to lose all this. Pretty soon you’ll be
sweeping my floor. Pretty soon I’ll be seeing you at your fancy beach club, and you'll be cleaning out the trash cans while I swim.” Eire reveals the irrational fears of many among the middle class who believed Castro intended to play Robin Hood in Cuba, giving the poor the former treasures of the wealthy, while placing former Cubans of privilege in subservient roles. Though a popular myth in exile communities, no evidence indicates these beliefs reflected Castro’s actual intentions.

This program of promoting social equality required participation from a Cuban citizenry dedicated to the goals and success of the revolution. Brigadier General José Ramón Fernández, former M26 member and Cuba’s Minister of Education from 1972 to 1982, explained the social imperative for Cubans from the perspective of the revolutionaries:

To be determined to fight, a man or woman must be convinced of why they’re doing so. In our case the people fight to defend a society where there is no racial discrimination; where the role of women has been expanded and continues to grow; where education...is free and available to the entire people; where there is a public health care system that despite shortages maintains a low infant mortality rate and a high life expectancy. Again, this promotion of racial and gender equality contradicted the traditional white male-dominated Cuban middle-class society. Consequently, without full dedication to the course of the revolution, the middle class became associated instead with the counterrevolution. By maintaining their traditional class-based desires for democracy, political participation and capitalism, they ultimately alienated themselves from the revolutionary process.
The Cuban Family

Nancy Morejón, an Afro-Cuban poet and journalist, recalled, “I can honestly say that what I witnessed as a result of the Cuban Revolution was an extraordinary change of values!”12 This change in values, however, affected lower- and middle-class Cubans differently. The impact of social reforms on Cuban children provides one of the clearest examples of such discrepancies. Children of the lower classes experienced educational opportunities and better access to healthcare as a result of the revolution. (Though Agustín, formerly a baker in Las Villas, insisted, “[i]n my opinion it was an elementary form of instruction, not a profound education, and I think it serves mainly to propagandize people.”13) Middle-class children, on the other hand, suffered the elimination of Catholic private schools and were sent to the country to teach the peasants to read. They also faced mandatory revolutionary participation, communist indoctrination and possibly being sent to the Soviet Union. All of this constituted a serious threat to patria potestad [parental rights] of middle-class families, particularly Cuban fathers who faced a loss of control over their children.

Education plans introduced in April 1961 involved forming an Army of Education comprised of approximately 100 thousand school children (“literacy teachers”) from sixth grade to high school. The program took Cuban children from their families for eight to eleven months, negatively affected urban private schools, and exposed privileged children to the conditions and people of the rural lower classes. Maribel Santos Ferro, a Cuban woman who volunteered for the Literacy Campaign at
age twelve, recalled,

It was an extraordinary experience for me, working with the peasants... in the Oriente region. We were so pleased to see how the peasants appreciated the fact that the townspeople left their homes— young people, because we were all very young— their homes, their parents, to go and live with them and try to teach them how to read and write. It was very moving, really very moving.14

The experience of the Literacy Campaign exposed middle-class youths to a world they were previously unaware of. Less idealistic Cubans, however, saw the Literacy Campaign as yet another of Castro’s attempts to indoctrinate their children and destroy middle-class democratic values.15 A former manager of a Cuban private school shared his opinion: “I believe that a school should not be mixed up with politics, nor politics with school.”16 By involving Cuban children in education reform and exposing them to communist ideology, the government threatened the ability of middle-class families to instill their own values in their children.

In June 1961, parental fears mounted once again as Castro nationalized Cuban private schools, essentially removing the last remaining Catholic, capitalist base of middle-class families. That same month, the revolutionary government sent one thousand Cuban students to the Soviet Union to study cultivation.17 Fearing their children’s exposure to communist propaganda taught in public schools and the possibility of losing them entirely to the Marxists, many middle-class parents chose to keep their children out of school, hiding them from the long arm of Fidel. Others planned to send their children out of the country. Eduardo Machado, an exile sent to the United States in October 1961, explained, “[my parents] were letting me go because
they were so afraid. Because the one thing they could not bear was that I might not end
up exactly like them, or who they wished me to be. Ambitious. Aggressive. A
capitalist.” As the first generation of middle-class Cubans under the revolution,
parents placed their ambitions for a future role in Cuba on their children. Government
efforts to use these youths instead to promote socialist reforms dashed these hopes,
again contributing to the eventual exodus of middle-class children, along with their
parents.

**Cuban Individualism**

The middle-class individualistic spirit also came under attack in revolutionary
Cuba. The government insisted all Cubans become fully integrated into the
revolutionary state, abandon self-centered individualism, and work together for the
good of the nation. In Cuba, historian Louis A. Pérez insisted, “[o]pposition was
portrayed as tantamount to treason. Dissent was perceived as both pernicious and
perilous to the nation’s survival.” The revolution demanded the complete support of
its citizens. Those who did not agree with its message faced constant hardship.

Instilling nationalism and promoting revolutionary participation proved
insufficient to secure government control by 1960. A US intelligence report insisted, “as
popular support waned, coercion and terror were employed more and more to
maintain the regime’s control.” More accurately, the regime feared attacks by the
opposition in Cuba and in exile and chose to utilize its mass support among the lower-
class Cubans to ensure the survival of the revolution. By 1960, this involved the
creation of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR’s), neighborhood groups intended to give a voice to revolutionary participants and monitor counterrevolutionary activity among neighbors. Explaining the responsibility of Cubans under the new committees, Raúl Castro declared, “[y]ou are supposed to keep an eye on everybody and a hand grasping onto their neck.”21 Members of the non-integrated middle class found themselves the targets of these defense committees, later citing their formation as a major catalyst for the middle-class exodus.

Eduardo Machado recalled the transformation of Cuban neighborhoods after the formation of the CDR’s: “Things were different now. Friendship was measured by your loyalty to Fidel.”22 Silvio, formerly a mechanic in Las Villas, added:

In Cuba what really exists is a system of psychological terror. Everyone lives in fear all the time. If, for instance, a friend says the government does good things for the people, you feel obligated to agree because you are afraid not to. Perhaps that person does not really believe what he is saying, but he is afraid of you, too. Even within families, people are afraid to discuss their political beliefs sincerely.23

Supporting this claim, Cuban exile and historian Silvia Pedraza said, “[f]amilies were deeply divided by the political sides they chose. More often than not, both sides insisted that politics should be placed above family.”24 In Cuba before the revolution, middle-class Cubans could not voice their political opinions because few would listen. After 1960, they remained silent for fear of imprisonment and social castigation.

The atmosphere of concern following the Bay of Pigs incident heightened fear and surveillance in Cuban neighborhoods. In June 1961, a Miami News article stated, “[t]he hunt for opponents of the regime is relentless. The government has just
announced that ten thousand additional ‘Defense Committees,’ whose ultimate purpose is to recruit 500,000 vigilantes all over Cuba, has been formed.”

This only increased the sense of desperation among middle-class Cuban families. A barber from Havana recalled, “[i]t was impossible for us to live, because the communist committees watched us day and night. Because we refused to cooperate with them, we were called counterrevolutionaries, which made our lives impossible.” His family chose exile, he explained, because, “I want my children to be educated in a democratic system, where they can live in tranquility.” The barber’s statement shows the multiple factors involved in the decision of middle-class families to leave the island, including political pressures, loss of personal security, and tarnished family values.

Mandatory integration into the revolution also disturbed many Cubans who did not agree with the socialist foundation of the government. Salvador, a fisherman from Las Villas, explained, “[y]ou have to join organizations over there. Otherwise they look at you as if you are not with the revolution.” A former employee of the Transport Ministry accounting department recalled, “[t]hey forced me to join the militia…I was forced to go out and cut cane…everything there was obligatory.” These Cuban men did not approve of being told what to do by a government they initially hoped would finally bring an end to undemocratic state actions in Cuba.

As in many aspects of the revolution that ultimately became intolerable for many middle-class Cubans, this mandatory duty to the revolution had precedents in Castro’s 1953 History Will Absolve Me. Invoking José Martí, Castro insisted, “[w]e are Cubans,
and to be Cubans implies a duty. Not to fulfill that duty is a crime, is treason.” In the aftermath of the 1961 Bay of Pigs, and increasing steadily as the revolution and opposition progressed, middle-class Cubans who refused to conform to the socialist program of the government became unwelcome citizens. Castro called them traitors, *gusanos*, counterrevolutionaries, elements of society to be destroyed or eliminated.

According to revolutionary supporter Naty Revuelta, the Cuban revolution succeeded in implementing social reforms:

> I can speak for tens of thousands of marginal Cuban women whose lives were greatly improved by the social reforms brought about after the revolution. Many of these women became professionals or technicians in ways they never could have dreamed of before. For thousands of black women who suffered double discrimination, the revolution opened up many doors of opportunity.

Yet these reforms, as Revuelta admitted, benefitted those who had little before the revolution—minorities, women, and peasants—not the men of Cuba’s middle class. Herself formerly a Cuban of privilege, Revuelta insisted the revolution demanded personal sacrifice for the sake of the masses. Yet many Cubans from similar backgrounds did not agree. By March 1962, the Cuban exodus having reached well over 100,000 since January 1959, Fidel Castro commented, “[i]t would be necessary to analyze the reasons why some reacted in one way and some in another. Behind it all were class interests.” For the middle class, a group from which many left while others stayed, one must consider personal interests in addition to these class interests.

A Cuban accountant summarized the rationale for many like himself who chose
exodus as a result of the revolutionary reforms of the 1960s:

My decision to leave was like thousands of Cubans. We were accustomed to a democratic way of life. We dedicated ourselves to family, work, and friends, and expressed our thoughts about all things freely. Then suddenly a brutal change came into our lives. Our democratic, religious, and cultural institutions were crushed overnight. There was complete disunity in the Cuban family—fathers against sons, brothers against brothers, childhood friends converted into enemies: in short, a series of occurrences befitting savages, not human beings.32

While the words of this embittered Cuban adhere to the common exile myth of a utopian and democratic pre-1959 Cuba, properly villianizing Castro and the revolution, they effectively represent the sentiments of many as they fled the island. Unwilling to tolerate the “savage” conditions in revolutionary Cuba, many middle-class families left for Miami. They reacted in response to reforms and events from the 1961 declaration of socialism through the Final Revolutionary Offensive at the conclusion of the decade. They abandoned their homes at that point in which love for country no longer outweighed their concerns for their futures.
This equality applied to most Cubans, but not homosexuals. A 1965 article in El Mundo insisted, “[n]o homosexual represents the revolution, which is a movement of he-men.” Paul Hoffman, “Cuban Government is Alarmed by Increase in Homosexuality,” 16 April 1965, 2.


Referring to this middle-class fear for their families, historian Yvonne Conde points out a quote by Lenin: “Revolution is impossible as long as the family exists.” Yvonne M. Conde, Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14,048 Cuban Children (New York: Routledge, 1999), 25.


Mary Waters, ed., Making History: Interviews with Four Generals of Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces (New York: Pathfinder, 1999), 96.


Geldof, 54.

Conde, 31-36.

17 Conde, 36.


22 Machado, 56.

23 Philipson and Llerena, 20.

24 Pedraza, 86.


26 Fagen, 81.

27 Philipson and Llerena, 23.

28 Fagen, 84.

29 Castro, 77.

30 Maloof, 50.


32 Fagen, 87.
Chapter 6: Disillusioned Middle-Class Cubans Choose Exile

Seeking exile or temporary political asylum in the United States as an opportunity to voice political discontent has deep-seated roots in Cuban history dating back to José Martí during the Independence Wars in the 19th Century. Martí insisted: “Man loves liberty, even if he does not know that he loves it. He is driven by it and flees from where it does not exist.”¹ Fulgencio Batista hid out in Miami after his 1940 presidency, returning later to run in the 1952 elections, and ultimately orchestrate his second successful coup d’état. Former President Carlos Prío and many of his supporters worked from Miami during the second Batista regime to plan an overthrow and build a new provisional government.² After 1959, former Batistianos left for Miami to escape the purge (and widespread executions) of the old government, army and elites, again planning to overthrow the current government of Cuba.³ So began the exodus of what has today reached over one million Cubans.

Historian Louis A. Pérez explained the magnitude of the exodus in the years immediately following the revolution:

Unable to devise effective means with which to oppose the revolution internally, disaffected Cubans emigrated by the tens of thousands. Planeload after planeload of Cubans left the island. The loss of population in the early years was stunning: sixty-two thousand in 1960, sixty-seven thousand in 1961, sixty-six thousand in 1962.⁴

During various phases of the exodus throughout the 1960s, large numbers of Cuba’s middle class joined the legacy of Cuban political exiles to seek refuge, however
temporary, among their North American neighbors.\(^5\) Castro often chided the exiles for their foolishness in entering exile and hoping to overthrow the revolution. In January 1960 he said,

'Imperialism’ gave them [the exiles] the belief that some day they would be able to dominate the great masses; it made them believe it did not matter what great popular support the revolution had, but that the revolution would be destroyed by imperialism sooner or later. And so they came to believe that one day their imperial masters would return them to their former places here with false independence.\(^6\)

Though Castro accused the exiles of betraying their fatherland and being slaves to an imperial master, Cubans continued to leave. Eduardo Machado recalled, “[i]t seemed more and more people were leaving every day...They would leave almost silently. There one day, gone the next.”\(^7\) Middle-class departure methods included the exodus of middle-class children from December 1960 to mid-1966 during *Operación Pedro Pan* [Operation Peter Pan], various treacherous voyages on makeshift rafts or hijacked boats and planes during the period of restricted travel between the Cuban Missile Crisis and fall 1965, the Camarioca Boatlift of fall 1965 and the Freedom Flights from December 1965 to April 1973.\(^8\)

The Government of Cuba ultimately embraced the exodus as an opportunity to rid the nation of a potentially powerful opposition. Che Guevara told Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in a 1960 diplomatic visit to Egypt: “I measure the depth of social transformation by the number of people who are affected by it and feel that they have no place in the new society.”\(^9\) By Guevara’s standards, then, the social transformation in Cuba succeeded. The *gusanos* became a powerful source of
propaganda for Castro in his speeches. The loss of several hundred thousand Cuban citizens also alleviated an economic burden for the government, and removed societal elements that refused to contribute to socialist programs. Additionally, the “brain drain” caused by the exodus of many of Cuba’s educated professionals enabled the government to train and educate a new generation of professionals from groups of Cubans who never experienced such opportunities prior to 1959.

**A Difficult Decision: Leaving Family, Property and Country**

Regardless of the ultimate catalyst for the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Cubans, the extremely difficult decision of leaving one’s patria, or homeland, came only after circumstances on the island became personally unbearable for the individual or family. After surveying hundreds of Cuban exiles in Miami in the late 1960s, historian Richard Fagen concluded that Cubans entered exile, “when they have experienced the effects of changes in economic arrangements, social structure, or political order in extremely personal and negative ways.” Fagen’s detailed study explores the personal and emotional impact of exile on the Cubans who fled the island. Historians must consider this essential point when studying the exodus: the immense emotional difficulty of leaving one’s homeland for a foreign land. Considering this, only extreme circumstances could cause such a substantial number of Cubans to leave their homes.

Entering exile in the United States was a difficult but not unreasonable choice for many. The middle class had a longstanding economic relationship with the United States, and familiarity with the country owing to North American university educations
or frequent family vacations to areas like Miami and New York. Choosing those locations as “ports in the storm” therefore presented a logical choice. The exiles shared conservative North American values of consumerism and anti-communism, as well as a modicum of self-absorbed political ambivalence concerning less fortunate members of society. Most also had family or friends already living in the areas, many Cubans having immigrated to the United States for economic opportunity throughout the 20th century.

Since 1959, established Cuban communities had developed in New York and Miami. Populated with fellow Cubans who shared the values of privileged society and a desire to see an end to the Castro government—although early exiles had supported Batista and the middle class was both anti-Batista and anti-Castro—these communities tempted many into exile. Without an effective political opposition on the island, the middle class entered the United States, where approximately two hundred anti-Castro groups actively plotted the overthrow of the Cuban government.11 Most traveled to the United States certain that their stay would be temporary, an opportunity to aid in the overthrow of the government and attempt once again to create a Cuba where their families would have a place and a voice.

Though the Cuban middle class left the island as a result of their unwillingness to adapt to a society based on equality for all citizens, they were still Cubans. Exodus meant leaving behind a country they loved; their homes; their families; their memories. The decision to prioritize self-interest over nationalism was not made lightly, and
became more difficult as travel restrictions increased. Exile author Eduardo Machado recalled, “I loved my country even as a child. I was fiercely proud to be Cuban. As I waited for my day, for my plane, I made a practice of memorizing everything around me.”12 Entering exile certainly constituted a significant sacrifice for many. This sacrifice eventually involved more than leaving behind one’s home and friends.

In August 1961, the Government of Cuba announced that exiles could leave with only one suitcase. Later that year, this decreased to three changes of clothes.13 The exiles lost not only their country as they left, but their treasured possessions as well. When he left Cuba in 1961, Pepín Bou recalled, “[a]ll I had was a dime.”14 Bou had the dime encased in a Lucite block that he carries with him to this day. Like many exiles who keep the keys to their homes that likely no longer exist, these symbols of an idealized lost past serve to perpetuate the exile myth of betrayal.

Most Cubans who chose exile in the United States believed their stay would be temporary. Exile author Román de la Campa explained:

Few Cubans who left their country in the early 1960s expected that their departure would become so final or determining...The general wisdom was that we were only going away for a short while, a matter of months at best, until Castro was overthrown by the United States.15

This passage confirms the conclusion of historian Louis A. Pérez that the exiles believed the United States would intervene in Cuba as it had so many times in the past.16 Their conviction that the stay would be temporary led many exiles to refuse to leave the Miami area. In June 1967 the Cuban Refugee Center in Miami claimed, of the 300,000 Cubans processed through the center, 150,000 remained in the Miami area.17
Means of Escape: Fleeing by Boat, Plane or Raft

Travel between Cuba and the United States remained inconsistent after the revolution. Pan American flights between Miami and Havana brought many out of Cuba easily at first, but gradual restrictions concerning visas or transportation availability hindered the exit process for many. During periods of restricted travel, most notably the nearly three-year period between the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and September 1965, illegal travel often involved sneaking onto US territory at Guantanamo Naval Base or risking hazardous ninety-mile voyages to Florida on makeshift rafts. Organized exodus movements also occurred intermittently throughout the last half of the 20th century, including Operation Peter Pan and the Freedom Flights during the 1960s and 1970s, the Mariel Boatlift of 1980, and the flotilla, also known as the Balsero Crisis, in the 1990’s.

Responding to the fears of many Cuban parents concerning the safety of their children, Operation Peter Pan began in December 1960. A joint effort between North American churches and the Cuban government, the program succeeded in distributing 14,048 Cuban children under age seventeen throughout the United States in twenty-two months. The program’s coordinator, Monsignor Brian Walsh of Miami, recalled, “[w]e received them at the airport here. About half of them had a destination to go to...But the other half we put into care and put them into foster homes and schools and boarding schools all over the country.” Many of these children reunited with their parents during the Freedom Flights period. Approximately twenty percent of the
children, however, never saw their parents again.\textsuperscript{21}

Exile author Carlos Eire sarcastically recalled the events surrounding his departure during Operation Peter Pan:

I was one of the lucky ones. Fidel couldn’t obliterate me as he did all the other children, slicing off their heads ever so slowly and replacing them with fearful, slavish copies of his own...[My parents] hid me in the ruins and threw me out the window before Fidel’s militiamen could get to me. They threw me as far as they could, and so it was that I was driven into exile, along with my older brother. Threw me across the turquoise sea, all the way to our own Egypt, all the way to the United States, the vault of everlasting illusion.\textsuperscript{22}

Eire explained the plight of these children who had no choice in leaving their homeland. He admitted the urgency of his parents’ decision in attempting to protect their children. Yet he also acknowledged the existence of the exile myth concerning their stories. He calls the United States “the vault of everlasting illusion,” a reference to the stories perpetuated by former upper-and middle-class Cubans in the United States, like his parents, who idealize pre-Castro Cuba and refuse to acknowledge any positive impact of the revolutionary process.

Those unable to secure a flight, or a seat on a boat, to the United States chose more dangerous methods. Over the past fifty years, approximately 63,000 Cubans have entered the United States on makeshift rafts. An estimated 16,000 more did not survive the treacherous 90-mile voyage.\textsuperscript{23} A skilled worker recalled his efforts to flee Cuba with his family:

I have three children, two boys and one girl. They would not give us a passport although I tried three times. I tried three times to take them out in a small boat and I failed. I even bought a boat from a Lieutenant in the G-2 [Castro’s secret service] who then waited outside to catch us. Fortunately, a friend of mine, who
was a prisoner...warned us, so that I was able to keep from being caught until I finally built a boat and was able to escape with my two sons...I left my daughter and wife in Cuba because I was tormented and could not think clearly.24

Similar to Operation Pedro Pan, such exile stories often resulted in breaking up families. Others unable to gain visas or safe passage attempted to reach the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay to escape. Rolando, an exile who fought in the struggle against Batista and later spent eleven years in a revolutionary political prison, recalled, “[s]ince I could not get out legally, I planned to escape with three friends by swimming to the Guantanamo base.” He explained, “[i]f they [the government] catch you jumping the fence at Guantanamo, and they kill you, they bury you in the cemetery close to the base.”25 Yet Cubans determined to leave the island continued to risk their lives to escape.

In September 1965, the government of Cuba announced that they would allow Cubans to leave the island for the first time since the Cuban Missile Crisis.26 Cuba opened the port at Camarioca and soon thousands of boats entered the harbor from Miami to collect friends and family in a “chaotic flotilla exodus.”27 Historian Silvia Pedraza insisted that the boatlift “was the first time Fidel used the massive exodus of Cubans as a weapon in the conflict with the US.”28 Cuba opened the door for dissident Cubans to depart, leaving the United States to deal with the mess. Indeed, a State Department document from September 1965 indicated:

Castro’s offer to send to the US all disaffected Cubans— with or without relatives in the States— is probably a genuine attempt on his part to rid himself of social surplus, that is, unproductive elements, mostly elderly persons such as parents of younger people who have left earlier for the US.29
In order to impose some semblance of order in the exodus, the United States and Cuban governments soon organized the *Vuelos de Libertad* [Freedom Flights] between Varadero and Miami.

Lasting from December 1965 through April 1973, three thousand “freedom flights” brought 260,500 Cubans to the United States. The program allowed the exodus of a large number of disaffected Cubans, including members of the middle class anxious to join their children in the United States, but also working-class Cubans fed up with continued shortages and hardship on the island. The crisis provided the United States with a powerful propaganda image of freedom-loving Cubans fleeing a Communist nation, but also caused a domestic crisis with the massive influx of immigrants.

For the government of Cuba, however, the boatlift and airlift not only eliminated a large portion of the opposition, but also enabled them to acquire the properties and savings of those individuals.

**Impact of Exodus on Cuban Government**

Fidel Castro frequently spoke out against the exiles in his speeches, referring to them as *gusanos* and *vendepatrias*. In a September 1961 speech he said,

> If some more want to go to Miami, let them go to Miami! Each time that a boatload of parasites leaves—the Republic comes out ahead. What do you lose, working men and women? What do you lose, men and women who live in slums, who live in shacks, who live in poor sections of town? What do you lose when a parasite leaves? One less beefsteak eater, one less driver of a fancy car, one drinker less…and if he has a good apartment, that apartment will go to a family that has a lot of children.

The exiles provided the government with yet another common enemy of the revolution.
Castro could blame the economic embargo for the nation’s shortages and economic difficulties and point to the exiles as responsible for acts of sabotage against the progress of the revolution and the Cuban people. Additionally, the loss of these Cubans benefitted Cuban society as a whole, because it resulted in additional employment and housing opportunities, fewer mouths to feed, and the elimination of those elements of society not integrated in the revolution and therefore not contributing to the progress of Cuban society. A November 1965 CIA document agreed that, by allowing the exodus, “[Castro] is further strengthening the Communist regime in Cuba by permitting malcontents and socially non-productive elements to depart.”

The exodus had both positive and negative repercussions throughout Cuba. Pérez referred to the exodus as “the exportation of the counterrevolution.” Indeed, the removal of internal opposition strengthened the Cuban government. However, the loss of a majority of the country’s university-educated population and professionals also harmed the Cuban economy. Román de la Campa explained, “[b]y 1960, a vast percentage of refugees were doctors, lawyers, journalists, businessmen, bankers and engineers...Their sudden exit from Cuban society has played a most significant role in that nation’s subsequent history.” Cuba had new medical clinics and new schools, but few doctors and teachers to staff them at first.

Fichu Menocal criticized those who left, calling them selfish and suggesting they were not true Cubans. Though her family also lost property and status after the
revolution, she insisted:

I still think a person has a duty toward their country...For the first time we are trying honestly to do something, to come out of the bottom of the pit where we were. We were just the dumping ground of the Americans. Where they could come here for prostitution and gambling and dope and horse-racing. Why not stay here and give your best to your country where you belong? And after all, we were the privileged ones, the ones that really got a good education...This nation needed us. They needed me. I think I am still needed here.36

Unlike the middle-class movements in Guatemala and Costa Rica in the 1940s that promoted a restructuring of society for the benefit of the entire nation, the self-serving motivations of the Cuban middle class left little room for compromise. Fidel had promised them security and political influence in a new Cuba, and they refused to let go of those promises. Though the revolutionary reforms improved the lives of a majority of their countrymen, the middle class acknowledged only betrayal. They promoted a myth of a beautiful and utopian pre-1959 Cuba that had been pervaded by the Marxists and must be overthrown. While nationalists like Menocal compromised their own status for the good of their fellow Cubans, others looked to the United States to bring an end to the evil Castro regime that “betrayed” their revolution and the Cuban people.


8 It is important to note that, beginning in the mid-1960s, Cubans from the lower classes also left for the United States. The 1960s exodus was not exclusively one of the middle class. Pedraza, 81, 120.


10 While the research and interviews conducted in the late 1960s by Fagen and Brody covers only the initial groups of exiles, their views remain applicable to the Cuban exile experience as a whole, especially concerning motives for exodus. Richard Fagen, et al., Cubans in Exile: Disaffection and the Revolution (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), 76.

11 “Major Cuban Exile Organizations,” Fact Sheet, 1962, Cuban Missile Crisis Collection, DNSA.

12 Machado, 61.


15 Román de la Campa, Cuba on My Mind: Journeys to a Severed Nation (New York: Verso, 2000), 22.

16 Pérez, 246.


18 For information on the Balseros see:
Josep MaDomenech and Carles Bosch, Directors, Balseros (Bausan Films, 2003).

19 Conde, 2.


24 Fagen, 80.


27 Pedraza, 4.

28 Pedraza, 121.


30 Lars Schoultz, That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 238.

31 Pedraza, 121.

32 Fagen, 119.
33 Office of Current Intelligence, CIA, “Castro’s Aims Regarding the Future of US-Cuban Relations,” 22 November 1965, NARA II.

34 Pérez, 247.

35 de la Campa, 27.

36 Geldof, 18.
Chapter 7:
The United States and the Exiles:
Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson use Miami as Cold War Propaganda

Following the termination of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States in January 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower commented on the recent influx of Cuban exiles in the United States:

This latest exodus of persons fleeing from communist oppression is the first time in many years in which our nation has become the country of first asylum for any such number of refugees. To grant such asylum is in accordance with the long-standing traditions of the United States. Our people opened their homes and hearts to the Hungarian refugees four years ago. I am sure we will do no less for these distressed Cubans.1

Indeed, a May 1961 policy paper confirmed, “no Cuban has been returned to Cuba against his will since January 1959.”2 The statements reveal a now decades-long legacy of United States’ special treatment of Cuban immigrants. Often, however, this special treatment owed more to political motives than humanitarian concerns. Fidel Castro accused Eisenhower of using the counterrevolutionaries to wage their own war against the Cuban revolution: “Imperialism became the leader of the counterrevolution and today we find ourselves engaged in a struggle in which the counterrevolution enjoys the full support of this mighty empire.”3

Particularly during the presidencies of Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy, overthrowing the Castro government became a priority. Yet their strategies often failed due to a combination of US arrogance and poor intelligence and Castro’s popularity at
home. Castro explained in a June 1976 speech, “[i]n the beginning, [the US] underestimated our revolution. Possibly, they thought it would be easy to eliminate it as in other times they had eliminated other revolutions; for example, as they eliminated the revolution in Guatemala.” Indeed, early actions by US policy makers suggest they believed the Cuban revolution would be easily suppressed. On many occasions, the methods of US Administrations involved minimal concern for the humanitarian implications of their policies. Louis A. Pérez explained that, since 1959, “the United States pursued the overthrow of the Cuban government with a single-minded purposefulness, through a combination of political isolation, military intervention, covert operations and economic sanctions.” He added, “[s]anctions were designed with malice of forethought, to make daily life in Cuba as difficult and desperate as possible.”

Throughout the 1960s, this tactic involved trade restrictions, termination of diplomatic relations, intimidation and propaganda campaigns. Perhaps the most significant tool in Washington’s propaganda arsenal was the Cuban exiles themselves.

Exile author Román de la Campa emphasized a principle cause of the United States’ support of the incoming middle-class exiles:

The sight of Cubans fleeing a socialist regime had considerable political value to a propaganda war against communism that was still raging in the early 1960s. What better lesson than the pictures of so many white, upwardly mobile Cuban refugees fleeing to the United States after leaving everything behind.

A Kennedy Administration policy paper on the exiles acknowledged the use of the exiles to promote anti-Castro, anti-communist Cold War propaganda: “The United States, through a program especially developed for the purpose, can capitalize on the
resources these exiles represent.”\textsuperscript{7} The exiles eagerly participated with the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations at first, confident they shared the common goal of overthrowing Castro and bringing a pro-US, democratic government to Cuba. Yet as conditions worsened after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, exiles became embittered. Pedro Pan exile Silvia Wilhelm admitted, “I think at the end of the day we were pawns between political powers, two countries.”\textsuperscript{8}

Ultimately, as the focus on Cuba shifted during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, so too did the focus of the exiles. Able to achieve permanent residency and ultimately full citizenship after the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act, the community—with the exception of remaining militant anti-Castro groups—focused instead on promoting their rights and concerns as Cuban Americans. Today, the former exiles constitute a significant political force in a powerful electoral swing state.

Historians debate the significance of the willingness of the United States to aid these exiles, regardless of the political motives. Jules Benjamin and Pérez argue that the ties of the privileged classes of Cuban society to the United States and the willingness of the US government to accept the exiles into the country essentially “pulled” them into exile while they waited for the United States to save them and overthrow Castro.\textsuperscript{9} While the availability of US aid certainly facilitated the exodus, this argument fails to support the shocking number of exiles who left their lives on the island and all of their possessions in such a short period. Silvia Pedraza stresses that, “the key idea necessary to understand the refugee in flight is that of the ‘push’ rather than the ‘pull’ that
prompts people to migrate.” Regardless of internal disagreements or attractive prospects elsewhere, the study of the mass exodus of middle-class Cubans in the 1960s must focus primarily on “push” factors created when Castro shifted the focus of the revolution, threatened their livelihoods, families, and privacy, alienating them from society. “Pull” factors associated with US policy, while important, could not have facilitated the exodus independent from these internal “push” factors.

**Dwight D. Eisenhower, January 1959-January 1961**

**Policy**

The Eisenhower Administration quickly sensed the revolutionary Cuban government would not allow a continuation of the status quo between Cuba and the United States. Unwilling to lose such a valuable “ally,” the Administration began examining options to eliminate the current government and replace it with a more amenable political body. According to Assistant Secretary of State Roy Rubottom, in mid-1959, “the Department decided, along with [the] CIA, that it would be impossible to carry on friendly relations with the Castro government in Cuba and that, as a consequence, we should devise means to help bring about his overthrow and replacement by a government friendly to the United States.” This process began with covert propaganda missions and eventual planning of the Bay of Pigs invasion as John F. Kennedy entered the White House in 1961. In October 1959, US planes flew over Havana, dropping anti-Castro leaflets and startling residents. Cuban exile Major Pedro Luis Díaz Lanz, with the support of the Eisenhower Administration, piloted one of
Cooperation between the United States government and the Cuban exiles had begun.

The administration carried out such propaganda efforts hoping to foment internal support for the opposition. The CIA continued similar campaigns during the Kennedy years with leaflets and broadcasts on the exile-staffed Voice of America radio program. In preparation for the Bay of Pigs invasion, for example, a massive propaganda effort took place to boost the morale of anti-Castro forces and intimidate supporters. An undated Eisenhower Administration document explained the strategy, “[t]he two primary propaganda mechanisms used during the Action Phase will be radio and leaflet dispersion. However, preparations have been made to utilize captured media, such as newspapers and printing facilities.” Exile author Eduardo Machado recalls planes during the Bay of Pigs invasion that dropped “parcels of anti-Castro propaganda, leaflets to fuel the fire.” He added, “[e]ven more bizarre than the appearance of the flyers was that my family agreed with their message: Get Fidel out of power.” Many Cubans agreed with the messages, yet the propaganda campaigns failed. The quality of Castro’s intelligence reports surpassed those of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. Castro jailed many Cuban counterrevolutionaries prior to the attack and easily defeated the invaders on April 17. With the exception of a small unit of guerilla opposition in the Escambray Mountains, most who opposed Castro entered exile after the Bay of Pigs, leaving the United States to overthrow a Cuban leader with few internal opponents.
The United States routinely failed to appreciate the level of internal support for the revolution. A January 1960 telegram from Ambassador Philip Bonsal in Havana to Secretary of State Christian Herter said, “[t]he United States government has confidence in the ability of the Cuban people to recognize and defeat the intrigues of international communism aimed at destroying the traditional and mutually beneficial friendship between the Cuban and American people.”\(^\text{18}\) This strategy attracted the disaffected middle-class Cubans disturbed by undemocratic tendencies, potential communist influence within the revolutionary government, and loss of privilege in Cuban society. However, it enraged the majority of Cubans for whom the Cuba-US relationship had never been mutually beneficial, and who maintained overwhelming support for the revolutionary government and reforms. Such strategies ultimately provided Castro with his own anti-Yankee propaganda, increasing the strong nationalism growing among revolutionary Cubans. In January 1961, Castro insisted, “[s]urely, without the efforts of imperialism against our revolution, our country would have no problems.” \(^\text{19}\)

In response to hardships in revolutionary Cuba, Castro could simply blame the United States. The embargo and the counterrevolution provided him with the ultimate scapegoat.

Eisenhower Administration policy decisions considered the possibility of a strong Cuban-Soviet alliance. As Castro did not publicly admit to the socialist foundation of the revolution until after the Bay of Pigs, the fears of the Eisenhower Administration were primarily speculative. Yet historian Cole Blasier insisted “US
perceptions of Castro’s relations with the Soviet Union were essentially correct . . . By the time Eisenhower left office, Castro had become dependent on the USSR as a market for Cuban sugar and a source of fuel oil and arms.” He explained that, while minimal Cuban-Soviet ties existed in early 1960, the potential for such an alliance posed a real threat. This threat prompted Eisenhower’s decision in March 1960 to begin planning for an armed invasion by counterrevolutionaries: Cuban exiles.

**Cooperation with Exiles**

Former Cuban elites and Batistianos opposed to the revolutionary government rushed to the United States in the early stages of the revolution. In August 1960, eighteen months after the victory of the revolution, United States Representative and Chairman of the House Immigration Subcommittee Francis Walter (D, Pa.) introduced a bill “designed to make it easier for dissatisfied Cubans to come to the United States.” President Eisenhower supported facilitating the entry of Cubans as well. Members of the Eisenhower Administration consulted often with these exiles. They quickly understood the value of using disaffected Cubans to overthrow the unacceptable—by US and privileged Cuban standards—revolutionary government.

In March 1960, Charles Torrey of the State Department met with Harry Goodfriend and various exiles to discuss Goodfriend’s proposed formation of an organization to depose Castro. While Torrey insisted, “the United States will not support any exile group aimed at the overthrow of another government,” (at least publicly) the meeting indicated the level of participation of the exiles within a year of
the revolutionary victory. The conversation also yielded a significant conclusion, as Goodfriend expressed his confidence that any exile movement led by former Batistianos would never gain the support of the Cuban people.22

Former Castro supporters like Díaz Lanz and the middle class therefore proved invaluable resources in the efforts of the United States against the government of Cuba. To gain support from these groups, the Eisenhower Administration began in April 1960 suggesting the idea that Castro had betrayed the ideals of the Cuban revolution.23 The “betrayal theory” as promoted by Washington encouraged Cubans to recognize the failures of the Cuban government and join the United States in an effort to finally bring democracy to Cuba. The strategy continued to dominate United States rhetoric throughout the remainder of the 1960s.

**John F. Kennedy, January 1961- November 1963**

**Policy**

During the 1960 Presidential campaigns, John F. Kennedy frequently chastised Vice President Richard Nixon for the Republican administration’s failure to prevent the takeover of an unfriendly regime ninety miles from US soil. Historian Lars Schoultz explained, “[i]n this election year, Cuba was about to become for the Republicans what the loss of China had been for the Democrats eight years earlier—a political albatross.”24 Aware of the planned invasion of counterrevolutionaries but confident Nixon would not betray the covert operation, Kennedy stressed to the voters the failure of Nixon and Eisenhower to find a solution to the Cuba problem. His successful
approach against the Republicans handed the Cuba problem over to a young Democratic administration.

Upon entering office in January 1961, Kennedy had little choice but to continue anti-Castro activities. Economic and diplomatic relations had been broken, tens of thousands of exiles populated North American soil, and a covert exile-led invasion plan was well under way. The Kennedy Administration led anti-Castro exile activities, allowed the formation of the farcical CIA Operation Mongoose, plotted to assassinate Castro,25 and attempted to gain favor among other Latin American countries with the 

*Alianza para el Progreso* [Alliance for Progress.]*26*

The Alliance for Progress remains among the most lasting—though not necessarily positive—legacies of Kennedy's Latin America policy. The President introduced the program in March 1961, explaining:

> We propose to complete the Revolution of the Americas, to build a hemisphere where all men can hope for a suitable standard of living, and all can live out their lives in dignity and freedom. To achieve this goal political freedom must be accompanied by social change. For unless necessary social reform, including tax and land reform, are freely made...our alliance, our revolution, our dream, our freedom will fail. Let us once again transform the American continent into a vast crucible of revolutionary ideas and efforts.27

Testimonials of supporters of the revolution in Cuba insisted their government's revolutionary reforms enacted such similar positive changes in Cuban society. In the same speech, Kennedy added to the irony of his aid to the exiles, saying, “[t]hose who possess wealth and power in poor nations must accept their own responsibilities. They must lead the fight for those basic reforms which alone can preserve the fabric of their
societies. Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.” Yet for the exiles, who refused to acknowledge any positive impact of the revolution on Cuba or the link between their exodus and the subsequent course of the revolution, the Alliance sounded promising.

Kennedy hoped to gain support against Castro throughout the hemisphere with the program, and also to prevent the export of socialist revolution to Latin American nations susceptible to such events due to poor internal conditions. The alliance failed due primarily to lack of oversight and intelligence on the part of the Kennedy Administration. The program became known as the Alianza sin Progreso [Alliance without Progress] throughout Latin America.

Seen frequently in United States documents and intelligence reports from this period, the failure of each US Administration to understand the internal situation in Cuba resulted in unsuccessful and often embarrassing policy decisions like the Alliance for Progress and actions such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco. A month after the invasion, Castro mentioned the intelligence failures in Washington. Referring specifically to the Pentagon and CIA Director Allen Dulles, he told a group of small farmers in Havana, “[t]hose who were thought intelligent and alert...know less than the backwoodsmen who was considered an illiterate.” Kennedy acknowledged the inadequacies of US intelligence on Cuba. A November 1961 presidential memorandum admitted, “[w]e know too little about the real situation inside Cuba, although we are taking energetic steps to learn more.” It appears the CIA knew more than Kennedy leading into the
Bay of Pigs invasion. As early as November 1960 architects of the attack concluded it would not be as successful as initially thought due to lack of popular unrest on the island. Yet it is likely they never shared this information with the President.\(^{32}\)

**Cooperation with Exiles**

While the majority of direct action against Castro during this period remained covert, the Administration openly and overtly supported the exiles.\(^{33}\) Most significantly, the administration supported the formation and activities of the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC), an exile organization led by Miró Cardona. An April 1962 Special Group [Operation Mongoose] report explained, “the US desires the CRC to be...a central refugee organization with mainly non-political goals, or a central organization of Cuban political-military actionists for liberating their homeland.”\(^{34}\) Since the United States could not directly intervene in Cuba without violating international law, the use of these exile groups proved an excellent alternative.

While denying the role of the United States government in exile activities like the Bay of Pigs, the Administration voiced its full support of such events. Expressing his support of anti-Castro exiles, President Kennedy wrote Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961:

> While refraining from military intervention in Cuba, the people of the United States do not conceal their admiration for Cuban patriots who wish to see a democratic system in an independent Cuba. The United States government can take no effort to stifle the spirit of liberty.\(^{35}\)

The following week, the *New York Times* published a statement released by the Cuban Revolutionary Council:
The heroes who confronted Castro’s tyranny, thereby affirming their status of free men—free men without fear and without blemish—summon the people of Cuba to continue the great enterprise without faintheartedness, without faltering. To say that those men were mercenaries is an unconscionable infamy.

They are our sons, our brothers, our companions in battle; professional people, students, workers, farmers; members of the Rebel forces guided solely by the Redemptive Idea. They, who symbolize the fatherland itself, a fatherland today enslaved by a foreign master, demand of all believers in liberty the irrevocable decision to return, to continue fighting without respite, until our independence has been reconquered...

We make a fervent appeal to all the men and women of this hemisphere who believe in liberty and social progress to join us and give to us the warmth of their sympathy and backing. The necessary war that we undertake for the liberty and progress of Cuba forms an organic part of the struggle for the liberty and progress of the people.\textsuperscript{36}

The CRC provided Kennedy with the ultimate propaganda weapon: a group of Cubans dedicated to the same principles and aims as the United States government.

Regardless of the shared goal of the exiles and the Administration, however, the exiles’ admiration for the Kennedy Administration diminished after the Bay of Pigs.

Cuban-American Fran McClure recalled,

\textit{Playa Girón was awful. I remember wondering why my beloved John Kennedy didn’t send the promised support for the Cubans...My uncle was captured and sent to prison. He came back looking like a concentration camp victim. Many Cubans of that generation have no love for JFK.}\textsuperscript{37}

Though many exiles resented Kennedy for failing to follow through on his promises to provide air and ground support for Brigade 2506\textsuperscript{38}, the rhetoric of the exile organizations continued to support his cause nonetheless.

As the refugee numbers increased during the Kennedy Administration, a policy paper concluded, “our only realistic policy with regard to the Cuban exiles is to scatter
them throughout the United States and integrate them within the US society in the shortest possible time so that they do not constitute a refugee problem.”  

This suggests the Kennedy Administration had considered the possibility of long-term residence for many of these exiles, yet they continued to allow the Cubans entry. Unfortunately, a majority of the exiles refused to leave the comforts of the exile enclaves in New York and Miami, encumbering government efforts to alleviate the cultural and economic shock of the exile influx. 

The numbers of Cuban refugees entering the United States skyrocketed between 1960 and 1962. By November 1960 between thirty and forty thousand Cuban exiles had entered the United States since the revolution. To accommodate, monitor, process, and possibly relocate these Cubans, President Eisenhower had appointed New York lawyer Tracy Voorhees refugee coordinator.  

Three months later, President Kennedy had approved the formation of the Emergency Cuban Relief Program, directed by Dillon Meyer working in cooperation with Abraham Ribicoff, Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The program grew rapidly throughout the Kennedy Administration, ultimately assisting tens of thousands of exiles by the termination of the Cuban Refugee Program in 1974.  

The Cuban Refugee Program enabled the United States to monitor the number of exiles entering Miami and recruit men for the opposition. The increasing numbers of middle-class professionals entering exile strengthened the leadership capabilities of the exile groups. The program also, particularly in the first years, provided exiles with
valuable benefits. The program included financial aid, healthcare, social services, education and training for adults and children, resettlement and job placement and childcare for those who registered at the center in Miami. The estimated cost for 1961 totaled $23,915,000. Between 1961 and 1972, the government spent $727 million on the program.

Beginning in late 1961, US efforts to orchestrate the overthrow of the Cuban government led to the formation of Operation Mongoose. An often-outrageous CIA-led effort—with frequent assistance from government, military, and mafia counterparts—the operation involved propaganda campaigns and acts of sabotage throughout the island nation. Plots to overthrow Castro ranged from outright assassination attempts like poisoned cigars to psychological intimidation such as formulating a powder that would cause Fidel’s beard to fall off.

In August 1962, the Special Group—leaders of Operation Mongoose—launched the “Gusano Libre” campaign, a propaganda effort dedicated to gaining internal support for the overthrow of Castro. The cartoons reveal united counterrevolutionaries, depicted as worms, working together to overthrow Castro and restore the republic. Task force leader William Harvey explained the campaign: “The term ‘Gusano’ was first applied by Fidel Castro to counter-revolutionaries. Since then it has been used proudly as a symbol by the opposition to the Castro/Communist regime in Cuba.” Using the gusano symbol as propaganda, the CIA hoped to exploit the case of the exiles to attack the Castro regime using media and leaflet drops.
The goal of these programs was to "bring about a degree of disorganization, uncertainty and discontent in Cuba which will predispose elements in the military and other power centers of the regime to overthrow [Castro]."\textsuperscript{48} After countless unsuccessful assassination attempts and sabotage efforts (some of which were successful), the program was ultimately abandoned. Mongoose dwindled after the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, as Schoultz insisted, “almost everyone was having second thoughts about reckless behavior.”\textsuperscript{49} However, efforts to overthrow Castro continued (and, indeed, continue to this day) among several groups of CIA-trained Cuban exiles.

**Lyndon B. Johnson, November 1963-January 1969**

**Policy**

In 1963, "LBJ had little time for Cuba."\textsuperscript{50} Entering office after the November assassination of President Kennedy, Johnson was eager to reach a solution to the Castro problem and dedicate more attention to domestic problems such as poverty and Civil Rights (and later, Vietnam and the Dominican Republic). However, he expressed his desire to avoid another Bay of Pigs fiasco, suggesting the administration explore a variety of solutions.\textsuperscript{51}

Covert activities by the CIA continued during the early years of the Johnson Administration. In January 1964, the covert action program involved intelligence collection, propaganda and low-risk sabotage, economic denial actions, exploitation of internal disaffection, general sabotage and harassment, and supporting anti-Castro exile
Yet in February 1964, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy urged the President to consider less hostile methods, insisting, “[t]he chances are very good that we will still be living with Castro for some time now, we might just as well get used to the idea.”\textsuperscript{53} The President called an end to these unsuccessful CIA activities in April 1964, instead seeking other avenues in dealing with Cuba and Cubans.\textsuperscript{54}

In May 1965, President Johnson ordered 20,000 US troops to invade the Dominican Republic, violating the OAS non-intervention policy, and the fundamental tenents of the Good Neighbor Policy and the Alliance for Progress. Johnson said, “[t]he American nations cannot, must not, and will not permit the establishment of another communist government in the Western Hemisphere.”\textsuperscript{55} While resigned to the possible permanence of the Castro regime, Johnson refused to allow another communist government in his back yard.

\textbf{Cooperation with Exiles}

In mid-1964, President Johnson distanced himself from any direct policies involving the government of Cuba after arranging to have the OAS terminate bilateral diplomatic and consular relations, trade, and sea transportation with the island nation.\textsuperscript{56} Yet in September 1965, Castro provoked Johnson to action by opening Cuban borders for those who wanted to leave. Days later, President Johnson echoed Eisenhower's sentiments of January 1961 saying, “I declare to the people of Cuba that those who seek refuge here will find it. The dedication of America to our traditions as an asylum for the oppressed will be upheld.”\textsuperscript{57} The Camarioca boatlift and “Freedom
Flights” began shortly thereafter. To accommodate the overwhelming number of refugees, the United States enacted the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act, ultimately granting permanent residency to Cubans after one year in the United States.\textsuperscript{58} The act further engrained preferential treatment of Cubans in United States immigration policy, but also contributed to large communities of Cuban-Americans who later became a powerful political force in the influential state of Florida.

**Exile Feelings Toward North American Hosts**

Early exile groups from the upper classes entered the United States between 1959 and 1961 to escape the uncertainty of the revolutionary government. They expected the United States to quickly return their nation to business as usual, and cooperated with the Eisenhower Administration in the Bay of Pigs project. As more middle-class Cubans entered exile after the invasion failed, the activities of the exiles increased. Hundreds of opposition groups emerged, some anti-Castro, some anti-communist, some both anti-Castro and anti-Batista, all ultimately desiring the rapid overthrow of the government of Cuba and a return to their homes. By the mid-1960s, however, this began to change. Cuban exile communities contained elements of upper, middle and lower-class Cuban society. The likely permanence of both the Castro government and their stay in the United States became more obvious.

Certain exile stories lend validation to the insistence that some fled Cuba to help liberate their fellow Cubans, especially the countless political prisoners. A former sales
supervisor who left the island to join the opposition in the United States lamented in a mid-1960s interview:

Today there are moments when it pains me not to have perished in the struggle against Fidel because I came [to the United States] in search of help to overthrow him and find myself powerless to do anything for the millions of enslaved prisoners of my country. I feel they have been abandoned and disgraced and their miseries exploited just for purposes of anti-Castro propaganda.59

Indeed, by the late 1960s, after a decade of revolution, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and crises in Southeast Asia diverted Washington's attention, the United States lost much of the initial anti-Castro fervor. A feeling of helplessness and frustration led many exiles to speak out against United States policy. It also contributed to the formation of a powerful political consciousness among the exiles in Florida.

“US Policy Toward Cuban Exiles,” 3 May 1961. Cuban Missile Crisis Collection, DNSA.


“US Policy Toward Cuban Exiles,” 3 May 1961. Cuban Missile Crisis Collection, DNSA.


611.37/6-2760, RG 59. “US Policies Toward Cuba,” Assistant Secretary of State R. Rubottom to Secretary Christian Herter. 27 June 1960. NARA II.


611.37/1-1960, RG 59. Telegram 1687. Ambassador Philip Bonsal to Secretary Herter. 19 January 1960. NARA II.


“Bill Would Aid Cubans,” New York Times, 24 August 1960, 14. The article claims 4,000 Cubans had entered the United States at that point since the revolution, though the accuracy of the statistic is questionable since the Cuban Refugee Centers were not yet operational to process incoming exiles.


Lars Schoultz, That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 110.

For a detailed (141 pp) report on Asassination attempts see: CIA: Report on Plots to Assassinate Fidel Castro. 23 March 1967. Folder 52, JFK Files, NARA II.

Blasier, 242.


McGeorge Bundy to Ribicoff and CIA Director. 25 April 1961. Cuban Missile Crisis Collection, DNSA.

“Operation Mongoose, 13-19 April,” Brigadier General Lansdale to Special Group, 19 April 1962, Cuban Missile Crisis Collection, DNSA.

737.00/4-1861, RG 59. John F. Kennedy to Nikita Krushchev, 18 April 1961. NARA II.


Author Interview with Fran McClure. Conducted via Email. 31 October 2009.

The group of over 1,100 CIA-trained Cuban exiles who invaded Cuba on 16 April 1961. They remained imprisoned by the Castro government until Christmas 1962. Bay of Pigs: 40 Years After, Chronology. NSA.

“US Policy Toward Cuban Exiles,” 3 May 1961, Cuban Missile Crisis Collection, DNSA.

737.00/11-160, RG 59. “Cuban Refugees in Florida,” Memo of Conversation. 1 November 1960. NARA II.

Pedraza, 5.

“US Policy Toward Cuban Exiles,” 3 May 1961. Cuban Missile Crisis Collection, DNSA.

“Revised Cuban Refugee Program,” 29 April 1961. Presidential Directives Collection, DNSA.


Members of the US mafia frequently offered their services to members of the United States government as well as Trujillo in assassinating Fidel Castro.
For examples of “Gusano Libre” propaganda leaflets and cartoons see APPENDIX.


“Cuba—Talking Points,” Department of State, 2 December 1963, Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.

Schoultz, 187.

Schoultz, 217.

Schoultz, 214-216.


Schoultz, 219.


Schoultz, 228.


Schoultz, 239.

Epilogue:
Miami: Cuba’s Seventh Province

Today, Miami is synonymous with Cubans. Tourists and locals alike know of the annual *Calle Ocho Festival*, the old Cuban men drinking Cuban coffee in Máximo Gómez Domino Park, the large community of Cuban Americans in Hialeah. Yet this was not always the case. Before the diaspora of Cubans after the 1959 revolution, Miami was little more than a winter tourist spot, not the bustling center of tourism, enterprise and culture it has become. Fran McClure, whose father immigrated to the United States from Cuba in the 1940s, explained, “My family lived in [New York City] until 1960, then moved to Miami. In the 1940s, Miami was a sleepy little town with very few Hispanics. Tampa had a Cuban population, but [New York] was the immigration capital.”¹ In a 1979 article, sociologist Morton Winsberg explained,

> Although direct emigration from Cuba ceased in 1973, movement of Cubans to Miami from elsewhere in the United States, a growing emigration from other Latin American nations, and higher than city average birth rates among the Latin Americans already resident in the county, have meant that the population continues to increase. In 1974, it was estimated that 430,385 Latins were living in Dade County, 30 percent of the population.²

The contributions of the Cuban presence in developing the Miami area may not be overlooked, nor can the experiences of that same community since their arrival in the United States.

Since the outset of the revolution in 1959, Cubans hoping to escape the uncertainties or hardships of revolutionary Cuba have come to the United States for
personal, political and economic reasons. Many of the exiles chose to remain in Miami, while others ventured to Tampa, Florida, Union City, New Jersey, New York, and Chicago, among others. The high concentration of Cubans in Miami-Dade County facilitated the development of a virtual second Cuba in the city, which soon became known as “Cuba’s seventh province.” Winsberg explained, “[t]ypical of ethnic minorities who have recently arrived in United States cities, the Miami Latin population was highly centralized; 70 percent lived within a 3 mile semi-circle on the west side of the city’s CBD [central business district.]”

Over time, the Cuban-American community in Miami has become as deeply divided as the backgrounds from which the exiles came in Cuba. While many of the old cigar-smoking, coffee-drinking, domino-playing men on Calle Ocho continue to complain about Fidel and the revolution and communism, others have adopted a more moderate mindset. These divisions owe primarily to generational variances, political differences, and, of course, the exodus waves that brought Cubans to Miami. Many moderates belong to later waves such as the Marielitos or Balseros, or those who were children upon their arrival in the 1960s (Pedro Pan children). The angry old men, on the other hand, personify the remnants of the same politically frustrated middle class that felt so betrayed by Castro in the 1960s.

**Cuban Exiles Choose Miami**

As years passed, Cuban exiles chose Miami not only because of their familiarity with the area and the similar climate to their homeland, but, more simply, because that
was where the Cubans were. Cuban exile and then director of the Cuban American National Foundation René José Silva explained,

> The intensity of the Cuban exile community here [in Miami] in proportion to what surrounds it is much different to, say, the Italians in New York. Without sounding overly trite, there’s a majority of Cubans in this community. We’re the majority, not the minority, so, for good or for bad. And that means we’ll be able to maintain our culture and our language and so on.

By April 1963, the *New York Times* estimated that 105,000 Cuban exiles lived in the Metro Miami area. By fall 1968, that number rose to approximately 200,000. United States Census Records indicate 299,217 Cubans in Dade County in 1970, and 581,030 in 1980. Indeed, the Cuban population in Miami has risen steadily in the past fifty years, and the city is today the second most populous Cuban city in the world—second only to Havana. Exile author Román de la Campa insisted, “[t]he current world of Cuban exiles, perhaps closer to a Diaspora, embodies a rich mixture of classes and races in constant migratory flow, anchored by a permanent community in Miami.”

Though many wealthy Cubans had visited the United States frequently for decades, they experienced a drastic change in their status as refugees rather than tourists after the revolution. Román de la Campa explained, “it was a totally different Miami from the one we had experienced as tourists three years earlier.” Many suffered cultural and social shocks and humiliation as a result. Carlos Eire recalled his transition, “[i]t would take only one brief plane ride to turn me from a white boy into a spic. And I’m reminded of it every time I have to fill out a form that lists ‘Hispanic’ as a race distinct from ‘white’ or ‘Caucasian.’” This description reveals not only the racism
in the 1960s United States— racism toward not only minorities present in Cuba like blacks and Chinese, but also Latinos— but also the inherent racism of Cuba’s privileged classes, who traditionally viewed themselves as racially as well as socially superior, and regrettably learned this was not the case in the United States.

Immigration racism manifested in the early waves of the Cuban exodus, as seen in the journey of the Afro-Cuban Foster family in 1962. “Pablo Foster recalls that upon arrival in Miami Cubans were segregated according to race. [His] family made its way up to the Bronx, where they spent the first five years in a very rough neighborhood.”

Yet in Miami, the labeling of Cubans of all races as ethnically Hispanic contributed to the later unity among members of the exile community, as they all found themselves viewed as brown people by white North Americans. As a result, the necessity of maintaining *cubanidad* [Cuban-ness] within the community became a crucial aspect of the development of the community in exile.

**Development of a Cuban American Community**

Throughout the 1970s, Cubans worked to create a cohesive community in Miami. The efforts of these exiles focused on economic development within the community, but also on maintaining *cubanidad*, essential aspects of their culture they refused to abandon. Román de la Campa described,

> Many aspects of the Old Cuba were reconstructed— not just restaurants but schools, businesses, law firms, medical practices, clubs, drugstores, bakeries and funeral homes. The city took on the air of an edited replica of Cuba, or Havana, in many respects, built with the conviction that copies can replace originals.

In this replica of Cuba, *New York Times* journalist Milton Bracker insisted, “the Cubans
keep their lives as intensely Cuban as they can. Patriotism always thrives.”

Cubans continued to embrace their cubanidad throughout the 20th century in Miami—while adopting the occasional North American tradition like Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. Román de la Campa emphasized the continuation of this phenomenon through the 1990s: “[Andy] Garcia and [Gloria] Estefan prove that Miami can breed a very strong sense of Cuban nationalism through a combination of nostalgia and refusal.”

For those Cubans from the early waves of the exodus, this meant nostalgia for the fictional idyllic pre-1959 Cuba and refusal to acknowledge any benefits of the revolutionary reforms or their own responsibility in legitimizing and prolonging the Cuban revolution.

Due to the large percentage of upper- and middle-class Cubans in the initial waves of the exodus, it is not surprising that economic development in the exile community occurred relatively quickly. Upon reaching the United States, middle-class professionals who in Cuba worked as doctors or lawyers found themselves working in hotels and restaurants. Privileged Cuban ladies like Carlos Eire’s mother, who had never worked a day in their lives, found work in factories or bakeries, wherever they could. These ladies faced such changes whether they left Cuba or stayed to support the revolution. Fichu Menocal worked as a typist in the National Library after the revolution, but explained, “I was not really trained to work. I was trained to be a very nice hostess. I was a cultured girl with a lot of social trimmings that would come in very handy anywhere else but in Revolutionary Cuba.”

By the end of the 1960s, however, a
shift occurred in Miami. Fran McClure described the process:

[The exiles] were very hard workers. Professionals didn’t have a problem taking a job as a dishwasher because it was a job and they could support their family. As they prospered, they helped out the new ones—so the guy who started off as a dishwasher might have opened up a restaurant and he’d hire other Cubans.21

The exiles worked to regain their social and economic status within the Cuban community in exile. A September 1968 New York Times article suggested five thousand Cuban businesses operated in Miami.22 Referring to the economic development in the city over the decades, exile María Cristina Herrera insisted, “[a]lthough the Cuban Refugee Program allocated millions of dollars to initially help the Cubans, the Cubans have more than repaid those millions through taxes and through the development of the area.”23

A Community Divided

A moderate faction of the exile community emerged as early as the mid-1960s, as many came to accept the permanence of Castro and the revolution. In a June 1976 speech, Fidel Castro acknowledged the disappearance of the once widespread and active counterrevolution:

Today, the counterrevolution is manifested abroad. There are still some remnants of worms who one day dreamed about destroying the revolution, because if we are to tell the truth, most of those who at one time committed the crime and treason of leaving their homeland now have no hope of crushing the revolution.24

Exile testimonials also explain the disappearance of the militant counterrevolution—with the exception of remnants of the CIA-trained exile opposition that continued terrorist activities throughout the 1960s and 1970s. María Cristina Herrera, formerly
an upper middle-class Santiaguera [from Santiago de Cuba], recalled,

I came to Miami in September 1961 thoroughly committed to the overthrow of the Cuban government as a militant member of the underground, which I had been for a year before. We struggled here for the better part of two years, and in the summer of 1963 I came to the realization that militant counterrevolutionary activity was going nowhere and had no future.25

With counterrevolutionary plotting abandoned, Cubans were able to focus on the development on a politically and economically active community in Miami. Yet remaining radical counterrevolutionaries resented the complacency of their fellow exiles, creating a rift even among exiles from the same exodus waves and similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Additional divisions in the community existed as different exile waves brought different societal groups together in Cuban Miami. Fran McClure explained the shift that occurred with the 1980 Mariel Boatlift:

It was different with the Marielitos- many of them were out of Castro’s jails and mental hospitals— the crime rate in Miami soared. Many didn’t seem to have the same work ethic as the first wave and the established community resented it— they were giving them a bad name in some minds. Those who would take menial jobs would often do them for less money putting Americans out of work. It created a great deal of tension between the Cuban and African American communities.

For two decades, exiles from Cuba’s privileged classes had struggled to distinguish their community from other Hispanics—or any racial, immigrant stereotype— in the eyes of their white North American neighbors. The arrival of the Marielitos, many of whom were Afro-Cuban, and particularly the later arrival of the balseros, threatened these developments.26 They also contributed to the diversity and development of Cuban
culture in Miami, as they had lived in Cuba under the revolution for decades, unlike the already established exiles.27

Finally, a distinct generation gap exists within the Cuban American community—not only between first and second generations, but between those who were adults upon entering exile in the 1960s and those, like the Pedro Pan children, who did not personally make the choice to leave their homes. In Achy Obejas’s novel Memory Mambo, Juanita Casas laments,

I realized that I’d left Cuba too young to remember anything but snatches of color and scattered words, like the cutout letters in a ransom note. And what little I could put together had since been forged and painted over by the fervor, malice and nostalgia of others.28

Indeed, younger generations of Cubans struggle with the concept of memory and their own understanding of Cuba—a homeland many of them have never seen or do not remember—as tainted and biased memories of their parents and grandparents distort their understanding of the history. In addition to a minimal understanding or ambivalence concerning Cuba and Cuban history, many second and third generation Cuban Americans do not speak Spanish, further contributing to the divide in the Cuban community.29

Ultimately, the community upper- and middle-class Cubans worked to create in Miami throughout the 1960s and 1970s supports the argument that they left to protect their social, political and economic values. They created in exile a community that maintains Cuban culture and nationalism while upholding tenants of democracy,
capitalism, family values and privilege—those same values threatened by the revolutionary reforms of the 1960s. Most have by now abandoned all hope of one day returning to a post-Castro Cuba, and instead have resigned themselves to the permanence of their “exile.” The middle class essentially succeeded in their 1959 goals of achieving a political voice, though not in Cuba. The powerful political lobby of Cubans in South Florida continues to influence US politics and election rhetoric, as remnants of the anti-Castro exiles demand a continuation of the embargo and a hard line against the revolutionary government.
Interview by author with Fran McClure, via email, 31 October 2009.


For detailed map of dispersion of exile population see APPENDIX.

Winsberg, 408.


de la Campa, 47.


García, 83.

de la Campa, 73.


18 de la Campa, 9.

19 Eire, 195.

20 Geldof, 17.

21 Author Interview with Fran McClure, via email, 31 October 2009.


23 Geldof, 215.


25 Geldof, 204.


27 de la Campa, 95.

28 Achy Obejas, Memory Mambo (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1996), 133.

29 Diaz, 60.
REFERENCES

Archival Material
National Archives and Record Administration II. Washington, D.C.
Digital National Security Archive.

Film

E-mail Message
Fran McClure. E-mail Interview with Author. 31 October 2009.

Newspaper Articles
New York Times
Miami Herald
Miami News
Diario de la Marina, Havana
Hoy, Havana
Diario de las Americas
Online Databases

Department of International Law. Organization of American States. Washington, D.C.  
http://www.oas.org

Foreign Relations of the United States. www.state.gov

University of Texas at Austin. Castro Speech Database.  
http://www1.lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html

José Martí Thoughts. Florida International University. www.fiu.edu

Books


**Dissertation**

Journal Articles


APPENDICES
APPENDIX I: MAP OF CUBA
http://www.lib.utexas.edu
APPENDIX II: 1980 MAP OF EXILE POPULATION

http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/exile-community.htm

Cubans in the U. S.

Since Fidel Castro’s revolutionary seizure of power in 1959, more than a half million Cubans have landed on U.S. shores, yearly totals fluctuating with policies of both countries. Among those who came in 1980 were 125,000 refugees, some political prisoners, who left by boat from Cuba’s port of Mariel, bound for Miami. Since then Florida has been home to more than 50 percent of America’s Cuban population; Greater New York City about 20 percent.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.

"LA MUERTE DEL CABALLO"
"IN UNITY THERE IS STRENGTH"
"THE DEATH OF THE HORSE"
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX III: GUSANO LIBRE CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA
Lot 66 D 501, JFK Files, NARA II.
APPENDIX IV: FREEDOM FLIGHTS 1966
http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/exile-community.htm

For Further Information
Please Contact:

Church World Service
Immigration Services
475 Riverside Drive
New York 27, New York

National Catholic Welfare Conference
350 Fifth Avenue
New York 1, New York

United HIAS Service
425 Lafayette Street
New York 3, New York

International Rescue Committee
255 Park Avenue South
New York 10, New York

Cuban Refugee Center
501 N.E. First Avenue
Miami 32, Florida

A Cuban Refugee Resettlement Program
APPENDIX IV: FREEDOM FLIGHTS 1966
http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/exile-community.htm

The Cuban Refugee Problem

Over 100,000 of our Cuban neighbors have fled from their home island only 90 miles from Florida into the Miami area. The President of the United States has extended a warm hand of friendship and welcome to the Cuban people. By his direction, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare has established a Cuban Refugee Center in Miami which, in cooperation with the State of Florida, provides registration, material support, medical, educational and resettlement facilities to Cuban refugees.

Since the Miami area cannot absorb all of these Cuban neighbors, interstate resettlement is essential. Working in closest cooperation with our governmental authorities, Church World Service, the National Catholic Welfare conference, the United Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the International Rescue Committee are seeking resettlement opportunities across the country for Cuban refugees.

Despite the best energies of the voluntary agencies in resettling 500 Cuban refugees per week, the influx of more than 1,500 per week continues. Three refugees enter Florida each week for every one resettled.

A Dramatic Appeal

Your city can play a significant role in meeting the interstate resettlement challenge. If one thousand American cities and towns would ac-
cept responsibility for a thousand special charter flights of Cuban refugees, the resettle-
ment job could be accomplished. Each city would be asked to receive one charter flight of
about 25 refugee families.

All of these refugees, officially registered at the Federal Refugee Center in Miami, will have
received medical health clearance and will be entitled to undertake residence and employment
in your community.

A dramatic series of special Cuban refugee charter flights can solve the Cuban refugee
problem. There is an unparalleled opportunity for an American community to extend a hand
of friendship to desperate refugees who have sought sanctuary on our shores.

The Cuban refugee is a distinguished neighbor of education, sensitivity, accomplishment
and potential. Understandably there is shyness and reserve about accepting the challenges of
interstate resettlement. The charter flight provides the possibility for friends and inter-related
families to move together and to avoid the fear of loneliness.

How Does the Charter System Work?

The most important step in the Cuban refugee charter flight system is the formation of a
civic Cuban Refugee Resettlement Committee. The Committee, hopefully securing the cooperation of the mayor as chairman or honorary chairman, should include representatives from the major religious faiths, civic welfare agencies
and private citizens.

Such a committee could be formed in close cooperation with an International Institute, service club, religious agency or other public-spirited organization. This Committee would be
responsible for planning the reception of the charter flight and securing individual sponsors
for the refugees.

Sponsorship Responsibilities

These responsibilities are best met if the individual sponsor secures the co-sponsorship of a
church, synagogue, or local agency.

(1) Housing—It will probably be necessary for each family to live in some sort of temporary
quarters for a short time. After meeting the family, the sponsor should help to obtain
suitable permanent housing. It may be necessary for the sponsor to pay some rent until the
wage earner in the Cuban family receives the first pay check. Sponsors should help in furnishing
the apartment, making rent arrangements clear, etc.

(2) Employment—All possible contacts should be utilized to help the Cuban man and/or woman obtain a job. While Cuban refugees, in their eagerness to become self-sufficient,
will accept virtually any type of employment, the sponsor should undertake special care to
place the wage earner in employment commensurate with his training and abilities.

(3) Language Training—Cuban refugees will feel at home sooner if they learn English rapidly. The sponsor should offer guidance in enrolling for English classes. Also, help with English phrases used in shopping and transportation is a small matter which can be very important.

(4) Special Care—There may be times when the sponsor can offer outstanding service in directing their Cuban friends to medical or spiritual aid at a time of need. The greatest value of the individual sponsor is the friendship and interest he invests in the Cuban refugee's successful future.

The sponsor should not hesitate to avail himself of the energy and resources available to him through the local Cuban Refugee Resettlement Committee.

Our Challenge to You

YOU ARE THE LINK! You can be the one to take the initiative in your city in forming a civic Cuban Refugee Resettlement Committee. You can be the catalyst in bringing together all the necessary and interested individuals and groups to make possible a Cuban Refugee Charter Flight. This would be good for the Cubans and for your city.

The success of this project depends on the cooperation of individuals, families, churches, synagogues, welfare and social service organizations, various civic interest groups, national agencies working with refugees and immigrants, and the Federal Government. American energies and resources are unlimited.

There are those who are highly skilled in working with refugees, whose services would be available on an advisory basis. There are also people in your local community who are experienced in working with people in need. They would be willing to cooperate at any time they are needed after the plane arrives in your city.
A Rewarding Project For U.S. Communities —
YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO HELP WORTHY CUBANS HELP THEMSELVES
— AND TO AID THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM EVERYWHERE —

Sponsors And Jobs Are Needed For

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

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

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

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

How To Plan Your Sponsorship of Cuban Refugees

NOTE:
(a) Refugee transportation costs to your city are paid by the U.S.
(b) There is now a “transition allowance” of $100 for families receiving public assistance in Miami who go to other cities. (For individuals, $60.)
(c) Should unforeseen complications develop in the resettlement, U.S.-financed assistance, including medical care, is provided in the resettlement community at no cost to the sponsor.

Sponsor Cuban Refugees... FULFILL THEIR FAITH IN FREEDOM

CUBAN REFUGEE CENTER, Freedom Tower, MIAMI 32, FLORIDA
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE — SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
BETWEEN 1,500 AND 2,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE IN U.S. EACH WEEK

MIA M: A GENEROUS HOST

Miami, Florida, 90 miles from the Cuban refugees' communist-dominated homeland, is a generous host, serving as the port of entry that receives this great number of refugees week after week. But there should be a greater sharing in this example of traditional American hospitality to freedom-seeking Cubans. Communities throughout this free land have opportunity to join in extending this welcome.

SPONSORS AND JOBS NEEDED

Sponsors and jobs are the immediate need. Every state, every city can help provide the jobs essential to full success of the federal government's plan for refugee assistance. The United States program is administered by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare under a directive from President Kennedy.

EAGER TO EARN THEIR WAY

Our Cuban guests are eager to earn livelihoods in our free country. How we welcome them and provide job opportunities has a direct bearing on their evaluation of the U.S. way of life. Other peoples in our hemisphere, too, are observing the experiences of the Cuban refugees among us.

CHARTER FLIGHTS TOTAL

Special charter flights have taken more than 1,150 refugees from Miami to cities of the United States. The great majority of resettled Cubans go to their new homes on regularly scheduled trips by air, train, and bus.

OBLIGATIONS OF A SPONSOR

When you or your community group decide to sponsor refugees the obligation includes temporary housing and support. This may mean payment of a month's rent and utilities and a moderate supply of food. Also necessary will be arrangements for job interviews after arrival, help in becoming acquainted with the community, schools, local customs, encouragement to study English, and friendly visits by the sponsor during the period of adjustment. Sponsors may aid families (small families predominating), or individuals. TRANSPORTATION COSTS TO THE RESettlement CITY ARE PAID BY THE U.S. Each family receiving public assistance in Miami is given a "transition allowance" of $100 on relocating. Should unforeseen problems, with unusual expenses, develop in a resettlement, federally-financed assistance payments at the place of resettlement are provided, at no cost to the sponsor.

A PRESIDENTIAL QUOTE

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: "The quest for human dignity under East Germans in Berlin, Chinese in Hong Kong, and Cubans in Miami. We must identify ourselves with this cause."
APPENDIX V: REFUGEE PROGRAM AND RESETTLEMENT 1962
http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/exile-community.htm

EXPERIENCED RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES (RELIGIOUS AND NON-SECTARIAN)
LINK THE REFUGEE CENTER WITH ALL COMMUNITIES OF THE NATION

Represented at the Cuban Refugee Center, Miami, ready to fill offers of
sponsorships and jobs for refugees, are those Voluntary Agencies expe-
rienced in resettlement:
Catholic Relief Services (NCWG)
Church World Service (Protestant)
United HIAS Service (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society)
International Rescue Committee (Non-sectarian)
Each may be reached through its representative in your community—
priest, minister, or rabbi—or directly by addressing the Agency of your
choice at the Refugee Center, Miami.

JOB SKILLS ARE ON RECORD
Also operating at the Center is the United States Employment Service,
Department of Labor, which interviews refugees, identifies their job skills,
and cooperates with the Voluntary Agencies in finding employment, the
vital need in any resettlement. Employers and personnel recruiters may
address USES directly at the Refugee Center, Miami.

BROAD RANGE OF ABILITIES
The Cuban refugees have a broad range of abilities. They include people
unskilled, semi-skilled, “blue collar” and “white collar” groups, clerical
workers, office supervisors, bank personnel, and the professions: doctors,
dentists, lawyers, architects, teachers, accountants, engineers, agronoms.

FACTORY TRAINING COURSES AID REFUGEES
Two shoe factory presidents in Lowell, Mass., have made possible a “job
assisted” resettlement project. They set up training courses and admitted
to them 22 men and women who took aptitude tests at the Cuban Refugee
Center and were found to be qualified to learn shoemaking techniques.
Thirty-one persons, including children, were flown to Massachusetts, in
two groups, each with a bilingual Cuban spokesman capable of interpreting
for his fellow workers. The project was proposed to the Refugee Center
through the Massachusetts Governor’s Commission For Refugees.

... A young couple, the husband legally trained, conclude their interview about resettlement. He is ready to “take anything” to make a new start, he says.

... Happy at the thought of a new home at some point on the map behind them, this family consults at the Refugee Center. The husband and father is a lawyer who has temporarily worked as a hotel bellboy in Miami.

Persons offering jobs for refugees should send these facts:
CUBAN REFUGEE CENTER
FREDDIE TIBES
Miami 32, Florida
EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME OF EMPLOYER
ADRESSEE
CITY AND STATE
POSITION TITLE
PHONE
EXPERIENCE, EDUCATION REQUIRED
AGE MALE FEMALE SINGLE MARRIED
PERMANENT TEMPORARY
SALARY RANGE
LANGUAGE ABILITY REQUIRED
OTHER SPECIAL SKILLS OR QUALIFICATIONS

Photo: Albert Lopez, Miami (A Cuban Refugee)
APPENDIX V: REFUGEE PROGRAM AND RESETTLEMENT 1962

http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/exile-community.htm