

The Miami-Havana Connection: The First Seventy-Five Years

by Francis J Sicius, Ph.D.

Those who have written about Cubans in Miami have always placed the story in the context of the last third of this century. However, this perspective denies geographic and cultural links that go far beyond the last few decades of history. Although Miami is only a little more than one hundred years old, its relation to Cuba goes back millennia.

Archaeologists have shown that native people from the island of Cuba traded with their cousins living on the banks of the Miami River for centuries. In 1507, when Europeans printed the first map of the new world, they recorded only two major pieces of land that are still recognizable today, South Florida and Cuba.¹ Even these earliest of European explorers recognized the indisputable fact of the geographic relationship between these two places. During the Spanish era of exploration, the conquistadors of Florida, Ponce (on his second excursion), Narvaez, DeSoto, and de Luna all launched their expeditions from Cuba.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Cuban fisherman pitched tents along the banks of South Florida from Key West to Biscayne Bay, where they would spend months catching fish and drying them for sale in Havana. And one of the first pieces of South Florida property that was titled bore the name of Juan Salas, a soldier from Cuba who owned the entire island of Key West in 1815.

History oscillates over time, but geography and its influence is constant. Although the stories of the ancient pirates and conquista-

dors had retreated into legend by 1896, the influence of Cuba remained. And when a group of optimistic Americans voted to incorporate this tented train terminus as a city in 1896, Cuba and Cubans continued to be a factor in its development. Among the 700 to 800 hardy residents of Miami in 1896 was a small group of Cubans. This fact is hardly surprising, since in 1890 Cubans represented then as now the largest foreign born community in the state. Although the Cuban population centered around the cigar industries in Tampa and Key West, word of the new city of Miami captured the imagination of Cubans as well as people from Florida and other states.² Some of these early Cuban pioneers distinguished themselves by introducing the industry of their homeland to Miami. On May 15, 1896, the *Miami Metropolis*, in its inaugural edition, reported that Luis Gonzalez, a Cuban born but long time American, had opened a cigar "factory" in Miami.³ Gonzalez was the first, but within a month two more "factories" had opened.⁴ Among the early Cuban cigar makers was Jose Sanchez. In 1896, Sanchez moved to Miami and became a foreman in a small cigar factory.⁵ In 1907, he married an American woman and raised a family here. Sanchez may have worked for the Ximenes Brothers of St. Augustine, who operated a small cigar factory in downtown Miami next door to what would become the first Burdines.⁶

Within a year, the *Metropolis*, ever concerned with the promotion of Miami, asked residents to consider what could be done to induce cigar factories to locate in Miami.⁷ And on March 4, 1898, The *Miami Metropolis* encouraged local farmers to grow tobacco plants and send them to the agricultural experimental station at the University of Florida in Lake City. "Any one who sends these specimens," the paper claimed, "will be rendering a great assistance to furthering the industry in which we are all interested." Not content to just produce cigars, some Miamians apparently hoped to make Miami a tobacco producing region also.

At one point near the end of the first decade of the new century there was a great flurry of activity and excitement over the possibility that Miami would become a cigar producing city. In 1910 the *Herald* reported that the Sanchez Haya Company of Tampa had signed a lease for the second floor of the opera house block on

Eleventh Street. The company planned to bring in over 150 workers from Havana, Key West and Tampa in order to start up a major cigar enterprise in the town. Over the next few months, a number of Cuban workers arrived, and the factory went into production at 325 Eleventh Street. A *Herald* reporter wrote that he saw:

men and women stripping tobacco, others sorting it, the cigar makers rolling it into fine cigars, others sorting the finished products according to color, girls putting on factory bands and others putting them into boxes. Then the Uncle Sam stamp was placed on the box and they were placed in large packing cases to be shipped to the uttermost parts of the earth.⁸

Although this factory began with great enthusiasm it did not last long. Within two years the factory had disappeared. The cigar industry never exerted the same economic influence in Miami that it did in Key West and Tampa, but its presence at Miami's beginning is a reminder of the early links that the Cuban people have had with this city.

While Miami was struggling to fulfill the dream of Julia Tuttle, one of its founders, of becoming a grand city, the island of Cuba was entering the final phase of its long quest to become an independent nation. As the war in Cuba escalated, Cuban patriots began to look north to the exile communities in Florida and New York for support. During the first half of the 1890s, the Florida cigar makers of Tampa and Key West sponsored a number of visits by Jose Marti to the Cuban communities of Florida. So enthused was Marti at the support he received from exiles here, that in 1895 he chose the city of Key West to publicly declare the birth of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. He called Tampa and Key West the "civilian camps of the revolution."⁹ Between these two hotbeds of Cuban revolutionary fervor lay the new city of Miami.

Although revolution was brewing only a few hundred miles to the south, most Miamians were preoccupied with the business of building a city, and those that were not included tourists, wintering at railroad baron Henry M. Flagler's posh Royal Palm Hotel, "the finest and biggest hotel on the East Coast." Located on what is now a

parking lot in downtown Miami, the Royal Palm Hotel became the focal point of Miami's social and economic life in its early years. Like one of Flagler's locomotives, the hotel pulled the Miami economy in the early years and many of the fine cigars smoked on the verandah of that grand hotel probably came from the hands of Luis Gonzalez, Jose Sanchez, and their fellow Cuban cigar workers.

The space the early editions of the *Miami Metropolis* that was not given over to enthusiastic boosterism was taken up with advertising for land and construction. One of the early contractors, was Edgar David, an Ohioan, who lived with his Cuban born wife Isabel and three children in Cocomanut Grove.¹⁰ Isabel, literate in English, probably read with great interest the fictional tale which appeared in the *Miami Metropolis* about the fate of a young Key West Cuban boy and girl, Emmanuel and Margarita. She may have even read the story aloud to her three young children as they sat on the back porch of their Cocomanut Grove home far away from the tumult in her home country. The article, written for the *Metropolis* by Walter Scot, could not have found a better audience than the few Cuban-American families living in Miami.

Margarita is the central figure of the story. She is the daughter of a wealthy Cuban who had been exiled to Key West by the Spanish for revolutionary activity. Her deceased mother was an "American girl from the South." Scot described Margarita as having an attractive Anglo-Spanish blend of rather dark features "which in a blond would have been rendered insipid." Margarita's "American characteristics," he wrote, "had softened the harsher lines of her Spanish beauty." Margarita falls in love with Emmanuel Morales, another Key West exile. Her father realizes she is in love, but he has his objections. This young man should be fighting for a "Cuba Libre," he declared, "not wasting his life in idle courting." He demanded that she tell her suitor that if he were to win her love, "he must do it with rifle and machete — and at once."

He waited for his daughter to counter assault "with a wild outbreak of feminine expostulation in defense of her lover. . ." But she did not. Rather she wept in her father's arms and sobbed in silent agreement with him. "God bless your heart, girl," the father sighed, "the true blood runs in your veins." He promised her that although the decision may seem harsh, in the end "she will love Emmanuel better for it."

Margarita convinces Emmanuel to go off to war and, of course, he dies. In Key West, Margarita receives word of the tragedy. Running to the sea, she looks up at the bright stars which illuminate the cool clear night. The evening breeze causes her to tremble and makes her think how cold Emmanuel must be too as he lies alone in his unmarked grave.¹¹ As Isabel David finished telling the story to her children she surely reminded them of their own roots in the sad island to the south.

Stories about the Cuban revolution must also have sparked the imagination of her husband, David. What intrigued him and his fellow workers, however, were not romantic tragedies, but rather stories of espionage and adventure on the high seas. After a busy day's work of turning campsites into homes, Miami men would retire at night to play billiards or drink beer smuggled into their "dry" town from places such as Woods and Company, located just north of the city limits, in a honky-tonk community called North Miami. Of course, there were always stories to tell, and in the summer of 1896 one story told with great frequency centered on filibusters to Cuba. Two names that came up most often were "Dynamite" Johnny O'Brien and Napoleon Bonaparte Broward. With their coastal transport ship, the *Three Friends*, these men completed the final link of a supply line of ammunition, weapons and men that began in New York and wound its way into South Florida. News of these exploits came to Miami either by word of mouth or telegraph dispatches posted outside the *Metropolis*. Every day men would run down to the large board outside the weekly newspaper's office to hear of the latest filibuster.

One excursion that received considerable attention that summer was the failed rendezvous between Broward and Captain Harry Tuttle's boat, *City of Key West*. Tuttle had been making regular runs between Key West and Miami for months, and in early July, while Tuttle's boat was docked at Garrison Bight in Key West, a group of Cubans, in an attempt to elude Federal agents patrolling the waters off the coast, bought one way tickets for Miami on his boat. They planned to meet Broward's boat, the *Three Friends* on the high sea and double back to Cuba with their cache of arms and ammunition.

Tuttle loaded his boat with weapons and revolutionaries, and left a number of passengers stranded on the Key West dock. The complaints of these abandoned passengers, including a *Metropolis* reporter, caught the attention of Key West customs agents. The suspicion of the agents was also aroused by noisy exuberant Cubans. When they realized the revolutionaries had cleared the harbor, the Cubans began dancing and celebrating on the boat and on the dock. With suspicions raised, the Coast Guard sent a boat to trail Tuttle back to Miami. Just south of Biscayne Bay, they were rewarded for their diligence. For in the light of early dawn they watched the transfer of Cuban revolutionaries and weapons from Tuttle's boat to Broward's vessel. Upon seizing Tuttle, Broward and their boats, the agents discovered "thirteen Cuban passengers as well as a very large freight which appeared to be ammunition." On Broward's boat they discovered more ammunition, cargo he apparently had taken on at New River, in Fort Lauderdale.¹² The Coast Guard took Broward, Tuttle and their seized ships back to Key West, the site of a Federal District court.

The story of this event was spread by word of mouth throughout Miami. Particularly nervous and distressed over the capture were A.W. Barrs, a salesman from Jacksonville, and another man that the aforementioned reporter described as a "swarthy looking Cuban of short stature who had checked into the Hotel Miami the day before." The *Metropolis* reported that Barrs had been engaged in a number of filibustering expeditions to Cuba in the past and that he probably had something to do with the present one. Around the gathering spots and watering holes in and just outside Miami a consensus of opinion developed. "If the *City of Key West* had left at its scheduled hour, and the exultant Cubans had been able to restrain themselves, the affair could have succeeded unnoticed."¹³

Even from its earliest days, the city of Miami involved itself in the political turmoil of its Cuban neighbors. Broward soon became a hero to the independent minded pioneers of South Florida, and they began to embrace the cause of Cuba as their own. Some Miamians also realized that a profit could be made in helping their southern neighbors win independence. Soon all the dynamite that the new phosphorous plants around Bartow in Central Florida could produce

was being shipped on Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway south to Miami instead of to the industrial north. From Miami it was being sold illegally and transferred to contraband boats headed for Cuba.

Even the local newspaper knew about the shipments and reported them (withholding names, of course) when bragging about the quantity of cargo that was leaving and entering the new port of Miami. A few months later, the same paper indignantly reported that international agents hired by the Spanish government had seized a munitions ship leaving Miami. These weapons, the *Metropolis* reported, were headed south to help "downtrodden Cubans" in their struggle for freedom. The *Metropolis* pointed out that Miamians wanted to help their neighbors living on "the fair isle just beyond the range of our vision," and the editors warned Spain to leave South Florida alone. "She does not own us as she used to" they wrote, "and Florida is a very recreant child." With foreign agents off its coast, contraband in its harbors, refugees on its streets and arms merchants checking into its hotels, Miami, in its first year of existence, had already realized the significance of its emotional and geographic proximity to Cuba. The words "Cuba Libre," which resonated from Cuba, Key West and Tampa, also reverberated through the streets of Miami.¹⁴

Soon the United States went to war against Spain for reasons of honor and of course a "Cuba Libre." On April 9, 1898, in response to the explosion of an American ship in Havana harbor and an insulting letter sent by the Spanish consulate in Washington to his government in Madrid, President McKinley declared war on Spain. Miamians, who had already made profits from the illegal shipment of arms to the south, began to dream of the windfall profits that would be realized now that the operations would be legalized. The *Miami Metropolis* printed accounts of some of those dreams, and enumerated the advantages that Miami would have as the principle point of embarkation for Cuba. The newspaper reasoned that since Miami had a safe landlocked harbor, a direct rail line to the coal fields of Alabama and was the American city closest to the theater of war, it should be the obvious choice for the center of military operations.¹⁵

Despite the newspaper's arguments, Tampa was chosen over Miami. Perhaps U.S. military intelligence understood what the

Spanish conquistadors had figured out four centuries before, that the sea route between Tampa and Cuba is longer but much safer than the treacherous route around the Keys and over the Straits. Despite this rejection, Miamians caught the war fever as intensely as the most patriotic of cities. When rumors spread that the great Spanish Armada was sailing across the Atlantic, Miamians were certain it was headed straight for them. Many feared the damage that a well placed gunboat could do to the new city. Sitting safely off the coast, the journal pointed out, a warship could destroy the newly constructed pride of the city, the Royal Palm Hotel, or worse, it could explode the new water tower near the Miami River, a great symbol of city pride and promise. Miamians also feared the damage that foraging Spanish soldiers might do to their fledgling dry goods and food stores. It was with an inflated sense of self-importance that Miamians believed that the Spaniards even knew of their existence. Nevertheless, the War Department relented and constructed battery works with two ten-inch and two eight-inch guns on the bay about a mile and a half south of downtown. Judge Ashton organized a militia force of sixty four men to represent Miami in the war against Spain, and when he presented his men to the Governor, he discovered that enthusiasm for the Cuban war had spread throughout the entire state. Twenty companies had reported to Governor William Bloxham, although the state quota had been set at twelve.¹⁶ Late in June the government fulfilled Miami's demand for protection from Spain when more than 7,000 troops arrived in the city. Despite careful preparation by the Florida East Coast Railway, the city could not support such a rapid influx of people. The railroad had dug a temporary sanitation system, but it quickly became overloaded and the men resorted to digging latrines which the soldiers (not understanding the nature of the Florida aquifer) placed dangerously close to their drinking water wells. Having found water so close to the surface, the men abandoned their artesian well project and despite warnings, the men continued to dig and use shallow water wells with dire consequences. Sickness and inactivity demoralized the men. Then came the hot mosquito filled months of July and August. Given a choice between hell and Miami, one man, probably echoing the sentiments of many others, said he would choose the former without hesitation. Tempers flared, and the

soldiers created far more disorder than order in the city they were sent to protect. One night shots rang out from a group of soldiers and a bullet pierced the tent of two railroad workers sleeping a few blocks away on Twelfth Street. One of the two, James T. Williams received a deep flesh wound and his roommate E.W. Ramage was hit in the wrist, which shattered the bone and made amputation necessary. Even Julia Tuttle was not immune from the disruptive presence of thousands of armed men in her new city. One morning she awoke to find that one of the soldiers, overcome with depression, had the temerity to shoot himself right in her back yard garden by the river.¹⁷

When the troops finally pulled out in August 1898, a collective sigh of relief emanated from the small city, though retailers profited handsomely from the soldiers, who cleaned out their inventories. The military excursion was ill-fated to the end. The day they were leaving a late summer storm battered the soldiers on the train platform. Many of the young men rushed to Fred Rutter's place just south of the platform to escape the rain or get a cold soft drink from the ice barrel. At that moment a bolt of lightning struck the shack killing two young soldiers. One of them, Charles Gill of Louisiana, was buried in the city cemetery with military honors. His grave remains the one last physical link that Miami has to Cuba's war against Spain.¹⁸

Despite the problems connected to the soldiers presence in Miami, the United States entry into the war in proved an important lesson for Miami regarding the city's relationship with its neighbor to the south. Miamians discovered that their close proximity to the Island made Miami a natural commercial partner with Cuba; they also learned that they could not be indifferent to political or social upheaval on the island. Finally, they realized their strategic significance in terms of foreign relations with Cuba. Although it would take the federal government a few more years to learn these lessons, Miami already knew that for better or worse its future was tied to Cuba's and that a part of its population would always clam the heritage of "Cuban-American."

America's defeat of the Spanish In 1898 marked the beginning of a new era of leadership in the Caribbean. The termination of four hundred years of history, however, did not end without conse-

quence, and for the first quarter of the twentieth century, political and economic convulsions erupted throughout the Caribbean causing the United States to send troops into the area over twenty times. This show of military strength was accompanied by investments of over a billion and a half dollars.¹⁹ Finally, by the end of the 1920s, the Caribbean was relatively peaceful and through an extraordinary display of guns and money the United States had established hegemony over the area.

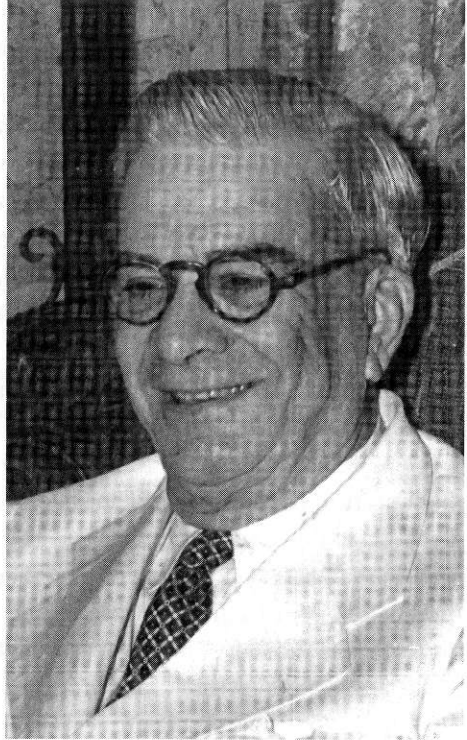
Being so close to the United States, Cuba felt this new force most directly. During the early years of independence, Cuba experienced American military or political intervention on at least five different occasions. It also received about eighteen percent of the total dollars invested in the region. As the Cuban poet and patriot Martinez Villena wrote:

Our Cuba knows well
when the hunt for nations begins
And how the threat
from the north continues
even when ambition lies dormant
Florida is the finger
that points to Cuba²⁰

The significance of this new area of exploitation was not lost on Miamians. Immediately after the Cuban war for independence, a group of Miamians joined other pioneers in an attempt to settle and annex the Isle of Pines off the coast of Cuba. For twenty years this island remained an American settlement until the Supreme Court, in 1920, decided that it belonged to Cuba.²¹

Large amounts of American money flowed into Cuba in the 1920s, and Miamians hoped to channel at least some of it through their city.²² In January 1930, Curtiss Wright announced his plans for the inauguration of flights to Havana which, the *Herald* reported, “spurred further speculation” of financial gain to be made in Cuba. The paper also cited the great success that Miami Airplane and Supply Company had after placing just one ad in a Havana newspaper.²³

Reporting on the increasing investments and the relative stability which seemed to be developing in the Caribbean, the *Miami Herald* predicted (correctly, as it turned out) that when air service was eventually established, Miami would become the gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America. Hence, the *Miami Herald* concluded, “although peaceful progress of Latin America concerns all the United States, it concerns Miami in particular.”²⁴ Ever since 1925 when Gerardo Machado became president, Americans had been bullish on Cuba. When Machado took



Gerardo Machado. HASF 1995-277-17438.

office he did so on a great wave of good will both at home and abroad. His promise of judicial, economic and educational reforms along with his denunciations of the ever intrusive Platt amendment gave optimistic Cubans hope that democracy would finally flourish on their island.²⁵ The United States was equally enthusiastic over the Machado presidency. While visiting New York, Machado promised that after five years of his government, “the capacity of Cubans to govern themselves would be assured.” At a banquet in his honor given by Charles E. Mitchell, president of New York’s National City Bank, he promised that in his administration “there would be absolute guarantees for all businesses.” Thomas Lamont of the House of Morgan said he hoped the Cubans would find a way to keep Machado in power indefinitely.²⁶

Carl Fisher and Glen Curtiss, two prominent Miami businessmen and developers, also hoped that Havana would provide a ready

market for their automobile, which they planned to mass produce in Opa Locka. They sent Machado a prototype of the car, and for his part Machado sent an enthusiastic endorsement letter which promised that the car would be well received in Havana. This was one more example, Machado pointed out, of Miami's "very special relationship with Cuba."²⁷ In 1930 Machado authorized a massive promotion of Cuba in Miami. The focal point of this campaign was a weekly five page special section of the *Miami Herald* which reported on life in Cuba. Not surprisingly, the paper showed nothing of the political turmoil beginning to brew on the island. It presented Cuba as a tropical paradise with unlimited economic opportunity. It contained articles on the best hotels in Havana, information on how to obtain Cuban citizenship, as well as articles on the most profitable goods for the import-export business. The special section also contained articles designed to convince Miamians of Havana's friendly pro American environment. As an example of this good will, they reported on the establishment of English language schools within four of Havana's high schools. This development arose when "the government realized the urgent necessity for Cuban youth to learn English."²⁸

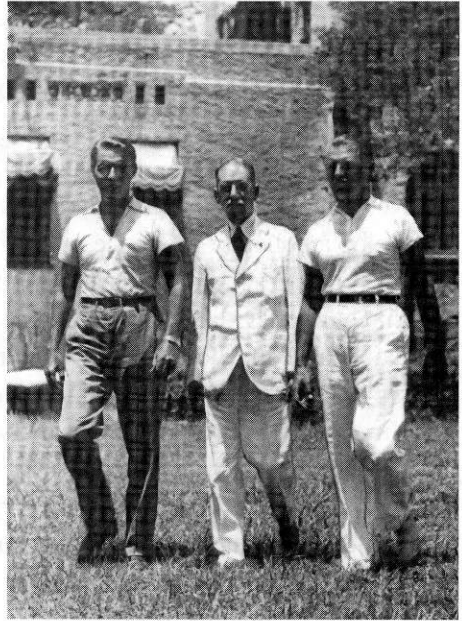
This promotional activity was not without benefit. During the Machado regime, investments in Cuba skyrocketed to over \$1.5 billion, an amount equal to the entire American investment in all of the rest of the Caribbean and South America at the time.²⁹ In the 1920s, the United States was still officially "dry" but Cuban rum flowed freely in the speakeasies and hotels of Miami. Greater Miami's vast waterways provided the port of entry for these extra-legal products.³⁰

Acknowledging the growing economic bond between Havana and Miami, Juan Tripp's newly formed Pan American Airlines inaugurated regularly scheduled flights between the two cities on January 1, 1931. The promise of a flourishing economic alliance with Cuba caused a number of developers in Miami, led by real estate magnate Clifford Reeder, to begin the promotion of an idea which would become known as "Interama," a permanent Caribbean Trade Fair, although the dream was never realized, it remained a significant symbol of the aspirations of many Miami promoters from 1929 when it was first conceived until the 1970s. Fragments of the dream still

remain along Northeast 163 Street where a few street signs still carry the name Interama Boulevard This unrealized vision underscored two dominant characteristics of Miami: the incessant boosterism of many of its citizens and the undeniable influence of its proximity to the Caribbean. In the 1930s the burgeoning relationship with Cuba gave substance to this disposition.³¹

In 1933, Miami's economic ties with Cuba drew it into the turbulence of the island's politics. In the 1930s Cubans were growing increasingly disillusioned with Machado and his failure to realize most of his promises of economic prosperity. As a result of economic depression in the United States and the collapse of international trade everywhere, sugar prices in Cuba dropped drastically and the economy of the island was on the brink of destruction.³² In order to bring some discipline to the economy, Machado in 1931 began an expansion of his power, which culminated in his announcement that there would be no elections held at the end of his six year term. He had decided to extend his term of office indefinitely. When two former political rivals, Carlos Mendieta and Mario Menocal joined forces in an unsuccessful coup, it became clear that the days of the Machado regime were numbered. The question on everybody's mind was when the U.S. Army would arrive to restore order with a new government. There was even a revolutionary party in Cuba [ABC] whose avowed purpose was to create so much chaos that the Americans would have to enter the country to restore order. But the troops did not arrive.³³

In the 1930s, under Franklin Roosevelt, U.S. policy toward



General Mario Menocal with sons Raul and Mario jr. in August, 1933. HASF 1955-277-17309.

the Caribbean had begun to change. One event which had tempered U.S. aggressiveness in Latin America was the Nicaraguan intervention of 1926. Americans had expected to enter the small country and restore order, but what they encountered was a full scale guerrilla war led by the folk hero General Augustino Sandino. The significance of the event was not lost on the State Department, and they determined to develop a policy of influence in the region that did not include as a first step the introduction of armed troops. The opportunity for experimentation with the new policy occurred when Machado lost his mandate to rule in Cuba. The new American policy utilized economic and diplomatic pressure against the government in power, coupled with financial support for exiled leaders who had demonstrated enough support to create a new regime. Given the changing American policy, exiled leaders spent a lot of energy convincing U.S. State Department officials that they had popular support. It was during this period that Miami became the center of Cuban exile activity in the United States. Three factors caused this geographic shift in exile power away from New York and Tampa. The first was the inauguration of Pan Am flights which placed Miami a mere two hours from Havana. The second was the decision of the millionaire ex president of Cuba, Mario Menocal, to settle in Miami and third was the arrival of a powerful revolutionary group of students and young people in Miami.

After the failed coup attempt Menocal, following a brief stint in prison, was exiled to Germany. But he quickly returned to the Americas and rented a large stone mansion with a tiled roof on Collins Avenue at Lincoln Road. This was one of five houses Menocal would live in with his extended family while he was exiled from Cuba.³⁴ Menocal brought with him to Miami a large group of followers who formed a colony of elite exiles on Miami Beach. Throughout the early thirties, newspaper men kept a vigil outside Menocal's mansion noting the arrival and departure of Cuban foreign ministers and political leaders. Menocal's contributions to the sugar economy of Cuba, his wealth, and his prestige as a former president and revolutionary leader caused those seeking power to gravitate toward him.

A second exile group living at the other end of the economic

and political spectrum also arrived in Miami in the early thirties. Under the leadership of Carlos Prio Soccaras, this group, which called itself the DEU (Directory of University Students), fled to Miami in 1932. Manuel Varona Loredó and Rubio Padilla, who represented the new generation of leadership, came with them.³⁵ Thus, by 1932, the most significant exile leadership of both the older and the new generations was located in Miami. Active exile groups continued to exist in Tampa and in New York, Menocal's old allies were receiving funds and encouragement from the U.S. Government, but the heart and soul of the revolution remained in Miami.



Carlos Prio with his wife, August, 1955. HASF 1995-27715623.

The radical group DEU has been described as the “purest and most cohesive of all revolutionary groups” in Cuba at that time.³⁶ It formed a cell in Miami which had broken away from a similar group in New York. The issue of controversy was U.S. intervention. The traditional view of Cuban revolutionaries was to demonstrate for U.S. interventions and help in changing the government. The DEU in Miami opposed this. Dependency on American intervention, they believed, had been the fatal flaw of every Cuban leader since Independence. These separatists who became known as the “Miami Cell” throughout the American exile community, opposed American intervention. They published a “Four Point Plan” from Miami which circulated throughout the United States and Cuba. The plan advocated the overthrow of Machado and the development of a true democracy completely free from American influence. To accept American mediation, they protested, “was to accept the participation of a government that is responsible for oppressing us as a people.”³⁷

The radical views of the DEU kept it outside the mainstream

exile community. They did not receive large donations and actually became a financial burden to the city of Miami. They were hardly part of the distinguished wealthy exile community exemplified by the Miami Beach group. Rather, they lived as poor refugees. They arrived in leaky boats and gathered in army camp barracks near the center of town, or they crowded into cheap apartments such as the one at 138 Northeast 11th Terrace, just north of downtown.³⁸

In 1932, there had been only a few hundred Cubans living in Miami, but by the following spring there were over a thousand exiles huddled within a few blocks of downtown Miami. Powerless as individuals, as a group they gave strength to the exile leadership.³⁹ This group could be depended on to provide hundreds of demonstrators whenever an important leader showed up at Menocal's mansion, or whenever disturbing news arrived from Cuba. The refugees in downtown Miami were mostly poor, radical and excitable, but they soon became the allies of their more genteel neighbors across the bay. Despite their differences, these disparate groups shared the philosophic point that the U.S. should not intervene in the creation of a new government for Cuba. As president of Cuba, and even in his early exile period, Menocal had supported the idea of U.S. intervention, but he had changed his point of view while in Miami. Just as the radicals living in Miami had suffered for this point of view so had Menocal. Although Menocal was probably the richest and the most politically powerful Cuban exile living in the United States, and despite a great deal of popular support he enjoyed both in and outside of Cuba, he was excluded from the junta that was being put together under Carlos Mendieta with U.S. support. It may be difficult to imagine an alliance between a ragtag group of student revolutionaries and the distinguished and wealthy ex-president of the country, but as Justo Carillo points out in his history of the 1933 revolution, Menocal and the DEU represented "opposite polls of force which were attracted to each other." They also represented a new political point of view for Cuba, which had developed in Miami, uninfluenced by the older established exile communities in Key West, Tampa and New York.⁴⁰ Clearly when one looks for the roots of the current Miami-Havana political connection, the revolution of 1933 cannot be ignored.

The alliance of the two groups was mutually beneficial. The radicals provided Menocal with spontaneous demonstrations of support, and in return Menocal helped provide financial support for the refugees. Unable because of his political position to obtain money from the federal government, he used his influence to raise funds for the DEU from private foundations and donors. For example, he joined with the Pan American League of Miami to put on a benefit for the refugees at the Biltmore Hotel. The Pan American League was one of numerous groups created as a result of Miami's new infatuation with the Caribbean. Founded by Mrs. Clark Stearns, and supported by such notables as Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, the League stated as its goal "the promotion of peace and understanding among the America's." It held luncheons, seminars and supported a speakers' bureau and artists' series. But probably the league's most significant contribution was the support it provided foreign students studying at the University of Miami. It was this connection that motivated the group to hold a major fund raising dinner in support of the Cuban radicals living in Miami. Important Miamians such as Judge Frank B. Stoneman and Hugh Matheson attended the affair, but those who declined invitations were also noteworthy. Miami Beach Mayor Frank Katzentine protested to the League when his name was placed on the list of guests attending the affair. He pointed out that the refugees were political enemies of the legitimate government of Cuba, and since the United States still recognized that government, he felt that his name should not be used to encourage political strife between factions in any other countries.⁴¹

If he had been asked, Katzentine might also have expressed dismay over the fact that one of the most powerful of Cuba's exiles was holding court in a mansion on Miami Beach. The Mayor's uneasiness was probably shared by many of Miami's entrepreneurs and boosters. They probably feared that the good will being generated between the two cities would be destroyed if Miami became identified as the center of intrigue against the legitimate government. Machado was by no means out of power, and he was responsible for stimulating the new economic activity between Miami and Cuba. If he survived the crisis in his government, and in February 1933, there was no indication that he would not, Miami entrepreneurs wanted to be sure

that he remained well disposed toward their city.

The *Miami Herald* shared this apprehension. Although *Herald* editor Frank Stoneman attended the benefit, his paper never noted the presence of the refugees until it was clear that Machado would fall. During the exciting months from the inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in March 1933, until the fall of Machado in August, Miami was a hotbed of Cuban political activity. Exile leaders met until the early morning hours at Menocal's mansion, demonstrations broke out spontaneously at various sites, including the Menocal house, the Pan American Airways terminal in Coconut Grove, and Downtown Miami's Florida East Coast Railway Station. There was even evidence that the revolutionaries had broken into the National Guard armory, stole weapons and smuggled them into Cuba, but none of this news ever appeared in the *Herald*. Its absence from the paper invites speculation. On at least fifteen occasions during the months prior to Machado's fall in August, the *New York Times* reported revolutionary events occurring in the Cuban exile community of Miami that the *Herald* ignored.⁴²

Perhaps economics can explain the *Herald's* indifference to the exile community. For example every Sunday during this unstable period, the *Herald* published five full pages of advertising paid for by the Cuban government. It even printed an announcement by the government stating that during the current crisis, Cuba intended to keep her tourists from being bothered by "internal problems." The *Herald* maintained this tolerant attitude toward the Machado regime even after the Cuban President had expelled the American publisher John T. Wofford and closed down his newspaper, the *Havana-American*, for making unfavorable comments about the government.⁴³ Additionally, the *Herald* represented the business community of Miami, not the exile community, and businessmen did not want to endanger the city's cordial relations with Cuba's legitimate government. It was best, they felt, for Miami to remain neutral in the struggle. Unlike the generation of 1898, there would be no cry of "Cuba Libre" in 1933. As the struggle wore on, however, neutrality and indifference became a difficult task, especially during the hot days of mid-August when Machado's government finally fell, and tempers exceeded the temperatures on the hot streets of downtown Miami.

In the middle of the night of August 13, the Machado regime ended. After leaving instructions to his wife to meet him in New York, Machado gathered up his five closest friends and advisers for a flight from Cuba. Still in their pajamas, they flew together in an amphibian Sikorsky to Nassau with five revolvers and seven bags of gold. It was up to the highest ranking official remaining, Secretary of State Orestes Ferrara, on the following day, to bring the government of Machado to a close.

Legalistic to the end and perhaps to make an important symbolic point that the government was surrendering to the American government not the Cuban people, Ferrara submitted his resignation to Sumner Wells, the U.S. Ambassador and chief negotiator during the crisis. During his trip to the U.S. Embassy, Ferrara smelled blood in the streets and feared for his life. He asked Wells for protection and safe conduct for him and his wife but the ambassador declined. Ferrara opened the window to Wells' office and asked him to listen to the sound of guns being fired in the street. Wells insisted that it was simply the excitement and celebration of the departure of Machado and that Ferrara would be safe to leave the country without harm. Ferrara and his wife left in an open car and when the "jubilant" crowd recognized him, it quickly became an angry mob. Guns were drawn and bullets flew over the heads of the former secretary of state and his wife. The car arrived at Havana harbor just ahead of the crowd. Ferrara and his wife ran from the car and onto the Pan Am clipper ship waiting at the dock. The pilot Leo Tertleskey had the engines idling and when he heard the mob, he taxied out into the harbor; as gunshots ripped through the fuselage, he took off leaving fourteen Miami bound passengers' baggage and the mail at the terminal. Gunshots ripped into the plane but no vital parts were damaged and two and a half hours later the bullet riddled plane taxied safely into Dinner Key harbor.⁴⁴

There at the Pan American Airway terminal another angry crowd awaited Ferrara. When he stepped off the plane into the hot muggy afternoon sun the crowd moved closer. As he walked through the canopied passage into the terminal the crowds called after him. Most of the shouting was in Spanish but interspersed in English the words "murderer," "butcher" and "assassin" could be heard. When a

reporter asked for a translation of what the crowd was saying a young man simply said, "Just imagine the worst words you know in English." Shaken but indignant, Ferrara faced the crowd from the second story balcony of the new air terminal. As he left the building someone shouted after him in English, "I wish I had a sword. I would fight a duel with you! In fact I will fight you with anything, you bum!" Ferrara, who was no stranger to the art of dueling, ran to answer the challenge, but he was restrained by the police. Then under heavy guard the ex-secretary of state and his wife were taken to the train station in Hollywood where they boarded a Pullman for New York.⁴⁵

The following day, Miami's Cuban refugees greeted Mrs. Machado similarly. This time, however, the crowd was less controllable. Mrs. Machado arrived in Miami drained both physically and emotionally. After watching her husband flee for his life the day before, she had taken the family's armored yacht to Key West. From there, she along with her daughters and their husbands, boarded the Flagler train. By the time she arrived at the Miami station at 7:30 in the evening, a crowd had gathered and it began taunting her and her family. When police threatened to disperse the crowd with clubs, it resisted by forming itself into a tight ring. Police reacted angrily with their billy clubs and they arrested about ten men considered to be the leaders. About fifty members of the crowd followed the police and demonstrated outside the jail demanding the release of their friends. Among those arrested was Manuel Mencia, nephew of Miguel Gomez, the popular former mayor of Havana who had joined Menocal in the aborted coup of 1931. When questioned by police the effervescent Gomez replied that there must have been a misunderstanding, for his nephew was a gentleman, and, therefore, he would never insult Mrs. Machado or any lady.⁴⁶

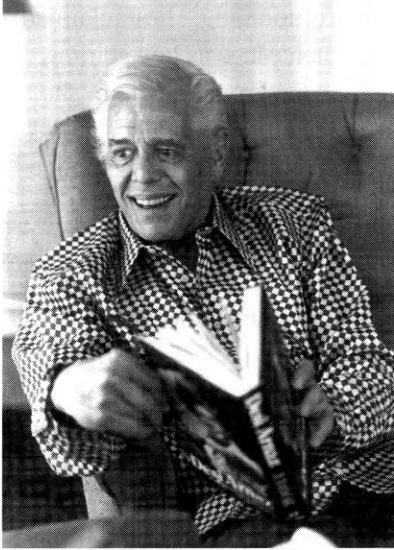
These last demonstrations by the exiles finally exploded the tranquil facade that many Miamians had tried to maintain during the crisis. Police Captain L.O. Scarboro told reporters that the patience of the entire force had finally been stretched to the breaking point. "No more demonstrations will be tolerated," he announced. "If they want to fight and raise hell," he declared, "Let them go back to Cuba!" He explained to reporters that for the past five months the city had been quietly putting up with the demonstrators and hundreds of exile

incidents. "But they have been pampered for too long," he exclaimed. "From here on out they will have to take their place as law abiding residents in the area. We don't believe that any group in Miami should be permitted to submit everybody else in the city to conduct as has been exhibited here. This situation has been embarrassing the police for some time," and he vowed to bring an end to it.⁴⁷

During his angry diatribe, Scarboro let out information that probably should have been kept quiet. For example, he told reporters "we have definite knowledge that thefts of machine guns and pistols from U.S. armories (across the nation) have been traced to Miami, undoubtedly through the activity of some of these exiles (and) the army has been sent here to investigate." When the story broke in the *Herald* there was an immediate attempt to quiet Scarboro. Menocal met with Police inspector Frank Mitchell and they issued a joint statement that he, Menocal, would be personally responsible for the conduct of the exiles from now on. Meanwhile, members of the Board of Trade met with Scarboro and tried to urge him to retract his statements from the previous day. But Scarboro remained adamant. "The statement I published yesterday was correct," he insisted, "I have nothing to retract." Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed and there were no more incidents involving the exiles and the police. The ten young men arrested the day before at the train station were released from jail and the new Cuba government, apparently as eager to maintain good relations with Miami as Miamians were, announced that it was sending a ship immediately to collect all of its citizens who wished to return to the island.

In reaction to news of the refugees departure, the *Miami Herald*, in an editorial, bid farewell to the refugees. With the "sudden retirement" of Machado, the editorial began, "Miami has begun to lose her Cuban residents who are fleeing back to their homeland." Ignoring the more tawdry events of the recent months the *Herald* stated that Miami had been glad to extend her hospitality to the exiles and "was sad to lose them." The editorial concluded on an ironic yet prophetic note, "Miami's gates will always be open to Cubans, should the time ever come again when they need a refuge. In the meantime," the article concluded, "our mutual interests will continue to grow."⁴⁸

The thirties witnessed an important turning point in the



Desi Arnaz with a copy of his book, February, 1976. Mack photo 1626.

Miami-Havana relationship. With the advent of the airplane, travel to Miami became safer and easier than the traditional journey to Tampa or New York, and competitive Miami entrepreneurs pursued this advantage aggressively in order to ensure a long lasting commercial relationship with Cuba. It seemed that the two areas were finally realizing the commercial and cultural destiny that geography and history had established for them. Although Cuba was subject to political turmoil, Miami business leaders were prepared to remain flexible, sending cars

and invitations to dictator Machado one day and bidding bon voyage to exile revolutionaries and best wishes to a new government the next. Miamians remained impervious to the political convolutions on the island. The benefits of the commercial possibilities seemed to far outweigh the ephemeral game of politics.

After Machado fell, a number of his supporters left Cuba for Miami and from that time on there would always be a large Cuban exile community living in Miami. America's most famous Cuban entertainer, Desi Arnaz, came to Miami at this time. Arnaz was born on March 2, 1917 and named after his father, Desiderio Arnaz, a dentist in Santiago, who was also involved in politics. During the Machado regime he served as the mayor of Santiago and during the revolution, like so many other Machado supporters, he had to run for his life. The story of the Arnaz family is a familiar one for Cubans living in exile here. Arnaz and his son arrived in Miami in 1933 as poor refugees. Pooling what little money he had with a friend, the senior Arnaz started the "Pan American Export Company" in a small warehouse on S.E. Third Street.⁴⁹ They imported bananas, which arrived rotten, and tiles that arrived broken. The partner quit in disgust, but Arnaz' father remained undaunted by his bad luck. He

and his son piled the broken tiles into the back of their tired old pick up truck and went to a construction site on Miami Beach where Arnaz told the contractor that broken tile was the latest design in Cuba. The contractor bought all the tile at a higher price than whole tile.⁵⁰

In order to save money to bring the rest of the family from Cuba, Desi Arnaz and his father lived in their warehouse. Soon his mother arrived and they moved into a small two bedroom house at 809 Northeast First Avenue.⁵¹ Arnaz went to St. Patrick's School on Miami Beach. During this time Dezi Arnaz got his first job as a performer. He played the guitar with a back up band to Buddy Rogers at the Roney Plaza, where he was discovered by Xavier Cougat who took him to New York. A year later he returned to Miami with his own band. It was here that Desi Arnaz introduced the "Conga Line" to America.⁵² There were many Cuban neighbors here with the Arnaz family in the 1930s. The former President of the Senate, Alberto Barreras, occupied a mansion at 2040 North Bayshore Drive on Biscayne Bay. Jorge Sanchez, the Cuban sugar king, lived on Miami Beach at Thirty-Seven Star Island, The Mendozo Brothers had a cigar factory, and there were three Cuban Public Markets, one at 116 Northwest Third Avenue, another at 1501 Northwest Fifth Avenue, and a third at 439 Northwest Seventeenth Avenue. During this period, two ex-Cuban presidents, Geraldo Machado and Mario Menocal, also called Miami home. A *Miami Daily News* article in 1939 reported that 25 to 30 Cuban families lived here permanently while another 3,000 lived here on a temporary basis.⁵³

Experiences during the Machado revolution greatly modified Americans foreign policy in the Caribbean. The formula included economic pressure, followed by support of an exile government with a legitimate claim to popular support coupled with the threat of military intervention. Miami had a major role as this new policy played out in tumultuous political life of Cuba in the forties and fifties. There were numerous changes in the Cuban government from 1933-1959, and with each change the Cuban population in Miami increased to a substantial minority. The provisional government established after the fall of Machado was replaced by a military coup led by Fulgencio Batista. Batista directed the formation of a constitutional government and was elected president in 1940. Ralston Grau San Martin followed

in 1944, and he was succeeded by Carlos Prio in 1948.⁵⁴ Each change in government brought a new group of political exiles to Miami and the tide never receded. As soon as one group returned to Cuba, another arrived to plot their own accession to power. As the *Herald* reported in 1947, "More than 10,000 political and military 'refugees' from Cuba have turned Miami today into a new kind of haven from storm and unfriendly weather. "Flagler Street has acquired," the *Herald* concluded, "a distinct Cuban flavor."⁵⁵

A clearer picture of Cuban influence in the city presented itself in the new Spanish language newspaper *Diario de las Americas*, which began publishing from its office at 4349 NW 36th Street in the early 1950s.⁵⁶ The *Diario* revealed a Latin life in Miami far richer than that alluded to by the *Herald*. According to the *Diario*, there were 80,000 Latins living in Miami in 1955. They drank Bustelo and Pilon coffee and every Saturday many of them listened to Susy Merino who hosted a show in Spanish entitled, "Ondas del Caribe," from 7:15 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. on WIOD.⁵⁷ In 1955, the *Diario* pointed out that although there were thousands of Cubans living in Miami, few were aware of the fact that a shrine to the patroness of Cuba, La Virgen de la Cobre, had been constructed at St. Michael's Church on Flagler at 29th Avenue. The statue was built from a donation made by Hilda Negretti who was the wife of a popular Cuban attorney in Miami, Gino Negretti.⁵⁸

It was also during the early fifties that Miami established its first bilingual school. According to *Las Diarios*, teachers at Miami's Buena Vista Elementary School at 3001 Northwest Second Avenue began to offer classes in Spanish, making it the first bilingual school in the county. Although there were at the time 129 schools in the county, only Buena Vista had a significantly large number of Spanish speaking students. Of the total of 609 students, 239 spoke Spanish as their first language. Although the majority of the Spanish speaking students were Puerto Rican, the second greatest number were Cuban.⁵⁹ Another indication of the growing Cuban community was the establishment of the *Circulo Cubano*, a Cuban Social Club in 1955. Located at 420 Southwest Eighth street, *Circulo Cubano* was a social club which sponsored weekly dances for adults and teenagers.⁶⁰ In addition to a club, radio station and a Church they could call their

own, the Cuban community ate at Cuban restaurants (The Garden Restaurant, 2235 Southwest Eighth Street, Club Latino, Thirty-Eight Northwest Fifty-Fourth Street, and El Florida Restaurant, 2322 Northwest Seventh Street) and bought Cuban pastries (Miramar 611 Northwest Twenty-Ninth Avenue and 314 Southwest Eighth Street, and Palermo Bakery and Panaderia 681 Northwest Seventh Street). They also went to the movies in Spanish, seeing films such as “*Esta Estrana Pasion*” at the Roosevelt Theater.⁶¹

The rapid rise in Cuban culture in Miami was propelled by the protean nature of politics in the homeland. During these periods of political upheaval, Miami opened its gates to ex-Cuban officials with money regardless of their political beliefs. Not atypical of these times was Grau San Martin’s friend and minister of education, Jose Manuel Aleman, who arrived in Miami in October, 1948 with \$20,000,000 in his suitcase.⁶² Scenes such as this symbolized both the corruption that plagued Cuban government and the strong economic ties that Miami and Havana continued to establish as they moved closer together in the decades of the forties and fifties. There were two very significant symbols of Cuban presence in Miami in the 1940s. The first was the Miami baseball stadium, a superb facility, built by Aleman. The second was the Pan American Airways. Juan Tripp, after moving his airline here in 1928, proceeded to build a beautiful art deco airport terminal at the old Dinner Key naval air station site. Tripp’s modern airport became the take off spot for all vacationers headed to Cuba and South America. After the war the airline moved out to the airport at Northwest Thirty-Sixth Street, but Pan American Airways continued to be the principle name in travel to the Caribbean and Europe, and Miami was its headquarters.

In the 1940s and 1950s, organized crime provided another economic link between Miami and Havana. Most of Havana’s entertainment operations, which included hotels, gambling and prostitution, were administered in Miami, a safe but proximate distance from the volatile republic. As a result of this new relationship with Cuba and the underworld, Miami became an important link in the commercial empire of organized crime. For example, heroin that flowed from France to Havana to New York had passed through Miami. And when dishonest Cuban politicians arrived in Miami with

suitcases full of money, the various mafia run businesses in Miami provided investment opportunities that did not scrutinize sources of income. By the mid-fifties, the U.S. Department of Commerce reported that investment by Cuba citizens in the United States had reached \$400,000,000, and most of this money went through Miami. Cuban exiles provided a financial waterfall to capital starved Miami.⁶³

The world of sport was also greatly influenced by the increased Cuban presence in Miami. The Miami Jai Alai Fronton and the race tracks of Hialeah, Tropical Park and Gulfstream welcomed Cuban jockeys and players. The flurry of financial activity between Miami and Havana both legal and illegal solidified their economic relationship. It also changed the city of Miami radically as people such as Meyer Lansky and other underworld figures began to play a major role in determining the city's future. But these changes, as great as they were, pale in comparison to the influences the island would have on the Magic City in the following decades.⁶⁴

In 1952, Fulgencio Batista, the young sergeant who had given the Cubans democracy in 1940, took it away from them with a coup de etat against Carlos Prio, and once again Miami was swept into the whirl of Cuba political upheaval. After the 1952 coup, Prio moved to Miami where he lived with the honor of being the last legitimately elected president of Cuba. For those with longer memories, he was also remembered as the idealistic leader of the DEU, the exile student group that had opposed Machado in 1933. With these credentials most Cubans were willing to forgive his indiscretions as president and recognized him as their leader in exile. Throughout the fifties, the plots of Prio and his compatriots to overthrow Batista again threw Miami into the world of Cuban politics. In September 1956, for example, a former Cuban legislator, Dr. Oscar Alverado, was arrested at Miami International Airport by the FBI. He was accused of buying weapons for use in Cuba for the overthrow of Batista. The newspapers announced that David Walters, the personal attorney of Carlos Prio would defend Alverado.⁶⁵ Six months later, on the morning of May 15, 1957, a group of seventeen supporters of Prio crept out of Biscayne Bay on their way to Cuba to begin the revolution against Batista. This small group of soldiers under Calixto Sanchez arrived

on the coast of Oriente where they were captured and summarily shot by the lieutenant of police of the tiny village of Mayari.⁶⁶ These relatively insignificant events marked the end of Prio's claim to leadership. Increasingly, support began to fall on the "hero" of Sierra Madre, Fidel Castro, and his followers.⁶⁷ By December 1958, Castro had taken control of the country, and early in the morning of January 1, 1959 the first Castro refugees began to arrive in Miami.

At first, Miamians accepted the appearance of refugees on the evening news as rather normal and routine. Most of the earliest arrivals had financial or familial connections and represented little burden to the city, in fact they proved to be the opposite, providing, as they did, a boost to an economy weakened by the recession.⁶⁸ Small businesses, especially used car dealers, appliance and furniture dealers and real estate agents began to enjoy a boom in their businesses. But very rapidly the hundreds of relatively well off exiles turned into thousands of desperate and penniless refugees. At first the Cuba community was determined to handle the problem themselves. This illusion did not last long, for in a very brief period, as Monsignor Bryan Walsh has pointed out, there were as many as nineteen families living in a single family residence.⁶⁹ Of course, this was the extreme, but even the average Cuba family in Miami during this period of early migration was sharing a two room dwelling with at least two additional adults.⁷⁰ When the pressure on the Cuba families became unbearable, they sought help from private charity, and, since it was a familiar institution, the first place they turned to was the Catholic Church. In response, the new Diocese of Miami (only a year old at the time) opened a refugee center at 130 Northeast Second Avenue, in a portion of the Gesu School building.

The Catholic Church also put refugee children into their schools, which inflated the average classroom size to over sixty students. In addition they established health care for refugees free of charge at Mercy Hospital. One of the biggest problems the church handled in these early days was the relocation of thousands of children who had been sent to Miami alone by their parents from Cuba. Through the assistance of the National Catholic Welfare Council, thousands of young children were placed in foster homes in forty-seven dioceses in thirty different states. The monumental task of

placing these children and keeping track of them was a human miracle and this event alone deserves a full chapter when the complete story of Cuban migration is told. In the first months of 1959, the Catholic Church spent in excess of \$200,000 on processing the refugees and providing direct financial support. This sum did not include hospital and educational costs. The following year this amount increased to \$561,000.⁷¹

Catholics of Miami quickly became aware of the refugee problem in their churches on Sunday when financially pressed pastors began to take up special collections for the refugees. The rest of Miami also began to realize the dimension of the problem as the exiles that appeared nightly on television began to look less like wealthy Latin visitors on a weekend holiday and more like the desperate refugees they had previously only seen coming out of East Berlin: bedraggled, confused, hungry and poor.

Upon arrival at Miami's Airport, the new immigrant was questioned by an immigration officer then given a quick physical inspection. The lucky ones were approved, photographed, fingerprinted and released. The less fortunate were sent to Opa Locka airport for further questioning. Having survived this ordeal the immigrant, with no family or friends to help him, turned to the Catholic Relief Center where he received a meal and possibly a few dollars with which to begin a new life.⁷²

Although shabby in appearance, and penniless, these refugees were quite different than the group of poor workers and students who had wandered the streets during the Machado revolution. These new arrivals were, as later statistics verified, decidedly middle class. Typical of the new immigrant was a man described by then Mayor Robert King High. "My law office recently required testimony from someone with a background in Cuban law," High testified before a Senate Committee. "We were able to reach a former judge, an appellate judge in Cuba who had served some 30 years. He came to Miami in mid-1960. It was brought out in testimony as to what his present position was and he stated that he delivers groceries on a part time basis for \$18 a week."⁷³ These poorly dressed, mentally depressed, uncomely wanderers were not the Cubans that Miamians had become accustomed to in the decades of the forties and fifties. Many

Miamians quickly grew impatient with their new guests from Cuba. News commentator Wayne Fariss echoed the opinions of a large number when he said:

Miamians view the Cubans as house guests who have worn out their welcome, who feel it is now time for them to move on... (The Cubans) are a threat to our business and tourist economy. It would appear that the hand that holds Miami's torch of friendship has been over extended.⁷⁴

Rejected in Cuba, poor and abandoned by all but the Catholic Church in Miami, and ridiculed by many, the first refugees from Castro's Cuba suffered a sad plight. Had word of this filtered back to Cuba, possibly the great flow of humanity would have ceased, perhaps the great energy expended in migration might have been expended against the Castro regime. But before the earliest unhappy experiences of Miami became established practice, and before the terrible experience of Miami filtered back to Cuba, an amazing event occurred which would change the character of Miami forever. The Federal Government intervened. Suddenly the refugee problem was not seen as a local issue but rather a matter of national security.

In the fifties and early sixties, as refugees poured out of Eastern Europe, Americans interpreted the phenomenon as proof of the failure of communism. When the federal government noticed similar numbers coming out of Cuba they instituted policies which would encourage continued migration and prove a similar point in the Caribbean. Miami soon became the latest battle front in the cold war, the "Berlin of the Caribbean," and refugees were no longer abandoned waifs but heroes.

Much of this ideological transformation is documented in United States Senate hearings held in Miami in 1961. Senator Philip Hart from Michigan set the tone for the hearings when he stated that if the United States was going to undertake a major refugee assistance program it must be done in a way "that reflects a conscious understanding that our action in this area bears directly on our foreign policy."⁷⁵ Local leaders, sensitive to the Washington sentiment and eager to obtain funds for their beleaguered community, also picked up

the Cold War theme. Congressman Dante Fascell, in soliciting funds for education, added that in every classroom time must be taken out for an indoctrination program.⁷⁶ Mayor Robert King High testified that, “We can no longer treat the matter of Cubans as a welfare problem. These people,” High continued, “who gave up their homes and in some instances their families because of their refusal to knuckle under to communist tyranny should be allowed to taste the fruits of freedom.”⁷⁷

Dr. H. Franklin Williams of the University of Miami, seeking funds for refugee programs at his school, testified, “(The refugee problem is) something larger than a community problem. We see Miami as the battlefield of the Cold War... For the first time,” he pointed out, “the United States was a country of first asylum, and the way we handle these people who have chosen to leave a Communist area was important to the Cold War.”⁷⁸ Of course, Williams as well as others who testified in Miami were seeking federal dollars for the community. But the immediate gratification of large amounts of federal money inhibited reflection on the long term implications for the future of the city. The great influx of federal money, along with the millions of Cuban dollars lying dormant in Miami since the 1940s, combined with the migration of a vigorous Cuba middle class to the area, set off an explosion of entrepreneurial activity that had never been seen in Miami, or for that matter, in few other places. Almost overnight, businesses sprang up throughout Miami. There were at least a dozen Cuban newspapers of varying quality printed in 1960 in Miami, and they all recorded the swift Cuba economic development. On December 30, 1960 the first Cuban movie theater opened at 313 West Flagler. It was called Teatro Flagler and its first show was the French film, “Este Cuerpo Tan Deseado” (literally, “This Body So Desired”). A Cuban employment agency opened at 223 Northwest Third Avenue and in December, 1960, on Miami Beach in the Raleigh Hotel, Mr. Abraham, the former owner of the Dulceria Mignon del Vedado in Havana opened a Cuban restaurant. “We have Cuban Food,” Abraham announced, “and we speak Spanish.” At Seventeenth Street and Biscayne Boulevard, where the revolutionary headquarters would eventually be established, there was a man selling liberty bonds.⁷⁹

More significant than these first openings, however, was the dramatic transformation of Southwest Eighth Street. Since the thirties there had always been a Cuban presence on Eighth Street, but within two years (1961-63), according to information found in the Miami City Directory, twenty-eight stores on Eighth Street, lying between Southwest Fifth Avenue and Fifteenth Avenue, changed ownership from American to Cuban.⁸⁰ An Italian shopkeeper on Eighth Street, Sylvan Paterno, put these statistics into human terms. After 28 years of running a shop on Eighth Street he had to close down and sell out in 1962. “(Cuba migration) is knocking the hell out of my business,” he said, “the Cubans trade with their own people and we merchants have to take a loss or sell out cheaply to the Cubans. It’s unbelievable how the Cubans could push out Americans in four years time.”⁸¹

On the other hand, in the late 1950s, the area taken over by Cubans in Miami had been in very poor economic condition. The city had the highest rate Veterans Association and the Federal Housing Administration foreclosures in the country, and Southwest Eighth had become a shabby row of poor businesses trying to survive in a deteriorating neighborhood.⁸² Also, many small merchants in Miami benefited from the Cuba migration. As Antonio Jorge and Raul Moncarz have pointed out, the influx of money and economic activity had a multiplier effect, which overflowed from the Cuban community into the general economy of the area. Small businessmen selling appliances, furniture, clothing, used cars, and other necessities of middle class life in the early 1960s shared in the new prosperity.⁸³

The major source of the new economic stimulus for this activity came from the Federal Government. In 1960, the fiscally



Two people shop at a restaurant on Southwest Eighth Street, August, 1979. HASF Miami News Collection 1989-011-15766.

conservative Republicans contributed four million dollars in benefits to the refugees, but by 1961, under the Kennedy administration, expenditures on Cuban refugees increased to \$2.4 million a month. By 1976 the Cuban Refugee Fund had pumped \$1.6 billion dollars into Miami's Cuban Community.⁸⁴ Additionally, traditional government disbursement sources, such as the Small Business Association targeted Cubans as recipients of benefits. As Professor Raymond Mohl has pointed out, of the \$100 million dollars distributed by the Small Business Association in the early 1970s over half went to Hispanics, a great majority of whom were Cuban.⁸⁵

Overshadowing all government expenditure in the 1960s, however, were the investments made by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Through front organizations such as the "Zenith Group" at the University of Miami, and fighting groups practicing in the Everglades, the CIA pumped over \$100 million dollars into the Cuban community in the early sixties. After the failed Bay of Pigs operation in April 1961, the CIA also introduced a new dimension to the Miami economy as weapons production and sales became an important industry in the area. Miami also provided a ready army for CIA operations throughout the world. At first, this militia activity was localized. For example, the counterrevolutionaries bombed Paula's restaurant at 435 North First Avenue, which was known as a hangout for Castro sympathizers. Any time a Cuban official came to Miami or passed through the city on the way to New York or Washington, these guerrillas would attempt an attack on them, claiming they were fighting the communists. The Government-funded anti-communist guerrilla group grew to such a point that eventually CIA agents could come to Miami and recruit an army of from one to two hundred Cubans simply by saying they needed their help in an anti communist operation. Although this was kept a secret, the implications became known to everyone, as events related to the Watergate break-in revealed that Miami Cubans had played an integral part in that operation.⁸⁶

This massive influx of federal money from various sources dwarfed normal public spending for the period. For example, the 1959 budget for the City of Miami totaled \$19 million.⁸⁷ In 1960, the Federal government contributed \$4 million, or an amount that represented more than twenty percent of the entire city budget, to the

Cuban refugees. By 1961, Federal contributions equaled the 1959 budget. In the early 1960s, the federal government created the largest refugee relief program in its history. As a result of the federal commitment to Cuban refugees, Miami was transformed economically, demographically and politically.⁸⁸

In 1995, thirty-five years after the Cuba policy was first put into place, the Clinton administration began a process which will end the special status of Cuba immigrants. With an era coming to an end, historians can now reflect on its impact. If the purpose of the program was, as local Miamians believed, to help stimulate the local economy, the Cuba refugee policy was an unparalleled success. Dreams of economic expansion into Latin America and the Caribbean which had begun with the first Pan American flights in the 1930s became a reality in the 1960s and thereafter. Exiled Cuba businessmen, building on old connections in the Caribbean, made Miami the new financial and trading center of the Caribbean. Around the foreign policy tables of Washington, however, Miami's economic prosperity was secondary or merely a byproduct of the real goal, which was a diplomatic victory over the Castro regime, a goal still unachieved. In fact the diplomatic and economic assault designed to break Castro's hold on Cuba actually strengthened him. For the Miami refugee policy created a safety valve for the revolution. Castro purged his most powerful enemies, the middle class, by allowing them to flee to Miami, ensuring that the most essential segment of the population necessary for a bourgeois democracy had been removed from Cuba. With only true believers and those indebted to the revolution left, Communism became the only destiny for the former island republic. This policy also created a source of economic strength for the island. From a purely demographic point of view the policy expanded Cuban influence into the United States and these new colonists, although they were forced here, have done what colonists have always done. They have provided wealth for the mother country, in this case Cuba. Cuban refugees in Miami, through concern for loved ones on the island, have provided money, medicine, clothing and food to the island that it otherwise would not have had.⁸⁹

Why did the United States embark on such a futile policy? In part, the answer is that it was just one segment of a larger cold war chess game fought on many fronts against communism. But

Miamians were not simply the passive recipients of this policy, they were active in its formation. In two previous revolutions, against Spain in 1898 and Machado in 1933, a small group composed of wealthy exiles and desperate radicals used Miami as a base for successful revolutionary operations. There was no reason to believe that the 1960s would be any different. Local government and businessmen lobbied heavily for government aid which would transform their city because it meant added income for the city. It was also a policy that had been pursued successfully in the past during other eras of political upheaval in Cuba.

What local politicians and businessmen did not fully grasp in 1960, however, was that the diplomatic playing field had changed drastically. The refugees were not just the extremely rich and the extremely poor. They were decidedly middle class. And as statistics for the first years of the revolution show the main goal of the majority of immigrants was not to ferment revolution in Cuba but to reestablish for themselves and their families the comfortable life they had known in Cuba. The United States Senate Hearings on the refugee problems held in Miami in 1961 reveal a large amount of money being spent to retrain accountants, physicians, teachers and lawyers so that they might pursue productive lives in the United States.

The radical change in the relationship between Cuba and the United States also played an important role in Miami's transformation. Cuban-American relations were no longer played out in the context of American hegemony in the Caribbean, but rather as part of the global Cold War. As President John Kennedy stated shortly after entering office, "Our objection isn't to the Cuba Revolution, it is to the fact that Castro has turned it over to the Communists." Miami and Havana became pawns in the Cold War and their destiny was no longer in their own hands. At one time these two important geographic centers were on a course of economic cooperation and development, as long ago as the 1930s, for instance, they provided a model for Anglo-Spanish cooperation in the new era of trade being stimulated by the airlines. But due to events over which neither had control, these two cities have scorned their natural destiny and have become enemies. The destruction of this relationship remains one of the great casualties of the Cold War.

Endnotes

1. "Waldseemueller map 1507" in William P. Cummings, *The Southeastern United States in Early Maps*, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958) plate 1.

2. The 1900 Dade County census suggests a small colony of about fifteen Cubans living here. Among the names in the census are George Villar, his wife Marie and two children, Mateo Encinosa, his wife Nora and four children, Nora Gonzalez and Frana Vamora both single women. At least one Cuban-American living here in 1900 was born in Florida. According to the 1900 census, Edward Gonzalez, son of Luis mentioned above, was born in Florida in 1872. Luis Gonzalez, who married an American woman, probably traveled to Miami from Key West either directly or via Tampa. Dade County Census, 1900.

3. "By Way of Preface," *Miami Metropolis*, 15 May, 1896, p.9. The word "factory" must be read in context. The term "cigar factory" could apply to a single cutting table on a front porch.

4. "Miami Mince Meat," *Miami Metropolis*, 12 June, 1896, p.1.

5. Dade County Census, 1900.

6. "C.L. Ximanies Died Suddenly in Macon," *Miami Herald* 2 June, 1911, p. 4.

7. "Tobacco Growers Convention," *Miami Metropolis*, 4 March, 1896.

8. "Everything Rushing in Sanchez-Haya Factory," *Miami Morning News Record*, 4 November, 1910, p.1.

9. Michael True, "Revolutionaries in Exile: The Cuban Revolutionary Party 1891-93" (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1965) 36-39.

10. Dade County Census, 1900.

11. "For a Cuba Libre," *Miami Metropolis*, 9 July, 1897 p.6-7.

12. "Cuba Libre," *Miami Metropolis*, 26 June, 1896 p.8; "City of Richmond," *Miami Metropolis*, 3 July, 1896, p.4; Sam Proctor: Napoleon Broward: Florida's Fighting Democrat. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1950) pp.99-118. *Miami Metropolis*; "Progress of Events," *Miami Metropolis*, 26 June, 1896, p.1. 3 July 1896, p.1.

13. "City of Richmond," *Miami Metropolis*, 3 July 1896, p.4.

14. "Progress of Events," *Miami Metropolis*, 22 April, 1898.
15. "A Signal Station Here," *Miami Metropolis*, 22 April, 1898,
- p.8. "Miami and the Soldiers," *Miami Metropolis*, 17 June, 1896,
- p.2. "Soldiers Are Coming," *Miami Metropolis*, 24 June, 1896. p.1.
16. Charlton Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971) 314.
17. "Careless Shooting," *Miami Metropolis*, 22 July, 1896, p.1.
18. "Terrible Accident: Two Soldiers Killed By Lightning," *Miami Metropolis*, 12 August, 1898. "Funeral," *Miami Metropolis*, 12 August, 1898, p.1.
19. Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 492, 586; *New York Times*, 28, 29 April, 1927.
20. Translation from spanish.
21. Leland Hamilton Jenks, *Our Cuban Colony: A Study in Sugar*, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928.)
22. According to the *Miami Herald* over \$1.5 Billion. *Miami Herald* 5 January, 1930. "Cuban and American Friendship Expands," *Miami Herald*, 5 January, 1930. Sec. II p.9.
23. "Cubans Are Anxious To Trade," *Miami Herald*, 3 January, 1930, p.12.
24. "Miami," *Miami Herald*, 6 January, 1930.
25. Thomas, 572.
26. "Bankers Support Machado," *New York Times*, 29 April, 1927.
27. "Fischer Receives Machado Letter," *Miami Herald*, 11 January, 1930, p.18.
28. "Cuban and American Friendships Expand," *Miami Herald*, 5 January, 1930, p.9.
29. *Ibid.*
30. For example, the *Herald* reported on January 1, 1930 that a thirty-four foot sloop with a full cargo of rum had been seized In a Coral Gables canal. "Liquor Seized on Boat in Canal," *Miami Herald*, 1 January, 1930, p.1.
31. "Pan American Center Envisioned for Miami," *Miami Daily News*, 3 December, 1944, p.1.
32. Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: La Lucha Por La Libertad 1762-1979*, Tomo 2: *La Republica Independiente 1909-1958*, Barcelona:

Ediciones Grijalbo, 1974) 775-789.

33. *Ibid*, 778-779.

34. Interview by author Mario Menocal, grandson of the ex-president, 20 September 1996, Miami Florida.

35. Justo Camllo, *Cuba 1933: Estudiantes, Yanquis y Soldados* (Coral Gables: Instituto de Estudios Interamericanos, 1985) 50-51.

36. Carillo *Cuba*, 178

37. *Ibid*. 51.

38. *The New York Times* reported on February 1 that, "Fifteen Cuban youths who described themselves as political refugees ... Were taken into custody by the United States immigration officials. . .when they landed in Tavenier. They were paroled in custody of the leaders of the Cuban exile colony here (Miami)" *New York Times* 1, February, 1933; Miami City Directory, 1933. Cuban Youths Seized on Florida Coast," *New York Times*, 1 February, 1933, p.1.

39. "Rebels in Florida Say Revolt Has Begun: Florida Colony Growing," 2 March, 1933. p.7.

40. "Revolt in Oriente Province; Statement by Government; Refugees Remain in Florida," *New York Times*, 30 April, 1933, p.1.

41. "Program is Benefit for Cuban Residents," *Miami Herald*, 24 February, 1933, p.9; "Cuban Benefit Cause of Diplomatic Stir," *Miami Herald*, 25 February, 1933, p.2.

42. "Political Refugees Set up Headquarters in Key West," *New York Times*, 5 February, 1933, p.1. "Foes of Machado in U.S. and Central America Planning Coup," *Ibid*, 10 February, 1933; "Rebel Movements Reported," *Ibid*, 11 February, 1933; "Revolt Plan Rumored," *Ibid*, 23 March, 1933; "Florida Colony Growing," *Ibid*, 2 May, 1933; "Refugees Remain in Florida," *Ibid* 30 April, 1933; "Junta Formed in Miami," *Ibid*, 30 April, 1933; "High School Students and Menocal Adherents Reject Mediation: Miami Group Will Not Receive Mendez Penate," *Ibid*, 25 June, 1933, p.18; "Effect of Overturn on Miami," *Ibid*, 20 August, 1933 sec. IV, p.3.

43. "Cuba is Deporting American Publisher," *Miami Herald*, 16 January, 1931, p.1. "Machado Moves to Aid Tourists," *Miami Herald*, 25 January, 1931, p.1.

44. *The New York Times*, 13 August 1933.

45. *Miami Herald*, 13 August, 1933.

46. "Riots Mark Overthrow of Machado," *Miami Herald*, 15 August, 1933.

47. "Menocal Assumes Exile Responsibility," *Miami Herald*, 16, 17 August, 1933.

48. "Miami's Loss," *Miami Herald*, 18 August, 1933.

49. Desi Arnaz, *A Book: The Outspoken Memoirs of Ricky Ricardo, The Man Who Loved Lucy* (New York: Morrow, 1976) p.36.

50. *Ibid.*, pp38-39. See also "Conga King Likes Billing as Cuban Mickey Rooney," *Miami Herald*, 15 November, 1939, Sec III p.2.

51. Arnaz, p.37; Also *Miami City Directory*, 1933.

52. Arnaz, In his biography, Arnaz explains how he improvised this "native Cuban-Miami ritual out of necessity." see *My Life*.

53. *Miami Daily News*, 14 November, 1939.

54. Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, 706-786

55. Although it could not document the exact number, the *Herald* estimated that more than 10,000 Cubans have turned Miami into a haven from the political storms on their island. "10,000 Cuban Refugees Bask in City," *Miami Herald*, 7 December, 1947 sec VI p.14.

56. *Miami City Directory*, 1955 Appeared there in 1955 directory for the first time.

57. From Advertisements in *Diario de las Americas*, 1955. Ironically, WIOD has now (1998) become one of the last bastions of talk radio in English in Miami.

58. "La Caridad de Cobre en Miami," *Diario de las Americas*, 9 September, 1955, Virgen de la Cobre.

59. "Mas Estudianted Hispanos Hay Ahora en Dade County," *Las Diarios* 18 September, 1956.

60. "Gran Entusiasmo Por El Balle del Circulo Cubano El Sabado," *Las Diarios* 21 September, 1956, p.4.

61. Specifically "Anuncio Classificados," p.3 *Diario Las Diarios* 21 September 1956. Advertisements throughout the paper given a good look at the commercial life of Miami's Latin Community in the 1950s.

62. Thomas, *Cuba: La Lucha Por la Libertad*, 984.

63. Lourdes Arguelles and Gary MacEoin, "El Miami Cubano," *Arieto* (Vol. VII No 28, 1981) 5-6.

64. University of Miami economist, Reinhold Wolff points out that in the 1940s the older local underworld leaders in Miami were driven out by a more aggressive group from the Northeastern United States; According to Arguelles and MacEoin this group was financed by the New York Crime syndicate headed by Meyer Lansky. See: Arguelles and MacEoin, "El Miami Cubano," 5.

65. "Politico Cubano Detenido Al Arrivar a Miami," *Diario Las Americas* 27 September, 1956 p.7.

66. Thomas, *Cuba: Pursuit of Freedom*, 950.

67. "Fidel Castro Alive and Holding Out Against Batista's Forces New York Times, 24 February, 1958, p.1.

68. According to *Economia*, the Castro inspired exile movement came in distinct waves from 1958 to 1962. Throughout the year 1958 there were approximately 3,000 refugees most of whom were connected to the Batista government. It was only after 1958 that the first wave of non-government refugees began arriving in large numbers. In 1959 there were 7,000, by 1961, 40,000, and in 1962, when the first suspension of flights occurred, there were 150,000 Cuban immigrants in Miami. *Economia* was a twenty page mimeographed paper put together monthly by former Cuban government officials, professors and economists living in Miami. Their principle purpose was to document the economic failure of the Castro regime in its early years. The point they were trying to make with their immigration statistics was a correct one (i.e. Cuba was losing the most productive part of its population) See also: Thomas, *Pursuit of Freedom*, 950; and "Testimony of James Hennessy, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization Service," *Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected With Refugees and Escapes*. Committee of the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty Seventh Congress, Second Session, part 2. December 2,3&4, 1962, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963) 210. (Hereafter: "Senate Hearings.")

69. "Monsignor Brian Walsh Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 231.

70. 7 *Dias del Diario de la Marina*, 26 November, 1960.

71. "Walsh Testimony" *Senate Hearings*, 226: "Coleman Carroll, Bishop of Miami Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 15.

72. "Hennessy Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 209.

73. "Robert King High, Mayor of Miami, Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 333 Some of the earliest immigrant statistics come from *the 7 Dias Del Diario De La Marina*, an exile newspaper. Citing figures from the International Rescue Committee established by President Eisenhower, *7 Dias* provide the following analysis of immigrants as of November, 1960: Professionals thirty percent Middle Class sixteen percent, Public Employees ten percent, Workers forty percent. Despite the separate category of "Middle Class" it seems more appropriate to put all these people in the category of "Middle Class" Since they all had certainly rejected the "anti middle class" that had taken hold of their homeland. It is also fair to put these statistics in context of the article in *7 Dias*, the editors were attempting to point out that the exiles were not simply political exiles but rather they represented the average Cuban citizen.

74. Wayne Farris, *Crisis Amigo* "WCKT Channel 7 Special Report" (December 5, 1961, 8:30-9:00 p.m.)

75. "Senator Phillip Hart Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 4.

76. "Congressman Dante Fascell Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 35.

77. "Mayor Robert King High Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 47.

78. "H. Franklin Williams Testimony," *Senate Hearings*, 82.

79. *7 Dias Del Diario De La Marina*, 1 October, 5, 26 November. 30 December, 1960.

80. *Miami City Directory* 1961-1963.

81. *Florida Times Union* (Jacksonville) 8 September, 1963.

82. "Miami Si, Cuba No," *New York Times*, 29 September, 1974, secVI p.28.

83. Antonio Jorge and Raul Moncarz, "International Factor Movement and Complimentary Growth and Entrepreneurship Under Conditions of Cultural Variation." *Research Group for European Migration Problems Supplement 14*, (Netherlands, September, 1981) 140.

84. *Senate Hearings*, 4; Jorge and Moncarz, "International Factor Movement. . . "30.

85. Raymond Mohl, "Race, Ethnicity and Urban Politics in the Miami Metropolitan Area," *Florida Environmental and Urban Issues*,

9 (April, 1982) 24.

86. Arguelles and MacEoin, "El Miami Cubano," 8.

87. *City of Miami Budget 1959-1960*, (Miami: City of Miami, 1959)

88. "Miami Si, Cuba No," *New York Times*, 29 September, 1974, secVI p.28.

89. Without information from Cuba it is difficult to ascertain the actual value of economic support from the "Miami Colony." However, in 1979 when Cubans were permitted to visit the island as tourists, they spent over \$100,000,000 there. Juan Clark, Jose Lasaga, Rose Regue, *1980 Mariel Exodus: An Assessment and Prospect*, 3.

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