

# Introduction (landau, 2009). migration after the revolution

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



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## **Introduction**

Cuban Americans are Hispanic United States citizens with Cuban origin.

These citizens either migrated from Cuba or were born in America by Cuban parents.

Cuban Americans have had a distinctive social, political, economic and demographic history in the United States. This group has shown different patterns from other migrant groups in the United States. Most Cuban Americans migrated into United States after the Cuban communist revolution and have had tremendous impact on the development of United States. This paper explores the struggles, the rise, successes and influence the Cuban Americans have had throughout the history of the United States.

## **The Cuban Communist Revolution**

Cubans migrated to the United States after the Cuban communist revolution in 1959. However, these were not the first Cubans to migrate into United States. Cubans had started migrating since 1565 during the Spanish colonial era.

This migration continued in the late 19th century when manufacturers and businessmen started relocating their businesses to Florida to flee from the political crisis in Cuba. The workers also followed suit. In 1870, there were approximately 1, 000 Cubans in Key West. Cuban American communities also started forming in Boston, New Orleans, New York City, Jacksonville, Philadelphia and Tampa. Economic and political changes in Cuba led to an increased rate of migration. However, it was after the Cuban communist revolution that the greatest migration of Cubans into the United States was witnessed (Herrera, 2001). After the Cuban communist revolution of 1959, there was an upsurge in migration as Cubans fled from Castro's socialist reforms. Cubans who migrated were welcomed as the United States government was against communism.

The Cuban communist revolution took place from 1953 to 1959. It was an armed rebellion against Fulgencio Batista, which was led by Fidel Castro. The revolution resulted in the ouster of Batista and Castro took over as the leader of Cuba. When Castro took over the leadership of Cuba, he highly militarized the country and nationalized many companies and properties, giving ownership to many peasants. After the revolution, many Cubans migrated to the United States to escape the dictatorship of Castro. They

relocated their businesses to the United States since Castro was implementing the communist policies of wealth distribution (Landau, 2009).

## **Migration after the Revolution**

Fidel Castro adopted socialist reforms to consolidate his power.

He fully nationalized industries such as banking, foreign trade and wholesale trade. This led the Cuban middle class to migrate to United States. The massive migration took place in three major groups. The first group migrated from 1959 to 1962. This group was about 215, 000 in total. The diplomatic ties between Cuba and the United States broke in 1961 and the United States government trained 1, 300 Cubans who had fled from Castro's dictatorship so they could go back and overthrow Fidel Castro.

They invaded Cuba at a place called the Bay of Pigs. However, this invasion failed and Cuba continued to be dominated by Castro's communism. The first group of immigrants mainly consisted of Cuba's upper class (Granello, 1996). This first group of Cuban immigrants was referred to as the "golden exiles" and consisted of military and political supporters of Fulgencio Batista, who fled from Fidel Castro's policies of wealth distribution. They were mainly professionals and businessmen. This group received aid and support from the American government, which was against communism in Cuba. This group was viewed as temporary exiles who hoped to return to Cuba if the United States was able to abolish communism in their country. However, after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, they lost hope of returning home (Woltman and Newbold, 2009).

Some other 300, 000 Cubans migrated to the United States from 1965 to 1973. The Cuban and United States governments organized an airlift so that Cubans could visit their relatives in United States. This group consisted of employees, small farmers, and merchants. The Cuban government was facing internal opposition after taking possession of around 55, 000 small businesses. This motivated this group to desire migration to United States to search for better financial opportunities. The Cuban government, therefore, yielded to the pressure of these Cubans and allowed them to leave (Chase, 2011). The third group of about 125, 000 Cubans migrated to the United States in 1980 when the port of Mariel was opened by the Cuban government. This group mostly comprised of the poor.

The communist revolution had intended to help the poor people by distributing the wealth of the rich. However, they got tired and disappointed by Castro's government and desired to leave the country. Castro allowed the opening of the Peruvian embassy in Havana and the port of Mariel in 1980 to help Cubans who wanted to migrate to accomplish their mission. This happened after desperate Cubans, tired of Castro's communist policies camped on the Peruvian embassy grounds expressing their desire to leave the country. This event received media attention and the Cuban government saw it as negatively affecting the public relations of the government. Therefore, whoever wanted to leave was allowed. Cuban Americans went to Cuba and brought their relatives to United States by boat. The Cuban government took advantage of this migration and released prisoners, the mentally ill and also gathered prostitutes and homosexuals and forced them

to leave the country with the others as a way of ensuring the country did not have unwanted members.

The prisoners were not necessarily criminals but most of them had been arrested for resisting the communist policies of Fidel Castro (Granello, 1996). This third group was not received warmly by the Cuban Americans and the United States as it was seen as a move by the Cuban government to dump the undesirable segments of society in United States. This group was viewed with suspicion and the Cuban Americans were not ready to bond with them. After this group entered United States, Miami experienced the highest rates of racial riots and crime in the history of America.

This group experienced many difficulties in United States especially resulting from the stigmatization by the media. The United States media greatly criticized them and referred them as social deviants who would bring problems to the American society. Other Cuban Americans were reluctant to accept them as they felt they would mar their good reputation in United States.

The first two groups of Cuban Americans had built a very good reputation themselves as very hardworking people and they had no record of criminal activity. Initially, the third group of Cuban Americans had difficulties finding jobs since they did not have any social networks and other Americans were reluctant to mingle with them, but within a short time, they were integrated into the Cuban American community and they got employed (Rothe and Pumariega, 2008).

## **Settlement of the Cuban Immigrants in the United States**

Cuban migrants were supported by the United States government. In 1961, the United States government, through the Cuban Refugee Program provided food, job training, relief checks, loans, education and medical care to Cuban refugees.

The Cuban Adjustment Act was enacted in 1966 and it enabled the Cuban refugees to attain permanent residency status in United States. After this, they were able to acquire private and federal loans and used the skills and education they had received as refugees to start economic ventures in Miami. This support greatly helped the Cuban Americans to establish themselves in business and prosper economically. This helped the groups that came later to get jobs. However, with the enactment of the Refugee Act in 1980, the number of Cubans allowed to migrate to the United States decreased.

Those who entered the United States during this period had their status pending. In 1984, the Cuban Refugee Act of 1966 was re-enacted and these refugees were able to receive permanent residency status (Johnson, 2009). Attaining permanent residency status enabled the Cuban refugees to become American citizens by naturalization. These Cuban Americans registered as voters and became a significant force in American politics.

Cuban Americans started representing municipalities as mayors in the 1980s. There were Cuban American mayors representing municipalities such as West Miami, Miami and Hialeah. In the 1980s, there were ten Cuban

Americans serving in the state legislature. Cuban Americans were also aggressively involved in the national politics of United States and formed the Cuban American National Foundation in 1981.

This foundation was mainly concerned with voicing views opposed to Fidel Castro and trying to influence the United States policy towards Cuba (Rothe and Pumariega, 2008). The relations between Cuba and the United States still affect the migration of Cubans to the United States. In 1984, the two governments came to an agreement allowing the migration of 20, 000 Cubans to the United States. However, the United States did not honor the agreement and started admitting around 2, 500 immigrants. However, many Cubans tried to reach the United States and were seized by the authorities. The United States has agreed to admit around 20, 000 Cubans into the country every year (Vickroy, 2005). The population of Cuban Americans in the United States was about one million in the early 1990s. Their refugee status enabled them to receive help from the federal government.

They were able to obtain housing and financial support through the Cuban Refugee Resettlement Program. According to the 2000 census results, there are approximately 1, 242, 685 Cuban Americans living in the United States. Cuban Americans constituted 3. 5% of the total Hispanic population.

Cuban Americans reside both in the suburbs and cities. Compared to other Hispanics, Cuban Americans are more economically successful and are well established in the United States in professions and business. Cuban Americans can be found in most United States' major cities. The largest



number resides in Florida while the second largest number resides around Union City. Many Cuban Americans do not reside in the ghetto neighborhoods like other Hispanics. Instead, many live in the suburbs such as Dade County and Little Havana in Miami owing to their prosperity (Garcia, 1996). Most Cuban Americans are politically active and tend to vote with the Republican Party unlike other Hispanics who prefer the Democratic Party.

The reason for the Cuban Americans to support the Republican Party is because of their strong hatred of Communism and they find more allies in the Republican Party who support their desire to overthrow Castro's government (Woltman and Newbold, 2009).

### **Successes, Struggles and Influence of Cuban Americans**

Cuban Americans are the most successful group of Hispanics. Compared to other Hispanics, Cuban Americans have higher economic security.

They get higher earnings and faster rates of population growth compared to other Hispanics. The Cuban Americans are well assimilated in the United States. They are great in number and have significant political influence. In 1988, 67.2% of Cuban Americans voted in the presidential election. Cuban Americans are also well educated with most of them having been to college. Cuban Americans are greatly concerned about education and even their children are well educated.

They are willing to pay for private education for their children so they can excel. Among all Hispanics, Cuban Americans value education very much and have enough resources to pay for their children's private schooling and

further education. Cuban American households also have low birthrates. This frees the female members of the community and, therefore, they look for employment. Cuban Americans have gone through very many struggles both in their country of origin and in the United States. In Cuba, Cubans who were seen as going against the policies of Fidel Castro were imprisoned and persecuted. Homosexuals were also persecuted. Writers who highlighted the oppression of the government in their works were also punished and forced to write positive views about the government.

Those who criticized the excesses of Castro's rule were oppressed.

Unemployment was criminalized and the jobless were arrested. Many Cubans who were oppressed by Castro's government were greatly traumatized (Vickroy, 2005). Many of the Cubans, therefore, migrated to the United States in search of freedom and to flee from oppression by Castro. The prisoners, homosexuals, mentally ill and other groups of people that Castro regarded undesirable were transported to the United States in 1980 through boatlifts (Chase, 2011). As exiles in the United States, Cuban Americans were disconnected from their homeland.

Cuban exiles have gone through a lot of challenges. Though the United States offered them refuge and an environment free from oppression, the Cuban Americans were traumatized because they lost their homeland and suffered alienation, isolation and dislocation. Moreover, even though early Cuban migrants to the United States were very successful, it is not the case for recent migrants. This group is less educated and has less professional and business experience and was, therefore, not warmly received in the

United States. Recent Cuban migrants have been labeled social deviants by the United States' media (Vickroy, 2005). Cuban Americans also have great influence in the United States.

The Cuban Americans have grown in numbers and have significant political influence. For instance, the Cuban American National Foundation was able to successfully prevent President Bill Clinton's administration from appointing a Latin American affairs undersecretary of state that the Cuban Americans were opposed to in 1993 (Woltman and Newbold, 2009). Cuban Americans have served in various positions in the United States government.

There are two Cuban American senators in the United States senate serving in the states of Florida and New Jersey and four members in the United States House of Representatives. Cuban Americans have also served high profile government jobs such as White House Chief of Staff, Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, ambassadors, Director of Immigration and Naturalization Services, Florida Supreme Court justice, Vice Chairman of the Export-Import Bank of the United States and chief judge of United States Court of Appeals (Woltman and Newbold, 2009).

## **Second Generation Cuban Americans**

The offspring of Cuban immigrants are forming new ethnic patterns and research shows differences from their parents in terms of social, cultural and psychological adaptation in the United States, education performance, political affiliation and attitudes towards Cuba, among others. Second generation Cuban Americans are wealthier, better educated, more politically

enlightened and active, and more willing to identify with the American culture than their parents. The children of Cuban immigrants are assured of success and economic development by the various resources available to them in their ethnic community in Miami (Granello, 1996).

Most second generation Cuban Americans prefer to speak English than Spanish while at school. They, however, speak Spanish with their parents at home. This group also feels less racially discriminated. These Cuban Americans still uphold the symbols and memories of their exile. They still celebrate their ancestry and identify with their cultural history. Most second generation Cuban Americans are college graduates and have a higher rate of high school graduates than any other minority groups in the United States. The Cuban Americans from the upper-class continue to live under the protection of their parents until they get married and this allows them to develop professionally, socially and economically. However, those from the working class start working while still in high school to support the family and this has resulted in high rates of school drop-out in this group (Woltman and Newbold, 2009).

Second generation Cuban Americans have also changed the traditional political affiliation of the Cuban American community. Cuban Americans have always supported the Republican Party, which they see as more committed to abolishing communism. However, the political views of second generation Cuban Americans are different and the support for the Republican Party has decreased (Rothe and Pumariega, 2008). For instance, a very large number

of Cuban Americans voted for the Democratic Party candidate Barack Obama.

## **The Role of Miami in the Development of Cuban Americans**

The largest number of Cuban Americans resides in Miami. They can be found in other areas in the United States but Miami is the most heavily populated by this minority group. They have contributed greatly to the growth of Miami into a big metropolitan city due to their professional, entrepreneurial skills and hard work.

They have organized many enterprises in Miami to serve their own population and ethnic market. The Cuban Americans have formed true ethnic cooperative in Miami. Miami attracts both external and internal Cuban immigrants from Cuba and other parts of the United States. The first two groups of Cuban immigrants brought in human capital and established businesses that created many jobs, facilitating the migration of other Cuban Americans from other regions of the United States into Miami. The federal government has been relocating Cuban immigrants from Miami to other parts of the United States, but they always come back to Miami.

Cuban Americans have established a Cuban culture and ethnic heritage in Miami and, therefore, most Cuban immigrants feel at home there (Woltman and Newbold, 2009). In the United States, Miami has become the center of Cuban American existence. The Cuban American population has greatly increased, affecting other groups that originally resided in Miami. There are different Cuban American neighborhoods in Miami based on the economic

ability of the residents. Kendal is inhabited by young and rich professionals while Little Havana consists of Cuban Americans who are elderly and mostly blue collar employees. The Cuban American community in Miami has established themselves and has complete institutions like banks and others.

Therefore, they can conduct business without relying on the rest of the society (Boswell, 1993). The Cuban Americans residing in Miami have continued to uphold Cuban culture. They maintain the Cuban musical heritage, literary tradition, festivals, parades, carnivals, architectural styles and food. Both English and Spanish are spoken in Miami. Cuban American households are mainly three-generation. Having three-generation families enables both Cuban American parents to be in full employment while the grandparents are left at home looking after the children (Rothe and Pumariega, 2008). Cuban Americans in other parts of the United States like Chicago, Los Angeles, New Jersey and New York City still migrate to Miami. However, very few Cuban Americans move from Miami to other regions.

The native Cuban Americans migrate to Miami in greater numbers than those born in the United States. The greatest rate of migration by Cuban Americans from other regions to Miami is higher among the poor, who move into this city in search of cultural, social, and economic support. Miami mostly attracts Cuban Americans with less education, older, foreign-born and disadvantaged (McHugh, Miyares and Skop, 1997). The development of Miami as a close-knit community has had several impacts on the Cuban Americans. This community ensures social, economic and cultural protection

to the Cuban Americans. Cuban American children and new migrants to Miami are assured of support from this community.

However, this community impedes the members of the community from adapting to the changing cultural, social and political situations. They uphold their traditional cultural and social beliefs and values and, therefore, do not blend with the mainstream American culture (Portes and Stepick, 1993).

## **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it is evident that Cuban Americans have a rich history of political oppression in their native country and later, finding freedom in the United States.

Most Cubans migrated to the United States after the communist revolution in Cuba. They quickly settled in the United States and have become the most economically successful group among the minorities in the United States. This success has been built by upholding the heritage and traditions of community and family among the community members and hard work. Cuban Americans have also received more support from the United States government than any other migrant group and have also been more educated and more professionally skilled and experienced.

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