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ON THE EDGE: BLACKS AND HISPANICS IN METROPOLITAN MIAMI SINCE 1959

by RAYMOND A. MOHL

ON Monday, January 16, 1989, hundreds of blacks in Miami took to the streets in angry rage for the fourth time in the 1980s. Over several days, they burned cars and buildings, looted stores, pelted passers-by with rocks and bottles, and faced off with riot police in Overtown and Liberty City, Miami's two major black communities. The incident that touched off this new expression of black anger was sadly familiar. A Miami policeman had shot and killed a black man fleeing a traffic infraction on a motorcycle, while a second black man, a passenger on the motorcycle, was thrown from the vehicle and also killed. It was difficult to miss the irony in the fact that this latest Miami riot took place on the same day that blacks had celebrated the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., the modern apostle of non-violence. There were other ironies, as well. In this new immigrant city, it should not have been surprising that none of those involved in the riot-triggering incident was a native-born American. The police officer who fired the fatal bullet, William Lozano, had immigrated to Miami with his family from Colombia. Although few noticed at the time, the two dead black men, Allen Blanchard and Clement Lloyd, were also migrants from the Caribbean basin, from the U. S. Virgin Islands. The three newcomers whose paths crossed on that fateful Monday evening had come to south Florida in search of the elusive American dream; what they found in Miami, ultimately, was something quite different.¹

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1. *Miami Herald*, January 17, 18, 19, 22, December 10, 1989; *Miami Times*, January 19, 26, 1989; *New York Times*, January 18, 22, 1989; *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 19, 20, 1989; Jacob V. Lamar, "A Brightly Colored Tinderbox," *Time* (January 30, 1989), 28-29; George Hackett, "'All of Us Are in Trouble,'" *Newsweek* (January 30, 1989), 36-37.

One can also find symbolic contradiction in the fact that the January 1989 riot in Miami came at the very time that this city of Cuban exiles was on the receiving end of a new mass immigration of Latin newcomers, this time from Nicaragua. Nicaraguan exiles began concentrating in Miami following the 1979 overthrow of the Somoza regime by the Sandinista revolutionaries. Politically comfortable with the right-wing, anticommunist Cubans, Anastasio Somoza set up an exile headquarters in the city, and many thousands of his countrymen followed over the next decade. Worsening economic and political conditions in Nicaragua in 1988 coincided with a loosening of United States immigration policy toward Central America, resulting in a new exodus of Nicaraguan exiles who trekked overland through Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico to Texas, and then on to Miami by bus. By December 1988, a month before Miami exploded into violence, some 200 Nicaraguans were pouring into Miami every day, and the press was widely predicting that an estimated 100,000 additional Nicaraguans would arrive in Miami within the next year. The new Nicaraguan migration provided the backdrop for the latest violence in Overtown and Liberty City. It was hard to escape the contradictions: the blacks were burning down their neighborhoods in despair, but the thousands of newly arrived Nicaraguan refugees pinned their hopes for the future on a new life in Miami.²

For observers of the Miami scene, all of this was quite familiar. It had happened before, and more than once. The 1980 Liberty City riots had been touched off by a not guilty verdict for several Miami policemen, some of whom were Hispanic,

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2. The new Nicaraguan exile migration has been covered extensively. See Dave Von Drehle, "Nicaraguan Refugees Flock into Miami," *Miami Herald*, January 13, 1989; Liz Balmaseda, "East Little Havana: A New Nicaragua," *ibid.*, February 5, 1989; Christopher Marquis, "Nicaraguan Exiles Changed Miami's Face," *ibid.*, July 16, 1989. See also Melinda Beck, "Exodus of the 'Feet People,'" *Newsweek* (November 14, 1988), 37; Barry Bearak, "Miami Reacts with Charity and Anxiety to Latest Refugee Influx from Nicaragua," *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1989; Paul Adams, "Next Stop, Miami," *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel, Sunshine Magazine* (March 5, 1989), 24-30; Brad Edmondson, "In Little Managua," *American Demographics* 11 (August 1989), 53-55; and Anne Moncreiff Arrarte, "The Contras and Miami: How Do You Resettle an Unemployed Army," *South Florida* 42 (August 1989), 64-67, 133-34.

charged with beating a black motorcyclist to death. This riot, too, coincided with massive Caribbean migrations to Miami: the 1980 Mariel boatlift, which brought 125,000 new Cuban exiles to south Florida, and the simultaneous migration of upwards of 25,000 Haitian boat people in 1979 and 1980, some of whom were washing up on south Florida beaches within sight of heavy palls of smoke from the torched neighborhoods of Liberty City and Overtown. Two years later, in December 1982, a Hispanic policeman killed a black youth in an Overtown video-game parlor, setting off another wave of black ghetto rioting.³

There was a tragic sameness to these events. Confrontations of various sorts between blacks and the police touched off violence each time. These encounters often involved Hispanic police officers. In two of the riots since 1980, mass migrations to Miami of Hispanic exiles and other Caribbean refugees occurred simultaneously, providing a poignant backdrop to the outbursts of violence in the city's black neighborhoods. As many observers have suggested, these events reflected much deeper social, economic, and political tensions between blacks and Hispanics in the Miami metropolitan area.

It is something of an historical accident that the Cuban Revolution and the subsequent exile migration to south Florida coincided with the civil rights movement in the late 1950s and 1960s. In the Miami area, those two powerful forces for change not only coincided, but they collided with one another. The human consequences were enormous and long-lasting. The Cubans arrived—over 800,000 of them between 1959 and 1980—just as the civil rights movement was opening things up for long-depressed and long-repressed black communities. As the old barriers of segregation crumbled throughout the South, blacks generally found new opportunities in employment, housing, schooling, government, and social services. Blacks also became empowered politically, which eventually led to a dramatic

3. For an analysis of the 1980 Liberty City riots, see Bruce Porter and Marvin Dunn, *The Miami Riot of 1980: Crossing the Bounds* (Lexington, MA, 1984). On the Mariel boatlift, see Robert L. Bach, "The New Cuban Exodus," *Caribbean Review* 11 (Winter 1982), 22-25, 58-60. On the migration of Haitian boat people, see Alex Stepick, *Haitian Refugees in the U.S.* (London: Minority Rights Group, Report No. 52, 1982); and Jake C. Miller, *The Plight of Haitian Refugees* (New York, 1984).

transformation of municipal politics and government as blacks rose to positions of leadership in the big cities and small towns of the South.⁴

But in Miami, things took a somewhat different course. In retrospect, it appears that the Cuban migration short-circuited the economic and political gains blacks were making elsewhere. Moreover, the exile "invasion," as it was called in the 1960s, touched off thirty years of competition and conflict between blacks and Hispanics over jobs, residential space, government services, and political power in the south Florida area. The widespread perception, supported by reams of economic and sociological data, that the Cubans have been exceptionally successful in the United States— and that they have, essentially, won out in the economic and political struggle in Miami— has contributed to a pervasive sense of powerlessness, resentment, and despair in black Miami. Each successive wave of newcomers in the 1970s and 1980s— the Haitians, the Nicaraguans, the Mariel Cubans— generated new expressions of concern for the consequences, and often of outrage and anger, in the black press and among those who spoke for the black community.

Tension between blacks and Hispanics in Miami was superimposed on a much longer history of racial conflict that dates back to Miami's origin as a city in 1896. Residentially, blacks were forced into a densely populated, unhealthy shacktown on the fringes of the business district. As in the rest of the South at the turn of the century, lynchings were not uncommon, and police repression in the black community was routine. The Ku Klux Klan acted with impunity into the 1930s and even as late as 1951 white night riders dynamited an apartment complex undergoing transition from white to black occupancy. The white primary system, and later other registration restrictions and voting procedures, such as at-large elections, effectively excluded blacks from the political process, and the urban renewal and highway building of the 1950s and 1960s destroyed large portions of Miami's black inner-city community."

4. For an analysis of the impact of the civil rights movement in the urban South, see David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge, 1990).

5. Paul S. George, "Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930,"

Race relations had never been very good in Miami before the civil rights era. Even after voting rights were assured in the 1960s, blacks did not become politically assertive, partially because the city had never developed much of a black middle class from which to draw leadership. Moreover, a troubled pattern of community-police relations plagued the city in the years between the two major ghetto riots of 1968 and 1980—a period during which thirteen “mini-riots” occurred, all stemming from police confrontations or altercations with blacks. Despite its national image through the 1950s as a glitzy tourist town and vacation spa, Miami was still very much a Deep South city during the segregation era, with all that that implied for race relations. As writer Joan Didion recently commented, with wry understatement, Miami “was a city with black people and white people viewed each other with some discontent.”⁶

Race relations in Miami were complicated in unanticipated ways by the outcome of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The migration of Cuban exiles over thirty years, and of more recent newcomers from other Latin nations, has brought a veritable demographic revolution to the Miami metropolitan area. During that period, more than 800,000 Cubans left their homeland for the United States. Despite federal efforts to relocate the Cubans throughout the country, a large proportion of them eventually settled permanently in the Miami area.⁷

Florida Historical Quarterly 56 (April 1978), 432-47; Paul S. George, “Policing Miami’s Black Community, 1896-1930,” *ibid.* 57 (April 1979), 434-50; Raymond A. Mohl, “Trouble in Paradise: Race and Housing in Miami during the New Deal Era,” *Prologue: Journal of the National Archives* 19 (Spring 1987), 7-21; Raymond A. Mohl, “Shadows in the Sunshine: Race and Ethnicity in Miami,” *Tequesta: The Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida* 49 (1989), 63-80.

6. On the weakness of Miami’s black leadership, see Clyde C. Wooten et al., *Psycho-Social Dynamics in Miami* (Coral Gables, 1969), 372-406. On the “mini-riots” between 1968 and 1980, see Porter and Dunn, *The Miami Riot of 1980*, 17-22. For the Didion comment, see Joan Didion, *Miami* (New York, 1987), 39-40.
7. On the Cuban exile migration, see Raymond A. Mohl, “Immigration through the Port of Miami,” in G. Mark Stolarik, ed., *Forgotten Doors: The Other Ports of Entry to the United States* (Philadelphia, 1988), 81-98; and Felix Roberto Masud-Piloto, *With Open Arms: Cuban Migration to the United States* (Totowa, NJ, 1988).

As a result of the Cuban exile migration, both the city of Miami and the entire Miami metropolitan area are now generally considered to be “tri-ethnic” in character. In 1950, prior to the Cuban exodus, Hispanics in the Miami area— mostly Puerto Ricans— totaled about 20,000, or 4 percent of the population. By the late 1980s however, some 900,000 Hispanics resided in the Miami area, and they made up almost one-half of the metropolitan population, and over 65 percent of the population of the city of Miami. Once the 1990 census is completed, these demographic statistics will almost certainly be revised upward still again. By contrast, the percentage of blacks in the Miami area has remained relatively stable over many decades, ranging from 18 percent in 1940 to 17 percent in 1980.⁸

The dramatic outpouring of newcomers from Cuba and other Latin nations of the Caribbean basin has had an enormous impact on the economic, political, and cultural life of the Miami area. For Miami’s blacks, who had long been on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder and politically powerless, the Cuban migration posed special problems. It did not take long for Miami’s black press and community leaders to recognize that the Cuban newcomers would be competing with blacks for jobs and housing.

Although often penniless on arrival in Miami, the earliest Cuban exiles had education, skills, and a strong work ethic. An entire professional and business class literally was uprooted from Havana and set down in Miami. Because the Cubans initially lacked capital, English language skills, and the appropriate credentials to practice their professions in the United States, they moved at first into the low-paying service-type jobs traditionally held by blacks, particularly in tourist hotels and restaurants in Miami and Miami Beach. They also found work in downtown retail, office, and service jobs; in the expanding local

8. On Miami’s changing demography, see William W. Jenna, *Metropolitan Miami: A Demographic Overview* (Coral Gables, 1972); Raymond A. Mohl, “Miami: The Ethnic Cauldron,” in Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, eds., *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War II* (Austin, TX, 1983), 67-72; Oliver Kerr, *Population Projections: Race and Hispanic Origin, Dade County, Florida, 1980-2000* (Miami, 1987); Oliver Kerr, *Population Projections: Patterns of Population Change, Dade County, Florida, 1970-2010* (Miami, 1987).

garment industry; in construction; and in other blue-collar employment where they competed with black workers. The stories are legendary of Cuban bankers working as janitors, Cuban accountants washing dishes in greasy-spoon restaurants, and Cuban doctors emptying hospital bedpans. As early as 1959, complaints from blacks and organized labor began to be heard, contending that the Cubans were taking the jobs of American citizens and undermining prevailing local wage levels.⁹

By 1963, when over 200,000 Cuban exiles had arrived, discussion of Cuban economic competition with Miami blacks had become commonplace. In June of that year, *Ebony* magazine published an extensive article on what was already being labeled the "Cuban invasion" of south Florida. The Cubans had injected new life and "Latin ways" into the city, the *Ebony* piece conceded, but they "also brought in the wake of their invasion a host of grave social and economic problems." In particular, the article pointed to the emerging competition between blacks and Cubans over jobs, housing, schooling, and government services—a sort of zero-sum analysis in which a limited supply of resources was now being divided among a larger number of competing groups. "The economic penetration of the refugees is now universal," *Ebony* sadly concluded. Similarly, beginning in the early 1960s the *Miami Times*, the city's black weekly newspaper, regularly lamented the negative economic impact of the Cuban influx. "The Cubans are slowly taking over the business of Dade County," the *Miami Times* typically complained in 1966.¹⁰

Initially, the zero-sum analysis was rejected by officialdom in Miami. City and federal officials introduced businessmen, economists, and experts willing to argue that few blacks had been displaced by the new Cuban arrivals. By the mid 1960s however, the evidence seemed to be building that job displacement had indeed been taking place. It was clear that the employ-

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9. Cal Brumley, "Cuban Exodus," *Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 1960; Neil Maxwell, "Unwelcome Guests," *ibid.*, May 6, 1963; Neil Maxwell, "New Influx of Cubans Faces Cool Reception from Many Miamians," *ibid.*, October 12, 1965; *New York Times*, October 21, 1961, October 17, 1965; Tom Alexander, "Those Amazing Cuban Refugees," *Fortunes* 74 (October 1966), 144-49; Edward J. Linehan, "Cuba's Exiles Bring New Life to Miami," *National Geographic* 144 (July 1973), 63-95.
 10. Allan Morrison, "Miami's Cuban Refugee Crisis," *Ebony* 18 (June 1963), 96-104; *Miami Times*, July 15, 1966.

ment gains blacks had been making elsewhere in the civil rights era had yet to materialize in Miami. By 1965, the city's Community Relations Board had taken up the issue at a time when it was feared that the economic competition between the two groups would spill over into violent conflict. Ironically, in view of Miami's later racial history, it was reported by the *Wall Street Journal* in 1965 that the city was taking "pride" in the fact that there had "never been a major race clash here." Racial violence held off until 1968 when the city exploded during the Republican national convention in Miami Beach. Cuban economic competition and governmental favoritism for the newcomers found a place among the official explanations for the 1968 Miami riot, as well as for later racial explosions. As one journalist noted in a *New York Times* article in 1974, "The role of the Cubans in the Miami job market of the early sixties contributed to a legacy of racial tension that hangs over black-Cuban relations today."¹¹

During the 1970s and 1980s as earlier Cubans moved upward economically and professionally, newer exiles from Cuba and elsewhere took their places in Miami's low-wage service and manufacturing economy. By the 1980s, for instance, according to the 1982 Miami report of the United States Civil Rights Commission, Hispanics made up two-thirds of Miami's construction labor force, and 85 percent of the workers in Miami's extensive garment industry. By contrast, despite the area's growing economy, blacks have remained on the economic margins, with high proportions of poverty-level incomes, high levels of unemployment, and little economic opportunity. Over time, Hispanics replaced blacks in the service economy where they had formerly predominated. In the hotel industry, for example, a survey of twelve major hotels in 1981 revealed that blacks held only 9.9 percent of almost 4,300 hotel jobs. "By all social indicators," the Civil Rights Commission reported, "blacks have been excluded from the economic mainstream in Miami." Despite the gains of the civil rights era, the commission contended, "generations of

11. *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 1963, October 12, 1965; Susan Jacoby, "Miami si, Cuba no," *New York Times Magazine* (September 29, 1974), 104. For an analysis of the 1968 Miami riot, see National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, *Miami Report: The Report of the Miami Study Team on Civil Disturbances in Miami, Florida, during the Week of August 5, 1968* (Washington, DC, 1969).

explicit and race-based employment discrimination have left a legacy that continues to infect the labor market."¹²

Not only did the Cubans move into the local job market, but their collective entrepreneurialism soon had a dramatic impact on business activity in the Miami metropolitan area. By 1972, when the Hispanic population of the area was about double that of blacks, Hispanics had established more than three times as many businesses as blacks, and gross receipts surpassed those of black businesses by five times. Moreover, black businesses were overwhelmingly small; they were concentrated in selective services and the retail trade, they lacked access to capital, and they employed few salaried workers beyond the business-owner himself. Things had hardly improved by 1982 when only 1 percent of Miami's businesses were black-owned, and almost all of them— 88 percent— were owner-operated with no employees.¹³

This pattern of energetic Hispanic business activity continued through the 1970s and into the 1980s. It is now clear that the Cuban exiles created a self-sufficient "enclave economy," one entirely separate from the mainstream white business community, and separate as well from the peripheral black minority economy. Some observers contend that the Cuban enclave economy has not undermined the economic standing of Miami blacks, since the Cubans carved out completely new business opportunities in ethnic goods and foods, cigar making, and international trade. Thus, say sociologists Kenneth L. Wilson and W. Allen Martin, the Cubans' extraordinary entrepreneurial success did not come at the expense of the black community.¹⁴

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12. U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Confronting Racial Isolation in Miami* (Washington, DC, 1982), 1-26, 124-90, quotations on pp. 18 and 124. See also Harold M. Rose, "Blacks and Cubans in Metropolitan Miami's Changing Economy," *Urban Geography* 10 (1989), 464-86.
 13. *Minority-Owned Businesses, Miami Florida* (Miami, 1975), 1-4, 15; George J. Demas and Richard J. Welsh, *Profile of Black-Owned Businesses, Dade County, Florida, 1982* (Miami, 1986); Andrew Neil, "America's Latin Beat: A Survey of South Florida," *The Economist* 285 (October 16, 1982), 21. For the contrast with Hispanic businesses, see Richard J. Welsh and Panos Efstathiou, *Profile of Hispanic Businesses, Dade County, Florida, 1982* (Miami, 1986).
 14. Kenneth L. Wilson and W. Allen Martin, "Ethnic Enclaves: A Comparison of the Cuban and Black Economies in Miami," *American Journal of Sociology* 88 (July 1982), 135-60. Additional insight into the Cuban enclave economy can be found in Jan B. Luytjes, *Economic Impact of Refugees in Dade County* (Miami, 1982); Antonio Jorge and Raul Moncarz, *The Political Economy of*

However, considerable evidence also suggests that, at least in some degree, Cuban entrepreneurial success did undercut black-owned businesses. For example, blacks owned 25 percent of all the gas stations in Dade County in 1960. By 1979, black ownership of service stations had dropped to 9 percent, but Hispanic stations numbered 48 percent of the total. Similarly, differential patterns can be found in the Miami activities of the Small Business Administration (SBA). Between 1968 and 1979, the SBA distributed about \$100,000,000 to Miami area businesses. Hispanics received 47 percent of the total over the twelve-year period; non-Hispanic whites, 46.5 percent; and blacks, 6.4 percent. In the year after the 1980 Liberty City riot, 90 percent of SBA loans in Miami went to Hispanics and whites. The Cuban enclave economy has absorbed hundreds of thousands of Hispanic newcomers over the years, but has done little to advance the economic position of Miami's blacks. As writer David Rieff put it, "The blacks were frozen out" by the Cubans, who "saw no particular reason to have to assume the burden of America's historical obligation to black people."¹⁵

Clearly, the Cubans exiles have fared well in the United States. Numerous studies have demonstrated the rapid upward socioeconomic mobility of the early waves of Cuban immigrants. Despite the leveling tendency of their emigration over time, statistical evidence from the Census Bureau reveals that the Cubans have more education, better jobs, and higher incomes than the Hispanic population generally in the United States. The economic success of the Cubans, without any comparable improvement for blacks, has been a persistent source of irritation and resentment in the Miami black community. In particular, blacks generally feel left out of the local job market, since, as one observer noted, "Miami blacks always live in danger of losing their jobs to the latest wave of immigrants off the islands

Cubans in South Florida (Coral Gables, 1987); Kenneth L. Wilson and Alejandro Portes, "Immigrant Enclaves: An Analysis of the Labor Market Experience of Cubans in Miami," *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (September 1980), 295-319; Alejandro Portes, "The Social Origins of the Cuban Enclave Economy of Miami," *Sociological Perspectives* 30 (1987), 340-72.

15. *Miami Herald*, May 17, 1981; Porter and Dunn, *The Miami Riot of 1980*, 68-69; David Rieff, *Going to Miami: Exiles, Tourists, and Refugees in the New America* (Boston, 1987), 172, 174; Rose, "Blacks and Cubans," 477-84.

prepared to work for peanuts.” As the Civil Rights Commission put it in 1982, blacks were “the missing partner” in Miami’s dramatic economic growth of the past several decades. This same theme was echoed six years later, in 1988, when *Newsweek* noted that “the black community has been left out of Dade County’s prosperity almost entirely.”¹⁶

The Cuban influx also created a new level of competition for housing and residential space in the Miami area. Miami had always had a highly segregated residential pattern. Several sociological studies, for example, noted that of more than one hundred large American cities, Miami had the highest degree of residential segregation by race in 1940, 1950, and 1960—before the Cuban influx—a legacy of the racial zoning of the segregation era. By 1970, Miami’s “index of residential segregation” had improved somewhat compared to other southern cities, but 92 percent of Miami blacks still lived in segregated neighborhoods. In 1980, after thirty years of civil rights activism in urban America, Miami still ranked near the top of a list of sixty metropolitan areas in the extent of black residential segregation.¹⁷

At the time of the initial Cuban migrations, most Miami blacks lived in Liberty City and Overtown, two large ghettoized communities north and west of the central business district, while others resided in half a dozen smaller black neighborhoods scattered throughout the metropolitan area. The urban renewal and interstate highway construction of the 1950s and 1960s, and continued downtown redevelopment activities in the 1970s and 1980s, resulted in the destruction of at least 10,000

16. Neil, “America’s Latin Beat,” 21-22; Civil Rights Commission, *Confronting Racial Isolation in Miami*, 79-123; Tom Morganthau, “Miami,” *Newsweek* (January 25, 1988), 29. On the demographic evidence for Cuban success, see A. J. Jaffe et al., *The Changing Demography of Spanish Americans* (New York, 1980), 245-78; and Frank D. Bean and Marta Tienda, *The Hispanic Population of the United States* (New York, 1988).

17. Donald O. Cowgill, “Trends in Residential Segregation of Non-Whites in American Cities,” *American Sociological Review* 21 (February 1956), 43-47; Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago, 1965), 39-41; Annemette Sorenson et al., “Indexes of Racial Residential Segregation for 109 Cities in the United States, 1940-1970,” *Sociological Focus* 8 (1975), 125-42; Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, “Trends in the Residential Segregation of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians: 1970-1980,” *American Sociological Review* 52 (December 1987), 802-25; *Miami Herald*, December 30, 1987.

housing units, mostly in the black, inner-city community of Overtown. At the same time, the Cubans were arriving in massive numbers and staking out their own inner-city residential space west of the central business district, in what is now known as Little Havana, and also in Hialeah in the far northwest quadrant of the metropolitan area.¹⁸

Blacks displaced from Overtown by urban renewal and redevelopment found their relocation choices limited. Consequently, existing black communities such as Liberty City grew in population, pushing out the frontiers of the ghetto into adjoining white, working-class districts such as Opa-Locka and Carol City. As one social scientist noted in a 1979 study, "the Latin American community of Miami has grown so rapidly in population that it has dramatically affected the residential space of other groups within the city." Urban renewal and the Cuban influx, taken together, limited the number of housing units available to blacks, the Civil Rights Commission reported in the wake of the 1980 Liberty City riots. The conjunction of redevelopment and immigration, in the 1960s especially, contributed to excessive rents, a high level of overcrowding, a rapidly deteriorating housing stock, and worsening slum conditions in Miami's black communities.¹⁹

From the early 1960s, Miami blacks were aware of the social and economic implications of the Cuban influx. Jobs and housing had always been high on the list of black grievances. But the arrival of the Cubans created a new grievance: governmental favoritism toward the newcomers. Because the Cubans were escaping communism in Cuba, they were accorded a special

18. Harold M. Rose, "Metropolitan Miami's Changing Negro Population, 1950-1960," *Economic Geography* 40 (July 1964), 221-38; Mohl, "Shadows in the Sunshine," 63-80.

19. Morton D. Winsberg, "Housing Segregation of a Predominantly Middle Class Population: Residential Patterns Developed by the Cuban Immigration into Miami, 1950-74," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 38 (October 1979), 403-18, quotation on p. 415. See also Kerr, *Population Projections: Race and Hispanic Origin*; Morton D. Winsberg, "Ethnic Competition for Residential Space in Miami, Florida, 1970-1980," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 42 (July 1983), 305-14; B. E. Aguirre et al., "The Residential Patterning of Latin American and Other Ethnic Populations in Metropolitan Miami," *Latin American Research Review* 15, No. 2 (1980), 35-63.

parolee status outside the regular immigration quota, and then given special treatment after they arrived. Initially, private voluntary and religious agencies, particularly the Catholic Church, supplied emergency assistance for the Cuban exiles. But very quickly, in December 1960, President Eisenhower created the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) to handle the actual processing and resettlement of the Cubans in Miami. After initial security screening of the exiles by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the CRP's Cuban Refugee Emergency Center in Miami provided them with food and clothing, housing assistance, social services, medical care, relocation assistance, educational programs, job training, and job placement. Special programs, costing \$130,000,000 in federal funds through 1972, were introduced into the Dade County public schools to aid in the adjustment and training of the newcomers and their children. Language classes, vocational training, business education, varied adult education programs, and the like proliferated to assist the Cubans. The University of Miami and other agencies were enlisted to train, "retool," and recertify Cuban professionals. As a result, thousands of Cuban physicians, nurses, lawyers, pharmacists, dentists, accountants, architects, engineers, veterinarians, and teachers were enabled to resume their professional lives in south Florida. Special federal loans were made available for Cubans wishing to attend universities. The assistance of the Small Business Administration, mentioned earlier, stimulated business start-ups among the Cuban exiles. This vast exile welfare program, according to one study, touched directly about 75 percent of all the Cuban arrivals before 1974. The cost was enormous: by 1973, more than \$1,000,000,000 had been spent by the federal government to assist Cuban resettlement in the United States. The continuing Cuban migration drove federal expenses considerably higher by the 1980s. The bill for processing, settling, and detaining the Cubans from the Mariel boatlift, for example, surpassed \$2,000,000,000 by 1990. Reflecting on the vast federal program for exiles, one Cuban teacher noted simply, "They have helped us a lot."²⁰

20. Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, *Political and Economic Migrants in America: Cubans and Mexicans* (Austin, TX, 1985), 40-52, quotation on p. 52; James LeMoyne, "Most Who Left Mariel Sailed to New Life, a Few to Limbo," *New York*

There was another source of governmental support for many Cubans in Miami as well. For years, the Central Intelligence Agency had thousands of Miami Cubans on the CIA payroll, perhaps as many as 12,000 or more at one point in the early 1960s. Some of these people surfaced during the Watergate break-in in the early 1970s, and others during the more recent Iran-Contra fiasco. During the 1960s, in fact, the Miami CIA station was the largest in the world outside of McLean, Virginia. In the cold war era, the hard-line, anticommunist Cuban exiles in south Florida found a ready source of financial and other support in the federal government.²¹

The vast outpouring of federal funding for the Cuban exiles had a lot to do with the quick adaptation and economic success of the newcomers from the Caribbean. Over time, blacks came to resent the preferential treatment of Cubans by government at every level. Black community leaders and the black press often drew comparisons between the rising condition of the Cuban refugees and the still-downtrodden situation of Miami's blacks. This issue of preferential treatment for Hispanic newcomers has persisted into the 1980s and beyond. Moreover, the perception among blacks that the recent Nicaraguan exiles are equally favored has kept this issue inflamed. The differential treatment accorded recent black immigrants from Haiti, who have been incarcerated in detention camps or forced back to their homeland, has only served to strengthen the sense of ill treatment among Miami's blacks.²²

Times, April 15, 1990. On the varied programs to resettle Cubans, see John F. Thomas, "Cuban Refugee Program," *Welfare in Review* 1 (September 1963), 1-20; John F. Thomas, "Cuban Refugees in the United States," *International Migration Review* 1 (Spring 1967), 46-57; Raul Moncarz, "Professional Adaptation of Cuban Physicians in the United States, 1959-1969," *International Migration* 4 (Spring 1970), 80-86; Raul Moncarz, "A Model of Professional Adaptation of Refugees: The Cuban Case in the U.S., 1959-1970," *International Migration* 11 (1973), 171-83; Joe Hall, *The Cuban Refugee in the Public Schools of Dade County, Florida* (Miami, 1965); Michael J. McNally, *Catholicism in South Florida, 1868-1968* (Gainesville, 1984), 127-66.

21. On the CIA connection in Miami, see Didion, *Miami*, 83-98; Rieff, *Going to Miami*, 193-207; and Cynthia Jo Rich, "Pondering the Future: Miami's Cubans After 15 Years," *Race Relations Reporter* 5 (November 1974), 7-9.
22. *Miami Times*, September 27, 1968; Wooten et al., *Psycho-Social Dynamics in Miami*, 256-67; Herbert Burkholz, "The Latinization of Miami," *New York Times Magazine* (September 21, 1980), 45-46, 84-88, 98-99. On the differential treatment of Haitian refugees, see Kevin Krajick, "Refugees Adrift:

The black sense of powerlessness in Cuban Miami has been intensified by changes in the local political culture. Over time, the Cuban migration dramatically altered the political structure of the Miami area, especially as the Cubans became citizens and voters by the mid 1970s. At one time, Florida was an integral part of the solidly Democratic South. Now, the Cubans have become a major cog in Florida's conservative Republican party politics.²³ On the local level, the five-member Miami city commission is dominated in 1990 by three Cubans, including Cuban-born mayor Xavier Suarez. Hialeah, Dade County's second largest city, has been controlled politically by the Cubans for almost a decade. At-large voting has prevented similar gains at the county level, but proposed charter changes replacing at-large voting with a district system will ultimately give the Hispanic newcomers control of the Dade County metro commission as well.²⁴

Although exile concerns have not completely died out, the Cubans have become adept players at the old urban game of ethnic politics. Local elections over the past decade have reflected bitter ethnic divisiveness in tri-ethnic Miami. "The animosity that exists between the three communities runs deep, real deep," one political writer observed as early as 1983.

Barred from America's Shores," *Saturday Review* (October 27, 1979), 17-20; Patrick Lacefield, "These Political Refugees Are from the Wrong Place," *In These Times* (November 7-13, 1979), 11, 13; "Haitians, Stay Home!" *America* 144 (May 16, 1981), 398.

23. Paul D. Salter and Robert C. Mings, "The Projected Impact of Cuban Settlement on Voting Patterns in Metropolitan Miami, Florida," *Professional Geographer* 24 (May 1972), 123-32; Gerard R. Webster, "Factors in the Growth of Republican Voting in the Miami-Dade County SMSA," *Southeastern Geographer* 27 (May 1987), 1-17; Gerard R. Webster and Roberta Haven Webster, "Ethnicity and Voting in the Miami-Dade County SMSA," *Urban Geography* 8 (January-February 1987), 14-30; "Miami's Cubans— Getting a Taste for Politics," *U.S. News and World Report* (April 5, 1976), 29; Dan Millott, "Cuban Thrust to the GOP," *New Florida* 1 (September 1981), 70-71.
24. On these issues, see Raymond A. Mohl, "Ethnic Politics in Miami, 1960-1986," in Randall M. Miller and George E. Pozzetta, eds., *Shades of the Sunbelt: Essays on Ethnicity, Race, and the Urban South* (Westport, CT, 1988), 143-60; Raymond A. Mohl, "Political Transformations in Miami: Maurice Ferre, Xavier Suarez, and the Ethnic Factor in Urban Politics," in Gary Mormino, ed., *Spanish Pathways in Florida* (Tampa, 1990), publication forthcoming.

Moreover, ethnicity pervades most of the important political issues in the Miami area, and the high degree of residential segregation not only lends strength to ethnic or racial voting, but intensifies certain kinds of emotional territorial issues such as zoning, school busing, or public housing location. As one recent scholarly analysis put it, "Ethnic conflict in Miami shows signs of growing brittleness and intransigence in an atmosphere characterized by group polarization and zero-sum politics."²⁵

The civil rights movement empowered blacks politically in other southern cities, but the Cuban influx to south Florida produced a different outcome. In Atlanta, New Orleans, Richmond, Birmingham, and other southern cities, black population majorities ultimately brought political power. This has not happened in Miami where blacks remain a relatively small minority and where at-large elections have effectively disfranchised black voters. Some black leaders have sought to overcome this political impotency by creating a new municipality for the sprawling, unincorporated Liberty City community. Black supporters of the plan view this so-called New City as a means of acquiring local political power, a community-controlled police force, and a higher level of services. The metro commission, which must approve the incorporation of any new municipality, has vetoed the New City plan numerous times.²⁶

The Cuban influx to metropolitan Miami altered the rules and the boundaries of the political game. Indeed, the Caribbean migration ultimately put a whole new team on the field, pushing the old players off to the sidelines. Black spokesmen have been alternately dismayed and infuriated by the emerging political dominance of the Cubans, or "the Cuban Takeover," as it is often referred to in the black press. As one black columnist

25. "Florida," *Southern Political Reporter*, No. 135 (November 22, 1983), 2; Christopher L. Warren et al., "Minority Mobilization in an International City: Rivalry and Conflict in Miami," *PS* 19 (Summer 1986), 626-34, quotation on p. 629. See also Christopher L. Warren and John F. Stack, Jr., "Immigration and the Politics of Ethnicity and Class in Metropolitan Miami," in John F. Stack, Jr., ed., *The Primordial Challenge: Ethnicity in the Contemporary World* (Westport, CT, 1986), 61-79.

26. For an analysis of these issues; see Raymond A. Mohl, "Miami's Metropolitan Government: Retrospect and Prospect," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 63 (July 1984), 24-50.

bitterly put it in the *Miami Times* in the wake of the 1989 riots: "The reality of Miami today and in the foreseeable future, is that the Cubans are the new masters in Miami. They should not be surprised when those who feel they have nothing to lose rise up against the new rulers."²⁷

It should be clear, then, that ethnic relations in the Miami area are in considerable disarray. Black resentment has been festering since the 1960s over the economic success of the Cubans, their dominance of the job and housing markets, their newly developed political power, and the preferential treatment they have received from government. Other more immediate issues such as police harassment and violence, or the perception of police violence, in the ghetto have produced the racial explosions that have characterized Miami since 1968. But behind these overt incidents lies thirty years of ethnic competition and conflict between Miami's blacks and their new Hispanic neighbors from the Caribbean basin. The persistent failure of the system to deliver often promised social and economic improvements—better housing, improved schools, job training, better services—contrasted with the perceived advantages and benefits received first by the Cubans, and later by the Nicaraguans, has kept black Miami on the edge of rage and despair.

Objectively, it is clear that there are wide economic disparities within the Cuban community, and that not all Hispanic immigrants to south Florida have shared in the reality of American economic opportunity. The Mariel boatlift of 1980, in particular, demonstrated that there was a distinct class and even a racial dimension to Miami's Cuban community. It is also true that, despite their vaunted economic success, the Cubans have yet to break into the upper echelons of the Miami power structure, often dominated by absentee bankers, developers, and corporate executives. Nevertheless, perceptions are important, and Miami blacks mostly see that Cubans and other Hispanics own the local businesses they patronize, control access to the local job market, dominate the local political decision-making process, limit accessibility and choice in housing, and fill increasing numbers of positions in local government and, significantly, on the

27. *Miami Times*, February 23, June 22, 1989.

police force. Blacks also share an uncomfortable sense that the Hispanic newcomers have become racists. As a black Miami architect, born in Houston, suggested to a reporter recently, "Too many of the Cubans . . . have adopted a southern mentality." As social scientists, we know that objective reality is less important than perception in determining behavior. Image-making was always important in the glitzy, glamorous tourist spa that Miami used to be, and it turns out that images and perceptions of a different kind now prevail in Miami, the new immigrant city.²⁸

The 1980 Liberty City riot focused new attention on race relations in Miami. One black scholar contended that "the political economy of racism" made Liberty City and other black neighborhoods "ripe for rebellion." However, one early post-1980 riot analysis— that by journalist Bruce Porter and social psychologist Marvin Dunn— pushed the issue of Hispanic competition into the forefront of discussion. Porter and Dunn sought to explain Miami's racial explosion, at least partially, as the result of the Cuban influx into the city. In a 1981 *New York Times* article summarizing their research, Porter and Dunn noted the political and economic powerlessness of blacks in Miami. But they went on to argue that the Cuban immigration to Miami prevented blacks from making economic gains just as the civil rights movement and desegregation were beginning to eliminate legal barriers. As Porter and Dunn put it, "Just as blacks were groping out of their forced isolation, in came hundreds of thousands of Cubans and other Hispanic immigrants"

28. Larry Mahoney, "The Cubans and the Blacks," *Miami Mensual* 5 (February 1985), 24-30, 90-94, quotation on p. 94. On the class and racial dimension of Cuban Miami, see Lisandro Pérez, "Immigrant Economic Adjustment and Family Organization: The Cuban Success Story Reexamined," *International Migration Review* 20 (Spring 1986), 4-20; Stephan Palmié, "Spics or Spades? Racial Classification and Ethnic Conflict in Miami," *Amerikastudien* 34, No. 2 (1989), 211-21; and Heriberto Romero Dixon, "Variation from the Social Norm: Black Cubans in the United States, 1780-1980" (paper presented at annual meeting of Organization of American Historians, Washington, DC, March 24, 1990). On Cubans and the local power structure, see Sylvan Meyer, "Cuban Power: Cracking the Anglo Structure," *Miami Magazine* 28 (August 1977), 22-27, 47; and the *Miami Herald's* series, "Miami's Power Elite," in *Miami Herald*, January 31, February 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1988.

who displaced blacks in the job market and “shouldered aside the existing black-owned businesses.” The depressed economic condition of Miami’s blacks, the report implied, was “the reverse side of a Hispanic economic boom.”²⁹

The charges that they have been somehow to blame for the economic condition of Miami’s blacks and for two decades of ghetto rioting have offended the Hispanic community in south Florida. “It’s not our fault,” Hispanics have argued, that centuries of slavery, racism, and segregation victimized blacks in the United States. “The centuries-old structures of racism” account for the economic condition of Miami’s blacks, contended Cuban-American sociologist Lisandro Pérez, not “Miami’s newly arrived Hispanic peoples, who are now being scapegoated for the consequences of those long-standing structures.”³⁰

Pérez has a point, to be sure, and this brings one back to the chief interpretive argument outlined at the beginning of this paper; that is, that the conjunction of the Cuban Revolution and the civil rights movement moved Miami onto an alternative path in race relations. “The Cuban Revolution,” one writer has noted, “was as much a pivotal event in Miami’s modern history as it was in Cuba’s.”³¹ While other cities, north and south, gradually addressed the issues dividing blacks and whites, Miami was much more preoccupied with receiving and accommodating the Cuban exiles, pushing civil rights and social reform issues into the background. The Cubans and other Hispanics from the South seized opportunities as they found them, and then created new opportunities for themselves in an amenable economic and political environment. But the blacks have not fared as well and generally believe that they have been “displaced from mainstream opportunities by the newly arrived im-

29. Bruce Porter and Marvin Dunn, “A Year After the Miami Riot, Embers Still Glow,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1981. On the “political economy of racism,” see Manning Marable, “The Fire This Time: The Miami Rebellion, May 1980,” *The Black Scholar* 11 (July-August 1980), 2-18. See also Susan Harrigan and Charles W. Stevens, “Roots of a Riot,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 1980.

30. Lisandro Pérez, “Where Analysts of the 1980 Miami Riot Went Astray,” Letter to Editor in *New York Times*, June 5, 1981. See also Anthony Ramirez, “Cubans and Blacks in Miami,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 29, 1980.

31. Barry B. Levine, “Miami: The Capital of Latin America,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 9 (Winter 1985), 46-73, quotation on p. 54.

migrants.” The legal barriers of the segregation era are gone, but Miami blacks have “remained economically and politically invisible, especially between riots.”³²

The failure of urban policy in the Reagan-Bush era has intensified Miami’s problems, as has been the case elsewhere in urban America. There is considerable irony, as well, in the fact that the conservative, right-wing Cubans, who benefited so extensively from government welfare in their early years in the United States, are adamantly opposed to the kind of social investment that Miami’s black community needs. Each of the riots since 1980 has produced an outpouring of verbiage on the necessity for better understanding and improved ethnic relations. But even the city’s Community Relations Board, as one observer has written, “is a power struggle between blacks and Hispanics— with the Anglos watching expectantly and playing as the occasional referee.”³³ Miami remains a city on the edge, an ethnic cauldron that often boils over— no melting pot here. Questions of racial and ethnic relations will not be easily dissipated in this new immigrant city in what was once the Deep South.

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32. Frank Soler, “Thoughts from a Wounded Heart,” *Miami Mensual* 5 (August 1985), 11; Robert Joffe, “Riot Politics: The Tokenism Aftermath,” *South Florida* (May 1989), 32.
33. Irwin S. Morse, Letter to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, July 24, 1989.