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STATE VIOLENCE AND THE CUBAN DIASPORA SINCE 1959

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ABSTRACT:

Between 1960 and 1976 the United States alone admitted an estimated 750,000 Cuban refugees.¹ By 2017 the number had risen to an estimated 1,314,100.² These numbers do not include the roughly estimated 300,000 Cubans who fled to Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Canada, Spain, Peru, Germany, Italy, and France.³ Nor do they include the unknown number of Cubans who drowned attempting to cross the Florida Straits in rafts or were killed or arrested by Cuban military patrols during attempts to illegally exit Cuba.⁴

Repression based on communist ideologies and the calculated use of violence to enforce them infiltrates all structural aspects of daily life in Cuba. It creates an overarching theme providing commonality between Cuban politics, sociology, economics, and culture as each applies to migration pushes. Published interviews with Cuban refugees, United States government documents, Cuban refugee memoirs, transcripts of intercepted Cuban radio transmissions, United States press articles, video documentaries focusing on Cuban refugees in the United States, and other primary and secondary sources all provide trace evidence that fear of violent reprisal from the Cuban State serves as a primary push in the decisions of individual Cubans to seek both legal and illegal means of exiting Cuba.

The Orwellian atmosphere created by the Castro Regime's methods of enforcing political, economic, and cultural ideologies is a rarely examined facet of the Cuban diaspora. Most studies of the Cuban diaspora focus on the long failing Cuban economy, the tightly controlled expressions of Cuban culture, and the development of Eastern European based communist politics and ideologies as pushes that have driven the cyclical tides of the Cuban diaspora since 1959. A minority of existing sociological, psychological, political, and cultural research touches briefly on the Castro Regime's calculated use of legitimized state violence to enforce ideologies, policies, and laws. This paper will link Cuban State violence and human rights violations through the

¹ Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration," *The International Migration Review* 19, no. 1 (1985), 4.

² Jorge Duany. "Cuban Migration: A Postrevolutionary Exodus Ebbs and Flows," *Migration Policy Institute* (2017), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cuban-migration-postrevolution-exodus-ebbs-and-flows>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Database," Archivo Cuba, accessed November 14, 2021, <https://cubaarchive.org/database/>.

nation's economic, social, cultural, and political structures to exhibit how pervasive, government cultivated, fear and anxiety create a keystone push that still drives the Cuban diaspora in 2022.

Historiography

As Holly Ackerman observes “[u]nlike Eastern Europe where communism was imposed by a conqueror, the Cuban people welcomed the revolution, and it came from within.”⁵ Castro's conversion to communism and budding alliance with the Soviet Union had blindsided the Cuban people. Besides Castro's early subterfuge, Cuba is also uniquely situated geographically in the western hemisphere, providing a unique geographical environment in which to study the relationship between the use of state violence and diaspora. However, this is by no means a comprehensive study. It hamstrung by lack of access to Cuban government records and archives. As such, this study relies heavily on Cold War era journalism, United States Cold War era records and policies, the Organization of American States and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and publications and records compiled and maintained by the Cuban American refugee community. It represents a view skewed towards American and Cuban American perspectives concerning state violence in Cuba.

The historiography of the Cuban diaspora has been examined from a daunting number of perspectives, including the application of numerous sociological theories, analyses of the cyclical economic crises, examination of the protean political and cultural policies of Castro, diplomatic and political discussions of Cuba's ties to the Soviet Union, the effects of hemispheric trade embargos, and examinations of the mercurial immigration policies of the United States. It is an interdisciplinary topic that attracts historians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, policy and law makers, economists, film makers, and political scientists. The existing literature collectively reveals that Cubans leave their homeland for a wide variety of reasons all dependent upon individual experience. Sociologist Silvia Pedraza-Bailey summed this up best when she quoted sociologist Peter I Rose: “Refugees do not live in a vacuum. They are part of an intricate sociopolitical web that must be seen as the background against which any portrait of their travails must be painted and any dissection of their innermost thoughts and feelings must be pinned.”⁶

Pedraza-Bailey's article “Cuba Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration” examines the waves of the Cuban diaspora through the publication of the article in 1985. Her work examines the changes in social and demographic characteristics of Cuban refugees by examining the ongoing changes within the Cuban revolution. These social and demographic changes help identify the individuals and groups targeted as adversaries or enemies of the Cuban state as it evolved under the Castros. Her work is built around, and reacts to, theoretical framework concerning refugee migration published by Egon F. Kunz in 1973 and 1981.⁷ The present study concerning state violence and the Cuban diaspora utilizes Pedraza-Bailey's work to identify the demographic

⁵ Holly Ackerman, “Mass Migration, Nonviolent Social Action, and the Cuban Raft Exodus, 1959-1994: An Analysis of Citizen Motivation and International Politics,” Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, August 1996, 193.

⁶ Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

groups most at risk of being identified as enemies of the Cuban state and most likely to seek out creative and dangerous means of leaving their homeland.

Available studies concerning the effects of state violence are generally limited to studies of violence to study its effects on the occurrence of psychological aspects, such as the occurrence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among refugees. For instance, M. Brinton Lykes and Rachel M. Hershberg in their study of psychosocial effects in Guatemalan migration, theorize that “multiple iterations of violence. . . can best be understood through an analysis of the complex interface of racism, gender violence, entrenched poverty, and forced migration; structural forces which participants themselves identify.”⁸ Lykes’ and Hershberg’s examination of how “marginalized groups, narrate their individual life stories to a greater or lesser degree within collective struggles of resistance to historical and contemporary oppression” in Guatemala provides a psychosocial foundation for examining how state violence effects the stories of Cuban refugees, exiles, and migrants.⁹ Their methodology was designed to focus on the issue of migration, however, they discovered that “all participants connected their migration to longer histories of violence.”¹⁰ Some subject narratives contained ‘graphic’ descriptions of experience with violence associated with armed conflict and others focused on its “material and psychosocial consequences.”¹¹

In her dissertation Holly Ackerman specifically examines the motivations of 63,000 Cuban Americans who traversed the treacherous ninety miles of the Florida Straits in flimsy, make-shift rafts between 1959 and 1994. Ackerman concluded that there were four reasons Cubans became *balsero* (rafter) migrants. First, is what she calls ‘*la doble cara o mascara*’ or “the necessity of wearing ‘a mask’ of political compliance in Cuba. This category encompasses “the duality of behavioral manifestation of unswerving support and loyalty to the regime that all citizens must show in order to avoid sanctions, and the underlying beliefs and reactions of the individual that lie beneath the supportive mask.”¹² The second category which she labels “the uncertainty of *quien es quien*,’ or ‘who is who’, covers motivations based on “the discomfort caused by the ubiquitous presence of ideological vigilance, scapegoating, state informants and state security at every level of society.”¹³ The third motivation she identifies is the necessity of engaging in black market trade “theft, illegal and immoral conduct.”¹⁴ The fourth commonly stated motivation was the “potential for violent retribution if the present system of social control erodes rapidly.”¹⁵ It is interesting to note, despite long standing economic trouble in Cuba, only 4.7% of Ackerman’s subjects identified purely economic motives for illegally exiting Cuba, while 56.6% identified political motivations

⁸ M. Brinton Lykes and Rachel M. Hershberg, “Continuities and Discontinuities in Human Rights Violations: Historically Situating the Psychosocial Effects of Migration,” *Journal of Social Issues*, 7, No.2 (2015), 248.

⁹ *Ibid*, 248.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 248.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 248.

¹² Ackerman, “Mass Migration, Nonviolent Social Action, and the Cuban Raft Exodus, 1959-1994, 153.

¹³ *Ibid*, 153.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 153.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 153.

such as “opposition to the regime, desire for freedom from communism and the pervasiveness of state control,” and 32.9% expressed a mixture of political, social, economic, and personal motivations.¹⁶

Works such as Richard C. Allison’s “Cuba’s Seizures of American Business,” K. M. Greenhill’s *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy*, Haroldo Dilla and Philip Oxhorn’s “The Virtues and Misfortunes of Civil Society in Cuba,” Ana Belén Martín Sevillano’s “From Domestic to Statist Violence,” and countless other authors provide in depth examinations of the various shifts and crises in economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of the years following the Cuban Revolution. A handful of authors, such as political scientist Yvon Grenier, add to the study of the use and effects of state violence through various political and cultural lenses. Grenier, for example, proposes that cyclic ‘closing’ and ‘opening’ of Castro’s cultural policies represent “part of the governing strategy of the regime.”¹⁷ Grenier is among the minority of researchers who have touched on the link between the motivations behind shifts in Fidel Castro’s policies and the violent and inhumane methods applied to enforce them. Grenier’s “The Politics of Culture and the Gatekeeper State in Cuba” focuses on Cuban cultural policies and how they affect artists and intellectuals who function within the restraints of the mercurial policies of Fidel Castro and those who insist on pushing past the edge of what is, at any given time, considered acceptable public criticism or representation of the revolutionary government.

Together, these studies provide the framework upon which to build an examination of how fear of state violence operates to drive the Cuban diaspora and provide an explanation for the hundreds of thousands of Cuban citizens who have risked or given up their lives in efforts to escape what Juana Castro once called “the inferno of today’s Cuba.”¹⁸

Blood Begets Blood

Historically, like most Latin American nations, the Cuban people are no stranger to poverty, violence, political instability, and other daily hardships. To understand the policies of Fidel Castro since 1959, it is important to review the seven years leading up to his rise to power.

Prior to the rise of Fidel Castro, Cuba was not a poor, underdeveloped, or uneducated nation. The island nation had enjoyed a democratic form of government since the Constitution of 1940. Cuban migration was low.¹⁹ This island nation boasted an above average percentage of literacy and an above average health care system compared to other Latin American countries.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid, 150.

¹⁷ Yvon Grenier, “The Politics of Culture and the Gatekeeper State in Cuba,” *Cuban Studies* 46 (2018), 261.

¹⁸ Associated Press, “Fidel Betrayed Cuba, Fleeing Sister Says,” *The News Journal (DE)*, June 30, 1964, 2.

¹⁹ Jorge Duany, “Cuban Migration: A Postrevolutionary Exodus Ebbs and Flows,” *Migration Policy Institute* (2017), accessed November 12, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cuban-migration-postrevolution-exodus-ebbs-and-flows>.

²⁰ Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, Carlos Alberto Montaner and Alvaro Vargas Llosa, *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot*, Lanham, MD: Madison Books (2001), 97.

Economically the island ranked on a par with nations like Italy.²¹ However, on March 10, 1952, a military coup led by General Fulgencio Batista put an end to the democratic government. In 1952, Fidel Castro, a lawyer and member of the reformist Cuban People's Party, was nominated as a Havana district candidate to potentially serve in the House of Representatives. After the coup, on July 26, 1953, Fidel led a small group of rebels in an unsuccessful attempt to oust Batista. The Batista regime imprisoned both Fidel and his brother Raul. Then the regime granted the brothers amnesty in 1955. The brothers went to Mexico where they organized other Cuban exiles hoping to make a second attempt to oust Batista. Fidel and Raul Castro, accompanied by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, returned to Cuba December 2, 1956. Armed conflict between the Castros' guerrilla revolutionaries and the Batista Regime quickly developed into the equivalent of a Cuban Civil War. The violence became so pronounced that by 1958 the United States had imposed an arms embargo against Cuba.²²

In May 1958, Dr. Jose Miro Cardona, President of the Havana Bar Association, and later President of the Cuban Revolutionary Council, publicly alleged that the Batista government was 'systematically' killing off the Cuban intellectual community.²³ Cardona estimated 3,000 people had been killed and that "[the] human reserves of Cuba [were] being exhausted."²⁴ Cardona charged that the Batista government was killing off the "best element" of Cuba and predicted that the longer the situation was allowed to stand the "fewer genuine leaders" would be left.²⁵ Cardona took refuge in the Mexican Embassy after secret police raided the Bar Association offices. He fled Cuba, taking up residence in Miami, Florida.²⁶ Cardona became a leader in the Cuban exile community and worked towards seeking international acknowledgement of and redress for human rights violations allegedly being committed by the Castro regime. Cardona was one of many Cubans who were either forced or chose to flee Cuba during the bloody conflict between Castro and Batista. What had been a drip in the overall flow of Cuban migration since the early nineteenth century, was now a slow flowing stream under Batista. Those who died at the hands of the Batista government has been estimated to be around 20,000.²⁷

Reports of massacres, kidnappings, bombing, destruction of highways, burning of crops, and retaliations for killings by both sides of the conflict frequently reached the American press. For example, in November 1958 a United Press International (UPI) news article circulated stating "[r]ebel tommy gunners killed four and wounded eight policemen. . . in a gang-style massacre apparently inspired by the police slaying of four insurgents ten days ago."²⁸ Another 1958 news

²¹ Mendoza, Montaner and Llosa. *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot*, 97.

²² "Cuban Revolution," Britannica, accessed November 13, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cuban-Revolution>; and "Fidel Castro," Britannica, accessed January 21, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/Biography/Fidel-Castro#ref157337>.

²³ "Attorney Charges Massacre in Cuba," *Linton Daily Citizen (IN)*, May 7, 1958.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Berrellez, Robert, "Shocking Story Lies Behind Cuba Atrocities, Executions," *The Sacramento Bee (CA)*, February 23, 1959; and Duany. "Cuban Migration: A Postrevolutionary Exodus Ebbs and Flows."

²⁸ "Massacre in Cuba is Reported Today," *Linton Daily Citizen (IN)*, November 18, 1958.

item, penned by *Cincinnati Enquirer* reporter George Amick, related an interview with Robert Kirsner, a Spanish professor who had recently returned to the United States from Cuba. Kirsner described the atmosphere in Cuba as “a place where machine guns bristle along the streets; where you steer clear of innocent looking packages because they might contain bombs, and where you’re never sure that the streetcleaner or clerk isn’t a secret policeman who could shoot you dead with impunity.”²⁹

Elections held in Cuba in November 1958 initially gave hope of some relief to the bloody situation. However, when the election results were announced, it was obvious to the Cuban citizenry that the Batista government had rigged the elections. Support for Batista quickly began to evaporate. The United States arms embargo had crippled Batista’s ability to effectively arm his soldiers and his forces were unable to stop the advance of Castro’s revolutionaries. After ringing in the New Year on January 1, 1959, Fulgencio Batista fled to an uncertain reception in the Dominican Republic. In August 1959 he left the Dominican Republic for the Portuguese island of Madeira.³⁰

Legitimizing State Violence and the First Wave

“Many times revolutionary violence makes history. But that history is of cruelty and failure, not of humanity and success.”

~ Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, Carlos Alberto Montaner and Alvaro Vargas Llosa³¹

An estimated 3,000 “political leaders, high government officials, military officers, and businessmen who had important political connections” quickly fled in Fulgencio Batista’s wake.³² Immediately following the exodus of the upper echelons of Batista’s government, Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries set about rounding up the remaining Batista supporters and anyone else who remained that they deemed to be an enemy of the revolution.

On January 12, 1959, under orders given by Raul Castro, seventy-three policemen and former members of Batista’s armed forces were executed, reportedly without anything resembling a legitimate trial or due process. The prisoners were taken to a shooting range at San Juan, positioned in front of a freshly dug ditch, and executed in pairs by a firing squad. A narrative prepared by the Free Society Project states that at least one man was believed to have been buried alive when the mass grave was covered.³³ An additional fourteen to sixteen more former members of Batista’s armed forces were executed in January 1959, again with nothing resembling a legitimate trial.³⁴ To add insult to injury, Hurricane Flora, which caused catastrophic damage to Cuba in 1963, washed out the shallow mass grave at San Juan. Instead of simply reburying the

²⁹ George Amick, “Havana Under Terror, UC Professor Finds,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer (OH)*.

³⁰ “Cuban Revolution,” Britannica.

³¹ Mendoza, Plinio Apuleyo, Carlos Alberto Montaner and Alvaro Vargas Llosa. *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot*, 90.

³² John F. Thomas, “Cuban Refugee Program,” *Welfare in Review*. 1, no. 3, (1963), 3.

³³ “Database,” Archivo Cuba.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

dead, it has been alleged that the Castro regime had the remains encased in cement and thrown into Bartlett Deep off the coast of the Oriente province.³⁵

Castro's rise to power, instead of creating confidence and hope by focusing on making life better for the Cuban people, became a blood-soaked quest for revenge against the ousted Batista government and the United States. Ana Belén Martín Sevillano captures the motivation behind the Castro Regime's initial use of violence in her article "From Domestic to Statist Violence." Sevillano states that the "Marxist political thought that fueled the Cuban revolution conceived revolutionary violence as a necessary, ethical method to liberate the nation from the neocolonial capitalist system embodied by the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista."³⁶ She places Castro's use of violence at the opposite end of the moral spectrum from the flavor of violence utilized by the Batista government. Sevillano goes on to state that "Castro nourished the idea of this regime's inherent emancipatory nature, which entailed the use of violence, presenting it as a legitimate resource to eliminate any political threats, and often exercising it as a warning performance for Cuban society."³⁷ Castro's political ideologies for Cuba were, at their core, cut from the opposite end of the same cloth as the violent, oppressive, and corrupt regime the Cuban people had just fought to rid themselves of. The Cuban people were no better off than when the revolution started.

By mid-January 1959, American news outlets reported that the new revolutionary government had carried out two hundred executions. In one such article, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that Castro intended to continue the executions "regardless of world opinion" and when asked if his government would call off the executions considering harsh international criticism, he was quoted as responding, "we have given orders to shoot every one of these murderers."³⁸ Castro was just getting started when it came to purging Cuba of anyone who opposed him.

Pedraza-Bailey uses the initiation of Castro's nationalization of foreign owned land and assets in October 1960 as the trigger for the first wave of refugees that took flight following the departure of Batista's government.³⁹ Cuban Law No. 851, enacted August 6, 1960, provided for the nationalization of Cuban corporations that were under the control of American stockholders. In his article "Cuba's Seizures of American Business," Richard C. Allison examines Castro's nationalization of foreign owned companies and the ramifications for U.S. stockholders and Cuban property owners. Allison captures the mercurial nature of Cuban law under Castro when he states, "constitutional guarantees still remaining in the law must be regarded with a certain skepticism in view of the demonstrated willingness of the Council of Ministers to suspend or alter them to suit particular governmental purposes."⁴⁰ To illustrate his point, Allison uses the example of the December 1959 Amendment to Article 24 which allowed Castro's new government to confiscate

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ana Belen Martin Sevillano, Scott Morgenstern, Jorge Perez-Lopez, and Jerome Branche, *Paths for Cuba: Reforming Communism in Comparative Perspective Account*, University of Pittsburgh Press (2018), 323.

³⁷ Ibid, 323.

³⁸ "House Group Acts on Cuba Executions," *The Baltimore Sun (MD)*, January 15, 1959.

³⁹ Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration," 9.

⁴⁰ Richard C. Allison, "Cuba's Seizures of American Business," *American Bar Association Journal*. 47, no. 1 (1961), 48.

“the properties of ‘counter-revolutionaries’.”⁴¹ Other studies concerning Castro’s nationalization and centralization of all aspects of Cuban life, such as the examination of Cuban civil society completed by Haroldo Dilla and Philip Oxhorn, note that the process “reduced the vitality of public spaces and led to the consolidation of paternalistic, clientelist relations between the state and society.”⁴²

As Allison notes, almost immediately following Castro’s rise to power in January 1959 multiple revisions, and amendments to those revisions, started occurring. There were suddenly laws imposing harsh penalties for acts considered ‘prejudicial’ to the Cuban economy and laws allowing the President and Prime Minister to expropriate foreign owned Cuban properties. The Agrarian Reform Law, enacted May 17, 1959, further allowed for the expropriation and redistribution of any landholdings exceeding 1,000 acres and provided for the establishment of collective farms. By June, Castro’s Regime had nationalized three cattle ranches owned by Americans.⁴³ The nationalization of land, livestock, and all farming equipment and machinery continued through 1960.⁴⁴ As Castro’s nationalization process proceeded, American interests in “hotels, oil refineries, banks, as well as other businesses” started to disaffect Cuba’s wealthiest citizens who also had significant interests in the nation’s sugar plantations and mills.⁴⁵ By the time Castro’s regime was through with initial law revisions and amendments affecting banking, utilities, businesses, agriculture, labor, and taxes “operations in Cuba. . . [became] impossible from an economic point of view.”⁴⁶

By 1961, Castro had closed all private universities and schools in favor of state-controlled education. This move by Castro prompted thousands of parents, fearing the loss of their parental rights to the State, to send an estimated 14,000 children, unaccompanied by an adult, to the United States.⁴⁷ Additionally, Castro started to repress expression of religion just days after he arrived in Havana. Law Number 4 was enacted on January 10, 1959, “abolishing the Invocation of God in the oath of the Judiciary.”⁴⁸ Two months later, on March 8, 1959, all religious and spiritual services for prisoners was abolished at La Cabaña Fortress and other state institutions, crosses were prohibited from being displayed in state hospitals and sanitariums, and “free instruction offered by priests, professors, and laymen was suspended.”⁴⁹ By March 1960 the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba had published his first “Pastoral Letter denouncing communist infiltration and warning: ‘The enemy is within.’”⁵⁰ Castro’s viscous campaign against the Catholic Church, as well as other missionaries and spiritual leaders, included a public announcement that the revolutionary Cuban

⁴¹ Ibid, 48.

⁴² Haroldo Dilla and Philip Oxhorn, “The Virtues and Misfortunes of Civil Society in Cuba,” *Latin American Perspectives*. 29, no. 4 (2002), 11-30.

⁴³ Thomas, “Cuban Refugee Program,” 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁶ Allison, “Cuba’s Seizures of American Business,” 49-50.

⁴⁷ Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 11.

⁴⁸ The Truth About Cuba Committee, Inc., *Religious Persecution in Communist Cuba: Chronology from January 1, 1959 to September 19, 1961* (1963), 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 3.

government would “not permit the stay in Cuba of counterrevolutionary foreign priests.”⁵¹ In 1961 an estimated 2,000 priests and nuns submitted applications to leave Cuba during the first exodus.⁵² This number does not include those who Castro either deported or executed for alleged counterrevolutionary activity.

The first Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Cuba” released in 1962 adds legitimacy to United States Press reports and documentation by the American Cuban exile community. It takes note of reports received that “on various occasions the Cuban militiamen have interrupted religious services and processions, seriously injuring the faithful on some occasions. . . expelled 135 priests, including a bishop. . . arrested several active members of a secular religious association. . . and religious radio and television programs have been indefinitely interrupted by the Government.”⁵³ By 1963, at least three protestant preachers, Reverend Antonio Gonzalez of the Evangélical Church, Reverend Pablo Rodriguez of the Church of God, and Reverend Jose Durado of Gideon Church, were known to have been executed or extra-legally killed by the Castro regime.⁵⁴

Castro’s announcement that he was a Marxist-Leninist, the corresponding shifts in policy and focus, coupled by the application of violence and cruelty by the revolutionary Cuban government, served to shape the demographics of each occurrence of mass migration from Cuba. Pedraza-Bailey describes the initial group of refugees as being “bound to a political and economic structure interpenetrated by the demands and initiative of American capital.”⁵⁵ This first wave, sometimes referred to as the ‘historical exiles’, is demographically distinct from the three tidal bores that followed it.⁵⁶ Pedraza-Bailey describes the first wave as being mostly middle-class and the remaining upper-class economic elites that had not decided to flee Cuba with the Batista regime.

A few refugees from the initial wave were fortunate enough to have funds deposited in either United States or other foreign bank accounts. As the upper and middle-class flight from Cuba continued the revolutionary government started to recognize the negative effects of the flight. Those seeking permission to leave started facing increasingly strict rules. It was not long before “all real and personal property was confiscated from refugees,” and they were allowed to leave with “only one suit, a few changes of underwear, and a maximum of five pesos.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ "2,000 Religious Process Exit From Cuba," Havana Cadena Oriental, May 9, 1961, Translated in *Daily Report*, Foreign Radio Broadcasts, no. FBIS-FRB-61-090, May 10, 1961.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Organización de los Estados Americanos. “Informe Sobre la Situación de los Derechos Humanos en la República de Cuba,” OEA/Ser.L/V/II.4 (March 20, 1962), accessed September 9, 2022, <http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Cuba62sp/indice.htm>.

⁵⁴ The Truth About Cuba Committee, Inc., *Religious Persecution in Communist Cuba: Chronology from January 1, 1959 to September 19, 1961*, 9.

⁵⁵ Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 9-10.

⁵⁶ Duany, “Cuban Migration: A Postrevolutionary Exodus Ebbs and Flows,” *Migration Policy Institute*.

⁵⁷ John F. Thomas, “Cuban Refugee Program,” *Welfare in Review*. 1, no. 3, (1963), 1.

The first upper and middle-class exodus included mainly “middle merchants and middle management, landlords, middle-level professionals and a considerable number of skilled and unionized workers” which included an estimated “2,000 accountants, 200 architects, 100 chemists, 300 dentists, 550 engineer, 1,800 lawyers, 500 pharmacists, 1,000 physicians, and 3,500 teachers and college professors.”⁵⁸ They were joined by “professionals and technicians of all types; company directors, executives, managers, and stockholders; advertising, marketing, newspaper, radio, and television executives and medium rank- personnel; persons whose incomes derived from rents; owners of medium-sized cattle ranches and sugar plantations; insurance and finance company men; and representatives of American companies which exported to Cuba.”⁵⁹ The flight of these members of Cuban society marked the beginning of the depletion of Cuba’s educated professionals and skilled workers. By mid-1961, the demographic had shifted to include more middle and lower socioeconomic professions including “small merchants, office employees, skilled and semiskilled factory workers, lower-grade technicians, and unskilled workers.”⁶⁰

Castro may have ridded himself of opponents and dissidents, but he lost key professionals and technicians that had been responsible for maintaining supply lines, keeping key machinery operational, and providing key health and social service functions, such as doctors and medical professionals. It did not take long before the dramatic drain on Cuba’s human resources prompted Castro to formulate policies to refuse exit to two key groups, males aged fifteen to twenty-six who were subject to compulsory military service and any “technical or skilled workers whose exit would cause a ‘serious disturbance’ in delivering social services or in production.”⁶¹

The first wave of refugees ended between the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 when Castro closed legitimate avenues for exiting Cuba. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, exit was only achievable illegally via extremely dangerous water crossings in rafts or small boats. Some refugees did find more creative means of smuggling themselves out of Cuba by stowing away on cargo ships, defecting during world sporting events, and finding ways off Cuban planes when they landed to refuel.⁶²

Human Rights Violations and Censorship

In early May 1961 American newspapers ran an article from the Associated Press. Castro had taken refuge from international criticism for his regime’s brutality behind a “curtain of total censorship on news communications and mail.”⁶³ Canadian Press Staff writer Jack Best wrote a widely circulated news article in August 1961 detailing his experiences with the Castro Regime’s

⁵⁸ Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 11; and Thomas, “Cuban Refugee Program,” 3.

⁵⁹ Thomas, “Cuban Refugee Program,” 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁶¹ Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 9.

⁶² Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 14; Associated Press, “Cubans Quit Plane, Seek U.S. Asylum,” *The Spokesman-Review (WA)*, November 3, 1964; Associated Press, “Cuban Wrestler Tells of Secret Police as Trainers,” *The Oshkosh Northwestern (WI)*, June 15, 1966; and Associated Press, “Cuban Defectors May Get Asylum,” *Johnson City Press (TN)*, August 19, 1961.

⁶³ Associated Press, “Castro Turns Mass Terror Upon Foes,” *Lancaster New Era (PA)*, May 5, 1961.

ensorship. Best stated “in a sense their censorship is more drastic than in countries where there are official censors, because stories from Cuba may be revised and distorted rather than simply eliminated or slashed.”⁶⁴ Cuban ‘censorship’ entailed outgoing news stories frequently being altered to include propagandistic language, for example ‘priests’ became ‘fascist priests’, or altered in a manner to make the Castro regime’s actions appear righteous and justified.⁶⁵

The world press, through information provided by refugees fleeing Cuban, pieced together the atrocities committed by the Castro regime despite government censorship. Estimates of those detained in Havana since Castro’s takeover in 1959 have been reported to be between 25,000 and 40,000 people, including Cubans, foreign nationals, and Americans. Unfortunately, such early estimates of the number of political prisoners are not likely to be dependable. The conditions of the prisons and holding areas as alleged by the press were inhumane. The press printed descriptions of “prisoners screaming for food” and “fighting their way through a litter of filth and excrement for a chance to use the few toilets.”⁶⁶ Stories were related to the press about guards firing shots into the crowds and the use of police dogs to quell attempted prisoner uprisings. At Morro Castle there was a report of “thousands of Cubans. . .herded into the dry moats” and at Matanzas “thousands. . .were taken into an open sports stadium and detained without food or sanitation for several days.”⁶⁷ The inhumane treatment of prisoners and detainees by the Castro regime, as well as rumors of abuses heaped upon prisoners’ families, eventually were corroborated by defecting members of the regime and other exiles who had initially been supportive of or actively involved in Cuba’s revolutionary government.

In 1962 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) released its first “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Cuba.” Since the Commission’s establishment by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1959, the Commission had taken “cognizance of 391 specific communications on specific acts of human rights violations in Cuba. . .[and] 530 communications of a general nature.”⁶⁸ By the time the first report was compiled an additional 35 specific and 19 general communications had been received.⁶⁹ The IACHR sent twenty-five notes to the Cuban government concerning the complaints that had been received but only received responses to eight.⁷⁰ Concerning the contents of the responses received from the Cuban government the report states:

In general, the responses received. . .have been limited to expressing its disagreement with the interpretation given by the Commission. . .Only on one occasion did the aforementioned Government offer to send a detailed list of measures adopted to guarantee

⁶⁴ Jack Best, “Writer Tells of Cuba Censorship,” *Red Deer Advocate (Alberta, Canada)*, August 26, 1961.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Associated Press, “Castro Turns Mass Terror Upon Foes.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁸ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Organización de los Estados Americanos. “Informe Sobre la Situación de los Derechos Humanos en la República de Cuba,” (March 20, 1962).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

the full exercise of human rights to the “great popular masses” of Cuba. However, to date the communication offered has not been received.⁷¹

The IACHR began holding hearings on October 5, 1961, and audiences were granted to the President and members of the Cuban Revolutionary Council in exile, members of the Student Revolutionary Directorate of Cuba in exile, representatives of the Cuban Economic Corporations in exile, as well as numerous individuals.⁷²

The 1962 report acknowledges that relevant legislative amendments examined were within “the scope of the sovereign powers of the Cuban State,” however, its investigation led it to conclude that “the imprecision of the new revolutionary legislation and the arbitrary way in which it has been applied, the number of those shot to date, after the revolutionary courts were reestablished, amounts to terrifying figures.”⁷³ The IACHR took note of the report of 1,789 individuals dead at the hands of the Cuban state through October 1961, including 638 officially executed, 165 executed without trial, 132 dead in prison, 253 “dead due to the ‘law of flight’, and the balance dead for various reasons also of political origin.”⁷⁴ The report also covered the violent activities of “so-called Neighborhood Committees”, on the spot execution of citizens attempting illegal exits from the country, and the gunning down of individuals attempting to reach the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeking diplomatic asylum.⁷⁵

Embassies in Havana corroborated reports of the denial of the right to asylum. The IACHR reports states:

The embassies in Havana are full of asylees who unnecessarily request safe-conducts from the Cuban government to leave the country. Moreover, it is stated that the embassies are strongly guarded to prevent the entry of politically persecuted people and that there are frequent shootings and demonstrations around them to intimidate the refugees and their families.⁷⁶

The report takes specific note of reports from the Ecuadorian diplomatic headquarters, the President of Venezuela, and the reports of shooting and violence directed at asylum seekers by Cuban militia outside both the Embassies of Ecuador and Uruguay.

Author Talek Nantes, in a collection of mostly anonymous recollections of Cuban exiles, retells the ordeal of one middle-class family who attempted to leave Cuba during the first wave of migration. The daughter had been attending school in the U.S. and had a fiancé in Cuba who she described as being “ecstatic and rush[ing] to join the *milicianos*.”⁷⁷ Her parents had become disaffected by Castro’s communist policies and “in fear for their safety, my family decided to

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Nantes, Talek, *Cuban Exile Memories: Journeys of Courage and Resilience in the Pursuit of Freedom*, Excelsior Press, Kindle Edition, 12-13.

leave.”⁷⁸ The exile’s mother had told her not to tell her fiancé of the family’s plans, however, she did and pleaded with him to leave too. The following day she learned that *milicianos* had appeared at her parents’ home and taken them away. Her father was convicted of being a counterrevolutionary and imprisoned for ten years in *La Cabaña* prison. Her mother, also convicted of being a counterrevolutionary, was sentenced to five years and then murdered in prison in an argument over some food. Her father had an additional ten years added to his sentence after a cellmate informed the warden that he had “spoken against Castro.”⁷⁹ Karma seems to have found her fiancé though, a ‘snitch’ betrayed him alleged involvement in the black-market.⁸⁰

Another exile’s ordeal followed the Bay of Pigs invasion. The family came home to find their home sealed by the G-2 (secret police). The exile was a child but recalls going “with my father because my mother thought they were less likely to abuse a man with a small child.”⁸¹ The exile remembers seeing other men at the G-2 office who had been beaten. The exile was released. When they returned home, their house had been turned upside down and their belongings had been both broken and stolen. The G-2 had detained the father for questioning over a battery testing device he utilized in the course of his employment as a salesman with an American battery company. The harassment did not stop with the damages to their home. Later, when the father tried to back the car out of the driveway, he found that “*milicianos* had spread the blood-stained uniforms of the Brigada 2506 in the driveway.”⁸²

The 1962 report of the IACHR lends credibility to such accounts when it states “in practice and without a court order, they raid Cuban homes, especially in the early hours of the morning to deliberately produce anxiety and unrest among their residents and neighbors. Armed with machine guns and in gangs, the militiamen (government police officers) break down doors when they are not allowed to enter.”⁸³ Several cases are cited to prove the assertion, reporting that people who protest the violation of their homes are detained, injured, and even killed.⁸⁴

In 1966 the IACHR investigated allegations that on May 27 through May 28, 1966, one hundred sixty-six political prisoners were exsanguinated of nearly all of their blood prior to their execution. Information gathered by the IACHR included accounts of political prisoners used in medical experiments by Cuban and Soviet military physicians and having their blood extracted and sold for profit to the North Vietnamese Embassy in Havana. Cuban exiles forced to take part in the execution process, as well as former prisoners, provided firsthand accounts. Newspapers printed portions of the information under consideration by the IACHR. Forced blood extractions “caused loss of consciousness and paralysis,” exsanguinated prisoners were “carried on litters by guards” and placed either “lying on the ground or in makeshift cots against prison walls” to be

⁷⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 13-14.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 15.

⁸¹ Ibid, 16-17.

⁸² Ibid, 17-18.

⁸³ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Organización de los Estados Americanos. “Informe Sobre la Situación de los Derechos Humanos en la República de Cuba,” (March 20, 1962).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

executed by a firing squad.⁸⁵ The dead were loaded twenty-five at a time into military trucks to be disposed of in a mass burial outside of Havana near Marianao.⁸⁶ After eight months of investigation, the IACHR released a deprecating report condemning the blood extractions from condemned prisoners prior to their execution as being carried out “with illicit and massive intentions . . . for scandalous business purposes.”⁸⁷ The IACHR also found that the Soviet’s and the Castro regime’s cruelty extended to the families of political prisoners. As a condition of prison visitation, family members were required to provide blood donations. These coerced donations took place at local blood banks. The collected blood was then sold to the North Vietnamese Embassy for profit.⁸⁸ The IACHR’s included its findings in its 1967 “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba.”⁸⁹

Since the 1966 investigation, additional executions involving exsanguination prior to execution were documented. Two such cases in October 1960 involved Cuban Americans taken prisoner as members of a militant exile group who attempted to land guerrilla fighters in Cuba. Eight more exsanguination executions were documented in 1961, an additional five in 1962, eleven in 1963, and five more in 1964.⁹⁰

State violence was not strictly targeted at Americans, capitalists, or those who had formerly served the Batista Regime, although Castro seems to have initially established its use among these sections of the Cuban population. The early and liberal use of executions and inhumane treatment of political prisoners as well as their families became a key motivator for those who fled Cuba. Fear of State reprisal for alleged counterrevolutionary activities operated primarily through the island nation’s political and economic structures for those who exited during the first exodus. But as Castro welcomed Soviet support and firmly entrenched Eastern European style communism in Cuba, state violence extended further towards enforcement of social, economic, and cultural policies. The IACHR has continued to investigate allegations of human rights violations and continued to publish the Commission’s “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Cuba” and the “Report on the Situation of Political Prisoners and their Families in Cuba” regularly since 1962.

Embargoes and Rationing Extremes

One thing the Batista regime had provided that the Castro regime has never provided was a stable and thriving economy. As Castro’s activities started to hint at a move towards establishing Eastern European style communism in Cuba, the United States began countering with economic sanctions. By October 1960, the Eisenhower Administration had ceased sugar imports from Cuba

⁸⁵ Robert S. Allen and Paul Scott, “Cuba Atrocities Charged,” *Oakland Tribune* (CA), August 19, 1966; and “Forced blood extraction of political prisoners before their execution in revolutionary Cuba,” Archivo Cuba, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://cubaarchive.org/database/>.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ “Forced blood extraction of political prisoners before their execution in revolutionary Cuba,” Archivo Cuba.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Organización de los Estados Americanos, “Informe Sobre la Situación de los Derechos Humanos en la República de Cuba,” OEA/Ser.L/V/II.17 (April 7, 1967), <http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Cuba67sp/indice.htm>.

⁹⁰ “Database,” Archivo Cuba.

and initiated a partial trade embargo that included a ban on American exports of food and medicine to Cuba. The Kennedy Administration placed a further economic stranglehold on Cuba by expanding the embargo and encouraging the Organization of American States (OAS) to consider the same. The OAS embargo became reality once it became evident that Castro was silently infiltrating other Latin American countries in attempts to export Cuban communism to the rest of Latin America.⁹¹ In 1962 Cuba was ousted from the OAS and cut off from almost the entire western hemisphere. Even Canada had initiated a partial embargo against Cuba.⁹²

Castro had burned his diplomatic bridges in the western hemisphere. The fallout from the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis had not made him any friends among the free nations of the eastern hemisphere either. Castro even sent an envoy to the Vatican to try to mend Cuba's relationship with the Catholic Church. Castro's use of violence, harsh repression of religion and the nationalization of Catholic Schools in Cuba, followed by the expulsion and voluntary exodus of religious workers from Cuba, had resulted in Castro's excommunication from the Catholic Church.⁹³ Relations between Castro and the Vatican would remain strained until after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Hemispheric and individual embargoes created a severe economic crisis in Cuba. By 1963 there were severe shortages of everything from food and clothing to gasoline and automobiles. The government instituted strict rationing policies on almost everything, including spare parts from old motor vehicles.⁹⁴ Economically these represented the most difficult years of the Cuban revolution. The crises also proved that Castro was failing in his goal to convert Cuba from a 'sugar monoculture' and successfully promote industrialization and diversity in the absence of American capitalism.⁹⁵

Talek Nantes' collection of the ordeals endured by Cuban exiles is full of painful and heartbreaking stories. Some of these stories involve memories of state reprisals for economic crimes demonstrating Castro's use of state violence to control Cubans through the economy. Prison sentences for economic crimes exposed those convicted to the inhumane treatment and conditions that the world press and IACHR had been documenting since Castro's rise to power in 1959. Stories of serving three years in a Cuban prison for the crime of 'hoarding' soap for resale to make a little extra money, being tried for the crime of "cultivating pineapples for personal consumption. . .without the permission of the Revolution," and entire families being tried and sent to prison for twenty years for slaughtering livestock without the permission of the state to be sold on the black

⁹¹ United Press International, "OAS Study of New Findings," *Ukiah Daily Journal (CA)*, February 12, 1963.

⁹² United Press International, "Canada Sets Policy on Cuba Trade," *The Tampa Tribune (FL)*, February 4, 1962; and Associated Press, "Castro Sets Beach Ban," *The Tampa Tribune (FL)*, February 4, 1962.

⁹³ Associated Press, "Cuba Sends Pope Envoy," *The Tampa Tribune (FL)*, February 4, 1962.

⁹⁴ Associated Press, "Cuba Auto Shortage Prompts New Decree," *Nashville Banner (TN)*, March 30, 1963.

⁹⁵ Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration," 16.

market are only three examples.⁹⁶ The Castro regime severely punished Cuban citizens for attempting to survive the economic crises outside of the State's parameters.

Severe food rationing and harsh punishments for circumventing the rationing instituted between 1962 and 1963, in conjunction with compulsory military service, added to the structural focal points that had helped trigger the first exodus. The economic crises had spawned a black market in Cuba and penalties were harsh for being associated with it. Compulsory military service commenced at fifteen, meaning that families attempting to exit Cuba with teenage sons subject to compulsory military service had to make the choice to leave Cuba without their sons or to risk staying to keep the family together. The accumulative pressures mounting inside of Cuba would soon require a release which finally came in 1965 in the form of the Camarioca Boatlift and the subsequent organization of the Freedom Flight exodus.⁹⁷

Hurricanes, Defections, Kidnapping, and the Second Wave

By February 1963 Cubans were restless and bitter under the harsh rationing regulations on almost all food and household items including clothing, shoes, and gasoline.⁹⁸ To make matters worse, Mother Nature made it even more difficult on the Cuban people. On October 4, 1963, Hurricane Flora made landfall on the southeastern side of the island. One of the worst hurricanes on record at the time, the storm stalled over Cuba and battered the island for four days. Mother Nature's fury left behind one hundred inches of rain, 1,750 dead, and three hundred million dollars in damages.⁹⁹ Estimates of the damage included the loss of half of the island's sugar, rice, coffee, cotton, and cocoa cash crops as well as its subsistence crops.¹⁰⁰ Castro blatantly refused offer of American humanitarian aid. He instead flung accusations at the United States alleging the withholding of meteorological data about Hurricane Flora and, more ludicrously, accusations that the United States had manipulated the storm to cause maximum damage to Cuba.¹⁰¹ Castro made a plea for the United States to lift its trade embargo while at the same time refusing offers of humanitarian aid from the United States. The request to relax the embargo was denied.

To raise money to repair and improve damaged infrastructure, Castro raised the price of beef, poultry, beer, and cigarettes.¹⁰² Over the next three years Cuba was hit by two more major

⁹⁶ Nantes, *Cuban Exile Memories: Journeys of Courage and Resilience in the Pursuit of Freedom*, 11-12, 16.

⁹⁷ Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration," 15.

⁹⁸ Arthur Jones, "Cuba: Rationing, Armed Guards, Shabby Clothes," *The State (SC)*, September 20, 1963, 10; and George Arfeld, "Cuba Today: Peasant and Plutocrat," *Tampa Bay Times (FL)*, July 21, 1963.

⁹⁹ "1963- Hurricane Flora," Hurricanes: Science and Society, accessed November 18, 2021, <http://www.hurricanesociety.org/history/storms/1960s/flora/>.

¹⁰⁰ Director of Central Intelligence and United States Intelligence Board, "The Effects of Hurricane Flora on Cuba," Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 85-3-63, LBJ Library Case #NLJ94-29 Document# 5.

¹⁰¹ Associated Press, "Castro Asks U.S. To Quit The Blockade," *The Napa Valley Register (CA)*, October 22, 1963: 14; Associated Press, "Hurricane Flora Battering Cuba," *Ironwood Daily Globe (MI)*, October 7, 1963; and "1963- Hurricane Flora," Hurricanes: Science and Society.

¹⁰² Associated Press, "Castro Gov't Raising Food Prices to Help Pay Flood Control Program," *The Tribune (IN)*, October 23, 1963.

hurricanes. Hurricane Cleo made landfall on August 26, 1964, leaving behind one dead and two million dollars in damage.¹⁰³ Hurricane Alma made landfall on June 8, 1966, leaving in her wake twelve dead and an additional two hundred million dollars in damage.¹⁰⁴

In June 1964, Juana Castro Ruz, a sister of Fidel and Raul Castro, who had initially been supportive and active in her brothers' revolutionary activities, defected to Mexico. She shocked the world by publicly denouncing her brothers' regime. She charged that there were 75,000 political prisoners held in Cuba being subjected to inhumane treatment.¹⁰⁵ She spoke of shortages of essentials, such as food and clothing, and intimated that the sixty-three million dollars in medicines that Castro received from the United States in exchange for Bay of Pigs prisoners did not find its way to benefiting the Cuban people. She admitted to helping hide those persecuted by the G-2, helping with the purchase and hiding of arms to aid counterrevolutionary groups, getting medicine and food to political prisoners, and relaying government information to counterrevolutionaries. Her efforts also extended to assisting people "leave the hell that is today's Cuba."¹⁰⁶ She likened her brothers' secret police to "the worst elements of Hitler's gestapo."¹⁰⁷ Her speech further supports the anxiety and fear that her brothers' regime was fostering:

What I do wish to speak of is the terror and panic existing in my country. Sons and daughters ratting out parents and friends; committees of defense composed of neighbors on each block, who observe all the people that enter and leave their houses and notify the beasts in the G-2. Of the panic that seizes any and every home when the monsters of the G-2 knock on their doors at any time of the day or night.¹⁰⁸

Her own flight from Cuba had been necessitated by confrontations with her brothers concerning her involvement with the black market, personal use of American capitalist products, and her participation in a Catholic procession that was attacked by militia. She described a nation of people desperate for assistance but unable to mount a challenge to a regime directly supported by Russian soldiers. She felt that her brothers had "betrayed the revolution and sold-out Cuba to the Soviet Union. . . [Cuba is] an enormous prison surrounded by water."¹⁰⁹ Juana Castro immediately went into hiding after her public denunciation. The Cuban exile community responded to her sequestering herself by stating to the press that they estimated two thousand Cuban exiles had previously been kidnapped from Mexico City by Cuban agents and returned to

¹⁰³ Gordon E. Dunn and Staff, "The Hurricane Season of 1964," *Monthly Weather Review* 93 no. 3 (March 1965), 177.

¹⁰⁴ Arnold L. Sugg, "The Hurricane Season of 1966," *Monthly Weather Review* 95 no. 3 (March 1967), 133.

¹⁰⁵ "Document #16: 'Statement from Mexico City,' Juana Castro (1964)," Brown University Library – Center for Digital Scholarship, Modern Latin America, 8th Edition Companion Website, accessed August 28, 2022, <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-4-cuba/primary-documents-w-accompanying-discussion-questions/document-13-document-of-a-cuban-dissident-year/>.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Associated Press, "Fidel Betrayed Cuba, Fleeing Sister Says," *The News Journal (DE)*, June 30, 1964.

Havana.¹¹⁰ Even outside of Cuba, the exile community did not feel safely beyond the reach of the Castro regime. A few reports of kidnapping attempts reached the world press.

In 1962, agents of Castro allegedly made two attempts to either kidnap or assassinate the Cuban Revolutionary Council President, Jose Miro Cardona, in Punta del Este, Uruguay where he was attending the Organization of American States conference on Cuba. Cuban agents were thwarted in two attempts on Cardona, one attempt at his hotel and second at a restaurant.¹¹¹ In September 1968 another kidnapping attempt by Cuban agents reached the world press when Cuban diplomats attempted to kidnap twenty-four-year-old Juan Ojeda in Mexico. Ojeda, a Cuban code expert, had defected from the Cuban mission in Jakarta, Indonesia and fled to Mexico. Mexican federal agents intercepted a group of Cuban diplomats escorting Ojeda, who appeared to be ‘drugged,’ at gunpoint to a waiting Cuban Airlines flight. Ojeda was placed under the protective guard of Mexican agents despite protests by the Cuban Ambassador.¹¹²

K. M. Greenhill examines the strategy behind Castro’s opening of the Cuban border that created the second, third, and fourth tidal bores of Cuban refugees. Greenhill theorizes that Castro, for the first time in 1965, engaged in the use of ‘coercive engineered migration.’ Castro purposely created a mass migration event to strategically cause an immigration crisis for the United States. Castro utilized his own citizens’ desire to leave Cuba, as well as his own need to rid himself of those with ties to the troublesome Cuban exile community, as a means of forcing concessions from the United States to close open Cuban migration flood gates.¹¹³ Greenhill observes that:

“Castro quickly learned that he was effectively able to ‘manufacture negotiating leverage for [Cuba] as a result of [his country’s] own weakness by negotiating its own options and relying on the ‘goodwill’ of the United States, while simultaneously retaining the capacity to threaten his counterpart’s interests.’ The most impressive part of this exercise was that (weak actor) Castro was able to negotiate this outcome with his superpower target after fewer than six hundred eighty-one Cubans had entered the United States.¹¹⁴

Holly Ackerman further observes that Castro’s opening and closing of Cuban borders to mass migration events “whether resisting the flow or augmenting it, the objective of the Cuban state was to maintain domestic control and to obtain political concessions from the U.S.”¹¹⁵

On September 29, 1965, Castro opened the port of Camarioca as a point of exit for those who had relatives living in the United States that desired to leave Cuba. The demographics of those who exited Cuba from October 10, 1965, through April 6, 1973, predictably shifts with the changes

¹¹⁰ United Press International, “Juana Castro Acts to Avoid Being Kidnaped,” *Anderson Herald (IN)*, July 2, 1964.

¹¹¹ Associated Press, “Castroites’ Plot Bared,” *The Tampa Tribune (FL)*, February 4, 1962.

¹¹² United Press International, “Mexicans Save Cuban Defector from Castro Agents at Airport,” *St. Louis Dispatch (MO)*, September 7, 1968.

¹¹³ Greenhill, K. M., *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy*, Cornell University Press (2010), 82-84.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 89.

¹¹⁵ Ackerman, “Mass Migration, Nonviolent Social Action, and the Cuban Raft Exodus, 1959-1994, 203.

in policies and focus by Castro. The second wave consisted significantly less of the professional, clerical, and sales professions and instead included close to forty-nine percent skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled blue-collar workers and the ‘petit bourgeois’ (employees, independent craftsmen, small merchants). An estimated ten percent of the second wave was also comprised of agricultural workers and fishermen.¹¹⁶ The erratic and unorganized Camarioca boatlift quickly gave way to a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ between the United States and Cuba.¹¹⁷ The result was the organization of the ‘Freedom Flights’ which included a hierarchical system that gave preference to the spouses, parents, and siblings of Cuban exiles already living in the United States.¹¹⁸ However, males subject to compulsory military service, “professionals, technical and skilled workers whose exit would cause ‘a serious disturbance’ in delivering social services or in production” were still refused legitimate exit by the Cuban government.¹¹⁹

By the beginning of the Freedom Flights, those who chose to leave Cuba were forced to forfeit all their belongings to the Cuban state. If something went awry during the exit process denying an individual or family permission to leave, forfeited belongings were not returned. Would be Cuban exiles were left stranded in Cuba with no job, home, or private property to return to. Some stories collected by Talek Nantes’ relate the smuggling of personal belongings out of Cuba that one might more reasonably suspect of drug mules. Items ranged from everything from typewriters concealed in luggage to gold jewelry and small valuables concealed in body cavities. Explanations of why such risks were taken typically center around the hope to sell or utilize a smuggled item to support their family economically when they reached their destination.¹²⁰

Castro completed the nationalization of property in Cuba with the confiscation of 55,636 privately owned small businesses.¹²¹ As Pedraza-Bailey notes, “With this last wave of nationalization, all industrial trade, and service activity passed into the hands of the state. . .only the small farmer prevailed. . .the refugees. . .believed in the promises of the revolution until the Cuban government labeled them ‘parasites’ and took over their small business holdings.”¹²² When the Freedom Flights terminated in 1973 roughly 260,600 Cubans had abandoned their homes and belongings in Cuba for the United States and other countries.¹²³

Marielitos

¹¹⁶ Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 15-16.

¹¹⁷ Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of the Historian, “Editorial Note No. 308,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1966, XXXII, Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guyana.

¹¹⁸ Greenhill, *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy*, 82-84, 89.

¹¹⁹ Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 16.

¹²⁰ Nantes, *Cuban Exile Memories: Journeys of Courage and Resilience in the Pursuit of Freedom*, 20, 22, 30-31, 83-84.

¹²¹ Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 19.

¹²² *Ibid*, 19.

¹²³ Duany, “Cuban Migration: A Postrevolutionary Exodus Ebbs and Flows,” Migration Policy Institute.

After the Freedom Flights ended April 6, 1973, the flood of Cuban refugees slowed until 1980. A major trigger for the 1980 Cuban mass migration, commonly referred to as the Mariel Boatlift, occurred in 1979 when an estimated 100,000 Cuban exiles took advantage of the Cuba government's invitation to visit relatives in Cuba. These visits renewed broken family ties, but more importantly they made it increasingly difficult for economically strapped Cuban citizens to continue to be accepting of both communist repression and extremely grim economic prospects. The third wave, more so than the preceding waves, was driven by hope as opposed to fear and desperation.¹²⁴ But this did not hold true for all Marielitos.

Severe cyclical economic crises and general unrest began boil over in 1979. By late October hijacking Cuban boats to the United States had become increasingly more common. These hijackings violated the 1973 Hijacking Treaty, but the United States made little effort to prosecute boat hijackers. This resulted in diplomatic protests from Cuba which the United States simply ignored.¹²⁵

Other violent attempts to escape Cuba in 1979 included crashing buses into the Venezuelan Embassy, until the Embassy reinforced barriers to prevent such incidents. A year later, in 1980 a group of six Cubans used a bus to crash through Cuban guards and onto the grounds of the Peruvian Embassy, killing one Cuban guard.¹²⁶ The Peruvians granted the six Cubans asylum despite demands by the Cuban government for their return. In retaliation for the Peruvians' refusal to hand over the bus crashers, Castro removed his guards and announced that the Peruvian Embassy was open to anyone wanting to leave Cuba. Soon an estimated 10,000 hopeful Cubans had crowded onto the grounds of the Peruvian Embassy.¹²⁷

Castro once again utilized 'coercive engineered migration' and, like the second exodus, on the surface it appeared that Castro was merely releasing pressure and ridding himself of dissidents with ties to the Cuban exile community. However, Castro was making very pronounced but unspoken political statement. Cuba, not the United States, was in control of immigration at the Florida border.¹²⁸ The United States was faced with a Cold War immigration policy conundrum. If it wanted to continue making Castro and the Soviets look bad by virtue of the number of people trying to escape from communist Cuba, then it had to accept Cuban refugees fleeing the oppressive communist regime.

On April 20, 1980, Castro opened the port of Mariel. He invited Cuban exiles to come by boat to pick up relatives who wanted to leave.¹²⁹ Hundreds of boats arrived from the United States. However, upon arrival, Cuban officials forced boat captains to transport unrelated persons in addition to family. A handful of these extra refugees were forced migrants originating in Cuba's

¹²⁴ Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration," 22.

¹²⁵ Greenhill, *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy*, 90.

¹²⁶ Dan Williams, "Now Free, He Fasts for 10,000 Countrymen," *The Miami Herald (FL)*, April 9, 1980.

¹²⁷ Greenhill, *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy*, 92.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 84.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 92, 97.

prisons and mental hospitals. Members of the Cuban LGBT community also voluntarily left Cuba.¹³⁰

Homosexuality has always been criminalized by the Castro regime. Prior to 1959, homosexuals often took jobs in the tourist sector catering to the demands of foreign guests. After 1959 communist Cuba defined homosexuality as a “deviant symptom of bourgeois excess” and a “morally corrupt manifestation of capitalism” that would not exist under Cuban communism.¹³¹ The result was that homosexuals were removed from their positions as educators and many other occupations.

In 1965 Castro opened the Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP). Individuals of working age deemed unsuitable for military service were sent to these ‘reeducation’ camps. Those incarcerated included homosexuals, religious practitioners, musicians, artists, the unemployed, and those who had previously sought permission to leave Cuba.¹³² UMAP camp inmates were put to hard agricultural labor, usually in the sugar cane fields, and forced to live in inhumane conditions. By April 1967, it had been estimated that 30,000 people had been sent to the camps and another 40,000 were expected to arrive.¹³³ The new UMAP camps, and one concentration camp named “26 de Julio” located near the town of Esmerelda that interred several thousand Cuban citizens accused of ‘vagrancy,’ again attracted the attention of the IACHR. Results of the investigations were published in the Commission’s 1967 report.¹³⁴

There were widespread human rights violations alleged in the UMAP camps. “Records show that gays underwent new experimental and psychiatric treatments, including drug therapies...Jehovah’s Witnesses especially suffered bloody beatings.”¹³⁵ LGBT Marielitos referred to the camps as the “House of Witches” and “concentration camps for homosexuals.”¹³⁶ Although the UMAP camps were only open for a brief period, they damaged the lives of thousands of Cuban citizens. For the Cuban LGBT community, the Mariel Boatlift represented an escape from living in constant fear.

Those who were unable to depart legally via the port of Mariel sought illegal, sometimes violent, means of exiting the country. One such example is the Canimar River Massacre of July 6, 1980. Three armed Cubans, one a military deserter, hijacked a tourist excursion service boat. The

¹³⁰ Associated Press, “Coast Guard beefs up Florida units.,” *The Kansas City Star (MO)*, May 16, 1980.

¹³¹ Janelle Hippe, “Performance, Power, and Resistance: Theorizing the Links among Stigma, Sexuality, and HIV/AIDS in Cuba,” *Cuban Studies* 42 (2011), 205.

¹³² Rebecca San Juan, “Cuba’s Unresolved UMAP History: Survivors’ Struggles to Counter the Official Story,” undergraduate thesis, (2017), 14; and “‘Slave Labor’ Conscription to be Increased in Cuba,” *The Palm Beach Post (FL)*, April 6, 1967.

¹³³ “‘Slave Labor’ Conscription to be Increased in Cuba,” *The Palm Beach Post (FL)*.

¹³⁴ Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Organización de los Estados Americanos, “Informe Sobre la Situación de los Derechos Humanos en la República de Cuba,” (April 7, 1967).

¹³⁵ Rebecca San Juan, “Cuba’s Unresolved UMAP History: Survivors’ Struggles to Counter the Official Story,” 14.

¹³⁶ Liz Crusan, “For Cuban Homosexuals, life was lived in terror,” *The Capital Times (WI)*, July 31, 1980.

Cuban military opened fire on the hijacked boat killing and wounding passengers. They finally succeeded in sinking the boat by ramming it with a boat used for heavy industrial work. The military deserter committed suicide, but the other two hijackers chose to try to save the surviving passengers from drowning. The two surviving hijackers received thirty-year sentences. In prison, they were subjected to psychiatric torture, psychotropic drugs, and extended isolation in a dark cell. With Spanish intervention, both men were eventually freed and exiled to Spain.¹³⁷

The shift in the demographics of the Marielitos was even more distinct from the preceding exoduses. First, an estimated forty percent of the refugees were black. By law, discrimination based on sex or race was not supposed to exist in Cuba. However, as Pedraza-Bailey summarizes:

The salience of race in the revolution predisposed them to leave, for it created role strain: both felt unequal to the new expectations. White workers perceived that the revolution displayed favoritism towards blacks; blacks felt that it suffered from tokenism.”¹³⁸

Castro’s revolution had failed to irradicate both racism and sexism at Cuba’s cultural core.

Pedraza-Bailey breaks Marielito occupations down into professionals, among whom teachers were most represented, accountants, entertainers, urban planners, architects, and nurses with roughly seventy-one percent being blue collar workers, including craftsmen and semi-skilled and unskilled workers, among which construction and transportation occupations were overrepresented.¹³⁹ Marielitos were also younger than preceding waves, being primarily between the ages of twenty and thirty-four years old.¹⁴⁰ Pedraza-Bailey also utilizes estimates from the Immigration and Naturalization Service to examine the makeup of the small group of forced migrants. Close to twenty-three percent were political prisoners. About seventy percent had been incarcerated for minor infractions or crimes only recognized in Cuba. Only about six hundred migrants were attributed to having their origins in a mental hospital and forced migration.¹⁴¹

The Mariel boatlift migration ended in late September 1980. An estimated 125,000 Cuban refugees had crossed the Florida Straits. Castro had strategically exploited a weakness between the Carter Administration, the Miami Cuban exile community, and Miami authorities. Castro’s motivation for opening the port of Mariel was revenge on the United States for ignoring diplomatic protests concerning the 1979 Cuban boat hijackings. The Carter Administration’s policy was still to receive the refugees with ‘open arms’ while Miami officials made threats to confiscate boats returning from Cuba to prevent the arrival of more refugees. Castro’s decision to send the criminal and mentally ill was designed to create ‘fear and outrage’ among the American public. As a result of Castro’s manipulations, Cuban refugees were faced with growing hostility both in Cuba and the United States.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ “The 1980 Canimar River Massacre: dozens killed for attempting to flee Cuba,” Archivo Cuba, accessed November 14, 2021, <https://cubaarchive.org/database/>.

¹³⁸ Pedraza-Bailey. “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” 24.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 25-26.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 26-27.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 26.

¹⁴² Greenhill, *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy*, 94-98.

The 1994 Balseros Crisis

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the hijacking of boats and the number of *balseros* (rafters) began to rise once again. Another increasingly common means of escaping Cuba was through the United States Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay. However, reaching the base was not easy. Land routes are blocked by fields of landmines, so refugees resorted to swimming to the base. In 1993 United States officials issued protests when soldiers at Guantánamo Bay witnessed Cuban troops dropping grenades in the path of swimmers, strafing the water with machine guns, and lifting the bodies of refugees out of the water with gaffs.¹⁴³

The year 1993 also saw the defection of Fidel Castro's estranged, illegitimate daughter, Alina Fernandez Revuelta. When asked what bothered her most about Cuba she stated, "It's very tiring being on a permanent war footing for so many years. . .Cuba is always in a state of war. . .We have never lived in peace."¹⁴⁴ Alina was critical of her father. "When people tell me he [is] a dictator, I tell them that's not the right word. . .Fidel is a tyrant. . . an absolute ruler unrestricted by law, who usurps people's rights."¹⁴⁵ After her successful defection Alina turned her attention towards extricating her daughter from Cuba.

One of the sparks that fanned the flame of the Balsero Crisis occurred on July 13, 1994. Seventy-two Cubans stole an old tugboat belonging to the Maritime Services Enterprise of the Ministry of Transportation with the intention of reaching the United States. Eyewitness reports state that two Maritime Service Enterprise boats immediately gave chase. Two more Maritime Service Enterprise boats joined the chase, each was equipped with tanks and water hoses. About seven miles off the coast of Cuba, the four Maritime Service Enterprise boats commenced an attack against the '13 de Marzo'. One boat blocked the stolen tugboat from the front and a second attacked from the rear, splitting the stern. The two newly arrived boats positioned themselves on either side of the pilfered tug and "sprayed everyone on deck with pressurized water, using their hoses" driving passengers below to the tug's engine room.¹⁴⁶ The tug finally sank leaving forty-one of the passengers dead. The crews of the four Maritime Services Enterprise boats did not aid those on the sinking '13 de Marzo.'¹⁴⁷ The thirty-one survivors of the '13 de Marzo' were not rescued until Cuban Coast Guard cutters arrived. Survivors were transported to a detention center where the women and children were finally released and the men held.¹⁴⁸ A report was made to the IACHR on July 19, 1994, and an investigation into the incident was opened.¹⁴⁹

With the Cold War was ending, the United States was intent on not allowing a repeat of the Mariel exodus. On August 5, 1994, protest riots erupted at the Havana seawall as the Cuban

¹⁴³ "US Officials assail Cuba's 'extreme cruelty,'" *The Miami Herald (FL)*, July 8, 1993.

¹⁴⁴ "Castro's daughter: 'Cuban socialism is a dead-end street,'" *The Miami Herald (FL)*, July 27, 1992.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Victims of the Tugboat '13 de Marzo' v. Cuba*, Case 11.436, Report No. 47/96, Inter-Am.C.H.R., OEA/Ser.L/V/II.95 Doc. 7 rev. at 127 (1997).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ "The Cuban Rafter Phenomenon," University of Miami Libraries. Cuban Heritage Collection 5689, accessed September 9, 2022, <http://balseros.miami.edu/#rafterTimeline>.

government began implementing measures to prevent boat thefts and hijackings. By August 8, 1994, civil unrest, prompted by the sinking of the ‘13 de Marzo’, led Fidel Castro to pull back his Frontier Guard to allow those who wished to leave Cuba by sea to leave. As Castro opened the Cuban migration flood gates once again, the Clinton administration responded first by ordering all ports closed to traffic going south towards Cuba, effectively preventing Cuban Americans from sending boats to pick up refugees as had happened in both the Mariel and Camarioca boatlifts. Then on August 19, 1994, President Bill Clinton made the announcement that Cuban rafters were to be refused entrance to the United States and rafters intercepted by the United States Coast Guard were to be transported and detained at the naval base at Guantánamo Bay. The Clinton Administration had also halted charter flights from the United States to Cuba and terminated remittances by Cuban Americans to their relatives still living in Cuba.¹⁵⁰

Despite changes in United States Cuban immigration policies, by August 25, 1994, the United States Coast Guard estimated that it had intercepted 13,084 Cuban rafters.¹⁵¹ Holly Ackerman examines the *Balsero* (rafter) phenomenon from 1959 through the 1994 crisis. In her dissertation she observes that:

The image of the rafters was as individual objects of rescue – not as subjects controlling their own destiny. The dangers of rafting were well known and created an image of despair. This underscored the image of the regime as omnipotent. To escape one had to be prepared to die.¹⁵²

Ackerman provides several estimates of the number of *Balseros* who did not survive crossing the Florida Straits from Cuba, but it is generally agreed that, based on the data available, *Balsero* refugees stood a 1:4 chance of survival.¹⁵³ She also quotes Fidel Castro’s estimate that, over a four year period, out of 51,076 *Balseros* only 13,275 survived.¹⁵⁴ She notes that the general distrust of neighbors and friends, due to the pervasive snitch environment that is strongly encouraged by the Cuban government, prevents Cuban citizens from organizing coordinated, nonviolent, protest movements. Riots, such as erupted at the Havana seawall after the sinking of the ‘13 de Marzo,’ are “quickly controlled and.. . subsequently labeled as violent, anti-social elements by the government.”¹⁵⁵

The 1994 *Balsero* mass migration differed in one significant way from the preceding mass migration events from Cuba. Those who attempted to exit Cuba in 1994 on makeshift rafts were overwhelmingly Cubans who had been born after Castro came to power in 1959. Ackerman notes that their motivations for leaving Cuba did not differ that much from earlier *Balsero* refugees, but

¹⁵⁰ “The Cuban Rafter Phenomenon,” University of Miami Libraries, Cuban Heritage Collection 5689.

¹⁵¹ Greenhill, *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign Policy*, 116.

¹⁵² Ackerman, “Mass Migration, Nonviolent Social Action, and the Cuban Raft Exodus, 1959-1994” 195-196.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 108.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 108.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 217.

instead of fleeing a transition from freedom to communism, the younger generation was fleeing a society they no longer wished to be stifled by.¹⁵⁶

Negotiations would not commence between the United States and Castro until September 1, 1994. An agreement was quickly reached on September 9 and Castro closed the Cuban borders once more on September 13, 1994. With the exception of unaccompanied minors, acutely or chronically ill, and the elderly, the *Balseros* detained at Guantánamo Bay would not be allowed to enter the United States until May 2, 1995.¹⁵⁷ Today it is more common for Cubans to flee to Latin American countries and then make their way north to the Mexican-United States boarder in their attempts to migrate to the United States. Cubans make up a small percentage of those waiting in limbo at the border in 2021.¹⁵⁸

Facing the Future

In 2006, prior to Fidel Castro's death, and again in 2016, after his death, *Forbes* magazine ran articles estimating the dictator's net financial worth. After accounting for what they believed to be privately held real estate and business interests, *Forbes* estimated that Fidel Castro's individual net financial worth in 2006 was close to nine hundred million dollars.¹⁵⁹ Despite the dictator's vehement denial of *Forbes'* estimate, the articles generated widespread criticism of dictator. A former security guard alleged that the dictator owned significant interest in private property including up to twenty mansions, a private island, yacht, and a cheese factory.¹⁶⁰ Fidel Castro was criticized for living a life of luxury while the Cuban people starved. On the other hand, a select few came to his defense criticizing *Forbes'* methodology in arriving at their estimate. They pointed out that it was next to impossible to determine if Fidel personally owned the property or if it was a state owned 'perk' of being Cuba's leader.¹⁶¹ Either way, there appears to be evidence that the Castros had exclusive access to daily luxuries the financially strapped Cuban people did not.

In February 2021, a song titled *Patria y Vida* (Fatherland and Life) was released. A collaboration between four Cuban exiles and two Cubans, the title is a play on Fidel Castro's slogan '*patria o muerte*' (fatherland or death). It is representative of a frustrated younger generation of Cubans who live in a world where youth are arrested for riding skateboards and musicians, artists, and writers are still censored and inhumanely punished and imprisoned for

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 159.

¹⁵⁷ "The Cuban Rafter Phenomenon," University of Miami Libraries, Cuban Heritage Collection 5689.

¹⁵⁸ Mary Beth **Error! Main Document Only.** Sheridan, "Cubans were once privileged migrants to the United States. Now they're stuck at the border, like everyone else." *The Washington Post*, November 5, 2019; and Jose Luis Gonzalez, "Cuban migrants protest at Mexico border, seeking entry to U.S.," *Reuters*, December 29, 2020.

¹⁵⁹ Luisa Kroll, "Fortunes of Kings, Queens and Dictators," *Forbes*, May 5, 2006; and Keith Flamer, "10 Surprises About Fidel Castro's Extravagant Life," *Forbes*, November 26, 2016.

¹⁶⁰ Keith Flamer, "10 Surprises About Fidel Castro's Extravagant Life," *Forbes*, November 26, 2016.

¹⁶¹ Leslie Marenco, "Castro's Family to Inherit \$900 Million or Nothing?!", *Trust Counsel*, December 15, 2016.

creative transgressions against the Cuban government.¹⁶² The song, a harsh criticism of the Cuban government, became an anthem at public protests. A Harvard Political Review article written by Ana Brito in November 2021 observes that “Cubans no longer fear risking their lives in the streets because their alternatives are not much better. . .frequent power outages, political oppression. . .dwindling food supplies [have] mounted to a deteriorating quality of life. . .Cubans no longer want to flee their motherland. . .they want to see substantive and positive change at home.”¹⁶³ Alina Fernandez Revuelta previously summed the situation up in 1992 when she stated, “I don’t think people can take this level of stress for much longer.”¹⁶⁴

Since 1959 Cuban exiles have become new generations of Cuban Americans and they have proven themselves capable of exercising political influence in the United States at the ballot box. So long as Cuban Americans want economic pressure kept on the Castro regime, politicians are unlikely to make any move towards lifting the long-standing embargo and the embargo remains in place as of this writing. What started out as an expression of foreign policy in the United States has since mutated into an expression of domestic politics.¹⁶⁵

In recent years, Cuban exiles have started the work of officially accounting for Cubans who have been executed, died in prison, killed extra-legally, or simply disappeared under the Castro regime. Such work has started to expose a history of state violence and human rights violations more fully, including such acts perpetrated by the Batista regime in the years prior to the Cuban Revolution. Documentation of executions and people who died while in custody attest to the brutality the regime is still capable of today, years after Fidel Castro’s death. The difficulty of locating government documentation, including known failures to create and file death certificates, also attests to the efforts to conceal ongoing human rights violations.

The Cuban State’s use of violence to enforce policies and ideologies has been a constant since Fidel Castro’s rise to power in January 1959. As the regime matured it became increasingly adept at exercising control using violence expressed both directly, through government action, and

¹⁶² Anamaria Sayre, “Explaining ‘Patria Y Vida,’ The Song That’s Defined The Uprising in Cuba.” *npr music*. July 20, 2021; and Vanesa Wilkey-Escobar, dir. *Amigo Skate, Cuba*. Hollywood, CA: Indican Pictures, 2020, DVD, Digital Copy.

¹⁶³ Ana Brito, “‘Patria y Vida:’ The Sound of Cuban Protests,” *Harvard Political Review* (harvardpolitics.com), November 23, 2021.

¹⁶⁴ “Castro’s daughter: ‘Cuban socialism is a dead-end street,’” *The Miami Herald (FL)*, July 27, 1992.

¹⁶⁵ Mendoza, Plinio Apuleyo, Carlos Alberto Montaner and Alvaro Vargas Llosa, *Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot*, Lanham, MD: Madison Books (2001), 101.

indirectly, through encouraging a ‘snitch’ system among the general population. Fear of state reprisal has served as a commonality between economic, political, social, and cultural migration pushes in Cuba since 1959. There is evidence that the use of violence by the Cuban government to enforce ideology, policy, and law directly affects the decisions of Cuban citizens to risk their lives to leave their homeland. It is an area in Cuban studies that has received limited attention and would benefit from more detailed study.

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