

Cuban Americans: From Golden Exiles to Dusty Feet—Freedom, Hope, Endurance, and the American Dream



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Chapter Overview

Patria o Muerte—Venceremos (Fatherland or Death—We Shall Overcome) are common phrases associated to communism, socialism, and the rise of the Castro regime. An accurate understanding of Cuban Americans and the group's unique challenges requires an examination of the cultural practices, beliefs, and strengths to position a positive framing in working with Cubans who seek mental health services. As Cuban communities offer a rich cultural mixture of people who have witnessed liberty in different phases of the communist government, an assessment of positive coping and patterns of resilience paralleling their core values forms the basis of this chapter. Many terms are part of this narrative including exodus, asylum, refugee status, and parolee; these are examined in the context of identity and the role of unique privileges, the embargo, and the effects of separating islanders from their country and family members. Values such as *Cubanidad* (the shared sense of being Cuban), survivors' pride, and the essence of here and now are examined. Finally, a multigenerational model accounting for wave differences (e.g., Golden Exiles vs. Mariel), the chapter offers directives for clinicians and mental health providers to work with Cubans while promoting their emotional and behavioral adjustment, mental stamina, and resilience.

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Positioning Cubans Within the Latinx Diaspora

For close to 60 years, US leadership has continuously contended with the Castro regime, its communist practices and Marxist-Leninist fundamentals; as such, the United States continues to address remnants of the Cold War with the small island of Cuba (Pérez, 1993a, 1993b). Given the Castro regime and the complete transformation of the island's governance resulting from strong ties with the Soviet Union and the removal of Cubans' human rights, home and business ownership, and other practices of strict socialism (Pérez, 1986, 1993a, 1993b), a long history of Cubans immigrating to the United States exists. Cubans' history in the States started during the Spanish Colonial period of the 1500s (Ripoll, 1987) with a trickling of islanders (a term used for the group as they are native of an island) seeking opportunities; however, the migration eventually led to numerous islanders seeking refuge for multiple reasons as will be discussed. As the pattern of seeking refuge fluctuated and coincided with US policies, multiple waves of migration reveal distinct immigration patterns among Cuban individuals. Moreover, early policies and current changing policies in response to the island exodus offer unique circumstances that speak to a group's particular circumstances, all factors to consider when offering mental health services (Bernal & Shapiro, 1996; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002).

Nuestra Historia en el Exilio—La Isla, La Política, y Nuestra Libertad (Cubans as Exiles: The Island, Politics, and Freedom)

Cubans have been migrating to the United States prior to the Louisiana Purchase and have a long-standing presence as immigrants since the 1800s (Pérez, 1986), with the greatest influx during the early settlements, close to the time when the Spanish and Cuban American War ended, and a Cuban government was established. In particular, Cubans first arrived as exiles and migrants to the United States in 1823 when Spain ruled the island. A number of these political exiles sought expansion (1823–1865) and hoped for annexation of the island by the United States with the goal of strengthening slavery, gaining independence from Spain, and preserving power for the Whites in the island (Mirabal, 2017). Other early Cuban exiles and migrants (both Afro-Cuban and White), however, advocated for the abolition of slavery, expansion of rights for slaves, and independence. Newspapers, pamphlets, journals, the creation of social political clubs and spaces were all means pursued to voice the importance of justice and freedom while developing a political exile agenda based around a freedom movement and revolutionary efforts (Mirabal, 2017).

In the middle to late nineteenth century, parallel to historical changes on the island and political conflicts with Spain, the onset of US cigar companies attracted

businesses and workers in a time of political, social, and economic challenges. Consequently, the hiring of Cuban laborers to roll tobaccos (avoiding Cuban political disruptions and high tariffs on products) facilitated a greater influx of Cubans (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985; Pérez, 1986). In addition, the development of cigar operations attracted thousands of Cuban workers that helped grow Tampa, Florida's population. Post this period, Cubans continued to emigrate between 1920s and 1930s primarily for economic reasons, looking for employment classified as labor immigrants.

Although Cubans lived in the United States prior to Cuba becoming a dictatorship in 1959, it was not until the Cuban revolution that great numbers left. Specifically, the US–Cuba relationship grew tense as the Castro regime strengthened ties with the Russian government, leading to the Bay of Pigs (1961) invasion as it has been labeled. Essentially, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) attempted to invade the island but its efforts failed, further intensifying strained relationships between the two countries. As ties with Russia and Cuba strengthened, the island requested protection from future invasions leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) when Russia stationed nuclear weapons in Cuba (Roberts, 2012).

Close to a quarter million Cuban immigrants arrived in the United States prior to the revolution; however, the largest exodus was after the Cuban revolution (1959), with exiles fleeing the country for freedom and human rights. The first wave of Cubans fled the island thinking their leave was temporary. They left their properties, homes, cars, and businesses with their friends. Given the political climate and concerned that Cuban children would be indoctrinated on communist principles, the CIA created the Operation Pedro Pan program between 1960 and 1962 in partnership with Catholic Charities facilitating the largest exodus of undocumented children to the United States. The program placed refugee children in relatives' homes, orphanages, foster homes, or boarding schools (Maret & Aschkenas, 2011).

In 1961, the CIA attempted to overthrow Fidel Castro (Bay of Pigs) but the dictator was secretly informed about the plan resulting in an unsuccessful invasion. Close to a year past the event, the United States faced the Cuban Missile Crisis, a 13-day political and military confrontation with the Soviet Union over the installation of nuclear missiles on the island and a threat to nuclear war. After great pressure, the Soviet Union agreed to remove all nuclear weapons but ties between the Soviet Union and Cuba remained strong and the government's loyalty resided with communism.

As the political climate in Cuba worsened and exiles continued to seek asylum, President Johnson enacted the Cuban American Act of 1966 allocating 1.3 billion dollars of direct assistance while making the group eligible for scholarships, financial aid, Medicare, public assistance, and free English classes. Moreover, the Cuban American Act of 1966 granted work authorization and permanent residency after 1 year in the United States safeguarding Cubans from the naturalization process and reducing any fear of prosecution or deportation (Abraham, 2015). The Act served as a unique privilege granted only to Cubans who were quickly seen as refugees given the Communist regime and the inhumane acts by Castro's dictatorship.

In 1996, President Clinton agreed with the Castro government that the United States would no longer accept Cubans found at sea and would only apply the Act to those who stepped on American soil. It was this agreement that spurred the wave of Cubans aptly named, “Dry Feet.” Changes in the Act appeased the Cuban government that argued it encouraged Cubans to leave, yet angered many Cuban Americans (Abraham, 2015) who felt it was dangerous to send Cubans back to the island given the regime’s history of incarcerating and mistreating those who did not support the revolution. Moreover, the Act underscored the longstanding-suffering experienced on the island and the insidiousness of Cubans’ compromised human rights.

For Cuban immigrants, the Act provided benefits of residency after a year post arrival, health care benefits, and federal aid that were initially implemented for early Cuban refugees (Bruno, 2016). However, there remained a growing number of groups (including some Cubans) who questioned the unique privileges still granted by the Cuban American Act of 1966. In 2016, two Republican Senators sought to redress it given instances of misuse by more recent arrivals. As a result, minor changes were implemented to ensure individuals collecting benefits were not returning to Cuba. Although President Obama removed the Wet and Dry Foot (known as the Cuban Thaw stemming from the Cold War in January 2017) and moved to stop the embargo with the island in 2015–2017, the Trump administration tightened travel and commercial ties in November 2017.

Immigration-related terminology Resulting from America’s response to the Cold War and its stance against communist ideologies, Cubans have “refugee status” that Kunz (1973) emphasizes as a “distinct social type” that underscores their loss of human rights in their homeland, a concept that acknowledges an involuntarily process of being “pushed out” of one’s country. In essence, it is not economic opportunity or a different lifestyle that drives Cubans to embark on the open seas, but restriction of expression and limited safety that prompts their departure. In addition, Cuban status has been associated to “parolee” allowing the Secretary of Homeland Security to protect those claiming asylum based on humanitarian interests (Wasem, 2009). Another term includes exile, which recognizes the “push out” experienced by Cubans fleeing the island and underscoring the expulsion from their homeland with no rights to return. Lastly, the term “defected” is related to abandoning one’s country or to be in opposition to one. As Cubans find themselves unprotected of their human rights, they defect and request refuge in a number of countries.

Other disparaging non-governmental names associated with those who left the island post-revolution include *gusanos* (worms) and *escoria* (human waste-scum). The Cuban government used the term *gusanos* to shame and discredit those who left and discourage other islanders from leaving. This process facilitates a separation between those who support Castro’s ideologies and those who seek refuge by actively creating tensions within Cuban communities both in the United States and on the island (Skop, 2001). *Escoria* was a term most associated with the Mariel wave. Another offensive term, it was also used to shame and embarrass those Cubans leaving the island and categorized them to be unworthy. These terms created emotional

distance and a buffer for those who opted to stay on the island and affirmed that those leaving had undesirable traits best addressed by *escorting* them off the island. Overtly, the division within Cuban communities on the island expanded as those who wanted to support the government attempted to gain status by siding with the communist regime while maintaining hope that circumstances were going to improve. Other reports suggest that the Cuban separatists felt pressured to call the exiles names in order to not be questioned about their loyalty to the Communist values.

Nuestra Llegada y Las Olas a Través de los Años (Our Arrival and Our Waves Throughout the Years)

As Cubans grew increasingly dissatisfied with Batista’s dictatorship (1952–1959), he was overthrown at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. In the midst of a country seeking leadership for liberty and justice, Fidel Castro proposed a movement toward stability and strong governance. Some Cubans immediately recognized Castro’s practices as communist or socialist, yet it was not until 1965 that the state was officially established under the Communist Party. Throughout the transition, Cubans witnessed persecutions, limited human rights, and endured issues of repression. These conditions alarmed countries witnessing the changes in Cuba and its people, promoting active practices (both by islanders and those in the United States) to facilitate the coming of Cubans to the United States. As a thorough review of Cubans migration or waves (i.e., time periods) is beyond the scope of this chapter, only a brief overview is presented in this chart.

Wave	Circumstances	Demographics	Process	Perceptions of group Unique points
Golden exiles/First Wave (1959–1962) The Historical Exiles or Golden Exiles	Beginning of the revolution Fled island in anticipation of the revolution	Included political leaders, government workers, executives, manufacturers, and established professionals (Gonzalez-Pando, 1998) There were approximately 200,000 exiles in this group (Rothe & Pumariega, 2008)	Defected as saw island changes Parted with all belongings	Considered risk-takers willing to leave all behind Perceived as highly educated and temporary residents Viewed as good immigrants with education and human capital Viewed as elitist given status Described as the group who “searched” and escaped (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985)

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Wave	Circumstances	Demographics	Process	Perceptions of group Unique points
Operation Peter Pan (Los Pedro Panes) The group— although not officially considered a wave, came from 1960–1962	As social climate of Cuba began to change, the Castro regime encountered resistance Worried for their offspring, parents sent their children to United States in hopes of protecting them from the revolution and its values	Initiative to host 14,000 young Cuban children who came without parents (Maret & Aschkenas, 2011) claiming political refuge	Operated by the Catholic Welfare Bureau Parent’s underground efforts with church to facilitate entry of minors to America with sponsorship (Maret & Aschkenas, 2011) Received approved visas at hand	Name related to story of “Peter Pan” who leaves to Neverland without parents Story of hope and promise for a younger generation Heroic sentiment of anti-communist efforts by United States An act of humanitarianism to offer entry to the minors
Los primero balseros— Camarioca Leading to Freedom Flights (1965–1973)	As social climate changed, Castro opened the port of Camarioca and invited family members to pick up their family members at sea	Given dangers of picking up islanders via sea, almost 5000 processed but 200,000 expected Via commercial airline, 3000–4000 Cubans a month entered United States for 8 years (until 1973), which were known as Freedom Flights—the largest airborne refugee establishment in the United States	Program facilitated adjustment by helping Cubans find their family members, offering residency upon arrival, and medical benefits	As these Cubans waited for changes on the island, these refugees were viewed as those who waited and received assistance in their transition (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985) Witnessed the confiscation of businesses and the abolishment of private property by the Communist Party. They witnessed repression if expressed discontent (Rothe & Pumariega, 2008) Both this and previous group’s welcoming approach seen as America’s effort to create a “brain drain” on Castro’s regime to dismantle its power and minimize its momentum

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Wave	Circumstances	Demographics	Process	Perceptions of group Unique points
El Mariel April– October 1980	<p>The discontinuation of the Freedom Flights and continued problems in Cuba resulted in a bus filled with Cubans being driven into the Peruvian embassy to claim exile</p> <p>Chaos resulted in guard being shot and Fidel retrieving his personnel from the Peruvian embassy</p> <p>Peru responded by opening the embassy and welcoming 10,000 Cubans (Skop, 2001)</p>	<p>Estimated 125,000 Cubans who came to the United States in a 6-month period (Card, 1990), of whom 56% were males and included Afro-Cubans</p> <p>Almost 50% had less than a high school education but 18% of the group had completed college (Card, 1990)</p> <p>1.4% of the group had committed unlawful crimes and some were from mental health facilities</p>	<p>Castro opened Mariel port and allowed all Cubans who did not want to be in the island to leave, as long as a ship came to pick them up</p> <p>Upon US arrival, some reunited with families and others found sponsors. Many males who did not have either were relocated to resettlement camps (Card, 1990)</p>	<p>Faced with media stereotype that were primarily criminals with false data representing them as threatening and dangerous</p> <p>Group not granted automatic refugee status as the other Cuban waves</p> <p>Given a designation of “status pending”</p>
Los Balseiros (Cuban Rafters) 1994–1996	<p>Numerous Cubans taking the sea to claim asylum</p> <p>Clinton administration quickly implemented the Wet Feet Dry Feet Policy</p>	<p>Intercepted at sea, more than 37,000 Cubans detained at Guantanamo Bay for 18-months</p> <p>Base housed adults and minors attempting to leave the island</p>	<p>In 1996, the last <i>balseiros</i> were flown to the United States ending this wave (Puig, 2002)</p>	<p>Distinct from other waves, this group entering United States after the 1990s, who were “born, raised and educated” under the Castro regime (Garcia-Larrieu, 2006, p. 124; Rothe & Pumariega, 2008)</p>
Dusty Feet (2015– 2017)	<p>With President Obama’s loosening of ties with the island, Cubans arrived to the United States, traveling through airports or the Mexican–US border</p> <p>Obama ends Wet Feet, Dry Feet Policy in January 2017</p>	<p>Close to 56,000 Cubans entered the United States in 2016—a 31% increase over the 43,159 Cubans who arrived the previous year (Krogstad, 2016)</p> <p>By sea in 2015, close to 10,000 Cubans arrived compared to 4746 who arrived in 2014</p>	<p>The anticipated changes promoted Cubans to flee the island and find creative ways to claim asylum in search of freedom as political refugees</p>	<p>Some reports suggest the most recent wave of Cubans was prompted by their fear of the normalization of the United States and Cuba ties resulting in the repeal of the Cuban Adjustment Act</p> <p>Other accounts suggest the most recent Cuban refugees showed patterns of returning to their home country for long periods to visit after granted asylum</p>

The reader is referred to Garcia (1996) and Gonzalez-Pando (1998) for a more thorough historical review of Cuban migration or waves.

It is important to note that the waves, as they are marked by time, conditions on the island, government policies, and Castro's open port cycles, directly inform Cuban Americans' perceived and lived experiences in the United States, their cultural identity, cultural preservation, social capital, socialization, and integration. Given the differences in level of education, income, professional status, years living under the regime, and challenges with their journey(s) to the United States, each wave of immigrants, and generational influence within families (e.g., US-born daughter of a *Balseiro*) will have a unique sense of identity, group affiliation, perspective of the island and varying relations with previous and newer waves.

Race There is a long history of race relations in Cuba, a community based on Indigenous, Spanish, and African roots. Prior to the revolution, Afro-Cubans comprised one-third of the population. Although there was no Jim Crow or formal segregation, the group still experienced numerous inequalities. Benson (2012) notes that some Cubans attended "separate and exclusive social clubs and recreational facilities" (p. 3). In addition, Afro-Cubans experienced limited opportunities in the context of education, employment, and opportunity as the roots of slavery and plantation practices still influenced everyday activities. In contrast, offering a chronicle in her ground-breaking work, Mirabal (2017) notes a multitude of narratives that point to Afro-Cubans' migratory experiences to the United States in early island history (1823–1957), the political positions they held, and the scholarship they contributed. Noted in her book, is an accounting of Afro-Cubans immigrating to the New York prior to the revolution with exceptionally rich stories of sharing *Cubanidad* with White Cubans through "intellectual and political activism" (p. 19).

Castro pledged to eliminate racial discrimination with a system that afforded opportunities for all. He set an ideology for the country that "revolutionaries could not be racist" and socialism was a great answer to addressing the institutional racism embedded in prior governments. As scholars attempt to understand the role of racism in Cuba today in the context of employment, access, and economic mobility, the analysis is difficult, as the Cuban government does not collect racial identity statistics. Yet, some writings have addressed the experiences of Afro-Cubans on the island, the integration of race in Cuba, and the relations across racial groups on the island (Casal, 1989; Cole, 1980). An important fact is that the early exodus is marked by the departure of White elite Cubans and Fidel's movement to develop more Black scholars and professionals. Others argue that the Communist Party really did not need to attend to Afro-Cubans' positioning in Cuba as they were integrated and experienced equity. Despite the two discourses, post-revolution, the earlier waves (1959–1980) presented a racially homogenous exodus primarily comprised of lighter skinned Cubans who later claimed their family members and facilitated later departures from the island. Benson (2012) also notes that Afro-Cuban adjustment to US life shows a slower integration process, less economic success (with lower wages), and no representation in politics. Further, early Afro-Cuban refugees showed a limited involvement and inclusion in leading groups in Miami (Benson, 2012). Given the centrality of race in Afro-Cuban experiences, race

relations have shaped Afro-Cuban racial and ethnic identities and these dimensions must be accounted for when working with Cubans individually and collectively.

Current demographics In 2013, Cubans in the United States comprised 3.7%, the third largest ethnic “minority” group of the Latinx population. Today, it is El Salvador that holds the third position. Since the 1980s, Cubans have more than doubled in numbers growing from close to 800,000 to 2 million. Moreover, the foreign-born population of Cubans has also grown by 78%, increasing from approximately 60,000 in 1980 to 1 million in 2013 (Lopez, 2015). Nearly 60% of Cubans are foreign-born with 50% being in the United States longer than 20 years. Further, 60% are citizens (5 and older) and speak English proficiently (Lopez, 2015). Data reveal that approximately half of the Cuban people in the United States are Spanish-dominant and 36% are bilingual. In addition, 63% of Cubans prefer to be identified by their ethnicity or ethnic identity, rather than by the pan-ethnic term of Latinx (or Latino); yet 55% consider themselves as “typical Americans” and close to 80% speak Spanish in the home (Lopez, 2015).

In terms of education attainment, Cubans have higher education attainment than other Latinxs (14% vs. 25%) but slightly lower than the US population at-large (30%) (Lopez, 2015). Data indicate that 36% of US-born Cuban Americans report earning a BA as compared to 21% of their Cuban-born counterparts (Lopez, 2015). By income, Cubans earn a slightly higher yearly income of \$25,000 vs. \$21,900 for all Latinxs, yet lower than the total US population (i.e., \$30,000). Approximately 20% of the group are in the poverty status but fair better than other Latinxs (25%), but higher than the US rate figure (16%). In relation to homeownership, 55% own a home as compared to 45% of Latinx, yet again lower than the US population (64%). Finally, 75% of the group have access to health care and 25% have no health insurance. By comparison, the Latinx group overall reports lack of health insurance at 29% while the US statistics reflect 15% of the population without coverage. The narrative for persons of Cuban heritage in the US is similar and different from that of their Latinx peers.

Author’s Narrative

Although neither of the two authors were born in Cuba, Castellanos is a Cuban American whose family (i.e., parents, grandparents) fled the island for liberty and justice. Reflecting on memories and the generational transmission of a culture (Castellanos & Gloria, 2016), there are a multitude of family narratives that underscore the needs on the island, the limited supply of medicine for proper health care, the disconnection between the regime and early Cuban refugees, the continued opposition to the Cuban government’s ideologies, the long-lasting yearning to have connection with family and hope for Cuba’s freedom. In bringing to light the critical elements of well-formulated and culturally centered inquiry, Castellanos openly shares insight into her experiences as a Cuban American and reflects the following familial narrative:

What Is a Critical Childhood Memory That Reflects Your Familial Story?

“*Guantanamera... Guajira Guantanamera.*” The Guantanamera was one of the first songs I learned to sing as a child. I vividly recall the emotional calls from Cuba one time a month and my mother’s sorrow resulting from family distance and the embargo. A working-class family with neither parent completing high school, my narrative is unique in that we did not live in Florida nor experience some of the protective factors of living in a Cuban community. Instead, Cubans in exile in California created ethnic organizations and gathered on the weekend to address political changes on the island. I remember dressing up to attend the Cuban club and have slight memory of pledging to the Cuban flag and watching the collective group of adults singing the Cuban Anthem.

My father departed Cuba in the 1960s and was one of the first rafters found at seas by the Coast Guard. Not knowing how to swim (age 29 and leaving his family), he still risked his life for liberty and the American dream. From a different social class, my mother came from Cuba via Spain with nuns being away from her parents at age 15 until her early 30s. Both shared the common pain of family separation, cultural shock, language challenges, grief for losses coupled with promise and hope. They came to America seeking freedom. My father was older when he arrived and my mother was a teenager who felt a sense of grief due to the separation from her family. The two had unique perspectives of their journey and experienced different feelings as years passed and their parents remained on the island and communism prevailed. In particular, my father (*Pipo*) accepted that circumstances might not get better (affirming his self-initiated departure); my mother (who was sent by her parents as a young adolescent) yearned for her parents but learned to manage the fear of the unknown and grew into a tireless and fearless independent woman who learned to embrace challenges (poverty, divorce, and parenting) as these arose.

How Does Your Connection to Cuba Parallel That of Your Parents?

Similar to my parents, I long for a free Cuba, human rights for the Cuban people, and the initiation of the healing process after 60 years of dictatorship endured by our people. As I share my parents’ mourning process of loss and sadness, disbelief of the regime’s longevity, my parents’ (and collective family’s) resilience, strength and perseverance through their struggles and sacrifices, this cultivates my worldview, value for culture, and zeal for life.

The Post-migration Era

Although each migration wave encountered different social perceptions, sentiments, supports, and subsequent challenges in their transition periods, Cubans nonetheless share common narratives and hold realities that span the different waves that can be understood in the context of the group's challenges, goals, and achievements. These realities in the post-migration era are reviewed next.

Hope, despair, and *consejos* (advice) The first Cuban exiles post the revolution came with the belief that they would return to Cuba after a temporary stay. Engaging in a "Survival Stage" (Gonzalez-Pando, 1998), the initial wave took whatever jobs were available, and had limited opportunities due to union laws; however, had human capital. As older educated professionals, these Cubans had "pride, enterprising drive, adaptability, and a host of other psychosocial strengths that served them well in their new environment" (Gonzalez-Pando, 1998, p. 51). Their established identities and economic capital allowed them to preserve their culture. Moreover, the perspective of only temporarily staying, facilitated a less integrated (bicultural) identity and assimilation to the host US culture.

Although they tightly held on to cultural values, the immigrants sought to actively integrate into the United States (e.g., work, schools, politics) systems to acclimate while offering *consejos* to new Cuban arrivals about finding jobs and making sense of other important infrastructures. As the Bay of Pigs unfolded and the Cuban Missile Crisis surfaced, many refugees mourned the loss of their country; commercial air flights were discontinued. The immigrants experienced disconnection, grief, and homelessness (González-Pando, 1997). The challenge to survive offered the group a shared sense of dissonance, and a lack of normality; the result was a deeper sense of solidarity, normlessness, and hopelessness resulting in solidarity. Following the transitional period, Cubans worked at adjusting to a new life.

Privileges, psychological gains, and pushbacks The Cuban Adjustment Act (CAC) in 1966 served to assist the group in its adjustment process. The policy was an anti-Castro effort yet was considered "a preferential treatment and a double standard" (p. 56). As Cubans continued to risk their lives at sea after the Freedom Flights ended, the Peruvian Embassy incident occurred (1980) resulting in the next exodus known for its diversity. The wave was met with negative sentiments as the media described the immigrants as criminals resulting in other Cubans differentiating themselves from this sub-group (Fernandez, 2007). As prejudice and discrimination were part of the first waves' experiences (viewed as "loud and clannish"), *Marielitos* experienced a sense of systematic disenfranchisement and a tougher integration process (Fernandez, 2007). Today, some scholars suggest that more recent Cuban refugee arrivals have fewer ties to the previous Cuban refugees resulting in less financial stability and security. This experience is in sharp contrast to the first initial waves that collaborated and formed support systems, employment opportunities, and a strong sense of solidarity.

Acculturation and ethnic pride Many immigrants and their children experience unplanned acculturation processes with numerous challenges (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). As such, acculturative stress encompasses the challenges of cultural adaptation around language acquisition, and managing cultural differences in the host country (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994). As the original waves of Cubans thought they would return to the island, their children were taught the language and understood the story of exodus, about how and why they left (Perez Firmat, 1996). Some children attended afterschool cultural programs—*Las escuelas Cubanas* (Garcia, 1996) to learn about the island and cultural practices. In addition, by living in ethnic enclaves in Miami Cuban parents sought to solidify their children's ethnic identity and minimize assimilation, experience Cuban support systems, and engage in unique opportunities not found in other parts of the country (e.g., Little Habana; Pérez, 1993a, 1993b; Rothe & Pumariega, 2008).

Although Cuban ethnic enclaves served as safety nets, people still faced discrimination and experienced anti-immigrant sentiment and racism. An example was “the passing of an anti-bilingual ordinance, prohibiting Spanish in public places” (Rothe & Pumariega, 2008, p. 254). Similarly, second-generation Cuban children in Miami who attended predominantly African American high schools had the highest dropout rate (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001a, 2001b) but the lowest if enrolled at predominant White non-Latinx public schools. In addition, Cuban children attending predominantly Cuban schools had lower GPAs reporting higher parental conflicts and more time watching TV. Protective factors included having an intact family, grandparents in the home, and dedicating more hours to homework. Results support the buffer of ethnic enclaves and the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics across these families.

Acculturation distress, trauma, and psychological disorders Different from those who came with family, the children of Operation Peter Pan navigated an unfamiliar terrain without parental supervision and had host families who spoke a different language and espoused different cultural values. Although the children may have understood the reason for departure and separation, many encountered severe emotional and psychological distress in leaving their families and coming to a new country with little knowledge of the culture and understanding of their future. Some children were as young as 5 years old, separated from parents for years, and as a result, lost their language and grew disconnected from their families. Unfortunately, a number of these children experienced sexual and physical abuse and many did not feel sense of safety, affecting the group's emotional development and overall well-being (Maret & Aschkenas, 2011). Consequently, these children reported experiences of isolation, fear, uncertainty, and lack of safety (Maret & Aschkenas, 2011). Now adults, the effects of psychological traumas manifest on the exiles' self-concept and many report feelings of anger for the forced departure, sense of abandonment from their parents, resentment for family separation, and depression or anxiety from the long years of separation (Torres, 2004). There are concerns about unmet needs during key developmental years, the disconnection with their parents upon reunion, (They do not know them; parents are just a memory.) and the need to emotionally

revisit times of childhood that still need healing but have been repressed. These experiences add a dimension of psychological distress and trauma that remain as part of the post-migration process. Indeed, there are long-lasting effects of the pre- and post-migratory experience that persist and inform current day families, long after re-settlement.

In contrast to other waves who fled early, the Mariel group came almost 20 years post the Communist revolution on boats (April 1980–October 1980). Given the circumstances and processes, research consistently addresses trauma, depression, PTSD, panic, psychosis, phobia, and patterns of separation anxiety for this group (Portes, Kyle, & Eaton, 1992; Skop, 2001). As a new immigrant group, some *Marielitos* were misdiagnosed and improperly treated by physicians in immigration proceedings with psychotropic medications or committed to long-term facilities (Boxer & Garvey, 1985). Although a wave that entered the United States almost 20 years later (1994–1996), the *Balsero* children also reported feeling anxiety and expressed frustration as they assumed roles of adults, serving as language brokers and cultural bridges for their parents (Puig, 2002). On behalf of their parents, children interacted with educational, social, and health systems addressing matters that served to change the parent–child relationship, adding complexity and challenge (Puig, 2002).

Collective psychological challenges As each wave experienced unique psychological challenges related to their journeys and specific circumstances relative to supports and perceptions of them, Cubans collectively shared challenges that reflect their refugee status and history in the United States. There are many compounding issues that result from the process of acculturation and loss that occur concurrently, these include: distress and stress, ethnic identity development and confusion, cultural repositioning, the impact of family separation between clients and their family, levels of depression, anxiety, sense of loss, and mistrust of shifting US policies (Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014; Garcia-Larrieu, 2006). Likewise, familial separation and readjustment of family roles are common difficulties such as tensions because of generational differences, children’s cultural adjustment, perception gaps between parents and children of challenges and sacrifices, and disappointment in the loss of family connection or less intense ties (resulting from busy lives and work responsibilities). Long-term effects of bicultural identities on family systems and cultural values (i.e., cultural clash) and everyday practices (Falicov, 2013; Garcia-Larrieu, 2006) are also experienced. Last, the psychological strains encountered by Cubans (the United States and on the island) are systems-based involving social, political, economic, and personal dynamic and challenges. In particular, the examination of how these challenges are filtered through individuals’ lived experiences (past and present), identities, and sociopolitical conditions is warranted in counseling situations.

Given the unique and collective challenges, and to better understand individuals’ experiences, the following guiding statements and questions are proposed when working with Cubans in the United States.

Questions	Domains to explore
1. Tell me about your coming to the United States	Year, wave, means of transportation, others who came, age of departure
2. How did you feel about leaving the island? (a) Who accompanied you and did you have family in the States?	Explore grief, sense of loss, sadness, regrets, hopes, ties with family, peers, lonely, lost, hopeful, disconnected or connected, the role of freedom and liberation
3. Who is left in the island? (a) How much contact do you have with them?	Nuclear or extended family, travel, phone, email, media
4. What was most challenging in your transition to the United States?	Language acquisition, cultural difference, family separation, generational differences, loss of property or social status
5. What challenges do you continue to face today? (a) How do the island's circumstances affect your well-being?	Cultural adaptation, continued separation, sense of hopelessness, despair, hope, gratitude, successes

Maintaining Cultural Values, Identity, and Sense of Belonging

Consistent with other core Latinx values, Cuban core values prioritize *familismo* (familialism) as the process and interconnection of values from which all others stem (Falicov, 2013; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). It is the strength and unity of family that offers a sense of community, processes of connection, and *compadrazgo*. The emphasis on the collective wellness of the family, not just the individual, suggests that the family's needs supplant the individual's needs (Garcia-Larrieu, 2006) and teach the younger generations that the family provides protection, guidance, support, and safety. Inspired by these family values, cousins are "brother-cousins and sister-cousins" (Garcia-Larrieu, 2006, p. 123), and a natural family system is reinforced through blood and fictive kin, individuals that offer family-like social ties although there are no blood ties.

Many Cubans separated from their family did not see their biological parents for decades, but found ways to recreate family systems and established acquired kinship through the new social systems in place. These new family systems (nuclear and extended) facilitated the engagement with others through *respeto* (respect), *personalismo* (pleasing interactions), and *cariño* (care). For example, Cubans pass down the value of greeting others properly or giving people a kiss on the cheek even if they are not family, emphasizing the role of *personalismo* with others. Younger generations of Cuban American seek to understand the interrelational nuances, the role of intense relationships, the importance of cultural expressions and affection, and even the value of engaging feeling and being openly spirited.

As they witness parents with fervent drives and heartfelt stories of resilience and endurance, younger generations and their parents are viewed as animated, vibrant, or overly enthusiastic. Coupled with keeping steadfast loyalty to surviving, the group also relays the message of *aguantarse* (to endure) in the midst of challenge while staying hopeful to realize a dream (*esperanza/sueño*). Further, Cubans emphasize the importance of *los abuelos* (grandparents), aunts and uncles, and other elders, and value and benefits through family connections. These ties facilitate family pride, buffer negative coping as life challenges arise, and reinforce culture and identity. As a result of life changes, family systems take different shapes. Cubans experience multi-systems of co-parenting (*compadres* and *comadres*) created to connect, extend, and support families (Gloria & Castellanos, 2013). *Los compadres* and *padrinos* (Godparents) offer emotional support, guidance, and another family system to the parents and the children while reinforcing power and sustainability through connections, collectivity, and community.

Although 50% of Cubans are Catholic, some embrace beliefs in cultural-bound syndromes, the power of supernatural exchanges (i.e., *mal de ojo*—evil eye), and the effects of *envidia* (jealousy) and other negative exchanges among individuals driven by ill-intentions. With strong ties to Catholicism, some Cubans practice *Santería* (a fusion of African and Catholic practices) or believe in the power of this religious practice, creating an additional layer in the context of religious beliefs, supreme powers, external locus of control, and the role of God (Baez, 2001; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

One consistent religious figure associated to Cuban Catholics is the Lady of Charity (*La Virgen de La Caridad del Cobre, Cachita*). Considered the mother of the island, this patron saint is viewed as a divine representation of the Cuban people, the mother of God and the mother of the Cuban people, the conduit to higher powers (Tweed, 1997). Known for her kindness, gentleness, and loving heart, she is recognized for her compassion, love of her children, putting greatest attention to those in need and guiding the way in all their life journeys. She is viewed as a loving mother *que contesta las plegarias del pueblo* (who answers the pleas of the town). In review of her multiple appearances; the most famous reference is when she appeared to three men at sea. As the three had gone out at sea, they encountered treacherous waters. One had a medal of the Virgin and they all started to pray for mercy, protection, and safety. Suddenly, the skies cleared and the boat drifted toward an image that stated “*Yo Soy La Virgen de La Caridad del Cobre*” (*I am the Virgin of Charity*). Today, *La Virgen de la Caridad* continues to be a source of cultural history, tradition, and refuge, cultivating strength and hope in her peoples, guiding Cuban in the island and in exile.

Cuban people share values with other pan-Latinx ethnic groups; however, there are *valores* (values) and *tradiciones culturales* (cultural traditions) that are directly socialized via family that have nuanced differences and meanings for those of Cuban heritage and are typically not addressed in most reviews of Latinx values. As *guajiros* (person from the inlands with agricultural background, farmers) fused their worldviews into the mainstream Cuban culture, there are a number of beliefs and practices aligned with the meaning of life, learning life lessons, and gaining from

different encounters. These lessons were often passed down through *dichos*—proverbs or other inspirational statements about life or how to live one’s life. An example of a few *dichos* include: *Nadie muere en la víspera* (Nobody dies on the eve; one’s destiny is determined), *Lo que esta pa’ ti nadie te lo quita* (What’s yours cannot be taken away), *Dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres* (Your friends tell me who you are), and *El vago trabaja doble* (The lazy person has to work twice as hard). These value-laden *dichos* underscore the active engagement, morals, faith, encouragement, and hard work ethic expected of Cuban people.

Cuban exiles rely on cultural beliefs, values, and traditions as they navigate challenging circumstances. Another supportive mechanism in the midst of trials and tribulations is a strong emphasis placed on humor. Early on, children are socialized to learn jokes, adults share funny stories, and laughter is a central element for connection and well-being. Similarly, the practice of *choteo*, or joking around, is one such value that has deep-meaning and implications for one’s narrative that warrants discussion. In the face of unspeakable events and lack of human rights, the ability to maintain hope and positive attitudes requires an internal perseverance and resilience that is celebrated and tapped into by engaging in informal connections with others and even humor. Cuban people rely on many known yet intangible forces and strengths to persevere. These include inner optimism, the ability for *recuerdo* (remembrance) and pride for surviving and thriving. It is through the strength-based interconnection of persons from which the value of *Cubanidad* emerges, emulating a rich history of survival, solidarity, and determination for human dignity and freedom (Goncalves, 2014).

Success Stories: What Has Worked

Although “success” comes in many forms and fashions, the far-reaching impact of individuals of Cuban influence are prominent in today’s society. From popular media, sports, academic, business economics, to politics, there are many and varied success stories of cultural maintenance, social advocacy, and advancement. In addressing the those who have influenced the social and cultural landscape of the United States, several persons of Cuban heritage are highlighted because their success stories reflect the values of perseverance, endurance, faith, hope, family, and *Cubanidad*.

Specific to entertainment, the songs of different Cuban individuals address endurance, living life positively, and making the best of life and its circumstances. For example, Celia Cruz sang about how “*La vida es un carnaval*” (Life is a carnival); while Gloria Estefan, with the Miami Sound Machine, yearned for a land she did not remember yet knew in her heart as she sang about “*mi tierra*” (my land). Similarly, Armando Christian Pérez, more commonly known as Pitbull raps about how Cuba still awaits the ability to live free. The influence of many others such as Benny Moré, Pérez Prado, Arturo Sandoval, Willie Chirino, and John Secada are well-known within the music industry.

Likewise, on television and movie screens, Cubans have been introduced into American homes as well as internationally. Desi Arnaz sang and led his orchestra in reverence to a *Santería* god, *Babalú Ayé*, about being lost and forsaken. He appeared as Lucy Ricardo's husband, portrayed as an "equal" partner, considering the era of the program. Other actors and actresses include Cameron Diaz, Emilio Esteban, and Andy Garcia. Their performances have reached many audiences and often people rarely notice that they are of Cuban heritage or Latinx. Expressions of *Cubanidad* through song or entertainment emphasizes the importance of the collective identity as Cubans, underscoring the group's struggles, strife, and ultimate success (Garcia, 1996; Perez Firmat, 1994).

Within the context of professional or competitive sports, Cubans are well-represented in major league baseball. With the introduction of baseball in Cuba in 1864 with the Habana Baseball Club, playing baseball was associated with Cuban nationalism and served as an act of resistance and defiance (González Echevarría, 1999). In baseball today, Cuban players are signed to multi-million dollar contracts such examples are: José Dariel Abreu Correa (first baseman for the Chicago White Sox), Yasiel Puig Valdés (right fielder for the Los Angeles Dodgers), or Yoenis Céspedes Milanés, (outfielder for the New York Mets). Most recently in 2014, Rusney Castillo, signed a 7-year contract with the Boston Red Sox, for \$72.5 million. Other nonprofessional Cuban athletes include Danell Johan Leyva, an all-around bronze-medal gymnast in the 2012 Olympics and a silver-medalist in the 2016 Olympic for parallel bars. A closer review of these unfolding statistics supports that approximately 95% of Cubans have participated in some sort of organized sport or exercise since childhood in the island (Longman, 2016). Yet, players "defect" because of the limitations of communism for its players.

Likewise, there are Cuban business professionals—Jeff Bezos founder and CEO of Amazon, Alberto Mestre former president of General Mills, and Nestor Carbonell former VP of Pepsico—who have made substantial influence through their economic leadership and social justice advocacy. Similarly, Mike Fernandez, a Cuban American health care business leader is most recognized for philanthropy and support of immigrant groups who have not attained unique privileges upon their arrival to the United States.

As the early Cuban arrivals were well educated, many attained professional positions, and found active means to be involved in political processes. Today, politics is a specific area of success in which Cubans are disproportionately represented among Latinx (Clark, Fowler, Loring, & Weigel, 2016). In 2018, a number of Cubans hold roles and influence in in Congress. These include U.S. Senators Ted Cruz, Republican; Marco Rubio, from Florida, and Bob Menendez, Democrat from New Jersey. In the House of Representatives is Ileana Ross-Lehtinen, Republican from Florida. Representing the Independent and Democratic Party, Xavier Louis Suárez was the first Cuban-born mayor of Miami (1985–1993 and 1997–1998). Following 1998, Miami has had a continuous representation of Cuban and Cuban American politicians serving as mayors up to 2018. These leaders representing the Cuban community in "little Havana" help further shape the Cuban collective identity and underscore the group's social mobility, gained social capital, and involvement in politics.

In reviewing scholars in higher education, there are an array of top Cuban administrative leaders, researchers, and professors. Recognized for his leadership, vision, and creative educational strategies, Eduardo J. Padron, President of Miami Dade College has been growing the Miami Dade education system to the largest institution of higher education in the United States since 1995. Today, he also is part of the board of directors of the American Council on Education. Trailblazing and demonstrating exceptional leadership, psychologist and professor Ana Mari Cauce is the first woman and Latina president of the University of Washington. Last, Dr. Antonio Puente is the second Latinx president of the American Psychological Association and the first Cuban in the position; Dr. Melba Vazquez, of Mexican heritage, was the first.

Closing Remarks and Reflections

In a time where the country continues to be increasingly diverse and pluralistic, there is a social climate promoting anti-immigrant sentiments. Cubans are not immune to this rhetoric led by the present White House administration. We must put intentional efforts forth toward cultural inclusivity among Latinx and people in-general. As political bodies push fear on younger immigrants in their messages to assimilate and ascribe to the American values, cultural understanding, ethnic pride, and cultural validation will be essential to sustaining healthy Cuban communities.

Younger generations of Cubans must learn about the struggles of their ancestors, the power in the narrative, and value of their ancestral heritage. A Latinx who does not fully understand the role of roots, history, cultural strengths, cultural teachings, and cultural meaning making will face the effects of fragmentation, the losses of cultural wealth and knowledge. Lack of cultural understanding can result in the person bypassing the deep understanding of the connection between wellness, the mind, cultural heritage, ancestors, and inner strengths. In sum, elders, history keepers, educators, and social advocates must arm younger Cubans with their cultural histories, family narratives, and cultural lessons (*El que no oye consejo, no llega a viejo*; One who hears no advice will not reach old age). Younger generations must learn and be able to identify the Cuban cultural imprints in American society in effort to facilitate personal power, generate internal understanding, and facilitate a movement toward collective consciousness in their future quests and dreams.

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