

Exiles Find Touch Of Havana in N.O.

By GENE BOURG

Once the "Pearl of the Caribbean," Havana is now a rusty, colorless city, according to those who have seen it in recent years.

Among the thousands of exiled Cubans who miss her charm and bright lights are a number who have found in the

ed many of them to this city of many Spanish influences.

Speak with a Cuban neighbor or store clerk and you will usually find a cheerful, friendly face.

"The majority of Cuban refugees," says Carlos Bringuier, one of them, "arrive here believing this will only be a temporary home. Then, after a while, the situation becomes a permanent one when they realize they must work and rear their families here."

(Third Article in a Series of Four.)

United States an area with much of the atmosphere of old Havana—New Orleans' French Quarter.

"We love the old buildings and the beautiful balconies," says Mrs. Raquel Sanchez, a Cuban refugee who has been in New Orleans since 1963. "Sometimes when I am walking on a street in the French Quarter, I almost feel that I am in Havana again."

THIS IS AN oft-repeated sentiment within New Orleans' Cuban population. A mild climate also has attract-

THERE IS little or no anti-American sentiment among these people, said Bringuier, although many still have hope that they may someday return to a free Cuba.

"We have the same sympathies as Americans," says Mrs. Sanchez, who operates a downtown jewelry store with her husband, Frolian, and their 23-year-old son, Angel Manuel.

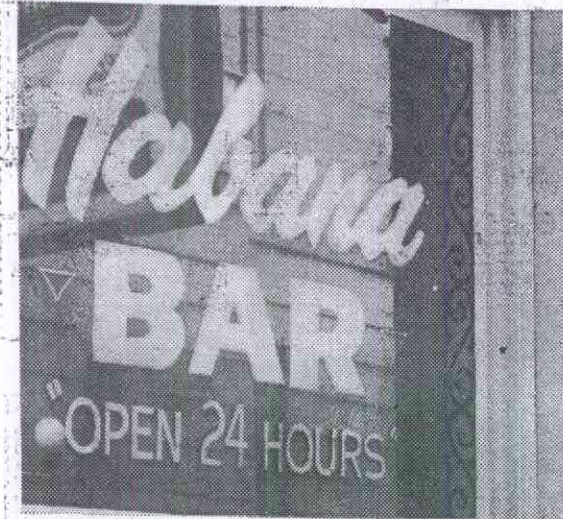
The younger Sanchez, who has adopted the nickname "Mike," came to New Orleans before his parents eight years ago.

"SOMETIMES, WHEN people learn I'm Cuban, they think I am a Communist," said Mike. "But these people—and they are not too many—don't understand that we left Cuba because we hate Communism."

Such misunderstandings are apparently a rarity.

The Cubans who have come to New Orleans since Fidel Castro took power arrived to find an already long-established Latin American community in the city. Now a distinct new culture has been added to that community and to the city itself.

For entertainment and information in their native language, New Orleans offers two movie theaters, the Famous and the Happy Hour; several hours of music and news daily on radio station



—States-Item photos.
A BIT OF CUBA IN THE CRESCENT CITY

WJMR, and a bi-weekly newspaper, Siempre.

CUBAN CUISINE is, curiously, difficult to find in this city whose restaurants are renowned. Jose Cortizas, however, recently opened La Caridad, offering a variety of Cu-

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ban dishes, at 4221 Magazine St.

Many supermarkets — some Cuban-owned — are meanwhile offering new items like Cuban-roast coffee and black beans, staples which were impossible to find here before. The exotic foods are processed usually in Puerto Rico or in Florida.

Several "Cubanos" expressed the view that the degree of social contact with Americans depends on three factors: the ability to speak English, age and occupation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE classes for foreigners have been offered at Delgado College, L. E. Rabouin Vocational High School, Cabrini High

School and by the American Red Cross.

Virtually all student-age Cuban children are bi-lingual, and making friends is apparently easier for them than for many of the parents.

Businessmen and professional people say they have many American friends with whom they exchange visits regularly.

What the Cuban community has retained for itself, however, is an especially strong family structure. Most of their businesses have been family efforts.

On a more formal basis, there is the Cuban Lyceum, a social and cultural organization with headquarters on University Place near Canal Street.

Parties, holiday celebrations and civic symposiums are held regularly at Lyceum headquarters, and a sub-organization, the "Club de Profesionales" has been established for Cuban doctors, lawyers and other professional men and women.

In addition, a movement is underway to establish an amateur Spanish - language drama group here

Despite the Latin's inherent interest in politics, there is little outward display of side-taking on controversial issues in the United States, although several Cubans here expressed strong endorsement and confidence in President Richard M. Nixon.

During the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination,

however, Bringuier, a lawyer-turned-store-owner, gained national attention with speeches criticizing District Attorney Jim Garrison's handling of his assassination investigation.

Bringuier recently published a book, "Red Friday," which defends the Warren Commission's findings in the Kennedy case.

"Many of us are aliens and cannot actively participate in the political life," said Bringuier, who has lost a relative to the Viet Cong. "We should still have an interest in what affects us, though."

A sign tacked on a wall in Bringuier's store proclaims in Spanish: "Respect the USA; love the USA, or leave the USA."

These sentiments were repeated in a conversation with Alejandro Ramos, a 42-year-old Negro who chose the United States over Castro's Cuba.

"I have never had any problems in New Orleans," said Ramos in his neat two-bedroom brick home in a Negro neighborhood. "My family has always received good treatment and attention from the Americans and we are very grateful."

Seven days before Castro took power, Ramos had been elected to the Cuban House of Representatives as a member of the party opposing then—

President Fulgencio Batista. He never took office.

"I have faith that President Nixon will help us to free Cuba again," he said. "If we cannot, I will stay in the United States, in New Orleans."

Ramos walked through his well-furnished home with pride. He said the cost of living in Cuba was much lower and conceded that he lived a better life there materially.

"For my present rent of \$110 a month, I could have lived in a palace in Cuba," he said, "but I am very happy and grateful to have this house."

Ramos has been a welder for a West Bank machine company for four years. Previously, he had been a carpenter in Miami, and, before that, an inspector for the Cuban Electric Company.

After serving a demi tasse of sweet, thick Cuban coffee, Ramos' wife Anna offered that her sole complaint about life in New Orleans is that it gets "too hot and too cold."

The visit to Ramos' home ended with an expressive rendition of a Latin American epithet, the ultimate in hospitality: "Mi casa, su casa"—"My house is your house."