

Success Story: U.S. Cubans

Refugees Make Strides in Income, Education

By Haynes Johnson

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MIAMI—Twice a day, five days a week, year in and out, the planes leave Florida empty, touch down at Varadero 75 miles east of Havana and return filled with men, women and children. The passengers arrive at Miami International Airport virtually destitute, with only the clothes on their backs. They are the latest line in an old American story—the immigrants.

It is an emotional scene as the Cubans are reunited with relatives. Old men and women meet their grandchildren for the first time. Often, they find they cannot understand the Americanized Spanish the children speak. There are tears, embraces and frantic conversations.

Sometimes women proudly

display wedding rings they have worn on their toes to avoid last-minute confiscation, the last link to a life they have left behind. Then, after processing, the refugees disappear to begin a new life in a strange society.

One Cuban recalls the sense of bewilderment after

American Diary

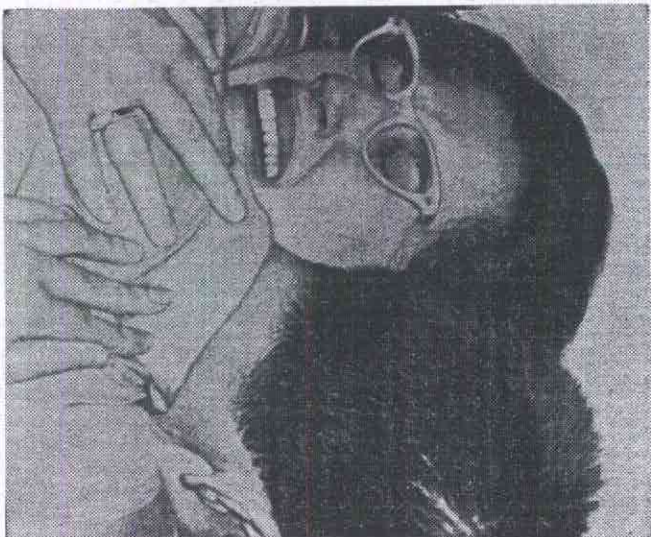
he first arrived. It was 10 years ago, on the eve of the Bay of Pigs invasion. He was wandering down a street in Southwest Miami, stopping other Cuban refugees and asking about mutual friends. "Where is Enrique?" he asked. "He's in the training camps." "What camps?" he asked again. "What camps?" "Why, the training camps for the invasion."

Education

The Cuban colony at that time was in ferment, a place where refugees clung stubbornly to their language and customs. Older Cubans still maintain their native customs—cooking the pig at Christmas in a large hole dug in the ground covered with banana leaves and gathering at parties to sing Cuban songs—but the emigres long since have been assimilated into American culture.

Grocery stores now sell as standard items such Cuban staples as black beans, plantains and yucca, along with wheaties and frozen TV dinners. Cubans who started in business by selling their country's food and delivering it to homes have branched out into restaurants appealing to all tastes.

See AMERICA, A12, Col. 1



A reunion after the Bay of Pigs. The exodus continues.

Associated Press

Cubans Make Great Strides in U.S.

AMERICA, From A1

Others who began by shining shoes or as stock boys have saved and moved up into broadly based businesses.

The Cubans today have written one of the most notable American success stories.

"Some historian some day writing a sociological history of the United States might well analyze what happened to the Cuban people in the essentially Anglo-Saxon society that we have," Robert Hurwitch, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for inter-American affairs, has said. "A remarkable story."

Nothing But Abilities

Since Fidel Castro seized control of Cuba in 1959, more than 410,000 Cubans have emigrated to the United States. A quarter of a million have come to America on the daily flights that began in December, 1965. They arrive with nothing but their abilities, and often without knowledge of English.

The age and occupational breakdown of those leaving Cuba has since the airlift began. The largest single group, accounting for nearly 24 per cent of the refugees, are between the ages of 6 and 18. The next largest, for almost 20 per cent, are between 30 and 39. The prime military age category from 19 to 29 accounts for nearly 9 per cent.

By occupation, more than 6 per cent are professional, semiprofessional or managerial, with an additional 11.5 per cent in clerical and sales and 9.2 per cent skilled workers. Children, students and housewives form 64 per cent of all refugees. These figures lie at the heart of the Cuban success. By and large, they are highly trained.

Today, 83 per cent of the Cubans are fully self-supporting. Many refugees have risen to positions of prominence in business and industry after starting over again, with nothing, in a new country.

Miami is now a bilingual city. There are some 4,500 Cuban-owned businesses—everything from small restaurants

to posh nightclubs, cigar and shoe factories, heavy and light industry concerns—and the economic level of Cubans is rising steadily. The mere figures tell a dramatic story.

High Incomes

The average income of the Cuban family is approximately \$8,000 a year. In the higher-educated and professional groups, it is \$18,000 or more per year. Some 49 per cent of the Cubans own their homes, and 22 per cent are in the process of buying one. Hundreds of Cuban teachers work in public schools attended by tens of thousands of Cuban refugee children. There is hardly an area of life on which the Cubans have not left their mark.

Americans who have dealt closely with the Cubans characterize them as extremely well-adjusted and well-motivated: thrifty, hard-working, willing to try anything.

"They have," one government official said, "made it on just pure guts."

College Program Cited

Howard Palmatier, director of the Cuban refugee program for the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, cites one government program as an example. The government operates a loan program for needy Cuban college students. Already, 11,000 loans have been made.

"The repayment rate is fantastic," Palmatier says.

What is most striking about the Cuban experience is that few expected them to adjust to America so successfully. Ten years ago if you went to Miami, you could find scarcely a Cuban who didn't think he was here only temporarily. Everyone was waiting to return to Cuba. The stories of Cubans sitting in their small rented stucco homes along Southwest Eighth Street with their suitcases already packed for departure while anxiously telling the latest rumor of Castro's imminent overthrow were legion—and true. Then, in the bitterness of the Bay of Pigs disaster, a great sense of betrayal welled up in the Cuban colony.

For months and even years after-

ward, Miami was a cauldron, the breeding ground for plots and vain-glorious schemes for action. Today, all that has changed.

"I am so different today that sometimes I hardly recognize myself," said Roberto Sanroman, one of the commanders of the Bay of Pigs invasion. "The hardest thing, I think, is to face reality. But it is the bravest thing."

He was talking about the prospects of returning to Cuba. "I would like to go back to Cuba," he said. "Of course. But I know it would be different. It will not be the same Cuba. Sometimes I think I would just like to be able to travel through Cuba—and then come back to my home here."

A Change in Tone

His is not an unusual view. Sit with Cubans at night in their homes and you will hear similar expressions. Their tone has changed from an ardent militancy to philosophical reflection. Now, there is more of an acceptance of conditions as they are, not as they might have been. And then, subtly but significantly, the conversation will switch from Cuba to Vietnam or the economy or their children.

"I used to stay involved, and try to keep up on what was happening in Cuba," said the wife of another Bay of Pigs invader who was captured and later ransomed with the survivors of the Cuban brigade. "But I don't anymore. We work too hard, and we're too busy in our own lives."

That doesn't mean the old fire—and desire to return to the homeland—has disappeared. One Cuban was talking about success his people have made in business here, and how the drain of talent (1,200 Cuban doctors have left Cuba since 1959, for instance, about half the total number on the island then) is bound to hurt Castro. Then he said:

"You know, Fidel calls those of us who have left gusanos (worms), and the Cuban people call him El Caballo (the horse). "Never forget, the worms always eat the horse."