

CHAPTER 4

The 1970s: Pluralization, Radicalization, and Homeland

As hopes of returning to Cuba faded, Cuban exiles became more concerned with life in the United States. Exile-related struggles were put on the back burner as more immediate immigrant issues emerged, such as the search for better jobs, education, and housing. Class divisions sharpened, and advocacy groups seeking improved social services emerged, including, for example, the Cuban National Planning Council, a group of Miami social workers and businesspeople formed in the early 1970s. As an organization that provided services to needy exiles, this group defied the prevailing notion that all exiles had made it in the United States. Life in the United States created new needs and interests that could only be resolved, at least in part, by entering the domestic political arena.

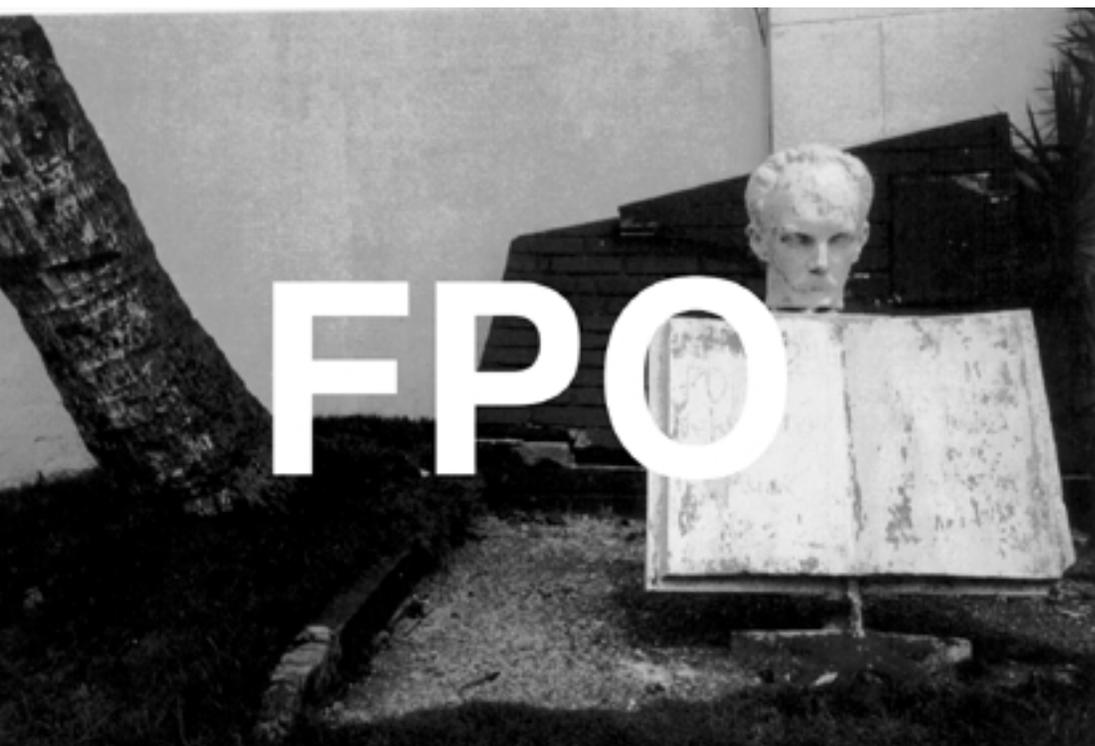
Although there had always been ideological diversity within the Cuban émigré community, it was not until the 1970s that the political spectrum finally began to reflect this outwardly.¹ Two sharply divided camps emerged: exile oriented (focused on overthrowing the Cuban revolutionary government) and immigrant oriented (focused on improving life in the United States). Those groups that were not preoccupied with the Cuban revolution met with hostility from those that were. Exile leaders felt threatened by organized activities that could be interpreted as an abandonment of the exile cause. For example, in 1974 a group of Cuban exile researchers conducted an extensive needs assessment of Cubans in the United States and concluded that particular sectors, such as the elderly and newly arrived immigrants, were in need of special intervention.² When their findings were publicized, they were accused of betraying the community because of their concern with immigrant problems rather than the overthrow of the revolution.

Those organizations providing social service to immigrants in some cases even aligned themselves with non-Cuban activists, further inciting groups devoted to the anti-Castro struggle. Agencies working with the elderly joined forces with Miami's non-Cuban senior citizens to advocate

quality medical care for their constituencies. A University of Miami group of psychologists, one of the first to emerge from the ethnic enclave, participated in activities with national Latino social service advocacy organizations.³ Organizations such as the Spanish American League against Discrimination (SALAD) dedicated themselves to fighting discrimination, a taboo subject for Cubans. Although their advocacy was moderate compared to the efforts of other civil rights groups, it was controversial within the exile community. To admit that there was discrimination at all was somehow to give the communist Cuban regime ammunition against the United States and a way to ridicule those who had left.

Many of the organizations involved in armed action against the Cuban government had disintegrated by this time, but splinter groups remained. Some of these, such as Alpha 66, a group dedicated to the armed struggle against Castro, and Cuban Power, headed by Orlando Bosch, relied on terrorist actions. Bosch's group developed a strategy called "la guerra por los caminos del mundo" (war through the world's roads) that internationalized terrorist actions. His aim was to prevent any country or corporation from conducting business with Cuba or from recognizing the Cuban government. Cuban Power bombed the offices of governments and corporations that maintained a relationship with the Cuban government, such as the Mexican Tourist office in Chicago, which was bombed in 1968. Bosch's organization reportedly was responsible for over 150 bombings⁴ before Bosch was jailed for firing a bazooka at a Polish freighter. At Bosch's trial Ricardo Morales, a former agent in Castro's secret police and then informant for the FBI, testified about how he had supplied dynamite and other explosives to Bosch. After leaving jail, Bosch took his fight to the Cuban community, vowing to kill anyone who supported detente with communist countries. Shortly thereafter José Elías de la Torriente, another anti-Castro leader, was assassinated. Among those targeted by extremist groups were people in the exile community who had abandoned the struggle to overthrow the Cuban government or who simply did not give it a high enough priority. In 1975 Luciano Nieves, an advocate of peaceful coexistence with the Cuban government, was assassinated. And Emiliano Milán, a Miami radio commentator who advocated dialogue with Cuba, lost both legs when he triggered a bomb that had been rigged to his car.⁵

Yet in the 1970s the Cuban émigré community as a whole seemed less concerned with returning to Cuba than with making it in the United States. This reformist tendency continued to grow. Those working in the social service sector did not necessarily advocate normalizing relations with Cuba, but their lack of concern with overthrowing the revolution placed these groups on the more liberal end of the political spectrum

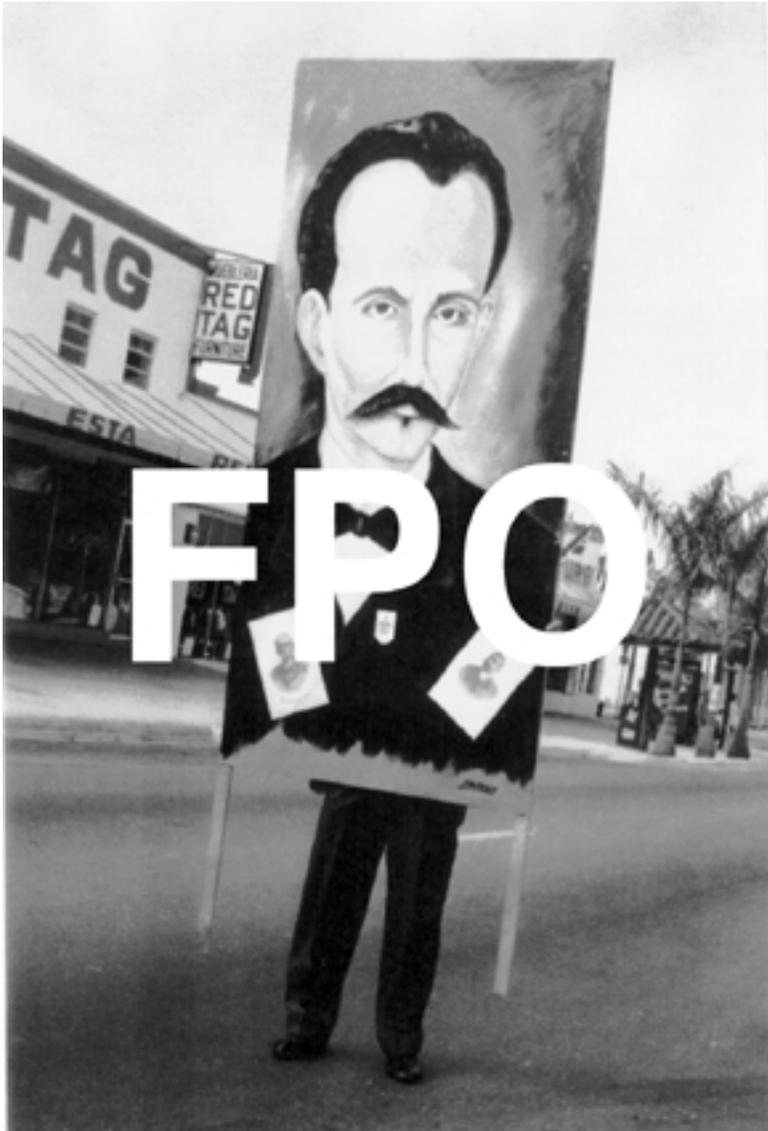


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alongside those who favored completely normalized relations. The very existence of groups serving the needy—evidence that some Cubans faced problems in the United States—posed a challenge to the Cuban Right, which either ignored or denied the social and economic problems some within the community were encountering in the United States.

Forced to confront the inefficiencies of the United States, some individuals involved in social service organizations also began to consider the possibility that the revolution in their homeland had resulted in gains for the poor. As a rule, the social service movement, including the Cuban émigré sector, was not generally concerned with foreign policy. But these sectors were allies in challenging the previously monolithic control over Cuban exile life held by Cuban conservatives. Those advocating normalization of relations disputed the then unquestioned aim of overthrowing the revolution, thereby creating the possibility of new discussion in regard to Cuba.

The challenge to the hegemony of the Cuban Right first became evident in academic circles. One of its earliest organizational manifestations was El Instituto de Estudios Cubanos. The institute, which held its first meeting in Washington, DC, in the spring of 1969, brought together Cuban émigré scholars who studied Cuba. Many had been members of various Catholic youth organizations that had joined the fight against Batista. Some had been students at la Universidad de Villanueva and had participated in the production of *Insula*, a journal of politics and culture. The goal of this first meeting was to allow Cubans of divergent ideologies and generations to share their views of Cuba within a climate of respect and camaraderie.⁶ Unlike the prevalent Cuban exile scholarship of the late 1960s, the institute encouraged a less antagonistic approach to the Cuban government.

In the early 1970s debate began over whether Cubans should engage in dialogue with the government from which so many of them had fled. Discussions first surfaced among competing factions of the opposition, who debated whether or not the covert war was over and, later, whether dialogue with the Cuban government would increase its legitimacy and thus contribute to its irreversibility. Young people seeking some kind of relationship with their homeland entered this debate with a more positive, perhaps more romantic, appraisal of the revolution. Little by little they started to form political organizations of their own.

Radicalization of Young Cuban Émigrés

The “pluralization” of the exile community was especially evident among young people.⁷ Ironically, as the émigré community at large turned its

attention toward the United States, many young Cubans in search of roots, identity, and political alternatives looked to Cuba and to their relationship with other minorities in the United States. Some of the first political groupings of young Cubans emerged in Washington and Chicago. These groups, composed of students and newly graduated young professionals, wanted to infuse the debate about Cuba with the voice of the younger generation. The Chicago group went on to organize a radio program and developed the skills necessary for a public relations campaign. There was great diversity of political opinion—so much so, in fact, that the group never reached a consensus on its name, informally calling itself *La Cosa* (The Thing). Eventually, the group split (one faction joined a more radical group forming at the University of Florida in Gainesville, while the other established what became a lucrative public relations and marketing firm in Chicago), yet it was an important first step, for it legitimized the need of many young Cubans to search for new ways of relating to their homeland.

Another organization of young Cubans, *Abdala*, was interested in providing a social democratic alternative to current Cuban politics. *Abdala*, a reference to a José Martí poem, initially grouped young Cubans interested in maintaining cultural ties with one another and brought them together through chapters in various cities and on college campuses. *Abdala* challenged the monolithic hold on the struggle against Castro by exile organizations that had given up their commitment to democracy. The group was highly critical, for instance, of the relationship of certain exile organizations to military dictators such as Augusto Pinochet of Chile.⁸

Other young Cubans were radicalized in other ways. Confronted with the civil rights and antiwar movements, a significant number of Cuban students on North American campuses underwent a political conversion that was to have surprising long-term political implications. The first signs of this movement were in publications such as *Nueva Generación* and the more politically defined *Areíto* and *Joven Cuba*. *Joven Cuba*, a New York-based progressive magazine published by Cuban émigrés, called on Cubans to become part of the civil rights struggles of the black and Latino communities. It focused on the problematic position of Cubans as a national minority in the United States and stressed the importance of their relationship with other Latinos. *Areíto*, first published in Miami, was aimed instead at building bridges between Cubans in the United States and Cuba. The first few issues of *Areíto* addressed the identity of Cuban youth while focusing on the exile's relationship with their homeland. In the final issues of the first generation of *Areíto* its concerns had expanded to include a Latin American perspective. *Nuevos Rumbos*, published by a student group at the University of Florida in Gainesville, was closer to *Areíto*'s

perspective on national identity but not on its stance toward Cuba. Another group, *Juventud Cubana Socialista* (Cuban Socialist Youths), emerged in Puerto Rico in 1972.⁹

At the time there was no way for Cubans to return to the island, even as tourists. Travel to Cuba was prohibited by both the United States and Cuba. But young Cubans began to lobby Cuban government officials at the United Nations. Some even traveled to Mexico and Europe in efforts to meet with Cuban Embassy officials in those countries. After intense lobbying efforts, the Cuban government granted a small number of visas to young Cuban émigrés who worked with *Areíto* and *Joven Cuba*. As a result, during the 1970s the Cuban government allowed a select number of Cuban exiles to visit the island.

The Cuban government first exempted from travel restrictions those who had emigrated prior to the 1959 revolution. These Cubans, many of whom were in fact sympathetic to the revolution, until then had been lumped together with the early 1960s émigrés. In the mid-1970s the Cuban government began to allow Cubans who were under eighteen years of age at the time of the revolution to visit the island. Entry permits were granted for a small number at a time. These young Cubans were told by their island hosts to tell people that they were Puerto Rican rather than Cuban; given the politicization of emigration, government officials feared a backlash against those returning. They were also leery that the process of returning might serve as a means for the Cuban right to infiltrate the island. Yet the visits influenced the attitude Cuban officials had of those who had left, and, finally, in 1977 the Cuban government shifted its policy and agreed to grant *Areíto* entry visas for a larger group visit.

The *Areíto* group was composed of middle-class Cubans who had come to the United States when they were young. They were raised in many different parts of the United States but shared a common longing to return to Cuba. Some worked with various publications, and others were scholars. Most faced stiff opposition from their parents for wanting to return to Cuba.

Generational conflict had been typical of Cuban families. Adapting to a new culture was not easy, nor was leaving behind a way of life, family, personal history, and dreams. As such, Cuban families suffered cultural clashes typical of other immigrant groups. Parents insisted that their children submit to the same cultural practices they had followed on the island, such as dating only with chaperons. These clashes were especially harsh as they unfolded at a time of cultural revolution in the United States. In many ways social upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s legitimized young Cubans' struggle against their parents. In this context Cuban parents seemingly had little to offer. They also were caught in a contradiction: on the one

hand, parents wanted their children to follow “Cuban ways,” while on the other hand they opposed their children’s desire to return to Cuba.

The desire of the “bridge generation” (those born in Cuba but raised in the United States) to return to their homeland distinguished the Cuban experience from that of other immigrant groups: instead of leading children away from the homeland, “Americanization” in the case of Cuban exiles was the catalyst through which young people were compelled to go home. In part the desire to return was about recovering a childhood and family lost to displacement, but it was also a statement about the inability of U.S. society to accept fully émigrés from Latin America. Thus, social and political change in the United States facilitated the return.

By the mid-1970s tensions between the two countries had eased, and congressional representatives began to question the utility of the U.S. embargo against Cuba. Some even traveled to the island: in 1974 Senators Claiborne Pell and Jacob Javitz visited Cuba, and in 1975 Representative Charles Whalen, a Republican from Ohio, became the first member of the House of Representatives to travel there. These legislators strongly felt that the time had come to normalize relations with Cuba. U.S. policy, they believed, was hurting the United States by making it appear isolated and unable to negotiate settlements.¹⁰ Cuban-American Democrats in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Boston were urging a new approach to U.S.-Cuban relations, while international pressure was mounting for warmer relations. In 1975 the Organization of American States (OAS) voted to lift its embargo of the island. Henry Kissinger, then secretary of state, entered into secret talks with Cuba aimed at further collaboration between the countries on air piracy and immigration. But Cuba’s activism in foreign policy ventures in Angola and Ethiopia resulted in the cancellation of these talks.

During the Carter presidency U.S. foreign policy again experienced a significant change in direction. The most memorable international incident of the Carter years was the Iranian hostage crisis, but a more fundamental trait of the administration was Carter’s campaign to inject humanitarian concerns into foreign policy. This new vision—recognition by a U.S. president of the need for reconciliation and dialogue—had marked effects on specific foreign policies, especially those aimed at Cuba and Latin America.¹¹

Early in his administration Carter became the first U.S. president since the revolution to make peace overtures to the Cuban government. After a series of talks both governments agreed to open “interests sections”—quasi-embassies hosted by third countries. A new type of diplomatic arrangement was reached whereby the United States established an interests section in the Swiss embassy in Havana, while Cuba opened one

in the Czech embassy in Washington, DC. Both were housed in what had been their respective embassies prior to the original severing of diplomatic ties. Travel to Cuba was permitted for the first time in almost twenty years, and some embargo restrictions against Cuba (constituting about 120 federal regulations) were relaxed. Although full diplomatic relations were not established, signals of a more peaceful relationship were clear.

Carter's domestic policies also contributed to strengthening the position of reformers within the Cuban community. Carter increased Latino visibility in government posts, especially that of the traditionally Democratic Mexican community in the Southwest. For example, Lionel Castillo, a Mexican-American from Texas, was named commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization Services. Reform-minded Cubans such as Alfredo Duran and Bernardo Benes—both veterans of the war against Castro—were especially active in Florida's state Democratic Party. Although maintaining an anti-Castro posture themselves, they were willing to tolerate Cuban émigrés who favored coexistence with the island government.¹² And in Washington the Carter administration developed relations with the Cuban National Planning Council, a group of moderate Cuban-Americans who advocated providing more social services for the exile community. Government grants were given to agencies interested in conducting an assessment of such needs.

The flexibility of Carter's policies toward Latin America and Latinos in the United States spawned a climate in which the more reformist elements in the Cuban community, and the Latino community in general, could organize and exert influence on governmental policies. The Cuban government responded in kind: one of its conciliatory actions was to allow visits of exiles to their homeland.

Homeland Encounters

First to be granted reentry was the *Areíto* group. Little by little its numbers expanded, and by 1977 the Cuban government gave the group fifty-five permits for a three-week tour of the island. Fear of reprisal from extremist exile groups required that the application and selection process be conducted in secret. Applicants had to be approved both by the group and by the Cuban Ministry of the Interior, which was charged with insuring that the returning exiles were not infiltrators.¹³ Once on the island the visit by these young Cubans had a tremendous impact on the government and the people of Cuba, who previously had been unwilling to communicate with Cubans who had left.¹⁴ Prior to the visit Cubans on the island accepted the myth that everyone who left was an enemy of the revolution. Just as Cubans in the United States had broken with the island, Cubans on

the island severed ties with those who had left. Filling the void were distorted images, a sense of loss, and seemingly no hope of ever healing the rift.

But, when the youth who had left Cuba (or who had been taken out during the years of flight) returned, a sense of national recovery permeated their welcome. The group, traveling as the Antonio Maceo Brigade, was met with open arms and much emotion. Unlike earlier visits, this tour was covered extensively on Cuban television, which broadcast images of brigade members visiting relatives they hadn't seen in twenty years, working with construction crews building apartments, touring the island, dancing, and singing until dawn.

The group met with high government officials, including Armando Hart, the minister of culture, who cried as he spoke of his brother's sons who had been sent to the United States by their mother after their father was tortured and killed during the revolution. At the meeting Andres Gómez, a brigade member from Miami, asked if he and others could return to the island, not just for a visit but to live. The answer to this plea came from Fidel Castro, who, though outwardly moved by the emotion of fifty-five young Cubans returning home, felt that the country would be better served if they returned to their U.S. communities to work on behalf of the revolution—to divide and conquer the exile community through its sons and daughters.

The brigade's visit had a profound impact on the island. The trip became the basis for a documentary by Jesús Díaz, *55 Hermanos*, which drew record crowds of viewers in Cuba. Scenes of young exiles returning to their childhood rooftop playgrounds and neighborhoods warmed the hearts of a public that until then had been publicly encouraged to despise those who had left. The documentary closed with a communiqué promising the return of all those children who had been taken out of Cuba by their parents. Audiences left the theaters crying. On subsequent trips brigade members would be stopped on the streets and embraced. In addition, the island-based Casa de las Américas published the group's story in *Contra Viento y Marea*.¹⁵

Upon returning to the United States, the initial group decided to expand the Antonio Maceo Brigade.¹⁶ In order to join one must have left Cuba because of a parental decision, refrained from participating in counterrevolutionary activities, opposed the U.S. economic blockade of the island, and supported normalized relations. Above all, the brigade defended the right of all Cubans to travel to the island in order to become reacquainted with the new Cuba and define their relationship to the homeland. The group was named after Antonio Maceo, the mulatto general of the Cuban War of Independence, because "of our desire to maintain a con-

tinuity with the history of our homeland . . . our rebellion against the foreign decisions and against the historical circumstances which uprooted us from our homeland . . . and our protests against the blockade which impedes our need to get to know the Cuban reality.”¹⁷ Within a year of the first trip to Cuba more than three hundred young Cubans had signed up to join the brigade’s second contingent, myself included.

Most were middle-class students united by their desire to return to their homeland. But this second group was not as politically homogeneous as the first group had been. I became a coordinator of the brigade and, along with the other coordinators, resisted demands by Cuban bureaucrats who wanted participants to pass an ideological litmus test. Because of the group’s diversity, island organizers tightened the program in order to minimize contact between the brigade and the island’s residents. Many brigade members had been part of the counterculture movement in the United States. We were advocates of gay rights and freedom of speech. Many of us were pacifists. Many still experimented with soft drugs. These beliefs and actions were punishable crimes in Cuba. Thus, contact between island youth and brigade members was discouraged.

Nonetheless, the brigade trips paved the way for future relations between the Cuban government and Cuban communities abroad. Both in Cuba and in the United States the myth of a monolithic Cuban community had been shattered, along with the myth of no return.¹⁸ But the process of building a relationship with Cuba was not without conflict and violence.

“El Diálogo” and Its Aftermath

In September 1978 Castro announced that he would hold talks with representatives of the Cuban communities abroad.¹⁹ Numerous factors facilitated “the Dialogue,” as these discussions were called. The Carter years marked a detente between the United States and Cuba. The United States had lifted its ban on travel to Cuba, imposed as part of the blockade implemented in 1961. The Cuban and U.S. governments had traded interests sections as a step toward reestablishing full diplomatic relations. Also, the Cuban revolutionary government had consolidated its power and was finally in a secure enough position to address those who had left the country. Furthermore, there were Cubans abroad who were ready to talk to the Castro government.²⁰

These policy changes also fulfilled an ideological function for the revolution. The Cuban government justified its change of position by acknowledging that the United States was no longer using Cuban émigrés to perform acts of terrorism against the island. It also served to shatter the

image of a Cuban community unwilling to recognize or sustain talks with the Cuban government.²¹ The rapprochement gave the revolution ideological ammunition because the Cuban government could now demonstrate not only that there were deep divisions in the exile community regarding relations with homeland but that the revolution's existence was recognized, and hence legitimized, by exiles willing to negotiate with government representatives. In addition, Cuban émigrés advocating dialogue with Cuba gave the Cuban state an inside political track to U.S. policymakers—a voice from within the community calling for normalization of relations. The Dialogue, which was held over two sessions in November and December 1978, brought 140 Cubans from abroad to Havana.

This was my first return trip. U.S. participants boarded a Cuban airline in Atlanta. From the outset we sensed that we were involved in a historic process. Its personal significance was tied to my return to Cuba, but it also had a broader meaning for the exile community as a whole. I met Cubans from throughout the United States who represented a broad range of political factions (even former Bay of Pigs prisoners joined in the Dialogue) and varying social backgrounds. Nuns, priests, and businesspeople all boarded the Cubana plane that took us to Cuba.

The formal agenda, consented to at the first meeting, included the release of political prisoners, permission for those prisoners and their families to leave Cuba, the reunification of divided families, and the right of Cubans living abroad to visit their relatives on the island. The Antonio Maceo Brigade presented the Cuban government with a more radical agenda than that agreed to by the overall group. This included the right of repatriation, the right to study in Cuba, the creation of an institute within the Cuban government to represent the interests of Cubans abroad, the opportunity to participate in social and professional organizations within Cuba, and the establishment of cultural and professional exchanges between Cubans on the island and abroad. We also supported the plea by a group of former political prisoners that the Cuban government release its female political prisoners.²² Other individuals and groups added suggestions throughout the process.

The talks resulted in the following agreements: the release of three thousand political prisoners and permission for current and former prisoners and their families to emigrate; permission for those with family in the United States to leave; and permission for Cubans living abroad to visit the island.²³ In the first stage these visits were described by Fidel Castro as visits by “tourist” groups.²⁴ Still, at the time such agreements were extraordinary. Prior to the Dialogue, not only were those who left considered traitors, but severe penalties were imposed against those leaving without government permission. Persons requesting such permission automat-

ically lost jobs and other benefits. The stigma for family members remaining on the island was difficult to overcome. Yet in 1978 the Cuban government negotiated an opening with Cubans who had left, including many who had participated in military actions against Cuba. This marked a pivotal, historic moment.

What most of us did not know at the time was that the Cuban government had already reached these agreements with the U.S. government. In fact, many of us did not find this out until the story was published in Wayne Smith's personal memoirs ten years later.²⁵ For months Bernardo Benes, a former anti-Batista fighter who later opposed Castro, had been negotiating these issues with Fidel Castro and others in his government as well as with State Department officials. The issues brought to the table included, among other things, the release of political prisoners, reunification of families, and the establishment of interests sections.²⁶ It seemed clear that Cuban officials desired a reestablishment of relations with the United States but were unwilling to discontinue their support for other armed movements throughout the world. For the Cuban government the exile community would become an arena in which they could attempt to manipulate Washington.

Implementing the Dialogue agreements proved more difficult than reaching them. The release of political prisoners was to take place with the full cooperation of the United States. And, while the release proceeded as promised, the processing of visas for emigration to the United States was very slow. In January 1979 the Cuban government began releasing four hundred political prisoners each month and continued at this pace for almost a year. The United States accepted all the jailed prisoners and their families who wanted to emigrate but refused to grant visas to former political prisoners and their families—they were told to apply through the regular Latin America immigration quota. For most people this represented a three- to eight-year wait. The Cuban leadership publicly toyed with another Camarioca solution—opening a single port for those who wanted to leave the country—if the United States did not grant the promised visas.

The visa slowdown resulted in part from changes in U.S. immigration regulations. In 1968 Latin America had been assigned a quota of immigrants—one from which, during the early 1970s, Cubans were exempt. U.S. immigration officials now wanted Cubans included. Griffin Bell, the U.S. attorney general at the time, did not support admitting large numbers of Cubans. State Department officials, in contrast, insisted on an open-door policy. The result was a temporary impasse. And, once again, U.S. policy toward Cuba fell victim to Washington's bureaucratic turf wars.²⁷ Eventually, the United States succumbed to pressure from former Cuban

political prisoners who, while not supporters of the Dialogue (they considered speaking to the Cuban government an act of treason), felt strongly that the United States should admit former soldiers who had fought against Castro. They lobbied the White House, and the United States finally granted visas to all political prisoners and their families. The former political prisoners, however, would have to wait their turn in the immigration quota line. It was through this program that well-known political prisoners such as Huber Matos, Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, and Ramón and Polita Grau were released.

Another agreement between the Cuban government and Cubans abroad resulted in more than 120,000 Cubans visiting the island in a year. At first traditional exile groups tried to convince people not to visit their relatives. Eventually, they gave in and instead encouraged exiles visiting relatives to help them gather intelligence information about life in Cuba, economic conditions, and military maneuvers.²⁸ It became clear that, while Cubans abroad had broken with the revolution, they were still interested in visiting their families and homeland. Committees to defend and implement the accords of the Dialogue sprang up throughout the United States and in Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Mexico, and Spain.²⁹

Much to the chagrin of Dialogue organizers and the pro-reconciliation groups that emerged during this period, Cuban visitors to the island often returned to their host country more embittered than they had been before the trip. The visitors felt exploited. Many believed that the Cuban government was taking advantage of their desire to see relatives by charging outrageous prices (at one point a weeklong visit from Miami cost \$1,500 even if the traveler stayed with relatives, compared to trips to other Caribbean islands that at the time cost around \$350). Clearly, the Cuban government viewed visits by Cuban exiles as a source of foreign exchange. Special stores were opened at which visitors could pay top dollar for consumer goods in short supply. The corruption visitors encountered on the island required them to hand out still more money, which only antagonized them further. Contrary to the explicit hopes of those organizing the exchange, these trips did not engender goodwill; rather, they contributed to further separating those abroad from those on the island.

Although the Dialogue was conceived with specific ideological and political aims, the accords were not implemented in a fashion that was in keeping with these goals. The problem can be traced in part to the nature of the decision to open Cuba's doors to its exile community; this decision was made by the upper echelons of the Communist Party and was never fully discussed or debated within the government, much less by the general public.³⁰ Only days before the Dialogue, party militants in Havana were

invited to a meeting to hear Castro's rationale for changing positions toward those who, until then, had been considered mortal enemies of the revolution. Consequently, the political and ideological aspects of the policy were lost amid a bureaucracy whose purpose it was to bring in hard currency. The exile community acquired a new, more cynical function for the Cuban state as a bearer of hard currency. Irí Abrantes Fernández, at the time vice-minister of the Ministry of the Interior, and Ricardo Alascoñ, the minister of Foreign Relations, sent consulates new travel regulations that provided that Cuban exiles travel in "tourist" groups. Havatas, a Cuban state corporation based in Panama, was the only agency authorized to sell plane tickets and transmit the paperwork.³¹

The visitors also had an important effect on the Cuban population. Many island residents objected to the uneven distribution of consumer products between those who had relatives in other countries who could purchase these items on their behalf and those who did not. While there was discontent among Cubans before the 1979 visits, many blamed the exiles' visits for the increasing number of people wanting to leave the country, culminating in the dramatic exodus of more than 120,000 Cubans through the port of Mariel.

The exile community, from 1977 to 1979, had been cast momentarily in a positive light. Fidel Castro had gone so far as to urge people not to use the derogatory term *gusano*, suggesting instead that they refer to the exiles as *comunidad* (community); colloquially, Cubans had already started to use the term *mariposas*, meaning "butterflies," or transformed *gusanos*. But beginning in 1980 Cubans returned to viewing the Cuban community abroad in its previous role as saboteur of the revolution.

Still, the willingness of the U.S. and Cuban governments to negotiate during and after the Dialogue changed the political climate between the two countries and, consequently, opened a new political space within the Cuban exile community. U.S. Cuban organizations that called for normalizing relations between the two countries found that their demands were now more politically acceptable. As a result, organizations that aimed to reestablish relations with the island flourished.³²

The first organization that emerged from the Dialogue was the Miami-based Committee of 75. Headed by Albor Ruíz, a member of the *Areíto* editorial board, the committee was organized to monitor the implementation of the Dialogue accords in the United States and Cuba. It concentrated initially on aiding in the processing of Cuban political prisoners who wanted to come to the United States by procuring lists of released prisoners from the Cuban interests section in Washington and, in turn, lobbying the U.S. government to process visas for them. The committee

also helped organize flights for prisoners coming to the United States. It kept Dialogue participants informed through a monthly newsletter and held periodic press conferences. Other organizations, such as El Grupo de Reunificación Familiar, sought to bring together divided families.³³

The increased contact between Cuba and the United States gave rise to organizations that provided services to the Cuban community in relation to the island. The most notable of these were the travel agencies that chartered flights from the United States to Cuba. The livelihood of these travel agencies depended on their relationship to the Cuban government—without its permission they could not do business with Cuba. Yet they also operated within the United States and, as such, had to organize their business within the U.S. legal framework. Since the embargo was not lifted during the Carter administration, direct commercial flights were prohibited, so only private agencies could provide services to people returning for family visits. Visitors were forced to buy land and air packages. Given the demand, there was a long waiting list, and charter operators often charged an extra fee for moving people up the list. Other services developed, including agencies that forwarded care packages to Cuba and pharmacies that sent medicine. Again, the charges were exorbitant, since these businesses had a near monopoly on the provision of service. And, like the travel agencies, these businesses had to be sanctioned by the Cuban government before they could operate. If opposition to the revolution had engendered its own economy in the exile community, so did closer relations. Both, however, would be put out of business if there was change in Cuba.

Other Cubans in the United States focused on advocating changes in U.S. policy toward Cuba, concentrating their efforts on organizing Washington-based groups that would lobby U.S. officials to lift the economic embargo on the island. One such group was the Cuban-American Committee (CAC). Composed of a cross-section of professionals, the CAC was the first official Cuban-American research and education group in Washington. It circulated petitions, met with political representatives, and held press conferences. In 1979 the committee presented the State Department with a petition signed by more than ten thousand Cubans requesting a speedy normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba. And, unlike political organizations of the past, the Cuban-American Committee played “*políticas a la Americana*” by taking on the U.S. political system on its own terms.

Still other organizations concentrated on academic and cultural exchanges between Cubans in the United States and those on the island. *Areíto* moved in a more intellectual direction and became involved in sponsoring exchanges between academics. An organization dedicated to

cultural exchanges, El Círculo de Cultura Cubana, was established in New York.³⁴ It sponsored conferences in the United States and Cuba and took groups of Cuban exile artists to the island. Many organizations promoting some form of exchange emerged within the U.S. Cuban exile community during this period. No doubt they surfaced, at least in part, because a new generation had come of age and felt strongly the need to maintain a link to the homeland. The increased contact with Cuba also spurred professional and cultural interest among Cubans inside and outside of Cuba. For a time the trend toward rapprochement became important outside the youth sector that had initially prompted it,³⁵ although its articulation into a broader movement was tempered both by the political climate in Cuba and by terrorism within the Cuban community abroad.

Backlash: Terrorism and Fighting Back

Although many Cubans wanted to visit the island, this sentiment did not necessarily translate into support for normalized relations with Cuba—a stance that was perceived as a vote of support for the Castro government. Still, groups that continued their quest to overthrow the revolution by violent means grew increasingly isolated. Their aim of invasion and return to the island—a promise extended relentlessly since the revolution’s beginning and financed partially through community fund-raising efforts—became less realistic and more desperate and was recognized as such by most Cuban exiles. These groups reacted violently to the new developments. Their first attack was on Dialogue participants.

In 1979 Omega 7, one of the most active terrorist organizations, claimed credit for more than twenty bombings aimed at the homes and business of Dialogue members.³⁶ Although Omega 7’s headquarters was reportedly in New Jersey,³⁷ the organization later moved into south Florida.³⁸ Communiqués were sent to the Miami offices of the Associated Press and United Press International vowing that any Cuban who traveled to Cuba would be killed. In April 1979 Omega 7 claimed credit for the assassination of Carlos Muñiz Varela, a twenty-six-year old member of the Antonio Maceo Brigade who coordinated the Puerto Rican offices of Viajes Varaderos, an agency that arranged travel to Cuba.

Members of the Antonio Maceo Brigade lived in constant fear. We were afraid that the events we sponsored would be bombed. Our names appeared in press communiqués under the headline “Castro’s Agents,” or we were called *dialogueros*, a term that came to have negative connotations.³⁹ The young organization turned inward. Security measures were instituted. The FBI’s first response to a call to investigate Muñiz’s murder

was to assert that Puerto Rico was outside its jurisdiction. There was speculation that individuals in the Puerto Rican government had provided support to the terrorist groups.⁴⁰ In contrast the Cuban government, eager to gather information about its enemies, provided a safe haven for young exiles. In November 1979, in Union City, New Jersey, terrorists killed Eulalio Negrin, another Dialogue member.⁴¹ His killers were never found.

In response to terrorist acts, more open-minded Cuban exiles launched a national campaign against terrorism, demonstrating that they had learned how to use the U.S. political system.⁴² A national task force was organized that included the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the World Council of Churches, the National Lawyers' Guild, the Conference of Black Lawyers, and the Committee of 75. The task force successfully lobbied several congressmen to establish special congressional hearings on Cuban exile right-wing terrorism, although ultimately these were more symbolic than effective in halting criminal acts or in pushing the FBI to investigate them.

Progressive Cubans outside Miami enjoyed better relations with elected officials than those within Miami. One exile group in Boston worked with State Representative Mel King to introduce a resolution in the Massachusetts House of Commons condemning terrorism.⁴³ The task force also succeeded in securing statements by Eduardo Boza Masvidal and Agustin Roman, the clergy that had blessed the Bay of Pigs invasion, who now pleaded with the community "to cease terrorism and learn to live with democratic ways."⁴⁴ Newark's archbishop did the same.⁴⁵ The task force was instrumental in ensuring that Rutgers University's Constitutional Legal Clinic documented cases of intimidation and assassination.⁴⁶ The Rutgers Clinic project was a hotline of sorts to which Dialogue participants and others could report incidents. This was particularly important to the victims of intimidation and terrorism, as most law enforcement agencies were perceived as sympathetic to right-wing exiles.

As a result of the combined effort of lawyers and progressive Cuban exiles, the White House eventually established a special FBI task force and named Omega 7 the most dangerous terrorist group in the United States. But it was another two years before the FBI would make its first arrests of Omega 7 members (see table 6).⁴⁷

The political legitimacy gained by those calling for a rapprochement with the revolution continued to shift the political middle ground in the Cuban community. Supporters of the Dialogue successfully organized a base of support among émigrés. The demand to normalize relations with Cuba implied the recognition that there was a government with which Cuban exiles had to negotiate. It further acknowledged that Cubans were

in the United States to stay. As the political spectrum of the community had expanded, organizations serving as advocates for the needs of émigrés were no longer as susceptible to charges that they were abandoning the cause of toppling the Cuban government. Eventually, they ceased to be targets of the Right.

**Changing the Rules of the Game:
“Política a la Americana”**

Within this expanded political spectrum new issues emerged. For example, the Cuban émigré community became a vocal supporter of bilingual programs in Dade County, Florida, a clear departure from mainstream local Anglo opinions that were generally antagonistic to teaching anything other than English to schoolchildren. This issue, along with Cuban support for bilingual voting materials, aligned Cubans with other Latinos throughout the United States. Furthermore, an unprecedented number of Cubans became naturalized U.S. citizens, a necessary requirement for voting. Thus, when the Democratic Party formed a caucus of Hispanic-American Democrats in 1979,⁴⁸ with the goal of unifying Latinos of different national origin under a single banner, traditional Cuban-American Democrats and representatives from the Dialogue movement played a key role. By 1976 most Cuban voters in Dade County were registered Demo-

TABLE 6. Partial List of Bombings by Cuban Émigré Terrorists, 1973–80

Year	Total Number of Attempts	Organizational Responsibility
1973	9	FLNC, CLN, GSC, DR, unknown
1974	26	FLNC, Zero, Alpha 66, unknown, CP
1975	11	FLNC, unknown
1976	41	CORU, FLNC, CNM, Omega 7
1977	5	unknown
1978	10	CORU, Omega 7, unknown
1979	10	CORU, Omega 7
1980	4	Omega 7, unknown

Source: Elizabeth Schneider, “The Basis and Need for a Coordinated Federal and State Investigation and Prosecution of Cuban Exile Terrorism” (Rutgers Law School, Constitutional Litigation Clinic, May 1979). Coded by Carlos Forment, “Caribbean Geopolitics and Foreign State Sponsored Social Movements: The Case of Cuban Exile Militancy in Miren Uriarte-Gaston and Jorge Cañas Martínez, *Cubans in the United States* (Center for the Study of the Cuban Community, Boston: MA, 1984).

crats. No longer did conservative Cubans monopolize connections with the formal political structures.

Political developments in the Cuban exile community were accompanied by parallel ideological currents. Especially significant was the emergence of a new self-definition that did not rely solely on the identity of exile. A more encompassing notion of the "Cuban community" was used with greater frequency as exiles felt that they could return to their homeland.⁴⁹ In some sectors the redefinition of self also included a conception of Cuban émigrés as a minority group within the United States.

The impact of abated tensions between the United States and Cuba on the process of political pluralization in the Cuban exile community cannot be underestimated. As part of a new human rights strategy toward Latin America, the Carter administration's willingness to explore the development of relations with Cuba created the political space for those Cuban-Americans who had been lobbying both governments to establish relations. Although the move toward rapprochement with the Cuban revolution already had begun in the Cuban community, it was not consolidated until relations between Cuba and the United States became a political probability.

More relaxed relations between Washington and Havana allowed the Cuban government to feel that it was not under direct siege and that it therefore could open political space in Cuba as well. Thus, significant changes in economic and political policies—including an unprecedented dialogue with the Cuban community outside of Cuba—resulted from the easing of tensions across the Florida Straits.

For Cuban émigrés Cuba—the homeland—continued to be at the center of political debate and life. Those promoting a better relationship found sympathetic ears in Washington, although even under these circumstances Cuban exiles continued to be pawns in the larger geopolitical game. But for the community new forms of political participation emerged that were related to the status of Cubans as U.S. citizens and residents. Political action within the United States now consisted of more than simply being used as pawns by underground political organizations; the issue of Cuba was taken up by registered lobbyists organized in Washington. This normalization spawned new political interests and activities. As homeland concerns were addressed, other issues emerged within the Cuban exile community agenda.

But the prospect of reconciliation with the Cuban government also provoked the ire of extremist groups, and terrorism against supporters of rapprochement increased by alarming proportions. By now, however, the Cuban exile community's response to terrorism was being routed through

mainstream political channels. Perhaps the most significant political development in the 1970s was the use of electoral and pressure group methods for political participation by Cuban exile progressives. This changed the rules of politics in the exile community. And, as these activities proved effective, they set a new standard for conducting the political business of the Cuban exile community.