

CHAPTER 5

The 1980s: Entering Mainstream Politics

The rapprochement between the exile community and the Cuban government was brief. A year after the government had authorized community visits to the island the doors began to close. The Cuba issue again found its way into U.S. presidential campaign politics. Ronald Reagan, the Republican nominee, hammered away at Jimmy Carter's foreign policy failures as the Cuban government once again opened a port on the island to rid itself of its discontents. In the next months over 120,000 Cubans were transported to the United States. In November 1980 Reagan was elected president on a platform that included a "get tough with Cuba" provision as well as the promotion of conservative exiles to government positions.

Dialogue Strained

For Havana the 1980s began when a small group of Cubans shot and killed a Cuban guard while trying to enter the Peruvian embassy in Miramar, an upscale Havana neighborhood. The Peruvian government refused to turn the group over to Cuban authorities and, instead, granted its members asylum. In retaliation Cuba announced that anyone wishing to leave the country could do so via Peru. Within a few days more than 10,000 Cubans jammed the compounds of the embassy.

The Cuban government was caught by surprise. There had been growing discontent on the island since the visits by more than 100,000 Cuban émigrés the previous year. Moreover, although the process was slow and without guarantees, it seemed as though for the first time in years there was real hope for those who wanted to emigrate to the United States. Nonetheless, the Cuban government underestimated the depth of discontent among much of the population.

Overwhelmed, authorities finally announced that those outside the island wishing to pick up relatives or friends who wanted to leave Cuba could do so at Mariel, a small port on the outskirts of Havana. (The port of Mariel was near where Ernest Hemingway made his home in the 1950s.) Hundreds of sailboats were immediately launched from Florida to Cuba. Cubans wanting to leave were asked to complete a questionnaire and were



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then issued exit permits. Those who identified themselves as homosexuals or prostitutes were processed first.

The government mobilized the Committees in Defense of the Revolution to organize rallies of “repudiation” at the homes and workplaces of those planning to leave the country. On May 1, 1980, for example, more than one million people rallied at the Plaza de la Revolución. The rally was called “la Marcha del Pueblo Combatiente” (March of the Fighting People), in honor of those who were staying and in condemnation of those leaving. Those who refused to participate were denounced as ideologically weak. Slogans and chants depicted those who had applied to leave as *escoria*, or “scum.” Old wounds were reopened as the weighty decision to leave or stay was again used to mobilize support for the government.

The Mariel emigration profoundly affected Cuba’s policies toward its community abroad. In search of an explanation for why so many people wanted to leave the island, the government used the Cuban community abroad as a convenient scapegoat. In the previous year more than 100,000 émigrés had returned to visit relatives. Most had come bearing gifts of refrigerators, fans, sewing machines, clothing, and food items such as canned hams and coffee bought mostly at Cuban government-owned stores. The visits disproved official government propaganda claiming that life in the United States was hard, poverty prevailed, and crime lurked on every street corner. Reportedly, even Fidel Castro was surprised at the real wealth and accomplishments of exiles in Miami.¹ When relatives returned to Cuba with gifts and consumer goods unattainable for the average island resident, emigration became more desirable. Ironically, the same community abroad that had been encouraged by Cuban officials to bring cash and gifts now became the culprit for explaining island residents’ desire for consumer goods.

But the community visits in and of themselves were not the only factor that provoked such an unexpected mass exodus. They were merely the catalyst that uncovered deep-seated, generalized discontent with the revolutionary government and the economic situation on the island. While socialist policies provided all Cubans with basic education and health care, consumer goods were lacking. Work was not appealing because there was nothing to buy. Many Cubans simply did not show up at their jobs, and those who did were often unproductive. With visitors bringing in consumer goods and dollars, the Cuban black market surged. Government stores had only a very limited stock of items such as clothing and shoes. On the black market, however, Cubans could buy jeans, shoes, and other items not available in government stores.

Before the Cuban exile visits diplomats and foreign students, mostly from Eastern European and African nations, supplied the black market.

After the visits Cubans with relatives abroad received not only gifts but also money with which to buy other goods. Those who did not have relatives abroad or who had severed ties with their exile relatives because they were loyal to the Communist Party resented the sudden shift in policy toward those who had previously been considered traitors to the revolution.

State corruption also contributed to the unrest. Government officials who traveled abroad and had access to government stores often had consumer items not available to the general population. And, while the differences between the haves and have-nots were not as great in Cuba as in the United States, the public rhetoric of socialism promised equality in the economic realm. As a result, the perquisites of office and rewards for political loyalty added to the crisis of legitimacy for the government. Another source of social tension came from released political prisoners anxious to leave the country. While the United States dragged its feet in processing their visa applications, their status as former prisoners prevented them from getting jobs in Cuba, so they waited, idle and frustrated.

After Mariel the Cuban government renewed its rhetoric against those who had left, updating the previous epithet of *gusano* with the newer term of *escoria*.² The pathos of these insults revealed the great embarrassment Mariel had caused the Cuban government: Instead of the old bourgeoisie and middle-class Cubans afraid of losing their status and privilege, those who exited through Mariel included many young men and women from class backgrounds that the revolution supposedly had aimed to help. Many had been educated in other socialist countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Government officials explained that, even in socialist systems, there was underdevelopment and the existence of a lumpen proletariat.³ These were the beginnings of an exclusively economic explanation for discontent.

The immediate effect of this ideological campaign was to reduce the number of visits allowed to Cuban exiles. New restrictions were accompanied by a dramatic increase in the price of the trips, essentially to make up for lost revenues from the lower number of flights and reentry permits granted. A one-week trip from Miami to Havana cost over fifteen hundred dollars, in addition to the price of passports and other documents and fees. Reentry permits were granted only if the traveler bought a tourist package that included a hotel room even if the traveler planned to stay with relatives.

Because U.S. travel agencies needed Cuban government cooperation in order to facilitate travel to the island, Cuban officials maintained complete control over business terms. Initially, some half-dozen travel agencies were authorized to do business with Cuba, but by the mid-1980s only three

were in operation: Marazul Charters in New York and Miami and ABC and CBT Charters in Miami. Each had an exclusive contract with a bureaucratic faction in the Cuban government.

Other businesses emerged as a result of the movement of people in and out of Cuba. One Ministry of the Interior office, Interconsult, was established solely to administer a program to sell visas to relatives abroad. The price ranged from two thousand to fifty thousand dollars, depending on how long the person was willing to wait. Interconsult also offered a service through which non-Cubans could pay to marry Cuban nationals and bring them to the United States or other countries and in turn receive a fee from the person who wanted to leave.⁴

A Cuban national could not leave the country without an exit permit from the government, and in order to secure this a valid visa from another country was required. As a result, the black market sale of visas and exit permits flourished. For example, Cuban nationals could buy a Panamanian visa with which they could then apply for a Cuban exit permit. Panamanian and Cuban government officials were involved in these transactions; often the financial arm of such operations was run out of Miami by private intermediaries. Special accounts were opened in Miami banks in which exiles could deposit down payments for relatives they wanted to bring permanently to the United States. Several families made these deposits, yet their relatives on the island failed to secure the necessary travel documents. So, banks adopted a special mechanism of freezing the deposits until the person reached the United States. The operations were so sophisticated that different services were offered at varying prices, depending on how quickly one wanted to be transported to the United States. For twenty thousand dollars a Cuban resident could be in Miami in three days. Intermediaries, whether in travel agencies or in banks, would add on fees of their own. In all, the "policy toward the community" became an incredibly lucrative business for the various actors involved, including the Cuban government, Cuban exiles, and Panamanian officials.

Cuba's internal bureaucratic turf wars made matters worse. There was no consensus within the Cuban government about which agency should implement its policies toward the émigré community. Initially, the Communist Party had assigned the Ministry of the Interior the responsibility for young Cuban exiles returning for visits. Those leading the fight against the counterrevolution were charged with insuring that the young exiles were not infiltrators, in light of the government's fear about the activities of the Cuban exile right. But those in the elite of the Communist Party bureaucracy, such as the Department of the Americas, which oversaw foreign policy matters, argued that they should direct policy toward

the community abroad. The relationship, they argued, had clear foreign policy implications, since most Cuban émigrés lived in the United States, and the Cuban-American right-wing community was very active in foreign policy projects aimed at Cuba. The Department of the Americas was headed by Manuel Piñeiro, popularly known as “Barba Roja” and reputed to be in charge of coordinating guerrilla activities throughout Latin America.⁵ In the early 1980s this department tried to wrest policy-making control from the units within the Ministries of Foreign Relations and the Interior that dealt with the émigré communities.

The Ministry of the Interior argued that offices in charge of emigration and immigration were under its jurisdiction, and, as such, it should be in charge of policies regarding those who left. It also argued that the exile community was its turf because those who had left Cuba were traitors and potential counterrevolutionaries, and the Ministry was in charge of defending the country from the counterrevolution. The Ministry of Foreign Relations defended the position of the Ministry of the Interior, while arguing that it, too, should have oversight since it administered the consulate offices abroad.

With impassioned rhetoric the government bureaucrats of the Ministry of the Interior were able to fend off the attempted takeover by Communist Party bureaucrats of relations with the exile community. They argued that these policies had tremendous domestic implications, as was made clear by the numbers of Cubans who wanted to leave the island after the community visits. It also had an effect on Cuba’s national security, since counterrevolution was primarily a product of the community abroad. In the end national security arguments won out over arguments for reconciliation. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior contained the immigration department and a counterintelligence unit. Their contact with the community could produce valuable sources of information for the fight against counterrevolution.

Within Cuba the exile community issue was studied initially within two centers. One was El Centro de Estudios Sobre América (CEA), a think tank of the Communist Party’s Department of the Americas. The Party maintained that it was responsible for developing Cuba’s policies toward the United States and, as such, wanted to provide input on issues that might affect those relations. Thus, the Party think tank was allowed to study immigration as a bilateral issue between the United States and Cuba and therefore part of its terrain. The Ministry of the Interior supported another research center, the Department of the Study of the United States at the University of Havana, which later spawned El Centro de Estudios de Alternativas Políticas (CEAP). This think tank developed a Cuban exile

community component in which all aspects of the community could be studied. Both centers approached the Cuban community within the context of U.S.-Cuban relations.⁶

There was simply no consensus in Cuba on how to handle its communities abroad. Hard-liners in the government wanted to sever relations completely with those who had left. Given their strength, the hard-line contingent was successful in setting the terms of the debate about policy toward the exile community. Opposing arguments were to be cast solely in political terms, and there was little room to advocate policies based on humanitarian grounds. For example, those who wanted to reach out to the community argued that such a strategy would isolate the right wing of the exile community by demonstrating that Cubans abroad wanted to return to their homeland and that this in turn would lessen the tensions between the community and the island. Yet they had little to show for their position. Ultimately, they were forced to justify their support for closer relations on monetary grounds. This was a position that found support in other Ministry of the Interior policies that encouraged profit-making, intelligence-gathering practices.

But when profit became the bottom line of the policy of openness, the prospects for positive reconciliation declined. Instead of feeling gratitude to the Cuban government for the opportunity to return, émigrés resented the excessive amount of money they had to pay to do so. Many, even among those who were not strictly anti-Castro, grew embittered. Thus, rather than engendering closeness and promoting understanding between Cubans on the island and the community abroad, travel to Cuba merely fueled the “us versus them” syndrome.

The Rise of the Cuban Exile “New Right”

In the exile community supporters of the Dialogue with Cuba were caught off guard by the Mariel immigration and the Cuban government’s response to it. Many had argued that the Cuban government enjoyed popular support on the island and that those who left should respect the wishes of those who had stayed. But this notion was shattered by Mariel.⁷ Furthermore, it was becoming painfully clear that many officials in the Cuban government had not wanted any type of relations with the exile community and had merely tolerated them as long as the government could make money. Spurned by the island government and rejected by both the exile community and the new administration in Washington, the pro-normalization sector of the community unraveled.

Those arriving in the United States via Mariel were initially welcomed with open arms. In the months that followed more than 120,000 Cubans

were transported to the United States. As the number of refugees increased, the positive response was tempered. U.S. popular opinion turned to alarm, and new arrivals from Cuba were placed in detention camps. The Freedom Flotilla, as their exodus had originally been called, gave way to a social construction that characterized the immigrants as social undesirables.⁸

The wave of Mariel immigrants shattered the image of the golden exile. Whereas prior immigrants from Cuba were often perceived as white, professional, staunchly anticommunist, and clustered in family groups, not even the most propagandistic anti-Castro Miami media could make those who came through Mariel fit the mold. However disgruntled with the Cuban regime, these were the children of the revolution, shaped and informed by its values. Mostly single males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, the “Marielitos,” as they came to be called by the established Cuban exile community, could not help but clash with their Miami brethren even though they did not fit the negative press descriptions.⁹

Although they were for the most part critical of the island government, the Marielitos generally held a more balanced view of Castro’s programs, often praising its systems of health care and education, its sports programs, and its gutsy nationalism. Unlike prior waves of Cuban exiles, they were hard to define ideologically. In many cases they parted ways with Cuba’s leadership because of its inefficient governance and poor economic performance. They wanted more—more economic and educational opportunities, more consumer goods, more sexual freedom, more liberty to travel. Needless to say, there were Marielitos who left for more explicit political reasons as well, such as author Reinaldo Arenas, whose book *Before Night Falls* chronicles his relationship to the revolution and the exile community. Nonetheless, whether coming to the United States for practical necessity or ideological principle, Marielitos were all considered outcasts.

Interestingly, the Mariel immigrants injected the émigré community with a new cultural life. Painters such as Carlos Alfonso and Juan Boza shared new visions of the island. Jazz musicians like Paquito de Rivera quickly established impressive recording careers. Yet the presence of these artists challenged the prevailing assumption within the exile community that culture could not be created on the island because of political repression. The community’s polarized vision of the island could not accommodate the nuances of this challenge. Thus, these artists, too, despite their success, were not fully welcomed into the community.

One of the most important ramifications of the mass exodus is that it called into question the stability of the Castro government. For the first time in years many émigrés again believed that Cuba’s revolutionary gov-

ernment could fall. This fueled the activities of traditional right-wing groups, who quickly organized paramilitary camps.¹⁰ Some groups became more militant in their positions, to the point that the previously moderate Abdala began promoting Dr. Orlando Bosch, the man who had established the terrorist group Cuban Power in the late 1970s.¹¹ This call to action within the right wing of the émigré community, combined with the simultaneous consolidation of the New Right in the White House, halted the diplomacy that had emerged during the Carter years. Rifts began to appear in the right-wing émigré coalition composed of the old Right, paramilitary groups such as Alpha 66, and new conservatives in search of a legitimate vehicle through which to conduct political and economic business in Washington. The exile community's new business sector represented the maturation of an economic base now seeking a political vehicle.¹² Their politics were expressed in ethnic terms in part because of local reaction against the Mariel Cubans, which contributed to reasserting an ethnic identity.¹³

The new conservatives shared in the Reaganite vision of world politics, particularly concerning Latin America. This vision was expressed in a document entitled *A New Latin American Policy for the Eighties*, presented to the president by the Santa Fe group of the Inter-American Security Council.¹⁴ The Santa Fe report advocated a series of theoretical and practical recommendations that played an important role in the administration's Latin American foreign policies. Roger Fontaine, one of its authors and a link to conservative exiles, was later appointed the president's principal advisor on Latin America in the National Security Council (NSC).

The main problem facing Latin America, according to the Santa Fe group, was internal subversion, which in its view was a product of "external intervention." Of perceived immediate danger to the region was the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the New Jewel Movement in Grenada, both of which were seen as instances of Soviet/Cuban involvement in Central America and the Caribbean. The Santa Fe group asserted that Cuba was a proxy for Soviet influence in the hemisphere and should be made to pay a high price for its alleged adventurism. The group recommended the expulsion of Cuban diplomats in Washington, the cessation of American tourism to Cuba, radio broadcasts to Cuba, and, if necessary, support for a war of liberation against the revolutionary government. It reclaimed the status of "freedom fighters" for those that had previously been named "terrorists."

At the beginning of March 1981 Secretary of State Alexander Haig appeared before the Senate and House Foreign Relations Committees confirming that a series of options were being considered to deal with the "Soviet problem" and that these included military actions against Cuba.

Days later a Miami tabloid featured a story headlined, “Plan Ready for Invasion of the Caribbean.”¹⁵ In the Cuban émigré community traditional exile organizations applauded these developments and began to prepare for war. Weekend training camps were rejuvenated in the Everglades and in other parts of the United States.

PACs Emerge

Key Republicans had been eyeing the Cuban-American community as early as 1980. This was especially the case among members of the New Right, whose ideology coincided with the conservatism many Cuban-Americans had shown in their past political involvement on foreign policy issues. Roger Fontaine asserted that what was needed in Washington was a strong, conservative Cuban-American lobby.¹⁶ As if in response, and just months after the 1980 election, a group of Cuban-American businessmen and ideologues formed the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF). Its first meetings were held at National Security Council offices in Washington as part of the administration’s effort to build citizen diplomacy for its projects. Jorge Más Canosa, a Cuban exile, was brought on board by NSC employee Richard Allen to help organize the foundation.¹⁷

Más Canosa became president of the CANF board. As a young man, he had fought against the Batista dictatorship and later joined the Bay of Pigs invasion. Like others in the invasion forces, Más Canosa established ties with U.S. intelligence services. He worked his way up the economic ladder in Miami, eventually buying out the multimillion-dollar contracting firm where he worked. As its president, he anglicized the company’s name from *Iglesias y Torres* to *Church and Tower*.¹⁸ His company flourished with minority subcontracts from both the private and public sector. At the time Más Canosa was a member of *Representación Cubana en el Exilio* (Cuban Representation in Exile), or RECE, along with Félix Rodríguez, the CIA agent who helped kill Che Guevara. RECE was involved in terrorist acts throughout the late 1960s.

Although CANF’s stated aim was to bring democracy and capitalism to Cuba, its oligarchic structure stood in stark contrast to its espoused democratic goals. The CANF board was composed of two tiers: directors, who paid the organization an annual fee of ten thousand dollars, and trustees, who paid five thousand dollars yearly.¹⁹ Only the directors were permitted to vote on foundation matters. CANF’s board of directors consisted exclusively of male leaders drawn mainly from Miami’s financial and import-export sector. It was not until 1990 that the first women members came on board, and, even then, only three of its sixty-six directors and three of its seventy-two trustees were women.²⁰ Instead of promoting a

vision of democracy that respected the principles of representation and equal opportunity for all, CANF in practice embodied a set of values contrary to its stated purposes.

The board named Frank Calzón its first executive director. Calzón had been the director of "On Human Rights," a Washington-based group dedicated to publishing materials and lobbying Congress on human rights violations in Cuba. Yet the board was in conflict with its administrative staff, and Calzón, a Washington insider for many years, clashed with Más Canosa. Calzón was interested in maintaining pressure on Washington and did not want to stray too far from issues closely related to Cuba. Más Canosa, however, was becoming increasingly embroiled in political turf wars in Miami, such as local electoral races, while venturing into other foreign policy concerns, such as building support for the Angolan opposition. Calzón left the organization. CANF's subsequent director, José Antonio Font, later resigned in protest over Más Canosa's dictatorial style.

While CANF was the product of a maturing economic base in Miami, its initial legitimacy within the community was based on its ties to conservative young ideologues like Calzón and Font. But conflict with these men gave the pragmatist Más Canosa an opportunity to exert more control over CANF. Calzón, Font, and their ideological counterparts took refuge in other organizations, such as Freedom House.²¹ CANF's influence continued to increase. In its first year of operations it spawned two other organizations: the National Coalition for a Free Cuba, a PAC initially headed by Frank Hernández, president of Ago-Tech International, a company involved in agribusiness with Latin America; and the Cuban-American Public Affairs Council, a lobbying group (see table 6).

Although CANF claimed to be nonpartisan, the goals and projects for which it lobbied closely resembled many of Reagan's own priorities. For instance, CANF became part of the Reagan public diplomacy program to support the contras in Nicaragua. During this period Más Canosa would often say, "The way to Havana begins in Managua."²² CANF became a strong supporter of the rebels fighting the Cuban-backed government in Angola. In these efforts Más Canosa's organization helped the administration repeal the Clark amendment, which prohibited the White House from funding the rebels. It also helped build support for the Grenada invasion and was instrumental in helping the president pass his Caribbean Basin Tax Plan, which directly benefited the businessmen on the CANF board.

All the while the GOP continued to recruit Cuban exiles into its domestic and foreign policy projects. The Republicans created private citizens' groups to help raise funds for projects on which Congress had imposed spending limits, including military operations in Central Amer-

ica. One such group was Prodemca, a sister organization to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a federal agency that distributed monies to projects that supported the administration's foreign policy. By 1988 CANF had received a total of \$390,000 in federal funds from the NED to disseminate information about human rights in Cuba. In turn, the National Coalition for a Free Cuba reported that over the same period its members had contributed \$385,400 to various political campaigns.²³ Cuban exiles also supported Reagan's military actions in Central America by helping to train Nicaraguan opposition forces. The NED was one of the key governmental players in this conflict as well.

In return, the Reagan administration hardened its policies toward Cuba and sought ways to limit contact with the island. Indeed, in 1982 the Treasury Department found a way to restrict travel without violating the Constitution,²⁴ by issuing regulations prohibiting the transfer of U.S. currency to Cuba.²⁵ Although this action was challenged, the Supreme Court ruled that U.S. residents did not have a constitutional right to spend money and upheld the president's order.²⁶ The regulations exempted academics and professionals, all of whom were potential challengers to the regulations on First Amendment grounds. The provisions also exempted Cuban exiles with families on the island; the administration understood that, regardless of the public rhetoric in the exile community, the vast majority of exiles wanted to visit their homeland. Exemptions notwithstanding, the regulations marked the first time in U.S. history that travel was restricted during peacetime.

There was one arena in which U.S. policymaking withstood the lobbying pressure of CANF, and that was immigration policy. Despite opposition by the foundation to the Reagan administration's entering into treaty negotiations with Cuba, the administration stood its ground and reached a landmark accord with Cuba in its immigration agreement of 1984. The negotiators hoped to put in place a process that would help normalize immigration between the countries.

For different reasons both governments wanted to avoid another Mariel. The United States did not want another country to decide who entered its territory, as had happened during Mariel. It wanted a guarantee that, if someone entered the United States without permission, it could deport that person. Furthermore, it did not want a future immigration situation like Mariel, which had been a political liability to the Carter administration.²⁷ For Cuba it was important to have a way through which people who wanted to emigrate to the United States could do so in a timely and orderly manner. The agreement called for the United States to grant up to twenty thousand visas a year and for Cuba to accept "deportables." Some of these were Cubans who were deemed unacceptable upon their

arrival and had been sitting in U.S. jails since leaving the island through Mariel in 1980. Others were Cubans who were arrested after they had been released from Mariel processing camps. After the agreements were signed, the United States began deportations from an Atlanta prison camp. CANF and others protested fiercely, but the administration thought it was more important to regain the upper hand on immigration dealings with the island than to satisfy the Cuban émigré constituency.

Perhaps the clearest indication of CANF's relationship with the Reagan administration and the New Right were its actions in support of Radio José Martí, the U.S. government radio station beamed at Cuba.²⁸ Radio Martí had the effect of worsening relations between the two nations. The idea for the project first appeared in the report on Latin America by the Santa Fe group.²⁹ A radio program was necessary, according to the report, to prepare the terrain for Cuban freedom fighters in case the Castro government did not fall on its own. The group felt the range of issues covered by the Voice of the Americas program diluted the emphasis on Cuban issues. Radio Martí would have its own programming staff and editorial board that responded directly to the White House. The administration initiated the project, and Paula Hawkins, former Republican senator from Florida, introduced a bill in the Senate. Reagan formed the Commission of Broadcasting to Cuba as a means of developing support for the radio project and named two Cuban-Americans to its membership: Tirso de Junco, a Californian Republican, and Jorge Más Canosa.

The bill initially faced opposition, especially from U.S. broadcasters who were concerned about the Cuban government's threat to retaliate by jamming U.S. airwaves. Wayne Smith, chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, also feared that Cuba would cancel the immigration agreement that had been reached. But CANF played a key role for the administration in gathering nationwide support for the bill by lobbying Congress and running ads condemning those who did not support it.

CANF knew that early and strong involvement would give it a voice in shaping policy at Radio Martí. Since its inception top CANF leaders have been involved in Radio Martí, and it often has been perceived to be as much a CANF effort as a U.S. government project. CANF also expected that the station would provide a way of rewarding its supporters with government employment. After passage of the Radio Martí bill, Reagan named Ernesto Betancourt, a member of the CANF speakers bureau, as its first director.

The Cuban-American Committee, the progressive group that had been formed after the 1978 Dialogue, lobbied against the Radio Martí bill. This time the group was met not by terrorists and would-be terrorists but by a well-organized and well-financed right-wing lobbying group with

which it could not compete. The committee had high visibility in Washington through its executive director, but it never succeeded in reaching beyond the Washington Beltway and broadening its support in the Cuban exile community. Indeed, with the unraveling of the pro-normalization movement and the reduction of flights to Cuba, the committee lost its main source of financial support and in the mid-1980s temporarily closed its offices. Although it reopened a few years later with a new board (of which I was a member), the committee could not contend organizationally or financially with CANF, even though its new director, Alicia Torres, frequently appeared in the media in debate with Más Canosa.

Despite opposition efforts by the Cuban-American Committee, on May 20, 1985, the Reagan administration launched Radio Martí with the highly visible participation of the Cuban-American National Foundation. The Cuban government, having few cards to play, responded by suspending the 1984 immigration agreement with the Reagan administration on the return of Mariel prisoners and exit visas for political prisoners. More surprisingly, Cuba also suspended the accords of the Dialogue and for one year did not allow Cuban exiles to visit the island. Although the U.S. government had restricted travel by prohibiting the transfer of monies to the island, it had exempted Cubans with relatives in Cuba. In contrast, Fidel Castro prohibited visits to the island by all Cuban émigrés, including members of the Antonio Maceo Brigade who were sympathetic to the revolution.³⁰

Although this action was meant in part to send a message to the Cuban exile community, cancellation of the agreements also reflected the lack of coherent governmental policies toward émigrés. It further showed that Fidel Castro could make and unmake policy whenever he felt like it. The action surprised Dialogue supporters, since, in effect, it aligned the Cuban government with those who had consistently fought against the travel of Cuban exiles to Cuba—the most reactionary forces in the exile community.

In the fall of 1985 progressive Cuban émigrés organized a meeting in New York to develop a strategy to protest Cuba's actions. The meeting was held despite pressure from Cuban government officials stationed in New York and Washington to cancel the meeting. Included among the coalition were the Cuban-American Committee, El Circulo de Cultura Cubana, *Areíto*, the Antonio Maceo Brigade, Casa de las Americas, a group of émigrés from the 1950s, and Marazul, the travel agency that chartered flights to Cuba. By this time progressive émigré groups had lost political prestige in the community. The right that we had defended—to return to our homeland without fear of reprisal from the right wing—was now being denied by the Cuban government.

In the 1980s those who remained focused on trying to better relations with Cuba and were relegated to negotiating the number of visas and the price of trips. Given their lack of legitimacy in the exile community, these groups had little possibility of influencing either government. Indeed, many progressives in the exile community, particularly in the travel industry, developed economic interests that were best served by *not* pressuring the Cuban government.

After 1985 Cuba moved cautiously to reestablish contact with the exile community. Family visits resumed but only under very specific conditions generally related to narrowly defined humanitarian concerns. For example, exiles were issued reentry permits from the Cuban government to visit sick relatives on the island only after the exile procured a document from a physician in Cuba as evidence that the close relative he or she wished to visit was seriously ill. Often, by the time the paperwork was completed, the relative on the island had died.

The doors were also reopened to progressive Cubans who had been advocates for better relations. The credibility of these groups had been greatly damaged as a result of the events that unfolded after Cuba canceled Dialogue accords after the Mariel exodus. Many still believed that a new Cuban policy toward the community was possible but that it had to be based on more humanitarian concerns. One of their chief priorities was that the price of trips to Cuba be lowered.³¹

In Cuba the exile community again became a taboo topic. Gone were the images of the Antonio Maceo Brigade that filled the island's news screens in 1978 and the stories of reunifying visits as captured in *55 Hermanos*. Exiles disappeared from the pages and reels of the Cuban press, much as they had after the October Missile Crisis.³²

The exile characters found in popular culture were now more ambivalent. Such portrayals were exemplified by *Lejania*, the new film by Jesús Díaz, the director of *55 Hermanos*. Unlike *55 Hermanos*, which embrace returning exiles, *Lejania* is a fictional account of a mother returning to Cuba to see her son, who had not been allowed to leave with her because he was of military age. In the story the son fends off his mother's attempts to lure him with gifts, opting instead to stay and work for the revolution.

Yet, while progressive Cuban émigrés vanished from public view on the island, Cuba's suspension of the Dialogue enhanced these groups' visibility in the United States, as it forced Cuban émigrés who supported the accords to refocus their political activities on domestic issues. This, in turn, provided the basis upon which to build coalitions with other minorities. Many progressive Cubans had initially been radicalized in minority community movements, and these past political relations eased the process of building bridges.

Latinos and the GOP Electoral Strategy

The Republican strategy of fundamentally altering the course of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America was accompanied by a domestic electoral strategy that included reaching out to Latinos. Reagan suffered from what the media dubbed an “image” problem with minorities. African-Americans and Latinos generally supported the Democratic Party in higher numbers than the Republican Party, and Reagan was forced to make special efforts to bridge this gap. It was unclear how he might accomplish this turnaround, since minorities generally did not support his economic agenda, which called for reversing years of gains in social programs that had mostly benefited urban areas.

The Republicans were keenly ideological in their approach to politics and, as such, understood the impact of symbolism. Hence, not only did they accept Cuban exiles as supporters, but they also promoted many of them to key policy positions within the government. Many appointees had close links to CANF. Among the highest-level appointments were those of José Sorzano, a Georgetown University professor of political science, as ambassador to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and Otto Reich to various diplomatic posts. Not all appointments were concentrated in foreign policy; Reagan appointed Cuban exiles to positions within the bureaucracy having domestic policy functions as well.³³ Cubans were also given key positions within the Republican Party hierarchy. The powerful Republican Finance Committee invited Carlos Benitez, also on CANF’s board, to join its other nine members. In 1983 the party replaced the president of its National Hispanic Assembly, Fernando C. de Baca, a Mexican from New Mexico, with Tirso de Junco, a Cuban from California. Cubans were also handed the reins of several state-level Republican Party Hispanic Assemblies.

Cubans in Florida provided the Republican Party with a base from which to establish itself in the usually Democratic-controlled state. The electoral strategy there relied on fielding Cuban émigré candidates against Democrats. In 1982 this led to Manuel Yglesias, a young Cuban exile from Miami, running against Claude Pepper. Although Yglesias lost, the Republicans had made their point: unlike the Democrats, they were willing to support Cuban-American candidates.

In the summer of 1983 Reagan announced that he would run for a second term. Florida, Texas, and California were among the states he targeted as necessary to win the 1984 election. Key to the outcome in all three of these states were registered Latino voters. In the 1984 campaign the Republican Party made concerted efforts to capture at least 30 percent of the traditionally Democratic vote. As part of that strategy, the opening

speech at the presidential nominating convention was delivered by Katherine Ortega, Reagan's highest-ranking Latina. As one of the top fiscal policymakers in the country, the symbolism of Katherine Ortega signing all paper currency did not go unnoticed by Republican image makers.

While Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans generally did not support Reagan's domestic and foreign policies, especially those directed at Latin America, a significant number of Cubans did. Cuban exiles saw Reagan as a champion of anticommunism and quickly embraced him and the Republican Party. As a result, by the early 1980s the Democrats had lost their hold on registered Cuban voters. Yet their support for the Republican Party was based on more than simply ideological concerns. In part Cubans supported the GOP because it backed local Cuban-American candidates. Unlike the Democrats in Florida who were unwilling to promote Cuban émigré candidates and still clung to a conservative domestic agenda, including English-only provisions,³⁴ the Republicans were more willing to welcome Cuban exiles into the fold.

In addition, sectors of the Cuban exile community, particularly businesspeople, also benefited from Reagan's economic policies that denounced government spending and privatized many government services. Often this translated into contracts for Latino business organizations. One particularly lucrative State Department contract was awarded to the Cuban-American National Foundation. Under this \$1.7 million deal CANF would establish a program for Cubans held in third countries to be relocated to the United States. CANF would screen the applicants, make a recommendation to the Immigration and Naturalization Service on whether or not to issue a visa, relocate the exile, and provide basic services during the period of transition. From this program other Cuban émigré businesses received subcontracts to provide health care and employment counseling to the new arrivals.

In the 1980s the Republican Party wrote off the African-American community as hopelessly Democratic and concentrated on the Latino community as its own minority.³⁵ Among Latinos the Cuban community responded most enthusiastically to these overtures. Cubans provided a basis on which Republicans could claim Latino support, which they hoped might help their image problem with other minorities. In turn the Republican administration increased its appointment of Latinos, including a significant number of Cubans, to government positions. Cuban exiles fulfilled both foreign and domestic policy purposes for the Republicans as supporters of Reagan's foreign policy and a convenient minority for the image makers. In the 1984 elections 30 percent of the national Latino vote went to Reagan; this included 18 percent of the Puerto Rican vote, 30 percent of the Mexican vote, and an overwhelming 80 percent of the Cuban

vote.³⁶ Cuban émigrés had become an important constituency for Republicans in Florida.

In spite of the political successes of the Reagan-aligned Cuban exiles, they failed in their first attempts to elect a mayor in Miami. In the 1985 primary elections Maurice Ferré, a national Democrat and Puerto Rican incumbent, came in third. The run-off was between Raul Masvidal, a vocal supporter of Reagan and a CANF board member, and Xavier Suárez, a Harvard graduate exile. Miami voters opted for Suárez, the candidate who had been most visible on domestic issues. Although CANF had strong ties to the foreign policy arena, it had a weak electoral base in Miami and little experience in developing and managing a grassroots campaign. CANF members worked effectively as closed-door lobbyists and negotiators; initially, though, they were at a loss about how to articulate domestic issues and loathe to engage in the often banal public debate that is at the core of popular elections.

By 1989, however, CANF managed to pull off a local victory. Several years of wielding power in Washington and returning jobs and services to the Miami community had given the organization an electoral foothold. CANF, along with the Republican National Committee (RNC), succeeded in electing Ileana Ros-Lehtinen to fill the congressional seat vacated by the death of Claude Pepper. The victory came, in large part, because of the RNC's involvement and a general trend toward the election of women candidates. But CANF played an active role in Ros-Lehtinen's campaign and then positioned itself to take most of the credit for her win. Ros-Lehtinen became the first Cuban émigré elected to Congress. The Democratic candidate was Gerald Richmond, someone who had alienated the Cuban exile community by supporting the English-only movement.³⁷ The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials heralded the event by noting, "Ros-Lehtinen's victory marks a milestone in Latino politics as she is both the first Latina and the first Cuban-American to serve in Congress."³⁸ Ros-Lehtinen was immediately welcomed into the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. By 1992 there were eight Cuban state legislators, two state senators, and one congressional representative from South Florida in office. All were Republican.

While Republicans garnered more than 90 percent of the Miami Cuban-American vote in the 1980 elections, they fared less well with Cubans in northern and midwestern cities. The percentage of Cubans voting for Republicans ranged from 65 percent in New York to 68 percent in Chicago.³⁹ Outside the Miami enclave Cuban exiles were more supportive of a progressive social agenda and a less interventionist foreign policy. Cubans in northern urban areas suffered from the severe cutbacks in federal services of the 1980s and hence were less likely to support Republi-

cans. Equally important, outside of Miami (and New Jersey) the Cuban right wing was less dominant, and there were fewer acts of political repression against progressive Cuban exile activists.

In cities outside of Miami progressive Cubans joined in building minority electoral coalitions. In Chicago a small but significant group of Cuban-American Democrats participated in the 1983 mayoral election. More than 50 percent of Cubans voted for Harold Washington, a progressive Democrat who became the city's first African-American mayor, despite a well-organized campaign by the Cuban Right in support of the Republican candidate, Bernard Epton.⁴⁰ In the 1987 reelection campaign, of all Latinos surveyed by the Midwest Voter Registration and Education Project, Cubans gave Harold Washington the highest proportion of their vote.⁴¹ In Boston Cubans also played an important organizing role in Mel King's campaign for mayor. King, an African-American, had been a vocal supporter of progressive local and national causes. In Philadelphia and in Atlanta progressive Cubans continued to play a part in the largely minority urban coalitions that ran municipal government, becoming members and executive directors of mayors' commissions on Latino affairs.

Cubans in cities such as Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston were a minority among other Latinos. Unlike the Miami enclave, these Cubans achieved political viability through a shared experience with other Latino communities. This in turn has had an impact on their political worldview, broadening the political spectrum of Cuban communities outside of Miami.⁴²

This forging of alliances with other Latinos occurred on a national level as well. During the 1980 presidential elections progressive Cubans formed the Cuban-American Democratic Committee. They lobbied the Democratic Party with a document produced by the Cuban-American Committee, outlining a series of policy issues that affected Cuban émigrés and other Latinos.⁴³ These issues included high school dropout rates, services for the elderly, daycare needs, bilingual education for youth, and immigration policy. The foreign policy section of the document voiced support for peaceful solutions to the crises in Central America and the Caribbean.

The 1980 campaign effectively broke the monolithic hold that conservative Cuban-Americans had on the Democratic Party. Other progressive Latinos now envisioned new possibilities for the inclusion of Cuban émigrés within their coalition. This dynamic was particularly important at a time when demographic shifts and a decade of voting rights struggles were yielding increased numbers of registered Latino voters and, eventually, record numbers of Latino elected officials.

Cuban Exiles: Changing Politics and Identity

The immigration of 120,000 Cubans and the rise of a conservative president reversed the liberalizing trend under way in Miami during the Carter administration. In the 1980s the Republicans reclaimed the White House, arriving with a well-articulated policy program that called for cutbacks in social services and the strengthening of the U.S. position abroad. The foreign policy vision they crafted was one in which Central America and the Caribbean were the regions of the world in which the East-West confrontation would be defined.

While most Latinos are Democrats, Republicans targeted the Cuban émigré community. An alliance was forged between the New Right of the Republican Party and the right wing of the Cuban exile community that had not been accommodated by the Democrats in Florida. Unlike past administrations that had relegated Cuban exiles to fighting dirty wars, the Republicans in the 1980s brought Cuban exiles into the halls of government. The Reagan administration used these Cuban exile appointments and candidates to build an image of Latino support for its agenda. In short, Republicans promoted Cuban exiles to key positions within government and the party,⁴⁴ and Cubans in turn provided a degree of legitimation for hard-line Republican policies. As such, the relationship between Cuban exiles and the Republican Party now had a domestic function, signaling the emergence of Cuban exiles from solely foreign policy actors to domestic policy actors as well.

In the meantime a maturing economic base in the Cuban-American community demanded political avenues through which these new interests could be articulated and defended. Some of these interests centered on the maintenance of identity, such as language and national heritage. Since the relationship between Latinos and U.S. society has been marked historically by cultural conflict, Latino communities often have supported an agenda independent of government with regard to issues of identity. And, even though the reception accorded Mariel immigrants was mixed in the Cuban community, the overall negative reaction by the U.S. public contributed to a sense of ethnic awareness for the community as a whole.⁴⁵ While elements of the Cuban exile community have played a supporting role in the foreign policy arena and in the ongoing struggle of Latinos for affirmative action programs, bilingual education and services, and political representation, not all sectors of the émigré community are guaranteed allies of local power structures but, rather, potential collaborators with other minority communities.

During the 1980s Cuban-American political participation in lobbying

and partisan electoral activities proliferated. For the Right it was conducted under the guise of Republican Party legitimacy; for progressive Cubans political activism was carried out in coalition with other minority groups. Curiously, ethnicity was an important factor in both types of organizations.

The formation of the Cuban-American National Foundation exemplifies an ethnic lobby group that emerged from the convergence of two important factors: the solidifying of an émigré community's own economic and political base *and* its common interests with the government.⁴⁶ CANF and the Reagan administration shared a view of the world and of Cuba in particular. In this case the émigré lobby also served a symbolic domestic function for the Republicans, allowing the GOP to claim that it had support from an important sector of a "minority" community.

When CANF and the administration disagreed, the administration prevailed in some instances and not in others. Yet the privileged status enjoyed by CANF as a result of its relationship to the Reagan administration provided Cuban exiles with sufficient resources, power, and knowledge of how government works to make them formidable opponents when such disagreements did arise.

The 1980s witnessed the exile community's transition from marginal political actors into the realm of mainstream politics—an impressive leap accomplished in fewer than twenty years. The transition was accomplished not only through lobbying at the national level but by building a local economic and political base. This dual power base resulted in greater influence in Washington as well as in the election of local and federal officials. The unique relationship between Cuban exiles and the American state, of course, facilitated this transition, as did its timing, with the émigré community coming of age politically in the 1980s—what has been called the decade of Hispanics.

It was also in the 1980s that the notion of "Cuban-American" became more prevalent. This change in self-definition from exile to hyphenated immigrant group is precipitated by an intent to participate in host country politics on a larger scale—to broaden the community's agenda from its singular focus on homeland and to exert its political capital in areas other than immigration or foreign policy. Nevertheless, as is the case with all hyphenated identities, concerns about homeland persisted.