

THE EMERGENCE OF CENTRAL FLORIDA'S PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY

by

CYNTHIA CARDONA MELÉNDEZ  
B.A. University of Central Florida, 1997

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## **ABSTRACT**

As with many cities in Florida, Orlando is becoming a melting pot of various ethnic groups. In particular, the Hispanic population in Orlando and throughout Central Florida is steadily increasing in numbers and influence. Groups such as Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Colombians are enriching the area with their culture, language, and diversity. Puerto Ricans, the largest of the Hispanic groups in Central Florida, are also emerging as the dominant group in the region as evidenced by their common language, historical and cultural heritage, shared common interests, and in some cases, residence within clear geographical areas.

Between 1980 and 1990, Central Florida witnessed its largest influx of Puerto Ricans. In 1980, Orange County had a little over 6,660 Puerto Rican residents, Seminole County had over 2,000 and Osceola County had a mere 417. These numbers rose steadily, and by 2003, the Puerto Rican population in Florida numbered 571,000, ranking second behind New York, and followed only by New Jersey. Central Florida has seen the biggest jump in these numbers and now has more than 250,000 Hispanics of Puerto Rican origin making them the largest single group of Hispanics in the region. They now represent 49 percent of all Hispanics living in Central Florida.<sup>1</sup>

My thesis examines the development of the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida, its impact, and its contributions by utilizing such sources as newspaper articles from local papers including Spanish-language papers, interviews with Hispanic community leaders, statistical data, and secondary literature on the overall Puerto Rican

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "American Community Survey: 2003 Data Profile."; "Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF1) 100 Percent Data."

migration to the United States and their experiences once here. To fully understand why the Puerto Rican community is developing in the Orlando area, I first place the analysis within the larger scope of immigration history. In this section, I examine some of the debates and patterns in overall immigration to the United States by various groups.

Next, I provide a brief introduction to the history of the Puerto Rican people and the reasons for their migration to the United States and how this migration fits into the patterns examined in the first section. Furthermore, this introduction leads to an examination of other cities with large Puerto Rican communities and a comparison between the development of Puerto Rican communities in these cities and Central Florida.

Finally, I explore the origin of the majority of Puerto Rican's moving to Central Florida, to discover if they are coming from the U.S. cities that originally saw a huge influx of Puerto Rican immigration (such as New York) or if the population is arriving directly from Puerto Rico. This determination sheds light on why the Puerto Rican population is choosing Central Florida as a place for settlement. I analyze my findings by examining factors such as better employment opportunities, better educational opportunities, and an overall improvement in quality of life, which are drawing Puerto Ricans to this area, when compared to these factors or conditions in Puerto Rico or other cities in Florida. In addition, I seek to determine if there are specific problems occurring in Puerto Rican cities that are compelling native-born Puerto Ricans to leave.

I also examine the ways that the growing presence of Puerto Ricans has changed Central Florida economically, socially, and politically. I also discuss the

effectiveness of Puerto Rican organizations that have arisen to serve the needs of this population and I seek to gain some indication of the long term implications for the region as a whole, especially in terms of their voting trends. Culminating this section is a description of the unique cultural contributions that the Puerto Rican community is bringing to the area.

My thesis proves that Puerto Ricans are finding the Central Florida area is offering them many of the opportunities that cities such as New York City provided them long ago. In addition, it offers the added appeal of a better quality of life than can be found in Puerto Rico or in other American cities, such as New York City. Among the important factors here are affordable housing, good employment opportunities, and more adequate schools.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

PRFAA	Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration
PNP	<i>Partido Nuevo Progresista de Puerto Rico</i> or New Progressive Party
PPD	<i>Partido Popular Democrático de Puerto Rico</i> or Popular Democratic Party

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Technically speaking, Puerto Ricans are not immigrants to the United States. They are citizens of this country, but they are not citizens of the fifty states that make up the union. Instead since 1952 they are citizens of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and, hence, occupy an anomalous position within the nation. In their traditions they are Hispanic and Caribbean people and their first language is Spanish. During the twentieth century, after Spain relinquished the island to the United States in 1898 following the Spanish American War, large numbers of Puerto Ricans migrated from their island to the United States. They formed their first communities in New York City and later gravitated towards Chicago, Illinois and part of the state of New Jersey. Most recently they have moved to Central Florida in migratory streams from New York City and the Commonwealth. In Florida their numbers have grown so rapidly that in two decades they have become the largest Hispanic group in the Greater Orlando community and a growing political, social, and economic force in the state. Their growing presence in Central Florida may, in fact, be giving them greater power as voters than they have enjoyed elsewhere in the contiguous forty eight states.

Although Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States, their former colonial status and their Hispanic and Caribbean heritage means that they have faced some of the problems and challenges that immigrants from foreign nations have confronted in the past. These include the uprooting of families, the facing of language barriers, and the need to make wrenching adjustments to a new and strange land with its own set of laws and traditions and, unfortunately, its own prejudices and patterns of discrimination. Hence, the movement of Puerto Ricans to the United States, before and after their

attainment of citizenship, is part of the broader history of immigration of this nation. For that reason, this study will place Puerto Ricans in the larger historical context of American immigration. It will also provide a brief review of the historical literature of immigration as a way of identifying the major questions and issues that historians have raised regarding the experiences of immigrants. In that way, where applicable, those same questions and issues will be raised and examined regarding Puerto Rican immigrants in both the United States at large and the community they have formed in Central Florida.

Migration is defined as the massive movement of peoples stemming from voluntary choice, forced removal, or great economic, political, or social upheaval.<sup>1</sup> As a result, individuals and families take up residence in countries where they are not native born. In the United States, immigration has helped to populate this nation and has played a pivotal role in the formation of its society and culture. An intricate process of cultural contact and interaction has shaped American art, literature, music, technology, and cultural beliefs and practices. While generally an enriching process, immigration to the United States has also had its tumultuous aspects.

Often seen only as newcomers to an already established society, immigrants have contributed to the creation of a perpetually evolving national American character. When expanses of cheap land were available, immigrants, largely from the British Isles and Western Europe, poured into the English colonies of North America throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As the colonies achieved independence and the

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Daniels, *American Immigration: A Student Companion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10-12.

new nation began urbanizing in the nineteenth century, large numbers of Irish and Germans arrived and settled primarily in the Northeast and the Midwest. After the pace of industrialization transformed the United States into the world's largest producer of manufactured goods, Eastern and Southern Europe provided the largest number of immigrants in the increasingly overcrowded cities. Termed the "new" immigrants and usually impoverished and, thus, arriving in the overcrowded holds of passenger ships, they were quarantined for fear of tuberculosis, cholera, and trachoma, a contagious eye disease resulting in blindness. Afterwards, those who stayed in the port cities or headed toward the larger cities of the interior had no choice but to live in slums close to their place of employment and in crowded, unsafe, and wretched tenements. In addition, immigrants, such as the Irish who were Catholic and the "new" immigrants who were often Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Jewish, confronted religious prejudice and an extreme American ethnocentrism that sought to restrict their citizenship and voting rights. On the whole, however, the attitudes towards immigrants, while often prejudiced, varied over time. For those reasons, historians have divided immigration history into four distinct periods.<sup>2</sup>

The first period, known as the Formative Period, began at the turn of the seventeenth century and ended around 1815. During this period, immigrants came predominantly from either the British Isles or Africa. Nearly one million people came to that part of North America that became the United States during this time and of these,

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<sup>2</sup> Daniels, *American Immigration*, 19-25; An example of restriction is the *Immigration Act of 1917*, Public Law 301, 64<sup>th</sup> Cong. (5 February 1917) also known as the Barred Zone Act; its major provision was a literacy test for future immigrants which the Immigration Restriction League hoped would exclude illiterate immigrants.

more than half consisted of slaves, indentured servants, or convicts. By the 1700s, Germans and Scots-Irish started to make their way to America. Arriving primarily in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, German immigrants were the first large wave of free political aliens unfamiliar with the English language and customs who were able to make a lasting impact on American society, primarily due to the large proportion of families that arrived among the newcomers which provided a strong base from which to draw support from in the adjustment of their new home.<sup>3</sup>

Rebellions and political disorder in Scotland and Ireland in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries created many political exiles who immigrated to America often reluctantly and with regret. Many came as indentured servants. In Ireland, large numbers of Scots-Irish who had originally gone to Ireland from Scotland at the request of the English crown, now faced high tariffs against their woolen cloths and a large increase in land rents. In increasing numbers they made their way to Pennsylvania, Maryland and North Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

Following the American Revolution, Congress passed a series of acts that greatly affected immigrants. In 1795, the Naturalization Act restricted citizenship to “free white persons” who resided in the United States for five years and renounced their allegiance

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<sup>3</sup> Daniels, *American Immigration*, 121-124; Richard O’ Connor, *The German-Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), 22-26; Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 37-57.

<sup>4</sup> James Graham Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 10-12.

to their former country.<sup>5</sup> The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, passed during an undeclared war with France, permitted the president to deport any foreigner deemed dangerous and a threat to the nation's peace and safety.<sup>6</sup> The Sedition Act called for a fine and imprisonment for persons convicted of publishing any false or scandalous writing attacking the U.S. government, Congress or the President. Finally, the twenty-year period prescribed in the Constitution during which the slave trade had been allowed to continue before Congress re-examined the subject, came to an end in 1808. Largely at the instigation of anti-slavery groups, the federal government prohibited the further importation of slaves into the United States for sale.<sup>7</sup> The end of the importation of slaves and the conclusion of the War of 1812, late in 1814, brought to an end the Formative Period of immigration.

The second period of immigration, known as the "Long" Nineteenth Century, lasted from 1815 until 1924 and brought 36 million immigrants to the United States. As a result of this vast increase, native-born Americans attempted to place restrictions on immigration and engaged in acts of discrimination against immigrants already here.<sup>8</sup> The first nationalities to immigrate to America in large numbers during this period were

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<sup>5</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2d sess (29 January 1795); Daniels, *American Immigration*, 9. Intended to exclude Africans and indentured servants, the Supreme Court later interpreted the act to include Asians in the 1880s.

<sup>6</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess (14 July 1798); Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Daniels, *American Immigration*, 9.; *Slave Trade Prohibition Act*, 9<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess (2 March 1807). This act although passed in 1807 did not prohibit the importation of slaves until January 1, 1808.

<sup>8</sup> Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 10-26.

the Irish and Germans. Each group faced discrimination--the Irish, as noted earlier, because of their Catholicism and its perceived allegiance to the Papacy in Rome, the Germans because of their foreign language and distinctly different culture. On the West Coast, beginning in 1848, Chinese driven from the Kwantung Province by poverty and overcrowding came next to prospect for gold and to work on the nation's first transcontinental railroad. The Chinese faced especially harsh discrimination and racial violence at the hands of white workers who saw them as a threat to labor organization and the country's supposed Anglo-Saxon purity.<sup>9</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, the last great group of European immigrants arrived in America, coming primarily from southern, central, and eastern Europe and including for the first time a large Jewish population. These groups were perceived as even more alien than the preceding European immigrant groups, and hence were more likely to experience prejudice from native-born citizens.

The Irish who traveled to America during this period represent the classic "push" migration that has been paramount in American immigration history and has formed the U.S. view of immigration. The Irish left Ireland for several reasons. First, the country's population had increased from 4.8 million in 1791 to 8.2 million in 1841.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the country experienced a general lack of economic opportunity, resulting in high unemployment. Second, an acre and a half of potatoes fed an Irish family of six and for most people was their only source of food. A fungus destroyed

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<sup>9</sup> Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 55-64.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1970), 5-11.

most of the country's potato crops beginning in 1844 and, hitting especially hard in 1847, caused a potato famine that resulted in the death of nearly 1 million people.<sup>11</sup> As the population decreased, 1.5 million survivors of the famine found their way to America.

The Irish, unlike other immigrant groups, sent more young women than men in their initial waves of immigration. Predominantly populating the northeastern cities of Boston and New York City, the Irish became the most urbanized nineteenth century immigrant group. Not only did subsequent generations of Irish men move into positions of power in the Catholic Church, they soon dominated the new urban occupations of policing and firefighting, at a time when the host society viewed these positions unfavorably.<sup>12</sup> In addition, within a generation the Irish were the first immigrant group to become so heavily involved in urban politics that they soon controlled local politics in New York City and Boston, much to the dismay of other immigrant groups moving into those areas. The Irish passion for politics was also evident in their ongoing campaign for Irish independence as they created organizations that still work towards that objective for Northern Ireland today and its unification with the Republic of Ireland.<sup>13</sup>

As a response to these waves of immigration many native-born Americans began calling for legislation eliminating immigration entirely. Nativists argued that immigrants were willing to work for lower wages than native-borns, and that they were

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<sup>11</sup> Daniels, *American Immigration*, 159. See also Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughter's in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Wittke, *Irish in America*, 103-110.

<sup>13</sup> Daniels, *American Immigration*, 159.



overpopulating the cities and threatening traditional American culture.<sup>14</sup> For example, they stereotyped the Irish as drunkards and criminals, whose poverty was self-generated while the Chinese were portrayed as opium addicts whose alleged personal degradation represented the “yellow peril.” Actually, Chinese workers’ main vices were that they were willing to work harder for lower wages and live more frugally than American workers, in part because they came as “birds of passage” without wives and with the intention of one day returning home. The prejudice against them was so strong that it resulted in the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which restricted Chinese immigration.<sup>15</sup>

Further restrictions on immigrants followed. In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt negotiated the so-called Gentleman’s Agreement, which forced the Japanese to restrict the immigration of their people to the United States. That same year, the Expatriation Act declared that an American woman who married a foreign national would lose her citizenship.<sup>16</sup> In 1924 the Johnson-Reed Act, which ended the second

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<sup>14</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 316-24. In 1843 the American Republican Party was created by masters and journeymen in the trades. The party’s platform was driven less by workshop grievances than by revulsion at the supposedly corrupting moral and political consequences of Catholic immigration and the immigration of Eastern Europeans. Its most respected member was publisher John Harper.

<sup>15</sup> 47<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess (6 May 1882). The proper title of the Chinese Exclusion Act is “To Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese” and its goal was to prohibit the entry of Chinese laborers. This act initiated an era of steadily increasing restrictions on immigration that lasted until 1943 when the Chinese and the United States were fighting against the Axis Powers.

<sup>16</sup> Teresa O’Neill, ed., *Immigration: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1992), 243; Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies:*

period of immigration and inaugurated the era of restriction, targeted the “new” immigrants. The law limited annual European immigration to 2 percent of the number of any nationality group in the United States in the 1890s. Thus Italians, Poles, and other Central Europeans felt the effects the strongest as the act restricted immigration from southern, central, and eastern Europe to a total of 300,000 a year.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the act excluded Chinese laborers, criminals, people with diseases, radicals, anarchists, and illiterates. With the onset of the Great Depression, economic hardship affected the entire country. Since fewer jobs were available, the number of immigrants entering the country declined. By 1943, the government felt comfortable enough with the reduction in numbers of immigrants to repeal, in particular, the Chinese Exclusion Act partly because China became an ally of the United States during World War II.<sup>18</sup>

The restrictions imposed on the Chinese and southern, central, and eastern Europeans during this third period of immigration resulted in an increase in the number of Mexicans who came to the United States, since there were practically no limits on immigration from the Western Hemisphere. Except for circular migration in border regions, there had been little migration from Mexico during the later decades of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, however, the expansion of agriculture in the Southwest, resulting from large-scale federal irrigation projects, had led to an

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*Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 41-43; Public Law 193, 59<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess (2 March 1907).

<sup>17</sup> Public Law 139, 68<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess (26 May 1924); Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 49-58.

<sup>18</sup> Daniels, *American Immigration*, 14; Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 70-75.

increased demand for farm laborers.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the upheavals of the Mexican Revolution sent many Mexicans fleeing across the border. The onset of World War I created additional labor shortages in America, which fueled further immigration from Mexico. Once here, Mexicans faced harsh discrimination, including segregated schools, limited employment opportunities, and inferior housing. Once their labor was no longer needed, the situation for Mexicans worsened. During the Great Depression, at least 350,000 Mexicans, and possibly as many as 600,000, mostly men, were rounded up and deported to Mexico. Many left behind families now headed by wives who, too frightened to seek relief or charity, sank into abject poverty, mitigated only by the sparse wages their children could earn as pecan shellers or hand sewers in the cities of the Southwest.<sup>20</sup>

With World War II came more labor shortages in the United States. The federal government, in cooperation with the Mexican government, set out to create a bilateral labor agreement.<sup>21</sup> In August 1942, the federal government created the Bracero Program, certifying Mexican farm workers' employment in the United States, exempting them from service in the American military, protecting them against racial discrimination in the U.S., and providing wage level guarantees. Further, the government paid for travel back to Mexico upon the expiration of their contracts. As a result of these positive

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<sup>19</sup> David Gutierrez. *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 57-65.

<sup>20</sup> Julia Blackwelder, *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1984), 190-200; Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 72.

<sup>21</sup> Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 133-138.

conditions, 200,000 Mexican workers came to the United States between 1942 and 1947. By 1964, the Bracero Program ended due to pressure from labor unions. After its demise, Mexican immigration briefly subsided as an issue in national politics, ushering in the next era for immigration.<sup>22</sup>

The fourth period of immigration, the Era of Renewal, began with President Lyndon Baines Johnson's "Great Society" and continues today. After the tumult over immigration policy during the 1950s, the debate waned considerably in the early 1960s. Then, in 1965, Congress eliminated the quota system entirely and replaced it with equal numerical caps for each hemisphere.<sup>23</sup> The Immigration Act of 1965 granted preferred status to close relatives of both U.S. citizens and resident aliens. All this resulted in an increase in the number of immigrants coming from Latin America, Asia, the Caribbean, the Ukraine, and Russia. Unlike previous waves of immigration, many of these immigrants were well educated and highly skilled. Even so, many still encountered severe discrimination. Like previous immigrants, however, they too were seeking a piece of the American dream.<sup>24</sup>

Given this overview of the history of American immigration, the historiography of the subject is vast and as varied as the people who have made the journey to America. Until the 1920s, however, immigration was largely ignored as a topic of research and debate. A form of ancestor worship, writings on immigration prior to the 1920s, paid

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>23</sup> *Immigration Act of 1965*, Public Law 236, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess (3 October 1965).

<sup>24</sup> Daniels, *American Immigration*, 16-17.

homage to particular ethnic groups, especially the original British colonists and their accomplishments once in America. The 1927 publication of Marcus Lee Hansen's "The History of American Immigration as a Field of Research" in the *American Historical Review* ushered in a new era for the subject and forced a reinterpretation of American immigration history.<sup>25</sup> Scholars began to analyze not just the immigrants themselves, but also the effects immigration had on the United States as a nation.

Hansen believed that only by understanding the history of immigration could one understand American national development. The posthumous publication of nine of his essays in *The Immigrant in American History* convinced historians that the source material existed to research immigrants. Hansen, moreover, provided them with the methods to do so. Having done extensive research in Europe, he stressed the importance of its history in understanding the culture of the people who had left the continent. Most important, Hansen examined the economic, political, and social crises that had caused people to emigrate. Finally, he placed the immigrants and their cultural heritage in the context of American history.<sup>26</sup>

Taking the work of Hansen a step further, Harvard historian Oscar Handlin revolutionized immigration historiography by arguing that it was not possible to understand American history without understanding those who immigrated to the United

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<sup>25</sup> Marcus Lee Hansen, "The History of American Immigration as a Field of Research," *American Historical Review* 32 (April 1927): 500-18.

<sup>26</sup> Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Immigrant in American History* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1940), 192-193.

States. In short, immigration history was American history.<sup>27</sup> Handlin, moreover, was the first historian to consider how coming to America affected the immigrants themselves. He concluded that the immigrant experience was one of great upheaval and alienation. In his view, the cultural shock of immigration was so overwhelming that many immigrants never recovered. Thus, only later generations fully benefited from immigration since the first generation never gained acceptance in American society. A strange culture, people, and customs forced immigrants to cling to their ethnic traditions as their only source of stability; that, in turn, made their integration into American society even more difficult.

Handlin's landmark work, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*, published in 1951, is an examination of the emigrants' encounter with American society and their attempts to adjust to a new land. Handlin's thesis, while not focusing on any particular group, is that in emigrating from their native lands, people became alienated from both their past and their present. Cutting themselves off from the very cultures that had shaped them, immigrants were unable to assimilate into their new environment. Alienated, they doubted they could ever belong in their new home and suffered from the consciousness that they were strangers. The dramatic shock that they experienced affected even their descendants.<sup>28</sup>

Writing in very general terms, Handlin began his argument by considering the peasant origins of immigrants. In these origins, Handlin maintained, one finds the roots

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<sup>27</sup> O'Neill, *Immigration*, 262. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), 3.

of the conflicts immigrants would face in America. Most immigrants were from European villages with defined boundaries that represented the concept of community to them. In addition, the village provided the immigrant with kinship ties, resulting in a feeling of general stability. This stability, especially within the family, perpetuated the village and its way of life. According to Handlin, population increases in Europe, declining death rates, and transformations in European agriculture, arising from vast consolidations of small land plots and mechanization, forced inhabitants to emigrate.<sup>29</sup>

In America, the immigrant found himself in a cultural and urban environment completely different from the familiar territory of his village. Lacking the skills he needed in this industrial environment, he had to take on menial jobs such as janitoring or street sweeping. In addition, he had to adapt to life in a city where commerce, industry, and mechanization dominated all activities and relationships.<sup>30</sup>

This new environment did not suit the agrarian immigrant. Even those newcomers who accepted work in industry found the change painful, both mentally and physically. Finally, work in the cities was not stable and the recurrent job loss increased the immigrant's insecurity. Even when the immigrant managed to earn enough money to provide for himself and his family, spending it also became a challenge. Without a clear conception of the relationship of money to goods, the immigrant was forced to use the expensive credit system in place in America. According to Handlin, all of this created in the immigrant a feeling of inadequacy. The immigrant saw himself as merely hired

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<sup>28</sup> Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 44-48.

labor, forced to compete for work and goods. His only hope was that perhaps his suffering might result in better circumstances for his descendants.<sup>31</sup>

Creating *The Uprooted* at a time when gender and family roles were rarely discussed in historical works, Handlin devoted little attention to the role of women in the immigration process or the effect immigration had on them as whole. What Handlin did describe was reliance on the part of the immigrant family on the village. Within this village, family was of paramount importance and revolved around the husband and wife. The man was the head of the household, controlling all its goods, making vital decisions, and providing a source of authority.<sup>32</sup> The woman's domain was the home, which was key, since the home acted as an economic unit within the village in a system of communal living and mutual assistance. Emigration from Europe ended this way of life.

Immigration took the family out of the village and the disruptive nature of that move was difficult for the people involved. The counsel and assistance that the village had once provided was now gone. The numerous decisions to be made in the immigrant's new environment had to be made by the family alone. Finally, the economic unity of the common household enterprise disappeared, forcing the woman of the house, in many cases, to seek outside employment and deepening the man's

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 8-9.



feeling of inadequacy regarding his ability to provide for his family in this strange new environment.<sup>33</sup>

Handlin continued his work in immigration history with the publication of *Children of the Uprooted*, a book that discusses the children of immigrants. In his opinion, they considered themselves a marginal group occupying a place somewhere between the culture of their parents and the dominant American culture. Not a psychological or sociological study, it consists of selections of writings of the children of immigrants, some of which reflect the tensions of those who felt themselves marginalized and experienced the continuing ache of uprootedness. The selections are organized into three periods-1845 to 1890, 1890 to 1920, and 1920 to 1965- and represent material culled from the literary activities of members of a score of nationality groups.

Handlin's thesis in this work holds that newly arrived immigrants rested their hope for stability and success in America on their children. Unfortunately, this placed the second generation in a difficult position. Its members grew up immigrant while at the same time they were shaped by a new society that was now their home. This dynamic created a rift between the uprooted immigrants and their children, especially if

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 233-238. David J. Rothman, "The Uprooted: Thirty Years Later," *Reviews in American History* 10 (September 1982): 312. Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 21-36. *The Uprooted*, according to historian David J. Rothman, was important not only for bringing to light the plight of the immigrant but also for its historiographical method and style. First, it is interdisciplinary. Handlin, among the very first American historians to recognize the contributions sociology could make to history, drew upon its concepts and findings. By examining the immigrant as a "peasant", Handlin offered the reader, a means of understanding the process and direction of social change as it pertained to immigrants. Second, although *The Uprooted* incorporated social science, Handlin avoided jargon. His accessible style attracted a large audience without ignoring the disciplinary rules of his craft or sacrificing his standards of research.

the children made their way more easily in the new society because of public schooling or increased employment opportunities. Handlin further argued that the second generation and subsequent generations hold a significant place in the final story of immigration history and, therefore cannot be overlooked. This was especially true once the United States had developed its own political, economic, and social character, and its own fervent patriotism in the nineteenth century. The children of later immigrants thus, had to contend with a national American culture and heritage already in place and one that was often hostile to their presence.<sup>34</sup>

That hostility was heightened when native-born Americans began to view the “new” immigrant population- the flow of peasant and ghetto peoples from Italy, Austria-Hungary, the Balkan states, and Russia- as so distinctive that they threatened what was called “the American way of life.” The sons and daughters of these immigrants, despite their differences from their parents, retained their ethnic identity among native- born Americans. Beginning with the 1880s, Handlin noted, calls for restriction upon immigration became commonplace. For example, in 1883 economists who founded the American Economic Association offered a prize of \$150 for the best essay on “the evil effects of unrestricted immigration.”<sup>35</sup>

The debate over restriction, Handlin continued, influenced the way Americans understood the second generation. Those against restriction saw this generation as the hope for the future and expected them to contribute to the richness of life in the United

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<sup>34</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Children of the Uprooted* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1966), 5.

States. Americans in favor of restrictions saw them as alien elements since, in their view, they had failed to shed their Old World traits completely. This, in their minds, justified limiting the number of new arrivals until the old ones could be culturally absorbed.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, ethnocentric writers such as Grant Madison were alarmed at the prospect of the second generation assimilating into American society. Viewing the issue as biological rather than cultural, assimilation to them meant the insertion of inferior racial traits and strains into the American bloodstream. According to Handlin, this group of writers was in the minority and lacked a true understanding of the second generation. The second generation was alien to the culture of both their parents and the host society. They had residual ethnic cultural traits that prevented them from participating fully in life around them. In some instances, members of the second generation could assimilate by changing their names, changing their manner of dress, or even intermarrying. Even so, Handlin contended, this group still felt marginalized and still harbored doubts about ever blending in with American society.<sup>37</sup>

Among the writings Handlin included in his book were those of the Harvard philosopher Josiah Royce who wrote about the difficulties he and his English family experienced when they crossed the continent in a hard journey to settle in the frontier. Another contributor, John A. Ryan, an Irishman from Minnesota, wrote about the social

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. See also John Higham, "Origins of Immigration Restriction, 1882-1897: A Social Analysis," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39 (June 1952): 79.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 6.

program of the Catholic Church, and Pardee Lowe described the customs of the Chinese in California. Writings by historians Arthur M. Schlesinger and Marcus L. Hansen, themselves sons of immigrants, also appear in this volume and are more specifically relate to the history of immigration.<sup>38</sup> Schlesinger's article, "The American-A New Man," sought an answer to the question, "What is American national character?" He concluded that American culture resulted from the interplay of Old World influences and New World conditions. In short, Schlesinger argued that immigrants are American and are as influential as the native born in determining, creating, and defining American national character.<sup>39</sup>

Hansen's essay, "The Third Generation," asserted that second generation immigrants in the United States, while traditionally viewed as resistant to assimilation, could no longer be considered immigrants. In order to assimilate, this generation accommodated itself to its surroundings mainly by improving its economic status. The second generation, often in rebellion against parental and family authority, therefore, was simply often not interested in preserving or writing about any of its history. After all, the second generation had the difficult task of inhabiting two worlds. Their heritage of language, religion, customs, and parental authority were not overthrown entirely simply because they were in a new land. Nonetheless, that was exactly what their parents

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 31-45; 143-150; 299-320.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 196, 215.

often thought they were doing- throwing away their traditions and assimilating entirely into American society.<sup>40</sup>

According to Hansen, hope for preserving immigrant history was in the hands of third generation descendants of immigrant families, those born in America and possessing no feelings of inferiority of any kind. Whenever any immigrant group reached that stage in its development, a spontaneous impulse arose, resulting in an interest in family and ethnic heritage. The third generation was the one most likely to investigate and pass on its ethnic history.<sup>41</sup>

For many years, Oscar Handlin's view of immigration as an alienating experience dominated historical thinking. The 1970s, however, brought an ethnic awakening that changed the ways in which the immigrant experience was interpreted. Immigrants no longer had to become fully Americanized in order to be valid members of American society. Ethnic groups now asserted their pride in their own traditions, leading historians to reinterpret the immigrant experience. In this context, historian John Bodnar, in *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*, viewed the immigrants' efforts to remain in touch with their Old World ties as a positive factor in their adjustment to American life. Rather than perpetuating their isolation, he argued, ethnic enclaves and networks eased the immigrants' entrance into life in America.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 257. For information on the assimilation and education of immigrant children, see Selma Berrol, *Growing Up American: Immigrant Children in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995) and Bernard Weiss, *American Education and the European Immigrant, 1840-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 271.

Bodnar maintained that the immigrants who came to America in the nineteenth and early twentieth century left their homeland in order to find a place in the new economic order of capitalism as found in urban America. Their ultimate goal was to secure the welfare and well being of their family or household. In addition, immigration and capitalism, as they developed in the United States, were inextricably intertwined. Immigrants provided the inexpensive labor American industry needed to supply the domestic market and increasing overseas demand for American staples. A smaller but no less influential group of well-educated, highly skilled immigrants brought to the U.S. the innovation needed for industrial growth in America.<sup>42</sup>

Bodnar argued further that emigration was caused by the forces of industrial expansion both in the United States and Europe. Like Handlin, Bodnar agreed that the old order of nobles and peasants was coming to an end in Europe and states that two manifestations of capitalism, manufactured goods and commercial agriculture, were replacing them. In short, the immigrant did not encounter capitalism for the first time in America but had already witnessed the beginnings of it in Europe. Further, immigrants, when making the decision to leave for America, were simply moving from one capitalist society to another. Thus, they were already well equipped to compete in the New World. Although many immigrants may not have achieved economic success, adaptation to their new surroundings was successful. Further, immigrants were not alienated from their past and future as Handlin suggested. Thus, their decision to leave

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<sup>42</sup> John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 54-57.

their homelands was not necessarily traumatizing. Rather, it was seen as a way of creating a brighter future.<sup>43</sup>

According to Bodnar, intact family units were the predominant form in which all immigrants entered the American industrial-urban economy and around which they ordered their lives. Since the immediate goal of the immigrant was family and household welfare, families did not wither within the capitalist system. Immigrant families remained functional because of the value they placed on cooperation. Further, communal associations and a vast network of kin allowed the immigrant to obtain work, food, shelter and order. As he emphasized, these circumstances did not create isolation but instead eased transition into the capitalist system of the United States.<sup>44</sup>

Like Oscar Handlin, Bodnar did not write about any particular ethnic group, but rather about the entire immigrant saga comprised of all groups and all cities. This fact does not allow for much mention of women or their roles within this immigrant saga. Bodnar instead focused on the experiences of adult male immigrants and their roles as wage earners, entrepreneurs, their role in the church, and their role as mediators between the family unit and the world of capitalism. Nonetheless, Bodnar saw the immigrant family not as culturally alien but rather as a unit that shared values that were compatible with those of American families in general. Both American and immigrant families believed that wives and mothers belonged in the home. It was children who were more likely to be sent into the labor force.<sup>45</sup> According to Bodnar, since women

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 75-79.

had an intimate knowledge of family finances and needs, men often turned their paychecks over to their wives. Women, to a remarkable extent, usually made the decisions to initiate small immigrant family businesses and were in charge of daily and long range expenditures. In short, the immigrant family, rather than having an obstacle to adjustment to American life was closer to the companionate family U.S. citizens idealized.

Giving women a voice in immigration history missing in the writings of Handlin and Bodnar, is *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990* by Donna Gabaccia. Immigrant women, Gabaccia held, did not simply adjust to American life, they redefined the meaning of American womanhood by developing an American ethnic, class and gender identity.<sup>46</sup> Their experiences were similar to those of native-born women who migrated from country to city, poor women who struggled to survive and prosper, and native-born minorities such as African-Americans seeking dignity and acceptance as Americans. Further, most immigrant women embraced American domesticity and then transformed it by weaving their own or their parents' memories of "the other side" into the daily lives of their children and grandchildren. By thinking of themselves as "hyphenated" Americans, immigrant women could behave in new and modern ways without casting off their old values and traditions.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 123-126.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-132.



Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers also saw immigration as a positive process although with some reservations. *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation* focuses on the various ethnic groups that settled in the United States, particularly after 1800. They find that it was harder for these later immigrants than it had been for those who came earlier, when any source of labor was welcomed.<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, despite growing prejudice against immigrants who were seen as a threat to native-born workers as the nation industrialized, Dinnerstein and Reimers argued that social mobility was a common experience among immigrants of different nationalities and ethnicities. The sole exception was for blacks who remained enslaved until after the Civil War. Even then, their mass migrations to northern industrialized cities did not occur until the turn of the twentieth century when the industrial city itself was changing and the demand for unskilled labor was declining. Ironically, its supply was increasing as the rate of immigration peaked, when about one million newcomers arrived in the United States each year from 1900 to 1910.<sup>49</sup>

According to the authors, this overall immigrant mobility, a “striking fact” of American history, is defined by an improvement in social status and living conditions for the descendants of the millions who have flocked to the United States. While the authors give a brief description of the efforts to achieve social mobility by various groups, they point to the Irish as a shining example. Although the Irish, more than any other Euro-American group, had the most difficult time initially because of their poverty

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<sup>48</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>49</sup> Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 5.

and the widespread prejudice against their Roman Catholicism, they eventually moved up the social ladder. Other ethnic groups, except for African-Americans migrating to northern cities, followed a similar pattern when the United States Congress drastically rewrote immigration law in 1924.<sup>50</sup>

The authors conclude that the decades after 1930 have been the era of the Spanish-speaking immigrants, primarily those from Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. These immigrants have come to the United States in such numbers that at present they represent the largest minority group surpassing even African-Americans. Cubans have been coming to the United States for economic and political reasons since the nineteenth century. Small groups of Cubans, mostly cigar makers, settled in Key West and Ybor City, Florida. During the long struggle for Cuban independence from Spain between 1868 and 1898, many exiles used the U.S. as a base of operations.<sup>51</sup> Since Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution in 1959, nearly 750,000 Cubans have fled the island, primarily to Miami, Florida. Their presence has helped to attract many other Spanish-speaking groups to Florida, particularly Puerto Ricans and other Latino groups from Central American countries, such as Columbia.

Rounding out this examination of American immigrant historiography is Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. This work is an intellectual departure from the writings of Handlin and Bodnar, and represents the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>51</sup> Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 76-81. See also Louis A. Perez, "Between Encounter and Experience: Florida in the Cuban Imagination," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 82 (Fall 2003): 170-190.

direction in which writings on ethnicity in America are heading. The first example of a school of thought concerning the history of immigration in this country that focuses on ethnic diversity, it argues that America incorrectly has always been defined as culturally white or European. From its very beginnings on the Virginia shore, America had diverse Native peoples greeting Caucasian and African immigrants. The truth is however, that the United States is, and has always been, a multiracial society. According to Takaki, current historical scholarship relating to ethnic groups is too narrowly focused, and excludes people who came from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, all of whom exhibit a great diversity of cultures within their respective groups. Finally, Takaki believes that studying ethnic groups separately, in isolation from other groups, provides an incomplete picture of immigrant history. This method ignores the dynamic nature of multicultural interaction and the role that it has played in the evolution of American society.<sup>52</sup>

Certainly the approach Takaki called for is one that is needed in studying the rise of a Puerto Rican community, particularly when the subject of study is Central Florida. While the insights of the other historians examined in this chapter remain valuable, the Puerto Ricans have a unique status and history within American society. These must be understood as entities in themselves and, equally important, in relation to other groups in American society, including other Hispanics or Latinos, people of color, and those of other Euro-American backgrounds as well.

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<sup>52</sup> Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 11.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE PUERTO RICAN EXODUS TO THE MAINLAND

A brief look into Puerto Rico's history reveals a unique status and relationship vis-à-vis the United States that is unlike that of countries outlined in Chapter One whose populations also migrated to the United States such as China, Italy or Ireland. Unlike the majority of the immigrants discussed in Chapter One, Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rico itself have been intricately intertwined with the United States for over 150 years. After Puerto Rico became a possession of the United States in 1898 following the Spanish-American War, the political and economic relationship that developed between Puerto Rico and the United States ultimately made Puerto Rico economically dependent on the United States. This dependence became the paramount factor in forcing Puerto Ricans to migrate to the mainland.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the roots of Puerto Rican immigration to the United States lie in the island's colonial past.

Composed of Taino Indians, Spaniards, and Africans, the population of Puerto Rico had been under the control of Spain since Christopher Columbus claimed the island for King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela in 1493. Juan Ponce de León became the island's first governor in 1508, and for over three hundred years Puerto Rico remained under Spanish control. By the 1860s, three groups with distinct political ideologies flourished on the island. These were the Assimilationists, Autonomists, and Separatists. Assimilationists wanted Puerto Rico to become a province of Spain with political representation in the legislature. Autonomists fought for the right of Puerto Rico to conduct its own affairs with limited independence from Spain while remaining under

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<sup>1</sup> Edna Acosta-Belen and Carlos E. Santiago, *Puerto Ricans in the United States: A Contemporary Portrait* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 30-55.

its protection. By contrast, Separatists wanted complete independence from Spain in order for Puerto Ricans to determine their own fate.<sup>2</sup>

After a failed revolutionary attempt known as El Grito de Lares or the Battle Cry of Lares in 1868, those involved in the independence movement immigrated to the United States. Organizing into political units from their base in New York City, these units waged propaganda campaigns and wrote political manifestos. Eventually they joined forces with Cuban exiles and other Latin Americans who were also struggling on behalf of various revolutionary movements in their countries. Three years later Puerto Rican political exiles in New York formed a branch of the governing body of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. In 1892 José Martí formed the Cuban Revolutionary Party to win Cuban independence from Spain. Within this governing body, the Puerto Ricans pushed for the establishment of socially and politically oriented associations dedicated to independence for Puerto Rico. These associations appealed not only to the exiles, but also to the small number of Puerto Rican laborers who began arriving in New York City during this time. The political activities of groups both on the island and on the mainland increased as American involvement in Puerto Rico's internal workings altered its status.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1891, annexationists in the United States had been eyeing Puerto Rico for several reasons. First, the island had a strategic military position between North and

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<sup>2</sup> Ramón Emeterio Betances, "Arriba Puerto Ricans!," *The Puerto Ricans: A Documentary History*, ed. Kal Wagenheim (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 59-76; Maria E. Perez y Gonzalez, *Puerto Ricans in the United States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 10-12.

<sup>3</sup> Wagenheim, *The Puerto Ricans*, 81-85.

South America and the Greater and Lesser Antilles. American possessions in this area would provide naval bases for the protection of the approaches to a proposed Isthmian Canal. Second, Puerto Rico had enormous potential for commercial investment in such crops as sugar. Third, it had potential as a tourist destination for U.S. citizens. Finally, Puerto Rico had tremendous natural resources in its rainforest, wetlands, and coral reefs.<sup>4</sup>

While Spain was embroiled in revolutionary wars in Cuba and the Philippines at the turn of the century, the *U.S.S. Maine*, which was stationed in Havana Harbor, exploded and sank. The battleship was in Havana to assure the security of American property and interests in Cuba, particularly investments in sugar and mining that had risen steadily in the 1890s. The United States accused Spain of destroying the *Maine* and as public hostility mounted, President William McKinley asked Congress for a declaration of war against Spain. Congress complied, and the United States, after defeating Spain, met with Spanish diplomats in Paris in 1898, to hammer out a treaty. Under its terms, Spain surrendered both the Philippines and Puerto Rico. Since both of these regions were involved in liberation movements of their own, the revolutionary elements initially looked forward to receiving U.S. aid in their fight for self-determination. Some Puerto Ricans had, in fact, aided the U.S. military at the time of its invasion of

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<sup>4</sup> Julius W. Pratt, "American Business and the Spanish-American War," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 14 (May 1934): 163-201.

Puerto Rico. In both places, however, the United States imposed a military occupation, in turn, creating animosity between the native population and its new governors.<sup>5</sup>

The military occupation of Puerto Rico, which began in October 1898 and ended in April 1900, devalued the island's currency and adversely affected imports and exports. The United States implemented a multiple currency system in which the dollar and the Spanish peso coexisted, but made official exchange rates for all currencies to facilitate business transactions. The U.S. chose the rate of 60 cents to the peso as a compromise between the intrinsic value of the peso and its value as generally accepted in transactions. This devaluation increased prices, which reduced purchasing power for Puerto Rican workers.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the high tariffs that military occupation brought to the island had a negative effect on trade. Because U.S. policymakers left Puerto Rico's legal status vis-à-vis the United States unresolved, tariffs on Puerto Rican exports to the United States remained in place and, in some cases, increased; technically Puerto Rico remained a foreign country. Spain and Cuba also raised their tariffs on Puerto Rican goods, particularly tobacco and coffee, thus closing the markets for these key exports and allowing no opportunity for new ones to develop.<sup>7</sup>

Conditions continued to deteriorate on the island after the U.S. Congress passed the Foraker Act in 1900. The Act replaced military rule with a civil government headed

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., *The Spanish-American War* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 25-30; Michael Gonzalez-Cruz, "The U.S. Invasion of Puerto Rico: Occupation and Resistance to the Colonial State, 1898 to the Present," *Latin American Perspectives* 25 (September 1998), 7-26; *New York Times*, 27 July 1898.

<sup>6</sup> James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 79-86.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-85.

by a presidentially-appointed governor and an executive council of eleven members, only five of them native Puerto Ricans.<sup>8</sup> It prohibited Puerto Rico from trading with other nations and setting its own tariffs, and made the U.S. dollar the official currency. Under the Foraker Act, Puerto Rico became a non-incorporated territory belonging to, but not part of, the United States. This meant the U.S. Constitution did not apply to the island. Rather, Congress would decide which constitutional guarantees were applicable and which were not. For example, Puerto Ricans did not have the right to trial by jury. Ironically, Puerto Rico had enjoyed greater flexibility under the Spanish-bestowed system in 1897 than in this new American system.<sup>9</sup>

As the U.S. government controlled politics and managed the economy in Puerto Rico under the Foraker Act, members of a committee headed by Luis Muñoz Rivera, as early as 1912, proposed to President William Howard Taft and Congress that Puerto Rico be freed from its colonial status. They proposed that the island be given autonomy, statehood, or eventual independence.<sup>10</sup> These proposals eventually culminated in the passage of the Jones Act of 1917, which changed Puerto Rico's status dramatically. The Act declared Puerto Ricans to be U. S. citizens and required obligatory military service in the armed forces in time for World War I. The President continued to appoint the governor of the island and still had unconditional veto power,

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<sup>8</sup> 56<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess (12 April 1900). This Act is also known as the Puerto Rico Civil Code Act and the official title of the law was "An Act Temporarily to Provide Revenues and Civil Government for Porto Rico and for other Purposes." *San Juan News*, 6 January 1904.

<sup>9</sup> Fernando Pico, *History of Puerto Rico: A Panorama of Its People* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), 240-243.

<sup>10</sup> Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 95-96.



along with the U.S. Congress, over any legislative decision made in Puerto Rico. Despite the continuing U.S. domination, citizenship would change the lives of Puerto Ricans and help many to escape the economic restrictions they faced on the island. Population moves between the island of Puerto Rico and the United States mainland began occurring shortly after the passage of the Jones Act. Within a year, more than 10,000 Puerto Ricans arrived in New York.<sup>11</sup>

As the years passed and the island continued to struggle economically, increasing numbers of Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States. The colonial government in Puerto Rico used emigration as a tool to alleviate the poverty and unemployment among the peasant population. This migration strategy also coincided with a strong demand by U.S. investors for low-wage labor for companies that were developing in the industrial sector in large cities in the mainland such as New York. Areas of recruitment included agriculture, manufacturing, and the service industry. After the U.S. takeover, the Puerto Rican economy changed from a monocultural plantation economy that produced tobacco, cattle, coffee, and sugar for export to one based solely on sugar production, with U.S. absentee owners controlling 60 percent of the industry. Further, the economy turned into a platform for export-production in factories. The United States pursued a program in 1947 to transform the Puerto Rican economy under an export promotion program known as “Operation Bootstrap” to attract industry to the island. Under “Operation Bootstrap” employment began shifting from agriculture to manufacturing and a largely rural population began moving to the towns and cities of

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<sup>11</sup> Public Law 368, 64<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess (2 March 1917).

Puerto Rico. In order for “Operation Bootstrap” to be most effective, the initiative also included a measure of population control that resulted in the encouragement of migration to the United States. In addition, the factories that came to the island were capital intensive, had little commitment to the island, and did not provide sufficient jobs for a growing population. The island and its economy would never be the same.<sup>12</sup>

By the late 1940s, Puerto Rico’s underdeveloped economy could not provide for a rising population resulting from high birth rates and increased life expectancy and as a result, migration to the Northeast became a solution to this enduring problem.<sup>13</sup> The production of sugar, tobacco, and coffee, still the major staples of the economy, required large amounts of labor part of the year but left the majority unemployed during the remainder. As the United States came out of the Great Depression and entered World War II, Puerto Rican migration began to intensify due to an increasing demand for labor during wartime. Migration to the mainland opened new opportunities since Puerto Ricans could find work year-round in heavy industry, garment manufacturing, and laundries. Finally, cheap transportation, which became cheaper over time was a major factor in Puerto Rican migration because of the island’s proximity to the United States. Commercial air travel on Eastern and American Airlines between the island and the mainland developed quickly after World War II, and as air traffic increased, fares dropped. In the 1950s, a person could travel from the island to the mainland for less

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 100-106; Harvey S. Perloff, “The United States and the Economic Development of Puerto Rico,” *The Journal of Economic History* 12 (Winter 1952): 45-59. Cesar J. Ayala, “The Decline of the Plantation Economy and the Puerto Rican Migration of the 1950s,” *Latino Studies Journal* 7 (Winter 1996): 61-90.

than fifty dollars, making the movement of Puerto Ricans the first airborne migration to the United States mainland. All the elements of a large-scale migration were in place. These included: unemployment at home, unrestricted travel, a community awaiting newcomers on the mainland, fast transportation, and an American government eager to provide American companies with low-wage labor.<sup>14</sup>

Historians have classified the migration of Puerto Ricans during America's possession of the island into three major periods. The first, known as the Pioneer Migration, started in 1900 and ended in 1945. The second, the Great Migration, started in 1945 and ended in 1964. The last, known as the Revolving Door Migration, started in 1964 and continues today. Puerto Ricans coming to the United States during the Pioneer Migration settled predominantly in New York City including areas of Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. These boroughs had large industrial sectors and provided the employment opportunities the Puerto Ricans sought. During this forty-five year period, about 3,000 Puerto Ricans came to New York each year. The majority were primarily from Puerto Rico's urban areas such as San Juan, had been previously employed, and had at least a high school education. They were skilled and semiskilled workers, unlike the majority of Puerto Ricans they left behind. By 1930, an estimated 52,000 Puerto

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland* (Englewood cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 30; Virginia E. Sanchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 29-50; Edna Acosta-Belen and Carlos E. Santiago, *Puerto Ricans in the United States*, 75-85.

Ricans were living in established *colonias* in New York City.<sup>15</sup>

The *Colonias* formed during the Pioneer Migration were dense Puerto Rican settlements in urban settings. In these areas, Puerto Ricans established institutions that fostered social interaction and cultural preservation while providing newcomers with assistance in adjusting to the host society. *Colonias* also cushioned the impact of migration by offering mutual-aid societies, social clubs and political organizations for the purpose of enhancing the socioeconomic status of Puerto Ricans and defending them against discriminatory acts. The development of a business and professional sector in the *colonias* and the leadership and stability this group provided as well as the wealth it generated transformed these areas of settlement into more than a mere landing place for Puerto Rican migrants. They became genuine communities with leaders who had achieved social and economic mobility and some degree of financial success. At the same time, however, familiar aspects of Puerto Rican culture, such as food, music, celebrations, and religious practices and ties to the homeland were maintained. This gave Puerto Rican immigrants a familiar base from which to operate. Migrants could look forward to settling in an area where the language, customs, attitudes, and interests were similar to those they had left behind in Puerto Rico.<sup>16</sup>

*Colonias* existed in East Harlem, South Central Harlem, and in the Borough of Brooklyn. With an abundance of restaurants, stores, theaters, and organizations, these areas formed the heart of the entire Latin community in New York City. Development of

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<sup>15</sup> Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 51-60; Clara Rodriguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A.* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1989), 3-8.; U.S. Census of Population, 1940 and 1950, *Puerto Ricans in the Continental U.S.*

*colonias* coincided with job availability and the earliest settlements flourished in those areas of the city where employment was readily available. For example, cigar makers settled in Manhattan's Lower East Side and Chelsea largely because the area was home to close to 500 Hispanic-owned and -operated tobacco factories.<sup>17</sup>

The Greenpoint section of Brooklyn attracted Puerto Ricans because of the availability of factory jobs at the American Manufacturing Company, which produced rope. That establishment and other companies directly recruited workers from Puerto Rico, bringing them by steamship to live in Brooklyn. Company representatives met the migrants and housed them in company-owned buildings. The American Manufacturing Company also provided bus transportation to and from work and held company-sponsored activities that allowed Puerto Ricans to familiarize themselves with each other and the surrounding neighborhoods. Puerto Ricans often sent information about their new lives back to friends and family on the island.<sup>18</sup>

The growth of a professional and commercial sector within *colonias* also perpetuated their existence. Settlements soon attracted small businesses catering to migrant needs. These included grocery stores or *bodegas*, restaurants, and rooming houses. The *Marqueta*, an open-air market that developed in Harlem, played an important role in the everyday lives of early migrants because it constituted the largest shopping center that sold Puerto Rican items. Puerto Ricans could obtain essential

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<sup>16</sup> Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 130-140.

<sup>17</sup> J. Hernandez-Alvarez, "The Movement and Settlement of Puerto Rican Migrants within the United States, 1950-1960," *International Migration Review* 2 (Spring 1968) : 40-52.

<sup>18</sup> Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 135-140.

goods including Caribbean foods and spices and seasonal clothing.<sup>19</sup> The Puerto Rican businessmen who founded and ran these economic enterprises ultimately formed the backbone of the pioneer settlements. They assumed a degree of leadership in the community by spearheading the establishment of neighborhood clubs and organizations. These leaders also helped to establish agencies that met the health needs and legal problems affecting those in the community. Ultimately, they distinguished themselves as organizers and power brokers for the *colonias*.<sup>20</sup>

An example of organizations within the *colonias* of the Pioneer Migration that improved conditions for Puerto Ricans and enhanced their communities' standing before the host society was the Puerto Rican Merchants' Association, one of the oldest in New York City. Founded in the late 1930s and continuously active until the 1970s the Puerto Rican Merchants' Association served as a networking organization that helped Puerto Ricans establish businesses such as the *bodegas* and restaurants that dotted the city.<sup>21</sup>

Julio Hernandez, one of the founders of the Merchants' Association, provides an excellent example of the upwardly-mobile Puerto Rican who began to emerge during the Pioneer Migration. Born in New York after his parents came to the mainland in the 1920s, Hernandez attended Maritime Training School and then served for ten years as an officer in the merchant marine. After settling in Brooklyn, he opened a grocery store and later a restaurant. To assist others, he helped establish the Puerto Rican

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<sup>19</sup> *The New York Times*, 30 July 1946.

<sup>20</sup> Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 60.

<sup>21</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans*, 49.

Merchants' Association, and served as its executive secretary for many years. Increasingly active in the Puerto Rican community, he became director of several government programs to promote small businesses among Puerto Ricans in the city during the 1960s. Hernandez represented the successful, civic-minded Puerto Rican entrepreneur who reached out to aid the struggling community of Puerto Rican newcomers to New York.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the growth of a commercial and professional sector, *colonias* during the Pioneer Migration made advances politically with the intention of furthering the stability and the permanence of the Puerto Rican community. Puerto Rican political clubs that developed fell into the category of "nationality" clubs. These clubs performed useful services in uniting heterogeneous groups into municipal, state or national party politics and also upheld traditions, language and leadership of the Puerto Ricans who were members.<sup>23</sup> Puerto Rican political club leaders sought to trade welfare and social benefits for the Puerto Rican migrant vote and, in some cases, aspired to deliver votes to non-Hispanic politicians in exchange for patronage and protection. One such politician to court the Puerto Rican vote was Vito Marcantonio, an Italian native raised in Harlem. Marcantonio, a Republican, was able to endear himself to the Puerto Rican community despite its tendency to vote Democratic, due in part to his familiarity with East Harlem and his personal attention. Due to the unique migratory patterns between Puerto Rico and the settlements in the U.S., those issues that most affected the island

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

either of a political, social, or work related nature affected the New York settlements as well. Marcantonio was well aware of this fact and served as a spokesman for the working class. He gained fame by defending the Puerto Rican nationalist leader, Don Pedro Albizu Campos, incarcerated for political acts against colonialism in Puerto Rico.<sup>24</sup> Further, Marcantonio, keeping Puerto Ricans in mind, opposed a proposed change in the Fair Labor Standards Act which would exempt Puerto Rico from minimum wage provisions and denounced as discriminatory the New York City Board of Education's classification of Hispanic or Latino students based on biased testing.

Finally, the prevalence of Spanish within *colonias* helped to solidify them as communities in addition to the growth of business sector and political achievements. The use of Spanish welded relationships within the *colonias*, and perpetuated ties with Puerto Rico and the rest of Spanish America. The bonding power of language was exemplified in the creation of Spanish language newspapers. For example, *La Prensa*, which began publishing in 1913 as a weekly, became a daily in 1918 and covered all aspects of community affairs. The newspaper carried advertisements for local businesses and those seeking employment combed its want ads for employment. Most importantly, *La Prensa* kept the Puerto Rican community in New York informed of events on the home island.<sup>25</sup> The use of Spanish, however, created problems for

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<sup>23</sup> Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 180. Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, "Puerto Ricans in Perspective: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland," *International Migration Review* 2 (Spring 1968): 7-20.

<sup>24</sup> Felix Ojeda Reyes, "Vito Marcantonio and Puerto Rican Independence," *Centro Journal* 4 (Winter 1991-92): 57-64; Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 187-195.

<sup>25</sup> *La Prensa*, 12 October 1918.



Puerto Ricans in their new host society since it alienated them from the dominant Anglo culture. The preservation of island customs and the Puerto Ricans' hostility toward cultural assimilation created additional friction. Nonetheless, by keeping Spanish as their language, Puerto Ricans maintained their cultural identity in their new home.<sup>26</sup>

The maintenance of cultural identity falls under transnationalism, the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Transnationalism is an appropriate description applicable to Puerto Ricans in the United States, particularly since they worked very hard to retain their cultural heritage as a group. This was most evident among Puerto Rican women during the first wave of migration to the mainland.<sup>27</sup> Puerto Rican women provided links between the island and the mainland enclaves and were pivotal in retaining ethnicity through transmission of language, customs, and traditions. The Puerto Rican community survived through the bond of traditional family units and women made this possible by maintaining Hispanic family values in the midst of an alien New York environment.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 70. See also Joy L. De Jesus, ed. *Growing Up Puerto Rican: An Anthology* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Linda C. Delgado, "Rufa Concepción Fernández: The Role of Gender in the Migration Process," *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*, eds. Linda C. Delgado and Felix V. Matos Rodriguez (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 171-172; For a complete definition of transnationalism see Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, Cristina Blanc-Szanto, "Transnationalism: A New Analytical Framework for Understanding Migration," in *The Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 645, July 26, 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 85-90.

Puerto Rican women also contributed to the financial support of the family when the need arose. Women engaged in piecework particularly within the home-based needlework industry. Puerto Rican women found another way of adding to family income while remaining in the home, by providing childcare in their homes and, like Jewish and Italian immigrants, they took in lodgers. Puerto Rican women created a system of childcare from the merger of working mothers who could not afford to lose their jobs or their union benefits and women who remained at home. By taking in lodgers, Puerto Rican women kept open the network of communication between the island and the mainland by making available their homes to new arrivals who brought with them news of their homeland. Outside of the home, Puerto Rican women worked as domestics in homes, laundries, and restaurants and as workers in factories, and the tobacco industry. In addition, Puerto Rican women in New York City became a source of cheap labor for the city's needle and garment trades. Like earlier European immigrant women, Puerto Rican women experienced gender segregated workplaces, low wages, and limited advancement both in the trades and in their major labor organizations. In addition, Puerto Rican women faced gender and ethnic discrimination. Nonetheless, their role within the *colonias* was pivotal.<sup>29</sup>

*Colonias* were still fostering Puerto Ricans as World War II ended. Afterwards, however, a new wave of migration began as economic opportunities drew 35,000 Puerto Ricans a year to the mainland. A few came as migrant farm workers, contracted to labor in states such as South Carolina, Vermont, and Connecticut. These migrants

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<sup>29</sup> Hedda Garza, *Latinas: Hispanic Women in the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 92-95.

have received little attention in the literature because many returned to Puerto Rico after completing their contracts. Those who remained often left agricultural contract labor and settled in urban areas. These migrants formed the nucleus of Puerto Rican communities that developed in states such as Hawaii, California, and Arizona.<sup>30</sup>

The majority of Puerto Ricans who came during the Great Migration, continued to settle in New York City, with the densest concentration settling in the South Bronx. East Harlem, called “el barrio” and later Spanish Harlem, was, however, the area that most people identified with Puerto Ricans. Even today it remains the quintessential Puerto Rican neighborhood in the minds of many Americas.<sup>31</sup> In its early development, Spanish Harlem was home to Italian and Jewish immigrants, many of whom owned garment factories in which Puerto Ricans came to work earning \$3 a dress, \$5 for a man’s suit, and \$12 a week for pressing clothes. When not employed in garment factories, Puerto Ricans in Spanish Harlem worked as dishwashers and busboys in restaurants. Puerto Rican children attended either Catholic or public schools along with Italian and Jewish children. As the Puerto Rican population grew, discrimination increased between Puerto Ricans and Italian and Jewish residents, causing the exodus of the latter groups. By the 1950s, East Harlem was almost entirely inhabited by Puerto Ricans.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Edna Acosta-Belen and Carlos E. Santiago, *Puerto Ricans in the United States*, 85-92.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Cayo Sexton, *Spanish Harlem* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 15-20.

<sup>32</sup> Carlos and Norma Cardona, interview by author, 11 April 2004, St. Cloud, Florida.

Puerto Ricans who came to the mainland between 1945 and 1964 consisted primarily of young men and women from the island's agricultural sector. These migrants had few or no skills and were less educated than the previous group. Many spoke only Spanish and faced a formidable language barrier. This group also encountered hostility from European immigrant groups competing for similar jobs. In addition, employment agents misled them about working opportunities and slumlords charged them high rents. All these difficulties meant that those Puerto Ricans who arrived in New York City in this time period faced immense animosity from the host society. This situation was made worse by the media's treatment of the issue as a "Puerto Rican problem."<sup>33</sup>

The host society in New York City in the post-World War II era had several complaints concerning the newly arrived Puerto Rican population. Commentators lamented their lack of facility in English, their inability to gain employment in anything other than low paying jobs, their increasing unemployment, and their deteriorating housing conditions. As research has indicated, though, Puerto Ricans during this migration were entering an already struggling New York economy. Their high unemployment rate was due largely to the lack of jobs available to them. In moving

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<sup>33</sup> Jesus Colon, *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (New York: Mainstream Publishers, 1961), 25-37; See also Cesar Iglesias Rivera, *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); *The New York Times*, 28 February 2000.

from a manufacturing to a service-based economy, New York City underwent four fundamental changes that had significant impact on the Puerto Rican work force.<sup>34</sup>

First, there were sectoral shifts. As the economy moved from one that was industrial to one that was postindustrial, manufacturing, the area in which most Puerto Ricans found employment, declined. Further, other low-level jobs available to Puerto Ricans did not increase. The result was high unemployment among the Puerto Rican population.<sup>35</sup>

Second, changes in the mode of production also occurred. Innovations such as automation and computerization resulted in the elimination of some jobs and changes in skill requirements for others. New York's blue-collar work force, a group in which Puerto Ricans had held a high proportion of jobs, felt these effects dramatically.<sup>36</sup>

Third, plant relocations moved many blue-collar and low-skill service jobs away from the Puerto Rican community. The creation of government-subsidized highways during the post-World War II era facilitated the creation of suburbs. As the population moved into these new areas, industries followed. For the most part, Puerto Ricans could not afford to live in the suburbs or pay for transit to the jobs available there. This once again resulted in increased unemployment among the Puerto Rican population.

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<sup>34</sup> Rodriguez, *Puerto Ricans*, 86; Juan Flores, *Divided Arrival: Narratives of the Puerto Rican Migration, 1920-1950* (New York: Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos, Hunter College, 1986).

<sup>35</sup> Roy Bahl, "Economic Change and Fiscal Planning: The Origins of the Fiscal Crisis in New York State," *Public Administration Review* (November-December 1992): 547-558.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. See also United States Department of Labor, *Labor Force Experience of the Puerto Rican Worker*. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Regional Report No. 9, 1968.

Finally, structural unemployment due to the transition from an industrial to a service-oriented economy hurt Puerto Ricans more than other groups. With an excess of factory workers looking for a decreasing number of jobs, the predominantly blue-collar Puerto Rican labor force faced diminishing opportunities and growing competition. Discrimination had limited their employment opportunities when jobs had been more plentiful; the impact of prejudice was more devastating in the changing economy. This shocked many Puerto Ricans, who thought their status as citizens made them immune to such problems.<sup>37</sup>

As the Puerto Rican population grew, the governor of Puerto Rico, Muñoz Marín, established an Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in New York City. Created in 1948 to fulfill several functions, the office, first and foremost, supervised the contracting of temporary farm workers brought to the mainland for specified periods. Second, the office provided employment services to assist Puerto Ricans in obtaining jobs. Third, it worked to properly identify Puerto Ricans because many non-citizen Spanish-speakers tried to pass themselves off as Puerto Ricans to gain the benefits of American citizenship. Finally, the office provided a social service referral program for Puerto Ricans, educational counseling and help in locating financial assistance for promising Puerto Rican students. Overall, it sought to assist Puerto Rican communities throughout the New York metropolitan area in identifying and exploiting various resources for their self-advancement and to act as a public relations instrument for the community throughout the rest of the city. The office accomplished this latter goal by

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<sup>37</sup> Flores, *Divided Arrival*, 90.

providing information about Puerto Rico and its people to New Yorkers and becoming a contact point that native-born New Yorkers could turn to when contacting the Puerto Rican community. Finally, the office served as a model for developing other organizations.<sup>38</sup>

In 1957, under the leadership of Dr. Antonia Pantoja, a group of Puerto Rican educators and professionals, seeing the need for a unified community-wide organization to promote the interests of Puerto Ricans in New York, formed the Puerto Rican Forum. As a teacher in Puerto Rico, Dr. Pantoja addressed the needs of disadvantaged children and after arriving in New York in 1944, she saw a need for an organization whose sole purpose was to promote Puerto Rican interests. The Forum looked for ways of ensuring economic self-sufficiency and its primary concern was the positive development of Puerto Rican youth. The Forum also stressed educational achievement and to this end created *Aspira*, in 1961, an organization to promote the importance of education to Puerto Ricans. The primary goal of this group was to address the exceedingly high dropout rate and low educational attainment of Puerto Rican youth. *Aspira* also sought to foster interest in continuing education, so that Puerto Ricans could enter professions, technical fields, and the arts. In addition, *Aspira* provided financial aid to students. Finally, it devoted itself to developing self-confidence and identity among Puerto Rican youth by familiarizing them with their own history and cultural background. Among grassroots organizations in the Puerto Rican community, *Aspira*

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

has been the most effective due to its national exposure and its overwhelming influence in developing programs promoting Puerto Rican education.<sup>39</sup>

Seeing the need for a more comprehensive development program for the Puerto Rican community, many members of the Forum created the Puerto Rican Community Development Project. It sought to promote a sense of identity among Puerto Ricans on the theory that newcomers integrate better from a position of strength. Its members believed that strong, stable immigrant communities had enabled earlier immigrants to move steadily and confidently into the mainstream of American society. After receiving funding in 1965 from the Office of Economic Opportunity, a federal program developed as part of President Lyndon Baines Johnson's War On Poverty. The Puerto Rican Community Development Project became involved in training programs, tutoring programs, neighborhood youth corps, and addiction prevention programs. Most importantly, adopting a page from the Civil Rights movement's playbook, it provided a political voice when Puerto Rican interests were at stake, often by mounting demonstrations before city halls to protest mistreatment of Puerto Ricans or to demand adherence to the civil rights of Puerto Ricans.<sup>40</sup>

Puerto Ricans continued to strive for political representation and equality, making the greatest progress in the early 1960s, the final years of the Great Migration. During that decade, the struggles for self-definition were complemented by a resurgence of radical politics. Throughout New York City, young men and women mobilized to right

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<sup>39</sup> Hilda Crespo, VP Public Policy and Federal Relations, *Aspira*, interview by author, 30 April 2004, Orlando, Florida.



the wrongs the host society had thrust upon them in organizations like the Puerto Rican Students' Union, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, and the New York Chapter of the Young Lords. Some Puerto Ricans also joined the Students for a Democratic Society. Students challenged leadership within and outside of the community, and conventional party politics were rejected due to their cumbersome methods and conservative mentality. Groups such as the Young Lords, which formed in May 1969, felt that political leaders were outdated and ineffective and were not doing enough to address the most basic and enduring concerns of the Puerto Rican community such as poverty, substandard sanitation conditions, insufficient health clinics, and unemployment.<sup>41</sup> A highly ambitious group, the Young Lords were the first group to officially condemn male chauvinism and transcend the machismo often displayed by earlier Latinos. They supported welfare mothers' groups, organized hospital workers, and created lead detection programs. Eventually, they created a political party which included full equality for women.<sup>42</sup>

During the Great Migration, some Puerto Ricans settled in other cities such as Chicago, Illinois and Lorain, Ohio where they sought economic opportunity. Many came to work in factories as operatives or took service jobs in hotels, restaurants, and cafeterias. In Ohio, they found employment in automobile factories and steel mills. The communities they created outside of New York City were different in size, type of

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<sup>40</sup> Edna Acosta-Belen and Carlos E. Santiago, *Puerto Ricans in the United States*, 158-159.

<sup>41</sup> Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 234.

<sup>42</sup> Garza, *Latinas*, 121-123.

settlement, and level of social or community organization. This was the case with Chicago, where the Puerto Rican community arose as a result of recruiting efforts on the part of the United States government and private businesses who were hoping to fulfill regional labor needs after World War II. As New York's Puerto Rican population rose to over 240,000, labor-contract and seasonal migration from Puerto Rico shifted to the Midwest. In 1946, employment agency Castle, Barton and Associates recruited Puerto Ricans to serve as foundry and domestic workers thus increasing the Puerto Rican population in Chicago.<sup>43</sup>

The pattern of settlement of Puerto Ricans in Chicago was more dispersed than the communities in New York City. Despite being the poorest Hispanic group, Puerto Ricans in the Windy City maintained a greater sense of solidarity than their counterparts in New York City. Their success stemmed from the efforts of church-related activities and organizations. During the 1950s, Catholic priests created a program of leadership development that still persists today. The Caballeros de San Juan, or Knights of Saint John the Baptist, formed during the Great Migration, promoted the interests of the Puerto Rican community in religious, cultural, and political affairs.<sup>44</sup> By 1960, Chicago had over 32,000 Puerto Ricans and today Chicago has the fourth largest Puerto Rican community on the U.S. mainland.

Simultaneously during this period, Chicago was witnessing the development of a Mexican community whose start and plight were similar to that of the Puerto Rican

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<sup>43</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans*, 65.

community despite Puerto Ricans being U.S. citizens. Both groups were actively recruited during times of labor shortages, both faced discrimination, and both had to struggle to achieve community solidarity within the Windy City.<sup>45</sup> Mexicans came to Chicago with the expansion of the railroad system during World War I when railroad companies recruited them as a reserve labor force to alleviate wartime labor shortages. Although considered temporary workers, by 1930, the Mexican population in the city had grown to over 25,000. Perceived as competition for jobs held by the host society, Mexicans faced discrimination and were victims of police violence. Despite their long history of community formation in Chicago through the greater part of the twentieth century, Mexicans have continued to be concentrated in so called “low skill” occupations such as industrial operatives, fabricators, and manual laborers. Nonetheless, Mexicans in Chicago have been able to mobilize politically and in the 1970s, the Pilsen section of the city, which was 55 percent Mexican, became the center of community-based political activity devoted to bringing its residents better public services, education, and housing.<sup>46</sup>

The last stage of Puerto Rican migration, known as the Revolving Door Migration, began in 1965 and continues today. The term Revolving Door describes the back and forth pattern of migration between Puerto Rico and the mainland due to the

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<sup>44</sup> Felix M. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 38-54.

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas De Genova and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *Latino Crossings: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 7-12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-23.

economic conditions in each location. When there is an economic upswing on the mainland, Puerto Ricans migrate there and then return to the island when its economy improves. During this stage, most Puerto Rican migrants have dual home bases that include a network of relatives and friends in each location that fulfill certain needs. They also exhibit a greater tendency to settle outside of New York City than in previous years. Though the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in the United States is still in New York City, only 33 percent of the population in the United States resides there. The majority lives elsewhere in the United States. States with sizeable Puerto Rican populations include New Jersey, Florida, Illinois, and Massachusetts, in descending order.<sup>47</sup>

Revolving Door Puerto Ricans have always been different, not just in their immigration patterns, but also in terms of cultural identity and assimilation. Puerto Ricans have experienced the same kinds of discrimination and exploitation that all newcomers faced, but at the heart of their experience is a struggle to maintain their sense of Puerto Rican identity. Part of this has included an effort to maintain their native language and culture in the midst of a different and pervasive host society. For Puerto Ricans engaged in Revolving Door migration, bilingualism and biculturalism have been of paramount importance.

Early immigrants usually saw their language and ethnicity gradually disappear over a period of three or more generations. To a large extent, the third generation and beyond adopted the way of life of the dominant Anglo-European culture. They may

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<sup>47</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans*, 37.

have practiced “symbolic ethnicity” by recalling their ethnic heritage in feasts or celebrations but by the third generation, most descendants of immigrants were part of mainstream American life. Further, European immigrant groups eventually became “hyphenated” Americans, meaning that their ethnic origins became symbolic, highly blurred, or totally lost. Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, remained culturally Hispanic, which means that they are somewhat Americanized but not de-ethnicized. Largely because of their position as a people sublimated within a larger imperial culture, Puerto Ricans have always found it especially challenging to maintain an independent cultural identity. Through their pendulous migration to and from the island, Puerto Ricans have strongly resisted assimilation.<sup>48</sup>

To maintain a cultural identity independent of the mainland, Puerto Ricans have developed a form of cultural nationalism. Although nationalism is based on the conception of the moral and spiritual autonomy of a people, cultural identity comes from commonly shared myths, rituals, language, and symbols, such as a flag. Emphasis is placed on the rejection of outside influences, such as those coming from the mainland. The ideology of political nationalism, which is based on the belief that all groups of people should have their own sovereign government, has not taken hold in Puerto Rico or in Puerto Rican communities within the United States, mainly because Puerto Ricans

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<sup>48</sup> Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 36; Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta define ethnicity as “a commonly shared personal perception of allegiance supplying coherence and meaning at a group level,” Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 310-314.

do not feel that their cultural independence is in any way predicated upon political independence.

Identity on the island of Puerto Rico also affects how mainland Puerto Ricans view themselves in relation to the host society. Puerto Rico has been defined as a “nation” on the move. Likewise, Puerto Rican cultural identity is not legally defined by citizenship, even though all Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens by birth. Finally, geographic considerations are irrelevant because there are no barriers to travel or trade between both places. Therefore, cultural rather than geopolitical definitions of identity play a key role in forging the concept of Puerto Rican identity.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the imperative of retaining their cultural identity, there have been several other ways in which the Puerto Rican immigration experience must be considered different. Puerto Ricans entered the United States as citizens, served in the armed forces, traveled between homeland and mainland through open borders, came from a territory of strategic importance to the United States, and had a Caribbean, as opposed to a European, cultural and racial background. Another unique Puerto Rican characteristic was that they were Spanish-speaking citizens. The prevalence of the use of Spanish has actually allowed for greater community solidarity within the host society. By contrast, other immigrant groups coming to the United States were required to speak English before becoming citizens and eventually had to forgo their native tongue in order to assimilate. Finally, Puerto Rican immigration and its causes have been defined

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<sup>49</sup> Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, 203-206.

by the special political and economic relationship that Puerto Rico has had and still has with the United States.<sup>50</sup>

This relationship with the United States may have eased migration to the mainland, but it also made Puerto Rico politically and economically dependent on the policies and actions of non-Puerto Ricans on the mainland. This economic dependence and associated economic development strategies resulted in the creation of a surplus workforce that was forced to migrate to the United States. Early works on Puerto Ricans, such as those by Oscar Handlin and Nathan Glazer, tended to present Puerto Ricans as a people divided by migration who suffered traditional immigrant hardships under which earlier immigrants had also had to suffer.<sup>51</sup> The experience of Puerto Ricans is similar in many respects to early immigrants: Puerto Ricans came to the United States in search of economic relief, they faced discrimination on several levels while here, and had to struggle for community solidarity and recognition. The similarities end there. Handlin and Glazer downplayed the political and economic relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States that made Puerto Rican economic dependence the paramount factor in unintentionally forcing Puerto Ricans to migrate to the mainland.

Migration to the United States for many Puerto Ricans leads to economic advancement. John Bodnar argued in his book *The Transplanted* that in every time and

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<sup>50</sup> Clara E. Rodriguez, "Puerto Rican Studies," *American Quarterly* 42 (September 1990): 441.

<sup>51</sup> See Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1963) and Oscar Handlin, *The Newcomers: Negroes and Puerto Ricans in a*

place men and women must make some effort to adjust to the economic realities which confront them.<sup>52</sup> For Puerto Ricans, while their relationship to the United States forced immigration upon them, it was nonetheless an adjustment to their economic realities. Although historians like Oscar Handlin argued that the flight to America was nothing less than an act of desperate individuals fleeing poverty and disorder only to be furthered weakened by their experience once here, Bodnar argues that newcomers to this country were aspiring individuals. These individuals moved to America eager for opportunity, advancement, and the rewards of capitalism.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the common bond between all migrants was a need to confront a new economic order and provide for their own welfare and that of their kin or household group. A confrontation with a new economic order was clearly the case of Puerto Ricans who came to the United States during the Pioneer Migration, later during the Great Migration, and today during the Revolving Door Migration. Today, in Central Florida, Puerto Ricans are making the same economic and social strides once made in previous migrations.

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*Changing Metropolis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>52</sup> Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, xv.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.



## CHAPTER THREE: PUERTO RICANS IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

Like Puerto Rico, Florida's history begins under the imperial rule of Spain. Shortly after Juan Ponce de León's conquest of Puerto Rico in 1507, the Spaniard became the island's governor in 1509. In 1512, de Leon's quest for gold and a fountain of waters believed to restore youth took him from Puerto Rico to what he believed was the island of Bimini. Instead, de León made landfall on what turned out to be the Florida shoreline, thus beginning 300 years of Spanish rule. Florida, like Puerto Rico, eventually became a part of the United States after Spain ceded the territory to the American government, subsequently becoming a state in 1845. In short, Florida's past has always been one of association with Spanish-speaking peoples.<sup>1</sup>

The rise of Florida's multicultural population has generally been attributed to the massive migrations of Cuban exiles since 1959, but Florida's immigration history has deeper roots. During Reconstruction, vast acreages of underdeveloped land and the need for resourceful settlers prompted the creation of the Florida Bureau of Immigration. Although short-lived, the Bureau managed to encourage the immigration of various groups who still have an impact on Florida today. Florida's first Hispanic immigrants arrived between 1885 and 1924, as Cubans, Italians, and Spaniards came to what would become Ybor City near Tampa. They made the city into the nation's leading center for the production of high-quality cigars. Ybor City flourished as its inhabitants

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gannon, ed., *The New History of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 16-150.

created a rich associational life with labor unions, foreign language newspapers, ethnic and fraternal clubs, and political organizations.<sup>2</sup>

The success of Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution in 1959 again altered Florida's demography. The Revolution spurred an influx of Cuban immigration into Florida and had a remarkable economic, political, and social impact in South Florida that ushered in a pattern of Hispanic migration that has been the trend in Florida for the last 40 years. Labeled the "Latinization of Florida," Hispanic immigration, once synonymous with the exodus of Cuban exiles, now includes Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and other immigrants from Central and South America and has moved well beyond South Florida to other large metropolitan areas including Orlando in Central Florida.<sup>3</sup>

As with many regions in Florida, Central Florida is emerging as an area for migration of various ethnic groups. Following statewide trends, Central Florida's Hispanic population is steadily increasing in numbers and influence and now includes significant numbers of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Colombians within its borders. But, it is the Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida that has made the greatest impact. Although Florida is witnessing its greatest influx of Puerto Ricans today, Puerto Ricans have been making their way to the state for over 60 years.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 175-204.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond A. Mohl and George E. Pozzetta, "From Migration to Multiculturalism: A History of Florida Immigration," *The New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995), 391-417.

<sup>4</sup> Jorge Duany and Felix V. Matos-Rodríguez, "*Puerto Ricans in Orlando and Central Florida: A Preliminary Assessment*." (Orlando, Florida: Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce, 2004), 32.

The first known Puerto Ricans to arrive in Florida were a small group of agricultural business owners who came to Miami in the 1940s during the Great Migration. This group of close to 500 Puerto Ricans consisted primarily of members of wealthy families from the island who wanted to invest in large tracts of land near the Everglades in order to establish a sugar cane refinery and eventually a bank. By 1947, they had purchased 80,000 acres of land and were contributing to the economic landscape of Miami. <sup>5</sup>

In the early 1950s, a small number of wealthy and educated Puerto Ricans, who were in direct contrast economically to the thousands of working-class Puerto Ricans making the mass exodus to cities in the Northeast, moved to Miami. The migration shift from the Northeast to Florida grew in the mid 1950s and the 1960s when the Migration Division of Puerto Rico's Department of Labor sponsored a contract farm worker program that brought primarily working class Puerto Ricans to the United States to work, including Florida. Puerto Ricans worked on farms in Dade, Broward, and West Palm Beach counties primarily harvesting vegetables such as beans, potatoes, tomatoes and lettuce. By 1953, close to 3,000 Puerto Ricans were working on Florida Farms.<sup>6</sup> The Puerto Rican Department of Labor continued to seek out employment contracts primarily with sugar growers for Puerto Rican farm workers during the 1970s. The Department's success in recruitment necessitated the creation of an office in Miami

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<sup>5</sup> *El Mundo*, 14 October 1945; *El Mundo* 18 November 1945.

<sup>6</sup> *El Mundo*, 22 July 1953.

in 1978 whose primary functions were the continual recruitment of agricultural workers from the island and the promotion of tourism and investment in Puerto Rico.<sup>7</sup>

During the late 1960s and through the 1970s, as the Revolving Door Migration was underway and as the Puerto Rican Department of Labor was trying to generate interest in Puerto Rico, many islanders were lured to Central Florida by advertisements for affordable housing and land in Puerto Rican newspapers.<sup>8</sup> This trend continued through the 1980s when companies such as Landstar Homes brought Puerto Ricans to the Central Florida area with successful advertising and marketing campaigns aimed towards islanders and Puerto Rican communities in New York and Chicago. The boom Landstar Homes created in such communities as Buenaventura Lakes in the 1980s spurred a trend that gave Osceola County's Hispanic population the largest percentage increase in Florida, as well as one of the highest increases in the nation. Indeed, Osceola County is now the fastest growing Hispanic county nation-wide.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, Landstar today maintains its only full sales office outside of Florida in San Juan. Not surprisingly, Buenaventura Lakes is the most identifiable core of the Central Florida Puerto Rican community. Simultaneously, the opening of Walt Disney World in Orlando in 1971 also lured Puerto Ricans from both Puerto Rico and the Northeast to Central

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<sup>7</sup> Felipe Rivera, "The Puerto Rican Farm Worker: From Exploitation to Unionization," *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience*, ed. History Task Force, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 239-264. See also United States Department of Labor, *Puerto Rican Farm Workers in Florida*. Bureau of Employment Security, 1955.

<sup>8</sup> *El Mundo*, 2 June 1968.

<sup>9</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 14 November 1993; *New York Times*, 6 June 1993; *St. Petersburg Times*, 19 June 1993.

Florida after many spent vacations in Florida and were exposed to the intensive sales efforts of major local home developers.<sup>10</sup>

Puerto Ricans migrating to Central Florida in the 1960s and 1970s consisted primarily of individuals from the island who were nearing retirement age and seeking a quieter, slower-paced environment. This group is generally seen as the pioneers of Central Florida's Puerto Rican community mainly due to their efforts in forming organizations to cater to the needs of newly arriving Puerto Ricans. Central Florida, in addition to offering affordable housing and vacation destinations, also offered employment opportunities, better educational opportunities, less crime than in Puerto Rican communities, and an overall stronger economy.<sup>11</sup> The area, once a largely agricultural region, had shifted towards tourism in the 1960s and 1970s in order to diversify its economy. The shift transformed the area into a growing, urbanized metropolis with a steadily increasing population. Adding to Central Florida's appeal was an affordable housing market, accessibility to travelers, and good schools.<sup>12</sup> For many, the area was an ideal place for settlement.

Puerto Ricans arriving from the island to the Central Florida area left homes that had been plagued by economic difficulties further complicated by political events. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Puerto Rico's political scene was characterized by the struggle over the future of the island. In 1967, the New Progressive Party of Puerto Rico (PNP)

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<sup>10</sup> *La Prensa*, 20 April 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Victor Colón, interview by author, 16 February 2007, Orlando, FL. Colón was president of the *Asociación Borinqueña* from 1989-90 and arrived in Orlando in 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Momino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 26-32.

was formed with a platform dedicated to Puerto Rican statehood and came to power with the gubernatorial election of Luis A. Ferré. The opposition party, the Popular Democratic Party of Puerto Rico (PPD) regained power in the 1970s with its support of the continuation of the island's commonwealth status. This struggle between these two political parties continued to plague Puerto Rico and its economy for decades.<sup>13</sup>

With its economy struggling, Puerto Rico's goal in the 1970s and 1980s, and even in earlier decades, was to become less financially dependent on the U.S. economy in order to gain strength. The commonwealth attempted to achieve this goal by luring pharmaceutical and high-tech companies to build and invest in the island with the dual incentives of tax breaks and cheaper labor costs. By the early 1980s, Puerto Rico had 87 pharmaceutical plants in operation, producing items as varied as artificial kidneys and Valium. In addition, manufacturers of electronics, medical products, precision instruments, and computers had also found their way to Puerto Rico. Still, all of these strides could not mask Puerto Rico's major economic difficulties. For example, in 1983, sugarcane, once the backbone of Puerto Rico's economy and still a major crop at the time, became an expensive economic drain. The government purchased most of the island's crop and owned all its sugar mills. Even with subsidies, sugarcane companies could not compete with producers like those of the Dominican Republic, where labor was even cheaper. Since every pound of sugar generated loss, the government-run sugar industry was criticized for being little more than a costly, outmoded public-

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<sup>13</sup> Luis Gómez, interview by author, 1 March 2007, Orlando, Fl. Gomez was president of the *Asociación Borinqueña* from 1987-1988 and served as City Attorney for the City of San Juan under Governor Luis A. Ferré until 1971 prior to arriving in Orlando in 1980.

employment program.<sup>14</sup> In his 1983 annual message to the legislature, Puerto Rican Governor Carlos Romero Barcelo expressed his anxiety over the fact that the unemployment rate had reached 21 percent and that 60 percent of Puerto Ricans qualified for food stamps. All these factors meant the island was extremely vulnerable to changes in federal spending policies, especially since the administration of President Ronald Reagan sought to reduce spending on social programs.<sup>15</sup>

In sum, Puerto Rico, during the 1970s and 1980s, experienced the painful death of its industrial dream. Operation Bootstrap had failed to attract capital investment to the island. Conceived as a means of lifting the island from its miserable poverty, the program had relied too heavily on tax incentives and low wage labor to attract labor-intensive industries, such as textiles and apparel, to Puerto Rico in an era when other places could offer even cheaper labor. Nor could the island turn back to agriculture since even its premier crop, sugar, was no longer economically viable to produce. Many islanders, faced with these economic hardships sought migration to other areas.<sup>16</sup>

As Puerto Ricans began to slowly arrive in Central Florida in the 1970s, the area was in stark contrast to the homes they left behind. Very little was familiar, and individuals relied on the businesses and media outlets created by Orlando's small Cuban population for familiarity and services that catered to Spanish-speaking

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<sup>14</sup> Susan N. Collins, *The Economy of Puerto Rico: Restoring Growth* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2006), 20-40.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 297-300. Bill Richards, "The Uncertain State of Puerto Rico," *National Geographic*, April 1983, 534. Andrew Cockburn, "True Colors: Divided Loyalties in Puerto Rico," *National Geographic*, March 2003.

individuals.<sup>17</sup> During this time, a very small population of Cubans had made their way to Orlando from Miami and had established a *bodega* and an AM radio station to cater to the group's needs. The largest and most identifiable Cuban-owned business at the time was Medina's Grocery and Restaurant and along with catering to the Cuban population, the establishment also began to serve a growing Puerto Rican population.<sup>18</sup>

As the Puerto Rican population began to increase, so did the development of organizations and institutions that contributed to the creation of community as they aided Puerto Ricans in the adjustment to their new homes. Two organizations in the 1970s led the way for growth. In 1977, *La Asociación Borinqueña*, or the Puerto Rican Association, was created by the Auffant Family, Armando Gonzalez, Eddie Martinez, and seven additional families as a means of uniting Puerto Ricans arriving in Central Florida in order to perpetuate Puerto Rican culture and customs.<sup>19</sup> Also, the organization stressed the importance of family and put little emphasis, if any, on religion and politics. Originally, the families of *La Asociación* met at people's homes, and their focus was on fundraising for the purpose of purchasing their own building.

By 1982, the organization consisted of 18 families and through their efforts, was able to purchase land on Valencia College Lane in order to build a meeting hall which was later completed in 1987.<sup>20</sup> Membership continued to double throughout the late

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<sup>17</sup> Colón interview. *Orlando Sentinel*, 11 September 1989.

<sup>18</sup> *Commissioner Mary I. Johnson Collection*, Orange County Regional History Center Archives, Orlando, Fl.

<sup>19</sup> Gómez interview. Colón interview.

<sup>20</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 9 August 1990.



1980s, and *La Asociación* went beyond its original goal of perpetuating Puerto Rican culture within its membership. The organization also began to focus on keeping the lines of communication open between the emerging Puerto Rican community and the rest of the population in Central Florida with the intention of increasing integration within the host society. *La Asociación* became involved with such civic endeavors as hosting a health fair and blood bank at the Strawberry Festival and coordinating disaster relief for the Caribbean along with other civic groups. Today, *La Asociación Borinqueña* consists of 250 families.<sup>21</sup>

The presence and growth of the Puerto Rican community evident through the creation of organizations such as *La Asociación* was also perpetuated by the creation of the Puerto Rican Student Association at the University of Central Florida in 1979.<sup>22</sup> Originally created as a way of uniting Puerto Rican students on the fast-growing campus, the Puerto Rican Student Association eventually started a marketing campaign to change the negative views of Puerto Ricans on campus and in the community. Additionally, the Puerto Rican Student Association helped baseball players from the Caribbean adjust to their new home as they arrived in Central Florida to play for the university. In 1985, the Puerto Rican Student Association became the Hispanic American Student Association.<sup>23</sup> The steady influx of Puerto Ricans arriving in Central

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<sup>21</sup> Gomez interview.

<sup>22</sup> Victor Diaz, interview by author, 28 February 2007, Orlando, FL. Diaz arrived in Central Florida in 1977 and was a founding member of the Puerto Rican Student Association at UCF. Diaz served as Special Assistant to Senator Paula Hawkins from 1984 to 1986.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Florida throughout the 1970s and their formation of groups and associations aimed at community formation ushered in a decade of tremendous growth for the migrant group.

Between 1980 and 1990, Central Florida witnessed its first large influx of Puerto Ricans. In 1980, Orange County had only 6,662 Puerto Rican residents, Seminole County had 2,079, and Osceola County had a mere 417.<sup>24</sup> Over the next ten years, these numbers rose steadily. By 1990, the Puerto Rican population in Florida numbered 247,000, ranking third behind New York City and cities in New Jersey. Central Florida saw the greatest population gains, and by then was home to more than 66,000 Hispanics of Puerto Rican origin living in the area. Between 1990 and 2000, the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida increased by 158 percent and now represents 49 percent of all Hispanics living in the Central Florida area, making them the largest single Hispanic group in the region.<sup>25</sup>

To indicate further their growing importance, in 1990, the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida accounted for 27 percent of all Puerto Ricans living in Florida, and Orange County, with over 34,000, was second only to Dade County in its total Puerto Rican population.<sup>26</sup> This had occurred because in the preceding decade more than one in three Puerto Ricans moving to the state settled in the Central Florida area. Since 1990, the growth of the Puerto Rican population has continued at a rapid

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<sup>24</sup> James Paul Allen and Eugene James Turner, *We the People: An Atlas of America's Ethnic Diversity* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1988), 235.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "American Community Survey: 2003 Data Profile."

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, *County-to-County Migration Flow Files 1990 Census of Population and Housing*, CD Rom Special Project 312.

pace and now 7 percent of all newcomers to the Orlando area come from the island.<sup>27</sup> Such mass migration is not a recent phenomenon for Puerto Ricans and these steadily increasing numbers rival those of the mass exodus of the 1940s and 1950s to the mainland's Northeast.

The more current mass migration to Central Florida can be compared to the Great Migration of the 1940s due in part to the volume of people arriving in the area, however, this migration is bringing a different population in terms of its characteristics. While Puerto Ricans arriving in Central Florida in the 1960s and late 1970s were primarily older adults from the island seeking a less tumultuous environment, Puerto Ricans arriving in the late 1980s and 1990s consisted mostly of younger working-class families arriving from cities in the Northeast as well. Like the earlier migrations of Puerto Ricans in the 1940s to the Northeast, Puerto Ricans arriving in Central Florida in the 1980s and 1990s are seeking employment opportunities and an improved economy.<sup>28</sup> In New York, being Hispanic once meant being Puerto Rican, but recently, the percentage of Puerto Ricans has begun to decline.<sup>29</sup> In about ten years, Dominicans will replace Puerto Ricans as the city's largest ethnic group, a shift due in part to Puerto Rican migration to other parts of New York State, New Jersey, and Florida.<sup>30</sup> The movement of Puerto Ricans reflects the traditional migration pattern of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Edna Acosta-Belen and Carlos E. Santiago, *Puerto Ricans in the United States*, 98-102.

<sup>29</sup> *The New York Times*, 28 February 2000.

<sup>30</sup> *The New York Times*, 9 October 2003.

groups dispersing from the city to the suburbs and other parts of the country or even returning to the island as they make economic headway. *El Barrio*, the heart of New York City's Puerto Rican community, witnessed many of its residents fleeing the area due to rampant drug selling and housing deterioration and abandonment. The once vibrant cultural center of this community is now filled with decaying buildings, and Puerto Ricans continue to leave for better living environments. Consequently their numbers dropped in this area from 42,816 to 34,626 between 1990 and 1999.<sup>31</sup>

Contrasted with the general economic success of Puerto Ricans in other parts of the country, such as Central Florida where household income has resembled that of the overall population, the state of Puerto Ricans in New York City has become dismal.<sup>32</sup> In the 1990s, the percentage of Puerto Rican households in New York City at or below the poverty line increased dramatically despite a strong local economy. According to New York City planners, about 40 percent of the Puerto Rican population qualified as poor, a figure considerably higher than that of African-Americans and worse than the average rate for all Hispanics in the area. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans leaving New York cite a lack of educational attainment as another reason for their exodus. Barely 10 percent of Puerto Rican New Yorkers 25 and older have a college degree, a fact that makes it difficult for them to compete in a city where economic expansion increased the demand for more highly skilled workers. Many Puerto Ricans thought the lack of educational

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<sup>31</sup> *The New York Times*, 10 December 2002.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

attainment lay with neglected schools, something they hoped to escape in Central Florida.<sup>33</sup>

Central Florida's appeal to Puerto Ricans arriving from the island was due in part to the area's strong local economy, which was in stark contrast to that of their home. Throughout the 1990s, Puerto Rico's economy continued to struggle. The island had less than half the \$18,000 per capita income of Mississippi, the mainland's poorest state, and still relied heavily on federal aid. Since the disappearance in 1996 of the federal tax breaks and exemptions that guaranteed U.S. corporations operating in Puerto Rico large profits, factories in Puerto Rico began moving to places such as the Dominican Republic and Singapore. The moves made it difficult for the island to compete in the global market and resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. Additionally, economists on the island note that constraints imposed by Congress that do not allow Puerto Rico to strike foreign trade deals, prevent the island from pursuing the policies it needs to compete with its independent peers in the Caribbean, such as the Dominican Republic.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, Puerto Rico has witnessed an exodus of teachers to school districts throughout the mainland, including Orange and Osceola Counties. In addition to the island's struggling economy, its public school system is troubled. Puerto Rico's Department of Education faces problems such as: a student dropout rate of nearly 50 percent, aging and poorly maintained school buildings, and a lack of modern technology in classrooms. Annually, U.S. employment recruiters travel to Puerto Rico promising

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<sup>33</sup> *The New York Times*, 28 February 2000.

better pay, better working conditions, and more opportunities for advancement within American school districts. As a result, Puerto Rico loses nearly 500 teachers a year who have not seen a pay increase on the island since 1994.<sup>35</sup>

In Central Florida, Puerto Ricans are finding a different way of life, a more viable economy, and stronger school systems. The region has half the crime rate of the home island. (According to 1993 statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the rate of serious crimes reported in Puerto Rico is more than double that of Orange County.)<sup>36</sup> This factor is heightened by the fact that by 1995 Puerto Rico had grown into a major gateway to the United States for South American drugs, functioning as the Caribbean's drug-smuggling hub. Along with the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico ranked second to Mexico as a corridor for drugs coming into the United States. Puerto Rico offers two advantages as a transshipment point from South America and other Caribbean islands. First, it is geographically convenient to both South and North America. Second, because of Puerto Rico's commonwealth status, once a drug shipment is in Puerto Rico, customs inspections are no longer a factor. The result of Puerto Rico's drug trafficking trade includes a murder rate that is more than three times the United States average, a saturated cocaine market that sells the drug for about half its price in American cities, and gang warfare.<sup>37</sup> Middle-class homes in Puerto Rico are covered by security bars, and many islanders living in suburban regions feel the anxiety and tension

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<sup>34</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 21 July 2002.

<sup>35</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 16 May 2005.

<sup>36</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 20 August 1995.

<sup>37</sup> *New York Times*, 23 July 1995.

of big city living with constant fears of carjackings, home invasions, and robberies of businesses. In addition to concerns with crime, others dislike the density, high level of noise, and shortage of roads in some of Puerto Rico's major cities, such as San Juan. Given these problems, they choose to relocate to an area such as Central Florida, where the pace is relatively slower.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to the settlement patterns of Puerto Ricans of the Great Migration of the 1940s to New York, Puerto Ricans moving to Central Florida spread out. During the migration of Puerto Ricans to New York City, Puerto Ricans only created communities within defined geographic regions, such as Spanish Harlem. In Central Florida, settlement patterns are broad and varied and not confined to just one city or county but rather to several enclaves. In Orange County, Azalea Park has been dubbed "Little San Juan" since 49 percent of the area's population is Puerto Rican while in Volusia County, Deltona boasts a large Puerto Rican population as well.<sup>39</sup> Due largely in part to Landstar Homes' vast marketing campaign aimed at migrating Puerto Ricans, Buenaventura Lakes in Osceola County has seen a major change due to Puerto Rican influence and numbers.<sup>40</sup> Hispanics, and Puerto Ricans in particular, are the fastest-growing segment of Osceola County's population. Today, Latin American traditions are nearly as prominent as the county's rural heritage, and Osceola County is the fastest-growing Hispanic county in the nation with Kissimmee and Poinciana as the chief

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<sup>38</sup> Maria Blanes, interview by author, 17 March 2005; Josh Lopez, interview by author, 3 March, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research, 1996.

<sup>40</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 19 October 2000.

destinations. Puerto Ricans make up 31 percent of the county's population, compared with two percent 20 years ago. More than 51,000 of Osceola County's 166,000 residents are Hispanic, with more than half of those being Puerto Rican.

In 1998 Osceola County took notice of the increase in the Puerto Rican population and sent a 40-member contingent of the Kissimmee/Osceola County Chamber of Commerce to Puerto Rico on its first trade mission. This group believed that the ever-increasing number of Puerto Ricans in Osceola County could contribute substantially to the county's economic vitality.<sup>41</sup> To help foster this belief, the Chamber created a Hispanic council consisting of more than 60 members from various Hispanic-owned businesses. Orange County followed Osceola County's lead, and in April 1999, a contingent of 30 businessmen, headed by then-Orange County Chairman Mel Martinez, spent three days in Puerto Rico meeting with investors and businessmen interested in Central Florida, specifically Orange County. This trade mission, coupled with the one sent by the Osceola Chamber, confirmed the presence of a sizeable and influential Puerto Rican community in Central Florida.<sup>42</sup>

Other indicators that the Puerto Rican community was becoming a major presence in Central Florida was the establishment in 1995 of the Orlando Regional Chapter of the Office of the Government of Puerto Rico. The Orlando office is staffed by a director, two administrative assistants, an executive secretary, and a

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. In 2004, Orange County voters changed the title of Orange County Chairman to Mayor.



representative from the Puerto Rico Department of Education.<sup>43</sup> Its primary function is to provide Puerto Rican-owned businesses in Central Florida the opportunity to visibly promote their products and services and to connect Puerto Rican communities, businesses, and political leaders with their counterparts in the local, state, and federal governments. The office also promotes tourism for the island and offers a source of general information on Puerto Rican history, culture, and traditions.<sup>44</sup> The Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA), the Puerto Rican government's lobbying arm at the federal level, oversees the Orlando office. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the PRFAA serves as Puerto Rico's voice before federal agencies with respect to the commonwealth, including its relationship with the rest of the nation.<sup>45</sup>

The Washington, D.C. office also works for the advancement of Puerto Ricans, closely monitoring activity in Congress that can directly impact the 2.7 million Puerto Ricans living throughout the United States. The PRFAA works to increase the awareness of federal government officials, members of Congress, and the mainland American population about what Puerto Rico contributes to the nation. This organization develops and implements advocacy strategies to promote economic, social, and political well being of Puerto Ricans and now has branches located in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Trenton, Miami, Boston, and Orlando.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Iris Eduarda Gutierrez, PRFAA Community Officer, interview by author, 18 October 2000, Orlando, FL.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Despite the tremendous influx of Puerto Rican migrants to the U.S., the stateside English-speaking press has historically ignored the commonwealth. The *Orlando Sentinel*, Central Florida's leading newspaper, researched the impact of this media void, and discovered that its Puerto Rican readers often kept strong ties to the island and were interested in more information from there than was available from mainstream wire services.<sup>47</sup> In addition, many Central Florida businesses were interested in Puerto Rico, and Puerto Ricans were among the most loyal and enthusiastic visitors to Orlando's tourist attractions.

In response, the *Sentinel* worked with former staffers and free-lance journalists who lived in Puerto Rico to provide stories about the island. In spring 1999, the paper decided that it needed a direct presence on the island and created a San Juan Bureau. In addition to providing increased news coverage from the area, the bureau gave the *Sentinel* a business presence on the island and a springboard for news in other parts of the Caribbean.<sup>48</sup> The establishment of the bureau proved informative such as the *Sentinel's* coverage of the controversy sparked by the U.S. Navy's presence in Vieques after an errant bomb killed a security guard. That report would have not been possible without a staffer on the island. The incident brought to light facts about training and environmental issues that made many islanders realize that the Navy's sixty-year

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<sup>47</sup> Mary Ann Horne, Assistant National Editor, *Orlando Sentinel*, interview by author, 10 November 2000, Orlando, Fl. *La Prensa*, a Spanish-language weekly was in circulation in Orlando as early as 1983 and originally relied on wire services.

<sup>48</sup> The Caribbean as a whole has become increasingly important to Central Florida in the same way that Puerto Rico itself has, due in part to the increasing number of migrants and visitors from that region and the areas expanding economies.

presence needed to end. Puerto Ricans in Central Florida were able to better follow this story than they had before 1999.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, as part of the Tribune Company, the *Sentinel* has found an appetite for stories from Puerto Rico among some of its "sister" papers in Fort Lauderdale, Chicago, Hartford, Long Island, and Allentown, Pennsylvania—all boasting large Puerto Rican communities.<sup>50</sup> By 2000, the *Sentinel* had one full-time reporter in San Juan and a content-sharing agreement with *El Nuevo Dia*, a prominent Spanish-language newspaper on the island. To date, however, the *Sentinel* is the only stateside English-language newspaper with a full-time reporter and a permanent office on the island.

In August 2001, the *Sentinel* launched *El Sentinel*, a separate newspaper for the Hispanic community. According to its editor, the paper reaches Hispanic readers in their preferred language, Spanish. In addition, the *Sentinel* created a newspaper reflecting the tastes and interest of this unique community, printing in bolder graphics and colors, as well as publishing stories such as immigration that specifically take into account the Hispanic experience in this country.<sup>51</sup>

Although Central Florida is providing the opportunity for Puerto Ricans to have better quality of life and to receive more attention from the local press, there is a language barrier problem, particularly among those coming from Puerto Rico. Problems

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<sup>49</sup> Horne interview.

<sup>50</sup> The Tribune Company also established a bureau in Havana, Cuba, after receiving the long-awaited approval from the Cuban government. The Cuban bureau members work together with their San Juan bureau members on covering the Caribbean.

<sup>51</sup> Maria Padilla, Editor, *El Sentinel*, interview by author, 30 September 2003, Orlando, FL.

resulting from English language deficiency are most evident in the public school system, especially since the population of Hispanic students, including Puerto Ricans, is increasing in public schools in Central Florida. In 1970, the number of Hispanic students in Osceola County made up less than one percent of the total student population while in Orange County Hispanics were not even represented due to their seemingly non-existent numbers. By 2003, the situation had changed. Hispanics accounted for nearly 44 percent of the student population in Osceola County and 27 percent of the Orange County student population since arrivals from Puerto Rico had reached over 16,000 by that year as compared to close to 10,000 arriving from cities in the Northeast.<sup>52</sup> Among these large numbers of Hispanic students in the area's public school system, Puerto Rican students coming from the island speak limited English, a problem partly due to a shortage of qualified English instructors in Puerto Rico.<sup>53</sup>

There are also political reasons English is not taught in Puerto Rico, stemming from attempts at reform that became tangled in the debate over Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States and the necessity to use English on the island. Few English-only schools exist in Puerto Rico, and attempts to open more of them or extend the English curriculum in the existing school system are seen as being pro-statehood. Thus, they conflict with the objectives of the current pro-commonwealth administration.<sup>54</sup>

While the debate continues over the teaching of English in Puerto Rico, the children of Puerto Rican families moving to Central Florida face additional challenges

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<sup>52</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 15 May 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Blanes interview.

<sup>54</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 25 April 2004.

and struggle to compete in the classroom. Only half of the public school students in Puerto Rico scored at grade-level on their English tests, which in Central Florida translates into a mere 14 percent passing rate for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Furthermore, in Orange and Osceola counties, less than 50 percent of students learning English graduated. To combat the problem of limited English before it leads to higher school dropout rates, the state of Florida spends \$837 million statewide educating non-English students.<sup>55</sup>

Yet despite these formidable challenges, Central Florida is clearly providing its Puerto Rican community with opportunities to pursue a better quality of life than it will find possible in most other places. Here they have a growing number of organizations to assist them and increasing economic clout and media awareness, all of which make it even more likely that existing institutions such as schools will seek new and improved ways of addressing their educational needs as students for English is not their first language. Additionally, an increasing political presence is aiding in Puerto Rican community formation. Initially, in the late 1980s, Puerto Ricans were less likely to vote in Central Florida elections despite a strong affinity to politics as exemplified by their turnout at elections in Puerto Rico to vote on the statehood issue. Although Puerto Ricans outnumbered other Hispanic groups in the area such as Cubans, they failed to dominate in elections as Cubans did in Miami.<sup>56</sup> At the time, there was little solidarity among the Hispanic groups in Central Florida, resulting in a lack of political force. Cubans, who historically had voted Republican, were in favor of strong foreign policy,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

while Puerto Ricans were mainly Democrats concerned with social issues such as education. In the 1990s, a shift in voting trends increased political influence among the Puerto Rican population. More and more Puerto Ricans registered to vote in Florida elections and, during this period, equal support for both the Democratic and Republican parties emerged. In 1998, the election of Democrat Tony Suarez of Winter Park to the Florida Legislature exemplified the growing clout of Hispanic and Puerto Rican voters as did the 2002 election of Republican John Quiñones to the new District 49 seat.<sup>57</sup>

Puerto Rican migration has been described as transient in character, a result of the population's shared citizenship and proximity to the United States. Because no special documents are necessary to travel, migration from the island to the mainland is essentially a revolving door in nature. This has affected Puerto Rican family life, reinforcing Puerto Ricans' close ties with their native land and their adherence to their ethnic and cultural heritage. The phenomenon is witnessed throughout Central Florida today. Each June, Puerto Ricans in Central Florida celebrate San Juan Day in honor of Saint John the Baptist, the patron saint of Puerto Rico's capital city.<sup>58</sup> People head either to their backyard pools, local beaches, or plan excursions to nearby cities to take a swim at the stroke of midnight and submerge themselves nine times, a ritual meant to eliminate bad luck. Just as John the Baptist christened the faithful on the river Jordan, Puerto Ricans flock to the water on the eve of San Juan Day for this invigorating dip.

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<sup>56</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 11 September 1989.

<sup>57</sup> Orange County Commissioner Mildred Fernandez, interview by author, 4 April 2005. Fernandez is commissioner for Orange County's District 3, a district with a large Hispanic constituency.

<sup>58</sup> *Orlando Sentinel*, 20 June 1995.

The enthusiasm for celebrating San Juan Day throughout Puerto Rico has become a part of Central Florida's cultural heritage.

In 1991, the City of Orlando hosted for the first time *La Semana de Puerto Rico*, or Puerto Rico Week.<sup>59</sup> During this week of activities, Puerto Ricans celebrated the discovery of their island. Organizers of these activities tried to emphasize the presence of Puerto Ricans in the area and accentuate the fact that the ties between Puerto Rico and Florida go back not thirty or forty years, but to the discovery of Florida itself. It was Don Juan Ponce de Leon, the first governor of Puerto Rico, who explored the peninsula 478 years ago. Cultural events such as *La Semana de Puerto Rico* and San Juan Day reinforce this tie, which grows stronger as the Puerto Rican community increases in number and presence within Orlando and the Central Florida region.

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<sup>59</sup> *La Prensa*, 7 November 1991.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Where do Puerto Ricans fit in the larger scope of American immigration and its historiography? As noted previously, Puerto Ricans are technically not immigrants but rather citizens of the United States since 1917. Despite possessing citizenship, Puerto Ricans, when arriving in the United States, have had and continue to have experiences typical of those considered immigrants to this country due to their cultural heritage. Among these experiences are adjustments to a new home and society and the struggle to form a community that serves their particular needs. Among the historiography of immigration studies, the concept of community especially as it applies to immigrant groups has been defined as a representation of a group of people who follow a way of life or patterns of behavior which mark them out as different from people of another society, or from other people in the larger society in which they live.<sup>60</sup> Under this definition of community, a group may speak the same language and most importantly, aid and support each other through the formation of their very own institutions and organizations. This definition definitely applies to Puerto Ricans who have migrated to the United States and formed communities during the Great Migration to cities in the Northeast during the 1940s and today in Central Florida.

A comparison between earlier migrations of Puerto Ricans to the mainland and those of today reveals that while the socio-economic backgrounds of the migrating population may vary, the common denominator among both groups is the attainment of a better quality of life and economic advancement.

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, "The Importance of 'Community' in the Process of Immigrant Assimilation," *International Migration Review* 1 (Autumn 1966) : 5-16.



According to Bodnar's work, *The Transplanted*, The common bond between all migrants is a need to confront a new economic order and to provide for their own welfare and that of their kin or household group. Community formation becomes vital during this process. A confrontation with a new economic order and a subsequent formation of a supporting community was clearly the case of Puerto Ricans who came to the United States during the Pioneer Migration, later during the Great Migration, and today during the Revolving Door Migration. Today, in Central Florida, Puerto Ricans are making the same economic and social strides once made in previous migrations.

The Hispanic population is growing five times faster than the general population and by the year 2045, the Hispanic population will be larger than non-Hispanic blacks, Asians, and American Indians.<sup>61</sup> According to projections by the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanics will comprise nearly 50 percent of Osceola County's population within 15 years.<sup>62</sup> Currently, Puerto Ricans are the largest Hispanic community in the region and make up about 16 percent of the population in Lake, Orange, Seminole, and Volusia Counties combined, compared with nearly seven percent a decade ago. Economically, Hispanics, particularly Puerto Ricans, will eventually contribute nearly \$11 million to the region's economy if the current rate of growth of this population continues. How Central Florida will change and grow due to the growth of the Puerto Rican population and how

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<sup>61</sup> Iris Eduarda Gutierrez, community officer, Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration, interview by author, 18 October 2000, Orlando, FL.

<sup>62</sup> Ramirez, Roberto R., and G. Patricia de la Cruz, 2002, *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 2002*, Current Population Reports, p.20-545, Census Bureau, Washington DC.

this growth will affect the Puerto Rican community will be an interesting facet of Central Florida's history.

## **APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

In what field are you employed? Tell me about your occupation.

Where are you from originally? What is your city of origin? What was your former place of residence? In what year did you arrive in Central Florida?

Why did you choose the Central Florida area to live in? What was the process that brought you here to Central Florida? Discuss as many reasons as you like. Tell me about your experience upon arrival in Central Florida?

Why did you choose to leave your former place of residence? Was crime a factor? Economic Reasons? New job? Better schools? Discuss as many reasons as you like.

What does Central Florida offer you that your former residence does not?

How does Central Florida fail you? Are there things that this area does not provide you?

Upon arriving in Central Florida, did you find that the area had an adequate support system for the Hispanic community? Discuss resources that you may have used upon arriving here.

Did religion or your religious beliefs play a role in your decision to move to the Central Florida area? If so, please explain.

Have you or any members of your family experienced any kind of discrimination in Central Florida? If so, please explain.

Do you plan on returning to your former city/country of residence? If so, please explain why or why not.

Do you maintain ties with your former residence? Do you visit often?

Do you advise relatives and/or friends to move to Central Florida?

Comments?

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