

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Understanding Elián: The Politics of Childhood in Miami and Havana, 1959-1962

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

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Chair

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DEDICATION

*To my mother and father, who did their best;
to God, for sheltering and sustaining me;
and to Mike, who makes everything possible.*

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Understanding Elián: The Politics of Childhood in Miami and Havana, 1959-1962

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This dissertation examines the centrality of symbolic and actual children to the transnational processes that propelled the 1959 Cuban Revolution and the subsequent formation of the US resident Cuban exile community. It argues that the bodies and symbolic representations of children were pressed into “nation-making” service by a Revolution that sought to fulfill Cubans’ frustrated dreams of democratic governance, social equality, and national autonomy; however, as it turned swiftly towards socialism

and the USSR in 1960, the state's imposition of new understandings and practices of childhood challenged Cuban middle class and Catholic values and traditions, provoking resistance to the new regime and sparking a massive exodus to southern Florida. Arriving in the United States at the height of the Cold War, Cuban refugees relied heavily upon child-centered anti-communist discourse to secure favorable treatment from the federal, state and municipal agencies and actors that oversaw their immigration and settlement. They and their US allies also made strategic use of representations of children to garner support from Miami's Anglo-American majority, many of whom were initially distressed by the rapid influx of Cuban refugees but sympathized with their Christian and middle class family values and anti-communist politics. Exiles thus developed a child-centered "creation myth" that explained their community's origins even as it promoted social coherence among a rapidly expanding but politically fragmented exile population. Children were similarly at the heart of exile leader's efforts to mobilize opposition to Fidel Castro's socialist Revolution and to elicit US support for their counter-revolutionary efforts and democratic-capitalist vision of their island nation's future. By 1962, when the resolution of the October Missile Crisis secured both the long-term viability of the Cuban Revolution and the indefinite extension of exiles' sojourn in the United States, struggles to define, control and make symbolic use of Cuban childhood had become inextricably intertwined with the mutually antagonistic ideologies and "nation-making" projects of the island and exilic Cuban communities. This "politics of childhood" resurfaced dramatically during the heated 1999 Elián González custody battle, revealing its ongoing importance to revolutionary and exilic community identities and to relations between the Cuba and the United States.

Introduction

The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami, 1959-1962

Beginning in November 1999, the drama surrounding the custody battle for Elián González, a small Cuban boy rescued in the Straits of Florida after his mother died attempting the perilous crossing, dominated the news in Havana and Miami for more than a year. In June of 2008, the now-14 year old boy joined Cuba's Union of Communist Youth, provoking a fresh wave of television coverage in Cuba and, in the United States, a renewed political debate about US-Cuban relations that many believed influenced that year's US presidential election.¹ Why all this fuss over a small boy?

This question assumes that the furor caused by the Elián González custody battle cannot simply be understood as an expression of island-resident and US-based Cubans' sympathy for the plight of the shipwrecked child. Nor do I believe, as scholars and journalists alike have suggested, that the passion displayed by island and US resident Cubans during the months of the child's residence in Miami can be understood strictly as an expression of the political antagonisms produced by the 1959 Cuban Revolution.² In fact, the struggle for Elián was but the most recent and best publicized manifestation of the importance of children to the varied and frustrated nationalist projects that predated

¹ See "Elián González Joins Communist Youth," *New York Times*, June 16, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

² Bruce D'Arcus argues that the Elián González case "...must be placed before the backdrop of the previous four decades of the historical geography of Cuban nationhood. Split by the politics of revolution and reaction, as well as by geography, Cuba in essence consists of two nations separated by the Florida Straits. On one side lie the champions of anti-imperialist nationalism and antibourgeois revolution. On the other lie the true believers in the moral rightness of democratic capitalism as led by the United States." See Bruce D'Arcus, *Boundaries of Dissent: Protest and State Power in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 116; also see Damián Fernández, "Elián as Metaphor: Cuba, Cuban-Americans and the Politics of Passion," (unpublished paper, 2007).

and propelled the Cuban Revolution and led to the emergence of a South Florida exile community by 1960. What's more, children and symbols of childhood played a constitutive role in these "nation-making" processes that cross and crisscross Cuban and US borders, extending forward in time beyond the battle for custody of the small *balsero* as well as backwards to the island's nineteenth century Wars of Independence—shaping the history of both nations as they have so many others since at least the beginning of the modern era.³

³ Since children have long been understood as "blank slates," unformed and malleable future citizens, they have often been treated as the building blocks through which modern nations could be constructed. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, Western European and American notions of childhood would be challenged by the creation of the Soviet Union, which brought not only an alternative vision of the nation state, but also distinct understandings of childhood. Within thirty years, tensions between these two radically opposed modern worldviews sparked the Cold War—an organic, if not inevitable, outflow of the competing projects of modernity articulated by the United States and the USSR after World War Two. However, the malleability of children and their role as "building blocks" of society would remain one of the essential notions around which modern democratic-capitalist and communist visions of the future were organized. See Peter Gay, ed., *John Locke on Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Hugh Cunningham, "Histories of Childhood," *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 (October 1998): 1207-1208; Sharon Stephens, ed., *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); and for the way twentieth century US political and civic leaders linked have linked children to the destiny of the nation, see Norman Fenton, *Mental Hygiene in School Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1949) and Theresa Richardson, *The Century of the Child: The Mental Hygiene Movement and Social Policy in the United States and Canada* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989). On the way children were impacted by the rise of Nazism in Germany and by World War Two and its aftermath, see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Tara Zahra, "Lost Children: Displacement, Family, and Nation in Postwar Europe," *Journal of Modern History* 81 (March 2009): 45-86; and Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives Under the Nazis* (New York: Random House, 2005). For a discussion of the close links between children and Soviet and Chinese communist nation-building projects, see Karl Marx, *The Early Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974); V. I. Lenin, *On Youth* (Moscow: Novosti, 1969): 41; Julia Mickenberg, "The New Generation and the New Russia: Modern Childhood as Collective Fantasy," *American Quarterly* 2 (March 2010); Anne E. Gorsuch, "Soviet Youth and the Politics of Popular Culture During NEP," *Social History* 17 (May 1992), 189-201; and T. E. Woronov, "Performing the Nation: China's Children as Little Red Pioneers," *Anthropological Quarterly* 80 (Summer 2007): 647-672. Though the study of Latin American childhoods is still developing, see Tobias Hecht, ed., *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002) and Bianca Premo, "How Latin America's History of Childhood Came of Age," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1 (2008): 63-76.

This dissertation departs from the premise that widespread public concern with childhood “finds political expression in the modernist project of nation-building.” Accordingly, just as “...the coincident emergence of the distinct category of childhood with the rise of the modern nation-state affects the creation, expansion, contestation, and duration of modern nations like the United States,” I argue that Cuban and Cuban-American history before and after the 1959 Revolution may also be fruitfully approached through the prism of the child.⁴ My study thus seeks to answer two interrelated questions: first, how have symbolic and actual children influenced and been influenced by the trajectory of the Cuban Revolution and the emergence of a Cuban-American exile community in the United States? And more broadly, what does their centrality to propaganda, public debate and political action on both sides of the Florida Straits reveal about the importance of children to the competing nation-building projects of twentieth century democratic capitalism and communism, and indeed, to the way that modernity itself has been defined?⁵

⁴ Many eighteenth and nineteenth century US writers also contributed to the longstanding association of the new nation with a child. Protesting the injustices of British colonial administration in the Thirteen Colonies, John Adams declared that Great Britain’s “child colonies are of the same ancestry” as the “old English folks” and so deserved to be treated with equality and justice. Believing that demands for increased representation were falling on deaf ears in England, Thomas Paine argued that the “infant state of the colonies’ justified their ‘separation from a corrupt parent’ country committed to denying their inherited “rights and liberties. Throughout early national political writing, the child was similarly and consistently represented as a symbol of the new nation, acting as a founding myth through which the United States had come into being. See John Adams [Humphrey Ploughjogger, pseud.], “We Won’t Be Their Negroes,” *Boston Gazette*, October 14, 1765; Thomas Paine, *The Political Writings of Thomas Paine* (Middletown, NJ: George Evans, 1837); and Caroline F. Levander, *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W. E. B. Du Bois* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 5-6.

⁵I locate the origins of modernity, as well as the origins of “modern” notions of childhood as a distinct stage of life, in sixteenth century Europe, during the era beginning with the invention of the printing press in 1439, given impetus by the Age of Discovery and the triangular Atlantic trade which funded the Industrial Revolution, and expressed most forcefully and consistently through the rise of the nation-state. During the modern era, the rise of capitalism coincided with the emergence of new models of

In order to answer these interrelated questions, this dissertation engages the transnational history of the Cuban Revolution as a site in which to interrogate the complex uses and abuses of children and the symbolic figure of the child in the construction and maintenance of modern nation-building projects. The persistent linkages between children and Cuban aspirations towards national autonomy, encompassing at least a century of struggle against first Spanish and then US dominance as well as experiments with both democratic capitalism and revolutionary socialism, provides an ideal lens through which to analyze the relationship between childhood and the nation-making projects that define the modern era. Although this theme resonates through the last two centuries of Cuban and US history, and indeed through the very history of modernity, sufficient attention has not been paid to children, neither as an active force in national life. I address these omissions by analyzing the transnational politics of

representative government. These processes created enormous wealth and a more equitable way of life for some; they also fueled ongoing imperial adventures and rivalries, the devastating slave-labor extraction of wealth from new world colonies, and the massive social dislocation and the dispossession of entire communities of people. In Western Europe and in North America after the founding of the United States, then, “modern” ideas of liberty, equality and individual human rights co-existed uneasily with Social Darwinism and scientific racism, concepts that justified the subordination and exploitation of many in the service of an elite few. Modern understandings of childhood were deeply implicated in the dynamics of conquest, expansion and imperialism that facilitated the rise of modern European nation-states. In the same way that hierarchical distinctions between male and female, adult and child, and public and private provided the foundation for the emergence of democratic capitalism, they also provided a means through which to construct other cultures as Europe’s innocent, undeveloped past. By both feminizing and infantilizing the peoples they encountered on military and trade expeditions, European imperialists were able to cast themselves in the role of wise, benevolent father and thus justify the conquest and control of foreign territories as in the best interests of the newly created colonial child-subject. This child-centered ideology would later become important to proponents of US expansionism in Mexico, the Caribbean and Asia. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Immanuel Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962); Stephens, *Politics of Culture*, 6; Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom, ed., *The Phillipines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* (Boston: South End, 1987), 23-26; and Ronald Takaki, “An Entering Wedge: The Origins of the Sugar Plantation and a Multi-ethnic Working Class in Hawaii,” *Labor History* 2, no.1 (Winter 1982): 34-46.

childhood in both Havana and Miami between 1959 and 1962, framing this dissertation as a case study that sheds powerful light on the role of symbolic and actual children in broader nation-making projects, both territorial and diasporic. This study thus situates the child at the heart of a complex modern process that is negotiated as much in the realms of culture and society as in the spheres of politics, the economy, and international relations.

Though concerned with events and themes that transcend its limited periodization, this dissertation focuses on the period between 1959 and 1962 as a key juncture in the history of the Revolution and US-Cuba relations, in which struggles to define and control Cuban childhood achieved a dramatic salience on the island and in the United States. During these three years, rebel commander Fidel Castro assumed control of the island's government, employing an increasingly authoritarian and personalistic style of leadership to transform a primarily nationalist and reformist movement to remove dictator Fulgencio Batista from power into a socialist Revolution. At the same time, the Revolution's rapid and unexpected radicalization alienated many of his original middle class, urban, and Catholic supporters, who by 1960 had begun to express their opposition through counter-revolutionary resistance and a massive exodus from the island. During this volatile period, both the symbolic figure of the child and actual children played an important role in creating political consensus, mobilizing support for revolutionary initiatives, and marginalizing dissenting voices; however, childhood also served as an important cultural site through which anti-communist and anti-Castro Cubans organized and articulated their resistance to the Revolution. Struggles to control understandings and practices of

childhood also served as a motivating force behind many Cubans' decisions to flee to the United States.⁶

Children, both symbolic and actual, also played a constitutive role in the creation and consolidation of a militantly anti-Castro exile community in South Florida.

Beginning in late 1959, Fidel Castro's use of symbolic and actual children to spur on a rapidly radicalizing Revolution contributed to the breakdown of historically intimate relations with the United States, leading the nation to pursue a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union in the first few months of 1960. As middle class Cubans left in ever greater numbers for the United States, they and their U.S. allies developed a child-centered "creation myth" which encouraged the federal government to open its doors to freedom-loving parents who sought to protect their children from the horrors of communism.

Moreover, the dissemination of this creation myth through the placement of stories and images of Cuban children in local and national media helped secure essential support for

⁶ The first wave of Cuban emigration, from 1959 to October 1962, encompassed about 200,000 persons, most of them white, middle class, urban and at least nominally Catholic; since many of the people who were most immediately alienated by the revolutionary processes were especially afraid of the potential impact of political changes on their children, families with children under 18 years of age were also overrepresented in this wave. During the second wave of migration between 1965 and 1973 growing numbers of lower middle and working class Cubans left the island, and were incorporated into the existing structures of the exile community and its anti-communist, Catholic and child-centered ideology. Changes in the Cold War strategies of US foreign policy during the late 1970s, as well as the different class, racial and familial characteristics of subsequent waves of Cubans departing the island, meant that discursive associations between childhood, family and anti-communism were much less salient in the stories that circulated about the 1980 *Marielito* refugees. Less forcefully articulated, the nonetheless significant links between childhood and emigration among the *Marielitos* and the Special Period *valseros* of the early 1990s burst back into the forefront of Cuban exile politics during the 1999 Elián González custody battle, even as the politics of childhood gained a new salience on the island. For more on the differences between successive waves of Cuban immigrants see Richard R. Fagen, Richard A. Brody, and Thomas J. O'Leary, *Cubans in Exile: Disaffection and the Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968); and Lisandro Pérez, "Growing Up in Cuban Miami: Immigration, the Enclave, and New Generations," in Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes, ed., *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 91-126.

refugees from Miami's Anglo-American majority by portraying them as sharing the Christian and middle class family values that had achieved prominence in Cold War America.⁷ Exile leaders also relied heavily on children and child-centered discourses and images to demonize the Castro regime and its Soviet patrons, to promote political unity and solidarity among displaced Cubans, and to solicit U.S. support for their counter-revolutionary activities.

After the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and the October 1962 Missile Crisis failed to produce the downfall of the Revolution, exiles' dream of Castro's defeat began to recede into the distance. Miami Cubans nonetheless clung to their belief that exile had been the right choice—a necessary evil to be endured in order to safeguard the wellbeing and future of their sons and daughters—and remained committed to securing the next generation's return to a democratic homeland. With the withdrawal of U.S. government support for future military action against the Revolution, discourses and images of childhood acquired an even deeper resonance. In the coming years and decades, exiles would turn increasingly to their children to make sense of their losses—of home, dignity, and identity—and for the inspiration and strength they needed to begin building new lives for themselves and their families in the United States.

This dissertation uncovers the persistent links between children and nationalist politics in the history of twentieth century Cuban and Cuban-American history, and more broadly throughout the history of the modern era. Located within the context of US

⁷ For cultural perspectives on the Cold War, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); and Jutta Weldes et al., ed., *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

imperialist interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean, it argues that the transnational politics of Cuban childhood emerged in response to and influenced Cuba's historic dependence on their powerful northern neighbor. Shedding new light on how the struggle to define, control and make political use of children propelled the 1959 Revolution and subsequent formation of the US resident exile community, it also reveals how the morally and emotionally charged politics of childhood obscured the historical similarities between Cuban and other Caribbean and Latin American struggles to negotiate the unequal political and economic relationships which bound them to the United States—giving birth to the mythology of Cuban-American exceptionalism that continues to separate the analysis of the exile experience from the experiences of other Latin American origin immigrants.⁸ This dissertation is thus uniquely positioned to contribute to the emerging field of hemispheric and comparative Latina/o History, revealing previously unexamined connections between events and actors in Havana, Washington DC and Miami and between exiles and other diasporic Latina/o peoples in the United States.

Making use of the analytical lens of the child to follow the story of the Cuban exile community back in time and to the home country and forward in time and across the Florida Straits, this dissertation demonstrates the generative possibilities of a hemispheric and cultural Latina/o History. It offers a nuanced consideration of the powerful cultural forces that propelled the 1959 Revolution, forces which are not adequately acknowledged

⁸For more discussion of how Latin American peoples' varied encounters with U.S. imperialism provides a connective thread in a hemispheric and comparative Latina/o History, see the introduction to David G. Gutiérrez, ed. *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States Since 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

in the structural explanations offered by so many scholars.⁹ Attention to the contested site of Cuban childhood sheds new light on how the nation's self-definition evolved in the first three years after Castro's ascent to power, illuminating the processes of cultural change which made possible the Revolution's radicalization. It demonstrates that the revolutionary government's strategic interventions in the realm of Cuban childhood allowed a nation saturated in US commodities, customs, and values to cast off foreign dominance and chart a new vision of the future that nonetheless resonated with historically Cuban aspirations. Moreover, close attention to the politics of childhood also sheds new light on how and why the Cuban counter-revolution emerged, the sites from which it launched its anti-Castro attacks, and the specific strategies it selected.

This child-centered lens allows us to go further than conventional class-based analyses in explaining resistance to the Revolution—it was, after all, not inevitable that the Catholic Church, private school educators and middle class parents would become counter-revolutionary, especially given the initial support of many clergy and middle class families for Castro's leadership. By focusing on children, this study does not downplay the importance of political and economic factors to the deterioration of relationships with the United States and the emergence of counter-revolutionary activity on the island, but instead offers a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the motives and methods of anti-Castro activity on both sides of the Florida Straits. It also reveals in a

⁹ Excellent studies of Cuban history, politics and society before and after the Revolution that prioritize structural approaches include Irving Louis Horowitz, *The Long Night of Dark Intent: A Half Century of Cuban Communism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2008); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Gillian McGillivray, *Blazing Cane: Sugar Communities, Class and State Formation in Cuba, 1868-1959* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

new way, the constitutive role played by symbolic and actual children in creating a shared exilic identity, a common anti-Castro and anti-communist agenda, and sense of solidarity among Cuban refugees in the United States. It likewise demonstrates that the US government's supportive relationship with the growing exile community was not strictly motivated by geopolitical considerations, uncovering the shared set of modern beliefs about the relationship between childhood and the nation and the future of democracy in a Cold War world that underwrote this relationship.

Attention to the nation-making power of symbolic and actual children reveals the inadequacy of structural analyses of the Revolution's origins and trajectory and class-based explanations of the emergence of the exile community, highlighting the importance of culture to all of these processes and to Cuban and Cuban-American history in general. Moreover, by exposing similarities between the child-centered understandings and practices of pro- and anti-Castro actors, this study uncovers previously hidden cultural continuities between pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba and between island and US resident Cubans—and indeed between the shared modern metanarratives that link children to the destiny of the nation-state in both democratic and communist visions of the future.¹⁰ It thus demonstrates that it is as ill-advised to separate children from adults in considering the history of a nation, as it is to examine political processes through the artificial dichotomies of public and private, state and individual, or base and

¹⁰ On the relationship between metanarratives and history writing, see Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon, "The Singularization of History: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge." *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 3 (2003): 704.

superstructure.¹¹ It also confirms that studies of childhood, usually conceived of in cultural terms, in fact have much to contribute to our understanding of “adult” political, economic and social history, both domestically and internationally, in times of nation-building, expansion, and imperialism, war and peace—and even revolution.

Towards a Theory of Childhood: The Child as Nation-Maker

Scholars are widely in agreement that the notion of childhood is a social construction which varies across place and time.¹² Rather than seeing the child as simply a reflection of the political, social and cultural forces of any given historical moment, though, I argue that symbolic and actual children have long played an active role in political life. Moreover, I argue that their importance to nationalist projects makes them into “nation-makers,” at the heart of efforts to make and re-make national communities and to shape relations between modern states and peoples. However, in order to make clear the ways that symbolic and actual children influence and are influenced by broader nation-making projects, further discussion of the terms “child” and “nation” is required.

¹¹ Levander, *Cradle of Liberty*, 6. Claudia Castañeda further notes that “the study of the child is important not only with respect to children and their experience of the world, but also with regard to the making of worlds more generally.” See also Claudia Castañeda, *Figuration: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 1. Along similar lines, Barrie Thorne has observed that “both feminist and traditional knowledge remain deeply and unreflectively centered around the experience of adults.” See Barrie Thorne, “Re-Visioning Women and Social Change: Where Are the Children?” *Gender and Society* 1, no. 1 (March 1987): 86; and Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 407-423.

¹² For discussion of the social and cultural construction of childhood, see Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*. While Ariès’ work deals largely with childhood in a European context, it remains the definitive history of childhood to date. A more complete historiography of childhood is offered in Chapter One of this dissertation.

This dissertation rests on a discursive approach to the theorization of childhood. Heavily influenced by Joan Wallach Scott's seminal work on gender, it draws upon the ideas of power, knowledge and discourse which were originally developed by Foucault within a discussion of shifting understandings of sexuality, ideas that have since been successfully made use of in interrogating the historically contingent categories of race, ethnicity and class. The work of these scholars offers an exciting point of departure from which to begin to develop a theory of childhood as a discursive construction.¹³

I begin, then, with a definition of childhood as the discursively constructed understanding and organization of physical, cognitive and psychological stage-of-life differences. Just as we cannot "see" sexual difference except through our socially mediated knowledge of the body, I argue that definitions of childhood cannot be disentangled from the discursive contexts in which they are always enmeshed. In specific historical moments, these definitions have been inflected by a range of power relations and perspectives shaped around inequalities of race, class, gender and sexuality; they have also been transformed through a constant process of negotiation between domestic and international political, legal, and economic structures, as well as by the social and cultural institutions of science and medicine, religion, the media, schools, and family.

This definition's emphasis on the relationship between power and the production of knowledge requires us to make a tentative heuristic distinction between "symbolic" and "actual" children—though in practice it is often difficult to ascertain where one ends

¹³ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

and the other begins, or to assess the ways they interact with one another. Representations of the symbolic child, though embodying historically specific and contingent understandings of childhood, frequently appear in dominant public discourse in the figure of an anonymous and universal “every-child,” thereby reinforcing hegemonic constructions of this stage of life.¹⁴ Highly normative and possessing great moral and emotional power, the symbolic child is the repository of a community’s self-image and vision of the future, incarnating its shared virtues, values and aspirations, as well as its vulnerabilities and anxieties; as such, it frequently appears as a symbol of the collective, suppressing those traits associated with any individual living child. It is also deployed to explain and justify actions taken on its behalf, and by extension, on behalf of “the community.”¹⁵

The symbolic child therefore has a powerful influence on the structures, institutions and practices which shape the lives of actual living children, whose minds and bodies have been targeted by adults for care and protection, training and

¹⁴ For a discussion of the use of symbols in the Castro government’s campaign to shape a revolutionary consciousness in Cuba after 1959, see Tzvi Medin, *Cuba: The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990). Medin’s work focuses on what he considers the main “integrative symbols” of the Revolution, among them nineteenth century independence leader José Martí, rebel leaders Camilo Cienfuegos and Che Guevara, and, of course, the all-encompassing figure of Fidel Castro. Though mentioning the ideological purposes attached to revolutionary education programs and the involvement of children and young people in political and civic campaigns like the 1961 Literacy Campaign, Medin does not explicitly include the figure of the child as among the integrative symbols he considers essential to the consolidation of the Revolution.

¹⁵ Like “child,” “community” is a problematic term for scholars attentive to the relations of power and difference within what have traditionally been understood as unified and bounded groups. I am similarly hesitant to employ the term in discussions of Miami’s first wave of Cuban refugees, especially in light of the political differences that divided pro- and anti-Batista exiles before 1961. For lack of a better alternative, however, I will continue to use “community” when referring to groups of people that have so self-defined or have been ascribed in this way. I do so while paying attention to the political purposes that often accompany the use of the term, and with the recognition that membership in these communities has not always been freely assumed or enjoyed equally by everyone presumed to “belong.”

mobilization, indoctrination and control—in order to shape their lives and behavior in the present and with an eye on their future role as citizens. Conversely, exigencies associated with actual children influence the ways in which the symbolic child is represented and deployed within their communities. They are thus inextricably intertwined with one another.¹⁶

It is nonetheless useful to distinguish between representations of the symbolic child and initiatives that seek to influence actual children. This distinction allows us to ask more precise questions about *why* and *how* knowledge about children is produced, contested and naturalized—and to what end. Which specific actors have sought to create or contest understandings and practices of childhood? Whose interests are served by these efforts? What are the natures and origins of those interests? What methods, media and techniques are employed by those seeking to define or redefine childhood—for example, the transmission of images and messages (both explicit and implicit) through diverse channels, or the establishment or abolishment of child-focused laws, policies, institutions and cultural practices? In the process, which alternative understandings or practices of childhood are negated, and which children included or excluded from definitions that have become hegemonic? What are the consequences, intended or otherwise, both for children and the communities which they are part of?

¹⁶ Claudia Castañeda uses the concept “figuration” to describe this dialectic between experience and representation by which the child (or any other concept or entity) is given particular form through discourse in ways that “speak to the making of worlds.” She argues that a “figure” is thus “the simultaneously material and semiotic effect of specific practices. Understood as figures, furthermore, particular categories of existence can also be considered in terms of their uses—what they ‘body forth’ in turn. Figuration is thus understood here to incorporate a double force: constitutive effect and generative circulation.” Conceiving of childhood in both material and semiotic terms requires, then, that the historian pay attention to both the real lives of children and the meanings attributed to them in specific social and historical contexts. See Castañeda, *Figuration*, 3.

Building on this discursive definition of childhood, I have developed an understanding of childhood as central to the “imaginative ideological labor” of nation-building and the ongoing construction of national identity, unity and stability.¹⁷ Rather than simply reflecting the political, social and cultural forces of any given historical moment, I argue that symbolic and actual children have consistently been drawn upon by modern nations in the pursuit of a wide range of political, economic, social and cultural goals; they have similarly been envisioned as important to the negotiation of nations’ relationships with other powers. Their constitutive role in national life thus makes them into “nation-makers,” essential to the emergence and maintenance of modern nation building projects.

This theorization allows us to move beyond passive constructions of childhood as a mere reflection of a given environment, in order to assess more precisely the distinct, though often complementary roles played by symbolic and actual children in influencing broader historical and political processes. While the political potential of the symbolic child has already been discussed, and is in any case easily grasped, additional analysis is needed to understand the function of actual children in these processes. Children have often been defined by legal categories that bar them from formal participation in the political sphere, even as so much political discourse is devoted to claims made by others in their name. However, in spite of bars to their participation in recognized political

¹⁷ Through imaginative ideological labor, nationalists work at “clarifying the idea of the nation and giving it concrete expression by creating historical myths, propagating values, and constructing institutions. Their labor seeks to “undermine competing loyalties, such as regionalism, and erect ‘an ideological and institutional structure of immense power’ within which the range of possible political activities and beliefs would be contained and thus the new national trajectory determined.” See Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 17; and Geoff Eley, “Nationalism and Social History,” *Social History* 6, no. 1 (January 1981): 92, 104.

activities such as voting or holding office, children have frequently been encouraged or required to perform other “adult” political duties—from attendance at rallies and participation in mass organizations to vigilance, intelligence gathering and even military service—in spite of (or perhaps because of?) the age-specific physical, mental and emotional characteristics that limit their ability to exercise free will or speak on their own behalf.¹⁸

Though the nature of children’s political action is clearly problematic, I nonetheless insist that the child does, in many cases, possess and exercise a limited form of agency. Though their lives are circumscribed by a range of political and legal, social and cultural, and physical/developmental factors beyond their control, children can and do act—though often not of their own volition or with full understanding—and these actions, as much as the meanings attached to their representation within public discourse, have enormous political consequences.¹⁹ It is on this basis that I see both symbolic and

¹⁸ Recent research has explored how the inequalities between adults and children has led to the subsequent misrepresentations and misuses of children in both popular and academic mediums; see the following: Julian Henriques, et al., *Changing the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1998); Alison James, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998); Alison James and Alan Prout, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise, and Problems,” in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, ed. Alison James and Alan Prout (London: Falmer, 1990); and Stevi Jackson, *Childhood and Sexuality* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1982). Other scholars have begun to demonstrate sensitivity to the political work which childhood performs on behalf of others. Claudia Castañeda analyzes “the ways in which the child (as one among a number of categories of [unequal] difference) comes to accrue significant cultural value, as well as the work that it does along the way. Asking how and why the child as a figure has been made a resource for wider cultural projects brings the child into the foreground of the analysis regarding its uses and value for adult discourses, and provides the groundwork for imagining an alternative order of things.” See Castañeda, *Figuration*, 2.

¹⁹ The actions and behaviors of actual children may be interpreted and represented in ways that appear to support or resist broader political projects, whether or not there is an explicit connection between them, thereby converting the actual into the symbolic—and giving further proof to the extent to which the two categories overlap. For example, photographs of children smiling and waving flags may be represented by the media as evidence of widespread support for a political leader. This fusion of the actual and the symbolic, a technique frequently employed by Cuba’s state-sponsored media after 1959, may be

actual children as actors in the broader historical and political processes that simultaneously shape their lives.²⁰

Theorizing the child as nation-maker further requires us to interrogate the meanings attached to the term “nation,” a construction as historically contingent as that of childhood. In line with Benedict Anderson’s generative re-envisioning of the nation as an “imagined community,” this study moves beyond conventional territorially-based definitions to embrace an understanding of nationhood as both a category of analysis and a category of social, cultural and political practice.²¹ According to this definition, the nation is not strictly a self-evident or static entity contained by clearly demarcated borders; rather, it is a ever-evolving social construct, produced via a complex range of interactions between the state, the market, and civil society, and between institutions and individuals, constantly in flux as a result of human activity and efforts to make and re-make its meaning. Moreover, the category of “nation” is also used by people to negotiate

understood as “symbolic action,” one of the essential integrative symbols Tzvi Medin sees as at the heart of Cuban revolutionary consciousness. See Medin, *The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness*, 57.

²⁰ In asserting a form of limited political agency for children, I diverge from other scholars who have written about Cuban revolutionary childhood. In *The Lost Apple: Operation Pedro Pan, Cuban Children in the U.S., and the Promise of a Better Future*, María de los Angeles Torres describes Cuban children as pawns and victims of the Cold War struggle between Cuba, the USSR and the United States. This characterization recognizes the gap between political claims made through, and on behalf of, Cuban children, but pays scant attention to the intentions and/or actions of the island’s young people embroiled in the struggle to define their nation’s political future. María de los Angeles Torres, *The Lost Apple: Operation Pedro Pan, Cuban Children in the U. S., and the Promise of a Better Future* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2003), 2.

²¹ See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (February 2000): 1-47; Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ana María Alonso, “The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism, and Ethnicity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 379-405.

their identities and membership in different communities and to make sense of themselves and their lives.

Rather than seeing this (admittedly amorphous) definition as limiting the possibilities for analysis, I employ it deliberately in order to emphasize the contingencies of nationhood, focusing less on what the nation *is* and more on how it is “done.” This definition further allows us to decouple the nation-as-practice from the nation-as-territory and, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, to begin to understand it as a transnationally/translocally-constituted phenomenon.²² These new understandings are essential to this study. Given the intimacy and complexity of the historical ties between Cuba and the United States, the significant influence of the island’s US colony before 1959, and the presence of Cuban diasporic communities in South Florida and New York over at least the past 150 years, I argue that it is essential to approach the history and politics of Cuban childhood within this transnational/translocal framework of the nation—even, as this dissertation will demonstrate, after the severing of formal relations between the United States and Cuba in 1961.²³

²² I am not suggesting that “transnational” or globalizing forces in modern society have dramatically diminished the power of the nation-state or its ability to control individuals’ access to the rewards and benefits of citizenship. The nation-state and national politics continue to determine, to a large degree the life possibilities enjoyed by most people, most poignantly in the case of refugees, undocumented migrants and their children. See Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald, “Transnationalism in Question,” *The American Journal of Sociology* (March 2004): 1177-1195.

²³ I use the term “transnational” to describe processes by which people build social fields that cross geographic, economic, political and cultural borders. Through these processes, transmigrants and their non-migrant relatives and communities develop relationships that link countries of origin, temporary residence and settlement in multiple ways. Expanding upon this concept, the term “translocal” refers at once to historical/structural locations, geographic scales, and subject positions...it is not centered in nation-states and nationalities but articulates geographic units of space (place, nation, region, world) with historical locations and subjectivities that take into account the ways people are concurrently and multiply positioned by their race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality—and even age. These processes and positions are integral to the formation of deterritorialized and diasporic nations and are at the heart of the

Through the struggles, upheavals and radical transformations of the modern era, transnational struggles to define and control Cuban childhood have shaped both the nation's domestic and international affairs and the lives of the island's children. The Cuban child-as-nation-maker—and, since 1959, as nation-breaker—has also served to focus and articulate the processes of political polarization that led to the fragmentation and reformation of the nation into “Two Cubas,” sharing as many similarities as differences, centered around the cities of Havana and Miami.²⁴ These two nations, island-resident and diasporic, in spite of the geographical and ideological barriers that divide them, continue to interact with one other in ways that influence the identity and trajectory of both communities. They remain mutually constitutive entities, shaped by an ongoing process of transnational encounters, contestation and accommodation, that continues to articulate itself through symbolic and actual children—a process which, as the 1999 Elián González custody battle revealed in poignant detail, also continues to impact the lives of Cuban children on both sides of the Florida Straits.

fragmentation and reformation of the Cuban nation into the “Two Cubas.” See Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach Science, 1994); Agustín Lao-Montes and Arlene Dávila, ed., *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 13; Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4; and Juan Flores, *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

²⁴ I allude to the fragmentation and reformation of Cuban nationhood after 1959 by referring to the “Two Cubas.” I take the term from Ann Louise Bardach, *Cuba Confidential: Love and Vengeance in Miami and Havana* (New York: Random House, 2002), xvii. Bardach characterizes Cuba and Miami as “parallel universes” that share more similarities than differences, including the predilection of both Cubas for *caudillo*, or antidemocratic, strongman, political leadership. The parallel political trajectories of Miami and Havana, especially in relation to migration and politics after 1959, are brilliantly analyzed in María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

Throughout this period, however, the role of symbolic and actual children in national life remained fundamentally consistent with the functions they assumed before and after the consolidation of the socialist Revolution. Understood in this way, the first three years of a transnational history of Cuban childhood reveal unexpected continuities and recurring trends in the island's history and highlight the remarkably persistent role of the child-as-nation-maker across time, ideological constructs, and even territorial borders.

Childhood and the “Two Cubas”: A Brief Historiography

Though located within the emerging field of hemispheric and comparative Latina/o history, this study also intervenes in ongoing scholarly debates about childhood, nationalism and the nation-state, as well as in current efforts to re-imagine the place of culture in the history of international relations/foreign policy, immigration and ethnic community formation. Breaking new ground in the theorization of the child as an active force in modern nation-making projects, it also offers more specific empirical interventions into the history of US-Cuba relations, the Cuban Revolution and the formation of the Miami exile community.

The history of childhood begins with Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), which argued that modern notions of childhood as a unique and intrinsically important stage of life did not acquire widespread social, cultural or emotional significance until at least the sixteenth century.²⁵ Through the 1970s, scholars devoted themselves to supporting his contention by portraying the pre-modern family as

²⁵ Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 369-370.

instrumental, authoritarian, and lacking in affective ties, insisting on the progressivism and moral superiority of the modern family²⁶ and, in the process, overstepping many of the tentative and nuanced claims of the original work.²⁷ Subsequently, in a critique that began to emerge in the 1980s, historians sought to disprove Ariès by insisting that parental awareness of childhood, in all its distinct ages and stages, special needs and vulnerabilities, can be documented all the way back to antiquity.²⁸ While historians have recently begun to ask broader questions about children in the past, they continue to approach them peripherally through studies of demography and household economics, social policy, or education, or focus primarily on the familial context of children's lives, thereby relegating them to an imagined "private" sphere of experience.²⁹

²⁶ See Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, *The European Family: Patriarchy to Partnership from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Karla Oostervan and Manfred Hörzinger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); and Lloyd DeMause, ed., *The History of Childhood* (New York: Psychohistory, 1974).

²⁷ Ariès, unlike many of his followers, vehemently rejected the idea that parents in the past consciously or deliberately neglected or despised their children. Nor did he see love as lacking in premodern households: rather, what was missing was parental and societal recognition of "the particular nature of childhood" and with it care for and involvement in a child's life. Parents just did not recognize their children as such, and so families in the past were "moral and social" units, but not "sentimental." Moreover, he did not understand changes to family life over time as a simple progressive and improving dynamic. Rather, as the child stayed home longer and families turned in upon themselves and away from community-based sociality, Ariès believed that heightened interest in children's development made them more susceptible to adult control and supervision. As a result, they became less free and joyous, and more pressured towards discipline and conformity. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 375, 390, 403.

²⁸ For analysis of the differences between these two eras of scholarship, see Steven Ozment, *Ancestors: The Loving Family in Old Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁹ More recent and more broadly defined approaches to childhood are reviewed by Cunningham, "Histories of Childhood," 1195-1208. Efforts to challenge the liberal hierarchies of public and private are framed as an explicit goal of feminist scholarship; Elizabeth Dillon reminds us that "...the gendered logic sustaining U.S. liberalism" has played a role in relegating childhood to the private sphere. "In such models, the child is understood to reinforce and extend women's association with privacy, shoring up an American political culture in which women are dependent and men are autonomous." Elizabeth Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 145.

A small body of recent scholarship explores the cultural meanings of childhood, noting how children through history have stood in for broader notions of innocence, hope, incapacity, or evil, and considers how these constructions have impacted the lives of young people.³⁰ However, most scholars persist in viewing the child as a reflection, and consequently as either victim or beneficiary, of historical change, rather than as an active force in national life. One exception is found in the work of Caroline Levander, who recognizes the importance of children within Cuban history, noting that the child was consistently featured in early political rhetoric in both the United States and Cuba to “constitute the very national entity it represents.”³¹ However, Levander’s study focuses on the way the figure of the child has influenced United States and Cuban race relations, and prioritizes the United States experience; moreover, her brief discussion of Cuban childhood does not extend beyond the independence struggle that freed the island from Spanish control in 1898.

My dissertation builds on Levander’s work, providing a more comprehensive theoretical model for the analysis of the myriad ways that childhood has influenced Cuban history during the national period, as well as considering its role in Cuba-US relations. I argue that Cuban children have played a constitutive role not only in the trajectories of Cuban independence, but also those of republican nationhood, revolutionary socialism, and exile community formation. They have also played a crucial role in the evolution of Cuba’s relationship with its northern neighbor.

³⁰ See, for example, James, Jenks, and Prout, *Theorizing Childhood*.

³¹ Levander, *Cradle of Liberty*, 5.

I break new ground in the theorization of childhood by re-conceiving symbolic and actual children as constitutive, rather than simply reflective of national life. Departing from the assumption that widespread public concern with children first emerged as a corollary to the modern nation-state, I re-envision childhood as central to the “imaginative ideological labor” of ascendant nationalist projects, the creation and maintenance of collective identities, and the consolidation of political and social movements, both within territorially bounded and diasporic nations.³² Moreover, I argue, national communities have long relied upon both symbolic and actual children in negotiating encounters with the outside world, linking childhood inextricably to the history of international relations and foreign policy. The centrality of children to all of these historical processes makes them into “nation-makers,” constitutive of the emergence, day-to-day functioning, and relations between modern peoples and states, within and across borders.

Making use of the theoretical lens of the child as nation-maker to challenge existing interpretations of the origins and trajectory of the Cuban Revolution and emergence of the US-based exile community, this dissertation simultaneously intervenes in recent debates on the origins, nature and continuing relevance of the nation-state; for just as understandings of childhood and its relationship to the nation remain largely implicit, modern conceptions of the nation which date back to the Treaty of Westphalia are only recently beginning to be interrogated. Framed around “Two Cubas” located in Miami and Havana, my study is in conversation with other Latina/o scholars’ re-

³² Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*; Castañeda, *Figuration*; Levander, *Cradle of Liberty*; Torres, *The Lost Apple*; Eley, “Nationalism and Social History”; and Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 17.

envisionings of the relationship between nations and their diasporas, especially those who study the US resident communities originating in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. For example, Jorge Duany defies traditional territorially and sovereignty-centered concepts of nationhood by suggesting that Puerto Rico—which he understands as encompassing both island-resident and diasporic communities—should be understood as a “nation on the move.” In line with this dissertation’s understanding of nation-as-practice, he redefines the term to mean “not as a well-bounded sovereign state but as a translocal community based on a collective consciousness of a shared history, language and culture.”

My study also engages Juan Flores’ transnational/translocal understanding of diasporic nationhood. Flores argues that diasporic communities must be understood relationally, vis-à-vis both countries of origin and new host settings, as well as in terms of the contradictions and complexities revealed through fissures along lines of race, class, and gender. Moreover, reinforcing my theorization of the child as nation-maker, Flores further argues that diasporic national life is best studied among youth.³³ Building on Duany and Flores’ theoretical advances, this dissertation produces new transnational/translocal knowledge in order to contribute to rethinking the outmoded conceptions of “the national” that still pervade much historical scholarship.³⁴

I also seek to intervene in recent debates about the role of culture in the history of immigration and diasporic/ethnic community formation by demonstrating how different understandings and practices of childhood, and the public discourses that have

³³ Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, 4; and Flores, *The Diaspora Strikes Back*.

³⁴ Recent scholarship on Cuba begins to adopt this perspective in Damián Fernández, ed., *Cuba Transnational* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).

surrounded them, influenced Cuban migration patterns between 1959 and 1962. I demonstrate that cultural constructs of childhood have played an important role in mediating the human encounters produced by migration, arguing that modernist constructions of childhood shared by Cubans and Americans, as well as the strategic representation of the island's children in the US media, contributed to the establishment of uniquely favorable immigration and settlement assistance policies that facilitated Cuban immigration.³⁵

This project also answers the calls of scholars of migration and citizenship for research on how immigrant cultural practices impact diasporic/ethnic community formation, informing interactions between immigrants and the receiving community and between different groups of ethnic and racially-marked people.³⁶ It does so by demonstrating that children were central to the Cuban exile community's interactions

³⁵ While previous generations of scholars saw immigrants as abandoning ties to countries of origin upon arrival in the United States, and framed studies of assimilation in terms of ethnic communities' efforts to reject or retain "traditional" cultures, more recent scholarship has challenged this view of culture-as-artifact and re-imagined ethnic cultures as a dynamic pastiche of inherited, adopted and invented practices through which marginalized peoples organize across transnational/translocal spaces to assert strategic identities, stage political claims for inclusion, and demand equal access to the benefits of citizenship. A concise overview of this earlier literature is available in John Bodnar, introduction to *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). George Sanchez and David G. Gutiérrez have developed these claims in their seminal work on the Mexican-American Chicana/o communities in the United States; see George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

³⁶ Francesca Polletta points to the power of such narratives, arguing that "...storytelling helps to make sense of the anomalous, how it elicits and channels emotions, and how it sustains individual and group identities..." The narratives of Cuban exiles, then, are not simply acts of remembering, but also are ways of constructing solidarities, policing ethnic boundaries, and pursuing political projects. As Alma DeRojas notes, "Not only do Cuban exiles desire to return to a mythical homeland of the past," through the narratives which they deploy, but "they also desire to construct a *Cuba libre* of the future." See Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 8; and Alma DeRojas, "La Cubanía in Exile," in *Cuba Transnational*, ed. Damian J. Fernandez. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 179-204.

with the various state institutions that managed their re-settlement in the United States, as well as with the black, white and Latina/o communities of southern Florida. I demonstrate that constructs of childhood played an integral part of the earliest wave of Cuban immigrants' efforts to build a garner sympathy from the US mainstream, prove themselves uniquely worthy of special governmental support and, eventually, to proclaim themselves successful and assimilated Americans, often by drawing unfavorable comparisons between themselves, African-Americans and other Latina/o immigrants—and even between themselves and more Cubans arriving after 1980.³⁷ My intervention in all these fields thus contributes to rethinking how nationhood is practiced, not only by Cuban exiles, but also by US Latina/os and other diasporic communities in a range of national contexts.

This dissertation also begins to build empirical knowledge about the as-yet unwritten history of Cuban childhood, offering an in-depth analysis of the active role played by symbolic and actual children during the three volatile years following the triumph of the 1959 Revolution. The work of Louis Pérez offers a starting point for readers interested in the understandings and practices of republican-era childhoods; however, where my study places children at the heart of national life, Pérez approaches Cuban children peripherally—through discussions of public education, changing consumption patterns, and popular culture—and as a means of illustrating his larger

³⁷ For a discussion of the ways that narratives of the Cuban exile community identity differ from those of Nicaraguan migrants who fled to Miami in the 1980s after the Sandinista Revolution, and the differential treatment of these communities by the US government, see Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Sara Curran, “Nicaraguans: Voices Lost, Voices Found,” in *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*, ed. Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 127-156.

argument about American economic, political and cultural hegemony on the island before the Revolution.³⁸ Pérez's work is nonetheless indispensable to my own, pointing towards a rich, yet almost entirely unexplored, field for research, and inviting a more systematic study of Cuban childhood.

Bringing together the distinct literatures on childhood, the modern nation-state, and Cuban and Cuban-American history and politics, I begin to tell the untold story of the relationship between the island's children and its long-deferred dreams of national autonomy. After making use of the powerful analytical lens of the child to shed new light on the protracted history of Cuban nationalism and Cuba-US relations that informed the first three years of revolutionary change, I focus on addressing the significant gaps in the literature on the relationship between childhood and the nation during that period.

Though interactions between the Revolutionary state and Cuban children have not gone entirely unstudied, many of the available works date back to the 1960s and 1970s. Cuban sources from this period, written in support of the new regime's claim that the Revolution was "For the Children," offer a vivid record of the tangible benefits it provided to rural and working class young people; however, in framing the Revolution as "giver of gifts" to children, most of these publications fail to acknowledge the ways the Castro government also benefited from its close relationship with the island's youngest citizens. Moreover, they do not explore the impact of revolutionary initiatives on the lives of middle class and elite children.

³⁸ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "The Imperial Design: Politics and Pedagogy in Occupied Cuba, 1899-1902," in *Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 35-52; and Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

Contemporary studies written by “outside” observers similarly focus almost exclusively on Castro’s efforts to expand public education on the island, and are often limited by their enthusiasm for the Revolution’s progressive approaches to schooling and childcare—again, to the detriment of a more comprehensive critical analysis of the ways that the Castro government made use of child-centered policies, programs and initiatives in the pursuit of broader political goals.³⁹ Julie Marie Bunck’s more recent and more critical study analyzes revolutionary efforts to place young people at the center of a new socialist culture on this island; nonetheless, Bunck’s excellent study also remains focused on education and other child-centered policy initiatives and neglects the active role played by symbolic and actual children in directly reshaping national life.⁴⁰ Tzvi Medin’s work on revolutionary consciousness similarly focuses on the role of ideology in education; though offering a more in-depth examination of the way that young people’s participation in the 1961 Literacy Campaign helped instill in them the socialist worldview projected by the Revolution, Medin also fails to recognize the strategic uses to which the Castro government deployed images and discourses of Cuban childhood to consolidate the socialist Revolution.⁴¹

My study also places children at the center of exile history and politics. Scattered references to children in studies of the US-based Cuban community allude the ways that

³⁹ One of the most representative of these is Karen Wald, *Children of Che: Childcare and Education in Cuba* (Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts, 1978); see also Elizabeth Sutherland, *The Youngest Revolution: A Personal Report on Cuba* (New York: Dial Press, 1969).

⁴⁰ Julie Marie Bunck, *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

⁴¹ Medin, *The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness*.

the swift radicalization of the Revolution threatened traditional notions of Cuban family life and childhood and accelerated emigration from the island; however, children play a peripheral role in most of these stories.⁴² The few studies focused on children are dedicated to documenting the experience of unaccompanied minors whose parents, fearing communist indoctrination in Castro's schools, sent them into foster care in the United States through "Operation Pedro Pan."⁴³ However, this scholarship has been produced by Cuban-Americans scholars who often seem to be writing primarily for an "insider" audience that shares their ideological proclivities, their intimate knowledge of local events, and their specific ideas about the significance of the Revolution. Such texts allude to and assume the existence of the historically specific understandings, practices and discourses of Cuban childhood, rather than analyzing their constitutive role in the transformation of Cuban nationhood after 1959.

This is not the case in María de los Angeles Torres' *The Lost Apple: Operation Pedro Pan, Cuban Children in the U.S., and the Promise of a Better Future* (2003), which views the voyage of these 14,000 unaccompanied children to the United States between 1959 and 1963 as representative of a thoroughly-analyzed dialectical relationship between childhood and the nation in Cuban history; nonetheless, her analysis rests on the assumption that children were simply reflections of, and passive victims of,

⁴² María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, *Political and Economic Migrants in America: Cubans and Mexicans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); and Silvia Pedraza, *Political Disaffection in Cuba's Revolution and Exodus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴³ Yvonne M. Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14,048 Cuban Children* (London: Routledge, 1999); Victor Andres Triay, *Fleeing Castro: Operation Pedro Pan and the Cuban Children's Program* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998); and Torres, *The Lost Apple*.

the larger Cold War forces that shaped the Revolution's trajectory. Missing from this analysis—and from the other previously discussed studies—is the recognition that Cuban children, both symbolic and actual, were not simply beneficiaries or victims of the Revolution, but rather, were powerfully constitutive figures of the events taking place in Havana and Miami between 1959 and 1962.⁴⁴ My dissertation focuses on addressing these omissions, asking how political actors in both Cuba and the United States made use of both symbolic and actual children to promote competing political agendas during the first three years of Revolution, analyzing the consequences for both children and the national communities to which they belonged.

Methodology and Sources

This dissertation draws on theoretical models and concepts drawn from the fields of history, sociology, cultural studies and political science, as well as data gathered in Cuba and the United States, to trace and analyze the nation-making work performed by Cuban children on both sides of the Florida Straits. In so doing, it seeks to transcend both

⁴⁴ Though I have reservations about the author's portrayal of Cuban children as pawns of the Cold War political struggle surrounding the Cuban Revolution, my dissertation owes its origins in large part to María de los Angeles Torres' excellent study of the migration of unaccompanied Cuban minors to the United States. *The Lost Apple* tells the story of a battle "between two states representing seemingly opposite systems of government. Both choose children as the means to wage their battles... The Pedro Pan exodus thus becomes a window through which to understand how children's needs were defined, and indeed manipulated, in a moment when competing versions of the modernist project, communism and democracy, face off. It tells us about the place of children in modern society and it suggests that the exodus was not a contest over protecting children but rather about competing state-building projects." This dissertation expands upon Torres' study by locating the Pedro Pan exodus among other struggles over Cuban children between 1959-1962, both in Cuba and southern Florida; rather than seeing the migration of unaccompanied minors as an isolated or exceptional event, I understand it as one among many child-centered struggles, all of them interconnected and representative of a broader historical trend: the emergence of a modern notion of childhood that envisions the care, upbringing and control of children as integral to the destiny of the nation-state. Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 22.

disciplinary boundaries and the Cold War era “area studies” model that continues to delineate historical scholarship in many American universities. Moreover, it challenges practices of “methodological nationalism” that equate society and nation with the state and assume that countries are the natural unit for analysis, reading Cuban and US sources as a single record of the transnational/translocal historical process by which residents of two politically and geographically separate, but nonetheless mutually constituting Cuban communities, utilized symbolic and actual children in the pursuit of radically different national projects.⁴⁵ By denaturalizing modern notions of both the child and the nation, I offer an alternative story of the Cuban Revolution, emphasizing its continuity with the island’s century-long nationalist project and, perhaps more unexpectedly, the shared adherence of ideologically opposed Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits to a fundamental set of modernist assumptions that predated, propelled and will most likely outlive the island’s socialist experiment.

This dissertation draws upon archival materials gathered in Cuba and Southern Florida during five research trips between 2000 and 2011. The majority of sources are housed at the *Biblioteca Nacional José Martí* in Havana, the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami, and the Hoover Institute on War, Peace and Revolution at Stanford University. I have integrated sources gathered on the island, including government publications, scholarly studies and newspaper, magazine and journal articles,

⁴⁵ See Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology,” *International Migration Review* (Fall 2003): 576-610.

with a range of archival sources located at these two US universities, using them together to tell this transnational story.

The Cuban Heritage Collection's extensive collection of government and civic publications, magazine and newspaper articles and editorials from Cuban periodicals through the Republican and Revolutionary periods as well as those produced by the Cuban exile community in the United States, make up the bulk of my archival sources. The most significant of these deal with the early period of exile community formation, including the records of the Cuban Refugee Center, which opened in 1960 under the auspices of the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. As the focal point of refugee registration, relief and settlement, the CRC collection offers a wealth of correspondence, statistics, pamphlets, government documents and records of congressional hearings, photographs, as well as records of films and other publications relating to the early exile community. These sources provided vivid insight into the political and social issues that affected Cuban émigrés, and consistently reflect the discourses of childhood which I see as at the heart of the fragmentation and reformation of the island nation into "Two Cubas" after the Revolution.

I have also made use of the records of the Truth About Cuba Committee, Inc., a non-profit organization founded by Miami exiles in 1961 to disseminate information about communist Cuba throughout the United States and Latin America, as well as the records of the *Cruzada Educativa Cubana*, founded in 1962 to promote Cuban culture and history in the United States and to fight the penetration and expansion of international communism throughout educational systems in the Americas. The transcripts, manuscripts, awards, photographs, proclamations and school programs

generated by this organization offer another lens onto the activities and public discourses through which exiles articulated their understandings of the relationship between childhood and the nation, and their intertwined ethnic and political identities as Cuban émigrés and refugees from communism. The CHC collection of more than 1,000 titles of *periodiquitos*, the independently published magazines, bulletins, newsletters and newspapers published by Cuban exiles beginning in late 1959, have also provided me with insight into exile perspectives on events taking place on the island as well as constant examples of the ways symbolic and actual children participated in émigré life.

At the Hoover Institute, I examined collections that helped me situate the Cuban Revolution and the growth of the exile community as part of the rise of global communism after World War II. These included the records of the International Rescue Committee, which placed the Cuban exodus and resettlement within the broader parameters of US Cold War era refugee policy. I also studied the Cuba file of The Americas Collection, which contains one of the most significant collections of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara's writings and speeches, documents on Soviet policy toward the island, and related clippings from serials and newspapers published in the United States and Cuba from the 1960s-1980s. Focusing heavily on education, it also contains posters, film footage, photographs, book jackets and iconography that provided compelling evidence of the salience of children in public debates over foreign relations between these nations. I also made extensive use of the Hoover Institute's records of the Citizens Committee for a Free Cuba, an organization of émigrés and academics who gathered data and published reports on the political, economic, social and cultural effects of Cuban

communism, US foreign policy towards Cuba, and émigré activities from 1960-1974.

The rich collection of Cuban émigré testimonials in this collection provided first-hand perspectives on the changing understandings, practices and discourses of childhood on the island in that period.

Within all of these collections I have paid special attention to the representation of children in news media and government and civic-organization sponsored propaganda messages, images, and initiatives, including speeches, political cartoons, pamphlets and press releases; I have also considered films, posters, storybooks and other child-centered publications, both academic and popular. Finally, I have studied the oral histories and memoirs produced by members of this community who were children during the early years of the Revolution.⁴⁶ Both interviews and memoirs help illuminate the complex relationship between representation and experience in the history of Cuban childhood; I employ them both as a means of emphasizing the ways they are intertwined, as well as to highlight my analytical distinction between the symbolic child, on whose behalf so many

⁴⁶ The use of memoirs presents a range of methodological concerns. The importance of the political in the lives of Cubans of all ages, on both sides of the Florida Straits and especially after 1959, cannot be overstated; this reality requires that historians commit to an especially rigorous reading of all texts, and engage in a careful process of cross-checking the multiple perspectives embedded in primary sources against secondary material that has been produced on the island and in the United States. However, while taking into account the ideological boundaries which often divide island and US resident versions of Cuban history, I contend that scholars must also pay attention to commonalities across the texts, and read empathetically for the origins of and responses to the Revolution that are at the heart of not only the “private” stories told in Cuban American memoirs, but also the “public” stories told by Cuban and American political and civic leaders as well as in the popular media.

political claims are made, and the actual child, whose life is shaped by agendas that often respond more to the interests of adults than those of the children they speak for.⁴⁷

I also draw upon oral histories and memoirs as a way to begin inserting children's voices into history and, more specifically, to draw attention to the very real processes of dislocation—political, social, cultural, as well as geographic—and separation that were lived by all Cuban children, whether they remained on or left the island after 1959. Accordingly, although this dissertation focuses the bulk of its analysis on issues of representation in the politics of the early Revolution and exile community, its prioritization of the symbolic child is balanced where appropriate by recognition of the actions and perspectives of actual children.⁴⁸ Though minimal, the inclusion of childhood recollections provides context for the claims made about and through children, and also allows us to begin to assess the distance between those claims and the effects they have produced.

⁴⁷ Stuart Hall's work on racial identities demonstrates that posing representations of race as outside of and opposed to concrete lived experience obscures the way the two are intimately linked to one another. See Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice* 20 (Spring/Summer 1993): 111. David Roediger similarly calls for "...a healthy refusal to imagine a choice between experience and representation" in his study of white racial formation. He uses the phrase "textured scholarship" to describe scholarship that integrates social and cultural history, analyzing material bases of experience as well as the representations that correspond to them. See David R. Roediger, "The Pursuit of Whiteness: Property, Terror, and Expansion, 1790-1860," Special Issue on Racial Consciousness and Nation-Building in the Early Republic, *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 590. Given that childhood, like whiteness, is a socially constructed identity, studies in this field would benefit from an equal commitment to "texture."

⁴⁸ Literary theorist Warren Boutcher addresses the relationship between discourse, or representation, and "reality" through the notion of an "applied text": "An applied text is rather the historically and culturally conditioned pattern of habitual perception and purposive reaction that can be inferred from copies of books when combined with other evidence. It is this combination which reveals the social relations, occasions, and conventions shaping the producer's patterns of intentions in and the reader's patterns of interaction with the book." See Warren Boutcher, "The Analysis of Culture Revisited: Pure Texts, Applied Texts, Literary Historicisms, Cultural Histories," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no. 3 (2003): 497.

In the process of gathering and analyzing all of these sources, I have confronted the difficulty of determining exactly how to distinguish between Cuban “children,” “youth” or adolescents, and adults. I have not been alone in this challenge—indeed, as the central argument of this dissertation stipulates, struggles to define and operationalize these terms played an important role in the transformation of Revolution from a nationalist and reformist movement into a socialist nation-building project, and played an active role in sparking and articulating conflict between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary Cubans, on and off the island. Therefore, and in line with my understanding of childhood as a discursive construct, this dissertation does not focus on a strictly-defined age group, but rather includes in its analysis all young people that archival sources define as “children,” noting the discrepancies, the meanings that were attached to different definitions of childhood by different political actors, and the consequences of these struggles to define and control those so defined.

Therefore, while much of the historical data and analysis presented here focuses on school-age, Cuban children between five and sixteen years—in part due to the availability of sources—attention is given to the early childhood years and to students up to the age of eighteen. I also refer at times to university students, when their experience seems relevant. The choice to include young people of this age group in a study on the child-as-nation-maker, albeit occasionally, is a deliberate one, an assertion of the need to consider how stage-of-life experience is influenced by one’s own earliest years. The presence of those whom some would describe as “young adults,” but who remain close to and were profoundly shaped by childhood experience, also reminds us of the

impossibility of completely separating childhood from adulthood in considering the history of a nation.⁴⁹

Organization

Chapter One of this dissertation offers a historical overview of the role of children in US-Cuba relations after the 1898 Spanish-Cuban-American War, and their centrality to the frustrated nationalist aspirations that propelled the island toward Revolution in 1959. Chapter Two focuses on the emergence of a “politics of childhood” on the island during the pivotal year of 1959, during which Fidel Castro’s provisional revolutionary government worked to immediately alleviate the suffering of the island’s most needy children, thereby bolstering the new regime’s widespread popularity and legitimacy and reinforcing one of its earliest slogans, *La Revolución es para los niños*—The Revolution is For the Children. This chapter also analyzes how the Castro regime made strategic use

⁴⁹ Two final caveats remain. While making use of the analytical lenses of race, gender and sexuality when they seem significant, this study does not place them at the center of its argument. Moreover, my discursive definition of childhood means that middle class children and their parents, many of them white, urban and at least nominally Catholic, play a prominent role in my analysis. There are a number of reasons: first, many of Castro’s revolutionaries and the members of his first government were themselves white, urban Catholics from middle class backgrounds, brought up in families that shared many of the assumptions about childhood that they first sought to capitalize upon, and then transform, in the pursuit of broader political goals. Second, the civic sphere in which revolutionary discourses were originally disseminated was also largely middle class, a site in which urban, literate and politically engaged Cubans debated the future of the Revolution before Castro’s 1960 campaign to suppress non-state sponsored institutions, associations and expression. It was perhaps unsurprising that opposition to the radicalization of the Revolution, and especially to its interventions in education, family life and childhood, thus also emerged among the middle classes, as did the exodus and the counter-revolution. Accordingly, though initiatives to redefine the lives of poor, working class and urban children were central to the Revolution’s self-definition, the child-focused political battles which accompanied its turn towards socialism and sparked the emergence of the exile community were primarily fought—on both sides—by members of the Cuban middle class, over the definition and control of middle class children. Their prioritization in this dissertation is thus a product of theoretical and empirical necessity, and should in no way be interpreted as reflective of my own politics or priorities.

of children to counter the first signs of opposition to his increasingly autocratic rule and the radicalization of the nation's economic and social policies, which also led to the deterioration of relations with the United States.

Chapter Three focuses on the evolving politics of childhood during 1960, during which dissenting voices began to be raised with more frequency in Cuba, prompting Castro and his allies to make increasing use of children to counter doubts and discontent on the island and in the United States and to mount an attack on a still autonomous civil society. Framing the improved life chances of Cuban children as the essential and unique expression of a “humanist” Revolution, the pro-Castro media created a shared discourse of childhood that linked children's wellbeing to the survival of the Revolution and demonized its detractors for their supposed indifference to the island's youngest citizens, even as the Revolution accelerated its movement towards socialism and the pursuit of a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union. Chapter Four covers the intensification of the politics of childhood between 1960 and 1961, analyzing those revolutionary initiatives that sought to radicalize children and to use child-centered programs and policies—as well as the bodies of actual children—to advance broader political goals associated with the Revolution's rapid turn towards socialism. I also consider the emergence of a United States and Catholic Church supported Counter-Revolution, inspired in part by the state's increasingly aggressive interventions into the realms of family life, childhood and education that similarly relied upon symbolic and actual children in implementing their anti-Castro agenda.

In Chapter Five, I follow the politics of childhood across the Florida Straits, analyzing the role of children in the formation of the Miami exile community between 1959 and 1961. I consider how symbolic and actual children influenced, and were influenced by, the rapidly expanding exile community's interactions with the US federal and state government, the Miami-Dade County School District, and local residents. During these years, Cuban refugees and their allies used discourses and images of children to garner support at local, state and federal levels for programs that aided their settlement. Received with open arms by a US government that recognized the propaganda value of families fleeing "communist terror" on the island, the emergent exile community drew upon their own understandings and practices of childhood to create the child-centered anti-communist "creation myth" through which they articulated their decision to emigrate, and interacted with the federal and state level agencies that oversaw their settlement.

In Chapter Six I analyze the centrality of symbolic and actual children to exile leaders' efforts to unify a politically fragmented exile population and to mobilize refugees in support of their anti-Castro agenda. Between 1960 and 1962, Cuban refugees relied on shared understandings and practices of childhood to forge a shared exilic identity and worldview, to recruit exile men, women and children for counter-revolutionary activities, and to demand US and Latin American governments collaborate in their efforts to overthrow the Revolution. During this time, the moral and emotional power of the emerging exile community's child-centered discourse was reinforced by a US government and media that feared Soviet intervention in Cuba and across Latin

America, as well as the communist indoctrination of American children by subversive elements within its own borders.

In my conclusion, I trace the contours of the transnational politics of Cuban childhood following the resolution of the 1962 Missile Crisis that secured both the long-term viability of the Cuban Revolution and the indefinite extension of exiles' sojourn in the United States. I demonstrate that the understandings and practices of childhood which propelled the Revolution and the formation of the southern Florida exile community between 1959 and 1962 continued to influence events in the Two Cubas throughout the remainder of the 20th century, culminating most dramatically in the 1999 Elián González custody battle. Just as the Castro government made deliberate use of symbolic and actual children to create a Manicheistic view of the Revolution as a totalizing struggle between the forces of good and evil, I demonstrate that Cuban exiles have similarly relied upon their own understandings and practices of childhood to generate the epic myths of political terror and martyrdom, heroic exodus, and dreams of future return and redemption that sustained their displaced community.⁵⁰

In spite of the radical transformation of Cuban children's lives on both sides of the Florida Straits after the Revolution, then, I conclude that many of the understandings,

⁵⁰ Tzvi Medin describes the Cuban revolutionary consciousness as "Manicheistic" inasmuch as it has long understood the Revolution's triumph and struggle for survival in apocalyptic and highly moralistic terms, relying on extreme stereotypes—the self-sacrificing virtue of Fidel Castro, the Revolution's leadership, and the Soviet Union, in contrast with the corruption, greed and cruelty of the exile community, described until recently as *gusanos* (worms) and *escoria* (scum), and the hypocritical, imperialistic, ruthless, almost Satanic, United States government. Given that these projections were firmly in place by the time the massive exodus from the island began, it is unsurprising that the counter-discourses generated by the exile community would adopt a similar conceptual framework. See Medin, *The Shaping of Revolutionary Consciousness*, 39-52.

practices and representations of childhood in the “Two Cubas” remain largely consistent. This consistency stems from their common origins in metanarratives that are implicit and essential to the founding of both nations, island-based and diasporic—metanarratives that also underwrite the national histories of the United States and the USSR, and more broadly, the nation-building project that encompasses so much of what we think of as “modernity.” This dissertation thus concludes that the transnational/translocal history of Cuban childhood, in all of its specificity and contingency, nonetheless reaffirms the enduring importance of the child-as-nation-maker across time, ideological constructs, and territorial borders.

Chapter 1

The Road to Revolution: Childhood, the Cuban Republic, and US-Cuba Relations, 1898-1958

United States interest in Cuba dates back to the early nineteenth century.

Inextricably tied to American dreams of Manifest Destiny and the growing nation's imperative for commercial and territorial expansion, the desire to possess or control the island was early and often expressed through notions of childhood, targeting the bodies and minds of Cuban children as a vehicle for its fulfillment. By the mid nineteenth century, children had similarly become a central concern for Cubans desiring independence from Spanish colonial rule, an aspiration which challenged US designs on the island. With the conclusion of the Spanish-Cuban-American War in 1898, childhood emerged as a central site in which United States and Cuban nation-making projects would collide, converting it into an active force in national life during sixty years of Cuban efforts to secure the political and economic self-determination that were denied after the imposition of US military rule in 1898.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Cubans relied upon symbolic and actual children in articulating their distinct aspirations towards national autonomy, representative government, and multiracial social and economic justice. At the same time, American officials, business and civic leaders, journalists and missionaries pressed children into the service of their varied interests on the island, unified by a shared belief that Cubans' racial inferiority and political immaturity left them ill-equipped for self-rule and that US control of Cuba was crucial to their own national destiny. Throughout the resulting period of mediated sovereignty and uneven modernization, first Cuban elites

and then a growing US-allied middle class also relied on children to justify and enforce the political and economic structures that protected their wealth and positions of prominence in a society marred by poverty, instability, and raced, classed, and gendered inequality. The overlapping and conflicting goals of all these actors, expressed through symbols and discourses of childhood and targeting actual children as a means of realizing a wide range of political, social and cultural nation-making projects, served to dramatically articulate the unfinished nature of the Cuban struggle for independence and helped propel the island toward a second nationalist revolution in 1959.

Childhood and the Cuban Independence Struggle, 1868-1898

The Cuban Wars of Independence against Spain were waged by a liberating army that was unique in the Atlantic world because of its racial equality. Drawing support from all sectors of Cuban society, the independence struggle represented a model of anti-racist nationalism that was a drastic departure from the Black Haitian republic that had been founded at the turn of the nineteenth century. This idea of racial equality, seen by many as essential to Cuban independent nationhood, depended in large part on reclaiming the image of the child as a central trope of national identity, for it was often through racialized discourses of childhood that United States and Spanish political commentators dismissed insurgents' aspirations toward autonomy and self-determination.

As early as the 1820s, American political leaders had identified Cuba for potential annexation to the United States. Annexationist interest grew during the decade preceding the US Civil War, especially among southern planters and politicians who coveted the island's fertile agricultural land and saw its large African-origin slave population as

essential to the expansion of their plantation-based society. Echoing the racialized and infantilizing discourses that had justified the expansionist Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and the subsequent redrawing of national borders to include 900,000 square miles of previously Mexican national territory, advocates of Cuban annexation emphasized the military and commercial benefits of acquiring the island and stressed Cubans' racially-derived political immaturity and inability to create a modern government, economy or society without US tutelage.⁵¹

Expressing these sentiments in 1859, Richard Henry Dana's travelogue *To Cuba and Back* likened Cuba to 'a child at play' with the idea of liberty but unable to achieve it," because its citizens lacked the qualities of the Anglo-Saxon race which were essential to self-government.⁵² Almost forty years later, poet Robert Manners justified US intervention in the last of the island's three wars for independence from Spain by characterizing Cuba as "the loveliest child that Nature gave" into the protective care of the United States, dramatizing even while denigrating the vain efforts of "Cuba's valiant children" to establish an independent nation.⁵³ Writers like Dana and Manners made use of discourses of children, so prominent in the early national political rhetoric that had proclaimed the United States as the birthplace of liberty and freedom, to emphasize Cuba's racial inferiority, immaturity, and unsuitability for self-rule, in the process

⁵¹ Similar racialized and infantilizing discourses were applied to the other peoples colonized by the United States around the turn of the century, including Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, and Hawaiians. See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

⁵² Richard Henry Dana, *To Cuba and Back: A Vacation Voyage* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1859), 205, 268.

⁵³ Robert Manners, "Cuba," in *Cuba and Other Verse* (Chicago: Way and Williams, 1898), 15, 44.

discounting the hard-won victories that had brought Cubans' thirty year independence struggle to its decisive moment by 1898.⁵⁴

After the last-minute entry of the United States into the war, American political cartoonists moved away from the common portrayal of the island as a fair Spanish *señorita* in need of rescue by a hyper-masculine United States military, building on earlier representations of Cubans as children to stress the island's vulnerability, dependency and inability to act decisively on its own. With the conclusion of the war, child-centered political cartoons began to draw more explicitly upon popular racial notions of the era to offer a quick and easy counter to the unexpected resistance of much of the Liberation Army to American intervention. Representing Cuba as an ill-behaved black child allowed the pro-war US media to frame the island's multi-racial insurgent leaders as immature, irrational, and—as is so often the case with a child caught in the throes of a temper tantrum—unwilling to accept badly needed instruction or help from his (white) tutors.⁵⁵

Racialized and infantilized media representations allowed American political leaders, journalists, and average citizens to explain away Cuban resistance to their involvement in the final moments of the independence struggle as a product both of racial inferiority and childishness; they also reinforced popular notions of the United States as a benevolent father, whose duty to protect and uplift 'backward' nations—for their own good—exposed him to the ingratitude and resentment of the non-white peoples on whose

⁵⁴ Levander, *Cradle of Liberty*, 164.

⁵⁵ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 237-239.

behalf he chose selflessly to act. Most importantly, they justified US imposition of military rule on the island in the immediate aftermath of the war as a measure taken to protect both United States and Cuban interests, lest the island fall into the hands of “an irresponsible government of half-breeds.”⁵⁶

In direct contrast to these racializing and infantilizing discourses, Cuban nationalists like General Antonio Maceo, José Martí and Raimondo Cabrera used images of the child to argue for Cuban independence, right to self-rule, and their vision of an anti-racist republic. Mirroring the revolutionary rhetoric of John Adams and Thomas Paine, José Martí insisted that it was precisely because “Cubans are children of their progenitors whose vices and virtues they reflect,” they must achieve national autonomy in order to move beyond the anti-democratic legacy of their Spanish colonizers. Taking this argument a step further, he used the image of the child to argue for a nationalism that could avoid repeating some of the mistakes the United States had made in the pursuit of its own nation-building project. The children of “*Nuestra América*” would be able to “save” Cuba from repeating the “grave blunders” which the United States had committed, because they would learn from the American example. Although Cubans had once had “a childlike confidence in the certain help of the United States,” Martí insisted that their collective “coming of age” rested on accepting responsibility for fulfilling their anti-racist national vision without northern help.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *New York Times*, August 1, 1898, 6.

⁵⁷ José Martí, “Our America,” in *Jose Marti: Selected Writings*, ed. Esther Allen (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 293.

Martí's pedagogical writings also emphasized the need for the training and preparation of Cuban children for democracy, revealing a modernist worldview shared with American educational advocates like Benjamin Rush, with one major difference: he elaborated his understanding of the relationship between the children and the nation within an explicitly anti-racist framework. Martí was a passionate advocate of public schools who saw democracy as tied to literacy and education, the means through which the citizenry would hold its government accountable; however, he argued that public education in the United States undermined the nation's founding ideals of liberty by encouraging racial prejudice and suffocating the individuality of the children on whom the nation's future rested. In contrast, nationalist Cubans were "working for children because they are the ones who know how to love, because they are the hope of the world," and understood that the key to founding an anti-racist republic was the knowledge that "...there will be no true growth for the nation...until the child is taught" to uphold its ideals.⁵⁸

Nationalist Cubans appropriated and reformulated American discourses of childhood to mobilize support for their own revolution, insisting that Cubans had equally legitimate reasons for seeking independence.⁵⁹ Even as US military officers, journalists and propagandists continued to represent Cubans as dark, childlike savages who were unfit for self government, "...the child featured in Cuban insurgent rhetoric...worked to create an antiracist Cuban nation—in direct opposition to the child featured in US

⁵⁸ Levander, *Cradle of Liberty*, 167.

⁵⁹ Raimondo Cabrera, *Cuba and the Cubans*, trans. Laura Guitéras (Philadelphia: Levy-Type, 1896), 272-273.

political rhetoric that upheld racial difference within and outside the United States.”⁶⁰

Thus Cuban children became an important mobilizing force in the independence struggle, even as they served as a powerful symbol of the longed-for future nation.

Cuban Children and the US Occupation: 1899-1902

In spite of the best efforts of these insurgent leaders, the conclusion of the Third War of Independence did not usher in the period of peace, prosperity and self-determination of which Cuban nationalists had dreamed.⁶¹ Although US military involvement in the war was limited to the last months of a thirty-year struggle, the negotiations leading to the December 10, 1898 Treaty of Paris excluded Cubans, and the Spanish Crown surrendered control of the island to the American government rather than local leadership. Moreover, though the fourth clause of the US Congress’ 1898 Joint Resolution had foresworn any intention to colonize the island and promised to leave the nation’s governance to its people, it nonetheless provided for an unspecified period of American military rule to pacify the war-torn society and prepare Cubans for eventual self-government. Accordingly, on January 1, 1899, the United States assumed formal possession of Cuba from Spain, and a military governor was appointed to oversee progress towards eligibility for self-rule—measured by a set of political, economic, social and cultural preconditions to be set and evaluated exclusively by the island’s new and self-appointed American trustees.

⁶⁰ Levander, *Cradle of Liberty*, 166, 168.

⁶¹ The final Cuban War of Independence is commonly referred to in the United States as the Spanish-American War, although US involvement was limited to the final three months of battle.

However, not all Americans shared a sincere commitment to the idea of Cuban independence. For more than seventy-five years, many American political leaders had clung to the goal of annexation, a pursuit that was central to the ideal of Manifest Destiny which continued to animate the United States' growth and expansion. High ranking officials in the McKinley and Roosevelt administrations regretted the imposition of the Joint Resolution, seeing it as an obstacle to the fulfillment of their nation's historical mission. Senator Alfred G. Beveridge forcefully articulated this belief, insisting that Cubans should never have been promised the right to form their own government since the island was "a mere extension of our Atlantic coastline."⁶² Similarly, former Secretary of State considered the Teller Amendment to be both "ill advised and futile," since both history and present circumstance dictated that Cuba become "in point of law what she already is in point of fact, namely, United States territory."⁶³

Though the Joint Resolution's Teller Amendment prohibited the annexation of Cuba as a result of the victory over Spain or as the consequence of US military occupation, it did not preclude the possibility of annexation at a later date. Therefore, many US military and political leaders clung to their expansionist hopes and pressed for policies that would facilitate the eventual acquisition of the island. These included the development of reciprocal trade agreements and national institutions compatible with US political and economic structures, the recruitment and cultivation of local allies, especially among the islands' conservative, land-owning white elite, the suppression of

⁶² Alfred J. Beveridge, "Cuba and Congress," *North American Review* (April 1901), 540-555.

⁶³ Richard Olney, "The Growth of our Foreign Policy," *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1900, 291.

Spanish colonial custom and the widespread “Americanization” of Cuban society and culture—all of which were presented as necessary preconditions for self-government, but would equally well serve the goal of the island’s incorporation as a US territory.

Leonard Wood, the island’s military Governor General from 1900 to 1902, thus believed that preparation for independence under American tutelage might simultaneously serve as an impetus towards annexation. While rejecting the acquisition of Cuba by force, he nonetheless expressed the hope that a brief experience of self-rule might satisfy the people’s desire for “theoretical liberty” and remove their resistance to union with their northern neighbor.⁶⁴ Wood believed, as did many other US military and political leaders, that the ground for this eventuality must be laid through the cultivation of a critical mass of pro-annexationists on the island, a goal his administration pursued by targeting Cuban children. In line with Progressive Era thought stressing the close relationship between the care and education of the child and the construction of a modern, democratic and prosperous nation, Wood’s military government quickly set out to prepare Cubans for self-rule—in harmony with US strategic and commercial interests on the island and without precluding the possibility of annexation—through the creation of a new system of public education geared toward the production of pro-US citizens.

Between 1898 and 1902, policies formulated by US military and provisional governments sought to replace the Spanish educational system, always inadequate to the island’s needs and almost totally destroyed during the upheaval of the final Independence War, and to remake Cuban society into a mirror of their own nation through the extension

⁶⁴ Hermann Hagedorn, *Leonard Wood: A Biography*, vol. 1 (New York: 1931), 371.

of American-style education to all children in Cuba.⁶⁵ Modeled on their counterparts in the United States, new public schools set out to disabuse Cuban children of their “Spanish” cultural inheritance, replacing the Catholic moral and religious instruction and rote learning methods which had dominated Cuban colonial schools with progressive pedagogical approaches designed to inculcate students with the “American” values necessary to the smooth functioning of democratic capitalist society. These included the virtues of hard work, frugality and self-discipline, respect for the law and property, civic engagement and prudent participation in electoral politics, obedience toward duly constituted political authority, and adherence to a protestant Christian spiritual tradition.

To that end, children in United States-occupied Cuba enrolled in co-educational schools modeled after the Ohio state system of public education, attended classes taught by teachers trained at special Harvard summer school programs for Cuban educators, and studied English and US history, geography and civics, in addition to other subjects taught with Spanish translations of American textbooks.⁶⁶ The role of Catholic clergy on local school boards and their influence in the public schools was strictly curtailed, and

⁶⁵ On the eve of the Spanish-Cuban-American War, Cuban public education was limited to approximately 900 municipal schools, staffed by about 1,000 teachers and serving a student population of no more than 36,000 children. By 1898 only 16 percent of children aged 5-17 attended school, and most of these were enrolled in a few private schools that remained open. Even those schools still open had few usable textbooks, no desks or supplies. See Erwin H. Epstein, “The Peril of Paternalism: The Imposition of Education on Cuba by the United States,” *American Journal of Education* 96, no. 1 (November 1987): 8, 9.

⁶⁶ Even as US officials and private citizens launched a new educational system to prepare Cuban children for citizenship in a modernizing nation, their perception of the island’s people as racially inferior and immature caused them to harbor grave doubts about the ability of Cubans to take charge of the education of their own children. Indeed, Cuban teachers sent to Harvard in 1901 were described in the US media as “grown up children...who could not understand the significance of what they saw.” See Sutherland, *The Youngest Revolution*, 150; and Epstein, “The Peril of Paternalism,” 4, 7, 9.

religious instruction was restricted to private schools, which continued to enroll a significant proportion of children from the island's elite white families.⁶⁷

The effects of the military government's campaign of educational investment and reform were immediate and dramatic: in the first year of Wood's administration, the graft and political trafficking in lucrative teaching appointments (limited to Spaniards of "good conduct" and "religious and moral character") that had characterized the Spanish colonial educational system was eliminated, teacher salaries were raised, in some cases exceeding those paid in the United States by as much as 80 percent, and school enrollments skyrocketed from 21,000 to over 100,000. By 1900, Cuba had a larger proportion of its overall population enrolled in school than Mexico, Argentina, Spain, France or Japan. In 1902, the Ministry of Education dedicated four million pesos of public funds—four times more than Spain had spent in 1894—to educational programs and the construction of new facilities.⁶⁸ Moreover, this initial growth in enrollments was substantially consistent across Cuba's different regions, including both urban and rural areas, and distributed evenly among the island's white and black children.⁶⁹

By the end of the occupation period, US military administrators had clearly demonstrated their concern with the care and education of Cuban children and had placed enormous resources at their disposal. However, their efforts were motivated less by

⁶⁷ Epstein, "The Peril of Paternalism," 6-7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 15.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10. School inspection records from 1900 and 1901 indicate that black children constituted a somewhat greater percentage of new school enrollments (between 35 and 40 percent) relative to their overall representation in the population (less than 32 percent).

altruism than by long-range strategic considerations. By ensuring that Cuban children would be educated in an American-inspired school system, occupation officials sought to guarantee the nurture of future generations in line with US interests, rather than in support of Cuban aspirations towards national autonomy, balanced economic development or social justice. Thus even before the establishment of the first Republic, the bodies and minds of the island's children had been pressed into the service of US efforts to consolidate their political and economic control of the new nation, transforming childhood into a site in which United States and Cuban nation-making projects would inevitably collide.

The Child Republic: 1902-1933

In 1901, Cuba was declared a republic and the occupation army was withdrawn; however, formal independence was granted in exchange for the imposition of the deeply unpopular Platt Amendment to the new Cuban Constitution, which gave the United States the right to intervene in the island's political affairs to ensure the "protection of life, property and individual liberty" and established the American coaling, naval and defense base at Guantánamo. Despite widespread protests to the amendment, Senator Orville H. Platt dismissed Cuban demands for immediate and unconditional independence as the product of only the "most radical element of the Cuban electorate," "irresponsible as children...dazzled with the prospects of at last being their own masters."⁷⁰ Their demands summarily ignored, Cubans thus greeted the proclamation of their republic with joy and

⁷⁰ Orville H. Platt, "The Solution of the Cuban Problem," *The World's Work* 2 (May 1901): 730.

bitterness, relief and disappointment, and above all, a profound uncertainty about the nature and extent of the island's independence and its ability to chart its own national destiny.

Cubans of all races and social classes nonetheless persisted in hoping that their republic would rapidly develop into a modern and prosperous nation. These hopes were not totally unfounded. US military occupation and investment had helped lay the foundation for democratic government and had rebuilt the island's war-ravaged infrastructure; a liberal constitution had been promulgated and universal suffrage granted, new roads and railroads had been built, and sugar mills were restored to operational condition. Spending on public health and schools had raised expectations that the next generation of Cuban children would be healthier, more educated and better equipped to confront the challenges and opportunities of a modernizing economy and society.

However, even as Cubans celebrated the election of Tomás Estrada Palma as the first president of the Republic, many recognized that the alarming growth of American investment in the island's economy and the United States' constitutionally-guaranteed right of intervention severely limited the autonomy of their fledgling government.⁷¹ The 1903 US-Cuban Reciprocity Treaty, which gave Cuban tobacco and sugar preferential access to the powerful northern market in exchange for reduced tariffs on US imports, exemplified the possibilities and perils contained in the new nation's increasingly

⁷¹ Driving home to Cubans the limits of their sovereignty, the US Congress voted to send troops to the island in 1906, 1912 and 1917 to shore up the governments of their choice against popular unrest.

intimate ties to the United States.⁷² In the thirty years it would last, the contradictions produced by the imposition of a “mediated sovereignty” on the Republic and Cubans’ deferred dreams of national self-determination would play themselves out in the complex interaction between notions of childhood, their strategic representation in the pursuit of competing political goals, and the experiences of actual children.⁷³

Resistance to the mediated sovereignty imposed by the Platt Amendment and Reciprocity Treaty produced different responses among different sectors of Cuban society. White elites quickly re-established themselves in the US-supported sugar industry and filled the majority of posts in the republican government, arguing that Cuba would only achieve full independence when its people had proved themselves worthy of full membership in the community of modern nations. Their quest for modernity sparked initiatives to rationalize the island’s political, judicial and bureaucratic structures, introduce new systems of agriculture and land tenure, and develop the burgeoning sugar industry. They also sought to promote scientific and technological knowledge and increase general levels of literacy, culture and morality among the masses. Adopting the values and customs of the protestant and Anglo-Saxon United States would liberate Cuba

⁷² The Reciprocity Treaty benefited the United States as much, if not more, than Cuba. While Cuban sugar received a 20 percent tariff reduction in the US market, American imports were guaranteed between 20 and 40 percent reductions in duties. Moreover, the Reciprocity Treaty also served to weaken Cuban ties to other markets, especially in the United Kingdom and Europe, that might have provided the Republic with relatively more room for economic maneuver. The Treaty was nonetheless supported by the Cuban sugar oligarchy, who in placing the potential benefits to their industry above the need to develop other spheres of the economy and other commercial relationships, became willing collaborators with US efforts to establish hegemony on the island. See Jorge Renato Ibarra Guitart, *El Tratado Anglo-Cubano de 1905: Estados Unidos Contra Europa* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2008).

⁷³ See Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 37; and Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in 20th Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 10.

from its backwards colonial past the argued; Cuba needed to turn away from its “primitive” African heritage and eradicate the superstitions and customs that stood in the way of the Republic’s march towards modernity.⁷⁴

By 1910, control of the island’s economy and political system was in the hands of this US allied, propertied white elite. Memories of the multiracial independence struggle nonetheless remained a strong guiding force in early republican politics; the prestige and visibility of the Liberation Army’s Afro-Cuban leaders, and a Martíán ideology of independence “that envisioned a new republic that would be not only politically independent but egalitarian and inclusive as well” underlay the evolution of competing notions of nationhood in the first decade after independence. The resulting political instability, strikes, and social upheaval, combined with the threat of US military intervention to restore order, all contributed to the revolt and racist repression of the *Partido Independiente de Color* in 1912 on the basis that their activities represented “a threat to the very survival of the republic.” At the same time, the state’s massive subsidization of immigration from Spain reflected elite beliefs that the key to the nation’s development lay in ‘whitening’ the population, whereas ‘Africanization’ would lead to political, economic and cultural ruin.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ This disdain for the culture of dark-skinned and lower class Cubans, common among the island’s colonial Spanish elite, was reinforced by notions of scientific racism that members of the US occupation government had brought to the island between 1899 and 1902. American leaders shared an ideology that saw a largely black population as racially incapable of self-rule; moreover, Cuba’s long history of miscegenation and inter-marriage meant that many of the island’s whites also possessed black blood, which seriously threatened their claims for fitness to enter the community of civilized modern nations. The resulting efforts of Cuban elites to remake Cuba into a white nation were at the heart of an immigration policy that sought to ‘whiten’ the population through the massive subsidization of immigration from Spain.

⁷⁵ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 10-13, 15, 46.

The political cleavage of the nation along classed and raced lines found expression in a new child-centered discourse, linking the imagined black threat to Cuba's aspirations toward modern nationhood with widespread fears of the danger Afro-Cuban religious practices represented to children. Many whites and even some middle class black Cubans feared African "fetishism" or *brujería*—witchcraft—believing that it drew its power from rituals involving human sacrifice and even cannibalism; popular belief further held that *los negros brujos*, or "black wizards," especially coveted the cadavers of white children for use in their gruesome rites.⁷⁶ During the first two decades of independence, Cuban journalists frequently reported the alleged kidnapping and murder of children, and especially small blonde girls, as part of African religious ceremonies.

In spite of significant evidence to corroborate the cases, media coverage and rumor repeatedly pointed at *los negros brujos* to explain the otherwise-inexplicable illness or death of a child. In 1906, the death of a young white girl in Pinar del Río was attributed to *brujería*; in 1907, another *brujo* was detained and his home searched following the death of a child, even though a doctor had previously certified that the death was caused by meningitis. When this finding was confirmed by an autopsy, the Cuban press nonetheless insisted on reporting the event as "*Brujería* in Havana."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Government efforts to repress *Santería* and other African-origin religious and cultural practices dated back to the colonial era and were continued by the US occupation government, which had prohibited Afro-Cuban religious processions and public demonstrations, as well "as immoral" black public dances.

⁷⁷ "Crimen Por Brujería?" *La Lucha*, July 26, 1906; "La Brujería en la Habana," *La Lucha*, June 14, 1907; and "Los Crímenes de la Brujería," *La Lucha*, March 20, 1910, quoted in Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); see also Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle For Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 107-16, 238-239.

Elite and middle class fears that Cuba's African heritage presented an obstacle to the achievement of modern nationhood, articulated through the early twentieth century panic over black witchcraft and the cannibalistic murder of white children, reflected and reinforced associations between children and the Cuban nation which dated back at least to the writings of José Martí. However, whereas the independence leader's writings had emphasized the importance of children to the construction of an egalitarian and multiracial nation, elite obsession with the small blonde victims of black wizards recreated white children as the exclusive embodiment of a Cuban nation threatened by African degeneracy, exacerbating the differences between the nation-building visions of US allied elites and the dark-skinned working classes.

By 1922, child-centered discourses had been used with great effect to discredit Afro-Cuban claims to equal cultural citizenship: laws were passed to repress the practices of *brujería* and traditional medicine, and a resolution passed by the secretary of the interior banned all Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies and dances on the grounds that they were opposed to culture and civilization; moreover, he claimed, "experience showed" that they frequently "led to robberies, kidnappings, or killings of children of the white race."⁷⁸

In spite of growing race and class cleavages in Cuban society, Cubans nonetheless remained widely united in Martí's belief that the future of the nation depended upon the education of the island's children. This belief was passionately held to by the island's

⁷⁸ That otherwise-unexplained deaths of black Cuban children were not attributed to black witchcraft further confirms both the racialized anxieties associated with notions of 'backwardness,' and the widespread belief that "modernity" was white.

Afro-Cuban parents, who enthusiastically sought access to an unsegregated public school system for their sons and daughters. By the 1920s many young blacks had taken advantage of this free education, graduating and earning white collar jobs that offered new possibilities of social mobility. However, exposure to the racist assumptions of elite Cuban and US teachers and North American curricula contributed to distancing black children from their African familial heritage, producing a growing middle class black community that sought to distance itself from its working class and rural roots and to use education as a point of access to an increasingly “civilized” and “modern” society.⁷⁹

During the first two decades of the First Republic, as efforts to define the Cuban nation increasingly diverged along lines of race and class, American politicians, businesspeople, and civic and religious leaders continued their aggressive efforts to safeguard US political and economic interests on the island. As a part of this larger strategic project, US notions of childhood, childrearing and education continued to be brought to Cuba by American political and civic leaders, entrepreneurs and missionaries who imagined Cuban-American political relations as a natural outflow of their civilizing mission on the island, placing the United States in the role of benevolent father figure and mentor, and Cuba as a grateful, obedient child and student.⁸⁰ This dependence was reflected by the rapid succession of a series of weak and illegitimate governments that remained in power only as long as it suited White House interests. The republican period

⁷⁹ See Juan René Betancourt, *Doctrina Negra La Única Teoría Certera Contra La Discriminación Racial en Cuba* (Havana: P. Fernández y Cía, 1954), 13, 78.

⁸⁰ See Epstein, “The Peril of Paternalism,” and Louis Pérez Jr., “Incurring a Debt of Gratitude: 1898 and the Moral Sources of United States Hegemony in Cuba,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 356-398.

thus ushered in a period of ever-increasing US political, economic and cultural dominance, justified by discourses of childhood and directed at remaking Cuban society through interventions in the lives of Cuban children.⁸¹

As US investment in the island's infrastructure, agricultural land, sugar mills and mines continued to expand, many American corporations sponsored the philanthropic and missionary efforts of organizations concerned with the failure of the US-initiated public school system to provide adequate education to all Cuban children. In doing so, they underwrote the exposure of thousands of children to American culture and values even as they anticipated the future benefit to their businesses represented by the cultivation of a new generation of workers trained in English and according to US standards. With these goals in mind, the United Fruit Company provided Quaker and Methodist groups with land, construction materials and funds to establish schools in Holguín, Gibara, Banes, Puerto Padre and Guaro. Hershey sponsored a Presbyterian school in Aguacate, and the Guantánamo and Constancia Sugar companies opened schools near mills.⁸²

Through the use of American methods and materials, mission schools sought to reshape the Cuban child, whom protestant Christian educators deemed irresponsible,

⁸¹ As a result of the 1903 Reciprocity Treaty and an explosion of direct investment by American entrepreneurs, US control over the Cuban economy had expanded dramatically by the 1920s. Between 1903 and 1902, Cuban exports to the United States had expanded by a factor of five, while US imports to the island had grown by a factor of seven. American investment, concentrated in the sugar industry, was thirteen times greater than it had been at the establishment of the Republic, and the US-owned shares of sugar production on the island had reached an all time high of 63 percent. Moreover, the United States had become the only significant buyer for Cuban sugar before the onset of World War One, firmly establishing the island's dependence on this primary export and its US market. See Alan Dye and Richard Sicotte, "U.S.-Cuban Trade Cooperation and Its Unraveling," *Business and Economic History* 28 (Winter 1999): 19-31.

⁸² Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 230.

indolent and overly individualistic. Missionaries criticized local childrearing practices, which they felt produced willful, selfish and undisciplined young people, and sought to redeem Cuban children through exposing them to American influences. Methodist Edgar Nessman praised the “character building experiences” of student government and 4-H clubs, enthusing, “It is exciting to watch the progress of youngsters brought up in an authoritarian culture as they learn to work together, each holding some responsibility for the success of the group.” The Methodist Agricultural and Industrial School proclaimed as its mission the preparation of Cuban children “for democracy by trying to practice democracy at all levels within the school culture.”⁸³

However, the professed democratic values of US educators and missionaries frequently came into conflict with, and were subordinated to the imperative of maintaining American political and economic control on the island. As a result, much of the preparation Cuban children received in US sponsored schools was informed by explicitly anti-democratic thought, discouraging Cuban children from seeing themselves, their parents or compatriots as deserving of or equipped for the mature enjoyment of national self-determination. History textbooks rewrote the story of the Spanish-Cuban-American War, instructing students that their republic had come into existence as a result of a heroic US military intervention in a failed independence struggle. American texts emphasized Cuba’s historic dependence on the United States, the US’ faithful

⁸³ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 251-252. It is worth noting that Cuban Protestants were very active in the revolutionary struggles of the 1950s. It is also interesting that both Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro attended foreign-operated schools in their rural hometowns.

discharging of their moral obligation towards the island, and reminded Cuban students of their corresponding duty to demonstrate gratitude towards their northern benefactor.⁸⁴

This revisionist history also allowed US politicians, businesspeople, civic leaders and missionaries to dismiss Cuban critiques of US involvement in the island's affairs or support for policies that placed national priorities above American interests as childish ingratitude, or worse, as evidence of moral degeneracy and immaturity that raised doubts about Cubans' fitness for self-rule. In 1915, when the Ministry of Education repealed a law stipulating mandatory English language instruction for Cuban children, an affronted journalist at the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* wrote "It was the people of the United States who gave Cubans their freedom...Cuba has not been a grateful nation." The US expatriate newspaper the *Havana Post* similarly complained that the decision "...may seem to some to be rather ungracious...for the Cubans to cut the language of their deliverers from the public school curriculum."⁸⁵ These arguments relied on both academic and popular historical memory to cast Cubans as dependent children in perpetual debt to a benevolent northern father, providing the ideological framework necessary to advance the US's continuing claims to the right to intervene in the island's political and economic life—and indeed, as demonstrated by American indignation at the curtailing of English language instruction, bolstered Americans' ongoing efforts to shape

⁸⁴ Cuban scholars would begin to refute US versions of their history in the 1950s and 1950s; the most explicit of these challenges was issued in Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Cuba no Debe su Independencia a los Estados Unidos* (Havana: Sociedad Cubana de Estudios Historicos e Internacionales, 1950).

⁸⁵ *Commercial Appeal*, September 27, 1915, 6; *Havana Post*, September 28, 1915, 2; quoted in Pérez Jr., "Incurring a Debt of Gratitude," 383-384.

the education of the next generation of Cuban citizens in line with their own national interests.

In spite of continuing growths in student enrollments through the first decade of the 1900s, however, the US-supported public school system was unable to meet Cuban demands for access to educational opportunities for their children. By the 1920s, when the country's primary export-based economy was hit with the collapse of sugar prices, school enrollments fell from 50 to 39 percent of the island's children.⁸⁶ Education became a hotly contested political issue, when Cuban nationalists who had long called for the repeal of the Platt Amendment simultaneously began to insist that independence and Cubanness were impossible without the fulfillment of Martí's vision of democratic education for all children.⁸⁷ This new wave of nationalist ferment, expressed powerfully through child-centered discourses, helped propel Gerardo Machado to the presidency in 1925.

Machado's original populist appeal rested in part on his much-publicized efforts to build schools, with significant benefits to Cuban children. By 1926, student enrollments had reached a high of between 63 and 71 percent.⁸⁸ However, as the Machado regime quickly deteriorated into corruption and tyranny, the inability of any Cuban government to satisfy people's demands for the kind of egalitarian and racially inclusive nation envisioned by Martí without provoking the wrath of US political and

⁸⁶ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 140-142.

⁸⁷ See Fernando Ortíz, *La Decadencia Cubana* (Havana: Imprenta y Papelería "La Universal," 1924), 6.

⁸⁸ Carlton Bailey, "Report: Education in Cuba," Havana, December 10, 1926, USNA, RG 59/837.42/21.

economic interests on the island became heartbreakingly clear. As a wealthy white elite and mixed-blood middle class allied themselves with Washington against socialist trade unions, peasant farmers and an increasingly landless black underclass throughout the *Machadato*, the continuing subordination of Cuban aspirations to Washington's dictates produced a deep crisis that would once again bring to the forefront of debate the nature of Cuba's independence and the meaning of national identity. This crisis led to the violent repression of the Cuban Socialist Party, an explosion of anti-US sentiment and eventually to the downfall of the Machado regime in 1933—a process in which, moreover, a significant number of politicized urban adolescents and young people participated.

The Second Republic: 1933-1958

During the First Republic, US hegemony marked the parameters within which the infant nation would struggle to develop into maturity, enforcing the conditions of political and economic dependency that trapped the island in an enduring parent-child relationship with their northern neighbor. Moreover, Washington's demands for order and stability had tended to reinforce colonial era inequalities, including hierarchies of race, class and gender, ensuring that Cubans' aspirations towards membership in the community of "modern" nations would only be allowed to take place at the expense of the multiracial vision of social justice propounded by José Martí. The stifling intimacy of this relationship produced a kind of mediated sovereignty that exacerbated social cleavages between a US allied white Spanish elite and a multiracial working class and, ironically, contributed to the very conditions of disorder and instability that US hegemony sought to safeguard.

However, after the collapse of the repressive Machado regime and the 1934 repeal of the odious Platt Amendment, conditions were once again ripe for Cubans to try anew to realize their competing visions of modern nationhood. Communists, peasants and sugar workers, working in tandem with a vibrant urban labor movement, struggled to revive Martí's aspirations for a multiracial and egalitarian republic, while US allied conservative forces sought to restore the relative order and stability of the pre-Machado republic, in part by granting significant concessions to workers. The concessions improved the living conditions of many working class families but contributed to the growing salience of class identities in Cuban society. Across class lines, however, most Cubans were united by a new sense of urgency to resist US hegemony on the island, to assert their right to national self-determination and to prioritize Cuban interests over American ones.

This surge of nationalist sentiment was expressed through efforts to reduce North American influence on the education of Cuban children. Taking the initiative in reclaiming control over the content of school curricula, a new left-leaning *Auténtico* government issued nationalist textbooks to replace the pro-American materials in common use. Of particular offense were US textbooks that instructed children in a version of the Spanish-Cuban-American War that featured US soldiers as the heroic rescuers of a failing Cuban insurgency, reinforcing claims that the Liberation Army would have been unable to secure independence on their own and emphasizing the

island's vulnerability, dependence and continuing need for US tutelage.⁸⁹ Cuban nationalists argued that North American textbooks alienated Cuban children from their history and culture and prevented them from developing the self-confidence and patriotic spirit that would allow future generations to exercise a more substantive form of national sovereignty than that enjoyed by their parents.

United States observers responded to the nationalist ferment on the island with indignation and disbelief. American political leaders and media sought to remind Cuba of her debt of gratitude to the island's US liberators and continuing dependence on American benevolence and guidance, and dismissed Cubans' pretensions at charting their own political course as expressions of immaturity and ingratitude. Henry Phillips decried Cuba as "the problem stepchild of the United States," adding that "While Cuba owes her very existence as a nation to the United States, her gratitude and friendliness have been of a most doubtful character."⁹⁰ More than American indignation stood in the way of Cuban demands for a system of public education that responded to nationalist aspirations and the needs of the island's children. The Great Depression drove the price for Cuban sugar to a new low, leaving the island's primary export economy in dire straits. Educational spending was hit hard, with children's enrollments falling to the lowest point in the whole republican era by the end of the decade.

⁸⁹ Resentment of US versions of Cuba's Wars of Independence continued to fuel anti-American sentiment throughout the Second Republic. See Agustín Tamargo, "Quien Injuria a Martí y a Maceo no Puede Ser Amigo de Cuba," *Bohemia*, August 26, 1956, 49-50. See also Pérez Jr., "Incurring a Debt of Gratitude."

⁹⁰ Henry Albert Phillips, *White Elephants in the Caribbean* (New York: R. M. McBride, 1936), 129.

The number of private schools on the island multiplied in response to the failures of the public education system to meet demand. Rather than representing a democratizing trend, however, this development only furthered the growing salience of class identities in Cuban society. The growth of the Cuban middle and lower middle classes in the 1930s and 1940s also led to a growth in the number of parents who made enormous financial sacrifices to enroll their children in private schools, in order ensure their children's future social mobility by guaranteeing them an education that would prepare them for university and thus for white collar jobs. Having children in private schools also worked in the present to signify many Cuban's tentative membership or aspiration to membership in the middle classes. Widespread social perceptions of private education as both the key to future success and present-day social status thus came to reproduce the hierarchies of class and race that increasingly characterized republican society.

With the convening of a new Constitutional Convention in 1939, competing notions of Cubanness clashed again, bringing the importance of children to the future of the nation once again to the center of public debate. Communist leader Juan Marinello explicitly linked the expansion of private education to the growth of inequality in Cuban society, asserting in 1940 that "All secondary and technical education of any value is dispensed in schools for white kids."⁹¹

At the forefront of a growing nationalist campaign for the "Cubanization" of the education system, Marinello and other local leaders demanded that US and Spanish teachers be replaced by Cuban instructors and that steps be taken to combat class elitism

⁹¹ Juan Marinello, *La Cuestión Racial en la Constitución* (Havana: 1940), 18.

and racial discrimination in private schools. Socially exclusive and segregated schools were condemned as antidemocratic and un-Cuban, an obstacle to the achievement of authentic national autonomy and social justice. Supported by the Communist Party and several prominent Afro-Cuban societies, laws to regulate private education were proposed, attracting considerable support from the public though failing to be approved by Congress.⁹²

Demands for a locally-conceived vision of the nation's past and future and Cuban control over the education of their children were nonetheless enshrined in the reformist Constitution promulgated in 1940. The new Constitution clearly established the important relationship between childhood and the island's ongoing nationalist project. It stated that all education would "be inspired in a spirit of Cubanness" and would have as its goal the nurture of "the conscience of the educated, love of fatherland, its democratic institutions and all those who have fought for them." The Constitution similarly required that teachers of Cuban literature, history, geography, civics and government, be Cuban by birth, and textbooks had to be written by authors who had been born on the island. It also guaranteed the rights of parents to choose private or public, secular or religious education for their children.⁹³

Nationalist civic leaders continued to insist that US-influenced curricula limited the ability of Cuban children to identify themselves culturally or place themselves within

⁹² Juan Marinello, "La Constitución Cubana y la Enseñanza Privada," *Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba* 6 (July 1945): 26-29.

⁹³ Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 38; see also *Constitución de la República de Cuba, 1940*, in *Constituciones Cubanas desde 1812 hasta Nuestros Días*, ed. Leonel-Antonio de la Cuesta (New York: Ediciones Exilio, 1974).

the framework of a meaningful national history. In 1949, Plácido Lugris y Beceiro lamented that Cuban children were not being taught to value the achievements of their *mambí* forefathers: “Ask any school-age child who were the men that sacrificed all...in order to give us a free and independent homeland and you will see that more than 50 percent don’t know more than half a dozen names. Inquire then, who have been the Cubans in the arts, in sciences or in sports who have carried the name of Cuba gloriously through other latitudes, and one won’t even arrive at that limit.”

Lugris y Beceiro also chastised parents and educators for failing to inculcate Cuban children with pride and patriotism and challenged them to “...make a list of the principal Cuban patriotic dates. Tell the child to explain what it is that each one commemorates and we will have an unpleasant surprise...Something that we should be immensely proud of is almost completely unknown to school age children.”⁹⁴

Though most Cubans agreed that education should instill children with national pride, continuing US hegemony and local political struggles eventually began to reshape these debates according to a Cold War paradigm. Attributing continuing political unrest and labor agitation on the island to communist incitement, the US supported government expelled communists from leadership of the national labor federation in 1947, and banned the Communist Party in 1952. That same year, when an Auténtico president, Carlos Prío Socarrás, was overthrown by Fulgencio Batista, nationalist textbooks that had been issued during the 1930s to replace US materials were labeled as “unadulterated

⁹⁴ Plácido Lugris y Beceiro, *Los Problemas de la Niñez Actual* (La Habana: Impresa Manuel Martín, 1949), 17.

Communist calumny” and withdrawn from the public schools. Recalling a Prió-era text which his son was issued, Batista wrote that the book was

...filled with skillful incitements to Communist subversion directed at Cuban youth...In tracing the history of the relations between the United States and Cuba, history was crudely falsified and our friendly neighbor was vilified on all occasions. This libel on our traditions, our aspirations and our history, masquerading as a geography text...was an example of the perfidious manner in which Communist agents had been infiltrating the educational field in order to poison the minds and hearts of our children...I immediately had this lying tract withdrawn from the school system.⁹⁵

Though public discourse revealed a growing concern with the content of school curricula, debate continued to center around the growing corruption of the Ministry of Education and the government’s failure to provide for the educational needs of all the island’s children. Moreover, while educational projects sponsored by American entrepreneurs and missionaries alleviated some of the pressures on understaffed and underfunded public schools, they never succeeded in providing access to schooling for all. Although urban areas benefited from an extensive network of public and private schools, many children in rural areas attended classes in one-room huts with palm-thatched roofs and dirt floors—and counted themselves lucky to be studying at all. According to the 1953 census, only slightly more than half of Cuban children attended school.⁹⁶ Throughout the 1950s, as a result of the “disproportionate increase of private school enrollments,” Cuban and US observers worried that the persistent failure to

⁹⁵ Fulgencio Batista, *The Growth and Decline of the Cuban Republic* (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1964), 82-83.

⁹⁶ Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 38.

provide all Cuban children with equal access to education would exacerbate existing tendencies “to intensify social class divisions.”⁹⁷

Unlike poor and rural children, elite and middle class children attended some of Latin America’s best schools. The best of these private and predominantly Catholic institutions were clustered in the capital, but several religious orders opened schools in provincial cities as well. While previous generations of well-off children, especially girls, had often been tutored at home, by the 1950s up to 35 percent of the elementary school population attended private schools. Another 150 *colegios*, *academias* and *institutos* provided private secondary education to thousands of middle and upper-class Cuban teenagers.⁹⁸ Moreover, in spite of directives established by the 1940 Constitution, private school curricula also continued to rely heavily on American texts and materials and offered extensive English language programs taught by North-American born or trained teachers. In the “best” schools, English songs, games and activities were introduced as early as kindergarten, and by first grade children could recite their ABC’s in both languages. Whether religious or secular, private schools uniformly sought to prepare children for enrollment in high schools, colleges and universities in the United States.

Private schooling did not only serve to inculcate middle class and elite children with a pro-US worldview; it also served to articulate the raced, classed and gendered structures of inequality that ordered Cuban society, dividing white and urban Cubans, many of them employed by American firms or subsidiary industries, from their poor,

⁹⁷ Francis Adams Truslow, *Report on Cuba* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1951), 404.

⁹⁸ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 400.

rural, and dark-skinned compatriots, and policing the boundaries between the unequal educational opportunities available to Cuban boys and girls. Attending a private school confirmed a child's membership in the middle or upper classes of Cuban society; accordingly, many parents of lesser social origin struggled to pay for the tuition, books and uniforms that enhanced their own and their children's social standing.

Study abroad similarly helped confirm a child's membership in the middle and upper classes. Cuban children had long gone abroad to complete their education, many of them attending high school or post-secondary institutions in the United States. The children of prominent Cubans, including José Martí, Antonio Maceo, Fulgencio Batista (and even, later, the son of Fidel Castro), studied in *el Norte*. While pro-US organizations sponsored scholarships for study abroad, most pre-revolutionary Cubans who attended American schools and colleges had no need of financial assistance. Of 1,046 Cubans enrolled in US educational institutions in 1958, more than 85 percent were self-paid.⁹⁹

Even in the late 1950s, however, it was more common for boys to study at boarding schools or abroad. Traditional notions of gender dictated that Cuban girls be kept close to home, where they could be closely supervised by mothers, aunts and grandmothers and educated in the skills and attitudes which would serve them as future wives and mothers. The pervasive concern with chastity, family honor and feminine virtue thus often precluded girls' pursuit of secondary or higher education if it required them to live away from home. Parents who sent their daughters abroad to study did so with mixed emotions, fearing the corrupting influence of the north even as they sought

⁹⁹ Institute of International Education, *Report on International Exchange* (1958): 43.

for them the prestige enjoyed by young women who had attended an American high school or college.

Recreational opportunities modeled after American programs and vacations in the United States also served to develop the elite child's understanding of the world and their place in it. Havana's young Americanized elite placed great importance on group activities. They interacted at children's events and parties held at social and professional clubs their parents belonged to. The Rotary and Lions Clubs arranged activities for member's children, and the Boy, Girl and Cub Scouts had established thriving troops on the island by the 1920s. *Escoutismo* (scouting) spread to the provinces, with branches in Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Camaguey, Banes, and Santiago de Cuba, as well as Havana. By the 1950s, approximately 2,500 Cuban girls and boys were part of the "Scouts de Cuba." Efforts were made to introduce children to American democratic values through these groups even as they ensured that children would form friendships with young people from similar class and racial backgrounds.

Many elite Cubans used English with one another and their children, if sometimes imperfectly, as a means of proclaiming their modernity and middle class identity, and in order to draw social boundaries between themselves and those who had not traveled abroad. By the 1940s and 1950s, many girls were given Hollywood-inspired names like Marilyn, Constance, Betty and Mae. Boys were christened Lincoln and Ike, after American presidents. Cubans of all classes gave their children anglicized nicknames like "Tony," "Frank" and "Mary Lou," believing that English names were a sign of sophistication and social status. Middle and upper-class Cuban mothers not only named

their children for an aspired-to northern reality, but also sought to rear their children and structure family life around an American model. They followed advice on nutrition and the most “modern” childrearing methods from American syndicated columnists who were translated into Spanish and appeared in magazines like *Bohemia* and *Vanidades*. Feature articles translated from American magazines offered guidance on toilet training, grooming, play, disciplinary methods, and toy selection, linking modern parenting to the careful selection and consumption of American goods.

American culture permeated the daily lives of middle class and elite Cuban children.¹⁰⁰ Many were voracious readers of translated American comic strips and books, including *Superman*, *Dennis the Menace*, *Dick Tracy*, *Little Abner*, and *Micky Mouse*, and radios broadcast American programs like *Superman*, *Tarzan*, and the *Lucky Strike Music Hour* into many Cuban homes. Cuba began to broadcast television programs in 1950, the first country in Latin America to do so; by the eve of the Revolution, Cubans owned more than 400,000 television sets, and ranked behind only the United States in per-capita television ownership. While radio and TV were found in some working class and rural homes, it was urban, middle and upper class children who were the most consistent listeners and viewers. A 1956 survey also indicated that many of Havana’s young people attended movies at least once a week.¹⁰¹

Hollywood deepened many Cuban children’s education in the history and culture of the United States, reinforcing the American values, social norms and aesthetic they

¹⁰⁰ See Thomas F. O’Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁰¹ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 177, 287.

had encountered at school and which their parents sought to emulate. Many middle and upper-class children even celebrated US national holidays. Georgie Anne Geyer recalls that in Banes, the hometown of 1950s dictator Fulgencio Batista, "...on the Fourth of July, the Americans and the Cubans held a huge picnic at the American Club..."¹⁰² American clubs in mill communities across the island invited well-positioned Cubans to join them for other holidays, such as Washington's Birthday and Thanksgiving.

Given the structural relationship of dependency which bound Cuba to the United States, however, Cubans' aspirations towards the American way of life were never entirely successful; nor did they usually allow Cuba's middle class and elite families to interact with expatriate Americans as social equals. In spite of their efforts to demonstrate their modernity or Americanness, well-off Cuban children still felt themselves inferior to their expatriate peers. American children living in Havana were at the top of the island's youthful social hierarchy, and lived almost completely isolated from their Cuban peers. English-speaking children in the capital lived in a few elite neighborhoods, notably the Miramar embassy district, and tended to socialize with other expatriate children. They attended only a few of the island's best private schools and were often educated at institutions that did not enroll local students. Although many Cuban middle and upper class children benefited from a similarly high quality education and a comparable standard of living, they were often isolated from and envious of the Americanized world inhabited by expatriate children.

¹⁰² Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 177, 287.

However, while elite Cubans were unable to completely bridge the gap between their social position and that inhabited by foreign residents on the island, they were able to make use of US-inflected notions of childhood to clearly distinguish themselves and their children from poor, working class and rural Cubans. Cuban parents made the care of their children, the foods they were served, the medicines or natural remedies administered (or prohibited) in times of sickness, and the choice of their clothes, into symbolic representations of their middle or upper class status. Through all of these child-centered practices, the bodies of their children were converted into signifiers of class, a text on and through which hierarchical social identities were written. Discourses of childhood were thus essential to the mediation of class relationships in pre-revolutionary Cuba, especially in relation to US cultural forms that dominated the lives of the well-off during this period.

Social reformers also drew distinctions between the children of the middle and upper classes and those of the poor and working classes, who were often cast as disorderly or deviant: a social problem that needed to be solved. These “problem children,” rather than drawing attention to the dramatic discrepancies between the Americanized childhoods of the middle and upper classes and the poverty, hardship and illness that defined the lives of the majority of the island’s youngest citizens, served instead as a way of explaining away the imbalances and injustices created by a modernizing economy. Poor and neglected children also became a focus for normative claims which served to reinforce the modernist assumptions linking the appropriate care and education of the child to the fate of the nation.

Nowhere was this more obvious than in public discussion of the plight of street children. By the late 1940s, *Habaneros* had grown all too accustomed to the sight of young boys and girls begging on the streets of the capital. Rather than exploring the links between the growing numbers of displaced or abandoned children and the stagnation of the sugar industry, the increase of rural landlessness, and rapid urbanization, middle class social reformers pointed the finger at their supposedly irresponsible or indifferent parents. *Los Problemas de la Niñez Actual*, a reformist tract published in 1949, blamed the desperate situation of Havana's street wretches on the working classes and the poor, who "are those who procreate on the largest scale," and "have no consciousness of the responsibility that they contract" in becoming parents.

According to the tract, the unfortunate children of the poor were "thrown onto the street" where they inevitably fell "first into begging and later in delinquency," a condition to be abhorred less for the danger it posed to any individual child than for the threat it represented to social stability. By portraying the failure of poor families to provide for their children as indicating a lack of social or civic responsibility, the tract reinforced the modern belief that the well-being of the child and of the nation were causally linked. Moreover, in attributing the existence of street children to the whims of irresponsible and indifferent parents, middle class reformers converted the ragged waifs who lined Havana's broad thoroughfares into pathetic symbols within a morality tale, reinforcing traditional notions of female chastity, Christian marriage and patriarchal duty by illustrating the disastrous consequences to the individual or society that strayed from these precepts. They thus precluded the possibility of critical debate in which street children might come to be understood as an inevitable byproduct of the

underemployment and landlessness which had displaced and fragmented so many Cuban families—the human cost of the island’s uneven economic development, inextricably linked to its structural dependence on the United States.

Instead, reformers and civic leaders targeted childhood as a site in which to resolve the pressing social problems flowing from their nation’s limited political sovereignty and uneven economic modernization, formulating policies and programs that provided services to unsupervised and neglected children without addressing the roots of this nation-wide phenomenon. Towns as small as Guara (population 4,500) and Perico (population 3, 200) organized at least one baseball team, and 1,600 boys between the ages of nine and thirteen played on sixty *Cubanitos* teams organized by the *Asociación de Béisbol Infantil*. While some middle and upper-class children belonged to this children’s league, *Cubanitos* was seen as a vehicle for reaching out to neglected or troubled working class youth. Again relying on modernist associations between childhood and national destinies, Armando Villegas wrote that the league aimed to “take a boy off the streets by way of baseball...to see him through school and discipline him for the future, to shape his character and good habits...to fight illiteracy and juvenile delinquency...”¹⁰³

In line with this individualistic approach to widespread social problems, direct government intervention in the lives of pre-revolutionary Cuban children was limited. In a 1949 speech to Havana’s Guaimano Masonic Lodge, Professor Plácido Lugris y Beceiro called for the creation of a federal Ministry of Child Welfare to study and respond to the needs of Cuban children. At the same time, Lugris y Beceiro feared that

¹⁰³ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 76, 257, 275, 285.

expanded government initiatives in child welfare would simply create new opportunities for corrupt politicians to divert national funds into their own bank accounts: "...I confess frankly that I have an instinctive fear of the word [Ministry], because I am afraid that it would quickly become a job factory to reward political favors, without any kind of practical result."¹⁰⁴

Lugris y Beceiro's fears shared by many Cubans who had long criticized the corrupt and inefficient Ministry of Education. The persistent and growing inadequacies of the public school system reaffirmed the remnants of a conservative political culture, a legacy of the colonial era that dictated that the problems of needy children were the province of the church and private charities, rather than an expression of structural inequities that the government should address. It is not surprising then that many child welfare programs, public or private, suffered from underfunding, corrupt or inefficient leadership, or societal indifference.

During the tumultuous decade leading up to the Revolution, funds dedicated to schools and child welfare initiatives were repeatedly looted and embezzled by corrupt Ministry of Education officials. As a result, public school programs increasingly fell into disarray, decreasing the already scarce learning opportunities for the poor, black, and rural children who had no access to private schooling.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, limited efforts at educational reforms continued to reinforce traditional hierarchical notions of gender in

¹⁰⁴ Lugris y Beceiro, *Los Problemas de la Niñez Actual*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ The 1953 Population Census found that approximately 25 percent of Cubans age ten and older had never attended school of any kind, and more than 50 percent had not completed the sixth grade. See Bunck, *Fidel Castro and Revolutionary Culture*, 22.

pre-revolutionary Cuba. Many rural families prioritized the education of sons and saw school attendance by daughters as a luxury that did not prepare them for their future roles in rural communities. The curriculum of the Rural Children's Homes and the Rural Domestic Science School in the province of Las Villas reinforced these gender biases, restricting technical education to boys; girls who attended the Las Villas school received instruction in home economics, hygiene, and the "practical problems of childbirth and childcare" to prepare them "for their future careers as housewives in the countryside."¹⁰⁶ Pre-revolutionary educational reforms thus made little difference in the lives of most Cuban children. Though the failing public schools and the problem of street children continued to provoke public outcry, poor Cuban children continued to work, hustle and beg for a living throughout the 1950s, while girls of all social classes and races continued to be educated—when they were educated—for a lifetime of subservience within a patriarchal and *machista* society.

During the final years of the Second Republic, as government corruption and ineffectiveness and the precarious state of the island's sugar-based economy became painfully evident to more and more Cubans, children were increasingly deployed to explain and maintain an insupportable status quo. Pressed into the service of a nation-making project that served American interests and prioritized the needs of a propertied and US-allied elite, symbolic and actual children were used to promote a vision of Cuban nationhood that had little in common with the one articulated by the island's nineteenth century nationalist heroes. Whereas Martí had once drawn upon the symbol of the child

¹⁰⁶ Batista, *The Growth and Decline of the Cuban Republic*, 78.

in calling for the establishment of a free, egalitarian and multiracial republic, by the mid twentieth century child-centered discourses and cultural practices played a crucial role in generating and policing the raced, classed and gendered inequalities that defined pre-revolutionary society.

By the early 1950s, however, symbolic and actual children also began to provide focus and urgency to progressive Cubans' demands for meaningful change, envisioned as a return to Martí's nationalist and egalitarian vision. Chafing under the dictatorship of former army sergeant Fulgencio Batista, many Cubans grew increasingly disillusioned by national political life; the appalling rates of poverty and disease in the countryside, most visibly manifested in the swollen bellies of toddlers suffering from gastroenteritis, contributed in no small part to the anti-Batista insurgency that began with Fidel Castro's 1953 assault on Santiago's Moncada Barracks. Urban working class barrios and shantytowns filled with unemployed sugar workers during the *tiempo muerto*, left idle and without a stable source of income for more than half of the year. Their children lacked adequate food, shelter, or access to education. The under-funded public school system which educated the nation's poor had descended into corruption and inefficiency. The 1953 census indicated that 25 percent of Cubans ten years and older had never attended school; more than 50 percent had dropped out before sixth grade. By 1959, less than half of the nation's children between ages seven and fourteen attended school. These numbers were, of course, much higher in rural areas.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Bunck, *Fidel Castro and Revolutionary Culture*, 22.

Given the poverty and inequality of the island's rural and eastern provinces, it was only fitting that Castro chose to launch his Revolution in Oriente. The group of student revolutionaries that became known as the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* or M-26-7 (in commemoration of Jose Martí's birthday) launched their anti-Batista campaign with an abortive attack on Santiago de Cuba's Moncada army barracks in 1953. The failed revolt resulted in Castro's imprisonment for two years at the Island of Pines, after which he fled to Mexico. In November 1956, the revitalized revolutionary band returned from exile with the important addition of Argentine doctor Ernesto "Che" Guevara to their ranks. They landed their ship, the *Granma*, at Playa Colorada, where Batista's troops were waiting. Only a handful of revolutionaries survived to accompany Fidel, Raúl and Che into the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Two years of guerilla war followed. The rebels were aided by a vigorous resistance movement, headed largely by students, who organized strikes and encouraged civil disobedience.

As resistance to the US sponsored Batista dictatorship grew, Cuban schoolchildren were caught between opposing political camps who struggled to control the content of their education and their loyalties. The classroom became a place of conflict and confusion, as children attempted to reconcile laudatory representations of the United States in their textbooks with increasingly vocal critiques of American support for Batista and continuing US political and economic domination of their island. Throughout the 1950s, these struggles moved from the classroom and out onto the streets, as even baseball fever took on political overtones in Cuba.

Community organizations such as the *Comite Nacional Acera del Louvre* encouraged baseball “for the moral and physical improvement of our youth and the betterment of relations with the American people”; sensing that Cuban children’s passion for baseball could serve strategic interests, the US embassy in Cuba promoted the game as an “unusually good opportunity for reaching primary USIS (United States Information Service) target audiences.”¹⁰⁸ The YMCA, which had arrived on the island at the turn of the century, similarly sought to expand efforts to garner pro-US sentiment while intervening with at-risk youth through sports and recreational activities—and, presumably, to use these activities to temper the political discontent that many of these young people were beginning to demonstrate.

In spite of new efforts to make use of children to foster US-Cuban relations (and, by extension, to bolster an increasingly insupportable political and economic status quo), even staunchly pro-US middle class families began to question their blind loyalty to all things northern by the mid 1950s. Washington’s support for the violent and repressive Batista regime dismayed many well-to-Cubans, and they began to search for nationalist solutions to their island’s political, economic and social crises. Some Cuban parents began to reassess the American values and lifestyle they had worked so hard to transmit to their children.

Anti-American sentiment, always under the surface of the Cuban emulation of all things northern, was on the rise, at the same time as a new appreciation for indigenous cultural forms began to grow. Nationalist writer José Pardo Llada condemned Cubans’

¹⁰⁸ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 272.

eagerness to *extranjerizarse*, or imitate foreign ways, seeing the American gangster, cowboy and detective comic books so popular with the island's children as a betrayal of national identity. Artist María Luísa Ríos criticized snow-covered northern representations of Christmas, and called on parents to incorporate local motifs into holiday decorations. Journalists urged Cubans to patronize local businesses and choose clothing, furniture and household goods suitable to life in the tropics. Families were urged not to go to Miami and New York for holidays, but rather, in the words of the popular song *Conozca a Cuba*, to “see Cuba first, and foreign countries later.”

Cubans began to examine the role language played in shaping and expressing—or rather, obscuring—their children's sense of national identity. Private schools, it was charged, stressed English literacy so much that many graduating students could not write in their home language. The popular usage of English slang expressions was criticized. While the Cuban Congress debated a bill to prohibit the use of foreign languages in business names and advertisements, more and more Cuban parents began to teach children the correct Spanish words for ice cream, hot dogs and hamburgers.¹⁰⁹ The new emphasis on teaching children to speak and write “correct” Spanish, unadulterated by imported phrases, was a reversal of a century-old trend, and a powerful reflection of the cultural transformations already in process on the eve of the 1959 Revolution.

During the last years of the Batista regime, violence, repression and acts of political terrorism became a constant part of Cuban life. Newspapers were filled with graphic images of dead rebels and escaped prisoners, soaked in blood, covered with flies.

¹⁰⁹ Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban*, 474-476.

Concerned parents tried to shelter their children from these images, and many spoke of Batista and Castro only when they were out of earshot. In spite of these protective efforts, threats to children were very real. Bombings of schools and theaters were weekly, if not daily occurrences. Countless innocent bystanders, including many children, were killed and maimed in the late 1950s.

These dangers did not stop young Cubans from forming their own political opinions and acting upon them. Given the glaring inequities of pre-revolutionary life, it is not surprising that many poor and working class Cuban teens from the cities and countryside were active in the anti-Batista movements; many joined the youth cadres of Fidel Castro's M-26-7 and other underground resistance groups active across the island. As early as 1955, Castro addressed the aspirations of these underprivileged children and young people by promising that "a revolutionary government would undertake the integral reform of the educational system."¹¹⁰ For the poor of all ages, the lack of educational opportunities for their children had come to represent all of the disparities between their lives and the privileged existence of the *capitalino* population. It is not surprising, then, that Castro's promises of educational opportunity for all Cubans won him many supporters amongst the nation's *campesino* and urban working class families.

What is perhaps more surprising is that the youngest resistance fighters were often not poor, black or from peasant families. Middle and upper-class children, particularly those living in Havana, inhabited a very different world than their rural or urban working-class counterparts; memoirs written by members of the island's pre-revolutionary elite,

¹¹⁰ Herbert L. Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 181.

whom Castro later referred to disparagingly as *los niños bitongos*, uniformly paint a picture of childhood as a time of luxury and sheltered innocence. Their recollections contrast sharply with the poverty and insecurity experienced by the overwhelming majority of the nation's children. However, the existence of extreme inequalities in republican Cuba was not lost on privileged young people, and many middle and upper class young people joined the pre-revolutionary resistance in an attempt to bridge the socioeconomic and cultural gaps which separated them from the rest of the island's children.

The youth of the underground resistance movement was active in both the countryside and in the nation's cities, contributing significantly to the eventual triumph of the Revolution. Batista's secret police eventually killed over 20,000 of Castro's supporters, making no exceptions for the movement's younger members. Teresa Caruso, a resident of Havana during the 1950s, witnessed the violent repression of the pre-revolutionary years first hand, writing "Every sunrise revealed dozens of corpses... The most barbaric methods of torture, not excluding castration, were daily incidents in the police stations where the groans of a whole generation of youths were heard as they were tortured for information or for having aided the revolutionary movement."¹¹¹

Batista's indiscriminate use of violence and terror did not deter these young revolutionaries, many of them teenagers from elite families in the capital whose parents also participated in revolutionary activities. Catholic youth played an especially crucial role in supporting the insurgency: unlike many senior clergy who still retained closer

¹¹¹ Lee Chadwick, *Cuba Today* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1976), 55.

links to the socially conservative church in Franco's Spain, "younger Catholics were calling for a renovation of their country and their church along more nationalist lines and in support of Christian Social Justice."¹¹² Fidel Castro himself was a member of the Cuban landowning elite and a graduate of Colegio Belén, a private Jesuit high school. Under his leadership, Cubans of all ages would bring the nation to the brink of a Revolution that was spurred on by their unfulfilled dreams of self-determination and social justice—and by a vision of the future that placed children at the heart of an ongoing quest for a modern and uniquely Cuban nationhood.

Conclusion

During the first half of the twentieth century, Cubans from different social classes, races, and political allegiances relied upon symbolic and actual children in pursuing independence from US political, economic and cultural domination on the island, targeting childhood as a site from which to launch a range of struggles for national autonomy, representative government, and multiracial social justice. At the same time, however, American politicians, business and civic leaders, journalists and missionaries pressed Cuban children into the service of their disparate goals, nonetheless united by the belief that Cubans' racial inferiority and political immaturity left them ill-equipped for self-rule and that US control of Cuba was crucial to their own national destiny.

Throughout this period of mediated sovereignty and uneven modernization, US-allied Cuban elites and a growing middle class also relied on representations of childhood

¹¹² Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 38.

and the bodies and minds of real children to justify and protect their wealth and positions of privilege in a society increasingly divided by poverty, instability, and raced, classed, and gendered inequality. The overlapping and conflicting goals of all these actors, expressed through symbols and discourses of childhood and manifesting themselves in the bodies and minds of actual children, served to dramatically articulate the unfinished nature of the Cuban struggle for independence and helped propel the island toward a second nationalist revolution. It thus came as no surprise when, after his triumphant arrival in Havana in January 1959, Castro declared that the Revolution had been fought on behalf of the island's children. More surprising to the many Cubans who had supported the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship, would be the unexpected direction taken by their Revolution, and the even more important role that children would play in shaping the nation's destiny in the tumultuous years to come.

Chapter 2

La Revolución—es Para los Niños? **Castro, Revolution, and the Children**

After the January 1, 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Cubans of all races, classes and political affiliations celebrated the rebirth of their nation. They invited insurgent leaders to form a provisional government that would usher in a return to democracy and introduce the political, economic and social reforms that would remake their society according to José Martí's egalitarian vision. During the next year, however, the Revolution passed rapidly through brief moments of democracy and inclusive humanism before coalescing around the nationalist and increasingly authoritarian leadership of Fidel Castro. During those first twelve volatile months, symbolic and actual children played an important role in mediating the tensions between the Revolution's widespread popularity and growing disagreements over the nature of Castro's leadership.

Beginning as early as January 1959, revolutionary leaders and a supportive media made use of child-centered discourses and images to pursue a range of political goals: to shore up the legitimacy of the Revolution by reframing the nation's history in a way that made the political ascension of Castro's M-26-7 into an inevitable extension of the nineteenth century independence struggle; to introduce Cubans to the nature and goals of the Revolution, as expressed through their concern for the wellbeing of all Cuban children; and to create and maintain political consensus and mobilize citizens in support of its initiatives. As the year progressed, Castro and his media supporters also increasingly made use of children to counter doubts and discontent on the island and in

the United States. Framing the improved life chances of Cuban children as the essential and unique expression of a “humanist” Revolution, the media created a shared discourse of childhood that linked children’s wellbeing, and indeed their very futures, to the survival of the Revolution.

As dissent became more vocal during the summer of 1959, Castro also began to emphasize the importance of children in a new Cuban nation, both in an attempt to conflate his Revolution with romantic notions of youthful virtue and promise dating back to the writings of José Martí and to expand his base of support by rallying young people to his cause. In doing so, he expanded earlier framings of children as beneficiaries of the Revolution’s largesse to admit the possibility of their reframing as political actors in their own right. Pursuing an ever more personal relationship with the nation’s children, Castro encouraged them to express their support for his Revolution and defend it against detractors, consolidating his own political power and hold over the masses in the process.

By the end of the year, Fidel Castro and his supporters had successfully harnessed the powerful symbolic figure of the child and began to make use of the bodies and minds of young people in the pursuit of revolutionary goals. This transformation of the understandings and practices of Cuban childhood went hand-in-hand with the rebel *comandante*’s rapid evolution into a highly charismatic, paternalistic, and authoritarian leader. The strategic deployment of both symbolic and actual children thus contributed to the narrowing of political freedoms which took place on the island by the end of 1959, creating a discursive framework in which those who expressed doubt, discontent or

disagreement with the trajectory of the Revolution became vulnerable to charges that they were indifferent to the destiny of the island's children.

A Nation Reborn: The Triumph of the Revolution

The Batista government fell when the dictator fled to Miami on New Year's Day, 1959. His departure sparked the immediate exodus of approximately five hundred of the nation's top military and political elites, but across the island, news of their departure was met by an immense outpouring of joy.¹¹³ Cubans of all social classes, in rural and urban areas, cheered Batista's flight from the island, wept with relief, and danced in the streets. One week later, liberal professionals and workers, students and children poured into the Havana's wide thoroughfares to throw flowers to the bearded revolutionaries who marched or rode tanks in a victorious procession through the capital. The hated tyrant had been ousted, and Cubans of all social classes believed the young, soulful liberators of the M-26 movement—many came down from the mountains carrying rosary beads, medals and prayer cards bearing the image of *La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, patron saint of Cuba—would lead the nation towards democracy, progress and prosperity. The triumph of the Revolution would redeem their nation.

Many children, perhaps too young to understand the historical significance of the event, nonetheless felt the outpouring of happiness and wondered at its cause. Román de la Campa recalls returning to Havana after a Miami holiday on the same day that Castro arrived to the city: "The festive atmosphere at the port was unforgettable... On the way

¹¹³ Félix Masúid-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the U.S., 1959-1995* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 32.

home we saw people of all ages and social classes jumping with joy in the streets as if it were New Year's Eve."¹¹⁴

From the first days following the Revolution, however, euphoria and revolutionary fervor co-existed with confusion, anxiety and even disillusionment. Even as the overwhelming majority of Cuban families celebrated the victory of the bearded rebels streaming into Havana from the Sierra Maestra Mountains, others felt uneasy about their place in the new order. Expressions of joy, awe and confusion were accompanied by an outpouring of darker emotions, produced during more than sixty years of the republic and exacerbated by the Batista dictatorship: political and personal hostilities, class envy, and the rage of the marginalized and dispossessed, combined to give rise to rioting and looting in the shadows of celebration. Gastón Vázquez, the adolescent son of a Spanish merchant, watched as a crowd smashed the windows of his father's shoe store in Centro Habana and stole the inventory, then continued on to vandalize other stores on the street. Initially supporters of the Revolution, Vázquez's family had even bought M-26 bonds to support their anti-Batista insurgency; within a few years, the teenager and several of his relatives would join forces with others, both on and off the island, to conspire against the Castro government.¹¹⁵

Children's recollections of the first weeks of 1959 provide vivid evidence of the contradictory emotions and responses provoked by the triumph of Castro's rebels. Within the first volatile year of Revolution, as the nation passed through a brief democratic

¹¹⁴ Román De la Campa, *Cuba on My Mind: Journeys to a Severed Nation* (New York: Verso, 2000), 26.

¹¹⁵ Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 71.

moment into an inclusive humanist and then the beginning of a nationalist phase, the new provisional government enjoyed the support of a majority of the island's citizens; however, moments of political consensus were accompanied by disagreements over the nature and priorities of Castro's leadership.¹¹⁶ Even as individuals and groups who had taken little interest in the events leading to the fall of Batista became passionate partisans of the new government, many of its earliest supporters became increasingly disenchanted. This complex, ever-shifting dialectic both influenced and was influenced by the representations of children in both the revolutionary media and in supportive independent newspapers, magazines and journals.

In his first interview after descending from the Sierra Maestra Mountains, Fidel Castro spoke to journalists Carlos Castañeda of *Bohemia* magazine and Jules Dubois of the *Chicago Tribune* about the nature, structure and goals of the provisional government. The Cuban Revolution, he insisted, was not communist; nor would Castro take on the role of head of state, a position that had already been filled by President Manuel Urrutia. He also gave assurances of Cuba's continued desire for friendship with the United States and promised that elections would be held within four months.¹¹⁷ Making note of the

¹¹⁶ Silvia Pedraza makes use of Nelson Amaro's (1977) periodization of the processes of political and social transformation in Cuba, dividing the Revolution into five stages: democracy, humanism, nationalism, socialism, and Marxism-Leninism. Though the narrative arc of this dissertation does not correspond exactly with these stages, I nonetheless find them to be a very useful frame through which to interpret the politics of childhood on the island between 1959 and 1962. See Nelson R. Amaro, "Mass and Class in the Origins of the Cuban Revolution," in *Cuban Communism*, 8th ed., ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1989), 221-251; and Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 36.

¹¹⁷ This understanding of the nature of the new revolutionary government was in line with the Manifesto of the 26th of July Movement, issued in 1956, which promised the restoration of the 1940 Constitution, the nationalization of the electrical and telephone companies, profit sharing and improved conditions for workers in sugar mills and the mining industry, as well as for *colonos*, or independent cane growers; the Declaration also promised to safeguard the property of small landowners and to protect civil liberties and

image of *La Virgen de la Caridad* on a medallion around Castro's neck, a clearly infatuated Castañeda approvingly interpreted this as a sign of Castro's Christian faith and goodwill towards the Catholic Church, which had supported the young insurgent leader since his imprisonment after the failed Moncada attack in 1953.¹¹⁸

Slightly more than a month later, however, Prime Minister José Miró Cardona and his cabinet resigned without explanation, giving lie to Castro's statement that he would play no role in the island nation's governance. On February 16 *Revolución*—the newsmagazine of the M-26-7 Movement—happily announced that Castro's swearing in as prime minister would resolve a “dispersal of power” in the provisional government, since before his appointment it was common for workers and individuals to follow the Revolutionary leader's pronouncements, rather than those of the government. “Now,” the article concluded with satisfaction, “the government, the Revolution and the people will take the same path.”¹¹⁹

political democracy. The M-26-7 movement's adherence to values shared by other Latin American Christian social democratic parties was made explicit by Felipe Pazos, one of the authors of the Declaration and one of Cuba's leading economists. See Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés, ed., *Cuba in Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972).

¹¹⁸ In addition to the Catholic students and youth organizations that formed such a significant part of the anti-Batista underground, many priests and bishops also initially supported the Revolution. After the failure of Castro's plan to take the Moncada army barracks in 1953, he was tried and imprisoned on the Isle of Pines. The archbishop of Santiago, Monseñor Enrique Pérez Serantes, interceded on his behalf, saving his life in the face of an imminent death sentence. *Bohemia*, Cuba's most widely read news weekly, had offered its own support to the anti-Batista insurgency; following the triumph of the Revolution, the magazine would become one of Castro's most fervent media allies. Many of its journalists, however, including Carlos Castañeda, would become disaffected by the end of 1959, and join the wave of journalists from publications both supportive of and hostile to the Revolution who began to seek refuge in exile in the United States and other Latin American nations by early 1960.

¹¹⁹ *Revolución*, February 16, 1959.

The overwhelming majority of Cubans welcomed Castro's ascension to the office of prime minister and offered him their support. The new government's popularity, as well as its cautiously positive reception in the United States, rested not only on Castro's charisma, however; perhaps more importantly at this early moment, the Revolution's legitimacy lay in its successful ousting of the corrupt and repressive Batista regime, its respect for constitutional and electoral processes, and its promise of moderate economic and social reforms in line with the platforms of Christian social democratic parties throughout Latin America.¹²⁰ These principles formed the basis for consensus among the broad coalition of individuals and groups who were represented in the Urrutia government and had participated in the anti-Batista movement, including members of the M-26-7 Movement, the *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil* (DRE), the *Federación Estudiantil Universitaria* (FEU), as well as Catholic youth groups like the *Agrupación Católica Universitaria* (ACU) and individuals of all ages and social classes who participated in the civic resistance.

Perhaps more importantly, though, Castro early and often drew upon Cuban notions of childhood to establish his Revolution as the fulfillment of the nineteenth century independence. Stating in February that "the *mambíses* initiated the war for independence that we have completed on January 1, 1959," Castro framed the Revolution as the realization of the island's long-deferred dreams of national autonomy.¹²¹ In doing so, he offered the Cuban people the opportunity to participate in a collective coming-of-

¹²⁰ Jorge I. Domínguez, "Crisis in Central America 2: Castro's Challenge," FrontLine News, PBS, April 10, 1985; and Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 49, 59.

¹²¹ *Revolución*, February 25, 1959, 4.

age celebration—one that had been delayed for more than sixty years by Cuba’s enforced political and economic dependency on the United States. Castro made this association early and frequently, stating that throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the United States had “...deprived the nation of the prerogatives to govern itself, they deprived the nation of its sovereignty, they treated it like a little child to whom they said: ‘We will give you permission to do just this, and if you do more we will punish you.’ The Platt Amendment was imposed and we either behaved ourselves—behaved ourselves in the manner convenient to the foreign country—or we would lose our sovereignty.”¹²²

This framing of the Revolution drew on turn-of-the century representations of Cuba as a child under the care of a benevolent US tutor and father figure in order to reject them and proclaim the island’s newfound adulthood, providing the Castro government early on with a powerful source of legitimacy that evoked Cuban understandings of childhood with their long-frustrated aspirations towards national self-determination. This child-centered discursive framing provided the Revolution with a moral imperative that spoke to Cubans of all races and classes across the island.

The provisional government furthered strengthened its legitimacy by targeting the island’s youngest citizens, especially working class, poor and rural children, as recipients of its earliest social justice initiatives. Even before the Revolution’s triumph, rebel soldiers had begun constructing clinics in the poorest and most remote regions of the island. Pre-natal and pediatric medicine was given top priority; in the first few months of 1959, the new government began to construct Maternal Homes for women who lived in

¹²² Fidel Castro, *Pensamiento de Fidel Castro: Selección Temática*, vol. 1 (Havana: 1959), 5.

underpopulated rural zones and previously had no access to hospital care. Programs were quickly established to send pregnant women to these homes several weeks before giving birth, where they were provided with comfortable accommodations, a nutritionally balanced meals and pre-natal medical assistance. Expectant mothers also attended orientations where they received instruction about birthing techniques and infant care. These initial efforts quickly contributed to falling infant mortality rates in poor and rural communities.

The new government also made the expansion of literacy and primary education to all parts of the island one of its first priorities. Rebel soldiers and community members worked with the government to hastily put together makeshift schools and dedicated themselves to the repair and renovation of existing school buildings, as well as the adaptation of non-academic facilities to meet the Cuban population's pressing educational needs. Nationalized or abandoned properties, including the mansions and summer homes of elite Cubans who had followed Batista into exile were quickly refitted as public schools. An ambitious program to house, clothe, feed and educate child beggars was undertaken in Camagüey province, while in Havana, the Ministry of Social Welfare designated two luxurious estates that had been appropriated from Batista supporters to be used as boarding schools for 400 street children.¹²³ Sixty-nine military forts and installations were soon converted into schools across the island, among these the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba.¹²⁴

¹²³ *Revolución*, September 17, 1959, 1; October 14, 1959, 1; and October 15, 1959.

¹²⁴ Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, *Nada Hay Más Importante Que Un Niño: Cuba, Año 20 de la Revolución* (Ciudad de la Habana: Editorial ORBE, 1979): 62, 70.

The provisional government's efforts to expand health care and educational services to all the island's children earned the cautious support of much of the island's clergy and some of its religious hierarchy. On January 3rd, 1959, Enrique Pérez Serantes, archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, issued a pastoral message entitled "*Vida Nueva*," in which he proclaimed that the Revolution had brought new life to the island. The letter sang Fidel Castro's praises and reiterated the Church's support for the provisional government's plans to restore democracy and undertake a program of Christian social reform in benefit of the island's most needy citizens. Many other Catholic intellectuals and priests, including Father Ignacio Biaín, editor of the island's widely disseminated Catholic magazine, *La Quincena*, offered statements, bulletins and homilies in which they shared their support for the Revolution and their conviction that it was inspired by Christian precepts. The Catholic youth of the ACU, whose organization was deeply committed to Catholic social justice and had years of experience in volunteer and advocacy programs among Cuba's rural poor, also offered their support and expertise as volunteers in some of the Revolution's earliest social and educational projects that sought to ameliorate the worst inequities of Cuban society.¹²⁵

The Church also supported early economic reforms that benefited many Cuban children. In January 1959, rents, electricity and telephone rates were lowered between 30 and 50 percent. Pharmaceutical prices were reduced, as were postal charges. The minimum wage was increased, and taxes on middle and working class households were reduced. At the same time, new laws eliminated loop holes through which many wealthy

¹²⁵ Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 56, 57, 64.

Cubans evaded paying taxes. These reductions in the cost of rents and other essential goods and services, combined with wage increases, increased the purchasing power of poor, working and middle class families and made possible improvements in the nutrition, health and general standard of living of many children. Many children also made their first trips to Woolworth's and other department stores in the early months of revolutionary prosperity and took home longed for store bought toys and games—many of them imported from the United States.

In order to shore up their wide base of support from Cubans of all classes, revolutionary policy changes were accompanied by a widespread public relations campaign that relied heavily on child-centered discourses and images to shape public understanding of the nature and goals of the provisional government. The M-26-7 publication *Revolución*, together with the pro-Revolution magazine *Bohemia*, took the lead in making use of Cuban understandings and practices of childhood to explain the Revolution's origins and actions. They justified the violence of the anti-Batista insurgency and the military trial and public execution of his police and military collaborators—a source of concern and embarrassment for even many of the Revolution's supporters—by detailing their crimes in newspaper articles and documentaries shown in movie theatres. Many of these enumerated the former regime's neglect of children and the torture and murder of their opponents, many of them adolescents.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 58.

One of the most visceral attacks on the *Batistato* came when the socialist newspaper *Hoy* printed an article claiming that one of Batista's senators had sacrificed a child in a ritual of African witchcraft. The newspaper accused Francisco Jiménez Hernández, a wealthy farmer resident in the sugar mill town of Jagueyal, of the February 1956 murder of three year old Emilito Tápanes; framing the child's death as indicative of a larger pattern of cruelty towards children, editorial commentary asserted that "the [Batista] tyranny not only committed political crimes...what was always suspected has now been proven. Let it be known: that the child was sacrificed in a ritual of witchcraft."

Jímenez was further accused of having previously participated in human sacrifices in order to perform rites to cure a gravely ill brother; indeed, Emilito Tápanes' murder was allegedly part of a second attempt to treat the incurable brother via a ritual that involved feeding him the toddler's intestines and bathing him in his blood. The Batista-era senator had used his wealth and connections to the former dictator's corrupt police force to avoid imprisonment for almost three years, but now, the article concluded with satisfaction, would finally face revolutionary justice.¹²⁷ *Hoy's* coverage of Jímenez's arrest, evoking the ghosts of a child-centered moral panic dating back to the turn of the century, thus resorted to innuendo and sensationalism in order to drive home the cruelty and degeneracy of the Batista regime and to proclaim the Revolution's commitment to protect the island's children.

¹²⁷ "Un Influyente Batistiano, Preso Por Realizar Actos Criminales de Hechicería," *Hoy*, January 29, 1959, 2.

Political cartoons also reminded Cubans that attacks by Batista-era military and police caused the death of many children. One such cartoon, signed by the artist “Arroyito,” depicted two pre-Revolutionary air force pilots on a bombing run over a peaceful seaside village. The wings of their aircraft are emblazoned with dual skull and crossbones; the caption quoted one pilot directing the other to “Let it go [a grenade] now, now! I see a woman and child over there!”

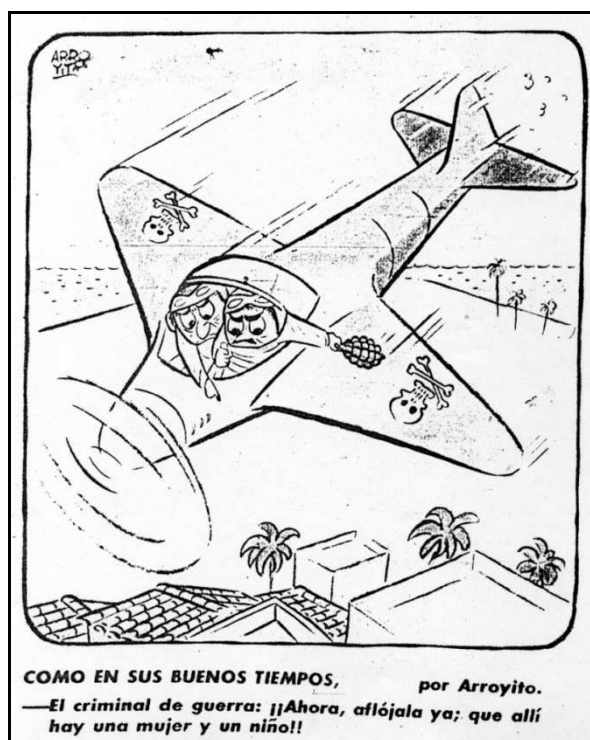


Figure 1: Cartoon, two war criminals flying an airplane¹²⁸

Photographs, film images, and political cartoons like this one sought to shore up the Revolution’s existing reserves of legitimacy by keeping memories of the terror and oppression of the *Batistato* fresh in the minds of the population, even as it publicized its own efforts on behalf of the nation’s youngest citizens; this child-centered discourse

¹²⁸ *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959, 19.

sought to remind Cubans why the Revolution had been fought and why it was deserving of their unconditional support.

In spite of these efforts to maintain the popular momentum of the first few months of 1959, for many Cubans, the euphoria was already beginning to fade. Responding to growing concern about the direction of reform, both on and off the island, Castro continued to insist that the Revolution was not communist. During a visit to the United States in April 1959, Castro appeared on *Meet the Press* to repeat his calls for friendship between the two nations, reassuring Americans that he would hold elections in Cuba within the next four years. Explaining this postponement of his original promise, he claimed that the Cuban people did not want elections to be held. During this visit he also made clear that Cuba would not accept aid from the United States; while continuing to desire the goodwill of their northern neighbor, the revolutionary government did not wish to be beholden to any other nation, or to enter into any agreements that would curtail the autonomy of the Revolution. Returning to Cuba in May, Castro again insisted on television that neither he nor the Revolution was not communist, characterizing it instead—echoing the nascent strains of nationalism which had begun to be heard in other proclamations—as not red but “*verde olivo*,” the olive green of the uniforms worn by the rebel soldiers.¹²⁹

These reassurances did not satisfy everyone. A growing sector of the population were distressed by Castro’s assertions that the provisional government’s legitimacy lay not in elections nor closeness to the United States—as it had throughout the island’s

¹²⁹ Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 59, 60.

republican era—but in the popular support which the Revolution inspired, especially among the working classes and rural poor. Still, most Cubans remained enthusiastic about the Revolution and its redistributive programs, including the Agrarian Reform Law of May 1959, which nationalized all properties above 150 *caballerías*.¹³⁰ Even the Catholic Church issued statements of qualified support for agrarian reform, though members of the ACU expressed concern about what they felt was the excessive concentration of power in the hands of Ché Guevara's National Institute for Agrarian Reform and the potential threat it represented to private property rights.¹³¹

Castro and the Children: The Church, Anti-Communism, and the Origins of Dissent

By late summer 1959, as unease and discontent continued to emerge, child-centered discourses and media images provided Castro with a means of justifying the postponement of elections and the mounting impositions of the Revolution's economic and social programs. Even as Castro began to consolidate power in his own hands by denying a meaningful political role to other members of the coalition that had ousted Batista, he issued increasingly insistent calls for broad-based support for the Revolution's redistributive social programs, insisting that any discomfort or disagreement with the revolution should be subordinated to the greater common good—especially when related to children.

¹³⁰ A *caballería* was about 33 acres; therefore, properties of less than approximately 5,000 acres were not initially affected by the Agrarian Reform Law.

¹³¹ Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 64.

Reminding people that the Batista regime was a corrupt and heartless system that preyed most viciously on the young, Castro declared repeatedly to a sympathetic media that anyone who criticized the Revolution was guilty of not caring about Cuban children. He urged the well-to-do to consider the needs of the nation's children and argued that social justice, not modern consumer goods, was the true measure of civilization. In doing so, he offered Cubans a new paradigm by which to evaluate their nation's position in the modern world: "And if we measure the level of civilization of a country by the number of children afflicted with parasites? And if we measure the real level by the rate of illiteracy and the rate of infant mortality in the country?...Any country that is thinking of the luxury of radios, refrigerators, televisions, etc., with thousands of children affected with tuberculosis...is a barbaric country."¹³²

It wasn't enough, Castro argued, that civilization be measured by the standard of living enjoyed by the nation's elite. A just society could not allow a small group to "drive around in Cadillacs while in Manzanillo 150 children died annually of gastroenteritis...." The *patria*, or homeland, should be one in which all, rich and poor, shared in the benefits of nationality. Castro included children in this new definition of *patria*. No child, he declared, would go hungry, uneducated, or without medical care in his or her homeland.

Although efforts to feed, clothe and provide health care to the island's poor enjoyed broad-based support, voices of dissent began to be raised as the Revolutionary provisional government intervened in more and more areas of everyday life. When the Educational Reform Act was passed in fall of 1959, the Catholic Church joined the

¹³² *Revolución*, September 19, 1959, 12; and September 30, 1959, 8.

chorus of those who felt that Castro was overstepping the bounds of the people's wishes. Though most Cubans supported the extension of educational resources to children across the island, many middle class and Catholic parents were alarmed by the promulgation of Laws 76 and 367, which established that private schools would be regulated by the same standards as public schools. The laws further stipulated that private schools would be subject to regular inspections by state officials, and that they would be required to use the same texts, authorized by the Ministry of Education, in use in public schools.¹³³

Minister of Education and Culture Armando Hart quickly dismissed the concerns of parents of private school students, insisting that fears about attacks on educational liberty were simply "crass and badly intentioned" rumors started by "reactionary sectors;" in fact, the legal changes introduced by the Revolution's educational reform were minimal and varied only "lightly" from the program laid out in the former 1946 education law. Moreover, he noted, drawing on Cubans' attention to events in both their former colonizing nations, Spain and the United States, regulation of private schools "existed in all countries, including the United States."

Increased oversight of the private schools by the provisional government, Hart concluded, would prevent reactionary teachers of history from praising the fascist Franco regime and singing the praises of authoritarian regimes. Intended to inform parents of the "good faith" of the Revolutionary government in the area of education, and to reassure members of the Confederation of Cuban Catholic Schools that the new policies would not

¹³³ Ramón Torreira Crespo and José Buajasán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan: Un caso de Guerra Psicológica Contra Cuba*, (La Habana: Editora Política, 2000), 42.

affect school teachers or directors, Hart nonetheless went on to state that the Educational Reform Act set a “path for the future,” leaving open, in the mind of private school educators and parents alike, the possibility of later interventions into Catholic education.¹³⁴

Fears that the Revolution was being overtaken by communist elements in the provisional government continued to grow as both the content taught in Cuban public schools and the environment in which children were educated became increasingly politicized. New teachers, many of them from working class or rural peasant backgrounds and themselves recent graduates of the first Revolutionary schools to be established in the countryside, had been hastily trained and put into service in the ever-expanding number of primary schools across the island. Most of them wholeheartedly embraced the ideological content of newly printed textbooks and dedicated themselves to nurturing a revolutionary *conciencia* in their pupils, organizing them to attend rallies and marches and facilitating the participation of students in voluntary work brigades and neighborhood campaigns. Middle class and Catholic Cuban parents expressed their concern about the Revolution’s radicalizing tendencies, seemingly confirmed by its educational policies and initiatives.

Unbeknownst to the general population, similar fears had begun to emerge within the provisional government, many of whom feared the increasingly radical direction of the Revolution’s economic and social reforms. In July, confident of his personal popularity with the majority of Cubans, Fidel Castro cited “moral differences” with

¹³⁴ *Bohemia*, November 15, 1959, 74.

President Urrutia and offered to resign as prime minister of the nation. When the Cuban people took to the streets to demonstrate their continued support for the maximum leader of the Revolution, the provisional government refused to accept his resignation. Instead, they charged President Urrutia with attempting to obstruct the process of reform and compelled him to step down, replacing him with Castro ally and long-time member of the *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP), Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado.¹³⁵

News reports of this second reorganization of the provisional government framed Castro's growing power as a reflection of the Cuban people's overwhelming support and their conviction that he was the true leader of both the people and the Revolution. Images of mass demonstrations often featured children marching on Castro's behalf. One photograph showed two boys, one black and one white, carrying a banner that read "Don't resign, Fidel—Freedom or death!" Underneath, the editorial text summarized, "Discrepancies with the magistrate Urrutia impelled Fidel to resign. The entire nation took to its feet in one single cry of solidarity with the leader of the Revolution."

¹³⁵ BBC World News, July 20, 1959.



Figure 2: Photograph, two boys holding a pro-Fidel banner¹³⁶

By selecting a photograph of two small boys to represent the entire nation, the pro-revolutionary media emphasized that Fidel Castro's moral authority was so self-evident that the nation's youngest citizens, in their purity and simplicity, were innately drawn to him. The image further alluded to the island's political tradition of highly individualistic and paternalistic *caudillo* leadership—a tradition it shared with many other Latin American nations—by framing the Cuban people as children in an attitude of supplication before a powerful but benevolent father figure.

Even as more and more popular demonstrations focused on Castro as the embodiment of the Revolution, the fragile coalition that held together an increasingly divided provisional government continued to break down. On October 19, 1959, Hubert Matos, a senior officer of the Rebel Army and high ranking official in Camagüey's provincial government, resigned from both positions. A close friend of Fidel Castro, who

¹³⁶ *Bohemia*, December 20, 1959, 74.

had fought with him in the Sierra Maestra, Matos wrote him a letter denouncing the communist turn taken by the Revolution, and asking him to return to the values and promises made in the M-26-7 movement's declaration of 1956. He was promptly arrested. Following this, several other members of the provisional government, including Manolo Ray and Elena Mederos, resigned their cabinet posts, protesting both Matos' detention and the placing of Communist Party members in positions of power within the government, especially given that the Party had withheld support for the anti-Batista insurgency until the last days of 1958. To add insult to injury, many of the Communist Party members that Ché Guevara had begun placing in high level posts lacked appropriate qualifications.¹³⁷

Matos' arrest and the mass resignations of cabinet ministers sent shockwaves throughout Cuban society and reached as far as the United States. Denying allegations of favoritism and wrongdoing in the newly reorganized government, Fidel Castro again insisted that neither he nor the Revolution were communist and reiterated his desire for peaceful relations with the United States. On November 1st, 1959, an article in *Bohemia* summarized Castro's thoughts on what he had begun to call his "humanist doctrine," revolving around a position of political neutrality, "neither with Russia nor the United States." He nonetheless affirmed that Cubans "love North Americans as a people. They are secure and welcome on Cuban soil."

¹³⁷ Huber Matos, *Llegó la Noche* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2002), 325-352; Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 62-63.

Photographs of revolutionary figures that had traveled to the United States interacting with American children re-appeared in Cuban newspapers and magazines, reassuring the pro-US middle classes of the benevolence of the Revolution and the two nations' shared humanist values, suggesting that friendship with the northern neighbor was still possible.¹³⁸ At the same time, a series of articles in *Bohemia* attempted to explain a growing wave of juvenile delinquency of the island by suggesting that it may have been caused by "the influence of what is happening in other countries." Without directly naming the United States, the editorial commentary appeared in the same issue as a lengthy photo essay about juvenile delinquency among Puerto Rican immigrant youth in New York City, highlighting the hardship and racial discrimination they faced in the ghettos of this American metropolis. The articles, ostensibly a discussion of youth problems on the island and the establishment of police-directed "youth patrols," also subtly framed Cuba and other Latin American nations, and especially their children, as victims of the United States. In doing so, they reflected a nascent anti-US and anti-imperialist rhetoric which would come to define the Revolution by mid 1960.¹³⁹

Such messages were, nonetheless, still in the minority. In the second half of 1959, supportive media focused on reaffirming the reorganized government's humanist and reformist intentions, providing frequent coverage of the Revolution's activities on behalf of all of the island's children, regardless of their race or social status. Stories about Fidel and Raúl Castro, along with Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, visiting

¹³⁸ *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959, 64.

¹³⁹ *Bohemia*, November 29, 1959, 51, 132.

guajiro families in the countryside, centered on images of the rebel leaders playing with and cuddling peasant children, many of them dark-skinned.



Figure 3: Photograph, Che holding a baby (top) and Camilo playing pool with peasants (bottom)¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959, 65.

Exposing urban and middle class Cubans to the poverty and abysmal living conditions of rural children, media images of country children served to underscore the necessity of agrarian reform and justify the continuing appropriations of privately owned middle and large-scale farms. They also reminded poor, rural and black Cubans of the Revolution's active efforts to improve their lives, solidifying its popularity among economic and racial groups whose marginalization they were working hard to redress.

The reorganized government similarly continued efforts to seek support for their political, economic and social initiatives among the Cuban urban and middle classes. Advertisements for a housing initiative asked Cubans to purchase savings bonds that would fund the construction of single family residences across the island; individuals who bought the "*Ahorro y Vivienda*" bonds would be entered in a lottery, through which the provisional government would give away ten houses every week. The ads featured a small white Cuban girl wearing a sundress, riding a tricycle on a sidewalk in front of one of the small lottery homes. The toddler was pictured waving to her mother, also wearing a sundress while she worked in a front lawn flower garden, while the father approached, returning home from work at a white-collar job, suit jacket thrown casually over his shoulder.



Figure 4: Advertisement, girl riding bike in front of a new house¹⁴¹

The advertisement depicted a street full of similar houses, small but uniformly well-appointed, in front of which other white housewives worked in identical flower beds. As such, it was designed to appeal to Havana's aspirational lower middle and middle classes, whose hopes for the future were still heavily influenced by American images that continued to be transmitted to Cuba through Hollywood and popular media.

By appearing to reproduce the values of suburban, nuclear family middle class life, this ad campaign demonstrated that the government had not yet begun to remake many Cubans' US-influenced visions of a prosperous middle class future; in doing so, it

¹⁴¹ *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959, 74.

sought to reassure the middle classes of the reformist nature of the Revolution, and to mobilize support for their initiatives. That this was the main purpose of the ad campaign was made clear by the accompanying captions, which urged Cubans to buy government bonds and thus “make their happiness” by “cooperating, in a clean and honest way, with one of the most generous works of the Revolution—the construction of private homes for you and all Cubans!”

The media also made use of images and discourses of childhood to mobilize Cubans of all ages to participate in and support revolutionary initiatives. Some of these campaigns used representations of child volunteers as a means of motivating or shaming adults into assuming a greater role in promoting social change; others featured children as a way of calling directly upon the island’s young people to take an active role in new programs. Counteracting the damage done to its popularity by the emergence of doubting and dissenting voices, both on and off the island, the reorganized government sought to appeal to a draw on the island’s history of youth activism to shore up its dwindling support base, rallying young people to its cause by increasing the frequency of messages about the importance of children in a new Cuban society.

Characteristic of these early attempts to mobilize children, a campaign by the Ministry of Agriculture to repopulate the island with fruit trees was launched in November 1959. Advertisements targeted both adults and young people as potential participants; they pictured children replanting trees, proclaiming “You too can help!” Providing detailed instructions on how to save, wash and dry seeds, the ads instructed citizens to turn them in at a newly established “Seed Bank” at the corner of 23rd and 12th

streets in Vedado, at the nearest police station or—to facilitate youth involvement—at neighborhood schools.

¡Cuba necesita repoblarse de FRUTALES!

¡Usted también puede ayudar!

Esa es la noble tarea que debemos afrontar los cubanos de hoy: repoblar a la patria de árboles frutales. Para eso es imprescindible recobrar y recolectar todas las semillas posibles, para nutrir nuestros viveros.

¡Coopere Ud. también! Reúna todas las semillas que usted pueda y llévelas a la estación de policía o a la escuela más cercana, o al "Banco de la Semilla", Edificio Atlantic, 23 y 12, Vedado. Allí las recogerán las Delegaciones Municipales de Agricultura para remitirlas al Ministerio.

No defraude a Cuba en esta generosa campaña
¡Cada semilla que usted bota... es un árbol que pudo haber sido!

COMO CONSERVAR LAS SEMILLAS:

1. Quiteles toda la masa o pulpa que puedan tener adherida, y lávelas.
2. Séquelas cuidadosamente para quitarles toda la humedad.
3. Empaquételas, ya bien secas, en una caja, preferiblemente de cartón.

DEPARTAMENTO DE REPOBLACION FORESTAL
Ministerio de AGRICULTURA
El futuro de Cuba está en la tierra.

Figure 5: Advertisement, boy planting tree¹⁴²

Images like this one encouraged children to see themselves as important contributors to the campaign even as their wholesome images linked the revolutionary

¹⁴² *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959, 103.

initiative with the presumed innate virtue of the island's youngest citizens. They may also have been intended to motivate, or even shame, recalcitrant adults into assuming social responsibilities that even children had taken on as their own. Moreover, the placement of an image of a growing child beside a slender sapling tree also subtly reminded the viewer of the importance of the young to the future of the Revolution, an idea reinforced by the advertisement's concluding caption, "The future of Cuba is in the earth."

Many Cubans responded to media campaigns that linked the Revolution's success with the wellbeing of children and, correspondingly, the nation's future. Drawing on images and discourses of childhood to build on a still widespread spirit of popular participation, *Bohemia* published a petition organized by Mario González de Chávez Clavero, making public the need for a school on the Finca Santa Rita, located in the municipality of Quemado de Güines. A few weeks later, in a letter to the magazine, Salvador Rodríguez announced his offer to donate land for the construction of a school in the area, and described the quick progress that had been made towards that end, including a visit to the isolated township by Vivencio Medina Alvarez, Municipal Director of Education, to organize a parents and neighbors committee to begin construction. His letter concludes: "I hope that before the end of the Year of Freedom and the Triumph of the Revolution, the Finca Santa Rita school will be completely finished and realizing its labor at full capacity. Thanks, many thanks to the Revolutionary Government! Thanks, many thanks to BOHEMIA magazine and to the section, 'Here, the People,' for all it has done and is doing for us!"

The letter was published below a picture of children and parents gathered on the future site of the Finca Santa Rita School. Entitled “School Granted,” the photograph and accompanying editorial celebrated the efforts of community members in organizing the new school, but nonetheless reminded all that the school had been established through the largesse of the Revolution, rather than through their own work or tax money. While reiterating the journalist’s satisfaction that the children of an underserved region would now enjoy improved educational opportunities, the editorial commentary emphasized that the school was first and foremost a gift from Fidel Castro: “Now, when it is finally functioning, the only thing that will remain to do is remind the children that fill its benches of Fidel’s phrase: ‘The child that doesn’t study is not a good revolutionary.’”

The text reaffirmed the personal populism and paternalism which were coming to define Revolutionary leadership after the reorganization of the provisional government. Moreover, it imparted a profoundly moralizing lesson about children as beneficiaries of Fidel Castro’s largesse and stressed their personal responsibility to him, and through him to the Cuban nation and the Revolution.¹⁴³

While the inclusion of children in ad campaigns proved very effective in mobilizing many Cubans to participate in Revolutionary initiatives—and in framing efforts to improve the life chances of the island’s neediest citizens as the exclusive gift of the Revolution, rather than a sphere for private initiative—they did not succeed in eradicating the fears of all about the changing political climate on the island. As doubts and discontent continued to mount, the media increased the frequency with which it

¹⁴³ *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959, 133.

resorted to images and discourses of childhood in formulating ever-more explicit demands of support for the Revolution. On November 1, *Bohemia* published a photograph of a recent march in support of the government. It focused on two pre-teen boys, marched in olive green rebel army uniforms; one carried a Cuban flag, the older boy a rifle, and in his other hand, a placard bearing an image of Fidel. Around his neck, he wore a rosary.



Figure 6: Photograph, two boys marching¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ *Bohemia*, November 1, 1959, 90.

The caption read: “Not even the children failed to show up for their appointment with the government of the Revolution. These two little guys march in military attire, carrying, together with the flag, Fidel’s portrait. Thus the people showed that they were not afraid; that they were there in full ranks because that was their government and that was their cause.”

The photograph and accompanying text accorded primacy to the presence of children in public actions supporting the Revolution, benefiting from the deliberate conflation of the Revolution with romantic notions of youthful virtue and promise that dated back to the writings of José Martí. Recognizing children as political actors in their own right, the text and image also reinforced the notion that supporting the Revolution was a natural thing to do, something that a child, whose motives were transparent and pure, would do. Similar media representations of children rallying to support Castro also sought to motivate or shame adults into assuming their own political duties to the Revolution, implying that those who did not offer their support were lacking in virtue and commitment to the *patria*.

By the autumn months of 1959, the pro-Castro media was saturated with messages emphasizing children’s past, present, and future importance to the Revolution. Many of these messages celebrated children’s courage, selflessness, and patriotic values, while reflecting the media’s awareness of the symbolic power of the child as a unifying nationalist symbol. In November 1959, when an aviation accident killed five persons in Jagüey Grande, *Bohemia* published the news under a photo of the youngest victim, Leonel Barrios Castillo, fourteen years old. Beyond a cursory mention that four others

died in the crash, the text of the article focused exclusively on Barrios Castillo, lamenting that the boy, “of extraordinary intelligence and the character of a man,” had “constituted a promise for the homeland.”

Noting that the boy had earlier participated in the activities of the Rebel Army in his area, it noted that the lost boy “hadn’t reached his fifteenth birthday,” and that his premature death had “turned him into an example of love towards the new Cuba.” The news story, ostensibly offering coverage of a fatal plane crash, in fact offered Leonel Barrios Castrillo, “boy-man-martyr,” as an example to Cuban young people of their importance to the nation, even as it sought to inspire an association between Cubans’ love for children and their love of *patria*, concluding that the deceased child “will always live in our memories.” The article reflects both the Revolutionary media’s preoccupation with the figure of the child, and their self-conscious manipulation of texts and images related to children as a way to elicit emotional outpourings of support for the Revolution.¹⁴⁵

The revolutionary government and its supporters thus began to expand upon early discussions of children as beneficiaries of the Revolution in order to reframe them as political actors in their own right. Castro addressed children directly in speeches at school openings and other mass events, praising their participation in revolutionary campaigns and rallies and exhorting them to study and perform volunteer work in their neighborhoods, encouraging even the nation’s youngest citizens to view themselves as essential to the country’s newly-bright future. The country was plastered with posters

¹⁴⁵ *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959, 45.

proclaiming “Children are the Revolution!” and calling on young people to embrace the new regime’s values and goals and to work to achieve them.

Inspired by messages about their importance to the nation’s future, many young people offered their enthusiastic support and defended Castro against dissenters. In November 1959, thirteen year old Juan Alberto Fernández Puntónel, from Cienfuegos, wrote a letter to journalist Agustín Tamargo, demanding an explanation for his recent critique of a government initiative; defending the newly reorganized regime’s integrity, Juan Alberto wrote: “Do you sincerely believe that the revolutionary government, the only one that has governed honorably in Cuba and the only in the world in which it is the people who decide the policies that must be followed for the wellbeing and prosperity of the Nation, could be a government to be condemned, even in the least?”

The chastened journalist published the letter in its entirety in a self-critiquing column. Echoing a now-familiar rhetoric that associated Cuban youth’s revolutionary fervor with both the purity and simplicity of childhood and with the island’s own revolutionary history, Tamargo introduced his adolescent critic to his readers as “the flower of patriotic love, the rose of Martí, next to his heart,” and offered him up as “...a symbol of the new Cuban generation, that perhaps might not beat out their antecedents in spirit of sacrifice but that we will always have to envy for the beautiful future, heavy with promises, that History seems to have reserved for them.”¹⁴⁶

Softened by the sentimental rhetoric of the editorial commentary, the publication of the young boy’s letter nonetheless indicated a rising intolerance for voices of dissent

¹⁴⁶ *Bohemia*, November 29, 1959.

after the resignation and arrest of Huber Matos in October. The child's indignation that a journalist would presume to critique the Revolutionary government reflected the narrowing of possibilities for the expression of dissent, even as Fidel Castro consolidated his control of the government by establishing direct links between himself and the masses—not the least through his ever-closer relationship with the island's children.

News coverage of the September 14th conversion of the Columbia Fort prison into a "*ciudad escolar*," or "school city," was similarly dominated by descriptions of the bond between Castro and the children. Describing the massive rally which celebrated its opening, *Bohemia* asserted that the event "had two protagonists: childhood and Fidel Castro," and noted that "thousands of children, reunited in the central plaza, had a heart-to-heart dialogue with the representative of the Revolution." In his speech to the students, Castro stressed the efforts that he and others had made in order to establish the new school city and reminded them that "You are the ones that will have to make the true revolution, and you will do it by studying." The article concluded with the following observation, celebrating the charisma of the maximum leader and its effect on the island's children: "That afternoon, Fidel Castro didn't lower himself to the level of the childlike mind; rather, the children's spirits lifted themselves up to him. The children responded to him as his best audience. The Revolution stopped being the exclusive concern of adults and invaded all ages...Even a child could understand and feel it."¹⁴⁷

The growing closeness between Fidel Castro and the children can be understood as an extension of the personalistic and paternalistic forms of populism exercised by

¹⁴⁷ *Bohemia*, December 20, 1959, 69.

many other Latin American *caudillos*. It nonetheless contained seeds, even in this early moment of the Revolution, of an awakening Marxist-Leninist conception of the relationship between generational conflict and social progress. On November 15, 1959, Castro attended a youth rally in Havana. Standing above them in a military jeep, he addressed a crowd of cheering adolescents and children. Addressing them, he said, “Many people who want to understand what is happening in Cuba today should keep this in mind: this is a Revolution of young people and young Cubans are the ones who give substance and meaning to the social transformations of the moment.”

Always conscious of the eyes of the world, and particularly those of the United States, upon their Revolution, Castro’s speech sought once again to associate the Revolution with youthful virtue; however, foreshadowing the more radical turn which the nation would take in the next few months, it also suggested that the Revolution was aligned with their aspirations for the future and that anyone who challenged its direction placed themselves at odds with the nation’s young people.

On December 11th, amidst preparations for the celebration of the island’s first revolutionary Christmas, Huber Matos was tried on charges of treason and sedition. Found guilty, he was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. With his conversion from rebel soldier and provisional government official to political prisoner, the “rule of the moderates” came to an end in Cuba.¹⁴⁸ By then, however, Fidel Castro and a supportive media had successfully harnessed the powerful political symbolism of the child to strengthen the legitimacy of the revolutionary government and begun to make use of

¹⁴⁸ The term originated with Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1965).

actual children in the pursuit of its goals. Constant media coverage reminded Cubans that the Revolution's initial redistributive programs had improved their lives and directly benefited the island's poor, working class, and rural children. Linking their ongoing wellbeing with the survival of the Revolution, coverage of Castro's speeches and of revolutionary efforts on behalf of the nation's youngest citizens offered a compelling response to the earliest voices of dissent that arose in response to early political, economic and social reforms.

Conclusion

Firmly grounded in a populist and paternalistic tradition of Latin American political leadership, the discourses and images of childhood present in Castro's speeches and in newspaper and magazine articles and photographs only served to strengthen direct links between the maximum leader and Cuban children, contributing to the consolidation of his personal power and narrowing the possibilities for discussion and debate about the Revolution's future path. Representations of children had been less successful, however, in negotiating a deteriorating relationship with the United States. As top US leaders became convinced of Castro's turn to communism, they increased support for intelligence agents collaborating with *batistiano* exiles to launch violent assaults on the island from bases in Florida, further damaging the rapidly diminishing possibility for productive bilateral relationships between the two nations.

In spite of US based threats to the Revolution—or perhaps in part because of them—Castro's government nonetheless continued to enjoy widespread legitimacy and popular support. However, many former supporters had reached the conclusion that the

political price of reform was too high: Fidel Castro, if not a communist, was becoming increasingly authoritarian and personalistic, and he was moving the revolutionary government, both in its domestic and foreign policies, in unexpected directions. Though a few still held out hope that Castro intended to restore the 1940 Constitution and hold elections at some point, their hopes grew dimmer as the days passed.

Chapter 3

The Politics of Morality: Childhood and Civil Society in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1960

During 1960, symbolic and actual children played a pivotal role in defining the trajectory of the Cuban Revolution.¹⁴⁹ During this year, both the ideology and policies of the Castro government took a radical turn, leading to the nationalization of as much as 80 percent of the island economy, the rupturing of relations with the United States, and the formation of a new relationship with the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, within the first months of 1960, civil society fell victim to a coordinated attack—religious practice was suppressed, workers’ militias began launching assaults on the non-revolutionary media, and political parties were banned, even as the *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP) continued

¹⁴⁹ For a detailed description of the events of 1960, see Edward Boorstein, *The Economic Transformation of Cuba: A First-Hand Account* (New York: Monthly Review, 1968), 27-33; and Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the United States: A Chronological History* (Melbourne: Ocean, 1997), 24-33.

¹⁵⁰ Scholars continue to interpret the radicalization of the Revolution that took place in 1960 in two ways. The first school of thought argues that Castro and his closest allies deliberately betrayed the democratic principles that had inspired the anti-Batista insurgency in order to consolidate their own power; the other school argues that US hostility and efforts to undermine reform in Cuba forced Castro to pursue strategic military and economic alliances with the Soviet Union. The ‘betrayal’ model of revolutionary history are represented by Theodore Draper, *Castro’s Revolution: Myths and Realities* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962); Theodore Draper, *Castroism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965); Mario Llerena, *The Unsuspected Revolution: The Birth and Rise of Castroism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978); Teo A. Babún and Victor Andrés Triay, *The Cuban Revolution: Years of Promise* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Carlos Alberto Montaner, *Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution: Age, Position, Character, Destiny, Personality, and Ambition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2007). The ‘strategic alliance’ model of Cuban revolutionary history appears in Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Richard E. Welch Jr., *Response to Revolution: The United States and the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Morris H. Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-1986* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 40-130; and Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution*, 61-75. More recent work, including Samuel Farber, *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) present evidence to support both interpretations.

to enjoy the exclusive right to organize.¹⁵¹ Before any of this took place, however, the Castro government first worked to establish the symbolic figure of the child at the heart of a discursive process of radicalization that preceded and facilitated many of these policy shifts.¹⁵²

Beginning in the last months of 1959 and accelerating in the New Year, Castro, senior government officials, and the pro-revolutionary media constructed the Revolution within an increasingly exclusive moral paradigm; this ‘politics of morality’ relied heavily on representations of symbolic and actual children in its efforts to eliminate competition with a still-vibrant civil society for control of both the definition and future trajectory of

¹⁵¹ Alfonso Quiroz defines civil society as “the area of legally protected, non-governmental, non-violent, self-organizing associative activities and institutions, outside the spheres of family and the state, in modern market societies.” Civil society is both a realm and an activity—expressed not only in formal organizations but in social movements, media, and as intellectual, cultural and religious associations. It is a dynamic sphere dedicated to the creation of “spaces for debates, conflicts over power, claims to authority, public policies and policy-making mechanisms, and norms and practices in society.” Civil society is also a key arena in which people produce critical discourses, express dissent, and “circulate new ideas and social practices.” An important distinction must be made between civil society, in which actors attempt to exert *influence* over political processes and policymaking and “political society,” in which actors compete directly for control of state apparatus. This distinction will become important in helping to draw conceptual lines between the revolutionary government’s suppression of civil society and the Castro regime’s ensuing confrontation with “counter-revolutionary” movements—although, as I will argue later, the two processes are causally linked and overlapping. See Alfonso W. Quiroz, “The Evolution of Laws Regulating Associations and Civil Society in Cuba,” in *Religion, Culture and Society: The Case of Cuba*, ed. Margaret Crahan (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003), 18; see also Marvin B. Becker, *The Emergence of Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: University Press, 1994); John Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Oxford: Polity, 1998); Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, “Making Sense of the Civic Engagement Debate,” in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, ed. Theda Skocpol & Morris P. Fiorina (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999).

¹⁵² Lillian Guerra argues that in Cuba during 1960, “events and conflicts in the realm of symbols and discourse helped catalyze support for those policies in dramatically militant ways.” See Lillian Guerra, “‘To condemn the Revolution is to Condemn Christ’: Radicalization, Moral Redemption, and the Sacrifice of Civil Society in Cuba, 1960,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 89 (February 2009): 74.

the Revolution.¹⁵³ Discrediting the Church and the middle classes as agents of progressive change, even while appropriating key aspects of their Catholic worldview and social justice aspirations, Castro and his allies made use of discourses of childhood in their struggle to establish the revolutionary state as the only legitimate source of national redemption.

Further alienating the middle class, calls for a return to electoral democracy and open discussion of the direction of reforms began to be framed as “bourgeois” complaints, at odds with the interests of the island’s rural and working class families, and as evidence of privileged Cubans’ indifference to the needs of poor and suffering children. As the role of progressive Catholics and urban professionals in the Revolution’s triumph and initial reform efforts began to be de-emphasized, and then denied, the working classes, and especially their young, were simultaneously constructed as the true protagonists and benefactors of the revolutionary process. Expressions of dissent on the island were more and more attributed to putative class differences—originating within a privileged reactionary sector on the island and among CIA-supported counter-revolutionaries in the United States—and framed as a threat to the well-being of children, the Revolution, and even national sovereignty.

As a result, a discourse that had previously framed the “humanist” Revolution as the protector and benefactor of all the nation’s children became increasingly inflected by class antagonism and anti-US sentiments, helping to establish within the discursive realm

¹⁵³ For an overview of the history of Cuban civil society since the colonial era until its suppression by late 1960, see Quiroz, “The Evolution of Laws.”

the ideological prerequisites for radicalization that then took material form in the nationalization of foreign and domestic banks and industries after May 1960. At the same time, political leaders evoked Castro's close relationship with the island's young people to cast his growing authoritarianism in a positive light, even as the *comandante's* practice of an increasingly personal and paternal populism constructed him as 'father figure' to all Cubans.

Representing Castro as benevolent patriarch and giver of all good things, the media collaborated in linking expressions of national sovereignty with the infantilization of the nation's citizenry, reminding Cubans of all ages of their patriotic obligation to render loyalty, obedience, and childlike and unquestioning love to their revolutionary father. The media's continued emphasis on images and discourses of children thus helped construct a *Fidelista* politics of morality that facilitated the suppression of a once-vibrant civil society and silenced public debate over the Revolution's consolidation in the hands of a supreme leader, the deterioration of its relationship with the United States, and its nascent alliance with the Soviet Union. This disappearance of opportunities to help shape the trajectory of the Revolution, or even to express opposition to its radicalizing path, thus created the conditions in which a Counter-Revolution, also heavily dependent on a discourses and images of childhood, would later emerge.

Civil Society and Middle Class Activism in Revolutionary Cuba

Many scholars contend that class interests were central to citizens' support or disaffection from the Revolution. However, with the exception of island's landowning elite and the upper ranks of the Batista government and military, most Cubans, including

the vast majority of the middle class, stood solidly behind radical reforms and state intervention in the economy through the early months of 1960. Heavily influenced by progressive Catholic social justice teachings, the urban middle class provided some of the earliest and most committed members of the anti-Batista insurgency. In the years leading up to the Revolution's triumph, the M-26-7 movement and other insurgent groups relied heavily on middle-class and Catholic-educated youth to plan and execute the most decisive actions of the struggle.¹⁵⁴ After January 1959, progressive middle class activists lent their support to the provisional government's reform initiatives while continuing to sponsor their own programs, many of which focused on aid to needy children and enjoyed the support of the island's US-affiliated capitalist class. Throughout most of 1959, the pro-business and pro-Catholic *Diario de la Marina* and the English language *Havana Post* carried positive coverage of the government's ambitious clinic and school construction programs, full-page advertisements by the revolutionary Ministry of Public Works featuring smiling children under the slogan "Revolution Means to Build," as well as articles praising privately organized social justice projects.¹⁵⁵ In an article highlighting the role of civic organizations in national health reform efforts, the September 30 edition of *Diario de la Marina* carried a lengthy article discussing the urgent need for the expansion and professionalization of pediatric medicine in Cuba. This ambitious undertaking, the editorial writer argued, would require collaboration between the state

¹⁵⁴ It bears repeating here that Fidel and Raúl Castro, sons of an eastern landowner and immigrant from Spain, were Jesuit educated, and that Ernesto "Ché" Guevara was the child of a middle class urban Argentinian family. Many other revolutionary heroes, including Frank País, were similarly products of the middle class and of private Catholic or Christian schooling.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, "There's a Warm Sun and an Ocean of Foam," *Havana Post*, July 4, 1959, and "\$7 Million Earmarked for Rural Cuban Schools," *Havana Post*, July 7, 1959.

and private organizations.

Including excerpts from a speech by Dr. Enrique Galán, newly appointed rector of the Cuban Society of Pediatric Medicine, the *Diario* noted that Galán began his talk by “offering a tribute to the martyrs of the Revolution, who spilled their blood to reinstate the freedoms that had been torn from it by a despotic government,” before moving into an analysis of the state of the nation’s pediatric medicine. Stating that “social-medical assistance to the poor child is, without doubt, the greatest responsibility of our Society and its members,” Galán declared:

We have the responsibility to declare publicly that in Cuba we lack no less than 3,000 hospital beds for poor children...at the present moment there are only around 400 available in Havana. Shockingly, in the five capitals of the other provinces, the number of available beds doesn’t reach 300. We must collaborate, at least in an advisory capacity, with the official organisms to ensure that closed hospitals be put into immediate service...that already existing ones be turned into true hospitals, and that the necessary additional ones be created according to the density of each province or municipality.

Galán went on to discuss the need for the creation of a children’s health insurance, under the auspices of either the government or a “private entity,” that would provide for the medical care of poor children, before concluding with a rhetorical flourish worthy of the discourses of childhood appearing in revolutionary publications: “To the Cuban child, to that child who lacks shoes, malnourished and belly distended with internal parasites, we must give immediate attention. Nothing can triumph unless we cultivate the first fruit of our agrarian reform, which is a healthy and well-fed citizen.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ “3,000 Camas para Niños son Necesarias en los Hospitales,” *Diario de la Marina*, September 30, 1959, 12.

In disseminating the remarks of the nation's leading authority on pediatric medicine, the conservative *Diario de la Marina* made no attempt to hide neither Galán's revolutionary sympathies nor his desire to collaborate with the provisional government in their well-publicized efforts to extend medical care across the island. Their coverage of his speech nonetheless documented the Revolution's inability as of yet to provide for the nation's medical needs, and argued for the continuing relevance of civic organizations and private initiative in the expansion and reform of the health care system. As such, both Galán's speech and the *Diario's* coverage—though ostensibly offered in a spirit of revolutionary collaboration—represented a threat to efforts to construct the Revolution as the exclusive dispenser of redistributive social justice.

By September 1959, coverage in the non-revolutionary media similarly highlighted the tensions between state-sponsored and private responses to the island's ongoing educational crisis. On September 17, the *Diario de la Marina* published a two-page editorial feature entitled "A Great Work of Catholic Social Action: The Don Bosco Salesian School of Guanabacoa," chronicling the Salesian Brothers's thirty-three years of educational outreach and social work among the city's poor and orphaned youth. Making clear that the project both predated and sought to continue to exist without support from the revolutionary government, the *Diario* praised the school for its long-standing commitment to social justice for poor Cuban children, noting that "...during thirty-three years it has forged thousands of useful men for the nation, in a silent, determined and constant effort that has benefited hundreds of orphans and destitute children, with the

cooperation of the generosity of the people and a group of benefactors who have given the Salesians indispensable economic assistance.”

During the 1959-1960 academic year, Colegio Don Bosco boasted an enrollment of 950 students, most of whom lived in the school’s “ample and hygienic” dormitories, enjoyed a “well-seasoned diet,” and benefited from the provision of free medical and dental care. However, the *Diario* noted, the school’s ability to provide poor Cuban children with the necessary “civic, religious and scientific formation” to prepare them for life as “future citizens” depended not only on the Salesian Brother’s wealthy benefactors, but also on the generosity of the newspaper’s readers. It called upon the nation’s private citizens and small business owners to send donations to the Salesian brothers in Guanabacoa, thereby preventing “this grand work of love towards our fellow man” from disappearing.¹⁵⁷

The two-page spread featured a series of photographs of uniformed boys working, studying and and playing under the supervision of attentive Salesian brothers, reminding readers that the Catholic Church continued to provide education and healthcare for many disadvantaged young people, even as the Revolution increasingly attempted to define itself as the only hope for the island’s poor children. Moreover, by encouraging Cubans to donate funds for the continuation of this Catholic educational institution, the *Diario* coverage directed attention and resources away from the Revolution’s school-building programs and toward competing social justice initiatives.

¹⁵⁷ “Una Gran Obra de Acción Social Católica: El Colegio Salesiano ‘Don Bosco’ de Guanabacoa,” *Diario de la Marina*, September 17, 1959.

The Catholic Church was not the only organization engaged in extra-revolutionary educational projects. On September 20, 1959, the *Havana Post* reported on a benefit party held by local sugar magnate Julio Lobo. The CEO of the Galban Lobo firm had gathered leading Cuban industrialists at his Vedado home to celebrate the inauguration of a “*Patronato Pro Escuela Rural Cubana*.” Announcing the establishment of a fund to build rural schools across the island to media in attendance at the party, Lobo’s comments echoed the sentiments of both Martíán and early republican-era positivism as well as revolutionary rhetoric linking the nation’s destiny with the expansion of educational opportunities for its young people: “The education of the country children has always preoccupied me, as it has so many other businessmen of our country, mainly because we understand that the future of our country rests in the development and preparation of those children who will become the men and women who will better its standard of life and permit its development on a large scale of agriculture and industry.”

Recognizing the widespread need for new educational facilities across the Cuban countryside, Lobo emphasized that the envisioned *Patronato* would be too large to be undertaken by any one individual or group. He stated that the first phase of the project would involve a vigorous publicity campaign to promulgate the idea and to “knock on the door of every merchant, industry, and private home” to raise funds, and called on all citizens to cooperate with his firm’s initiative.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ “Julio Lobo Announces Country School Plan,” *Havana Post*, September 20, 1959, 3.

Less than a week later, Galban Lobo took out full-page advertisements featuring photographs of solemn-faced *guajiro* children in *yarey* hats in the *Diario de la Marina*. Headlined “A Call to the Economic Classes For the Expansion of the Cuban Rural School System,” the ads announced that Galban Lobo “feels the patriotic obligation to cooperate in the development of the rural schools” and invited “all corporations, industries and businesses of Cuba, as well as citizens of sufficient resources” to take part in their “new civic crusade” on behalf of “the Cuban child, foundation of the new generation.”¹⁵⁹ In calling upon businesspeople and well-off individuals to support his *Patronato Pro Escuela Rural Cubana*, Julio Lobo sought to reach out to a progressive middle class that still believed civic organizations could take the lead in promoting social justice in revolutionary Cuba.¹⁶⁰

Then, on September 24, the *Havana Post* reported at length on the inauguration of a new school, built by the Moa Bay Mining Company, in a remote corner of Oriente Province. The opening ceremony was attended by Mirta Terrero, secretary of the Department of Education, the municipal mayor, as well as representatives of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the mining company. The article noted approvingly that the corporate-funded school would fulfill the dreams of students from both Moa and the neighboring village of Los Mangos, where “a large number of children of school age

¹⁵⁹ *Diario de la Marina*, September 25, 1959, 13.

¹⁶⁰ Indeed, in the first half of 1959, educational activism was not restricted to the middle class and the Catholic Church; on many occasions rural Cubans, unwilling to wait for the Revolution’s official representatives to reach their communities, joined together to build and operate their own schools. These schools were belatedly recognized and claimed by the Revolution as part of its program of rural educational reform. See “Campesinos de Guantánamo Hacen sus Propias Escuelas,” *Hoy*, February 4, 1959; and “Escuela Concedida,” *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959, 133.

have been unable to attend school due to the lack of facilities”); it also noted that the mining company had made substantial contributions for the construction of a Catholic Church in the town, as well as funding a combination post office-communications building and the construction of an aqueduct and sewage disposal system.¹⁶¹

The presence of military officers and government officials at this September 1959 inauguration indicate that the Revolution was still willing to enter into collaborative arrangements with industry in order to meet what the *Post* obliquely referred to as the island’s ongoing “school problem.” Nonetheless, it is perhaps not surprising that the Moa Bay School opening did not appear in the M-26-7’s *Revolución*, or even in the pro-revolutionary *Bohemia*, where the benevolence and decisive action of the Revolution to extend education and health care to all the island’s children were emphasized, and where civic, industrial or private social justice initiatives went unacknowledged. Though it is impossible to speculate on the intentions—reformist or reactionary, or perhaps a combination of both—underlying non-state sponsored school building projects, it is clear that they co-existed in uneasy tension with the Revolution’s efforts to publicize its own efforts to expand and reform education across the island.

It is also noteworthy that coverage of civic educational activism appeared to peak in September 1959, the month that the revolutionary government passed its comprehensive Educational Reform Act mandating increased state oversight and regulation of the nation’s public and private schools. Mining and sugar companies, the

¹⁶¹ “Moa Bay Mining Company Builds Public School in Oriente Town,” *Havana Post*, September 24, 1959, 10.

Catholic Church and various Protestant missionary organizations had been active players in the establishment of republican Cuba's educational system since the early 1900s, and it is perhaps to be expected that they should hope to continue exercising this function in a Revolution that had not yet explicitly ruled out a leading role for industry, civic organizations and private citizens in its reform efforts. Coverage of the opening of privately funded schools, while not directly pressing these claims, reminded the public of organizations and individuals whose educational initiatives may have predated the Revolution, and as such provided them with the social visibility and prestige to challenge the Castro's government's right to unilaterally restructure education on the island.

The *Diario* took this more aggressive stance in a series of editorial articles expressing opposition to the Educational Reform Act, arguing both that the act initiated an unwarranted process of state intervention in the education of Cuban children, and that it had been created and promulgated in an undemocratic manner. Recognizing the right of the Revolution to "enter with a pickaxe to demolish those educational edifices, institutions and methods that it considers ineffective or antiquated," the *Diario* nonetheless feared that the Educational Reform Act would have deep repercussions in the arena of private education, and posed the following question: "We understand—as do many educators—that such an important question should be aired publicly and not behind closed doors. Why now, when round tables and forums are so in fashion, aren't the problems of education being discussed in a worthy, serene, competent manner, among those who because of their capacity, knowledge and experience, deserve to be heard...?"

These sentiments, the article continued, were shared by Felipe Donate, head of the Cuban Teacher's Professional Association, and a group of "distinguished educators" who had organized under his leadership to call for a greater voice for teachers in the revolutionary process of educational reform. Emphasizing that the resolution of these issues was of utmost importance in shaping the future destiny of the nation, the text concluded that "the education of our children is too delicate of a matter for such far-reaching and resonant innovation to be introduced without mediation and wide discussion..."¹⁶²

Critical of both the purpose of the Educational Reform Act and the top-down political process that had produced it, the *Diario* joined hands with Cuban teachers who quickly began to organize to demand that the provisional government guarantee civic organizations and private citizens a continuing role in the formulation and implementation of the nation's educational policy. In doing so, the newspaper and the teachers' organizations offered a direct challenge to the Revolution's efforts to construct itself as both the exclusive provider and only legitimate administrator of educational services to Cuban children.

Perhaps more alarming to revolutionary leaders, by September 1959 the perceived threat to the autonomy of private (and especially Catholic) education and the growing visibility of the PSP within his government unleashed a storm of Catholic social and political activism. Cuban young people played an important role as organizers and participants in many of these initiatives. On the fourth Sunday of the month, Havana's

¹⁶² "La Actualidad: La Reforma de la Enseñanza," *Diario de la Marina*, September 18, 1959, 4.

youth celebrated the 23rd annual “Cuban Catholic Youth Day” and paid patriotic homage to their nation by making floral offerings at monuments to Maceo and Martí before participating in a midday open air mass in the capital’s Plaza Cívica. The *Diario de la Marina* reported approvingly that this event, though a Havana tradition since 1936, “reached a new resonance this year because of the numerous crowds that attended,” and “manifested the apogee of Cuban Catholicism, reaffirming in our nation’s new generation the spiritual ideals which come down to these: God and the Homeland.”¹⁶³

In spite of—or perhaps in defiance of—efforts to link the Revolution, the nation, and the island’s virtuous young people in the public consciousness, no reference to revolutionary precepts or values was made in the article. Instead, the *Diario* presented images of Cuban youth offering honors to the heroes of the independence struggle and participating in Catholic rituals as an alternative model for both nationalism and morality. Moreover, the *Juventud Católica* were pictured fulfilling their patriotic duties under the supervision of Catholic priests, drawing inspiration and guidance not from Fidel Castro, but from the city’s religious leaders.

Then, in November 1959, the 25,000 members of *Juventud Católica* organized their own mass demonstration in honor of Cuba’s national patron, the Virgin of Charity, and participated in the island’s first National Catholic Congress. At least one million Catholics of all ages attended the Congress *misa* and rally in Havana’s Plaza Cívica, the very location where many of Fidel Castro’s own rallies were held. Their numbers represented a highly visible challenge to his ability to draw previously unprecedented

¹⁶³ “El Día de la Juventud Católica Cubana en la Habana,” *Diario de la Marina*, September 29, 1959, 17.

crowds, and their chants of “¡Caridad, Caridad, Caridad!,” invoked Cuba’s patron saint as both a unifying national symbol—in direct challenge to efforts to link Revolution, patriotism and nationhood—as well as an alternative Catholic inspiration and modus operandi for the process of social transformation in which they insisted on remaining active participants.

It is thus no surprise that Castro quickly left the rally, and that this first national Catholic Congress to be celebrated in revolutionary Cuba would also be the last.¹⁶⁴ Mass demonstrations by Catholic students, workers and professionals, as well as messages issued by clergy, dramatically raised the stakes in the competition between the Revolution and religiously-inspired activists for pride of place at the vanguard of social renewal on the island. They produced a dramatic increase in active participation in religious life in Cuba, especially among youth, as churches became highly politicized sites of alternative expressions of national and social consciousness.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, as concerns began to arise about Fidel Castro’s communist sympathies, Catholics joined forces with Protestants, Masons and Jews to organize an “anti-communist and anti-capitalist” movement modeled after Latin America’s Christian Democratic parties.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Gervasio G. Ruíz, “Una Cruz Gigantesca Arderá Sobre la Habana,” *Carteles*, November 22, 1959, 30.

¹⁶⁵ Guerra, “To Condemn the Revolution”; and Margaret E. Crahan, “Salvation through Christ or Marx: Religion in Revolutionary Cuba,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 21, no. 1 (1979): 161; see also *International Relations: Hearings on H.R. 6382, before the Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations*, 94th Cong., 274-288 (1976) (Testimony of Margaret E. Crahan).

¹⁶⁶ Gervasio G. Ruíz, “Nace una Organización: Movimiento Demócrata Cristiano,” *Carteles*, January 10, 1960, 48, 68; “Exposición del Congreso Católico,” *El Mundo*, November 18, 1959, C-8.

By December 1959, progressive Catholic and middle class activists were competing aggressively with revolutionary agencies in the provision of clothing, food, and medical care to the urban and rural poor, contradicting government claims that they alone held the power to produce meaningful social change. Church leaders had also demonstrated their ability to compete with Castro as leaders and organizers of the island's young people, disrupting efforts to link youthful activism, virtue, and nationalism with the revolutionary project. Moreover, political organizing across denominational and religious lines also represented a nascent political threat to the Revolution. This combination of middle class, faith-based social justice and political activism, centered on the representation of symbolic and actual children, was quickly becoming the most serious obstacle to the consolidation of the Revolution and the concentration of power in the hands of its leader.

Navidades en Cuba Libre: Nationalism, Fidelismo and the Politics of Morality

In the weeks following the National Catholic Congress, Castro and his allies embarked on a campaign to de-emphasize, discredit, and eventually suppress non-state sponsored social and political activism. The first step in this campaign involved the appropriation of the nationalist and Catholic-inflected middle class values and discourses around which Cuban civil society was organized. In December 1959, Castro made a speech acknowledging that middle class Cubans had been largely responsible for the triumph of the anti-Batista insurgency. However, he insisted, their past contributions and presumed "Christian" values gave them no special claim on virtue or fitness for political leadership, nor would they play the principal role in determining the nation's future.

Rather, it was the poor of Cuba, and the revolutionaries committed to ameliorating their suffering, who would define and direct the Revolution. As for the nation's Catholic social activists, Castro had this to say: "Many pound their breasts making themselves out to be great Christians, but they are just a bunch of scoundrels...more Christian is a *guajiro* who is born poor like Jesus. [The well-off] cannot be Christians....They speak ill of me because I have spoken the truth. They crucified Christ for speaking the truth."¹⁶⁷

The message was clear: middle class Catholic activists who criticized the Revolution were self-interested hypocrites, like the Pharisees and Romans who had crucified Christ. And Fidel, incarnation of Jesus Christ, had come to save Cuba's poor and working classes—the Revolution's chosen people. Castro's suggestion that poor Cubans should compare him to Christ resonated deeply with the island's spiritual and political traditions, evoking associations with both the son of God and the almost equally revered father of Cuban independence, José Martí, who had also self-identified with Christ's mission among the "poor of the earth."¹⁶⁸ Castro invoked both Jesus and Martí in defining the Revolution as "*para los humildes*"—an association further strengthened by all three figures' presumed love for children.

This redefinition of the Revolution along class lines appropriated key aspects of the pre-revolutionary Cuban moral paradigm even as it worked to discredit republican

¹⁶⁷ Vicente Martínez, "A Cristo lo Crucificaron por Decir la Verdad," *Carteles*, December 13, 1959, 21.

¹⁶⁸ In 1960, 72.5 percent of Cubans identified themselves as at least nominally Catholic; though a lower percentage than in other Latin American nations, the influence of Catholic doctrine, beliefs and imagery on Cuban culture is indisputable. See Crahan, "Salvation through Christ or Marx," 162; Ottmar Ette, *José Martí, Apostol, Poeta, Revolucionario: Una Historia de su Recepción*, trans. Luis Carlos Henao de Brigard (Mexico City: UNAM, 1995); Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

and “bourgeois” values of electoral democracy, private property, freedom of expression, education and assembly; moreover, it would permit Castro to justify the suppression of an independent civil sphere and the imposition of “direct democracy” in which the island’s hungry, illiterate and oppressed, like loyal and obedient children, would ask for and receive what they needed directly from their revolutionary Father.¹⁶⁹ Castro’s logic, however compelling, deliberately left out an inconvenient reality: that few of the state’s early redistributive projects would have succeeded without the political and financial support of Cuba’s middle class—support which the 1959 provisional government had gone to great lengths to secure.

Indeed, urban and professional people had responded enthusiastically to public appeals framed in precisely the kinds of moralistic and child-centered language that was now being appropriated by the Revolution; in addition to funding private initiatives in the realm of healthcare and education, middle-class Cubans also made possible massive social spending in three principal ways: by volunteering to pay the back taxes that they had withheld from the Batista government, by supporting the confiscation of properties seized from *Batistianos*, and by making direct donations to fund programs like the May 1959 Agrarian Reform. The *Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria* alone benefited from more than eight million dollars’ worth of private donations towards the purchase of farm machinery and supplies for a new class of small farmers.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Fidel Castro, “Democracia: Gobierno de las Mayorías,” in *El Pensamiento de Fidel Castro*, vol. 1, part 2 (Havana: Editora Política, 1983), 393.

¹⁷⁰ See Guerra, “To Condemn the Revolution,” 76; “Ministerio de Hacienda: Honradez con Honradez se Paga,” *Revolución Anuario* (1960): 11-12; “Informe al Pueblo: Colecta de la Libertad: \$2.111.628,94,”

Choosing to ignore and increasingly to suppress information about the continued vitality and progressive inclinations of the Cuban civic sphere, Castro's media allies contributed to the appropriation of the middle classes' nationalist and Catholic-inflected discourses as a means of defining the Revolution within a highly evocative and yet still-familiar moral paradigm. Nowhere was this more dramatically manifested than in the media's coverage of the celebration of the island's first Christmas. Conscious of the symbolic importance of the holiday season in a family-oriented and at least nominally Christian nation, plans began as early as September 1959 for the celebration of "*Navidades en Cuba Libre*," in which the revolutionary media would portray the Revolution, rather than the Christian story of the birth of Jesus, as the source of holiday joy, and Fidel Castro as the benevolent paternal giver of gifts to Cuban children—of all ages.

In November, the *Casa de las Américas*, under the direction of the Revolution's most celebrated maternal figure, Haydeé Santamaría, staged a nation-wide children's competition around the theme "Christmas on the American Continent." *Bohemia* magazine announced that children under the ages of fourteen were invited to submit drawings, compositions and songs expressing their understanding of "the most excellent of the Christian world's celebrations." Emphasizing the relationship between the Castro government and the island's pre-eminent Catholic holiday, *Bohemia's* coverage of the contest further linked the Revolution to conventional notions of Martíán nationalism and

Bohemia, 5 July 1959, 74-77; Antonio Nuñez Jiménez, "Dos Años de Reforma Agraria," *Bohemia*, 8 May 1961, 37.

childhood, proclaiming: “The Revolution, unlike authoritarian regimes, cannot view the child as simply a receptacle of adult ideas, but rather as having their own sense of life; in this grand opportunity it will stimulate the creative initiative of Cuba’s young scholars, in whom it sees, as Martí did, the hope of the world.”¹⁷¹

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Education launched a coordinated, nation-wide effort to mark the first Christmas of the revolutionary era as the most patriotic and joyful the island had ever experienced. Work began immediately to organize Cubans to volunteer their time, effort and resources to prepare for the advent season. Homes and businesses across the island were adorned with Christmas trees, colorful paper chains and decorations, and brigades of children were mobilized to go house to house to collect donations to decorate the streets of their *barrios*. Competitions were arranged, and medals awarded to neighborhoods with the best decorations. On *la nochebuena*, dances were held in the streets in towns and cities across the island; revolutionary Santa Clauses sporting black beards, in honor of Fidel and the M-26-7’s *barbudo* rebels, distributed gifts. Children stayed up all night, passing from house to house to celebrate with their families and neighborhood friends.

The reason for this seasonal joy? According to Justina Alvarez, women’s columnist for the socialist newspaper *Hoy*: “Today Cuba has achieved freedom, for the first time in her history. The Revolution which triumphed on January 1st has changed every aspect of Cuban life, imprinting them with patriotic joy.” And the preparation and celebration of the island’s first revolutionary Christmas, a work carried on by Cubans of

¹⁷¹ “Los Niños y la Navidad,” *Bohemia*, November 11, 1959, 75, 86.

all ages, was proof that the Revolution “advances forward, forward, carried on the shoulders of the men, women and children of the nation.”¹⁷² *Bohemia* concurred with these sentiments, announcing that this year the island would experience “a distinctly Cuban Christmas, an unforgettable holiday season in Free Cuba, now that the era of oppression that kept us for seven long years under a reproachful tyranny has happily passed.”¹⁷³ The magazine also ran cartoons explicitly framing the Revolution’s accomplishments and Fidel’s benevolence as the sole reasons for seasonal joy.

The first of these cartoons, entitled “The Revolution’s Christmas Tree,” featured Christmas ornaments labeled “Agrarian Reform,” “Public Beaches,” “Lower Rents,” and one on which “Prison Forts” had been crossed out and the word “Schools” written below it, alluding to a program to convert these buildings into educational facilities. Beside the tree, a *guajiro* raised his hand in a gesture of joy, exclaiming “Thanks, Fidel!”

¹⁷² *Hoy*, January 10, 1960, 10. It is worth noting that most of the news coverage of actual children in this socialist newspaper appeared in Justina Alvarez’s column “Para la Mujer.” This is in contrast to the deployment of symbolic children in political rhetoric, which was an equal-opportunity practice, and perhaps even a primarily male one, given that most of the island’s journalists were men. In most cases, it appears that the ground-level work of organizing children’s programs in early Revolutionary Cuba—though events are often attended by male figureheads and written about by male journalists—was still done by women.

¹⁷³ “Navidades en Cuba Libre!” *Bohemia*, December 20, 1959.



Figure 7: Cartoon, peasant waving, “*Gracias, Fidel!*”¹⁷⁴

The second, an advertisement placed by the government, bore the slogan “This is how a Cuban Christmas Tree is Made” and showed children clamoring to hang schoolhouses, desks and books on its branches. The caption read “Schools are planted, and then lit up with thousands of teachers; the shadow of the prison is erased; classrooms are filled with light, with books, desks, pencils...and when there is education for all children, there is freedom and justice for all men...the people take to their feet and hang their laughter on this tree, because now they have a reason to sing to the world: Happy Holidays!”

¹⁷⁴ *Bohemia*, December 20, 1959.

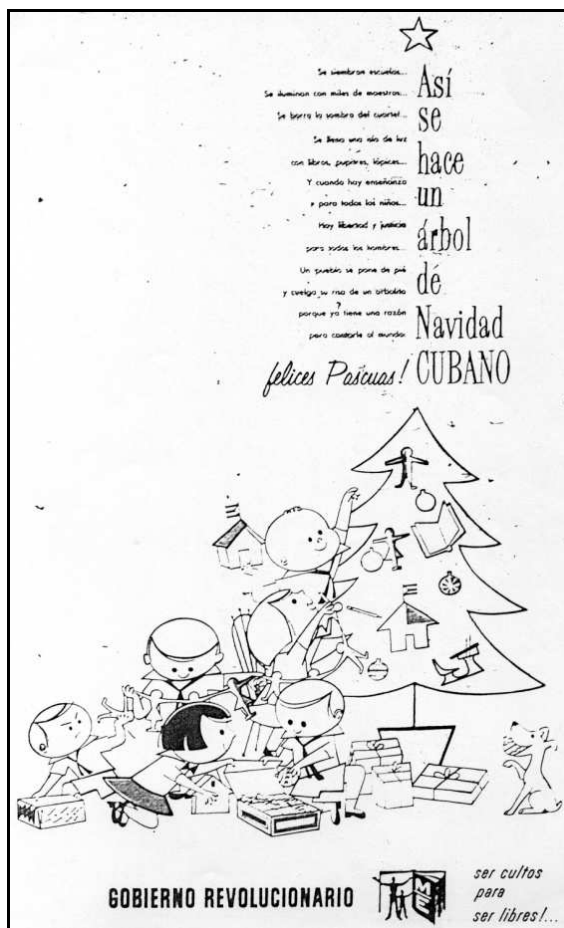


Figure 8: Cartoon, children decorating a Christmas tree¹⁷⁵

Through cartoons, advertisements and media coverage, the Revolution and its allies thus sought to transform Cubans' understanding of the holiday season, replacing their traditional, Catholic-influenced paradigm with a revolutionary nationalist model that emphasized Castro's benevolence and primacy as giver of gifts—in the form of redistributive programs and public works—to the people. In doing so, they sought to claim for the Revolution the cultural and moral “capital” of the Christian tradition that inspired middle class civic activism on the island.

¹⁷⁵ *Bohemia*, December 20, 1959, 51.

Christmas Day, however, would not be the epogee of revolutionary celebration. In keeping with the nationalist emphasis of the island's first revolutionary holiday season, media and businesses were directed to focus advertising and reporting on the traditional Spanish celebration of *El Día de los Reyes*, Three Kings Day, on January 6th. Subsequent coverage of Three King's Day celebrations in the socialist newspaper *Hoy* provided an opportunity for the expression of revolutionary nationalism, but even more importantly, offered a compelling showcase for the display of the Castro's government's moral virtue and benevolence, manifested through their concern for the happiness of the island's needy children on this child-centered holiday.

By the end of December, coverage of the Ministry of Social Welfare's "Operation Toys for Poor Children" dominated the revolutionary media. The headline on the front page of the January 3rd edition of *Hoy* announced that "All the Children of Cuba Will Have Toys on This 'Night of the Kings;'" the subtitle read, "The People Multiply by Five the Social Welfare Budget for Toys" and noted that the mother of recently deceased rebel hero Camilo Cienfuegos would distribute toys "in his name" at a revolutionary children's party. The article explained that the Ministry had conducted a census to determine the age and sex of the island's poor children and was now in the process gathering "drums, skates, dolls, and go-karts" from unions, revolutionary organizations, and private citizens, which would be distributed to children's homes in disadvantaged neighborhoods across the island. This was being done so that "all the children of Cuba may laugh happily on this first Three Kings Day of revolutionary Cuba." Moreover, in a veiled attack on Catholic charities that had long engaged in the distribution of Christmas and Three Kings

Day gifts to children, the article insisted that the Revolution had taken on this function in order to eliminate the previous custom, whereby Cubans of limited means had been forced to join “long humiliating lines of humble people begging for a toy for their poor child.”¹⁷⁶

Special efforts were made to prepare for Three Kings Day celebrations in rural zones, where officials of the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA) had participated heavily in the census taking and collection of donations; many urban *municipios* had covered their own costs for the program, allowing the entirety of the Ministry’s budget to be dedicated to gathering and transporting toys to the countryside. Throughout the last days of December and into the New Year, cargo loads of gifts were transported to the countryside by truck and train, and by January 3rd, aircraft from the Revolutionary Air Force began transporting toys. Noting that “almost all sectors of society, workers, students, professionals, and the middle class, have offered their support,” revolutionary media nonetheless de-emphasized the role of civic actors in the campaign, framing it as the exclusive initiative of the revolutionary state and further evidence of its special sensitivity to poor children.

On January 5, “Operation Toy” geared up for one final offensive. Minister for Social Welfare Dr. Raquel Pérez issued a call to Cubans to increase their donations, since, she said, there were still parts of the country where enough toys had not been gathered. Two truckloads of toys held by the nation’s Customs office were turned over to

¹⁷⁶ *Hoy*, January 3, 1960, 1.

the Ministry for “Revolutionary Resolution;” sensitive to any suggestion of wrongdoing, *Hoy* pointed out that their toys had either been abandoned, or the date for reclamation by their original owners had expired.¹⁷⁷ The next morning, children across the island were visited by gift-bearing representatives of the Revolution. With the assistance of the Banco de Seguros Sociales de Cuba and the Revolutionary Air Force, 25,000 toys were distributed in the most isolated regions of Oriente, including the zones of Songo, La Maya, Sierra Cristal, Calabazas de Sagua, Concepción and Mayarí, as well as Isla de Pinos and la Ciénaga de Zapata. More than twenty military helicopter loads of toys were distributed to 5,000 children through the region.¹⁷⁸

In other Three Kings Day celebrations focusing on poor children, rural winners of the *Casa de las Américas* national children’s competition, “Christmas on the American Continent,” were brought to Havana to participate in an awards ceremony on January 5th.¹⁷⁹ Women members of the *Unidad Femenina Revolucionaria* (UFR), the *Federación Campesina Camagüeyana* and the local branch of the M-26-7 similarly brought 2,000 children from the province’s countryside to celebrate the holiday with “their little city brothers.” Arriving on January 3rd, thousands of the city’s residents turned out to greet the arriving children and to offer them accommodation in their homes. *Guajiro* children in *yarey* hats and carrying pictures of Fidel or Camilo played games and attended parties, where according to *Hoy*’s women’s correspondent, city children “treated their little

¹⁷⁷ *Hoy*, January 5, 1960, 5.

¹⁷⁸ *Hoy*, January 7, 1960, 7.

¹⁷⁹ *Hoy*, January 5, 1960, 2.

brothers from the countryside with the greatest affection.” Indeed, she commented approvingly, “Adults and children alike treated them as if they were beloved toys.” Expressing satisfaction with this gesture of “deep human and social content,” in line with the Revolution’s efforts to reduce distance and disparities between urban and rural life, the journalist concluded that “the old city of Camagüey now belongs to the children of the countryside.”¹⁸⁰

Hoy’s political cartoonists drove home the message of “Operation Toy:” the Revolution was both uniquely concerned with and equipped to provide gifts to the Cuban people. Cartoons like those that had appeared in *Bohemia* during Christmas week similarly appropriated the Catholic imagery of the Spanish Three Kings Day holiday and applied it to Fidel and the Revolution, depicting grateful *guajiros* clutching gifts from “El Rey Barbudo;” others dressed the Three Kings in cloaks labeled “Instituto de Ahorro y Vivienda,” and showed the kings distributing houses to the people.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Justina Alvarez, “Dos mil niños del campo en Camagüey,” *Hoy*, January 6, 1960, 1.

¹⁸¹ “The bearded king,” a reference to Fidel and his bearded rebel soldiers, commonly known as “*barbudos*.”

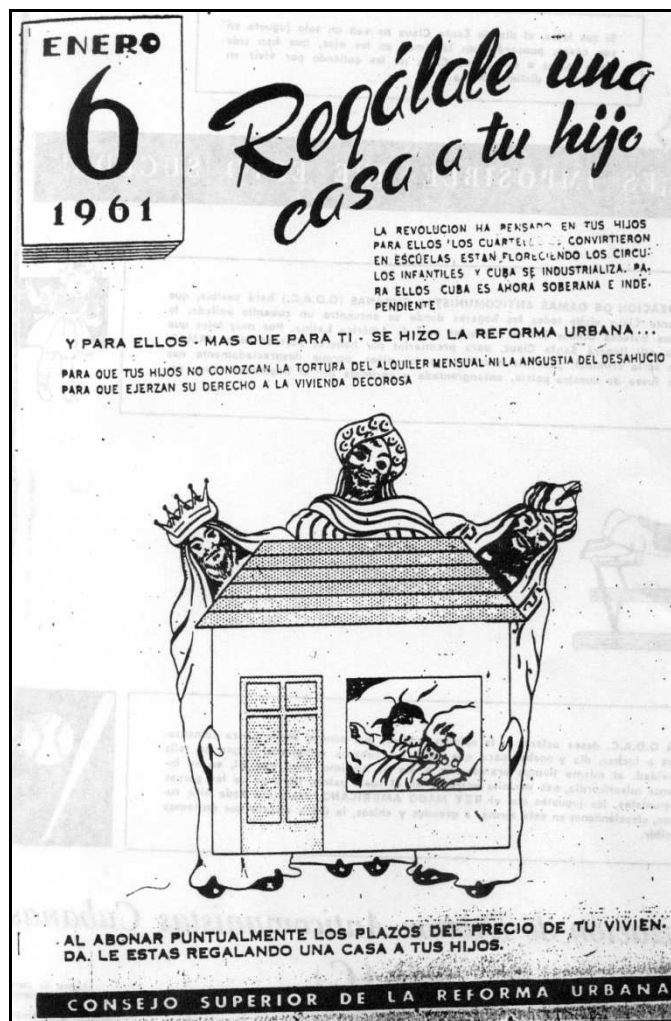


Figure 9: Cartoon, Three Kings holding a house¹⁸²

The most explicit effort to frame Fidel and the Revolution within a nationalist and Christian-inflected moral paradigm was published on the front page of the newspaper's January 5th edition. Under the headline "A Child Asks 'Rey Mago Fidel' to Provide Arms to 'defend Cuba,'" there appeared a letter from a young boy addressed to "Mister 'Rey Mago' Fidel, Dear Commander." The letter read:

¹⁸² *Revolución*, January 5, 1961, 4.

I was going to write to the three Reyes Magos as in previous years, but since you are bearded just as they are, and the reason for the great benefits that have been given to our *patria* and, in particular, to Cuban children, bringing us happiness and tranquility and a world of hopes, I Enriquito Enríquez Estorino, eleven years old...direct this letter to you so that on Three Kings Day (after fulfilling my responsibilities with my family and with my Cuba by collecting pennies and by belonging to the juvenile patrol) you might give me a weapon so that I can defend this Revolution as my father does. My dear “*Rey Mago Fidel*,” I am still small, but I have enough courage to help the cause of my people and defend my little brothers from the threats of the war criminals. Send me gifts, Fidel, and count on me as you can count upon all the children of Cuba.

The boy signed the letter, “Affectionately, your rebel, Enrique Enríquez Estorino.”¹⁸³ Both reinforcing the campaign to frame Castro and his gifts as the source of seasonal joy and demonstrating how successful it had been in embedding the revolutionary leader within the island’s Christian-influenced moral paradigm, the letter offered a model for other patriotic Cuban children—indeed for citizens of all ages—desiring to fulfill their duties to the homeland through Fidel-worship and the defense of the Revolution.

As the holiday season came to a close, the revolutionary government intensified efforts to build its moral capital by launching programs to rehabilitate prostitutes and regularize common-law marriages, a prevalent form of union among the island’s working classes and rural poor. In the new year, the government began to celebrate collective marriage ceremonies in the countryside. In Fomento, a village in Las Villas province, sixty couples were married in this manner in January 1960, responding to official exhortations that they regularize their relationship and the status of their offspring by

¹⁸³ *Hoy*, January 5, 1960, 1.

having themselves and their children entered in the Civil Register. In the same month, forty-six couples were married in similar fashion in Camagüey.¹⁸⁴ Programs to regularize marriages and register children, while reinforcing the conservative and Catholic values of pre-Revolutionary Cuba, also contemplated the possibility of future legislation that would regularize the status of children born to unwed parents without requiring them to participate in marriage ceremonies, another step toward disconnecting children's access to care and protection from Catholic charity institutions and their moral framework, centering on notions of family and legitimacy.

As part of a broader effort to establish the Revolution as the only provider of essential services to needy children, images of malnourished babies, orphans, and street urchins continued to appear in the media, where they continued to be framed not only as representative of the Batista regime's cruelty, but also increasingly as proof of the privileged Cubans' indifference towards the nation's most needy and vulnerable citizens. These images were accompanied by descriptions of the Revolution's unceasing commitment to care for the young, reinforcing claims about the Revolution's moral mission and Castro's extraordinary compassion. One journalist, lamenting the poverty and misery of children in the countryside, informed Cubans that Fidel had personally reassured him that he would bring an end to this suffering: "How many times has Fidel, knowing of our interest in these social problems, indicated that very soon all of them would come to an end, since this was a basic factor in his humanist doctrine?"¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ *Hoy*, January 9, 1960, 7.

¹⁸⁵ *Bohemia*, January 8, 1960.

Accordingly, the revolutionary media provided in-depth coverage of continued efforts to provide badly needed services to the impoverished countryside. The Pancho Pérez Tobacco Cooperative, funded by INRA with supplements from the Ministry of Public Works and constructed by students, members of the Rebel Army, and civilian volunteers, was the subject of in-depth coverage early in January 1960. The Cooperative would provide rural *tabaqueros* with reinforced concrete houses equipped with electricity and glass windows, modern bathrooms and washing machines. A six classroom school was also built, with a kitchen and dining area, and carpentry workshop. A journalist reporting on the construction of the cooperative noted that not only would children receive a better education than had ever been possible in the countryside, as well as the use of a theatre, two swimming pools and a baseball field. Incredibly, he marveled, “sports will be done there. Imagine! The peasants of our earth, doing sports!” He concluded by evoking God’s blessing on the Revolution’s efforts to revitalize the countryside: “Blessed be, Agrarian Reform!”¹⁸⁶

The Revolution’s ambitions to build up to 10,000 new schools across the countryside, and especially its program to convert military forts and prisons into educational centers, took pride of place in the creation of a *fidelista* politics of morality.¹⁸⁷ Photographs of Castro attending school openings drove home the message that the new schools were Fidel’s, an expression of his deep paternal concern for the wellbeing and happiness of all Cubans, of all ages—for all of them were his children. One columnist

¹⁸⁶ *Hoy*, January 3, 1960, 4.

¹⁸⁷ “Con Tres Mil Nuevas Escuelas Se Aumenta a Siete Mil el Número de las Creadas,” *Hoy*, February 17, 1960.

described the opening of the Ignacio Agramonte Regiment School in Camaguey in January 1960, describing the appreciation of the young “citizens of tomorrow” for the revolutionary gift of education: “It was as if the fatherland itself, overwhelmed with gratitude, applauded its children who, knowing how to love their nation, worked for its wellbeing and gifted it with schools, many schools, that will be inexhaustible seedbeds of better citizens; generous quarry that will give forth men and women to pursue the work of the Revolution.”

Making explicit that this gift was the personal expression of Castro’s paternal love and generosity, the article concluded with an approving description of the youthful Fidel-worship that it deemed a fitting response to the revolutionary leaders’ benevolence. It described how the children “...fought to get close to Fidel Castro, holding out their hands and lifting up their arms to him. And the Prime Minister let the young ones take his hand, and he smiled at them with the tenderness of a father...and those that were able to touch him and even those that couldn’t, went home to bed with great satisfaction. Fidel had given them classrooms, teachers, workshops! They could be happy!”¹⁸⁸

That same month, Castro presided at the ceremony inaugurating a new educational center in what had previously been Centro Habana’s Fifth Police Station. At the conclusion of the ceremony the station, notorious center of torture during the Batista dictatorship, was turned over by Chief of Revolutionary National Police Efigenio Ameijeira for use as a middle school. The act was attended by thousands of teachers and middle school students from across the island, and was televised nationally and

¹⁸⁸ *Bohemia*, January 8, 1960.

internationally. A similar ceremony was held in Santiago de Cuba, where the Moncada Barracks had also been converted into a school. Guests of honor at this ceremony included President Osvaldo Dorticós, Minister of Education Armando Hart, Haydée Santamaría, and Fidel and Raúl Castro. Also in attendance were the survivors of the 1953 Moncada assault which had initiated the anti-Batista insurgency and hundreds of flag-waving schoolchildren who were set to begin studying at school.

Speaker after speaker emphasized the Revolution's passionate commitment to children. An emotional Raúl Castro declared that he and other revolutionaries had not risked their lives to topple Batista for their own benefit, but rather had fought on behalf for future generations. He invoked the memory of José Luís Tasende, a fallen *Moncadista* who had asked him to care for his newborn daughter before his death; lifting his arms towards Telma Tasende, now six years old and a guest of honor at the event, he invited her to "Today, Telmita, look upon the work of your father!"

Fidel Castro then addressed the children, drawing upon the nationalist discourses of pre-revolutionary Cuba to explain the patriotic significance of the movement to convert forts and prisons into schools. This educational initiative, he said, had been the desire of Martí and the *mambises* who had fought for the island's independence in the nineteenth century—only to see their dream frustrated under Batista's oppressive and foreign-dominated dictatorship. He then spoke to the young people about the existence of dissent on the island, framing opposition to the Revolution as a moral failing: "Today there are bad Cubans that don't understand the beautiful work of the Revolution and speak badly of her. But when these few selfish people disappear, when an educated

people progresses through its work and intelligence, everyone will speak well of the Revolution.”¹⁸⁹

Official pronouncements and the revolutionary press hailed the transformation of forts into schools as evidence of the Revolution’s moral superiority to the Batista regime, which it charged had turned the island into a militarized police state. At the same time, journalists struggled to explain the ongoing role of the military in education, even at the primary level. One article in *Bohemia* noted that “the men who wore the olive-green of the Sierra can enter the schools because they know that the students will greet them as their own, as the good friends that gave them places in which to learn to love Cuba as they have; as those that loved them and had turned military forts into schools.”¹⁹⁰

The article, and others like it, ignored the fact that the children who attended these schools often did so under the supervision of soldiers hastily pressed into service as teachers, and indeed, that many of them received military instruction from uniformed service members and marched in formation for morning inspections—on parade grounds that Batista’s military had used for exactly the same purpose only two years before.¹⁹¹ Paradoxically, even as the ongoing militarization of Cuban society was both denied and celebrated by the Castro government, it nonetheless played an important part in the construction of a *fidelist*a politics of morality;¹⁹² for while the military continued to play a

¹⁸⁹ *Hoy*, January 29, 1960, 5.

¹⁹⁰ *Bohemia*, January 8, 1960, 69.

¹⁹¹ “Convertido en Centro Escolar el Cuartel Goicuría,” *Revolución*, May 2 1960, 18.

¹⁹² Gaspar Jorge García Gallo, “Educar: Tarea Decisiva de la Revolución,” *Escuela y Revolución en Cuba* 1, no. 1 (December 1962-January 1963): 4-5.

dominant role in Cuban national life, it was claimed that the military had been democratized to not only include the nation's poor, as it had during the turn of the century independence struggle, but indeed to explicitly defend their rights and interests.¹⁹³

By February 1960, as the revolutionary government continued its well-publicized initiatives to revitalize the countryside, constructing schools, clinics, and agricultural cooperatives where children's access to adequate housing, education, sanitation, and recreation improved dramatically, media representations of these efforts had facilitated the Revolution's appropriation of the middle class values, expressed through nationalist and Catholic-inflected imagery and discourses, which animated a still-vibrant civil society. This process of appropriation was a necessary precursor to the construction of a *fidelista* politics of morality through which civic social justice activism would be first de-emphasized, then discredited, and by the end of the year, almost completely suppressed.

Castro, the Children, and the Suppression of Civil Society

By the end of 1959, the window of opportunity for activism by progressive middle-class Cubans, even—and perhaps especially—efforts that mirrored social justice priorities claimed by the Revolution, was beginning to close. Beginning early in the New Year, Castro made clear that opportunities for participation in revolutionary governance would be limited to mobilization for its defense. Cuban citizens who wished to participate could join armed workplace, university or youth patrols, attend mass rallies in support of

¹⁹³ Efforts to frame the de- and re-militarization of Cuban society within the new revolutionary morality become even more problematic in light of the fact that one of Batista's own attempts to respond to the crisis of rural education in Cuba was through a "Sergeants to Teachers" program that placed soldiers in classrooms across the countryside. See Batista, *The Growth and Decline of the Cuban Republic*.

Fidel and his initiatives, and join together at demonstrations to denounce the Revolution's enemies. Through these activities and these alone, citizens of all ages could claim membership in the Revolution and involve themselves with their government.

Correspondingly, extra-revolutionary voices and actions, regardless of their purpose or political sympathies, began to fall increasingly under attack. The University of Havana, a traditional site for political activism, had already been submitted to a process of reform in which its constitutionally guaranteed right to political autonomy was revoked, and appointments as well as curriculum were placed under the authority of Castro's Council of Ministers; as many of two-thirds of the university's professors who had protested this curtailment of academic freedom had lost their positions the previous summer.¹⁹⁴ The most important of the still-functioning institutions of civil society were the non-state sponsored media and groups and individuals linked to the Catholic Church, whose continued autonomy constituted the most serious threat to the monopoly of influence over public discourse and space that the Revolution sought to establish.

In early 1960, the regime and its allies launched a carefully coordinated attack on the non-state sponsored press, accusing it of fomenting opposition to the Revolution. Discontent and criticism, needless to say, had no place in publications such as *Bohemia* and *Revolución* nor, given the close ties developing between Castro and the Cuban Socialist Party, in the socialist newspaper *Hoy*; however, in the first half of the year, non-revolutionary newspapers, magazines and journals were submitted to a process of

¹⁹⁴ "A los Profesores, Estudiantes y Empleados de la Universidad de la Habana," *Revolución*, 2 July 1959, 8.

harassment and intimidation by revolutionary militias and Partido Socialista Popular supported typographic unions, who demanded that these publications accept editorial oversight by “the people.” Access to increasingly scarce supplies of paper and ink, newly subject to rationing, became dependent on a publications’ willingness to subject content to review and revision, or to print a “*coletilla*,” or editorial commentary, to articles which presented opinions or arguments at odds with the official interpretation of events.

Publications that refused to accept the imposition of the *coletilla* fell victim to more aggressive sanctions. One of the first newspapers to fall under attack was the conservative *Diario de la Marina*. First established in 1832, the *Diario* had initially offered its cautious support for the Revolution; however, by the end of 1959, the newspaper’s criticism of revolutionary financial, agrarian and educational reforms, as well as its maintenance of a pro-US stance and insistence on publishing articles in support of Church and private enterprise-sponsored social justice initiatives, had marked it as a ‘reactionary’ publication. On May 12, 1960, a group of armed *milicianos* broke into the *Diario*’s offices, vandalized the premise and machinery, and forced the printers to publish a Revolutionary tract. The next day, chief editor José Ignacio Rivero sought asylum in the Peruvian Embassy.¹⁹⁵ When a *Prensa Libre* journalist wrote about the suppression of *Diario de la Marina* and the threat this represented to freedom of the press in Cuba, the publication was seized by the government.

¹⁹⁵ The newspaper was subsequently re-established in exile in Miami, but ceased publication there after little more than a year.

In the first half of 1960, the diminishing number of still-independent publications fell victim to similar attacks, ostensibly for fomenting opposition to the Revolution. Children were regular participants in public acts of denunciation of the “counter-revolutionary press” that were organized across the island. In January, residents of Bejucal gathered to stage a symbolic burial of conservative and independent Cuban newspapers and magazines, including *Diario de la Marina*, *Crisol*, and *Prensa Libre*, as well as US media including the *Miami Herald* newspaper and *Life* magazine. Under the leadership of journalist Rubén Chaviano Gavillán, chair of the local branch of the *Directorio Revolucionario*, men, women and children shouting “*paredón! paredón!*,” congregated in Maceo-Gómez Park. They marched across town in procession behind a coffin representing the “counter-revolutionary press,” staging a symbolic burial of the coffin as a demonstration of their anger at published critiques of the Revolution.

Coverage of the event in *Hoy* noted approvingly that “the entire town joined in” with enthusiasm, to the extent that “even the children were able to demonstrate their repudiation of the nation’s *vendepatria* press and of the mercenary magazines and newspapers” of the United States. Photographs accompanying the text featured children gathered around a sign reading “May the Reactionary Press Rest in Peace.” Utilizing language similar to that found in descriptions of other media burials in *Bohemia* and *Revolución*, *Hoy*’s coverage took the presence of children at the mock burial as evidence of the moral correctness of this denunciatory act, as well as proof that the entire nation supported the Revolution and condemned dissenters.



Figure 10: Photograph, children holding signs protesting, at the burning of “reactionary” newspapers¹⁹⁶

Mock burials and burnings of non-revolutionary media, both domestic and foreign, continued across the country into the late summer. At the same time, more and more non-state sponsored publications fell under attack by armed mobs and militias, vulnerable to charges that their supposed opposition to the Revolution was proof of their membership in a reactionary and morally depraved privileged class. Dissenters of any kind, regardless of their arguments or motivation, were framed as categorically against the Revolution, and therefore enemies of the people and especially of the children on whose behalf it had been fought. It was therefore fitting and even laudatory that children were active participants in the mass demonstrations against the rapidly disappearing independent press. The irony, not lost on the disaffected journalists who left the country

¹⁹⁶ *Hoy*, January 29, 1960, 4.

during this time period for the United States and other Latin American nations, was that many of them had initially participated in media efforts to represent children as both a symbol and main beneficiaries of the Revolution, linking children's wellbeing and indeed their very futures to the survival of the Revolution. Members of the island's non-revolutionary press had thus unwittingly contributed to the politic of morality that created the ideological conditions for their own suppression.¹⁹⁷

The revolutionary government also made use of militias and mobs to launch a similar attack on the Catholic Church and associated organizations. Throughout the winter and spring of 1960, Sunday masses across the island were interrupted by groups shouting denigrations and pro-Revolution slogans, violence, and the arrest of dozens of parishioners. These confrontations were especially frequent in wealthy congregations like Havana's Jesús de Miramar church, but also took place in middle- and working-class congregations like those of Artemisa, Bauta, Sagua la Grande, and at Cathedral in Habana Vieja.¹⁹⁸ And then, in August 1960, Cuba's five archbishops issued a joint pastoral declaration to be read at all the nation's parishes. Reiterating the Church's commitment to "profound social reforms based on justice and charity," the bishops nonetheless cited papal encyclicals rejecting Marxist materialism as antithetical to Christian morality and affirmed the right of Catholics to express their opposition to

¹⁹⁷ Miguel Angel Quevedo, founder and editor of Bohemia magazine, recognized this contradiction after going into exile. Taking his own life in 1969 in Caracas, Quevedo's suicide note proclaimed his guilt, and indeed that of all Cuban journalists in the early days of the Revolution, whose uncritical support of the Revolution and sensationalist coverage helped create the *Fidelista* cult of personality that preceded the Revolution's radicalization.

¹⁹⁸ See for example "En Jesús de Miramar," "El Suceso de la Catedral," and "Los Detenidos," *Información*, July 19, 1960, A-14; and "Al Pueblo Cubano," *Juventud Obrera*, September 1960, 2.

Communist doctrine, arguing that freedom of speech should not be suppressed “in the name of a poorly understood sense of civic unity.”¹⁹⁹ Following this barely-veiled critique of the Revolution, an even more violent series of denunciations and attacks fell upon the island’s parishes.

By summer 1960, Church services and meetings of Catholic organizations like the *Juventud Obrera Católica* (JOC) had been converted into regular sites of protest and clashes with revolutionary mobs. Nonetheless, priests and powerful bishops like Monseñor Enrique Pérez Serantes, who had saved Fidel from execution after the failed Moncada assault, continued to exercise their right of public address and circulation of printed material. As they did so, their influence over the rapidly shrinking Cuban civil society continued to grow—both because the almost total suppression of the non-state sponsored media and the subsequent absence of other venues for the expression of dissent, and because middle and upper-class Cubans, regardless of whether they attended mass regularly, were disproportionately represented among Catholic private schools students and parents.²⁰⁰ Left-leaning Catholic organizations like the JOC and *Acción Católica* were also popular among university students and, in spite of the Revolution’s efforts to offer a class-based explanation for the existence of dissent, maintained a strong representation of blacks, mulattos and the working classes.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ “Declaraciones del Episcopado Cubano,” *Juventud Obrera*, September 1960, 9.

²⁰⁰ Arzobispo de Santiago de Cuba, “Por Dios y por Cuba,” *Juventud Obrera*, June 1960, 10, 14; “Hay Persecución Religiosa en las Naciones Comunistas,” *Información*, July 19, 1960, A-14; and Crahan, “Salvation through Christ or Marx,” 163.

²⁰¹ See *Juventud Obrera*, June 1960, 15; and “Actividades Jocistas,” *Juventud Obrera*, April 1960, 5.

Progressive Catholic organizations continued to circulate widely read monthly newspapers as late as October 1960, when their publication was prohibited. That same month, Monsignor Eduardo Boza Masvidal released a public letter condemning revolutionary efforts to marginalize its original Catholic and middle class supporters. Asking “Is the Social Revolution Being Realized in Cuba a Christian One?” Boza Masvidal concluded that it was not. Critiquing Castro for redistributive policies that he felt were too extreme, the archbishop warned that “pitting the poor against the rich... is not to reestablish justice, but rather carries injustice to the opposite extreme. The Christian thing would be...to create wellbeing mutually and [opportunities for them to] love one another as brothers.” He also criticized the Revolution’s “lack of respect toward the natural right of property” and toward the family, as well as its systematic attack on the United States and growing friendship with Russia and other socialist nations.²⁰²

Enraged, Castro fired back in a series of speeches accusing the Cuban clergy of “selective Christianity,” asserting that revolutionaries who sacrificed themselves on behalf of others and gave to the poor were the “true Christians.” If the Cuban clergy were truly Christian, he challenged—ignoring their long history of social justice activism on the island—they should “leave their temples” and go to the countryside to help the sick, to plant trees, to build houses, to help with the Agricultural Reform campaign, and to knit and embroider nightgowns for children that didn’t have clothing. In this explicit formulation of the revolutionary politics of morality, Castro irrevocably set the

²⁰² “Es Cristiana la Revolución Social que se está Verificando en Cuba?” *La Quincena*, October 30, 1960, 3, 33.

Revolution, the authoritative example of “what it means to be a Christian,” at odds with the remnants of the island’s civil society, the members of which he accused of going “to the doors of the temples [to] conspire against the homeland.” Labeling them once and for all as “Pharisees,” insincere, self-interested collaborators with a foreign power, Castro’s angry words made clear that Catholic-affiliated middle class Cubans had no credibility within the new moral paradigm provided by the Revolution.²⁰³

By the end of year, then, when attacks on the non-revolutionary media had resulted in the closing of most publications and the relocation to exile of a growing number of the island’s journalists, it was perhaps inevitable that counter-discourses of childhood would begin to emerge as part of a broader opposition to the radicalization of the Revolution. It is also unsurprising, given that an embattled Church represented one of the few remaining spaces in which Cubans could freely assemble and express dissenting views, that many of these discourses originated with and were disseminated by members of the island’s various Catholic communities. They would soon become a central aspect of the counter-revolutionary struggle that emerged as the space for lawful political dissent disappeared.

Conclusion

This analysis of the politics of childhood between 1959 and 1960 reveals that the radicalization of the Revolution not only *began* in the discursive realm, but gained popular legitimacy through revolutionary leaders’ constant and deliberate efforts to

²⁰³ “En Cuba,” *Bohemia*, December 11, 1960.

deploy symbolic and actual children as part of broader efforts to manipulate Cuban national symbols and historical paradigms, religious beliefs and practices, and moral values. By early 1960, middle-class mobilization in favor of a socially transformative but anti-Communist and pluralist state had prompted a deliberate and child-centered campaign to discredit non-state sponsored activists, manifested in Fidel Castro's claims that the Revolution, not Catholic social justice activism, represented the radical fulfillment of Christianity.

This was accomplished in significant ways through the promulgation of a highly moralistic and increasingly class-based discourse and set of practices centering on Cuban children. This discourse predated and propelled the radicalization of the Revolution by narrowing the range of actors and ideas eligible for inclusion in the category of "revolutionary," as well as those who could hope to benefit from its initiatives. By emphasizing the revolutionary project's transcendent morality, evidenced through its concern for needy children as much as its appeal to the island's young people, Fidel Castro sought to suppress debate about the direction of the Revolution with demonstrations of the virtue shared by its leaders and loyal followers—and above all, as expressed in the quasi-divine personhood of Castro himself, benevolent father of the revolutionary nation.

Discourses and practices of *Fidelismo*, relying heavily on both symbolic and actual children, thus served to consolidate the establishment of the Revolution as an exclusive moral paradigm—one that focused more and more narrowly on the interests of the poor and the working classes, and had less and less room in it for "selfish" middle

class calls for the safeguarding of electoral democracy, property rights, and freedom of expression and religious association. Within this new *fidelista* politics of morality, civic organizations' traditional claims to moral authority, based on nationalist and Catholic-inflected values and discourses, as well as their ability to serve as vehicles of social change, were de-emphasized then discredited—at first, as misguided and ineffective stumbling blocks along the path to revolutionary transformation, and increasingly as reactionary, self-interested, immoral, and eventually as counter-revolutionary.

Considered outside of the context established by this child-centered discursive struggle, class interests alone fail to explain the Revolution's radicalization. The takeover of US owned properties and businesses and the mass demonstrations that accompanied them undoubtedly played an important role in marginalizing the Cuban middle classes, leading to the eventual exodus of formerly supportive non-property owning professionals, including doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other left-leaning social justice activists. However, the suppression of Cuba's once-vibrant civil society and the closing of a window of opportunity to participate in shaping the trajectory of the Revolution, was an equally important factor in many Cuban's subsequent decision to join the Counter-Revolution or go into exile—or both. That this process was frequently and forcefully articulated through child-centered discourses and images ensured that counter-revolutionaries and their supporters would make similar use of symbolic and actual children in articulating their opposition to Castro's continued domination of their island nation.

Chapter 4

Children, Radicalization and the Cuban Counter-Revolution, 1960-1961

Between 1960 and 1961, childhood emerged as one of the primary sites of struggle in which the forces of Revolution and an emerging Counter-Revolution battled to determine Cuba's destiny. Seeing children as central to their radically different visions of the island's future, pro- and anti-Castro actors worked to create and operationalize new understandings and practices of childhood or defend traditional child-centered notions and customs, while they also battled for control of the bodies and minds of actual children. Revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries also sought to strategically deploy the symbolic figure of the child in support of mutually antagonistic political goals.

Beginning in 1960, Fidel Castro began to rely upon symbolic and actual children in order to spur on the radicalization of the Revolution, stressing their obligation to participate in this process. He made efforts to strengthen his highly visible relationship with Cuban young people and sought, through the creation of new laws and policies and the expansion of public education and child-centered mass organizations, to forge direct linkages between children and the revolutionary state. In doing so, the government sought to reduce the role of private schools and the Catholic Church in guiding children's thinking and supervising their activities, further weakening these two institutions that continued to resist the Revolution's efforts to absorb the few remaining autonomous functions of Cuban civil society.

By 1961, Castro's government proclaimed the "Year of Education" and launched a massive effort to raise the educational level of all Cubans while strengthening the

ideological content of public school curricula and incorporating children into the Revolution through volunteer service. These efforts culminated most dramatically in *La Campaña de Alfabetización*, which mobilized and trained more than 100,000 young people to serve as literacy instructors in the countryside. The creation of new educational programs and children's mass organizations did much more than increase young people's access to learning and leisure opportunities; conceiving of childhood as a primary site in which the battle to suppress the Counter-Revolution would need to be fought, Castro's government simultaneously sought to use child-centered laws, policies and initiatives to wrest control of education from private and especially Catholic Church control and to replace home teachings with revolutionary values. Moreover, programs like the Literacy Program and the quasi-military *Pioneros* brigade employed children directly as agents of revolutionary change, both as a means of putting their energy and enthusiasm to work building a new society and in order to deepen young people's identification with Fidel Castro and the Revolution at the expense of other loyalties and affective ties. That this was one of the government's intended goals was further revealed by their attempts to encourage children to monitor, influence and report on the political beliefs and activities of their parents and other adults.

During the first two years of Revolution, then, the disaffection of many Cubans was not simply a product of the Castro government's increasingly radical political and economic initiatives; rather, the state's aggressive initiatives in the realms of childhood, family life and education angered and alienated many former supporters as much as, and perhaps more than, agrarian or urban reform laws or even the postponement of elections.

Middle class parents, in particular, resisted the ideological remaking of the public school system and defended the right to private education, asserting the authority of parents and the Church in the care and upbringing of the young. They also feared the involvement of children in youth militias, volunteer service programs and mass organizations that challenged traditional political, cultural and spiritual values, removed young people from direct parental supervision, and weakened children's loyalties to their families.

At the same time, Catholic clergy who had once praised the Revolution's commitment to social justice became increasingly critical of state intervention in the Church-dominated private school system, warning parents that Castro's efforts to suppress Catholic education were evidence of his turn towards atheistic communism.²⁰⁴ As a result, individuals who had initially supported new redistributive policies and may have been willing to accept, at least for a time, Castro's failure to deliver promised democratic reforms, were spurred into dissent, counter-revolutionary activity, and even exodus as part of a broader resistance to the state's intervention in young people's lives, as well as to protect their children from the perceived physical, moral and spiritual dangers of the new revolutionary society.

These different forms of resistance were encouraged by counter-revolutionaries and their CIA allies, who relied heavily on the child-centered institutions of the private schools and the Catholic Church as sites in which to construct an anti-Castro base on the

²⁰⁴ One of Castro's most damning condemnations of the Church, given Cubans' re-inflamed nationalist passions and their historic anti-Spanish sentiments, was that most Catholic priests were transplanted Spaniards. This, however, did not automatically imply (as was frequently claimed) that they were all fascists or Franco supporters. For every Francoist priest that ministered to a Cuban congregation, another had fled Spain during or after the Civil War, fearing their loyalty to the Socialist Republic had marked them for execution. See Guerra, "To Condemn the Revolution," 104-105.

island. The Counter-Revolution's aggressive propaganda campaign similarly focused on the child as the embodiment of threatened Cuban bourgeois values and offered representations of persecuted children as symbolic of the Republic under attack by the evil forces of atheistic Communism. However, even as they decried the Revolution's assault of the Cuban family, the indoctrination of children and the militarization of the island's young, counter-revolutionaries also made use of young people in their own operations, introducing them to anti-Castro ideas and benefiting from their involvement in acts of resistance and sabotage.

Between 1960 and 1961, pro- and anti-Castro forces not only fought *for* children, battling on behalf of the understandings and practices of childhood that underlay their worldviews and visions of the island's future; they also fought *through* children to make the Cuban nation, understanding the symbolic and actual child as a site in which the complex processes of political, economic, social and cultural transformation brought on by a radicalizing Revolution could be promoted or contested. During these two tumultuous and increasingly violent years, the island's children found themselves more and more frequently drawn into "adult" political struggles, directly impacting the dialectical relationship between radicalization and Counter-Revolution even as their own lives were transformed by their new salience in national life.

1960: Children, Radicalization and Counter-Revolution

On New Year's Eve 1960, Cubans celebrated the first anniversary of the triumph of their young Revolution. Though the Castro government continued to enjoy the support

of a substantial majority of the island's citizens, the early euphoria of victory and widespread popular consensus about the nature and goals of the Revolution had been tempered by the dissolution of the provisional coalition government, the indefinite postponement of elections, and the rapid concentration of power in the hands of the *comandante-en-jefe*. Many Cubans, as well as journalists and political leaders in the United States, were also beginning to harbor doubts about the true nature of Castro's political ambitions. Their concerns revolved around two central questions: were the leader's increasingly radical restructuring of Cuban political and legal structures, the economy and civil society, not to mention his growing antagonism towards the Catholic Church, evidence of secret communist sympathies? If so, what did this mean for the future of what had originally been conceived of as a nationalist and reformist Revolution, and for the island's relationship with the United States?

Conscious of these concerns, Fidel Castro nonetheless continued to make use of child-centric language to sidestep questions about the influence of communism on his government. He chose to continue framing discussions of the Revolution within a moral paradigm, emphasizing the Revolution's virtue and humanism, evidenced by its commitment to the welfare of the island's children. Castro also worked to discredit his detractors through repeated references to their supposed indifference to the wellbeing of the young. Labeling all who criticized the Revolution as Batista collaborators, he reminded the public of the previous regime's failures to provide for the basic needs of the poor, and insisted that those who now challenged his leadership were to blame for "all those children across the island that for lack of medicine, hospitals or centers of

rehabilitation had died without medical assistance.” Their cruelty and neglect had been responsible for “thousands of crosses in all the cemeteries of our Fatherland.”

In contrast, he argued, the “imperative duty of the Revolution” was to create prosperity for Cuban families and children: “To carry...education and medicine into the very heart of the nation. To get our families out of *bohíos* with dirt floors, where humidity infects little ones with tuberculosis.” Castro’s supporters at *Bohemia* magazine echoed his repeated assertions that the Revolution’s commitment to the needy and the young both defined its politics and transcended conventional political labels, declaring: “We don’t know if this [Revolution] can be called communism. Christ called it Christianity. Roosevelt, democracy. Fidel, humanism. Our José Martí said it well in his unforgettable verses: ‘*Con los pobres de la tierra/quiero yo mi suerte echar...*’”²⁰⁵

Sidestepping the question of communist influence on the Revolution, Castro and his supporters increasingly adopted a child-centered moral discourse to defend their virtue and attack that of their detractors. It was nonetheless clear that revolutionary discourses were becoming more and more class inflected, sparking a dialectical process that both discredited “bourgeois” critiques of the government and inflamed middle class Cubans’ latent fear of communism, further alienating the Revolution from its dwindling middle class support base and raising new questions about its “humanist” concern for the island’s needy—and especially its focus on the education of young people.

²⁰⁵ “With the Poor of the Earth, I Want to Throw in My Luck,” *Bohemia*, January 8, 1960.

Whereas during 1959 the government had portrayed its educational initiatives as part of a broader moral campaign to extend opportunities for schooling to the island's needy rural children, official statements about the nature and function of education now began to take on a more explicitly ideological tone. On January 14, 1960, Education Minister Armando Hart announced that teachers had "an unavoidable obligation to transmit revolutionary thinking to students."²⁰⁶ In order to encourage them to do this, the Ministry of Education stepped up its efforts to standardize curriculum and instruction across the island. Acting in accordance with Educational Law 559, established on September 15, 1959, Hart announced the establishment of a "Historic-Patriotic Calendar" to accompany the new academic calendar, specifying the dates which should be commemorated by all schools. These included, as was to be expected, the January 28th birthdate of José Martí and the observance of his death on May nineteenth, as well as a number of dates associated with the wars of independence and the establishment of the republic of Cuba; however, the majority of the new Calendar's dates commemorated recent revolutionary events and accomplishments, including the March 13th assault on the Presidential Palace and death of José Antonio Echevarría; the April 9th general strike against Batista, the July 26th attack on Santiago's Moncada Barracks, and the July 30th death of Frank País.

Minister Hart also released guidelines on how each different date was to be celebrated, whether by a schoolwide assembly and early dismissal, or within individual classrooms, and announced that these dates should be marked by displays of student work

²⁰⁶ Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan*, 16.

of “high academic and social value.” Similarly, awards were to be presented to students of high “academic, moral and civic character.”²⁰⁷ New laws like these, requiring all Cuban schools to adhere to a standardized state-approved calendar and curriculum, were met with displeasure by many teachers and parents, especially those with children enrolled in private schools. Moreover, media messages proclaiming the duty of educators to harmonize their teaching methods and content with the political goals of the Revolution followed on the heels of Minister Hart’s January 6th speech announcing a new military training program for high school students.

In order to support the new People’s Militias, the government had decreed that all Cuban students would learn to bear arms; hand in hand with the new education laws, the increasingly common sight of uniformed youth patrols marching and drilling in public parks aroused fears that the Revolution’s attention to youth was not strictly ‘humanist.’²⁰⁸ Announced only weeks before Soviet deputy premier Anastas I. Mikoyan’s highly publicized visit to the island, during which he placed a hammer and sickle at the feet of a prominent statue of José Martí, these new educational measures inflamed fears that the stricter regulation of the nation’s schools reflected the Revolution’s still-unacknowledged drift towards communism.

Aware of growing dissent among the middle classes, Fidel Castro sought to accelerate the radicalization of his Revolution by strengthening his already highly visible relationship with children, stressing their obligation to participate in this process. During

²⁰⁷ *Hoy*, January 9, 1960, 7.

²⁰⁸ Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan*, 16.

the January ceremonies inaugurating the opening of a new school in Santiago's Moncada Barracks, Castro spoke directly to the children in attendance about the revolutionary meaning and purpose of their education: they needed to study hard in order to fulfill their new role in the society that was to come and to ensure to survival of the Revolution. "We want to make a future nation that is better than this one," he said. "In the future, we want everyone to know how to read and write and to acquire the knowledge to be useful to their parents and to the fatherland." The future of the Revolution, Castro emphasized, was in the hands of this first generation of Moncada schoolchildren, who would be acclaimed by history for their efforts on its behalf. They would be the "admiration of the children of the future" because they would be "the ones that will finish the work of the Revolution."²⁰⁹

In conclusion, Castro proclaimed, "today Santiago is happy, today Cuba is happy, the children are happy, the apostle [Martí] is happy, today our dead are content...today is a happy day for the fatherland." Including children in this invocation of historical actors who had struggled for the island's independence, Castro encouraged the children to think of themselves as political actors, inheritors of a great patriotic obligation that they could fulfill through study and service to the Revolution. Moreover, in linking the happiness of Cuba to the happiness of its youngest citizens, Castro elevated the importance of young people to national life, reiterating a vision of the child as symbolic equivalent of the nation.

²⁰⁹ *Hoy*, January 29, 1960, 5.

The growing importance of children to the advancement of the Revolution's self-image and goals was reflected in speeches, radio announcements and newspaper stories encouraging the nation's youngest citizens to participate in the myriad social, environmental and public health mass campaigns organized by the new government. In the first months of 1960, moreover, children were also increasingly called on to fulfill political functions: to demonstrate their love and loyalty to Fidel Castro through joining mass organizations and initiatives, marching in parades, and participating in rallies. The rebel leader was held up as role model for young people, to be emulated in their studies and volunteer work in their neighborhoods or in the countryside. Young students and volunteers were reminded that their leader and commander-in-chief, Fidel Castro, was also the chief teacher of the people and a father figure to the nation. The ever-closer relationship between Castro and the island's pure, selfless, and patriotic young people served as a metaphor and model for the appropriate relationship between the leader and all citizens of the island.

New linkages between children, Fidel Castro and the revolutionary state came hand-in-hand with the growing power of the Cuban Communist Party in the government. Moreover, as the Castro regime began to pursue a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union in the first half of 1960, many feared the increased potential of Communist influence on their children. As the island's relationship with the United States deteriorated and its ties to the USSR grew, Castro more and more frequently stressed the need for a reinterpretation of the child as autonomous political actor, capable of and expected to render specific individual service to the Revolution. This not only threatened traditional

middle class understandings of childhood as a time of innocence, play and dependence on family; it also seemed to emulate Soviet attitudes toward children, inflaming anti-communist anxieties at exactly the moment when the Revolution launched a radical program to nationalize much of the island's industry and private property.

In the summer of 1960, Castro authorized the Cuban state to take control of the nation's banking system, railroads, ports, airlines, department stores, hotels, casinos, bars, *cafeterías*, restaurants, and even most movie houses. He also established a new militia, composed of young people between the ages of twelve and seventeen, to guard these properties from former owners and ensure high production levels among workers. Christened the *Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes* (AJR), the new Association of Rebel Youth organization included former members of the Communist Party's youth group and individuals selected on the basis of their commitment to volunteer labor in cooperatives, factories, and other work sites. The presence of armed AJR *milicianos* at work sites and newly nationalized businesses signaled the growing political importance of young people in revolutionary society, as well as a startling shift in the social balance of power between children and adults; many of the gun-toting "Young Rebels" were barely adolescents.²¹⁰

Dispossessed of their homes and properties, confused by the disruption of traditional age-based social hierarchies and family relationships, and disoriented by the ongoing dissolution of Cuban civil society, middle class Cubans grew increasingly alarmed as the revolutionary government intervened in the few social institutions

²¹⁰ Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, "Trabajo, Estudio y Fusil," *Boletín Cultural*, January/February 1961, 6.

retaining a degree of autonomy. By summer of 1960, the two most significant of these institutions were the Catholic Church and private schools—both of which shared parents' fears about the changing nature of childhood on the island and resented their diminishing role in guiding children's thinking and supervising their activities, even as they struggled to maintain their independence in the face of growing revolutionary hostility. Gearing up for the opening of the 1960/61 school year, the anti-Castro alliance born between middle class Cubans, private school educators and Catholic clergy shared two goals: to keep children's issues at the heart of the emerging political struggle on the island, and also to construct struggles over children, family life and education as proxies or symbols of a broader resistance to the Revolution's dramatic turn towards the left.

By the opening of the September school term, many teachers and administrators—especially, but not limited to, those working at schools sponsored by the Catholic religious orders—found themselves at growing odds with the Revolution. Some made use of their position as teachers to criticize the government and Fidel Castro, to share their anti-communist political views with students, and to discourage young people from participating in mass demonstrations of support for the Revolution. State media lost no time in drawing the public's attention to such incidents, seeing them as proof of the “reactionary” tendencies of the private educational system. According to an exposé in *Verde Olivo*, at the beginning of the 1960 academic term, Silvio González, director of the Jesuit-run Belén Technical School, warned the student body that he would not allow militia members, communists, or members of the Revolutionary state's security apparatus to interfere with the orderly functioning of his school. Nor, the magazine reported the director as saying, would he tolerate the presence of “perturbing elements” among the

student body. Throughout the school year, González repeatedly interrupted classes to submit students to “counter-revolutionary talks” and even threatened to expel students who expressed support for the Revolution.²¹¹

At the same time, student-led opposition movements sprang up in many of the island’s Catholic middle and high schools, often organized with the support and blessing of teachers and the administration. Counter-revolutionaries on and off the island also supported youth opposition to the Revolution, making use of the exile-run and CIA funded Radio Swan to broadcast statements of support for their activities and directing anti-Castro messages at private school students and their parents. Warning them that the Revolutionary government intended to close all private schools, nationalize them, and turn priests, nuns and teachers into state employees, the radio broadcasts further stated that classes in religious education would soon be prohibited and that all schools would be forced to use communist textbooks.²¹²

These broadcasts were intended both to create panic among students and parents and to promote further opposition activity. Both goals were achieved, as the middle class families who were linked to Cuban private schools began to take action against the Revolution. A student strike was organized for November 14, 1960, both to protest government intervention into the scholastic lives of the nation’s children and to pay homage to Porfirio Remberto Ramírez Ruiz, a Catholic student leader who had been sentenced to death for his participation in counter-revolutionary activities in the

²¹¹ Julián Iglesias, “Jóvenes Patriotas Salvan una Escuela,” *Verde Olivo*, February 26, 1961, 15.

²¹² Torreira Crespo and Buajásán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*, 26.

Escambray mountains, and who had been executed by firing squad on October 14th. Responding to charges that the student strike had been organized by the Church and religious teachers in private schools, Catholic clergy insisted that the movement had originated with, and been entirely carried out, by students acting in accordance with their own political convictions.

However, even if the strike was organized strictly by students, counter-revolutionaries in exile, including former Catholic student leaders, were aware of the plans and lent their support via Radio Swan.²¹³ On October 26, 1960, a former leader of the *Agrupación Católica Universitaria* (ACU) broadcast a message of support for dissenting Cuban students from Miami, telling Cuban young people that it was their duty to join the strike in order to “show the world that Porfirio Ramírez wasn’t alone.” The following day another message was broadcast: “Attention Cuban student. Join the strike on November 14 against the communist traitors that govern our fatherland. Remember that you are indebted to the great martyr Porfirio Ramírez.”²¹⁴

The Catholic Church on the island also threw its support behind the student strike. On November 13, declared a day of mourning for Porfirio Ramírez, Catholic Churches across the island read a pastoral letter by Monsignor Enrique Pérez Serantes. Known afterwards as the “Rome or Moscow” letter, the pastoral document derided communism as appealing to the bitter and maladjusted, to those who lacked “substantial values,” and

²¹³ *La Quincena*, November 30, 1960, 9, 43-44, 48.

²¹⁴ Torreira Crespo and Buajasán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*, 35.

labelled it a “mortal virus” to which young students were particularly vulnerable.²¹⁵ Radio Swan continued to stoke the fears of Cuban parents during October 1960 by broadcasting reports of the imminent promulgation of a new *Patria Potestad* law, which would grant final custody of all children to the revolutionary state. The reports stated that “the communists in power” intended to win over the hearts and minds of Cuban children, first by “supplanting God with Fidel,” and then by teaching them that love towards their mothers, brothers, or any relative were feelings that they should suppress. Similar broadcasts warned mothers that a soon-to-be promulgated revolutionary law would remove children from their homes between the ages of five and eighteen years, and return them as “materialist monsters.” Fidel, the broadcasts announced, “was going to become the supreme mother of Cuba.”

On October 27, another Radio Swan message announced:

Cuban mother, the government will take away your child and indoctrinate him with communist values. They will tell him that Che isn't an adventurer, but rather a good and brave man who helped liberate the fatherland; that Fidel is the father of the nation...Cuban mother, they can take away your clothing, your food and even kill you, but nobody can take away your right to raise your child; remember that there is no animal more savage than the one that defends her cub. Offer your life to a just cause like ours, before surrendering your child to the beasts.

These alarming messages, continuing throughout the autumn months of 1960, concluded with exhortations for Cuban mothers to fight back, to not allow their children to be removed from their care, and instructed them to follow the orientations of the clergy and “take their children to Church,” in order to make sure that they believed in God.

²¹⁵ Enrique Pérez Serantes, *La Voz de la Iglesia en Cuba: 100 Documentos Episcopales* (Santiago de Cuba, 1960), 135-141.

At the same time that these first *Patria Potestad* rumors were being publicized through Radio Swan, other frightening stories drew on middle class Cubans' intimate knowledge of the Spanish Civil War—many of them were children of immigrants or had themselves immigrated from Spain—and the republican government's removal of children from battle zones and their relocation to Soviet Russia. Terrifying tales of communist violations of mothers, murders of children, and their forced indoctrination spread like wildfire. Children were also exposed to these rumors by their parents and teachers. In 2000, Sonia Almazán del Olmo remembered the terrifying stories circulating throughout 1960, and especially those told by missionary priests at the American Dominican School in Cienfuegos:

They gathered us in the school patio and they began to talk to us...about the missionaries who'd come from Russia, about how they [the communists] used bayonets to open the bellies of pregnant mothers and take out the babies, and about how they took children away from their homes to indoctrinate them...about how they took them to camps because it was the State that educated them...²¹⁶

Stories of young people being forced to spy on their parents and report their opposition to the Revolution also began to circulate, as did the rumor that the government was taking custody of children whose parents had been jailed for counterrevolutionary activities and sending them to Russia as an additional reprisal for their crimes.²¹⁷ Stories of resistance in defense of children also appeared. Among these was the apocryphal tale of fifty mothers in the town of Bayamo that had signed a pact to kill their children before surrendering them to Castro. The fears produced by the *Patria Potestad* rumor campaign,

²¹⁶ Torreira Crespo and Buajasán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*, 26, 91-92, 94.

²¹⁷ Leslie Dewart, *Cuba, Church and Crisis: Christianity and Politics in the Cuban Revolution* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 160.

originating among the early exile community in Miami and counterrevolutionaries on the island, were intended to provoke resistance and destabilize the Revolutionary regime; they succeeded primarily in creating panic among Cuban parents and provoked a wave of youthful emigration from Cuba to the United States, where parents sent their children to continue their studies. While many of these early emigrants were high school and university students, as time passed, the children being sent off the island would become younger and more numerous.

Those who remained on the island launched a campaign to resist what they understood as a conspiracy to remove custody from the hands of parents and place children under the authority and care of the Revolutionary state. At the beginning of November 1960, the Church-sponsored National Confederation of Parents' Associations held its third annual Congress. Participants held discussions emphasizing the important role of the Church in the education and formation of children and youth, and agreed to petition the Castro government to guarantee that Christian education would be provided in all the nation's schools. In the Final Declaration issued by the Congress, participants addressed the *Patria Potestad* rumors, affirming that the right to decide how children would be educated was one that "could not be renounced, nor would it ever be renounced, because it is an inalienable right constituting the most sacred of a parent's duties." In conclusion, the Congress members reaffirmed that the Church, as "spiritual mother of all Christians," had an essential part in educating children, whereas the state should be limited to playing a supportive role.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Torreira Crespo and Buajasán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*, 93.

Articles in the revolutionary media vigorously denied charges that the state was intending to assume legal custody of Cuban children. On October 28, only days after Radio Swan began issuing messages about the supposedly imminent promulgation of the *Patria Potestad* law, *Revolución* drew citizens' attention to the work of the Revolution to strengthen the Cuban family. They reminded Cuban parents that the Castro government had recently launched "Operation Family," initiated with the passing of Law 797 on May 20, 1960, to legalize the unions of the more than 400,000 unmarried Cuban couples who were living and raising families together. The main beneficiary of this program, the article stated, would be Cuban children, whose previous status as children born out of wedlock left them outside of many of the protections of the law. Operation Family also made it possible for parents to register the births of their children and facilitated the issuance of their birth certificates at no cost, and even provided for the free collective baptisms of children, if their parents desired. "Is it conceivable," the article continued, "that the government that sheltered them in this way would then go on to deprive them of the warmth of their homes and the love of their families?"²¹⁹

Middle class families and clergy remained unconvinced, however, citing the Revolution's aggressive efforts to wrest control of educational decision-making, and ultimately control of young people's intellectual and moral formation, from the hands of parents and the Church, as evidence of their ultimate goal to make the state the guardian of Cuban children. Their suspicions reached a new high in December, when the government announced the establishment of a nation-wide *Ficha Escolar Acumulativa*, a

²¹⁹ Torreira Crespo and Buajásán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*, 98-100.

cumulative scholastic record that would gather family data on each public and private school student and their families, as well as observe and document “all activities inside and outside school.” Attempting to reassure those already alarmed by the *Patria Potestad* tales, *Revolución* announced on December 26th that the *Ficha* had “nothing to do with the false rumors about the state being wardens of the children.” Moreover, the revolutionary publication went on to accuse “certain religious schools” that were known for “twisting the facts and openly engaging in counter-revolutionary activity” of having disingenuously “connected one thing with the other.”²²⁰

In spite of these reassurances, many Cuban parents saw the new government administered scholastic record as yet another step towards state control of children’s lives. Some feared that it had been put into place as a means of identifying the island’s brightest young people, in order to send them to Russia for technical and ideological training. Other suspected that the *Ficha* would be used to ensure children’s and even parents’ loyalty to the Revolution by distributing rewards and punishments, such as access to higher education and even jobs, in accordance with students’ record of ideological conformity.²²¹

By the end of 1960, as relations between private school educators, the Church and the state deteriorated further into distrust and hostility, more young people, many of them former supporters of the Revolution and members of organizations like the *Juventud Obrera Católica* and the *Juventud Católica Estudiantil* and Catholic Young Workers,

²²⁰ *Revolución*, December 26, 1960, 1.

²²¹ Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan*, 26.

became involved in counter-revolutionary activities. Supported by Catholic clergy who offered the island's youth a doctrinal alternative to the Revolution's as-yet undeclared socialist ideology, organized youth resistance spread from the universities into high schools like Belén and La Salle in Havana, as well as into middle schools and Church sponsored youth groups. Some of these children and youth—mostly, but not exclusively, adolescent boys— participated in acts of sabotage, bombings and armed resistance against Castro.

Other children were caught in violent confrontations between counter-revolutionaries and revolutionary armed forces and militias. On October 10th, in the municipality of Madruga, Havana province, counterrevolutionaries fired on a vehicle carrying Haydeé Machado Reyes and members of her family. Machado Reyes was gravely wounded and her twenty-two month old son, Reinaldo Muñiz Machado, was killed. On October 30th, during the hijacking of a Cuban airliner, twelve year old Argelio Hernández Rodríguez was gravely wounded. Then, on Christmas Eve, a bomb exploded in Flogar Department Store in Havana, injuring fifteen people, among them four children. Other bombs and gunfights, in and outside the capital, wounded and claimed the lives of children as the armed counter-insurgency scaled up its efforts to destabilize the Castro regime.²²²

As internal and external opposition intensified, revolutionary media sought to discredit the anti-Castro movement in emotionally charged newspaper articles and

²²² “Asesinado un Niño por un Grupo Contrarevolucionario,” *Revolución*, December 12, 1960, 1, 8; “Grave el Niño Balaceado por Esbirros en el Avión,” *Revolución*, October 31, 1960, 1, 8; “Ante el Brutal Acto de Flogar,” *Revolución*, December 28, 1960, 1, 12.

photographs of children injured in counter-revolutionary acts of terror, mobilizing support against counterrevolutionary insurgency, which had begun shortly after Castro's M-26-7 movement took power. Political cartoons depicted insurgent Cubans as war criminals who targeted women and children and showed brave Cuban children resisting their attacks and sabotage campaigns.²²³ Fearing for their children's lives and for the security of their entire families, parents began to seek ways of removing them from the island before they were wounded, imprisoned, or killed. Many of them turned to the Church for assistance in securing visa waivers to send their sons and daughters to Miami, where they joined the growing stream of unaccompanied children being cared for by Catholic welfare workers and exile volunteers, themselves members of a refugee community that had swelled to more than 80,000 by the end of the year.²²⁴

1961: Año de la Educación

On New Year's Eve, Fidel Castro and members of the revolutionary government joined with 10,000 teachers and 1,000 foreign guests gathered at the Ciudad Libertad school city, former site of the Columbia fortress prison, for dinner, dancing and celebrations to welcome 1961, the Year of Education. Castro addressed the audience,

²²³ See *Bohemia*, November 8, 1959; and *Revolución*, November 1, 1960.

²²⁴ The Pedro Pan airlifts, the massive exodus of more than 14,000 unaccompanied children from Cuba to the United States during the first three years of Revolution, began in late fall 1960, originally as a program to relocate children of counterrevolutionaries to the United States. At first a response to counterinsurgent parents' demands that their children be safely removed from Cuba, the program swelled to unprecedented numbers in response to the *Patria Potestad* rumors that emerged in fall 1960, and then again in the days following the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion and Castro's declaration of the Socialist Revolution. See Bryan O. Walsh, "Cuban Refugee Children," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* (Jul-Oct 1971): 384; and Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 58.

offering a summary of the Revolution's accomplishments in the field of education during its two years in power, and of the work still to come. Since 1959, he noted, the revolutionary government's initiatives had trained 33,000 new teachers, a 30 percent increase; all of the nation's largest forts and prisons had successfully been converted into educational facilities, and 40,000 children now studied in former military encampments.

In the year to come, Castro continued, the Revolution would embark upon an even-more ambitious program of school construction and teacher training, expand early childhood education through the creation of 300 *círculos infantiles*, and embark upon a massive literacy campaign, at the end of which he promised no illiterate person would be found in Cuba.²²⁵ In order to empower Cubans of all ages to give their full energy to accomplishing this goal, the school year would be closed early, in May, mobilizing teachers and students from sixth grade and above to participate as volunteer literacy instructors. Utilizing militaristic language to describe this massive educational effort, Castro concluded that "In the same way that we have organized the National Militias, so will we organize the Army of Education."

²²⁵ "Discurso Pronunciado en el Acto de Clausura de la Plenaria Nacional de Secretarios Generales de Sindicatos sobre los Círculos Sociales Obreros y Círculos Infantiles," *Revolución*, December 17, 1960. On February 7, 1961, the first three *Círculos Infantiles* in Havana were inaugurated, in El Pontón (Nueva del Pilar y Manglar), Poey (Arroyo Apolo), and the barrio of Las Yaguas (Luyanó). The act celebrating the opening of these new early childhood educational centers was attended by Vilma Espín, president of the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*. Photographs of a smiling Espín kissing and cuddling the toddlers who would be enrolled in these centers appeared the next day on the front page of *Revolución*; however, in spite of the priority the government placed on the *Círculos Infantiles* as part of the broader goals of the Year of Education, neither Fidel Castro, nor President Dorticós, nor Education Minister Armando Hart were in attendance at the ceremonies. Given their frequent and visible presence at the opening of primary, middle and high schools, especially those in converted prisons or military forts, this absence is all the more striking and speaks to continuing gendered assumptions about the care and education of the youngest children, still apparently seen as "women's work." *Revolución*, February 8, 1961, 1.

Castro's next comments, however, made clear that the goals of the Year of Education were not strictly limited to improving access to learning for Cubans, but rather would serve the Revolution's broader political goals—including its defense against international detractors and a growing Counter-Revolution. Criticizing Latin American nations that had succumbed to US pressure to break relations with Cuba, he offered the just-announced initiatives of the Year of Education as evidence of the Revolution's moral virtue and contrasted its ambitions in the areas of schooling and childcare with the neglect of these areas by other regional governments. "To those submissive leaders who break relations with us, that wish to proscribe us from this continent, in the third year of the Revolution in Cuba, Year of Education, we ask them: when are you going to send teachers to the countryside? When are they going to send teachers to the people in Peru, for example?"²²⁶

The Castro government also began to insist upon teachers' obligation to promote both the functional education and ideological formation of the island's children, thereby resisting counter-revolutionary efforts to turn young people against the Revolution. A new mass teacher's organization was founded, the *Frente Revolucionario de Profesores Secundarios*; seen as a first step towards the integration of teachers at all educational levels into the service of the Revolution, the *Frente* membership vowed to make use of the island's classrooms to promote revolutionary laws and initiatives, especially the new Educational Reform Law.²²⁷ The organization's first public act took place on February 6,

²²⁶ *Revolución*, January 2, 1961, 2.

²²⁷ "En Manos de los Profesores, Como en las Manos del Pueblo, está el Porvenir de la Revolución," *Revolución*, February 6, 1961, 6.

when more than 8,000 secondary school teachers responded to their call to attend a mass meeting at Havana's Palacio de los Trabajadores Theatre. Education Minister Armando Hart addressed the crowd first, inviting the teachers to "meditate deeply upon the Revolution." Educators, he said, were the people most obligated to understand it, since their work with future generations held the key to "the correct development of the social form" of the nation. To those who were against the direction of the Revolution, he issued a warning: think seriously.

That minority of teachers that take an open counter-revolutionary attitude are invited to rectify their ways, or to leave if they are incapable of analyzing, of displaying reason...those who oppose the educational progress that is taking place today, are opposed to social progress and to the Revolution. Those who think in this way no longer have a place in our fatherland. And the moment is passing during which the Revolution will wait for those stragglers and vacillators...²²⁸

Speaking specifically to the persistence of counter-revolutionary activity in the island's Catholic schools, Hart insisted that while the Revolution had been "respectful of all religious ideas," it was nonetheless inevitable that the growth of public education was threatening the future of Cuban private schools. This was the true cause of protest and dissent among Catholic educators who, Hart insisted, sought to create disorder and to "poison" children with "ideas contrary to those their parents defend, contrary to all those who were working to create a society founded in virtue, in efficiency, in work." Railing against clergy and lay teachers in private schools, he condemned them:

Cowards, those that never preoccupied themselves with creating classrooms in the mountains; that lived off of the rich, that lived off of vice, because now we know how the Cuban oligarchs lived, surrendered to bacannalia and immoralities...now that civilized, educated norms prevail,

²²⁸ *Revolución*, February 6, 1961, 6.

now those private schools begin to try to confuse our young people and adolescents. When in those private Catholic schools did they conspire against Batista? When did those private Catholic schools protest the corruption of the last few years in the Ministry of Education? They protest today when eleven thousand classrooms have been created, when legions of volunteer teachers invade the mountains to teach peasants to read and write, they protest now when a government and a Revolution has conceded such importance to education that they designate an entire year as “Year of Education.” They are materialists, vulgar and avaricious...”

In contrast, he said, “a Revolution in two years has resolved the problem of children without schools, and that confronts in one year the problem of illiteracy, is a Revolution with morals and with strength to flatten its enemies.”

Those enemies, Hart made clear, were using the island’s schools as a hiding place and a site to launch their attacks on the Revolution. Frustrated by the failure of their sabotage and propaganda campaigns, “The counter-revolution has selected teachers and education in order to realize its criminal work...inaugurating in these days a new era of counter-revolutionary agitation that wants to have its headquarters in the schools of our country.” However, he continued, the Revolution’s supporters would fight back. Just as rebel soldiers had gone to the trenches in combat for the Revolution, teachers would now be called upon “to occupy, in the schools, together with the students, the trenches and the positions of combat in the Revolution, and you will have to occupy them because you must defend the Revolution.” His statements made clear that there was no longer room for vacillation, reservations—or even political neutrality—among Cuban educators.

President Dorticós then addressed the meeting, emphasizing the importance of children to the destiny of the nation and presenting Cuban teachers with two stark alternatives: “Either exercise the profession, in strict adherence with the high historical duty to serve the fatherland, the Revolution, and the future generations, or turn one’s

back on this inexorable mandate of history, and betray the Revolution, the future generations, and the fatherland itself.” In concluding remarks, the chair of the *Frente*, Antonio M. Maicas, announced the decision of the island’s secondary school teachers to cooperate with the Literacy Campaign, as well as to “integrate their obligations with the homeland” into their teaching responsibilities by demonstrating solidarity with the agricultural and industrial reform projects of the Revolution.²²⁹

Revolutionary leaders thus saw the diverse programs to be launched during the Year of Education as part of a broader effort to suppress counter-revolutionary activity on the island. At a February 21 meeting of the Havana chapter of the Association of Rebel Youth, Armando Hart again spoke about the Counter-Revolution’s struggle to control Cuban schools and through them, the minds of children and youth, predicting the rapid demise of private education on the island. Denying that the Church or its schools had been victims of harassment or repression, Hart insisted that “the policy of the Revolutionary Government has been principally to raise the prestige of the public school without interfering in the interests of the private schools.” Nonetheless, he continued, “within three or four years private education will begin to die a natural death, as a result of the growth of the national school, and for this reason they are attempting to create an artificial death by provoking conflict with the Revolutionary Government.”

Identifying the conservatism of private educators as one of the most serious threats to the future of the revolutionary project, Hart nonetheless reassured his Rebel Youth audience that the Revolution would prevail against all forces that attacked it. “If

²²⁹ *Revolución*, February 6, 1961, 6.

this Revolution was capable of facing and defeating a powerful professional army, if it faced and defeated economic threats,” he asked, “how is it going to be afraid to confront the problems created by a few private school leaders?” Even though “the criminals in cassocks are deforming the conscience of children of six and seven years, turning them against us...the Cuban people know that heaven is the glory of our Revolution.” In conclusion, he reassured Havana’s Rebel Youth that “this year the Revolution will launch the definitive battle against reactionary forces in the field of education,” with the goal of producing “the most revolutionary generation in the Americas, the first great generation, product of this marvelous Revolution.”²³⁰

The combative terms in which the nation’s leadership framed the Year of Education made clear to Cuban teachers, clergy and parents, already frightened by the direction of revolutionary educational policy, that the Castro government intended to intensify its ideological interventions in the lives of their children.²³¹ Negotiation and even political neutrality became less and less feasible options for those who opposed the radicalization of their society. As the island’s population became daily more polarized—one sector more fervent in their support of the Revolution, the other in support of the growing counter-revolutionary movement, the Catholic Church, and the United States—the rhetoric being produced and distributed by both sides grew more strident, and counter-revolutionary violence continued to increase.

²³⁰ *Revolución*, February 28, 1961, 12.

²³¹ See Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba, Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 358-359.

Acts of sabotage, armed attacks, and skirmishes with revolutionary forces wounded and even claimed the lives of children. On January 9, 1961, an attack on the village of Río Blanco in San Antonio de las Vegas led to the shooting death of eleven year old Leopoldo Martínez Rodríguez—and was promptly announced in the media and attributed to US agents.²³² The increasing militance of the counter-revolutionary movement also spilled over into the schools, where conflicts between the Revolution's supporters and detractors also deteriorated into violence. On February 28th, the Nobel Academy in the Havana neighborhood of La Víbora was partially destroyed by a dynamite bomb that blew up the school's bathrooms, knocked down the walls of two classrooms, and caused multiple injuries to students. Among the eight students seriously wounded, María Eugenia Echániz, sixteen years old, and Olga Valdés Díaz, seventeen years old, required surgery to extract shrapnel from their faces, necks and arms; in spite of the best efforts of the surgical team, Echániz lost her left eye.

Two Nobel Academy students, Roberto del Castillo Fernández, sixteen years old, and Adrián Sánchez del Castillo, eighteen years old, were later charged with the attack. According to the media, both boys were members of a counter-revolutionary students' group that met at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in La Vibora, and had previously caused disturbances at the school, tearing down pictures of revolutionary figures from classroom walls, attacking pro-Castro students with bottles, and provoking a brawl with classmates

²³² "Criminal Atentado en Pinar del Río: Lesionados 26 Niños," *Revolución*, May 29, 1961, 1, 6; "El Oro Yanqui Paga a las Manos Criminales," *Bohemia*, June 4, 1961, 66-67.

who were supporters of the Revolution.²³³ Condemning the attacks on March 4th, Castro again charged Catholic teachers of aiding the Counter-Revolution, accusing them of assisting those that “want to bloody our country” and “murder children.” He warned them that the nation would stand against this alliance between the Church and counterrevolutionaries, because “the people know that it could be their child that is killed by a bomb, or who loses their arms or is blinded.”²³⁴ To further guarantee the safety of schoolchildren and to prevent their exposure to counter-revolutionary propaganda, by the end of February the Association of Rebel Youth had established delegations in almost all schools, public and private, with the purpose of monitoring both the attitudes and behaviors of students and the revolutionary commitment of teachers.²³⁵

Teachers thus found themselves compelled, whether by conviction or circumstance, to participate in the initiatives of the Year of Education. Among the first tasks set was the strengthening of ideological content in school curricula and ensuring students’ adherence to it. Revolutionary consciousness was developed through new textbooks, pictures, and slogans, as well as through the names given to new schools in honor of anti-Batista insurgents, rebel soldiers and increasingly, international socialist figures. New educational materials taught young Cubans to think of their lives as infused with revolutionary meaning and instructed them in the Revolution’s history, its values and initiatives, and in identifying its enemies. An essential component of this growing

²³³ Extensive coverage of the school bombing appeared in the Revolutionary press, including “Cómo Fue el Crimen,” *Verde Olivo*, March 12, 1961; *Bohemia*, March 5, 1961, 73; *Verde Olivo*, March 19, 1961, 72-73; and *Hoy*, March 1, 1961.

²³⁴ Speech by Fidel Castro, March 4, 1961; reprinted in *Verde Olivo*, March 19, 1961, 42-43.

²³⁵ *Revolución*, February 27, 1961, 7.

emphasis on ideological education was the strengthening of reverence for Fidel Castro and his increasingly personalistic and authoritarian leadership. While Fidel-worship was partly a spontaneous phenomenon, by 1961 it was institutionalized in new public school curricula and methodologies that consistently linked the leader and his agenda to the fate of the nation's children.

Teachers encouraged children to praise and express affection for Castro in essay, poetry and letter-writing assignments that were then frequently published by the revolutionary media. A special issue of *Bohemia*, dedicated to children, featured a number of these compositions, including a letter from a nine year old girl named Albita. In an expression of girlish hero worship, she asked the *comandante-en-jefe* to send her an autographed photo as a Three Kings Day gift; it could be a small photograph, she wrote, as long as it was “dedicated to me in your own handwriting.” Reflecting an awareness of politics at least partially attributable to new revolutionary curricula, she also warned Castro to “close well your shirt so that you won’t get shot by one of those bad people that set bombs and that don’t like the Revolution. I know this will make you feel very hot but it’s better that you be hot than die.”

An editorial comment responded approvingly to Albita’s admonishment that the *comandante-en-jefe* take care to protect himself from counter-revolutionary attacks:

As for your words to Fidel, the ineffable warning that he take care of himself, closing the olive green collar of his shirt so that he isn’t wounded by mercenary bullets and they steal him from you and all Cuban children that represent the best of the Homeland—I have something to say as well: It’s your right, demand this of him! That he takes care of himself in order to care for you, Albita! Write and write; don’t let your little hand get tired of forming letters for him. I know that he will read them. And Fidel will have to listen to your constant, firm, energetic demand, the order that comes from your young soul, that now has security to grow freely and

respected upon the soil of its country. You are the living history to which Fidel will have to respond and which he will have to watch over!²³⁶

Encouraging children to identify emotionally with Fidel Castro, teachers and journalists alike thus contributed to the ideological formation of young people and encouraged Cubans of all ages to see themselves as “children of Fidel” and to invest their hopes and dreams for the future in him.

An equally important component of children’s ideological education was the new emphasis on class-based interpretations of Cuban history, its relationship with the United States, and its new Revolution. After the severing of US-Cuban diplomatic relations in January, and as fears of an exile invasion became more likely, classroom teachers increased anti-American messages and new texts were issued to instruct students in the basics of dialectical materialism, class struggle, and proletarian solidarity. These teachings were in line with the broader radicalization of the Revolution and the nation’s ever-closer ties to the Soviet Union, both of which were transforming Cuban society and remaking the terms of debate about the nation’s destiny. Though the Revolution’s turn toward socialism had not yet been openly acknowledged, the political and economic transformation of the nation, not to mention the content of children’s education, left little doubt as to the course that Fidel Castro’s government had adopted.

By the end of March 1961, Castro’s addresses to children had drawn clear and antagonistic lines between young people who had demonstrated their active support for the Revolution, and those who were unsure or opposed it. While the Revolution had

²³⁶ *Bohemia*, January 8, 1961.

initially been proclaimed as “for the children,” of Cuba, Castro now made clear that the island was engaged in a war between classes in which the nation’s youngest citizens were deeply implicated. At a speech given to the First Student Plenary of the Association of Rebel Youth on March 27th, Castro explained to his young followers why political divisions among children and youth were an inevitable consequence of the Revolution. During a social revolution, he stated, it was logical that those students who came from the “rich classes” would be against the revolutionary regime, as a consequence of their education and the influence of their elders, who resented the disruption of their comfortable lives.

Ignoring the substantial support his own M-26 movement had received from middle class Catholic youth organizations, Castro insisted that during the fight against Batista, “opposition to the government did not come fundamentally from centers of private education.” Among middle class youth, he insisted—in blatant disregard for the historical record—support for Batista was the norm, and “conformity reigned and order was the first priority,” because “those governments didn’t affect the interests of the families those students came from.” In fact, he continued,

The revolutionary struggle between classes can be observed, especially, in the attitude of private school students...where traditionally the children of the richest families went...today this is where the counterrevolutionary movements are born...many of those young people, coming from wealthy families, could be saved for the Revolution and for the fatherland, in spite of the resentments of the social classes from which they come; except that to this resentment is added the factor of the intellectual and spiritual accomplices of this exploiting class...they dedicate themselves to inculcating these young people with hatred for the Revolution, hatred for

the fatherland, and fondness for special interests and foreign domination of our country.²³⁷

However, in spite of Castro's efforts to paint division among young people in terms of an inevitable class struggle, the reality was more complex. Many of the incidents of political confrontation and violence involving young people took place between private school students—both supporters and detractors of the Revolution—and the majority were from the middle and upper classes.

Pro- and anti-Castro children and parents clashed with one another in the classrooms and corridors on the island's most exclusive private schools. On April 11th, a group of students at Havana's prestigious La Salle High School gathered on the patio to demonstrate their support for the Revolution; when they were expelled, a group of students and parents gathered that afternoon outside the school to demand justice for the young revolutionaries.²³⁸ Politicized middle class children also participated in state-sponsored meetings and rallies, where their differences in opinion occasionally degenerated into fistfights. On March 10th, a meeting was organized by the Federation of University Youth and the Association of Rebel Youth to promote the literacy campaign and the integration of middle and high school students into the Conrado Benitez Brigades.²³⁹ Held at the Children's Theatre in Holguín, the meeting was disturbed by

²³⁷ Torreira Crespo and Buajasán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*, 51-52.

²³⁸ *Revolución*, April 12, 1961, 8.

²³⁹ The children's literacy brigades were named after the adolescent volunteer teacher who was killed in the Escambray Mountains by counter-revolutionaries on January 5, 1961. In the same way that counter-revolutionaries held up executed student leader Porfirio Ramírez as a martyr to their cause and role model for patriotic children, the Castro government and media offered Conrado Benítez to young people as the symbolic embodiment of the values that inspired the Revolution.

shouting matches between revolutionary students and dissenters from the local Lestonac and Marist Brothers Catholic High Schools. José Antonio Tamargo, also a student at Marist Brothers High School, denounced the dissenters. Returning to the school later that afternoon, Tamargo was attacked and beaten by the students who had earlier interrupted the literacy campaign meeting.

Taking advantage of the opportunity to present Catholic school students as the violent pawns of a reactionary clergy, *Bohemia* reported the attack on Tamargo as an example of “Falangist provocation” against the literacy volunteers. Another article in *Verde Olivo*, titled “In Holguín, Students Confront the Maneuvers of the Falangist Clergy,” featured first-person testimony by Tamargo along with photographs of the adolescent boy lifting his pants to show the bruises left on his legs by his attackers.²⁴⁰ The articles glossed over the fact that the attack was the result of a confrontation between pro- and anti-Castro students, all of whom attended the same private Catholic schools. Incidents like this one suggest that politicized middle class and Catholic students, at least in the early months of 1961, still held a diversity of opinions about the Revolution, and that their opinions were not pre-determined by their class position within Cuban society, as Castro continued to insist.

Nor were children from rural or poor families assumed to possess the revolutionary values and commitment that the government sought to instill in all young people. Indeed, scholarship students who travelled from the countryside to attend new boarding schools were targets of the Year of Education’s most comprehensive ideological

²⁴⁰ *Bohemia*, April 2, 1961, 32-34; and *Verde Olivo*, April 2, 1961, 48-49.

education initiatives. Boarding schools were run with militaristic discipline and, in many cases, staffed by hastily-trained and inexperienced teachers, and relied heavily on rote learning, memorization and drills that encouraged uniformity of thought and expression. Moreover, scholarship students, or *becados*, were frequently housed at school, both for pragmatic reasons—consolidating children from isolated areas in larger central schools was a practical strategy—but children were also deliberately removed from their homes in order to increase the state’s ability to engineer a revolutionary learning environment and “to replace old ideas with new ones in the absence of parental influence.”²⁴¹ These new school construction and scholarship programs were thus a mixed blessing; the Revolution founded programs that offered badly needed educational services to the island’s neediest children while dramatically increasing the state’s access to—and thus opportunities for social control and influence of—of the nation’s youngest citizens.

However, the efficacy of this approach to the ideological education of poor and rural students would rapidly be confirmed by the revolutionary fervor demonstrated by many former *becados*, many of whom graduated from accelerated sixth grade equivalency programs and immediately entered crash teacher-training programs. With so many educated and professional Cubans fleeing the country at the same time that the government had declared its commitment to extending educational opportunities to all Cubans, potential teachers were recruited from among those who had barely finished primary school themselves. Young students, often lacking a high school education, were nonetheless deemed qualified to teach basic skills, literacy and numeracy, and perhaps

²⁴¹ Sutherland, *The Youngest Revolution*, 114.

more importantly, to impart the ideological education that revolutionary leaders considered essential to consolidating the Revolution's control over the nation's youngest citizens.

By the end of 1960, the first primary teacher training program had been established at the Minas del Frío School in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Aspiring teachers, most of them from *campesino* families, usually ranged in age from thirteen to fifteen, though some were as young as eleven; the only requirements for admission to the program were a sixth grade completion certificate and evidence of commitment to the Revolution. Classroom instruction was organized around memorization, drills and collective recitation, and male and female students were dressed alike in militia-style uniforms and boots.

Further accentuating the militaristic tenor of many of the Revolution's new educational programs, teacher training also involved a combination of ideological formation and physical conditioning, seen as necessary for teachers who would go to rural and mountainous areas. Climbing mountains, sleeping in tents and lean-tos and withstanding cold and rain was also envisioned as a way for students to vicariously relive the hardships experienced by rebel soldiers and thus to build identification with their revolutionary project. Before graduating most new teachers climbed the Pico Turquino, in order to retrace the footsteps of Fidel Castro's guerilla journey and develop the virtues of self-sacrifice, discipline and dedication that they were encouraged to associate with the rebel leader.

For pragmatic reasons—the Sierra Maestra Mountains were remote and difficult to reach—students were boarded at the Minas del Frío School. However, boarding was also seen as a way of further developing aspiring teachers’ new revolutionary identities, in order to reduce the influence of parents and community members during this critical period of ideological formation. Children studying at Minas were thus not allowed to leave the school except in case of grave family illness or emergency, though families were permitted to visit on select weekends. Though separation was undoubtedly difficult, for many poor rural families with eight or nine children, sending a child to teacher’s school was not only a way of honoring the Revolution, but also a practical survival strategy; children were sheltered, clothed and fed, reducing the burden of support on parents. Thus early programs to train primary teachers responded to a range of practical exigencies, providing for the well-being of disadvantaged Cuban young people even as they furthered the political goals of the Revolution by fomenting a growing cohort of young militants.

Graduates from the Minas del Frío training program were quickly put into service as teachers in new schools across the Cuban countryside, where they were charged with the intellectual and ideological formation of other children.²⁴² Placing adolescents in charge of their own classrooms helped meet the enormous demand for education in the island’s rural communities; however, the minimal age gap between student and teacher during this period of the Revolution’s radicalization also served to blur the lines between child and adult, making the rite of passage to adulthood as much about the child’s

²⁴² Sutherland, *The Youngest Revolution*, 119.

relationship to the state—and the authority conferred by their assumption of duties to the Revolution—as it was about any psycho-social, cognitive or biological process. Through the training and deployment of children to meet social needs traditionally filled by adults, revolutionary leaders contributed to a process of cultural change in which a new “coming of age” rite, represented by full incorporation into revolutionary citizenship and service, thus began to supercede and even to replace traditional notions and practices of childhood.²⁴³

This early deployment of children in the service of revolutionary educational and political goals foreshadowed their massive mobilization in the Literacy Campaign that would be launched in January 1961. The jewel in the crown of the initiatives launched during the Year of Education, the *Campaña de Alfabetización* also sought to integrate efforts to raise the educational level of all Cubans through literacy instruction with the ideological training of the nation’s citizenry. In this as in all the year’s initiatives, children were a key focus of revolutionary attention. Unfolding within the context of growing fears about a US-backed invasion and the strategic pursuit of military and economic ties with the Soviet Union, the campaign was viewed as a means by which to inculcate both youthful literacy instructors and their pupils in an increasingly radical revolutionary ideology, as well as to serve as a powerful symbolic expression of the

²⁴³ This may have been truer in the case of *becados* and other poor and rural children, for whom the experience of childhood already varied dramatically from that lived by middle class children. Many in the countryside carried heavy responsibilities on family farms and worked for wages well before adolescence, and married and bore children in their early teens. As such, it is inarguable that middle class and urban parents would have been more disturbed by the Revolution’s re-shaping of concepts of childhood and adulthood; nonetheless, new expectations that children would assume revolutionary values and commitments as independent political actors certainly clashed with customs of paternal authority, deference, and family loyalty that were prevalent among Cuban *campesinos*.

Revolution's legitimacy and moral imperative. The planners of the *Campaña* sought to accomplish these goals both through the deployment of actual children and through the politically and emotionally charged discourses and images of young literacy volunteers produced for public consumption.

The Castro government quickly put already-politicized young people to work mobilizing Cuban children to participate in the Literacy Campaign. On February 26th, Aldo Alvarez, director of the National Executive Commission of the Rebel Youth, gave a presentation on "Cuban Youth and the Year of Education" on the *Televisión-Revolución* program "People's University." He spoke to the task that had been placed in the hands of the Rebel Youth: the recruitment of 100,000 young literacy volunteers, a work that AJR representatives in schools across the island had enthusiastically given themselves to. He stated that thousands of Cuban children had already volunteered for the program; indeed, a pilot brigade of youth literacy instructors, comprised of 236 volunteers of both sexes, had left Havana that day, charged with establishing guidelines for the work of literacy education. They had been designated the first troops of the "Conrado Benítez Literacy Army," and would later be designated the senior staff of that army. A similar advanced party of 130 literacy volunteers had been established in Las Villas for the same purpose.²⁴⁴

A camp had already been established in the pine forests of Mayarí, in the Sierra Cristal, where young illiterate rebels that had served in the Sierra Maestra were being taught to read and write by fifty volunteer instructors. Fifty thousand portable

²⁴⁴ "Ha Conquistador el Derecho a la Educación la Juventud," *Revolución*, February 27, 1961, 7.

blackboards had been constructed by the AJR, and the revolutionary government pledged to provide 40,000 more. Young literacy workers also enjoyed the support, moral and material, of socialist youth around the world. The World Federation of Youth pledged to donate a million pencils and other scholastic supplies; and the Soviet Youth promised to pay for the construction of a school in the Sierra del Escambray, in the counter-revolutionary stronghold. To further motivate young people to participate in the campaign, Alvarez announced that a “*Semana de la Juventud*” would be celebrated across the island from April 22nd to April 28th, and a grand party for children and youth would be held on opening day on Havana’s Prado. A number of scholarships would also be made available for Cuban young people to study in Havana schools as well as to pursue technical training in the Soviet Union.

Alvarez contrasted the self-abnegation of the first literacy volunteers, and the widespread enthusiasm of the Cuban people for the campaign, with the “counter-revolutionary” attitude of the administrative leadership of “numerous private schools.” Schools controlled by the “falangist clergy,” he stated, had “repeatedly refused to cooperate in the “literacy crusade,” insisting that “they couldn’t interrupt classes for this patriotic work.” He also noted that some private schools were demanding that parents pay tuition for students who had volunteered to spend up to eight months out of classes to participate in the campaign. However, resistance to the Literacy Campaign was not limited to private school teachers and clergy; even during this preliminary stage, many parents had expressed reservations about allowing their children to participate. Responding to the widely-disseminated *Patria Potestad* rumors as well as complaints that the revolutionary government was trying to separate children from their parents by

sending them to do volunteer service away from their homes, Alvarez insisted that the parents of the literacy *brigadistas* had not only authorized their participation; many of them had also revealed their own revolutionary zeal by volunteering to serve as literacy instructors themselves. He also stressed that every youth volunteer needed to be at least thirteen years old and have passed the sixth grade.²⁴⁵

Alvarez's comments suggest an unspoken reality: that literacy volunteers were primarily from middle class and urban homes, since most rural and working class children had not attained a sixth grade education. As such, early opposition to the Literacy Campaign among middle class parents was inevitable, given that it struck at the heart of the sector of the population in which opposition to the Revolution could most commonly be found. The revolutionary leadership nonetheless prioritized the mobilization of middle class youth, seeking through them to advance both the educational and political goals that animated the campaign and the other programs of the Year of Education. These relatively well-educated children and youth not only represented great practical value as literacy volunteers; healthy, well-groomed middle class youth volunteers would also travel across the island, cooperating in the literacy campaign and "representing the Revolution," embodying exactly the kind of image the Revolution sought to project. If they could be convinced to participate, these fresh-faced, enthusiastic, and well-mannered young people would reinforce in a powerful way the associations that the media had worked so hard to establish between the Revolution and the virtues of youth. Of equal importance were the political dividends to be gained by

²⁴⁵ *Revolución*, February 27, 1961, 7.

removing these children from potentially counter-revolutionary homes and exposing them to positive interpretations of the Revolution.

Reflecting on the intertwined educational and political goals of the literacy campaign, an FMC representative stated that the literacy campaign “constituted...a vital learning opportunity for the literacy instructors themselves, many of them young people and even children.”²⁴⁶ Revolutionary leaders sent youthful *alfabetizadores* to live, work and study with Cuban *campesino* families not only in order to increase the educational levels of rural populations, but to expose them to the difficult conditions outside the capital city. This exposure, it was hoped, would help young Cubans to develop a sense of solidarity with the less fortunate, and “especially for those who had lived a comfortable life in the cities,” provide an opportunity to learn to adapt to the difficult realities of peasant life. In facing and overcoming hardship, children and youth would also have the opportunity to demonstrate that they were “truly young revolutionaries, adaptable to the way of living in which they will need to pursue their activities in favor of the people.” The fact that volunteers’ work was framed in these sacrificial terms and the initiative itself alternately referred to as a “battle” and a “crusade,” firmly established the Literacy Campaign as the greatest-yet expression of the quasi-religious and moral imperatives of the Revolution. For many privileged children, raised to respect the Catholic Lenten traditions of fasting and repentance, participation in the campaign offered a way to share

²⁴⁶ Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, *Nada Hay Más Importante*, 84.

in the suffering of the nation's rebel redeemers and to be reborn with them and with their island.²⁴⁷

The planners of the Literacy Campaign thus imagined it as a way to increase educational levels on the island while transforming the political worldviews and loyalties of both volunteers and their students. Accordingly, pedagogical materials used by *alfabetizadores* contained a strong ideological component, designed to reinforce socialist values in both the teacher and the taught.²⁴⁸ Even before April 1961, when Fidel Castro acknowledged the socialist transformation of the Revolution, the Literacy Campaign had become an important tool for instilling revolutionary *conciencia* in an illiterate peasantry and among relatively well-educated Cuban young people, providing many children and adolescents with ideological training for citizenship in a new socialist nation.

The state-sponsored media had also quickly recognized the symbolic power of young *alfabetizadores* and their value in mobilizing support for the revolutionary government, even among those who chose not to participate in the Literacy Campaign. Images of the youngest *alfabetizadores* possessed a strong normative power and encouraged the association of the Revolution with youthful virtue. Shortly after the start of the campaign, magazines began to publish photographs and articles praising these

²⁴⁷ *Revolución*, February 27, 1961, 7.

²⁴⁸ The literacy manual *Alfabeticemos* contained a series of short lessons that associated different letters of the alphabet with the names of different revolutionary figures, and short readings entitled, "Fidel is our Leader," "Nationalization," "The Revolution Turns Prisons into Schools," "Friends and Enemies," "Imperialism," and "The Revolution Wins All Battles." To complete the program, students were required to write a thank you letter to Fidel Castro, again reinforcing one of the key ideological precepts of the Year of Education: that Fidel was benevolent father to Cuban children of all ages, who should identify personally with their leader and invest their hopes for the nation in him. See *Alfabeticemos* (Havana: Imprenta Nacional de Cuba, 1961).

volunteers. One such image, of a boot-clad girl resting in a hammock, was accompanied by a caption that read: “Still just a ‘squirt,’ this young teacher, conscious of her patriotic duties, has renounced the diversions of adolescence to join the legions of rural educators. A genuine product of the Revolution.”



Figure 11: Photograph, girl in a hammock²⁴⁹

The symbolic figure of the youthful *alfabetizador*—not to mention their actual bodies—could also be deployed in the fight against the Revolution's enemies. Many

²⁴⁹ *Revolución*, February 1, 1961.

literacy volunteers worked in the Sierra Escambray, which was the second largest mountain stronghold on the island and the center of counter-revolutionary armed insurgency, and a small number fell victim to the violence that plagued the area. How many of these young people also fought with local militias or participated in surveillance or intelligence gathering activities is unknown; however, their presence alone may have served to inhibit counter-revolutionary attacks in the region, since the propaganda value of young wounded literacy volunteers was enormously beneficial to the Revolution and in discrediting those that struggled against it.²⁵⁰

By calling for and celebrating the participation of children in the Literacy Campaign, the revolutionary government consolidated its new vision of the child as political actor and initiated a new relationship between the child and the state. The correct place for children would no longer be the domestic sphere; children could, and would be, expected to assume a productive role as citizens in the project of building a new Cuba. However, not all Cubans celebrated this re-envisioning of childhood or saw children's activism as evidence of the Revolution's virtue. In fact, youth participation in the Literacy Campaign and the new understanding of the role of the child in Cuban society that it reflected further alienated many Cuban middle class parents from the revolutionary regime.

The mass mobilization of children as literacy volunteers clashed with traditional middle class notions of childhood as a protected, private space, and in particular, threatened gender norms that required the strict supervision of Cuban girls whenever

²⁵⁰ Sutherland, *The Youngest Revolution*, 36.

outside the home. Many parents were frightened by the thought of their children living in intimate proximity to peasant families in their small, poorly equipped and unsanitary *bohíos*, or worried that they would be housed in co-ed dormitories under the care of state officials. Many feared the possibility of illness or injury and the increased opportunities for unsupervised contact with adolescents of the opposite sex that might lead to loss of virginity or pregnancy. Continued counter-revolutionary propaganda played upon these fears, generating a strong backlash against the Literacy Campaign among some Cuban parents, in spite of the fact that government officials insisted that it was a voluntary program, and that all participants needed to have the permission of their parents in order to become an *alfabetizador*.²⁵¹

In conjunction with other new policies and programs directed towards children and the state's continuing interventions into the realms of education and family life, the Literacy Campaign represented yet another threat to the practices and understandings and practices of childhood of many urban, middle and upper class and Catholic Cubans. The media-celebrated journey of young *alfabetizadores* into the countryside, envisioned as a means of consolidating the Castro government's political control over the nation, thus also produced at least one unintended consequence: their concerted efforts to incorporate privileged children into the campaign and to thereby secure their ideological commitment to the Revolution also worked, ironically, to spur on support for the Counter-Revolution and to accelerate the exodus of middle class families and children from the island.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Torreira Crespo and Buajásán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*, 42.

²⁵² I view the travels of youth through the 1961 literacy campaign and the Pedro Pan airlifts as parallel "nation-building journeys" which would become essential to the narrative constructions of the "Two

The distance between the Revolution's devotees and its detractors continued to grow as a result of the state's efforts to increase its influence in the lives of the nation's children—as well as to secure their labor in service of the Revolution—through the creation of child-centered mass organizations like the *Pionero* league. Originally created as a children's auxiliary to the island's socialist party in the 1930s, the organization was reborn on April 4, 1961 as the Union of Rebel Pioneers. Pioneer leaders sought to convert the organization into a national association in the first years of its existence. Massive enrollment and public relations campaigns were mounted, exhorting children aged six through fourteen to join the movement. Magazines printed pictures of Fidel surrounded by smiling pioneers, wearing their signature blue kerchief over his fatigues. Pioneer leaders and members of other mass organizations knocked on doors to invite, and often pressure, parents to enroll their children in the club.

The magazine *Pionero*, also launched in 1961, was the second revolutionary publication to go to press. Its editorial staff modeled the magazine after similar publications in other socialist countries. With an initial monthly circulation of 80,000 copies, the *Pionero* was first distributed through the children's organization and as a supplement to the socialist newspaper *Hoy*. The magazine included fiction and comics as well as articles on varied topics of interest to children, all with a heavily ideological

Cubas." The role of narrative and collective memory in establishing a new revolutionary identity on the island, as well as the exile identity of the Miami community, will be a key focus of my future research. On narrative, memory and identity, see Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever*; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994); Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and DeRojas, "La *Cubanía* in Exile," 179-204. For discussion of the ways that narratives of Cuban exile community identity differ from those of Nicaraguan migrants who fled to Miami in the 1980s after the Sandinista Revolution, see Fernández-Kelly and Curran, "Voices Lost, Voices Found," 127-156.

focus. Director Ricardo Pampín stated that one of the magazine's "fundamental objectives" was to "aid in the integral formation of the child," including but not limited to their political formation:

In one sense this was political—but not just political, because a complete person can't be only political. Within this context, we try to give (the Pioneers) a sense of history, a sense of internationalism, a hatred of imperialism—remember, Che talked about how hatred for the enemy is as important as love. Love for peace includes a hatred of the enemy of the people. But because the formation isn't just political, we also want to have literature, science, art... We see the magazine as an organizer, a vehicle to help create all these ideas and attitudes in children.²⁵³

The cartoon format of *Pionero* made the magazine very popular among young readers. New comic strips dealt with the history of Cuban and Latin American struggles for independence, while short stories highlighted the lives of well-known figures in the international communist movement. *Pionero* also included community and national news, as well as editorial pieces urging children to care for social property and conserve scarce energy resources. Through Pioneer activities and publications alike, Cuban children received first-hand exposure to the revolutionary notions that were re-creating the society into which they had been born.

Following the April Bay of Pigs invasion, after which Castro declared himself a Marxist-Leninist, the children's movement adopted a new slogan: "Pioneers for Socialism, Always Prepared!" The re-conceived organization quickly assumed responsibility for transmitting the nation's official socialist ideology to Cuban children. Pioneers were also urged to press their family members to define their own commitment to the socialist Revolution. Perhaps as a result, many Cuban parents thought long and

²⁵³ Wald, *Children of Che*, 211-212.

hard before allowing their children to join a now openly communist organization. Some who had already become disaffected with the Castro regime nonetheless hesitantly allowed their children to become Pioneers, often doing so only to avoid drawing unwanted attention to their lack of revolutionary fervor, or to protect their children from social isolation. In such cases, impressionable children brought revolutionary rhetoric and concepts learned at Pioneer meetings back into their homes, and urged their parents to adopt socialist attitudes and behaviors. Pioneer leaders, far from being unaware of the movement's ideological value, encouraged children to exert political pressure on their parents. According to a former leader of the organization, there were

Many interesting experiences of children who have transformed the conduct of their parents. For instance, a doctor was planning to leave the country, and his son was a Pioneer...when it came time for them to leave, the son told his father that he was a Pioneer, and that Pioneers don't betray their country. The decision was made by the child; the father stayed. This is perhaps one of the exceptional cases—but by no means the only one—that demonstrates how the child's interrelationship with the organization affects the parents.²⁵⁴

By encouraging its members to influence their families politically, the children's organization contributed to the transformation of parent-child relationships in Cuba. Pre-revolutionary children were taught to defer to their elders; Pioneers, on the other hand, were trained to actively promote and defend the values and actions of the new socialist regime, even if—*especially* if—they went against home teachings. This training encouraged children to think of themselves as politically autonomous individuals, no longer accountable to their parents for their beliefs; it also demanded loyalty to the Revolution above and beyond family ties. Children who joined the Pioneers thus

²⁵⁴ Wald, *Children of Che*, 186.

sometimes found themselves caught between the competing values and expectations of two mutually hostile institutions, struggling to reconcile their familial identity with their membership in the children's organization.

During and after the exile-led Bay of Pigs invasion, the Revolution's demands on Pioneers and members of other children's and youth organizations became even more rigorous. On April 17th, 900 cadets from a military school were mobilized to repel the attack at Playa Larga; more than half of the cadets were reported killed before Castro's army took the beach the following day. Armed *milicianos* as young as thirteen years of age were also pressed into service to defend the *patria*, participating in raids, making arrests, and guarding prisoner's camps. The pressure may have been too much for at least some of these adolescents; on several occasions, young *milicianos* fired on crowds with their machine guns, wounding and killing at least three young men.²⁵⁵ Moreover, during the police crackdowns leading up to and following the invasion, children were also organized through the new neighborhood Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), and were urged to report suspected counterrevolutionary behavior occurring in their communities and homes.²⁵⁶

In the jubilant days following the failed attack, tensions between the revolutionary government and the Catholic Church reached an all-time high, aggravated by the presence of three Catholic priests and many young members of Catholic Action and the Catholic Student Association (ACU) among the exile force. The involvement of young

²⁵⁵ "We Who Tried," *Life*, May 10, 1963, 69.

²⁵⁶ Bunck, *Fidel Castro and Revolutionary Culture*.

Cubans in the attack further confirmed the Castro government's fear that a reactionary Church still exercised control over a significant proportion of the island's children and youth.²⁵⁷ The time had come to strike a definitive blow against counter-revolutionary private school educators and clergy, whose pernicious influence on the island's children could no longer be allowed to impede the Revolution's march toward socialism.

On May 1st, Fidel Castro announced the promulgation of a new socialist constitution. Declaring that "a new world required a new school," he also announced the nationalization of private schools and stated that all foreign Catholic priests remaining in the country, whose efforts to induct young people into counterrevolutionary violence and terrorism had been proven, would be expelled. This decree affected an extensive network of Catholic educational institutions, including 132 primary schools, 52 secondary schools, and 11 boarding schools. The Sisters of Charity, who had run the National Orphanage since its foundation under Bishop Jerónimo Valdez during the colonial era, were also expelled, and the orphanage was placed under revolutionary management.²⁵⁸ At the same time, private protestant and secular schools were also nationalized, concentrating control of the island's educational system exclusively in hands of the state.

In the months following the declaration of the socialist Revolution and the nationalization of Cuban private schools, the number of children being sent unaccompanied to the United States skyrocketed. As the demand for visa waivers and airline tickets grew, and the Castro regime cracked down on the exit of unaccompanied

²⁵⁷ Torreira Crespo and Buajasán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*, 60-61.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

minors, the original network of Catholic clergy, private school educators, and private citizens involved in spiriting the children out of Cuba expanded to include collaborators in the embassies of Holland, Belgium, Japan, Switzerland, and Spain, and counted on the assistance of the staff from several commercial air transport companies, most prominently from Holland's KLM Airlines. As more and more parents from progressively lower social origins sought a way out for their children, they increasingly relied on a support network that included members of the working classes as well, including gardeners, kitchen employees, bartenders and waiters who provided intelligence and hid and transported travel documents.²⁵⁹ In spite of this support, the majority of the children removed from Cuba were middle class, while the working classes opted to remain with their families on the island, a decision stemming either from their support for the Revolution or from the lack of resources that might make their exit possible.

Those who remained on the island enrolled in the newly nationalized schools for the academic term beginning in the autumn of 1961. No longer faced with ideological competition from private and Catholic schools, the Castro government increased efforts to remake the educational system in the service of the Revolution. These efforts rested on the belief that the education of the new generation was the key to the island's transformation into a socialist nation; perhaps even more important than revolutionizing relations of production would be the drive to remake the ideology, customs, and culture of the island, a project which would pay its greatest dividends among the island's youth.

²⁵⁹ Ramón Grau Alsina and Valerie Ridderhof, *Mongo Grau: Cuba Desde 1930* (Madrid: Agualarga Editores, 1997), 137.

The correct formation of children was thus proclaimed the Revolution's best hope for uprooting ideas associated with former class relationships and creating a new socialist consciousness. In continuing to make strategic use of child-centered laws, policies and initiatives to pursue this goal even after the defeat of the April exile invasion, the Castro government made childhood into a primary site in which the battle not only to defeat the Counter-Revolution, but also to build the socialist nation, would be fought.

Conclusion

In the weeks leading up to and following the Bay of Pigs invasion, when Castro ended the school year early in order to mobilize young people as volunteers in a national Literacy Campaign, prohibited private and Catholic education and expelled foreign clergy from the island, fears that the Revolution would disrupt children's education and indoctrinate young people in Communist and atheistic teachings seemed to be confirmed. These concerns had first been sparked in mid 1959, when the promulgation of new educational laws placed greater control over academic calendars, curricula and instructional methods in the hands of new revolutionary leaders. During the following year, the mutually reinforcing interaction between Cuban middle class parents' already activated fears for their children and their sense of confusion and dispossession in a radicalizing society produced a growing panic over the trajectory of his Revolution, contributing directly to the emergence of an organized Counter-Revolution by the opening of the 1960/61 school year.

In January 1961, the intertwined social and political goals behind the declaration of the Year of Education propelled the expansion of literacy and primary schooling

across the country; but they also inspired the creation of ideological education programs and child-centered mass organizations and mobilized children to participate in volunteer service that removed them from the private spheres of home and family life. These initiatives helped forge direct linkages between children and the state and contributed to their reframing as autonomous political actors, answerable to the Revolution as much, if not more, than to their parents. Changing understandings and practices of childhood undermined the traditional notions and family values that many middle class Cubans held dear. They also lessened parent's power over children while increasing Castro's power over Cubans of all ages, provoking resistance even in a moment of still-widespread public support for the Revolution. Taking place within a context of the nation's severing of diplomatic relations with the United States and the cementing of new ties to the Soviet Union, these processes of cultural change compelled Cubans to choose their side—for or against the Castro government—and thereby contributed to the accelerating radicalization of the Revolution.

Cubans on both sides of this political divide were nonetheless united by a shared belief that children were central to their radically different visions of the island's future. As organized resistance began to emerge in the summer and fall months of 1960, both the Castro government and its opponents made frequent use of representations of children and child-centered discourses to articulate their political positions and rally Cubans to their causes and to discredit one another, relying on strikingly similar assumptions, images and rhetorical frames in the pursuit of radically opposed political goals. Revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries not only fought *for* children, battling on behalf of the understandings and practices of childhood that underlay their worldviews

and visions of the island's future; they also fought *through* children to make the Cuban nation, understanding the symbolic and actual child as a site in which the complex processes of political, economic, social and cultural transformation brought on by a radicalizing Revolution could be promoted or contested.

During these two tumultuous and increasingly violent years, the island's children found themselves more and more frequently drawn into "adult" political struggles, directly impacting the dialectical relationship between radicalization and Counter-Revolution even as their own lives were transformed by their new salience in national life. The continuing importance of young people to this political struggle ensured that the beginnings of exodus from the island and the subsequent emergence of an exile community in southern Florida would also be articulated in child-centered terms, placing Cuban children at the center of what was already beginning to be framed as a Cold War contest for control of the island's destiny.

Chapter 5

Creating the Exile Community: The Politics of Childhood in Miami, 1959-1961

This chapter explores the crucial role played by children and strategic representations of childhood in creating the exile community in southern Florida between 1959 and 1961. Upon arriving in Miami, Cuban refugees who had rejected Castro's increasingly aggressive interventions in the spheres of education and family life drew on their shared commitment to protecting their sons and daughters from the terrors of communism to develop a child-centered "creation myth" that justified their decision to seek asylum in the United States. This creation myth was central to refugees' efforts to form the strategic relationships with US federal, state and municipal governments, voluntary agencies, local and national media outlets, and Miami's Anglo-American majority that would ensure their survival in exile until a return to Cuba became possible.²⁶⁰

As soon as they arrived in the United States, Cuban refugees began to deploy symbolic and actual children in their interactions with the US government and the

²⁶⁰ All nations and ethnic groups have legends of how they came to be constituted as a people; immigrants have similar legends explaining the motives and circumstances of their migration and decision to settle in a new location. These legends of migration and resettlement, often centering around archetypal themes that are symbolically resonant to a group's shared experience, function as a community's "creation myth" to represent the primary unifying folk themes which explain over and over again who a people are, and illuminate the group's emerging place in the North American social order. As such, what is selected out and what is included in these re-tellings of a community's origins are equally important. Creation myths are expressed through family oral tradition, in conversation, newspapers and other popular media, and appear in official discourse in government and civic proclamations and publications. Drawing on many of these very sources, this chapter demonstrates that children were at the heart of the Cuban exile community's creation myth. For more discussion on Cuban exile creation mythology, see José Llanes on the importance of the community's 'legends of migration' in *Cuban Americans: Masters of Survival* (Cambridge, MA: Abt Books, 1982), ix; see also Miguel A. De la Torre, *La Lucha for Cuba: Religion and Politics on the Streets of Miami* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

voluntary agencies that oversaw their immigration and settlement. Forcefully projecting the message that Cubans were compelled to undergo an involuntary exile in order to protect their families from state intervention and their vulnerable children from scarcity, physical danger, and Marxist indoctrination, Cuban refugees sought to ensure that government officials treated them as welcomed political exiles from Communist persecution rather than less desirable 'ethnic' immigrants. Drawing upon child-centered discourses and images to emphasize the harmony between refugees' political opposition to the Revolution and United States anti-communist foreign policy goals, Cubans fleeing the island positioned themselves as uniquely deserving of preferential immigration status and were able to request and receive financial assistance from the federal government, both of which made possible their relocation to Miami.

A rapidly expanding Cuban exile media also took the lead in creating child-centered messages to explain the growing influx of refugees to concerned Miami-Dade County residents, to overcome Anglo Americans' prejudices against Latin American origin peoples, and especially to address white Miamians' racialized distrust of Cubans, whom they historically associated with south Florida's pre-1959 working class, Roman Catholic, and African-descent Cuban immigrants. Exile journalists and informants worked hand-in-hand with federal government agencies and U.S. public relations and media agents to saturate local Spanish and English media with representations of white and well-groomed Cuban children enjoying their newfound freedom in the United States, strategically de-emphasizing their (and their parents') historical, racial and cultural

affinities with other US Latina/os and working to ‘code’ them as white, middle class, and sharing the anti-communist, Christian, family values of Cold War America.

The exile media’s collaboration with US government, public relations professionals and journalists—driven both by refugees’ anti-communist commitments and the strategic needs of the growing refugee population—was strikingly successful in awakening mainstream America to the revolutionary threat to Cuban children. The frequent and forceful deployment of the emerging exile community’s child-centered creation myth played a crucial role in activating white Miamians’ own Cold War anxieties and focusing their attention on refugees’ emerging political identity in order to overcome their fears about Cuban racial and cultural difference. Child-centered discourses and images thus worked powerfully to secure refugees’ largely favorable reception by Miami’s Anglo-American majority—a welcome by no means inevitable or unconditional—and public sympathy for the needs of their growing community.

Cuban Immigration and Racial Politics in Pre-Civil Rights South Florida

Given southern Florida’s complex history of immigration and race relations, it was by no means inevitable that Cubans arriving in Miami after 1959 would receive an unequivocal welcome, be perceived as “white” or accepted as sharing political, social or cultural affinities with the city’s Anglo- American majority. Indeed, local knowledge of what constituted “Cuban,” based on the interplay between regionally specific notions of race, class, culture and politics, reinforced nation-wide prejudices against Latin American origin people and predisposed many white Miamians towards a racialized distrust of Cuban refugees.

White Floridian notions of Cubanness can be traced back at least as far as the island's protracted independence struggle, which encompassed three wars before independence before 1898 and forced tens of thousands of Cubans to flee to the United States, mostly to New York City, Tampa and Key West.²⁶¹ Beginning in the 1860s, several cigar manufacturers also moved their factories to these three cities, spurring further immigration to the United States and giving birth to a number of stable working class, mixed-race communities with a population of more than 5,000 by 1870. These original exiles and economic migrants played an active role in the liberation of their homeland from Spain, especially in the 1890s, when José Martí travelled to the United States to seek their help and donations in launching the final battle against the Spanish colonial regime. When Cuban independence was finally granted in 1902, a number of these first exiles and economic migrants, many of them Afro-Cubans, stayed in Key West, Tampa, Jacksonville, and Ocala, originally named "Martí City" by settlers from the island.²⁶²

Since the turn of the century, Cuban immigration responded to changing political and economic conditions on the island and in the United States. During the Republican era, middle class mixed-race and white Cubans came frequently and in greater numbers to Florida, as students, tourists, immigrants, and temporary political exiles, relying on the availability of cheap and regular passages on steamships and airplanes. Immigration to

²⁶¹ See Louis A. Pérez Jr., "Cubans in Tampa: From Exiles to Immigrants, 1892-1901," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57 (October 1978): 129-140; and Gerald E. Poyo, *With All, For the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989.

²⁶² Thomas D. Boswell and James R. Curtis, *The Cuban-American Experience: Culture, Images, and Perspectives* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 39-41.

the United States slowed during World War One and throughout the 1920s, when anti-immigrant and anti-Cuban vigilante activities surged in south Florida, exacerbated by labor unrest in the Cuban-dominated cigar industry. Tensions abated by the end of the decade, and the multi-racial US resident community continued to grow during the 1930s and 1940s, as both wealthy white elites and black and mixed-race workers and radicals fled political upheaval and persecution on the island.²⁶³ Although Cuban immigration to southern Florida was often short term and cyclical, it nonetheless followed an upward trend throughout the first half of the twentieth century and expanded significantly during Fulgencio Batista's 1952-1959 dictatorship, during which period the Cuban population of Miami grew from 20,000 to 50,000.²⁶⁴

The relatively small size of the Cuban immigrant population before the 1959 Revolution contributed to many Americans' unfamiliarity of Cubans' historic presence in the United States. By the 1950s, a small handful of entertainers and athletes had made the community somewhat more visible; however, their growing popularity served to reinforce pre-existing notions of Cuban racial and cultural otherness and inferiority. Afro-Cuban musicians like Mario Bauza, Miguelito Valdés, and Arsenio Rodríguez enjoyed national reputations as part of the Big Band craze that swept the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. Kid Chocolate and Kid Gavilán were popular Cuban boxers in the United States, and a number of Afro-Cubans played baseball in the Big Leagues,

²⁶³ James S. Olson and Judith E. Olson, *Cuban Americans: From Trauma to Triumph* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 39.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39. Others estimate that as few as ten to twelve thousand Cubans lived in the greater Miami area just prior to the 1959 Revolution. See Boswell and Curtis, *The Cuban-American Experience*, 71-74.

reinforcing both regional and national tendencies to associate Cubanness with Africanness, and both with the racialized characteristics of musicality, physical strength and sensuality originating in stereotypical constructions of black Americans.²⁶⁵

Racialized notions of otherness and inferiority similarly informed white Americans' perceptions of the few European-origin Cubans who had become public figures in the pre-1959 era. Desi Arnaz Jr., a *Santiaguero* of Spanish descent whose wealthy family had come to Miami during the political turmoil of the 1930s, enjoyed fame as a bandleader before marrying Lucille Ball in 1940; he achieved a new level of prominence in the 1950s when he took on the role of the lustful, hot-tempered, *conga*-playing Ricky Ricardo on their hit television series "I Love Lucy." Arnaz's television persona, beloved by mainstream America, reinforced stereotypes of Cubans as irrational, emotionally volatile, and hypersexual dating back to the turn of the century US intervention in the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Moreover, the wild drumming, singing and dancing, and nonsensical "African" chanting featured in his character's musical performances further contributed to linking notions of Cubanness to blackness, subsuming Cubans of all colors into the category of racial "other."

Further complicating the racial and cultural identities of Cuban immigrants, few Americans drew clear lines between Spanish-speaking peoples of different national origins, obscuring their differences within the amorphous ethnic category of "Latin" that also included Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, others of Latin American origin, Spaniards—and

²⁶⁵ Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 40-41.

even, occasionally, Italians, Greeks, or other “Mediterraneans.”²⁶⁶ Among those Americans who did distinguish between Latina/os of distinct national origins were many who did not hold positive views of Cubans—especially in southern Florida, where regional differences in attitudes, reflecting local economic, social and political histories and structures, influenced the way Cubans and their US born children were perceived by white Americans.

In the South, where white cotton, tobacco and sugar planters were traditionally anti-union, many were also anti-Cuban, hostile to the nineteenth and early twentieth century tradition of labor militancy and organization among Key West and Tampa cigar workers. Many Southerners viewed the Cuban workers as a kind of radical vanguard, and by the 1950s, during the Red Scare, more than a few southern politicians had voiced concerns about the possibility of Cuban-led communist cells in South Florida.²⁶⁷ Adding to Southern landowners’ hostility toward organized labor, many of these cigar workers were Afro-Cuban, many of whom had chosen (or were compelled by local racialized political, economic and social structures) to assimilate within local African American communities. Forced to observe the rigid southern “color line,” “Cuban niggers” were barred from living in white neighborhoods, and their children were segregated into black schools. These Afro-Cubans, whose racial, political, and national identities alike provoked white suspicion and hostility, were often targeted by the Ku Klux Klan and fell

²⁶⁶ As but one example of this tendency to conflate “Spanish,” “Latin,” and “Hispanic” origin Americans into one ethnic group, the 1950 census reported approximately 20,000 “Hispanics” living in Dade County, about 4 percent of the total population of approximately 495,000. The percentage of Cubans among the county’s Latina/o population—estimated at no more than 50 percent—was not revealed by the census. See Boswell and Curtis, *The Cuban-American Experience*, 71-74.

²⁶⁷ Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 43.

victim to racialized threats, harassment and violence between the 1930s and 1950s.²⁶⁸

During the same period, the FBI and CIA investigated Afro-Cuban communities for secret communist groups planning “anti-American” activities.²⁶⁹

US southerners were also suspicious of light-skinned Cubans. Anglo Americans in the pre-Civil Rights south were openly hostile to racial diversity, believing that “moral virtue in any decent society was concentrated in the white community.” The only real diversity in Southern ethnic life—the division between whites and blacks—had historically been a source of strain and violence.²⁷⁰ In this context, light-skinned Cubans were not perceived as unequivocally “white”; rather, Anglo American southerners saw them as undesirable mixed-race “Hispanics,” and—perhaps even worse—potential carriers of trace elements of African blood that might nonetheless “pass” for white, thereby circumventing the “one drop” racial order that continued to shape Southern society.

Thus, while the children of light-skinned Cubans were usually allowed to enroll in white schools, they were often treated with suspicion and hostility, forbidden to speak Spanish, even during lunch and recess.²⁷¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, school dropout rates

²⁶⁸ José Yglesias, “The Radical Latino Island in the Deep South,” *Nuestro* 1 (1977): 1-10.

²⁶⁹ Robert Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); and Gene Burnett, “Death and Terror Scar Tampa’s Past,” *Florida Trend* 18 (1975): 76-80.

²⁷⁰ Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 43.

²⁷¹ Complicating already complex racial and ethnic relations in the region, Dade County also had a substantial Puerto Rican community, approximately 10,000 in 1950, many of whom were migrant laborers employed in local agriculture. This community would grow to 100,000 by the mid 1980s. Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 320. However, little is known about how Puerto Rican migrants fit into the local racial order, or about interactions between Puerto Rican and Cuban workers in South Florida.

were very high among Cuban students of all racial backgrounds, reinforcing white southerners' racialized anxieties about juvenile delinquency and exacerbating the problems of poverty and underemployment among working class Cuban communities in southern Florida, where social and labor market discrimination was rife and such phrases as 'Cubans need not apply' were commonly used to deny south Florida's Cuban workers access to employment and housing.²⁷²

Adding to the racial, economic and political factors barring Cubans of all colors from socioeconomic mobility within their host society, many mid-century southerners also professed a fundamentalist Protestant Christianity that was intensely anti-Catholic. Indeed, for many, Roman Catholicism represented "an alien religion inherently different from the spirit of American institutions."²⁷³ From the 1920s through the 1950s, Southern Protestants feared Catholic plots and conspiracies to take over the United States, opposed large scale immigration from "papist" Ireland, southern and eastern Europe, and Latin America, while the Ku Klux Klan added Catholics and Jews to its list of 'enemies of the United States.'²⁷⁴ Though few pre-revolutionary Cuban émigrés were religiously active, the majority were baptized Roman Catholics, which only added to the suspicion and hostility provoked by their racial undesirability and history of labor activism and progressive politics.

By the early 1950s, northern whites with more moderate political and social views had begun to settle in Miami, helping to develop a local political and social context that

²⁷² Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 43.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

was somewhat more liberal than the rest of the state; however, the city continued to operate in accordance with its pre-civil rights era southern racial order.²⁷⁵ Moreover, the Ku Klux Klan maintained a visible presence in Dade County and other areas of Cuban settlement in southern Florida throughout the decade.²⁷⁶ Thus Afro-Cubans continued to suffer intensely the racism of the South, while white Cuban workers struggled to resist the ethnocentrism, suspicion and intolerance that surrounded them.²⁷⁷

Before 1959, then, most southern Florida Cubans continued to function on the margins of American society. A smaller number, however, had found the United States more hospitable and had successfully established themselves and their families within the nation's political, economic and social hierarchies. Among these republican-era exiles

²⁷⁵ This is not to suggest that Miami Blacks were not already engaged in the civil rights struggles. Indeed, in the post World War Two era, as many black veterans settled in the area, their worldviews changed by wartime service and centering on a more assertive demands for civil rights, Miami became "ripe for social conflict." The Civil Rights period in Dade County dates back to the early 1940s, at least a decade earlier than other parts of the South. However, desegregation of housing had not become a social reality until the early 1970s. Before civil rights activism in the early 1960s, "Whites Only" signs were prevalent in Miami as they were across the South. Blacks couldn't use public facilities, parks or beaches; they lived in segregated neighborhoods, many in slum conditions. Some areas, like black Coconut Grove, lacked connections to sewage disposal systems, and trash pickup was erratic. Public schools were strictly segregated, and most universities did not admit black students. Blacks were also excluded from most labor unions. By the late 1950s, black pressure on white neighborhoods had turned violent; local and state leaders of the KKK were involved in picketing and intimidating blacks who moved to white neighborhoods; attempted cross burnings and dynamite bombs were occasionally placed. By the 1960s, blacks began slowly to be admitted to whites-only trade unions, but they were still not hired by white contractors for better-paying construction jobs. Bus desegregation only took place in 1957; the struggle to desegregate beaches began in 1958. In December 1960, in response to a NAACP lawsuit, a federal judge ruled that Miami could no longer bar blacks access to city swimming pools; in April 1961, city officials ruled that blacks couldn't be barred from any public recreational facility. Demonstrations against segregated lunch counters took place from 1959 through 1960, and they were desegregated on August 1, 1960—Miami was the first city to take down racial barriers. However, many conservative whites resisted the civil rights and desegregation efforts, accusing the NAACP and other civil rights groups of being communist and subversive organizations. Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*, 191, 209, 214, 218, 222-223. To that end, Stepick, Grenier, Castro and Dunn conclude that "Miami's race relations have been undeniably southern." See Alex Stepick et al., *This Land is Our Land: Immigrants and Power in Miami* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 24.

²⁷⁶ Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*, 163.

²⁷⁷ Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 46.

and immigrants were a handful of wealthy individuals with important US business contacts, who were able to quickly become established within the Miami business community. They invested in real estate and became active in local business and civic organizations. Many among this small minority of elite Cubans were as American as they were Cuban, enjoyed the benefits of US citizenship, and carefully cultivated a white racial identity.²⁷⁸

However, this group represented a minute proportion of the Cubans living in the United States before 1959, and their relatively privileged position within mainstream society remained contingent on their embrace of American ways of working and living. These elite thus struggled to balance their commitment to pride in their Cuban heritage and membership in Miami's Pan-American *colonia* with the need to at least publicly embrace an American identity and to suppress markers of racial, cultural and linguistic difference that would activate Anglo-American prejudices against Latina/os or invite the association of Cubanness with blackness.

Because of their significant differences in origins, lived experience, and worldview, and indeed, because the socioeconomic mobility of the most privileged among them depended on the suppression of ethnic and cultural difference, the pre-revolutionary Cuban population of South Florida lacked both a clearly articulated collective identity and strong community ties. They were nonetheless united, albeit loosely, by their experience of racialized discrimination while in the United States, where social and cultural acceptance by the Anglo-American mainstream continued to elude

²⁷⁸ Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 47.

them.²⁷⁹ Their shared marginalization also linked Cubans to other Latin American origin people in Miami-Dade County as part of the region's small *colonia latina*.²⁸⁰ Broadly speaking, then, most pre-revolutionary Cuban residents of southern Florida shared with one another and with Puerto Rican and other Spanish-speaking Americans, the tenuous experiences of daily life in a society that was at best ignorant of Latin American origin peoples.

Cuban Children, the Cold War and the Exile Creation Myth, 1959-1961

After 1959, the sudden influx of refugees to Miami would exacerbate Anglo-Americans' anti-Latina/o prejudices and racialized notions of Cubanness, provoking fears that refugees would remake the city's ethnic and cultural landscape. As a result, Cuban émigrés quickly realized that their immigration status, access to resettlement assistance,

²⁷⁹ Even Miami's "white" Cubans and other light-skinned Latina/o Americans, including those who had attained a middle class socioeconomic position, were united by a shared experience of residential segregation that predated the arrival of the post-1959 exiles. As early as the 1930s, a concentration of Latin-American origin people lived within a three mile semi-circle on the western side of the city's Central Business District; by the 1950s, 70 percent of Miami Latina/os lived in this economically depressed area, bordered to the north by similarly blighted and racially segregated black neighborhoods. Moreover, the tract with the highest Latina/o population, approximately two miles southwest, had acquired the name "Little Havana" among non-Latinos by that decade, suggesting both Miamians' awareness of the city's Cuban population and their disinclination to distinguish between Spanish-speaking peoples of different national origins. See Morton D. Winsberg, "Housing Segregation of a Predominantly Middle Class Population: Residential Patterns Developed by the Cuban Immigration into Miami, 1950-1974," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 38 (October 1979).

²⁸⁰ Well into 1959, Miami's Spanish-language media reflected the tendency of Anglo-Americans and US resident Latin-American origin people alike to characterize Cubans as part of a broader "Hispanic American" or "Pan-American" community. Before the emergence of a distinct Cuban exile media in 1960, Miami's most widely circulated Spanish language newspaper, *Diario las Américas*, was Nicaraguan owned and operated; in line with its editorial mission of promoting "Better understanding between the Americas," the paper reported heavily on activities by Pan-Americanist organizations like Miami's Alianza Interamericana and la Casa de las Américas. It also frequently referred to the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and Peruvians who appeared in its social pages as "valued members of our Hispanic American colony in Miami" or "esteemed members of the Hispanic circles of this city," while only sometimes mentioning their distinct national origins. See, for example, *Diario las Américas*, January 1, 1959, 4; January 7, 1959, 4; and March 29, 1959, 5.

and reception by mainstream American society, depended heavily on distinguishing themselves from other marginalized Latina/o immigrants and especially from African Americans. Cuban refugees' ability to survive their exile in the United States therefore depended on their ability to persuade the Anglo-American majority that political, socioeconomic and religious commonalities between them and their mainstream US hosts outweighed their fears of Cuban racial and cultural difference.

As early as 1959, refugee children would play a central role in exile efforts to relocate Cuban exiles within southern Florida's pre-existing racial and ethnic hierarchies. Upon arriving in Miami, exiles drew on their shared commitment to protecting their sons and daughters from the terrors of communism to develop a child-centered "creation myth" that justified their decision to seek asylum in the United States. Both out of conviction and necessity, then, refugees rapidly began to deploy child-centered discourses and images as a powerful means of highlighting the emerging exile political identity and their shared commitment to Cold War American values and foreign policy goals, as well as to bridge the perceived gap between Cuban émigrés and white, middle class, family-oriented Americans.

By the first months of 1960 and increasingly by the summer of that year, the radicalization of the Castro regime, the deterioration of US-Cuba relations, and the sudden influx of a wave of middle class refugees from the island focused mainstream America's eyes on the swiftly growing exile population and especially on their children. This process was driven by exile leaders, journalists and media informants, who quickly formed partnerships with Cold War-obsessed US government officials, refugee allies, and

media professionals, to disseminate stories and images that portrayed Cuban children as the latest and most vulnerable victims of global communism.

This portrayal of Cuban refugee children worked to strategically align exile needs with the hardening of Washington's opposition to the Castro regime, ensuring the conditions for refugees' immediate survival. It was also strikingly successful in creating a favorable climate for their reception by the Anglo American mainstream—a welcome by no means inevitable or unconditional—by highlighting their rejection of communism and enthusiasm for the US democratic capitalist system, simultaneously de-emphasizing their historical, racial and cultural affinities with other US Latina/os and Latin American immigrants and working to 'code' them as white, middle class, and sharing the Christian family values of Cold War America.

In the first six months following the Revolution, during which period approximately 26,500 Batista-aligned Cubans sought refuge in the United States, Cuban exiles and their children received little attention from the federal government or local or national media.²⁸¹ The lack of interest in these first exiles reflected most American's limited concern with a Revolution that was initially not understood as socialist; moreover, the first refugees and their children maintained a low profile, settling in Miami's affluent neighborhoods and enrolling their children in local private and Catholic schools. Comfortably self-supporting, they represented neither an increase in competition for local jobs nor a drain on municipal social services, and therefore went

²⁸¹ The 'first wave' of Cuban refugees, arriving between January 1959 and October 1962, totaled approximately 280,000; Batista-aligned exiles, then, represented slightly less than 10 percent of this total. Llanes, *Cuban Americans*, 8.

largely unnoticed by the national and local government and media and by English-speaking Miami residents.

As early as the summer of 1959, however, some of the Revolution's original leadership and their children began to join the *Batistianos* in Miami. They were accompanied by a growing number of former Castro supporters, drawn from the progressive urban middle classes who had formed the majority of the rebel army and the M-26-7 movement.²⁸² As Castro deepened the Revolution's ties to the Soviet Union in the first half of 1960, the suppression of non-revolutionary media and civil society, the massive nationalization of businesses and property, the government's increasing persecution of the Catholic Church and interventions in the island's educational system drove more and more dispossessed and disaffected Cubans to join the exodus from the island. As radicalization progressed at an ever more rapid pace, these refugees were joined by a growing number of unaccompanied minors, whose parents sent them off the island to protect them from revolutionary threats to their physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being.²⁸³

Cubans fleeing the Revolution faced little difficulty entering the United States; many already possessed visas, and those who did not were able to easily acquire them

²⁸² Pedraza, *Political Disaffection*, 62-63.

²⁸³ It is important to recognize the overwhelmingly middle class identity of the first wave of Cuban refugees. Exiles were overrepresented in professions and underrepresented in primary occupations, but less than 40 percent should be considered "elites" in Cuba. They were a highly diverse group, representing all occupations. Nonetheless not representative of the entire Cuban population, especially in terms of education; only 4 percent of refugees had less than a fourth grade education, compared with 52 percent of all Cubans. Thirty-six percent had completed high school and/or some college, whereas this number among all Cubans was only 4 percent. They were also overwhelmingly urban; 62 percent were from Havana, and another 25 percent were from other large cities. See Boswell and Curtis, *The Cuban-American Experience*, 45-47.

from the US embassy in Havana.²⁸⁴ Moreover, in light of White House concerns about the direction and nature of Castro's leadership, already minimal visa requirements for Cubans had been further relaxed as early as the last months of 1959.²⁸⁵ After Castro initiated diplomatic contact with the Soviet Union in February 1960, the worst fears of

²⁸⁴ A small number of these early middle class exiles settled in Spain and Latin America, but the overwhelming majority sought refuge in the United States, where many families had at least one relative already living in South Florida or New York. The economic and cultural presence of the United States in republican Cuba meant that the United States was not overly "foreign" to many exiles, especially the earliest upper and middle class refugees, who had studied, conducted business, and vacationed in the United States. Many of them had studied English in private schools, as had their children, and had attended boarding schools, colleges and universities in the United States. Moreover, they had been avid consumers of Hollywood movies, American mass media, and US fashion, sports and recreation. This cultural proximity, as well as geographic closeness, made the United States the logical place to go for temporary exile. Others, however, who were unable to get seats on planes to the United States, could not meet immigration criteria, or had business or personal ties elsewhere, went to Spain, Mexico, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico. Among these were Cubans who preferred to live among Latin Americans, whose nationalism made them resentful of US interference in Cuban affairs, and whose pride and anger prevented them from turning to the United States, who had a long history of propping up corrupt and antidemocratic Cuban presidents who were seen as allies of US economic interests on the island. See García, *Havana USA*, 15.

²⁸⁵ Cuban refugees were only the third sizeable group of refugees to be admitted en masse to the United States. During the first half of the twentieth century, refugees represented an exception to the generally restrictive and racially exclusive immigration policies of the first half of the twentieth century, articulated in the Immigration Restriction Act (1924) and the McCarran-Walter Act (1952), which made entry difficult for all and almost impossible for non-white people. However, Cubans refugees enjoyed two advantages most aspiring immigrants did not. First, most mid-century immigration restrictions—excluding, of course, the blatantly racist and anti-Mexican "Operation Wetback" initiated in 1954—did not apply to the ostensibly "white" immigrants from Latin American nations of the Western Hemisphere. Keeping the Americas as an unrestricted immigration zone corresponded to US hemispheric policies, beginning with the Monroe Doctrine and strengthened by the Roosevelt Corollary, which asserted US rights to economic and geopolitical control of the region, and to the prevalence (if unevenness) of Pan-American sentiment, especially after the institution of Herbert Hoover's and Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policies in the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, in the post World War Two era and with the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower, an evolving asylum policy created preferential entrance categories for those who conformed to the racial and ideological norms of mainstream America and whose admittance was seen as advancing the US position in the global Cold War—meaning that anti-communist refugees who were also at least nominally white were widely accepted. Cubans thus joined refugees displaced by World War Two and Hungarian freedom fighters who had resisted their homeland's incorporation into the Soviet Union as preferred immigrants to the United States. Well into the 1980s, refugee policy continued to respond to these racial and ideological prerogatives, with well over 90 percent of those admitted during this period having fled from communist nations. See Gilbert Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945-Present* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Juan Ramos García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980); Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*; and Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

the US government and intelligence community appeared to be confirmed. In response, covert plans to topple the Castro regime were launched, with the goal of preventing the penetration of international communism in Latin America, a region that the United States historically defended as within its sphere of interest.

As early as 1960, the US government had begun to focus on Cuban children as a means through which to further its Cold War foreign policy goals and to prevent the consolidation of a radicalizing Cuban Revolution. Stimulating out-migration from the island by exacerbating Cuban parents' anxieties about the safety and wellbeing of their children was a vital component of these plans from their inception. By opening the doors to fleeing Cubans, especially professionals and the middle class, the US government hoped to strain the island's economy and infrastructure to the breaking point, thereby destabilizing the revolutionary regime. Moreover, refugee men, especially those with military experience, provided the intelligence community with a growing pool of recruits for the government sponsored anti-Castro programs that began as early as 1960. Thus, even as the federal government instructed immigration officials to allow Cubans virtually unrestricted entry to the United States, the US intelligence community worked to further stimulate the exodus from the island by playing on the fears of Cuban Catholic and middle class parents, already deeply concerned about the Revolution's interventions into the spheres of family life and education.

Cuban children were also central to US media efforts to support the nation's Cold War policy goals by exploiting the propaganda value of refugees and their children. In collaboration with the federal, state and voluntary agencies charged with overseeing refugee settlement in Miami and drawing heavily upon eager exile informants, American

media professionals energetically disseminated the Cuban exile community's child-centered creation myth through stories and photographs that provided tangible evidence of Cubans' rejection of Castro's move towards communism. They worked hand-in-hand with exiles to discredit the Castro regime, in the United States as well as in Cuba, Latin America and around the world, by framing the Revolution as a threat to Cuban children. To that end, in March 1960, the *U.S. News and World Report* published a series of photographs of uniformed Cuban children, marching, practicing judo, and studying; the caption under one photo read, "In class Luís is mindful of Castro's warning: children who do not study are not good revolutionaries." Though not yet directly labeling the Castro government as communist, the *New York Times* drew a less-than-subtle comparison between the Revolution's approach to children and the methods employed in the Soviet Union, reporting: "The pattern of training is similar to that used by many totalitarian governments. It includes indoctrination in schools, on radio and in the press; military training from seven years of age; a hate campaign, this time directed against the United States; the organization of work brigades for boys fourteen through eighteen; and meetings and fiestas, all with a political purpose."²⁸⁶

Since American journalists had already begun to encounter difficulties reporting from Cuba in early 1960, child-centered stories relied heavily upon exile informants, who eagerly shared their personal experiences, anecdotal information and rumors with the US media. From the earliest days of the middle class exodus, then, US government and civic leaders as well as media professionals depended on exile leaders, journalists and

²⁸⁶ *U.S. News and World Report*, March 21, 1960; *New York Times*, June 8, 1960.

informants to craft an ever-increasing barrage of stories that framed Cuban refugee families and children within a discourse of anti-Communism that served the Cold War interests of American foreign policy.

By mid-1960, exiles and their US allies also began to deploy discourses of childhood to explain and justify the growing influx of Cuban refugees—and their children—to concerned residents of the greater Miami area. By June of that year, the number of Cuban émigrés in Miami had risen to more than 60,000.²⁸⁷ However, in spite of federal policies that explicitly welcomed refugees from communist states and widespread anti-communist sentiment among the general population, initial feelings toward recently arrived Cubans and their children were ambivalent. The first concerns were raised by white residents who feared that the growing population of racially suspect, Spanish-speaking and Catholic Cuban refugees threatened to remake the city's ethnic and cultural composition. The racialized distrust of Cubans was also directed at Cuban children, who had begun to enroll in Miami's public schools in increasing numbers.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, "Cuban Refugee Program," Fact Sheet, Social and Rehabilitation Service, Miami, Florida, December 1, 1969.

²⁸⁸ Carlos Eire, a white Cuban whose parents sent him to Miami in 1962 (he was eleven years old), experienced this racialized discrimination which even exclusively European-origin Cuban refugees encountered in southern Florida. He notes "we Cubans tended to be viewed by the locals as non-white intruders, even if we had blond hair and blue eyes. The lower you went on the social scale, the stronger the biases...but prejudices against Hispanics permeated the entire culture." These prejudices were exacerbated by south Floridians historical experience with Afro-Cubans, their knowledge of black and mixed-race Cuban artists and athletes, and US school texts which represented Cuba as a primitive island peopled by black *campesinos*. Eire recalls how shocked he was to encounter these images in US history and geography books issued to him when he enrolled in a Miami school: "My geography book has only one photograph of Cuba, and its of a grass hut and half-naked, barefoot black kids standing at its door...My history book says that Cuba, like all Latin American countries, is too backward to handle democracy or genuine civilization, and that whatever little progress it has made is due to the help that the United States has offered since it freed the island from Spain's grip in 1898." Local racial constructs combined with Miamian's understanding of Cuba's historical dependence on the US thus begin to explain Eire's experience of being asked "What was it like to wear shoes for the first time when

Tensions between Anglo-Americans and Cuban refugees first emerged in a neighborhood that already had a small but residentially concentrated population of Cubans, the four square mile area about two miles southwest of the central business district that long-term Miami residents had already begun referring to as ‘Little Havana.’²⁸⁹ Though a general trend toward suburbanization meant that this and other neighborhoods in Miami’s central city “transitional zone” were suffering from excessive vacancies and tendencies toward blight, Cuban families who filled rental properties that might otherwise have remained vacant were not necessarily welcomed. A study commissioned by Metropolitan-Dade County Mayor Chuck Hall determined that the settlement of refugees and their children in the central city had provoked tension between Cuban renters and Anglo American property owners, exacerbating the movement of

you got to America?” “You had toilets in Cuba?” Other questions directed at the blonde, blue-eyed author, including “Why aren’t you dark?” and “Why do all Cubans have big lips?” point more explicitly to the racialized lens through which many mainstream Americans interpreted even the lightest-skinned refugees. See Carlos Eire, *Learning to Die in Miami: Confessions of a Refugee Boy* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 17, 99-100.

²⁸⁹ In 1960, Dade County’s population was approximately 81 percent non-Latina/o white, 15 percent black, and 4 percent Latina/o. The county’s small Cuban population nonetheless provided the basis for the subsequent establishment of Miami as the primary site of Cuban exile settlement in the years following the Revolution. Although New York had once been the leading US destination for Cuban exiles and immigrants, by 1960 it had become less attractive; housing and employment conditions in the city had begun to deteriorate, and crime was on the rise. Miami, on the other hand, was relatively safe, offered inexpensive housing, and had a familiar tropical climate. Most importantly, it was a short flight or ferry trip away from Cuba, to which most exiles expected to return shortly. Little Havana was attractive to refugees not only because of the presence of other Cuban families. The neighborhood, once a largely middle class Anglo neighborhood that had developed following the First World War, was losing population as a result of suburbanization and economic downturn; single family homes and small apartment buildings were rapidly deteriorating, retail trade had seriously declined, and residential and commercial rents were low. The area’s proximity to downtown, where social services and job opportunities were located, and the availability of public transportation were also appealing. Also importantly, Catholic Churches and schools were located nearby. As the Cuban population swelled, the neighborhood’s appeal grew. However, other refugees also settled to the north of Miami in Hialeah, a working class Anglo city that had developed around the Hialeah Park Horse Track. Like Little Havana, it offered low cost housing and was situated near large employment centers, including the Miami International Airport. See Boswell and Curtis, *The Cuban-American Experience*, 71-78.

white residents out of the area and contributing to the already-prevalent trend of racial and ethnic residential segregation in Miami. The study noted:

It can be asserted that different social customs strained the coexistence, and many of the long term residents of these areas moved out. Such differences as tendencies to gregarious behavior, the inclination toward large families (into an area which is typically made up of older, childless people), and a general inability to smoothly fit into the customary neighborhood patterns caused an undetermined number of long-time residents to move out. This inability of the Cuban to fit into a purely native neighborhood has led to the colonization of some of these areas into self-imposed Cuban quarters.²⁹⁰

The influx of large Cuban families, including many children, into the central city thus provoked tension and even hostility among some Anglo Americans. However, outside of Little Havana, Cubans faced more marked forms of ethnic discrimination. Despite their middle class status and claim to whiteness, many of the earliest first wave refugees struggled to find housing. Indeed, it was common to find signs on apartment buildings throughout Miami that simply stated, “No Cubans, no pets, and no children.”²⁹¹ The ubiquitousness of these signs suggest that the sudden influx of refugees in 1960 activated and exacerbated white Miamians’ anti-Latina/o prejudices and their tendency to equate Cubanness with racial otherness. They thus looked upon refugees and their

²⁹⁰ More than one source attests to the prevalence of the For Rent signs and Rental ads specifying “No Cubans, no pets, and no children” which presented the exiles with a major obstacle to settlement in the Anglo American neighborhoods of pre-Civil Rights era Miami. See “Effects of the Cuban Situation on the Economic and Social life of Dade County, Florida,” *Memorandum to Honorable Chuck Hall, Mayor, Metropolitan Dade County, From Hoke Welch, Acting County Manager*, (CHC Vert. File, “Dade County Public Schools”, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library: February 5, 1965), 6; see also Miguel González-Pando, “Interview with Cuban-American Banker and Community Leader Luís Botifoll,” in *The Cuban Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998), 35.

²⁹¹ De la Torre, *La Lucha for Cuba*, 34.

numerous and often ill-supervised children as undesirable additions to their communities, and sought to erect barriers to their presence.²⁹²

Given the suspicion and hostility with which Florida's conservative whites had historically regarded the pre-revolutionary working class, politically progressive, and at least nominally Roman Catholic Cubans of south Florida, this initially ambivalent reception—and the understanding of Cubans as racially and culturally distinct from and inferior to white Americans—was perhaps inevitable.²⁹³ Moreover, by mid-1960, as the

²⁹² Given the family strain caused by refugee families' dislocation, the overcrowding of shared housing, and the desperate financial situation of many, which often compelled both mothers and fathers to work long hours at long distances from their central Miami homes, many refugee children were, in fact, lacking in parental supervision. For many, this was a new experience, drastically different from their sheltered lives on the island. Reflecting on his childhood in Miami, a Cuban American writer, Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Next Year in Cuba: A Cubano's Coming-of-age in America* (University of Houston, TX: Arte Público, 2005), 54-55; recalls, "Exile had brought me a special kind of freedom. At Dade Elementary, for the first and only time in our lives, my brother Pepe and I walked to school. After school, we went home and I headed for the park or the Boy's Club, where I stayed until nightfall. In Cuba no kid in my family was allowed to walk to school, much less roam the streets...Once in the United States, within certain limits, we were on our own and we made the most of it. Although I sometimes felt isolated wandering the streets, I was happy to trade solitude for latitude."

²⁹³ Scholars disagree about the extent to which Anglo-Americans perceived early Cuban exiles as "white." José Llanes asserts not only that First Wave Cubans were white, but were unequivocally recognized as such by Anglo Americans. He argues that "those Cubans who arrived in the First Wave were definitely from the 'white, refined' half [of Cuban society]. That was fortunate, because when they landed in the United States, the people they met were similar to themselves...The few social problems associated with the early Cuban arrivals were overcome by an overwhelming American outpouring of affection and support for the brave refugees." However, this was not an absolute truth; not all Americans perceived Cubans to be similar to themselves. In fact, as this chapter goes on to demonstrate, the US media's reliance on images and discourses of childhood in order to highlight similarities between refugees and their hosts points to the need to combat Anglo-American notions of Cuban difference that were more prevalent than have been previously acknowledged. Llanes nonetheless insists that "the similarities in race, class and background between the refugees and their hosts made this first massive encounter of Cubans and North Americans a model of successful immigration. There was plenty of room for the exiles in Miami." This version of exile community history is likely marred by a certain degree of wishful thinking, in that it fails to consider that this "model of successful immigration" may have developed precisely because the growing Cuban presence in Miami was NOT understood as immigration, but rather as a temporary sojourn on US territory—an understanding reflected and reinforced by US government officials and media, who consistently referred to Cuban exiles as "guests" in the United States. Most importantly, it attributes the welcome received by refugees to Anglo-Americans' ostensible recognition of Cuban racial and cultural similarity, without acknowledging that the acceptance of the growing exile community was directly tied to their perceived value in the global anti-communist struggle upon which both US foreign policy goals and much of its national identity relied. On the other hand, Cheris Brewer Current argues that Cuban exiles' anti-

number of Cubans flowing daily into the city began to swell, refugees began to find it difficult to take money or other assets off the island. Relatives, friends, Catholic Church parish priests and local voluntary agencies struggled to assist them in finding shelter, food, and employment. Refugees were also in dire need of childcare, without which mothers were unable to accept even the low-paying jobs in cleaning, sewing, and picking fruit and vegetables that provided their families with desperately needed supplemental income, and scrambled to find seats for their children in parish and public schools, often unable to pay even the minimal tuition fees that the Dade County Public Schools charged non-resident students.²⁹⁴

communism, whiteness and middle-class attributes were strategically linked and broadcasted by the US government and media in order to secure public support for refugees throughout the 1960s and 1970s. However, Current's assertions that Cuban exiles occupied a "variety of socioeconomic, racial and political positions," and were "united only in their exile" overstates the diversity of exiles, especially during the decade of the 1960s; moreover, the author fails to recognize that US media efforts to portray Cubans as white, middle-class and anti-communist built heavily on exile media representations that reflected a rapidly emerging consensus among refugees themselves as to the origins and nature of their growing community. Miguel de la Torre offers a more nuanced assessment of the way that race, class and culture affected Anglo-Americans perceptions of and openness to Cuban refugees. He argues that the light skin color of first and second-wave exiles allowed them to avoid "certain racial barriers" in the United States; though acknowledging the problems of ethnic discrimination in housing and employment, he insists that the "social class of Exilic Cubans affected the construction of their ethnicity once they were in the United States and spared them from the minority status of other Latinas/os." Torres thus draws parallels between Cuban exiles before the 1980 Mariel Boatlift and turn of the century southern and eastern European immigrants who were similarly categorized as "white"; though their whiteness did not necessarily translate into acceptance by the Anglo American mainstream, their racial credentials allowed for the possibility (though not the guarantee) of cultural assimilation leading to their eventual transformation into 'first class' citizens." See Llanes, *Cuban Americans*, 29-30; Cheris Brewer Current, "Normalizing Cuban Refugees: Representations of Whiteness and Anti-Communism in the USA During the Cold War," *Ethnicities* 8 (2008): 42-67; and De la Torre, *La Lucha for Cuba*, 34-36; for examples of government and media references to Cuban 'guests' see "Practical Patriotism," *Waltham News-Tribune*, January 15, 1962; *Public Information Activities Report, Cuban Refugee Center, Miami: January 1-August 20, 1963*, Cuban Refugee Center Collection 0218 (Series 1, Box 1, Folders 12 and 16, CHC, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library).

²⁹⁴ As early as the summer of 1960 the Catholic Church in Miami adopted an activist role regarding refugee policy and settlement, and was committed to providing educational support to Cuban families, many of whom preferred their children to attend Catholic Schools. This was especially true of the earliest and most affluent immigrants; however, it also the religious inclinations of the Cuban middle classes as well as their perception, rooted in the island's history, that private and Catholic schools offered a superior education

As the growing Cuban influx became more visible, and as their increasingly desperate economic situation began to be revealed, long-term Miami residents, already concerned about the changing ethnic and cultural composition of their neighborhoods, also began to raise their voices in protest against refugees' impact on an already depressed local economy, their strain on municipal services and schools, and their generally negative impact on city life. Cuban refugee families, they insisted, were moving into the homes of other Latin American residents in the Little Havana area, creating a ghetto that was greatly overcrowded, causing deterioration of real estate values and creating a potential public health risk.

Moreover, refugee children were draining resources and instructional time away from white students and negatively impacting their educational success. According to a study released in autumn of 1960, there were approximately 2,000 Cuban students attending elementary and secondary schools in Miami-Dade County; over half of those children had received fee waivers absolving their parents from paying the fifty dollar non-resident tuition fee. As a result, the Dade County School Board had already spent more than \$100,000 in order to allow Cuban refugee children to attend public schools. In spite of this expenditure, the report continued, there were a significant number of Cuban children who were not attending school at all, noting that "both church and police authorities have expressed concern at the potential juvenile delinquency situation."²⁹⁵

tailored to the needs of professional and upwardly mobile families, and that public schools were geared toward the education of lower socioeconomic classes.

²⁹⁵ *Cuban Refugees in Florida*, author unknown, Cuban Refugee Center Collection 0218 (Series 4, Box 38, Folder 71, CHC, University of Miami Otto Richter Library, November 8, 1960).

Fears of delinquent Cuban youth and deteriorating home values reflected more general Anglo American objections to the ethnic and cultural transformation of their neighborhoods. White residents objected to the émigrés, who they perceived as clannish and loud, and disliked hearing a foreign language spoken in their midst. They also reacted with alarm to extended Cuban families and the collectives of non-related nuclear families who frequently pooled resources to share the rent on small apartments. These kinds of refugee survival strategies encouraged Miami residents to associate Cubans with the poor “ethnic” immigrants that they sought to distance themselves from, awakening exile leaders and their US allies to the need to raise public awareness about the presumptive class and cultural similarities between refugees and their hosts, and to emphasize Cubans’ difference from other US Latina/os and “ethnic” immigrants by emphasizing the essentially political origins of the exile community.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Cubans on the island and in south Florida were well aware of the difficulties faced by other Latin American origin people in the United States, and showed a particular concern for the economic and social marginalization of New York’s Puerto Rican community. Both revolutionary and exile newspapers published frequent articles decrying racial discrimination against this other group of Caribbean Latinos, revealing an awareness of the persistence of negative attitudes and structural barriers to mobility for African-origin and mixed race peoples, as well as for ostensibly “white” ethnic immigrants, in the United States in February 1961, the largest exile periodical, *El Avance*, published a two page feature entitled “They Discriminate Against Puerto Ricans in New York,” asserting that the 750,000 Puerto Rican men, women and children who resided in New York “are suffering for many years a persecution that could well be called racial or national discrimination.” The article cites examples of US citizens who refused to rent to Puerto Ricans, who were charged extravagant rates by slumlords who took advantage of their lack of knowledge of law or English—a situation many Cubans in Miami had experienced firsthand. Though expressing disapproval of US racism and revealing sympathy for the Puerto Rican plight, articles like this also suggest that Cuban exiles were well aware of the importance of dissociating themselves from other marginalized Latina/os by de-emphasizing their ethnic similarities to other US resident Latin American origin people (including Miami’s small community of Puerto Rican migrant agricultural laborers and hotel and restaurant service workers) while simultaneously stressing their political, cultural and class affinities with white middle class Americans. See *Bohemia*, November 29, 1959, 51, 132; José Montes Q., “Discriminan a Portorriqueños en N.Y.,” *El Avance*, February 24, 1961, 12; see also “Effects of the Cuban Situation,” CHC Vertical File.

Responding to these charges, exile leaders, journalists and media informants stepped up their efforts to disseminate child-centered discourses and images that reinforced the community's emerging creation myth—that Cubans had left the island in order to save their children from communist oppression and indoctrination—thus working to emphasize Cubans' political identity and de-emphasize the “ethnic” characteristics that might link them unfavorably to other US Latina/os. Unlike other immigrants from Latin America, exiles insisted, they had come to the United States not to seek economic opportunity but rather to protect their children from the “red terror” that had overtaken their island homeland, and to ensure their upbringing in accordance with the Christian and democratic values that united Cubans with their US hosts. To encourage mainstream Americans (as well as newly arrived refugees) to understand the emerging exile community in these almost exclusively political terms, they sought to ensure that public representations of the community focused heavily on middle class Cuban parents and their well-dressed, lovingly cared-for children, in order to stress their family values and class and cultural affinities with mainstream Americans.²⁹⁷ They also sought to

²⁹⁷ Exile portrayals of their community, though strategically selective, were for the most part congruent with reality. As Miguel de la Torre notes, “to protect their self-interest, Exilic Cubans merely had to assert what they had all been along in order to become what they [would] be...” In other words, refugees worked to secure their survival in exile by ensuring that both the US government and everyday citizens understood them in the terms through which they understood themselves—as white, middle class anti-communist Christians. That this was an accurate description of most first wave refugees is indisputable; however, it was not a complete picture of their lives upon arriving in the United States. They did not publish pictures of Cuban men sweeping factories or waiting tables or women picking tomatoes on Dade county farms; and they most certainly did not feature exile children dressed in worn out clothing or scuffed shoes, working after school jobs or selling newspapers to augment family incomes. Instead, exile media represented the community as it wanted to see itself, as well as the public image they had chosen, for strategic reasons, to hold up to the host society. Nor was this effort to maintain a middle class image strictly an expression of Cuban refugees' pride. Well aware of the history of US race relations and the prejudices of Miami residents and their concerns about the economic and social impact of the refugee influx on their city, exiles understood that it was by no means guaranteed that mainstream Americans would overlook Cubans' ethnic differences and accept the exile community's positive self-definition. The child-centered discourses and

reinforce the community's child-centered myth by producing and disseminating texts and images that framed Cuban children as innocent victims of international communism.

Recently established exile *peridoquitos* featured interviews with newly arrived refugees in every issue, documenting their invariably negative view of political, economic and social developments on the island and recounting their reasons for leaving the homeland. Driving home the oft-repeated message that Cubans choose exile in order to protect their children from communist oppression and indoctrination, these exile interviews regularly appeared alongside large photographs of refugees' children and grandchildren, with captions that lovingly recounted their names, ages, and harrowing journeys to safety and freedom in the United States. One such exile interview, appearing in *El Avance* on October 28, 1960, described how a frightening experience at a children's matinee had prompted a father to flee the island with his two young daughters. The family had gone to see the Disney film *Snow White* at a Havana cinema; when the princess' evil stepmother appeared on the screen, the father told *El Avance*, a number of children in the theatre "began to shout, *Paredón! Paredón!* In the same tone used to chant Fidel's words at his rallies." "The family left the theatre before the film ended; returned home, they packed their bags and fled into exile in Miami. According to the newspaper, the father was "terrified by the cruel lack of conscience that Fidel and his people are sowing in children's minds. Thus is today's Cuban youth being raised up: under the sign of the execution wall."²⁹⁸

images disseminated through official speeches, documents and US and exile media were essential to ensuring this acceptance. See De la Torre, *La Lucha* for Cuba, 37.

²⁹⁸ *El Avance*, October 28, 1960, 17.

Exile publications also frequently featured stories that described and analyzed the specific dangers children faced in revolutionary Cuba—often including several per issue, placed prominently on the front page. On November 11, 1960, a story entitled “Hundreds of Children Arrive at Miami Airport Everyday” appeared in the community’s most widely circulated newspaper. Subtitled “Panic Among Cuban Parents Because of Communist Laws,” the article informed exiles that

The inhuman and arbitrary laws being promulgated in Cuba have provoked a wave of panic among Cuban parents contemplating the possibility that their children may be snatched away from them just as happened during the Spanish Civil War...Laws prepared by the Ministry of Education practically convert all children between five and fifteen years of age into property of the state, which reserves for itself the right to educate and mold them as they wish and to move them to any location that they see fit.

The article further detailed how the suppression of non-revolutionary textbooks and the persecution of private and Catholic schools were paving the way for the “communist indoctrination” of Cuban children on the island. In accordance with new state-dictated curricula, “the main subject will be Marxist doctrine and complete submission to the red dictator who today governs Cuba.” Reverence for Fidel Castro would replace children’s belief in God; revolutionary teachers would “make them believe that God doesn’t exist; they make them renounce their religious beliefs, and they form in them a malevolent conscience based in the communist creed that defends as virtues betrayal, deceit, lies, denunciation, and total submission to the totalitarian State. The tender minds of children will be injected with the poison of vengefulness, intolerance, bitterness and revenge.”

As an example, the article quoted a teacher recently arrived from Havana, who described the visit of a revolutionary school inspector to her classroom during a lesson on civics and morals:

The children stood and she asked them to take their seats. Raising her voice she said to them, 'Do you want sweets?' The class responded with an enthusiastic Yes! 'Then, close your eyes and ask God for sweets.' The children obeyed her. 'Now open your eyes; see? God hasn't brought you anything. Now close your eyes again and ask *padrecito* Fidel to give you sweets.' The children obeyed her again. While their eyes were closed, the inspector moved among the desks, leaving sweets on each one. 'Now open your eyes,' the inspector said. The delighted children shouted and began eating their sweets. They had just received their first lesson in communist indoctrination.²⁹⁹

Drawing upon Cubans' collective memory of the Spanish Civil War, the article continued:

In Spain the communists did what today is being attempted in Cuba, separating children from their parents to indoctrinate them in Marxism. When the reds began to understand that they had lost the war, they dedicated themselves to the task of embarking these thousands of children for Russia, in order to continue their communist formation and educate them in accordance with the ideas of fanatic slavery that dominated in Russia. The communists were counting on converting them, in the future, into agents that could infiltrate Spanish speaking nations.

Three photographs, including the following, accompanied the article.

²⁹⁹ Versions of this story continue to circulate in the exile community; upon learning the subject of my research, a number of Miami Cubans of different generations have told me their own variations. Though I have been unable to confirm its accuracy, the story is in line with other documented examples of revolutionary indoctrination in the island's schools. What is most significant about the story, however, is that it reflects a widespread consensus among early exiles about the Revolution's special determination to target the young for communist brainwashing.



Figure 12: Photograph, toddler holding an adult's hand³⁰⁰

The close-up shot of a toddler girl holding the hand of an adult appeared with the following caption: "I'm not going back to Cuba,' she seems to be saying, this small girl that has just arrived at Miami Airport, fleeing with her parents the *fidelista* threat that attempts to put children under the communist tutelage of the totalitarian State that today dominates Cuba."

Another caption read: "A Cuban family arrives in Miami fleeing the red fury. Upon stepping on North American soil, they smile with satisfaction to breathe the air of

³⁰⁰ "Centenares de Niños Cubanos Llegan al Aeropuerto de Miami Todos los Dias," *El Avance*, November 11, 1960, 9.

freedom after their escape from the communist hell that threatens to take away the custody of children to surrender it to the totalitarian state that today has subjugated the homeland. Hundreds of children arrive on the Florida coasts daily, some with their parents, others sent into the care of relatives...”

Initial exile media efforts to focus attention on Castro’s threat to Cuban children were strikingly successful in articulating the community’s emerging creation myth. However, since the rapidly growing range of exile *periodiquitos* were published almost exclusively in Spanish, they were only accessible to a limited audience. As a result, many English-speaking Miami residents still lacked an in-depth understanding of the origins of the Cuban exodus and its importance to their nation’s Cold War foreign policy goals. Miamians continued to focus on more immediate concerns: the perceived negative impact of refugees on a depressed local economy, their strain on municipal health and educational facilities, and the social crisis their growing numbers threatened to precipitate, especially in Miami’s central city neighborhoods.

Responding to a growing barrage of letters to the editor and general public disquiet, in October 1960 the *Miami Herald* joined forces with exile leaders, media, and their US allies, launching a broad publicity campaign to raise awareness of the presence and plight of Cuban refugees in Dade County. They invited local officials, public figures and celebrities to form a panel to discuss the circumstances of the Cuban refugees and to find rapid and effective solutions to the increasingly needy exile community’s problems. Reflecting Cold War America’s growing acceptance of Roman Catholicism, a result of the Church’s newfound prominence as an energetic opponent of international

communism, local clergy were also invited to speak about their efforts to provide aid and comfort to Cuban refugees.

Miami political leaders also made use of the panel to address their disgruntled constituents, seizing the opportunity to educate city residents about the broader geopolitical implications of the Cuban exodus and their patriotic obligation to embrace the refugees. Franklin Williams, member of the Miami City Council on Public Welfare, argued that the influx of Cubans offered Miami's citizens the opportunity to "show the world how we react here in the face of the communist problem created by the red regime that we have next door." Congressman Dante Fascell, also invited to address the panel, similarly asserted that "Miamians don't need to go to Latin America to do good work in the "people to people" program. We have that work here in Miami; we can and must do it."³⁰¹

United States refugee advocates also relied upon the discourses and images of childhood originating within the exile community in order to raise public awareness about the communist threat to Cuba and drew upon the community's child-centered creation myth to prepare Miami residents for the likely expansion of the exodus from the island in the months to come. Mr. Wendell Rollason, Director of the Inter-American Affairs Commission wrote to Dr. Joe Hall, Superintendent of Dade County Public Schools on November 7, 1960, arguing that the Castro government's interventions in the lives of children revealed the Revolution's communist nature. He reminded Superintendent Hall of the enormous sacrifice that Cuban parents underwent in order to

³⁰¹ *El Avance*, November 11, 1960, 9.

send their children to freedom and safety in the United States and urged him to extend all possible support to Cuban refugee students:

It is clear to even to even the most casual observer of the Cuban situation that Fidel Castro's government is following the party line of International Communism in most of its policies. This is particularly true concerning state control over children. The government has removed the discretionary control of the child's education from the hands of his parents. Our reliable sources in the Cuban underground state that additional "laws" are prepared that will remove virtually every vestige of parental authority from over every child in Cuba. Already, Cuban parents are sending their youngsters to Miami in increasing numbers. During the past two weeks, at least one-half of the children from that island have arrived in Miami unaccompanied by their parents, being consigned to the care of relatives in residence here. To avoid this despicable destruction of family life so dear to every free man, the Cuban parents can be expected to continue this exodus of their children at an ever-increasing tempo as long as the Castro government permits.

The letter continued: "This office advises you that the community can expect an influx of upwards to 10,000 Cuban children unaccompanied by parents in the year 1961....And we, as avowed champions of personal freedom throughout the world, must meet the challenge by enthusiastically accepting these little refugees from International Communism..."³⁰²

United States journalists and refugee advocates deployed these child-centered arguments both out of conviction and for their strategic value in ensuring that mainstream Americans understood the broader geopolitical implications of the Cuban exodus and garnering sympathy for the growing exile community. Texts and images of Cuban

³⁰² *The Cuban Refugee in the Public Schools of Dade County, Florida: A Report Covering the Period from Early 1960 to December 1961*, by Dr. Joe Hall, Superintendent of Schools, Cuban Refugee Center Collection 0218 (Series 4, Box 39, Folder 99, CHC, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library, January 1962).

children submitted to communist indoctrination in classrooms and nurseries, forced to carry pickets at revolutionary rallies or participate in militia drills, or suffering hunger or material want spoke directly to the fears and fantasies of many US parents, who had come to idealize the sheltered, consumption-oriented, and economically and politically inactive middle class childhood as an essential expression of the American way of life. Consumed within the larger context of the Cold War, newspaper articles, pamphlets and speeches that drew upon these child-centered discourses and images created moral indignation at Castro's efforts to mobilize Cuban children for political, economic and military efforts, fueling anti-communist sentiment across the nation.

Pleas for sympathy towards Cuban refugees notwithstanding, exile leaders and their allies recognized that Miami's infrastructure was incapable of absorbing the ever-greater number of Cuban families and children arriving in the city, and that the continuing goodwill of local residents would depend on more than appeals to their anti-communist and patriotic sentiments. Since refugees were arriving in the United States as a result of federal asylum policy, they reasoned, the federal government should in some measure share the burden of providing for their needs.³⁰³ Local officials organized a Cuban Refugee Committee and "in terms of the greatest urgency" called upon President Dwight D. Eisenhower to "join...in determining the dimensions of the problem and the extent of need for material assistance, employment or other such means as will both be of

³⁰³ The Catholic Church, represented by Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh, director of Miami's Catholic Welfare Bureau, had already petitioned the Florida state government for assistance for refugee relief without success in 1960; their continued advocacy would play a crucial role in securing federal support for Cuban families and unaccompanied minors.

practical aid to these our Cuban friends and will maintain the position of honor and respect abroad which we cherish for our country.”

Florida governor LeRoy Collins also called for assistance from the White House in responding to the influx of Cuban refugees into Miami, as did representatives from two Florida senators’ offices, the House Committee of the Judiciary, and from the departments of State, Justice (INS), Labor, and Health, Education and Welfare. The City Manager of Miami, the International Rescue Committee and the US Committee for Refugees also expressed concern at the growth of the refugee problem.³⁰⁴ They were joined by exile groups such as the *Frente Revolucionario Democrático*, who called on President Eisenhower to send Tracy Vorhees, head of the federal Hungarian Refugee Program from 1956-1957 and a tireless supporter of anti-communist causes, to Miami to make an assessment of the needs of the exile community. Together with continued pleas for support from Miami’s Catholic Welfare Agency, these requests for assistance finally led to a federal response in on December 2, 1960, when President Eisenhower allotted one million dollars of discretionary funds to refugee aid and authorized the creation of the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center to coordinate the efforts of voluntary agencies providing relief and resettlement services to the growing number of exiles.

On February 3, 1961 President John F. Kennedy expanded federal support for refugees, announcing that he had authorized eighteen million dollars in additional funds for the creation of the Cuban Refugee Assistance Program.³⁰⁵ The program would provide

³⁰⁴ *Cuban Refugees in Florida*, Cuban Heritage Collection.

³⁰⁵ Robert M. Levine and Moisés Asís, *Cuban Miami* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 24; see also José del Cueto, “La Unidad Hay que Practicarla,” *El Avance*, August 25, 1961, 24.

financial assistance to Cuban families, in addition to supplying them with health care and assistance in securing affordable housing and employment. It also including funding to support the Cuban Children's Program, founded under the auspices of the Catholic Welfare Bureau in November 1960, to provide shelter and aid to the unaccompanied minors whom President Kennedy called "the most troubled group among the refugee population."³⁰⁶ Refugee registration and assistance would be administered through the Cuban Refugee Center, established at 600 Biscayne Boulevard in central Miami.

³⁰⁶ Well before the President's announcement, a number of child welfare organizations and voluntary agencies, led by Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh, Vicar for Spanish-Speaking Peoples in the Catholic Archdiocese of Miami and Director of the city's Catholic Welfare Bureau, had already been engaged for several months in providing shelter and aid to the unaccompanied minors who began to arrive at Miami International Airport in November 1960. Monsignor Walsh's repeated interventions before the federal Secretary of the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare played a crucial role in President Kennedy's decision to dedicate funds especially for the care of unaccompanied minors separately through the Cuban Children's Program, ensuring that responsibility for these refugee children would remain local and primarily in the hands of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish organizations. Walsh's concern that "the religious heritage of the child be safeguarded" was linked not only to his Catholic vocation, but stemmed equally from the fact that "this was one of the chief reasons why parents were sending their children into exile." See Walsh, "Cuban Refugee Children," 388. Walsh's continued advocacy ensured that unaccompanied minors would receive special consideration as part of congressional hearings to further ascertain exile community needs in 1961 and 1962. However, in spite of the immediately evident propaganda value represented by these youngest and most vulnerable refugees from communism, the volunteers and US government officials who collaborated in caring for unaccompanied Cuban minors nonetheless worked to suppress details of how those children arrived in the United States. Walsh and other volunteers working with refugee children were deeply implicated in what would become known as "Operation Pedro Pan," a secret program involving Cubans and Americans, several foreign governments and officials of federal and state governments, more than one hundred child welfare agencies, and representatives of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths, through which more than 14,000 children were spirited off the island between late 1960 and 1962. However, the distinction between the efforts of the clandestine Pedro Pan network and the official Cuban Children's program, which continued operating into the 1970s, must be maintained; moreover, the program only provided foster care to 6,486 of the Pedro Pan children upon or following their arrival in the United States. The wide range of individuals and agencies involved in transporting refugee children from the island and in caring for them in the United States, and the fact that parents' decisions to send their children alone into exile actually received minimal media attention until years later, suggests that the relationship of unaccompanied minors to US foreign policy goals was a complex one, motivated by political and philosophical concerns that extended far beyond the children's potential value as subjects of anti-Castro propaganda. That Operation Pedro Pan and the Cuban Children's Program both worked to maintain a low profile even while benefiting from an unprecedented level of federal funding and an almost blank check in terms of immigration requirements reflected a broad consensus among government officials and private citizens about the special vulnerability of children to communist indoctrination, and a shared vision of their importance, within the context of the global Cold War, to the future of the democratic capitalist model of modern nationhood. See Walsh, "Cuban Refugee

From its inception, the Center was charged with coordinating a national public relations campaign to create sympathy for exiles and support for refugee aid programs and—perhaps most importantly—to encourage both exiles and Americans to collaborate with efforts to alleviate economic and social tensions in Miami by resettling Cuban refugees across the nation.³⁰⁷ In a master stroke of public relations planning that simultaneously emphasized the political identity of the Cuban refugee community, while appealing to Americans’ positive national self-image, the US media quickly dubbed the

Children,” 378-415; “Cuban Refugees,” *New York Times*, February 4, 1961, 1; and US Senate Committee of the Judiciary, “Cuban Refugee Problems,” *Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected to Refugees and Escapees*, 87th Cong. (1961 and 1962).

³⁰⁷ Beginning even before the Cuban Refugee Center began to operate in January 1961, evidence suggests that US government officials and media had recognized that support for aid to the exile community relied on establishing a close degree of coordination and information exchange between English and Spanish language media at both the local and national levels. In December 1960, a circular letter entitled “Immediate Recommendations for Establishing the Work of the Cuban Refugee Center in the Minds of the General Public” was distributed to federal, state and municipal officials, voluntary agencies, and staff of the nascent Cuban Refugee Center. It stated, “Since the Cubans have been arriving as political refugees for quite a few months, no ‘airlift or exodus’ has been dramatized; thus there seems to be a lack of appreciation throughout the country as to the seriousness of the refugee problem in the Greater Miami area.” The letter argued that this was partly due to the US media’s inadequate and inconsistent coverage of the evolving situation in Cuba and of the exodus from the island, since “members of the press have come to the Miami area and have pieced together stories without any central direction or any ‘party line.’” Therefore, “an immediate education program must be instituted to convince: (1) the American public of the need to assist in sponsoring or resettlement of the displaced Cubans; (2) to educate the refugee community in the Miami area that they cannot expect to remain here since facilities, housing, and other resources are extremely over taxed and could not continue to maintain the large numbers of refugees.” The letter recommends the immediate launch of a coordinated national public relations campaign to achieve these goals: “When the operational plan of the new Cuban Refugee Center is completed, and when the staff, employment service, welfare and resettlement agencies are in place, this should be announced with as wide coverage as possible...the White House might [simultaneously] release the interim report on the Cuban refugee problem prepared by Mr. Vorhees. Copies of this report should be available at the Cuban Refugee Center press conference.” It also recommends that Mr. Vorhees meet privately with key executives of Miami newspapers, both English and Spanish, chiefs of the various wire service bureaus and magazines, and radio and television station managers, in order to outline to these individuals the future plans for alleviating the Cuban refugee problem in the Greater Miami Area. In conclusion, the letter states “As soon as this Center begins active operation, there probably will be a great influx of press representatives from all of the United States to see “first hand” what’s going on in Miami...if this event is brought to the attention of the major national communications media as a truly important announcement of national concern, they will cover.” See Mark Foster, *Immediate Recommendations for Establishing the Work of the Cuban Refugee Center in the Minds of the General Public*, Circular Letter 12.9/60, Cuban Refugee Center Collection 0210 (Series 1, Box 5, Folder 74, CHC, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library).

new Refugee Center the “Tower of Liberty;” this media move was almost certainly a deliberate one, most likely encouraged by the Refugee Center’s motivated PR staff.³⁰⁸

Expanded efforts to share information and coordinate coverage between the English and Spanish language media in Miami and around the United States meant that US journalists came increasingly to rely on the child-centered anti-communist discourses and images produced by their exile counterparts, mounting a federally directed campaign to portray Cubans as model immigrants—white, well educated, hardworking, middle class, and dedicated to freedom, capitalism, and family.³⁰⁹

After January 1961, American journalists coordinated closely with the Cuban Refugee Center public relations staff, who worked tirelessly to create child-centered discourses and images that would encourage US citizens to open their hearts and homes to Cuban families and unaccompanied children.³¹⁰ At the request of the Cuban Refugee

³⁰⁸ The director and upper level management of the Cuban Refugee Center were US citizens, appointed from Washington DC; however, the rest of the staff were Cuban refugees themselves, the majority university educated, many with training in law, journalism and social services. They were also, needless to say, Spanish speakers and avid followers of the exile media. These Cuban workers thus played an essential role in translating the child-centered discourses and images produced by their countrymen and women and disseminated in speeches, pamphlets, and local *periodiquitos* for use in the English language messages disseminated by the Refugee Center to local and national media. See Brewer Current, “Normalizing Cuban Refugees,” 63.

³⁰⁹ However, it bears repeating that part of what made Cubans “model immigrants” was the understanding, often directly stated within the media, that their stay in the United States would be temporary; welcomed guests, they were nonetheless expected to return to the island upon the imminent demise of the Castro regime.

³¹⁰ Given that one of the primary goals of the Cuban Refugee Assistance Program was to resettle new arrivals outside Miami, the Cuban Refugee Center PR staff also directed their child-centered discourses and images at exiles, many of whom were reluctant to leave southern Florida, as part of efforts to convince them that resettlement was in their children’s best interest. To that end, the Refugee Centers’ monthly newsletters regularly included photographs of Cuban children, warmly bundled against the Midwestern cold, smiling on the stoops of their new homes, perched on the hoods of secondhand cars refugee sponsors had helped their parents to purchase, and gathered around Christmas trees laden with gifts donated by well-wishers in their new communities. These pictures also decorated the waiting room, corridors and offices of

Center, Cuban boys and girls, many of them relocated as far away as Columbus, Ohio, were photographed by local voluntary agencies and their host families: attending parties and classes at local schools, dressed in football uniforms, and sledding in the snow. These photographs were archived by Cuban Refugee Center staff and disseminated to civic associations, television and radio stations, and newspapers and magazines across the United States, where they were published alongside articles explaining the mission of the federal Cuban Refugee Assistance Program, praising Cubans' faith, work ethic and family values, and calling upon Americans to offer their warmest welcome to exiles and their children.³¹¹

Other CHC photographs appealed more explicitly to Americans' tenderness towards small children and babies and highlighted in poignant ways the intense bonds between parent and child. One CHC publicity photograph immortalized a Cuban exile father, relocated to Baltimore, embracing his toddler son; another which appeared in a CRC bulletin entitled *Gracias, Amigos!* lovingly depicted a Cuban refugee mother

the Cuban Refugee Center, through which all refugees seeking financial assistance and support from the US government necessarily passed.

³¹¹ A wide selection of the photographs that appeared in US and exile media and that adorned the walls of the Cuban Refugee Center are preserved in the Cuban Refugee Center Collection 0218 (Series 6, Box 43, Folders 28, 30, 34, and 35; and Box 44, Folder 91, CHC, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library). The Refugee Center also used images of children to highlight the different aspects of its mission, described in the agency's "Nine Points" mission statement. They commissioned and selected photographs of children to accompany the six of nine points that were related, directly or indirectly, with children. These included Point One, which called for with the provision of daily necessities for refugees; Point Three, which dealt with the provision of funding and support for resettlement; Point Five, the provision of essential health services, and especially child health; Point Six, furnishing federal assistance for local public school operating costs related to the impact of Cuban refugee children on local educational facilities; and Point Eight, the provision of financial aid for the care and protection of unaccompanied children, which were defined as "the most defenseless and trouble group among the refugee population." See *Cuban Refugee Center: Nine Points Mission Statements*, Cuban Refugee Center Collection 0218 (Series 6, Box 42, Folder 19, CHC, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library).

holding a sleeping baby girl. These family portraits sought to drive home the importance of the universal bonds between parents and children and the centrality of these bonds to Cubans' decisions to flee the Castro regime; they also made refugee families intelligible and emotionally resonant to mainstream Americans, who in the family-focused climate of the early 1960s identified with exile's roles as parents and saw their own children's futures reflected in the faces of Cuban refugee children.³¹²

As public awareness of the exile plight grew, Miami residents began to demonstrate more support for refugees fleeing communism. By February 1961, many Anglo Americans seemed increasingly willing to overlook the strain the Cuban influx placed on the local economy and infrastructure, responding "with cordiality to the problems of the exiles." After the United States broke diplomatic relations with Cuba, many Miami residents went to the airport to welcome the large number of arriving Cuban families that arrived. One vindicated exile leader commented, "For more than a year we've been trying to tell people that the government of Fidel Castro is a dictatorship worse than that of Batista. Now, finally, they are opening their eyes to the facts."³¹³

United States government officials and journalists worked together to encourage Miami residents' newfound sympathy for the refugees, deliberately reinforcing their positive perception of Cubans as well as their understanding of themselves and their nations as defenders of the vulnerable and oppressed, especially as represented by

³¹² These photographs are archived in the Cuban Refugee Center Collection 0218 (Series 6, Box 44, Folder 86, CHC, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library).

³¹³ *El Avance*, February 10, 1961, 48.

refugee children.³¹⁴ A February 9, 1961 *Miami Herald* editorial entitled “Our Cuban Visitors” praised the Miami community for their unprecedented friendliness to “the victims of the Communist Tyranny” and drew upon the exile community’s child-centered creation myth to remind white Miamians of the class and cultural affinities between refugees and middle class Americans. It noted that “the Cuban visitors represent all phases of life and professions, having an excellent level of education...more than half have their families with them, including children brought from Cuba to escape communist indoctrination in the schools.” The editorial reassured readers, “They are honest persons, that have refused to kneel before the Soviet boot ruling in Cuba, and they have come in search of Freedom among their American neighbors of the same ideas.” Delighted that the US media was so closely reflecting the exile community’s collective sense of selfhood and its recognition of the sacrifices they had made to protect their children, *El Avance* republished the editorial “in a place of honor” in its February 24th edition.³¹⁵

As relations between the United States and Cuba descended into open hostility in the spring of 1961, the few American journalists remaining on the island worked to send

³¹⁴ This general dynamic—and its shadow side—is described by Bonnie Honig, who notes that “good” immigrants and refugees have often served to enhance or reinvigorate the national democracy by renewing its faith in the moral value of its economic and political structures, culture, and notions of community and family. Paradoxically, however, the ability of the immigrant to reinforce Americans’ nationalist pride relies on their continued framing as “foreign” or outside the national body, and is accompanied by the persistence of suspicions of immigrant foreignness. Thus “nationalist xenophilia tends to feed and (re)produce nationalist xenophobia as its partner.” Thus it is no surprise that the lavish praise of Cuban refugees’ moral and political uprightness, responding to muted but nonetheless persistent concerns about their impact on south Florida’s economy and society, were often accompanied by references to their status as temporary guests in the United States. See Bonnie Honig, “Immigrant America? How Foreignness ‘Solves’ Democracy’s Problems,” *Social Text* 56 (1998): 3.

³¹⁵ “Our Cuban Visitors,” *Miami Herald*, February 9, 1961; *El Avance*, February 24, 1961.

home stories reinforcing the dangers faced by children in Castro's Cuba—and indeed, of the threat which the indoctrination of Cuban children represented to the future of democracy throughout the Americas. Reporting from Havana on February 8, Jim Fontaine wrote: “At the same time as he lays siege to Catholic Education Fidel Castro has said that he plans to send a thousand Cuban children to the Soviet Union. The goal, observe horrified parents and educators here, is to form a generation of ‘mass-men,’ communist automatons for the penetration of the Americas.”

Once again alluding to the memory of the Spanish Civil War, Fontaine reminded US and Cuban exile readers that this was not the first time innocent children had been kidnapped and trained to serve the nefarious purposes of international communism: “Today the apparently Russian and Czechoslovaks that amble through Havana as ‘technicians’ and that speak Spanish so well, are the children that twenty-five years ago the Reds in Spain sent to Russia.”³¹⁶

During the dramatic events of the CIA sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961, and in the weeks and months following its disastrous failure, the US government and media focused even more attention on the island's political transformation and the explosive growth of the Miami exile community. Journalists drew the attention of already-alarmed Americans to the increasingly desperate plight of Cuban children under a regime that had now openly declared itself socialist.³¹⁷ *New York Times* correspondent

³¹⁶ Jim Fontaine, “Why Castro Asphyxiates Catholic Education,” original source of publication unknown, reprinted as “Por Qué Castro Asfixia a la Educación de Tipo Católico,” *El Avance*, March 3, 1961, 45.

³¹⁷ Stories like these worked in Cuba to spur more parents to take the drastic step of sending their children alone into exile, even as they encouraged Americans to open their homes to refugee families and

Tad Szulc reported on Castro's increasingly intimate bonds with the Soviet Union, noting revolutionary Education Minister Armando Hart's recent visit to Moscow as evidence of the communist takeover of Cuban schools; as further evidence of the sovietization of children's lives, he cited a Radio Havana broadcast declaring that newborn babies "all over Cuba are being named Yuri," in tribute to Major Yuri Gagarin of the Soviet Air Force, who had become the first man to orbit the earth on April 12th.³¹⁸

Time magazine also reported with distress on the growing militance of Cuban youth, who were being organized into juvenile patrols and militias members charged with policing city and village streets at night, empowered to conduct arrests or respond as they

unaccompanied minors. However, in spite of the immediately evident propaganda value of these youngest and most vulnerable refugees from communism, the volunteers and US government officials who collaborated in caring for unaccompanied Cuban minors nonetheless were assisted by many journalists in suppressing details of how those children arrived in the United States. Walsh and other volunteers working with refugee children through the official Cuban Children's Program were also deeply implicated in initiating and overseeing what would become known as "Operation Pedro Pan," a secret program which spirited more than 14,000 unaccompanied minors out of Castro's Cuba between late 1960 and 1962. The Pedro Pan network included Cubans and Americans as well as several key players from Britain, several foreign governments and officials of US federal and state governments and the intelligence agencies, as well as teachers, airline officials, and more than one hundred child welfare agencies representing the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths. Given the staggering number of individuals and agencies involved in transporting refugee children from the island and in caring for them in the United States, and indeed, the potential propaganda value represented by Cuban parents' desperate decisions to send their children alone into exile, it is surprising that Operation Pedro Pan did in fact receive minimal media attention until March 9, 1962, when a journalist at the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* threatened to break the carefully maintained silence about the clandestine network. When all efforts to suppress story failed, Monsignor Walsh agreed to issue a press release describing the operation in basic terms, but omitting all references to the network in Cuba. This reticence was owed to concerns about repercussions to the ongoing operation on the island; however, it also suggests that the relationship of unaccompanied minors to US foreign policy goals was a complex one, motivated by political and philosophical concerns that extended far beyond the children's potential value as subjects of anti-Castro propaganda. The multiple motives and concerns that gave birth to Operation Pedro Pan and the Cuban Children's Program nonetheless reflected a complex but wide-ranging consensus among government officials and private citizens about the special vulnerability of children to communist indoctrination and, within the context of a global Cold War, a shared vision of their importance to the future of the democratic capitalist model of modern nationhood. See Walsh, "Cuban Refugee Children," 378-415; "Cuban Refugees," *New York Times*, February 4, 1961, 1; and US Senate Committee of the Judiciary, *Cuban Refugee Problems*.

³¹⁸ Tad Szulc, "Castro's Regime Moves to Solidify Links to Soviet," *New York Times*, April 30, 1961.

saw fit.³¹⁹ In a follow-on series of articles documenting the Castro government's preparations for the island's first socialist celebrations of May Day, the *New York Times* described the busloads of *guajiro* children who were bussed into the capital to march in the day-long procession through the capital city's Plaza Cívica, while Castro, President Dorticós and high officials of the Armed Forces watched from a stand erected at the foot of the José Martí monument in the plaza's center. At midnight, the horrified *Times* correspondent reported, Cuban children marveled at fireworks and applauded the burning in effigy of US President Kennedy.³²⁰

In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, Americans across the nation responded passionately to Cubans' plight and to the ever-increasing flood of refugees who fled to the United States in order to save their children from communist terror on the island. Local Lions and Rotary Clubs donated money to voluntary agencies for exile aid and donated badly needed supplies. As public awareness and sympathy for refugees grew, so did the scope of American efforts to demonstrate their anti-communist solidarity by welcoming and assisting new arrivals. In May 1961, eighty-eight Kiwanis Clubs from across the country organized "Freedom Caravan for Cuban Refugees." More than twenty-five trucks bearing more than one hundred thousand dollars' worth of food and supplies—including children's clothing and toys—arrived in Miami where local Kiwanis club leaders organized the distribution of these goods to needy refugees. Organized by N.M. Harrison, a retired minister, who told exile journalists that "there exists among the

³¹⁹ "Foreign Relations: Grand Illusion," *Time*, April 28, 1961, 21. Theodore Draper Papers, Box 9, Folder D14, Hoover Institution Archives.

³²⁰ Tad Szulc, "Castro Rules Out Elections in Cuba," *New York Times*, May 2, 1961.

American people a deep feeling of compassion for the suffering of the people of Cuba” and that in all the cities the caravan visited, people were eager to help.³²¹

Galvanized by events on the island and encouraged by these outpourings of support, refugees began to join exile leaders in urgent efforts to raise American awareness of their needs, relying on the child-centered images and discourses that helped to create them as an exile community in the American mainstream and even drawing upon their own children to elicit sympathy and support. To that end, in June 1961, a recently arrived exile couple brought their six month old baby girl to the Cuban Refugee Center. The chubby baby, dressed in a cotton dress and sun bonnet, wore a sign printed in English pinned to her dress: “I want to bring here my aunt, she doesn’t want to be Red— Please help!” She was promptly photographed and the following image published in a leading exile *periodiquito*.

³²¹ *El Avance*, May 19, 1961, 18-19.



Figure 13: Photograph, baby with sign pinned on her dress³²²

However, the fact that the baby's sign was painstakingly, if somewhat awkwardly, printed in English, suggests that the exile parents had deliberately targeted the English

³²² *El Avance*, June 2, 1961, 17.

speaking staff of the Cuban Refugee Center and perhaps even the US media, in search of the broadest possible audience for their anti-communist message.

Whether this particular message—as poignant as it was self-conscious—reached the English speaking mainstream, by the spring of 1961, efforts by exiles and their US allies to disseminate the exile community’s child-centered creation myth and to educate the public about the particular vulnerability and suffering of refugee children had clearly begun to bear fruit. Following the Bay of Pigs debacle, these efforts took on a greater urgency, even as they were received with a new alacrity by anti-communist Americans across the nation.

Conclusion

Beginning in early 1960, child-centered media messages had been strikingly effective in creating favorable conditions for Cuban immigration and ensuring a warm welcome for exiles in Miami and wherever they resettled. These messages were at the heart of a coordinated local and national public relations campaign, driven by refugees themselves, to persuade Americans that they had been compelled to undergo an involuntary exile in order to protect their families from state intervention and their vulnerable children from scarcity, physical danger, and Marxist indoctrination. This understanding of the Cuban exodus emphasized the harmony between refugees’ political opposition to the Revolution and United States anti-communist foreign policy goals, thus ensuring that the US government treated Cubans as political exiles from Communist persecution rather than conventional ‘ethnic’ immigrants. The symbolic figure of the

child thus worked to strategically positioning Cubans fleeing the island as uniquely worthy of assistance from the US government.

Child-centered discourses and images also worked powerfully to counter white Miamians' notions of Cuban racial and cultural otherness rooted in the complex history of Cuban immigration to south Florida's complex and the evolution of the region's race relations. Beginning with the establishment of the Cuban Refugee Center in January 1961, a well coordinated public relations campaign that encompassed both English and Spanish media effectively deployed child-centered messages to respond to Anglo American Miami-Dade County residents' concerns about the growing influx of racially and culturally suspect Cuban refugees to their city. Over time, representations of light-skinned, well dressed and well groomed refugee children enjoying their newfound freedom in the United States were crucial to securing Cuban refugees' largely favorable reception by the American mainstream—a welcome by no means inevitable or unconditional—by 'coding' the exile community as white, middle class, and sharing the Christian family values of Cold War America.

This process, however, was not a unitary or absolute one; indeed, as radicalization proceeded on the island, exile leaders and advocates sometimes highlighted the presence of mixed-race and 'humble' families and children among those fleeing the island, precisely to emphasize their shared political identity and to discredit Castro's efforts to portray his Revolution as class-based, with blacks and the poor as its primary beneficiaries.³²³ Paradoxically, however, by highlighting "humble" families' opposition

³²³ Exile *periodiquitos* made much of the limited number of black, mixed-race and *guajiro* refugees that were included in the early exodus from the island, featuring them in articles that often made direct

to communism, even these representations worked to reinforce the political identity of the growing exile community, therefore encouraging Anglo Americans in Miami and across the nation to frame Cubans within the context of their relationship to the global Cold War struggle rather than in racial or ethnic terms.

Moreover, while Cubans may have enjoyed a largely favorable reception from Anglo Americans, not all Miami residents were enthusiastic about the seemingly never-ending flow of Cuban refugees into the city. Exile's success in winning support from local, state and federal government and civic organizations did not necessarily endear them to Miami's other Latina/o communities or to local African Americans, who in the midst of ongoing civil rights era struggles still suffered from segregation and unequal access to employment, schools, public facilities and resources.³²⁴

reference to their "humble" racial or class origins. Public relations workers at the Cuban Refugee Center similarly highlighted their efforts to assist non-white and working class refugees; as but one example of this tendency, a Refugee Center photograph of an Afro-Cuban family preparing for resettlement, accompanied by a press release and inscribed *53 Resettlements: African descent*, is archived in the Cuban Refugee Center Collection CHC 0218 (Series 6, Box 44, Folder 63, CHC, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library).

³²⁴ A small group of scholars have recently begun to analyze the impact of Cuban immigration on Miami's other non-white communities. This focus on how not only established resident white Americans have responded to immigrants, but also on how Miami's African American population has reacted, is developed in Stepick et al., *This Land is Our Land*, the authors argue that the "extraordinarily generous welcome afforded Cubans not only allowed them to achieve unparalleled rapid economic success, but also strained relationships among all groups in Miami. African Americans argued that Cubans received the fruits of the civil rights movement"; moreover, as a result of the continuation of Cuban immigration throughout the sixties and seventies, "working-class white Americans frequently either fled the city or initiated a backlash, which included [in the early 1980s] the English Only movement..." Marvin Dunn similarly argues that "the Cuban influx succeeded not only in diverting attention from Miami blacks during the crucial integration period, but also by virtue of their greater social acceptability and entrepreneurial skills, Cubans began winning the lion's share of public dollars..." Dunn also argues that the widespread perception of racial/ethnic disparity in employment opportunities continued to cause resentment of Cubans among Miami blacks, especially given that the city was suffering from a recession between 1959 and 1961, and considering that unemployment rates were much higher in black districts. However, while the initial influx of Cuban refugees to Miami certainly caused some displacement of blacks in the tourism industry, Dunn concludes that it was most likely minimal; what is nonetheless significant is that "many blacks believe that it has occurred." See Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*, 319-320.

Children were nonetheless at the heart of largely successful efforts by Cuban refugees and their allies to articulate a “creation myth” that emphasized their political identity while de-emphasizing other potential markers of difference, strategically allying themselves with Cold War America’s anti-communist mission while distancing themselves from aspects of their identity that might cause them to be unfavorably associated with Miami-Dade County’s minority and immigrant communities. This process relied heavily on the child-centered discourses and images that accompanied both explicit or implicit reinforcements of Cuban refugees’ whiteness, middle class origins, and Christian family values, as well as their fervent anti-communism and commitment to the principles of democratic capitalism, all of which they ostensibly shared with their US hosts and sponsors. While these qualities were certainly shared by the majority of the first wave of Cubans fleeing Castro, it was not inevitable that the Anglo American mainstream would accept the exile community’s emerging collective identity or their claims to racial, class, political cultural affinities with middle class Americans. Children, so central to the exile community’s efforts to exiles’ strategic self-definition and public image in the light of the continuing refugee influx to southern Florida, thus played an essential strategic role in securing the local goodwill upon which Cubans’ ability to survive in exile would depend.

Chapter 6

Creating the Exile Community, Part Two: Children and the Anti-Castro Struggle, 1959-1962

This chapter analyzes the role played by children and discourses and images of childhood in facilitating the transition of southern Florida's ethnic Cuban population from a diverse and loosely bounded group of US citizens and residents to a cohesive and self-aware community, united by their rejection of Fidel Castro's socialist Revolution and their commitment to its demise. Between 1959 and 1962, at the same time as the exiles' child-centered creation myth worked to secure refugees' preferential immigration status, resettlement assistance and the goodwill of Miami's Anglo-American majority, symbolic and actual children were also at the forefront of exile leaders' efforts to construct a political identity that would supercede refugees' initially dramatic political differences and to mobilize refugees to support their passionate efforts, in collaboration with US and Latin American governments and political actors, to overthrow the Castro regime.

Between January 1959 and the conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis in November 1962, the highly visible presence of children among the initially fragmented refugee population and within its nascent media contributed powerfully to exile leaders' efforts to construct an inclusive community identity that overcame racial, socioeconomic and political differences between the earliest and most conservative elite Batista-aligned exiles and working class and left-leaning US resident Cubans, and between both of these groups and the progressive middle class refugees who began arriving in 1960. As a result of their efforts, this deeply fragmented community-in-the making began to coalesce around the emotionally charged and child-centered creation myth which asserted that

loving Cuban parents had fled the island in order to protect their children from physical danger and hardship, communist indoctrination, and spiritual and moral corruption.

Discourses of childhood were thus essential to the emergence of a fragile exile political consensus by mid-1960, bridging the divides between progressive working and middle class Cuban residents and refugees and the widely disparaged Batista-aligned elite who had arrived in the first six months of 1959.

Building upon the child-centered creation myth that articulated Cubans' decision to flee the island for asylum in the US, exile leaders also drew upon discourses and images of childhood to frame their counter-revolutionary efforts as a collective struggle that had been launched on behalf of the innocent refugee children whom the Revolution had deprived of their historical patrimony and the shelter and comfort of their island homeland. Within the context of this extended creation myth, leaders quickly began to insist that political diversity was a stumbling block that prevented refugees from coming together in support of the anti-Castro cause.

Thus, even as radicalization proceeded on the island and the numbers of refugees arriving in Miami grew, exile leaders drew more and more frequently on this creation myth in demanding refugees' demonstrate their shared commitment to an increasingly hegemonic anti-communist and anti-Castro ideology. They also increasingly relied on discourses and images of childhood to mobilize exiles in support of counter-revolutionary and paramilitary and propaganda campaigns, and even deployed girls and boys in anti-Castro actions that sought to bring their sojourn as exiles to a swift conclusion.

Between 1960 and 1962, then, exile leaders relied heavily on their child-centered creation myth and both symbolic and actual children in developing and pursuing the political goals that rapidly came to define their community. During this period, child-centered discourses and images—and in some cases the efforts of actual children—were consistently important to the anti-Castro and anti-communist activities and propaganda produced by exile leaders as part of a hemispheric campaign to discredit the Revolution throughout the Americas, to turn Cubans on the island away from their new leader, and even to engineer the overthrow of the revolutionary regime.

Children, the Exile Creation Myth and the Forging of a Counter-Revolutionary Consensus

On the eve of the 1959 Revolution, the southern Florida Cuban population was composed of individuals of widely varying racial identities, socioeconomic positions, levels of assimilation within American society, and diverse political affiliations, all of whom had varying reasons for taking up residence in the United States. However, despite this diversity, ethnic Cubans were largely united—as were many Americans—in their initial support for the Revolution.

Conscious of the importance of children and youth to their island's aspirations towards independence, democratic governance and social justice, Cuban Floridians wrote impassioned letters to the editor of Miami's widely circulated Spanish-language newspaper, *Diario las Américas*, drawing upon child-centered discourses to express their support for the anti-Batista insurgency and to condemn the dictator's few remaining supporters. "Doesn't it seem to you," Fernando Crespo addressed the paper's editor, "that

there is little conscience in the souls of those men that still defend the Batista regime, knowing that his government is supported only by bayonets and has denied the people all their rights?" This same regime, he continued, was responsible for "the death of our best sons, of the most noble and heroic generation of the republican era." Another reader, signing his letter only as "a Catholic," thanked the newspaper for "its editorial policy of combating dictatorship and defending democracy," and urged Miami's Spanish-speaking peoples to "pray for the homeland of Martí...and for those brave youths that have given everything to serve the cause of justice. God save Cuba and her best sons!"³²⁵

On January 1, 1959, thousands of Miami Cubans of all backgrounds and ages came together to celebrate Batista's downfall, taking to the streets in spontaneous expression of joy. Caravans of cars waving Cuban flags and M-26-7 banners processed jubilantly down Flagler and Biscayne Boulevards, and along North West 7th Street. Exiles and long-term US resident Cubans and their children gathered in front of the statue of José Martí in Bayfront Park to pay homage to their "apostle of independence" and proclaim their support for the Revolution. In Tampa, local representatives of the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* and the *Directorio Revolucionario* organized a parade of 2,000 automobiles, and children waved Cuban flags and proudly carried revolutionary banners, just as children on the island were participating in the festivities surrounding their nation's liberation from tyranny. Images of these children appeared prominently in

³²⁵ *Diario las Américas*, January 1, 1959, 2B.

Miami's Spanish-language media, driving home the unifying message that all Cubans, including the children so beloved of Martí rejoiced at the triumph of the Revolution.³²⁶

Hundreds of Cubans also gathered at Miami International Airport, hastily joining forces to publicly repudiate the first exiles to flee to the United States, *Batistianos* whose known connections to the dictator's corrupt and repressive government, military and secret police force had forced them to flee revolutionary reprisal on the island. Nor did they reserve their rage for adults associated with the Batista regime; indeed, the dictator's two sons, twelve-year old Roberto and nine year old Carlos Manuel, sent off the island by their father on the night before his government fell, were assailed by screaming and jeering pro-Castro Cubans upon their arrival at Idlewild Airport in New York. Police officers prevented a group of five men from attacking the children and detained the men for questioning before escorting the children and their caregivers from the airport to safety.³²⁷

Batista's beleaguered children were among the first to flee Cuba. They were part of a small "wave within a wave" of early refugees from the island, composed of the approximately 26,500 Cubans who sought refuge in the United States during the first six

³²⁶ "Desbordante Alegría Causa en Miami Caída del Dictador Batista," *Diario las Américas*, January 3, 1959, 10; and *Diario las Américas*, January 4, 1959, 14.

³²⁷ Henry Logeman, "Desórden en New York al Arribar los Hijos de Batista," *Diario las Américas*, January 1, 1959, 1. In other clashes between anti-Batista Cubans and the dictator's supporters outside Cuba, children also suffered injury and, in at least one case, a child was killed; eleven year old María Fagundo, daughter of Cuban exile Ovidio Fagundo, was shot during a riot outside the Cuban embassy in Venezuela, where a group of two hundred Castro supporters tried to enter the embassy to remove a Batista army officer who had taken refuge there. See "Hija de Exilado Resulta Muerta en Venezuela en Manifestación de Cubanos," *Diario las Américas*, January 3, 1959, 6.

months of 1959.³²⁸ *Batistianos* established homes in southern Florida and New York, where they lived off income from US investments or their substantial savings deposited in American banks. Reviled by progressive Cubans and Castro supporters, these first Batista-aligned exiles thus initially sought to maintain a low profile and in many cases even avoided social contact with other Latin American origin peoples, among whom Castro and the Revolution were also popular. Alienated from their US resident countrymen and women by their hatred of the new regime, *Batistianos* quietly nursed the bitterness of their lost power and status even as they hoped for a quick return to the island, organizing amongst themselves some of the earliest plots to overthrow Castro and desire to regain their assets.³²⁹

Before the Revolution's first year had passed, many of its original leaders had begun to rethink their loyalty to Castro; many of them began to join the *Batistianos* in Miami, swelling the ranks of the city's small but rapidly growing exile population. The new regime's expanded persecution of the Catholic Church and unprecedented interventions in the island's educational system, followed by the massive nationalization of businesses and property in the spring and summer of 1960, drove more and more dispossessed and disaffected Cubans and their children to join the exodus. Most of these

³²⁸ The 'first wave' of Cuban refugees, arriving between January 1959 and October 1962, totaled approximately 280,000; Batista-aligned exiles, then, represented slightly less than 10 percent of this total. Llanes, *Cuban Americans*, 8.

³²⁹ De la Torre, *La Lucha for Cuba*, 34; Sergio Díaz Briquets and Lisandro Pérez, *Cuba: The Demography of Revolution*, Population Bulletin, 36:1 (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, April 1981), 26.

new arrivals to Miami had nonetheless applauded the anti-Batista insurgency, believing that a revolution was necessary to bring substantial change to the island.³³⁰

The middle class and anti-Batista refugees who began to arrive in Miami in late 1959 were originally a politically heterogeneous group; initially pro-Castro, these disenchanted members and supporters of the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* included political conservatives and liberals, socialists and Christian Democrats, unified only by their belief that the Revolution had exceeded its mandate and introduced policies that went against the vision of the majority of the citizenry. Exiles were also initially divided by their differing attitudes towards the United States. A small number were *plattistas* who defended US hegemony over their island and called both for US support for Castro's overthrow and the restoration of Cuba's historically close economic and political ties with their northern neighbor. However, many of the earliest first wave refugees were passionate Cuban nationalists who opposed American imperialism in Latin America and sympathized with the Puerto Rican independence movement; in order to secure greater autonomy for their own nation in the future, they believed that the struggle to establish democratic rule on the island must be undertaken primarily by Cubans.

Also present among the refugees were representatives of the wide range of prerevolutionary political parties, factions, and urban resistance and guerrilla groups; they clashed over the direction of the anti-Castro struggle, seeking power for their

³³⁰ Many exiles were neither Batista supporters nor anti-Castro in 1959. A 1963 exile survey indicated that 70 percent were in favor of the downfall of the Batista dictatorship; another study of the same year found that 23 percent of the immigrant Cuban adults had participated in anti-Batista activities prior to Castro's victory. It is estimated that between one third and one half of the early exiles had originally been active supporters of Fidel Castro's Revolution. Fagen, Brody, and O'Leary, *Cubans in Exile*, 51; Thomas J. O'Leary, "Cubans in Exile: Political Attitudes and Political Participation" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1967), 33.

organizations in exile and to advance their claims to leadership positions in a newly democratic Cuba. As a result, a wide range of exile civic and political organizations were quickly established under the leadership of charismatic and outspoken leaders, each focused on their own particular ideological vision and practical priorities. Debate between these different organizations only exacerbated the already confused and politically charged atmosphere in Cuban south Florida.³³¹

As late as the summer of 1960, then, the only obvious collective point of references for all Cuban refugees was their final rejection of Castro's Revolution.³³² Though they had fled the island for different reasons, refugees quickly realized that an effective campaign to restore the Republic would require overlooking the multiplicity of motives behind exiles' anti-Castro sentiments and their distinct ideological visions for the future of the nation. In order to return home, exiles would first have to forge a shared explanation for their exodus that could encompass everyone who found themselves in Miami, and therefore allow the leveraging of all of their resources for a shared fight against Castro.

Even as they debated their widely ranging political visions for their homeland's future, many exiles discovered that they interpreted their flight from the island in similarly child-centered terms. Socioeconomic and political differences aside, a majority of exiles shared the belief that the Revolution represented a terrible threat to their

³³¹ García, *Havana USA*, 3.

³³² See Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Refugees: Manifold Migrations," in *Origins and Destinies: Immigrations, Race and Ethnicity in America*, ed. Silvia Pedraza-Bailey and Rubén G. Rumbaut (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1996), 263.

children's physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, and that exile was the only way to protect them from harm. They further believed that the struggle to overthrow Castro must be waged to reclaim their sons' and daughters' futures as citizens of a democratic Cuba. One of these early exiles neatly articulated these axioms of the community's emerging child-centered creation myth:

These were people who had it all in Cuba. They were living comfortable lives...and they gave it all up because they wanted their children to live in an environment of freedom. They wanted to free Cuba; they came to this country with the idea that this was the place from where to organize their struggle for Cuba's freedom, where their children could grow and develop their full potential—something they couldn't do in Cuba.³³³

This powerful child-centered creation myth would thus provide the common ground for building a fragile political consensus among a politically fragmented exile community and facilitate the mobilization of refugees for the anti-Castro struggle, thereby ensuring that future generations would grow to adulthood in the democratic nation bequeathed to them by Martí and the other heroes of Cuban independence.

Children and the Anti-Castro Struggle

Even as they deployed this child-centered creation myth to secure US government and public support for the needs of Cuban refugees, newly arrived journalists from the island also relied heavily on discourses and images of childhood to fuel the processes of consensus building and political mobilization among exiles. They worked feverishly to establish or re-establish Cuban media outlets in Miami, wiewing their community-

³³³ Interview with Cuban exile attorney Rafael Peñalver by Miguel González-Pando, *The Cuban Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998), 33.

building efforts, as well as the production of child-centered anti-Castro propaganda, as a necessary complement to the paramilitary counter-revolutionary struggle. From the beginning, then, exile *periodiquitos* relied heavily on morally and emotionally charged representations of children as part of a broader effort to consolidate the increasingly hegemonic anti-Castro and anti-Communist worldview that would provide refugees representing a wide range of political and socioeconomic positions with a shared identity and purpose, thus advancing their shared goal of overthrowing the Revolution and re-establishing democratic rule on the island.

The exile newspaper *Patria* quickly established itself at the forefront of efforts to deploy the figure of the child in support of the counter-revolutionary cause.³³⁴ On May 13, 1960, the paper suggested that a shared concern for children had motivated the rapidly expanding body of anti-Batista insurgents, former revolutionary officials, religious and civic leaders and everyday citizens, on the island and in exile, who had put aside their differences to join the fight against the Castro regime. “The rebellion grows larger by the minute,” it claimed.

In front of the communist despot, traitor of the Revolution, thousands and thousands of men and women are mobilizing across the nation to launch the definitive

³³⁴ Though editorials frequently claimed to have opposed the repressive regime of Fulgencio Batista, it has been speculated that this newspaper, one of the exile community’s earliest and most stridently anti-Castro publications, accepted financial contributions from the deposed dictator. It is uncertain when this support may have been first extended. It may have been prompted by exiles’ realization that any and all available resources were needed to launch a successful counter-revolutionary struggle; it may also have been facilitated by the increasingly hegemonic anti-Castro and anti-communist exile worldview that originated with the community’s child-centered creation myth, which allowed for at least the partial rehabilitation and integration of Batista aligned exiles into the broader community. See “La Toga Verde Olivo,” *Patria*, May 13, 1960, 1.

battle, not just against Castro's regime, but something more grandiose, to exterminate communism in our homeland. No more are they the men of the past regime, more or less affected; no longer is this about 'criminals of war, evil doers, great landowners,' terms that Castro has been using against his adversaries...Now, in front of the red Hyena...are mobilizing figures of recognized merit, in the struggle against the past regime that today are beginning to reinitiate the battle for a better Cuba. Here, in front of Castro, traitor and communist, we have Tony Varona, Aureliano Sanchez Arango, Arturo Hernandez Tellaeché, Grau, Artime, Diaz Lanz, Huber Matos, Rasco; Marquez Sterling, the priests O'Farrill, Aguirre and Perez; organizations like SIP; Monsignor Perez Serante, industrialists, homeowners, shopkeepers, workers with their salaries reduced, Catholics, thousands of prisoners, the very elements of the 26th of July movement...who fought for a Cuban, not a Russian, Revolution...

Among these illustrious figures who had joined the counter-revolutionary ranks, *Patria* claimed, could also be found "thousands of Cuban mothers, tired of hearing talk of deaths, that think only about the children."³³⁵

In July, *El Avance Criollo*, recently re-established in exile, offered its own child-centered critique of the Revolution. The newspaper attacked the hypocrisy of Castro's ostensibly antimilitary posture, most famously embodied in his broadly publicized campaign to convert Batista-era prisons and police stations into schools, since "at the same time, he was creating worker, peasant and student militias" and carrying away "to

³³⁵ "Inevitable la Guerra en Cuba," *Patria*, May 24, 1960, 1.

the Sierra Maestra young students of both sexes, dressed in olive-green uniforms, on an exhausting march that, of course, also removed them from their classrooms.” The attack continued: “The *Fidelista* militarism didn’t stop there...it was necessary to move on to the preparation of children and the youth militias emerged, a tropical reproduction of the Spanish *flechillas* and the Nazi youth. Fidel wants to prepare the youth for the millennium that he is preparing for.”

Fidel’s emulation of communist and Nazi methods, the article claimed, didn’t end with the creation of youth militias. In addition to compelling students to take up arms to defend the Revolution, Castro had also launched a widespread brainwashing campaign that targeted children, basing the future of his despotic regime on the unconditional support and obedience of the island’s youngest citizens.

...It isn’t just the military marches, the uniform of a markedly Nazi design. It’s the indoctrination, the teaching of hard and implacable principles and dogmas of totalitarianism. That’s the basis for the reading textbooks edited by the Ministry of Education, where the letter “F” is taught with the word “Fidel”; the letter “Ch” with Ché Guevara; and “R” with Raúl, etc. Only textbooks from Soviet Russia and its most oppressed “colonies” use this method. Fidel and his regime are setting up for a Nazi millennium.³³⁶

In September 1960, the newspaper used similarly child-centered language to make common cause with anti-communist student groups in Mexico in demanding that

³³⁶ “Las Patrullas Juveniles,” *El Avance*, July 8, 1960, 2.

the Organization of American States take a stand against the Castro regime. On the eve of the meeting of American Heads of State at the Organization of American States in San José, Costa Rica, *El Avance* joined the Feminine Democratic Union, the Mexican Federation of Democratic Youth, and the Feminine University Association in Favor of Peace and Liberty in a campaign to “save our children,” declaring themselves “categorically opposed to the conspiracy that is being forged, against peace and the order of our Continent, by the present rulers of Cuba, conniving with the governments of Russia and China.”

They issued a blanket rejection of communism, which threatened “the destruction of the home and the separation of families,” and demanded that the OAS oppose to their fullest “the imposition of the designs of the universal communist conspiracy in our Americas, that already has Cuba subjected to its hegemony and plans to impose its dominion over all the other nations of the Continent;” concluding, “We oppose the idea that any communist dictator that believes themselves the only one worthy to think for the rest, and to impose by blood and fire his ideas and resolutions, should govern the thoughts of our children.”³³⁷

In the same month, new evidence of the revolutionary threat to children—not just Cuban children, but indeed all children of the Americas—shocked the exile community. During Castro’s September 1960 visit to the United Nations headquarters in New York, a gang of revolutionary supporters opened fire on a group of exiles eating in a Cuban

³³⁷ *El Avance*, September 2, 1960, 6.

restaurant. Nine year old Magdalena Urdaneta, a Venezuelan girl on holiday in the city with her family, was caught in the crossfire. Shot through the lungs, she died in the arms of her mother. Miami's exile journalists wasted no time in blaming the innocent child's murder on the leader of Cuba's communist Revolution, declaring "The streets of New York are covered with children's blood, with 'red,' the footprint of a red that is not satisfied with destroying life in its homeland, but rather has to destroy it... wherever it puts down its foot.... Fidel always causes death: in *Moncada*, aboard the *Granma*, in the civil war, in power, in Venezuela, in Bogotá."

While acknowledging that it "wasn't him who fired the gun," *Patria* insisted that "it was he that armed the criminal hand that, without conscience, has killed a girl that was the joy of her parents." This crime, moreover, was further proof of Castro and his communist henchmen's cruel disregard for life, their contempt for familial ties, and their indifference to children:

...What does Fidel know of these things of the heart? He that doesn't love his own mother. He who in his demagoguery insults his dead father. He who reacts with the coldness of marble in front of the son agonizing in a hospital.... He can feel neither shame, nor pain, nor sadness, in front of the inanimate little body of a girl, murdered by his gangs.... He is incapable of being moved by the weeping of her parents, since in order to feel moved it is necessary to have a soul... and Fidel doesn't have a soul... the poor little Magdalena, the unfortunate child vilely assassinated, could not possibly move Fidel Castro or his communists—feelings are bourgeois prejudices—but they definitely make us feel great sadness in the depths of our hearts. Because we have children and we love

them more than our own lives, we know how to measure the deep and unending loss that the parents of Magdalena are feeling. While an innocent angel flies to the heavens to be taken in the loving and sweet arms of the Lord; on the earth, the diabolical figure of Fidel Castro will continue sowing suffering, hatred, rancor and evil...³³⁸

Implicit to the article's concluding lines was the argument which underwrote the exile community's child-centered creation myth: loving Cuban parents had spirited their children off the island to save them from the Revolution. Stories like this kept ever-present in refugees' minds the *fidelista* and communist threat to the young. They also reminded exiles of the urgent need to unite across their differences, not only to restore the lost homeland to its smallest citizens, but, indeed, to save all the children of the Americas from Castro's "satanic clutches."

Building on the fear and outrage that followed the story of Magdalena's death, in October refugees learned of an even more sinister threat to the island's children—and to their parents, relatives and neighbors—when *El Avance* reported that the Revolution had begun training children as spies. The newspaper accused the director of the Cuban Ministry of Social Welfare, Dr. Raquel Pérez, of overseeing the establishment of "centers of indoctrination" in order to prepare "these childrens brigades in the techniques of betrayal, ratting out, and espionage":

The process was simple: they carefully selected children from the schools and militias who had the best mental predispositions, and those whose parents could be

³³⁸ Armando Garcia Sifredo, "Magdalena," *Patria*, September 27, 1960, 2.

pressured in some way by the regime. After imbuing them with false ideas of heroism and patriotism, they immediately gave them courses of indoctrination. In order to stimulate them, they gave them prizes of great psychological value, with promises to improve the conditions of their families. Once their childish minds had “matured” sufficiently...they were divided into brigades of five, and day and night—disguised as beggars, lottery ticket sellers, etc.—they roamed the streets of La Habana....When some citizen saw one of those ragged children and urged them to seek help from the Ministry of Social Welfare, the invariable response was that [under state care] ‘they weren’t given anything to eat; they were badly treated or abused....’ If the citizen fell into the trap and spoke badly of the government, immediately their ‘case’ was reported to the Chief who closely watched over this work of children’s espionage.

El Avance claimed that the children’s espionage program, supported by G-2 intelligence officers and other high officials in the Ministry of Social Welfare, had already put 250 child-spies to work in the capitol’s streets; another 250 children were undergoing indoctrination and training and would soon join them. At least one Cuban had already lost their life at the *paredón* on the basis of intelligence gathered by child-spies.³³⁹ Accompanying the terrifying exposé, a photograph showed Fidel Castro hoisting a small girl into the air; the caption read “First he praises them! Then he makes them into child-spies.”³⁴⁰

³³⁹ “Entrenando Niños Como Espias,” *El Avance*, October 21, 1960, 9.

³⁴⁰ *El Avance*, October 21, 1960, 8.

As the end of the year approached, journalists continued to fan the flames of anti-Castro fervor with increasingly alarmist reports of the threat faced by Cuban children on the island. Then, in November, the exile media's commitment to the counter-revolutionary cause received additional impetus when news of exile paramilitary training was leaked to the press. The campaign of covert action initially approved by President Eisenhower, always an open secret among Miami exiles, began to receive attention from national English-language media, bolstering refugees' confidence that a US-backed invasion would take place within months. Exile political activities increased in preparation for the imminent amphibious landing on Cuba's coastline, which most anticipated would take place in March 1961. This invasion, they believed, would give rise to a brief battle, sparking a general uprising and the collapse of the revolutionary regime, followed by the exiles' triumphant return to the homeland.³⁴¹

While the majority of the growing number of paramilitary recruits were motivated by their political commitments, some based their decision to take up arms to safeguard their island's political destiny on more immediate factors—including the urgent need to secure the means to feed and shelter their children in exile. Many of these new recruits thus relied on CIA stipends to provide for their family's immediate welfare, even as they

³⁴¹ Drawing on the growing number of Cuban refugee husbands and fathers willing to take up arms against the Castro regime, in August 1960 President Eisenhower had funded the CIA's "Operation Pluto" and authorized the Department of Defense to assist the agency in building a paramilitary exile force. The first training camp was established near Fort Meyers, Florida, then moved to Fort Gulick in the Panama Canal Zone; as the exile force swelled, training had moved to a new facility, Camp Trax, in Guatemala. See Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 56.

trained for the invasion that would ensure their stay in exile was a short one.³⁴² Confident that they enjoyed the full support of the US government, counter-revolutionary volunteers were certain that their objective would be achieved within a few months; Castro would be quickly and easily overthrown, the Republic restored, and their children would return home to resume their lives and education in a free Cuba.³⁴³ CIA support for anti-Castro activities thus served to harmonize US foreign policy objectives with Cuban exiles' short-term needs and long-term goals for their homeland's (and their children's) future, through the paychecks that fed, clothed and sheltered Cuban refugee children.³⁴⁴

³⁴² By the spring of 1960, between two and three thousand Cuban exile men had signed up with the CIA-backed exile force. Volunteers were motivated to join the anti-Castro struggle by a complex combination of political and pragmatic reasons, all intertwined with the well being, present and future, of their children. Ramón Puerto arrived in Miami in late 1959 with his wife and two small children; after several months of trying unsuccessfully to find employment, with no access to municipal or state relief programs, the family's financial situation grew increasingly desperate. Finally, on the brink of destitution, the former army sergeant decided to go on the CIA payroll in July 1960. Though Puerto was ideologically committed to the anti-Castro struggle, he ultimately resolved to translate his politics into action in order to ensure the day-to-day survival of his son and daughter. He recalled, "The man from the CIA said we would all get paid, even if we got caught, and the money would go to our families. Rosario and the children needed it. I joined." José Llanes, *Cuban Americans*, 66-67.

³⁴³ US government officials and Cuban exiles both suffered from a degree of wishful thinking, inextricably intertwined with the historic parent-child dynamic that had long bound the island to its northern neighbor, about the Revolution's long-term viability. CIA intelligence insisted that Castro was politically unpopular and that it would not be difficult to raise a national uprising against the leader. This assessment suffered from an anti-Castro bias and unwillingness to take the Revolution's commander-in-chief seriously, consistent with US paternalistic attitudes towards the island's political leaders that dated back to at least the turn of the century; Theodore Draper Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, CA. Many middle class exiles, among them some who had lived or studied in the United States or worked for American firms on the island, similarly assessed the Revolution's chances of survival through a US-centric lens that took for granted their homelands' dependency on its powerful northern patron. Well aware of the geopolitical importance the United States had long attached to the island, exiles were confident that the White House would never allow a communist regime to hold power within their self-proclaimed sphere of influence. CIA funding and support for exile's anti-Castro activities thus reaffirmed their belief that the Revolution's days were numbered and their triumphant return home to a newly democratic nation was imminent.

³⁴⁴ Indeed, the clandestine wing of the US government may have been one of Dade County's largest employers during the first three years of the exile community's struggle to establish itself in Miami.

By summer 1960, US-backed guerilla networks had begun conducting armed skirmishes in the mountains of Cuba's interior. However, the political divisions, suspicions, and pre-existing hostilities between different elements of the exile community made building a unified paramilitary force for an invasion of the island a much more difficult proposition. To make matters worse, most exile men with military experience were former Batista-era soldiers and officers; their recruitment by the CIA only deepened the persistent divisions within the exile forces and the broader community. Tensions arose between *Batistianos*, former M-26 insurgents and other non-Batista aligned men; training exercises led by officers of the Batista-era armed forces frequently led to disagreement, and many disintegrated into heated arguments and even physical violence.³⁴⁵

Plans for the invasion's aftermath foundered as exiles confronted once again the continuing reality of their political heterogeneity and their conflicting visions for their nation's future. On January 23, 1961, exile leaders organized a meeting in Miami, with the objective of consolidating approximately sixty exile groups into a coordinated force for the overthrow of the revolutionary government and the re-establishment of democratic rule on the island. It quickly became apparent that the only common bond shared by all groups was their passionate desire to unseat the revolutionary regime. They

³⁴⁵ Retrospectives on the early exile community describe the arguments and violence between counter-revolutionary militia members. See, for example, "Castro Building Drab Red State as Internal Opposition Falts," *New York Times*, July 21, 1963, 1, 7:

could not agree on who should coordinate their efforts or what type of government would replace Castro's if they were successful.³⁴⁶

Determined to overcome persistent ideological divisions between refugees, leaders of Cuban political and civic organizations in exile followed the lead of exile journalists, turning to the community's children for support in communicating their anti-Castro and anti-communist agendas and to bolster calls for counter-revolutionary unity. Including young boys and girls in positions of prominence in their public ceremonies and activities, they sought to drive home the unifying message of the exile creation myth. Loving Cuban parents and grandparents had been forced from their homeland by their shared loved for their children; they must now overcome their differences and work together in order to recover the island nation for all its victimized youth.

The approaching anniversary of José Martí's birthday provided an ideal opportunity to publicly link the fate of the island's children with exiles' desire to overthrow the Castro regime, and to link both to Cuban's long-deferred dreams of national autonomy, social justice and representative government. On January 28, 1961, the College of Cuban Educators in Exile, headed by director Dr. Isolina Diaz, organized a childrens' parade and ceremony to honor the birth of the nation's apostle of independence. Advertising the event in advance and urging all Cuban refugees to attend, *Patria* stressed that the parade "...should count upon the enthusiastic support of all those in exile, the same exile that José Martí suffered in his tireless struggle for the freedom of

³⁴⁶ Boswell and Curtis, *The Cuban-American Experience*, 169.

Cuba, who today struggle to reconquer our lost freedom. Children, women and men should all answer ‘present!’ to this homage to the great citizen of America that was Martí.”

The community responded enthusiastically to this child-centered, nationalist and counter-revolutionary message. At ten o’clock in the morning on January 28, a crowd of several hundred refugees gathered in central Miami to honor the apostle’s birth. Festivities began with a procession of painstakingly groomed refugee boys and girls dressed in their finest clothes; when the parade reached the small bust of Martí in Bayfront Park, children reverently deposited flowers at the feet of their national hero.³⁴⁷

Local *periodiquitos* provided enthusiastic and comprehensive coverage of this and other events in which children played a visible role, ensuring that the community’s child-centered creation myth remained salient in refugees’ minds, maintaining anti-Castro fervor and reinforcing the need for unity and unconditional support for the counter-revolutionary cause. The increasingly hegemonic messages that accompanied media reports of children’s participation in exile political activities thus worked to suppress difference among the disparate individuals and groups represented among the refugee population, and to blunt the centrifugal forces of conflict and competition that threatened the still-fragile consensus upon which the exile identity and the dream of a triumphant return home rested.

³⁴⁷ “Invitan Los Educadores,” *Patria*, January 17, 1961, 2.

In the first month of 1961, Miami's Cuban journalists stepped up their activities to destabilize the Castro regime, proclaiming exiles and their media central players in the battle to prevent the penetration of international communism in the Americas. Noted exile journalist Ernesto Montaner forcefully articulated this belief in an open memorandum to the US State Department, published in *Patria* on January 24th, in which he analyzed the "tragic balance of the errors of democracy when faced with communism." Framing the sovietization of Cuba as a prelude to the final step in Lenin's long term plan to destroy capitalism and the United States, Montaner argued that the US government and media's failure to counter Soviet propaganda with a sufficiently vigorous anti-communist information campaign had placed the entire hemisphere at risk.

The United States has lost the battle of propaganda....This has made possible the accelerated vertiginous Russian penetration in all parts of the world, especially in Latin America. And even in the United States, where with frequency can be observed democratic Americans, with their brains "intervened" upon by Soviet propaganda, to the point of repeating—in good faith—the basic arguments upon which international communism bases itself in order to destroy the foundations of capitalist society.

Montaner recognized the importance of symbolic and actual children to the claims of Soviet propaganda:

They specialize in presenting simple partial aspects of the great questions...they present the millionaire that lives in opulence and luxury, as the cause of the rural misery where children die, without medical assistance, annihilated by parasites. It moves one to indignation, true? The first just impulse is to hang the "guilty millionaire" from the tree nearest to the abandoned *bohío*. And one thinks: "miserable bastard! Squandering a fortune in yachts and luxury cars, while that poor child was dying fully of parasites....And towards that point propaganda is directed. To awaken the

idea of ‘a different way.’ So that—knowing the monstrosities of the capitalist regime—one will immediately think in communism as the only solution to the great evils of society....Democracy doesn’t make propaganda. It suffers the publicity barrage and carries the guilt of the millionaire while the communists harvest the cadaver of the child full of parasites...

In order to prevent communist appropriation of the symbolic figure of the child, Montaner continued, free-world journalists must be willing to follow the lead of the exile media in fighting fire with fire, putting the political power of children to work in the service of democracy. The US media needed to return to the “old honest style, convincing, truthful and aggressive” that had been “employed with such success to pulverize the Nazis.” Vigorous propaganda efforts to turn the tide of anti-Americanism in Latin America and to battle communism in Cuba must be immediately launched, before “the diabolical affirmation of Nicolai Lenin blows up like an atomic bomb at the feet of the Statue of Liberty.”³⁴⁸

Well versed in the methods of propaganda, exile journalists needed no such prompting.³⁴⁹ As the date for the US-backed invasion of the island drew closer, Miami *periodiquitos* continued to engage in the strategic manipulation of their readership’s emotional and moral sensibilities through child-centered discourses and images.

Journalists worked tirelessly to create consensus among the exile community’s multiple

³⁴⁸ Ernesto Montaner, “Memorandum al State Department: Rusia a 90 Millas de Estados Unidos,” *Patria*, January 24, 1961, 1.

³⁴⁹ This understanding of propaganda as a necessary, effective and morally justifiable weapon of war was not unique to Montaner. In a speech to the sixteenth Congress of the Sociedad Interamericana de Prensa (SIP) in Bogotá, on October 20, 1960, *El Avance*’s director Jorge Zayas, said: “The Cold War is basically ideological war, psychological war, a war of propaganda. Therefore journalists, more than those charged with pushing the buttons that fire rockets, are in the first lines of combat.” He called on SIP to “form ranks in the defense of western ideology against the new invasion of the barbarians. That this should not happen is the first responsibility of the press.” *El Avance*, May 12, 1961, 3.

factions and also directed their child-centered anti-Castro messages at their *compatriotas* still on the island. Taking advantage of the still relatively unimpeded flow of information across the Florida Straits, Miami's Cuban journalists and their readers stayed obsessively up to date with events and debates in the homeland and frequently sought to intervene in them, contesting articles appearing in the revolutionary media through articles, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor. Transported to the island, these *periodiquitos* played an important part in the production and dissemination of propaganda in support of counter-revolutionary efforts to discredit and destabilize the Castro regime.³⁵⁰

In February, exile journalists challenged two of the Revolution's claims to legitimacy, both centering on the new regime's relationship to children and young people. The first of these challenges was in response to a January 23rd speech by Fidel Castro, in which the leader spoke out against the death of youthful literacy volunteer Conrado Benítez García at the hands of counter-revolutionaries in the Sierra Escambray, claiming that counter-revolutionaries "had executed him because he was poor, young, black and a teacher." *El Avance* flatly denied this statement:

That is not true. It's not true that they killed him because he was poor, because the fields and cities of Cuba just like its exile are full of poor Cubans...that demonstrate with their heroic and sacrificial conduct the most complete renunciation of the material goods of all classes. It's not true either that they killed him because he was young, because in the anti-Castro ranks there is an enormous majority of youngsters of less than

³⁵⁰ Miami-based journalists and their readers were well aware that their publications were being read in Cuba, and indeed sought actively to ensure that this occurred, seeing the distribution of exile *periodiquitos* on the island as part of their struggle to overthrow Castro. One example of this awareness is revealed by the notice appearing in the January 17, 1961 edition of *Patria*. It read, "Make Revolution: When you finish reading this edition of *Patria*, don't throw it away. Send it to someone in Cuba by mail. Make the *patria* [homeland] with *Patria*." *Patria*, January 17, 1961, 2.

twenty-five years, full of the ideals and of the virile *cubanía* that Martí ascribed to the *Pinos Nuevos*.³⁵¹

Neither had counter-revolutionaries killed “the supposed literacy volunteer” for being black. Challenging the idea that Afro-Cubans were among the Revolution’s strongest supporters, the exile newspaper insisted that Cubans’ unifying anti-communist stance crossed political, socioeconomic and even racial lines, both on the island and in exile. Conrado Benítez had not been targeted by guerillas in the Sierra Escambray because of his color, because “the opposition to communism that enslaves Cuba has provoked national union among whites, *mestizos* and blacks, exactly the same as that which operated in our Independence Wars.”

Most importantly, *El Avance* rejected Castro’s claim that Benítez had lost his life because he was a teacher as yet another example of the leader’s ongoing campaign to frame the Revolution as the defender of children—and, conversely, to discredit its opponents as indifferent to the wellbeing of the island’s youngest citizens. Counter-revolutionaries, motivated precisely by their concern for Cuban girls and boys, would never have targeted an educator “because the national body of teachers is almost entirely against the gangsters of the Sierra Maestra and many dozens of them are in combat in the Sierra Escambray.” Rather, the exile newspaper asserted, the Escambray insurgency had acted to protect rural children from brainwashing at the hands of a Soviet puppet. Anti-Castro guerillas had killed the young revolutionary for one reason alone: because he was

³⁵¹ Martí, as much a poet as a hero of independence, famously referred to Cuban children and youth people as the “young pine trees,” evoking their freshness and innocence while articulating his dream that they would grow into mature citizens, capable of raising their island nation to new heights within the community of nations while remaining rooted in the Cuban soil.

a communist, “and one of the most dangerous communists, since he has dedicated to poisoning the innocent Cuban childhood. His hanging has been a work of patriotic prophylaxis. There is no doubt.”³⁵²

El Avance also rejected Castro’s child-centered declaration of 1961 as the “Year of Education,” telling its readership in Miami and on the island that it would more accurately be called the “Year of *Paredón*,” or execution wall. Alternatively, Armando García Mendoza suggested, Cubans who were truly concerned with the well-being of young people could “...call it the year of learning for slavery; year of communist indoctrination and of brainwashing; the year of the end of *Patria Potestad*, to prevent Cuban parents, so affectionate with their children, from inculcating in them the love of God and of family, consideration and sympathy for others, respect for friendship and devotion to the homeland and to the truths that our heroes left us as a legacy.”³⁵³

Articles like these resisted the revolutionary media’s attempts to deploy the figure of the child in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the Castro regime; as such, they were an important component of the exile media’s broader campaign to discredit the Revolution and to mobilize Cubans in Miami and Havana to become active participants in its overthrow.

As the date of the much-anticipated invasion approached, leaders of a rapidly reconstituting exile civil society began to make plans for a return to the island, eager to

³⁵² “Por Qué Mataron al ‘Maestro Rural,’” *El Avance*, February 10, 1961, 2.

³⁵³ *El Avance*, February 10, 1961, 2; see also Armando García Mendoza, “La Tiranía de Castro y la Enseñanza Cívica en Cuba,” *El Avance*, February 17, 1961, 27.

play an active role in the counter-revolutionary struggle and the restoration of the Republic. New civic organizations, many of them headed by displaced teachers, dedicated themselves to resisting Castro's interventions in the island's educational system and to preparing for the rehabilitation of its indoctrinated children were established. One of the first exile civic groups to explicitly link a child-centered agenda to the paramilitary anti-Castro campaign was the Federation of Cuban Private Schools. In late February 1961, they released their mission statement to the public, committing themselves

...to struggle to orient the private schools still functioning in Cuba, through radio and written messages. To prepare plans for the courses of study of a future Cuba, giving preference to plans for the 'decomunization' and de-toxifying of the minds of students, of the many destructive and immoral doctrines that have been forced upon them by false teachers, bad Cubans and foreigners who today have taken charge of this contemptible mission.

The Federation's statement stressed that their redemptive work with Cuban youth was part and parcel of their broader anti-communist mission; moreover, since its realization was dependent upon the success of the imminent invasion, Federation leaders expressed "a sincere recognition for those Cubans involved in the clandestine struggle" and emphasized their resolve "to cooperate with all sectors of the struggle against communism." They also reinforced the community's growing belief that exiles must put aside their differences in order to restore the homeland to its youngest citizens, concluding its mission statement by calling on all Cubans, without distinctions of political or religious beliefs, "so that in a supreme effort, as much in exile as in the

island's clandestine struggle, we may unite to achieve our principal objective: the extermination of communism."³⁵⁴

Anti-Castro activities and propaganda aimed at Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits proceeded hand-in-hand with preparations for the exile invasion, continuing to call upon freedom-loving Cubans to work together to save the island's children from the terrors of communism. These emotionally charged calls for unity, together with US government pressure for exile organizations to form a cohesive anti-Castro front, began to bear fruit in mid-March, when the CIA supported *Consejo Revolucionario Cubano* was formed. The council elected Dr. José Miró Cardona, prime minister of the Revolution's provisional government in 1959, as its president, and charged him with coordinating the diverse activities of hundreds of small exile organizations in support of impending military action against the Castro regime.³⁵⁵

As exile factions coalesced under the leadership of the Cuban Revolutionary Council, preparations for invasion gained momentum. So too did the production of child-centered anti-Castro messages aimed directly at Cubans on the island. Confident that the Revolution would be quickly and easily overthrown by the more than 2,000 paramilitary troops who awaited deployment from their bases in southern Florida and Central America, exile leaders and their Miami media supporters began to call directly upon their countrymen and women to rise up against the Castro regime. *Periodiquitos* stepped up

³⁵⁴ "Por la Patria: Por la Escuela," *Patria*, February 21, 1961, 3.

³⁵⁵ *Cuban Revolutionary Council: A Concise History*, Appendix to Hearings by House Select Committee on Assassinations, vol. 10, 4-57.

their coverage of the problems and failures of the Revolution and praised Cuban parents' fight against the rumored imposition of the *Patria Potestad* law, the desertion of *milicianos*, and the escalation of civil protests and armed resistance against the regime, devoting special attention to forms of resistance that included children.

El Avance celebrated clandestine efforts to make Cubans on the island aware of the Revolution's campaign against the Catholic Church and the brave efforts of Christian parents to ensure their children continued to receive the religious and moral guidance of the clergy. In late March, the exile paper described the recent actions of the *Junta Catequista Diocesana*, an underground organization that had distributed anti-Castro and pro-Church leaflets throughout the city of Havana. Featuring a close-up of a wide-eyed boy's face, the leaflet asked, "This child, will he be a believer or an atheist? It depends on you. Cooperate with the catechism."

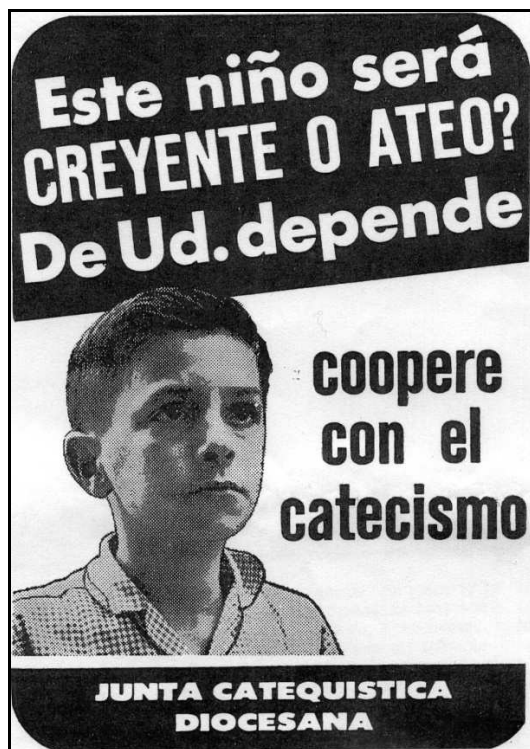


Figure 14: Catholic Propaganda flyer³⁵⁶

Shortly after the leaflets' appearance, "...the boys and girls of Catholic schools began to sell in the streets and house to house small lithographs [of the leaflet]. And the impact was formidable in the public opinion. In businesses, in automobiles, on the walls, everywhere, the face of this interrogating child appeared like an invitation to the citizenry for their recapacitation in the face of what has been happening."

Revolutionary officials reacted quickly, publicly condemning the catequist action. Noting that the regime's spokesperson had stated for the record that the child on the flyer "wasn't black," *El Avance* roundly rejected this latest attempt to frame the anti-Castro movement as the sole province of the island's white citizens. They ridiculed the

³⁵⁶ *El Avance*, March 25, 1961, 9.

Revolution's attention to the boy's race—"As if all children had to be, for obligation, black, and this when it is well known that children, like souls, don't have color—" and proclaimed the denunciation a failure. But the Castro regime had persisted in its attempt to suppress the clandestine Catholic movement:

They then resorted to another Bolshevik tactic: they reproduced the same announcement, with a "guerilla" slogan: "This child, will he be a patriot or a traitor? It depends on you. Teach him the works of the revolution. *Patria o Muerte. Venceremos.*" At the same time, communist parents were ordered to tell their children to tear off the lithographs with the Catholic message from wherever it was found, and that they substitute it with the communist version. But this also failed, because before they had even turned around, the Catholics had once again pasted up the catechist announcement and made the "guerilla" one disappear.

What did this latest struggle to control the formation of the island's children mean? According to *El Avance*: "All this reveals two things: first, that the publicity sector of the local communism is in crisis and on the defensive, since a simple Catholic announcement, that cannot be considered contrary to the 'humanism' of the regime, drives them mad; and second, the above episode demonstrates that a totalitarian regime like the Fidelo-communist one won't allow the smallest expression of free thought."

The exile media's interpretation of the catechist movement and the official reaction provoked by it sought to discredit the Revolution and to persuade Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits of its tenuous hold on the island's population. Left unstated—perhaps because both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries understood

this implicitly—was how these events reflected the centrality of child-centered images and discourses to both sides' efforts to project their legitimacy and to mobilize support for their mutually antagonistic political goals. The brief but intense propaganda battle revealed the lengths to which both revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries were willing to go to defend their exclusive right to control and manipulate representations of childhood. Moreover, the fact that Catholic insurgents and the Castro regime both put young boys and girls to work distributing competing versions of the controversial leaflet further reveals their willingness to deploy symbolic and actual children as proxies in an all-encompassing struggle over the nation's destiny.³⁵⁷

In tandem with calls to Cubans on the island to rise up against Castro, exiles also issued statements urging freedom-loving citizens of other Latin American nations to support the overthrow of his regime. They also drew upon child-centered messages to emphasize that communism threatened all of the hemisphere's children and to chastise governments that had refused to stand against the Revolution. In an article appearing in *Patria*, entitled "America the Accomplice," Armando García Sifredo critiqued those who had failed to condemn Castro's crimes against children:

Boys, almost children, are put in front of the firing squads....In the year 1961, in an American Republic, they are murdering children and that is contemplated with indifference! Castro, the macabre spectre that has placed his claws on the American Continent, is showing before the world, that in the Americas children can be murdered,

³⁵⁷ "Otra Derrota que Sufre Castro," *El Avance*, March 17, 1961.

they can be brought before firing squads, with the complicit silence of all the nations....In front of the martyring of children...all America responds with the complicity of silence...to permit a country to officially murder innocent children, young people who could be great citizens of tomorrow, is to join in solidarity with so much barbarity.

The journalist attacked Latin American governments for defending the revolutionary nation's "right of non-intervention" that guaranteed that these crimes against Cuba's young people would continue.

This America that suffers in silence the ocean of blood that exists in Cuba, cannot be the America of Lincoln, nor of Bolívar, nor of Martí, nor of Juárez...this America, suffering in silence the murder of children, the jailing of thousands of men and women, the exodus of entire families...is a condemned Continent, irredeemably to be devoured by communism....To speak of rights, of humanity, of justice and love in the Americas, is sarcasm, is irony! While in Cuba they continue murdering children and youth....The blood that today is spilled in Cuba, splashes and stains all the governments of the Americas."

Impatient with the subtleties of international politics, Garcia Sifredo used the symbolic figure of the Cuban child to frame the complex arena of Latin American diplomatic relations in morally absolute, almost apocalyptic terms—Latin America must stand against the Revolution or accept its guilt as an accomplice in the ongoing persecution of Cuban children. Making one final attempt to shame the hemisphere's leaders into action, he concluded that even if the continent remained indifferent to exiles' pleas for help, "Cuba will know how to tear herself from the claws of communism. And

when she is free again, SHE will offer aid to any country menaced by communism in the Americas.”³⁵⁸

“*Queremos Abrir Esta Puerta:*” Children, the Bay of Pigs and Beyond

In early April, a period of frenzied political activity overtook the Little Havana neighborhood. Plans for the looming invasion were discussed openly by exiles on the streets, in restaurants, cafes, and churches. Local newspapers provided coverage of training exercises and activities in south Florida. A number of Americans and a large number of former Hungarian freedom fighters publicly offered to join the rebel forces.³⁵⁹ Cubans eagerly awaited word that the battle to reclaim their island nation had been launched. And then, on the evening of April 17th, the long-awaited action began. Expeditionary forces and support personnel of around 3,000 men landed at Playa Girón, at the mouth of the Bahía de Cochinos on the southern coast of Cuba. Exile journalists wasted no time in announcing that “the war against communism” was underway, rallying Cubans in Florida to unite in support of the fight to save the homeland and the future of its children.

The morning of April 18th, *Patria* declared that “bullets have begun to fly” on the island, and called on the entire exile community to dedicate itself to winning the war to defend freedom. This could only happen if the community came together in “the

³⁵⁸ Armando Garcia Sifredo, “America Cómplice,” *Patria*, March 14, 1961, 2.

³⁵⁹ Boswell and Curtis, *The Cuban-American Experience*, 170.

elaboration of a Cuban plan, without sectarianism,” for the reconstruction of the homeland—something that persistent ideological divisions between exile groups had so far prevented. “Let us leave aside jockeying for advantage, ambitions, rancor, hatred,” *Patria* begged its readers. “There is a common enemy: communism. There is a war to be fought: against communism.” And there was a common motive for struggle that bound all exiles together and linked them to freedom-loving men and women on the island: their concern, as loving parents, for the future of their sons and daughters. Cubans must unite, for once and for all, in the fight “to guarantee to our children and the children of our children, that upon achieving the total and definitive surrender of the communists, there will be in Cuba a provisional government...capable of deserving the support, the respect, and the consideration of all Cubans.”³⁶⁰

The invasion, however, was doomed from the start. On the eve of the amphibious landing, President Kennedy suddenly ordered a sudden stop to all US air operations in support of the exile mission. Castro had received advance notice of the attack, placing his own 75,000 strong army and air force on standby; they responded swiftly, decimating the tiny invading force. The absence of US air support, minimal coordination with underground groups inside Cuba, and the poor choice of landing sites, combined to spell disaster for the exile troops, while an island-wide police crackdown and the massive jailing of suspected dissidents and their families ensured that no national uprising took place in support of the invasion.

³⁶⁰ Armando Garcia Sifredo, “Ahora, Las Balas,” *Patria*, April 18, 1961, 2.

After three days, 114 exile troops had been killed and 1,214 had been captured, bringing the exile campaign to a tragic and humiliating end.³⁶¹ The failed invasion was a fantastic victory for Castro; the bungled operation allowed him to portray the revolutionary army as a powerful and efficient fighting force capable of destroying its external foes. It also justified decisive action against the few suspected dissidents remaining on the island and offered damning evidence of US imperialist designs on the island, galvanizing public support behind the government. As a result, the Bay of Pigs helped to further legitimize the Revolution throughout Cuba.³⁶²

In Miami, the exile community's shock and despair knew no bounds. Betrayed by President Kennedy and desperate for news of their relatives imprisoned in Castro's jails, Cubans finally came together in a collective response to the catastrophic failure of the invasion. In the days and weeks following the Bay of Pigs debacle, exile unity reached a high point, led by the women who organized to provide aid and comfort to grieving widows, suffering families and orphaned children, and to petition the United States government and the global community to secure the release of their prisoners. Understanding their activities as an extension of their roles as wives and mothers, refugee women articulated their concern for the wellbeing of Cuban families and children in tandem with their patriotic commitment to the eventual liberation of their homeland from communist rule, bringing into stark relief the already well-developed associations

³⁶¹ Guarione M. Díaz, *The Cuban American Experience: Issues, Perceptions, and Realities* (St. Louis, MO: Reedy, 2007), 31.

³⁶² Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 57.

between the child and the nation-state so forcefully articulated in the exile community's unifying creation myth.

Women's groups like the feminine auxiliary of the *Movimiento Rescate Revolucionario Democrático* (MRRD) already had more than a year's experience caring for Cuban refugee families and children; under the presidency of Emelina Ruisánchez de Varona, they had also dedicated themselves to supporting the exile forces' struggle to defeat communism on the island. Announcing that "they would have no problem taking arms to fight" but preferred to leave that work "to honorable men," they had prepared for the gender-appropriate work that would await them upon returning to the homeland, offering first aid to the wounded, re-orienting "childish minds contaminated by the divisive theories of communism," and ensuring that Cuban women who had joined militias return to their natural dispositions and roles and "become once again feminine, sweet, smiling and friendly."³⁶³ In the aftermath of the failed invasion, the feminine section of Rescate and other organizations like it turned their attention to meeting the more immediate needs of the devastated women and children whose male relatives had been captured on the island.

At the same time, they mobilized for political action that relied heavily upon representations of suffering mothers and children to press for the release of their prisoners and to compel US and Latin American leaders to expand support for exiles' continuing struggle against Fidel Castro. In the last week of April, Cuban women

³⁶³ "Intensa Labor Patriótica Realiza la Sección Femenina de 'Rescate,'" *El Avance*, April 21, 1961.

gathered in Miami's Bayfront Park. Setting up camp in front of the bust of José Martí, they vowed to remain in the park until the American continent changed its attitude towards the "case of Cuba," which they insisted was really the "case of the Americas." They organized their children to parade around the bust of the apostle of their independence, carrying placards that called upon US and Latin American leaders to join their fight against Castro and communism. One of these signs read, "Help us today and your children will be able to live tomorrow."

Patria reported approvingly on this political activism by the community's women, "symbol of maternity," and children, "symbols of the future of the nations." What's more, the newspaper asserted, the mothers of Cuba were not simply struggling on behalf of their own children. They fought "for all the children of the American continent," as well as all the mothers who would suffer "the same martyrdom that today those Cuban mothers suffer," unless communism was eradicated from Cuba and the Americas.³⁶⁴

Throughout the month of May the relatives of men killed or captured at the Bay of Pigs, most of them women and children, continued to gather in Bayfront Park. They wept together and knelt in prayer before the monument to José Martí and the park's Torch of International Friendship, calling for the release of their fathers and brothers, husbands and sons and the liberation of the homeland. They also organized to protest new dangers to children on the island following Fidel Castro's public declaration of the

³⁶⁴ "Damas Cubanas Reclaman Ayuda," *Patria*, May 2, 1961, 5.

Socialist Revolution. When young exiles demonstrated against the recent nationalization of all Cuban private schools, *El Avance* leapt at the opportunity to put them to work in service of their continuing anti-Castro propaganda efforts. On May 12, 1961, they published a large photograph of a boy waving a Cuban flag, a US flag positioned behind him, together with this commentary on the demonstration:

The monster that enslaves Cuba and that has delivered it, without the slightest shame, to the insatiable bloody claws of the Kremlin dictator, has just announced his decision to take possession of the Cuban Private Schools—legitimate pride of our culture and our progress—to convert it into an center of Marxist indoctrination under the control of its “elite” communizing pseudo-intellectuals. In the face of this atrocity, the patriotism of Cubans in exile has been inflamed once again and they have expressed their energetic protests. And it is the Cuban children—the favorite prisoners of the insatiable Beast—who have comprehended this vile aggression, and have made public their sentiments.

Using a technique well-developed by the revolutionary media by the end of 1959, the exile journalist explicitly singled out the flag-waving boy’s youthful virtue, patriotism and determination as a model for the entire exile community. The newspaper praised the nationalistic conviction of “this little one that, with decisive gesture and strong arms, hoists the glorious colors of the solitary star and appears to be saying, defiantly, ‘This is my only flag and nobody can tear it from my hands.’” Calling attention to the boy’s strategic positioning in front of a US flag, *El Avance* reinforced exiles’ shaken faith in the US commitment to their cause, noting that behind him, “as a symbolic support to his words, the victorious flag of the United States reveals its stars.”³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ *El Avance*, May 12, 1961, 1.

Children also played an active role in petitioning international leaders and organizations to take a stand against Castro's Revolution. In order to highlight their identities as victimized Cuban mothers and to remind the public of the communist threat to their island's youngest citizens, refugee women took their sons and daughters with them to rallies, marches and demonstrations across the city. In early May, they gathered at Dupont Plaza Center to demonstrate in front of the hotel where Dr. José A. Mora, Secretary General of the Organization of American States was staying. Demanding the support of the OAS for the exile struggle, children and their mothers (a few fathers were also in attendance) carried signs proclaiming themselves "*Con Cristo y Contra Castro*"; they also called on the OAS to make a stand for freedom with signs reading "*OEA Decídete por la Democracia*" and "Cuba: Hungary of America."³⁶⁶

The following month, children were among the hundreds of Cubans who awaited ex-Chancellor of Ecuador Ricardo Chiriboga's arrival at Miami International Airport on his way to take up a position at the Interamerican Development Bank in Washington D.C. At this rally organized by the *Consejo Revolucionario Cubano* and the *Frente Revolucionario Democrático*, children carried signs, shouted slogans of solidarity with Ecuador, and praised Chiriboga for his efforts on behalf of democracy in the Americas.

Women with their children in tow also participated in a caravan of Cuban refugees who travelled by hired buses from Miami to Washington DC to solicit President John F. Kennedy's assistance to continue their battle against international communism. In

³⁶⁶ *El Avance*, May 5, 1961, 6, 7.

the nation's capitol, exiles held a procession through the Lincoln Mall and placed a wreath of flowers in front of the monument to this beloved US president, attended a special mass in Arlington Cemetery, and marched in front of the White House holding signs and waving Cuban and US flags. Highlighting the importance of both symbolic and actual children to the community's newfound sense of unity and its unshaken commitment to the anti-Castro struggle, children were featured prominently in exile media coverage of the event. *El Avance* published a large photograph of a "beautiful Cuban child," no more than two years old, who "waved the two sister flags in the fight for liberty: the American and the Cuban."³⁶⁷

Children also filled the pews of Miami's Catholic churches, brought by their mothers to pray and say the rosary for the safe return of their loved ones and the homeland's liberation. As many as 20,000 exiles gathered nightly in houses of worship and in public parks for masses dedicated to the anti-Castro struggle; photographs of children, babies and toddlers, and local parochial school students in attendance at religious services appeared regularly in exile publications that sought to remind Cubans of why they must continue the fight "for the total liberation of Cuba, for the defeat of Fidelo-communism, and the rescue of her freedoms and her sovereignty."³⁶⁸

The public renewal of refugees' religious faith, operating hand in hand with the continuous re-articulation of the community's child-centered creation myth, provided

³⁶⁷ *El Avance*, May 19, 1961, 14-15.

³⁶⁸ "Misa Solemne en Bayfront Park el Dia Panamericano," *El Avance*, April 28, 1961, 10; "Oraciones y Lágrimas por los que Cayeron," *El Avance*, May 5, 1961, 1; *El Avance*, May 5, 1961, 4, 9.

comfort and direction for Miami Cubans. Children also played an important role in strengthening exile solidarity and resolve after President Kennedy's decision to replace CIA plans for political change in Cuba with a limited covert campaign to destabilize the Castro regime. After the failed invasion, as many as 12,000 refugee men remained on the agency's payrolls; the CIA also provided support to new exile paramilitary groups like Alpha 66 who used agency funds to expand their operations, purchasing the boats and arms with which they conducted commando raids on Cuban railroads and utility plants.³⁶⁹ However, few exiles believed that another large-scale invasion was feasible, and many despaired both for the freedom of their imprisoned relatives and for the future of their nation.³⁷⁰ In light of this uncertain future, discourses and images of childhood increased the community's resolve to fight on, using the limited means still available to them, to restore the homeland to their children.

The failure of the military wing of the anti-Castro cause positioned the exile media and civic organizations to take the lead in the battle to prevent communist penetration on the island and throughout the Americas. Throughout the month of May, Miami-based groups worked overtime to produce and distribute child-centered propaganda in Cuba, the United States, and Latin America. A special campaign directed at the island's militiamen and women was launched; counter-revolutionary leaflets printed and dropped from airplanes over the cities of Cienfuegos, Sagua la Grande, and other towns in Las Villas, as well as in Artemisa and Isla de Pinos. Many of these

³⁶⁹ Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 57.

³⁷⁰ From an interview with exile leader Antonio Jorge, in Miguel González-Pando, *The Cuban Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998), 28.

messages relied on symbolic and actual children to discredit the Revolution and exhort Fidel's supporters to think of their own children's future in a socialist Cuba. One such message, entitled "Get up and Walk Away, Militiaman," used this rhetorical strategy to plant seeds of doubt in the minds of these most militant revolutionaries:

You have just finished another shift in support of Fidel Castro and his communist accomplices...and you ask yourself, why am I doing all this? Your conscience answers you: "Because you still have a lot of childishness in you." Remember that as a child you wanted to be a soldier, to put on a uniform and give orders. Fidel gave you the opportunity to put on a uniform, to march, to give military orders in a rough and manly voice. And Fidel made your childish dreams into reality, giving you a revolver, a machine gun, a pistol, that actually kill. So well do they kill that many of your *companeros* have died as a result of the use of those things. And so you say to yourself: "But I'm not a boy anymore. I'm a man. What am I doing? Why do I work more than ever before? Why do I receive less pay than I did before, and why do I tolerate it?" Your mind, asleep for months, begins to awaken. You begin to look for answers. You know now, because the blindfold has fallen from your eyes, that Fidel only tells lies. That Fidel has sold Cuba out. And you know that the only thing that Fidel has left in Cuba is men and women like you. The ones that want to be soldiers of lies.

The leaflet urged *milicianos* to think about their families and consider how their revolutionary commitment threatened the well-being of their children:

Fidel says that he will destroy everything: *Patria o Muerte*. You have repeated it a thousand times. But will this mean death for that little boy of yours; or for your beautiful little daughter? You will see them someday

with their guts mingled with the mud of the street. And you, mother or father? *Patria o Muerte!* You know that the *patria* belongs to the Russians...but you still have time, although very little. You have time to turn your weapons against the traitor that has sold you out....You have time, *miliciano*. Free and Democratic Cuba awaits your decision.³⁷¹

Anti-Castro propaganda also made use of artistic creations and political messages produced by exile children. The *Directorio Magisterial Revolucionario* (DMR), an organization of Cuban teachers in exile, reproduced a drawing by an 11-year old Cuban girl, created during an art class at Shenadoah Elementary School in Miami, on a flyer intended for distribution throughout the United States and Latin America. The girl had sketched a church, doors barred by a hammer and sickle; a shattered cross lay at the doorstep. A Cuban girl in rags, a flag in her hands, sat weeping in the entryway. She had written in bold letters, in both Spanish and English, “*Ayúdanos-Please Help Us!*” on the wall of the church. A second bilingual message—“*Queremos Abrir Esta Puerta/We Want to Open This Door—*” as well as the address of the DMR had been stamped on the picture.

³⁷¹ *El Avance*, May 12, 1961, 26.



Figure 15: Propaganda flyer, “*Queremos Abrir Esta Puerta*”³⁷²

The drawing vividly expresses the pain of the young exile, her religious faith, and her desire to return to a democratic homeland. Notwithstanding its apparent sincerity, however, what is most significant is not the artwork’s message, but rather its strategic deployment by an exile civic organization in service of its broader political agenda. Just as revolutionary publications featured letters written by children, often reproduced in the child’s own handwriting, to articulate the values and aspirations of the Revolution, the

³⁷² *El Avance*, June 23, 1961, 12.

DMR's alteration and dissemination of a young girl's art class project sought to press this refugee child into service as the ultimate *vocero* of the exile cause and to frame her as the symbolic embodiment of a victimized nation. In the same way that Castro's government and his media allies regularly appropriated the moral power of the symbolic figure of the child in support of their political goals, then, this DMR leaflet revealed the extent to which exile propaganda had similarly come to rely upon children to express its counter-revolutionary message.

During the remaining months of 1961 and into 1962, child-centered images remained a constant feature of exile media and civic organizations' efforts to bolster anti-Castro fervor and to press US and Latin American leaders to join the struggle to restore democracy to their homeland. Miami *periodiquitos* dedicated themselves to describing the oppression and hardship that defined daily life on the island. Political cartoons showed hungry children waiting in line for food rations. In one, a small toddler contemplated three interminable lines and asked the last person, a man dressed in ragged clothes, "Excuse me, sir, which one is the line for meat?"



Figure 16: Cartoon, “Excuse me, Sir, which is the line for meat?”³⁷³

Journalists thus used cartoons and exposés to ensure that the suffering of Cuban children remained ever-present in exiles’ minds, offering frequent and detailed reports on the indoctrination of schoolchildren, the separation of families, and widespread childhood illness and death due to chronic shortages of basic medicines.³⁷⁴

Children also remained at the forefront of exile political and civic organizations’ efforts to gather support for their cause. On February 23, 1962, refugee boys and girls were front-row attendees of the ceremony in Bayfront Park in honor of José Martí, organized by the MRRD. During the patriotic event, community leaders made poignant

³⁷³ *El Avance*, June 30, 1961, 12.

³⁷⁴ “Mueren Niños en Matanzas por Falta de Antibióticos,” *El Avance*, August 4, 1961.

reference to exile children and young people on the island, calling on US and Latin American nations to provide “the moral and material help that Cubans need” to restore democratic rule to their homeland. In April, children also participated in a hunger strike in Bayfront Park, accompanying their parents in demanding the US government supply them with weapons to liberate Cuba.³⁷⁵ Ongoing political and civic activism, lovingly covered by the local Cuban media, thus continued to rely on symbolic and actual children to fan the flames of counter-revolutionary sentiment, bolstering exiles’ commitment to securing their homeland’s liberation and maintaining community cohesion in the face of centrifugal political forces that still threatened to pull it apart.³⁷⁶

Building on the exile community’s already-entrenched practice of linking child-centered activism and advocacy efforts with the broader goals of the anti-Castro struggle, exile educators lead by former senator María Gomez Carbonell established the *Cruzada Educativa Cubana* in July 1962. The organization held its first meeting on August 2nd of that year, pledging itself to promoting the patriotic and religious education of refugee children by exposing them to the Republic’s intellectual and civic traditions, Cuban culture, and democratic and Christian values. Their mission was “a true crusade of patriotic impartiality, love for the family and an extraordinary vocation for the intellectual and moral formation of our children and adolescents—today torn away from the truth of God, respect for their parents, and love for their fellows.”

³⁷⁵ *El Avance*, April 6, 1962, 39.

³⁷⁶ *El Avance*, March 30, 1962, 38.

From the beginning, however, the *Cruzada* revealed its militant commitment to the Revolution's overthrow and their belief that the education (and re-education) of Cuban children was central to the process of redeeming their island nation. Their first public manifesto, "Message to the People of Cuba," expressed the overlap between their moral and pedagogical vision and their far-reaching political agenda, predicting the imminence of a total war against Castro which would represent

...the decisive battle against international communism, intrinsically perverse, and the legions of Democracy called upon to inaugurate a new national era under the sacred historic rules of Faith, Law and Culture. And when the noise of the weapons ceases and the forces of good have exterminated barbarity, we will confront, painfully, a homeland morally and physically undone; a family, dipossessed by those miserable ones who violated its sanctuary...a school prostituted by infamy, sickened by lies and oriented towards hatred, betrayal and crime, the only patterns of human emulation known to Communism. The teacher will be—once this second War of Independence is won—the primary figure that will have to remake, with his virtues and his moral integrity, the future of the nation in ruins.

According to the *Cruzada*, the restoration of the Republic would be achieved by the family and the school, working together as "cornerstones of the homeland, destroyed by the galloping Communism that made her an easy prisoner in 1959." In order for their vision to be realized, however, first the exile community would need to come together "without divisionary exclusions" and in solidarity with freedom-loving countrymen and women on the island. Only the total unity of all anti-Castro Cubans, their manifesto concluded, would ensure the salvation of the homeland and of its children.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁷ "Mensaje al Pueblo Cubano," *Provisional Executive of Cruzada Educativa Cubana, Miami, July 1962*, Cuban Exile Collection 302 (Series 1, Box 3, Folder 39, CHC, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library).

The exile media celebrated the establishment of the *Cruzada Educativa Cubana*. In a front-page article of their September 14, 1962 edition, entitled “Let us save the Children,” *Patria* praised the new organization for understanding the importance of Cuban children to the exile cause, and their centrality to the destiny of the island nation:

Before the crime that communism is committing against Cuban childhood, poisoning their minds, executing their souls and creating true monsters, we have published information, calling for a democratic action to save our children. For this we have felt true satisfaction when we learned of the creation of the “*Cruzada Educativa Cubana*...” For their patriotic commitment. For saving Cuban childhood, we offer the “*Cruzada Educativa Cubana*” our pages, since we share their understanding that, as important as the war against communism will be the mental rehabilitation of Cuban children.³⁷⁸

The following month, exiles’ oft-repeated calls for a decisive battle against communism in Cuba and in the Americas took on a new urgency. On October 14th, American U-2 reconnaissance flights revealed the presence of inter-regional ballistic missile silos at several sites in Cuba, indicating USSR plans to bring Cuba under its nuclear umbrella. The range of the missiles was estimated at up to 1,500 miles, which would place many US cities within range of a Soviet attack. A week later, President Kennedy condemned the USSR’s intervention in the western hemisphere and ordered an immediate naval blockade of the island. Fear of a possible nuclear showdown between the superpowers sent shock waves across the nation and across the world. Militant Cuban

³⁷⁸ “Salvemos a Los Niños,” *Patria*, September 14, 1962, 1.

exiles, however, saw the missile crisis in a different light. Vindicated in their predictions that the Castro regime intended to open the doors to Soviet infiltration of Latin America, they welcomed a confrontation between the United States and Cuba, which they were confident would produce the long-awaited demise of the Revolution.

When negotiations between Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev resolved the missile crisis, the balance of Cold War power was restored—much to the chagrin of Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits, who had imagined the conflict as a final apocalyptic battle between good and evil for the destiny of their nation, and indeed, of the world. Exiles found little comfort in the narrow avoidance of a global nuclear war; Castro had once again defied the United States and destroyed the hopes of the displaced Miami community, and his socialist regime, protected now by the guarantee of non-invasion Khrushchev had wrested from the Washington, appeared stronger than ever.

For Cuban exiles who already felt betrayed by Kennedy's vacillations during the Bay of Pigs, the negotiated end to the Missile Crisis was simply another failure of resolve on the part of the US president, whose soft stance on communism had cost them a decisive opportunity to liberate their nation. They felt the US president had abandoned their cause, this time irrevocably. Those fears were not unfounded. Shortly after the Missile Crisis, the United States discontinued the majority of the military and financial assistance it had funneled to Cuban counter-revolutionary fighters since the summer of 1960 and withdrew support from exile paramilitary operations. Without the help of the US government, exiles understood that they would no longer be able to offer a credible

threat to the Castro regime, whose military strength grew daily as a result of increased military and technical assistance from the USSR.

Once again, a despairing community returned to its religious faith and to its child-centered creation myth to rebuild their shattered dreams of return to a democratic homeland. On November 23rd, during the height of the Missile Crisis, *Patria* columnist Armando García Sifredo began publishing his weekly op-ed pieces on the anti-Castro struggle under the headline, “For Our Children.” Always at the forefront of efforts to deploy symbolic and actual children in support of the exile cause, García accompanied his first article about the crisis, entitled “Nobody is Crying Here!,” with a photograph of a young girl that had previously appeared in the rival publication *El Avance*. The portrait of a small fair-haired *niña*, kneeling in supplication at the altar of a Miami Catholic Church, accompanied the journalist’s exhortation that exiles not succumb to despair. Even if President Kennedy had chosen hemispheric security over the aspirations of freedom of Cubans, he insisted, exiles must continue fighting to free their homeland, for however long it was necessary—“for our children.”

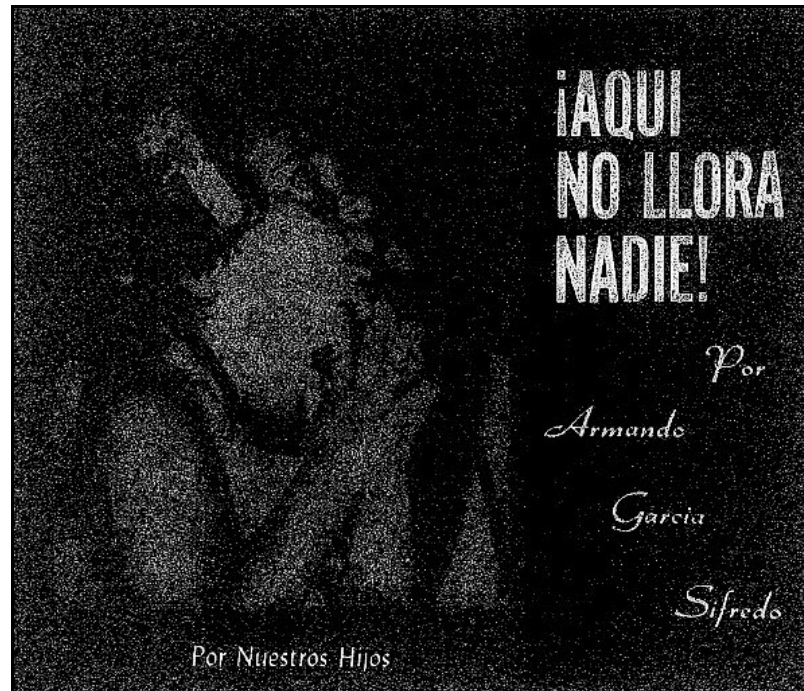


Figure 17: Photograph, “*Aquí No Lloro Nadie!*”³⁷⁹

On December 7th, García Sifredo offered his readers what he labelled “the best commentary that has been published in exile.” Ceding “with true emotion” his weekly space to a hand-written letter by a young Cuban girl that he claimed had “moved my heart as a father and as a Cuban. She says everything; why say more?” The letter followed:

³⁷⁹ *Patria*, November 23, 1962, 2.

Dear Sir:

I am the little girl in the portrait that you put above your article “Nobody is Crying Here!” and I want to thank you in the name of my little brothers and of all the children of the friends of my father who is in heaven. Our parents died for God, for Cuba, and for us, and for all the Cubans in “Playa Girón,” and surely they applaud from heaven the call that you make to keep struggling. Neither do I cry. And when I feel very sad without my Daddy, I ask Father God and the Virgin that soon Cuba will be free.

Myrna Maria Millan.³⁸⁰

As García noted, the small girl had said everything. There was no need to further elaborate on a text that articulated in its purest essence the child-centered creation myth of the exile community. The powerful resonance of the child’s letter nonetheless had its limits. Myrna’s words, however galvanizing, could not dispel Cuban refugees’ growing sense of hopelessness in the face of the Revolution’s apparent invincibility, shielded from external aggression by the might of the Soviet empire. Nor would the child’s prayers for the liberation of the island alter a second, equally painful reality: refugees’ decision to flee the island, which most imagined would be followed by a short stay in the United States and the swift overthrow of Fidel Castro, had led them into a wilderness they had never contemplated. Destiny had marked them for indefinite exile in a foreign land. In light of recent events, to believe otherwise was foolish—the dream of a child.

Conclusion

Between 1959 and 1962, the highly visible presence of children among Miami’s Cuban refugee population and within its nascent media facilitated exile leaders’ efforts to

³⁸⁰ “El Mejor Comentario del Exilio,” *Patria*, December 7, 1962, 2.

construct a shared political identity and to mobilize refugees in support of the armed struggle to overthrow the Revolution. By early 1961, this still deeply fragmented community-in-the making had coalesced around a powerfully unifying child-centered creation myth that provided refugees with a shared story of their exodus from Cuba; over time, exile leaders drew more and more frequently on the symbolic figure of the child in calling for community solidarity on the basis of a shared commitment to an increasingly hegemonic anti-communist and anti-Castro ideology.

Child-centered discourses and images were equally important to the propaganda produced by exile leaders as part of a hemispheric campaign to discredit the Revolution throughout the Americas, to turn Cubans on the island away from their new leader, and even to engineer the overthrow of the revolutionary regime. Moreover, as the anti-Castro struggle gained momentum and urgency in the months leading up to the Bay of Pigs invasion, exile leaders also began to make use of the bodies of refugee boys and girls in support of various counter-revolutionary activities.

With the successive failures of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Missile Crisis to produce the downfall of the Revolution, the dream of Castro's defeat began to recede into the distance. Miami Cubans nonetheless clung to their belief that exile had been the right choice—a necessary evil to be endured in order to safeguard the wellbeing and future of their sons and daughters—and that someday, somehow, they would find a way to secure the next generation's return to a democratic homeland. Discourses and images of childhood, always at the heart of the anti-Castro agenda, now acquired a deeper resonance. With the conclusion of the Missile Crisis and the impossibility of future military action against the Revolution, exiles would continue to rely upon their child-

centered creation myth to make sense of their losses—of home, dignity, and identity—
even as turned increasingly to their own sons and daughters for the inspiration and
strength they needed to begin building new lives for themselves and their families in the
United States.

Conclusion

Understanding Elián: The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami, 1959-1999

After the October 1962 Missile Crisis, which produced a US government promise not to attack Cuba, the survival of the island's socialist Revolution seemed certain. In subsequent years, the Castro regime focused on children as the raw material from which they would construct a new revolutionary culture and communist society. Miami exiles similarly sought to keep their dreams of a democratic Cuban Republic alive in their children, seeing their bodies, hearts and minds as the vessels in which their cultural and political traditions and values could be preserved until the fall of the Castro regime. Moreover, both the island and US resident Cuban political leaders continued to rely on child-centered images and discourses to consolidate their own communities and promote their mutually antagonistic political agendas. On both sides of the Florida Straits, a shared belief in the centrality of children to the revolutionary and exile nation-building projects ensured that Cuban children remained at the heart of the Cold War struggle in which the island's future was enmeshed.

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union did not bring an end to Cubans and Cuban Americans' struggle for the destiny of the *patria* and its future generations. Between 1959 and the 1999 Elián González custody battle, the ever-evolving transnational "politics of childhood" would continue to articulate the processes of alienation, fragmentation and re-constitution that led to the creation of "Two Cubas" on opposite sides of the Florida Straits. Tracing the contours of this continuing politics of childhood

through this forty year period sheds further light on the constitutive role played by children as “nation-makers” on the island and among the US resident Cuban community.

In the aftermath of the October Missile Crisis, the Castro regime set to work consolidating the socialist Revolution. After declaring himself a Marxist-Leninist in December 1962, Castro set his government the interrelated tasks of building a socialist culture while implementing plans for the construction of a communist society. The successful realization of both of these goals depended on the Revolution’s ability to control the future development of Cuban children. New policies and programs thus focused on children as the central site from which to launch campaigns to redirect loyalties away from the institutions of the family, the Catholic Church, and African-origin religious communities, while encouraging commitment to the Revolution and the communist party. Understanding that adult citizens would be more resistant to efforts to transform their worldviews, loyalties and lifestyles, the regime focused on the more impressionable children, allocating enormous quantities of time, energy, and resources to the care and formation of the island’s next generation.³⁸¹

By 1965, Ernesto “Ché” Guevara’s essay “Man and Socialism,” which argued that the Revolution must commit all its energies towards the creation of a “New Man,” became the guiding force behind education policy and children and youth programs. Education at the primary and secondary level was re-designed to incorporate Marxist instruction into all academic subjects. The following year, the government took over control of day-care centers from the Federation of Cuban Women, re-organizing their

³⁸¹ Bunck, *Fidel Castro and Revolutionary Culture*, xi, 2-7.

operations, curricula and pedagogical methods to prioritize the fomentation of revolutionary *conciencia* in toddlers. They also opened membership in the Pioneers league to all elementary school students in order to allow the children's organization to take a leading role in the ideological formation of Cuban children and the struggle to create a revolutionary culture and the future communist society.³⁸²

The Ministry of Education also introduced the “*Escuela al Campo*” program, which required middle and high school students to combine study with agricultural labor in rural areas. The “School Goes to the Countryside” program removed children from the potentially “bourgeois” influence of their parents while providing an intense immersion, under the supervision of ideologically militant teachers, in revolutionary values.³⁸³ In 1967, these educational programs were augmented by an ideological campaign directed at Cuban parents. Television and radio programs, books and parenting manuals, and CDR study sessions instructed parents in how to raise their children as future citizens of a socialist society. The next year, the regime further called on neighborhood vigilance committees to oversee the activities and attitudes of parents and their children, instructing them to report non-revolutionary behaviors to the police.³⁸⁴

In 1960s Miami, the care and education of exile children proceeded in ways that were analogous to events and processes on the island. Cuban children remained at the center of exiles' continued opposition to the Revolution and their unflagging commitment

³⁸² Marvin Leiner, *Children are the Revolution: Day Care in Cuba* (New York: Viking, 1974), 15; see also Wald, *Children of Che*.

³⁸³ Rolland G. Paulston, “Education,” in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*, ed. Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 387.

³⁸⁴ Luis P. Salas, “Juvenile Delinquency in Postrevolutionary Cuba: Characteristics and Cuban Explanations,” in *Cuban Communism*, 9th ed., edited by Irving Louis Horowitz and Jaime Suchlicki (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1995).

to the restoration of a democratic Cuban Republic. Having accepted that their return home would not be imminent, exiles did not let their perhaps permanent separation from the *patria* undermine their commitment to the eventual liberation of the island; however, the community was forced to undergo a collective reordering of their priorities, turning their attention to the pursuit of economic success in the United States in order to assure the wellbeing of their families. Though many would continue to dedicate themselves passionately to the anti-Castro struggle, they attempted to balance political activities with an increased focus on the care and education of their children, who would most likely grow up in the United States. Exiles' practical and political commitments should nonetheless not be seen as unrelated; rather, many US resident Cubans understood their efforts as parents as a means of continuing the struggle for a democratic Republic.

Through careful upbringing, exiles hoped that their sons and daughters would become the repository of Cuban political and cultural traditions and values—vessels of *Cubanía* through which the nation in exile would be preserved until the return to the island could be achieved. Children's education in the nationalistic, patriotic and cultural traditions of the island, their formation according to their parent's religious values, and their preparation for leadership of a democratic capitalist nation with close ties to the United States, were thus seen as central to the exiles' nation-building project. With these political goals in mind, exiles founded and re-opened bilingual and Catholic Cuban schools, including the Edison School, La Salle and the Immaculata Academy, in Miami. They also pressured the US government and private organizations to provide additional funding for bilingual programs in public schools, the first of which was established at

Coral Way Elementary in 1962.³⁸⁵ At the same time, they dedicated themselves to the creation of a thriving economic enclave, becoming proprietors of small business, homeowners, and self-appointed apostles of the “American Dream” who understood every Cuban exile child educated to become a doctor, lawyer or businessperson as another victory against communism and Fidel Castro.

In the same way as the Revolution’s consolidation occurred in tandem with the implementation of a new vision for the care and education of the island’s youngest citizens, what Miguel de la Torre called the “imaginary nation of Exilic Cubans” began to grow up in Miami alongside the first generation of refugee children.³⁸⁶ During the first decade of Revolution and exile, long-term political aspirations and more immediate concerns for the wellbeing of Cuban boys and girls thus remained intimately intertwined in the nation-building projects of the “Two Cubas,” territorial and diasporic. Moreover, since child-centered messages formed an essential part of the metanarratives of both revolutionary and exile visions of Cuban nationhood, they continuously re-asserted

³⁸⁵ The support, both government and private, for English language training and bilingual programs for Cuban refugee children allowed many of these children to quickly adapt and begin performing at high levels within US public schools. This was in marked contrast with the situation of other Latina/o children in the United States: In 1960, the rate of drop-out for Puerto Rican origin eighth graders was approximately 53 percent; in 1968, 80 percent had failed to complete high school. In the southwest, the average Chicana/o child had only a seventh grade education; in Texas, the high school drop-out rate for Mexican-origin children was 89 percent. The role of Cold War politics in shaping these markedly different educational outcomes of children from distinct national origin Latina/o communities deserves further attention by historians and educational researchers. William Francis Mackey and Von Nieda Beebe, *Bilingual Schools for a Bicultural Community: Miami’s Adaptation to the Cuban Refugees* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1977), 6, 59.

³⁸⁶ Seymour Martin Lipset wrote, “Countries, like people, are not handed identities at birth but acquire them through the arduous process of ‘growing’ up.” Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), 18; quoted in Bunck, *Fidel Castro and Revolutionary Culture*, 1. See also De La Torre, *La Lucha For Cuba*, 31-33.

themselves in moments of perceived political opportunity or threat to the mutually antagonistic nation-building projects located on opposite sides of the Florida Straits.

Though the evolving politics of childhood was more or less salient in response to changing circumstances in Havana and Miami, it remained a fundamental and largely unchallenged component of both nation's collective identities, structures of feeling and *razónes de ser*. Less constant, however, was the response of the United States government and of mainstream America to the evolving politics of childhood in Havana and Miami. Throughout the 1960s, the US popular media continued to outrage its readers with exposés of the communist indoctrination of children in Cuba and to charm them with exile families' success stories. Buoyed by public sympathy for these brave and resourceful refugees, between 1961 and 1971 the US federal government spent more than 730 million dollars on Cuban immigrant aid. An additional 130 million dollars in federal funds were allocated to bilingual education and multicultural awareness programs in Dade County Public Schools.³⁸⁷

However, by 1965, the exile's anti-communist partnership with freedom-loving Miami-Dade County was beginning to show signs of strain, as public debate over the continuing Cuban refugee influx laid bare the growing tension between the federal government's Cold War foreign policy objectives and Florida state and municipal government's more local concerns. As a second wave of refugees took advantage of US government funded "Freedom Flights," to leave the island, thousands of newly arrived Cuban children entered Miami's public schools. An overwhelmed district struggled at

³⁸⁷ Olson and Olson, *Cuban Americans*, 64-65.

first to accommodate them, but was unable to meet the demand for seats in classrooms already filled to capacity; by September of the 1965 academic year, superintendent Joe Hall threatened to suspend enrollment of Cuban students unless the federal government provided immediate and expanded funding to offset the district's expenditures for their education.³⁸⁸ The next month Dante Fascell, a Miami Democratic delegate to the Florida House of Representatives and previous advocate of the exile community, made a speech on the House floor demanding congressional hearings to set a limit on the number of Cuban refugees admitted to the country.³⁸⁹

Though Miami's political and civic leaders still expressed sympathy for the suffering of refugee children and solidarity with the exiles' anti-communist struggle, they began to respond to local residents' growing concerns about the county's ability to absorb what appeared to be a never-ending flow of Cuban refugees. New strains also began to appear within the exile community, as the first generation of island-born children began to come of age in the United States. During the turbulent mid to late sixties, the United States experienced a radical transformation of its social structures and political and cultural values, reflected in a newly militant phase of the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War and antiwar protests, and the advent of a new counter-cultural generation that rejected everything many conservative Americans—and the majority of Cuban exiles—valued about the existing social order.

³⁸⁸ Pete Mann, "U.S. Foots Cuban School Bill: Hall Orders 300 Children Admitted," *Miami Herald*, November 23, 1965; "And Other Cuban School Costs?" *Miami Herald*, November 25, 1965; Pete Mann, "Battle Brewing On Paying for Exile Students," *Miami Herald*, December 19, 1965; "School Aid Talks Due in Dade," *Miami Herald*, December 23, 1965; Louise Blanchard, "U.S. School Funds For Exiles Argued," *Miami News*, January 6, 1966, 9A.

³⁸⁹ "Exiles in Miami Still Need Aid," *Miami Herald*, February 9, 1965.

Cuban parents and grandparents were alarmed by US-raised children's participation in a youth culture characterized by sexual license, experimentation with drugs, and other counter-cultural behaviors. Exiles that had fled the island in order to protect traditional middle class and Catholic-inspired understandings of childhood and family life were horrified by the counter-culture "hippy" lifestyle their children were exposed to in the land that had been their refuge from the Revolution's godlessness and amorality. They increasingly took refuge in their anti-communist and anti-Castro worldviews and in renewed efforts to create organizations that kept their cultural traditions alive, working harder than ever to inculcate children with the values and ideals which had spurred their exodus from the island.

The exile community's persistent attachment to its child-centered creation myth thus exerted an enormous pressure on young people, who had to not only negotiate the formidable challenges of individuation that are inherent to adolescence, but were required to do so in the context of the exacting and highly politicized expectations of their community. Moreover, since many Cuban parents viewed the preservation of a traditional Cuban identity and culture as part of a continuing struggle for the eventual restoration of a democratic Republic on the island, they interpreted children and adolescent's rebellions and experimentations with alternative lifestyles and worldviews as a betrayal, not only of their family values, but of their *patria*. Thus US-raised but Cuban-born young peoples' involvement in the anti-Vietnam War movement and their foundation of the leftist journals *Areíto* and *Joven Cuba*, which called for greater dialogue with the Revolution, were met with extraordinary displays of anger.

An even greater controversy erupted in the late 1970s, when radical Cuban American youth—many of them former Pedro Pan children—organized the Antonio Maceo Brigade. The young members of the brigade travelled to the island to reconnect with their native land and culture and to promote dialogue between the two Cuban nations, island-resident and diasporic. The mission of the *brigadistas* provoked an unprecedented negative response in Miami. Brigade members were shunned by family and community members and excoriated on Spanish language radio stations, some even received death threats. Twenty years after the triumph of the Revolution, these extreme responses to the Antonio Maceo Brigade revealed the extent to which the exile community clung to its child-centered creation myth, and to their insistence on interpreting Cuban American youths' desire to return to the island as a repudiation of the personal and collective sacrifices exiles had made on behalf of their children.

Equally alarming, the young *brigadistas*' openness to the Revolution also put into doubt the exile community's efforts to preserve their own vision of Cuban nationhood in the minds and hearts of their sons and daughters. Their failure to pass along their Catholic values, pro-US worldview and hatred for Castro's socialist Revolution to the next generation represented an imminent threat to their dreams of restoring the Cuban Republic and returning to the *patria*. Ironically, it was brigade members' own desire to return to their island homeland—a desire they shared with their parents and grandparents—that motivated them to take what was perceived by their elders as an act of treason against the future democratic Republic.³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ See Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 15-16.

On the island, however, political leaders welcomed the young Antonio Maceo *brigadistas* with open arms, seeing their arrival as an opportunity to reinvigorate an increasingly institutionalized Revolution. Following the failed 1970 sugar harvest, the Castro government had sought to combat a wave of disillusionment and apathy, distressingly prevalent among youth. They had militarized the Pioneers children's organization and required middle and high school students to participate in work-study education and agricultural labor in the countryside. However, hopes that new educational methods and programs would create a socialist *conciencia* among the island's maturing revolutionary children had not been fulfilled. In fact, by the end of the decade, many students and youth resisted the regime's efforts to put them to work building and defending the Revolution, choosing instead to skip school, failing to show up for volunteer work and militia service, and engaging in juvenile theft, vandalism and other crimes.³⁹¹

In light of this social malaise, the island's leadership hoped the visit of the young Antonio Maceo *brigadistas* would rekindle Cubans of all ages' revolutionary fervor. Just as during the early 1960s the US media had characterized every refugee arriving in Miami a "vote against communism," every young exile who returned to the land of their birth was a "vote against capitalism and the United States" that legitimized the regime's socialist nation-building project. Moreover, the Castro government hoped that brigade members' idealism and courage might re-inspire or shame Cuba's "Lost Youth" on the

³⁹¹ Bunck, *Fidel Castro and Revolutionary Culture*, 11.

island into a new commitment to the Revolution.³⁹² Many *brigadistas* were aware of their instrumental value to the regime and were eager to contribute to helping renew the Revolution in this way; however, others were disappointed to realize that Cuban officials and journalists sought to take advantage of their presence and to manipulate their personal and family histories in the service of political goals not directly related to the purpose of their visit.

The Antonio Maceo brigades made several more highly publicized visits to Cuba; youth malaise on the island nonetheless continued to deepen. Though the late 1970s and the early 1980s were a period of relative economic prosperity, supported by generous Soviet aid, the goals of cultural transformation and the creation of a socialist *conciencia* among future generations remained elusive. Twenty years after the triumph of the Revolution, the “children of Che” were still not always demonstrating the commitment to revolutionary values and service expected by their leaders. Adding insult to injury, the majority of the 125,000 refugees who left the island during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift had been born after 1959 or had received a socialist education courtesy of the government. These young people may not all have rejected the political values of the Revolution; however, their decision to leave made clear that they were no longer willing to make the revolutionary sacrifices expected of the new generations, including the reduced standard of living provided by the Revolution, when greater opportunities beckoned in the United States.

³⁹² The expression, “Our Youth is Lost,” circulated widely among disaffected young people during the 1970s; for the revolutionary perspective on this decade’s youth problems, see *Granma Weekly Review*, May 6, 1990, 12; and September 23, 1990, 12.

The *Marielitos* played a different role in Miami's own evolving politics of childhood. Arriving in a historical moment when Cold War fears had begun to recede in the American imagination, they did not receive the warm government welcome or the sympathetic US media coverage that the first two waves of Cuban refugees had enjoyed—instead, they were detained in makeshift camps and military bases throughout the southern United States, their immigration status uncertain. This third wave of refugees also provoked widespread public fear and hostility because they did not collectively reflect the early exile community's ethnically neutral identity, anti-communist credentials, or middle class Christian family values. Many were black or mixed-race and working class; some had criminal records. Equally importantly, a significant number were unmarried men without children, or with children they had left on the island. The new arrivals thus did not meet US racial, political or cultural expectations for Cuban refugees. Worse, their indeterminate family circumstances threatened exiles' child-centered creation myth, which the community still relied upon to ameliorate white and black Miamians' distinct concerns about their city's growing Cuban population.

Arriving during a moment of heated public debate over language policy and bilingual education programs in local schools, this latest wave of refugees exacerbated a growing anti-Cuban backlash in Miami.³⁹³ Attempting to ease the hostility towards their newly arrived countrymen and women—and by extension towards the entire exile community—while justifying the continued need for the US government toward

³⁹³ Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*, 321.

preferential immigration status to Cubans, exile leaders and journalists made an effort to portray *Marielitos* within the interpretive lens provided by pre-existing discourses of childhood. However, the US government and public met claims that these were in fact “political” refugees with deep skepticism.

Official ambivalence towards the Mariel refugees was at least partially a product of US political leaders’ newfound reluctance to endorse the exile community’s politics of childhood. Discourses that justified the unconditional acceptance of Cuban refugees in order to “save the children” from violence, hardship and oppression on the island spoke to the popular American belief that their nation’s immigration laws and foreign policy were motivated by moral and humanitarian, rather than strictly instrumental, concerns. In light of President Jimmy Carter’s recent decision to deny refugee status to approximately 30,000 Haitians, fleeing poverty and political violence on their own Caribbean island, this moral conceit was becoming increasingly hard to sustain.³⁹⁴ The federal government found it equally difficult to explain the humanitarian calculus of the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Central American refugees fleeing political violence at the hands of US-allied regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala, especially when return often meant death or destitution for their children.³⁹⁵

The most glaring contradiction between the moral and humanitarian claims underwriting federal support for Cuban exiles and policy towards other Caribbean and

³⁹⁴ President Carter, caught in a moral dilemma in the face of Haitian suffering and the unjustifiable favoritism shown to Cubans, eventually created an immigration category, “Cuban-Haitian entrant,” which allowed entry and provided federal support for both groups but denied both refugee status. See Masúd-Piloto, *Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*, 5.

³⁹⁵ María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 114, 118, 162.

Central American asylum seekers was found in the treatment of Nicaraguan refugees. Highlighting the causal relationship between the United States' Cold War intervention in the region and subsequent out-migration, many Nicaraguans requesting asylum in the United States did so because they feared that their children would be drafted into military service by the socialist Sandinista regime—and be killed in battle with US government supported *contra* rebels.³⁹⁶

The Mariel exodus, occurring during a moment of national concern about a sudden influx of Haitian and Central American refugees, compelled the federal government to rethink a well-established practice of justifying unlimited Cuban immigration. Government officials and the US media thus sought to downplay exiles' insistence that Mariel refugees were political refugees who fled the island to protect their children, even as they insisted on categorizing Haitians, Salvadorans, Guatemalan, and even anti-communist Nicaraguan asylum seekers as economic migrants. These actions were not unrelated: continuing to endorse the exile community's child-centered creation myth by focusing public attention on the dangers faced by children in Castro's Cuba might raise embarrassing questions about the government's lack of concern for other children from the region. Political leaders and the mainstream US media thus had good reason to avoid framing discussions of Mariel refugees in the child-centered terms that previous administrations had so enthusiastically adopted.

A decade after the Mariel Boatlift, the transnational politics of Cuban childhood were reshaped by the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1991, the island experienced a

³⁹⁶ Masúd-Piloto, *Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*, 121.

crisis greater than any since the 1962 Missile Crisis. During the subsequent “Special Period,” characterized by economic austerity measures, political restructuring and social unrest, Cuban young people began to demonstrate unprecedented levels of disaffection from the Revolution. This was expressed in the emergence of a youth-centered culture of noncompliance, individualism and materialism, and through direct and indirect forms of political dissent and human rights activism.³⁹⁷ These phenomena, combined with the deterioration of the public health and school systems and diminishing access to postsecondary education, threatened the Revolution’s historic claims to a special relationship with young people and its socialist nation-building project.

On the other side of the Florida Straits, the end of the Cold War further threatened exiles’ ability to use child-centered discourses and images to justify the preferential immigration policies that protected their community. Then, when deteriorating economic conditions and increased political oppression provoked tens of thousands of Cubans to take to the sea on homemade rafts or *balsas* during the summer of 1994, the US government confronted a fourth wave of Cuban refugees. But these *balseros* had no strategic value to the US government, no longer engaged in a foreign policy battle against international communism. Abandoning previous administrations’ humanitarian pretenses and professed concern for Cuban children, President Bill Clinton reversed the thirty-five year old practice of allowing unrestricted entry to the United States to all Cubans fleeing Fidel Castro and instituted a policy that would intercept rafters at sea and transport them to detention camps aboard the US Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay.

³⁹⁷ John Newhouse, “A Reporter at Large: Socialism or Death,” *The New Yorker*, April 27, 1992, 52-83.

Stunned by this reversal, exiles who had come to see their right to asylum in the United States as unconditional frantically resurrected their child-centered creation myth. Miami Cubans turned once again to their media outlets to expose the Revolution's ongoing victimization of innocent Cuban children on the island and to remind the American people of their moral obligation, as leaders of the free world, to provide asylum to Cuban young people. On October 15, 1994, the following letter appeared in the *Miami Herald*:

Dear Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, and fellow Americans:

A scene I watched on television last week has been haunting me since. A young Cuban girl in the Guantanamo naval base had just learned to play "The Star Spangled Banner" on her only worldly possession—a violin. I was both spellbound and wretched by the irony of it all. There she was, surrounded by almost three thousand other children, behind barbed wire fences, yet still pursuing the ideal of liberty and justice for all. As a father, I know you understand, Mr. President, these children beseech you to open the doors of the land of the free.

PLEASE, MR. PRESIDENT, DON'T LET THESE CHILDREN DOWN.

Respectfully yours,
Dr. Manuel Rico Pérez and my six children
2295 Coral Way
Miami, Fl 33145

The Pérez family's pleas, though employing child-centered discourses that had moved previous generations of American parents and political leaders, failed to influence the federal government's handling of the *balseiro* crisis. Still, undeterred by the president's actions and facing indefinite detention at Guantánamo, the rafters kept coming. Then, in May 1995, President Clinton announced that he would release the detainees and process them for entry to the United States. However, he announced, the nation would no longer accept unlimited numbers of refugees from the island. An

immigration quota was established; while generous in comparison with other Latin American quotas, it nonetheless required Cubans to apply for visas like other would-be entrants to the US. Exiles were shocked and enraged by the end of their community's preferential immigration status. Perhaps predictably, many of them saw Clinton's actions as a betrayal by a government that had gone soft on communism, repudiating its own democratic values as well as the cause of Cuban liberation—precisely when the Castro regime appeared to be at its weakest.³⁹⁸

Four years later, the future of both the revolutionary and exile nation-building projects appeared uncertain. And then, in November 1999, a small shipwrecked boy was rescued off the coast of Florida. His mother had died during the dangerous crossing from Cuba, so the boy was taken to the home of his Miami relatives. The boy's name was Elián González.

Cuban leaders on both sides of the Florida Straits immediately mobilized, seeing in this traumatized orphan child the salvation of their nationalist dreams. In Miami, Elián quickly became what Miguel de la Torre called “the poster child” for the Miami exile community.³⁹⁹ Cuban-Americans of all ages came together to demand that Elian remain with his US relatives, where he would enjoy the freedom his mother had died to give him. In Cuba, students marched, demanding that the boy be returned to his island home and his loving father.

³⁹⁸ Masúd-Piloto, *Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*, 143.

³⁹⁹ De la Torre, *La Lucha for Cuba*, 3.

Elián provided the Castro regime with an undreamed-of opportunity to inflame public sentiment against the United States and the exile community and to rally support for the socialist regime. Remaking the child into a symbol of their nation's early victimization at the hands of CIA sponsored saboteurs and terrorists and the ongoing suffering attributed to an ongoing economic embargo, revolutionary officials and media used Elián to rekindle support for a Revolution mortally wounded by the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁴⁰⁰

In Miami, the child similarly galvanized anti-revolutionary sentiment, becoming a symbol of aging exiles' continued sense of victimization by Fidel Castro, who had deprived them of their *patria*, their culture, their ancestral homes and extended families, and even their dreams of being laid to rest in a free Cuba. The struggle for the child's destiny also allowed older and politically intransigent exiles to reconnect with their politically diverse "Yuca" children and grandchildren.⁴⁰¹ For younger Cuban-Americans and their first-and-a-half, second and third generation children, the Elián saga offered a way to connect on a powerful emotional level with the community's creation myth, creating a climate of political unity in Cuban Miami that hadn't been seen since the early 1960s.

⁴⁰⁰ Revolutionary journalists and scholars drew explicit connections between Elián's victimization and US victimization of previous generations of Cuban children. The most blatant attempt to do so was published at the height of the custody battle. Titled "Operation Peter Pan: A Case of Psychological War Against Cuba," the book was sold with an accompanying bookmark that proclaimed it the "story of 14,000 Eliáns." Torreira Crespo and Buajasán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan*.

⁴⁰¹ An acronym for "Young Urban Cuban Americans," the play-on-words refers both to the starchy cassava root vegetable, a staple of the Cuban diet, and the upwardly mobile generations of Miami Cubans who were born and/or raised in the United States.

Revolutionary and exile leaders thus made use of the Elián custody battle to advance broader political goals, in ways consistent with their historical deployment of children in pursuit of their mutually antagonistic nation-making projects. The politics of childhood in Havana and Miami had nonetheless been irrevocably altered by the end of the Cold War and changing US foreign policy priorities. In a strange reversal, Castro—who had once railed against the family as a bourgeois institution that impeded the socialist formation of children—had taken on the role of protector of family values, arguing that international law and universal humanitarian norms demanded Elián’s return to the loving care of his father and grandparents. US public opinion—which forty years earlier had shown overwhelming support Cuban refugees’ commitment to saving their children from communist brainwashing—now favored the child’s repatriation.

An enraged exile community fought back, rejecting Castro’s claims that he cared about the Elián’s best interests. Calling themselves “The Elián Mission” (*Misión Elián*), a group of Miami Cubans organized to testify to the Cuban government’s continued and deliberate policy of separating children from their families, and to “unmask Fidel Castro’s manipulation [of the custody battle] before the world.” They organized demonstrations at Liberty Tower—the former home of the Cuban Refugee Center—in downtown Miami. Waving placards that said “Castro Separates Families With Distance And With Death” and “These Children Are Hostages,” group members hoped to raise public awareness of the plight of hundreds of nameless Cuban children who had been

denied permission to leave the island to be reunited with their parents in the United States.⁴⁰²

Local Spanish-language media featured interviews with Cuban immigrants who had been forced to endure years of separation from their families before the Castro government granted exit visas to their children. *El Nuevo Herald* told the story of Luís Grave de Peralta, a scientist who had arrived in the United States in 1996; at the time of the Elián custody battle in 2000, his sons, Gabriel, twelve and César, seven, were still in Cuba. Though they both had US immigrant visas, the Cuban government had yet to grant permission for their departure. The newspaper quoted Grave de Peralta: “It’s totally hypocritical that the Cuban government demands the return of the child Elián González and that they present themselves as the guardian of the integrity of the family, when there are hundreds of parents and children separated by the express will of that same government....It’s an act of calculated cruelty, to create conflicts and familial divisions.”⁴⁰³

The exile community’s activism and pleas that Elián be allowed to stay with his Florida relatives fell on deaf ears. As the world waited for the US Justice Department to decide the boy’s fate, Miami’s non-Cuban residents and indeed most Americans became increasingly confused and alienated by the exile community’s emotionally charged protests and demonstrations. The Cold War was over and the exile community’s child-centered creation myth now held little credibility outside Little Havana. Those who

⁴⁰² Ivette M. Yee, “Llaman la Atención Sobre ‘Niños Rehenes’ de Castro,” *El Nuevo Herald*, January 8, 2000.

⁴⁰³ “Científico Cubano Sufre Separación Familiar,” *El Nuevo Herald*, December 12, 2000.

retained a degree of sympathy for the Miami Cubans saw their passion as anachronistic, unaware of how important children were to exiles' identities and worldview and unwilling to accept their commitment to the ongoing struggle, by any and all means possible, against the Castro regime. This lack of sympathy and understanding was vividly expressed the morning that Elián was removed from the custody of his Miami relatives—in a way that demonstrated both disrespect for the exile community and a shocking disregard for the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of a five year old child.

Before dawn on Saturday, April 22, 2000, INS agents stormed the home of Lázaro González and retrieved Elián at gunpoint. Word of the raid spread like wildfire, and Cuban Americans took to the streets to express their horror and fury. In Little Havana, almost all of Calle Ocho's businesses were closed. Devastated exiles once again accused the US government of betraying the very community who had been the most loyal supporters of the nation's democratic capitalist way of life. Crowds carrying anti-US government placards declared Bill Clinton a communist; Cuban flags flew all over the city, as did many US flags—hung upside down. Bomb threats were issued, and one-third of students in Miami-Dade public schools stayed home from classes. On the island, tens of thousands of Cubans also took to the streets, joyfully hailing the return of the small boy who had snatched from the jaws of the imperial monster to the north. Parades and ceremonies were organized, and Elián's first day back at school and his reunion with his jubilant classmates was televised across the nation. Photographs of Fidel Castro embracing the small boy appeared in every revolutionary newspaper.

These extreme public reactions in Havana and Miami reveal the extent to which revolutionary and exilic Cubans understood the Elián González custody battle as the

continuation of a fifty year struggle, not only for the minds, bodies and hearts of its children, but also for the political future of their island. This continuity aside, the past fifty years have also witnessed dramatic changes in the lives of families and children in the “Two Cubas.” Divorce rates and unwed teen pregnancy rates have skyrocketed in on the island; the dramatically circumscribed role of the Catholic Church, continued emigration from Cuba to the United States and elsewhere, and the rising percentage of children raised in one-parent homes or by grandparents or other relatives, have further exacerbated the instability of family life. Cuban exile families are similarly divided between the island and the United States, and are vulnerable to the economic and social pressures of migration. The changing realities of Cuban and Cuban-American family life and childhood thus reveal the myriad ways in which “private” spaces are irrevocably altered by political, economic and sociocultural processes, even as the discourses that emerge from these spaces inhabited by children continue to influence the fate of nations.

Processes of both continuity and change are embedded in the experiences of revolutionary and exilic Cuban children, whose minds, bodies and hearts have been inscribed with the pre-revolutionary histories of the United States and Cuba, by their homeland’s revolutionary recreation after 1959, and by the historical trajectory of the US-resident exile community. They remind us that historically specific understandings of childhood have been an integral part of the emergence of the nation-state and the interrelated processes of foreign policy and immigration that are associated with it. But at what cost to actual children?



Figure 18: Photograph, Elián González being taken from his family by INS agents⁴⁰⁴

This image speaks poignantly to the position of all children who have found themselves trapped in the political machinations of adults who claim—in a consistently cruel irony—to be acting on their behalf. However, it, and this dissertation, leave a number of important questions unanswered. The extent to which children impact and are impacted by these machinations remains among the complex and troubling of these unanswered questions. How much agency, after all, do children really have? This dissertation has argued that children are not simply victims; their actions, whether willing or fully informed, play a powerful role in the constitution of nations and their relations with other states. However, neither does it deny the significant degree to which children have been and continue to be victimized in the name of nationalist politics.

Further research needs to be done to explore the ways that Cuban children have been affected by their experiences as participants in the 1959 Revolution, as refugees,

⁴⁰⁴ Al Díaz, *Associated Press*, April 22, 2000; accessed April 4, 2011, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/36196262/ns/world_news-americas.

and as members of the exile community. Given—as this dissertation has demonstrated—that the histories of the “Two Cubas” continue to be inextricably intertwined, any attempt to come to terms with the lived experiences of actual Cuban children will need to be told as one story. In light of political conditions on the island, continuing exile resistance to non-hegemonic versions of their history, and the US government’s continued resistance to the declassification of documents dealing with exiles and their children, this story may have to wait until processes of political opening and reconciliation take place on both sides of the Florida Straits.⁴⁰⁵

In the meantime, while pointing in the direction of future research, this case study of the politics of childhood in Miami and Havana points towards the generative possibilities of a new approach to the hemispheric and comparative Latina/o History, even as it provides a powerful analytical lens through which the political history of the modern process of nation-building, immigration and diasporic community formation may fruitfully be considered. However, the analytical approach developed in this project is not just applicable to Latina/o history, nor is it limited to studies of the modern era. Given the persistent normative force contained in the symbolic figure of the child, the theoretical frame of the “child as nation-maker” may also provide a point of departure for studies analyzing the transition from modern to postmodern during the era of late twentieth century global capitalism following the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ Scholars who have worked on the story of exile migration and the Cuban Children’s Program have faced countless obstacles to their research in both Cuba and the United States. See Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 19; and Masúd-Piloto, *Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*, xvii-xviii.

⁴⁰⁶ This transition from the modern to the postmodern is an issue I expect to confront in future research on Cuban childhood. Elián González seems to me a striking symbol for the postmodern child, adrift between

By denaturalizing the child—among academia’s few remaining essentialisms—this project invites historians and other scholars concerned with children to explore the power of the child as nation-maker in a range of contexts, whenever and wherever they may appear in the stories they are pursuing. More importantly, though, greater attention to the ways that childhood is bound up in the sweeping metanarratives by which societies define themselves may help increase awareness about the urgent need to historicize the claims that are made about, and on behalf of children. A more rigorous focus on the gaps between representations of childhood and the lived experiences of actual young people may motivate us to adopt a more critical view of reforms and initiatives directed at “the future generation.” They may even help us to develop alternative ways of understanding childhood that are more sensitive to the needs of real children.

the bounded signifiers of the modern: national borders, language, and the family; and yet, while representing a uniquely unstable postmodern moment, his story has been—and, as I have argued, necessarily so—told within the metanarratives of modernity. Given that many of the processes that we view as fundamental to the postmodern era—globalization, transnational and diasporic peoples, the reassessment of the role of the nation state and reconfigurations of citizenship, and the hybridization of culture—have their origins in the modern projects of nation-building, democratic capitalism, imperialism, it should be expected that there will be overlaps in the discourses through which people and societies interpret their experience. The role that childhood has played, and will continue to play, in the making of the postmodern world promises to be a rich area for future research.

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