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Mid-Twentieth Century Cuban Immigration: A Footprint in Florida's Cultural Landscape

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From the culturally vibrant zeitgeist of Little Havana to the decidedly educated workforce of Florida's Cuban immigrants, the vast influx of migrants to Florida during the Cuban Communist Revolution has become an ethnically substantial contribution to Florida's unique culture, while also contributing to the celebration of America's economic ideals. Ambitiously seeking better opportunities during Fidel Castro's institution of his Communist regime, nearly half a million Cuban immigrants arrived in Florida between 1959 and 1980. Fleeing was often a decision made to escape transgressions such as religious persecution and economic inadequacy; alternatively, the American ideal offered opportunities for employment and the foundational democratic privileges of the nation, including the coveted freedom of religion, speech, and the press. Those who made this bold transition were yet unaware that they weren't simply beneficiaries of America's prosperity, but also were Florida's cultural benefactors, pervading the state with a celebration of Hispanic spirit and culture. As a Spanish proverb eloquently states, "al hombre osado la fortuna le da la mano", or "the bold man fortune gives her hand"- the immigrants' influential success can be attributed to their bravery and perseverance.

While access to the “American Dream” liberated the lifestyles and opportunities of many new Cuban-Americans, their developing community also thoroughly benefitted Florida and its unique cultural landscape. The most concentrated Cuban population in Florida is the neighborhood of “Little Havana” in Miami, named after Cuba’s capital and boasting many of its characteristic features, including traditional food, festivals, and the arts. The cultural enclave of Little Havana allows for an unparalleled preservation of original Cuban tradition, while glorifying Hispanic culture and history. Education, as well, remains an integral priority in the Cuban ethnicity, and its prevalence provides Florida with a medical and scientific community that bolsters the state’s propagating network of innovation. Perhaps most significantly, the Cuban-Americans’ brief experience with communism allowed the population to develop a profound appreciation for the American freedoms, substantiating the spirit of Florida’s political and economic character as they allowed their culture to flourish unrepressed.

This historic mass immigration during the mid-twentieth century not only expresses these effects on the state’s past and present, but also presents profound insight to the future. This Cuban population represents only one of the many ethnic enclaves that are presently dispersed throughout Florida, and are continuing to develop. Unfortunately, their incomplete assimilation due to this attempt to preserve original culture has, in some instances, perpetuated stereotypes and racism, a negative effect of culture clash. If overcome, a greater celebration of Hispanic culture may prevail. The Cuban-Floridians who migrated during this era are influential not only due to their positive influence on Florida’s cultural, artistic, scientific, economic, and political landscape, but also because they represent one of many unique groups who dared to embark on an uncertain exodus

for the sake of bettering themselves, their lives, and the opportunities of their families: this is the very essence of what America represents as a country, and Florida's striking culture is a symbol of its positive consequence.

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