

Cuba

AND Culture

Lillian Bertot, Ph.D.

Once the takeover of Cuba by the communists was consolidated between 1960 and 1961, producing the massive exodus of Cubans abroad, the plan of deculturation extended to include the deculturation of the Cuban exiles. While it is true that the displacement of hundred of thousands of Cubans to the United States, an English-speaking country with a tradition, culture and customs very different from those of Cuba, has made a great impact on, and has contributed to the deculturation and assimilation of Cubans, it also is true that Cubans have been able to maintain for more than forty years, with many sacrifices and thanks to their large numbers, perseverance and constant migration from Cuba, a true enclave, especially in Miami and in New Jersey, where not only the language, but also many of their customs, cultural manifestations, traditions, and history are maintained.

To begin with, the economic environment in a country of free enterprise allowed the Cubans to put into practice the lessons acquired during the Republic. Many have suggested that the economic success of the Cuban community in the United States is due to the fact that Cubans had been rich in Cuba and that they had left the country with most of the capital they possessed in their country of origin.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Although there were Cubans that could take out from the country something of their personal fortunes, most of the Cubans left only with their industriousness, with their knowledge and with their managerial abilities, which were considerable. This, together with the fact that in Miami and in places like Union City, New Jersey, the economic space existed to build a self-sufficient and self-supplying community of goods and services, have been the bases of the economic success of the Cubans in the United States. There are those who have said that in places like Miami and Hialeah, in Florida one could be born and die within the Cuban community, without noticing that one is living in the United States. The Cuban companies go from hospitals to funeral homes, from organized Cuban municipalities in exile, to political parties once active in Cuba.

Among the businesses and companies where Cubans work and in many instances own are, small grocery stores, supermarkets of several branches, insurance companies, real estate agency, automobile dealerships, gas service stations, automotive shops and stores, cinemas, theaters, schools, churches, textile and shoe manufacturing outfits, sugarcane mills, ice cream parlors, fruit stands, furniture stores, banks, print shops, newspapers, bookstores, export and import companies, hardware stores, restaurants of all types and for all budgets, appliance stores, boat builders, cabinet makers, electronic and computer stores. Also, there are Cubans in all the professions, from doctors to accountants, construction workers, electricians, plumbers, bank presidents, contractors, engineers, architects, teachers, baseball players, movie actors, music super stars, photographers, cameramen, film directors, writers, economists, bishops, priests, decorated soldiers, lawyers, mayors, councilmen, federal and state representatives, and U. S. senators.

The success of the Cuban community (around a million and

half souls) is such that, in 1980 (it could be greater now), it was estimated that the gross national product of the Cuban exiles was three times as large as that of Cuba!

According to an article published in the Spanish newspaper *El País* (July 31, 1999) from Madrid, with the title ["Lights and shades of the liberalization of the Cuban economy,"] journalist Juan Jesús Aznarez writes: "The government is reluctant to allow private involvement, and at times reverses its policies, fearing political fallout [...]. Capital in private hands represents a threat to centralized power." And he adds: "The contraction of the PIB [gross internal product] was 35 percent, the fall of the fiscal deficit was equally brutal, the imports of fuels and foods decreased by 6,000 million and the 13.5 million tons of petroleum received from Moscow [even today with Venezuela's oil, scarcity is still rampant] became less than 6,000." And he adds: "The structural shortcomings are another obstacle. Government planned agriculture is not very efficient, the same as with very old industrial machinery, and from 1986 [three years before the fall of the block] a moratorium was put in place on the payment of a foreign debt of 11,000 million."

It would be useless to speculate where the Cuban economy would be today if the country's economy had continued within the structures of free enterprise, free markets and individual initiatives, as well as within the western and inter American geopolitical and democratic system, but we could suggest that, having Cuba continued in that direction, it would be very far from the bankruptcy, mendacity and devastation of its current situation.

In the United States, Cuban refugees of all times (the exodus that started in 1960 still continues in our



times) and of all social classes have successfully integrated to North American society and they prosper in little time; it will be worthwhile to verify the statistics compiled by the sociologists Juan Clark, José S. Lasaga and Rose S. Reque with regard to the development of the populations of the Cuban exodus in its different times, in their work of 1981: [*The Mariel exodus: evaluation and future projections*].

Along with the economic prosperity of the exiles other areas of preservation could be appreciated (although with great difficulty) of other aspects of Cuban culture. First and foremost is the study and preservation of the Spanish language (this in spite of the English-speaking environment and of a great campaign against bilingualism unleashed in the United States for the last twenty years).

Aware of the role exiled Cubans might play in the future of the Cuban nation the Cuban community sends its children to private schools where Spanish is taught from the elementary grades all the way to high school. Parochial schools also have, as part of their curriculum, classes conducted in Spanish, Spanish television outfits both local and from Spain and Latin America transmit in the areas where Cubans live, as do radio stations. Newspapers written in Spanish proliferate, and the local newspaper in Miami, *The Miami Herald* publishes a newspaper *El Nuevo Herald* entirely in Spanish. In fact, because of the strong Cuban presence in South Florida, the area has become a hub for business with Latin America, where people from Argentina to Mexico can come and do business in their own language.

Likewise the production, the study and the conservation of Cuban literature are also encouraged, as is art and music. The study of Cuban history is constantly being nurtured and books and documentaries on current events proliferate. The culinary tradition (dishes and recipes from Cuba) have been kept or modified by creative innovations that are unknown to the malnourished Cubans of the Island.

However, it would be necessary to point out that, in the United States, another factor that has contributed to the process of deculturation of the exiles, is the interest, on the part of many of the most noted scholars, Cuban or Americans, on Cuba (those who carry out their studies in universities or research centers in the United States like Harvard or Columbia, or Pittsburgh), on closely following the revolutionary process, considering it a *fait accompli*, irreversible, which would take root in Cuba and which would have to be approached descriptively. For many the Cuban revolution is a case study, which has to be studied and not contested. It is a reality, in their opinion, to which not even an alternative need be found, because it is not the job of the *cubanólogos* [experts on Cuba] to do so, and, also, because the liberal democratic Republic, many think, had failed, and maybe communism is the future for Latin America, as it had been for so many countries in Europe.

The forceful deculturation of the exiles has been attempted, and up to a point has been achieved, by elements of Castroism, of international communism and by those sympathetic with the Cuban revolution: those elements who look to the Cuban model as one to be emulated not only in Latin America but in the rest of the world.

Many have been the attempts at dismantling and discrediting the intellectual work of the exiles. I remember the campaign of censorship and exclusion of Cuban writers and intellectuals on the part of many North American, Mexican and Spanish publishers during the 1980s. The Cuban community has been called a “mafia”, or “elements of the right at the service of Yankee imperialism”.

Cuban students in the humanities have been ostracized, as have been Cuban academics professing opposition to the Cuban model in American universities. Political science professor, Alfred G. Cuzán published an illustrative article in the prestigious American publication *Academic Questions* (1994) devoted to studying the policies of the Latin American Studies Association a well-known association of scholars on Latin America. According to Cuzán: “Like other associations of erudites, LASA became radicalized during the seventies. The Association undertook to denouncing the cruelties perpetuated by the military regimes of Latin America in passionate language and as it appears in one of its resolutions, its “accomplice, the Government from the United States,” while at the same time, LASA silently ignored the same violations occurring in Castro’s Cuba and in Sandinista

Nicaragua, and in fact, sided with these regimes in their respective conflicts with Washington.”

One could conclude, although this essay is only an outline, that in spite of the setbacks and efforts to deculturize the Cubans, on the Island as in exile, for more than forty five years of communist tyranny, there are still underlying, as it has been evident in other countries of the Soviet block, the structures and genuine aspirations of the Cuban people. This has been achieved through a complementary and natural relationship of the Cuban family, inside Cuba and in exile, and, contrary to the designs of the Castro government, to the massive scattering by stages of the Cuban people. It has also been demonstrated, by the activities that still survive, that the socio-cultural fabric of Cuba was tighter and much more ingrained than what some have suggested.

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