

“CUBANS: AN EPIC JOURNEY”—GENESIS OF A BOOK

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The book, *Cubans: An Epic Journey* is a historical overview of the last six decades of the relationship between the people and government of Cuba, and the people and government of the United States, and events that shaped the history of the two countries. It portrays the Cubans’ journey into exile, dramatizing their struggle for freedom against the communist regime as well as the triumphs and tribulations of those who fled the island—the diaspora.

The book highlights an important difference between Cubans and most other immigrant groups: Cubans are political exiles who opposed a Communist dictatorship. Many of them fought heroically in the underground, and the survivors went into exile in large numbers, or escaped under dramatic circumstances, often after many years in prison. From this exile group emerged the members of the expeditionary force of the Bay of Pigs—almost 1,500 young people—and back into exile they returned after serving almost two years in prison. It was the largest but not the only time Cubans battled the regime from inside the island and from exile.

The Cuban exiles living in the United States, mainly in South Florida, represent 55% of the diaspora. According to the 2010 U.S Census, Cubans were approximately 1.8 million. If one adds those who have made their home in Spain, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico and even those who were left behind in the Eastern European countries as a result of Cuba’s three-decade-long membership in the Soviet bloc, there are more than two million people born in Cuba, or of Cuban descent, outside of the island.

This is a book of what millions of Cubans have had to endure for more than half a century. It is a book

that tells our story, debunks many myths and reminds many of us of why we are here; why we honor those who died in trying to liberate our homeland, and the success that many of our brothers and sisters have had in this great country that opened its doors to us, as well as in many other countries throughout the world. *Cubans: An Epic Journey* is rich in data and offers reasonable interpretations of historic events.

The essence of this book is to debunk four major myths about Cuba and the Cubans who fled the island.

- The truth is that in 1958 Cuba did not need a Socialist or Communist revolution.
- Both from within the island and as exiles, thousands of Cubans have died or went to prison fighting for the liberation from the Communist regime. The fight has never stopped. It continues today as we meet in this conference.
- The success of Cubans exiles in all facets of life in the United States and in many other countries throughout the world demonstrate clearly that the exile community is not a bunch of “mafiosos” as the regime want to portray us.
- Finally, by comparing and contrasting the success of exiles outside the island with the failures of the regime we are demonstrating with facts—not adjectives—the failures of the Cuban Revolution.

That is but the outline of what we set out to accomplish. We had much research and writing to do in order to compile a comprehensive one volume history of Cuba and those who have left the island and continue to do so to this day. This was a project conceived by FACE—Facts About Cuban Exiles—a

not-for profit organization that will turn 30 this year. The book project was carried out under the presidency of César Pizarro and written and edited by 31 journalists, academicians and people with unquestioned expertise in the topics on which they wrote. Twenty nine of these writers and editors are of Cuban origin—two are American.

The process of writing the book was painstakingly long, for we adhered to strict journalistic and academic standards. Adjectives would not work. The story had to be told by citing sources, primary ones whenever possible. It was also hard for in doing so we were saddened by the stories we had to tell. In some cases we were writing the names of people we had known, admired and in some cases loved as dear friends.

The book contains the story of many who gave up their lives fighting to liberate their homeland. They failed and paid the ultimate price: they were executed by the regime’s firing squads or died in horrible conditions in inhumane jails—the likes of which international human rights groups have not been allowed to inspect.

We mention scores of those who died in jail or facing a firing squad. Who does not know the story of how Pedro Luis Boitel was allowed to die in a hunger strike? We recall how Humberto Sorí Marín, a one time member of the regime and Rogelio González Corzo, alias Francisco, the head of Cuba’s MRR clandestine efforts in 1961 were captured, tried and executed. We also mention young university students, Alberto Tapia Ruano, Virgilio Campaneria, Juanín Pereyra and Juan Koch. Those are the first that come to mind. There are many more in the book. And we are sure that many of those here had friends or relatives that suffered at the hands of Cuba’s repressive regime.

This book, however, is more than a strict historical view. It also chronicles the success that Cubans have had as exiles. They have adapted admirably to the United States, and are a remarkably successful group of immigrants. Their income is close to the average white American; they are well-educated; and they have quickly learned the peculiar democratic game of the country. Cuban-Americans have elected three

U.S. senators and six members of the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as dozens of mayors and other officials in several states. Two Cuban exiles who arrived in the United States as adolescents have served as Secretaries in the Presidential cabinet; and there are many Cuban-American judges, prosecutors and ambassadors appointed by state or federal authorities.

Their success is even more remarkable considering that the largest concentration of Cubans is in Greater Miami or Miami-Dade County, an urban area with relatively low wages. If the majority of Cubans were located in Boston or New York in addition to shivering in the cold—a bleak prospect for any person born in the Caribbean—their income would be higher. But success in Miami has allowed them to establish a kind of “parallel mainstream,” where their large middle and upper class can sustain a refined culture, creating and preserving its own music, food, literature, theater, cinema, radio and television.

We write about the success they have had in South Florida, but also write about others who have been successful in other parts of the United States or in other countries. This book has more than three thousand names and they are just examples of achievements of the diaspora. We could have just as easily included 30,000 names. That was not our goal. Our mission was not to be all inclusive, but rather have examples of those who had been successful in their respective fields of endeavor.

For instance we write about business success stories like that of:

- Carlos Barceló, who sells more than \$30 million a year in trees and plants in California and Arizona.
- José Suquet, who is chairman of the board, president and CEO of Pan American Insurance in New Orleans.

We talk about those who have been important in academia like:

- Carmelo Mesa-Lago, a Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Economics and Latin American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh.

- George J. Borjas, the Robert W. Scrivner Professor of Economics and Social Policy at the Harvard School of Economics and Social Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School.
- Jorge Domínguez, the Antonio Madero Professor of Mexican and Latin American politics and Economics and Vice Provost for International Affairs at Harvard University.
- Carlos Eire, a Professor of Religion at Yale University who also has made a name for himself as an author.
- And all those who been successful in South Florida like, José de la Torre, Dean of the Alvah H. Chapman Graduate School of Business at Florida International University (FIU); Antonio Jorge, Professor Emeritus of Political Economy at FIU. Also in the book are Jorge Salazar Carrillo, a Professor of Economics, Damián Fernández, a Professor of International Relations, and Raúl Moncarz, all from FIU.
- From the University of Miami we mention among others Jaime Suchlicki, the Emilio Bacardí Moreau's Chair of Cubans Studies and Director of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies; and Andy Gómez, Assistant Provost for Accreditation and Assessment and a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies.

Even this short list, a sample of the names in the book would not be complete without including a prominent Cuban who had an international reputation while in Cuba and later as an exile in Puerto Rico and Venezuela. He was Leví Marrero who died in 1995 and authored the Geography of Cuba text book taught in Cuba before the Revolution and *Cuba: Economía y Sociedad*, a 15-volume study of Cuba published while he was in Puerto Rico.

Our goal in writing and publishing this book is that future generations of Cuban Americans in the United States and in other countries; academicians and the media; as well as someday, hopefully soon, the people in Cuba, may come to better understand who we are and what our struggle has been.

One question remains unanswered: Will Cubans in the diaspora continue to perform well? As Carlos Alberto Montaner said in his introduction to the book “all indications are positive, although the exodus of Cubans to the United States is still underway with 20,000 to 30,000 Cubans entering the United States every year. The number of arrivals from 1990 to 2010 exceeds those who arrived between 1959 and 1980. Is each wave of Cuban exiles different from the last? Of course, their life experiences were shaped by different key circumstances. However, all share a fundamental trait: the desire to integrate into American society.”