

The importance of Cuban Refugee Relocation in the United States



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Abstract

This research investigated the affects and importance of the history, politics, and language aspects of the Refugee Relocation Programs located within The United States of America. It also studies the importance and significance of these programs and the services they offer to refugees coming into the U.S. borders. The main part of this research was focused on Cuban refugees and exiles that have been coming to the United States since the early 1960's. According to the results, the Refugee Relocation Programs are paramount for exiles seeking refuge from their home countries. Together by word of mouth and by service throughout the community and by other organizations, service and aid can be made available to such refugees.

At the end of the reported year of 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported over sixty million people being forcibly displaced from their homes. According to the UNHCR, they are now considered refugees. That is on average 42,500 individuals that leave their homes daily. In the year of 2015, the United States of America alone received only about 70,000 refugees, and those reported individuals have since been relocated and been given a new home. Citizens from over thirty different countries have found new homes in the United States, one of these many countries is a country just south of our Florida border, a country that the U.S. has had an incredibly confrontational foreign relationship with over the last sixty years. Cuba is the country in which this research will be focusing on. Over the past few years, the United States has had a large fluctuation of evacuees coming over from Cuba, due to sanctions that have been in place between the two countries for that last sixty years being lifted by President Barack Obama. In 2015, a little over 5,500 Cubans made their way to the United States borders by land and sea to claim refugee status. That number is almost 1,300 more than the previous year. Whether it is because of sanctions being lifted in Cuba, or because of other reasons, that so many Cubans are coming to the United States, we may never know. One thing we do know, is that now, in 2016 there is an even larger amount of Cubans making their way to the United States border seeking refuge, and asylum. This research paper will analyze the study of the Refugee Relocation Programs and their importance to why they are vital and imperative to help solve the problem of integrating refugees into the American Society.

Learning more about Refugee Relocation Programs and the services that they offer, will help and aid the refugees, so that the programs will be successful, and help and give assistance to those enrolled in the programs. Also, the more people know and understand about these programs and organizations the more likely and willing they will be to give service to help the

refugees that are in need. For example, recently the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) along with the Catholic Community, have started focusing more on the importance of helping with refugee projects and organizations. This type of concentration on the topic will help spread knowledge and information to more people, and they will be able to see the importance of helping with the organizations throughout their communities by donations, service and many other types of aid.

In the beginning of this study of the Refugee Relocation Programs and organization, one must know what a refugee is exactly, and how one would qualify under United States Statute. According to the UNHCR, a refugee is:

someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries (UNHCR 2016).

Taking the information from this definition and applying it to the history and background of Cuba, we can see that after the 26th of July movement that started in 1953, led by Fidel Castro, why so many Cubans left their country. After failed communication between Castro and the U.S. Government, those escaping Cuba and going to the U.S. among other places, felt that persecution due to violence and war and were sincerely afraid to do so, were now considered refugees. Now because they considered themselves as refugees seeking asylum, the United States had to have a law or policy to keep this in order, so defined under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), in section 101 (a)(42):

a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country because of a “well-founded fear of persecution” due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin. This definition is based on the United Nations 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocols relating to the Status of refugees, which the United States became a party to in 1968. Following the Vietnam War and the country’s experience resettling Indochinese refugees, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which incorporated the Convention’s definition into U.S. law and provides the legal basis for today’s U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) (America Immigration Council 2015).

This act would not only open doors for Cuban exiles, but would open doors for refugees coming from multiple countries for over sixty years.

Altercations between the United States and Cuba started long before the 1960’s. One could say that they started back when the United States decided to come and help Cuba eradicate Spain out of their borders. The U.S. didn’t want to go and immediately start a war so the United States Navy stayed off the coast of Havana doing nothing. Then on February 15, 1898 one of the U.S. battleships named the Maine, blew up killing 260 men on board. No one could say for sure who was at fault for the explosion and death of all of those men, but the U.S. held the blame on Spain and declared war on them, starting the Spanish-American War on April 25, 1898. It was a war that lasted only a little over 3 months and ended with Spain signing the Treaty of Paris, and packing up and relinquishing dominion over Cuba. The Treaty of Paris “ that formally ended the war gave the United States direct control not only of Cuba, but also over Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines” (Gonzalez 2000). The United States had brought these new inherited countries to their knees, and they had little idea of what lay ahead. Unlike her sister islands,

Cuba and her citizens were not effortlessly submissive to the U.S. coming in and taking control. Gonzalez states that, “During the initial occupation, U.S. officials turned the island into a protectorate by forcing the Platt Amendment into the Cuban constitution” (Gonzalez 2000). This Platt Amendment was a modification to having U.S. military control in Cuba saying that they would relinquish those services and let Cuba govern herself on eight special conditions. These conditions would forbid the Cuban government from entering into any form of international politics, or treaties that could antagonize current Cuban independence. They also give the U.S. the right to intervene in Cuban politics whenever they saw fit. Another condition given was that it gave the right of the sale of all naval stations to the United States, which is known today as Guantanamo Bay. These are simply a few of the strict conditions placed on the Cuban government by the infamous Platt Amendment. This amendment would come into play multiple times over the space of the next thirty years, and the U.S. would come down multiple times to intervene in Cuban politics.

Then in 1940 Fulgencio Batista Zaldívar, a military man who had worked his way up the ranks over the last decade, was elected as the new President of Cuba. President Batista did not get along with the American government right away. It wasn't until his second term as president in 1952 when the U.S. was seeking support from all South and Central American countries to stop communism from spreading, even if it meant the rising up of military dictatorships. President Batista gladly gave them what they were searching for in that aspect. The United States welcomed Batista, because “he offered welcome stability for foreign investors...and social reforms” (Gonzalez 2000).

President Batista maintained his government and people until riots started and revolutionaries began trying to fight against the government that he and the U.S. had built up.

One such insurgent, named Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz, along with his brother Raul, and many other revolutionaries were upset with Batista and his government and decided to stand up for what they believed, leading an uprising against Batista. This caused them in the end to flee the country in exile in order to ultimately elude arrest. While in exile, Castro met many other revolutionary minds that would stick with him as they returned in 1956 in order to lead another rebellion against the Cuban Government. Finally, in 1959 with the 26th of July movement Castro and his group of men were able to complete the task at hand and over throw Batista and his administration, sending him running to the United States borders for protection. Once Castro gained control, he decided to implement a Marxist-Leninist representation of government and converted Cuba into a Socialistic state. Because of such actions thousands of Cubans fled the country in exile and sought refuge to the United States.

From the time of Castro's government takeover in the 1960's to the present, many Cubans have tried to make their way to the United States. The journey to the United States and also to gain citizenship has been tough for Cuban nationals. For many Cubans not only was it hard to gain citizenship, it was hard to even get out of Cuba. For many years, Castro did not process exit visa's due to the amount of Cubans wishing to leave Cuba. There were two waves of migration where people were lucky enough to get exit visas before Castro cut them off again. Rumbaut and Portes both stated that, "The first wave spanned the years from 1959 to October 1962 and amounted to about 200,000 persons" (Rumbaut and Portes 2001). The second wave opened in 1965 when the Cuban government allowed those Cubans currently residing in the United States to come back and get family still living in Cuba.

After the Cuban revolution, in 1966, the United States Congress passed the Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA) which stated that any Cuban natives with their spouses and children

wishing to enter the U.S. could with the requirements that all Cuban natives and their families must have been present in the United States for at least 1 year and must be able to be accepted as immigrants. By taking this brief look at the history of Cuban Exiles, and the difficulties they had faced up until this point trying to gain refugee status and come to the United States, this act passed in 1966, allowed more than 125,000 Cubans that would try to enter the American borders by boat through the south of Florida by 1980.

By 1995, there was a revision on the CAA that was nicknamed the “Wet Foot, Dry Foot Act.” This revision to the original act was given by the Clinton Administration and fundamentally states that in the original CAA (any Cuban Seeking refuge and wanting to pursue citizenship within the U.S. would be able to gain such within a year) now had more restrictions. After the revision it stated that anyone who was caught in the strip of water between Cuba and the U.S. would either be sent back to Cuba or to a third participating country (wet foot). Also, any Cuban who was able to make it to shore would be able to get a chance to gain their citizenship or Permanent Residency in the United States (dry foot). This revision was not very well accepted among current Cuban-Americans, and Cubans that were looking into seeking refuge from the place they had once called home. It has caused multiple problems and disputes in the past, but nonetheless, it has not stopped Cubans from trying to make it to the American border, it has only made them find other means of passage to the border that would count as a dry foot arrival. Even though Cubans have had many hardships and trials like the revisions to the CAA, nothing could deter them from coming into the United States and we can see how since the 1980’s the number of Cuban refugees currently living in the United States has only increased (see Fig. 1).

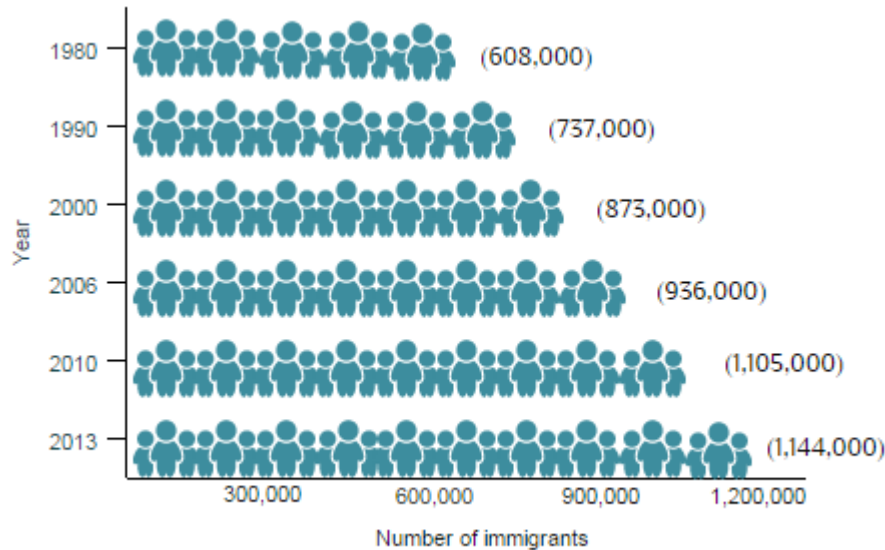


Fig 1: Data from U.S. Census Bureau 2006, 2010, and 2013 American Community Surveys (ACS), and Campbell J. Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign- born population of the United States: 1850-2000” (Working Paper no. 81, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington DC February 2006)

The path to Refugee status has never been an easy road as stated previously. Many have tried and still try to take large boats to the borders of south Florida without getting caught and sent back home due to the “Wet Foot, Dry Foot Act” set in place by President Clinton and his Administration. Because of this fear, many Cubans will either take boats down to the Guyana or Venezuelan border and walk their way up to the Texan border, or by passage to Ecuador. Because Ecuador is the only county in the vicinity that doesn’t require a visa, once they arrive, they walk through the countries that lie amidst them up to the Texan border, so they can present themselves to the border control to gain refugee status, only later to be sent to one of the many different Refugee Relocation Programs around the U.S. After being relocated to one of many

Refugee Relocation Programs in one of the states, they are applied into many systems such as the Social Security Administration, and government programs so that they can attempt to gain citizenship faster.

As of 2014, the United States has donated over \$1.2 billion to the United Nations Refugee Relocation Program and yearly that rounds out to be about a yearly budget of \$18 million. As for the Cuban Refugee Program, over \$1.3 billion has been dealt in financial assistance in programs such as the Matching Grant system. The Matching Grant system is one of the system or programs mentioned above, that virtually every Cuban exile is applied into. It is an:

alternative to public cash assistance providing services to enable ORR-eligible populations (refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, certain Amerasians from Vietnam, Victims of Severe Forms of Trafficking, and Special Immigrant Visa Holders (SIVs) to become economically self-sufficient within 120 to 180 days of program eligibility (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2012).

These Cuban Refugee Programs allow Cuban exiles to become eligible for Medicare, free English as a Second Language (ESL) Courses, Job Development assistance, and low-interest college loans, etc.

Probably the most emphasized and imperative program aside from getting these new residents in financial aid programs and on their feet, is the ESL program. The ESL program is a government funded program that helps Cubans that are coming from a country where English wasn't taught in the primary schools, or if it was taught it was on a very basic level. In an article written by Rusin, Sylvia, and Zong, it States that:

Cuban immigrants were much less likely to be proficient in English and speak English at home than the overall foreign-born population. In 2013, about 62 percent of Cuban immigrants (ages 5 and over) reported limited English proficiency, compared to 50 percent of the total foreign-born population. Approximately 6 percent of Cuban immigrants spoke only English at home, versus 16 percent of all immigrants (Rusin, Zong and Batalova 2015).

Many citizens of the United States strongly postulate that every person living in the United States needs to be able to converse in English, even if its just by a little bit.

As a new refugee arriving in The United States of America, an orientation is required by the Refugee Relocation Program. During these orientations each refugee is asked a series of questions and one is how well they know and understand the English language. Some may respond, that they know it very well or some may not respond at all because they know and understand very little English. A refugee's knowledge of the English language may determine how well they succeed in the "land of the free". In *Cuban Exiles in the United States*, a book written by Carlos E. Cortés in the early 1980's he states, "Competence in the English Language Should emerge in the future as a major determinant of different facets of assimilation among respondents" (Cortes 1980). Who knew such a statement would still be as true today as it was thirty-six years ago. It is more important than ever, that knowing the English Language can only bring more and greater success for all those seeking citizenship here in the United States. One Cuban named Angela came to the U.S. as a refugee, while she was in her 40's, and it wasn't until then when she began learning the English language:

Before enrolling for this class, it had been a long time since she had last sat in a classroom. During her life and employment in Cuba she had had no need for English or any other foreign language. She said with a sigh, *‘Pero no tenía nada que ver el inglés. Aquí me hace falta.’* (But I didn’t have to see anything of English. Here I need it.) *‘Yo estaba sorda. Llegué aquí y era ni nada. Y me queda así.’* (I was deaf. I arrived here and there was not anything [to comprehend]. And it remains for me so) (Butcher and Townsend 2010).

These people who come to the U.S. want to be able to communicate outside of their communities and to work in jobs that they enjoy and become an American. In order to do this, they have to go back to some type of school, no matter the age, because they know that through learning this new and important language they can start rebuilding their lives right where they have been resettled.

A study was done in Miami Florida to show the influence that English has in Cuban Miami and also with other Cuban communities all over the United States:

De hecho, sus 11 Informants hicieron hincapié en la relevancia del inglés en su día a día y algunos admitieron que lo preferían al español en la mayoría de sus situaciones de habla ... sugiere que esta preferencia por el inglés a nivel individual podría perjudicar la estabilidad del bilingüismo de la comunidad de habla (In fact, his informants stressed the importance of English in their day and some admitted that they preferred the Spanish in most of its speaking situations ... suggests that this preference for English to individual level could undermine the stability of bilingualism speaking community) (Bajuelo 2011).

The stressing of learning another language will never go away for them in order to function in day to day lives, but those who live in a bilingual Community, like Cuban Miami, will always have their native language to fall back on.

Throughout this research, there has been information shared about the history of Cuban exiles and what made them so desperate to come to the United States and claim refugee status. This research focuses on the foreign policy that the United States has had with Cuba since the late 1800's and how the relationship precipitated the Cuban revolution and the new Socialistic state ran by Fidel Castro. There has been an exploration into what it takes for those of Cuban nationality to make it to the American border, and trials that await them due to amendments in U.S. policy, natural causes, or other adversities that lie in their paths, whatever they may be. In another part of this research, an inquisition of the study shows a look into the actions that refugees have taken and need to take, once they are relocated into a Refugee Relocation Program. The Refugee Relocation Program makes sure they are set up financially, and are prepared to live their new lives, so that once they are able to obtain jobs they may become self-sufficient. Making sure they become self-sufficient is critical, but so is the study of the English language once they arrive here. Studies have been analyzed showing the facts about the importance of the ESL program offered to every refugee per government law. The outcomes of the ESL program have been seen in how Cubans decided to live their lives after receiving citizenship and how they choose to pursue their new American dream. The ESL program gives these new residents a chance to communicate with not only those of their own nationality but of every nationality knowing the English language.

This research has shown many different aspects of the importance of Refugee Relocation Programs here in the United States of America. The information exhibited throughout this study shows that even though Cubans are coming from a confrontational past on a political standpoint, helping those who seek refuge in the U.S. As Americans we provide service and all types of assistance for the programs within the Refugee Relocation Program. Overall this program will help Americans as a community to unite in order to help these refugees come into a new world and a new way of life. Cortès states that, “More effective outreach efforts are needed to close ‘information gaps’ about the Cuban Refugee Program” (Cortès 1980). With the help of not only the Catholic, and LDS Community spreading the information about refugees, every person in any community can help the spreading of information and dire knowledge that needs to be shared.

BIS Analysis

When I started preparing for graduation I didn't really know what to expect, or really what I was going to do. I went into a type of panic mode began going through the motions that everyone around me was doing. But after talking to Marie Clayton and another committee member, we all saw that my original path and BIS project wasn't quite right for me. So with some great guidance, I decided to do the Community Engaged Learning Project and volunteer with some type of community outreach program. Even after I came to this decision, I was still in panic mode because whenever I was asked what I was going to do with my degree, I didn't know the answer. My degree covers three areas and while I had a broad idea what I could do, I was never really sure of the specifics. So when it came to choosing a Community Engaged service project which would involve all three areas, I froze and didn't know what to do. After talking to one of my committee members, we decided the best route would be to go down a path with refugees. This would allow me to speak Spanish, deal with international politics, as well as allow me to see history in the making and become a part of history as I worked with these refugees and their new life in the United States.

The next thing for me to do was to find a program or business for whom I could volunteer. After almost a month of researching, I decided I wanted to volunteer at Catholic Community Services (CCS) with their Refugee Relocation Program in Salt Lake City. As I headed down there on my first day for orientation and a tour of their offices, I didn't really know what to expect. I didn't realize the work and time that goes into relocating those who are seeking refuge from what once was their homes. I thought I might translate here and there, and drive them to their apartment and that would be that. Little did I know it was so much

more than that. My first day consisted of watch an orientation film and meeting one of the former refugees and getting to talk to him about what CCS has done for him and his family. My mind was seriously blown! Not only was there more to the stories and to the process, but I found something that I wanted to do. I now knew that one day, I wanted to become a helper, an aide, and a colleague. What I had thought would be an occasional visit to hang out and help translate, turned into arriving at the break of day, working harder than I do at my current (paid) job, and listening, laughing, and sharing. I not only translated, but also helped them fill out forms, took them to the social security offices, and Department of Work Services (DWS) so that they could get their new lives started.

If I had time to go and do it all over again, one thing I would do differently is to reduce hours at my current job and try to volunteer more at CCS. Since I have finished volunteering, I found myself missing the environment, the people, and the experiences. I felt like I have grown so much, not only in the knowledge of what really happens with refugees when they come to the United States, but also with my Spanish language skills. At the beginning, many Cubans laughed because of my Argentine accent. Now many say that I am getting the Cuban accent, and that makes me very proud.

In the end, I hope that many would have benefited from my work at CCS. Not only workers but refugees, asylees, and parolees that came in search or help, comfort, and peace. But I would say that I have benefited the most from this experience. As I stated earlier, when asked what I wanted to do with my degree and my areas of study, I never had a direct answer, but because of this opportunity, I can honestly say what I want to do. And with the amazing job opportunity that CCS has offered me, I will be able to go and

accomplish my dream of working, and enjoying my work, after I graduate. I would never trade these last few weeks for anything, they have changed me and in return I hope I can go and help change others' lives.

Audit Report

January 21, 2016

I set up an appointment to go to Catholic Community Services to learn about what I could do for my Community Engaged Service Project. I met with Samantha and she went over the different things they do with the Northern Division, and what options I could do at that center. She did mention that the Refugee Relocation Program was only down in Salt Lake, so if I was interested, she could contact someone named Raul to set up an orientation to get me going on my project. Samantha was so nice and so informative and was able to answer all the questions I had. Now all I have to do is go to the Orientation down in Salt Lake to start working with refugees! I'm not sure what I will be doing but nonetheless I am excited.

January 28, 2016

I went in to the orientation to learn about the program and what I would be doing and it was absolutely amazing! I have learned about Refugees in class and about the history and international politics outlook on the subject but to actually see the effects of it right in front of you, it is very emotional. The other 2 people in my orientation with me were actually refugees but are now citizens of the United States of America, the land of the free, and to see how far they have come, it was absolutely beautiful! I am so excited to start participating and doing this I sincerely look forward to the hours I will spend down there. I was even able to meet some of the refugees that have gone through the program because they hire many of the refugees to help work with cases from their countries.

February 1, 2016

Today was absolutely amazing! I started out the day by going to go and get a simple state background check so that I would be able to start my work the not only the Cuban Refugees and Parolees but also many other Refugees of different Nationalities. I was able to meet people with different cultures and different back grounds with so many different stories! Many that touched my heart! I also realized today how much work goes into resettlement of Refugees and how it's not all easy work and all play. There is a lot of preparation that goes into this and when problems arise they all work together to figure out a solution. I had so much fun today, and I was reminded why I am doing the BIS program and remembering what I want to do with my life and who I would like to be.

February 8, 2016

I was able today to work translating again today and help Cuban refugees and one specifically touch me so much! She came to the United States as a Refugee, not a Parolee, or an Asylees, and he story was so touching! She couldn't get the medical care she needed in Cuba and was just starting to get the care she needed here when her Medicare ran out. Medicare is only given to refugees for 8 months and she needs it for just a while longer. Since we saw this need we were able to set her an apt with Michael over at the Asian Assoc. to figure out another way to help her get the medical aid she needs and deserves. I was also able to work on case notes for many of the Cuban asylees and parolees and I thoroughly enjoyed that, because I kind of got a look behind the process and what they have done.

February 22, 2016

Today we had two Cuban families show up un announced so they turned to me and told me that if I wanted that I could start my very own cases (with supervision of course) I was able to work in the actual case note and get information from the cases to start inputting case notes. I was once again able to translate for the Cuban Asylees and Parolees. Through the last few weeks I have come to love what I do more and more, time seems to fly and doesn't seem to matter because all that does seem to matter is what we can do for those who are in need.

March 7, 2016

Today was an AMAZING and Remarkable day... today there were 2 new Cubans who entered the country on the 1st of March and Mark was busy with another case so I was but with another Case Manager, Khalid, to work with these Cubans. And it is amazing to see the process from the beginning how this works and I was able to talk to them and see the fresh feelings that were on the surface and my heart honestly broke for them and I can't wait to continue working with them!! I never realized how much paperwork is associated with getting these new Refugees on their feet and getting them established in our community. Even though by the end of the day I was exhausted, it was all worth it in the end.

March 14, 2016

Today I was to go translate and also participate in a health orientation for the Cuban Refugees that I helped register last week and I also got to know them a little more. I also learned this week that there is an influx of Cubans coming from Cuba trying to come to the United States before relationship are repaired and refugee status is taken away from them. With this knowledge CCS once again has offered me a chance if I want to work for them after my graduation and become part of their team so they can get as much help as possible. One thing I also learned

today is that Cubans are in a hurry because they are in need and they feel like they can get that care more from the United States than from their own country, which is really sad and kind of breaks my heart.

March 28, 2016

Today will be my last day volunteering at CCS until the semester is over. I am kind of sad because I have really enjoyed my time here working not only with the other case workers but also with the amazing people who walk through the front doors on a daily basis seeking help from the Refugee Relocation Program. Today I was able to take Ivania Zalvidar to the Social Security Administration building to start processing her paper work so that she can finally receive her social security number. It was a wonder way to end the last few weeks with CCS. But overall I hope after graduation, if the offer still stands to come back to this amazing place and continue working not as a volunteer this time but as a case manager.

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