

## Cuban-American Cuba Visits: Public Policy, Private Practices<sup>1</sup>

Susan Eckstein<sup>2</sup> and Lorena Barberia<sup>3</sup>

### Executive Summary

Since Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 Cubans have come to comprise one of the largest immigrant groups in the United States. As a proportion of Latin American immigrants Cubans comprised 4 percent in the 1990 census. However, they are more prominent than their numbers suggest because of their geographic concentration and political clout.

Currently Washington allows island émigrés to visit family remaining in Cuba one time per year. They are one of the only groups subject to restrictive visitation rights. Cuban-Americans differ in their views toward the restrictions.

Drawing upon interviews with Cuban-Americans in Florida and New Jersey and with Cubans, this study shows that the yearning to visit island family and the public stance on visitation rights vary among Cuban-American immigrant cohorts, although all Cuban émigrés value family dearly. First-wave émigrés, who came between 1959 and 1979, are more likely to oppose publicly transnational visits than islanders who emigrated since 1980. This is especially true among the Cuban-American leadership. First-wave émigrés, along with their now grown children, dominate, politically and economically, the main communities of Cuban-American settlement, and they wield the most influence in Washington. The leadership and their supporters oppose people-to-people ties across the Florida Straits for political and, from their vantage point, moral reasons. Vehemently anti-Castro, they believe that the more isolated Cuba is, the more likely it is that the government will fall. At the same time, they publicly downplay the value many émigrés, especially those who came to the U.S. since 1980, attach to visits to family left behind.

Post-1980 émigrés by now constitute about half of the Cuban-American population. In contrast to earlier émigrés who consider themselves exiles, the recent arrivals more typically see themselves as immigrants. In moving to the United States, they do not want to break with family left behind and they do not oppose visiting Castro's Cuba on moral grounds. And, unlike earlier émigrés, they typically still have a considerable number of close kin on the island. While preferring to visit openly and legally, in light of lingering hostile Cuban-American community pressures and their limited public involvements, they do so quietly and, depending on U.S. law, sometimes illegally.

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Annual visits are reaching an all-time high, as an increasingly broad spectrum of Cuban-Americans wish to see family remaining in Cuba, as they realize that travelers are not chastised, as they heed the Pope's call for the world to open up to Cuba, and as the Castro government has eased travel restrictions. Under the changed circumstances, Washington policy, rooted in the Cold War and responsive to continued first-wave Cuban-American leadership corps politics, pressures, and principles, is no longer suited to the contemporary reality. The restrictive visitation policy proves unenforceable, it fuels law evasion, it is inconsistent with the continued deep family commitments of an ever-larger émigré pool, and it is premised on an erroneous foreign policy logic. Transnational people-to-people ties, often unwittingly, are doing more to undermine the Cuban Communist political economy than cross-border family isolation.

Washington would benefit by allowing more flexible visitation rights. Stepped up people-to-people contact would advance the civil society build-up goals of both the 1992 Cuban Democracy and the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democracy Solidarity Acts. A more flexible visitation policy might not immediately bring about the political and economic transformations Washington and many Cuban-Americans want. However, it would promote family values, reduce noncompliance with U.S. law, increase Cubans' independence of the state, reduce hostilities between the closest of neighbors, and keep emigration pressures somewhat at bay by allowing families to remain in contact without fleeing the island and by allowing Cuban-Americans to help their island kin in need.

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### I. Introduction

Nearly all aspects of Cuban society have changed since Castro took power in 1959, but Cuban commitment to family remains as strong as ever. What impact has emigration had on families divided by the revolution? Since 1994 Washington has permitted émigrés to visit Cuban kin a maximum of once a year. The Cuban-American leadership supports restrictions, on the presumption that they isolate the Castro regime and generate internal pressure for change. Based on a study of the two key Cuban-American communities, this report will show, however, that (1) the Cuban-American leadership, at best, is representative of first-wave exiles from Castro's Cuba, not of émigrés since 1980 who constitute an ever larger portion of the Cuban-American community;<sup>4</sup> (2) early and recent émigrés differ in their views toward island travel and in the amount of close family they still have in Cuba; and (3) Washington's efforts to regulate travel are ineffective. Following a discussion of Cuban immigration history that led families to live apart, the report examines the evolution of the main Cuban-American communities and their leadership, U.S. and Cuban laws regulating émigré visits and their impact, reasons for visits, and the effect of visits on the people-to-people, community, and national levels.

This report draws on U.S. and Cuban sources. It draws on interviews the authors conducted with a non-random sample of 64 community leaders and rank-and-file residents in the two main U.S. Cuban-American settlements: in Greater Miami Dade County (Florida) and Greater Union City Hudson County (New Jersey). It also draws on informal discussions with nearly 40 Cubans (ordinary islanders, scholars, and officials) about emigration and cross-border ties.<sup>5</sup>

### II. Cuban Immigration History

Cuban-Americans' ties to their homeland must be understood in the context of Cuban-U.S. immigration history. Actual and coveted Cuban-American/Cuban contacts vary with the social, economic, and political background of émigrés, when and why they emigrated, and how much family they still have on the island.

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<sup>4</sup> The most significant divide within the Cuban-American community—socially, culturally, economically, and politically—is between those who left the island before and after 1980. We refer to the two cohorts as first- and second-wave émigrés, respectively. However, there are additional nuanced differences among émigrés who came in different years within each of the two waves.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotes in the document come from these interviews.

U.S. law accounts only in part for Cuban immigration rates. Indeed, U.S.-Cuba immigration policy has changed over the years partly in response to conditions not of Washington's making or choosing.

U.S.-Cuba immigration policy has rested on lofty principles, on welcoming Communist victims. However, it came to be influenced by pressures from the emergent Cuban-American community, and, paradoxically, also by policies of the very island regime Washington sought to bring to heel. The Cold War led Washington to privilege Cuban immigration, and in so doing fueled the evolution of a well organized, economically successful Cuban-American community that continued to influence immigration and related policy after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, when fear of a Communist specter in the United States' backyard ceased to guide Washington foreign policy.

Cuban ties to the United States predate the revolution. Prior to 1959, Cubans came frequently and fairly freely to the States. Building on that tradition, Cubans discontent with Castro from the very beginning sought refuge on U.S. shores.

Political exiles, mainly officials of the Batista government, came first. The Cuban upper class, and then others of the pre-Revolutionary business, professional, and middle class, soon joined them. This emigration represented a class exodus, in response to the radicalization of the revolution.

Cubans who fled benefited from pre-existing Cold War legislation for global victims of Communism. The Walter-McCarran Act of 1952 offered preferential immigration status to Communist refugees. The Act contributed to over 200,000 islanders emigrating to the States between 1959 and 1962. Aspiring émigrés from other countries were less fortunate. At the time the Immigration and Naturalization Service typically set a cap of 20,000 persons per country.

Several specific U.S. programs, in addition, privileged Cuban émigrés and facilitated their adjustment to the U.S. In particular, the Cuban Refugee Program, initiated in 1961 and in effect until 1973, provided a broad range of financial, educational, professional retraining, employment, and other services to incoming Cubans. Three-fourths of all émigrés benefited from the multifaceted program, with its budget of \$957 million over the twelve-year period. Because Miami's Dade County could not readily absorb the fast-growing immigrant population, one aspect of the Program (of only limited success) involved resettlement elsewhere. Then, in 1962, the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act granted most Cuban immigrants, regardless of their motives for coming, immediate refugee status.

Washington's efforts to regulate emigration notwithstanding, in 1965 Castro unilaterally contributed to the entry of an estimated additional 6,000-plus islanders, upon announcing that earlier émigrés could pick up family left behind at the port of Camarioca.<sup>6</sup> Castro here revealed his understanding of the importance Cubans attach to family, and his readiness to manipulate emigration to his own advantage.

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<sup>6</sup> Nearly 3,000 Cuban rafters arrived on private boats between September 30 and November 30, 1965 from the port of Camarioca. The State Department, with the assistance of the US Coast Guard, transported an additional 4,598 Cubans during November as part of "Operation Sealift."

Against the backdrop of the Camarioca exodus, the U.S. and Cuban governments negotiated their first immigration accord. Under the Memorandum of Understanding of December 1965, Washington agreed to transport, in so-called Freedom Flights, 3,000 to 4,000 Cubans a month to the United States, with priority given to islanders with close family already in the States. Then, in 1966, Washington passed the Cuban Adjustment Act. This law not only granted political asylum to all Cuban émigrés but also eased procedures whereby Cubans obtained resident status and U.S. citizenship. The number of permanent residents was chargeable to the 120,000 Western Hemisphere quota, in place until 1976. Cubans, who came illegally as well as legally, and for non-political as well as political reasons, benefited from the law. All Cubans who reached U.S. soil were presumed to be refugees and made eligible, after a year and a day (and after having been inspected, paroled or admitted), for U.S. residency status.

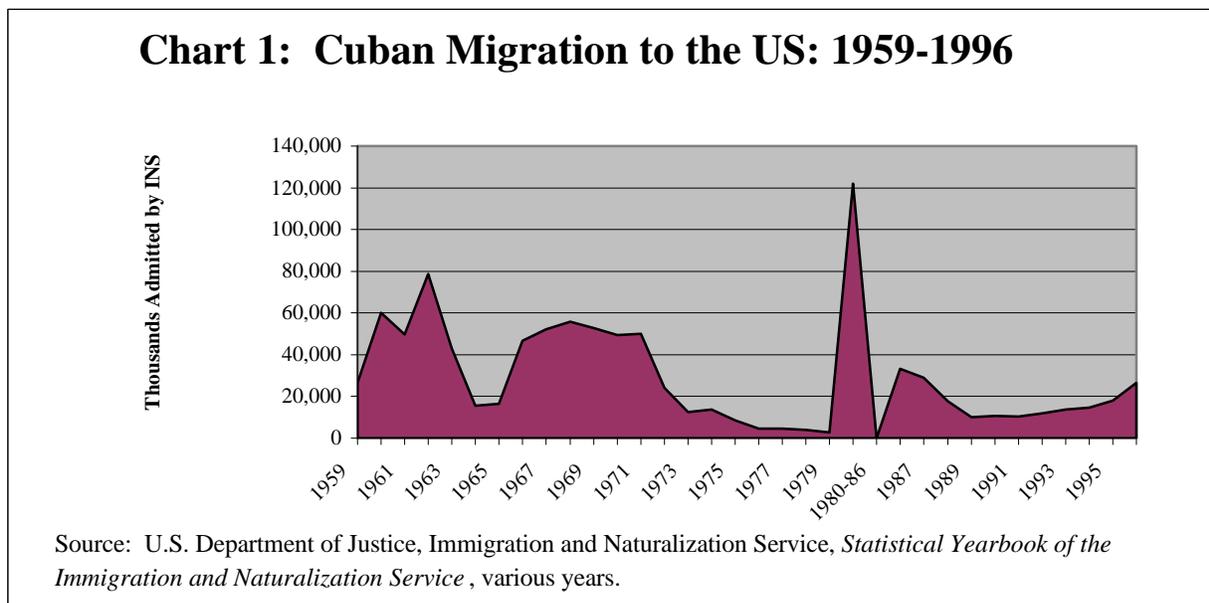
Before they were halted in 1973, the Freedom Flights brought more than a quarter of a million Cubans to the U.S., an average of about 30,000 a year. The flights included lower middle class service workers and small businessmen whose shops were nationalized in 1968.

The ending of the airlifts, together with the policy of family reunification, made for a somewhat contained émigré community. Cuban-Americans succeeded in getting most of their close kin to the States before entry became difficult. Also, the émigré community represented social classes with no remaining island counterparts. The private sector, in which most had been employed, had become (with the partial exception of agriculture) a matter of history a decade into Castro's  
remained rooted in the way of life and values of the pre-  
revolutionary era.

Under President Carter, U.S.-Cuban relations briefly thawed. His administration lifted a ban on travel to the island in effect since the promulgation of the embargo in 1962. It also allowed for the emigration of 3,000 actual and former political prisoners, and of 600 islanders (with their immediate kin) who had been caught trying to escape the country illegally. The prisoners had been released as a result of a first-ever so-called Dialogue between the Cuban government and members of the Cuban-American community. At the same time Castro allowed for other family reunification in the States, and most significantly, he allowed émigrés to visit their homeland for the first time.

According to U.S. sources, close to 150,000 Cuban-Americans took advantage of the opportunity to visit between 1979 and 1982. Cubans from the two sides of the Straits of Florida found their meetings traumatic. Emigration had polarized families. In Cuba, the government had stigmatized émigrés as *gusanos*, worms. Links with relatives abroad had been considered a sign of ideological weakness, and grounds for denial of membership in the Communist Party and the Union of Young Communists. With the late 1970s reconciliation, émigrés were redefined as members of the Cuban community abroad. Returning family, meanwhile, boasted of their economic success (real or imagined) in the United States, and offered to support relatives remaining on the island who wished to leave. Although the Cuban economy experienced its highest growth rate under Castro in the mid-70s, material deprivations remained and visiting émigrés stirred hopes and expectations of a better life in the United States. New emigration pressures built up.

Against this backdrop, in 1980 Cubans stepped up seizures of ships and planes and broke into several Latin American embassies. At first opposing the embassy break-ins, in April of that year the Cuban government agreed to allow anyone wanting to emigrate to Peru to enter the embassy's grounds. Within three days 10,000 responded. The government refused to tolerate any more but instead announced that anyone who wished to emigrate to the States could do so through the port of Mariel. Once again Castro took the lead in shaping emigration. He readied the Mariel port to receive U.S. transport vessels, with the proviso that Cuban-Americans who sent boats to pick up family take non-kin as well. The Cuban government decided to load prison inmates and mental patients onto the boats. Before that emigration option was closed down, some 125,000 so-called Marielitos came to the States, as discussed below. The Marielitos accounted for about half of all émigrés in the 1971-1980 decade (see Chart 1).



Marielitos represented a different Cuba than earlier émigrés, in their social and economic background and island experiences, especially in comparison to the pre-revolutionary elite who came between 1959 and 1961. They were more working-class and darker skinned, and they were socialized in Castro's Cuba. The majority arrived without family accompanying them or awaiting their arrival. Stereotyped as criminals and undesirables, even though only a small portion of them had broken the law or been mentally ill, earlier émigrés snubbed them. The size and timing of the boatlift contributed to the hostility Marielitos experienced. The new émigrés came during an economic recession in the United States, and settled in Florida, where the unemployment rate then was high.

Washington, on its part, initially denied the visa-less new arrivals privileges extended to previous island émigrés. It did not grant Marielitos automatic political asylum or special social assistance. Indeed, their residency status remained unresolved until 1984, when the Reagan Administration agreed to have the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 applied to them.

Castro's unilaterally-initiated Mariel exodus, like the Camarioca exodus, resulted in yet another bilateral immigration agreement in 1984. This time the United States agreed to accept up to 20,000 Cuban immigrants a year (the maximum allowed any country at the time), plus 3,000 political prisoners and their relatives. On its part, Cuba agreed to the repatriation of Marielito "excludables." "Excludables" involved persons with criminal records who did not qualify for U.S. residency according to U.S. immigration law.

In May of 1985, the United States began to beam anti-Castro Radio Martí to Cuba. In response, the island government canceled the Migration Agreement, as well as routine Cuban-American visits, get-togethers it had allowed—under conditions discussed below—since the late 1970s. Washington responded, in turn, by prohibiting Cuban-Americans from sending money and other assistance to island family and by granting entry visas to a mere fraction of the number of émigrés the 1984 law permitted. Between 1989 and 1994, years during which emigration demand picked up with the economic crisis caused by the precipitous contraction of Soviet aid and trade, the United States accepted only 50 to 73 percent of the 20,000 annual cap. The restrictive policy, enforced by the Bush and Clinton as well as Reagan Administrations, marked a shift in Washington strategy. The new strategy was designed to foment domestic pressure for change in Cuba by inducing new material deprivations, by isolating Cubans from their family abroad, and by preventing emigration of those unhappy with island conditions.

Accordingly, the U.S. and Cuban governments brought both immigration and Cuban-American/Cuban contact to a near standstill once again. Marielitos, most of whom still had family in Cuba, were especially hard-hit by the bilateral clampdown. However, the political uprising that Washington and the Cuban-American leadership hoped for and anticipated did not materialize.

As in the past, dynamics "on the ground" operated somewhat independently of the law. The closing of officially-sanctioned U.S. entry options did not put a stop to emigration. Instead, Cubans determined to come to the States took to covert means in ever-larger numbers. Some of those who were able to obtain U.S. family visit permits took advantage of the opportunity to leave the island and migrated by default when they did not return. Many more sought refuge in make-shift seacrafts. Rafters assumed that if intercepted at sea or if successful in making their way to the United States, they would be granted asylum rights. The U.S. Coast Guard reports having rescued over 1,000 Cuban rafters between 1982 and 1990 and over 45,200 between 1991 and 1994 (when economic conditions in Cuba worsened and the government became more tolerant of islanders willing to leave by sea). As a consequence, covert emigration accounts for the vast majority of the over 50,000 Cubans the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) admitted in the early 1990s. Once in the States, illegal entrants became eligible—according to the Cuban Adjustment Act, in a year and a day—for legal residency status. In the process, however, an undocumented number of Cubans lost their lives at sea. The fate of Elian Gonzalez's mother, who died in the Straits of Florida in November of 1999 while the then five year old boy was rescued at sea by two fishermen, illustrates how risky the 90 mile trip can be.

During the 1980s, but especially in the 1990s, Cubans sought refuge first and foremost for economic reasons. Typifying the shift in immigration motives, an arrival at an INS detention center in Miami noted—as reported in *The New York Times* in 1991—that "without food there

was nothing to do but leave.” The precipitous decline of Cuba’s gross national product by some 40 percent between 1989 and 1993, following the dissolution of Soviet bloc aid and trade, added fuel to the fire. Tensions grew as the food supply reached rock bottom. With emigration options limited by Washington, some 1,000 to 2,000 desperate and angry Cubans took the risk of protesting in downtown Havana in the summer of 1994. Protesters carried placards reading “Down with Fidel,” and some looted stores. While Washington and the Cuban-American leadership had hoped such a “pressure cooker” uprising would bring the regime to heel, Castro turned the situation around by unilaterally removing emigration restrictions once again. Some 38,000 islanders, known as *balseros* or rafters, took advantage of the opportunity, and tried to battle their way across the Florida Straits in makeshift rafts. This time Washington broke its policy of accepting Cubans picked up at sea. It announced that rafters intercepted in the Florida Straits would not be granted automatic U.S. entry. Yet, the commonly called “wet foot/dry<sup>7</sup> policy continued to entitle any émigré who reached U.S. shores the right to stay and qualify for resident status and ultimately U.S. citizenship. As part of its retaliatory policy, the Clinton Administration also canceled air traffic from Miami to Cuba and prohibited the sending of remittances to relatives on the island.

The number of *balseros* would have continued to mount had Washington not rushed to negotiate a new accord with Havana. The two governments signed yet another immigration agreement in September of 1994, with Washington now pledging to grant a *minimum* of 20,000 entry visas per year. Since 1984 it had officially allowed a maximum of that number but admitted only a fraction of the cap. The Cuban government, on its part, pledged to prohibit illegal emigration. The 1994 accord marked the first time the two governments agreed to collaborate in the control of illegal and covert immigration, and Havana agreed to accept, without retribution, islanders Washington refused. Some islanders qualified for U.S. entry through a newly instituted lottery, others under family reunification prerogatives. Even more than the Marielitos, 1990s émigrés bore little resemblance to those who first left: they differed in social class, cultural background, motives for emigrating, and the extent to which they still had close kin in Cuba. The INS, for example, reported in their 1999 Statistical Yearbook that, of the most recent immigrants for whom it had information, almost half were operators and laborers, 16 percent were service workers, and 13 percent were craft and repair workers. By contrast, only 2 percent had been executives, administrators, and managers. The demographic profile was a near mirror image of the émigrés who came in the early years of Castro’s rule.

While the 1994 accord deprived Cubans picked up at sea of the automatic entry they alone among immigrant groups had enjoyed for 35 years, they still enjoyed privileged U.S. access (especially on a per capita basis). Washington guaranteed entry to 20,000 Cubans at a time when it abandoned quotas for immigrants from other countries.

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<sup>7</sup> The “wet foot” component refers to the new policy requiring the U.S. Coast Guard to return to Cuba all islanders picked up at sea unless they could prove that they were refugees in need of asylum. The “dry foot” component refers to the continued policy of allowing Cubans who made it to U.S. shores to qualify for resident status.

### III. The Making of the Cuban-American Community

Cuban-American émigrés gravitated primarily to Dade County, Florida, but also to Hudson County, New Jersey. While from the outset Washington sought to disperse Cubans from South Florida, its efforts proved to no avail. With time the approximately 1.3 million Cuban-Americans—émigrés and their U.S.-born children—became ever more centered there.

Cubans settled in the Dade Country Greater Miami area for several reasons. First, Cubans had historic ties to the region. Even before the revolution Cubans settled in the Florida region, although in small numbers. They also visited and for a century plotted politics there. Second, close to Cuba, Dade County made a natural settling point, whether islanders arrived by sea or plane. Third, the area's tropical climate resembled Cuba's. This made Florida attractive not merely to émigrés upon arrival but also to Cubans who settled elsewhere when they retired. Fourth, as Dade County became an ever more populated Hispanic enclave, it became a magnet for Cubans. Cubans occupied a privileged position within the Hispanic community, economically and politically; this made settlement there all the more attractive. Fifth, personal networks, once in place, brought ever more émigrés to the region on an informal and familial basis. Immigrants of all nationalities gravitate to where they have relatives and friends who can provide them with housing and help them find work upon arrival.

Queries by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, reported in their 1999 statistical yearbook, reveal how strong the Miami pull had become by the turn of the century. When surveyed upon entry, Cubans in overwhelming numbers noted their intention to settle in Florida. In 1997 over 80 percent expected to settle there. New Jersey attracted the second largest number, but only 3 percent of island immigrants. By the year 2000, Dade County had become home to 63 percent of the nation's Cubans, up from 42 percent a generation earlier.

The New Jersey Hudson County Cuban-American community, by contrast, is a shadow of its former self. Union City remains the hub of the state's Cuban-American enclave. However, whereas in 1970 Cuban-Americans accounted for about 80 percent of the Union City population, and an even higher percent of the businesses on the city's main commercial street, thirty years later the immigrant group comprised only about 20 percent of the city's population and far fewer of the businesses than before. Although still the largest single ethnic group in Union City, which remained the symbolic center of the state's Cuban-American community, the émigrés' very success contributed to their dwindling local numbers. While many have remained in the Union City (New York/New Jersey) metropolitan area, typically successful émigrés, and their children above all, have moved from the city to affluent suburbs, communities with better housing and schools. In the suburbs they comprise a numerical minority, unlike in the Dade County municipalities where affluent Cuban-Americans settle.

Interviews the authors conducted with businessmen, clergy, politicians, group leaders, and journalists in both New Jersey and Florida reveal that Cuban-Americans have come to dominate the less dynamic Union City as well as the more dynamic Miami community. In both locations, the Cuban-Americans who dominate are first-wave émigrés and their grown children, that is, the cohort who left Cuba before the Mariel exodus.

Cuban-American influence in Dade and Hudson counties has been broad-based. Cuban-Americans wield political power in Florida through the Republican Party and in New Jersey through the Democrats. They are also influential in the religious domain through parish councils and other lay groups, and in civic life through a range of social and business groups. Cuban-Americans, moreover, tend to own and control local media, above all in Florida but in New Jersey as well.

Ordinary Cuban-Americans, in turn, have shaped community life. For decades extended kin, émigrés from the same Cuban towns of origin, and neighbors shared their lives together. Even those who moved to suburbs return for annual local Cuban patriotic and religious celebrations.

Both U.S. and Cuban government policies contributed indirectly to the communities “turning inward” and becoming self-consciously Cuban. Not only did Castro prohibit Cuban-American émigré visits for twenty years, but also, until he decriminalized dollar possession in 1993, they help their island family economically. In addition, Washington-imposed restrictions on visitation rights and remittance-sending, and on mail and telephone communications, limited relations between family on the two sides of the Florida Straits.

Restrictions constricted but never eliminated transnational ties, though. As any Cuban will confirm, family comes first. Cubans will put family above the law and above politics. Stronger even than the revolution, the Cuban family has survived ideological splits, separation by the Straits of Florida, and Cuban government stigmatization of émigrés as *gusanos*.

Cubans’ concept of family is inclusive. Cubans may feel equally close to immediate and distant kin, and they make no distinction between first, second, or third cousins. They even may consider as family people with whom they share no blood ties. U.S. Cuba policy pertaining to visits and remittances is premised on a more restricted Americanized concept of kinship.

Both family ties and shared community have kept nationalist sentiment and national identity strong among émigrés. Like family, nationalism knows no geographic borders. Cubans on the two sides of the Florida Straits concur that they both have rights and claims to the Cuban nation. The first-wave émigrés, who to date often consider themselves exiles, rejected the Cuban government but not their sense of nationalism. Indeed, in depriving them of their homeland Castro may inadvertently have intensified their nationalist fervor. First-wave émigrés remain passionate Cuban nationalists, even those who have lived most of their lives in the United States. However, they are increasingly committed to a nationalism that is more imagined than experienced. Commitment to an imagined Cuba is especially characteristic of the grown children of first-wave émigrés, who either came when young or were born in the States and never set foot on the island. The current leader of the main Cuba-American lobbying group, the Cuban American National Foundation, for example, does not even know Cuba first-hand.

First-wave émigré nationalism is premised on a deep hatred of Castro, more than of Communism. The early émigrés blame Castro personally and directly for their family suffering: for their loss of property, their loss of country, and their loss of stature, and for prison terms served for political convictions. Some also blame Castro for loss of family, if loved ones died in counter-revolutionary struggles.

The deep-rooted emotional island identity helps sustain Cuban culture among first-wave émigrés and their children who have the means to assimilate fully into the American mainstream. This identity motivates their continued concern about U.S. Cuba policy even when they have little, if any, close family remaining on the island.

While nationalism binds Cuban-Americans together, both the Florida and New Jersey émigré communities have become internally differentiated. The most important divide is generational, tied both to period of emigration and country of birth. Earlier and more recent émigrés have had distinctive life experiences, in Cuba as well as in the States. They not only come from different social, economic, and political backgrounds but they also experienced different Cubas, have different personal ties to Cuba, and have adapted differently to the United States.

Whatever their antipathy to Castro, the newer—Mariel and subsequent—émigrés were educated and socialized under the Communist government and their families lost less and gained more with the revolution. Their reasons for coming to the States and their desire to retain homeland ties differ from those of first-wave émigrés. The newer arrivals have come more for pragmatic economic than principled political reasons. Their reasons for emigration have come to include a *family* strategy, to earn money for kin left behind in the growing dollarized island economy. Accordingly, they often put family first. Earlier émigrés, by contrast, whose relatives in the main are reunified in the States, are well positioned to give priority to politics.

The first-wave émigrés and their children, who almost without exception form the leadership corps of the Dade and Hudson County communities, seek to speak for all Cuban-Americans. They do so even though their interests and experiences typify an ever-smaller portion of island émigrés. About half of all Cuban-Americans have come to the States since the 1980 Mariel exodus. The first wave émigrés project their values on the communities, dominate public discourse, and advocate a U.S. foreign policy consistent with their political formation and family commitments. It is they who have deftly lobbied at the local and federal levels. They were initially influential because they advanced Washington's Cold War anti-Communist agenda, but more recently because they have become wealthy well-organized lobbyists from states (especially Florida but also New Jersey) commanding large numbers of electoral votes.

Among first-wave émigrés and their children it is the conservative faction that is most outspoken and influential. First-wave anti-Castro émigrés who favor transnational engagement over isolationist economic strangulation lack the organizational presence and clout of the conservative faction. Not all first-wave émigré families and their now grown children are of one mind.

The dominant first-wave core has maintained its hold through intimidation when normative means have not sufficed. For decades pre-Mariel Cuban-Americans who disagreed with the community leadership feared making their views known. They feared social isolation within their community, and they feared discrimination in the world of work. A businessman in favor of improved U.S.-Cuban relations, whom we interviewed, in this vein noted that “If you don't comply with the ‘politically correct’ way, they'll hurt your business. They will call your customers and pester you on the phone. If I worked with Cuba or Cuban-Americans my business would be affected.” Similarly, a school director explained that “There is not much tolerance

here. They call you names and chastise you. They accuse you of being a Communist if you don't say what's mainstream. You can get fired if they don't like what you say about Cuba.”

The “hard-liner” core has also used force and threats of force to keep U.S.-Cuba ties at bay. A New Jersey priest, for example, who traveled to Cuba in the latter 1970s to negotiate the release of political prisoners and to engage in the then Cuban-American/Cuba Dialogue with island officials, informed us that he experienced bomb threats and church disruptions when he returned. The abuse was such that he had to be reassigned to a parish elsewhere. While such intimidation has since tapered off, the local coordinator of the Miami meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, the main scholarly organization of Latin American specialists, received death threats as recently as March of 2000, because Cuban academics had been invited to the conference.

Nonetheless, public discourse sometimes conceals what Cuban-Americans actually do. Community leadership intolerance constricts activity less than in years past and less than is publicly acknowledged. In ever larger numbers Cuban-Americans are quietly defying not only leadership condemnation of transnational people-to-people ties but also U.S. law. In view of community pressures, some Cuban-Americans go so far as to publicly chastise what they privately defy. The main privately felt, if publicly unarticulated, fault line within the community is generational, rooted first and foremost in emigration wave. Marielitos and subsequent émigrés do not publicly challenge community leader views or the Washington policies with which they disagree. They do not want to attract attention to themselves. The costs are too high and the task of organizing too difficult. Recent émigrés lack the organizational prowess of those who first came. Socialized in Castro's Cuba, they never experienced civil society participation. Yet, because they came to the United States for pragmatic more than principled reasons and because they still have family on the island, they want to maintain close ties with islanders they left behind. First-wave policy purism thus conflicts with the interests of recent émigrés.

The generational divide is increasingly also between immigrants and their U.S. born children. While many children remain loyal to their parents, with family ties so important and parental anti-Castro passions so strong, second generation Cuban-Americans are less apt than their island raised mothers and fathers to oppose U.S.-Cuban engagement.

#### **IV. Travel to Cuba**

Cuban-Americans go to Cuba mainly to see kin, and family visits are the only routine travel Washington permits without an official license under current U.S. law. Yet, both Havana and Washington have regulated the transnational kin get-togethers. As noted, originally Cold War politics, and then first-wave émigré Washington lobbying efforts, account for the travel constraints.

##### *A. U.S. and Cuba Travel Policies*

The basis for restricted family travel has changed over the years. Initially the main restrictions were imposed by Havana. Until 1979 the Cuban government categorically prohibited visits by

the exiles who had rejected the regime. Then, after the 1979 opening precipitated the Mariel exodus, Havana drastically reduced both the number of Cuban-Americans it let in and the regulations it imposed on them. Émigrés could come for no more than two weeks and were required to stay in state-run hotels. Following the Reagan Administration's 1985 introduction of anti-Castro Radio Martí, Cuba banned émigré visits for a year. When it resumed visitation rights, the government established an émigré visitor quota, which it gradually increased from 5,200 to 26,000 per year, until it eliminated the cap altogether in 1994. The Cuban government also imposed different travel restrictions on distinctive émigré cohorts. For example, it prohibited 1980 Marielitos from visiting until the end of the decade and the 1994 *balseros* from visiting for five years (except in cases of emergency). In addition, it limited entry of individual Cuban-Americans from all emigration waves whose motives it suspected, by requiring émigrés both to travel with Cuban passports and to solicit visas, which were not automatically granted.

Since the mid-1990s, however, Cuba has made travel easier. By the close of the century Cuban-American visitors could stay with island relatives, a less costly option and one more conducive to intimate intermingling than when they were compelled to stay in hotels, and they could stay for up to three weeks per trip, a week longer than previously permitted. Moreover, the Castro regime for the first time allowed islanders who emigrated before 1970 to enter with North American (as opposed to Cuban) passports (with a humanitarian or standard entry permit), and visitors with Cuban passports to qualify for two-year multiple entry visas.

However, when Havana loosened its restrictions Washington tightened its own. In addition to the new immigration restrictions Washington imposed, it initiated visitation and remittance regulations imposed on few other immigrant groups. First, the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act,<sup>8</sup> otherwise known as the Torricelli Bill, restricted Cuban-American remittance-sending activities. Second, in response to the *balsero* crisis in 1994, President Clinton banned family visits except in cases of extreme hardship (such as terminal illness or severe medical emergency, and with a special license from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control). In addition, the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democracy Act, popularly known by the names of its two sponsors, Helms-Burton, called for changes in Cuba as prerequisites for the renewal of travel; the sought-after changes, however, were not codified in the law. Section 112 of the law presents a sense of Congress calling for the President to insist that the Cuban government both release political prisoners and recognize the right of association and other fundamental freedoms before re-instituting general licenses for Cuban-American island travel. The law was quickly passed when anti-Castro sentiments surged after Cuba shot down planes flown by the Miami-based anti-Castro group, Brothers to the Rescue. Backed by the well-organized anti-Castro Cuban-American lobbying group, the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF, otherwise known as the Foundation), the new law was premised again on the isolationist "pressure cooker" thesis. The Foundation leadership is drawn predominantly from first-wave émigrés and their now-grown children.

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<sup>8</sup> Section 1706 of Title XVII of the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 states that "the President shall establish strict limits on remittances to Cuba by United States persons for the purpose of financing the travel of Cubans to the United States, in order to ensure that such remittances reflect only the reasonable costs associated with such travel, and are not used by the government of Cuba as a means of gaining access to United States currency."

Before the end of the 1990s the Clinton Administration defied the sense of Congress expressed in the Helms-Burton Act and terminated restrictions introduced earlier in the decade. The Administration did so because the regulations were unpopular with ever more Cuban-Americans, because they were unenforceable, and because they were inconsistent with the Pope's call, in his 1998 visit to Cuba, for the world to open up to Cuba. The Pope's visit became the frame for easing U.S. travel restrictions (and for introducing other foreign policy reforms). In a statement released by his press secretary on January 5th, 1999, Clinton said "Last March, in the wake of Pope John Paul's historic visit to Cuba, I authorized measures designed to ease the plight of the Cuban people and help them prepare for a democratic future. The restoration of direct passenger flights...expansion of people-to-people contacts...have had a positiv

The spirit if not the letter of the law proved unenforceable because émigrés could still travel to Cuba through third countries when they could not travel directly. Washington's travel prohibition contributed to covert noncompliance, not to a cutback in travel.

Meanwhile, there came to be a growing consensus outside the Cuban-American leadership core and their conservative Congressional allies that engagement with Cuba offered a better way to foster domestic island change than the pressure cooker isolationist strategy. The latter approach had proved ineffective. Consistent with the new view, in January of 1999 Washington added new U.S. and Cuban arrival/departure sites to the Miami/Havana nexus: Los Angeles and New York on the U.S. side, and provincial cities on the Cuba side. The measures were to facilitate family reunification for persons living outside the two city U.S.-Cuba hub. Clinton, nonetheless, continued to impose restrictions not imposed on most other immigrant groups. For example, his administration prohibited Cuban-Americans from traveling to Cuba more than once a year.

The Cuban-American community, as detailed below, proved divided in its views toward Washington's liberalized travel policy. However, it is divided in principle more than in practice.

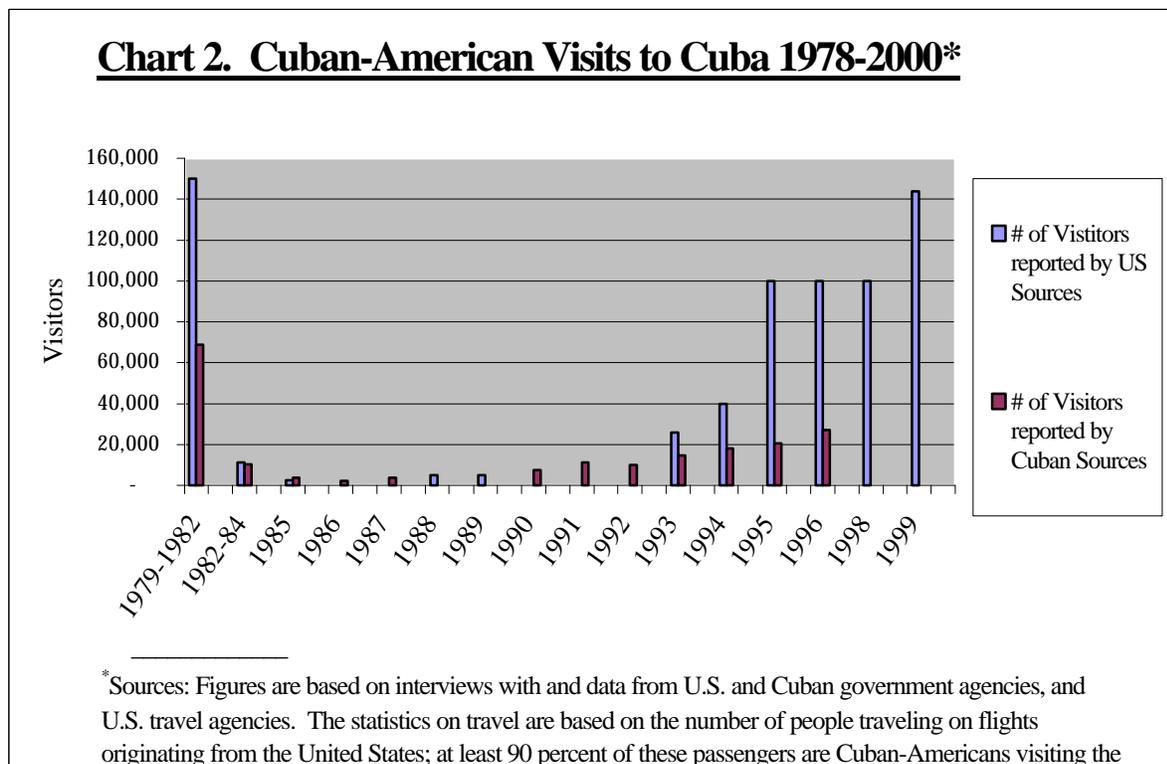
### *B. Cuban-American Travel*

Havana also became cautious and more restrictive because of stepped-up émigré-instigated violence following the 1979 Dialogue. When Cuban-Americans lost hope of a Washington sponsored invasion after the failed Bay of Pigs episode, a militant minority turned to terrorist practices. Cuban planes, for example, became one of their targets.

Notwithstanding Cuban government ambivalence and then Washington-imposed obstacles as well, travel surged by the end of the 1990s. It reached levels reminiscent of 1979, this time for consecutive years and without the same political impact. Cuban-American travel increased from approximately 7,000 at the start of the 1990s to over 140,000 at the decade's end, with a minimum of 100,000 émigrés annually visiting between 1996 and 1999 (see Chart 2). The heightened travel meant that by 1999, an average of one in about every 10 émigrés had traveled to Cuba.

While the first opening to visits, in 1979, led an estimated 150,000 Cuban-Americans to take advantage of the opportunity, the number of yearly visitors proved negligible for the next decade and a half. Visits tapered off in part because travel was no longer a novelty but also because Havana limited entry, in ways indicated above, to prevent "another Mariel." The unrest that led

Castro to open the Mariel port to islanders wishing to leave is attributed to the massive return of émigrés in 1979. It was Cuban-American/Cuban contact that stirred islander discontent, not Cuban isolation, the premise of the embargo.



As travel picked up, the profile of the typical returnee changed. The average age of travelers dropped, and émigrés began to visit more frequently with shorter intervals between trips. Although our Hudson and Dade County rank-and-file samples are small and non-random, reported interviewee experiences reveal a changing stance toward transnational people-to-people ties. Nearly 87 percent of all travelers in the rank-and-file sample had visited island family in the 1990s, and thirty-nine percent of those questioned traveled for the first time between 1994 and 1999, years during which Washington banned direct travel. Surprisingly, first-wave émigrés made more visits to Cuba than did later émigrés, first-wave leadership opposition notwithstanding. They went, on average, 3.1 times, compared to second-wave émigrés who averaged 1.4 trips. (It should, however, be remembered that Cuba restricted entry of the Marielitos until the end of the 1980s and of 1994 *balseiros* until 1999, and that first-wave émigrés, by virtue of living in the States longer, had more possible years in which to visit.).

First and second-wave émigré respondents, meanwhile, differed in their travel patterns. Second-wave émigrés were much more likely than first-wave émigrés to make their first trip in the 1990s. Second-wave émigrés accounted for 71 percent of 1990s first-time travelers, but for only 24 percent of the sample. Also, among repeat travelers, second-wave émigrés tended to go with shorter intervals between trips. The time between first and second trips averaged 7.1 years for those who emigrated prior to 1980, while among those who emigrated subsequently only 2.8 years, on average, elapsed before a second visit.

In essence, the data suggest that the Cuban-American leadership that publicly opposes travel speaks increasingly less for the yearnings of the émigré community. However, the leadership corps typically honored the moral boycott on travel they advocated. The survey also suggests that U.S. travel restrictions are out of sync with the emergent wants of many Cuban-Americans. While the study found that on average Cuban-Americans traveled annually no more than Washington officially allows, the frequency with which some second-wave interviewees go suggests that the once-a-year cap is unenforceable as long as other countries are unsupportive of Washington's restrictive policy.

### *C. Why Cuba Travel Increased*

Why did Cuban-American travel pick up in the 1990s, just when Washington made visitation rights more restrictive? Several factors, rooted above all in émigré cohort differences, explain the increase.

#### 1. Increased numbers of émigrés with family in Cuba

Stepped up immigration and the transnational spread of family among second-wave émigrés contribute to heightened interest in travel to Cuba. The greater the kinship networks spanning the Florida Straits, the more likely émigrés want to visit the island. Post-1980 émigrés are much more likely than their predecessors still to have family on the island. Indeed, recent arrivals tend to be young men without immediate family in the States.

#### 2. The shift from politically to economically driven migration

While first-wave émigrés left Cuba for political reasons and to *preserve* their socioeconomic status jeopardized by the radicalization of the revolution, many second-wave émigrés came to the United States for economic reasons, to *improve* their material well-being. Indeed, as the island economy bottomed out and the U.S. dollar became the common currency in the 1990s, islanders emigrated to help, not break, with island relatives. In a 1993 University of Havana study of 188 rafters whom the Cuban government intercepted at sea, 83 percent cited the need to help family as the primary motivation for seeking refuge in the States.

The more Cubans emigrate to the States for income-earning purposes, the less likely are politics to stand in the way of transnational family ties. For economic immigrants, visiting Castro's Cuba poses no moral dilemma, even if they would welcome the leader's downfall.

#### 3. The Pope's visit

Pope John Paul II's January 1998 visit to Cuba has proved the biggest boon to travel since Castro's 1979 opening. In the year after the pontiff stepped on island soil, travel increased some 25 percent. Television coverage of the Pope's journey around the island stirred memories, peaked émigré homeland interest, and evoked a yearning to visit the island among some of those who previously resisted travel. Moreover, the Pope legitimated travel. Catholic Cuban-Americans heeded the holy leader's call for the world to open up to Cuba. Meanwhile, a

religious revitalization in Cuba, predating the Pope's visit but strengthened by it, contributed to a mending of relations among Cuban Catholics in both countries, who were previously divided by religious conviction as well as politics.

Reflecting on the impact of the Pope's visit, one anti-Castro civil liberties activist who himself has, in his own words, "not gotten up the courage yet to visit Cuba," noted that "the Pope's visit broke the ice. His holiness conveyed the message that it was not only all right to help Cubans but that people had a moral obligation to do so." This interviewee felt that the best way to heal and assist Cubans was to help them help themselves, best done not with showy projects but through people-to-people contact.

Both U.S. and Cuban priests, moved by the Pope's trip and his homilies in Cuba, in turn are contributing to changing cultural attitudes toward transnational family ties. The number of clergy in Cuban-American congregations who use their influence quietly and cautiously to change parishioner views towards Cuban citizens has increased. Some priests have taken to visiting Cuba themselves, and to encouraging parishioners to help island brethren. Similarly, visits to the States by Cuban-based priests are helping to build transnational bridges, including between émigrés and their parishes of origin. The religious-based activity is reducing moral barriers to travel.

#### 4. Nostalgia and the (re) establishment of roots

Some first-wave émigrés entering old age are stirred by a yearning to see their homeland after years of separation. This age-related yearning helps explain why older people accounted for most travelers until the 1990s. However, children of first-wave émigrés, in small but growing numbers, also want to connect with their roots. While many continue to honor their parents' morally based travel boycott, others with only childhood memories and a conception of Cuba more imagined than real, are breaking with their parents and visiting the island. Family identity with Cuba is so deep-rooted that even children who emigrated at less than a year old refer to trips as "going back." For them, returning is a state of mind, and a powerful one. Such Cuban-Americans typically visit cousins and distant relatives whom they never previously knew personally. Reunification may be shocking, but bonds are fast to form in a culture where blood ties are strong.

#### 5. Diminution of fear and social pressure regarding travel

Until recently, community pressures among first-wave émigrés kept travel desires at a minimum. As a man who emigrated in the 1960s explained, "My social class doesn't go to Cuba. [Former Cuban-American National Foundation leader] Mas Canosa is a saint. We won't break ranks." The man remained loyal to Mas Canosa's wishes even after the revered, charismatic former leader died. In other instances, however, fear of community retribution, more than community moral commitment, discouraged travel.

Pressure notwithstanding, travel has a contagion effect. Visitors return with stories and videos of their trips that they show friends and family. They thereby spark interest in travel informally, and in so doing contribute, consciously or not, to a changed stance toward island visits. Cuban-

Americans once reluctant to visit Cuba see that nothing happened to those who went, either in Cuba or within the Cuban-American community that once ostracized those who defied the local leadership's travel boycott. "People don't criticize you anymore if you go," émigrés now tell you.

Polling data concur that Cuban-Americans have gradually become more supportive of family visits. In surveys of Miami Cuban-Americans conducted between 1991 and 1995 by Florida International University's Institute for Public Opinion Research (IPOR), roughly 40 percent supported negotiations with the Castro government to promote family visits to Cuba. In 1995, the only year in which the poll was conducted in Union City, 56 percent reported supporting travel negotiations. By 1997, however, IPOR found a dramatic shift in views. Seventy percent of the Miamians interviewed endorsed travel to the island. No difference existed among respondents across gender, education, and income lines. However, views toward travel were found to differ somewhat by race and citizenship. Seventy-seven percent of blacks and mulattos supported travel versus 69 percent of whites, and whereas 65 percent of émigrés who were U.S. citizens favored visits, 81 percent of those who were not citizens approved of homeland trips. With second-wave émigrés more likely to be dark-skinned and less likely to be U.S. citizens, race and citizenship-linked differences probably reflect émigré cohort linked differences in views. Differences aside, the polls, interestingly, suggest that Cuban-Americans became more supportive of island family visits just when U.S. policy became more restrictive.

#### 6. Ease of travel

Difficulties of travel did not keep Cuban-Americans from flying to Cuba through third countries when the Clinton Administration prohibited direct flights. Similarly, hours of waiting and security checks in the Miami airport do not keep determined travelers away. However, Washington's resumption of flights and the establishment of new U.S. and Cuban landing and departure sites, along with Havana's initiatives to make trips less onerous, make travel more likely.

#### 7. Improved communication

The more Cubans on the two sides of the Florida Straits communicate, the more their desire to see one another is stimulated. Both phone and mail communications improved in the 1990s. Reflecting the impact of long distance conversations, a staunch Union City anti-Castroite who emigrated in 1970 noted, when interviewed, that she decided to visit island family after talking to them by phone.

#### *D. Remaining Travel Barriers*

While increased travel suggests that a new permissive subculture is evolving within the Cuban-American community, constraining factors remain. Legal restrictions, travel costs, and lingering fear continue to inhibit the number of Cuban-Americans visiting Cuba and the frequency of their travel.

## 1. The law

Given that a maximum of one visit per year is allowed (except in emergency situations), law-abiding Cuban-Americans cannot travel freely. In view of how deeply Cubans value family and the proximity of the island, especially to Floridians, it is hard to imagine that the two sets of Cubans would not get together more frequently—for holidays, birthdays, sick-visits, and casual get-togethers—were bilateral relations normalized. Indeed, Cuban authorities report that one-third of travel by Cuban-Americans to the island takes place during the Christmas and Spring holidays. Moreover, the frequency with which Cuban-Americans shuttle between Florida and New Jersey to visit family also suggests that transnational family travel would increase substantially were there a relaxation of travel restrictions (and costs).

In emergency situations, U.S. law impedes immediate travel. Under situations of urgency family members may solicit a humanitarian visa from Washington. However, official responses take weeks, which may be too long in times of crisis. Under the circumstances émigrés are faced with being apart from loved ones or going to Cuba illegally. A 56-year-old retired former aviation industry employee who emigrated in 1961, for example, reports having applied for a humanitarian visa upon learning that his elderly mother in Cuba was gravely ill. Notified by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control three weeks after submitting his application that he still needed to complete a phone interview prior to approval for a travel license, he had reluctantly left in the interim without permission. Time was of the essence.

## 2. Cost of travel

Costs include not merely air tickets and hotel accommodations (unless hosted by island family), they also entail government fees. In the year 2000 the Cuban government charged \$230 for a passport,<sup>9</sup> \$150 for a multiple entry visa, and \$60 for a humanitarian visa.

Costs are also moral, informal, and personal, as well as bureaucratic. No Cuban-American goes empty-handed to family in Cuba. While gift-giving is not new, the scale of generosity increased dramatically in the 1990s—as Cubans could no longer subsist on their peso earnings, and as the economy “dollarized” first illegally, then legally. Reflecting on the impact of the informal costs associated with family travel, Eugenia (a pseudonym, as are all other names used), in Dade County Hialeah, recalled, “I go to help. If I can't help, I don't go.” In the words of Margarita, a first-wave Union City émigré who herself boycotts travel to the island, “By the second trip Cubans are asking for money. But many Cuban-Americans want the money for their own children and for better housing. This makes them have second thoughts about visiting Cuba.”

Reflecting on the weight of gift-giving, a priest noted that many Cuban-Americans “suffer a ‘Messiah complex.’ When they go to Cuba they feel like God, like saviors. They go with big packages and fat wallets. And in Cuba they take family to stores where you can only pay in hard currency. They buy fans and other things that Cubans can't buy for themselves.”

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<sup>9</sup> According to the Cuban Interest Section in Washington D.C., Cuban citizens who arrived in the United States after 1970 must use a valid Cuban passport to enter their homeland.

Whatever pleasure émigrés get from helping island family, gift-giving costs probably inhibit first- more than second-wave émigrés. Recent arrivals, though poorer, often emigrated with the intent of helping family back home, and their transnational family ties are stronger.

### 3. Lingering Anti-Travel Social Pressures

Lingering fear of community stigma and retribution dissuades some émigrés from traveling or from traveling as frequently as they might like. Several people interviewed reported unpleasant incidents. After returning from his second trip to Cuba in 1999, an émigré who left as a teenager and who now works for the U.S government, for example, received an anonymous letter with a copy of a newspaper editorial opposing Cuba travel. Similarly, a retired émigré who left in 1961 recalls television footage aired on local Miami stations in which Cuba-bound travelers were filmed at the city's international airport. According to him, camera crews were allowed to film travelers because the airport was considered a "public space." Another traveler, in turn, recalls the Miami airport atmosphere as tense and unpleasant, with numerous security checks. With travel still not publicly sanctioned by the community leadership, many émigrés remain secretive about their trips and ambivalent about going.

#### *E. The Impact of Visits*

The ripple effects of visits are multiple, and far greater than most travelers intend or even understand. Travel humanizes feelings towards family abroad and softens views toward both countries. Accordingly, the growing number of trips is serving to improve transnational people-to-people ties and attitudes, with potential ramifications for bilateral relations. Visits are also having the unintended effect of remaking the Cuban economy, polity, and society. In this section, we explore effects of travel on émigrés, on transnational group, organizational, and institutional ties, and on Cuba and Cubans.

#### 1. Impact on Travelers and Kin in Cuba

Reactions to visits, not surprisingly, vary first and foremost by generation and cohort. At one extreme, recent émigrés are unfazed by visits. Still, there are first-wave émigrés whose visits confirm their preconceived views of Castro's Cuba, and some grown foreign-born children of first-wave émigrés who are transformed by island encounters. Nearly all reacted well, however, at the people-to-people level.

First-wave Cuban-Americans who left the island as adults under difficult circumstances often find that visits reconfirm their dislike of the regime. They remain convinced that ties between the two countries should stay minimal as long as Castro is in power. Moreover, they do not identify with the Cuba they see. Reflecting on the impact of visits, a New Jersey priest commented that most émigrés "find that visits confirm their prior beliefs. They return saying, 'I was right,' more convinced than before that the government is a disaster."

In this vein, the reaction of Josefina, an elderly Union City woman who went to Cuba in 1998 to visit a sister whom she had not seen in 32 years, is telling. Josefina went into exile after her family had been imprisoned and tortured by Castro's army. Her husband, whose brothers all live

in the States, chose not to accompany her. He echoes the view shared by many first-wave émigrés. “I won’t visit, I will return,” he explains. Fearing that the opportunity “to return” would not come about before either she or her 81 year old island sister passed away, Josefina decided to make a one-time pilgrimage with another sister who lives in Miami. Two years after the visit, Josefina still cannot speak of the visit without becoming overwhelmed with emotion. She describes encountering a country “filled with misery and destruction. It was like Beirut. My sister’s house was collapsing. As I drove with my family to my hometown, I saw everyone walking alongside the highway. There wasn’t transportation and people had to walk many er, the purpose of the trip was to seek reconciliation and closure with family. While there she also made peace with a niece, a fervent supporter of the Revolution whom she had chaperoned as a young girl. Ideologically at odds, the two had severed ties for decades. When her trip drew to a close Josefina knew “that this was goodbye. I vowed never to return

Another Union City woman, who left in 1970 and went back for the first time 25 years later, had a similar reaction.

I went to see the family that I remembered and family I never previously met. But it looked like Beirut. Everything was in a state of decay, falling apart. I couldn’t help it. I just began crying. What made it tolerable for me was that the family warmth. It was a big event for them that I came....That Hitler monster. When he is gone it could be wonderful. But there are 40 years of decay. Even people’s spirits have been affected. For generations they have been unable to express themselves.

Similarly, a first-wave émigré social service worker reconfirmed her negative views of the regime on two visits. Said she, “I was astounded at the level of distrust and the animosity that Castro injected in people. I was called a foreigner in my own country! I saw a hardened and stressful people, so “imbibed” with stupid nationalism that they couldn’t see through it.”

Some first-wave émigrés who emigrated as infants or young children have had a different experience when daring to defy their parents’ personal travel boycotts. Those who grew up outside Union City and Miami, and the hostile anti-Castro cultures there, were most apt to break with the family travel ban. Having only vague memories, at most, of their native country and having left the island at their parents’ will, they are prompted both by curiosity to see the island and a desire to assess the accomplishments and failures of the Revolution for themselves. They also seek to re-establish ties with family, often distant family, whom they barely if ever previously knew. For some of them visits are a very positive and transforming experience, even if they return critical of the government.

Liliana, who lived only part of her life in Miami, recounts the dramatic impact of her first visit. She visited Cuba initially in a professional capacity. One year old when her family fled the island in 1959, she was the first in her family to go back.

I was blown away on my first visit. I grew up thinking that Cuba was like Eastern Europe—gray and fearful. But I found it *gorgeous*. People have a hard time but

they also have a sense of life. It was very different than the Miami image, an image my family had given me. I cried every night because it was the first time I felt at home. It was similar to when Jews go back to Israel and experience their roots. There were Cubans talking with their hands! And I knew their accent! I began to change. While I didn't agree with Castro, I felt as if I would have stayed in Cuba had I been old enough to make the decision in 1959. I experienced a sense of homecoming. My sister who left at 6 and went back with me at age 45 felt the same. Both of us were young when we left and lived most of our lives outside Miami.

Their experience contrasts, however, with their parents' and older sister's:

For my mother it was different. I took her with me on my second trip. She expected that she would cry, but she found it was not her home anymore. The country was different than the Cuba she remembered, so that the trip was not an emotional homecoming for her. She shed only a few tears, when she saw old friends. My father, in contrast, refuses to go back or even look at my photos. He observes a personal boycott of Cuba. He has a vision of Cuba and doesn't want it to change. His family lost more wealth than my mother's did. Perhaps that explains his view. And my older sister, who was 16 when we left in 1959 and who has lived in Miami all her life, won't step foot in Cuba.

The older sister, like the mother, remembers the good life they enjoyed before the revolution, and the two live in the Miami social world that scorns island travel.

Alejandra, who grew up in the Midwest but subsequently resettled in Miami, had an experience similar to Liliana's. She was sent as a child, after the Bay of Pigs invasion, to live with family in Mexico. Her parents, who ultimately joined her, had feared that the Communist government might take her away. "For years I resisted going to Cuba," she explained. "But in my dreams I would walk the streets." Having lived imagining Cuba, she decided a safe time to go was during the Pope's visit. "It was almost surreal. Things were much smaller than I had remembered and trees had grown. But once setting foot in Cuba I made several trips back. I feel so free there. I now go about three times a year. I decided to make documentaries there." While taking pleasure in her trips, her initial decision to visit was difficult, in part because of family disapproval.

I went after my father died. I don't think I could have gone if he were still alive. Still, my sisters and mother are unhappy with me, as are my Miami relatives. In Cuba I have distant relatives—second and third cousins. I see them whenever I go, more frequently than I see many of my relatives here. My Cuba family never asks but I bring them presents and give them money. They give me things too. If I say I like some food they prepare it for me the next time I go. The Cubans I see are so resilient. Life is frustrating but the people try to put on their best. Their education and cultural awareness are impressive, even in the towns.

Yet another woman who emigrated as a child, Elisa, was similarly transformed by a visit. She too got up her courage to take a trip when the Pope traveled to Cuba. From an ardently anti-

Castro Catholic family, she was so moved by her experience that upon return to the States she became an activist for improved bilateral and improved transnational religious ties.

While family bonds and parental political passions continue to disincline the now grown first-wave children from breaking their parents' disapproval of Cuba travel, Liliana's and Alejandra's experiences show how transforming visits by grown children of first-wave émigrés may be. Gradually the younger generation wants to "connect" with their roots, linking their childhood memories to their identity as adults.

Though poorer than first-wave émigrés and their children, Marielitos and especially 1990s émigrés are more apt to go whenever they can. Still adapting to the United States, they have fewer U.S. and more Cuba ties. For them trips are less traumatic. Since they grew up in the Cuba they visit, they are fairly unfazed by the travel. Their reactions are personal, not political.

Orlandina typifies the "new émigré." A housekeeper in a New Jersey suburb, she has returned to Cuba every two years since obtaining U.S. residency in 1993 (for which she became eligible a year and a day after arrival). Leaving her children behind, Orlandina emigrated to help them. "My family in Cuba is very poor," she explained. "Growing up, we worked in the tobacco harvests. The Revolution didn't take anything away from us. I never expected to come to the United States, but I'm here working to help my family. I don't care about who is in power. I just want to help my family." Aside from visiting biannually, Orlandina phones home to Cuba weekly and sends packages when she can. "The economic situation in Cuba has worsened since I left. Because of the blockade and other problems, my family is experiencing tremendous difficulties," she explains. The \$300 Orlandina sends monthly (in violation of the official U.S. *quarterly* \$300 cap since 1999, and of the earlier prohibition of remittance-sending) goes to food and medicines for her elderly mother, her two sisters, a disabled brother, and a daughter who is an unemployed single mother. For Orlandina, travel to see family is essential. "I would return to Cuba more often. The only thing holding me back is the cost of trips."

Natalio, a more well-off Miami small businessman who left Cuba in 1981, also travels routinely to Cuba. A former high school teacher in Havana, Natalio emigrated in his 30s, leaving close kin behind, including his daughter, ex-wife, and father. Through friendship with a Cuban government official, Natalio obtained special permission to visit Cuba before his cohort of émigrés could return officially. He has gone back 11 times, traveling mainly through third countries. Contrasting first and second-wave émigrés, Natalio noted that

Those of us who left after Mariel understand the intentions of the Revolution— to improve the living conditions for the working class in Cuba— and recognize the achievements in health and education. We are more tolerant and respectful of Cubans who choose to remain on the island. Unlike older exiles, we know and understand the conditions under which our families struggle to survive, because we lived them ourselves. We do not feel it appropriate to demand that our families and friends in Cuba make sacrifices (that is, live without dollars) or take actions (against the government) that we were unwilling to make.

He disagrees with those Cuban-Americans who say émigrés should not send remittances because the money helps the government. Echoing Orlandina's sentiments, Natalio explained "my visits give my friends and family hope, and make life easier for them. Ninety percent of the passengers on the flights to Cuba are people just like me who only want to help their families. I don't feel that I am doing anything wrong. This isn't a matter of politics. It is a matter of

Similarly reflecting the different émigré wave views towards visits, a Cuban-American businessman reports that his gardener, who came around 1990, "simply makes money and goes." The landscaper travels approximately every two months, and goes for holidays. Washington's once-a-year cap does not stand in his way. "For him, the trips are a routine part of his life." Likewise, a school director describes how her nail manicurist who emigrated since Mariel goes frequently to see her grandmother in Cuba. "The ties are incredible."

These examples suggest an inverse correlation between socio-economic status and travel, the opposite of the leisure traveler experience in the States. The working class proclivity to visit Cuba is also generationally explained. While second-wave émigrés undoubtedly would visit more were travel cheaper (as it is likely to be for Floridians, in particular, after the lifting of the embargo), the costs as such are not an impediment to kin visits. Transnational family commitments make travel a routine part of recent émigré lives.

Visits by family who emigrated tend to be well received, although sometimes not without ambivalence. In some instances visits heal emotional wounds for Cubans who had resented abandonment by loved ones. The get-togethers have become instrumental as well—visiting family come with gifts, including with dollars that have become essential even for survival.

Lizbeth's experience reflects the impact of family reunification through visits. She was 20 years old when her mother left during Mariel. For the next 14 years, Lizbeth had little contact with her mother in Miami, and mainly only through letters addressed to her aunt and telephone calls at a neighbor's house. A member of the Union of Young Communists (UJC) and a student at Havana University, Lizbeth was very hesitant to have contact with her "mother. She feared it might cause others, notably her local CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution, the official nationally organized block organization) and potential employers in the state-controlled economy, to question her loyalty to the Revolution. At a personal level, Lizbeth resented her mother's departure, which she experienced as abandonment. Then the economic crisis of the 1990s gave Lizbeth's mother the opportunity to reestablish a role as the family's matriarch. Aside from "taking care of her children back home" with financial support, the mother came to have more open, frequent contact with Lizbeth and her siblings who also remained on the island. Lizbeth, who had become a divorced, unemployed single mother just as the economy bottomed out, in turn, began to reach out to her mother, from whom she had become estranged. For Lizbeth, her mother's more frequent visits in recent years allowed for a rebuilding of their relationship. As she explains, "today, my mother is intrinsically involved in every aspect of my life and I would like to think that I am likewise an integral part of her life in Miami. We talk constantly on the phone and write frequently. Whereas before the distance between us seemed enormous, we now have a deeper level of trust and understanding of each other's reality."

## 2. From Transnational Family to Transnational Organizational Ties

Family visits are beginning also to serve as building blocks for a remaking of Cuban civic life. They are contributing to changes within Cuba and across national borders.

The building blocks are partially cultural. Liliana, whose first return to Cuba stirred a new commitment to the country she left at age one in 1959, decided to build on her professional as well as ethnic background to co-found a non-governmental organization to support the arts in Cuba. The group collects donations—dance shoes and outfits, music sheets, paint supplies, and the like. It also raises funds for non-political cultural projects in Cuba. Meanwhile, the school director, Alejandra, who decided to make documentaries portraying life in Cuba, seeks to make island culture accessible to Americans who do not have the opportunity to go there.

The building blocks are also social, including at the community level. Natalio, the Miami small businessman who emigrated in 1981, for example, started an annual informal softball tournament in his old Havana neighborhood in which local players compete against a visiting émigré team. Now in its fourth year, the program has added youth teams to the original neighborhood tournament schedule. Since the Miami émigré teams get together during the course of the year to practice and to raise funds for equipment and uniforms they bring their Havana counterparts, the sports exchange strengthens community on both sides of the Florida Straits.

Émigrés also build connections through religious activity. This is true of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Several Catholic Cuban-Americans report visits to their former island parishes. Some participated in religious celebrations, meetings, and church reconstruction. Miami priests have also begun to engage their more open-minded parishioners in informal “adopt a parish” projects. They encourage visits, and raise funds for Cuban churches in disrepair. Illustrative of the new transnational religious ties, a Hialeah resident who left Cuba in the early ‘80s first returned to the island as a representative of a Catholic group during the Pope’s visit to Cuba. Since then, she has continued to communicate with Cuban Catholic counterparts and contemplates returning to Cuba for missionary work. Similarly, Elisa, as previously noted from a well-to-do first-wave family, was initially inspired to visit by the Pope but has since become active in Catholic charities that have taken her to Cuba several times.

In New Jersey, Catholics also are engaged in activity to revitalize religious life in Cuba. For example, the elderly Union City woman, Josefina, who had emigrated in the mid-1960s and visited for the first time in 1998 to see her 81 year-old island sister, participates in an émigré-led initiative to raise funds to rebuild a church in her hometown. Although members of her family suffered torture and imprisonment, her religious commitment has led her to put political hostilities aside and help rebuild the spiritual life in the Cuba she once enjoyed.

There are far fewer Protestants and Jews among Cubans either in the States or in Cuba, although Protestant evangelical groups are increasingly attracting converts on both sides of the Florida Straits. Reflecting the energies of new converts, Baptist Cuban-Americans in Union City actively raise funds to help support Cuban counterparts. Meanwhile, Roberto, a retired Miami-based computer programmer who travels frequently to Cuba, participates in a Jewish

organization that collects clothing, medicines, and eyeglasses for the small remaining Jewish community there.

Efforts to build civil society also include political organizations. Aside from émigrés who support and cultivate ties with island dissidents and political prisoners, there are Cuban-Americans promoting political engagement through more formal and “above ground” channels. An economically successful Miami businessman, moved by an early 1990s visit, seeks to promote interchange between political institutions on the two sides of the Florida Straits. On trips he has spoken with middle level officials “who understand the need for change,” and in the States he works with a Cuban-American partisan political group. Elisa, the Catholic charities activist, also has become involved in promoting a loosening of the embargo, despite her anti-Castro background.

Efforts to rebuild civil society that follow from family visits remain in a nascent stage. But they are mending wounds and strengthening ties between Cubans separated by the Florida Straits, and they are fostering social and cultural life independent of the state.

### 3. Visits and Macro Economic, Societal, and Political Restructuring

While the cumulative long-term impact of the surging transnational people-to-people ties remains to be seen, the new bonds are serving to remake Cuba in ways that visiting family, motivated by kinship loyalty, had not intended and in ways the Cuban government can no longer control. Transnational kinship bonds are increasing émigré presence within Cuban society, challenging the state’s ideological hegemony, reducing Cubans’ dependence on the state, undermining the statist economy, and inducing state institutional reforms.

The growing number and frequency of émigré visits is increasing immigrant presence in Cuban society. In stark contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, when they were ostracized as counterrevolutionaries, émigrés increasingly are being integrated into daily life. Émigré visitors, unlike leisure tourists, have extensive and intensive contact with ordinary Cubans. They stay in relatives’ homes and partake in everyday neighborhood routines and conversations. The everyday interaction not only breaks down barriers between the two groups of Cubans but also is serving to remake routine cultural and social life, now partially transnationally based.

The new transnational culture, family encounters, and reunification, are so much part of contemporary Cuba that they have become a major theme of films, literature, and music on both sides of the Florida Straits, with Cuban government approval. Two of the ten songs on the 1999 Grammy award-winning album by Cuba’s Los Van Van, for example, speak to migration themes. Similarly, several films produced in the last decade, including *Lejania* and *Mujer Transaprente*, deal with transnational family and friendship reencounters. Meanwhile, émigrés are being incorporated into Cuba’s artistic and cultural life. The prestigious government Casa de las Americas Literature Award in 1997, for example, went to Sonia Rivera-Valdés, a Cuban who emigrated in 1966, for her short story compilation *Las historias prohibidas de Marta Veneranda*.

Aware of these changes, Cuban officials have redefined émigrés and the immigrant experience, modified policies, reformed the state apparatus to accommodate émigrés, and sponsored

programs to improve relations with the Cuban diaspora. Cuban functionaries as well as intellectuals today define national identity in terms of “shared culture” in terms of state allegiance. Since 1994 the government has institutionalized émigré relations through the formation of a special office within the Ministry of Foreign Relations. This same Ministry has sponsored two conferences on the Nation and Migration. The 400-large second meeting addressed ways to normalize relations between émigrés, their island families, and the Cuban government. It resulted in the previously mentioned multiple entry permit for visiting émigrés. The Cuban government has even extended investment and bank account privileges to émigrés. Émigrés, according to the 1993 Foreign Investment Law, enjoy private property and investment rights denied remaining islanders (although the U.S. embargo prohibits Cuban-Americans from taking advantage of the government opening). They also may now open dollar bank accounts in Cuba. Meanwhile, during the second Nation and Migration Conference in Cuba, Cuban-Americans gave testimony to the National Assembly on the effect of a new citizenship law.

The increased flow of people, goods, information, and ideas, in turn, is challenging the government’s ideological hegemony. In an authoritarian society, simple interactions between people can challenge a state’s monopoly over knowledge and viewpoints. As a Cuban doctor related,

My aunt’s visit to Cuba really challenged my basic assumptions about capitalism and life in the U.S. Through conversations with her I was exposed to an alternate viewpoint. For example, I remember that we spoke extensively about the widespread availability of food in the U.S., compared to the scarcity we are experiencing in Havana. This led me to question my life in Cuba more critically.

Returning émigrés provide evidence of how life might improve with an economic opening, Cuban government condemnation of Miami émigré life notwithstanding. Islanders are faced with the fact that their U.S. kin earn more money than they at socially inferior jobs, and that even those of them who are professionals are dependent on family abroad. The differential in transnational earning capacity comes quickly, very soon after Cubans emigrate. A retired couple in their mid-60s, whose son, daughter-in-law, and grandchild left in 1998 after winning the U.S. visa lottery, for example, were struck by the fact that their son began sending remittances almost immediately upon settling in Miami. And despite tremendous difficulties in adapting, an island-trained non-English speaking engineer who worked in a Florida factory impressed his island family with the range of Christmas gifts he brought on a visit to Cuba.

The case of Pepe, a well-connected, educated professional in Cuba, in turn, illustrates how visiting family are causing Cubans to question the system under which they live. Pepe together with his wife, also a professional, earn a combined monthly peso income equivalent to \$30 from their professional public sector jobs. Members of his maternal and paternal families, who emigrated to New Jersey and Miami in the late 1960s, visited in the late 1990s and left him \$200 dollars. This one-time inflow came to more than 50 percent of his yearly household earnings, and was essential for buying such basic foods as cooking oil and milk for his children. Yet, he expressed mixed feelings about the assistance from family in the States. “It’s ironic. I’m better educated and I have a better career than my visiting relatives, yet I have to recognize that I

couldn't survive without them. They are perceived by Cuban society and by my family as being members of a superior class and we treat them accordingly." Misgivings aside, Pepe would never refuse help from U.S. relatives. His peso salary is insufficient to meet the most fundamental family needs.

Meanwhile, remittances, transmitted by émigrés on visits (as well as through official transfer agencies), have possibly become the Cuban government's main net source of hard currency. Opposed by the Cuban-American leadership corps precisely because the money props up a bankrupt economy that might otherwise collapse, the generous informal transnational family dollar-giving is economically and socially destabilizing. It is causing new inequalities and resentments among islanders without remittance-giving relatives abroad. It is also distorting and undermining the official economy. Indeed, the influx of money sent to starving island relatives in the years following the collapse of Soviet aid and trade (and the superpower itself) created such a dollar black market that the government, in its effort to rein it in, decriminalized possession of the U.S. currency in 1993. The very legalization of the dollar, in turn, made law-abiding Cuban-Americans more likely to send money to their Cuban kin—for survival, but also for non-durable purchases at new dollar-only stores and occasionally also for investment purposes. Officially reported remittances from the States soared, from \$200 million in 1993 to \$800 million four years later. Remittance estimates climbed to \$1 billion by the turn of the century.

With peso earnings becoming worthless in the dollarized economy, islander motivation to work has plunged. As a consequence, the government has come to have difficulty delivering the very services, education and health care, on which its legitimacy has hinged.

The macroeconomic effects of remittances thus differ markedly from the familial motivations for monetary gifts. Paradoxically, the macroeconomic effects are consonant with the destabilizing goals of the Cuban-American leadership corps that oppose transnational financial transfers.

## **V. Conclusions and Policy Implications**

The findings of the study suggest the following conclusions and policy recommendations:

1. Cuban-Americans are very family-oriented. Those who go to Cuba see family there. However, depending on time of emigration, Cuban-Americans differ in the amount of close family they still have on the island. The sooner after Castro took power that islanders left, the less close family they currently have in Cuba.
2. Attitudes toward travel to Cuba also vary by emigration cohort. Earlier émigrés, who left principally for political reasons, are most apt to oppose transnational visits. Yet, it is mainly the leadership corps that resists travel—in word as well as deed. For them, family ties rarely stand in the way of their politics. Most of their close kin now live in the States. In contrast, post-1980 émigrés, who constitute approximately half of all Cuban-Americans, emigrated primarily for economic reasons. They want to help, not break with, island kin. From their moral vantage point, politics should not stand in the way of family.

3. The leadership of the Cuban-American community comes almost exclusively from first-wave émigrés and their now grown children. Politically powerful, economically successful, and organizationally skilled, they dominate the public arena and public discourse about U.S. Cuba policy. The views of those who emigrated in the second wave go largely unvoiced. Recent émigrés lack the human and material resources and the political clout of the first-wave leadership corps.
4. U.S. travel policy is Cold War in origin and consistent with the perceived and articulated interests of the Cuban-American leadership. However morally grounded the travel restrictions may be from the government's and the leadership's perspective, the regulations prove unenforceable. Cuban-Americans violate the travel embargo, and the spirit of the embargo, when it stands in the way of family values. They travel via third countries, which do not support Washington's visitation restrictions. Washington, meanwhile, subjects almost no other immigrant group to family visitation restrictions.
5. Visits to Cuba, which have increased dramatically in recent years, even when prohibited by Washington, are contributing to island social, cultural, and economic changes that travelers have not necessarily intended. Paradoxically, these changes are consistent with the transforming goals of both Washington and the Cuban-American leadership corps that oppose visits.
6. Because ever more Cuban-Americans want to visit island family, because current travel policy is unenforceable, and because visits are serving to bring about changes consistent with U.S. foreign policy interests, Washington would do best to eliminate barriers to travel. Elimination of such barriers, moreover, is consistent with humanitarian people-to-people family values.