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HISTORY OF THE CUBAN DIASPORA AND RESPONSES TO JULY 2021 PROTEST IN
CUBA: AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF AN EMERGING SOCIAL MOVEMENT

by

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B.S. University of Central Florida, 2020

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

In July of 2021, thousands of people took to the streets in different cities of the United States in demand of military intervention by the U.S. government and freedom for the people of Cuba. This study aims to explore the motivation behind the Florida-based Cuban American population to engage in acts of civic protest. The study explains the unique characteristics of the Cuban American Immigrant group in the United States influencing social movement participation. The study provides an analysis of the background of the S.O.S. Cuba movement. To accomplish this, in-depth focus groups were conducted to explore the opinions, reactions, and perspectives among the Cuban American population regarding S.O.S. Cuba. In these focus groups, participants shared their experiences, their Cuban identity, and how that identity has played a major role in informing their actions in the U.S. A qualitative content analysis revealed interviews four major: dictatorship trauma, detachment, gratitude to the U.S. government, and a history of sacrifice, struggles, and sadness. These prominent themes, along with their sub-themes, are used to understand why Cuban Americans, as a group, have been found to refrain from participating in major social movements and the influence of the S.O.S Cuba movement on the changing attitudes of political participation.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Cuban Americans, predominantly concentrated in the South Florida area, are widely recognized as a distinct minority immigrant group. They first began to arrive in the United States in large numbers in the early 1960s, after the perceived triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 (Portes 1987). The history of how this revolution came to be is quite unique. Before 1959, the capitalist system in Cuba had been in place since the beginning of the 20th century (Staten 2003). Under this system, Cuba began to see a growing accumulation of wealth in the higher classes, and trends of corruption in the Cuban governmental body which worked to benefit the wealthy (Smith and Llorens 1998). From this major political predicament, Fidel Castro, and a small group of leaders, gained the support of the Cuban population in a movement to seek change in the government system (Guerra and Maldonado Guallardo 2009).

Castro, as a young lawyer, attempted to demonstrate governmental corruption in Cuba, but his attempt was rejected by the legal system in place at the time (Guerra and Maldonado Gallardo 2009). After this failure, he was exiled to Mexico, where he rallied forces and began to plan an underground movement to overthrow the Cuban government (Fulkner 2019). Castro's most widely known collaborators were his brother, Raul Castro, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos (Perrottet 2019). Together in Mexico, they recruited soldiers and began to plan their attack on the Island (Fulkner 2019). On December 2nd of 1956, they discreetly traveled back from Mexico with a total tribulation of 82 individuals. In the years to come, they continued their efforts by recruiting and leading a small militia composed of working-class men (Fulkner 2019). A series of battles took place for the next three years and in 1959, ending in Castro's rise to power and overthrowing the previous dictatorship (Chomsky 2010).

While the very early stages after the revolution may have been perceived as promising for the working class, those with higher economic statuses began to emigrate to the United States. The upper class lost the ability to financially prosper and maintain their socioeconomic status before the revolution (Travieso-Diaz 1998). This led to the first wave of Cuban immigration into the United States in the early 1960s. This group of wealthier individuals began to settle in South Florida, specifically in the City of Hialeah (Portes 1987). This initial wave of immigration is what most consider the predominant reason why the Cuban American group has such a significantly different political and economic status than most other major Latinx immigrant groups, such as Mexicans and/or Puerto Ricans (Portes and Bach 1985). The wealthier families who immigrated in the 1960s set a form of foundation for the enclave that still stands in current times (Pew 2006; Portes 1987).

An enclave is defined as a geographical area in which the population is distinct from that of the surrounding areas (Cambridge Dictionary and Thesaurus 2021). These initial immigrants, highly educated and affluent, aided in the building of a strong economic foundation for the enclave. Their monetary resources helped them to establish sources of revenue, housing, networks, etc. (PEW 2006; Portes 1987). In turn, the current Cuban American population have a higher median household income and higher levels of education, and higher rates of home ownership than the rest of the Latinx population in the United States (PEW 2006).

The Cuban enclave, which is still located in South Florida, is a self-sufficient and relatively independent system which held upwards of 64% of Cuban Immigrants in the United States in the 2011-2015 period (Cuban Studies Institute: Census Data 2016). Throughout the years, the enclave has grown immensely, granting Cuban immigrants with specific paths of adjustment that most other groups do not have (PEW 2006). This area grants Cuban immigrants

jobs in an array of businesses that do not require English knowledge to hire (Gonzalez Diaz 2018). This is an extreme advantage to non-English-speaking immigrant, because it signifies that they can obtain regular blue-collar jobs. Similarly, Cubans have been found to hold greater rates of usage for Medicaid, Food Stamps, and other community-based services than their Puerto Rican and Mexican counterparts, which arguably, could facilitate a smoother immigrational transition (Aleman 1993). The social network in place also allows for social support during the difficult times of starting over in a new country (Puyat 2013). Having a legal path to residency and citizenship opens many more doors for a Cuban immigrant than those in other groups, as it allows for individuals to enroll in colleges, seek higher-paying employment, vote (in the case of citizenship), seek governmental aid, etc. (PEW 2006). Overall, the decades-long history of acceptance and aid granted to Cubans has placed them in a privileged position socially, politically, and economically (Portes 1987).

Historically, the benefits of access to legal status in the US set Cuban immigrants apart from other Latinx groups. Policy and legal status are arguably the most important aspect for immigrants in the US. In the early 1960s, Cubans were encouraged to immigrate to the United States and would be granted asylum even if found off the coast of the U.S. (Wasem 2009). From that point on, Cubans began to be granted political asylum which is defined by The Oxford Languages Dictionary (2021) as “the protection granted by a nation to someone who has left their native country as a political refugee” (Oxford Languages Dictionary 2021). Asylum came along with a guaranteed path to legal residency and citizenship among other benefits such as financial assistance to aid them in settling in (Correa-Cabrera and Spagat 2020). This policy remained for years to come and was only modified in the latter half go the 1990s when the living situation in Cuba worsened drastically (Correa-Cabrera and Spagat 2020). As the Cuban

population on the Island became incredibly frustrated, many began to build rafts and boats out of any materials they could get their hands on (Fernandez 2000). This often led to unsafe travels through the Gulf of Mexico, aiming to reach the Florida Keys, which often resulted in severe injuries and deaths (Fernandez 2000).

To discourage this dangerous behavior, the United States government enacted the Dry Foot, Wet Foot policy (Bardach 2016). This law stated that those found in International or U.S. waters by authorities would be sent back to Cuba while those who were found on dry U.S. territory would be granted asylum in the same manner as before (Bardach 2016). The Dry Foot, Wet Foot policy stood untouched for close to two decades and only came to be removed in 2016 at the end of the Barack Obama administration (Florida 2017). Cuban immigrants are still granted a path to legal residency and citizenship today for those who enter by a Visa and/or through the Mexican or Canadian Borders and seek political asylum for which a judge will deem them fit or unfit (Correa-Cabrera and Spagat 2020). Furthermore, residency is still granted to those who arrive through the coast undetected and live in the United States for a year and one day (Correa-Cabrera and Spagat 2020). While policy continues to change constantly and the Cuban government continues to take extremely harsh measures against those who attempt to leave the island, many still risk their lives for the possibility of reaching the United States (Rosati 2021).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Cubans in the United States

Throughout the last decades, the situation in Cuba has been recognized worldwide as a major crisis (Alvarez et al. 2006). Because of this, Cubans are often still allowed to cross the Mexican border after completing the adequate paperwork and going through an interview process which would take anywhere from a couple of hours to a day or two (Correa-Cabrera and Spagat 2020). During the Trump administration, this process was deemed inappropriate and the ex-POTUS mandated that each Cuban's case for political asylum was individually assessed by a judge (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2020). At this point, the process began to take roughly months in its totality (Pachino and Meyer 2020; Human Rights First 2020). During the time awaiting a hearing, Cubans were being held in detention camps hosted by the Mexican Government (Pachino and Meyer 2020). This situation is still present today but has been adjusted since the start of the Biden Administration. Current POTUS Joe Biden mandated that those being detained are transferred to U.S. territory, as Mexican camps were quite dangerous for the detainees (Narea 2021). An opportunity unique to Cubans in the US, in comparison to immigrants from other Latin American countries. The process of seeking asylum is now shorter (2-10 days) as Cubans are being allowed to await their hearing while already living inside the United States, they are simply provided with a date on which to present themselves at court (BBC Mundo).

Aside from their path to citizenship, a major aspect that historically sets Cuban Americans apart from most other Latinx immigrant groups is their affiliation with the Republican Party. In 2020, 58% of Cubans self-identified as Republican or Republican-leaning

which comes as a shocking contrast to 65% of Non-Cuban Hispanics reporting Democratic leanings (PEW 2020). Scholars have often allocated this unique stand to the higher economic status of the group when compared to other Hispanic/Latinx groups (Moreno and Warren 1996). Yet, in recent times, sources of popular media have begun to explore trends of trauma in the Cuban American population which tends to trigger when political ideals are perceived to resemble aspects of communism (Martinez 2020). Political campaigns, propaganda, slander, and media outlets are all crafted carefully to frame the Democratic Party as having Communist or Socialist leanings which is, in turn, used to instill fear in the Cuban American population who have suffered immensely under the communist dictatorship in the island (Martinez 2020). In 2016, 54% of Cuban Americans from the state of Florida reported voting for Republican candidate Donald Trump (PEW 2020). Add a connecting sentence or two connecting the next section... “This and other factors make their participation in social activism...etc.”

Cuban Americans and Social Activism

In July of 2021, Cuban Americans took to the streets around the world in defense of the freedom of those in the Cuban mainland, this movement became widely known as “#S.O. S.” (Lopez Segrera 2021). Cuban Americans’ participation in the S.O.S. Cuba protests predominantly occurred in south Florida. Most importantly, as mentioned previously, this paradigm does not align with their past trends of social activism movement involvement (Martinez 2005). Historically, Cubans are less likely to participate in social movements for Immigrant Rights (Mora et al. 2018). Add a couple more sentences to highlight other Latinx social movements like access to healthcare, food stamps, etc. Especially, the immigration rights movement majorly consists of immigrant communities (along with others who support the cause), who mobilize

seeking a standardized path to citizenship and incorporation into American politics, among other things (Johnson and Ong Hing 2007). These specific goals could arguably be perceived as the exact reasons why Cuban Americans do not tend to participate in this movement since they have a standardized path to citizenship and long-established political involvement as a community (Martinez 2005; Correa-Cabrera 2020). To illustrate, Mora et al. (2008) found that Mexican, Dominican, and Central American immigrant groups held higher rates of participation in the Immigrant Rights Movements throughout the major wave of protests in 2006 than any other immigrant group. In general, Cuban Americans are less likely to participate in social movements than their Mexican and Puerto Rican Counterparts (Martinez 2005).

While it has been found that Mexican and Puerto Rican groups hold higher rates of involvement in acts of unconventional politics such as protesting and activism, it cannot simply be attributed to Cuban's privileged paths to citizenship, as Puerto Ricans hold citizenship as well (Valle 2018). Due to Cubans' unique history of immigration, which mainly consisted of wealthier Cubans, they now hold higher educational and monetary statuses than other Hispanic/Latinx groups (Pew 2006). For example, research indicates that Cubans diverge from the norm in comparison to other major Hispanic/Latinx groups: "Cubans are better situated to take advantage of individual and community resources so that they need not resort to unconventional political tactics to bring about change. In other words, Cubans may not be as politically disenfranchised as Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, making protest unnecessary" (Martinez 2005).

S.O.S Cuba

Cuban Americans' participation in the July S.O.S Cuba protests does not align with these past trends of social movement involvement, but it has an intricate background to explore. Most media outlets that have attempted to piece together the key moments of what is now popularly referred to as the “Nueva Revolución” (New Revolution) or “Verdadera Revolución” (True Revolution), have marked November 9th of 2020 as the start of it all (Aleman 2020). On this day, Cuban singer Denis Solis was arrested by the Cuban police for uploading a picture to his social media accounts. In the picture he was standing and held a sign in front of him, the sign read “Pueblo de Cuba, decide tu Futuro” which translates to “People of Cuba, choose your fate” (Radio Television Cubans 2021a). This sign spoke directly to the Cuban population and urged them to stand their ground and work towards a better future for Cuba as a whole. Solis was later judged in a court of law and sentenced to 8 months of imprisonment (Matienzo Puerto 2020).

Other Cuban artists, along with activists, independent journalists, and scholars, composed the pre-existing “San Isidro” movement. This movement, founded in 2018, had slowly gained popularity using social media and it advocated for freedom for the people of Cuba (Movimiento San Isidro 2020). The group demanded freedom for Denis Solis, and various members began a peaceful hunger and water strike after no action was taken (Aleman 2020). On November 26th, after the strike has been taking place for roughly 7 days, The Cuban Government sent out members of the armed forces, disguised as medical personnel, to dismantle the hunger and water strike (Lozano 2020). A video was uploaded to social media, showcasing upwards of half a dozen men in white coats and teal scrubs barging into the setting of the strike and violently carrying the participants out (Radio Television Marti 2020a). The government did not anticipate the video's proof of their actions uploaded to the internet for the world to see. In response, the

governmental authorities publicly stated that the Hunger Strike broke COVID-19 lockdown protocols and the reported reason for the necessity to forcefully interfere (Lima 2020). On November 27th, 2020, now widely known as “27N,” a large group of Cubans gathered in front of the Ministry of Culture and protested the actions that were taken the night before and demanded the Minister’s resignation (Henken 2021). They explained that it should be the Minister of Culture’s responsibility to ensure the safety of artists, and the actions that were taken against those who were protesting were unacceptable (Radio Television Marti 2020b). These protests could be considered one of the major moments in the history of the new Cuban revolution, as public manifestations against any government agency are still illegal and often punished by imprisonment (Aldous 2015). The protests lasted more than 24 hours, and it was until the next day that the vice-minister of culture allowed a limited group of the activists to hold a private meeting to discuss the protestant’s concerns (Arciniegas 2020). While the demands made during this meeting have not been made public, no action was taken thereafter (Arciniegas 2020). Yet, in the weeks to come, oppressive measures increased on the population and special attention was paid to widely known activists and members of the opposition (Radio Television Marti 2021b). Many activists uploaded photographs of armed forces being stationed outside their homes for constant vigilance and monitoring (Bruguera 2021).

On the other hand, the Cuban media attempted to manipulate the narrative by speaking ill of protestors and encouraging their imprisonment (Radio Television Marti 2020a). It is important to note that while the internet is now accessible in Cuba, it is not afforded to everyone (Borges 2020). For context, while many individuals in both developed and developing countries have been able to access the internet for more than two decades, this has not been the case for the Cuban population. During the earlier years of the 2000s and 2010s internet access in Cuba was

quite limited, only present in major government agencies, international embassies, and other major entities (Baron and Hall 2014). Internet at home for the Cuban people who were able to afford the costs, meant limited access to certain email platforms and very little else (Rodriguez Brito 2018). Wealthier Cubans were able to illegally attain access to the internet, and certain individuals downloaded content such as TV series and movies, which they sold in CDs and later flash drives to others. This form of business was widely known as “el paquete” (the package) and considered illegal by the Cuban Government (Castellanos Arguelles, Kelume Maranhao and Camara 2019).

Through the years, access continues to expand with certain implementations such as a limited form of home WIFI called “Nauta Hogar” in 2015 (Rodriguez Brito 2018). Legal, wider access to the internet has only been present in Cuba since 2019 (Bertot Triana 2020). Now Cubans can access social media sites and other forms of communication such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. The access is still limited in many ways, as it is costly and certain things like streaming platforms, which use a lot of cellular data, are very difficult to afford (Semple and Cohen 2019). In 2016 the median salary in Cuba was reported as 740 Cuban Pesos, which correlates to 29.6 U.S. dollars (National Cuban Office of Statistics and Information 2020). In a popular media article, which explains internet accessibility in Cuba, an interviewee explains it as follows “Access exists... but no regular salary would suffice to confront the current prices. My mother, who earns \$17 a month, would not be able to sacrifice \$1 per hour to obtain the minimum-access package...” (Borges 2020). The internet is not as available to certain areas and populations as TV and Newspapers are. This entails that the information that reaches the population, is government filtered and approved through traditional media such as TV or

Newspapers (Vicent 2021b). This propagates the spread of misinformation and creates a significant barrier between the people of Cuba, and what is truly happening in Cuba.

In the case of the 27N movement, misinformation continued to be spread by the media and the Cuban Government managed to simmer down the actions of the protestors. The situation, while still dire because of the debilitating effects of the pandemic, did not encounter its major turning point until January of 2021. The Cuban Government put forward a series of new policies, completely restructuring the economic system of the country. The overall change in the monetary system was labeled “Tarea Ordenamiento” (Organizational Assignment) by the Cuban Government. A name which was soon thereafter altered by the Cuban population to “Tu Ordena y Yo Miento” (You Organize, I lie) as a form of denouncing the negative impact of the policies (Lopez Segrada 2021). This reform implemented salary modifications and change from Cuban currency to USD in stores, along with other policies (Ministerio de Economia y Planificacion 2021). The change of currency was especially significant as Cubans continued to earn their salaries in the national currency and only those who receive money from international sources (family, friends, or income) can access the USD currency (Segrada 2021). These changes seriously affected the overall wellness of the Cuban population by making an already-dire situation quite extreme. Those who were unable to access USD currency, were faced with serious difficulties acquiring food and other necessities (Vicent 2021c).

As the weeks passed, the situation on the Island only worsened and many began to share their experiences through social media, in hope that more awareness might place pressure on the governmental forces to make changes (Ocando Alex 2021). Cuban artists, on and off the island, began to shine light on the issues on a larger scale and, in turn, became leaders in the movement. A few singers collaborated towards the release of a song named “Patria y Vida.” This phrase

translates to “Homeland and Life” and it is a play on words on a common phrase enforced by the Cuban regime, “Patria o Muerte” (Yotuel et al. 2021) The Phrase “Patria o Muerte” is taught to Cubans at a very young age, and continues to be a part of the everyday life of Cubans as it is constantly repeated by government officials, armed forces, and even part of the National Anthem, which sings daily in every school (Molina 2018). The song, which was released in February of 2021, went on to be used as the anthem and slogan of the new revolution (Sayre 2021).

Cuba and COVID-19

The new revolutionary movement continued to slowly develop as the COVID-19 situation worsen. For some context, when COVID-19 began to spread, the Cuban government was presenting a strong front to the rest of the world, which portrayed Cuba as handling the pandemic well (Burki 2021). Cuba was widely known for developing its own vaccine prototypes, and Cuban doctors were sent out to other countries which were being affected quite harshly by the virus (Marsh and Zodzi 2020; Yaffe 2020). Scholars have even discussed Cuba’s handling of the pandemic as an example to other countries and shone a light on their effective preventative and containment measures (Galban-Garcia and Mas-bermejo 2021; Yaffe 2020). It was not until the summer of 2021 when COVID-19 cases in the island began to spike. During the earlier months of the year, the daily cases were situated anywhere around 800-1500. It was only after mid-June that the cases began to step into the 3000’s and continued to rise, reaching the 6000s by the 11th of July (JHU CSSE 2021). At this point, there was a complete crash of the healthcare system which manifested through a shortage of ventilators, oxygen, medicine, and personnel in addition to a dire shortage of aliments (Lima 2021). Hospitals, clinics, and even funeral homes

were unable to withstand the extreme outpour of COVID-19 cases (Robles 2021). Doctors spoke out and reported an utter lack of basic medicines, such as antibiotics and painkillers. (Augustin and Montero 2021). Even though Cuba is recognized as the country with the highest physician-to-patient ratio in the world, they were simply unable to keep up with the demand for treatment, with cases reaching the 9000's in late summer (Augustin and Montero 2021; World Health Organization 2018; JHU CSSE 2021).

The Cuban Movement Now

On July 11th, 2021 thousands of Cubans took to the streets of the Island in a civic protest demanding freedom from the current dictatorship, due to the Cuban government's inadequate handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current dire financial state of the island (Lopez Segrera 2021). Yet, this was not an act that rose out of the blue. There is an intricately rich history behind this memorable day, with many now call "11J" which reads as "Once Jota" and translates to "eleven jay." (Torres Santana 2011). For the last 60 years, the Cuban people have experienced a debilitating dictatorship that has limited the country's ability to prosper in many ways. Historically, international relations have been scarce which limits trade and commerce and, in turn, the resources available (Ritter and Kirk 1995). The governmental system in place maintains the population earning unreasonably low wages for a great majority of jobs and makes it illegal to seek independent sources of income (Espina 2008). This limits the opportunities available to the population and restrains their ability to seek independent forms of income.

These specific circumstances led Cubans to manifest in mass numbers seeking change and, for the first time, it was being shown on the internet for the world to see (Lopez Segrada 2021). This form of civil activism called the attention of the world, as it is illegal to protest, and

freedom of speech is not a right in Cuba (Aldous 2015). These protests began on July 11th and the last reported protest was on July 17th. The protests, in turn, triggered other manifestations in support from various countries around the world, especially in the Cuban Enclave of South Florida (Serna Duque 2021). Many groups demanded the resignation of the current Cuban president, and the rest of the government officials in hopes of rebuilding the governmental structure. They also demanded humanitarian aid and military intervention from the United States (Rodriguez 2021a). Initially, the Cuban government refused humanitarian aid (Moreno 2021). Yet, at this point, many around the world had begun to see the debilitating effects of the dictatorship and the living conditions of Cubans through photos and videos uploaded to social media outlets like Facebook and Instagram (Lima 2021). Furthermore, the Cuban government's response to 11J was aligned with previous forms of repercussion. They contained, reprimanded, physically assaulted, and even murdered those who were found protesting (Lissardy 2021). While the official count of known deaths is five, it is widely speculated by the Cuban American community that many more were tracked down by Cuban officials and illegally beaten to death. Upwards of 500 individuals are thought to have been arrested during and after the protests (Moreno 2021).

Additionally, internet access was cut off by the Cuban government, as the protests began and are yet to be fully re-established (Ortutay, Bajak and Arbel 2021). Young men ages 17 to mid-'20s were taken from their homes and forced to begin and/or return to military training. While thousands of Cubans joined in the protest, after seeing the governmental response, many grew in fear for their safety and the protests began to die down (Ortutay, Bajak, and Arbel 2021) & (Infobae 2021). As protests in Cuba took place and until present times, the Cuban American population, along with Cuban exiles around the world, continue to seek freedom for Cuba and

governmental reform. Members of “The Opposition” (those who stand against the Cuban government) formally requested authorization to peacefully march on November 15th of 2020. The Cuban government responded by announcing a military march that is to occur on the same day (Rodriguez 2021b). This movement is just starting, and the efforts to make a change continue. Social protests happen sporadically in different cities of the world and information and awareness continue to be spread through social media platforms in hopes of keeping the efforts alive.

Theoretical Framework

The study attempts to answer: what makes a group that has refrained from participating in social movements for decades support a social cause? The researcher argues that their comfort with participating in this form of activism could be related to the group’s recent exposure to massive forms of protests through popular media. The Cuban American population, especially recent immigrants are actively discovering the importance and effectiveness of social protests. For example, through the television and media wide-spreading of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). The researcher argues that exposure to BLM may be a significant contributor to Cuban America’s change in perspective about Social Movements. Additionally, the researcher attempts to determine if a shift in political perspective may have occurred within the Cuban American population after contemplating the governmental response to their demands of intervention. Will the lack of response from the United States Government break a barrier of long-standing respect between the Cuban American population and the government? Will there be a shift in their trends of engagement in major social movements in the future? These are questions that the researcher attempted to answer through the analysis of interview data.

Alternatively, there is the possibility that this occurrence stands alone, as a one-time divergence from established patterns. Therefore, this study aims to understand why this group deemed it necessary to engage in acts of activism and protest in the summer of 2021. At first glance, the act of protesting by Cuban Americans in the United States could possibly be perceived as a shift in behavior from their history of abstaining from social movements and activism, but it could also be a break in a pattern that is to be resumed. In that case, the researcher argues that this specific form of protesting was backing a cause that directly relates to them, as many Cuban Americans have family and friends left on the island. And, even for those who do not have anyone in Cuba, the images that were being exposed on social media at the time served as triggers to past trauma and experiences, or that which they have heard from parents or grandparents. The emotional significance of this specific social cause marks the difference for the studied population. It is quite possible that a great majority of them will continue to refrain from engaging in social activism in the future.

Critical Race Theory (CTR), at large, explores the silent racism present in present-day America, it claims that today's institutions are laced with latent forms of racism present in institutions, laws, policies, procedures, regulations, agencies, etc. (Bonilla Silva 2017). Bonilla Silva (2017) introduces the concept of Colorblind Ideology. Colorblind Ideology describes a societal stance in which the governing agencies and the ruling class have adopted a race-neutral mindset (Bonilla Silva 2017). This mindset fails to address the unfair position that this ideology places blacks and other dark-skin minorities in. It creates the sense that skin color is insignificant, which fails to address the invisible barriers that minority individuals face.

In this study, the author argues that Cuban Americans may have refrained from engaging in forms of social activism due to persistent colorblind ideologies present within the population.

Cuban Americans hold a privileged position in the United States when compared to other Latinx groups, with a pronounced history of financial stability and lack of suppression. This unique standing could arguably be considered a major cause for their lack of participation in major social movements in the past. The comfort and stability experienced by those who maintain residence within the enclave could have internalized Colorblind Ideologies within the population. A position in which they took a tone-deaf stance towards the major social inequalities that other minority groups faced, such as the problems of African Americans (BLM) or other Latinx groups (Immigrant Rights Movement). The researcher argues that the lack of education about inequalities and the reliance on limited sources of information such as the news sections of Spanish-language TV such as Telemundo or Univision, may serve as a form of bubble agent that keeps Cuban Americans from understanding the full severity and importance of social reform issues involving other minorities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Questions

Research question #1: What circumstances can be identified for the Florida-based Cuban American population that lead to their engagement in the civic protests during July of 2021, which demanded freedom for the people of Cuba and military intervention from the United States government?

Research question #3: What reasoning can be attributed to Florida-based Cuban Americans' lack of participation in previous social movements such as Black Lives Matter, Immigrant Rights, Reproductive rights, etc.?

Methodology

The main purpose of this thesis is to explore the avenues which lead the Florida-based Cuban American population to engage in acts of civic protest in July of 2021, which differs from their pronounced history of abstaining from this form of activism. This study recruited participants by means of convenience sampling. The researcher, a Florida-based Cuban American, has direct access to the studied group and reached out to individuals who met the criteria to request their participation in the study. Data was collected from Miami-based Cuban Immigrants and Cuban Americans during the month of June 2022.

The South Florida area is home to the largest concentration of Cubans outside of the mainland. Due to its proximity to the island of Cuba, this area has been the main destination for Cubans exiles since the 1960s. Today, after six decades of immigration, it holds hundreds of thousands of Cuban Americans as well. Therefore, the present study is contained to the South Florida area as this large accumulation of Cuban people in one area facilitates the study. Only

Cuban immigrants and descendants of Cuban immigrants who are 18 years old or older were qualified and allowed to participate. Those participants were asked to recruit members of their close circle who would also meet the criteria and refer them to the researcher to potentially participate as well. The researcher obtained a total of 16 participants. And, focus groups were formed ranging from 2 to 4 participants. All interviews were conducted in Spanish to maintain cultural-linguistic dynamics intact for the studied group, as it was understood to be their preferred, or only, language.

At the beginning of each focus group, the researcher asked each participant if they were comfortable with the interview being audio-recorded, after receiving their consent, the interviewer began audio-recording. Once consent was granted from each participant, the researcher sent each person a link to a small Qualtrics survey that gathered their demographic information. This small survey took participants around 1-2 minutes to complete. This survey was designed in English and Spanish by the researcher, and the participant was able to choose which language they were more comfortable utilizing, all participants chose the Spanish version. The survey asked them to state their name, gender, and age. It additionally asked participants to share their position as it relates to their Cuban heritage, by specifying if they are a Cuban Immigrant themselves, first-generation Cuban American, second-generation, or any generation thereafter. Furthermore, it seeks to situate each participant within the waves of Cuban Immigration by asking those who identified themselves as immigrants and what specific year they immigrated. For those who self-identify as Cuban Americans, the survey asked that they specify what the timeframe of their ancestor's immigration was. To understand everyone's ties to Cuba, it also asked a simple yes/no question about whether or not they have any family or close friends in the mainland.

After completing these initial steps, the focus group began. This included an array of questions aiming to assess a full picture of each participant's characteristics and opinions. The researcher divided the interview guide into three separate sections. Section 1 of the interview dives into the participant's Cuban identity and background. The questions asked are designed to understand each participant's proximity to their Cuban heritage and the importance that they place on it. Section 1 questions also seek to understand the participant's specific reactions to the S.O.S. Cuba movement, the protests, and the situation people on the island are facing. Participants were asked to relay their opinions on the living situation in Cuba, how it has shifted over the years and how the government may have influenced those changes. Similarly, participants were also asked about their specific feelings towards the events which occurred in Cuba on July 11th. Section 2 of the interview utilizes a visual stimuli component; the participants are prompted to state their reactions to a series of photographs. These pictures were obtained by the researcher through a wide social media search, and each depicts crucial moments in the S.O.S. Cuba movements. Section 3 of the interview is designed to assess each participant's specific opinions and perspectives regarding major recent social movements such as the Immigrants' Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter movement. The researcher prefaced this third section during interviews with a brief description of these major social movements being that some Cuban Immigrants were not aware of what they were. The interviews aim is to understand participants' intricate background and social standing. To do so, initial interview questions ask participants to explain their cultural background, so that the interviewer could assess if any major racial or ethnic factors play a role in the participant's life. After obtaining a clear picture of everyone's background into the United States, participants discussed their Cuban and/or Cuban American identity and heritage, what does the Cuban identity mean to them? Are

you ever faced with a sense of dual identity and how does that affect the way you live your life? Are there any other identities that take front stage over your Cuban identity, for example, do you consider yourself more American than Cuban.

Furthermore, interview questions also attempt to understand the structure which makes Cuban Americans a unique immigrant group, the Miami enclave. Participants were asked to explain how they feel they fit into the United States, how do they feel different at times where they travel outside of the South Florida area? Would they ever consider moving away? Do they feel a sense of community and belonging in Miami? What specific sources of support did they (or their elders) receive when arriving to the U.S.? Do they believe the enclave plays a role in their ability to prosper? If so, why? How did factors such as language, help from family, or government assistance play a role in your adjustment after immigration?

Interviews were also designed to qualitatively analyze specific trends of perspectives, emotions, and opinions on the protests in the mainland as well as in the United States. The participants were asked to walk me through the specific thoughts and emotions that they remember having when they became aware of the protests in Cuba. They were asked if there are any actions that they wish they could take but could not because they were not on the mainland. They were asked to walk us through what they think they would have done if they were still living in Cuba. If the participants reported having family or friends left on the mainland, they were asked to walk me through their thoughts and feelings towards their loved ones when the protests broke out. Did they wish that their relatives would participate even though it was dangerous or were they hoping they would avoid it and prioritize their safety It also assessed their perspectives on the economic restructuring which the Cuban Government put forward in January of 2021, and how they believed it to have affected the population? The interview also

dived into the participants' opinions of the Cuban governments' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were asked to explain their perception of how the pandemic affected the living situations of Cubans and to provide any examples that they might have.

After the visual stimuli section of the interview, the questions then transitioned into assessing the participant's specific perspectives of the U.S. government, U.S. politics, and Conservative vs Progressive thoughts. After obtaining an understanding of their political leanings, they will be asked to explain their thoughts on issues like abortion, immigrant rights, religiosity, governmental welfare programs, and tax rises for the wealthy, in detail. They will be asked if they currently hold the ability to vote, and if so, what specific reasons lead them to choose one presidential candidate over the other in the last election. How involved and up to date do they consider themselves to be with the political happenings of the United States. Are there any specific movements, bills, or policies that they have a strong opinion on? These questions will simply try to explore Cuban Americans' rate of active involvement in American politics. Does immigrating from a country that grants scarce political freedoms to its people lead exiles to make great efforts to participate in American democracy? Why do you consider that we see a lack of involvement from the Cuban community in major forms of activism such as Black Lives Matter and Immigrant Rights? Does protesting break a boundary of respect towards the government that has provided them with a home after leaving their own?

These interviews had a duration of 15 minutes to 1 hour. They involved lengthy anecdotal discussions that flowed effortlessly. The interviews exclusively took place at participant's homes. This is the setting that each participant selected would be of most comfort and convenience for them. All their homes are located within the greater Miami/Dade County area. After the process of data collection, a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was used to

code the participant's responses. Sub-categories were developed to explore common trends within the participants' narratives. Initial coding consisted of an overview of the transcribed data in which I separated the text into the three major sections of the interview itself. These three initial sections are 1. Cuban Identity and Response to S.O.S. Cuba; 2. Visual Stimuli; and 3. Past Social Movements. This initial separation and review of the data allowed me to familiarize myself with the responses once again and begin to see what categories could be developed. This review of the data allowed me to create four specific categories. These are *Dictatorship Trauma*, *Gratitude to the U.S. Government*, *Detachment vs. Attachment* and, *a History of Struggles Sacrifice and Sadness*. Numerous repetitions of these subcategories by multiple participants were then qualified as themes and were then qualified to be highlighted in the discussion by the researcher. Because of the analytic approach taken by the author, the process of developing subcategories was approached open-mindedly, with room for new and emerging themes to arise at any point. I aimed to find what specific shifts may have occurred within the Cuban American community that lead to the S.O.S protests. This study is also open to exploring the uniqueness of the Cuban American community and how their rich and intricate culture sets them aside from other minority groups in the United States.

Reflexivity Statement

This research seeks to explore a variety of intricacies among the South Florida-based Cuban American population. This population is widely understudied and often also grouped with other Latinx groups. It is the purpose of this study to highlight this group's uniqueness and suggest straying from generalizing findings of other Latinx immigrant groups onto Cuban Americans. The author of this study is a Cuban Immigrant who has resided in South Florida from a young age. As a member of the community, this author brings a unique understanding of the

topics discussed. Interviews were conducted at participants' homes, within the comfort of their community, in their native language, and with a researcher who can fully understand the Cuban dialect. While the researcher is trained to remain impartial, the importance of her cultural background is to be considered when reading the current study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Cuban Americans have been found to commonly refrain from engaging in protests, activism, and other major forms of Social Movement in the United States. Additionally, they identify as a Republican-leaning minority group, past researchers have speculated their lack of civic engagement could be related to their conservative tendencies. While limited access to the Cuban American population and previous research on the matter may have led past studies to reach such conclusions, the ever-growing and ever-evolving nature of the Cuban American community leads the current study to widely different findings. The intricately unique history of the Cuban American community comes along with significant baggage carried over by each individual immigrant and the generations that have and will come after them. This thesis argues that a combination of the communal characteristics of their way of life in the United States, along with the uniqueness of their lived experiences within a longstanding dictatorship, encompass an explanation for their lack of participation in major American movements. This same combination of circumstances is also found to be exactly why many Cuban Americans found it utterly necessary to take to the streets in July of 2021 in support of the liberation of those still on the Cuban mainland.

The massive protests that happened in cities across the U.S. were majorly present in the South Florida area, representing a massive break in the group's pattern of behavior. For this, a series of questions were designed to understand the perspectives of Cuban Americans. Six small focus groups were interviewed, with a total of 16 participants who freely expressed a series of opinions. Most of the participants interviewed were middle-aged (11/16) individuals while the

remaining (5/16) were all in their 20's. The great majority (15/16) of these individuals immigrated to the United States themselves, with only 1 participant being born in the United States. Additionally, nine of the participants were women while seven of the participants were men. When asked to describe their origins and background most individuals referenced tracing back their origins to the Canary Islands, and the country of Spain as a whole. On the other hand, a few participants did mention not having any knowledge of their ancestral background and that all they've ever known is that they are Cuban. When asked where in Cuba they were from, six of the participants responded that they were from the capital city of Cuba, Havana, while the other ten were from more rural provinces within the country, predominantly a province named "Pinar Del Rio." Most of the interviewees lived for long periods of time in Cuba, ranging from 9 to 30+ years on the Island. While there was one participant who lived on the Island for the first 9 years of her life, the other fourteen Cuban-born participants experienced years of coming of age and adulthood on the island. Consequently, all participants mentioned feeling some degree of connection with their Cuban identity, with fourteen participants auto-qualifying themselves as utterly connected to their Cuban heritage and culture. Two participants mentioned feeling as though they were more American than they are Cuban. This was reinforced by all participants stating in the initial demographics survey that they still have close family and friends who live in Cuba.

Through the lens of QCA, four major, and interlaced, themes were extracted: dictatorship trauma, detachment, gratitude to the U.S. government, and history of sacrifice, struggles, and sadness. These prominent themes, along with their sub-themes, are used to understand why Cuban Americans have been found to refrain from participating in major social movements. These themes were found to directly address the research questions of this study.

Dictatorship Trauma

Dictatorship Trauma refers to the participants' lived experiences when residing in and/or emigrating from Cuba and how those experiences may have left a negative impact on them. More specifically, how the Cuban dictatorship and the living conditions in Cuba, shaped and contributed to the participants' trauma. It also unveils how happenings and circumstances in present-day Cuba still affect them well after having left the country. Within this broad theme, three sub-themes will be discussed: Movement & Displacement, Worry for the Future, and Persecution.

This trauma is directly derived from participants' or participants' relatives' experiences living within the dictatorship, and more specifically, how this trauma influences their thoughts, actions, and beliefs. Participants' responses showcased an engrained history of movement and displacement that came because of constant hardships, constraints, and persecution by the Cuban Government. In other words, participants felt forced to emigrate from their country of birth because of circumstances that would not be present if the current dictatorship did not remain in power. Their immigration into the United States, as well as the unique struggles they faced before, during, and after their immigrational journey, is directly consequential to the harsh reality of their homeland and the desire to offer their children, and the next generations to come, the possibility for a better future. The great majority of participants mentioned that they specifically left Cuba seeking a better way of life for their children, with many mentioning that they would most likely not have made the same decision if they did not have children. "Yo me fui atras de mis hijos" (I left chasing my children), states a father of two, who felt moved as these memories resurfaced, and could barely manage to get these few words out when discussing this topic.

Participants' responses often showcased that many of their current decisions are often, consciously, or subconsciously, influenced by that which was learned from their years in Cuba and the fear of facing similar circumstances again. Participants repeatedly mentioned that their way of life in Cuba consisted of a constant refrain of speaking their minds, expressing themselves, and openly showcasing their dissatisfaction with the actions of the Cuban Government. Getting by, unnoticed was the best way to survive in Cuba, the less attention a person calls to themselves, the more able they are to "inventar" (to create) ways of obtaining the resources needed for their survival within the system in place. The following participant, a young woman in her early 20's, born in the United States, expressed her opinions on Cuban Americans' way of life and referred directly to stories she has heard from her Cuban parents. She states:

"No es como si estabas aquí y tenía los derechos que una persona debe tener de hablar contra el sistema y eso, pero eso no ha pasado, no ha sido una oportunidad en Cuba en tanto tiempo."

"It is not like when you are here and you have the rights, that a person should have, to speak against the system and such, but we haven't gotten there, this has not been a reality in Cuba in so long."

Additionally, participants explained that this way of living, which is ingrained in them through trauma, does not simply go away when moving to a new country and encountering new-found freedom. They also tend to live a quiet, complacent life after immigrating, because they still hold on to the fear that speaking their mind or showcasing their opinions in forms such as social movement or protesting could reap the harsh consequences that it did in Cuba. Their responses guide to an understanding that moving to a new country does not necessarily mean assimilating to their culture and habits, especially when they so greatly differ from your own. Cubans have a unique and intricate background that involves an utmost degree of silencing and

manipulation from the Cuban government. This stands as a major difference between them and other immigrants who may not have experienced dictatorships.

Also, Cubans may not feel the need to protest as much as their Latinx counterparts because they feel secure in their community when comparing it to the circumstances that they were born. They showcased that it causes them to fear engaging because they might think that it could somehow make them suffer again, as they did in Cuba, to potentially lose their rights again.

“Tal vez no se sienten más cómodos a poder hablar porque, (que tal) si se lo quitan, los derechos, como... Solamente es como el miedo ese que tú vuelves para atrás, como en tu país y te tratan mal, como allá.”

“It may be that they feel don’t feel comfortable to speak up because, what if they take it away, the rights, like... It is just like a fear of moving backward, like in your country, where they treat you badly, like it is there.”

In general, the suffering and difficulties faced by many Cubans were so extreme that sometimes issues such as abortion or racial inequalities may be seen as distant and foreign because Cubans at some points dealt with more palpable issues such as the dire lack of food and medicine. The feeling of distancing, or detachment, from bigger political issues, is further explored in the following major theme.

Movement & Displacement

Movement & Displacement refers to the hardships and emotional trauma that comes along with participants having to leave their homeland and begin a new life in a new country, just like many other immigrants. But this specific subtheme analyzes the intersection of said hardships with the unique standing of coming from a controlling dictatorship.

In the same manner, as many other immigrant groups, Cubans encounter many of the hardships present when starting a life from scratch in a new country, which is often inevitable. Struggles such as finding housing, work, transportation, etc. Yet, for the Cuban American population moving away from their homeland, where a strong dictatorship takes place, comes with a unique set of emotional boundaries that are often carried over unconsciously. Participants discuss Cuban Americans' lack of participation in social movements often came accompanied by participants explaining their lack of "habit" or "culture" of civic activism. An older mother of two, who immigrated in the early 2000's states:

"Porque el cubano es muy cubano, eso es lo que pasa, el cubano es muy cubano y lo que le importa nada más es la isla aquella, y que aquella gente avance. Además, no tenemos cultura de eso, no nos enseñaron esa cultura, no la tenemos"

"Because Cubans are really Cuban, that's what it is, Cubans are very Cuban, and all they care about is that island, and that those people move forward. Additionally, we just do not have that culture, they didn't teach us that culture, we do not have it."

As they immigrated from a place of immense suppression and lack of resources, leading a free life in the United States seems like more than enough for them. They explain that they carry over that fear of speaking their mind, which was instilled in them from a young age when moving to a different country. The following quote was stated by a young man in his late 20s who immigrated into the United States shortly after the 11J protests after living in Cuba his whole life. This participant disclosed never having wanted to leave Cuba, like many of the people his age did, he explained that he loved his life, his family, and his country dearly and wanted to make a life for himself in Cuba, he felt infuriated that those in power have taken Cuba to such awful circumstances where fleeing is often the only possibility a person can think of in order to find happiness. Throughout the years he grew tired and scared, so he decided to leave, thankful to have the opportunity to do relatively easily do so, and aware that the great majority

does not have such privilege. Yet, to him leaving a country does not mean that the customs and social norms that you have adhered to your whole life are suddenly erased. He states:

“...En Cuba se vive de una forma y se piensa de una forma diferente a como se vive en el resto del mundo. Entonces desde siempre, desde la revolución, lo que han hecho es que han oprimido o reprimido a las fuerzas que salen a la calle en forma de protesta. Entonces (los cubanos) ya tienen en la cabeza esa cultura de que si salen les va a pasar algo al estar en contra del gobierno.”

(“In Cuba, they live and think in a different way than those in the rest of the world. For a long time, since the revolution, all they have done is oppress and suppress any form of protest. Because if these Cubans have this sort of culture ingrained in them, if they take to the streets, something will happen to you because they are going against the government.”)

He explains that the way of life in Cuba is different from that of other countries around the world. Since the revolution, the government has oppressed those who take to the streets in protest, and so Cubans have developed a culture of worry about repercussions surrounding the act of protesting against the government. They have a fear of being blacklisted which is why they tend to refrain from acts of activism such as strikes. Because of what they have seen happen to those who protest their whole life, they bring that fear along with them even when they move to the United States. Even in the case of facing severe economic hardships in the United States, they feel grateful for their ability to work through it freely, while being able to express themselves freely and make their own decisions, without the (Cuban) government controlling every step they take. He then went on to present the group with the following analogy to efficiently get his point across:

“Es como cuando, por ejemplo, te educan que en tu casa no se puede gritar, y nadie grita en tu casa entonces sabes que si gritas te va a pasar algo, te van a regañar. Entonces vas a una casa ajena y ves a todo el mundo gritando por lo que sea, tu no vas a gritar porque te educaron así, y si gritas te regañan. Entonces, por lo mismo es algo que esta ya ahí en la psicología de las personas.”

(When you are raised in a household that has a rule which asks that members of said household do not scream, and if you do scream, you will be reprimanded, you learn not to scream. Consequently, when visiting another household, even if the members of this other household do scream, you still will not, because you fear the consequence. Just like that, it is something that is already ingrained in people's psyches.)

This response helps us to understand that moving to a new country does not necessarily mean assimilating to their culture and habits, especially when they so greatly differ from your own. Cubans have a unique and intricate background that involves the utmost degree of silencing and manipulation by the Cuban government. This stands as a major difference between them and other immigrants who may not have experienced dictatorships.

Worry for the Future

All participants mentioned their children, and their well-being, multiple times as reasons for certain actions and decisions they took in the past. In other words, there were repeated mentions of having fled Cuba or made specific decisions in Cuba because they felt the need to grant their children better opportunities and better lifestyles that did not include constant worry, censorship, and persecution. It was also found that Cuban parents often felt compelled to “tomar el salto” (make the jump) themselves while they had the opportunity to do so safely and the resources to establish themselves in a different country (i.e. savings, family, friends, job opportunities, etc.) than continuing to get by in Cuba fearing that their children would attempt to leave the country on their own, even if it was in an unsafe. One of the participants, a wife, and mother of two, who left Cuba in 2008 says:

“Yo me fuí porque yo pensé que cuando mis hijos tuvieran edad suficiente, 18 o 20 años, se iban a ir de Cuba, porque no iban a tener un future ahí y toda la juventud en Cuba se quiere ir. Entonces para eso, van a buscar cualquier medio, como hacen muchos que se tiran al mar, buscan balsas, o lo que sea y se van como sea, ahora

mismo están atravesando una selva para llegar a aquí. Yo no quería, me daba miedo que mis hijos hicieran eso. Entonces decidí que era mejor irme yo primero (junto a ellos) para ayudarles yo y que ellos pudieran estudiar o formarse ya de chiquitos en el otro lugar.”

(I left because I thought that when my kids became old enough, 18 or 20 years old, they would leave Cuba, because they wouldn't have had a future there, all of Cuba's youth wants to leave. In order to accomplish that, they would employ whatever means necessary, like many who throw themselves to the ocean, they find rafts, or whatever and they leave however they can. Right now some are going through a jungle to get here. I didn't want that, I feared that my kids would do that. That's why I decided it was better for me to leave first (with them) so I could help them, so they could study and establish themselves from a young age somewhere else.)

In the case of this mother, she explained that her situation in Cuba was not necessarily dire or constrained, she held a stable position with the European Union Embassy in Havana, where she earned a standard European Salary, while her husband worked for an international corporation that allowed them to travel. Through their travels they were able to obtain goods to sell and obtain extra sources of income while keeping their family comfortable, never struggling to obtain food or any other core necessity. She shares that “she and her family were not struggling in Cuba” yet she found it necessary to make the hard decision to leave behind a comfortable life and embark on a journey of immigration that came with endless economic and emotional hardships exclusively for the sake of her children, for them to experience life freely. Today, 14 years and 3 countries later, both of her children are fully established in the United States. Her son is an engineering student at Florida International University and her daughter is weeks away from defending her master's Thesis. This mother feels as though it was completely worth it for her and her husband to endure the blunt force of that sacrifice 14 years ago, and for many years after that, then for her children to be enduring now, that they are in their 20s.

These fears and worries for future generations are further reinforced by multiple participants who echo her thoughts. Another mother of two sons brought up her disgust towards the way the Cuban Government forcibly demanded young men to join the armed forces when the July 2021 protest first broke out. She lived in Cuba at the time of these first protests and was under overwhelming worry that her children would be forced to beat on protestors and engage in violent acts against the people of Cuba, while they shared the same hopes and ideals as them, simply because they are young men in a country with mandatory military training and drafting.

“Uno tiene hijos juvenes, y se imagina lo que les pudiera pasar si fueran ellos los que hubieran salido a la calle. Especialmente sabiendo que el gobierno Cubano va a reprimir lo mas que puedan, van a mandar a gente a la carcel y van a dar golpes y van a hacer todo lo posible por silenciar al pueblo.”

(I have young sons, and I can only imagine what could happen if it was them who had taken to the streets. Especially knowing that the Cuban government was going to suppress the people as much as they could, they are going to send people to jail, and they are going to beat people, and they are going to do everything in its power to silence the people.)

She went on to explain that, as this was unfolding, her children sat her down and explained that they would not comply if asked to join the armed forces, and in turn, they would be sent to jail, so it was time for them to flee the country. They were running out of time as some of the young men from their close circles were already being taken forcibly to take part in these acts of violence against protestors. This overwhelming fear led her to understand that it was time for her and her family to leave the country as soon as possible because, for the first time, they felt that the safety of her two sons was in danger.

Persecution

Multiple participants centered their explanation on why they believe Cuban Americans have historically refrained from engaging in major social movements around the theme of trauma. They explained that freedom of speech and the right to protest do not exist in Cuba, and there were often extreme measures taken against those who defy those rules. The following participant, a father of two, who left Cuba 14 years ago, expresses his reasoning for leaving Cuba. He states:

“No siempre son temas políticos o económicos, son un grupo de cosas, por ejemplo, en mi caso, no puedo decir que era un problema económico, sino más bien, un problema de que, cuando nosotros vivíamos en aquel país, hacíamos cosas que iban rozando con la ley en Cuba y llegaba un momento en que uno se sentía perseguido por hacer ese tipo de cosas, con temor de caer preso.”

(It isn't always about a political difference or economic hardship, it's a combination of many things, for example, in my case, I can't say I was struggling financially in Cuba, on the other hand, it was a different problem. When we lived in that country, we did things that closely toyed within the line of legal and illegal according to the laws in Cuba. It gets to a point when one feels persecuted because of your engagement in that sort of thing, in constant fear of going to jail.)

He feared that the ways he found to provide for his family would be exactly what would have him incarcerated, he lived with constant stress and worry, having to watch everything he did and said, attempting to call as little attention to himself or his business as possible. In turn, when forcibly moving to the United States, because of such situations, and having to start a new life, the thought of protesting and defying the authorities of their new home, seems like a foreign and sometimes even scary concept. This is because their life in the United States, even if still leading a humble and low-income lifestyle, is most importantly free of persecution and constant struggles to obtain necessities.

As previously mentioned, the way of life in Cuba is different from that of other countries around the world. Since the revolution, the government has oppressed those who take to the streets in protest, and so Cubans have developed a culture of worry about repercussions surrounding the act of protesting against the government. They have a profound fear of being blacklisted which is why they tend to refrain from acts of activism such as strikes. Because of what they have seen happen to those who protest their whole life, they bring that fear along with them even when they immigrate to the United States. In that manner, they don't have the tradition or custom to protest. They have the tradition of staying silent and simply standing by to see what happens.

Movement & Displacement, Worry for the Future, and Persecution all encompass and could be traced back to the greater common denominator, trauma. They often felt forced to emigrate because of the difficulties and political limitations that they faced in Cuba, in addition to fearing for their children's ability to have a prosperous life in Cuba and feeling watched and monitored by the Cuban government. The awful circumstances and hardships that Cubans have had to face for generations leads them to take a unique place in society, rooted in the trauma that they had to endure.

Detachment vs. Attachment

The second major theme is Detachment vs. Attachment, and it directly explains participants' juxtaposing stances when explaining their connection to their Cuban identity and the current situation on the island. This is further explored by the two subthemes of this category: Lack of Hope and Guilt. Cuban Americans' perceived detachment from American Politics was repeatedly found in this study. Participants explained that major happenings within American

culture, such as major social movements, often feel foreign and detached from them. They feel as though it is something happening to *them* (Americans) rather than to *us* (Cubans). They explain that it is often hard for them to feel a part of the wider American culture, partly because they do not necessarily understand everything that goes on, as well as because they are often more concerned or focused on the happenings within their community and those that they feel they have left behind in Cuba. Because of the trauma many Cubans have endured, and the dire living situations they have had to face, focusing their energy on issues that do not affect them as directly feels unnecessary or unimaginable at this point, while many of their loved ones still live under the dictatorship.

The detachment was, by far, the most significant theme. They explained that Cubans tend to live in their own world. They immigrate from Cuba and focus on building a life and a community here. Their sources of information are limited and contained in Spanish TV channels or Facebook publications. Participants explained that the Cuban American community does not consume traditional media and often is not even aware or informed of what happens in the U.S. at large. They tend to only engage with whatever news Televisa or Univision shares.

Cuban Americans live with the internal juxtaposition of detachment vs. attachment. Most participants demonstrated a significant division between their desired detachment from Cuba, to move on and leave their traumatic experiences behind, and their need to help and support those still on the island. In addition to the trauma that they carry with them, findings also lead the way to understanding that Cubans are often driven to detachment from their Cuban identity due to an utter lack of hope for the future of their homeland and for those who have no choice but to remain living there. They explain that after 60 years of this dictatorship and witnessing the

population's inability to raise against the government as well as the lack of international support or interventions, they have no hope or idea of how it could all come to an end.

Lack of Hope

Participants' lack of hope is shared through their descriptions of detachment from Cuba and its problems with specific verbiage that showcased their lack of hope for the betterment and freedom of Cuba, with various mentions of having left it all behind. While this verbiage was widely present, with many participants rapidly expressing that they had no hope whatsoever for the future of Cuba, their words and narration of actions throughout the interviews told a different story. They all showed deep care and hope for the betterment of the living situation for those left on the island. They even explained that for many Cubans, thinking and working towards helping their family on the island consumes a lot of their time and interest. Often leading to one of the reasons why Cubans feel disconnected from American culture and politics at large. For example, this participant explained:

“Porque los cubanos están centrados en cómo mejorar aquel país, cómo se pudiera ayudar a aquel país, que es donde uno nació”

“Because a Cuban is concentrated on how to better that country, how one could help that country, where one was born.”

Furthermore, as we continued to dive into the subject, participants explained that sometimes they do have specific opinions and feelings toward controversial national (American) issues, such as abortion or racial discrimination. One participant even expressed that she doesn't think that Cubans are “stupid” and that they don't have opinions or feelings about national issues, they simply don't feel directly related or involved with said issues. They feel detached from the issues at large. They explained their need to focus on surviving and finding ways to

help those they left behind, they are detached from those American political issues, but it is not necessarily because they simply don't care. There is a complex and intricate intersection of reasons why they may have historically refrained from participating in major social movements. One participant expressed her perspective regarding their lack of participation in social movements. She says:

“No es que no haya un criterio en relación a eso, porque yo tengo mi criterio en relación al aborto y en relación a todas esas cosas, a la discriminación racial. No es que el cubano sea un anormal, que no piense o tenga criterio sobre el tema, pero no veo que se identifique con las causas esas en este país. Como que no tienen que ver conmigo realmente.”

(It's not that we don't have opinions on the matter, because I do have opinions on abortion and matters of that sort, like racial discrimination and such. It's not that Cubans are stupid, that they do not think or have opinions of their own, I just feel like we do not feel identified with the causes they are fighting for in this country. It feels like it has nothing to do with me.)

An overall sense of detachment from major American social issues was widely shared across various interviews. While many Cubans have made a new home within the boundaries of the United States, this does not necessarily mean that they feel utterly attached to the customs and social norms. They often feel grateful for new opportunities and find great pride in calling themselves Americans, yet their actions continue to be centered around their Cuban identity. Participants explained that Cubans tend to live in their own world. They immigrate from Cuba and focus on building a life and a community here. Especially considering that their disconnect with this sort of issue is caused by their sources of information being biased and their sources of information are often limited and contained to Spanish TV channels or facebook publications. They feel a disconnect with the bigger political issues that may cause protests. To illustrate:

“La comunidad cubana... primero no lee ese tipo de noticias, ni se entera que existe. Las noticias que hay son las del 23 (univision), las de Telemundo que no hablan de eso...”

“The Cuban community... firstly, they do not read that type of news, they do not even find out about them. The sort of news they see are from chanel 23 (Univision), and from Telemundo, and they don't talk about that.”

In turn, by continuing to develop a community where they feel somewhat comfortable and can establish themselves, they also tend to grow somewhat independent from the rest of the greater U.S. culture. As they assimilate to their new lives within the borders of the United States, this does not necessarily mean that this unique group acclimates to American social norms in the same manner that other immigrant groups might be forced to. There is a constant theme of detachment that has lived within this immigrant group since their start in the 1960s.

Guilt

Participants explained that while they feel gratitude for the new opportunities that they have been granted and a deep desire to move on and focus on their future, it is very hard when constantly feeling stressed and worried about their family's ability to obtain basic human necessities. Many of their thoughts and actions are meticulously focused on helping and bettering the circumstances of their loved ones on the island, often sending money, food, medicine, and other necessities that people on the island often struggle to obtain. While discussing why Cuban Americans have historically refrained from engaging in major forms of protest as a group, an older participant in his early 60s, who immigrated to the United States more than 20 years ago, presented the following metaphor:

“Lo mas malo del mundo para una persona es el cancer, cuando tu dices, por ejemplo, tengo cancer en la rodilla, no te preocupa el dolor de cabeza, no te preocupa si tienes picazón, si tienes una uña enferma. Por que? Porque lo mas

grande que cosa es? El cancer. El cubano lo mas que le preocupa es la situación que tienen sus hijos, su familia, los que dejaron allá. El problema del aborto, un ejemplo... en treinta países lo aceptan, en treinta países no lo aceptan, hay personas que aplauden a favor del aborto, otros están en contra. Entonces (los cubanos) no lo ven como una cosa importante, lo ven como una cosa que no se va a resolver, no importa si hay aborto o no hay aborto... Entonces para el cubano no es una cosa elemental.”

(The worst thing in the world to many people is to get cancer, let's say, for example, I have knee cancer, suddenly you don't care if your head hurts, you aren't worried about having an itch, or a sick nail. Why? Because what is the bigger issue? Cancer. What worries Cubans the most is the situation in which their children, their family, and everyone they left behind are living. The issue of abortion, for example... in thirty countries is legal, in thirty countries is illegal, there's people who enthusiastically support it and people who don't. Cubans do not see it as something important, they see it as something with no solution, whether there is or isn't abortion is irrelevant to them, its not an elemental issue to Cubans.)

While this may be a unique and extreme opinion on the matter, he gets the point across. He connects the theoretical circumstance of having cancer on the knee, he then asked, after finding out you had that cancer, would you worry about a headache or an itch? You would focus on your cancer, and in the same manner, Cubans focus on themselves and their family. They focus on surviving here, often with very little resources, and having to start their life over from scratch, adapting to a new environment, a new way of life. They have to find new jobs, new homes, new schools, etc.. some even have no option but to change their occupation as certain degrees and certifications that they acquired in Cuba are not valid in the United States. Parents also must ensure the acclimation and wellbeing of their children while attempting to adapt themselves. Simply because there is an enclave in place to facilitate this transition for many Cubans, this does not mean that an utter change of life is emotionally easy for any individual to go through, especially when most wish that it wasn't necessary for them to do so. This all comes in addition to finding ways to help those they left behind. This may entail sending a portion of their salary to

their relatives, or shipping supplies such as nonperishable foods, hygiene products, and other necessities. Many of these responsibilities do not only consume money but also time and effort, and it carries an emotional toll to a certain degree as well by causing stress and worry. Not only are they responsible for providing for themselves, and in certain cases, for their children, but also for their parents or other loved ones left on the island. In turn, their time and ability to become engaged with the greater American culture are quite limited. This directly derives in such detachment from those political issues we have continuously discussed throughout the study. While this demonstrates profound detachment from American culture, it simultaneously demonstrates profound attachment and care for their loved ones and the people of Cuba, which leads to one of the unique reasons why they chose to take to the streets of South Florida in July of 2021. For example, when expressing their thoughts on the S.O.S.Cuba protests, participants explained that in moments of discomfort and uncertainty, because of how the Cuban Government was reacting, their guilt for not being there led them to feel that maybe taking to the streets of South Florida in protest was the only way of showing empathy and support for those on the island.

“Nosotros salimos tambien... como apoyandolos a ellos, due de la manera que uno encontro para poderlos apoyar a ellos tambien, ya nosotros sabemos que ellos estaban viendo eso tambien porque ya ellos tienen como verlo. Me imagino que ellos se sentirian super contentos de vernos aqui a nosotros aquí también en la calle.”

(We went out too... like to support them, its the way we found to show our support to them too, we knew they were able to see us too because they are now able to see the internet. I imagine that they felt happy to see us on the streets here too.)

In moments of discomfort and uncertainty, this participant explained that taking to the streets of South Florida in protest was the only way she found of showing her empathy and support for those on the island. They felt it was the only way that those outside the island could

show their care and support, the only way they could show that they have not forgotten. Their attachment to those they have left behind is very relevant in their lives, the major theme of guilt is interlaced within a majority of the Cuban American community, and it drives and affects many of their actions, thoughts, and beliefs.

Gratitude to the United States Government

This theme dives into participants' perceptions of the U.S. government in comparison to their experiences with the Cuban government and how thankful they feel for the opportunities granted to them in their new home. More importantly, it dives specifically into how this profound gratitude influences participants' actions, decisions, and beliefs. The theme of gratitude was found to hold major significance when attempting to understand why Cuban Americans may have historically refrained from engaging in major acts of social movements. After enduring major trauma derived from their experiences within the Cuban dictatorship, the ability to seek refuge and plant new roots in the United States is something they feel deep gratitude towards. An older mother of two who immigrated within the last 5 years with the purpose of reuniting with her daughters and grandchildren, states: "muy agradecida" (very thankful), when referring to her ability to immigrate and settle with her children after many years of separation.

This feeling is intensified by the support within the Cuban enclave where, as previously mentioned, Cubans can often find aid and guidance when starting over. This was not only mentioned by the participants but was also explained to be something they often see and hear among Cubans in their community. It was found that Cuban immigrants feel grateful to the relatively smooth transition that they face when moving to the United States and, in turn, feel as though engaging in protests, could potentially be perceived as a lack of respect or gratitude for

the new life that they were granted in the U.S. For example, this father of two, who immigrated in the late 90's explained his perspective as follows:

“Por el Gobierno, lo respetamos mucho y a veces hasta con esta institución nosotros los cubanos u otro cualquiera, por no conocer las leyes o puede ser que tú porque tú protestas haces algo, tú estás haciendo algo ilegal.”

“Because of the government, because we respect it so much and at times, even with this institution, us Cubans or maybe even others, due to not knowing the law, it may be that when you protest, maybe you could be doing something illegal.”

This quote directly represents the reality of many Cuban Americans, who live thankful, yet secluded from the social norms that many Americans embrace. For this unique group, there is a profound disconnect between living within the borders of the United States and truly understanding or connecting to the general culture of people. Their reality, in the South Florida area is significantly different from the reality of individuals who live integrated within other big cities such as New York, Chicago, or even California. Their community specifically plays a significant role, where this argument might not be true in the case of a Cuban American immigrant living outside of the Miami enclave. In turn, such “respectful” detachment, paves the way to understanding Cuban American’s lack of participation in major social movements.

Hope and Liberty

The only subtheme in this major category is labeled Hope and Liberty and it expands on the sense and opportunity for fulfillment that come along with opportunities granted by their new life in the United States. Furthermore, how the development of their lives in the United States helps them to find newfound hope for future generations while aiding to heal past traumas and finding enjoyment in their newfound liberty. Cubans' gratitude towards the American government for the ways in which it has accepted Cubans into the country for many years is a

significant factor related to their guaranteed path to citizenship, and the comfort they find within South Florida after immigration. They explained that most Cubans feel grateful to the American Government for providing them with a new home and treating them somewhat differently than other immigrants by granting them residency.

“La mayoría de los Cubanos que yo conozco aquí en Estados Unidos están como muy agradecidos de que el gobierno los haya aceptado aquí y que nos haya dado residencia ... nos trata un poco diferente de como trata a otros inmigrantes y entonces no hay mucho motivo para estar protestando y se han concentrado mas bien en desarrollar una comunidad ... donde se habla español, donde la gente resuelve trabajo de cierta manera. El problema... el disgusto es con el gobierno de Cuba que nos obligó a venir a tener que instalarnos aquí y dejar el país, la familia, los amigos cuando mucha gente ni siquiera quería hacer eso.”

(The majority of Cubans that I know here in the United States are, like, very thankful that the government accepted them here and for having granted us residency... they treat us a bit differently than how they treat other immigrants and so we do not see the motive to be protesting and we've focused more on developing a community... where people speak Spanish, where jobs can be found in many ways. The problem... our anger is with the Cuban government that forced us to have to move and install ourselves here and leave the country, family, and friends when many people did not want to.)

They feel like the opportunities they are granted in the U.S. prevents them from engaging in social movements and rather focus their energy on developing their community for themselves and those who will continue to come from Cuba. Preparing a community where Spanish is the prominent language, where new immigrants can find jobs easily, etc. They feel angry towards the Cuban government, which forced them to leave those they love behind, they often do not give what is happening in the American community much thought or energy. In simple terms, Cuban immigrants feel grateful for the relatively smooth transition that they face when moving to the United States and, in turn, feel as though engaging in protests, could potentially be

perceived as a lack of respect or gratitude for the new life that they were granted in the U.S. In support of this claim a participant said

“Yo pienso que sea el habito que no tenemos de protestar y el respeto que tenemos por este país... por el gobierno, lo respetamos.”

(I think that it's the habit that we do not have, to protest as well as the respect we hold for this country... for the government, we respect it.)

This is directly related to a series of trends that are more predominantly seen among the Cuban American community than other immigrant groups. Most importantly, the enclave allows most Cubans to have a pre-built social network when arriving to the country, this facilitates access to jobs, information, and support. They can begin earning an income right away by finding jobs that do not require that the employee speaks English. They are also able to have family or friends guide them through complicated processes such as obtaining food stamps, finding housing, and navigating other areas like transportation, grocery shopping, credit cards, etc.

Cuban Americans' History of Sacrifice, Struggles, and Sadness

This category dives into the unique struggles of the Cuban Immigrant community coming from a long-standing dictatorship and how creates a unique set of hardships for the group. Along with the previous findings, Cubans have a profound history of sacrifice, struggle, and sadness, which is directly derived from their experiences living under the Cuban dictatorship. Because of this, Cubans on the Island are accustomed to figuring out alternative ways of producing income, being that they have been unable to stay afloat with government salaries for many years now. After the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation in Cuba reached an all-time low. People found themselves confined to their homes, and with strict social distancing protocols in

place, they were unable to “*inventar*” to find and practice alternative ways of producing income. Participants felt as though this sudden inability, in addition to wider access to the internet and fast forms of communication like WhatsApp or Facebook led Cubans on the island to muster the bravery to mobilize and take to the streets like never before. A mother of two who immigrated close to ten years ago stated:

“Si la pandemia desbarató o hizo mella en países de primer mundo como España, como aquí en Estados Unidos se moría la gente por chorros, ¿qué iba a pasar en un país como Cuba que ya todo estaba destruido antes de llegar la pandemia? Además, que no había medicina y no había insumos desechables, no había nada.”

“If the pandemic destroyed or made serious damage in developed countries such as Spain, like here in the United States, where people died in huge quantities, What could happen in a country like Cuba, where everything was already destroyed before the pandemic even arrived? Additionally, there was no medicine, there were no disposable items, there was nothing.”

This participant explained that such awful circumstances were inevitable in Cuba with the rise of the pandemic, because no matter how amazing Cuban doctors may be, they cannot practice without appropriate resources. This dire struggle is considered by many to be the last bit of struggle that they needed to begin mobilizing. Participants explained that seeing such a major social movement in Cuba, was an extreme shock, something they never thought would happen, it brought them a joy to an extent. Participants also expressed that they wish they would have had the bravery to go out and protest in that manner when they lived there, they felt proud and saw a sliver of hope for the first time in years. Yet, these protests mostly worried them, because they know exactly how the Cuban government has historically reacted to such forms of defiance. This fear is so instilled that it continues to manifest intergenerationally, as the children of Cuban immigrants also continue to feel for those on the island. The youngest participant of this study, a

psychology graduate student in her early 20's, was born in the United States and expressed the following:

“Me dio miedo que algo le podía pasar a la familia y a ellos. Solamente porque yo sé la historia, pero estaba feliz y nerviosa que algo podía pasar, pero también una oportunidad nueva.”

“I became fearful that something could happen to the family or to them (Cubans). Only because I know the history, but I was happy and nervous that something could happen, but I also saw it as a new opportunity.”

She felt worried and afraid of the consequences that the people who took to the streets would experience, because she knew of the history, she knew what happens to those that protest. At that moment, right after the news of the protests broke out, the Cuban government cut off the population's access to the internet. Cubans in America were faced with extreme uncertainty about what was happening to their loved ones on the island. This extreme worry and support of those still in Cuba is perceived as another major trigger for the Cuban American population to take to the streets in South Florida like never before. In this manner, they could seek aid and support from the American Government and simultaneously showcase their love and support to those in Cuba. A participant explained why she personally took to the streets in the following manner:

“Como apoyándolos a ellos. Fue la manera que uno encontró para poderlos apoyar a ellos también... .. Darle fuerza a ellos para que ellos... .. Ya ahora eso tienen cómo verlo. Me imagino que ellos se sentirían supercontentos de vernos a nosotros aquí también en la calle. Es lo mismo.”

“Like supporting them. It was the way one could find to support them too... .. Send them strength so they could... .. Now they have ways of seeing it. I imagine that they felt so happy to see us here on the streets too. We are the same.”

She explains that this was the only way she found to feel a fraction less powerless in the face of such a monumental time for the Cuban people. This same participant later went on to

explain that she was simultaneously also hoping the protests within the U.S. borders would entice the American government to perform a military intervention. This is important to note because it is a unique topic that many Cubans struggle to agree on. For example, when this topic came up during a focus group with four middle aged individuals, they also stood strongly against any sort of military intervention:

“Yo viví ahí y a mí no me hubiera gustado que nos intervinieran militarmente y estar en una situación de guerra. Más miseria, más todo, es más problemas de los que tienen.”

“I lived there and I would not have liked for them to send a military intervention and then live in war-like situation. More misery, more everything, more problems than they already have.”

She, along with the other three participants within this focus group, explained that war would only bring about more death and necessities, and it would only further harm the already quite fragile community. Many who do not support this sort of intervention or overtaking by a separate country, mostly support the idea of an overtaking from within, performed by the people of Cuba.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia is explored as well as how the Pandemic worsened living situations in Cuba and brought many Cuban Americans overwhelming feelings of Sadness. When asked what their initial reactions to hearing about the 11J protests breaking out were, all participants had quite similar responses. They felt happiness and an overwhelming sense of joy that they had lost hope in ever feeling. Cubans saw progress for the first time in many years, they felt proud of the masses who took to the streets of Cuba.

“Yo me alegré, me alegré muchísimo que las personas salieran a la calle a realmente expresar lo que ellos sienten.”

(I felt happy, I felt very happy that people took to the streets to truly express what they felt.)

The participants expressed that they felt joy knowing that the people of Cuba were finally able to express how they truly felt by taking to the streets in protest. They reacted with disbelief that something they had wanted to do so many times was finally happening, mixed with sadness that they never had the courage or opportunity to do it themselves. Because of their profound understanding of the ways and history of the Cuban government, they soon after began to feel scared and worried for the safety of the protestors. They were fully convinced that the Cuban government would react quite harshly and potentially violently.

“Yo no me lo creía que estaría realmente sucediendo algo que yo había esperado por tantos años y yo quería haber hecho tantas veces y también en combinación con alegría y mucha confusión y preocupación de cómo respondería el gobierno cubano.”

(I couldn't believe that something I had waited for for so many years was really happening, something I had wanted to do so many times, in combination with happiness and so much confusion and worry of how the Cuban government would react.)

The protests evoked feelings of nostalgia and regret among many of the participants, who felt as though they wish they would have done the same thing when they lived in Cuba yet felt too scared to do so. Their traumatic lived experiences held them back from expressing themselves in fear of the harsh consequences.

Aside from the participant who was born in the United States, most others mentioned having lived here for 10+ years. Only four participants immigrated recently, more specifically, during the last year. Thereafter, participants were asked if and how they believe that the living situation in Cuba has changed from when they lived there to the present, or more specifically to the months before the 11J protests. This question was modified for those who recently

immigrated, they were asked how they believe that the living situation changed from 5 or 10 years ago to the present. The perspectives of those individuals who recently immigrated are especially relevant as they were able to provide specific and current examples of how the living situation worsened throughout the last couple of years. A young participant who immigrated into the United States roughly a year ago explained:

“Hemos vivido un cambio muy drástico, porque es muy rápido que van sucediendo los cambios y es para peor, y para peor, y para peor y más. Si estamos mal, estamos más mal aun. Fue muy rápido en los últimos 10 años. Incluso en el último año fue mucho más rápido.”

“We have lived a very drastic change, because changes have happened very quickly, and it only gets worse, and worse, and worse, and worst. If we are doing badly, we are (now) doing even more badly. It has been so fast throughout the last 10 years. Especially this last year, it has been even faster.”

The participants who lived in Cuba through the various economic changes, the pandemic, and the protests bring this study a different perspective. They experienced the rapid downfall firsthand and are able to explain the degree of difficulties that Cubans have faced throughout the last few years. In regards to such deterioration the same participant provided this specific example:

“Sí. Simplemente en el transporte cuando ibas a salir a la calle, porque como tienes que usar el transporte público, antes era mucho más fácil y pasaban más seguidos los días en la guaguas o los taxis que se llaman almendrones allá, los boteros. Incluso los precios eran mucho más bajos, mucho más asequible al bolsillo, por los salarios.”

“Yes. To put it simply, in regards to transportation, when you were going out, you had to use public transportation, it used to be so much easier. The buses circulated their stops more frequently, or the different types of taxis too. The prices were way lower, it was way more affordable, because of what the salaries are.”

This was just one of many examples of what Cubans face on the island today. These unlivable circumstances create worry and cause pain to Cubans Immigrants in the United States, it makes them feel powerless and sincerely worried for the well-being of their loved ones.

The Pandemic

Consequently, when asked what they believed to be “*la ultima gota que derramó el vaso*” (a common Latinx phrase that directly translates to ‘the last drop that made the cup overflow’ and is used to refer to the most recent and prominent triggering agent to a specific event) in the case of the 11J protests, most participants felt as though it was the utter lack of food and medicine in combination with the confinement that came as a consequence of having to isolate during the pandemic. They explained that Cubans are accustomed to figuring out alternative ways of producing income, being that they have been unable to stay afloat with government salaries for many years now. When people found themselves confined to their homes, with strict social distancing protocols in place, they were unable to “*inventar*” to find and practice alternative ways of producing income.

“Yo creo que la pandemia fue lo que mas... cuando cerraron todo. Por que el Cubano viaja, va y viene, y busca y va a otros paises y compra ropa y tu sabes, se la busca. Pero cuando cerraron todo, ahi fue cuando se detono todo.”

(I think the pandemic was what did the most... when they closed everything. Because Cubans tend to travel, they come and go, they buy clothes in other countries and you know, they find ways. But when they closed everything, that’s when everything detonated.)

Participants felt as though this sudden inability, in addition to wider access to the internet and fast forms of communication like WhatsApp or Facebook led Cubans to feel the need to mobilize and take to the streets like never before. A few participants also referred to the previously mentioned “*tarea ordenamiento*” as a major reason for the rise of the protests. The massive monetary change affected millions of Cubans who were unable to access USD or Euros while stores would only accept those currencies as payment.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The current study came to be after the unprecedented events which occurred on July 11th, 2021, when massive numbers of Cubans on the Island, and Cuban Americans in South Florida, engaged in a major social movement seeking freedom for Cuba. Previous research has hypothesized that Cuban's lack of participation in protests is associated with their privileged position in society when compared to other Hispanic/Latinx immigrant groups. Additionally, this group's political involvement and affiliation with the Republican party has been associated with why they do not hold high rates of participation in major Social Movements. The first objective of this thesis is to understand why Cubans in the U.S., who tend to refrain from engaging in Social Movements, changed patterns and took to the streets to protest. The second objective of the current study is to dive deeply and obtain a thorough understanding of why the Cuban American community has historically refrained from these acts of protest. Significant themes were found after the systemic coding and analysis of the focus-group interviews were Dictatorship Trauma, Detachment vs. Attachment, Gratitude to the U.S. Government, and a profound History of Sacrifice, Struggles, and Sadness. These four major themes, when analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory, leave us with a better understanding of why Cuban Americans have adhered to such trends of involvement, or lack thereof, for the past few decades and what may have caused such a major shift in their behavior in July of 2021.

Firstly, the major theme of Trauma unveiled participants' sensitivity surrounding topics of protesting and manifesting their thoughts publicly. They repeatedly mentioned that after living in Cuba for so many years, where there are severe consequences to speaking your mind, people learn to live within that system, that you may or may not believe to be wrong. In turn, when

analyzing the unique case of Cuban Americans, their trauma and lived experiences on the island should be taken into consideration when attempting to provide an explanation for their lack of participation in a certain social movement, because they come from a place where there are severe consequences to such actions. Meanwhile, other immigrant groups may feel more enticed, and found statistically more likely, to engage in protests because they come from places where protesting and activism is not as rare and controversial as it is in Cuba.

Secondly, the researcher explores the theme of Detachment, which was born from the role played by the Cuban enclave and their overall lack of access to information. It has been made apparent that Cubans tend to maintain themselves within the bubble of the Cuban Community. This unique trend may lead many of them to become detached from major social problems in the U.S., or to never have felt any sort of attachment to them to begin with. Participants explained that Cubans often feel a greater pressure to worry about the problems of those within their own family and community, but most importantly those which they left behind. They expressed feeling worry and constantly outputting care and energy into taking care of their loved ones in Cuba however they can. They feel as though that often takes president in their minds and can easily distract individuals from what is happening in the country, they currently live in.

Thirdly, the theme of gratitude can be directly related to a series of trends that are more predominantly seen among the Cuban American community and sets them apart from other immigrant groups. Most importantly, this is due to an established enclave which provides most new Cuban immigrants with access to a safer and more comfortable lifestyle than that which they had in Cuba. They often have family or friends guide them through complicated processes such as obtaining food stamps, finding housing, and navigating other areas like immigration

procedures, transportation, grocery shopping, credit cards, etc. They now can also have guaranteed sources of food and medicine, reliable electricity and water, livable housing conditions, and overall access to more comforts, privileges, and basic human rights than they did in Cuba. Additionally, their guaranteed path to citizenship facilitates their access to education, government aid, and the ability to travel back to Cuba, which is imperative for those with close family on the island. After obtaining permanent residency, which is estimated to take a year and a half, Cubans can travel back to their country and bring back supplies and necessities that their family struggles to attain daily. Their relatively easy access to residency, and eventually citizenship, may further reinforce Cubans' sense of gratitude. This path allows them to obtain legal, high-paying, jobs, attend centers for higher education, pursue many different career paths, obtain rent or loans to buy homes, etc. It especially facilitates the establishing of their new life tremendously. These factors arguably play a major role in their sense of gratitude which, in turn, shapes their desire, willingness, and ability to publicly speak up or socially mobilize.

Lastly, the theme labeled as a History of Sacrifice, Struggles, and Sadness most directly addresses why Cuban Americans broke their patterns of behaviors and took to the streets in July of 2021. Overall, Cubans' immigrational experiences are not the easiest, especially considering the journeys that many Cubans must take to make it to the U.S. and the reasons why they feel forced to leave. Many Cubans leave behind very close family members, and often leave Cuba through unsafe means, like fleeing on a raft or traveling through South American jungles to reach the Mexican border. Many Cubans lived for many years within inhumane conditions, overcoming extreme hardships, and struggling to obtain basic necessities, and it has been this way for decades. Yet, in July of 2021, something changed, the pandemic, along with an endless array of unresolved problems, placed the Cuban population at an all-time low. This triggered the

population to take to the streets, and the sock and desire to support, triggered Cuban Americans to take to the streets as well. Their need to showcase their empathy and encouragement resulted in a complete shift from what they have done for so many years.

Studies have argued that Cuban's long-standing history of immigration may place them in a more comfortable position to establish political enfranchisement. The current study stands to argue quite the opposite since Cuban Americans tend to stay within their own community in South Florida while Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans tend to spread in communities among many states. Cubans are less likely to be entirely aware and understanding of the full picture. While there was no mention of feeling less grateful to the American government after the lack of responsiveness to their protests, it was mentioned by two participants that, in their opinions, if the current president was a part of the Republican party, the American government's response to the events in Cuba may have been different.

In the specific case of this community, it could be argued that Cuban Americans' trauma holds a greater presence in their life than their ability, or lack thereof, to take to the streets in protest. While a decent portion of the Cuban American population may have access to the financial needs necessary to engage in protest. Their culture and past lived experiences may have a greater influence on their decisions. Similarly, their way of life is arguably different from those of other immigrants such as Puerto Ricans or Mexican Americans and could be considered as well. The Cuban enclave and the previously mentioned system in place which help Cuban immigrants make the settlement and adjustment process easier also intersect by keeping Cubans exposed to limited sources of information. This may skew or limit the knowledge received by the Cuban community and directly affect their decisions when learning of social inequalities and political issues. These findings suggest the need to study how additional circumstances faced by

a certain population may hold a greater influence over their decisions than their socioeconomic status.

Previously, the author predicted that colorblind ideology could potentially be utilized to explain Cuban Americans lack engagement in social movements. Arguing that Cubans hold a privileged place in American society when compared to similar Latinx counterparts and that this may have led them to attain a sense of comfortability and turn a blind eye to the major social problems that occurred in the country at large. After collecting and analyzing the data obtained from these focus groups, some of the arguments previously made have shifted, while others could potentially still be considered true. While their privileged place in society may still be a contributing factor to their lack of participation, this author argues that rather than developing a tone-deaf stance towards social issues, they are simply not as informed and aware of their severity as other communities might be. Yet, the critical aspect of CRT influences the researcher to reflect on the idle position that Cuban Americans have continuously adhered to throughout the last decades. When asked directly, as proven by this study's interviews, Cuban Americans tend to designate their unique set of circumstances, as the reasons why they have chosen to stay away from engaging in acts of protests or social movements.

The themes found explain that Cubans are centered on themselves and their family and see little beyond the community they live in and those they aim to help and provide for back on the island. This circumstance may be of extreme influence on their behavior and their perceived embodiment of colorblind ideology may be more complex than it seems at first glance. As mentioned by one of the participants: "I have opinions about abortion and racial inequalities, it's not that I don't care, it just seems like a foreign issue to me, I do not feel an attachment to those issues in the way that I feel about Cuba's liberation." Additionally, the researcher previously

argued that TV channels such as Telemundo and Univision being some of Cuban's exclusive sources of information were found to be true, which was then also brought up during the focus-group interviews. It was mentioned by participants that they also believe the type of information that Cubans are exposed to are a major factor in their lack of involvement. It keeps Cuban Americans from understanding the full severity and importance of social reform issues involving other minorities or the country at large. Because of this, CRT leads the current research to highlight the bystander position that this immigrant group is currently adhering to. By continuously maintaining themselves uninformed and uninvolved in political issues, this group is making a major impact on the voting tendencies of Floridians. To reach the Cuban American group, and potentially influence the way they vote, policymakers and activist groups need to restructure their strategies and understand that Cubans cannot continue to be grouped and generalized under the same umbrella as other Latinx groups. Their tendencies and voting habits greatly differ from other major groups, and the same strategies will not suffice to reach this unique group.

While future research could find a stronger connection between this group's socioeconomic status or political affiliation and their lack of participation in social movements, this was not proven or disproven by the current study. Rather, alternative variables were found that hold greater importance in the perspectives of those interviewed. Future research is encouraged to explore avenues of research to find more specific descriptors of this group's trends. Additionally, it is also encouraged that future research acquires a pool of participants which contains more second or third generation Cuban Americans than the current study, as they could potentially present varying opinions than those found by the current study.

Overall, it can be concluded that Cuban Americans' lack of participation in past social movements is not only attributed to socioeconomic class or political affiliation. There is a unique and intricate background that places Cuban immigrants in an interesting position, different from other Latinx immigrants. The findings of the current study demonstrate that there are an array of reasons and background information that contribute to Cuban Americans history of disengagement. In turn, the researcher encourages future research to focus on the uniqueness of each individual immigrant group when attempting to create policy or mobilize voters. Not all Latinx communities, or immigrant communities at that, can be reached and educated in the same manner. By understanding where they differ and where they align, a more structured path can be built to reach all immigrant communities.

APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board

FWA00000351
IRB00001138, IRB00012110
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

June 2, 2022

Dear Carolina Alonso Domech:

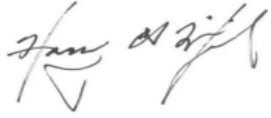
On 6/2/2022, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Exempt 2ii
Title:	"History of the Cuban Diaspora and Responses to July 2021 Protest in Cuba: An in-depth Examination of an Emerging Social Movement."
Investigator:	Carolina Alonso Domech
IRB ID:	STUDY00003917
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C. Alonso Thesis Domegraphics Survey .docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire; • C. Alonso Thesis Interview Guide.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions; • HRP 254 with revisions, Category: Consent Form; • HRP 255 with revisions, Category: IRB Protocol;

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harry Wingfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "H".

Harry Wingfield
Designated Reviewer

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