Forming A Puerto Rican Identity In Orlando: The Puerto Rican Migration To Central Florida, 1960 - 2000

Julio R. Firpo

University of Central Florida

Part of the Public History Commons

Find similar works at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd

University of Central Florida Libraries http://library.ucf.edu

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2004-2019 by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

STARS Citation

https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/2127
FORMING A PUERTO RICAN IDENTITY IN ORLANDO: THE PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION TO CENTRAL FLORIDA, 1960-2000

by

JULIO R. FIRPO
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2012
© 2012 Julio R. Firpo
ABSTRACT

The Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area became the fastest growing Puerto Rican population since 1980. While the literature has grown regarding Orlando’s Puerto Rican community, no works deeply analyze the push and pull factors that led to the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to Central Florida. In fact, it was the combination of deteriorating economies in both Puerto Rico and New York City (the two largest concentrations of Puerto Ricans in the United States) and the rise of employment opportunities and cheap cost of living in Central Florida that attract Puerto Ricans from the island the diaspora to the region. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans who migrated to the region established a support network that further facilitated future migration and created a Puerto Rican community in the region.

This study uses the combination of primary sources including government document (e.g. U.S. Censuses, Orange County land deeds, etc.), local and nation newspapers, and oral histories from Puerto Ricans living in Central Florida since the early 1980s to explain the process in which Puerto Ricans formed their identity in Orlando since 1980. The result is a history of the Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida and the roots of Orlando’s Puerto Rican community.

---

Dedicated to all future pioneers.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Ezekiel Walker and Dr. Fon Gordon for their guidance throughout my entire graduate program. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Luis Martínez-Fernández for advising me every step on the way to completing this manuscript and for making sure I created a product I would be proud of. These three professors pushed me intellectually to accomplish more than I thought capable of myself.

I could not have completed this process without my peers and seniors throughout the graduate program, especially Michael, Lindsey, David, Eric, Lew, Keegan, Daniel, Russell, and Austin. I would also like to thank my seniors, Mike, Lindsey, and David, for providing me their experienced perspectives and helping me in forming my framework.

I owe thanks to the librarians in the Orange County Public Library, University of Central Florida, University of Florida, and the archivists in Florida State Archives. I owe a special thanks to Richard Gause at the University of Central Florida, who took much of his precious time to aid me in finding crucial data for my research.

I also want to extend my gratitude to all participants in the “Puerto Ricans in Central Florida, 1940s-1980s: A History” and those who met with me personally to provide me their stories and insight to the Puerto Rican experience in Central Florida. The process was both enlightening and taught me much about my own experience and identity.

At last, I would like to thank my family: my brothers, Rafael and Jaime, for believing in me more than I believed in myself; and my parents, José Raúl and Lissette, for molding me into the man I am today. Most of all, I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Silver for teaching me how to be a scholar. Thank you, for everything.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA ................................. 18

CHAPTER TWO: FLORIDA AND THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA ........................................ 38

CHAPTER THREE: THE PUERTO RICAN PIONEERS IN CENTRAL FLORIDA .................... 58

CHAPTER FOUR: THE MASS PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION TO CENTRAL FLORIDA .......... 70

CHAPTER FIVE: FORMING THE PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL FLORIDA ...... 87

CHAPTER SIX: THE DIVERSIFICATION OF CENTRAL FLORIDA’S PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY ............................................................................................................................... 103

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................................. 121

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................................... 125
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Landstar Advertisement ............................................................................................................. 55
Figure 2: Monterey Subdivision Land Deed.................................................................................................. 63
Figure 3: Florida Census Tract 405.03 – Buena Ventura Lakes................................................................. 72
Figure 4: Asociación Borinqueña Clubhouse on Econlockhatchee Trail .............................................. 91
Figure 5: Batey Dancers......................................................................................................................... 92
Figure 6: Puerto Ricans Celebrating at the University of Central Florida, 1982............................... 93
Figure 7: La Casa de Puerto Rico ........................................................................................................... 109
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area Population, 1970-1990 ........................................ 47
Table 2: Central Florida Puerto Rican Population by County, 1990.................................................. 70
Table 3: Selected Orange County Census Tracts, 1990...................................................................... 71
INTRODUCTION

From 2001 to 2007, Orange County, Florida (where the city of Orlando resides in) was the number one destination for Puerto Ricans moving from Puerto Rico to the United States, approximately 10.1 percent of the migrants relocating. Also in the top ten was Osceola County—another county within the Orlando Metropolitan region—which came in eight place with 1.7 percent. Combined, the number of Puerto Ricans migrating to Central Florida was over twice the number of any other region in the United States mainland. In the year 2010, there were 269,781 Puerto Ricans living in the Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Over the course of the past fifty years, Central Florida became the fastest growing Puerto Rican community in the nation.

For most of the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans did not migrate in large numbers to Florida. Yet something changed during the last third the century that led to a consistent growth of migrants heading to the state: in 1960, there were only 19,535 Puerto Ricans (2.2 percent of the total Puerto Rican population in the United States, not including Puerto Rico); in 1970, 28,166 (2.0 percent); in 1980, 94,775 (4.7 percent); in 1990, 247,010 (9.1 percent); in 2000, 482,027 (14.2 percent); and 2010, 847,550 (20.1 percent). Meanwhile, New York underwent a drastic decline in its percentage of Puerto Ricans: from 72 percent in 1960 to 25.8 percent in 2008. Puerto Ricans began choosing Florida over New York and specifically, Central Florida over New York City. What led to the shift in destination preference?

---

2 U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 U.S. Census, retrieved from PRCF Journal, 8.
3 U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 U.S. Census.
4 U.S. Census Bureau, 1960 Census; U.S. Census Bureau, 1980 Census; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey; all previously mentioned sources retrieved from PRCF Journal, p. 8.
5 Ibid.
Furthermore, why did Puerto Ricans not migrate to Florida before, considering how close it is to the island of Puerto Rico which is just a two hour flight by plane?

Every migration pattern is dictated by the union between push and pull factors that lead a people from their native home to establish themselves in the frontier—a frontier not necessarily unpopulated, but rather unsettled by the respective migrants. The two primary push factors are economic downturns and persecution (i.e. political, religious, and xenophobic). In regards to pull factors, either political amnesty and/or the allure of opportunity draw most migrants to their destinations. From the Puritans searching for religious freedom in the seventeenth century, the Irish fleeing the Great Famine in the nineteenth, to the Cuban emigres seeking political refuge in the twentieth, all these movements towards the United States arose from dire circumstances in the origin land in hand with the chance at the “American Dream” in America, even when facing discrimination upon arrival.

The Puerto Rican diaspora is no different. Puerto Ricans facing hardships and economic turmoil on the island often practiced their agency by migrating to the U.S. mainland throughout the twentieth century. For most of the century, the primary destination of the diaspora was New York City. This changed, however, in 1980; the economic declines of New York City and Puerto Rico during the 1970s pushed Puerto Rican migrants away from these two traditional homes. Compounded with the growing allure of Orlando (i.e. a growing labor demand, the demise of Jim Crow and institutionalized racism, and the prominence of cheap land), Central Florida became the Puerto Rican diaspora’s primary destination. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans quickly etched their mark on the region, creating a nurturing community that fostered further migration to the region.
This shift in the migration patterns of the Puerto Rican nation led to a reinterpretation of what drives mass migrations of the Puerto Rican people.

**Puerto Ricans in Central Florida Literature Review**

The Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida did not surface into academic discourse until the past decade. In 2004, the Greater Orlando Chamber of Commerce convened a Hispanic Summit to overview the scope of Hispanic impact on the Orlando SMA.\(^6\) Out of this summit came “Puerto Ricans in Orlando and Central Florida: A Preliminary Assessment,” written by Jorge Duany, a professor of sociology and anthropology, and Félix V. Matos-Rodríguez, professor of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies. Duany and Matos-Rodríguez’s report outlines the origins to the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida, the historical background of the migration, Puerto Rican settlement patterns, and cultural aspects of the community. The report further illustrates potential research agendas and routes for future scholars to follow. Duany and Matos-Rodríguez laid the ground work for the scholarship on both the Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida and development of the Puerto Rican community in Orlando.\(^7\)

The next work to look at Puerto Ricans in Orlando was the dissertation “Where Two or More Are Gathered: The Inclusion of Puerto Ricans in Multiethnic Latino Parishes in Southeastern United States,” written by Susan E. Eichenberger in 2004. Eichenberger used Puerto Ricans in the Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as a case study for looking at

---


\(^7\) Jorge Duany and Félix V. Matos-Rodríguez, “Puerto Ricans in Orlando and Central Florida: A Preliminary Assessment” (Orlando: Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce, 2004).
how Catholic Puerto Rican church leaders interpret identity, transnationalism, and multiethnicism and the resulting discourses between leaders and their congregations.  

Another academic work to discuss pull factors for Puerto Ricans relocating to Orlando was Irma Olmedo’s “Voices of Our Past: Using Oral History to Explore Funds of Knowledge within a Puerto Rican Family,” published in 2005. The article discusses ways in which school teachers could use oral histories from student’s family members as a teaching tool. Olmedo used her family members residing in Orlando as a case study for Puerto Rican oral histories, inquiring as to why they chose to move to Orlando.

Olmedo’s contribution to the scholarship on the Puerto Ricans in Central Florida study is twofold. First, she illuminates how her relatives chose to follow her grandmother, the family matriarch, to Orlando. Through interviewing her family, Olmedo illustrates the existence of relatives and friends in the region being a factor in the Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida. Second, the article provides an example of utilizing oral histories as primary research otherwise inaccessible. Olmedo discovered the motivations behind her family’s migration to Central Florida. Through the collection of more oral histories, trends become apparent and shed more light behind the migration.

While previous scholars were social scientists, Cynthia Cardona Meléndez was the first historian to contribute to the historiography of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. Cardona Meléndez wrote her History master’s thesis on the Puerto Rican community in Orlando. “The Emergence of Central Florida’s Puerto Rican Community,” defended in 2007, provides an

---

overview of the Puerto Rican migration from the island to the mainland, and further details the development of the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida.\textsuperscript{10} Cardona Meléndez analyzes the Puerto Rican population and creation of cultural institutions throughout Orange, Seminole, and Osceola counties.

In his 2008 dissertation, “Puerto Rico’s 79th Municipality?”, geographer Luis Sánchez identifies four Puerto Rican enclaves in Central Florida: Orlando, Kissimmee, Buena Ventura Lakes, and Poinciana; Sánchez labeled the regions as areas of “considerable concentrations,” but not “high density.”\textsuperscript{11} Sánchez’s work is primarily a qualitative analysis of the Central Florida Puerto Rican migration, based on interviews, identifying “Puerto Ricanness” and corresponding spaces, and the agency Puerto Ricans practice in redefining the local spaces and culture. Sánchez argues that Central Florida’s Puerto Rican community is a hybrid community: the juxtaposition of (1) developing cultural, social, economic, religious, and (2) political institutions that is “evidence of their determination to stay,” and integrating the “dominant Anglo culture” quickly, and some form of integration acceptance.\textsuperscript{12}

Another geographer, Ramón Luis Concepción Torres, also wrote his Master’s thesis on Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida. In his 2008 thesis, “Puerto Rican Migration, Settlement Patterns, and Assimilation in the Orlando Area,” Concepción Torres approaches Puerto Rican migration using quantitative methods, as opposed to Sánchez’s qualitative approach. Through data sets such as U.S. Census tables, Arc GIS Mapping, and focus groups, Concepción Torres concludes that the Puerto Ricans migrating to Central Florida are not settling


\textsuperscript{12} Sánchez, 107.
in black neighborhoods, as typically seen in the U.S. northeast, but instead among white residential areas.\footnote{Ramón Luis Concepción Torres, “Puerto Rican Migration, Settlement Patterns, and Assimilation in the Orlando MSA,” M.A. thes., Binghamton University, 2008, 113-114.}

According to Concepción Torres’ defining an enclave as areas with one core census tract with twenty-five percent of the population being Puerto Rican and surrounding census tracts being twenty percent or higher, he identifies four enclaves: east Orlando, primarily the neighborhoods from Semoran Boulevard to Dean Road; Buena Ventura Lakes, on the Orange-Osceola Border; Kissimmee, located near Disney World; and Poinciana, at the southern tip of Osceola.\footnote{Concepción Torres, 37-39.} Concepción Torres and Sánchez both arrived to the same conclusion: Puerto Ricans who migrated to Central Florida brought with them their culture and identity, and established a sense of *puertorriqueñidad*, or “Puerto Ricanness.”

**Central Florida Historiography**

A study on the impact Puerto Ricans had on Central Florida would be insufficient without contextualizing it within Orlando’s historiography. Orlando’s settlement dates back to the end of the Second Seminole War, in which pioneers began settling in Central Florida during the 1840s and 1850s.\footnote{Jerrell H. Shofner, *Orlando, the City Beautiful* (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, 1984), 30.} Before Walt Disney chose Orlando as the home for his Magic Kingdom, the small city’s economy was based around citrus production and military engineering contracts. With Disney came a seemingly overnight transformation into a tourism-driven economy, resulting in a sudden demand increase of labor. Now, the city is one of the main tourist destinations in the
world, home to high-tech firms and businesses, has one of the fastest growing Puerto Rican populations.

Published in 1984, Historian Jerrell H. Shofner’s *Orlando, the City Beautiful* narrates the history of Orlando. It covers the founding of Orlando and its early settlements, and then follows its transformation to a farming community, primarily comprised of orange groves. The book concludes with the shift toward tourism and high-tech business firms that occurred in the 1970s and into the 1980s. *Orlando: the City Beautiful* highlights the importance Disney and other theme parks played in Orlando’s rise, both in population and popularity. Shofner also notes the role Kennedy Space Center played in drawing corporations in the high-tech industry sector and the development of Florida Technological University (renamed the University of Central Florida in 1978). However, the work spends little time on the impact the U.S. military played in the region, especially considering Central Florida had four operating bases during World War II and the Cold War (Orlando Air Force Base, 1940-1949, 1951-1966; McCoy Air Force Base, 1940-1947, 1951-1975; and Naval Air Station Sanford, 1942-46, 1950-1968).

Orlando’s explosive development in the latter half of the twentieth century did not occur in a vacuum: it fits the trends that occurred throughout Florida. Gary Momino’s *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida*, published in 2005, puts Orlando within the context of Florida’s modern transformation. Mormino attributes Central Florida’s growth to the rise of tourism, the proximity to Kennedy Space Center, and the impact real estate had on the region. Mormino also looks at the influence of Hispanics in Florida. Although the
majority the chapter focuses on Cubans in south Florida, he includes a section on the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida.\textsuperscript{16}

In regards to measuring the impact of Disney World, political scientist Richard E. Foglesong’s \textit{Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando} provides the best insight at explaining how impactful Disney was in reshaping Central Florida. Foglesong provides a history of the Walt Disney Corporation’s negotiations with the city of Orlando, Orange County, and Osceola County governments and explaining how Disney acquired its land and autonomy in Central Florida. Foglesong argues that Disney’s presence and the ensuing tourist economy led to stagnant wages and limited benefits for employees; nonetheless, the region benefited from record low unemployment in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{17} Foglesong’s book examines how the Disney Corporation transformed the region, creating thousands of new jobs and attracting migrants from across the globe, including Puerto Ricans.

Although Disney’s presence has since redefined Central Florida’s image as predominately a tourist region, if any tourist drove away from Orlando in any direction for more than thirty minutes, they would quickly discover Florida’s deep ties in Southern culture and identity. James C. Cobb’s book, \textit{Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity}, explains how Southern identity has been used by scholars, historians, novelists, and other popular writers in the early twentieth century in contrast to a northern, more acceptable culture, especially with the stain upon the South’s honor that was slavery.\textsuperscript{18} The process of southern states, especially Florida, reinterpreting their southern identity and culture to be less derogatory against blacks and

\textsuperscript{17} Richard E. Foglesong, \textit{Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 12.
other minorities played a pivotal role in immigration to the region. Since the end of Jim Crow in
the 1965, the South was no longer perceived as simply the part of the country that one’s race was
the primary indicator in how one was treated, leading to Hispanics and other immigrants being
more comfortable migrating to the region.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Puertorriqueñidad and Latinization}

Many scholars examine how latinization influenced other cities in the United States. One
specific example is \textit{Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York}, edited by Agustín Laó-
Montes and Arlene Dávila. In the introduction of the anthology, Agustín Laó-Montes states that
the concept of \textit{latinidad} derives itself from the Spanish Latin American culture, “with the Latino
identity refers to the specific positioning of peoples of Latin American and Caribbean descent
living in the United States.”\textsuperscript{20} The essays in \textit{Mambo Montage} explore Latino collective histories,
specifically how Latinos constructed latinidad in diaspora communities.

One essay in specific, “Making Loisaida: Placing Puertorriqueñidad in Lower
Manhattan,” written by Liz Ševčenko, looks at the development of the term, “El Barrio,” and
how Puerto Ricans redefined the Lower East Side landscape, creating a space of their own within
Manhattan.\textsuperscript{21} Through various social movements, such as the Nuyorican Movement, the Young
Lords Party, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, and the Puerto Rican Day Parade, Puerto Ricans

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Davila, Arlene and Augustín Laó-Montes, eds., \textit{Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York} (New York: New
\textsuperscript{21} Liz Ševčenko, “Making Loisaida: Placing Puertorriqueñidad in Lower Manhattan,” in \textit{Mambo Montage: The
\end{flushright}
mobilized to repair the deteriorating residential areas and perpetuate their puertorriqueñidad through celebrations, commemorations, and common histories.\textsuperscript{22}

Ševčenko specifically analyzed how activists, such as the Loisaida activists or the Young Lords organizations, constructed puertorriqueñidad by alluding to Puerto Ricans’ Afro-Indian roots and their working class heritage via the \textit{jíbaros}. Jíbaros, or peasants, were Puerto Rican self-sufficient farmers from the interior of the island. Loisaida activists used the jíbaros as a symbol of self-determination, relying on one’s own resources instead of relying on the dominant society that marginalized the activists. Another avenue in which Puerto Ricans displayed their identity was through music and celebrations. One example was “La Bomba,” a Puerto Rican folk music genre that relies heavily on African beats, again alluding to their “Afro-Boricua culture.”\textsuperscript{23} Puerto Ricans extended puertorriqueñidad onto the mainland.

Jorge Duany’s book, \textit{The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States}, explains how Puerto Ricans constructed their identity, both on the island and on the mainland. Duany recounts how Puerto Ricans on the island developed a national and cultural pride movement throughout the twentieth century. These mainland Puerto Rican populations developed transnational communities throughout the U.S. mainland. Duany claims that Puerto Rican migrants and their descendants in the mainland “have not completely assimilated into American culture, if the measure of assimilation is discarding Spanish and replacing it with the English language, becoming a hyphenated ethnic minority, or abandoning their emotional attachment to the Island.”\textsuperscript{24} Directly as a result of this categorization of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{22} Ibid., 304-307.
\bibitem{23} Ševčenko, 305.
\end{thebibliography}
transnational community as a result of rejecting assimilation, Puerto Ricans in Central Florida did not assimilate at the turn of the 1980s; instead, they retained their cultural identity and developed a diasporic community as a result of this retention.

He further elaborates on how Puerto Ricans in the diaspora expanded the discourse of Puerto Rican identity beyond the shores of the island.\(^{25}\) Through the creation of formal organizations and informal festivities, puertorriqueñidad became the visual representation of a people both on and off the island. The organizations and celebrations also further perpetuated latinization throughout the mainland by facilitating Latino identities and cultures, such as retaining the Spanish language in the diasporic community. Duany uses the formation of organizations as early as the 1920s in New York City community, such as the Alianza Obrera Puertorriqueña, the Porto Rican League, and the Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana, to illustrate ways in which Puerto Ricans congregated and develop strong and cultural ties to both the islands and with other Puerto Ricans in the diaspora.\(^{26}\)

Prior to the 2000s, scholarship on latinization in the United States was typically associated with states bordering Mexico or cities in New York, New Jersey, and other northern states that with large Hispanics populations. Historian Raymond Mohl’s article, “Globalization, Latinization, and the Nuevo New South,” analyzes the Hispanic migration towards the US South caused by both the “globalization of markets” and “new American immigration policy.”\(^{27}\)

Mohl examines the influx of Hispanics in the U.S. southern states during the 1990s via the low wage earning Central American workers and working class Hispanics. By attempting to


\(^{26}\) Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation*, 185-207.

sustain and celebrate their cultural heritage and livelihood, the growing Central American population produced a latinization effect, the process of transforming social spaces in a local landscape, with characteristics associated with Latino traditions and aesthetics via the creation of social and cultural institutions (e.g. restaurants, grocery stores, music outlets, and festivals).  

By building off Mohl’s model of latinization, Patricia Buzato’s thesis, “Brazilian Immigration: A New View of Latinization,” overviews the Brazilian migration to Orlando. In academic scholarship regarding latinization, scholars often omitted Brazilians, as they do not share the common Spanish ancestry with the majority of Latin America and do not migrate in large numbers to the United States. Buzato examines the Brazilian community in Orlando and makes the case that Brazilians are inherently a part of the latinization process that historian Raymond Mohl defined in “Globalization, Latinization, and the Nuevo New South.” Buzato argues that Brazilians migrating to Central Florida carried out the same latinization process as other Latin Americans. She observes the similarities that both Brazilians and other Latin American workers suffer in the transition between their homeland and Central Florida. Furthermore, she analyzes how Brazilian institutions, such as Brazilian Protestant churches, eased the transitions for undocumented Brazilian workers, much like Hispanic churches did in other regions of the U.S. Buzato finds Brazilians applicable for Mohl’s model for latinization due to the characteristics shared between Brazilians in Central Florida and Mexicans in Alabama, specifically focusing on their essential roles in the low wage labor market.

28 Ibid., 429.
30 Buzato, 55-57.
31 Buzato, 69.
Mohl’s model is not the most appropriate in analyzing Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. Mohl focused primarily on Mexicans in North Carolina and Alabama who worked low wage labor in rural regions of the states. While a major portion of the labor force of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida during the mass migration was at entry-level industries, a significant portion of the migration included professionals and entrepreneurs. The Puerto Rican community in Central Florida is more comparable with the Cuban community in south Florida. Both Orlando and Miami are SMAs with significant Hispanic populations, and Puerto Ricans and Cubans are the largest Hispanic groups in each region, respectively. Puerto Ricans and Cubans both had mass migrations to Florida that predate the Hispanic population shift that Mohl references in his article. Lastly, both the Puerto Rican and Cuban migrations to Florida consisted of both college-educated and working class migrants, as opposed to strictly low-wage earning migrant workers that comprise the majority of the Central American migration into the U.S. South.

Many Puerto Ricans underwent a culture shock after moving from a racially mixed, Latin American island to a southern U.S. state with a binary racial system, a similar experience Cubans faced when they arrived in Miami in the early 1960s. Havana USA, written by Marí Cristina García, focuses on Cubans in Miami. García splits the book into two sections: the first focuses on the emigration from Cuba to Miami, one chapter on the migration before the 1980 and the second focusing on Mariel boatlift and its consequences. She relies primarily on the American press to document the Cuban emigration to Miami, but also included accounts from Cubans.
The second part of the book explores how they rediscovered their identity in their new south Florida home, redefining sections of the Miami landscape to incorporate *cubanidad*. Cubans felt obligated to protect their identity. One example was the retention of Spanish as the most important language for their community. They established *bodegas*—Spanish grocery markets—and other Cuban businesses along Calle Ocho (Southwest 8th Street), which became the center of Little Havana. They also immersed themselves into the media, and created periodicals and Spanish-language radio stations. Cubans published hundreds of *periodiquitos*, small newspapers, often in the form of political tabloids with hefty amounts of anti-Castro rhetoric. Another outlet Cubans utilized was radio, with at least ten Spanish-language radio stations broadcasting in south Florida by the late 1980s.

In recent years, more focus was put on the growing Puerto Rican community in Central Florida. In the summer of 2010, the *Centro Journal* of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies published an issue dedicated to the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida. The issue contained eleven articles from scholars from various disciplines including sociology, anthropology, history, education, and political science. The topics focus primarily on social issues, economics, political agency, and education of Puerto Ricans in the region from the 1990s on. Only the introduction essay, authored by Jorge Duany and Patricia Silver, briefly covers the history of Puerto Ricans in Florida, and focuses most of its attention to Central Florida.

---

33 García, 88-90.
34 Ibid., 86-119.
36 Ibid., 106-108.
Orlando is quickly becoming the Puerto Rican equivalent of Little Havana. Historian Luis Martínez-Fernández dubbed it “Puerto Rico’s 79th municipality,” as the Orlando’s Puerto Rican population in 2003 exceeded those in all of Puerto Rico’s seventy-eight municipalities except San Juan. But what led to this significant Puerto Rican population growth? What specifically drew Puerto Ricans to Central Florida as opposed to traditional settlement regions, such as New York City or Chicago? The most common cause of migrations is economic needs, specifically the need of employment. This alone does not explain the shift towards Orlando and Kissimmee, however. Moreover, what implications did this Latino group have on the Orlando SMA?

**Contribution and Methodology**

While social scientists recently began analyzing the Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida, the historiography on the subject remains limited. This study aims to use new data and sources in understanding the shift in the Puerto Rican diaspora towards Central Florida and the implications of the Puerto Rican community in Greater Orlando. In this discussion of a diasporic community, it is important to distinguish between a marginal ethnic population and when said population transforms into an ethnic community.

Anthropologist Jorge Duany argues a Puerto Rican community is linked to the island by an “intense circular movement of people, identities, and practices.” In the case of Orlando, this circular movement and retention of both identities and practices between the region and the island did not start until the 1980s. In this thesis, I argue that this decade marked the beginning of

---

39 Duany, 5.
Central Florida’s Puerto Rican community, sparked by declining living conditions and unemployment in Puerto Rico and New York City which occurred at the same time that Central Florida’s economy was on the rise since Disney World’s opening in 1971. Thousands of Puerto Ricans relocated to Orlando, Kissimmee, and other surrounding towns and cities in the region. Over the next two decades, this population reaffirmed its identity and redefined the Central Florida landscape to include this newly formed community.

In addition to working with the secondary literature from previous scholars, both historians and social scientists, I analyzed several collections of primary sources to distinguish between a small, perhaps assimilated Puerto Rican population in Central Florida and a thriving, diasporic community. I’ve analyzed at the newspaper collections, primarily but not limited to the Orlando Sentinel, the main newspaper of record for Orlando, and La Prensa, the longest running Spanish-language newspaper in Central Florida, running from 1980 to present. I also utilized government resources, including U.S. census records and local government agencies’ records (e.g. Orange County Comptroller’s Office, Orange County School Board).

Another useful source in analyzing puertorriqueñidad in Central Florida was the “Puerto Ricans in Central Florida, 1940s-1980s: A History” oral history project. By gathering these new primary sources and building off the secondary sources, this work contributes to the scholarship threefold: it adds a new chapter to the greater history of the Puerto Rican diaspora history; it expands on current Florida history to include the contributions of Puerto Ricans in the

---

40 Directed by Patricia Silver and Natalie Underberg, the project comprises of oral history interviews from Puerto Ricans who moved to Central Florida between the 1940s and 1990s. The project aimed at discovering the reasons why Puerto Ricans decided to settle in Central Florida; hereafter cited as PRCF History.
Central Florida region; and it provides a new research model for the current “latinization of the U.S. South” paradigm, used by historian Raymond Mohl.

If this thesis analyzes how Puerto Ricans impacted Orlando and Central Florida, it is first important to distinguish what geographic spaces are being discussed. There are several interpretations to what defines “Central Florida” as opposed to central Florida, which signifies the entirety of peninsula’s central landmass—from the eastern Space Coast to the western Gulf Coast. In this work, I use the terms Central Florida and Greater Orlando synonymously with the Orlando MSA according to the 1990 U.S. Census, which encompasses Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties. Since then, the U.S. Census Bureau has expanded the Orlando MSA to include other counties such as Lake, but for the sake of consistency, when referring to Central Florida or Greater Orlando, I refer to these three counties unless otherwise noted.

This work is splits the Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida into three sections. First, it provides the push factors (Chapter 1) and pull factors (Chapter 2) behind the move towards Central Florida. Next, it details the Puerto Rican migration to the region, starting with how early Puerto Rican migrants influenced future migration (Chapter 3), and both qualifying and quantifying the 1980s mass migration (Chapter 4). Last, it explains how Puerto Ricans interpreted their identity in the region and carved out their own community (Chapter 5) and how the community evolved over the 1990s into a legitimized part of Central Floridian society (Chapter 6). The combination of these sections explains how Puerto Ricans redefined Central Florida landscape in their image, with flags and Puerto Rican shops spread throughout the metropolitan area.
CHAPTER ONE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA

U.S. political and corporate interests shaped Puerto Rico’s politics and economy since the U.S. acquired the island in 1898. Puerto Rico became an increasingly convenient source of labor, both for the mainland and in other U.S. territories. When Congress gave U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans in 1917 via the Jones Act, Puerto Rican movement between the island and the mainland increased drastically. U.S. companies and enterprises began recruiting Puerto Ricans to work in the states, which lead to the formation of several Puerto Rican communities throughout the mainland. Puerto Ricans also emigrated from the island independent of labor recruitment, choosing to move to the mainland in search of better jobs and opportunities.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the primary destinations for the majority of Puerto Rican migrants were northern U.S. cities, especially New York City. The primary push factors behind the diaspora were the economic downturns on the island. In his article “Mobile Livelihoods,” Jorge Duany explains further, “In response to shifting economic circumstances in the United States and Puerto Rico, people may seek better employment opportunities elsewhere and maximize their resources by moving constantly.”

But why were Puerto Ricans migrating to northern states when there were much closer states, specifically Florida? The distance between San Juan and Miami is just over one thousand miles, one of the most direct paths between the island and the mainland. Instead, for the first half of the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans settled in regions much further, including Hawaii,

---

42 Travelmath, “The flight distance from Miami, Florida to Puerto Rico is;,” http://www.travelmath.com/flight-distance/from/Miami,+FL/to/Puerto+Rico.
one of the farthest U.S. territories from Puerto Rico. This was in major part due to the recruitment of Puerto Ricans by labor contractors during the first half of the twentieth century.

**The Early Puerto Rican Diaspora**

The first major Puerto Rican migration after the U.S. acquired the island was to another recently acquired U.S. territory, Hawaii. The Puerto Rican migration to Hawaii was the first of many moments in the Puerto Rican experience in which American contractors attempted to recruit Puerto Ricans from the island as a cheap labor source. Recruited by the Hawaii Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) from 1900 to 1901 looking for domestic non-Asian sugarcane cutters, 5,000 Puerto Ricans embarked on an arduous journey from Puerto Rico to New Orleans via boat, then to San Francisco by train, and then sailed once again across the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii. Almost half of the Puerto Ricans recruited escaped en route due to lack of “proper clothing and medical attention promised on the way.” Those who continued the trek to Hawaii were greeted by harsh working conditions, hazardous living spaces, malnourishment, low wages, and other forms of mistreatment by both their employers and island natives.

Historian Carmen Teresa Whalen argues that the Hawaii labor recruitment of Puerto Ricans by U.S. companies was the trendsetter for the Puerto Rican diaspora, a diaspora defined by labor movement and primarily influenced by economic hardships on the island. Another commonality between this first movement and future migrations is the resistance to Puerto Rican

---

settlements by the dominant society, be it through stereotypes, racism, or violence. The Puerto Ricans in Hawaii also developed cultural institutions such as baseball clubs, a Puerto Rican radio program, and a civic club, to retain their identity in the midst of the frontier.

Questions of Puerto Rican’s citizenship arose immediately after the United States acquired Puerto Rico from Spain in 1898. No longer Spanish citizens but also not U.S. citizens either, Puerto Ricans simply remained with “Puerto Rican citizenship,” an ambiguous status: citizens of a stateless nation. In a 1904 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, Puerto Ricans were considered not “alien immigrants,” but the Court did not rule on their status of U.S. citizenship, and thus the U.S. Constitution did not necessarily apply to them. As result of the 1904 decision, Puerto Ricans became capable of entering the U.S. mainland without the restrictions faced by other foreigners. By 1910, 1,513 Puerto Ricans lived in the mainland (not including 3,510 in Hawaii).

The question of citizenship was finally answered over a decade later. In 1917, the U.S. Congress passed The Jones-Shafroth Act which gave Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship, a Senate to be elected by popular vote, their own bill of rights, and fully authorized the position and election of the four year termed Resident Commissioner, a position stationed at Washington D.C. By gaining citizenship, Puerto Ricans gained some rights of the U.S. citizens, along with some of their responsibilities, such as eligibility for military service via a draft. Another result of Puerto Ricans acquiring citizenship was the fact that movement between the island and the mainland

---

smoother for migrants; by 1920, 11,811 Puerto Ricans had migrated to the mainland, nearly two-thirds of them in New York City (7,364, 62.4 percent).  

The U.S. War Department discovered a new labor supply in their newly acquired U.S. citizens. The first major Puerto Rican movement to the U.S. South was a direct result of the World War I war effort in 1918. That year, the war department transported 13,233 Puerto Ricans men to southern cities to work on military bases and defense industries: in New Orleans, LA; Wilmington, NC; Charleston, SC; Brunswick, GA; and Savannah, GA. Puerto Ricans quickly suffered from inhospitable conditions and discrimination from their employers and U.S. servicemen. By 1920, only a handful remained in the southern states, with just a few over 200 collectively in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Out of the 2,774 that left to work in New Orleans, only 114 Puerto Ricans stayed. The majority instead chose to leave the southern states.

While the U.S. South only saw a handful of Puerto Rican migrants, granting citizenship to Puerto Ricans led to a drastic growth in the Puerto Rican diaspora towards the mainland. “Displaced by economic change at home, recruited as a source of cheap labor, and seeking work to improve their lives,” as Whalen explains, “Puerto Ricans boarded steamships and came to the States in large numbers.” In 1920, the Puerto Rican population in the U.S. was less than 12,000; by 1940, it was near 70,000, with majority in New York City. During this era of the

---

52 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1950 U.S. Census of the Population, vol. 4 Special Reports, Pt. 3, located in Puerto Ricans in the Continental United States, Table A, 3D-4D.
54 Ibid, 19-20, 24.
56 Ibid.
migration, New York City became synonymous with the mainland, as the city was the primary destination for migrants.

During the interwar period, the largest increase was in New York City’s Puerto Rican population, which grew from 7,364 in 1920 to 61,463 in 1940, consisting of almost 88 percent of the Puerto Rican population in the mainland. Sociologist Virginia E. Sánchez Korrol outlines the two major factors that led to the development of New York City’s Puerto Rican community. The first was the transition on the island from primarily local-owned coffee haciendas to American-owned absentee sugar plantations. The overall acreage devoted to sugar grew from 26.2 percent in 1899 to 49.3 percent in 1929, as compared with the coffee, which shrank from 71.6 percent to 39.7 percent as U.S. capitalists invested into and dominated the market. During this transformation, many small farm owners gave up their land holdings and workers lost their jobs and agregado (aggregate) status as a result of new taxes, credit limitations, and the lower value of Puerto Rican currency due to American acquisition of the island. Many peasants began migrating both within the island and away from the island in search of better economic opportunities.

The second major factor that led to the Puerto Rican migration to New York City was the restrictions to European immigration to the U.S. mainland legislated after World War I. In 1921, Congress passed the Johnson Act of 1921, which restricted the number of yearly immigrants.

---

60 Sánchez Korrol, 17-28.
from a specific country to 3 percent based off their respective population according to the 1910 U.S. Census. The revised Johnson Act of 1924 further restricted immigration to 2 percent of the number of immigrants in 1890. The revision in 1929 standardized the total annual quota to 150,000 immigrants. Puerto Ricans now carried U.S. citizenship, exempting them from such quotas. As the amount of blue-collar jobs in industrial sectors of the city continued to rise, the immigration restrictions halted the steady supply of European laborers that typically held such positions. Hence, Puerto Ricans displaced by the agricultural, and economic, shifts on island found opportunities in New York City in jobs traditionally held by European immigrants.61

In every instance, the two main causes of early mass Puerto Rican migration away from the island towards the United States was the economic downturn on the island and concomitant rise in unemployment, in addition to the abundance of job opportunities away from the island, toward the mainland and other U.S. territories. This premise of an economic-driven migration remained the reoccurring theme of the Puerto Rican diaspora, reoccurring throughout the twentieth century as the primary motivation behind Puerto Ricans decision to leave the island and migrate to the mainland.

**Post-World War II Puerto Rican Exodus**

World War II came to a close and Puerto Rico underwent another economic transition as both mainland and island policymakers chose to modernize via industrialization. The end of World War II brought about the beginning of the Great Migration, in which Puerto Ricans began migrating to the mainland in unprecedented numbers. During this thirty year post-war era, the Puerto Rican population in the United States (not including the island) grew from 69,967 in 1940

---

to 1,391,463 in 1970.\textsuperscript{62} New York City continued to be the primary destination for Puerto Rican migrants: in 1940, the city’s Puerto Rican population was 61,463; in 1970, it reached 817,712.\textsuperscript{63} However, other Puerto Ricans settled in other urban locations throughout the mainland, especially Chicago, Philadelphia, and Bridgeport, Connecticut. In 1950, only 2,555 Puerto Ricans lived in Chicago, 1,910 in Philadelphia, and 590 in Bridgeport. In 1970, those populations grew to 79,582; 26,948; and 10,048, respectively.\textsuperscript{64}

Economic conditions on the island continued to displace Puerto Rican workers. In Puerto Rico’s attempt to industrialize in the wake of World War II left many agricultural workers in search of jobs in Puerto Rico’s urban regions and the mainland. Contract laborers used advertisements successfully to recruited thousands of Puerto Ricans to work in agricultural fields and industrial sectors in the states. Other Puerto Ricans chose to emigrate away from the island to find employment on their own, instead relying on support networks of family and friends to aid them in their search for better economic opportunities. Even while Puerto Rico’s economy was growing at this time, the push factor for this migration was also the lack in employment opportunities on the island for displaced workers and the pull towards the mainland was the increasing labor demand in both agricultural and industrial regions of the states. But this time, Puerto Ricans began settling in regions such as the Midwest and New England regions, along with the previously settled community in New York.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
After World War II, both Puerto Rican policymakers and U.S. corporate interests shifted their goals for both the land and people of Puerto Rico. To combat the uncertainty of sugar and unemployment, the Puerto Rican government aimed to industrialize Puerto Rico by initiating Operación Manos a las Obras, or Operation Bootstrap. The program’s goal was “industrialization by invitation,” that is, the industrialization of Puerto Rico via attracting U.S. companies to invest in labor-intensive industries on the island by giving them economic advantages such as exemptions to property, excise, municipal and insular income taxes and licensing fees. While the Jones Act already gave individuals and corporations exemptions from federal income taxes, the Puerto Rican policymakers learned that Puerto Rico could not just be “attractive,” but had to be “irresistible,” as economic historian James Dietz characterizes it. Operation Bootstrap shifted the island’s economy from an agricultural economy to labor-intensive industries, especially the textiles industry.

A common result of industrialization is urbanization, Puerto Rico being no exception. Just as before at the beginning of the century with the agricultural shift towards sugar as the main cash crop of the island, the transition to industrialization left rural peasants and farmworkers displaced once again. Thus, they began migrating towards coastal urban regions of Puerto Rico, such as San Juan, Ponce, Mayagüez, and Aguadilla. Between 1940 and 1950, the urban population saw a 58 percent growth. Puerto Rico also saw a simultaneous migration pattern: emigration from the island towards the mainland. In New York City alone, the Puerto Rican

---
67 Ibid, 207.
population grew from 61,463 in 1940 to 187,420 in 1950, representing 82.9 percent of the total mainland population at the time.\(^{69}\)

Island policymakers claimed that “overpopulation” led to the drastic migration shift toward the mainland, and deemed the outflow as a “safety valve” for the island and deemed it as essential to raise the standard of living for the rest of the island.\(^{70}\) Puerto Rico’s legislation created the Migration Division within the Labor Department in 1948 to facilitate “follow[ing] its migrant citizens to facilitate their adjustment and adaptation in the communities in which they chose to live.”\(^{71}\) While according to Public Law 25 the government’s official position was to not “stimulate or discourage the migration of Puerto Rican workers to the United States or any other foreign country,” Puerto Rico’s policymakers still endorsed contract labor programs. The Migration Division promoted contract labor programs that relocated women to Chicago and Philadelphia to work as domestics or in the garment industry, and men to Midwestern and New England states to work in agricultural industry and industrial sectors of urban centers, with their families soon following.\(^{72}\)

Sponsored labor migration played a significant role in the development of the Puerto Rican communities in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Bridgeport. Nicholas de Genova and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas explain the “primary motivation for steering Puerto Rican migration to Chicago”


\(^{70}\) Whalen, “Colonialism,” 28; Dietz, Economic History, 228.


was due to “manufacturing jobs in New York City...quickly disappearing by the late 1950s.”\textsuperscript{73} Instead, labor contractors routed Puerto Rican workers to the Midwest, with many Puerto Ricans settling in Chicago, primarily in the North Side of Chicago. While many Puerto Ricans went to urban centers, farmworking became the most prominent labor program, with between 10,000 and 17,000 contracted farmworkers that came to the mainland between 1950 and 1960.\textsuperscript{74}

In the Puerto Rican migration to Chicago, men typically left before the rest of the family to secure employment and housing. The primary field of employment for Puerto Rican males was blue-collar jobs in the industrial sectors of the city. Once situated, they would often bring the rest of their immediate family: wives, children, and future brides in the case of single men.\textsuperscript{75} Puerto Rican women in Chicago worked predominately in domestic services, including “cooks, maids, clothes washers, nursemaids, and for general housework” positions, detailed by Puerto Rican Studies professor Maura Toro-Morn in her history essay, “Boricuas en Chicago: Gender and Class in the Migration and Settlement of Puerto Ricans.”\textsuperscript{76} However, in most cases, Puerto Ricans could only secure housing in shoddy and run-down residential sectors of the city as a result of both “poverty” and a “stringent pattern of housing discrimination,” in which Toro-Morn’s quote illustrates the class struggle Puerto Ricans underwent in Chicago.\textsuperscript{77}

As in other cases in the diaspora, Chicago’s Puerto Rican community grew as a result of a search of cheap labor, and Puerto Ricans within the community suffered from racial

\textsuperscript{74} Whalen, “Colonialism,” 31.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 131.
discrimination. To compensate for the low wages, poor living conditions, and mistreatment they suffered, the Chicago Puerto Rican community developed social networks to aid new arrivals and those already living there. The community’s growth fostered the creation of bodegas, social clubs, civic organizations, and grass roots movements to ease the transition and nurture the culture in the community.  

In the northeast, many Puerto Rican migrant farmworkers who traveled to New Jersey and Pennsylvania left their contracted positions and relocated to Philadelphia. As historian Carmen Teresa Whalen elaborates, “The city seemed to offer jobs, housing, and a more hospitable environment.” Women became concentrated in manufacturing positions and men worked in both manufacturing and service industries. News spread to the surrounding labor contractors and Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican population continued to grow from 1950 to 1970, leading it to become the third largest Puerto Rican stateside population at the time.

Sponsored labor contractors also brought thousands of Puerto Ricans directly to fields and indirectly to factories in Connecticut. American labor contractors recruited Puerto Ricans to work in Connecticut’s tobacco fields. However, Puerto Ricans became disenanchanted due to hot fields and poor living conditions, many chose to migrate towards the cities: primarily Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford. Puerto Ricans easily found employment in the cities’ factories as a

---

78 Toro-Morn, 139.
result of the lack of European immigrant laborers that factory owners employed earlier in the century.\textsuperscript{81}

But the majority of Puerto Rican migration occurred outside the island government-sponsored labor programs, with individuals relying on social networks and pre-existing communities that fostered growth. The largest mainland community, New York City, grew through well-established social networks due to its existing Puerto Rican community. Puerto Rican men often helped family members and friends look for employment, usually in their own jobs. Puerto Rican women also played an integral role in the community. If they were not employed outside the household, they contributed via childcare and providing shelter for lodgers, new arrivals who typically were family or friends.\textsuperscript{82} Puerto Rican cultural institutions, usually in the form of social clubs, eased the transition for new migrants from the island to the city through providing jobs, shelter, and other forms of aid.\textsuperscript{83} Puerto Ricans who moved to New York City often had support in the form of family and friends or social agencies that aided in the transition.

To summarize, whether it was at the turn of the twentieth century with the recruitment of Puerto Rican agricultural workers to Hawaii, the contract workers that left the island for urban regions in the northeastern states, or Puerto Ricans opting of their own volition to relocate to previously established communities; all these movements were triggered by economic downturns on the island. By 1960, the direct result of U.S. corporate interests and attempts by island policymakers to modernize Puerto Rico led to 892,513 stateside Puerto Ricans aimed at making a better life throughout the mainland.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 184-186.
\textsuperscript{82} Sánchez Korrol, 96-107.
\textsuperscript{83} Jorge Duany, \textit{Nation}, 174.
\textsuperscript{84} U.S. Census Bureau, 1960 U.S. Census.
As a result of sponsored labor contracts, the post-World War II migration also dispersed the mainland Puerto Rican population throughout the mainland. Before the post-war migration era, Puerto Ricans were highly concentrated in New York City, comprising 87.8 percent of Puerto Ricans in the United States in 1940.\textsuperscript{85} Gradually decreasing through the following thirty years, only 58.5 percent resided in New York City by 1970. No longer confining themselves to one central urban center, Puerto Ricans continued to migrate to new destinations, including but not limited to Chicago, Philadelphia, and Bridgeport. This trend continued past 1970, and soon Puerto Ricans began settling in the U.S. South, specifically Florida.

Furthermore, in each case, Puerto Rican mainland communities also developed support networks that fostered community throughout the mainland populations. Puerto Ricans gathered together to form grassroots movements, social clubs, political organizations, and other cultural institutions in order to retain their identity amidst the diaspora. One of the primary effects of establishing these cultural homes outside the island was the facilitation of communal growth. Through the aid of family and friends in the community, Puerto Ricans gained economic and social advantages (e.g. job recommendations, temporary and long-term lodging, political representation) unavailable to the Puerto Rican pioneers who first arrived in their respective regions.

The major thrusts away from Puerto Rico were economic downturns and displaced workers; conversely, and the major draw to the mainland being job opportunities and other unavailable or limited economic incentives on the island. These two elements continued to define

the diaspora into the 1980s and 1990s, as Puerto Ricans still found it difficult to procure a stable job on the island during the 1970s and 1980s; meanwhile, the dominant diasporic community, New York City, also suffered from economic hardships through the 1970s. As such, the economic recession of the 1970s led the Puerto Rican diaspora to Florida.

The 1970s Economic Recessions of Puerto Rico and New York City

Since the turn of the twentieth century, if a Puerto Rican on the island suffered an economic crisis, he could move to New York where there was an abundance of jobs, other Puerto Ricans available for support, and seemingly limitless opportunities to start fresh. In the 1970s, this was no longer the case. Puerto Ricans became displaced as New York restructured its industrial economy into white-collar service positions, which caused poverty and unemployment in the community.86

Instead, some Puerto Ricans returned to the island, which was also in the midst of an economic turmoil. In 1967, American and Puerto Rican policymakers shifted Puerto Rico’s economy from labor-intensive enterprises to petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals.87 When the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) proclaimed an oil embargo in 1973 as result of the U.S. supplying the Israeli military during the Yom Kippur War, Puerto Rico underwent an economic crisis as a result of rising fuel prices and the island’s reliance on

petrochemical industries. Unemployment levels on the island rose past 10 percent throughout the 1970s and continued through the 1980s, reaching over 20 percent.\textsuperscript{88}

The changes that redirected the Puerto Rican diaspora towards Central Florida began in the 1970s. Both Puerto Rico and New York City suffered economically during the 1970s, leading to increased poverty and high numbers of unemployed Puerto Ricans in both settings. With the island hit hard by the 1970s economic recession, and the appeal of New York City fading, Puerto Ricans would have to search for a new region with better opportunities. This section of the chapter focuses on the changes in Puerto Rico, New York City, and Central Florida that shifted the Puerto Rican diaspora towards Orlando.

There were three stages of industrialization: stage one (1950-1963) was establishing labor-intensive industries; stage two (1967-1977) was the switch to capital-intensive industries, two main commodities being petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals; and the third stage (1978-1996) focuses on high-technology industries, primarily electronics and engineering firms (although pharmaceuticals still play a major role in the Puerto Rican economy).\textsuperscript{89} During the second stage, oil companies, such as Caribe Nitrogen, Gulf Caribbean, and Commonwealth Oil Refining Company began investing in Puerto Rico.\textsuperscript{90} Economic historian James Dietz and sociologist Palmira N. Ríos argue that Puerto Rico attempted to industrialize too quickly, shifting from primarily labor-intensive industries (industries with high quantities of skilled workers, such as textile businesses and agriculture) to capital-intensive industries (industries with high


\textsuperscript{90} Dietz, \textit{Economic History}, 253.
quantities of highly trained workers or professionals). A significant portion of the Puerto Rican economy became intertwined with the petrochemical industry, and with the OPEC embargo that led to the 1973 oil crisis came a recession that hit both the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico.

In Puerto Rico, unemployment rose in to its highest levels since the Great Depression years. In 1970, unemployment reached 79,000 (10.3 percent); in 1974, it rose to 109,000 (12.3 percent). By 1976, unemployment reached 172,000 (19.4 percent); about twenty percent of the labor force was without a job. While it dropped to 180,000 (18.8 percent) in 1980, it grew back up to 215,000 (23.4 percent) by 1983. Furthermore, these statistics do not include partial employment. Many Puerto Ricans had jobs, but worked fewer than forty hours, often times not making enough to provide for their families. Dietz attributes the cause to the structure of the development program, with the Puerto Rican model being based on the assertion that “industrialization was required because agriculture alone[sic] could not provide an adequate economic base, a program was forged that functioned as if agriculture could be ignored altogether and industrialization, at nearly any cost, was the exclusive goal.”

A substantial number of Puerto Ricans from the mainland attempted to flee the recession hitting the U.S. by returning to the island only further exacerbated Puerto Rico’s economic crisis. During the 1960s, Puerto Rican net-migration away from the island equaled 144,724 persons (less than one-third than 1950, but still migration flowed away from Puerto Rico). However,

---

92 Ibid.
94 Dietz, Economic History, 276-277.
95 Ibid, 274.
between 1970 and 1980, the net-migration flowed to the island, amounting to 158,513.\textsuperscript{97} This migration shift back to the island seen in these figures demonstrates Puerto Ricans’ attempt to alleviate their economic struggles via movement between the mainland and the island.\textsuperscript{98}

New York City did not fare well either. New York City lost one-sixth of its economic base that led to a recession and almost brought the city’s government to bankruptcy.\textsuperscript{99} Sociologist John H. Mollenkopf mentions in his book, \textit{New York City in the 1980’s}, that the “areas with declining incomes or the lowest income gains were firmly centered in areas long settled by African Americans and Puerto Ricans,” including Harlem, the South Bronx, and El Barrio.\textsuperscript{100} Even with the increase in the overall median household income in the city, the Puerto Rican median household income fell between 1977 and 1986, from $10,499 to $10,032.\textsuperscript{101} Mollenkopf further elaborates that “Blacks and Puerto Ricans who did well between 1980 and 1990 may have left New York City.”\textsuperscript{102} Sociologist Marta Tienda argues that New York City’s industrial restructuring from industrial positions to white-collar positions was responsible for Puerto Rican men withdrawing from the labor force.\textsuperscript{103} During the 1980s, only a small portion of the Puerto Rican population held jobs as managers and professionals; instead, the majority worked in “retail, personal services, and health services,” Mollenkopf explains.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 41.
\textsuperscript{102} Mollenkopf, 6.
\textsuperscript{104} Mollenkopf, 48.
New York City also suffered from a rise in crime, especially in the South Bronx. Many New Yorkers left the city starting in the late 1970s to escape the growing crime rates, especially those involving gang violence and drug trafficking, that plagued East Harlem. Violence became so rampant, journalist Herbert London wrote an article illustrating how a mob quickly formed to enact social justice—and kill—a would-be mugger in the middle of a East Harlem street, and quickly the mob dispersed and carried on with their previous activities. Anthopologist Philippe Bourgois conducted his ethnographical fieldwork by observing the day-to-day lifestyle of inner city Puerto Ricans in Spanish Harlem. “In the day-to-day experience of the street-bound inner city resident,” Bourgois recalls, “unemployment and personal anxiety over the inability to provide one's family with a minimal standard of living translates itself into intra-community crime, intra-community drug abuse, intra-community violence.” Between the dropping employment and the rising crime rate, thousands of Puerto Ricans left the city, primarily back to the island. Between 1980 and 1990, only 26,000 Puerto Ricans entered the city versus the 112,687 that left it, the majority (39 percent) with the island as its destination.

Upon arrival, Puerto Ricans from New York City found the island also lacking in employment and opportunities. Puerto Ricans from both the island and city searched for a new setting for employment and to raise their families. What was once an unattractive place to live became a highly desirable destination to live: Florida. A state where non-whites, including

105 Mollenkopf, 49.
Puerto Ricans, historically endured racism and discrimination, transformed into the next major urban center in the Puerto Rican diaspora.

**Conclusion**

If the Puerto Rican migration before the end of World War II (1898-1945) established the Puerto Rican diaspora primarily in New York City, and the post-World War II exodus (1945-1965) expanded the diaspora beyond New York to Midwestern and New England communities, then the third stage in the diaspora (1965-present) shifted the migration towards Florida.\(^{110}\) Puerto Rican migration scholars defined the 1970s movement onward as “circular migration,” due to the massive return of Puerto Ricans from the mainland to the island that occurred in the decade, quickly following by the resurgence of emigration from the island toward the mainland.\(^{111}\) Duany notes, “The number of returnees began to surpass those leaving for the United States in the early 1970s, especially as a result of minimum wage hikes on the island and the industrial restructuring of New York City, the traditional center of the Puerto Rican diaspora. But mass emigration resumed during the 1980s, at the same time that return migration continued unabated, foreign immigration increased, and circular migration emerged as a significant phenomenon.”\(^{112}\)

With both Puerto Rico and New York City suffering from dire economic declines, Puerto Ricans practiced their economic mobility by procuring a new hospitable residential space with ample job opportunities. After 1971 with the emergence of Disney World, Central Florida

---


\(^{111}\) Ibid.

\(^{112}\) Duany, “Mobile Livelihoods,” 358.
became a region with plenty of open land, job growth, and demand for a Spanish speaking population. Now Puerto Ricans had a new region that became much more accepting of them, especially in comparison to how Florida treated minorities fifty years prior.
CHAPTER TWO: FLORIDA AND THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA

It is during the Puerto Rican diaspora’s third phase (1965 to present) that Puerto Ricans began migrating to Florida in large numbers. In 1970, only 29,588 Puerto Ricans resided in Florida; by 2000, there were 482,027. Over this thirty year time span, not only were Puerto Ricans migrating to the state in high numbers, but they also dispersed throughout the state as opposed to settling in one enclave within a metropolitan region. In 2008, three of the top ten Puerto Rican populations in metropolitan regions were in Florida (Orlando, 2nd; Miami, 4th; Tampa, 6th). Florida became the fastest growing Puerto Rican population, and as of 2008 was the second largest in the states (744,473), after New York (1,088,197).

While the phase of the diaspora begins in 1965, the migration specifically to Florida originated in the 1970s; still, it is a part of the same era as the circular migration or “revolving-door” migration. However, these labels fail to recognize the significance Florida played in the diaspora. As Puerto Ricans were heading to and from Puerto Rico and New York City, they were also heading toward Florida as well. This migration shared the same push factor as earlier movements in the diaspora, as Puerto Ricans migrated to Florida in search of “better employment opportunities elsewhere and maximize their resources,” as stated by Duany earlier, akin to previous Puerto Rican labor movements.

So what led Puerto Ricans to Florida, a land previously notorious for its poor treatment of non-whites? Why did Puerto Ricans move away from their homes in Puerto Rico and New York

---

114 U.S. Census Bureau, 2009.
115 U.S. Census Bureau, 2009.
116 Duany, Nation, 361.
City? What changed, both in Puerto Ricans’ traditional settlements and in their newly discovered frontier? How did Central Florida become the second largest concentration of Puerto Ricans on the mainland?

The dominant characteristic of the Puerto Rican diaspora remained the same throughout the twentieth century: In this chapter, I explain how Puerto Rican migration was primarily dictated by the economic conditions of both the island (and later New York City) and their prospective new home. Puerto Ricans practiced their economic mobility predominately through migration; when things got bad on the island or in their diasporic home, they would relocate to a region with better economic opportunities. With the deteriorating conditions in Puerto Rico and New York City during the 1970s, along with the shift in the racial dynamics, growing labor demand, and abundance of housing in Central Florida, Puerto Ricans began settling in Orlando and the surrounding region, which led to the development of the Central Florida Puerto Rican community.

**Early Puerto Rican Populations in Florida**

Puerto Ricans generally did not migrate to Florida for the better part of the twentieth century. In 1900, there were only twenty-four Puerto Ricans in the state, eighteen of them in Tampa. In 1910, it grew to seventy-eight, 189 in 1920, and 203 in 1930, most of them in the Tampa Bay region, primarily consisting of tobacco workers in Ybor City.² During the mid-twentieth century, Florida employers were discouraged by political and industry leaders in both Florida and Puerto Rico because disgruntled laborers could not be deported due to their U.S.

---

citizenship. The majority of labor contracts sent Puerto Ricans to seemingly more hospitable regions of the northeast and Midwest states, where they still endured discrimination and resistance from the dominant society.

Florida remained entrenched in Southern ideals (i.e. white supremacy) and bigotry during the first-half of the twentieth century. American blacks were politically suppressed, socially abused, and in some cases physically beaten throughout the American South, Florida being no different. The few Puerto Ricans living in Florida before the Civil Rights Movement often endured harsh treatment and resistance from white Floridians, as they were often regarded as “black.” Due to frequent racial mixing within Puerto Rican society, Puerto Ricans range from the palest white to the darkest black and everything in between. Duany contrasts the difference between American and Puerto Rican, stating, “…whereas Americans pay close attention to national and ethnic background in defining a person’s identity, Puerto Ricans give a higher priority to birthplace and cultural orientation.”119 While blacks had “subordinate status in both societies,” white American Southerners typically relied on the “one drop rule,” in which an individual with any recognizable African ancestry is identified as black. In Florida specifically, the legal definition of “negro” included every person with one-eighth or more of African/black blood.120 As the majority of Puerto Ricans had African ancestry, most would be considered black in Florida and hence, before Civil Rights, Puerto Ricans suffered from institutionalized discrimination and American personal biases against non-whites.121

119 Duany, Nation, 242.
120 Pauli Murray, States’ Law on Race and Color (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 78.
121 During the 1940s, there was a small group of elite-class Puerto Rican entrepreneurs who invested in the sugar industry south of Lake Okeechobee. For more readings, see Jorge Duany and Félix V. Matos-Rodríguez, “Puerto
The earliest Puerto Rican community in Florida dates back to the 1940s, when Puerto Rican men began migrating to Miami to work in the fields of southern Florida and Puerto Rican women as seamstresses in garment factories.\textsuperscript{122} By 1953, there are at least 3,000 Puerto Rican agricultural workers in southeastern Florida.\textsuperscript{123} In 1954, local Miami businesses estimated approximately 1,200 Spanish-speaking female garment workers, many of whom were Puerto Rican, as Melanie Shell-Weiss documents in her essay, “Expanding Southern Unionism in the Mid-Twentieth Century Lingerie Industry.”\textsuperscript{124} By 1960, there are 11,804 Puerto Ricans in Dade County.\textsuperscript{125} Many worked in agricultural work, the garment industry, and the tourism industry, especially in hotels and restaurants.

During this Jim Crow-era Florida (1876 – 1965), Puerto Ricans did not fit nicely into the U.S. binary racial system. In 1954, the New York Times reported many white parents in Dade County kept their children from attending school as long as Puerto Rican migrant worker’s children attended. As a result, several county schools banned Mexican and Puerto Rican students from attending school, as they were seen as “dirty” and “disease carriers.”\textsuperscript{126} Meanwhile, Puerto Ricans did not want their children in the segregated black schools. The Dade County superintendent lifted the ban shortly after, yet this was not the only incident of racial prejudice against the Puerto Rican community in south Florida.

\textsuperscript{124} Shell-Weiss, 238.
\textsuperscript{125} 1960 U.S. Census Tract, Miami.
Miami police chief Walter Headley commented to the *Miami Herald* on the Puerto Rican population in Miami. In 1957, Headley heralded that Puerto Ricans were one of the greatest criminal threats to the city, and that “crime violence recorded for Puerto Ricans are greatly out of proportion to their numbers.”

Melanie Shell-Weiss describes several anecdotes on police brutality and discrimination against Puerto Ricans, including an example where two police officers follow a young Puerto Rican home and proceed to beat both him and his father, along with arresting the family at the end of the night.

**Changes in Racial Policies in Mid-twentieth Century Florida**

Of all the factors behind the Puerto Rican diaspora change towards Central Florida, the change in racial policies in Florida during the middle of the twentieth century played the largest role. Both Puerto Rican and U.S. policymakers avoided sending Puerto Rican laborers to the U.S. South after Puerto Ricans encountered unwelcoming conditions when employed as migrant laborers at American military bases during World War I, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. The handful of Puerto Ricans who did migrate to Miami, Florida suffered from discrimination from their employers, local residents, the public schools, and even the police. Without the change in Florida’s racial policies, the state would remain inhospitable towards Puerto Ricans. The end of Jim Crow laws and segregation was the first step in making Florida more attractive to Puerto Rican laborers and residents.

Until the Civil Rights Movement restructured the nation’s racial system, Florida was a political dichotomy: empowered whites and disfranchised blacks. Even when Congress ratified

---

127 *Miami Herald*, 23 April 1957, quoted from Shell-Weiss, 239.
128 Shell-Weiss, 240.
two amendments to the U.S. Constitution to protect the rights of African Americans, southern states found ways, including the legislating laws, to circumvent said amendments and suppress blacks. The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) broadened citizenship to include African Americans and those born within the United states, along with preventing states from depriving a person of life, liberty, or property without due process; the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) prohibited any U.S. government from denying the right to vote to citizens based on their race, color, and whether they were slaves. Even so, blacks remained politically marginalized throughout most of the twentieth century due to Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws were the collection of both state and local laws that restricted rights and enforced social biases against African Americans based upon the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling for “separate but equal” facilities (e.g. segregated schools, often times with black schools receiving less funds and accommodations than white schools).  

From 1868 to 1945, most African Americans lived in the rural regions of Florida. When blacks did reside in developing urban centers, they were often isolated and pushed to the outskirts of the cities, and Central Florida was no different. In the case of Orlando, builders created an “all-colored settlement” known as Jonestown, which was to be separated from the city in the 1880s. Division Avenue, at the heart of Orlando, marked the eastern residential area boundary for blacks in the city. In Winter Park, a city that now borders Orlando, blacks resided in a segment of the town named Hannibal Square. In 1893, Winter Park separated Hannibal Square from the city limits. The residential areas were highly segregated, and kept blacks assigned to agricultural labor.  

130 Shofner, 51.  
Then the Civil Rights Movement came, which redefined the U.S. South along with the rest of the country. The pivotal *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* led to the desegregation of public schools with the famous words, “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” Blacks still were spatially segregated for over a decade after the court decision, but by the 1970s, the U.S. South became home to many ethnic groups that would have suffered greatly in the Jim Crow South, including Puerto Ricans. *Brown v. Board* marked the watershed moment when the South, along with the rest of the U.S., began transforming from a racial dichotomy of white supremacy and black suppression towards a more racially accepting society.

A more direct benefit from the Civil Rights Movement for Puerto Ricans in Central Florida was the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs offered in public schools beginning in the 1970s. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned educational discrimination based on national origin. This led to *Lau vs. Nichols* in 1974, where Chinese American students in California claimed that they required special assistance to overcome their language barrier because they were entitled to equal education via Title VI. Through *Castañeda v. Pickard* in 1981 the Supreme Court implemented three-part assessment for bilingual programs to be held to the standards of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, which prohibited discrimination of staff, students, faculty, including racial segregation, although desegregation began occurring in the 1960s. While the League of United Latin Americans Citizens (LULAC) Consent Degree occurred in 1990, Florida schools implemented ESOL programs throughout the seventies and eighties, especially due to Southern Florida’s

---

sudden mass influx of Cuban exiles. This gave Puerto Ricans in Central Florida a new way to overcome the language barrier, specifically for children originating from the island.

With Jim Crow laws ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court or overruled by Civil Rights Acts from the 1960s, Puerto Ricans no longer faced institutionalized racial discrimination. Furthermore, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 banned housing discrimination based on race, religion, nationality (and in 1974, gender). While desegregation took over twenty years to unravel in Florida and individual racial discrimination continues to exist today, racial discrimination being deemed unconstitutional was a major step toward Puerto Ricans migrating to Florida in higher numbers. As Civil Rights came into full effect in 1960s and 1970s, Orlando changed its economy.

Urban-Population Growth in Greater Orlando, 1970 to 2000

Much like the rest of the South (and Puerto Rico), Florida remained an agrarian society throughout the first-half of the twentieth century. Historian David Goldfield attributes the agriculturally based economy to the separation of white and black spaces. Thus, Goldfield argues the separation of labor further prevented Southern states from urbanizing as early as northern states:

Race has been a heavy burden on the southern region. Agriculture exploited the land, but the biracial society exploited the people. The biracial system required the separation, social and economic isolation, and subjugation of the Negro race. But the system also denigrated the white man, although perhaps more subtly. The biracial society restricted regional and hence urban development by devaluing human capital, black and white, and the consequent waste of human resources proved to be not only a tragedy for the people but for the region as well.134

Hence, this separation of labor prevented poor blacks from filling low wage positions in factories that contributed to the urbanization process as seen in the northern United States.

After World War II, American southerners migrated to the urban centers to fill jobs that resulted from the growing industrialization of the New South. Florida quickly became urbanized, faster than the rest of the South. The Greater Orlando region’s population exploded over the course of forty years. Throughout the second-half of the twentieth century, Orange County had a consistent growth: 114,950 residents in 1950; 263,540 in 1960 (229 percent increase); 344,311 in 1970 (131 percent increase); 471,016 in 1980 (137 percent increase); 896,344 in 1990 (190 percent increase).\(^\text{135}\) While the population in Orange County rose steadily throughout the decades, other counties in Central Florida saw growing populations as well. Seminole County’s total population increased from 26,833 in 1950 to 54,947 in 1960 to 83,682 in 1970; then the county saw a larger influx of new residents, rising to 179,792 in 1980 and 365,196 in 1990.\(^\text{136}\) Osceola County saw equally impressive population growth during the 1980s. In 1950, there were 11,406 individuals counted; 19,029 in 1960; 25,267 in 1970; and 49,287 in 1980. In 1990, it grew to 172,493.\(^\text{137}\)

As Orlando expanded throughout the 1970s, its urban sprawl intensified. Its growth signifies the dynamic nature of Florida’s urban cities. In just two decades, the population for the region grew by over a million residents, many searching for new opportunities, primarily jobs


\(^{136}\) U.S. Census Bureau, 1960 Census; U.S. Census Bureau, 1970 Census; U.S. Census Bureau, 1980 Census.

\(^{137}\) Ibid.
and housing, in Central Florida. As Puerto Rico transformed from a U.S. agrarian territory into an industrialized “associated free state” (estado libre asociado), Central Florida also underwent three drastic changes in its economic landscape that facilitated population growth and urban sprawl.

### Table 1: Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area Population, 1970-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Orange</th>
<th>Seminole</th>
<th>Osceola</th>
<th>Orlando MSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>344,311</td>
<td>83,682</td>
<td>25,267</td>
<td>427,993138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>471,016</td>
<td>179,792</td>
<td>49,287</td>
<td>700,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>896,344</td>
<td>365,196</td>
<td>172,493</td>
<td>1,434,033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The rest of the chapter focuses on the three major pull factors that urbanized Orlando and attracted Puerto Rican settlement. First, the federal government influenced Central Florida’s growth via the Kennedy Space Center and the establishment of military installations throughout the region beginning as early as World War I. Second, the rise of tourism as a result the opening of Disney World in 1971 further contributed to the region’s development and job expansion. Third, real estate companies began selling thousands of acres of lands in Central Florida, due partly to the impact of the two previous factors. The combination of these three factors led to the development of Orlando’s key industries and population growth, the primary draws behind the Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida.

---

138 For the 1970 U.S. Census, the Orlando MSA only included Orange and Seminole County. In 1980, Osceola County was added.
The Military and High-Tech Industry’s Impact on Central Florida

Starting in World War I, the U.S. armed forces established hundreds of military installations across Florida, ranging from fully functioning bases, to air fields for test flights and refueling, to radar stations to protect the nation’s shoreline. Due to the demands of World War II, the U.S. Army established two new Army bases in Orlando, Orlando Army Air Base and Pinecastle Army Air Field, in 1940. In Sanford, a city in Seminole County just north of Orlando, the U.S. Army commissioned Naval Air Station Sanford on November 3, 1942. All the bases were dedicated to aircraft testing and pilot training.

The U.S. military transferred both Orlando Army Air Base and Pinecastle Army Air Field to the United States Air Force shortly after its opening in 1947 and utilized the bases during the Korean War. On May 7, 1958, the death of Colonel Michael McCoy due to a disastrous test flight, led to the renaming of Pinecastle Air Force Base to McCoy Air Force Base. In 1968, The U.S. Air Force transferred Orlando Air Force Base to the U.S. Navy, and it became known as Naval Training Center Orlando. The bases did contribute to the population increase with the rise in personnel stationed at the installations, but this military population remained transient—many of the servicemen often saw relocation after a year or two of duty in the region. While many veterans chose to return to Central Florida to retire, the greater impact the bases had in the region was the industries they attracted.\(^\text{139}\)

Although several companies set up shop in Central Florida to establish contracts with the military, others heard the siren call of the Kennedy Space Center (KSC). Initially known as Launch Operations Directorate in 1958, KSC put Central Florida on the map long before Disney World began secret meetings with Orlando government officials. The national media remained

\(^{139}\) Mormino, 160-161.
very attentive to the Space Race with the USSR, and President Kennedy’s 1961 promise of a man on the Moon before the end of the 1960s led to an increase in manpower and skilled labor. Orlando and neighboring cities gave technological firms a new home in close proximity to Cape Canaveral.

One of the most successful corporations was Martin-Marietta, an American aeronautics company that secured many defense contracts from the U.S. military. The Glenn L. Martin Company built its plant in Orlando in 1956 on Sand Lake Road. In 1961, the Martin Company merged with American Marietta and became Martin-Marietta. Martin-Marietta and KSC both contributed to Orlando’s consistent growth; Historian Gary Mormino states that Martin-Marietta’s Sand Lake plant employed over 10,000 workers and was Florida’s largest industrial plant in the early 1960s. Martin-Marietta focused primarily on high-tech weapon systems, and created the Patriot, Bullpup, Lacrosse, and Matador missile systems. Now the company is known as Lockheed Martin, but it continues to draw military and NASA contracts.

Other companies planted their flags in Greater Orlando. Litton Systems, Inc. developed the International Laser Systems Division as a research and development firm in 1968. Grumman and Boeing are two aerospace firms that opened plants in Orlando. The Harris Corporation established multiple facilities in Melbourne and Palm Bay (both located in Brevard County). Tupperware Company moved its headquarters to Kissimmee (Osceola County) in 1952. In 1978, the Florida Legislature created Central Florida Research Park, a park dedicated to housing high-tech and research-based institutes in cooperation with Florida Technological

---

140 Shofner, 131, 156, 168.
141 Mormino, 167.
142 Shofner, 216.
143 Shofner, 213.
University (FTU), the Orange County Research and Development Authority, and the Orange County Board of County Commissioners.

What started with KSC and a few military installations led to the development of a high-tech industry centralized in the region. With the spurt of high-tech and engineering-focused firms throughout the region, Central Florida generated a need for qualified, college-educated employees from throughout the country. As high-tech related companies consolidated into Greater Orlando, other non-tech related industries complemented the region’s growth. Attorneys’ offices, business owners, and private medical practices spurted throughout the region, embracing the region’s growth and prosperity. Orlando General Hospital had to relocate to Lake Underhill Road to provide a bigger facility, and expanded twice, in 1971 and 1982. Middle-class southerners and northerners found economic opportunity in developing Orlando, and the growing professional job market fueled the domestic migration.

Disney World and Tourism

The opening of Disney World was the day, as Orlando historian Jerrell Shofner put it, “the thunderbolt strikes.” Disney’s official announcement occurred on November 15, 1965, and began the shift in the region towards a more tourism-based economy. Mormino argues, “Never in the history of the Sunshine State had the opening of a single business so altered the course of an industry.” Looking for a region with year-round sunny weather, the Disney Corporation accumulated land in Orange and Osceola counties via dummy companies throughout the 1960s. After draining the swamps and constructing the park, Disney World’s

---

144 Shofner, 219.
145 Shofner, 145.
Magic Kingdom opened its doors in October 1971, and became the world’s number one tourist destination by the end of the decade.\textsuperscript{146}

Disney’s decision to open Disney World in Central Florida led to the creation of other theme parks, further developing the tourist industry in the region. Two years after the opening of Disney World, SeaWorld opened in Orlando, a tourist attraction with dolphins and killer whales performing acrobatic feats for admiring spectators, similar to Marineland, one of Florida’s first tourist attractions (1938). With the success of its sister facility in Hollywood, California and the local theme parks in Central Florida, Universal Studios opened its second theme park in Orlando in 1990. The park aimed at recreating experiences from its parent company’s films through rides, shows, and various movie genre-related themes throughout the park.

Disney also opened three more parks. Originally aimed at being Disney’s Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, a planned utopian city of the future, the Epcot Center opened on October 1, 1982 (exactly eleven years after the Magic Kingdom opened its gates). The park consisted of two parts: Future World, a portion of the park dedicated to futuristic scientific accomplishments; and the World Showcase, collection of nine pavilions representing countries from around the globe. Disney’s third park opened in 1989 as Disney-MGM Studios, a park themed around Hollywood movies. Disney’s fourth animal-themed park, Animal Kingdom, opened in 1998.

Most tourist companies did not have the capital to compete with Disney World and SeaWorld. Instead, many created night-time dinner shows, such as Medieval Times and Arabian

\textsuperscript{146} Richard E. Foglesong, \textit{Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Foglesong details how Disney collaborated with Orlando, Orange County, and Osceola officials, often pitting one county against the other and utilizing both promises and threats to acquire cooperation from local officials.
Nights, to complement tourists’ schedules. Meanwhile, hotels and restaurants continue to emerge throughout the two cities of Orlando and Kissimmee, notably on International Drive and U.S. 192, respectively. With the rise of Disney World, a new service-sector labor demand developed—restaurants needed cooks and waiters, hotels needed administrative staff and cleaning personnel, and attractions needed salesmen and technicians. While the high-tech industries nurtured the professional class influx, the tourist industry fueled semi-skilled migration to the region.

Disney World attracted Puerto Ricans via two methods. First, Disney and other tourism businesses employed Puerto Ricans to work in the parks and the surrounding facilities. Disney often hired Puerto Ricans straight from the island. In the 1990s, Disney hired workers who could speak Spanish and offered $900 to relocate to Orlando along with a bonus for referring other potential employees. Speaking Spanish was a skill often sought out by Disney for the benefit of Latin American visitors coming to the parks. Many bilingual Puerto Ricans found many opportunities through Disney to capitalize on their dual identity as both American (vis-à-vis citizenship and their ability to freely move in and out of the U.S. without a passport) and Latin American (linguistically and culturally).

Second, it brought Puerto Rican tourists to the region, and many claim to have fallen in love with Central Florida and decided to settle in the area. Part of Disney World’s success is in its ability to provide a moment of escapism, arguably amusement parks primary allure. Amusing the Million points out how specific amusement parks can play a larger role in the American

---

147 Mormino, 106-107.
148 Foglesong, 183.
149 The Orange County Public Library has a collection of Disney World-related documents, including job postings for employees, and many stated speaking multiple languages to be a preferred skill.
culture and should not be limited to just being a nostalgic time period in American history. John Kasson argues Coney Island during the 1920s was a representation of modernity and acted as an escape from the everyday living.\(^{150}\) Disney World epitomizes this phenomenon. Tomorrowland projected a distant world that was within grasp, the world of the future here today in Orlando, Florida. The cleanliness of the parks and the seemingly foreign lands of Frontierland and Mainstreet U.S.A. were atypical of the United States most Puerto Ricans were aware of; the majority of the population was accustomed to New York City and Chicago. Through Disney World, this new world that was open, clean, fresh air, not too cold like up north, and the affordable land and housing for Puerto Ricans throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Several Puerto Ricans interviewed for the PRCF project mentioned that after visiting Disney World they fell in love with the region and soon decided to stay. They spoke of Disney World with such joy and exhilaration, breathing out happy sighs and talking about the enjoyable experiences they had when they visited the parks and the wonderful contrast Central Florida was from the crowded and at times unsafe Puerto Rican and New York City neighborhoods.\(^{151}\)

**Central Florida Real Estate**

Real estate also played a key role in attracting Puerto Ricans. Land and homes became widely available for cheap prices, a stark comparison to the crowded streets of Puerto Rico and New York. First aiming to attract retirees and older generations, real estate companies shifted


\(^{151}\) Reina Rubert, PRCF History; Víctor Díaz, PRCF History.
their approach to attract Hispanics, and Puerto Ricans in particular, from both Puerto Rico and northern cities by opening offices in both settings. \(^{152}\)

Until recently, many historians did not acknowledge the “aged migration” to the southeast, especially to Florida. Historians Robert Cassanello and Colin J. Davis explain, “What this [aged] migration produced in the 1960s through the 1970s was an anxiety on the part of Southern residents who believed that retirees would not only sap the limited social services those communities offered, but also represent a significant tax burden on the existing, yet-to-retire population.”\(^{153}\) However, in Florida, many companies aimed to capitalize on this growing migration.

The Mackle brothers built numerous Floridian communities, particularly in the 1960s. In 1962, the brothers founded the Deltona Corporation, and created Deltona as a city with affordable housing units. An article in *Florida Magazine* in 1966 shows that the intended buyers were retirees, with advertisements showing the vast, open spaces of communities such as Spring Hill and personal statements of how serene and relaxing the neighborhoods are in Deltona.\(^{154}\)

The personal bios in the article were from older men and women, with their age printed alongside their names, the majority being in their fifties and sixties. By giving the reader the age of the homeowners, the article was essentially a multipage advertisement intending to entice retirees to moving to these new planned housing communities the Mackle brothers developed.

Other real estate companies flourished during the post-1950 land boom. The General Development Corporation (GDC) had a temporary merging with the Mackles, and built

\(^{152}\) John Hernández, PRCF History.


neighborhoods and homes throughout the state. In Central Florida, Landstar Homes became very prominent, beginning in the late 1970s. With many of its properties sold near the Orange-Osceola border, Landstar Boulevard navigates amidst neighborhoods developed by the company. The boom initially targeted the retiree demographic. Landstar had advertisements in local real estate magazines such as *The Shopper* and *Home Finder* that aimed at both retirees and young families.

![Landstar Advertisement](image)

**Figure 1: Landstar Advertisement**

Soon after, Landstar Homes targeted Puerto Ricans. The real estate company heavily targeted Hispanics in New York, Chicago, and Puerto Rico, spending $500 to fly out potential buyers and providing two-night lodging, breakfast, and travel to and from the airport. As a result, Landstar sold 7,000 homes in Buenaventura Lakes (BVL), many to Puerto Ricans. While the executives attempted to downplay their influence in the Hispanic boom, Landstar Homes played a crucial role in facilitating Puerto Rican migration to Osceola County.

Conclusion

The sweeping changes in Florida’s racial policies made the state more hospitable for minorities, especially those with African heritage. While Puerto Ricans did settle in Miami before the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, it was not until afterward that they came in large numbers throughout the state, including Central Florida. It was in the 1970s and 1980s that Puerto Ricans began migrating in large numbers (beyond a few hundred) to Central Florida. Once a state known for its cruelty against American blacks, a prime example being the murders of Harry T. Moore and Harriette Moore in 1951, post-Civil Rights Florida made the state more attractive for Puerto Ricans as they no longer need fear lynch mobs and institutionalized racism and segregation.

The change in racial policies was not the sole factor behind the Puerto Rican migration shift. The military’s contribution to the region’s growth, the opening of Disney World and other tourist attractions, and the impact of real estate in the 1970s all further fueled Central Florida’s growth in the post-Civil Rights era. All three of these factors brought Puerto Ricans to the

156 Ibid.
region: many Puerto Rican servicemen stationed at local bases decided to settle in Greater Orlando; local tourist attractions and hospitality businesses created a demand for Spanish speaking employees; and Florida’s cheap land prices alleviated Puerto Ricans’ concerns for expensive housing and lodging, especially in comparison to New York City. These features combined with the new racial policies are the reason Central Florida became the Puerto Rican diaspora’s new favorite destination.
CHAPTER THREE: THE PUERTO RICAN PIONEERS IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

Both the overall Hispanic and Puerto Rican populations in the Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) grew exponentially in the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1980, the Hispanic population grew from 7,952 to 25,972. In 1981, Dr. Ida Cook, a Sociology professor at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, attributed the population growth to “overcrowding in South Florida and climate” due to the large Cuban presence in south Florida and the fact that Hispanic migrants originate from warmer climates. The Orlando Sentinel also attributes part of the population growth to “President Jimmy Carter’s welcoming of Cuban refugees to America’s—namely Florida’s—shores.” While the article did not indicate the specific population numbers of the different Hispanic groups, it and other articles published in the 1980s reflect that the local Central Florida press became aware of the growing Hispanic presence and influence in Central Florida.

It was during the 1970s that Puerto Ricans emerged as the most-numerous Hispanic group in the Orlando MSA, outnumbering Cubans, the second-largest group in the region. Up to this point, Cubans were the dominant Hispanic group in the region. But in 1980, the U.S. Census reported 9,158 Puerto Ricans in the Orlando MSA, almost twice the number of Cubans at 5,098. The Puerto Rican population grew over tenfold during the 1970s. This decade marked

---

159 Sabulis, “Mid-Florida Gets Latin Accent.”
161 U.S. Census 1980, Table 16.
162 U.S. 1980 Census.
the beginning of the mass Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida and thus the change in the
diaspora from New York City and other northern communities and toward the Orlando
metropolitan region.

**Early Puerto Rican Settlement in Central Florida**

While the mass Puerto Rican movement towards the region does not occur for another
two decades, a small Puerto Rican population existed in the region before 1980. In 1960,
Orlando was a small city: 88,135 in the city; 175,405 in Orange County, outside the city; and
54,947 in Seminole County. At the time, there were 135 Puerto Ricans in Orlando city, 255 in
the remainder of Orange County, and 81 in Seminole County. This was a tiny portion of the
overall population. Overall, Puerto Ricans in the MSA represented less than 1 percent of the total
population.

What brought most of these Puerto Ricans is only known to those individuals: only
anecdotes exist explaining why some of these Puerto Ricans migrated to the region, primarily in
the form of oral histories. For instance, Yvonne Milligan decided to enroll in Rollins College in
Winter Park in 1951. It was there that she met her husband, a local Floridian from Winter Park,
whom she stayed and raised her family with in Central Florida. But these few personal
narratives do not necessarily fall under macro-movement patterns.

One major cause of Puerto Rican movement was the United States military, as Puerto
Ricans served in the military since the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout the twentieth
century, U.S. military leaders saw Puerto Rico as an important military asset due to both its

---

163 U.S. 1960 Orlando SMSA Census Tracts.
164 Yvonne Milligan, PRCF History.
strategic location in the Caribbean and for its pool of potential American soldiers. Puerto Ricans fought with the United States Armed Forces as early as 1898. Soon after the Spanish-American War, the United States commissioned three auxiliary military groups composed of Puerto Ricans: the Porto Rican Commission, the Porto Rican Scouts, and the Porto Rican Guards.¹⁶⁵

Puerto Ricans had numerous points of entry into the American military: traditional voluntary enlistment through Armed Forces recruiters, the ROTC programs located on Puerto Rican college campuses, and even wartime service due to the military-service draft. After the U.S. acquired Puerto Rico in 1899 via the Treaty of Paris of 1898, the U.S. began recruiting volunteers from the island for a Puerto Rican battalion, which was later renamed the U.S. Army’s 65th Infantry Regiment.¹⁶⁶ The Jones Act of 1917 extended the military draft to Puerto Ricans on the island.¹⁶⁷ Two years later, the U.S. Army created a Reserved Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) at the University of Puerto Rico.¹⁶⁸ In 1952, the University of Puerto Rico incorporated an Air Force ROTC program as well.¹⁶⁹ Initially, Puerto Rican servicemen served in segregated units (i.e. the Porto Rican Commission, Porto Rican Scouts, Porto Rican Guards, and the U.S. Army’s 65th Infantry Regiment). After the Korean War, the U.S. Army disbanded the 65th Infantry Regiment, thus ending Puerto Rican segregated units.¹⁷⁰

Since they were no longer segregated and instead dispersed throughout the different military branches and bases, Puerto Ricans were inevitably stationed at Central Florida bases. Most military servicemen have little say in deciding where they will be stationed, a decision left

¹⁶⁵ Héctor Andrés Negroni, Historia militar de Puerto Rico (Spain: Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario, 1992), 367.
¹⁶⁶ Negroni, 371-376.
¹⁶⁸ Negroni, 392.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 394.
¹⁷⁰ Negroni, 376.
to service personnel centers and commanding officers. For example, Ernesto Peña Roque was stationed in Orlando in 1955; he later decided to return to Orlando.\textsuperscript{171} The U.S. Air Force also deployed José Santana to McCoy Air Base in 1962 in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis, and after living in Central Florida for several years, chose to retire in the region.\textsuperscript{172} Col. Salvador E. Felices was a Puerto Rican veteran who served in the Korean War as a pilot. On June 1, 1968, Col. Felices became the commander of the 306th Bomb Wing at McCoy Air Force Base.\textsuperscript{173} He later went on to become the first Puerto Rican general in the U.S. Air Force.

Much of the Puerto Rican population was located near Orlando Air Force Base and McCoy Air Force Base, according to the Orlando city 1960 census tracts. Census tracts are statistical subdivisions the U.S. Census Bureau applies within MSAs to distinguish between sections of the region. Many of the Puerto Ricans who lived in the region were military personnel stationed at local bases, in tracts 18, 25, 26, and 38, according to the U.S. 1960 Census Tracts.\textsuperscript{174} The largest concentration of Puerto Ricans was in tract 25, making up almost ten percent of the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida. Tract 25 was the residential block between city road Semoran Boulevard, Lake Underhill Road, South Conway Road, and Curry Ford Road.

By 1960, tract 25 consisted of two subdivisions: Monterey, which began construction in 1952; and Dover Shores East in 1958.\textsuperscript{175} The Monterey subdivision is a neighborhood in East Orlando with Spanish street names. The names of the subdivision’s streets include Hermosa

\textsuperscript{171} Ernesto Peña Roque, PRCF History.
\textsuperscript{172} José Santana, PRCF History.
\textsuperscript{173} \textit{OS} “New Commander Selected for 306th Wing at McCoy,” 26 Apr 1968, B1.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid. Tract 18 recorded 30 Puerto Ricans; tract 25, 54; tract 26, 25; tract 38, 35.
Street, San Juan Boulevard, Santiago Avenue, and Coquina Court. The first neighborhood settlers were American servicemen with the U.S. Air Force including Puerto Ricans. The Monterey neighborhood is located across the street from the Orlando Executive Airport, which in 1960 was still the Orlando Army Air Base. The Orange County Comptroller’s Office houses over 1,600 deed transactions between Monterey Home Incorporated and clients. While the company had sales corresponding to other subdivisions, the vast majority during the late 1950s pertained to the Monterey neighborhood. The final number of units in the subdivision totaled 663 units; but the development was still under construction by 1960.176 Also, home grantees, the receiver of the property, often became grantors within a few years of their original purchase. The short-termed residence tenure implies that the Monterey subdivision comprised of military servicemen.

The deeds themselves provide partial data on the demographics of this neighborhood, as several of the grantees on the deeds have Spanish names. While neither the property owner’s nationality nor ethnicity was recorded, their names alone insinuate that the grantees and grantors were of Hispanic origin, especially when married to somebody who also has a Spanish name. One example is a deed for a property located on 700 Romano Avenue with the names Oscar Felix Perez and his wife Ardith Juanita Perez, dated August 16, 1955( the deeds themselves lack the accent marks in the names).177 Another is a deed with the names Estela Gonzalez and Josephine Fandino. The occurrence of these names confirms the presence of Hispanics in the neighborhood denoted by the census tracts. With Spanish surnames, Puerto Ricans’ ability to

join into the U.S. Armed Forces, and the numbers extracted from the census tract together suggest a substantial number of Puerto Rican servicemen as residents in the Monterey neighborhood.

Figure 2: Monterey Subdivision Land Deed

So where does the Monterey settlement fit in the greater narrative of Puerto Rican communities? In the historiography, scholars referred to early Puerto Rican settlements in the states as *colonias*. In her book, *From Colonia to Community*, sociologist Virginia E. Sánchez Korrol defined colonias as “geographic, urban centers marked by dense settlement; they provided outlets for Puerto Rican interests, creating institutions which affirmed social identity and fostered internal activities while coping with problems stemming from contacts with the host society.” In other words, a *colonia* is a concentrated ethnic settlement that creates several cultural institutions to retain Puerto Rican identity and provide support for arriving migrants.

However, the early Puerto Ricans settlements in Greater Orlando during the 1960s do not fit under the label “colonias.” First, Puerto Ricans did not settle in large numbers before the late-1970s. Furthermore, the early Puerto Rican population in the region did not develop community or cultural institutions. Instead, it was just a collection of individuals and families moving to Central Florida outside major migration trends.

So what role did this population play in the migration? Most likely this early Puerto Rican population in the area may have influenced future settlement in that specific part of the city and thus deserves mentioning. The Orlando Air Force Base’s settlement is located in East Orlando. In the following decades, East Orlando’s Puerto Rican population became one of the highest concentrations of Puerto Ricans in the region. This early Puerto Rican population can also shed light on motivations for future Puerto Ricans that chose to migrate to the region outside the tourism industry’s rise in the 1970s.

---

178 Sánchez Korrol, 53. For further reading behind the historiography and literature of the term *colonia*, see Sánchez Korrol, 4-9.
The Foundations of Community

In the case of Orlando, one cannot address the development of the Puerto Rican community without including the contributions of local Cubans. Due to Cuba’s and Puerto Rico’s shared history, both nations share many cultural aspects (i.e. food ingredients, cooking techniques, dance, and music styles). For this reason, Puerto Ricans benefited a Cuban market since they brought not only goods Puerto Ricans were accustomed to; they also spoke Spanish, an invaluable quality many Puerto Ricans enjoyed when on the mainland. While Puerto Ricans became the largest Hispanic population in the 1970s, Cuban entrepreneurs established businesses and agencies that fostered Puerto Rican identity by enabling the latter to continuing cultural traditions and customs in Orlando. Cubans like grocery owner Rafael Medina and radio station founder Oscar Kramer brought Spanish Caribbean food and music to Orlando, much to the benefit of both Cubans and Puerto Ricans alike.

It is common for immigrants and ethnic groups to continue their cooking traditions and cuisines in their new home. For this reason, bodegas (Spanish for grocery store) became one of the most successful Hispanic businesses in the U.S. Duany explains that bodegas played crucial roles in New York’s Puerto Rican community, “catering to a growing demand for Puerto Rican-style cooking ingredients, such as coffee, malt, sofrito (season), rice, beans, and plantains.”

These sites evoked a sense of familiarity for Puerto Ricans who moved from the island, between the shelves stocked with Goya goods, Caribbean style music playing on the speakers, and, perhaps most importantly, the use of Spanish among customers and bodega employees.

In Florida, Puerto Ricans kept their comida criolla, the term used by Puerto Ricans to define their unique style of cuisine, in a large part due to the assistance of Cuban bodegas. Puerto

---

Ricans also frequented the bodega, as it was the only market in Orlando where they could find the ingredients necessary for Puerto Rican dishes. While El Refugio, the first bodega in Orlando, closed a few years after it originally opened in the early 1960s, other grocery stores filled the void. Another bodega of note is Medina’s Grocery Store, located east of downtown Orlando.\textsuperscript{180} Rafael Medina moved to Orlando in 1969 at the urging of family friends already residing in Florida. “I saw that this space was available for rent, and since I don’t know English I told my brother that we should open a Bodega, you just put the prices on the stuff and sell them, hardly have to speak English for that, even though we knew the numbers.”\textsuperscript{181} In 1970, Rafael and his family opened Medina’s Grocery Store.\textsuperscript{182}

He initially struggled (“When I sold zero to twenty-five dollars, those were good days,” Medina recalls), but the business succeeded and continued to thrive throughout the following decades.\textsuperscript{183} To acquire inventory for the grocery store, Medina drove to Miami and Tampa to gather the ingredients and canned goods.\textsuperscript{184} Medina’s store was an important space for Puerto Ricans who arrived in the 1970s. Twenty (out of seventy-eight) of the PRCF oral history participants mentioned Medina’s Grocery in their recollection of bodegas in the area, saying it was one of the few places where a Puerto Rican could collect their traditional cooking ingredients.\textsuperscript{185} One such interviewee, Víctor Alvarado stated, “I remember going to Medina because that was the only bodega I knew and buying what I need there.”\textsuperscript{186}

\textsuperscript{180} Kirsten Gallagher, “New Floridians Bring their World with Them,” Orlando Sentinel 7 May 1985, E-1.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} Delgado, “Hispanic Community is Growing.”
\textsuperscript{183} Medina, PRCF History.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{185} Víctor Alvarado, PRCF History; Caraballos, interviewed by author; Robmas, interviewed by author; James Auffant, PRCF History; Amaury Díaz, PRCF History; Charlie Gambaro, PRCF History; Petra González Durocher, PRCF History; Mary I. Johnson, PRCF History; Raquel Lee, PRCF History; Rafael Medina, PRCF History; Elsa
In his book *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, Duany argues that bodegas in New York City further evolved through the years into “center(s) of neighborhood life and information exchange,” providing Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic groups a site to learn of local news and meet new acquaintances along with buying their groceries.\(^{187}\) This phenomenon also occurred in Orlando. Over time, Medina’s Grocery became a Hispanic meeting ground, with Puerto Ricans befriending other Hispanics and creating communal ties, much like Hispanics did in the bodegas in New York. Hispanics of all professions gathered at Medina’s: from doctors and lawyers to convenience store clerks and janitors. “This was the only place to gather and talk,” Medina explains, as El Refugio had closed by the time he opened his store. “Doctors came to talk about medicine, and other people came and talked about baseball, fishing.”\(^{188}\) Other interviewees also noticed this interaction. “And everybody would go there and argue about politics,” Yvonne Milligan observed.\(^{189}\) Waldemar Serrano felt that by the late 1980s to the 1990s, Medina’s store became a center for the Hispanic community.\(^{190}\)

Oscar “Bebo” Kramer founded the first Spanish-language radio station WMJK 1220 AM, La Magica.\(^{191}\) Built in October, 1978, the station aimed its programming at the Hispanic community in Central Florida and featured music, news, and novelas (Spanish soap operas).\(^{192}\) However, the station’s location in Kissimmee kept it from reaching the majority of Hispanics.
who lived in Orange County. For instance, Paul Gamache kept tuning into the station in hope of keeping track of the local elections in Puerto Rico, mentioning that the station had a weak signal, barely reaching him in the eastern part of Orlando.\textsuperscript{193} Kramer sold the station in 1986 and the new owner, Augustine “Gus” Cawley, decided to change the station’s format to Adult Contemporary, because “Osceola County, despite its proximity to Orlando, is a separate community,” as stated in an Orlando Sentinel article.\textsuperscript{194} While the local press at the time acknowledged the Hispanic community in Orlando, Cawley did not realize Kissimmee and Osceola County was also in the midst of developing a significant Hispanic community (see Chapter 2).

At first, in the 1970s, the majority of the Central Florida population continued to settle in Orlando as opposed to Osceola and Seminole Counties, and the original Hispanic businesses in Orlando belonged primarily to Cubans entrepreneurs But with the 1980s dramatic growth in Hispanic populations, primarily Puerto Ricans, greater demand rose for businesses and agencies that supported these rising demographics. No longer confined to niche Hispanic markets and music, Puerto Rican entrepreneurs and community members began targeting specifically the Puerto Rican people and less the pan-Hispanic population.

**Conclusion**

During the 1970s, the Puerto Rican population saw drastic growth. According to the 1980 Census, 6,662 Puerto Ricans lived in Orange County, while 2,079 settled in Seminole County.\textsuperscript{195}

\textsuperscript{193} Paul Gamache, PRCF History.
\textsuperscript{195} U.S. Census Bureau, 1970.
Combined, the increase was 11.33 times the population from ten years before and began the shift in the Puerto Rican diaspora towards Florida. As the decade progressed, Puerto Rican settlements extended throughout Greater Orlando’s residential areas. During this time, there is no tract with a Puerto Rican population being over ten percent of the total population. The areas that both geographers Luis Sánchez and Ramón Torres Concepción note as enclaves developed during the 1980s and 1990s.196

The military brought many Puerto Ricans directly to the Central Florida region, yet perhaps its greater impact was indirect. With the Orlando Veterans A. hospital (date) and the McCoy naval station exchange, many military families and veterans could enjoy the perks of free military healthcare in Greater Orlando. Servicemen stationed in the region who came to appreciate Florida’s temperature and environment returned later for retirement, such as José Santana and Ernesto Peña Roque.

Lastly, with the aid of the Cuban businesses, Puerto Ricans benefitted in two ways: first, by having access to goods and services they enjoyed in Puerto Rico and New York, especially their food and music; and second, by having a template of how Hispanics were a marketable demographic. Between these two factors, Cubans facilitated Puerto Rican entrepreneurship, especially when Cuban owners and businessmen formed the first Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

---

196 Sánchez, 101; Torres Concepción, 38.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE MASS PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION TO CENTRAL FLORIDA

The 1980s marked the start of both the mass Puerto Rican migration to Central Florida and the development of the Puerto Rican community. The largest population increase occurred in Orange County, growing from 6,662 Puerto Ricans to 34,223. Seminole County’s Puerto Rican population also grew, from 2,079 to 9,502. Osceola’s Puerto Rican population emerged during the 1980s. The decade before, the majority of Puerto Ricans migration was into Orange County during the 1970s: Orange County reports having 6662 Puerto Ricans in contrast to Osceola’s 417 (Seminole County reported 2,079).\(^\text{197}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Puerto Ricans</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>34,223</td>
<td>677,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osceola</td>
<td>8,122</td>
<td>107,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminole</td>
<td>9,502</td>
<td>287,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlando MSA</td>
<td>51,847</td>
<td>1,072,748</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As the decade progressed, more and more Puerto Ricans chose Greater Orlando over any other destination in the country to settle, especially in Osceola County. Puerto Ricans attempting to find employment in the region relocated to areas of the region not only near potential employers but near family and friends who already established themselves in the area. In this

\(^{197}\) 1980 Census, table 16.
chapter, I demonstrate how this support network played an integral role in facilitating the migrant influx and in fueling the creation of the Puerto Rican community.

**Characteristics of the Mass Puerto Rican Migration**

In Orange and Seminole counties, the Puerto Rican population was more evenly dispersed. Seminole County had no areas with a concentrated Puerto Rican population; instead it spread throughout the county, scattered across various neighborhoods and cities. The Puerto Rican population in Orange County was neither concentrated nor spread out; in the 124 census tracts located in Orange County, Puerto Ricans represented at least ten percent of the population in thirteen tracts. Tract 110 corresponds to a portion downtown Orlando. Tracts 132 through 134.02 represent east Orlando.

**Table 3: Selected Orange County Census Tracts, 1990**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Tracts</th>
<th>Puerto Ricans</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>% PR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tract 110</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>3,462</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 132</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>6,240</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 134.01</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>8,884</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 142</td>
<td>1,112</td>
<td>7,569</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 143.02</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>4,364</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 163.02</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>3,146</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 167.02</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>11,188</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 167.05</td>
<td>1,352</td>
<td>12,660</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 167.06</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>11,273</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 168.01</td>
<td>1,248</td>
<td>7,929</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 169.01</td>
<td>2,083</td>
<td>15,158</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 169.02</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>4,223</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 170.03</td>
<td>1,789</td>
<td>13,075</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Osceola County saw the largest percentage growth, from a mere 417 individuals to 8,122, increasing 1848 percent, as opposed to Orange’s 414 percent. By 1990, the majority of Puerto Ricans in Osceola County resided in census tract 405.03, numbering at 3626 (the next highest tract 401.02 at 822 Puerto Ricans). Tract 405.03 is where Buena Ventura Lakes (BVL) is located, and where Puerto Ricans made up 26.4 percent of the total population within the tract (13,737). According to Sánchez and Torres Concepción’s definitions of enclaves, Buena Ventura Lakes was a Puerto Rican enclave in 1990.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau, \textit{1990 Census of Population and Housing}, retrieved from American FactFinder, \url{factfinder.census.gov}, 11 Nov 2010.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{florida-census-tract-405-03.png}
\caption{Florida Census Tract 405.03 – Buena Ventura Lakes}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{florida-census-tract-405-03.png}
\caption{Florida Census Tract 405.03 – Buena Ventura Lakes}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{florida-census-tract-405-03.png}
\caption{Florida Census Tract 405.03 – Buena Ventura Lakes}
\end{figure}

\footnote{Luis Sánchez, 110-114; Torres Concepción, 27-28.}
Landstar Homes played a key role in the Hispanic influx to Osceola County. The real estate company heavily targeted Hispanics in New York, Chicago, and Puerto Rico. The executives attempted to downplay their influence in the Hispanic boom since the neighborhood residents claimed whites felt it was a new Little Havana or Little Cuba; BVL resident Luis Román stated, “They look at BVL as the new slum of the ‘90s.” Contrary to their public statements, Landstar Homes played a crucial role in facilitating Puerto Rican migration to Osceola County.

The number of flights between Orlando and Puerto Rico increased throughout the 1980s, demonstrating the magnitude of movement between Puerto Rico and Central Florida. Beginning in May 1985, the airline Arrow Air introduced nonstop flights between Orlando International Airport and Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport in San Juan, prompting competitor Eastern Airlines to also begin providing the flights between the two cities during the summer. In 1987, SunCoast Airlines, Inc. scheduled twice-daily flights between San Juan and Orlando. In June 1988, Delta Airlines added daily direct flights to San Juan, Puerto Rico from Orlando International Airport. This growth in the number of flights between Puerto Rico and Orlando continued in the 1990s. In April 1993, US Air also provided nonstop flights between Orlando and San Juan. Kiwi International Airline also expanded from three-day-a-week schedule for flights to San Juan to seven-day-a-week from December 16, 1993 until January 5, as a result of the increased demand caused by Puerto Ricans visiting family on the Island for the Christmas

200 OS, “Landstar Homes.”
201 Ibid.
In June 1994, Kiwi continued to expand flights to San Juan, doubling the number of flights to the Island a day to an average of four flights.\textsuperscript{207}

In 1990, 125,011 passengers traveled from Orlando to San Juan and 126,935 from San Juan to Orlando.\textsuperscript{208} The two figures show the prevalence of travel between Central Florida and the island. Over the next few years, the movement only strengthened. Four years later, it grew to 198,684 passengers to San Juan and 200,964 passengers flying to Orlando International Airport from the San Juan by the end of 1994.\textsuperscript{209}

The sheer quantity of Puerto Rican migrants alone demonstrates the mass movement to Orlando, but this collection of statistics does not explain which Puerto Ricans chose to migrate. It is not simply the number of Puerto Ricans that shaped the migration, it was also the fact that the majority comprised of entry-level workers searching for employment.

**Orange and Osceola Counties Demographics**

Early in the migration in 1981, a spokesman for Orlando’s Hispanic Chamber of Commerce described Puerto Rican migration as primarily a “professionals,” including engineers, doctors, lawyers, and businesspersons.\textsuperscript{210} This description of did not take into account the thousands of entry-level positions Puerto Ricans took due to lack of college degrees. Even if one had a B.A., they were unable to attain jobs within their specializations due in many cases to their lack of English language fluency. José and Ana Caraballo moved from Puerto Rico to Greater

\textsuperscript{207} Jerry Jackson, “Kiwi Plans to Double Orlando Departures,” OS 1 Jun 1994, B1.
Orlando in 1980 to be closer to family members and so that their children could learn English to succeed at the university-level and acquire professional careers. While José Caraballo had a Bachelor’s degree in Engineering and Ana had a Master’s in Social Work from accredited Puerto Rican universities, neither could find employment in their respective fields due to lack of English mastery and lack of connections. They instead worked at entry-level jobs, including cleaning rental cars at the Orlando International Airport, a gas station clerk, hotel cleaning lady, and babysitter.\(^\text{211}\) This is just one of many instances in which Puerto Ricans could not acquire employments in fields they qualified for.

Contrary to the belief at the time, this was not a predominately “professional” migration during the 1980s.\(^\text{212}\) Data on the demographics of Puerto Ricans migrating from Puerto Rico to Greater Orlando is attainable via the county to county in-migration flow files on the U.S. 1990 Census.\(^\text{213}\) For the 6,974 Puerto Ricans of ages eighteen and over in Orange County from the sample, the average education level was high school graduate: 1,194 had less than a high school diploma (17.1 percent), and 3,837 had high school diplomas (55 percent); this is in contrast to 801 with Associate degrees (11.5 percent), 881 with a Bachelor’s degree (12.6 percent), and only 261 had a graduate or professional equivalent degrees (3.7 percent). Out of the 1,904 eighteen year old and older Puerto Ricans from Osceola County’s sample, 555 had no high school

\(^{211}\) José and Ana Caraballo, interviewed by author, 06 May 2011.
\(^{212}\) Santos-Berry, “Latin Presence.”
\(^{213}\) U.S. Census Bureau, “Census of Population, 1990: County to County Migration Flow File on CD-ROM,” Special Project (SP) 312 [machine-readable data files], 1995. Cross-referencing the 1990 county of residence with the place of residence in 1985 can only provide limited data: the U.S. Census Bureau did not break down the in-migration beyond Hispanic and as many Puerto Ricans migrated from New York and other northern states; therefore, it is impossible to specify which Hispanics are Puerto Ricans. For the island, however, it is safe to say that the overwhelming majority of the 9,091 Hispanics that migrated from Puerto Rico to Orange County are Puerto Rican. Unfortunately, the figures do not break down the income levels, education, occupation, and other categories based on origin and citizenship, so the figures reported will include the potential non-Puerto Ricans reported, with a pool of 9,489 recorded moving from Puerto Rico to Orange County.
diploma (29.1 percent), 896 had high school diplomas only (47.1 percent), 166 had Associate
degrees (8.7 percent), 233 had Bachelor’s degrees (12.2 percent), and only 54 had a graduate or
professional equivalent (2.8 percent). The sample distributions mirrored Florida’s average
education attainment levels: less than High School, 25.7 percent; High School diploma, 50.6
percent; Associate’s degree, 6.8 percent; Bachelor’s Degree, 11.3 percent; Graduate, 5.6
percent.

Perhaps the most telling statistics are the employment and income levels. From the
sample of Puerto Ricans that migrated to Orange County from Puerto Rico, unemployment was
at 8.4 percent and Osceola’s sample had unemployment at 11.1 percent. In 1990, both Puerto
Rico and New York City’s Puerto Rican population recorded the same unemployment figure,
13.7 percent. In comparison, the samples of Central Florida Puerto Ricans found more
employment in Greater Orlando, especially those living in Orange County. Furthermore, 1886 of
persons 16 years and over in Orange County were not in labor force (25.6 percent) and 659 in
Osceola (33.1 percent), implying a significant retiree population.

Another indication of professional versus non-professional status is income. Professional
annual salaries are typically higher than non-professional annual income. In 1990, the median
household income in current dollars was $35,353. However, the income levels show the

---

214 Ibid.
215 U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census, Summary Tape Files 3.
216 U.S. Census Bureau, “Census of Population, 1990: County to County Migration Flow File on CD-ROM,” Special
Project (SP) 312 [machine-readable data files] . 1995
“The Socioeconomic Status of Hispanic New Yorkers: Current Trends and Future Prospects,” Pew Hispanic Center
27 Sep 2011.
218 Ibid.
majority of Puerto Ricans that migrated to Orange and Osceola Counties in the latter half of the 1980s were lower to lower-middle class. For Orange County, 1,729 had less than $5,000 annual income; 1,632 had an annual income between $5,000 and $9,999; 1,510 had an annual income between $10,000 and $14,999; 640 between $15,000 and $19,999; and only 857 reported income levels at $20,000 and over (1,137 reported no income). In Osceola County, 397 had less than $5,000 annual incomes; 464 had annual incomes between $5,000 and $9,999; 431 had annual incomes between $10,000 and $14,999; 226 between $15,000 and $19,999; and only 154 reported annual incomes at $20,000 and over (418 reported no income). So as Puerto Ricans did find employment in the Central Florida region, 80 percent in Orange County and 92.6 percent in Osceola County took jobs with under $20,000 yearly salaries, incomes not associated with professionals.

To be more specific, the majority of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida worked in the service industry. Out of Orange County’s sample of 4,911 employed persons 16 years and older, the most listed occupation fell under the category “Other service” at 1,506. The second highest occupation frequently listed was “Administrative support including clerical,” (e.g. supervisors, secretaries, typists, clerks, payroll employees) at 680. In third came “Sales” at 653. In terms of professional categories, there were 305 recorded in “Executive, administrative, and managerial” (e.g. public and education administrators, financial managers); and 342 recorded in “Professional specialty” (e.g. engineers, lawyers, physicians, scientists, teachers, therapists). In Osceola County, “Other service” also ranked first at 405 out of 1,186; “Sales” ranked second at 189; and

---

221 Ibid.
“Administrative support including clerical” ranked third at 138. For the professional positions, 20 were recorded in “Executive, administrative and managerial,” and 78 in “Professional specialty.” Overall, only 13.2 percent of the labor force from Orange’s sample and 8.3 percent from Osceola’s sample are comprised of professionals; instead, the vast majority held non-professional positions.

Furthermore, in the past, Puerto Rican men often left the island by themselves and usually had their wives and children follow soon after, but the prevalence of households comprised of families in a five year transition period implies that Puerto Ricans migrated from the island with their entire family. The majority of Puerto Rican migrants in Orange County were families, as opposed to single men or women: 6,690 were two-parents families (72 percent), 1,799 were single-parent families (19 percent), and only 824 were single individuals (9 percent). With regards to the labor force (which included persons 16 years and over), 4,911 Puerto Ricans were employed (67 percent), 460 were unemployed (6 percent), 1,886 were not in the labor force (26 percent), and 100 worked for the Armed Forces (1 percent). The fact that Puerto Ricans brought their families with them speaks to the perception that Central Florida was a better place to raise a family over Puerto Rico.

The majority of growth in the 1980s came from the non-professional employees capitalizing on Central Florida’s labor and real estate booms (see Chapter Three). Most Puerto Ricans left Puerto Rico due to the high unemployment rates and limited work hours for employed individuals. Even Puerto Ricans with college degrees had to work in the service sectors due to their lack of English-language mastery. While the samples only contain migrants

\footnote{Ibid.}
from the island and not New York City, the case study provides a preliminary analysis of the
Puerto Rican community amidst its adolescence in the region. The collection of data
demonstrates the diversification of the Puerto Rican settlements between their demographics,
income levels, counties in which they resided, and their employment. And while the combination
of growing job opportunities, the climate, and high supply of cheap land did pull many Puerto
Ricans, these reasons were not the sole causes of the large influx of Puerto Ricans in the region.
One of the most important factors was the support networks that developed from Puerto Ricans
already living in Greater Orlando.

Support Networks in Greater Orlando

Support networks served a crucial role in the success of incoming migrants, including
finding housing and employment, understanding local politics, and learning the lay of the land.
Puerto Ricans in Central Florida relied heavily on families and friends who arrived in the region
previously. With many migrants coming and informing others of potential jobs and opportunities
in Florida, word-of-mouth was a critical motivator for Puerto Ricans deciding to leave their
current home to Florida.

Puerto Ricans often relied on the support of family members and friends in finding
housing, work, where to find Puerto Rican ingredients, and other necessities for their new
environment. The use of support networks is a commonality throughout the Puerto Rican
diaspora. Sociologist Sánchez Korrol’s book, *From Colonia to Community*, provides several
examples from the Puerto Rican community in New York City. In New York, parents bore the
responsibility of childcare with other members in the community. The role of the childrearing
often times fell upon compadres and comadres (godparents) while the natural parents would work with outside employment, usually a direct maternal relative, such as aunts, sisters, or mothers.\textsuperscript{223} Families also took in lodgers, either newly arrived migrants or long-term second families sharing living space with the head of the household.\textsuperscript{224} Support networks functioned similarly throughout the Puerto Rican nation and played a major factor in forming Central Florida’s community.

By 1990, almost every Puerto Rican knew somebody who lived in Central Florida. This became overwhelmingly apparent in the oral histories. Almost every interviewee from the PRCF History or interviews conducted by me had either a family member or friend who already lived in Greater Orlando or shortly followed them after. When José Caraballo’s arrived in Orlando, his sister was already there to greet him.\textsuperscript{225} Caraballo and his family moved to Orlando because they believed the schools in Florida would be better for their children and they had family in the region. They came in 1988 with the support of his sister, Migdalia Robmas, who already lived in the city for ten years. Migdalia helped them find jobs and a church to attend.\textsuperscript{226} As the Puerto Rican population grew in Central Florida, future migrants experienced an easier transition than that of their predecessors due to the growing Puerto Rican social networks of family, friends, and contacts.

The spiritual family was also instrumental in supporting new migrants. When Cicela Adujar moved from Puerto Rico to Central Florida in 1989, she already knew which church she would be attending: Discipulos de Cristo (Disciples of Christ), located on Chickasaw Trail in East Orlando. Her friends from the church aided her search for a home and schools for her

\textsuperscript{223} Sánchez Korrol, 100.
\textsuperscript{224} Sánchez Korrol, 102-103.
\textsuperscript{225} José and Ana Caraballo, interviewed by author, 06 May 2011, digital recording.
\textsuperscript{226} Migdalia Robmas, interviewed by author, 25 Apr 2011, digital recording.
children to attend.\textsuperscript{227} Fabián and Elsa Mercado also benefited from their church family, stating, “We had a lot of Puerto Rican friends from church in New York who had moved here to Orlando. They moved here before us, so when we decided to move here in 1973 we already knew we had a lot of friends so we knew we were not going to be completely alone.”\textsuperscript{228}

Religious institutions also served as spaces for social networking and community building. Many local churches were places for Hispanics to meet other Spanish-speakers in the area. The majority of Puerto Ricans were Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. Many Puerto Rican families developed friendships and communal ties with fellow Hispanics in their church. By choosing the local church and by being Puerto Rican, newcomers already had two things in common with other Puerto Ricans attending the same church. Religious institutions gave Puerto Ricans a sense of familiarity, as local services were similar to those on the island.

At first, Puerto Ricans convened in non-Hispanic churches that held Spanish services and masses. One of the first churches to hold a Spanish mass was Good Sheppard in East Orlando. In the 1970s, very few Hispanics attended the church, a reflection of the small number of inhabitants.\textsuperscript{229} The Puerto Rican population growth in East Orlando led to a rise in the church’s Hispanic membership. Good Shepherd offered communions, choirs, religious education, and counseling sessions in Spanish as early as 1981.\textsuperscript{230} By 1988, about 400 registered Hispanic families attended masses at the church, which now offered two out of its eight masses in Spanish.\textsuperscript{231} Recognized in Spanish as Buen Pastor, Puerto Ricans enjoyed services in their native

\textsuperscript{227} Cicela Adujar, interviewed by author, 17 Mar 2011, digital recording.
\textsuperscript{228} Fabian and Elsa Mercado, PRCF History.
\textsuperscript{229} Mary Johnson, PRCF History.
tongue: a sign of retaining cultural identity in the mainland as opposed to assimilating to the dominant culture.

Though many Hispanics attended non-Hispanics churches that catered to the growing ethnic populations, Hispanics generally preferred parishes and congregations predominately comprised of other Hispanics. Starting in 1975, Hispanics from Calvary Assembly in Winter Park would also meet informally once a week in each others’ homes. As the group continued to grow over the next five years, they decided to branch off and establish their own independent church. In 1980, they bought a vacant lot from Calvary Assembly and created Iglesia Calvario (Calvary Spanish Church). The church grew dramatically throughout the decade: in 1983, its attendance was 400; by 1989, it was up to 1,200. Another large Hispanic Protestant congregation was the Hispanic Assemblies of God, which had several churches in Central Florida, including the first Hispanic church in Poinciana, in Osceola County. Osceola County had a greater number of Hispanic Protestants over Catholics.

Puerto Rican religious institutions fostered communal attachments to the island through culture and traditions, such as conducting their services in Spanish or celebrating Puerto Rican religious holidays. Many of the congregations grew from Puerto Rican residential areas throughout Orlando and Kissimmee, including Good Shepherd in east Orlando and Iglesia Calvario in Oakridge. They also supplied other Latin Americans with Spanish religious services, both Spanish Catholic masses and Spanish Protestant churches. As a result, many Puerto Ricans

234 Ibid.
created new social ties with other local Hispanics, building friendships and a new community in their new Central Floridian home.\textsuperscript{237}

**Education and ESOL**

After 1980, more Puerto Rican children began attending public schools throughout Central Florida. According to Orange County Public Schools’ Enrollment Summary, Hispanics comprised only 1.2 percent of the student body in Orange County in 1977, the oldest date in the records that include race and ethnicity (but did not distinguish among Hispanic groups).\textsuperscript{238} In just over a decade, October 1988, the percentage of Hispanic students grew to six percent.\textsuperscript{239} By 1996, they made up 17.3 percent of the students in Orange County.\textsuperscript{240} One of the largest increases in Hispanic students within a school took place in Engelwood Elementary School, located in east Orlando, across the street from the Monterey neighborhood and in the center of the Puerto Rican enclave. Hispanics made up 7.7 percent of the student body in Engelwood Elementary in 1977.\textsuperscript{241} Only three years later, the percentage jumped to 16.59 percent.\textsuperscript{242} By 1988, it rose to 34.43 percent.\textsuperscript{243} In 1996, Hispanics hit another milestone: one-half of the students in that school were Hispanic.\textsuperscript{244}

Meadow Woods and Hunter’s Creek are two areas in Orange County with large Puerto Rican populations; their respective schools also had large Hispanic populations. In 1996,

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{238} Pupil Assignment, “Enrollment Summary: 1977,” Orange County Public Schools, accessed 11 Nov 2010; hereafter cited as “OCPS X,” with X representing the corresponding year of the enrollment summary.
\textsuperscript{239} OCPS 1988.
\textsuperscript{240} OCPS 1996.
\textsuperscript{241} OCPS 1977.
\textsuperscript{242} OCPS 1980.
\textsuperscript{243} OCPS 1988.
\textsuperscript{244} OCPS 1996.
\end{footnotes}
Meadow Woods Elementary School had a 39 percent Hispanic student body, reflective of the heavy Puerto Rican presence in the area. Hunter’s Creek was another neighborhood with a large Puerto Rican population, which was also reflected in the student population: Hunter’s Creek Middle School had a 31 percent Hispanic student body and Hunter’s Creek Elementary School was at 20 percent. The Puerto Rican influx contributed to Orange County Public Schools’ decision to construct these three schools since they were constructed in the 1990s, shortly after the Puerto Rican population emerged in the area.245

Education in Central Florida benefited Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics via the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs offered in public schools beginning in the 1970s. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned educational discrimination based on national origin. This led to Lau vs. Nichols in 1974, where Chinese American students in California argued that they required special assistance to overcome their language barrier because they were entitled to equal education via Title VI. Through Castañeda v Pickard in 1981, the Supreme Court implemented three-part assessment for bilingual programs to be held to the standards of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, which prohibited discrimination of staff, students, faculty, including racial segregation, although desegregation began occurring in the 1960s.

In the state, Florida schools implemented ESOL programs throughout the 1970s and 1980s due to south Florida’s Cuban influx, yet many parties, including the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) felt the programs did not meet the standards established by the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974. In 1990, the state of Florida signed in the

245 Ibid.
Florida ESOL Consent Degree, which called for core classes to be taught in the students’ native tongue until they acquire English proficiency.\textsuperscript{246} This gave Puerto Rican students a new means to overcome the language barrier, specifically for children originating from the island. Thus, the Central Florida schools themselves became an extension of the support networks by providing students with English training.

Schools and churches are a means of measuring a developing community, but it takes connectivity of people, identity, and practices to form the community. The immense population increase facilitated the development of Puerto Rican cultural ties. Quickly Puerto Ricans began congregating together and forming social, political, and cultural institutions that led to the formation of a Puerto Rican identity within Central Florida.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Puerto Ricans who migrated to Central Florida in the 1980s did so because they saw a growing demand for labor, especially from Spanish speakers. The fact that Puerto Ricans are already U.S. citizens made them more attractive for employers looking for semi-skilled workers in entry-level positions. While a handful of professionals migrated to the region, the majority of Puerto Rican laborers in Orlando and Kissimmee consisted of non-skilled or semi-skilled positions.

As a result of the growing number of Puerto Ricans flocking to the region was the rise of communal aid offered to arriving migrants. By the end of 1990, most Puerto Ricans knew somebody who lived in or around Orlando. This support network assisted in the transition from life on the island or in the Big Apple to sunny Florida. With the aid of friends, family, and

church members in explaining how to operate in the region, often times explained in the native
tongue of Spanish, new arrivals learned quickly how to adapt to their new environment. Yet this
network also led to a growing appreciation within this growing population for things Puerto Rican; in other words, the support network directly led to the formation of the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida.
CHAPTER FIVE: FORMING THE PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

Puerto Ricans fought to retain their identity within their new home on the mainland. Puerto Ricans formed social clubs, festivals, and other celebrations to create spaces in which they could continue their traditional practices and retain their identity. Duany states, “Puerto Rican organizations in the United States selectively appropriated the discursive practices traditionally associated with being Puerto Rican, yet they continued to portray themselves as part of a translocal nation divided between the island and the mainland.”

In New York, for example, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics formed the Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana (Puerto Rican and Hispanic League) in 1926, with the goal of uniting Hispanics and representing the colony—the Hispanic community within Manhattan—to the dominant society. Two years later, Puerto Ricans founded Los Jíbaros, primarily a “social, cultural and sports club,” in which members would dress in typical Puerto Rican peasant garments and cook traditional Puerto Rican foods, such as chicharrones (fried pork rinds) and arroz con gandules (rice with pigeon peas).

While Orlando supplied Puerto Ricans with jobs and cheap housing, they long to retain their culture and traditions intact through the means of constructing their own community. Community is not only defined by an area having a presence of a population but also requires said population to define what residential area is “theirs,” be it a neighborhood, sector of the city,

---

247 Duany, Puerto Rican Nation, 186.
248 Duany, Puerto Rican Nation, 188.
249 Ibid.
or strictly a street. A community forms upon the basis that a group of people identify a space as their own, which is often claimed with recognizable symbols that represent the identity, akin to planting a nation’s flag during the era of colonialism. For instance, in Humboldt Park in Chicago, Puerto Ricans constructed twin flag monuments on Division Street and further claimed it by redubbing the street *Paseo Boricua* (Puerto Rican Drive). These Puerto Ricans in Chicago laid its claim on that space within the metropolitan, much like Puerto Ricans in New York City, Hartford, and other parts of the diaspora.

By forming social clubs, local festivals, holiday celebrations, and an Orlando chapter of the Puerto Rican Parade, Puerto Ricans provided both long-term residents and new arrivals with a space to celebrate puertorriqueñidad. The chapter illustrates how the formation of the Puerto Rican civic organizations like Asociación Borinqueña, the first Puerto Rican social club, gave residents a “cultural home” away from the island. Festivals like the Puerto Rican Day Parade gave them a day to celebrate—and embrace—what makes them different from other Americans. By creating these institutions, Puerto Ricans had a means to cope with being away from family and their familiar homes (whether it be Puerto Rico or New York City), and provided them with a space to meet other Puerto Ricans migrants.

**The Rise of Central Floridian Puertorriqueñidad in the 1980s**

In the midst of the 1970s migration, many Puerto Ricans longed for a familiar, communal space in Orlando. A handful of Puerto Rican families met in each other’s homes, celebrating holidays and birthdays together. One night, a member of the group stated, “Why don’t we form a

---

251 Ibid, 50-54.
252 Duany, “La nueva meca boricua.”
Puerto Rican organization here in town?‖253 This moment was the origin of the Asociación Borinqueña. Five families formed the club: Blanca Howe, José Luis Martínez, Armando González, James and Lilian Auffant, and Pepín Ramos. They continued to meet in homes at first, and then began renting a room in a hotel. They invited twenty-five Puerto Rican families. On that night in October 1979, sixteen families joined the organization.254

Three months later, they decided to formalize the association. James Auffant, a practicing attorney, drafted the association’s constitution. One founding member, Pepín Ramos, was an Air Force retiree. As a military retiree, he was allowed to rent a room in the NCO (non-commissioned officer) Club, located near the Naval Training Center: Orlando. The sixteen families swore themselves in at the NCO Club and celebrated by dancing to American country music. Auffant recounts, “Sixteen Puerto Rican families dancing country music…that’s a symbol of the times.”255 The families felt their culture might be lost without any formal institution to retain the values and practices from the Puerto Rican island.

While the founding members had varying rationales for creating the association, they all agreed it would be a means to bring Puerto Rico to Orlando. At first, as a club with no clubhouse, the group would rent out church halls and hotel convention rooms. With the collection of the membership dues from the growing membership and by hosting events such as dances and festivals, the association bought a piece of land and built a clubhouse on it in 1982. The plot cost ten thousand dollars and was located on Valencia College Lane, near the

---

255 Ibid.
intersection with Goldenrod Road in east Orlando. In 1988, they constructed their 2,000 square-foot building, which the members named the “Casa Club.”

Asociación Borinqueña grew through the 1980s. By 1990, about fifty families were members of the club. Soon, the organization decided to expand once again, and relocate to another facility. The association’s president in 1992, Luis Gómez, and the rest of the board decided to buy new property on the corner Econlockhatchee Trail and Colonial Drive for $150,000. In 2002, the association constructed a 16,000 square-foot, two-story building on the property for an estimated $1 million. By this time, the membership had grown to 120 members. It is the oldest Hispanic civic group in Central Florida, and continues to grow and hold events in their current headquarters off Econlockhatchee Trail in east Orlando.

Celebrating the culture went beyond the walls of the clubhouse. Members from Asociación Borinqueña performed “El Batey,” a ballet written by Sylvia Torres based off Puerto Rican folkloric ballet which debuted in June 1987. Written in 1986 by Sylvia Torres, Puerto Rican families—ranging from children to grandparents—all gathered to perform the Batey. The dancers performed primarily at Asociación Borinqueña, but also visited other venues, such as Valencia Community College in 1989, to celebrate the association’s ten-year anniversary. Darío González, a Puerto Rican who moved to Central Florida in the mid-1980s, recalled in his oral history the pride he felt being a part of the Batey group. The dance was a symbol of his

---

259 Ibid.
260 Ibid.
262 Darío González, PRCF History.
identity and the history of his Puerto Rican culture; it was a way for him to celebrate his ancestry.

Figure 4: Asociación Borinqueña Clubhouse on Econlockhatchee Trail

Source: Photographed by author, 14 Sep 2008.
Asociación Borinqueña was not the only Puerto Rican social club in Orlando. Even at the local university, students created associations that reinforced their link to the island cultural traditions. In 1981, Puerto Rican students at the University of Central Florida joined to form the Puerto Rican Students Association. Advised by José Fernández, a Cuban professor at the university’s history department, students created the student organization as a means for Puerto Rican students to form their own space within a foreign environment. The students organized a parade during Homecoming Week for the university in which men dressed in traditional jíbaro attire: white shirts, shoes, and pants with red scarves and pavas (a traditional Puerto Rican straw
hat) and the women in colorful Puerto Rican dresses. The Puerto Rican students celebrated their culture within an alien realm, in this case a predominately non-Hispanic white university with a marginal Puerto Rican population. “I bet it was the first time they all saw something like that,” Víctor Díaz reminisced.

Figure 6: Puerto Ricans Celebrating at the University of Central Florida, 1982

Source: PRCF History, courtesy of Elaine Ciceraro.

---

263 Victor Díaz, PRCF History; José Fernández, interviewed by author, 20 Apr 2010, digital recording.
Social clubs were not the only locations in which puertorriqueñidad resonated. Festive celebrations gave the Puerto Rican community opportunities to exhibit cultural traditions and practices out in the open and among the host society. One of the earliest Latino celebrations in Orlando was the Hispanic Latin Fiesta, dating back to 1978. The Hispanic Business Committee of the Greater Orlando Chamber of Commerce organized the festival. Many Hispanics, not just Puerto Ricans and Cubans, participated in the fiestas. In 1985, an *Orlando Sentinel* article featured the event, stating, “Among the drawing cards will be folk dancers, musicians, native foods and arts and crafts from 15 Latin nations, including Argentina, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Colombia, Guatemala, Venezuela and Spain.”

Another prominent festival was the Fiesta de San Juan, held at Wet n’ Wild water park on International Drive in Orlando. Started in 1981 by Amaury Díaz, the Fiesta de San Juan always took place the Saturday closest to Saint John’s Day, celebrated on June 24th. As per Puerto Rican tradition, many Puerto Ricans would gather at the beach on June 23th. When midnight came, they would dip themselves into the ocean, recreating Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist. Since the nearest beach was at least an hour away from Orlando, Díaz organized the celebration at Wet n’ Wild. At midnight, well beyond the water park’s normal closing hours (which usually closes around dusk), Puerto Ricans honored the holiday tradition by dipping themselves in the wave pool.

All societies incorporate commemorations to convey memory between generations; this is the thesis of Paul Connerton in his book, *How Societies Remember*. Connerton argues that

---

266 Amaury Díaz, PRCF History.
social memory is conveyed and preserved through “more or less ritual” performances. Connerton uses the United States Presidential Inauguration and various religious services as examples of rituals that encompass “bodily automatisms”—physically going through the motions—to be considered legitimate by a group, whether it be as small as a club or as large as a nation. His broader thesis argues that social memory is created and retained through the inclusion of the physical performances and ritual practices, yet Connerton also argues that “commemorative ceremonies” are an essential tool for a group to retain its identity. For Central Florida’s Puerto Ricans, cultural traditions like el batey and La Fiesta de San Juan were such commemorative ceremonies which reinforced Puerto Rican identity in the region. By dancing and dressing the way the jíbaros did on the island or through dipping their heads underwater at the stroke of midnight in a wave pool instead of the Caribbean Sea or Atlantic Ocean, Puerto Ricans continued behaving like Puerto Ricans, even when not in Puerto Rico.

Puertorriqueñidad fueled the development of Puerto Rican social clubs and festive celebrations. The associations gave Puerto Ricans a place and festivals gave them a moment in time to celebrate their heritage and culture. With the 1980s came cultural organizations dedicated to specifically the Puerto Rican nation as opposed to pan-Hispanic institutions. The Puerto Rican club, Asociación Borinqueña, led the wave for future ethnic-specific organizations, such as the founding of the Asociación Cubana (Cuban Association) in 1985 and the Central Florida

---

268 Ibid, 4-5.
269 Connerton, 42-71.
Brazilian Organization in 1992.\textsuperscript{270} Of the multitude of cultural organizations that developed over the past fifty years, Puerto Ricans created one of the first.

**Spanish-language Media Expansion**

The expansion of Spanish-language media is another indicator of the growing influence of Hispanics and Puerto Ricans in the Greater Orlando region. In the early 1970s, Central Florida had no media outlets in Spanish. Gradually, radio stations began playing Latino music, television channels started introducing *novelas* (Spanish soap operas) and other Hispanic programs, and newspapers printed stories about Latin America and Latin Americans in Central Florida. As the Hispanic population expanded, especially the Puerto Rican community, the growing demand for Spanish-language media led to the development of Central Florida’s Spanish-language press and entertainment. Again, both Cubans and Puerto Ricans were instrumental in developing the Spanish-language media presence in Orlando.

Spanish-language radio diversified in the 1980s. For instance, in 1980, Paul Gamache was a recent migrant hoping to monitor the elections in Puerto Rico. Unfortunately for him, the only local Hispanic radio station was located in Kissimmee and thus had a weak signal.\textsuperscript{271} Then, soon after graduating from the University of Central Florida in 1982, Gamache began working at WONQ 1140-AM (known as *Once Q* to its listeners) as a reporter for the morning segment, “Buenos Dias Orlando” (Good Morning Orlando).\textsuperscript{272} Once Q was the second Spanish station in Greater Orlando and the first in Orlando. Puerto Rican George Arroyo founded WONQ in 1985

\textsuperscript{270} Patrizio, “Cubans’ Clubhouse Began as a Dream,” *OS* 18 May 1990, B1; Patricia Buzato, “Brazilian Immigration: A New View of Latinization,” (M.A. Thes, University of Central Florida, 2007), 32.

\textsuperscript{271} Gamache, PRCF History.

\textsuperscript{272} Gamache, PRCF History.
on John Young Parkway in Orlando. The radio station’s playlists were predominately comprised of Latin ballads with salsa and merengue mixed in, genres typically enjoyed in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Its primary age demographic was twenty-five year olds and older, and while the station’s song selections were geared towards Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans, any Latin American could enjoy a radio station that provided music, news, traffic, and talk shows in Spanish.

Three Puerto Ricans founded the first and longest-standing Spanish-language periodical in Orlando. After arriving in Orlando in 1980, Manuel Toro worked in the sales department of a hotel near the Orlando International Airport for a year. Toro felt that Hispanics did not have a “voice” in the region, leading to his decision to start a Spanish-language newspaper. Manuel Toro, his wife Dora Casanova de Toro, and Ruthie Ileana Figueroa established *La Prensa*, a newspaper created to provide Hispanics in the region news on topics that affected them. It aimed at informing Hispanics in Orlando of the current events, from local elections to topics regarding Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spain, Venezuela, Brazil, and Bolivia.

The first issue offered came out on August 21st, 1981, and cost ten cents. Several weeks later, the price dropped to free of charge to encourage readership, with the paper receiving its revenue strictly via advertising. *La Prensa* only had four employees on staff, including Manuel Toro as the editor. The publication served as a means for local Hispanic businesses to advertise to Spanish speakers, with advertisements ranging from lawyers and accountants to plumbers and landscapers. Employment offices also bought Spanish advertisements in the paper, which provided an avenue of employment for workers with limited English-proficiency. It also aided

---

businesses by tapping a bilingual labor pool. For instance, several law firms and local colleges had job postings in the paper in English.\textsuperscript{274} The requirements for the jobs varied from a high school degree to a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. As a result, both working and professional class Hispanics could find jobs through the newspaper.

The newspaper also capitalized on Hispanic tourist in the area looking to visit Disney World and other amusement parks. \textit{La Prensa} provided Hispanic visitors and new residents with limited English proficiency with sections dedicated to tourism, real estate, shopping, important local phone numbers, and classifieds. The section containing tourist destinations included Busch Gardens, Church Street Station, Kennedy Space Center, Mystery Fun House, Sea World, Disney World, and Wet ’n Wild. Each destination had a small description, cost of admittance for both children and adults, and directions to the site. With \textit{La Prensa}, Hispanics could find their way to the amusement parks.

\textit{La Prensa} gave both Hispanic newcomers and residents with limited English proficiency a means to understand and contextualize their new Central Florida home. Other Spanish-language newspapers arose, such as \textit{La Semana} during the 1980s, \textit{El Sentinel}, Orlando Sentinel’s Spanish-language sister paper started in August 2001, and \textit{El Nuevo Día}, Puerto Rico’s most read newspaper, opened an Orlando branch in September 2003.\textsuperscript{275} Puerto Rico’s most prominent newspaper hoped to profit from Orlando’s community.

\textsuperscript{274} \textit{La Prensa}, 21-27 August 1981, 15.
The English-only Amendment

Since the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and national origin has not been completely eliminated, but instead submerged and more subtle. While many Puerto Ricans interviewed over the course of this work mention never encountering any discrimination, others recalled moments in their experiences in Central Florida filled with strife, obstacles, and discrimination due to their ethnicity. Participants of the PRCF History project shared incidents of discrimination they endured in Central Florida. James Auffant, a Puerto Rican attorney who moved to Central Florida in 1978, related an anecdote of being approached by a non-Hispanic and being told not to speak Spanish at the restaurant Auffant and his friends were eating at.\(^{276}\) Puerto Rican Edward Heinzman spoke of an incident regarding his wife and a local school principal. His family arrived in Altamonte Springs in 1977. His wife applied to be a translator for a local school as she was fluent in both English and Spanish. The principal, unaware that Mrs. Heinzman was of Puerto Rican descent, quipped “You don’t have to do too much for these people.”\(^{277}\) Upon hearing this statement, she rejected the position.

Perhaps the greatest resistance to Puerto Ricans and Hispanics in general took the form of a state referendum. In the 1980s, the introduction of an English-only Amendment for Florida’s state constitution, which passed on November 8th, 1988, made apparent the anti-Hispanic sentiments in Florida.\(^{278}\) Viewpoints clashed in the Orlando Sentinel. For instance, one article quoted Orlando resident Neville Buchanan as saying, “We should not have two languages or

\(^{276}\) James Auffant, interviewed by author. 15 April 2010, digital recording.
\(^{277}\) Edward Heinzman, PRCF History.
several languages in government. We should use English only." In the same article, Winter Springs resident Carolyn Foye stated “The people who immigrate here often speak other languages, but that diversity serves a purpose—we learn from one another. Making English our official language would limit some of our citizens.” These opinions originated from Orlando Sentinel’s “Sound Off” system, in which local residents called a line from the newspaper to voice their opinions directly.

During the months leading up to the referendum, the Orlando Sentinel’s pages were filled with articles detailing the opposing viewpoints on the amendment. One article included the then-governor Bob Martinez’s opposition to the proposal, stating, "We are an international state with Disney World and international trade...There has been a lot of concern about the image it would present.” In Greater Orlando, the executive director of the Kissimmee/St. Cloud Convention and Visitors Bureau released a memo in 1988 asking employees to “speak only English.” LULAC cited the incident as anti-Hispanic discrimination and linked the episode to the English-only amendment. While a bureau manager stepped down in the wake of the incident in an attempt to calm the backlash, the memo still reflects an anti-Hispanic attitude that existed in the region.

---

280 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
The successfully passing of the amendment and the prevalence of the “English only” mentality indicate how Floridians felt threatened by the growing Hispanic population throughout the state. The amendment itself had no deep ramifications to the state residents other than to tell speakers of foreign tongues that English comes first and foremost in Florida, which is ironic considering that the territory was discovered and named by Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León. In the end, the amendment did little to deter Hispanic migration to the state or to stop Puerto Ricans from celebrating their identity in public spaces.

Conclusion

Family gathers and church services were the first occurrences where families and friends could reminisce their past like how they both went to the same school, the funny incident at the quinceñera in Queens, or how they miss falling asleep to the sound of coquis in the evening. These shared experiences forged Puerto Rican identity beyond boundaries, and slowly extended beyond the walls of homes and churches, forming the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida. With the additions of social clubs and cultural festive celebrations, the aid of Spanish language media outlets, and the existing support network comprised from families and friends living in the region, these factors combined to forge a Puerto Rican communal identity in Greater Orlando. Furthermore, these constitutions fueled further growth, enticing potential migrants with the growing number of resources to aid in the adjustment of living in Florida.

The Puerto Rican social clubs, festivals, parades, newspapers, and radio stations were not the only ones to exist at the time. Other small Spanish language newspapers and periodicals printed in Orlando and Kissimmee such as La Semana, but none had the impact that La Prensa
had, which also continues to print at the time of this document’s submission. *Once Q* continues
to provide Spanish speaking listeners with news, music, and other programs every day. These
media businesses serve as both a lens to measure how Hispanics expanded the local media
market and as a sample of how local Puerto Ricans discovered a demand for Spanish language
programming and literature.
CHAPTER SIX: THE DIVERSIFICATION OF CENTRAL FLORIDA’S PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY

By the 1990s, the Orlando MSA had already become the fastest growing Puerto Rican community in the mainland. Other urban centers throughout the U.S. with significant Puerto populations showed little expansion. In New York City Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA), the Puerto Rican population only grew 2.76 percent between 1990 and 2000. Compared to Orlando, Chicago also saw minor growth, at 7.89 percent. Philadelphia grew by 32.84 percent and Hartford’s population increased by 42.55 percent. The largest Puerto Rican population increase in an urban center outside of Florida was Boston, at 74.39 percent. The second-largest growth was also in Florida: Tampa’s Puerto Rican population grew 116.14 percent (from 34,986 in 1990 to 75,621 in 2000). Miami’s community also grew by 55.64 percent (1990: 99,760; 2000: 135,265). Nonetheless, none compared to Orlando’s 411 percent increase in the 1990s.

The development of the Puerto Rican community can be divided into decades: the 1970s saw the establishing of foundations that would aid in the development, the 1980s is the decade when Puerto Ricans began migrating to Greater Orlando in large numbers, and the 1990s is when the community flourished, further developing the significant Hispanic market. By the end of the decade, the Puerto Rican influence on the metropolitan landscape could be detected by any visitor: either by flipping through radio stations and television channels, looking at billboards near major highways, or by simply walking in a crowded shopping plaza and hearing Spanish being spoken by local residents.
Quantifying the Puerto Rican Community in the 1990s

Geographers Luis Sánchez and Ramón Luis Torres Concepción determined the settlement patterns of Puerto Ricans migrating to Greater Orlando. With the bulk of their data acquired from the U.S. 2000 Census, both argue that the Puerto Rican settlement pattern in the Orlando MSA differed from Puerto Rican nuclei in other urban centers, especially New York City and Chicago. Sánchez’s dissertation, *Puerto Rico’s 79th Municipality?*, contrasts Orlando’s settlement patterns with the northern urban centers:

Spatially, Orlando is different from cities in the northeastern and midwestern United States. The metropolitan area of Orlando, as is the case of the state of Florida, is characterized by lower population densities and more urban sprawl. Here growth has moved towards suburbanization, therefore, the spatial organization of this metropolitan area does not provide the conditions for highly dense urban areas, including, a densely populated Puerto Rican neighborhood.\(^{285}\)

Torres Concepción furthers this claim, stating that Puerto Ricans in Central Florida “display a special assimilation pattern where immigrants may have a residential dispersal out of the center city area into a dominant U.S. born White population area.”\(^{286}\) In other words, Puerto Rican settled throughout the metropolitan region as opposed to congregating into one dense, heavily populated ethnic settlement. In New York City, the majority of the Puerto Rican population resided in El Barrio, a northeastern Manhattan district with a predominately Latino population, mostly comprised of Puerto Ricans. In Chicago, Humboldt Park has a large concentration of

---


\(^{286}\) Ramon Torres Concepción, “Puerto Rican Migration, Settlement Patterns, and Assimilation in the Orlando MSA,” (MA thes., Binghamton University M.A. 2008), 16.
Puerto Ricans. Other Latino communities in the mainland also settled in large concentrations; for instance, Little Havana is a Cuban neighborhood in Miami that developed in the 1960s.287

In Orlando and surrounding areas, several parts of the metropolitan region rose as Puerto Rican enclaves. The enclaves developed at separate phases during the migration. For instance, the Puerto Rican settlement of East Orlando dates back to the 1960s. Starting its development in the mid-1980s, Buenaventura Lakes became the enclave with the highest Puerto Rican concentration at over 25 percent by 2000.288

**Rivalries, Diversity, and Competition in the 1990s**

As with every community’s development and expansion, the Puerto Rican community in Central Florida suffered from growing pains. Rivalries flared up between Puerto Ricans and Cubans, both vying for their own leadership within the Hispanic community. In Puerto Rican organizations, many felt disenfranchised and instead formed their own social clubs shaped with their own mission statements and goals. Other individuals just saw opportunity in the growing demand for Hispanic goods and formed new businesses. For instance, in 1970, there was only one bodega; by 2000, there were over a score, and local supermarkets, like Publix, began carrying Spanish Caribbean goods. The rise of options and competition during the 1990s solidified the importance Puerto Ricans had on the Central Florida landscape: they were no longer a niche ethnic group with one respective radio station, grocery store, and newspaper;

---


instead, they became a significant population that both Hispanic and non-Hispanic businesses and organizations began catering to.

Perhaps the greatest example of how tensions affected the local Hispanic community is the history of Orlando’s Hispanic chambers of commerce. While Puerto Ricans, such as Juan Pedro Rivera (the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce’s first secretary), were involved in the creation of the newly merged Latin Chamber of Commerce, Cubans comprised the majority of the leadership and membership. Due to the success of Puerto Rican businesses later in the 1980s, new Puerto Rican entrepreneurs began yearning for a chamber geared toward Puerto Ricans. The Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce opened an Orlando chapter in 1986, primarily aiming to aid Puerto Ricans from the island that relocated to Orlando. Architect Manuel González was the temporary president when the chamber was first created, stating, “We decided to go ahead and form the group when we saw that there were a lot of Puerto Rican professionals coming here from the island who needed information and advice about how to start their own businesses.”

Founding chamber members also included La Prensa editor Manuel Toro and attorney James Auffant. These two members also reflect the membership of the chamber: on one hand, there are shop and local business owners; on the other, are local professional practices such as lawyers and doctors. Together, they became the professional representatives of the Hispanic community.

As the years passed, resentment grew in Orlando between the two chambers, and between Cubans and Puerto Ricans. In 1989, an Orlando Sentinel reporter S. Renee Mitchell printed an article titled “Hispanics Share a Language, Little Else,” discussing the feud between Cubans and

---

289 James Auffant, Oral History, Juan Pedro Rivera, PRCF History.
Puerto Ricans in Orlando, going as far as to call a local city commissioner, Mary I. Johnson, an “aberration” for having a Cuban father and a Puerto Rican mother. The article inflamed the feud further when Latin Chamber of Commerce President Otta Acosta claimed, “Puerto Ricans are jealous of the success Cubans achieve and don’t like having to work for them.” This comment led to a response by tax attorney and Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce president Miguel A. López, in which he offered a rebuttal to Acosta’s remarks, stating, “A job has no race, creed or nationality… Thousands of Cubans and Puerto Ricans work together, marry each other and socialize together.” López disregarded the notion that Puerto Ricans were jealous of Cubans and stated that Puerto Ricans should continue to show pride in their culture and identity, even when on the mainland.

The dispute between the two Hispanic groups continued past the turn of the decade, but in 1992, attitudes changed. Both chambers realized that their goals remained parallel, and promoting support for Puerto Rican businesses would benefit other Hispanic businesses and vice-versa. The two chambers began talks of a possible merger in June 1992. While preliminary, the Puerto Rican chamber president Ricardo Pesquera foresaw promising results. In February 1993, the two chambers merged to become the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The first Hispanic chamber president, Conrad Santiago, gave the credit behind the merger to the Latin chamber president Al Sarabasa and Puerto Rican chamber president Ricardo Pesquera. James Auffant gave credit to Disney and other companies that thought it would benefit both chambers

292 Ibid.
to have one organization receive all the aid as opposed to splitting the funds in half.\textsuperscript{296} Of the 210 members of the combined chambers, only nineteen opposed the merger.\textsuperscript{297}

The peace did not last forever. Over the next four years, some Puerto Rican chamber members felt the Puerto Rican businesses were not getting the attention they deserved. Reinaldo Ledesma, Danny Ramos and Manuel Toro, along with other Puerto Ricans, decided to leave the Hispanic chamber and recreate the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce.\textsuperscript{298} Despite the creation of this strictly Puerto Rican chamber, Puerto Ricans remained members of the Hispanic chamber, with many Puerto Ricans opposing the split, which occurred in 1997.\textsuperscript{299} By early 2012, there are still two separate chambers: the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce.

The Hispanic chambers’ histories are filled with tension within the leadership and membership, which hindered their influences within the Central Florida community; however, the chambers still represent the economic power and influence Hispanic businesses had in Central Florida. Orlando has had Hispanic chambers since 1980, remaining functional throughout the decades, albeit to varying degrees of success. Nonetheless, Puerto Ricans continue to play a role in shaping Orlando and Central Florida’s economy, which can be seen through their involvement in the local Hispanic chambers.

Puerto Ricans established new social and cultural meeting grounds beyond the walls of Asociación Borinqueña. In 1991, another organization for Puerto Ricans formed, La Casa de Puerto Rico, which aimed to aid Puerto Rican newcomers in adjusting to the local laws, customs,

\textsuperscript{296} James R. Auffant, interviewed by author, 15 April 2010, digital recording.
\textsuperscript{297} Jim DeSimone, “2 Organizations Merge to Form Hispanic Chamber,” \textit{OS} 15 February 1993, 13.
\textsuperscript{299} Padilla, “Hispanics at Odds Over New Chamber.”
and finding jobs and homes. Twelve Puerto Ricans formed the club, including retirees Sal Ferrera, Darío González (also a member and former president of Asociación Borinqueña), and Manuel Martínez. La Casa de Puerto Rico also provided Puerto Ricans with another cultural space, a place to be Puerto Rican, as demonstrated on the clubhouse itself, with its walls painted with Puerto Rican symbols, such as the Puerto Rican flag and Taíno (the original Puerto Rican natives) petroglyphs. The clubhouse also hosted festivals, dances, and art shows.

Figure 7: La Casa de Puerto Rico

Source: PRCF History, photograph donated by Lizette Valarino.

The prime example of Puerto Ricans celebrating their identity and culture is the Puerto Rican Parade of Central Florida. Founded in 1992, Mildred Zapata and twenty other Puerto

---

Ricans organized the parade to honor the discovery of the Americas and the contributions Puerto Ricans provided throughout the island and mainland.\textsuperscript{301} Using New York’s Puerto Rican Day Parade as a model, Orlando Puerto Ricans celebrated the parade annually between September and October throughout the 1990s and the 2000s in downtown Orlando. Vendors provided traditional Puerto Rican food, musicians played Afro-Latino beats, and hundreds of Puerto Ricans waved the Puerto Rican flag in the streets of Orlando.\textsuperscript{302}

The Puerto Rican Parade and other festivals provided Puerto Ricans with public displays of their culture and traditions. Historian Liz Ševčenko’s essay, “Making Loisaida,” illustrates how Puerto Ricans utilized social movements and celebrations, such as the Young Lords organization and the Puerto Rican Day Parade, to mobilize and unite the Puerto Rican community to reconstruct apartments in El Barrio in New York City.\textsuperscript{303} Puerto Ricans in Orlando also gathered and mobilized behind communal causes. For instance, the Puerto Rican Day Parade organizers encouraged donations of food and diapers for Hurricane Andrew victims in south Florida.\textsuperscript{304} Asociación Borinqueña held a fund-raiser for Puerto Rico when Hurricane Hortense hit the island.\textsuperscript{305} Religious organizations also sent aid, such as the Centro de la Familia Cristiana.\textsuperscript{306}

Events like the Puerto Rican Parade and the Fiesta de San Juan are prime examples in which Puerto Ricans in Orlando openly celebrated their identities in the diaspora. These events continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and brought in crowds of Puerto Ricans and other

\textsuperscript{301} OS, “Parade to Move to With a Latin Beat,” 5 Sep 1992, D-3.
\textsuperscript{302} Mildred Zapata, PRCF History.
\textsuperscript{305} OS, “Central Floridians Give $3,100 For Hurricane Relief,” 21 Sep 1996, D-3.
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid.
Hispanics for the goal of celebrating puertorriqueñidad. In doing so, Puerto Ricans retained their culture and identity, distinguishing themselves from the dominant society. Between the social organizations and the festive events, Central Florida’s Puerto Ricans had multiple options for celebrating their identity publicly.

Cuban business owners paved the way for other Hispanic entrepreneurs in Orlando. In 1978, a Dominican named André Fernández established the La Primera Carnicería y Grocery on Semoran Boulevard, near Azalea Park.³⁰⁷ Seven years later, Navarro’s Market opened down the street on Semoran, owned by Ismael Méndez from Puerto Rico.³⁰⁸ By 1988, ten markets had opened, with the largest being the Xtra Super Food Center.³⁰⁹ These bodegas were integral for supplying Puerto Ricans with both the ingredients required for their cocina criolla and as a center to meet other Puerto Ricans in the area.

The growth of media outlets targeting Hispanics further illustrate the significance of the Puerto Rican population, which comprised fifty percent of the Hispanic population at the time. While several small Spanish-language newspapers hit the stands in Central Florida, only La Prensa ran successfully throughout the two decades of the 1980s and 1990s. The Orlando Sentinel’s desire to reach the Spanish-speaking population led to the launching of El Sentinel in August 2001.³¹⁰ The region’s first weekly bilingual paper, Orlando Sentinel (hereafter known as OS) Publisher Kathleen M. Waltz quipped, “The time is ripe. We have a truly bilingual marketplace. Even a cursory look at the recent census shows that the Hispanic population is

---

³⁰⁸ Ibid.
³⁰⁹ Delgado, “Hispanic Community is Growing.”
exploding.\textsuperscript{311} Two years later, \textit{El Nuevo Día}, launched local Spanish-language daily paper in August 2003. Now armed with three local Spanish-language periodicals, Central Florida offered its Hispanic population several options for receiving their printed local and international news.

The Puerto Rican and Hispanic influence on the local media was not limited to the print media. In terms of radio, there was only one local Hispanic AM station in 1980. By 2000, there are three radio stations, including one FM station, WNUE 98.1-FM “La Nueva” (the New)—playing Latin dance music.\textsuperscript{312} In the visual medium, Univision and Telemundo beamed into Central Florida households and were included as standard channels with cable service.\textsuperscript{313} Puerto Ricans like Paul Gamache and George Arroyo were among key Hispanics who expanded the Hispanic broadcasting market. Newly arriving Puerto Ricans benefitted from Spanish-language programming, and could follow the local news from Puerto Rico, which was not available in Central Florida during the 1970s except via telephone or correspondences. After 1980, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics could get their news via radio, television, and newspaper. If a Puerto Rican left the island, they still could watch their favorite novela, listen to their favorite music on the radio, or just stay informed with the nightly news in their native tongue; the growth in Spanish-language broadcasting made Central Florida more attractive for potential migrants from the island.

Between the dynamic and volatile relationships of the Hispanic chambers, the creation of new festivals and the transport of older celebrations (e.g. the Puerto Rican Parade), and the upsurge of Spanish-language media in the 2000s, the prevalence of visual puertorriqueñidad

\textsuperscript{311} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{313} Oscar Suris, “Spanish TV Station Set to Go,” \textit{OS} 8 Aug 1989, 1.
throughout the region makes it difficult to deny the spreading influence of the Puerto Rican community. The development of these three demands (entrepreneurial networking, growing number of festival themes, and the expansion of Spanish-language media) show how Puerto Ricans desired to keep their identity intact, including the use of Spanish. Furthermore, these celebrations demonstrate the Puerto Rican desire to retain the native tongue of the island, as it is seen as an essential part of the Puerto Rican identity.

The “Osceola Incident”

Relations between Floridians and Puerto Ricans hit a rough spot in the mid-1990s as a direct result of the Osceola Incident. On June 15, 1996, John Fuentes and three fellow Puerto Ricans visited the Coldwell Banker/Landstar Real Estate Group in Buena Ventura Lakes.³¹⁴ Their goal was to find housing for Víctor Ríos-Javier, one of the other three Puerto Ricans present. Fuentes served as the interpreter for the foursome. According to a Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) report, the real estate agent became suspicious when “Fuentes flashed a badge, said he worked for the FHP,” and claimed his two colleagues worked for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).³¹⁵ After they left the office, the real estate agent called the FBI, who in turn notified the FHP. When the four Puerto Ricans returned the next day, nine armed FHP troopers detained them.³¹⁶

Dressed in street clothes, Pedro Fuentes and Miguel Luciano were law enforcement officers from the island escorting Ríos-Javier, a participant of Puerto Rico’s Witness Protection Program. Puerto Rico had its own witness protection program, separate from the U.S. Federal

³¹⁶ Ibid.
Witness Protection Program. Since 1987, the island’s program often relocated witnesses to cities throughout the U.S. mainland, often providing them with funding for housing and other expenses. However, none of the mainland law enforcement agencies were aware that either Puerto Rico had a witness protection program or that Puerto Rican law enforcement officials were transferring witnesses—some with criminal records—to their regions. Therefore, both parties were unaware of the other’s intentions: FHP believed the four Puerto Ricans were criminals impersonating law enforcement and the Puerto Rican officers thought the troopers were disguised assassins attempting to silence Ríos-Javier.

Both parties have separate accounts as to what occurred that day. Luciano, Pedro Fuentes, and his nephew John Fuentes filed a lawsuit against FHP, claiming the troopers attacked them, used harsh, abusive, and profane language, and left them on the floor in handcuffs for over an hour. The FHP troopers stated that they quickly restrained the Puerto Rican officers, before they could reach for their guns. They further reported that while everybody waited for confirmation of their identities from Puerto Rican authorities, the handcuffed detainees sat in chairs and were allowed to use the bathroom and drink water. A FHP spokesperson went as far as to say that the troopers treated them “cordially.”

The months following the confrontation, dubbed the “Osceola Incident” by Puerto Rico’s media, led to a breakdown in relations between Puerto Rico and Florida.

Following the incident, the Orlando Sentinel began investigating into the Puerto Rican witness protection program. On October 11, 1996, the newspaper’s front page read “SAN JUAN

318 Leusner & Curtis, “FHP Cleared.”
319 Ibid.
320 Jacobson, “Suit against Highway Patrol.”
321 Curtis and Leusner, “San Juan Dumps.”
DUMPS DRUG DEALERS HERE: Local Authorities Not Told of Relocations by Puerto Rico Witness Protection Program.” The news agency discovered that the program relocated Puerto Ricans who served as witnesses in criminal cases and were often granted immunity in exchange for their testimonies against the accused. After relocating the witnesses and aiding in his or her adjustment, the program did not keep track of them. As local law enforcement agencies had no knowledge of the program or how it relocated witnesses to the mainland, Central Florida leaders and the local media feared that the majority of those relocated were “drug dealers” and “murderers.”

The Sentinel also linked the rise in heroin trafficking and deaths in Central Florida with the Puerto Rican witnesses who took up residency in Greater Orlando. An article published a week before the witness protection controversy came to light reported that Orlando’s growing heroin supply came from San Juan. Titled “Heroin Flow Has Orlando in a Crisis,” the article said that “More than 50 major traffickers in heroin have been charged since 1992 in greater Orlando. In most cases, they or their families are from Puerto Rico.” Between this Sentinel article and those previously mentioned, distrust erupted between non-Hispanics and Puerto Ricans.

Outrage ensued. Gladys Casteleiro, the Regional Director of the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration, received more than one hundred phone calls from both Puerto Ricans and non-Hispanics the day the story broke. She listened to the reactions and fears from both sides. She explained “Anglos are calling and asking why we are sending criminals to the community.” Meanwhile Puerto Ricans expressed their frustrations with the Sentinel’s article

321 Ibid.
322 Ibid.
323 Ibid.
324 Ibid.
325 Ibid.

115
from that day. Former-detective Armando R. Ramírez submitted an editorial to the newspaper, articulating his grievances with the reporting. Ramírez took particular offense to the idea that the Puerto Rican government was “dumping” drug dealers and argued that the “massive flow of illegal drugs entering our island of Puerto Rico is the sole responsibility of the U.S. government and the U.S. customs office.”

While Puerto Ricans and non-Hispanics projected their anger at the portrayal of the events, some aimed at calming tensions between the two groups. Due to the backlash from Puerto Rican residents in Central Florida, Orlando Sentinel Editor John Haile published an editorial in the paper titled “We’re All Victims of Drug Trade – Let’s Fight Back Together.” Haile explained that many Puerto Ricans were concerned about becoming stereotyped as drug dealers. He attempts to bridge the communities together by stating that the fighting the drug trade in Central Florida was in both groups’ interests:

> It is real fear based on experience, and it will be wrong if those of us who live here let that happen. Rather than dividing our community into camps, this is the time to fight back together. The drug trade has infiltrated all our communities, and we’ve all got a role in stopping it.

The Sentinel continued to print stories highlighting the Puerto Rican community’s backlash to the story even when they criticized the newspaper’s portrayal of the events.

Hispanics also denounced the Sentinel’s portrayal of the events as “yellow journalism.”

Hoping to show their solidarity against the drug trade, twenty-five local Hispanic community leaders organized a march. On November 3, 1996, thousands of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics gathered in downtown Orlando for the “March for Dignity” against drug abuse and

---

328 Ibid.
poor perceptions of Hispanics. Puertoricansalsa musician Willie Colón flew down from New York City to promote the march, asking the community to stand united against drugs. An estimated 3,500 to 5,000 individuals rallied through the streets, carrying signs and both the U.S. and Puerto Rican flags, and marking the largest anti-drug gathering in Orlando history.

In the following months, Florida and Puerto Rican government officials attempted to improve relations between the two, solve the witness protection concerns, and battle the drug trade. At the request of Florida Governor Lawton Chiles, Puerto Rico Governor Pedro Rosselló and Governor Chiles signed a pact in January of 1997. The agreement pledged to end the practice of secretly sending witnesses and to identify known and suspected criminals sent to Florida from 1995 onward.

Relations continued to improve over the course of the year, due in large part to the newly designated director of Puerto Rico’s Special Investigation Bureau (SIB), Aníbal Torres. Torres agreed to meet with Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) officials in April to provide information on relocated witnesses. Although the agreement only requested identities from witnesses that moved to Florida since 1995, Torres promised to provide information on all ninety-five witnesses the program relocated to the state since they began moving them to the mainland.

---

330 OS, “Hispanic Marchers: No to Drugs, Yes to Unity,” 04 Nov 1996, C1.
331 Ibid.
In May of 1997, the SIB provided the FDLE the identities and locations of forty-six of the forty-eight witnesses relocated to Florida since 1995. SIB and FDLE agents teamed-up to locate and contact all the witnesses in Florida, as agreed upon in January. The last two were fugitives, one wanted for heroin-related charges. The FDLE also decided to send agents to Puerto Rico to continue collaborating with the SIB on mutual interests, “including drug, fugitive, weapon, and Medicare fraud cases.” Due to the efforts of the FDLE and SIB leadership, cooperation between law enforcement agencies between Greater Orlando and Puerto Rico improved drastically over the course of eight months.

At the start of the scandal in October 1996, Orange County sheriffs were highly critical of Puerto Rico’s law enforcement officers and procedures. But by July 1997, they sang high praise for the island’s policemen. José Melecio was wanted by Orange County for a 1995 drug-exchange that turned into a fatal confrontation. Orange County Sherriff’s Detective Jim Lutrell stated, “We got super cooperation. All we had on Melecio was some possible phone numbers. They did a lot of the legwork and a lot of stakeouts for us.” The July article noted that the arrest marked improved relations between law enforcement in both regions.

As relations improved since the “Osceola Incident,” the confrontation and the events that followed provide insight on how American federal policies affect local perceptions on Hispanics. The rise in the drug trafficking through Puerto Rico directly resulted from the crackdown on the U.S.-Mexico border. In Orlando in October 1996, President Clinton’s drug czar Barry McCaffrey described it as “squeezing a balloon. You press on it on one side, and the balloon just pops out

---

336 Ibid.
337 Curtis and Leusner, “San Juan Dumps.”
someplace else.” As the U.S.-Mexico border became more difficult for drug traffickers to circumvent, the path of least resistance led through Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. The rise in the Puerto Rico’s involvement in the global drug trade brought to light the communication breakdown between the Puerto Rican and Floridian governments: Puerto Rico’s law enforcement officials initially did not find it necessary to alert mainland officials of witness relocation, an act that left Central Florida law enforcement officers in disbelief. Thus, the resulting misperception of Puerto Ricans was caused by a disconnection of communication between Puerto Rico and mainland officials.

Anti-Hispanic sentiments spiked during the mid-1980s due to the Florida English-only Amendment debate and resurfaced as a result of the Osceola Incident and the witness relocation scandal in 1996. These events were largest incidents of anti-Hispanic—and in the case of the latter event, anti-Puerto Rican—fervor in Central Florida. At the individual-level, there are many cases of discrimination and biases against Puerto Ricans, but in general, Puerto Ricans and non-Hispanics improved since 1996. The Orlando Sentinel even released a new publication in 2001, El Sentinel, marketed for Hispanic readers in the Greater Orlando region. Since Puerto Ricans began migrating to Central Florida, there were only two moments of mass-resistance from the dominant society, and the anti-Puerto Rican sentiments died down over the following months.

---

339 Haile, “We’re All Victims.”
341 Curtis and Leusner, “San Juan Dumps.”
Conclusion

The prevalence of Puerto Rican flags in shop windows, Spanish billboards, and Spanish-language services show how strongly puertorriqueñidad resonates throughout the Central Florida landscape. Where once only a handful of storeowners spoke Spanish with their customers, now retail stores, public and private sector employers, and education facilities seeking Spanish-speaking employees. This change occurred over the course of two decades due to the efforts of Hispanics, primarily Cubans and Puerto Ricans, in establishing transitional organizations and cultural institutions that aided migrants and facilitated Latin American population growth.

The legitimacy of the Puerto Rican community solidified over the course of the 1990s. First, New Puerto Rican social clubs, Hispanic festivals, and competing Spanish language newspapers thrived throughout the decade—one major indication that the Puerto Rican population in the area played a role in the local economy. Social clubs and festivals hold many festivals and events sponsored by businesses and companies, further driving the Hispanic market. Second, the Osceola Incident demonstrated that law enforcement and political officials hoped to temper the outrage between the Puerto Rican community and non-Hispanics, especially considering that a Puerto Rican population existed in the metropolitan region for over twenty years at the time of the occurrence, acknowledging that the local Puerto Rican community had political sway in the region, and thus, legitimacy. These two points show that the Puerto Rican population is an essential community in Central Florida: they contribute economy through labor and their influence on the impact, they became a noteworthy portion of the population, and they’ve developed a significant amount of clout in the political sphere of the region.
CONCLUSION

As mentioned before, this thesis analyzes the importance Orlando played on the Puerto Rican diaspora; specifically, from 1960 onward, this research shows why Puerto Ricans chose to relocate to Central Florida. Since Duany and Matos-Rodríguez provided their preliminary assessment, several scholars published works analyzing the importance Orlando plays for the Puerto Rican nation. The main goal of this work is to detail how employment opportunities and a strong support network-turned-community in Central Florida shifted the Puerto Rican diaspora towards the Orlando-Kissimmee metropolitan region—in other words, the creation of Puerto Rico’s 79th municipality.

Chapter 1 explains how Puerto Ricans practiced their economic agency through migration to and from the United States. For the better half of the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans primarily moved to northern states due to demands for labor contracts and the unwelcoming atmosphere in the southern states towards minorities that led displaced Puerto Rican workers from the island. As Chapter 2 argues, the United State’s move away from segregation and institutionalized racism in the 1960s opened up the door for Puerto Ricans to begin relocating to southern states. With Central Florida’s transformation from primarily being a citrus-growing industry to a tourism and high tech came an unprecedented need for entry-level workers. The moment was ripe for Puerto Rican migration.

Chapter 3 describes how early Puerto Rican settlers interacted with Central Florida during the 1960s and 1970s. Since the majority of Puerto Ricans in the region were military servicemen, and thus transients, they did not form a community nor had much impact on forming a local identity. However, these pioneers did establish themselves in east Orlando, an area that
Puerto Ricans heavily congregated into during the 1980s. Furthermore, with the aid of Cuban entrepreneurs, Hispanics businesses arose during these two decades.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the Puerto Rican mass migration to Orlando and Kissimmee amidst the 1980s. With the aid of a growing support network—the combination of family members and friends that already moved to the metropolitan region and already established themselves—thousands of Puerto Ricans found new opportunities in Central Florida now that resources were no longer available on the island and New York City. This population carved out their identity and spaces within Orlando, resulting in the formation of a Puerto Rican community, as seen in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 explains how the community flourished through analysing the rise of marketing to the Puerto Rican population. The chapter also overviews how the dominant society viewed the community, as can be seen with the main local newspaper making an effort to accommodate to the population due to their social and political influence in the region. Between accusations held against the Puerto Rican people, the community’s ability to mobilize and denounce the Orlando Sentinel’s remarks was a key moment in the community’s history, the moment in which the community united to uphold itself.

**Considerations for Future Research and Final Comments**

This thesis does not research the extensive influence Puerto Ricans had on the politics of the region, namely due to research time constraints. While this work analyzes the impact and development of puertorriqueñidad, Puerto Rican social clubs, and Spanish-language media, other manifestations of identity require more research. The largest insight of the influence of any
specific ethnic group is through its political power, both at the local and national levels. José E. Cruz already published an article on Puerto Rican political participation in Osceola County from 1991 to 2007, but no in-depth analysis of Puerto Ricans’ participation in Orlando and Orange County exists beyond short newspaper opinion pieces and editorials. Research on Orlando’s first Hispanic representative Mary I. Johnson (of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent), voted into office in 1980 and stayed a representative until 1997, could provide insight on local Hispanic issues, voting patterns, and campaign strategies. While I understand the importance political power plays in defining the legitimacy of a community, this work illustrates other ways in which Puerto Ricans practiced their political influence and power through gatherings and marches that demonstrated their ability at collective bargaining.

Another important avenue of future research is the tensions between Puerto Ricans from the island and New York Ricans. During the research process for this thesis, I discovered animosity between the two groups, both believing the other brought the rise in crime in the region. Furthermore, both have different interpretations in how puertorriqueñidad personifies itself, a phenomenon Jorge Duany contributing several works to explore. Central Florida serves as an ideal setting for future research, as it is a neutral zone in which neither has complete dominion over the other; furthermore, as a new generation of Florida-born Puerto Ricans grow, a third, separate interpretation of puertorriqueñidad will eventually emerge. This process of

---

344 Duany, The Puerto Rican Nation; Duany, “Mas allá del barrio.”
diverging viewpoints of Puerto Rican identity contesting against one another while coexisting within the same space is a phenomenon worth noting.

Puerto Rican mass movement to and around the U.S. mainland relies heavily on Puerto Ricans’ unique status as Hispanics with American citizenship. As an anomaly when compared to other Hispanics groups, Puerto Ricans have inherently less restricted movements when migrating throughout the states. Being unhindered, Puerto Ricans dispersed throughout the country, but as I demonstrated in this thesis, it was the Orlando community that began concentrating Puerto Ricans. Central Florida’s Puerto Ricans continues to be the fastest growing population in 2010, and at this rate, it will become the center of the Puerto Rican nation.
REFERENCES

Primary Sources

Government Sources


Oral Histories


Newspapers

*Miami Herald*

*New York Times*

*El Nuevo Dia*
Secondary Sources

Books


Essays in a Collective Work


Cassanello, Robert and Colin J. Davis. “Introduction,” in *Migration and the Transformation of...*


Journal Articles


Dissertations and Theses


Concepcion Torres, Ramón Luis. “Puerto Rican Migration, Settlement Patterns, and Assimilation in the Orlando MSA.” M.A. thes., Binghamton University, 2008.


Reports