The Cuban American National Foundation and Its Role as an Ethnic Interest Group

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Introduction

Since the 1960s, Cuban Americans have made social, economic, and political progress far beyond that of most immigrant groups that have come to the United States in the past fifty years. I will argue that the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) was very influential in helping the Cuban Americans achieve much of this progress. It is, however, important to note that Cubans had some distinct advantages from the beginning, in terms of wealth and education. These advantages helped this ethnic interest group to grow quickly and become powerful. Since its inception in the early 1980s, the CANF has continually been able to shape government policy on almost all issues related to Cuba. Until at least the end of the Cold War, the CANF and the Cuban American population presented a united front in that their main goal was to present a hard line towards Castro and defeat him; they sought any government assistance they could get to achieve this goal, from policy changes to funding for different dissident activities. In more recent years, Cubans have begun to differ in their opinions of the best policy towards Cuba. I will argue that this change along with other changes will decrease the effectiveness of the CANF. CANF lobbying has often resulted in policies that give Cubans an unfair advantage. Sometimes is has even resulted in policies that may not necessarily be in line with national interest for the U.S. The U.S. government has several reasons to maintain its support for this ethnic organization. Traditionally, the U.S. has supported Cuban exiles because they considered them to be persecuted under a communist regime. Now,
with the U.S. emphasis on spreading democracy, the CANF is seen as an organization that can possibly bring about democracy in Cuba. Additionally, Cuban Americans have donated significant amounts to various political campaigns and are an important voting bloc in heavily populated South Florida. Although it is impossible to pinpoint the exact causes of the rise and possible decline of the CANF and Cuban influence, I have found several factors that seem to contribute. Ideologies of anti-communism and democracy building, a united goal of defeating Castro, the money and organization to create a powerful voting bloc and lobbying group, and presidential favor all contributed to the rise of the CANF; growing anti-immigration sentiment and a less cohesive member base pose a threat to the ongoing success of this group.

I will begin with a discussion of how the CANF was formed. I will address the situations that led Cubans to be considered as a favored group and the anticommunist sentiments of the early 1980s. I will then turn to the CANF’s role in local politics verses its role in national politics. I will explore the CANF’s emphasis on national politics as connected to their goals which are largely related to foreign policy. Next, I will talk about the way in which Cubans have been treated as compared to other immigrant groups. I present the Cuban case as exceptional especially in comparison to the Haitians. I then turn to the funding of the CANF, which comes largely from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). I will discuss how this funding allows the U.S. government to be involved in dissident work that it would not like others to know it is involved in. One such project I will discuss in this paper is Radio Marti, a government financed radio station that operates in Cuba. Next I explain the Cuban involvement in a
variety of legislation during the Clinton years, including the Toricelli Bill and the Helms-
Burton Act. These bills are prime examples of the influence that the CANF can exert in
the lobbying arena. Both bills were passed after the Cold War, yet the CANF maintained
its influence. Although the rhetoric of communism had passed, the CANF was able to
play into electoral politics and the rhetoric of democracy building. I then discuss the
Cuban influence in electoral politics in Florida. Although the Cuban voting bloc was
never large enough to determine the winner of the presidential election, they still
represent a sizable constituency. Since presidential favor is important to the CANF, it is
especially important to this group to show their support for various presidential
candidates. Finally I turn to a discussion of the present state of the Cuban American
population. I address growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. and the prospects for
Cuban Americans after President George W. Bush leaves office. I also mention the
changes in the attitudes of younger Cubans towards U.S. foreign policy.

In writing my thesis I gathered my data from a variety of sources. Most of my
information came from secondary sources on a range of topics from interest group
formation, to immigrant assimilation, to information on the Cubans in Miami, etc.. I also
made use of many newspaper articles, especially for my information on electoral results.
Some of the information, such as that on the NED came from the websites of groups
trying to promote transparency in the United States. Finally, I made use of several
statistical studies on electoral results. My research focused on topics from the 1950s to
the present.
Chapter I
The Cuban American National Foundation: How was it Formed?

To understand the foundations of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) it is important to understand the conditions under which it was formed. Few would argue that the Cold War did not have major implications for U.S. policy in Latin America and everywhere in the world, for that matter. From the beginning of the 1950s the U.S. seemed to base its policy objectives on its goal of defeating communism. Much of the rhetoric of this time period described communism as the primary enemy of the U.S. A closer look at the Cold War era shows that promoting regimes friendly to capitalist interests was another primary goal. In Latin America, this meant using almost any means necessary to make sure that communist leaders did not come to power, or in the case of Cuba, using any means to defeat them once they rose to power. “The success of Castro’s revolution in 1959 had a profound impact on U.S. immigration policy” (“The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966”, 908). After Castro’s revolution, careful policy making concerning Cuba had become crucial. However the first policy decision with regards to Castro ended up working against the United States. Eisenhower’s refusal to meet with Castro led Castro to form an alliance with the communist Soviet Union; before forming this alliance Castro was not a communist and posed little threat to the U.S. (Leogrande, “Cuba Policy Recycled,” 106).

U.S. leaders reacted to Castro’s alliance with the Soviets by taking a hard line against the Cuban government and trying to undermine Castro economically and politically. In 1962 the U.S. imposed an embargo on Cuba, devastating the Cuban
economy. Then, in 1966, Congress passed the Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA) in order to further some of its policy goals and undermine Castro’s government. The CAA changed immigration policy towards Cuban immigrants, making them a special favored group. Under this act, Cubans who arrive in the U.S. are automatically paroled, without having to apply for asylum, as other immigrants do. After spending two years in the U.S., these immigrants are then granted permanent resident status. “The CAA helped advance three Cold War objectives. First, by facilitating a mass exodus from Cuba…Second, the CAA aided in undermining the legitimacy of the Cuban government…Lastly, the CAA helped the American government achieve broader political goals” (“The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966”, 909). After the Eisenhower administration’s “missed opportunity” basically handed Cuba to the USSR, the U.S. needed to prove Castro unsuccessful in order to prove the strength of democracy. By achieving these objectives, the U.S. felt that they were saving Cubans from the conditions in which they were forced to live, while undermining the Cuban government by proving that people would leave Cuba if given the chance. The CAA resulted in massive groups of Cuban immigrants flocking to the U.S. in the late 60s and 70s; overwhelmingly they settled in Miami. “The migration flow from the island, because it originated with the process of socialist transformation, has been disproportionately composed of individuals who possess a complex of skills, aspirations, and experiences that give them a relative advantage of most other U.S. immigrant groups in the process of economic adjustment” (Perez, 134). These displaced people were often businessmen and individuals who had held prominent positions in Cuba before Castro came to power. With Castro’s new government they were not
welcome to voice their opinions or were driven out of the county. In sum, the U.S. government took a hard line against the Cuban government while welcoming in Cuban refugees.

The situation changed slightly in the late 70s during Carter’s presidency. “A series of agreements with Cuba in the first year of the Carter presidency seemed to mark the beginning of a new era of U.S.-Cuban relations. Fishing and maritime agreements were signed, travel restrictions that had been in place were not renewed, and the two governments reestablished diplomatic relations” (Haney and Vanderbush, 346). Tensions with Cuba, and in the Cold War in general, seemed to be easing.

However, when Reagan came to office all this changed. One situation that had a profound effect on Reagan’s policy towards Cuba was the Mariel boatlift. “By 1980, however, the pressures for emigration once again caused the Cuban government to open a port for unrestricted emigration. The port was Mariel, giving the name to the boatlift that lasted for six months and that brought, in a manner uncontrolled by the United States, more than 125,000 Cubans” (Perez, 130). This new influx of Cubans put increased pressure on Reagan to somehow toughen relations with Cuba. If he just sat back and let Castro get away with this, he would appear to be letting Castro have the upper hand. He effectively reversed any progress that Carter had made in the direction of creating a friendlier relationship with Cuba. It was during Reagan’s presidency that the CANF was first conceived of.

In the meantime, between the time the Cuban Adjustment Act was passed in 1966 and Reagan’s presidency in the early 80s, the Cuban exile community in Miami
managed to make extremely successful inroads in both the economic and political arenas. “By 1980, a successful entrepreneurial class with accumulated surplus capital had emerged within the Cuban American community…This new prosperity could be tapped to create a presence in Washington…This convergence of economic and political conditions made possible the creation of the Cuban American National Foundation” (Grenier and Perez, 91). As Cuban Americans became prosperous, the Reagan government found itself in need of an organization to promote its goals for Cuba and Latin America. These two groups’ ambitions coincided in that both groups were determined to undermine Castro and willing to work with each other. Cuban Americans welcomed any support they could get from the U.S. government and were eager to have their voices heard in Congress. Reagan needed a voice besides his own to convince the American public of the need to crack down on Cuba. Haney and Vanderbush notice that both groups found it crucial to influence public opinion in the U.S. during this time period. According to these researchers, for the Reagan administration, “An alliance with exiles from the island, who were themselves intent on maintaining pressure on Castro, certainly made sense. Both the Reagan administration and a Cuban-American lobby had much to gain from each other” (Haney and Vanderbush, 347). Hence the CANF was formed.

Although some people claim that the Cuban American National Foundation was formed independently of the Reagan administration, there is significant evidence that Reagan’s administration had at least an influence in the formation of this group. On the one hand, “Jorge Mas Canosa [one of the founder’s of CANF] has claimed that the
impetus for CANF was the idea of a few Cuban-Americans, acting on their own, without help from any Reagan supporters” (Haney and Vanderbush, 347). Mas names Pepe Hernandez, Raul Masvidal, and Carlos Salmon as three of the original members. On the other hand, “Masvidal, who has since left CANF following a series of disputes with Mas, recalls a different version of the organization’s founding. He claims that the original push for the CANF’s formation came from Richard Allen, Reagan’s first National Security Advisor” (Haney and Vanderbush, 348). According to Haney and Vanderbush several media outlets and major newspapers corroborate Masvidal’s story. “The New York Times and Washington Post use some variation of ‘at the behest of the Reagan administration [in their description of the founding of this organization]’” (Haney and Vanderbush, 348). Haney and Vanderbush also note that Allen has admitted to advising Mas to create a group along the lines of the Israeli lobbying group.

Whether or not the Reagan administration in fact had a direct effect on the formation of the CANF, Reagan’s policies and objectives created the political space necessary for the CANF to form. Whereas Carter had emphasized easing tensions, Reagan’s hard line policies allowed the political space for a group intent on undermining Castro to speak. And, coincidentally or not, the CANF did end up forming along the lines of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), as Allen had suggested. “CANF is structured like AIPAC – into separate research, lobbying, and funding organizations. Money is contributed through the Free Cuba political action committee, lobbying is done by the Cuban American Foundation and the CANF itself served a research and education function” (Haney and Vanderbush, 349). Haney and Vanderbush
note that separating the organization into these three branches allowed the CANF to receive government funding while remaining a tax-exempt organization. Another aspect of the AIPAC model the CANF used was developing local branches throughout the country. By this time, Cubans had formed significant communities in some other parts of the country besides South Florida, especially in New Jersey. Forming local branches allowed them to gain more widespread support and reach more members of Congress.

On the CANF’s official website they state their goals to: “advance human rights in Cuba,” “educate public opinion on the plights of Cuban people,” “dispel prejudice and intolerance against Cubans in exile,” and “promote Cuban culture” (www.CANF.org). Although the language it uses has changed with the language and circumstances of the times, the CANF continues to lobby and educate for essentially the same purposes it did before. In an attempt to overthrow Castro the CANF now uses a language of “advancing human rights” and “assisting pro-democracy activists” rather than a language of defeating communism. They continue to “educate public opinion” as they did during the Reagan years in the 1980s. Finally, they maintain their culture and dispel prejudices partially in the hopes that one day they can return to Cuba.
Chapter II
The Role of the Cubans and the CANF in Miami’s Local Politics and Implications for National Politics

From the early 1980s to the present, Cubans have made up a sizable proportion of Miami’s population. Although Cubans have moved throughout the country and have large populations elsewhere, Miami remains home to the largest Cuban population in the U.S. by far. “The Miami-Ft. Lauderdale region of southeast Florida accounts for slightly more than 52 percent of the entire Cuban-origin population of the United States” (Perez, 130). Not surprisingly, Miami is also the birthplace of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). Considering the substantial influence the CANF has in national politics, which I will discuss later in this paper, one might think that the CANF would have an equally significant effect on Miami’s local politics. Unexpectedly, however, although many of the same men who lead the CANF are prominent businessmen in Miami, this organization has less influence on local politics than one would think. The main Florida politics the CANF gets involved in are those that have an effect on politics at the national level. Cuban politicians in Miami appear preoccupied with foreign policy; they manifest this preoccupation by raising large amounts of money for the national group. Miami politics at the local level reflect the niche the CANF is trying to occupy at the national level. Much of policy at the local and state level has the secondary goal of trying to influence the executive branch of the U.S. government and in turn effect foreign policy.

The situation of Cubans in Miami is a unique one, which plays an integral role in the shaping of local politics. Perez writes, “In comparison with other major U.S. Hispanic
groups, the sociodemographic profile of the Cubans is fairly unique; a large proportion of middle-aged and elderly persons, a female majority, low fertility, and high socioeconomic status” (Perez, 126). Perez explains this unique demographic through three factors: “the socioeconomic selectivity of postrevolutionary Cuban emigration,” “high rates of female labor force participation,” and “the presence of a strong ethnic enclave” (Perez, 126). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Castro’s rise to power resulted in an overwhelming emigration of wealthy businessmen and intellectuals; this is the socioeconomic selectivity that Perez notes. The once Cuban elite were seen as a threat to Castro’s consolidation of power. “It is undoubtedly true that during the 1960s Cuba’s upper socioeconomic sectors, those most likely to be alienated by Cuba’s swift transformation into a socialist state, were overrepresented in the exodus” (Perez, 129). Even in the U.S., these men continue to be a threat to Castro’s power through organizations such as the CANF. For example, Jorge Mas Canosa migrated to the U.S. in the 1960s; by the 1980s he owned a telecommunications company worth $700 million and was able to use some of his profits towards founding the CANF (PBS.org). The large proportion of middle-aged and elderly, low fertility rate, and high female labor force participation also contribute to the wealth and power that prominent Cubans in Miami have been able to amass. In contrast to many Hispanic immigrant groups, Cubans in general have already gained job skills and established themselves; the majority are not starting out with young families and insignificant work backgrounds. These factors have allowed Cubans in Miami to create an ethnic enclave, and in return the ethnic enclave works to assist new immigrants in adapting to Cuban life in the U.S. “Recent Cuban
immigrants enter the U.S. market, primarily through the large number of enterprises in South Florida that are owned and operated by other Cubans who arrived earlier” (Perez, 135). All these characteristics of the Cuban population in Miami make for a favorable situation for Cubans to gain local political power.

Although Cubans have gained a significant share of power in Miami, they are not the only ones vying for power in the complicated structure of Miami politics. Grenier and Castro argue that there exists, “a triadic structure—black, Cuban, and Anglo—that underlies and often confounds contemporary politics in Miami” (Grenier and Castro, 274). This structure is further complicated by the racism that exists between these groups and the Cuban politicians’ focus on foreign policy and national politics. “Early Cuban refugees were drawn largely from the white, urban middle class…Most shared a belief in the superiority of capitalism, a confidence in their own abilities, and a positive regard for the United States” (Grenier and Castro, 279). In the 1960s, at a time when black civil rights leaders nationwide were clashing with prominent whites, Cubans immigrants, who were a mainly white and represented a rejection of communism, were welcomed into politics with open arms. As black leaders were continually pushed down, many Cubans were able to get ahead. There was no shortage of ethnically based programs to help them out. The federal government provided an assistance program for new Cuban immigrants and “vast CIA operations run out of Miami in the early 1960s meant an infusion of cash into the local Cuban community” (Grenier and Castro, 280). Racism in all aspects of life in Miami was not limited to the 1960s. “Between 1968 and 1980 the Small Business Administration (SBA) cumulatively disbursed 46.6 percent of its Miami-Dade County
loans to Hispanics. Only 6 percent went to blacks” (279). All this worked to create and cement a political structure in Miami that is fraught with racism and difficulties in which Cubans, Blacks, and Anglos are constantly vying for power.

Since 1980, Cubans have been able to make further significant inroads into the Anglo-dominated political scene in Miami. “Cubans now are well on their way to establishing significant political power in Miami, a process that both benefits from their economic wherewithal and in turn serves to increase it” (Grenier and Castro, 282). Grenier and Castro then go on to explain, “Cuban American power is exercised through a growing number of elected officials and influential organizations, such as the Cuban American National Foundation” (Grenier and Castro, 282). It is evident that the CANF influences local officials, yet it is the way that they often use this influence which makes the situation particularly interesting. As of 1999 some of this influence was felt as “the city manager in Miami and the executive mayor of Miami-Dade County are Cuban Americans…More than a third of the county’s current delegation to the state legislature is Cuban American. Two Cuban-born Republicans serve as members of Congress” (Grenier and Castro, 282). In her analysis of Miami’s vast growth in the past few decades Jan Nijman notes the effective results of the “incessant lobbying, manipulating and cajoling” of the CANF in Miami. She argues that this lobbying has served mainly to fuel Miami’s expansive economic growth in recent years. Nijman writes that it is typical of immigrants in a new community to have a focus on bettering themselves economically. Because of this, she argues that many of the Cuban leaders of Miami are very concentrated on economic gains and lose focus of civic concerns. She describes Miami
as a place that is ruled by the global economy and is lacking in civic institutions. A result of this according to Nijman is, “Despite their growing importance on the political scene, Miami’s Hispanics are still underrepresented in local government. Of 27 municipalities in Dade County, only 5 have a majority of Hispanics in their elected offices” (Nijman, 170). Although Cubans remain underrepresented at the local level, they are overly represented at the state and federal level where, considering Florida’s electoral votes, they can make a difference in national politics. “Of all the Dade County representatives at the federal and state level, and overwhelming majority are Hispanic (14 of 25), all of them Cuban. This is a reflection of the concerns of Cuban Americans with issues regarding Cuba and Cuban refugees, which are mainly decided at the state and federal level” (Nijman, 170). Rather than becoming involved in local politics in order to influence their local communities, Nijman argues, Cubans in Miami remain primarily concerned with raising money at the local level. This money can be then fed through organizations such as the CANF that work to promote concerns at the state and federal level. The CANF remains minimally involved at the local level unless the situation pertains to a question that could be solved at the federal level, such as a question of foreign policy.

Both the racial tension involved in local Miami politics and the Cubans’ focus on foreign policy issues are evident in local newspapers. Guillermo Grenier and Max Castro conducted a study of articles in newspapers with a predominantly black readership and newspapers with a predominantly Cuban readership. They found, “Black perceptions of Cubans are characterized currently by increasing concern over their growing power and
an adversarial discourse stressing conflict and competition over cooperation” (Grenier and Castro, 283). Clearly this level of conflict felt by Blacks reflects the racially tinted political scene and in turn fuels further conflict. “Cuban perceptions of blacks, while adversarial, do not feature as prominently in Cuban American discourse, which is centered more on issues of Cuba, Cuban American advancement, and relations with the still economically elite Anglos” (Grenier and Castro, 283). Overall Cubans seem less focused on what is going on in their community and more focused on issues related to Cuba. Grenier and Castro also describe instances of local crime which receive little focus in Cuban newspapers and more in black newspapers. Cubans’ attention remains on issues beyond their local community, reinforcing Nijman’s assertion that locally Cubans are focused on their foreign policy goals.

Many of the issues surrounding local Miami politics can be illustrated by studying the reactions of the various ethnic groups to Nelson Mandela’s visit in 1990. “Cubans …were outraged at his [Mandela’s] refusal to disavow Fidel Castro” (Grenier and Castro, 273). As a result, local Cuban politicians refused to meet with Mandela or acknowledge his visit. In this situation, local Cuban politicians were showing their concern with foreign policy issues. Shortly thereafter, various leaders of black organizations organized a boycott of Miami that led to significant economic losses. Cuban leaders did not even attend the talks that ended this boycott. This is just one example of the fragmented political scene that exists in Miami today.

The whole local political situation fits in well with the role the CANF plays furthering the executive branch of government’s goals. The executive branch has little
need for local politics. Additionally, the CANF has little need for local politicians who have no real sway with those making foreign policy decisions. The CANF better spends its time locally raising money for its lobbying activities for foreign policy issues.
Chapter III
Cubans as a Favored Immigrant Group: The Cuban Adjustment Act and the Case of the Haitian Boat People

As mentioned in previous chapters, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) was formed in a climate of general good favor towards Cuban American immigrants. The Cuban Adjustment Act, which offered Cuban immigrants automatic asylum based on assumed political persecution, was passed in 1966. Between 1966 and the formation of the CANF in the 1980s, many Cubans migrated and gained permanent residency with little opposition. This favorable treatment only intensified as the Reagan administration encouraged the formation of a Cuban exile group in the form of the CANF; this served as part of President Reagan’s greater mission to allegedly fight the threat of the spread of communism under Castro. The favoritism shown towards the Cubans is especially emphasized in contrast to the treatment received by Haitian migrants. Increasingly in the 1970s and 1980s Haitians were turned away from American shores, often without even being given a chance to have their cases heard. These contrasting attitudes towards Cuba, a communist nation, and Haiti, a repressive country supported by the U.S., set the stage for the later successes of the CANF.

A close examination of the history of the difference between the situation in Haiti and the situation in Cuba reveals that the U.S. treats these immigrants very differently despite fairly similar experiences among the two groups. This advantaged treatment helped the CANF to form and exert its influence. Before Castro’s rise to power, the U.S. was intimately involved in influencing Cuba’s leaders and virtually controlled Cuba’s
economy. When Castro gained power, this quickly came to an end. During the Cold War this did not bode well for U.S. interests; the U.S. wanted control over the whole region. Historically, Haiti was in a similar situation with regards to the U.S. “As one historian comments, ‘the success or failure of a Haitian government is always ultimately determined by relations with the US’” (Lennox, 692). A history of U.S. occupation led the Haitian government to be tied to the U.S. Their economy and political decisions became linked with the wishes of U.S. leaders. From 1915 to 1934 the U.S. occupied Haiti, and for almost 15 years after this, the U.S. retained power over the Haitian treasury. During this time the U.S. trained Haitian military leaders and paved the way for a politically and economically weakened Haiti. In 1957 Francois Duvalier came to power, succeeded by his son Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1971. Duvalier instituted a regime of violence and vast human rights violations. When he created a paramilitary force, “political opposition to Duvalier was dealt with through these personal instruments of state terror” (Loescher and Scanlan, 317). Following Duvalier’s accession to power, vast numbers of Haitians began to migrate to the U.S. Like in Cuba, the first immigrants were mostly wealthy well-educated people, followed by successive waves that were more representative of the population. Similar to the situation in Cuba, these immigrants were fleeing from widespread political persecution by a regime that was able to come to power partially because of political instability in the country that had been fostered by the U.S. By the 1960s Cuban exiles were getting various types of support from the U.S. government, while Haitian exiles were getting exactly the opposite. In 1966 when the government passed the Cuban Adjustment Act, the government also passed a variety of
measures to hinder the efforts of Haitian groups trying to overthrow Duvalier. “Radio jamming equipment was provided to Haiti to counter broadcasts of anti-Duvalier exiles, and a vigorous law enforcement effort was initiated to stop exile activities – organization, training, fundraising, or launching attacks – based in the U.S. and aimed at Haiti” (Loescher, 326). This is especially interesting in comparison to the aid given to Cuban exile groups. The U.S. government directly helped Cuban exiles broadcast messages via Radio Marti. Additionally, U.S. officials “arrested groups of Haitian exiles training in Florida, seized large arms caches, and indicted their leaders for planning to invade Haiti and to export arms illegally” (Loescher, 326). Again, this showed a sharp contrast to treatment of Cuban exiles.

Although many U.S. officials have claimed that the Haitian boat people are fundamentally different from the Cubans in that they are economic rather than political exiles, the historical similarities show that this is not true. Both groups were fleeing from oppressive political regimes; the Haitians from Duvalier, and the Cubans from Castro. At first the wealthy Haitian migrants were afforded basically the same treatment as the wealthy Cuban migrants who were immigrating. “If Haitians claimed political refugee status, the INS ordinarily placed them under ‘docket control,’ in effect failing to enforce orders of deportation while granting work authorization, yet denying all opportunity to obtain permanent residence status. This treatment was similar to that initially afforded hundreds of Cubans who arrived in the United States without visas” (Loescher, 319). However, around 1965, U.S. policy changed to a policy based on Cold War politics and arguably racism rather than equal treatment of political refugees. Rules for Cubans were
relaxed, while Haitains were henceforth considered economic refugees. “Subsequent steps to relax immigration rules for the Cubans, including the practice of waiving the visa requirement altogether, and the passage of Public Law 763 in 1966 to grant earlier arrivals ‘permanent resident’ status’ were not taken for the Haitians” (Loescher, 319). After the passage of this law, also known as the Cuban Adjustment Act, Cubans were automatically considered political refugees and granted permanent residency status after being in the country for only two years. Haitians, on the other hand, who were no longer coming from the upper echelons of society, were now considered to be migrating for economic motives. Since, most of Haiti was deeply entrenched in poverty, it was therefore easy to make this argument.

After 1966 Haitian migrants in most circumstances were denied entrance to the country. “The two traditional explanations for U.S. immigration policy are: (1) Haitians are economic, not political, refugees; and (2) Haiti is a noncommunist country” (Lennox, 704). Haiti was therefore removed from a list of countries whose immigrants are considered political exiles, and Haitian immigrants were subject to being captured at sea or detained in camps in the U.S. and elsewhere. “In 1981, President Reagan issued a proclamation authorizing the Coast Guard to interdict vessels carrying Haitians at sea, before they reached U.S. soil” (Lennox, 703). The vast majority of these people were not even afforded a trial to claim their status as political refugees, and of those who were, only a few succeeded. “Between 1981 and 1990, 22,940 Haitians were intercepted at sea; only eleven were deemed qualified to apply for asylum” (Lennox, 704). In 1992 when a surge of refugees reached Guantanamo, President Bush declared that all ships would be
sent back to Haiti without even a chance to prove political refugee status (Mitchell, 79). Although this move angered many and was denounced as racist in comparison with Cubans and Eastern European immigrants, Clinton continued the policy into his presidency. Clearly treatment of Haitians was nothing like the presidential favoritism shown to Cuban exiles. Reagan went out of his way to foster the formation of the CANF, while he introduced policies such as the interdiction policy for Haitian immigrants. Having the support of the Cuban exiles helped him in his anti-Castro policies towards the region, while he cared little for the fate of Haitians undergoing human rights violations in Haiti. Reagan’s favoritism strengthened the position of Cubans exiles and certainly paved the way for the vast influence the CANF would have into the 1990s and even today.

In conclusion, the comparison between Cuban and Haitian exiles emphasizes the favoritism shown towards Cuban immigrants over other groups. Special measures such as the Cuban Adjustment Act were passed to help Cuban immigrants while other groups such as the Haitians were being rejected. Critics verbalize a number of reasons for this, including the U.S. rhetorical commitment to defeating communism and racial prejudices that existed at the time. Whatever the reason, the favored treatment of Cuban exiles led the way for the formation of the powerful CANF. While Haitian broadcasting programs were being blocked, Cuban programs were being actively supported. Reagan was able to use the Cuban exiles to his advantage in a way that presidents were not able to use other exile groups like the Haitians. The special treatment of the CAA only worked to foster more special treatment in the future.
Chapter IV  
CANF Coordination with the National Endowment for Democracy

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is an important source of funding for the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and other anti-Castro groups, both in the U.S. and in Cuba. This group was originally created in 1983 to promote democracy abroad through enhancing civil society. During the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a backlash among the American public regarding the secretive methods of the CIA in its efforts at democracy building. The National Endowment for Democracy was conceived of as a response to these criticisms. Technically the NED would be separate from the U.S. government; although it is funded by the government, the NED is a private organization. The activities of the NED would be out in the open and would not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. government. One of the NED’s main strategies for defeating communism was funding groups that would work to subvert communist governments such as Castro’s, so from the beginning the NED gave a large portion of its funds to groups like the CANF. The NED is one group that contributed greatly to the growth of the CANF for its democracy building capabilities, while providing yet another link between the group and the U.S. government.

The National Endowment for Democracy was created by the Reagan administration in the early 1980s to represent key U.S. labor and business interests as well as the interests of the two major political parties in the U.S. Thomas Carothers writes that “taking into account the need for a politically balanced structure to maximize
chances of congressional approval, the group elaborated a plan for a democracy foundation that would be funded by the U.S. government but operated as a private corporation. It would have four core grantee institutes representing U.S. labor, U.S. business, the Republican party, and the Democratic party” (Carothers, 125). These four institutes are, respectively, the Free Trade Union Institute, the Center for International Private Enterprise, the International Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. These groups can then delegate the money they receive to smaller groups that work on the ground, such as the CANF. In general the money is divided up by geographical region. For instance a certain amount will go to Latin America, a certain amount to Africa, some to Asia, etc. “The endowment is funded through a line item in the annual budget of USIA…Annual congressional funding for the endowment ranged from $15 million to $18 million [yearly] from 1984 to 1990 and from $25 million to $30 [yearly] million from 1991 to 1993” (Carothers, 126). Both the Clinton and the Bush administrations have continued to increase funding for this organization. In addition to distributing money to the four institutes, the NED also reserves about twenty percent of its funds for special projects that they consider extremely important.

Since Cuba is a close neighbor to the U.S. and one of the only remaining communist countries after the cold war, groups aimed at subverting the Cuban government are often recipients of these discretionary funds. “The Cuban American National Foundation was, predictably, one of the first beneficiaries of NED funding. From 1983 to 1988, CANF received US$390,000 for anti-Castro activities” (Agee, 2).
This might seem predictable given the Reagan administration and Republican party’s favoritism for the group in the 1980s; however, the CANF continued receiving a large amount of funding well into the 21st century. According to a study by Right Web, in 2002 the International Republican Institute’s largest grant of $350,000 went to programs related to Cuba. This article also states, “two of the favored instruments of NED democratization funding in Cuba were the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and the AFL-CIO’s American Institute for Free Labor Development” (Right Web, 5). The CANF and other groups can then use this money for a variety of activities from organization in Miami to dissident activity on the island. In being a private corporation, the NED has the ability to achieve things that the U.S. government could not, through its funding of smaller organizations like the CANF. If the U.S. government were to directly aid anti-Castro groups within Cuba, this would be considered a violation of territorial sovereignty. “Cuba has its own laws criminalizing actions intended to jeopardize its sovereignty or territorial integrity…such as collecting information to support the US embargo or to the subvert the government, or for disseminating US government information to undermine the Cuban government” (Agee, 3). The U.S., particularly the CIA, has certainly been involved in a variety of operations that do aid subversive groups; however, it looks better for the government to not have a direct involvement in these activities and to let private groups do the majority of the dirty work. Thus, the CANF is able to do things that the government would never be able to do directly. In this way, the CANF is yet again connected to the U.S. government. The organization’s growth and
funding is directly tied to continual government support. They must take part in lobbying and other activities to make sure that they maintain this support.

The NED finances the CANF purportedly with the goal of bringing about a democratic government in Cuba; however, results towards this goal have been less than satisfactory both because of the methods of the NED and of the CANF. For one, the traditional CANF strategy of supporting the embargo and cutting off all communication has not seemed to have much effect towards bringing about a democratic government in Cuba. One of the key goals of the promotion of democracy abroad is to bring an end to human rights abuses that are often rampant under dictatorships. Agee argues that in the case of Cuba, however, the U.S. is actually promoting human rights abuses. He cites the case of Castro’s imprisonment of 75 political dissidents. He writes that there was an outcry against this imprisonment in the U.S., but these political dissidents were actually funded by the U.S. under NED programs. Cases like this are prevalent in a country where the U.S. effectively encourages people to break local laws. Additionally, the NED has been heavily criticized for funding right wing groups while neglecting to fund leftist groups that are just as legitimate despite its stated goal to promote pluralism of opinion. “The NED hasn’t provided aid to foster progressive or leftist opposition in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, or Eastern Europe…Cuban dissident groups and media are heavily supported however” (Blum, 4). It is evident that the NED, one of the largest sources of funding for the CANF is far from perfect.

In conclusion, NED funding serves to connect the CANF to the U.S. government. The CANF must work to court the support of the government in order to maintain
funding. At the same time, since the NED is technically a private organization, the government must work to court the support of the CANF and other organizations that receive funding but are essentially free to work on their own. Through NED funding, the CANF is able to accomplish on the ground activities in Cuba that the U.S. government would never be able to publicly undertake. The NED adds yet another element to the complicated intertwined relationship between the CANF and the U.S. government.
Chapter V
The Case of Radio Marti

Radio Marti is one of the longest ongoing projects between the U.S. government and the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). This project was conceived of in the early 1980s, around the same time that the CANF was created. Jorge Mas Canosa, one of the founders and longtime leaders of the CANF also served on the Executive Commission for the Formation of Radio Marti. In creating Radio Marti, President Reagan sought to provide news and information to the people of Cuba, who he claimed were misinformed by their own government. This project was similar to other projects in Eastern Europe, where the U.S. government used radio broadcasts to provide communist countries with information. The difference, of course, is while these countries were thousands of miles away, Cuba was situated just 90 miles from U.S. shores, making it easier for Cuba to retaliate against the U.S. with radio operations of their own. Dumping propaganda on the people of Cuba was not purportedly one of Radio Marti’s aims; however, in reality, many have argued that the station quickly became a propaganda arm of the CANF. Once Radio Marti began broadcasts, Fidel Castro almost immediately began jamming the radio waves and blocking those broadcasts. As a result of this jamming, only a very small percentage of the Cuban population was ever able to hear Radio Marti. Despite these setbacks U.S. taxpayers continued to pay millions each year for a project that still exists today, even though the Cold War has been over for years. In 1990, a similar project, TV Marti was created; this met with even less success than the radio station. Radio Marti presents a very interesting case of the relationship between the
executive branch and the CANF. Reagan originally envisioned this project, but from the very beginning, Mas was heavily involved. Mas and the CANF were deeply involved in the programming and content of the radio station, while it remained a government funded project. This relationship still exists. The Bush administration continues to support Radio Marti. The executive branch of the U.S. fulfills dual roles through Radio Marti; it supports the CANF while simultaneously broadcasting its own foreign policy initiatives. This failure of a project financed by U.S. taxpayers continues with little opposition from Congress Members afraid to confront the powerful CANF.

Radio Marti was not the first such project that the U.S. government had tried. In addition to multiple similar projects in Europe, the CIA had undertaken a radio broadcasting initiative to Cuba in the 1960s. This operation was called Radio Swan, and Mas was involved in this as well. “As a commentator on CIA’s Radio Swan, one of E. Howard Hunt’s projects, he [Mas] broadcast propaganda to Cuba, a profession he still pursues” (Franklin, 2). Radio Swan, “broadcast extremely partisan views, information and material designed for short-term psychological effect” (Final Report of The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, 4). Despite its connections with the CANF, Radio Marti was designed to provide less partisan coverage than Radio Swan and to be an operation undertaken in the open with Congressional approval.

From the beginning this project was under direct control of the executive branch, with the CANF heavily involved. Reagan began his initiative for Radio Marti in 1982 by appointing a commission of ten members, including several prominent businessmen from Miami, to investigate possibilities for this project. The executive committee of this group
was composed of the chairman Clifton, White, Senator Richard B. Stone, and Jorge Mas Canosa. According to this commission, “Radio Marti would fill an important informational void created by more than twenty years of censorship and control of the Cuban media by the Castro government” (Final Report of The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, 3). According to the report of the Presidential Commission, the goals of this station included providing information and other news about Cuba and its place in the world “that was not tainted by state control.” However, “Radio Marti espouses no single specific political, economic, or religious point of view. It should have no relationship to any political party or exile organization” (Final Report of The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, 22). Despite these original stated intentions, almost from the beginning, the CANF was intimately intertwined in the organization and programming of Radio Marti. Carla Anne Robbins writes, “Critics charge, however, that the radio has become a propaganda arm for the Foundation—at a cost of $15 million a year to the American taxpayer” (Robbins, 165). She also adds, “Supporters claim that the station’s in depth coverage of the Foundation is proportionate to the group’s power and influence in the exile community” (Robbins, 165). In other words, the Foundation reflects the CANF’s huge influence in South Florida by devoting extraordinary amounts of time to coverage of its own activities. All this remains under government support and the huge bill is footed by the U.S. taxpayers.

In the Report of the Presidential Commission, Mas is quoted urging Congress to set a date quickly for broadcasts to begin. At the Commission’s fifth meeting, “Another motion was approved at the request of Mr. Mas, recommending that the target date for
beginning Radio Marti should be January 28, 1983 in commemoration of the birthday of Jose Marti” (Final Report of The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, 130). Mas again flexed his muscles again by firing the director of Radio Marti after a disagreement. “Ernesto Betancourt is a prominent example. Appointed the first director of Radio Marti and militantly anti-Castro, he turned out not to favor tightening the trade embargo… Fundamentally, he objected to use of Radio Marti as the voice of Mas. Betancourt was ‘reassigned’ and then resigned in 1990” (Franklin, 3). These examples make it clear that throughout this government sponsored project, Mas and the CANF were highly influential.

The original discussion of the formation of Radio Marti included questions of logistics and expenditure. It was decided that because of various technological difficulties, radio waves, and in particular AM radio waves, would be the most feasible method for transmission of the broadcasts. “The FCC formally identified 1040 kHz as the recommended frequency for Radio Marti in a letter dated October 19, 1981. The NTIA formally assigned it for used by the U.S. Government in January 1982” (Final Report of The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, 11). Despite the fact that a station called Voice of America (VOA), capable of broadcasting to Cuba, already existed in South Florida, the green light was given to spend millions of dollars to create another station. VOA had been previously used in the 1960s and 70s to broadcast a daily show to Cuba, so its effectiveness was clear. (Final Report of The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, 4). Even so, “To launch Radio Marti a budget of $10 million in FY 82 and $7.7 million in FY 83 has been submitted to Congress by the
Department of State” (Final Report of The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, 20).

When originally discussing the appropriate radio frequencies, the possibility of television broadcasts were also discussed. It was decided that television broadcasts were impractical because such a small percentage of the Cuban population had access. Ten years later the prospect was revisited and TV Marti was born. However, the Commission would have been better off following their original advice because TV Marti never met with much success. While it can be argued that Radio Marti reached at least some proportion of the Cuban population, TV Marti was an utter failure. In a 2003 congressional overview of Radio and Television Marti, a critical member of the committee stated “On TV Marti we have been doing it for about 12 years now. We have spent at last count I think about $160 million on TV Marti, and there is little evidence that all but a very few handful of Cubans have ever watched a minute of it” (Hearing Before the Subcommittee on The Western Hemisphere, 16). However, he did not heavily pursue his criticism, and later on in the hearing it was agreed that TV Marti would continue to be funded. So this failure of a project continues today.

Although Radio Marti was vastly more successful than its TV counterpart, it too underwent its fair share of difficulties. One such problem was interference. Even before Radio Marti began broadcasting, AM stations in the U.S. were experiencing a large degree of interference from Cuba. When Castro gained power he soon took the Cuban government out of the international system which assigned frequencies. He began to broadcast at whatever frequency he chose, creating problems for U.S. stations. Radio
Stations within the U.S. came to testify before the Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, worried that if the U.S. were to start broadcasting to Cuba, interference would worsen. “The present and projected disruption of service is devastating to both public and radio broadcasters” (Final Report of The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba, 66). In addition to interference another major issue was jamming. The U.S. government had experienced jamming in Eastern Europe as governments of the countries they were broadcasting to tried to prevent U.S. government signals from reaching the desired audience. Jamming was not extremely difficult and was perceived as a likely strategy to be employed by the Cubans at the outset of Radio Marti. Studies have shown that due to jamming and content related issues, Radio Marti actually reaches is only 5% of the Cuban population. (Hearing Before the Subcommittee on The Western Hemisphere, 15). Finally, Radio Marti is designed to combat Castro and his human rights violations, yet in some cases it breeds further violence and human rights violations. “As you know, Martha Beatriz Roque was sentenced, along with many other dissidents. One of the charges against her was that she had done interviews for the Martis” (Hearing Before the Subcommittee on The Western Hemisphere, 20). One has to question the efficiency of these programs if they are causing Cuban people to undergo jail time and other forms of punishment.

One might assume that Radio Marti was a project of Reagan’s that ended when he left office; however this is not the case. The station still exists and George W. Bush has even intensified the efforts of the Marti’s despite the end of the Cold War and the associated anti-communist rhetoric. Bush has pushed for innovative ways to make the
stations more effective. One of these innovations involved using government planes to help broadcast his speeches. “On May 20, Cuban Independence Day, the Bush Administration finally broadcast over the Florida straits to Cuba, via an EC-130, a direct broadcast” (Hearing Before the Subcommittee on The Western Hemisphere, 3). Although this was somewhat effective many were concerned about the use of taxpayer’s money and safety of using these planes so close to Cuban airspace. In addition to new and controversial technological methods, Radio Marti also began introducing new content to try to woo more listeners including broadcasting major league baseball games. A spokesperson for the station said, “We are now in the process of formulating a modernized programming schedule to serve what we could call our core listeners, who are best described as mature, 35 years of age and above” (Hearing Before the Subcommittee on The Western Hemisphere, 11). Yet if the station is geared towards an older population, one would have to question its effectiveness in inspiring those capable of overthrowing Castro and leading a new government into the future. Overall, the Martis have produced a mixed record of failures and successes; yet, they remain one of the clearest cut examples of a collaboration between various Presidents and the CANF.
Chapter VI
Clinton’s Election, the Torricelli Bill and the 1994 Refugee Crisis

The end of the Cold War brought the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) a changing political climate, one which they were able to adapt and use for their own benefit. The end of the Cold War marked the end of an era for the United States in terms of their foreign policy. Clinton, a Democratic, entered the White House after twelve years of Republican rule. A new emphasis was placed on domestic concerns rather than foreign policy, and as a result the balance of power shifted slightly from vast executive control to a mixture of executive and legislative control. (Vanderbush and Haney, 387). Within this new balance of power the CANF found it necessary to switch some of their focus from lobbying the executive branch to lobbying Congress. They were fairly successful managing to lobby Congress while manipulating executive electoral politics to their own advantage (Vanderbush and Haney, 393-94). Additionally, with the end of the Cold War, a shift occurred from a focus on defeating communism as a world force to at least nominally promoting democracy and human rights. This shift influenced some within the Clinton administration to advocate taking a new approach and a softer line in regards to the Cuban situation. Since CANF members continued to favor a tough policy, this new opposition posed a new threat regarding matters related to Cuba. The CANF responded with an emphasis on democracy and an increased connection to the National Endowment for Democracy, as mentioned previously. Anti-immigration forces
within the United States also posed a new challenge to Cuban Americans who liked the favored treatment their family members and friends had been receiving when they immigrated. Despite the end of the Cold War and the end of the crusade against communism, the CANF was able to effectively move into the 1990s and use electoral politics and legislative lobbying mostly to their advantage in the case of the Torricelli Bill and the raft crisis in 1994.

The Cuban Democracy Act (CDA) was first introduced during the Bush administration in 1991 by Connie Mack, a Republican congresswoman from Florida. This bill “prohibit[ed] subsidiaries of U.S. firms from trading with Cuba” (Vanderbush and Haney, 392), effectively furthering the strain on Cuba’s already weakened post Cold War economy. The Bush administration ultimately opposed this bill for a number of reasons, saying that it would create a problem with foreign allies and business. “Among the most important [objections to the bill] to the administration…was that the bill would cause the U.S. diplomatic costs and impinge ‘on the President’s constitutionally mandated powers to conduct foreign affairs’” (Vanderbush and Haney, 394). The premise of the bill was questionable at best under international law, and U.S. allies were angry that subsidiaries of U.S. firms would not be able to trade with Cuba. As a result, this bill was easily defeated when it was set forth in 1991.

When democratic candidate Clinton voiced his support for the CDA, Bush was forced to cut his losses and support the CDA to prevent the democrats from gaining further ground in Florida. This time Congressman Robert Torricelli and Senator Bob Graham introduced the CDA. It would again stop subsidiaries of U.S. firms from trading
with Cuba, and it would also make communication and family visits to Cuba easier. According to Vanderbush and Haney, “CANF played a prominent role throughout the legislative process of this bill. Torricelli had developed close ties to the interest group” (393). After developing this relationship with the CANF, “Torricelli had been the largest congressional recipient of campaign funds from conservative Cuban Americans-- $120,650” up to that point in time (Leogrande, “From Havana to Miami: U.S. Policy as a Two-Level Game”, 75). CANF members supported the CDA or “Torricelli Bill,” as it came to be called, because it proposed harsh economic terms on Cuba while allowing communication with family who may still be on the island. From the CANF point of view, this act was just what they wanted. In order to promote this bill, the CANF began lobbying the legislative branch. Despite the new support for this bill the Bush administration remained weary; it was only due to electoral politics that this bill was finally able to pass with Bush’s support.

With the 1992 presidential election soon approaching, Mas Canosa approached the Democrats and “offered to provide help for Clinton’s presidential campaign if he decided to endorse the CDA” (Vanderbush and Haney, 394). Clinton took him up on this and voiced his support. “With a campaign short of funds, an interest in being competitive in Florida against President Bush in the general election, and even a Rodham family connection to the Cuban-American community in Florida, candidate Clinton signed on in Miami” (Vanderbush and Haney, 394). Clinton is by far the largest Democratic recipient of Cuban American campaign contributions, receiving $69,00 for his two presidential campaigns. Bush in comparison received $165,225 (Opensecrets.org). After Clinton’s
statement of support, Bush reluctantly agreed to work with congress members to create a CDA that he would agree to sign. “CANF had been able to use its money and votes to influence a sitting president to support a policy toward Cuba that he had previously argued was unnecessary, if not harmful to U.S. interests, and constitutionally problematic” (Vanderbush and Haney, 395). This could only take place within the new context of a post Cold War world, in which the importance of foreign policy had shifted.

Following the end of the Cold War the U.S. stance and the stance of the CANF began to change. “With Cuba…U.S. security concerns were nil and potential economic interests modest, so it was no surprise that the promotion of democracy became a key element in the revised agenda of U.S. demands. This shift was reinforced by the growing political power of conservative Cuban Americans” (Leogrande, “From Havana to Miami: U.S. Policy as a Two-Level Game”, 73). Castro Marino notes that the CANF thought that this new situation was ideal for trying to undermine the Cuban Revolution (47). The CANF was able to shift its focus towards the legislative branch, and in the circumstance of the CDA, use electoral politics to its advantage.

For the most part, the goals of the CANF were in line with the goals of members of the Clinton administration and Congress as far as promoting democracy in Cuba; however, some new groups with an interest in Cuba emerged, taking a softer stance towards Cuba. “These included nongovernmental organizations and private voluntary organizations with an interest in sending humanitarian aid to the island, think tanks, business groups, environmental organizations, and public health groups…they all advised improvement of economic and diplomatic relations” (Castro Marino, 48). These new
groups introduced a new source of competition for the CANF in terms of providing
domestic opposition to the CANF. The CANF continued to be fairly successful despite
these threats, increasing its lobbying and continuing to interact directly with the
president.

Another issue that threatened the CANF’s all encompassing control of policy
towards Cuba was the growing anti-immigration sentiment in the U.S. during the early
1990s. There were now other domestic groups besides just the CANF that had a stake in
U.S. policy towards Cuba. “Clinton faced new pressures from domestic constituencies in
this crisis with regard to the immigration issue, state level elections, and even budget
considerations about the mounting expense at Guantanamo” (Vanderbush and Haney,
400). The anti-immigration issue was especially prevalent in Florida, where the vast
majority of Cuban Americans lived. “The influx of refugees from Cuba, Haiti, and
elsewhere had severely strained Florida’s social services and provoked an anti-
immigration backlash among the electorate” (Leogrande, “From Havana to Miami: U.S.
Policy as a Two-Level Game”, 76). This anti-immigration backlash played a part in the
resolution of the refugee raft crisis of 1994. The CANF was not able to maintain the
influence that it once had.

In 1994 Cubans started leaving the island en masse; the situation was reminiscent
of the Mariel boatlift of 1980. When these immigrants arrived in the U.S. they were
given asylum just as Cuban immigrants had been since the 1960s. The recent strict
enforcement of immigration policy towards Haitians only served to intensify the problem.
And then, “Fidel Castro announced that henceforth Cubans were free to leave the island,
and thousands of *balseros* (rafters) proceeded to leave on whatever small rafts they could construct” (Vanderbush and Haney 397). In the wake of anti-immigration sentiment, Clinton was faced with a difficult decision as to what to do about this new development. Clinton’s foreign policy advisors met and on August 18th, Janet Reno announced that Cuban immigrants would no longer automatically be granted asylum. “The 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act had been effectively repealed, and Cuban migrants would no longer automatically receive political refugee status. While the process might not seem synoptic, it does show the president acting during a crisis with substantial prerogative like we might expect” (Vanderbush and Haney, 398). The migrants would be detained at Guantanamo until Clinton could figure out exactly what to do with them. CANF members were not pleased with this new policy and heavily lobbied Clinton to change his mind. In order to appease the CANF, “Clinton announced a series of new sanctions that limited cash remittances and visits to the island, and authorized an increase in broadcasting to the island by TV and Radio Marti” (Vanderbush and Haney, 399). Finally the decision was made to return all illegal Cuban immigrants at Guantanamo or en route to the United States back to Cuba and to limit the number of visas granted to Cubans to 20,000 per year. The raft crisis brought both wins and losses for the CANF in terms of its goals; however it definitely represented a changed situation for the amount of influence the CANF had with regards to issues in which Cuba was involved. In this situation the CANF found its role and authority greatly reduced. Other groups had an influence on Clinton’s decision and the solution to the problem was ultimately reached in
secret talks in which the CANF was not consulted. Despite these apparent losses, Clinton did feel compelled to give the CANF certain concessions.

During the early years of the Clinton administration the CANF had to adapt to the changing post Cold War U.S. political climate. They were fairly successful, but now there were other groups competing with them for the president’s influence with regards to Cuba. For the first time in years, the president made a decision about Cuba in which the CANF had no role and ultimately disagreed. As Cuba became less of a foreign policy issue and slipped beyond total executive control, the CANF also had to begin increasing their influence on Congress. The CANF shifted emphasis to use the Clinton administration’s new emphasis on promoting democracy for their own desires. This pattern would more or less continue for the rest of Clinton’s presidency.
Chapter VII: The Helms-Burton Law

As Clinton’s presidency wore on in the mid 1990s, the CANF faced a record of both wins and losses. They no longer had the muscle that they had during the Reagan years. They had won their fight for a stricter embargo with the Torricelli Bill, but lost in terms of the stricter policy towards Cuban immigrants. Rather than consulting the CANF leaders, Clinton conducted a deal in secret with Cuban leaders agreeing to return detainees caught at sea and curb the number of annual visas granted. This took place within the context of growing anti-immigration sentiment nation-wide. Problems with other immigrant groups led to an increasing push to reform immigration policy. Additionally other groups, especially Haitian immigrants and the Black caucus, were starting to complain about the differences between policy towards the Haitians and policy towards the Cubans. Despite all this Clinton continued to back the policy set forth by the previous Torricelli Bill; while others in Congress pushed for harsher measures towards Cuba, Clinton stood strong. Then everything changed after Cuba shot down two planes of the Cuban exile group Brothers to the Rescue. A new element had been added to the situation that the Clinton administration could not ignore. Under these conditions, the Helms-Burton law, which included drastic measures towards Cuba, passed. The Helms-Burton law had three objectives: “(1) to tighten the economic siege and hamper the process of economic transformation in Cuba; (2) to render improved relations between Cuba and the United States impossible;…(3) and to bring Cuba back to the status it had early in the twentieth century, when the United States dictated the destiny of the Cuban nation” (Marino, 62). Although the CANF was involved in massive lobbying efforts
towards the passage of this law, they were not directly involved in changing Clinton’s mind. They got what they wanted eventually, but it was due to external factors, not CANF direct influence on the president. The role of the CANF had shifted from direct involvement with the congress and president to more of a backseat lobbying effort in which they seemed to have less influence.

The push for the Helms-Burton law began in 1994 and continued as the climate of anti-immigration sentiment intensified through 1995 and 1996. Mitchell describes the various situations that occurred between the U.S. and Cuba in the 90s as, “Underlying these instances of political tensions is a strong, and only partially met, demand for migration to the United States from parts of Latin America and the Caribbean on the one hand, and a growing anxiety in the U.S. to ‘control the nation’s borders.’” (Mitchell, 93). He writes that an incomprehensible immigration policy resulted in situations that could not be managed and inevitably turned into “diplomatic emergencies.” One such of these circumstances was the Cuban refugee raft crisis in 1994. The policies set up to govern Cuban immigration were completely inadequate to cover such an issue, and the situation soon devolved into an emergency. Rather than relying on set policies, Clinton had to rely on secret meetings. A similar situation would occur in 1996 when the Brothers to the Rescue plane was shot down. Mitchell wrote in his article in 1994, “Growing restrictionism is a nation-wide phenomenon” (Mitchell, 100). By 1996 the national phenomenon had only gained more intensity. “The impetus for a new legislative initiative began to emerge even before the 1994 elections that would lead to Republican majorities in the House and Senate. Many on the Hill were frustrated that Castro had
survived the wave of democratization that had swept Latin America” (Vanderbush and Haney, 400). The plane incident gave them the final excuse they needed to push the bill through.

After Clinton snubbed the CANF in his secret deal regarding the raft crisis, the Cuban American community decided to take action. “Right wing sectors of the U.S.-based Cuban community founded a coalition known as the Committee of United Cuban Exiles, that included, among others, …the CANF.” (Marino, 54). This Committee saw immigration policy moving in another direction regarding Cuba and decided to take matters into its own hands. “The Committee, together with Brothers to the Rescue and the Democracy Movement, sponsored flotillas that sailed around and flew over the island in a dangerously provocative and flagrant violation of Cuban borders” (Marino, 54). In addition they angered the Castro government by scattering anti-Castro leaflets over Havana. When the Republicans gained control of Congress in 1994, the CANF and the Cuban community saw their chance to get a foot in the door with policy making. “With the legislative elections in November, 1994, the Republicans had achieved a majority in Congress with a highly ideological and conservative agenda…This made it possible for the right, and particularly the CANF to move a number of anti-Cuban proposals through the legislature” (Marino, 55). However, even with the conservative congress the CANF did not have the power that they once had with the executive branch. “Absent from the drafting process [of the Helms-Burton law] was the CANF, which by the mid 1990s was behaving as a typical PAC that gave money primarily to incumbent Democrats and thus deserved no special place in the drafting process” (Vanderbush and Haney, 401).
Although the CANF was not involved in the actual drafting, they still gave money to various congress members and now had a new voice in the House. “On the House side, not only had the view of the CANF changed since the 1980s but so too had the demographics of the House itself, now including three Cuban-Americans. These members took on many of the roles that CANF had previously played” (Vanderbush and Haney, 401). It was partially through this a combination of CANF lobbying and support from Cuban House members that the Helms-Burton law was able to come about.

In the mean time, Clinton was acting independently of Congress with regards to Cuba. In theory, “The Clinton administration…had tried to cut a deal with the sponsors of the Helms-Burton Act by agreeing in principle with the purpose of the draft” (Marino, 55). In reality Clinton was following his own path. In 1995, he issued an executive order which permitted shipments from NGOs to go to Cuba, and loosened travel and business restrictions towards the island. As Clinton continued to act without consulting the CANF, they concentrated their efforts on Congress. This did not make either the CANF or Brothers to the Rescue happy, and both parties continued to step up their efforts against the Clinton administration. Clinton was concerned that the Helms-Burton Act violated principles of international law. “It violated principles basic to international law such as the self-determination of nations, sovereign equality among states, the illegitimacy of the use of or threat of force (including economic coercion), and non-interference in the internal state of affairs” (Marino, 62). The parts of the bill he was referring to were Titles III and IV. “Title III that would give U.S. citizens the right to sue in U.S. courts foreign companies that ‘traffic’ in stolen property in Cuba” (Vanderbush
and Haney, 402). Title IV, “would deny visas to executives of companies ‘trafficking’ in confiscated properties in Cuba” (Vanderbush and Haney, 403). Not only was Clinton worried that this would violate international law, he was also worried about spoiling relations with U.S. allies.

This changed with the shoot down of the Brothers to the Rescue plane. “On February 24, 1996, Cuban MiG planes shot down two small civilian aircraft in international waters over the Straits of Florida, killing four of their crew members” (Leogrande, “From Havana to Miami: U.S. Policy as a Two-Level Game”, 80). This was not an unprovoked event. Although they were not violating Cuban space at this specific point in time, Brothers to the Rescue had been violating Cuban airspace and dropping pamphlets for some time. Castro’s government had been in contact with both the U.S. government and U.S. businessmen and threatened retaliation if these flights did not cease. Castro had been given every assurance that the flights would stop. Nevertheless, with this attack, Clinton had no choice but to react and change his stance towards the Helms-Burton Law. “He declared his intention to work with Congress to pass the then-pending Helms-Burton bill, ordered an expansion of Radio Marti, and prohibited direct charter flights between Cuba and the United States” (Marino, 60). A few weeks later, Clinton signed the Helms-Burton Act into law. U.S. allies opposed the Helms-Burton Act and it was even arguably illegal under international law; yet it passed. Once again, electoral politics came into play. “The Helms-Burton Act, like the Torricelli Act, was passed in an election year. Both events were influenced by a fear that the president would be accused of weakness toward ‘Castro’s Cuba’” (Marino, 61). This demonstrated a general trend in
which the president could no longer do whatever he pleased without being subject to criticism by his voter bases. It was no longer a cold war climate where security concerns dominated everything else. The all encompassing power of the CANF too seemed to be slipping.

One of the most surprising things about the passage of the Helms-Burton law is that Clinton voluntarily relinquished some of his presidential authority. Very rarely does the president give one of his authorities to Congress. In this case, Clinton stripped himself of the ability to control the embargo and gave full authority to the legislative branch, barring Castro’s death or the fall of his regime. By codifying the embargo into law, Clinton was no longer able to lift it. Vanderbush and Haney note, “entrepreneurial members of Congress usurped many of the functions once performed more exclusively by the executive and CANF” (Vanderbush and Haney, 406). This seems to be the overwhelming lesson of the Helms-Burton Law and the Clinton era. Power had passed out of the hands of the executive, and interest groups like the CANF were forced to find new ways to influence politics; this led to an increase in lobbying Congress and a decrease in attempts to win favor with the president.

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1 In the case of the Helms-Burton act members of congress drafted and passed the Act with little influence from the CANF compared to other Bills concerning Cuba.
Chapter VIII
Florida’s Elections and the Cuban Influence

With all the suspense and debate regarding the state of Florida in recent presidential elections, one must ask what role the Cuban vote and the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) had to play in all this. The 2000 election came down to a tie, and the result hinged on the final decision by the state of Florida, which was riddled with arguments and irregularities. Although the 2004 election was not as contested, it was still very close and again Florida was up for grabs as a crucial swing state. With the 2008 election soon approaching, Florida’s 25 electoral votes may be in play again.

Although the past few elections in Florida have been very close, this was not always the case. In the first half of the twentieth century Floridians were die hard southern Democrats; the state went overwhelmingly Democrat in almost every election. With the Civil Rights era, the positions of the Democratic party began to change, and some Florida voters began to shift their opinions as well. From almost the time of the Cuban Revolution, Cuban Americans voted steadfastly Republican. Many attribute this to animosity Cubans had towards Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs and also to the Cubans’ alliance with Reagan in the 1980s. During the 1980s, Cuban Americans represented a significant voting bloc for the Republicans in Florida. This trend continued well into the 1990s, however, in recent years patterns have begun to change. Recently some Cubans and other Hispanics have begun to vote Democrat, although pressure remains from the CANF to vote conservatively, and the majority of Cubans remain Republicans. This slight shift has been attributed to younger Cubans focusing on issues other than deposing
Castro. While the exodus from Cuba remains in the minds of older Cubans, especially members of the CANF, younger second and third generation Cubans are beginning to focus more on other issues like the economy and U.S. immigration policy. Additionally, older Cubans have reacted to both Republican and Democratic policies that go against their mission in Cuba. Whichever political party is willing to side with the CANF wins CANF money and votes. Although, the power of the conservative Cuban voting bloc has begun to wane and is not discussed as much in recent elections; it still remains a force to consider especially in elections that are as close as the recent elections in Florida.

In the 1980s, Cuban Americans represented an important group within the Republican Party in Florida. This was the first time the Republican Party had made any significant inroads in the state. This time period was also the height of power for the CANF during Reagan’s presidency. The organization had influence in everything from the Cuban embargo to the running of Radio Marti. They also had the power to largely sway the vote of the Cuban American population in Florida. Many of the members of the CANF had been born in Cuba and immigrated between the 1950s and 1980s. Their main political goal was to oust Castro and they saw the anti-Castro, anti-communist, Republican Party as their vehicle to do this. “The influx of Cubans throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s …bolstered Republican aspirations” (Colburn, 106). At this point, Cubans were a huge asset to the party and noted for the change they made in the political climate in Florida. “Cuban Americans voted heavily for President Reagan in 1980 and 1984” (Volsky, 1). In 1988 when George H.W. Bush ran for president, Cuban
Americans made up, “8 to 10 percent of the Republican vote in Florida”\(^2\) (Volsky, 1). He certainly courted the Cuban population; while campaigning, he announced that if elected “he would appoint a Hispanic person to the Cabinet” (Volsky, 1). Jeb Bush, a local politician and George H.W. Bush’s son, was a key member of his father’s campaign. He is quoted as saying about the Cuban community, “in terms of money, it’s an important community and will be very important for my dad” (Weinraub, 1). In 1987, Bernard Weinraub reported, “Mr. Bush seems especially popular among Cuban-Americans. The reasons are his link to President Reagan, a hero to the Cuban community; the work of his Spanish speaking son Jeb, as well as the Vice President’s [Bush’s] appeals to Cuban and other Hispanic leaders” (Weinraub, 1). In this election, Cubans made up a large proportion of the Hispanic community in Florida, and Bush won an overwhelming 84% of the Hispanic vote (Sack, 1). Although Florida did not play a primary role in this particular election, the Cuban American vote was quite influential there and Jeb Bush emerged as an important political figure.

The son of George H.W. Bush and brother of George W. Bush, Jeb Bush has been in Florida politics for decades and now serves as the governor of Florida. He is also credited as playing a crucial role in campaigning within the Cuban community for both his father and his brother. In the early 1980s Jeb Bush made inroads into the Cuban community in Florida by partnering with Armando Codina, an influential Cuban businessman in the area to form a real estate business (Colburn, 158). Jeb later used these connections with the Cuban community in his father and brother’s campaigning. “Jeb had
\(^2\) See chart at the end of the chapter detailing Cuban Republican and Democratic voting in recent elections.
worked on his father’s campaign in Florida and helped him secure the votes of Blue Dog Democrats in the central and northern sections of the state and of Cubans in Miami-Dade” (Colburn, 145). When George W. Bush ran in 2000, Jeb was in an even better position to have an influence, as governor. “Moreover, Republican leaders gave Jeb Bush credit for the party’s political rise to state leadership” (Colburn, 163). By the end of the 1990s, Florida was no longer a state of traditional Democrats; the Republican party had gained a true foothold.

During Clinton’s two terms in office from 1992 to 2000, the traditional Cuban American Republican voting bloc began to erode. In 1992, the Cuban Americans voted predictably with 72 percent of Cubans voting to re-elect President Bush (Navarro, 1). However, as Clinton began to woo Cuban voters with his policies and second and third generation Cuban immigrants came of voting age, this began to change. During his time in office, Clinton enacted a number of policies with regards to Cuba, both good and bad by the standards of the CANF. As a result, the Cuban American electorate shifted back and forth in their support of the Democratic Party depending on Clinton’s most recent action.

In 1996, Florida was a state with 14 million people and 25 electoral votes. In the 1990s it came into its own as a crucial swing state, “which Bill Clinton lost in 1992 by 100,000 votes” (Navarro, 1). With this tight margin in 1992, it was possible that the state could go in either direction in 1996. Sack writes, “Hispanic voters account for about 15 percent of Florida’s registered Republicans” (Sack, 2). Although 15 percent does not seem like an extremely large amount, with a margin of only 100,000 it could make a
difference. Navarro writes, “Although Cuban-Americans, about 7 percent of the state’s electorate, are not usually critical as a voting bloc in Florida, which Bill Clinton lost in 1992 by 100,000 votes, a shift in their support could help the President erase the gap” (Navarro, 1). Opinions about how Clinton would do with the Cuban vote in this election varied widely. Navarro writes about Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Cuban American Republican member of the House of Representatives from Florida. According to Navarro, Ros-Lehtinen had stopped voting with her party recently in some circumstances because of a strong anti-immigration stance among Republicans. “Her rebellion underscores the disenchantment of Cuban-Americans with Republicans” (Navarro, 1). The Democrats also gained the support of many Cubans when Clinton voiced his support for the Helms-Burton Act and denounced Castro for shooting down the two Brothers to the Rescue planes. “By tightening sanctions against Cuba and removing his opposition to a bill aimed at discouraging foreign investment in Cuba, Mr. Clinton managed to steal the spotlight from Republican candidates” (Sack, 1). In an interview with Francisco Hernandez, the president of the Cuban American National Foundation, Hernandez said, “He [Castro] has never been silent for very long. And if the President stands up against another challenge, I would say there’s a possibility that he could carry the Cuban-American community” (Sack, 2). These were strong words from the leader of the CANF, an organization that had been staunchly Republican for years. Whatever the views of the Cuban community on Clinton’s policies, polls showed that the community had begun to shift as a voting bloc. “A survey in August by Dario Moreno, a political scientist at Florida International University in Miami, found that although Mr. Clinton gets the
support of barely a quarter of Cuban Americans, only 57 percent would vote for Mr. Dole” (Navarro, 1). A large amount of the 72 percent that had gone to Bush in 1992 had deteriorated. This change shows a reaction to Clinton’s pro-Cuban policies as well as a need by Cuban Americans to show favoritism to Clinton in order to have a say in his future policies with relation to Cuba. Clinton won the state but lost among Cubans, but only by a margin of 4 percent.

All this shifting back and forth within the Cuban American community proved especially important within the context of the 2000 election. This election ended in almost a dead tie in Florida, with Gore requesting a recount because of irregularities and mistakes in the counting of many votes. Florida was the deciding factor in the nation for this election; whichever party won Florida had won the election. Although the Cubans did not represent an extraordinarily large voting bloc, in an election this close, every vote mattered. Cubans were angered by the Democrat’s decision to send Elian Gonzalez, a child who had become a political symbol, back to Cuba. Additionally, in 1999 Tim Golden wrote, “The Clinton administration is quietly moving to expand contacts between the United States and Cuba” (Golden, 1). This is the last thing most Cuban Americans wanted. As a result, “four out of five Cuban-Americans backed Bush in south Florida, helping tip an election where the difference turned on a few hundred votes” (Sesin and Federico-O’Murchu, 1). After a series of judicial and legislative inputs, Gore conceded the election and George W. Bush became the next President.

In 2004, another close race in Florida ensued. Yet again Cubans were split over who to vote for. Some Cubans were angered by the restrictions on visits to Cuba that
Bush enacted in his first term (Sesin and Federico-O’Murchu, 2). John Kerry, the Democratic contender, said in his platform that he would roll back these restrictions. However, the Bush administration also enacted positive reforms from the point of view of most Cubans. “Other elements of the package included increased funding to support democratic activists in Cuba and for Radio Marti, the U.S. backed radio station” (Sesin and Federico-O’Murchu, 3). A survey of Cubans in Miami revealed that the length of time they had been in the U.S. directly correlated with how they planned to vote. “Those born in Cuban and who came to the United States before 1980…favored Bush by 89 percent (Sesin and Federico-O’Murchu, 2). These voters had been in the country for a long time and traditionally favored the Republican Party. “The second group, 15 percent [of registered Cuban voters], fled the island since 1980, and has closer ties to Cuba. They have more relatives on the island, and are therefore more affected by the new restrictions. The majority favored Kerry by 40 percent, with 29 percent backing Bush, and 31 percent undecided” (Sesin and Federico-O’Murchu, 2). As those who immigrated before 1980 get older, those who have immigrated more recently will have more of an influence. Finally, “The third group made up 10 percent of the registered voters, and these were American-born children of Cubans. They do not have direct ties to Cuba and favored Kerry by 58 percent, against 38 percent for Bush, 10 percent undecided” (Sesin and Federico-O’Murchu, 2). Despite these changes, Bush ended up winning Florida in 2004.

With all of the hype surrounding these recent elections, the Cuban vote in Florida remains highly sought after for the upcoming 2008 presidential election. It is likely that Florida will remain a swing state and the vote in this state will again be close. Laura
Wides-Munoz writes of the campaigning politicians’ recent visits to Miami, “Such visits are a quasi-requirement because South Florida’s Cuban-Americans have turned out heavily for Republicans, particularly in presidential races, and nearly 770,000 of the state’s more than 1 million Cuban Americans live in Miami Dade County” (Wides-Munoz, 1). Additionally, “A survey in June on behalf of the New Democratic Network by Bendixen and Associates, an independent polling firm based in Miami, found that 75 percent of the 437,332 Miami-Dade registered voters are Cuban-Americans” (Sesin and Frederico-O’Murchu, 2). In trying to determine Cuban influence in future elections it is useful to look at past trends among Cuban voters. Cubans certainly seemed to have their strongest influence in the 1980s when they voted as a coherent bloc for the Republican Party. Since then things have begun to shift as younger Cubans with different priorities have come of voting age. Additionally Cuban voters have reacted both favorably and negatively to various policies by the Clinton and Bush administrations; this has led to further deviations in their voting patterns. The Cuban American community continues to want a politician in power who can promote their goals; however, they have now started to differ in their opinions of the way in which to do this. Older Cubans still want a Republican who is strict towards Castro in power. Newer generations have started to side with the Democratic Party and its more lenient policies towards immigration.
Cuban Voting Patterns

*Results from 1980 to 1996 are taken from Dario Moreno’s data from predominantly Hispanic districts in Miami-Dade County. Moreno argues that this is a fairly accurate representation of the Cuban vote because Cubans make up the majority of Hispanics in these precincts and because Cubans are significantly more likely to participate in politics than other Hispanic immigrant groups.

**Results from 2000 are taken from a New York Times article and are representative of South Florida. I was not able to find the exact number of Cubans that voted for Gore, but compared to voters statewide Cubans voted overwhelmingly for Bush.

***In a 2006 survey of Miami-Dade and Broward Counties this represents the percentage of Cubans registered as Republicans and Democrats not actual votes cast.
With each new presidency the Cuban lobbying effort must adapt and change. I have investigated Cuban American populations during past presidencies, and I will now turn to the policies of our current president and describe how Cuban Americans as a group are currently faring. With the 1997 death of Jorge Mas Canosa, who had been the leader of the CANF for over two decades, many were wondering how the lobbying group would hold up. For the next few years the CANF went through a period of less coherence than before, and it seemed that some Cubans, especially younger Cubans, were starting to part ways with the once all powerful group. This changed with the controversy over six year old Elian Gonzalez, a Cuban boy who was rescued at sea on Thanksgiving Day 1999 and brought to his relatives in Miami. The custody battle that ensued between the boy’s relatives and his father in Cuba gave Cuban Americans in Miami a cause to rally around. This issue has helped to revitalize the CANF. Additionally, Bush’s policies have been just what the exile group wants, strengthening restrictions on Cuba. However, despite these promising developments, opposition to the CANF is also growing both among Cubans and among outsiders. With Castro’s decline non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other groups are becoming more and more vocal about ending the embargo and increasing contact with Cubans. While in the past the CANF had mainly the president and congress to contend with, it seems that in the future the American public and many Cubans will challenge the group.
With the many thousands of immigrants that come to the U.S. every year no one could have foreseen the controversy that would embroil the whole nation with the arrival of 6 year old Elian Gonzalez. Most immigrants enter the country as just another statistic, but this one captured the attention of the media, the Cuban community, the American public, and even presidential candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore. Elian was rescued at sea on Thanksgiving Day 1999, after the raft carrying his mother and several others capsized. His mother died in the accident. Once in Miami a custody battle began with the boy’s relatives arguing that they could provide him with a better life than his father in Cuba, therefore they should have the right to custody. According to Sarah Benet-Weiser, the relatives argued, “the ‘Democratic American family’ is one in which the little boy will be raised properly…This family was then juxtaposed against the equally caricatured ‘Communist Cuban family’” (Banet-Weiser, 6). Banet-Weiser writes that Elian’s use as a political pawn is the reason the family even had a case to be heard in courts, rather than just having him immediately returned to his father as custody laws would entail. She writes, “it was Elian’s potential as a political subject, what he represented metaphorically in terms of dominant ideologies about citizenship and immigration in the U.S., and his position in a particular immigrant community, the Cuban exile community in Miami, that so captured an American media audience” (Benet-Weiser, 7). In any event, while Elian’s case was being heard in court, bills were introduced both in the House and the Senate to give this boy permanent residency status.

While all this was going on, Gore and Bush who were both campaigning for the upcoming 2000 presidential election felt the need to voice their opinions in order to gain
the support of the Cuban community. David Rieff writes, “For decades, it has been a truism that anyone aspiring to national office will cater to the most extreme and fanatical elements in the Cuban exile community rather than stand on principle. Backing their demand that Elian be given permanent United States residency status, Mr. Gore plays into their attempts to delay and obstruct Elian’s return” (Rieff, 1). At odds with many in the Democratic Party, Gore sided with the Cuban Americans in this hotly contested debate. Rieff attributes Gore’s move as an attempt to win the vote of younger Cubans. He says Gore thought that attaining the Cuban vote was a distinct possibility and cites the 1996 election in which the Republican candidate Bob Dole got many less Cuban votes than expected. Gore was also at odds with the American public in his statement. “On April 24, the last time Gallup asked this question, 63 percent of Americans wanted Elian to live with his father, while only 25 percent sided with the Miami relatives” (Mayer, 594).

Despite all of the pleas that were made on Elian’s behalf, the court ended up ruling in favor of his father, and INS had to be sent in to physically remove him from the relatives’ custody. George W. Bush capitalized on this event when he “contributed to the editorializing of the event and remarked that ‘the photograph of the frightened boy being ‘removed from his home at gunpoint’ was ‘chilling’ and ‘not an image a freedom-loving nation wants to show the world’” (Banet-Weiser, 18). The Cuban community had entered center stage with an issue in which two presidential candidates felt the need to become involved. This was good publicity for their cause and helped rally the somewhat weakened community after the death of one of their greatest leaders Jorge Mas Canosa.
The Elian controversy again proved to be important when the 2000 presidential race came down to almost a dead tie in Florida. Evan Thomas and Mark Hosenball write that the Cuban community had a part in slowing the recount of votes in Miami-Dade because “they never forgave the Clinton-Gore administration for the Elian grab” (Thomas and Hosenball, 1).

Besides the revitalization of the Cuban community around the Elian issue, the community was also able to rejoice in Bush’s policies towards the Castro regime. In 2003, “President Bush announced…that the government was tightening a ban on travel to Cuba and making it easier for more immigrants to enter the United States” (Bumiller, 1). Both of these actions fit in well with the goals of the CANF. Additionally, “Mr. Bush also announced the creation of a commission, to be led by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and Mel Martinez, the Cuban-born secretary of housing and urban development, to plan for what Mr. Bush said would be ‘Cuba’s transition from Stalinist rule to a free and open society’” (Bumiller, 1). This Commission came to be known as the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. Although Bush has clearly not turned Cuba into a democratic society, the mere creation of such a group suggests his solidarity and willingness to work with exile groups. Wayne Smith describes the plan the Commission came up with: “A few more Radio Marti broadcasts, a few more travel restrictions, another economic sanction or two and it would all be over” (Smith, 1). When he says ‘it would all be over,’ he refers to the communist regime in Cuba. The plan also strongly advises that the U.S. intervene if Fidel Castro were to try to pass power to his brother Raul. As Smith notes, this has already happened and nothing the U.S. has done has been
able to topple the regime. As noted in previous chapters, the increase in ineffective Radio Marti broadcasts and embargo sanctions that have been in place for years are likely to make little difference. Smith also notes, “The administration also promises to provide some $80 million for dissidents on the island... Virtually all such funds remain in Miami” (Smith, 2). Basically the administration’s goals are very much in keeping with the goals of the CANF, but they have done little or nothing to actually change the situation in Cuba.

Given that after years, the CANF and government policies towards Cuba seem to have little effect other than wasting taxpayer’s money, there is an increasing emergence of groups working against these policies. In a poll published in 2001 by Public Opinion Quarterly most Americans reported not feeling that Cuba was a threat after the end of the Cold War. Additionally, “In two surveys conducted in 2000... about 55 percent of the American public favored reviving diplomatic ties with Cuba, while 33 percent opposed it” (Mayer, 591). Not surprisingly, this level of opposition to current policies translated into action at the level of NGOs and Cuban dissidents. One such group is an Independent Task Force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations. This group argued for action that must be taken within our current framework to initiate change. They focused on the issue of human rights abuses, which as they saw them, would not go away unless the U.S. took a more proactive stance. They also argued that the Bush administration’s bans on travel were ridiculous, writing, “the Task Force believes that freedom is contagious and that people-to-people contacts with ordinary American citizens will help convey democratic and free-market ideas to ordinary Cubans” (U.S. Cuban Relations in the 21st
Century, 20). This is a claim that many have put forth, even within the government; the best way to bring about democracy is to have more contact with the Cuban people. As I mentioned earlier, even many Cubans, especially younger ones are beginning to disagree with the harsh line being promoted by the CANF. Although they are often stifled within the Cuban American community, these dissidents voice their objections voting against the traditional political party of the Cubans, the Republicans.

In conclusion, although the Cuban community was able to create quite a bit of hype surrounding the Elian issue and win the favor of George W. Bush in most of his policies, a growing opposition movement is presenting a challenge to the monolithic view presented by the CANF. NGOs, Cubans and some members of the government wish to lift the embargo and extend an olive branch to the Cuban people. In the past, the Cuban Americans have been fairly successful at organizing around new issues, like the Elian case, and influencing various presidents; however, one must wonder how long this can go on with opposition to the group growing steadily.
The question remains: how and why has a small immigrant population amassed so much power that they are able to almost single-handedly dictate policy towards Cuba? From the 1980s to the present the CANF has been able to convince/force presidents, both Democrat and Republican alike, to enact policies that are questionably in the interest of the United States. Some of these policies have been racist, some have purposely deceived American citizens, and all have resulted in failure with regards to the goal of promoting democracy in Cuba. Why have presidents, congresses, and the public allowed this to go on for so long without question or condemnation? I have found several theories that people have used to answer this question. Some have argued that money in the form of campaign donations or electoral votes caused presidents to bend over backwards for the CANF. However, I have found the solution to this question to be over-determined. There is no one factor or set of factors that have proved important enough to definitely answer why the CANF has had so much sway. I have been able to identify several factors that contributed to making the CANF unique and added to its success. I have also determined that the CANF achieved a great amount of success in a relatively short time, so much so that they were able to influence presidents to make decisions that were at best questionable and at worst detrimental to the national interest of the United States. However, why the CANF still yields so much power after years of mistakes is a question
that must be further addressed by presidents, Congress, and the public. This abuse of power must not be allowed to continue.

While it is impossible to determine the exact causes of the rise or decline of the CANF, I have identified several factors that seem to be contributing factors. The CANF has enjoyed success as an ethnic interest group that is arguably unrivaled by any other group except perhaps the Israel lobby. This success is probably due to a number of factors, but one must at the very least consider the position that Cuban immigrants occupied in society as opposed the position that most other immigrants occupy. In 1950s and 60s Cuban immigrants often came from the middle and upper classes in Cuba and were well prepared to gain a foothold in Miami both economically and politically. Also, it certainly helped that the U.S. government thought that letting immigrants from communist countries into the U.S. would discredit the communist way of life. The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 made it incredibly easy for Cubans to enter and become American citizens. This act remained in place well into the 1990s. As I mentioned in my comparison of Cuban and Haitian immigrants, many have even gone as far as to declare this immigration policy racist. By favoring Cubans over other immigrant groups the government has created tensions between immigrant groups and encouraged the type of anti-immigration hysteria that exists today. It is unclear why Cubans were shown favoritism for so long in that this policy was in effect for 30 years and never resulted in a weakening of Castro’s government.

In the 1980s, when Reagan was looking for a way to appear tougher towards unfavorable Latin American regimes, an alliance with the Cuban American exiles seemed
to be an opportunity to achieve this. The Cuban Americans would support Reagan’s tough stance, and in turn he would support their group. Hence, a number of circumstances converged to pave the way for the creation and success of the CANF.

Through the 1990s, long after the end of the Cold War, this group remained powerful and successful in its mission of lobbying the U.S. government to take a tough stance towards Castro. For example, they heavily lobbied for the Helms-Burton act, which prevented multinational corporations from doing business with Cuba and greatly angered U.S. allies abroad.

In recent years, as a new generation of Cuban Americans has come of age in the United States there has been a slight decline in the CANF’s influence. Without the prior leaders, like Jorge Mas Canosa, voices of dissent are becoming prevalent in the Cuban community. The younger generation of Cuban Americans are further removed from Castro’s regime and many of them have never even been to Cuba. Therefore, they align themselves more with other immigrant groups in the U.S. than with Cubans. They tend to disagree with the harsh conservative measures of the founders of the CANF and support measures that would help all immigrants in the U.S. Additionally, more recent immigrants from Cuba are statistically not as likely to be from the upper class there, and are less likely to become rich and achieve positions of power in the United States. There are now voices of dissent within the Cuban community about the way in which the U.S. should conduct relations with Cuba. Additionally, now that Castro is no longer the leader of Cuba, Cuban Americans have lost the symbol of the regime that they once rallied against. They no longer have one coherent goal to defeat Castro. Consequently, I expect
that all of these factors will lessen the powerful position that the CANF has been able to create for itself in society.

Although the CANF seems to be on somewhat of a decline, the unchecked power that they held for years with regards to Cuban policy remains amazing. The U.S. government had a long record of tense relations with Cuba, and the CANF was able to build upon this and lobby successfully for harsh measures that were sometimes not in the national interest of the U.S. One of the primary examples I have highlighted is the funding of Radio and TV Marti. Both of these programs are funded by U.S. taxpayers and neither of them are widely known to the U.S. population.

Many non-Cuban U.S. citizens have consistently supported normalizing relations with Cuba, especially since the 1990s. The ongoing embargo with Cuba has not ruined Castro’s government, and there is no real explanation as to why the embargo continues. There have been a plethora of arguments made that normalizing relations would increase trade and the spread of ideas. This would ultimately be more effective in bringing about a democracy and ending human rights abuses than a harsh embargo would. Instead of working to normalize relations, TV and Radio Marti programs, which are run by the CANF and financed by the U.S. government, have served to annoy the Castro government and increase tensions by spreading U.S. propaganda. Radio and TV Marti waste huge amounts of money and are not in keeping with what the majority of U.S. citizens think is best for the country. What is worse, neither of these programs has even been particularly effective at what it sets out to do. Radio Marti has been blocked in a wide range of areas by the Castro government for years now. It still reaches some
percentage of the population, but the percentage is relatively small and it is hard to
determine whether any positive results have actually come of these broadcasts. TV Marti
is even less successful. Very few Cubans have televisions, and the programs have been shown to reach almost no one.

The lack of success of the Marti programs leads one to question why the
government allows itself to pander to the wishes of the CANF, spend millions of dollars, and go against the interests of many U.S. citizens. Some have argued that the answer to this question lies in large donations to campaigns, but I have concluded that CANF donations are not especially large or influential. The amount of money that the CANF donates might be influential to local politicians, but it is a pittance compared to the overall amount that presidential candidates raise in campaign financing. Yet, presidents continue to pay attention to the Cuban American population in their campaigning and are later held hostage to the wishes of the CANF in their policy making. Other scholars have argued that presidents are beholden to the Cuban Americans because they seek their electoral votes in order to win Florida. However, I have shown in my paper that although Cuban Americans typically vote as a block, they are too small of a population to have much of an effect in the election as a whole. Electoral votes and money may play a small part in the power of the CANF but they do not explain the vast influence this group has over presidents both liberal and conservative alike.

Another policy that I found to be particularly questionable is the funding for the National Endowment for Democracy. The National Endowment for Democracy is funded by the government, but the money is given out to private organizations. The
organizations, such as the CANF, act privately, but since their money comes from the government, they must take into account whether their actions are in line with government wishes; if they are not favored by the government, they may not qualify for further funding in the future. In this way, the government can achieve some of its more subversive “democracy building” objectives without direct involvement. Organizations like the CANF get involved on the ground in Cuba in ways that the U.S. government could not. This program represents yet another example of deception of the American taxpayers. And, yet again, it is questionable whether the U.S. government is acting in its own self interest. By giving its money out to private groups, the government no longer has direct control over its policy objectives. Groups such as the CANF can undertake harsher measures than the government and take part in activities that may not in fact lead to democracy building. The government claims to give vast amounts of money to the CANF through the NED for purposes of democracy building; yet, as I mentioned before, the CANF’s harsh measures for democracy building in Cuba have not worked in the past, and they are not likely to work in the future. This is another policy that U.S. citizens and Congress should be seriously questioning and reworking.

Finally, I conclude that the failures and successes of Cuban Americans have often been tied to the policies and sometimes mistakes of individual presidents. As I have discussed, if Eisenhower had established relations with the Castro government, it is unlikely that Castro would have even turned to the Soviets formed a socialist government. This was the beginning of real problems for the United States when it came to Cuba. Carter made small steps towards easing tensions with the Cubans, but when
Reagan came into office, relations worsened. Reagan felt the need to be tough on Latin American governments that he did not approve of. His administration is credited for providing the impetus for the CANF. He needed the Cuban Americans to back him up, and they needed him to provide a venue for them to express their foreign policy desires. The CANF did in fact help Reagan promote his objectives towards Cuba, however, as I have mentioned, in later years this organization went on to increase tensions with Cuba, which was not necessarily a good thing for the United States. Clinton’s erred in flip flopping on his policies towards Cuba. At times he tried to act independently of the CANF. At other times, such as the shooting down of the Brother’s to the Rescue plane, he played right into the hands of the CANF. Both Clinton and George W. Bush acted as if gaining the Cuban American vote was crucial to their winning their respective elections, yet the Cuban American vote comprises only a very small portion of Florida’s population. Many of these decisions lead me to question what the various presidents were thinking and why they felt that they had to listen to the CANF so much. My study of past presidencies indicates that the policies of individual presidents will continue to be influential to the successes or failures of the CANF. Future presidents need to take a long hard look at their policies towards Cuba and evaluate whether they are actually in line with the interests of the United States. While the reason why the CANF exerts so much influence remains unclear, one thing is clear: CANF policies have not been effective in forming a democracy in Cuba. The time has come for the American public to seriously question the amount of power this organization has and take control of Cuba policy into its own hands.
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