Spanish-speaking Caribbean Migration in the 20th Century

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I. Introduction

The region of the Caribbean and the human migration of its people have played a fundamental yet not well understood part in the emergence of the Modern world. Its strategic location between Europe and the Americas has placed the Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations of Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Dominican Republic at the center of competing political, economic and globalization forces. Before the Dutch's imported the first black slaves into the Island of Manhattan or the British appropriated North America's indigenous territory, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean region had already endured centuries of European conquest, colonization and forced miscegenation of its people in the creation of economic plantation systems destined mainly for extraction. Since the arrival of Columbus in the middle of the 15th Century, and that of Americans in the early 20th Century, the history of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean has been defined by European and North America's expansionist quests for economic investments, geopolitical strategies and democratizing imperatives. Not surprisingly, the complex history of this region requires the emergence of analytical frameworks which can help explain how a history of colonization, including mostly that of its people's productive capacities, affected and still affects racial identity formation processes, socio and economic stratification as well as a sense of transnational nationhood as diasporas move across ex-colonizing territories.

At the onset of the 20th Century, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations broke from the chains of colonization. While scholars argue the United States and the international community[1] play a central role in fostering economic development and self-sustainability within this and the larger Latin American regions (Fukuyama, 2008), others have noted the opposite: a dual articulation between increased foreign aid, development and growth and economic interdependence, and unemployment and massive immigration (Sassen 1991; 2003; Roy 2010, Eisenstein 2010). These debates call for a re-examination of the historical processes which have placed the Spanish-speaking Caribbean region at the center of new global projects with opportunity for the nations' development and autonomy but also new forms of subjugation and economic displacement of its people into territories and economic structures which reproduce old *colonialities of power* (Quijano 2002). An example of a historical global project, for example, in the early decades of the 20th Century, was the construction of the Panama Canal (1903-1914). This project led to the migration of over 100,000 Jamaican and Barbadians temporary workers to the Canal's region. Similarly, the development of colonial sugar industry systems in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, geared mainly for monopolistic extraction by Europe, the U.S. and Canada, fueled an intra-Caribbean migration of workers from less developed nations, such as Jamaica, Barbados and Haiti, into the larger, sugar production regions of the larger, Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations. However, Caribbean and Latin American scholars argue that the total number of intra-Caribbean migrants pales in comparison to those who sought jobs in the economic powers of ex-colonizing territories (Duany 2011, Acosta-Belen, 2006). In addition, WWI and WWII led equally to the deployment of large US military populations as well as that of Europeans into the Spanish-speaking Caribbean given economic and social incentives for land allocation and investments in agriculture. Scholars also argue that the increased in

[1] (key among these, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the United Nations)

European and North American immigration into the region was a geopolitical attempt to increase the white population or 'whitening' of the Caribbean people (Torres-Saillant 1999; Acosta-Belen 2006; Duany, 2011). Nearly three decades ago, the Caribbean Basin Act (CBI) in 1984, for example, one of the most far-reaching initiatives designed to promote trade and investment in the Caribbean nations had been declared unsuccessful for failing to curb the continuous flow of Caribbean immigrants to the US, Canada and other nations. A decade later, the more comprehensive, North American Free Trade Agreement Act (NAFTA) passed in 1994, designed to promote bilateral, free trade agreements between US and Mexico, again failed to reduce cross-border undocumented immigration from Mexico to the US.

Historical Antecedents

The massive movement of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean people to the U.S. is associated with the victory War of 1898, the so called Spanish-American war. The U.S., by then an industrial and economic power, defeated Spain in less than 10 weeks thereby gaining control of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Pacific Islands of the Philippines and Guam. The immediate annexation of Puerto Rico and the strong commercial ties created with Cuba provided the first channels for the groups' immigration to the U.S. In the case of Cuba, political upheavals throughout the first part of the 20th century prompted waves of migration that mostly settled in south Miami, Ocala (originally called Marti City) and Key West (Duany, 2011). The greatest of this migration, however, did not take place until after the ascent to power of Fidel Castro in 1959[2]. Annexation of Puerto Rico and re-structuring of its traditional sugar cane production economy by the U.S. leads to displacement of *campesinos* and internal migration of rural peasants. The growing inability of Puerto Rican workers to compete in the more commercialized sugar and cocoa market prompts a rural-to-urban migration; limits opportunity for employment within urban centers and leads to immigration to the mainland (Rodriguez, 1989; Duany 2011). In 1917, after the U.S. grants citizenship to all Puerto Ricans, what had been an immigration process became a "migrant" one (Rodriguez, 1989). Puerto Rican laborers were brought to the US throughout the first part of the 20th century in specific quotas and the pattern of influx closely tracked that of economic development in the U.S. The migration from the Island reached its apex from 1946-1964 when an average of 34,165 Puerto Ricans per year arrive to the U.S. However, the greatest migration took place in 1953, when the numbers reached an unprecedented 74,603 (Acosta-Belen 2006). The Dominican Republic, the largest of the three Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations, did not become an official, colony or territory of the U.S. after the War of 1898. The Dominican Republic was not directly affected in the aftermath of the war but the economic problems of the country allowed the U.S. to gain economic control in 1905; and, with its political system in disarray, the US eventually opted for armed intervention in 1906. Nonetheless, the growing economic problems in the Island, the influence of the U.S. in the region and the threat of another European invasion allowed the US to gain monopoly of the Island's economy (1905) and conduct military intervention (1906). This economic influence affected also the political and social re-structuring of the nation towards modernization. This, in turn, led to the gradual rural-to-urban migration of *campesinos* to the two main cities of economic production, Santiago and Santo Domingo. The repressive political regime of Rafael Trujillo (1930s-1960s) s curtailed outmigration to the U.S. and Europe. Between 1951 and 1960 only 1000 Dominicans per year entered the U.S., mostly members of the elite (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991:19). With the deposition of Trujillo in 1961 and the enactment of the 1965 immigration reform Act, the number of Dominicans immigrating to the U.S. increased dramatically. Despite the development of a viable, Dominican economic enclave and political organization in New York City, the Dominican community's socioeconomic profiles have been on decline since the mid1990s (Hernandez, 2002; Fuentes-Mayorga, 2005). The immigration patterns are increasingly gendered, with women over-represented among new cohorts and males among the deported and apprehended. Since the 1990's,

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[2] Grenier, Guillermo. "Cuban Immigrants" In Multicultural America: An Encyclopedia of the Newest Americans By Ronald H. Bayor. **(YEAR?**)

raising levels of poverty has been linked to the group's concentration in low-paid jobs within the lower strata of the service and informal sector, given declines in manufacturing the group's major niche of employment. New research now reveals that the growth of small service sector firms has increased the exclusion of Dominican and other racial minority workers, like Puerto Ricans, as employers prefer to hire new vulnerable and cheaper workers, such as Mexicans, over other immigrants. This pattern of class and racial exclusion is most evident within minority neighborhoods undergoing rapid gentrification where employers import labor from outside neighborhoods, sorting workers by gender, race and ethnic markers and where racial and class micro-inequities of work usually go unnoticed by the average Census officer or labor market researcher (Fuentes, 2011).

Early and Late 20th Century Spanish-Speaking Caribbean Immigration

In the early 20th Century, WWI (1914-1918) marked the period of major international migration into the US. Between 1911 and 1920, 5.7 million foreigners entered the U.S. with 83 percent mainly from Europe. In 1922, Congress limited this yearly quota to 2 percent, closing its door until the end of the Great Depression and that of WWII (Bergad and Klein, 2010). With its doors closed to foreigners, and expanding industrialization, the U.S. faced the greatest internal rural-urban migration composed of free African Americans slaves, and internally colonized, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. The end of Slavery and the lack of free labor and indentured servitude forces the U.S. to solution its 'labor problem' by recruiting free blacks and Puerto Rican immigrants for manufacturing work in the North and temporary, Mexican labor for agricultural work in the South and the Southwest (Montejano, 1995). The U.S.'s military occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898 and annexation in 1900 with the US-Spain Treaty of Paris, does not lead to immediate Puerto Rican immigration to the U.S. In 1917, the passing of the Jones Act proclaims Puerto Rico as a 'non-incorporated territory' of the U.S. (Duaney, 2011). This ambivalent status excluded citizens from the category of international immigrants and the Island from membership among autonomous, Caribbean nations (McCabe 2011; Duaney, 2011).[3] However, the U.S. Immigration Act of 1952 moved the numerical quota established for each nationality since 1880s to 1920s to reflect new quotas calculated chronologically. This new calculation changed the older bias favoring immigrants from North Europe and allowed the massive immigration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland as many were pushed and pulled by economic and demographic shifts in both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Puerto Rican flows arrived first in Haiwaii, recruited as laborers for the growing sugar industry, and into New York, for work in expanding manufacturing. Most of these first immigrants settled in New York City's Red Hood Brooklyn, East Harlem, later known as "El Barrio," and the parts of the south and east Bronx (Rodriguez, 1989; Sanchez-Korrol 1983; Haslip-viera 1994).

Cuban-Puerto Rican scholar Jorge Duany argues that the migration characteristics of different Caribbean nations can be traced to the type of relationship established between the sending state and the receiving nation (Duany, 2011:2). From this perspective, Puerto Rican migration became easier and dramatically increased as it became an associated protectorate of the U.S. and as requirement for visas became unnecessary. Cuba, on the other hand, while developing a strong economic dependency on the U.S. on the first part of the 20th century, became an enemy state after the communist revolution of 1959. Yet, Cuban's acceptance as political refugees made the only requirement for immigration to the U.S. that they set foot on American territory. Their refugee status and the benefits most Cubans received to help their integration facilitated the socioeconomic integration as well as relations with Americans as the most successful of all the three Caribbean groups. Unlike Puerto Rico, Cuba opted to remain an independent country and was declared so in 1902 albeit subject to stringent conditions put in place via the Platt Amendment which was attached to the constitution of the newly freed nation. Military interventions to put down internal political dissention took place in 1906-1909, in 1912 and partially in 1933 when Fulgencio Batista became dictator for the next 25 years after deposing Gerardo Machado (Duany, 2011).

[3] See the historical accountings of Jose L. Vazquez Calzada , *La Poblacion de Puerot rico y su trajectoria historica.* (Rio Piedras: Raga Prnting, 1988), p. 286. c.f. in Laird W. Bergard and Herbert S. Klein, *Hispanics in the United States: A Demographic, Social and Economic History, 1980-2005..*

The first half of the 20th century saw the influx of American entertainment and gambling industries into Cuba and a local service economy quickly developed. This meant that there was little incentive for Cubans to emigrate and that is was mostly peasants and agricultural workers who left the Island for better paying jobs in the U.S and Europe. When the Batista's regime was finally toppled in 1959 by the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro, the flow of Cuban immigration to the U.S. peaked and has been destined mainly to Florida (Pietro 1984). In Florida early immigrants sought work in tobacco factories and other local industries and while members of the second and affluent post-Castro immigrant cohort, imported substantial financial and human capital and through government aid were able to reproduce their pre-migration class position and multiply their wealth (Grosfoguel and Georas, 2000). Eventually the manufacturing opportunities in the New York metropolitan region attracted Cubans who could no longer find work in Florida.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, large enclaves of Cuban immigrants developed in Miami, Tampa and Northern New Jersey areas where they became organized and politically influential. Some scholars have argued that the Cuban success story cannot be explained only by the group's importation of human capital and networks (Portes and Stepick, 1985; Grosfogueel and Georas, 2000) but due to the U.S's. intervention as a global strategy used to represent the symbolic superiority of capitalism over socialism.[4] This successful incorporation into American society allowed Cubans to escape the symbolic subordination of the 'coloniality of power experienced by other colonial/racial subjects, like Puerto Ricans and Dominicans.

Unlike Puerto Rico and Cuba, the Dominican Republic was not affected by the outcome of the Spanish-American war of 1898. Having gained independence from Haiti and from Spain, it maintained its sovereignty. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Island was at the edge of bankruptcy as European powers attempted to collect their debt via military force. This led the U.S. to revive its old Monroe Policy in the region to regain control of the Dominican Republic's economic affairs (Grosfoguel and Georas, 2000, Wikipedia). Economic control eventually became political mandate; and in 1916, when the elected government rejected the U.S.'s economic policies, a U.S. invasion followed. This invasion lasted until 1922 concluding with the creation a newly elected government that lasted only a few years. In 1930, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo became President of the Island, putting in place a ruthless, dictatorial regime that lasted nearly three decades, until his assassination in 1961. During the first half of the 20th century immigration from the Dominican Republic to the U.S. was small, especially during the Trujillo's regime. Scholars have identified four waves of Dominican immigration to the US: The first took place between 1930 and 1960, when the United States admitted 19,148 Dominicans, mostly members of the upper classes, light –skinned and well educated (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Duany 2011). To avoid another Cuba in the Caribbean Basin, the U.S. invaded the Dominican Republic with a military occupation that lasted four years (1961-1965) (Grosfoguel and Georas, 2000). Encouraged by Dominican elites and the U.S. government, the second wave of Dominicans to the U.S. takes place between 1961 and 1965, when 35,372 nationals arrived, mostly elites and political supporters of Trujillo. After 1965, a third and major wave of 58,744 arrives to the U.S. between 1966 and 1970 (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991:20). The last major wave immigrates between 1986 and 1996, reaching its peak in mid1990s. Unlike the geopolitical strategies applied to help the integration of Cubans, Dominicans were left to fend for themselves as many came with tourists visas and were unable to obtain permanent resident permits (Grosfoguel and Georas 2000:109). Most of the immigration of Dominicans concentrated in New York where the groups formed small enclaves developed in specific areas of New York City within Puerto Rican and Cuban communities and through ethnic enclaves mostly owned by the first wave of entrepreneurial and affluent migrants (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Guarnizo, 1992; Fuentes-Mayorga, 2005).

In 2009, the U.S. was home to 3.5 million immigrants from the Caribbean who accounted for 9 percent of the total foreign-born population. More than 90 percent of these immigrants come from Cuba,

[4] Pedraza-Bailey 1985a, 1985b; Grosfoguel 1994, 1997b c.f. in Grosfoguel and Georas, 2010: 112).

the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica, Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago, although Cubans have been among the top ten-foreign groups in the U.S. since 1970 (McCabe 2011). Half or 51.8 percent of all foreign born from the Caribbean identified themselves as Hispanic in 2009. Between 1970 and 2009, immigrants from the Dominican Republic contributed to the rapid growth of the Caribbean-born population and accounted for 26.2 percent of the foreign born population between 1960 and 2009 (McCabe, 2010). About 69 percent of the immigrants reside in Florida and New York. Caribbean immigrants account for close to 3.2 percent of unauthorized immigrants, or 1 in ten of the 3.5 million. Between 2000 and 2009, 6.2 percent of refugees arrived to the U.S., 99.7 percent from Cuba and 6.6 percent from Haiti were granted asylum. In the same decade, 10 percent of the 10.3 million immigrants granted permanent residence (i.e., green cards) were from the Caribbean, the majority obtained through family reunification. Among those obtaining naturalization (or citizenship), Cubans had the highest rates (58.3 percent) and Dominicans the lowest (47.6 percent). Over half, or 53.7 percent, of Caribbean immigrants were women (Bergad and Klein, 2010; McCabe, 2010). The gender imbalance is more pronounced among Dominicans (58.8%) than Cubans the group with more even gender ratio with men only slightly outnumbering women (50.5). Finally, Caribbean immigrants were more likely than other immigrants to have graduated from high school. However, they are less likely than other foreign groups to have completed a college or higher professional degree (Bergad and Klein, 2010). However, Dominicans share the highest rates of poverty, next to Puerto Ricans among all Caribbean groups.

Immigration, Incorporation, Progress and Poverty:

Since the 1960s, mainly after the passing of the US 1965 Family Reunification Act, two new major migration waves changed the national, class and racial composition of US's immigration history from Europe to one mainly composed by Latin America, including the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and Asia. In the 1940s, Latin Americans and people from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean accounted for over a third of all US foreign-born. In the 1960s and 1980s, 3.5 million persons from Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean regions were included in the US Census. Yet, this data underestimated the influence of Puerto Ricans or that of Mexicans in the larger Latin American population as the former had not been listed as immigrants, considered American citizens, and a great number of the latter group was omitted as undocumented since they were employed as 'temporary' migrant laborers (through the Bracero Program, 1940-1960 and earlier, from the 1920s up till the mid1930s) (Bergad and Klein 2010:31). Although in the 1970s the shared of Puerto Ricans in New York had reached 1.4 million, with 87 percent concentrating in the State, by the 1980s, the population began to decline by close to half, or 49 percent. Demographers attribute this shift to diminishing manufacturing jobs, aging of the population and its natural pattern of segregation and dispersion as experienced by previous European immigrants in the US. In any event, since the 1960s, the Puerto Rican diaspora has concentrated in New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Philadelphia, Hartford and Orlando, Florida, where they established important communities. These Spanish-speaking communities, in many ways, paved the way for the integration of successive cohorts of Caribbean and Latin American immigrants, among these, mainly Dominicans, Cubans and now Mexicans. In New York's racial/ethnic labor market, Puerto Ricans among all Spanish-speaking groups have traditionally occupied the lowest niche in manufacturing (between 1950s to the 1970s) until de-industrialization and labor subcontracting displaced many of their jobs (Rodriguez, 1987). Manufacturer and small business employers chose to exclude Puerto Ricans and hire new waves of more vulnerable immigrants at cheaper wages, among these Latina women and Dominicans. These macro and micro structural changes contributed to the class and racial isolation of Puerto Ricans and African Americans within inner city structures of New York and to the birth of the underclass. (Wilson, 1987; Rodriguez, 1987; Grosfoguel and Georas 2000).

Although a few key Cuban figures had already established themselves in the U.S.' Florida and New York by the end of the 19th Century (such as Carlos Manuel Cespedes, elected mayor of Key West in 1875; and, Jose Marti, leader of the "Partido Revolutionario Cubano" in 1889 (Duany 2011:49), the massive immigration of Cubans to the US began in the 1960s, with Fidel Castro's 1959 communist

revolution. US Scholars (Portes and Bach, 1987; Portes and Stepick 1985) have distinguished two major Cuban immigrant waves: In the decade of the 60s, a first cohort arrived composed mostly by the upper strata of the Cuban society, many of whom had already established institutional ties in Florida and New York; notable among these, political dissidents, scholars and economic elites, mostly white, older and with high levels of human capital. This first cohort's fast and successful integration in the U.S. is contrasted with that of the second cohort, arriving in the 1980s, known as the 'Mariel Boat Lift People,' who were pushed by a lack of work opportunities and repressive communist regime in Cuba. By the end of the 1980s, 70 percent of the U.S. Cubans lived in Florida and experienced a fast and successful incorporation as entrepreneurs, small business owners and manufacturers leading to what sociologists have termed the ethnic or 'Cuban Economic Enclave' (Portes and Stepick 1985). Unlike the integration and successive mobility of this earlier cohort, members of the cohort, or 'the Mariel Boat Lift people (*Marielitos)*, as the group was derogatorily labeled, received little support from the US government and the Cuban community. Most originated from 'Oriente' or the region of the Island where the black population has concentrated. Hence, class and racial divides which have historically marked the segregation of rich and poor Cuban groups in the Island were attenuated among the Diaspora.

Similar to the experiences of a large segment of U.S. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, the poverty levels shared by members of the Mariel Boat Lift has paralleled those among impoverished, racialized, minority native groups. Hence, some scholars argue that the picture of 'Cuban success' in the U.S. cannot be generalized to all members of the diaspora. While scholars agree that the context of reception affects the life chances of immigrant groups (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Alba and Nee 2003) this framework does not fully consider how the relation the U.S. has established with the country of origin will mainly determine who immigrates and different groups will be received (Duany 2011). Since the 1980s, the large scale arrival of Caribbean and Latino groups has created inter-ethnic class and racial divides as well as bifurcated immigrant integration within these groups, with the growth of an ascending middle class and concentration of even larger segments into poverty. However, evolving comparative research now reveals that members from the three major Spanish-speaking Caribbean groups do better outside of major immigrant destination 'gateway' cities (Miami, Chicago, Florida, New York); and that differences by foreign-born and domestic-born status affects life chances in the host society, with the former exhibiting higher rates of marriage, or maintenance of intact, two-family households; higher medium household incomes, higher education and lower rates of unemployment and engagement with crime as well as mortality and co-morbidity (Bergad and Klein 2010). Since the 1980s, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans as well as Central Americans have exhibited the highest poverty in New York. However, Puerto Ricans continue to be the exception: with the highest rates among the single head of household, highest levels of poverty, infant mortality, and lowest life expectancy which closely parallel those found among impoverished, racialized native groups. Scholars attribute Puerto Ricans worst mortality rates among all foreign born to the group's long history of intergenerational poverty and concentration in marginalized, inner-city neighborhoods with lower living standards than those faced by any other immigrant groups. In contrast, Cubans continue to exhibit the highest socioeconomic profiles and lowest age-adjusted deaths given the group's sustained access to much privileged living conditions (Bergad and Klein 2010: 121).

The 21st Century: Immigration, Racialization and Transnationalism

A colonial history of nationhood building and an Euro-centric and American-centric socialization has not only dictated the implementation of imported economic models in the nation of origin but also the forging of and prevalence of colonial identities. At worst, the internalization of both Euro-centric and negrophic cultures has created dissonant racial identities (Torres-Saillant 1999; Duany 2011) which respond to rejection of an association with historically, marginalized blacks or indigenous, meso-American Indians as well as with internally colonized, racialized immigrant groups in the U.S. (Grosfoguel and Georas 2000). Given the historical association of white people with success, especially among the elites and European settlers of the Caribbean and Latin American regions, most Latin Americans, including Afro-

Caribbean groups, see whiteness as a favorable identity, given that the confluence of class and race has historically ranked ex-colonizers or whites as well as light skin *criollos* on the top of the social hierarchy and *mulatos* and blacks and Indians at the bottom. This is particularly the case in the Dominican Republic where over 80 percent of the population, more than in Puerto Rico and Cuba, is mixed with African ex-slaves**.** New research reveals that blacks in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic do not view themselves as blacks or as whites or at least in the polarized categories used in the U.S. but rather as in between racial people or 'Indios' (a different combination of tan or brown skins, see works by Rodriguez, 2003; Candelario, 2007). Other scholars argue that immigration and the virulent history of racialization that defines U.S. black-white relations heightens racial consciousness as well as discrimination between and among immigrant groups. In addition, the term 'immigrant' obscures the different experiences of inclusion and exclusion different groups experience in the U.S. Hence, scholars now argue that racialization, a process that entails the systemic marginalization and exclusion of minority groups as well as association with problematized, racial others, has affected the poorer life chances of Puerto Ricans (and now of Dominicans) as 'colonial immigrants,' whose continued segregated and isolated integration in the U.S. limits the groups' ability to fully assimilate into the larger, American society. However, new scholarship poses that, *transnationalism*, or the process through which immigrants can participate (in different degrees and forms) in both the society of origin and that of reception, may present an alternative model for excluded groups to assimilate but also challenge the expectation that all immigrants must abandon connection to their home of origin and undermine the state's legal definition of "boundaries" in the "blurring of new cultural borders." (Levit 2001, 2004; Smith 2006; Duaney 2011).

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