

Cuban Privilege

For over half a century, the United States granted Cubans, one of the largest immigrant groups in the country, unique entitlements. While other unauthorized immigrants faced detention, deportation, and no legal rights, Cuban immigrants were able to enter the country without authorization, and have access to welfare benefits and citizenship status. This book is the first to reveal the full range of entitlements granted to Cubans. Initially privileged to undermine the Castro-led revolution in the throes of the Cold War, one US President after another extended new entitlements to Cubans, even in the post-Cold War era. Drawing on archival, interview, and survey data, *Cuban Privilege* highlights how Washington, in the process of privileging Cubans, transformed them from agents of US Cold War foreign policy into a politically powerful force influencing national policy. By comparing with the exclusionary treatment of neighboring Haitians, the book discloses the racial and political biases embedded in US immigration policy.

SUSAN EVA ECKSTEIN is Professor in the Pardee School of Global Studies and the Sociology Department at Boston University. Specializing in Latin American social movements, rights, justice, and immigration, she has single-authored, edited, and co-edited nine books. This is her third book that focuses specifically on Cuba and Cuban immigrants. She is the recipient of many fellowships, including from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Radcliffe Institute.

Cuban Privilege

The Making of Immigrant Inequality in America

SUSAN EVA ECKSTEIN

Boston University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108830614
DOI: 10.1017/9781108902465

© Susan Eva Eckstein 2022, 2025

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022
First paperback edition 2025

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-83061-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-108-82239-8 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

For EU product safety concerns, contact us at Calle de José Abascal, 56, 1º, 28003 Madrid, Spain, or email eugpsr@cambridge.org.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-82239-8 — Cuban Privilege
Susan Eva Eckstein
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

*To Meera, Reena, Deven, Ellis, and Aubrey
With love for the joy you provide and in anticipation
of the world you will improve*

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Foreword to the Paperback Edition by William M. LeoGrande</i>	xi
<i>Preface: Privileged Cubans</i>	xv
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	xxix
1 The Making of Cuban Immigration Exceptionalism, 1959–1979	I
2 The Privileging of Cuban Immigrants in the United States, 1959–1979	43
3 The Immigration Crisis of 1980: Carter Administration Privileging of Cubans Anew, Spillover Benefits for Haitians	74
4 Delinking Cubans from Haitians: The Deepening of Cuban Privileging and the Turn against Haitians under the Reagan and Bush I Administrations	127
5 Taking with One Hand, Giving with the Other: Clinton Administration Retraction and Expansion of Cuban Immigrant Entitlements	182
6 From Further Expansion to the Unraveling of Cuban Privileging amid Mainly Exclusion of Haitians: The George W. Bush and Barack Obama Administrations	241
7 From Heaven to Hell under the Trump Administration: Walls for Cubans After All	287
8 Exceptionalism in Practice? Actual Immigration, Lessons Learned	317
<i>Index</i>	343

Figures

8.1	Persons obtaining LPR status by country of last residence: Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Haiti, FY1950–2019	<i>page</i> 322
8.2	Percentage of persons born in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti granted LPR status as refugee and asylee adjustments, 2000–2019	326
8.3	Refugee admissions from Cuba and Haiti, 1984–2019	329

Foreword to the Paperback Edition

William M. LeoGrande

The story of how Cuban migrants came to the United States and established a politically and economically powerful diaspora community in South Florida is inseparable from the history of the Cold War and Cuba's unique role in it. Shortly after Fidel Castro's revolution triumphed in 1959, Cuba became a focal point of the global rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and that shaped Washington's migration policy toward Cubans. From the beginning, political refugees fleeing Cuban socialism were welcomed "with open arms," as President Jimmy Carter put it during the 1980 migration crisis known as the Mariel Freedom Flotilla. They received exceptional privileges to enter and remain in the United States – privileges enjoyed by no other nationality. Many of these privileges remain in place today, even though most of the people fleeing Cuba in recent decades have been economic migrants rather than political refugees.

In this book, Susan Eckstein provides a deep dive into the history of how the US government structured its immigration policy to the advantage of Cuban migrants in order to further its attempts to destabilize Cuba's revolutionary government. The book caused quite a stir among some Cuban Americans, who were insulted that someone pointed out policies that helped make the Cuban American community a success story.

Cuban Privilege is not Eckstein's first book on the Cuban diaspora. She has written extensively on the threads that connect Cubans abroad with their family still on the island. In *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*, she authored one of the first in-depth studies of how the Cuban American community began reconnecting to the island in the 1980s and 1990s, building bridges based

mainly on family ties. In the 1960s and 1970s, both the Cuban and US governments erected a “sugar cane curtain” that made it almost impossible for families to stay connected across the Florida Strait. There was no travel allowed, no direct mail service, and connecting by phone was nearly impossible and prohibitively expensive. But in the 1980s, travel opened up and remittances began to flow. Ever since the Special Period, Cuba’s economic crisis in the 1990s, Cuban American remittances have made an essential contribution to the standard of living of millions of Cuban families.

Cuban Privilege reverses the lens to look not at Cuban immigrants but at the US immigration policies that brought them here. It is the definitive account of how Washington, motivated by the Cold War, gave Cuban immigrants unprecedented, privileged access to the United States and unprecedented support once they got here. Key elements of that privilege persist to this day, defended by powerful Cuban American legislators. Among the most important is the Cuban Adjustment Act, which allows most Cuban arrivals, who have made their way to the United States without official immigration visas, to apply for permanent residence after being in the United States for just a year.

Most of the time academics toil in relative obscurity, writing for one another in hopes of contributing new knowledge to their chosen field. On occasion, they write for a broader audience, hoping that their expertise might have some positive impact on public policy. And most of the time, when they speak truth to power, power is not listening. Rarely do academic contributions to the public debate attract much attention or make much difference.

Susan Eckstein’s *Cuban Privilege* is a cautionary tale of what can happen when the public *does* take notice. When she was invited by Florida International University (FIU) to give a talk on the book in December 2022, a political furor erupted. Miami-Dade County Commissioner Kevin Cabrera called the book “hate-filled” and “anti-Cuban,” even though he admitted he had not read it. Other politicians and influencers jumped on the bandwagon. Eckstein was denounced as a Cuban government agent, and both she and the event’s organizers were threatened with violence. The event, held in an FIU auditorium packed with hundreds of mostly hostile people, amounted to an Orwellian 60 minutes of hate. A commentator, added at the last minute to mollify critics, said almost nothing about the subject of the book – US migration policy – but instead accused Eckstein of “deficient” scholarship because she did not chronicle the pain endured by Cuban migrants.

Eckstein hit an emotional nerve by pointing out that Cuban migrants have received extraordinary privileges enjoyed by no other nationality – a simple fact starkly demonstrated by comparing migration policy toward Cubans with migration policy toward Haitians, as Eckstein does throughout the book. Some Cuban Americans seem to think that the impressive success of their community is entirely of their own making, and they resented Eckstein for pointing out that they received – and are still receiving – a major assist from Washington.

Ironically, the policy of privileged immigration for Cubans, which was intended to weaken and embarrass the Cuban government, has instead embarrassed the US government, producing a series of migration crises: the Camarioca crisis in 1965; the Mariel Freedom Flotilla in 1980; the rafters crisis in 1994; and the post-COVID crisis that is ongoing today. The privileges Cuban migrants receive have also distorted US domestic politics by creating one of the most powerful foreign policy lobbies in history. Since the 1980s, Cuban Americans in South Florida have exercised a disproportionate influence over US policy toward Cuba.

For thirty years, successive presidents – with the sole exception of Barack Obama – have been afraid to stand up to the Miami lobby. As President George H. W. Bush’s National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft put it, “Cuba is not a foreign policy question. Cuba is a domestic issue.” The result is a US policy that has focused for sixty-five years on regime change, even though it has done nothing to advance the cause of democracy or human rights in Cuba, and has alienated Washington from allies in Latin America and Europe. Its only “success” has been to cripple the Cuban economy, lowering the living standard of the Cuban people, and setting the stage for future migration. That is the legacy of the immigration policies that Susan Eckstein so expertly chronicles in *Cuban Privilege*.

William M. LeoGrande is Professor of Government at American University in Washington, DC, and co-author with Peter Kornbluh of *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Preface

Privileged Cubans

In 1991, during George H. W. Bush's presidency, the US Coast Guard stopped a leaky Haitian fishing boat carrying 161 Haitians and 2 Cubans who the Haitians had picked up in a gesture of brotherhood.¹ Two years later, when Bill Clinton was president, a boat carrying seven Cubans and ten Haitians landed in Florida. All those aboard the boats wanted to come to the land of opportunity. They arrived, however, without US-granted immigration visas. The Immigration and Naturalization Service, nonetheless, admitted the Cubans. In contrast, the Haitians were whisked off to detention facilities. Almost all were repatriated. The Clinton administration refused to admit the Haitians even though Clinton had promised during his campaign that, if elected, he would end the George H. W. Bush administration's cruel practice of sending unauthorized Haitians back to a brutal dictatorship. With the support of Haitian voters, Clinton hoped to make President Bush, running for reelection, a one-term president. Clinton succeeded in winning the election, but even before taking office he announced that he would continue to enforce Bush's Haitian repatriation policy. How could the presidents treat Cubans and Haitians so differently?

Fast forward to May 1, 2006. On that international day honoring workers, approximately three-fourths of a million unauthorized immigrants across America courageously absented themselves from their jobs to participate in what organizers of the work stoppage called the "Day Without Immigrants." They wanted to convince owners of businesses and

¹ Anthony Depalma, "For Haitians, Voyage to a Land of Inequality," *New York Times* (July 16, 1991), sec. A, p. 1.

the American people, and members of Congress in turn, how important immigrants were to the economy. At the time, Congress was deliberating legislation that would determine whether to legalize or continue to criminalize the eight million undocumented workers then in the country.² Most of the immigrants who participated in the nationwide demonstrations that May Day came from Latin America. They wanted legal rights to stay and work. Some of them had been in the United States for as long as a quarter of a century without labor rights and other protections.

Even though Cubans constituted the second-largest Hispanic immigrant group in the country, they were noticeably absent from the demonstrations. Were Cubans treated so differently that they saw no reason to join? The United States, indeed, treated them differently, as the book reveals. Despite most Cubans coming to the country without visas issued in conformity with immigration regulations set by Congress, they were admitted and, since 1966, permitted to become lawful permanent residents offering a path to citizenship. The Cubans on the boats with Haitians in 1991 and 1993 were among the hundreds of thousands of Cubans who, by the Day Without Immigrants, were legal residents, even if they had arrived without US-authorized immigration visas. By 2006, many of them also were citizens who enjoyed voting rights.

Fast forward again to 2016. That year as many as 56,000 Cubans came to the United States without authorization,³ at a time when the United States capped annual lawful immigration from any single country at 20,000 a year. After brief detention, these Cubans were admitted into the country, granted a range of immediate and long-term entitlements, and spared the risk of deportation. That same year the Obama administration deported over 1,500 Haitians⁴ and nearly half a million unauthorized immigrants from other countries.⁵

² Michael Hoefer, Nancy Rytina, and Christopher Campbell, “Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2007,” Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, August 2007, p. 2 (www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2007.pdf).

³ Jens Krogstad, “Surge in Cuban Immigration to U.S. Continued through 2016,” *Facttank* (January 13, 2017) (www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/13/cuban-immigration-to-u-s-surges-as-relations-warm/).

⁴ Data for October 2016 to January 2017. Makini Brice, “After Daring Voyage to U.S., Haitians’ Dreams End in Deportation,” *Reuters* (February 10, 2017) (www.reuters.com/article/us-haiti-usa/after-daring-voyage-to-u-s-haitians-dreams-end-in-deportation-idUSKBN15P2RM).

⁵ Data for 2016. Muzaffar Chishti, Sarah Pierce, and Jessica Bolter, “The Obama Record on Deportations: Deporter in Chief or Not?,” *Migration Information Source* (January 26,

WHY CUBAN PRIVILEGING?

Why were Cubans exempt from the fate of other “illegals”? This book explains why and describes the range of unique entitlements they have received since January 1959, when Fidel Castro came to power. The United States extended unique entitlements to Cubans even after Castro died and even after his brother Raúl’s tenure as head of state.

January 12, 2017, however, marks a turning point in US Cuban immigration policy. On that day, President Barack Obama ended special entitlements that a succession of eleven presidents, across the partisan divide, had granted Cuban immigrants. One president after another will be shown to have honored entitlements their predecessors granted and, typically, to have extended additional entitlements to Cubans. At times, Cubans even were privileged *at the expense* of both other foreigners and native-born Americans. In some years, for example, Cubans enjoyed preferential access to limited immigration slots allotted by the United States, and labor market advantage owing to special job training, special job placement services, and special funding for university studies. Cubans who arrived without authorization even enjoyed certain entitlements that were denied authorized immigrants, such as immediate rights to welfare.

Sometimes Congress was the enabler by authorizing funding for special resettlement benefits and granting Cubans unique entitlements. At other times, however, presidents circumvented Congress’ official authority over immigration to privilege Cubans. If interested in immigrating to the United States, it was good to be Cuban. However committed presidents and legislators were to equality and equity, they made exception for Cubans.

Yet, the reasons for privileging Cubans changed over time. Republican Dwight Eisenhower, who was president when Castro assumed power with widespread – though not unanimous – support from his country’s people, immediately welcomed opponents of Castro and the revolutionary remaking of Cuba that he oversaw. President Eisenhower singled them out for special entitlements. His successor, President John F. Kennedy, a Democrat, singled out more Cubans for special entitlements and expanded entitlements for them. Both presidents hoped that, in reaching out to Cubans, they would convince those who remained on the island of the superiority of capitalist democracy over Castro’s nationalist,

2017) (www.migrationpolicy.org/article/obama-record-deportations-deporter-chief-or-not).

populist, and increasingly state-dominated Marxist-Leninist Soviet-allied regime. They also hoped to induce a “brain drain” that would debilitate the Cuban economy to the point of collapse. Meanwhile, they turned to incoming Cubans to assist covert efforts to oust Castro and contain his influence over other Third World countries, especially in America’s “backyard.” They even invested in training Cuban arrivals for leadership positions in a US-friendly post-Castro government.

Both presidents envisioned their immigration policy to serve their Cold War concern with defeating global communism. Paradoxically, though, their outreach to Cubans helped Castro solidify his base of power and the island’s political-economic makeover by ridding the country of opponents to the revolution and by rallying Cubans against US meddling in their national affairs.

Despite the unique welcoming of Cuban immigrants leaving Castro entrenched in power, subsequent presidents granted yet more Cubans unique immigration rights and unique resettlement benefits. They did so to address problems that earlier entitlements generated or left unresolved, and to address new problems that arose. By the time the United States “won” the Cold War, with the Soviet Union’s collapse, Cuban immigrants who had been beneficiaries of earlier entitlements had become so politically influential that they pressed for continued privileging of “their people.” Domestic politics replaced foreign policy as the driver of privileging Cubans. Even presidents who tried to end special entitlements for Cubans reversed their stance in response to pressure from Cuban immigrants who, in increased numbers, made use of their unique path to citizenship, with accompanying voting rights, for ethnic gain. The Reagan administration even facilitated Cuban immigrant transformation into savvy lobbyists for their own concerns, including under subsequent administrations. Presidents, and their administrations, found themselves “locked in” to continued privileging of Cubans. Earlier privileging contributed to continued privileging. Presidents perceived the domestic political costs of ending entitlements for Cubans antithetical to their own interest in reelection.

President Obama finally revoked key entitlements during his last full week in office. He did so against the backdrop of a surge in unauthorized Cuban immigration that undermined US control over its borders, as well as a growing socioeconomic and political divide among Cuban Americans that eroded support for continued Cuban immigrant privileging. He did so when he committed to a new Cuba foreign policy, premised on cross-border bridge building, not continued Cold War hostility. Because he was completing his second term of office, he was also not personally constrained by possibly alienating Cuban American voters. He took

Preface: Privileged Cubans

xix

advantage of the new domestic political and foreign policy juncture to make immigration policy more equitable by retracting rights for Cubans, rather than by extending rights Cubans enjoyed to other immigrants.

Campaigning on an anti-immigrant platform, Donald Trump made no effort to reopen Cubans' path of privilege when winning the presidency and succeeding Obama in office. Rather, he further shuttered the path, and aggressively so. He outsourced and offshored immigration control, including of Cubans. He thus opened a new chapter in Cuban immigration history involving privilege and justice for few.

REASONS FOR WRITING THIS BOOK

I wrote this book for several reasons. Most importantly, Cuban privileging for over half a century, and its basis, are not well known. The book is the first to describe and explain US Cuban immigration policy, and its unintended as well as intended consequences, from the time Castro assumed power in 1959 through the first non-Castro to become head of state in October 2019.

I wrote the book also because there are lessons to be learned from the Cuban experience about how policy can be improved so that the United States benefits from immigrants while treating them more equitably. Washington's immigration system is widely believed to be broken and in need of reform. In comparing the Cuban with the Haitian, and in the final chapter, also with the Dominican, immigrant experiences, I highlight how differently the United States has treated immigrants depending on their country of origin, and how differently immigrants have experienced America as a result.

I consider myself particularly qualified to write the book. It draws on my expertise. I have studied Cuba and Cuban immigrants for decades. It builds on my earlier books, *Back from the Future: Cuba under Castro* and *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*. The earlier works inform my understanding of Cuba and Cuban immigrants in transnational and historical context, and of US Cuban immigration policies over the years and their unintended as well as intended consequences.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

During the period on which the book focuses, beginning with the Eisenhower and ending with the Trump administration, the world changed considerably, including Cuba.

Assuming power in the throes of the Cold War, Castro challenged US hegemony over Latin America, a region Washington had claimed as its sphere of influence. Eisenhower, president at the time, believed that he could leverage immigration to debilitate and delegitimize the Castro-led government to the point of collapse. He accordingly offered Cubans special immigration privileges. With rare exceptions, subsequent presidents not only honored but expanded entitlements for Cuban immigrants. By the time Trump assumed the presidency nearly sixty years later the Soviet Union was history and Cuba struggled to adapt to the market-dominated world order. Despite efforts by Obama to improve bilateral relations, Trump both revitalized efforts to strangle the Cuban economy and imposed new barriers on Cuban immigration, both authorized and unauthorized.

Because Cuban immigration policy is best understood in the context of Washington's general immigration as well as refugee policies, the next chapter begins with a brief overview of those policies, insofar as they are relevant to Cubans. I then address Cuban immigration policy during the first two decades of Castro's rule, which provide backdrop for understanding Cuban immigration policy since 1980, the main focus of the book.

I proceed in the chapter to describe how both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations turned to Cuban émigrés to help topple the Castro-led government. They trained émigrés to carry out the famed failed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) orchestrated invasion of Cuba. The CIA relied on Cuban émigrés to conceal US violation of international law protecting countries' rights to self-determination. The Eisenhower, and especially the Kennedy, administrations also funneled funds to Cuban immigrant groups ostensibly to empower them but in fact to try to control them and involve them as co-conspirators in other plots as well to overthrow Castro. Yet, I describe how the groups, in turn, used US resources to advance their own agendas.

In this and subsequent chapters, Cuban immigrants, and aspiring Cuban immigrants, will be shown to pursue their own interests within constraints imposed by the United States. Cuban immigration history needs to be understood from the vantage point not merely of state institutions with formal power but also of ordinary Cubans, including in transnational context. On several occasions, changes in US–Cuban immigration policy resulted from pressure from ordinary Cubans with no formal power, who defied official policy at the time.

Chapter 1 highlights how Vice President Lyndon Johnson, on assuming the Presidency in 1963 after Kennedy's assassination, built on

precedents set both by Eisenhower and Kennedy, and privileged yet more Cubans. To gain the upper hand over mounting unauthorized Cuban arrivals he extended a welcome mat to all Cubans who wished to come – at US taxpayers' expense. He announced the welcoming on the very occasion that he signed a new omnibus immigration reform into law that ended the national origin basis of US admission and capped yearly admission from any single country at twenty thousand. His welcome mat authorized the immigration of more than a quarter million new Cubans before President Nixon withdrew it in 1973. The welcoming brought, on average, nearly twice as many Cubans yearly as the new immigration reform permitted from any single country.

The chapter then proceeds to reveal that in the course of the 1970s Cuban privileging appeared to run its course. After 1973, the Republican administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, and the administration of Democrat Jimmy Carter during its first three years, admitted few Cubans and reined in resettlement benefits for the Cubans who came. Even fervently anti-Communist Nixon slashed funds for Cubans who sought refuge in America.

Meanwhile, Chapter 2 focuses on the Cuban immigrant experience *in* the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. I describe the unique entitlements Cubans received on arrival and the impact entitlements had on their adaptation to the United States.

Chapters 3–5 focus, in turn, on President Carter's last year in office and the Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton administrations. They show the contraction of Cuban immigrant privileging to have been short-lived. Cuban privileging resumed in 1980, during President Carter's last year in office: initially less by design than in response to Castro giving Cubans a green light to immigrate without US entry permission. After initially opposing the onslaught of unauthorized Cuban boatpeople, Carter welcomed approximately 125,000 of them. He built on past privileging of Cubans.

President Carter, together with President Clinton, both Democrats, admitted over 150,000 new Cubans who had not been screened abroad in compliance with Congressionally mandated regulations. President Carter, in addition, extended exceptionally generous entitlements to the arrivals under his watch. Although both presidents initially had tried to block entry of the unauthorized Cubans, they quickly reversed their stance and followed the precedent of previous presidents. They welcomed the new Cubans. President Clinton even privileged Cubans against the backdrop of a nationwide surge in nativist, anti-immigrant sentiment. He

did retract one prerogative Cubans had enjoyed for decades, but concomitantly piled new unique entitlements for Cubans onto old. While calling for the repatriation of Cubans picked up at sea, he guaranteed Cubans a minimum number of immigration visas yearly, a guarantee offered no other nationals; he approved of unique welfare rights for Cubans; and he exempted Cubans from new restrictions imposed on unauthorized immigrants from all other countries.

In the years between the Carter and Clinton presidencies, the Reagan and Bush Republican administrations admitted fewer Cubans. Yet, they permitted a Cuban immigrant group to admit new Cubans on their own. President Reagan, with the assistance of Bush when his Vice President, also will be shown to have turned, anew, to Cuban émigrés to assist covert efforts to rein in Left-leaning movements – this time in Central America, not Cuba. At the same time, President Reagan reimagined the 1980 unauthorized Cuban arrivals as refugees, after President Carter very explicitly had deemed them not to be. The Cubans thereby were able to become lawful permanent residents and enjoy citizenship and voting rights. President Reagan also helped transform Cuban Americans into a political force in their own right, able to independently influence US Cuba policy. Cuban immigration policy, as a result, subsequently became rooted in domestic politics, including after the Cold War's end when foreign policy toward Cuba ceased to be a primary concern of Washington.

Then, Chapter 6 focuses on US Cuban immigration policy after the turn of the century. Republican George W. Bush (Bush II) was the last President to grant Cubans new, unique entitlements, and also honor earlier entitlements. He went international in extending new entitlements to Cubans, circumventing official Congressional control over immigration. He initiated a program to welcome Cuban medics working for their government overseas. As if the Cold War had not ended, he hoped “defecting” Cubans would discredit their government and deprive it of earnings aid workers generated overseas. President Bush also arranged for Cuban families to reunify in the United States before officially cleared for immigration visas. President Obama continued the policies of President Bush as well as of earlier presidents – until his last days in office, when he reined in Cuban privileging “as we knew it” for over half a century. The chapter details the entitlements he retracted, how, and why.

Chapter 7 focuses on how the Trump Administration took advantage of the Obama policy shift to make Cuban immigration more difficult. It retracted entitlements, *de facto* if not *de jure*, such that authorized as well

Preface: Privileged Cubans

xxiii

as unauthorized Cuban immigration became near-impossible, and unauthorized immigration became costly and exceedingly dangerous. At the same time, in further strangulating the Cuban economy, President Trump gave Cubans all the more reason to want to leave. He reversed President Obama's efforts to improve bilateral relations.

The final chapter of this book addresses the impact that more than half a century of privileging had on inducing Cubans to move to America, and how immigration rates from Cuba compare to rates from other Caribbean countries, namely from the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Remarkably, the number of Cubans who immigrated proves to be less exceptional than the formal privileging would suggest. Although US Dominican policy is not a central concern of the book, comparisons with Dominican immigration are noteworthy. Despite the United States offering Dominicans few special entitlements, in the 1980s Dominicans' informal diasporic ties fueled more immigration than Cubans' formal entitlements. The Dominican–Cuban immigration gap did close significantly after the turn of this century, through Obama's presidency, though not because Cubans received new entitlement incentives. Rather, three decades of strained ties between Cuban immigrants in the United States and family they left behind, rooted in their opposing views toward the revolution, broke down when Cubans suffered from the economic crisis caused by the Soviet Union's collapse. Under the circumstances, Cubans turned to family in the United States to help them immigrate, as had Dominicans for decades – with the help of human smugglers who capitalized on an opportunity to profit.

In contrast, far fewer Haitians will be shown to have settled in the United States: the result of decades of US discrimination and exclusion that I detail throughout the book. During the Cold War, Haitians had the misfortune of coming from a country allied with the United States. Consequently, their admission did not serve US foreign policy interests at the time. Haitians also had the political misfortune of being dark-skinned, unlike most Cuban immigrants. As a result, Haitians were victims of racial biases in US immigration policy, before, during, and after the Cold War. The racial biases against Haitians continued even after the 1965 omnibus immigration reform officially ended earlier racial biases in Washington's admissions. Haitians gained special immigration entitlements only when they had the good fortune of arriving without authorization alongside Cubans, when discrimination against them became blatantly transparent, and when immigration rights lawyers and activists fought on Haitians' behalf.

The final chapter also addresses “lessons learned” from the Cuban experience, including when viewed from a cross-national perspective. In a partial preview of what is to come, the book reveals:

1. An initial privileging of Cuban immigrants set in motion a chain of privileging across presidential administrations, Republican and Democratic alike, in what sociologists and political scientists would call a “locked in” path-dependent manner:⁶ namely, one set of entitlements spurred implementation of other entitlements, to address problems earlier entitlements generated or left unresolved and new problems that arose, as well as emergent interests in continued Cuban privileging. By the same token, presidents found it difficult to retract entitlements, even after their initial rationale no longer justified their continuation. Only when Cuban privileging worked both against new US foreign policy interests and against interests of influential Cuban Americans did the United States revoke key entitlements. The changed context did not make termination of Cuban exceptionalism inevitable, but made it possible with little political pushback. Even then, Congress did not sunset entitlements it had legislated, reflecting a “stickiness” to its legislation.
2. The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations extended immigration entitlements partly as a “soft power” strategy to convince Cubans of the virtues of capitalist democracy.⁷ They

⁶ On path dependence, see Jack Goldstone, “Initial Conditions, General Laws, Path Dependence, and Explanation in Historical Sociology,” *American Journal of Sociology* vol. 104, no. 3 (November 1998): 829–45; Paul Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics,” *American Political Science Review* vol. 94, no. 2 (June 2000): 251–67; Paul David, “Path Dependence: A Foundational Concept for Historical Social Science,” *Cliometrica* vol. 1 (2007): 91–114; James Mahoney, “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology,” *Theory and Society* vol. 29 (2000): 507–48; Ruth Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures and the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Anik Leithner and Kyle Libby, “Path Dependency in Foreign Policy,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (July 2017) (oxfordre.com/politics).

⁷ On soft power, see Joseph Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). “Soft power” entails influencing other countries without use of force or coercion; “hard power” rests on utilizing force and coercion. Nye argues that successful states need both hard and soft power: the ability to coerce others as well as the ability to shape their long-term attitudes and preferences. On use of “soft power” by global dominant countries vis a vis Third World countries, see Atul Kohli, *Imperialism and the Developing World: How Britain and the United States Shaped the Global Periphery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Preface: Privileged Cubans

xxv

- promoted “soft power” initiatives amid mounting international pressure not to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries.
3. Under the Eisenhower administration, and even more so under the Kennedy administration, the CIA covertly embedded “hard power” in “soft power” strategies to topple the Castro-led regime. Even though neither the “hard” nor the “soft” power strategies accomplished their intended foreign policy purpose, subsequent administrations continued to privilege Cubans.
 4. No single factor explains the ongoing privileging of Cubans for over half a century. The initial Cold War foreign policy rationale created vested domestic interests in the continued privileging of Cubans, such that Cuban privileging continued after the Cold War’s end.
 5. With and without Congressional backing, presidents and their administrations privileged Cubans by deliberately imagining them as refugees, by imagining them as if they were refugees when recognizing that they were not, and by introducing unique criteria for refugee status in order to enable Cubans to qualify for refugee entitlements for which they would not otherwise qualify. Social science “constructivists” would say that in conceiving Cubans as refugees, policy makers could and did privilege Cubans.⁸ Accordingly, Presidents and their administrations, as well as Congress, have not subjected all nationals to the same entry requirements and the same entry queue. They even privileged Cubans on the basis of their nationality after the United States officially ended national origins-based admission. Nonetheless, Cuban exceptionalism ebbed and flowed over the years.
 6. Washington has not set and implemented immigration policy entirely to its choosing. The Cuban experience demonstrates that even weak states within the international arena, such as Cuba, as well as ordinary people through their force of numbers, diasporic ties, and defiance of official regulations, may shape US immigration policy and determine who immigrates.

⁸ “Constructivists” point to the role of ideas, norms, and culture. For an overview of “constructivism,” see Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* vol. 4 (2001): 391–416. In this book I demonstrate that by framing Cubans as refugees, successive administrations and Congress circumvented immigration regulations to privilege Cubans.

In disrespecting Cuba's right to self-determination, the US rationale for privileging Cubans was never noble. Yet, in due course, Cuban immigrants helped transform Miami into an economically and culturally dynamic city with hemispheric reach. So too did they become politically influential, not only in Florida where they mainly settled, but also nationally. They have made important contributions to America, from which the country at-large has benefited.

THE WRITING OF THIS BOOK

I used a range of sources in writing this book. I have drawn on archival materials from the official libraries of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush I, and Clinton. I am grateful for the assistance of their respective archivists. I have also made use of the *Congressional Record*, Congressional hearings, and other documents. As a sociologist, I draw on the primary sources in an interpretive, analytically grounded manner, to understand policies and their consequences.

Particularly concerned with policy ramifications, I have also drawn on materials compiled by US agencies; immigration statistics; survey and voting data; and news analyses. In addition, I have drawn on secondary sources on Cuba, Cuban immigrants, and US immigration policy.

In writing this book I also benefited from interviews and conversations I had with several members of Congress (and their staff), US diplomats who served in Cuba, officials of the Departments of State and Homeland Security and the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, and former mayors of Miami. I also benefited from interviews and conversations with Cuban American politicians and other Cuban American leaders in Miami, with Cuban American lobbyists and Cuban Americans involved in nongovernmental organizations, with scholars and others well-informed about Cuban immigration, and with ordinary Cubans both in the United States and their homeland. In Cuba, I also benefited from discussions with foreign service officials at the American Embassy and with Cuban scholars knowledgeable about Cuban immigration policy.

The interviews and conversations that I had were open-ended and focused on individuals' expertise. They were designed to deepen my knowledge about and understanding of Cuban immigration policy and Cuban immigrants. I am most appreciative of the insights I gained from these discussions, although, with rare exception, I respect the anonymity of the individuals with whom I spoke and do not refer to them by name.

Preface: Privileged Cubans

xxvii

My understanding of Cuba and Cuban immigrants also draws on decades of research related to my previously noted books, which I wrote while making use, in the main, of a similar mix of source materials. Taken together, my research over the years has helped me understand how and why Cubans benefited from special immigrant privileges for over half a century, and the impact their privileging has had (including in Cuba).

My understanding of Haitian and Dominican immigration, in contrast, derives almost entirely from secondary sources, plus Congressional hearings and immigration statistics, and discussions with Haitian and Dominican scholars. Unfortunately, I do not have the same depth of knowledge about Haitian and Dominican experiences. I compare immigration from the three countries primarily to highlight how differently and inequitably most presidents, along with Congress, have treated immigrants and aspiring immigrants from the three countries. If Cuban privileging merits close attention, so too does what I call the disprivileging of Haitians: a task I leave to others.

I am most appreciative of the grants, fellowships, and other support I have received over the years that released me from teaching obligations and helped fund the research on which this book is based. The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University very generously funded this book project. The Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, in addition, gave me confidence in the worth of the project when first conceiving it. The American Council of Learned Societies, the Radcliffe Institute, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, and the Mellon-MIT Inter-University Program on NGOs and Forced Migration, and, at Boston University, the Frederick S. Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future, in turn, very kindly funded earlier work of mine on Cuba and Cuban immigrants, on which the book builds. The book is better thanks to these sources of generous support.

Since this book draws on decades of my research on Cuba and Cuban immigrants, I cannot begin to thank all the people who contributed indirectly to it. Specific to this book, I am grateful to very insightful comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript by Lars Schoultz, Jeffery Paige, Rachel Nolan, Alex Stepick, and Carl Lindskoog, and to very helpful comments on certain chapters by Holly Ackerman, Cybelle Fox, Wayne Cornelius, and Adam Isaacson. Also, Maria de los Angeles and Christopher Mitchell deepened my understanding of aspects of US Cuban

and Dominican policy, and Douglas Massey my understanding of general US immigration. I am grateful also to Renata Keller who most helpfully introduced me to the world of archival research, and to comments by anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press. In addition, I am most appreciative of my husband, Paul Osterman, who tolerated living with me when I worked on the book, in his view, for too many years. He influenced ideas incorporated into the book.

Last but not least, my thanks to the team at Cambridge University Press (CUP), beginning with Deborah Gerschenowitz, who oversaw the press' acquisition of my manuscript. The CUP team included Cecilia Cancellaro, as well as Rachel Blaifeder, Victoria Inci Phillips, Lisa Carter, and Neena Maheen. I am indebted also to Kevin Hughes who very carefully copyedited my manuscript for CUP.

Acronyms

BTTR	Brothers to the Rescue
CAA	Cuban Adjustment Act
CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CDA	Cuban Democracy Act
CERF	Cuban Exodus Relief Fund
CFRPP	Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program
CHTF	Cuban-Haitian Task Force
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMPPP	Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program
CRP	Cuban Refugee Program
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HEW	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
HRIFA	Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IIRIRA	Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
IRCA	Immigration Reform and Control Act
LPR	Legal (Lawful) Permanent Residence
MPP	Migrant Protection Protocols
NACARA	Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act
NSC	National Security Council
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act

xxx

List of Acronyms

PSI	Private Sector Initiative
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SSI	Supplementary Security Income
USCIS	US Citizenship and Immigration Services