



## Models of the internal colonialism and ethnic relations: The case of Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the United States

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### Abstract

The United States is a very good example of a multiethnic society by having large groups of people from more than eleven different ethnic origins. Some of these groups were voluntarily integrated into American society, whereas others were forced in by involuntary means. Notwithstanding the fact that they have all faced social barriers, the barriers themselves have differed significantly based on the group's ethnic identities, cultures, social standings, and many other features. This study examines two of those ethnic groups namely the Cuban and the Puerto Rican Americans' standing in the U.S.. To do this, the researcher utilized the internal colonialism model and Aguirre & Turner's model of ethnic relations. Both models explain, to some extent, the situation of these minority groups in the U.S.

**Keywords:** Internal Colonialism; Ethnic Relations; ethnicity; race; the Cuban; the Puerto Rican

### Introduction

The United States is a very good example of a multiethnic society by having large groups of people from more than eleven different ethnic origins. Some of these groups were voluntarily integrated into American society, whereas others were forced in by involuntary means. Notwithstanding the fact that they have all faced social barriers, the barriers themselves have differed significantly based on the group's ethnic identities, cultures, social standings, and many other features.

This paper examines two of these minority groups, Cuban Americans and Puerto Rican Americans. In the following sections, first the history of the Puerto Ricans and the Cubans Americans are discussed to better understand their standing in the society of the U.S. Then, the internal colonialism model and Aguirre & Turner's model (1998) are applied to those ethnicities.

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## **The History of the Cuban Americans**

Cuban Americans are one of the largest ethnic groups in the United States with over 1.2 million people and constituting 3.5% of the entire Hispanic population according to the U.S. Census Bureau statistics (Guzman, 2001). Some historians believe that Cubans' first entry to the United States traces back to the 1500's with the establishment of St. Augustine by Pedro Menendes De Aviles in Florida (A Brief History, 2004.). Most of the people who dwelled in St. Augustine were Spanish and Cuban soldiers. However, the first notable immigration by Cubans after U.S. independence 1776 started in the late 1800s.

Contrary to other minority groups, such as Puerto Rican Americans, Cuban Americans' initial entry into the United States was not voluntary. Most of the early Cuban immigrants were actually refugees from Cuba (Marger, 2003). They were involuntarily deported for their stance against the Spanish domination over Cuba. Jose Marti was the most prominent, dedicating his entire life to the liberty of Cuba from Spanish domination (Marger, 2003). Jose Marti spent 15 years in the United States where he established the Cuban Revolutionary Party (Belnap & Fernandez, 1993). Many Cuban people immigrated to the United States voluntarily during the 1880s and formed small colonies (Marger, 2003).

Spanish rule over Cuba ended with the Spanish-American War in 1898 (Weinmann, 2004). Cuba was not the only territory that Spain lost, the United States declared sovereignty over Puerto Rico and Philippine Islands (Sernau, 2006). The United States started the war in order to secure commercial interests but the result also opened a new era for the Cuban people lasting until the latter part of the 1950s (Chronology of Puerto Rico, 1998).

A huge wave of Cuban immigration to the United States began after the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1950s (Sernau, 2006). Many Cubans were against Fidel Castro but there was no way to voice their dissent since they were not under the protection of democracy. Initially, Castro's policy towards the people who wanted to leave Cuba was liberal and he permitted anyone wanted to leave the country to do so voluntarily. These early immigrants consisted of middle-class educated people having sufficient wealth to secure a living in the United States.

Traveling to the United States became harder for Cubans after the late 1970s, forcing many Cubans to seek dangerous ways to escape Castro's rule. These latter immigrants were unskilled and poor, seeking entry into the United States in order to start a new life. Most of these people found their

chance to enter to the United States after the opening of Port Mariel. These immigrants were later called Marielitas and a huge number of Marielitas came to the United States during the 1990s. Some suggested that most of the Marielitas were actually prisoners of Cuba and were intentionally released from the prisons then sent to the United States (Sernau, 2006).

Nevertheless, after the mass numbers of immigration, Cuba and America decided to make an agreement regarding these immigrants, which President Bill Clinton and Cuban authorities signed in 1994. Accordingly, the United States of America agreed to issue 20,000 visas each year to new Cuban immigrants. Furthermore, the new agreement outlined the procedures for immigrants who would try to enter the United States illegally. Publicly known as the “Wet Feet Dry Feet” policy, this procedure stated that any Cubans found on US soil would be permitted to stay in the country while the Cubans found in the water should be returned to Cuba immediately.

### **The History of the Puerto Rican Americans**

Puerto Rican Americans are also members of the Hispanic population. The U.S. Census Bureau statistics show Puerto Ricans to have a population of 3.4 million people, almost one tenth of the total Hispanic population (Guzman, 2001). Among all minority groups, Puerto Ricans have the exceptional status of being U.S. citizens even before entering the United States. This decision was made in 1917 and since then Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens (Sernau, 2006).

Like Cuba, Puerto Rico’s Spanish domination ended with the Spanish-American War. Following this war, Puerto Rico became a United States territory. After 1917, United States accepted Puerto Ricans as U.S. citizens (Duany, 2003). This decision gave Puerto Ricans an opportunity to enter and leave the United States without needing a visa.

Granted citizenship status, Puerto Ricans started entering the United States immediately. However, the initial immigration was limited to small numbers of people. It was not until the end of World War II that Puerto Ricans moved to the United States en masse. In the 1950s, almost one fifth of the Puerto Rico population moved to the United States after advancements in the Airline industry made travel to the United States cheap and quick (Marger, 2003). The main reason for this mass immigration was a need for cheap labor in the United States and high employment problems on the island. After this time many Puerto Ricans moved back and forth to Puerto Rico and the United States. Currently, there are over three million Puerto Rican Americans living in the United States with most concentrated in the New York area.

Table 1

*The historical chronology of the Cuban Americans and Puerto Rican Americans.*

<b>Cuban Americans</b>	<b>Puerto Rican Americans</b>
1500s. St. Augustine, Florida was established by Pedro Menendes De Avilez.	1898 Spanish-American war. Puerto Rico invaded by U.S.
1880s Jose Marti, the founder of the Cuban Revolutionary Party spent his exile in the U.S. (Marger, 2003).	1917 Puerto Ricans became U.S. Citizens (Sernau, 2006)
1898 Spanish domination over Cuba ended with Spanish-American war	1947. United States granted Puerto Rico with the right to elect its own governor .
1959 Fidel Castro became Cuban dictator.	1950s. 20% off all Puerto Rican population migrated to migrated to U.S. (Marger, 2003)
1960s. Mass numbers of migration started after the revolution. (Marger, 2003)	Puerto Rican Americans mostly moved to New York.
1973. Migration slowed (Marger, 2003)	1970s. Migration reversed (Marger, 2003)
1980s. Migration continued with Marielitas.	1970s and 1980s. Puerto Rican Americans dispersed to Chicago, Nevark, and Jersey City.
1995. Cuban Migration Agreement (Wet feet, dry feet policy)	1980s and 2000s. Puerto Ricans move back and forth between the Puerto Rico Island and the United States.
1990s Special Cuban Migration Lottery.	2000s. The island political status is still questioned by the Islanders.

### **The Internal Colonialism Model**

In terms of politics, colonization occurs when a dominant power subordinates a weaker group. This may occur in two ways. External colonization is where a dominant or powerful country subordinates the people of another country and exploits their natural resources. Internal colonization occurs when the dominant group uses its power to subordinate another group or minority within the same country. Almquist (1984) explains the characteristics of the Internal Colonialism model by using Blauner's categorization.

*a) The minority group's entry in the dominant country is involuntarily:* According to this first principle, the minority group should enter the country involuntarily. When we apply this feature to Cuban Americans and Puerto Rican Americans, we see no direct corresponding points since both of the minority groups entered the United States voluntarily. However, if we look at the Cubans from another perspective, we can clearly see that for many their entrance to the United States was involuntarily rather than voluntarily. This notion is valid especially for the first major immigrant groups of the 1950s escaping Castro. Most of the first immigrant group consisted of people who were forced to leave the country due to their opposing stance against Castro. There is still a common belief in many Cuban Americans that they are still exiles within the United States despite their permanent resident status.

*b) Destruction of the minority groups native culture:* There are several aspects of culture with language being the most prominent. In order to destroy a culture, perhaps, the best way is to replace the group's native language with the dominant language. Both Cuban Americans and Puerto Rican Americans were originally speaking Spanish as their native language. While most Cubans still continue using their native language, the same cannot be said for Puerto Ricans.

The majority of Cuban Americans are residing in the Miami area where most of the schools offer bilingual education (Marger, 2003). Furthermore, many Miami radio and television stations broadcast Spanish spoken programs and many newspapers are published in Spanish. This gives a great advantage for Cubans in preserving their native language; however, new generations prefer learning English and using English more often since they prefer going to English spoken schools.

Puerto Rican Americans, on the other hand, illustrate a different picture. They are mostly concentrated in the New York area and they lack of bilingual schools and media, making it much more difficult for them to preserve their native language. In contrast, Puerto Rico has bilingual education at schools on the Puerto Rico Island. This is due to the effects of the American ruling that put the English in affect in many areas such as business and schools by establishing a bilingual status. However, this bilingual status is not the same as the status in Miami. Miami belongs to the United States and having a chance to speak Spanish is a privilege for Cubans. However, the Puerto Rico Island is the property of Puerto Rican people and using a bilingual system is not advantageous to them.

*c) The substitution of white-dominated bureaucracies to control the new group:* This principal introduces ways for the dominant group to justify enforcing their practices over weaker groups. In other words, many unfair activities are justified through unfair courts or subjective laws ruled over by the dominant power. We can recall the removal of Native Americans from their lands as an example to this principle (Almquist, 1984).

This principle partially applies to Puerto Ricans. After the Spanish-American War in 1899, United States dominated the island. Officials who were appointed from the United States governed Puerto Rico following the Treaty of Paris. It was not until 1946, that Puerto Rico had its first elected governor among the islanders. Even though Puerto Ricans had the right to elect their governors since 1946, there is still an ongoing debate regarding the political status of the island.

d) *Racism*: Racism, in its elementary meaning, is the belief in superiority of some groups over the others. Racism, actually, is another way for the dominant group to justify their exploitation over a subordinated people.

Despite the fact that most Cubans have dark skins, they have not experienced racism as severely as Puerto Ricans. It may be due to the fact that most immigrants of the early 1950s had adequate education and were mainly whiter immigrants (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985). This education helped many Cubans to support themselves in finding better jobs rather than being just unskilled temporary workers. Another factor is sympathy for the Cuban people who escaped from Castro's regime.

Puerto Ricans' experience is different than Cubans. The fact that they tend to have darker skins they are often associated with African Americans. In view of the racist approach, their skin color is a disadvantage. Interestingly, many Puerto Ricans who are referred to as light colored, in other words white, in Puerto Rico are referred to as dark skinned or black in the United States (Marger, 2003). Today, most Puerto Ricans prefer speaking Spanish instead of English despite the fact that they live in the United States and have citizenship status. This is actually a defense mechanism for them to prevent being confused with African Americans.

e) *The dual market system*: The dual market system is a system where job distribution is based on certain characteristics; such as race and ethnicity. This system supports the dominant power and provides the dominant group with higher status jobs. In this system, the weaker groups are employed in lower status jobs. These weaker group members are often not allowed to occupy managerial positions.

Excluding the early immigrants from Cuba who were highly educated and well skilled, the latter immigrants from Cuba, as well as the immigrants from Puerto Rico experienced the affects of the dual market system. Particularly, Puerto Ricans were more affected because of their darker skin color and their lack of English.

Considering the standings of both Cuban Americans and Puerto Rican Americans, we can say that the features of the Internal Colonialism model are quite prevalent for Puerto Ricans. Even though the first principle is not a good fit for Puerto Ricans, the rest of the four principles are quite applicable.

### **Aguirre and Turner's model of ethnic relations**

There are numerous theories that describe ethnic relations in a society. Some of these theories can be listed as assimilation theories, pluralism theories, biological theories, human ecology theories, and power and stratification theories (Aguirre & Turner, 1998). However, none of these theories incorporate all the aspects of ethnic relations. Therefore, each theory focuses on particular types of relationships. In explaining ethnic relations, Aguirre and Turner propose a more comprehensive theory of ethnic relations.

There are several concepts in Aguirre and Turner's model of ethnic relations. These concepts are dependent on each other and result in generating a cycle. Aguirre and Turner state that discrimination plays the central role in this cycle. Moreover, they claim that experiencing more discrimination creates an environment leading to a more distinctive ethnic identity.

The second concept is the degree of identifiability of the ethnic group. This concept also influences discrimination. They assert that the more distinct the group, the more likely will they be discriminated against. This distinctiveness, in other words identifiability, is based in biological and cultural characteristics. Biological distinctiveness includes biological factors such as skin color whereas cultural distinctiveness includes language or social behaviors.

The third factor is resource sharing and the first two concepts, discrimination and identifiability, play a major role in distributing the available resources. It is inevitable that the more discriminated a group is, the less will they receive from shared resources and be almost entirely restricted from others, which will result in even more identifiability through low income and poor schooling environments. All these concepts become so dependent on each other that it is really hard to break the walls that surround an ethnic group.

The fourth factor is the sense of threat perceived from the ethnic group. This sense of threat occurs when the population of the ethnic group becomes larger and poses a threat to the dominant group as well as to other ethnic groups through their sheer numbers. This sense of threat becomes more obvious if the ethnic group has entrepreneurial resources such as money or ability. Aguirre and Turner state that the numbers of people in a group with entrepreneurial resources affect the view of the dominant group towards them. Small numbers of people having entrepreneurial resources do not pose a threat to the dominant group whereas large numbers of such people do.

Finally, Aguirre and Turner (1998) explain how the dominant group legitimates their acts of discrimination by creating negative stereotypes about the discriminated group.

### **Exploring Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the United States by using a revised model of Aguirre & Turner's model by Almquist**

The contemporary characteristics of Cuban and Puerto Rican Americans are listed in Table 2 and we can start interpreting this demographic information using that data. According to Healy (1995), large numbers of ethnic populations face discrimination. When we compare the Cuban and Puerto Rican American populations we can clearly see a difference between the two groups. Puerto Ricans, with more than double the population of the Cubans, should have experienced more discrimination than Cubans according to this model. As we examined both groups for the Internal Colonialism model, we observe that this statement to be true.

Almquist (2000) explains ethnic minorities' experience of occupational success through two concepts: low education or poor startup capital. Since we do not have data for the startup capital we should look at the education status for both groups. According to Table 2, the percentage of Cuban Americans exceeds that of Puerto Ricans in college graduates. This occurs both for males and females.

According to Almquist (2000), there is an imbalance between minorities and ethnic groups for managerial and high status jobs. Almquist claims that when the status level of the job gets higher, the percentage of minority people who are in these occupations gets lower. When we look at Table 2, we can clearly see that this assumption is valid for both Cuban Americans and the Puerto Ricans. On the other hand, Cuban Americans have better standings than Puerto Ricans in terms of both managerial jobs and high-status professions. This latter statement is also validated by the assumption that percent in manufacturing affects the number of people in managerial jobs. Almquist clarifies this by saying that manufacturing jobs do not require large numbers of managerial positions. Therefore the percentage of Puerto Ricans in manufacturing exceeds that of Cubans validates this assumption.

Table 2 also distinguishes men and women by giving data for both genders. Almquist(2000) claims that gender inequality exists in all settings, including managerial jobs and high status professions. Observe that the gender ratio favors more women graduating college than men for both groups. Conversely, the gender ratios for managerial jobs and high status professions are lower than 100%



level. Considering the positive affect of education in acquiring high status professions or managerial positions, we should expect that the gender ratio should also be over 100%. These results suggest that gender discrimination is still prevalent for both Cuban Americans and Puerto Rican Americans.

Finally, we should compare both groups' median family incomes in order to see their standings among the ethnic groups. Cuban Americans, having more median income than Puerto Ricans, possess a better standing than Puerto Ricans. This is also supported with the fact that the percentage of Cuban Americans who live below poverty level is considerably smaller than that of the Puerto Ricans.

Table 2.

*Contemporary characteristics of Cuban Americans and Puerto Rican Americans*

Variable	Cuban Americans	Puerto Rican Americans
<b>Independent variables</b>		
Population size	1,785,547	4,623,716
Percent foreign born	71.7	N/A
Percent college graduates		
Women	24	12
Men	21	11
Gender ratio	112	104
Percent employed in Manufacturing	17	20
Class of worker by Percent:		
Private wage & salary	82	78
Government	7	19
Self-employed	11	3
<b>Dependent Occupational Variables</b>		
EORI for Managerial Occupations:		
Women	82	60
Men	116	65
Gender ratio	71	92
EORI for high status Professions:		
Women	52	36
Men	130	69
Gender ratio	40	52
<b>Outcome Variables: Socioeconomic status</b>		
Earnings of Year Round, Full Time Workers		
Women	26,254	25,582
Men	31,527	30,281
Gender ratio	83	84
Median Family Income	42,642	32,791
Percent Below Poverty Level	11	30

### **Gender Issues among Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the United States**

Patriarchal ideology prevents females from enjoying the same amount of freedom that men enjoy as well as preventing females from obtaining equal employment opportunities. The prevalence of this ideology is higher in some countries lower in others. Puerto Rican women highly experience the affects of the patriarchal ideology stronger than Cuban American women do and are more likely to obtain egalitarian roles in terms of family relations (Almquist, 1989).

It is interesting to observe that Puerto Rico had a matrilineal structure in the 1500s (Amott & Matthaei, 1996) where women were able to work in high-status positions. However, after the Spanish invaded the island this system was dramatically changed and women's status declined (Amott& Matthaei, 1996). After the 1900's, women's contribution to work life rose but they were limited to domestic jobs. Educational opportunities were also limited for Puerto Rican women. Amott and Matthaei (1996) state that men were six times more likely to receive an education than women in the 1900s.

After the immigration to the United States, Puerto Rican women contributed to the work life as low-wage workers who were employed in domestic jobs such as garment workers (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). Dill (2000) argues that permitting racial-ethnic groups' entry into the United States was an intentional behavior towards creating a cheap labor force. Therefore, Puerto Rican women's status in the United States exactly resonates with this statement. Today, employment is still a major problem for Puerto Rican women in terms of getting high-status jobs (Almquist, 1989).

Cuban women entered the United States together with the Cuban men after Fidel Castro became the dictator of Cuba. Similar to early Cuban male immigrants, Cuban women were educated people (Almquist, 1989). Initially these women had to work in domestic jobs; however, they were able to obtain the necessary skills for better jobs very quickly. Therefore, Almquist (1989) states that the way Cuban women entered work life was quite similar to White women.

In terms of family life, first generation Cuban women were more likely to do housework as well as working outside. Almquist (1989) asserts that newer Cuban generations differ from those early generations in terms of family life expectations. The new generations expect more egalitarian roles within the family; thus, they are more likely to assimilate into mainstream society.

### **Socioeconomic status of Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the United States**

Socioeconomic status (SES) is maybe the best predictor of one group's social standing in the society. SES is composed of elements such as income, occupation, and levels of poverty or wealth (Marger, 2003). Almquist (1987) states that a group can achieve a good socioeconomic status by having either good communication or adequate capital. When we apply this principle to Cubans, we observe that in particular, the early Cuban immigrants were well-educated people (Marger, 2003). Having sufficient educational background, which includes strong communication skills based on learning the native language, resulted in better skills for employment. Thus, Cubans received more acceptance from the dominant group. Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, lacked both a good educational background, communication skills or adequate capital (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). Since they did not carry the necessary credentials that the dominant group appreciates, they experienced economic problems.

Another difference between Cubans and the Puerto Ricans are their political standpoints. Cubans came from a country where the regime ended up becoming communism. Therefore, by standing against a communist regime, Cubans earned sympathy from the United States. Puerto Ricans lacked the sympathy that Cubans received because of the absence of such a situation. Furthermore, being mostly black skinned, Puerto Ricans were associated with African Americans and were exposed to discrimination (Marger, 2003). All these factors combined with the lack of sufficient skills required for high-status professions resulted in a low SES of Puerto Rican Americans.

### **Conclusion**

There are several factors that help explain the differences between Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the United States. Cubans, have better overall education, concentrating in single communities, such as the ones in Miami with its institutionalized structures, and support from the U.S. people has increased in many areas. Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, have not shown much a success because of a general lack of a good education mostly due to the lack of sufficient language skills. Puerto Rico's political status also played a major role. Puerto Ricans have been exploited in terms of employment for many years, initially by the Spanish and later by the United States. Overall, Cuban Americans have been more successful in obtaining a good socioeconomic status than the Puerto Ricans in the United States.

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