

**Yolanda Prieto. *The Cubans of Union City, Immigrants and Exiles in a New Jersey Community*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. 224 pp.**

Most studies of Cuban immigration focus on the post-1959 migration that settled in South Florida. This is understandable given that over half of the 1.3 million people in the United States who claim Cuban ancestry live in Florida's Dade and Broward counties. However, Cuban immigrant and exile communities have existed in the U.S. since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in places as diverse as New York, Philadelphia, Tampa, and New Orleans, but these older communities have received comparatively less scholarly attention. Yolanda Prieto, Professor Emerita of Sociology at Ramapo College, tries to address some of this oversight with her ethnographic study of one Cuban immigrant community in transition –Union City, New Jersey– dubbed Cuba's "northernmost province." Compared to the population, in south Florida, the Cubans of Union City are smaller in number and have always commanded less attention from national media outlets. Since the 1980s, the community has witnessed a further reduction in population as older immigrants die, move to the suburbs, or retire to south Florida. Prieto's community study reminds us that there is no one typical Cuban immigrant experience (despite the homogenizing portrayals of the news and film media), and examining the differences are essential to understanding the impact that race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and federal and local politics have on successful integration or assimilation.

The first Cubans in Union City settled here in the 1940s, arriving from the town of Fomento in Villa Clara province to work in the needlework factories. They were largely white and working-class, and they migrated in search of economic opportunity. After 1959, this established community drew other working-class immigrants from Villa Clara to the Northeast, exemplifying how migration is calculated and immigrants tend to settle where others like them reside. In chapter 1 Prieto draws on the existing historical and sociological literature on Cuban immigration to provide the context for examining the particularities of this community, but by chapter 2 her subjects begin to tell their own story: through participant observation and in-depth interviews, Prieto's subjects tell us why they migrated to New Jersey instead of Florida; how they adapted to life in the northern United States; the tensions between generations and compatriots; and their conflicted relationship to homeland and host society. As a longtime resident of this Cuban émigré community, Prieto interweaves her own personal history into the ethnography but it never dominates the narrative. She has deep affection for her community but

that does not prevent her from focusing a critical eye. Her comments and insights are balanced, fair, and respectful.

The subsequent chapters are the most engaging. Chapter 3 examines how Cuban exiles/immigrants created *comunidad*: the civic associations, clubs, schools, businesses, and news media they established to address particular needs. Prieto tells us that Cubans became the dominant economic and political voice in this multiethnic city –and they have maintained this visibility in recent years even as they lose their numerical majority. In chapter 4, Prieto focuses on the role of women in relation to family and work, expanding on her earlier gender studies of this community. Chapter 5 examines the role of the Catholic Church, in particular the key role of St. Augustine Parish, in assisting Cuban immigrants to navigate American bureaucracies and equally important, to reevaluate their relationship to the homeland. Chapter 6 examines the political life of this community. While many of the most controversial anti-Castro organizations emerged in or established a popular and financial base in New Jersey, Union City was also home to some of the key voices in the pro-*diálogo* movement. Unlike their compatriots in south Florida, however, Union City Cubans have always voted disproportionately Democratic, and even their anti-Castro positions are articulated within the Democratic party. Finally, in chapter 7, Prieto offers some concluding considerations regarding Cuban assimilation or integration to the United States.

*The Cubans of Union City* is a highly readable and engaging study appropriate for undergraduate and graduate courses in immigration, Latino studies, and local history. It is sure to inspire a new generation of scholars to examine other understudied aspects of Cuban migration.

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