## Chapter 13 - The Cuban American Experience Onscreen

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For as long as there has been “media,” as we use the term today to refer primarily to audiovisual productions, Cubans have been present in it and been part of its imaginary. The first such audiovisual medium was the cinema, and Cuba played an integral role in its growth since 1895, year of the “birth” of cinema and the year of the Spanish American War, in which the US intervened in Cuba’s long-standing struggles for independence from Spain (since 1868).

### Historical Background

The US and Cuba have always had relations, given the island’s proximity (90 miles from Key West, Florida). There has always been traffic between the countries, especially given that Cuba was the center point of global trade in the colonial period, triangulated between Spain, Britain, and the US. After the Louisiana Purchase of 1819, Louisiana and Florida became provinces of the Captaincy General of Cuba and there was much traveling and immigration. That immigration became more significant after 1869, during the first Cuban wars of independence from Spain, when many tobacco growers settled in Key West and Tampa and established the latter’s tobacco industry. Later, many who were involved in the struggles for independence also moved to the US to gain support, most notably, José Martí. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century there was a lot of travel between the two countries and some immigration, dependent on economic factors and Cuban politics. Cuban immigration to the US became an exodus only after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, especially after Fidel Castro’s government aligned itself with the Soviet Union and introduced communism, and the US broke off diplomatic relations with the island and put in place a crippling trade embargo, engaged in an invasion, and invested in other measures to destabilize the Cuban government.

There have been several waves of immigration to the US from Cuba since then. During the first, moneyed elites and allies of the deposed dictator Fulgencio Batista, followed their interests. Then, parents frightened about the state’s expanding powers over all citizens, collaborated with Operation Peter Pan, in which more than 14,000 unaccompanied minors were sent to the US and resettled in Miami, first, but subsequently all over the country in orphanages and foster homes. Many of these children’s white upper/middle-class families also managed to immigrate to the to the US through “**Freedom Flights**” (twice-daily flights operated though an agreement between the US and Cuban governments that brought about 300,000 refugees to the US between 1965 and 1973) or through third countries. The best-known exodus, however, was the one that occurred through the Port of Mariel in 1980, known as the **Mariel Boatlift**. Approximately 125,000 Cubans reached the US in privately chartered boats that had sailed from Florida and were settled in camps in the US. Many remained in the Miami areas and became known as “marielitos.” The marielitos were noticeably different from the prior Cuban exiles: less educated, less affluent, less “white,” more male, more homosexual and many with prior criminal and or mental health backgrounds. This was because many were leaving Cuba due to extreme poverty rather than ideological differences, and because Castro expelled many people considered “undesirable” during the temporary lifting of the ban on leaving Cuba without government permission. The term marielito became a term of opprobrium and was eventually linked to the growth of the drug trade in the region in the 1990s. Subsequent exoduses such as the 1994 **balsero crisis** triggered by the collapse of Cuba’s economy in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, the island’s main trading partner, were less impactful. The crisis did lead to the US implementing the “**wet foot-dry foot policy**” that granted Cuban immigrants the right to stay in the United States if they made it to US soil. If they were intercepted at sea, they would be turned back. Although it placed limitations on the **Cuban Adjustment Act**, a 1966 law that granted permanent residency to any Cuban who had lived in the US for a year or more, the “wet foot, dry foot policy,” which remained in place until 2017, gave Cubans a privileged status in the US in comparison to other immigrants from Latin America. More than 1.3 million Cubans have immigrated to the US (the population of the island is roughly 11 million).

On December 17, 2014, US President Barack Obama (and President Raul Castro in Cuba) announced the start of a process of normalizing relations between Cuba and the U. S. which led to unprecedented exchanges, including the establishment of embassies in Havana and D.C. and Obama’s own visit to the island in 2016. In 2017 and beyond, President Donald Trump cancelled all the Obama openings towards Cuba and even imposed greater restrictions for economic and cultural relations between the two countries.

### Cuba and US Media

The earliest images of Cubans generated by US cameramen were of the Spanish American War of 1898. The Library of Congress has preserved and made available a rich repository of the work of these amazing cameramen who braved sea travel and perilous conditions to bring images of the ongoing struggle to their audiences back in the US, barely three years after the introduction of the medium as a mass spectacle (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/spanish-american-war-in-motion-pictures/about-this-collection/>) Granted, as well outlined in the literature about these images, a good number of them were what we would now call “fake news:” battle scenes staged in bathtubs with toy ships and tobacco smoke. But there was also much legitimate footage of the fighting and/or its aftermath (like the Battle of San Juan Hill) and of Cubans surviving in unimaginable conditions (many of the opposers of Spain had been sequestered in concentration camps).

<Fig. 13.1 here> *Pack mules with Ammunition in Santiago de Cuba, 1898.*

These are not only the first motion picture images of a war, but they are also the first motion picture images of Cuba and Cubans to enter the US imaginary. Alongside these motion pictures, photographers for the major US newspapers (and the Yellow Press) also captured thousands of pictures of the island and its freedom fighters before and during the war. These widely circulated images played a major role in drumming up popular sentiment for the US intervention and its subsequent protectorate over the island.

Cuba did not feature very prominently in Hollywood cinema in the silent period although many Americans became very familiar with Cuba during Prohibition (1920-1933). After the **Volsted Act** banned the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcohol, US distillers, bar owners, bartenders, customers, and smugglers flocked to the island, especially to Havana, which quickly became a mecca for tourists looking for “fun.” *Havana Widows* (1933), for example, features two burlesque dancers who flee to Havana to find millionaires to fleece for money. With the fascination with ‘exotic’ musical rhythms that followed the coming of sound (1927-9), “fun” in Cuba was often featured in Hollywood musicals like *Weekend in Havana* (1941), in which a Macy’s shop girl achieves her dream of a Cuban holiday, and *Holiday in Havana* (1949), which featured Desi Arnaz as a hotel busboy dreaming of becoming a musician.

Desi Arnaz was, in fact, the first and most successful Cuban American star of the era. He had been the leader of a very successful band in New York City, with which he introduced the concept of conga line dancing and had already appeared in several Hollywood musicals when he and his wife, the actress Lucille Ball, established Desilu Productions in 1950 and secured a deal with CBS for a television sitcom: *I Love Lucy* premiered on CBS in October 1951. *I Love Lucy* was a pioneering TV program: the first to be filmed in front of live audiences, using multiple camera set-ups, and filmed in 35mm to allow stations around the country to offer high quality broadcasts. It was also the first television program to feature a successful Cuban American (or any Latino, for that matter) and, above all, one happily married to an American white woman (redheaded to boot). The norm in Hollywood cinema was, basically, that the Latino man never got to remain with the white girl. Yet here we had a Cuban American successful musician who always managed to outwit his wife’s slapstick’s antics and come out “right.” He was, after all, the “I” of *I Love Lucy*.

The huge cultural impact of “Ricky Ricardo’s” persona was evidenced in Oscar Hijuelos’ Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Mambo Kings Sing Songs of Love* (1989) that invokes Ricky Ricardo, *I Love Lucy*, and Desi Arnaz himself (Desi Arnaz, Jr. plays Ricky Ricardo in the film version of the novel) as *the* central cultural icons of New York’s Latino community in the first half of the 1950s.The novel’s recreation of a “real” episode of *I Love Lucy –*in which the Castillo brothers appear on the program as Ricky’s Cuban cousins—restructures the program’s ethnic and gender relationships in a revealing way. The episode makes use of the Cuban-ness of the Castillo brothers and their relationship with Ricky (defined through their shared ethnicity and musicality) to displace Lucy’s antics –making it impossible for her to undermine what has been understood as Ricky’s ethnic power. Framed by an iconic television screen from the 1950s, the clips of the program are a hit with the “real” Latino community gathered in the living room to watch the show together. This audience, like the one in the studio, laughs at the jokes, but takes delight when the Castillo brothers repeatedly say “No hablamos ingles” (“We don’t speak English”). What is even more significant is how *Mambo Kings* places *I Love Lucy* at the dramatic climax of the novel’s nostalgic and historically imperfect narration of the origins of the construction of Cuban-American identity. In so doing, the novel and film affirm and confirm the power of televised images and stories in the construction of the history of our ethnic past.

### After the 1959 Revolution

After the mass exodus from the island motivated by the Cuban Revolution of 1959, mediated Cuban Americaness began to shift away from rhythm, dancing and comedy towards politics and the immigrant experience. The media at large was filled with images of the arrival of exiles in the 1960’s, all coded as political exiles, not immigrants. In fact, many were indeed involved in the failed US-backed **Bay of Pigs** invasion (April 17, 1961). After the Missile Crisis in October-November 1962 (the Soviet Union had placed missiles in Cuba that were pointed at the US) also failed to motivate the US to invade the island or to intervene militarily in Cuban affairs, a steady exodus continued though the 1960s and 70s, especially through the Freedom Flights.

### El Super (1979)

On a frigid New York City morning during the notoriously snowy winter of 1978, the protagonist of *El Super*, Roberto, harshly awakens in his basement apartment to the sound of the pipes clanging and tenants clamoring for the boiler to be turned on. Roberto (Raymundo Hidalgo-Gato) is the Cuban exile superintendent (“el super”) of a building in Washington Heights, where he lives with wife Aurelia (soap-opera star Zully Montero) and teenage daughter Aurelita (Elizabeth Peña in her first movie role). After ten years in exile, Roberto has trouble believing in the possibility of a mythical return to the island and even more difficulty dealing with the dreariness of the tenants’ unending demands and the harshness of winter. His wife, Aurelia, is still psychologically in Cuba, while daughter Aurelita has moved away from the “Cuban way” and seems to be fully embracing the American teen life of late 1970s New York (marijuana, sex, and disco dancing).

<Fig. 13.2 here> *Roberto and Aurelia in their basement apartment kitchen reminiscing about Cuba as the Americanized Aurelita looks on in* El Super*.*

Produced on a shoestring ($20,000) with a mostly volunteer cast and crew, director Leon Ichaso’s *El Super* remains, more than forty years after its release in 1979, the most poignant filmic articulation of the Cuban exile life as it became a permanent state. Stylistically as deceptively simple as the Cuban American lives it chronicles, *El Super* deploys a transparent style of editing, but evidences a tremendous visual sensibility via its careful use of framing, a realistic but symbolically charged mise-en-scène (the close-ups of the flaming boiler, the calendar with the Virgen de la Caridad on the wall, and the small altar to Santa Barbara, for example), and its measured cinematography. After the claustrophobia and humor of the action set in the basement apartment, Roberto’s forays into the frigid streets of New York, replete with plowed snowbanks at every corner and mounds of garbage in front of every building, are carefully framed and filmed. Rather than represent moments of openness or freedom, the figure of Roberto in his tightly buttoned heavy coat and ear-flapped cap surrounded by snow and the oppressively gray skies remains visually as downtrodden as when he is inside.

<Fig. 13.3 here> *Roberto surrounded by grayness and snow in* El Super*.*

What makes *El Super* unusual, is how it framed the Cuban exile experience. Most of the films produced by “first-generation” Cuban exile filmmakers such as Orlando Jiménez Leal and Néstor Almendros (for example, *The Other Cuba* [1983] and *Improper Conduct* [1984]) were documentaries that mythologized prerevolutionary Cuba in order to differentiate it from the revolutionary present of the island and make sense of their exile. Although *El Super* precedes these documentaries, it explicitly eschews their self-justificatory work of denunciation. It is a film of exile longing and displacement. In the years spent “cleaning stairs, picking up garbage, and shoveling snow,” Roberto has come to recognize that the reality of exile is far more tragic than the simple act of leaving to escape an allegedly impossible and frustrating situation and/or to make a political statement. Leaving means losing a way of life and one’s moorings and passions, and the exile’s life is one of loss and anxiety. No matter how hard he tries to invoke “Cuba,” Roberto’s home is now the dreary basement, the grim reality of a blustery New York winter, and his increasingly Americanized daughter who blasts the radio even though he “can’t stand English first thing in the morning.” The genius of *El Super*, however, is that it presents this pathos without melodramatic grandiosity. Rather, its gently humorous rendering of Cuban exile angst operates to demystify a community that all too often had been characterized exclusively by its sociopolitical positions.

### From Exiles to Cuban Americans

Almost at the same time as *El Super*, ¿*Que Pasa USA?*, the first bilingual situation comedy on US television began to air on PBS stations around the country circa 1977-79 (it was produced by WPBT, the Miami-South Florida Public Broadcasting station, and had aired in Florida since 1975). ¿*Que Pasa, USA?* shifted registers: rather than exiles, we are presented with a truly Cuban American family. The show explores the challenges faced by the three generations of the Cuban American Peña family as they deal with their new lives in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami, in a new country and in a new language. It was originally imagined as an avenue to help Cuban American teenagers navigate their Cubanness and Americanness. The program was funded by the US Office of Education Emergency School Assistance Act-Television Program (ESAA-TV), whose goal was to promote educational television programming to promotive positive racial attitudes in children and their programs were designed to attract specific ethnic groups. It was in place from 1972 to 1982 (Rivero). The show had very high production values and eventually reached a much broader heterogeneous national audience (Rivero). The working-class bilingual Peña family included the teenagers Joe (born in Cuba) and Carmen (born in Miami), their Cuban parents, Pepe and Juana, and their grandparents, Adela and Antonio. As fitting for the situation comedy genre, each episode featured order, confusion, and the restoration of order for the most part associated with Joe and Carmen’s negotiations between their Cuban and American identities, Pepe and Juana’s efforts to balance their home environment between Cubanness and US educational values, and Adela and Antonio’s inability to find a space in their new foreign and English-based environment. In its five-year run, the show broached a variety of significant themes that included but also exceeded the concerns of the Cuban American experience such as racial and ethnic prejudices, homophobia and feminism and the then new equal opportunity programs.

<Fig. 13.4 here> *Opening credits for* ¿Que Pasa USA?

Not unlike *El Super*, ¿*Que pasa, USA?* also challenged the discourse of the exile community as upper-middle class, strongly politicized and Cuba-centric. The Peña’s were resolutely working class, uninterested in Cuban politics and doing their best to gracefully assimilate into the US mainstream. The show also demystified the dream of a return to Cuba (i.e., the overthrow of the Castro government): in the universe of ¿*Que pasa USA?*, Cuba is only the remembered nostalgic homeland (especially invoked by the grandparents), but the US is the present and the Peña’s new home. However, unlike *El Super* which featured all Spanish dialogues and was subtitled for its release, ¿*Que pasa USA?* was completely bilingual (app. 60% English-40% Spanish) and without subtitles, which led to some interesting audience reactions: English monolingual audiences could understand the narrative and main points but would miss the jokes (often delivered in Spanish by the grandparents) which triggered the laughter of the bilingual live in-studio audience. ¿*Que pasa USA?* was an early and successful example of diasporic mass media that addressed the objective of transforming Cuban exiles into US immigrants. And it was the media representation of what has come to be called the 1.5 generation, in between Cubanness and Americanness, as theorized by Gustavo Pérez Firmat (*The Cuban Condition* and*Life on the Hyphen*).

### Mariel and Beyond

The two significant exoduses of the 1980s and 1990s – the Mariel Boatlift of 1980 and the balsero crisis of 1994 – changed the face of Cuban exiles and Americans in the media through the 1990s. Mainstream media constantly circulated images and videos of desperate immigrants hanging off the sides of extraordinarily overcrowded vessels as they made their way across the Florida straits and followed them with another barrage of audio-visual material about the “Tent Cities” and relocation centers that were created in Miami and, later, elsewhere (Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Puerto Rico) to accommodate the refugees for processing. The latter were reserved primarily for “hard to sponsor” refugees who had criminal records and/or documented mental health issues. After some well documented riots in the tent cities and relocation centers, the perception and popular belief was that the marielitos were spreading crime and moral turpitude (many were explicitly homosexual), especially throughout South Florida. The Mariel migration, highly stigmatized and vilified, challenged the image of Cuban American success in the US national imaginary.

Brian De Palma’s *Scarface* (1983) a remake of Howard Hawk’s gangster classic of 1932, picked up on this popular perception and substituted marielitos for the Italian gangsters of the original. Starring Al Pacino as the penniless marielito Tony Montana who eventually becomes a powerful drug lord in Miami, the film was initially criticized for its explicit violence and drug usage but has gone on to become a cult classic and has been considered among the best gangster movies ever made. Nevertheless, its depiction of marielitos contributed to a national moral crisis about these Cubans immigrants, irrespective of social and demographic status.

By 1995, the tone had shifted to comedy. In *The Perez Family* (1995, directed by Mira Nair), a male and female who happen to share the last name Perez are assumed to be a family unit by an immigration official upon their arrival at Mariel. Juan Raul Perez is a former aristocrat who was thrown into jail for burning his cane fields rather than handing them over to the government. Fresh from prison, all he wants is to reunite with his wife Carmela, who’s been in Miami for the past 20 years. Two decades younger than Juan, Dottie Perez is a farm worker and occasional prostitute who dreams of rock and roll and wants to sleep with John Wayne. When she discovers that it is easier to find American sponsors as a family than as singles, she convinces Juan to go along with the farce since he is so eager to reunite with Carmela. Ultimately, the film is much more about the vagaries (and humor) of immigration than it is about the Cuban American experience per se, undoubtedly also a result of the casting of non-Cubans/non-Latinos in all the principal roles.

### Self-Representations

In the 1980s and through the 1990s, we also begin to see Cuban Americans engaging more pointedly with media to represent their own experiences, particularly in the realms of experimental cinema and performance art (López). Miñuca Villaverde, for example, developed a small but significant body of experimental films that were at once formally innovative, in dialogue with the filmic avant garde, and very much inflected by her Cubanness and migration. Villaverde had already been involved in filmmaking in Cuba (alongside her husband Franciso Villaverde, who briefly worked for the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC, Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industrias Cinematográficas), but became involved with the New York avant garde scene in the 1970s. Beyond her experimental short films of the 1970s, Villaverde also produced one of the most incisive and formally interesting documentaries about the Mariel exodus: *La ciudad de las carpas* (*Tent City*, 1980). Filmed with an old 16mm hand-cranked Bolex camera and with sound captured with a non-synchronous Nagra recorder, Villaverde‘s film is the fruit of her immersion in the world of a tent city that had been quickly erected for the refugees waiting to be processed (under the I-95 interstate in the heart of Miami). Because of her technical limitations, there is no synchronous sound in the film, but the juxtaposition of still images and recorded testimonies and songs are staggering in their simplicity and affectivity. The dislocation of sounds and images affords the characters and their daily lives a sense of privacy and dignity that is very unusual in the realm of documentaries about a poor marginalized and at-risk community.

<Fig. 13.5 here> *One of the witnesses in Miñuca Villaverde’s* Tent City*.*

Also in an avant-garde tradition, the work of Alina Troyano as the lesbian spitfire Carmelita Tropicana straddles performance art, theater and film. With her sister Ela Troyano directing, her *Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst is Your Waffen* (1994) introduced Tropicana as a Lower East side performance artist who is a political activist by day and a nightclub performer by night who straddles latinidades. Although Tropicana is very Cuban, she is also very Latinx and the film tackles stereotypes across the ethnic paradigm and genres like the musical and the telenovela with brilliant ease. But her work does point to an interesting phenomenon: the gradual blending of Cuban Americanness with other Latinx ethnicities.

### The 21st Century: Nostalgia, Music, Returns and Assimilations

Wim Wenders’ documentary *Buena Vista Social Club* in 1999 ushered in a nostalgia that became the norm for the representation of Cuba and Cubans and a defining characteristic of Cuban Americanness in the 21st century. First there was the 1997 album produced by Ry Cooder featuring a group of veteran Afro-Cuban musicians devoted to preserving the music of pre-Revolutionary Cuba (boleros, danzones and sones) which became an international best-seller. Wim Wenders’ film ostensibly “documents” (after the fact) how Ry Cooder, his longtime friend, organized the musicians and arranged for the recording of the album and the group’s two subsequent shows (in Amsterdam and in New York’s Carnegie City Hall) and their trip abroad. There were a lot of misconceptions involved in the framing of the *Buena Vista* narrative for international consumption. In fact, these musicians were far from forgotten (several were simply retired, others, like Omara Portuondo, had never stopped performing) and these popular rhythms had never stopped being played and happily consumed by Cuban audiences. Through Wenders’ exquisite cinematography, however, the image of a city in ruins yet peopled by extraordinarily attractive and talented older citizens became the leitmotif of US representations of Cuba ever since. The metaphor of a country frozen in time and the extraordinary beauty of Havana’s ruins have taken over how the US thinks of Cuba today: just think old cars, sexy dark-skinned women, beaches and ruined structures.

Beyond the centrality of ruins, music and nostalgia continue to be central threads for how media portrays Cubans and Cuban Americans. The ethos to recapture what must surely have been a glorious past and to wallow in its present ruin has been a constant in many US media representations of Cuba that range from the independent – for example, *Habana: El arte nuevo de hacer ruina*s (2006)– to the mainstream like the series *Celia* (2015-16; aired on Netflix), which chronicles the life of the talented singer Celia Cruz, from her humble beginnings in Cuba to super stardom in the US, all framed in prototypical melodramatic biopic style.

However, the representation of Cuban Americans took a major leap with *One Day at a Time* (*ODatT*, Netflix 2017—2020). A remake of Norman Lear’s very successful sitcom that aired on CBS in the 70s and 80s, this version is centered on a Cuban American family living in Echo Park in Los Angeles and negotiating contemporary social and political issues -- sexuality, queerness, racism, sexual consent, mental health, and the struggles of veterans. With oversight from Lear himself, Executive Producers Gloria Calderon Kellett (herself Cuban American) and Mike Royce put together a stellar cast that included Rita Moreno (*West Side Story*) as Lydia, a sassy grandmother; Justina Machado as Penelope, a newly divorced former military nurse and mother; Isabella Gomez as Elena, the teenage daughter; and Marcel Ruiz as Alex, the tween son. The role of Schneider, their friend and landlord, is a carryover from the original show and played by Todd Grinnell. Like the original the show was shot with multiple cameras in front of a live audience, which enhances its nostalgic feel, yet *ODatT* is resolutely a 21st century media artifact with story lines that continue throughout the seasons to shape the serial as a coherent narrative. Thus, for example, season one follows the preparations for Elena’s *quinceañera*, during which she must contend with her own desires and sexuality and her mother and grandmother’s cultural expectations. Furthermore, although the *ODatT* is bilingual, it is subtitled/dubbed as is typical of Netflix shows, thus eliminating the zones of incomprehension of a program like ¿*Que Pasa, USA.?*. Finally, the show’s initial production and distribution by Netflix – and the lack of reliance on the selling of viewers to advertisers of typical network television, enabled the producers and writers to take unusual steps for their representation of the Latinx family. Although this is a Latinx family and there is a certain reliance on typical Latinx media stereotypes, it is very much a Cuban American one with an unusual level of cultural and historical specificity that producer Calderon Kellett hoped would “resonate” with Latinx and other audiences in general (Del Rio and Moran, 8).

One of the most striking aspects of *ODatT* is its focus on sexuality in Season 1. Latinx women have historically always been represented as overly sexualized, often pitting the hypersexual young woman against an asexual maternal figure, but *ODatT* develops a complex multi-generational array of sexualities that shatters that narrative device. All the three principal female characters are in a process of transition: Grandmother Lydia is recently widowed, Penelope is recently divorced, and Elena is discovering her sexuality. However, each of these characters sit ambiguously on the stereotype: Lydia, a former entertainer in Cuba, is very sexualized, but as the grandmother her sexuality is normalized through her memories of her deceased husband and serves as a moral signpost for her family; Penelope is “sexy,” but reluctant to date and struggling as a single mother; finally, Elena is an active feminist engaged in an exploration of her sexuality and sexual identity that leads her to come out as queer in Season One. Thus the show spreads out the complexities of sexual identity among the characters and establishes multiple points of identification.

The show’s treatment of immigration is similarly complex and polyvocal. Lydia’s immigration to the US from Cuba frames the family’s identity and points to the challenges of sustaining Cuban Americanness across generations. But it also allows the show to speak to immigration more generally as it stages multiple immigration stories (that of Elena’s friend Carmen, a Mexican immigrant, and that of Schneider, a Canadian, for example) and highlights the inconsistencies of US anti-immigrant policies (See Season One, Episode 5).

<Fig. 13.6 here> *Penelope learns from Elena that her friend Carmen’s parents have been deported and Carmen has no place to go in* One Day at a Time*.*

Simultaneously Latinx and Cuban American, *ODatT* highlights a process of assimilation that is decades long and that continues to mark the Cuban American experience and its representation in the media without losing or magnifying the specificity of Cuban American experiences.

The most recent socio-political conflicts in the island (massive popular protests on July 11, 2021 that led to extreme governmental repression) have produced a barrage of representations of Cubans in and out of the island unlike anything we had experienced since the Mariel exodus. Social media in general (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) have been overwhelmed by posts from both sides of the Florida Straits establishing often acrimonious political debates. It is only a matter of time before we see these new developments emerge in both documentary and fictional forms across mainstream media.

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### For Further Study

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