

“PERO TU NO ERES CUBANA”: NORTHERN HAVANA AND THE OTHER
MIAMI(S)

IN JOAN DIDION’S *MIAMI* AND TOM WOLFE’S *BACK TO BLOOD*

By

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To my hometown Miami,

With love.

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The title of this paper is taken from an experience I had with my Abuela when I was younger. I had entered her house and greeted her jokingly with “que bola, acede?,” a greeting usually attributed to Cuban-Americans that translates roughly to “what’s up, bro?” My Abuela, who migrated from Nicaragua to the US in the 1970s, was scandalized and replied hastily and with no little condescension, “Miami se ha convertido a Havana, pero *tu* no eres Cubana!” (Miami has become Havana but *you* are not Cuban). Her tone implied that there was something discernible and wrong with being or behaving like a Cuban-American, or more aptly, what she considered the way a person of Cuban-American heritage might speak. While working through this paper, this brief exchange emerged as a telling example of Miami, Florida, as a site of cross-cultural interaction and conflict. This conflict is reiterated throughout Tom Wolfe’s 2012 novel *Back to Blood* and Joan Didion’s 1987 genre-bending *Miami* as both authors attempt to encapsulate the interactions and tensions within and among the cultural enclaves in the tropical metropolis.

My Abuela echoes Didion and Wolfe in her choice to call Miami Havana, based on the large population of Cuban-Americans living in south Florida. Didion and Wolfe are specifically interested in how certain Cuban-Americans have come to **control** Miami economically, politically and culturally. Didion conducts a quasi-sociological examination of post-1980 Miami, focusing primarily on the influx of Cuban refugees between the early 1960s (after Fidel Castro’s rise to power) and 1980 (during the Mariel Boatlift). Tom Wolfe’s novel follows various characters and their interactions in a highly criminalized and hyper-sexualized Miami. Both texts, despite their various idiosyncrasies, address the conflicts and shifts in Miami as a result of substantial waves

of migration, including Anglo-Americans moving out of Miami, in their efforts to characterize the city as definitively non-American and more specifically, Cuban.

I focus on Didion's and Wolfe's selective representation of groups of immigrants, particularly Cuban-Americans and Haitian-Americans, as these representations speak to how and why Cuban-American hegemony has been established in Miami. I argue that the socio-economic privileges granted to certain Cuban exiles, which both Didion and Wolfe observe, are related to anti-Communist sentiments and racial hierarchies that have been firmly instantiated in the US and subsequently have influenced the treatment of those seeking asylum. I term the selective privileging of Cuban-Americans *selective Cuban-American favoritism*. This idea will serve as a lens through which I examine Didion and Wolfe's depictions of racial and social differences within the Cuban-American communities of Miami.

My use of the concept of selective Cuban-American favoritism will be twofold: 1) use this term to show that international interactions have influenced the advantages granted to all Cubans attempting to enter the US. Cubans were universally granted asylum, while Haitian refugees fleeing Francois Duvalier were almost universally repatriated. Racial differences among Cubans did not strongly impact who was allowed to enter, though these differences did influence who was able to leave Cuba and how they were received in Miami. 2) I show that the Cuban exiles, predominantly white males, who arrived in Miami immediately after Castro rose to power (particularly those who arrived between 1961 and 1973) were favorably treated when compared to other immigrant groups *and* later waves of Cuban refugees. I interrogate widely-circulated

narratives of successful Cuban-American assimilation and reveal that such narratives are contingent on the coding of “successful Cuban refugee” as white and male.¹

This model, in which all Cubans are granted asylum in Miami but few are assisted in their financial successes, shows that racial differences within Cuban immigrant groups are both elided and made crucial, revealing the complexity with which immigration is addressed and represented nationally and locally. A comparison between different immigrant groups and a comparison between different waves of Cuban migration into Miami provides a more nuanced view of race and ethnicity in discourses of migration to the US.

These migrations are policed by implementations in US immigration policy and border patrol. Selective policing impacts US spaces, particularly large cities, as it dictates the kind of diversity allowed to flourish in these spaces. Such policing allows spaces like Miami to be transformed while simultaneously setting limits on these transformations. An examination of this limited diversity might help to answer important and relevant questions as to how “old” US racial ideologies (i.e., white hegemony) come to be reconstituted in “new” ideologies of multiculturalism and diversity. Both ideologies are particularly relevant to the Miami “melting pot” as it is continuously reshaped by immigration.²

WHOSE SOUTH? : DISCIPLINARY AND GEO-SPATIAL DELINEATIONS

I have chosen to focus on Miami because of its unique positionality as “a global city” located in the US South. Sheila L. Croucher links Miami’s globality to its diversity, noting that the city’s “international commerce...and demographic makeup” have resulted

in its characterization as a “City of the Future” (Croucher 234). An image of Miami as a diverse, commercial, modern metropolis might be opposed to the “static” and “backward” US South (Duck 8-9). Indeed, Croucher notes that during the 1994 Summit of the Americas, several Cuban-Americans “took the opportunity to recount the wonder of Miami’s transition from a southern backwater to a ‘city of the future’ and to emphasize the part they played in the process” (Croucher 243). Even preceding Cuban immigration, Miami has historically been exempted from the South because the land was not suitable for early colonial agriculture and as such, Miami did not share the Deep South’s plantation culture (Staubach 32). More recently, as Croucher suggests, Miami has become commercially global as a result of the movement of capital, but demographically Caribbean as a result of the movement of bodies, particularly the movement of Cuban exiles into Miami.

My point in calling attention to US Southernness, globality, and Caribbeanness in Miami is to foreground my engagement with the ambiguities and complexities Didion and Wolfe navigate in their respective works. Unlike Croucher, Didion and Wolfe would likely be hesitant to entirely reject Miami’s Southernness. Both authors observe Miami as a diverse space that has been transformed by immigration, but also as a rigidly segregated, racist city not radically dissimilar from the “backwaters” in the Deep South. For example, while both Didion and Wolfe remark on the cultural mixture of Miami, they also call attention to the neighborhood delineations of the city, focusing on predominantly black areas like Little Haiti, Liberty City, and Overtown. Through their examination of these neighborhoods, Didion and Wolfe highlight the impact racial segregation had on Miami’s geo-spatial organization (I address this point in more detail

below). Their depictions of Miami demonstrate that structural racism continues to shape US spaces, even those that have been described as “non-American” (Didion 23).

Didion and Wolfe’s choice to read Miami as an ambivalent space, one that is both diverse and racist at the same time, suggests that characteristics of US Southernness are observable in non-Southern regions. Leigh Anne Duck expresses a similar sentiment, asserting that throughout the 19th and 20th century “southern racial practices corresponded, rather than conflicted with those of the larger nation” (Duck 7). Duck suggests that US racial ideologies are hyperbolized and displaced onto the US South and that these “anachronistic cultural forms” are in fact reconstituted in many US spaces, be they the US North, or metropolitan hubs like Miami (Duck 7).³

An examination of Miami also challenges disciplinary delineations, particularly between Southern and Caribbean Studies. A recent effort was made to include Miami in studies of the US South and the Caribbean in *Look Away! : The US South in New World Studies*.⁴ Editors Deborah Cohn and Jon Smith assert that scholars should examine the US South not as a monolithic space, “but as a scene of the cultural conflicts that white imaginings of community seek to forget, as a . . . postplantation realm still dealing with the legacy of race slavery” (Cohn and Smith 6).⁵ While Cohn and Smith suggest that “we redirect the critical gaze of southern studies *outward*, away from the nativist navel-gazing that has kept mainstream southern studies methodologically so far behind American studies,” I posit instead that we trace movements *inward*, following the paths traveled into different US spaces, especially those in the US American South (Cohn and Smith 13). Such an inversion of Cohn and Smith’s methodology would provide a more

inclusive, comprehensive and rejuvenated lens through which the US South can be examined.

Inhabitants of Miami, particularly those who have made these inward movements, straddle multiple cultural, social and racial ideologies. This straddling renders the city a rimland, or a site of contact and convergence. Though Ian Smart uses the term “Caribbean rimland” to describe the shared plantation structures of Caribbean and Central American regions, his interest in the dispersal of peoples and culture makes his idea quite relevant to my effort to categorize Miami. As Smart writes, “just as there have been constant lines of communication among the peoples of all the islands over the five centuries of their colonial and neocolonial existence, there have been similar continuing contacts among the islands and the rimlands” (Smart 9). Smart does not endeavor to characterize the coastal regions of countries like Mexico or Guatemala as exclusively Central-American or Caribbean. Instead, he aims to reveal the degree to which these lines of communication and various movements have transformed both regions. In Miami, these lines of communication have been strengthened in the wake of the physical movements of émigrés and refugees from Central American, South American, and Caribbean countries.

Both Didion and Wolfe explore Miami as an in-between city and demonstrate that at any moment it can either affirm or subvert ideas of US Southernness and multicultural fluidity. Further, they suggest that the rest of the US can learn important lessons from Miami. As a reviewer of *Back to Blood* notes, in the novel Wolfe explores “class, family, wealth, race, crime, sex, corruption and ambition in Miami, the city where America’s

future has arrived first” (Trachtenberg). This review is equally relevant for Didion’s *Miami* as both texts set the city as a precedent for current US politics and concerns.

THE 80S, 90S AND TODAY: DIDION’S AND WOLFE’S LITERARY GENEALOGY

The publication dates of both texts construct a kind of literary genealogy in which one can observe representations of Miami at very different cultural moments. Didion traveled to Miami in the years immediately following the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, while Wolfe would have been conducting research and writing about Miami well after three notable waves of Cuban immigration into Miami in the 20th century. The first wave included the émigrés known as the “Golden Exiles” who fled immediately after Fidel Castro took power, arriving between 1959 and 1973. In *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994*, María Cristina García provides an explanation for this moniker, writing that “Cubans of the upper class were the first to leave” (García 13). García continues, writing that these earlier arrivals would have been familiar with US culture and practices “because of the pervasive American economic and cultural presence in post-revolutionary Cuba” (García 15).⁶ While “golden” is linked to economic status, it may also be an implicit commentary on the racial makeup of this group as García notes the earliest arrivals (those who arrived between 1959 and 1962) were “disproportionately white and middle class,” suggesting that these exiles were “exemplary” in multiple categories (García xi).

Racial and economic factors along with international events informed the experiences of the “Golden Exiles.” García writes that President John F. Kennedy and his administration considered these exiles “victims of the Cold War and thus a national

responsibility” (García 22). These favored exiles, as Croucher notes, were welcomed by politicians as “freedom-loving refugees from a communist regime” and upon arrival “received an unprecedented aid package as well as widespread support from public officials, politicians, church groups and community organizations” (Croucher 240). In spite of this national response and the establishment of the Cuban Refugee Program in 1961, the Cuban exiles were not welcomed with open arms by *all* US citizens (García 43). García cites instances of local xenophobia and violence against Cuban exiles, concluding that while the Cuban exiles became a national responsibility, they were considered a local problem.⁷ In spite of the local mistreatment, the financial support granted to these exiles renders them the primary beneficiaries of selective Cuban-American favoritism.

The second wave of émigrés were not so hospitably received. They arrived during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift and were perceived as uneducated criminals. (I return to the establishment and effects of this reputation when addressing Didion’s depiction of the Miami settlement camps.) The third wave of émigrés, the *balseros*, traveled to Miami in makeshift boats and rafts during the 1990s. García observes that this wave peaked in 1994. These two later waves of immigration broadened the representation of Cuban class and racial groups in Miami: “with each wave...the migration became more representative of Cuban society, not just in socioeconomic status but also in race, ethnicity and geographic distribution” (García 1). These varying cultural markers merge and collide with highly pervasive US American ideologies of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status that are portrayed by both Didion and Wolfe in their respective works.

Like their texts, Didion and Wolfe also share many similarities. Neither Joan Didion nor Tom Wolfe is from Miami. This may speak to an outside and potentially voyeuristic Anglo-American gaze. This is not to suggest, however, that either author represents *the* definitive Anglo-American gaze, or that such a portrayal is possible. Rather, I mean to argue that these texts allow for an engagement with US immigration policy *and* a selective representation of immigrants in the US. Didion's earlier work reveals a similar investment in political strife and cultural conflict. Her book-length essay *Salvador* was published in 1983. In the essay, Didion explores the effect of US foreign policy on Salvadoran politics. Bruce Bawer compares *Miami* to *Salvador* and concludes that both stylistically and thematically, "*Miami* is a follow-up to *Salvador*" (Bawer 95). Didion's *Miami*, described on the back cover as "Current Affairs/Literature," marries her biased observations with statistics of immigration and politics in Miami.

Wolfe's work also reveals a career-long thematic investment. In *A Man in Full* (1998), as in *Back to Blood*, Wolfe explores conflict in a populous US city. His earlier novel is set in Atlanta and explores the real-estate market in what Martyn Bone describes as an "international" and "world-class" city (Bone 209). Like Wolfe's Miami in *Back to Blood*, his Atlanta challenges ideas of the Old South through his examination of international commercialization.⁸ In *Back to Blood*, Wolfe is equally interested in problematizing the South. He shows that much of the socio-cultural landscape in Miami has been informed by Southern racial ideologies that precede and exist alongside narratives of 20th century Cuban immigration.

In addition to the notable thematic overlap of their works, Didion and Wolfe have similar stylistic investments that likely stem from their shared interest in New Journalism

and literary journalism. Wolfe edited an anthology called *The New Journalism* and posited that “it is possible to write journalism that would...read like a novel” (Wolfe 1). In *Back to Blood*, Wolfe is very much interested in communicating facts through narrative as his characters personify broader cultural conflicts.⁹

These texts and their shared concerns, themes, and styles are especially relevant in the wake of the 2012 US presidential election. As the aforementioned reviewer of *Back to Blood* opines, Miami anticipated the contemporary US, or “divided nation,” that was described in the media coverage of the election (Page). Political strategist Mike Murphy declared that the Republican Party has a “Latino problem” that cost Republican nominee Mitt Romney the election (NBC). Murphy’s problematic assessment of the Republican Party’s failure to “get the Latino vote” speaks to this group’s recent political power and influence. Of course, these concerns have dominated politics in south Florida since at least the 1960s. This most recent election marked an important shift in Cuban-American voting in Miami as President Barack Obama received more support from the Cuban-American voters in his re-election than he did in 2008 (Tamayo). These shifts, and the concern expressed by strategists such as Murphy, reveal that immigration from Caribbean, Central-American, and South-American nations is as nationally relevant to the US today as it has been in Miami since the mid-20th century.

MIAMI’S MELTING NOT: CUBAN-AMERICAN HEGEMONY IN *BACK TO BLOOD* AND *MIAMI*

Didion was concerned with the influence Cuban immigration had on US national politics. She conducts a brief overview of documented responses to the newcomers, citing an unnamed *Miami Herald* writer who claimed that Miami Cubans were “role models for

a community determined to assimilate itself into ‘American society.’” Didion also references a speech given by George H.W. Bush in Miami on May 20, 1986. Bush concluded that Cuban-Americans in Miami are “the most eloquent testimony [he] [knew] to the basic strength and success of America, as well as to the basic weakness and failure of Communism and Fidel Castro” (Didion 60). Cuban exiles became symbols for the success of US democracy, opportunity, and generosity.

While Didion’s observations sometimes affirm Bush’s assessment of successful Cuban-American assimilation, Bush’s speech is interesting in its historical placement, considering the criminalization of the “Marielitos” who had arrived six years before. During the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, President Jimmy Carter granted asylum to approximately 125,000 Cuban refugees after Fidel Castro “announced that all who desired to leave Cuba would be permitted to do so...from the port of Mariel” (García 46). Carter soon discovered that Castro had strategically included Cubans from prisons and mental asylums on the boats headed for south Florida. Addressing Castro’s manipulation of the US during the Mariel Boatlift, Didion writes “many see it as ‘the trick,’ the way in which Fidel Castro managed to take his own problem and make it Miami’s” (Didion 42). Implicit in Didion’s wording is that, while the narrative of successful assimilation of Cuban refugees is a national point of pride, Castro’s ability to trick the Carter administration becomes a problem that is displaced onto and contained in Miami. The split between US national and Miami local politics relates to a tendency in *Miami* and *Back to Blood* to set Miami apart from the rest of the US. In this instance, it served the national administration not to admit to being tricked by a communist leader.

The reading of the Marielitos as a “problem” is related to an increase in Miami crime upon their arrival. María Cristina García notes a sixty-six percent increase in crime in Miami in 1980, with “over a third of those convicted of murder [being] Mariel Cubans” (García 70). This criminal activity was most concentrated in the settlement camps that had been established for the émigrés in downtown Miami. García writes that though “the troublemakers were a small fraction of the camp population,” the media did not waste time characterizing this wave of Cuban refugees as criminal and dangerous (García 70). The criminalization of the Mariel Boatlift refugees may also be related to the demographic of the group. As García notes, “there were more blacks and mulattoes among them (from 15 to 40 percent, compared with 3 percent of the 1959-1973 migration)” (García 68). The 1980 émigrés were compared to the earlier arrivals to Miami and seen as darker, criminal, less affluent and less educated.

As Didion’s inclusion of Vice President Bush’s speech suggests, she focuses on the influence Cuban immigration had on the cultural makeup of Miami. Didion opens the text with “Havana vanities come to dust in Miami” (Didion 11). Didion’s choice to focus on Havana in her introduction and throughout the text omits the geographical diversity of those who left Cuba for south Florida. “Havana” and “Cuba” become synonymous:

The entire tone of the city, the way people looked and talked and met one another was Cuban. The very image the city had begun presenting of itself, what was then its newfound glamour, its “hotness” (hot colors, hot vice, shady dealings under the palm trees), was that of prerevolutionary Havana, as perceived by Americans. There was even in the way women dressed in Miami a definable Havana look, a more distinct emphasis on the hips and décolletage, more black, more veiling, a generalized flirtatiousness of style not then current in American cities (Didion 52).

Didion posits that Miami has transformed into a past, glamorized version of Havana. The glamour puts Miami fashionably ahead of other cities in the US and Didion suggests that

Cuban immigration eventually had a more widespread impact of US culture. Though Didion does not mention any visits or first-hand experiences in any part of Cuba, she attributes the new atmosphere of Miami to its connection to Cuba's capital. Didion's focus on Havana and the booming metropolis of Florida provides an example of how she neglects differences among Cubans in Miami. Indeed, by 1987, when Didion published *Miami*, the Cuban population would have been quite diverse, including people from the Cuban countryside who would have had different lifestyles than those coming from Havana. It is made clear that Didion is concerned with a particular group of Cuban immigrants, those who come from the bustling metropolis and were likely better educated and economically successful. While these descriptions explore the superficial changes Cuban immigration had on Miami, Didion outlines many more substantial changes the city underwent in the latter half of the 20th century.

To provide a thorough description of Miami, Didion makes clear that it is not like any other US city. She writes that Miami is

[n]ot exactly an American city as American cities have until recently been understood, but a tropical capital...referring not to New York or Boston...but to Caracas and Mexico, to Havana and to Bogotá and to Paris and Madrid. Of American cities Miami has since 1959 connected only to Washington, which is the peculiarity of both places and increasingly the warp (Didion 14).

Through the metonymic use of "Washington," Didion suggests that Miami connects to US politics and an international network, not to other US cities. The link Didion constructs between Washington and Miami suggests a line of thinking that informs the entirety of Didion's text, namely, that Cuban-Americans represent a political group, a vote that can potentially shape US politics. Didion continues to outline Miami's

alienation from other US spaces, suggesting that the racial and linguistic fluidity render its connection to Washington tenuous. She claims that each time she flew into Miami, she

experience[d] a certain weightlessness, the heightened wariness of having left the developed world for a more fluid atmosphere, one in which the native distrust of extreme possibilities that tended to ground the temperate United States in an obeisance to democratic institutions seemed rooted, if at all, only shallowly (Didion 23).

Didion suggests that “developed” US democracy is more firmly instantiated than Miami’s politics and atmosphere. While Didion’s use of fluidity is related to ethnic and racial diversity, it is also another marker of Didion’s exclusion of Miami from a US ideal. As she demonstrates throughout the text, much of this exclusion is based on a rejection of a traditionally racialized hierarchy in which Anglo-Americans dominate politically and exercise control over territory and resources.

Didion’s exclusion of Miami from the US is echoed in the prologue of Wolfe’s *Back to Blood*. Ed and Mac, a self-proclaimed “White Anglo-Saxon Protestant couple,” are rushing to a meeting at an expensive Miami restaurant when they encounter a typical big-city problem: finding a parking spot. Ed’s wife, Mac, is driving their small car, having just spotted an available spot, when a “Hispanic” woman swoops in and takes it. Mac is enraged and begins to spew insults as the woman looks on sardonically. The woman, who remains unnamed, reciprocates in Spanish and Mac screams “YOU’RE IN AMERICA NOW! SPEAK ENGLISH!” to which the unnamed woman replies, laughing, “You een Mee-ah-mee now!” (Wolfe 21-22). Mac reveals that she has a very particular conception of what “America” should mean and takes ownership of that concept. While Mac insists that folks should learn English to communicate in the US, the woman makes clear that Mac will not be accommodated in the socio-auditory atmosphere of Miami. The

unnamed woman's refusal to speak English marks Mac's loss of control and power, as she cannot even fight with someone who refuses to speak the same language. Implied in this metaphor for conflict over territory is that Miami is not part of the US.

Didion similarly observes a sentiment of ownership expressed by the Anglo-Americans she interacts with during her visits to Miami. Didion writes that

[t]his set of mind, in which the local Cuban community was seen as a civic challenge determinedly met, was not uncommon among Anglos to whom I talked in Miami, many of whom persisted in the related illusions that the city was small, manageable, prosperous in a predictable broad-based way, southern in a progressive sunbelt way, American and belonged to them (Didion 51).

The choice to view the growing local Cuban community as a "civic challenge" suggests that the Anglo-Americans consider themselves responsible for controlling the population of the city, along with its prosperity. Apart from this illusory control, Didion's Anglo-American interlocutors also express that Miami's Southernness was gradually transformed with the expansion and increasing diversity of the city. Though they observe the city as progressive, cultural diversity is still contingent on white hegemony, in spite of the fact that, as Didion implies, Miami now belongs to another group.

There exist, then, two conflicting understandings of Cuban immigration: first, it is an affirmation of US opportunity and a condemnation of communism, and second, on a more microscopic level, it is viewed as an invasion and overthrow. Indeed, after Mac's exchange with the Spanish-speaking woman, which Ed has been watching uncomfortably from the passenger seat, he notes, looking at his wife's "red" face, that she is "some last soul of a dying genus" (Wolfe 10). Didion's assessment of a loss of Anglo-American control and Wolfe's rhetoric of extinction might relate to trends of Anglo-American domestic migration out of Miami which William Booth of the *Washington Post*

investigated in 1998. Booth cites an interviewee who claimed to be heading to Weston, Florida because “it’s more like America” (Booth).¹⁰ Though Booth’s interviewee’s claim can be read any number of ways, most significantly, one can understand that “America” signifies as a white-dominated, English-speaking space in which European descended people maintain political and economic control.

An exchange between Dr. Norman Lewis and Magdalena in *Back to Blood* perfectly explains the unique hegemony found in Miami. Dr. Lewis, an Anglo-American psychologist observes that “Latinos run all of South Florida. They run it politically and they’ve got the most successful businesses, too. It doesn’t bother *me*.” Magdalena smartly replies, “Of course not...because you people run the whole rest of the country. You think South Florida is a tiny version of... Mexico or Colombia or someplace (Wolfe 251).¹¹ Lewis speaks directly to Latin-American dominance in Miami, both politically and economically, while Magdalena comments on the uniqueness of that form of dominance in the US. Magdalena suggests that should Dr. Lewis, a well-educated white man choose to leave Miami, he would not have trouble finding success in other parts of the country. Magdalena, a first-generation Cuban-American woman with limited access to higher education would unlikely encounter the same fortune. Reading Booth’s interview and Magdalena and Dr. Lewis’s exchange together highlights the socio-cultural factors that contributed to Miami’s “white flight.” The abandonment speaks to the disruptive effect rising immigrant populations had on a firmly entrenched white/black hierarchy traditionally attributed to US society.

The Manichean demarcation of cultural groups in the US is affirmed by Didion's discussion of predominantly black neighborhoods in Miami. She recounts the cautionary tales she was told while traveling around Miami, stating that

[o]n my first visit to Miami I was always being told that there were places I should not go...I should lock my car doors when I drove at night. If I hit a red light as I was about to enter I-95 I should not stop but look both ways and accelerate. *I should not drive through Liberty City, or walk around Overtown.* If I had occasion to drive through what is called '*the black Grove,*' those several dozen blocks of project housing which separated the expensive greenery of Coral Gables from the expensive greenery of Coconut Grove I should rethink my route (Didion 39; my emphasis).

Writing as a journalist and tourist, Didion is told specifically to avoid these predominantly black areas. It would appear, as she notes no instances of interaction with African-American Miamians living in these neighborhoods (or other parts of Miami), that she heeded this advice. What can be gleaned from the warnings Didion receives is that the "rich" and "poor" neighborhoods border each other and that the composition of these neighborhoods is largely determined by race. Tom Wolfe also makes reference to Miami's geospatial divisions, writing that "immediately to the west on the other side of Biscayne Boulevard were Little Haiti, Liberty City, Little River, Buena Vista, Brownsville...Nestor could imagine the Latins and the Anglos up here thanking God every day for Biscayne Boulevard, which fenced them off from the badlands" (Wolfe 382). The segregation and containment Wolfe addresses suggests that "problem populations," i.e., African-Americans and Haitian Americans are kept in their place (away from whites and Latins) by the geography of the city. Such a division is ambiguous, as it is unclear which side Afro-Latins would be expected to inhabit. It is however clear that though multiple groups are represented in the city, they are maintained

in particular areas. This representation of diversity counters an image of the city as a global melting pot and evokes instead the image of a partitioned tray where different groups exist within feet of each other but are separated by rigidly enforced divisions.

These divisions, both ideological and geographical, become especially relevant during times of conflict in Miami such as the 1980 riots. The riots, which occurred in Overtown and Liberty City, were a response to the acquittal of the police officers charged with beating Arthur McDuffie to death. The riots received widespread national attention and the media coverage reveals how race and ethnicity are depicted in discourses of power and law. McDuffie was African-American, and the police officers charged with his murder were Anglo-American and white Cuban men. Alex Marrero, a Cuban-American police officer, was charged with second-degree murder. Marrero is at times described as white and at other moments described as Cuban. White Cuban-American rapper Pitbull refers to the McDuffie case in the outro of his 2006 album *El Mariel* stating that, “Arthur McDuffie was...beaten to death by four white cops” (Pitbull), while scholar Patrice Gaines-Carter refers to Marrero as “Latin” or “Cuban” (Gaines-Carter 22;25). Whiteness and Cubanness are made distinct in these incomplete descriptions. Pitbull does not make reference to Marrero’s Cuban background and Gaines-Carter neglects the racial differences amongst Cubans.

How do we parse the tension between ideologies of “whiteness” and “Cubanness” in an American space? It is an important question to address in this instance of state violence, where power is attributed to white men who eventually became symbols of racialized police brutality. One way to address race **and** ethnicity might be to combine the terms to understand how power and resources are distributed in Miami. The

categories of “white” and “Cuban” are not exclusive; the use of either term should not foreclose the usage of other descriptors.

Didion discusses the McDuffie trial to characterize the tense atmosphere in Miami preceding the arrival of the Marielitos. She concludes that in 1980, Miami “was a city in which black people and white people viewed each other with discontent” (Didion 40).

Didion continues, outlining the impact the McDuffie trial and the Boatlift had on the African-American community:

The first Mariel refugees arrived in South Florida on April 21, 1980...by May 17, the day the McDuffie case went to the jury in Tampa, there were already some 57,000 Mariels camped under the bleachers at the Orange Bowl and in makeshift tent cities in the Orange Bowl parking area and on the public land under the I-95, downtown, in the most visible and frequently traveled part of the city, in case it had escaped anybody’s notice that the needs of the black community might not in the immediate future have Miami’s full-attention (Didion 42).

Didion suggests that the arrival of Cuban refugees rendered the African-American communities nearly invisible. The hyper-visibility of the Mariel refugees, camped out in the busiest business district in Miami, counters the image of the segregated and contained black communities. The redirected attention toward the recent Cuban immigrants is significant in examinations of the McDuffie trial as it suggests that both attention and power (state-sanctioned power in the case of Officer Marrero), were granted to Cuban immigrants and Cuban-Americans. This distribution of power undoubtedly led to tensions between Cuban-American officials and disenfranchised African-American Miamians.

Tom Wolfe references frictions between Cuban-American police officers and African-American citizens when one of his Cuban-American characters, Officer Nestor Camacho, speculates about his encounters with African-American Miamians while on the

job. He asks “And did the American blacks resent the Cuban cops, who might as well have dropped from the sky, they had materialized so suddenly, for the sole purpose of pushing black people around?” (Wolfe 63). For Nestor, white Cuban-Americans became another possibly oppressive force in the daily lives of African-Americans. Wolfe does not comment on Nestor’s race, but based on his discussion of African-Americans, one is led to assume that he is not black. Cuban, for Wolfe and Didion, becomes a description of race and ethnicity. As a result of this simplified reading of Cuban-Americans, the complexity of racial differences and the effects of these differences are lost.

Though both authors comment on Cuban-American hegemony in Miami, particularly over African-Americans, they also note tensions between Cuban immigrants and Anglo-Americans. Didion writes:

Miami Anglos and Miami Cubans were failing to connect: Miami Anglos were in fact interested in Cubans only to the extent that they could cast them as aspiring immigrants, ‘determined to assimilate,’ a ‘hard-working’ minority not different in kind from other groups of resident aliens...Anglos did not on the whole understand that assimilation would be considered by most Cubans a doubtful goal at best (Didion 90)

Didion continues noting that Cuban-Americans were viewed as “decorative”—sprinkles of “ethnic” flavor that should and would eventually become part of US mainstream culture (Didion 92). Didion’s observations suggest that Anglo-Americans felt entitled to determine how Cuban-Americans were allowed to contribute to Miami. While Cubans could assimilate into US business, according to the Anglo-Americans Didion talks with, they should do so by abandoning any markers of their Cuban heritage. Didion makes an important distinction between cultural and economic assimilation, noting that Cuban immigrants still spoke Spanish and cooked Cuban food (Didion 57). Didion argues that

this resistance to complete cultural assimilation led to conflicts between Anglo-Americans and Cubans living in Miami.

Tom Wolfe's character, Chief of Police Cyrus Booker, alludes to similar conflicts among Anglo-Americans and Cuban-Americans during a meeting with a largely white-Cuban committee. Chief Booker notes that "every Cuban in this room thought of himself as white. But that wasn't the way real white people thought of them" (Wolfe 425). Though the men Chief Booker observes have clearly been afforded some authority in Miami, the hierarchy in Miami is not representative of the broader US. Didion and Wolfe's portrayal of tensions between Anglo-Americans and white Cubans were likely exacerbated for different groups represented in the later waves of Cuban immigration.

Racial differences are especially important when considering employment opportunities for all populations in Miami. Didion writes, "with another disruption of the local status quo, the major Cuban influx meant that jobs and services which might have helped awaken an inchoate black community went instead to Cubans who tended to be overtrained but willing" (Didion 48). Didion asserts that there was a competition for jobs that Cubans often won, though such a competition may have been more complex for Afro-Cubans looking for employment during the 1980s. She reads the black community as necessarily apart from the Cuban immigrant population, making no reference to Afro-Cubans, Afro-Haitians or Afro-Jamaicans which might complicate her use of "black." In expounding on the social and financial successes of some Cuban-Americans, Didion asserts that "there were Cubans in the clubs that did not admit Jews or blacks, and four Cubans in the most recent mayoralty campaign" (Didion 52). Implied in this passage is that these successful Cuban-American men are white, as I doubt that a country club that

would refuse an African-American man would allow an Afro-Cuban man entrance.

Didion chooses to describe Cubans as a homogenous group, neglecting racial and class differences within the Cuban immigrant population in Miami.

Along with race, Didion gives no attention to other indicators of social status that may have impacted interactions within Cuban-American communities, such as gender religious practices, and place of birth. While these rigid delineations Didion depicts are useful in examining some conflicts and the distribution of resources in Miami, they also inhibit any overlap and a more nuanced understanding of race and ethnicity within immigrant populations. These distinctions, between Cuban, white, black, etc., create liminal groups, that complicate generalized claims and reveal relationships between racial hierarchies in the US and other countries.

CUBAN AND CUBAN-AMERICAN SOLIDARITY: SHIFTS AND RIFTS IN CUBAN MIAMI

Didion's exploration of race in Miami in the wake of Cuban immigration leads to important questions: How would Afro-Cubans have experienced immigration and assimilation? Would there have been or is there solidarity amongst Afro-Cubans and African-Americans? María Cristina García notes that Afro-Cubans faced difficulties in Cuba, as they represented "the poorest segment of Cuban society" and generally had difficulties emigrating to the US because "US immigration policy gave preference to those with relatives already in the US, thus favoring whites, who were the first to leave [Cuba]" (García 45). I do not take the small Afro-Cuban population in Miami to represent socio-cultural politics in Cuba.¹² Rather, by introducing the obstacles Afro-Cubans likely faced in 20th century immigration to Miami, I mean to point out that the narrative of

successful Cuban-American assimilation put forth by the Kennedy Administration and reiterated by Vice President George H.W. Bush is contingent on various factors, including the facilitation of movement and employment informed by racial hierarchies in the US and Cuba.

The similarities of Cuban and US racial politics reveal that the globalization Croucher attributes to Miami is selective (and *selected*) and that not each story of immigration is covered under the umbrella of successful Cuban-American assimilation. By taking into account the differences amongst Cuban-American populations in Miami, we can better address racial, socio-economic and generational conflicts that influence interactions within these populations. Wolfe is astute in addressing intra- and intergenerational conflicts among Cuban-American populations. These conflicts are perhaps best personified by the Cuban community's response to Nestor after his actions when a Cuban raft is discovered in Biscayne Bay and by Magdalena's argument with her mother.

In the first chapter of *Back to Blood*, Officer Nestor Camacho is on a Safe Boat with two "*americano*" officers, described as blue eyed and blond, on their way to "see about a man on a mast" (Wolfe 23). Though Nestor does not speak Spanish (though he understands the language), his choice to use the Spanish "*Americano*" as opposed to "*American*" highlights his marginalization from his colleagues and reinforces tensions between Anglo-Americans and Cuban-Americans. Nestor soon learns the man is a Cuban refugee who has climbed up the mast of a small boat and is attempting to set foot on Miami land in order to be granted asylum (Wolfe 23). Nestor expresses a strong dislike for his fellow officers because they Americanize and thus mispronounce his name

as *Nester* as opposed to the correct Spanish pronunciation *Nestor*. The two men also assume that Nestor will know about how Cuban and Haitian refugees are able to make it to Miami. One of the men asks “They don’t even *have* masts in Cuba. Right? Say ‘Right,’ Nestor” (Wolfe 29). The men on the police force fail to realize that Nestor, as a second-generation, non-Spanish speaking Cuban-American, may have more in common with them than with the man on the mast. The rigid racial and cultural delineations the two white officers reinscribe with their racist banter become increasingly important after Nestor’s management of the situation.

His two fellow officers, assuming Nestor speaks Spanish, make him climb the mast to attempt to talk the man down and avoid a situation, as many people have gathered on the Rickenbacker Causeway to watch. The people are booing the authorities, including Nestor, as he notes the onlookers shouting at him in Spanish. Nestor takes particular note to the words “traidor” (traitor) and “comemierda, hijo de puta” (shit-eater, son of a bitch), which Wolfe does not translate in the text (Wolfe 44). The hecklers are hoping that the man will be able to touch Miami soil before Nestor gets to him. As Nestor notes, “that’s all a Cuban has to do: set foot on American soil...and he will be granted asylum...Any *Cuban*... No other refugees were granted such a privilege. America’s most favored migration status the Cubans enjoyed” (Wolfe 44; 42). Wolfe’s emphasis on “Cuban” highlights the indiscriminate privilege granted to the Cuban immigrants arriving in Miami and reinforces the general favoritism the US expresses toward Cuban refugees. As demonstrated earlier, all Cuban immigrants are not treated equally once they arrive in Miami, but the open-arms policy impacts how the man on the mast is hoping to be treated.

Though Nestor identifies and is identified by his colleagues as Cuban-American, he is also desperate to prove himself in this new position and thus must struggle between enforcing US policy and showing loyalty to the Cuban-American community. Though Nestor does not realize the stakes of his actions in the moment, he later learns how quickly cultural symbols can be made and manipulated in Miami. Nestor determines that he will climb up the mast and bring the man down, performing this incredible feat by clutching the man with his legs and climbing half way down the rope before the two men fall into the water. Throughout the struggle to get control of the man, Nestor notes his pleas in Spanish: “I’m begging you! Begging you! You can’t send me back! They’ll torture me until I reveal *everybody*! They’ll destroy my family. Have mercy! There are Cubans on that bridge...Is one more such an intolerable burden?” (Wolfe 48). The man observes that Cuban-Americans are advocating for him and that they are such a large public presence in Miami that his arrival would not make a difference. The man also calls attention to the fact that Nestor is being observed by two audiences—his white colleagues and his fellow Cuban-Americans.

Nestor is forced to interrogate his loyalties, having aligned himself with US authority and state-sanctioned population control as opposed to any form of Cuban/Cuban-American solidarity. After the spectacular events which have been broadcasted, Nestor expects to be greeted at home with fanfare and is vastly disappointed, learning from his father that he has disgraced the Cuban-American community. Camilo Camacho, Nestor’s father, is enraged by Nestor’s part in effectively sending a man back to be interrogated and tortured in Cuba. Camilo explodes: “How could you do that to a man of your own blood? He’s eighteen meters from freedom, and

you arrest him! You condemn him to torture and death in Fidel's dungeons! How could you do that to the honor of your own family?!" (Wolfe 75). Through Camilo's outburst, Wolfe addresses generational conflicts within the Miami Cuban-American community that relate to assimilation, employment and the enforcement of US policy.

Notable shifts in Cuban-American solidarity in Miami have been observed by scholars such as geographer Heike C. Alberts. In "Changes in Ethnic Solidarity in Cuban Miami," Alberts reports that each wave of migration changed the solidarity amongst Cuban-American Miamians. Alberts notes:

On the community level, deep rifts now exist among Cubans of different refugee generations, due to different class backgrounds, values, ideologies, religious beliefs, and race. However... many remain strong supporters of the Republican Party, which they perceive as more staunchly anti-Communist (Alberts 246).¹³

As Wolfe depicts, even within Cuban-American families, ideological chasms have formed which may be a consequence of recurring imperatives to "become American." This is particularly relevant for a character like Nestor who was born in the US and has different investments than his father. In Nestor's case, assimilation is exaggerated, as he becomes a representation of the selective US government.

Magdalena reveals similar challenges to Cuban-American assimilation. Having just announced that she is moving out of her parents' house, she is met with the wrath of her mother. Estrella confronts Magdalena stating: "I know you don't care if you ruin your family's name. There is only one reason girls move from home. Everybody knows that" (Wolfe 65). Magdalena counters, "Listen, you're not in Camagüey any longer, Estrellita! In this country you don't have to wait until you can marry yourself out of the house" (Wolfe 65). Magdalena notes that she has doubly offended Estrella, observing that "her

mother always told people she was from Havana, because the first thing every Cuban in Miami wanted to know was your family history in Cuba—history of course, meaning social status. Being from Camagüey was synonymous with being a *guajira*, a hick” (Wolfe 65).¹⁴ This suggests that where Estrella is from in Cuba impacts her interactions and status in Miami and reveals a shared socio-economic hierarchy in the US and in Cuba. Magdalena’s adoption of the word “hick” is telling, as the chiefly US-American idiom also connotes a particular ideology of whiteness. “Hick,” not unlike “hillbilly” or “white trash,” is used to describe provincial, poor white people who generally live in the US South or in the Appalachian region. Duck writes that descriptions of poor whites in the South were “often racialized, based on the argument that poor whites were descended from convicts and indentured servants, people said to be of inferior genetic quality” (Duck 96). At once then, the term evokes whiteness and blackness, or rather, reveals a racial hierarchy within the broader category of “white” that is contingent socio-economic status. Magdalena continues her critique, extending this complex black/white logic onto her mother’s religious practices.

Magdalena notes that as a “real Camagüey country girl,” her mother practices Santería, which is described as:

an African religion that slaves had brought to Cuba...replete with spirits, magic, ecstatic dancing, trances, potions, ground roots, divination, curses, animal sacrifices, and God knows what other *hoodoo voodoo*...Magdalena’s mother and father were light-skinned, as were many believers by now. No way, however, could Santería ever shake loose of its social origins...slaves and simpleminded country *guajiros*. This had become a handy needle for Magdalena (Wolfe 68; my emphasis).

Magdalena uses the class, religious and racial differences between her and her mother to argue that she fits into a US life style that seems to include looking down on any form of

spirituality that is not Christian or Roman Catholic. That Santería, Voodoo and Hoodoo are linked in this passage reveals much about Cuban and Cuban-American structures as well as hinting at representations of Haitians and African-Americans that prevail in the US and perhaps more globally. The three African-derived religions are linked with rural, pre- or anti-modern slaves. While Magdalena sees herself as a properly US-American woman, her parents become coded as unintelligent, primitive and black.

Magdalena's parents are incapable of shaking off these negative associations and are thus incapable of being truly US American. In this gesture, Magdalena invokes a US white-black binary, in which blackness forecloses the possibility of assimilation. Though such a binary could conceivably be disrupted by a new category like "white Cuban," Magdalena's judgment of her mother suggests that there are various cultural markers (i.e., Cuban, African, Santería-practitioner, black, white) that immigrants must navigate (or reject) to be considered adequately US American.

A PREFERENCE TOWARD PREJUDICE: HAITIAN IMMIGRATION TO MIAMI

Magdalena's stereotypical description of Voodoo and Hoodoo represents a broader ideology of blackness that is reflected in the selective policing of US borders. The racialized criticisms to which Estrella is subjected explain, to some extent, the privileges bestowed upon certain Cuban refugees and the near universal repatriation of Haitian refugees attempting to acquire asylum in the US in the latter half of the 20th century.

Alex Stepick traces a prominent influx of Haitian-Americans to Miami to approximately 1972, almost squarely between the two large Cuban migrations of the

early 60s and early 80s. Since their arrival, Stepick notes, “the US government has been engaged in a ceaseless struggle to expeditiously return as many as possible to Haiti” (Stepick 163). Stepick cites racist immigration policy and the US’s favoritism for those fleeing leftist governments and not, as was the case in Haiti under Jean-Claude Duvalier, right-wing authoritarian regimes (Stepick 163; 166).¹⁵ He reports that the pervasive US anti-communist sentiment played a major role in the establishment of immigration policies throughout the 20th century. Haitian refugees were repatriated because they were deemed to be fleeing economic strife as opposed to political persecution, while Cuban-Americans were unquestionably escaping political persecution. Though, as Kevin Johnson notes, when interviewed, many Marielitos said that food was scarce in Cuba and they would have more economic opportunities in the US. The US’s enmity for Cuban communism made Cuban refugees the beneficiaries of the most generous US immigration policies. The line between political and economic strife is ambiguous and allows for a racialized enforcement of policy that, as Johnson notes, is often presented as a strictly political gesture.

Blanket assumptions about Haitian economic strife led to many instances of unfair treatment toward Haitian refugees during their asylum trials. Stepick remarks on the mistreatment and prejudice directed at Haitian refugees, describing instances where “up to forty Haitians at a time were led handcuffed into INS hearing rooms” (Stepick 189). This treatment suggests that Haitian refugees were a homogeneous mass and court decisions would be equally applicable to each member of the group. Judge James Lawrence King’s opinion in the 1980 class action suit *Haitian Refugee Center v. Civiletti*

provides a succinct assessment of the treatment of Haitians in Miami during the 1970s and 1980s:

This case involves thousands of black Haitian nationals, the brutality of their government, and the *prejudice of ours*. Perhaps thirty thousand Haitians have flocked to the shores of South Florida over the past twenty years, fleeing the most repressive government in the Americas. From among that group come the plaintiffs: five thousand persons who have sought political asylum in the United States. They claim that if they are returned to Haiti they will face persecution, imprisonment and death. *All of their asylum claims were denied by the Immigration and Naturalization Service...* the court has seen a stark picture of how these plaintiff-immigrants will be treated if they return to Haiti. And it has seen an equally stark, and even more troubling, picture of the treatment of Haitians by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (*Haitian Refugee Center v. Civiletti*; my emphasis).

King's use of "ours" is significant as it implicates the entirety of the US government. As King makes clear, the US policy towards Haitian refugees is one of unanimous rejection and repatriation founded on discriminatory practices and little else, as the case summary cites instances of unfair and unjust trials for Haitian refugees seeking asylum. King also condemns the Haitian government for its violence and persecution, implying that the most repressive government in the Americas is not Cuba, but Haiti and Haitian refugees should receive equal treatment.¹⁶ Such a comparison is difficult either to substantiate or to disprove, particularly given the firmly entrenched socio-economic and racial hierarchies established in Cuba, but King's assessment of Haiti raises several important questions: how does the US decide who is granted asylum? What structures and ideologies influence these seemingly arbitrary decisions? How do international interactions and US foreign policy interact to influence the development of certain US spaces? As the language of the case summary suggests, these various factors: international interaction, foreign policy and immigration policy, are informed by biases.

Judge King observes that “Haitians who came to the United States seeking freedom and justice did not find it,” and concludes that he could see no other interpretation of evidence than racialized enforcement of border policy (*Haitian Refugee Center vs. Civiletti*).¹⁷ This can be linked to a conflation of “Haitian” with “dark,” and a simultaneous linkage of black Haitian with abject poverty. A brief, even cursory, look at Haitian history and the history of Haitian immigration to the US promptly counters this stereotype. But a mythic understanding of Haiti and black bodies no doubt combines to influence US treatment of Haitian refugees.¹⁸

(RE)MAKING BLACKNESS: STEREOTYPES OF BLACKNESS IN HAITIAN IMMIGRATION AND ASSIMILATION

In “Refugees, Racism and Reparations: A Critique of the United States’ Haitian Immigration Policy,” Malissia Lennox traces the history of US travesties toward Haiti, stating that Haiti has historically been a source of anxiety in the entire Western world after the Haitian Revolution. Lennox concludes that these beliefs have been codified in the American psyche and have resulted in a biased treatment of Haitian refugees (Lennox 699).¹⁹ To support this claim, Lennox reports that between 1972 and 1980 “approximately 50,000 Haitians attempted to gain asylum in the United States; as few as twenty-five succeeded” (Lennox 700). As Lennox’s exhaustive survey of US-Haitian relations demonstrates, the historical perceptions of race in the US have influenced Haitian refugee asylum policy in various US cities.

Tom Wolfe’s character Professor Lantier, a Haitian-American professor of French and Creole at Everglades Global University, reveals an awareness of biases against Haitian-Americans and Haitian refugees. He links class-status and skin color,

expressing gratitude that his daughter Ghislaine “[can] easily...pass” (Wolfe 177). Nestor meets Ghislaine while busting a drug house in a child care center in Overtown and expresses surprise that she is Haitian, asking “You’re...*Haitian*?” to which Ghislaine replies “I’m so light-skinned...isn’t that what you’re thinking?” She goes on to explain that “there are a lot of light-skinned Haitians...it’s just that in [the US] if you say you’re Haitian, people pigeonhole you right away...that means you can’t possibly be *this*...or *this*... or capable of *that*” (Wolfe 376). Ghislaine outlines the associations of dark-skin and poverty that are linked to “Haitian” within the US and Cuban-American psyche, countering Nestor’s notions of Haitian identity. In Ghislaine’s articulation, her Haitian heritage becomes mutable, allowing her to embrace, reject and straddle multiple ideologies of Haitianness.

The fluidity Ghislaine puts forth in this patient explanation to Nestor might explain Lantier’s horror that his son, Philippe, though light-skinned, spends his time with a dark-skinned Haitian-American who speaks Creole and Black English, both of which Lantier links inextricably to poverty and ignorance (Wolfe 177). Lantier’s discomfort at his son’s decisions and his own racial and class situation may speak to broader US American structures of race and class. The stakes of assimilation for Lantier involve distancing his family from stereotypes of American blackness and stereotypes of Haitian identity. Lantier’s bias towards Philippe’s friend, Antoine, exposes class-based delineations that exist within diasporic Haitian populations. Further, it suggests possible tensions between Haitian-Americans and African-Americans. Lantier asks silently:

Why on earth would an essentially bright, handsome, light-skinned Haitian, directly related to the Lantiers of Normandy... want to turn himself into an American *Neg*? Those too-big baggy pants for example...the *Neg* criminal wore them in jail. The jailed weren’t about to

go to the trouble of *measuring* an inmate before giving him clothes. They just gave them clothes that were obviously big enough, which meant they were always too big, the little *Negs* on the street wore them because they idealized the big *Negs* in jail. They were their heroes. They were baaaaad. They were fearless. They terrified the American whites and the Cubans....But Haitian boys...imitated stupid, ignorant neg attitudes, too. That was the real problem (Wolfe 191).

Lantier attributes his son's light-skin to his French heritage. His description of his son's brightness and light-skin suggests that colorism, as well as ethnic differences, influence Lantier's self-description. By foregrounding his French heritage, Lantier also implicitly invokes a history of French imperialism choosing to align himself with the enriched colonizers, as opposed to the disenfranchised colonized. Lantier suggests a biological superiority of whiteness that his son sullies with a performance of blackness. For Lantier, his son's behavior becomes a minstrel performance. Lantier's description of African-Americans is grotesque, using exaggerated stereotypes to create a stark juxtaposition between his European heritage and American blackness. Like Magdalena, then, Lantier makes clear that only certain forms of assimilation are acceptable and desirable in the US. Becoming a stereotype of US American blackness does not qualify.

Lantier's use of "Neg," like Magdalena's use of "hick," reveals Wolfe's continued interest in the international use of idioms that convey shared racial hierarchies. "Neg" is an abbreviation of the French word "nègre," which, like most racial epithets, has a violent history appropriation and reclamation and has historically been used to mark the marginalization of a particular group of people.²⁰ Through the use of this term, Lantier asserts his Frenchness, reaffirming the difference he sees between himself and black, poor Haitians and African-Americans.

Though Lantier's language reveals his persistent delineation between light-skinned, well-educated Haitians and dark-skinned, poor Haitians and African-Americans, he also, perhaps inadvertently, alludes to shared treatment of both groups through his reductive focus on the incarceration of black males. Haitian refugees were often kept in prison-like detention centers in Puerto Rico and in many US states, including Florida, while the paperwork to grant asylum was endlessly backlogged (Lennox 701). This speaks to a criminalization of blackness that functions across ethnic groups. This similarity also reveals the US's efforts to control the population of certain groups, a fact that affects Lantier in his job as a professor at Everglades Global University.

Lantier outlines EGU's "diversity quotas" and reveals similarities between such quotas and US immigration policies. Quotas can ensure that different populations are represented but they also establish an acceptable minimum to cap off employment opportunities ("we already have enough of *those*"). Lantier claims that EGU

[I]iked the 'diversity' of having a *Haitian*...with a PhD, from Columbia...who could teach French and Creole. Oh yes, Creole...they were hot to have a professor who taught Creole... 'the language of the people' ...probably 80 percent of his countrymen spoke Creole and only Creole (Wolfe 180).

The fetishization of Creole as the language of the layman speaks to an ambivalence towards "foreignness"—there is enough interest to exoticize the language and the people who speak it but enough "difference" to dramatically limit the amount of Haitian refugees allowed to enter the country, or, in Lantier's case, who are allowed to work in the department.

In spite of Lantier's efforts to distance himself and his family from stereotypes of American blackness, there are similarities between Lantier's departmental treatment and

Chief of Police Cyrus Booker's treatment as a political device to appease the African American community. The idea of a totalized, homogeneous African-American community is mobilized by Mayor Dionisio Cruz, a white Cuban, who uses said idea to explain his promotion of Chief Booker. Regarding Chief Booker's promotion, the narrator observes:

In case after case, you had Cuban cops accused of knocking African Americans' lights out. Liberty City, Overtown, and other African American neighborhoods became lit fuses and the bomb always went off. The latest riot was just two years ago. After that one Dio Cruz decided to promote Assistant Chief Cyrus Booker to Chief. See? One of your own, not one of ours, runs the entire Police Department. (Wolfe 230)

Booker's position, like Lantier's, is in part based on his qualifications but also because he can be used as a symbol diversity that will, in Cruz's mind, prevent race riots (Wolfe 231).²¹ Later in *Back to Blood*, Officer Camacho and Officer Hernandez are accused of police brutality after their violent arrest of an African-American man and Chief Booker is called into a meeting with Mayor Cruz after footage of the arrest is posted on YouTube. During the arrest Officer Hernandez referred to the suspect as "sub-moron" and "subhuman" and mocked him, making gorilla noises (Wolfe 413-415). Mayor Cruz is surprised when Chief Booker defends his officers, asking "So what these two cops said about African Americans doesn't bother you...as the highest-ranking African American in this city?" (Wolfe 428). Mayor Cruz assumes that his notion of African-American solidarity will transcend all other socio-cultural distinctions Chief Booker might identify between himself and the arrested man.

Cruz has assumed that Chief Booker has consented to being made a symbol of Cruz's version of racial justice, or perhaps more aptly, he has taken Chief Booker's skin as an automatic indication of consent. As Cruz suggests, "A thing like this could set off

another riot. *They* always riot over the same thing, the criminal justice system. That's not gonna happen on my watch. Your Camacho and Hernandez...they go, Cy...for the good of the city" (Wolfe 428; my emphasis). Cyrus's position is meant to mollify a community while making little changes to a biased criminal justice system that perpetuates racial inequality and injustice. Disinterested, it would seem, in any true form of justice, Cruz exploits ideals of racial equality to give the appearance of diversity and consequently of a fair and just judicial process where one does not exist. Cruz, a white Cuban man who has risen to a position of power and control in Wolfe's Miami is now responsible for controlling the "African-American community." Again, then, Wolfe calls attention to the policing of black Miamians by white Cuban-Americans who have been granted power and authority in Miami by virtue of US American ideologies of race.

CONCLUSION

Miami is only a starting point in answering valuable questions: How do we scale progress when narratives of success, diversity and assimilation are controlled by racist policies? How do we include the wide-range of experiences of those who migrate to the US from the same or different countries? *Miami* and *Back to Blood* explore these questions, depicting Miami as a global *and* Southern city where "diversity" is controlled and shaped by biased US foreign and immigration policy. These texts, not unlike my Abuela's scold, make clear that an examination of inter and intra-group conflict in Miami must take into account various differences within immigrant groups. Both friction and cohesion impact the various interactions that transpire in Miami. As Mayor Cruz claims, "If you really want to understand Miami, you got to realize one thing first of all. In

Miami, everybody hates everybody” (Wolfe 424). While I do not take this claim entirely seriously, the idea of cross and intra-cultural conflict should not be dismissed in scholarly studies of immigration into the US. These conflicts destabilize any notions of a harmonious diversity and provide valuable insight into how representations of race and ethnicity shift continuously in contemporary US media, including US literature, and politics.

ENDNOTES

¹ I use “white” and “whiteness” to convey the socio-economic advantages granted to Cuban refugees who are observably of European-descent. Though such description is superficial and necessarily unstable, I use these terms, as well as “black,” “Cuban,” and “Haitian” to highlight the uneven distribution of resources often based on these arbitrary forms of categorization.

² Rudolph J. Vecoli explores the term and phenomena of “melting pots,” providing a brief overview of the shifts in immigration into the US from the early 1940s through to the 1970s and 1980s. While the Vecoli’s deployment of the term connotes diversity, it is also suggestive of violence and cultural clashes like those Didion and Wolfe note throughout their texts.

³ Duck continues, by asserting that a reconsideration of “the relationship between nation and region” demands an “investigation of how cultural forms considered anachronistic could coexist in often vital relationships with those recognized as central to modernization” (Duck 7).

⁴ Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn explain that the collection focuses on the often elided “geographical, demographic, and economic differences within [the US South’s] borders and similarities across them” (Cohn and Smith 5).

⁵ It is puzzling to me that a project that sets as its aim the problematization of Southern and US American identities includes only Steven Hunsaker’s “Citizenship and Identity in the Exile Autobiographies of Gustavo Pérez Firmat,” in which Hunsaker discusses Miami exclusively in relation to Cuban migration, in spite of the efforts, successes and failures of different Caribbean and South-American groups to settle in Miami.

⁶ García also notes that these exiles, mostly businessmen, would have likely spoken English (García 16). Their familiarity with the language and culture would have helped them adjust to life in Miami.

⁷ García notes that some apartment buildings in Miami posted signs reading “No Cubans allowed” and that teachers in Miami often neglected the special needs of their new students (García 29).

⁸ Martyn Bone writes: “*A Man in Full*’s critical cartography of Atlanta reconfigures the canonical, literary-critical map of ‘the South’” (Bone 210).

⁹ Though I don’t have space to fully explore the implications of style, I would posit that Miami operates for the authors as a harmonious, multi-ethnic myth where they can examine the stakes of the shifting ethnic and racial composition of the US while also

giving voice to the racial and ethnic violence and conflict. Both stereotype and statistic are effectively addressed through this reportage story-telling.

¹⁰ This sentiment was not at all uncommon. Croucher states that bumper stickers that read “Will the last American leaving Miami please bring the flag?” and “I’m a Native—An Endangered Species” were very popular during the 1990s (Croucher 246).

¹¹ It is interesting that Magdalena chooses to compare Miami to Mexico and Colombia as opposed to Cuba—though Wolfe does not include Mexican-American or Colombian American characters, he may be hinting at growing populations of these groups in parts of south Florida. Shifting comparisons of Miami to Cuba, Mexico and Colombia suggest an implicit contest for control. These comparisons also reaffirm earlier descriptions of Miami as a non-American space.

¹² As William Wood suggests in his studies of forced migration, “refugees and asylum seekers represent only a small fraction of those person who flee their communities because of violent discrimination, civil unrest, and other life-threatening economic and ecological conditions” (Wood 608).

¹³ While Wolfe does not address the historical Cuban-American loyalty to the Republican Party, it might be time to revisit questions of Cuban-American allegiance and political solidarity in the wake of the 2012 presidential election and the increased support for the Democratic Party.

¹⁴ “Guajira” or “guajiro,” like “hick” are both used pejoratively to describe people from rural, “country-side” areas in Cuba and in the US respectively.

¹⁵ Stepick writes “Historically, [the US’s] practice has been to grant a blanket presumption of persecution to those fleeing Communist states while maintaining a far stricter standard for those fleeing rightist authoritarian regimes. This dichotomous policy and the inherent tension between the policy and the general humanitarian principles of the UN Protocol is one of the underlying issues in the controversy involving the Haitian boat people (Stepick 168).

¹⁶ The case summary also describes the comparative treatment of Cuban refugees: “Most Cuban refugees were not processed under 8 C.F.R. § 108 [stipulates that “aliens” are required to apply for asylum in their respective districts] because of special Presidential and Congressional action. However, all those who were processed in individual proceedings under 8 C.F.R. § 108 did receive asylum” (*Haitian Refugee Center vs. Civiletti*). This suggests that there is a bias against Haitian refugees that, as Stepick suggests, extends far beyond the US’s friendly relationship with the Haitian government.

¹⁷ The unequal treatment of Haitians was not lost on the national media. Notably Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm (member of the Congressional Black Caucus) penned a letter to President Carter, calling for better treatment of Haitian refugees. This gesture

suggests a kind of solidarity, at a national level, at least, between African-Americans and Haitian refugees (Stepick 188).

¹⁸ In *The Black Jacobins*, CLR James discusses the different classes of free men in Haiti preceding the Haitian Revolution, noting the presence of “free Mulattoes and free blacks” (James 36). This suggest racial mixture that resulted not only in class delineations but also a variation in skin tones.

¹⁹ Lennox continues an exploration of US-Haitian interaction, including the US occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934 and the US’s eventual backing of Francois Duvalier. She asserts that “the United States maintains that it bears no special obligation to Haitian refugees. This stance contradicts the United States’ prominent involvement in Haitian affairs, but it is not surprising given the history of US immigration policy toward Haitians” (Lennox 699).

²⁰ In *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* Brent Edward’s concludes that the deployment of the term was contextual, often used pejoratively, as “nigger” is used in English, but also used in an “[attempt] to wrench the term nègre into the service of anti-imperialist alliances” (Edwards 36).

²¹ The manipulation of race and ethnicity in politics is apparently not uncommon in Miami, as Croucher notes, “politicians and local officials in Dade County are known for their capacity and willingness to manipulate ethnicity and ethnic identity for political gain” (Croucher 237).

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