
RACE, IMMIGRATION, GENDER, AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION

The Mariel Boatlift, Haitian Migration, and the Revelations of the "Black Refugees"

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Drawing from the coverage in the Black-owned *Miami Times* newspaper, this article examines the 1980 Mariel Boatlift through the eyes of the Miami Black community. Previous research has centered on the African American view that the United States government's acceptance of Cubans and denial of the asylum claims of Haitians was a case of white vs. Black racism on an international scale. The current research explores another angle of analysis, focusing on themes in the *Times* that began to challenge the mutual exclusivity in Cuban/Haitian allegiance. Harkening back to the historical prominence of both Cuba and Haiti in the African American fight for Black justice, this research finds that the *Times* also recognized that the federal government's treatment of both black Cubans and Haitians highlighted its failures in the area of human rights. Moreover, the newspaper criticized the treatment of these "Black refugees coming on our shores" in the local community, where they, like native-born Blacks, were subject to discrimination, surveillance, and detention. Such scrutiny within the *Times'* coverage of Mariel and the Haitian migration amplifies themes circulating among Black Americans in Miami, which linked local experiences to internationalist concerns about Black unity across the globe.

Keywords: Mariel Boatlift; Haitian migration; Afro-Cubans; refugees; African Diaspora; African American press; Black Miami

Introduction

"While it may be true that America cannot absorb every refugee who seeks political asylum in this country, it is also true that our failure to do so was never so vehemently pronounced until black refugees began arriving on our shores."¹

This essay provides a critical look at the 1980 Mariel Boatlift through the eyes of members of the Miami Black community. By means of an analysis of the coverage in the Black-owned *Miami Times*, a weekly newspaper that has served Miami-Dade County since 1923, I capture how for this community, Mariel, and the simultaneous Haitian migration were inextricably linked. The events were connected not just by time period but, more importantly, by the effects they had on Black politics. In contemporary conversations about immigration and immigration policy, Cubans and Haitians figure prominently, most often in scholarship focusing on their differential status and reception.² Viewpoints situating Cubans and Haitians as rivals were also evident in the *Miami Times* in its coverage of African American critiques of the U.S. government's handling of the Cuban and Haitian migrations.³ However, within this range of responses, the *Times* also gave voice to perspectives that challenged Cuban/Haitian exclusivity through a Black diasporic framework. In this essay, I look closely at the implications of these perspectives and examine how they illustrate the ways in which Mariel, along with the concurrent Haitian migration, was crucial in influenc-

¹ "The War against the Haitians."

² Manoucheka has made this claim, p. 68; also see Stepick.

³ See Grenier and Stepick; Gosin.

ing how Blacks would engage in larger debates about race and U.S. immigration policy, and position themselves in relation to a wider African Diaspora. The presence of migrants from Haiti and Cuba—the “Black refugees arriving on our shores”—further exposed the failures of the U.S. government in the area of human rights. Indeed, as Jenna Loyd and Alison Mountz point out, “The racialized history of U.S. responses to boat migration across the Caribbean in the 1970s and 1980s is central to understanding the lasting commitment of the U.S. government—and others following its lead—to migration, detention, deterrence, and expulsion” (80). Accordingly, as African Americans and other local Blacks grappled with the hypocritical governmental response to arrivals from both countries, they consequently solidified their commitment to the fight against anti-Black racism affecting both native-born and foreign-born Blacks. This fight, however, was about not only eradicating local forms of oppression, but also promoting Black dignity and unity across the globe.

Background

The Black story of Mariel

While scholarship tends to primarily focus on Mariel from the perspective of its relevance to the study of the Cuban American exile community, it is also the case that the boatlift marks a crucial period in Miami's Black history. Mariel began just before the city witnessed the McDuffie Riot, a major uprising protesting the acquittal of the police officers who had brutally beaten to death Arthur McDuffie, an unarmed Black man. With a larger proportion of Blacks among them than ever before, the Mariel wave of Cuban migrants and the simultaneous arrival of large numbers of Black Haitians created a convergence that invites us to further “reframe Miami in terms of Black hemispheric movement” (Francis and Harris 1). In contrast to those who first fled the Castro regime and were held up as the image of anti-communist heroes, symbols of the rightness of U.S. imperialist interventions in the Southern hemisphere, the “Marielitos” were “Blackened” and depicted as social deviants in the media.⁴ Thus, the Mariel exodus was momentous in that it presented a “rude awakening” for Cuban Americans about the nature of their reception in the United States.⁵ While the importance of the Mariel Boatlift for Cuban and Cuban American studies is undeniable, this scholarship is limited in its focus on one side of the story. Coinciding with a particularly racially charged moment in the midst of Black civil unrest, the Mariel Boatlift cannot be disentangled from larger conversations about Blackness, civil rights, migration, and U.S. imperialism in Caribbean nations. As Donette Francis and Allison Harris argue, the making of contemporary Miami “...is often narrated through the lens of the Latinization of Miami while absencing (or bracketing) the deeply-embedded Blackness against which that Latinization came to be defined” (2). Thus, a Black studies perspective allows us to re-center the Blackness that imbues the city, inclusive of its Latinx/African American intersections, its *Afro-Latinidad*, and its greater multi-national Caribbean-ness. Through an evaluation of local Black press, this examination delves into the multifaceted implications of the Mariel Boatlift while allowing Black voices discussing race and Blackness to drive the conversation. The coverage of the Mariel Boatlift and the Haitian migration highlights that the “Black refugees” from Cuba and Haiti form a substantial part of the story of the Black fight for racial justice in Miami and reveals layers of complexity in Black concerns and consciousness that extend beyond the local environment.

Interweaving histories in the fight for Black liberation: Cuba, Haiti, and the United States

Historically, Haiti and Cuba have figured prominently in the African American fight for Black justice. Historians recount a long history, since at least the second half of the eighteenth century, of Black internationalism: “...a product of consciousness, that is, the conscious interconnection and interlocution of black struggles across man-made and natural boundaries—including the boundaries of nations, empires, continents, oceans, and seas” (West and Martin 1). In this tradition, Black activists from the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa fought for Black emancipation, conceptualizing Black resistance on a global scale. Early on, both Cuba and Haiti played crucial roles in inspiring this Black activist position. Enslaved people of the greater Caribbean and Atlantic worlds were filled with hope in the possibilities for liberation following the successful slave revolt in Haiti in 1791. The revolt led to the emancipation of the slaves there and precipitated Haiti becoming the first Black independent nation in the world, gaining their independence on January 1, 1804. As such, Haiti would then continue to inspire black radical traditions going forward.

⁴ See Aguirre et al. p. 487; Gosin p. 79.

⁵ See Portes and Stepick 1985; 1994 p. 31; García p. 60.

Cuba has also figured prominently in internationalist Black struggles, going as far back as the 19th century when African Americans and Cuban Blacks joined forces to fight against American imperialism and anti-Black racism in both the U.S. and Cuba.⁶ In the 20th century, radical Black American activists looked to Cuba and the Fidel Castro revolution for third world revolution strategies to employ in the U.S. context. Cuba was deemed a safe space for radical Black thought and a haven for activists such as those Black Panthers exiled from the United States. As Cynthia Young points out, "For many during this period, mobilization against racism entailed mobilization against Western imperialism, a task that required the forging of alliances between and among U.S. national minorities and emerging postcolonial nation-states" (21–22). Despite the early gains for Blacks in Cuba, the failures and limitations of the Castro government in carrying out its anti-racist goals are abundantly clear today.⁷ However, during the 1960s and 1970s, many African Americans lauded Castro's anti-imperialism and viewed him as an ally to oppressed people.

While African Americans have historically looked to both Haiti and Cuba to inspire their fights against antiblackness and imperialism, during the Cold War era a shift in knowledge production created a climate in which the idea of a global fight for Black liberation was undermined. As the nation state became a primary unit of analysis within "area studies," North American Black studies was conceptualized as having been born out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, disconnected from the Black internationalist activism of earlier eras.⁸ After the Black urban rebellions of the 1960s into the next decade, the Civil Rights movement had an "internal crisis of purpose and direction" (Johnson 11). This crisis seemed to occlude the potentially encouraging fact that by the Cold War era, the world would see the fruits of this early Black activist labor: decolonization in Africa and in other parts of the world, and desegregation in North America. The Cold War would also inspire anticommunist attacks against individuals and collectives actively calling for radical change and Black unity, which further suppressed such activism. In Miami, however, the continued migrations of people from the southern hemisphere, Latin America, and the Caribbean encouraged a continued Black internationalist consciousness. The continued subjugation of native-born Black Americans, along with migrations often shaped by U.S. imperial interventions in Caribbean nations, would underscore the need to merge "a radical internationalist posture—anticolonialism, Third World solidarity, and opposition to U.S. imperialism—with an equally radical critique of U.S. society, exposing urban poverty, housing shortages, unequal education, and police brutality" (Spencer 217).

In practice, however, this united front proved difficult to materialize when Cubans, coming from a communist country, were receiving preferential treatment from the U.S. government, while Haitians arriving in the U.S. received rejection of their claims of asylum. The United States' history of intervention in both Haiti and Cuba had set the stage for a Cuba vs. Haiti polarization. The U.S. supported President François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, who took an anti-communist stance against Fidel Castro's Cuba in favor of the United States. As a result, the U.S. then turned a blind eye to Duvalier's abuses, considering Castro a much greater foe, and discouraged Haitians from migrating to the U.S.⁹

As previous scholarship drawing from the *Miami Times* shows, the aforementioned Cuban/Haitian antagonism was evident in the paper during this period. African Americans were intentional in taking up the cause of Haitian migrants, who they readily embraced as Black. As the Cubans who arrived in the 60s and 70s were primarily white, African Americans contested what they saw as the U.S. redoubling of domestic anti-Black racism within its immigration policy.¹⁰ Yet, Black voices in the *Miami Times* also uncover spaces for delinking the humanity of (Black) Cuban and Haitian individuals seeking refuge from the constraining forces of the imperialist interventions in their homelands. In the current analysis, I explore this angle, and highlight Black perspectives in the *Miami Times* that had the potential to rally an Afro-diasporic consciousness that challenges the mutual exclusivity in Cuban/Haitian allegiance.

Beyond the Cuban-Haitian Division in the Miami Times

In 1980, the reporting in the *Miami Times* revealed a pan-Africanist desire to solidify shared support of Black people from various nations. The paper, founded by Bahamian-born Henry Ethelbert Sigismund Reeves and based in one of Miami's historically African American neighborhoods, Liberty City, had reflected from its

⁶ For studies on these African American/Cuban alliances see: Hellwig; Brock and Castañeda Fuertes; Mirabal; Guridy; Hoffnung-Garskof.

⁷ See Spence Benson; Cleland; De la Fuente.

⁸ See West and Martin p. 2.

⁹ See Pamphile p. 20.

¹⁰ African Americans were also reacting in response to local white Cuban hegemony—experiences where white Cuban business owners for instance discriminated against them and looked down upon them (see Dunn; Mohl 1984, 1990; Grenier and Stepick; Gosin).

beginnings the heterogeneity of Miami's Black community.¹¹ The newspaper provided an official platform for a diversity of Black perspectives on current events. Along with its reporting on local events and civil rights concerns, the paper ran columns on international issues affecting the Black diaspora. For instance, the paper ran a column called "Caribbean Diary" that gave short reports on important events in various countries in the Caribbean. The *Times* also amplified the local voices of diaspora members of Miami's Black communities, as they reacted to the U.S. response to the Mariel Boatlift and to the Haitian migration.

The *Times* coverage focused more intensely on the Haitian migration, which was happening in the midst of a UNESCO-led international campaign to preserve three historical monuments in Haiti, asking international organizations and private individuals to help preserve "the evidence of the struggle of peoples for liberty." In one article, a U.N. official described Haiti's struggle for freedom from French colonialism, noting that, "for the first time in the history of the black slave trade, the descendants of Africans, deprived of the most basic needs of humanity, had in the New World proudly proclaimed the right to the dignity of all mankind."¹² The irony was not lost on members of the Black community that refugees from Haiti, a nation held in high esteem for its early anti-colonialist victories, were now by contrast being rejected by the U.S., a nation that supposedly upholds the values of liberty and justice as paramount. Thus, the *Times* ran multiple reports on Black American efforts to support the Haitian cause through benefit concerts and food and clothing drives, and published appeals for help in letters to the editor.¹³

Since Haitians were being categorically denied protections, both U.S.-born Blacks and Haitian-born advocates found it important to paint a picture of why Haitians should be considered refugees and not economic immigrants. As the paper argued, the "denial of basic human and political rights is hardly a monopoly of communist countries" (Vernon). The paper tracked the class action lawsuit filed the year before by the Haitian Refugee Center and Haitian individuals against the INS and U.S. Attorney General, which sought to have Haitians classified as political refugees. Here, in the humor-infused column about the weekly news written by "Shaft," the author makes corroborating arguments about current conditions in Haiti:

We can't help but wonder what Miami's Immigration and Naturalization officials are saying to themselves in the wake of Haiti's President-for-Life Jean Claude Duvalier's recent crack down [sic] on independent journalists and opposition spokespersons. To date some 300 people are estimated imprisoned since last Friday on the island, many of whom are independent radio station and newspaper owners. Will they be accused of being "economic refugees" if they ever make it to our shores?

This and other examples in the paper illustrate how Black advocates took pains to illustrate that Haitians indeed had political reasons for leaving Haiti and made arguments for why they should be given asylum.

The *Times* often neglected, however, to include the Cubans arriving from Mariel in the overt activism around immigration policy. Many African Americans saw Cubans as already having advocates. The large and powerful Cuban American community was coming out in force: retrieving Mariel newcomers in boats, taking them into their homes, and attending to their resettlement needs. However, though the African American reception of the newcomers from Mariel was disparate, the *Times* reporting encapsulated how the simultaneous nature of the Cuban and Haitian migrations made them inextricably linked in the view of government officials.¹⁴ The Cubans who arrived after April 20, 1980, along with the more than 25,000 Haitians that arrived during Mariel, came to compose a new category of migrant, "Cuban-Haitian Entrant (Status Pending)," during the Carter administration. This category solidified the link between Mariel Cubans and Haitians in terms of their significance for U.S. immigration policy as the U.S. sought to avoid categorizing either group as refugees under U.S. immigration law.¹⁵

As the *Miami Times* reporting indicates, the simultaneous migration of Haitians and of Cubans from Mariel brought the exclusionary effects of asylum policy into clear focus for the local and international Black community. In particular, reports pointed to how Mariel was instrumental in amplifying the Haitian

¹¹ See Rose p. 24.

¹² "Funds Sought for Registration Projects in Haiti."

¹³ See: "Haitian Refugees Receive Record Food-Clothing Donation."

¹⁴ See "D.C. Sets up Cuban-Haitian Task Force."

¹⁵ See "D.C. Sets Up Cuban-Haitian Task Force"; "House Reveals new Cuban-Haitian Plan"; "Cuban-Haitian entrants" came to refer to Cubans who arrived in the U.S. between April 21, 1980 and October 10, 1980, and Haitians who were in INS proceedings on or before October 10, 1980 regardless of date of U.S. arrival. They were allowed a 6 month parole period (that could be extended for another 6 months) to determine their status. During the period, congress could consider legislation to create for them permanent legal status. The parole action was renewed until July 15, 1981 when congress did not act See Wasem; Carosso; Stepick.

cause. For example, an editorial that ran just weeks after the boatlift began elucidates the mutuality of the two groups. It reads, "It took an inflow of 24,000 new Cuban refugees in the past week to bring attention to the 25,000 Haitian refugees who have been here among us for two years."¹⁶ While the tone of the overall article highlighted favoritism for Cubans, it also reflected the idea that arguments around human rights and asylum policy were made stronger by the evidence of these simultaneous migrations. Indeed, the *Miami Times* drew comparisons that propelled people to contend with the conditions of these countries in great detail and listen to "testimonies of horror stories" regarding torture and consequences they would face if they were returned to the dictatorships they fled.¹⁷ Drawing these comparisons, the paper reflected how African Americans sought to elevate the treatment of Haitians to the level Cubans had previously received, a level of support and acceptance they believed should be equally available to people fleeing political oppression, regardless of county of origin.

The consequences of asking questions about and defining human rights and dignity also extended to the Mariel Cubans, who were newly impacted by the exclusionary practices of the U.S. immigration system. Indeed, "While Cuba remained a Cold War foe, [for the U.S. government] the lesson from Mariel was that a mass movement of asylum seekers was seen as a crisis to be prevented, in part because of how this group was racialized, depicted as criminals and even sexual deviants" (Loyd and Mountz 80). The Mariel wave of Cuban migrants was distinguished from the ones that came before in "...the frustrating ambivalence with which the new exiles had been received in the United States" (Bach et al. 30). There was much delay in determining their legal status, precipitated by a common public perception of them as people with criminal tendencies, given Castro's characterization of them. While entrants who were white, female, and married were more likely to be processed and released into Miami like previous Cuban migrants had been, the younger, Black, single males were often sent to military camps.¹⁸ Among local Cuban Americans, the belief that Cubans were entitled to exceptional treatment under U.S. immigration law persisted. Yet, Mariel would signal that this U.S. favoritism only went so far, and that Mariel Cubans, according to some readers and writers of the *Miami Times*, should also be regarded as part of those "Black refugees" whose arrival called into question the United States' commitment to human rights. Thus, while Cubans historically have had an edge over Haitians in the U.S., the differential treatment of the "Marielitos" and the fact that Haitians were not receiving asylum despite also fleeing a dictator prompted greater scrutiny of the whole system and a reckoning with how to apply the terms "human rights" and "human dignity" in practice. Thus, the *Miami Times'* coverage related to Mariel juxtaposed with its coverage of Haitian migration serves to broaden the conversation beyond the Cuban/Haitian opposition perspective, as such dynamics represented not an isolated conundrum but rather components of an ideological and moral question that pervades many other contexts.

Stories in the newspaper that picked up on how Black Cubans from Mariel were facing discrimination in the local community illustrated ways some African Americans sought to bring Black Cubans into the greater Afro-diasporic fold, indeed recognizing them as part of the "Black refugees arriving on our shores." This was documented in editorials that took up the theme of Black internationalism, calling for the recognition of Haitian, South-African, Afro-Cuban, and Afro-American suffering.¹⁹ In a feature story "Black Refugees Forced from Commandeered Houses," the writer puts the focus wholly on Afro-Cubans, and argues that they do not have the same support from the Miami Cuban community as their white peers, thereby diminishing any advantage (Black) Cubans have over Haitians in the local environment. The story details how Black Cubans who could not find sponsorship were squatting in abandoned homes located in Allapattah. The story goes on to tell of the anguish of one of the squatters upon learning she would have to leave, with nowhere else to go. Reporting that these homes were set to be burned down to make way for the Metrorail Allapattah station, the story links its criticism to the history of development moves made by the city that disenfranchised Black residents.²⁰ A letter to the editor also detailed such discrimination faced by Afro-Cubans, which was the reason many were in Allapatah in the first place. The writer calls attention to the fact that Afro-Cuban migrants were being "cast off" by white Cubans, consequently being housed in African American neighborhoods such as Opa-locka and Allapattah rather than in traditionally Cuban neighborhoods such as Hialeah.²¹

¹⁶ "Haitian refugees finally noticed."

¹⁷ See "Haitians Want Court Ruling on Refugee Status."

¹⁸ See Bach et al. p. 32.

¹⁹ See Jabali.

²⁰ See "Black Refugees Forced from Commandeered Houses." For more on these city practices see Connolly.

²¹ See "South Florida's goal: Keep out Haitians."

African Americans in the *Times* also documented the fact that Afro-Cubans were experiencing greater surveillance from local police and were subject to the widespread criminalization experienced by Black people in the U.S. regardless of national origin, which was becoming more and more apparent. An editorial entitled "Cuban refugees and Haitian refugees" argued that one reason why so few Black Cubans were settled in Miami and were sent to military bases (such as Fort Chaffee in Arkansas and Elgin Air Force Base in Florida), was that they were being actively rejected because of their Blackness.²² As the *Times* explained, those that remained in the area were regarded with suspicion. Indeed, the Miami police attributed a rising crime rate to the entry of the "Marielitos." When they made arrests involving individuals from Mariel, the police began attaching an "R" (for "refugee") to arrest records of "Marielitos," describing them as dangerous, young, single males, and rapists.²³ This characterization, often associated also with young Black American youths at the time, led to Cuban refugees being targeted by cops carrying out a "stop and frisk" policy. Precipitated by this phenomenon, a writer for the *Miami Times* remarks: "We can understand Miami Beach officials being alarmed over the escalating crime rate, but that new stop and frisk law must be monitored closely. It could prove discriminatory especially since a large number of the Cuban refugees happen to be black" (Shaft).

The *Times* was keenly aware of how the treatment of Black refugees mirrored the treatment of native-born Blacks, as both were disproportionately subjected to incarceration and detention. Significantly, these practices of detaining Cubans and Haitians during the 1980s would inspire the U.S. government to put in place the policy of mandatory detention for asylum seekers, a defining characteristic of the modern immigration system which remains in force to this day. Indeed, the first modern migrant detention center, built in Oakdale, Louisiana, was first filled with Cubans from Mariel who were found to be inadmissible to please the U.S. but could not be returned because Cuba would not accept them.²⁴ *Times* stories lamented the overcrowding at local facilities holding Haitians seeking asylum as well as those holding Mariel Cubans. The paper was critical of the practice of detaining the refugees in general, also noting the plight of those sent elsewhere to be processed. In a story focused on Haitians sent to New Orleans, the writer connects the detention of refugees to the enslavement of African Americans in the U.S. South. The writer asserts, "The New Orleans authorities displayed their plantation mentality that is so prevalent among American officials by placing the refugees in a jail and juvenile detention center."²⁵ For many Blacks in Miami, it was clear that Black immigrants were being pushed into subjugation right in line with the U.S.' historical treatment of native-born African Americans.

The *Miami Times* criticized the many failures of the local and federal governments in responding to the influx of Black refugees as well as in their continued disregard for the rights and concerns of native-born Blacks. It illustrated the inevitability of continued failure, for instance, in reports focused on a lawsuit filed that year by Miami Mayor Maurice Ferrer against the U.S. Census Bureau, which alleged the undercounting of the Miami city population. As one of the reports reads: "The suit states that the failure of census takers to go into black neighborhoods because of the [McDuffie] May riots, and the arrival of Haitian and Cuban refugees after the census was taken are two principal reasons for the undercount."²⁶ The suit also claimed that census takers neglected to distribute forms in Spanish or Kreyol. As the report contends, the gross undercount of the Cuban and Haitian populations almost certainly resulted in the loss of millions of dollars in revenue for the unique needs of the local community. It is noteworthy that this negligence was taking place in the context of a "ground swell [sic] of Anglo opposition to bilingualism" that resulted in the forcing of a county-wide referendum on anti-bilingualism which proposed that "all county government meetings, hearings, and publications shall be in the English language only" (Mohl 49). The referendum, approved by Miami-Dade voters in November, was testament to the waning welcome for Cuban refugees at the local level. The inattention to the needs of local Blacks and newly arrived Cuban and Haitian refugees, as exemplified by the handling of the census, and as evidenced by the referendum vote, illustrated how all these groups were positioned outside the American mainstream by local Anglos and by government officials.

²² See "Cuban refugees and Haitian refugees."

²³ See Williams and Fleischman. Also: Hamm; Gosin.

²⁴ This detention center, which opened in 1986, was the site of a 1987 uprising by Cubans who had come to the U.S. during Mariel, who destroyed many of its buildings in protest against a decision that was made to send them back to Cuba. In the years since the uprising, the facility was rebuilt and expanded, and currently serves as both a minimum-security correctional facility and a detention center for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). See Loyd and Mountz p. 80.

²⁵ "Haitian Refugees Arrive in New Orleans."

²⁶ "Blacks, Refugees Uncounted; City Sues Census Bureau."

While the *Times* expressed strong criticism of the local government's failures regarding its reception of the Haitians and Black Cuban refugees, it reserved its strongest criticism for the federal government for "straddling the fence on refugee policy" and placing the full burden of processing and providing for the influx of Cuban and Haitian migrants on the local South Florida community.²⁷ Ultimately, voices in the *Times* showed how Black people in Miami—native-born, Afro-Cuban, and Haitian—were all still in the midst of a fight for Black rights and against white oppression. Reporting on the drownings of 20 Haitians trying to flee Haiti, a *Times* writer expounded on this theme by comparing the contemporary treatment of the Black refugees arriving on our shores to the treatment of African slaves: "Those 20 drownings ... sharpen the parallel between the plight of the refugees and the treatment of Africans who were shipped to this country hundreds of years ago and sold into the most brutal type of slavery the world has ever known."²⁸ With so much evidence of the plight of the Black refugees arriving on U.S. shores, members of the local Black community in Miami began to connect these struggles to those of the local heterogeneous Black population, fueling their commitment to promote and preserve the freedom and dignity of Black people everywhere.

Conclusion

Though not always fully acknowledged, the Mariel Boatlift plays a meaningful role in the story of the Black fight for racial justice in Miami. For members of Miami's Black community, one cannot talk about the Mariel Boatlift without also discussing Haitian immigration. A significant part of this story relates to the ways African Americans challenged the U.S. for enacting favorable immigration policy for Cubans while rejecting Haitian migrants. Yet a reading of the *Miami Times'* coverage of the Haitian migration alongside their coverage of Mariel provides an additional dimension, disrupting the notion of Cuban/Haitian mutual exclusivity. Rather, the coverage demonstrated a recognition that Black refugees were not only arriving from Haiti, but also from Cuba, yet they were all subjected to the same "detention, deterrence, and expulsion" (Loyd and Mountz 80). Indeed, in direct response to the "crisis" of Mariel, the U.S. would make detention of those seeking asylum in the U.S. a mandatory practice. While the U.S. sought to signal a desire to treat all migrating groups equally with the new "Cuban-Haitian entrant" label, in practice, migrants in this new category were met by the U.S. government and people with fear and dread. But for Black Miamians, the treatment of Black Cuban and Haitian refugees only revealed in no uncertain terms how deeply uncommitted the U.S. was to universal human rights. In spite of this, the Black refugees would inspire and galvanize African Americans already fighting for the rights of native-born Blacks to personally invest in the fight for equitable immigration policy, in addition to other local and national concerns. Moreover, the Black refugees revealed that the arrival of Black people on U.S. shores, regardless of the time period and the country of origin, becomes subject to similar forms of racial scrutiny. This acted as both revelation and confirmation, helping to solidify the community's stance toward Black activism and renewing a shared commitment that interweaves the local and global fight for Black justice.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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²⁷ See "Despite All, Haitian Struggle Must Continue."

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