Critical thinking Assignment
Cubans versus Mexicans: Differences in Access to Assets and Cultural Capital

Why have Cuban Americans had more political and economic success than have Mexican Americans? In particular, consider differences in access to economic assets and cultural or social capital for the Golden Exiles and for post-1848 Mexican-Americans. Does game theory help to explain these differences and how were they ideologically justified? For example, how did the zero-sum fight over access to land and its resources (e.g., loss of Mexican land grants, competition for unskilled agricultural jobs) shape the social construction of storylines about Mexicans (with racist “Bandido” and “greaser” images)? How was this similar to the zero-sum struggle over land (forcible removal, Allotment Act 1887, etc.) shaping the social construction of storylines about Indians (featuring racist images of “savages” or of “children” needing guidance)? In contrast, in what sense did the Cold War and the Cuban-American enclave economy create a non-zero sum game shaping Cuban-American images? Use the definitions below, lectures 13 and 14, and the excerpts that follow: “Golden Exiles” versus “Victims of Manifest Destiny and Conquest.”

Asset: Any item of economic value owned by an individual or corporation, especially that which could be converted to cash. Examples are cash, securities, accounts receivable, inventory, office equipment, real estate, a car, and other property. Intangible assets include trademarks, patents, copyrights, goodwill. (http://m.investorwords.com/273/asset.html)

The term cultural capital refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. Examples can include education, intellect, style of speech, dress, and even physical appearance, et cetera (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_capital)

Douglas Massey (2007: 17) Categorically Unequal: “The possession of cultural capital makes an individual more productive not because he or she can perform a given operation better or faster, but because he or she can navigate structures of power with greater ease, feeling relaxed and comfortable in the social setting they define and thus interacting with other persons of influence to get things done. Cultural capital represents a symbolic resource that privileged groups can manipulate through opportunity hording to perpetuate stratification and increase inequality.”

“Social Capital” comes into existence whenever a social connection to another person or membership in a social organization yields tangible benefits with respect to material, symbolic, or emotional resources, such as getting a job that offers higher income, greater prestige, and more attractive sexual partners.” Most “good” jobs are not found through formal mechanisms such as paid advertisements but through informal connections with other social actors who provide information and leads (Granovetter 1974).” (excerpt from Massey, 2007: 17)

Capital: “In classical economics, of course, capital refers to anything that can be used in production of other resources, is human-made, and it not fully consumed in the process of production (Ricardo 1996). Common examples are financial capital, which can be invested to generate income, and physical capital, which can be applied to production to increase output.

The Golden Exiles

Modified extract from:

. . . [It] is important to understand the history, support, and success of Cubans who emigrated to the United States after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The early Cuban exile population. . . [that] fled the Castro regime was met in Miami with unprecedented political, social, and economic support. The first wave of exiles, known as the "Golden Exiles", who arrived between 1959 and 1963, entered the United States during the time when the 'red scare' was sweeping throughout the US. "Immigration in the [post World War II] period attempted to maintain the foundational . . . [framing or ideology] of the Cold War whereby the United States was a 'beacon of freedom' to oppressed and appropriate people. At the same time, immigration policy was charged with screening out 'undesirable immigrants' who would not make good (p. 3) citizens."

1 During the Cold War period, this 'foundational . . . [framing or ideology]', privileging particular immigrants over others, also equated notions of progress with assimilation and national harmony2.

The Cuban golden exiles were very much considered 'desirable immigrants'; they not only "represented the only pro-US elite of Latin America whose loyalty to US interests", but they also shared the determination to defeat communism with the United States. Early Cuban exiles were not only ideal Latin Americans, but also ideal Americans; they fled from communist Cuba - and therefore also the grip of the socialist Soviet Union - to the United States, where they were finally 'free'. It is in this regard that most Cuban exiles received greater private and public assistance when they arrived in the United States than any other immigrant or refugee group had historically.

The political background and the social construction of the Cuban exile's journey to the United States and their life in the US has given them advantages that no other Hispanic group has experienced. "Mexican and Latin American immigrants who live in Los Angeles have been constructed almost exclusively in economic terms, as desperate people fleeing their own countries to take advantage of the economic opportunities in the US. Cuban immigrants, on the other hand, have been represented almost exclusively as political refugees, thus legitimating the global dominance of the United States as a place of political refuge." 3

The United States government created the Cuban Refugee Program, which spent nearly $1 billion between 1965 and 1976. Through this program, the federal (p. 4) government paid transportation costs from Cuba and offered financial assistance to needy refugees and to state and local public agencies that provided services. 4 The Cuban exiles also took advantage of programs in Miami not specifically designed for Latinos. From 1968 to 1980, Latinos (almost all Cubans) received 46.9% of all Small Business Administration loans in Dade County. 5
Furthermore, Cuban exiles in Miami were given social support in order to incorporate themselves into the United States. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) - an agency of the US government - employed as many as 12,000 Cubans in Miami. The state of Florida also passed laws that made it easier for Cuban professionals to work in the United States. "In the late 1970s and early 1980s, 53% of minority contracts for Dade-County's transit system went to Latino-owned firms. Dade County schools led the nation in introducing bilingual education for the first wave of Cuban refugees in 1960. The Dade County Commission also designated the county officially bilingual in the mid-1970s."\(^6\) The Cuban experience did not only occur because of the support that was given to the exiles in Miami, but also because of their appearance and backgrounds. The first wave of exiles was different from other minorities in the United States. The "Golden Exiles" were predominantly white, middle to upper class professionals; they were the tops of Cuban society who wanted to flee the socialist revolution. "The presence of entrepreneurs and professionals in the Cuban refugee flow provided a trained and experienced core who knew how to access and use the extraordinary (p. 5) benefits provided by the US government."\(^7\)

Also, the 'Golden Exiles' success and their ability to use resources given to them allowed them to establish a footing in Miami and in the United States. The roots laid by the earlier-arriving, higher-status refugees helped lead to the success other waves of Cubans incorporating into the culture of Miami and the US. Economically successful Cuban refugees would hire other Cubans newer to Miami to jobs with a real possibility of economic growth. This is evident in a comparison of Cubans and Mexicans "who came to the United States in the mid-1970s [that] revealed that the Cubans not only had higher wages than the Mexicans, even Cubans with the same educational level as Mexicans received higher wages."\(^8\) This led to many later-arriving Cubans, who were not as educated or wealthy, becoming part of the middle and even upper class.

The political, social, and economic support given by the US government to Cuban exiles, as well as the foundation set by the "Golden Exiles" led to "Miami Cuban immigrants [achieving] economic and political power unprecedented in the entire history of U.S. immigrants."\(^9\) The success that Miami Cubans have had is visible: "Miami has proportionally the largest concentration of Latino businesses (over 55,000). Although Miami-Dade County has only 5% of the total U.S. Latino population, 31 of the top 100 Latino businesses in the United States are located there. U.S. Cubans’ rate of business ownership is more than 3 times that of Mexicans and nearly 6 times that of Puerto Ricans."\(^10\) (p. 6) U.S. support of Cubans as well as the exiles' ability to take advantage of the opportunity given to them led unexpected and unprecedented success. . . . The early support given by the United States to the Cuban exiles led to the success of the Cuban community in the United States. (p. 7)

**References**

Victims of Manifest Destiny and Conquest

Below is extract from “1848 Mexican American War” at http://www.umich.edu/~ac213/student_projects06/magsylje/history.html

The Mexican American War was mainly driven by the idea of “Manifest Destiny”; the belief that the U.S had a God-given right to occupy and civilize the whole continent. As increasingly large number of Americans migrated towards the west in search of land, . . . [a] belief that democratic English-speaking America would do a better job of running the lands than the Native Americans or Spanish-speaking Catholic Mexicans prevailed. President Polk shared and led the vision of Manifest Destiny, and did offer to buy much of the southwest land from Mexico. However the Mexican government refused the offer, and an unyielding desire to populate those southwestern lands caused tensions to continue to rise.

In 1848, at the conclusion of the U.S.- Mexican War, the two countries signed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. The treaty called for Mexico to give up almost half of its territory, which included modern-day California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. . . . At the time of the treaty, approximately 80,000 Mexicans lived in the ceded territory. . . . Only a few people chose to remain Mexican citizens compared to the many that became United States citizens. Most of the 80,000 residents continued to live in the Southwest, believing in the guarantee that their property and civil rights would be protected. Sadly, . . .[by] the end of the 19th century, most Mexicans had lost their land, either through force or fraud. . . . In Texas, Mexicans were restricted from voting. In New Mexico, Mexicans were the victims of violence, while in California, laws against them were passed, some of which were known as the Greaser Laws. (http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/6.html)

In 1855, California adopted the Vagrancy Act, known popularly as the Greaser Act, addressing “all persons who are commonly known as ‘Greasers’ or the issue of Spanish and Indian blood . . . and who go armed and are not peaceable and quiet persons.” Targeting the supposed “idle Mexican,” this anti-loitering law was the precursor to modern laws directed at loitering, gang activity, and other apparently race-neutral offenses that in practice are often used to justify interrogatory stops of persons of color. . . .Originating in the mid-1800s, . . . “Greasers” was a
popular reference by U.S. troops in the U.S.-Mexico war of 1846–1848, as well as by settlers in gold rush California. Its original usage appears to have been sexualized, a way to describe a “treacherous Mexican male who was sexually threatening to and desirous of white women.” Although the term continued to be associated with Mexican men in its Hollywood usage, “greasers” came to refer to Mexicans generally, encompassing both sexes as well as both Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Further, the term originated as a derogatory reference toward those of Mexican origin, but its use expanded over time . . . to describe anyone of Spanish origin. . . . the Hollywood greaser image of the 1900s was the villain of such films as The Greaser’s Gauntlet (1908), Tony the Greaser (1911), The Girl and the Greaser (1913), The Greaser’s Revenge (1914), Bronco Billy and the Greaser (1914), and, simply, The Greaser (1915).7 . . . Hollywood resurrected the greaser from time to time, beginning with the 1961 western One Eyed Jacks. Particularly in the 1940s, Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, especially young boys, were labeled “pachucos” or “zoot suiters.” Later, Mexicans and Mexican Americans became “wetbacks,” “aliens,” and “illegals” as the U.S.-Mexico border was fortified against entry by undocumented Mexican immigrants. (www.nyupress.org/webchapters/081479887Xpref.pdf)

Below is an extract from “Land Loss in California” Digital History ID 570 Author: Hutchings California Magazine (Date:1857) (http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=570)

The consequence of the system [the Land Commission instituted in California 1852-1855] was, that a large portion of the most valuable farming land in the State was occupied by [Anglo] squatters. This occupation contributed greatly to injure the value of the property. The land owner [a Mexican who received title to land before 1848] could not sell his land, nor use it, and yet he was compelled to pay taxes. His ranch brought serious evils upon him. It was the seat of a multitude of squatters, who--as a necessary consequence of antagonistic pecuniary interest,--were his bitter enemies. Cases we know, where they fenced in his best land; laid their claims between his house and his garden; threatened to shoot him if he should trespass on their inclosure; killed his cattle if they broke through the sham fences; cut down his valuable shade and fruit trees, and sold them for firewood; made no permanent improvements, and acted generally as though' they were determined to make all the immediate profit possible, out of the ranch. Such things were not rare. . . . Blood was not unfrequently spilled in consequence of the feuds between the land holders and the squatters; the victims in nearly every case, belonging to the former class. (http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=570)


Recently in Texas, Mexican-American families have begun to fight for the return of their ancestral lands, lands taken from them throughout decades of injustice at the hands of predominantly Anglo courts. . . . Only a handful of these claims have resulted in successful outcomes for Mexican Americans; and of these, none were based on the seemingly
forgotten promises of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. . . .Under the terms of the Treaty, Mexican property holders were to retain full enjoyment and protection of their property as if they were citizens of the United States. . . . [It] is significant to note that Mexican Americans are the only minority group in the United States, other than Native Americans, to be annexed by conquest and to have their rights allegedly safeguarded by treaty. . . . [T]he United States, through an unwritten policy of territorial expansionism. . . . has denied Mexican Americans their Constitutional rights both as landowners and as citizens in general. . . . [T]he acquisition and control of land was the primary factor behind the disenfranchisement of Mexican Americans at the precise moment that they became a substantial component of the population of the United States.

(http://academic.udayton.edu/race/02rights/guadalu7.htm)