



Shoppers in Cuban-American area of Bergenline Avenue in Union City, N.J.



The New York Times / Carl T. Gossett

A man carries stalks of sugar cane purchased in store on Bergenline Avenue

Bombings Revealed Split Among Cubans in Jersey

By DAVID VIDAL

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UNION CITY, N.J. — Bergenline Avenue is a bustling one-way street whose shops, smells, sounds, people and language speak of Cuba. The bustle comes from the revival of this city just across the Hudson River from midtown Manhattan, which has taken its life again and again from waves of immigrants.

Originally, it was the Swiss and the Germans, then the Armenians and Syrians and later the Italians and the Jews. Finally, in the early 60's, came the Cubans, and the dying mill town came to life again.

Small merchants moved aggressively into abandoned stores. Spanish-language signs went up: the Varadero Jewelry Store here, the Hernandez Restaurant there. Bodegas — grocery stores — flourished. Gradually, this 1.4-square-mile city in Hudson County has become the hub of the second-largest concentration of Cubans in the country, after Miami.

In all, 250,000 Cubans are believed by community leaders to live in the region spreading from here into adjacent Weehawken and West New York, farther

south into Elizabeth, in Union County, and into New York City.

"This town was on the way out," a local builder said in a recent interview. "The Cubans brought it back."

By and large, this community is concerned with consolidating itself in the middle class, or simply getting there. Many families have moved on to more prosperous communities, a sure sign of upward mobility. Until recently, its notable success in this effort has been its only story to outsiders and community members alike.

But a spate of bombings attributed to an anti-Castro organization — Omega 7 — which struck a local pharmacy, a refugee services center and a ramp loading suit-

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Bombings Pointed Up Split In Jersey's Cuban Residents

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cases on a coast-to-coast flight at Kennedy International Airport last week — has shaken many people here into an awareness of the changing reality of the Cuban community.

It is a reality that includes fear, political divisions and divided families as the relationship between the regime of Fidel Castro and the Cuban community in this country undergoes change.

The change is tied to a significant event called "El Dialogo," or "the Dialogue," which some people consider the most important to affect the Cuban community in the United States in the last two decades. It began last September when the Committee of 75, a varied group that excluded obvious antigovernment organizations and exile leaders, met in Havana with the Cuban President. They discussed such problems as family reunification, tourism by Cubans from the United States and the release of political prisoners.

These conversations, which participants say were held at the initiative of the Cuban Government, did not include American officials.

Release of Prisoners Agreed On

"Without a doubt, it was a major turning point," said the Rev. Andres Reyes, a diocesan priest at the Holy Family Roman Catholic Church here and a member of the committee.

The outcome of this dialogue was an agreement to release some 3,000 political prisoners and to permit Cubans residing in this country to return to visit relatives and friends for the first time in the 20 years since the revolution. Since January, 4,000 Cubans have traveled to Havana — half of them from the metropolitan area — and demand for seats on special flights is heavy even though the cost is \$850 in a single installment for a seven-day package tour.

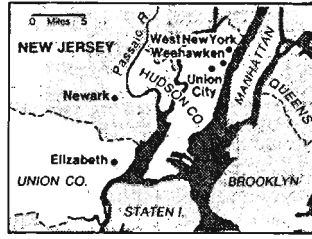
"Cuba has been closed for so long that there is a lot of pent-up demand, and it is completely a seller's market," said 26-year-old Rafael Betancourt. He left a job with the Federal Government in Washington to open Cubatravel, an agency that handles much of the tourism by Cubans from the metropolitan area. Mr. Betancourt said that hundreds of calls poured into the agency's offices in midtown Manhattan every day and that the lines of inquirers were constant.

According to law enforcement officials, last week's Omega 7 attacks marked a sharp departure from past incidents attributed to the group, because for the first time there was a possibility that dozens of people could have been killed. There were 155 passengers aboard the Trans World Airlines plane to Los Angeles, for which the suitcase with the bomb was destined.

But the feeling of some community members and non-Cuban residents is that there is more than fervid political opposition to Fidel Castro involved in this shift.

Loss in Business Feared

They believe that unrestricted travel to Cuba by hundreds of people stands to hurt businesses that thrived during the prohibition. They also fear that the people involved, including some suspected of earlier activism during a period of worse violence several years ago in Miami, will



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go to great lengths to protect their interests.

"There are a lot of people who stand to lose from the business of smuggling dollars or getting gifts and packages into Cuba," one seemingly knowledgeable private citizen said. "There is a lot of fear, but since many of the Cubans are not citizens, they don't feel safe enough to complain."

"This is an economic threat to those people who were charging \$700 to get packages into Cuba via Canada," added Father Reyes, who has been active in lending support to those with relatives who may be in Cuban prisons.

"We have nearly 600 applications from people wanting information about their relatives," he said.

Fear is one of the reasons few community residents not directly involved in helping people reach their families again are hesitant to talk publicly about the cleavage within the community. Another is the common knowledge that criminal, as well as extremist, elements may be working hand in hand.

Sentences Were Criticized

Two Cuban brothers recently sentenced to life imprisonment in connection with the 1976 murder in Washington of Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean Ambassador, are natives of Union City.

When the sentences were announced, many statements condemning them appeared in Spanish-language newspapers, issued by innumerable anti-Castro exile organizations whose membership often includes only a few people.

Last Monday, for example, the largest foreign-language newspaper in the United States, *El Diario-La Prensa* of New York, with a circulation of 89,000, carried an article headlined: "Sentence of Novo and Ross Energetically Condemned."

It went on to say that the life sentence imposed on two area Cubans for involvement in the murder of Mr. Letelier, "has had extraordinary repercussions throughout the Cuban exile community in the Northeastern United States."

Ricardo A. Pastrana, who was identified as coordinator of a *Movimiento Insurreccional Martiano*, a reference to the famed Cuban patriot José Martí, was quoted as saying:

"It is a judicial monstrosity, and they know that neither this fact nor any other is capable of silencing the voice of the true Cuban cause, that no one will be able to silence the voice of dynamite against international Communism, that they will have to face all the anti-Communist Cubans who remain prepared to fight."

Bombs Used in Battle for a Cause

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WEEHAWKEN, N.J. — "Omega 7 is nothing but a name," said Eulalio José Negrín. He spoke at an office filled with rubble. There were twisted metal folding chairs, immigration forms for Cuban refugees and calling cards identifying him as the head of the New Jersey Cuban Program, established here a few months ago.

A Cuban and an American flag hung from the plaster walls of the single-room, storefront office that had been bombed late the night before, presumably by the clandestine anti-Castro organization Omega 7.

The bombing was one of three last week. The other targets were a pharmacy in adjacent Union City that has shipped medical supplies to Cuba and a suitcase bound for Los Angeles on a Trans World Airlines flight. The airline has been involved in charter flights to Cuba for American tourists.

According to Federal investigators, Omega 7 is a pseudonym used by members of the Cuban Nationalist Movement, an anti-Castro organization based in the New York-New Jersey area. Three members of this group have been convicted in the bombing death of Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean Ambassador. Omega 7 has claimed responsibility for 12 bombings in the metropolitan area since early 1975 and has recently appeared to widen its scope of targets.

Last October, for example, a blast occurred in the offices of *El Diario-La*

Prensa, the Spanish-language newspaper, which habitually seeks to avoid becoming enmeshed in the political feuds of its diverse Hispanic constituencies. The paper, however, had given editorial backing to measures allowing Cubans here to return to their native island on visits.

There are more than 30 Cuban organizations, based mostly in New Jersey, that identify with the anti-Castro cause. But unlike Omega 7, most of them limit themselves to making scathing denunciations of President Castro in Spanish-language media, which include many limited-circulation newspapers distributed in grocery stores, restaurants and social clubs.