

GLOBAL ATLANTA SnapSHOTS

A LOOK AT ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE ATLANTA REGION



C U B A N S

The Global Atlanta Snapshots were created to foster understanding among all people of the Atlanta region. The Snapshots show the rich ethnic and cultural diversity that our region now enjoys. The residents of Atlanta's ethnic communities may have lived in the region for a long time or may have recently arrived. They may come from cultures and have customs significantly different from each other's, and from those of the general population of the Atlanta region. What they have in common with the rest of the region is that they make it their home, and they share in and contribute to its success. The Snapshots introduce and portray selected communities in terms of their backgrounds, their customs and cultures, their roles in the regional economy, and specific local resources available throughout the region.

Who are the Cuban-Americans?

Some 90 miles south of the Florida Keys is the island nation of Cuba and its nearly 11 million persons. Cuba's proximity to the U.S. has provided opportunities and challenges over the years, though since the Cuban revolution 45 years ago, there have been no formal diplomatic relations between the neighboring nations. This tense reality is ever-present in the thoughts of Cuban-Americans.

Prior to its discovery by Christopher Columbus in 1492, Cuba was inhabited by Amerindians: the Ciboney and Arawak tribes. Colonization by Spain did not begin until 1511, but with Spanish settlement Cuba became one of the richest colonies in the West Indies. Colonization also brought disease, warfare and enslavement to the native population, leading to its eventual extinction. Over the next two centuries, Spain began to direct more of its attention on its colonies in Central and South America and lost its grip on Cuba. In 1762, the British captured Havana and encouraged the cultivation of sugar cane, which soon became a dominant element of the island's economy.

Over the next 60 years, trade increased, as did immigration from Europe and other areas of Latin America. The introduction of the steam-powered sugar mill in 1819 hastened the expansion of the sugar industry. While the demand for African slaves grew, Spain signed a treaty with Britain prohibiting the slave trade after 1820. Over the next three decades, there were several unsuccessful slave revolts. The Spanish-American War of 1898 ended Spanish rule and established Cuba's independence, which led to the U.S. military occupation of Cuba from 1899 to 1902.



Since 1959, Cuba has been led by President Fidel Castro, whose socialist revolution overthrew dictator Fulgencio Batista. The years immediately following

Castro's ascendancy were marked by turbulence, including the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis – the nuclear missile showdown between the U.S. and the Soviet Union – in 1962.

In the years before the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, Cuba maintained a close political and economic relationship with the USSR. At the same time Cuba had a distant and antagonistic relationship with the U.S.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are nearly 1,250,000 persons of Cuban descent in the U.S. Of these, 846,000, about 68 percent, live in the greater Miami area. There are also sizable Cuban communities in New York, New Jersey and California. Some 9,400 Cuban-Americans live in metro Atlanta with about 4,900 members of that population being foreign-born.

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A PERSONAL STORY

Jorge Fernandez came to Miami in 1961 at the age of 10, along with his 17-year-old sister. They came from their home in Cuba through Operation Peter Pan. Since adults were required to have a visa in order to enter the U.S. and therefore could not leave Cuba, many children fled the country on planes by themselves, leaving behind their parents and other family members.



Fernandez and his sister lived with the family of his sister's classmate in Miami after a brief stay in a refugee center. His parents joined them a year later, though such was not the case for all those who left Cuba. Fernandez said it's difficult to imagine how his parents put their children on a plane without knowing if they would ever see them again.

Operation Peter Pan (*Operación Pedro Pan*)

Between Dec. 26, 1960 and Oct. 23, 1962, more than 14,000 Cuban children were brought from Cuba to the U.S. This movement, dubbed Operation Peter Pan, was orchestrated by the U.S. government, the Roman Catholic Church and Cuban opponents of the Castro regime. The operation was arranged to provide a safe haven for the young children of parents who opposed the Communist government established in Havana. The children were known as "Peter Pans." One of the most famous of the group is U.S. Senator Mel Martinez of Florida, nominated as the next chairman of the Republican National Committee.

As a child, Fernandez said he viewed the experience as an adventure. He and his sister communicated with their parents through letters, but never knew if their parents were in danger.

Eventually, his parents arrived in the U.S. and the family moved to Puerto Rico where his father found a job.

When Fernandez arrived in the U.S. he spoke no English. His sister had attended an American School in Cuba and therefore could speak English. Back then, he said, there were no English As A Second Language (ESOL) classes. "It was sink or swim," Fernandez said.

Fernandez, who was always interested in aviation (and in fact notes that his flight out of Cuba when he was a child was his first flight), received his pilot's license at 17. He decided to join the Air Force ROTC program but, as a result of the fuel crisis that was taking place that year, there was a delay getting into the program. In the meantime he earned his college degree and worked for General Foods International, focusing on the Caribbean market. When an Air Force slot opened, he took it. He was a cadet at 20 and second lieutenant at 22.

After a 24-year career in the Air Force, his wide range of experience led to senior positions with Delta Air Lines. He ultimately became International and Alliances Vice President for Delta at its headquarters in Atlanta, where his responsibilities encompassed all Caribbean, Latin American, Pacific, and Transatlantic operations. In 2006, when the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce sought someone to lead its initiatives in international trade, Fernandez was recruited to become Vice President of Global Commerce.

Fernandez met his wife, Sylvia, in Puerto Rico when they were in high school. They dated through college and lived in their first house together in Phoenix, Ariz., where he attended pilot training. His first daughter was born in Texas; his second daughter in Colorado Springs while he was at the Air Force Academy. He attended language school in Washington, D.C. to study Portuguese for an intelligence position and his first overseas assignment took him to Rio de Janeiro. He has served in Southern Africa (including Namibia and Angola) and Portugal.

Fernandez said that although he doesn't seek out an entirely Cuban lifestyle, he does gravitate to people, food and entertainment with a Cuban flavor. "It's part of your DNA", he said. "The roots come out unintentionally."

Holidays Celebrated

In addition to other Western holidays, Cubans may celebrate the following:

Three Kings Day

Jan. 6

Cuban Independence Day

May 20

All Saints' Day

Nov. 1

Easter and Holy Week

March/April

Hispanic Heritage Month

Sept. 15 – Oct. 15

All Souls' Day

Nov. 2



Cubans in the Atlanta Region: By the Numbers

Cherokee: 170	Clayton: 352
Cobb: 826	DeKalb: 1,026
Douglas: 21	Fayette: 83
Fulton: 926	Gwinnett: 1,018
Henry: 170	Rockdale: 123

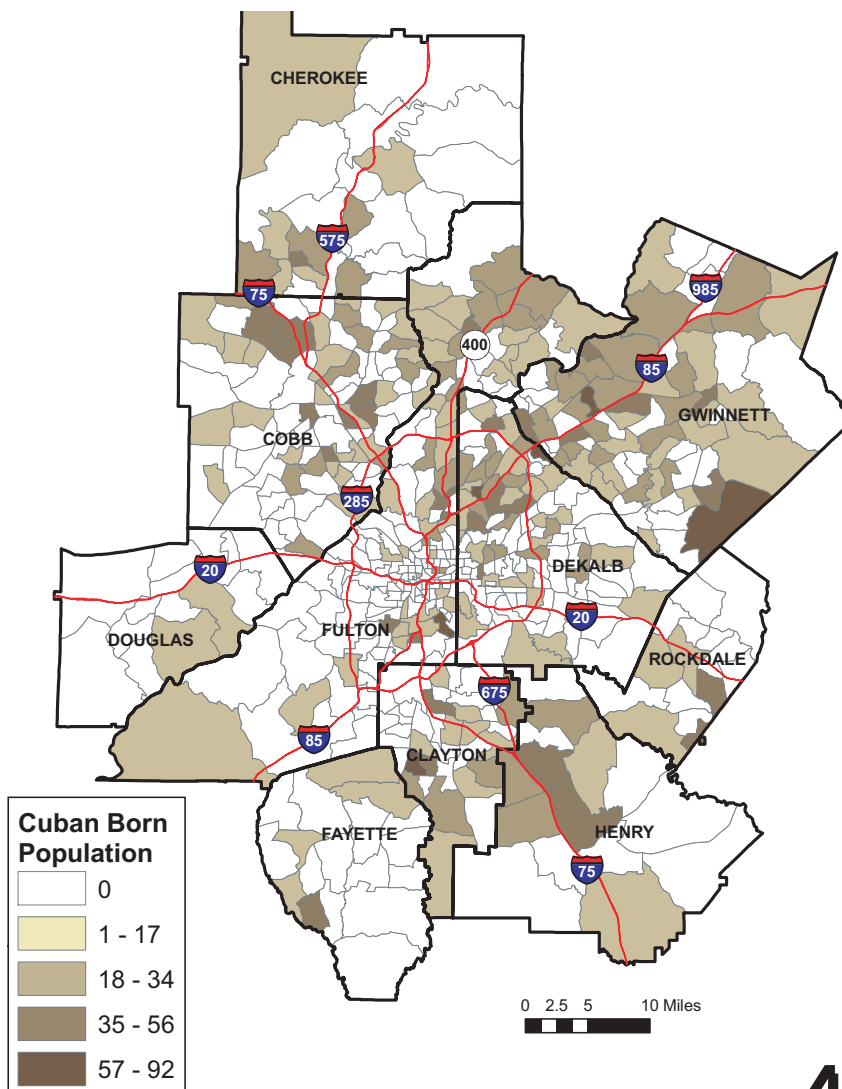
Total 10-county Region: 4,715

- **DeKalb County** is home to the largest population of Cubans, with 1,026, followed closely by **Gwinnett** with 1,018. **Fulton County** is next with 926.
- **DeKalb and Gwinnett** are home to **43 percent** of the Cubans in the Atlanta region and **32 percent** of the Cubans living in Georgia.
- The 10-county Atlanta region is home to approximately **42 percent of Georgia's total population**, but represents **74 percent of the state's Cuban population**.
- Unlike most foreign-born populations, Cubans are relatively dispersed throughout the 10-county region, though they do tend to cluster around the interstates, which is common among other international groups. The largest concentrations are found in Gwinnett.



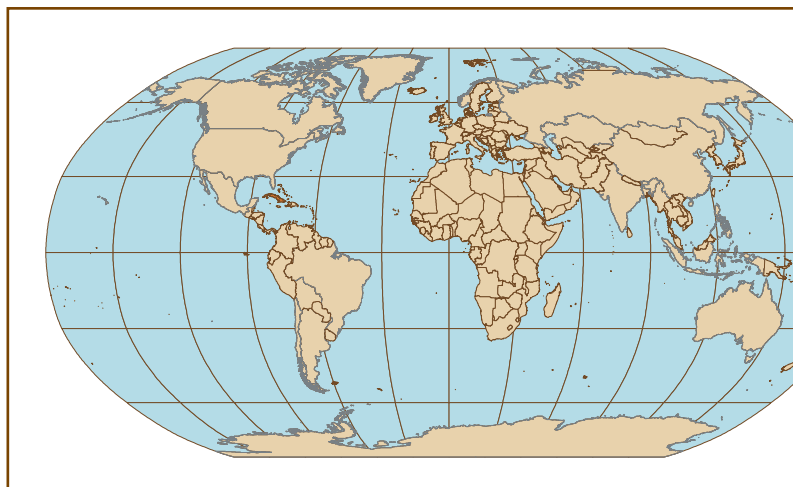
Julio Guzman, Owner Coco Loco Café

CUBAN POPULATION IN ATLANTA Atlanta Region, 2000



(Source: 2000 Census Data on Foreign-Born Population by Region, Country or Area of Birth)

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Cubans in the Atlanta Economy

There have been a number of highly successful Cubans in Atlanta, including the well-known former CEO of Coca-Cola, Roberto Crispulo Goizueta, who died in 1997 after leading the company for nearly 17 years. Another prominent Cuban-American is Ralph de la Vega, the CEO of Cingular. Sara Gonzalez, who previously worked with the Latin American Association and the organizing committee of the Centennial Olympic Games, is the president and CEO of the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. In addition to these individuals, there are Cuban lawyers in some of the top firms in the city, natural gas company owners and professors.

Cubans are actively engaged in international commerce. The Cubans in Atlanta are metropolitan, involved in global commerce, established and entrepreneurial. The Cuban community in Atlanta is older than many of the foreign-born population and assimilated into the general population.

Cuban Life in Metro Atlanta

The experience of Cubans in metro Atlanta, like those of Cubans in Puerto Rico, has much in common with those of Fernandez, he said. They, like him, left Cuba when they were young and have adapted to their local community. But the Cuban community in Atlanta differs from the one in Miami. In Atlanta there is an older generation of Cubans, while in Miami there is such a large number of Cubans that it feels like being in Havana. There, he said, you are immersed in Cuban culture.

For many years, the Atlanta Cuban Club has been an important center of Cuban community life. The cultural and social organization serves both Spanish- and English-speaking members. The organization presents historical seminars, recreational classes and Hispanic



The Cuban-American workforce in Atlanta numbered 4,811 in the 2000 census (2,872 men and 1,939 women). Among the men nearly 20 percent are employed in management, business and financial operations occupations. One of every seven men (415) are in management occupations. Another 19.5 percent are in professional occupations, with concentrations in computer specialists and engineers. Also, 21.6 percent are in a wide variety of sales and office occupations. Cuban men are also represented in the blue-collar labor force, with 18.2 percent in construction, maintenance and related occupations. Another 11.8 percent are in production and transportation jobs.

Cuban women in Atlanta are even more heavily represented in management and professional occupations (43.4 percent). Within the professional field, there is a notable concentration in teaching at the elementary and middle school levels. Almost a third (31.2 percent) of the female workforce is found in sales and office occupations. Other smaller concentrations are in food preparation and production jobs.



culture, from art exhibits, to concerts and flamenco dances. The building in Doraville also features a cafeteria and restaurant for members.

Another popular gathering place for Atlanta's Cubans is the Coco Loco Café. Located in the Buckhead Crossing shopping center, this restaurant and lounge, which opened in 1988, features authentic Cuban and Caribbean cuisine. Menu items include the *Picadillo* sandwich, similar to a Sloppy Joe, featuring seasoned ground beef on Cuban bread, and *Enchilado de Camarones*, an entrée featuring tender shrimp sautéed in Cuban creole sauce.

What are Cuban Customs and Culture?

The serious illness of 80-year-old Cuban President Fidel Castro in the summer of 2006 again raised questions about the future of the nation after Castro. The questions also served as a reminder of the intense interest and emotional ties of Cuban-Americans to their island homeland. In particular, there remains a high level of interest on the part of the Cuban-American community in the policies of the U.S. towards Cuba. This interest is expressed through political activity and the wide circulation of Cuban-American newspapers and other periodicals.

The dominant religion among Cubans is Roman Catholicism, although there are also significant numbers of Protestants and a small Jewish community.

The major community holiday observed locally is Cuban Independence Day, May 20, which commemorates Cuba's freedom from Spain. The Atlanta Cuban Club has sponsored outdoor events such as a picnic to celebrate the day.



Another important festivity is Christmas Eve, when local Cuban families congregate, feast and exchange gifts. The holiday meal usually features traditional foods, such as roast pork, black beans and rice, *yucca con mojo* (cassava with a special sauce), or fried plantain. Another popular dish from Cuba is *ropa vieja*, which translates literally as "old clothes", made of shredded flank steak in a tomato-based sauce.

The Cuban Christmas extends to Jan. 6, marking the day that the Three Wise Men arrived bearing gifts. According to Cuban tradition, children are brought gifts by the Three Wise Men (not Santa Claus). Families exchange personal gifts on Christmas Eve, but then small children receive more gifts twelve days later on Three Kings Day. Local Cubans report that it is a difficult tradition to keep alive in Atlanta, but that they consider it worth the effort.



Béisbol: More than a Sport

Baseball (béisbol) has been a popular sport in Cuba since the 1870s, as much a political statement as for recreation. In the 1870s to 1890s, when discontent with Spain was spreading rapidly, many people turned their backs on bullfighting to embrace baseball, viewed as more modern and enlightened. In 1878, the Cuban League of Professional Baseball was established, just three years after the founding of the National League in the U.S. The Cuban League was the second professional baseball league in the Western Hemisphere. Baseball even helped finance the revolution against Spain. Cubans living in Key West and Tampa, Florida organized their own league and monies collected at the games were donated to the cause of Cuban independence.



Cuban Organizations, Associations and Resources

Below is a listing of selected organizations who work with the Cuban Community. Additional resources are available at www.atlantaregional.com and www.globalatlantaworks.com

ASSOCIATIONS

Atlanta Cuba Solidarity Committee

9 Gammon Ave., SW
Atlanta, GA 30315
Contacts: Sobukwe Shakura, Jerome Scott
404-508-3420 / 404-622-0602
SobukweKuumba@yahoo.com

Atlanta Cuba Club

5797 New Peachtree Road
Doraville, GA 30340
770-451-3477

Latin American Association

2750 Buford Highway
Atlanta, GA 30324
404-638-1800
404-638-1806 (fax)
E-mail: main@latinamericanassoc.org
www.latinamericanassoc.org

LAA – Gwinnett Outreach Center

Harmony Station Outreach Center
Harmony Station Apartments
1250 Old Norcross Tucker Road
Tucker, GA 30084
678-205-1018
404-396-5150 (cell)
678-205-1027 (fax)
E-mail: ndyste@latinamericanassoc.org

LAA – Cobb Outreach Center

Hickory Lake Outreach Center
Hickory Lake Apartments
490 Windy Hill Road
Smyrna, GA 30082
678-213-0500
404-396-8017 (cell)
678-213-0374 (fax)
E-mail: galaragam@latinamericanassoc.org

LAA – Las Colinas Apartments Outreach Center

861 Franklin Road
Marietta, GA 30067
678-213-0360
404-396-7478 (cell)
678-213-0650 (fax)
404-929-9998
E-mail: cobboffice@latinamericanassoc.org

League of United Latin American Citizens

Southeast Region – Georgia
P.O. Box 12104
Atlanta, GA 30355
www.lulac.org

BUSINESS

Coco Loco Cuban & Caribbean Café

Buckhead Crossing Shopping Center
2625 Piedmont Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30324
(404) 261-0198

Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

(La Cámara de Comercio Hispana de Georgia)
2801 Buford Hwy., Suite 500
Atlanta, GA 30329
(404) 929-9998
www.ghcc.org

GENERAL

Catholic Social Services, Inc.

680 West Peachtree St.
Atlanta, GA 30308
404-881-6571
www.cssatlanta.com
Note: Contact main office for services and outreach center locations.

HEALTH

AID Atlanta

Hispanic Outreach Program
1605 Peachtree St.
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-870-7700
E-mail: maria.rivas@aidatlanta.org

RELIGIOUS

The Cuba-America Jewish Mission

E-mail: mission@thecajm.org
www.thecajm.org

MEDIA

Hispanic Yellow Pages

(Páginas Amarillas Hispanas)
Casablanca Publishing, Inc.
P.O. Box 191033, Atlanta, GA 31119
(404) 844-0600
www.paginasamarillas-atl.com

Mundo Hispánico

P.O. Box 13808, Atlanta, GA 30324
(404) 881-1484
www.mundohispanico.com

Contact:

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The Atlanta Regional Commission is the official planning agency for the 10-county Atlanta region including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale, as well as the City of Atlanta and 62 other cities. ARC provides a forum where leaders come together to discuss and act on issues of region wide consequence.

The Community Foundation • 50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 449, Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.688.5525 • www.atlcf.org

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