

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

FREEDOM TOWER

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Freedom Tower

Other Name/Site Number: Cuban Assistance Center; Cuban Refugee Center "El Refugio," Miami Daily News Tower

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 600 Biscayne Boulevard

Not for publication:

City/Town: Miami

Vicinity:

State: FL

County: Miami-Dade

Code: 12

Zip Code: 33132

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ___

Public-Local: ___

Public-State: X

Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: ___

Site: ___

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

___ buildings

___ sites

___ structures

___ objects

___ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register:

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 4

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Summary

The Freedom Tower is considered the “Ellis Island of the South” for its role during a twelve year period between 1962 and 1974 as the Cuban Assistance Center, offering nationally sanctioned relief to the Cuban refugees who sought political asylum from the Communist regime of Fidel Castro. Due to the political climate of the time and the Cold War, Cubans were readily welcomed into the United States and extended an unprecedented amount of assistance belying the immigration policy that had dictated the flow of immigration into the country until that point. The Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 was enacted by the Kennedy Administration to offer assistance to the large number of Cubans fleeing to Miami seeking political asylum. The Freedom Tower stands as the single most identifiable building with the Cuban exile experience. The building stands as a physical manifestation of Cold War era politics, and the influence it exerted over national immigration policies developed to assist the steady stream of Cubans arriving in the United States during the period.

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Freedom Tower faces east with 125 feet frontage onto Biscayne Boulevard (originally known as North Bayshore Drive) and occupies 253 feet of frontage on N.E. Sixth Street, and 189 feet on the north property line which parallels the Florida East Coast Railway. When the tower was constructed it was a short distance from the foot of Biscayne Bay. The railroad tracks of the Florida East Coast (FEC) railway are directly to the north of the building, and led to the FEC’s Terminal station and dock on Biscayne Bay.¹

The building has a four-story base, supporting a twelve-story tower that terminates in a cupola. The building actually possesses a basement story, unusual in South Florida, and steps lead to the lobby level, approximately three feet above the grade. The foundation consists of 12 concrete footings that extend 10 feet below the surface. The three story rectangular building that extends perpendicularly from the tower was built to house the printing presses, and is relatively unornamented. The foundation for this extension is a concrete slab, two-feet thick.

Described in contemporary newspaper accounts as “Spanish Renaissance,” the design of the building is a premier example of the adaptation of Spanish colonial architecture that occurs in South Florida, known as Mediterranean revival.² The style is an eclectic mix of a Spanish and Italian architectural vocabulary that is frequently embellished with Moorish ornament.

The base of the building is divided into three bays, with the principal entrance set in the center. The entrance, consisting of a two-story round arched portal, is embellished with an elaborate pediment and ornament above so that it rises the full height of the four-story base. Windows on the ground or first floor level feature shouldered arches that contained awning windows. The stucco of the ground (first) floor is scored to resemble individual blocks of stone that create the impression of a strong base that carry the remaining stories.

The second floor is fenestrated with tall casement windows that are set with a quoined flat arch. A shallow balcony, comprised of a stone balustrade, is located at the base of the windows. The ceilings of this floor feature groined vaults and the floor to ceiling height is twenty feet. A forty-foot long mural that depicts an ancient navigational map occupies one wall of this space. Due to its advanced state of deterioration, the artwork was almost wholly recreated by artisans during the 1988 restoration of the building by architect Richard J. Heisenbottle.³

¹ Prospectus, Oscar Dooley, Realtor.

² “Intricacies in Masonry Achieve Artistic Reach,” *Miami Daily News*, July 26, 1925.

³ Jeffrey Kleinman, “Piecing Together A Heritage: Artists Labor to Re-create Freedom Tower Mural,” *Miami Herald*, October 6,

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 5

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The third (or fourth) floor is fenestrated with a series of casement windows that repeat the symmetrical alignment of each of the bays and possess elaborate surrounds. The base of the building terminates in a decorative masonry grille that acts as the parapet for the flat roof of those portions of the building that flank the tower.

The tower, based on the design of the *Giralda* Tower of the Cathedral in Seville, is eleven stories in height and three bays deep. The first nine stories are framed by the quoins at the corners. This section of the building is the most unornamented in the composition, and serves as the transition from the extraordinary base to the intricate detail of the tower element.

The bell tower begins at the fourteenth floor and is stepped back from the plane of the tower section. A balustrade creates the base of the fifteenth and sixteenth stories that act to build a crescendo to the crowning achievement of the cupola.

From 1962 to 1974, when the Freedom Tower was used to assist Cuban refugees, the building itself was not altered. The main change instituted to accommodate its new bureaucratic function was the installation of fluorescent lights and the infusion of rows of desks for government workers. The spectacular Mediterranean revival features remained intact, and some, like the navigational map mural, made strong visual impressions still remembered by now adult Cuban Americans who recall their hours spent at the Freedom Tower.

In 1957, James M. Cox, the founder and owner of the *Miami Daily News*, died. Shortly thereafter, the newspaper moved to a new building and for the next five years the Tower was virtually unused. By 1957, it had suffered the usual types of alterations that occur to grand buildings constructed during an earlier era: ceilings had been lowered, fluorescent lighting and paneling had been installed, and spacious rooms had been subdivided with wooden partitions. The only areas that retained their grandeur were the lobby on the first floor, and the stairways to the mezzanine.⁴

This was the interior appearance of the building when the federal government leased it from 1962 to 1974 to assist the Cuban refugees. Old videos and interviews with people who used the building, either as employees or refugees, reveal details of what the building was like. The Cuban Refugee Center at the Freedom Tower utilized the basement, lobby, mezzanine, third, and fourth floors of the building.⁵

The lobby was the first area refugees encountered when they came for assistance, entering from the east-side of the building. It was and remains a striking space, with a two-story, wooden coffered ceiling with chandeliers. The west wall, opposite the main entrance, features a cast stone bas-relief scene of a Gutenberg printing press in operation, and above it is a depiction of Queen Isabella of Spain.⁶ Elaborate flights of stairs, barrel-vaulted, coffered with floral medallion ceilings, rise up to the mezzanine level from the north and south walls of the room, located to the west. No one contacted recalls the area behind the bas-relief, the western part of the floor, so it likely that it was not used by the relief agencies.

1988, 3.

⁴ Jose Abreu (Pedro Pan child and former Florida Secretary of Transportation), telephone conversation with Barbara E. Mattick (Florida Deputy SHPO, Division of Historical Resources), June 17, 2004; Fernando C. Mendigutia (Former Chief, Fiscal & Personnel Section, Cuban Refugee Center), telephone conversation with Barbara E. Mattick, June 18, 2004.

⁵ Celia Rhodes Sanchez (worked behind counter at the Cuban Refugee Center), telephone conversation with Barbara E. Mattick, June 17, 2004; Mendigutia, telephone conversation.

⁶ Raul Rodriguez (restoration architect), telephone conversation with Barbara E. Mattick, June 15, 2004.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 6

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The mezzanine (sometimes referred to as the second floor, or included as part of the first floor along with the lobby) was where applicants went to initiate their requests for assistance.⁷ Most took the northern flight of stairs to access the initial registration area and waiting area located in the northeast corner of the mezzanine.⁸ The waiting room was the old Composition and Advertising Room for the *Miami Daily News* decorated with a groined ceiling and Corinthian columns; however, during its reuse as the Freedom Tower these features were obscured by a lowered ceiling.⁹ A magnificent mural depicting an Old World map still remained visible on the east wall.¹⁰ A counter ran north-south across the width of the waiting area.¹¹ Applicants would go to the counter upon arrival and fill out initial paperwork, present their green cards, and receive a number to wait for an interviewer. Heads of families were given a choice of agencies from which they would receive assistance: the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC), Church World Service (CWS, Protestant), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), or International Rescue Committee (IRC, Non-sectarian).¹² Jose Abreu, former Florida Secretary of Transportation, remembers long rows of chairs between the columns where refugees waited for their number to be called.¹³ When called, they would meet with an interviewer from the agency they had requested. The USCC interview area was located in the southwest corner of the mezzanine next to a smaller area occupied by the IRC. The interviewers for CWS were in the southwest corner of the third floor, and HIAS occupied two offices in the small suite on the fourth floor, next to the base of the tower.¹⁴

The third floor also contained offices for the Center's administrative staff. The Director's Office was in the northeast corner, the same one occupied by James Cox when he ran the *Miami Daily News*. Down the hall, to the west were offices for the Assistant Director, Resettlement Officer, Liaison with the U.S. State Department, FBI, and other federal agencies. Offices for Personnel and Correspondence, including translators, were located further down the hall. A Data Processing Center (IBM) was located in a large room in the middle of the west-side of the floor, the old *Miami Daily News* Composition Room. Toward the middle of the floor were rest rooms, a lunch room and elevators. The Public Relations Office was located in the southeast corner of the floor.¹⁵

Among the services provided at the Center was health care. The basement of the building contained a Medical Dispensary with physicians, dentists, and a pharmacy. It was here that refugees received health screenings, including a check-up, x-rays, inoculations, and dental care.¹⁶ Some, such as former Secretary Abreu who came to the United States by way of Spain, received their health screenings before entering the country. The basement also contained a small cafeteria, an office for the building manager, and storage. Stairs near the cafeteria led directly up to the lobby. The basement area is now a parking garage.¹⁷

⁷ Rhodes, telephone conversation.

⁸ Rhodes, telephone conversation; Abreu, telephone conversation.

⁹ Abreu, telephone conversation; "House of Freedom, Tower of Dreams," VHS, produced by Mia Laurenzo (Miami, FL: WLRN, Public Radio and Television, 2003); The Austin Company, Freedom Tower floor plan, Metropolitan Dade County, Florida, 1950; Freedom Tower, interior photograph, 1924.

¹⁰ Jorge Hernandez (architect), telephone interview with Barbara E. Mattick, June 2004; Mendigutia, telephone conversation; Rhodes, telephone conversation.

¹¹ Abreu, telephone conversation; Rhodes, telephone conversation; Mendigutia, telephone conversation.

¹² Rhodes, telephone conversation; Mendigutia, telephone conversation; Cuban Refugee Center, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, *How the U.S. Cuban Refugee Program Operates* (Washington, DC: pamphlet, November 1967).

¹³ Abreu, telephone conversation.

¹⁴ Rhodes, telephone conversation; Floor plan sketch by Fernando Mendigutia, June 2004.

¹⁵ Rhodes, telephone conversation; Mendigutia, telephone conversation.

¹⁶ Mendigutia, telephone conversation.

¹⁷ Abreu, telephone conversation; Mendigutia, telephone conversation; "House of Freedom, Tower of Dreams," produced by Mia Laurenzo; Sherry Piland, Freedom Tower interior photograph, January 2004.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 7

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Memories of the Freedom Tower remain etched in the minds of many of the Cuban Americans who came to America and found support at the old *Miami Daily News* building. Aside from the spectacular lobby and the Old World map mural on the mezzanine, most of the building reflected its temporary use as a governmental agency. Quite understandably, restoration efforts have focused on returning the building to its original grandeur. The false ceilings on the mezzanine level have been removed revealing the spectacular groined ceiling and Corinthian capitals on the columns; wooden partitions no longer clutter the spacious areas. What remains virtually unchanged is the exterior. Former Secretary of Transportation Jose Abreu, one of the Pedro Pan boys,¹⁸ recalls his visits to the Cuban Refugee Center with his uncle. Each time they went there to obtain assistance in rejoining him with his parents, they would park in the same place a block and a half away. Most vividly etched in his mind is not the interior, but the sight of the Tower as they made what became the familiar walk toward the Center. For him and for countless other Cuban refugees, the Tower was a symbol of hope, El Refugio.¹⁹

THE FATE OF THE FREEDOM TOWER (1974-2007)

When in 1974 the Freedom Tower was no longer leased by its major tenant, the United States government, the building was offered for sale. During the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration of the United States, New York lawyer Sam Polur purchased the building for a little less than \$2 million dollars. Polur offered to sell the building to the Cuban exile community for use as an interpretive center depicting the Cuban exodus. Unfortunately, the idea met with a lukewarm reception and was subsequently abandoned. In 1978 the building was again sold, this time to the New York based Citibank, which purchased the Freedom Tower for a mere \$700,000.²⁰

The following year, the Freedom Tower was listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its association as the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center and as the offices of the oldest newspaper and plant facilities in Miami. Citibank continued its efforts to sell the building, and in 1981 transferred the deed to Southeast Bank Trust. In May 1985 the Florida Legislature commissioned a \$15,000 study to evaluate the options for the preservation and redevelopment of the Freedom Tower.

In July of that same year, the Miami City Commission began to look at a possible relocation of their City Hall into the Tower. In November, then President of Miami-Dade Community College Robert McCabe, proposed that the State of Florida purchase the building. In February of 1986, hopes for its redevelopment as Miami city offices were dashed when then City Manager Cesar Odio revealed the high costs required for its conversion.

The first real signs that the Freedom Tower would be rescued from dereliction came in November 1987, when Zaminco International, a Saudi Arabian consortium controlled by brothers, Amin and Hassan Al-Dahlawi, bought the building for more than \$7 million, with plans for a luxury office building and elegant 15,000 square foot banquet hall located on the mezzanine floor.²¹ During the interim, however, when the Freedom Tower was

¹⁸ Operation Pedro Pan was a program established by the Catholic Church in the United States to facilitate the exodus of 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors from the island between December 12, 1960 and October 23, 1962. Children were sent to the United States by their Cuban parents to prevent their indoctrination by the Communist government, with the hope of eventually reuniting the family in the United States, once they were themselves able to leave the island. Children were temporarily taken in by other family members already residing in the States or placed under the guardianship of the Catholic Church. Operation Pedro Pan is known as the single largest exodus of unaccompanied children in the Western hemisphere (Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc., "History," <http://www.pedropan.org> [accessed May 18, 2007]).

¹⁹ Abreu, telephone conversation.

²⁰ Geoffrey Tomb, "The Freedom Tower," *Miami Herald*, November 20, 1988, 1H.

²¹ Cheryl Kane, "Tower's Freedom Hall to Open in November," *Miami Today*, August 11, 1988.

FREEDOM TOWER**Page 8**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

unoccupied, the building suffered enormous damage, principally from vagrants. They stripped the building of its brass stair railings, copper pipes, including the copper roof. The building was completely uninhabitable.²²

Zaminco chose Richard J. Heisenbottle as the project architect and charged him with the restoration of the building. Heisenbottle had already achieved a formidable reputation locally, regionally, and nationally for his work with such projects as the painstaking restoration of the Olympia Theater (now Gusman Center for the Performing Arts) in downtown Miami. Heisenbottle's task was to completely rehabilitate the building and to convert the former *Miami Daily News* office space on the mezzanine level into a 625-seat banquet facility. It seemed that the neglect of the Freedom Tower was over.

The task ahead for Heisenbottle was daunting. The steel structure from the fifteenth through the seventeenth floors was extensively rebuilt from the inside. The reinforced concrete stairs, beams, and columns of the building's base were also repaired using gunite and new reinforcing steel when necessary. The stairway, which ran from the base to the terminal story, was completely replaced.²³

To create the catering kitchen for the new ballroom Heisenbottle created a small addition that extended from the rear of the building. Because the addition was minimal and located on a secondary elevation, there was only minimal impact to the building's integrity.

All of the systems in the building, the electrical, mechanical and elevators needed complete replacement. A new condenser water type air-conditioning system was selected, as it would have minimal impact to the structure itself, possess the maximum flexibility for the tenants, and be the most energy efficient. The electrical system was replaced with a new switchgear and an emergency generator. A new fire alarm and life safety systems that were minimally invasive to the building, were installed. New elevator cabs were placed within the existing shafts designed to resemble the originals with their sumptuous brass and mahogany details.²⁴

Exterior elements of the building were either repaired or reconstructed with the aid of the original Shultze and Weaver drawings. These elements included the oak main doors, cast iron decorative transom and wrought iron balcony located above the doors, the cast concrete cherubs above the pediment, the windows, and seventy-three obelisks and eight finials. The construction team also recast sixty to seventy balusters and recreated the nineteen-foot tall copper weather vane.²⁵ The cost for the rehabilitation was estimated at \$12 million.

In a brilliant, festive black tie affair held in 1988, the building opened to much fanfare. The banquet hall was ablaze with newly installed chandeliers that emphasized the sheer proportions of this magnificent building. Unfortunately, in the months thereafter leasing efforts went poorly and too few parties were held in the banquet hall to achieve any sound financial footing. Contractors, who had yet to complete the tower floors, filed suit against Zaminco claiming unpaid bills. In 1992, all functions scheduled to take place in the ballroom were cancelled. By 1994, a Liechtenstein corporation, which had been Zaminco's principal lender, put the building up for sale for \$6.5 million.²⁶

In 1996, under the leadership of Miami-Dade County's largest not-for-profit historic preservation organization, "Dade Heritage Trust," a campaign was launched to convince the State of Florida to purchase the building. In

²² Richard J. Heisenbottle (architect), interview by author, August 29, 2003.

²³ Richard J. Heisenbottle, "Freedom Tower," *Dade Heritage Trust Presentation*, April 1989.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cindy Krisher Goodman, "Neglected Freedom Tower is For Sale-Again" *Miami Herald*, 18 October 1994, 3C.

FREEDOM TOWER**Page 9**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

July 1997, the State's Conservation and Recreational Land Acquisition program (CARL) placed the Freedom Tower on its priority-funding list.²⁷ Before the state of Florida acted, however, Jorge Mas Canosa, founder and leader of the powerful Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) purchased the building in September 1997 for \$4.2 million. The CANF wanted to turn the building into a monument to the Cuban struggle for freedom from oppression. As Jorge Mas Santos, son of Mas Canosa and chairman of the CANF, explained: "For Cuban exiles, the tower represents something similar to Ellis Island, . . . it's a symbol of freedom. We wanted to leave a permanent structure that would speak to our history and be a symbol for people fleeing from a totalitarian regime. It is also a testament to the greatness of this country and its willingness to welcome us with open arms."²⁸

Just two months after the purchase Jorge Mas Canosa passed away. The overwhelming loss of the family's patriarch stalled the project until August 1999, when Mas Canosa's son Jorge Mas Santos began the selection of a project architect, construction manager, and consulting engineers. Jose G. Puig, a professional engineer with over thirty-five years' experience in the construction industry, was named project manager. He in turn selected the project architect, Raul Rodriguez, partner in the Rodriguez & Quiroga architectural firm. Rodriguez, an accomplished architect who had completed such major restoration work as the San Carlos Institute in Key West and the Charles Deering Estate in south Miami-Dade County, had a very personal association with the Freedom Tower.²⁹ In 1959, Rodriguez and his family left Havana to escape the tyranny of the Castro regime. They were frequent visitors to the Freedom Tower as they began their new lives in Miami.

From January until May 2000, work on the building entailed the restoration of the structural system. The first phase consisted of repairing the deteriorated reinforced concrete slabs, columns and beams. The lobby level work included the restoration of the lobby walls, its coffered ceiling, and the cast concrete details. The former ballroom would be converted into museum space. By July 2000 selective demolition of the 1987 catering kitchen addition was complete. The space originally occupied by the *Miami Daily News* composition department was to be converted into an auditorium where lectures could be held. In July 2000, work began on the exterior of the building. It included the repair of the wooden doors, the steel casement windows, cast concrete details, the repainting of the stucco surfaces, and the installation of new tower windows.³⁰

Delays beset the project, as the conditions encountered proved worse than anticipated. The initial \$2 million budget for the structural repairs actually doubled. Still on May 19, 2002, the Mas Family, accompanied by noted Cuban celebrities, community leaders, and members of both the United States Congress and Senate, celebrated the historic restoration phase of the Freedom Tower with a street party that boasted 18,000 participants. The inauguration festivities launched a fundraising campaign with the hope of garnering funds for further restoration and the establishment of a museum endowment fund.³¹

In 2004, the Mas Family sold the Freedom Tower to another well respected Cuban American family residing in South Florida, the Pedro Martin Family. The Martins subsequently announced the donation of the Freedom Tower to Miami Dade College (MDC) in 2005. Pedro Martin has proposed the construction of a building, possibly condominiums, adjacent to the Freedom Tower, however, no final determination has been made and the exact nature of the construction is as of yet unknown.

²⁷ Stephen Smith, "Freedom Tower Part of Past, Future for Architect" *Miami Herald*, May 13, 2001, 1M.

²⁸ Fabiola Santiago, "Beacon Will Mark History of Exiles" *Miami Herald* (Broward edition) May 13, 2001, 22A.

²⁹ "The Freedom Tower, A Dream Come True" Special supplement to the *Miami Herald*, May 17, 2001, 12SE.

³⁰ "The Freedom Tower," Informational Booklet. Rodriguez and Quiroga Architects Chartered, 2001.

³¹ Damarys Ocaña, *Hispanic Magazine*, "Miami Freedom Tower Restored: Historical Refugee Processing Center Becomes a Museum," July-August 2001 Panorama, <http://www.hispanocmagazine.com/2001/julaug/Panorama>.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 10

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Serving as a steward of the Freedom Tower is a fitting development for Miami Dade College since it enrolls more Hispanic students than any other college in the nation. Even more appropriately, through its doors have passed thousands of Cuban Americans, many of which serve in leadership roles today. The President of the College, Dr. Eduardo J. Padron, as a Cuban American himself passed through “El Refugio” in 1961 alongside his family. He refers to the Freedom Tower as his “first stop in America.” Today, he is considered among one of the most influential Hispanics in the U.S., recognized for his vision and years of leadership at MDC.

Serving as an educational, cultural and community center, the Freedom Tower is once again a destination for the students and residents of Miami Dade and beyond. Recently, it served as the site for several exhibitions including an exhibit of the works of Carlos Alfonzo, a renowned Cuban American contemporary artist, as well as an exhibit showcasing the work of the students of the New World School of the Arts. Other cultural and community events have taken place at the Freedom Tower including the opening night of the Miami International Film Festival and an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) press conference, announcing the construction of new immigrant processing centers.

Included in the College’s long term plans for the Freedom Tower is its conversion into a Cuban-American Historical Museum. This museum will feature the story of the Cuban exodus and the community’s dynamic experience in the United States, and their broad contributions to the nation. As the only museum dedicated to the history of the Cuban-American experience, it will feature interactive historical databases, research facilities, a conference area for symposia and conferences, classrooms for lectures and undergraduate student learning, and exhibit and gallery space.

The Freedom Tower’s role in the City of Miami, first as an impressive monument to the real estate boom phenomenon of the 1920s and later as a symbol of hope to hundreds of thousands, still enriches the community today. The prophetic words of CANF founder Jorge Mas Canosa, provide a compelling reason for the preservation of the Freedom Tower: “This building, which long served as a beacon of hope, will be assured its rightful place for prosperity [*sic*] as a monument to the legacy of thousands of Cuban Americans for whom its halls became the gateway to freedom.”³²

Under the stewardship of Miami Dade College, Mas Canosa’s words will be honored through the continual maintenance and restoration of this iconic structure by the College, to duly recognize its historic significance and pay tribute to the building’s cultural legacy.

³² Fabiola Santiago, “Freedom Tower Opening Delayed Until October,” *Miami Herald*, May 16, 2002, 1E.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 11

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B C X D

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A B C D E F G X

NHL Exception(s): 8

NHL Criteria: 1, 3

NHL Theme(s): I. Peopling Places
 3. Migration from Outside and Within
 IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
 4. Political Ideas, Cultures and Theories
 VIII. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community
 1. International Relations
 4. Immigration and Emigration Policies

Areas of Significance: Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic
 Politics/Government
 Social/Humanitarian
 Immigration

Period(s) of Significance: 1962-1974

Significant Dates: 1962-1974

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Leonard Schultze and S. Fullerton Weaver

Historic Contexts: IX. Political and Military Affairs After 1945
 XXX. American Ways of Life
 E. Ethnic Communities

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 12

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The United States assumed its role as “the melting pot” for immigrants in the late nineteenth century as thousands of Europeans entered New York through the Ellis Island immigration station en route to their new lives and identities as American citizens. While Ellis Island is of paramount importance, there were other immigrant processing centers in the United States that were crucial in the migration of other nationalities. For example, Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, California, was the principal port of entry for Asians during the period from 1910 through 1940, and became known as the “Ellis Island of the West.”³³ Unlike Ellis Island or Angel Island, Miami’s Freedom Tower processed Cubans who came as political exiles rather than immigrants. At the height of the Cold War, United States foreign policy stressed the containment of communism and as a result, the Cuban exodus was viewed unlike any previous wave of immigration.

Even so, the Freedom Tower is viewed by many as the “Ellis Island of the South.” The Freedom Tower is significant under National Historic Landmark Criterion 1 for its role in the unprecedented immigration of hundreds of thousands of exiled Cubans who fled the country when Fidel Castro assumed power in 1959. During a three-year period between 1959 and 1962, the first wave of immigrants sought asylum in Miami. It was also during those three intense years that the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion occurred, and the world was brought to the brink of war during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Flights out of Cuba would not resume until 1965 and continued, with only a brief hiatus, until April 6, 1973. In over three thousand “Freedom Flights,” another 175,000 Cubans arrived in Miami.³⁴ The huge influx of Latins in South Florida has created tensions and sometimes quarrelsome ethnic relations, causing the flight of many Anglos to neighboring communities and the development of an entirely new demographic profile. The Cuban exile community, however, has made significant contributions to the United States in general, and Miami has become a major international community in large part due to its transformation as a result of the influx of Cuban refugees.

The Freedom Tower, in its role as a Cuban Assistance Center, is of further national significance under National Historic Landmark Criterion 3 as it represents the American ideal of inclusivity and the firm belief that democracy should be available to all who fight against tyranny and demagoguery. The sheer numbers of Cubans who were welcomed into the United States within a short span of years, estimated at 650,000, evidences the magnanimity of the American people. The United States immigration policy was relaxed beginning with the Eisenhower administration, and continued during the Kennedy Administration. With the passage of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act in 1962, Kennedy initiated a program of financial relief that would assist tens of thousands.³⁵ Several assistance centers were set up in Miami and other cities around the states to help with the welcoming and resettlement of Cubans in the US. Most of those offices were established within buildings already serving organizations belonging to churches, state, and the federal government. These centers, however, were smaller, short-lived, and did not offer the newcomers the array of services available to them at the Freedom Tower. “You could find all the help you needed only at the Freedom Tower, plus most of the people working there were Cuban and understood very well the needs and idiosyncrasies of the refugees.”³⁶ The welcoming of the Cuban exile community was a matter of national policy begun under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, continued through the administration of President John F. Kennedy, and culminated during

³³ Phillip P. Choy and Susan Kline, “U.S. Immigration Station, Angel Island,” National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, December 09, 1997).

³⁴ María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 102.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁶ Ms. Lucia de Aragón (former federal government employee at the Cuban Refugee Program in Washington DC), telephone interview with the author, March 8-9, 2004.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 13

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

President Richard Nixon's administration.

The Freedom Tower, known to the Cuban refugees as "*El Refugio*," is nominated for National Historic Landmark designation under Criteria Exception 8, as it achieved national significance less than fifty years ago. The period of significance demonstrated by the Freedom Tower as a Cuban refugee-processing center is from 1962 when the center opened until it closed in 1974. Although the role of the Freedom Tower as a Refugee Processing Center and the events that transpired within its confines occurred less than fifty years ago, the building is exceptionally significant. The center was established as a result of differences in political ideologies between communism and democracy. Moreover, the center was born from a need by the United States to aid those who were seeking asylum from a communist regime that took root only ninety miles away from its shores, hence reinforcing the United States' ideological struggle against communism. The Freedom Tower stands as the most significant structure in relation to Cuban immigration in the United States and is a symbol of freedom and democracy, much as Ellis Island was for many European immigrants. The Cuban exodus began at the height of Cold War tensions, and the Cuban people were powerful witnesses to the conflict between democracy and communism. The very reason the building functioned as a refugee processing center was born of crisis, and as such, its use as a processing center was temporary in nature. In the words of Marshall Wise, the Cuban Refugee Center's Director in 1963: "This office is temporary, always has been and will be. Basically, our job is to work ourselves out of a job."³⁷ Though it operated for only twelve years, the building has become an icon representing the faith that democracy brought to troubled lives, the generosity of the American people and a hopeful beginning that assured thousands a new life in a new land.

Immigration Stations in the United States

Ellis Island

Throughout its history the United States has welcomed millions to its shores, earning it the moniker of "the melting pot." The greatest period of immigration was during the end of the nineteenth century. On the East Coast the Port of New York received the largest number of immigrants from all over the world. In 1890, the federal government selected Ellis Island to be the Federal Immigration Center for New York. Ellis Island opened in January 1892, receiving thousands of refugees mostly from Europe, each day. They were examined for disease, questioned, and received travel assistance. The peak period for Ellis Island was between 1892 and 1924, when approximately 12 million immigrants were processed into the country.³⁸ In 1924 Congress passed the National Origins Act that severely restricted the numbers of immigrants admitted into the country. As immigration slowed, the activity and need for a facility like Ellis Island dwindled. During World War II the facilities were used as a detention center for enemy aliens. In 1954 the doors were closed.³⁹

Angel Island

On the West Coast, the United States Immigration Station on Angel Island served as the point of entry for Asians from 1910 until 1940. Angel Island, the largest island in the San Francisco Bay area, was first used as a military installation. In 1908 construction began on facilities to house a federal immigration station, and included an administration building, detention barracks, hospital, powerhouse, and wharf. Upon its opening in 1910 the station served as the major point of entry for Chinese immigrants.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Life Begins Anew, The Cuban Refugee Program*, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), Social and Rehabilitative Service, January 1970.

³⁸ Ellis Island Immigration Museum, "History of Ellis Island," http://www.ellislandimmigrants.org/ellis_island_history.htm (accessed May 4, 2003).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Choy and Kline, "U.S. Immigration Station, Angel Island."

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 14

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Chinese immigrants were detained at Angel Island in a prison-like environment while awaiting permission to enter the United States. Unlike the European immigrants who entered Ellis Island, with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Chinese were prohibited from becoming citizens. Exemptions were only allowed for diplomats, travelers, ministers, students and children of citizens. On arrival in San Francisco, whites, Japanese, and other Asian immigrants would be separated from the Chinese.⁴¹

Angel Island Immigration Station closed in 1940 but the facilities were used during World War II as a Prisoner of War camp. From 1942-1946, the facilities housed German, Italian and Japanese prisoners of war. The Army declared the facility surplus in 1946. Unlike the immigrants from Europe and Asia who entered the United States at Ellis Island and Angel Island, the Cubans who entered America by way of the Freedom Tower did so as political exiles.⁴²

Historic Background of the Freedom Tower

The City of Miami, incorporated in 1896, the year that Henry Morrison Flagler brought his Florida East Coast Railway to the city, began as little more than a frontier outpost in the 1860s. It soon became a megalopolis, whose major industries included tourism and whose geographical position made it a logical point of departure for travel to Central America and the Caribbean.

Miami's growth was also largely dependent on its accessibility, which continued to improve as the twentieth century experienced a wave of new technological advances. The availability of personal automobiles and the advent of the Federal Highway System were keys to its progress. Following World War I, Miami became a highly desirable place to visit, and many made it their year-round home. In 1920, during the presidency of Calvin Coolidge, economic prosperity was commonplace throughout the nation. It was an era of rum running, optimism and burgeoning development.

Perhaps more than any other state in the country, Florida grew at an exponential rate during this thriving economic period. The demand for land in Florida was unrelenting, and the ambitious development of this heretofore unimproved sub-tropical landscape was explosive. It was in this environment that the Miami News Tower was constructed.

The Miami Metropolis was first published on May 15, 1896 as a weekly. James M. Cox purchased the paper in 1923 and changed its name to the *Miami Daily News and Metropolis*. Cox was a former governor of Ohio, and in 1920 was the Democratic Party's presidential candidate. In 1924, Cox commissioned the New York firm of Leonard Schultze and S. Fullerton Weaver to design a building that would house the offices and printing presses of the paper.⁴³

The architectural firm of Schultze and Weaver was founded in 1921. Before they became partners, Leonard Schultze supervised the construction of Grand Central Station (1903-1913) and the New York Biltmore and Waldorf Astoria hotels. S. Fullerton Weaver had formerly been the president and owner of a New York construction company. The firm was the company architects for John McEntee Bowman's chain of Biltmore Hotels. Before their work for Bowman at the Miami-Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, Schultze and Weaver had designed the Westchester Biltmore in Rye, New York, the Sevilla Biltmore in Havana, Cuba, as well as the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "Decorative Design Has Much Intricate Detail," *Miami Daily News, Tower Section*, July 26, 1925.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 15

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Atlanta Biltmore.⁴⁴

Construction of the Miami News Tower began on June 11, 1924. The cost of the building was, for the time, a phenomenal \$2 million. New York contractor George Fuller managed the construction, and John Orr of Miami handled the architectural detail for the building. At seventeen stories tall the sheer height of the building measuring at 283 feet, was a significant achievement. Located at the foot of Biscayne Bay (it was built before the land was extended eastward by the filling of Bayfront Park), it set the standard for the future high-rises that hugged the shoreline.

The building contains over 82,000 square feet, and was constructed of reinforced concrete and vitrified tile. Each of the tower floors (floors four through twelve) contain 1,600 square feet. The 15,000 square feet of the mezzanine level, immediately above the lobby and sometimes referred to as the second floor, housed the advertising and circulation departments. This second floor space, with its twenty-foot groin vaulted ceiling was later converted to a spectacular ballroom. The third floor (terminal story of the base) was the “nerve center” of the newspaper’s operations, housing the city room, sports desk and editorial offices. The tower floors were leased to other businesses. The thirteenth and fourteenth floors were the private domain of *News* owner James Cox. The three-story rectangular section of the building is perpendicular to the tower, and contained the newspaper presses and loading docks.⁴⁵

The *Miami News* Tower opened on July 26, 1925. In celebration of this great accomplishment, the *Miami News* printed an edition of the paper that contained 504 pages, and weighed a hefty seven and one-half pounds.⁴⁶ The year 1925 was the zenith of the Florida real estate boom and between the advertisements for goods and services and the real estate advertisements, there was every need for a paper that huge.

The end of the boom was in sight, however, and beginning with a devastating hurricane in September 1926, the bottom fell out of the Florida real estate market. Unsecured loans, the unavailability of building materials and bad press from northern newspapers all contributed to Florida’s financial collapse. By 1928, there was very little activity in this once flourishing mecca.

Nonetheless, the Miami News weathered the storm and continued to publish its daily editions. The newspaper occupied the building until it moved to a new facility in 1957.⁴⁷ The future use of the *Miami News* Building would create an entirely different identity for the building, one that has assumed the stature of symbol to many.

Cuban American Relations

Because of their close geographic proximity, the relationship between Cuba and Florida has spanned centuries, and their mutual destinies have corresponded in many ways to one another. Florida has long held ties with Cuba, as the Spanish crown ruled both for many years beginning in 1513. From the 1600s on, England continued its campaign to add to its American holdings. In 1702 they first attacked St. Augustine, and in 1742, after decades of skirmishes, British colonists defeated the Spanish at the Battle of Bloody Marsh on St. Simon’s Island, Georgia, establishing the St. Mary’s River as Florida’s northern boundary. Under the British (1763-83) Florida was divided into two provinces, with St. Augustine as the capital of East Florida, and Pensacola as the capital of West Florida. When the Treaty of Paris was signed at the conclusion of the American Revolution in

⁴⁴ Samuel LaRoue and Ellen Ugucconi, *The Biltmore Hotel: The Legacy Endures* (Miami: Centennial Press, 2002).

⁴⁵ Geoffrey Tomb, “Freedom Tower,” *Miami Herald*, November 20, 1988, 1H.

⁴⁶ “St. Paul Paper Second Biggest,” *Miami Daily News*, June 24, 1949.

⁴⁷ Tomb, “Freedom Tower.”

FREEDOM TOWER**Page 16**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1783, the ownership of Florida reverted back to Spain.

The United States' foreign policy was sensitive to the balance of power in Europe and North America. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the Spanish Empire began to fall apart. Latin and South America, Chile, Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela cast off the yoke of colonialism and became republics. In 1823, President James Monroe espoused the nation's foreign policy that would become known as the "Monroe Doctrine." The United States expressly stated that the American continents were no longer open to European colonization. It further stated that the United States would not intervene in European wars or internal affairs and expected Europe to stay out of American affairs.⁴⁸

Spain's control of Florida during this Second Spanish Period was tenuous at best, and encounters and disputes continued with the United States. In 1821, Florida became a U.S. Territory after the Spanish government agreed to cede Florida in exchange for the assumption of \$5 million in damages claimed by U.S. citizens against Spain. Andrew Jackson became Florida's first military governor. In 1845, Florida became the twenty-seventh state in the Union.

When the Treaty of Paris restored Florida to the Spanish in 1783, Cubans began a long fight for independence from Spain. At the same time, periodically until the Civil War, Americans schemed to annex the island. In 1868 a ten-year war began that ended with Spain promising concessions to the Cuban people. Throughout this period, a significant number of Cubans made their way to Florida, establishing communities in Tampa and Key West.⁴⁹

As a result of the lack of promised reforms, a second Cuban revolution began in 1895 with Jose Martí as its leader. When the U.S.S. *Maine* was sunk in Havana harbor in February 1898, the United States entered into the conflict, joining Cuban forces against Spain. The so-called Spanish-American War officially ended with the Treaty of Paris, signed in December 1898. In it, Spain relinquished its control over Cuba and handed the island over to a provisional U.S. military government. On May 20, 1902 Cuba became an independent republic; the United States, however, retained the right to intervene in Cuban affairs through the Platt Amendment to the Cuban constitution. The U.S. exerted that right with partial military interventions from 1906 to 1909, in 1912, and from 1917 to 1923.⁵⁰ Economically, the U.S. presence in Cuba was rapidly increasing. American investments in Cuba at the beginning of the twentieth century were substantial and included plantations, refineries, railroads and factories.

In the first half of the twentieth century the relationship between Cuba and Miami usually remained amicable and mutually beneficial. The island was an easy and pleasant 90-mile trip by airplane or boat, and tourism was encouraged. Miamians took advantage of the nightlife and gambling in Cuba, while Cubans often made the trip to Miami to sightsee and shop. Some Cuban families sent their children to school in Miami, and during the 1920s and 1930s, the University of Havana and the University of Miami in Coral Gables, played football against each other. In the early 1950s Cubana Airlines advertised a round trip from Miami to Havana for \$36 that included a continental breakfast and frozen daiquiris. The trip took about an hour.⁵¹

Cuban politics were not so tranquil. Gerardo Machado, who had been elected president in 1924, had promoted

⁴⁸ United States Department of State, *The Monroe Doctrine*, <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/democrac/50.htm> (accessed May 7, 2003).

⁴⁹ Robert M. Levine and Moisés Asís, *Cuban Miami* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 15.

⁵⁰ Greg Scott, "History of Cuba-U.S Intervention and the Platt Amendment," <http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk/ratb/cuba/history3.htm> (accessed January 28).

⁵¹ Levine and Asís, *Cuban Miami*, 18.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 17

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

investments in tourism. But, becoming increasingly dictatorial he announced in 1933 that he was extending his term of office for another six years, and that there would be no elections. When Machado fell that same year after civil rebellion, a provisional government led by Ramon Grau San Martin (1933-34) followed. Later, a coup d'etat led by Fulgencio Batista established a constitutional government that elected him president in 1940. Ramon Grau San Martin succeeded him in 1944, followed by Carlos Prío in 1948. When Batista initiated a second coup d'etat in 1952, he abolished the constitutional framework established in 1940. The stage was set for the most dramatic upheaval in Cuba's history.⁵²

The Politics of Exile

The world still feels the impact of the startling political development that occurred in Cuba more than forty years ago. Cuba was once the playground of Americans who visited its pristine beaches, enjoyed its storied history, and invested in its hotels and agricultural pursuits. In the early 1950s a young rebel began his rhetorical war with then dictator Fulgencio Batista, a war that would soon escalate to physical violence and the eventual overthrow of the Batista regime.

Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz was the son of a prosperous landowner and grew up schooled by Jesuits. He later married into one of Cuba's wealthiest families, the Diaz-Balarts, and earned a law degree from the Universidad de la Habana. Already jailed for his subversive attacks on the Batista regime, in 1955 by prophetic chance he met the Argentinean revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Together they led a rebel army into a guerilla war that ended with Castro in power by 1959.⁵³ In January 1959, Castro's revolution did not merit the front page of *The Miami Herald*, the city's leading daily newspaper at the time, but the consequences of that revolution affected Miami in such a profound way that it would change the city's face forever.

Initially Castro remained popular and was even supported by the Catholic Church.⁵⁴ However, it was not long before his policies caused a mass exodus of Cuban people. He began as a champion of the working class raising their wages while seizing the assets of the wealthy. He then began the expropriation of lands and businesses. Sugar factories became the property of the Cuban government, and large tracts of agricultural lands were also nationalized. Shortly thereafter he aligned himself with Communism. Drove of white upper and middle-class Cubans fearing imprisonment, violence, or worse, fled the country leaving their possessions behind. There was never any doubt in their minds that they would soon return to Cuba after Castro was ousted from power. Cubans thought of themselves as exiles, not immigrants, as did the U.S. government, and that perception influenced the conduct and policies of the United States in dealing with their resettlement.⁵⁵

When Castro sought relations with the United States in April 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower refused to meet with him.⁵⁶ The State Department sought compensation for U.S. business interests in Cuba that had been claimed by the Castro government. Castro would not negotiate, became wholly anti-American, and allied the Cuban government with the Soviet Union.⁵⁷

Castro's government began a campaign to rid the island of anyone who did not support his ideologies.

⁵² *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Fulgencio Batista Y Zaldivar," <http://www.1upinfo.com/encyclopedia/B/Batistay.html> (accessed March 22, 2003).

⁵³ *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Fidel Castro," <http://www.1upinfo.com/encyclopedia/C/Castro-F.html> (accessed March 22, 2003).

⁵⁴ Damián J. Fernández, *Cuba and the Politics of Passion* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2000), 73-74.

⁵⁵ García, *Havana USA*, i.

⁵⁶ Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, or, The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1998), 1058.

⁵⁷ Levine and Asís, *Cuban Miami*, 31.

FREEDOM TOWER**Page 18**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Thousands were imprisoned and reportedly as many as 10,000 people were executed. The unprecedented mass exodus from Cuba that ensued impacted the United States in both the short and long term. Never before had the country experienced an immigration of this proportion with so many arriving all at once. The first wave of immigrants arriving between 1959 and 1962 was comprised of the wealthier classes, who were highly educated. Some of them had already had the opportunity to travel to Miami and were somewhat familiar with the culture there. Others were from the solid middle class, whose disenchantment with the dictator's policies caused their flight. The number of émigrés to the United States was estimated as 62,000 in 1960; 67,000 in 1961; and 66,000 in 1962.⁵⁸

In 1960 President Eisenhower authorized the CIA to begin training and equipping Cuban exiles that, at secret bases located in Panama, Nicaragua and Guatemala, were preparing to take back the island of Cuba by force. When President John F. Kennedy assumed office in January 1961, he was informed about the CIA mission to train troops for the invasion of Cuba. The Cuban combat troops numbering about 1,300, took the name of Brigade 2506, and invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs on April 17, 1961. The air and naval support promised by Kennedy, however, did not arrive and Brigade 2506 was strongly outnumbered by Castro's forces. Within three days, Brigade 2506 was defeated with 117 of their members dead and the remaining survivors arrested and sentenced to thirty years in prison. Seven of them were executed. Negotiations between the United States and Cuba led to the release of more than a thousand prisoners in December 1962. They had been pardoned in exchange for more than \$53 million in food and medicine.⁵⁹

Surprisingly, throughout these months of tension with the United States fueled by the Bay of Pigs invasion, Castro continued to allow flights from Cuba to the United States. In October 1962 the situation abruptly changed when during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world teetered on the brink of nuclear war. The crisis was created because the Soviet Union had placed nuclear weapons on the island that were within striking distance of the United States. Following a series of anxious days, President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev reached an accord, and the missiles were removed.⁶⁰

Between October 1962 and December 1965 there were no flights between Cuba and the United States. Though Cubans continued to leave the island by boat, flights out of Cuba would not resume until 1965 when Castro decided to allow Cubans with relatives already in the United States to leave Cuba. Two daily flights left from Varadero Airport, east of Havana, to the City of Miami. The flights became known as "freedom flights." Pan American World Airways flew two flights per day, five days a week. From December 1, 1965 through December 31, 1969, over 175,000 Cubans were transported by the airlift.⁶¹

In August 1971 Castro stopped the Freedom Flights allowing them to resume in December 1972. He did so with the goal of removing the elderly and infirm. Although the flights ended in April 1973, the Cuban Assistance Center in Miami would remain open until October 1974 closing a remarkable chapter in the nation's history.

El Refugio, The Cuban Assistance Center

In October 1959, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service began sending additional agents to assist in the processing of Cuban exiles in Miami. As yet, the surge had not yet begun. With the final diplomatic break

⁵⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 35-38.

⁶⁰ Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution, Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 35-48.

⁶¹ Levine and Asís, *Cuban Miami*, 43.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 19

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

with Cuba in January 1961, circumstances abruptly changed. By the end of 1960, approximately 40,000 Cubans had entered the United States and their numbers increased by about 1,500 weekly.

In those years before massive federal aid arrived, the Catholic Church was the leader in the Cuban relief effort. Because the majority of Cubans were Catholic, they turned to the Church for assistance. In 1959 Bishop Coleman Carroll established the Centro Hispano Católico, located in a wing of the Gesu Church in Downtown Miami. The center offered services such as job referrals, small loans, English classes, educational classes for children, and help in finding housing. By December 1961, the Miami diocese had spent around \$1.5 million in refugee assistance. Other voluntary agencies were soon formed and included the Protestant Latin American Emergency Committee. It was affiliated with the Church World Service, the International Rescue Committee, and United HIAS Service in cooperation with the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.⁶²

Monsignor Bryan Walsh, then a young priest, witnessed the exodus and assumed a principal leadership role in the humanitarian efforts that took place. Father Walsh was among the Catholic Relief workers who saw many of the 60,000 displaced Cubans who received aid at the Catholic Spanish Center next to the Gesu Church on Flagler Street. He characterized the arrivals as having no place to stay and no food: "They are simply destitute, and these are the people who were people of substance in Cuba."⁶³

The situation in Miami was tense as the Cuban émigrés competed with others for jobs and assistance. Although many of the Cuban arrivals had been professionals in their own country, in Miami they were unable to practice because of state licensing requirements, their inability to speak English, and the general lack of jobs in their fields of expertise. As a result, Cubans had to seek unskilled labor positions. This put them in competition with the unskilled labor pool already in place largely composed of African-Americans.

Tensions increased leading Miami Archbishop Coleman F. Carroll to approach local officials and heads of relief agencies to discuss the situation and devise solutions. He approached Florida's governor LeRoy Collins for help. Governor Collins took the solution another step forward when he concluded that the Cuban exodus demanded federal attention.⁶⁴

Help soon came. The Eisenhower administration made \$1 million in disaster relief immediately available.⁶⁵ The federal funds came from those established by the Mutual Security Act passed during the Truman Administration. Immediately following World War II when the former European leadership was in shambles, President Truman addressed Congress to seek aide for Greece and Turkey. In March 1947, Truman articulated what would become the charge of the United States for decades to come. The Truman Doctrine emphatically stated that the United States should support "free peoples resisting aggression from without and within."⁶⁶ The National Security Council was created to advise the president on international policies, specifically with an eye towards maintaining the nation's security.

The politics in Cuba under the Castro regime were perceived as a threat to the United States, as this new communist country was within a mere 90 miles of the U.S. mainland. By making these funds available, Eisenhower officially acknowledged that Cuba was a communist state and that the Cubans coming to America were considered political refugees. The money went to establish the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center.

⁶² García, *Havana USA*, 19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁴ Guy Gugliotta and Guillermo Martinez, "The Exiles Create a New World," *Miami Herald*, December 11, 1983, 7M.

⁶⁵ García, *Havana USA*, 20.

⁶⁶ Harry J. Carroll Jr., et al., *History of Civilization* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1961).

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 20

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Although the Federal funds were a welcome supplement to the monies already expended by the Catholic Church and private agencies, the funds could only be used for resettlement efforts, leaving the burden of providing food, clothing and medical assistance to charitable organizations. One of the government's earliest suggestions was to establish a refugee camp. Msgr. Walsh recalled, "The politicians wanted to put everybody in Opa-Locka (a city north of Miami) at a camp, and we fought them tooth-and-nail on that one. We decided a Palestinian refugee camp is what we did not need in Miami."⁶⁷

Faced with opposition from the Diocese, the federal government decided that instead of creating a camp, they would provide rent subsidies of between \$80 and \$100 a month, so that the refugees could find their own housing. The subsidies actually facilitated the creation of "Little Havana" in an aging Miami neighborhood that once was known as Riverside. The first federally funded assistance center was set up in this area at a building located at Southwest 12th Avenue and Coral Way.⁶⁸

The Eisenhower administration, therefore, established a unique foreign policy. By relaxing immigration quotas, the administration "bent the rules" for this group of refugees. President Eisenhower emphasized the "uniqueness" of this situation and stressed the fact that this was the first time the United States became the country of first asylum for a large group of refugees. This immigration policy was a temporary solution as the government and the refugees themselves fully expected Castro's hold on power to be short-lived and that they would soon return to Cuba.⁶⁹

In 1961, following his election, President Kennedy sent his Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) Secretary Abraham Ribicoff, to Miami for a first hand evaluation of the problem. Kennedy considered the Cubans to be victims of the Cold War and thus increased federal levels of support. In one address Kennedy said that by providing relief, the country proved "the resolve of this nation to help those in need who stand with the United States for personal freedom and against Communist penetration of the Western hemisphere."⁷⁰

New federal funding policies now allowed for health services, job training, monthly relief checks, and surplus food distribution. In the next twelve months, the staff of the Cuban Refugee Assistance Center would increase from fourteen to over three hundred. The Kennedy administration further formalized United States policy by creating the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act in 1962. The act provided a dedicated source of funding for the Cuban relief effort.

On July 1, 1962 the General Services Administration leased the first four floors of the Miami News Building, 52,000 square feet, for the Cuban Assistance Center. The building had been leased only sporadically since the *Miami Daily News* moved to new facilities in 1957. Irving Maidmore, president of Maidmore Realty Corporation in New York, who paid \$1.4 million for the building in 1957, owned the News Tower.⁷¹

In simple gold lettering the building at 600 Biscayne Boulevard was identified as "The Freedom Tower." Lines of Cuban immigrants snaked around the building, families waiting their turn for help in achieving self-sufficiency in the United States. At the Freedom Tower immigrants were furnished identification cards and were interviewed to identify both their needs and strengths. The first through fourth floors were used for the

⁶⁷ Gugliotta and Martinez, "Exiles Create a New World," 7M.

⁶⁸ "Old News Tower Leased for Cuban Refugees," *Miami Daily News*, April 19, 1962, 1.

⁶⁹ García, *Havana USA*, 22.

⁷⁰ *Life Begins Anew, The Cuban Refugee Program*, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), Social and Rehabilitative Service, Cuban Refugee Program, ca. 1970, 9.

⁷¹ Geoffrey Tomb, "The Freedom Tower," *Miami Herald*, November 20, 1988.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 21

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

processing of refugees at each of the different stations. While the building still possessed its dramatic lobby, columns and vast interior spaces, there was little attention paid to the décor while the building was used for the actual conduct of business. Plain but functional desks and fluorescent light fixtures adequately accommodated the work of the center.

The new immigrants were given a medical examination, checked for tuberculosis, and inoculated. Those found seriously ill were transferred either to the Gesu Medical Clinic or Jackson Memorial Hospital. Volunteer agencies interviewed the new arrivals to arrange for resettlement outside of Miami.⁷² Surplus foods like cheese and canned meat were distributed to augment the financial means. The Red Cross distributed personal articles, and the Florida State Welfare Department, who administered federal funds, arranged for financial assistance. The maximum payment was \$100 a month for a family and \$60 a month for a single person.⁷³

Refugees' stories are much the same, seemingly unremarkable, yet the turning point in so many lives. Maria flew to New York in October 1960 to meet relatives and stay for a visit. In 1962 she relocated to Miami and went to the Freedom Tower to register for the food program and the free medical clinic.

Elena flew from Havana to Miami International Airport on May 6, 1962. In July when the government program began, her aunt brought her to the Freedom Tower to register for the food program and the medical clinic. She remembers receiving rice, peanut butter, cheese and powdered milk for her family.

Adriano came to Miami on a Pan-American World Airways flight in August 1962, bringing with him his wife and 8 ½ month old son. They walked from the Miami International Airport to the Freedom Tower and registered for the food program and the medical clinic for his son. Adriano received \$100 a month for his living expenses (his rent was \$70 a month), so he went to work at the Fontainebleau Hotel on Miami Beach as a dish washer. He had been a lawyer in Matanzas and began studying for the bar in Florida shortly after their arrival. He attended the University of Florida for three years (while working as a busboy in a restaurant), and was awarded a law degree. He is now a retired attorney and resident of Miami Springs.⁷⁴

The resettlement effort was a major program of the Cuban Assistance Center. While the Federal Government insisted there be no "forced" resettlement, the community of Miami simply could not handle the huge influx of new residents. Lists of job offers in different parts of the country were maintained and the government tried to send at least four families to the same location so that they avoided the feeling of isolation. In 1963 John F. Thomas, Federal Director of the Cuban Refugee Program explained: "The only policy that makes sense, and this is and will continue to be the policy of the federal government, is the resettlement of refugees away from the Miami area where no opportunities exist, to other areas where opportunities do exist. And it is important to recall that resettlement has been the key of all refugee programs everywhere."⁷⁵

Freedom Flights

The federal government also promised to pay for the resettled immigrants' trip back to Miami once the Castro government was removed. Refugees were sent to over 3,000 cities across the United States. When the Freedom Flights began in December 1965, the Freedom Tower provided a critical service to Cubans who sought to bring relatives here. A list of relatives who were still in Cuba was compiled at the Freedom Tower,

⁷² García, *Havana USA*, 29.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁴ Mrs. Norma Hall, telephone interview with the author, April 14, 2003.

⁷⁵ Dom Donafede, "Refugee Center Officials Say June Closing Is False," *Miami News*, April 7, 1963.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 22

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

and compared against a list maintained in Cuba of those who had claimed U.S. relatives and were waiting for flights out. The Freedom Flights that ended in April 1973 brought the second wave of Cuban immigrants to Miami.⁷⁶

On December 2, 1965 the first plane from Cuba landed with 75 passengers on board. The Pan American World Airways DC7C's landings on the runway at Miami International Airport were met by hundreds of exiled Cubans who had already completed the journey. Many of those first passengers had been notified only hours in advance of their selection to make that first trip, negotiated as a "Memorandum of Understanding" between the United States and Cuba.⁷⁷

The second wave was different from the first in that the United States limited immigration to those with families already in the country. The Cuban government began the careful screening of the emigrants refusing to let those with skills considered important to the regime, to leave. The result was an influx of primarily blue-collar workers. Women and the elderly, who were less likely to work, came in disproportionate numbers compared to the men. It was during this period that the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 (PL 89-732) was enacted. It allowed those Cubans who entered the country after Castro's takeover to legally reside in the United States and apply for permanent residency after a year of residency in the country.⁷⁸

It was also during this second wave that a substantial number of Cuba's Chinese and Jewish population arrived. In Cuba most of the Chinese and Jews were merchants, operating small businesses that were severely affected by the Castro government's reform laws. Some of the Cuban-Chinese immigrants settled in Miami, but a vastly higher percentage resettled in New York and upstate New Jersey.⁷⁹

In 1953 Cuba's black and mulatto population was estimated at 27% of the country's whole. When Castro took power, he championed the cause of racial equality. Blacks, who were among the poorest Cubans, saw in him the opportunity to improve their lot and had no desire to abandon their home for a country with a long history of racial intolerance. Not surprisingly, blacks were the least represented group among Cuban émigrés.

By 1974 the Cuban population in the United States represented each of the six Cuban provinces and was diversified racially, religiously, and occupationally. The federal government began phasing out the Cuban Refugee Program after having spent some \$957 million dollars in the effort.⁸⁰ Even though the government program ended, thousands more would come in the next three decades, many risking their lives to find a new way of life in a new country. The Freedom Tower, though its role as a Cuban Refugee Emergency Center was over, remained a powerful symbol of the indomitable spirit of a people whose most important possession was freedom.

Cuban exiles and Cuban Americans of all generations have come to realize that their community has some of the best elements of both countries. They are able to express their cultural values-- their *cubanidad*, in a politically stable environment that offers numerous social and economic opportunities. The first generation exiles were forced to leave economic opportunities. The first-generation exiles were forced to leave their homeland and adapt to customs and traditions to the realities of life in the United States, but in the process they forged a hybrid society, a

⁷⁶ García, *Havana USA*, 41.

⁷⁷ "75 Cubans Land in Airlift to Begin Life of Freedom," *Miami Herald*, December 2, 1965, 1.

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, PL-89-732.

⁷⁹ García, *Havana USA*, 44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 23

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

uniquely Cuban-American culture.⁸¹

Conclusion

American foreign policy toward Cuba has changed over the years. The Freedom Tower represents the federal government's decision to openly receive political exiles from a communist regime at the height of US-Cuban tensions during the Cold War. The fact that the U.S. government did not reopen the Freedom Tower during the Mariel influx in the 1980s is evidence of a change in that American-Cuban foreign policy. Although other buildings and structures were used to assist Cuban immigrants, they were smaller facilities in churches or government offices and used for very brief periods. The Freedom Tower is the single most significant building related to the Cuban exodus to America and remains a national symbol of the liberty sought and found by Cuban refugees who came to America by way of Miami, Florida.

⁸¹ Ibid., 118.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 24

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- “Artful Antiquity Achieved by Skills of News Painters.” *Miami Daily News*, July 26, 1925, tower section.
- Bohning, Don. “Refugee Center Passes Milestone -- 85,000 Helped.” *Miami Daily News*, December 9, 1964.
- Bonafede, Dom. “Refugee Center Officials Say June Closing is False.” *Miami Daily News*, April 7, 1963.
- Cuban Refugee Center, Department of Health and Education and Welfare. *How the U.S. Cuban Refugee Program Operates*. Washington, DC: pamphlet, November 1967.
- Domínguez, Jorge I. *To Make a World Safe for Revolution, Cuba's Foreign Policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- “Decorative Design Has Much Intricate Detail.” *Miami Daily News, Tower Section*. Sunday, July 26, 1925.
- Fernández, Damián J. *Cuba and the Politics of Passion*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000.
- García, María Cristina. *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Gugliotta, Guy and Guillermo Martinez. “The Exiles Create a New World.” *Miami Herald*, December 11, 1983, p. 7M.
- Heisenbottle, Richard J. “The Freedom Tower.” Dade Heritage Trust Presentation. April 1989.
- . Interview with Ellen J. Uguccioni, 29 August 2003.
- House of Freedom, Tower of Dreams*, VHS. Directed by Mia Lorenzo. Miami, FL: WLRN Public Radio and Television, 2003.
- Levine, Robert M. and Moisés Asís. *Cuban Miami*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000.
- “Life Begins Anew, The Cuban Refugee Program,” United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Social and Rehabilitation Service. Cuban Refugee Program, [c. 1970]. Howard H. Palmatier, Director.
- “News Tower Spanish Type Architecture--Decorative Plateresque Dominates Design of Entire Building.” *Miami Daily News*, July 26, 1925, tower section.
- “Old News Tower Leased for Cuban Refugee Workers.” *Miami Daily News*, April 19, 1962, p. 1.
- Rodriguez, Raul. “The Freedom Tower.” Informational Booklet, 2001.
- Schnier, Sanford. “Flight Bans Aid Freedom Tower.” *Miami News*, November 1, 1962.
- Sicius, Francis J. “Cubans in Miami: An Historic Perspective.” Address before the Florida Historical Society.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 25

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Miami, FL. May 13, 1988.

Strassburger, Robin R. "The Freedom Tower." National Register of Historic Places Nomination. Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, May 31, 1979.

Thomas, Hugh. *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1998.

U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. "How the U.S. Cuban Refugee Program Operates." November 1967.

Wilkinson, Mary Louise. "Exile Aid Shapes Up As Long Term Job." *Miami News*, June 2, 1963.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 Previously Listed in the National Register.
 Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
 Designated a National Historic Landmark.
 Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State Agency
 Federal Agency
 Local Government
 University
 Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Less than 1

UTM References: **Zone** **Easting** **Northing**
 17 581240 2851400

Verbal Boundary Description:

All of that part and parcel in Lots 10 through 14 of Block 60N as indicated on the subdivision map of Miami North.

Boundary Justification: The boundary is the parcel of land that has been historically associated with the *Miami Daily News* Tower/Freedom Tower.

FREEDOM TOWER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 26

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Ellen J. Uguccioni, Historic Preservation Planner
City of Miami Planning Department

Address: 1115 Obispo Avenue
Coral Gables, FL 33134

Telephone: (305) 446-7470

Date: January 7, 2004; May 2007 (revised)

Edited by: Caridad de la Vega
Historian
National Park Service
National Historic Landmarks Program
1849 C St., NW (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Telephone: (202) 354-2253

DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
October 8, 2008