

NICARAGUANS IN MIAMI HOPING FOR A FUTURE AS LEGAL RESIDENTS

The New York Times

April 22, 1986, Tuesday, Late City Final Edition

Copyright 1986 The New York Times Company

Section: Section A; Page 10, Column 1; National Desk

Length: 1215 words

Byline: By GEORGE VOLSKY, Special to the New York Times

Dateline: MIAMI, April 21

Body

An immigration official's decision to stop sending Nicaraguans back to their country has raised modest hopes for a stable new life among exiles struggling to get a foothold here.

The official feared that people sent back would be persecuted by the Marxist Sandinista Government, and that feeling is widely shared here. But the daily concerns of the exiles often have little to do with such things as the politics of the Government at Managua or American aid to the anti-Government rebels, the contras.

Like the first wave of Cubans who fled when Fidel Castro came to power, many of the estimated 70,000 Nicaraguans in the Miami area are professional and middle-class people. Most are working at relatively menial jobs and strongly hoping to obtain legal immigration status and eventually become legal residents of the United States.

Some believe that their chances were furthered with the announcement last week on deportations by Perry A. Rivkind, district director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Miami, but they remain cautious.

"While very few people talk about the contras, this apparent change of policy has made our people a little less apprehensive now," said Nancy I. Rodriguez, a Nicaraguan lawyer who works as a paralegal here and is studying to revalidate her degree.

Longing for Permanence

"But this is just one small first step," she said. "Nicaraguans will not be completely reassured until their status is legalized and they have the right to become permanent U.S. residents. As of now, thousands do not even have work permits."

Jorge A. Sacasa, a Nicaraguan architect and part owner of a small restaurant, La Carne Asada, agreed.

"The longing of everybody I speak to in my place is to be a permanent resident," he said. "Should this happen, we could obtain better jobs and finally be able to plan for the future."

La Carne Asada is, in a way, a microcosm of the Nicaraguan exile community in the Miami area. The restaurant, whose title means broiled meat, employs 12 people, including the owners' families.

The patrons discuss just about every subject except politics. "We are all anti-Communists here," said Mr. Sacasa. "But over the years we have become apatheic about politics. Our main worry is how to find jobs, how to make ends meet, how to survive."

NICARAGUANS IN MIAMI HOPING FOR A FUTURE AS LEGAL RESIDENTS

Mr. Sacasa, who is 48 years old, keeps regular office hours selling real estate, then works in the restaurant until 11 P.M. His partner, Mario Fernandez, 37, was trained as a zoologist. The cook, Glenda Rojas, has a degree in business administration. One part-time waitress is a plastic surgeon; two others, a young married couple, have masters degrees in economics.

Constant Fear of Deportation

The restaurant helps eight other Nicaraguans to make a living. They supply home-made desserts and other foods. Friends who visit from Managua bring Nicaraguan specialties unavailable here and with the proceeds purchase clothing, shoes, cosmetics and electronic goods. All these are in very short supply in Nicaragua.

There are thousands of Nicaraguans who have entered this country illegally, like many other Central Americans, usually by crossing the border from Mexico. The illegal aliens and others who work with false documentation live in constant fear of being detained and deported.

According to Silvio Arguello, a Nicaraguan who is a lawyer, an economist and a civic leader here, about 160,000 Nicaraguans live in the United States, and most of them came here after the downfall of the Government of President Anastasio Somoza Debayle in July 1979.

The second largest concentration of Nicaraguans, some 30,000 people, is in Southern California, and the third, 15,000 refugees, in the San Francisco area.

Only a small percentage, Dr. Arguello said, are permanent residents. Most have applied for political asylum, which is difficult to obtain: Last year the Government denied 91 percent of the 4,771 applications for asylum filed by Nicaraguans.

Work Ethic Is Praised

Mr. Rivkind, the district immigration commissioner, said in an interview: "For me it is agonizing to have to reject their applications, because their asylum claims under the present regulations are very difficult to prove. Nicaraguans are escaping Communism. They are very decent, hard-working people who have not given our authorities here any problems."

Judge Seymour Gelber, chief of Dade County's Juvenile Court Division, concurs. "I don't recall having seen any Nicaraguan youngster in my court in the last five years," he said. "Nicaraguans seem to be very law-abiding and have a strongly ingrained work ethic."

Law-enforcement officials in California made the same point. "Nicaraguans have never made themselves known as a group with criminal activities," said Officer Fabian Lizarraga, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Police Department. Despite hard work, the process of economic and social adjustment has been very slow for most Nicaraguans in this country because only a few speak English. This has forced many to seek low-paying jobs where the knowledge of English is not essential. In Miami these days, it is mostly Nicaraguans who make night-time home deliveries of newspapers. Thousands more work as security guards at night, which allows them to hold second jobs by day.

Tamales on Weekends

Women, many of them formerly well-to-do Nicaraguans, work as baby sitters, maids in hotels and private homes, or take care of the sick. Luz Maria Blandon, who is paid \$4 per hour as a food store clerk, makes about 50 large Nicaraguan tamales on weekends and sells them at \$2 each to a growing clientele. Luisa Emilia Montalvan, whose husband, Alvaro, owned a large cotton plantation and a cattle ranch confiscated two years ago by the Sandinistas, makes leather and fabric belts that she sells to local department stores.

NICARAGUANS IN MIAMI HOPING FOR A FUTURE AS LEGAL RESIDENTS

A number of **Nicaraguans** interviewed in the last several weeks said they felt that social and economic problems had added to a sense of political malaise.

Several, while stressing their opposition to the Sandinista Government and their endorsement of the Honduras-based contras, expressed doubt about the long-range American commitment to fight the Government at Managua.

"In my college every Nicaraguan supports the contras, but few have faith in their victory without direct intervention of the American troops," said Cesar Rivas, a 24-year-old Nicaraguan who works by day and studies electrical engineering at night. "I have not heard anyone say that he liked to go to Honduras and join the contras. Most of the **Nicaraguans** I know plan to stay in the United States even should the contras win."

According to Mrs. Rodriguez, the lawyer, there is also a "floating population here of between 5,000 and 10,000 **Nicaraguans** who travel between the United States and Nicaragua and who are either apolitical or politically on the fence."

"In the long run," said Mr. Sacasa, "the United States will benefit from the Nicaraguan migration. There is a disproportionate number of professionals and skilled workers among us. We came here because under Communism there is no **future** for our children. Slowly, despite difficulties, we shall get ahead, as this restaurant has been able to survive and now even to make a decent profit."

Graphic

photo of Jorge Sacasa, Glenda Rojas and Mario Fernandez (NYT/Ray Fairall)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (78%); DEPORTATION (78%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); PARALEGALS (74%); MARRIAGE (60%); REBELLIONS & INSURGENCIES (56%)

Company: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%)

Organization: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%)

Industry: RESTAURANTS (89%); PARALEGALS (74%); REAL ESTATE (67%)

Person: FIDEL CASTRO (55%)

Geographic: MANAGUA, NICARAGUA (79%); NICARAGUA (95%); UNITED STATES (92%)

NICARAGUANS IN MIAMI HOPING FOR A FUTURE AS LEGAL RESIDENTS

End of Document