Waiting for Snow in Havana
Confessions of a Cuban Boy
BY CARLOS EIRE

EVERYONE IS READING
In Philadelphia

Resource Guide
One Book, One Philadelphia

January 16 – March 15, 2007
Continuing Events through May 2, 2007
2007 Featured Title

Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy
by Carlos Eire (Free Press)

Carlos Eire was one of fourteen thousand children airlifted out of Cuba without their parents in the early sixties as part of Operation Pedro Pan. His beautifully crafted memoir, Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy (Free Press), winner of the 2003 National Book Award, tells the story of an ordinary boy caught up in the events of an extraordinary time. Eire’s vivid prose brings readers face to face with the sights and sounds of his childhood in Havana, where everything familiar begins to crumble away with the Cuban Revolution. One by one, Eire’s schoolmates disappear—spirited away to the United States without goodbyes. Narrated with the urgency of a confession and reading like a novel, Eire’s haunting ode to a vanished world is at once specific and universal, capturing the terrible beauty of those times in our lives when we are certain we have died—and then are somehow, miraculously, reborn.

2007 Companion Titles

Esperanza Rising
by Pam Muñoz Ryan
(Scholastic Press)

Coming to America: the Story of Immigration
by Betsy Maestro
(Scholastic Press)

The Author

Born in Havana in 1950, Carlos Eire left his homeland in 1962, one of fourteen thousand unaccompanied children airlifted out of Cuba by Operation Pedro Pan. After living in a series of foster homes in Florida and Illinois, he was reunited with his mother in Chicago in 1965. He worked full-time as a dishwasher, grocery clerk, and factory assembler while attending high school and college. After earning his Ph.D. at Yale in 1979, Eire taught at St. John’s University in Minnesota for two years and at the University of Virginia for fifteen. He is now the T. Lawrason Riggs Professor of History and Religious Studies at Yale University. Until recently, Eire’s writing dealt with sixteenth-century Europe and the history of Christianity. Waiting for Snow in Havana, his first book without footnotes, won the 2003 National Book Award for Nonfiction.
Dedication

This One Book, One Philadelphia Resource Guide is dedicated to Sibyl Cohen, gifted trainer of book discussion leaders, active member of the One Book, One Philadelphia Steering Committee, and key figure in the creation of the Resource Guide since the program’s inception.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the following people for their assistance in the preparation of this resource guide: Paul Artrip, Anusha Balasubramanian, Emily Brochin, Brian Convery, Vera DaVinci, Sandra Farrell, Iris Griffin, Tess Hemphill, Linda Lewis, Maria Mills-Torres, Joseph Perry, Clare Peterson, Martha Raively, Anne Silvers Lee, Vincent Verderame, Joseph Wilson

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Introduction

One Book, One Philadelphia is a joint project of Mayor John F. Street and the Free Library of Philadelphia. The mission of the program, now entering its fifth year, is to promote reading, literacy, library usage, and community-building throughout the Greater Philadelphia region.

This year, the One Book Selection Committee chose Carlos Eire’s National Book Award-winning memoir, Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy, as its 2007 featured title. To engage the widest possible audience and encourage intergenerational reading, two thematically-related companion books for children, teens, and families were also selected: Esperanza Rising, by Pam Muñoz Ryan, and Coming to America: the Story of Immigration, by Betsy Maestro. Both provide children and adults with the opportunity to further understand the experience of immigration and to engage in discussions about its history and impact.

Read one or read them all—just be sure to get out there and share your opinions!

For more information, website links, and reading materials, please visit our website, at www.library.phila.gov
Questions for Discussion
The questions that follow are intended to enhance your reading group’s discussion of Carlos Eire’s memoir.

Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy, by Carlos Eire
Questions prepared by Iris Griffin, Literacy Coach, Office of Curriculum and Instruction, School District of Philadelphia, and Vincent Verderame, School Growth Specialist, Office of Curriculum and Instruction, School District of Philadelphia

1. Why do you think Eire inserts Spanish words into his writing? Find examples to support your response. What effect does the mixture of Spanish and English have on you as a reader?

2. In the third chapter, Eire writes, “My father, Louis XVI, didn’t seem to mind this wreckage of his handiwork at all. He seemed to enjoy it.” What does this say about his father?

3. Sugar Boy’s party makes Carlos aware of his family’s social status. What role does social class and status play in his family’s story? How does it affect him when he comes to America?

4. Eire writes of “refugee hospitality.” Have you ever witnessed or experienced this or another instance of a community coming together? Describe.

5. Waiting for Snow in Havana was written entirely from memory. What are some advantages of this? What might be some disadvantages? To what extent does writing from memory influence form, structure, and style? Give examples to support your thinking.

6. This book is often listed as “autobiography/memoir.” Sometimes it can be found in the history section. Where do you think it should be placed? Explain your response.

7. Almost every family in America has a story of relocation or immigration. What is your family’s story? How did your family come to live in this city? Ask 2–3 family members to share their memories and write them down.

8. In Chapter 25, Veinticinco, Eire says that the Revolution was real and made its way into his family’s everyday life. Explain why he says this. Who did the Revolution benefit? What did it mean to various groups of people that Castro declared himself a Marxist-Leninist and the Revolution and the country Communist?

9. Eire begins by telling the reader that Thomas Aquinas came up with five proofs of the existence of God. Look up Thomas Aquinas to identify these five proofs—can you come up with five of your own? Revisit Eire’s Seven Proofs of the existence of God and explain how he uses the circumstances and events in the book to prove them.
Timeline of Cuba
Intersecting with Events in the Life of Carlos Eire

1933 September: “Sergeants’ Revolt,” organized by Fulgencio Batista ends the rule of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes and begins a period of democratic, albeit sometimes corrupt, rule.

1940 October: Batista is elected president and rules until 1944, when he is constitutionally obligated to step down.

1952 March: Former president Batista, supported by the army, seizes power.

1953 July: Fidel Castro launches an unsuccessful attack on Batista’s armed forces. After being imprisoned for almost 2 years, he is pardoned and released, and flees to Mexico.

1956 November: Fidel Castro, with some 80 insurgents including Raúl Castro, Che Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos, sets sail from Mexico for Cuba.

1957 March: Student leader José Echevarría and a small group take over a radio station in Havana. Echevarría is killed while retreating to the university. In a simultaneous attack on the presidential palace, 35 rebels and 5 palace guards are killed. *Carlos is in first grade with one of Batista’s children. (p. 33)

1958 May: Batista sends an army of 10,000 into the Sierra Maestra to destroy Castro’s 300 armed guerrillas, and thousands more to the Escambray to take on the guerrillas led by Eloy Gutierrez Menoyo. By August, both rebel groups have defeated the army’s advance and captured a huge amount of arms.

1958 December: Castro and the other rebels capture several towns in eastern and central Cuba. *Carlos celebrates Nochebuena with his family, interrupted by a stranger asking to use the telephone. (p. 182–192)

1959 January: President Batista resigns and flees the country on the same day that Fidel Castro’s column enters Santiago de Cuba. Four days later, Manuel Urrutia is named President of Cuba. *Carlos’ story begins. (p. 2) Carlos attends Castro’s “triumphal parade” and watches his speech on television. (p. 212)

1959 January: Summary trials and executions by firing squads begin immediately. By the end of the year, nearly 1,000 Cubans are assassinated. Che Guevara takes charge of the executions. *Carlos witnesses much of this on his television. (p. 218–219)

1959 February: Fidel Castro becomes Premier of Cuba.

1959 March: Castro confronts racism in a speech in Havana and makes racial prejudice a punishable offense.

1959 May: The Cuban government enacts the Agrarian Reform Law which limits land ownership to 1,000 acres and expropriates all other land. *Carlos “sells out” and draws a poster in favor of the Reform Law. (p. 231)


1959 October: Other revolutionary leaders such as Huber Matos and Camilo Cienfuegos are imprisoned or simply disappear without a trace.

1960 February: Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan visits Havana, sets up a trade agreement between Cuba and the U.S.S.R.

1960 March: The freighter, La Coubre, a 4,310-ton French vessel carrying 76 tons of Belgian munitions, explodes while it is being unloaded in Havana harbor. Castro uses this incident to stir up anti-American sentiment in Cuba. *Carlos’s cousins Fernando and Miguelito are “involved with the people who blew up that ship.” (p. 234)

1960 March: Radio stations are seized by the Revolutionary government. Freedom of expression on the airwaves is stifled.

1960 March: U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower orders CIA director Allen Dulles to train Cuban exiles for a covert invasion of Cuba.

1960 May: All newspapers are seized by the Revolutionary government and the already limited freedom of press and speech is virtually abolished.

1960 June: Anti-Castro guerillas take up arms in the mountains of central and eastern Cuba. Castro fights back, beginning the Escambray Revolt, or the War Against the Bandits.

1960 June: The exodus of middle and lower class Cubans begins in earnest. *Carlos’ classmates begin to disappear, leaving Cuba, and Carlos and his brother switch schools. (p. 237)

1960 July: All U.S. businesses and commercial property in Cuba are nationalized at the direction of the Cuban government. The nationalization is complete by the end of October. *During the nationalization process, Carlos sees his family lose all of their savings. (p. 272–274)

1960 September: Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) are established throughout Cuba. Close surveillance of all citizens begins. *Carlos’ new neighbors run one of these spy houses. (p. 269)

1960 October: Cuban-owned private enterprises are nationalized and all rental properties seized, along with commercial bank accounts. Abolition of private property and free enterprise begins.

1960 October: U.S. imposes embargo prohibiting all exports to Cuba except foodstuffs and medical supplies.

1960 December: *Carlos’ mother hears rumors that children will be taken from parents who are deemed “counter-revolutionary” and decides that her children should leave Cuba as soon as possible. (p. 270)

1961: Castro proclaims this year the Year of Education (Año de la Educación) and the Year of Literacy (Año de la Alfabetización). Accordingly, efforts are made to increase literacy in the countryside, improve teacher quality, and implement other educational reforms.

1961 January: The U.S. breaks off official diplomatic relations with Cuba.

1961 April: An association called the Pioneers is established. The organization is a youth Communist group, which is praised for its promotion of environmental responsibility, literacy, and other community value, but is also construed as a youth arm of Castro’s forces. *Carlos refuses to join and heckles the Pioneers who march on his street. (p. 269)

1961 April: Bay of Pigs: The United States-planned and funded attempted invasion by armed Cuban exiles in southwest Cuba fails. Thousands of Cubans are arrested and imprisoned. *Including Carlos’ uncle Filo. (p. 285-293)

1961 May: Private schools are seized and education is nationalized.

1961 August: Currency is changed. All personal bank accounts are seized by the government. *Carlos stands in line to change a few bills. (p. 272–274)

1961 September: Outdoor religious processions are suppressed and hundreds of clergy expelled. *Carlos marvels at the destruction of religious symbols. (p. 271)

1961 December: Castro openly declares himself a longtime “Marxist-Leninist.”

1962 April: *Carlos and his brother Tony leave Cuba and arrive in the United States. (p. 374–387)

1962 August-October: Cuban Missile Crisis. President Kennedy is informed of the presence of surface-to-air missile batteries in Cuba. In October, the U.S. establishes air and sea blockades in response. The U.S. also threatens to invade Cuba if the missile bases are not dismantled and warns that a nuclear attack launched from Cuba would be considered a Soviet attack requiring full retaliation.

1962 October: Khrushchev agrees to remove nuclear weapons from Cuba and the U.S. agrees to remove missiles from Turkey and promises not to invade Cuba.

1962 November: U.S. ends Cuban blockade satisfied that all bases are gone and Soviet jets will leave the island by December 20.

1962 November: Emigration from Cuba is halted by the Revolutionary regime. The parents of over 10,000 Pedro Pan children are trapped in Cuba. *Carlos’ mother risks her life searching for a way out. (p. 307)


1967 October: Che Guevara is executed in La Higuera, Bolivia.

1975 November: Cuba sends troops to Angola, beginning a decade of revolutionary involvement in African wars.

1976: Universal free healthcare is enshrined in the Cuban Constitution in Article 50. The Cuban government’s healthcare initiatives lead international organizations such as the World Health Organization to praise them as leaders in the field.

1976 September: *Carlos’ father dies in Havana. (p. 221)

1976 December: Fidel Castro assumes the title of President of the State Council, and becomes Head of State, Head of Government, and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.

1979 January: Cuban exiles are permitted to visit their families in Cuba. More than 100,000 do so that year. *Including Carlos’ mother. (p. 51)

1980 April: Mariel Boat Lift: Cuban Government announces that anyone wishing to leave Cuba may depart by boat from Mariel Port, prompting an exodus of up to 125,000 people to the U.S.

1996 February: Cuban authorities arrest or detain at least 150 dissidents, marking the most widespread crackdown on opposition groups in the country since the 1970s.

1998 January: Pope John Paul II becomes the first Pope to visit the island.

1999 November: Christian activist Oscar Elías Biscet is detained by Cuban police for organizing meetings in Havana and Matanzas. He is released in 2002 thanks to pressure from human rights groups, but is arrested once again along with 75 other dissidents in 2003.

1999 November: 6-year-old Elián González is found in the Straits of Florida, clinging to an inner tube. *The Cuban government’s insistence that Elián be reunited with his father prompts Eire to write his memoir.

2000 April-August: *Carlos writes Waiting for Snow in Havana.

2003 April: Cuban government arrests 78 writers, dissidents, and librarians. All are declared guilty of treason and sentenced to varying lengths of imprisonment. Books from several independent libraries are confiscated or destroyed.

2003 November: *Waiting for Snow in Havana wins the National Book Award; it is condemned and banned by authorities in Havana.

2006 July: Raúl Castro assumes presidential duties as Fidel Castro recovers from an emergency operation. The Cuban military is placed on highest alert and all reservists are called into active duty.

Timeline Sources:


Questions for Discussion

The questions that follow are intended to enhance your reading of Pam Muñoz Ryan’s *Esperanza Rising* and Betsy Maestro’s *Coming to America: the Story of Immigration*.

**Esperanza Rising** by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Questions prepared by María E. Mills-Torres, Lead Academic Coach–Latino American Studies, School District of Philadelphia

1. Based on the book cover, what do you think the book *Esperanza Rising* might be about?

2. Did you observe anything in particular about the chapter titles? What do you think these titles have to do with the story?

3. Compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of working on a farm versus working in an urban city.

4. Compare and contrast Esperanza’s experiences as a child living on a farm in Mexico and working on a farm in the U.S.

5. What are some traditions that you observe with your family?

6. Have you ever taken part in a quinceañera? If not, is there any similarity between a quinceañera and one of your family traditions?

7. Discuss and share with a partner or group your responses to the following: How did Esperanza’s life change after her father died? How do you think Esperanza can learn to accept her new reality? How would you or your group advise Esperanza to help her cope with her new circumstances?

8. Why does Miguel feel inferior to Esperanza? What would you tell Miguel to help him boost his self-esteem?

9. Based on the following quote, why do you think Esperanza decided to ask Hortensia for some rosehip tea? “Abuelita said the rosehip contained the memories of the roses and that when you drank tea made from it, you took in all the beauty that the plant had known. These roses have known Papa, she thought. She would ask Hortensia to make rosehip tea tomorrow.” (p. 35)

10. As an immigrant child, Esperanza felt strange in her new life in the U.S. Imagine that you are in a new situation in which you feel you do not fit in. Would you react similarly to Esperanza? How could she have dealt differently with her new situation?

11. Cesar Chávez is a Mexican American hero who fought for the farm workers’ rights. He founded the Farm Workers’ Union. Can you identify other Latinos who have made great contributions to our society?
12. Interview some Latino people to find out how their families first came to the U.S. Create a chart to show the variety of places they come from, the reasons why they came, and the jobs they held when they first arrived.

13. Pretend that you’re a member of an immigrant family working on a farm. You hear Marta’s plea for the farm workers to strike and protest so they can get better working conditions, health benefits, and salaries. While each member of your family agrees with Marta, you are all hesitant to join her. What is the final position that your family takes? Are you going to strike or continue working? Why?

14. If you were Esperanza, would you have kept quiet that you had seen Marta hiding after the immigration officers deported the strikers away? Why or why not?

15. Discuss the following quote: “Isabel had nothing, but she also had everything. Esperanza wanted what she had…” (p. 176)

16. In our nation, some people discriminate against each other. Can you identify some other incidents in the book that are examples of discrimination? Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your skin color, culture, gender, etc.? How did you feel? If you have not had the experience, can you share one about someone you know, read about, or heard of who has been discriminated against? If you find yourself in a situation where you are the target of discrimination, how can you best deal with that kind of situation?

17. Read and discuss the following quote: “…people here think that all Mexicans are alike. They think that we are all uneducated, dirty poor, and unskilled. It does not occur to them that many have been trained in professions in Mexico….Americans see us as one big brown group who are good for only manual labor.” (p. 186–187)

**Coming to America: The Story of Immigration** by Betsy Maestro

Questions prepared by Vera DaVinci, Program Manager, Office of Accelerated Learning, School District of Philadelphia

1. The author, Betsy Maestro, states that everyone in the United States is either an immigrant or related to an immigrant. Explain how this observation applies to you.

2. The Story of Immigration shares the history of immigration to the United States. Create a timeline with drawings to explain the history of immigration using information from the book.

3. Research one group of immigrants from your timeline. Make a list of questions that you would like to learn about this group. Ask the librarian at your school or local library to help you find books or online information about this group. Share your information with family and classmates.

4. Discuss the many reasons why people left the country of their birth to come live in the United States. Explain which reason(s) would cause you to want to leave the land where you were born.
5. Many immigrant groups selected a particular location in which to live in the United States. What factors entered into their decision about where to live? If you decided to move, what improvements would you appreciate having in your new home?

6. If you had been an inspector at Ellis Island, what questions do you think would have been important to ask the arriving immigrants?

7. The author says that many new arrivals in the United States are treated poorly because they look or act differently. Think about what information about your community would be helpful for you to share with the new arrivals. How could you help someone who did not speak English? Develop a plan to help new immigrants and make them feel welcome. Present your plan to the people who work in your school and your classmates.

8. The American Immigration Law Foundation agrees with Betsy Maestro that immigrants have made many important contributions to the United States. Every year they honor a different immigrant group. To date they have honored Chinese-Americans, Irish-Americans, Indian-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Italian-Americans, Vietnamese-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and will honor Cuban-Americans in 2007. Based on what you have read and discussed, create a class letter to send to the Foundation with a recommendation for which immigrant group they should nominate in 2008 (American Immigration Law Foundation, 918 F. Street, NW, 6th Floor, Washington, DC 20004).

9. *Coming to America* is a nonfiction book. Find and read a fictional book about an immigrant or immigrant group. Discuss the ways in which your book is similar to and different from Betsy Maestro’s book.

10. There have been times in our history when the number of people who were allowed to immigrate to our country was limited. Based on what you have learned, explain what rules should be in place regarding immigration.
Timeline of Immigration to the United States

1565: First permanent European settlement in the U.S. is established at St. Augustine, Florida, by the Spanish.

1598: Spanish immigrants settle in what is now Texas and New Mexico.

1619: The first shipload of 20 indentured African slaves arrives in Jamestown, Virginia, beginning large-scale importation of African slaves to the U.S. for labor.

1630–1640: Termed “The Great Migration,” the Massachusetts population sky-rocketed with the arrival of approximately 21,000 immigrants to New England, about a third of them being Britons.

1678: Scottish and Irish immigration begins from Ulster, with most of the immigrants settling in or around New England, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

1807: The U.S. Congress declares it illegal to import African slaves.

1812: The War of 1812 brings immigration to a virtual standstill as hostilities prevent oceanic transport.

1820 (~1880): Marking the period known as “the first great wave of immigration” in the U.S., over 10 million immigrants arrive, predominantly from Northern and Western Europe.

1825: Great Britain decrees that England is overpopulated and repeals laws prohibiting emigration.

1845: The potato crop fails in Ireland, sparking the Potato Famine, which leads to the death of over one million people. This prompts almost 500,000 Irish to immigrate to America over the next 5 years. In the following years, more crop failures in Europe force mortgage foreclosures, sending tens of thousands of displaced people to the U.S.

1848: The Mexican-American War ends, with the U.S. acquiring additional territory and people under its jurisdiction. Also, German and Hungarian political refugees flee to the U.S., following failed revolutions there.

1849: The discovery of gold in California lures people from all over the world, most notably from China, to work mining claims.

1860: Poland’s religious and economic conditions prompt immigration of approximately two million Poles by 1914.

1862: The American Homestead Act allows any male over 21 and who is the head of a family to claim up to 160 acres of land, increasing immigration from all over the world, especially from Scandinavia.

1864: Congress enacts legislation to help stimulate immigration by authorizing employers to pay for the passage of prospective immigrants.

1868: Previous legislation is repealed. Also, the Burlingame Treaty is ratified, pledging unrestricted immigration of Chinese citizens to the U.S.

1869: Japanese immigration begins to the U.S., mostly to California as political refugees or to Hawaii to work in the sugar cane fields.

1880: Italy’s troubled economy, crop failures, and political climate drive mass immigration of Italian nationals to the U.S.

1881: The assassination of Czar Alexander II prompts instability in Russia and the immigration of Russian citizens to the U.S.

1882: Anti-Semitism in Russia prompts mass immigration to the U.S. of Russian nationals. Also, the Chinese Exclusion Act is passed in the U.S., suspending the immigration of Chinese laborers.

1885: The U.S. Congress bans the admission of contract laborers.

1894: To escape massacres by the Young Turks government, Armenian Christians flee Armenia for the U.S.

1898: The Spanish-American War ends with the U.S. acquisition of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam, and the people in their jurisdictions.

1907: President Theodore Roosevelt negotiates the Gentleman’s Agreement with Japan in which the Japanese government refuses to issue passports to laborers wishing to immigrate to the U.S. and the U.S. agrees not to impose a quota on Japanese immigration, effectively ending migration of Japanese laborers to the U.S.

1910: The Mexican Revolution sends thousands of Mexicans to the U.S. looking for security and employment.

1911: The U.S. Immigration Commission (also known as the Dillingham Commission) identifies Mexican laborers as the best solution to the Southwest labor shortage. Mexicans are therefore exempted from immigrant “head taxes.”

1914–1918: World War I interrupts mass immigration to the U.S.

1917: A literacy test for incoming immigrants finally becomes law; however, Mexican immigrants are exempted from this and other anti-immigration laws so that they can provide labor.
1919: Two years after the Russian Revolution succeeds, panic over a Communist threat in the U.S. prompts officials to seize and/or deport thousands of immigrants for their suspected Anarchist and Communist beliefs.

1921: The Emergency Immigration Restriction Law introduces a quota system for immigrants, which favors northern and western Europeans.

1924: The Immigration and Naturalization Act imposes permanent numeric limits on immigration and creates the U.S. Border Patrol largely to control Chinese immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border.

1941: The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor prompts panic in the U.S. and the incarceration of over 1,000 Japanese-American leaders. Through the end of World War II, in 1945, over 120,000 Japanese-Americans are forced into internment camps.

1942 (–1964): The Bracero Program provides temporary residence permits to attract Mexican and South and Central American workers during a labor shortage (caused by World War II).


1945: The War Bride Act and the G.I. Fiancés Act (1946) allow the immigration of foreign-born wives, fiancée(s), husbands, and children of U.S. Armed Forces personnel to the U.S. In addition, large-scale Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. begins due to crushing poverty on the island.

1948: The United States admits persons fleeing persecution in their native lands, allowing 205,000 refugees to enter within 2 years.

1954: Operation Wetback, President Eisenhower’s border control program begins, cutting Mexican immigration and increasing anti-Latino discrimination. This program also results in the deportation or departure of more than 1 million undocumented Mexican immigrants who were already in the U.S.

1959: Fidel Castro’s Cuban Revolution prompts mass exodus from the island, with over 200,000 people emigrating over three years.

1964 (–1975): The Vietnam War creates a pool of Southeast Asian refugees.

1965: “Freedom flight” airlifts begin for Cuban refugees. Also, the Bracero Program ends after temporarily employing 4.5 million Mexican nationals alone.

1966: The Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act permits more than 400,000 Cuban citizens to enter the U.S.

1980: The Refugee Act of 1980 systematizes the refugee immigration process and codifies asylum status. This act is created in response to the Vietnamese and Cuban refugee crises.


2001: The September 11th attacks drive the U.S. Congress to pass the USA Patriot Act, which creates a number of new immigration policies that restrict the flow of immigrants into the U.S.

Timeline Sources:


Related Materials

Books for Adults

Fiction

Title: *Call it Sleep*
Author: Henry Roth
Free Library Call Number: Fiction
Notes: “One of the few genuinely distinguished novels written by a twentieth-century American. The central figure is David Schearl, an overwrought, phobic, and dangerously imaginative little boy. He has come to New York with his East European Jewish parents, and now, in the years between 1911 and 1913, he is exposed, shock by shock, to the blows of slum life.”—Irving Howe, *New York Times Book Review*

Title: *Crescent*
Author: Diana Abu-Jaber
Publisher: W.W. Norton
Free Library Call Number: Fiction
Notes: This romantic and richly textured novel captures the vital Arab-American community in Los Angeles through the eyes of an Iraqi-American immigrant family.

Title: *The Dew Breaker*
Author: Danticant, Edwidge
Free Library Call Number: Fiction
Notes: The central character of Edwidge Danticat’s newest novel was a brutal torturer in his native Haiti whose new life as a loving family man and kind landlord in America hides his horrific past.

Title: *The Fourteen Sisters of Emilio Montez O’Brien*
Author: Oscar Hijuelos
Free Library Call Number: Fiction
Notes: Pulitzer Prize-winning author Hijuelos has written a rich saga of a large Irish-Cuban immigrant family set in a small Pennsylvania town.

Title: *The Joy Luck Club*
Author: Amy Tan
Free Library Call Number: Fiction
Notes: Tan’s poignant novel captures the lives of four Chinese women and their American daughters, offering readers universal stories about familial relationships.

Title: *The Namesake*
Author: Jhumpa Lahiri
Free Library Call Number: Fiction
Notes: Gogol Ganguli, son of an Indian academic and his homesick wife, feels as out of place as his pet name that becomes permanent when the letter bearing his formal name is lost between India and America.

Title: *The Queen of the Big Time*
Author: Adriana Trigiani
Free Library Call Number: Fiction
Notes: This is the latest of Trigiani’s warm, family novels set in an Italian immigrant community in rural Pennsylvania.
Nonfiction

Title: *The Great Escape: Nine Jews Who Fled Hitler and Changed the World*  
Author: Kati Marton  
Free Library Call Number: McNaughton  
Notes: Marton follows the lives of nine men who grew up in Budapest before World War II but fled to the West because of anti-Semitism. Her book includes scientists Edward Teller, John von Neumann, Leo Szilard, and Eugene Wigner who helped usher in the nuclear age and the computer; filmmakers Michael Curtiz, who directed *Casablanca*, and Alexander Korda, who produced *The Third Man*; photographers Robert Capa and Andre Kertesz; and Arthur Koestler, author of *Darkness at Noon*.

Title: *Hunger of Memory*  
Author: Richard Rodriguez  
Free Library Call Number: 371.97 R618h  
Notes: Speaking fewer than 100 English words when he enters Catholic school in Sacramento, CA, Rodriguez becomes a model student and writer whose life takes him far from the Mexican-American community.

Title: *The Lost Boys of Sudan: An American Story of the Refugee Experience*  
Author: Mark Bixler  
Free Library Call Number: 362.8709 B55l  
Notes: Jacob Magot, Peter Anyang, Daniel Khoch, and Marko Ayii were four young men rescued from the war-ravaged Sudan and resettled without family in America. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter chronicles their inspiring stories as they face a baffling modern world and deal with loneliness, post-9/11 xenophobia, and the unbearable memories of the civil war.

Title: *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*  
Author: Loung Ung  
Free Library Call Number: 973.0495 UN3l  
Notes: Cambodian refugee Loung Ung continues her story begun in *First They Killed Cambodia*.

Title: *When I was Puerto Rican*  
Author: Esmerelda Santiago  
Free Library Call Number: 974.71 SA59w2  
Notes: The classic coming-of-age story of a Puerto Rican teenager who struggles with poverty, adolescence, and alienation in New York where her language and heritage make her an outsider.
Books for Teens

Fiction

Title: *Ashes of Roses*
Author: Mary Jane Auch
Free Library Call Number: Fiction Teen-aged Collection
Notes: 17-year-old Irish immigrant Rose Nolan survives the notorious Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire where over 140 girls and women lost their lives.

Title: *Behind the Mountains*
Author: Edwidge Danticat
Free Library Call Number: Fiction Teen-aged Collection
Notes: It is not easy when Celiane Esprance and her mother flee the violence in Haiti to build a new life in New York.

Title: *Born Confused*
Author: Tanuja Desai Hidier
Free Library Call Number: Fiction Teen-aged Collection
Notes: New Jersey teenager, Dimple Lala, “not quite Indian, and not quite American,” revises her rebellion against all things Indian and discovers that the Indian boyfriend chosen by her parents may not be so unsuitable after all.

Title: *Crossing the Wire*
Author: Will Hobbs
Free Library Call Number: Fiction Teen-aged Collection
Notes: Desperate to provide for his widowed mother and young siblings, fifteen-year-old Victor Flores makes the treacherous and illegal crossing from Mexico to the United States.

Title: *An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio*
Author: Judith Ortiz Cofer
Free Library Call Number: Fiction Teen-aged Collection
Notes: Twelve short stories chronicle the adventures, both joyous and sad, of Puerto Rican teens in New Jersey.

Title: *Shadow of the Dragon*
Author: Sherry Garland
Free Library Call Number: Fiction Teen-aged Collection
Notes: Gangs make the conflict between tradition and the American way even more difficult for Danny Vo whose family has come to America from Vietnam.

Title: *A Step from Heaven*
Author: An Na
Free Library Call Number: Fiction Teen-aged Collection
Notes: Korean-American Young Yu’s family’s American dream is more like a nightmare of hardship and unhappiness.

Title: *Swimming to America*
Call Number: Alice Mead
Free Library Call Number: Fiction Teen-aged Collection
Notes: Eighth grader Linda Berati’s friendship with Cuban-American Ramon helps her deal with life in America and her family’s refusal to share the secrets of their old life in Albania.
**Nonfiction**

**Title:** *Chinese Cinderella: A True Story of an Unwanted Daughter*
**Author:** Adeline Yen Mah
**Free Library Call Number:** 979.4004 M277c
**Notes:** Mah’s autobiography is the painful but triumphant story of a girl who survives a cruel stepmother and uncaring family in China to become a physician and successful writer in America.

**Books for Children**

**Title:** *America, My New Home*
**Author:** Monica Gunning
**Free Library Call Number:** j811 G957am
**Notes:** Jamaican-born poet Monica Gunning tells her immigrant’s story with gentle humor, grace, and a child’s sense of wonder. In doing so, she tells the tale that belongs to many—the children of immigrants to America. Ken Condon’s bold illustrations illuminate the journey. Ages 7-10.

**Title:** *A House of Tailors*
**Author:** Patricia Reilly Giff
**Free Library Call Number:** j-Fiction
**Notes:** When thirteen-year-old Dina emigrates from Germany to America in 1871, her only wish is to return as soon as she can. Then she survives a multitude of hardships living with her uncle’s family and she starts to think of Brooklyn as home. Ages 9-12.

**Title:** *Bridge to America*
**Call Number:** Linda Glaser
**Free Library Call Number:** j-Fiction
**Notes:** Young Fivel, left behind in his Polish shtetl while his father in America earns passage for the rest of the family, endures extreme hunger and the terrifying threat of Russian pogroms before the money finally arrives. Upon stepping off at Ellis Island, however, Fivel’s joy commingles with an uncomfortable sense of having “left . . . easy belonging behind.” Readers will appreciate Fivel’s direct, unaffected perspective on the hardships of the old country and the often-messy process of adjusting to a new culture. Ages 8-12.

**Title:** *How Many Days to America: A Thanksgiving Story*
**Author:** Eve Bunting
**Free Library Call Number:** j-Fiction
**Notes:** Refugees from a Caribbean island embark on a dangerous boat trip to America where they have a special reason to celebrate Thanksgiving. Ages 5-9.

**Title:** *I Hate English!*
**Author:** Ellen Levine
**Free Library Call Number:** jE
**Notes:** When her family moves to New York from Hong Kong, Mei Mei finds it difficult to adjust to school and learn the new sounds of English. Ages 5-7.

**Title:** *I Lost My Tooth in Africa*
**Author:** Penda Diakite
**Free Library Call Number:** jE
**Notes:** While visiting her father’s family in Mali, a young girl loses a tooth, places it under a calabash, and receives a hen and a rooster from the African Tooth Fairy. Ages 5-9.
Title: *Isla*
Author: Arthur Dorros
Free Library Call Number: jE
Notes: A young girl and her grandmother take an imaginary journey to the Caribbean island where her mother grew up and where some of her family still lives. Ages 5-7.

Title: *My Chinatown: One Year in Poems*
Author: Kam Mak
Free Library Call Number: j811 M289am
Notes: A young Chinese immigrant must adjust to his new life in the United States. Though the transition is difficult at first, the boy grows to enjoy his new surroundings. Finely detailed illustrations enhance the text. Ages 5-8.

Title: *My Name Is Maria Isabel*
Author: Alma Flor Ada
Free Library Call Number: j-Fiction
Notes: Third-grader Maria Isabel, born in Puerto Rico and now living in the United States, wants badly to fit in at school; the teacher’s writing assignment “My Greatest Wish” gives her that opportunity. Ages 7-10.

Title: *My Name is Yoon*
Call Number: Helen Recorvits
Free Library Call Number: jE
Notes: Disliking her name as written in English, Korean-born Yoon, or “shining wisdom,” refers to herself as “cat,” “bird,” and “cupcake” as a way to feel more comfortable in her new school and country. Ages 4-8.

Title: *One Green Apple*
Author: Eve Bunting
Free Library Call Number: jE
Notes: While on a school field trip to an orchard to make cider, a young immigrant named Farah gains self-confidence when the green apple she picks perfectly complements the other students’ red apples. Ages 5-9.

Title: *The King of Mulberry Street*
Author: Donna Napoli
Free Library Call Number: j-Fiction
Notes: In 1892, Dom, a nine-year old stowaway from Naples, Italy, arrives in New York and must learn to survive the perils of street life in the big city. Ages 8-12.

Title: *Vietnamese in America*
Author: Lori Coleman
Free Library Call Number: j973.0495 C677v
Notes: This book is part of the *In America* series by Lerner Publications (various authors) that provides information about the many groups who immigrated to America. Among the titles available are ones about Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Irish, Chinese, Italians, and more. Ages 9-12.
Movies

**In America** (2002) (Africa & Ireland)
The lives of a young family of illegal Irish immigrants are touched by a reclusive African artist.

**The Joy Luck Club** (1993) (China)
The beautiful film adaptation of Amy Tan’s novel is a timeless mother-daughter story told with intimacy amidst the sweep of Chinese history.

**Before Night Falls** (2000) (Cuba)
Javier Bardem was nominated for an Academy Award for his role as gay Cuban novelist and poet, Reinaldo Arenas, in this moving and powerful film.

**My Big Fat Greek Wedding** (2002) (Greece)
In this sleeper hit, an unmarried daughter finds love outside her warm extended Greek-American community.

**Mississippi Masala** (1992) (India)
Mira Nair’s engaging and sexy romance finds Sarita Choudhury’s Mina, whose Indian family has been violently exiled from their native Uganda, falling in love with Denzel Washington’s handsome carpet cleaner, Demetrius.

**The Godfather films** (Italy)
Based on Mario Puzo’s bestselling novel, Francis Ford Coppola’s brilliant and brutal epic trilogy captures the life of an Italian immigrant family.

**Prisoners Among Us** (2004) (Italy)
The battle for assimilation Italians faced in America during World War II is the subject of this award-winning documentary.

**Bread and Roses** (2000) (Latin America)
Immigrant cleaners in a non-union shop risk possible deportation and certain poverty when they challenge management in Ken Loach’s committed and passionate film.

**Real Women Have Curves** (2002) (Mexico)
A lovely, full-figured East LA Latina honor student dreams of college while her mother has more traditional plans.

**Hester Street** (1975) (Russia)
Joan Micklin Silver’s classic fictional story of Jewish immigrants making their way in the New York tenements at the end of the 19th century won an Academy Award nomination for Carol Kane’s endearing performance.
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- Books and Readers Book Club
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One Book, One Philadelphia Celebrates Five Years of Reading and Community

2003 The Price of a Child, by Lorene Cary,
2004 The Color of Water, by James McBride
2005 The Things They Carried, by Tim O’Brien
2006 The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, by Benjamin Franklin
Franklin: The Essential Founding Father, by James Srodes
Ben and Me, by Robert Lawson
2007 Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy, by Carlos Eire