



# Oye Loca: From the Mariel Boatlift to Gay Cuban Miami

*Susana Peña*

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During only a few months in 1980, 125,000 Cubans entered the United States as part of a massive migration known as the Mariel boatlift. The images of boats of all sizes, in various conditions, filled with Cubans of all colors and ages, triggered a media storm. Fleeing Cuba's repressive government, many homosexual men and women arrived in the United States only to face further obstacles. Deemed "undesirables" by the U.S. media, the Cuban state, and Cuban Americans already living in Miami, these new entrants marked a turning point in Miami's Cuban American and gay histories.

In *Oye Loca*, Susana Peña investigates a moment of cultural collision. Drawing from first-person stories of Cuban Americans as well as government documents and cultural texts from both the United States and Cuba, Peña reveals how these discussions both sensationalized and silenced the gay presence, giving way to a Cuban American gay culture. Through an examination of the diverse lives of Cuban and Cuban American gay men, we learn that Miami's gay culture was far from homogeneous. By way of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and archival analysis, Peña shows that the men who crowded into small apartments together, bleached their hair with peroxide, wore housedresses in the street, and endured ruthless insults challenged what it meant to be Cuban in Miami.

Making a critical incision through the study of heteronormativity, homosexualities, and racialization, ultimately *Oye Loca* illustrates how a single historical event helped shape the formation of an entire ethnic and sexual landscape.

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