

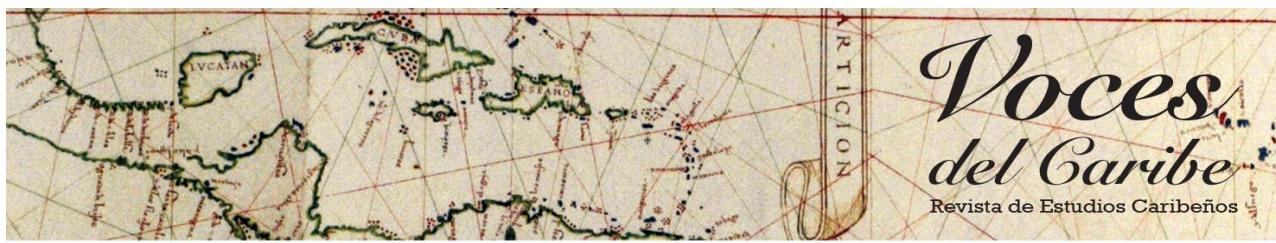
Volumen 9, Número 1

Otoño, 2017

Marisella Veiga. *We Carry Our Homes With Us: A Cuban American Memoir*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul, 2016 (182 pp.).

Journalist, writer, and adjunct instructor at Flagler College, Marisella Veiga arrived in the United States as a political exile of Cuba in 1960. Veiga was raised in St. Paul, Minnesota and Miami, Florida, and she currently resides in St. Augustine, Florida. In April 2016, Veiga published her memoir entitled, *We Carry Our Homes With Us: A Cuban American Memoir*. The memoir recounts Veiga's journey from her arrival in the United States as a political exile to her assimilation into the American culture to her eventual return to Cuba as an adult. Veiga discusses her personal struggles as she comes to terms with her bicultural identity, all while providing the history behind the relationship between Cuba and the United States. Guided by her family and her faith, Veiga ultimately embraces the two halves of her life that make her identity whole. Throughout the memoir, Veiga injects herself into the academic discourse surrounding biculturalism as she interweaves academic research and her own childhood stories together. In her honest and well-researched memoir, Veiga puts herself and her story into the Cuban-American literary canon and challenges the existing narratives and stereotypes surrounding Cuban-Americans and other immigrants.



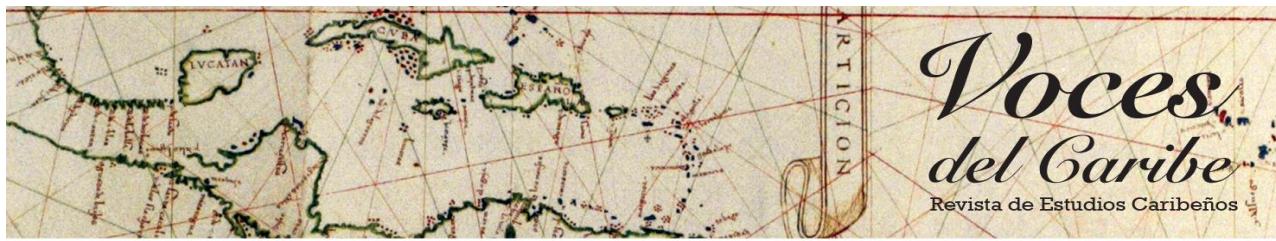


Volumen 9, Número 1

Otoño, 2017

On December 30, 1960, Marisella Veiga, along with her mother and two brothers, boarded a plane from Havana to Miami. Her father joined the family a few months later with a total of fourteen U.S. cents in his pocket. Like many other Cuban exiles, the Veiga family intended their stay to be temporary until the fall of the Castro regime; however, they soon realized that they would need to find a new home for themselves in the United States. Originally residing in Miami, the Veiga family's assimilation was a culturally and politically comfortable one; they were surrounded by the familiarities of the Spanish language, a subtropical climate, and root vegetables. Yet, because of resettlement efforts from the U.S. Governors' Conference, the Veiga family was among the number of Cubans in Miami who resettled to other states to find work and economic stability. Through Catholic Relief Services, the Veiga family moved to Minnesota and was hosted by the Lauers, a Roman Catholic family. There, the Veigas began their transition from the sugarcane fields and subtropical climate to the extreme cold of the Midwest with its farmland and cornfields. Veiga delves into her memories, which are blurry given her multiple moves as a child and her initial resistance to learning the English language. The constant moving from house to house does remind Veiga that being an exile is a major part of her identity. One of Veiga's memories that stands out most clearly for her is the solitude she experienced as an elementary school child. Veiga recalls not having any friends until the fourth grade and keeping quiet because she did not yet fully





Volumen 9, Número 1

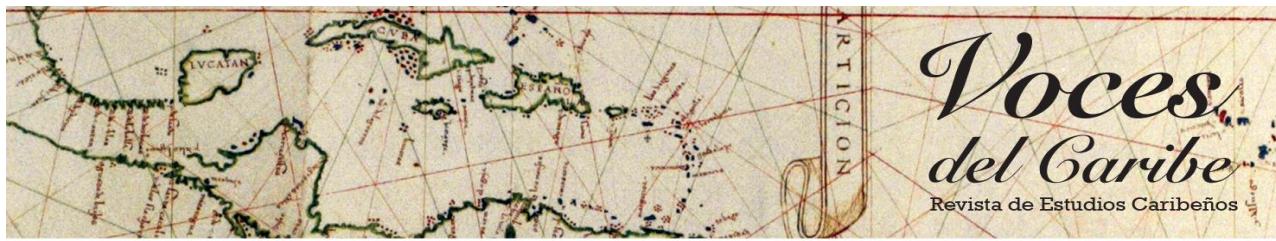
Otoño, 2017

speak and understand English. In fact, she notes that with the help of the Lauer children, she could ice skate before she could speak English. Besides the language barrier, Veiga also looked different from the other students. With a darker complexion than her siblings, she was often seen as an Afro-Cuban. Initially defining herself as a “Cuban raised in the United States” (7), Veiga learns to overcome her challenges and embrace her *cubanidad*.

Throughout *We Carry our Homes with Us*, Veiga attempts to deconstruct the existing myths of Latina women. While Latina stereotypes suggest that women are solely maternal figures who have a passion for cooking, Veiga notes that her mother had little desire to remain in the kitchen. She continues by mentioning that scholarship took priority over cooking in her family. While the Veiga family’s perception of a woman’s place is heavily influenced by their privilege and access to formal education, they defy the traditional expectations of women in a Latino family. Veiga sheds light on alternative Cuban-American dynamics and breaks the common thread of the generational expectations passed down from mother to daughter.

Veiga also notes the importance of collectivism in Cuban culture and the role of family on her own identity. Veiga specifically grapples with her family and culture’s long-established expectations of womanhood and what that means for her as a daughter of Cuban parents. Upon the death of her





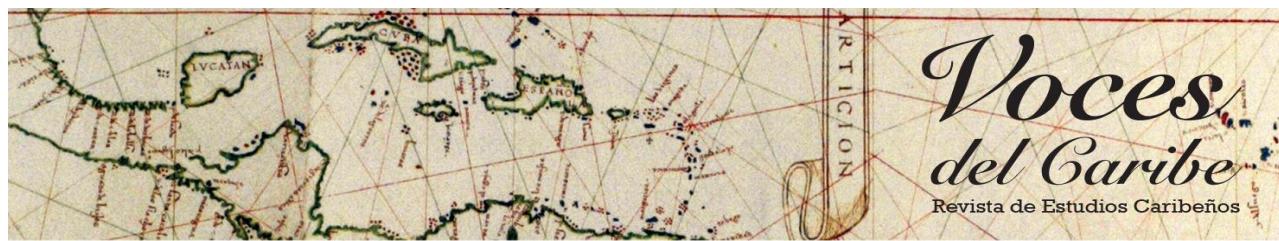
Volumen 9, Número 1

Otoño, 2017

mother, Veiga recounts the personal duty she felt to return to Miami and temporarily assume her mother's role. As the eldest daughter, Veiga notes the linguistic, cultural, and generational divide that took place after the upset within her family; she felt pressure from her grandmother and older relatives to take on the previous domestic responsibilities of her mother. At a pivotal moment in her life, Veiga must contend with the conventional norms of womanhood and the cultural and societal expectations of her sex.

Just like when Veiga felt an intense duty to return to Miami and assume a role as the mother figure in her family, she also feels cultural pressures in the terms of writing. In her memoir, Veiga notes, "Writing about exile was tricky as a result of its triumphs but also its inherent cultural conflicts. I also lacked the confidence to be honest with readers. So many of my thoughts were hidden or ignored, just as my elders deleted our past life in Cuba" (79). Nonetheless, Veiga excels in her narration of her experiences as a Cuban-American. It is her hope that by telling her family's story, native-born Americans will not fear an immigrant, but will rather see her as a carrier of another culture with its own customs, food, and religions. *We Carry Our Homes With Us* strives to not place too much importance on materialism and instead welcomes change as the one constant in the lives of an ever-adapting Cuban-American exile.





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477