

**Palm Beach Post**  
**Fanjuls disturbed by film's portrayal of sugar 'slavery'**  
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Life's not so sweet these days for the sugar-baron Fanjul family, which finds itself awash in media attention including a critical documentary and a nighttime soap opera.

The Palm Beach clan of Cuban-Americans is sour on a fictional CBS drama that they say hits too close to home; a movie script reproving the family is floating around Hollywood; and on Wednesday a viewing of a film featuring their Dominican Republic operations caused a near riot at Florida International University.

The film, *The Sugar Babies*, is a documentary on the lives of Haitians and their children working in the Dominican Republic sugar cane fields and the Central La Romana factory run by the Fanjuls.

The screening was part of FIU's Haitian Summer Institute for students interested in learning Haitian Creole and about Haitian culture. It was open to the public.

About 200 people showed up to watch filmmaker Amy Serrano's documentary, which is said to depict Haitians working "under circumstances that can only be considered modern-day slavery."

Following the 95-minute viewing, Serrano opened a question-and-answer session in which Dominicans living in South Florida loudly voiced their opposition to the portrayal of Haitians as slaves. Haitians in the audience returned the dissent with their own raucous commentary.

"It lost a bit of its order in the end," said Liesl Picard, associate director of FIU's Latin American and Caribbean Center, which cosponsored the viewing. "Amy didn't have time to answer too many questions because there was so much commotion."

Miami's Dominican consul, Manuel Almanzar, stormed out of the auditorium during the tumult.

Almanzar did not return repeated phone calls Thursday.

Thor Halvorssen, president of the Human Rights Foundation, which helped pay for the film, said Almanzar was angry that he could not show a seven-minute movie he had brought that shed a more positive light on the country's sugar cane industry.

University officials told him they would reserve a room for the viewing of his film.

"They have tried to frame this as an anti-Dominican film, which it is not," Halvorssen said. "Our film focuses on human trafficking and the complicitous relationship between Dominican law enforcement and the Fanjuls and Vicinis."

The Vicini Group is another large sugar producer in the Dominican Republic.

Gaston Cantens, a spokesman for Florida Crystals Corp., the Fanjuls' Florida sugar company, said the family feels blindsided by the scrutiny and was not contacted about the documentary until the crew had returned from filming in the Dominican Republic.

He said the filmmaker's portrayal of slavery-like conditions is preposterous.

"It's kind of 'gotcha' journalism," Cantens said. "From what we can see, it uses a huge, broad brush to paint everyone the same."

Cantens said the Fanjuls have set up schools, medical centers, an AIDS clinic and a counseling center for sugar cane workers, including the 4,500 to 7,000 who work in the family's factory.

He said the shantytowns shown in the documentary in which workers live for free were never meant to provide permanent housing and originally were built for single men doing seasonal work.

"They've created thousands of jobs with their company down there," Cantens said of the Fanjuls, who have not seen the documentary. "They're obviously concerned about it. This is a family that has been in business in the United States for 50 years, and they've never had these types of allegations before."

Last month, *The Palm Beach Post* reported that a script for a movie based on the Fanjuls called *Sugarland* had been shelved temporarily because of scheduling conflicts. Jodie Foster was reportedly set to direct and star in the film as a lawyer fighting for the rights of mistreated sugar cane workers. Robert De Niro was supposed to play Alfy Fanjul, one of the founding brothers of the Fanjul sugar empire.

A fictional TV drama, *Cane*, about a wealthy Cuban-American family whose money is made in the sugar cane industry, is scheduled to air on CBS this fall.

Lawyers for the Fanjuls are reviewing the script for *Cane*, which follows the fictional Duque family and includes an internal power struggle between two brothers.

Real-life brothers Alfy and Pepe Fanjul began their sugar cane business in 1960 following Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba.

Flo-Sun, the Fanjuls' holding company, has come to own the Domino, C&H and Florida Crystals brands of sugar and grows about 10 million tons of cane on 400,000 acres of land in Florida and the Dominican Republic.

La Central Romana, featured in the documentary, was founded in 1912. With about 20,000 employees, the company is the Dominican Republic's largest private employer, according to information provided by Florida Crystals.

Cantens said there's no plan for legal action to try to stop *The Sugar Babies*, but the Fanjul family is frustrated by the negative portrayal.

"It's disconcerting," he said. "It's frustrating when you have people with an agenda doing this."

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