¡NO TE DEJES QUITAR A TU HIJO!
OPERATION PEDRO PAN AND THE CUBAN CHILDREN’S PROGRAM

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Speaking in Diasporas
To Edward Said
by Lourdes Gil

There must have been a day like this
one in your life:
Orphaes ascending
a plane full of children
without a trail of crumbs
no fairy tale.
A day of scattered seeds to the four winds
the solid blue line
of terror.
A day with footsteps echoing each other
footsteps
unrecognizable
penumbras of exile.

There must have been a day like this for you:
new maps are drawn
excluding us
and others now inhabit
our homes.

A day of lilac trees in flames
the dust of souls disturbed.
New souls draw breadth
from the wet grass;
the living dead
to walk among the living.

A day like this one:
23rd of August, 1961
the veil of memory is torn
the empty shell discarded.
What choice but to be poets
free, undaunted.

A day like today
when we can finally speak
across our histories.
INTRODUCTION

When I was eight years old, I received a gift from my father’s friend Maria Ferrer, an extraordinary woman who my family stayed with in Miami to visit Cuban relatives. The book, *Children of the Flight of Pedro Pan*,¹ is a fictional historical account of the lives of two of the over 14,000 children who were flown out of Cuba in the 1960s and taken in by the Catholic Church in America. The story is told from the perspective of Lourdes, a ten-year-old girl who recounts her feelings about leaving Cuba with only her brother for company, living in foster care, and ultimately reuniting with her parents. My father explained that Maria went through a very similar experience, as had many of his fellow Cuban exiles. Operation Pedro Pan, as it was dubbed by a reporter, had become a cultural phenomenon in Miami. At the time of the book’s publication in 1994, children’s books were the only available literature on this part of Cuban history within the United States. The event was embraced by journalists who searched for a humanitarian piece, and children’s authors who were interested in the personal repercussions of the event, but not by historians or academics.

Over a decade later, in a literature class at Duke, I came across a very different account of the Operation. Maria de los Angeles Torres’ work, *The Lost Apple: Operation Pedro Pan, Cuban Children in the U.S., and the Promise of a Better Future*,² is an intensely-researched academic piece. She combines the personal journeys of these children with the political and economic motives that funded them. She mentions the Catholic church, the CIA, the Cold War, and multinational corporations. This book had little in common with the gift that Maria had given to me so many years ago. Confused and intrigued, I searched my parents’ house for the

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children’s story and found that Maria had asked the author to write an inscription to me. “Family is the most important thing. They teach us our traditions, culture, and customs,” she had written. This juxtaposition of personal and political information propelled me into a research trip to Miami, back to Maria’s house and into the homes and lives of several others, and eventually to this thesis.

While the genesis of this project for me is predicated on the juxtaposition of the personal and the political, the origin of Operation Pedro Pan must begin with an account of what happened in Cuba on New Year's day in 1959. On that day, Fulgencio Batista, the longtime dictator of Cuba and ally to the U.S., was exiled to Miami for the final time as Fidel Castro and his forces came to power. For most Cubans, this was an enormous relief. Castro promised to bring democracy to a country that was only six decades old, to halt social corruption and to end economic dependence on the U.S. In particular, the middle class played a large role in participating in the underground and legitimizing the revolution. Cuban parents would never have guessed that less than two years later, they would be caught up in the turmoil of the Cold War, so desperate to get their families out of the country that they would send their young, unaccompanied children to the U.S., not knowing where they would stay, who would take care of them, or how long the separation would last. But as Cuba quickly became a battleground in the struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and the Central Intelligence Agency worked overtime to fuel hysteria and backlash against Castro, thousands of parents committed the unthinkable. In fear of their children becoming nationalized and indoctrinated in new president Fidel Castro’s militaristic education model, over 14,000 families sent their children to Miami between 1960 and 1962.
At the same time, the Eisenhower administration was undecided about how to handle the Cuban Revolution. Along with the prevalence of anti-communist McCarthyism at the time, the administration had already demonstrated its fear of communist uprisings in Latin America. Just five years prior, in 1954, the CIA had led a coup d’état in Guatemala, overthrowing the democratically-elected socialist president Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, in fear of the spread of communism and actions against U.S.-owned companies. Though the U.S. government feigned support for Castro’s democratic promises through 1960, by September 1959 the CIA had already begun working on a covert mission to oust the new leader. December 1960 marked the first international airlift of children in the Western Hemisphere, when the combined powers of the Catholic Church, the U.S. government, the CIA, and several multinational corporations with interest in Cuba altered the lives of thousands of Cuban families that were caught in the middle of the political vortex. By early 1961, ‘Operation Mongoose,’ or the Cuba Project to oust Fidel Castro, had officially begun under the administration of John F. Kennedy.

Cuban parents were influenced by a combination of the push from the communist-veering actions of the Castro government and the pull from the U.S., as the CIA fueled rumors via radio and leaflet drops of drastic indoctrination and nationalization. The Catholic Welfare Bureau placed about half of the children who arrived in Miami into the foster care system. The other half went to live with relatives who already lived in the U.S. Placements included refugee camps, orphanages, boarding schools, and foster homes in 35 states. The U.S. State Department and various corporations formerly invested in Cuba funded the flight of these children as well as their living provisions.\(^3\) The CIA denies connection to the Operation, but evidence from recently released files indicates otherwise. The periods prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961

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\(^3\) Each agency or foster care family received $6.60 per day for the care of a child from the federal government.
and leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 were particularly tense times in which the U.S. was putting considerable effort into undermining Fidel Castro. Most of its actions were done clandestinely, as the U.S. was attempting to not taint Cuba’s image internationally.

In total, about two percent of the Cuban exile population participated in the Operation, yet historical accounts of the Cuban exodus often neglect to cover this sect of exiles. In Cuba, the Operation has become infamous for its connection to the CIA and has been interpreted as an integral part of the invasion at the Bay of Pigs. A number of obstacles have hindered the possibility of a clear, unbiased account of the Operation becoming part of Cuban exodus history. Although several large organizations, including the Catholic Church, the State Department, the CIA, Pan American Airlines, Esso Standard Oil, and the British Embassy in Cuba, participated in the Operation, it was launched and run by a few individuals. In early 1960, a priest in Miami, an American headmaster of a school in Havana, members of the State department, and bureaucrats recently forced out of Cuba came together to begin the airlift. The Operation was instigated and run by a few individuals who struggled to hold everything together at a very chaotic time. Due to this disorganization, lack of evidence, personal biases from the individuals who have come forward and given their accounts, and political polarization within the exiled Cuban community, the oral history of Operation Pedro Pan is biased and confusing at best. Just as with subject matter on Cuban exiles, or exiles in general, the topic of the Operation has become extremely politicized. For many exiles, the propaganda spread by the CIA became hard reality in their minds. Some Pedro Pans, as the grown-up participants are commonly referred to, attribute their lives and happiness to the U.S. government. Others suggest that the U.S. used Cuban exiles as pawns in an attempt to show that Cuba under Castro was not a livable place. In addition, the shroud of secrecy surrounding most of the official documents from the CIA, State Department,
and Florida state records has made compiling the official history of the Operation almost impossible. Since the 1960s, the American press has consistently reported on the Operation as a human interest piece, neglecting to investigate the political and economic interests in play, or CIA involvement.

In the past two decades, two major books have been published covering the Operation, both by former Pedro Pans, yet several questions remain unanswered. These authors performed exhaustive primary source research, yet the paper trail for this clandestine Operation of the recent past has yet to be opened to the public. In primary source researching, I have come up against the same obstacles as my predecessors. For example, the Operation files of the Catholic Welfare Bureau that have been donated to Barry University are slowly being processed, and are not available to the public. The state of Florida has not made its files public. An exceptional case is that of the aforementioned María de los Angeles Torres, an author and former Pedro Pan. She performed years of research for her book, and utilized a number of new original sources. She managed to gain access to some Cuban government records, three presidential libraries, and the national archives. The CIA originally refused her requests, so she filed a lawsuit and gained partial access to three never before seen files.

Even if access to all of these files were possible, there would still be large gaps. The files were not all-inclusive, because at the age of nineteen children were technically out of the system, and thus not recorded. Those who ended up with friends or relatives were not recorded nor did they receive federal funding. The biases and stark ideological divisions of the Cold War and within the Cuban exile community today add to this confusion, continuing to polarize individual and historical perspectives. The writings of those whose lives have been shaped by this

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4 Ibid., 146-147.
Operation in recent history reflect a blend of the personal and the historical, the ‘lived’ versus the ‘official’ history.

Two examples of this blended history have been written in the past decade by participants in the Operation, the aforementioned De los Angeles Torres text (published in 2003) and Yvonne Conde’s *Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14, 048 Cuban Children.* Both are seminal texts in that they have contributed greatly to creating an established history of the Operation. In researching her book, Conde collected questionnaires from 442 of the participants, interviewed 173 children and several other key figures, and conducted a study of the US press in the 1960s. She also placed freedom of information requests with the State Department of Florida, the Immigration Department, and CIA. She was denied access by the CIA based on state security. In her book, Conde presents the history of the Revolution as the answer to the question of why the Operation occurred. De los Angles Torres began researching in 1993 by first interviewing her parents, which led to several others involved in the Operation. In summing up her final product, she notes, “What I did not realize was that a more layered exploration into this period would mean defying both the exile and island versions of our exodus.” Torres’ account gives exactly that: a more layered exploration. She is the first to go far beyond the facts, considering the role of other similar operations in history, the psychology of children in wars, and the role of the press and military. Above all she writes that in the Cold War, “…there was no room for those who had been supporters of the Revolution but critical of Fidel. You were either a supporter or an opponent.”

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6 De los Angeles Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 12.
It may be years before historical “truth” about Operation Peter Pan is uncovered. It may simply be forgotten. I quickly discovered that this historical project, like most, is clearly subjective. Additionally, many adults who participated in the program do not realize today that they were a part of the movement; some with whom I have spoken had never heard the phrase “Operation Peter Pan,” nor were they aware of the size or the structure of the Operation. In addition to these technical difficulties, every account biased: lived versus official history, Cuban versus Cuban American, versus American, Cuban press versus American press, the historical “facts” of the 1960’s versus contemporary facts, factions of anti-Castro hardliners versus those who are pro-dialogue, exiles versus Revolutionaries, children versus parents, and communist versus capitalist. Objective facts are nearly impossible to come by, and in most accounts cold facts are not the goal. Conde sought to examine why the Operation occurred, from a political and personal perspective. De los Angeles Torres sought an understanding of the Cuban American exile community and debated the question of whether saving children’s minds should come at the expense of their emotional well-being.

In response to this dilemma, in the search for a balanced and meaningful account, I turn my focus to the perspectives that have surfaced to date, through press coverage, interviews, and literature. Operation Pedro Pan was much too complicated to be a purely humanitarian or political event. Instead, it was the culmination of a series of political, economic, religious, and personal dilemmas that brought children to the forefront of the Cold War. For most Pedro Pans, their experience in the program deeply affected their lives, and for some shaped their emotional and social well-being. My central purpose is not to present the Pedro Pans as heroes or as cannon fodder in the ideological battles of the Cold War. Rather, it is to determine why the political history of the Operation is so different from the personal.
In my thesis, I examine each source on the Operation as a hybrid of oral history and recorded fact, and place it in the context of the Cuban exile experience. I believe that it is possible to understand the unusual history of Operation Pedro Pan from a broader perspective by establishing the complexities of the political and historical experience of Cuban Americans. Therefore, chapter one covers the political, economic, and religious motivations through which the State Department, the CIA, and the Catholic Church began the Operation from Havana, Washington, and Miami. Chapter two first takes an in-depth look into the CIA’s use of propaganda during the period prior to the Bay of Pigs, and then examines the press coverage of the Operation to show the polarization of American and Cuban perspectives. Chapter three explores the living history of the Operation through personal interviews and literary works by the participants. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I examine these firsthand accounts and historical evidence against the contemporary exile community’s views of the Operation and the reaction to the case of Elián González in 2000. In the final analysis, I contend that the Operation was neither a wholly humanitarian effort nor a politically-driven plot to manipulate Cuban children as pawns. Regardless of the complex origins of their exodus, the historical memories of Pedro Pans reflect the constantly evolving personal and political views of Cubans in exile and on the island.
CHAPTER 1
Operation Exodus: The Catholic Church, the CIA and the Bureaucrats, 1960.

When both Pedro and Mel were young men, their parents wanted their children to grow up in freedom. So they put them on an airplane to a foreign land. They had great faith in America, faith -- so much faith in the ideals of our country that they were willing to trust their teenage children with a stranger in a foreign country. And they came and were loved…. I love the story of Pedro Pan.

-President George W. Bush, on (former) Cabinet Member Mel Martinez and Pedro García, Superintendent of Nashville Public Schools.

So that those victims will not be forgotten, so that never again will something of this nature occur in any nation in the World, to remember the circumstances and the manner in which that monstrous crime was committed, so that no one can ever again doubt the absolute veracity of this report, this book is published containing the history of the 14 thousand Elianes (Peter Pans, in reference to Elián González)"

- Ramón Torreira Crespo y José Buajasán Marrawi. From the introduction of Operación Peter Pan: Un caso de Guerra psicológica contra Cuba (Operation Peter Pan: A case of psychological war against Cuba).

Current academic work describes Cuban-American history as divided into two emigrant groups: the earliest political and religious exiles who came during the 1960’s and were predominantly white and upper class, and those from the 1980’s Mariel boat lift who were typically non-white and of working class origin. The former are known for constructing modern Miami, quickly rising into the upper ranks of American society, and turning Cubans into model Latino immigrants. Most historians attributed their success to the substantial amount of federal support the refugees received upon arriving in the United States, yet few question the government’s incentives. Though the Cuban exile experience played directly into the political relations between the United States, Cuba, and the Soviet Union during the Cold War,

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8 Ramón Torreira Crespo and José Buajasán Marrawi, Operación Peter Pan, 5. Translated from Spanish: “Para que aquellas víctimas no sean olvidadas, para que jamás se repita algo semejante en ningún otro país del mundo, para recordar las circunstancias y la forma en que fue cometido aquel monstruoso crimen, para que no le queden dudas a nadie sobre la absoluta veracidad de la denuncia, se edita este libro con la historia de los 14 mil Elianes.” Translation is my own.
contemporary history tends to separate the individual lives of Cuban-Americans from the drastic political maneuvering that has shaped the Cuban Diaspora from 1959 to the present. Few scholars consider the effect of this ideological split upon the Cuban-Americans whose lives were the most drastically changed by the Revolution: the children of Operation Pedro Pan.

Between December 1960 and October 1962 over 14,000 unaccompanied children were sent alone to the United States by their parents in Cuba to save them from becoming nationalized in new president Fidel Castro’s communist education model. There are a variety of reasons why parents chose to send their children: the foremost being the rumor, spread by CIA propaganda, that Castro was intending on removing Patria Potestad, or the right of parents to control the lives of their children. In 1960 Castro announced plans to send Cuban students to the Soviet Union, beginning with a group of about 1,000 children, including his own son Fidelito. Military conscription was mandatory for boys ages 15 and over, and several minors had opted to join the counter-Revolution movement rather than the army. This, coupled with the fact that Castro’s government had executed close to 600 “war criminals” during the first three months of his government in a country where the death penalty had been prohibited by the constitution, instigated fear among parents for their teenage sons.  

The majority of children sent, particularly during the first year, were boys ages 12 and over. In Cuba today it is widely accepted that many parents believed a rumor that their children might be sent to Siberian slaughter houses and returned as canned meat. Other rumors at the time suggested that fifty mothers in Bayamo, eastern Cuba, signed a pact to kill their children rather than subject them to Castro’s

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10 Conde, Pedro Pan, 52.
indoctrination. Then, in September 26, 1960, Castro announced to the United Nations that
Cuba would launch an all-out offensive to eradicate illiteracy. In his speech he declared, “Death
to illiteracy would be the number one goal in 1961,” and added that all schools would be closed
in April for an eight month period to launch his campaign against literacy. This forced parents
to confront the fact that once the schools opened the following year, public schools teaching
Marxist doctrine would be the only option. Cuban parents were also wary of the literacy
campaign itself, as many of the literacy workers were youth who would otherwise be in school.
Catholics became particularly frightened when the government banished many members of the
clergy from the country. Among those who sent their children in the first few months, many were
involved in the anti-Castro underground movement and feared that their children may be taken
hostage, similar to what occurred in the Spanish Civil War only thirty years prior. Cuban exile
Iliana Ros-Lehtinen writes that, “It is difficult to find the appropriate words to recreate the storm
and terror that developed and spread throughout the entire country.” While at first parents sent
their children in hopes of seeing them return within the year, after the U.S. loss at the Bay of

Juventud Rebelde, 15 March 2000. Via email Dubinsky described these rumors from her time spent living and
researching in Havana in 2001-2002. She also cited the García Marquez editorial, described these rumors.
12 Conde, Pedro Pan, 31.
13 Everett M. Ressler, Neil Boothby, and Daniel Steinbeck, Unaccompanied Children: Care and Protection in Wars,
independence was only 61 years old at the time of the Revolution, many Cubans were Spanish or of direct Spanish
descent and had vivid memories of the Spanish Civil War. Similar air lifts of Basque children were sent out of Spain
unaccompanied for this reason. Most children were sent to France, but others went to England, Belgium, the
U.S.S.R, Mexico, Switzerland, and Denmark. The problem of unaccompanied children was much worse in Spain, as
children were often separated from their parents or orphaned before they were evacuated. Many families were split
up in the mass movement across the northern border from Spain to France. The total number of children separated
from their families is unknown, but 20,000 children were counted in just one organized evacuation. There were over
90,000 orphans after the first year of fighting alone. In a similar manner to the situation in Cuba, evacuations were
originally planned as a type of vacation trip on the assumption that the war would be quickly over. However, the war
dragged on for several years with the Spanish Government, which the children’s parents supported, on the losing
end.
14 Ramón “Mongo” Grau Alsina and Valerie Ridderhoff, Mongo Grau: Cuba desde 1930 (Madrid: Agualarga
Editores, 1997), 9.
Pigs, some parents sent their children as the easiest way to establish a relative in the United States to petition for visas for themselves.

As exiles within the first five years of the Revolution, these children were predominantly white, middle and upper class, and Catholic. However, their lives were rapidly turned around as they became Hispanic “orphans” within the United States, distributed among temporary camps, foster homes, orphanages, juvenile delinquent institutions, boarding schools, and homes of relatives. The exact origin of the Operation is debatable, though it clearly was created by the United States State Department, Central Intelligence Agency, and the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Miami. By the end of 1962 it involved thousands of Cuban and American families, several foreign governments including Haiti and Great Britain, over 100 child welfare agencies, multiple state and government officials, the CIA-created anti-Castro group Rescate in Havana, an estimated $28 million in US federal funding,\textsuperscript{15} multinational corporations with former investments in Cuba, and the Catholic, Jewish, and Hindu faiths in the United States.\textsuperscript{16}

As stated, multiple histories and perspectives shape the ‘official’ history of the Operation. In what follows, the history of the Operation will track a multitude of sources, including the living history of its participants, and the secondary sources which have sought to reconstruct the facts from their authors’ own perspective.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} García Márquez, “Naufrago en tierra firme,” 7.  
\textsuperscript{17} This is not to claim that any source holds a particular agenda, only to clarify that the history given in this thesis is not official as the supporting documents are largely unavailable.
Four institutions had direct influence on the inception of Operation Pedro Pan within the U.S.: the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Miami, the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the former American Chamber of Commerce in Havana. Together their political, economic, and religious motivations worked to bring thousands of children to the U.S. There were also several volunteers both inside and outside of the dwindling U.S. Embassy in Havana who organized the logistics of connecting interested families to the Operation. As the Operation was orchestrated on the ground by an agency of the Catholic Church, many historians in the U.S. have described the Operation as first and foremost a Catholic humanitarian mission. For many this was the case; however, this perspective does not recognize that the decisions of the church were affected by broader political implications and supported by federal funding.

When U.S.-Cuba relations began to deteriorate in early 1960, U.S officials looked toward the Catholic Church in Cuba as an ally. Communist influence on the region was a large concern, as were Castro’s youth programs. While the Cuban Church had historically been passive and detached from strong political action due to historical alienation between the people and the Church, after Castro’s Revolution that began to change. Allegiance to the Revolution within the clergy was mixed. The predominantly Spanish higher clergy had supported Fulgencio Batista, former president of Cuba, while the secular lower priests and deacons had been abused.

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19 Leslie Dewart, *Christianity and the Revolution: The Lesson of Cuba* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 92-95. Dewart describes the Cuban clergy’s close attachment to Spain, which alienated most of the population, and estimates that only 10% of Cubans were practicing Catholics as opposed to the 80% who would “accept it nominally”. Although the Church’s role may seem minimal according to these statistics, the fact that Castro forced all clergy into exile and remained true to Marxist doctrine in eradicating religion indicates that the Church held significant power.

20 Batista was ousted by Castro’s forces on January 1, 1959.
and tortured by the former president’s regime. On May 17, 1960, Archbishop Serantes of Santiago de Cuba issued the first pastoral letter against the growing fear of communism, “Por Dios y por Cuba” (For God and Cuba). Serantes openly criticized commercial ties between socialist countries and Cuba, cited the Bible and Pope Pius XI as condemning communism and its principles, and characterized the fight as between Christianity and communism rather than Washington and the Soviet Union. U.S. officials probably appreciated his description of the shrewd indoctrination of communism,

With communism, nothing, absolutely nothing, before the repeated condemnations, preceding from the authorities of Catholicism, out of urgent necessity we recommend and even warn the clergy (alongside all Cubans) that they do not want in any manner to cooperate with communism, or to give it strength in any way; even more, they should retreat from this relentless enemy of Christianity as much as they can, and not be impressed by any phrases, promises, or flattery of communism, which are always false and cunning; nor by the shrewdness that Communism unfolds when giving a helping hand…21

He also condemned communism for subordinating family life to the state and educating children as the state wished without considering parental rights. Serantes’ letter began a growing sentiment of fear among Cuban Catholics, which the U.S. recognized as a useful tool in ideologically framing an attack against Cuba. Wayne Smith, the U.S. embassy’s liaison with the church, wrote in a report from January, 1961, of the role of the Church with respect to destroying the regime, “…does stand as a united block dedicated to the thesis that the Castro regime is an evil which must be destroyed. [It] can use its moral weight in the struggle and can deal the

21 Monsignor Enrique Pérez Serantes, “Por Dios y por Cuba,” La Voz de la Iglesia de Cuba, Circular, No. 27, pp. 70-74, 17 May 1960. 71. 
Translated from Spanish: “Con el Comunismo, nada, absolutamente nada, Ante las repetidas condenaciones, procedentes de la autoridad suma del Catolicismo, nos vemos en la imperiosa necesidad de recomendar y aun de conminar a nuestros diocesanos (y si cabe a todos los cubanos) no quieran en manera alguna cooperar con el comunismo, o ir del brazo con el mismo; más aún, deben tratar de alejarse de este implacable y prepotente enemigo del Cristianismo cuanto puedan, y no dejarse impresionar por frases o promesas mis o menos disimuladas o halagüeñas, siempre falsas y taimadas, ni tampoco por la astucia que el Comunismo despliega al tender la mano…”. Translation is my own.

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regime some psychological blows.”22 Thus the Cuban Catholic Church was instrumental in the framing of Castro’s Cuba, and Operation Pedro Pan, by the American government.

Within the United States the Catholic Church was also instrumental in opposing Castro’s Cuba, as the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Miami became responsible for the daily functions of Operation Pedro Pan. Many historians begin with the account of Monsignor Bryan Walsh, the face of the Operation for most former Pedro Pans. As the director of the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Miami, in November of 1960, Walsh was allegedly first confronted by an unaccompanied Cuban refugee, fifteen-year old Pedro Menendez. Pedro had been sent by his parents to live with relatives who did not have the resources to support him, and was therefore being passed from house to house. Several similar instances are said to have occurred, as observed by the Catholic Welfare Bureau, a child and family agency licensed by the Florida State Department of Public Welfare for child welfare programs, and therefore responsible for these children. One case gained notoriety in Key West, when a Cuban mother was brought to court for allegedly sending her two sons alone.23 After meeting with the Welfare Planning Council, Walsh appealed to Tracy Voorhees, a government official appointed by President Eisenhower, to evaluate the Cuban Refugee problem in Miami. Walsh requested that Voorhees include in his report recommendations for funding for a, “special foster care program for the care of unaccompanied Cuban refugee children under the auspices of the Miami child welfare agencies”.24 The Welfare Planning Council also appealed to the Cuban Refugee Executive Committee who requested, “…funds for foster care in institutions or family homes for children

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23 Conde, Operation Pedro Pan, 55.

separated from their parents, who have been sent here to avoid coercive regimentation.”25 At this point, on November 22, 1960, these funds would be for the Cuban Children’s Program, an agency formed to assist in placing and caretaking the children who had already been sent unaccompanied. The notion of creating an Operation to assist in getting these children from Cuba to Miami was not on Walsh’s or anyone else’s mind at the time. Although Walsh later became deeply ensconced in the political workings of the Operation, the Catholic Welfare Bureau was involved, for the most part, for humanitarian reasons. One priest described what he perceived to be the reasons for Cubans to send their children in his dissertation on the Cuban Children’s Program in 1964 in the following terms: “What ominous threat would cause them to ship off their children to a foreign land with no knowledge that they would ever again see or hear from them and almost complete uncertainty as to who would care for them? Part of the answer lies in their unquestioning faith in…the trustworthiness of the U.S. Government. The rest…lies in the keen fear they felt about the evils of Communist indoctrination of youth.”26 His reference to the ‘trustworthiness of the United States Government’ is interesting given that some point to U.S. citizens within Cuba for getting the Operation up and running. Shortly after Walsh first wrote to Voorhees, another central figure in the Operation, James Baker, entered the scene. Baker was the headmaster of Ruston Academy, an American school in Havana that catered to the children of U.S. residents and upper class Cubans. As one of 5,000 Americans living in Havana in 1959, Baker was an example of the imperialist relationship between the United States and Cuba at the time.

U.S.-Cuban relations at the time of the Revolution were strongly colonial, dating back to immediately after Cuban independence from Spain in the War of 1898. North American influence infiltrated the economic, political, cultural, educational, and even athletic realms of Cuban life. When considering Operation Pedro Pan it is important to realize how Cuban perceptions of America had formed before they made the decision to send their children unaccompanied to a ‘foreign country’. Most middle and upper class Cubans had vacationed and perhaps attended school in the U.S. They may have worked for U.S. corporations, attended U.S. spring training baseball games in Cuba, celebrated Thanksgiving, and enjoyed American music and films. Simultaneously, Cubans struggled to hold onto their own forming national identity as they fought the lingering influences of Spanish colonization. While Cuba was a popular vacation spot, and a few thousand Americans lived in Havana, for the most part the only background knowledge that American caretakers of Pedro Pan’s had of Cuban culture was from watching *I Love Lucy*.\(^{27}\) However, from the perspective of the American political and corporate officials that supported the program, it is also relevant to consider the United States’ economic and cultural interest in the country.

Following the War of 1898, the U.S. signed economic treaties with Cuba that cemented Cuba’s role as a sugar export economy to the American market and an importer of American goods. The Reciprocity Treaty of 1903 gave Cuban sugar a 20 percent tariff reduction in the U.S., and U.S. imports a 25 to 40 percent tariff reduction. This allowed Cuban farmers to compete with those in California in sending crops to New York, firmly embedding Cuba in the American economy. Reciprocity treaties led to lower tariffs and higher percentage of imports, and did not allow for Cuba to diversify its economy and import-substitute like other Latin American

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countries attempting to diversify their single crop economies. In 1934 the U.S. passed the Jones-Costigan Act that replaced tariffs with quotas as a means of protecting domestic American sugar producers. Essentially, these economic rights that the U.S. held simultaneously weakened the Cuban economy and made it dependent upon the U.S., even more so than other Latin American countries at the time.\(^{28}\) In 1959 the U.S. had an estimated $800 million invested in the island, and provided approximately 75% of its imports. In February 1960, Phillip Bonsal, U.S. ambassador to Cuba, described to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee why Castro had been able to seize power. He spoke of the enormous corruption in pre-1959 Cuba, rising unemployment which Cubans attributed to the reciprocal tariff arrangements with the U.S. that “…prevented them from protecting their own industries, and from diversifying their own agriculture, all in the interest of their own exports.”\(^{29}\) Before Castro the U.S. controlled 50 percent of sugar production, monopolized all electric, power, and telephone Operations on the island, and co-owned all oil refineries with Britain. Bonsal attributed Castro’s support to the anti-U.S. tension arising from these economic disadvantages.

For many Cubans, these economic ties came with cultural dependency. Social life formed in the late 19th Century was heavily influenced by many university students returning from studying in North America. Many clubs in Havana, including The Havana Yacht Club, named in English, were founded in the 1880s and held events modeled on American clubs. By the 1950s Cubans celebrated U.S. holidays, including Mother’s Day, Valentine’s Day, and Thanksgiving. Christmas cards and advertisements depicted Christmas the North American way- with snowmen


and ice skating, in a country that never saw snow. Considerable U.S. effort went into the infiltration of Cuban media to obtain a favorable representation of the “American way of life,” as the U.S. Information Service disseminated an enormous quantity of news, information, and photographs to the Cuban press.

Cuban historian Louis Peréz Jr. cites Cuba’s national sport of baseball as one of the most obvious American influences. When it was brought to the island during the 1860s by students returning from North American universities, he states that Cubans, “were introduced to the sport at a critical moment in the formation of national identity, when Cubans were assembling the elements on which to base a separate nationality.”

Perhaps the most perplexing phenomenon concerning Cuban baseball was that it was played in English- virtually no terms were translated.

Illeana Fuentes, a former participant in Operation Pedro Pan described the influence of American culture on her life in Cuba as a teenager prior to leaving, and how it affected her transition to the U.S. Despite the fact that separation from her family was painful for Fuentes, she was already familiar with American pop culture. She recalls going to the movies “to see our favorite stars, like Cary Grant, Rock Hudson, Doris Day,” listening to American singers such as, “Nat King Cole [and] Elvis Presley,” and wearing American fashions like, “bobby socks and saddle shoes- they were the rage among Cuban teenagers.”

Prior to Operation Pedro Pan, in the first half of the twentieth century many children and young adults also traveled to the United States for education. Beginning in 1899, the U.S. based Cuban Educational Association provided scholarships and financial aid for Cuban students to attend schools up north. The director of the association stated in private correspondence that he

30 Peréz Jr, On Becoming Cuban, 5.
expected sending Cuban children to U.S. schools would cut in half the time it would take to, “Americanize this place.” In 1925 the Havana Post stated that, “every man whose economic position will permit, sends his children to Cuba.” They enrolled in programs ranging from elementary to graduate school, and the placement of Cuban students in North American programs became a lucrative business. Businesses sprung up for the sole purpose of placing children in secondary schools and universities. (see Figure 1.1) Delinquent youths were often sent to military schools in the United States to be reformed. Between 1955 and 1958 some 1,100 students annually enrolled in higher education institutes, and more than 6,000 attended primary and secondary schools. In addition, many Cubans were migrating long before the Revolution. In 1932 it was estimated that over 40 percent of the Cuban population lived in the U.S. at some point in their lives, and between 1946 and 1956 over 50,000 Cubans received permanent resident visas.

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33 Ibid., 354.
34 Ibid., 408.
35 Ibid., 412.
Ruston Academy, where James Baker served as headmaster, was modeled on North American curricula, just as all prestigious secondary schools were in Havana. All private schools taught English from kindergarten on, and some had full immersion programs. In the 1950s Ruston Academy enrolled nearly 600 students in the elementary school program, approximately one-third of whom were Cuban. The high school was 50% Cuban. The faculty was made up of mostly North Americans and Cubans educated in the United States. The curriculum, sports, and social events were all modeled on the North American school environment. Students had a prom night, an annual rock’ n’ roll dance contest, theater productions, and a yearbook in English that named “the most popular,” “the most athletic,” “the most handsome,” and “the prettiest”. Ruston was also discreetly funded by U.S. officials, who saw the value of private schools in forming attitudes and values. In the 1950s public affairs officer Jacob Canter affirmed, “The indoctrination of Cuban children in the principles of democracy and the knowledge and
understanding of these children obtain of the U.S. while attending a school like Ruston are perhaps the most effective means of shaping Cuban opinion in the future.” Continuing, he discussed the value of education in comparison to propaganda, “By sharing everyday experiences with American classmates, [Cuban students] are developing at an early age an attitude of friendship for the U.S. which no amount of adverse propaganda will be able to eradicate.”

Although Baker was a member of this elite sect of Cuban society, he also had hopes of bringing democracy to Cuba and was initially a strong supporter of the Revolution. However, as the Revolution’s goals quickly changed, Baker began to hear concern among the parents of Ruston. In November 1960, the same month that Walsh contacted Voorhees, Baker agreed to fly to the U.S. to look for options in getting children out of Cuba. Initially he went to Washington, where he met with state officials who directed him to Miami. The reasons for Baker’s trip to Washington and the names of those he met are not known. According to Walsh, Baker sent two Ruston teachers to Miami and Washington in October to “look over the situation” and they had suggested establishing a boarding school. Once in Miami, he met with a group of businessmen from the former American Chamber of Commerce in Havana. As members of companies formerly invested in Havana, these men had been forced out in the earliest days of the Revolution during the land reforms. In 1960 they registered as a nonprofit in Florida, where the organization remains functioning today waiting for the restoration of US-Cuba business relations.

36 Ibid., 404.
38 The American Chamber of Commerce in the United States, Inc., www.amchamcuba.org. Internet, Organization site, accessed 1 October 2008. These investors include BellSouth, Chiquita Brands, and Marriott International. They claim to hold no political position, but advocates a policy that would allow US firms “to pursue commercial opportunities in Cuba, while seeking to follow international business practices and principles that are sound and ethical and are consistent with US national interests”.

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Among those meeting with Baker were investors who were very aware of the political situation. Kenneth Campbell and Bob O’Farrell of Esso Standard Oil and the Shell Oil Company, as well as Richard Colligan of Freeport Sulfur Company who agreed to fund the Operation, were already aiding the government’s efforts. Specifically, they were funding the International Rescue Committee, which worked with the CIA on refugee matters, as well as the flights out of Cuba for the children. By early 1961, Castro forbade using Cuban pesos to purchase airline tickets to the U.S. Corporations purchased tickets in Miami via family members of the Pedro Pans who were already in Florida, and then routed the tickets through Miami’s Henry Smith Travel Agency, which maintained an office in Havana. In May of 1962 an AP report stated that, “Children in Cuba, the same as adults, must produce 25 American dollars somehow to buy an airplane ticket. Men who still do business with Havana say that apparently Castro would rather have the dollars than the kids.”

Multinational corporations had been briefed on Eisenhower’s plans for military intervention in what would later become the Bay of Pigs, and did not have reason to believe these would be unsuccessful. From the perspective of everyone involved in these meetings, these were temporary plans to safeguard children in Miami until they could return to Cuba within a few months. After the meeting, the members of the Chamber of Commerce agreed to fund Baker’s project and also arranged for Baker to meet Msgr. Walsh. Although the connection between Walsh and the members of the American Chamber of Commerce is not certain, it is

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39 Walsh, “Cuban Children Refugees,” 8. These companies were named in letters from members of the American Chamber of Commerce to Walsh, but no known documentation exists of these or other possible companies that funded the Operation.
40 De los Angeles Torres, The Lost Apple, 63.
speculated that the Catholic Welfare Bureau was known for working with the CIA on previous refugee programs.\footnote{Interim Report to the President of the United States on the Cuban Refugee Program, 19 December 1960, Report by Tracy S. Voorhees, 5. Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960, and Walsh, “Cuban Children Refugees,” 398. Such as the Hungarian Free fighters, 1956-1957, when approximately 38,000 Hungarians sought asylum in the United States. It is also relevant to note that corporations were involed in caring for the Hungarians, as two officials at the Ford Motor Company were Vice President and deputy of the Hungarian refugee camp. One of these officials, Mr. Leo C. Beebe, was Voorhees’ special assistant at the Cuban Refugee Center in Miami. This is just one example of how corporate and government officials worked hand in hand in refugee assistance programs.}{42}

On December 12, 1960 Walsh and Baker met for the first time in Miami, uniting their somewhat disparate efforts into a broader plan to provide care for Cuban children. Walsh convinced Baker that a boarding school would not be sufficient to handle the religious and social needs of the children, and that the Cuban Children’s Program could provide better care. He explained Voorhee’s agreement to provide some federal funds for the program. Yet what Baker brought to the table was much more influential, as he suggested the need for the funding of a clandestine Operation to get children without visas out of Cuba. Baker was able to set up the logistics of getting student visas for approximately 200 children, with the Catholic Welfare Bureau taking responsibility for enrolling the children in school. Walsh also had to agree to provide transportation from Miami International Airport as well as foster care for those children without friends or relatives in the U.S. With these basic provisions covered, Operation Pedro Pan officially began on December 26, 1960 with the arrival of two children, Sixto and Vivian Aquino.\footnote{Ressler, Boothby, and Steinbeck, Unaccompanied Children, Table I-I. It is important to note that these were not the first unaccompanied children to arrive from Cuba, but the first brought by Operation Pedro Pan, according to available sources. When Baker met with Walsh there were already children in Miami on tourist visas. An article in the Cuban magazine Bohemia in November described students being taken from Villanueva to the U.S. in a program sponsored by the State Department. It is estimated that 17,000 Cuban children came to the U.S. unaccompanied from 1960-1965, of which only 14,048 were recorded in Operation Pedro Pan.}{43} The trickle of children slowly increased until after The Bay of Pigs when numbers rose sharply. Walsh continued to expand his network of individual and institutional support, ultimately placing children in 35 states within every foster care scenario imaginable.

42 Interim Report to the President of the United States on the Cuban Refugee Program, 19 December 1960, Report by Tracy S. Voorhees, 5. Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960, and Walsh, “Cuban Children Refugees,” 398. Such as the Hungarian Free fighters, 1956-1957, when approximately 38,000 Hungarians sought asylum in the United States. It is also relevant to note that corporations were involed in caring for the Hungarians, as two officials at the Ford Motor Company were Vice President and deputy of the Hungarian refugee camp. One of these officials, Mr. Leo C. Beebe, was Voorhees’ special assistant at the Cuban Refugee Center in Miami. This is just one example of how corporate and government officials worked hand in hand in refugee assistance programs. 43 Ressler, Boothby, and Steinbeck, Unaccompanied Children, Table I-I. It is important to note that these were not the first unaccompanied children to arrive from Cuba, but the first brought by Operation Pedro Pan, according to available sources. When Baker met with Walsh there were already children in Miami on tourist visas. An article in the Cuban magazine Bohemia in November described students being taken from Villanueva to the U.S. in a program sponsored by the State Department. It is estimated that 17,000 Cuban children came to the U.S. unaccompanied from 1960-1965, of which only 14,048 were recorded in Operation Pedro Pan.
Walsh’s network of individuals quickly grew, inside and outside of Cuba. The most prominent leaders of the Operation in Cuba included Mongo and Polita Grau, the nephew and niece of Ramón Grau, the former president of Cuba from 1944-1948.\footnote{Polita Grau also served as first lady to her bachelor uncle.} Immediately after receiving a letter from Walsh and the Catholic Welfare Bureau, both Graus used their connections, as well as the anti-Castro group *Rescate* (clandestinely formed by the CIA within Cuba) to produce visa waivers and distribute them to children across the country. Mongo also had connections with the airlines KLM and Pan American, who assisted the children on the plane and in Miami. Both siblings were sentenced to 30 years in prison after being accused of plotting to overthrow Castro in 1965, and eventually entered exile in Miami. In the prologue to his autobiography, current U.S. congresswoman (and Cuban exile) Iliana Ros-Lehtinen describes Mongo’s involvement in the Operation, and why she chose to nominate him for a Nobel Peace Prize, “he created a secret network of diplomats and friends to organize the exodus known as Operation Pedro Pan...During those five years Mongo coordinated an exodus for children that was thought impossible, one of the most amazing conspiracy secrets that has never before existed.”\footnote{Grau and Ridderhoff, *Mongo Grau*, 9.}

Though it is difficult to determine the true intentions among the individuals that created the Operation, Msgr. Walsh provided the most straightforward account. Through documenting his work in journal articles and several public and private interviews, as well as cultivating personal relationships with the children, he portrayed his involvement as largely humanitarian while giving a limited amount of information concerning the inner workings of the CIA and State Department. James Baker also spoke to several historians, but often gave an unclear order of events and agendas. Officials in the State Department never gave interviews, as they took an
oath of privacy and may have been protecting individuals within the CIA. Nevertheless, Walsh’s writings and personal accounts provide insight into his feelings toward the Operation.

Walsh’s initiative in not only leading the Cuban Children’s Program, but in also agreeing to claim responsibility for the welfare of a sizeable number of Cuban children, was both daring and puzzling. Until his death in 2001, and even today, Walsh is revered among the Cuban-American community as the ‘Father of Operation Pedro Pan’. Former Pedro Pans and their parents view his mission as primarily humanitarian, quickly contradicting any speculation that he had even minimal political or outside interest.46 While his mission was undoubtedly humanitarian, Walsh’s perspective as an ambassador for the Church to Washington should also be considered by historians. As I will discuss in the next section, the CIA and the State Department were very much aware of the Operation in its entirety, and Walsh had to create and mediate an unprecedented program, one for which he had relatively little support in the initial phases.

Walsh describes his first concerns for the unaccompanied Cuban children in an article written in 1971. After becoming aware of the growing problem in Miami, he began thinking about the role of the State Department in caring for Hungarian refugee children just three years prior. In a program designed to provide refuge for Hungarian Free Fighters, Mr. Tracy Voorhees, the same individual responsible for the Cuban refugee problem, was appointed to regulate a program for placing Hungarian teenagers. Walsh was aware that these teenagers had been placed into homes without the usual precautions of U.S. foster care and welfare services, and that the placement had been “unsuccessful”. Voorhees had used agencies such as Catholic Relief Services, Church World Services, and United Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which were not

46 This is in reference to editorials and responses in The Miami Herald. See “Walsh, the embargo, zealots”, The Miami Herald, 7 January 2001.
set up to run child welfare services. As the Catholic Welfare Bureau had been licensed by the Florida State Department of Public Welfare for child welfare programs, Walsh believed they would be better prepared in assisting children. He describes the lack of training within the aforementioned organizations and his concerns:

As a result, many of their placements, including some in Miami, had failed. My worry was that, unless our local agencies responded to the challenge, it was very likely that responsibility for the care of unaccompanied Cuban refugee children would be given by Mr. Voorhees to these same agencies…My first concern therefore was that the program for the care of unaccompanied children should be handled by child welfare agencies. My second concern was that the religious heritage of the child be safeguarded…my third concern was how a program of foster care could be funded. 47

Beyond these personal concerns, Walsh later explains that after he received confirmation from Voorhees that the government would provide assistance to refugee children beyond what private charity could cover, he felt obliged to take on more responsibility, “Once our agencies had received the promise of government support, it seemed clear that our agencies were obligated to provide a well-arranged and well-planned reception for those children who would need care.”48 On December 30 he took a much larger step for the Catholic Welfare Bureau. After receiving a call from Frank Aurbach of the State Department, he was given an ultimatum: assume ultimate responsibility for the children or the Catholic Welfare Bureau would lose federal funding.49 He quickly signed a statement representing the Catholic Welfare Bureau agreeing to take responsibility for the children, without authorization from Bishop Carroll or any other diocesan official. Clearly, Walsh took great initiative in garnering support for the program, but in reality federal and private care for unaccompanied children came from a number of different resources, not just from Monsignor Walsh.

47 Walsh, “Cuban Refugee Children,” 388.
48 Ibid., 392.
49 The U.S. government was not willing to assume ultimate responsibility for the children.
On October 24, 1960, over a month before Walsh and the Miami diocese held their first meetings on unaccompanied children, the White House held a meeting to discuss the Cuban refugee situation. The following week federal and state officials held a meeting in Miami where they documented the Cuban children problem for the first time. Among the other issues facing Cuban refugees they found that, “Apparently there are many unattached children … this problem is expected to become more serious as plans are now being developed by the Castro regime to make children wards of the state… some [children] are roaming the streets in [Miami] depending upon the sympathy of persons they meet on the streets for food and shelter.” 50 From this meeting Eisenhower ordered Voorhees to investigate and devise a plan to handle the growing number of Cuban refugees. On December 2 the president approved $1 million toward the Cuban Refugees from the Mutual Security Funds, federal funds allocated towards relief programs for people who had been “enslaved by Communism.” 51 After seeking information from several local officials, including Monsignor Walsh, Voorhees provided an interim report on December 19th in which he allocated part of the Mutual Security Funds toward unaccompanied children, “If it should prove necessary, beyond what private charity can do, such Mutual Security funds will also be utilized for assistance to Cuban refugee children in extreme need.” 52 It was from this one sentence in Voorhee’s report that Monsignor Walsh was able to convince James Baker, several members of

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51 The Mutual Security Act of 1951 created the Mutual Security Administration to oversee foreign aid distributed to U.S. allies, particularly those who were named endangered of Soviet influence. It authorized the President to grant up to $150 million in these countries, and was an extension of the Marshall Plan funds distributed in post World War II. It was amended in 1954 to direct funds specifically towards relief programs for refugees from communist countries. At this point, in December 1960, Cuba was considered politically and economically aligned with the Sino-Soviet bloc.

52 Interim Report to the President of the United States on the Cuban Refugee Program, Tracy S. Voorhees.
the American Chamber of Commerce, and U.S. Embassy officials in Cuba to join forces and
begin the clandestine airlift of Operation Pedro Pan.

However, Walsh was not acting alone in his plans to care for Cuban children as they
arrived. In the month of December, Frances Davis, director of the Division of Child Welfare for
the Florida Department of Public Welfare, had become aware of the growing problem and asked
the Children’s Bureau for assistance in discussing policies for the care of refugee children.
Katherine Oettinger, director of the Children’s Bureau, meet with Davis concerning the
unaccompanied children already in the southern area of the state.

Through December Walsh and Baker had successfully brought over several children, and
everything seemed to be coming together for the Operation. Yet growing political strife quickly
brought their scheme to a halt as Eisenhower cut off diplomatic relations with the Cuban
government on January 3, 1961, closing the U.S. embassy and ending the issuing of student
visas.53 This move brought the Catholic Church and the State Department together to form a visa
waiver program that allowed the full 14,048 children to come within the next two years. While
temporary plans were made to attain British visas and send children to Miami through
connecting in the British colonies of Jamaica and the Bahamas,54 Walsh and Baker made contact
with the State Department and arranged a meeting on January 8th in Washington. Walsh
describes his feelings on the day of this first meeting with the State Department, “Somehow the
weather, the day, the time, the happenings of the past weeks all combined to create an

53 De los Angeles Torres, *The Lost Apple*, 70.
54 This plan involved Baker’s former employee Penny Powers, who worked in the intelligence division of the British
embassy. Baker and Powers developed a plan of getting student visas to go to Jamaica or the Bahamas, British
colonies at the time, and allowing children to board either a Havana-Miami-Kingston flight, and get off at Miami, or
take direct flights to Kingston where they would receive a visa from the U.S. consulate and fly to Miami the
following day. This worked well as Cuba was anxious to maintain good relations with Britain. Walsh arranged for
the clergy in Kingston to provide shelter and care for those children staying briefly in Kingston. While many
children were brought this way, the majority were able to come after the visa-waiver program was established.
atmosphere of intrigue and conspiracy.” Several men attended this meeting, including Robert Hale, the head of the visa office in the State Department, a representative from the British embassy, and possibly a representative of the Central Intelligence Agency. At this meeting Walsh and Baker were given, “a very big concession regarding the visa waivers which was to make our program of distribution in Cuba much easier.” This involved a blanket authority to issue visa waivers to all Cuban children ages six to sixteen, and to those sixteen to eighteen who had passed security clearance. Later that year the State Department also granted blanket visa waivers to anyone with an immediate relative to petition for the person from the United States. Many involved in the Operation, including Walsh, believed that the CIA continued to monitor the Operation until its ending in 1962. One recently declassified document reported a social worker communicating with the CIA about the drastic reduction of refugee children in June 1962, just four months before the end of the Operation. The reasoning for granting this open passage to Cuban children for those two intensely political years has been described as humanitarian, political, and ideological.

While there is not one concrete reason for why the State Department granted visa waivers, the events of the early 1960’s point to two explanations. First, the steps taken to alleviate the stress of Cuban refugees in south Florida through Mutual Security Funds show the government’s allegiance to its pledge to help refugees suffering from the “enslavement of communism.” Second, there was a growing desire to invade Cuba by officials in the CIA, and the exodus of a

55 Walsh, “Cuban Refugee Children,” 400.
57 Walsh, “Cuban Refugee Children,” 402.
58 De los Angeles Torres, The Lost Apple, 82-85. This second visa waiver network was headed by Wendell Rollason, and immigrants rights community organizer in Miami who received applications from family members and forwarded them to Washington for waivers. While most applicants received a visa waiver, the process took a much longer time than the Pedro Pan visa waivers, which averaged about 4 months, due to the lack of a screening process.
great number of Cubans was bad propaganda for Castro and made it more difficult for him to identify counter-Revolutionaries as they left the country.

In September 1959, exactly 9 months after Castro came into power, CIA officials began laying the groundwork for covert action against Cuba’s Revolutionary government. From this point until after the failed invasion in April 1961, the U.S. government attempted to cover up any indication that it had involvement in anti-Castro action. The State Department, the CIA, and Kennedy wanted the Operation to look as if the Cuban exiles could have planned it, so that the administration could claim "plausible deniability" and avoid responsibility for the invasion as a U.S. Operation. In Eisenhower’s first meeting with top national security officials to discuss the plan, he stressed that, “our hand must not show in anything that is done.” 59 In March, 1960 officials documented, “A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime.” This was the four point plan for what became known as the Cuba Project:

1. Formation of a Cuban exile organization to attract Cuban loyalties, to direct opposition activities, and to provide cover for Agency Operations.
2. A propaganda offensive in the name of the opposition.
3. Creation inside Cuba of a clandestine intelligence collection and action apparatus to be responsive to the direction of the exile organization.
4. Development outside Cuba of a small paramilitary force to be introduced into Cuba to organize, train, and lead resistance groups. 60

The CIA formed the Cuban exile organization Revolutionary Democratic Front of Cuba (FRD) that served as the “declared opposition” to Castro. As stated in point 4, they also trained anti-Castro ‘guerilla forces’ in southern Florida and in Guatemala, where the CIA had recently instigated a war to overthrow president Jacobo Arbenz for suspicion of communist tendencies.

David Atlee Phillips, a former Havana operative for the CIA and a veteran of the agency’s 1954

59 A.J. Goodpaster, “Memorandum of Conference with the President,” 17 March 1960.
61 Ibid., 15.
coup against Arbenz, became chief of propaganda for the CIA’s Cuban Task Force. “What’s the plan?” he asked at headquarters in Washington. “The Guatemalan scenario”, a CIA officer replied. The plotted attack on Cuba was part of the pledge by the U.S. government to ward off communism in Latin America as the Cold War escalated. The Red Scare became a very real fear for Americans across the nation, and the Eisenhower administration began to suspect Castro’s communist allegiance only 9 months after his rise to power.  

The first attacks on the Bay of Pigs were by air on Castro’s air bases on April 15, 1961, two whole days before the land invasion on the 17th, allowing Cuba to prepare for the imminent attack. When the 1400 Cuban exiles arrived on the beach at Baja de los Cochininos (Bay of Pigs), the Cubans were not taken by surprise. The exiles, known as Brigade 2506, were defeated by Castro’s much larger force (estimates range from 25,000 to 51,000) in less than 72 hours. Cuban fighter aircrafts sank the Brigade’s ammunition ship and other support craft, and the exiles never broke through Playa Girón, the beachhead at the Bay of Pigs.  

From the approximately 1500 exiles that fought, 68 were killed and the rest captured and put on trial. A few were executed and the rest sentenced to 30 years in prison. After 20 months of negotiation with the U.S., Cuba released the exiles in exchange for $53 million in food and medicine. Cuba’s casualties are unknown, but speculated to be between two and five thousand.

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62 The timing and reason for Fidel Castro’s affiliation with the communist party is a controversial topic. While he did not declare himself a Communist until 1961, some believe he was a communist from his university days. Some cite his brother Raul’s attendance of a communist youth conference in the Soviet Union before his presidency as an indication of his earlier beliefs. Others believe that the policies pursued by the Eisenhower and Kennedy Cold War administrations pushed him towards the Soviets and communism.


64 Ibid., 3 and Triay, *Fleeing Castro*, 75. Kornbluh estimates between four and five thousand, while Triay claimed there were around 1800 casualties.
Historian Theodore Draper described the battle of The Bay of Pigs as, “one of those rare events in history- a perfect failure.”65 The strike on Cuba began on April 15, 1961 and ended on April 21st. It included land, sea, and air attacks. The majority of troops were Cuban exiles trained by the CIA in Guatemala and Florida. However the CIA also hired a number (find numbers) of U.S. pilots to fly support missions. Though it is generally accepted by historians that the battle was a failure for the U.S., there is a debate over where the failure originated. Some find flaws in the CIA’s faulty assumptions about overthrowing Castro and for misleading the White House about the likely success of the Operation. Others blame Kennedy’s decision to cancel the second airstrike and his refusal to salvage the Operation through military intervention. One American pilot who flew in the attack blames neither of these, but rather the unanticipated, nonmilitary restrictions of the plan. When the exiles surrendered on the 21st, Castro may have been down to his last gallon of fuel, and his ordinances were exhausted.66

Perhaps the most obvious flaw was that the invasion failed to be a covert Operation that the administration could ‘plausibly deny’. Cuban intelligence was aware of anti-Castro exiles training in Guatemala as early as November 1960. On April 9, six days before the attack, The New York Times published a front page story, watered down after a call from the president, entitled “Anti-Castro Units Trained to fight at Florida Bases.” Kennedy was quoted as stating, “Castro didn’t need agents over here- all he has to do is read our papers”. The CIA attempted to portray the first air strikes on the 15th as from defected Cuban air force pilots by marking B-26 light bomber aircrafts with markings of the Cuban Revolutionary Air Force. The planes then arrived at Miami International Airport with pilots claiming that they had defected from the

65 Ibid., 3.
Cuban airforce in stolen planes and had carried out the attack and flown to the U.S. Reporters noted that the planes’ machine guns had not been fired and that the noses were made of solid metal while Castro’s B-26s had plastic noses. A statement was issued that the raids in Cuba were carried out by Cuban pilot defectors. After reading American wire accounts Castro commented that “even Hollywood would not try to film such a story.” 67

This cover story fell apart within hours of the statement being issued; but not before the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Adlai Stevenson, presented the false account to the entire General Assembly. The CIA happened to launch the attack on the very week that the United Nations was meeting to address Cuba’s charges of U.S. aggression. On the 15th just hours after the strike Stevenson stated that, “…there will be no intervention by the armed forces of the United States and that the United States will do everything in its power to assure that no American participates in any action against Cuba.” 68

While Operation Pedro Pan is not mentioned in any U.S. literature on The Bay of Pigs invasion, most Cuban texts devote a chapter to the Operation and its role in the CIA’s Cuba propaganda project.69 The propaganda began in November 1959 with anti-Castro radio broadcasts from Mexico. Media, including radio, television, and newspaper, would continue to be used for propaganda purposes through the present day. In March of 1960 Eisenhower authorized the CIA to enact a plan of covert Operations against Cuba. The plan calls for a “massive propaganda offensive,” including radio broadcasts, speaking tours, and publishing

67 Kornbluh, The Bay of Pigs Declassified, 303-304.
68 Ibid 305.
69 The Operation is not mentioned in any American text available on The Bay of Pigs. One author, Victor Triay, has written two books, one on Operation Peter Pan and the other on Brigade 2506 of the Bay of Pigs attack, and neither text alludes to a connection to the other. Juan Carlos Rodriguez’s The Bay of Pigs and the CIA is a Cuban text that has a chapter devoted to the Operation, entitled, “Legal Custody of Children”. 
projects. The continued use of propaganda has affected the American, exile, and Cuban perspectives on Operation Pedro Pan.

The point from January 1961 to the invasion at Playa Girón, the Bay of Pigs, on April 15, marks the first phase of the Operation, as the motives of the CIA and the number of children leaving both changed drastically after the loss at the Bay of Pigs. The second phase is the period between the invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when direct flights from Cuba were stopped and the Operation could not bring any more children over.

The most important issue in the presidential election of 1960 was the spread of communism, particularly in Latin America. On January 20, 1961 John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as president, coming into office with a promise of a hard-line policy towards the “Reds.” On February 3 he announced another $4 million in government aid to “house, feed, school, employ, and resettle” Cuban refugees, citing that the resources of local relief organizations had been “badly overstrained.” He specified that it included money for the care of unaccompanied children, “the most troubled group in the refugee population.” He also selected Abraham Ribicoff to administer these funds in overt refugee programs. This may have

70 John Finney, “President Orders Cuba Refugee Aid,” The New York Times, 4 February 1961, 1. The nine point plan illustrates the extensive aid that Cuban refugees received: 1. Providing all possible assistance to voluntary relief agencies in providing daily necessities for needy refugees, for resettleing as many refugees as possible, and for securing jobs for them. 2. Obtaining assistance of both private and governmental agencies to provide useful employment opportunities for displaced Cubans, consistent with the over-all employment situation in Florida. 3. Providing funds for the resettlement of refugees to other areas. 4. Furnishing financial assistance to meet basic maintenance requirements of needy Cuban refugees in the Miami area as required in the communities of resettlement. 5. Providing for essential health services for the refugees. 6. Furnishing federal assistance for local public school operating costs in the Miami area. 7. Initiating measures to augment training and educational opportunities for Cuban refugees. 8. Providing financial aid for the care and protection of unaccompanied children—the most defenseless and troubled group among the refugee population. 9. Undertaking surplus food distribution to needy refugees.


72 Though the Cuban Refugee programs became public, the visa waivers and the transport of children remained clandestine until the Cleveland Newspaper The Plain Dealer broke the story on March 9, 1962. Previously the press had been in agreement in keeping the Operation a secret. On the same day the Diocese of Miami published a seven page spread on the Operation in its publication The Voice.
been the first move in utilizing children in ‘Operation Mongoose’. Commonly referred to as The Cuban Project, this Operation involved covert actions and propaganda against Castro and the communist government of Cuba. It involved political, psychological, military, sabotage, and intelligence Operations, as well as assassination of key leaders. Cuban children were specified as useful in psychological Operations, or anti-Castro propaganda.

Among the available declassified documents, the most pertinent references to unaccompanied children come from letters and memorandums among the State Department and CIA. In a memorandum dating February 20, 1961 ambassador Phillip Bonsal wrote to Robert Stevenson of the State Department urging him to expedite entrance to members of divided families, noting, “the continued exodus of Cubans from Castro’s paradise is good propaganda for our side. It may force Castro to take measures to stop it.” 73 Exactly one year later, in a program review by Edward Lansdale, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, on Operation Mongoose, he states that children are “particularly useful.” As part of the goal to demonstrate concern for the plight of parentless children, the document states that, “Mrs. Kennedy would be especially effective in visiting children refugees. (One camp near Miami has about 1,000 children who came out without their parents.) Her impact upon Latin Americans on the recent Presidential visit to Venezuela and Colombia suggests this.”74 Beyond these two direct propaganda motives, De los Angeles Torres writes of the military interest in Operation Pedro Pan, as the Department of the Army issued a warning that Cuban exiles who had joined the military effort were a potential security threat since they still had relatives in Cuba and could be exploited or recruited through coercion by Cuban intelligence. She suggests that the American

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74 Program Review: Operation Mongoose 1962, 32.
government had similar incentives in bringing children of counter-Revolutionaries to the U.S., she also sheds light on the purposes of having the children of the underground, “… the parents could continue fighting in the underground without having the immediate pressure of having to tend to their children. Then there was the fear factor if they were caught- what would happen to their children? In addition, the CIA would have control over the children ensuring compliance on the part of Cubans.”75

As the political and humanitarian goals of the Church and the government in the Operation continue to unfold four decades after the fact, for the most part the ‘facts’ remain debatable. One perspective that very few Pedro Pan scholars have considered is that of the American and Cuban publics during the Cold War. Though the details concerning the Operation remained secret until March 1962, the multitude of unaccompanied children was a popular human interest story for the American press throughout the 1960’s. In Cuba, the press changed drastically in 1966 as the former newspaper publications were replaced with Granma, the communist paper, and Juventud Rebelde, the youth communist league publication. Clearly, the publics on both sides of the forming ideological fault lines between the U.S. and Cuba as part of the Sino-Soviet bloc had distinct perspectives, largely developed by the press.

75 De los Angeles Torres, The Lost Apple, 61.
CHAPTER 2
Creating the Official Myth: Propaganda and the Media Surrounding Operation Pedro Pan

In reality, these debates are battles to define historical memories. Cuba is an island ravaged by a Revolution. If the battle over the children’s minds in the 1960s had been a way to contest the country’s political future, interpreting the exodus became a way to control its history...Both the U.S. and the Cuban governments are still interested in spinning the facts. The battle has moved from saving children’s minds to controlling the narrative of the exodus.76

-María de los Ángeles Torres

From the very beginning of Operation Pedro Pan, both the U.S. and Cuban governments were working to shape the “narrative of the exodus”, as De los Ángeles Torres so aptly expresses in her work. While historical events are always shaped through the lens of looking back, the history of Operation Pedro Pan is unique in that the facts for Cuban parents sending their children were unclear, or fabricated, from the very beginning. The two most powerful agents in shaping this perspective were the federal governments on both sides, which spread propaganda and committed acts of sabotage, and the American and Cuban media, which cemented the official myth of the Operation in the minds of exiles.

Most American journalists and authors on the subject have ignored the connection between the Operation and the U.S. government’s mission to spread propaganda and instigate disorder throughout Cuba. Accounts from the Cuban government link the two directly, along with the pressures that came with the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis ending in October 1962. In contemporary Cuba, Operation Pedro Pan is considered to be solely a function of CIA propaganda.

This chapter explores how CIA propaganda and the story perpetuated by the press in the 1960s shaped the ‘official myth’ of Operation Pedro Pan, in both the U.S. and Cuba. Though

76 De los Ángeles Torres, The Lost Apple, 228-229.
Operation Pedro Pan was not solely a CIA led project, after reviewing CIA actions in the early 1960s, it is apparent that propaganda and other covert action changed the perceptions of both Cubans and Americans of their own reality. For Americans and Cuban exiles, the Operation became widely accepted as a humanitarian mission, one in which Cuban families endured enormous sacrifices in order to save their children’s minds. For Cubans, the Operation was not discussed in detail in the press or in public until the 1980s. When the narrative finally emerged, it told of an Operation that took place solely due to CIA propaganda, and suggested that all Pedro Pans endured physical and sexual abuse in foster care. Though hard facts are hard to come by, the historical reality probably lies somewhere in between these polarized accounts. As stated, the Operation was carried out by the political, economic, and religious elements that converged in the Cold War for Cuban families. The propaganda spread throughout Cuba via leaflets, radio, and internal spies was part of the covert action instigated by Eisenhower, and continued by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations as Operation Mongoose, or the Cuba Project.

In the first chapter I covered some of the government’s motivations for financially supporting Operation Pedro Pan, and the government’s actions prior to the failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs. Carlos Alberto Montaner, a Cuban professor who resides in Spain once commented on U.S. action against Cuba in 1961, “The CIA, with a long series of successes in Latin America, underestimated Castro’s capacity for maneuver, and dusted off the Operations manual for banana republics. The result was one of the most resounding failures, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the beginning of its liquidation as an omnipotent organism.” However, after the Kennedy’s colossal failure to execute the overthrow of Castro, CIA tactics turned wholly to propaganda and sabotage. It is imperative to realize that though there was a CIA presence both on and off the island before

the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, its actions were increased significantly afterwards as the possibility of another U.S. invasion became very slim. After the Cuban missile crisis ended in October 1962 with Kennedy promising Khrushchev that the U.S. would not invade the island, the only option the U.S. had against Castro was to create sabotage from within by using the CIA. During the missile crisis the U.S. also stopped flights from Havana to Miami on October 22, 1962, marking the end of Operation Pedro Pan. This chapter focuses on the CIA’s actions in Cuba from the beginning of Castro’s administration in January 1959 to the end of the Operation in October 1962.

Though the U.S. government publicly supported Fidel Castro until he declared himself a communist in 1961, in September 1959 a Joint State Department/USIA directive called for increased criticism of the Revolutionary government. It cautioned that such messages must not appear to be of U.S. origin: “any information which may assist in focusing Latin American opinion on the negative aspects of the Castro regime shall not be attributed to any U.S. government source.” It reiterated that the Eisenhower administration was, “seeking to avoid any impression that the United States is hostile to the regime of Prime Minister Fidel Castro or unsympathetic to the achievement within Cuba of the proclaimed humanitarian objectives of the Revolution which he heads.” The U.S. had, “sought to avoid statements or actions which singly or cumulatively would suggest or imply a systematic campaign against Cuba.”

Three months later, in December 1959, CIA director Allen Dulles approved a proposal for destabilization projects including, “clandestine radio attacks from Caribbean countries of the liberal group, working closely with us and using Cuban nationals for broadcasting,” and “intrusion Operations” to disrupt Cuban TV and radio broadcasts. By early 1960 CIA officers in

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Havana had begun clandestine propaganda Operations to encourage opposition to the Revolutionary government. By March Eisenhower had authorized the CIA to enact a plan of covert Operations against Cuba. The plan calls for a “massive propaganda offensive,” including radio broadcasts, speaking tours, and publishing projects. Alongside the work the CIA completed in recruiting exiles for training camps for the Bay of Pigs, they launched an attack through media and agents on the island.

On May 17, 1960 Radio Swan, the CIA’s first major anti-Castro radio station, began broadcasting to Cuba and the Caribbean. Located on a tiny island off the coast of Honduras, the station was owned by a CIA front posing as a private U.S. company. Broadcasts on Radio Swan addressed parents, and more specifically mothers, concerning their children beginning in October: “Cuban mothers, don’t let them take your children away! The Revolutionary Government will take them away from you when they turn five and will keep them until they are 18. By that time, they will be historical materialist monsters.” A few days later broadcasts specified a new law that would carry out these threats, adding, “And by the time they are returned to you…Fidel Castro will have become the Mother Superior of Cuba. Attention Cubans! Go to church and follow instructions given you by the clergy.” Other broadcasts also directed parents to the church for direction, where the clergy were involved in securing visa waivers for children to be sent through Operation Pedro Pan, “Fidel is trying to find a way to destroy the

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79 In September 1960 Castro denounced Radio Swan and alleged that the U.S. was behind it in a speech before the United Nations General Assembly.
80 Radio Swan reports, 1960, from the personal archives of Ramón Torreira Crespo. “Madre Cuba, escucha esto! La próxima ley dell gobierno sera quitarte a tu hijo! Es la nueva ley del Gobierno quitártelo…y cuando te devuelvan serán unos monstruos del materialismo.” Translation is my own.
81 Ibid., “¡Madre Cuba, escucha esto! ¡La próxima ley dell gobierno sera quitarte a tu hijo! Es la nueva ley del Gobierno quitártelo…y cuando te devuelvan serán unos monstruos del materialismo. Fidel se va a convertir en la Madre Suprema de Cuba. ¡No te dejes quitar a tu hijo! ¡Atención cubanos! ¡Ve a la Iglesia y sigue las orientaciones del clero!” Translation is my own.
Church, but this cannot be. Cubans! Go to church and do what the clergy tell you.”\textsuperscript{82} These radio broadcasts were combined with action by the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FRD), a Cuban exile political front started by the CIA.

In August 1960 the FRD, later changed to the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC), published a series of full or double page advertisements in Miami newspapers. They attacked the Castro regime on various points, including the dispatching of Cuban youths to Communist governments for indoctrination and Communist training. The group also presented a statement to the OAS that asked, “What was next? . . . The Communist indoctrination of youth through the state monopolization of education and the imposition of a single history text.” In response, on April 16\textsuperscript{th} the Cuban government ran a 2 page advertisement in \textit{Bohemia}, a national magazine, inviting parents to meet with a group of \textit{brigadistas}\textsuperscript{83} directly. The ad closed with an appeal to parental responsibility and patriotism: “Don’t deny your child this opportunity to serve the Fatherland.”\textsuperscript{84} Clearly, the media battle had already begun.

Meanwhile, the CIA was secretly funding these same Miami newspapers, as well as organizing and supporting anti-Castro speaking tours throughout Latin America. A document “A Program of Covert Operations Against the Castro Regime,” from March 16\textsuperscript{th} states that, “The mission of these men will be to gain hemisphere support for the opposition of Castro,” the CIA

\textsuperscript{82} Juan Carlos Rodriguez and the State Security Historical Research Center (CIHSE) Cuba, \textit{The Bay of Pigs and the CIA}, trans. Mary Todd (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1999), 55. Radio Swan reports from June 1960 to April 1961. This was just one example of how the CIA chose to use the church. In March one CIA official selected a “symbol of Christian resistance”, the fish, in an attempt to increase support of the invasion. The propaganda theme was imposed on the Cuban Revolutionary Council CRC, the replacement for the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FRD). This symbolism also played on earlier use’s of the Church. For example, the FRD’s first publication, \textit{Rescate}, ran cartoons depicting Fidel Castro as ‘The anti-Christ’. Howard Hunt, who guided the group’s propaganda Operations, reported later that Phillip’s man in Miami, ‘Douglas Gupton’, had reached to Catholic leaders in Florida and several Central American countries to rally and coordinate a ‘fixed response’ of church opposition to the Revolutionary government.

\textsuperscript{83} Term for young people working in the literacy brigade. As stated in chapter one, the brigade worked in the countryside attempting to eliminate the illiteracy problem in Cuba.

\textsuperscript{84} De los Angeles Torres, \textit{The Lost Apple}, 116.

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explained. The anti-Castro lectures will be amplified by all of the CIA’s “controlled Western
Hemisphere [media] assets,” and, “selected American journalists who will be briefed prior to
Latin American travel.”85 The same document details plans for infiltrating the Cuban press,
“Newspapers are also being supported...Avance, a leading Cuban daily, has been confiscated as
has El Mundo. Arrangements have already been made to print Avance weekly in the U.S. for
introduction into Cuba clandestinely and mailing throughout the hemisphere on a regular basis.
As other leading newspapers are expropriated, publication of ‘exile’ editions will be considered.”
As detailed later in this chapter, attempts to influence the psychological climate through the press
inside of Cuba were not successful. Press publications read widely by Cuban exiles such as
Diario de las Americas were funded by the CIA, but were also influenced by Cuban exiles and
therefore clearly expressed anti-Castro opinions. The CIA’s last act in The Cuba Project in 1960
was to create the Cuban Freedom Committee, an ostensibly private group in the United States
that would prepare additional anti-Castro radio programming, tapes of which are broadcast under
the name, “Free Cuba Radio.”

In 1961 Kennedy took the reins of the presidency and turned his attention to the planned
exile invasion. Castro began successfully jamming Radio Swan, and the CIA reassessed the
station in February, which they would continue to do until present day. After the failure of the
Bay of Pigs, Kennedy approved the continued use of propaganda, renaming Radio Swan ‘Radio
Americas.’ At the first cabinet meeting after the failed invasion, the atmosphere was "almost
savage," a White House aid noted privately: "there was an almost frantic reaction for an action
program.”86 In November the president and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, made

85 Elliston, Psywar, 15.
86 Noam Chomsky, Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance (New York: Metropolitan
Books, 2003), 80.
preparations for such a program, Operation Mongoose. In Robert Kennedy’s notes for the White House meeting discussing the Operation on November 3rd, he writes, “My idea is to stir things up on the island with espionage, sabotage, general disorder, run and operated by Cubans themselves with every group but Batistaites and Communists. Do not know if we will be successful in overthrowing Castro but we have nothing to lose in my estimate.”87 The Operation would continue on well past 1963 when the president was assassinated. Some historians speculate that this was in part due to the fact that Robert Kennedy was angered by the humiliation his brother received after the Bay of Pigs, and saw it as his duty to extract revenge on Castro.88

Operation Mongoose, “The centerpiece of American policy towards Cuba,”89 was first launched in November 1961, but was not publicly acknowledged until March 1962.90 It was founded on the same false belief that the Kennedy administration held prior to the Bay of Pigs—that there was a large anti-Castro opposition in Cuba. The objective was to overthrow Castro by harassing the Cuban government, and to use direct military force if an anti-Castro uprising was triggered. The focus continued to be on using mainly Cubans, both in exile and in opposition on the island. The agency’s role was to furnish support in the form of “funds, training, equipment, communications, frequently the facilities to conduct the actual infiltration.”91 The initial outlook on the covert Operation was very positive, as one aid wrote to the President, “If the best happens we will unseat Castro. If not, then at least we will emerge with a stronger underground, better propaganda and a far clearer idea of the dimensions of the problems which affect us.”92

88 Ibid., 87.
89 Ibid., 71.
90 Until October 1962, the beginning of the missile crisis, knowledge of the existence of the Operation was restricted to the president’s cabinet and a limited number of directors within the CIA.
91 Ibid., 77.
Memorandum for the record, January 12, 1962: An evaluation from CIA Director McCone provided Robert Kennedy with a more realistic evaluation by pointing out that, “an Operation of this type, as presently planned, has never been attempted before…it will be extremely difficult to accomplish…the CIA and US government are short on assets to carry out the proposed program,” yet reiterated that, “the [Central Intelligence] Agency, however, is lending every effort and all-out support.”93 General Edward Lansdale, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and a top official in the Operation, made an important distinction in describing progress of Mongoose in December, stressing the fact that, “the proposed Operation is primarily a political one, and that economic and paramilitary aspects are secondary to the political,”94 as opposed to Operations prior to the Bay of Pigs, which were primarily military acts.

As both Operation Mongoose and Pedro Pan continued into 1962, the propaganda and the numbers of children fleeing the country without their parents continued to rise. The CIA recorded various “Non Sensitive Activities” such as, “the support of Anti-Castro radio programs on some 60 Latin American stations and 3 stations in Florida; the Operation Radio Swan; [and] the use of a broadcasting ship for intruding radio broadcasts on Cuba TV channels.”95 The first television intrusion took place on January 22, 1962, during a speech by Castro. In a February meeting the pentagon proposed various ideas for sabotaging Castro’s reputation in Cuba, including overriding radio and TV stations and interjecting messages such as, “Communism exploits the masses,” and more outlandish schemes.96 On February 7th Kennedy broadened the

93 White, The Kennedys and Cuba, 87.
94 Ibid., 85.
95 Ibid., 76.
96 Ibid., 100. Memorandum from Department of Defense Project Officer for Operation Mongoose William H. Craig to Chief of Operations Lansdale. Such as ‘Operation Good Times,’ Which involved preparing a fake photograph of an, “an obese Castro with two beauties in any situation desired, ostensibly within a room in the Castro residence, lavishly furnished, and a table brimming [sic] over with the most delectable Cuban food with an underlying caption (appropriately Cuban) such as, ‘My ration is different.’”. The plan was to distribute a flyer such as this all over the
trade restrictions first begun by Eisenhower in October 1960, excluding only the non-subsized sale of food and medicine. Almost immediately the embargo proved to hurt the lives of Cubans throughout the country much more so than any other propaganda or covert action, perhaps the most effective strategy in impacting daily Cuban life.97 Among the accomplishments cited in the report on phase one of Operation Mongoose in July 1962 are the establishment of the Caribbean Admissions Center at the Opa-Locka airbase where hundreds of Pedro Pans were housed,98 and the dissemination of five million copies of the cartoon book, “Los Secuestradores,”99 the kidnappers, published on the “Brainwashing of Children,” as part of, “numerically the largest U.S. intelligence agent effort inside a Communist state.” Though the report states that, “Dissemination of leaflets and propaganda inside Cuba by balloon or aircraft has not received policy approval,” some Cubans remember seeing leaflets that spread rumors about the fate of children under Castro in early 1961.100 In October of 1962, just as the Kennedy administration was escalating Operation Mongoose, and the number of children in Operation Pedro Pan peaked, the White House learned that the Soviet Union was constructing missile sites in Cuba. The Cuban missile crisis was soon underway, during which the United States greatly expands its Cuba broadcasting Operations and stopped commercial flights from Havana to Miami on

country by airdrop or agents, which, “should put even a Commie Dictator in the proper perspective with the underprivileged masses.”

97 Louis A. Pérez, Jr., Cuba, between Reform and Revolution (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), 346. "The U.S. trade embargo after 1961 had jolting effects. By the early 1960s, conditions in many industries had become critical due to the lack of replacement parts. Virtually all industrial structures were dependent on supplies and parts now denied to Cuba. Many plants were paralyzed. Havoc followed. Transportation was especially hard hit: the ministry was reporting more than seven thousand breakdowns a month. Nearly one-quarter of all buses were inoperable by the end of 1961. One-half of the 1,400 passenger rail cars were out of service in 1962. Almost three-quarters of the caterpillar tractors stood idle due to a lack of replacement parts."


100 Tony Cuello, interview by author, Richardson, Texas., 2 January 2008., Written notes.
October 22. At the same time the CIA was also working to implant American covert agents in Havana.

In an interview for the film *Secrets of the CIA*, Verne Lyon, a former agent deployed to Havana in 1962, describes his experience working for the government in the early 1960s. As a student at Iowa State University, he was recruited to be an agent as an alternative to conscription into the Vietnam War. After graduation he was sent to Havana posing as a leftist engineer working for the Cuban government. Eventually he was caught by the Cuban government, imprisoned, and faced one of Castro’s fake firing squads several times before being released. He recalls his time in Cuba, and one particular instance in which he sabotaged milk being transported to children in a school.

After the October crisis of 1962…the U.S. was frozen into a policy of trying to bring Castro down from within, which meant sabotaging the average lifestyle of the Cuban citizen…doing whatever we could to sabotage the economy to discredit the Revolution. One way of doing that was to try to control the amount of food coming into Havana for distribution to the public. [In one instance]…a brand new secondary school that had opened up in the countryside was going to receive its week supply of fresh milk. We bribed the driver of the truck to take a few extra minutes on his breakfast break so we could put cement powder into the milk. *We declared war on schoolchildren, [and] that shouldn’t be the policy of the United States government…* The CIA’s goal eventually was to increase this frustration level to a point where there would be a civil Revolution within Cuba to bring him [Castro] down. (emphasis added)

Though Lyons harbors very strong feelings towards the CIA, his recollection demonstrates one example of the extreme actions the U.S. government took during the Cold War in Cuba, particularly after the disasters of the Bay of Pigs and the missile crisis. Though the

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101 In 1965 ‘Freedom Flights’ began, with two flights a day from Havana. Relatives, and especially parents, of Cuban refugees were given first priority on these flights, and many families were reunited. However, from 1962 to 1965 many Pedro Pans did not know when, or if, they would ever be reunited with their parents. The Freedom Flights lasted until 1971 when the Cuban government suspended the flights. Approximately 250,000 Cubans came via these flights.


103 Miguel Faria, *Cuba in Revolution--Escape from a Lost Paradise* (Macon, Georgia: Hacienda Publishing, 2002), 103. The Cuban Missile Crisis was a confrontation between the U.S., the Soviet Union, and Cuba during the Cold
connection between covert actions that sought to sabotage Cuban schools and Operation Pedro Pan is impossible to prove, it is clear that the CIA was willing to use any angle possible to destroy not only Castro’s image, but the well-being of Cubans. It is worth noting that this particular instance took place after direct flights to Cuba were stopped. The U.S. continued to instigate panic in a country that was very difficult to leave. Several Pedro Pans have come forward with personal conjectures on how Operation Pedro Pan may have fit into the CIA’s objectives during this volatile time.

Nelson P. Valdés, a sociology professor at the University of New Mexico who left Cuba at age 15, told the *Los Angeles Times* that he believes that the airlift was a CIA-concocted plot to drive wealth and knowledge from Cuba. He also speculates that Castro probably knew about the airlift, but declined to intervene and validate fears that parental rights would be abrogated. Others guess that after the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban government’s policy was to denationalize those from the underground, to export the dissenters. Armando Codina, the son of a senator in Cuba who arrived penniless, dropped out of school when his mother arrived, and went on to build one of the most lucrative real estate empires in the Southeast, agrees with Valdés and adds, "We were a relief valve, a way to get rid of the opposition." From this perspective, the Pedro Pans were not victims of democracy or communism, but simply a tool manipulated by both sides in the Cold War. One of the major confrontations of the Cold War, it is often regarded as the moment in which the Cold War came closest to escalating into a nuclear war. The climax period of the crisis began on October 14, 1962, when U.S. reconnaissance photographs taken by an American U-2 spy plane revealed missile bases being built in Cuba, and ended two weeks later on October 28, 1962, when U.S. President John F. Kennedy and the intercession of U.N. Secretary-General, U Thant, reached an agreement that Cuba was no threat toward the United States. On October 28 the Kennedy-Khrushchev Pact was declared, and the U.S. promised to respect Cuba’s sovereignty. In a letter to Khrushchev Kennedy wrote, “The U.S. will make a statement in the framework of the Security Council in reference to Cuba as follows: It will declare that the United States of America will respect the inviolability of Cuban borders, its sovereignty, that it take the pledge not to interfere in internal affairs, not to intrude themselves and not to permit our territory to be used as a bridgehead for the invasion of Cuba, and will restrain those who would plan to carry an aggression against Cuba, either from U.S. territory or from the territory of other countries neighboring to Cuba.”

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104 Carol J. Williams, “Lost boys of Cuba? Hardly; The young De Cespedes brothers were among 14,000 ‘Pedro Pans’ airlifted to Miami in 1961. They soared in exile –but at a cost,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 February 2007, A.1.
Cold War. In a 1995 article for The Miami Herald, María de los Angeles Torres wrote of the use of Cuban exiles as political pawns, in which she explained the ‘special place’ of Cubans as political capital, noting, “When the United States was at war (albeit a Cold War) with the former Soviet Union, refugees coming to the U.S. demonstrated to the world that this system was better than the other one. The special place assigned the Cuban refugee was not because of the lack of democracy in Cuba. It was about a world power struggle between two empires.” While these opinions are well-formed and valid, in reality the evidence to support their claims is not available. There are also several factors to consider, including the individual details of Cubans’ lives at the time. It is definite that the CIA spread propaganda within Cuba, but many historians overlook the fact that the U.S. government and the press was creating their own history of the Operation inside the United States. In her work on the Operation Torres cites perhaps the only example of Pedro Pan propaganda distributed inside the U.S., the film The Lost Apple.

Funded by the United States Information Agency, an “independent foreign affairs agency supporting U.S. foreign policy and national interests abroad,” The Lost Apple was created expressly for Pedro Pans as they arrived in Miami to explain their journey. The film lasts approximately 25 minutes, was produced in both English and Spanish, and follows the journey of Roberto, a six year-old Cuban as he acclimates to the Florida City camp. The narrator questions why the children were sent away from their parents, and then quickly responds, “Fidel Castro,” further explaining, “So you couldn’t be changed into strangers in your very home.” Though the film is supposed to target children in the camps, the narration alternately addresses

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105 María de los Angeles Torres, “Cuban Exiles as Political Pawns,” The Miami Herald, 7 May 1995, Viewpoint, 1M.
107 The Lost Apple, dir. David Susskind, Paramount, 1963, videocassette. This film was funded by USIA. Copy obtained from the Barry University Archives, May 2007.
Americans and Cubans, as it explains, “The very idea of going to live in a different country is strange to Cubans. There isn’t a word in Spanish for foster home, but there is one for scholarships.” The most telling moment in the short film comes as a group of children gather to sing songs and act out skits, and one priest gives a type of battle cry, stating, “I wouldn’t want this amusement to make you forget the crucial moment that the world is going through. You are here in Florida City under the sheltering skies of the United States, far from the … the warmth of your parents. This is a constant reminder that there is something very wrong in the world. I’d like you to be children with a great sense of responsibility,” and addresses the politically charged future they have waiting for them, “There is a new society, a new world waiting ahead of you. A homeland you have to build. A homeland, that new world, can only be built with new men. And that is what Cuba is waiting for from all of you. Cuba hopes that you don’t fall into the same errors that have caused this depressing tragedy.” It also has religious undertones, showing clips of children eating in the mess hall of the camps as the narrator quotes a Bible verse, “I was hungry, and you fed me.” Though the film is by no means cheerful, it has a serene optimism. It mentions certain children who are not coping well, such as Seraphina, who is, “almost five. Health reports say she almost never smiles,” or the protagonist Roberto, “It could be wished that Roberto could be more certain of himself,” and offers a solution for these lonely children: “Perhaps when he learns of what his parents have done to help him and better his life he will participate more in activities.” The film also informs the children that their plight pales in comparison to that of their parents, part of the official myth perpetuated by the American Press. The narrator ponders, “Strange how you can be so lonesome with so many people around you all the time. But you’ll get used to it, everyone does. No one can stay lonesome forever. Except maybe, parents. How big an emptiness a child can be.” The Lost Apple is without a doubt a very
strange piece of the Operation, and demonstrates not only how the U.S. government viewed the Operation, but also how those living in the shadow of the Cold War rationalized war-time activities.

The Cuban government created its own response to *The Lost Apple* in 1995 with the documentary *Del otro lado del cristal*,108 (On the Other Side of the Glass). Filmed in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, the documentary provides a short history lesson and then interviews eight different Pedro Pans, all who recall a very traumatic personal story. All of the interviewees are women who arrived between the ages of six and nine.109 The documentary focuses on the biggest disaster of the Operation, the fact that the U.S. stopped flights out of Cuba after the Missile Crisis, leaving many parents stuck and not knowing if they would ever see their children again. The narrator declares dramatically, “The history of that separation is the theme of this documentary.” The film states that in December 1960 100,000 young people participated in a humanitarian literacy campaign, while a counterRevolutionary organization simultaneously, “made up a false law that the Cuban state would deprive parents’ authority,” and then immediately jumps to 1962 with footage of the missile crisis. It credits the Catholic Church in the U.S. and Cuba, as well as the U.S. government and counterRevolutionary organizations with carrying out the Operation in both countries.

The interviewees provide their own take on the Operation, as Illeana Fuentes110 observes, “What is ironic about all of this is that our parents –these 14,000, 15,000 parents- react this way: ‘they want to send my children to Russia? They’re going to take my authority away? No, I’m

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109 The directors may have intentionally chosen to omit those that came as older children or were boys. In the case of many older boys, the Operation saved them from being drafted into the military or killed for Revolutionary activity. Older children (above the age of 12) also tended to experience less trauma.
110 Illeana Fuentes is one of the eight Pedro Pans interviewed for this film, and has also written on her experience. I cite her written work in the next chapter.
going to send them to the U.S…they lost the parental authority they were defending. They lost it in a different way, but they lost it.” While the experiences recounted are not noticeably different than those in interviews for U.S. publications, some of their comments are more pointed against their parents and the Operation. Fuentes commented that, “I was sent abroad. I was abandoned. Although that wasn’t the intention, that was the result. I had to survive. I survived. I convinced myself to survive and I did. Then…that separation from the people you love, led me to this conclusion: I managed by myself, they have to respect me now.” Rosa Otero recounted how she did not confront her feelings toward the Operation until her daughter was sent to fight in the Gulf War. Once she saw the pictures of her daughter in Iraq she said to her mother, “Do you know what that reminds me of? When I arrived from Cuba, those barracks, those rules.” Rosa was shocked that her feelings, “hit her [Rosa’s mother] like a volcano.” All of the interviewees recalled trauma and repression, and their parents’ unwillingness to discuss the situation after arriving. Lourdes Rodriguez repressed her feelings until she started having anxiety attacks as an adult, as she states, “I always knew it was a historical reality, but it wasn’t until twenty years later that I connected my human feelings with the historical event.” After the interviews, the film concludes with one last reminder of the greatest fault of the Operation, “The reunion for some of these children with their parents never came.”

In addition to Del otro lado del cristal, the Cuban government issued a book and a few articles on the Operation in 1999 and 2000, in the wake of the Elián González crisis. In Operación Peter Pan: Un caso de Guerra psicológica contra Cuba, (Operation Peter Pan: A case of psychological war against Cuba), the authors give the Cuban perspective on the Operation.

111 Del otro lado del cristal, “El reencuentro de algunos de estos niños con sus padres no se produjo jamás.” Translation is my own.
The text includes a discussion of the Cuban Catholic Church and its involvement, and a rehashing of the research performed in the U.S. concerning the Operation. In typical form, the authors scrutinize those Cuban-Americans who have written on the subject, including Yvonne Conde and Victor Triay, by dubbing them, “los apologistas” (The apologizers). Using dramatic language they make such declarations as, “…they uprooted thousands of children from their homes and their motherland, separating them from their parents and other loved ones for years, and in some cases for the rest of their lives.” The text brings up a few unique questions surrounding the subject such as, “Why did they do this when the Revolution never prohibited the legal immigration of families, including all of the children that were affected by patria potestad?” The authors make a valid point, in that all of the families who participated could have technically immigrated legally, especially early on in 1960 and 1961, when there were fewer restrictions. At the same time, this serves as a testament to how real and immediate the rumor felt for those living in Cuba—they not only wanted to get their children out, they wanted them out as soon as humanly possible.

In another article by one of the same authors, he gives a historical account of communism throughout the world in the 1950s, and states that the U.S. was applying the status quo treatment for communist countries. Other passages in this account are more biased and dramatic, particularly those concerning specific individuals in the Operation. In particular, they focus on the clergy members who participated, vilifying Monsignor Walsh. They state that in an interview

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112 Ibid., 318.
113 Torreira Crespo and Buajasán Marrawi, Operación Peter Pan: Un caso de Guerra psicológica contra Cuba (Havana: Editora Política, 2000), 8. “Utilizando métodos conspirativos y clandestinos, arrancaron de sus hogares y de su patria a los miles de niños mencionados, separándolos de sus padres, y demás seres queridos durante años y en algunos casos por todo la vida.” Translation and editing is my own.
114 Ibid., “¿Por qué se hizo esto cuando la Revolución nunca prohibió la emigración legal de las familias, incluidos todos los niños que estaban bajo su patria postestad?” Translation is my own.
115 Ramón Torreira Crespo, “La Operación Peter Pan en la memoria histórica del pueblo cubano,” Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Miami, 4.
for Television Martí,\textsuperscript{116} Walsh exposes himself as a “chosen by the CIA to look after Operation Peter Pan in the United States,” it continues, “He also conceived and supported the promulgation of the Cuban Readjustment Act, the beginning of U.S. strategic plans against Cuba, that have caused the death of mothers and children.”\textsuperscript{117} The authors refer to the Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act, enacted on November 2, 1966, which established the “wet foot, dry foot” policy, allowing any Cuban that reaches the soil of the U.S. automatic refugee status. In all interviews and accounts available Walsh did not mention participating in the formation of the Cuban Readjustment Act, which was passed in 1966, four years after the Operation. To say the least, this statement is an exaggeration. Though official information from the Cuban government gives a more historical, researched perspective than anything released from official U.S. sources, the amount of censorship that existed in Cuba in 1999, as well as the government’s overt agenda, leaves the source with little credibility.

\textbf{I. Press Coverage of the Operation}

In order to give a broad depiction of the press coverage at the time, my study includes articles from four major newspapers (\textit{The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times, and The Miami Herald}), and two newsmagazine publications (\textit{Time} and \textit{Newsweek}). The first three newspapers were chosen for their dominance among readership, and \textit{The Herald} was chosen for its relevant location and position in the Cuban-American community.

\textsuperscript{116} Television Martí was a television station created by the U.S. government in the 1980s as an addition to Radio Martí (formerly Radio Swan and Radio Americas) to broadcast “unbiased” news to Cuba. The government stopped funding on the station in 1994 after they realized very few Cubans were able to watch it. This book describes the station as “a transmitter created by the United States with subversive aims against Cuba”.

\textsuperscript{117} Torreira Crespo and Buajasán Marrawi, \textit{Operación Peter Pan}, 55. “Fue escogido por la CIA para encargarse en Estados Unidos de la Operación Peter Pan. También fue uno de los que ideó y apoyó la promulgación de la Ley de Ajuste Cubano, siguiendo planes estratégicos de Estados Unidos contra Cuba, que han causado la muerte de madres y niños.” Translation is my own.
These sources were also chosen for their use by Pedro Pan scholars in constructing an official history. As the pages that follow will detail, during the 1960’s the U.S. press transitioned from covering the fears and politics of Cuban parents and children to softer pieces describing the humanitarian stories of generous American institutions and families.

For the majority of studies on Operation Pedro Pan prior to the recent book publications, the motivations for Cuban parents in sending their children were taken from one article published in *Time Magazine* in October 1961, “Cuba: And Now the Children?” The article describes how the rumors spread by the anti-Castro underground manifested in parental fear:

The uproar started when the anti-Castro underground circulated copies of what it said was a new decree soon to come from the government. Under the decree, all children would remain with their parents “until they are three years old, after which they must be entrusted for physical and mental education to the “Organización de Circulos Infantiles”- Castro’s network of state nurseries. Children from three to ten would live in government dormitories in their home provinces, would be permitted to visit their families ‘no less than two days per month’…Recently, stories about trucks picking up unaccompanied children on the streets have swept Cuba. The government admitted having placed 700 youngsters in state homes ‘at the children’s request’…At the town of Bayamo, 50 mothers signed a pact to kill their children rather than hand them over to Castro.118 (emphasis my own)

There are a few things to note about this very influential article. First, the title itself indicates that the information within the text is not certain. The author also identifies this ‘decree’ to have come from the anti-Castro underground, a falsified document. The actions of the government in placing children in state homes are also not necessarily out of the ordinary; since U.S. children welfare agencies enact this procedure quite regularly. Finally, the mention of the mothers of Bayamo has been established as a false rumor associated with the fear that children would be killed and eaten.119 One of the first academic texts written on the Operation, a

dissertation written in 1964, which several scholars have relied on, describes the situation from this article:

The reason was well founded rumors from the underground that a new decree was forthcoming from the government. Under this decree ‘all children will remain with their parents until they are three years old, after which they must be entrusted for physical and mental education to the Organización de Circulos Infantiles’ (Castro’s network of state nurseries). Children from three to ten would live in government dormitories in their home provinces and would be permitted to visit their parents ‘no less than two days a month’… Many parents vowed to resist as the picture crystallized. At the town of Bayamo, fifty mothers signed a pact to kill their children rather than hand them over to Castro.120

Adessa takes subtle yet very dangerous assumptions from the article. The false document spread by the anti-Castro underground becomes a well-founded rumor, and he reiterates the rumor of the Bayamo mothers as a fact. Though this decree never materialized, Castro did develop a network of state nurseries, which were a form of free day care, and were offered to children much younger than three years old.121 Whether or not communist indoctrination began at these centers is debatable, but the mothers who received this day care were expected to devote their time to “Revolutionary tasks,” such as agricultural work for the state.122

Just four months prior to the publication of this article, in April 1961, Newsweek published an article of Castro’s plans for beginning a “Children’s Crusade” to eliminate illiteracy in the poorer areas of Cuba by sending teachers and teenagers to instruct adults in the countryside. It reported that the teenagers were Fidel’s most radical supporters, while the adults were not interested in the propaganda. Though it explained that the ‘Year of Education’ would also be a year of indoctrination, and that “the teaching manuals are purely Revolutionary

120 Adessa, “Refugee Cuban Children,” 34-35.
121 In August 1960 Castro established the Federation of Cuban Women (EMC), and instructed that they develop an organization to care for the children of working mothers to facilitate the incorporation of women into activities outside the home. A large number of Circulos Infantiles were first built in 1961.
122 “Children’s Nurseries are now Free Throughout Cuba, Providing Loving Care and Attention, Freeing Women for Revolutionary Tasks,” Granma Weekly Review, 22 January 1967.
propaganda,”\textsuperscript{123} there is no mention of any fear or concern by the parents or teens. The press quickly centered on the Illiteracy Fight as a ruse for leftist indoctrination in Cuba.

This education by indoctrination was reported as one of the first programs Castro put into effect. While the drive to raise literacy rates in the countryside may have appeared to be a good program, the press quickly investigated and found the programs to be a transparent ruse for indoctrination. Teachers gave reading instruction “clearly aimed at teaching two things at once, The ‘ch’ sound for example, is taught with a picture of Che Guevara, and the lines, ‘Che climbed the mountain and fought for Cuba; now the children can go to school’”.\textsuperscript{124} Other reports of Castro’s desire for ‘Mass Mind Control’ cited his plan to train 35,000 new teachers to replace those from private schools and to build a school-city to educate the children in scattered communities in rural Cuba. One article notes that besides the advantage to Castro from indoctrinated youth, “…the intensified educational program will have an enormous propaganda impact in Latin America.”\textsuperscript{125}

One piece notes that mandatory English classes were taught beginning in the seventh grade, but also quotes a sixth-grade textbook, “In general, the North American people are noble, good, sound and industrious, and have made great contributions to civilization; but these people are dominated and governed by great monopolistic interests which oppress the weak people of the world, whom they exploit and subject to the worst tyrants.”\textsuperscript{126} By 1965 the press reported a militarized education style, with the linking of elementary schools to armed forces. Forest

planting and military services were emphasized. The Deputy Minister of Education is quoted for his plans for “a struggle against intellectualism and against academic tendencies.”

The occasional article highlights the positives of Castro’s education program, such as the new education centers that benefited the poor population. The most positive article, an Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times* during the early 1960’s that framed Castro’s education program as beneficial, noting an improvement in education and nutrition, was quickly rebutted in a letter to the editor. The author was Abel Mestre, a prominent exile and former media mogul who owned the majority of the newspaper, radio, and television stations in Cuba. Mestre responded with pre-Castro statistics disputing the fact that the peasants of Cuba were ill-educated and poorly fed in the 1950s, and referred to the, “Communist rape of the island.”

Other crimes against children’s minds were reported. Wendell Rollason, director of a commission issuing visa waivers to relatives of children within the U.S., testified to a Senate subcommittee that children of suspects in the Cuban underground were being paraded in front of their parents’ prison cells in Cuba to elicit confessions. Rollason gives this testimony from his interaction with refugees in Miami. After the failed Bay of Pigs invasion one of the prisoners claimed that he saw 9 and 10 year old children guarding anti-aircraft batteries at San Antonio Air Base south of Havana.

The journalists from 1967 to the early 1970s began to change their tone. Though the main focus remained anti-U.S. indoctrination, one article describes the very same education programs feared in 1961 as “remarkable and in most ways admirable programs to wipe out illiteracy, and

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127 “Cuban Pupils to get tie to Armed Forces,” *Special to The New York Times*, 31 August 1965.
provide state education for every energetic and talented child in Cuba. The Government takes over the care of infants after the first 45 days of life, cares for them in nurseries, and then in local primary schools, where the brightest of them are selected as ‘exemplary students’ for special training here in the capital.”

The framing of this program drastically contrasts with the same regulations listed in *Time* just six years prior as a baby-stealing program. By this point, six years after the Bay of Pigs, both countries had less interest in spinning the facts. Many articles began to point out the lackluster teenage population, noting that those in Havana, “…show no hostility towards the United States, a strong attraction for American goods, and a certain skepticism toward the insistent anti-American propaganda.” *The New York Times* ran a four page interest piece on the clashing “hippie” and “square” movements among Cuban youth, noting the dissatisfaction that had developed among youth who had only known socialism from birth.

The U.S. government was initially skeptical of providing federal funding for Cuban refugees due to the perceived volatility of the exile population. In November 1959 the United States put Cuban refugees on notice that it would not tolerate attempts to set up a government in exile within the U.S. Approximately a year later *The New York Times* reported that the Cuban newspaper *Revolución* complained that Eisenhower’s pledge of $1 million in aid to refugees, “officialized and legalized the financing of counter-Revolution.”

By 1961 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that this suspected government had been organized with headquarters in New York, complete with a six-point platform.

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To counteract this problem coming from the wealthy, earliest of exiles, the government sought to create an image of federal aid that was “Purely humanitarian”. By 1960 an Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times* was arguing that even though the earlier refugees were wealthier and could be manipulated for political or financial purposes, the refugees aided by The Mutual Security Act were, “women and children who are simply tragic victims of a political convulsion which with they had nothing to do.”

Abraham A. Ribicoff, appointed by Kennedy to replace Voorhees in monitoring the refugee situation in Miami, explicitly told the press that he was not in Miami, “for any political motives but to help human beings who are in trouble,” adding that the refugees “must be aided in a manner which would not impair their self-respect and dignity.” This framing may have helped to set the stage for the coverage of Operation Pedro Pan once the story broke in March 1962.

Before the Operation became known to the public several newspapers noted the strain on Miami schools from the growing number of Cuban children, and the fact that one third of passengers arriving on Pan American Airways were minors. Though there was little reporting on the fact that children were being placed by child welfare agencies, it was noted that friends and relatives were taking in unaccompanied youth. One article observes, “Some child refugees come accompanied by their parent. Others, whose parents are unable to leave Cuba, are sent with relatives or friends of the family.” After news of the Operation broke in March 1962 human interest pieces about individual children and families became popular, particularly as the families became reunited in the late 1960’s. These stories reported that Catholic Charities had formed the

Operation on its own, and that it was merely funded by the government. Stories ranged from
nuns in Boston taking in 100 Cuban children142 to heroic stories of parents who were jailed in
Cuba for not letting their children attend indoctrination classes, and examples of Americans who
“opened their doors and arms to homeless refugee children from Cuba.”143 Though these articles
mention the sometimes harsh conditions for Cuban children, and the possibility that they may
never be reunited with their parents, the majority are positive pieces attempting to depict the
American dream. One article covers the story of Dorothy Lay, a mother who took in two children,
Ileana and Aurelio, or “Eileen” and “Henry”, and states that she took in the children because,
“Both of us are interested in the Spanish language and culture. And I guess the real reason is
simply that we like Latin People”. The article concludes with Lay cheerily stating, “But you
know, now our Cubans are getting to be just all-American kids.”144

Although both the Cuban and American media were influenced by their government’s
interest in spinning the facts during the 1960’s, their coverage of Cuban children during the Cold
War provides a glimpse into how the public viewed Operation Pedro Pan and Cuban refugees in
general. The American press’s transition from questioning the politics of federal funding to
depicting human interest stories on unaccompanied children quickly turned the plight of refugees
from a hard, political story to a soft, humanitarian one. Within Cuba children took on a much
larger role in the press, as they did in the Revolution. While the interests of children may have
been debated by Americans contemplating Operation Pedro Pan, for Cubans the interest of their
nation was tied directly to the fate of youth. Ideally the clash of ideology and politics depicted in

143 Carolyn Lewis, “Political Haven Fits like an Old Shoe for two Children from Cuba,” The Washington Post, 20
February 1966, F5.
144 Ibid.
the press will provide some insight into the conflicting perspectives of participants in Operation Pedro Pan, as individuals with ties to both countries.

During the 1960s Castro revamped the Cuban media, particularly the newspapers, by closing the newspapers of Batista’s era and replacing them with over 10 newspapers aligned with the Revolution in 1966. When Castro encountered criticism for censoring the press, he responded that “there are more than ten newspapers in Cuba…and all of them happen to agree with the Revolution.”¹⁴⁵ Among these ten newspapers, the most prominent one by far, particularly in Havana, was Granma, followed by the communist youth publication, Juventud Rebelde. To provide an efficient study of the Cuban press’s treatment of the Operation and children’s issues, I utilize these two publications as well as the news magazine Bohemia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Daily Distribution (Nation-wide)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Granma</td>
<td>327,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>El Mundo</td>
<td>158,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juventud Rebelde</td>
<td>68,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>El Socialista</td>
<td>6,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giron</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vanguardia</td>
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<td>Adelante</td>
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<td>Sierra Maestra</td>
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Ahora 5,000


While some readers may question the validity of Cuban sources, particularly those from the 1960s during strict censorship, the purpose of this section is to show the interests of both countries in spinning the facts based on national agenda. Additionally, the Cuban press should not be judged solely as a voice for Castro. In a study on the social functions of the Cuban press in the 1970s, John Spicer Nichols found that, “…the Cuban press is not a monolith responding solely to the ideological dictates of a single ruler”, but rather worked in a ‘distribution control function’. He explains,

“In the distribution control function, the mass media withhold, selectively distribute, or restructure tension-laden information in order to maintain the system…In Cuba, the announcements of favorable production figures, government decrees, speeches by the leadership, schedules of cultural activities, and other information intended for routine consumption (rather than to stimulate the social reaction) serve a distribution control function”146

Cuban papers followed this model closely, as the majority of news was government decrees, speeches, and coverage of cultural activities. While there are also multiple examples of blatant propaganda within these Cuban sources, they are a useful source in providing insight into the mind frame of Cuban parents during the Operation. Cuban reporting on children’s activities in and out of the country fell into two categories: the positive and the negative. Positive press focused on the role of children in the Revolution, youth cultural events and public services, and personal interviews with children. Negative press covered the exiled ‘gusanos’ (worms), the adolescent delinquent ‘parasites’, and the treatment of poor and minority children during the U.S. civil rights movement. While there was no direct coverage of Operation Pedro Pan, the press focused a great amount of attention on criticizing the American treatment of children and

glorifying the services offered to Cuban children. In this sense the Cuban press performed a
similar function to its American counterpart in speculating on the horrors of growing up in the
midst of imperialism.

Among the positive press the features range from soft news stories covering children’s
day (a national holiday in Latin American countries) to public services such as free nurseries, to
military conscription and the success of child farm workers in the agricultural movement. The
majority mix human interest stories with public services provided by the Revolution. An article
entitled “The Young Sprouts” details the daily tasks of children in state nurseries, with a cartoon
of one infant saying to the other, “Mi mamá tambien está en el campo” (“My mother is also in
the country”, a reference to the Revolutionary work in agricultural). One mother’s assessment
of the nursery is quoted, “I know that they are taking care of my child just like I would. It is
wonderful to be able to leave her here while I work at Revolutionary tasks, as women can
perform these jobs just as well as men can.”147 Perhaps the most unique press coverage of
children in Cuba was the interview feature, in which a group of fifteen or twenty youths’ answers
to a list of questions were published. While some questions were leading and referred to the
Revolution, others simply asked about their future and how they enjoyed their work.148 In some
respects coverage of the more serious events sought to galvanize youth into action, as one article
defines the most important tasks for Cuban youth, “…in production, in defense, in studies and in
militant solidarity with the peoples who are struggling against imperialism.”149 Another piece
links the Revolutionary focus on education to the militarization of youth, claiming, “Today,

147 Manresa and Naon, “The Young Sprouts: Children’s Nurseries are now Free throughout Cuba,” Granma Weekly
149 “Young Communist Assembly: There Will be no Weakening in our Battle Against Imperialism,” Granma Weekly
Cuban students participate actively in the defense of our glorious Revolution; they are ready to exchange books for guns and withstand any imperialist aggression against our country.” Close coverage of schools throughout the country stressed the importance of the “Pioneers”, a club organized by the Young Communist League. Within these articles, inserts provide news on the integration struggles in the United States, combining positive press on Cuban institutions with the negative struggles of the American civil rights movement.

On the front page of a September 1966 issue of *Granma* the Cuban Minister of Education’s goals of “aspiring to make our children’s generation better than our own” by providing education to everyone is positioned next to a snippet, “And the Negro Boy Only Wanted to go to School,” describing the mobs of whites surrounding schools in Mississippi as African-American children entered. In a similar manner, one article announces skepticism of Lydon Johnson’s “Great Society” program, citing one psychiatrist’s reasoning that the essence of the problem of the airline strike of 1966 and the racial tensions in Chicago was that, “Our children learn to enjoy violence. We are exposed to violence in comic books and on television, until it no longer shock us.” The journalist also aligns the Cuban Revolution with the struggle of African-Americans in the U.S. to “move independently, free of the tutelage of leaders whose present methods stand in the path of progress,” and points to, “The attempts by religious Negro leaders to turn the Negro children of Chicago from violence indicate this polarization of ideas,” *Granma* also criticized the treatment of children within Cuba by the U.S, those living near the Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay. These children who ‘Live on the Front Line Facing the Enemy’, are compared to those in Vietnam, the Congo, and Cambodia, as they “have heard shots,

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shots fired by U.S. Marines. They have collected M-14 and Garand bullets in the streets where they play. They knew that they could have been wounded, that the victims could have been their parents, their playmates, their friends, or the soldier they look up to, a soldier of the Revolution. This fascination the Cuban press held with dramatizing the plight of Cuban children is interesting, considering that they never reported on the Operation. In the 1980s and 1990s the press centered in on the Operation and its ties with the CIA and the Bay of Pigs. In all likelihood Castro’s administration was aware of the Operation at the time, but for unidentified reasons did not publicize information on the children of ‘worms’ sneaking away.

Though the airlifts of Pedro Pan were managed independently of the CIA or the press’s influence, both held authority in constructing the historical narrative of the Operation. The CIA’s propaganda and clandestine sabotage are critical to understanding the atmosphere of hysteria that burgeoned in Cuban homes. The agency’s continued denial of any connection is counteracted by the recently released files in which it checked on the status of the Operation in June 1962. As stated, the government’s perpetual reluctance to associate themselves with Cuban exiles has roots in the Bay of Pigs. In the five decades since the Operation many of these exiles have come to consider themselves Americans, and fully integrated themselves into the political system. Though the U.S. committed to the embargo and the exiles, the CIA and State Department still refuse to make actions of the past transparent.

The press’s treatment of the Operation is intriguing, as they created and perpetuated the official myth of Pedro Pan, particularly in The Miami Herald and El Nuevo Herald. The lack of coverage in Cuba is yet another unanswered question concerning the Operation. The Castro administration may have deliberately chosen not to spin the story, it is ironic that they covered

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the story so thoroughly in the 1980s and 1990s. They also capitalized on every other facet of Cuban life that was affected by the U.S., including Guantánamo, the Vietnam War, and changing race relations. With the Revolution’s focus on youth, and the master propaganda machine in Cuban press, the noticeable lack of coverage is perplexing. Due to this lack of concrete evidence, the following two chapters examine the history as recounted by Pedro Pans and other Cuban exiles.
CHAPTER 3
Living History: Firsthand Perspectives on Operation Pedro Pan

Despite the fact that Operation Peter Pan was complicated by Cold War propaganda and political and economic incentives for the United States, oral and written narratives of Peter Pans provide a personal story that attempt to evade the political. Most interviews with former Pedro Pans detail a variation of the same human interest piece that has appeared in the American press since the first story broke in 1962- the decision to leave Cuba, the traumatic experience of the airport and plane ride, a brief stay at a camp in Florida, arriving at their new foster home or orphanage, and after much distress and heartache, being reunited with much changed Cuban parents.154 Though personal accounts vary from fond memories with foster families that became like their own to scarring tales of abuse, alienation, and neglect, most tell of their gratitude towards the Operation, the United States, and their parents.

These personal stories have been researched and documented more than any other aspect of the Operation. While all of the accounts are intriguing and provide insight into the diverse structure of the Operation, they virtually ignore the political strife between the U.S. and Cuba, the Bay of Pigs, or the role of the CIA. The drastic differences between the historical account given by authors such as De los Angeles Torres and the rest of the Pedro Pans may be attributed to a couple of factors. First, the fact that most are not aware of the role that the U.S. State Department and CIA had in funding the Operation or spreading propaganda about children throughout the country. Second, even the parents and older relatives who do have memories of

154 An example of the typical description in the press: “They were lost boys and girls, clutching stuffed toys as they prepared to fly away from Cuba- staring through glass partitions at grieving parents, friends and the world they were leaving behind.”

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the propaganda do not believe it was associated with the US government. As with all exiles, every perspective of Cuban American life is shaped by political beliefs, and in Pedro Pans this is often compounded by the psychological and emotional distress of their traumatic childhoods, the melancholia of exile, and the mythical association with the story (rather than the history) of Operation Pedro Pan. In his writings on the Pedro Pan experience, Francisco Soto eloquently describes his Cuban American dilemma, “I am quite aware that whatever I say or write about Cuba will be interpreted against the background of Cuban politics...[I am] an individual who, fortunately or unfortunately, was born on an island destined to become the site of significant twentieth-century historic events. I have yearned often to simply be able to talk about my Cuban experiences without provoking political interpretations in people’s minds.” Soto notes that being Cuban has become synonymous with being polarized politically, and is imbedded in every word he writes. In the same paragraph he worries that he is instantly being judged and placed on one side or the other, “Even now, when I would like to write freely and without anxiety, I am aware of the fact that what I articulate will be deconstructed to prove allegiance to one side or another of the Cuban political debate. I long to express myself...without falling into a political vortex. Of course, I know I will fail.” It this dilemma that historians of Pedro Pan must challenge as they evaluate each source and determine the meaning of the experience behind the biases.

Previous studies on the individual stories of Pedro Pans are most concentrated in the fields of psychology, sociology and social work. They tend to use case studies, or sample a

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155 Though most Cuban Americans are aware that the U.S. government funded the Operation (just as it funded the transition of all Cuban refugees) they are not cognizant of the role of the CIA or the combined support from federal funding and multinational corporations.


specific group of children from one location of placement. The most comprehensive study has been completed by author Yvonne Conde, who gathered data from 442 participants, and completed 173 personal interviews. Collectively she studied 615 Peter Pans, three percent of participants in the program, yet it is not a random sample. Unlike sociological and statistical studies, the book lacks a guide to the interviews, or an appendix with the full text, as opposed to the passages which were edited, paraphrased and summarized.158 As a complete study on all 14,048 participants and their families has yet to be accomplished, the historical analysis of Pedro Pans examines the various accounts of Operation Peter Pan through its lived history. Personal perspectives often contrast sharply with the political history of the Operation; so a consideration of the conflicts between oral and written history is in order.

Due to the lack of a collective, official history on Operation Pedro Pan, the subject has not been viewed objectively by an academic source. Rather, the lives of children refugees have been recorded predominantly through oral history or literary narratives. This may present a problem for some historians who argue that written history is ideally objective and unbiased, and that spoken history may include the “unsystematized, biased, fragmented bits of personal memories that have no room in academic history books…[and] reflect individual views rather than the facts themselves”, making it more subjective and evaluative.159 Some historians, have gone so far as to argue that at times oral history moves into, “the world of image, selective memory, later overlays and utter subjectivity”, suggesting that oral evidence will lead, “Not into


158 Román de la Campa, Cuba On My Mind: Journeys to a Severed Nation (London: Verso, 2000) 54-55. De la Campa critiques Conde’s project and notes these inconsistencies. He goes on to note that her text, “seems to be driven by a political project rather than a neutral voice organizing a collective memoir.”

history, but into myth”. While every source must be scrutinized for authenticity and biases, it is my contention that neither written nor oral history achieves the impossibility of sincere objectivity. Rather, oral history, written narratives, and academic texts have similar flaws and limitations.

The work of Alessandro Portelli, an Italian scholar well known for his use of oral histories, has “…transformed oral history from being a kind of stepchild of history into a literary genre in its own right.” Portelli focuses on the themes and structures of oral accounts, and has found that these sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing and what they now think they did. He dissects the advantages and disadvantages of writing versus oral conversation, “[the] agreement between writer and readers is not of the same nature as that established in oral conversation. In conversation, agreement implies a reciprocal influence of two subjects; in writing, readers may agree (or believe they agree) with a text (or with other absent readers) but have no way of interfering with the verbal form of the text as found, which will remain exactly as it was before it was answered.” In engaging in interviews and conversations concerning Operation Peter Pan, I have come to realize how pertinent oral history is to extremely polarized topics such as that of the history of Cuban exiles.

Not surprisingly, in spite of the fact that many historians insist on the worth of oral historical traditions and personal memories, comparatively little effort has been made to incorporate such materials, even when they are collected, into written history. In the case of

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162 Ibid.
Cuban American history, and particularly for former Pedro Pans, historical oral evidence and the oral tradition of enfabling history often become confused. The official myth of Peter Pan was constructed by administrators of the program, both in the church and the government, and the press. In referring to the airlift as ‘Operation Peter Pan’, and dubbing the children ‘the Lost Boys of Peter Pan’ the American press imposed its own myth on the children exiles long before they were able to understand their own place in history.

In addition to the sensationalism of the American press, the Pedro Pans’ own nostalgia, grief, trauma, political beliefs, and personal experiences have all jaded the official history of the Operation. Besides the fact that the CIA and the Cold War are rarely mentioned, there is also an interesting confusion of facts. While some are slight exaggerations, others are complete fabrications of events and even people. In addition to the political divide and the tendency of personal anecdotes that is common to oral history, in the case of Pedro Pan there is also a sense of the mythical. Rather than focusing on the harsh realities of trauma, abuse, and small children alone in a foreign land, personal histories are told from a romanticized point of view.

The most common Pedro Pan story told in The Miami Herald, Operation Pedro Pan Alumni websites, or in the children’s books written on the subject, tells of Cubans achieving the American dream. The Miami Herald’s piece on Carlos and Jorge de Cespedes provides a good example of a ‘rags to riches’ story. The brothers, who now own a pharmaceutical supply company that grosses over $600 million a year in sales, experienced a familiar plight. After a family friend could no longer take care of them, they spent five years in two different camps for Pedro Pans. The article tells of how they “learned of capitalism” and were entrepreneurs at a young age, which led to enormous success later in life. Carlos, the older brother, exudes

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164 See appendix 2.4, “Pedro Pan brothers rise from rough start to professional success”.

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appreciation for the U.S., explaining, “I owe what I am today to the Catholic Church, Monsignor Walsh who directed the Pedro Pan program and the U.S. government”. These stories have formed a stereotype of former Pedro Pans, one that applies truthfully to those like the Cespedes brothers, yet also serve to ignore the political and bureaucratic details of the origin of the Operation.

In addition to this stereotype, there are a number of embellishments and speculations that Cuban Americans have assigned to the history of Operation Pedro Pan. In many cases, the exaggerations and assumptions made by Cubans are founded in propaganda spread by the U.S. government at the time. For example, in many spoken and written accounts the Operation is described as extremely clandestine for the safety of the children. While the Operation was classified by the U.S. National Security Council, this was due to the fact that organizers were afraid that many of the children’s parents who were in the underground resistance movement could be easily identified by the Cuban government. Some Cuban sources also report that adolescents in the underground who were in danger of being imprisoned were smuggled out of the country through Operation Pedro Pan, and the other children were used as decoys. Nevertheless, Castro and his administration became well aware of the fact that many children were leaving unaccompanied, and that they were fueled by American propaganda, and made no effort to stop the process. Nevertheless, Castro and his administration became well aware of the fact that many children were leaving unaccompanied, and that they were fueled by American propaganda, and made no effort to stop the process.165 Ironically, some exiles now attribute the propaganda to the Cuban government, reasoning that Castro wanted the upper class out of Cuba.166

165 This may have been complemented by the fact that the Cuban government made $25 U.S. dollars off of each Pan American ticket from Havana to Miami.

166 Tony Cuello, interview by author, “That’s what happened in Russia, they try to eliminate the upper class. Only later did I realize it was the [Cuban] government distributing the leaflets.” This is not to imply that Castro did not want the upper class out of Cuba, as most evidence points to the fact that he did. Exiled Pedro Pans sometimes link these two unrelated things: the propaganda spread by the CIA and Castro’s desire to get the bourgeoisie out of the country.
The myth of Pedro Pan extends beyond its participants. Even Monsignor Walsh’s accounts, both in his writings and interviews, are different depending upon his projected audience. On example comes from the short historical piece he wrote for Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc., a non-profit organization founded in 1991 to reunite Pedro Pans and give back to needy children. Walsh wrote a slightly defensive description of the Operation and the Cuban Children’s Program, perhaps in response to the rumors and various myths that had circulated within the Cuban American community. He describes the participants in very optimistic terms, stating that they, “included youth from all parts of the island. While the majority was Catholic, several hundred were Protestant, Jewish or non-believers. Very few were from wealthy backgrounds. These were already in Miami with their families. Most were of the middle class or lower middle class and included children of different racial background, Black and Chinese.”

Although this statement is not a fabrication of the truth, his language suggests an extremely wide reaching program. He does not make obvious the facts that approximately half of the participants were from Havana, which held most of the wealth in Cuba, and that 95% of children were Catholic. In 1981 he contradicted himself in a cultural anthropology paper he wrote about the program, stating that the 180 minors that came in the Mariel exodus of 1980, “…resembled the children of the 60’s, though of a lower social and racial background.” He also makes the claim that,“Contrary to reports, no children were placed in reformatories or facilities for delinquent children. This would not have been permitted under state law”, which is contradicted by several interviews of children who were placed in homes for delinquent children. However, the most egregious claim he makes is that the parents’ initial fears from the 1960s, “have been proved by

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168 Walsh, “Cultural Identity and Mental Health Factors Among Cuban Unaccompanied Minors,” 7.
history to have been altogether too true.” As evidence, he cites a speech by Pope John Paul II in 1998, in which he spoke of the “problem which has existed in Cuba for years, people being obliged to be away from the family within the country, and emigration which has torn apart whole families and caused suffering for a large part of the population.” Though the pope was referring to emigration to the U.S. and the semi-required trips Cuban minors take to work in the country, Walsh suggests he is speaking of communist indoctrination and the removal of parental rights. Though there are many discrepancies in the spoken history of Operation Pedro Pan, the element that truly separates their oral tradition from objective history is their use of mythical language.

Though the spoken history of former Pedro Pans convolutes historical truths, their contributions flesh out the gaps in written history. Some historians have found that the lapses in memory and embellishments of events can actually be useful in assessing history from a variety of perspectives. Alessandro Portelli studied the lapses in memory and misremembering as historically significant, stated that, “what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings.”169 The fact that some Cuban Americans do not remember the American propaganda, but rather blame Castro’s government for exaggerating youth training in order to get rid of the bourgeois, demonstrates both the perspective of the general public at the time and the continuing narrative which Cuban exiles are forming for themselves. After spending almost 50 years in exile, they have to maintain the belief that Cuba under Castro is an unlivable place.

Personal accounts from Pedro Pans recall a series of traumatic events, from the very beginning of their journey from Cuba to Miami to the years spent trying to reconnect with their

169 Thompson, Fifty Years On, 585.
parents. Among the common experiences are: the decision to leave Cuba, the traumatic experience of the airport and plane ride, a brief stay at a camp in Florida, arriving at their new foster home or orphanage, and after much distress and heartache, the reuniting with their parents after they had become Americanized. Like adjustments for many children in foster care in the United States, traumatic experiences were inevitable for Peter Pans as they endured relocating and adapting to a new environment. However, unlike American children in foster care, at the same time they were experiencing culture shock, a language barrier, and the fear that they may never see their parents again. How did the politics of the Cold War play out in the lives of Cuban families caught in the middle? Analyzing these rites of passage for Peter Pans allows insight into how former Peter Pans’ stories have shaped their beliefs about Cuba, the United States, and the program.

Cubans leaving in the early 1960s endured an embarrassing and distressing experience at Jose Martí airport in Havana. A glass enclosure was built around the departure gate in which only those with plane tickets could enter, while the relatives staying behind watched from outside the glass. Cuban Americans refer to this room as, la pecera, or the fishbowl. Memories of the fishbowl are recounted in almost every interview, as some of the most upsetting moments of the time spent away from their families. Those leaving would enter the room around three or four hours before the plane took off, and spend the time waving and signing to their families. Ileana Fuentes, a teenager when she left, discusses her final moment in Cuba, “As I boarded the plane, I looked back one last time. Unknowingly, I caught a final glimpse of my childhood. It stood there, inside the airport behind glass partitions, staring at me through the eyes of my mother and my godmother…dressed in black from head to toe, like them… in mourning for its
own death on that October morning.”\textsuperscript{170} Carlos Eire, a current professor at Yale who wrote his memoir detailing his struggle as a Pedro Pan, describes his time in the fishbowl, “The airport was sheer torture. Apparently, the Revolution felt that [we] had to be kept at a safe distance from those we were leaving behind…[we] milled around nervously for a short while outside the fishbowl…Some of them were making the trip as one, parents and children together. I envied them. There were other children who were about to travel alone, like us, other Peter Pan Lost Boys.”\textsuperscript{171} Once Pedro Pans arrived in Miami they realized that the ‘torture’ of the Jose Martí airport was just the beginning of a very confusing exodus.

After children reached their destination, their experiences were varied. Approximately 7,464 of the 14,048 children were cared for by the Catholic Welfare Bureau, while the remaining lived with relatives. Children were placed in 35 states under the auspices of 95 different child welfare agencies in orphanages, foster homes, and in Florida camps. While some children were reunited with the parents after a few months, others waited years, and a few never saw their parents again. Many were placed in more than one location, making their adjustment that much more difficult.

Those children that went immediately to stay with relatives or friends in Miami generally fared better than those in camps or foster care, even though limited resources and cramped living situations placed stress on both children and their caretakers. In his memoir Eire described the plot of one exiled man already in Miami who was asked to take his friends’ children, “I’ve often tried to put myself in his place. I’m a lawyer mopping floors, I’ve got two babies, a wife, and both of my in-laws to feed, and now my wife wants me to do something about these two

\textsuperscript{171} Eire, \textit{Waiting for Snow in Havana}, 352.
boys I barely know.”172 Though many Cubans in this situation took in an extra child or two, as time passed and their parents were not able to come, some children were placed back into the Pedro Pan program.

Children who did not have relatives or friends to take them in were taken to one of seven Florida camps immediately after they cleared immigration in Miami. There were seven camps in Florida. Casa Carrion (or the Ferre Home) was the first used in December 1960. Camp Matecumbe opened in July 1961, and housed only teenage boys. The Cuban Home for Boys, or the Jesuits’ Boys Home, opened in September 1961. Monsignor Walsh resided at St. Rafael Hall, where he continued to care for boys until the 1980s. Kendall Children’s Home opened in early 1961 and housed mostly boys. The Florida City camp, 35 miles south of Miami, opened in October 1961 and housed all children under age twelve. Opa-locka Air Station opened after flights ceased in October 1962, and also housed some adult refugees. It is possible that a CIA questioning station was also placed at Opa-locka, where agents questioned all Cubans who fled through the U.S. embassy. In a moment of questioning awe of the Operation, Eire describes the surreal nature of the camps in his memoir, “Nuns ran the camp [I was at]. Don’t ask why. It was a camp established by the Central Intelligence Agency and run by Cuban nuns.”173 He alludes to the fact that most Cubans, even Peter Pans, do not realize how or why the Operation was conducted. He also mentions that Cubans worked in the camps, as they did in many facets of the Operation. Many federal and state agencies hired Cubans to work in caretaking and social work roles.

Accounts of the camps range from fond memories of time spent in camaraderie with other Cubans to tales of sexual abuse from other campers and unbearable loneliness. Though

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172 Ibid., 346.
173 Ibid., 344.
some children spent only a few days in a camp, for others it would become their home until their parents arrived. Depending on their age, Pedro Pans were given flexibility in choosing their fate, and some chose to stay in order to remain in close proximity their siblings or avoid a poor foster care experience. Teenage boys, who made up 60% of Pedro Pans, were most of the permanent residents in camps. Roman de la Campa, professor of romance studies at the University of Pennsylvania, was first sent to Monsignor Bryan Walsh’s house, referred to as St. Raphael’s House. He recalls his time spent there lightly, noting an, “…exhilarating climate of improvisation at Father Walsh’s house, almost a party atmosphere, with new kids checking in at all times, and little supervision.” However, Walsh had limited space and he was quickly transferred to the Kendall children’s home. He describes his camp experience as forgettable, as daily life consisted of bitter fighting and mockery rather than kinship among the other adolescent boys, “I could feel my life changing through subtraction – an accumulation of losses that left me in an existential void…the games we shared were of a nastier nature than those one might expect among adolescents in camp. Perhaps it was a defense mechanism; perhaps we were still insensitive to the gravity of the circumstances surrounding our lives.” Another Pedro Pan sent to the same camp describes the ‘games of a nastier nature’, the constant chaos of living in a camp full of groups of teenage boys who would, “…gang up and rob others, would cut off another one’s hair; they put snakes in coat pockets…I couldn’t study, and the camp leaders did not impose order. And my mother thought I would be sent to a good school! Many times we didn’t go to class because they would say the bus [had] already left the camp. Other days the bus would

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174 Children were separated in camps by age and gender. Some children were reunited in foster care.
175 De la Campa, *Cuba On My Mind*, 39.
be turned over…” Though some Pedro Pans remember these shenanigans fondly, others were terrified by the lack of stability in their lives. In further self-analysis De la Campa writes thoughtfully on the denial that Eire mentions in the epigraph of this section, the lack of introspection or outward discussion that was common for Pedro Pans, “Our exile condition was hardly ever discussed; neither was our national predicament, nor the family separation we were all enduring…The Bay of Pigs invasion had failed. Cuba was becoming rapidly more distant to me, even though my family was still there. The moment called for critical reflection, but our group was not prone to much introspection.”

His nostalgic desire for more critical reflection seems lofty from a historical perspective. For the Pedro Pans in the U.S. during the tension began by the Bay of Pigs and lasting until the Cuban missile crisis, such as De la Campa, their families were divided between two countries at war. Neither their parents nor the governments knew the fate of these children, so introspection and a heightened sense of self awareness were understandably forsaken for the chaos of everyday life at the camps. Illeana Fuentes has a different theory, that as children they had already learned to develop a sense of detachment. She theorizes that all of the children had an, “unconscious consciousness that those friendships were temporary. That they were circumstantial relationships, and that the best thing to do was not to tie bonds. Those bonds would break. The links we had with those we knew best in our lives, family ties, friends from our childhood, from our primary school –had been broken in less than

176 Grupo Areito, Comité de Redacción (Compilation Committee), Contra Viento y Marea (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1978), 34. “Habían equipos de muchachos que le robaban a uno, le cortaban el pelo, le ponían serpientes en los bolsillos del abrigo, y nos despertaban en la madrugada. No se podía estudiar, ya que todo era un relajo mantenidos por las cabecillas que se habían impuesto en ese campamento de cincuenta cubanos. ¡Y pensar que mi madre creyó que así podría ir a una buena escuela…! Mucha veces no íbamos a clases porque se decidía ir de paseo en la guagua del campamento. Otro día se volcó la guagua por el relajo que había en ella, puesto que todos querían manejar y se turnaban los muchachos el timón en medio de la carretera una vez que amenazaban al chofer y lo obligaban a sentarse en el asiento de atrás.” Translation and editing is my own.

177 Ibid., 43-44.

178 Dates are between April 15, 1961 and October 22, 1962.
24 hours.”\textsuperscript{179} She also recalls that “Every two or three days they posted lists with the names of the girls who had arrived at the camp, and whom they were sending away and where.” This constantly changing atmosphere was all part of the lottery that every child became a part of, their fate decided by circumstance and availability at the time in 35 states all over the country.

Perhaps the most peculiar occurrence at these camps was this waiting game that the children played for \textit{becas}. Many children were told by their parents that they were being sent to the U.S. to attend boarding schools on scholarships. The U.S. government produced a film, \textit{The Lost Apple},\textsuperscript{180} to explain to Pedro Pans why they had been sent alone, and how they would acclimate to their surroundings. The politically loaded film explains that although there is not a word in Cuba for foster home, there is one word all Cuban children understand: \textit{beca}, or scholarship. The film shows one little girl dutifully reporting to a social worker weekly to inquire if there is a \textit{beca} available. Once placed, children would describe their situations as a good \textit{beca} or a bad \textit{beca}.\textsuperscript{181} Several adolescents were dismayed at their situation in the Florida camps and wrote to the U.S. government inquiring about help in finding scholarships. For the children that received a bad \textit{beca}, they experienced the most severe trauma among the Pedro Pans.

Placements in foster care and institutions ranged from loving families and top notch boarding schools to abusive foster care parents and institutions for delinquent children. The most notable distinction between placements with relatives or camps and those in foster care or orphanages is location. While all of the camps were located in south Florida, and the majority of Cuban exiles still lived in Miami, foster care placements were spread over 35 states. Two-thirds

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\item \textsuperscript{179} \textit{Del otro lado del cristal}, 1963.
\item \textsuperscript{180} \textit{The Lost Apple}, 1963.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Letters to Sara Yaballi, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, Miami.
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of the 7,464 Pedro Pans cared for by the federal government were placed in institutions. Many were sent to places drastically different from the climate and culture of Miami, such as Dubuque, Iowa, and Helena, Montana.

Illeana Fuentes wrote of her time at Queen of Heaven, a Catholic orphanage in Colorado, “….an earthly world of English only, frosty Rockies, weekly confession and daily communion, generous gringos\textsuperscript{183} turned weekend fosters, invisible Mexicans and even more invisible Indians not yet known as Chicanos and Native Americans, and bitter nuns all dressed in black …”\textsuperscript{184} Fuentes describes elements that many children encountered: the language barrier, (and not being allowed to speak Spanish) a drastically different climate, weekend time spent with American ‘foster parents’, and the lack of a Hispanic identity group within the United States. These difficulties were the standard for Pedro Pans in orphanages. Some faced much more horrendous circumstances, such as Raquelin Mendieta, placed in a Catholic orphanage in Columbus, Ohio. She recalled her letters home being censored by nuns, and being locked in the furnace closet for hours after crying too much. She continues, “Another Cuban girl was beat up by a nun because she took a shower on a day she was not supposed to bathe. The same nun punched my sister repeatedly in the face as her head hit a door knob because we did not want to go roller-skating….She had escaped from Communist China and she kept telling us we would never see our parents again.”\textsuperscript{185} Censorship of letters home was fairly common for Pedro Pans, though many censored their own feelings when talking or writing to their parents. While it is impossible to gauge how many children were abused, from anecdotal evidence, physical and emotional abuse were fairly common. There are also accounts of sexual abuse, though not as many. Those

\textsuperscript{182} De los Angeles Torres, \textit{The Lost Apple}, 162.
\textsuperscript{183} Slang term for Americans, or Anglos.
\textsuperscript{184} Fuentes, “Retrato de Wendy,” 61.
\textsuperscript{185} De los Angeles Torres, \textit{The Lost Apple}, 167.
children that came forward and voiced complaints about abuse were not acknowledged in most cases, and the censorship of letters to parents probably worsened this problem. In contrast, some Pedro Pans enjoyed their time spent in institutions, such as Rosendo Ferrer, who spent three years in an Arkansas boarding school, and remembers receiving a superior education and enjoying the opportunity to ride horses. Nevertheless, the boarding school was Rosendo and his brother Raphael’s third placement – only after living with an aunt and briefly in a camp did they reach their destination. Adding to their trauma, after three years they had to overcome another common experience for Pedro Pans, adjusting to living with their parents and five siblings in another remote location.

Reuniting with their parents marked the final stage for children in Operation Pedro Pan, and like all other experiences, varied according to each situation. A few children never saw one or both of their parents again, and some waited decades to go visit their parents in Cuba. The majority were reunited within two to five years of being separated, especially after the Freedom Flights began in 1965. Reunions usually evoked a bittersweet reaction in Pedro Pans, as they confronted the resentment, relief, and confusion they felt towards their parents. De la Campa recounts his strange reunion with his family, remembering,

…looking at my father’s eyes and meeting a silence that cut across our greeting – the silence of what he had been through while we were apart, which he declined to share with me; and the silence of what I had experienced, which I wasn’t particularly ready, or perhaps inclined, to tell him or my mother. It felt as if we didn’t know each other anymore, or as if we would never catch up with each other’s stories. Besides, it was not time to talk, and certainly not time for me to render anything but a glowing review of what my life in the United States had been.

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186 Ibid., 182. She adds, “Those complaints did not suit the mythology spun in the ideological battle of the Cold War about children who had been rescued from the evils of communism – their real experiences, to be lived and suffered silently.”
188 De la Campa, Cuba On My Mind, 47.
He acknowledges the fact that for many parents, the time separated from their children was very painful and hectic. Some were involved in the anti-Castro underground, and had served time in prison. Others were beside themselves with worry about the well-being of their children. Maria Ferrer described how her parents spent the four and a half years separated from their four eldest children, “My mother was beside herself, she couldn’t believe that we were in a place she didn’t know existed, Dallas…Her friends said all she did was cry, all day all long….it devastated her. And by that time, in order for them to get paperwork to leave the country my father could not work. So he was having to find a way to keep his family alive.”\textsuperscript{189} Following the reunion, a number of families went through role reversals, as the older children had already learned English, become Americanized, and were capable of holding jobs. Some had been separated from their parents since an early age and harbored resentment for being alone for so long, such as Vivian Otero recalled that when her mother came to pick her up, “it was as if a stranger had arrived, as if I were defending myself. My mother said: ‘Our daughter is very strange.’ How could I be otherwise, what did they expect from me? To give them kisses? Because the only thing a 7 year old understands is that she has been abandoned.”\textsuperscript{190} This frustration and resentment continued to plague families as they adjusted to life as refugees.

Carlos Eire and his brother supported their mother at the ages of 17 and 15, working night jobs in restaurants. Maria Ferrer and her three siblings that were also Pedro Pans subsidized their father’s income to keep the family going. For Maria, she attributes her strong work ethic to this experience rather than her time spent in an orphanage, as she recalls, “…when my parents got here, we all had to work to give to the house. It took that for us to survive. Because my mother still wasn’t working. Whatever money I made babysitting or cleaning houses, it wasn’t my

\textsuperscript{189} Maria Ferrer, interview by author, Transcript, 4.
\textsuperscript{190} Del otro lado del cristal, 1963.
money. And my brothers worked at restaurants. We got a work ethic very, very young.”

There were also cultural clashes within the family. While Maria and her older siblings worked to support the family, they also had a difficult time acquiescing to their parents’ rules. As another Pedro Pan stated, “How can you tell a 15 year old girl that she has to do her homework when you haven’t been at her side for 7 years?”

Maria’s sister Magaly recalls that initially she could not communicate with her parents at all, as she had forgotten Spanish, and the regular arguments over her independence and the ‘American’ way to treat children. Msgr. Walsh described this phenomenon noted in Miami studies of the children, stating that, “intergenerational differences in behavioral acculturation develop over time because younger members of the family acculturate more rapidly than older family members. This breakdown is frequently manifested by the younger person’s overt rejection of parental authority, and conversely, by the parents’ ineffective functioning in that role.”

Adjusting into the typical roles of a linear family was difficult for both parents and children after reuniting.

The children of Operation Pedro Pan had a varied, at times traumatic, scarring, character building, and absolutely life-changing collection of experiences. Though it is impossible to provide a generic tale of a ‘Peter Pan’, it is also certain that very few fit neatly into the official myth created by the press and the government: they were saved from communism, well-adjusted, and grateful to be in the United States. Though the rest is merely details in the history of Cuban exiles, these details provide insight into the shaping of history during the volatile time of the Cold War.

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191 Maria Ferrer, 6.
192 Del otro lado del cristal, 1963.
193 Walsh, “Cultural Identity and Mental Health Factors Among Cuban Unaccompanied Minors,” 4.
There are a number of elements in these personal histories that answer questions that the official history leaves open. Perhaps the most important in the case of the Pedro Pans is their description of the political, emotional, and national atmosphere in Cuba during the early 1960s. The question of why parents chose to send their children is fundamental to the historical problem of Operation Pedro Pan. Interviews provide a more fleshed out answer to this question. In particular, they provide a glimpse into the life of strict Catholic families in Cuba at the time. Along with the paranoia-inducing rumors, the drastic changes implemented by the government such as currency exchange caused Cubans to believe that under Castro anything was possible. Many Cubans also had relatives or ancestors who had gone through temporary exile in the United States and returned unscathed, as is evidenced by the history of Cuban migration. The ease of visa regulations is perhaps the most obvious reason for parents, combined with the increased chance for their own emigration if they sent their children. Beyond these motives, a few Peter Pans have offered their own speculation on why their parents chose to send them: when Castro threatened to send the wealthy, white, Catholic children of Havana into the poverty-stricken, Santeria-practicing, and predominantly black countryside, fear of race, class, and religious differences affecting their children had to be an issue.

The predominate reason proved to be fear; terrifying propaganda that spread rapidly and caused panic for mothers nationwide. Pedro Pans and their parents reinforce this memory of fear, yet also describe the political climate within Cuba that worsened the terror. By December of 1960, Fidel Castro’s government had been in place for almost two years. The initial strong support he had once carried had drastically dwindled, particularly among the religious and middle class. Along with the patria potestad rumors, the turmoil surrounding many Cubans’ lives led them to believe that anything could happen under Castro’s government. Raquel
Mendieta Costa, a child at the time of the Revolution who remained in Cuba with her family, describes her, “amazement” at the world she grew up in, with radical changes and deep political divides, “[people] disappeared as if by magic: ‘They left for the North’, we would hear, and we began to speak of them in the past tense, the way you speak of the dead. The world was split in two irreconcilable halves: before and now, there and here, ‘worms’ and Revolutionaries, traitors and patriots, Catholics and Communists.” Costa’s language of the division among Cubans is not just her sentiment. Within every neighborhood one house stood as the ‘Committee of Defense’. Among the many radical changes occurring, many former Pedro Pans describe the day of currency exchange in Cuba as the most indicative of the instability of the country at the time.

Just prior to Castro’s rise to power, in 1958 Cuban owned banks controlled 60% of total bank deposits, or approximately $932 million pesos, then at par with the US dollar. By late 1960, however, the commercial banking system of Cuba and the free circulation of money ceased to exist. In efforts to become a part of the Soviet Bloc, in June the Castro regime expropriated all business enterprises, including banks belonging to citizens of the United States. In September they confiscated all the branches of the National City Bank of New York, Chase National Bank and the Bank of Boston. This was followed on October 13th by Law 891 which nationalized all Cuban-owned banks on the island. Along with the closing of banks came the limited circulation of money, which meant all Cuban citizens were allowed one day to exchange a

194 In the early 1960s in Cuba exiles were referred to as gusanos (worms), a derogatory term used by the Castro administration. It is rumored to originate from the fact that the thin bags which exiles used to carry their luggage took the shape of worms. There were strict weight requirements that varied from year to year restricting how much each person could take with him/her, ranging from 11 to 44 pounds, and these bags were the lightest available. In the past decade the Castro administration has shied away from using the term gusanos.


limited amount of money for new currency. The government surprised the population with an announcement that they only had one day to exchange their money, and could only exchange 200 pesos at a time. María Massud described the money exchange as “One of the signs that things were changing,” and remembers the night her family was awoken in the middle of the night with the news, “We were on vacation in Varadero. My father’s cousin came rushing into the hotel room and he told my father: ‘Secundino it’s 200, 200!’ And my father, who was awakened by Mario’s screams, told him, ‘200 ships? What are you talking about?’ And he said, ‘No, not ships, 200 pesos. Only 200 pesos at the money exchange. My father finally woke up and said, ‘what’s going on?’ And Mario said, ‘They have changed the money.’”197 Along with the initial confusion and disarray that it brought, to Cuba, this drastic change had a lasting impact on some Cubans who lived through the day of currency exchange.

Carlos Eire describes the day at the age of nine when he observed his family and friends in a panic exchanging their money, and the affect it had on how he perceives the world today,

Four decades later I am staring at my troubled bank account, meditating on the numbers I see before me. Suddenly I see them all turn to zero. I am back in line that Sunday morning and I don’t know whether to laugh or cry. I still expect all the money in America to disappear someday, the same way. It’s all an illusion, mere figures on paper. Retirement account? Stocks? Bonds? Savings accounts? Forget it. I don’t put away one cent. I don’t have any money in the bank, save for the little I have in my checking account, which is always fully depleted by the end of every month. I spend every cent I earn and then some. I’m always in debt, always ready for the day when everyone else will lose their money…Not one penny put away. Not one penny to lose. 198

After the money was exchanged, many Cubans felt that they lacked control over their own lives. As Tony Cuello, who was 20 years old the day the currency was exchanged, and the

197 Del otro lado del cristal, 1963.
198 Eire, Waiting for Snow in Havana, 273.
husband of one former Pedro Pan, stated in an interview, “After the money was taken it wasn’t that far fetched that the kids would be taken [by Castro], too.”

Another factor that should be taken into account when evaluating the mindset of Cuban parents at the time is the history of Cuban migration to the United States. Like many Cubans, Consuelo Cuello and her family believed that the children sent into exile in the U.S. would return within a few years, “I thought I would return, that was the general consensus. When I came I had no idea how long it would be…. We really didn’t think we’d be staying. We didn’t become citizens until 15 years later, and that’s when it sank in. It was part of our history, living in exile wasn’t a strange thing. We had English as a second language from first grade.”

By 1960, Cubans had been expatriates, emigrants, and exiles in the United States for approximately 150 years. In the early 19th century slave owners feared that with Cuba’s emerging independence from Spain, slavery would be abolished. The U.S. also began a relationship with Cuba in hopes to annex the island as an additional slave state. As a Cuban national consciousness emerged, political division over the issue of Cuban independence and slavery led to a growing number of political and literary exiles who fled to the U.S. Cuban and Spanish historians estimate that up to 100,000 Cubans emigrated between 1868 and Cuban independence in 1898. By 1900 there were over 3,000 Cubans working in Key West at one of the

199 Consuelo Cuello. Interview by author, 2 January 2008, Richardson, Texas., Written notes. Among other changes, the government passed a law on December 5, 1961 declaring that all property of those leaving the country would be confiscated by the government, and imposed an inventory of household items before an individual was allowed to leave. It was a crime to sell any personal belongings to anyone before leaving, bank savings that had been withdrawn had to be returned, and money obtained from the sale of an automobile or any other conspicuous item had to be surrendered to the government. As the departing Cuban received notice of his exit date, a final inventory was made, checking for his missing items, and the house was ‘sealed.’ The late owner or renter then had to manage on his/her own or with some relatives or friends for the remaining time in the country.

200 Ibid.

80 Cuban-owned cigar factories. In the 1930s, as Cuba gained true independence from the U.S., a new pattern of exiles emerged as one president after another was toppled by a coup and forced to flee to Miami, along with the elite Cubans who were in support of him. This pattern did not end until Fulgencio Batista’s flight to Miami in 1959 after Castro marched into Havana. The 1950 census recorded 33,700 foreign-born Cubans in the U.S. Miami had a substantial Cuban American population and also was host to many expatriates and vacationing Cubans during the summers. Therefore, from a historical perspective it is not surprising that the general perspective for the majority of parents sending their children away was, “that everybody would be back in Cuba sooner rather than later.” Since the 19th Century exile has not been a permanent state for Cubans.

Although most Cubans assumed that their children would return, many were seeking short term or permanent asylum for themselves. Even before Monsignor Walsh ever took interest in bringing Cuban children to the U.S., Cubans had a much easier time acquiring visas for minors than for adults. In many cases where family members in both the U.S. and Cuba petitioned for visas, the children were the only ones to receive them. Parents knew that after the children were sent, they could petition for the rest of the family, greatly increasing the possibility that everyone could leave Cuba safely and promptly.

Many Pedro Pans have their own speculations as to why their parents chose to send them unaccompanied to the U.S. In her writing Ileana Fuentes discusses the fact that, for Cuban parents...

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202 Ibid., 53.
203 In 1931 former president Mario García Menocal and his followers fled as Antonio Machado came to power. In 1933 Machado fled from Batista. There were nine changes in government between 1933 and 1936, as Batista proposed and deposed presidents at his will, several of whom went into exile in Miami. From 1944-1952 Batista lived in exile on his estate in Miami. In 1952 Batista staged a coup against President Carlos Prio, who fled to Miami. He ruled until New Year’s of 1959 when Castro ousted him from power and he fled to Miami for the final time.
204 Maria Ferrer, interview by author, Transcript, 2.
205 A variety of reasons contributed to this. Adults had the potential to be much more of a liability, and cost more for the government to support.
parents, the personal safety of their children was at times secondary to their moral and sexual control, which was at risk with the Revolution’s youth movement. Fuentes ponders that, “perhaps it wasn’t so much about political oppression as it was about premature personal freedom… mine! Perhaps it was more about being sent to the Cuban countryside on a literary campaign, free from parental supervision, than it was about being sent to the communist Soviet Union on a scholarship…Perhaps it was more about lust taking over our pubescent bodies than about communism taking over our minds. It was too high a price for everyone to pay just to get us out of Fidel’s way, especially since his days in power, everyone thought, were numbered.”

Fuentes hints at a rumor that still circulates among Cuban Americans: that once the youth were sent on literacy campaigns in the countryside they were encouraged to explore their sexuality and reproduce. Stories circulated of formerly chaste teenage girls returning to Havana pregnant, their parents horrified. In 1998 James Baker, one of the key figures in Operation Pedro Pan from Havana, recalled from his experience in the early 1960s how, “[Castro] separated teenagers from their parents…they were subjected to intense indoctrination under the guise of preparing them to participate in the program of reducing illiteracy in rural areas. Girls who had been carefully chaperoned all their lives were taught that sex was a natural need, which should be satisfied, as was hunger for food. As a result of this campaign to break down family values, so many teenage girls returned to Havana pregnant that a special abortion clinic had to be established to cover up this catastrophe.”

Some Cubans recall the administration enforcing a campaign to raise birth rates because of Pedro Pan, rather than vice versa. This may have been Castro’s solution to the fact that many of the most educated children were leaving. Though it is impossible to know if

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any of these perceptions are factually correct, Cuban birth rates did rise sharply between 1959 and 1964, and remained high until 1972.\textsuperscript{209}

De la Campa agrees with Fuentes that sexual morals may have come into play for parents, and adds that racial politics complicated the decision for parents of both genders, as the changes implemented by Castro’s regime were perceived as, “…both a moral menace and a direct threat to parental control. But perhaps the gravest danger lay in the racial implications of such freedom. Havana’s high society was Cuban white, an enclave very protective of its minority status in a country where Blacks constituted the majority. The literacy campaign…exposed white children to the rest of Cuba.”\textsuperscript{210} According to De la Campa, this may have the most significant threat to what were otherwise known as parental rights.

Regardless of the pressures to send their children, for most parents the decision was not an easy one, and at times it divided families. For Carmen Cecilia Ferrer, a Cuban woman with seven children at the time of the Revolution, the decision to send her four oldest children in 1961 came only after her husband gave her an ultimatum: agree to send the children, or get a divorce.\textsuperscript{211} For many families like the Ferrers, participating in Operation Pedro Pan was a distressing experience before the children ever left home.

The case of Consuelo Cuello, a former Pedro Pan who left Cuba at the age of 17, is unique in that she was able to petition for both her parents and her husband. In May of 1961 her family and boyfriend were all attempting to obtain visas, but only she received visas for herself and her younger sister Gloria, age 10. At the age of 17 she qualified to receive a visa waiver after


\textsuperscript{210} De la Campa, \textit{Cuba On My Mind}, 59.

\textsuperscript{211} Carmen Cecilia Miralles de Ferrer and Rafael Ferrer, interview by author, 12 August 2007, Carrolton, Texas. Transcript, 3.
her uncle petitioned for her from the U.S., and quickly married her boyfriend, 20 year old Tony Cuello, just four months before departing. After arriving with her sister in Miami, as a married woman Consuelo was considered an adult and placed in her own apartment. She was also charged in taking care of her younger sister and her husband’s two younger brothers. She recalled the day she first met with Catholic Relief services, “The man I met with tallied up our expenses, and told me it would be about $180 a month. [Yet] Gloria and me only got a $100 a month, and surplus food. I just remember him telling me that matter-of-factly, that we would need another $80 that I did not have to survive. We had to buy groceries on top of that. We didn’t even have a quarter for the bus. We walked everywhere.”

Consuelo’s husband and parents arrived in Miami in the next six months. Some other Pedro Pans were not as lucky. For Maria Ferrer, her trip to Miami as an 8 year old dramatically altered her life, her personality, and her family dynamic. When Maria and her 6 year old sister flew out of Havana on [insert date], they were not part of Operation Pedro Pan. Her aunt was living in Miami and had petitioned for their visas, as well as her two older brothers. Leaving her parents’ house in Guantánamo, she was told to wait for her aunt in the airport. However, once they arrived she was shocked to be forced into a van with other Pedro Pan kids after her aunt never came to pick them up, “I was kicking and screaming, Magaly was just crying. It was a long, drive at that time from Miami International to Florida City. It was already dark. I had no idea where I was going, I knew I wasn’t with my aunt, where I thought I would be. And that was what my mother thought, the only reason she allowed her children to go was because she thought we were going to be with her.”

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212 Consuelo Cuello, interview by author, written notes.
213 Maria Ferrer, interview by author, transcript.
Maria’s aunt, like many other Cuban emigrants, realized after offering to take care of her sister’s children that she did not have the resources. Most Cubans adults who came were placed in efficiencies and lived on limited means. For the adults in Miami, the Operation relieved them of the pressure of caretaking for various relatives’ children. Maria’s story is not unique. In a paper on cultural identity and mental health among refugee children, Monsignor Walsh commented on those children whose “placement was necessary because the spouse of the blood relative did not want the kid around, or the aunt was afraid of caring for a teenager,” that, “Rejection became a major variable and most children required psychotherapeutic intervention, and some even residential treatment.”214 In response to the increasingly common psychological and emotional trauma that the children endured, Catholic Charities of the Archdioceses in each city which took children performed psychological evaluations on each child after they arrived and assessed their family situation. Records from each file include a general information sheet, which note interests, health, schools attended, siblings, languages, placement preference, and placement recommendations. Some contain more detailed accounts on children’s behavior, their parents, and parents’ role in Revolution. Physical records were also kept, though much of the information was based on what the child could recount of his or her health in Cuba.215 Personal files are not yet available for public use, but future academic analysis of these resources may lead to insight into the intricacies of the Operation. One file describes the turmoil of a girl who left her parents, supporters of the Revolution in Cuba. After changing her beliefs once she arrived in the U.S., she became distraught over the fact that her parents were associated with the

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214 Walsh, “Cultural Identity and Mental Health Factors Among Cuban Unaccompanied Minors,” 4.
215 These files are currently held in the Barry University archives in Miami. They are confidential and only former Pedro Pans can view their own file. Sister Dorothy Jehle, Director of Archives, was kind enough to explain what information is kept in each file. The Lost Apple, a film created by the U.S. government, shows a social worker in Miami questioning a six year old boy about his past physical health, demonstrating the methods in which physical records were kept.
Castro regime. The clinical psychologist commented that, “We have made her understand that she must love her father in spite of his political ideas.” This case demonstrates the political divide that many children were facing within their own families, as well as between their two countries.

Maria Ferrer endured a very similar living situation in a girls’ orphanage in Dallas, Texas for four years. She describes daily life as, “…very regimented, you got up, went to mass, went to breakfast, did your chores, changed your clothes, went to school right there. It was just like the military, you fell out in the morning, said the pledge of allegiance in the hallway and went into your classroom… the nuns were just like sergeants.” Maria went on to serve in the U.S. military to pay for her education, and commented that this time in her life was very good preparation. Though she admits that this trying experience completely shaped her personality, she does not find the fact that in order to avoid being sent to a Cuban military camp, her parents inadvertently sent her to a military-like American orphanage strange or unfair. She responded that she ‘definitely’ believed the experience made her a stronger person, which is supported by the fact that after leaving the orphanage Maria went on to put herself through private high school, college, and graduate school while assisting her parents financially with her four younger siblings. Through all of this she does not hold any resentment towards her parents. In her Master’s thesis dedication she attributes her success towards their bravery, “…whose love and courage it took to send their children to this country alone without knowing whether we would ever be reunited. May their belief in democracy and freedom of choice, which has brought us to this country, and which they instilled in their children, continue through the stormy years that lie

216 Maria Ferrer, interview by author, transcript, 4. Emphasis is my own.
ahead for all humankind.” Maria’s story is only one among the over 14,000 Pedro Pans. Even her younger sister, who traveled with her and lived in the same orphanage for four years, recalls a much different experience and trauma.

For Magaly Ferrer, the initial experience at the age of 6 years old of traveling from her home in Guantánamo to an orphanage in Dallas, Texas within a week was so traumatizing that the psychiatrist provided by the U.S. government recommended that she be sent back to Cuba. Like most of the youngest children that came, after the first few months she almost forgot about her life in Cuba, as she remembers, “I didn’t even think about my parents much. I would dream of being an orphan, I really considered myself an orphan. I didn’t even think of myself having a mother. I lived in a fantasy world.” She recalls her rapid assimilation, citing, “I came in late March of 62 and by June I was on a summer vacation with an American family.” When they were reunited with their family four years later, Magaly had to readjust to her family. She had completely lost her ability to speak Spanish, and recalls “always fighting with my mother” about cultural differences, such as the different expectations for her and her brothers. Both of these issues were also common for Pedro Pans once they were reunited with their parents. Most either took on an adult role in the household, and like Maria supported their parents, or like Magaly, had difficulty adjusting to life with Cuban parents.

217 “A mis padres, Carmen Cecilia Miralles de Ferrer y Rafael José Ferrer, por su amor y coraje que demostraron al mandar solos a sus hijos, a este país, sin saber si algún día volveríamos a vernos. Que su fe en la democracia y en la libertad que infundieron en sus hijos y que fueron imprescindibles en nuestra venida a los Estados Unidos – continué en los años venideros que le esperan a la humanidad.” Translation is my own.
218 Magaly Ferrer, Phone Interview by author, 25 September 2007, conducted from Durham, NC., Written notes. She also commented that although several of the children in the orphanage had emotional problems, “the government would only pay for the Cubans to be evaluated”. There are rumors of children who were sent back to Cuba after coming to the U.S. via Pedro Pan. Most were reportedly ridiculed for leaving the country.
219 Like many Pedro Pans placed in orphanages, the Ferrers spent time with American ‘foster parents’ every other weekend.
The media and literature surrounding Pedro Pans have focused on success stories like Maria’s, overcoming tremendous odds to become financially and emotionally stable and support families. The most successful narrators, such as current Republican senator Mel Martinez, former mayor of Miami Joe Carollo, former vice chairman of the Import-Export Bank for the George W. Bush administration Eduardo Aguire, and Latin pop singer Willy Chirino are cited as examples of how Pedro Pans, “…are risk-takers, [who] had a willingness to sacrifice today for a better tomorrow.” This glamorization of the Pedro Pan experience comes from a combination of the sensationalism of the press and the effect of oral history. Most exiles prefer to recall the official myth of Pedro Pan rather than the disconcerting possibilities of real, long lasting trauma. In 1994 Illeana Fuentes speculated on a different common experience to Pedro Pans, that the confusion resulting from the Operation, “has not ended. Not in 35 years, the external and the internal confusion. There’s a common denominator in all this experience. And that common denominator is at a human level, on an individual and family level, at a relationship level. Family was never the same again.” Cubans born in the 1950s and 60s were unanimously affected by the Revolution from a young age. Their lives have been divided almost from birth, as they live the role of exile or patriot, gusano or loyal comrade. Their happiness and safety are assessed in a value judgement from both countries. However, in essence both groups were caught in a political vortex of the Cold War.

The fact that the Operation has predominantly been recorded through an oral tradition gives it an advantage over other recorded history, in that the individual perspectives are often drastically different than the more generalized account. Lourdes Gil wrote about her own role in

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220 Nicole White, “After 40 years, memories of Pedro Pan exodus fresh; Youngsters fleeing Castro’s Cuba found pain, success alone in U.S.” The Houston Chronicle. 30 November 2001. Quote from Monsignor Walsh.

221 Del otro lado del cristal, 1963.
the Operation, and her struggle with not being able to choose her own fate, “…there are situations where choice is not possible. I have learned that when you enter this world at the time of your birth, you also enter history. And history is a collective force that shapes your destiny, while individual lives are merely brittle twigs swept by its winds.”222 Through hybrid sources of oral history and officially recorded facts, the history of Operation Pedro Pan may be recounted in the most holistic fashion.

222 Eire, Waiting for Snow in Havana, 352.
 CHAPTER 4
The Legacy of Pedro Pan

Suffice it is to say that the history of Operation Pedro Pan is complex and controversial, and will continue to be so as long as both countries have an interest in spinning the facts. The politics of the Operation did not end in October 1962 when the flights stopped. In many ways they had just begun. In the late 1970s, when the Pedro Pans reached adolescence, sects of extremists joined together groups supporting or opposing the Revolution, in many instances polarizing themselves from their parents and the exile community. A few former members of these sects went on to write on the Operation later in life, and have provided an interesting perspective on their evolving grasp on the Operation. As the Cuban-Americans flourished in Miami, certain individuals took on the role of culture-bearers, as their identity became seamlessly attached to their actions and opinions within the community, and particularly during the Operation.

During the past two decades, awareness of the Operation and a sense of kinship have developed among Pedro Pans. The late Elly Chovel, a key culture-bearer, started Operation Pedro Pan Inc., a national charitable organization, in 1991. The organization put an official face on Pedro Pans, has reunited members of the exodus, and funds projects assisting Cuban exiles and current refugee children in Miami. In 1999, as Elián González arrived alone on the shores of the Florida straits, comparisons to the Operation were quickly made, and history was re-drawn in both countries amidst the political saga. As research on the Operation did not begin until the 1990s, this subject is in its initial stages as a part of Cuban and U.S. history. This chapter will examine the continuing development of the Operation, and its affects on relations between the United States and Cuba, with a brief look at the Elián González saga. The complexities of

223 The only exception are the reports written by Monsignor Walsh in the 1970s and 1980s.
Operation Pedro Pan are fundamentally intertwined with the changing state of Cuba in recent years, with the end of the era of Fidel Castro.

In the 1960s and 70s, many Pedro Pans became involved in causes for social justice. Several groups were founded involving the state of Cuban affairs, from individuals on both sides of the political divide. Among the most popular leftist groups were the Brigada Antonio Maceo, the Venceremos Brigade, and Grupo Areíto. In 1969 a group of leftist Americans desiring to show their support to the Cuban Revolution founded the Venceremos Brigade (loosely translating to ‘We Shall Overcome’), and continues to exist today. Their main activity involves taking service trips to Cuba without regard to the U.S. embargo on travel. Their mission statement explains that they first came together “as a means of showing solidarity with the Cuban Revolution by working side by side with Cuban workers and challenging U.S. policies towards Cuba, including the economic blockade and our government’s ban on travel to the island.” Pedro Pans who attempted to join some of the first brigades were taken aback from the fact that they were not welcome, as they had inadvertently “become traitors to the Revolution,” simply from being a former member of the upper or middle class in Cuba, and by fleeing as children.

Disappointed by once again becoming trapped in a political vortex between their parents’ beliefs and their desire to return to their homeland, they formed their own brigade, the Brigada Antonio Maceo. Named after the second in command of the Cuban army during the War of 1898, the brigade joined together as a group of young Cuban exiles who desired to live and study in Cuba. In 1978 140 exiles, many Pedro Pans, flew to Havana to reunite with family

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225 Commonly referred to as the Spanish-American War, recently Latino scholars have begun to use the term ‘War of 1898’ to acknowledge Cuba’s presence, and liberation, during the war.
members and meet personally with members of the government.226 One former participant
recalled the personal and political experience, “I cried from the time I got off the plane... I didn’t
want to leave, I kept saying, ‘I’m breathing Cuban air.’ When I returned to Miami, I was very
anti-Cuban exile. I made declarations that ended up in a communist...My parents called me a
communist. I would go back to Cuba in a minute, but I got scared. I’ve come to terms with the
fact that I do not belong here nor do I belong there.”227 Most of the brigade returned against their
parents wishes, and were questioned by their community at home. María de los Angeles Torres
was among of the few chosen to return and personally negotiate with Fidel Castro over 3,600
political prisoners. Though initially she was pleased the ability to return, she did not feel
completely accepted by Cuban citizens or the government.228 None out of the brigade moved
back to Cuba permanently.

During the same year, in 1978, Grupo Areíto formed and composed the first text on
Operation Pedro Pan, Contra Viento y Marea, (Against Wind and Tide). The text describes the
painful history of Pedro Pan, and the same disconnection from Cuba that members of the Brigada
Antonio Maceo felt. In the introduction they describe their ambivalent feelings towards Cuba,
“…the Cuba we left is a jumble of bittersweet memories, sometimes wrapped in the gauze of
fantasy. The memories paint a vivid portrait of the atmosphere of the exodus- with pain,
desperation, lies, confused hopes, poorly founded myths, and self imposed suffering.”229 They
also comment on the desire of the press to censor their experiences, “In the U.S., and particularly

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226 Gayle Reaves, “UT Students Return to Cuba,” American Statesman, University of Texas at Austin (December
1978).
227 Conde, Operation Pedro Pan, 197.
228 De los Angeles Torres, The Lost Apple, 110.
229 Grupo Areíto, Contra Viento y Marea, 17. “Para la mayoría de nosotros, que salimos de Cuba niños o
preadolescentes, la Cuba de la salida es un amasijo de recuerdos agriúlces, a veces como envuelto en una gaza que
le da apariencia de irrealidad. Los recuerdos retratan vividamente el ambiente del éxodo con sus tristezas,
desesperos, mentiras, confundidas esperanzas, mitos mal fundados y autoimpuestos sufrimientos.” Translation is my
own.
in the exile press, there was an interest in discrediting us and stopping our testimonies, we have been accused of many things, of being anti-Revolution having fanatic attitudes.” 230 The majority of the book details the experiences of some of the 45 Pedro Pans interviewed. Though the majority of those interviewed for the book were members of the Grupo Areíto, the introduction states that, “there was a conscious effort made to obtain a broad representation of all of the children.” 231 Yvonne Conde, one of the recent writers on the Operation, in analyzing these two leftist groups noted, “Many members of the Brigada Antonio Maceo and Areíto have changed through the years, mellowing with age. As their parents hoped, they matured and overcame their rebelliousness as they watched the ideals of the Revolution crumble.” 232 Two other writers already discussed, De los Angeles Torres and De la Campa, are examples of ‘reformed’ leftists, though their work demonstrates they still struggle with formulating an opinion on the Operation.

Not all of the socially active Pedro Pans chose leftist groups. In 1969 the Abdala Student Movement was created, propelled by the ideals of sacrificing life for a homeland without the Castro government. Abdala was founded and conceived as a student movement within American universities in defense of the, “sovereignty and democracy of Cuba. Vis-á-vis the Venceremos Brigade, and the Antonio Maceo Brigade that had a propagandist movement defending the [Castro] regime.” 233 Though they held different political ideals than the leftist movements, members of Abdala were facing the same identity struggles as those in Antonio Maceo or Areíto. In an article from their journal Luis Reina wrote, “Today it is my decision to be Cuban… thanks to Abdala the Cuba that I carry inside the one lay dormant in my soul, was reborn. And I didn’t

230 Ibid., 122. “En los Estados Unidos, y particularmente en la prensa exiliada, interesada en desacreditarnos y quitarle valor a nuestros testimonios, hemos sido acusados muchas veces de tener ante la Revolución Cubana una actitud de fanáticos papanatas.” Translation is my own.
231 Ibid., 14. “...se hizo un esfuerzo conciente por lograr una amplia representación de todos sectores antes mencionados.” Translation is my own.
232 Conde, Operation Pedro Pan, 199.
233 Ibid., 198.
think about it, without a doubt, I said ‘present’ to my homeland and I am willing to offer all I have for its liberation.” Both the Abdala Student Movement and the Antonio Maceo Brigade have been to commit terrorist acts. However, the U.S. government has generally been much more wary of the leftists groups.

At this point most Pedro Pans are well over 50 years old, are nearing retirement, are long past their activist days, and the majority have never been back to Cuba. From an outsider’s perspective they may seem completely removed from their childhood experiences four decades ago. However, most consider the Operation to be a formative event in their early life, and therefore hold strong opinions about the motives and outcome of the Operation. In particular, the official myth created by the U.S. government and the press has shaped the perspective of Pedro Pans. While they do not all feel positively towards the Operation, many tend to make comparisons to the story of Peter Pan and the Lost Boys, and speak about their own experiences as if they were a myth. They also offer their own theories on the importance of the Operation, and how it relates to U.S.-Cuba political and migration relations.

In 2001 Jose Lucas Badue, a successful editor and translator who edited a book on the Operation wrote a letter to The New York Times in response to a review of the work of Eduardo Machado, a Pedro Pan and playwright on Cuba. In the article Machado gave the impression that he had, “…questioned and resented [his parents’ decision to send him] all his life.” He explained, "They were teaching us Marxism in school, but my parents treated it like they were gassing us." He theorized the U.S. sponsored the Cuban children's flights, "to make things chaotic in Cuba," and that Castro allowed them because "he thought he'd have real panic if he didn't do it." Statements such as these, especially when they are printed in national publications, are typically

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234 Ibid., 201.
quickly rebutted by a member of the exile community. Badue wrote that Machado’s statement, “crudely minimizes the dynamics that gave rise to [our] exodus.” In his letter he states what he sees as hard facts, or “common knowledge,” of the Operation. Badue writes,

It is common knowledge that shortly after coming to power Castro began to implement draconian policies. Among the policies that the regime had planned to enforce was the revocation of the patria potestad…Cuban parents found it better to sacrifice their children to a free society than to a totalitarian one, one whose sorry track record on anything resembling human rights and democracy has proved them right…This exodus of Cuban children was not based on hysteria but was a direct result of Castro’s warped vision of a new Cuba. The evidence shows that the exodus was not the idea of foreign nations (i.e., the United States). It was organized on a popular level and run by many people who later spent many years in jail as payment for the "crime" of giving freedom to more than 14,000 children…

Though the details of the Operation are by no means hard facts, oral history has provided a solid base of evidence that the exodus was in fact, based on hysteria. His notion that ‘evidence’ shows that the exodus was not the idea of the U.S. is also a very biased statement, considering the Operation was started and funded by an American priest and the U.S. government. This letter is particularly remarkable considering that Badue is not merely a Pedro Pan, but an editor and translator who “recently edited a book on Operation Pedro Pan.” The reasons for this bias may be pressure from the community, or lack of knowledge of recent research such as that completed by De los Angeles Torres. However, even in publications from 2007 the history continues to be muddled.

Guillermo Vidal’s memoir, *Boxing for Cuba*, the most recently published Pedro Pan narrative, tells a common story but with the author’s own twist on history. Vidal’s memoir is a mixture of personal memories and a ‘history’ of the Revolution, though he does not cite any other sources. In discussing Operation Pedro Pan, he gives a slightly different version of the facts. For example, he credits Father Walsh for naming the Operation rather than the Cleveland

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reporter. Theorizing that since the first child Walsh assisted was named Pedro, and the airline that flew the children out of Havana was Pan American, “the name was logical enough,” and “no doubt Walsh hoped ‘Operation Peter Pan’ would carry with it for many of the children it served a sense that their flights out of Cuba were magical journeys themselves, the sort that never would engender foreboding, fear, or terror so deep that you believed you were going to die.” What is most telling about this case fabrication of the truth is the fact that it negates all of the research completed in the past ten years surrounding the Operation. This book was published in 2007, four years after the exhaustive research of María de los Angeles Torres, and yet there was not so much as a fact check before its release. Perhaps this is a portent of the permanence of the myth of the Operation, and the unlikelihood that it will ever have a place in academic historical texts.

Conversely, Vidal’s recent publication does provide a perspective on the controversy surrounding the Operation. He addresses the problem head on, debating whether the Operation was, “simply a humanitarian effort by a kind and compassionate nation…or was an imperialist government working diligently to terrify people in Cuba’s business and professional ranks into sending their children far from home.” He then gives an original answer: “[Regardless of the motivation] What remains clear to me is that for people like my parents, Operation Peter Pan emerged as a blessed life-raft, and if the prospect of our separation from them was horrific in many ways, at least it offered them an opportunity to act on their family’s behalf at the time when action of any kind otherwise seemed impossible.” This sentiment, that Cuban parents felt helpless at the possibility of subjecting their children to a terrible fate, is shared by another Pedro Pan, Antonio Imbert. In his writing on the Operation he ends with a quote by José Martí,

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238 Ibid., 70.
“To gaze idly at a crime is to commit it.” With very few exceptions, adult Pedro Pans focus on honoring the bravery of their parents in choosing to send them, and sometimes resent anyone suggesting an alternative to the official myth.

In particular, in her investigation of the CIA De los Angeles Torres has sparked controversy in the Pedro Pan community. Marilyn Barroto, a Miami resident who came to the U.S. at 16 said, “I owe these people my life, and I owe the Americans my coming over here. So, I don't see why she wants to go through the trouble.” Even Monsignor Walsh, who participated directly with the government during the Operation, held a similar sentiment to Barroto. In 1998 a reporter that spoke with him noted, “he was familiar with Torres' concerns. But he said that he doesn't know, and really doesn't care, if allegations about Pedro Pan and the CIA are true.” Later in the article he is quoted, “Governments take political positions…sometimes, those positions coincide with humanitarian reasons. That's the real world. Thank God that in this case, whatever motivated the government, that it gave these parents the right to choose where these children would be raised and how they would be educated.”

Roman de la Campa, a former Pedro Pan and member of Grupo Areito, has come to a more moderate position since the 1970s. However, he agrees with De los Angeles Torres’ on her notions of Cuban exiles as political pawns. In his narrative he associates Operation Pedro Pan with the history of Cuban migration policy with the U.S., stating that the Cuban migration stories reveal that, “…migration turned into a political weapon in the U.S.-Cuba Cold War, and the degree which Cuban history has been shaped by it since the 1960s.” As discussed in chapter two,

240 Elaine de Valle, “Professor plans to sue CIA over Cuba airlift papers,” The Miami Herald (12 January 1998).
241 Ibid.
De la Campa focuses on the strategies that were devised after the Bay of Pigs attempt in 1961, and the Missile Crisis of 1962. First, the economic embargo of 1962, and then the special immigration granted in 1965. He notes that, “That law has stimulated- often irresponsibly- the migration of more than one million people out of Cuba,” and continues, “It constitutes the most important weapon…Little Havana [has] to deploy against the Revolution, to embarrass it in the eyes of the world. Castro’s main defense against it has been to threaten to flood American shores with Cubans willing to cash in on the special law- a threat he has carried out various times, most notably in 1980, through the Cuban port of Mariel.”

When considered in the context of the history of the U.S. immigration policy towards Cuba, it is more difficult to negate the argument that the government did not consider Operation Pedro Pan in the greater context of its political future.

While some Pedro Pans have come forward with political or academic theories on their experiences, others are drawn to make mythical comparisons with Peter Pan, the story with which they contrast their life. Maria Ferrer offhandedly commented that, “I think it’s so funny that they call us ‘Peter Pans’ because to me Disney is a fantasy. I live in the real world. [Operation] Peter Pan made me live in the real world.”

As the narrative of the exodus continues to develop in the exiled community in Miami, a number of individuals have become designated culture-bearers of the Cuban exile experience. Their role in the exodus or in the exiled community immediately afterwards has marked their lives. Several of these individuals were key figures in Operation Pedro Pan, including Monsignor Walsh, Elly Chovel, Penny Powers, and Ramón and Paulita Grau. Walsh is perhaps the most obvious case, as he is tapped as the key figure in organizing and orchestrating the Operation.

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242 De la Campa, *Cuba on My Mind*, 49-51.
243 Maria Ferrer, interview by author, transcript, 10.
Even in post-mortem he remains one of the sanctified figures in Miami, at times credited with saving the lives of the children he assisted. While the others are not as revered, all are instrumental in creating and perpetuating the official history of Pedro Pan.

Without a doubt, the most celebrated and revered individual from Operation Pedro Pan is Monsignor Bryan Walsh. This is not undeserving, as Walsh not only masterminded the Operation, but also gave it twenty years of his life and home. Walsh’s acclaim in the community cannot be understated. His business savvy was indisputable, as he ran the Operation for over twenty years and managed a budget of approximately half a million per month in 1962. Yet he was also responsible for a myriad of other accomplishments that are overlooked by the Miami community. During nearly a half-century as a priest, until his death at 71, Walsh, pastored several South Florida parishes and ran Catholic Charities, the Archdiocese of Miami’s vast human-services network. Under his leadership, it grew from a $100,000 Operation with 11 staff members in 1955 to a small army of 840 working with a $30 million budget. In the years after Miami-Dade was rocked by the May 1980 race riots, Walsh was among the voices of reason through his work with the county’s Community Relations Board, created to ease tensions. He also advised the late New York Times writer Tad Szulc on his 1995 definitive biography, Pope John Paul II. The author commented that, “he was very helpful in explaining the arcane and complex inner workings of the Church.” He also was “a very deep thinker and an intellectual,” said George Volsky, a retired New York Times correspondent now living in Miami. “He was very well read.”

Despite his complex political and social opinions, the Cuban-American community has ceaselessly lauded Walsh for his ‘successful’ mission. In particular, the press focuses on his

statements that were in agreement with the official myth of the Operation. One article after his death claimed that, “Walsh always said the mission worked, proudly ticking off the success stories of Pedro Pan alumni like Mel Martinez; outgoing Miami Mayor Joe Carollo; Eduardo Aguirre, the Bush administration's pick for vice chairman of the Import-Export Bank, plus a slew of doctors, accountants, bankers and other professionals.”

When columnist Max Castro wrote about the myriad of Walsh’s other accomplishments and his informed political stance, particularly on the issue of supporting Pope John Paul II’s condemnation of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, the Miami community responded in anger.

The fact that Walsh was a member of the clergy, a master networker, and a suave businessman boosted his popularity. James Baker, the other ‘mastermind’ of the Operation, is now virtually unknown, despite the fact that he risked his life and his security in the U.S. for the Operation. Walsh’s life was extremely intriguing, and his work for refugees of many different nationalities and faith admirable, but in the narrative of Pedro Pan he became pigeonholed into his role as a humanitarian priest, and politically staunched.

Second only to Walsh in Miami are Ramón “Mongo” and Polita Grau, siblings and relatives of the former president of Cuba, two culture-bearers and martyrs in the eyes of the exile community. Cuban Americans believe that the siblings, who worked on visa waivers in Havana starting in the summer of 1961, were solely responsible for the Operation on the island. In 1965, three years after the Operation had ceased to exist, Mongo was incarcerated and not released until 1986. The charges on his arrest record state, “counter-Revolutionary activities and espionage” without mentioning visa waivers or a children’s program. However, in an article in the Cuban paper Granma days after his release in 1985 he is named responsible for, “sending

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246 Ibid.
247 De los Angeles Torres, The Lost Apple, 182.
away 15,000 Cuban children away from their homeland.”248 After he was released from prison he exiled to Miami where he was regarded as a hero by the families of Pedro Pan for “masterminding the smuggling of more than 14,000 children out of Cuba.”249 By 1987 the Spanish version of The Miami Herald, El Nuevo Herald, published stories thanking Grau for his anonymous, tireless work in Cuba. It reported that Grau, “visited the little lunch place at the airport three or four times per week, choosing a place from where he could see ‘his kids’ going through the ‘fishbowl’ of Cuban immigration,” and added, “Parents of the children never met Grau, as they completed the deal by means of reliable intermediates.”250 The same article notes that his sister Paulita completed 14 of a 30 year sentence for her participation the Operation. A year before, The New York Times published an article on Grau, describing him as, “Peter Pan of Cuba,” how he used his connections and stayed up all night on occasion forging visa waivers to get the children out.251

The Graus undeniably participated in the Operation in Havana. However, the network in Cuba involved a number of individuals, some who still live in Cuba and were never imprisoned. For example, Penny Powers, a British expatriate working at the embassy in Havana, worked to get children’s visas stamped by the United Kingdom before the U.S. government agreed to the visa waiver program. However, the actions of the press in the 1980s glorified Grau, and ignored the rest of the Cuban network. His reputation has been solidified, as Cuban Americans glorify him and Cubans vilify him, leaving little room for historical truth.

249 De los Angeles Torres, The Lost Apple. 130.
250 “Las muchachitas de Pedro Pan: Cubanas deben su felicidad a hombre que no conocieron,” El Miami Herald (19 October 1987). “Grau visitaba el pequeño puesto de almuerzos del aeropuerto habanero tres o cuatro veces por semana, eligiendo un lugar desde el cual pudiera ver a ‘sus niños’ pasar la ‘pecera’ de la Inmigración cubana. Los padres de los niños nunca conocían a Grau, quien hacía los tratos a través de intermediarios de confianza.” Translation is my own.

The youngest culture-bearer associated with the Operation, Elly Chovel, founded Operation Pedro Pan, Inc. in 1991, a national charitable organization that serves to reunite Pedro Pans and raise money for current refugee children. Until her death in November 2007, she served as the spokesperson for the Operation, creating her own legacy in Miami. Chovel perpetuated the official myth of Pedro Pan when she spoke at functions, to the press, and to researchers of the subject. In 1999 when Yvonne Conde published the first well-received book on the Operation, the press looked to Chovel to speak on behalf of the children. She spoke mostly of family, the right to freedom, and the story of Peter Pan. An example from The Miami Herald: “The story of Pedro Pan should serve as an example that no one should ever have to choose between family and freedom. It was devastating for the parents and for the children,” she said, linking the Operation to the current war at the time in Europe, “But families continue to be split everywhere. Look at what’s happening with Kosovo.”252 This statement was typical of those released from the organization, in that it avoided mentioning the politics or the economics of the Operation.

She spoke of her visit with Elián in 1999 to The Miami Herald, emphasizing the contrast to the character of Peter Pan. For many former Pedro Pans, the Elián González saga in 1999-2000 brought up old memories while simultaneously sensationalizing their exodus.

He kept asking me to teach him how to fly like Peter Pan”, she recalled. “He kept saying, ‘I want to fly, I want to be Peter Pan’. He said this over and over, until I asked him why he wanted to fly. He whispered, ‘So I can go wherever I want to’. This memory still brings tears to her eyes. “It also brought a shocking awareness that nothing has changed” she concluded. ‘Families continue to be split 40 years later’. That experience brought to surface all the old feelings of separation, the pain she and other Pedro Pans have lived with for years and the sad realization that they still cannot fly.253

Chovel’s comments exemplify how the political and historical details of the Operation can become quickly overshadowed by the pain of nostalgia and past trauma, along with the mythical portrayal of the Operation. The fact that Chovel chose to explain the story of Peter Pan to Elián was not an aberration, as many Pedro Pans identify with the character, calling themselves one of the ‘lost boys’.

Figure 4.1 The official symbol of Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc. (Website)

On their official website, Operation Pedro Pan, Inc., addresses only Monsignor Walsh in his role in the Operation. They state, “We will forever be grateful to Mons Walsh who gave us the opportunity to grow up in a democracy where diversity is respected and encouraged and freedom of speech is an undeniable right. He understood our need to share, to uncover our history, forming a bond that has helped us heal and move forward.” The foundation is primarily a charitable organization, and its literature and website are not overly emotional. Although they do not generate exorbitant amounts of donations, from 2002-2005 they received

over a quarter of a million dollars through membership fees and donations,\textsuperscript{255} indicating that they cater to the successful former Pedro Pans who have lived up to the myth. In 1993 Pope John Paul II gave his official blessing to the group (see appendix 4.1). In tangling the religious and political, the polarization is not only of left and right, but also of morally right and wrong.

A splattering of smaller, non-charitable organizations have sprung up around the country to unite Pedro Pans. The Pedro Pans of California call themselves the “Cuban Kids from the 60s Exodus,” and hold informal social gatherings to discuss their experiences. In their mission statement they express their desire to, “Demonstrate in action and words our gratitude to the United States for the gift of freedom and opportunity, while celebrating our rich Cuban American heritage.”\textsuperscript{256} The website also includes informal writing pieces from Pedro Pans, and a blog where individuals can post questions and announcements. Antonio Imbert, the main author of the website, gives a more emotional desire for forming the group then comes across in the mission statement, as he writes, “We’re here, maybe the most forgotten of exiles, but we also are part of community that has battled and progressed, and we want to expose the true pain of our past, and furthermore, render a tribute to our parents, the true anticomunist heroes who gave everything to save us from the red horror, and without a doubt, were not always well understood.”\textsuperscript{257} Another Pedro Pan expresses his interest in, “…getting to know more Pedro Pans, and take the steps towards reuniting…and speaking about the common pain, while at the same time vindicating the sacrifice of the other victims, our parents. I have read about this


\textsuperscript{257} Antonio Imbert, “En Busqueda de su Realidad Histórica,” 3. “Hoy nos dicen: ‘Hey, nosotros estamos aquí, quizás los más olvidados del exilio, quizás en parte por culpa nuestra, pero somos también parte de esta compleja comunidad que ha luchado y ha progresado, y hoy queremos exponer la realidad dolorosa de nuestro pasado, y además, rendirle un tributo a nuestros padres, verdaderos héroes anticomunistas que lo dieron todo por salvarnos del horror rojo, y que sin lugar a dudas, no siempre fueron bien comprendidos.” Translation is my own.
painful drama that the Cuban family lived at the beginning of the Revolution, and I have had
contacts with many of the protagonists, but never could understand how they could all keep it all
inside and not show their emotions.”  The distinctions between the official Operation Pan
group in Miami and the other informal groups outside of the exile enclave are telling, as they
demonstrate the stronghold that exile politics exert over every facet of Miami and Cuban
Americans, no matter what their experience.

The Elián González saga of 1999 brought to the limelight the everlasting conflict
between Cuban government and the joint forces of the U.S. government and the Miami exile
community. By the turn of the century Cuban-Americans were much more than just loudly
voicing their opinion—they were major players in the political scene of the U.S. The Cuban
American National Foundation, (CANF) was formed in 1981 by Jorge Mas Canosa and has over
50,000 members. Considering that their political action committee, The Free Cuba PAC, has
donated between $100,000 and $260,000 to congressional and presidential candidates during
each cycle since its founding, the activities of CANF have had considerable impact on the
American government’s unwillingness to consider a policy of engagement or negotiating with
Cuba. However, it is also worthwhile to consider how the views of CANF were partially shaped
by the Cold War and the propaganda spread by the U.S. during the Revolution.

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258 “Me interesé por conocer más sobre los Pedro Panes locales, y su gestión por reunirse, confraternizar y hablar del
dolor común, y al mismo tiempo reivindicar el sacrificio de las otras victimas, sus padres. He leídos sobre ese
doloroso drama que vivió la familia cubana al principio de la Revolución, y he tenido contactos con muchos de sus
protagonistas, pero jamás pude comprender la procesión que llevan por dentro.” Translation is my own.

political contributions tracking site, accessed 20 March 2008. The PAC gave to candidates from both parties,
though substantially more to Republican candidates. For example, individuals gave $165,225 to George Bush in
1992, and $69,000 to Bill Clinton.
Supposing that the claims made by María de los Angeles Torres are correct, and Cuban refugees, particularly those involved in Operation Pedro Pan, were used as political pawns, then Cuban exiles have turned the tables on the U.S. government. In the wake of the Elián saga David Vise of the Washington Post commented on the hard-line status and ‘passion’ that the Cuban American community had taken towards Cuba in supporting the embargo and in fighting to keep Elián in Miami. From a foreign policy point of view for the U.S. government, he suggested that exiles did not want to acknowledge the notion that it was permissible for Elián to go back to Cuba, because it implied that everything they had fought for in the four decades leading up to 1999 was nullified. He continued, “it’s not just the Cold War, it’s what their lives have been for 41 years, waiting to see their homeland liberated…those passions are real and they have to be taken into account in the way we deal with this country.” What Vise does not recognize is the U.S. history of foreign policy which engendered and played into this ‘passion’ of Cuban exiles. The reciprocal relationship between the wealthy Cuban exiled community and the American government began with the clandestine motives of the CIA during the Cold War. The exaggerated passions of the Elián episode of 1999 were just a small glimpse into the hysteria and fear that thousands of Cuban parents experienced in the early 1960s. Once again, the U.S. press fostered the official myth of Operation Peter Pan with their coverage of it in light of Elián.

The press since Elián has reverted to the same language that made up the humanitarian pieces in the 1960s. One column from The Miami Herald in 2000 begins, “These were the children who were made to fly. They were slipped out of Cuba on the wins of a secret, labyrinthine mission.” Another article quoted a Pedro Pan still terrified of being trapped by

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261 Ibid.
Castro’s government, claiming he would never go back for fear that he would “somehow get caught down there and they wouldn’t let me leave.”262 Media also focused on the success story of the rising politician Mel Martinez, the present day governor of Florida who was the co-chairman of George W. Bush’s presidential campaign in 1999. These soft pieces championed him as a prime example of the American dream, with Martinez agreeing whole-heartedly, “It’s taught me to be self-reliant…to stand up to adversity. And it’s taught me that there’s a wonderful God.”263 Incongruously, though the press drew a connection between the Elián crisis and Operation Pedro Pan, their increased attention to the Operation led to more soft pieces rather than investigative reporting.

From the federal government’s perspective, Elián stirred up the latent politics of Operation Pedro Pan, a connection that would portray the U.S. in a bad light. In 1999 shortly before the scandal broke headlines Sandra Luckow, a documentarian from New York, considered using the Operation as the subject of her next documentary. Planning on examining the experiences of the Pedro Pan children through the lens of one woman’s personal life-long journey, she applied to the federally sponsored National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the largest source of humanities funding in the United States, for a $30,000 grant. Luckow’s proposal never mentioned Elián, as it was submitted before his migration, and had a humanistic rather than a political focus. Yet the committee did not give her the grant on the basis that they were, “…worried a bit about the political agenda which may lie behind the project,” continuing that it seemed, “inappropriate…because of its political nature and and because of the potential

262 Barbara Karakabi, “After the exodus; Four decades later, grown participants of Operation Pedro Pan reflect on their fateful flights from Cuba,” *The Houston Chronicle*, 1 August 1999.
devisiveness [sic] it would certainly bring about.”264 Their decision was clearly affected by the media’s onslaught of coverage on Elián and his family, and the forced connection between him and the Pedro Pans that reverberated throughout the press.

The saga of Elián González changed the way Cubans looked at the Operation as well. The government capitalized on the opportunity to paint the U.S. in a bad light by sponsoring a book published covering the Operation. As detailed in chapter two, Operación Peter Pan: un caso de Guerra psicológica contra Cuba, describes a much more detailed version of the Operation and its association with Cuban and U.S. history than any American text. Published in 2000, it gave the Cuban population a heightened awareness about Operation, and a direct association with Elián González, calling Pedro Pans, “Elianes.”

Pedro Pans visiting Cuba since 2000 have received an extremely warm welcome. Vidal discusses an experience he had with this text in his memoir. He recalls one night out to dinner with his on his return journey to Cuba in 2001. After mentioning that he had come over as part of the Operation to his waiter, he was “overwhelmed and perplexed” when the entire wait and kitchen staff, as well as the chef, come out to greet him and welcome him home. He quickly learned that, “Throughout Cuba, Elián…had achieved a stature little short of Che Guevara’s…and for everyone at the hotel, I became in the subsequent days the next best thing to meeting the boy himself.”265 Clearly the Elián saga permanently changed the perspective on Operation Pedro Pan in Cuba.

The 49 year rule of Fidel Castro and the steadfast political front of Miami exiles prolonged the issues of the Cold War into the 21st century. Therefore, evidence from the exiled

264 Gaspar Gonzalez, “The Elian Effect: Sandra Luckow though the time was right for a documentary about Operation Pedro Pan. Boy was she wrong,” Miami New Times, 3 August 2000.
265 Vidal, Boxing for Cuba, 214.
community in Miami is useful only with an understanding of the constant political pressures that Cuban Americans share. The legacy of Pedro Pan that has developed since the participants’ coming of age is an important part of the historical narrative. In the volatile times of the 1960s and 1970s, to the American Left Pedro Pans were members of the Cuban bourgeoisie who had abandoned their countrymen in the midst of the revolution. For parents of Pedro Pans in the conservative exile community, the fears from the Cold War in Cuba were still very real. This placed Pedro Pans in an uncomfortable middle, wanting to celebrate as the Civil Rights Movement triumphed but fearing rejection from their community. Some of the more strong willed participants sought refuge in political groups. Those in Grupo Areíto made a valuable contribution in crafting the first text on the Operation. The fact that this was a collection of personal accounts demonstrates that from the beginning, the study of Operation Pedro Pan was a personal responsibility of its participants rather than an assumed part of recorded history. Like many from their generation, most who were very political in their youth moved became more moderate with time. Cuba also went through some extreme changes, as the Soviet block fell in 1989 and the Cuban economy faced its worst times in the 1990s. To a certain extent, conservative exiles felt relieved by the failing Cuban state, and the political extremism lessoned.

At the same time, in the 1990s Cuban Americans focused renewed attention on the Operation. In 1991 Elly Chovel began Operation Pedro Pan, Inc. and established her role as a culture bearer in preserving the legacy of Pedro Pan. Children’s books, a dissertation, and Yvonne Conde’s book on the Operation were published. In November 1999 the controversy of Elián changed the history of the Operation in both countries, bringing up a host of new issues forgotten since the 1960s. Through all of these developments, the press continued to cover the Operation as a humanitarian story, without investigating the economic or political gaps. At this
point, the history of the Operation has extended much farther past 1962. As relations between the U.S. and Cuba continue to change, and both countries still have an interest in spinning the facts, the framing of Operation Pedro Pan will continue to evolve.
CONCLUSION

Operation Pedro Pan was a complex event that took place in the midst of the Cold War and Castro’s drastic economic changes that affected Cubans and Americans alike. It was also a time of immense uncertainty for Cuban parents. They watched their property, currency, and church disappear, and wondered if their children might be next. Well aware that an invasion by the United States was imminent, they also worried about their own physical safety. In addition to these mounting problems, the Central Intelligence Agency had started a clandestine propaganda and sabotage campaign against Castro, making daily life more difficult and distorting reality for all Cubans. The Operation itself tore families apart for years at a time in some cases, forcing children to grow up quickly and alone in a different culture and language. When these families reunited, they were often strangers in their own home, as children already adapted to the U.S. took on the role of head of the household. This shocking experience combined with the cycle of trauma and repression that many Pedro Pans underwent has led to personal accounts that are varying and, at times, biased.

While oral history accounts are muddled and conditioned to individual experience, official documents from the CIA, federal government, and State Department are incomplete and often unavailable. Those that have been released have been so on the condition of governments that hold a strong interest in protecting their own truths. Yet these gaps in information have allowed for oral history to hold an equal footing, if not a greater one, than written. The discrepancies between the personal and the official have shed new light on the questions that may have never been asked otherwise. The cold facts of the Operation may never surface. However, these voices help to answer the more central question of how individual lives fit into the pivotal moment of the Cold War. A few Pedro Pans have come forward with their own
theories on how the CIA, government, or church held an interest in convincing their parents to send them to a foreign country at a young age. The majority, however, have spent their lives coping with the fact that history forced them into an extraordinary and unexplainable situation. The Catholic Church played a vital role in providing a buffer zone between Cuban families and the businesses and government that sponsored their separation. The Operation was ingeniously conducted in that its participants believed they were only dealing with the Catholic Church, an institution that Catholics in a communist country would never question.

Chapter one established the foundation of the Operation through the convening interests of the political, the economic, and the religious: the U.S. government, the CIA, multinational corporations and the Catholic Church. It made the important distinction that individuals rather than major institutions started the Operation. Monsignor Walsh, a priest, James Baker, headmaster of a secondary school, and volunteers in Cuba successfully started Operation Pedro Pan with the backing force of U.S. government funding and State Department logistical support. It further detailed the history of the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba, explaining that Cubans had a long-standing cultural and economic relationship with this country. In particular, they had been sending their children to the U.S. for education since the 19th century. This chapter clarified the connection between the operation and the CIA’s clandestine plans for the invasion at the Bay of Pigs, and the role of exiles in taking back Cuba in the name of U.S. interest.

While chapter one’s look at the CIA focused on the Bay of Pigs, chapter two addressed the entirety of Operation Mongoose, and how propaganda combined with the press in both countries shaped the ‘official myth’ of the narrative. This myth, perpetuated by the exile community, suggests parents sent their children solely because of Castro’s actions. It
acknowledges that the separation was traumatic for some, but points to the parents in the
Operation as the true heroes. It especially highlights the most acclaimed Pedro Pans as shining
proof of a successful Operation. As was explained, many pertinent CIA files remain classified.

Yet the examination of the CIA’s actions from 1959 through the missile crisis in 1962
demonstrated that the organization was working to disturb the lives of Cubans and motivate them
to leave the island. Though De los Angeles Torres was the first to take an in depth look at the
CIA, an analysis of the Cuban press in the shaping of this history has not been completed by
previous scholars of Pedro Pan. In the U.S., journalism quickly transitioned from covering the
hard facts concerning the children’s transport to soft journalism, which ignored the connection
between the operation and the U.S. government’s mission in Cuba. This chapter discussed how
the Cuban press in the 1960s ignored the Operation entirely, and why this is yet another open
question concerning the Operation. It is almost impossible that Castro was not aware of the
thousands of children leaving alone, but he may have enjoyed the $25 the government received
from each one, or seen it as a release valve for dissenters and their children. Accounts from the
Cuban government in the 1980s and 1990s link the Bay of Pigs and the Operation directly. In
contemporary Cuba, Operation Pedro Pan is considered to be solely a function of CIA
propaganda.

The third chapter analyzed an assemblage of oral histories, fictional narratives, and
personal interviews as hybrid sources of personal experience and influence from the exile
community. In particular, the plight of the Ferrer family illustrates a typical, and yet unique,
Pedro Pan experience. Each interview is accessed with the mindset that Pedro Pans often face the
same quandary as Francisco Soto, who so aptly noted, “While I can intellectually accept how
history has marked my existence as a Cuban, emotionally I want things to be different. I have
yearned often to simply be able to talk about my Cuban experiences without provoking political interpretations in people’s minds.”

The conflicts between written and oral history are considered in the broader context of past historians. Ultimately I argue that neither written nor oral history achieves the impossibility of sincere objectivity. Rather, oral history, written narratives, and academic texts have similar flaws and limitations. The ‘official myth’ of Pedro Pan was first enfabled by the American press, and then followed by the exile community. In light of this, the Pedro Pan experience is examined through common focal points in each narrative. Personal accounts gave insight into motivations for families to send their children that other literature overlooked, such as the practicality of securing visas for the entire family.

The final chapter of this work considered the Operation in light of present day Miami. Pedro Pans not only survived their early lives in the Cold War, but also came of age during the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War. In forming political activist groups they forged together to attempt to mold their own identity, in one instance publishing a collection of their experiences through the Cuban press. In addition to some of the outspoken Pedro Pans, several figures in Miami have become culture bearers in that they identify strongly with their role in the Operation. The charitable organization Operation Pedro Pan, Inc. focuses on assisting current refugee children and honoring these culture bearers for their job well done during the Operation. Finally, the fourth chapter looked at the Elián González saga of 1999, and how this changed the narrative of the Operation in both countries.

Since the 1970s former participants in Operation Pedro Pan have grappled with the struggle to define their own histories within the context of lingering perspectives from the Cold

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War. Flora González, a literature professor in Boston, described her personal resistance to history, “At the time we left Cuba, the historical moment was pressing. History was determining a course in my life I would never want to follow. The weight of history fell upon me. I didn’t want to have anything to do with history, because history had changed my life in such a way. It had separated me from my family, what had formed the first 12 or 13 years of my life.”

Though Dr. González has written extensively on her own experiences, she is an anomaly in the Pedro Pan community. The majority of Cuban Americans often dismiss their own story as nothing more than an immigrant’s tale of the American dream, not realizing the politicization of their own immigration. This acceptance, combined with unavailable documents collecting dust in both countries, has left Operation Pedro Pan out of the Cuban exodus. However, in the past decade several authors have expressed renewed interest in the Cold War, cloak-and-dagger aspect of Pedro Pan, rather than as a humanitarian account of the Catholic Church. The transforming state of Cuba in the past year and a half has also been an exciting indicator for the future of U.S.-Cuba relations. In order for the lives of these 14,000 families to fit into the history of both Cuba and the U.S. without a political agenda, the half a century of economic and political stagnation will have to cease.

267 Del otro lado del cristal, 1963.
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**Films and Television**


Electronic Resources


Dissertations


Appendix

2.1: Douglas Deimer, “After 4-Year Separation Cuban Family Reunited” Dallas News, March 1965. This article records the reunion of the Ferrer family in Dallas four years after they sent the four eldest children to live in Miami with relatives, only to be surprised to realize their children were sent to orphanages in Dallas and Arkansas. The article does not address Operation Pedro Pan, but rather gives Rafael Ferrer’s (the children’s father) account of the conditions in Cuba at the time.

After 4-Year Separation

Cuban Family Reunited

By DOUGLAS DOMEUER

Fear and failure are unanimous words but they characterized again and again the situation in the country Rafael Ferrer described here Monday.

Ferrer, his wife, and three of his children left Cuba last August, arriving in Dallas from Miami Monday for a joyful reunion with two daughters they had sent to America four years earlier.

“Franch has a dream,” Mrs. Ferrer said smiling, after hugging Magaly, Ferrer, 10, and Maria del Carmen Ferrer, 11, both from St. Joseph’s Catholic Home for Girls.

But Ferrer did not smile much in telling about his homeland.

“I know I have no work,” Ferrer said through an interpreter. He was an accountant at a sugar mill in Guantanamo. “Things cost three times their former value, and people cannot obtain all they want.”

Despite his good wishes, the family of 12 are for all practical purposes residents of Cuba.

Rafael Ferrer hopes to be employed here as a certified public accountant, as he was in Cuba. The name of the mill where he worked, formerly La Antonio, was changed to Manuel Tamor for aighter driver in Castro’s Communist revolution.

As that seemed a long way away Monday to Mrs. Ferrer, learned...
2.2 Visa Waiver used in Operation Peter Pan. Monsignor Walsh’s Personal Collection donated to the Barry University Archives, Miami.
The Cuban Refugee Emergency Center is pleased that you have been resettled for this means, once again, that you will be self-supporting instead of dependent on outside help.

Your resettlement gives you the opportunity to meet new friends, develop new skills and interests, become familiar with the American way of life. You are another means of creating stronger ties between Cubans and Americans.

The job which will be found for you will be within your capacity. It will conform to fair labor standards and the going wage rate in the area. You have accepted this resettlement after due consideration of your personal and family situation. Your future in your new home will depend largely upon whether you make every effort to succeed regardless of any problem.

You will not be eligible for public assistance if you return to Miami without adequate cause. In the event that your resettlement breaks down for reasons of health, or if you lose your job, you are not to return to Miami. You should remain at your place of resettlement because you are authorized to receive welfare assistance there under the standards of the welfare agency in that community. It is important that you always carry your blue card.

It is most important that when any problem arises, you immediately contact your local sponsoring organization for its members will guide and counsel you.

Remember that President Kennedy's program of aid to Cuban refugees makes it possible to help you in your eventual return to Miami for repatriation to Cuba as soon as that is again possible.

You have an English translation of this letter. Please sign the copy in Spanish for our assurance that the details in this letter have been discussed with you by your resettlement agency.

Sincerely,

J. Arthur Issell
Deputy Director for Resettlement
2.4 Article from *The Miami Herald*, giving a typical Pedro Pan success story.

The Miami Herald  
October 1, 2003, Wednesday  
**Pedro Pan brothers rise from rough start to professional success**

**BYLINE:** By John Dorschner  
**SECTION:** DOMESTIC NEWS  
**LENGTH:** 725 words

MIAMI — Carlos and Jorge de Cespedes now run one of the top Hispanic businesses in America, Pharmed Group, a pharmaceutical and medical supply company that does more than $600 million a year in sales.

Sons of a dental surgeon, Carlos was 11 and Jorge 8 when they came to Miami from Cuba in May 1961. They were placed with a friend of their father and got a cold splash of American life and schools.

But three months later, the family friend died and his American wife couldn’t deal with them. They were sent to a Pedro Pan camp for younger kids in Florida City, Fla.

This trauma of gaining and losing a family so fast made the brothers not want to go through the process again, so whenever they were offered another foster home, they would say no.

Then, after two years, Carlos was shipped to a new camp for older boys, a former military barracks in Opa-locka, Fla.

The separation from his brother, Jorge says, “was super-traumatic for me.” He had come to think of Carlos almost as a parent. In fact, his fondest memories, he says, are of Cabs and him talking a bus to Florida City on weekends so they could go bowling.

Carlos attended Monsignor Pace High School, where he earned $1.15 an hour doing odd jobs. At the end of the school year, he was ordered to clean out the lockers and throw away anything the other students had left behind. Instead, finding plenty of textbooks, he erased the names and sold them in the parking lot the following fall.

“I made $500 or $600 that way,” he says.

In the Florida City camp, meanwhile, Jorge, too, learned of capitalism. Each week, the supervisors gave each child a $1.40 allowance but only after they’d written a letter home. Some didn’t want to write, so Jorge wrote for them — “generic ‘Hi, Mom, everything’s fine,’” he says — and sold the letters for a quarter apiece.

When the brothers’ parents joined them in the United States 1966, it required another adjustment.

“We were teenagers,” Jorge says. “We were men.”

Carlos recalls being 16 when his mother asked where he was going one night and when he’d be back.

“For 10 seconds,” he says, “I thought: ‘Who the hell is this lady?’ Then I remembered: ‘She’s my mother.’”
The de Cespedes brothers later became pharmaceutical salesmen, then started a supply company. With a $10,000 Johnson & Johnson line of credit, they dared bid for a $1 million contract with Jackson Memorial Hospital. They had all of three employees. But their Pedro Pan experience, they believe, had steeled them for just such a moment.

“You learn to handle rejection well,” Jorge explains.

They won the contract and placed an order through Johnson & Johnson. Reminded of their credit limit, Carlos responded with “So what? It’s your problem now.” A Jackson official warned them that “We might bankrupt you” since the hospital was a notoriously slow pay, often taking 120 days.

The brothers’ solution?

“We hired a very pretty girl to walk through Jackson, taking their invoice from department to department,” Jorge says. “We told them, ‘Don’t mail us the check. We’ll pick it up!’”

To this day, Carlos, the older brother, remains upbeat about his experiences.

“I owe what I am today,” he says, “to the Catholic Church, Monsignor Walsh who directed the Pedro Pan program and the U.S. government.”

Jorge’s memories are a bit more troubled.

“I have some major issues going back to those days,” he says. “For many, many years, I couldn’t open up to anyone other than my brother.”

Once their business was a success, Jorge sought therapy to work out some of those problems. He thought he’d reached a milestone one day when he told his mother that he was going on a business trip and she chastised him for leaving her. For the first time, he says, he allowed himself a flash of anger at her — for not having been there for him those five long years.

“You have a lot of guts getting angry anytime I’m gone for five hours,” he told her.

Only in recent years have the brothers learned that others share those feelings. In 2001, perhaps a thousand Pedro Pans attended Monsignor Walsh’s funeral.

Says Jorge: “There was this incredible bond — sort of like what you hear from people who’ve gone to war together.”

(c) 2003, The Miami Herald.
4.1 Pope’s official blessing of Operation Pedro Pan Inc. Barry University Archives, Miami.