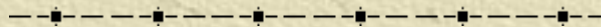


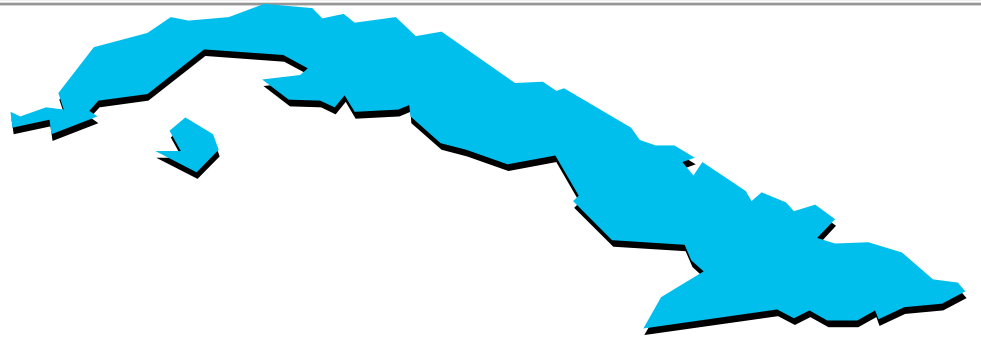


# *Operation Pedro Pan*

The Secret Exodus of  
More than 14,000 Cuban Children to  
the United States



## *Cuba, 1959*



- ✦ In a revolution led by Fidel Castro, Cuba was transformed into a one-party, socialist country
- ✦ Private property and businesses were seized
- ✦ Opponents to the new government were imprisoned or executed

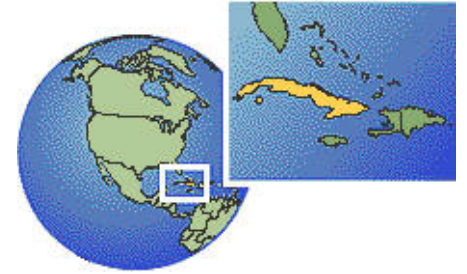


- ✦ Youth were conscripted by the government to serve in revolutionary programs, such as the Union of Rebel Pioneers and the mass literacy crusade of 1961
- ✦ Private schools were closed
- ✦ Reports of children being sent to the Soviet Union for communist indoctrination, the establishment of state-operated dormitories, and the opening of government childcare centers


# *Patria Potestad*

- ✦ Rumors were soon heard of *patria potestad* — the government having legal authority over children and the loss of parental rights
- ✦ Some parents panicked and began looking for ways to help their children escape the island

## *Flight to Never-Never Land*



- ✦ Some began sending their children to the U.S. for protection, believing that they would be separated for only a short while
- ✦ With the help of Father Bryan O. Walsh, a young Irish-born Catholic priest, and James Baker, the director of the American Ruston Academy in Havana, Cuban children began leaving the country clandestinely



✦ Like Peter Pan --- the boy who could fly ---  
the children ...

# *Underground Network*

- ✦ Visa waivers, passports, and airline tickets, were procured and distributed through a secret network
- ✦ Many individuals were caught and imprisoned for many years

# *Arriving in the U.S.*

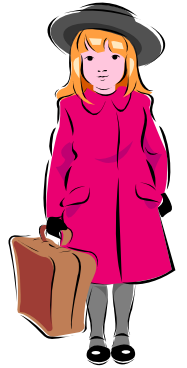


- ✦ The children travel unaccompanied
- ✦ Although they were supposed to be between the ages of 6 and 16, some were as young as 3 years of age
- ✦ About 60% were teenage boys (many parents sent their sons to avoid the military draft in Cuba)
- ✦ Although all economic classes were represented among the children, the majority were from wealthy families
- ✦ The exodus lasted from Dec 1960 to Oct 1962



# *Making their home in the U.S.*

- ✦ Some of the children went to live with relatives living in the U.S.
- ✦ Others were sent to live with foster families, juvenile homes, or orphanages
- ✦ There were some reports of abuse at the hands of caretakers, but the majority of the placements seemed to have had positive outcomes.



# *Reunification*

- ✦ Nearly half the children were reunited with their families in less than a year
- ✦ For some, the separation lasted for years
- ✦ Some children did not see their parents again until they were adults



## *Reactions by the Pedro Pans*

- ✦ Reports from children of nightmares, resentment, and feelings of abandonment
- ✦ Coped with anxiety and fear by focusing on survival
- ✦ Despite the extreme pressure they were under, the group as a whole seemed to be remarkably resilient

# Operation Pedro Pan *Group*

- ✦ *Operation Pedro Pan* Group is made up of the former child refugees
- ✦ The group helps refugee children and preserves the history of the Pedro Pan exodus
- ✦ <http://www.pedropan.org>

# *Pedro Pan children today*

- ✦ Many have become successful business-people, educators, lawyers, judges, and entertainers
- ✦ Senator Mel Martinez was a Pedro Pan child
- ✦ Singers and songwriters Willy Chirino, Lissette Alvarez, Marisela Verena, and Carlos Oliva were all *Pedro Pans*; together they produced a song based on their experiences as child refugees
- ✦ American singer Tori Amos also wrote and recorded a song, “Operation Peter Pan”