



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Exiles in America: Cuban Pedro Pans and Balseros

NMAH.AC.1377

Wendy Shay

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Exiles in America: Cuban Pedro Pans and Balseros
Date:	1960-1969, undated 2014-2015
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1377
Creator:	Velasquez, Steve (Interviewer)
Extent:	6.4 Gigabytes (9 .wav files and 3 mp3 files) .50 Cubic feet (1 Box)
Language:	English , Spanish; Castilian .
Summary:	Exiles in America: Cuban Pedro Pans and Balseros was an oral history project designed to research and document the journeys and experiences of two distinct immigration/migration experiences of the Cuban diaspora. Steve Valesquez of the National Museum of American History Division of Home and Community Life conducted twelve oral history interviews between 2014-2015. The project was funded by the Consortium for the American Experience. Correspondence written by the interviewees (as children) was transferred, processed, and digitized in 2020 through funds awarded by the Smithsonian Institution's Latino Initiatives Pool.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Made by Steve Velasquez, curator, for the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution in 2014-2015.

Separated Materials

The Division of Home and Community Life (now Division of Cultural and Community Life) National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution holds artifacts related to this collection.

Preferred Citation

Exiles in America: Cuban Pedro Pans and Balseros, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research. Interviews and supporting documentation available only in the Smithsonian Institution Digital Asset Management System (DAMS). Correspondence is available for access (physically and digitally).

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Accruals

Approximately .50 cubic feet of archival material consisting of correspondence, photographs, newspaper clippings, and drawings was donated by Margarita Lora, Lola Prat-Kampard, Maria C. Halloran, and Eloisa Echazabal to the Division of Culture and the Arts in 2015. The materials were transferred to the Archives Center in 2021.

Biographical / Historical

Exiles in America: Memory and the Lived Experiences of Cuban Pedro Pans and Balseros was a collecting initiative that looks at the journeys and experiences of Cubans who came to the United States as unaccompanied children via Operation Pedro Pan in the early 1960s, and of those who fled the island as balseros—rafters—beginning in the mid-1990s. Building on relationships already established with former Pedro Pan children, universities, archives, and museums in Miami, the project conducted research, recorded oral histories, and acquired collections to document the legacy of Cuban migration to the United States. This project was funded by the Consortium for the American Experience in 2014 and was part of the Smithsonian-wide Immigration Initiative and the National Museum of American History exhibit project, Many Voices, One Nation.

Following the Cuban Revolution of 1959, many Cubans became wary of their country's new leader, Fidel Castro, and his Communist regime. Those who opposed the revolution sought ways to keep their family together and "save" their children from Communist indoctrination. This growing sentiment prompted underground forces in Cuba and the Catholic Church in Miami—with later assistance from the State Department—to establish Operation Pedro Pan, an underground exodus of approximately 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children to the United States, beginning in 1960 and ending in 1962. By 1961, the U.S. government waived all visa requirements for Cuban children and set aside federal money for their care. Under the auspices of Catholic Charities and the Catholic Welfare Bureau, the Miami diocese processed the Cuban children and placed them in shelters (foster care, orphanages, or with family) in forty-seven dioceses in thirty states. In 1962, the Missile Crisis severed all ties between the U.S. and Cuba, halting Operation Pedro Pan; some children waited years to reunite with their parents, others never saw their parents again.

In addition to the State Department's endorsement of Operation Pedro Pan, the federal government enacted policies such as the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 that provided federal aid and resources to help Cubans resettle in the United States and become permanent residents. Many scholars, such as Lillian Guerra, argue that these anti-Communist/Cold War policies ultimately influenced Cubans to embrace "Cuban exceptionality" as fundamental to their identities in the U.S.

In the summer of 2014 the project set out to collect stories and objects, via "collecting days" in collaboration with HistoryMiami. The project invited the community members to participate, record their stories, and collect objects (material culture) related to Operation Pedro Pan and balseros, respectively.

The goal was to research and document the journeys and experiences of Pedro Pans and balseros to understand how two distinct immigration/migration experiences of the Cuban diaspora have shaped the larger American and U.S. Latino experiences, affected the identity-formation of Cuban Americans, and how Latinos have shaped the nation.

Three interviews were collected prior to the collecting days (see Family of Voices (AC1365)) in Miami. Three were recorded in Miami. Four were collected in Washington D.C. and two over the phone. Collected by Steve Velasquez, Division of Home and Community Life.

Steve Velasquez

Scope and Contents

Exiles in America: Cuban Pedro Pans and Balseros consists of eleven born digital oral history interviews about the journeys and experiences of Cubans who came to the United States as unaccompanied children via Operation Pedro Pan in the early 1960s, and of those who fled the island as balseros—rafters—beginning in the mid-1990s. There is also supporting documentation in the form of interview transcripts and summaries.

In 2020, correspondence written by some of the interviewees (as children) was transferred from the Division of Cultural and Community Life and digitized.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in three series.

Series 1: Oral History Interviews, 2014-2015

Series 2: Supporting Documentation, 2014

Series 3: Correspondence, 1960-1969, undated

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Anti-communist movements
- Catholic Charities USA
- Children
- Cuban Americans
- Emigration and immigration
- Latinos in American society and culture
- Operation Pedro Pan
- boat migrant
- oceanic migrant

Types of Materials:

- Oral histories (document genres)

Names:

- Castro, Fidel, 1926-2016

Places:

- Cuba

Container Listing

Series 1: Oral History Interviews, 2014-2015

Scope and Contents: **Available in the Smithsonian Institution Digital Asset Management System (DAMS).**

Item AC1377-BDA0001	<p>Jorge Dorrbecker, 2014 August 23</p> <p>Notes: Jorge Dorrbecker was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1940. Jorge moved to Atlanta, Georgia in 1958 to attend school. After Castro took over, Jorge's family left Cuba in 1961 and settled in Spain. He remained in Atlanta and after finishing school in 1964 he moved to Miami. He first worked for architecture firms in the city and later worked 24 years for the Miami-Dade County public school system. He retired 3 years ago. In 1971, he was granted American citizenship. In the 90s, Jorge volunteered for the Cuban American Pilot Association for 4 years. He took several flights along the Florida straits.</p>
Item AC01377-BDA0002	<p>Eloisa Echazabal, 2014 November 19</p> <p>Notes: Eloisa Echazabal was born in Havana, Cuba. As a teenager, Eloisa was sent to Florida with her younger sister and 3 8-years old cousins. The children arrived to Florida in 1961, where George Guarch was waiting for them. After their paperwork was processed, Guarch drove them to Kendall Camp, where they stayed for 7 days. On September 13 Eloisa and her sister were transferred to Buffalo, New York, while their three cousins were taken to an orphanage in Richmond, Virginia. The girls were later taken to a foster home, where they lived with their foster family for 7 months. After 9 months apart, the girls were finally reunited with their parents in Miami. Eloisa still lives in Miami and is one of the founders of the Pedro Pan Group Inc.</p>
Item AC1377-BDA0003	<p>George Feldenkries, 2014 July 17</p>
Item AC1377-BDA0004	<p>Susana Gomez, 2014 December 15</p> <p>Notes: Susana Gómez was born on June 22, 1947 in Havana, Cuba. She was sent to Florida with her brother Joe on March 15, 1965. The siblings were sent to Kendall Camp and later to live with family members in New Jersey, before they got reunited with their parents. Years later, Susana settled in Washington, DC where she had a very successful career at the White House.</p>
Item AC1377-BDA0005	<p>Maria Halloran, 2015 June 11</p>
Item AC1377-BDA0006	<p>Ben Leon</p> <p>Notes: Ben León was born in Holguín, Cuba. In 1961 Ben was sent to Miami, Florida. He became a very successful entrepreneur and</p>

presently owns and manages a rest home for the elderly. He still resides in Miami with his wife.

Item AC1377-
BDA0007

Olga Lopez, 2015 July 23

Item AC1377-
BDA0008

Mario Petrirena, 2015 January 26

Notes: Mario Petrirena was born in Union de Reyes, Cuba on November 19, 1953. In 1962 Mario was sent to Florida along with his 2 sisters. After 8 months, the family got reunited and settled in Miami. They later moved to Belle Glade and then to West Palm. Mario became an artist and later moved to Atlanta, where he still resides with his wife.

Item AC1377-
BDA0009

Lola Prats-Kamprad and Margarita Lora, 2014 August 9

Notes: Margarita Prats was born on February 16, 1953 and Lola Prats was born on June 16, 1955 in Camagüey, Cuba. They were sent out of Cuba and arrived to Florida in 1961. The sisters were sent to live in an orphanage and later with a foster family. They got reunited with their parents 4 years later. The family then settled in Bethesda, Maryland where the Prats still live.

Item AC1377-
BDA0010

Cesar Ramirez, 2014 August 22

Notes: Cesar Ramírez was born on July 14, 1962 in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba. In 1994, at the age of 32, Cesar along with 5 other fellow balseros left the island. Four days later, they were rescued by the US National Coast Guard and were taken to Campamento La India Camp in Guantánamo Bay Base. After a month living at the camp, he was taken to Howard Base in Panama. Cesar stayed in the base for three months and dedicated his time to organizing artistic activities for refugees. In 1994 he was issued a humanitarian visa that allowed him to travel to Florida, where he received urgent medical care. On January 1995, Cesar moved to Las Vegas. Eventually Cesar moved back to Florida, where he still resides.

Item AC1377-
BDA0011

Carlos Saladrigas, 2014 September 22

Notes: Carlos Saladrigas was born on August 31, 1948. He was 12 years old when he was sent to Florida in 1961. Carlos lived with family members and friends, before he reunited with his parents a year later. He lived a normal life until his mother was diagnosed with a rare type of cancer. He dropped out of school and held different jobs. Years later, he became a very successful entrepreneur. He currently lives in Miami with his wife Olga.

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Series 2: Supporting Documentation, 2014

Scope and Contents: **Available in the Smithsonian Institution Digital Asset Management System (DAMS).**

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Series 3: Correspondence, 1960-1969, undated

Box 1

Language: English, Spanish; Castilian.

Scope and Contents: This series includes correspondence, photographs, and other ephemeral objects mostly created by young Cuban girls who were relocated to the United States as part of Operation Pedro Pan. Some of the girls went on to participate in the oral histories (as adults) collected by NMAH. The bulk of the materials is from sisters Lola and Margarita Prats. Letters are addressed to their temporary foster family and relatives. Other material (photographs, drawings, and a case file) documents other girls' experiences in Cuba and the United States. Some of the earlier dated content and official records from the Catholic churches is in Spanish.

Genre/Form: Correspondence -- 1960-1970

Topic: Teenage girls
Cuban Americans
Latinas
Latin Americans -- United States
Migration
Children -- Cuba
Family -- Cuba

Subseries 3.1: Lola Prats-Kamprad, 1962-1968, undated

Scope and Contents: The materials in this sub-series document the experiences of Lola Prats. Her oral history can also be found in the first series of this collection under Lola Prats-Kamprad, her married name.

Box 1, Folder 1	Correspondence, 1963
Box 1, Folder 2	Correspondence, 1964
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence, 1965
Box 1, Folder 4	Correspondence, 1966
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence, 1967
Box 1, Folder 6	Correspondence, 1968
Box 1, Folder 7	Correspondence, undated
Box 1, Folder 8	Ephemera, 1962-1965
Box 1, Folder 9	Photographs, undated

Subseries 3.2: Margarita Lora, 1961-1969, undated

Language: English.

Scope and Contents: The materials in this sub-series document the experiences of Margarita Prats. Her oral history can also be found in the first series of this collection under Margarita Lora, her married name.

Box 1, Folder 10	Correspondence, 1961
Box 1, Folder 11	Correspondence, 1962
Box 1, Folder 12	Correspondence, 1963
Box 1, Folder 13	Correspondence, 1964
Box 1, Folder 14	Correspondence, 1965
Box 1, Folder 15	Correspondence, 1966
Box 1, Folder 16	Correspondence, 1967
Box 1, Folder 17	Correspondence, 1968
Box 1, Folder 18	Correspondence, 1969
Box 1, Folder 19	Correspondence, undated
Box 1, Folder 31	Photographs, 1976, 1978, undated
Box 1, Folder 32	Report Cards, 1961-1965, undated

Subseries 3.3: Margarita and Lola, 1961-1964

Language: English.
 Scope and Contents: The materials in this sub-series document the experiences of Lola and Margarita Prats. While most of the letters in this sub-series were written by Margarita, Lola was an occasional contributor and all letters are signed by both sisters. Their joint oral history can also be found in the first series of this collection under Lola Prats-Kamprad and Margarita Prats, their married name.

Box 1, Folder 20	Correspondence, 1961
Box 1, Folder 21	Correspondence, 1962
Box 1, Folder 22	Correspondence, 1963
Box 1, Folder 23	Correspondence, 1964
Box 1, Folder 33	Envelopes, 1965-1969

Subseries 3.4: Angela Prats, undated

Scope and Contents: The contents of this folder include illustrations by Angela Prats, the younger sister of Lola and Margarita Prats.

Box 1, Folder 24 Correspondence, undated

Subseries 3.5: Mariana Prats, 1966-1967

Scope and Contents: The materials in this sub-series document the letters written by Mariana Prats, mother to Lola, Margarita, and Angela Prats. The letters are addressed to Ruth Clough, the girls' foster mother.

Box 1, Folder 25 [Correspondence, 1966](#)

Box 1, Folder 26 [Correspondence, 1967](#)

Subseries 3.6: Ruth Clough, 1962

Scope and Contents: The folder contains two letters written by Ruth Clough to her foster daughters' mother, Mariana Prats.

Box 1, Folder 27 [Correspondence, 1962](#)

Eloiza Echazabal, 1960-1962, undated

Scope and Contents: This subseries contains the case file and photographs of Eloiza Echazabal. The case file is from the diocese that placed her with her foster parents once Echazabal arrived in the United States. Her oral history can be found in the first series of this collection.

Box 1, Folder 28 Case File, 1960-1962, undated

Box 1, Folder 29 [Photographs, 1949, 1960, undated](#)

Subseries 3.7: Maria C. Halloran, 1950-1964, undated

Scope and Contents: The sub-series contains photographs documenting Maria C. Halloran's experiences. Her oral history can be found in the first series of this collection.

Box 1, Folder 30 [Photographs, 1950-1964, undated](#)

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