

Maribel Boat Lifts Lesson Plan

By: Deanna Jaroszeski, Frostproof Middle/Senior High School

I Lesson Plan Summary

a.) Summary At the beginning of the unit students will watch a video from united streaming or other video on the country of Cuba. The students in small groups will create protest posters after they have done some research on Cuba. They will be protesting for or against the refugees of the Maribel Boat Lifts coming to America. Students will go to the computer lab for research or the teacher will provide a brief summary of the event and the articles in the Materials section of this lesson plan. I read a chapter from a book to my students and then we have a discussion on the issues present. There are several good articles on the internet available also. The culminating activity is the DBQ in the Materials section.

b.) Objectives: Student's will be able to...

- Explain why some of the people of Cuba wanted to leave the country
- Discuss Castro's reaction to the masses of people trying to leave
- Analyze the affects of the event on the state of Florida and its people.
- Discuss the pros and cons of the event on both countries

c.) Time Period and Event

The event took place in late 1970s and early 1980s Cuba and Florida.

d.) Grade level and Subject

Middle and high school History or Geography

e.) Time Needed

One and a half block schedule class periods

f. Materials

- Video of Cuba or Castro (History Channel or United Streaming).
- Class copies of the articles in the Appendix
- Class sets of the DBQ in the Appendix
- Poster boards or news print for posters
- Markers or paint

II Lesson Procedures

- 1.) Show the video
- 2.) Discuss the video and answer any questions
- 3.) Go to computer lab, or read articles
- 4.) Create protest posters
- 5.) Pass out the DBQ and go over the expectations of the writing assignment

III. Assessments

- 1.) Class discussion
- 2.) Posters
- 3.) Answers to the DBQ
- 4.) Final composition

IV. Appendix

A – K Articles and Photos

L – DBQ

V. Resources

- 1.) www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/mariel-boatlift.htm
- 2.) www.cuban-exile.com/doc_326-350/doc0332.html
- 3.) www.answers.com/topic/mariel-boatlift
- 4.) www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/365124/Mariel-boatlift
- 5.) www.mlive.com/us-politics/index.ssf/2009/04/castro_launches_mariel_boatlif.html
- 6.) www.trutv.com/library/crime/notorious_murders/mass/happyland/index_
- 7.) www.emlab.berkeley.edu/~card/papers/mariel-impact
- 8.) www.ideas.repec.org/a/ilr/articl/v43y1990i2p245-257.html
- 9.) www.archive.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2002/10/10/160700.shtml

Appendix A

Marief Boatlift

The Mariel Boatlift officially began April 15, 1980 and ended October 31, 1980, with the arrival of over 125,000 Cubans to Southern Florida from Port of Mariel, Cuba.

The Coast Guard's role in migrant interdiction has been important since the service's inception. In 1959, Fidel Castro took power in Cuba and within two years, the Coast Guard established patrols to aid refugees and to enforce neutrality, interdicting the transportation of men and arms. This responsibility peaked in 1965 due to increased restrictions on immigration from Cuba and then abated until the Mariel Boatlift of 1980.

Amidst growing dissent, housing and job shortages as well as a plummeting economy, Cuban Premier Fidel Castro withdrew his guards from the Peruvian embassy in Havana on 04 April 1980. This move should have served as an early warning to the United States of trouble brewing in Cuba, but the signal went unnoticed. Less than 48 hours after the guards were removed, throngs of Cubans crowded into the lushly landscaped gardens at the embassy, requesting asylum.

The migrant interdiction mission first gained high visibility during the first mass migration emergency the United States faced between April 21 and September 28, 1980. Fidel Castro permitted any person who wanted to leave Cuba free access to depart from the port of Mariel, Cuba. Boats with Cuban migrants began departing Mariel, Cuba, in April, 1980 after Castro declared the port of Mariel "open." Hundreds of small craft departed Miami and sailed to Mariel, where they loaded up with refugees, in most cases more than the craft was designed to carry safely, and then attempted to return to Miami.



Known as the Mariel Boatlift, approximately 124,000 undocumented Cuban migrants entered the United States by a flotilla of mostly US vessels in violation of US law. The Coast Guard interdicted vessels en route to Mariel Harbor, as well as provided search and rescue assistance to vessels bound for the United States. What followed became the largest Coast Guard operation ever undertaken in peacetime to that date and is a remarkable example of the Coast Guard's ability to respond to a developing crisis quickly.

Coast Guard resources were sent from all over the Atlantic seaboard to reinforce the taxed Seventh District, and President Jimmy Carter called up 900 reservists to active duty in that District. Coast Guard Auxiliarists also contributed to Coast Guard operations by filling in at various bases, sailing their own vessels and flying their own aircraft to augment the active duty personnel. The President also ordered Navy assets to assist as well. By the time the boatlift came to an end, over 125,000 Cubans had made the journey to the United States and of those only 27 perished at sea, a remarkable example of the effectiveness of the men and women in uniform who responded to the crisis with little to no warning beforehand. Coast Guard cutters responded to the Mariel Boatlift and saved thousands of lives.

The Coast Guard also provided assistance to other federal agencies in the processing, investigation and prosecution of boat owners suspected of violating US law. More than 23,000 of the arriving Mariel Cubans revealed to Immigration Officials previous criminal convictions. However, many of those convictions were for offenses that would not warrant detention under United States law. Contrary to the media attention given to these alleged criminals and that the Mariel Boatlift was a disaster, only 2% or 2,746 Cubans were actual criminals under United States law and were not granted citizenship. South Florida absorbed these refugees with some adjustment but without long-term affects. Research done by economist David Card of Princeton suggests that the influx of refugees did not drive down wages or raise unemployment among existing Miami residents, but actually increased the area's overall wealth.

In 1980, the Attorney General directed the Bureau of Prisons to provide detention space for criminal and mentally ill Mariel Cubans who could not be safely detained in INS temporary detention centers or at any of the resettlement camps established to process the Mariel Cubans. The majority of the Mariel Cubans in Bureau custody today are not

eligible for repatriation under the agreement and will most likely remain in detention or be released under INS parole authority to the community or to a pre-release treatment facility.

In 1984, the United States and Cuba negotiated an agreement to resume normal immigration, interrupted in the wake of the 1980 Mariel boatlift, and to return to Cuba those persons who had arrived during the boatlift who were "excludable" under US law. Cuba suspended this agreement in May 1985 following the US initiation of Radio Marti broadcasts to the island, but it was reinstated in November 1987. In March 1990, TV Marti transmissions began to Cuba.

Some 800-900 Cuban criminals were pushed into the United States by Fidel Castro in 1980 (as part of the Mariel Boatlift), and have been in detention ever since. Following their initial detention, these criminals were granted immigration parole into the United States by the INS. While on immigration parole, each of them was convicted of, and sentenced for, violations of state or federal law ranging from attempted murder to trafficking in cocaine to petty theft. After they were released from their imprisonment for these offenses, their immigration parole was revoked on the basis of their convictions. The problem has been that Castro has refused to take them, notwithstanding a formal immigration agreement between the Castro regime and the Clinton Administration.

Master drummer and singer Felipe García Villamil of Matanzas, Cuba, toured throughout Cuba as a ceremonial and stage performer for approximately thirty years before his arrival in the United States in 1980. Carlos Alfonzo, who came from Cuba in 1980 via the Mariel boatlift, achieved national prominence in the art world before he died of AIDS at age 41 in 1991.

Probing and thoughtful, Juan Carlos Zaldívar's movie "90 Miles" is a personal memoir that offers a rare glimpse into Cuba. The Cuban-born filmmaker recounts the strange fate that brought him as a teenage communist to exile in Miami in 1980 during the dramatic Mariel boatlift. Zaldívar uses news clips, family photos and home movies to depict the emotional journey of an immigrant father and son struggling to understand the historical and individual forces shaping their relationships and identities in a new country.

Maríel refugees: six years after.

[Portes A, Clark JM.](#)

In 1983, the economic situation of Maríel Cubans could be summarized as abysmal. Those without a job represented close to 1/2 of the sample; the unemployment rate amounted to 27%. A study conducted by Johns Hopkins University in collaboration with Miami-Dade Community College and Florida International University has investigated whether Mariels remain a group apart within the broader Cuban community or whether they have melted into the rest of the community. The study followed a large sample of Maríel refugees living in the Miami area over a period of several years. A sample of 514 Maríel men and women were interviewed in 1983 and were reinterviewed during 1985-1986. The authors conclude that, as a group, Maríel refugees have made rapid progress toward integration into the South Florida economy. There has been a rapid decline in unemployment during the past 2 years and a rapid shift into self-employment. There is still a sizable gap in labor force participation and earnings between this group and the pre-Maríel Cuban population. Maríel incorporation into South Florida society has taken place almost completely through their absorption into the pre-existing Cuban community; there is tension, however, as Maríel refugees see themselves as more discriminated against by fellow Cubans than by outside Anglos. This minority-within-a-minority syndrome is likely to underlie the reported willingness of many to leave the US if conditions in Cuba were to change for the better. Despite these problems, the majority of Maríel refugees would come again to the US if they had to make the choice anew and declare themselves satisfied with their present lives. Within Dade County, the more positive indicators of economic advancement and general adaptation are found among refugees in the cities of Miami and Hialeah. The most problematic economic situation and the greatest alienation from their surroundings is detected among refugees living elsewhere, primarily in Miami Beach. Results indicate that official and private programs targeted on this refugee group should give priority to 4 aspects: 1) support of small entrepreneurship through credit and training facilities to buttress the widespread efforts in this direction; 2) provision of English language courses and help to overcome extreme language deficiencies; 3) promotion of the reunification of the Maríel refugee families who were separated against their will; and 4) additional efforts by Cuban-American organizations to combat lingering prejudice against Maríel refugees.

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Appendix C

• **A Chance to Leave**

A weak economy, coupled with housing and job shortages and “simmering internal tensions on the island” compelled the Castro regime to [allow Cubans to leave for the United States](#), according to History.com.

Hector Sanyustiz and four other people had driven a bus through a fence at the Peruvian embassy on April 1, and obtained political asylum. One Cuban guard was killed when a gunfight ensued, and the Cuban government demanded that the five be given up to go on trial; Peru refused.

By April 4, Castro had removed his guards from the embassy, and on April 6, there were 10,000 more Cubans requesting asylum there.

Just a few days later, Castro announced that anyone wanting to leave Cuba was to gather at the port of Mariel to load into boats bound for the United States. By the next day, the first in a wave of 125,000 refugees arrived in Florida.

Guards packed refugees onto approximately 1,700 boats in unsafe numbers. One boat capsized under its weight and 14 people were killed. As the “tempo of the exodus increased,” U.S. officials were stepping up patrols and responding to frequent distress calls, the United States Coast Guard explained.

The boatlift proved to be a considerable [challenge for the Coast Guard](#). The agency was also handling many inquiries from boaters looking to head to Cuba to pick up refugees.

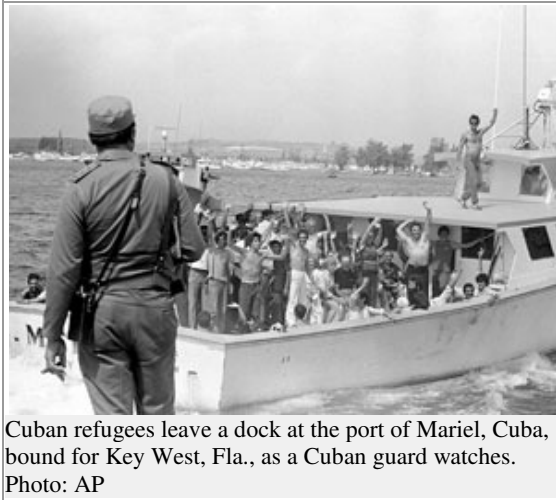
Cuba and the United States mutually agreed to end the exodus in October 1980.

Since the boatlift, [emigration from Cuba to the United States](#) has been a big issue, according to Encyclopedia Britannica. In 1987, the two countries agreed to allow 20,000 Cubans to come to the United States each year. Thousands more still move illegally to the United States and elsewhere.

Castro launches Mariel boatlift, April 20, 1980

By **ANDREW GLASS** | 4/20/09 4:19 AM EDT

Text Size: [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)



On this day in 1980, Cuban President Fidel Castro proclaimed in Havana that any Cuban who wished to immigrate to the United States could board a boat at the nearby port of Mariel. During the ensuing months, some 125,000 Cubans fled to Florida in about 1,700 packed boats, at times overwhelming the U.S. Coast Guard and immigration authorities.

Families were reunited, creating an initial spurt of euphoria. But soon the Mariel boatlift spawned political problems for President Jimmy Carter. It turned out that some of the exiles had been released from Cuban jails and mental health facilities. Accordingly, some of them were shunted to refugee camps, while others, facing deportation hearings, were held

in federal prisons. All in all, more than 1,700 exiles were jailed, and another 587 were detained until they could find sponsors.

Surveys revealed that Cuban refugees were increasingly being viewed by U.S. voters as undesirable immigrants. The turnaround in public opinion, paired with pressure to allow Haitian rafters to be granted refugee status, caused the Carter White House to take steps that led to heightened tensions between the U.S. and Cuba.

Earlier, the Carter administration, in a bid to improve relations with the communist regime, had established an Interests Section in Havana. The Cuban government reciprocated by establishing an Interests Section in Washington. The Cubans had also agreed to release several dozen political prisoners and allowed Cuban-Americans to return to the island to visit relatives.

Most of the Mariel refugees decided to live in Miami, increasing by 20 percent that city's Cuban working population. Washington and Havana agreed the impromptu exodus would end Oct. 31, 1980, days before Republican Ronald Reagan denied Carter his bid for a second term.

A RIVER OF TEARS: HAPPY LAND

- Print
- Email



Smaller | Larger
By Mark Gado

Maríel Bay, Cuba

9:00 A.M., May 15, 1980

The young man, who was just 26 years old, he didnt think much. Most of his time was spent following others. He had been that way as far back as he could remember. When the guards kicked the prisoners out of their stinking cells that morning, he simply followed behind the people in front of him. But he hadnt committed any real crime; on this occasion, that is. He simply told the police that he was a drug dealer so he could join the boatlift to leave Cuba. The guards marched them quickly through the forest toward the bay. A rolling surf pounded against the beaches with a familiar rhythm as they gathered at the edge of the sea to wait. They huddled onto a dilapidated wooden dock that seemed to barely hold the crushing weight of hundreds of people. They stood in rows of threes as Castros troops, their AK-47s held at the ready, hurried them along. *Vamanos! Vamanos!* the soldiers yelled as they pushed the helpless men and women toward the swaying boat at the end of the dock. The crowd moved quickly for they knew the soldiers would shoot them down like dogs at the first provocation. *Vamanos desgraciado!* they screamed as they beat the prisoners with long, flexible sticks held in one hand and drank *cerveza* with the other. Of course, these people didnt know where they were going and didnt really care. Anything was better than a Cuban prison where there was no food, little water and lots of *muerte*. Some said they were headed for America, though none could really comprehend this. What government would be crazy enough to take in another countrys criminals?

Somewhere among this multitude, the young man, who was wearing rags and hadnt eaten in two days, glanced around him. He had deserted the Cuban Army in the early seventies and spent 3 years in prison. He recognized some of these men since he had been in jail with them in 1974. They were thieves, drug addicts, the mentally deranged, rapists, murderers and worse. There were political prisoners too, for Castros jails made no distinction between them and other common criminals. These people were the national flotsam of Cuba: the corrupted and depraved, the rejected and the homeless. They joined a hundred thousand other refugees who would soon risk life and limb to reach the shores of a magical country they could easily die to see. They were a small part of a larger group, a footnote to history. And although these prisoners represented less than 4% of the immigrants who arrived in America during this tumultuous period, this era would mostly be remembered as the time Fidel Castro emptied his jails and dumped Cubas unwanted into Carters lap. This ragtag exodus became known as the Freedom Flotilla and these people were later called *los marielitos*.

The crowds shuffled along the dock, like so much cattle, until they were tossed on the boat deck by two powerfully built soldiers who alternately cursed and beat the prisoners between gulps of warm beer. The tropical heat was brutal; several women fainted and were lying on the deck unattended as the frightened mass simply stepped over their bodies, eager to escape the swinging whips of the guards. The boat trembled as the shifting weight caused it to tilt dangerously to port. When it finally got under way, its ancient engine kicking and gasping for air, the boat seemed as if it would barely make it out of Mariel Bay. But out to sea it went, northeast, across an azure sea, on its perilous journey to the fabled country that, for them, existed only in their dreams. For most of these refugees, however, that dream would soon become a nightmare when they later found themselves languishing for months and years in detention centers in Arkansas and Wisconsin, the pawns of bureaucratic red tape and the ever-shifting political winds. Barely two weeks later, on May 31, 1980, at Key West, Florida, Julio Gonzalez, 25 years old, uneducated, impoverished, a military deserter in his own country, a man who, so far, had accomplished nothing in life, an ex-convict with no possessions and no future, arrived in America.

Appendix F

Mariel Boatlift of late April 1980 was named for the northern Cuban port from which thousands joined an unprecedented exodus to the United States, and was rooted in Fidel Castro's earlier announcement that anyone who wanted to leave Cuba could do so. The crisis began when Peruvian patrol boats sank two Cuban fishing vessels off the Peruvian port of Callao, worsening relations between Lima and Havana, and inspiring groups of would-be Cuban emigrants to seek refuge in Havana's Peruvian Embassy. Castro then ordered his police to cease guarding the embassy. After someone died in an accidental shooting, the police retreated, and hundreds and then thousands of Cubans entered the embassy grounds to seek asylum and assistance in emigrating. Within days, more than 10,800 desperate Cubans lacking food and water jammed the embassy. Thousands of others camped out in the swamps around the port of Mariel, waiting for permission to leave. Embarrassed and [resentful](#), Cuban officials opened the door for emigration, although many [dissidents](#) seeking to leave were [harassed](#), sometimes viciously, mostly by police and civilians at the port of Mariel.

Hundreds of boats, large and small, headed across the Florida Straits to pick up passengers and bring them to the United States. Some refugees in Miami sold possessions or took out second mortgages on their homes to buy a boat. Perhaps fittingly, the man who took command of the [flotilla](#) that eventually brought 125,000 Cubans to Florida was Napoleón Vilaboa, a car [salesman](#) and one of the members of the 1978 Committee of 75 that had journeyed to Havana as part of a Jimmy Carter administration-backed people-to-people "dialogue."

Having grown up under communism, the new arrivals assumed the U.S. government would give them jobs, housing, and [sustenance](#), as they had come to expect in Cuba. South Florida's militant exile community, by then nearly half a million strong, distanced themselves from the new arrivals, and recoiled when the mostly young and mostly dark-skinned *marielitos*, some named Vladimir or [Vassily](#) or Irina because of Cuba's cultural relationship with the Soviet bloc, used socialist words like *compañero* ([comrade](#)). In response, the Carter administration released \$10 million in emergency refugee funds to [reimburse](#) the voluntary agencies that were working night and day to take care of the newcomers.

Appendix G

Two decades later, Mariel boat lift refugees still feel effects of riot

From Associated Press. Saturday, May 5, 2001. [Los Angeles Times](#).

BARLING, Ark.--"Manuel Fuente was here," reads one faint message, scraped in Spanish into a barracks wall. And on an opposite wall of Ft. Chaffee, inside a hand-fashioned heart, is this scrawled sentiment: "Iatalina y Jorge."

Simple human expressions, they are also something far more: a silent, physical reminder of a time of chaos and bloodshed that visited this place two decades ago when 21,000 Cuban refugees rioted and National Guard troops surrounded a U.S. Army post barracks to restore an uneasy calm.

Like the scribbling they left behind, the men who lived in this now-abandoned barracks during the summer of 1980 are more complicated than they first appear. They are roofers and factory workers, blue-collar laborers who came to be in this corner of Arkansas under incredible circumstances.

Floods of refugees crossed the Florida Strait in 1980 during the six-month Mariel Boat Lift, when Fidel Castro temporarily lifted restrictions preventing his people from leaving their Caribbean homeland.

More than 125,000 people left Cuba; among them the "undesirables"--people from the nation's prisons and insane asylums--but also many law-abiding, mentally healthy "Marielitos" who continue to suffer the stigma associated with the exodus.

One of five refugees eventually landed at Ft. Chaffee in the midst of a political storm further fueled by a backlash from a community that feared them and wanted them sent elsewhere.

As the summer progressed, violence inside and outside Ft. Chaffee escalated. Locals, many armed with rifles, marched through the streets of Barling. Hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan demonstrated outside the front gate.

Most of the Cubans are gone now, save for a few making lives around nearby Ft. Smith. Those who remain say the riot is only a sliver of their history, but it has defined the community's view of them ever since.

Even the recent influx of Spanish-speakers from Mexico and central America hasn't helped their adjustment, more than 20 years after the riot. While the refugees and the newcomers share a language, there is no sharing the experience.

"When we look around, we are just ourselves. We can talk to other people, but the only ones who can understand everything we've been through are each other," said Earlton Batles Manley, one of about 15 Mariel refugees still in the area.

The Cubans liken what has happened to a scar that, decades later, hasn't healed.

"It was a tremendous human saga," said Jack Moseley, editor of the Times Record newspaper in nearby Ft. Smith. "No one was very high on the Cubans. It was a totally different reaction than to the Vietnamese who were out there in the 1970s."

Clinton's Decision Helped Defeat Him

Then-Gov. Bill Clinton agreed with the Carter administration's decision to house some of the Cuban refugees in Arkansas, a move that later contributed to Clinton's defeat in his first reelection bid.

Afelino Fuentes Roca, one of the refugees sent to Ft. Chaffee, has remained in the region and recently revisited the old Army post, which was closed in 1995 as part of the nation's military cutbacks.

Sitting on the front steps of a barracks, he recalled the events in his life that led him here. The memories, he said, are like a movie--too fantastic to be real.

He was asleep in a Cuban prison cell on May 9, 1980, 14 years into a 71-year sentence for theft.

"They knocked on my door and said, 'You get out of here. You are leaving the country,' " said Roca, now a Ft. Smith roofer.

Less than 48 hours later, after crossing a slice of ocean in a small boat, he went from a 14-year diet of mostly bread and water to being served sandwiches and soft drinks in an airplane headed to Arkansas. He patted his stomach with satisfaction and rolled his eyes in amazement while sharing the memory.

When the plane landed, he disembarked into chaos. The anxiety and uncertainty of the refugees was turning to bloodshed.

Roca said many of the Cubans, detained for months at the base, wanted to begin their new lives in freedom, but they weren't allowed to leave Ft. Chaffee until they found sponsors willing to take them in. That wasn't easy: Mariel refugees had been labeled criminals.

Jose Salina, another refugee still in the area, said the refugees were antagonized by the Ku Klux Klan and the angry townspeople who demonstrated against them.

"Many of us were taken out of our country against our will. We came here, we didn't know the language and we didn't know what our future would be. And you had extremely violent people

kept in the same place as honest people," he said.

In June 1980, the refugees rioted and set several base buildings afire. About 300 escaped and ran through the streets of nearby Barling before being captured. Clinton mobilized the National Guard, and officials from the Carter administration flew down to help.

By the time the last Cubans left the base in February of 1982, law enforcement officials estimated that at least 450 assaults had occurred. Two Cubans died in the 7attacks on the base.

"The people of Barling and all that area were carrying guns," said J. Fred Patton, 94, a historian and lifelong Ft. Smith resident. "They were scared to death."

He said the town divided into two groups--people who sympathized with the Cubans and those angered at their presence. In the end, he said, it was a lesson about patience and tolerance.

"I think we have done a better job of integrating new citizens since," he said.

But others say the reaction from the town was as much about racism as fear.

"There wasn't a level of acceptance when the Cubans arrived," said Billye Carter, who with her husband, Don, sponsored some of the Cubans.

"The first Cubans who came looked white. And then some of the other ones were black," she said. "You hate to say it, but I think there was a reaction to that."

Carter worked at the base when the Cubans began arriving and was a member of the Black Community Developers, an organization that tried to help the refugees.

"After the darker-skinned Cubans came, people started getting leery," he said, "and the sponsorships stopped."

To this day, the Carters and the Cubans remain close.

"We were 20,000 people surrounded by a barricade, and none of us knew what our destiny would be," said Manley, a black Cuban who said he was able to survive the experience because of help from black Ft. Smith residents like the Carters.

Tears welled in Roca's eyes as he told of his flight to freedom. Then he said: If he'd known that 14 years in prison in Cuba would produce 20 years of freedom in the United States, he would repeat his life willingly.

"I would go through it all again," he said.

Appendix H



Appendix I



**Marinel 11 May 1980
Marines assisting the docking of a boat
load of Cuban refugees at Truman Annex**

Appendix J



Appendix K

On April 1, 1980, six Cubans crashed a stolen bus through the gates of the Peruvian embassy in Havana, Cuba. They knew that the Peruvian government had granted asylum to other Cubans who had recently managed to enter the embassy compound and that these people had subsequently been allowed to move to Peru. When word spread the embassy was open to all who could get there (Sonneborn, 2002). Cuba's leader Fidel Castro was enraged with these people because he thought it made him look bad in international news that his own countrymen hated him and would go to great lengths to escape his rein. Castro decided to get even with the countries accepting Cuba's refugees by releasing prisoners, mental patients and all those he did want in Cuba. He accomplished two by doing this, first he got rid of the people costing him the most to care for in jails and hospitals. Secondly, we got his rejects and now we are paying to care for those that have not matriculated into our society.

