

Maríel Boat Lift: Castro's Clever Gift to America

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On April 20, 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 Maríel. 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.

Part 1

Directions: Read the documents and study the pictures below. For each document answer the questions that follow. After reading the documents and answering the questions write an essay that explains why Fidel Castro released thousands to relocate in the United States and the result.

Document 1:



- 1.) Explain the question asked on the cover of Time Magazine.
- 2.) What does it tell us about the opinion of the American people?

Document 2:

Source: NewsMax.com

Before entering the area for people already authorized to leave the country, we had to wait in a long line and submit our passports to an agent of State Security who checked our names against those listed in a huge book; they were the names of people not authorized to leave the country.

Castro also exploited the freedom flotilla to unleash spies and thugs against America: Before boarding the boats, we were sorted into categories and sent into empty warehouses: one for the insane, one for murderers and hard-core criminals, another for prostitutes and homosexuals, and one for the young men who were undercover agents of State Security to be infiltrated in the United States. The boats were filled with people taken from each of these different groups. (Cantor, 2009)

- 3.) What type of people did Castro allow to leave his country for passage to the U.S?

- 4.) What was the job of the State Security?

Document 3:

Source: River of Tears, by Mark Gado

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

The young man, who was just 26 years old, he didn't 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 hadn't 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 Castro's 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 didn't know where they were going and didn't 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 country's criminals?

- 5.) Did the immigrants in this story know where they were going?

6.) Did they want to leave their homeland and families?

7.) Why were they allowed to leave?

Document 4:

Source: goggle images



7.) Does this boat look overloaded to you?

8.) What do you notice most about the boat?

9.) Do you think the people are afraid of the boat sinking?

10.) Are they more afraid of Castro than they are of the dangerous ride they are taking?

Document 6:

Source: Google Images



11.) Can you see men, women and children in this picture?

12.) Why do you think so many people are on the boat?

Document 7:

Source: Google.com

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.

13.) Do you think Castro deliberately released mental patients and prisoners?

14.) What was his plan?

15.) Why do you think people were upset with President carter?

Document 8:

Source: google.com

Mariel refugees: six years after.

[Portes A, Clark JM.](#)

In 1983, the economic situation of Mariel 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 Mariel refugees living in the Miami area over a period of several years. A sample of 514 Mariel men and women were interviewed in 1983 and were reinterviewed during 1985-1986. The authors conclude that, as a group, Mariel 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-Mariel Cuban population. Mariel incorporation into South Florida society has taken place almost completely through their absorption into the pre-existing Cuban community; there is tension, however, as Mariel 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 Mariel 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 are 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 Mariel refugee families who were separated against their will; and 4) additional efforts by Cuban-American organizations to combat lingering prejudice against Mariel refugees.

15.) How high was the unemployment rate of refugees in 1983- 3 years after moving to the U.S.?

16.) Who do the refugees feel more rejected by other Cubans or Americans?

17.) Are the refugees satisfied with their decision to come to America?

Part II

After completing the questions in this DBQ use the information learned in class and combines the two into a five paragraph essay explaining Castro's reasons for releasing his people to come to America and evaluate if they were better off once they came to the United States.