

# My America: A Portrait of Exile

by [Pedro Blas González](#) (July 2019)



*The Raft (La Patera)*, Armando Mariño, 2002

In the mind of her debunkers, America is reduced to being merely an economic system. This insipid reductionism misses the point altogether—on purpose. Because this criticism is fueled by bad will, this simplistic portrayal of America eventually finds itself frustrated by its own malice. This is a visceral understanding of history, the human condition and man's nature. According to her detractors, America is

chastised for not being a source of universal nanny-ism.

America is more than this for those who seek refuge in her borders. Historical documentation bears this out. America is an idea that resonates with freshness, hope and justice. In the absence of citizens who resemble Rousseau's mythical enlightened savage, America offers civil and social order to a tiger that is perennially sharpening its claws. This tiger, we need not forget, is the human condition. Most importantly, America delivers the kind of possibility for spiritual and moral transcendence that is rarely achieved in what is essentially a secular world.

People come to America for the dignity of personhood that her traditions and best institutions secure, respect for individual liberty and not having to apologize for articulating a moral imagination.

Human reality is fueled by universal essences that do not change with the ebb and flow of history. This is perhaps the greatest lesson that history teaches us. History is the repository of these universal essences, for human history is the unraveling of the knots inherent in the human condition. Those who negate this fundamental aspect of history pervert and do damage to subsequent generations.

Luckily, for people who are weary of the tiger within us, human nature cannot hide behind the smokescreen of fashionable radical ideological trends. The wars and devastation wrought on the twentieth-century by totalitarian ideologues confirm this.

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America is the implementation of noble, timeless wisdom. What America has achieved is unique in man's history, for she has taken the idea of the noblest and most enlightened portion of human nature and enabled it to shine, knowing that man's debasement does not take kindly to nobility of spirit. The former is the reason for the creation of her most worthy civil institutions.

America is the practice and culmination of noble ideas. For me, America enables man the cultivation of transcendent values, in a world rife with bad will. This is all that my will demands of the land of Jefferson and Washington. The land of Lincoln tames the tiger.

Albert Camus is right in asserting that what the world lacks most is people of good will. Good will and common sense are not as abundant as some would have us believe. Yet people of good will have made America the seat of differentiated, self-ruling persons who seek nothing more from social-political organization than the ability to entertain their primal and existential freedom.

America offers us the promise to live dignified lives.

Aristotle is equally correct in arguing that politics is the art of governing. America's greatest institutions, I suggest, originated in a quest for duty and conscientious good will. Their time-proven purpose is to enable self-rule for responsible citizens.

From its onset, America has recognized and respected the nuances inherent in human nature, for America allows free will and the discretion of the moral imagination to guide the lives of thoughtful citizens.

Like Boethius' love of lady wisdom, America's wisdom is rooted in her understanding that baseness, like corrosive rust, never sleeps. America permits people of good will to sustain themselves with toil, aspirations and ingenuity.

My America safeguards the sanctity of moral goodness from the ravages of man's lamentable history—from the claws of the perennial tiger. American constitutional democracy takes into account man's vile nature and the consequences of bad will.

America is a metaphor for the best that the human condition has to offer. Inspired from John Locke's profound understanding of the human will and psyche; America was conceived as a place where the Pandora's Box of primal human barbarity would be kept at bay. America personifies the social-political practice of rare wisdom. She did not come about as the result of Marxist theory, the quest for world domination or the vapid dreams of hapless utopians.

## My Arrival in America

We arrived in Miami, Florida at 8:45 a.m. on Friday, December 4, 1970. The temperature was 42°F. This was symbolic of the profound changes that my family was to encounter in America.

After serving five plus years as a political prisoner under Castro's communist police state in the Escambray concentration camp, my father was very lucky to be claimed by an aunt and uncle who had lived in the U.S. since the early 1950s. His crimes: he was a practicing Catholic, and he and my mother refused to live and raise children in a communist country. At that time, in order to have the opportunity to enter the United States from Cuba legally, one had to be claimed by a relative.

We came to America on one of the Freedom Flights that President Lyndon B. Johnson established in late 1965. Between 1959, the time of the communist take-over of Cuba and 1962, over 200,000 Cubans fled the communist island on small boats and makeshift rafts. This number does not take into account the people who perished trying to cross the Florida Straits. During 1965 alone 149,000 Cubans left the island through what has come to be called the Camarioca boat lift.

This mass exodus of refugees signaled a massive response to the oppression of the communist government that Fidel Castro created. Besides being a major embarrassment for those who forged communism in Cuba, this exodus also meant a long-lasting brain drain and the Cuban work ethic that Cuba, to

this day, has never enjoyed again under the rule of the new socialist man.

After taking notice of this steady exodus of Cubans, including many defections, President Johnson took the Dictator Castro to task for saying that no one wanted to leave Cuba.

On October 3, 1965, Johnson embraced the plight of the Cubans who desired to leave: "I declare to the people of Cuba that those who seek refuge here will find it." This was the beginning of the Freedom Flights. The flights took effect in 1965 and continued to 1973. In eight years, over 250,000 Cubans gained their political freedom via those two-a-week flights.

Between December 1960 and 1962, over 14,000 children ages 6 to 17 were sent to the U.S. by their parents in what was called Operation Pedro Pan. The children were taken in by churches and private schools and placed in homes throughout the U.S. Their parents preferred to send the children to America alone than allow them to become the pawns of communist indoctrination and forced induction into the Cuban armed forces.

At the time, Cubans harbored the illusion that they would soon reunite with their children and other loved ones in the near future. No one in Cuba imagined the strong-arm, long-lived terror-state that they would now have to live under.

No one could have foreseen that 60 years later Cuba would

still be in the repressive throes of a communist dictatorship, in a time of mass media and the Internet. Why? Despite the inhuman life that communist dictatorship has forced upon the Cuban people, Cuba continues to be the darling of Western intellectuals and opportunistic postmodern radical ideologues.

Another decisive mass migration of Cuban refugees to U.S. is the Mariel boatlift of 1980, when 125,000 Cubans arrived on U.S. soil. The history of the many phases of Cuban refugees coming to America is well documented and available for those who want to understand communism in Cuba.

Also, important to the saga of Cuba and the plight of its citizens under communist dictatorship is the steady flow of people who continue to risk their lives on makeshift rafts—the *balseros* (rafters).

Of the millions of people who reach American shores every year, few can be considered political refugees. People come to America because they recognize that she can provide them with a better life. Yet most immigrants to America are not refugees. That is, they are not fleeing state-sponsored oppression. The circumstances and pathos of political refugees is unique, especially when compared to other forms of immigration to America.

People who do not understand the shattered lives and psyche of political refugees should consider such a reality before making lazy comparisons between political refugees and other immigrants who come to America.

Cubans of the Cold War era are very proud of being called refugees. I refer to my childhood experiences in the United States, in the early 1970s, as the "polyester generation." Cuban refugees in the US at that time wore second-hand clothes that was donated by well-wishers and Catholic institutions like Saint Vincent DePaul.

Being a representative of this group of people is especially rewarding, considering that people who came to the United States from Cuba on the Freedom Flights brought all of their belongings with them in several suitcases. Property or private items that we left in Cuba was confiscated and given away to communist-party members. This is one way that Cuban communism began to forge the new Soviet socialist man. This is also egalitarianism with a hammer. Envy, resentment and the politics of suspicion—the building-blocks of communism—are rewarded by destroying the lives of others.

People who wanted to leave Cuba and not live under communist oppression were considered *personae non gratae*. We were called *gusanos* (worms), parasites that were expendable in every sense of the word. Today, we have had ample time and possess considerable data to verify the sheer evil of the historical reality that is communism. It is estimated that communism is responsible for the death of over 200 million *personae non gratae*.

Gusanos were imprisoned, tortured and murdered by firing squad because they were considered a threat to state security. Their relatives and children were harassed at work and school. The homes of gusanos were under constant surveillance by state security forces. After Castro took power, neighborhood committee members reported all activities at the home of the



gusanos to the state police. This is envy and resentment in practice. These resentful snitches traded dignity for the few morsels that communism promised them for their devotion to mother state.

People of good will realize that envy and resentment are key emotions that serve as the ground of Communism. One natural response to envious and resentful people is to turn a cynical eye toward all forms of individual achievement. Resentment, as the German philosopher, Max Scheler, aptly demonstrated is a supremely destructive motivator of human action.

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