



Adrift: The Cuban Raft People

Alfredo A. Fernandez

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In 1989 the world watched spellbound as the Berlin Wall tumbled down, and then looked on as the entire Iron Curtain shook itself to pieces, freeing Eastern Europe after decades of Soviet domination. But how many observers noticed as the swells and shockwaves of those events slowly crossed the Atlantic Ocean to roil the waters of the Caribbean and break upon the shores of Cuba?

In *Adrift: The Cuban Raft People*, Alberto Fernández surveys the turbulence produced an entire hemisphere away by the collapse of the USSR--and concludes that, ironically, the greatest collateral damage has been inflicted not on the regime of Fidel Castro but rather upon men, women, and children seeking to flee his dictatorship. For although U.S. immigration policy changed soon after, Castro's grip on the Cuban people has remained unyielding, even as extraordinary economic crises have wracked the island. As a result, countless refugees seeking freedom have disappeared without a trace into the churning waters of the Florida Straits. And many of those rescued in international waters by U.S. naval vessels have simply been turned back over to the Cuban authorities.

Focusing especially on the years 1994 through 1996--by which time the magnitude of post-Soviet changes in Cuba had become fully aparent--Fernández presents a compelling international gallery of survivors, victims, traitors, rogues, and heroes. From the infamous destruction of two unarmed private planes (sponsored by the humanitarian grup Brothers to the Rescue) by Cuban MiGs in February 1996, to an afterword on the media-driven frenzy over five-year-old Elián González, found alone in an inner-tube two miles off Fort Lauderdale in November 1999--this is the powerful, true saga of two nations in conflict and the hapless people adrift between their shores.

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