



**RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY**  
**Office of Development**  
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Contact: Angela Daidone  
[adaidon1@ramapo.edu](mailto:adaidon1@ramapo.edu)

## **Ramapo College Professor's Book '*Operation Pedro Pan*' Explores Extraordinary Cold War Humanitarian Event**

MAHWAH, N.J. – When Cuba opened its borders to the United States in 2015 after decades of closure, it was global news. Since then, several Cold War histories have unearthed incredible events that took place on the island. One, which is seldom told, focuses on Cuba's children.

In his new book, *Operation Pedro Pan: The Migration of Unaccompanied Children from Castro's Cuba*, John Gronbeck-Tedesco explores the extraordinary undertaking by the Miami Catholic Diocese, federal and state offices, child welfare agencies, and anti-Castro Cubans to bring unaccompanied children to the United States to escape Castro's dictatorship.

"John Kennedy had just been elected as our first Catholic president and we were right in the middle of the Cold War. Our country as well as the Catholic Church were undergoing extraordinary changes," said Gronbeck-Tedesco, Associate Professor American Studies at Ramapo College of New Jersey. "There was a big shift to show that American family values were at the forefront of our culture."

At the outset the proposal seemed modest: transfer two hundred unaccompanied Cuban children to Miami to save them from communism. The time apart from their parents would be short, only until Castro fell from power by the result of U.S. force, Cuban counterrevolutionary tactics, or a combination of both. Families would be reunited in a matter of months. "A plan was hatched, and it worked—until it ballooned into something so unwieldy that within two years the modest proposal erupted into what at the time was the largest migration of

unaccompanied minors to the United States,” Gronbeck-Tedesco writes.

In all, over 14,000 children ranging from age 2 to 18, were put on planes or boats by their parents from Cuba to Miami. Pedro Pan was the colloquial name for the Unaccompanied Cuban Children’s Program, which began under government largesse in February 1961. Children without immediate family support in the United States—some 8,300 boys and girls—received group and foster care through the Catholic Welfare Bureau and other religious, governmental, and non-governmental organizations as young people were dispersed throughout the country. Most were eventually reunited with family members, but the experience still left lifelong psychological scars.

In interviews with some of those refugees – now in their 60s and 70s – Gronbeck-Tedesco, through connections in Miami and South Florida, captures their words as they try to reconcile those feelings of abandonment and successful adaptation from decades ago.

“Some of them cried. Their memories are still so vivid,” he said.

Operation Pedro Pan is available on [Amazon](#) and will be widely released in October 2022.

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Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state’s premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. The College is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by College Choice; is recognized as the state’s top college on the list of Best Disability Schools by *Great Value Colleges*; was named one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America by *CondeNast Traveler*; and is recognized as a top college by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplinger’s*, Princeton Review and *Money* magazine, among others. Ramapo College is also distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by CollegesofDistinction.com, boasts the best campus housing in New Jersey on Niche.com, and is designated a “Military Friendly College” in Victoria Media’s *Guide to Military Friendly Schools*.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor’s degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master’s degrees in Accounting, Applied Mathematics, Business Administration, Contemporary Instructional Design, Computer Science, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a Doctor of Nursing Practice.

