



# Escape to Miami: An Oral History of the Cuban Rafter Crisis (Oxford Oral History Series)

*Elizabeth Campisi*

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While the Naval base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba is well-known for its infamous prison camp, few people are aware of its prior use as an immigrant detention center for Haitian and Cuban refugees. Beginning in August 1994, the United States government declared that thousands of Cubans who had launched themselves into the Florida Straits on rickety rafts were "illegal refugees" and sent them to join over fifteen thousand Haitians already being held on Guantánamo after fleeing a violent coup in Haiti.

Escape to Miami recounts the gripping stories of the rafters who were detained in Guantánamo during the 1994-1996 Cuban Rafter Crisis. After working in the camps for a year as an employee of the U.S. Justice Department, Elizabeth Campisi conducted life history interviews with twelve of the rafters, chronicling their departures from Cuba, their rafting trips, life on the base, and their initial experiences in Cuban Miami. Through these remarkable narratives, the book details the ways in which the rafters used creative expression, such as performance and artwork, to cope with the traumas they experienced in the camp. Campisi explores these coping mechanisms, showing that, when people work through individually-traumatic experiences as a group, the new meanings they create during that process can come together to change existing cultures or create new ones.

Vivid and engaging, *Escape to Miami* gives voice to the untold stories of Guantánamo. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in policy, Latin American history, and human rights.

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