

Elian Gonzales: Don't Send The Boy Back

By now, everyone knows about little Elian Gonzales, the photogenic Cuban boy who washed up on US shores in November, the only survivor of an exodus from communist Cuba embarked on by his mother. He has since then been the center of a gigantic political battle which has occupied our television screens and newspapers for what seems like an eternity.

Those who argue that the boy return to Cuba claim that this case is about the concept of family and about a father's rights. They claim that the father must be granted custody as the sole surviving parent. They claim that it doesn't matter that Elian is from Cuba and Cuba is communist; he should not be kept from his father just because we disagree with Cuba's political views. However, neither of these arguments is valid, if one considers Elian's best interests and Cuba's lack of freedom.

First, we must consider what kind of life Elian would face if he were to return to Cuba, *vis a vis* the kind of life he would face here in the United States.

In Cuba, he would not enjoy even the most basic rights and freedoms that Americans take for granted, including the right to speak freely about whatever he chooses without fear of government punishment and the right to earn money free of government control. He could not start his own business and reap its profits. He could not move his place of residence without approval from the government. He could not bear arms for his own self protection. He would not be free to pursue happiness. He could not do what he wanted to do; he would only be free to do what the government allowed him to do. He would not be an individual, he would be a ward of the state. This is not freedom. The true pursuit of happiness cannot happen in this kind of repressive environment. These sad facts hold true so long as Elian is in Cuba, whether he is being raised by his father or anyone else there. Thus the issue of Elian's freedom trumps the non-issue of the "father's right to his child".

It is particularly telling that those most strongly opposed to sending Elian back to Cuba are those who have had first-hand experience of life in a com-

munist dictatorship. Cuban-Americans know what it is like to live without freedom, and they know from personal experience that freedom is better. This is why they would never want to send a person back to Cuba. This is why they remain in the United States and do not return to Cuba. It should turn on a light in our heads that the people who lived in Cuba are the ones who want to keep the boy from returning there. As a corollary, it is interesting to note that those so in favor of sending the boy back have no idea what it is like to live in an unfree society. Perhaps they assume that Cuba is not too different from the United States. Maybe they think

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that basic rights are not important. I would propose letting these individuals live in Cuba for some time, letting them see first hand the deprivation of economic, political and social freedom. Then, after they return, ask them if they still want to send a child back to that place if he had a chance to live in the United States. I am sure the answer would be a resounding NO.

Please, don't take my word for this. Ask any of the 750,000 Cuban-Americans why they gave up everything and left Cuba for America. Ask Cuban parents who put their children on "Freedom Flights" why they sent their children to America knowing that they would never see them again. The answer will be resounding and simple: **freedom**. They wanted a chance to live in a **free** society which respects inalienable rights and allows for the true pursuit of happiness, free of government coercion and control. It is clear that Elian would not have this if he is returned to Cuba; Cuba has no Bill of Rights and does not guarantee its citizens' inalienable freedoms. Each man is a ward of the state. It is therefore ethically wrong for the United States to

return Elian Gonzales to Cuba, since his freedom to pursue happiness would be much, much less there than it would be in the United States. This argument not only applies to Cuba, but would be identical if Elian were from North Korea, China, or any other communist country which refuses to recognize basic inalienable rights.

We cannot assume that Juan Miguel Gonzales, Elian Gonzales' father, is speaking for himself. His attorney, the famous Washington lawyer Greg Craig, has even stated on national television that the Cuban government "assisted" Mr. Gonzales in writing the speech that he delivered on television upon arrival in the United States. If Mr. Gonzales does not say what Fidel Castro wants him to say, his life could be ruined with the snap of a finger. He could lose his job, his home, or even end up in jail. Thus, since Mr. Gonzales very well might not be speaking of his own volition, we cannot be sure that he is eager to return to Communist Cuba with his son. We therefore must choose the most honorable option: make a serious and concerted effort to get Juan Miguel Gonzales American citizenship and offer him the option to live here. If President Clinton were even a shadow of what he ought to be, he would march over to the Maryland home where Mr. Gonzales is currently staying, which is just minutes by car from the White House, and personally extend an offer of United States citizenship to Juan Miguel Gonzales.

In addition, we must also consider the mother's wishes, since she had custody of Elian at the time. If a mother died bringing her son away from Communist Cuba into freedom, is it ethically sound to send him right back? Do her desires count for anything? Our current policy states that any Cuban who washes up on American shores automatically becomes a citizen. Why then are we having such a hard time with little Elian? It is difficult to see this episode as anything more than an attempt by President Clinton and the left to pander to Fidel Castro for the sake of improving Cuba-America relations. Fidel Castro is not a man that should be given any breaks.

The boy claims that dolphins saved him; I wouldn't rule out God having something to do with it. Let us not destroy this boy's golden chance to live in freedom in the United States. We would be tragically wrong to send him back to a morally evil communist dictatorship which has no respect for the "inalienable rights endowed to us by the Creator".

By John Gibbs

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