

## *Juan Gonzalez and His Son*

The New York Times

March 31, 2000, Friday, Late Edition - Final

Copyright 2000 The New York Times Company

**Distribution:** Editorial Desk

**Section:** Section A; ; Section A; Page 26; Column 1; Editorial Desk ; Column 1; ; Editorial

**Length:** 592 words

### **Body**

---

The Elian Gonzalez case grows more tangled and charged by the hour, and the fate of the young Cuban boy is now yoked to a destructive combination of cold-war animosities and presidential politics. The furor is a terrible disservice to Elian and is rapidly becoming a national embarrassment. Elian needs to be reunited with his father, and all those involved should be working to find a reasonable way to accomplish that rather than using the boy to score political points.

Cuba's leader, Fidel Castro, has opened the door to a fair resolution with his announcement that the boy's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, is ready to come to the United States to take custody of his son and remain here until the legal process runs its course. Yesterday Mr. Gonzalez's attorney, Gregory Craig, said Elian's father was seeking visas for himself and a group of family members. But the father will come only if he receives assurances that he will have custody of Elian while the case is adjudicated.

If Elian's Miami relatives are truly interested in the child's welfare, they will accept this proposal, since uniting son and father is so clearly the right thing to do. With the father in Cuba, the relatives could argue that their custody of Elian was warranted while the courts considered the case. But if the father, who is known to be a loving parent, comes to America, a refusal to deliver Elian to him verges on kidnapping. It would suggest that the relatives not only intend to defy the government but also the natural bonds that link parent and child.

Elian's Miami relatives and their lawyers have thrown up a legal smokescreen by arguing that the law is unclear in a case like this. It is not. As the Immigration and Naturalization Service has maintained, and a federal district court judge has confirmed, Elian's father is the person entitled to speak for the child. If, as expected, further court review upholds the father's right to be reunited with his son, the decision whether Elian and his father return to Cuba should be theirs alone.

Vice President Al Gore needlessly complicated the issue yesterday by breaking with the White House to support legislation in Congress that would grant permanent resident status to Elian, his father and other members of the child's family in Cuba. This is purely a political maneuver, designed to enhance Mr. Gore's appeal in Florida, a crucial state in November. The point of such legislation is to take the case out of federal jurisdiction and improperly place it in the hands of a Florida family court. Gov. George W. Bush supports a similar plan.

Miami's political leaders are acting even more shamelessly. Alex Penelas, mayor of Miami-Dade County, has exacerbated tensions by saying he would hold President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno responsible for any civil unrest and violence, and would not allow local police to assist federal agents in executing any order to repatriate Elian. There should be no need to remove Elian forcibly from his Miami relatives. That would be a defeat for all parties, and emotionally lacerating for Elian. But Mr. Penelas increases the chances of a confrontation with his irresponsible rhetoric.

## Juan Gonzalez and His Son

The I.N.S. did its part yesterday to defuse the case by postponing its threat to terminate the Miami relatives' custody of Elian, and to continue discussions with his great-uncle. If the relatives can set aside their political fervor against Fidel Castro and see this case in simple human terms, they will agree to turn Elian over to his father now.

<http://www.nytimes.com>

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** FAMILY (88%); LEGISLATION (87%); JUDICIAL REVIEW (78%); JUVENILE JUSTICE (78%); LAWYERS (78%); COLD WAR (78%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (77%); POLITICS (77%); US PRESIDENTS (77%); CHILD CUSTODY & SUPPORT (76%); CITIZENSHIP (75%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (74%); FAMILY LAW (74%); FAMILY COURTS (74%); IMMIGRATION (73%); JUDGES (73%); LAW COURTS & TRIBUNALS (72%); CHILDREN (71%); ATTORNEYS GENERAL (70%)

**Company:** IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (59%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (59%)

**Organization:** IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (59%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (59%); IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (59%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (59%)

**Industry:** LAWYERS (78%)

**Person:** BILL CLINTON (73%); FIDEL CASTRO (58%); AL GORE (57%); GEORGE W BUSH (57%); GREG CRAIG (57%)

**Geographic:** MIAMI, FL, USA (94%); FLORIDA, USA (93%); UNITED STATES (92%); CUBA (91%)

**Load-Date:** March 31, 2000