This essay explores the significance and meaning of the international custody battle forged between Miami Cubans and the government of Fidel Castro over six-year-old Elián González, one of only three survivors of a boat loaded with fourteen other Cubans that capsized at sea in late November 1999. It argues that the massive legal and political campaign launched by exile leaders in Miami to prevent Elián from being returned to his father in Cuba dramatized the creation and growth of what many Miami Cubans understand to be the “real Cuba” in the United States. Critical to this vision of the “real Cuba” are two related myths of Cuban exceptionality. Articulated today by exile leaders for their own ends but conceived by powerful, founding groups of exiles who arrived in Miami in the 1960s, these myths posit U.S. Cubans as uniquely entitled to special treatment from the U.S. government and as uniquely qualified to defend the interests of democracy and anticommunism better than any non-Cuban U.S. citizen and even better than the U.S. government itself. Using popular mobilizations of Miami Cubans around Elián as a window on the political and ideological underpinnings of these myths, this essay also suggests that the “real Cuba” of Miami has, as the case of Elián showed, little legitimacy or resonance with island Cubans, today or in the post-Fidel age.
defender los intereses de la democracia y el anticommunismo mejor que cualquier otro ciudadano americano no cubano y mejor aún que el propio gobierno de Estados Unidos. Usando las movilizaciones populares de los cubanos de Miami alrededor de Elián como una ventana hacia los elementos políticos e ideológicos que sostienen estos mitos, este ensayo también sugiere que la “Cuba real” de Miami tiene, como el caso de Elián mostró, poca legitimidad o resonancia entre los cubanos de la isla tanto hoy como en la era pos-Fidel.

Introduction

On Thursday, 25 November 1999, Thanksgiving Day, two fishermen rescued a six-year-old boy, Elián González, from an inner tube floating just three miles off the coast of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The boy was one of only three survivors of a group of fourteen Cubans who had embarked for the United States four days earlier on a sixteen-foot, homemade motorized craft. After only a day at sea, the boat capsized. The boy’s mother soon figured among the dead. Lacerated by the stinging tentacles of jellyfish and delirious from severe dehydration, a young man and woman who also survived the trip were found less than forty miles away from Elián by another pair of fishermen. Their story, by now typical of the tens of thousands of Cubans who crossed the Florida straits from Cuba in the 1990s, merited only cursory media attention.1

By contrast, the cute, pale, and comparatively healthy boy quickly found himself at the vortex of a different but equally harrowing ordeal. His mother’s plan to take him to the United States had not only ended in tragedy, but it remained unknown to his father, Juan Miguel González, in Cuba, until his own relatives notified him from Miami. Although Elián’s exiled relatives had initially intended to send the boy home to his father and few if any disputed the idea, both the González family’s plan and the public opinion of Miami’s nearly one million Cubans suddenly reversed course after Fidel Castro demanded that the boy be returned within seventy-two hours.2 As Lisandro Pérez, director of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University explained to reporters for the PBS series, *Frontline*: “It didn’t become just a question of where should the child live or where should the child go. It became now a question of ‘Fidel wants this,’ so [the Cuban exile community in Miami] say, ‘Well, if he wants the child, he can’t have him.’ And it became very quickly, therefore, a confrontation that fed into a forty-year-old struggle between Cuban exiles in Miami and Fidel Castro.”3

In the coming months, the ensuing custody battle over Elián between the González family in Cuba and the González family in Miami became a political priority of international and domestic proportions for the Clinton Administration, catapulting the small child to the heights of fame. News of Elián’s plight began to compete for media space with such celebrities as Britney Spears and
Cate Blanchett in U.S. magazines as diverse as Vogue, Time, People, and the New York Times Magazine. Meanwhile, his Miami relatives received a new car, trips to Disney World, and an extensive collection of toys from anonymous donors. In one week alone, the Elián González Defense Trust Fund collected nearly a quarter of a million dollars for legal expenses. Organized exile groups, every elected official of Cuban descent in the municipal and city government of Miami-Dade County, and the exile-controlled media of South Florida launched attacks not just on Cuba, but on the U.S. federal government and the U.S. public itself for supporting Elián’s return. The U.S. Secret Service investigated death threats to both President Bill Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno for their policy of trying to return Elián home. Meanwhile, crowds of 200 to 300 exiles staged twenty-four-hour vigils in Little Havana and demonized Reno publicly, despite her bafflingly obsequious efforts at appeasement. Dissenters who took the view that Elián should not stay in the United States suffered rebuke and reprisals for harboring Communist sympathies.

At the same time, in Cuba, the state mobilized hundreds of thousands of citizens for highly orchestrated demonstrations, leaving the national economy, already burdened by the collapse of Soviet-subsidized socialism and the recent transition to capitalism, at a standstill. The Communist state also saturated its own media with constant coverage of Elián. Many who stood at the margins of exile politics could not fathom the reasons behind the political importance of the custody case: for close to eight months, it was as if the small stretch of ocean separating Cuba from Miami had become a distorted mirror in which both sides parodied the other, each hoping to demonstrate the greater moral force behind their respective arguments about which version of Cuba was truly free and how the youngest generation of Cubans deserved to live. However, even alienated observers could not deny that the case of Elián represented more than a media circus or an opportunity for Cuban and exile leaders to demonstrate their power among respective constituents. Elián catalyzed a full-scale ideological and cultural war among Cubans, wherever they were. Yet, in Miami, the call to arms took on peculiar force: if you were not a Cuban exile yourself or raised in the U.S. exile community, you were not expected to understand why an exception in U.S. law should be made for Elián and you were certainly not expected to complain.

This essay argues that, although participants in the Miami protests undoubtedly believed that Elián should stay in the United States, the nature of their protests and the discourse of defiance that they launched against Castro spoke to a higher goal, one only tangentially related to the present and future of Cuba and much more directly related to the history and future of the United States. That is, through Elián, these U.S.-based Cubans asserted and explained the terms of their claims to an authentic place in the historical process that had defined the political values of the United States. They also claimed a central
role in determining the United States’ ideological direction—both during the Cold War and beyond. Thus, the campaign to keep Elián in Miami expressed less about the future of Cuba and more about the tensions and contradictions that Miami Cubans faced in articulating their position in U.S. society in relation to their perceptions of Cuba. For these exiles and U.S.-born Cubans, what was at stake during the Elián saga was not simply the future of Cuba but, more importantly, that of the United States. Perhaps more passionately and articulately than ever before, these groups dramatized through Elián their vision of an alternative, authentic nation, rooted in Miami, whose moral and ideological purity surpassed the now-corrupt and politically unreliable ideals of both Castroite Cuba and the United States. For many, Elián showed that the alternative patria, the “real Cuba,” had finally been born.

This essay explores how the “real Cuba” of Miami was founded and what it means. It shows how the coincidence of language and symbol that emerged during the Miami campaign for Elián’s right to stay revealed a consensus of truth regarding the authenticity of the alternative Cuba constructed in the United States among exiles and U.S.-born Cubans alike. This consensus of truth came about through the mobilization of what might be called “the twin myths of Cuban exceptionality” that were everywhere articulated, displayed, and deployed during the Elián affair, both by exile leaders and by supporters, many of whom had never shown an interest in the exiles’ political activism before. These twin myths posit U.S. Cubans as uniquely entitled to special treatment from the U.S. government and uniquely qualified to defend the interests of democracy and anticommunism better than any non-Cuban U.S. citizen or even the U.S. government itself.

As we shall see, these myths derive from two principal sources: first, Cubans’ own history of having been treated as a privileged group of immigrants under U.S. law since the early 1960s and second, a master narrative created by the earliest Cuban refugees and reinforced by subsequent waves of asylum seekers that justifies their exile from Cuba on the premise that it was not economic interest but the Cuban Revolution’s betrayal of political democracy and moral values that drove people to leave. The Elián case invited Miami Cubans to openly tout their credentials as “truer” defenders of such ideals in a unified way; in doing so, exile leaders and supporters asserted that they were simultaneously more Cuban and more American than people on the island or the rest of the U.S. public could be.

“150 Percent American, 150 Percent Cuban”:
Elián and the Twin Myths of Cuban Exceptionality

The Elián affair, as it became known in the U.S. media, ended abruptly and violently: in the early predawn hours of 23 April 2000, the day before Easter,
heavily armed Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents, acting on Attorney General Janet Reno’s orders, forcibly removed a terrified Elián from the González family home in Little Havana.\textsuperscript{11} Three hours later, a smiling Elián and his jubilant father reunited in the comparatively neutral terrain of Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{12} For the first time since the Revolution of 1959, it seemed that the U.S. and Cuban governments had finally found something on which to agree, a fact that ironically pushed Cubans on the island and Cubans in the United States further apart.\textsuperscript{13} More importantly, it sparked the most dramatic demonstration so far of what many Miami Cubans had come to believe and express during the past several months: the idea that they, more so than the people of the United States or its government, represented the authentic commitment to freedom — especially from Communist totalitarianism — historically associated with the United States.

In the hours that followed the INS seizure of Elián, 4,000 Miami Cubans responded with a full-fledged riot, setting tires on fire and burning the U.S. flag on the streets of Little Havana. Between 260 and 400 people were arrested, and at least one man was charged with the attempted murder of three police officers. This collective expression of rage reflected the peculiar logic that arguably underlay most Miami Cubans’ identification with Elián until that point. As one protestor, a forty-eight-year-old bus driver explained, “We are protesting to save the liberty of this country. . . . Communism is right around the corner.”\textsuperscript{14} Many protestors echoed this view to reporters on the scene, depicting themselves as self-appointed keepers of the ideals of democracy that both the U.S. government and the rest of the United States had betrayed.\textsuperscript{15}

Undoubtedly, exile organizations like the Cuban American National Foundation have succeeded in implementing plans to keep the United States’ decades-long policy of isolating Cuba alive in order to sabotage the island’s economy to the best of their abilities and pave the way for a reassertion of their own economic power and political control of Cuba once Fidel Castro dies. However, according to polls conducted by institutions in Miami annually, the vast majority of Cubans in South Florida do not expect to reside in Cuba after Castro no matter what happens.\textsuperscript{16} Although most Miami Cubans might endorse exile leaders’ dreams of fomenting “regime change” in Cuba itself, the former’s perceptions of what the end of Fidel Castro will mean for them do not necessarily go hand-in-hand with those of the exiles. Nonetheless, observers, analysts, and journalists generally assume the opposite is true. One reason for this has to do with exile leaders’ success in convincing fellow exiles that their own checkered past prior to the Revolution does not matter. The other has to do with the tendency to confuse all calls to rescue “the nation” among U.S.-based Cubans as one and the same in terms of content, purpose, and the direction of the message.

Certainly, the rush to unite against Castro muffles discordant memories of
who stood for what and why before Castro. On the one hand, members of the exile elite have never kept secret their plans to reconquer Cuba’s political system and recover the expropriated wealth that many of them lost. Still, although Cuban exiles of different generations may share anger with the Castro regime over injustices inflicted on them at different times during the course of the Revolution, including property expropriations, the details of what exactly elite exiles want back and how they lost it are often conveniently left out of most discussions. The fact that many of the most recalcitrant leaders lost their properties long before Cuba became Communist because of their family’s direct political ties to Cuba’s corrupt and brutal dictator, Fulgencio Batista, is generally ignored; so is the fact that the vast majority of Cubans supported these blanket expropriations, especially the middle-class Cubans whom Batista and his cronies defrauded. For example, few Cubans outside of Cuba tend to remember that Florida Republican Representative Lincoln Díaz Balart’s father, Rafael Lincoln Díaz Balart, was a member of Batista’s cabinet after Batista staged his 1952 coup, and he was a primary beneficiary of the fraudulent electoral side-shows that the dictator later organized to present the illusion of democracy to the outside world. In other words, exile leaders’ self-serving efforts to ignore the very real historical fissures that divide them from their constituents’ historical background and experience help to generate monopolistic understandings of how political culture in Miami works. The other factor explaining this may be more important, however, such as the meaning that claims to “the nation” may have for those Miami Cubans who took to the streets in the name of Elián repeatedly over eight months in 2000.

Marshall Sahlins explores precisely this question in an excellent discussion of the fanaticism and intolerance of Miami’s political culture during the Elián affair, assuming that the exile elite and protestors’ motivations expressed the imagined community associated with a future, post-Castro Cuba, rather than a reflection of their vision of identity as Cubans living in Miami, here and now. For example, Sahlins quotes Cuban-American sociologist Damián Fernández, stating that “Elián is a metaphor for the Cuban nation, and it’s a nation in crisis . . . ,” yet neither Sahlins nor Fernández goes on to explain which nation either he or Fernández means—that is, the Miami Cuban nation or the Cuban Cuban nation. Sahlins himself later argues that the religiosity through which protestors represented their passion for saving Elián from Castro served as “structural relays, motivated mediations by which the history of the national was interpolated in the interpersonal. . . .” Again, his approach fails to explain exactly which national history was being conveyed among Miami Cubans and what bearing it has on the political future of the island of Cuba versus Cuban Miami.

Nonetheless, as Sahlin’s work points out, the history of unemployment, abortive educational aspirations, and criminal records that characterized the
background of Elián’s Miami relatives only underscores the degree to which struggle or outright failure to achieve the classic American dream has characterized the lives of many Miami Cubans, most of whom are working class, if not that of the exile elite. For the exile elite, Elián provided an opportunity for mobilization against Castro and the articulation of their power through the discourse, structures, and bodies of tens of thousands of followers who found their employers and local officials canceling work and school so they could attend rallies. For the many working-class and lower-middle-class Miami Cubans who attended those rallies, on the other hand, Elián provided an opportunity of a different sort. In struggling to achieve only Elián’s right to stay in Miami, protestors declared their own success and pride in simply making it to the United States, even if they had not actually made it in the United States. Within this frame of perceiving reality and identity, leaving Cuba does not constitute the betrayal that Castro’s government claims it does, but an act of patriotism. Fighting to keep Elián in Miami proved this by signifying that a life in the United States was a triumph in and of itself. For some Elián fighters, defending the “real Cuba” that exiles constructed in Miami was more important than what might happen in Cuba. Their Cuba was already free. In rejecting U.S. government mandates for Elián’s return as well as any critics of their defiant position regarding Elián, they hoped to keep it that way.

I came to experience this perspective first-hand between December 1999 and January 2000, when I visited my own relatives in both Cuba and Miami. A few days before leaving to visit my father in Miami, I called him and reminded him of my upcoming trip to Cuba, admitting that I was anxious to see how Cubans in Cuba were responding to the Elián affair for myself. My father responded angrily to this remark, warning me not to reveal my future plans to any Cubans I might see while I was in Miami and telling me that if I was “a loyal Cuban,” I wouldn’t go to Cuba at all, especially not now. “Hija,” he said, “es que tú nunca te vas a dar cuenta de que esa gente de allá no son cubanos. Para ser cubano, hay que vivir en los Estados Unidos. [Daughter, it’s clear that you are never going to realize that those people on the island aren’t Cubans. To be Cuban, you have to live in the United States.]” To my amazement, most of the Miami Cubans I saw over the holidays agreed. Subsequent press accounts of the Elián campaign in Miami repeatedly confirmed my father’s view. As a sixty-two-year-old member of the right-wing exile group Mothers Against Repression told the New York Times, “[Supporters of Elián’s return] want us to be traitors. Surrendering this little boy makes us traitors.”

Traitors to what? I asked myself. Looking at the Elián case closely, the answer was clear: traitors to the nation that many Cubans in the United States associate with the political vision and culture that exiles have long cultivated in Miami; this is a nation that cannot exist in Cuba because it does not respond to or engage the very thing that shapes islanders’ everyday reality and perceptions...
of the future—the Revolution. Yet, it is also a nation framed as much by Cuba’s historical political culture as the one in which Fidel Castro and ten million other Cubans live. As Nelson P. Valdés argues, charges of treason are not only endemic to Cuban political discourse, but among Cubans, “interpretations of social and political reality are often dominated by the belief that one’s opponent is treacherous. Political differences then turn into charges of betrayal. If a national or political aim is not attained, there is only [one] possible reason: treason or betrayal.” In other words, the problem with a failed political project never lies with the viability or aims of the project itself, but with the people charged to accept and implement it.

Given that Cubans outside of Cuba live with the constant burden of having failed to attain what they wanted for themselves or for the country as a whole within Cuba, the traditional logic of Cuban political culture that Valdés describes must take a slightly different course. Rather than blame themselves and the condition of exile itself for these failures or question their interpretation of the political views of most island Cubans, many exile activists and their followers are tempted to believe that only Cubans in Cuba can be the true traitors and the government of the United States, as in the case of Elián, a double agent or Castro ally. Shifting blame and resisting the impulse to examine the relevance of their political visions to island Cubans allows such exiled Cubans to see betrayal as a constant danger without ever needing to examine the viability of exactly what is being betrayed—a Cuba rooted in Miami.

At the same time, Miami Cuba’s political culture also represents a historical response to the “Patria o Muerte [Fatherland or Death]” philosophy enforced by the increasingly authoritarian revolutionary government under Fidel Castro in Cuba after 1959. Because the Revolution has long mandated that one’s support for the Castro regime be all or nothing, exile logic has necessarily mandated that opposition to that government must be all or nothing. In recent years, this logic has expanded its reach: now rejections of the idea that island Cubans might consider the Revolution to be legitimate in any way must also be all or nothing. Today as yesterday, upholding a united front against Castro means that apparent divisions among the exile community must be denied, suppressed, or actively repressed. Thus, although exile leaders may be concerned with eventually transferring their “real Cuba” from Miami to the island after Fidel dies, the appeal of their discourse among the majority of Miami Cubans may lie elsewhere.

For them, the mere act of staying in Cuba and tolerating the Revolution in a passive way confirms the legitimacy of Castro’s false vision of freedom and betrays the “real Cuba” that can only exist outside of Castro’s control, among Cubans in Miami. Avoiding all debate over the reasons for the historic persistence of the revolutionary state, the official exile version of “Cuba” recognizes that any divisions among Cubans did not and do not spring from the
legacies of pre-1959 U.S. interventionism, political authoritarianism, economic injustice, greed, corruption, racism, or cultural prejudice. Rather, all that divides Cubans today, like all that divided them in the past, both on the island and between the island and Miami, derives from the malevolence of one single man and the complicity of others less powerful and possibly less courageous than they in tolerating him: Fidel Castro. It is for this reason that more often than not, exile organizations’ discussions of Cuba make no mention of the ten million Cubans who remain in Cuba and may well reject not only exile leadership in the future, but any exile-derived model of government that does not engage the promises, social policies, or anti-imperialist legacies of the Revolution as potentially positive. In fact, Cuba has become for the most prominent exile leaders, a place whose people need to be reformed, rehabilitated, and reeducated in the ways, interests, and style of the United States democracy as represented by President George W. Bush’s Commission for a Free Cuba, chaired by Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and the Cuban exile leader who is now Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutiérrez. According to the terms of the Commission’s latest public report to the president, Cubans in Cuba never considered the Revolution or its leaders legitimate and are not only desperate for change, but for exile-led, U.S.-mandated forms of change.24

During the 1960s, the first waves of exiles to South Florida authored the master narrative of exile authenticity, which frames this Commission’s report, as they faced the reality of very recent political divisions among themselves that leaving Cuba and arriving in the United States laid bare. In 1959, the first Cubans to flee the island were, unlike later refugees, former supporters of the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. When subsequent waves of Cubans arrived, they in no way favored a return to Batista but opposed Castro’s radically nationalist policies, programs for the redistribution of wealth, and eventual decision to seek Soviet guarantees for Cuba’s national sovereignty vis-à-vis the United States. Suddenly, upon arrival in Miami, circumstances forced what had once been pro-Batista and anti-Batista political opponents into a strategic all-or-nothing alliance. Batistiano pariahs became anti-Castro refugees’ political advocates, employers, and even friends.25 Thus, it is not surprising that subsequent contradictions underlying Cuban identity in the United States have an amnesiac quality to them, as well as a logic of their own. One of the best examples of this emerged during a 1996 interview that pop music superstar Gloria Estefán gave to People magazine. Proudly, Estefán proclaimed her father’s work as a “security officer for President Fulgencio Batista,” a characterization that glossed over batistiano security officers’ well-earned reputation in the 1950s as a death squad responsible for the disappearance and torture of hundreds of urban middle-class activists.26 Later, the article went on to say, Estefán’s father “served as a tank commander in the disastrous 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion but was captured and jailed in Havana” until his release in
1963. Adding weight to Estefán’s sanitized account of the batistiano beginnings of exile activists like her father, People featured a circa 1959 photograph of “Little Glorita” sitting on the lap of her father with a quote from Estefán that read, “The poor thing had a rough life.”

In fact, Cubans of this early period of emigration preserved the principle of pragmatism on which they based the fusion of their forces against Fidel and the Revolution. This was the presumption that they were not coming to the United States to stay, but only to live—for a while. In their own minds, they were visitors to the United States who were merely awaiting the inevitable: the fall of Castro and the collapse of a sovereign revolutionary state before the economic and political power of a country whose government and businesses had manipulated the island’s political possibilities since 1898. Rejecting the term immigrants, they became exiles. To claim otherwise would have been to admit defeat.

According to Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a brilliant literary critic who is commonly seen as a spokesperson for Cuban identity in the United States, the forerunner of that identity can be found in the relationship between Ricky Ricardo, played by Cuban actor Desi Arnaz, and Lucy, played by Lucille Ball, in the 1950s U.S. television sit-com I Love Lucy. However, as Max Castro has pointed out, I Love Lucy, like Pérez Firmat’s analysis, tends to represent Cubans’ historical encounter with the United States as “collusion” rather than “collision,” a comic love story rather than dramatic tragedy. This love-story version of Cubans’ construction of their identity in the United States refuses to see any conflict between Cubans and Americans and erases half a century of direct U.S. military interventions that impeded a less radical process of political change in Cuba by providing unconditional backing to conservative political elites and a string of violent dictators. Indeed, Pérez Firmat’s analysis reproduces the tendency often observed among many older Cuban exiles who want to primordialize the origins of their identification with the United States to a time before 1959. Such views obscure the roots of Cuban exiles’ construction of their identity through the lens of an exceptional moment in history: the 1959 Revolution itself. They also bury the imperialist history of the U.S. role in Cuba and deny the fact that anti-imperialism and socio-economic critique rather than love for the United States defined Cuba’s political culture long before 1959. As Luis Aguilar has shown, open espousal of a central role for the United States in Cuban affairs spelled certain doom for any one of Cuba’s dozen or more political parties or their representatives by 1940.

In 1959, Cuba became the first country in Latin America whose revolutionary state ignored dictates of the U.S. State Department, nationalized all U.S. properties, and abandoned the upper and middle classes in favor of poor constituents. Between 1959 and 1961, repeated efforts at U.S. mediation, intervention, and a CIA-sponsored military invasion at the Bay of Pigs ended in
failure. Essentially, the secondary, post-batistiano, wave of Cuban refugees was the product of that unprecedented failure, just as subsequent waves of immigration from Cuba can be seen as a product of the failure of U.S. policies to isolate Cuba and destabilize its government.31 Ironically, together with the safety valve of immigration itself, U.S. policies of continuing to isolate Cuba appear to have had the opposite effect, bulwarking rather than weakening the legitimacy of the Castro-led government for those who do not leave.

In a sense, then, Cuban exile identity as originally conceived and continually articulated by exile leaders can be understood to derive from the exceptionality of these multiple failures. At a time when massive movements calling for political change and economic redistribution were exploding across the hemisphere, Cuban exiles represented the only pro-U.S. elite of Latin America whose loyalty to U.S. interests and opposition to social change in their home country went unrewarded. While the United States invested billions of dollars in preserving the power of other elites from El Salvador to Chile, Cuban exiles in Miami were out of power in Cuba, despite their quintessential absorption of U.S. ideals and support for U.S. power. For many early exiles, this left an abiding sense of injustice tinged by betrayal. They were not only ideal Latin Americans but ideal Americans. As Haynes Johnson, a CIA agent who trained Cuban exiles for the Bay of Pigs invasion put it, “They were proud of America . . . and they liked to compare themselves to Americans. . . . ‘We even look more like Americans than other Latins,’ they would say proudly.”32

Nearly four decades later, such distinctions were no longer necessary for such right-wing exiles as Florida State Senator Mario Díaz Balart: “I consider myself 150 percent American. But I am also 150 percent Cuban. That’s not a mutually exclusive thing.”33 Lying at the heart of Díaz Balart’s deceptively simple statement are at least two related ideas: first, being in the United States makes one more authentically Cuban than living in the fraudulent, Communist-contaminated form of Cuba that Fidel Castro represents; second, championing U.S. interests and the historical effects of U.S. interventionism in Cuba’s political process is necessary to creating the kind of free Cuba that the most vocal exile leaders and the U.S. government would like. In the construction of an identity articulated as “150 percent American, 150 percent Cuban,” neither imperialism nor anti-imperialism has any place at all. In this regard, it is arguably the case that most Cuban exiles received greater private and public assistance when they arrived in the U.S. than any other immigrant or refugee group had historically. However, exile culture and politics has long denied this, just as it has denied the failure of hard-line U.S policies toward Cuba.34 Against this backdrop, Cuban exiles’ fight to control and determine the fate of Elián González makes the most sense, as does Mario Díaz Balart’s statement: the United States’ historical generosity toward Cuban exiles is matched, if not surpassed, by their worthiness as uniquely qualified, “Americanized” recipients.
For many observers, support for Elián’s right to stay closed the ranks of the Miami Cuban community more tightly than ever before in recent memory, possibly by pushing younger Cubans or those with dissenting views on hard-line policies into greater degrees of self-censorship or outright support for exile traditions of denial. Certainly, the climate provided exile leaders of the far right with the legitimacy to inject radical ideas into the discursive mainstream. Thus, the Elián billboard, above one of Miami’s main expressways, featured side-by-side images of Hitler, Stalin, and Castro, each accompanied by a small child, the last of whom was Elián. An English-language heading at the top read, “A Crime Against a Child is a Crime Against Humanity.” Clearly directed at non-Spanish-speaking drivers who might support a more nuanced view of Castro and Elián’s return home, images like this one redefined the criteria for membership in the self-righteous, authentic nation articulated in Miami according to the litmus test of supporting the campaign for Elián’s right to stay. It implied that Cuban exiles who supported this right were more ideologically American than Americans, that is, antiCommunist, antifascist, as well as more essentially good because of their historical identity as Cubans and their genuine, continuing moral crusade against such forces for the sake of humanity.

Protestors on behalf of Elián echoed these views daily. Not only were Miami Cubans more authentically Cuban than island Cubans, they were more authentically American than U.S. officials or any other American who supported or worked for Elián’s return. Thus, they represented another nation, one that stood alone in its ideological and moral purity. For example, during the final month’s standoff between the González family in Little Havana and the federal government, exile protesters frequently accused U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno of being Fidel Castro’s lawyer and declared President Clinton a Communist dupe. Convinced of the rightness of their cause, protesters often seemed oblivious to their own moral hypocrisy in conversations with reporters. For example, one man blamed “the tyrant” for keeping his two sons in Cuba, while explaining that he had left them behind in order to make a life for himself in the United States. Another proudly proclaimed that her daily prayers for Castro’s death would one day come true.

Standing in his fenced yard before protestors, Elián himself could survey signs reading “Would you send your child to Hitler?” and “Clinton is Castro’s Monica Lewinsky.” The same day Elián absorbed these messages, a group of men entertained fellow protesters with an effigy of Fidel Castro in fatigues, wearing a stuffed bra and smoking a cigar. The images were a thinly veiled reference to the fact that the U.S. lawyer for Elián’s father, Gregory Craig, had also served as President Clinton’s attorney during his impeachment proceedings for having had a sexual affair with White House intern, Monica Lewinsky.

After the INS’s seizure of Elián from his uncle’s home on the day before
Easter, emphasis on the moral dimensions of Miami Cubans’ cause to save Elián from Hitler, the devil, and other ideas associated with Castro intensified. For example, a few days before the raid, demonstrators stabbed a dummy of Fidel Castro with Cuban flags and ripped off its head. On the day of the raid, one protestor carried a large crucifix of a male doll that declared President Clinton responsible for crucifying Elián. Through both word and deed, protestors performed the idea that they were not only better qualified than U.S. officials to interpret and defend the sanctity of not only U.S. law and democracy but also of notions of common decency and sexual morality. They represented a nation apart and above the one they were in.

The rationality behind this point of view comes from the fact that Cuban exiles do enjoy a history in the United States of being apart from every other immigrant group and, when politically convenient, above the law. Thus, U.S. exile groups connected to the CIA and other U.S. federal agencies committed to subversion in Cuba have consistently managed to prevent the perpetrators of political crimes against Cuba, such as airline bombings, sabotage, arson, and assassinations from being prosecuted in U.S. courts, often by manipulating the legal system and relying on the political will of exile officials in Miami. As early as January 2000, current members of anti-Castro paramilitaries who were long considered responsible for such atrocities were applauding the Elián effect on other Miami Cubans. “People had grown distant from the cause,” Emma García, security director for the terrorist group Alpha 66, remarked. “Time has passed. People had lost their will, their enthusiasm. Now people are fighting shoulder to shoulder.”

For nearly forty years, U.S. law has equated Cubans’ decision to leave the island with collective acts of political protest to state oppression, rather than with class interests or the individual will to aspire to a materially comfortable life in the United States. The latter desires apparently only motivate Haitians, Mexicans, and other illegals, but not Cubans, or so the logic of U.S. policy seems to imply. Significantly, Elián’s mother had clearly staked his future on this history of Cuban exceptionality when she paid an estimated $2,000 to the rickety motorboat’s captain and climbed aboard in November 1999. The group that left Cuba that night planned to take advantage of the Dry Foot Law, the latest extension of a policy of exemption that has allowed Cuban exiles refuge and automatic residency in the United States since the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966.

Not surprisingly, then, Elián’s Miami relatives consistently brandished the idea that their status as Cuban exiles endowed them with special rights in the U.S. legal system, a position they pushed to a degree not articulated before. Thus, when Elián’s U.S.-born cousin, Marislesis González, testified before Congress on the horrors of brainwashing to which Elián would be subjected if he were returned to Cuba, Florida’s Republican Senator Connie Mack, a long-
time beneficiary of exile votes and financial contributions, responded with an unprecedented legal solution: she proposed a bill to confer U.S. citizenship on the boy. Had the bill been approved, Elián González would have enjoyed an honor only previously bestowed on figures such as Winston Churchill after World War II. In practical terms, however, such an act would have disqualified his father’s rights to him in Cuba, and stepped far beyond the traditional privilege of granting Cubans legal status as soon as they arrive in the United States.47

In response, U.S. Representative Alcee Hastings, an African American leader of the Congressional Black Caucus, fired back with a counter proposal: Why did the U.S. Congress not also consider conferring permanent residency rights on a motherless six-year-old Haitian girl in his district with a similar story as Elián’s? If anything, the girl’s plight was worse: not only did she face automatic deportation to Haiti, but the absence of anyone in Haiti who could claim her.48 Alcee Hastings’s rebuke found no resonance among Elián’s supporters in Miami, although it did serve to highlight how U.S. Cold War policies that spawned the privileging of Cubans over other refugees were not just classist but also racist, a fact not lost on Miami’s black community.49

After the INS raid returned Elián to his father, Elián’s Miami relatives continued to pursue their case only to find out that the U.S. government not only disagreed with the merits of separating the boy from his father but, in fact, with the very fundamental truth that Cuban exiles had always taken for granted—their own history of having fought for special treatment and protection from U.S. law and of having won. In June of 2000, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that “Communist re-education and indoctrination are not necessarily ‘persecution’ as defined in U.S. asylum law.” Therefore, the INS was not obligated to consider such possibilities when assessing Elián’s application for asylum.50 According to dominant exile notions of what it meant to be Cuban in America, the court’s ruling violated and betrayed everything that their identity stood for, especially their commitment to anticommunism and unconditional support for policies that would seek the defeat of communism wherever it might be found. As such, the ruling represented a direct assault on the nation they had been building in Miami and that now had to defend itself as much from Havana as it did from Washington.

One Nation Under God:
The Campaign for Elián as Moral Crusade to Defend the “Real Cuba”

“I was born here because of Fidel Castro,” Alberto González, a twenty-seven-year-old college student whose parents came to the United States in 1962, told the New York Times. Like dozens of other U.S.-born Cubans, Alberto was keeping vigil one night outside Elián’s Miami home. “There are bodies on the
bottom of the ocean floor. There is a history of death. And no one seems to care." In similar terms, Joe García, executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation, described Cuban exiles’ unique historical mission: “Here in Miami, Florida, communism is still alive. We have victims that wash up on our shore almost on a daily basis. The Cold War didn’t end for us. We’re still . . . people are still dying for that pursuit of freedom. It may have ended for America and we may want to move on, but it didn’t [end] here.” Similar to Mario Díaz Balart’s statement about being “150 percent American and 150 percent Cuban,” the legitimacy of García’s contentions hinge on long-inscribed exile memories of betrayal by the Democrat-led government of John F. Kennedy during the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Traditional exile analyses of the Bay of Pigs conclude that Cuban exiles know more than Americans do about fighting for freedom because the exile invaders fought bravely against Castro, even as the United States withdrew its critical promise of air support. Based on a counter-factual interpretation centered on the idea that Cubans would have rallied en masse to the cause of the invaders if the United States only destroyed Castro’s air force, these accounts dismiss the popularity that Fidel Castro and the Revolution enjoyed in Cuba at the time and ignore the primary element that made the cause of the invaders illegitimate among island Cubans to begin with, regardless of Castro: that is the fact that the invaders were not only CIA-trained supporters of the socio-economic status quo in Cuba, but that most of them were also former supporters of the thoroughly discredited Fulgencio Batista. Nevertheless, the counter-factual heroism that shaped exile views of the Bay of Pigs and its pivotal role in the Cold War remains critical in cultivating adherence to the cause of the “real Cuba” as a moral, mystical crusade.

Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of this emerged in conceptualizations of Elián as a mystic. Laced with allusions specific to Cuban culture, some exiles’ associated Elián with the miraculous, legendary appearance of Cuba’s Virgin of Charity to three Cuban fishermen during a storm at sea in the 1620s. Rumors, protest strategies, and religious belief soon conspired to render the idea that the cause of keeping Elián in Little Havana and his deliverance to the Miami Cubans signified a divine mission supported by God. Early examples of this view emerged during the visit of Elián’s two Cuban grandmothers to Miami. Amid protestors’ usual chants of “Freedom! Freedom! . . . Elián, Miami is with you” outside the González home, protestors posted a sign reading “3 kings, 3 children: Moses, Jesus, and Elián.”

By March, the Catholic Church, which took an officially neutral position, contributed to the fervor by leading thousands in forming a human cross in Little Havana as priests read from the Bible and led supporters in prayer. After reading about Roman Emperor Herod’s plan to murder the baby Jesus, Auxiliary Bishop Agustín Román directly compared Elián’s rescue by his mother and
stepfather from the clutches of Castro to Jesus’s rescue from Herod by Mary and his foster father, Joseph. “Open the door and protect him from the people who want him for bad things,” the Miami Herald quoted Román as saying. Mothers Against Repression, a group normally known for intimidating moderate exiles by holding all-night prayer circles in front of their homes, also led prayer circles for Elián. Even Cuban exiles who were not Catholic or even Christian participated in the discourse of a divinely sanctioned role for Elián, and by extension, a divinely constructed identity for exiles. “Elián is the Moses of the year 2000,” one Jewish Cuban who was carrying the flag of Israel, told reporters. “This is a sacred child. . . . So the flag of the Holy Land is appropriate here, because this street is holy land.” Another protestors explained why he had not taken a U.S. flag to demonstrate: “I didn’t bring the U.S. flag because that is a damned symbol of corruption. That’s Clinton’s flag.”

Eventually, visions of the Virgin Mary herself began to appear. The most famous sighting occurred after the employees of a Little Havana branch of Totalbank noticed a luminous, oily smudge on the window near the entrance. As word of the vision spread, the window became a shrine, and the bank had to close its doors. Soon, Miami Cuban families in SUVs started arriving at the bank-shrine, fully equipped with camcorders. Women rubbed their babies against the window pane for good luck. Others scrubbed the smudge with paper towels to see if it would fade. Meanwhile, the spokesman for Elián’s Miami family declared that “All signs are good signs” and emphasized both his client’s and their lawyer’s strong religious beliefs. Later, an image of the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe appeared on a mirror in Elián’s room, prompting protestors who were keeping vigil outside the home to wave increasingly ominous signs: “Elián is Christ. Reno is Lucifer. Castro is Satan.” As tensions over the case increased and the Miami relatives’ legal victory grew unlikely, religious views of Elián gained both currency and normalcy. As one supporter of keeping Elián in the United States expressed in an online post to Miami’s El Nuevo Herald, “This whole scene is reminiscent of what the atmosphere must have been like when Jesus was taken to be crucified. All the machinery of the state moved inexorably to that infamous conclusion, and the majority of people cheered the whole process.”

For students of Cuban history, the idea that a group of Cubans would conceive their defense of the nation as a divine mission or the founder of that nation as semidivine (in this case, Elián) could not have been surprising. Historically speaking, it may be nearly impossible for any community of Cubans to collectively imagine a nation not inspired and directed by a divine force. Reasons for this can be found in the foundational work of José Martí, the most influential ideologue of Cuban independence and nationality. In his writings and speeches, Martí often strategically laced his own appeals for Cuban nationalism in divinely sanctioned, highly moralistic, and Gospel-inspired terms.
Similar invocations can be found in the earliest nineteenth-century expressions of Cuban nationalism. Jose Martí merely channeled them into a broader moral vision for a republic that would ideally include all and represent the interests of all equally. In the early twentieth century, the depiction of Martí himself as a Cuban messiah became commonplace among all sectors of the Cuban population, from anarchist workers to members of Congress, from the high literary elite of Havana to provincial Communist craftsmen in Oriente. Moreover, by 1921, public commemorations of the birth of Martí and the ascription to Martí alone of the title of “Apostle” was mandated by law. Even after 1959, when the revolutionary state officially adopted atheism and rejected all forms of religion as false consciousness, Cubans who descried the Revolution as well as those who defended it did so through a highly religious discourse in which Fidel was either a Christ-like redeemer or a devilish pariah.

Thus, rumors of Castro’s demonic intentions toward Elián carried great historic weight in legitimating the vision of a new, more authentic Cuba among his Miami supporters. If Elián had become the incarnation of Jesus or Christ’s own messenger, then Fidel was the Cuban anti-Christ and U.S. officials his willing conduits of evil. Importantly, though, the terms in which believers articulated these rumors did not engage typical Catholic notions about evil but white Cuban stereotypes about the black Cuban religion of Santeria. Traditionally demonized by Cuba’s white elites since the early days of the twentieth century, black practitioners of Santeria, for decades before the 1959 Revolution, were regularly arrested (and occasionally lynched) on the charge of abducting and cannibalizing a young white child. The fact that evidence for these crimes never appeared did not stop either the prosecution of blacks on such charges or the repetition of similar cultural patterns in discrediting Santeria even after the Revolution.

During the Elián affair, many of these racist understandings of blackness and African-derived religion resurfaced as iconic evidence of Fidel Castro and the Revolution’s intrinsic evil. Some Miami Cubans claimed that a Santeria priestess had warned Fidel that he would one day be overthrown by a child who had been saved by dolphins at sea. Some (including Elián’s own great uncle Lázaro González, according to a Catholic nun close to the Miami family) believed that Fidel only wanted the child back to use him in a Santeria sacrifice, despite the fact that Santeria has never involved the use of human victims. Others suggested that returning the child to Cuba would allow Fidel to diffuse Elián’s negative spiritual potential on the revolutionary state. At the time, my uncle, who is a doctor in Miami, told me that several of his patients claimed that Castro’s black bodyguards were planning on using Elián’s testicles to remedy their leader’s sexual and political impotence.

Curiously, however, it was not only Catholic Cuban exiles, who were disdainful of Santeria, blackness, or both, who contributed to the rumors. Some
practitioners of Santeria in Cuba themselves legitimated the idea of Elián’s divine mission on Earth, albeit for entirely different reasons. “He is the chosen one, I’m sure about that,” Victor Betancourt, a babalao in Central Havana, exclaimed to a reporter for the New York Times, although he did not specify about exactly what Elián might have been chosen for. Another Havana Santero questioned Elián’s predestination; however, he also conceded that the boy “brings well-being wherever he goes” and went so far as to suggest that Elián might want to consider training and a full-time career in Santeria upon returning to his island home.69

The testimony of these black island Santeros provide just a taste of the extreme differences between the ideological perspectives underpinning perceptions of what makes up the “real Cuba” in Miami versus those perceptions that might exist among Cubans on the island. Indeed, if exile leaders believe they can export the alternative Miami version of the “real Cuba” to the island after Fidel dies and the Revolution as he defined it ends, they may be deceiving themselves as much as those Miami Cubans who believed in the power of Elián’s semidivinity to topple Fidel.

**Conclusion: The Fate of the “Real Cuba” post-Fidel**

If Elián González provided Cuban exile leaders the chance to promote their official vision of what Cuba is and has been since 1959, as well as what they considered it ought to be, the fight to keep Elián in Miami represented something much more important for those Miami Cubans who supported that fight: it represented the chance to dramatize the building of a “real Cuba” in the United States. This Cuba would not only be free of Fidel Castro but also free of the legacies of Cuba’s neocolonial history and the Revolution’s nationalist goals and socialist policies; this “real Cuba” of Miami annulled memories of half a century of U.S. military occupations, political interventions, and corporate domination in Cuba as irrelevant. It alleviated the need for any discussion of the negative effects that such a history might have had on either Cuba’s past prospects for democracy or the viability of such a goal in a Fidel-free future. At the same time, keeping Elián gave his Miami Cuban defenders the opportunity to gloss over the fact that leaving Cuba makes it easy to fight Fidel Castro on safe ground. Rather than confront Fidel Castro, the Cuban military, and the potentially broad popular legitimacy that the Revolution may still hold among millions of Cubans in Cuba, fighters for Elián used the symbolic realm of words to perform a narrative of Miami Cuba’s greater authenticity and purer political morality vis-à-vis Communist Cuba.

Ironically, though, by building and displaying the elements that make up their alternative better Cuba in the United States, Elián’s Miami defenders may have clearly demonstrated that their fight and their vision of Cuba had little
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place in Cuba at all. As this essay shows, the struggle for Elián revealed that many U.S.-based and exile-Cubans’ believe that their primary battlefront is located in the United States. By keeping Elián safe from Communist Cuba, the Revolution, and the role of U.S. imperialism in shaping both, citizens of Miami’s “real Cuba” conceived themselves as shock troops in the battle to keep the United States safe as well—not just from Revolutionary Cuba, but from Americans’ own naïve desire to put U.S. immigration law and respect for sovereignty before the chance to humiliate Fidel Castro and defeat communism on the moral plane.

Today, Cuba and Cuban Miami are both very different places than they were at the time of the Elián affair. In part, Elián himself is the reason: having lost the battle to keep him, Cubans in Florida made sure to punish the Democrats in the 2000 election by refusing to vote for Al Gore. Voting for George W. Bush by large margins in a swing state that had formally gone Democrat in the previous presidential elections not only put Bush in office, it also ensured that the Bush administration would implement the Cuban American National Foundation’s fervent demand for an end to the kind of person-to-person exchanges that defined U.S. policies of opening Cuba up to U.S. citizens in the Clinton era. By most measures, President Bush has served right-wing exiles’ agenda of reducing relatives’ remittances from the U.S. and all legal contact between U.S. citizens and U.S.-based Cubans themselves to a bare minimum since 2004. Not only have all U.S. university programs for study in Cuba disappeared, but family visits to Cuba have been severely restricted, from once every six months under Clinton to once every three years under Bush. This latter move angered those Miami Cubans who, unlike the exile elite, retained ties to Cuba precisely through annual travel there.

Indeed, whereas Bush officials claim that the Castro regime is feeling the pinch, Cuban citizens themselves seem increasingly convinced that George Bush and Fidel Castro are only concerned with preserving their own power among respective blocks of constituents, not the short- or long-term interests of the Cuban people. Moreover, as the Bush administration’s financial support for exile-directed dissidence has ballooned over the last two years (including an additional $80 million pledged this July), dissidents on the island confirm that such programs really only further the political and economic power of exiles in Miami, not the cause of change or transition on the island.

Nonetheless, as demonstrated by exile leaders’ pronouncements and the mass street celebrations in Miami that followed Fidel Castro’s declaration that he had transferred power to his brother Raúl Castro on 31 July of this year, belief in the “real Cuba” of Miami is not only alive but growing. Until the U.S. government under President Bill Clinton refused to bend to the will of Miami Cubans and fought to send Elián back to Cuba, Cuban exile identity had depended on the U.S. government’s willingness to confirm and advance the twin
myths of exceptionality. Briefly, as seen by Janet Reno’s public handling of the Elián case, the federal government abandoned the exceptionality myths and left Miami Cubans feeling betrayed, a process that catalyzed the articulation of an alternative nation among Cubans in the United States, one that exile leaders were only too happy to promote and defend for their own purposes. Since then, the Bush administration has essentially reinstituted the grounds for Cuban exceptionality and reinvigorated the official prestige accorded to Miami’s right-wing exile groups, a fact that can only impel the “real Cuba” envisioned in Miami forward.

Still, it remains to be seen whether exile leaders will be able to impose the values and vision of their “real Cuba” onto island Cubans, especially if they cannot count on the help of a U.S. interventionist force or the return of the million-plus Cubans in Miami, most of whom have no intention of leaving the United States permanently. Outnumbered by a ratio of ten to one with respect to the island’s population of Cubans, Miami Cubans represent a minority, not only in terms of the demographics of the United States but in terms of their political vision and understanding of identity on the island — that is, if they all suddenly returned. Their “real Cuba,” regardless of what exile leaders say, has arguably little to with the everyday experiences, aspirations, and agendas of islanders — for whom, potentially, the only “real Cuba” may exist on the island, not in exile.

Putting the possible views of island Cubans aside, the relevance of Miami Cubans’ vision of an alternative nation, which crystallized during the Elián affair, for Cuba’s contemporary and future prospects is twofold. First, the commitment to anticommunism that served as the essential core of the movement in defense of Elián derived from an even deeper conviction: that compromise and tolerance of dissent have no place in a new Cuba freed from the anti-imperialist moorings of its historical past and set adrift on the sea of Miami Cubans’ political imaginings. On the basis of this conviction, Cuban exile officials in Miami’s local and federal governments have mobilized constituents to condone, encourage, and reward actions of violent intimidation of other Cuban exiles as a means for silencing dissent as recently as the 1990s. When coupled with the claim often articulated during the Elián affair that true believers in the alternative Cuba should be above the law, such patterns of official behavior do not bode well for any future incorporation of Miami exiles into Cuba’s political or economic scene.

Second, just like the varied reactions that Cubans in Miami had to the Bush administration’s prohibitions on their right to travel to Cuba, the Elián affair also revealed how diverse Miami Cubans’ motivations for supporting Elián’s right to stay were. In particular, as argued at the beginning of this study, the campaign for Elián implied that living in the United States was, in itself, a
triumph. As a result, inclusion in the “real Cuba” did not require wealth, high
degrees of education, or any other measure of success. It did, however, imply
access to the kind of symbolic power exile leaders and long established Cuban
political traditions of messianism associated with being morally right. This
latter appeal, when couched in the language of capital and the lure of consump-
tion, might well prove the most powerful and difficult to resist if exile leaders
ever succeed in attempting to impose Miami’s version of Cuba on the island, a
society increasingly shaped by despair and long defined by scarcity.

Despite the fact that Elián is long gone, a microcosm of the Miami-vision
of the alternative nation of Cuba that activists once invited him to join still
remains in Little Havana. After Elián’s return to Cuba in July of 2000, Miami
exile leaders created a shrine and museum to Elián out of the González family
home, complete with a bronze statue of the boy playing in his front yard.
Jammed with religious artifacts complemented by multiple photographs of
Elián, the museum is largely devoted to icons of a different kind — symbols of
what one journalist dubbed, “American-style kiddie consumerism.” Literally
flooded with toys, his old bedroom also features a sign through which one
assumes visitors are meant to interpret the abundance of wealth that capitalism,
when tended and patrolled by true patriots, can provide. “A child sworn to
communism in U.S. soil,” the sign reads. “Your child may be next.”

And yet, once again, the museum’s contrasts between the spiritual and the
material reflect the very different meanings that Miami Cubans, many of whom
were born in the United States, ascribed to their participation in the Elián
protests and the hope they found in constructions of a “real Cuba” among
them. Flocking to the street demonstrations and stopping by his Little Havana
house on their way home from night clubs and the beach, thousands of young
Miami Cubans, who had never known Cuba, enthusiastically celebrated their
membership in the alternative Cuba their parents had created in South Flor-
ida. For some, participation in this imaginary Cuba that colonized U.S. terri-

Thus, it is hard to say what might happen next and what might become of
young Miami Cubans’ questioning of materialism versus exile leaders’ poten-
tial for promoting it if the “real Cuba,” for which so many Elián supporters
fought, ever actually arrives in Fidel’s (or Raúl’s) Revolutionary Cuba. How-
ever real Miami Cubans’ version of nation may be to them, islanders’ current
visions of nation or dreams of forging a new one are equally, if not more, real. A
clashing of perspectives on the order of that prompted by Elián can only be
expected.
NOTES

12. For example, see “ ‘We’re Taking You to Papa’,” *Maine Sunday Telegram*, 23 April 2000, 1; and “Cuban Boy Seized by U.S. Agents and Reunited with His Father,” *New York Times*, 23 April 2000, 1.
18. The first public condemnation of Díaz Balart’s active complicity on the part of Batista’s regime appeared in “Díaz Balart,” *Bohemia*, 18–25 January 1959, 99; for Díaz Balart’s own account of his dependence on Batista, see “Testimony of Rafael Lincoln Díaz Balart,” *Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary*, United States Senate, Eighty-
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20. Ibid., 189.
21. Ibid., 174–78.


34. Ibid., 62–154; for examples of Cubans’ special treatment, see García, Havana USA, 22–29.


36. Ibid., 261.


38. Ibid.

39. Alvarez, “Block by Block.”


49. On the question of how a history of racism among Miami Cubans affected their relationship to other sectors of Miami’s society and image during the Elián affair, see “Saving Elián”; García, Havana USA, 44; Levine, Secret Missions, 262.

50. Jay Weaver, “No Asylum for Elián: Court Dismisses Miami Family’s Appeal” and “The Saga of Elián,” Miami Herald, 2 June 2000, 1; 20A.


52. “Saving Elián,” Frontline.


54. Ibid. For an alternative analysis of the meaning and substance of Elián’s iconization as a religious symbol, see Sahlins, 186–93.


57. See photograph accompanying the article by Lynda Gorov, “Reno Meets with González Relatives in Miami,” Boston Globe, 13 April 2000, A34.


60. Laughlin, “Prayer Vigil Lifts Elián.”


64. Guerra, Myth of José Martí, 153–91, 223–53.


67. Laughlin, “Prayer Vigil Lifts Elián.”

68. Personal communication with Dr. Julián Rodríguez, 16 March 2000. My uncle supported Elián’s right to stay.


70. Levine, Secret Missions, 249–85.


76. Bragg, “Fiercest Lullabies.”