MIDDLE EAST REPORT, A POWERFUL COMMENCEMENT SPEECH, MISSILE DEFENSE, ERITREA, VIEQUES, INDONESIA, COLOMBIA, NADER AND THE GREENS, VICTORY FOR WORCESTER NURSES, LEONARD PELTIER, AND ELIAN GONZALEZ
The Legend(s) of Saint Elian

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The image of a beaming Elian Gonzalez reunited with his smiling father will stand as a memorable icon in the controversy surrounding the curious experience of this six-year-old child as the passionate battle for his custody continues. By now an international sensation with his picture in every home and shop window, Elian combines the pixellike aspects of a Peter Pan with the gnomic antics of an Irish Leprechaun. That he’s white and cute makes his case even more compelling for this society, since cute black kids from Haiti are obviously persona non grata. His image transcends the helpless mortal creature and has attained symbolic and heroic status on both sides of the Florida Straits. Yet it is ideology that transforms his wafflike image into an icon of power as both sides wrangle over the superiority of their moral and political positions. The offensive video image of a Republican representative of Florida wrapping Elian in the American flag was only the latest in a series of insults to Cuban national pride. Actually, the revolution’s diehard enemies make Castro look good by encouraging reflections on the revolution’s history and exposing themselves as diehard Batista-losers.

On the flip side of the Feds’ rescue operation, the photograph of the black-helmeted, bespectacled agent pointing his automatic weapon at the fisherman who rescued Elian and the terrified child in his arms will also constitute a major relic in some future pictorial archive. Janet Reno’s strategy was well-intentioned and probably necessary, but the conspicuous visibility of the assault weapon must delight the NRA, and underscores the USA’s continuing role in world politics as Top Gun. It seems as if the solution to every problem is looking down a gun barrel at a cowing enemy, a national ideal that tragically appeals to all age groups in our society.

In any event, the two images together will conjure up a bizarre moment in US-Cuban relations that can only assume mythic dimensions in the years to come. Already the photograph of the goggled-eyed INS agent has been labeled by protesters in Miami as an example of “Federal Child Abuse,” and when he is finally returned to Cuba guess what image will be featured in the kind of procession normally arranged for conquering heroes?

It is easy to predict that eons from now these two images will be venerated in sacred shrines dedicated to the memory of St. Elian, the focus of a worldwide religion that will have spread to the farthest reaches of outer space. Naturally, some doctrinal differences will characterize the religion in diverse regions of the universe. Let us imagine we are enabled by the miracle of technology to eavesdrop on the priestly oratory at the unveiling of the latest statue of St. Elian—a ceremony during which the origins of the new religion in the land known as Little Havana are recounted.

Long ago in a time known as the Information Age there was an uparoous showdown between Good and Evil, incarnated by the mighty divinities “Avuncular Sam” and “Infiel Castro,” who contended for world domination. The dwarfish antagonist to the South was no match for Avuncular Sam of the North and his mighty arsenal; but nevertheless, Avuncular Sam felt the threat from his puny rival in his gut. Avuncular Sam could not tolerate the least irritation so long as it offered an alternative to his volatile economic system.

Avuncular Sam’s struggle was abetted by noisy monsters and lesser deities, occupying the tiny independent land Little Havana within Sam’s kingdom, who battled the nasty colossus ruling over Big Havana ninety miles away in the deep blue sea. The struggle was complicated, however, by the fact that Little Havana and Big Havana were linked by ties of kinship and marriage and many families were divided between the two lands.

What had led to the original breakup was Infiel Castro’s attempt to transform his domain into a beautiful paradise. He began by sharing it equitably with his people, providing universal medical and health care and drastically reducing the infant mortality rate, decreeing low or zero rent for housing, offering free public education to attain universal literacy.

But those who owned the better part of the land resisted the sacrifices they were called on to make and fled from Big Havana to Little Havana where they uttered a mighty war cry and swore eternal vengeance against the hideous Usurper. Avuncular Sam, who spotted a singular opportunity to discredit his foe, welcomed them with open arms and took up their cause. The long years of relentless hostilities persisted without destruction of the Tyrant, causing great dismay in the ranks of Little Havana who hopelessly envisioned the struggle lasting for all Eternity.

Myth of the North

One day a group of discontented mortals tried to fly from Big Havana to their relatives in Little Havana with wings made of albatross feathers affixed to a frame with wax, but the blazing Florida sun melted the wax and they fell into the sea and were drowned. Miraculously, a bright-eyed child emerged out of the ocean riding on the back of a dolphin with the aim of bringing salvation to the beleaguered Little Havana. He told them there was no need to continue the fighting, that the Infiel Castro was willing to grant them peace in exchange for food and fuel to feed his people. The noisy monsters in Little Havana, belching forth fire and flames, suspected a trick and accused the mighty Infiel of using the child to advance his own interests. Little Havana’s sharp-toothed demons Lazarro and Marisleyssis kidnapped the child and claimed that he was being restored to his Rightful heritage in the Land of the Free and the Brave. The child, paraded before the multitude and showered with fun and games by the demi-gods, momentarily forgot his mission. When a mortal named Juan Miguel, claiming to be the child’s father, broadcast a plea for the return of the child, he was accused of harboring the sinister political beliefs of his Master, the Bearded Ogre of Big Havana.

Meanwhile, Avuncular
Sam’s right-hand goddess, Auntie Janet, whose tender heart was filled with compassion when she beheld the gallant parent, slipped out of her palace at early dawn in the disguise of an INS agent, and under cover of darkness entered the prison where Elian was confined and delivered him from his captors. A photograph taken after his rescue depicts a beatiﬁed tot held up for view by Juan Miguel, looking to all the world like the Christ child in the arms of a proud Saint Joseph. Haloed could be clearly glimpsed radiating above their heads. News of his delivery angered the Demons of Little Havana who promptly accused Avuncular Sam of renewing on his sacred principles and staging the photograph to appeal to Easter pilgrims. Avuncular Sam, who wondered what they meant, only chuckled when he heard this accusation.

In Big Havana, a ground swell of gratitude towards Avuncular Sam for rescuing Elian led to a revolt of the lesser gods against Jindel Castro and they wrested the Crown from the malvolent Colossus who was banished in humiliation to a remote section of Big Havana named Guantánamo. Then they offered to merge Big Havana with Little Havana, to Avuncular Sam’s great delight. This miraculous event elevated the child Elian into sainthood and the focus of the new religion named Elianism that now dominates the universe. Periodically, in his name, the upstarts rose up to vanquish anew the dread fourfold specter of Leftism, Castroism, Communitism, and anti-Capitalism. Bowing to the inevitable, Big Havana acknowledged its sins and was converted en masse.

Myth of the South

The Southern branch subscribes to a different story with the names of the protagonists changed to “Carbuncular Sam” and “High Fidelity Castro.” According to this version, the snatching of Elian backﬁred on Little Havana and revitalized the dormant dream of Big Havana by sparking a massive show of support in favor of its immediate return. Every day there were festivals and ceremonies conducted in Elian’s honor, and the people called upon the heavens to avenge Carbuncular Sam’s ruinous Big Havana policy, which had caused Elian’s plight. The crass materialism by which Little Havana tried to win Elian over was held up to ridicule as an example of Carbuncular Sam’s deﬁcient world view.

Meanwhile, frustrated Little Havana raised such a violent storm of protest that the earth trembled, the waters boiled in the seas, and the hills came crashing down. A powerful hurricane was unleashed that swept up the entire community at the peak of its fulminations and swiftly carried it across the sea right to the center of Big Havana. The rude impact so jarred their faculties that the dazed newcomers sustained almost complete loss of their collective memory of the post-1959 era, and the two groups reconciled under the aegis of the boy/saint to found a Reform Movement within Elianism. A confused Carbuncular Sam, pressed by the spread of the new religion, lifted the embargo against Big Havana and the dream of paradise was again restored. St. Elian was called upon to work his powerful charm and restore High Fidelity Castro to youth and vigor and the most exciting social experiment of the ancient period was ﬁnally realized. Although schismatic memories persisted and the different tales were retold again and again, the fourfold curse of Capitalism, Consumerism, Corporatism, and NRAism was completely routed, and Little Havana disappeared from sight to replace in legend the Lost Atlantis.

Speaking Out on the Innocence of Leonard Peltier

This letter appeared in the “Speakout” section of the Denver Rocky Mountain News on May 15. Glenn Morris is Professor of International Law and Politics at the University of Colorado/Denver, a member of the American Indian Movement, and an advisory board member of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, PO Box 583, Lawrence, KS 66044; 785/842-5774; <www.freepeltier.org>

In reporting the FBI’s latest campaign to defame imprisoned American Indian activist Leonard Peltier (April 22 article, “FBI ﬁghts to prevent a pardon for Peltier”), the Denver Rocky Mountain News repeated several factual errors and pieces of FBI misinformation that deserve correction. At the outset, it should be stated that Leonard Peltier has now spent 23 years in federal prison for crimes that he did not commit. His convictions are the charges that he murdered two FBI agents were secured through perjured affidavits and testimony, exculpatory evidence was concealed by the FBI, and a judiciary has consistently ignored truth and justice in the case. The respected human rights organization Amnesty International concluded that Peltier should be released immediately. Amnesty has been joined in its plea for Peltier’s freedom by Nobel Peace Prize laureates Nelson Mandela, the late Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Rigoberta Menchu, and Desmond Tutu.

In the article reprinted in the News, some of the scurrilous tactics of the FBI’s smear campaign were revealed when the FBI continued to suggest that Peltier had attempted to kill other police ofﬁcers in Milwaukee prior to the 1975 Pine Ridge Indian Reservation shootout that left one Indian and two FBI agents dead. The FBI omits the fact that Peltier was acquitted of all charges in the Milwaukee case. It also neglects to mention that the case was fabricated by two Milwaukee police ofﬁcers who set Peltier up, in their own words, to catch “a big one for the FBI.”

Today, given revelations in such cases as Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, the Los Angeles police department’s Rampant Divi-

sion scandal, and Denver’s own Mena case, we know that the capacity of police agencies (including the FBI) to railroad innocent individuals for political or racial purposes, is virtually boundless. As documented in Peter Matthiessen’s award-winning book, In the Spirit of Crazy Horse, the FBI attempted to conceal its own ballistics tests which excluded Peltier’s purported gun as the one that killed the FBI agents. Before the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, the US prosecutor admitted to the court that “we can’t prove who shot those agents.” Later, on CBS’ 60 Minutes, the same prosecutor, Lynn Crooks, defended his and the FBI’s conduct in the Peltier case, claiming that he didn’t think that “we did anything wrong, but I can tell you, it don’t bother my conscience one whit if we did.” Such is the nature of “justice” in the Peltier case.

Despite the FBI’s attempts to spread lies about Peltier and his trial, people of good will should examine the facts for themselves. Those who are persuaded by truth and justice will join the international call for presidential clemency.