

Cuba: On Cubans who spent time in
Atlanta Penitentiary

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sent by telephone via Miami (Elsie Cherry)

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Past week Cuba flooded with U.S. reporters including the television media. The occasion - an invitation from the Cuban government to come down and see for themselves just how the 201 Cubans who spent time in Atlanta Penitentiary and were deported to Cuba in the Spring of 1985 were living.

The riots among Cubans in Louisiana and Atlanta were set off when the U.S. and Cuba announced the renewal of the immigration agreement that had been suspended by the Cubans in May 1985, only six months after it was signed. The suspension came on the heels of a the inauguration of broadcasts by Radio Marti, a U.S. owned station which uses Cuban exiles and blasts its propaganda message into Cuba.

The Cubans at that time said they would not lift the suspension until Radio Marti went off the air. But accepting Radio Marti as a fact of life the Cubans finally agreed to the renewal of the agreement on November 20, 1987 which included a clause for further negotiations on the future of medium wave broadcasts from one country to another. In about a dozen interviews over a space of a week, Vice Minister of foreign Affairs, Ricardo Alarcon, said that if the negotiations do not lead to a solution, Cuba had the right to blast its own powerful radio signals into commercial broadcast frequencies in the United States. Castro told the U.S. media representatives the agreement.

When the Cubans got wind that the rioters and the Miami exile community were saying that any returned prisoners would be mistreated, tortured, sent to jail and maybe even killed, they were indignant. The invitation to the U.S. media was to set the record straight.

Alarcon told a reporter for one television network that only those deported Cubans who were convicted of crimes in the United States would have to serve out their sentences if they were deported to Cuba. He said "we have a moral duty to sanction those who were already convicted in the United States."

But Alarcon, who negotiated the renewal of the agreement in Mexico City on November 18, said those who had not committed crimes in the United States, although they had been taken out of prison here, would be free to live with their families, work and live a normal life.

Speaking of those more than 2500 Cubans who the United States would like to deport Alarcon said: "People are revolting there because they believe they will suffer terrible things here, that they will be coming to hell. I am not saying they are coming to paradise but certainly they are hnot coming to hell. The majority of the 201 who were sent back are leading a normal life. They will not be discriminated against or harassed."

Some U.S. journalists found their own deportees who had spent time in Atlanta penitentiary while most were taken by Cuban foreign ministry officials to interview others.

The story they go from most was pretty much the same. Those