

17 Arrive From Haiti And Cuba Together, But Fates May Differ

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Body

Seventeen Cubans and Haitians who joined forces and bought a boat for a voyage to the United States arrived in the Miami area over the weekend, the Border Patrol said today.

The seven Cubans and 10 Haitians told the authorities that they met in the Bahamas, pooled their money, bought a boat and made the eight-hour trip to Florida on Saturday.

The arrival of the group underscored how differently refugees from the two Caribbean countries are treated under United States immigration law.

To avoid deportation, the Haitians must prove they face persecution in their homeland. But Cubans, under a 1966 law granting refugees from the island special treatment, are automatically eligible for permanent residency a year and a day after they arrive in the United States.

Although Cubans who come from third countries like the Bahamas are not automatically eligible for entry to the United States, they are almost never sent back to their homeland.

'Let Them Stay'

"There's a definite disparity between Haitians and Cubans who have been arriving together for several months," said Rolande Dorancy, executive director of the Haitian Refugee Center, an advocacy group in Miami.

"They should let them stay," said Rolando Gonzalez, 27, one of the seven Cubans. "They've gone through as much trouble as we have."

Both the Haitians and the Cubans were released and ordered to appear before an immigration judge to explain why they should be granted asylum.

Four other boats intercepted this weekend carried either all Cubans or all Haitians, Mike Sheehy, a Border Patrol spokesman, said.

Border Patrol agents picked up the refugees from the Cuban-Haitian group and three of the other boats.

The agents interviewed two Bahamian crewmen from the fifth boat, which they believe smuggled in 4 to 10 Haitians, who got away, he said.

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Immigration authorities have said they are concerned about the growing use of the Bahamas as a launching point for alien smuggling and illegal entry into Florida.

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