

PRISONERS OF “COLOR”

Islas will dedicate a page in each issue to the Afro-Cubans' serving time in Cuba's penal system

NOTE: More than 80 percent of Cuban prisoners are citizens of color, black or mulattos. The best available data indicates that the penal population on the Island of Cuba oscillates between 80,000 to 100,000 inmates. Manuel Vazquez Portal, an independent journalist in Cuba, stated that “Being black in Cuba is like having a sign on your forehead that reads ‘Dangerous criminal’ ... In just one day you could land in jail a couple of times, simply because you’re black.”

Brief Biography of

Jorge Luis García Pérez *“Antunez”*

Jorge Luis Garcia Perez was born on a historical date, October 10th, 1964, ninety six years after Carlos Manuel de Céspedes made his famous Yara Cry proclaiming the independence of Cuba from Spain. The economic situation of his home and the delicate health of his mother forced him to study at the ESBEC (Basic Secondary Schools in the Fields) and the IPUEC (Pre-university School in the Fields), where his first political questioning about the Castro’s regime emerged, when he was able to read some articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. From that moment on he started to reject all the indoctrination that was taught in the school, and for that reason he was admonished in front of the professors and the staff of the school. Because of this situation, and the necessity to earn



money to alleviate the terrible economic situation of his family, Jorge Luis understood that his long kept dream of becoming a lawyer was vanished, so he began working in the most diverse and tiring

jobs, such as sugar cane cutter, construction worker and farm laborer. He was expelled from many of these jobs, just for expressing his political points of view against the dictatorship ruling his country.

By that time Jorge Luis started to be watched closely by the Cuban government, and after he spent six months working at the Cuban Atomic Plant at Juragua, Cienfuegos, he was fired as the result of an investigation carried out by the Ministry of Labor, which classified him as “disaffected to the process”. In the last days of 1983, while he was chatting with some friends at the 20th Anniversary Square in the city of Placetas, he said that Fidel Castro held sole responsibility for the death of 23 Cubans who died in combat with the US Army at Granada, and he was immediately beaten by agents of the so called National Revolutionary Police (PNR). He was taken from there to the Department of the State Security Police in Santa Clara, where he was released after being issued a “warning act”. But none of these intimidation and repressive acts stopped Jorge Luis’ will to express himself according to his beliefs. On March 15, 1990, while he was again at the same 20th Anniversary Square listening to an official radio transmission calling for the IV Congress of the Communist Party, he started to shout that “communism is an error and a utopia” and “we want and we need reforms like the ones performed in Eastern Europe”. He was immediately beaten by agents of the PNR and the State Security Police, who took him again to their headquarters in Santa Clara, where he was charged this time for “oral enemy propaganda”.

That is the way that Jorge Luis’ long and courageous history as a political prisoner began. In June of the same year,

being already held in the Provincial Prison of Santa Clara, he was sentenced to 6 years in prison, and for that reason he started a hunger strike that lasted 21 days. This was the first of a long series of occasions that Jorge Luis appealed to this action to protest against the innumerable and brutal beatings, locking in punishment dungeons without water or access to sunlight, and the uncountable offenses directed against his person because of the color of his skin. But none of these acts has broken the unbridled spirit of this young prisoner of conscience. On February 19, 1991 he declared himself as a Preso Plantado, refusing to wear the same uniform as the non-political prisoners and rejecting the so called “Communist Re-education”. Among the multiple actions of rebellion and protest made by Antunez, one which stands out above others is his escape from the Las Grimas prison, in Placetas, on October 17, 1992. In 1995, while he was held in the Kilo 8 Major Severity Prison, known by the nickname of “Se me perdio la llave” (I have lost the keys), he founded, among other prisoners of conscience, an organization called Pedro Luis Boitel Political Prisoner’s Movement, dedicated to denounce the terrible situation of the political prisoners inside Cuba’s prison and to promote the usage of civic resistance against the brutality of the jailers of the regime.

From birth, the life of Jorge Luis García Pérez (“Antúnez), a young man, member of the black race and from humble origin, has been marked by his commitment to freedom, and by the courage with which he has known how to defend it.