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## Immigration's double standard is an outrage

Sen. Connie Mack has arrived at the startling conclusion that U.S. immigration policy appears unfair in its disparate treatment of Haitian and Cuban refugees.

There's a real shocker. The Haitians have been getting shafted for only about a dozen years now. It's nice that somebody in Washington finally noticed.

Mack's moment of revelation came after two outrageous incidents made the double-standard impossible to ignore.

On July 7, a Coast Guard cutter intercepted a wooden sailboat packed with 161 Haitian refugees and two Cuban rafters, whom the Haitians had rescued at sea. The Cubans were brought to Miami, while the most of the Haitians were returned to Port-au-Prince.

Even the most cold-hearted bureaucrat could grasp the awful irony. To the Haitians on that creaky sailboat, the Cuban rafters must've seemed like kindred travelers — poor, like themselves, but brave enough to risk an ocean crossing in pursuit of a new life. Of course the Haitians would reach out and help; they shared the same dream.

Then with the interdiction came the bad news, and excuses: The Cubans get to stay because Cuba won't take them back. The Haitians have to go because Haiti will. So much for being good Samaritans.

### Chains of sorrow

News of the refugees' plight sent a crackle of anger through Miami's Haitian community. This time the discrimination was so flagrant — and the juxtaposition so sad — that politicians had no place to hide. How could one seriously defend a policy that welcomed Cuban refugees but rejected the Haitians who had saved them?

Last week, a new spark erupted. All it took was one stark, indelible image on television: Haitian stowaways, manacled and caged on the hot deck of a freighter.

It could've been a flashback to the 1800s, when slave ships sailed the tropics. But this was 1991 in Miami, Florida. The United States of America.

Where men whose only crime was to seek a better future were being locked in chains.

The five stowaways were removed from the freighter and brought to the Haitian consulate. Arrangements were made to send them home. When immigration officers arrived to take them to the airport, the Haitians cried and struggled and begged to stay. In the scuffle, one managed to escape.

Most of that, too, was captured on television. It was painful to watch.

But if you stayed tuned a little longer, you saw another kind of immigration story, one with a cheerier angle. A young Cuban baseball player named Rene Arocha had defected to the United States, slipping away from his teammates during a stopover in Miami.

Now Arocha was being hailed as a hero, wined and dined and fitted with a new Italian suit and a silk necktie. No manacles on his wrists, no INS agents at his side.

### Land of endorsements

Arocha told reporters that he throws a 92 mph fastball. He said he wants to play in the major leagues. One of his former coaches called him "the Dwight Gooden of Cuba."

Back home, Arocha led a more comfortable and privileged life than many of his countrymen. He was not a political activist, just a ballplayer with a good right arm. He didn't leave Cuba to escape persecution, but to seek fortune. He said lots of other players would love to do the same thing.

And why not? In America, a 92 mph fastball is worth millions of dollars. A Wheaties commercial can't be far behind.

That Arocha will be allowed to stay is a forgone conclusion. INS looks favorably on sports celebrities. It matters little that he isn't a true political refugee; neither was Ivan Lendl or Martina Navratilova.

Destitute Haiti, not having an abundance of tennis courts or baseball diamonds, doesn't produce many tennis pros or big-league pitchers. But it is a place that, like Cuba, produces many brave dreamers.

To favor some over others is more than an injustice. It shames this country, and all of us whose ancestors made the same journey.

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