A fishing boat with 161 Haitians and 2 Cubans as it was intercepted by the Coast Guard on July 7.

For Haitians, Voyage to a Land of Inequality

By ANTHONY DePALMA
Special to The New York Times

MIAMI, July 12 — Riding calm seas, with thunder crackling across a hazy night sky, 163 men, women and children jammed aboard a leaky Haitian fishing boat called Conail were 36 miles from Miami when they were stopped July 7 by the Coast Guard cutter Barano for border patrol.

Following procedures, Coast Guard officers ordered the people off the Conail and on board the Barano. Of the 163 people on board, 161 were Haitians trying to escape the grim poverty of their homeland. The other two were Cubans whose flimsy raft had been plucked from the water by the Haitians in a gesture of brotherhood.

What happened next has infuriated Haitians living in the United States, called attention to a double standard in United States immigration policy and further divided the collage of cultures that makes up the city of Miami.

The shipboard incident has reopened a longstanding dispute over the favored treatment that Cuban refugees have enjoyed in the United States since Fidel Castro came to power in 1959.

News Summary

A2

Oblituaries

D19

Weather

C10

Arts C13-16 Fashion B6
Bridge C16 Media D17
Dess C16 Op-Ed A19
Chronicle B18 Sports B7-12
Crossword C16 TV Listings C17
Editorials A18 Word and Image C16

Continued on Page A14, Column 1
For Haitians, a Risky Voyage to the Land of

Inequity

Desperate people on a leaky boat are at the center of a bitter debate.

34-year-old dietician in a food-service department who came from Haiti in 1979, several years before the United States began to intercept the boats. "Today is a different story. Today, if there are 10 Cuban people and 10 Haitian people looking for a job, they make the Haitians fill applications and then never call them. The Cuban people fill the applications and get all the jobs."

With the exception of the massive Mariel boatlift in 1980, Cuban refugees since the Communist takeover have generally managed to fit into the United States. In 1986 a Cuban-American organization, the Cuban American National Foundation, entered a special agreement with the United States Government in which it essentially handles Cuban immigration policy.

Some Cubans Sympathize

For the last three years, the foundation, with headquarters in Miami, has screened, selected and settled almost 8,000 Cuban "balseros," the name given to the desperate refugees who arrive in rafts, inner tubes, and anything else that floats onto the United States mainland. It was the foundation that, within a day of the arrival of the two Cubans on board the Conail, had interviewed them, located an aunt in New York and arranged for transportation and a job.

For most Haitians, the voyage to the United States is lined with fear and frustration. Those who are not turned away at sea are taken by immigration officials to the Krome Avenue Detention Center in Miami, where they can be kept behind barbed wire for months while their petitions for asylum are reviewed. Most are denied asylum and sent back home, but immigration officials said accounts of their fearful stays at Krome act as a deterrent to other would-be refugees.

After years of pressure from groups such as the Haitian Refugee Center, the

THE NEW YORK TIMES NATIONAL

TUESDAY, JULY 16, 1991

Cont. Page (3)
Government recently changed some of its immigration policies. Starting last January, Haitians caught trying to come into the United States illegally have been given more extensive interviews, lasting about 20 minutes instead of 5 as before, to establish their claims for political asylum.

Asylum for Lucky Few
In the 10 years before the change, some 23,000 Haitians were stopped as they attempted to enter the United States illegally, according to the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees. Of those, only eight were granted political asylum, even through the years when Haiti was ruled by the dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier.

Since the longer interviews were begun in January, 17 Haitians have been identified as eligible for asylum. So far this year, six or seven Haitian boats carrying about 800 people have been intercepted, as against 1,196 in all of 1990, before democracy came to Haiti, and 3,368 in 1989, according to the coalition.

Many Haitians find a bitter irony in the changes coming now that Haiti for the first time has a democratically elected Government under Jean-Bertrand Aristide. But though the incident aboard the Conail has angered Haitians in Miami because it reminds them of the unequal treatment they receive, the new Government in Haiti, six months old and still full of promise, fills the shops and streets of Little Haiti with hope.

"Haitians know that surviving in Miami is tough," said Rev. Thomas G. Wenski, the Creole-speaking pastor of Notre-Dame d'Haiti Parish in Little Haiti. "The community has gone through a tremendous amount of things to be frustrated about. But the people are still on a little bit of a high because of their hopes for a Democratic Haiti.

"If this is a country of immigrants, then why are some immigrants treated like princes and others treated like dogs?" asked Rolande L. Dorancy, executive director of the Haitian Refuge Center in Miami.