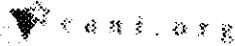


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TODAY'S CUBA NEWS:

The Miami Herald
March 10, 2001

People on run finding selves at home abroad with Castro

PAUL BRINKLEY-ROGERS

U.S. authorities seeking to arrest a Key Largo woman on kidnapping charges for taking her son to Cuba would be making history if they persuade Havana to send her back for prosecution.

Cuba has never returned any of the 77 federal fugitives the FBI says are enjoying Fidel Castro's protection despite demands from Congress that go back 30 years. Giving political asylum to Arletis

Blanco, the Key Largo woman, or to black radicals such as convicted murderer Joanne Chesimard — better known to her supporters in the United States as Assata Shakur — gives Cuba yet another opportunity to thumb its nose at Washington, U.S. officials say.

Blanco fled to Cuba in November with her 5-year-old, U.S. - born son and was indicted last month. In an interview in the Communist Party daily Granma, Blanco claimed she sought asylum because she uncovered an anti-Castro plot by her former employer.

She is wanted on a grand theft charge in Monroe County for allegedly stealing close to \$150,000 from McKenzie Petroleum, where she worked as an office manager. Company officials have denied her allegations.

Like Blanco, 52 of the 77 fugitives are Cuban-born. Sixty-eight are air hijackers. According to Dennis Hays, the former State Department Cuba Desk officer who heads the Cuban American

National Foundation's Washington office, there may be
``many more fugitives from state charges."

Once in Havana, many fugitives become fiercely outspoken advocates for Castro even as they eke out a living as tour guides, translators and entrepreneurs doing favors for the Cuban state.

"You could call this little community an ego booster for Castro," said a Washington official familiar with Cuban affairs. ``They are beyond the reach of American justice and Fidel loves that. But in reality, they are a sad, homesick bunch."

When the Cuban president spoke at a Harlem church last year during a visit to the United Nations, he was lauded for rejecting a request by Congress in 1998 to return Chesimard -- the aunt of slain rapper Tupac Shakur -- to the United States.

Patricia Wilson, a New York City-based member of one of several support groups, claims Chesimard is a victim of FBI ``terrorism" directed at the Black Panthers. Wilson said Chesimard did not fatally shoot a New Jersey state trooper after she helped hold up a bank in 1973. Chesimard staged a dramatic escape in 1979 from a maximum-security facility with the help of four friends who commandeered a prison van.

But New Jersey officials such as U.S. Rep. Robert Menendez, a Democrat, say she is an unrepentant murderer. ``She committed some very heinous crimes," Menendez said.

When former Gov. Christie Todd Whitman offered a \$100,000 reward in 1998 to ``anyone who assists in the safe return" of Chesimard, Cuba Foreign Ministry spokesman Alejandro González described her as a ``well-known civil rights activist."

CHANGE UNLIKELY

The cases of these renegades, who include former CIA agent Frank Terpil, an arms dealer convicted of weapons charges, and financier and indicted swindler Robert Vesco, have long been a major irritant to the United States.

Antonio Jorge, professor of economics and international relations at Florida International University, said the issue probably will not be resolved as long as Castro rules.

The Cuban leader, Jorge said, ``continually inveighs against

the American system -- the oppression of minorities, the exploitation of capitalism, imperialism. With these people he can prove that there are political dissenters in America.

"If he were to send them back it would mean he that he was surrendering to American imperialism," he said. There is no extradition treaty with Cuba.

Many of these Americans on the run are given a basic package: an apartment in Havana, ration cards, medical care, a wedding blessing, and sometimes e-mail privileges and the ability to make pro-Castro political statements at arts festivals.

Some have been in Cuba for decades. Puerto Rico hijacking suspect Luis Peña Soltren has been a fugitive longer than anyone else, according to the FBI. A warrant was issued for him on Dec. 5, 1968. It is not known what he does in Cuba.

STILL ON THE RUN

Some of the half-dozen former Panthers who hijacked planes -- often to escape prosecution -- are now senior citizens. Most of them speak Spanish, are raising families, and say they are still committed to revolution.

Former Panther William Lee Brent, now almost 70, shot two police officers and hijacked a plane in June 1969. He spent 22 months in a Cuban jail but was released to teach at a Cuban high school. He is married to American travel book writer Jane McManus, who is not a fugitive.

Nehanda Abiodun, 51, calls herself a "political exile." But according to the FBI, the former Cheri Dalton has been a fugitive since 1981 from charges she held up armored cars in the New York City area. She said in an interview last year she still regards herself as a Black Liberation Army soldier.

DEEPLY HOMESICK

Charlie Hill, a member of the separatist Republic of New Afrika, shot a police officer and hijacked a plane from Albuquerque 28 years ago. In Cuba, he is a translator. In a 1999 interview, Hill said he tunes his radio to sports events from the United States and acknowledged in a 1999 interview that he is deeply homesick.

Puerto Rico nationalist Guillermo Morales, 51, lost both hands when a bomb he was making in Queens, N.Y., blew up in 1978. He was convicted of weapons charges and

sentenced to 89 years in jail but escaped from a prison hospital and fled to Mexico. Mexico concluded he was a victim of U.S. political persecution and put him on a plane to Havana in 1988.

Morales has told interviewers he remains steadfastly "anti-imperialist." Cuba, he said, treats him with "dignity." Castro has asked the U.N. Decolonization Committee to declare Puerto Rico a colony.

Not all of the fugitives are treated warmly.

An air piracy agreement signed by Havana with the United States in the 1960s obliges Cuba to apprehend hijackers.

Tyrone Wong of San Francisco killed himself at a prison farm with a machete. Tony Bryant, a Panther who forced a Miami-bound plane to fly to Havana, was jailed and then expelled after complaining about prison conditions. After U.S. officials decided not to prosecute, he joined the Miami-based anti-Castro Commandos L.

Vesco fled to Havana in 1982 after allegedly stealing \$250 million from American investors and then helped the Cubans with high finance. But in 1996 he was sentenced to 13 years in Villa Marista prison -- the headquarters of Cuba's secret police -- for trying to market a miracle drug behind Castro's back.

Terpil, who allegedly supplied arms to Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, was placed under house arrest in 1995 after Cuba investigated his business. "Cuba could never completely trust a man like that," said FIU's Jorge. "He could embarrass Castro."

The FBI says it cannot discuss which suspects are thought to have most recently fled to Cuba. The bureau's fugitive list once included Panther founders Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver.

But other sources say newcomers may include more players on the international finance and arms smuggling scene who may be of use to Cuba as it struggles with economic distress.

They could include, for example, the dapper, Chile-born Carlos Remigio Cardoen, who is wanted on a warrant out of U.S. District Court in South Florida for exporting munitions without a license.

"Cuba is a rogue state," said a Washington official. "It is an ideal place to hide, or use as a base for illegal activities -- as long as you please friends in high places."

Rep. Menendez said sheltering fugitives enables Castro to claim he is protecting citizens of the country most critical of Cuba's human rights record.

Menendez and other members of Congress have made the fugitives' return a condition for ending the embargo. Castro is capable of bargaining the future of the fugitives, he asserts.

"With Vesco, it was a lot of money -- not politics. Castro is, at any given time, not beyond using these people to his advantage."

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Fugitives In Cuba Wanted by the FBI

Michael Finney(California)
Ralph Goodwin (Illinois)
Charlie Hill (Maryland)
James Patterson (Michigan)
William Palm (Missouri)
Theresa Grosso (California)
Clinton Smith (Cuba)
Richard Linares (Cuba)
John Marques (Louisiana)
William Brent (Cuba)
Oreste Bello (Cuba)
Cosme Iglesia (Cuba)
Barbara Alvarez (Cuba)
Ofelia Bernardo (Cuba)
Jose Bernardo Tunon (Cuba)
Ernest Ferrero (Cuba)
Fidel Rego Otano (Cuba)
Vincente Rego Otano (Cuba)
Nacasio Delgado (Cuba)
Miguel Sanchez (Cuba)
Ricardo Coro (Cuba)
Rosalino Rodriguez Cabria (Cuba)
George Wright Virginia
Jose Montero (Cuba)
Hector Ochoa (Cuba)
William Potts (unknown)
Mario Fonseca (Cuba)
Divaldo Rojas Reyes (Cuba)
Wilfredo Oquendo (Cuba)
Eduardo Salgado (Cuba)
Roberto Salgado (Cuba)
Carlos Arias Valdez (Cuba)
Marino Samon (Cuba)
Rolando Cadenas (Cuba)
Silvio Cabrera (Cuba)
Crecencio Zamora (Cuba)
Sergio Rojas (Cuba)
Juan Garcia (Cuba)

Robert Gracial (Cuba)
Ciro Granda (Cuba)
Santiago Guerra Valdez (Cuba)
Patrick Latortue (unknown)
Ramon Delgado (Cuba)
Hector Gonzalez (Cuba)
Victor Gerena (New York) Daniel Abad (Cuba)
Brian Wilson (Cuba)
Joaquin Babin Estrada
Joanne Chesimard (Cuba-United States)
Miguel Aguiar (Cuba)
Rogelio Leyva (Cuba)
Roberto Aguiar (Cuba)
Jose Caballero (Cuba)
Eduardo Jiminez (Colombia)
Gilberto Calero (Cuba)
Ambrosa Montfort (Georgia)
Robert Vesco (Michigan)
Luis Soltren (Puerto Rico)
Catherine Kerkow (Oregon)
Antajares Payano (Dominican Republic)
Ishmael Ali (Virgin Islands)
Cheri Dalton (New York)
Miguel Toledo (Cuba)
Nelson Molina (Cuba)
Rafaele Minichiello (Italy)
Felix Coolin (Dominican Republic)
Manuel Vargas Agueros (Cuba)
Armando Diaz La Rossa (Cuba)
Esmeraldo Ramirez Castaneda (Cuba)
Jose Garcia Sanchez (Cuba)
Pedro De Quesada (Cuba)
Rigoberto Gonzalez Sanchez (Cuba)
Ramon Martin (Cuba)
Jesus Armenteros (Cuba)
Gilberto Carrazana Y Gonzalez (unknown)
Donald Rider (North Dakota)
Francis Teroll (New York)