

PRISONERS OF COLOR

ISLAS WILL DEDICATE A PAGE IN EACH ISSUE TO THE AFRO-CUBANS SERVING TIME IN CUBA'S PENAL SYSTEM

In many countries people are detained for trying to exercise their rights of freedom of expression, association, assembly, or movement. Some are imprisoned because they or their families are involved in political or religious activities. Some are arrested because of their connection with political parties or national movements that oppose government policies. Trade union activity or participation in strikes or demonstrations are common causes for imprisonment. Often, people are imprisoned because they questioned their government or tried to publicize human rights violations in their own countries. Some are jailed on the pretext that they committed a crime, but it is in fact because they criticized the government. People who are imprisoned, detained or otherwise physically restricted because of their political, religious or other conscientiously-held beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, color, or language and who have not used or advocated violence are considered to be prisoners of conscience.

Augusto Guerra Márquez

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Political prisoner Augusto Guerra Márquez was born on November 2nd. 1964, in Havana's Poey neighborhood. Because his mother was his family's sole supporter, they were poor. She raised five children in a problem-plagued environment, and the hostile surroundings in which Guerra Márquez grew up got even worse, as he became older, and was drafted into Obligatory Military Service (SMO). This caused his negative attitude towards the government, and his cry for equality, safety and social justice, to get stronger, too.

Guerra Márquez became a pipe fitter, and is vice-president of the Neo-Catholic Party. He

preaches the word of God publicly and at religious ceremonies, and criticizes both the country's chaotic sociopolitical and economic situation, and its highest leadership. He sees the nation as a home for all Cubans, one that should not be abandoned. Government agents banned him from doing this kind of preaching.

Because this peaceful dissident is actively engaged in civic matters, he has suffered a great deal of harassment. He was detained on January 23rd, 2003, charged with contempt, and sentenced to one year in prison. A few months after having finished serving his sentence, he was newly detained, on July 7th, 2004,



Augusto Guerra Márquez

again charged with contempt. This time he was given a two-year sentence. After his release, he was arrested for a third time, on August 14th, 2006, and charged with assault, for which he was sentenced to six years.

After having done time at State Security's regular prison (Villa Marista), Guerra Márquez was moved to and from numerous high security prisons—1580, Toledo, Valle Grande, Combinado del Este, Kilo 5 1/2 and Kilo 8 (both in Pinar del Río) and Canaleta, among them. Guerra Márquez, whose *status* is that of a recognized prisoner of conscience, has maintained his dignity and coherence at all these institutions, and throughout all his years of politically motivated imprisonment. He refused to wear common, convict clothing (for which he was punished by depriving him of family visits for one entire year), and went on several hunger strikes. In his struggle to defend human rights, he includes his condemnation of

the violations and abuses perpetrated by jailers on common prisoners in Cuba.

He has been severely punished for his civil and political conviction, and his rejection of totalitarianism. Guerra Márquez has even had his genitals beaten. He has also been put in solitary confinement and subjected to invasive, full body searches. His punishment has also included receiving poor medical attention, being denied medications, being offered little and poor nourishment, and being forced to live in highly unsanitary conditions. He is currently at the Agüica prison (in Matanzas province) living in deplorable conditions characterized by even a lack of water, despite the fact that pig farm nextdoor has copious amounts of drinking water available. Guerra Márquez is now serving out a ten-year sentence at this prison, because on April 11th, 2008, he demanded better attention from the prison authorities. Their response was to convict him of assault and contempt, which added another four years to his original prison sentence. The last part of the document containing his charges states "that Augusto Guerra Márquez managed to climb onto a wooden desk...from which he shouted things like 'Down with Fidel!' and 'This is terrorism!'"

Guerra Márquez suffers from gastritis and a duodenal ulcer, all as a result of the physical and psychological abuse he has endured. He may have scars on his head and leg, but he is still relentless in his contestatory and pro democratic attitudes. Many other prisoners admire his conduct, as do other friends and compatriots who aspire to a free and prosperous Cuba where all Cubans can live together despite they differing political opinions, and without having to flee their homeland.