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Lawmakers' Cuba concerns are misplaced

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In Havana, the seven Democrats visited the families of the prisoners and came away inspired. The members of Congress raised concerns about human rights, lengthy prison sentences and the suffering on both sides of the Florida Straits.

One vowed to write a letter to first lady Michelle Obama, pleading to her sensibilities as a mother, wife and lawyer. Another called on compassion. This is the time, the members of the Congressional Black Caucus proclaimed.

If only the group had met with even one prisoner of conscience or one of the wives, mothers, daughters or sisters of the 75 independent journalists, librarians and human-rights advocates imprisoned in Cuba's "Black Spring" of 2003. They would have easily spotted the Ladies in White in Havana on Palm Sunday, walking in protest to raise awareness about their men's harsh sentences for daring to think outside the communist box of limitations.

ON HUNGER STRIKE

Or the seven could have traveled three hours from Havana to see the hunger-striking dissidents led by Jorge Luis "Antúnez" Garcia in Placetas. Or they could have asked to see Oscar Elias Biscet, a doctor serving 25 years in prison for following the peaceful resistance of Martin Luther King Jr.

Or what of the mothers of three young men who were tried in a day and killed the next by firing squad in 2003 for trying to hijack a ferry from Havana Harbor? No passenger was hurt, but that didn't stop the Cuban government from sending a swift and terrifying message to the country's Afro-Cuban masses.

But no.

The black U.S. lawmakers' concerns weren't for the 300-plus Cuban prisoners of conscience listed by Amnesty International or the hundreds of dissidents working from their homes under the watch of a totalitarian regime. Or the lack of civil rights in a country with a majority black and mixed-race population ruled by an overwhelmingly white gerontocracy.

Their angst was for the "Five Heroes," as Cuba's controlled media calls the Cuban government spies captured in Miami, including one sentenced for conspiracy to murder the four Brothers to the Rescue pilots killed by Cuban fighter planes in 1996.

Let's agree that basic human rights have to be upheld for enemies -- that's the very definition of justice.

Where's the justice in Cuba?

Certainly the Clueless Seven, led by Rep. Barbara Lee of California, didn't make a fuss about 50 years of the Castro brothers' rule, the human rights violations or the escalating and disproportionate number of black Cubans held behind bars. Indeed, Rep. Bobby Rush, a former Black Panther, could only show his empathy "for the suffering of political prisoners," as he referred to the five spies.

Just once, I'd like to see a delegation of muckety-mucks see the real Cuba. Sure, talk with *Tío* Fidel, as three of the Clueless reportedly did during their trip that ended Tuesday. But also go see opposition members, feel their pain.

Rep. Kendrick Meek, who was traveling the Panhandle Tuesday in his U.S. Senate bid, offered this wise analysis of his Black Caucus colleagues' "fact-finding" mission:

‘THREAT TO SECURITY’

"Political prisoners jailed in Cuba are held for peacefully expressing their rights and freedoms, like Dr. Oscar Biscet and Antúnez," he said. ``The Cuban spies held in the U.S. federal prisons were a threat to our national security. That's the difference between night and day."

Had the Clueless Seven removed the blinders they would have known it.

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