

Cleared murder suspect deported to Dominican Republic

By GUY STERLING

Newark man aided federal firearms investigations

A Newark man cleared of a murder conviction last week after spending more than 10 years in prison has been deported to the Dominican Republic.

Rene Santana, 40, was flown to Miami early yesterday, where he was scheduled to be put on another flight to Santo Domingo. He was escorted by agents of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

A judge in Essex County last week dismissed a 1976 murder conviction against Santana in return for his confession to supplying the guns that were used in the December 1974 killing of reputed numbers dealer Remigio Sanchez during an armed robbery at a Newark apartment.

After Superior Court Judge William Harth vacated the conviction and sentenced Santana to time served, Santana returned to Rahway State Prison to collect his belongings and was taken to the Passaic County Jail in Paterson as an INS detainee pending his return to his native land.

In January 1976, an immigration judge gave Santana three months to leave the United States voluntarily. But he could not leave the country at that time because he was being held in connection with the murder of Sanchez. The deportation order took effect in April 1976, a month before Santana's conviction.

In issuing his decision, however, the immigration judge noted that, during deportation hearings, officers assigned to the New York office of the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and the New York City Police Department had testified on behalf of Santana, saying he had helped their agencies in some investigations.

An ATF agent said Santana was "constantly endangering his life" in the work he was performing for the agency.

A letter the New York ATF office sent to immigration officials in June 1974 reported that Santana's work had resulted in the arrest of "three defendants" and seizure of a "quantity of illegal firearms." The agency added that it believed five other cases of illegal firearms sales in which Santana had been involved "will reach a successful conclusion in the near future."

According to his attorney at the immigration hearing, Santana was

brought to this country by the United States government following a revolution and U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in the mid-1960s. A letter that New York lawyer John Parilla wrote the INS in 1975 claimed Santana "was granted sanctuary by our armed forces" for his role in the leftist uprising that resulted in a change of government.

According to James McCloskey, the lay minister from Princeton who in-

vestigated Santana's conviction and worked to bring the case back to court, Santana was setting up a suspect for an illegal firearms sale "under the auspices of the ATF" when he was arrested for killing Sanchez.

McCloskey, who has voiced his belief that Santana played no part in the murder of Sanchez and told Harth that he provided the killers with the guns only to gain his freedom, developed evidence from INS files that a key wit-

ness at the trial had three charges against him dropped just before his testimony placing Santana at the murder scene.

That information was never turned over to Santana's defense lawyer. At an evidentiary hearing before Harth earlier this month that the inmate's lawyer hoped would lead to a new trial, an Essex County assistant prosecutor testified that the criminal record of a second state's witness also

had not been made available to Santana's trial counsel.

McCloskey reported raising \$1,200 to send to Santana "so he can start a new life down there." He added that it is the goal of his organization—Centurion Ministries, which works on behalf of prisoners who it believes are innocent—to help Santana return to the United States.

Santana, McCloskey said, "personally knows no one in Santo Domingo."

"His entire family, except his mother in Miami, lives in New Jersey and New York," McCloskey added.



Rene Santana
Vindicated after 10 years