What a Riot

Jamaica jails jumpin’

January 1, 1998

Condom handout at two Jamaican prisons last summer ignited a four-day gay-bashing spree, killing 16. Guards at Kingston General Penitentiary and St. Catherine District Prison went AWOL to protest anti-HIV giveaways that they viewed as an affront to their heterosexuality. Riots flared during the walkout, and convicts pegged gay were dealt fatal blows. The attempt by Corections Commissioner John Prescod to temper the spread of HIV in prison back-fired, police said, because guards and inmates alike were enraged by the insinuation of male-to-male sex. Authorities charged 25 prisoners with murder. Promising a thorough investigation, Prime Minister P.J. Patterson said that the guilty would “be dealt with to the full extent of the law.” If convicted, the killers could spend the rest of their lives in prison. Those condoms might come in handy.

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