

February 18, 2004

Charles R. Fulbruge III
Clerk

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

No. 03-50944
Conference Calendar

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff-Appellee,

versus

LEONEL LOPEZ-MERCADO, also known as Leonel
L. Mercado, also known as Eder Lopez-Mercado,
also known as Jesus Lopez-Valovinos, also known
as Ivan Lopez-Mercado,

Defendant-Appellant.

Appeal from the United States District Court
for the Western District of Texas
USDC No. SA-03-CR-53-ALL

Before HIGGINBOTHAM, EMILIO M. GARZA, and PRADO, Circuit Judges.

PER CURIAM:*

Leonel Lopez-Mercado appeals the sentence imposed following his guilty plea conviction of being found in the United States after deportation/removal in violation of 8 U.S.C. § 1326. Lopez-Mercado contends that 8 U.S.C. § 1326(a) and 8 U.S.C. § 1326(b) define separate offenses. He argues that the prior conviction that resulted in his increased sentence is an element

* Pursuant to 5TH CIR. R. 47.5, the court has determined that this opinion should not be published and is not precedent except under the limited circumstances set forth in 5TH CIR. R. 47.5.4.

of a separate offense under 8 U.S.C. § 1326(b) that should have been alleged in his indictment. Lopez-Mercado maintains that he pleaded guilty to an indictment which charged only simple reentry under 8 U.S.C. § 1326(a). He argues that his sentence exceeds the two-year maximum term of imprisonment which may be imposed for that offense.

In Almendarez-Torres v. United States, 523 U.S. 224, 235 (1998), the Supreme Court held that the enhanced penalties in 8 U.S.C. § 1326(b) are sentencing provisions, not elements of separate offenses. The Court further held that the sentencing provisions do not violate the Due Process Clause. Id. at 239-47. Lopez-Mercado acknowledges that his arguments are foreclosed by Almendarez-Torres, but asserts that the decision has been cast into doubt by Apprendi v. New Jersey, 530 U.S. 466, 490 (2000). He seeks to preserve his arguments for further review.

Apprendi did not overrule Almendarez-Torres. See Apprendi, 530 U.S. at 489-90; United States v. Dabeit, 231 F.3d 979, 984 (5th Cir. 2000). This court must follow Almendarez-Torres "unless and until the Supreme Court itself determines to overrule it." Dabeit, 231 F.3d at 984 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). The judgment of the district court is AFFIRMED.

The Government has moved for a summary affirmance in lieu of filing an appellee's brief. In its motion, the Government asks that an appellee's brief not be required. The motion is GRANTED.

AFFIRMED; MOTION GRANTED.