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# Freedom of the Press in Cuba from 2002-2013: Voices of Post-Revolutionary Exiled Cuban Journalists, Writers and Dissidents in the U.S.

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Freedom of the Press in Cuba from 2002-2013:  
Voices of Post-Revolutionary Exiled Cuban Journalists, Writers and Dissidents in the U.S.

Karen Anaya

An Honors Thesis  
Submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with honors in Communication Studies  
from Hamline University

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**Abstract:**

The role of media in any society is determined by the level of press freedom in that society. Freedom of the press can be best seen in the relationship between the government and mass media institutions. Since the end of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the Cuban regime has been criticized by organizations all over the world for allegedly limiting press freedom in the island. Despite the wide controversy, little is known about the state of freedom of the press in Cuban media in the last few years. This study set out to investigate the level of press freedom enjoyed in Cuba from the year 2002 to 2013 as well as any changes in policy in regards to this freedom in the same timeline. Through interviews with Cuban exiles living in the United States, it was concluded that there is a very limited amount of press freedom granted to mass media institutions. Additionally, it was concluded that no fundamental changes have been made to grant a higher level of press freedom.

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## Introduction

Media play a vital role in our society by disseminating information to help citizens form public opinions about issues that are deemed important to their lives. Freedom of the press is therefore a fundamental element in any democratic society that allows citizens to access information about their government, to scrutinize their roles and policies, and to hold government officials accountable for their actions. In other words, the level of press freedom in a society helps define the functions of mass media in that society. Freedom of the press can be understood by observing the relationship between the government and media institutions. While mass media in a democratic society such as the United States enjoy a high level of press freedom, mass media in a non-democratic society such as Cuba do not. Despite the close proximity of Cuba and the United States and a large Cuban population currently living in the United States, we know very little about the present state of Cuban media. No studies have taken place to shed light on the level of freedom of Cuban journalists in recent years amidst the increasing influence of the Internet and social media use; and there has been a lack of literature on this subject in the United States in the last decade.

This study sets out to investigate the level of freedom of the press in Cuba from the year 2002 to 2013. It aims to determine the level of freedom of the press in Cuba and any changes in Cuban policy regarding the exercise of this freedom. Through an extensive literature review and interviews of Cuban exiled journalists, writers and dissidents in the United States, the researcher seeks to create a baseline for future research on the subject. Finally, the Cuban media are discussed using the *Four Theories of the Press* (Schramm, Sibert, & Peterson, 1956) to help us gain insight into the rationale for the use of mass media by the Cuban government.

## Literature Review

### *Historical background- Post revolutionary Cuba*

The Cuban Revolutionary movement began in July 1953, led by revolutionary socialist leader Fidel Castro, who later took power from former Cuban Prime Minister, General Fulgencio Batista in January 1959. Fidel Castro came into power promising a democratic government opposite to Batista's dictatorship. At the beginning of Fidel Castro's rule, most Cubans saw Castro and his allies as heroes and praised the new government policy for liberating them from the repressive regime of Batista. However, soon after, he began to receive criticism not only from Cuban citizens but also from other countries for allegedly violating human rights and for not adopting a democratic type of government as promised but rather a socialist type of government. Human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Freedom House, which monitor press freedom worldwide, suggest that freedom of the press, have and still are denied to the people of Cuba<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, there are numerous testimonies and letters from exiles, political prisoners, and independent journalists talking about repression in the island (Amnesty International, 2012; Cavanaugh, 1997; Cragg, 2003; Fainstein, 1996; Hilton, 2003; Penton 2010).

Raul Castro, Fidel Castro's younger brother, officially took power in 2008 due to Fidel Castro's worsening health condition. Like his older brother, now President Raul Castro has received criticism for allegedly continuing to legally pursue any Cuban citizens who are publicly critical of the administration and of the government's public policies (Amnesty International,

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<sup>1</sup> See Amnesty International, 2012; Annual Report on Cuba 2013, 2014; Annual Report on Cuba 2012, 2013; Annual Report on Cuba 2011, 2012; Annual Report on Cuba 2010, 2011; Annual Report on Cuba 2009, 2010; Annual Report on Cuba 2008, 2009; Annual Report on Cuba 2007, 2008; Freedom House, 2002; Freedom House, 2003; Freedom House, 2004; Freedom House, 2005; Freedom House, 2006; Freedom House, 2007; Freedom House, 2008; Freedom House, 2009; Freedom House, 2010; Freedom House, 2011; Freedom House, 2012; Freedom House, 2013.

2012; Latell, 2007; Wilkinson, 2010). On the other hand, he has also received recognition for allowing greater freedom of speech. For example, he has encouraged more debate and criticism in society and released imprisoned human rights activists (McKinley, 2008).

According to Nicola Miller, a professor of Latin American History at the University College London in the United Kingdom, the Cuban journalism system is at the service of the state (2008,). During an interview with Lee Lockwood in 1965, former President Fidel Castro talked about freedom of the press. Fidel Castro said:

An enemy of Socialism cannot write in our newspapers- but we don't deny it, and we don't go around proclaiming a hypothetical freedom of the press where it actually doesn't exist.... Furthermore, I admit that our press is deficient in this respect.... Not that I would tell you we delude ourselves that under the present circumstances journalism can have any other function more important than that of contributing to the political and revolutionary goals of our country. We have... an objective to fulfill, and that objective essentially controls the activity of the journalists (Morgan, 1975, p. 13).

In response to Fidel Castro's statement, Lent (1985) argues that the main objective of the Cuban media is to communicate and reinforce government policies and objectives as well as official positions.

### *The Press in Cuba*

Currently, there are 22 official newspapers in Cuba (Medios de comunicacion- Periodicos, 2014), 7 official news agencies (Medios de comunicacion- Periodicos- Agencias de prensa, 2014), 33 official radio stations (Medios de comunicacion- Radio, 2014), 22 official television networks (Medios de comunicacion- TV, 2014), 16 official magazines (Medios de comunicacion- Revistas, 2014), and 3 internet portals (Medios de comunicacion- Portales, 2014). These media outlets cover a wide range of topics; for example, the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* (Rebellious Youth) is completely dedicated to topics of interest to the youth, the newspaper



*Trabajadores* (Workers) is dedicated to the working population, the news agency *Prensa Latina* (Latino Press) disseminates breaking news mainly in Cuba and Latin America, *Radio Coco* is the informative and sports radio station, TV Serrana reflects and defends the human rights and the culture of the people of Sierra Maestra (a mountainous area in Cuba from where Fidel Castro launched the revolution), and the magazine *Mujeres* is dedicated to women issues (“Medios de comunicación”, 2014). All official news agencies are owned and controlled by the government.

Despite their wide coverage, the current number of all media in Cuba is smaller relative to the amount of media outlets existent before Fidel Castro came into power in 1959. During Batista’s years, the mass media was admittedly corrupt and independently owned (Lent, 1985). During Batista’s presidency, muckraking editorial writers were suppressed by bribes from the government. If they decided to publish an unwanted article they would simply deny the bribe without facing criminal charges (Morgan, 1975). When Castro took power in 1959, media was affected by the shift in ideology and philosophy of the Revolution. Mass media became owned and controlled by the government and must follow and encourage socialist ideas in accordance to government policies (Lent, 1995).

On several occasions, Fidel Castro has expressed his belief that the press and the media belong to the people and that the only way to keep mass media safe is to be government owned. He feels that giving the press more freedom would create more problems; therefore, he doesn’t allow any comments against the government. He claims that he’s only looking out for the best interest of Cuban society (Fairley, 2010).

Before the revolution, there were between 60 and 70 newspapers in the island. When Castro took power in 1959 he exposed corrupt journalists, seized five dailies, and took over two of the main dailies he had seized, *Alerta* (which he renamed *Revolución*) and *Hoy*. Some

independent newspapers remained open. However, these independent newspapers closed up due to a resolution passed by the Journalist's Association which was established in 1963. The resolution allowed public comments on the articles published which were required to be publicized. Many people sent comments discrediting the papers. Some papers refused to publish these comments and as a result, were seized by the government (Morgan, 1975).

In October of 1965 Fidel Castro merged the two seized newspapers, *Revolución* and *Hoy*, into one (Morgan, 1975) and named it *Granma* after the name of the yacht in which he traveled from Mexico to Cuba with Che Guevara to complete his plan of revolution in 1953 (Lent, 1985). *Granma* is the largest and most important national daily newspaper in Cuba. It is the essential organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba and it has a circulation of about 700,000 (Medios de comunicacion- Periodicos, 2014; Miyares, 1999). Additionally, it can be accessed online in six different languages (Digital Granma Internacional, 2014). According to official Cuban sources, the daily newspaper talks about current events in Cuba and the world (Medios de comunicacion- Periodicos, 2014). The daily has been criticized for having a political agenda which praises the Soviet Union, supports Latin American guerrilla movements and builds hate towards the United States (Morgan, 1975) which are tasks assigned and encouraged by the government (Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba: Tesis y Resoluciones- Sobre los medios de diffusion masiva, 1975).

According to Ted Morgan, a veteran journalist who studied the press in Cuba, "The papers reinforce rather than comment upon Cuban policy" (1975, p. 16). Like Morgan (1975), Rodriguez (2009) a journalism professor at the University of Habana, suggests that the Cuban media are persuasive and propagandistic rather than conversational and analytic. Morgan's and Rodriguez's suggestions are challenged by the Cuban government which claims that public

debate is encouraged (Miyares, 1999). Recently, in 2006, Raul Castro encouraged Havana University students to fearlessly express themselves on the failures of revolution. He encouraged open debate and a willingness to listen to government criticism and concerns directly from the students (Roig-Franzia, 2006; Snow, 2006).

During the most recent Congress of the Communist Party in 2011, it was stated that the press should encourage debate and public opinion. In the congress' central report it was stated that

En este frente se requiere también dejar atrás, definitivamente, el hábito del triunfalismo, la estridencia y el formalismo al abordar la actualidad nacional y generar materiales escritos y programas de televisión y radio, que por su contenido y estilo capturen la atención y estimulen el debate en la opinión pública. (Informe central al VI Congreso del Partido Comunista, 2011, p. 23)

[Translation] In this area of work [media] it is also necessary to definitely banish the habit of describing the national reality in pretentious high-flown language or with excessive formality. Instead, written materials and television and radio programs should be produced that catch the attention of the audience with their content and style while encouraging public debate. (Central Report to the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, 2011, para. 73)

During this congress, the government also recognized that the Cuban press disseminates boring, improvised and superficial reports due to a lack of timely access to information and a lack of access to the cadres or experts on the issues in question. They recognized this as an issue but did not mention a need or a plan for change. They also re-enforced the fact that the mass media needs to contribute to the promotion of national culture and to the revival of civic values in society ("Informe central al VI Congreso del Partido Comunista", 2011, p. 23). During the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party in 1997, it was acknowledged that the Cuban media disseminates information to educate the population on current issues as well as on international issues (Castro, 1997).

*Policies on Cuban Media: Purposes and Parameters*

A series of laws and rules have been passed to establish the purpose and parameters of the media in Cuba. In 1971 the Cuban National Congress on Education and Culture said that radio, television, cinema, and the press are the key instruments to create ideologies and collective conscience; therefore, they need to be controlled (Lent, 1985). Later in 1975, the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party stated that mass media is responsible for the political and ideological education of the masses. They stated that one of the main goals of the mass media must be to promote the revolution (Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba: Tesis y Resoluciones- Sobre los medios de difusión masiva, 1975). The resolution states

Al responder a los intereses del pueblo trabajador, la prensa escrita, la radio, la televisión y el cine asumieron progresivamente, como instituciones revolucionarias, una función social cualitativamente nueva, identificada y comprometida con el empeño de hacer avanzar, defender y consolidar nuestra Revolución. (Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba: Tesis y Resoluciones- Sobre los medios de difusión masiva, 1975, p.1)

[Translation] In response to the interests of the working people, the written press, the radio, the television, and the cinema, as revolutionary institutions, assumed the new social task of advancing, defending and consolidating our Revolution.

In the most recent Cuban Constitution revised in 2002, Article 53 states

Se reconoce a los ciudadanos libertad de palabra y prensa conforme a los fines de la sociedad socialista. Las condiciones materiales para su ejercicio están dadas por el hecho de que la prensa, la radio, la televisión, el cine y otros medios de difusión masiva son de propiedad estatal o social y no pueden ser objeto, en ningún caso, de propiedad privada, lo que asegura su uso al servicio exclusivo del pueblo trabajador y del interés de la sociedad. La ley regula el ejercicio de estas libertades. (Constitución de la República de Cuba, 2002)

[Translation] Citizens have freedom of speech and of the press in keeping with the objectives of socialist society. Material conditions for the exercise of that right are provided by the fact that the press, radio, television, cinema, and other mass media are state or social property and can never be private property. This assures their use at exclusive service of the working people and in the interests of society. The law regulates the exercise of those freedoms.

Through this legislation, the mass media are owned and controlled by the government for the benefit of society and they can never be privately owned. Journalists are encouraged to be devoted to the development of a “truly revolutionary and socialist style in the use of the various forms and techniques of expression” (Lent, 1985, p. 610). At the 1982 Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC), Culture Minister Armando Hart Davolos, said that “artistic creativity is free as long as its content is not contrary to the Revolution” (p. 610). Fidel Castro re-enforces this idea (Kronenberg, 2011). Artistic expression is also mentioned in the Cuban Constitution article 39 item CH which states that “there is freedom of artistic creation as long as its content is not contrary to the Revolution” (Constitución de la República de Cuba, 2002).

The Fifth Congress of the Communist Party stated that the mass media and its organizations have a vital role in the ideological struggle to strengthen the revolution and have the duty to inform on the current events in Cuba and the rest of the world (V Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba: El partido de la unidad, la democracia, y los derechos humanos que defendemos, 1977). The Sixth Congress of the Communist Party emphasized the fact that the mass media need to contribute to the promotion of national culture and to the revival of civic values in society (“Informe central al VI Congreso del Partido Comunista”, 2011, p. 23).

The Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC) is a social and professional nongovernmental organization (still registered with the Cuban Ministry of Justice) created in 1963 with the purpose of uniting journalists previously divided among different associations. Previous media associations included Colegio Nacional de Periodistas, Asociación de la Prensa de Cuba, Asociación de Reporteros de la Habana, and many more smaller organizations made up of journalists, photographers, camerographers, cartoonists, etcetera (Perfil de la UPEC, 2013). According to Article 9, item a, of the UPEC statutes approved in 2013, it is the organization’s

goal to defend journalists in the legal and ethical implementation of their profession. According to Article 9, item b, the organization also aims to contribute to the formation of journalists in traditional political ideology and patriotic principles (Estatutos de la UPEC, 2013). The UPEC is a member of various international organizations such as the Organization of Journalists (OPI), the Latin America Federation of Journalists (FELAP), and the Caribbean Media Workers Association (CAMWORK). They claim to aim to protect the practice of journalism, encourage technical and cultural education as well as social recognition for journalism (Miyares, 1999). The organization has received criticism for allegedly working for the benefit of the government and not for the benefit of journalists. In 2013, during the IX Congress of the Union of Cuban journalists, Diaz Canel, the first Vice President of the Council of State of Cuba, stated that the Cuban press stands firm on the revolution and aids the Castros in building the desired socialism (Nuestra prensa es fiel a la Revolución, a Fidel y Raúl, afirmó Miguel Díaz Canel, 2013).

The Constitution states that rights and freedoms recognized by the government are only lawfully exercised if they do not go against the ideals of socialism and communism. Article 62 states that

Ninguna de las libertades reconocidas a los ciudadanos puede ser ejercida contra lo establecido en la Constitución y las leyes, ni contra la existencia y fines del Estado socialista, ni contra la decisión del pueblo cubano de construir el socialismo y el comunismo. La infracción de este principio es punible. (Constitución de la República de Cuba, 2002)

[Translation] None of the freedoms which are recognized for citizens can be exercised contrary to what is established in the Constitution and by law, or contrary to the existence and objectives of the socialist state, or contrary to the decision of the Cuban people to build socialism and communism. Violations of this principle can be punished by law.

Article 53 of the Cuban Constitution gives people freedom of expression and freedom of the press but based on article 62 of the Constitution, this freedom does not allow expression against socialism or the government. The freedom of speech and the press given by the Cuban

government has limitations. It does not allow people to express freely about their disagreements with the government or the revolution; and if they do, they can legally be punished.

The Cuban Penal Code lays out the punishments for disrespecting the government in Article 144 items 1 and 2. In this Article the crime is called “desacato” (disrespect). The definition of “desacato” is very broad, therefore, dissidents are often convicted for this crime (de Leon, 1995). The crime of “desacato” is defined in Chapter II of the Cuban Penal Code, ‘Violence, Disobedience and Causing Offence to Authorities, Public Functionaries and their Agents’, Under Section 3 Article 144 as:

1. El que amenace, calumnie, difame, insulte, injurie o de cualquier modo ultraje u ofenda, de palabra o por escrito, en su dignidad o decoro a una autoridad, funcionario público, o a sus agentes o auxiliares, en ejercicio de sus funciones o en ocasión o con motivo de ellas, incurre en sanción de privación de libertad de tres meses a un año o multa de cien a trescientas cuotas o ambas.
2. Si el hecho previsto en el apartado anterior se realiza respecto al Presidente del Consejo de Estado, al Presidente de la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, a los miembros del Consejo de Estado o del Consejo de Ministros o a los Diputados a la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, la sanción es de privación de libertad de uno a tres años. (Codigo Penal, 1999)

[Translation]

1. Whoever threatens, defames, maligns, injures, or in any way offends, orally or in writing, the dignity or propriety of any authority, public official, or any of their auxiliary agents, with regard to the exercise of their duties or in the execution of those same duties, shall be punished by loss of liberty for between three months and one year, or a fine of between 100 and 300 cuotas, or both.
2. If the offense set out in the previous paragraph is committed against the President of the Council of Senate, the President of the National Assembly of Popular Power, or against the members of the Council of Ministers, or against Deputies to the National Assembly of Popular Power, the punishment shall be loss of liberty for between one and three years.

These punishments are viewed as extremely unfair by many. The chair of the American Library Association international relations committee said that “You don’t throw people in the slammer for expressing ideas” (Gonzalez, 2005, p.1). Reporters who write against the regime may face

surveillance, interrogation, prison, or exile (Amnesty International, 2012; Orsi, 2012; Miller, 2008; Wilkinson, 2010).

Finally, restrictions on travel were established by the government to those who oppose the government. The Immigration Law of 1976 required Cubans to ask the government for permission to leave the country. People who publicly disagree with the government also known as counter-revolutionaries were denied permits that would allow them to travel. Recently, in 2012, and Immigration Reform was drafted and implemented in 2013. Decree Law 302, which modifies Immigration Law 1312 of 1976, states that Cubans no longer need government permission to leave the country. All they will be required to have is a valid passport and a visa (Decreto-Ley 302: Modificativo de la Ley 1312 “Ley de Inmigración” de 20 de Septiembre de 1976, 2012)

### *The Internet*

The Internet has become a way for people to connect and organize themselves. Governments that rely on centralized political control might face challenges as networks of dissidents, activists, and nongovernmental organizations come together through the web to pressure the regime for change (Boas, 2000; Mohr, 2007). Boas (2000), a junior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, suggests that in Cuba, even though Internet use has slowly increased over the past few years, the government has not been weakened by dissidents on the web. He believes this might be due to the fact that the government firmly controls the Internet.

Miyares (1999) suggests that the U.S. hostility and defamation against Cuba, keeps freedom of the press limited in the island since the main role of journalists becomes to protect



Cuba's image in the eyes of the world. Boas (2000) suggests that due to the United States' threat to use the internet to destabilize the Cuban government, the Cuban regime has maintained and will continue to hold centralized control of the Internet to regulate and restrict its access especially against threats to communist ideology. Boas concludes that because of this political environment, the Internet has failed as a tool for reform since the development of the internet is not enough to encourage reform.

Boas' arguments are corroborated by recent data on Cubans' internet access. According to Mohr (2007) and Monica (2012), very few people have access to the Internet in Cuba. College students and entrepreneurs are among the few groups of people that can enjoy Internet access under close government supervision. Only organizations and individuals who strongly favor the regime, like politicians, can enjoy unsupervised Internet access.

Cyber cafes have been opened in the island, however, they have been criticized for being overpriced and almost impossible to afford by common citizens (Hildreth, 2001; Mohr, 2007; Wilkinson, 2010). Cuban activists face many obstacles when trying to disseminate information to educate and mobilize the population to challenge the regime (Mohr, 2007). The communist regime must grant people access to the Internet in order for political activists to use it as a means for change (Kalathil, 2003).

In countries like China and Egypt, Internet use has significantly increased over the years. However, the increase of citizens in the web has led governments to control their access by censoring material from the internet. Similar to governments in China and Egypt that censor Internet material, it is hypothesized that the Cuban government will censor websites and other opposing information from the Internet as Internet use slowly increases in the island (Kalathil, 2003).

Cuban Decree Law 209 talks about the access from the island to the World Wide Web. Articles 11 through 14 regulate Internet use to the benefit of national interests and specify that the Internet will have a selective use. Additionally, direct access to the Internet has to be approved by the government. All Internet providers must be registered in the National Ministry of Electronic Information for the Web. People seeking access to the Internet must submit applications and receive licenses. Furthermore, article 44 states that dissemination of messages through the Internet contrary to the social or moral interests of the country or that threaten the integrity or security of the nation must be reported (Decreto No. 209- Acceso desde la Republica de Cuba a redes informaticas de alcance global, 1996). According to Kalathil (2003), the government encourages Internet companies to monitor users.

As previously stated, under Decree Law 209, government permission is required to set up a private connection to the Internet. Permission is rarely granted so the only public access available to citizens is at government run cybercafés and tourist hotels. Access through these mediums is extremely costly. According to Wilkinson (2010), the cost for an hour of Internet access is about five U.S. dollars. It is important to note that the average monthly wage in Cuba is about fifteen U.S. dollars (Wright, 2011; Wilkinson, 2010).

In 2001, the government released data suggesting that only about 60,000 people out of the population of 11 million were allowed to have e-mail accounts, most of which were only allowed to send e-mails domestically (Mama sees you, 2001). Internet access is mainly provided to politicians, schools, and businesses (Boas, 2000; Hildreth, 2001; Mama sees you, 2001, Mohr, 2007). Luis Morelos, IT director of the Institute of Scientific and Technology Information stated that this is due to the limited data capacity. According to him, Cuba only has 10 megabytes of internet access. Because of a lack of available means, the government has to prioritize who gets

Internet access (Hildreth, 2001). Despite economic and material limitations, the Cuban media have been encouraged to access the internet (Miyares, 1999). Currently there are 13 national media electronic editions including daily newspapers, magazines, and radio stations, 4 international electronic editions, and 43 online regional periodicals, radio stations and television networks (Prensa Cubana en Internet, 2014).

In 2000, the Cuban government launched a campaign called “The Battle of Ideas” aiming to preserve the country’s culture to better the life of its citizens despite the cultural invasion and hostility from other nations through the mass media. According to then President, Fidel Castro, the goal of this campaign is to encourage the emergence of ideas that can bring peace to the world and a solution to violence. This campaign has encouraged the development of universal computer literacy by training teachers and adding computer classes to school curriculums starting from preschool to higher education (Mendes & Marques, 2009).

Cuban use of the Internet has also proven to bring many benefits to the island. For example, the Ministry of Public Health’s network *InfoMed* provides people with medical journals and pharmaceutical databases. Additionally, it sends out medical alerts via e-mail to doctors and hospitals (Boas, 2000; Kalathil, 2003).

Boas (2000) suggests that Cuba uses the Internet as a way to portray the regime’s version of the situation in Cuba to the world. They see the Internet as an opportunity to show the world their reality. Additionally, they distribute government propaganda through the web within the nation to support the revolution (Boas, 2000; Hildreth, 2001; Mama sees you, 2001, Mohr, 2007). During the 7<sup>th</sup> UPEC Congress in 1999, it was decided that information from the island in the Internet had to be strengthened (Rodriguez, 2009).

## *Blogs*

In 2005, through an agreement with the National Company of Cuban Telecommunications, 872 journalists associated with the Union of Cuban Journalists gained access to the Internet from their homes and with private computers. The government sought to increase Cuban presence in the Internet to contradict inaccurate representations of the Nation. This open access to the web facilitated the emergence of Cuban blogs (Rodriguez, 2009).

Blogs have gained popularity in Cuba over the last few years. In 2005, encouraged by the Union of Cuban Journalists and the Central Committee of the Communist Party, blogs were highly used by professional journalists to increase publications on Cuban reality from within the nation. They saw this as an opportunity to defend the nation from distorted information in the Internet published from other countries. UPEC created a blogging system within its website's server through which bloggers could post their blogs. In 2007, six bloggers joined the UPEC blogging site. Later on in 2009, *Blogcip.cu* (now *Bloguea.cu*) was created to increase the amount of readers. Bloggers discovered that blogs were a fast and independent way of publishing information that allowed them to interact with readers (Rodriguez, 2009). Currently, there are 308 bloggers registered with UPEC coming from 16 different provinces in Cuba. Bloggers use four different blog publishing services which are *Blogia.com* (Spanish blogging), *Bloguea.cu* (Blogs of Cuban Journalists), *Blogspot.com* (Google owned), and *Wordpress.com* (Directorio de blogs de periodistas Cubanos, 2013).

Journalists saw blogs as a medium to publish informative stories that would otherwise never be published. However, informative stories in blogs have the potential to lose its credibility since blogs are not held to the same objective standards of traditional media. Blogs therefore diminish objectivity and sometimes are highly opinionated. Additionally, the individuality and

personal perspectives in blogs are threatened by bloggers' fear of stating anything that might be interpreted as contrary to the Revolution. Traditional media institutions have the duty of revising blog content to ensure that if politically sensitive material is mentioned, the blogger defends the principles of Revolution (Rodriguez, 2009).

### *Independent Journalists and Bloggers*

Journalists and bloggers who are not registered with government controlled media institutions face many challenges (Amnesty International, 2012; Miller, 2008). Lizabel Monica (2012) is an artist and writer who runs a digital magazine and a blog. She describes the difficulties of utilizing the Internet to disseminate information and explains an underground exchange of unofficial information. She explains that media, including her magazine, which is not registered with an official institution is illegal and cannot be presented in any public space. Therefore, independent journalists burn their content onto CDs and distribute them through human networks. To disseminate their blogs on the web, bloggers write their blogs on home computers without internet access, then save them on flash drives and give them to friends with Internet access such as hotel employees or employees of government offices (Wilkinson, 2010.) Other types of media, like the telephone, facilitate the flow of reports from independent journalists within the country. Since they are not allowed to publish in Cuba, these journalists call relatives or colleagues abroad to dictate their reports and get their information out there (Boas, 2000; Wilkinson, 2010).

Independent journalists and bloggers who are able to disseminate their material on the World Wide Web go through extraordinary measures (Radio Marti covers Cuba's first ever blogging competition, 2009; Monica, 2012; Wilkinson, 2010). According to Wilkinson (2010),

“There are more than one hundred unauthorized bloggers in Cuba, including at least two dozen who are openly critical of the government” (para. 2). These type of bloggers and journalists face harassment, police surveillance, loss of employment, and have just recently been allowed to travel (Orsi, 2012; Wilkinson, 2010).

Yoani Sanchez is the most well-known Cuban independent journalist and blogger openly critical of the Revolution. She runs a blog called “Generation Y” which is translated in 17 different languages (*Generacion Y*, 2014). On several occasions, she has been arrested, harassed and highly criticized for her opposition to the revolution (Orsi, 2012; Wilkinson, 2012).

According to Sanchez, her blog talks about the reality in Cuba. She has gained popularity worldwide and admits that her popularity is mainly due to U.S. press coverage. Sanchez has received numerous journalism awards from the United States and Europe and was recognized in 2008 by *TIME* magazine as one of the top one hundred influential people (Wilkinson, 2012). Due to the immigration reform in 2013, Sanchez has been able to travel the world giving speeches about Cuba to politicians in North America, Latin America, and Europe (Haven & Orsi, 2013). Cubans critical of Yoani Sanchez and her work claim that she is working hand in hand with the U.S. government to undermine the Cuban government. Cuban websites that support the Cuban government like *Cuba Debate*, consider her an ignorant of Cuban history, a compulsive liar, and a despiser of the Cuban nation (*¿Quién es Yoani Sánchez?*, 2012; Wilkinson, 2010).

A study done by Stuart Allan (2006) indicates that blogging has the potential to change public debate. Blogs are a highly influential tool with the potential to transcend the traditional role of news (Cokley, 2009). Independent journalists in Cuba are trying to do just that.

Critics of independent journalists suggest that they only publish negative stories about

Cuba which include lies and defamations about the Cuban government encouraging the Cuban people to undermine the regime (Miyares, 1999).

### *Cuban Government's Response to Criticism*

During the Fifth Congress of The Cuban Communist Party, Fidel Castro stated that the Cuban enemies hold great power through their mass media and campaigns to keep the Revolution from influencing the people and to continue establishing their dominion. Castro stated that other countries portray a false picture of Cuba which is very different from what it really is (1997). During that same congress, the United States media were criticized for their manipulative qualities.

La gran prensa, las agencias de noticias, la radio, el cine y especialmente la televisión y otros medios cada vez más sofisticados de comunicación, forman gigantescos sistemas monopólicos con los cuales manipulan la mente del hombre y fabrican la opinión pública. (V Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba: El partido de la unidad, la democracia, y los derechos humanos que defendemos, 1997, p. 28).

[Translation] The big press, the news agencies, the radio, the cinema, and especially the television and other more sophisticated communication mediums, create gigantic monopolist systems with which they manipulate the minds of people and formulate public opinion.

The United States has been described by the Cuban government as the “Trojan horse” aiming to weaken the Cuban Revolution from within the island. This belief is backed up by a series of actions taken by the United States towards Cuba (Landau, 2008). Such actions include the 1996 Helms-Burton (Liberatd) Act. This Act provides organizations that strongly oppose the Cuban government and stand on U.S. policy with grants to support the encouragement of democracy in Cuba (Boas, 2000) and also prevent foreign investment in Cuba by denying entrance to the U.S. to anyone who does business in Cuba (Mendes & Marques, 2009; Wright, 2011). In response, in 1999 the Cuban government passed Law 88 for the “Protection of National Independence and the

Economy” (Ley N 88- Proteccion de la Independencia Nacional y la Economia, 1999). The law punishes anyone who acts in support of the Helms-Burton Act and undermines the Cuban government. In regards to the press, the following was stated in Article 7,

El que, con el propósito de lograr los objetivos de la Ley "Helms-Burton", el bloqueo y la guerra económica contra nuestro pueblo, encaminados a quebrantar el orden interno, desestabilizar el país y liquidar al Estado Socialista y la independencia de Cuba, colabore por cualquier vía con emisoras de radio o televisión, periódicos, revistas u otros medios de difusión extranjeros, incurre en sanción de privación de libertad de dos a cinco años o multa de mil a tres mil cuotas, o ambas. (Ley N 88- Proteccion de la Independencia Nacional y la Economia, 1999)

[Translation] One who with the purpose of achieving the goals of the Helms-Burton Act, the embargo and the economic war against our country, aims at undermining internal order, destabilizing the country, and eradicating the socialist state and the Cuban independence, supports by any way via the radio, television, newspapers, magazines or any form of mass media, is punishable by law to loss of liberty from two to five years or a fine of a thousand to three thousand cuotas, or both.

Through this law, journalists have to not only abstain from supporting U.S. policy through any form of media, but also abstain from doing anything that might suggest U.S. support.

According to Miyares (1999) Cuba is willing to show its reality by allowing foreign journalists into the country and by giving them the freedom to go anywhere and talk to anyone. Currently, there are 159 permanent accredited correspondents in Cuba from 27 different nations and 83 different media outlets (Prensa extranjera en Cuba, 2013). Miyares (1999) also suggests that in countries where mas media are privately owned, ethics and values such as respect and consideration are lacking and replaced by “racism, sexism, bigotry, xenophobia, child and adult pornography” (p. 81). He argues that in countries like Cuba in which the government sponsors the media, there might be restrictions against programming that goes against the principles of Revolution, but there is also no denigrating programing allowed. Finally, he states that Cuban journalists have the responsibility to defend and protect the island from those who try to demoralize it (Miyares, 2009; Rodriguez, 2009).



Mendes and Marques (2009) believe that even though the government's main goal is to encourage and support the Cuban Revolution, "it has always moved towards the recognition of social rights" (p. 77).

## **Methodology**

The aim of this study is to shed light on the status of freedom of the press in Cuba from 2002 to 2013. The research method selected for the purposes of this study was interviews. These interviews aim to understand people's perspectives on the level of freedom of the press in Cuba. Additionally, through one on one interviews, the researcher retrieved interviewees' past experiences and gained expert insight on the situation in Cuba and on its government. Finally, information gathered from interviews created a record of communication that could later be analyzed.

The type of interviews conducted were informant interviews. During the course of the study (June 2013), the researcher met with 6 people whose knowledge about Cuba and journalism were valuable for achieving research objectives. These informants informed the researcher about freedom of the press in Cuba during the past decade.

### *Participants and Procedure*

Considering Cuban legislation regarding statements contrary to the Revolution previously stated, it is difficult to gain access to the opinions of Cuban people in the island concerning sensitive government information. Due to the lack of access to information from informants in the island, informants were selected from cities of high Cuban populations in the United States.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, eight cities in the state of Florida have the largest Cuban population in the United States. These cities are Hialeah, Tamiami, Kendall Lakes, Fontainebleau, Miami, Kendall, Miami Beach and Carol City (StatJump, 2010). Once the sampling units were identified based on geographical data and demographics, the snowball sampling strategy was employed. The sample was created through referrals from people who knew of others knowledgeable of journalism in Cuba. Participants were selected based on the fact that their experiences and professions are central to the research question.

During the month of June of 2013, the researcher traveled to Florida to conduct formal interviews with Cuban exiles. There was a total of six interviewees; these included four journalists and writers employed by Spanish media networks in the United States located in Florida, one Cuban-born United States politician and one Cuban dissident living in Miami.

Informant one was born and raised in pre-revolutionary Cuba. He worked as a television director in Cuba but fled the country after the revolution in 1967. He is now active in various television networks located in several countries in North America, Latin America and Spain such as *Univision and Telemundo*. He has worked in the mass media business for many years and has a successful career in the journalism field. He has received various awards throughout his career in Latin America and the United States. He resides in Southern Florida but has connections to old colleagues still in the island.

Informant two is a radio personality in Miami, FL. He was born in post-revolutionary Cuba when Fidel Castro was already in power and moved to the United States in his 20s. Currently, he is the manager of a Spanish speaking radio station located in the city of Miami. The radio station includes extensive programming about current events in Cuba. The informant has received recognition for his professional accomplishments and is part of the Association of

Cuban Journalists in exile. He keeps in contact with journalists in the island and has connections to a variety of people in the Cuban media.

Informant three is a recently retired Cuban journalist in the city of Miami. He is well known in Miami's Cuban exile community and has received recognition for his contributions to the Cuban community in the United States. He has worked as the host of TV Marti's morning program and has cohosted a variety of other shows within the network. He has also worked at the principal radio stations in Miami and as a columnist for three well recognized Spanish language periodicals, *El Nuevo Herald*, *Diario Las Américas* and *la Revista Ideal*. The informant was a journalist in Cuba and was incarcerated for his anti-Castro ideas. He escaped prison in 1962 and received political asylum in the United States in 1963. He keeps in contact with colleagues currently in the island.

Informant four was the first journalist to ever interview Fidel Castro when he was hiding in Sierra Maestra planning revolution. He died in October 2013, three months after the interview. He worked as a journalist for the most popular Cuban magazine in the late fifties, *Bohemia*, since the start of his career in 1954. After seeing Fidel Castro's failed promises of democracy, he fled to the United States in 1961. In Miami, he worked as the editor in chief of Radio and TV Marti for 20 years. He also wrote publications in exile such as the magazine *Bohemia en el exilio* and *Réplica* and two poem books. He worked for the Miami radio stations WQBA, WRHC, and WCMQ. He won the "Premio Nacional de Periodismo" in Cuba (National Award of Journalism) in 1959. To this day, he is considered one of the top journalists in Cuba.

Informant five is a Cuban-born American politician. He is the mayor of a city in Florida with a very high Cuban population. He is a former City Councilman. During his service, he worked to bring new ideas, assisted the former mayor, pointed out things that needed

improvement, and offered suggestions on how to improve those issues. He had previously run for mayor in 2007 but lost by three votes. He ran again in 2012 and was elected. He is very active in his community and his goal is to run the city as a “big family.” Because of his political experiences and his constant contact with recent Cuban immigrants in his community, he is knowledgeable of the political atmosphere in the island.

Informant six is a Cuban-born U.S. citizen who is highly concerned about social justice and human rights in the island. He lived in the island throughout his childhood but he and his parents moved to Miami to escape political oppression during his teenage years. His family highly opposed the regime and feared persecution from the Castro regime. The informant has family members who still live in the island and is constantly updated about the current events and changes in freedom of the press in Cuba.

All six informants are Cuban exiles residing in Florida, U.S.A. Because of their geographical location, they are exposed to large amounts of U.S. media. As stated earlier, U.S. media about Cuba often consist of rhetoric criticizing the Cuban regime. Due to this exposure to U.S. Anti-Castro rhetoric through U.S. media outlets, such as *TV Marti*, informants might be biased. Their beliefs about press freedom in Cuba might be influenced by the U.S. use of media toward Cuba.

The researcher selected the methodology based on her personal experiences with the Cuban population in the state of Florida. The researcher resided in the city of Miami from the year 2003 to 2010. During her time in the city of Miami, she was extensively exposed to the Cuban culture which allowed her to select a methodology through which she could best approach the Cuban informants. The methodology was therefore selected based on her understanding of Cuban culture for the purposes of acquiring quality data. The researcher’s past experiences with

the Cuban population in Florida might influence her ability as a researcher by not allowing the complete eradication of personal bias.

### *Interview Questions*

The interview questions focused on the subject of freedom of speech and the press in Cuba and their perspectives about it. The questions aimed to find out the participants' opinions on the current situation of their native country and whether or not they had noted any changes on press freedom since 2002. The questions asked during the interviews were open ended and did not impose much structure. The two main questions are:

1. Is there Freedom of the Press in Cuba?
2. Have you observed any changes in the level of freedom in the past 10 years (2002-2013)?

The simplicity and limited number of questions were strategically established to allow for the maximum amount of truthful information as they know it. The broadness of the inquiries allowed for the informants to dwell upon a wide range of topics and experiences without limitations.

## **Results**

### *Categorization*

In order to analyze data from interviews, responses gained from each informant were divided into four categories:

1. Main characteristics of the Cuban government
2. Topics included in media outlets
3. Impact/Influence of the government on mass media

4. Overall current level of freedom of the press and changes in level of freedom from 2002 to 2013

*Main characteristics of the Cuban government: Totalitarian and Authoritarian*

The two characteristics used by informants to describe the Cuban government were authoritarian and totalitarian. The *Merriam-Webster* (2014) dictionary defines authoritarian as “expecting or requiring people to obey rules or laws: not allowing personal freedom.” The same dictionary, defines totalitarian as “controlling the people of a country in a very strict way with complete power that cannot be opposed.” These definitions are representative of the informants’ definitions of these words. Although the two words have similar meanings, there is a small, yet important difference. Both, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes restrict freedoms; however, totalitarian regimes also punish those who oppose them.

Informant five, the Cuban born U.S. politician, described the regime as authoritarian because of its repressive policies. He mentioned that there are a lot of rules restricting people in general from enjoying personal liberties such as expressing their disappointment with the revolution and the Castro regime. The other five informants, the four journalists and the dissident, described the government as totalitarian and based their description on the extreme repression they experienced and because of their knowledge of persecution of dissidents.

Informant one expressed criticism against the role that law enforcement plays in the Cuban political oppression of dissidents. He mentioned that the Cuban police often goes undercover to search for dissidents in the streets and either arrest them, fine them, investigate them, or harass them. Informant two, also referred to the Cuban regime as totalitarian because of its tendency to not only restrict freedom of the press, but to also punish Cubans who hold

opinions that oppose the revolution. Informant three explained that to understand the Cuban regime, one must understand the definition of totalitarian. He stated that “a totalitarian country controls the totality of Cubans’ lives.” He then expanded on the idea that the Castro totalitarian regime has “a total lack of scruples.” He believed that since 1959 the regime’s number one goal is to hold complete power at all cost. Informant four stated that Cuba moved “from Batista’s dictatorship, to Fidel Castro’s tyranny.” He described the regime as totalitarian through his own experiences. He saw how innocent people were killed in streets in the name of revolution. He mentioned a time when he saw Fidel Castro’s troops kill everyone in a small town claiming that they were counter-revolutionaries. He later found out that they were simply country people whose animals and crops were needed by the troops so they executed them to steal their supplies. He also described Fidel Castro as an “evil genius” who fooled everyone by promising a democracy and when in power implemented a totalitarian dictatorship.

#### *Topics included in media outlets*

Each informant mentioned a variety of types programming, news, and topics in media outlets. Based on the types of programming, news, and topics that were mentioned, themes broadcasted and published in Cuba were determined. This category was divided into four themes: 1) Government propaganda, 2) Anti- U.S. rhetoric, 3) Cuban achievements, and 4) Social problems. These categories encompass the four topics mentioned during interviews. Responses for this category were assigned to each sub-category based on semantic similarity. For example, the answers “Speeches by Fidel or Raul,” “achievements of the Revolution,” and “praises to Che Guevara” were included in theme one, government propaganda. Theme two: Anti-U.S. rhetoric, included the answers “news about the horrors of capitalism” and “criticism of

<b>TABLE 1</b>				
<b>Types of news reported by informants</b>				
	Cuban Propaganda	Anti-U.S. Rhetoric	Cuban Achievements	Social Problems
Informant 1	5	3	7	2
Informant 2	4	3	5	1
Informant 3	4	4	3	1
Informant 4	4	3	4	1
Informant 5	2	1	1	0
Informant 6	6	3	4	1
TOTAL	25	17	24	6

U.S. policy and the embargo.” Theme three: Cuban achievements, included the answers “the National Book fair was a success,” “growth in tourism,” and “educational and medical advancements.” The answers “the disgrace of independent journalists,” “the need for revival of civic values,” and “the need to develop revolutionary values on the youth” were included in theme four, social problems. It is important to note that responses on media for this component only included Cuban officially recognized news outlets, not independent journalists.

In general, according to the interviews with informants, most of the media in Cuba are made up of Cuban propaganda and news stories on Cuban achievements. All informants suggested that the media are at the service of the state. Informant three stated that with no other role than supporting and praising the revolution, it is no surprise that propaganda is the most abundant theme in all media outlets. Informant one, former director of various TV shows in Cuba, stated that before the revolution there was a wide variety of programming in television networks which were replaced by long ours of speeches by Fidel Castro after the revolution. Informant six expressed his resentment towards the lack of valuable dissemination of truthful information in the news to allow public debate on social issues. He stated that the news should be



reporting on social problems such as the lack of food and police brutality, so that something can be done to solve them. Table 1 shows an overview of the four main themes in the Cuban media according to the informants.

### *Impact of the revolutionary government on mass media*

This category sought to measure the amount of control held by the government over media outlets. All informants responded in the same manner. All informants mentioned the fact that the totality of official media outlets are supported and sponsored by the government. They stated that all of the official mass media including newspapers, magazines, television, the radio, and the Internet, is controlled by the government and operates at the service of the state. They suggested that there is no room for criticism or opposition of the government or the Revolution in journalism. To ensure the absence of criticism on the media, informants stated that most heads of mass media outlets were hired based upon their support of the government and the Revolution and those who refuse to cease opposing revolutionary ideals face death or exile. Managers and editors in chief who are affiliated with the government monitor the work of journalists to eradicate all criticism or opposition. Finally, they all agreed upon the idea that the government uses the mass media to make Cubans believe whatever is convenient for the regime.

Informant four, the first journalist to interview Fidel Castro before the revolution, explained the significant impact that the revolutionary government had on the media through his own experiences working for the Cuban magazine *Bohemia*. *Bohemia* was the magazine responsible for Fidel Castro's popularity among the Cuban population before the revolution. Informant four traveled to Sierra Maestra in 1958 and lived side by side with Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and their troops for a number of months to report on Castro's plans. He was a strong

supporter of the revolution before it actually happened. He trusted that Fidel Castro would implement democracy. He stated,

During one of my interviews with Fidel, he told me that his government would be democratic, that he would respect our freedom of the press and the human rights of its citizens; that he would hold elections within the next two years and many other promises. He lied. The promised democratic revolution was betrayed.

During his time in Sierra Maestra, the informant witnessed events that suggested that Fidel Castro would become a dictator. At his return to Habana, he told the then owner and editor in chief of *Bohemia*, Miguel Angel Quevedo, about Fidel Castro's communist doctrines and the many killings. He also told Quevedo that Fidel would win and become a dictator. Quevedo was able to publish editorials against communism and various articles criticizing the previously praised Fidel Castro. As foretold by our informant, Fidel Castro was victorious and because of his criticism, Quevedo was displaced from his position as the government named Enrique de la Osa the new owner and editor in chief of the magazine. Quevedo found asylum in the Venezuelan embassy and was later exiled to Caracas. Due to a horrible sense of guilt from promoting the revolution, Quevedo committed suicide in 1969 despite our informant's attempt to keep him from doing so. Many journalists and employees of *Bohemia*, including informant four, were against what was happening with the press but could do nothing to prevent it so they abandoned the magazine and sought asylum around the world. Through this account, an example of a media outlet that was put under government control and the persecution of journalists who criticize the revolutionary government are illustrated. Informant four also mentioned that the government tries to "buy" journalists. He mentioned that the Cuban government offered one of his colleagues the director position of *Radio Rebelde* in exchange for support of the revolution. His colleague denied the offer and died in exile in Miami.

Informant one had a similar account that further illustrated how the revolutionary government changed television programming by placing all television networks under government control and censoring programming. Informant one worked for *Chanel 6: CMQ Television* (Currently *Cubavisión*). He was initially the director of a popular show called “Casino de la Alegria” which showcased international celebrities that visited the island. He stressed that nothing was censored neither by the government or the network owner. However, on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1960, the Cuban government created the *Cuban Telephone Company* so all of the radio and television networks were now required to be part of the *Instituto Cubano de Radiodifusion* (*Cuban Institute of Broadcasting*) which later became known as the *Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión* (*Cuban Institute of Radio and Television*). All of the television programming was displaced and replaced with Fidel Castro appearances and long hours of speeches. Self-censorship also began to expand. Informant one mentioned a time when he wanted to talk about a story concerning Russian farmers who were fleeing the country during one of his shows. He was discouraged by his boss who stated that sensitive topics like that cannot go on air. His boss started censoring the material on the network because of government policies. Due to his regular suggestions to talk about sensitive topics on air, on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1997, a government official came on set while he was working and told him “You have no place in television.” He was fired. He then fled the country and got asylum in the United States.

*Overall current level of freedom of the press and changes in level of freedom from 2002 to 2013*

This category seeks to illustrate any changes in the level of freedom over the years. To formulate the illustration, answers regarding persecution of independent journalists and human

rights advocates, hostility of the government towards dissidents, and censored material contrary to the revolution were included in this section.

In answering the first question during the interviews, “Is there Freedom of the Press in Cuba?” every informant answered “No.” As they elaborated on their response, they all mentioned various incidents in which dissidents and independent journalists had been imprisoned, exiled, or even executed by the government. They mentioned the dangers of publicly opposing the government or the Revolution. Informants talked about censorship and self-censorship of articles and news stories because of fear of losing one’s job. According to the informants in this study, the presence of fear to speak their minds is clear evidence of the lack of freedom in the country. When talking about any noted changes in the last ten years, informants agreed upon the fact that there have been some minor changes in policy regarding religious activities, increased access to the Internet, less restrictions on travel, released political prisoners and decreased dissident incarcerations. However, they all still believe that there have been no fundamental changes to increase the freedom of speech and the press in the island.

Informant one explained that currently there is a very low level of freedom of the press in Cuba, the level is not very different from how it was when he fled the island. He stated that censorship and self-censorship dominates every media outlet. He suggested that journalists who do not agree with the revolutionary regime but work for official media outlets are in constant fear of publishing something that the regime might consider inadequate since they can lose their jobs and face legal consequences. He also mentioned that even if something opposing the regime is written, somehow it will be censored or stopped from reaching the Cuban population. He stated that “freedom of the press has been nonexistent since 1960.” A change that he has noticed is an increase in the amount of independent journalists, but he stressed the fact that this is not a change

caused by the government but rather a change caused by the Cuban society. When talking about independent journalists, informant one referred to them as brave people who are widely admired by the population. He mentioned that these independent journalists face many dangers since they are opposing the regime and going against the law. According to him, independent journalists are harassed, assaulted, and their children are not allowed to go to school. He finished by stating that “They [the Cuban government] are so weak, that they can’t allow the truth.”

Informant two, like informant one, stated that “there is no freedom of the press at all.” He said that all media outlets need to be at the service of the political system. He mentioned one exception that is excluded from censorship which are Catholic articles. He clarified that these religious publications are not officially accepted by the regime but are somehow tolerated under a lot of government pressure. He also mentioned that recently, minimal changes have been implemented within the country but always with some government control. One example is the recent access to the Internet through internet cafes. He clarified that internet use comes with a catch since it is extremely expensive and supervised. He stated that Cubans make about \$15.00 U.S. dollars a week and Internet cafes usually cost about \$5.00 U.S. dollars per hour. He added that e-mails can be received from other countries but that pictures are never allowed to come through. He talked extensively about independent journalists since this is how he gets truthful information from the island for his radio broadcasts. He explained that independent journalists are highly persecuted and suffer due to unfair incarceration. Independent journalists cannot disseminate their reports inside the island so the info gets leaked out of the country and disseminated in other parts of the world.

Informant three also believes that there is a lack of freedom of the press in the island. When he talked about changes in recent years, he refers to them as fake liberties implemented at

specific moments in time for the convenience of the Cuban regime. He explains that small changes makes it look like Cubans have more freedom which is not accurate. For example, he mentioned the recent opening of cyber cafes. The Cuban government is trying to make the world believe that Cubans now have the freedom to access the World Wide Web when in reality, it is so expensive to utilize the internet that barely anyone can access it. Additionally, those who can access it are supervised. He stated that “There have not been any changes in basic Cuban laws and everything is still the same.”

Informant four explained censorship from his own experience and strongly believes that journalists today experience censorship like he did. During his interviews with Fidel Castro, Castro would check the informant’s notes and erase what he could not publish. Before publishing articles, Castro would also ask our informant to show him the article to make changes. The informant mentioned that sometimes, his articles were reduced by more than 50% on the information he had compiled. The informant fears that in today’s Cuba, unfortunately the same occurs. Editors in chief and government officials censor articles with information that is not convenient for them and often make significant edits to journalists’ works eradicating the essence of the original piece. Informant four believes that changes in media in the last ten years such as limited access to the internet and less restrictions on travel are all “cosmetic changes” rather than “fundamental changes.” He believes that fundamental changes are needed for freedom of the press to actually exist in the island once again. He expressed a lot of admiration for independent journalists who fight against oppression despite fear. Informant four himself feared for his life and his wife’s life if he ever returned to the island because of all the criticism he has published toward the Cuban revolutionary government.

Informant five believes that Cuba is slowly advancing towards a more free press. He admits that there are still many rules and regulations but stated that if people continue fighting for what they want, they will see a free Cuba. He mentioned that the number of political prisoners has decreased over the past few years, and that people are less fearful to oppose the regime.

Informant six believes that there is still a very low level of freedom of the press in Cuba. He explains that all media outlets are still owned by the government and can therefore be censored and controlled. He stated that there is no dissemination of information within the island and that he knows people who know more about Cuba when they move out of the island than when they actually lived in it. He explained that there is a little more freedom of religion. He also stressed the fact that technology has helped independent journalists since they can now record whatever the government is doing, such as police officers physically assaulting an activist, and leak it to other countries to expose the government and demand change. According to him, this process of exposing the government is highly dangerous since independent journalists are being incarcerated, tortured and even killed by the regime. He also mentioned that the government sends people disguised as civilians to harm protestant, activists or dissidents. For example, he knew a rapper who would scream out his criticism towards the revolutionary government in the streets. A few weeks after, he found his house destroyed. Another example is harassment toward the Ladies in White which is a group of women who have relatives incarcerated as political prisoners and lead peaceful protests every Sunday. He knows of women who are pushed around, physically assaulted, or get their property damaged.

## Discussion

This study sought to determine the level of freedom of the press in Cuba from the year 2002 to the year 2013 and to identify any changes in the level of freedom in that same timeline.

Overall, based on the interviews of six Cuban exiles who are currently residing in the United States, there are concerns over the lack of freedom of the press in Cuba. Informants seemed to suggest that freedom with limitations is not freedom. Additionally, it was discovered that according to the informants there have been minor changes to allow more freedom but no fundamental reforms have been established. Based on their testimonies, the data suggest that most Cubans in this study consider their regime to be totalitarian. They believe that the Cuban government strictly controls the media, and that the majority of the media in Cuba is made up of propaganda and stories on Cuban success.

Based on the results of this study, the Cuban press can be described through Wilber Schramm's (1956) Soviet Communist Theory of the Press often referred to as the Communist Theory of the Press. Schramm was the director of the Institute for Communication Research in Stanford University and wrote about the press from a communist perspective. This theory stems from the society of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin in which the press is owned and controlled by the government and has the sole purpose of advancing the government's objectives with no room for criticism or opposition.

On various occasions, Fidel Castro has expressed his admiration for Marx and Lenin and has admitted that he based his decisions on how to run Cuba on their principles. For example, during a speech in 1961 Fidel Castro stated "somos marxista-leninistas... seremos siempre marxista-leninistas" [Translation] "We are Marxist-Leninists... we will always be Marxist-Leninists" (Castro, 1961, para. 42). Schramm (1956) points out three basic characteristics of the



communist press which are state ownership, censorship, and propaganda (p. 105). Based on the informants' responses, these three characteristics are prominent in the Cuban press. Freedom of expression is also mentioned in the theory. Schramm mentions that in a communist government, people can exercise their freedoms of speech and the press within the limitations of its government. As stated earlier, the Cuban government grants these freedoms in its Constitution as long as these rights are exercised in accordance to the revolution.

### *Ownership*

All Cuban media are owned and controlled by the government and its institutions. According to Schramm's Soviet Theory of the Press, the government needs to control all mass media facilities in order to be able to control the dissemination of information. As previously stated in this study, the Cuban government has several institutions in place to control and regulate all mass media facilities including the presses, the paper, and the broadcasting stations. Another part of Schramm's theory, is the belief that the government knows what is good for society and must therefore do what is best for them. The Cuban government believes that a way to avoid social unrest is to control the information in the media. Finally, communist governments own the media for the purpose of guaranteeing equal access to the media by eliminating a class-dominated press. As previously stated, the Cuban regime is a strong opposer of imperialism and owning the media allows for class equality in the press.

### *Censorship*

Schramm states that under the communist press "attacks against leadership are equivalent to treason against the state" (1956, p. 117). Basically, no opposition against the government is

allowed through the mass media and opposition is punishable by law. Based on this study, this component of the theory applies to the Cuban media. Policies and laws are in place against any counter-revolutionary comments in the media. Independent journalists are persecuted and articles criticizing the revolutionary government are censored. Censorship leads to repetitiveness in the news which is viewed as a strength, not a weakness.

Schramm explains that in a communist society, the government has the purpose to create unity within the nation. The only way to achieve this, is to get all citizens under the same mindset. To create and maintain national unity, communist governments censor disrupting publications and keep opposing views from foreign publications and broadcasts outside of the country. The Cuban regime seeks to create and maintain national unity by creating a positive view of the revolution. To achieve this, the government does not allow publications with divergent views to reach the Cuban population.

Self-censorship is also examined by the Communist Theory of the Press. According to Schramm (1956), "Freedom and responsibility are inseparably linked in the Soviet theory" (p. 129). He expands on the idea that the government gives the responsibility of creating a positive image of the country to journalists. In Cuba, journalists self-censor their works based on the responsibility given to them by the Cuban regime to create a positive image of the island to the world. The government claims that there are a lot of negative misconceptions about the island due to U.S. anti-Castro propaganda and that it is the duty of the press to clarify these misconceptions.

### *Propaganda*

Lenin stated that the media has three main roles to play which are "collective propagandist, collective agitator... collective organizer" (as cited in Schramm, 1956, p.116).

Based on these three roles, the media serves as instruments of the government to get people to support their ideals. Schramm mentions the instrumentality of the media used by the government to advance their power. The media therefore serve the purpose of not only informing the masses about the government, but also, to convince the people of the greatness of the government. In Cuba, the government controlled media broadcasts long hours of speeches by Fidel Castro and have daily publications praising the revolution. This type of Cuban propaganda is meant to build support toward the revolution. Cuban media aims to shape the way Cubans see their world, their country, and more specifically, their government. Through propaganda, the Cuban government aims to benefit by not only gaining popularity but also by gaining approval.

Even though these findings yield interesting conclusions, they are not definite and cannot be generalized since the sample was not representative of the larger population they were drawn from. Additionally, confirmation bias of informants cannot be eradicated. Due to their geographical location, they do not have direct contact with Cuban journalism or the Cuban government since they no longer live or exercise their profession in the island. Their knowledge on the current state of freedom of the press comes from sources within the island, not from personal recent experiences. Based on their demographics, informants' experiences took place many years ago and the situation might not necessarily be the same in today's Cuba.

## **Conclusion**

Further research is needed to expand the knowledge on the levels of freedom of speech and the press in Cuba. There is a great lack of current literature on the issue and the public's perceptions on Cuba needs to be yielded by scholarly literature and not by U.S. rhetoric. As technology quickly develops and more reforms are introduced to the island, wider opportunities

for research in Cuba might increase. Looking at blogs, social media and the internet might be important considerations for future studies.

Based on the study, results reached through the literature review and the interviews of Cuban journalists, this study concludes that there seems to be a limited amount of freedom of the press in Cuba from 2002 to 2013. Additionally, it is concluded that little change in regard to press freedom has taken place in the island during the last decade.

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