

**Literacy, Censorship and Intellectual Freedom: The Independent Library
Movement in Contemporary Cuba**

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Introduction

Education is arguably one of the greatest achievements of the Cuban revolution of 1959. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the literacy rate in Cuba is nearly 97%. While this and other data have established that nearly every adult on the Island is technically capable of reading and writing, it is less clear that the average Cuban citizen can fully benefit from these skills.

Previous research demonstrates that Cubans have been forbidden from fully expressing their opinions – both in public and in private, whether in writing or by any other means – for more than half a century. In my article entitled, “Violations of Freedom of the Press in Cuba: 1952-1969,”¹ I examined the limitations and prohibitions of freedom of the press during the dictatorships of Fulgencio Batista (1952-1958) and Fidel Castro (1959-1969). I found that varying degrees of freedom of the press existed under Batista’s regime and that there was no freedom of the press on the Island by 1961.

Intrigued by my findings that the Cuban people have long been prohibited from writing without censorship, the purpose of this paper is to investigate whether they have been allowed to read what they desire. More specifically, this paper will 1) review the concepts of “freedom of expression,” “freedom of information,” and “intellectual freedom,” 2) analyze the independent library movement of Cuba, and 3) address four of the main divisive issues surrounding on this matter.

¹ Vidaillet, Kelsey. “Freedom of the Press in Cuba: 1952-1959”, *Archive: A Journal of Undergraduate History* (University of Wisconsin-Madison – DoIt Digital Publishing) 2005 Vol 8: 69-93.

Research Questions and Methodology

This paper addressed three overarching research questions. First, what is the current state of freedom of expression, freedom of information, intellectual freedom and censorship in Cuba? Second, what are the origins of the Independent Libraries in Cuba, what activities are they involved in and under what conditions do they work? Lastly, what are some of the main controversies that surround this issue?

These questions were addressed by researching newspaper articles written about the Independent Library Movement, sending structured questionnaires to “experts” from the entire political spectrum of political perspectives participating in this debate issue, and traveling to Cuba. To analyze the rationale behind the creation of Independent Libraries in contemporary Cuba, I evaluated the access that the average Cuban citizen had to the works of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi in government controlled libraries. King and Gandhi are arguably the most prominent leaders of non-violent, civil disobedience and the inability to access their writings has frequently been cited by supporters of the independent libraries in Cuba as one of the reasons for the creation of the movement. I visited the archives of both La Biblioteca Nacional José Martí de Cuba (The José Martí National Library of Cuba) in the city of Havana and La Biblioteca Pública Géner y del Monte in the city of Matanzas (the capital of Matanzas province, the province immediately to the east of Havana province). An in-person visit to these libraries was necessary given that there are no online catalogues of the collections in the Cuban library system.

I acknowledge that I was only able to visit a limited number of libraries while in Cuba and that evaluating the availability of specific books at such locations might not necessarily be

able to be generalized to all public libraries on the Island. Nevertheless, I believe that such an exercise was useful in describing the current access to information on human rights issues that the largest government-run library in Cuba offers to the over 2.3 million citizens of the cities of Havana and Matanzas - and by extension to the 3,555,000 people total in both provinces ² - which accounts for over 30% of the entire population of the country. Lastly, I also went to El Museo Nacional de la Campana de Alfabetización (the National Literacy Museum) in Havana to learn about the Cuban government's perspective regarding the literacy campaign of 1961.

IA. Background: Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Information and Intellectual Freedom in Cuba

In order to effectively place the creation and existence of the Independent Library Movement of Cuba into context, the purpose of this section of the paper is to 1) offer an overview of freedom of expression, freedom of information and intellectual freedom on the Island, as well as to demonstrate how the limitations of such freedoms personally affect Cuban authors and readers, as well as to 2) provide a brief overview of censorship of individual freedoms on the Island. A review of freedom of information in Cuba has led me to conclude that there has no intellectual freedom in Cuba since soon after Castro's ascension to power.

To begin, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an international agreement signed in 1948 by numerous countries around the world, including Cuba states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

² “Cuba.” *City Population* website. <<http://www.citypopulation.de/Cuba.html>>

Nevertheless, freedom of opinion and expression are only two of numerous, basic human rights that are allegedly denied to the Cuban people.

In 1961, Fidel Castro stated his views on freedom of expression, in a speech that would later become known as the “Words to the Intellectuals”:

“...within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing. Against the Revolution, nothing, because the Revolution also has its rights and the first right of the Revolution is to exist, and against the right of the Revolution to be and exist, nobody...I believe that this is quite clear. What are the rights of the revolutionary or non-revolutionary writers and artists? Within the revolution, everything; against the Revolution, no right.”³

The Cuban government justifies its methods of censorship and the suppression of freedom of expression by stating that the interests of the State to protect itself and remain in power are superior to the rights of the people.

In 1971, during his closing speech at the Congress of Education and Culture, Fidel Castro set forth the official policy on cultural freedom in Cuba:

“...to receive a prize in a national or international contest, one has to be a true revolutionary, a true writer, a true poet, a true revolutionary. This is clear. And clearer than water...Only revolutionaries will be acceptable.”⁴

Freedom of expression in Cuba was further explicitly denied at the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1975:

“The First Congress of our Party feels that the Revolution...has the duty to reject any effort to use the work of art as an instrument or pretext for spreading or legitimizing ideological positions adverse to socialism...Our Party...fosters art and literature in which the socialist humanism that is at the heart of our Revolution is present as an encouraging support.”⁵

³ Castro, Fidel. *Palabras a los intelectuales*. Montevideo: Comité de Intelectuales y Artistas de Apoyo a la Revolución Cubana, 1961.

⁴ Padilla, Heberto. “Prologo con novela,” *En mi jardin pastan los heroes* (Barcelona 1981), p.118.

⁵ “Documentos del Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba. Resolución 21, *Casa de las Américas*, Yr. XVI (Nov.-Dec., 1976), p.21.

According to this resolution, the only forms of art and literature that would be allowed would be those that were not in conflict with the goals of the socialist state.

Similar sentiments were further echoed at the Second Congress of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba in 1977 where the resolution on the Draft Regulations of the Literature Section suggested that the function of the group was to:

“foster the creation and dissemination of literature that through its ideological content and aesthetic quality contributes to the education and spiritual enrichment of the people.” As a result, literature like all artistic activity, demands a study of Marxism-Leninism so that the creative work produced by the trained artist will reflect social problems ‘with the greatest depth.’”⁶

IB. The Cuban Writer: Reinaldo Arenas and Heberto Padilla

Yet arguably it is only through the words of those who have faced personal condemnation for attempting to express themselves, that one can truly come to understand the totality of the lack of freedom of expression in Cuba.

Reinaldo Arenas, was a young, openly homosexual novelist who was persecuted in Cuba for “ideological diversionism” and sentenced arbitrarily to a year in prison. Arenas once explained the workings of Cuban censorship:

“...It would be almost naïve to analyze the repression only in terms of the people the system has decided to sentence to prison or shoot. More subtle, more sinister, more immoral, more impossible to verify and more terrible, is the repression of silence, of compulsion, of threats, of daily extortions, the unceasing official menace, the fear unleashed through the perfect mechanisms that make of man not only a repressed person, but also a self-repressed one, not only a censored person, but a self-censored one, not only one watched over, but one who watches over himself, since he knows – the system has taken it upon itself to let him know – that the censorship, the vigilance, the repression, are not simple psychological manias or fantasies of persecution, but rather

⁶ *Union*, XVII, 1. (March, 1978), p. 30.

sinister apparatuses, ready to silently strike us without the free world (the other doesn't count here) even managing to know for certain what happened to us."

Heberto Padilla, was a poet who was detained by Cuban state police in March 1971, and was forced to sign a four-thousand-word document "acknowledging" his "counterrevolutionary errors." His poem, "In Hard Times" expresses his criticism of the commitment required of intellectuals by the Cuban government.

"In Hard Times" ⁷

They asked him for his time
so that he [might] join it to the time of History.

They asked him for hands
because during hard times
there is nothing better than a good pair of hands.

They asked him for his eyes
that once had shed some tears
so that he could see the clear side
(especially the clear side of life)
for when it comes to horror
one single eye will do.

They asked him for his lips
- which were parched and dry -
so that they [might] issue an affirmation
and with each affirmation build the dream
(the high dream).

They asked him for his legs
- which were knobbly and hard -
because during hard times
is there anything better than a good pair of legs
for building or for trenches?

They asked him for the woods
that nourished him as a child
with its obedient trees.

⁷ Translated by Jorge Guitart, (note: bolded and underlined text added)

They asked him for his chest, his heart, his shoulders.

They told him that it was strictly necessary.

They explained to him later

that all these donations would be useless

unless he also surrender **his tongue**

because during hard times

nothing could be more useful

for stopping hatred or lies.

And finally they asked him politely

to start moving

because during hard times

this is, no doubt, the decisive test.

IC. Censorship in Cuba

“In Castro’s Cuba...there were no newspapers, except official ones. No books, except those sanctioned by the regime...jails filled with prisoners – from those who violently opposed the regime to those who simply dared speak out.”

- columnist Nat Hentoff ⁸

In his article, “Censorship in Castro’s Cuba: ‘Against the Revolution, Nothing’” from the book *Patterns of Censorship Around the World*, Dr. Roger Reed ⁹ explains that “the Cuban government uses several methods to suppress freedom of expression.” ¹⁰ He furthermore divides such methods into three main groups: ¹¹

- (1) the nationalization of the communications industry,
- (2) the punishment of Cubans who violate restrictions on freedom of expression, and
- (3) the denial of access to foreign sources of information.

(1) The nationalization of the communications industry:

To understand the foundations for the lack of freedom of expression on the Island, it is crucial to understand that within only three years of coming to power, the Castro government

⁸ Hentoff, Nat. “Freedom to read!” *The Village Voice* Vol.50, Iss.7 (16-22 Feb 2005): 26.

⁹ For additional bio, please see Kent State University’s website – “Geneva Semester Faculty and Staff” <<http://dept.kent.edu/cicp/geneva/reed.html>>

¹⁰ Reed, Roger. “Censorship in Castro’s Cuba: “Against the Revolution, Nothing”” in *Patterns of Censorship Around the World*. Ed. Ilan Peleg. Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press, 1993, p. 67.

¹¹ Ibid.

completely controlled the press.¹² As Professor Carlos Ripoll stated in his article, “Harnessing the Intellectuals: Censoring Writers and Artists in Today’s Cuba”, “the first victim of censorship is almost always the press, because no totalitarian government can withstand criticism, much less public denunciation of its errors and excesses.”¹³

Yet, not only was the press nationalized, but so was the entire communications industry. Independent publishing houses, for example, are non-existent, and the only publishing is owned, controlled and operated by the Cuban government. For writers in Cuba to be able to publish their work, they must belong to the official government sponsored and controlled Writer’s Union. Furthermore, given that the State is the only employer in the country, any author or poet whose writings are considered to be “against the Revolution” could not only face losing their Union membership, their ability to publish any of their work, their job, and possibly even face greater consequences, such as imprisonment (and commonly torture) or even death.

(2) The punishment of Cubans who violate restrictions on freedom of expression:

One might ask, “what are some of the laws that officially prohibit and reprimand the Cuban people who are perceived *not* to act “within the Revolution”?” The following is a brief list of a few of such legal statutes and consequences.

<< Article 52 of the 1976 Constitution >>

“Freedom of speech and the press, in accordance with the goals of Socialist society, is recognized for its citizens. The material conditions for their exercise are guaranteed by the fact that the press, the radio, television, movies and other mass media are state or social property and cannot be the object, in any case, of private property, which insures their use in the exclusive service of the working people and the interest of society.”

¹² Vidaillet, Kelsey. “Freedom of the Press in Cuba: 1952-1959”, *Archive: A Journal of Undergraduate History* (University of Wisconsin-Madison – DoIt Digital Publishing) 2005 Vol 8: 69-93.

¹³ Ripoll, Carlos. *Harnessing the intellectuals: Censoring Writers and Artists in Today’s Cuba*. Washington, D.C.: Cuban American National Foundation, 1985., p. 7.

<< Article 108 of the Penal Code (November 1979)>>

(1) There will be a sanction of deprivation of freedom of from one to eight years imposed on anyone who:

- (a) incites against the social order, international solidarity or the socialist State by means of oral or written propaganda, or in any other form;
- (b) makes, distributes or possesses propaganda of the character mentioned in the preceding clause.

(2) Anyone who spreads false news or malicious predictions liable to cause alarm or discontent in the population, or public disorder, is subject to a sanction of one to four years imprisonment.

(3) If the mass media are used for the execution of the actions described in the previous paragraphs, the sanction will be deprivation of freedom of from seven to fifteen years.

<<Law 88>>

In February 1999, the National Assembly passed Law 88 for the Protection of Cuba's National Independence and Economy. This law calls for a prison sentence of between 7 to 15 years for passing information to the United States that could be used to bolster anti-Cuban measures such as the US economic blockade. The term could rise up to 20 years if the information was acquired secretly. The legislation also bans the ownership, distribution or reproduction of "subversive materials" from the US government, and proposes terms of imprisonment of up to five years for collaborating with radio and TV stations and publications deemed to be assisting US policy.

<<Article 91 of the Penal Code>>

"He who, in the interest of a foreign state, commits an act with the objective of damaging the independence or territorial integrity of the Cuban state, incurs the penalty of ten to twenty years imprisonment or death."

In the March 2003 crackdown on human rights activists, 75 intellectuals, writers, journalists, librarians and human rights activists – individuals who have also been named “Prisoners of Conscience” by Amnesty International - were all accused of either Law 88 or Article 91 of the Penal Code, or a combination of both.

(3) The denial of access to foreign sources of information:

As Reed states “foreign newspapers, magazines, and books that challenge the official orthodoxy in any way are banned from public circulation in Cuba. Publications as innocent as...*National Geographic* are not sold on newsstands anywhere in Cuba.”¹⁴

Additionally, access to the Internet in Cuba is extremely restricted. According to *Reporters Without Borders*:

“Cuba is the world’s biggest prison for journalists and free expression is banned. The regime carefully processes the news it feeds to its citizens and tolerates no independent press. The government has a contradictory position on the Internet. It trains thousands of students in the new technologies (official sources say some 30,000 are currently receiving training). But it prevents the vast majority of the population from having online access. The authorities have gone as far as to call the Internet “the great disease of 21st century.”¹⁵

Additionally, their 2004 “Internet Report” concluded:

“The government passed laws as soon as the Internet appeared in Cuba. In June 1996, Decree 209 (entitled “Access to the World Computer Network from Cuba”) said it could not be used “in violation of the moral principles of Cuban society and its laws” and that Internet messages must not “endanger national security.” ... “Cubans who want to log on to it or use public access points must have official permission and give a “valid reason” for wanting to and sign a contract listing restrictions. Decree 209 says access is granted “with priority given to bodies and institutions that can contribute to the life and development of the country.” Apart from embassies and foreign companies, this means political figures, top officials, intellectuals,

¹⁴ Reed, Roger. “Censorship in Castro’s Cuba: “Against the Revolution, Nothing”” in *Patterns of Censorship Around the World*. Ed. Ilan Peleg. Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press, 1993, p. 70.

¹⁵ Reporters Without Borders – “Cuba” *“The Internet Under Surveillance: Obstacles to the Free Flow of Information Online 2004 Report.”* <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10611>

academics, researchers and journalists working for the government, managers of cultural bodies geared to exports, computer firms and the Catholic hierarchy.”

“Cuba is one of the world’s 10 most repressive countries as regards online free expression. The Internet is reserved for the ruling elite. But even the privileged few usually have access only to an Intranet specially created and filtered by the authorities.”¹⁶

And, what about the average Cuban citizen? The same report summarized:

“Cubans have been able to use a special national e-mail service at ETECSA access points since September 2001, without connecting to the Internet. Three hours of access to this service - valid for only one person - costs 3.5 euros (a third of the average Cuban monthly wage of about 10 euros). The user must prove identity, fill in a long form and give an address. The ISP is able to monitor all messages before they are sent or received. According to official figures, Cuba currently has 480,000 e-mail accounts.”

But...“unless they have official authorisation, Cubans cannot access the Internet from a public access point. The Internet is only available to tourists - at a prohibitive charge of about 6 euros an hours - in hotels and a few cybercafés.

The government has set up Internet centres - usually in post offices - where Cubans can access their e-mail and an Intranet called Tu Isla (Your Island), consisting of websites chosen by the authorities, including the sites of the state radio and TV stations that broadcast their programmes online. To use these public access points, they have to sign a register and show ID.”¹⁷

Lastly, Cuba ranked 161 out of 167 in the 2005 *Reporters Without Borders* Worldwide press freedom index where “a higher number in the ranking means more restraints on freedom of the press.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Reporters Without Borders – “Cuba” *“The Internet Under Surveillance: Obstacles to the Free Flow of Information Online 2004 Report.”* <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10611>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “Reporters Without Borders” article. *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* website. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reporters_Without_Borders>

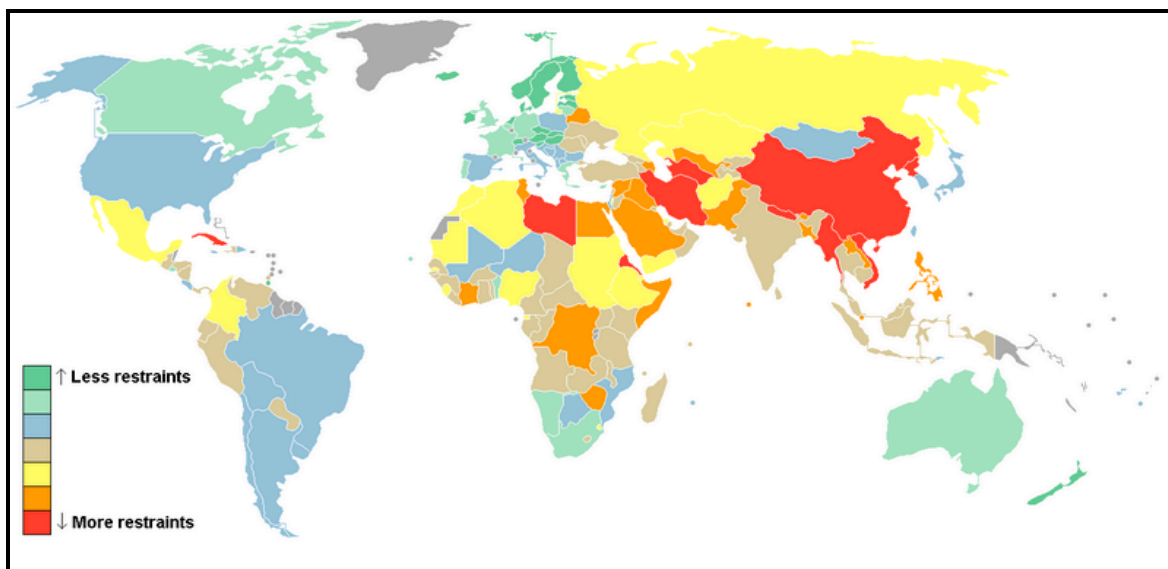


Figure A – Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Ranking¹⁹

According to *Reporters Without Borders*:

“The index measures the state of press freedom in the world. It reflects the degree of freedom journalists and news organisations enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by the state to respect and ensure respect for this freedom.

It is based solely on events between 1 September 2004 and 1 September 2005. It does not look at human rights violations in general, just press freedom violations.

Reporters Without Borders compiled a questionnaire with 50 criteria for assessing the state of press freedom in each country. It includes every kind of violation directly affecting journalists (such as murders, imprisonment, physical attacks and threats) and news media (censorship, confiscation of issues, searches and harassment).

It registers the degree of impunity enjoyed by those responsible for such violations. It also takes account of the legal situation affecting the news media (such as penalties for press offences, the existence of a state monopoly in certain areas and the existence of a regulatory body) and the behaviour of the authorities towards the state-owned news media and the foreign press. It also takes account of the main obstacles to the free flow of information on the Internet.

We have taken account not only of abuses attributable to the state, but also those by armed militias, clandestine organisations or pressure groups that can pose a real threat to press freedom.

¹⁹ “Reporters Without Borders” article. *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* website.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Reporters_without_borders_2005_press_freedom_ranking-fix.PNG>

The questionnaire was sent to partner organisations of Reporters Without Borders (14 freedom of expression groups in five continents) and its 130 correspondents around the world, as well as to journalists, researchers, jurists and human rights activists. A scale devised by the organisation was then used to give a country-score to each questionnaire. The Statistics Institute of the University of Paris provided assistance and advice in processing the data reliably and thoroughly.

The 167 countries ranked are those for which we received completed questionnaires from a number of independent sources. Others were not included because of a lack of credible data.”²⁰

II. The Independent Library Movement in Cuba

a) Origins

It is in this context that the Independent Library Movement in Cuba came to be. It was created following a live televised interview of Fidel Castro that took place at the International Book Fair held in Havana in February 1998. A foreign journalist asked Cuban leader Fidel Castro, “Comandante, are there books prohibited in Cuba?” Castro replied, “There are no books prohibited in Cuba. There is just not enough money to buy them all.” Consequently, Ramón Colás (a psychologist)²¹ and Berta Mexidor (an economist and former university professor)²² created the first independent library in their home in the eastern Cuban province of Las Tunas.

²⁰ “How the index was compiled.” *Reporters Without Borders* website.

<http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15338>

²¹ “Dr. Colás graduated in Psychology in the University of Las Villas in 1985. He worked as a psychologist at the Pediatric Hospital of Las Tunas; directed the handicapped and mental health center in the capital of the province and in the Las Tunas Psychiatric Hospital, from which he was expelled for his ideas and political opinion.” (source: “Annex 1” of IFLA/FAIFE Report on Cuba / September 1999. <<http://www.ifla.org/faife/faife/cubarep1.htm>>.)

²² “Bachelor in Economics at the University of Oriente, 1985. Specialist in Accounting and Finance of the Provincial Food Distribution Dept. from 1985 to 1988. Assistant professor at the Las Tunas University Center from 1988 to 1997.” (source: “Annex 1” of IFLA/FAIFE Report on Cuba / September 1999. <<http://www.ifla.org/faife/faife/cubarep1.htm>>.)

According to journalist George Gedda of the *Los Angeles Times*:

“it was on March 3, 1998 that Colás...placed a sign in large black letters in front of his house. On it was the Castro quote asserting his no-censorship policy.

Farther down was another sign: “Independent Library...As Colás described it, “I used Fidel’s words to protect myself.””²³



Figure B ²⁴ – the sign created by Mexidor and Colás, which says “Biblioteca Independiente Felix Varela” (Felix Varela Independent Library) and on the bottom line, the quote “En Cuba no hay libros prohibidos – Fidel” (“In Cuba, there are no prohibited books – Fidel”)

At no cost to users, Colás and Mexidor began offering their own books, magazines and other reading material that reflected all points of view – a concept they believed was not followed by state-run facilities. Their main goal is “to promote reading not as a mere act of receiving understanding, but to form an opinion which is individually arrived at without censorship nor obligation to one belief.”²⁵ Today there are more than 100 active independent libraries throughout the Island. Independent Librarian Ricardo González Alfonso (who is currently serving a 20 year sentence for his alleged “dissident activities”) offered his perspective

²³ Gedda, George. “Castro’s bookish foe – Ramon Colas opened an independent library in Cuba. He’s seeking backing from the U.S.” *Los Angeles Times* 5 Sep 2003: E15.

²⁴ *The Friends of Cuban Libraries website* - Ed. Robert Kent. Last revised 20 March 2006. 11 May 2006. <<http://www.friendsofcubanlibraries.org/>>

²⁵ “Annex 1” of IFLA/FAIFE Report on Cuba / September 1999. <<http://www.ifla.org/faife/faife/cubarep1.htm>>

on the importance of this movement. When asked about Castro's statement regarding there being "no banned books in Cuba," González Alfonso responded, "technically, that's true."

According to Vivian Sequera from the Associated Press, he also "acknowledged there is no known official list of banned books and authors," while additionally stating:

"“But we all know that ‘Animal Farm’ by George Orwell, is not among the favorites of the government,” he said, referring to the 1945 anti-Stalinist fable of an uprising of oppressed farm animals. The government “doesn’t prohibit, but makes things unavailable,” Gonzalez said. “It’s like going to the ice cream store and having them tell you that they only have chocolate. How am I going to order strawberry?””²⁶

Since the government owns all property in Cuba, independent libraries are located in the homes of volunteers who willingly risk facing negative consequences from the Cuban government. For example, shortly after founding their Independent Library, Mexidor was fired from her job, the couple was forced to pretend to be divorced for 6 months, their home was searched, Colás was imprisoned and beaten,²⁷ and their children Talía and Zeús, who were 14 and 8 at the time, respectively “were shunned by their friends and were warned by school authorities that education in Cuba was exclusively for supporters of the revolution.”²⁸ In August 1999, the family was evicted from their home, where Amnesty International reported they “had lived...for 13 years before being told they were illegal occupants.”²⁹ Due to such repercussions, the family applied for political asylum. They received their visas from the U.S. in October 2000, but did not receive permission from the Cuban government to leave the country

²⁶ Sequera, Vivian. (from the Associated Press) “Libraries Let Cubans Read Outside the Party Line.” Chicago Tribune 14 Dec 2000: 8.

²⁷ Ollwerther, Matt. “Speaker talks about life in Cuba without books.” Marshfield News Herald 22 March 2006. <<http://www.marshfieldnewsherald.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060322/MNH0101/603220674&SearchID=73239873009282>>

²⁸ Gedda, George. “Castro’s bookish foe – Ramon Colas opened an independent library in Cuba. He’s seeking backing from the U.S.” Los Angeles Times 5 Sep 2003: E15.

²⁹ Currie, Duncan. “The Forgotten 14: The American Library Association embraces Castro.” National Review Online. 22 July 2003.

until December 2001. The family lived in Miami until August 2005 when they moved to Jackson, Mississippi.

It is important to note that since 1998, this movement has gained recognition from across the political spectrum. In 2004, Colás and Mexidor were awarded “*The Voice Award*” by People for the American Way. (see Figure C below) As stated on the People for the American Way website:

“The ‘Voice’ Award goes to individual(s) or organization whose struggle in defense of Free Speech has international historical significance. This may or may not be a posthumous recognition.”³⁰

Ramón Colás and Berta Mexidor were honored:

“for their bravery in establishing a network of independent libraries in private homes throughout Cuba, wherein censored literature was available to the public.”³¹



Figure C³² - Colás and Mexidor (center) receiving the Voice Award

b) What services do the Independent Libraries provide?

Although I had originally proposed to visit Independent Libraries while conducting research in Cuba to be able to personally interview the Independent Librarians, I was unable to do so for many reasons. Authorities at the University of Wisconsin at Madison feared supporting

³⁰ People for the American Way website – “Who Are We” – Events: Celebrate Free Speech Awards 2004
<<http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?oid=15905>>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

a project where their money could potentially give the Cuban government “reason” to punish the Independent Librarians. Due to my inability to guarantee the University authorities and/or the Institutional Review Board at the University that their involvement in my research could not potential pose negative consequences to them as participants in this student, I decided against directly contacting Independent Librarians on the Island. Consequently, I have only been able to access the services they provide from interviewing the leaders of this movement who live outside the Island, as well as through evaluating websites and newspaper articles.

According to the sources each independent library must have a minimum of 300 books, which must be located in a visible area (i.e. not hidden in drawers or underneath either beds or mattresses.). Every independent librarian must have a basic understanding librarianship and the desire to assist in the education of patrons. Lastly, the independent librarians are not allowed a) to practice censorship in regards to subject area, authors, ideology, religion or b) discriminate the patrons of these libraries.³³

A general description of the Independent Libraries is illustrated through the following two examples. Associated Press journalist Vivian Sequera described Gisela Delgado’s “Dulce María Loynaz Independent Library,” one year after the library had opened, in the following way:

“It’s a small room lined with about 500 books and magazines, most in Spanish and a few in English, dealing with such subjects as politics, culture, religion, law and philosophy. Visitors can read at the libraries or take books home.”³⁴

Houston Chronicle journalist Laurie Goering offered this description of Rogelio Traviso’s

“Juana Alonso Independent Library”:

³³ “Overview”. *Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba* website. <<http://www.bibliocuba.org/english/pages/Overview>>

³⁴ Sequera, Vivian. (from the Associated Press) “Libraries Let Cubans Read Outside the Party Line.” *Chicago Tribune* 14 Dec 2000: 8.

“The faded tomes of Rogelio Traviso’s independent library spill out of two small bookcases in his home’s tiny back office, sharing space with an ancient Olivetti typewriter and a decrepit loveseat piled with out-of-date foreign news magazines.”³⁵

Furthermore, although I acknowledge having been limited in my ability to personally access a perhaps representative sample of the most common titles, authors, subjects, etc. offered by the Independent Libraries in Cuba, I have identified the findings of journalists who were able to travel to Cuba, interview the specified Independent Librarians, and evaluate their catalogues.

In August 2000, Karen DeYoung from *The Washington Post* wrote an article about Ricardo González Alfonso’s Independent Library. She described the library by stating:

“The thousand or so bedraggled books stacked on the dusty floor and sagging shelves of Ricardo Gonzalez’s single, sunlit room are an eclectic mixture. There are some paperback novels, biographies of José Martí and the “Thoughts of Fidel Castro.” There are Cuban authors banned for ancient and forgotten reasons, and a shelf of poetry.”

When DeYoung interviewed González Alfonso, he further discussed other books in his library:

“For instance, look at this book – “Mea Cuba,” a play on the words ‘mea culpa.’ It was written by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a winner of the Cervantes Prize...The book was published in the early 1960’s, but it is prohibited. He was the Cuban cultural attaché in Belgium and broke with the government and started to criticize it. This book is his thoughts and remembrances about pre- and post-revolutionary life here. The author...is more controversial than the book.”

“Here’s “The Works of Che Guevara,” and “Nation and State in Liberal Spain” – that one’s not allowed. If somebody comes in and asks about human rights, here’s the official version, “Cuba and Human Rights.” Here’s another version, published by UNESCO. It’s prohibited. I show them both and I don’t care which one they take.”³⁶

Chicago Tribune journalist Vivian Sequera also reported on the Independent Library of González Alfonso in December 2000:

³⁵ Goering, Laurie. “Independent Cuban libraries popping up unwelcomed.” *Houston Chronicle* 24 Feb 2002: 36.

³⁶ DeYoung, Karen. “Independent Libraries Mix Politics, Culture in Cuba; Banned Books Offered, but Government Rarely Interferes.” *The Washington Post* 3 Aug 2000: A26.

“His library offers more than 1,000 titles, ranging from “Animal Farm” to Victor Hugo’s “Les Miserables.” Also on his shelves are “Manhattan Transfer,” by John Dos Passos, United Nations magazines and reports from Amnesty International, as well as a biography of Karl Marx.”³⁷

David González from *New York Times* described Marcia Pérez Castillo’s Independent

Library in June 2001:

“Among the books...is “The Challenge of Liberty.”...[and] “Newsweek magazine”... “Yet only a fraction of her library’s books can be considered political. Like others, hers has the slapped-together feel of castoff collections: college texts on engineering and mathematics next to dog-eared copies of Sinclair Lewis and Mark Twain. The most popular books, in fact are on parapsychology, mysticism and Eastern religions.”³⁸

In addition to describing Pérez Castillo’s collection, González also reported his findings on Norman Jorge Rodríguez Cabrera’s library:

“The variety is evident in the 400-book library that Norman Jorge Rodriguez Cabrera has in his living room in Santiago. It includes books on religion, peaceful resistance, the fall of Communism and pamphlets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a document that human rights advocates here have long fought to disseminate...The library also includes books on the Cuban revolution and Marxism, as well as writing by Lenin commonly found in public libraries.”³⁹

In February 2002, Laurie Goering from the *Houston Chronicle* wrote about the collection of books that Rogelio Triviso had in his library:

“Among his 300 books are a text on the Philosophy of Capitalism, alongside a copy of Mark Twain’s Tom Sawyer and reference guides to U.S. history and German law. Novels by Dean Koontz, Isabel Allende and William Faulkner compete for space with textbooks on democracy and the French revolution. A few texts by Fidel Castro and one by North Korea’s Kim Il Sung make the cut – “I like to provide options,” Triviso says – but so does An Early American Reader and The Diary of Anne Frank.”⁴⁰

³⁷ DeYoung, Karen. “Independent Libraries Mix Politics, Culture in Cuba; Banned Books Offered, but Government Rarely Interferes.” *The Washington Post* 3 Aug 2000: A26.

³⁸ González, David. “In Book-Starved Cuba, Little Feasts for the Hungry.” *New York Times* 6 Jun 2001, Late ed. (East Coast): 4.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Goering, Laurie. “Independent Cuban libraries popping up unwelcomed.” *Houston Chronicle* 24 Feb 2002: 36.

Letta Tayler from *Newsday* described Gisela Delgado's Independent Library in June 2002:

"Most U.S. readers would consider the offerings in these renegade libraries benign. The bulk of the 3,200 volumes in Delgado's library – a small, humid room in her third-floor walk-up apartment in Havana – are books such as tattered legal tomes, detective novels, poetry compilations and translations of classics such as "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."⁴¹

Delgado's library was further evaluated by *Knight Ridder Tribune News Service* journalist Tracey Eaton in February 2003:

"Two of the most popular titles are "1984" and "Animal Farm." Each of the George Orwell classics, read by school children all over America, issues a scathing criticism of government repression. Other titles in her library include "Journey to the Center of the Earth," "Around the World in 80 Days" and "Huckleberry Finn."⁴²

Through my research, I also found that in some of the descriptions that have been published about the Independent Libraries there seems to be a perception of fear on behalf of some Cubans with regard to the libraries. In August 2000, *The Washington Post* journalist Karen DeYoung wrote:

"The Jorge Manach Independent Library, named for a once-famous journalist is a different, long-ago Cuba, is open to lend, but there are few borrowers. "Sometimes [Communist] Party youth come here," said Gonzalez, a former government journalist with a booming voice and a ready laugh. "Not many, because they're scared. We're really just a service to the community, but some in the community are scared. Of course, some people just come for the prohibited books, and ask for them by name. Whoever comes, no matter what they think, if we have the book, they can have it. I don't care what they take. People have the right to read."⁴³

⁴¹ Tayler, Letta. "In Cuba, Private Libraries Draw Threats." *Newsday* 9 Jun 2002: A17.

⁴² Eaton, Tracey. "Cuba blocks shipment of books sent by U.S." *Knight Ridder Tribune News Service* 27 Feb 2003: 1.

⁴³ DeYoung, Karen. "Independent Libraries Mix Politics, Culture in Cuba; Banned Books Offered, but Government Rarely Interferes." *The Washington Post* 3 Aug 2000: A26.

In June 2001, *New York Times* journalist David González, came to a similar conclusion, also in describing González Alfonso:

“He keeps his library open all day long, closing only when he goes to sleep. He said about six people a day come by to borrow a book for a week. Sometimes, though, he has to track down overdue books – there are no fines – when borrowers lend them to friends nervous about going themselves to the library.”⁴⁴

However, it was also identified that the Independent Librarians are aware of such fear of the average Cuban citizen and they are trying to counteract such concern. The first specific example came in February 2002, when *Houston Chronicle* reporter Laurie Goering, interviewed Independent Librarian Rogelio Traviso and stated:

“...he says many of his visitors are anxious about leaving their names. Because of that, Traviso says he doesn’t feel the need to keep meticulous borrowing records. “The books go out and I don’t care if they come back,” he said, “It’s better for them to be passed from hand to hand.””⁴⁵

The second example is the lending program designed by Gisela Delgado (the Director of the Independent Libraries of Cuba) and her husband, Hector Palacios Ruiz so that their books can reach as many readers as possible. Julie Eastlack Hopson described their efforts in April 2003 in the *Wisconsin State Journal* following conducting on-site research for her PhD:

“Hector’s library distribution works like this: Starting with 3,000 books, volunteers box up four dozen books, then lend them out to 25 reading groups. Group leaders pass them along to 25 additional readers. In the end, this human bookmobile allows books to be read by a 1,000 people at any given time. Gisela said that she “has to do it this way because the demand for the books is so great.””⁴⁶

⁴⁴ González, David. “In Book-Starved Cuba, Little Feasts for the Hungry.” *New York Times* 6 Jun 2001, Late ed. (East Coast): 4.

⁴⁵ Goering, Laurie. “Independent Cuban libraries popping up unwelcomed.” *Houston Chronicle* 24 Feb 2002: 36

⁴⁶ Eastlack Hopson, Julie. “Crackdown on Cuban Librarian Shows Fragility of Free Expression.” *Wisconsin State Journal* 11 Apr 2003: A8.

Other services provided by the Independent Libraries include lending, in addition to books, “magazines, newspapers, videotapes, discs, maps, and other material to enlarge cultural knowledge.”⁴⁷

Additionally, the Independent Libraries also offer a wide range of services, including workshops, lectures, children's games, theater, movie discussions, music, presentations of books and authors, literary circles, exhibits, conferences as well as other cultural initiatives that promote reading.⁴⁸

The Independent Libraries of Cuba also sponsor a literary contest called *El Herald*, which “is a free cultural initiative that has allowed independent Cuban authors to publish their works and reach readers throughout Cuba.”⁴⁹ The contest is further described by the Independent Libraries of Cuba, Inc. website:

“The first Independent Library in Cuba was named after Félix Varela, a Catholic priest who was born on November 20, 1778, and died in the United States on February 25, 1853. According to José de La Luz y Caballero, another illustrious patriot, Father Varela taught Cubans to think for themselves and played an important role in restoring freedom in Cuba. He is rememberd (sic) as Cuba’s Herald.

After recogonizing (sic) the success of the Independent Libraries Project, the founders decided to organize a literary contest intended for those Cuban authors that cannot publish their works within Cuba because of official censorship. The authors participating in the contest have reflected Varela’s significance and the transcendence of his ideas as a reputable man who discovered, in the strictness of a colonial society, the need to free the mind and seek the light of truth.

For Cuban society, it is important to offer the readers the possibility to get information and give the authors the space to produce their works. The Herald achieves this goal and goes farther, because among its participants there is an important number of worthy artists and writers who, before The Herald contest, were unknown and uncertain whether their works would ever be published.

The oldest and the newest writers now find in The Herald contest the possibility to be promoted and listened to, and they are also sure that literary justice is applied, as the Cuban Independent Libraries Project has chosen a prestigious jury with the necessary

⁴⁷ “Overview”. *Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba* website. <<http://www.bibliocuba.org/english/pages/Overview>>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “About the Contest”. *Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba* website. <<http://www.bibliocuba.org/english/pages/About-the-contest>>

artistic background to be able to select the best works, within the essential pluralism and the necessary diversity.

Our contest includes the categories of Poetry, Short Story, Epistle, Testimony, Essay, and Journalism. The first time only sixty works entered the contest; in the third edition, which finished very recently, more than 350 works were analyzed, and the quality and diversity of topics was significant.”

Additionally, as stated on their website, the rules of *El Herald* are:⁵⁰

- 1) All writers who reside in Cuba are invited to participate.
- 2) The theme and structure of the works are open.
- 3) The length of the works in the short story, essay, journalism, testimony and epistle categories must be between 25 and 50 pages, double spaced, on sheets measuring 8 _ by 11. In the case of poetry, writers may present between 5 and 10 poems.
- 4) The works must be sent in a closed envelope with the name of the author, telephone number, address, and brief bibliographic information.
- 5) The deadline for submission is 30 September.
- 6) The selection panel will award three works in each genre, although the panel could decide to leave some of the awards vacant.
- 7) The decision of the panel is final, and it will be made public in October.
- 8) The author awarded first prize will receive 300 Cuban pesos; second, 200 Cuban pesos; and third, 100 Cuban pesos. In addition, the awarded works will be published.
- 9) The awards will be published on the following website www.bibliocuba.org and in other media sources.
- 10) The works must be sent to the headquarters of the Independent Libraries Project: Calle 25 # 866, Apto. 3, entre A y B, Vedado, Ciudad de La Habana CP 10400.
- 11) Royalties will not be paid. The Independent Libraries Project will have the rights to publication for one year.
- 12) By participating in this contest, the author agrees to these conditions.

Lastly, in the fall of 2005, the Independent Libraries of Cuba, Inc. published the first edition of a children’s magazine, *Limón Partido* (see Figure D).

⁵⁰ “About the Contest”. *Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba* website.
<<http://www.bibliocuba.org/english/pages/About-the-contest>>



Figure D – Limón Partido magazine

c) Under what conditions do they work?

“Lending someone a book doesn’t seem like a big deal. That is, unless you live in Cuba, where just about any dissent is discouraged – and where operating a private library is considered to be dissent.”

- The Gazette journalist Peter Diekmeyer⁵¹

The individual experiences of the independent librarians in Cuba vary from person to person and from time to time, given that specific individuals are looked upon less favorably than others by the Cuban government and at certain times the Cuban state has been known to apply greater restrictions on this movement. It would be inaccurate to conclude that all independent librarians in Cuba are currently imprisoned on the Island. However, it is essential to understand that because the Cuban government owns all property on the Island, these facilities have to be located in private homes. Furthermore, the Independent Librarians are subjected to the same limitations on freedom of expression, freedom of information and intellectual freedom as previously explained by Article 52 of the 1976 Constitution, Article 108 of the Penal Code, Law

⁵¹ Diekmeyer, Peter. “Cuban libraries lend books, voice for dissent.” The Gazette 15 May 2002: B.1.BRE.

88, and Article 91 of the Penal Code. Given such conditions, Independent Librarians knowingly risk material confiscation, imprisonment and ultimately even death.

In December 2001, Independent Librarian Gisela Delgado reported beginning to receive “threatening telephone calls several times a days, with a male voice saying things like, “Your time is up,”⁵² calls which would “start in the middle of the night and continue on the hour until dawn.”⁵³ Delgado told the *Houston Chronicle* in February 2002, “I fear being put in jail or that the authorities might take steps against my family,” Delgado said, “But this is an important principle.”⁵⁴

In May 2002, Raydel Ramirez, director of the “Luis Orlirio Mendes Pérez” Independent Library, told *The Gazette*, “Our organizers and customers are constantly visited by the police...they follow us, threaten us and tell us our activities are illegal.”⁵⁵

In April 2003, Julie Eastlack Hopson, following her in-person interviews with Gisela Delgado and Hector Palacios Ruiz, reported that in Cuba the “[Independent] Librarians’ phone lines are tapped. Patrons checking out books are followed or questioned.”⁵⁶

However, my research also found that the possibility of facing negative consequences – specifically imprisonment – is not only faced by the Independent Librarians themselves, but also foreigners who interact with them. In interviewing Robert Kent, a reference librarian at the New York Public Library and a co-founder of group “The Friends of Cuban Libraries,” he told me

⁵² Williams, Mike. “Tiny, renegade libraries offer view of world.” *The Atlanta Journal – Constitution* 14 May 2002: A14.

⁵³ Tayler, Letta. “In Cuba, Private Libraries Draw Threats.” *Newsday* 9 Jun 2002: A17.

⁵⁴ Williams, Mike. “Tiny, renegade libraries offer view of world.” *The Atlanta Journal – Constitution* 14 May 2002: A14.

⁵⁵ Diekmeyer, Peter. “Cuban libraries lend books, voice for dissent.” *The Gazette* 15 May 2002: B.1.BRE.

⁵⁶ Eastlack Hopson, Julie. “Crackdown on Cuban Librarian Shows Fragility of Free Expression.” *Wisconsin State Journal* 11 Apr 2003: A8.

that he was deported from Cuba after having traveled to the Island previously numerous times.⁵⁷ He said that state police came to the “casa particular” (a personal house in Cuba, where the owners rent out individual rooms to foreigners) where he was staying and said, ‘There is a problem with your passport. Pack up your things and come with me.’ After he was detained and questioned for several hours as to his involvement in supporting the Independent Librarians as well as other dissidents, he was forced to leave the country immediately.⁵⁸

Furthermore, in September 2000, *The Washington Post* reported the 20-day imprisonment at the Villa Marista prison outside of Havana and the ultimate deportment of Douglas Schimmel, a 70-year-old man from Chicago, who was accused “on charges of “rebellion”... after he gave money to dissidents and distributed children’s books.”⁵⁹ *The Washington Post* reported that Schimmel claimed that prior to his trip, Frank Calzon, the Director of the Center for a Free Cuba in Washington, D.C., asked him to take \$1000, but Schimmel admittedly refused, saying ““No, if I give money to somebody, it will be my money.””⁶⁰ Additionally, Schimmel accused Calzon of giving “him eight children’s books to give to one of Cuba’s independent libraries, and the names of several dissidents.”⁶¹ Although confirming that Schimmel “was one of many people who visited his nonprofit group before leaving Cuba,” Calzon denied all three of Shimmel’s allegations:

“We did not pay for any of his expenses, we did not give him any names, we did not ask him to carry anything...I was very discouraged to hear he was detained. I can’t understand how the Cuban government could detain a U.S. citizen for distributing children’s books.”⁶²

⁵⁷ It should be noted that Kent made it clear that although his travel expenses on some of his visits to Cuba were paid by Freedom House and USAID, “organizations which have grants to send uncensored publications to Cuba,” further clarifying however that some of the travel expenses have been repaid.

⁵⁸ Kent, Robert. Personal interview. 22 April 2006.

⁵⁹ DeYoung, Karen and Scott Wilson. “Cuba Frees Detained American; Chicago Man Held for 20 Days for Giving Money to Dissidents.” *The Washington Post* 2 Sep 2000: A16.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

However, regardless of the personal disagreements between Schimmel and Calzon, Schimmel admitted that:

“Cuban officials objected to his meetings with dissidents including Elizardo Sanchez, head of the Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission, and Marta Beatriz Roque, an economist who was imprisoned for calling for political reform. She was recently released after almost three years.”⁶³

Additionally, Schimmel described in detail his experience of being detained:

“I allowed them to question me, and I agreed to make statements...I felt I hadn’t done anything wrong. In retrospect, meeting with that number and level of dissidents, and taking videos and photos, was certainly provocative in terms of paranoia...I ended up talking to about a dozen dissidents,” said Schimmel, who had his picture taken with each and videotaped them talking. “In each case, I would give them just a token amount of money. They gave me their time and their trust. I know they don’t have regular employment.”⁶⁴

III. The Controversy

The evaluate the differing points of view towards the Independent Libraries of Cuba, I analyzed the history of the awareness of and the response to the Cuban independent library movement both in the press of North America and Western Europe, as well as by professional associations, such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the American Library Association (ALA), the Canadian Library Association (CLA), and government-controlled library organizations in Cuba. By reviewing newspaper articles on this topic, I also identified numerous intellectuals and activists interested in the Independent Libraries in Cuba, many of whom were affiliated with the organizations mentioned above.

⁶³ DeYoung, Karen and Scott Wilson. “Cuba Frees Detained American; Chicago Man Held for 20 Days for Giving Money to Dissidents.” The Washington Post 2 Sep 2000: A16.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

All of the individuals in the following list were contacted via e-mail and sent the structured questionnaire in Appendix A. As indicated in the questionnaire, the “research participants” were asked to respond to the 8 questions and respond by a certain date. If after that date, the individual had not either recognized receiving the questionnaire or had not sent their answers to me, I followed-up with a second e-mail to see if they were still interested in participating. If, after this point, he or she did not write back, I did not further pursue contacting them.

List of individuals who were sent and replied to the structured questionnaire (listed alphabetically by last name)

Ackerman, Holly – Amnesty International’s Cuba and Haiti country specialist

Calzon, Frank – Director of the Center for a Free Cuba

Kent, Robert - a Reference Librarian at the New York Public Library and co-founder of “The Friends of Cuban Libraries”
(<http://www.friendsofcubanlibraries.org/index.htm>)

Marquardt, Steve – Dean of Libraries at South Dakota State University

Member of ALA who asked to remain anonymous (1)

Pateman, John - Head of Libraries and Heritage for the London Borough of Merton, founder of the Cuban Libraries Solidarity Group
(<http://cubanlibrariesolidaritygroup.org.uk/>) and 2002 recipient of the National Cultural Award of Cuba ⁶⁵

Rosenzweig, Mark – member of ALA’s Social Responsibility Round Table and Chief Librarian of the Reference Center for Marxist Studies (the repository of the archives of the Communist Party USA)

Tartakoff, Laura - Political Science Professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio ⁶⁶

⁶⁵ “Information for Social Change” website. Ed. John Pateman and Ruth Rikowski. 11 May 2006.
(<http://libr.org/isc/articles/16-Pateman-2.html>)

⁶⁶ Professor Tartakoff was contacted after reading her quote about the Independent Libraries in the article “A Library In Cuba: What Is It?” by Felicia R. Lee, New York Times 28 Jun 2003, Late ed. (East Coast): B7.

Wetmore, Mark – Vice-president of the Vermillion, South Dakota Public Library
Board of Trustees ⁶⁷

I would now like to identify the four main controversies that I believe surround the Independent Library Movement. As indicated by the coding system in the list, of the above 32 individuals, only 9 responded with complete answers to the e-mail questionnaire. In addition to the answers I personally received in response to my questionnaire, I would also like to make reference to quotes of many of those who did not respond to the structured questionnaire , but which have been published in newspaper articles on this topic.

The four main controversies are: 1) What is the purpose of the Independent Libraries in Cuba?, 2) How are they funded?, 3) Should these “Independent Libraries” consider themselves or be considered “libraries” and should the individuals who run them consider themselves or be considered “librarians?”, as well as 4) Should associations such as the ALA and IFLA recognize the Independent Libraries? Due to the divisive nature of the contrasting view points on these controversial issues, the opinions will be presented here as either “opponents” or “supporters” and merely as bulleted points to a great extent.

⁶⁷ In November 2004, the Vermillion Public Library became the first public library in the United States to adopt an Independent Library in Cuba. Mr. Wetmore helped to lead their efforts towards adopting the Dulce María Loynaz Independent Library in Havana. The first two volumes shipped to the Independent Library were a collection of works by Mark Twain and the first two books in the Harry Potter series, all which were in Spanish. (source: Hentoff, Nat. “Sweet Land of Liberty.” *Washington Times* 31 Jan 2005: A19.) Since that time, Mr. Wetmore has also “written a guide, Sponsoring an Independent Cuban Library, that lays out “the steps a library board in this country” can take” to adopt an Independent Library in Cuba. “In it he tells, with specificity, how the Vermillion Public Library learned how to do it – and much more, including how to ship books to Cuba, and what it costs.” (source: Hentoff, Nat. “Freedom to read!” *The Village Voice* Vol.50, Iss.7 (16-22 Feb 2005): 26)

The Controversy #1: What is the purpose of the Independent Libraries in Cuba?

Through my analysis of the Independent Library Movement in Cuba, one of the main divisive issues was the role that the independent libraries played. The viewpoint of those who are opposed to the movement can be described by the following four individuals.

Eliadas Acosta, the director of the National Library of Cuba calls the independent libraries “a political project opposed to the Cuban Revolution.”...“This has nothing to do with freedom of expression, nor does it have anything to do with literature or culture... If an independent library is a private collection of texts, “then there are as many libraries as there are people who have books in their homes.”⁶⁸ Additionally, he told the Communist Party newspaper *Granma* that the libraries are run by “traitors of the nation” who want “to convert a handful of rogues and salaried counter-revolutionaries into noble fighters for free access to information.”⁶⁹

Rafael Dausa, a foreign ministry official in Cuba, “brands the libraries as subversive. He has said, “they are centers of conspiracy against the Cuban revolution.””⁷⁰

Mark Rosenzweig, a member of American Library Association’s Social Responsibility Round Table and Chief Librarian of the Reference Center for Marxist Studies (the repository of the archives of the Communist Party USA) believes that the libraries “are dependent on the US for their existence, for the formulation of their policies, for the selection of their materials, for their propagandistic promotion and the use of their supporters in campaigns to attack the Cuban state at the behest of the USA. The earmark of their policy is not "good librarianship" carried out independently to meet some un-met need, but pseudo-librarianship suggesting that it represents

⁶⁸ Sequera, Vivian. (from the Associated Press) “Libraries Let Cubans Read Outside the Party Line.” *Chicago Tribune* 14 Dec 2000: 8.

⁶⁹ Williams, Mike. “Tiny, renegade libraries offer view of world.” *The Atlanta Journal – Constitution* 14 May 2002: A14.

⁷⁰ Tayler, Letta. “In Cuba, Private Libraries Draw Threats.” *Newsday* 9 Jun 2002: A17.

some kind of “alternative” to the highly developed and successful Cuban library system and system of library education. It's independence is a complete fraud. The organizers of these little operations are all on the US dole in violation of Cuban law and subject to criminal sanctions.” He went on to say that “the line item for these libraries in the US budget is under the broader heading of regime-change “transition” activities, implicitly challenging the legitimacy of social system of Cuba, and doing so in a way which is a violation of Cuban sovereignty and international law.”⁷¹

John Pateman, the Head of Libraries and Heritage for the London Borough of Merton, founder of the Cuban Libraries Solidarity Group (<http://cubanlibrariesolidaritygroup.org.uk/>) and 2002 recipient of the National Cultural Award of Cuba argues their purpose is solely political. “The ‘director’ of the ‘independent library’ which I visited in Havana was very open about this. He admitted that he received books and a monthly ‘salary’ from the USIS. He also admitted that his purpose in agreeing to set up the ‘library’ in his home was to get a visa so that he could move to the US – which he subsequently did.”

On the other hand, those who are in favor of the Independent Libraries of Cuba believe that they have a very different purpose.

Dr. Julie Eastlack Hopson, stated that the Independent Libraries have a role to play on the Island based on her research on the education system in Cuba. She stated, “Cuba is touted as having a literacy rate of 96 percent. Once there, however, I found that even if Cubans could read, there was not much to read. The government publishes propaganda tracts for its libraries and controls the one daily newspaper.”⁷²

⁷¹ Rosenzweig, Mark. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

⁷² Eastlack Hopson, Julie. “Crackdown on Cuban Librarian Shows Fragility of Free Expression.” Wisconsin State Journal 11 Apr 2003: A8.

Robert Kent, a Reference Librarian at the New York Public Library and co-founder of “The Friends of Cuban Libraries” stated, “Cuba's independent librarians are committed to promoting intellectual freedom by providing materials which reflect all points of view ...In addition to offering public access to uncensored books, Cuba's independent librarians also sponsor uncensored debates, seminars, public meetings, art exhibits, literary contests and children's programs, all free of government control.”⁷³

Holly Ackerman, former Amnesty International Cuba and Haiti country expert believes that in Cuba, “freedom to read is limited by the materials available. The government controls all the media and decides what books can be written and what can be published as well as limiting circulation. I’ve been in Cuba and the TV, radio and press are absolutely stultifying...Overall, there is a need for independent libraries to provide alternative materials.”⁷⁴

Gisela Delgado, Director of the Independent Library Movement in Cuba, summarized that the purpose of the Independent Libraries is because of both the lack of contemporary novels in state-run libraries and the lack of economic resources of the average Cuban citizen. “Regular Cuban libraries don’t have contemporary titles,” [further] explaining that many of her library’s 600 patrons are not politically active but simply intellectually curious. “And not all of their books are available to everyone to borrow. People can’t buy books because nobody here has money.”⁷⁵

Letta Tayler, a Latin American Correspondent for *Newsday* found that the Independent Libraries serve a critical function because of the lack of accessibility to other libraries on the Island.

⁷³ *The Friends of Cuban Libraries website* - “Frequently Asked Questions.” Ed. Robert Kent. Last revised 3 June 2002. 11 May 2006. <<http://www.friendsofcubanlibraries.org/FAQs.htm>>

⁷⁴ Ackerman, Holly. E-mail to the author. 7 March 2006.

⁷⁵ Goering, Laurie. “Independent Cuban libraries popping up unwelcomed.” *Houston Chronicle* 24 Feb 2002: 36.

“Since his 1959 revolution, Castro has increased Cuba’s literacy rate to nearly 100 percent, the highest in Latin America. But state-run libraries bar Cubans’ access to much of their materials unless they carry an authorization card from their employer or university. ‘I can’t just walk into a public library and ask for books on Afro-Cuban religion,’ said Luis Antonio Bonito Lara, a retired engineer and avid reader. ‘I can’t even ask for copies of Granma from two years ago without special permission. It’s enormously frustrating.’ Bookstores offer a few bestsellers, along with classics from authors such as Marcel Proust and longtime Cuba resident Ernest Hemingway. But at 10 U.S. dollars each, which is almost an average monthly wage, they are out of most readers’ reach. Some books, like George Orwell’s anti-authoritarian “1984” – the most frequently requested novel in Cuba’s independent libraries – simply aren’t available in stores or state libraries, even if catalogs list them.”⁷⁶

So whereas opponents of this movement view the purpose of the independent libraries as solely political, it was interesting to note that Holly Ackerman’s response to question # 7 of my structured questionnaire . She stated:

“They are in a very tightly controlled society where being independent is not allowed. Individualism and self-starting is not valued and is punished. Therefore, they are making a political statement when they assert their right to read without censorship. There are political consequences to their behavior and they cannot avoid a polemic.”⁷⁷

Gisela Delgado supports Ackerman’s claim. According to journalist Vivian Sequera of the Associated Press, Delgado argues that the purpose of the Independent Libraries in Cuba is “simply to give Cuba’s highly literate population a variety of reading materials.” Yet, as Delgado further clarified, the Cuban government “considers us to be dissidents, opponents, when all we have wanted to do is promote culture.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Tayler, Letta. “In Cuba, Private Libraries Draw Threats.” Newsday 9 Jun 2002: A17.

⁷⁷ Ackerman, Holly. E-mail to the author. 7 March 2006.

⁷⁸ Sequera, Vivian. (from the Associated Press) “Libraries Let Cubans Read Outside the Party Line.” Chicago Tribune 14 Dec 2000: 8.

Additionally, prior to his arrest in March 2003, Independent Librarian Ricardo González Alfonso said, “This isn’t a political undertaking, it’s a cultural one...but of course, in these conditions, it’s hard to separate the coffee from the milk in your café con leche.”⁷⁹

Controversy #2: How are the Independent Libraries funded?

The feelings of those who are opposed to the Independent Library Movement in Cuba can be summarized in the following two statements. John Pateman stated, “These so-called ‘independent libraries’...are neither independent nor libraries. They are not independent because they are totally dependent on the US Interest Section (USIS) in Havana for support, direction and funding. Without USIS they would not exist.”⁸⁰ Mark Rosenzweig believes that “these alleged libraries --the wholesale creation on the ground of the US Interest Section (USIS) in Havana, with the backing of USAID, of the known CIA front “Freedom House,” of the so-called National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a dubious private organization funneling government money into US regime-change projects around the world and of individual Cuban revanchistes émigrés in the US -- are the artificial and entirely illegitimate brain-child of the psy-op experts in the US working on regime change in Cuba (as is explicitly clear in the documentation of the official US game-plan for US-led/funded Cuban "transition")...”⁸¹

Contrastingly, people who support the Independent Libraries point to donations from abroad as being the primary source of funding of the movement. In December 2004, an article in the *Wall Street Journal* stated:

“One inspiring example comes from the town of Vermillion, South Dakota, whose public library is sponsoring the independent...Dulce María Loynaz Library in Havana”...“Mark Wetmore, a Vermillion Library trustee tells us, “It

⁷⁹ DeYoung, Karen. “Independent Libraries Mix Politics, Culture in Cuba; Banned Books Offered, but Government Rarely Interferes.” *The Washington Post* 3 Aug 2000: A26.

⁸⁰ Pateman, John. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

⁸¹ Rosenzweig, Mark. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

diminishes all our libraries a little if we know that there are people being persecuted for trying to operate free, uncensored ones and we don't at least try to do something about it."...The French cities of Paris and Strasbourg also support independent libraries in Cuba."⁸²

However, many - such as Gisela Delgado and Ricardo González Alfonso – argue that such donations have not and continue to not be looked upon favorably by the Cuban government. In December 2000, Vivian Sequera reported, Delgado “complains that many donated books sent from Mexico, Spain and the United States are seized by customs officials without explanation.”

⁸³ In February 2002, following an interview with Delgado, Vanessa Bauza reported:

“Most books are donated by international non-governmental organizations or foreign embassies in Havana, including the U.S. Interests Section, which sends a van several times a week to deliver books and magazines. Some shipments sent by mail never make it past customs officials, who deem certain texts “counter-revolutionary.” Delgado showed a reporter a form filled out by a customs official last year, explaining that three books sent from Italy were seized for “threatening the general interests of our nation.” Some of the more dicey authors include the Cuban American writer Zoe Valdes, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, an early supporter of the revolution who has since become one of Castro’s most outspoken critics, and Peruvians novelist Mario Vargas Llosa.”⁸⁴

Additionally, on February 27, 2003 (less than a month before the March 2003 crackdown began)

Tracey Eaton reported about Independent Librarian Ricardo González Alfonso:

“Gonzalez has more than 2,000 books. Cuban customs agents sometimes confiscate books that supporters in the United States, Mexico and Italy send to him by mail, he said. But that hasn’t stopped him and he plans to reopen his library after he gets his planned magazine off the ground.”⁸⁵

However, my research found that the complaints of these two particular, individual Independent Librarians seem to not be unfounded. In her article, “Cuba blocks shipment of

⁸² “Castro’s Jailed Librarians.” Wall Street Journal 23 Dec 2004, Eastern ed.: A10.

⁸³ Sequera, Vivian. (from the Associated Press) “Libraries Let Cubans Read Outside the Party Line.” Chicago Tribune 14 Dec 2000: 8.

⁸⁴ Bauza, Vanessa. “Independent Libraries Are Gaining Momentum.” South Florida Sun Sentinel 10 Feb 2002: 21A.

⁸⁵ Eaton, Tracey. “Cuba blocks shipment of books sent by U.S.” Knight Ridder Tribune News Service 27 Feb 2003: 1.

books sent by U.S.,” in addition to interviewing González Alfonso, journalist Tracey Eaton further explained the government confiscation of books sent to Cuba from abroad:

“Calling it an issue of national sovereignty, the Cuban government has blocked a shipment of more than 5,000 books sent by the U.S. government to the island’s growing network of independent libraries. The shipment includes 20 titles, including John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath” and Stephen King’s “The Shining.” Cuban authorities objected to the books because U.S. officials wanted to give them to dissidents, said James Cason, chief of the American mission in Havana. He quoted a Cuban official as saying, “It’s not the books. It’s who you’re giving them to.” A senior Cuban official confirmed Thursday that the book shipment had been blocked. The books won’t be seized or destroyed, but they won’t enter the country, either, he said.” Refusing the shipment “is our right as a sovereign nation,” said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity and declined to elaborate. The dispute highlights a broader debate over Cubans’ right to read what they want. For the past several weeks, the Cuban government has been selling hundreds of thousands of books to the public at rock-bottom prices, less than \$1 for most titles. But U.S. officials – and dissidents – say Cubans still have no access to a broad range of books and literature. So the American mission decided to hand out 5,101 books. The shipment, worth more than \$68,000, consists of 20 titles, including Carl Sagan’s “Contact,” Groucho Marx’s “Memoirs of a Mangy Lover,” Spencer Johnson’s “Who Moved My Cheese?,” and Martin Luther King’s “Dreams for All People, Hope for All Time.””⁸⁶

The following day, Anita Snow reporting for the *San Diego Union-Tribune* further elaborated on the incident, stating that there had been a total of 5,101 books and that the shipment was worth \$68,770.41.⁸⁷

In response to this “independent vs. dependent” claim, Frank Calzon, Director of Center for a Free Cuba stated:

“The independent libraries in Cuba are as independent as human rights activists were in supremacist South Africa, Chile’s Pinochet, or Communist Poland. The independent librarians have one goal in mind: to make available to the Cuban people all kind of books, including titles like Animal Farm, which are censored by the regime.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Eaton, Tracey. “Cuba blocks shipment of books sent by U.S.” Knight Ridder Tribune News Service 27 Feb 2003: 1.

⁸⁷ Snow, Anita. “Cuba seizes shipment of books by U.S. authors.” The San Diego Union- Tribune 28 Feb 2003: A18.

⁸⁸ Calzon, Frank. E-mail to the author. 1 April 2006.

Holly Ackerman, from Amnesty International, offered a similar – but slightly different argument as Calzon:

“No enterprise is independent if it depends on renewal from an outside source. To have a successful library you must get new books. Collections have to expand to be of value to a community. In Cuba it is not possible to have a network of libraries with inter-library loans, shared collections and that sort of thing. So, they must all be dependent on outside help. People have to buy and carry the books to Cuba or send them from another country. The economic conditions of the country are such that ordinary Cubans cannot buy books in Cuba – they can’t afford them; they don’t have a wide selection of books to buy. There is a very narrow range of opinions that is allowed in Cuban publications...Hence, the libraries are not independent but this is nothing to be ashamed of...They have to have outside help.”⁸⁹

It is important to clarify that the National Endowment for Democracy website lists the specific organizations who they donate grants to, the amount of money each organization receives, and the purpose of money. The following “Cuba” list is the most updated version available online, from 2004.⁹⁰

Center for a Free Cuba

\$55,000

To provide humanitarian assistance and emergency relief to political prisoners and their families. Assistance will go to family members of the prisoners detained in the March 2003 crackdown as well as the more than 280 prior political prisoners.

Cuban Committee for Human Rights

\$65,000

To support human rights in Cuba. The Cuban Committee for Human Rights will work with the U.N. Human Rights Commission in monitoring and investigating the human rights conditions in Cuba. The Committee will publish and disseminate both in Cuba and internationally, news and information about the human rights situation in Cuba and provide humanitarian assistance to political dissidents and prisoners of conscience in Cuba.

⁸⁹ Ackerman, Holly. E-mail to the author. 7 March 2006.

⁹⁰ “Grants - Description of 2004 Grants: Latin America and the Caribbean”. The *National Endowment for Democracy* website. <<http://www.ned.org/grants/04programs/grants-lac04.html>>

CubaNet

\$41,000

To promote independent journalism and freedom of expression in Cuba. Endowment funds will allow CubaNet to continue supporting the professional development of independent journalists.

Disidente Universal de Puerto Rico (Universal Dissident of Puerto Rico)

\$57,000

To increase the flow of independent information to Cuba through publications of the monthly journal, El Disidente, containing articles and editorials from activists living on the island, dissidents living in exile and international news organizations.

Federación Sindical de Plantas Eléctricas, Gas y Agua (Federation of Electric, Gas and Water Plants in Exile)

\$78,000

To document labor rights violations inside of Cuba. The Federación Sindical de Plantas, Eléctricas, Gas y Agua will establish a training center dedicated to labor rights inside Cuba; conduct research and write reports on labor conditions in Cuba; and disseminate information both inside Cuba and internationally on labor rights violations committed by the Cuban government.

Fundacion Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana (Encounter Magazine)

\$85,000

To provide support for production of the quarterly journal Encuentro. Encuentro is dedicated to discussion and promotion of political change in the larger context of Cuban culture, philosophy, and history.

Fundación Hispano Cubana (Hispano-Cuban Foundation)

\$ 75,700

To increase the flow of independent information to Cuba. The Foundation will publish three editions of its journal Revista Hispano Cubana, which will be distributed within Cuba and internationally. The Foundation will post each edition on the journal's website, as well as prepare 16 previous editions of the journal in CD ROM format.

International Republican Institute (IRI)

\$ 412,678

To help the Cuban Democratic Directorate (Directorio) continue its development of prodemocracy materials for distribution in Cuba. Directorio will also disseminate information about Cuba's democracy movement to the international community; maintain its contacts with pro-freedom activists and citizens in Cuba and produce radio broadcasts about the activities of the pro-freedom movement in Cuba.

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)

\$140,000

To strengthen the ability of advocates to increase international awareness of and support for the Varela Project. NDI will work with the International Committee to Support the Varela Project with activities to disseminate information about Varela Project activities and organize conferences and meetings.

Pan American Development Foundation

\$45,000

To work with and promote independent libraries inside Cuba. PADF will provide direct assistance to independent libraries in Cuba and promote international awareness of the library movement. Independent library representatives will travel to Latin America and Spain to meet with librarians, universities, think tanks and other organizations to enlist their support for individual libraries and the libraries movement.

People in Need Foundation (PINF)

\$65,000

To work with various independent groups in Cuba to develop their capacity to produce and distribute samizdat. PINF will also help organize the first meeting of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba to be held in Prague.

Red Feminista Cubana, Inc. (Cuban Feminist Network)

\$30,000

To promote women's rights in Cuba. Red Feminista will establish contacts with women's movements throughout the world, collect materials and initiate a series of training programs inside Cuba for independent women activists. Red Feminista will work with women's groups inside Cuba to disseminate information on the strategies and activities of women's movements in other countries.

Nevertheless, to fully address the claim by the opponents of the Independent Libraries in Cuba that these “dissidents” are merely ‘paid, CIA-agents,” it is also crucial to note the specific, money-related sentencing charges of the 15 Independent Librarians imprisoned in March-April 2003. Florida State University runs the “Rule of Law and Cuba” website. Of the 24 available sentencing documents online,⁹¹ here is a summary of the funds accused to have been received by the 15 imprisoned Independent Librarians. Please note that only 3 were accused of an exact dollar amount, 2 were accused of receiving an unstated amount of “dollars and other goods” or

⁹¹ *Rule of Law and Cuba* website. <<http://www.ruleoflawandcuba.fsu.edu/documents.cfm>>

“payments”, 6 were not accused of receiving funds, and the sentencing information for 4 was not available.

- 1) Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona: Deposited \$315.03 (USD) in a Cuban bank. Received 2001 through 2003 a total of \$2070.10.
- 2) Fidel Suarez Cruz: No funds mentioned.
- 3) Ricardo Severino Gonzalez Alfonso: No funds mentioned.
- 4) Jose Ubaldo Izquierdo Hernandez: \$2,000.
- 5) Iván Hernández Carrillo: together with Felix Navarro Rodriguez was accused of “... through supposed friends and family members ... receiving ... \$3352 between November 2001 and March [2003].”
- 6) Omar Pernet Hernández: (Information not available on website)
- 7) Arturo Pérez de Alejo Rodríguez: (Information not available on website)
- 8) Blas Giraldo Reyes Rodriguez: No dollar amount stated, but accused of receiving “dollars and other goods.”
- 9) José Luís García Paneque: (Information not available on website)
- 10) Leonel Grave de Peralta Almenares: No funds mentioned.
- 11) Luis Milan Fernandez: No funds mentioned.
- 12) Julio Antonio Valdes Guevara: No funds mentioned.
- 13) Juan Roberto de Miranda Hernández: No funds mentioned.
- 14) Migler Sigler Amaya: (Information not available on website)
- 15) Raúl Rivero Castaneda: No dollar amount stated, but accused of receiving “payment for his harmful writings.”

Additionally, the website offers information for four additional individuals who were not identified as “Independent Librarians” for the purposes of this analysis but who were accused of having books, pamphlets, and other reading material in their houses in March-April 2003: 1) Jose Gabriel Ramon Castillo: “\$7,000 during 2002 and forward”, 2) Pedro Pablo Alvarez Ramos: “\$1,300,” 3) Hector Palacio Ruiz: wrote articles “in exchange for \$15 to \$100 ... magazines, newspapers and web pages ... paid him between \$15 and \$25.” and 4) Guido Sigler Amaya: received \$500 in 2001, \$2400 in 2002 and \$200 in 2003, from “antirevolutionary Angel D’Fana.”⁹²

⁹² *Rule of Law and Cuba* website. <<http://www.ruleoflawandcuba.fsu.edu/documents.cfm>>

Controversy #3: Should these “independent libraries” consider themselves or be considered “libraries” or Should the individuals who run them consider themselves or be considered “librarians”?

Throughout my investigation of the Independent Libraries of Cuba, I found that disagreements about semantics formed one of the main controversies of this topic. The points of views of opponents to the Independent Libraries as to whether “library” and “librarian” are appropriate terms to describe this movement are best explained by John Pateman who responded to the questionnaire by writing, “They are not libraries because the people who run them are not trained librarians and the ‘library’ collections are often just a few books and pamphlets (supplied by USIS) in someone’s living room.”⁹³

As illustrated through this statement, there are two separate issues at hand a) the lack of a library science degree on behalf of the Independent Librarians and b) the collection size of the Independent Libraries.

3a) Library Science Degree

Those who support the Independent Library Movement in Cuba point to two facts to counteract the claim that the “independent libraries” should not be considered “libraries” because the individuals who run them are not trained “librarians.”

First, the supporters mention the University system on the Island, which was illustrated in Steve Marquardt’s, the Dean of Libraries at South Dakota State University, response to the question, “If the “independent librarians” had official, university library science degrees, would your opinion of them change? Why or why not?”:

“No, because this question is irrelevant in Cuba, where political reliability in one criteria for admission to and graduation from professional programs. That is the result of President Castro’s principle of “Within the Revolution, everything.

⁹³ Pateman, John. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

Outside the Revolution, nothing.” It is the modern form of a religious test for office or appointment. Persons independent of the religious or revolutionary creed to not qualify for degrees.”⁹⁴

Additionally, the supporters also demonstrate the prominence of the lack of an official, library science degree among other, well-known and “legitimate” librarians. On his “The Friends of Cuban Libraries” website, Robert Kent claims:

“Directors of libraries are commonly referred to as librarians, whether or not they have a university degree in the field. For example, neither the director of Cuba’s National Library nor the U.S. Librarian of Congress has a degree in librarianship. We believe volunteer librarians without a degree who endure persecution for opposing censorship are more “professional” than librarians with a degree who fail to support intellectual freedom, the cherished core principle of librarians throughout the world.”⁹⁵

Interestingly, when asked “If the “independent librarians” had official, university library science degrees, would your opinion of them change? Why or why not?” in the structured questionnaire, all respondents said “no” but for different reasons.

Individuals who did not support the Independent Libraries said “no” because of their belief that the purpose of the movement was purely political. John Pateman responded, “My opinion would not change because this would not alter the fact that these ‘libraries’ are a front for US political interests in Cuba.”⁹⁶

However, the feelings of the supporters of the movement can be summarized through the following three statements. Holly Ackerman from Amnesty International and Mark Wetmore, the Vice-president of the Vermillion, South Dakota Public Library Board of Trustees came to similar conclusions. Wetmore wrote:

⁹⁴ Marquardt, Steve. E-mail to the author. 9 March 2006.

⁹⁵ *The Friends of Cuban Libraries website* - “Frequently Asked Questions.” Ed. Robert Kent. Last revised 3 June 2002. 11 May 2006. <<http://www.friendsofcubanlibraries.org/FAQs.htm>>

⁹⁶ Pateman, John. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

The Vermillion South Dakota Public Library was run by men and women without formal library degrees for the first three-fourths of its history, but it was a library all that time, nonetheless.”⁹⁷

Ackerman stated:

“No, it doesn’t matter to me if they have library science degrees...Small lending libraries can be set up and maintained easily by non-librarians and they provide a vital service in places where books are censored or in limited supply.”⁹⁸

Lastly, Frank Calzon expressed his belief that it didn’t matter if the Independent Librarians had an official library science degree by saying:

“In Cuba the official librarians are severely restricted, and the argument for ‘university degrees’ is simply a way to keep from recognizing Cuba’s reality. What is a university degree in Cuba? What level of politicization is required? How does a Cuban official library differ from a library in the outside world? At a very basic level a library should be a place where books could be read. All books. It is sad, that some of the librarians who object to US government efforts to obtain names of readers, are unwilling to speak out about Castro’s intellectual repression, which includes libraries. Early on Castro at a meeting at the National Library told Cuban intellectuals: ‘Inside the Revolution everything. Outside the revolution nothing at all.’ American librarians should donate (and perhaps take to Cuba) collections of news magazines, and all kind of books in Spanish. It would be wonderful if the American Library Association would donate (and make sure they are made available to the public) a thousand titles of books about Cuba and the Cuban revolution.”⁹⁹

As previously stated, the second factor of whether or not the Independent Librarians should be called “librarians” or the facilities they run “libraries” was the collection size of each “library.” This was expressed by John Pateman’s earlier quote, “They are not libraries because the people who run them are not trained librarians and the ‘library’ collections are often just a few books and pamphlets (supplied by USIS) in someone’s living room.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Wetmore, Mark. E-mail to the author. 9 March 2006.

⁹⁸ Ackerman, Holly. E-mail to the author. 7 March 2006.

⁹⁹ Calzon, Frank. E-mail to the author. 1 April 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Pateman, John. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

When asked “Are you in favor of or opposed to the “independent libraries” in Cuba receiving either monetary and/or supply (books, pamphlets, etc.) donations from abroad? Why or why not?,” Pateman responded:

“I am totally opposed to the ‘independent libraries’ receiving support from abroad because I view this as an attack on the independence and sovereignty of Cuba. Also, I see no need for these ‘independent libraries’ – the official state libraries are well stocked and staffed and open for generous hours. Books are cheap to buy in Cuba. Literacy levels are high. Most Cuban homes have their own ‘library’. Cuba does not need or want ‘independent libraries’ which are used to undermine their political leadership.”¹⁰¹

With regard to the size of the library’s collection, those who support the Independent Library Movement are exemplified by Robert Kent. On his “The Friends of Cuban Libraries” website, he explains:

“A library is a library, regardless of its size or whether it is sponsored by a government agency or a private organization. All libraries have a right to exist, no matter what any government may claim to the contrary. It cannot be a crime to open a library, any more than it can be a crime for “unofficial” authors to write books or for “unofficial” journalists to publish a newspaper.”¹⁰²

Contrastingly to Pateman’s response to the same question, the most notable responses by the “supporters” of the Independent Libraries to the questionnaire question, “Are you in favor of or opposed to the “independent libraries” in Cuba receiving either monetary and/or supply (books, pamphlets, etc.) donations from abroad? Why or why not?” include the following two statements.

Steve Marquardt said:

“I am in favor of them receiving materials from abroad. Why not? My own library does. In recent months the library in which I work has received gifts from Iceland, Mexico, Switzerland and France. I would be pleased to receive materials from Cuba. Nor do I see anything wrong with monetary gifts or grants from

¹⁰¹ Pateman, John. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

¹⁰² *The Friends of Cuban Libraries website* - “Frequently Asked Questions.” Ed. Robert Kent. Last revised 3 June 2002. 11 May 2006. <<http://www.friendsofcubanlibraries.org/FAQs.htm>>

persons or groups abroad. This happens all the time, in answer to disasters or for the sake of cultural information.”¹⁰³

Frank Calzon agreed, stating:

“I am in favor of any librarian, independent or otherwise receiving all kinds of books, pamphlets, etc. Those who oppose providing some humanitarian assistance, donations, etc. to Cuban librarians would not object to sending similar assistance to librarians, writers, etc. under right wing dictatorships.”¹⁰⁴

In an attempt to address the obvious discrepancies in the concept of “a library,” I contacted the IFLA, the ALA, and the CLA. Karen Muller, a Librarian and Knowledge Management Specialist at the American Library Association at the ALA and Don Butcher, the Executive Director of the CLA responded with the following answers, labeled as (1) and (2) respectively:

(1) “I’m referring you to an online glossary of library terms,

<http://lu.com/odlis/>

This gives the following definition:

library

“From the Latin *liber*, meaning “book.” In Greek and the Romance languages, the corresponding term is *bibliotheca*. A collection or group of collections of books and/or other print or nonprint materials organized and maintained for use (reading, consultation, study, research, etc.). Institutional libraries, organized to facilitate access by a specific clientele, are staffed by librarians and other personnel trained to provide services to meet user needs. By extension, the room, building, or facility that houses such a collection, usually but not

¹⁰³ Marquardt, Steve. E-mail to the author. 9 March 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Calzon, Frank. E-mail to the author. 1 April 2006.

necessarily built for that purpose. Directory information on libraries is available alphabetically by country in *World Guide to Libraries*, a serial published by K.G. Saur. Two comprehensive worldwide online directories of library homepages are LibDex and Libweb. See also the UNESCO Libraries Portal. Abbreviated lib. See also: academic library, government library, new library, proto-library, public library, special library, and subscription library.

Also, a collective noun used by publishers, particularly during the Victorian period, for certain books published in series (example: Everyman's Library).

Also refers to a collection of computer programs or data files, or a set of ready-made reusable routines, sometimes called modules, that can be linked to a program at the time it is compiled, relieving the programmer of the necessity to repeat the code each time the routine is used in a program.”

It is not the “official” ALA definition, as we have not defined library in any of our policy documents, keeping the interpretation broad, so as to be inclusive of the many types of libraries.”¹⁰⁵

(2) “The Concise Oxford Dictionary offers us guidance.

The first definition is not particularly useful:

“1. Room or building containing books for reading or reference; room in a large house devoted to books.”

¹⁰⁵ Anonymous ALA member. E-mail to the author. 26 March 2006.

The second definition is more useful:

“2. A collection of books for use by the public or by some class of persons; similar collection of films, records, etc.; public institution charged with care of such collection.”

“The real value of the dictionary definition follows that one, where it uses adjectives to sharpen the definition into different types of libraries: lending library, reference library, free library, public library.

As you can see, the essence of a library is a collection of material for use by some group of persons.”¹⁰⁶

Controversy #4 - Should associations such as the ALA and IFLA recognize the Independent Libraries?

While a chronology of the main events in the ALA/IFLA/Cuba history is provided in Appendix B, the main objective of this section of this paper is to present the various opinions of the questionnaire respondents regarding such events. The following are the responses received to question # 2 of the structured questionnaire – “Do you believe that groups such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the American Library Association (ALA), and/or the Canadian Library Association (CLA) should recognize the “independent libraries” in Cuba? Why or why not?”

Individuals who do not support the Independent Library Movement explained their beliefs best in the following two statements.

John Pateman believes:

“They most definitely should not recognize these –so-called ‘independent libraries’ because they are neither independent nor libraries. They are not independent because they are totally dependent on the US Interest Section (USIS) in Havana for support, direction and funding. Without USIS they would not exist... They are not libraries because the people who run them are not trained librarians and the ‘library’ collections are often just a few books and pamphlets

¹⁰⁶ Butcher, Don. E-mail to the author. 30 March 2006.

(supplied by USIS) in someone's living room. I know this because I have visited a so-called 'independent library' in Havana.”¹⁰⁷

Mark Rosenzweig said:

“No. These operations are not independent, (they are US-financed , organized and provisioned) , they are not "libraries" as we know them, being mere pretences of libraries containing no systematic collections, not operated under the principles of professional librarianship and not providing the access and services of libraries. They are also run by people who are not real librarians and who have no library experience /training. Their purposes are entirely political.

They are not working with the recognized libraries associated with ASCUBI and, because their goals have nothing to do with real librarianship, have never attempted to work with the internationally-recognized library organization n of the people of Cuba, which is indeed a member of IFLA and has official relations with ALA and CLA. Recognizing this anti-ASCUBI group would be a slap in the face of all the real Cuban librarians who work so hard to maintain the professional standards which allow them to successfully encourage the highest levels of literacy in the region.”¹⁰⁸

Contrastingly, the supporters of the Independent Libraries believe that they should be recognized by the ALA and CLA. Holly Ackerman replied:

“receiving international attention and support would certainly help the independent libraries in receiving materials, protecting themselves from government attacks and providing an outlet for their point of view and a place to turn for help...The ALA committee on relations with Cuba is controlled by ideologues who see the world in manichean terms. They also hate the United States and wish to see it shamed. So, Cuba=Perfect and USA=All that is evil. They have packed the committee that handles these matters in ALA and have railroaded their personal preferences on to the organization. Professional librarians, on the whole, run from a fight, so the organization is not going to refute their own committee even if it is wrong.”¹⁰⁹

Frank Calzon concurred with Ackerman in saying:

“Librarian organizations outside should do everything they can to help those in Cuba who are willing to gather books and make them available to their neighbors; they should also recognize the high level of cultural and intellectual repression in today's Cuba and understand that the official Cuban library associations are only

¹⁰⁷ Pateman, John. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Rosenzweig, Mark. E-mail to the author. 27 March 2006.

¹⁰⁹ Ackerman, Holly. E-mail to the author. 7 March 2006.

free to say whatever the government would allow them...American librarians are very careful to oppose book censorship in the United States, but some look the other way when books are confiscated and Cuban independent librarians are punished.”¹¹⁰

Robert Kent stated:

“All of these organizations are committed to defending intellectual freedom as a universal human right, especially in the context of libraries. For example, the ALA's mandate recognizes the legitimacy of "all libraries." As a matter of principle, library organizations have an obligation to defend Cuba's independent librarians from persecution, just as they speak out in defense of intellectual freedom in other countries...Library organizations such as IFLA and ALA have a duty to defend all library workers, not just those with library degrees. For example, the ALA spoke out in defense of a Palestinian library worker when he was threatened with deportation by the Israeli government. The Friends of Cuban Libraries have not been able to find any evidence that the Palestinian library worker had a degree in library science. And who deserves more respect: library workers without a degree who endure persecution for defending intellectual freedom, or library workers with a degree who do nothing to oppose censorship? The answer is clear.”¹¹¹

Steve Marquardt replied:

“I believe that all library associations should defend the existence of non-governmental libraries that individuals and groups wish to establish in order to expand the range and variety of information and creative expression available to people anywhere and everywhere.

Yet arguably the most interesting response received regarding this question was from the member of the ALA who asked to remain anonymous. This individual added their own question to the structured questionnaire: “Why did I vote as I did in ALA Council?”

- a) I am a unit representative and I voted as instructed by the board, but
- b) I asked the board for that instruction because I was conflicted over the resolution, because while I want to support dissidents,
- c) When ALA delegates an issue to a committee, I prefer to support the committee's report rather than second-guess it.

¹¹⁰ Calzon, Frank. E-mail to the author. 1 April 2006.

¹¹¹ Kent, Robert. E-mail to the author. 29 March 2006.

Conclusion

“An educated people is a free people.”

- José Martí

It could be argued literacy is to education what voter turnout is to democracy. Along with other basic indicators such as infant mortality, these metrics are widely used as objective measures of governmental priorities and societal status.

As previously noted, nearly all adults in Cuba are literate. Based on the effort and resources required to attain this remarkable accomplishment, many might assume that the government of Fidel Castro would want to capitalize on its investment in education by ensuring that all Cubans have unregulated access to information. My findings suggest otherwise.

The purpose of this investigation was to analyze whether the Cuban people are fully capable of taking advantage of their technical skills to read in order to gain the knowledge they desire. Many might claim that without free access to information – regardless of the subject matter, author or political orientation – and without the fear of being persecuted for the material that one reads, having the ability to read is not an appropriate surrogate for the educational level of a country. Without free access to information, one’s knowledge is extremely restricted.

It is from this perspective that this paper has 1) reviewed the concepts of “freedom of expression,” “freedom of information,” and “intellectual freedom” in contemporary Cuba, 2) analyzed the origins of, the activities and the working conditions of the Independent Library Movement of Cuba, and 3) addressed four of the main controversial issues surrounding on this matter. These questions were accessed by researching newspaper articles and other media sources about the Independent Library Movement, sending structured questionnaires to

established “experts” representing the entire spectrum of political perspectives, and conducting on-site research in Cuba.

This manuscript represents the first in-depth academic evaluation of the Independent Libraries in Cuba, a topic long divided along sharp political lines. The Cuban government and supporters of its policies justify the restrictions enforced on basic human rights and intellectual freedoms by pointing to examples of threats to national security, such as the Bay of Pigs invasion, assassination attempts on Fidel Castro and the economic blockade imposed by the United States government. Nevertheless, I believe that a government should never use fear of the masses’ access to information to excuse repression. It is my hope that this paper will spark greater interest about the Independent Library Movement of Cuba, as well as increased future investigations on this complex subject.

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Appendix A – “Libraries in Cuba: A Structured Questionnaire”

Dear [name],

Hello, my name is Kelsey Vidaillet and I am a senior at the University of Wisconsin at Madison double majoring in Spanish and Latin American, Caribbean & Iberian Studies (LACIS). As part of my senior honors thesis, I am conducting a structured questionnaire designed to elicit opinions regarding libraries in Cuba not funded by the Cuban government, otherwise known as “independent libraries.” Realizing there are various perspectives on their purpose and role, my objective is to enhance my understanding of their activities and how these individuals are perceived by both individual persons with unique expertise in this area as well as professional organizations outside the island. Your responses are very important to me and to this entire field of research.

Informed Consent: Your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary and you should feel free to skip any questions that you are uncomfortable in answering. If you prefer that any or all your responses be kept confidential, and/or prefer that your name not be identified, just let me know. The data you provide will be grouped with data others provide for research, reporting and presentation purposes. If you choose to complete the short questionnaire below, it should not take longer than 20 or so minutes for you to complete.

Please check here to give your consent to use your responses in this evaluation.

Please check here if you prefer not to complete the questionnaire but would be willing to offer me an explanation. for this decision (type below).

I would appreciate it if you could please send me your completed questionnaire by [date].

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Kelsey Vidaillet

krvidaillet@wisc.edu or krvidaillet@gmail.com

- 1) How did you first learn about “independent libraries” in Cuba? (e.g. via a professional association, newspaper article, journal article, personal connection, online web site, etc.)
- 2) Do you believe that groups such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the American Library Association (ALA), and/or the Canadian Library Association (CLA) should recognize the “independent libraries” in Cuba? Why or why not?
- 3) If the “independent librarians” had official, university library science degrees, would your opinion of them change? Why or why not?
- 4) Do you believe the “independent libraries” in Cuba are truly “independent”? Why or why not?
- 5) Do you believe that the “independent librarians” have a specific, political criteria in the selection of and/or display of their material? Why or why not?
- 6) Are you in favor of or opposed to the “independent libraries” in Cuba receiving either monetary and/or supply (books, pamphlets, etc.) donations from abroad? Why or why not?
- 7) Do you believe that the individual, political beliefs of the “independent librarians” have any affect on how you perceive them, their “independent libraries,” or the “independent library movement”?
- 8) In general, do you believe that there is freedom of expression, freedom of thought, freedom to read in Cuba? Why or why not?

Appendix B – Chronological Bibliography of main events in ALA/IFLA/Cuba History

June 21, 1999

ALA - "Campaign Launched to Support Independent Libraries in Cuba"

<http://www.ala.org/al_onlineTemplate.cfm?Section=june1999&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=2550>

January 8, 2001

The following report was delivered by Ann Sparanese to the LANIC Committee of the IRC at the 2001 ALA Midwinter in Washington, D.C. The committee was hearing Robert Kent's request for action on the "repression of independent librarians" in Cuba. Partially as a result of Mrs. Sparanese's report, LANIC recommended "no action."

To: Pat Wand
Chairperson, ALA IRC Latin American & Caribbean Subcommittee

From: Ann C. Sparanese
SRRT Action Councilor

Subject: Hearing on Charges by "Friends of Cuban Libraries"

Thank you for inviting me to speak before your Subcommittee. These notes have been prepared for your consideration. I am the head of Adult & Young Adult Services at the Englewood Public Library in New Jersey. I have been an active member of ALA for ten years. As well as serving on SRRT Action Council and its International Responsibilities Task Force, I have been a member of YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults Committee, the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, and I am the current Chairperson of RUSA's John Sessions Memorial Award Committee. I also have a long history of interest in, and travel to, Cuba. I attended the 1994 IFLA Conference in Havana and my most recent visit was this past November, when I visited Cuban libraries and met with Havana members of ASCUBI, the Cuban Library Association. I have followed with interest, and argued against, the allegations of Mr. Kent since he began his campaign in 1999. The Social Responsibilities Round Table passed the attached resolution regarding the FCL at midwinter conference one year ago. Mr. Kent would like to present his proposal as a no-brainer, a simple question, a single pure concept: intellectual freedom. But it is not. This paper is respectfully submitted with the hope that the subcommittee may approach Mr. Kent's requests with a fuller appreciation of history, the facts and the issues.

1. Who Are the "Friends of Cuban Libraries?"

This is how Robert Kent and Jorge Sanguinetty described themselves at the outset of their campaign for Cuban "independent libraries." (1)

"Before going to the debate, however, the Friends of Cuban Libraries would like to answer some inquiries from the public regarding the goals and origin of our organization. The Friends of Cuban Libraries, founded on June 1, 1999, is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization which supports Cuba's independent libraries. We oppose censorship and all other violations of intellectual freedom, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, regardless of the ideology or leadership of whatever Cuban government is in office. The founders of the organization are Jorge Sanguinetty and Robert Kent. Jorge Sanguinetty resides in Miami. He was the head of Cuba's Department of National Investment Planning before he left the country in 1967. He was later associated with the Brookings Institution and the UN Development Programme. He is the founder and president of Devtech, Inc. He is also a newspaper columnist and a commentator on Radio Martí. Robert Kent is a librarian who lives in New York City. He has visited Cuba many times and has Cuban friends whose viewpoints cover the political spectrum. During his visits to Cuba Robert Kent as assisted Cuban, American, and internationally-based human rights organizations with deliveries of medicines, small sums of money, and other forms of humanitarian aid. On four occasions he has taken books and pamphlets to Cuba for Freedom House and the Center for a Free Cuba, human rights organizations which have received publication grants from the U.S. Agency for International Development; on three occasions his travel expenses were paid wholly or in part by Freedom House or the Center for a Free Cuba. On his last trip to Cuba in February, 1999, Robert Kent was arrested and deported from the country."

Many references to Mr. Sanguinetty appear on the WWW. He speaks widely on the subject of returning free market enterprise to Cuba. As a commentator on Radio Marti, Mr. Sanguinetty is or was an employee of the United States government. Cubans on the island have always listened to Miami radio and even some TV stations. But Radio Martí is a propaganda station directly controlled by the most right-wing elements of the Cuban-American exile community, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). It is not a neutral voice or a bastion of "free expression." It has never aired the voices of liberal elements of the Cuban-American community who favor the normalization of relations with Cuba. Mr. Sanguinetty is simply a professional propagandist. In October 1995, President Clinton presented a \$500,000 government grant to Freedom House for publishing and distributing pamphlets and books in Cuba.(2) The funds were also devoted to paying for individuals to travel to Cuba as tourists in order to make contact with dissident groups, organize them and fund them.(3) Robert Kent is evidently one of these couriers -- another propagandist on an illegal, paid-for mission on behalf of Freedom House. He is not the only American to be sent on such a mission (4) and be deported. Kent evidently believes that by acknowledging his sponsor, this somehow legitimizes his activities. But it only demonstrates the nature of his campaign as part and parcel of stated US foreign policy intended to destabilize Cuba.

2. What Are the "Independent Libraries"?

The "independent libraries" are private book collections in peoples' homes. Mr. Kent and the right-wing Cuban-American propaganda outlets, call them "independent libraries" and even "public libraries." These "independent libraries" are one of a number of "projects" initiated and supported by a virtual entity calling itself "Cubanet" (www.cubanet.org) and an expatriate anti-Castro political entity calling itself the Directorio Revolucionario Democratico Cubano. The Cubanet website describes what the "independent libraries" are, how they got started and who funds and solicits for them. The index page says that the organization exists to "assist [Cuba's] independent sector develop [sic] a civil society..." This is the wording used in both the Torricelli and the Helms Burton Acts, both of which require that the US government finance efforts to subvert the Cuban society in the name of strengthening "civil society." You will see on the "Who We Are" page that Cubanet, located in Hialeah, Florida, is financially supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and "private" "anonymous" donors. The "exterior" representative of the "independent libraries" is the Directorio Revolucionario Democratico Cubano, also located in Hialeah. (5)

3. Who are the Independent Librarians?

You will read on the pages of Cubanet about the individual "libraries" and their personnel. Not one of the people listed is actually a librarian. Not one has ever been a librarian. Most, however, are leaders or officers of various dissident political parties, such as the Partido Cubano de Renovacion Ortodoxa and the Partido Solidaridad Democratica. This is documented on Cubanet, although Mr. Kent never mentions these party affiliations in his FCL press releases. We know absolutely nothing about the principles, programs or activities of these parties, or why they have been allegedly targeted. We don't know whether their activities are lawful or unlawful under Cuban law. Kent maintains that their activities are solely related to their books - but in reality we have no idea whether this is true and in fact, one of these "librarians" told one of our ALA colleagues that this was not true! By using the terms "beleaguered," "librarians" and the buzzwords "freedom of expression" and "colleagues" Mr. Kent hopes to get the a priori support of librarians who might not look beneath this veneer. After all, isn't this the reason that the subcommittee will be considering their case in the first place? But I wonder if ALA is willing to establish the precedent that all politicians with private book collections who decide to call themselves "librarians," are therefore our "colleagues"?

4. Who funds Cubanet, the Directorio, and the "independent libraries" - and why is this important?

A recent book entitled *Psy War Against Cuba* by Jon Elliston (Ocean Press, 1999), reveals, using declassified US government documents, the history of a small piece of the 40-year-old propaganda war waged by our country against the government of Cuba. The US has spent hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars over these years to subvert and overthrow the current Cuban government - US activities have included complete economic embargo, assassinations and assassination attempts, sabotage, bombings, invasions, and "psyops." When even the fall of the Soviet Union and the devastation of the Cuban economy in the early 1990's did not produce the desired effect, the US embarked on additional, subtler, campaigns to overthrow the Cuban

government from within. One element of this approach is the funneling of monetary support to dissident groups wherever they can be found, or created. This includes bringing cash into the country through couriers such as Mr. Kent, and increasing support to expatriate groups operating inside the US, such as the Directorio, Cubanet and especially, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) The website AfroCubaWeb (www.afrocubaweb.org) has gathered information from the Miami Herald and other sources to document the recipients of this US funding. USAID, a US government Agency, supported the Directorio Revolucionario Democrático Cubano to the amount of \$554,835 during 1999. This is the group that supports the "independent librarians" in Cuba and is listed as their "foreign representative." The money that they send to Cuba, as well as the "small amounts" of cash that Mr. Kent carried illegally to Cuba violates Cuban law, which does not allow foreign funding of their political process. Neither does the United States allow foreign funding of its own political process - the furor around alleged Chinese "contributions" to the Democratic Party is a case in point. The "independent libraries" may be independent of their own government, but they are not independent of the US government. The US government is not the only anti-Castro entity that has adjusted its policy to changing times-- the most right-wing forces in the Cuban expatriate community have also stepped up their support of dissident elements inside Cuba over the last few years. The *Miami Herald* reported in September 2000 that "the leading institution of this city's exile community plans to quadruple the amount of money it sends to dissident leaders on the island..." This leading institution is the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), and the article reports that part of the group's \$10,000,000 budget will begin "flowing to the island through sympathetic dissidents by the end of the year." More specifically, CANF will, among other declared activities, "increase funds to buy books for its [Cuba's] independent libraries." (6)

5. What is CANF? What is its record on free expression, intellectual freedom, and democratic rights here in the USA?

The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) was founded by Jorge Mas Canosa, a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion and CIA operative, at the behest of the Reagan administration in 1982. It has become the most wealthy and powerful voice of the right-wing Cuban community in South Florida and has wielded extraordinary political power for the last twenty years. It has been connected to violence and terrorism both in Cuba and in Miami. Its newest tactic, as described above, is to "support" dissidents in Cuba, including buying books for "independent" libraries, presumably to support "freedom of expression" in Cuba.

Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetti claim to be proponents of human rights and frequently refer to the "landmark" IFLA "report." But they seem to have no problem with their libraries' CANF connection, even though CANF was the subject of a truly "landmark" report issued by Americas Watch, a division of Human Rights Watch, in 1992. The Americas Watch report on CANF is the first that organization ever issued against a human rights violator in a city of the United States. It states that "a 'repressive climate for freedom of expression' had been created by anti-Castro Cuban-American leaders in which violence and intimidation had been used to quiet exiles who favor a softening of policies toward Cuba." (7) The executive director of Americas Watch at that time said "We do not know of any other community in the United States with this level of intimidation and lack of freedom to dissent." (8) The report documents "how Miami Cubans who are opposed to the Cuban government harass political opponents with bombings, vandalism, beatings and death threats." (9) A campaign spearheaded by CANF against the *Miami Herald* in

the early nineties resulted in bombings of *Herald* newspaper boxes and death threats to staff.(10) Pressure from CANF closed the Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture because it showed work by artists who had not "broken" with Cuba.(11) Anyone who followed the Elian Gonzalez case this past year noted that tolerance for dissenting views by Cuban Americans was completely lacking in Florida and a hostile atmosphere was maintained by CANF during the duration of the affair. Can you imagine what the life expectancy of a pro-Castro "independent library" in the middle of Little Havana would be, given this history? CANF does not respect freedom of expression or democratic rights in the USA, yet it is a direct financial supporter of Mr. Kent's independent libraries. Neither Mr. Kent nor Mr. Sanguinetti have disowned this support – in fact they haven't even mentioned it! They have not chosen to examine or criticize the lack of free expression among the very people that give them succor and publicity here at home, yet they claim to be its great champions in Cuba!

6. What about free expression and democratic rights in Cuba?

There is no doubt that political dissidence has its consequences in Cuba. Those who want to overthrow the current socialist government are considered political problems. Because of the declared and well-funded US policy of seeking to destabilize Cuba by creating and/or instigating social unrest, the Cuban people consider these people to be agents of US policy and enemies of the nation. This view is shared by the former head of the US Interests Section in Cuba, former Ambassador Wayne Smith who says: "Since 1985, we have stated publicly that we will encourage and openly finance dissident and human rights groups in Cuba; this too is in our interest. The United States isn't financing all those groups - only the ones that are best know[n] internationally. Those dissidents and human rights groups in Cuba - that are nothing but a few people - are only important to the extent that they serve us in a single cause: that of destabilizing Fidel Castro's regime."(12) This is the reality of a small country that has been in a virtual state of siege by the most powerful country in the world for more than 40 years. The US has engaged in invasion, sabotage, assassination attempts against its leader and even the maintenance of a military base against the will of the Cuban people, as well as well-documented psyop and propaganda campaigns. With the economic blockade, the US has sought to bring the Cuban people to their knees by depriving them of sources of foodstuffs and denying medicine to their children.(13) Ambassador Smith: "Through these two policies, economic pressure and human rights - we want to force the overthrow of Fidel Castro and then install a transitional government that we like - to reinstate the people we want and thus, control Cuba again."(14) It is a fact of life that democratic rights suffer in any nation under siege or engaged in war. A view of our own history will illuminate this point: simply look at the what happened to the American people's freedom of expression, constitutional rights and human rights during the Civil War, WWI, WWII, the Cold War McCarthy period and even during our most recent wars. Can we realistically expect and demand that Cuba be the model of democratic rights in the face of the unrelenting US economic and political aggression? Cuba does not have a perfect human rights record. But are we simply to condemn Cuba for this situation? Don't we, as US citizens, whose tax dollar has been used for so many years to create this situation, have a special responsibility to look at the full picture? Shouldn't our first concern be to change the policy that has directly contributed to the limitation of democratic rights in Cuba? Even the UN special rapporteur for human rights, while critical of Cuba, credited the US policy for making the situation worse than it might otherwise be.(15) Mssrs. Kent and Sanguinetti are asking this committee and the ALA

for a sweeping condemnation of Cuba on the basis of human rights. But are not food, education, medical care, income, freedom from violence, and literacy "human rights"? The Cuban people enjoy free medical care - despite the US denial of Cuba's right to purchase basic medical products - and have one of the highest per capita rate of doctors in the world. All Cuban children attend school and enjoy free education through university. The Cuban people are an extraordinarily literate people with many more libraries and books than people in most of the undeveloped world, despite Mr. Kent's attempts to ridicule their library collections with absurd claims that have been refuted by Cuban librarians. Cuban workers have the right to an income even if they have been laid off from work; they have a society free from violence and no Cuban child has ever been killed by a gun in his/her school. Racism, as we know it in the US, is not present there and vestiges of racism are actively combated at all levels of society. If these are taken as measures of human rights, Cuba comes out looking very good indeed. This is not to say that intellectual freedom and complete freedom of expression are not important. But Cuba's exceptional success in fulfilling these basic human needs explains why the majority of the Cuban people are not anxious to trade their current situation for the "free market", "wealthy exiles get their property back" plans of Kent/Sanguinetti's sponsors in Miami and the US government. Before the ALA passes judgment on Cuba, even in the area of free expression, we need to look at the whole picture and we need to have some first-hand experience. We cannot simply act on what one ill-informed librarian and a professional expatriate propagandist -- both with US government backing -- tell us.

7. How does US policy towards Cuba affect free expression and intellectual freedom for US citizens?

For close to forty years, in various permutations, the US has maintained a travel ban, which specifically denies the right of US citizens to visit Cuba outside a small set of "legal" and "licensed" exceptions. This means that if any US citizen (any US librarian, for instance) wants to travel to Cuba, simply to see for her/himself what is going on there (not for any specifically academic or professional purpose), this is against US law and punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. If members of this subcommittee want to visit Cuban libraries, simply to chat with your counterparts and even seek out the "independent librarians" - it is not the Cuban government that is preventing you, it is the US government! This is clearly an issue of intellectual freedom(16) - but not to Messrs. Kent and Sanguinetti. They are purists. They are only concerned about freedom of expression and intellectual freedom in Cuba - not in the US - and only for Cubans in Cuba, not in Miami! This is utter hypocrisy. Because of this forty-year war against Cuba by the United States, it is not just Cuban citizens who have seen their democratic rights limited, it is US citizens as well. To deliberately ignore this reality reveals the claims and motives of Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetti as deeply suspect.

8. What About the IFLA Report?

Why has the FCL been able to go forward with their accusations? The answer is a report by the recently formed IFLA - FAIFE (Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression) Committee. The sole basis for this action - the first such action taken by committee - was the Friends of Cuban Libraries allegations, and several phone conversations with the alleged librarians involved. No member of FAIFE ever visited these "libraries" or attempted to. No

"investigation" whatsoever was undertaken beyond these phone contacts. Parts of the report were taken verbatim from the papers of Mr. Kent and Mr. Sanguinetty. Even the FAIFE report acknowledges the role of financing by "foreign interests," but it does not seem to find this point very important. It does not address the issue of who these "librarians" really are, but accepts FCL's allegations that they are librarians. The IFLA investigation meets no standards. Nevertheless, it has bestowed on Mr. Kent's cause a certain legitimacy and has allowed Kent to go the Canadian Library Association, and other groups, which also reacted to the IFLA report and did no independent investigation. In an especially crass but clever move, Kent even managed to get a recently imprisoned Chinese American librarian to make statements about a situation about which he has no knowledge. Perhaps IFLA can be forgiven for not understanding the nature of US hostility toward Cuba, and the lengths to which the US and the right-wing Cuban expatriate elements will go to further their aims of overthrowing the Cuban government. But the American Library Association will have no such excuse. Our own members and colleagues have visited Cuban libraries and the "independents" (without prior notification) and have testified as to their inauthenticity. They must be listened to. This is already more than IFLA cared to do. The IFLA report, and all that followed because of it, cannot be allowed to grant any further imprimatur to the Kent/Sanguinetty campaign.

9. What about our real colleagues - the librarians of Cuba?

The charges that have been spread by Kent and his FCL have deeply offended our real colleagues, the librarians of Cuba, and our sister library association, ASCUBI. Our real colleagues are beleaguered by shortages of things as simple as paper, professional literature, computers and printers - and much of this has to do with their inability, because of the US blockade, to purchase any items from US companies (or foreign companies doing business with the US). Computers cannot be brought to Cuba from the US legally, even as a donation by licensed travelers. True "friends of Cuban libraries" would be concerned about these matters. It is time that we begin to know our real counterparts/colleagues in Cuba. It is time that we begin to have the kinds of conversations and exchanges on all subjects -- including intellectual freedom and censorship. It is US policy, not Cuban policy, which prevents us from doing so. As the representative of US librarians, the ALA has an obligation first to address our own country's limitation of freedom of expression and the freedom to travel, then to criticize others. The American Library Association cannot allow itself to be the willing instrument of a US government/CANF-sponsored disinformation campaign. If the ALA takes any action at all on Cuba, it should be to call for an end to the embargo and the hostile US policy towards Cuba which harms the democratic rights, including freedom of expression, of both the Cuban and US people. ALA should begin in the spirit of the resolution passed by the US librarians who attended the IFLA conference in Havana in August 1994 (see attached).

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1 See http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/if/cuba.html. Most of the activities carried out by the FCL take place on the listserves, of which this site has an "anthology."

2 Franklin, Jane. Cuba and The United States: A Chronological History. Melbourne, Ocean Press, 1997. p375.

3 Calvo, Hernando and Katlijn Declercq. The Cuban Exile Movement: Dissidents or Mercenaries? New York, Ocean Press, 2000. p.130.

4 Ibid.

5 Another of its stated purposes is "informs the world about Cuba's reality", but their news pages simply report only anti-government events or incidents.

6 "In Miami, Cuban Exile Group Shifts Focus" by Scott Wilson. The Washington Post Foreign Service. Thursday, September 14, 2000; Page A03. As quoted at <http://afrocubaweb.org/dissidents.htm>.

7 "Miami Leaders are Condemned by Rights Unit" by Larry Rohter. New York times, August 19, 1992 Section A, Page 8, retrieved from Lexis-Nexis.

8 Ibid.

9 Franklin, p.300.

10 Op.cit.

11 Franklin, p 241, 242, 252,277.

12 Calvo & Declercq, pp 156, (interview with Ambassador Smith.)

13 "Denial of Food and Medicine: The Impact of the U.S. Embargo on Health and Nutrition in Cuba," A Report from the American Association for World Health, March 1997.

14 Calvo & Declercq, p160.

15 Franklin, p 330.

16 In "The Right to Travel: The Effect of Travel Restrictions on Scientific Collaboration Between American and Cuban Scientists," the American Association for the Advancement of Science is every bit as critical of the United States in limiting travel as it is of Cuba! The report notes that the US government does not recognize the right to travel as an internationally recognized fundamental right. <http://shr.aaas.org/rtt/report/one.htm>.

January 15, 2001

American Library Association - International Relations Committee -
Latin American and Caribbean Subcommittee – “Report on Cuban issue”

<<http://www.ala.org/ala/iro/iroactivities/alacubanlibrariesreportcuban.htm>>

Report of visit to ACURIL XXXI and its host country, Cuba, May 23 - May 30, 2001

(Dated 6/11/2001 Revised 7/13/2001)

<<http://www.ala.org/ala/iro/iroactivities/alacubanlibrariesreport.htm>>

June-August 2001*

ALA - “Protocol of Cooperation Between ALA and ASCUBI”

<<http://www.ala.org/ala/iro/iroactivities/alacubanlibrariesprotocol.htm>>

** Adopted by the ALA International Relations Committee, June 19, 2001*

Adopted by the Executive Committee of ASCUBI, July 20, 2001

Signed at the 67th IFLA Council and General Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, August 24, 2001

July 20, 2001

ALA - “Resolution on Access to Information by Cuba’s Libraries”

<<http://www.ala.org/ala/iro/awardsactivities/resolutionaccess.htm>>

July–August 2001 *

IFLA - “IFLA/FAIFE - Report on Cuba / August 2001 - Libraries in Cuba - An IFLA/FAIFE Report on Free Access to Information in Cuba”

<<http://www.ifla.org/faife/faife/cubareport2001.htm>>

** Written by Susanne Seidelin (Director of the IFLA/FAIFE Office) in July 2001, published in “Report on Cuba” in August 2001*

August 24, 2001

IFLA - “Resolution adopted at IFLA Council II held at Boston, USA on Friday 24th August 2001”

< <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/resol-01.htm>>

May 8, 2003

IFLA Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression – “Intellectual freedom in Cuba” article

<<http://www.ifla.org/V/press/faife-cuba03pr.htm>>

June 4, 2003

The following is a letter from Gisela Delgado to Michael Dowling of the ALA International Relations Office

Michael Dowling, Director
mdowling@ala.org International Relations Office
Phone: (312) 280-3200
Fax: (312) 280-4392

Havana, June 4, 2003

Sir,

I send you this recorded message due to the fact that my fax was seized during a raid on my home, during which my husband Hector Palacios was arrested. They also seized materials related to the Independent Libraries Project. Sir, I would like to send this message seeking your solidarity with this library project and because of the repression to which we have been subjected. Many Cubans have been arrested because of their manner of thinking and for their promotion of culture within Cuba.

Sir, I greet you and other members of the ALA on behalf of the members of the Independent Library Project of Cuba. Our project was founded on March 3, 1998, due to four decades of literary censorship to which our nation has been subjected. Our library movement was founded with the goal of offering the Cuban people access to uncensored reading beyond the limits imposed by a required ideology. We have now established 103 libraries throughout the country [*in addition to about 100 independent libraries founded by other groups - editor's note*]. I append an annual report that was completed at the end of the year 2002 in which we explain the varied activities that we carry out and the achievements of this project in favor of a civil society in Cuba.

Since March 18th of this year numerous Cubans were detained, including about a dozen librarians and dozens of human rights defenders, independent journalists and dissidents. This was accompanied by raids on the homes of these persons and the seizure of books, typewriters, cameras, radios, computers, etc. These raids have impacted more than thirty libraries, and other librarians were taken to detention centers by the political police and warned that if they if they continued their work to promote independent cultural activities they would be imprisoned.

What we are asking, sir, is that your association show solidarity with our project and with the innocent persons who are now in prison. We would like you to ask the Cuban authorities to immediately release these detained persons.

Sincerely,
Gisela Delgado Sablon
Director
Independent Library Project of Cuba

June 12, 2003

IFLA Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression –
“IFLA Calls on U.S. to Allow Visits and Information to and from Cuba” article

<<http://www.ifla.org/V/press/faife120603pr.htm>>

2003 Annual Conference - June 22, 24, and 25

<http://www.ala.org/al_onlineTemplate.cfm?Section=councilmeetings&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=40569>

The following are excerpts from “ALA Council - 2003 Annual Conference” article

“Iraq and Cuba

A resolution submitted by the International Relations Committee in response to the loss of cultural resources in Iraq following the U.S.-led invasion (CD#18.4) passed unanimously, but not before receiving a thorough going-over from Council. Michael Gorman pointed out that the resolution was based on a document he had drafted with fellow councilor Michael Malinconico, but that the wording had been changed to make it less critical of the U.S. actions. IRC member Winston Tabb, who led the committee’s meetings in the absence of chair Betty Turock, said the committee felt that the harsher language could have hindered the resolution’s goal of obtaining funding for reconstruction and rebuilding.

Gorman submitted an amendment stating that ALA “deplores the inaction of the U.S. and British authorities to secure cultural institutions” (rather than “expresses deep sadness” at the lack of action), which was approved handily. The amended resolution met swift approval. At that point, Tabb said to laughter from the floor, “Now we’ll move to the easier resolution relating to Cuba.”

Councilors’ amused reaction to Tabb’s characterization was in response to the widespread controversy over Cuba that had preceded the conference: ALA’s support of the country’s libraries and opposition to the U.S. economic embargo had come under attack in articles in the *Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere, and was the target of a smear campaign by supporters of the island’s self-styled “independent librarians.”

Noting that the five Cuban librarians at the conference were only able to attend because the event was being held in Canada rather than the U.S., Councilor Al Kagan asked permission for Marta Terry of the Cuban Library Association to address Council. “We are here defending our own right to a library and to cultural access for the whole 11 million Cubans,” said Terry, who expressed gratitude to ALA for allowing the Cuban librarians’ voices to be heard and for paying attention to their concerns.

Discussion revealed general dissatisfaction with the resolution (CD#18.5), much of it centering on the document's scattershot nature: The resolved clauses urged the Cuban government "to respect the rights of all individuals to freedom of expression and access to information"; urged "the U.S. government to eliminate existing policies . . . that limit the ability of the people of Cuba to access information, and that inhibit the continuation of professional exchanges between the two countries"; reaffirmed ALA's relationship with the Cuban Library Association; and called upon the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions to investigate further the role of "independent libraries" in Cuba. Ultimately, Council voted to refer the resolution back to the IRC and to the Intellectual Freedom Committee for further consideration."

2004 ALA Midwinter Meeting: January 9-14, 2004 in San Diego, CA

The following is a proposed amendment to the IRC/IFC Report on Cuba which was presented by Karen G. Schneider at the 2004 ALA Midwinter Meeting in January

To be moved by Karen G. Schneider, Councilor at Large

Proposed: the following modification to the IRC/IFC Report on Cuba:

Changing this:

ALA joins IFLA in its deep concern over the arrest and long prison terms of political dissidents in Cuba in spring 2003, and urges the Cuban government ...

To this:

ALA joins IFLA in its deep concern over the arrest and long prison terms of political dissidents in Cuba in spring 2003, **and calls for their immediate release.** ALA urges the Cuban government ...

Rationale

This change would add action language related to the arrest and lengthy prison terms of the dozens of journalists, writers, and others arrested in the spring, 2003 crackdown. These journalists, writers, and other activists were arrested for a variety of actions that we have repeatedly affirmed in numerous ALA policies: writing and speaking about free speech and civil liberties, and owning private book collections (often referred to as "independent libraries"). Additionally, personal book collections were confiscated and in many cases destroyed. In calling for the release of the people arrested in the March, 2003 crackdown, we join Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, President Jimmy Carter, journalist Nat Hentoff (recipient of the 1983 ALA Imroth award), and other organizations and individuals who champion free speech everywhere. This action language is consistent with ALA policies, including ALA Policy 58.8, which affirms our support for Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human

Rights; "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression") and ALA Policy 58.1(2) (International Relations, especially 58.1(2), a policy objective to "support human rights and intellectual freedom worldwide."

ALA's commitment to free speech everywhere is so strong that in the last fifteen years ALA has passed resolutions on behalf of human rights and intellectual freedom in these countries: Romania (1990), Afghanistan (1991), Thailand (1995), Zimbabwe (1996), Nigeria (1996), Yugoslavia (1999), Cuba (2001), Palestine (2002), and Iraq (2003). These resolutions were not limited to calling for free speech for formally accredited librarians or for access to "official" libraries, and some of the individuals we cited in these resolutions were labeled dissidents in their own countries.

As evidenced by the following report, however, the amendment did not pass

Caywood, Carolyn. "Councilor's Report for ALA's Midwinter Meeting, San Diego 2004" *Intellectual Freedom Round Table*. No. 54, Summer 2004.
<<http://www.nd.edu/~jarcher/ifrtreport/no54/2.html>>

...Karen Schneider dropped her resolution on Cuba in favor of a proposed amendment to the IRC/IFC report, "...and calls for their immediate release. ALA...." The paragraph in the report would then have read: "ALA joins IFLA in its deep concern over the arrest and long prison terms of political dissidents in Cuba in spring 2003, and calls for their immediate release. ALA urges the Cuban Government to respect, defend and promote the basic human rights defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights." My perception was that the IFRT Board did not want to support Karen's resolution because it contained some inaccuracies and because the Board felt that the report of the joint IRC/IFC committee represented the best compromise we could expect. Karen's change to a short amendment addressed her inaccuracies but not the negotiation that went into the report. Nevertheless, I could not in all conscience vote no to a simple plea to release political dissidents, so I abstained on the amendment, which was defeated. The joint report, ALA CD#18.1, International Relations Committee and Intellectual Freedom Committee's Report on Cuba was adopted.

January 13, 2004

ALA – "ALA International Relations Committee and Intellectual Freedom Committee's Report on Cuba"

<<http://www.ala.org/ala/pr2004/prjan2004/alacounciladopts.htm>>

January 16, 2004

IFLA – “Statement on Restriction of Internet Access in Cuba”

<<http://ifla.org/V/press/cuba160104.htm>>

January 27, 2004

ALA - “ALA updates online information on intellectual freedom in Cuba”

<<http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=pressreleases&template=/contentmanagement/contentdisplay.cfm&ContentID=55474>>

2004 ALA Annual Conference: June 24-30 in Orlando, FL

The following is a letter from Gisela Delgado to John Berry, which was delivered by Ramón Colás to the ALA Annual Conference in Orlando on June 28, 2004

June 18, 2004

Mr. John W. Berry
Chairman
International Relations Committee
American Library Association
50 E. Huron
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Mr. Berry,

I extend my congratulations and best wishes for success on the occasion of your upcoming annual meetings. It is, indeed, a proud moment for the American people and librarians worldwide when your organization meets to openly address issues affecting the profession charged with preserving the historic memory of every society and of disseminating information within it.

Unfortunately, that type of meeting is not possible a mere 90 miles from the shores of the state in which your gathering is to be held. Such is the case in my own country of Cuba, where the Cuban people, having learned to read, are not able to freely exercise their right to do so. Hence the value of projects such as ours, the Independent Libraries of Cuba. This project, which

I am honored to direct, promotes reading and access to information of all kinds, to whomever wishes to approach it, as I have described in prior letters to members of your organization.

I now find myself in the obligation to write you once again – unfortunately not to report on our successes, as I would like – but to urgently request the international solidarity that your organization has come to demonstrate in so many cases throughout your long history.

Since March of 2003, the Cuban government has unjustly imprisoned, because of their ideological positions, members of our organization that defend intellectual liberty. My own husband, Hector Palacios, was arrested when state police raided the Dulce Maria Loynaz library, of which I am director. He and fifteen independent librarians, and a large number of human rights activists find themselves detained, in abhorrent conditions, that have been described by the international media and several international organizations.

Amnesty international, which is seeking the release of the imprisoned librarians, has declared them to be Prisoners of Conscience. Their report (“Cuba: One Year Too Many: Prisoners of Conscience from the March 2003 Crackdown”) describes this unconscionable reality. Alarming details of abuses perpetrated against those who participate in our cultural project, many of whom are suffering serious health problems, are contained in this report. Thanks to international attention, three librarians have been liberated, including Leonardo Bruzon Avila, Julio valdez Guevara, and Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva, all of them in serious health condition. Still more international attention is required to bring about the release of those remaining.

Your organization has an important role to play. As a world leader among librarians, grounding yourselves in your principles of defending intellectual liberty, ALA could become a catalyst for change by shedding further light on these abuses of fundamental human rights. I trust and hope that it will be so.

Sincerely,

Gisela Delgado Sablon

National Director

Biblioteca Dulce María Loynaz

Calle 25 #866, Apt. 3, entre A y B, Vedado, Ciudad Habana, Cuba

www.bibliocuba.org

The following is a letter from John Berry to Felipe Pérez Roque regarding Gisela Delgado's letter from June 2004

Date: July 27, 2004

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sr. Felipe Pérez Roque
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores
Calzada No. 360
Vedado
La Habana, CUBA

Dear Minister:

In January of this year, the American Library Association (ALA) Council, ALA's governing body, adopted the report of the association's International Relations Committee and Intellectual Freedom Committee on Cuba. This report was sent to the Cuban government through the Cuban Interests Section in the United States, and distributed widely as a press release. I am attaching the report with this letter.

ALA signed an agreement in 2001 to cooperate with the Asociación Cubana de Bibliotecarios (ASCUBI) on an array of issues including exchanges of materials and professional exchanges.

Since 2001, ALA has supported the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) call for the need for the U.S. government to share information resources widely in Cuba, and not restrict its provision to just a few individuals.

The ALA report calls for the elimination of the embargo by the United States government that restricts access to information in Cuba and for lifting travel restrictions that limit professional exchanges.

The unfortunate political climate between our two countries is not cause for indifference to the fundamental human rights of all people as defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, in the report ALA also joins IFLA in its "deep concern over the arrest and long prison terms" of 75 political dissidents in Cuba in spring 2003.

We thank you very much for your attention and assistance to ensure the health and welfare of these detained individuals.

Respectfully,

John W. Berry
Chair, International Relations Committee Past President, American Library Association

The following is a letter from John Berry to Gisela Delgado's letter in response to her letter from June 2004

Date: July 27, 2004

Mrs. Gisela Delgado Sablon
Calle 25 # 866, Apt. 3 Entre A y B
Verdado Cuidad
Habana, CUBA

Dear Mrs. Delgado Sablon:

We are responding to your letter of June 18, 2004, which was delivered by Mr. Ramón Colás at the ALA Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida on June 28, 2004.

As you know, in January of this year, the American Library Association (ALA) Council, ALA's governing body, adopted the report of the association's International Relations Committee and Intellectual Freedom Committee on Cuba. This report was sent to the Cuban government and distributed widely as a press release. I am attaching the report with this letter.

Since 2001, ALA has supported the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) call for the U.S. government to share information resources widely in Cuba, and not restrict its provision to just a few individuals.

The ALA report calls for the elimination of the embargo by the United States government that restricts access to information in Cuba and for lifting travel restrictions that limit professional exchanges.

The unfortunate political climate between our two countries is not cause for indifference to the fundamental rights of all people as defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Therefore, ALA joined IFLA in its "deep concern" to the Cuban government over the arrest and long prison terms" of 75 political dissidents, including your husband.

We are again sending the report adopted by the ALA Governing Council to the Cuban government.

Respectfully,

John W. Berry
Chair, International Relations Committee Past President, American Library Association