

An Open Letter

in anticipation of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba's
new recommendations slated to become public in May 2006

ENCASA/US-CUBA

Emergency Network of Cuban American Scholars and Artists for Change in U.S.-Cuba Policy

We are a group of Cuban American scholars and artists who have coalesced as a network of U.S. citizens opposed to current U.S. policy toward Cuba. We are committed to promoting reasoned debate in the public arena, to countering the stereotype of a monolithic Cuban American community, to challenging the disproportionate influence of an unrepresentative sector out of touch with U.S. public opinion, and to help bring about an end to a failed policy that defies all sound principles for conducting foreign affairs.

By any measure, U.S. policy toward Cuba has been singularly unsuccessful for almost half a century. It has been a political and moral failure. The U.S. embargo inflicts economic hardship on the Cuban people while denying opportunities to American farmers and business. Harsh travel restrictions infringe on the rights of American citizens and contribute to the trauma of separation of Cuban families. Laws intended to isolate Cuba internationally instead have alienated the U.S. from the rest of the world, especially its closest neighbors in this hemisphere, while earning the Cuban government sympathy and solidarity. Time and again, from the Bay of Pigs to the Helms-Burton law, the policy of regime change—in place since the Eisenhower administration—has backfired. Increasingly, hard-line U.S. policies have done nothing but reinforce hard-line tendencies on the island. The Bush administration has taken this policy to an even more extreme level by adopting the *2004 Report to the President: Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba* (<http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rt/cuba/>). This singular track record of failure points to the need for a fundamentally different approach toward Cuba.

As U.S. citizens, we call for a new U.S. policy toward Cuba consistent with U.S. principles and ideals. Restrictions which bar U.S. citizens from traveling to Cuba, and which are not applied to any other nation in the world, curtail our fundamental freedoms. These restrictions pose an additional and inhumane hardship on Cuban families already suffering from often traumatic separations, as demonstrated by a recent Human Rights Watch report, “Families Torn Apart: The High Cost of U.S. and Cuban Travel Restrictions” (<http://hrw.org/reports/2005/cuba1005/>).

New regulations on travel by Cuban-Americans to visit their families in Cuba restrict family visits to once every three years, providing no exception for medical and other emergencies. The restrictions also radically and absurdly redefine "family" in a way that excludes cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews. Such redefinitions are not in line with widely-held understandings of "family," especially in the context of Cuban cultural practices, and undermine and disregard the emotional and psychological importance of family ties. New limitations in the number and dollar value of shipments to family members of such basic necessities as medicines and medical supplies, as well as the elimination of packages containing clothing, toilet paper, soap, and other basic necessities, are cruel and counter to humanitarian principles. We insist that family values must include the freedom to visit and to send vital necessities to our families.

The tightened restrictions on travel also curtail the freedom of American citizens to pursue programs of cultural and educational exchange in Cuba. The value of scholarly study about Cuba, as well as the right of U.S. citizens to pursue such study, is seriously undermined, and the ideal of the free exchange of ideas is profoundly diminished. Further, the possibilities of contacts and exchanges of a religious and humanitarian nature between U.S. citizens and Cubans are seriously restricted. These limitations on the basic freedoms of U.S. citizens are unacceptable.

The Cuban nation has a long and proud record of struggle for self determination and defense of its sovereignty. For more than 500 years, Cubans have rejected and defeated colonialism, military interventions and foreign influences. The policy embraced by the Bush administration and spelled out in the 2004 Commission Report ignores and misreads Cuban history. Moreover, the policy attempts to negate the Cuban people's right to self determination and sovereignty by implying that the U.S. should have a major role in determining Cuba's future. Cuba's present and future must be determined by the Cuban people, not by the United States.

Just as we condemn U.S. policy over the last 47 years and the restrictions and violations of basic freedoms and rights in Cuba over the same period, we lament the climate of intolerance that exists in our own community. The only beneficiaries of this culture of intransigence are certain enterprises, politicians, and media personalities who have built careers and fortunes manipulating the pain of our community. Those who practice persecution or who use their money and influence to silence those in the Cuban American community who dissent from a false monolithic consensus undermine democracy and human rights here and in the homeland.

While Cuban American academics and public intellectuals—artists, writers, philosophers, scientists, legal scholars and others—have at times played significant roles in efforts to change U.S.-Cuba policy as individuals, to date there has been no *concerted* participation of this sector of our community in the struggle to end an unjust and irrational approach toward Cuba. In Cuban history, intellectuals repeatedly acted as moral agents and catalysts for change. In the United States today, intellectuals continually come together to speak out on important causes, providing a moral compass to their society. Drawing from those noble traditions of civic participation in both Cuba and the United States—and with a great sense of urgency—we have organized ourselves to voice our outrage at a policy that is inhumane, unjust, ill-conceived, hypocritical, and contrary to American ideals. For too long, this debate has been dominated by one sector of our community. We are determined that no longer will others in our community speak for us as they continue to insist on taking this country down a misguided path that has served neither the best interests of the United States nor those of the Cuban people.

(The following is a partial list of members of ENCASA/US-CUBA.
Institutional affiliations are given for purposes of identification only.)

María Isabel	Alfonso	Ph.D. Candidate	University of Miami
María	Alvarez	Ph.D. Candidate	University of Iowa
Maribel	Alvarez	Research Social Scientist	University of Arizona
Alejandro	Anreus	Associate Professor	William Patterson University, NJ
Lourdes	Arguelles	Professor	Claremont Graduate University, CA
Ruth	Behar	Professor	University of Michigan
Emilio	Bejel	Professor	University of California, Davis
Berta Rosa	Berriz	Adjunct Professor	Lesley College, MA
James	Buckwalter Arias	Assistant Professor	Hanover College, IN
Beatriz	Bustamante	Independent Producer	Miami, FL
Manuel	Cachán	Cuentista	Valdosta State University
Jorge Luis	Cacheiro	Director	Montclair State University
Marta	Caminero-Santangelo	Associate Professor	University of Kansas
Susan	Caraballo	Executive Director, Curator	Artemis, Miami
Rubén G.	Carbonell	Professor	North Carolina State University
Adrian	Castro	Poet, author	Miami, FL
Max	Castro	Independent Scholar	Miami, FL
Miguel Angel	Centeno	Professor	Princeton University
Elizabeth	Cerejido	Curator	Florida International University
Karina Lisette	Céspedes	Ph.D Candidate	University of California, Berkeley
Ana	Chichester	Associate Professor	University of Mary Washington, VA
Cristina	Civantos	Associate Professor	University of Miami
José	Cobas	Professor	Arizona State University
Jorge Ignacio	Cortiñas	Playwright	New Dramatists, NY
Roman	De la Campa	Professor	SUNY, Stony Brook
Alejandro	De la Fuente	Associate Professor	University of Pittsburgh
José	De la Fuente	Research Professor	Oklahoma State University
Ivania	Del Pozo	Professor	Youngstown State University, OH
María Elena	Díaz	Associate Professor	University of California, Santa Cruz
Lilliam	Domínguez	Photographer	Miami, FL
Ana María	Dopico	Professor	New York University
Jorge	Duany	Chair and Professor	University of Puerto Rico
Alfredo	Durán	Attorney, Law	Miami, FL
Kenya	Dworkin Méndez	Associate Professor	Carnegie Mellon University, PA
Leonardo	Falcón	Program Supervisor	Museum of Florida History
Samuel	Farber	Professor	CUNY, Brooklyn College
Raúl	Fernández	Professor	University of California, Irvine
Delvis	Fernández Levy	President	Cuban American Alliance Education Fund

Ada	Ferrer	Associate Professor	New York University
José	Gabilondo	Assistant Professor	Florida International University
Raúl	Galván	President	Milwaukee-Nuevitas Association, WI
María Cristina	García	Professor	Cornell University
Ofelia	García	Professor	Columbia University
Nereida	García Ferraz	Artist	Miami, FL
Lisa	García-Bedolla	Assistant Professor	University of California, Irvine
Eduardo	González	Professor	John Hopkins University, MD Madison-Camagüey Sister City Association
Ricardo	González	President	Yale University
Lillian	Guerra	Assistant Professor	Editorial Plaza Mayor, San Juan, PR
Patricia	Gutiérrez Menoyo	President	University of South Florida
David	Hernández Rivero	Graduate Student	University of Florida
Reynaldo	Jiménez	Associate Professor	University of Miami
Celita	Lamar	Associate Professor	CUNY, Bronx Community College
Alex	Lamazares	Lecturer	Miami, FL
Olga	Lastra	Independent Scholar	University of Miami
Mía	Leonin	Instructor	Tulane University, LA
Ana	López	Associate Provost	Brandeis University, MA
María	López	Scholar	University of Miami
Tomás	López	Professor, artist	Los Angeles, CA
Rosa	Lowinger	Writer	Columbia University
Eduardo	Machado	Playwright	University of Miami
Lillian	Manzor	Associate Professor	FUNDarte, FL
Niurka	Márquez	Executive Director	University of North Texas
Teresa	Marrero	Associate Professor	Florida International University
Juan	Martínez	Professor	DePaul University, IL
Félix	Masud-Piloto	Professor	University of Maryland
Eyda	Merediz	Associate Professor	San Francisco State University
Nancy	Mirabal	Associate Professor	Florida International University
Hugo	Moro	MFA Candidate	Palo Alto, CA
Elías Miguel	Muñoz	Writer	New York University
José Esteban	Muñoz	Professor and Chair	CUNY, Graduate Center
Ricardo	Otheguy	Professor	University of California, Santa Cruz
Manuel	Pastor	Professor	University of Michigan
Silvia	Pedraza	Professor	Yale University
Eduardo	Peñalver	Visiting Associate Professor	Miami, FL
José	Pérez	Independent Curator	Florida International University
Lisandro	Pérez	Professor	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Louis	Pérez, Jr.	Professor	University of California, San Francisco
Eliseo	Pérez Stable	Professor	

Alejandro	Portes	Professor	Princeton University
Roberto	Poveda	Musician	Miami, FL
Gerald E.	Poyo	Professor	St. Mary's University, TX
José	Quiroga	Professor	Emory University, GA
Deborah	Ramil	Program Manager	Tulane University, LA
Eliana	Rivero	Professor	University of Arizona
Orlando	Rodríguez	Professor	Fordham University, NY
Julio	Ruiz	Clinical Associate Professor	State University of New York
Carlos	Rumbaut	Software developer, writer	Austin, TX
Luis	Rumbaut	Attorney, writer	Washington, DC
Rubén G.	Rumbaut	Professor	University of California, Irvine
Enrique	Sacerio-Gari	Professor	Bryn Mawr College, PA
Neli	Santamaría	President	Common Ground, Miami
Alberto	Sarraín	Theater Director, Playwright	Miami, FL
Lucía	Suárez	Assistant Professor	University of Michigan
Zulema	Suárez	Associate Professor	Adelphi University, NY
Belkys	Torres	Graduate Student	University of Notre Dame
Alina	Troyano	Artist, writer	New York, NY
Mirén	Uriarte	Professor	University of Massachusetts
Nelson	Valdés	Professor	University of New Mexico
Andrew	Valls	Assistant Professor	Oregon State University
Maria Teresa	Velez	Psychologist	University of Arizona
Alan	West-Durán	Associate Professor	Northeastern University, MA
Silvia	Wilhelm	Executive Director	Puentes Cubanos, Miami
Gilberto	Zaldívar	President and Producer	Repertorio Español, NY
Margarita	Zamora	Professor	University of Wisconsin, Madison

**If you agree in principle with the ENCASA/US-CUBA statement, join us:
please e-mail your name, title, and profession/institutional affiliation to
encasa-us-cuba@runbox.com**