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Shifting Relations Suggest the Start of a “New Chapter” with Cuba—Or Do They?: Portrayal of Cuba in the New York Times, January 2014-July 2015

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**SHIFTING RELATIONS SUGGEST THE START OF A “NEW CHAPTER”
WITH CUBA—OR DO THEY?: PORTRAYAL OF CUBA IN *THE NEW YORK
TIMES*, JANUARY 2014-JULY 2015**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

The United States and Cuba announced that they would begin the process of restoring diplomatic relations in December 2014 after over fifty years of political disengagement. The shift in foreign policy produced a plethora of news articles. What do newspaper articles, in particular articles in *The New York Times* published between January 2014-July 2015, reveal about how, if at all, the representation of Cuba has changed since the two countries have initiated the process of restoring relations? How did the U.S. public react to this change? A qualitative content analysis of 117 articles from *The New York Times* reveal that the thaw in foreign relations with Cuba does not mean a significant shift in the portrayal of Cuba in U.S. newspapers. Cuba continues to be characterized as an undemocratic, unfree government.

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SHIFTING RELATIONS WITH CUBA

On March 20, 2016, President Obama became the second sitting president to ever visit Cuba. The last sitting president to visit Cuba was President Calvin Coolidge in 1928. This visit comes after the two countries restored formal diplomatic relations and the two countries reestablished embassies in the respective countries on July 20, 2015. The change from interests section to embassy was symbolized by the raising of the Cuban flag above the Cuban embassy in Washington, D.C. and the raising of the U.S. flag at the U.S. embassy in Havana, Cuba. Attempts at restoring relations between the two countries have been taking place since the Eisenhower administration broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba on January 3, 1961 with “every president since Eisenhower [engaging] in some form of dialogue with Castro and his representatives” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2014, p. 2). However, these efforts have been informal and kept away from the public eye and were happening at the same time that the United States government was actively trying to destabilize the Cuban government.

Media and propaganda in the United States were used during the fifty-three year period to shape U.S. public opinion about Cuba and to justify the need to break off diplomatic relations and the demand for an embargo—or *bloqueo*, blockade, as it is referred to by Cubans because the term *bloqueo* seems to better encompass the isolating, war-like nature of the codes and regulations. Newspapers reflect and influence public opinion as well as contain traces of “the dominant worldview embedded within them”

(Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 237). In regards to Cuba, “U.S. mass media have reflected the views of the U.S. government and systematically misrepresented the Cuban Revolution. Most post-1959 news stories reminded people that Cuba was a Communist, totalitarian, dictatorship that routinely violated human rights” (Landau, 200, p. 49). The distorted portrayal of Cuba was possible because of what Herman and Chomsky refer to as the five filters of the *propaganda model*. The propaganda model “traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). With the Cold War as the backdrop, it was necessary to portray Cuba as a threat to national security and as an adversary to the U.S. ideals of freedom and democracy. How, if at all, has the representation of Cuba changed since the two countries have initiated the process of restoring relations? And how did the U.S. public—as represented in *The New York Times*—react to the shifting diplomatic relations?

A qualitative content analysis of 117 articles from *The New York Times* between January 1, 2014 and July 31, 2015 can help to reveal the values, rationales, and justifications used by the United States to explain the decision to commence the process of restoring relations with Cuba. The portrayal of Cuba in current U.S. newspapers is informed by the shared history between the two countries. My thesis will begin by situating the newspaper articles within a historical context. The history between both countries can be best understood from a revisionist point of view which utilizes the misbelief of U.S. superiority as a framework to understand U.S.-Cuba history and the

representation of Cuba in U.S. newspapers. While the U.S. has moved towards a policy of engagement in regards to Cuba, the sample of *The New York Times* articles reveal that the U.S. continues to view Cuba as undemocratic and in need of a new form of government.

Positionality Statement

The misrepresentation and erasure of Mexican Americans in dominant U.S. history classes in school drove me to become interested in Cuba's intricate history and relationship with the United States. While I have always identified strongly as a daughter of Mexican immigrants, my racial formation and identity is fluid and thus has changed, so that by the time I graduated high school I was identifying more so as a Latina, and dare I say it, a Chicana. I became keenly aware of how little I knew about Latinxs in the United States and about Latin America in general. The word "Latinx" is the gender-neutral term that many have embraced in the United States as a way to include various genders outside of the man-woman binary. As I began to learn about Latin America, my previously accepted notion that Cuba was an oppressive state run by dictators was challenged. I began to recognize that Cuba, and its revolution in particular, is much more complex and nuanced than I had once believed. Where had I gotten the idea that being "communist" meant being "evil"? Why had I once accepted the "benevolent" U.S. backing of the Bay of Pigs invasion as necessary in order to ensure "democracy" and "freedom"? Did I assign Cuba the role of "bad guys" myself or was this a message constructed for me? These were some of the questions that came up as I

continued to learn about Cuba and that inspired my thesis. continued to learn about Cuba and that inspired my thesis.

I had the opportunity to live and study in Havana, Cuba from mid-August to mid-December in 2014 on a study abroad program through Sarah Lawrence College. I returned to the United States three days before the United States and Cuba announced that they were going to begin the process of formally restoring relations. There had been talk that the U.S. and Cuba were close to restoring relations the last month I was in Cuba, but at the time they seemed to just be murmurings. Some of my friends in Cuba expressed hope as they heard the news—optimistic that restored relations would mean an end to the bloqueo—while other friends were skeptical about the U.S.’s intentions. While I was curious about how the restored relations would affect Cuba, I was also interested in how the U.S. would react to the news and how, if at all, Cuba’s representation in U.S. news would change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Shared History of Cuba and the United States: How did we get here?

The physical proximity of Cuba to the United States has meant that the histories of the U.S. and Cuba have been intertwined. Aviva Chomsky identifies two tendencies that U.S. historians fall under when writing about Cuba-U.S. relations since 1959. More traditional historians “privilege the Cold War context, emphasizing the Communist

nature of the Revolution, Cuba's ties with the USSR, and the Cold War ideologies that motivated U.S. policies during the second half of the twentieth century" (Chomsky, 2011, p. 66). On the other hand, there are the U.S. revisionist scholars who tend to agree with the majority of Cuban historians by centering "the U.S. imperial stance towards the Caribbean and Latin America, which predated both the Cold War and the Revolution, as the most important context" (Chomsky, 2011, p. 66). I draw mostly from U.S. revisionist accounts because my thesis seeks to understand the ways in which the U.S. government has worked closely with U.S. newspapers to manufacture public opinion about Cuba within the United States. The portrayal of Cuba in U.S. newspapers rests on the belief of U.S. superiority.

Expansionists in the United States, in particular white southern slave-owners, had their imperialist eyes on the island since the 1850s with "U.S. investors, including both individual planters and well-known companies like Hershey and the United Fruit Company, [taking] over the production of sugar in the late nineteenth century" (Chomsky, 2001, p. 21). Therefore, it is not surprising that the United States became involved in Cuba's war for independence in 1898 hoping to acquire Cuba (Franklin, 1997, p.8). The desire to annex Cuba was consistent with the U.S. values embodied in the idea of Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine. The \$50 million that U.S. investors had invested in Cuba's economic sectors in 1898, primarily sugar, further prompted U.S. involvement in the Cuban wars for independence (Gilmore and Sugrue, 2015, p. 41).

The designation of Cuba as a U.S. protectorate and the subsequent military interventions were motivated by racist ideologies held by the U.S. occupation forces who

came to the island. Alejandro de la Fuente writes that “even ‘well-meaning’ Americans... arrived on the island feeling like missionaries ‘among savages of various degrees of gentleness’” (Fuente, 2001, p. 40). There was a consensus amongst Americans “that Cubans were lazy, childish, inconsistent, and afflicted by an acute ‘feeling of inferiority’”(Fuente, 2001, p. 41). Unsure of whether the Cuban people were fit to rule themselves, the U.S. occupational forces took it upon themselves to reserve the right to intervene in Cuba’s internal and foreign affairs. In 1903, the United States imposed the Platt amendment onto the newly written Cuban Constitution and made its passage a condition for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the island (Franklin, 1997, p. 10). The Platt amendment gave the United States the right to intervene and a perpetual lease on Guantanamo Bay (Castro, 2009, p. 214). Hence, after multiple wars for independence, Cuba “found [itself] free from Spain but in the grip of a new power, the United States” (Meade, 2010, p. 75).

In the following decades, “treaties and laws promulgated by the U.S. military governors gave U.S. businesses unmatched advantages in the Cuban market, and U.S. investments flowed freely” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2014, p. 9). The U.S. capitalists were primarily concerned with maintaining their ownership of most of Cuba’s sugar industry, in addition to their “tobacco industry, the banks, and public utilities” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2014, p. 9). Because of the high number of investments in Cuba, the U.S. was willing to back anyone who would protect their finances, including dictatorships such as that of Fulgencio Batista. The United States appreciated Batista’s protection of U.S. assets and so the U.S. was quick to overlook “Batista’s seizure of

power, suspension of constitutional rule, [and] flagrant corruption, including deals with the Mafia” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2014, p. 9). Opposition to the Batista regime increased throughout the 1950s. When it became clear that Batista would be ousted, the question for the U.S. became whether or not the new “revolutionary government [would] protect the interests of U.S businesses in Cuba” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 69) which at the time of the ousting of Batista surpassed a “billion dollars in assets” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2014, p. 11).

The Cuban Revolution finally triumphed on January 1, 1959. The United States officially recognized the Cuban government on January 7 (Franklin, 1997, p. 18). However, much to the dismay of the U.S., it soon became clear that “the Revolution sought, and the population clearly supported, political and economic independence from the United States” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 69). So, the answer to whether or not the revolutionary government would protect U.S. economic interests, was no. Almost immediately the CIA began to carry out murder attempts against Fidel Castro and began developing ways to “encourage within Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America opposition to the [supposedly] extremist, anti-American course of the Castro regime” (Franklin, 1997, p. 18 and Chomsky, 2011, p. 74-75). The new revolutionary government would draw heavily on nationalism to support their various reforms, including the May 1959 Agrarian Reform which “brought the conflict between the Cuban government’s goals and the interests of U.S. investors to a head” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 71). The Agrarian Reform made it clear that Cuba was not going to answer to the U.S. In January 1960, Cuba expropriated “70,000 acres of property owned by U.S. sugar companies, including 35,000

acres of pasture and forests owned by United Fruit Company in Oriente province” (Franklin, 1997, p. 24). In light of the expropriations, “the United States came to perceive Cuba’s revolutionary government as a threat to its interests” (Schoultz, 2010, p. 2).

Attempts to undermine the Cuban revolutionary government included encouraging emigration and working closely with right-wing Cuban-Americans who opposed the revolution. Migration from the island “drained Cuba of the human capital that the country’s economy demanded, discredited the revolutionary political model, and established the social base that would lend support to the counterrevolutionary movement” (Arboleya, 2000, p. 184). Arboleya situates the conservative Cuban-American community within the Cuban counterrevolutionary movement which predicated itself as the antithesis to the ideologies of the Cuban revolution of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and socialism (Arboleya, 2000, p. ix). The Cuban counterrevolution within the United States was characterized by its “aggressiveness, intransigence, and blunt plan of restoration and dependency” (Arboleya, 2000, p. 288). Many of the operations carried out by Cuban-Americans could not have happened without “the support, or at least the consent, of the U.S. government” (Arboleya, 2000, p. 148). Noam Chomsky goes as far as to describe the relations between the U.S. and Cuba from 1959 onward as a state of war (Goodman, 2015).

The animosity increased when Cuba and the USSR agreed to trade Cuban sugar for Soviet oil in February of 1960. When U.S. oil companies refused to process the Soviet oil, Cuba nationalized all oil companies (Chomsky, 2011, p 77). Angered, the United States imposed an broke off all diplomatic relations with Cuba on January 3, 1961.

Shortly after, the United States' CIA, along with the newly-arrived Cuban immigrants, undertook the failed military invasion of the Bay of Pigs (Arboleya, 2000, p.186).

Seeking to isolate Cuba politically, the U.S. successfully expelled Cuba from the Organization of American States in January 1962 (Hayden, 2015, p. 73) and imposed a total embargo on Cuba on February 3, 1962 (Franklin, 1997, p. 48).

The embargo was tightened over time so that by 1966, some of its regulations included:

A ban on “imports of all goods made from Cuban materials or containing any Cuban materials even if made in other countries” (Franklin, 1997, p. 51); the withholding of “U.S. aid from “any country that allows planes or ships under its registry to transport certain materials to Cuba (Franklin, 1997, p. 55); the prohibition of “shipowners involved in trade with Cuba...to transport U.S. shipments of foreign aid supplies” (Franklin, 1997, p. 56); an outlaw on “unlicensed commercial or financial transactions between Cuba and U.S. citizens” (Franklin, 1997; p. 66); a freezing of “all Cuban-owned assets in the United States” (Franklin, 1997; p.66); and a bar on “food shipments to any country that sells or ships strategic or nonstrategic goods to Cuba” (Franklin, 1997; 92). The stipulations of the embargo extend beyond economic sanctions of Cuban businesses in relation to the U.S. Rather, the statutes of the embargo also sanction other countries for engaging with Cuba. Because of its extraterritorial nature, the rules and codes that make up the “embargo” isolate and block off Cuba from the rest of the world. There is no need for hostile ships and armed troops when trade ships are being kept away by the fear of punishment from the U.S. government. Thus, Cubans refer to the embargo as a *bloqueo* or blockade because the term more adequately describes the effects of the codes and regulations

The Cuban Revolution and the United States's decision to break off diplomatic relations and place the *bloqueo* on Cuba happened with the Cold War as the backdrop.

The bloqueo and attempts at isolating Cuba were also rooted in the U.S. desire to maintain its hegemony in Latin America; “The growing Cuban-Soviet alliance was seen not only as a geo-political threat to the Cold War power balance... but also as a threat aggravated by certain primordial feelings on the part of the United States that Cuba was destined to be ours” (Hayden, 2015, p. 49). In particular, the Cuban-Soviet alliance challenged the U.S. sense of entitlement that Cuba was meant to benefit the U.S. economically¹. The need of the Kennedy administration to legitimize the active opposition to Cuba left little room for alternative voices in the media.

Overthrowing the Cuban government outright became complicated because of the government’s popular support in Cuba. Polls at the time “showed backing for the new government exceeding 90 percent” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2014, p. 12). The task then became “to try to guide—or manipulate—the new government into compliance with U.S. business and economic development goals” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 70). The fear was not simply that the U.S. would lose out on their economic privileges in Cuba but rather that the Cuban revolution would be used as a model for other Latin American countries (Chomsky, 2011, p. 74). Tom Hayden, and Zebich-Knos and Nicol, would also add that the U.S. was not only afraid of what Cuba represented to countries abroad, but also what it could mean to oppressed groups within the United States. C. Wright Mills, a U.S. sociologist, suggested that “*the domestic costs of Yankee imperialism someday might cause an armed revolutionary vanguard to rise within the United States itself*”, in

¹ While Cuba is often written about as a pawn of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Lambie—as well as many Cuban historians and scholars—would argue that Cuba offered a “refreshing alternative to Soviet communism” (Lambie, 2010, p. 157) .

² Italics in original

the belly of the beast that Martí hated” (Hayden, 2015, p. 44). Thus it became necessary to engage in active, covert campaigns to overthrow the Cuban government. To justify these campaigns it was necessary to convince the U.S. public that Fidel was a dictator violating people’s human rights and freedom—freedom as defined by the U.S. government. The words “freedom” and “democracy” have very nuanced meanings that are particular to a time period, place, and group of people. While “freedom” and “democracy” take on various definitions in the United States, the hegemonic discourse of the economic elite conflates freedom and democracy with capitalism.

The Cold War continued to be used as a justification for the hostile posture of the United States towards Cuba. Fidel’s communist Cuba was portrayed as the ultimate enemy and antithesis to U.S. ideals of *freedom* and *democracy*. During the Cold War, estrangement with Cuba was further rationalized as a U.S. national security problem. Decades of “imprecise news about Cuba” followed, with various “media stars and hacks alike, like parrots, [repeating] U.S. government pretexts for anti-Cuban policies” (Landau, 2008, p. 49). When the Cold War ended in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union, few bothered to question why Cuba retained its status as a national security threat to the U.S. and why the bloqueo continues to this day. The importance of Cuba in terms of foreign relations lessened with the end of the Cold War. Thus, “Washington decision-makers, with higher priorities to attend, followed the path of least resistance by leaving the policy of hostility in place” (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 477). Officials in the U.S. Interests Sections stated in 2005: “Ninety-eight percent of U.S. citizens never think of Cuba, the only people who think Cuba is important are the Cubans in Miami” (Schoultz,

2010, p. 4). About two-thirds of Cuban-Americans reside in Florida—the state with the third highest number of electoral votes (29), along with New York (Schoultz, 2010, p. 4). Thus, “domestic politics or, more concretely, the interest politicians have in winning elections” explains the unchanging stance of the U.S. towards Cuba to a greater extent (Schoultz, 2010, p. 4).

Cuban-Americans began to have increasingly more political power in the 1970s, as a larger proportion of the community became U.S. citizens. Right-wing Cuban-Americans mobilized and founded various organizations. In addition to influencing U.S. policy, various right-wing Cuban-American organizations engaged in bombings and assassinations. In the 1970’s alone, “Cuban terrorists organizations carried out at least 279 actions throughout the world, more than half (144) on U.S. soil” with the FBI attributing 103 bombings and six assassinations between 1973 and 1976 to Cuban-American groups and organizations (Arboleya, 2000, 160). The tremendous influence of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) which was composed of wealthy Cuban-Americans living in Miami “gave the community virtual veto power over US policy from 1981 to 2008” (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 476). CANF was largely responsible for advocating for the passage of the Helms-Burton Act, also known as the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996 (Arboleya, 2000, p. 264) which “codified the embargo” into legislation and “prohibited ending the embargo until the president certified that Cuba has a democratic government that is defined, inter alia, as one that is ‘moving toward a market-oriented economic system’” (Schoultz, 2010, p. 15).

The political clout that Cuban-Americans possessed until 2008 meant that political candidates had to commit to upholding the bloqueo until Cuba became a democracy. In other words, until Cuba became a capitalist nation. The importance of Florida in national elections has meant that presidential candidates have had to pay particular attention to the opinions of Cuban-Americans. Thus, the presidential campaigns of President George W. Bush and President Obama “were guided by astute pollsters who in 2004 advised Bush to tighten the embargo but in 2008 advised Obama to relax it” (Schoultz, 2010, p. 6). The ever-changing Cuban-American community and the shifting foreign relations with Latin America meant that by the time Obama was campaigning for president, it was no longer political suicide for a presidential candidate to call for “a new approach to Havana” (LeoGrande, 2011, p. 38). Rather, it was necessary to engage a new policy because of the increasing isolation and pressure the United States was experiencing from Latin America.

While most Latin American countries, with the exception of México, followed suit when the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba in the 1960’s, by 2009 the scene had changed and the United States remained the only country in the Western Hemisphere to not maintain diplomatic relations with Cuba (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 481). The heads of various Latin American countries pressured the Obama administration on the Cuba issue, with Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and Rafael Correa of Ecuador refusing to attend the Sixth Summit of the Americas because Cuba had not been invited (LeoGrande, 2015, p.482). Most Latin American countries threatened to not attend the Seventh Summit of the Americas in April of 2015 if Cuba was not invited, and

all Latin American countries encouraged “Panama, the host country, to invite Cuba despite U.S. objections” (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 482). Thus, the position of the United States on Cuba was threatening to expose its weakening hegemony in the area.

In addition, the U.S. was motivated to take on a new approach because Cuba had undergone a change in leadership when Raul Castro became president in 2008. Under Raúl Castro, “a policy of engagement became more attractive, since it offered the opportunity for the United States to influence the trajectory of change in Cuba rather than stand passively on the sidelines” (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 485). It is important to note, then, that when the Obama administration finally announced that it would commence the process of formally restoring relations on December 17, 2014, it did not mention a change in U.S. goals but rather a shift in how they would attempt to reach these objectives. The declaration that the two countries would restore diplomatic relations primarily “represented Washington’s acceptance that the Cuban government was not going to disappear any time soon, and that U.S. policy would henceforth be to coexist with it rather than try to overthrow it” (LeoGrande, 2015, p. 485). After fifty-four years of estranged relations, the United States had finally accepted Cuba’s revolutionary government as legitimate—even if only symbolically.

The announcement that Cuba and the United States would commence the process of restoring relations was issued simultaneously on television by Barack Obama and Raúl Castro in their respective countries on December 17, 2014. The announcement occurred after mid-term elections in the U.S. and was delivered after polls indicated that there was broad national support for restoring relations. An Atlantic Council poll in February 2014

demonstrated that “over 60 percent of respondents favoured re-establishing diplomatic relations” nationwide and 63 percent of respondents in Florida supported normalizing relations (LeoGrande 2015, p. 479).

If national polls suggest that the majority of the U.S. population favored restoring relations with Cuba, then one would assume that national newspapers in the U.S. would reflect this opinion. Newspapers act as cultural mirrors and reflect values, dominant worldviews, and public opinion. However, they also play an important role in helping to construct popular opinion. With the United States’s deep-rooted imperial stance towards Latin America—Cuba in particular—and the lasting anticommunist sentiments inspired by the Cold War, to what extent has the representation of Cuba changed since the two countries have initiated the process of restoring relations? To understand how the perception of Cuba has changed (or not changed), it is first important to understand how Cuba became known in the United States as primarily the Communist, totalitarian, country run by a “dictatorship that routinely [violates] human rights” (Landau, 200, p. 49).

Conceptual Framework: A Propaganda Model

Anticommunism and anti-Castro sentiments prominent in U.S. public opinion have been used to justify the need for a “new Cuba” since 1959. However, these anti-communist and anti-Cuba sentiments did not originate organically from the U.S. public, but rather these opinions were manufactured and persisted due in part to the perceptions put forth by newspapers. Edward S. Herman’s and Noam Chomsky’s

analysis of the systematic propaganda model in *Manufacturing Consent* helps to explain how public opinion about Cuba was manufactured during the Cold War and how perceptions of Cuba in the media, particularly in newspapers, have changed (or not) depending on U.S. foreign policy. They argue that “It is much more difficult to see a propaganda system at work where the media are private and formal censorship is absent” such as in the United States (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 1). Given this, it is harder to see the ways in which other factors, such as money, serve to censor particular stories. The prominent hegemonic idea is that the press is free and everyone’s voice can be heard equally. The U.S. is quick to point to countries that have formal laws restricting free speech, such as Cuba, when presenting itself as the proponent of free speech and as an extension, freedom. The inconspicuous censorship in the United States—in addition to an active campaign to destabilize Cuba and few to no alternative voices to the dominant discourse—naturalized discussions around Cuba during the Cold war such that “98 percent of those surveyed in the United States had heard of Fidel Castro, and 82 percent had a negative opinion of him” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 1). This public opinion and discourse is manufactured through the use of propaganda. As Herman and Chomsky argue, there are 5 key ingredients of the propaganda model that serve to censor out which “news [is] fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). Possible news stories, or opinions about current events, pass through these 5 filters. While the dominance of these five filters in manufacturing public opinion are beginning to be challenged by the increase in internet use, the filters are still intact.

The first filter in the propaganda model is the “the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). When Chomsky and Herman published *Manufacturing Consent* in 1988, there were 24 media giants that made up the top tier of media companies who determine which news is presented to the public and how it is framed (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 4-5). Thus, there were mainly 24 media giants who decided what stories to print about Cuba. Since then, “the loosening of the rules limiting media concentration, cross-ownership, and control by non-media companies” has meant a greater integration of the media into the market (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 8). Therefore, the size and concentrated ownership of media outlets is regulated and affected by U.S. policies. The rise in internet use since the late 1990s and early 2000s in the United States has meant that individuals and companies who do not belong to the top tier are able to publish opinion pieces through alternative venues, such as online blogs or websites. However, while the internet has created a space for common people to express dissenting and alternative voices, the majority of internet sites are owned by only 17 corporations, meaning that ownership and profit remain concentrated in the hands of a few (Pew Research Center's...2012) .

The second filter in the propaganda model is “advertising as the primary income source of the mass media” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). Advertisements allow media companies to sell their newspapers at prices lower than production price ensuring wider circulation which then attracts more advertisers because the more papers that are sold, the greater the size of the potential consumer market. So, the news perspectives that

are the most palatable or common amongst those with the most purchasing power, including of course the economic elite, are more likely to be published or featured. Newspapers may also be more hesitant to critique corporations that advertise in their newspapers. People and companies with economic interests in Cuba, such as Coca-Cola, ITT, and Standard Oil, were very unlikely to benefit from the Cuban revolution and such companies would be more likely to invest in the manufacturing of dissent against the Cuban revolution. Conversely, this means that “working-class and radical papers have been at a serious disadvantage” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 15). Newspapers that may have been sympathetic to the Cuban revolution were limited by production costs because they do not attract as many advertisers. While the internet has allowed newspapers to reach a much wider audience, many of them still rely on advertising revenues. There has recently been a decline of revenue from advertisements in print newspapers and cable news but an increase in internet advertising revenues (Mitchell 2015).

The third filter of the propaganda model is “the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and ‘experts’ funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). Most arguments in newspaper articles are based on the creation of knowledge by these so called “experts”. Media outlets rely heavily on places like the White House, the Pentagon, and the State Department in Washington, D.C because government and corporate sources are “recognizable and credible [because of] their status and prestige” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 19). This assumption of legitimacy saves media outlets

money because they do not need to establish the credibility of their sources. However, this reliance on governmental agencies also means that “the media may feel obligated to carry extremely dubious stories and mute criticism in order not to offend their sources and disturb a close relationship” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 22). Newspapers relied, and continue to rely, heavily on these experts when reporting about the restoring of relations with Cuba. Moreover, the government and corporations also play a role in the creation of ‘experts’. In order to assure that experts support their point of view, government officials and corporations are put on the payroll as consultants, their research is funded, and “think tanks that will hire them directly and help disseminate their messages” are organized (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 24). This practice allows “the supply of experts [to] be skewed in the direction desired by the government and ‘the market’” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 23). News coverage in the 1960s was “naively trusting of government, shamelessly boosterish, unembarrassedly hokey and obliging” (Stepp, 1999). Thus newspapers shied away from critiquing U.S. foreign policies—especially in light of the fears of nuclear war during the Cold War.

In addition, the creation of “experts on Cuba” was influenced by the Cuban-American community. Cuban-Americans tended to favor the Republican party because of its “perceived strong stance against Fidel Castro” (Zebich-Knos and Nicol, 2005, p. 147). The media favored “experts” on Cuba who had a strong opposition to Cuba and the Castro government because these experts appeased Cuban-Americans as well as the fear of the spread of communism.

The fourth filter is ‘flak’, or negative responses, “as a means of disciplining the media (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). In the U.S., “the government is a major producer of flak, regularly assailing, threatening, and ‘correcting’ the media, trying to contain any deviation from the established line” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 28). However, flak can also be produced by groups of people—not just the government. The political clout and financial power of conservative Cuban-Americans, exemplified in groups such as the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) and Poder Cubano, granted them the ability to “[punish] any public official who even hinted at a policy of engagement with Cuba” (Leogrande, 2015, p. 476). Orlando Bosch, founder of Poder Cubano, stated that the objective of Poder Cubano was to “[attack] those who in the United States supported negotiations with Cuba or other so-called leftist causes...In Miami they carried out twenty-eight bomb attacks against objectives ranging from a Mexican airplane, the residence of the British consul, the Chilean consulate, the offices of Air Canada, and a number of agencies that sent family aid packages to Cuba” (Arbolea, 2000, 151). Thus, any mention of wanting to restore relations with Cuba in Miami during the Cold War would have been extremely foolish and even life-threatening.

The last filter of the propaganda model is “‘anticommunism’ as a national religion and control mechanism” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). During the Cold War, communism became synonymous with the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Thus, communism is portrayed as the ultimate evil. It was seen as a threat not only abroad, but also as a possible threat within national borders. Anticommunism in the United States was fueled partly by a desire to “fragment the left and labor movements and [to serve] as

a political-control mechanism” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 29). Later on, anticommunist sentiment was fueled by “well-publicized abuses of Communist states” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 29). In addition, “a constant focus on victims of communism helps convince the public of enemy evil and sets the stage for intervention, subversion, support for terrorist states, endless arms race, and military conflict—all in a noble cause” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. xv). The U.S. was able to justify the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 with anti-communist rhetoric. So while Herman and Chomsky only mentioned Cuba in passing, anticommunism played and continues to play an important role in filtering out news articles worthy of being printed.

The filters that Herman and Chomsky laid out can be applied to the ways in which U.S. public opinion in regards to Cuba has been manipulated in the past. To what degree does this persist? It is essential to pay attention to the representation of Cuba in newspapers because print and television news remain the preferred news outlet “(vs. social media or blogs, for example)” (Mastro, Tukachinsky, Behm-Morawitz, and Blecha, 2014, p. 139). In addition, traditional news sources such as newspapers “constitute the most influential and socially significant component of the public sphere” (Mastro, Tukachinsky, Behm-Morawitz, and Blecha, 2014, p. 139). Anti-communism and anti-Castro sentiments continue to be fueled by the purposeful diverging definitions of “democracy” and “freedom” and the misdefinition of communism in the United States.

Warring definitions of “Freedom” and “Democracy”

Aviva Chomsky complicates the terms “freedom” and “democracy” in her book, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*. She mentions the dichotomy that exists surrounding the use of the word “freedom” by the United States and Cuba. She writes: “U.S. policymakers tend to use [freedom] to refer to freedom for private enterprise, while for Cuban policy makers it generally means freedom from U.S. interference” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 2). In addition, many Latin American countries relate freedom to the absence of hunger and poverty. Whereas, the U.S.’s definition of freedom allows it to support the government of someone like Fulgencio Batista simply because he had a history of “siding with Washington internationally and safeguarding U.S. interests” (LeoGrande and Kornbluh, 2014, p. 9). The different economic structures in both countries adds an additional layer to the differing definitions of “freedom”. The United States has a capitalist economic structure and “as an economic system, capitalism is based on the notion of ‘freedom’—workers are ‘free’ to find work or to quit their job. Entrepreneurs are ‘free’ to open or close their businesses...” (Eddles and Appelrouth, 2005, p. 33). Economic decisions are made by “private individuals and institutions” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 57). On the other hand, Cuba’s socialism is based on the idea that “economic decisions should be made by the government” on behalf of the people for the good of the people (Chomsky, 2011, p. 57). From a U.S. perspective, entrepreneurs are not “free” under Cuba’s socialism because they are not free to open or close a business. It is these warring definitions of “freedom” that allow the U.S. to speak about freedom while still engaging

in covert operations to undermine the Cuban government. When news media in the United States talk about Cuba not being “free”, they are really referring to Cuba not being open to U.S. interference or U.S. economic investments.

Similarly to the differing definition of freedom, concepts of democracy are different in the two countries. Both countries agree that a “democracy has to do with systems or mechanisms for the people of a society to be involved in making decisions about how their society will function” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 56). However, for many in the U.S., “the type of democracy that has developed in this country sometimes seems to be the only, the inevitable, or the ideal form of democracy” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 56). Many U.S. Americans fail to recognize that “the Cuban Revolution’s vision of democracy was quite different from U.S. style electoral democracy” (Chomsky, 2011, p. 56). Not only was it different, but “Cuba has [intentionally] attempted to produce an alternative approach to democracy and human progress to the one prescribed by the capitalist West” (Lambie, 2010, p. 162). One such difference is the absence of money in Cuban elections. Cuban mass organizations allow average Cuban citizens to engage with their country’s participatory democracy. Mass organizations— such as the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), the Federation of University Students (FEU)—are a “means by which the ideas, problems, concerns, and interests of ordinary people are expressed and communicated upwards to the decision makers” and also serve as “vertical, downward ‘transmission belts’” (Lambie, 2010, p.152). In addition, “the spaces opened with the creation of the Organs of People’s Power in 1976 (especially locally) have allowed

citizen participation in the selection of their local government representatives”³ (Dilla, 1986, p. 120). Elections for delegates to the Municipal Assembly occur every two years in *circunscripción*, “similar to English ‘wards’ in which candidates are nominated to represent their local area” (Lambie, 2010, p. 163). Representatives in the municipal assembly then elect people to represent them in the Provincial and National Assembly⁴. Jesús Arboleya, author of *The Cuban Counterrevolution*, defines the U.S. obsession with promoting democracy abroad as a guise in order “to achieve the stability needed by the globalized system of production, the basis for a supranational power that is also expressed in the manipulation of multinational political institutions, in the transnational control of mass media, in the open and subliminal imposition of a cultural model, and in many other aspects of contemporary life” (Arboleya 2000, p. 260-1).

With diplomatic relations restored, it is easy to assume that the United States no longer wishes to undermine the Cuban government. However, if we approach the restored relations from a revisionist point of view, we have to remember that U.S. policies have been historically “guided by imperialist and economic motives” (Chomsky 2011; 27). The United States still wants a “free” and “democratic” Cuba where private enterprise can flourish—in particular U.S. private enterprise. Obama admitted that the U.S. approach to Cuba has failed and that now the United States was going to try a policy of engagement (Obama 2014). The goal is still to regain Cuba as a U.S. economic market and production center. So, if the goals are the same will U.S. media continue to portray

³ Original in spanish; Translation my own

⁴ For more information on the Cuban political system, see Lambie, 2010

Cuba as undemocratic and “unfree”? Or have newspapers begun to change their portrayal of Cuba now that the two countries are getting along?

DATA AND METHODS

Why Content Analysis?

Newspapers are cultural spaces in which dominant worldviews are created, reproduced, and reaffirmed. In regards to political and foreign affairs issues, “most Americans [in the U.S.] notice only those issues that are in the news” and “what the public notices becomes the principal basis for their beliefs about the state of the country” (Iyengar, 2011, p. 242). The same holds true with foreign affairs. “Policy makers know that when the media spotlight is aimed at a particular issue”—such as the restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba— “they are likely to have greater success in proposing or moving along legislation on that issue” (Iyengar, 2011, p. 245). This is true because it “is more difficult for those who might normally try to block such efforts to do so when the public is clamoring for action” (Iyengar, 2011, p. 245). Thus it is important to look at whether the attention that newspapers paid to Cuba increased before or after the announcement—or if coverage remained the same.

A qualitative content analysis of widely read newspapers can reveal perceptions and misconceptions that writers, editors, and/or newspaper owners have about Cuba and opinions that they want their audiences to adopt. Letters to the editor also reflect the ways in which the U.S. public has responded to the shift in diplomatic relations. Qualitative

content analysis is a “technique for making inferences from a focal text to its social context in an objectified manner” (Bauer and Gaskell, 2005, p. 133). Rather than looking at the newspapers for historical facts and to try and figure out what happened, a qualitative content analysis allows us to look at the actual meaning of the text. Not only is it important to look at whether coverage of Cuba increased after the announcement but rather if the representation of Cuba has changed. A qualitative content analysis allows us to “[utilize] a *set of procedures* to make valid inferences from the text about the senders, the message itself, or the audience of the message” (Weber, 1985: 9). So, what do the articles on Cuba reveal about the editors and writers of *The New York Times* and its audience?

Sample

The final sample for this study consisted of 117 articles published in *The New York Times* between January 1, 2014 and July 31, 2015. *The New York Times* had the third highest readership for print and online newspapers in 2012 (Edmonds, 2013). In addition, *The New York Times* brand is the second online newspaper worldwide in terms of unique visitors with 53,966 unique visits in January 2015 alone (Barthel, 2015). The high national circulation of *The New York Times* in addition to its role as a representative of the economic and intellectual elite means that it is “considered authoritative, giving it influence over opinion leaders and policy makers” (Saguy and Gruys 2010: 236). Moreover, reporting in *The New York Times* has also been “shown to shape reporting in other news media” (Saguy and Gruys 2010: 236). Because of its cultural significance, the

way in which *The New York Times* writes about the process of restoring relations influences the ways in which smaller newspapers also portray Cuba.

I focused on January 1, 2014 to July 31, 2015 because I wanted to see if the amount of articles written about Cuba increased after the simultaneous announcement of Raúl Castro and Barack Obama about commencing the process of restoring relations on December 17, 2014. On the day of the announcement, it had been fifty-three—almost fifty-four— years since the U.S. embassy in Cuba had packed up its bags and closed its doors and the Cuban embassy in the United States did the same. How did the U.S. public and *The New York Times* react to this announcement? Did the representation of Cuba change in the months leading up to the restoration of relations in order to rationalize why the U.S. government had decided to engage in diplomatic relations with Cuba after years of hostility? The two countries officially restored relations on July 20, 2015. Thus I collected articles up until the end of July 2015.

The articles for my sample were selected utilizing the newspaper library database LexisNexis. First, I ran a broad search for all articles published between January 1, 2014 and July 31, 2015 that contained the word “Cuba” in either the headline or anywhere in the text. The search resulted in 1,418 articles published during that time frame. I skimmed through the expanded result list and eliminated any articles that were completely off-topic or mentioned Cuba in passing—referencing an inmate in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba or quickly noting that a person had been born in Cuba or had traveled to Cuba. Then, I saved all of the remaining articles in a chronological list and marked every third article to be kept in the final sample. I ended up with 117 articles

which constituted my sample. As expected, the amount of articles written about Cuba increased after President Barack Obama and President Raúl Castro announced that the two countries would begin the process of restoring relations. Thirty-one of the articles in my sample were written before the announcement, six articles were written on December 17, 2014, and the remaining eighty articles in my sample were written between December 18, 2014 and July 31, 2015.

Coding Frame

Coding was an iterative process that began with an open-coding of 25% of the articles. The articles served as both cases and the unit of analyses. I read the sub-sample closely and used the data to create codes, coding criteria, and subcategories that made up my coding frame. Examples of codes derived inductively included: “Immigration, the Economy, and Fidel.” In addition, some codes were informed by both the data and existing literature on U.S.-Cuba relations, such as the varying definitions of freedom and democracy as well as the “embargo/bloqueo.” Once I had constructed my coding frame, I carried out a focused coding of the entire sample. I assigned a code to either entire articles or subsections in articles that fit my coding criteria—adding and revising my coding frame as I went along. Some of the codes that I added were: “Cultural Exchange, President Obama, and Ebola.” When appropriate, I created subcategories within my codes. For example, I coded for articles originally published in the *New York Times*. Within that code, I coded for whether it had been published on *The New York Times* print newspaper, *The New York Times on the Web*, or *The New York Times blog*. In the end, I had 39 codes. For the purpose of the analysis for this study, I will be utilizing the

following codes: “Who is Cited, When it was written, Democracy and Freedom, Fidel/Castro Regime, Dissidents, Alan Gross, Human Rights, Economy/Business, Bloqueo, Ebola, Approve Relations, and Against Relations”. To see my full coding frame, please see Appendix A.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

When President Obama first announced that the U.S. and Cuba would begin the process of normalizing relations in December 2014, he distanced himself and the U.S. from the past by saying: “Neither the American, nor Cuban people are well served by a rigid policy that is rooted in events that took place before most of us were born” (Obama, 2014). Like many people in the U.S., Obama uses “American” to refer to U.S. Americans and not to all the people of the Americas. He even evades responsibility from the aggressive acts the U.S. has committed against Cuba by reminding his audience that he had not been born yet. He asserts that “America chooses to cut loose the shackles of the past so as to reach for a better future” (Obama, 2014). Similarly, various writers and editors of *The New York Times* described the lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries as a remnant of the Cold War. The lack of relations was referred to as ‘archaic’ and as “extremes of the Cold War” (Linger, 2014). So, the restoration of diplomatic relations was lauded as a new beginning, or as Obama called it, “a new chapter” (Obama, 2014). It was characterized as a break from the past. However, what constitutes as “[cutting] loose the shackles of the past?” What do the writers, editors, and readers of *The*

New York Times imagine as a “better future?” One would think that a new beginning would imply not only a change in U.S. policy toward Cuba but also a change in the ways in which Cuba is written about in U.S. newspapers, such as *The New York Times*. However, the majority of articles from our sample demonstrated that *The New York Times* continued to write about Cuba from a stance of U.S. superiority—just as it had done before the announcement. Newspaper articles contained prevailing sentiments that the U.S. knows what is best—and that still means a change in Cuba’s government.

Portrayal of Cuba Before the Announcement

The sample of articles about Cuba written before the announcement on December 17, 2014, portrayed Cuba as an undemocratic regime that often violates human rights. This narrative was constructed, in part, by who was interviewed and quoted in the articles. Writers were quick to cite people who opposed the Cuban government, such as local dissidents (Cave and Villegas, 2014), former CIA agents (Cave, 2014a), and leaders of counterrevolutionary and opposition groups (The Editorial Board, 2014 and Robles, 2014b). The dissidents and opponents of the Cuban government were given the same authority as academics who were cited, such as “Cuba experts William M. LeoGrande, a professor of government at American University,...Peter Kornbluh, the director of the archive’s Cuba Documentation Project” (Robles, 2014) and Ted Henken, “a professor at Baruch College and president of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy” (Cave and Villegas, 2014). The voices of Cubans and Cuban-Americans who support the

Cuban government—or who at least are not actively trying to destabilize it—were largely missing from the majority of these articles.

One of the most prominent themes throughout the articles was the notion of democracy and freedom—or lack of freedom in Cuba from a U.S. perspective. Tied to the belief of Cuba’s lack of democracy and freedom are the figures of Fidel and Raúl Castro. When describing Fidel Castro, one journalist wrote: “Mr. Castro, 87, led Cuba for 48 years before handing the reins to his brother, Raúl Castro” (Garcia, 2014). By stating that Fidel Castro “[handed] the reins to his brother”, it ignores the fact that the National Assembly of People’s Power elected Raúl Castro as president in the elections of 2008. It makes it seem as if Fidel Castro made the decision unilaterally. In addition, words such as “regime” and “authoritative” were constantly used hand-in-hand when talking about Cuba’s government (The Editorial Board, 2014a). “Regime” holds a negative connotation in the media and implies a totalitarian government. By utilizing words such as “regime” and “authoritative” the authors signal to their audience that the Cuban government is illegitimate and undemocratic.

Articles then used these notions of an undemocratic regime to excuse the bloqueo. *The New York Times* Editorial Board wrote: “The Castro regime has long blamed the embargo for its shortcomings, and has kept ordinary Cubans largely cut off from the world” (The Editorial Board, 2014a). In this case, the bloqueo, or embargo as it is called, is not an evil-doing of the U.S. but rather an unfounded excuse used by the Cuban government to avoid addressing national problems. Furthermore, the article accuses the Cuban government of keeping “ordinary Cubans largely cut off from the world”—which

simplifies and ignores the real ramifications of the bloqueo on the lives of ordinary Cubans. More than that, Cuba was also described as being opportunistic. In a different article, the Editorial Board writes: “The dissidents passionately argue against lifting sanctions without reciprocity by Cuba. Give the Cuban regime an inch, and it will take a mile” (Menendez, 2014).

The imprisonment of Alan Gross was used as the prime example of human rights violations made by Cuba. Alan Gross was elevated as the ultimate victim of an oppressive regime. His imprisonment was described as “unjust” (The Editorial Board, 2014a) and based on “false charges” by the Editorial Board (Menendez, 2014) even though articles that had originally been published in other newspapers admitted that his 15-year sentence was due to “illegally attempting to establish Internet service for Jews in Cuba” in 2009 (Reuters, 2014). Articles tried to flame the indignation of their readers by emphasizing Mr. Gross’s U.S. American identity with some article titles simply referring to him as the “American” (Archibold and Burnett, 2014). Readers wrote in to *The New York Times* expressing that “The Cuban government should release [Alan Gross] now as a humanitarian gesture. If it does not, the United States government should press Cuba more forcefully to take this step” (Reich, 2014). This reader suggests that the U.S should take on the role of enforcing human rights. Articles often referred to the Alan Gross case as the main hindrance to the normalization of U.S. and Cuban relations. He was referred to as “the obstacle that would not be moved: the American contractor whose imprisonment kept relations between the United States and Cuba locked in place, as paralyzed as a seized transmission” (Cave, 2014b). While Mr. Gross’s imprisonment was

an issue between the two countries, the emphasis on his case distracted readers from other conflicts.

One of the biggest reasons that articles gave for why the U.S. and Cuba should restore diplomatic relations was primarily economic. Polls in early 2014 indicated that the majority of U.S. Americans favored normalizing relations (Gladstone, 2014). However, respondents wanted a change in diplomatic relations because they believed a policy change would “enable American companies to do business in Cuba and permit Americans unfettered freedom to travel and spend money there” (Gladstone, 2014). Many respondents saw “freedom” as being bound up with “free markets” and the common belief that U.S. Americans have the right to travel wherever they wish. Not only that but the Editorial Board pushed the notion that “failing to engage with Cuba now will likely cede this market to competitors” (The Editorial Board, 2014a). The idea that the U.S. would “cede [the Cuban market] to competitors” incited feelings of being cheated because of the prevailing assumption that Cuba was intended to benefit the U.S. economically. By suggesting that the U.S. was in danger of missing out economically in Cuba, the Editorial Board was pointing out that the U.S. was becoming increasingly isolated in its bloqueo against Cuba. Therefore, normalizing relations with Cuba was also motivated by interests abroad. The Editorial Board hinted at the fact that “normalizing relations with Havana would improve Washington’s relationships with governments in Latin America, and resolve an irritant that has stymied initiatives in the hemisphere” (The Editorial Board, 2014a). Thus, restoring relations was seen as a way to attempt to latch on to the weakening U.S. hegemony in the Americas.

The goals of the U.S. were best presented when discussing the bloqueo and its failure to topple the Cuban government. As previously mentioned, articles rarely referred to the bloqueo as a bloqueo but rather as an embargo. Only one article in the entire sample mentioned that Cubans refer to the bloqueo as a “blockade” (Baker, Austen, etc, 2014). Journalists wrote that the “embargo” had not only “failed to satisfy its purpose of unseating the Castro government,” but may have also “[helped] to perpetuate it” (Gladstone, 2014). Readers shared this sentiment. One Letter to the Editor read: “[The embargo’s] purpose -- essentially, to starve the Cuban populace into rising against the government -- has not been served, and isn’t going to be” (Reich, 2014). The quotes reveal that the main goal of the bloqueo was to promote a revolt against the Cuban government. As a central piece of U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba, the goals of the bloqueo adequately sum up the goals of the U.S. in regards to Cuba prior to the restoration of relations. In the speech on December 17, 2014, Obama promised that he would “[engage] Congress in an honest and serious debate about lifting the embargo” (Obama, 2014). The restoration of diplomatic relations and lifting the bloqueo would facilitate discussions and collaboration between the two countries about mutual interests. Many articles hinted at the possible future cooperation between Cuba and the U.S. in containing the Ebola outbreak.

The Possibility for Collaboration

Cuba’s response to the Ebola outbreak was one of the few aspects about Cuba that journalists in *The New York Times* praised. One article written by the Editorial Board

described Cuba's role as "impressive" (The Editorial Board, 2014b). Another article also written by the Editorial Board admitted that "the work of these Cuban medics benefits the entire global effort and should be recognized for that" (The Editorial Board, 2014b). These articles were some of the only articles in the sample which portrayed Cuba in a positive light. Not only did they applaud Cuba for sending much needed medical workers to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone but the Editorial Board also agreed with Fidel when he suggested that Cuba and the U.S. "put aside their differences...to combat a deadly scourge" (The Editorial Board, 2014b). Unlike articles which suggested that restoring relations with Cuba would only benefit the U.S., these articles written by the Editorial Board presented Cuba and the U.S. as equal partners. Each country had something important to contribute and the cooperation between the two countries would benefit everyone.

However, even when it came to Cuba's remarkable and quick response to Ebola, there was still some who accused Cuba of malicious intent. They questioned the morality of sending medical professionals to help out with the outbreak. Among those who were critical of Cuba's contributions were "Republican lawmakers from South Florida" (Londoño, 2014). Representative Mario Diaz-Balarat described the doctors and nurses who composed the Cuban medical response teams as "forced medical labor" sent to West Africa by the "Cuban dictatorship" (Londoño, 2014). Through his comment, Representative Diaz-Balarat manipulates readers into thinking that Cuba is an authoritative dictatorship that controls the lives of its citizens akin to slavery. In the same fashion, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen suggested that the medical professionals

were simply a “thinly disguised propaganda attempt” that was dangerous because it could “put South Florida at risk” (Londoóo, 2014). In so doing, Representative Ros-Lehtinen implies that sending Cuban medical professionals to West Africa was dangerous for U.S. Americans. Because both Representative Diaz-Balarat and Representative Ros-Lehtinen are Republicans, it becomes easy to attribute their comments to a more conservative populace. However, their sentiments of Cuba being a “dictatorship” are not that far off from the views of the Editorial Board who also portrayed Cuba as being an undemocratic regime. How did the Editorial Board, as well the writers and readers of *The New York Times* respond to the announcement made on December 17, 2014?

“Welcome Back, Cuba!”

The number of articles written about Cuba in *The New York Times* increased after the announcement of President Obama and President Castro. It was as if all of a sudden Cuba was once again worthy of being the subject of an article. This attitude was reflected best in an article published on December 18, 2014. The article was titled: “Welcome Back, Cuba!” (Kristof, 2014). This article title made it seem as if Cuba had not existed before the announcement and Cuba was only important in relation to its connection to the United States. It implied that the U.S. had been patiently waiting for Cuba to return all along. A reader commented that “Cuba has historically been a part of the regional American family, but is ostracized. It's long past time to bring the family back together” (Beck, 2014). There is no mention of why Cuba has been ostracized or by whom. However, the reader does express that the restoration of relations has been past-due.

“[Bringing]the family back together” conjures feelings of warmth and unity and this American family includes Cuba and the United States—with the U.S. as the older Uncle Sam who looks out for the rest of the family.

Like before, one of the biggest reasons given as to why the “family” should be reunited was economic. One journalist writes that since the announcement in December, “trade delegations seem to land in Havana every day” (DePalma, 2015). Business delegations, led by U.S. government officials and governors, flocked to Cuba (Craig, 2015). The members of delegations often reflected the close relationship between Washington and business. Many business people wanted to figure out how the new U.S. policy of engagement would profit them. They interpreted the policy of engagement as a signal that Cuba is now “Open for Business” (DePalma, 2015). The restoration of relations will make it easier for U.S. businesses to extend their reach into Cuban markets. Some of the companies that announced their plans to conduct business in Cuba include Netflix and Amazon. A journalist applauded the news that the two countries would begin the process of restoring relations. He wrote: “So bravo for the new Cuba policy. Sending in gunmen to liberate the Bay of Pigs failed. Maybe we’ll do better with swarms of diplomats, tourists and investors” (Kristof, 2014). The idea that Cuba needs to be freed remains. With diplomatic relations restored, many who approve the shift do so because they believe that this is simply a different approach to achieve the same basic goal as always: ensure that Cuba benefits the U.S. economically by promoting a change in government.

A few articles published after the announcement in December allowed differing opinions to be expressed. Unlike articles that favored normalizing relations to ensure economic benefits, one article pointed out the ways in which normal diplomatic relations could be beneficial to both countries. The article identified criminal activity, drug trafficking, and immigration as issues on which Cuba and the U.S. could collaborate to resolve (Huddleston, 2014). In addition, one article mentioned the changing Cuban-American community and their differing reactions to the restoration of diplomatic relations (Alvarez and Madigan, 2014). However, just as young Cuban-Americans applauded the change in diplomatic relations, Republicans and one leading Democrat were quick to proclaim their disapproval of a policy of engagement with Cuba.

“A Mindless Concession”

Republicans, along with Democrat Robert Menendez of New Jersey, denounced the restoration of relations. They were some of the most quoted in *The New York Times* articles that argued against normalizing relations. The arguments put forth by the Republicans who were quoted and Senator Menendez claimed that restoring relations enabled the Cuban government—which they characterized as an evil dictatorship. Speaker John A. Boehner called the restoration of relations a “mindless [concession] to a dictatorship that brutalizes its people and schemes with our enemies” (Hulse, 2014a). He criticized both the Obama administration as well as the Cuban government. He suggested that the Obama administration is incompetent because they did not evaluate their decisions while at the same time accusing the Cuban government of oppressing its people

and working with our enemies. He added that a policy of engagement with Cuba “emboldens all state sponsors of terrorism” (Hulse, 2014a). No longer is Cuba linked to the communism of the Soviet Union and the Cold war but rather to the more current danger of terrorism. Connecting Cuba to terrorism alerts the reader that Cuba should be feared and not trusted. Boehner is drawing on the assertion of the U.S. that it does not negotiate with terrorists to claim that the U.S. should not normalize relations with Cuba because it would be similar to negotiating with terrorists. His views were reinforced by other Republicans and by Senator Menendez.

As the son of Cuban immigrants, Senator Marco Rubio was elevated as the prime expert on Cuba. Senator Rubio became one of the most quoted individuals in articles against the restoration of relations. Like Boehner, Senator Rubio called the restoration of relations “just another concession to a tyranny” (Shear and Hirschfeld Daves, 2014). Rubio denounced the arguments put forth by those who approved the restoration of relations. He asserted that a policy of engagement and invading Cuba with tourists would not work because it was based on “the lie and the illusion that more commerce and access to money and goods will translate to political freedom for the Cuban people” (Kristof, 2014). He ignores the fact that the bloqueo remains in place and that, as many before him have confessed, the goals of the bloqueo had not been met. The restoration of relations is defined as being unAmerican by Senator Robert E. Menendez who states that the thawing of relations are “clearly intended to circumvent the intent and spirit of U.S. law and the U.S. Congress” (Hirschfeld Davis and Gordon, 2014). Others warned that the Cuban government had not changed its ways simply because the two countries had

begun the process of restoring relations. One article argued that “the government in Havana, feeling vulnerable in the face of a flood of investment, increased travel and a less-regulated flow of information, may well seek to redouble its efforts to stifle dissent” (Dunlap, 2014c). Thus, Cuba continues to be portrayed as a repressive and oppressive government which stifles people’s freedoms.

CONCLUSION: A New Era Begins

The restoration of relations between Cuba and the United States began what President Obama called a “new chapter” of foreign policy. The reopening of the Cuban embassy in Washington, D.C. and the U.S. embassy in Havana, Cuba marked the beginning of a new policy towards Cuba. However, the reopening of the embassies was not the end of fully normalizing relations. Discussions continue about the future of Guantanamo Bay and the dismantling of the blockade—a process which will take time. So, while the discussions and the progress that has been accomplished up to this point should be applauded, there still remains much work to be done. The shared history between Cuba and the United States is tainted by the imperial stance of the U.S.. Notions of U.S. superiority remain present in the representation and portrayal of Cuba in widely read newspapers such as *The New York Times*. Change is slow and the U.S. is composed of a diverse set of people who hold varied opinions about Cuba. The dominant narrative about Cuba at the time that the embassies were reopened continued to be that Cuba is an undemocratic dictatorship that needs to be changed. However, the restoration of relations

has the possibility to convince the majority of the U.S. public that Cuba and its government is much more complex and nuance than the Cuba painted for us in widely circulated newspapers.

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APPENDIX A: CODING FRAME

Name of Code	Code Criteria
Where published	Mutually exclusive subcodes: NYT, blog, web
Who is cited??	Said, “”,
Editorial?	Editorial desk, letters to the editor, Op-Ed
When written?	Mutually exclusive subcodes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Before Dec. 17, 2014 (announcement) - Day of announcement (Dec. 17) - After announcement
Alan P. Gross	Alan Gross, American contractor, The American Prisoner
Los Cinco	Los Cinco, Cuban Spies, Cuban Five
Elían Gonzalez	Elían Gonzalez, custody battle between Havana and Cuban-Americans
Assata Shakur	Assata Shakur, Joanne Chesimard, Black Panther, murder killed NJ state trooper
Ebola	Ebola, Cuba’s contribution, Cuban medical teams
Guantanamo	Guantanamo, naval base
Interest Section	Interest Section
History	Cold War, Mr. Kissinger, historical precedence, archaic, 50 years, past, confiscation of American properties,
Domestic-Cuba	Art, dance, domestic, pay for workers, Cuban lawmakers, sports, domestic economic policies
Workers defect	_____ defect, changing loyalties
Immigration	Immigration, Flee, refugees, asylum, deportation, rafts, wet foot/dry foot
Cuban-Americans	Cuban-Americans, Cuban exiles, voting bloc,
Dissidents/ Protests against	Protest, revolt, rebellion, dissidents, Adversaries,

government	Opposition group, Cuban activists, Ladies in White
Fidel/ Castro Regime	Regime, Tyranny, dictatorship, Fidel, Castro/Castros, authoritative,
Repression	Government beatings, repression, harrasment, oppression
Democracy and Freedom	Undemocratic, unfree, communist, democracy, freedom,
Human rights	Human rights, humanitarian grounds
Loyalty/dutiful communists	Military, favoritism
U.S. polls and opinions	Time to restore relations, U.S. attitudes, majority of Americans, support, shifting politics
Economy/Business	Economic reform/policies, market, foreign investment, financed, capital, development, business, trade, exports, imports, banking, confiscation of U.S. properties, financial transactions
Bloqueo	Bloqueo, embargo, economic sanctions, blockade,
U.S. goals	Goals, objective
Ties to "Bad" Government	North Korea, China, Russia, State Sponsor of Terrorism
Relations to Latin America	Summit of the Americas, Latin American countries, Western Hemisphere, ALBA, Americas
Approve restorations	Approve, support, applaud, past due
Neutral restorations	Changes include
Against restorations	Counterproductive, waste, ignorant, critics
Reporting on Progress or Talks	Discussion, future
Cuban Views	Cuban opinion/views of U.S. and relations,
Cuban Liquor/Cigars	Cuban liquor, ciga, nostalgia, island
Tourism	Tourism, travel,
Cultural Exchange	Cultural Exchange between both countries, art, dance, sports, baseball,
Pope	Pope Francis, Catholic Church
President Obama	President Obama

Race	Race, other, exotic
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