

What are the country's prospects for liberty?

The Future of Freedom in Cuba

The Castro dictatorship has clung to power in Cuba for more than five decades. But as the regime ages, the outside sources of finance that buttress it are being put in jeopardy. At the same time, a new generation of Cubans is using the Internet to protest the pervasive lack of freedom and opportunity in their country.

At a Cato Policy Forum in March, two prominent Cuban dissident writers—both recently given permission to travel outside of their country—described life in current-day Cuba. In doing so, they provided a window into the activities of the island's dissident community—a group struggling to make an impact in the face of repression—and shared their vision of a pluralistic, tolerant society.

Yoani Sanchez, a dissident blogger referred to by the *New York Times* as “a cause célèbre for democracy on the island,” discussed the wave of repression that has been unleashed in Cuba, as well as “the effervescence of new movements, of new voices” challenging the state. She referred, in particular, to the metaphor of a wall. “The people in Berlin had their own wall made of cement and concrete,” Sanchez said. While this barrier was a very tangible one, the Cubans are dealing with the difficulties of trying to tear down a wall of censorship.

Following her remarks, Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo, photographer and editor of the independent e-zine *Voces*, assessed the extent



In March the Cato Institute held an event that addressed a new generation of Cubans. Above: With the help of her translator, dissident blogger **YOANI SANCHEZ** (center) addressed the standing-room-only crowd while moderator **IAN VÁSQUEZ** took questions from the audience. Below: Journalists and fans surrounded Sanchez after her talk.

of Raul Castro's so-called reforms and offered his thoughts on the prospects of a free and open country. In short, he highlighted the crucial importance of dissent. “Ultimately, I am just another critical voice within the chorus of voices of an emerging civic society that has struggled for years . . . against the totalitarian nature of our state,” he said.

In a country where everyday citizens increasingly feel the indignities of a totalitarian regime, these exercises of personal freedom are a poignant reminder of the power of the individual. ■



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Speakers for the 2013 program include John Allison, president of the Cato Institute and former chairman and CEO of BB&T; Mary Anastasia O'Grady, *Wall Street Journal*; Jeffrey Miron, Harvard University; Robert McDonald, United States Military Academy; and Tom G. Palmer, Cato Institute—with a special dinner event featuring Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY).

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