



## Interview: US attorney Mara Verheyden-Hilliard of Partnership for Civil Justice



*US attorney Mara Verheyden-Hilliard of Partnership for Civil Justice was interviewed on New York City station WBAI, program "Law and Disorder" which is the program of the National Lawyers Guild.*

*The interview focuses on the case of the Cuban Five.*

### [Attorney Mara Verheyden-Hilliard:](#)

- **The Cuban Five, are five Cuban men who came into the United States to basically learn what the terrorists in Miami were planning. Cuba is a country that has been subject to terrorist attacks for decade after decade.**
- There have been bombings, planes shot down. A huge amount of death and destruction but it comes out of the United States from anti-Castro in Miami who are reeking terror on the people of Cuba.
- The U.S government has never taken action to stop these terror attacks that emanate from their shores. In fact the CIA has had been known to have at least some of these people on their payroll or working with them over the years.
- Ultimately, they (Cuban Five) uncovered information which was shared with the FBI, from the Cuban government to the FBI. What happened was the terrorists weren't arrested, these men were arrested.
- They were charged with espionage offenses, put on trial and found guilty.
- The issue is . . . they were tried in Miami, they were tried in this heated environment, tried in conditions that there was no way they could have gotten a fair trial. An issue



that has been repeated over and over again in the years of appeals.

- **What has been uncovered more recently is that [the U.S. government had journalists on their payroll](#) who were presenting themselves as independent journalists in Miami who filled the airwaves and newspapers with extremely hostile and inflammatory coverage of Cuba as well as the trial itself.**
- There's no way this couldn't have had an impact, on the jury, on the jury pool, on the sitting jury.
- **The U.S. government itself is prohibited by the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 from funding activities to influence and propagandize public opinion.**
- **We live in a country where we're free to be wire-tapped, spied on, to have the FBI infiltrating religious institutions and monitoring peaceful protests.**
- Prisoner exchange: The fact is the Cuban Five were not attempting to undercut or destabilize the U.S. government. They were simply trying to get information about terrorist attacks emanating from the United States, hurting the people of their country. Alan Gross on the other hand was sent as part of a covert U.S. government operation into Cuba multiple times to material, satellites, phones, communication material, in an attempt to destabilize and over throw the Cuban government.
- We have fought for years with Freedom of Information Act demands and working in partnership with the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five and Gloria LaRiva who has led that organization. She is the key person in the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five that raised this issue, that spent a huge amount of time, going through records, going through the records, audio and visual of the different media, television and radio - and linking these together and doing research into these journalists and establishing what appeared to be this covert operation.
- **Much of that material is up on a website called [ReportersForHire.org](#)**
- Because the State Department was clearly holding material within a certain time period and had not searched their records at all for the material we demanded, we filed a lawsuit in Federal court, and that's a lawsuit we're still in the process of litigating.
- The issue of the blockade, which on its face, starving a population to try and force them to change their government is really criminal and a violation of international law.
- **Standing on its own without the U.S. blockade, Cuba would thrive.**
- Cuba is still there and has withstood and been strong through all of this.
- By lifting the blockade and allowing the U.S. to penetrate into Cuba with American capitalism would be another way of attempting to over throw the government of Cuba.
- **A major major funding stream for these groups and these entities in Miami who are working against the people of Cuba and against the government of Cuba.**

*In the interview, US attorney Mara Verheyden-Hilliard also comments on the recent New York Times editorials on Cuba, particularly the one calling for a prisoner exchange between Washington and Havana.*

Lately, Cuba and its relationship to the United States has been in the news. The New York Times alone had 4 editorials on Cuba. Several urged the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba which were severed more than 50 years ago. **Another urged the prisoner exchange of the Cuban Five now 3, and Alan Gross, the American who has been in a Cuban prison for several years. Last year attorneys with the Partnership for the Civil Justice Fund filed a Freedom of Information Action lawsuit against the U.S. State Department for its refusal to produce responsive materials in its possession about secret payments by the U.S. government to Miami-based journalists who were**



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**“reporting” on the Cuban Five case before and during the trial and while the jury deliberated.**

[Mara Verheyden-Hilliard](#), **co-chair of the [Guild’s National Mass Defense Committee](#)**, co-founder of the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund in Washington, DC, she secured \$13.7 million for about 700 of the 2000 IMF/World Bank protesters in *Becker, et al. v. District of Columbia, et al.*, while also winning pledges from the District to improve police training about First Amendment issues. She won \$8.25 million for approximately 400 class members in *Barham, et al. v. Ramsey, et al.* (alleging false arrest at the 2002 IMF/World Bank protests). She served as lead counsel in *Mills, et al v. District of Columbia* (obtaining a ruling that D.C.’s seizure and interrogation police checkpoint program was unconstitutional); in *Bolger, et al. v. District of Columbia* (involving targeting of political activists and false arrest by law enforcement based on political affiliation); and in *National Council of Arab Americans, et al. v. City of New York, et al.* (successfully challenging the city’s efforts to discriminatorily restrict mass assembly in Central Park’s Great Lawn stemming from the 2004 RNC protests.)

<http://www.radiohc.cu/en/heroes/39721-interview-us-attorney-mara-verheyden-hilliard-of-partnership-for-civil-justice>