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Chairperson
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BY

BLAIR DEWITT WOODARD

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the visual discourse between Cuba and the United States that has helped shape the foreign relations between the two countries over the last fifty years. Images celebrating proximity and metaphorical connections, produced before the 1959 Cuban revolution, assisted in fortifying linkages between the two nations; whereas after the revolution, adversarial imagery further splintered the relation between the two countries. I argue that the visual culture produced in Cuba and the United States are not just “windows to the past,” but were also “active agents” of dialogue that both reflected and shaped an evolving transnational relationship. This relationship was characterized not only by state-to-state diplomacy, economic exchange, and military intervention, but also by the dissemination of popular representations that produced and reinforced the essence of foreign relations at a more intimate level. While traditional diplomatic history tells the story of such relationships at the official level, popular visual culture provides for a better understanding of how the U.S. and Cuban general public perceived of these relationships through
representations and metaphors of family, gender, race, and class, often not visible in
the textual record. It is through the interpretation of the time period’s visual culture—
advertising, billboards, comic books, films, photographs, political cartoons, posters,
and television shows—that the history of foreign relations between Cuba and the
United States as an intimate popular experience comes most clearly into focus. It is
this personal, intimate connection to foreign relations produced by the visual culture
of both societies that I evoke in this project.
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INTRODUCTION

We are disturbed not by events, but by the views which we take of them.

—Epictetus

As a matter of general theory it is useful to recognize that means of communication are themselves means of production.

—Raymond Williams

Art is not a mirror which reflects the historical struggle, but a weapon of that struggle.

—Dziga Vertov

At 8:46 in the morning on September 11, 2001, hijackers deliberately crashed American Airlines Flight 11 into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

Seventeen minutes later hijackers flew a second plane into the south tower while two other planes crashed into the Pentagon and into a field in Pennsylvania. The 9/11 attacks shattered the popular perception that the United States was somehow immune from a large-scale terrorist attack. The horror of the day unfolded in real-time images on television screens across the globe. News programs continuously replayed footage of the aircraft striking the buildings, of people jumping to their deaths to escape the flames, and of the Twin Towers collapsing again and again, etching the pain and fear of the moment into the collective memories of millions. Nine days after the attacks, President Bush appeared before a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress and declared
that all nations were “either with us, or with the terrorists.” The War on Terror had begun.¹

In the weeks and months that followed, innumerable images of bearded, turban-clad, AK-47 rifle-toting “Islamic terrorists” became pervasive throughout U.S. popular culture—in films, Internet videos, political cartoons, and television shows—visually identifying this new threat for the U.S. public. Names of people and places previously unknown to the majority of Americans—Osama bin Laden, Taliban, al-Qaida, Kabul, Fallujah, and Abu Ghraib—entered into the U.S. lexicon through a myriad of images as the world once again trained its gaze on the Middle East. The media bombarded the U.S. public with visions of Iraq and Afghanistan as enemies now subject to U.S. scorn and attacks. Ironically, during the 1980s, the United States had considered both of these newly declared enemies as allies.²

This switch from ally to enemy was not a new phenomenon in U.S. history, and neither was the creation of a good-versus-evil binary, through the use of rhetoric and images. Historians and the popular media often presented the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union as a Manichean struggle throughout the entire conflict (1945-1989). Although this conflict between the United States and the Soviet


Union ended twelve years before the 9/11 attacks, residues of that struggle, including the U.S.-Cuban conflict, remained. Amidst the retaliatory attacks in Afghanistan and efforts at regime change in Iraq, the Bush administration also increased its hostility towards one of the United States’ few remaining Cold War adversaries: Cuba. Only a few months after the twin towers collapsed, Bush and his Under Secretary of State, John Bolton, included Cuba as part of the “adjunct axis of evil,” and publicly speculated about the possibility that the Cuban government might produce chemical weapons to use against the United States.³

Along with this increasingly hostile rhetoric, President Bush tightened controls on who could travel to Cuba and limited the amounts of money that Cuban exiles could send to their relatives on the island. As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq intensified, the U.S. searched for a place to detain captured “enemy combatants.” Ignoring outrage and protests from resident Cubans, the U.S. government converted the Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay into a terrorist holding pen. The U.S. Interest Section in Havana further angered the Castro government with a Christmas light display that included the number seventy-five, for the number of political prisoners incarcerated in Cuba in 2004. Cuban agencies responded by erecting massive billboards in front of the U.S. Interest Section in Havana displaying images of Iraqi prisoners undergoing torture in Abu Ghraib and images of President Bush juxtaposed with Nazi swastikas. In January 2006, the U.S. Interest Section installed an electronic message board in the upper story windows of their building that flashed five-foot-

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high letters that spelled out continuous messages in Spanish such as “Democracy in Cuba,” quotes from Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., and political messages critical of Cuba’s leadership. After the U.S. officials refused Cuban demands to turn off the scrolling marquee, the Cuban government constructed a memorial of a hundred and thirty-eight black flags with a single star dedicated to Cuban martyrs who had died fighting U.S. imperialism. The flags, placed directly in front of the U.S. Interest Section obscured the messages of the marquee from view.4

Although the U.S. War on Terror triggered this latest round of diplomatic gamesmanship between the United States and Cuba, the “billboard war” was just the most recent part of a fifty-year battle of rhetoric and images waged between these two nations. In this work, I explore the visual discourse between Cuba and the United States that has helped shape the foreign relations between the two countries over the last fifty years. Cuban and U.S. visual culture played an integral part in naturalizing their relationship both as allies, before 1959, and as enemies after the diplomatic break. Images celebrating proximity and metaphorical connections, produced before the 1959 Cuban revolution, assisted in fortifying linkages between the two nations; whereas after the revolution, adversarial imagery further splintered the relation between the two countries. I argue that the visual culture produced in Cuba and the

United States are not just “windows to the past,” but were also “active agents” of dialogue that both reflected and shaped an evolving transnational relationship.\(^5\)

This relationship was characterized not only by state-to-state diplomacy, economic exchange, and military intervention, but also by the dissemination of popular representations that produced and reinforced the essence of foreign relations at a more intimate level. Cuban and U.S. artists created images that allowed for a sense of personal connectivity and immediacy to the foreign relationship that texts alone did not. It is this personal, intimate connection to foreign relations produced by the visual culture of both societies that I evoke in this project. While traditional diplomatic history tells the story of such relationships at the official level, popular visual culture provides for a better understanding of how the U.S. and Cuban general public perceived of these relationships through representations and metaphors of family, gender, race, and class, often not visible in the textual record.\(^6\) It is through

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\(^6\) Louis Pérez Jr. makes a fantastic case for the use of visual as well as textual metaphors as an arena where the general public comes to understand the power relations in foreign relations. See his *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Christina Klein, Melani McAlister, and Alan Nadel also point to the power of images to normalize power relations between different countries. See Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture,
the interpretation of the time period’s visual culture—advertising, billboards, comic books, films, photographs, political cartoons, posters, and television shows—that the history of foreign relations between Cuba and the United States as an intimate popular experience comes most clearly into focus.7

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many U.S. leaders saw Cuba as a “natural” extension of U.S. territory and echoed the cries of the Cuban elite who urged for annexation to the United States.8 The geographic proximity of the two nations created a transnational contact zone, a borderland of exchange—cultural, commercial, and personal.9 As historian Louis Pérez, Jr. has eloquently argued, Cuba


8 Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were among the U.S. founding fathers who saw Cuba as “naturally” connected to the United States. Louis Pérez Jr., Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 38-91.

9 Mary Louise Pratt used the term “contact zone” to describe “the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each
became part of the “American imagination,” and the United States was an integral part of “becoming Cuban.” Cuba and the United States came to define their relationship through a set of economic, political, and cultural “ties of singular intimacy.” Images within the popular culture of each nation bolstered and defined Cuban and U.S. citizens’ collective view of these ties, creating an initial intimate connection between the two nations. These real and metaphoric ties created a relationship that favored U.S. economic, military, and cultural dominance on the island from 1898 until 1959. This connectivity manifested itself visually in advertisements, maps, and promotional literature, reinforced by metaphors of family, gender, race, and class. These metaphors were contained in such visual sources as *I Love Lucy*, tourism advertisement, and early heroic visions of Fidel Castro.

As much as borderlands can facilitate exchange and cooperation, they can also be contested sites (or perhaps more appropriately for my study, “sights”) of other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.” Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 6-7. Gilbert Joseph further explains “contact zones” as the multitude of arenas that U.S. power affects Latin America: “Contact zones are not geographic places with stable significations; they may represent attempts at hegemony, but are simultaneously sites of multivocality: of negotiation, borrowing, and exchange; and of redeployment and reversal.” Gilbert Joseph, “Close Encounters: Toward a New Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations,” in Gilbert Joseph, Catherine Legrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, editors, *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 5.

competing sovereignties. When the Cuban revolution disrupted U.S. political and economic domination on the island, both countries quickly sought to re-imagine their relationship. The official reordering of this relationship played out through U.S. military intervention and economic isolation of the island, and the Cuban military and economic alliance with the Soviet Union. This diplomatic reordering also facilitated the production of a torrent of images in both countries that utilized archetypal enemy imagery, applied and adjusted to fit this new Cold War battlefield.

In this context, the Castro government made a concerted effort to literally wipe visions of U.S. domination clean from the Cuban people’s line of sight. The United States responded with several campaigns to visually discredit the new Cuban government in the United States and abroad. In both countries, politicians and image-makers alike reconfigured the metaphors of proximity, once touted as a natural advantage for trade, into visions of hazard and risk. The media also replaced metaphors of familial connectivity between the two nations with images of

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dysfunctionality, lasciviousness, and homosexuality. The U.S. press turned images of Castro and the 26 of July Movement leadership’s masculine heroic actions on their heads, and portrayed them as barbaric and insane. Ricky Ricardo’s wholesome family-man image was replaced by Scarface’s anti-father figure, Tony Montana.

Family ties were also literally severed by the revolution as hundreds of thousands of Cubans fled the island into exile in the United States. The resulting tide of émigrés from Cuba to the United States became a third stage on which images were produced and consumed. Resident Cubans looked upon their expatriate citizens as the worst traitors, to be vilified and scorned, while the exiles viewed their homeland from across the Florida Straits as a hijacked and ruined memory. Family disputes, like the custody battle for Elián González, created images that continued to reinforce the metaphorical and physical battle for the custody of the island itself.

**Literature**

The Cuban revolution and the U.S. response to the revolution represent a pivotal moment in the history of the global Cold War. An important starting point for examining shifts in U.S.-Cuban relations is the large body of traditional diplomatic histories that examine the various aspects of the relationship between these two countries. Traditional diplomatic studies have ranged from the broadest

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13 Traditional histories of U.S. foreign relations relied heavily on political, military, and economic studies primarily from U.S. sources and perspectives. A debate among U.S. diplomatic historians has been going on for the last few years as to how to reinvigorate the field of U.S. foreign relations. For excellent discussions on the discussions of trends in the study of U.S. Foreign Relations see Michael Hogan, “SHAFR Presidential Address: The ‘Next Big Thing’: The Future of Diplomatic History in a Global Age,” *Diplomatic History*, (January 2004), 1-21 and Thomas W.
chronological studies of the entire two hundred years of diplomatic relations to studies that examine critical periods such as the U.S. military occupation (1898-1902) or the breakdown in diplomatic relations (1959-1961).14 These histories provide an indispensable grounding necessary for the study of popular culture within foreign relations. Out of the multitudes of studies, Louis Pérez, Jr.’s *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* remains one of the best and most concise histories of the relationship between the United States and Cuba from the 1750s to the 1990s. Pérez shows how the U.S. doctrine of “no transfer” from Spanish possession to a third party (including the Cubans themselves) was one of the central political points that

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has continued to drive U.S.-Cuban policy.\textsuperscript{15} In many ways the legacy of this
eighteenth century policy led to the U.S. government’s violent reaction against the
revolutionary government’s much-needed economic and social reforms on the island.
Instead of working towards a compromise with the new Cuban government, the U.S.
leadership chose to militarily oppose the revolution and Fidel Castro. This opposition
drove the Cuban government towards the Soviet Union for protection and support.

Another superior diplomatic history is Thomas Paterson’s \textit{Contesting Castro:}
\textit{The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution}. Patterson’s work
examines the intricacies of the political conflict that grew out of the revolution.
Paterson provides a critical overview of the period from 1956 to 1962, showing how
the U.S. government incorrectly gauged the level popular support for the revolution.
This widespread support would eventually become the basis for the power that Castro
and the 26 of July Movement would harness to move the revolution forward in
defiance of Washington’s ultimatums and aggression.\textsuperscript{16}

At the beginning of the revolution, this widespread support for Castro and the
26 of July Movement was not limited to Cuban citizens. Historians and the U.S. press
often forget or purposely omit the fact that the Cuban revolution enjoyed high esteem

\textsuperscript{15} Louis Pérez, Jr., \textit{Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy}
(Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 40.

\textsuperscript{16} Thomas G. Paterson, \textit{Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of
the Cuban Revolution}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); For another important
reference see Lars Schoultz’s incredibly dense tome, \textit{That Infernal Little Republic: The
United States and the Cuban Revolution}, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North
Carolina Press, 2009) and Richard E. Welch, Jr., \textit{Response to Revolution: The United States
and the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1961}, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina
in the United States from 1957 until 1959. A fantastic book that illuminates the revolution’s popularity in the U.S. at this time is Van Gosse’s *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the Making of a New Left*. Gosse demonstrates that the revolution became part of a wider leftist political awakening in the United States from the late 1950s into early 1960s. Gosse also shows how the 26 of July movement’s leadership cultivated financial and media support in the United States critical to the revolution’s success. Like my own study, Gosse’s work illustrates how various media outlets produced images that became part of the rebel’s arsenal to be used against the government of Fulgencio Batista. For a brief moment these images strengthened the intimate connection between the United States and Cuba through the celebration of the same movement that would eventually rip the relationship apart.¹⁷

Like Van Gosse, many historians acknowledge the power of popular culture to influence political events. As historian Gilbert M. Joseph has declared, “any adequate history of the global Cold War must be a social and cultural history, one that takes seriously the actions, identities, and beliefs of ordinary people, as well as of elites.”¹十八 Images produced about these events often influenced popular beliefs. Increasingly,


historians are answering the call by cultural historian Peter Burke and others to take the evidence of such images more seriously. As Burke asserts, “historians tend to treat them [images] as mere illustrations, reproducing them in their books without comment. In cases in which the images are discussed in the text, this evidence is often used to illustrate conclusions that the author has already reached by other means, rather than to give new answers or to ask new questions.”

Of the works that have answered Burke’s and Joseph’s challenges, and use images as well as other forms of popular culture to examine U.S.-Cuban relations, Louis Pérez, Jr.’s *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, and *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*, stand out. In *On Becoming Cuban*, Pérez successfully analyzes the multiple types of popular culture and their impacts on the national consciousness of Cuba from 1850 to 1950. In *Cuba in the American Imagination*, Pérez examines U.S. visual metaphors of Cuba that constructed the island as part of the U.S. sphere of influence from the eighteenth century to the present. Pérez’s studies demonstrate that culture in its many manifestations helped to foster the relationship between the two countries in a more immediate and intimate way than economics and political connections alone. Pérez does an excellent job of underscoring the importance of popular culture in creating the relationship between the two countries before 1959. My dissertation builds on his

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19 Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images As Historical Evidence*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 10. Increasingly historians are talking about the “visual turn” in historic research. Addressing this turn in scholarship, several panels at the 2010 meeting of the American Historical Association dealt with the use of images as historical evidence.
work, while extending the time frame to examine how popular culture subsequently shaped and defined the antagonism between the two nations after 1959.

No single work has examined how Cuba and the United States constructed one another as enemies through popular visual culture; however, studies on other parts of the world have provided important models for my dissertation. John Dower’s *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* examines the different ways that the U.S. and Japanese popular images dehumanized each other during World War II. Both the Japanese and U.S. governments produced propaganda that presented the other nation as non-human and racially inferior in order to facilitate mass killing. Dower’s work demonstrates how popular culture can be utilized to create perceptions of an enemy through archetypal images that have been consistently used in various conflicts. Sam Keen’s book, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*, also examines the myriad of ways that societies have invoked image archetypes when creating enemies in historical conflicts.20

Several other recent works reach beyond the official state documents to utilize popular culture as a means to examine the everyday encounters of foreign relations. In particular, Melani McAlister’s *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East* is a fantastic example of how multiple forms of popular culture work to produce meaning in foreign relations. McAlister demonstrates how image-makers in the United States have transferred U.S. racial stereotypes to images of the Middle East to support U.S. corporate and political agendas. This was not a

conspiracy, he argues, but rather a “messy intersection” that combined cultural forms with economic and political interests to support U.S. objectives in the region. This type of “messy intersection” between U.S. culture, commerce, and foreign relations was also evident in the visual images produced in Cuba and the United States prior to 1959.

Christina Klein’s work on Asia in the U.S. imagination, and Alan Nadel’s treatment of the popular culture of the U.S. domestic Cold War, also inform my study. \(^{21}\) Klein and Nadel demonstrate how popular culture normalized the view of foreign relations for the U.S. general public. Klein’s *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* shows how popular culture created connections between the United States and Asia following World War II, while at the same time reinforcing U.S. notions of superiority over Asians. Nadel’s *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* examines how Cold War metaphors of containment penetrated the U.S. public’s psyche through popular narratives that equated containment of communism with dominant U.S. metaphors of family, gender, and race. Both of these authors strive, as I do here, to show how everyday citizens forged a more personal understanding of U.S. foreign relations through images and metaphors contained in popular culture.

Chapters

To illustrate how images have served to create the relationship between Cuba and the United States, I have organized my dissertation into five thematically distinct chapters that overlap chronologically. My first chapter, “Border Relations, No Passports, and Lucky Guys: Connections Between the United States and Cuba, 1945-1959,” examines the years following World War II when Cuba was the cornerstone of U.S. dominance in the Caribbean Basin. During this time period, U.S. and Cuban commercial interests produced images that helped construct a sense of connection between the two nations. These images came from tourist maps and consumer advertisements, which created the perception of geographic connectivity as well as shared values and societal norms. Drawing on dominant U.S. notions of gender, race, and class, these images served to naturalize U.S. dominance over Cuba. This dominance, meanwhile, bred economic disparity in Cuba and would contribute to widespread discontent that manifested itself in full-scale rebellion on the island.

My second chapter, “Robin Hood, Reporters, and Real Men: Fidel Castro’s Honeymoon with the U.S. Media, 1955-1959,” begins as the island exploded into revolution. Although Fulgencio Batista’s commanders claimed Fidel Castro had been killed upon arrival in Cuba, Castro and the 26 of July leadership survived but desperately needed funding and popular support to continue their fight. The 26 of July Movement received the needed publicity from a wave of U.S. newspaper and television reporters who sprinted to Cuba for the chance to interview Castro and the “real men” fighting in the Sierra Maestra mountains. These reporters told stories about Castro and the revolution in the guise of a real-life adventure unfolding next
door. These stories contained gendered metaphors of “true manhood” revered in the United States. The images produced during this period continued the intimate connection between the two countries through metaphors of shared masculine virtue and family values. These shared metaphors would soon be overturned by the conflict between Cuba and the United States.

Chapter Three, “From Smiling Face to Most Dangerous Place: The Destruction of U.S. and Cuban Relations and the Nature of the Enemy, 1959-1963,” examines the splintering of the relationship between the two nations and the creation of one of the most dangerous and enduring standoffs of the Cold War. Cuban and U.S. images of mutual friendship gave way to images of mutual animosity. A hostile environment between Cuba and the United States festered and spawned images through which both sides demonized and dehumanized the other, evoking many of the same enemy archetypes of past hot war conflicts. These hostile images bounced back and forth across the Florida Straits as each nation redefined itself in opposition to the other. The images during these first few years set the tone for the visual animosity that has continued to the present day.

My fourth chapter, “Sources of Maximum Danger: Cuba, the United States, and the Struggle for Hearts and Minds, 1959-1989,” examines the importance of image-making efforts to win public approval in Cuba, the United States, and Latin America. The revolution quickly turned from being a military operation against Batista to a conscious effort to reshape Cuban society and identity. The creation of images was crucial to a re-imagined and re-envisioned Cuban national identity and “New Man” based on socialist ideals separated from U.S. influence. In the United
States, image-makers seared the idea of Cuba as a new enemy into the public imagination through films, political cartoons, and television specials. The U.S. government viewed Cuba as part of the larger Soviet threat and produced images in an effort to thwart “another Cuba” from happening elsewhere in the western hemisphere.

The fifth and final chapter of my dissertation, “Martyrs, Murderers, and Miracles: Images of the Cuban Exile Within and Without, 1959-2000,” examines the special role that the exile community in the United States has played in the production of images in the United States and Cuba. Both Cuba and the United States have used the exiles as political pawns over the last fifty years. Resident Cubans envision those who have abandoned the revolution as an enemy even more contemptuous then the U.S. government, traitors to be forever scorned. The U.S. government and U.S. public have viewed the exiles as both heroes and political liabilities. Images of their presence in the United States have changed over time, embodied first in the bandleader and family man Ricky Ricardo, and later in the drug dealer and gangster Tony Montana. The conflict between the exiles and the Castro government continues to be one of the most personal and intimate battlefields between the two nations.

The prolific amount of images produced on both sides of the Florida Straits, has significantly shaped foreign relations between Cuba and the United States. The story that follows provides a heretofore-absent examination of the visual dialogue that took place between Cuba and the United States during a time of tremendous change and conflict. The production of images of alliance and antagonism has both bound and divided these two border nations. It is within the visual culture of both countries,
not just the textual record, that the intimate nature of the relationship between the two nations can be best perceived.
Cuba’s nearness to the United States makes it of easy access for residents of that country…The inborn hospitality of the Cuban people, to be noted even the government institutions and the authorities, insures a friendly welcome.

—Cuba: Ideal Vacation Land (1953)

In Cuba I’m Cuban, In the USA I’m a Yank Wherever I am I’m home and I’ve got you to thank… I’m a lucky guy!

—“Ricky Ricardo” (Desi Arnaz) I Love Lucy (1956)

U.S. forms penetrated so deeply through habitual usage and became so much a part of everyday life so as to be indistinguishable from what passed as commonplace, but most of all what passed as Cuban.


From 1898 until 1959, the United States and Cuba were bound together by what President William McKinley described as “ties of singular intimacy.”1 Although economic, political, and military links were at the core of the official government relationship, the intimate relationship between Cuba and the United States that was

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forged in the hearts and minds of each country’s citizens came into focus through popular images in advertising, film, television, and most importantly tourism. The physical proximity made the ocean boundary between Cuba and the United States porous and easy to bridge, enhancing economic and cultural exchange. This arrangement favored the dominant status of North American businesses and products, and offered preferential treatment for U.S. tourists. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, images and industries that bridged the Straits of Florida came together in a symbiotic harmony that produced as well as reflected the ties of singular intimacy that President McKinley had observed in 1899.

During the 1950s, the intimate relationship between Cuba and the United States dearest to the hearts of the U.S. public was a marriage between a Cuban bandleader and his redhead-wannabe-starlet wife in the wildly popular television show *I Love Lucy.*2 The show’s plot centered on the relationship between Ricky Ricardo, a successful Cuban entertainer living in New York and the antics of his zany wife Lucy. Lucy’s aspirations for stardom, combined with her lack of talent, were often the cause for chaos and comedy in the Ricardo household. Lucy’s slapstick and Ricky’s Cuban accent and rapid-fire Spanish combined to form a television comedy behemoth.

Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball were both an on-screen and off-screen mixed race couple. CBS television executives originally feared that the show would break too

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2 *I Love Lucy* ran from 1951 to 1957 on CBS and consistently ranked number one or number two in the Neilson Ratings and was the first television program to reach more than ten million homes. Bart Andrews, *The “I Love Lucy” Book*, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1985), ix-xiv.
many racial taboos for 1950s U.S. society and would not garner a large TV audience. However, the connection between Cuba and the United States was so entrenched that a mixed-race couple was perhaps more acceptable with our closest neighbor. In addition, Arnaz was a very light-skinned Cuban and did not pose the same challenge that an Afro-Cuban and a white American couple would have. The characters of Ricky and Lucy also fulfilled many of the normal gender roles for a middle-class U.S. family in the 1950s. Ricky was portrayed as a loyal breadwinner and ultimately in control of the family. Lucy was a stay-at-home mom and homemaker who would push Ricky’s buttons but would eventually give into her husband’s demands. The Ricardos enabled a broad U.S. audience to internalize the relationship between the two countries as a metaphoric marriage that despite the differences had a core sameness that allowed the relationship to flourish. The show vaulted to number one in the Nielson ratings and served as a popular reminder of the intimacy of the U.S.-Cuban connection in the United States.

On December 3, 1956, an episode of *I Love Lucy*, entitled “The Ricardos Visit Cuba,” directly addressed many of the real and imagined intimate connections between Cuba and the United States. In the episode, the Ricardos as well as their ever-present neighbors, Ethel and Fred Mertz, flew from New York to Havana aboard the Pan Am Clipper so that Lucy could meet more of Ricky’s extended family. Ricky’s family members were portrayed as white Cubans fluent in English as well as Spanish. The fictional hotel entertainment was presented in English as it actually

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would have been for a U.S. tourism audience in the 1950s, and not a single Afro-Cuban was present in the entire episode. This absence perpetuated the racial myth that Cuba was primarily a white country. The reality was that Afro-Cubans were literally in the background in elite Cuban society, considered second-class citizens, and barred from many hotels and clubs except as workers, just as many of their African-American counterparts were in the mid-1950s.4

At the end of the show Ricky played a concert at the Hotel Nacional Casino Parisien with his son Lil’Ricky. Ricky summed up his own fictional Cuban-American connection with his song, “I’m a lucky guy” and in doing so illustrated the connection between the two countries as perceived by U.S. citizens. Ricky crooned,

You see un hombre afortunado  
Which means you’re looking at a lucky guy  
In Cuba I’m Cuban  
In the USA I’m a Yank  
Wherever I am I’m home and I’ve got you to thank.  
You never see me homesick ‘cause from home I’m never away  
Wherever I am I’m home in Cuba or the USA  
I’ve got two places to hang my hat  
Two verandas on which to snooze  
And in two languages a welcome mat  
Say hello to my shoes  
In New York or Havana  
People make me feel I belong  
Wherever I am I can go but I can’t go wrong  
Just name me one other chap with a girl like Lucy on his lap  
And a diet of hot tamales and apple pie  
You see un hombre afortunado  
Which means you’re looking at a lucky guy  
I’m a lucky guy!5

4 For a superior study of race relations in Cuba in the twentieth century see Alejandro de la Fuente, A Nation For All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

5 Robert G. Friedman “I’m a Lucky Guy” CBS Television, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball producers, I Love Lucy, “The Ricardos Visit Cuba,” 3 December 1956,
Ricky’s song illustrated the real ability of North Americans and to a more limited degree wealthy Cubans in the 1950s to move between the two cultures.

The boundary between the Cuba and the United States in the late 1950s was porous especially for North American goods and travelers. For many Americans, the ninety miles of ocean stretching between Cuba and the United States seemed easier to culturally bridge than the ninety meters of river that separated the United States and Mexico. Ironically, on the day before the Ricardos landed in Cuba on U.S. television sets, another very real military landing was taking place on the eastern side of the island. When Fidel Castro and eighty-one members of the 26 of July Movement ran aground on December 2, 1956, Cuba was an island dominated by wealthy “Ricky Ricardo” Cubans, “lucky guy” U.S. tourists, and U.S. commercial interests—a constructed island paradise for foreign consumption thoroughly incorporated and influenced by U.S. concepts of modernity and identity. The U.S. and Cuban public came to know each other through popular culture images like *I Love Lucy* that contained dominant North American constructions of family, gender, class, and racial hierarchies. Ultimately, these images helped support and produce a relationship that favored U.S. citizens over their Cuban neighbors.

**Products, Power, and No Translation Necessary**

The influence that the U.S. sought to exercise over the island can be traced back to the desires of the U.S. founding fathers. John Adams stated that the

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annexation of Cuba was “indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the Union,” while Thomas Jefferson commented that Cuba would make a “most interesting addition” to the United States. Although the United States failed to annex Cuba, the U.S. government took measures to ensure that the island never fell under the control of any other country after Spain. This policy of “no transfer” included the Cuban people themselves and set the stage for U.S. intervention during the Cuban-American-Spanish War of 1898 and the fifty-year conflict with the revolutionary government after 1959.  

Following World War II, the United States assumed a position of global power and influence unprecedented in its past. Through its economic and military power, the U.S. was able to influence trade relations, strategic agendas, and cultural forms in much of Latin America. The strength of their northern neighbor forced smaller Latin American countries like Cuba to operate in an economic, political, and cultural space that was largely controlled from the exterior. Although not officially part of the United States, U.S. authority over the island manifested itself in a variety of forms. Sugar, Cuba’s primary export, remained at the heart of U.S. trade and influence on the island; indeed almost ninety percent of Cuba’s sugar was bought by the United States. U.S. control over sugar paved the way for U.S. control over other industries such as transportation, utilities, and consumer goods on to the island. During the first half of the twentieth century, Cuba became ever more dependent on the United States as a primary trading partner. Economic dominance led to further

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6 For a discussion on the U.S. policy of “no transfer” and its legacy see Pérez, *Cuba and the U.S.: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, 34-45.
cultural assimilation of Cuba into the North American sphere of influence and the intertwining of these border nations.  

Throughout the twentieth century the United States and Cuba forged closer cultural ties to the point that middle and upper class Cubans, especially in Havana, came to judge their own progress and success based on U.S. standards. Cubans embraced many types of U.S. culture—including baseball, films, television programs—and a wide range of consumer products, all of U.S. origin, became staples in Cuba. These products and customs had been coming into Cuba since before the U.S. intervention in 1898 and had grown more and more prominent after the end of Spanish colonial rule. By the 1950s, Cuba’s elite classes were emulating North American consumption patterns. Their key reference points in terms of status and progress were linked to definitions of progress and modernity as envisioned by the multitude of U.S. advertisements and U.S. tourist on the island. Part of what drove Cubans to accept and clamor for North American cultural forms was a rejection of

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Spanish colonial norms in favor of the perceived modernity linked to North American customs and products.  

Not only were the products themselves North American in origin but so were the ways they were marketed and advertised. U.S. advertising firms set up offices in Havana almost immediately after the Spanish surrendered the island in 1898. Over the next fifty years, advertisements for U.S. products found in popular Cuban periodicals became one of the primary means that idealized visions of U.S. culture were spread on the island. Advertisers sought to reflect the popular aspirations and values of its intended audience as a way to connect to the viewer as well as to create desire for the product being advertised. Advertisements did not reflect a true reality of U.S. society but rather an idealized and stylized version of what upper-middle class Americans valued and aspired to be like. These ideals and aspirations were then transferred to a Cuban audience. In this way advertisers transplanted the commodified “American Dream” of prosperity and a happier life to Cuban consumers in an effort to create a “Cuban Dream” that normalized American consumer patterns for upper and middle class Cubans. 

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8 Louis Pérez Jr. catalogues a vast amount of cultural forms and connections to the United States in his masterful discussion about United States and Cuban cultural connection from the nineteen century until the revolution in his On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); For a discussion on the Cuban perception of U.S. culture as more modern than Spain see Louis Pérez Jr., “Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898,” Journal of American History; September 1994, Vol. 81 Issue 2, 493-517.

9 Louis Pérez Jr. points to how the United States following the Spanish-American war had not only the will but the means to reshape Cuba in a American vision. This vision came through a variety of sources including advertisements that normalized U.S. dominance on the island. See his On Becoming Cuban: Identity,
Advertising images also linked the more well-off segments of Cuban and U.S. society through the emphasis in the ads themselves on white, affluent, patriarchal family units. By having the same visual discourses in the United States and Cuba, advertisers were constructing a similar frame of reference that connected U.S. and Cuban consumers. This image-based cultural connection went above the official diplomatic agreements between the two countries to join segments of the U.S. and Cuban public at visual everyday level. Just as *I Love Lucy* served as a popular reminder of the intimate connection between the two nations through the fictional as well as real marriage between Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, advertising of U.S. products also made a visual connection between the two nations through the stylized images as well as the availability of the actual products.¹⁰

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, print advertisement continued to rise in importance along with popular newspaper and magazine readership. Better economic conditions in the United States and Cuba after World War II also facilitated competition for advertisers to spur consumption. In the United States two of the larger mainstream periodicals, *Time* and *Life* Magazines, contained a vast amount of advertisements that reached over three million homes. In Cuba, *Bohemia* magazine, which had was first printed at the beginning of the twentieth

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century, became the island’s largest magazine with a circulation of over a million copies in 1959.\textsuperscript{11} Bohemia was read primarily by Cuba’s educated wealthy and middle-classes. Comparison of the advertisements in Bohemia to those in \textit{Time} and \textit{Life} reveal a multitude of product promotions that were literally mirror images of one another, with only the advertising copy changed from English to Spanish. Because the images were essentially the same, Cubans were repeatedly exposed to U.S. constructions of race, class, gender, and family models. In many of these advertisements the images reveal dominant North American social constructions, not actual realities but an idealized vision of a “step up” from reality that the product could supposedly provide.\textsuperscript{12} The ads were also drawn to show how a certain products would make the consumer more modern and advanced because of the purchase. If there were people depicted in the advertisements, they were usually young, white, and affluent. In many advertisements wholesome family—units a man and a woman with two children, a boy and a girl—were also pictured. The advertisements portrayed these families as having been made happier by the purchase of whatever product was being promoted.

U.S. and Cuban advertisements often touted new products or services as a way to make family life better. The idealized families in advertisements were visual clichés—white, happy, good-looking—that did not reflect the class and racial realities


\textsuperscript{12} For a great explanation into how advertisers assisted in the construction of a idealized vision of middle and upper class U.S. society see Marchand, \textit{Advertising the American Dream}, 164-167.
of either society. These idealized families were also male-dominated, with father figures playing the central role in the advertisements as they were assumed to play within a family unit. By constantly repeating these idealized visions of families, they were normalized in both societies. In a 1957 U.S. Keds advertisement from Bohemia a family of four is depicted as walking hand in hand, made apparently all the more joyous because of the Keds shoes on their feet. [See Figure 1.1] In the illustration the father is depicted as holding both of his children by the hand; the mother holds only the hand of the youngest. This places the father as breadwinner and protector of his children at the center of the family circle, the ultimate authority, having provided the means for the shoes that the family now wears. This type of patriarchal image was often repeated in Cuban and U.S. advertisements for a multitude of products including banks, cars, gasoline, soda, televisions, travel, and tires to name but a few.

In an advertisement for Pan American airlines, advertisers envisioned a similar family circle, this time flying to Europe for a vacation via New York. [See Figure 1.2] Even though the majority of Cubans in the 1950s would have been unable to afford this type of vacation, the image still communicated what an idealized version of a family looked like. In this advertisement the father was pictured as pointing at something through the window for his oldest child to look at like the father is the teacher. The mother in the advertisement also looks from a window but is far more passive, busy instead with two younger children. This ad again visually places the father as the most important member of the family. The idealized patriarchal family, like the Ricardos in I Love Lucy, where husbands and fathers were ultimately in control, bound both countries in the same fiction through idealized
definitions of shared family values. These idealized visions of family with subtexts of patriarchy and masculinity would play a continuous role in the relationship between the two nations.

One place where advertisers assumed 1950s women in both U.S. and Cuban cultures to have control without the aid of men was in the kitchen. The marketing of U.S. appliances in Cuba provides several examples of consumer products promoted as central to domestic happiness. At the turn of the century, the U.S.-owned Cuban Electric Company began electrifying the island using the same current (110 volts) as the United States, making appliances immediately transferable between the two countries. U.S. appliance makers could literally plug their products in on the island. A multitude of U.S. brands of dishwashers, blenders, mixers, and toasters were marketed to Cubans as the key to domestic bliss and as part of a modern family unit. Household appliances like Frigidaire refrigerators were advertised with the same appeal of convenience and luxury with only slight differences in approach. [See Figures 1.3 and 1.4] In each of the 1957 Frigidaire advertisements a stylized white woman stood over the appliances. She was dressed in eveningwear to emphasize the idea of sophistication and luxury of the product. Both advertisements emphasized the “sheer look” of the product, as if the appliance itself could become an extension of the sophistication of the consumer and a means of self-expression. Although most consumers would not normally wear formal clothes, the dressing of the models in this

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13 On the construction of families in advertising see Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 248-254.

14 Pérez, On Becoming Cuban, 329.
fashion connected the viewer to an idealized lifestyle a step up from their own. This step up was also apparent in the contents of the Cuban refrigerator. The appliance was a modern day cornucopia overflowing with every type of food imaginable. In filling the refrigerator, advertisers were suggesting abundance for the Cuban consumer and the better life that a modern appliance could bring. This differed from the U.S. advertisement, showing empty shelf space that was assumed would be eventually filled but did not need to be illustrated with food in order for the product to still appeal to a U.S. audience.

Advertisers used similar images in marketing a variety of products—Emerson televisions, Esso gasoline, General Electric appliances, and Goodrich tires, to name but a few. Cubans were also encouraged to literally consume, like their North American neighbors, through advertisements for packaged food products such as Coca Cola, Del Monte vegetables, and Kellogg’s Corn Flakes. Fashion, personal hygiene, and leisure were also advertised in similar ways in both Cuba and the United States with images of white men and women portrayed as the primary consumers. U.S. products outnumbered Cuban products almost ten to one reflecting and normalizing U.S. commercial dominance on the island.

“Cuba: Holiday Island of the Tropics”

In addition to consumer goods, tourism also created a point of contact between the two nations. Like the fictional trip of the Ricardos took to Havana in I Love Lucy, tourists from the U.S. frequently made the short trip by cruise ship, car ferry, or plane to Cuba. Tourism promoters planned the primary destinations for U.S.
tourists in Cuba, Havana and Varadero Beach, to include music, food, and accommodation that were all familiar to the U.S. consumers. Cuban and U.S. tourism promoters marketed the island to U.S. consumers in two main ways, as a foreign destination that was still familiar and close to the United States, and as a place for North Americans to escape from the moral confines and rules of U.S. society. The tourism industry filtered and normalized Cuban culture for the U.S. tourism market and became a constant source of Americanized images of Cuba for U.S. citizens, while creating another avenue for U.S. culture to permeate the island. Like U.S. product importation and advertisement, mass tourism created another “contact zone” between the two cultures and became another way that the two countries were intimately connected in a relationship that ultimately favored the United States over Cuba through the creation of laws, places, and promotions that encouraged U.S. tourists to know Cuba not as an equal neighbor but as a product to be consumed.15

U.S. tourism to Cuba increased steadily after World War I. In 1919, the Cuban government set up the Cuban Tourist Commission to promote U.S. tourism to the island. The commission would eventually have offices in Havana, Miami, and New York. Part of the early boom in U.S. tourists to Cuba was based on Havana’s

popularity during U.S. Prohibition (1920-1933). During Prohibition, North Americans knew Cuba as a place to get away from U.S. liquor laws and gamble. Images of travel to the island in Hearst newsreels from the 1930s featured U.S. visitors gambling, dancing, and drinking in what was dubbed the “carefree and gay center of the Americas.” Images of drinking were also highlighted in another Hearst newsreel on the horseracing season in Havana. The abundance of liquor was almost as important as the races, as the commentator stated, “if you lose, it doesn’t matter; there’s plenty of drink to drown your sorrows.” This reputation that the island laid outside the bounds of U.S. laws and morality would remain a popular U.S. perception of the island until the 1959 revolution. 16

After World War II, the Cuban government aggressively pushed to increase U.S tourism to the island. The Cuban government supported corporate efforts of companies building hotels by granting them tax breaks and gaming licenses. On May 26, 1948, the Cuban government passed one of the most important tourism development laws. Known as “Presidential Decree Number 1798,” this law exempted hotels from paying taxes to the Cuban government. Because many of the hotels were owned and operated by U.S. hotel entrepreneurs, this decree allowed for more capital

to be exported back to the United States. These types of tax incentives spurred hotel
development on the island and paved the way for an influx of U.S. tourists in the
1950s. In addition to hotel development, from 1951 until 1957 the Cuban government
spent over fifteen million pesos on tourism infrastructure improvements. These
projects included new and improved roads, bridges, airports, aqueducts, parks, and
buildings. In addition, public health improvements such as sewers, paved streets, and
mosquito fumigation were undertaken with the goal of making Cuba more appealing
for U.S. tourists.\footnote{For statistics on the amounts of money spent on tourism see Villalba, \textit{Cuba y El Turismo}, 86-87; also Corporation Nacional del Turismo, \textit{Plan Mínimo para la Preparacion Turistica del Pais} (Havana, Cuba: Corporacion Nacional del Turismo, 1945), 12-76.}

The Cuban government also worked with U.S. investors to create other tourist
destinations on the island. One example of this type of cooperation was the tourist
resort of Varadero Beach. Varadero is located one hundred and forty kilometers east
of Havana, approximately ninety minutes by car. Irénée DuPont, president of the
DuPont Chemical Corporation, originally bought land in Varadero in 1926 to grow
henequen in order to make rope. DuPont became enamored with Varadero and
commissioned a large estate to be built for his family called “Xanadu.” By 1931,
DuPont had bought up the majority of the land on the peninsula and began developing
an exclusive resort for DuPont and General Motors executives. These developments
included roads and an aqueduct that brought water from the San Juan River to the
peninsula to service his estate. By the mid-1940s, DuPont had sold off large portions
of the peninsula to tourism investors. The Cuban government participated with U.S.
business owners to develop the resort area for foreign visitors and Cuba’s elite. In 1949, “Presidential Decree No. 2904” established the “Via Blanca Project” to link the cities of Havana and Varadero. This multi-million dollar road project was designed to connect the two main tourism hubs in order to facilitate travel between both locations.18

With increased government spending, corruption also became widespread in the Cuban tourism industry, especially under the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista (1952-1959). Batista helped pass several laws encouraging hotel construction on the island by offering investors a Cuban gaming license with any hotel costing more than a million dollars. The resulting explosion in casino building and Batista’s friendly relationship to organized crime figures in the United States encouraged a mass migration of the U.S. Mafia to the island. Although the U.S. Mafia had been active in Havana since prohibition, Batista’s outright dealings with the crime syndicates greatly increased its presence and influence on the island during the 1950s. Meyer Lansky, the famous Jewish gangster and “Lucky” Luciano’s right-hand man, went to Cuba after his release from prison in 1953. Batista had lived just up the road from Lansky’s illegal casino in Daytona Beach, Florida, in the 1940s and welcomed the gangster to Havana with open arms, appointing him as his national gaming

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supervisor. Gangsters ran hotels throughout the island: Meyer Lansky at the Rivera, Jake Lansky at the Nacional, Santo Trafficante at the Sans Souci. Cuban tourism’s association with organized crime reinforced for Americans the image of the island as a place where U.S. tourists could participate in any number of illicit activities.\textsuperscript{19}

During the 1950s, the economic upsurge in the United States made travel not only appealing but also financially possible for a larger segment of the U.S. population. In June of 1956, the \textit{New York Times} reported that approximately fifty million people, roughly one third of the U.S. population, would be taking a summer holiday. This shift in custom from a smaller traveling public to a larger mass tourism culture in the United States helped to create a new generation of American tourists who increasingly headed south to Cuba. Tourism to Cuba from the United States reached its pre-revolutionary zenith in 1957 with over 350,000 arrivals. More than 85\% of all tourists to Cuba before 1959 came from the United States. Tourism allowed for personal connections between the two cultures while the multitude of images produced in tourism promotions that celebrated these linkages.\textsuperscript{20}

The North American public’s visions of Cuba was often shaped through images in travel magazines and tourism advertising whether the readers traveled to


the island or not. Because of the proximity of each country to the other, one of the main selling points was the ease of travel between the two countries. Tourist advertisers promoted the idea that Cuba was geographically connected to the United States—just a short jump from New York or Miami. Advertisers and travel writers continuously heralded this proximity as a benefit to both countries, emphasizing it on maps and magazine descriptions. In an Esso Oil Touring Map, Cuba was drawn with lines connecting it as if by bridges to Miami, New York, and New Orleans. [See Figure 1.5] The lines emanating from the cities create an image of movement and visual linkages between the two countries. The map also includes illustrations of commodities that would be flowing on the lines and tourism points of interest and activities. An Omni Bus Traveler’s Guide includes pictures of an airplane, cruise ship, and bus in Havana. [See Figure 1.6] The illustration emphasizes the different types of transportation that were readily available to the U.S. tourist to conveniently travel to the island and on it after arrival.

Transportation technologies were one of the keys to mass tourism to Cuba. Daily ferry service from Key West, Miami, and New Orleans connected the two countries and allowed passengers to bring their own automobiles to use upon arrival. Technological advances in airplanes, which had been improved out of

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wartime necessity, further spurred Cuba’s popularity as a travel destination.

Construction of airfields during the 1940s provided the infrastructure for air travel after the war.\textsuperscript{23} Multiple airlines vied for the tourist business between the U.S. and Cuba. Braniff International Airways, Cubana de Aviación, Delta Airlines, National Airways, Pan American Airways, and Royal Dutch Airways (KLM) all flew to Havana and emphasized the speed of daily flights between the two countries: from Key West forty-five minutes, from Miami sixty-five minutes, and from New York five hours direct.\textsuperscript{24} Airline advertising touted the latest advances in technology to take people, with optimum speed and efficiency, to their holiday destinations. The speed of air travel allowed U.S. tourists to enjoy weekend getaways to the island.\textsuperscript{25} The Varadero International Hotel marketed itself as an ideal place to come just for a weekend:

Varadero Beach is as close to New York as your nearest airport. From Havana by air 30 minutes, by car 2 hours. In fact, it's a matter of hours from any part of the U.S. Its accessibility makes it possible for you to come down just for a weekend.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{23} Louis A. Pérez, Jr., \textit{Underdevelopment and Dependency: Tourism in the West Indies} (El Paso: Center for Inter-American Studies, 1975), 8.


\textsuperscript{25} Paul J.C. Friedlander, “Going South for the Summer,” \textit{New York Times}, 15 June 1951, 1XX.

\textsuperscript{26} “Varadero International Hotel,” (Advertisement), \textit{New York Times}, 15 October 1949, 12XX.

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Airlines made the geographic proximity of the two countries seem even closer. Now the ninety miles of water was reduced to mere minutes. The image of an almost effortless connection to the island was further cemented into U.S. public viewpoint.

Cuban travel laws and policies also favored status enjoyed by U.S. tourists on the island. This status included the flexible entrance requirements for United States citizens traveling to Cuba. In 1946, U.S. tourists were allowed to stay up to six months on the island and needed only proof of U.S. citizenship (no passport or visas) to enter Cuba.27 By the middle of the 1950s U.S. tourists could enter and leave Cuba multiple times for up to two and a half years with the same tourist card.28 By contrast, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic permitted U.S. tourists to stay thirty days while El Salvador allowed U.S. tourists to stay for only eight days. U.S. and Canadian tourists traveling to Cuba were required to have a landing card, a birth certificate, a round trip ticket, but no passports.29 These policies applied only to U.S. and Canadian tourists and allowed U.S. tourists to see Cuba more as an extension of U.S. territory than as a separate country. This perception was strengthened even further by the more standard requirements for tourists from other nations. Citizens of


29 Ibid.
countries in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere in Latin America all needed passports and a visa to visit the island.  

Other policies strengthened the message of familiarity and safety for U.S travelers who, like Ricky Ricardo, were made to feel “at home” in Cuba. U.S. visitors were not required to exchange currency on the island because the Cuban peso was valued at the same rate as the U.S. dollar and was accepted in lieu of pesos throughout Cuba. Just as dollars were a translatable form of currency, tourist promoters assured visitors that English was widely spoken throughout Cuba. Tourists were also assured that a branch of the Cuban national police known as “the Tourist Police” would give them special protection. The police were there for U.S. tourists and were identified with an armband marked “National Police-Speak English.” If any dispute arose between a U.S. tourist and a Cuban national, the tourist police would intervene. And if need be, a delegate from the Cuban government’s Cuban Tourist Commission would represent the tourist in Cuban court.  

Travel advertisements, magazines, and guidebooks promoted this privileged status of Americans traveling to Cuba. Many of the advertisements and photographs in U.S. travel magazines and newspapers represented Cuba’s landscape as devoid of the local population. In some advertisements featuring Cuban beaches, the images did not contain any people at all. Advertisers and travel magazines depicted Cuban beaches as empty, naturally beautiful, an unknown paradise apparently waiting to be

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discovered by U.S. tourists.\textsuperscript{32} One travel map of the Caribbean described it as “a vast playground for island-hoppers,” while another proclaimed: “The tourist, 457 years after Columbus, is rediscovering the West Indies.”\textsuperscript{33} In the same way that Cuban tourist policies and laws cleared the way for the U.S. tourist industry, the images and metaphors of the island as an undiscovered land also reinforced that Cuba was ripe for the taking by U.S. tourists.

If and when Cuban nationals were pictured, it was most often serving U.S. tourists. Cubans in these photographs were often darker skinned than the U.S. tourists. These images reflected and reinforced racial and class hierarchies between the two countries. Cubans were seemingly in their own country to serve the needs of a U.S. tourist audience. A February 1949 issue of \textit{Holiday Magazine} featured an article on touring the West Indies, and contained two pages devoted to photos of Varadero Beach. The middle of the page proclaimed, “In winter, Varadero Beach turns into an American Colony.” The photos featured North American tourists enjoying themselves in different ways on the beach. There were photos of a Cuban man cutting a little boy’s hair, an older couple from the United States enjoying the beach, a Cuban man throwing a net into the water, a North American tourist buying shells from an older and darker-skinned Cuban man, and a young girl pulling an inflatable raft into the water. The U.S. visitors pictured were all white and outnumber the Cubans ten to one.


The caption for one photo read “a girl from Alabama braves the Varadero surf in February, an unthinkable season for most Cubans. They swim in summer only, when the water improves to an average of 70 degrees.” Cuban beaches were apparently vacant accept for U.S. tourists, who also just happen to be attractive, apparently single, blondes from Alabama. [See Figure 1.7] This image also conveyed a racialized subtext that it was safe for white women to travel to Cuba because of the absence of Afro-Cubans on the beach. According to the caption, Cubans would not be at the beach until the summer rendering the space clear for U.S. visitors to enjoy. The appeal of the familiar within the exotic and the image of a “safe” environment for U.S. tourists facilitated increased travel between the Cuba and the United States and furthered the intimate connections between the two neighbors.34

Although many of the advertisements and images promoted this idea that the island was safe and familiar, advertisers also marketed Cuba as an escape from the normal bounds of morality in the United States. Guidebooks, magazine articles, and advertisements all pointed to how Cuba permitted U.S. citizens to behave outside the codes of U.S. normal behavior.35 The majority of these images revolved around the perception that Cuba as providing the backdrop for a love affair or anonymous sex.


35 Michel Foucault described this type of spatial escape or reversal as part of what he called “heterotopias.” Within a heterotopia the individual is taken out of his or her normal spatial condition and is able to explore different spatial practices, representations, and meanings that they would not normally encounter or experience. Frequently, these activities take place in an anonymous environment that allows the participant to take on a new temporary identity. See his essay, “Of Others Spaces,” Diacritics 16:1, Spring, 1986: 22-27.
These images of Cuba as a North American playground were mirrored in Hollywood films from the time period. The films *Week-End in Havana* (1941), *Cuban Pete* (1946), *Holiday in Havana* (1949), *Affair in Havana* (1957), and *A Night in Havana* (1957), portrayed the island as a romantic getaway for U.S. visitors.

*Week-End in Havana* was one of the most popular films using Cuba as the location for a romantic musical. In the film, the McCracken Steamship Company’s Ship *Cuban Queen*, while in route to Havana, ran into a reef off the coast of Florida. The vice-president of the company, Jay Williams (John Payne), arrived in Florida to secure waivers from the passengers to protect the company from a lawsuit. Jay needed every passenger to sign the waiver before he could return to New York and get married. Jay was able to collect all of the signatures he needed except for one, Nan Spencer (Alice Faye), a shop girl from Macy’s. Nan refused to sign the waiver until the company delivered on its travel-brochure promises of a good time in Havana. Desperate for the signature, Jay agreed to travel with Ms. Spencer to Havana to guarantee her good time, going so far as to hire Monte Blanca (Cesar Romero) to be her lover. Doe-eyed Nan looked at everything in Havana and swooned, “I just knew it would be romantic.” The films’ musical numbers sung by Carmen Miranda, Cesar Romero, as well as Payne and Faye, contained these themes of romance as well. “Tropical Magic,” “Romance and Rhumba,” and “When I Love, I Love” reinforced this idea of romance for the North American tourist in Cuba. Eventually
Jay himself was also overtaken by the allure of Cuba. He fell for Nan, broke off his engagement, and lived happily ever after.  

Like Nan Spenser, Lucy in the *I Love Lucy* show traveled to Cuba for a weekend with the hope of meeting a man. Lucy’s romantic efforts aboard ship were foiled but once in Havana she met Ricky Ricardo, a taxi driver with show business ambitions. Lucy learned that her new love wanted to come to the United States and start a musical career. After more hilarity involving Lucy’s inebriation and incarceration, she landed Ricky a job in Rudy Vallee’s orchestra while at the same time securing a husband for her.  

For U.S. women, popular depictions of Cuba concentrated on the possibility of romance and marriage, while for U.S. men they also focused on Cuba as a place that offered the possibility for anonymous sex.

The tourist advertisements and promotional literature echoed these romantic images from films and titillated consumers with the possibility of sex. One advertisement touted Cuba as being a place “where even business is a pleasure and your pleasure is our business.”

*Your room has a big picture window and a balcony. You can reach out and touch the rustling palms. By day it’s a beautifully appointed modern apartment, by night it becomes a luxurious bedroom with the moon and stars*

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36 *Week-End In Havana*, DVD, directed by Walter Lang, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Productions, 1941.


38“Caribair,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1949, 5XX.
just inches away. Here at the Varadero International there are so many enticing charms, you'll want to stay forever…

The sexual subtext of travel to the island was even present even in airline advertisements. [See Figure 1.8] Delta’s “velvet ride” to Havana pictured a black-gloved female hand caressing the phallus of a jet plane. This not-so-subtle sexual subtext was marketed along with the traditional emphasizes on speed and connection to the island. The advertisers seemed to suggest that if one flew Delta to Cuba, pleasure was sure to be fast at hand.

Cuba was also sexualized for U.S. tourists through images of Cuban dancers. [See Figure 1.9-1.11] Tourism advertisements and magazine articles contained images of scantily clad Cuban women in alluring poses who were seemingly available to the U.S. male tourist. Images of dancing, especially the rumba, were equated with sex, and guidebooks encouraged North American tourists to visit Cuba to “improve your rumba where the rumba was born.” Tourist magazines described the rumba as “torrid,” “a burlesque of barnyard courtship.”

Dancing was tied into the idea that Cubans were sexual available to their North American guests. The sexualized dancers also played to racial stereotypes that would not challenge the U.S. tourist market. The women were often light skinned Cubans who may have been considered more appealing to a male U.S. audience. If there was a Cuban male dance partner, he was often pictured as a light skinned Afro-Cuban man in effeminate costumes. The race

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and costumes made male Cubans potentially less threatening to U.S. men. Tourism advertisements played to the 1950s racial hierarchy that assumed white U.S. male superiority to Afro-Cubans. Additionally, the male Cubans’ frilly dance costumes worn in the photographs suggest homosexuality again removing them as a potential threat to women tourists or to the desires of U.S. tourists for Cuban women. The images of sexuality in tourism advertisements favored a U.S. tourism audience over their Cuban hosts.

With the large amounts of advertising, ease of transportation, and lax entry requirements for U.S. citizens, tourism to Cuba continued to expand and flourish, enhancing for Americans the perception of the bond between the two nations. However, for most Cubans, tourism became one of the most glaring examples of the inequality that existed on the island. While North American guests could enjoy the lavish casinos of Havana and white sands of Varadero, the majority of Cubans languished behind in severe poverty that kept them confined to subsistence agriculture and illiteracy. As more hotels and public works projects kept money and investment limited to the capital and its environs, the further reaches of the island became notoriously neglected. Batista’s loyalists profited from the corruption and graft but a majority of Cubans came to resent the dishonest and illegitimate government.41

The ease of travel between the two countries did not apply in the same way to Cubans traveling to the United States. Most Cubans could not afford to travel to the United States. Those that did had to meet requirements that were almost the exact

opposite of what U.S. citizens faced in Cuba. To enter the United States, Cuban tourists were required to have a valid passport and were only permitted to stay for a total of thirty days.\textsuperscript{42} Cuban pesos needed to be exchanged for U.S. dollars in order for Cuban tourists to spend money even in Miami. Spanish was certainly spoken and understood in many places that Cubans would visit but travel advertisements did not include the promise of language accessibility. This inequality in tourism practices was consistent with the relationship between the two countries, in that the connection ultimately favored the U.S. citizens over their Cuban counterparts.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the twentieth century the United States increased its economic, military, and cultural dominance throughout Latin America. Because of geographic proximity, Cuba and the United States had always had close relations. Following World War II, the strength of their northern neighbor forced Cuba to operate in an economic, political, and cultural space that was largely controlled by the United States. During this period, the cultural connections between the two countries became even more intimate. Cubans, especially the middle and upper class in Havana, embraced a myriad of cultural forms including baseball, Hollywood films, and a wide range of consumer products. Not only were the products themselves North American but so were the ways they were advertised on the island. Advertisements for U.S. products found in popular Cuban periodicals became a primary means that idealized visions of U.S. culture were spread on the island.

\textsuperscript{42} Aeroguia Cubana Volume II No. 9 September 1955, 35.
North Americans came into contact with Cuba through images contained in advertisements, television shows, and tourism. Tourism provided the most personal connection between the two countries both in images and in practice. The Cuban government encouraged the development the tourist industry on the island through the creation of laws, accommodations, and promotions designed to ease travel for U.S. visitors. Tourists from the United States frequently made the short trip an island that by all appearances had been set up primarily for North American visitors. These tourist locations in Havana and Varadero Beach, included music, food, and lodging designed to be familiar to U.S. consumers. Cuban and U.S. tourism promoters produced images of the island as a foreign destination where North Americans could feel at home but also if they chose to escape from the normal morality of U.S. society. The tourism industry and its visions of the island became another way that the two countries connected in a relationship that ultimately favored the United States over Cuba.

The images contained in popular culture that flowed back and forth across the Florida Straits held more than just the record of the products or places that they were meant to advertise. These images also contained the visual cues through which the general public in each country came to know one another. Because North American cultural forms and consumer products dominated Cuban society, images in the advertising of U.S. products included dominant U.S. constructions of family, race, class, and gender. Through these images Cubans came to know their northern neighbors and came to judge their own progress and success based on often-unobtainable U.S. standards. In the United States, the popular television show, *I Love*
Lucy, allowed U.S. viewers to see their Cuban neighbors as metaphorically married to the United States and sharing cultural values. At the same time tourism images promoted a vision of Cuba as subservient to U.S. interests and as a product to be consumed. Both of these dominant U.S. views of Cuba—intimately connected yet subservient—would add to the U.S. public’s shock when Cubans eventually broke from these images to create an alternative reality.

While Cubans had been encouraged through consumer images to participate in a version of the “American Dream,” the reality was that the relationship privileged North Americans over their Cuban neighbors. Although some Cubans enjoyed a standard of living superior to other Latin Americans, poverty was still widespread on the island. The reality of Cuban “Lucky Guy” Ricky Ricardos who could travel between Cuba and the United States was almost non-existent for most Cubans in the 1950s. Instead the connections to their northern neighbors had brought to the island increased prosperity for the few and the corrupting influence of “Lucky” Lucianos. The increasing cultural and financial inequality, when coupled with the corruption of Batista’s government, brought Cuba into a crisis situation in early 1950s that would eventually explode into the Cuban revolution.

Ultimately, the cultural connections forged between Cuba and the United States were unequal, favoring “Lucky Guy” wealthy Cubans and U.S. tourists to the detriment of the majority of middle and lower class Cubans. Fidel Castro would use this cultural and financial inequality to his advantage and directly challenge the connections to the United States in the name of Cuban nationalism. Castro was at first able to use the connections to the United States in order to support his revolution with
funds, arms, and a U.S. media frenzy that assisted in the victory of the revolution and in his rise to power. He would later go on to use the same popular cultural images that had promoted U.S. dominance on the island against the U.S. in order to support his revolution at home and abroad. Indeed the connections promoted by popular culture that had favored the U.S. markets and tourists would be overturned and replaced with a popular culture of Cuban independence that directly responded to what the revolution would label the “tyranny of capitalism imposed from without.” The rallying cry of Cuban nationalism and identity would subvert the siren’s call of the “American Dream,” as the “Holiday Island of the Tropics” and the unequal connections to the United States became a rallying cry for sustained rebellion.
Para toda la familia...

Para cada uno encontrará usted un modelo adecuado de zapatos U.S. KEDS. Fuertes... cómodos... frescos... lavables.

Fabricados con los mejores materiales de que dispone la industria, y por las manos más expertas. De venta en todas las peleterías de toda Cuba.

Figure 1.1 U.S. Keds advertisement *Bohemia* March 3, 1957 p. 129
¡Cinco personas pueden volar a Europa vía Nueva York por el precio de tres!

El "Plan Familiar" de la Pan American ofrece grandes rebajas en el precio del pasaje para una familia que viaje juntos a Europa desde Nueva York. Por ejemplo, si la familia que aparece en la ilustración, volase su servicio de turismo, solamente el padre pagaría el pasaje completo de ida y vuelta. El bebé (menor de 2 años) pagaría sólo el 10%. El niño y la niña (menores de 12 años) pagarían la mitad del pasaje y la madre ahorraría $200.00 dólares.

Si los tres hijos son mayores de 12 años (y menores de 23), el ahorro sería $200 dólares por persona incluyendo la esposa, economizando un total de $600 dólares. Si la misma familia volase en Primera Clase el ahorro todavía sería mayor: $1200 dólares en el viaje de ida y vuelta.

Pero lo mejor de todo es que desde noviembre hasta finales de marzo Ud. puede ahorrar hasta un 25% en el costo de servicio de hoteles y transporte local en Europa.

Dispóngase ahora a llevar su familia a Europa vía Nueva York por Clipper. Su Agente de Viajes le puede dar detalles completos, o si prefiere, llame a Pan American, LA LINEA AEREA DE MAYOR EXPERIENCIA EN EL MUNDO.
Figure 1.3 Cuban Frigidaire advertisement. Bohemia 10 February 1957, 34.
Figure 1.4 U.S. Frigidaire advertisement. *Life Magazine* 18 February, 1957.
Figure 1.5 The map was printed in English, Spanish, and French and was designed for the traveler who was bringing their own vehicle. Cuba and the U.S. are shown as connected by enumerable transportation lines. Each of the countries had drawings of the major exports, historical and geographical points of interest, and entertainment possibilities for the tourist. Esso Standard Oil Touring Map *The Caribbean with the Bahamas and Bermuda* (New York: General Drafting Company, 1951)
Figure 1.6 In an Omni Bus timetable from the early forties the emphasis on transportation the airplane, ship, and bus all making Cuba easily reached. Cuban Tourist Commission, *Guia Nacional Del Viajero/Travelers Guide to Cuba, 1941-1942* (Havana: Cuban Tourist Commission, 1941), 30-31.
Figure 1.7 A.J. Liebling, “The Greater Antilles of the West Indies,” *Holiday* 5:2 (February, 1949), 38-39.
Delta brings you the “Velvet Ride” to HAVANA

on Golden Crown DC-7’s
equipped with all-weather radar

Delta DC-7B’s, DC-7’s and Super Convairs are radar-equipped so your captain can select the smoothest possible course. Fly Delta direct to Havana via the New Orleans gateway—or if more convenient, make direct connections at the Miami gateway. Delta also serves Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. For unsurpassed speed and luxury call Delta now... or see your Travel Agent.

General Offices: Atlanta Airport, Atlanta, Georgia

Figure 1.8 Delta Airlines, “The Velvet Ride,” Advertisement, ASTA Convention Program, October, 1959.
Figure 1.9  A.J. Liebling, “The Greater Antilles of the West Indies,” *Holiday* 5:2 (February, 1949), 37.
Figure 1.10 Cuba: Holiday Island of the Tropics (Miami: Cuban Tourist Commission, 1949)
Figure 1.11 *Holiday* 10:6 December, 1951, 184.
CHAPTER TWO

Robin Hood, Reporters, and Real Men: Fidel Castro’s Honeymoon with the U.S. Media, 1955-1959

I can tell you with complete confidence that in 1956 we will either be free men or we will be martyrs. That means that in 1956 we will be fighting in Cuba.

—Fidel Castro, New York, (1955)

This was quite a man—a powerful six-footer, olive-skinned, full-faced, with a straggly beard...It was easy to see that his men adored him...Here was an educated, dedicated, fanatic, a man of ideals, of courage, and of remarkable qualities of leadership.


And there is one particular man I want to tell you about who stood before them all called Fidel Castro...It doesn’t take more than a minute to realize that here was a man a real man.

—Errol Flynn, Cuban Story, (1959)

The people of the United States, they have great admiration for you and your men because you are in the real American tradition of a George Washington.


On the rainy night of November 25, 1956, eighty-two men boarded a dilapidated American yacht named the Granma and set out from exile in Mexico to begin a revolution in Cuba. The rebels drifted for six miles down the Tuxpán River and into the turbulent waters of the Gulf of Mexico. As the Granma entered the Gulf,
the men began to sing La Bayamesa, the Cuban national anthem. But their exhilaration was short lived. The journey from the Mexican harbor to the East Coast of Cuba was, by all accounts, a nightmare. Heavy seas, mechanical problems, and sickness plagued the revolutionaries on the over-crowded sixty-foot vessel. Their food and water ran out and they became lost. One of the rebels, Roberto Roque, fell overboard and the Granma had to circle for over an hour to find him in the darkness. The voyage left the men exhausted and disoriented. What was supposed to have taken four days lasted seven. On December 2, 1956, unbeknownst to U.S. tourists enjoying the beginnings of another winter season in Cuba, the Granma ran aground just off the coast of the island’s Oriente Province at Los Cayuelos. As the 26 of July captain Juan Manuel Márquez described it, “It wasn’t a landing, it was a shipwreck.”

The boat came to rest more than a hundred yards offshore in thick mud. The revolutionary band had to abandon all but the lightest equipment and could barely get themselves to shore through the waist-deep mud. Instead of a beach, Castro and his men encountered a dense mangrove swamp, which further impeded their progress. As they struggled through the swamp, Cuban air force planes bombed and strafed the

beleaguered band. The men of the 26 of July Movement finally made it to land, exhausted and half-starved. Local peasants assisted them with food and water and led them farther inland into the hills of the Sierra Maestra. On the fifth night after the landing, a well-armed company of a hundred of Batista’s soldiers set upon the rebel group. The firefight that ensued was disastrous for the rebel column. Although a majority of the eighty-two revolutionaries were killed, a small band of twelve men (the numbers vary) including the top leaders— Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos, and Argentine doctor Ernesto “Che” Guevara—escaped further into the Sierra Maestra.

Increased activity by 26 of July Movement’s supporters in the United States, the student movement in Havana, and the urban underground arm of the 26 of July Movement had put Cuban armed forces on high alert and allowed them to be ready for the Granma’s arrival. Castro himself had all but notified Fulgencio Batista’s government of the exact time and place of his planned landing. In 1955, during his seven-week tour of the United States to raise money to support the revolution, Castro pledged to invade Cuba before the end of 1956. In typical style he boasted to a New York audience of Cuban-Americans, “I can tell you with complete confidence that in 1956 we will either be free men or we will be martyrs.”² Most of the 26 of July landing force became the latter, but the landing in itself was a powerful image of defiance against the Batista government.

On December 3, 1956, the day following the landing, the front page headline of the *New York Times* proclaimed, “Cuba wipes out invaders; Leader among forty dead.” According to the wire service report, the revolutionaries had been caught out in the open and killed by Cuban air and ground troops. The article featured an Associated Press photo of a young, clean-shaven Castro with the caption, “Reported Killed: Fidel Castro, leader of so-called revolutionary force.” The Cuban army reported that they had identified the Castro brothers and other 26 of July Movement leaders by documents found in their clothes. The Batista government erroneously declared the Cuban revolution to be over before it began. These unconfirmed media reports set the stage for the dramatic resurrection of Fidel Castro and the 26 of July rebels from their fabricated deaths and served to further discredit the Batista regime in the eyes of the U.S. and Cuban public.

The *New York Times* would soon overturn its own story about the demise of the rebel leaders with a sensational account of Fidel Castro’s survival, his army’s growing strength, and their heroic actions. What followed was a brief but intense love affair between the U.S. media, Fidel Castro, and the U.S. public. Beginning in February 1957, with *New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews, and continuing over the next two years, multitudes of U.S. journalists traveled to Cuba and brought back stories of the bearded rebels of the Sierra Maestra. Like heroes in popular adventure dramas, U.S. journalists presented the 26 of July fighters as renegades, Robin Hood-like figures on the fringe of society struggling for justice against a harsh and

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dangerous world. The journalists who traveled to Cuba at this time also envisioned themselves as actors on the revolutionary stage celebrating their own rebel spirit as much as that of the Cuban fighters. These journalists would produce a wide array of newspaper stories, magazine articles, and television programs that created an image of the Cuban rebels as “real men” who were not afraid to put their beliefs into action. These popular accounts not only portrayed the revolution as a fight against Batista but also connected the Cuban struggle to the values idealized in the U.S.’s own mythologized past of the U.S. founding fathers, western frontier myths, and the U.S. wartime self-sacrifice to promote “freedom and democracy.” The stories about Cuba’s “jungle fighters” inspired U.S. citizens to protest the Eisenhower administration’s military aid to Batista’s government, to send money and arms to the rebels, and in some cases to even join the fight alongside the revolutionaries in Cuba.

The U.S. visions of the bravery and fortitude of the 26 of July rebels were similar to the images contained in popular Western films, jungle adventure stories, and action comics of the 1940s and 1950s that formed the basis for what much of the U.S. public imagined “real men” to be like. Like the heroes from Westerns, the U.S. media presented Castro and his men as possessing exemplary masculine virtues—brave and decisive, willing to risk everything for what they believed. As in these U.S. popular myths, U.S. journalists depicted 26 of July rebels as capable of violence and bloodshed but also possessing fatherly love for their families and the Cuban nation. As the U.S. media equated the Cuban revolutionaries with popular visions of “true manhood,” Fidel Castro became the ultimate vision of the romanticized masculine ideal—a courageous, idealistic, father figure. Even though the United States official
sided with the Batista government, the intimate popular connections between the United States and Cuba produced an alternative relationship between the two countries. This separate relationship allowed the rebels to cultivate and construct a favorable vision of themselves for the U.S. and Cuban public and for the U.S. public to feel personally connected to Fidel Castro and the 26 of July Movement before they entered into Havana.4

**A Revolution Resurrected: Herbert Matthews and the Reporter/Rebel Hero**

According to 1950s statistics, Cuba had one of the highest standards of living in Latin America. These numbers did not reflect the reality for the majority of Cubans because the wealth of the country was concentrated in the capital and in the hands of the very few. The island had in essence two economies, one centered in Havana that was connected to the U.S. consumer economy and the other in the countryside comprised mainly of poor subsistence farmers who were disenfranchised and looked down upon by their fellow citizens in the capital. These class lines reflected Cuban racial lines as well: the wealthiest Cubans were white, the poorest black. Afro-Cubans were denied access not only to bastions of white privilege such as Havana’s private

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social clubs and beaches, but also to basic education and health care. These economic and racial inequalities on the island combined with an almost constant state of political turmoil punctuated by military coups and violence. This climate of political instability was further exacerbated by Fulgencio Batista’s coup in 1952 and the corruption and the brutality of his dictatorship. It was this combination of political corruption, class and racial inequality, and increasing economic polarization that set the stage for Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution.  

Throughout his dictatorship, Batista tried to control the negative reporting that tarnished his image at home and abroad. The Cuban leadership was also disturbed by the rising tide of pro-revolutionary propaganda from inside Cuba and the favorable reporting in the U.S. press. By the late 1950s, Batista had implemented a censorship campaign on the island in an attempt to ward off negative stories about his government. When the New York Times arrived on the island, Cuban government censors would literally cut out articles and editorials that were critical of the Batista government. After the false reports of his death, Castro knew that Batista’s censorship would prohibit the anti-Batista Cuban exile community from finding out

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that he was still alive and fighting. Many Cubans, including the deposed Cuban
president Carlos Prío Socarrás, had fled for the United States following Batista’s
coup. The ex-president would contribute large sums of money to the revolution,
including the 20,000 dollars used to purchase the Granma. Castro needed the
continued support of the Cuban exile community to aid the revolution financially.7 In
order to publicize their continuing struggle, Castro and the 26 of July Movement
revolutionaries prioritized getting a member of the U.S. press into the mountains.
Castro realized that support from the U.S. media would give the revolution increased
international legitimacy by publicly recognizing it as a threat and possible alternative
to the Batista government. The New York Times provided Castro and the 26 of July
Movement with exactly the type of publicity they needed.8

When Herbert Matthews reached his desk on December 3, 1956, the front
page of the New York Times contained the wire service report of Castro’s death.9

7 Carlos Prío Socarrás at one point claimed to have contributed over $250,000
to the revolution. For an account of Castro’s fundraising with the Cuban exile
community in the United States see Thomas Paterson, Contesting Castro: The United
States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution, (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1994), 15-33; Robert Quirk, Fidel Castro, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company,

8 For discussions of Batista’s censorship and the 26 of July Movement’s desire for
publicity see United Press “Censors Use Scissors: Cuba Applies Old Means of Handling
U.S. Publications,” New York Times, February 17, 1957, 19; Paterson, Contesting Castro,
69-80.

9 Herbert Matthews was born in New York City in 1900. He enlisted in the
Army in 1918 and was sent to France with the United State’s Tank Corps but never
saw battle. He returned to the U.S. and graduated from Columbia University in 1922
and immediately went to work for the New York Times. He covered the Italian
invasion of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II as a war
correspondent for the Times. After 1949 his ailing health forced a move back to New
Matthews was skeptical of the story and knew that the Times correspondent in Havana, Ruby Hart Philips, had plead unsuccessfully with her editors to hold the story until she could independently confirm United Press International’s sources. After the story of Castro’s death, the Times began reporting more on Cuba and the growing rancor with the Batista regime both in Cuba and the United States. When 26 of July supporters approached Philips in Havana, seeking a U.S. reporter to publicize the fact that Castro was alive, she immediately thought of Matthews. Philips cabled her colleague to let him know about the potential story. Matthews wasted no time and immediately made plans to travel to Cuba to interview the rebel leader.\textsuperscript{10}

Matthews and his wife Nancie flew to Havana on February 9, 1957. From the beginning, the trip to interview the rebel leader was colored with an air of adventure and intrigue. Matthews met with Philips, who had arranged with 26 of July Movement leaders to transport the couple from Havana to eastern side of the island. On the fifteenth of February Javier Pazos, a student leader in Havana, Liliam Mesa, a Havana socialite and Castro supporter, and Fastino Pérez, the 26 of July Movement leader in Havana, picked up the journalist at the Sevilla Biltmore hotel. Together they drove throughout the night, avoiding detection at army checkpoints to the city of Manzanillo. Nancie Matthews stayed in Manzanillo while Herbert hiked with his

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\textsuperscript{10} DePalma, The Man Who Invented Fidel, 34-41; Patterson, Contesting Castro, 74-77.
guides up into the foothills of the Sierra Maestra.\textsuperscript{11}

The rebel guides took Matthews to a camp that had been set up for the purpose of the interview. Celia Sánchez Manduley, a revolutionary leader and one of Castro’s most trusted confidants, instructed the eighteen rebels who were in the camp to repeatedly march pass the reporter in order to create the impression of a larger number of troops. Castro also played to these theatrics and implied that he was commanding more men then were actually in the 26 of July Movement at the time.\textsuperscript{12}

The interview lasted for more than three hours. Matthews had Castro sign and date his notes to prove their authenticity. He also took several photos of the rebel leader before returning to Havana. Nancie Matthews smuggled the notes and film out of the country in her girdle. On the plane ride home, Matthews had already begun formulating the story that would become the most important of his career.\textsuperscript{13}

When he arrived in New York, Matthews immediately began writing. The first of three articles appeared on the front page of the \textit{New York Times} on February 24, 1957. The historic headline read “Cuban Rebel Is Visited In Hideout: Castro Is Alive And Still Fighting In Mountains,” accompanied by a photo of a defiant Castro holding a rifle. [See Figure 2.1] In many ways this was one of the most important images of the revolution. It confirmed that Castro had survived and introduced the world to the romanticized vision of the leader that would help bring him the necessary


\textsuperscript{12} DePalma, \textit{The Man who Invented Fidel}, 83-86. Patterson, \textit{Contesting Castro}, 76.

\textsuperscript{13} Herbert Matthews, \textit{The Cuban Story}, 44.
strength and support to win the revolution, while, casting even more doubt onto Batista’s legitimacy and his hold over the island. Although the shade makes Castro’s image dark and somewhat obscured, the photo conveys the idea of Castro standing tall with his rifle hidden by an “impenetrable” landscape but very much a presence, unafraid, and ready to fight. To prove the authenticity of the photo, the *Times* editors included Castro’s dated signature under the photo.  

In the first article, Matthews detailed his own odyssey into the Sierra Maestra to meet with Castro as if it were an adventure drama—hours of driving muddy back roads, eluding army patrols, wading through icy streams, and clawing his way up mountains—all to get the story. Matthews boasted that he had broken “the tightest censorship in the history of Cuba,” and that no one outside of Cuba had seen Castro or knew about the rebel leader’s survival before he reported it. He gave the impression that he and Castro had both traveled great distances in order to meet. In his article, Matthews celebrated his own bravery in getting the interview linking the courage of his own journalistic enterprise to Castro and the revolution. In an internal *Times* memo, Matthews boasted, “The articles on Fidel Castro and the Cuban situation which I did in February have literally altered the course of Cuban history, and the job I have done has also had a sensational impact on Cuban affairs.”

Descriptions of this type of journalistic valor would be repeated by the multitudes of U.S. reporters who followed in Matthews’ footsteps, trekking into the Sierra Maestra  

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15 Matthews wrote this memo after another trip to Cuba in June 1957. See Matthews, *The Cuban Story*, 308-309.
in order “to get the story,” seeing themselves as participants in the revolution not just observers.\(^{16}\)

In addition to glorifying his own journalistic triumph, Matthews extolled on Castro’s charisma and masculine attributes. “The personality of the man is overpowering,” Matthews observed, “It was easy to see that his men adored him and also to see why he has caught the imagination of the youth all over the island. Here was an educated, dedicated, fanatic, a man of ideals, of courage and of remarkable qualities of leadership.”\(^{17}\) Matthews also admired Castro’s physicality. He described Castro as “quite a man—a powerful six-footer, olive-skinned, full-faced, with a straggly beard.”\(^{18}\) Matthews and the other U.S. reporters’ depictions of Castro’s physical prowess, intellect, and beard would play a dominant role in creating the image of the idealized masculine rebel leader. Castro’s beard in particular would become a lasting visual symbol of the revolution and the rebel leader. Castro’s beard held so much attention because it differentiated him from the white, clean-shaven, Ricky Ricardo-type Cubans that the U.S. public was used to. Because Batista had vowed to summarily execute anyone his forces captured with a beard, the rebel beards became symbols of commitment to the revolution and of personal bravery.


Besides the description and photo of Castro, the first story also contained a map entitled “Rebel Territory.” [See Figure 2.2] The map showed a large section of Cuba, falsely implying that Castro and his forces dominated the entire eastern half of the island. At the time of Matthews’s visit to Cuba, the Sierra Maestra provided the rebels with good cover but they hardly controlled the eighty miles of mountains that the map portrayed or any other large portion of Cuba. The map gave spatial legitimacy to Castro and the 26 of July movement and implied that the group possessed more strength than it actually did. Matthews went so far as to comment that “…one got the feeling that he (Castro) is now invincible.”\(^{19}\) This assertion of the inevitability of victory for Castro and the rebels would be repeated by many U.S. reporters continually giving strength to the 26 of July Movement while undermining Batista.

Matthews’ next two articles continued the same basic themes: Batista had the upper hand for now, but was sure to be defeated; Castro was leading the youth of Cuba, and symbolized hope for the nation; Castro’s fight was heroic, while Batista’s continued dictatorship was barbaric and corrupt. In his third article, Matthews reported on his meeting with José Antonio Escheverría, the leader of the revolutionary University Student Directorate (DEU) in Havana. Matthews described Escheverría as young and handsome, but was obviously not as enamored with the student leader and the urban underground as he was of Castro and the mountain fighters. U.S. reporters who followed Matthews also concentrated their efforts on

interviewing the 26 of July Movement leaders, ignoring the other organizations fighting the Cuban revolution. The image of the 26 of July rebels in the mountains captivated the imaginations of U.S. readers more than that of the urban fighters. Moreover, by June 1957, Batista’s forces had killed the most-important leaders of the urban underground, José Antonio Escheverría in Havana and Frank País in Santiago de Cuba. Batista’s troops and police had inadvertently helped solidify Castro and the 26 of July Movement place as the dominant revolutionary group in both image and reality. Leaders of the 26 of July Movement would reinforce the historical myth of a revolution centered primarily in the Sierra Maestra as part of its effort to consolidate power after January 1959.  

Recognizing the potential impact of Matthews’ article, Batista’s government responded with its own spin control. Batista’s Minister of Defense, Dr. Santiago Verdeja, claimed that the stories were “a chapter in a fantastic novel.” He challenged the *New York Times* to prove that the interview with Castro had actually taken place. “Mr. Matthews has not interviewed the pro-Communist insurgent, Fidel Castro,” he wrote: “and the information obtained came from certain oppositional sources. It is noted that Matthews published a photograph saying that it was of Fidel Castro. It seems strange that, having had an opportunity to penetrate the mountains and having had such an interview, Matthews did not have a photograph taken of himself with the pro-Communist insurgent in order to provide proof of what he wrote.”  

In response,  

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the *Times* published the minister’s statement along with a photo of Herbert Matthews and Fidel Castro smoking cigars together in the Sierra Maestra, proving that Castro was indeed alive and in command of the situation.22 [See Figure 2.3]

The *New York Times* and Herbert Matthews’ stories gave Castro the first propaganda victory that he needed to ensure international interest in the insurgency. Castro knew that his image and of the revolution were crucial in order to receive funding and arms support from the Cuban exile community in the United States. The articles established Castro in the minds of the U.S. audiences as the true leader of the revolution. Matthews and the U.S. reporters who followed created a vision of the invincibility of Castro’s revolutionary momentum and the inevitability of victory over Batista. Throughout 1957 and 1958 the U.S. press perpetuated this romanticized image of Castro as a “real man,” to be embraced by the U.S. public.

Mountains of Media Madness

Herbert Matthews not only raised Fidel Castro and the 26 of July Movement from a prematurely reported death, he also created an instant celebrity and began a U.S. media feeding frenzy. Immediately after the Matthews articles were published, scores of journalists swarmed the island in the hopes of grabbing the next big scoop on the rebels of the Sierra Maestra and the real life adventure happening only ninety miles away. Throughout 1957 and 1958, the 26 of July Movement actively courted and received continued support from the U.S. press. *Time* magazine alone ran over thirty stories during 1957 and 1958, on the revolutionaries, and Batista’s inability to

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22 Ibid.
stop the rebellion. Among the most famous journalists to travel to the island during this period were Jules Dubois (Chicago Tribune), Andrew St. George (Life and Look Magazine), Robert Taber (CBS), and celebrity-turned-newsman Errol Flynn. With each reporter the image of Castro and the 26 of July Movement was continuously constructed as an adventurous, young, well-educated, and heroic fighting machine pitted against the cruel and brutal dictatorship of Batista.23

The increasingly powerful medium of television also joined the ranks of the image-making process during the Cuban revolution. In early March 1957, two NBC television journalists, George Prentice and Anthony Falletti, traveled to the Oriente Province interviewing and filming anti-Batista critics. The Cuban Military Intelligence Service (SIM) detained the journalists and confiscated their film before releasing them at the behest of the U.S. consulate. This suppressive act only created more demand from eager rebels to have a U.S. television crew film them in the Sierra Maestra.24 Castro and the 26 of July leadership realized the undeniable evidence that television coverage could offer the rebels, since Batista still denied that Castro was a real force. This opportunity came in late April 1957 when CBS sent journalist Robert Taber and cameraman Wendell Hoffman to Cuba. Mario Llerena, who headed the 26 of July Movement Committee in New York, helped arrange for Taber and Hoffman to be escorted into the Sierra Maestra where they met up with the 26 of July forces. The


24 Paterson, Contesting Castro, 84.
reporters were able to penetrate Batista’s barriers by posing as Presbyterian missionaries on assignment to photograph their church’s schools on the island. The duo spent close to two weeks with the revolutionaries filming and interviewing the insurgents in the mountains. The result was the CBS documentary *Rebels of the Sierra Maestra: Cuba’s Jungle Fighters*, which aired in May 1957. This film provided U.S. audiences with the first televised accounts of the 26 of July rebels and Fidel Castro, which left no doubt that the rebellion continued and was increasing in strength.²⁵

Utilizing the language of Hollywood action/adventure films, *Rebels of the Sierra Maestra: Cuba’s Jungle Fighters* began with the narrator describing how Robert Taber and Wendell Hoffman walked one hundred and fifty miles into the mountains. Taber then took over the voice-over and described how difficult it was to get into the eastern mountains. He portrayed the journey like something out of a spy novel—sneaking through army roadblocks, avoiding detection and danger at every turn in order to reach their goal. Taber boasted that they were lucky to avoid capture and presented the viewer with the idea that Batista’s troops were actively pursuing the film crew, although there is no evidence that this actually occurred. Like Matthews’ description of his heroic efforts to reach Castro, Taber boasted about the hardships that they endured. While showing the blisters on their feet to the camera, Taber reported that they toted seventy-five pounds of equipment one hundred and fifty miles mostly uphill to “get the story.” Taber described their “mission.”

²⁵ Robert Taber, Director, *Rebels of the Sierra Maestra: Cuba’s Jungle Fighters* Produced by CBS News/Prudential Insurance, 1957; For a description of the making of *Rebels of the Sierra Maestra* see Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are*, 82-86.
Ours was a challenging but simple assignment. Not to explore the maze of Cuban politics but instead to penetrate the maze of jungle mountains in eastern Cuba and to find a rebel leader named Fidel Castro. The man the Cuban government says isn’t there. However surrounding these mountains some of the governments best troops. This then is the story of how we evaded 3,000 of these Cuban soldiers to join the rebels, to climb the remote Sierra Maestra Mountains, and to interview Castro atop the highest mountain in Cuba.26

Taber’s description made it sound as if the real story was that of his and Hoffman’s getting into the Sierra Maestra to do the interview rather than the substance of the interview itself.

“Two months and two tries, we finally got our news cameras into Castro’s headquarters.” Taber recounted, “These are the guerilla fighters, our first real look at them. This is the hardcore.” The viewer, through the footage and the voice-over, understood that it was not just the rebels who were considered “hardcore” but the reporters as well. Taber described the news assignment as a “mission,” further depicting himself as not just a reporter but also an important actor in the revolution itself. The importance of the U.S. reporters to the rebel cause was legitimate. Celia Sánchez and Haydée Santamaría led the CBS team into the Sierra Maestra into the mountains where two other 26 of July leaders, Camilo Cienfuegos and Raul Castro, met them. The fact that four of the top commanders from the 26 of July Movement personally escorted the reporters to their camp demonstrates the importance that the rebel leadership placed on U.S. television crew’s presence.

After the footage of the journalists hiking into the mountains, Taber further utilized Hollywood filmmaking techniques by having Castro and other 26 of July

26 Taber, Rebels of the Sierra Maestra, 1957.
Movement troops hide in bushes and brandish their rifles while voice-over narration introduced the “Jungle Fighters” to the sounds of flamenco guitar.

These are the guerilla fighters…Many of these men exiled to Mexico fought their way back into Cuba last December. Spending five days at sea. Assaulted by waves and Batista’s bombs in a sixty-foot PT Boat. Inside the mountains they are untouchable. Outside the mountains they are out numbered 100 to 1…With Fidel Castro here are former clerks, technicians, students, townspeople, and the simple campesinos, natives of these hills. All are members of the movement of the 26 of July…27

Like Matthews’s articles, the program does not explore any of the other organizations that were actively opposing Batista. Also like the New York Times articles, Taber exaggerates the 26 of July Movement’s geographical reach. He reports: “The military stronghold of the opposition lies to the east of the high sierra, which stretches for 200 miles along Cuba’s southern coast.” The film’s claim that the rebels were in control of a large area “200 miles” of Cuba was false. At the time Taber interviewed Castro, the 26 of July Movement was only safe in the farthest reaches of the Sierra Maestra mountains. Statements about the Castro’s forces controlling a larger area suggested that the rebels were more powerful and gave them added legitimacy. Taber could have made a more accurate case for the broad reach of the insurrection had he included the various factions who were fighting in Cuban cities but like Matthews articles the focus of the show was limited as its title suggested, to the “Jungle Fighters.”

In addition to the error on how much territory the rebels held, Taber’s use of the word “jungle” to describe the Sierra Maestra was a misnomer. However, the image of Castro fighting in the “jungle” enhanced the story of adventure that Taber

27 Ibid.
wanted to tell about the revolution, and by association, himself. By referring to the
Sierra Maestra as a jungle, Taber also connected his story to other male-centered
adventure stories that the U.S. public of the 1950s would have been familiar with,
especially Tarzan. Like Westerns, Tarzan and jungle adventure stories would have
been a common point of reference for a U.S. audience from the multitudes of films,
serials, and comics of the 1940s and 1950s.28

After the initial introduction of Castro and the rebels, the film focused on
three American teens who had snuck off the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay to
join the rebel fighters. The U.S. Consulate in Santiago de Cuba, acting on behalf of
the boys’ parents, had requested that Taber and Hoffman try to convince the boys to
come out of the mountains and return to their families. The boys were seventeen-
year-old Victor Buehlman, fifteen-year-old Michael Garvey, and twenty-year-old
Charles Ryan. [See Figure 2.4] In the film, the boys tested their courage and became
men in the Sierra Maestra. Like Tarzan’s enhanced masculinity from facing the
challenges of the jungle or men’s trials by violence in Westerns, Taber presented the
U.S. teens as learning to be men through the ordeals they were facing with the rebels.
Taber described the boys duties in the 26 of July army. “Mike is assigned to a light
machine gun with Castro’s rear guard.” Taber reported, “Chuck is rifle guard for the
machine gun.” Taber interviewed the boys and Charles Ryan spoke for all three. Ryan

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told Taber that they had come to the mountains out of a sense of duty. Ryan proclaimed,

We came to do our part for the freedom of the world…We just felt moved to come here and do our part. So we made contact with Cuban friends and asked them if there was anything we could do to help their revolution to help them to get freedom. So here we are in the Sierra Maestra.  

Journalists like Taber and Matthews echoed this sentiment and equated the Cuban struggle against Batista with the ideals of what the United States stood for: freedom, liberty, democracy. Castro praised the young Americans’ efforts but also gave them permission to leave with the reporters and return to their families in Guantánamo. Buehlman and Garvey chose to honor their parents’ wishes and leave with the CBS team; Ryan elected to stay, and ended up fighting along side the rebels. He later went on to do fundraising tours for the 26 of July Movement in the United States.

Taber’s portrayal of the U.S. teens and a subsequent *Life* magazine headline, “In a Man’s War, U.S. Boys Quit,” summed up the tone of the episode involving the young Americans.  

30 Taber and the article implied that the “boys” from the United States had been given an opportunity to prove themselves in the Cuban “jungle” but had quit and failed to become men. Like Matthews’ portrayal, Taber presented the revolutionaries as idealized masculine examples; the U.S. boys by comparison, were not able to meet the challenges that would have put them on equal footing with the equally young Cuban rebels. Only Charles Ryan, who was the oldest at twenty, was able to take on the challenge. The revolutionaries saw the propaganda benefits of

29 Taber, *Rebels of the Sierra Maestra*, 1957.

having U.S. boys in the Sierra but in reality were much more interested in funding and weapons from the United States than recruits. Castro emphasized this to Taber and explained that volunteers came into camp daily and were turned away because of lack of equipment and appealed to U.S. viewers for arms and money but not boys from Guantánamo.

At the end of the film, Taber hiked to the top of Pico Turquino to interview Castro. Castro talked about how Batista could not force them out of the mountains. Castro remarked that what Taber had seen was “just the beginning” and that “the last battle will be fought in the capital, you can be sure.” The film ended with the rebels singing the Cuban national anthem and holding up their weapons while crying out “Viva!” Taber then concluded his narration by putting the emphasis back on himself. Taber boasted, “Assignment completed. We have found Castro and our job is done but the future chapters yet to be written in these green mountains of the Sierra Maestra.” Like the Matthews articles, Rebels of the Sierra Maestra was a huge public relations victory for Fidel Castro and the 26 of July Movement. After its broadcast there could be no doubt in the United States that Castro was indeed alive and thriving in the mountains. Taber had perpetuated the heroic myth of the rebels and U.S. journalists who went to interview them, and set the stage for more stories about Castro and his jungle fighters.

As the reports came out of Cuba about the rebellion, more and more journalists traveled to the island to join in the adventure. The oddest and most

31 Taber, Rebels of the Sierra Maestra, 1957.

32 Ibid.
unlikely of these “journalists” to fall under the spell of the 26 of July Movement fever was actor Errol Flynn. Flynn was forty-nine when he went to Cuba in 1958 and by all accounts spent most of his time in Havana drinking and gambling with his friend Victor Pahlen. Somewhere between daiquiris, the aging adventure star became enamored of Fidel Castro and the growing romance surrounding the revolution. As a result, Flynn co-produced and appeared in two films about the Cuban revolution, *Cuban Story: The Truth About Fidel Castro’s Revolution* and *Cuban Rebel Girls*.

*Cuban Story* was a documentary shot by Victor Pahlen and narrated by Flynn. The film was essentially a series of clips of Cuba before, during, and immediately following the revolution, with Flynn appearing occasionally to narrate the cacophonous montage. In an interview conducted years later, Pahlen’s daughter stated that her father and Flynn thought that because of Castro’s wide popularity, the film would do well in the United States. However, the political climate between Cuba and the United States deteriorated so quickly that by the time the film was completed in late 1959 Castro had gone out of favor with much of the U.S. public. The only contemporary public exhibition of the film was a screening at the Moscow film festival in 1963 before it was shelved and forgotten for more than three decades.

*Cuban Story* began with Errol Flynn striding onto camera to the Cuban national anthem while smoking a cigarette. The set looked like an office set up in a hotel room with a map of Cuba on the wall and a globe. After addressing the camera,

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Flynn picked up the globe and pointed to Cuba, asserting that the country, “may be small but recently it has grown very big in the hearts of men who love liberty and humanity the world over.” Flynn mused that although he usually came to Cuba for a few daiquiris and “pastimes,” he began to think that there was something wrong on the island. He recalled that,

The name of this man Castro kept popping up all the time. Sometimes it was with hatred, sometimes just with mere scorn and disdain, especially if you happen to read the Batista controlled dictatorship press. Mostly when Castro’s name was mentioned it was with love and hope. But that was all secret, very secret, you were not allowed to say that. Well, as I said, the man began to intrigue me more and more. Who is this man? Is he some kind of Giuliano, the man they used to call the Robin Hood of Sicily? What flourishes here? What goes on in the hills of Cuba in the high sierra, in the Sierra Maestra?34

Flynn then proceeded to narrate over footage of himself gambling at the Hotel Capri casino. He described the gambling and nightlife of the early 1950s while juxtaposing his own experiences with the economic inequality on the island. As he learned more about the revolution, he explained that wanted to meet Castro and set off for the Sierra Maestra. Like the other reporters before him, Flynn described his own adventure and hardships while eluding Batista’s troops en route towards Castro’s “mountain hideout.” Flynn eventually met Castro, not in the Sierra Maestra, but late in 1958 just before the 26 of July army entered Santiago. The film star was duly impressed with the rebel leader and echoed Taber and Matthews describing Castro’s masculine charisma. Flynn proclaimed, “It doesn’t take more than half a minute for anyone to realize that here was a man, a real man.” Like the other reporters, he was also enamored with Castro’s beard and the pledge the 26 of July members had given not to shave until the end of the revolution. Flynn explained any man who had been

34 Pahlen, Cuban Story, 1959.
caught in the Sierra Maestra with a beard would have been executed by Batista’s troops for participating in the rebellion. Flynn and the other U.S. journalists, helped make the rebel beards emblematic of the revolution and a visible sign of courage.

After describing his meeting with Castro, Flynn showed the camera a scarf given to him after his meeting with Castro. On the one side was the Cuban coat of arms and on the other the Cuban flag combined with the flag of the 26 of July Movement. “It was woven and embroidered,” Flynn explained, “by one of the girls of the rebellion.” Like Matthews and Taber, Flynn mentioned the women in the rebel ranks but failed to identify the vital role that women played in the revolution as soldiers, preferring to devalue them to “girls” who sewed him a souvenir. Flynn, like other U.S. journalists, chose to report on the impressive qualities of the men of the mountains alone, evoking the idea that Castro and the “real men” of the revolution were living testament to the masculine virtues of freedom and democracy. After describing the scarf, Flynn ended his film sanctimoniously expressing his hope for Cuba and his own commitment to the revolution. “I’m personally staying on.” Flynn proclaimed, “Because I want to see that all those sacrifices made by those gallant people you just watched aren’t in vain.” He then read a telegram allegedly from Castro inviting U.S. citizens to come visit the island. “I invite you all to come the beautiful island of Cuba, a beautiful land.” Flynn apologized for his Spanish as he translated the message, “Where freedom and democracy and all the things that men live by are a reality.” Flynn, enamored until the end asserted, “I believe that. You believe it too.”
Flynn’s second film centered in title only the “girls of the rebellion.” *Cuban Rebel Girls* starred Flynn and his fifteen-year-old girlfriend Beverly Aadland.\(^{35}\) [See Figure 2.5] The film was to be Flynn’s last; he died shortly after its completion in October 1959. *Cuban Rebel Girls* contains actual footage from the revolution combined with poorly acted fictional scenes. Although the title implied that the film would be about the female revolutionaries, in actuality the film’s plot, like its poster, centered on Flynn. In the film, Flynn played a journalist, who like Herbert Matthews, traveled to the mountains to interview the rebels. This fictional role was one that Flynn would actually attempt to fill in Havana after the revolution by writing columns for Hearst’s *New York Journal-American*.\(^{36}\) The film consisted mainly of a series of melodramatic skirmishes and escapes with a few pauses to allow for Aadland to be filmed bathing in a river or kissing the rebels. Like *Cuban Story* most of *Cuban Rebel Girls* was shot without sound, with Flynn providing the necessary voice-over narration. The film was very low-budget; however, the revolutionary government did help the production value by allowing the crew to shoot scenes on a sugar train, a tank, and in a sugar mill. The 26 of July leadership’s cooperation spoke to their continued desire to cultivate any and all positive publicity in the United States following the revolution. The aging adventure star, like the aging journalist Matthews, appeared to relish the opportunity to have one last adventure and to be part of the heroic effort that the Cuban revolution represented.

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\(^{35}\) Barry Mahon, Director, *Cuban Rebel Girls (Assault of the Rebel Girls)*. Produced by Barry Mahon and Errol Flynn, 1959.

\(^{36}\) Gosse, *Where the Boys Are*, 98.
Revolution Triumphant and a New Media Blitz

Throughout 1957 and 1958, U.S. magazines, newspapers, televisions, and movie theaters were filled with images of the “heroic rebels”. Popular support for Castro and the 26 of July Movement was at an all-time high by the time Batista fled on New Years Eve 1959. This support had been made possible in part through the popular intimate ties between the two countries that were well established before the rebellion began. For two years the images and stories publicized in the U.S. press portrayed the rebels as pillars of masculine virtue fighting a moral and just war connected metaphorically to the U.S. own mythologized past. In an interview for Life Magazine, Guantánamo runaway Charles Ryan summed up the idea of the Cuban revolution for many people in the United States when he stated, “I figure the fight in Cuba is for the kind of ideals on which the U.S. was set up on.”37 Despite the widespread popular support for the rebels in the United States, the U.S. government remained unmoved by the favorable publicity and continued to openly support the Batista regime until March 1958. The Eisenhower government hoped that an alternative third option to either Castro or Batista would emerge to lead Cuba. The U.S. government in Washington and the U.S. Embassy in Havana recognized the growing popularity of Fidel Castro but believed the chances of the rebellion succeeding against the U.S.-backed Cuban military were slim at best.38

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37 “In Man’s War U.S. Boys Quit,” Life Magazine, May 27, 1957 p. 43

38 On the U.S. attitudes towards the Batista government and the revolution see Morris H. Morley, Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-
Batista’s government had been receiving enormous amounts of military aid under the U.S. Military Assistance Program (MAP) since 1953. MAP was a Cold War program designed to help bolster “hemispheric defense” against the Soviets. The weapons and elite army units trained by the United States in this program were never intended to be used internally but had been continuously deployed against the 26 of July Movement since 1957. Ambassador Earl T. Smith had urged the Eisenhower administration to continue to supply arms to Batista’s government in order to stabilize the country and kept encouraging Batista to hold elections and relinquish power. Eventually it was Batista himself and his failure to deliver on his promise to the U.S. government to hold free elections that turned him into a political liability that the U.S. government could no longer support. When Batista continued to use U.S. arms internally, and no election appeared, the Eisenhower administration suspended Cuban arms shipments in March 1958.39

Batista was furious at the action of the U.S. government and increased his efforts to end the insurrection once and for all. He re-imposed the restrictions on constitutional rights, banned travel to the Oriente province, and recruited an additional seven thousand troops to combat Castro.40 On June 28, 1958, the Cuban Army began Operation Verano, which was designed as an all-out offensive to crush

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40 Franqui, Diary of the Cuban Revolution, 293-294.
Castro and the 26 of July Movement in the Sierra Maestra. Batista committed 12,000 troops to the operation but over half were new recruits with little or no experience. Although Castro’s army had only three hundred people under arms at the time, they were able to defeat the forces and capture vast amounts of weapons. These victories emboldened the 26 of July Movement, and more Cubans from around the island joined the rebellion. Castro and his followers went on the offensive and over the next four months delivered key defeats to Batista’s armies on the eastern side of the island. The decisive battle for Santa Clara was lead by Camilo Cienfuegos and Che Guevara in late December 1958.41 Early in the morning of January 1, 1959, Castro and the 26 of July Movement entered Santiago de Cuba while a plane carrying Fulgencio Batista, his family, and his top advisors departed Cuba and flew to the Dominican Republic. The island was now in the hands of the rebels. And all eyes looked to Fidel Castro, who, as Hearst newsreels reported, was “thirty-two and the man of the hour.”42

The Eisenhower government instantaneously recognized the new Cuban government following Batista’s departure.43 In addition, U.S. and Cuban corporations rushed to praise the rebel victory and publicly acknowledge the new Cuban leadership. Business interests on the island took out full-page advertisements in the

Bohemia magazine congratulating the new Cuban leaders and celebrating the success and their hopes for more profitable times ahead. Coca Cola was the first company to run a full-page advertisement in Bohemia. The advertisement was just the blank page with a statement that read, “The Coca Cola Bottling Company rejoices with the people of Cuba for the resurgence of democratic liberties in our country.”

Over the next three months all types of companies—automakers, agricultural suppliers, banks, breweries, oil companies, motorcycle makers, and manufacturing companies—followed suit, publicly declaring their gratitude and hopes for the new Cuban leadership.

The victory of the Cuban revolution sparked off a new journalistic feeding frenzy from the United States. Newspapers and television networks rushed to be the first to interview Castro and to capture the 26 of July Movement’s victorious procession towards Havana. This new media blitz would continue to reinforce the masculine rebel identity of the new Cuban leader, while also serving to transform him in the minds of the U.S. public into the legitimate leader of the country. Castro, for his part, attempted to assure the U.S. public and U.S. government of the good intentions of the revolution in the hopes of being able to carry out his promised reforms. Jules Dubois of the Chicago Tribune was the first U.S. journalist to interview Castro after Batista’s departure. Dubois interviewed Castro in Holguín on

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44 Coca Cola Advertisement, Bohemia, January 11, 1959, 52.

45 Companies that took out advertisements in Bohemia included thirty-seven banks, wire company Pheldrak, ship outfitter Jarcia, Polar, Tropical, and Cristal Beers, Canada Dry Soda, Shell Oil, and BSA Motorcycles. All the advertisements essentially communicated the same thing—congratulations to the revolution and hopes for the restoration of democracy to Cuba. Bohemia, January-March, 1959.
January 3, 1959. When asked about Cuba’s future relations with the United States, Castro revealed his awareness for the need to present a more moderate image. “If I have had to be very cautious about my statements in the past,” Castro stated, “from now on I am going to have to be even more careful.”46 Because of his publicly stated aims of social and economic reform, Castro realized that his leadership and the revolution as a whole were in a tenuous position with the U.S. government.

Television crews also raced to Cuba hoping to be the first to interview Castro and report on the victorious revolutionaries. The winner of this race was none other than Ed Sullivan. Sullivan was by many accounts one of the most successful and influential people in the entertainment industry with his variety show *Toast of the Town*, but what Sullivan really wanted was to be considered a serious journalist. To impress Edward R. Murrow and the rest of the CBS news team, Sullivan flew to Cuba and met up with Castro on January 8, 1959, just before Castro entered into Havana. Sullivan actually scooped another CBS program, *Face the Nation*, with his interview.47 Sullivan asked how Castro would stop another dictatorship from happening in Cuba. Castro stated in English that this would be “Very Easy. Not permitting that any dictatorship to come again to rule our country. You can be sure that Batista will be the last dictator of Cuba. Because now we are going to improve our democratic institutions.” Sullivan then echoed other journalists who connected


47 For an account of Ed Sullivan’s desired to be taken seriously as a journalist and his interview with Castro see: Bob Schieffer, *Face the Nation: My Favorite Stories from the First Fifty Years of the Award-winning News Broadcast*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 43-56.
the Cuban revolution and Castro to the ideals of the United States. Sullivan openly praised Castro saying, “The people of the United States have great admiration for you and your men because you are in the real American tradition of a George Washington... We want you to like us and we to like you, you and Cuba. Fidel it has been a great honor to meet you and your men.” Sullivan presented Castro not as a leader to be feared but as a friend who held the same values and should be admired in the United States.\textsuperscript{48}

At the same time that Sullivan was interviewing Castro, the team of journalists from \textit{Face the Nation} flew to Cuba to film the rebel leader. The CBS team met with Castro in Havana on January 8, 1959. Ted Ayers, the producer of \textit{Face the Nation}, had received permission form the 26 of July Movement to interview Castro. The tone of the \textit{Face the Nation} interview was more confrontational than the other interviews that Castro did upon his arrival in Havana. The program consisted of a round-table discussion with several prominent U.S. journalists who directly questioned Castro regarding communism, the executions, and when free elections would be held. CBS news correspondent Stuart Novins moderated the twenty-eight minute discussion. He was joined by Richard Bates from CBS, William L. Ryan of the Associated Press, and Jay Mallin from \textit{Time/Life}.\textsuperscript{49}

The journalists began by asking Castro if he had any communist ties, to which he repeatedly said no. To counter this allegation, Castro pledged to hold elections and


\textsuperscript{49} Schieffer, \textit{Face the Nation}, 48.
assured his interviewers that there would be a democratically-elected government within eighteen months. He promised to return the Cuban government to how it was before Batista took over in March 1952. When asked about the trials and executions of Batista’s followers, Castro went on the defensive and said that the people executed were known criminals and that the people demanded action. Castro explained, “Justice is the first thing necessary for the happiness of the country. We never punished anybody without trial, the proof is easy, we respect human rights.” Throughout the interview, Castro seemed more guarded about his answers and continuously made the journalists explain their questions. Castro’s answers were framed to alleviate U.S. fears and to present himself as a leader forced to make difficult decisions no different then U.S. leaders in similar situations. Castro realized that U.S. public opinion was as crucial for him to keep power as it was for him to gain it in the first place.

Another facet of this media blitz presented not just Castro’s rugged masculinity but also his gentle “human side.” Invoking another common image of “true manhood,” Castro was presented as a gentle father figure, the soldier who could also be nurturing and kind. Hearst Metronome’s Rebel in the Mountains: The Fidel

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50 Stuart Novins, Director, *Face the Nation*, CBS, January 11, 1959.

*Castro Story* portrayed Castro as “quick and decisive, without fear or flaw, a doctor of philosophy, and a god to his woman—Celia Sanchez.” Castro’s men, the narrator explained, “pledged their allegiance to live or die for the rebel of the mountains.” However, the narrator also stated that Castro was “gentle with children” and was a man “who gives and receives affection easily.” This caring side of the revolution manifested itself in scenes of the rebels making bread with the peasants of the Sierra Maestra set to romantic music. The film closed with scenes of Castro as a “prophet of plenty,” a father figure and breadwinner for his “family,” the Cuban nation.52

The U.S. media’s emphasis on Castro as a father figure whom the U.S. public should not fear of was prevalent in the post-victory depictions of the rebel leader. Nowhere was this more evident then Edward R. Murrow’s interview with Castro for his show *Person to Person*. Murrow was one of the most respected names in 1950s television journalism and rose to fame when he challenged Senator Joseph McCarthy on his show *See It Now*. His show *Person to Person* was considered to be “softer journalism” and was a highly popular CBS program. The show’s premise was to take extraordinary people and talk to them in their most normal setting, their own homes.53

Murrow, like many other U.S. journalists, introduced Castro to his audience as a hero. Murrow reported, “Just thirty days ago Fidel Castro entered Havana to be greeted by cheering mobs as one of the greatest heroes in Cuba’s history. A week before that General Batista and his top aids had fled the country. Leaving it to Castro,


his rebel army, and their supporters.” Murrow interviewed Castro in his suite at the Havana Hilton, as in the other early interviews by U.S. television reporters, the conversation was in English. Castro appeared in pajamas seated on a sofa. Castro could have been dressed in fatigues or normal clothes but chose the most disarming of apparel, pajamas. This choice of clothing, along with the rest of the interview, was designed to present the gentle side of the Cuban leader to a U.S. audience. His mannerisms and speech were not of the fiery orator that inspired the awe of Cuban masses, but were instead downplayed, meekly appealing to U.S. viewers, his head cocked with puppy dog eyes. [See Figure 2.6]

Murrow began the interview with a personal question asking Castro about his reunion with his mother. Castro responded emotionally that when his mother saw him “she began to cry.” To emphasize this softer side of Castro even more, Castro’s son Fidelito was sent out in front of the cameras bearing a puppy, “a gift to his father.” Fidelito was often put in the spotlight with his father in the early days of the 26 of July takeover in order to emphasize Castro’s gentle fatherly nature.54 [See Figure 2.7] The emphasis on Castro’s affectionate side was seemingly meant to round out his image as a leader—strong but also compassionate to his people. Just as U.S. presidents often pose with their children and pets, Castro appeared to want to present himself as a caring family man.

Like other reporters, Murrow asked Castro if he worried about communist influence in Cuba. Castro cooed, “Oh I am not worried because really there is not a

threat of Communism here in Cuba.” Murrow also asked whether or not Castro thought U.S. tourists would return to Cuba. “Well if you help us.” Castro honestly answered, “We ask that people from the United States come and visit our wonderful friendship country.” Murrow continued by asking when Castro would come to the United States to visit and if he would be coming “with the beard or without it?” “It’s possible if I go soon to the United States with the beard.” Castro responded, “Because I am not thinking now to cut my beard. Because I am accustomed to my beard. And my beard means many things to my country. When we have fulfilled our promise of good government I will cut my beard.” In what could have been a superficial part of the interview, Castro endeavored to transform the symbolic meaning of his beard from one of rebel strength and defiance to a promise of good government and hope for the future. In so doing, Castro attempted to demystify a part of the physical appearance that was potentially threatening to a cleaned shaved U.S. male public and instead mark his beard as a symbol of solidarity with U.S. aspirations and values of honesty and democracy. Murrow concluded the interview on a personal note by asking the pajama-clad Castro what books he had been reading and by saying goodnight to Fidelito.55

This humanization of Castro as a “real man” who could command troops and fight but who also had feelings was important to the 26 of July Movement’s public relations efforts in the early months after Castro’s rise to power. Castro was trying to assure a nervous Cuban and U.S. public and an even more nervous U.S. government that he was not a threat and was thoroughly situated on the correct side of the Cold

55 Edward R. Murrow, Director, Person to Person, CBS, February 6, 1959.
War. Through these portrayals, the image-makers and Castro himself were attempting to present a more well-rounded vision of a leader who was not only a “jungle fighter” but also compassionate and kind. It is within this balanced presentation that Castro became even more acceptable to both the Cuban and U.S. public as the new “father” to the Cuban nation. Castro was tapping into the same kinds of family metaphors that had made Ricky Ricardo a beloved Cuban in the United States—strong, steady, caring, and in control. It was this gentle Castro that traveled to the United States in the spring of 1959 with the hopes of shoring up relations with his neighbors.

**A Revolution of Public Relations: Castro’s Victory Tour of the United States**

In April 1959, the U.S. media, the biggest advocate for the Cuban revolution, staged a massive public relations campaign. At the urging of *Chicago Tribune* reporter Jules Dubois, the American Society of Newspaper Editors invited Fidel Castro to the United States on an unofficial eleven-day tour of the United States. The U.S. State Department criticized the visit because it had not been arranged through official diplomatic channels. President Eisenhower chose not to meet with the new Cuban leader, preferring instead to play golf in Augusta, Georgia. Castro was allowed to meet “informally” with Vice President Nixon and Acting Secretary of State Christian A. Herter. Although the expectation was that Castro would be seeking economic aid and a higher sugar quota, Castro kept his visit devoted to what

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he called a “truth operation” to educate the American public about the revolution.  

The sites chosen for his visit were all centers of the U.S. establishment with whom Castro was seeking acceptance. Castro toured and spoke in Washington DC, New York City, Princeton, and Harvard University before flying back to Havana. During the trip enthusiastic fans greeted the bearded rebel wherever he landed and his visit was headline news for the duration of his stay.

Castro’s visit was a testament to the power of his media image in the United States. Although “unofficial,” his well-publicized visit drew large crowds everywhere he went. In Washington, DC, a crowd of fifteen hundred supporters met the Cuban leader’s plane. [See Figure 2.8] Castro reaffirmed the unofficial nature of his trip when throngs of supporters greeted him and he announced, “I have come here to speak to the people of the United States. I hope the people of the United States will understand better the people of Cuba, and I hope to understand better the people of the United States.” In Washington and New York he breezed past his own security to shake hands with the adoring masses. He laid wreathes at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and recited the Gettysburg Address aloud while being photographed in front of the Lincoln Memorial.


59 Ibid.


61 Photo of Castro laying the wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier see:Dana Adams Schmidt, “Castro Stresses Land Reform Aims” New York Times,
While in the United States, Castro met with the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations and U.S. House Foreign Affairs committees, as well as with the U.S. press at both the Newspaper Editor’s meeting and on television with Meet the Press. As with the early U.S. interviews, Castro spoke in English, appealing directly to the American public and leadership in their own language. Castro gave medals to those reporters who had interviewed him during the revolution and had helped the 26 of July Movement to gain support in the United States. Herbert Matthews, Sam Halper, Robert Taber, Georgette Chapelle, Ray Brennan, Andrew St. George, Morton Silverstein, Jules DuBois, Robert Branson, Homer Bigart, Wendell Hoffman, Charles Shaw, and Karl Meyer each received a hand-struck medal of appreciation from the new Cuban government. Castro insisted that Cuba would have a free press and that “the free press is the first enemy of dictatorship.” At these meetings and throughout the trip, Castro repeatedly asserted that the Cuban revolution was not communistic but humanistic. Castro also assured U.S. officials that the revolution was “not for export,” but that Cuba might serve as an example for other struggles against dictatorships in Latin America.  

During Castro’s tour of the United States special attention was given to the continued efforts to reassure the U.S. public that they had nothing to fear from the new Cuban leader. Like the first interviews of Castro in Havana, the U.S. press emphasized the “softer” side of Castro’s masculinity while he was in the United States.  

April 21, 1959, 5. For the photo of Castro in front of the Lincoln Memorial see Bohemia, April 26, 1959, 64.  

States. Just as the Cuban press had paraded Fidelito out during the first days after the triumph of the revolution to emphasize Castro’s fatherly and gentle side, so, too, in the United States, Castro had his photo taken with children everywhere. Toy manufacturer Jack Noahson made over a hundred thousand 26 of July Movement outfits for boys to play revolution. Photos of these outfits also appeared in Life magazine with New Jersey kids dressed in fake beards and toy guns playing revolution in the New Jersey woods with the headline “Castro-bearded Babes in the Woods.”63

**Figure 2.9 and 2.10** The beards of the rebels were made out of dog hair and were the most obvious visual symbol of who the boys were playing. Like playing cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers, Castro and the 26 of July rebels were for a brief moment seen as an appropriate form of masculine play for U.S. boys. Sociologists and psychologists view the playing of masculine role models as a means to socialize boys into male society. The images of U.S. boys “playing Castro” in Life magazine again demonstrated the widespread acceptance of the Cuban leader as an acceptable masculine role model. The image that the U.S. journalists had created of the valiant rebel heroes had filtered into the common view of the U.S. public. For a brief moment, it was acceptable for U.S. boys to pretend to be Cuban revolutionaries in the same way that they played U.S. myths such as Cowboys and Indians, Daniel Boone, or World War II. In many ways the photo of the New Jersey boys in dog-hair

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beards represented the height of Castro’s popularity and acceptance in the United States.64

Another example of how the U.S. press’s positive depiction of Castro had transferred to other forms of popular media can be seen in the 1959 U.S. comic book *Battle*.65 The title of the story was “The Man with the Beard!” with a drawing of a triumphant Castro greeting the Cuban masses. [See Figure 2.11] This comic portrayed the history of Castro and the Cuban revolution in twenty panels. The description of the first panel read,

This is Fidel Castro, the man with the beard, the leader of “Los Barbudos” the bearded rebel army that has taken Cuba in a much-publicized war! This is the man Cuba hail as hero and liberator! This the man…and this was his war…and both are inseparable!

The description throughout the comic accentuated the image of Castro as the ultimate “man.” The drawings of Castro portray him as a determined warrior and politician fighting for the good of his country and as the legitimate leader of the revolution. The comic book depiction echoes the image created by U.S. journalists and even explicitly mentions U.S. newspapermen coming to interview the rebels in the mountains. Besides the story of the Cuban revolution, the rest of the comic was filled with stories of U.S. soldiers in World War II, U.S. submarines, U.S. troops in Korea, and work-

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out advertisements including a weight-training program from Charles Atlas “the world’s most perfectly developed man.” The inclusion of Castro in this company again implied his acceptance as a viable role male model for U.S. boys in the same way as United States’ own mythical heroes.  

Throughout his trip Castro played to his friendly image and tried to connect to his U.S. audience in various ways. While in New York, Castro “spontaneously” decided to go to the Bronx Zoo. While at the zoo, he fed the elephants, crossed a barrier to pet a Bengal tiger, and ate ice cream and a hotdog. In the photos throughout the trip Castro looks as if he is having a legitimately good time. [See Figure 2.12] The image of him jumping the barrier to touch the tiger again played to the images of Castro’s unequalled daring. The U.S. public must have appreciated the image of the “jungle fighter” petting the jungle cat. Throughout his trip, Castro seized every opportunity to demonstrate to his American audiences that he was very much like them. Like Cuba’s promotion of tourism during the 1950s, Castro’s appeal to the U.S. public was one of the exotic mixed with the familiar. In this guise there was much to

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be interested in Cuba’s rebel leader but little to fear from the change in Cuban leadership.67

Castro charmed his way through the two-week tour of the United States. He spoke English to U.S. officials and reporters, he engaged energetically with the crowds waiting to see him, he smiled and waved enthusiastically wherever he went. Many of the leaders in the United States misread these actions and the photos of the Cuban leader’s gentler side. Some in the U.S. government thought of Castro and the rebel leadership as children “playing” at revolution and now “playing” at running a country. Both Vice President Richard Nixon and Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter commented that Castro seemed quite “child-like” and “innocent.” And that like a child he was capable of doing “almost anything” and therefore needed to be “led.”68

These comments from the U.S. leadership harkened back to older metaphors of the Cuban people as children. Images of Cubans as children had been a constant metaphor in the U.S. press since the United States stepped in against the Spanish in 1898. Cubans were depicted as children who needed U.S. care and direction to govern their own island. Members of the U.S. government and the U.S. media had long held that Cubans including the new Castro regime were incapable of governing themselves. These images also supported the traditional U.S. stance of “no transfer” on the island, whereas no other power including the Cubans themselves would be


68 Patterson, Contesting Castro, 257. Peréz, On Becoming Cuban, 490.
allowed to govern the island. By portraying Cubans as children, the U.S. popular press justified continued U.S. dominance over the island.69 This continued misconception of the capacity and will of the Cuban leadership and people would lead to many miscalculations on the part of the U.S. government in the years to come.

Conclusion

Although it is often forgotten or purposely omitted from history, from January 1957 until May 1959, a broad segment of the American public embraced Fidel Castro the Cuban revolutionaries as heroes. Beginning with Herbert Matthews’ trek into the mountains, throngs of U.S. journalists traveled to Cuba to report on the bearded “jungle fighters” of the Sierra Maestra. The U.S. popular press celebrated the rebels as a vision of “true manhood.” Within the popular accounts of the Cuban rebellion, U.S. journalists portrayed Fidel Castro as the ultimate vision of the romanticized masculine ideal—brave and decisive, willing to risk everything for what he believed, while at the same time fatherly and caring for the Cuban nation. These same journalists used their stories of trekking into Cuba’s eastern mountains as a means to celebrate their own masculine identity and saw themselves as participating, not just reporting, in the revolution.

The U.S. media’s depictions of the 26 of July Movement rebels were similar to the images of heroes in popular U.S. Western films, jungle adventure stories, and action comics of the 1940s and 1950s. These popular cultural stories and images contained the basis for what the U.S. public imagined “real men” to be like. The U.S.

69 For a discussion of the popular U.S. metaphor of Cuba as a child see Peréz, *Cuba in the American Imagination*, 105-174.
public in turn saw the Cuban revolution as reflecting their own values mythologized in the U.S.’s own heroic past—fighting for freedom and liberty in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds. Ironically, the U.S. government had been heavily responsible for creating the conditions that Castro and the revolution fought against, namely Batista’s repressive government and the economic disparity that plagued the island. But the media’s celebration of the revolution as reflecting U.S. values, allowed the U.S. public to ignore these contradictions. Even though the United States official sided with the Batista government, the popular culture connections with Castro and the 26 of July Movement produced an alternative relationship between the two countries. This separate relationship allowed the rebels to construct a favorable vision of themselves for the U.S. and Cuban public before they entered into Havana.

For others, especially in the U.S. government and some members of the U.S. press, the revolution was viewed with measured skepticism. John Gunther in his television series *High Road* summed up this attitude early in 1959. Gunther cautioned,

> No matter how the new Cuban revolution works out. We ought to recognize that it isn’t superficial. A profound national upheaval is taking place. Fidel Castro showed us how a revolution can be won. The question that remains is can he consolidate his victory and bring peace and freedom to the Cuban people? Can he deliver? Will the Cuban people get what they have been waiting for since 1898? And what effect is this fluid revolutionary situation in Cuba going to have on other countries in the Caribbean and Latin America so important to the United States? These are urgent questions we don’t yet know the final answers yet.”

Questions over the real meaning of the revolution started the moment that Batista fled and would continue to loom over Cuba and the United States for the next year.

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During Castro’s triumphal visit to the United States, the U.S. press continued to express concerns over the influence of Communism on the new government, the trials and executions of Batista’s henchmen, increasing trade with the Soviet Union, the security of property owned by U.S. citizens, freedom to criticize the new government, and when elections would be held. Castro’s manipulation and exploitation of his media image kept these fears at bay temporarily and allowed time for the new government to enact many of the economic and social reforms that he had promised while in the Sierra Maestra.

The media love affair and the myth of the heroic revolutionary ended when the actual Cuban revolution began, when the “real men” of the Sierra Maestra came down from the mountains and began the real work of reform. When the military rebellion turned into actual social revolution with all of its components—executions, agrarian reform, commitment to fervent nationalism, and anti-Americanism—the U.S. government, press, and public abandoned Castro and “his” revolution. The long-promised reforms placed Castro and the revolutionary government in direct confrontation with the dominant commercial interests of the United States, and, by extension, with the Eisenhower administration. The U.S. reaction to the Cuba’s revolutionary reforms would eventually push the island away from its intimate neighbor and into the Soviet sphere of influence. The myth of “The man with the beard” Fidel Castro, and the “real men” of the 26 of July Movement created by the U.S. press, eventually exploded into enemy images of a communist threat ninety miles away. The image of the Cuban revolutionary fighter who was linked in spirit to the United States own heroic myths would be replaced by an aesthetic of the enemy
that would dominate the visual discourse between the two nations for the next fifty
years.
Matthews’ articles brought the 26 of July Movement back to life.
Figure 2.2 Map from the February 24, 1957 *New York Times*. The map gave a false impression of the size of territory being occupied by the 26 of July rebels.
Figure 2.3 Fidel Castro and Herbert Matthews smoking cigars together in the Sierra Maestra. This photo was published in the *New York Times* as a response to the Batista government’s claim that Matthews had not actually seen Castro.  
*New York Times* February 28, 1957
Figure 2.4 Robert Taber (seated) interviewing the three American boys who came from the U.S. Navy Base at Guantánamo Bay to fight with the 26 of July forces. (From left to right are fifteen-years-old Michael Garvey, twenty-year-old Charles Ryan, and seventeen-year-old Victor Buehlman.) Photo from the film *Rebels of the Sierra Maestra: Cuba’s Jungle Fighters*, Robert Taber, Director, Produced by CBS News/Prudential Insurance, 1957.
Figure 2.5 Errol Flynn’s *Cuban Rebel Girls* Directed by Barry Mahon
Produced by Errol Flynn and Exploit Films. (1959)
Figure 2.6 Castro seated with Fidelito and his puppy as he appeals to the U.S. public on the Edward R. Murrow Fidel Castro *Person to Person* on CBS Television February 6, 1959.
CASTRO'S SON, Fidelito, who had been living in New York, is held by rebels as he rides in procession.

Figure 2.7 Life Magazine “Liberator’s Triumphant March through an Ecstatic Island,” Life Magazine January 19, 1959, p. 31.
Figure 2.8 Fidel Castro arrives in Washington, DC April 16, 1959 to jubilant crowds. *New York Times* April 16, 1959, Page 6.
**Figure 2.9** New Jersey boys playing at being 26 of July Movement rebels in the New Jersey woods. \textit{“Castro’s Babes in the Woods”} \textit{Life} Magazine April 13, 1959 Page 17
Figure 2.10 New Jersey boys playing at being 26 of July Movement rebels in the New Jersey woods. “Castro’s Babes in the Woods” Life Magazine April 13, 1959 Page 16
Figure 2.11 Two Panels from the comic book *Battle*, New York: Male Publishing Corporation, October 1959.
Figure 2.12 Fidel Castro visited the Bronx Zoo on his trip to the United States. In this photo he is seen after jumping over a fence to pet the Bengal Tiger. Again asserting his fearlessness to a enraptured public. *New York Times* April 25, 1959, Page 1.
CHAPTER THREE

From Smiling Face to Most Dangerous Place: The Destruction of U.S.-Cuban Relations and the Nature of the Enemy, 1959-1963

When I saw the missiles that they dropped on Mario’s home, I swore that the Americans would pay dearly for what they were doing. When this war is finished, a longer and bigger war will start for me: the war that I am going to unleash against them. This will be my true destiny.

—Fidel Castro to Celia Sanchez, (1958)

I want to talk with you tonight about the most glaring failure of American foreign policy today—about a Communist menace that has been permitted to arise under our very noses, only 90 miles from our shores. I am talking about the once friendly island that our own shortsighted policies helped make communism's first Caribbean base: the island of Cuba.

—John Kennedy, Campaigning NY, (1960)

Ramos Clemente, a would-be god in dungarees, strangled by an illusion, that will-o’-the-wisp mirage that dangles from the sky in front of the eyes of all ambitious men, all tyrants—and any resemblance to tyrants living or dead is hardly coincidental, whether it be here or in the Twilight Zone.

—Rod Serling, The Twilight Zone, (1961)

On January 1, 1959, Cubans poured into the streets of Havana to celebrate the news of Castro’s victory and Batista’s departure. The revelry soon turned to revenge as seven years of repression was released in a tidal wave of rage and violence against
the symbols of the Batista’s corruption. The crowd decapitated parking meters and paraded them through the capital streets, sacked and burned the homes and businesses of former Batista captains, and then turned their anger on what many Cubans considered to be the most glaring symbols of the corruption and repression that had dominated the island, Havana’s casinos. The mob vandalized almost every casino in Havana, throwing gaming tables and slot machines into the street and setting them on fire.¹

After the revolutionary forces entered the city and suppressed the remaining pockets of resistance and violence, the new Cuban leadership quickly attempted to revitalize the tourism industry in order to provide a much needed revenue stream for the country. After sugar, tourism had often been referred to as Cuba’s “second harvest” but tourism revenues had declined precipitously during the more than two years of fighting on the island.² The 26 of July Movement leaders hoped to tap this second harvest and to renew the industry without the corruption and vice associated with Batista. In many of his initial interviews, Castro encouraged tourists “from the

¹ The parking meters in Havana had been one of the concessions of Batista’s relatives and therefore were one of the first targets destroyed by the mob. For descriptions of the celebrations and riots after Batista’s departure see: Wayne S. Smith, The Closest of Enemies: A Personal and Diplomatic History of the Castro Years, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 38-41; For other accounts of Batista’s flight and the celebration that followed see Robert Quirk, Fidel Castro, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 202-209; Thomas G. Paterson, Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 226-237.

² For discussions on the economic importance of Cuban tourism see Rosalie Schwartz, Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Evaristo Villalba Garrido, Cuba y El Turismo, (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1993).
The Cuban leadership’s efforts to court U.S. tourists continued throughout 1959 and into early 1960.

In an ambitious attempt to revive tourism to the island, the new government hosted the American Society for Travel Agents (ASTA) conference in Havana on October 18, 1959. The conference, originally planned by the Batista regime, now featured a program with a photo of the smiling new Cuban “hosts”—Fidel and Raúl Castro. Fidel attended many of the events in the hope of assuring travel professionals of the new government’s commitment to reviving the tourist industry. The conference participants were treated to seven days of fun and frivolity as the revolutionary government tried to showcase the island as a still-ideal Caribbean tourist destination. The convention was just one of new government’s efforts to persuade tourists to return to the island.

In addition to the conference, the Cuban government continued to run full-page advertisements in U.S. newspapers encouraging tourists to “Get on the

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Friendship Airlift to Cuba.” The Cuban government’s Tourism Commission advertisements also played to earlier visions of connection and friendship. These advertisements featured the smiling face of an unassuming white Cuban hotel worker ready to serve U.S. tourists. [See Figure 3.1] The caption read:

The face of Cuba is a friendly face and the heart of Cuba is warm with hospitality! From the clerks who greet you at the airport, the driver who takes you to your hotel, the bootblacks, guides, chambermaids, flower venders, waiters and bus drivers…to the señoras and señores you pass on the street – the faces you meet in Cuba are sincerely friendly. They are the smiling faces of a people who have always liked and welcomed visitors from North America, and nothing has changed today! All Cuba offers its friendship, and opens its lovely green island to your pleasure. You’ll enjoy weather as sunny and beautiful as the Cuban countryside…nightlife as cosmopolitan as in any European capital…historic sights; superb swimming, fishing, hunting, and boating; and memorable shopping! Come soon. You’ll be greeted by smiling faces wherever you go – in Cuba, one of the Caribbean’s most inviting islands. Ask your Travel Agent now. Send for brochures and schedule of events!

The Cuban government wanted to reassure the U.S. public with familiar images of friendship and connectivity that hearkened back to pre-revolutionary images of a Cuba created for North American visitors. This image of “Cuba’s friendly face” was a white, clean-shaven, Ricky Ricardo-type persona, chosen to be purposely different from the visions of the bearded-rebels that were increasingly falling out of favor in the United States.

Even though the revolutionary government went to great efforts in an attempt to save its U.S. tourism market, deteriorating political relations between Cuba and the

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7 “The Face of Cuba is a Friendly Face” (Advertisement), New York Times, January 10, 1960: 36X.
United States made these attempts futile. By January 1960 when the advertisements promoting Cuba’s “friendly face” appeared, the revolutionary Cuban government had already enacted several reforms that adversely effected U.S. commercial interests: land reform, reduced utility rates, lower rent prices, and the nationalization of some U.S. owned industries. These reforms had brought increasing criticism from the U.S. government as had the revolutions military tribunals, increasing anti-American rhetoric, and closer economic relations with the Soviet Union. U.S. popular images of Cuba as a tourist paradise and the 26 of July Movement rebels as heroes were quickly replaced with visions of firing squads, Soviet ships docked at Havana harbors, and anti-American rallies. The porous border that had once been viewed as a natural boon for tourism and other commercial interests was re-imagined as a source of “maximum danger.” The U.S. media transformed Cuba’s “friendly face” into a non-human communist menace lurking only ninety miles from U.S. shores. Meanwhile, Cubans—confronted by an increasingly aggressive U.S. government—came to see their northern neighbor not as a source of tourist dollars and consumer goods, but rather as a threat to be deterred only with the help of Soviet nuclear weapons.

This new hostile environment between Cuba and the United States spawned a multitude of hostile images aimed at degrading the other. These images were similar to well-known depictions of enemies in past hot war conflicts, including World War I and. During World War II, the Japanese and U.S. government created images that dehumanized and demonized each others’ entire population in order to ready their
armies to kill one another. Cuban and U.S. image-makers used similar visuals to represent the others’ governments as enemies and tapped into the collective memories of hot-war conflicts in both societies. The proliferation of these familiar forms of enemy-making increased the hostility between the two countries. These images included animals, insects, diseases, devils, monsters, and madmen. As with earlier popular images that had created popular connections between the two nations, these new images helped define and shape the antagonistic relationship for the masses beyond official diplomacy. During the initial break in relations between Cuba and the United States from 1959 to 1963, images in popular media that had linked the two nations were replaced with an aesthetic of enemy making that has remained crucial to the visual war between the two nations until this day.

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8 For fantastic discussions of the demonization and dehumanization of an enemy see Sam Keen’s work on the use of Jungian image archetypes throughout a variety of conflicts. Keen looks at the different groupings of hostile images throughout human history especially those mass produced during WWI and WWII. Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1986); For a fantastic discussion of the way that racial enemy images were used in WWII see John Dower’s *War without Mercy*. Dower explains how certain image archetypes were used during WWII to demean each other through racist discourse that was designed to persuade each side to kill the other. John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1987); For a discussion of traditional image tropes used in U.S. political cartoons about Latin America see John J. Johnson, *Latin America in Caricature*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1980); For a discussion about the use of visual metaphors produced by the U.S. about Cuba up to the revolution see Louis Jr. Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); See also Vilho Harle, *The Enemy with a Thousand Faces: The Tradition of the Other in Western Political Thought and History*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000); Paul Martin Lester and Susan Dente Ross, *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).
Neighbors, Ninety miles, and the Break in U.S.-Cuban Relations

Throughout the first few months of 1959, Fidel Castro and the new Cuban leadership received widespread support from the U.S. public. However, this honeymoon period with the U.S. press and public was ultimately short-lived. Indeed, some members of the Eisenhower administration, including Vice President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Christian Herter, had immediate concerns about Castro’s political direction. After the revolutionary government began to execute Batista’s henchmen and enact the social and economic reforms it had promised during the revolution, increasing numbers in the U.S. government and the U.S. public began to voice their concerns over the political leanings of the revolutionary leadership.⁹

Throughout the revolution, the 26 of July Movement leadership promised a series of economic and social reforms to be enacted after the defeat of Batista. True to their word, in the early months of 1959, the revolutionary government reduced rents, cut the price of electricity by thirty percent, and nationalized the U.S.-owned Cuban Telephone Company. In addition, the new Cuban government made good on one of the main promises made during the revolution by enacting broad-reaching agrarian reform. Similar land reform measures had previously placed Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in direct confrontation with U.S. corporate interests and eventually led to his removal from office and exile through a CIA directed coup in 1954.

Cuban government knew that any attempt at real agrarian reform in Latin America was almost sure to elicit a negative response from the U.S. government.\textsuperscript{10}

Although well aware of the risks, the new Cuban government passed the first agrarian reform law in May 1959. The law limited private land ownership to one thousand acres with a three thousand acres exception for those growing sugar, rice, or cattle. Any acreage over the limit was expropriated. The owners, in lieu of cash, were paid with a twenty-year government bond with a fixed interest rate of four and a half percent for the declared tax value of the land. In many cases large landholders, including many U.S. corporations, had not adjusted their tax assessments for twenty to thirty years, which had allowed them to pay a pittance on their taxes. This made the amounts that the revolutionary government compensated the owners less than the actual land value. As expected, agrarian reform prompted concern from U.S. agricultural interests and members of the U.S. government.\textsuperscript{11}

Early economic reforms angered many U.S. business leaders and further worried the U.S. government about the new Cuban government’s political leanings.


\textsuperscript{11} U.S. agricultural corporations such as United Fruit were particularly concerned about land reform and had significant political leverage in Washington. For the timeline of revolutionary reforms and U.S. response see Jane Franklin, \textit{Cuba and the United States: A Chronological History} (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997), 18-23 and Louis Pérez Jr., \textit{Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy} (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 238-243.
These fears were compounded in February 1960 when Cuba and the Soviet Union brokered an agreement whereby the Soviets would supply Cuba with crude oil, petroleum products, wheat, fertilizer, and machinery in exchange for sugar. Tensions between the two countries rose significantly when the first shipments of Soviet crude arrived in Cuba in July 1960. With Soviet tankers sitting in Havana harbor, U.S. and British refineries—in compliance with the wishes of their governments—refused to refine the oil. In response, the Cuban government nationalized the Esso, Shell, and Texaco refineries.\textsuperscript{12} Reacting to the nationalization of the refineries, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution to terminate the Cuban sugar quota for the rest of 1960, prompting President Eisenhower to publicly declare that this action amounted to direct economic sanctions against Cuba. Meanwhile, the Cuban government continued efforts to free the island of U.S. control by nationalizing additional U.S. properties and businesses. The Eisenhower administration responded by canceling the Cuban sugar quota indefinitely and the Cuban government, in turn, nationalized all remaining U.S. agricultural, business, commercial, and industrial property in Cuba.\textsuperscript{13}


Angered by Cuba’s economic reforms and takeovers and frightened by the strengthening relationship between the revolutionary government and the Soviet Union, the U.S. government began planning to overthrow Castro. The Eisenhower administration began covert operations against the Castro government in late 1959 with small sabotage missions against the island, and by mid-March 1960 had approved a plan to train a group of Cuban exiles for a full-scale invasion of the island. Throughout 1960, the diplomatic gamesmanship and U.S. covert efforts to topple the revolutionary government eventually motivated Castro to denounce the U.S. embassy in Havana as a “den of spies.” On January 2, 1961, he demanded that the United States reduce its diplomatic staff in Cuba from eighty-seven to eleven people in forty-eight hours. Although this number was equal to the number of Cuban diplomats in Washington DC, the Eisenhower administration, claimed that it was impossible to maintain the U.S. embassy in Cuba with so few staff and broke diplomatic relations with Cuba on January 3, 1961.14

Geographies of Maximum Danger: Pigs, Mongooses, and Missiles

The increasingly intense diplomatic tennis match between Cuba and the United States became the backdrop for the 1960 presidential race between Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon. During the campaign, the image of Cuba as a looming threat to the United States gained momentum. Cuba’s increased
dealings with the Soviet Union and the economic reforms implemented by the Castro government became a main topic of debate amongst U.S. politicians and the media. After capturing the Democratic Party’s nomination for president, Kennedy wanted to make sure that Richard Nixon was unable to label him as “soft” on communism. Kennedy took the offensive and began to use Castro’s takeover in Cuba as a central example of the Republican failure to effectively confront Soviet aggression in the Western Hemisphere.\textsuperscript{15}

Throughout the campaign, Kennedy portrayed Castro and Cuba’s proximity as a “source of maximum danger” to U.S. national security.\textsuperscript{16} In several speeches and television appearances, Kennedy commented on the “loss” of Cuba to the communists and made direct comparisons between China in 1949 and Cuba a decade later. Kennedy emphasized that Cuba was an even larger loss, presenting a more immediate danger to the United States because it was in “our own backyard.”\textsuperscript{17} The metaphors of “backyard,” “doorstep,” and “under our noses” were used repeatedly to describe the nearness of the threat of communism in Cuba. These images also evoked the idea of an intimate threat to one’s home, family, and person. Kennedy labeled Cuba as “a hostile and militant Communist satellite—a base from which to carry Communist


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Campaign and the Candidates}, Charles Jones and Robert Prialulx Directors, Produced by Lou Hazam/ NBC, 1960, UCLA-FTA Code: VA3878.
infiltration and subversion throughout the Americas”—and prophetically warned that
the United States needed to be ready to confront “a potential enemy missile or
submarine base only ninety miles from our shores.”¹⁸

Many U.S. editorial cartoonists expressed increased apprehension about
Cuba’s proximity and the growing danger of communism through various
cartographic renderings of the Caribbean. Jack Knox of the Nashville Banner echoed
Kennedy’s rhetoric that Cuba’s revolution was turning into a noxious situation “under
our very noses.” In Knox’s cartoon, the map of the United States was portrayed as
Uncle Sam with Florida as his nose, smelling a rotten fish lying on the island while a
silhouette of a rebel held up a rifle in a celebratory pose. [See Figure 3.2] The fish,
labeled “The mess in Cuba,” reflected the growing suspicions that the revolution’s
political course had turned into a unappetizing situation for the United States. The
cartoon’s title, “Clean it up!,” signified that Uncle Sam needed to deal with the
increasingly dangerous situation created by the revolution. Jeff Yohn’s cartoon in the
San Bernardino Sun Telegram also addressed the growing anxiety over Cuba’s
closeness as an inherent danger to the United States. [See Figure 3.3] Yohn’s cartoon
of Cuba as a shark cruising with its fin in the form of a Soviet hammer and sickle just
breaking the surface of the water illustrated the threat of communism lurking below
the surface in Cuba, just off U.S. shores. As the caption suggested, Cuba was turning
into a “New Habitat” for Soviet communism and represented an intolerable risk for
the United States.

¹⁸ Senator John F. Kennedy, Speech given in Cincinnati, Ohio, Democratic
Dinner, October 6, 1960, John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American
Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, Available at
Like the U.S. presidential candidates, Castro found that denouncing his neighbor as a threat only ninety miles from Cuban shores gained him popular support. Castro countered Kennedy’s campaign rhetoric with his own statements about Cuba’s vulnerability to U.S. aggression. Castro protested to Herbert Matthews: “You Americans keep complaining that Cuba is only ninety miles from your shore. I say that the United States is ninety miles from Cuba and for us that is worse.” The new Cuban government began to fear that the United States might intervene directly on the island, and by the middle of 1960 had begun to receive intelligence reports about Cuban exiles training specifically for that purpose.

Cuban intelligence proved correct and the exile force that became known as the 2506 Brigade began training in March 1960. CIA chief, Allan Dulles, briefed Kennedy about the plans for an invasion of Cuba during the presidential campaign. After his inauguration, Kennedy began reviewing plans for the invasion. His administration had been given assurances that it would be successful, but as always


20 2506 was the serial number of Carlos Rodriguez Santana who fell to his death during a training exercise in Guatemala. The Brigade members wore the number 2506 in his honor.

Kennedy was concerned first and foremost about his public image and wanted assurances of “plausible deniability” should the invasion not go as planned. It was this preoccupation with trying to officially distance the United States from the invasion as well as the lack of the promised popular support on the island that would lead to its failure.\(^{22}\)

On April 15, 1961, eight B-26 Bombers, painted by the CIA with Cuban air force markings, took off from Nicaragua for Cuba and began bombing three airfields with the intention of crippling the Cuban Air Force. Although the pilots claimed to have inflicted catastrophic damage, in reality the bombing had failed to destroy Cuban air power, a misstep that would cost the invasion force dearly. The day after the bombing, Fidel Castro went on national television to appeal to the Cuban people to be ready for the invaders. In the same speech, Castro for the first time publicly declared that the revolution was socialist. Castro mockingly used the same metaphors of geographical closeness that had been used as a warning by Kennedy when he trumpeted, “We have made a revolution, a socialist revolution, right here under the very nose of the United States.”\(^ {23}\)

The invasion took place the day after on April 17, 1961, at Playa Girón on the Bahía de Cochinos—the Bay of Pigs. The landing force was made up of approximately fifteen hundred Cuban exiles, many of whom had been large


landowners and Batista loyalists before the revolution. The poorly-equipped Brigade landed in a mangrove swamp, making it difficult to advance or retreat, and were eventually surrounded and captured. Most importantly the uprising that had been predicted failed to materialize and the invasion instead strengthened Castro’s popularity on the island. Out of the thirteen hundred troops that landed, one hundred were killed during the attack and twelve hundred were captured. Those captured were publicly tried and sentenced to thirty years in prison. The U.S. State Department, after extensive negotiations, eventually secured their release in December 1962 for a ransom of fifty-three million dollars in food and medical supplies.24

The failure of the 2506 Brigade publicly embarrassed Kennedy’s but served to strengthen the new president’s quasi-religious devotion to ridding the world of communism and drove his resolve to oust Castro to the point of obsession. This increased mandate to overthrow Castro took the form of a voracious clandestine effort known collectively as The Cuba Project, and most notoriously as Operation Mongoose.25 This operation headed by Brigadier General Edward Lansdale and

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25 The name Mongoose was chosen not for any metaphorical reason but because “MO” was a diagraph designated for a Thailand covert operation and was picked to confuse anyone looking at the name of the plan. “AM” would have been the diagraph for Cuba in the 1960s. Taking a diagraph that designated a code name from another region made the operation even more secret even to those in the intelligence industry. For an explanation of how the name was chosen and a great summary of the
Robert Kennedy became the largest covert action ever taken by the United States against another nation and was intended to incite internal rebellion in Cuba leading to the overthrow of Fidel Castro. The operation called for widespread economic sabotage, propaganda, and the build-up of counter-revolutionary movements on the island. Dozens of sub-plans within Operation Mongoose with a plethora of titles and objectives such as Operation Bingo, Operation Break-Up, Operation Dirty Trick, Operation Free Ride, Operation Good Times, Operation Smasher, and Operation Horn Swoggle, to name but a few. Operation Good Times was an image-based misinformation plan that would have provided “fake photographic material” to be distributed throughout the island. The plan called for images depicting “an obese Castro with two beauties in any situation desired, ostensibly within a room in the Castro residence, lavishly furnished, and a table brimming over with the most delectable Cuban food with an underlying caption (appropriately Cuban) such as ‘My ration is different.’” The photos would have portrayed the Cuban leader as a lascivious glutton that called into question the moral legitimacy of his rule. The idea was to anger the island’s populace by portraying Castro as having betrayed the values of the revolution and favoring himself over the average Cuban. Other plans ranged from misinformation campaigns, radio broadcasts, and dropping leaflets on the island,

26 For a list of some of the “Nutty Schemes” thought up to overthrow Castro see: Bohning, The Castro Obsession, 93-106; Elliston, Psywar on Cuba, 83-90; White, The Kennedys and Cuba, 100-105.

27 Bohning, The Castro Obsession, 98; Elliston, Psywar on Cuba, 90; White, The Kennedys and Cuba, 104.
to burning cane fields, cutting power lines, and destroying factories, to lacing
Castro’s cigars with LSD or drugging him so that his beard would fall out.\(^{28}\) Both the
U.S. government and U.S. media now looked at Castro’s beard, which had been a
source of curiosity and a positive masculine attribute, as an easily recognizable
symbol of the enemy.

Operation Mongoose also included a contingency plan to incite direct U.S.
military intervention on the island. In a March 13, 1962, memo to General Edward
Lansdale titled, “Justification for U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba,” Lyman L.
Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joints Chiefs outlined specific actions that could be taken
in order to create a pretext for a U.S. invasion of the island. This top-secret memo,
known as Operation Northwoods, included calls for staging an attack on Guantánamo
Naval Base, sinking a boat carrying Cuban refugees (real or simulated), creating a
“remember the Maine incident” by blowing up a U.S. ship, or simulating a Cuban
invasion of another Caribbean island. All of these incidents were under consideration
in order “to place the United States in the apparent position of suffering defensible
grievances from a rash and irresponsible Cuba and to develop an \textit{international image}
of a Cuban threat to peace in the Western Hemisphere.”\(^{29}\) It was the image of Cuba
posing a threat to the United States more than any real evidence that was considered

\(^{28}\) FRUS 1961-63 Volume X Cuba, 1961-1962, Documents 273-297,
http://www.state.gov/ www/about_state/history/frusX/01_15.html, (Accessed
November 14, 2008); Bohning, \textit{The Castro Obsession}, 68-128; Elliston, \textit{Psywar on
Cuba}, 66-126; Escalante, \textit{The Cuba Project}, 98-109; White, \textit{The Kennedys and Cuba},
71-131.

\(^{29}\) “Justification for Military Intervention in Cuba,” Operation Northwoods,
necessary to justify action against the Castro government.\textsuperscript{30} The U.S. military had also scheduled amphibious exercises off the coast of Puerto Rico on the island of Vieques in the fall of 1962 designed to practice landing on a Caribbean island as well as increase pressure on the Castro government. The operation, code-named Operation Ortsac (Castro, spelled backwards), was cancelled due to the real crisis between the Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the United States that took the world to the brink of nuclear war in October 1962.

On October 22, 1962, President Kennedy requested network airtime to address the entire country on a matter of the national urgency. Kennedy announced that U.S. surveillance had produced conclusive evidence that the Soviet Union had secretly placed tactical nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba.\textsuperscript{31} For the Cuban government, the instillation of the missiles was viewed as a deterrent to continued U.S. aggression against the island, whereas the Soviets saw the instillation of the weapons as a way to even out the missile deficit with the United States.\textsuperscript{32} The missile range maps of the Western Hemisphere produced during the crisis resembled the concentric rings produced when a stone hits a still body of water. [See Figure 3.4] The maps


explicitly illustrated that all of the continental United States, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and as far south as Peru were in range of attack from Soviet missiles in Cuba. The maps were a powerful image that confirmed what Kennedy had predicted in his campaign about Cuba’s conversion to communism and its proximity to the United States: a Soviet missile base only ninety miles away.

During the Missile Crisis, the hostility between Cuba and the United States became the focus of global attention as the eyes of the world watched developments on the island with bated breath. A drawing by Washington Star cartoonist Gib Crockett summarized the public sentiment from the time period. On October 26, 1962, at the apex of the crisis, Crockett published a cartoon in the Washington Star portraying Cuba as a gigantic missile base with the entire globe on the front of a missile. [See Figure 3.5] The caption was a countdown “8-7-6-5-!!!” Crockett’s drawing reflected what many people who lived through the crisis believed: that nuclear war and the end of the world was eminent. The regional crisis between Cuba and the United States had turned into central conflict of the Global Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Fortunately President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev negotiated a settlement to stop the countdown. In the agreement, Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba in exchange for Kennedy’s assurance that the United States would not invade the island. The United States also secretly removed

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missiles from Turkey as part of the agreement. Castro and the Cuban government were furious to not be included in the negotiations and felt betrayed by the Soviets. Cuban diplomatic demands such as a U.S. withdrawal from its naval base at Guantánamo Bay, were never on the table. Castro was frustrated that Khrushchev had squandered an opportunity for Cuba to gain more concessions from the United States.  

Because Khrushchev and Kennedy negotiated the end to the crisis without Cuba’s input, U.S. editorial cartoonists propagated view in several images that Castro was powerless in his relationship with the Soviets. In a famous cartoon entitled, “This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you,” Edmund Valtman of the Hartford Times portrayed Nikita Khrushchev as a dentist pulling missile fangs out of Castro’s mouth. [See Figure 3.6] Valtman portrayed Khrushchev as a dentist grudgingly de-fanging the missile faced monster he had created. In the drawing, Castro the unwilling patient submitted to Soviet control and manipulation. This image reinforced the popular perception, official action, and ultimate reality during the Missile Crisis that the heart of the conflict was ultimately beyond Castro’s control and remained between the two main Cold War players.

In another comic, syndicated cartoonist Bill Crawford further echoed the idea that Castro had little or no control over the political situation surrounding the missiles, drawing the Cuban president as a child throwing a tantrum as Khrushchev walked away with his missile “toys.” [See Figure 3.7] The caption read “Trouble in the nursery.” Crawford relied on classic metaphor of Cuban (now specifically

34 Schultz, That Infernal Little Cuban Republic, 183-187.
Castro) as a child incapable of governing the island. Castro was not regarded politically “grown up” enough to engage in the decisions made in the “adult” conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. The visual metaphor of Cubans as children unequipped to govern themselves was thus preserved beyond the revolution with Castro, the child, now under the tutelage of the Soviets.35

With Kennedy’s assurance to the Soviets that the U.S. would not invade the island, “rescuing” Cuba from the grip of communism was now more out of reach than ever before. The island became continuously portrayed as held captive by Castro and communism. During the Missile Crisis, Kennedy repeatedly referred to Cuba as an “imprisoned island.”36 The transformation of Cuba’s image from an island paradise into a Communist prison has remained constant ever since. Maps of the island were often drawn with skulls and bars around it. [See Figure 3.8] Cuba was represented as a woman or a peasant with a ball and chain around her or his ankle appealing to the United States for salvation. [See Figure 3.9] Illustrations of Cubans in shackles or incarcerated dominated the early exile press with Castro drawn as the ultimate jail keeper. The image of Cuba as a prison would later become part of the rhetoric of the Cuban exile in their efforts to escape from the island to the United States and freedom.


The Bay of Pigs and the Missile Crisis were the most direct confrontations between Cuba and the United States in what became primarily a war of rhetoric and images. The early confrontations between Cuba and the United States permanently altered the view of the symbolic geographical relationship between the border nations. Both countries now had to contend with their proximity not as a natural blessing but as a natural hazard. Images of the Florida Straits changed from an easily traversed channel of cultural and economic exchange to a fortified moat of ideological demarcation between two enemy camps that now separated and defined the two nations more than ever before. U.S. public perception and the Cuban projection of the island as home to the “Smiling Face” of Cuban tourism was transformed as each country waged an ideological war of images against the other.

A Menacing Menagerie: The Dehumanization of U.S.-Cuban Relations

As the splintering of the ties between Cuba and the United States took place, images emerged that served to increase the hostility between the two neighbors. These images dehumanized each nation’s leadership and demonized their social and economic systems. Cuban and U.S. image-makers produced a virtual menagerie of animal metaphors designed to dehumanize the governments on both sides of the Florida Straits. These images included alligators, bats, bears, cats, chickens, cows, crows, dogs, donkeys, eagles, fish, goats, horses, mice, monkeys, mules, octopi, parrots, pigeons, pigs, rats, sharks, snakes, and vultures as well as fictional beasts such as dragons, sea serpents, sirens, and various fanged monsters. These images helped solidify and give a form to the new enemy relationship between the now rival nations.
One of the more common animals used to depict the political leaders in each country were birds. Both Cuban and U.S. image-makers used numerous renditions of birds to depict the other nation. U.S. artists often employed images of vultures to depict Castro or Cuba as a starving or dying island. In a post-Missile-Crisis comic entitled “Breaking one egg doesn’t clear the nest,” Jack Knox drew Castro’s face on the body of a vulture sitting in a tree smoking a cigar. [See Figure 3.10] The eggs in the nest were labeled “Communist Espionage Agents,” “Fishing Ports,” and “Possible Bomber Bases,” all with the Soviet hammer and sickle. Broken on the ground below the nest was an egg labeled “Red Missile Bases.” Knox pointed out that only one of the possible threats incubated by Castro had been destroyed and that the many of risks associated with a communist Cuba remained to be hatched. Edmund Valtman also drew Castro’s head on a vulture perched on the arm of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Valtman presented Castro, not as a bird of prey, but as a scavenger, tethered and dependent on the Soviet Union. Images of vultures also accentuated the idea that Castro presided over an island of death and decay.

Another bird commonly drawn by Cuban and U.S. artists was the bald eagle. The eagle has been the national symbol of the United States from the country’s beginnings and is widely known as the “American Eagle.” One of the first U.S. artists to use an eagle to depict the increasing tensions between the United States and Cuba was St. Louis Dispatch cartoonist Bill Mauldin. In early 1960, Mauldin drew a political cartoon entitled “He loves me not…” Mauldin featured a smiling Fidel

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Castro yanking the tail feathers out of an eagle like a little girl would from a daisy. [See Figure 3.11] The eagle looked to be barely tolerating having his feathers plucked just as the U.S. government was barely tolerating the Cuban government reforms that were plucking away at U.S. hegemony on the island. During the Missile Crisis, Mauldin again depicted the eagle but this time attacking a rat made to look like Castro forcing him to drop a nuclear missile he was holding in his claws. [See Figure 3.12] Mauldin’s fierce eagle was more in keeping with the traditional usage of the bird as a symbol of U.S. courage and strength, whereas for the Cuban image creators the eagle was transformed into a negative image.

Cuban artists often portrayed the United States by using its own national bird, the bald eagle. Because the eagle was emblematic of the United States, Cuban illustrators transformed the bird from a symbol of U.S. pride into a symbol of U.S. aggression and imperialism, a monstrous presence to be feared and repulsed. 38 An early symbolic use of the eagle by the Cubans occurred two weeks after the U.S. defeat at the Bay of Pigs. In front of a large and jubilant May Day crowd, the Cuban government had the statue of the bald eagle ripped down from the top of the monument to the _U.S.S. Maine_ in Havana. The destruction of eagle statue was

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38 In propaganda transference of images is one of the most effective means to attack your enemy. Images that already represent the country or people targeted are especially effective. For excellent discussions of propaganda methods and techniques see: Toby Clark, _Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: The Political Image in the Age of Mass Culture_, (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1997); Vilho Harle, _The Enemy with a Thousand Faces: The Tradition of the Other in Western Political Thought and History_, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000); and Walter Hixson, _Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961_, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).
emblematic of the end of U.S. domination over the island. In an undated poster the Latin American and Caribbean Students’ Association (OCLAE) produced an image of the eagle composed of different U.S. company names. This eagle was drawn landing in a nest that was actually a Nazi helmet, conveying the message that U.S. capitalism was another form of fascism. Echoing the Cuban leadership’s message that the United States was the enemy of the developing world, Cuban artists often portrayed the eagle swooping in on the maps of various countries or threatening groups of people gathered to protest the United States. These eagles were sometimes drawn with U.S. fighter jet markings further associating the bird with the U.S. military presence in Latin America. Like the destruction of the eagle statue, Cuban artists often depicted the virtual killing of these eagles in order to signify the destruction of U.S. imperialism. The image of the eagle became so recognizable as part of Cuba’s anti-American images that some posters did not show the entire bird and instead only depicted the bird’s talons reaching out to attack crowds of people.

[Figure 3.13]

In addition to animal images, Cuban and U.S. artists employed depictions of insects to debase one another’s countries. These included ants, bees, butterflies, cockroaches, flies, mosquitoes, spiders, termites, wasps, and most importantly worms. Worms were one of the main insects used to humiliate the other in the Cuba-U.S. conflict. The use of the term “gusanos” (worms) had its origins in War of the Escambray known by the Cubans as the Lucha Contra Bandidos (War Against the

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Bandits). This counter-revolutionary rebellion began immediately following the 26 of July Movement’s takeover of the Cuban government. The rebellion was led by former revolutionaries and dispossessed landholders who were angered by Fidel Castro and the revolution’s slide to the far left.  

The rebellion was centered in the Escambray Mountains in south-central Cuba and lasted from 1959 to 1965. U.S. leaders pointed to the existence of the rebellion before the Bay of Pigs as evidence that an exile invasion might inspire a widespread popular uprising against Castro. The rebels in the Escambray Mountains conducted sabotage raids on sugar refineries and even killed a literacy teacher, Conrado Benítez, for whom the literacy brigades were later named. On January 28, 1961, Fidel Castro spoke in Santa Clara to honor Benítez and to encourage the continued fight against the last pockets of counter-revolutionaries on the island. Castro compared the fight in the Escambray to the fight against Batista. It was in this speech that Castro first used “gusano” (worm) as a pejorative term to describe counter-revolutionaries. Castro

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40 For an account of the War of the Escambray see Víctor Dreke and Mary-Alice Waters, From the Escambray to the Congo: In the Whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution: Interview with Víctor Dreke, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 2002), 85-117; On the U.S. hopes for an Escambray uprising during the Bay of Pigs invasion see “CIA Weekly reports April 13, 1961,” Available from Documents on the Bay of Pigs, http://www.foia.cia.gov/bay_of_pigs.asp, (Accessed February 12, 2009); For the U.S. government’s explanation into the origin of the word “Gusano” see Elliston, Psywar on Cuba, 115-117; and FRUS 1961-63, Volume X, Cuba, 1961-1962, Documents 365, Available from U.S. Department of State http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusX/01_15.html, (Accessed October 24, 2008); Maria de los Angeles Torres cites a different origin for the term in her book on Cuban exiles. Torres states that the term for Gusano came from the duffle bags that Cubans carried with them when they left the country in the 1960s. However it is my contention that the term was used to describe the exiles only after it had been used to describe the counter-revolutionary fighters in the Escambray. See Maria de los Angeles Torres, In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 51.
triumphantly proclaimed: “It took us two years to crush that nest of worms,” meaning Batista’s forces. Castro urged the citizens of Santa Clara to eradicate these new gusanos who continued to oppose the revolution.  

In the summer of 1961, following the Bay of Pigs failure, the revolutionary government began the “Limpia de Escambray” (Cleaning of the Escambray), which was a search-and-destroy operation designed to wipe out the remaining insurgents in the region. A Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR) poster from the time included an illustration of a worm about to be decapitated by a machete-wielding soldier. [See Figure 3.14] Cuban illustrators drew the “gusano” to resemble a barbed-tailed venomous caterpillar native to the island. More than an earthworm, which viewers would have seen as beneficial, this image of a venomous caterpillar would have been recognizable especially to rural Cubans as dangerous and as an insect that should be killed to protect themselves or their families from their painful stings. The insurgents were metaphorically venomous to the revolution and needed to be eradicated. After the Bay of Pigs, Castro also added Cuban exiles to the category of gusanos when he denounced the Cuban exile groups in Miami as “a council of worms.”  

The revolutionary government also made use of images of “lazy gusanos” on leaflets to motivate workers in the Cuban countryside to cut sugarcane. 

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43 Torres, In the Land of Mirrors, 53.
repeated use of the image of “gusanos” became part of the Cuban lexicon to describe counter-revolutionaries on the island and exile traitors in the United States.

As part of Operation Mongoose the CIA attempted to “turn the worm” on Castro and use the image of a gusano to promote resistance on the island. In a memorandum written from CIA operations officer William Harvey to the head of Operation Mongoose Brigadier General Edward Lansdale, Harvey spelled out the agency’s hopes for using a worm as a symbol of resistance. Harvey explained:

The term “Gusano” (worm) was first applied by Fidel Castro to counter-revolutionaries…CIA plans a coordinated campaign to popularize, exploit, and encourage the use of “Gusano Libre” as the symbol of resistance to the Cuban regime. So as to give the impression that adoption of the symbol is a spontaneous internal development and not an exile one, CIA controlled outlets will refer to instances of use of the symbol inside Cuba rather than calling on Cubans to adopt the symbol. We intend to use the occasion of the next “Voice of Free Cuba” submarine operation planned for mid-August 1962 to announce that the “Gusano Libre” has become the symbol of popular resistance against the Castro regime, calling upon the people of Cuba to show their defiance of the government by scrawling this symbol in public places.44

Harvey went on to explain an ambitious program for the “Free Worm” and how it would stand for among other things a return to the Constitution of 1940, democratic government, better agrarian reform, private property, free trade, and social justice.

In addition to the radio broadcasts from submarines that talked about the free worm, visual materials such as pins, armbands, pencils, and balloons with the

44 “Memorandum from the Central Intelligence Agency Operations Officer for Operation Mongoose (Harvey) to the Chief of Operations, Operation Mongoose (Lansdale)” August 6, 1962, Available from U.S. Department of State, FRUS http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusX/361_375.html (Accessed March 30, 2009); Elliston, Psywar on Cuba, 115.
“Gusano Libre” symbol were distributed throughout the country.⁴⁵ Like the MINFAR version of the gusano, the CIA “Free Worm” looked more like a venomous caterpillar than an earthworm, implying that counter-revolutionary resistance represented a venomous threat against Castro. To encourage this resistance, the CIA created leaflets with drawings of the “Gusano Libre” engaged in acts of sabotage that were dropped on the island with the hope of encouraging popular revolt. [See Figure 3.15] As the “Gusano Libre” conducted sabotage it had a smile on its face suggesting the enjoyment that came from fighting against the revolution. The worm was drawn cutting electric lines, throwing away machine parts, and putting nails on the road in front of a soldiers’ jeep. In one of the leaflets the worm was drawn winking at the viewer as it held a pack of matches and gasoline suggesting that anyone seeing the leaflet would have an idea of what the worm was encouraging them to burn.

The symbol of a fighting and sabotaging worm was also popularized in exile publications. Exile cartoonists drew the worm haunting the dreams of Castro or causing him doubts about his future. [See Figure 3.16] Two popular exile cartoonists, Nino and Anthony, adopted a version of the gusano libre as part of their signatures. [See Figure 3.17] Another cartoonist N’Ga also drew single panel cartoons featuring the gusano libre for the exile publication El Avance Criollo. In N’Ga’s comics the gusano was dressed in an army helmet with a Cuban flag and was often firing a machine gun, conducting sabotage, or spying on his Cuban foes. [See Figure 3.18] Like the CIA “Free Worm” the exiles’ gusano libre often were drawn as smiling or winking at the viewer. This cooptation and mocking of Castro’s pejorative image was

similar to the Castro government’s attempts to transfer the symbolic meaning of the bald eagle from a U.S. national symbol to a symbol of imperialism and tyranny. The CIA attempted to transfer Castro’s original “gusano” pejorative into the “Free Worm,” a symbol of counter-revolutionary resistance.

Beyond animals and insects, Cuban and U.S. artists also portrayed each other as mythical creatures—demons, devils, and monsters. Like Edmund Valtman’s portrayal of Castro as a fanged monster during the Missile Crisis, the U.S. media transformed the image of Castro as a revolutionary hero whom had been considered worthy of little U.S. boys to emulate in 1959 into a vision of evil incarnate. These renderings of Castro included various visions of a bloodthirsty tyrant to images of the Cuban leader as a devil cliché with red skin, cloven hooves, a sharp tail, horns, and a pitchfork. [See Figure 3.19] Cuban artists fired back with images of every president since Kennedy represented as monsters. One of the most famous examples of this was an Alfrédo Rostgaard poster that the viewer unfolded to reveal a drawing of Richard Nixon as a vampire. The poster’s image plus the action of unfolding the image allowed the viewer to reveal Nixon’s inner character as monstrous. [See Figure 3.20] The images of monsters and devils became a lasting marker of each country’s inhumanity and served to further solidify the perception of the each nation as a demonic other to be feared and reviled.

Hygiene, Homosexuality, Hysteria, and Hitler

In addition to the dehumanizing images of animals and insects, U.S. and Cuban artists drew caricatures of each other’s leaders as a means to question their
moral character and ability to lead. U.S. artists drew caricatures that further destroyed the image of the “heroic” Cuban leadership that had been so widely celebrated in the United States. Newspaper artists depicted all of the 26 of July Movement leaders in a negative light with Castro as the main target. In these images, Castro was often lampooned as fat and dirty his stomach out of proportion to the rest of his body and bursting through his shirt. [See Figure 3.21] Illustrators also portrayed the Cuban leadership as filthy with swarms of flies buzzing around their heads. Ché Guevara was often depicted as filthy, his face distorted with sullen ape-like features. [See Figure 3.22] In depictions of adversaries, simian features were a common way to tap into racist stereotypes in order to construct an enemy other.46 The illustrators made Ché and the other leaders appear darker in appearance and replaced the images of the “real men” of the Sierra Maestra with pejorative stereotypes of Latin Americans as black, childlike, dirty, fat, lazy, and stupid.47

Besides racist images and caricatures that demeaned the Cuban leaders’ physical appearance, U.S. image-makers also attacked the masculine character of the “real men” of the Sierra Maestra through images that brought into question their sexual orientation. The drawings of Raúl Castro, in particular, used homosexuality as a means to demean the Cuban leadership. During the revolution, members of the U.S. media often commented that Raúl Castro, unlike his “barbudo” comrades, did not

46 For fantastic examples of monkey-like features in portrayals of enemies see: Dower, War Without Mercy, 77-93; and Keen, Faces of the Enemy, 60-64.

47 For a great overview of the many caricatures used in U.S. political cartoons about Latin America see: Johnson, Latin America in Caricature, 1980; and Pérez, Cuba in the American Imagination, 2008.
grow a full beard making him appear “boy-like” or “baby-faced” by comparison. As the connection between Cuba and the United States crumbled, these depictions of Raúl’s boyish appearance deteriorated into images of Raúl as a homosexual. Claims about Raúl’s homosexuality proliferated throughout the U.S. media, even though Raúl was married to another revolutionary leader, Vilma Espín, with whom he had four children.

Images of Raúl as effeminate and gay played into long-standing prejudices against homosexuals in Cuban culture. Homosexuals in Cuba were considered less than men, second-class, and sinful. Although the revolution promoted social equality on the island, these changes did not extend to homosexuals. Homosexuality did not fit into the revolutionary leadership’s ideal of Cuba’s virile and honorable “new man.”

As early as 1961, the revolutionary government sought to eradicate homosexuality as a social vice and conducted raids in Havana to round up homosexuals along with prostitutes and drug addicts whom the new government believed to be all closely linked. Thus, to accuse one of the revolutionary leaders, and the brother of Fidel Castro, of homosexuality was to call the legitimacy of the revolution itself into question.

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In many political cartoons, Raúl Castro’s features were made to look feminine—fuller lips, long fingernails, feminine buttocks, fluttering eyelashes, ponytail, and pinky fingers sticking out. [See Figure 3.23] Artists often drew his clothes with ruffles or even portrayed him as wearing a dress and high-heeled shoes while fanning himself. Cartoonists also depicted Raúl with flowers in his hair or smelling flowers. In some of the cartoons, U.S. illustrators drew Raúl flying or flitting around, which corresponded to a Cuban slang term for homosexual, mariposa (butterfly). [See Figure 3.24] In many of the cartoons, Fidel Castro and the other leaders looked aghast and burdened by Raúl’s lack of manhood. Insulting Raúl in this manner was another way to insult Fidel Castro, for to have a homosexual brother in Cuba was considered a source of shame.

Homosexuality was just one image that the U.S. media propagated that served to destroy the image of the Cuban revolutionaries as idealized masculine figures. Beginning in 1959, U.S. image-makers began to portray the brutality and insanity of the 26 of July Movement leadership. Summary justice against those who had opposed the revolution began in the Sierra Maestra and had continued with military tribunals after Batista had fled the island. The result were hundreds of executions that took place in a relatively short period of time after the revolutionary forces took over in January 1959. The images of executions in both film and magazines had an immediate and chilling effect on U.S.-Cuban relations.  

Allen Young, Gays under the Cuban Revolution, (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981).

50 For a discussion on the use of brutality and insanity in enemy making see Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy,
One of the most disturbing series of photographs and film footage was of the execution of Colonel Cornélia Rojas, Batista’s Chief of Police in Santa Clara. In photos published from the execution, the Colonel was led out of the jail and stood against a wall. He made proclamations damning the revolution and then stood facing his executioners as the order of “¡Fuego!” was shouted. The film and photos captured the moment of the bullets ripping through Rojas’s body, including the one that shattered the Colonel’s skull and sent his hat flying straight up in the air. The image of Rojas’s lifeless body lying on the ground with open eyes and half his head torn away must have been very disturbing to U.S. and Cuban viewers alike. *Time*, *Life*, and *Bohemia* magazines all published graphic images of this execution but *Bohemia*’s was by far the most gruesome. [See Figure 3.25] The publication of these photos in Cuba served as a warning not to oppose the new government and as a celebration of revolutionary justice.51

Bill Mauldin poignantly summarized U.S. sentiment damning the brutality of the executions in a political cartoon published in the *St. Louis Dispatch*. [See Figure 3.26] The cartoon was captioned “Just think what could happen to you if we weren’t idealists…” The drawing was originally published in the *St. Louis Dispatch* and then reprinted in *Time* magazine. Mauldin depicted a Cuban soldier shooting a bound prisoner in the back of the head with a pistol while the other two prisoners awaited

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their fates while tied to posts. The revolutionaries were drawn not as the heroic fighters of the Sierra but as dirty and disheveled, brutal and cold in their purpose. These were not the revolutionaries who loved children and puppies, nor were they the type of fighters who should be emulated by U.S. boys as ideal masculine figures. Their brutal actions were portrayed as cowardly and callous. The cartoon highlighted the idea that the revolutionary rhetoric of change came with a high price and cast further doubt about the true intentions of the revolutionary leadership.

After coming to power in 1959, the U.S. media repeatedly questioned Castro about the executions. He defended the new government actions by stating that the executions were just and demanded by the Cuban people. To prove this, the new government held rallies where the masses of Cubans gathered to chant in unison “To the Wall!” Castro accused the U.S. media and politicians of hypocrisy considering how many people had been executed by the Batista regime without drawing any criticism from the United States and how many people were executed in the United States. In an attempt to assuage the fears of the U.S. public and to prove to the international community that the trials were indeed just, the Cuban government began televising the trials of Batista’s people. The effort to thwart criticism only increased international outcry against the circus-like atmosphere of the “show trials.”


53 Stuart Novins, Director, Face the Nation, Produced by CBS, January 11, 1959.

After the break in relations between the two countries, the images of the execution Colonel Rojas were used in the anti-Castro films for years afterwards to show the viciousness of the Castro regime.\textsuperscript{55} In his book, \textit{A Garlic Testament}, Stanley Crawford recalled being subjected to footage of the revolutionary firing squads while working as a technical writer for the defense industry for Thompson Ramo Wooldridge (TRW) at California’s Norton Air Force Base in 1962. The footage of the executions was used in 16mm commercials projected before team-building events held on the base to promote the buying of U.S. Government Savings Bonds. The purchase of the bonds was intended to support U.S. efforts to halt communist brutality in the hemisphere.\textsuperscript{56}

The brutality of Castro and the executions was also portrayed as symptomatic of the insanity of the regime. In an October 1961 \textit{Twilight Zone} episode, “The Mirror,” executions provided the background for the episode. In the show, Peter Falk played “Ramos Clemente,” a revolutionary who had just triumphed over the dictator, “General De Cruz,” in an unnamed Central American republic. Falk was made up to look like Fidel Castro, dressed in fatigues, with a beard, and smoking a cigar. [See Figure 3.27] The other actors were also made to look like Cuban revolutionary leaders—Manuel Urrutia, Ché Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos, confirming as Serling had stated to the viewer, “any resemblance to tyrants living or dead is hardly coincidental.”


At the beginning of the episode, Clemente ordered the execution of the deposed dictator General De Cruz and “all prisoners.” Before his death, De Cruz laughed at Clemente and warned him that he would start to see enemies everywhere, even in the mirror on the wall. From that point forward the sounds of shots continuously fired could be heard in the background as the executions continued day and night. When his comrades begged Clemente to stop the killings and questioned him over the course of the revolution, the new ruler became angry and believed he had been betrayed. As predicted by De Cruz, Clemente began to have visions of his “enemies” in the mirror in his office. These enemies turned out to be visions of his comrades trying to kill him. In response to these visions, Clemente began killing off his officers as he slowly went insane. Clemente asked “Father Tomas” why he had so many enemies. The priest replied, “This is the story of all tyrants. They have one enemy. The one they don’t recognize until it is too late.” Clemente then saw his own image in the mirror and realized that he was his own worst enemy and shot himself. “The Mirror,” like many other images, portrayed Castro and the 26 of July Movement leadership’s policies of brutality as insane and as part of what made the new leadership illegitimate in the minds of many.57

Cuban image-makers also produced visions of U.S. leadership’s brutality and insanity from John Kennedy until George W. Bush. One of the best examples was a poster by Cuban artist, Luis Blaguer. [See Figure 3.28] In this late 1960s poster protesting U.S. violence in South East Asia, Blaguer portrayed President Richard

Nixon with a maniacal look, his eerie and twisted smile along with the sideways glance of his eyes suggested the president’s untrustworthiness and instability. The colors—Nixon was drawn with a blue face on an orange background—added to the disconcerting quality of the image. The artist sought to allow the viewer to see inside Nixon’s brain and to ponder the president’s mental state. The message became even clearer when upon closer examination it was revealed that one was looking not at Nixon’s grey matter but a pile of decomposing bodies. It was Nixon’s insanity that lay behind the brutality of Vietnam War and by broader implication was a condemnation of the United States itself.

Cuban and U.S. illustrators also combined images of brutality and insanity by comparing each others’ leaders to Adolf Hitler—considered the most brutal and insane leader in modern history. Hitler and the Nazis were so reviled that any use of imagery associated with them elicited a negative reaction from the viewer. Artists from both the United States and Cuba used Nazi symbols to make visual comparisons of their neighbor as an ultimate evil. Castro, in particular, was compared to Hitler as well as to several other Nazis such as Adolf Eichmann, the “architect of the Holocaust” and Heinrich Himmler, head of the S.S. Illustrators depicted Castro in a Nazi uniform or with a Nazi armband and even joined the faces of Castro and Hitler together. [See Figure 3.29] The caption read, “all dictators think alike and are cut from the same cloth.”

Cubans also used Nazi imagery and references to Hitler to defame U.S. leaders. Cuban artists have drawn almost every U.S. presidents with references to the

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58Hitler is seen by many cultures to be the “paragon of evil” and has been used ever since World War II to vilify enemies. Keen, Faces of the Enemy, 1986, 13.
Nazis. In early revolutionary political cartoons Kennedy was depicted as a dog with Swastikas for a collar. Cuban image-makers have used the swastika repeatedly to show a connection between U.S. imperialism and Nazi fascism. A famous Cuban political poster portrayed Nixon as a king on a playing card that if flipped over had the same king but the image of Hitler. As late as 2008, billboards in Havana featured the likeness of President Bush merged with Hitler that declared Bush to be a fascist. These images of the brutality and insanity of each country’s leaders dominated the visual dialogue between the two countries and served to further separated the neighboring nations.

Conclusion

On July 7, 1963, President Kennedy asked his press secretary Pierre Salinger to purchase a thousand Cuban cigars. Salinger returned to the White House the next day with twelve hundred of the president’s favorite H. Upmann Petit Coronas. After Salinger had informed Kennedy of his purchase, the president pulled a document from his desk and signed the “Trading With the Enemy Act” against Cuba.59 With this act, Kennedy prohibited all unlicensed commercial transactions with Cuba, including individual purchases of Cuban products and travel to the island, making it illegal even for the president to purchase Cuban cigars. This order was designed to

further isolate the island economically and made it impossible for the vast majority of U.S. citizens to legally travel to Cuba.

By the time Kennedy invoked the Trading with the Enemy Act, the ties between Cuba and the United States had been permanently altered. During the early 1960s, the friendly relationship between the two nations devolved into open political and military conflicts that changed the popular view of each country towards the other. The popular viewpoint was also influenced by images that helped define the new relationship between the two nations. Images that had once promoted linkages were replaced with new enemy images that made past connections seem like a distant memory. The Cuban government no longer promoted its “Friendly Face” in the hopes of attracting U.S. tourists, but instead propagated images that continuously vilified its northern neighbor. In the United States cartoonists, filmmakers, and television producers denigrated Cuba as a scorned and estranged member of the U.S. family of allied nations. The proximity and porous nature of the border that had been seen as a natural advantage to tourism and trade between the two nations was re-imagined as a source of “maximum danger.” A failed U.S. invasion and a nuclear standoff pushed the animosity between the two countries further than most Cubans or North Americans could have imagined in 1959.

The visual dialogue of enemy creation became an important part of the battle for the hearts and minds in the western hemisphere. The images that were produced in both countries assisted in creating a new set of myths that constructed the relationship between Cuba and the United States. For both countries this new relationship would serve as a catalyst for action in opposition to the other. The U.S. government became
obsessed with trying to prevent “another Cuba” from happening in the western hemisphere, fearing that it could not afford to loose another battle against communism in Latin America and maintain its place on the world stage. For the Castro government, the antagonistic relationship with the United States bolstered its position internally and throughout the world by having an adversary to mobilize against. The Cubans used the animosity towards the United States to promote revolutionary reforms on the island and to spread visions of their success and of the malevolent nature of the United States around the world. The contest to win the hearts and minds in Latin America and the rest of the developing world through images would perpetuate the intimate relationship between Cuba and the United States but now as enemies. It is to this contest that we now turn to in chapter four.
Figure 3.1 “The Face of Cuba is a Friendly Face” (Advertisement), New York Times, January 10, 1960: 36X.
Figure 3.2 Jack Knox “Clean It Up!” *The Nashville Banner*, Tennessee, 1960.
Figure 3.3 Jeff Yohn “New Habitat?” *The Sun Telegram*, San Bernardino, California, 1960.
Figure 3.4 Soviet Missile range map, October, 1962.
Figure 3.5 Gib Crockett, “-8-7-6-5-!!” *Washington Star*, Washington, DC, October 26, 1962.
Figure 3.6 Edmund Valtman, “This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You,” *The Hartford Times*, Connecticut, October 30, 1962.
Figure 3.7 Bill Crawford, Newspaper Enterprise Association, "Trouble in the Nursery," 1962.
Figure 3.8 Silvio, “The Hammer and Sickle are symbols of Peace.” El Avance Criollo, June 30, 1961, page 24.
Figure 3.9 Joe, “Now I Know What Communism Is!” *El Avance Criollo* August 4, 1961.
Figure 3.10 Jack Knox, “Breaking one egg doesn’t spoil the nest,” *Nashville Banner*, 1962.
Figure 3.11 Bill Mauldin, “He Loves Me…” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Missouri, 1960.
Figure 3.12 Bill Mauldin, “Drop It!” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Missouri, 1962.
Figure 3.13 Rafael Enríquez, OSPAAAL, "El Salvador, Against Imperialist Intervention."
Figure 3.14 Calvo, Ministry of the Armed Forces (MINFAR) “Clean the Escambray!” Fidel Castro’s quote, “We will not be tolerate those who betray the nation. No counterrevolutionary leader will escape!” 1961.
Figure 3.15 CIA Leaflets of the “Gusano Libre” Jon Elliston, *Psywar on Cuba: The Declassified History of U.S. Anti-Castro Propaganda*, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1999), 207.
Figure 3.16 Silvio, “The Worms: The Nightmare of the Beast of Birán” *El Avance Criollo*, December, 1961, p. 12. The caption reads, Birán is a town in Holguín Province in Cuba and is where Castro was born.
Figure 3.17 Cartoonists who incorporated the worm into their signatures.
Figure 3.18 D’Ga “El Gusano Libre,” *El Avance Criollo*, 1962.
Figure 3.19 Rosenda, Castro as Devil, “Mr. Perverso,” Zig-Zag Libre, July 21, 1962.
Figure 3.20 Alfrédo Rostgaard, “Nixon as Monster,” OSPAAAL, 1968.
Figure 3.21 Nino, “No, he’s not dead...he just smells the same.” Castro as Fat and slovenly, *El Avance Criollo*, August 4, 1961, 34.
Figure 3.22 This caricature shows the commonly drawn simian features of Ché, Fidel Castro’s obesity, and Raúl Castro as a homosexual. Nino “Moscuba” El Avance Criollo, June 23, 1961, page 20.


**Figure 3.23** Raul as homosexual, *El Avance Criollo*, 1961.
Figure 3.24 Charro Nuñez, “Castropoide,” *El Avance Criollo* January 5, 1962 page 59.
Figure 3.25 Execution of Colonel Cornelio Rojas, *Bohemia*, January 12, 1959.
Figure 3.26 Bill Mauldin “Just think what could happen to you if we weren’t idealists...” Originally printed in the *St. Louis Dispatch* and reprinted in *Time Magazine*. January 22, 1959.
**Figure 3.28** Luis Balaguer, Latin American and Caribbean Students’ Association (OCLAE), “Day of Continental Support for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, October, 15-21, 1969
Figure 3.29 Niko, Castro as Hitler, “Hitler and Castro think alike...Dictators cut from the same cloth.” *El Avance Criollo*, June 23, 1961, 2.
CHAPTER FOUR

Sources of Maximum Danger: Cuba, the United States, and the Struggle for Hearts and Minds, 1959-1989

I think the big task of the next administration is going to be to contain this revolution in Cuba, itself, and not have it spread through Latin America.


Castro’s voice is heard all over Latin America... The cry Yanki No! Is a cry for help, a cry of warning a cry for you, Yanki, to care about your neighbors.

—Yanki No! Bell and Howell Close Up, (1960)

While imperialism wants to destroy us and our revolution, we are going to destroy imperialism with our example, our success.

—Fidel Castro, To the Literacy Brigades, (1961)

In August 1961, President Kennedy’s advisor Richard Goodwin attended a special meeting of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Punta del Este, Uruguay. The United States called this meeting of the OAS member nations to adopt the Alliance for Progress (Alianza del Progreso). The Alliance for Progress was a U.S. economic aid program designed to assist the developing Latin America republics but also had at its very heart the mission of further isolating Cuba from the rest of the hemisphere. At the end of the conference, Goodwin was invited to a birthday party thrown for a Brazilian delegate. At the party Goodwin was led into a back room where a meeting
had been arranged between the U.S. official and Cuban revolutionary leader Ernesto “Ché” Guevara.

Guevara had attempted to meet with a member of the U.S. delegation earlier in the week but had been rebuffed until the conference had concluded. It was Guevara’s desire to talk privately with Goodwin in order to propose opening a back channel for the U.S. and Cuban governments to discuss their relations. During the discussion, Ché reiterated to Goodwin that the Cuban government believed that the Alliance for Progress would ultimately fail and further warned that the program “might set loose forces…ending in a Cuba style revolution.” Ché insisted that Cuba would not play a direct role in fomenting these revolutions, but Cuba’s example would spread throughout Latin America. The 26 of July leader then thanked Goodwin for the Bay of Pigs invasion saying “that it had been a great political victory for them [Cuba]—enabled them to consolidate (the revolution)—and transformed them from an aggrieved little country to an equal.” It was from this “equal” vantage point that Guevara expressed hope that the two nations might be able to find common ground or at least a “modus vivendi.” After the meeting, Goodwin left immediately to record what had been said while Guevara stayed on to enjoy the rest of the party.¹

Upon returning to the United States, Goodwin sent a memo to President Kennedy about his run-in with Guevara. “Cuba is undergoing severe economic stress,” Goodwin postulated, and “the Soviet Union is not prepared to undertake the

large effort necessary to get them on their feet…and that Cuba desires an understanding with the U.S.” Instead of looking to use this meeting with Guevara as a possible opening for dialogue between the two countries, Goodwin recommended that Kennedy maintain an aggressive stance towards the Castro government. Goodwin urged the president to publicly downplay U.S. concern about Cuba so as “to not encourage anti-American and leftist forces in other countries to rally round the Cuban flag.” Goodwin further recommended that the president quietly intensify pressure on revolutionary government by continuing covert activities aimed at destabilizing the Cuban economy as well as stepping up anti-communist and anti-Castro propaganda throughout the hemisphere.2

Although this impromptu encounter between Guevara and Goodwin could be viewed as little more than a cursory discussion between two rival delegates, the meeting also revealed the main goals that each country was developing towards the other. At the most fundamental level, the Cuban and U.S. governments wanted to convince their own populaces and the rest of the world about the righteousness of their causes and the dangers posed by the other country, in other words, to win hearts and minds. To achieve this goal, both nations engaged in domestic and international efforts to showcase themselves, while at the same time discrediting each other through a variety of programs and visual mediums.

In the United States domestic images designed to influence public opinion about the dangers posed by communist Cuba were created by a variety of editorial cartoonists, filmmakers, and television producers. These artists generated a multitude of images that assisted in cementing the idea of Cuba as part of the larger threat posed by Soviet aggression into the U.S. public’s imagination. U.S. image-makers depicted Latin America as an unstable breeding ground for communist revolution further threatening U.S. hearth and home if the U.S. public remained apathetic. The U.S. government also commissioned artists to create images to be used in its external propaganda efforts. The U.S. government distributed films, posters, and perhaps most importantly in comic books throughout the hemisphere under the auspices of the Alliance for Progress (1961-1968). In addition to Alliance’s economic and military assistance programs, different types of U.S. propaganda envisioned Cuba and Castro as an enemy and at the same time heralded the United States as the region’s true friend and brother nation.

Following the defeat of Batista, the Cuban revolution quickly turned from the military rebellion into a conscious effort to reshape the meaning and purpose of Cuban society. These changes were done in part, as Guevara had explained to Goodwin, to create a society that would serve as an example for the rest of Latin America. After 1959, the new government immediately set out to execute a series of multiple, mutually reinforcing social and economic reforms as part of its over-arching ideological goals of class, gender, and racial equality. These projects included agrarian reform, the literacy campaign, universal health care, housing developments, and national tourism. These projects greatly improved access for Cuba’s underclasses
to once forbidden spaces and services. After the Cuban government put these reforms into motion, Cuban artists continuously celebrated the programs in advertisements, billboards, films, pamphlets, and posters displayed throughout the country. Through these images Cuban artists visualized and disseminated the notion of a new national Cuban family unhindered by past racial or class biases. It was through the images, as much as the reforms themselves, that the Cuban government was able to deliver its message of what it meant to be part of the new revolutionary society. In addition, from the triumph over Batista in 1959 to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, the revolutionary government sought to spread the message of Cuba’s national identity as a challenge and alternative model to U.S. hegemony to the rest of the world. Over these forty years, Cuban transmitted images of its revolutionary message to third world nations on three continents.

Unable to find the modus vivendi that Ché had proposed, the U.S. and Cuban governments maintained their positions of animosity towards the other. Popular culture produced in both countries became a primary arena for the expression of national identity and a key battlefield for popular support of the competing ideologies in the hemisphere. U.S. and Cuban image-makers produced a dialogue of images that reflected these animosities and were designed to influence not only their own populaces but also to win the hearts and minds of the rest of the world.

Yanki No! U.S. Images of Fear of Castro’s Reach

Following Castro’s 1959 victory tour of the United States, the U.S. press’s image of the Cuban leader changed almost overnight from a venerated heroic figure
to a pernicious threat. The major change in images occurred after the first set of agrarian reform laws began to be institutionalized in 1959 and the nationalizations of U.S. corporations began to take effect on the island in early 1960. The tension created by these reforms was compounded by sabotage on the island from anti-Castro forces as well as Castro’s own increasingly harsh rhetoric towards the United States due to his own preconceived notions of U.S. opposition to social reforms in Latin America. U.S. image-makers, particularly political cartoonists and documentary filmmakers, echoed the growing concerns of U.S. politicians and businessmen, and began to portray Castro as a maleficent communist in an effort to raise U.S. awareness against the once popular rebel. Cuba’s increasing ties with the Soviet Union and Castro’s anti-American diatribes also played into the image that the revolutionary leader needed to be stopped from spreading his influence to other Latin American countries. In a famous illustration, *Chicago Sun Times* political cartoonist Bill Mauldin depicted a smirking Castro smoking his signature cigar, his beard now turned into octopus tentacles grabbing at all of Latin America. [See Figure 4.1] The use of the octopus’s body was a classic archetype used in past conflicts to represent a

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3 Wayne S. Smith, who served in the U.S. Embassy in Cuba in 1959, makes a convincing argument that the U.S. government was willing to negotiate with Castro on matters related to the agrarian reform, but it was a combination of the reforms and Castro’s increased rhetoric against the United States as a means to unite the country against a common enemy plus his own foreign policy objectives of spreading revolution throughout Latin America that assisted in creating an atmosphere of disharmony between the two nations. See Wayne S. Smith, *The Closest of Enemies: A Personal and Diplomatic History of the Castro Years*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 42-67; For additional accounts of the deterioration of relations see Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 241-263; Lars Schultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 82-141.
far-reaching and dangerous influence.\textsuperscript{4} The U.S. media increasingly employed this type of visual hybridization of Castro, his head placed on an animal body in an effort to dehumanize the Cuban leader. The combination of Castro with the octopus’s tentacles effectively communicated the fear and vilification of Castro’s influence over Latin America that was emblematic of the early 1960s.

U.S. artists used several types of imagery to communicate their opinions about the need to confront Castro before his impact spread to all of Latin America. *Nashville Banner* cartoonist Jack Knox drew “Cuban mosquitoes” in the shape of Soviet hammer and sickles flying off the island to spread a “plague” of communism. [See Figure 4.2] Knox drew Uncle Sam looking at Cuba holding a bottle of “Anti-Communist quick action formula” insecticide. The caption read “Use a strong insecticide before they spread a plague.” Knox was echoing the calls for “quick action” on the part of the U.S. government to stamp out the swarming communism in the Caribbean. Knox also wanted to emphasize to the U.S. public that the dangers of spreading communism was not limited to Latin American countries. To achieve this visually, Knox included a sign in his drawing that read “90 Miles” reminding his audience that the communist mosquitoes did not have far to travel to infest the United States with their infection as well.

The metaphor of disease would have contained a personal meaning to the U.S. public for the need to take aggressive action to protect themselves and their families.

\textsuperscript{4} Since the nineteenth century, artists have repeatedly employed the visual metaphor of octopi to represent spreading danger. For an excellent discussion of the octopus as visual metaphor see Michelle Farran, “Vulgar Army: Octoprop to Octopop,” Available from Vulgar Army, http://vulgararmy.com, (Accessed February 18, 2010).
against illness. Unlike explaining the economic or political differences between communism and capitalism, the visualizing of disease as a risk for one’s own family was immediately impacting. Curing the “disease” of communism in Cuba became an obsession of the Kennedy administration and an effective rhetorical device. During his presidential campaign, Kennedy repeatedly referred to communism in Cuba as a disease and called for an aggressive cure to stop Castro from spreading the infection.5 Political cartoonists visually presented this call by depicting the map of Cuba as a communist infection endangering the health of the rest of the world. Echoing these sentiments, Nashville Banner cartoonist Jack Knox drew Cuba as in the form of an infected boil on the globe spreading its sickness across the rest of the western hemisphere. [See Figure 4.3] U.S. political cartoonists also portrayed Cuba as a sick nation bedridden with a communist contagion. Exile newspaper, El Avance Criollo, cartoonist Anthony drew Cuba as a woman infected with a communist boil swelling on her shoulder. [See Figure 4.4] Anthony’s image called on the well-known gender construction of Cuba as a woman, the damsel in distress, in need of male help from the United States.6 Editorial cartoonists often portrayed Latin America as a nurse or

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5 Kennedy used the metaphor of disease repeatedly in his speeches and it was a common metaphor applied by editorial cartoonists to Cuba and communism in general. On the use of the metaphor of disease in foreign realtions see Jacqueline Foertsch, Enemies Within: The Cold War and the AIDS Crisis in Literature, Film, and Culture, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); John J. Johnson, Latin America in Caricature, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); and Louis Pérez Jr., Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 253-255.

6 Images of Latin American countries as female and of the United States as male have been used since the nineteenth century. Cuba in particular has often been portrayed as female. See John J. Johnson, Latin America in Caricature, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 72-116 and Louis Pérez Jr., Cuba in the American
the United States as Uncle Sam ready to administer an injection in the hopes of “curing” what ailed their diseased Cuban patient. In all of these political cartoons a common theme was repeated—Castro needed to be recognized by the U.S. public as a threat and communism in Cuba would spread unless the U.S. government dealt with the growing danger.

This call to awareness and action by editorial cartoonists was repeated in several documentary films and television shows produced in the early 1960s. U.S. filmmakers aimed at convincing the North American public to take a more active role in thwarting the increasing menace of communism in Latin America. The active role proposed was for the United States government to economically and militarily aid Latin American democracies through programs like the Alliance for Progress and to oppose Castro and Cuba by any means necessary. The filmmakers presented Castro’s Cuba as the possible precursor to a wider spread communist takeover in the western hemisphere. In the filmmakers’ opinion, if the U.S. government and to a larger extent the U.S. public, remained ambivalent to confronting communism, then violent revolution throughout Latin America was a foregone conclusion. The filmmakers endeavored to convince the U.S. public that the crisis in between Cuba and the United States was a life or death struggle for global freedom.

One of the first documentaries to warn that the United States was losing the battle for the hearts and minds in Latin America was Robert Drew and his team of cinematographers Richard Leacock, Albert Maysles, and DA Pennybaker’s

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documentary *Yanki No!* All four filmmakers pioneered the “direct cinema” movement of the 1960s. Direct cinema was a style of observational documentary making that utilized compact cameras and sound equipment in order to present subjects as they existed in everyday life. Drew, Leacock, and Pennybaker were partners in Drew Associates while Albert Maysles and his brother David had their own company. All four filmmakers were publicly acknowledged as the preeminent documentarians of the 1960s.\(^8\)

In *Yanki No!* Robert Drew’s principal concern in the film was why anti-American sentiment was increasing in Latin America. Drew and the other filmmakers wanted to encourage their U.S. audience see themselves as part of a larger hemispheric family that was increasingly under attack from communism. Throughout the documentary, the filmmakers focused their interviews on families in order to personalize the different situations in Latin America and give the U.S. viewer a way to empathize with their Latin American neighbors. The film opened with scenes of poverty in Latin America and emphasized the disparity between rich and poor. The filmmakers first interviewed the “Manzanita family,” Gabriel, his wife Maria, and their two kids who lived in a Caracas slum. Scenes of naked babies, kids with no shoes, a dead baby in coffin, and children looking through trash flashed across the screen while the narrator described the conditions. The Manzanita family explained the difficulties of living in the slums and the lack of opportunities that they had for

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advancement. “Latin America is heading into another kind of revolution,” the narrator postulated, “an economic revolution with Russia bidding to supply the ideas. Cuba is the spearhead.”

Drew then turned his attention to Cuba and the changes that had been taking place on the island since 1959. Amid scenes of Cubans marching, the narrator announced that Cuba was organizing its population into a huge militia with supplies from the Soviet Union. The filmmakers portrayed the Cuban masses as a dangerous mob, hostile to the U.S. government and seemingly to the U.S. public itself. Drew and his fellow filmmakers focused on the protest of the Declaration of San José in August 1960. This organized demonstration brought together over a million Cubans to the Civic Plaza in Havana to protest the OAS document that condemned Soviet incursion into the hemisphere. The document was designed to further isolate Cuba and censure the Castro government for cultivating economic ties with the Soviet Union. The film captured the million strong protest chanting “Cuba Sí! Yanki No!” During the filming of the protest, the filmmakers focused much of their attention on Afro-Cuban protestors as they gathered in the plaza. By emphasizing the anger of the crowd of Afro-Cubans and the amounts of people gathered in the plaza, the film played to white North American audiences confronting their own increasing racial tensions in the 1960s.

In addition to the rally, the filmmakers documented many of the improvements that had taken place in Cuba following the revolution. They

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highlighted the advancements in education, health, and housing that Cubans were experiencing as a result of the revolution. Some Cubans considered these reforms to be a more than fair trade-off for the lack of elections. Drew again chose to interview a family instead of a government official to report on what was happening on the island. The family of Jesus Moreno, a fisherman, who had received a new house from the revolutionary government, told the documentarians his opinions about the revolution. Moreno explained to the filmmakers that he was very excited about the revolution and boasted, “What do we need an election for? We are on top.” He then turned towards the camera and thanked Fidel Castro for receiving his house.

The filmmakers contrasted the economic successes in Cuba to the poverty of Caracas and left their audience with a dire warning.

Castro’s voice is heard all over Latin America—in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, in the slums of Buenos Aires, in the slums of Lima, in the slums of Panama. Vast and rapid changes are inevitable. They’ve already started. With an anti-American messiah, Soviet help, and Communist infiltration in Latin America, these changes will sweep the rest of Latin America, either violently with communist help or peacefully under the present democratic governments. This is a life and death challenge for the United States. A hostile Latin America could sabotage the U.S. position in the Western Hemisphere and weaken it around the world…The cry “Yankee No!” is a cry for help, a cry of warning, a cry for you, Yankee, to care about your neighbors. You, Yankee, must be prepared to follow through with understanding, effort, and dollars. To act quickly and strongly on their behalf, your own behalf, and on the behalf of freedom in the world.

Like the editorial cartoons about the increasing danger of Cuba’s spreading influence, *Yanki No!* appealed to the U.S. public to actively oppose communism in Cuba as a tangible threat that would increase in Latin America if left unchecked. The filmmakers’ use of images of families also brought an intimacy to the message that a straight political analysis of the decaying situation between Latin America and the
United States would have missed. By using families to explain how they personally felt about their situation, the documentary had a more personal impact on the viewer by allowing them to place themselves into the situation of their Latin “neighbors.” It was this intimate stake in foreign relations that the filmmakers wanted to make clear to their U.S. audience. Ultimately the filmmakers appealed to the U.S. public to be less apathetic towards the hemisphere and to recognize that they were connected to a larger hemispheric family that was greatly in need of their help.

The metaphor of families and the need increasing for U.S. public action against Cuba’s influence in the region continued in Marshall Diskin’s television special, *90 Miles to Communism*. In his program, Diskin argued that ignorance and misinformation about the rise of communism in Cuba was the ultimate threat to the United States and the rest of the hemisphere. Like many early films about Castro’s Cuba, Diskin focused his first scenes on armed Cubans as the narrator gravely warned, “At America’s back door. More than a quarter of a million under arms.” Diskin paid special attention to armed women and children marching in unison. The filmmaker wanted to shock the U.S. audience with more than just the threat of military action from the island only ninety miles away, but also with who comprised the army. “The militia drills every day,” the narrator lamented, “Women learn the lock step instead of the rumba. Children are also being trained…the twig is easier to bend at an early age.” This image of women and children as soldiers would have offended common notions of family in the United States. U.S. media depictions of

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10 Marshall Diskin, Director, *90 Miles to Communism*, Bell and Howell Close Up! ABC Public Affairs Production, April 18, 1961.
communism often linked the political system with the destruction of the nuclear family, torn apart and forced to live separate lives in the service of the state.

Like the filmmakers in *Yanki No*, Diskin interviewed a number of Cubans about what they thought about the changes happening on the island. Most of the people interviewed cared little about revolutionary ideologies and more about the immediate economic benefits that they had received from the new government. One sugarcane cutter put it very succinctly (and perhaps too articulately for a “cane cutter”) when he said, “I don’t know much about Russia or China, but this government is the uplift of this country.” Another Cuban peasant put it more bluntly when he announced to the camera, “We have a new house and if anyone tries to take it we will cut their throats.” Diskin dismissed what said in these interviews and criticized the Cubans for not recognizing the truth of what was actually happening in Cuba, an insidious communist takeover. Diskin presented the Cubans as under the spell of Castro and unable to see or purposely ignoring the dangers of the communist leader.

Both Robert Drew and Michael Diskin sought to warn the U.S. public about the dangers of communism through their films; however, it was Ed Butler, who can be considered the most zealous and over the top anti-communist filmmaker from this period. A self-proclaimed expert on communism, Butler, became politically motivated after the Cuban revolution and began to work against what he saw as the increasing threat of communism in Latin America. In order to work against this threat, in May 1961, Butler created the Information Council of the Americas (INCA). INCA’s goal was to defeat Castro and communism in the Western Hemisphere.
Butler recognized the power of propaganda in Castro’s rise to power and saw the communist leader using images as a tool to convince other Latin American countries to “go communist.” Butler believed that the United States needed to mobilize its own propaganda efforts in order to combat this threat and that INCA could assist the government in this cause. Butler wanted to create a new recognized position of propaganda specialist that he termed “conflict manager.” According to Butler the role of conflict managers was to “engage in direct confrontation with communism.” From his New Orleans offices, Butler began to produce numerous radio programs, pamphlets, flyers, and films in his effort to win what he termed the “brain war” against communism.  

Butler aimed at frightening the viewer into opposing Castro and Cuba. One example of Butler’s scare tactics was INCA’s most notoriously melodramatic film effort, *Hitler in Havana*. In the film, sponsored by the Schick Safety Razor Company, Butler used the example of family as a means to frighten his intended U.S. audience. Butler presented Fidel Castro as the modern day equivalent of Adolph Hitler. The film’s dramatic soundtrack and over-the-top narration described the horrors of the Cuban “red menace” with scenes of Castro juxtaposed with images of Hitler, the Cuban militia along side the Nazi army, swastikas morphing into hammers and sickles, and Hitler youth montages with scenes of Cuban children engaged in military drills. The film made several claims against the Castro government was destroying the lives of Cuban families. These claims included that Cubans citizens

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were going hungry, that the secret Cuban police monitored the Cubans every movement, and that young girls had been stolen from their families and sent to the Soviet Union for “indoctrination,” with the implied subtext of forced prostitution. Cuba, according to Butler, was the spearhead of a Soviet led communist takeover in Latin America equivalent to the Nazi takeover of Europe. INCA, Butler asserted, was combating this propaganda by disseminating “the truth about Castro’s Cuba” to the hemisphere. “Castro knows the power of words as a weapons,” Butler proclaimed, “His propaganda mills work overtime firing mental missiles into the heart of enemy nations.”

The revolution, according Butler, had turned Cuba into a gloomy militarized wasteland. Butler also blamed Castro for many of the concurrent problems in the United States. Among these problems was the Kennedy assassination, college student liberalism, and African American riots. Butler based his assertions on a debate he had led with Lee Harvey Oswald over the Fair Play for Cuba Committee on the radio three months before he assassinated Kennedy. Butler used this interview as evidence that Oswald had been incited to kill the president by Castro and communism. To this effect, Butler claimed Castro was now trying to brainwash liberal U.S. college students to rise up against democracy by turning them into an “army of Oswalds.” It was Butler’s contention that if the United States did not contain Castroism in Latin America and on U.S. college campuses then other U.S. presidents were sure to be assassinated.

13 Ibid.
Like the filmmakers of *Yanki No!*, Butler also used race to grab his U.S. viewers attention. Butler sought to frighten his audience with the specter of increased racial violence in the United States because of communism. “It is communists,” insisted Butler, “not Negroes who bare the ultimate blame for racial violence in America.” Butler labeled Castro as the instigator of racial tension; “The Hitler in Havana has invaded America with vicious ideas not troops. Communist instigated riots have splattered the United States with blood and flames.” For Butler racial violence was just another symptom of communism tightening chokehold on U.S. society. The film ended with Butler’s ominous warning to the U.S. public to take action against their southern neighbor. “If we do not win the war of words now,” Butler forewarned, “we will loose our lives in revolutionary riots tomorrow.”

While Butler’s *Hitler in Havana* was by far the most bombastic of documentary of the time period, each of these three film productions echoed U.S. editorial cartoonists message that the U.S. public needed be conscious of the dangers that had been created by Castro. According to the cartoonists and filmmakers, Castro, the revolution, and Soviet involvement in Cuba were all threats to democracy in Latin America and ultimately to U.S. security. By using metaphors of proximity, family and race, the cartoonists and filmmakers made the threat of communism seem more immediate and personal for their intended U.S. middle-class audience. The filmmakers and cartoonists’ repeatedly warned that the conditions of poverty in the region made Cuban style revolutions possible if not probable throughout the hemisphere. And if the United States did not act Castro’s Cuba could convert all of

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14 Ibid.
Latin America to communism. The conviction to defeat Castro in the battle to win hearts and minds would manifest itself in Kennedy’s Latin American aid program—the Alliance for Progress.

“Progreso si, tirania no!” The Alliance for Progress

On January 20, 1961, President Kennedy became the thirty-fifth president of the United States. His inaugural address left no doubt that his intention to confront Castro and the threat of communism in Cuba. Kennedy intended to strengthen the ties between the United States and the rest of the Western Hemisphere in order to oppose the threat of communism. Kennedy stated,

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge: to convert our good words into good deeds, in a new Alliance for Progress, to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. But this peaceful revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house.15

On March 13, 1961, the newly elected President Kennedy made good on his promise and announced the creation of the Alliance for Progress. In his plan, Kennedy set forth a broad and bold initiative, calling on the “free nations” of the hemisphere to unite in a “revolution” for social change. Kennedy meant the Alliance to be a “Marshall Plan” for the Americas that would raise the standard of living for all Latin Americans and thwart communist expansion in the Western Hemisphere. The Organization of American States (OAS) met in August 1961 and signed the Punta del

Este Charter to adopt the Alliance for Progress. The U.S. government barred the Dominican Republic and Cuba from participation in the program. The Alliance was a central part of Kennedy’s efforts to contain Cuba’s revolution and to showcase U.S. capitalism and democracy in the hemisphere. To achieve this goal the program called for broad economic development initiatives, counter-insurgency, and, of course, an aggressive propaganda campaign.16

While the mainstream U.S. media recognized disparities of extreme poverty and wealth in Latin America as a fertile breeding ground for communism, the Alliance for Progress was initially met with only tempered enthusiasm. Many people in the United States saw the Alliance as a program of handouts and as not doing enough to directly combat the root cause of communism in the Americas, Cuba. Cuban exiles in particular had mixed opinions on a program and expressed these sentiments in a number of political cartoons. Some cartoonists presented the program as a strong method for combating communism in the hemisphere. In one illustration, exile cartoonists portrayed Kennedy as a hero, triumphantly striding across Latin America. [See Figure 4.5] Those Cuban exile cartoonists who were enthusiastic about Kennedy’s program saw the Alliance as literally crushing both the Cuban revolution and the communist threat in the hemisphere. The Cuban exile artist Joe drew the Alliance as a huge cement block crushing Che Guevara. [See Figure 4.6] A second image in the same strip portrayed the “Punta del Este” as a lance impaling Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Raul Castro. The exile cartoonist Rafael echoed the

16 For an excellent contemporary account of the Alliance see Jeffery F. Taffett, Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America, (New York: Routledge, 2007).
idea of the Alliance as a force that would crush communism. Rafael depicted a hand labeled “Latin America” clasped with a hand labeled “J.F.K. Alliance for Progress” the two hands were shaking and in the process crushing Nikita Khrushchev. [See Figure 4.7] The caption translates to “strong relations.”

At the same time other Cuban exile cartoonists saw the Alliance as not doing enough to rid Cuba or Latin America of communism. In one cartoon, exile artist Silvio drew Kennedy as “Johnny Appleseed” planting the seeds of economic development in a field of Latin American countries. [See Figure 4.8] Unfortunately, communist crows ate the seeds that JFK scattered. The largest crow resembled Castro. The caption on the cartoon read, “With these ugly birds it is impossible to get a good harvest…” Silvio, like many other artists in the exile community, took the view that the economic assistance to Latin America without direct action against Cuba would have little success. Antonio Prohías echoed Silvio’s claim that the aims of the Alliance were at best misguided because they did nothing to get rid of communism. Prohias portrayed Uncle Sam as a bullfighter and communism as the bull. [See Figure 4.9] Prohias drew a Latin American standing on the side of the bullring watching as Uncle Sam plunged banderillas into his own neck instead of the bull’s. The Latin American mocked Uncle Sam saying, “Listen uncle, it’s the bull that you’re suppose to stick with the banderillas.” Even with concerns about the program, the U.S. government nevertheless pushed forward with its program to convince Latin America to adopt the Alliance.

In addition to giving economic aid and military aid to strengthen Latin American “democracies,” the Kennedy administration also sought to combat Castro’s
communist influence in Latin America through the use of propaganda. Following the Bay of Pigs, the Kennedy administration stepped up its efforts to discredit Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution to the rest of Latin America. As part of Operation Mongoose and under the aegis of the Alliance for Progress, the administration began production of propaganda in “all media” to achieve the administration’s goal for a politically and economically isolated Cuba that would eventually lead to destabilized government ripe for internal revolt. Donald Wilson, Deputy Director of the United States Information Agency (USIA), was tapped to lead the production of a massive propaganda effort. USIA was charged with creating propaganda that “exploited Castro defectors and children refugees…and (conducted) research on musical and visual symbols.” This effort was to “utilize all media in mobilizing public opinion in the other countries of Latin America against the Castro/Communist domination of the Cuban people…” In a July 20, 1962, memo from Donald Wilson to Edward Lansdale, head of Operation Mongoose, Wilson outlined the results for first phase of the operation. From March 1962 until July 1962, USIA produced and distributed an


enormous amount of propaganda including daily radio programs, television shows, an animated film, books, and perhaps most importantly comic books.\textsuperscript{19}

**Illustrating the Alliance: The Comic Book Program of the Alliance for Progress**

Comics had been part of the United States Information Agency efforts to combat communism in Latin America even before Castro’s takeover in Cuba. Richard Cushing, who worked for the USIS in Cuba during the revolution, had created a comic book while serving as the Public Affairs Officer for the USIS in Chile from 1950-1951. The comic *Juan Verdejo y su Sueño de Utopía* - (John Doe and his Dream of Utopia) told the story of a Chilean worker who became disenchanted with the promises made by communists. \textbf{[See Figure 4.10]} This comic was reprinted and distributed throughout Latin America.\textsuperscript{20} This same plot line of communists making


\textsuperscript{20} Richard Cushing’s son, Lincoln Cushing, provided me with a copy and explained the significance of the *Juan Verdejo* comic for me in 2006. Also note that the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the United States Information Service (USIS) were the same agency. USIS was the name used for the agency abroad but it was called USIA domestically so as to not confuse the agency with the United States Immigration Service (also USIS).
false promises to Latin American workers would be repeated on a much larger scale to counter the threat of communism spreading from Cuba. The Alliance for Progress comic book program was important enough to warrant its own director, Earnest Keller. Keller, who began his career as a journalist and embassy attaché in Manila, ran the Latin America comic book program in Washington, DC from 1963 until 1967. Keller’s office at USIA produced detailed reports documenting country by country the titles and amounts of each comic distributed. The program would eventually produce a total of thirty-six different comics between 1961 and 1967 and by September 1967 had distributed over sixty-six million copies throughout Latin America.21

The U.S. government utilized a variety of local presses in Latin America to print Alliance comics. In several incidences, USIS printed comics simultaneously in different cities in the same country, for example Guayaquil and Quito, Ecuador, Mexico City and Monterrey, Mexico, and Caracas and Maracaibo, Venezuela. In some cases private corporations sponsored the comics’ printing. For example, in Mexico in March 1962, Pepsi Cola paid for the printing of over three hundred thousand copies each of three different anti-Castro comics, El Despertar, La Estafa, and La Traicion. This is ironic considering that Coca Cola was one of the first countries to congratulate the revolution in Bohemia in 1959. Printing in Mexico also was listed in the USIA documents as having been paid for by a “private anti-communist group.” Similarly, in Columbia, Ecuador, and Venezuela the private

21 “Cartoon Books and Photo-novellas Distribution by Country, 1967” Ernest Keller Papers (EKP), Georgetown Special Collections, Box 4, Folder 34.
“Latin American Information Committee, Inc.” was listed as the financiers and distributor of the comics. These types of “private” companies were exactly the type of cover organizations that the CIA would use to channel funds to different programs.

After the USIS printed the comics locally, they were then given to newsstands to sell or distributed free of charge and in a variety of ways in eighteen different Latin American countries. Keller described in an internal memo dated May 22, 1963, the “ingenious ways” that USIS distributed the comics. Keller explained,

The Latin American USIS posts distribute the cartoon products in various ways, some highly ingenious. For instance, in two countries USIS furnishes the books as ‘text-book’ material to aid in the teaching of reading. In some places books are offered free of charge to shoppers in stores and in one supermarket are stuffed into customers’ bags by the checkers. Labor unions distribute them to their members, and in this connection one post reports that a Communist speaker became incoherently enraged when union members at a meeting continued reading their USIS cartoon books while he was haranguing them. In one country the books sell competitively on the newsstands with other cartoon books of the comic variety. Churches place them in their parishioners’ hands. USIS mobile units distribute them gratis at movie showings and USIS-sponsored public events.

Keller also explained that even more important than the distribution of the comic books themselves was the utilization of the comics by the Latin American newspapers. In some cases Latin American newspapers serialized the comics weekly while others stuffed the comics into their newspapers as supplements. For example, in Columbia, the weekly newspaper *El Campesino* printed comics as a weekly strip.

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22 “Comic Publishing Records,” EKP, Box 4, Folder 33.


24 Ibid.

In the anti-Castro comics, the artists denounced Castro as a ruthless dictator, discrediting the revolutionary government’s national and socialist agenda, in order to educate Latin Americans of all ages on what Keller referred to as “the manner in which Communism by its very nature breeds want and hunger in every country it

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25 “The Cartoon Book Program Report,” March 19, 1964, EKP, Box 4, Folder 32. This report lists seven titles. *Eso No Puede Pasar Aquí!* (This Cannot Happen Here!) “Castro takes over all private businesses,” may have been published after Keller left the agency in 1967 as there is no record of the comic among the Keller papers.
blights.”26 The full-size comics were sixteen pages long and printed using a four-color process. U.S. artists drew action-packed covers for the comics with either a scene of violence unfolding or about to unfold. [See Figures 4.11 and 4.12] The illustrators depicted bearded communists perpetrating violence against honorable clean-shaven revolutionaries and their families or shadows creeping up on women and innocent children. The titles of the comics were emblazoned across the top of the booklet in large eye-catching red or orange block letters. There was a place for a price to be assigned to the comic, although, as mentioned before, these comics were most often given away free of charge. Inside the comic, various size panels contained multiple characters illustrated with meticulous detail. Traditional dialogue bubbles above the characters and general descriptions boxes gave voices to the characters, set the scene, and described the action.

The majority of the anti-Castro comics followed the same storyline—Cubans rejoiced with the downfall of Batista, Castro then betrayed the revolution by adopting communist totalitarian policies, and true revolutionaries had no choice but to flee the country to save their families and to continue the fight against Castro from abroad for a Cuba that could someday be truly free. The comic creators designed these comics with action and romance to appeal to a broad audience—men, women, and children. In the anti-Castro comics, the heroes were all white Cubans representing the middle and upper class families in both Cuba and the Latin American countries where the comics were distributed. Many of the USIS writers employed the same plot of communism threatening Latin American families, especially women and children, in

order to have a maximum impact on their readers. These images of a threat against
ones own family made the larger political battle between two ideologies into a
personal one.

One of the first USIS anti-Castro comics was entitled, *El Despertar* (The
Awakening) “Castro’s Phony Land Reform.” *El Despertar* told the story of the Cuban
government threatening the lives and livelihoods of Cuban farmers. The policies of
the Cuban government forced the loving couple, Pepe Cuadros and Blanca Vazquez,
to fight against Cuba’s communism and unfair land reform. [See Figure 4.13] Pepe
Cuadros and Mateo Vazquez (Blanca’s brother) returned home from fighting in the
revolution. The family celebrated the end of Batista’s dictatorship and the promise of
receiving their own farms through the agrarian reform. However, this promise was
corrupted when the Cuban government insisted on controlling what the farmers could
grow and mandated that they could only sell their products to the government to buy
goods in government owned shops. Often in the in the Alliance comics the Castro
government delivered reforms that fell short of the initial promises made during the
revolution. In this way the comic artists sought to persuade their readers not to trust
what they had heard about Castro’s reforms and to look instead to the reforms offered
by the Alliance programs instead.

To counter the false hopes and broken promises of the Castro regime, the
Alliance comics often pointed to alternatives for Latin America. In *El Despertar*
Pepe’s cousin, Jorge, lived in Puerto Rico and wrote to his family about Puerto Rico’s
“land reform.” Jorge explained how he could plant what he wanted, received wages
for work, and sold his crops to whomever he wanted for actual money. In contrast,
when one of Pepe’s neighbors died from exhaustion, the revolutionary government confiscated the farm from his family. This angered Pepe and Mateo, who confronted Pontones, the head of the local militia. When Pontones refused to help, Mateo and Pepe realized that they did not actually hold title to their land. In response to what they then saw as a phony land reform, Mateo and Pepe wrote a letter to Castro in protest. Pontones intercepted the letter and accused them of counter-revolutionary activity. He took Mateo to jail and promised to be back for Pepe. A “good member” of the local militia, Manolo, warned Pepe and Blanca that Pontones was coming back to arrest Pepe. In response, Pepe and Blanca had to flee Cuba in order to save themselves and their family. [See Figure 4.14] The last line of the comic read, “The story is repeated. Once again two Cubans, lovers of liberty are obliged to flee their own country. Because, like many others, they have come to understand at last that the regime of Fidel Castro is a totalitarian dictatorship!” All of the Alliance comics ended with this type of pronouncement—Castro had betrayed the Cuban revolution and could not to be trusted.

In another anti-Castro comic La Mordaza (The Gag) “Castro Throttles Press, Radio and TV,” declared on its cover that, “No country is really free without freedom of expression.” [See Figure 4.15] The comic writers again placed romance and family at the center of the plot as a way to draw readers of different backgrounds into the story and to then illustrate how Castro’s treachery put not only their individual lives at risk but also the life of the entire nation. In this story Andrés Ruíz and Rosita García worked as television reporters who supported the revolution to the point that Castro personally thanked them for their help in winning the fight against Batista.
Although Castro promised to keep freedom of speech at the forefront of the revolution, the new government ended up going back on its pledges and shut newspapers down and imposed their will on all forms of speech. Andrés who was a television reporter at first acquiesced to the communist’s demands and reported their censored stories. He did this because he was worried for his own and Rosita’s safety. However, Andrés soon realized that his actions were helping to prop up Castro and his dictatorship and that was ultimately where the real danger lay. Andrés resolved to take a stand and had his friend Juan prepare a boat to leave the island. Andrés went on the air and exposed the truth telling his audience that he had been reading statements prepared by the government and that the communists now controlled Cuba. Because of this breach of security, Andrés and Rosita had to flee the island and barely escaped with Juan out of the country. [See Figure 4.16] Again the comic writers illustrated that “true revolutionaries” had to become exiles in order to continue the fight against Castro’s communism from abroad.

In both El Despertar and La Mordaza the heroes supported the revolution but for the love of their country and each other were left with little choice but to flee Castro’s Cuba. The comic writers portrayed the protagonists as victims of Castro’s communist government—idealists betrayed. The central message of the comics was that if the middle and upper classes in other Latin American countries did not defend themselves against communist aggression in the hemisphere then the same fates could befall them. The comics all supported the political agenda that the U.S. government kept reiterating—the revolution to rid the island of Batista was justified, social reforms were needed in Cuba but the methods that were used to carry out these
reforms were incorrect, and the communist government suspension of basic liberties made it impossible for “freedom loving” Cubans to stay on the island. The heroic individuals and families in the stories risked certain death if they were true to their values and tried to remain on the island. The comics presented the Castro government as extreme and unbending in its quest for totalitarian power.

Besides the Anti-Castro titles, the USIA also produced several comics to promote the Alliance for Progress and in an attempt to foster unity between the United States and Latin America. These comics encouraged Latin Americans to participate in Alliance’s rural development projects, praised the merits of non-communist labor unions, and campaigned for good citizenship and the benefits of self-help. The writers of these pro-Alliance for Progress comics often portrayed nefarious outsiders as trying to defeat good Latin Americans who desired a more prosperous future for their families and communities. The comic’s plots also contained benevolent outsiders, usually from an Alliance for Progress program, who wanted to help the people as well as encouraging the self-determination that was seen as ultimately needed to build a better future. The comics often used documents from the OAS meeting at Punta del Este as evidence to support the goals of the heroes. Like the anti-Castro comics, the story arc in the Alliance comics was also essentially the same—the hero had the necessary conviction and a dreams for a better future, communist outsiders attempted to defeat this optimism, but with assistance from the Alliance for Progress they ultimately triumphed and were able to meet their goals. The comics acknowledged that change was necessary in Latin America but that the
only avenue for real change was through programs like the Alliance not through communism and its false promises.

In one example, *Pepe Obrero y Su Sueño* (Pepe the Worker and His Dream), told the story of factory workers and their quest for a better life. This comic had a very different look than the anti-Castro comics. It was much more cartoon like in its drawings and action. [See Figure 4.17] This difference could have been because the comic’s message was far more positive than the dire anti-Castro comics and was not designed to scare its audience. In this story, Pepe believed that it was possible for his family and the entire community to have a better life with schools, housing, and a higher standard of living for his town. These dreams were not achieved through handouts or communism, but instead through hard work and small businesses. The stories of the Alliance contrasted with the nationalizations of industries and businesses taking place in Cuba. The Alliance comics presented private enterprise and entrepreneurship as the keys to economic development with only limited help from the outside.

In *Pepe Obrero*, a furniture factory opened in Pepe’s town and began producing chairs. Pepe and the other factory workers as well as the owner, Don Félix, were dissatisfied with the conditions at the factory and the products produced. In response, the workers formed a union and were able to negotiate with Don Félix for better conditions and wages. Don Félix in return received better work and products to sell. However, “opportunists” (read communists) moved into the town and destroyed the effectiveness of the union. The union demands became untenable and caused the factories to close and move elsewhere. Pepe and the other workers realized that the
unions needed to be more democratic and be able to vote on what was best for both the workers and the owners so that everyone could prosper. After the union implemented these reforms, the factories reopened in the town. Pepe and his fellow worker, Juan, realized that the union could not solve all the problems of the town and that they still needed help to achieve their dreams of development. At the end of the story, Pepe and Juan read from the charter of the Alliance for Progress. [See Figure 4.18] The two workers realize that the Alliance offered them and all Latin Americans the hope to achieve all their dreams together.

Another comic entitled, La Hora Decisiva (The Hour of Decision) is an example of another type of pro-Alliance comic. In this type of story the protagonist must stand up for what he believes in, risking everything for the ultimate good of his country and loved ones. The Alliance was portrayed as controversial but those who understood the aims of the program triumphed, the truth ultimately coming to light. In La Hora Decisiva the protagonist, Roberto Gomez was committed to helping his fellow classmates become involved with the Alliance for Progress in their (unnamed Latin American) country. [See Figure 4.19] Unfortunately for Roberto, the other students did not believe in the true intentions of the Alliance. One classmate in particular, Ramón was vocal about his disbeliefs in the Alliance and claimed it was part of “Yankee imperialism.” Ramón had other evil intentions and sought to discredit Roberto in an effort to steal Roberto’s girlfriend, María. However, Roberto remained true to his beliefs even risking the love of María for what he believed was right for his country. Roberto is eventually able to show his fellow students the work that the Alliance is doing and the great benefit the projects will bring to the country.
At an all student rally, Roberto passed out the preamble of the Alliance for Progress. (The preamble was reprinted in the comic.) [See Figure 4.20] He was careful to emphasize that unlike the communists the Alliance did not promise “a paradise tomorrow” and that the projects would take time to complete but that with hard work together with the Alliance the university students could create a brighter future for their countrymen. Roberto convinced his fellow students, even Ramón, and in doing so won back the love of María.

The use of comics was an effective and relatively inexpensive medium to distribute the U.S. message against Castro and communism. Because all age groups read comics they could have a far-reaching impact. The U.S. government knew that the power of visually linking political messages with entertainment and appealing to the masses through an already popular and easily digestible genre should not be underestimated. The Alliance comics fulfilled the desire for the U.S. government to assert its “storyline” about Castro’s Cuba and what the Alliance hoped to accomplish into the hands of millions of Latin Americans. Ultimately military power and the support of dictatorships friendly to U.S. interests more than images kept the western hemisphere from converting to communism. However, the comic book effort alone shows that the U.S. government believed that images were an integral part of the battle against Castro’s Cuba and for hearts and minds of Latin America.

**Cuba Nueva: Promises Kept and the Winning of Cuban Hearts and Minds**

The Cuban government was well aware of the U.S. government’s direct and indirect efforts to politically and economically isolate the island. Although Cuba had been barred from receiving aid from the Alliance for Progress, it was still a member
of the OAS. Ché Guevara was Cuba’s representative at the meeting and was given the opportunity to speak at the conference. During his lengthy speech, Guevara asserted that, “this conference and the special treatment given to all of the delegations…all bear the name of Cuba, whether the beneficiaries like it or not…” Guevara went on to criticize the Alliance as a U.S. smokescreen that would do little to alleviate any real suffering in Latin America and instead would serve to prop up U.S. imperialism. Cuba on the other hand, Guevara declared, intended to offer the hemisphere an alternative model and become a beacon of hope for the world through example.27

Before Cuba could become a beacon for other countries like Guevara predicted, the new government first needed to convince its own populace of the righteousness of the revolutionary cause. Central to this mission was keeping the promises of change and development that the rebels had pledged during the revolution. Immediately following Castro’s entry into Havana, a majority of Cubans met the revolution with a mixture of relief and hope. The Cuban political cartoonist Antonio Prohías summed up the optimism that was widespread in the first months after the revolution. Prohías was one of the most celebrated political cartoonists in Cuba and served as the president of the Cuban Cartoonist Association from 1958 to 1959. In March and April 1959, Prohías deviated from his normal *Bohemia* comic strip “El Hombre Siniestro” (The Sinister Man), to draw a set of two frame cartoon comparisons of what Cuban society was like before the revolution and the hopes for

what Cuba could be like after. In these cartoons entitled “Cuba Nueva,” Prohías illustrated several of the revolutionary promises that were beginning to take place in Cuban society. [See Figures 4.21 and 4.22] The cartoon’s title had a map of Cuba hatching from an egg as if the beginning of a new life for the island and summed up many of the changes that the new government was trying to implement. These changes included agrarian reform, the literacy campaign, housing, and national tourism all of which supported the overarching goals of racial, class, and gender equality. Prohías was able to capture the hopes for several of the main social reforms that the revolutionary government was attempting to implement.

The revolutionary government’s ability to implement social reforms as proof that they were keeping their promises was critical to build up their legitimacy. Indeed, the most important set of hearts and minds that needed to be convinced about the merits of the revolution were the Cuban people themselves. The leadership realized that only after the island’s majority was behind the revolution would it be possible to expand its message outward to Latin America and the wider developing world. With every reform the Cuban government produced images that served to remind the populace that the leadership was fulfilling its promises. Because the majority of people in Cuba were only semi-literate, visual communication was imperative to reach the largest segments of the population. The Cuban leadership commissioned images in advertisements, billboards, cartoons, films, pamphlets, and posters that showcased the new society that was attempting to build.28

28 For an excellent article that deals with the multiple types of visual culture created in Cuba after the revolution as political tools up to the mid-1970s, See David Kunzle “Public Graphics in Cuba: A Very Cuban Form of Internationalist Art,” Latin
One of the first sets of changes that the revolutionary government implemented was to grant access to spaces that were once off limits except to the very wealthy. These reforms allowed the poor and especially Afro-Cubans to participate in arenas of Cuban life that had at one time been explicitly off-limits. These reforms enabled the new government to use race and class to now build a stronger base of support and to redefine the national family. National tourism served The government wanted to reward the populace for winning the revolution and to promote national unity through domestic tourism. In several advertisements, gasoline companies encouraged Cubans to explore their own country. [See Figure 4.23] These advertisements presented the possibility for all Cubans to explore locations that previously had been available only to foreign tourists or the very wealthy. The goal, as shown in the Prohías cartoon (Cuba Nueva), was to change the Cuban mindset away from traveling to the United States or Europe and to instead have Cubans embrace their own national patrimony.

One of the first changes the revolutionary government made to encourage national tourism was to open all Cuban beaches to the public.29 With this change the government eliminated the racial and class barriers that had existed at private beaches and clubs before 1959. One of the most symbolically important beaches was Varadero Beach located a hundred miles east of Havana and had the reputation as one

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29 The “Ley 270” was passed in April of 1959. This law opened all Cuban beaches to the public. Ley 270 *Leys del Gobierno Provisional de la Revolución* (Havana, Cuba: Editorial LEX, 1959), 222.
of the most exclusive resorts on the island. After the revolution, the Cuban
government explicitly allowed Cubans who had been previously denied access to
vacation at Varadero.\textsuperscript{30} For Cubans, especially black Cubans, to vacation at Varadero
held great symbolic value for the new Cuban leadership and Cubans in general. In
1961, Castro proclaimed this significance at Varadero stating,

\begin{quote}
The fatherland today gives every child the opportunity, which was formerly
reserved for a few. You have an example of this here with this beach, where
some 40,000 students with scholarships will vacation. A few years ago only
the sons of multimillionaires could enjoy themselves here. Today this same
beach can be used by the most humble son of a worker or a farmer.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

In keeping with the spirit of this speech, Varadero became known as the “National
Center of Vacation and Recreation for workers, peasants and the young.”\textsuperscript{32}

The new government facilitated the visiting of Varadero by nationalizing
hotels and properties in Varadero that had once belonged to foreign individuals or
corporations. Prices were then drastically reduced—a single room cost as low as 1.00
peso. The Cuban government nationalized and converted the villas of the wealthy into
tourism apartments and charged only thirty-five pesos for a week’s vacation for up to
ten people. The government also extended credit through the National Institute of
Tourism (INIT) to make vacations to Varadero and the rest of Cuba affordable.\textsuperscript{33} This

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{30} Ley 270 \textit{Leys del Gobierno Provisional de la Revolución} (Havana, Cuba:
Editorial LEX, 1959), 222.
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\textsuperscript{31} Fidel Castro, “1961 Speech Literacy Brigades at Varadero,” (speech given
at Varadero Beach, Cuba), Available from UT-Lanic Fidel Castro Speeches Database,
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\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Bohemia}, October 15, 1961, 51.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Bohemia}, January 15, 1961, back cover.
\end{flushright}
credit was extended in order to encourage Cubans to travel to Varadero and other places in Cuba as a means for better acquainting themselves with the country as a means to build sense of national pride and identity. The new government also used vacations to Varadero as a way to reward the best workers. INIT initiated a reward program in which the best “workers, students, police, and military would receive holidays at different tourism centers.34 The Comité de Trabajadores Cubanos (CTC) also held contests to reward the most productive workers in the country with holidays.35 Varadero was part of the reward system for workers supporting the revolution with their best efforts.

To promote the new national tourism and to also showcase the tearing down of racial and class biases, the Cuban National Institute of Tourism (INIT) advertised tourist destinations with images of racial harmony. Because tourism had been extremely segregated in the past, spaces previously off limits to Afro-Cubans, like Varadero, provided a perfect opportunity to illustrate the differences that the revolution was making in terms of establishing racial equality. Castro represented the inclusiveness of Varadero when he stated,

The beaches, now that the Olive Green Revolution has constructed a new nation—for this reason we say, A.R. and D.R., meaning before and after the revolution—have been rescued, along with the rest of our national heritage, to be given over to the legitimate owners. Now the blue of the waters and the

34 INIT, Productividad, Boletín Mensual Plan Nacional Emulacion Socialista Consolidado de Empresas INIT, November and December 1961, 6.

Tourism representations in the early years of the revolution not only encouraged more people to visit Varadero but also became a propaganda tool of the new government that continuously reaffirmed ideological goals and confirmed revolutionary success.

In many of the INIT advertisements the government’s underlying message was that the entire nation now belonged to all Cubans regardless of race and class. Advertisements featured families arriving in Varadero and groups of Cubans enjoying the beach underneath large canopies. In other advertisements, INIT depicted groups of Cubans from different races traveling together. In one example INIT presented, a group of five people—including two mulattos, two white Cubans, and an Afro-Cuban—playing volleyball together on the beach. [See Figure 4.24 and 4.25] The caption in advertisement read,

Now the country’s workers can enjoy the advantages of our climate of eternal spring and delight -- twelve months out of the year -- in the sun and sea of our beaches, the revolutionary Government has made dormitories and cabins available all year, at reasonable prices, there are dances, games and pastimes, and all the facilities to play sports. Cuban now that you have a socialist homeland that has given you the right to rest you can enjoy your days off more than ever before…go and enjoy your beaches where all year long the people are happy! 


39 Bohemia, October 15, 1961, 38.
In the eyes of the revolution, all Cubans were now part of the same national family, and could enjoy Varadero with the same rights.

In addition to national tourism, another way the new government sought to create a new cohesive and equal nation was through the literacy campaign. The *Brigadas de Alfebetizadoras* or Literacy Brigades like national tourism helped to unite the Cuban people through the program itself as well as through the many visual forms that celebrated the program. Before the revolution Cuba’s illiteracy rate stood at about forty-two percent. Reducing this rate had been one of the stated goals of the revolution from Castro’s attack on the Moncada. The new government wasted little time and declared 1961 the “Year of Education.” Eventually, over a hundred thousand teachers went out into the Cuban countryside to teach. Young and old, men and women, everyone was given the opportunity to learn. In order to amass the number of teachers necessary, the Cuban government closed all secondary and pre-university schools on April 15, 1961. Everyone over the age of thirteen who had completed the sixth grade was encouraged to volunteer for the program. The campaign was so successful that in the course of a little more than a year the literacy rate in Cuba was improved to ninety-six percent. The new government achieved their stated goals for raising the rates of literacy as well as the secondary goal of promoting the revolutionary government itself.


The campaign itself was presented to the Cuban people with militaristic language. The program to eradicate illiteracy was “a battle” the teachers “an army.” The government presented education not just a fight to improve reading and writing but as the frontline of a war against imperialism. The teachers themselves reflected this rhetoric dressed in military uniforms with berets, boots, and arm insignia. The brigadistas marched in parades with giant pencils and lanterns instead of guns. Posters promoting the campaign carried the idea of brigadistas killing illiteracy. In a 1961 poster the brigadista was pictured stabbing the word illiteracy in the mountains with a pencil. [See Figure 4.26] The style of the poster was similar to the military posters that had urged action against “gusano” counter-revolutionaries. The brigadista was larger than the mountains, an unstoppable force. Visually both efforts, one to wipe out anti-revolutionary forces on the island and the other wiping out illiteracy caused by imperialism, were visually joined.

The cover image of Literacy Campaign’s teaching manual further illustrated these military themes. [See Figure 4.27] The manual’s cover drawing featured a teacher striving forward with a shield bearing the insignia of the campaign while holding the lamp of the brigade in the other hand. Behind the teacher, was a group of Cuban men, women, and children, of all races—the new revolutionary family—marching forward in unison as they were guided out of the darkness. The instructor’s shield was emblazoned with the words Ejercito de Alfabetizadores (Army of “Education,” in Dudley Seers, Cuba; The Economic and Social Revolution, (Chapel hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 161-282; and Marvin Leiner “The 1961 National Cuban Literacy Campaign,” in Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff, eds, National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives, (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 173-196.
Teachers) protecting the nation as it followed behind him. The cover depicted a kerosene lamp that served a real purpose in the campaign of providing light to conduct classes in rural settings that had no electricity at night. The lamp was also symbolic of the Literacy Campaign and the Cuban revolution bringing of the light of knowledge to all Cubans.

The Literacy Campaign’s curriculum also contained martial overtones. Teachers taught math and reading using examples that reinforced the superiority of the revolution and the evil nature of the United States using the twenty-four “themes of revolutionary orientation.” These themes included the history of the revolution, new social programs such as the agrarian reform, revolutionary organizations, and the general inferiority of the United States. Through these lessons students learned not only to read and write but also that the United States was their enemy. The slogan for the literacy brigades was “We have won another battle over imperialism!” As a Cuban report to UNESCO frankly stated, “The aims of education in the new Cuba include instilling in our children and young people an unbounded love of the Fatherland… to abhor imperialist wars of plunder… [and] to develop a love of country and a love for workers and peasants…”

Images from the program also reinforced the mission of the revolution as a whole. In 1961, the beach at Varadero was chosen as the national training site for the

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Literacy Brigades further redefining this once exclusive resort. The teachers stayed in the hotels and villas that had been used by foreign tourists. At full capacity the training center housed twelve thousand volunteers. Over a one hundred thousand teachers trained at Varadero then traveled to the far reaches of the country. The Cuban government chose the beach as a training site as an incentive for those who had volunteered for the program. The use of Varadero as a staging point for the literacy campaign further distanced the resort from the symbol of U.S. dominance that had once been associated with the beach. Advertisements for literacy workers used images of the beach as an incentive to work for the literacy brigades. [See Figure 4.28] One advertisement from Bohemia in June 18, 1961, showed a young Cuban volunteer pointing to the beach where his fellow trainees played in the surf. The caption read, “During training I am enjoying a vacation in Varadero, I will then go to work planting the flowers of education in our country…” The volunteer was dressed in a brigade uniform and appeared happy to be going his part to help the revolution. The brigadista in the advertisement appeared to be very young and white.

The Cuban government utilized the Literacy Campaign as another method to break down barriers between the races. Images from the campaign contained photos of white Cubans working with their Afro-Cuban brothers in a common purpose of eliminating illiteracy and at the same moment visually eliminating racism. During the Literacy Campaign, companies advertised their products with images of multi-racial Cubans cooperating and learning together. In a March 5, 1961, Coca Cola advertisement commemorating the literacy campaign, the photo in the advertisement depicted the hands of a white upper class woman guiding the darker hand of her
domestic servant writing the alphabet. [See Figure 4.29] The caption read “In 1961, the year of education, use your ‘pause that refreshes’ to teach reading and writing to whomever you have near.” The message was that a “woman of the house” could teach while having her “Coca Cola” break. Although there was still a power relation in the image that favored white Cubans over Afro-Cubans, the image still pushed for cooperation. Like the government’s push for national tourism, the literacy campaign became a means that the revolutionary leadership united white and Afro-Cubans in a common revolutionary effort through which each race could come to know and respect the other. The government pointed to the campaign as eliminating illiteracy and also contributing to building a new sense of national unity.

The government reminded the Cuban populace about the literacy campaign through billboards and murals painted throughout the island. Billboards were an effective means of visual communication that the Cuban leadership employed to continuously remind the public about the revolution’s goals and successes. The Castro government took the billboards that had been used before 1959 to promote U.S. products and transformed them into advertising for the revolutionary message. 44 These billboards like posters could be quickly changed to suit the revolutionary government’s needs such as celebrating revolutionary heroes, instilling motivation, or highlighting revolutionary achievements such as the literacy campaign. 45

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44 For a overview of the categories of posters see Harjan Bos, Cuba: The Billboards, (London: Lulu Press, 2008).

45 Murals painted to honor the Brigadas de Alfebetizadoras are still visible in Varadero but fading. Most Cuban tourism guidebooks from the 1960s to the 1980s mentioned the Literacy Brigades as part of Varadero’s history. See Evaristo Villalba, Cuba y El Turismo, (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1993), 160; See also
The Cuban Film Institute, ICAIC, also visually promoted the “fight” against illiteracy. In March 1959, the revolutionary government founded the first cultural institution of the revolution, the Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos, the Cuban Film Institute, (ICAIC).\(^{46}\) The new government recognized that one of the most important visual mediums they could utilize to spread their message was film. Like the documentary films that presented Cuba as a threat to the United States, ICAIC produced documentaries that denigrated their northern neighbor and more importantly educated the island’s populace about the revolution’s activities and goals. These films documented the new social reform programs such as agrarian reform, housing, health care, and the literacy campaign.

One of the first films on the literacy campaign was Manuel Gómez’s 1962 *Historia de una Batalla* (Story of a Battle).\(^{47}\) Gómez used his film to link the fight to eliminate illiteracy to Cuba’s larger fight against imperialism. The martial theme of the film, “study to defend,” was anti-American. Gómez shot *Historia de una Batalla* during the push by thousands of volunteers into the countryside in 1961. The film’s scenes of volunteers riding trains and marching through Havana resembled the deployment of an army. Gómez purposely juxtaposed these images with scenes of

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\(^{47}\) Manuel Gómez, Director, *Historia de una Batalla* (Story of a Battle), ICAIC, 1962.
Cubans defeating the U.S. led invasion at the Bay of Pigs to further emphasize the militaristic nature of the fight against illiteracy. Gómez also honored the teachers who had been killed by counterrevolutionary forces while trying to teach in the Escambray Mountains like they were fallen revolutionary soldiers. The victims of these attacks were declared martyrs of the revolution and were held up as examples of self-sacrifice equal to those who died fighting Batista. The film echoed the revolutionary government’s call to participate in the campaign by linking the idea that literacy to defending the nation against U.S. imperialism and aggression.

ICAIC directors continued to celebrate the literacy campaign and connect it to military action years after the project was completed. Octavio Cortázar’s 1977 fictional account of the literacy brigade, *El Brigadista* (The Teacher), followed the story of Mario, a fifteen-year-old boy who traveled to the Zapata swamp to teach farmers. **48** Although the villagers did not welcome Mario at first, through his determination and dedication to the revolution he won the town over. Mario also gained the villager’s respect when he helped them defeat counter-revolutionaries hiding in the swamp. Cortázar film reaffirmed the importance of the Literacy Campaign to the collective memories of the Cubans who had participated as teachers and those who had been their students. Similar to national tourism, images of the Literacy Campaign, as much as the government program itself served to unite Cuba in common purpose and supported a new vision of national identity free of racial and class prejudice.

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Images of Alliance and Opposition: Cuba’s Quest for Hearts and Minds Abroad

Like Cuba’s domestic programs, the Cuban government produced a variety of visual sources to document Cuba’s goals in foreign relations. To assert their views internationally the Cuban government would often commission images to be created in a variety of visual mediums to address a single issue. For example a Cuban agency would produce a poster, ICAIC would make a film, and billboards would be erected all in support or protest of the same foreign policy issue. The multitude of images thus reinforced Cuba’s message of its place in the world and how Cuba’s new society fit in globally. Just as the revolutionary leadership supported its domestic program of change to promote a new sense of Cuban identity with multiple images, the Cuban government employed multiple visual mediums to publicize its international policies as it sought to become a voice for change in the rest of the Third World.49

Cuba materially and visually supported multiple social revolutions in the Americas most notably in Guatemala, Grenada, and Nicaragua.50 Cuba stood against the racist policies in South Africa and the United States. Indeed the Castro


50 After a November 1964 meeting of Latin America communist organizations held in Havana, Cuba was asked to reframe from giving aid to the most radical factions of the Latin American revolutionary struggles. Although Cuba kept quietly supporting Latin American leftist movements, by January 1965 Havana turned its more visible support towards liberation struggles in Asia and more importantly Africa. See Piero Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 12-29.
government treated the struggle for equality by African-Americans as another struggle for liberation by a non-aligned nation. Cuba stood in solidarity with the North Vietnamese communists and opposed the U.S. bombings of Cambodia and Laos. During the mid-1970s, Cuba began to actively support liberation movements in Africa. In total, Cuba sent more than sixty-five thousand troops and civilian advisors to seventeen African nations and actively participated in armed conflicts in Algeria, Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and most dramatically Angola. The liberation movements that Cuba supported were opposed across-the-board by its northern neighbor. Much like a chess game, any move that Cuba made on the international stage was countered the United States, any movements that the United States made, Cuba would oppose. The Cuban government would often produce images that professed its opposition to U.S. foreign policy goals. In this way the struggle for hearts and minds around the world reinforced the continued struggle of Cuba against its most formidable enemy, the United States.51

One of the most successful means for the Cuban government to make its position visually known on a wide array of both foreign and domestic issues was through the distribution of posters. Between 1959 and 1989 most Cuban

governmental agencies produced posters. These agencies employed a multitude of artists who between them created thousands of posters promoting revolutionary ideas and goals. Best estimates approximate the number of Cuban posters produced between 1959 and the present at over 12,000 individual posters bringing the total number of copies distributed to well over sixty million. The agencies that produced the majority of posters included the Cuban Communist Party, the Latin American and Caribbean Students Association (OCLAE), the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), the Cuban Tourism Institute (INIT), and the Organization in Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. (OSPAAAL).

Out of all the Cuban agencies that produced posters, OSPAAAL’s international efforts were the best known. Poster artists working for OSPAAAL created a myriad of images that drew attention to Cuba’s stance on international affairs throughout the world. OSPAAAL was founded as a non-governmental organization in Cuba after the revolutionary government hosted the Tricontinental congress in Havana from January 3-15, 1966. Representatives from eighty-two Third World nations attended the congress. OSPAAAL has maintained its offices in Havana ever since and receives funding from the Cuban government. The stated aims of


53 A majority of OSPAAAL posters have been catalogued and published in Europe. See Richard Frick, The Tricontinental Solidarity Poster, (Bern, Switzerland: Comedia-Verlag-Bern, 2003); and in the United States at UC Berkeley by Lincoln Cushing on his website Docs Populi, Available from http://www.docspopuli.org/, (Accessed March 14, 2009).
OSPAAAL from the beginning were to fight against imperialism by promoting freedom and solidarity within the Third World. OSPAAAL’s leadership claimed that the posters themselves were a “combative form of cultural expression,” to be use in the fight against imperialism.54 The most prolific period of OSPAAAL’s poster production was from 1967 until it lost the majority of its funding with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, but the organization has continued producing posters on a more limited scale to the present day.55

OSPAAAL distributed its posters worldwide as part of its *Tricontinental* magazine. At its height, OSPAAAL distributed over 50,000 copies of the magazine per month. Each issue of *Tricontinental* included a poster that was folded inside the magazine to be pulled out and displayed. From 1967 to 1989 roughly fifteen million posters were distributed over a twenty-two year period.56 OSPAAAL posters were published with captions in four languages, Spanish, French, English, and Arabic. However, OSPAAAL artists knew that their intended audience was largely illiterate and so relied more on the images themselves to convey their message. The posters graphics used many recognizable symbols and archetypes that made the dissemination of the images readily accessible across national boundaries and cultures. OSPAAAL commissioned posters for the many cold war and anti-colonial conflicts that were fought around the globe. OSPAAAL posters offer not only a


55 Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, OSPAAAL has continued to produce posters but at a severely reduced rate.

historical record of the many Third World struggles that took place during the Cold War but were a weapon of change used during many of those conflicts.

For example, during the Vietnam War, Cuba produced a number of posters to protest U.S. involvement in South East Asia and celebrated the fortitude of the Vietnamese people. Many of the poster showed the victims of U.S. aggression, especially children maimed or killed by U.S. bombs. Again this use of images of family as victims was used by both the United States and Cuba to make the conflicts personal to all viewers. Cuban posters from this time period also depicted U.S. presidents Johnson and Nixon as responsible for the atrocities being committed in Vietnam. In 1971 René Menderos’ famously portrayed Nixon as a monster in the shape of an eagle violently tearing the heart out of South East Asia. [See Figure 4.30] Like Bill Mauldin’s visual hybridization of Castro as an Octopus, Menderos affixed Nixon’s head to the body of an eagle, his face bearing vampire fangs. By comparison OSPAAAL artists’ depictions of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese people were joyful, peaceful, and serene. [See Figure 4.31] The posters celebrated Vietnamese victories against the United States and condemned the U.S. escalation of the war into the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. In celebrating Vietnam’s determination against the United States, the Cubans also celebrated their own struggles against U.S. aggression.

This comparison between a hostile and insanely aggressive United States and a peaceful but determined Vietnam was visible in several Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) films. One of the most famous films about the Vietnam War was Santiago
Álvarez’s *79 Primaveras* (79 Springtimes). Santiago Álvarez was a founding member of ICAIC and one of Cuba’s most celebrated film directors. He was the in charge of the Cuban newsreel program and produce over seven hundred short documentaries for ICAIC. Álvarez was instrumental in transforming film in Cuba and clearly stated the purpose of filmmaking after the revolution. “Cinema, is not an extension of revolutionary action, Álvarez asserted, “Cinema is and must be revolutionary action in itself.” In order to advance the cause of the revolution, ICAIC averaged more than forty documentaries per year from 1959 until the present. Like Cuban posters and billboards, Álvarez’s documentary style was primarily visual containing little or no dialogue.

The title of the film, *79 Primaveras*, referred to North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh who died in 1969 at the age of seventy-nine. Álvarez used few words in his films and yet was able to tell a history of Vietnam’s struggle for independence. Like the OSPAAAL posters, Álvarez’s film contained contrasting images of the beauty of Vietnam and the brutality of the United States—blooming Vietnamese flowers that morphed into exploding U.S. bombs, Vietnamese children dancing around Ho Chi Minh and children burned by U.S. napalm bombs, U.S. soldiers killing Vietnamese and posing for photos with their bodies. The film also showed the anti-war protests and violence taking place in the United States because of the war, U.S. imperialism as

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a domestic crisis as well as an international one. Towards the end of the film, Álvarez presents the violence of the war, as so intense that the film itself seems to come to pieces as the viewer is watching. Through these images of violence inflicted by the United States, Cuban image-makers were able to show the differences between the new Cuban society and the brutality of U.S. imperialism.

Another societal difference that was highlighted in various visual forms by Cuban artists was race. From the very beginnings of the revolution one of the main goals was the ending of racist policies on the island. This official achievement was celebrated by in Cuba in the early 1960s and contrasted with the continuing struggle of African-Americans in the United States. Castro continuously aligned himself with the plight of African-Americans. In September 1960, Castro came to the United States to address the United Nations on his second visit since assuming power. This visit had a very different tone then Castro’s celebration tour of the United States in 1959. The 1960 visit was punctuated by the Cuban delegation leaving their mid-town Manhattan hotel in protest over “ill-treatment,” and relocating to the Hotel Teresa in Harlem. Because Harlem was the epicenter for Black culture in the United States, the move by the Cuban delegation provided visual shorthand that communicated to the U.S. Black community and to the world that Castro considered African-Americans part of Cuba’s global struggle for social justice.60

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One the first attempts to play on the differences in racial policies between Cuba and the United States was through tourism marketing. In January 1960, the Cuban government offered to hire U.S. boxer, Joe Louis, to promote Cuban tourism to African-Americans. Louis was reported as saying “There is no place in the world except Cuba where a Negro can go in the wintertime with absolutely no discrimination.” Louis was photographed with Castro and was enthusiastic about the contract. Nothing came of the arrangement in terms of tourism promotion or income for Louis. Instead, a year and a half later, Louis testified before a U.S. congressional sub-committee as part of its investigation into Cuban communist infiltration into the U.S. through the Caribbean. Of particular concern to the committee was that Cuba was trying to attract African-American tourists who, in their opinion, could then be turned against the U.S. government. The committee wrote a special report detailing the perception of possible communist infiltration entitled “Cuba and the American Negro” that was attached to the hearings proceedings.

In a *Time Magazine* article from June 1960, Castro was quoted as openly questing “what would happen if the Negroes in the Southern U.S., so often lynched, were each given a rifle?” Various Cuban agencies produced posters in support of

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African-Americans in the United States. Several posters depicted leaders of the U.S. Black Panther Party like revolutionary heroes such as Angela Davis, George Jackson, Huey Newton. [See Figure 4.32] The Cuban government repeatedly condemned the violence against African-Americans in the United States as a human rights abuse. Several posters echoed these condemnations and contained photos of the Ku Klux Klan and violence perpetrated on African Americans. In a Heri Escheverria poster published by Editora Politica, the shape of the statue of liberty was filled with images of racism and violence in the United States with the caption “What types of fighter for Liberty are these?”[See Figure 4.33] The images in the poster were from the Watts riots in 1965, which also became the subject for a celebrated ICAIC documentary.

In 1965, Santiago Álvarez produced one of his most famous documentaries focusing on racism in the United States—NOW! Like 79 Springtimes, NOW! was comprised of “found” footage and photographs from U.S. magazines and newsreels. From these sources, Álvarez created a collage of the images to depict racism and brutality in the United States. The entire film is only six minutes long and was set to a U.S. banned Lena Horne song “Now “that used the Jewish celebration song “Hava Nagila” as its basis. The scenes in the movie are of the Watts riots in 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. meeting with president Johnson, and widespread violence against African-Americans in the southern United States. The film ended with the sound of a machine gun and animation spelling out the word now in bullet holes. Álvarez’s film mirrored Castro’s call for African-Americans to rise up in armed struggle against an internal imperialism propagated by a U.S. government that oppressed their race. As
with many of the domestic and international issues in the early years of the revolution, images of solidarity with African-Americans supported the rhetoric of the Cuban leadership.

In its efforts to support struggles against injustice throughout the world, Cuba produced a multitude of images in every visual medium to show their solidarity. However the ultimate image of Cuban revolutionary struggle came in the form of a single photo of Ché Guevara. In March 1960 a French freighter, La Coubre, loaded with Belgium arms exploded in Havana Harbor killing seventy-five and injuring another two hundred people. During a speech Castro made denouncing the bombings, photographer Alberto Diaz Gutierrez better known as Korda snapped a photo of Che Guevara he titled Guerrillero Heroico (Heroic Guerrilla). [See Figure 4.34] Korda was commissioned by Castro to document the revolution in photographs and became in essence the official photographer for the Cuban revolution. Guerrillero Heroico became the most famous and lasting images of the revolution and is widely regarded as one of the most recognizable photos in the world.64

From the photo, every form of visual media imaginable has been emblazoned with Ché’s image—advertisements, album covers, banknotes, billboards, bumper stickers, buttons, coins, flags, key chains, murals, postage stamps, posters, and t-shirts, to name but a few.65 In addition, Che and Che’s image have been the subjects

64 Korda snapped the image at a memorial service for the victims of the explosion the La Cobre March 5, 1960. The explosion in Havana’s harbor was regarded as an act of sabotage.

65 For a fantastic account of all the different images of Ché see Michael Casey, Che’s Afterlife: The Legacy of an Image, (New York: Vintage, 2009) and David Kunzle, Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message, (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler
of numerous books, films, and songs. Korda’s image has been transformed so many times that it now represents a set of ideas more than the man himself. It is Ché’s image not necessarily his actions that have survived and continue to inspire other movements.

The modern use of Ché’s image tends to provoke a response of fraternity or anger. Most people who wear the t-shirt have no idea who Ché Guevara was or what he stood for and only see his image as a symbol of youthful rebellion. Ironically the image has been so mass-produced and sold that it is representative of the very type of global mass capitalism that Ché would have fought against. Nevertheless, the image remains a potent symbol of protest and is one of the most enduring legacies of the Cuban revolution. Although Ché’s forays into Africa and Latin America in an effort to foment Cuban style revolutions abroad were unsuccessful and led to his death, Ché’s image as an inspiration for other struggles of liberation can be seen as a global victory Cuban victory in the struggle for hearts and minds.

**Conclusion**

In the aftermath of the Cuban revolution, Latin America became a frontline battleground of the Cold War. Castro’s acceptance of aid and weapons from the Soviet Union sent a clear signal that the Cold War had expanded beyond a primarily European front and into a more global conflict. Because of this shift, the United States could no longer count on Latin America to be a stable and benign region. Even before taking office, Kennedy began to see Latin America as the “most dangerous

area in the world” and worked to destroy the Cuban revolution in both image and reality. After January 1959, the revolution turned from a military operation against Batista to a conscious effort to reshape the meaning and purpose of Cuban identity. It was in this new quest for a re-envisioned national family based on socialist ideals of racial, class, and gender equality that the Cuban revolution found its most lasting mission. Castro seized upon the constant specter of U.S. aggression served as a catalyst to speed revolutionary changes on the island and as an impetus for the Cuban government to spread their example abroad.

Both Cuba and the United States worked to win the domestic and international battle for hearts and minds. For the new Cuban government winning the hearts and minds of the Cuban people was the primary objective of building a new society that could serve as a beacon to the rest of the developing world. In order to build this society, Cuban artists endeavored to produce a new worldview of the island as an independent and equal nation apart from the United States. The new government encouraged Cubans to get to know their own country and to know one another as equals. Crucial to this effort to form a new society was an increase in access, education, and common images and messages that continuously spoke to the Cuban people as a revolutionary unified society.

In the United States, the battle for hearts and minds centered on the containment of Cuban communism. U.S. political cartoonists and filmmakers demanded that the public pay attention to the increasing danger now posed by their once close ally. The U.S. government considered popular visual culture such as comic books an important part of the fight against communism spreading to other Latin
American nations. Arguably U.S. military power, more than images, kept the western hemisphere from converting to communism. However, the use of images was always included in plans to contain Cuba’s advance and therefore was considered an important psychological tool used to spread U.S. ideas and values.

Since 1959 the United States also had another image of Cuba’s failure to convince a portion of its own population of the merits of the revolution, the continuous mass exodus of Cuban from the island to the United States. The Cuban exile community has been a continuous source of image making against the Castro government and is in many ways the most intimate and personal aspect of the conflict between the two nations. By their very existence, the exiles have continuously fed U.S. popular culture with images of the failure of the Cuban revolution and Castro. It is the changing nature of these images and the Cuban and U.S. response to the exile community that we next turn.
Figure 4.1 Bill Mauldin, Castro as Octopus spreading his reach over Latin America, Chicago Sun Times, 1963.
Figure 4.2 Jack Knox, “Use a Strong Insecticide Before They Spread a Plague,” *Nashville Banner*, 1961.
Figure 4.3 Jack Knox, “The Real Danger is Spreading Infection,” *Nashville Banner*, 1960.
Figure 4.4 Anthony, Communism as infection, *El Avance Criollo*, August 25, 1961, 35. The caption reads, “God willing the vaccine will save me from this infection.”
La Democracia se va abriendo paso a través del convulsionado continente americano.—Venezuela, Colombia y Panamá son tres pueblos más que se unen a la política cristiana y justa.—Kennedy penetra en esos países llevando como estandarte de su doctrina un plan constructivo que es una realidad: “Alianza para el Progreso”.

**Figure 4.5** Kennedy Strides over South America. *El Avance Criollo*, January 5, 1962, Cover
Figure 4.6 Joe, “Punta del Este,” *El Avance Criollo*, August 25, 1961, 14.
Figure 4.7 Rafael, “The Firm Handshake,” El Avance Criollo, January 5, 1962, 10.
Figure 4.8 Silvio, “With these types of nasty birds, it is impossible to get a good harvest…” Kennedy as Johnny Appleseed, *El Avance Criollo* August 25, 1961, 40.
Figure 4.9 Antonio Prohias, “Listen Uncle, it’s in the bull where you stick the banderillas…” *El Avance Criollo*, December 1, 1961, 4.
Figure 4.10 Richard Cushing, Juan Verdejo y su Sueño de Utopia (John Doe and his Dream of Utopia), USIS, Chile, 1950.
Figure 4.11 *Escuela de Traidores* (School for Traitors) “Castro’s guerrilla training camps,” Alliance for Progress, 1966.
Figure 4.12 *La Traicion* (The Betrayal) “Castro’s Takeover of Labor Unions,” Alliance for Progress, 1962.
Figure 4.13 *El Despertar* (The Awakening) “Castro’s Phony Land Reform,” Alliance for Progress, 1962.
Figure 4.14 Pepe Cuadros and Blanca Vazquez leaving Cuba to continue their fight against communism and unfair land reform from abroad. In *El Despertar* (The Awakening) “Castro’s Phony Land Reform,” Alliance for Progress, 1962.
Figure 4.15 *La Mordaza* (The Gag) “Castro Throttles Press, Radio and TV,” Alliance for Progress, 1962.
Figure 4.16 Andrés, Juan, and Rosita “Lovers of Liberty,” flee from Cuba and barely escape with their lives. In *La Mordaza* (The Gag) “Castro Throttles Press, Radio and TV,” Alliance for Progress, 1962.
Figure 4.17 Pepe Obrero dreams of a better life for his family. In *Pepe Obrero and Su Sueño* (Pepe the Worker and his Dream), Alliance for Progress, 1963.
Figure 4.18 Pepe Obrero reads from the Punta del Este Charter. In *Pepe Obrero and Su Sueño* (Pepe the Worker and his Dream), Alliance for Progress, 1963.
Figure 4.19 *La Hora Decisiva* (The Hour of Decision), Alliance for Progress, 1963.
Robert Gomez was committed to helping his fellow students become involved with the Alliance for Progress. In *La Hora Decisiva* (The Hour of Decision), Alliance for Progress, 1963.
Figure 4.21 Antonio Prohias, “Cuba Nueva,” Bohemia, March 29, 1959, 12.
Figure 4.22 Antonio Prohias, “Cuba Nueva,” *Bohemia*, March 29, 1959, 12.
Figure 4.23 “Go for the gusto in Cuba!” Shell Gasoline Tourism Advertisement, *Bohemia*, March 29, 1959, 56.
AHORA TODO EL AÑO PUEDES

con un 50% de rebaja
en las cabañas,
por semana

Ahora están abiertas las playas todo el año...

Ahora el pueblo trabajador puede disfrutar de las ventajas de nuestro clima de eterna primavera y gozar -los doce meses del año- del sol y del mar de nuestras playas, en las que el Gobierno Revolucionario le ofrece todo el año albergues y cabañas, a precios populares, bailes, juegos y diversiones, y todas las facilidades para practicar los deportes.

Cubano, ahora que tiene una Patria socialista que hace efectivo tu derecho al descanso, ahora que puedes disfrutar más que nunca de tus días libres... ¡sal a gozar de tus playas, donde todo el año hay alegría de pueblo!

Figure 4.24 “Now all year long you can enjoy your beaches.” Instituto del Turismo Nacional Cubano (INIT), Bohemia, October 15, 1961, 38.
DISFRUTAR DE TUS PLAYAS

Dondequiera que vives tienes cerca una gran playa popular.

Las 37 playas públicas que el Gobierno Revolucionario ha puesto a disposición del pueblo, se dividen en tres grupos.
Gruppo “A”: Ofrecen conocido alegramiento en cabañas y cuentan con cafetería, restaurán, taquillas, botas, etc.
Son las siguientes:
Gruppo “B”: Contienen de dos a más edificios equipados con restaurán, cafetería, taquillas, etc.
Son las siguientes:
Gruppo “C”: Por lo general tienen en solo edificio con cafetería y taquillas.
Son las siguientes:
Varadero. Caimar (Beléndar). Guanabacoa. Bajajagua. (I de Pasc)

Cabañas de $4
Semana $28 $42
Vie-Sáb-Dom. 12 18
Cabañas de $6
Semana $42 $71
Vie-Sáb-Dom. 18 14

Figure 4.25 “Now all year long you can enjoy your beaches.” Instituto del Turismo Nacional Cubano (INIT), Bohemia, October 15, 1961, 39.
Figure 4.28 “While I train I can enjoy a vacation at Varadero…” Literacy Brigade Advertisement, Bohemia, June 18, 1961, Inside Front cover.
Figure 4.29 “In 1961, the year of education, use your ‘pause that refreshes’ to teach reading and writing to whomever you have near.” Coca Cola, Bohemia January 8, 1961, backcover.
Figure 4.30 René Menderos, Nixon tearing the heart out of South East, OSPAAAL, 1971. Reprinted in Richard Frick, The Tricontinental Solidarity Poster, (Bern, Switzerland: Comedia-Verlag-Bern, 2003), 290.
Figure 4.31 Alberto Blanco, Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese People, OSPAAAL, Reprinted in Richard Frick, *The Tricontinental Solidarity Poster*, (Bern, Switzerland: Comedia-Verlag-Bern, 2003), 292.
Figure 4.32 Rafael Morante, George Jackson, OSPAAAL, Reprinted in Richard Frick, The Tricontinental Solidarity Poster, (Bern, Switzerland: Comedia-Verlag-Bern, 2003), 421.
Figure 4.33 Heri Escheverria, “What kind of ‘Freedom Fighters’ are these…” Editora Politica, Undated-Post 1965.
CHAPTER FIVE

Martyrs, Murderers, and Miracles:
Images of the Cuban Exile Within and Without, 1959-2000

Some ask can it be that bad in Cuba and I always think of these people who have faced a hundred miles of ill highways, the sun, the storms, the terror of the night in tiny boats to flee red paradise.


We say to those who do not have the genes of revolutionaries, or the blood of revolutionaries, or who do not have the necessary discipline and heroism for a revolution: We don’t want you! We don’t need you!

—Fidel Castro, Anti-Mariel Rally, (1980)

I'm Tony Montana, a political prisoner from Cuba. And I want my fuckin' human rights, now! Just like the President Jimmy Carter says. Okay?


No one—not even a father—has the right to enslave another human being.


On Thanksgiving Day, November 25, 1999, a five-year-old boy was discovered floating in an inner tube off the coast of Florida. The boy was reportedly found alone, surrounded by dolphins, and miraculously unsunburned despite having been adrift for days, the only survivor of an escape from Cuba. The discovery of this child set off an international custody battle that became part of the larger war of images that began decades before his birth. That war started on another stormy
November 25 forty-three years earlier when an overcrowded and dilapidated boat set out for a return voyage to Cuba from Mexico. That voyage was also attributed as full of heartaches, myths, and miracles. Both of these famous seafarers, Elián González and Fidel Castro, have been part of one of the constant themes of Cuban history—exile.

The Cuban exile community in the United States has been a central part of the conflict between the United States and Cuba. Both governments have used images of the exiles to support their political own agendas. For the Cuban exiles themselves, the conflict between the Cuba and the United States has been fought on the most intimate level—whole families have been uprooted; parents and children split apart; property expropriated. The majority of Cubans arrived in the United States in four waves, the first wave of 1959-1962, the “Freedom Flights” of 1965-1973, the Mariel Boatlift of 1980, and the Balsero Crisis of 1994-1995. Each of these groups of exiles became the subject of a new set of images produced on both sides of the Straits of Florida.

The exiles have been a curse and a blessing for both the Cuban and the U.S. governments. Allowing or even encouraging a portion of Cuba’s population to leave the island has been a method for the revolutionary government to constantly externalize dissent. Because the exiles rejected their place in the new revolutionary Cuban family, the Cuban government in turn rejected them as the worst traitors of the revolution. Within the revolutionary framework, those who remained on the island then had increased legitimacy in Cuban society while those who left were automatically counter-revolutionaries in league with the enemy. Emigration from the island also served the Castro government as a social safety valve. Every Cuban that
left the island was one less person relying on Cuba’s socialist system for economic support. In addition, Cubans who opposed Castro but left the island no longer posed a danger for internal rebellion. The Cuban exile community has also become an economic lifeline to thousands of resident Cubans through the remittances that are sent every year totaling upwards of a billion and a half dollars. However, the price for this safety valve and foreign currency has been a constant source of negative images for the U.S. government to use against the Castro regime.

The U.S. government, for its part, welcomed the exiles into the U.S. national family because they served as a potent symbol to be used against communism during the Cold War. For the U.S. government, the massive departures of Cubans from the island provided a constant image base to point out of the failure of Castro’s system. However, the exiles have also been a political liability to their U.S. hosts. Their willingness to confront Castro directly through sabotage and acts of terrorism at times aided the U.S. government and at other times was at odds with the stated objectives of the United States. Some members of the exile community viewed any action, legal or illegal, as justified as long as it worked towards their ultimate goal, eliminating Fidel Castro. Domestically, the exiles have played a crucial role in reinvigorating South Florida yet at the same time have been linked to the region’s major crime problems.

The exiles have continuously bound the two nations together through family ties to the island as well as divided the nations by acting as the most vocal opponents to any reconciliation between the two estranged neighbors. The visual metaphors of family that have both connected and separated the two countries are often rooted within the exile community. These images—from Ricky Ricardo’s family man
fantasy, to Tony Montana’s anti-hero family tragedy—captivated the U.S. public imagination and in turn shaped the view not only of the émigré community but also the relationship between Cuba and the United States more generally. The contested family connections between the United States and the island, like the custody battle for Elián González, continued to reinforce the metaphorical battle between Cubans for the custody of their island.

The exiles are in many senses the embodiment of the intimate relationship between the two countries, the personal made political and the political made personal. The U.S. and Cuban governments turned every exile who chose to leave the island into a political image. For most exiles, the personal reasons why they left the island were based on the consequences of the strained political relationship between Cuba and the United States. These reasons including differences in political ideology, fear of government persecution, economic opportunity, or any combination were often the result of the conflict between the neighboring nations. Popular images produced by exiles and about them often reveal this personal/political duality and served to define it. These popular images have both obscured the truth of the exiles history as well as revealed details about them and their connection to the U.S.-Cuban foreign policy that would have otherwise remained hidden from view.

First Waves: Golden Exiles and the Formation of the Community

Since the beginnings of the twentieth century almost every Cuban political figure—José Martí, Gerardo Machado, Ramón Grau San Martín, Carlos Prío Socarrás, Fulgencio Batista, and Fidel Castro—has spent time in exile in the United States. Some of them came to the United States in order to launch their political
careers in Cuba; others came at the end of their tenure. Thousands of Cubans also
taveled back and forth between Cuba and the United States for professional and
personal reasons. Immigration to the United States, both legal and illegal from Cuba,
has been continuous from the early nineteenth century. Before 1959 the number of
Cubans who remained in the United States as permanent residents was relatively
small, around 30,000. The Cuban revolution of 1959 provided the catalyst for a
substantial and sustained exodus from the island. The second half of the twentieth
century has accounted for the largest numbers of Cuban immigrants with over a
million Cubans arriving in the United States over the last fifty years (1959-2009).

The first large migration of Cubans to the United States took place
immediately following the revolution and lasted from 1959-1962. Because
commercial air travel continued to the island until the Cuban Missile Crisis, most of
these immigrants simply boarded tourist planes from Cuba to the United States and
never went back. These immigrants came from the upper echelons of Cuban society
and had the most to lose from the revolution. The exiles were a relatively
homogenous group—predominantly white, educated, and with significant resources.
Some of the first to arrive in the United States had been connected to the Batista
government and needed to flee the island or risk imprisonment or death. Soon after
the revolution began its social reforms wealthy landowners, large business owners, or
managers in U.S. corporations also left. Although many in the first waves came from
opposing political camps—some backed the revolution, others supported Batista—
one in the United States they joined together to oppose Castro and the development
of Cuba as a socialist state. Before the Bay of Pigs, the first exiles believed that their
stay in the United States would be temporary. The Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962) brought a halt to this first wave and the Cuban government stemmed the flow of exiles for three years. In total close to a quarter of a million Cubans arrived in the United States in the first three years following the revolution.¹

Following the Missile Crisis, the Cuban and U.S. governments suspended commercial flights between the two countries. Nevertheless, Cubans continued to immigrate to the United States via third countries. Between October 1962 and September 1965, over 50,000 Cubans came to the United States mainly through Mexico and Spain. Another four thousand Cubans left the island in small boats and rafts. The media in the United States paid much more attention to the small number of Cubans who crossed the ninety miles of ocean clandestinely, heralding them as heroes. During the first years of the revolution, the Straits of Florida, which tourism advertisers had touted for its azure and placid beauty were now portrayed in the media as an inhospitable shark-infested “corridor of death.”²


² Cuban waters have been associated with sharks for centuries. One the most famous early representation of shark attack is John Singleton Copley’s 1778 painting
Images of sharks and the other natural hazards of crossing the Straits of Florida made stories of Cubans fleeing the island in homemade rafts even more harrowing. [See Figure 5.1] Even though from 1960 to 1980 the amount of Cubans who came to the United States via their own craft was only two percent, the U.S. government, U.S. press, and the exiles themselves played up the image of Cubans risking their life to flee Castro’s “red hell.” A multitude of images in the exile press from the early sixties featured images of Cubans swimming or rowing away from the island. [See Figure 5.2] For the exiles the Florida Straits became the metaphorical equivalent of the Berlin Wall—a barrier keeping people prisoners of communism. Cubans became the Western Hemispheric equivalent of Eastern European “escapees.” Images of exiles risking life and limb crossing the shark-infested Straits on rafts supported the United States position that Castro and communism was failing the people of Cuba. The U.S. government also popular images of this moral triumph of the exiles fleeing communism to justify granting Cubans easy admission into the United States and supplying them with substantial aid.3

“Watson and the Shark.” In the painting a sailor reaching for help is attacked by a giant shark in Havana Harbor. Another popular tale of shark attack and Cuba is Ernest Hemingway’s Old Man and the Sea. In the story sharks devour the marlin the Cuban fisherman, Santiago had caught as he is rowing back to shore. For a description of the exile view of the Florida Straits as dangerous see Patrick Lee Gallagher, The Cuban Exile: A Socio-Political Analysis, (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 40-42. The images of sharks were also used to illustrate the enemy by both countries. See for example Figure 3.3 Jeff Yohn’s cartoon of the shark as communism patrolling the Caribbean. Also in the Robert Cohen film Three Cubans children sing about Fidel Castro devouring the sharks at the Bay of Pigs. Robert Cohen, Director, Three Cubans, National Educational Television (NET), 1965.

During this first exodus Cubans from every profession came to the United States including a Cuban political cartoonists who could believed that they could no longer practice their arts without fear of reprisals from the Cuban government. As the Cubans who came to the United States supplied stories of the worsening shortfalls on the island, exile cartoonists illustrated these complaints in cartoons published in several exile periodicals. The exiles used the food shortfalls on the island as evidence of Castro’s government failure. Many of the first exile cartoons played up this idea of the island plagued by famine and hunger. In 1961, exile cartoonist “Joe” portrayed the island with a cartoon captioned “Cuba Territory of everyman for himself in America,” the map of Cuba was labeled with one word, “Hunger.” [See Figure 5.3]

In another cartoon, Joe illustrated Cuba with food shortages as so bad on the island that even the pans were leaving. In the same cartoon, Joe drew the militia eating their weapons instead of fighting with them. The exile cartoonist Nino also portrayed the militia chasing a would-be exile but ended jumping on the boat himself. [See Figure 5.4] These images supported the reports that the desperation on the island was growing and that Castro could not be in power for long.

The second large wave of Cuban immigrants came to the United States between 1965 and 1973. Frustrated by the continued propaganda victories that the

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unsanctioned outflow of Cubans provided for the United States, the Cuban government decided to try and turn the exile crisis to their advantage. In September 1965, Castro announced that Cuba was opening the port of Camarioca to anyone who wanted to leave the country and that Cubans in the United States could come and pick up their families. The U.S. government was shocked by the immediate response of Cubans sailing from Miami to pick up their relatives. Not wanting a large unregulated flood of immigrants coming into the United States, the Johnson administration opted to negotiate with the Cuban government to stop the free flow of exiles across the Straits. Following these talks, both governments agreed to allow for daily flights to transport family members of those already in the United States as well as political prisoners out of Cuba. This airlift became known as the “Freedom Flights.” Beginning on December 1, 1965 and lasting until April 6, 1973, two flights per day between Varadero and Miami transported almost three hundred thousand Cubans to the United States.4

The U.S. press heralded the first waves of Cuban exiles as “golden exiles” and “model immigrants.” The U.S. popular media praised the exiles for their financial success, patriotism, and staunch anti-communism. Images in U.S. magazines celebrating white Cubans attending university classes, working in high tech fields, and standing in front of their businesses were widespread during the first two waves of exiles. Like the U.S. media reports about the revolutionaries in the Sierra Maestra,

these news stories spoke of the Cubans in very masculine terms. The press heralded the exiles as “men of action,” the new Horatio Algers of the United States—pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps. The July 1973 *National Geographic*, lauded the Cuban exiles for invigorating the economies of where they settled, especially in South Florida. *National Geographic* showcased the Cuban men for having brought “new life to Miami.” The exiles had “left their indelible mark on Miami,” lauded *National Geographic*, “boasted its economy, spiced its culture, and established an enclave of several hundred blocks…” The exile community and the U.S. government cultivated the image of Cubans as an ideal immigrant group throughout the 1960s and 1970s and as a direct propaganda slap in the face to the Castro government. The fact that Castro had called this group of Cubans worms and undesirables made their material successes in the United States a challenge to Castro and the revolution’s legitimacy.

**Exiles Gone MAD: Espionage, Antonio Prohías, and Spy vs. Spy**

Besides this challenge to the new Cuban government that the exiles created through images of their success in the United States, the first waves of Cubans also engaged in direct confrontation with the Castro government. In addition to

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businessmen and political exiles, the first wave also contained a violent class of people as well. Dispossessed Cuban military officers as well as ex-Batista and mafia henchmen made up a portion of these golden exiles. With the support of their wealthy fellow exiles and the CIA, the first wave of refugees formed numerous paramilitary groups with the intention of overthrowing Castro by force. During the first several years of exile, Cubans in the United States, especially in South Florida, formed hundreds of different anti-Castro organizations. Some of the groups that emerged were more violent and direct than others. Among the most active and destructive of these groups were Alpha 66, Commandos L, Coordinators of Unified Revolutionary Organizations (CORU), Revolutionary Student Directorate (DRE), Insurrectional Movement for Revolutionary Recovery (MIRR), and Omega 7. Starting in 1959, these organizations began to conduct sabotage raids in Cuba, planted bombs at Cuban embassies and on planes, and threatened businesses in the United States deemed as too friendly to the Castro government. This sabotage and violence was the dangerous side of the “men of action” now residing in the United States.7

During the first years after the Cuban revolution, the U.S. government supported the exiles’ sabotage efforts against the Castro government as well as waging their own extensive clandestine effort to topple the revolution. To direct these missions the CIA operations station in Miami became the largest in the world outside of CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Known by its code name JMWAVE, the

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CIA headquarters at the University of Miami remained open until 1967 and operated more than three hundred front companies throughout greater Miami. Estimates vary as to how many CIA agents were working out of Miami during the early 1960s. Most accounts put the number at three to four hundred case officers. Each case officer would have had several agents or teams working under them bringing the total on the CIA payroll into the thousands.8

Exile magazines and newspapers celebrated the sabotage raids and valor of the counter-revolutionary organizations. [See Figures 5.5 and 5.6] Cuban exile artists Silvio and Antonio portrayed Castro as shocked at the destruction that took place on the island. His expression was one of confused anger as the exile planes bombed the island. These types of images displayed both the reality of exile sabotage and calls to action. In Silvio’s drawing, he depicted the bombing of the Niagara sugar refinery in Pinar del Rio, while Antonio depicted the bombing of the Nico Lopez oil refinery in Havana. The exile cartoonists often expressed their anger and maleficent wishes for Castro and his government in their illustrations. [See Figure 5.7]

As the Castro government clamped down on the freedom of the press, many Cuban writers and cartoonists migrated to the United States. These editors and illustrators recreated many of the same publications that they had published in Havana including magazines such as El Avance Criollo, Occidente, and Zig-Zag. For example, El Avance Criollo was founded in Cuba in 1934 and was one of the leading

8 For a description of CIA activities in Miami see Bohning, The Castro Obsession, 129-149; Joan Didion estimated that the number of people on the CIA’s Miami payroll could have been anywhere from twelve thousand to one hundred and twenty thousand. Joan Didion, Miami, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 90-91; Ellison, Psywar on Cuba, 151-192.
politically moderate newspapers. The revolutionary government seized it in January 1960 and it was reestablished in Miami the following year. Zig-Zag was founded in Havana in 1941 and was a popular satire magazine. In February 1959, Zig-Zag was the first newspaper to be closed by the revolutionary government for lampooning Castro and the revolutionary leadership. The magazine was refounded in Miami in 1962 and became one of the most successful exile periodicals due to the high volume of political cartoons. By 1966 Zig-Zag Libre had thirty thousand subscriptions and dissident groups airdropped an additional fifty thousand copies into Cuba. [See Figure 5.8] Political cartoonists such as Anthony, Joe, N’Ga, Silvio (Silvio Fontanilla), and Antonio Prohías all immigrated to the United States during the first waves of exiles and contributed to these publications.\(^9\)

Out of all the exile cartoonists Antonio Prohías became the most famous in the United States. Prior to the revolution Prohías had been the most celebrated political cartoonist in Cuba having won the Juan Gualberto Gomez prize, the highest award for cartooning in Cuba, six times. He was a one of the founding cartoonists of Zig-Zag in Cuba in 1941 and published regularly in the Havana newspaper El Mundo and Bohemia magazine. In 1958 and 1959, Prohías served as the president of the Cuban Cartoonist Association. Immediately following the Castro’s takeover, Prohías praised the social changes being made by the revolution in a comic entitled “Cuba Nueva.” However, he soon earned the ire of the new

government when his cartoons became critical of Castro and the revolution’s increasing drift to the left. As an example of the power of images, after Prohías published cartoons against the Cuban government, Castro publicly criticized Prohías at a rally to the point that the incensed mob called for the cartoonist to be shot. Afraid for his safety during the highly charged beginnings of the revolution, Prohías left for the United States in May 1960. ¹⁰

Upon arrival in the United States, Prohías published hundreds of anti-Castro political cartoons for *El Avance Criollo* and *Zig-Zag Libre* but the cartoons he became most famous for drawing was *MAD* Magazine’s “Spy vs. Spy.” Prohías creation became a mainstay of *MAD* for thirty years and provides a fantastic commentary on the Cold War climate of U.S. Cuban relations during the early 1960s. Prohías said that his inspiration for the comic came from having been accused of working for the CIA in Cuba and the “with us or against us,” climate of the early revolution.¹¹ “Spy vs. Spy” encapsulated the continuous espionage between Cuba and the United States that was centered in Miami. In addition to large amount of CIA activities, Miami’s anti-Castro exile organizations targeted Cubans themselves within the exile population for anything that could be deemed as supporting Castro. Adding to this air of suspicion was the presence of Cuban spies loyal to Castro who lived amongst the exile community and reported back to the island. All of this espionage

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¹¹ Ibid., 1-22.
and counter-espionage created a pervasive sense of paranoia and suspicion in South Florida. ¹²

In “Spy vs. Spy” Prohías drew two spies, a black spy and a white spy, completely identical except in color. The spies constantly tried to outwit the other. Sometimes the white spy would win, other times the black one, but neither was better than the other. A majority of the “Spy vs. Spy” cartoons were set in suburbs resembling Miami’s Little Havana or at sea in the same locations where exile spy organizations and Cuban spies operated. The spies were constantly trying to come up with ever more elaborate ways of destroying each other. [See Figure 5.9] The spies used all sorts of devices to attack each other, but the most common were bombs. [See Figure 5.10] Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, bombings were a constant form of terrorism used by anti-Castro organizations in Cuba, the United States, and against Cuban targets abroad. ¹³ Futile and useless violence provided the drama for “Spy vs. Spy,” that often mirrored the real lives of Cuban exiles.

The environment of espionage in Miami became the subject of negative scrutiny in several documentaries produced in the mid-1970s. Following the Watergate scandal (1972-1974) and the public outrage with the Vietnam War, the


¹³ Different exile groups set hundreds of bombs aimed at Cuban targets as well as U.S. targets deemed friendly to the Castro government. For a description of the many different bombings see Calvo, The Cuban Exile Movement, 2000; García, Havana USA, 130-145; Lars Schultz, That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 241-290.
U.S. congress sought accountability for a variety of actions that had taken place over the last few decades. A 1975 ABC News Close Up! Special entitled “The CIA” examined Cuban exile community’s links to the CIA, especially the role Cubans had played in the Watergate scandal.\(^{14}\) The filmmakers pointed out that the espionage between Cuba and the United States had spurred increased domestic surveillance activity in the United States. The program’s director followed the trail of the Watergate burglars back to the Cuban community in Miami. The television reporters traveled to Miami to meet with various Cuban exile leaders to discuss Cuban involvement with the CIA. The exiles told the reporters that they were fearful of saying too much on camera because they could get in trouble if what they said was deemed to not be sufficiently anti-Castro.

Like “Spy vs. Spy” the film underscored the environment of distrust that the high volume of espionage had created in Miami. “Miami’s Cuban exile community,” the narrator admonished, “has been a man-power pool for the CIA for the past 15 years. With their own hostility towards Castro and their frequent CIA assignments—it was not always clear, not even to the Cubans, when their operations were official and when they were not.” According to the filmmakers, it was this atmosphere of continuous missions and singleness of purpose that made the Watergate break-in justifiable to some Cubans because they believed that a Nixon victory would help to rid the island of Castro.\(^{15}\) Four of the five Watergate burglars, Bernard L. Barker,

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\(^{15}\) Miguel de la Torres discussed how many of the exiles viewed Watergate as a heroic act because they thought it would help get rid of Castro. De la Torres, La Lucha for Cuba, 40-41; See also “Traials: Starting on Watergate,” Time Magazine,
Virgilio R. Gonzales, Eugenio R. Martinez, and Frank A. Sturgis were from Miami, and deeply involved in anti-Castro covert activity. Additionally, E. Howard Hunt, who was also indicted and pled guilty to conspiracy, was a CIA operative who had played a prominent role in planning the Bay of Pigs invasion. The Cuban exiles' involvement in Watergate was damaging to the Miami Cubans' public image in the United States.

The “golden exiles’ patriotic image was further damaged in a 1977 CBS News special, “The CIA’s Secret Army.”\(^\text{16}\) This program continued the theme of fanatical exiles acting outside of the law in their quest to rid the island of Fidel Castro. Bill Moyers hosted the show and was critical of the exiles’ involvement with acts of terrorism. Moyers explained that although there was a limited number of exiles actually involved with the violence the entire Cuban community shared culpability because they sheltered them and supported their actions. “Terrorists like fish need a sea to swim in a community to sustain them,” Moyers chastised, “they find it here in Miami’s Little Havana.” Moyers continued to use a negative tone while describing how the anti-Castro groups in Miami had become an uncontrollable political liability for the U.S. government. As in previous films, Moyers pointed out how four of the five Watergate burglars had been part of the CIA backed anti-Castro group Operation 40 and the Bay of Pigs invasion. Howard Hunt, the architect of the break-in, had convinced the exiles that the reason for the break-in at Democratic campaign

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headquarters was that Castro had “funneled money to George McGovern’s campaign.” Moyers contended that the single-minded hatred of Castro and communism enabled these groups to agree to anything so long as it was against the Castro regime. Throughout the program, Moyers presented Cubans in Miami as more of a threat to U.S. security than Castro himself. Although the espionage and involvement in Watergate had caused some damage the image of the Cuban exile community it was Fidel Castro and the next human wave from across the Florida Straits that would permanently undo the golden exile image.

**Say Hello to My Little Friend: Mariel and the Destruction of the Golden Exile**

Immediately after taking office in January 1977, the Carter administration attempted to ease tensions between the United States and Cuba. Carter’s administration came the closest of any U.S. president to normalizing relations with the Castro government. In an attempt to start the process towards healing the relationship with Cuba, the United States made several diplomatic overtures towards the island. Carter suspended U2 reconnaissance flights that had continued to spy on Cuba without pause since 1960, lifted the ban on travel to the island by U.S. citizens, and lifted the ban on U.S. expenditures in Cuba. These first steps led to each country opening a diplomatic interest sections (one step below an embassy) in Havana and Washington, DC. Carter hoped that Castro would reciprocate by releasing political prisoners, toning down his rhetoric for an independent Puerto Rico, and decreasing Cuban military involvement in Africa.17

17 For a discussion about the momentary thaw in relations between the two countries see Schultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 291-361; Wayne S. Smith,
In addition to the increased diplomatic effort by the United States, the Cuban exile community also began to try and improve relations with the Castro government. In 1977, Bernardo Benes, a Cuban exile banker, began secret talks with the Castro government in an effort to improve relations between Havana and Miami. These talks eventually led to more formal discussions in what became known as “El Diálogo” (The Dialogue). During these talks, Benes helped to negotiate the reunification of divided families, the release of three thousand political prisoners, and the right for Cubans living abroad to visit their families on the island. The Castro government was at first resistant to allow Cuban exiles to visit the island but eventually agreed, partly because of the potential to make money off the exile travel. Between 1977-1980 over 100,000 exiles visited Cuba.\textsuperscript{18}

Images from this time period reflected the spirit of these thawing relations and readied the U.S. public for the possibility of normal relations with their neighbor. An ABC News \textit{Close Up!} Special entitled “Cuba the Castro Generation” presented the island in a more complimentary light.\textsuperscript{19} The program focused on the positive attributes of the Cuban people and the benefits that normalized relations with the Castro government could bring both countries. The program made the point that the United States was ready to negotiate with the Castro government and offered an apology for the bad relations in the past. The narrator explained that Cuban “hostility


\textsuperscript{18} For an account of the efforts of the dialogue see De Los Angeles Torres, \textit{In the Land of Mirrors}, 84-104; and Garcia, \textit{Havana USA}, 47-54.

is based on our [U.S.] exploitation of Cuba before Castro and attempts to invade Cuba or assassinate Castro since.” The film reported that the Carter administration wanted to find middle ground between the two countries, much like Ché Guevara had expressed hope for when he had met with Richard Goodwin at the Punta del Este Conference in 1961. The Carter administration hoped, as the filmmakers explained, that by allowing Cubans and U.S. tourists to visit the island that the people to people relationship could bring the two countries closer together and eventually lead to a resumption of normal diplomatic relations. However, these efforts at normalization were short lived. The Cuban government did not meet U.S. demands and eventually talks broke down. The political situation between the two countries would become even more strained by the end of Carter’s presidency.20

The increased contact between resident Cubans and exiles was met with mixed feelings on both sides of the Straits. Many Cubans were eager to see their relatives and to visit the island. Resident Cubans benefited from the money their exile family members brought with them as well as goods that were hard to obtain in Cuba. On the other hand, some exile organizations objected to this contact and viewed any aid to Cubans still on the island as propping up the Castro government. Cubans on the island who had exile relatives were grateful for the financial assistance; those who did not resented that the Cuban government was now dealing with the declared enemy. Many Cubans saw how the exiles had prospered in the United States and became hungry for the better life that exile seemed to promise. In response to these visits and

20 For an account of the break down in talks between the Carter Whitehouse and the Castro government see Schultz, That Infernal Little Cuban Republic, 291-361; and Smith, The Closest of Enemies, 101-127.
continued economic problems on the island, more Cubans attempted to immigrate to
the United States. Throughout 1979 and 1980, increasingly desperate Cubans broke
into foreign embassies to request political asylum. Other even more brazen actions by
Cubans desperate to leave the island included hijacking boats to cross the Straits. The
majority of these hijackers were given immunity from prosecution upon reaching
U.S. shores, infuriating the Cuban government.21

On April 1, 1980, a small group of disaffected Cubans (the estimates vary
between four and twelve) crashed a bus through a fence at the Peruvian Embassy.
Although the fleeing Cubans were unarmed, in the melee that followed a ricocheting
bullet killed a Cuban policeman. Castro was furious at the dissenters and even more
upset that the Peruvian Ambassador refused to hand over the asylum-seekers to
Cuban authorities. As a result, on April 4, 1980, Castro ordered that the Cuban police
assigned to guard outside the embassy be removed. The Cuban government stated
that Cuba would not “protect embassies that would not cooperate in their own
protection.”22 To further punish the Peruvians, the Cuban government publicly stated
that any citizen wishing to leave Cuba could do so through the Peruvian Embassy.
The response was immediate, overwhelming, and took the Cuban government
completely by surprise. Within forty-eight hours, over 10,000 Cubans had entered
Peru’s embassy grounds claiming asylum. Images from television and newspaper

21 On increasing discontent on the island and the continued hijackings see
David Wells Engstrom, Presidential Decision Making Adrift: The Carter
Administration and the Mariel Boatlift, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield
Publishers, 1997); Smith, The Closest of Enemies, 101-127; Gott, Cuba a New
History, 261-263.

22 “Havana Removes Guard from Peruvian Embassy,” New York Times, April
5, 1980.
reports showed desperate Cubans climbing over fences and literally fighting their way into the overcrowded embassy compound. President Carter further exacerbated the situation on April 9, 1980, when he stated that “our hearts go out to the almost ten thousand freedom-loving Cubans” who were seeking asylum in the Peruvian Embassy.23

In response to this public display against the revolution, Castro denounced those in the Peruvian Embassy as “traitors and escoria (scum).” In an effort to diminish the negative impact of the images broadcast around the world of Cubans clamoring to get into the embassy, Castro claimed that those wanting to leave Cuba were parasites feeding off the revolution and that Cuban society would be better off without them. The Peruvian government, for its part, refused to allow more than a handful of the Cubans that had taken refuge in their embassy to immigrate to Peru. This left the Cuban government in a bind over what to do about the people who had been publicly declared “traitors” but who also had been given permission to leave yet had no means to do so. The Costa Rican government stepped in offered to fly the Cubans trapped in the embassy to the Costa Rica and allow them to complete their immigration process in San José. The Cubans agreed and several flights did take hundreds of Cubans out of the country; however, when most of these Cubans continued on to the United States and reported on the stark living conditions in Cuba, the Castro government put an end to the flights. On April 18, 1980, the Cuban government announced that anyone wanting to leave Cuba needed to proceed directly

to their ultimate destination and not through a third country. Two days later, Castro declared that anyone wanting to leave for the United States would be allowed to do so through the port of Mariel on the outskirts of Havana. President Carter reiterated that the United States would welcome anyone wishing to flee communism with open arms, and with that, a massive flotilla of boats began to leave from Florida for Cuba.24

In order to leave the country through Mariel, Cubans had to apply for exit visas. The Cuban government ordered the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) to organize attacks on those who applied for exit visas. CDR units publicly humiliated their fellow citizens and in some instances beat them in the streets. To further disgrace those Cubans wishing to leave and mark the anniversary of the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban government held mass rallies of over a million people to denounce those wishing to leave as traitors. The Cuban government televised these rallies and broadcast to the entire island in a strong show Cuban solidarity against the United States. Protestors illustrated banners with worms of every kind—worms carrying suitcases, worms being flushed down toilets, gangster worms, and homosexual worms. The crowd carried posters with debris, cockroaches, rats, and worms filling up a trashcan with the colors of the U.S. flag and the expletive that was yelled repeatedly by the crowd, “Que se vayan!” (Let them go!)25 [See Figure 5.11]

24 For a description of events leading up to the boatlift see García, Havana USA, 46-80; Gott, A New Cuban History, 266-269; Quirk, Castro, 805-811; Smith Closest of Enemies, 197-235.

On April 21, 1980, the first boats began to arrive in Mariel harbor from Florida to pick up their families. Hundreds of boats made the ninety-mile crossing to assist those wanting to leave. Most of the boats from Florida came with the intention of picking up friends and loved ones; however, the Cuban government insisted that the captains take aboard whomever they were given. Smaller boats that were supposed to carry less than ten passengers were forced to take over thirty. Within thirty days over 90,000 Cubans had arrived in the United States. By the time that the boatlift had finished in October 1980, almost 125,000 Cubans had come to the United States.26

To downplay the newspaper and television photos of so many Cubans wanting to leave the island, Castro argued that the United States had done Cuba a favor by taking the worthless parts of Cuban society to Florida. To give credence to this rhetoric, Castro forced captains to take scores of criminals, homosexuals, mentally ill, and prostitutes on boats headed for Miami and then trumpeted that what he had done to the international press. This well-publicized purge of Cuba’s “undesirables” made the reception for many Marielitos very different from earlier exile groups. “Marelito” became a pejorative not only in Cuba but also in the exile community itself.

U.S. immigration authorities were caught completely off guard and were overwhelmed by the human tidal wave. Because of refugee overcrowding in South Florida, the U.S. government opened exile processing centers at four military bases—

Camp Santiago, Puerto Rico; Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; and Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. To be released from these facilities the Marielitos had to be claimed by their family or receive sponsorship from a U.S. family. The U.S. government printed brochures encouraging private citizens to take in Cuban refugees. [See Figure 5.12] These publications contained primarily photographs of children and families even though the vast majority of refugees were single Afro-Cuban men.

Besides the “undesirables” in the boatlift one of the main differences between the Mariel exiles and the first waves of exiles was their racial composition. Before Mariel the majority of Cuban arrivals in the United States were white families, whereas more than half of all Marielitos were single Afro-Cuban males. Although Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits denied racism existed within their societies, in Miami racial divisions were still very much part of exile Cuban society. Many of the Golden Exiles came from the most elite classes in Cuba and looked upon Afro-Cubans as inherently inferior. The racial background of the Marielitos also played into U.S. racial biases against blacks that further challenged the image of the exiles as ideal immigrants in the United States.27

Cuban image-makers seized on the negative descriptions of the Marielitos. During the middle of the exodus, Cuban artist René de la Nuez Robaina, better known by his single name Nuez, summed up the negative attitudes towards the boatlift in a

book of political cartoons published in July 1980 entitled *Humor del Pueblo Combatiente* (Humor for the Fighting People). [See Figure 5.13] Nuez’s book was a series of one hundred and twenty-four cartoons illustrating the history of the first three months of the Mariel Boatlift. [See Figure 5.14] The majority of cartoons were of a Cuban *guajiro* (Cuban from the countryside/farmer) shouting insults at across the Florida Straits at President Carter. The *guajiro* was emblematic of the Cuban nation, long celebrated as the heart of the revolution. Throughout Nuez’s book, the boatlift was illustrated as continuing while the *guajiro* and Carter spared with each other from opposite sides of the Florida Straits. Nuez’s use of the *guajiro* instead of a cartoon of Castro was also indicative of the view that it was the Cuban nation, not the government that was standing together in opposition to the United States. Nuez’s *guajiro* demanded that the U.S. government lift the blockade, withdraw troops from Guantánamo, and end SR-71 reconnaissance flights over Cuba or the boatlift would continue. Nuez drew Carter as overwhelmed and loosing the battle to control the situation. [See Figure 5.15] Nuez’s *guajiro* celebrated the boatlift as a major victory against the United States and especially the Cuban exile community, a “second Bay of Pigs.”

The images in the U.S. press echoed Nuez’s illustrations, continuously playing into Castro’s hand by emphasizing the criminal element of the Mariel exiles. Estimates put the numbers of those Mariel arrivals who had a criminal record at 23,000 or close to one fifth of the total of Mariel arrivals. However, out of these

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“criminals,” less than five thousand had committed crimes that would have been considered felonies in the United States.\(^2^9\) The exiles themselves also created negative publicity. Refugee riots at Fort Chaffee and Miami as well as the murder and rape committed by a refugee against his sponsor added fuel to the fire of bad press surrounding the Marielitos. These images made it more difficult to place the refugees, especially the single black males that made up a large portion of the newly arrived.

With Mariel, Castro and the revolutionary government successfully destroyed the pristine image of the Cuban exile in the United States. Although the numbers of criminals and mental patients who came to the United States as part of the Mariel Boatlift was not as high as the press in both countries originally reported, crime did significantly rise in Miami after Mariel. In 1980, crime rose by sixty-six percent. Thirty-five percent of those criminals convicted of murder that same year were Mariel Cubans. To add insult to injury, the Cuban government claimed that crime rates in Havana dropped more than fifty percent since the Marielitos had left.\(^3^0\)

After Mariel, U.S. popular culture would continue to depict Cubans as criminals. On November 23, 1981, *Time* Magazine published a cover story entitled “Paradise Lost” that blamed much of the rise in crime in South Florida on the newest group of Cuban refugees. [See Figure 5.16] *Time’s* cover image looked like a postcard that would have been sent from a person on vacation; however, on closer examination the letters that made up “South Florida” were photos of crime and

\(^2^9\) Most of the refugees who had criminal records had gone to jail in Cuba for “anti-social behavior,” crimes of a political nature that would not have been punishable by prison in the United States.

\(^3^0\) García, *Havana USA*, 56-71.
violence. One of the photos was of a Cuban protesting while held in a processing camp during Mariel. The other images of drugs and violence linked South Florida and by association the Cuban exile community to the crime that was now decimating the Miami. The *Time* article described Miami as a city in chaos, the drug capital of the United States, with dealers and refugees running wild, ordinary citizens arming themselves to the teeth with guns and bullet-proof cars, and a city morgue so overflowing with bodies they had to be stored in a refrigerated truck borrowed from Burger King. According to the author, Marielitos were “believed to be responsible for half of all violent crime in Miami.” Before Mariel, Cuban immigrants were model immigrants, fiercely anti-communist hard-working white families, who like Ricky Ricardo wanted nothing more than to achieve the American Dream. Mariel replaced these images with cocaine cowboys, Miami Vice, and, most notoriously, *Scarface’s* Tony Montana.31

The Brian DePalma 1983 film, *Scarface*, propagated many of the negative views of the Mariel Boatlift. The film was written by Oliver Stone and starred Al Pacino as Mariel exile, Tony Montana. [See Figure 5.17] *Scarface* was sharply criticized by the Cuban community in the United States for its negative and violent portrayal of Cuban exiles. The Miami Cubans protested the making of the film and much of the production had to take place in Los Angeles. Although the film did not

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do particularly well when it first came out, *Scarface* became one the most revered cult classics of all time.\(^{32}\)

The film opened with composer Giorgio Moroder’s ominous music while introducing the history of the Mariel Boatlift. The introductory notes read,

In May 1980, Fidel Castro opened the harbor at Mariel with the apparent intention of letting some of his people join their relatives in the United States… It soon became evident that Castro was forcing the boat owners to carry back with them not only their relatives, but the dregs of his jails…

The film then showed footage from a Cuban May Day rally where Castro denounced the Cubans leaving the island from Mariel. The crowds in the rally carried posters and banners criticizing the United States. Castro was shown shouting the end of his famous speech, “We don’t want you! We don’t need you!”\(^{33}\) The film then cut to scenes of the boatlift with thousands of Cubans on boats heading for Miami. The footage showed Cubans who were either very young or very old as well as the many Afro-Cubans and young men. The opening segment ended with scenes of Cubans frisked by border guards furthering the idea that the Marielitos were criminals.

The main character, Tony Montana, was introduced with U.S. authorities questioning him just after he arrived in Miami. Montana was dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and had a thick accent. When asked who taught him to speak English Montana replied that he learned from watching U.S. movie actors, Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney. Montana’s character was thus established as a product partially of U.S. popular culture. The immigration officers asked Montana about his past,

\(^{32}\) Brian DePalma, Director, *Scarface*, Universal Pictures, 1983.

\(^{33}\) Castro’s full quote was “We say to those who do not have the genes of revolutionaries, or the blood of revolutionaries, or who do not have the necessary discipline and heroism for a revolution: We don’t want you! We don’t need you!” See Garcia, *Havana USA*, 59.
specifically if he had been in jail in Cuba. The whole time Montana responded to the officers’ questions a photograph of President Jimmy Carter was in the background of the scene visually implicating the president in the decision to allow criminals into the United States. When the head immigration officer had finally had enough of Montana’s lies he ordered that Montana be sent to “Freedom Town” one of the immigrant camps. Montana fired back at the officer,

You a communist? Huh? How’d you like it, man? They tell you all the time what to do, what to think, what to feel. Do you wanna be like a sheep…You own nothing, you got nothing! Do you want a chivato on every corner looking after you? Watching everything you do? Everything you say,…How you like that? What, you want me to stay there and do nothing? Hey, I’m no fuckin’ criminal, man. I’m no puta or thief. I’m Tony Montana, a political prisoner from Cuba. And I want my fuckin' human rights, now! Just like the President Jimmy Carter says. Okay?

Unimpressed by Montana’s diatribe, the immigration officer saw Tony Montana not as an individual but as part of the larger political problem caused by Carter and Castro. He responded, “I don't believe a word of this shit! They all sound the same to me. That son of a bitch Castro is shittin' all over us. Send this bastard to Freedom Town.” The view that Castro had dumped the dregs of Cuban society on the United States was one of the primary negative images of Mariel. Scarface cemented this idea in the minds of many Americans.

To be released early from “Freedom Town,” a Cuban gangster in Miami Frank Lopez offered Tony and his friend Manny a green card in exchange for killing an ex-revolutionary leader, Rabena. Although Rebena had been a revolutionary, he had fallen out of favor with Castro and had been deported on the boatlift. When Montana learned about the deal he agreed, adding that he would “kill a communist for fun,” but for the offered green card he would “carve him up real nice.” Tony’s
sentiments echoed the fervent anti-communism of the exile community that believed that any action against communism was justified. However, Tony’s act was not ideologically motivated as much as self-interested. In the film, just as in the real camps holding the Marielitos in Florida and Arkansas, the refugees rioted to get out. During the riot, the refugees chant “libertad” as Tony and his crew herded Rebena out to meet his fate. Montana stabbed Rabena demonstrating his the cold-blooded nature that was about to be unleashed into U.S. society.

After Tony and Manny were released from the refugee camp they worked for Frank Lopez, another Cuban who had already made it big selling cocaine. After partying with Lopez, Tony and Manny drove home. Manny declared his hopes for achieving the same financial success as Lopez. Tony, the bigger American dreamer, declared that he wanted more. Montana wanted what was coming to him, “the world and everything in it.” Montana’s character is the ultimate capitalist. Scarface in many ways can be seen as an indictment of the American Dream gone wrong. Through violence and drug dealing, Tony achieved his American dream of excess. However, the materiality ultimately made him unhappy. Montana’s dream of having it all turned into a nihilistic nightmare.

Later in the film as Montana sat in the best restaurant in Miami with his estranged wife Elvira and his friend Manny, Montana broke down in an existential crisis. Montana wondered aloud,

Is this it? That's what it's all about, Manny? Eating, drinking, fucking, sucking? Snorting? Then what? You're 50...I got a junkie for a wife...I can't even have a kid with her, Manny. Her womb is so polluted, I can't even have a little baby with her!
The film is also a family tragedy. Tony lamented his wife’s inability to have a child but Elvira is his wife because he had killed Frank Lopez, Tony’s boss and Elvira’s first husband. He is estranged from his own mother who refused to accept his offering of money. His sister, Gina loves him, but ultimately comes to fear him. When Tony saw his best friend Manny and Gina together he killed Manny and Gina was killed by hitmen trying to kill her brother. By the end of the film Tony has killed everything he loved and died because of his own greed and arrogance. In many ways Tony Montana was the anti-Ricky Ricardo, just as the Marielitos were the anti-Golden exiles.

Further sealing the negative image of South Florida and the city of Miami in the U.S. imagination was the immensely popular television series *Miami Vice*. Michael Mann’s “MTV Cops” show ran from 1984 until 1989 and used the rising crime rates in Miami as the basis of the show. Like *Scarface*, *Miami Vice* was also an indictment of the American Dream gone wrong. As producer Anthony Yerkovich explained

> I thought of it [Miami] as sort of a modern-day American Casablanca. It seemed to be an interesting socioeconomic tide pool: the incredible number of refugees from Central America and Cuba, the already extensive Cuban-American community, and on top of all that the drug trade... Miami has become a sort of Barbary Coast of free enterprise gone berserk.34

Although *Miami Vice* portrayed the city of Miami as a city plagued by crime, the show did not implicate the Cuban exile community in these crimes to the same extent

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as *Scarface*. In the show drug dealers were most often Columbian not Cubans. For this reason the *Miami Vice* was not protested by Cuban exile community and allowed to film almost exclusively in South Florida.

If *Miami Vice*’s writers did deal with Cuban criminals they were portrayed as connected to corrupt groups who had betrayed the exile community such as the CIA. In the episode entitled “Cuba Libre” Sonny had to infiltrate an anti-Castro paramilitary organization “Segunda Brigada.”35 The group was stealing money from drug dealers in order to launch an invasion against Castro. However, the group was also blackmailing a Bay of Pigs invasion hero to help them. The show portrayed the men in “Segunda Brigada” as corrupt and out of touch with the Miami exile community. Although this was the only episode that explicitly featured Cubans as the antagonists, the show balanced its storyline with a moral Cuban hero who abhorred violence and was from the more honorable segment of the exile community. This balancing act was most likely done to placate the Miami Cuban community.

Although *Miami Vice* did not directly implicate the Cuban community in the problems associated with the city like *Scarface*, the images of crime in the hit television show kept the idea of South Florida as a “Paradise Lost,” in the national consciousness. After the arrival of the Marielitos, U.S. popular culture was no longer automatically inclined to celebrate the Cuban exile community. Instead of portrayals of Miami Cubans as “Golden Exiles” who helped build the city and their fortunes in the 1960s and 1970s through hard work, after Mariel U.S. popular culture just as likely to portray Cuban exiles as an internal crime risk that threatened the fabric of

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American society from within. Because of the changed perception of the Cuban exiles in U.S. popular culture the likelihood of another Mariel boatlift became less likely and with the end of the Cold War the usefulness of the Cuban refugee as a political tool further decreased the willingness by either the U.S. government or the U.S. public to automatically accept a large influx of Cuban refugees. This change in image and perception would take on physical and political form in the last large wave of Cuban migration to the United States—the Balsero Crisis.

**Aliens and Elián: The Balsero Crisis and the Ultimate Exile**

After the Mariel Boatlift, the outflow of Cubans stabilized. Cubans continued to immigrate to the United States but at much slower pace. Even though the Reagan administration increased negative rhetoric towards the Castro government by linking the island to civil wars in Central America as well as reinstated the U.S. travel ban, the administration still signed an immigration accord with the Cuban government in 1984 agreeing to accept twenty thousand refugees per year. As part of the accords the Cuban government agreed to prevent further mass out migrations by patrolling its borders and when possible apprehending Cubans attempting to migrate illegally to the United States. The numbers of immigrants slowed to less than 10,000 people a year throughout Reagan’s presidency a number far less than the 20,000 that had been agreed upon.\(^{36}\)

Then at the end of Reagan’s second term an even occurred that would begin the largest change in Cuban society since the revolution and call the very existence of the revolution into account. In 1988, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced sweeping economic changes for the Soviet Union. These changes eventually lead to the dissolution of the council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the common market of socialist nations. Cuba had started trading with the CMEA in the mid-1970s and by the late 1980s was dependent on the Council for over eighty-five percent of all of its trade. Because the Soviet Union was no longer able to subsidize the CMEA the stability of the socialist bloc began to deteriorate and the privileged trading arrangements that Cuba had enjoyed for over twenty-five years fell apart. By 1991 annual oil imports from the USSR to Cuba had declined from 13.3 million tons to less than 1.8 million tons leaving the island with a critical deficit. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cuban leadership found itself desperate for hard currency. As the Miami Cubans became excited by what they believed would be the final breaths of the Castro regime, the government in Havana braced itself against this latest economic storm.37

Seeing the economic writing on the wall, in August 1990, Fidel Castro declared that the revolution had entered a “special period in a time of peace.” The term “special period” came from the Cuban government’s long-standing plan for

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37 Before the 1990s, Cuba had been able to resell a large percentage of refined oil on the world market, serving as a way for the Cuban government to obtain hard currency in order to buy products that the island needed. For discussions about the collapse of the CMEA see Patricia Ruffin, *Capitalism and Socialism in Cuba: A Study of Dependency, Development, and Underdevelopment* (London: Macmillan Press, 1990); and Gail Reed, *Island in the Storm: The Cuban Communist Party Fourth Party Congress* (New York: Ocean Press, 1992).
extreme rationing in the event of a total U.S. naval blockade of the island. Although the blockade never took place, the plan was now put into order for the island to reinvent the Cuban economy without Soviet aid. The Cuban government introduced severe rationing of food, cooking supplies, gasoline, clothing, soap, and almost every other imaginable product. Shortages of every kind during the first few years of the “special period” became severe and by 1994 many Cubans became desperate to leave the island. On August 5, 1994, a riot broke out in Havana protesting the worsening economic conditions and the government’s clampdown on Cubans attempting to flee the island. As a result of the growing unrest, and citing the U.S. government’s failure to honor the existing immigration accords that called for admitting 20,000 people to the United States annually, the Cuban government announced on August 8, 1994 that the Cuban Frontier Guard (the Cuban Coast Guard) would no longer prevent anyone attempting to leave the country. In response to this announcement, over thirty thousand Cubans departed the island on hand-made crafts in a little more than a month. This exodus would become known as the Balsero (rafter) Crisis.38

Images of the Balseros provided the U.S. public with evidence of the severity of the economic crisis that was taking place in Cuba. The rafters appeared to be the most desperate of the exiles to leave Cuba, risking their lives to leave not because of ideological commitment but often because of food shortages and general scarcity caused by the economic depression. One of the most famous images from the crisis was of Roberto Avendaño Corojo. Avendaño left Cuba on August 13, 1994, with four

other companions. After five days at sea, tensions on the plywood raft became so intense that Avendaño cut himself free and paddled away on a single inner tube. Forced to drift alone for an additional ten days and fight off sharks with a knife, Avendaño was eventually spotted by a U.S. citizens on a sailboat. The people on the boat provided him with water and radioed the U.S. Navy and waited with him for the Navy cutter to rescue him. On August 28, 1994, he was sent to Guantánamo Bay where he waited several months before he was allowed to immigrate to the United States. The people on the boat had taken Avendaño’s photo while he waited for the Navy ship. The image of him alone on an inner tube made him a poster child for the crisis. [See **Figure 5.18**] The exile community reproduced Avendaño’s image on several posters to emphasize the desperation of those Cubans fleeing the island. [See **Figure 5.19**]

Avendaño’s and his fellow Balseros, unlike the first waves of exiles who came to the United States on airplanes or the Marielitos who arrived in U.S. boats, had actually fled the island on homemade rafts. Images of Cubans on rafts before the Balseros, obscured the reality of how the majority of Cuban refugees had actually arrived in the United States. The U.S. media popularized the false images of the first waves of Cuban exiles fleeing Cuba and communism on rafts as a way to enhance the Cold War propaganda impact. The image of the Cuban rafter was repeated so many times that it became accepted as part of the Cuban exile identity. Ironically once the Balseros provided a reality to that image the Cold War was already over.39

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39 Avendaño’s story and his photo from Guantánamo were related to me by Matthew Horner who worked in Guantánamo as a liaison for the military and the refugees.
At the beginning of the Balsero Crisis, President Bill Clinton, decided to handle the influx of refugees different that Jimmy Carter. In 1980, Clinton had been Governor of Arkansas and received severe criticism for the Cuban riot that had taken place at Fort Chaffee. Political analysts have pointed to the riots as one of the reasons that Clinton lost reelection in 1980. Reversing the U.S. government’s thirty-year stance on allowing Cuban immigrants free entrance, on August 19, 1994, the Clinton administration declared that Cuban rafters would not be automatically allowed into the United States and instead would be taken to a “safe haven” at Guantánamo Bay for immigration processing. The decision sparked outrage from the exile community in Miami but gave the U.S. government the needed time and space to control the influx of people.

As the U.S. government was making decisions about how to best handle the refugees, U.S. diplomats were working quickly with the Castro government to close the flood of people leaving the island. On September 9, 1994, the United States and Cuba signed new emigration accords and on September 13, 1994, the Cuban Coast Guard resumed patrols to prevent people from illegally leaving the island. Although the Balsero Crisis lasted less than a month, over 40,000 Cubans were picked up at sea and eventually “processed” through Guantánamo Bay and eventually allowed to immigrate to the United States. The new emigration agreements put an end to the massive hemorrhaging of people from Cuba but some still risk making the journey across the Florida Straits.

One such journey came to an end on Thanksgiving Day 1999, when thirty-three-year-old Nivaldo Fernandez Ferran and his twenty-two-year-old girlfriend
Arianne Horta-Alfonso were found floating on an inner tube off the Florida coast near Key Biscayne. Twenty miles to the north, a five-year-old boy, Elián González and the body of sixty-year-old woman, Merida Loreto Barrios were found tethered to a second inner tube. These three people were the only survivors from a group of fourteen Cubans who had left the island from the port town of Cardenas east of Havana three days earlier. The other eleven people including Elizabet Broton González, Elián’s mother, drowned when the aluminum boat that had been carrying became inundated with rainwater in high seas and sank. When Elián’s father, Juan Miguel González, a resident and loyal Cuban, learned of his son’s survival, he demanded that the boy be returned to Cuba. Although divorced from Elián’s mother, Juan González shared custody of Elián and had not given his permission for the boy to be taken to the United States. The resulting international custody battle created a frenzy of images across the Florida Straits as Elián became the focus of billboards, books, films, murals, museums (in both countries), political cartoons, posters, statues, t-shirts, and even a *South Park* episode.  

The myths surrounding Elián González’s rescue became immense. The popular descriptions and images about the rescue often obscured the reality of what had actually happened to the boy. Most stories about the Elián’s discovery left out that there were two other survivors. And that the body of Merida Loreto Barrios was lashed to Elián’s inner tube. Instead, the story repeatedly recounted was that Elián

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was found alone in an inner tube, surrounded by dolphins protecting him from sharks, and that God had brought him out of Cuba to freedom. Miami artists created paintings and posters that echoed these religiously inspired stories that envisioned Elián wrapped in swaddling clothes while being guided to safety by dolphins directed by God’s hands. [See Figure 5.20] In these depictions, artists drew Elián as smiling, not reflecting the horror that a five-year-old boy must have felt watching his mother drown then to be left alone tethered to a dead body in the ocean at night. The myth continues that Elián, despite having been at sea for days without any shelter, was miraculously unsunburned. Although it is truly miraculous that the Elián survived, in reality Elián was only adrift in the inner tube for a few hours.41 The images of Elián’s rescue obscured the reality of the boy’s experience but added to the powerful symbolism of Elián as emblematic of the Cuban exile experience more generally. Elián in some ways was the ultimate exile, an innocent child, saved from communism by the ultimate sacrifice of his mother and then saved again by god to begin again in the United States.

The stories of the miracles surrounding the survival of the child led to Elián being hailed as a messianic figure by many Miami Cubans. Some exiles saw his arrival and fight for custody as an omen for the imminent downfall of Castro. Others described him as a Cuban Moses who would lead the exiles back to the island. There were reports that the Virgin Mary appeared at the house of the boy’s uncle and on the

41 For a good examples of the way the history of Elián’s rescue has been written to reflect the myth see Robert M. Levine, and Asís, Moisés, Cuban Miami, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 63; and Alex Stepick, This Land Is Our Land: Immigrants and Power in Miami, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1.
side of a nearby building. Believers in the Afro-Cuban religion Santería said that Elián was a child of the Yoruba goddess Oshún or chosen by the god Elegguá to bring down Castro. Elián’s deceased mother was also turned into a quasi-saint, who had died like for all Cuban mothers who desired their children to be free. The image of Elián as a religious figure brought many of Miami’s diverse religions together as each bestowed their own meaning upon the child. These groups were also united in their wish to not have the miracle boy not returned to Cuba and Castro.42

Like the Marielitos, it bears mentioning that Elián’s race played a part of the exile community’s fervor surrounding the boy. Because Elián was white and the majority of wealthy first wave exiles also identify themselves as white, his connection to the upper echelons of exile society was immediate. It is reasonable to speculate that because of Elián’s race he tapped into the sympathies of the first waves of exile society more than he would have had he been of Afro-Cuban descent. Unlike the refugees from the Mariel Boatlift whom the U.S. popular press and the first waves of exiles had shunned for their ethnicity and reported criminal backgrounds, Elián was seen as emblematic of Miami’s controlling elites and of the “golden exiles” of the past.

The fight over Elián’s return to his father became much larger than a child custody case. On the one hand the fight over Elián was simply a case of the exile community not wanting to give any kind of victory to the Castro government. Because Elián’s father was loyal to the revolution, Miami Cubans viewed him as

42 For a discussion about the religiosity surrounding Elián González see Miguel A. De la Torre, La Lucha for Cuba: Religion and Politics on the Streets of Miami, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-25.
Castro’s communist lackey not worthy of a god given Cuban exile son. In one poster the slogan, “No one—not even a father—has the right to enslave another human being. Freedom for Elián!” encapsulated the growing fervor surrounding the young boy. [See Figure 5.21] Elián’s father’s desire to “enslave” him in Cuba was equated to Castro’s enslavement of the entire island. Miami’s elite saw the Elián case as an opportunity to deny Castro something that he wanted and joined forces to keep the boy in Florida.

Elián’s custody battle became emblematic of the battle between Miami Cubans and resident Cubans for the custody of the island itself. For Cubans on both the island and in Miami the battle became an obsession. Each side demanded the possession of the boy and declared their right to the child, much like both resident Cubans and the exiles declared their rights over the island. The family metaphor of who could best care for the Cuban child was similar to the arguments about who could best care for the island itself, those in exile or the Castro government. Each side claimed that they were the legitimate guardians of the child and could give Elián the best life, just as Miami Cubans and revolutionary Cubans proclaimed their legitimacy to know what was best way to govern the island. Miami Cubans proclaimed that because Elián’s mother had made the ultimate sacrifice, literally dying to take her child out of Cuba. Her wishes needed to be honored. Elián’s father was equated to Fidel Castro, as a bad and neglectful father figure who did not have the boy’s best interest at heart.

In Cuba, Elián’s custody battle became a rallying cry against the United States and a symbol of the survival of the revolution through the Special Period. Overnight,
Cubans erected billboards, printed posters and T-shirts all with the same message “Liberen Elián” (Free Elián) and “Salvemos a Elián” (Save Elián). [See Figure 5.22] Many of the images portrayed Elián behind bars, kept against his will in the United States. The image of Elián imprisoned behind star covered prison bars was a Cuban rebuttal to the exile community’s constant portrayal of Cuba as a prison. The Cuban government also staged multiple mass demonstrations across the island to protest Elián’s captivity in the United States. The demonstrations became so regular that in February 2000 the Cuban government constructed an amphitheater in front of the U.S. interest section for the express purpose of holding Elián rallies. Originally named “The Plaza of Dignity of the Cuban People,” it is now officially known as the “Tribuna Anti-imperialista José Martí,” (José Martí Anti-Imperialist Arena). A central feature of the plaza is a large statue of José Martí,” holding a child in a protective pose and pointing accusingly at the interest section. [See Figure 5.23] José Martí is considered to be the father of the Cuban nation and was a staunch critic of the United States.43 The statue of Martí holding Elián symbolized Cuba’s continued struggle against the United States. Martí holds Elián, emblematic of the Cuban nation in his arms accusing the United States of abuse and vowing to protect the nation against the constant threat of U.S. imperialism. This plaza has provided the Cubans

with a permanent site of protest in front of the U.S. interest section and has continued to be used ever since.

As the custody battle over the child became a political battleground, U.S. editorial cartoonists drew hundreds of illustrations connecting the more personal battle of Elián’s father to reclaim his son from his Miami relatives to the larger political and cultural struggle between the two countries. Instead of the fabled dolphins, several cartoonists portrayed Elián floating in an inner tube surrounded by “sharks” representing the various interest groups that wanted a piece of the child. In Joe Heller’s cartoon the sharks—politics, anti-Castro interests, and anti-American interests—circled the helpless child. [See Figure 5.24] Many U.S. cartoons dealt with the perceived cultural clash between U.S. opulence that Elián had experienced and the imagined austerity of what his life would be like in Cuba. U.S. illustrators depicted Elián as having been spoiled by his time in Miami, a fantasy life of parties, toys, and Disneyland that most U.S. children did not experience themselves. Having been the center of attention in Miami, many exiles believed that it would be difficult for the child to return to a normal and less privileged life in Cuba. [See Figure 5.25] U.S. Editorial cartoonists also expressed concern that his Miami relatives were manipulating the child’s actions and words to get Elián to say that he wanted to remain in the United States. Several political cartoons encapsulated this idea of his Miami relatives coaching Elián whenever he was on camera. Ultimately syndicated cartoonist Taylor Jones’s image of Elián published in the Puerto Rican newspaper *El*

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Nuevo Día captured the essence of what Elián had become for Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits—a political pawn. [See Figure 5.26]

After more than a month of debate, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service ruled that Elián needed to be returned to his father by January 14, 2000. Attorney General Janet Reno agreed with this ruling, as did President Bill Clinton. The Miami Cuban community was outraged and compared this decision to Kennedy’s “betrayal” of the exiles at the Bay of Pigs. In Miami, Cubans demonstrated and demanded that the boy be given political asylum while Cubans in Havana continued to march on an almost daily basis demanding the boy’s return. Negotiations between the federal government and Elián’s Miami relatives went on for months, the boy’s uncle refusing to hand the child over to the authorities. This decision was in keeping with the general feeling amongst many exile Cubans that any action was justified so long as it was intended to damage Fidel Castro. Finally, in an effort to end the stalemate, Janet Reno set a mid-April deadline for Elián to be turned over to federal authorities. Juan Miguel González, Elián’s father, flew to Washington DC to collect his son. When Elián’s relatives failed to comply the Attorney General’s order to handover Elián, Reno decided to take the boy by force. In the early morning hours of April 22, 2000, federal marshals stormed the house of Lázaro González and took the boy. The photo of the raid became an instant rallying point for the Miami Cubans and Republican lawmakers. [See Figure 5.27] The exile community used the image to point to the failure of another democratic president to protect them from Fidel Castro. Metaphorically the photo was also an indictment of the U.S. government’s failure to deliver the island of Cuba into the custody of the “legitimate” guardians of Cuba, the
exiles. Washington republicans used the image of the raid to criticize the Clinton administration for cow towing to a communist “terrorist” and would use the image and the Clinton Whitehouse decision to court the exile community’s vote in the 2000 presidential election. Elián was reunited with his father in Washington, DC, but had to wait in the United States while the courts finished debating his legal status.

While Elián and his father waited for U.S. courts to decide when they could leave, Miami Cubans continued to protest with extreme public displays of disapproval over the U.S. government’s decision. A South Park episode entitled “Quintuplets” poked fun at the entire affair. In the episode, which amazingly aired only four days after Elián was taken from Miami, a group of Romanian quintuplet circus performers sought asylum in the United States. The Romanian leader, who looked a lot like Fidel Castro, forced the quintuplets’ estranged father to demand that the girls be returned to Romania. Cartman and the rest of the South Park gang staged massive demonstrations to keep the quintuplets in the United States. But in the end, Janet Reno swooped in dressed as the Easter Bunny with an assault rifle to extract the girls.45

The cartoon encapsulated how ludicrous the Miami Cubans’ fanaticism appeared to most people outside of the exile community. To U.S. citizens outside of the exile community the decision to reunite a five-year-old child with his biological father transcended any political battle. But as was so often the case within the relationship between the exile community and the island’s resident population, the personal was inherently political and the political was inherently personal. The battle for Elián González became another case of the mirror imaging and rhetoric has been a
constant battle between Miami Cubans and their resident Cuban counterparts. To the exiles, Fidel Castro and Juan Miguel González were acting just like the Romanian leader and father of the quintuplets in the *South Park* episode, demanding the boy’s return, not because it was best for the boy, but because it was a political opportunity. The same interpretation of the exile actions towards the boy existed in reverse for resident Cubans. It was the opinion on the island that the exiles cared less for what happened to Elián and more about scoring any victory possible over Castro and the revolution no matter what the cost.

After two months of waiting in Washington DC, the U.S. courts ruled that Elián’s Miami relatives could not file for political asylum on the boy’s behalf. Elián and his father returned to Cuba on June 28, 2000. Castro ordered that there be no public demonstrations; the posters and billboards demanding the boy’s return were taken down overnight. The Castro instructed the island look upon the return of the boy to his father and to Cuba as natural and logical ending to the affair and chose a silent victory in the face of the Miami exile community’s screams of disapproval. In Miami a museum/shrine was set up at Lázaro González’s house to continue to pray for Elián while another museum was set up in Cárdenas to celebrate the victory of his return. These museums each highlighted the personal battle for the custody battle for Elián González as part of the larger political battle. In Cuba Elián became another image of Cuba’s continued victory over U.S. imperialism. The return of the child signaled that although their revolution had been battered by ten years of economic hardship it would continue into the next generation. In Miami Elián’s loss was part of the larger loss of the island itself. Elián’s return to Cuba signaled that the long
awaited return to Cuba was still in the future. Each museum told its side of the story but ultimately was the mirror image of the other.

The Elián González case dominated the U.S. and Cuban presses for over six months. The international uproar over the custody of a five-year-old boy showed that the images produced on both sides of the Florida Straits remained a potent source of popular power. Elián in many ways crystallized the metaphoric power of family in the images of the relationship between the exiles and the island and was emblematic of the personal conflicts of Cuban exiles as intrinsically connected to the larger political conflict between the United States and Cuba. The personal/political connection that all stages of the Cuban exile shared became clearly visible in the images of the Elián González case.

**Conclusion**

The Cuban exile community and the images about that community form a unique part of the relationship between Cuba and the United States. The exiles bind the two nations together through continued family ties to the island, as well as divide the nations by acting as the most vocal opponents to any reconciliation between the two estranged neighbors. The visual metaphors of family that have both connected and separated the two countries are often rooted within the exile community. These images, from Ricky Ricardo to Tony Montana, shaped U.S. perception not only about the exiles themselves but also about the foreign relationship between Cuba and the United States.

The relationship between the exile community and the island was most often like a mirror, reflecting the other but in constant opposition. For the exiles the
personal reasons why they left the island during different time periods was based on the political relationship between the two nations. The personal contested family connections between the United States and the island, like the custody battle for Elián González, continue to reinforce the political and metaphorical battle between Cubans for the custody of their island.

The exiles have been a curse and a blessing for both the Cuban and the U.S. governments. Images of the Cuban exile community often reflect these dualities. Those who left were traitors. Those people who stayed on to complete the difficult work of the revolution heroes. By forcing a certain portion of the island’s population to leave, the revolutionary government has effectively externalized dissent. While the exile community has provided an economic lifeline for their relatives and the Castro government through the remittances that are sent every year. The price of that economic support has been the most potent symbol of resistance to the revolution, the negative images of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing from Castro.

In the United States the exile community has also played a dual role in the relationship between the two countries. The different waves of exiles have received a variety of receptions from the U.S. government and the U.S. public. The first waves were celebrated as “golden exiles” that rejuvenated the economy and culture of South Florida while later groups of exiles were blamed for contributing to the criminality of Miami and its image as the drug smuggling capital of the United States. The image of Cubans departing the island has been a massive propaganda victory for the United States. But at times the U.S. government has had to handle large waves of immigrants with little warning or preparation. Besides their value as a propaganda tool, the exiles
became the main source for soldiers in the U.S. clandestine effort to topple the Castro government. However, after the exiles were tied to the Watergate scandal, the U.S. media portrayed the exiles as fanatics who justified criminal behavior in their struggle against Castro. Even after the United States and Cuba normalize relations, the Cuban exile community will continue to be an influential group in the U.S. national milieu and in the relationship between Cuba and the United States.
Figure 5.1 José Manuel Roseñada (Roseñada), “Fleeing Red Hell” “Thank God I’m Safer Now!” Zig-Zag Libre August 7, 1965, 2.
Nino “Self determination put into practice…” *El Avance Criollo* August 25, 1961, 26


**Figure 5.2**
Figure 5.3 Joe “Wretched Cuba” “The Ultimate Exile” “In the Military School-Forward Compatriots, with a little salt you can eat them.” El Avance Criollo, July 21, 1961, 20.
Figure 5.4 Nino, “Stop! Brother! Make a little room for me, I’m leaving too..” *El Avance Criollo* April 6, 1962, 24.
Figure 5.5 Silvio, Sabotage by exile planes on the Niagara sugar refinery, *Zig-Zag Libre*, January 23, 1965.
Figure 5.6 Antonio Exile planes bomb the Nico Lopez gasoline storage facility in Havana, *Zig-Zag Libre*, August 31, 1963.
Figure 5.7 Silvio, “This is the package that needs to be suspended,” Zig-Zag Libre January 27, 1968, Cover.
Figure 5.8 Zig-Zag Libre miniature copies available to be thrown from aircraft. Zig-Zag Libre, January 30, 1965.
JOKE AND DAGGER DEPARTMENT

Antonio Prohías, whose anti-Communist cartoons so angered Fidel Castro that he was forced to flee Cuba, brings us another installment of that friendly rivalry between the man in black and the man in white—better known as ...
Figure 5.11 Anti-Mariel Poster, Roberto Figueredo, “Que Se Vaya!” Comites de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR), 1980.
Figure 5.12 Cuban/Hatian Task Force, “Refugiados Cubanos: Last Step to Freedom,” 1980, 4.
Figure 5.13 The Cuban machete wielding guajiro is the hero of René de la Nuez Robaina (Nuez), *Humor de Pueblo Combatiente*, (Havana: Editora Política, 1980).
Figure 5.14 Nuez was able to capture many of the moments of the Mariel crisis and help depict the boatlift as a victory for Cuba and defeat for the United States. René de la Nuez Robaina (Nuez), *Humor de Pueblo Combatiente*, (Havana: Editora Politica, 1980).
Figure 5.15 Nuez depicted the various stages of the Mariel crisis. Always referring to those leaving the island as scum. René de la Nuez Robaina (Nuez), Humor de Pueblo Combatiente, (Havana: Editora Politica, 1980).
Figure 5.16  “Paradise Lost?” Time Magazine, November 23, 1981.
Figure 5.17 Al Pacino as “Tony Montana,” Brian DePalma, Director, *Scarface*, Universal Pictures, 1983.
Figure 5.18 Unidentified artist, “This is Escape from Castro,” Miami, 1994. Poster of Roberto Avendaño Corojo during the Balsero Rafter Crisis.
Figure 5.19 Photograph by Matthew Horner, 1994, Balsero Roberto Avendaño Corojo holding up a poster of himself in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.
Figure 5.20 Alexis Blanco, “The Boy and the Dolphins,” turned into the Elián poster “God Given Freedom,” 2000.
Figure 5.21 Unknown artist, “No one—not even a father—has the right to enslave another human being. Freedom for Elián!” Miami, 2000.
Figure 5.22 Unknown artist, “We Will Save Elián,” Havana, 2000.
Figure 5.23 Blair Woodard, José Martí and child pointing at the U.S. Interest Section in Havana. “Tribuna Anti-imperialista José Martí,” Havana, Cuba, 2000.

CONCLUSION

In 2008, two historical elections took place that hold the potential to alter the relationship between Cuba and the United States. On February 18, 2008, Fidel Castro resigned as president of Cuba and as commander and chief of the Cuban armed forces. Castro had maintained control of Cuba for almost fifty years and only resigned because of a long battle with an undisclosed intestinal illness. On February 24, 2008, the Cuban National Assembly unanimously elected Fidel’s brother Raúl Castro as Cuba’s new president. Although Raúl’s election was a continuation of Castro family rule on the island and not a complete elimination of Fidel’s influence, it was still a sign that Cuba is fast approaching a post-Castro era, with the possibility of a new relationship with the United States.

The second milestone election took place in the United States. On November 4, 2008, U.S. voters elected Barack Obama the forty-fourth president of the United States, the first African-American to become president. During his campaign, Obama promised to begin a new dialogue with the Cuban government and work towards forging a better relationship. In the first few months of his presidency, Obama enacted several changes likely to affect U.S.-Cuban relations. Obama ordered the closing of the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center, eased restrictions on travel to the island and remittances for Cuban-Americans, and ordered that the scrolling marquee in the top windows of the U.S. Interest Section in Havana be turned off.

The marquee had been part of a four-year “billboard war” waged between the U.S. Interest Section and the Cuban government. In 2004, the Cuban government erected massive billboards in front of the U.S. Interest Section, displaying images of
Iraqi prisoners of war and then-President Bush as a Nazi. The Cuban government commissioned the billboards to protest the U.S. invasion of Iraq as well as the Bush administration’s increasingly hostile rhetoric and actions towards the island. Since 9/11, at which time the Bush administration identified Cuba as part of the “adjunct axis of evil,” the U.S. government had been systematically increasing diplomatic pressure on Cuba. The installation of the scrolling marquee on the upper floor of the Interest Section took place in 2006 and continuously flashed five-foot-high crimson letters, spelling out messages in Spanish critical of the Castro government. The Cuban government retaliated by building a memorial of 138 black flags, emblazoned with a single star to honor Cuban martyrs killed fighting against U.S. imperialism. This memorial was placed directly in front of the U.S. Interest Section, effectively obscuring the marquee from view.

The removal of an electronic message board might seem minor in comparison to the other two changes in policy by the Obama administration; however, it was the only change that was aimed directly at improving relations with the Castro government. The order to close the Guantánamo Bay prison was tied more to ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, the continued involvement of the U.S. in Iraq, and an attempt at repairing the international reputation of the United States. The order to loosen travel restrictions on Cuban-Americans was primarily a domestic political decision that was both safe and popular in the Cuban-American community and Washington DC beltway. The decision to shut down the marquee, however, was a direct overture from the Obama administration to the Castro government as well as a
visible symbol to the Cuban people, and Latin America more broadly, that the new U.S. government desired change.

In response to the marquee going dark, the Cuban government visually responded the Obama administration’s gesture of good will. Raúl Castro’s government removed the anti-American billboards from the front of the U.S. Interest Section and changed the black flags of the Cuban martyrs to Cuban national flags. By examining the visual culture employed by Cuba and the United States in the “billboard war,” historians can come to a better understanding of the build-up of tensions between Cuba and the United States during the Bush administration and efforts to restore more positive relations at the beginning of Obama’s tenure in office. Although the official textual record shows that little of substance has changed in the relationship between Cuba and the United States since the Bush to Obama transition—the embargo is still intact, Guantánamo Bay prison remains open, the travel ban for U.S. citizens remains in effect—the visual record reveals that emotional tensions between the countries have changed because of the removal of the discordant images. The changing of the visual rhetoric between the two nations was an important first step in re-envisioning the relationship between Cuba and the United States that may lead to more substantive diplomacy in the future. The “billboard war” and its resolution is just one an example of the role that visual culture has continuously played in foreign relations of both countries.

This dissertation has documented the transformation of the visual culture of U.S.-Cuba relations over the last fifty years. This relationship was characterized not only by state-to-state diplomacy, economic exchange, and military intervention, but
also by the dissemination of popular representations that produced and reinforced the essence of U.S.-Cuban relations at a more intimate level. This work demonstrates that through the study of visual culture—advertising, billboards, comic books, films, photographs, political cartoons, posters, and television shows—and not just the official textual record, the history of U.S.-Cuban relations can be seen as a personal, as well as political, experience shared between two nations. While traditional diplomatic history tells an official story of state-to-state relations, popular visual culture provides insights of how the general public perceives and makes sense of foreign relations. Within the visual culture of U.S.-Cuban relations, metaphors of family, gender, race, and class—often not visible in the official record—give meaning to the relationship between the two countries at a much more intimate level. Within the different historical time periods and phases of the U.S.-Cuban relationship, image-makers in Cuba and the United States have re-envisioned these intimate connections between the two countries. It is this personal, intimate connection to foreign relations produced by the visual culture of both Cuban and U.S. societies that I have evoked in this project.

Before 1959, Cuba and the United States, because of their geographic proximity, became allied in an economic, political, and cultural relationship that was largely controlled by the United States. Cubans, especially the middle and upper class in Havana, embraced a myriad of cultural forms, including baseball, Hollywood films, and a wide range of consumer goods. Advertisements for U.S. products became a primary means through which romanticized visions of U.S. culture were spread on the island. These promotional images carried not only information on the products...
they were trying to sell, but also North American constructions of family, race, class, and gender that became naturalized in Cuban society. Through these visual constructions, Cubans came to judge their own personal and national progress based on these idealized U.S. norms. While consumer images encouraged Cubans to participate in a version of the “American Dream,” it was, in fact, unobtainable for most Cubans, and severe poverty was still widespread on the island.

In the United States, the U.S. public came to know Cuba through images contained in advertisements, television shows, and tourism. Tourism provided the most personal connection between the two countries both in images and in practice. Travel maps and guidebooks presented North America and Cuba as visually connected to one another, with Cuba envisioned as an extension of the United States. Tourist laws and regulations allowed U.S. visitors to come and go from Cuba with almost the same ease as traveling domestically. In U.S. periodicals, tourism advertisements promoted a vision of Cuba and even the Cuban people as subservient to U.S. interests and as products to be consumed. The connections forged between Cuba and the United States, though intimate, were inherently unequal and favored U.S. citizens over their Cuban neighbors.

Increased cultural and financial inequality on the island coupled with the corruption of the Batista dictatorship pushed Cuba into crisis in the mid-1950s and plunged the country into full-scale rebellion by 1956. At the center of the revolution was Fidel Castro, a Cuban lawyer, who became the primary leader of the 26 of July Movement. Although it is often forgotten or purposely omitted from history, from January 1957 until May 1959, a broad segment of the American public embraced
Fidel Castro as heroes. This oft-forgotten history is clearly revealed by studying the contemporary visual culture. U.S. reporters flooded American newspapers, magazines, and television shows with triumphant stories and images about Castro and his bearded rebel heroes. Journalists, such as Herbert Matthews, Robert Taber, and even Errol Flynn, reported on the Cuban revolution in heroic terms that connected the rebels to U.S. constructions of idealized masculinity—brave and decisive men, willing to risk everything for their ideals. The U.S. media’s depictions of the 26 of July Movement rebels were similar to the images of popular Western film stars and action comics of the 1940s and 1950s. These images contained the basis for what the U.S. public imagined “real men” to be like. The rebels were so accepted as masculine heroes that it was considered appropriate for U.S. boys to dress up and play Cuban Revolution.

The U.S. media’s love affair and the myth of the heroic revolutionary ended when the military rebellion turned into actual social revolution with executions, Soviet alliances, fervent nationalism, and concomitant anti-Americanism. Throughout 1959 and 1960, Cuba and the United States engaged in a tug-of-war of rhetoric, sanctions, reprisals, and increasingly negative images that ended with a complete break in diplomatic relations in January 1961. The visual culture of this time period reveals the intensity of the conflict and a sea change in perception between the two nations. The images produced by both countries demonized and dehumanized the other’s leadership, much like the images used in past hot-war conflicts such as World War II. The metaphors of proximity and connectivity, once touted as a natural advantage for trade, were transformed into visions of hazard and risk. The U.S. press
ceased publishing images representing the masculine, heroic actions of Castro and the
26 of July Movement leadership and instead portrayed the Cuban leadership as
barbaric, insane, and homosexual. The failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs and near
disastrous nuclear stand off during the Cuban Missile Crisis gave physical
manifestation to the enemy aesthetic that now existed between the two nations.

Confronting their ally-now-made-enemy became an obsession on both sides
of the Florida Straits. Cuba and the United States produced a vast amount of images
in the battle for hearts and minds domestically and internationally. The U.S. media
continually warned its populace about the dangers posed by a communist nation “on
America’s doorstep.” The U.S. government vowed to prevent “another Cuba” from
happening in “America’s backyard”—the Western Hemisphere. Through these
metaphors of hearth and home under attack, U.S. political cartoonists and filmmakers
depicted the communist threat to the U.S. national family. Artists’ use of images of
family personalized the threat of Cuban communism both domestically and
internationally. To prevent communism from spreading to other Latin American
nations, the United States committed to the largest economic aid program for the
Western Hemisphere, the Alliance for Progress. This program contained a massive
propaganda campaign designed to spread the image of Castro as an adversary
throughout the hemisphere. U.S. Information Service comic book artists utilized
images of Latin American families under attack from communism or creating a better
life for themselves through the Alliance programs.

For the Castro government, the antagonistic relationship with the United
States bolstered the revolution internally and allowed the government to rapidly
implement revolutionary reforms on the island. After January 1959, the revolution
turned from a military operation into an effort to reshape the meaning and purpose of
Cuban identity. It was in this new quest for a re-imagined Cuban national family,
based on socialist ideals as well as racial, class, and gender equality that the Cuban
revolution found its most lasting mission. Cuban artists celebrated revolutionary
social programs, such as national tourism and the Literacy Campaign, as working to
build a new Cuban identity. These images in advertisements, billboards, and films
supported the new vision of what it meant to be Cuban in a revolutionary context.
Artists also depicted Cuba’s social reforms in multiple visual mediums that allowed
Cuba to spread its message to other third world nations in order to aid their struggles
against U.S. imperialism.

Finally, the group most intimately affected by U.S.-Cuban relations is the
Cuban exile community; indeed, images of and about Cuban exiles form a crucial part
of the visual dialogue between the two nations. Images of family that have both
connected and separated the two countries are often rooted within the exile
community. These images—from Ricky Ricardo to Tony Montana—have shaped
U.S. perception about the Cuban-American community and helped to define the U.S.-
Cuban relationship. The images that the U.S. media produced about the different
waves of exiles at times distorted the truth about the Cuban immigrants. U.S. image-
makers celebrated the first wave of exiles from 1959-1975 for their financial success
in the United States and for having escaped Castro and communism. These first two
waves of “golden exiles” were indeed successful and helped to revitalized South
Florida. However, unlike what the images of these groups would suggest, most
Cubans in the first two waves came to the United States already possessing the financial assets, education, and experience to make this transition smoother. These exiles were also more easily acceptable to the U.S. public because they were predominately white middle-class families. The majority of these exiles did not “escape” the island on tiny boats or rafts as they were so often depicted, but instead arrived on two regularly scheduled commercial airline flights that flew daily from Varadero, Cuba to Miami, Florida.

The later waves of exiles, in the 1980 Mariel Boatlift and the 1994 Balsero Crisis, did not receive the same warm reception from the U.S. public. These later groups of exiles were blamed for contributing to the criminality of Miami and its image as the drug smuggling capital of the world. These later waves of exiles included many more Afro-Cubans and desperately poor who received a colder reception from the U.S. mainstream press. These demographics made the transition for these later groups far more difficult. The U.S. government was unable to use images of these exiles against the Castro government to the same effect; instead, Castro turned the exiles into a Cuban propaganda victory. The images produced about the exiles have kept the personal cost of the conflict between Cuba and the United States central to much of the discussion about normalization. This personal stake in the relationship was most recently evident in the custody battle for Elián González. This battle over whether to allow a five-year-old boy to return to his biological father in Cuba or be raised by his Miami relatives became metaphorical for the battle over the custody of the island itself.
This study of the popular culture of U.S.-Cuban relations provides a heretofore-absent examination of the visual dialogue between Cuba and the United States during a time of tremendous change and conflict. This dissertation explores the development of an aesthetic of alliance and antagonism that has both bound and divided the two border nations. From the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis, to the Mariel Boat Lift, and Elián González, the images that make up this relationship reflected and influenced the political and social dialogue between the two countries. Following the revolution, this dialogue included re-envisioning Cuba and the United States as dangerous places, demonizing their respective leaders, and seeking to convince other nations of the righteousness of their cause. Revolutionary Cuba has, in part, forged its national identity through the use of oppositional images created to combat U.S. imperialism. For the United States, Cuba’s continued defiance has rendered a visual justification for an aggressive foreign policy throughout Latin America. The continued conflict has created a large exile community in South Florida who have remained active participants in this international conflict. Just as the Obama and Castro governments realized that by changing the images between the two countries they could facilitate a more productive dialogue, the visual relationship between Cuba and the United States will continue to be crucial in determining whether the nations can find common ground or continue to view one another as intimate enemies well into the twenty-first century.
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