CHAPTER 13

Cuba and the US in a Sandbox: Cuban Funny Papers

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Abstract: The current precarious state of affairs between Cuba and the United States stems from a legacy of some very questionable political decisions made on both parts. Contemplating the series of events that transpired between January 1, 1959 and December 2, 1961, one can easily see an absurd back and forth political tit-for-tat in which each country tries to establish itself as king of the sandbox. Nowhere does this play itself out more remarkably than in the Cuban funny papers, where in the great tradition of caricature worldwide, Cuban graphic artists vilify the United states, call into question US power and manhood, and taunt Uncle Sam and his forces with invitations to test the resolve of the Cuban people to resist invasion and political control. Appealing to the notorious Cuban sense of humor, and in particular the choteo as discussed by Mañach, graphic humor of the day mocks Uncle Sam, President Kennedy, U.S. intelligence organizations, and global associations that follow the lead of the United States. This paper explores political cartoons from 1959-1960 and 2007-2008, to determine what has changed and what remains the same in this longstanding graphic battle.

The current precarious state of affairs between Cuba and the United States stems from a legacy of some very questionable political decisions made on both parts. I say the choices are questionable not because one specific alternate route stands out that would have made the last forty years easy, but rather because in order to understand the intransigence of the US around the issue of the economic embargo and the vehemence of Cuba’s belligerent stance toward their enormous neighbor, one does have to ask certain questions about the history of US-Cuban international relations. Several scholars have made a cogent (if obvious) case that the United States’ implementation of an economic blockade of the island is a direct result of Cuba’s alignment with its absolute worst ideological enemy dur-

1. An excellent chronology of events is included as the first Appendix in Brenner, LeoGrande, Rich & Siegel (527-35).
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ing the Cold War, the USSR. However, Cuba’s choice in this matter was a response to the manipulative move of the US canceling the import agreement that formerly had counted for approximately 80% of the Cuban GNP.

Contemplating the series of events that transpire between January 1, 1959 and the end of 1962, one can easily see an absurd back and forth political tit-for-tat in which each country tries to establish itself as king of the sandbox. Not only do the leaders of both nations figuratively pick up their toys and refuse to play anymore, they engage in the sort of taunting and name calling reminiscent of the most puerile of our childhood days. Despite the abundance of evidence of such behavior in the mass media of the United States, due to space constraints I exclusively look at the Cuban reactions in this paper. Nowhere does this play itself out more remarkably than in the Cuban funny papers, where in the great tradition of caricature worldwide, Cuban graphic artists vilify the United states, call into question US power and manhood, and taunt Uncle Sam and his forces with invitations to test the resolve of the Cuban people to resist invasion and political control. Half a century later, the game playing through satirical caricature continues, reflecting the lack of any real progress toward détente. Here I will explore the representation of the United States in Cuban comics from two distinct eras: the first years of the Revolution, and in the here and now, 2007-2008. The principal questions addressed include: How exactly is Cuba laughing at its political enemy? What changes, if any, have occurred in the content or style of this comic mud-slinging? And finally, to what extent can this sort of graphic humor be understood as the Cuban choteo?

I’ll See You in the Funny Papers

The trajectory of Cuban graphic humor railing against colonialism and advocating independence finds its beginnings around 1848, according to Evora Tamayo, in subversive bills posted on public walls, as with the anti-Spanish caricature “found” by Cirilo Villaverde on the wall of the Tacón Theater (Figure 13-1; “la vaca de leche”). The target of Cuban comic artists shifts to the United States at the turn of the 19th century, as is to be expected, as the Platt Amendment and increasing US holdings make Cuban independence feel like a sham to many (Figure 13-2; “Bromas de la intervención,” La política cómica 1906, in Tamayo 67). However, after
the triumph of the 1959 Revolution and the subsequent intensification of political enmity between the two nations, anti-imperialist and especially anti-United States political cartoons become an official weapon of the government. As newspapers and popular magazines depend entirely on state financing, and their content must pass through the offices of the censors, their status as governmental organs of communication is inarguable. So it is that Bohemia prints verbatim speeches by Fidel as well as inaugurating a supplementary page of cartoons, entitled “Humor y Revolución,” both of which are utilized to disseminate policy nationally and internationally, as well as to influence beliefs and behaviors of the reading public. Also at this time, with the triumph of the Revolution, the new periodical Palante will replace Zig-Zag as the voice of rebel humor, which now is converted from a semi-underground and subversive posture to the official Cuban stance.

The political cartoons of the era serve crucial functions, one of which is to provide visual elucidation of the current events in the news to a newly literate population. Similar to the editorial commentaries, or even the news stories that appear in the newspapers and variety magazines, the comics offer interpretations of world happenings and the role Cuba plays in them. Appealing to the notorious Cuban sense of humor, and perhaps in particular the choteo as discussed by Mañach, graphic humor of the day mocks Uncle Sam, President Kennedy, U.S. intelligence organizations, and global associations that follow the lead of the United States. Taking their opponents down a notch or two, Cuban caricaturists (and their compatriot readers) assert their ideological and moral superiority, and most significantly their independence from an authority that wishes to be recognized as ethically correct, if not divinely mandated.

The bar against which Kennedy and the like will be judged are Che Guevara’s ideals of the New Cuban Man and the Guerrilla as Social Reformer. In 1960 Guevara writes that, “in Cuba a new type of man is being created, whom we cannot fully appreciate here in the capital, but who is found in every corner of the country…” He refers first to the peasants, wielding hoes and pickaxes, who fought alongside the rebels from the Sierra Maestra during the revolution. He speaks of the men who believe in working toward the collective good and deem that “far more important than a good remuneration is the pride of serving one's neighbor; that much more definitive and much more lasting than all the gold that
one can accumulate is the gratitude of a people” (“On Revolutionary Medicine” n.p.). He also speaks of the rough and ready guerrilla fighters, who have survived the harsh conditions of combat as well as life in the mountains, and who are ready to sacrifice their own lives for the cause. The guerrilla warrior, who in many cases comes from the landed classes, also must dedicate himself selflessly to the betterment of the poor, in every area, until all Cubans achieve a high level of economic, cultural, moral, and technological improvement. This, then, is the first image of the New Man in Cuba: manly, risk-taking, disciplined, principled, humble, accustomed to a simple existence, close to the land, and dedicated to building a just (and eventually classless) society. The United States government and their allies will be judged as corrupt, money-hungry, effete, manipulative, egocentric, and childish. Drawing them as such in the comics will inculcate a sense of pride in Cuban advancement and a parallel derision of the number one enemy of the Cuban Revolution.

Felo’s “Panorama de un campamento Yanqui,” for example, depicts clownish and dissipated military officers, who wield bullwhips, drink to excess, play dice, and force their soldiers to engage in ridiculous training exercises, such as balancing upside-down on a beach ball. The soldiers themselves are hapless and undisciplined, tricked into joining the army, then ill-trained and poorly treated. In the two-page spread, one soldier expresses a sense of futility, saying, “¡La verdad, yo no sabía que el imperialismo era así, pero ya estoy embarcao!” [To tell the truth, I didn't know that imperialism was like this, but I've already come aboard!] FBI and CIA agents wander through the campground, sometimes contributing to the chaos, often in emasculating disguise, such as a showgirl or a blind man (Figure 13-3; Palante Suplemento “Life en Español” p.XI, 1961). The artist Dagoberto also lampoons organizational corruption in his cartoon depicting FBI and CIA as piglets who eat Nazi slop and mildly look on as an enormous sow lays on top of the wire news services (AP and UPI) while dreaming of money (Figure 13-4; Palante #3 p.VIII, October 30, 1961). Portrayed as both lazy and avaricious, they are diametrically opposed to the New Man ideals that dictate social evolution in Cuba.

In general the United States are painted as unrepentant bullies with unilateral control in the international sector. In a Palante cover from 1961, Kennedy is shown feeding a baby Rómulo Betancourt with a bottle, indicating Cuba’s blame of the United States for Venezuela’s President’s
changing political stance (Figure 13-5; Cover, November 6, 1961). In one of the hundreds of Uncle Sam cartoons that were penned in the early years of the Cuban Revolution, one that particularly stands out is his introduction of a sexily clad woman labeled “OEA” (OAS-Organization of American States) into a brothel staffed by sirens labeled “CENTO” (Central Treaty Organization), “OTAN” (NATO-North American Treaty Organization) and “SEATO” (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization) (Figure 13-6; Palante vol.20 p.6, February 26, 1962). A response to the OAS conference in Uruguay from January 22-30, 1962, where Cuba is excluded “from participation in the inter-American system,” and “OAS members are blocked from providing weapons to Cuba,” this comic none too subtly recalls that the measure originated in the White House (Chang and Kornbluh 348). As Cuba by this time has begun to rehabilitate prostitutes, a step in the cleansing of decadent imperialist influences on the island, calling Uncle Sam a pimp and the major treaty organizations whores is a doubly-charged insult.

Nonetheless, Uncle Sam finds himself in many other roles in addition to that of libertine. In a Blanco cartoon from the same year, the United States mascot is in the corner of the boxing ring, obviously badly beaten and on his last legs, but being reassured by a CIA “trainer” that his strategy is a winning one (Figure 13-7; Palante vol.13 p.2, January 8, 1962). To put this into context, remember that at this time Cuba is secretly receiving arms shipments and military training from the Soviet Union; the alliance is fairly common knowledge on the island, however, and so the artist taunts the United States for proclaiming imminent victory over his country. In this same year, and shortly after the OAS mandated arms blockade, Palante magazine continues to stir up feelings of Cuban pride by recalling the defeated Bay of Pigs invasion (a year ago to the day) in a Palante cover captioned “Hace un año en Girón me la hicieron jirones” [In the Bay of Pigs they tore me to shreds.] (Figure 13-8; Palante vol.27, April 16, 1962). The vision of a chagrined, bandaged, naked Uncle Sam holding up his shredded costume is a grave violation, placing the iconic male figure in a position of debility and sexual vulnerability. His blackened eyes proclaim defeat, his large red nose dissipation, and his awkward stance embarrassment, overall presenting an easy target for many types of jokes.
After Kennedy is sworn in as President in 1961, and immediately buys in to the CIA plots of assassination and possible invasion, he becomes a popular target for the caricaturists. He consistently is shown as weak although he believes himself to be all-powerful, and corrupt despite seeing himself as selfless. He is drawn as an ugly and awkward ballerina with frilly underpants (*Palante* vol.1 p.3, October 16, 1961), an emaciated and coiffed Superman (Figure 13-9; *Palante* vol.7 p.X, November 27, 1961), a member of the Chicago Mafia (*Palante* Cover vol.14, January 15, 1962), a caveman (*Palante* vol.25 p.13, April 2, 1962), and a little boy who sat on cactus and has trouble removing the spines (*Palante* vol.39 p.6, July 9, 1962). Note that in each case, his manhood, intelligence and/or his integrity are somehow suspect; the Superman portrayal is worthy of special note, as the stance in general and holding of the pinky finger in particular suggest effeminate homosexuality. A puerile tactic oft-used in childish taunting, questioning an opponent's sexuality unfortunately is as ubiquitous as an “adult” insult.

Many comics mix character assassination with political censure. Kennedy is portrayed not only as hypocritical, but also either ignorant or unreasonable, as he rails against the reaction to his offer of foodstuffs to offset suffering caused by the blockade. Covered in tomato juice, he complains to his military officers, “¡Mal agradecidos los cubanos! Les ofrezco los ‘alimentos para la paz’ para aliviarle nuestro bloqueo y… ¡miren la respuesta!” [Those Cubans are ungrateful louts! I offer them “food for peace” to alleviate our blockade and… look at their response!] (Figure 13-10; *Palante* vol.25 p.3, April 2, 1962). This early in the game of king of the hill, and still buoyed up by substantial financing from the Soviet Union, nobody in Cuba wants to take charity from the enemy. The pride and obstinacy of JFK, mirrored by that of the Cuban exiles who eagerly support his machinations against Castro and the socialist regime, is matched by the stubborn righteous indignation of Fidel himself—the very model for Cuban reactions.

The Cuban upper echelon, and the cartoonists who illustrated their stance, clearly see the series of moves and countermoves in these early years of the Revolution as a game of tit for tat. For each military feint from the USA, Cuba would retaliate. The two page cartoon “Pueblo vs. imperialismo: Una partida clásica” [The People versus Imperialism: a classic board game] brings this amusement explicitly into the public
A board composed of sixteen black or white blocks, each outlining actions and reactions of the two governments, carries the ideological and political fight into the living room of a massive number of regular Cubans. Not only are the readers shown that this is their battle, they legitimately (albeit vicariously) can join in the disdain toward an enemy who can’t defeat such a relatively small opponent. Joining in the game, regular Cubans would match code words to the description of their nation’s righteous self-defense and participate in mocking the almighty world power. This drives home the additional point that for each anti-Castro insult in the world media, Cuba would strike back with scorn and laughter, a threat overlaid with the famous Cuban sense of humor that proclaims them still solid in their national pride, not yet willing to bow to any authority they do not truly respect. If the shark of United States aggression advanced toward the island to rip it apart, the armored and sharp-toothed crocodile, or maybe the Caimán Barbudo himself, would swallow whole its aggressor and lick its chops afterward (Figure 13-13; Palante 1962, reproduced in Tamayo 227).

**That Was Then, This is Now**

In the spirit of the 2008 CUNY conference, which looks at innovation and change on the island, I now turn to Cuban political comics currently being published in print and on the Internet. Unsurprisingly, many similar images and attitudes prevail, although some changes can be noted. The continuity, however, is more easily determined: just as the United States and Cuba persist in their almost half-century battle of wills (or some would say ideology), they still sling mud-verbally and most decidedly graphically. Currently the major graphic humor publications include *Palante*, *Dedeté*, and *Melaíto*; the longer-standing *Bohemia* still maintains two page of cartoons. Although *Bohemia*’s general humor pages are lacking political cartoons these days, the full-page panel of “Grafiopinión” by Tomy offers a mordant editorial comic each week and often targets the United States.²

A Tomy panel from February 2, 2007 depicts a confused and frightened George W. Bush resting atop a boot, wherein resides a manacled older man attached to a container of C4 explosives, apparently referring back to the December 22, 2001 incident in which a passenger on Ameri-
can Airlines flight 63 attempted to explode the airplane by igniting the fuse leading to his explosive-filled shoes (see Figure 13-14). Over five years later, the repercussions of the attempt continue to complicate air travel within the United States, with all passengers removing their shoes to pass through security checkpoints. The satirical allusion surely mocks Bush’s war against terrorism as ineffective and his strategies as ludicrous; perhaps Tomy points out that Cuba’s failure to require similar screening measures haven’t allowed any successful shoe bomb attacks.

United States policy is ridiculed in another comic referring to the recent debate over the use of corn to produce ethanol as an alternative fuel; an affluent, appearing Uncle Sam is lecturing a dispirited and barely clothed man of color. He says, while shaking his index finger, “Ustedes no se desarrollan porque en lugar de ocuparse de los biocombustibles se pasan el tiempo pensando en comer” [You are not developing, because instead of getting busy with bio-fuels you spend all you time thinking about food.] (Figure 13-15; Bohemia 99.16 p.4, August 3, 2007). The United States government, embodied by a white man wearing tails and the usual top hat with the strips of the national flag, is ridiculed as being hypocritical, ignorant, and without compassion for the millions whose subsistence depends on inexpensive and plentiful corn as a dietary staple. This theme also inspires three comics by Pedreira in the May 2007 issue of Palante: in one comic the world wrestles a gangster for an ear of corn (Figure 13-16); in another Uncle Sam fills a five-door limousine with ethanol as an arm in a tattered shirt sleeve holds out an empty plate (Figure 13-17); and finally a talking head of corn addresses the United States public (Figure 13-18). The last comic of course is meant to refer to Bush, whose alleged low level of intelligence is the target of scores of Cuban comics. Here the presidential figure not only has the brain of a vegetable, but also is shown as perplexed, by the air bubbles surrounding his head as well as his scratching his forehead, common signs for confusion.

Comic mockery of Bush tends to vary between this sort of image of a befuddled simpleton, whose ill-founded actions stem from ignorance or

2. April 9, 1999-Dec. 27, 2002 no political satire was included in Bohemia’s “Humor” section, the comics always found on the last newspaper page of the magazine. Similarly, the “Humor” section from issues 99.3 (Feb. 2, 2007) and 99.16 (Aug. 3, 2007) lack political comics.
stupidity, and a malicious—either satanic or Hitleresque—killer whose hunger for power is his primary driving force. Although the latter may seem a more vicious characterization, Cubans may see an accusation of idiocy to be the worse insult, given the extraordinarily high levels of literacy and higher education on the island. Even those Cubans who make jokes at Fidel Castro’s expense and seriously lament the precarious economic state of their country are quick to compare their leader’s brilliance, knowledge and eloquence with Bush’s relatively poorer attributes. Here a graphic version of the ubiquitous choteo is utilized to emphasize Bush’s frailty or failing, bringing him down a few notches from his self-proclaimed position as leader of the free world. In this, comics haven't changed much in the intervening decades—we see the same jokes mocking a different world leader.

Actual US-Cuba diplomatic and economic relations still preoccupy the news media, although to a much lesser extent overall, except when discrete events provoke official (and then public) outrage. In a Palante panel significant for its implication that Cuban exiles are now less supportive of the economic embargo, Pitín (Gustavo Prado Alvarez) draws a worm that, after having eaten through a report entitled “Plan Bush para Cuba,” [Bush’s Plan for Cuba] spits out all he has chewed. The worm exclaims, “¡Esto no hay quien se lo trague!” [Nobody can swallow this!] (Figure 13-19; Palante p.2, May 2007). Specific incidents aside, the US economic embargo is always a legitimate topic for humor and derision, as it is blamed for most problems that exist on the island today. One of the 2007 issues of Palante is an “edición muy especial” [very special edition] that instead of a volume number or exact date is called merely the “número antibloqueo” [anti-embargo volume]. José Luis’s cover art gives the reader a cowboy Bush brandishing pistols and astride a dinosaur (labeled “Bloqueo a Cuba” [Cuban Embargo]), who warns the readers that they will become extinct no matter what (see Figure 13-20). The special issue features multi-panel pages by Lacoste, Pedreira, Ñico, José Luis, Míriam, Wilson, Tomy, and Nuez, as well as a few single panels and essays, and the four-page “play” Cubicidio: ¿Jura decir la verdad? crafted by Isca-jim, José Luis, Perfecto and Pedreira (see Figures 13-21 to 13-26). The caricatures of the politicians who maintain the blockade, as well as the portrayal of repercussions from the almost fifty years of embargo, range from light-hearted to darkly sinister.
Specific contemporary events provide slightly different topics for the graphic artists’ pens; the war in Iraq has provided endless fodder for the art of caricaturists worldwide. In Cuba, most of the prominent comic artists have contributed to the criticisms of United States foreign policy in the Middle East as self-serving and inhumanely callous. Many comics seem to blame Bush personally for the war, while others more generically condemn the military apparatus or the administration as a whole. In a full-color cartoon first published in *Dedeté*, Lázaro Miranda shows Bush looking remarkably like a monkey and sweeping coffins under the White House (Figure 13-27; Miranda). The triple insult is effective in commenting on Bush’s intelligence, his duplicity, and his indifference toward the American people. Two *Palante* comics from May 2007 use a combination of graphics and dialogue to make their commentary. Rafael presents two bug-eyed soldiers running away from Baghdad, as one says to the other, “…La guerra está llena de mentiras de Bush, pero nuestros muertos son de verdad” [The war is full of Bush’s lies, but our dead are for real] (Figure 13-28; Rafael). Here the common foot soldiers are depicted in a sympathetic light, as frightened, deceived by their leaders, and placing their lives in jeopardy without any personal wish to fight. Lloró depicts the opposite, a soldier with vampire teeth and hard eyes, more heavily armed than Rambo, sporting a U.S. flag, a skull, and a pair of swastikas as decoration. In the background one onlooker facetiously comments to another, “¿Terrorista? ¡No! Luchador por la democracia y los derechos humanos” [Terrorist? No! A warrior for democracy and human rights.] (Figure 13-29; Lloró). As has become second nature for the mass media of Cuba and the United States, each interprets armed intervention by the other as unmitigated aggression and deconstructs the offered rhetoric of justification.

War and peace, as well as environmental awareness, are two major themes that have claimed attention over the last couple years. The mural painted in San Antonio de los Baños to celebrate the 15th Biennial of Graphic Humor, is covered with panels by several of the top artists belonging to IPEC’s humor section, and most of the art demonstrates the Cubans’ condemnation of US military actions. By way of example, Juan Carlos Pedreira paints a planet-sized, evil-eyed Uncle Sam lurking behind the globe, with his claws grasping the edges (see Figure 13-30). A segmented, writhing, white tube reaches toward the dove of peace; the impli-
cation is that a technological serpent under US control is threatening the
planet's possibility of achieving peace. Pedreira is equally concerned with
the motivations behind the series of wars and military actions in the Mid-
dle East, as is evidenced in his panel “Chupa-petróleo” [Oil-sucker] (Fig-
ure 13-31; Palante p.12, November 11, 2007) and animated comic
“Robando petróleo” [Stealing Oil] (Figure 13-32; Palante website January
23, 2008).

Comparing Uncle Sam to the “chupacabras” [goat-sucker, a mythical
monster] of Puerto Rican and Mexican legend is a sign of the growing
internationalism of Cuban graphic art. Similarly, Lázaro Miranda’s ele-
gantly rendered depiction of Iraq as the victim of a U.S. flag-decorated
“Alien,” reminiscent of the popular United States action-horror film, indi-
cates that Cuba has escaped the cultural bubble that for some time kept its
art and literature from wide global understanding and appeal (see Figure
13-33). These factors, together with the increasing presence of Cuban
graphic art on major Internet sites, is one of the major signs of change. As
of this writing, Dedeté is currently in the judging phase of their Biennial,
entitled “Dale un chance al planeta” [Give the planet a chance], adapted
from John Lennon’s famous line (see Figure 13-34). Entries from nations
all over the world tend to vilify the role played by the United States in
ecological destruction, and the Cuban entries are no exception to that gen-
eral rule. So yes, there has been change, but the nature of the humor that
permeates most of the comics in both Bohemia and Palante, and to a
lesser extent Dedeté, has remained a constant. If the caricatures and car-
toons discussed here do impart a sort of Cuban “flavor” of humor, would
that be the style made infamous by Jorge Mañach, the notorious choteo?

To what extent may we say that the Cuban political cartoons, both
those currently in vogue and those from the onset of the Revolution, may
be characterized as examples of this genre? The answer is partly a ques-
tion of semantics, and partially a question of politics. To Mañach’s initial
definition of choteo, “no tomar nada en serio…tirarlo todo a relajo” [to
take nothing seriously…to screw everything] (57) the author adds a

3. All of the entries to this competition, as well as the prize-winners, can be found on the
official Web site of the journal Juventud Rebelde [Rebel Youth], for which Dedeté is
the humor supplement. http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/cuba/2007-11-02/bienal-inter-
nacional-del-dedete-2008/
refinement to connote a habitual lack of respect for authority: “ya sea porque el individuo afirma despiadadamente su valor y su albedrío personales o porque reacciona a un medio social en que la jerarquía se ha perdido o falseado” [whether because the individual unashamedly affirms his own worth and free will or because he reacts to a social medium where the hierarchy has been lost or falsified] (58). For Mañach, the infantile burlesque that marks much of Cuban humor shows an unfortunate inability to understand the gravity of a situation, or in other words a lack of critical acumen and adult sensibility that are necessary for social progress; he champions, however, a humor that incorporates intelligence and self-restraint. Such humor would reflect the inherent desire for liberty from oppression and corruption that plague the island. “Ha llegado la hora de ser criticamente alegres, disciplinadamente audaces, conscientemente irrespetuosos” [The moment has arrived to be critically joyful, audaciously disciplined, conscientiously disrespectful] (94). Pérez Firmat further clarifies that Mañach’s “benign choteo consists in a selective disrespect for those kinds of authority that one thinks illegitimate. Since it exposes falsity and pretentiousness, benign choteo can fulfill a salutary function in society” (68). However, Pérez-Firmat asserts that the “choteo comprehends a three-term equation whose members are disorder, dirt, and marginality” (73) and is in essence a verbal comic form differing from the vulgar trompetilla [the “raspberry”] mainly in its use of language. 4 Both agree in the privileging of a more subtle and intelligent humor, a judicial and multi-layered wit permeated with irony, or at least parody, although for Mañach a serious and salubrious sociopolitical intent is at least as important.

4. I disagree with Pérez-Firmat in his final analysis that the crass and unsubtle “choteo is the dialect of the inarticulate...just a notch above the despective grimace and well below parody, satire, and irony in the scale of mockery” (77). I suspect that he doesn't believe this entirely himself, and that the extraordinarily clever word-play of his essay is an intentional example of what he accuses Mañach of “self-parody or auto-choteo” (77). A critic as incisive as he would not accidentally include that contradictory equation two paragraphs below where he definitively proclaims the two forms of humor are unequal. Instead, the evasive and eloquent prose of Pérez-Firmat's essay clearly both revels in and reviles a scatological humor that still holds much sway in Cuba and the Diaspora, worthy and witty in direct proportion to the intelligent irreverence of the wielder.
Both Mañach and Pérez Firmat might argue with the application of the term choteo to the genre of graphic humor, especially inasmuch as it contains many examples that completely eschew the verbal. Mañach perhaps would classify the comic humor here studied as benign, in that it seeks to uphold a certain social order and differentiates between authority to be respected versus false authority to be mocked. Pérez-Firmat surely would make the political argument that the Fidel-sanctioned comics lack the individuality or finesse to escape the denomination of choteo, despite any present evidence of irony, satire, and parody within them. Still, a close study of personal styles developed over the last few decades could well contradict such an assertion.

If something is indeed lacking in these comics, it is perhaps the dispassionate objectivity of the wordsmith or sculptor who is distant enough from her target to be able to play with the words or the clay endlessly (without any end to her available time, without wanting any certain ends to come from the use of her time). Many of these political comics certainly focus on the immediate and project an expected reaction of solidarity. Nevertheless, a wide variety of humor permeates the drawings, captions, and sparse dialogue, ranging from a slapstick comicity to dry and dark sardonic stabs. Placing the comics all in the same category seems inadequate, although two elements do run through them. However adult the themes and concepts, a childish petulance seeps through every panel. Yet however puerile some of the jokes may be, the undeniable reality of the post-colonialist and economically desperate context removes the reader's ability to judge them as completely lacking in substance. The insistent vilification of Tío Sam and a long line of U.S. Presidents and Defense Ministers is without a doubt a continuation of the tit-for-tat characterizing over a century of U.S.-Cuba relations. However, in view of the current international disenchantment with U.S. foreign policy, visible in hundreds of publications worldwide (but perhaps most humorously on Internet sites such as IranComics), Cuba is finding a lot of new friends on the playground. The next hundred years in the sandbox could be quite interesting.
Funny Papers: Figures and Images

FIGURE 1. La leche del vaca

Source: Cirilo Villaverde on the wall of the Tacón Theater, 1848.

FIGURE 2. Bromas de la intervención

FIGURE 3. Panorama de un campamento Yanqui


FIGURE 4. FBI and CIA Piglets

FIGURE 5. Kennedy with Baby Rómulo Betancourt

Source: *Palante* Cover, 6 November 1961.

FIGURE 6. Uncle Sam’s Brothel

Source: *Palante* vol.20 p.6, 26 February 1962.
FIGURE 7. U.S. Mascot in the Boxing Ring


FIGURE 8. Girón, Jirones

Source: *Palante* Cover vol.27, 16 April 1962.
FIGURE 9. President Kennedy Superman


FIGURE 10. Kennedy: Food for Peace

FIGURE 11. Pueblo vs. imperialismo: Una partida clásica

Source: Palante vol.30 p.8-9, 7 May 1962.

FIGURE 12. Pueblo vs. imperialismo: Una partida clásica (Final Square)

Source: Palante vol.30 p.8-9, 7 May 1962.
FIGURE 13. El Tiburón... y el Caimán


FIGURE 14. Bush in an Exploding Boot

FIGURE 15. Uncle Sam and Bio-fuel

![Cartoon of Uncle Sam and a bio-fuel context](image)


FIGURE 16. World Wrestles Gangster for Corn

![Cartoon of a gangster and a food shortage context](image)

FIGURE 17. Ethanol-fueled Limousine


FIGURE 18. Talking Head of Corn


FIGURE 20. Bush Rides Dinosaur, Bloqueo

FIGURE 21. Bloqueo (Lacoste)


FIGURE 22. Bloqueo (Pedreira)

FIGURE 23. Bloqueo (Nico)


FIGURE 24. Bloqueo (José Luis)

FIGURE 25. Bloqueo (Míriam)


FIGURE 26. Bloqueo (Wilson)

FIGURE 27. Bush Sweeping Coffins

Source: Lázaro Miranda. Dedeté.

FIGURE 28. Fleeing Soldiers, Bush’s War Lies

FIGURE 29. Terrorist or Human Rights Warrior


FIGURE 30. Uncle Sam Lurking Behind Globe, Mural

Source: Juan Carlos Pedreira. San Antonio de los Baños Mural.
FIGURE 31. Chupa-petróleo [Oil-sucker]


FIGURE 32. Robando petróleo [Stealing Oil]

FIGURE 33. Alien

Source: Lázaro Miranda.

FIGURE 34. Dale un chance al planeta

Source: Dedeté Biennial.
Bibliography


