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The Post-Revolutionary Roles of Fidel Castro: A Semiotic Analysis of Cuban Political Posters, 1959-1988

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The Post-Revolutionary Roles of Fidel Castro: A Semiotic Analysis of Cuban
Political Posters, 1959-1988

Meghan Elizabeth Payne

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Post-Revolutionary Roles of Fidel Castro: A Semiotic Analysis of Cuban Political Posters, 1959-1988

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This study employs semiotic methods to identify the post-revolutionary roles of former Cuban President Fidel Castro in order to classify the transformations of his character portrayal over time. Informed by Goffman's framing theory as well as suggestions of agenda-setting and priming, this qualitative study analyzes 19 propaganda posters for communications of encoded messages. In this medium, the research explores thematic patterns of sociopolitical and sociocultural signs which add to the richness of Castro's appeal. In addition to providing a unique perspective on interrogating visual images, this study offers a better understanding of the influential power of professional design and the use of semiotics in political propaganda.

Keywords: Castro, Cuba, propaganda, political posters, semiotics, framing theory

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CHAPTER I: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

On New Year's Eve, 1958, former Cuban President, Fulgencio Batista fled the country in a panic after receiving word that the city of Santa Clara had been seized by Fidel Castro's rebel forces. The following day, January 1, 1959, guerilla forces led by Ernesto Guevara (famously known as "Che") and Camilo Cienfuegos entered Havana, having been victorious in the battle at Santa Clara. Revolutionary instigator and leader Fidel Castro arrived with his militia one week later. Under the command of Castro, a new government was put into place, and the palpable triumph of the revolution seemed to permeate the very air around them (Padilla, 2007). This turning point for Cuba ushered in many political and cultural changes, which would begin to strain relations between the United States and Cuba, later ushering in the U.S.-imposed embargo.

More than half a century later, this communist nation still exists in isolation from the United States. Now, well into the twenty-first century, with the embargo still in effect, it is not easy to access Cuban media, much less understand its communications. Following the cunning verbal and visual influences of Fidel Castro and other revolutionaries, pro-revolutionary propaganda has become a normal part of news consumption for Cubans (Strom, 2016). Despite efforts to improve diplomatic relations, Cuba's track record of high propaganda levels has fed strongly into their political system. With each generation, acceptance and loyalty to the revolution is culturally bred, and persuasive power is evident in those media techniques.

One pressing question concerning Castro's revolutionary journey remains: how? How did one man start a revolt against a government and succeed? What communication strategies were employed to achieve such widespread allegiance to his regime? With every revolution comes

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risks and failure in some form. Additionally, with every dictatorship comes influential bias. Verbal influence was certainly no stranger to Castro. A brilliant orator, he ranks among the twentieth century's most charismatic rulers. As an unsympathetic foreign journalist once acknowledged, "Castro had a mystical and magical influence, a commanding spell, with tremendous power to convince people" (Eckstein 2004, p. 19). Additionally, visual influences through the media quickly became a tool of communication for the regime. In fact, in all communicatory forms, the blanket of communism began to fall on the Cuban nation more than ever before. Vocal influence, combined with a visual identity, laid the groundwork Castro would need to successfully create unity among his followers.

As Cuba remains a time capsule of mystery, there is much historians do not know about the political influences within it. However, propaganda images from the time carry with them coded messages and meanings, which offer insights to the leadership within the country. Driven by this belief, Cuban propaganda posters were chosen as the medium of this study, with Fidel Castro as its subject. Using semiotics—or the study of signs—a visual analysis is implemented in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the portrayed images of Fidel Castro, and his perceived roles from 1959-1988. Sociopolitical and cultural themes from the posters are identified through observation of patterns. This study also provides a unique ideological framework, referring to theories such as framing, agenda setting, and priming for academic parallels.

Historical Background

In order to best understand the meaning of Cuban propaganda, it is imperative to understand the historical context. This section will chronicle a timeline of sociopolitical and sociocultural events in Cuba, while recognizing significant contributors to Cuban history. The

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account of wars and the attitudes of the time lay a foundation for understanding the origins of this study, and for making scholarly connections to the findings.

Cuba's fight for independence from Spain was a long journey that took place over the course of nearly 30 years. The uprising was led by Cuban-born planters and other wealthy natives. On October 10, 1868, sugar mill owner, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes (1819–1874), pronounced all his slaves free and bid them and other followers to join his quest in proclaiming independence, which began the first of three liberation wars that Cuba fought against Spain. It became known as The Ten Years' War (1868–1878), the other two being the Little War (1879–1880) and the Cuban War of Independence (1895–1898). The final three months escalated with United States involvement, which became known as the Spanish-American War (Tone, 2006). Over the course of these wars, other Cuban heroes, like Céspedes, emerged from the common class to fight for freedom. Among these, José Martí, Máximo Gómez, and Antonio Maceo Grajales rose in prominence and recognition for their movements against the Spanish government (Navarro, 2001). José Martí (1853–1895) has long been considered a national hero in Cuba. During his relatively short life, he was a poet, essayist, journalist, revolutionary philosopher, translator, professor, publisher, Freemason, and political theorist. Martí even published his own newspaper: *La Patria Libre (The Free Homeland)* which campaigned for Cuban independence. Through his writings and political activity, he became a symbol for Cuba's bid for freedom against Spain in the 19th century and is referred to as *El Apostol de Independencia de Cuba*, “the Apostle of Cuban Independence” in English (Font, 2006). Máximo Gómez (1836–1905) was Dominican-born, and originally trained to be a cavalry officer for the Spanish Army. After facing a failure in the Dominican Annexation War, he moved his family to Cuba and became a military strategist. Eventually, Gómez was promoted to major general in the

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Ten Years' War, and later to military commander in the Cuban War of Independence. Antonio Maceo Grajales (1845–1896), known for his ethnicity and status as *El Titan de Bronce*, “The Bronze Titan,” was second in command in the Cuban Army of Independence, and also served in the Ten Years' War. Spaniards referred to him as *El Leon Mayor*, “The Greater Lion,” and he was one of the most noteworthy guerilla leaders in 19th century Latin America. Each of these men, save Gómez, were killed in military action, fighting for Cuba. These 19th century wars laid the foundation for future revolts in Cuba which would draw from such history as warfare backing.

In the decades following its independence from Spain in 1898, Cuba experienced a period of significant instability, enduring a number of revolts and periods of U.S. military intervention. Fulgencio Batista, a former soldier who had served as the elected president of Cuba from 1940 to 1944, became president for the second time in March 1952, after seizing power in a military coup and canceling the 1952 elections. Although Batista had been a considered a right-wing progressive during his first term, he proved far more dictatorial and indifferent to popular concerns in the 1950s. His administration became based on economic liberalism, which led to the growth of American businesses and capital in Cuba. This did not agree well with the indigenous islanders. Complaints against this political system were high, as Cubans began to claim that Americans were usurping resources and suffocating the local economy. While Cuba remained plagued by high unemployment, Batista antagonized the population by forming lucrative links to organized crime and continuing to allow American companies to dominate the Cuban economy (Karol, 1971).

Finally, on July 26, 1953, a young Fidel Castro, with 150 other government insurgents, knowns as *rebeldes* (“rebels”) led an armed revolt on the Moncada Barracks in the city of

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Santiago de Cuba. Many were killed, and Castro, along with his younger brother Raúl, were both captured and sentenced to 15 and 13 years in prison, respectively. At his trial, Castro battled these charges against him in a four-hour defense speech on October 16, 1953. Much of Fidel Castro's oration included passages of Martí's work recited from memory, as his prosecutors allowed him no resources. The concluding lines of his statement to the court are as follows: "*Condenadme, no importa, la historia me absolverá*" ("Condemn me, it doesn't matter. History will absolve me.") Though no contemporaneous record of Castro's words was kept, he later reconstructed them for publication on January 1, 1958, and subsequently numerous additional publications since the first. This line later became the title for his work and the manifesto of this event sparking the Revolution, which would become known as *El Movimiento 26 de Julio*, the July 26th Movement (Suarez, 1967).

However, political pressure outweighed the Batista's administration's interests, and in 1955 the government freed all political prisoners in Cuba, including the Moncada attackers. Remarkably, Fidel Castro's Jesuit childhood teachers succeeded in persuading Batista to include Fidel and Raúl in the release (Castro, 2007). Though freed from prison, the rebels were all deported to Mexico. Soon, the Castro brothers joined with other exiles to prepare for the overthrow of Batista, receiving training from many other leaders, including the Republican forces from the Spanish Civil War. In June 1955, Castro was introduced to the Argentine revolutionary, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who joined his cause. During a long conversation with Castro on the night of their first meeting, Guevara concluded that the Cuban's cause was the one for which he had been searching, and before daybreak, he had signed up as a member of the July 26th Movement. From this point on, despite their "contrasting personalities," Che and Fidel began to foster what dual biographer Simon Reid-Henry (2009) deems a "revolutionary

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friendship that would change the world,” as a result of their coinciding commitment to anti-imperialism. As chief advisor to the Castro brothers, Guevara aided in the initiation of Batista’s amnesty. His unique perspective on the adversary was a valuable mindset for guerilla fighters:

The enemy soldier in the Cuban example which at present concerns us, is the junior partner of the dictator; he is the man who gets the last crumb left by a long line of profiteers that begins in Wall Street and ends with him. He is disposed to defend his privileges, but he is disposed to defend them only to the degree that they are important to him. His salary and his pension are worth some suffering and some dangers, but they are never worth his life. If the price of maintaining them will cost it, he is better off giving them up; that is to say, withdrawing from the face of the guerrilla danger (Gerassi, 1968).

Following the formation of rebel services in Mexico, a surge for revolution was sparked again. In response, Castro’s forces began making and executing plans which would begin the long string of battles—which would continue sporadically for the next three and a half years—to overthrow the Cuban government. In addition to armed resistance, the rebels sought the use of propaganda to their advantage. Additionally, a pirate radio station called Radio Rebelde, or “Rebel Radio,” was set up in February 1958, allowing Castro and his forces to broadcast their message of a revolution nationwide. Following the ousting of Batista and the success in taking over Havana, propaganda began to play a more significant role in establishing loyalty to the Revolution within the island (McCran, 2009).

On New Year’s Eve of 1958, the Battle of Santa Clara took place in a scene of great confusion. The city of Santa Clara fell to the combined forces of Guevara, Cienfuegos, and other Cuban rebels. News of this defeat caused Batista to panic. He fled the country by airplane for the Dominican Republic just hours later on January 1, 1959 (Falcoff, 2003). As soon as Castro

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learned of Batista's flight in the morning, he immediately started negotiations to take over Santiago de Cuba, the second largest city in the nation. On January 2, his forces succeeded. Later that day, Guevara and Cienfuegos simultaneously entered Havana. They had met no opposition on their journey from Santa Clara to Cuba's capital (Suarez, 1967). On January 8, Fidel Castro, with Cienfuegos, Guevara, and other revolutionaries by his side, finally marched into Havana, victorious. He was welcomed with open arms by the people and a new regime was implemented in the island nation of Cuba. This day was the ultimate culmination of a plot to overthrow the Batista government, which had been in power for almost a decade previous. Following the revolution, Castro's administration took a turn for the left wing, establishing for the first time, the Communist Party of Cuba on the island. State socialistic reforms were employed creating a classless society throughout the nation. This "chicken in every pot" mentality became the lifeblood of the Castro regime. The revolution had powerful domestic and international repercussions, particularly re-shaping Cuba's relationship with the United States. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Castro's government began a program to nationalize American assets which transformed Cuba's economy as well as its civil society (Fagen, 1965).

Castro's victory and post-revolutionary foreign policy began to see global repercussions. Influenced by the expansion of the Soviet Union into Europe after the 1917 Russian Revolution, Castro immediately sought to "export" his revolution to other countries in the Caribbean and beyond, sending weapons to Algerian rebels as early as 1960 (Crozier, 1973). Unsurprisingly, the Cuban Revolution was a crucial turning point in U.S.-Cuban relations. Although the American government was initially willing to recognize Castro's new government, it soon came to fear that communist insurgencies would spread through other nations in Latin America, as they had in Southeast Asia (Paterson, 1995). Castro, on the other hand, resented the Americans

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for providing aid to Batista's government during the revolution. After the revolutionary government nationalized all U.S. property in Cuba in August 1960, the Eisenhower administration froze all Cuban assets on American soil, severed diplomatic ties, and tightened its embargo of Cuba. In 1961, the U.S. government backed an armed counterrevolutionary assault on the Bay of Pigs with the aim of ousting Castro, but they were swiftly defeated by the Cuban military (Staten, 2015). In the following decades, Cuba became heavily involved in supporting communist insurgencies and independence movements in many developing countries, sending military aid to insurgents in Ghana, Nicaragua, Yemen and Angola, among others. Castro's intervention in the Angolan Civil War in the 1970s and 1980s was particularly significant, involving as many as 60,000 Cuban soldiers (Crozier, 1973).

Following the American embargo, the Soviet Union became Cuba's primary ally. Working alongside Russian military leader Nikita Khrushchev, Fidel Castro began to form an alliance against the United States. The two communist countries quickly developed close military and intelligence ties, culminating in the stationing of Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba in 1962, an act which triggered the Cuban Missile Crisis. Cuba maintained close links to the Soviets until the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. The end of Soviet economic aid led to an economic crisis and famine known as the Special Period in Cuba (Bain, 2005).

In the mid-2010s, the U.S. began efforts to normalize relations with Cuba. In July 2015, Raúl Castro declared an official act toward the reestablishment of ties between the United States and Cuba, and in August 2015 formally reopened its embassy in Havana after more than half a century of being shut down (Staten, 2015). Despite a partial loosening in recent years, the American embargo against Cuba—the longest-lasting single foreign policy in American history—is still in force as of 2017 (Glorioso, 2017).

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In the summer of 2016, I visited the island, documenting experiences and observations. While in the capital, I ventured to various cultural hotspots, including but not limited to the



Figure 1. Propaganda in Cuba Today. (Havana, 2016).

University of Havana, La Biblioteca Nacional, the Capitol Building, the Factory of Cuban Art, and many Afro-Cubism colonies. During that time in the city, it was no shock to see propaganda in all forms dotting the streets. The lack of commercial advertisements was oddly

apparent. As such, on every corner, phrases revering the Cuban Revolution plastered the sides of buildings, cement walls, fences, billboards, cars, and even homes. Such phrases spoke volumes of what loyalties the Cuban people still place value in: “*¡Socialismo O Muerte!*” (“Socialism or Die!”), “*La Revolución Seguirá Adelante*” (“The Revolution Continues On”), “*Viva Cuba Libre*” (Live Free Cuba), “*CDR: Comité de la Defensa de la Revolución*” (“CDR: Commit to the Defense of the Revolution”), and “*Unidos Vigilantes y Combativos*” (“United, Vigilant & Combative”). These loud reminders communicated the reality of long-term effects of propaganda on a secluded community over half a century of consumption.

Though he lived to age 90, Fidel Castro’s death on November 25, 2016 brought with it a flashback to nearly 60 years previous; the following day, his ashes were taken and traced in reverse along the same path he once marched victoriously into Havana in 1959. After nine days of this “Freedom Caravan,” his ashes were finally buried in Santiago de Cuba. Castro’s legacy

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continues to dwell among the people of Cuba, on brick walls and taxi bumper stickers. It appears his presence will long be remembered.

Literature Review

In its survey of literature, this study discusses a comprehensive overview of topics dealing with the role of image and its significance regarding what it has communicated through Cuban media, media literacy, and most prominently, propaganda posters.

Of the media studies conducted on Cuba, several are of interest to the present study. For example, Ed McCaughan and Tony Platt (1988) conducted a qualitative analysis of U.S. press coverage of Cuba in 1986. Based on a 331-item survey, they provide an overview of how Americans' opinions of Cuba were formed through a pattern of stories, opinions and images, and omission. McCaughan and Platt discuss the significant role of the press in communicating imagery and symbols concerning controversial issues. In 1986, the Reagan administration made human rights the centerpiece of its ideological attack on Cuba. The press responded to this by also giving this topic the most coverage in 1986. However, as in most U.S. media coverage of Cuba, reality is skewed less by what is said than by what is omitted (McCaughan and Platt, 1988). They suggest that the press, through framing, encouraged false conceptions of reality, as well as how imagery displayed through the media can be deciphered.

A good example of the transformation of Cuban political practices through media can be found in the work of Alejandra Bronfman. Relying on newspaper and recorded sources from archives in Havana, she argues that the acquisition of 20th century technologies such as the telegraph, telephone, and radio opened up a new medium of communication in Cuban media. "As the power of these media became increasingly evident, historical actors from all sides of the

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ideological spectrum came to rely on its capacities for persuasion” (Bronfman, 2012, p. 37).

Though she sheds light on the advancement of media technology and its influence on these “historical actors” little is mentioned about Cuba’s political tactics in propaganda.

Allen’s (2009) ethnography offers a unique standpoint addressing the comparison of race acceptance in Cuba versus the United States. Allen presents his theories on media influence in both countries, and the possible explanations for why the cultural differences exist. Most of this influence, however, deals with human subjects as the medium for such opinions. He suggests that in the United States, to see Cuba, is in large part to see it through the very particularly conditioned perspectives of Cuban-American “exiles.” On this side of the falsely dichotomous debate, members of the Cuban exile community and others blame Castro for the island’s ills even as they continue to use powerful lobbying organizations to advocate U.S. policies toward Cuba that make life extremely difficult for Cubans.

Cuban diplomat and professor at the University of Havana Carlos Alzugaray Treto (2009) sheds light on more recent media coverage received by Cuba. He discusses the “momentous crossroads” Cuba is faced with in the 21st century, and the economic and political challenges that have emerged from it. He predicts that a new process of governing in Cuba is beginning to evolve claiming that “scientists and scientific institutions have a responsibility for public service, which consists of communicating specialized information and analysis directly to society not as political proposals but as well-founded interpretations that contribute to improving culture and public awareness on a variety of issues” (p. 25).

As these scholars have suggested, media communications of Cuba (both internal and external) present a multitude of angles—particularly when it involves coverage of Fidel Castro, Cuban political practices, and cultural phenomena. However, none of these studies adequately

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expand upon the methods for interpreting these mediums; the following sources attempt to shed light on this ideology.

While media involves the general representation of information, media literacy specifically, draws on the idea of reading visual images as text, creating its own family of meaning. In doing so, media literacy deals with how images argue and are understood as argumentation. This will be further explained in the methodology section. As Aristotle said, “There can be no words without images.” Images offer so much more than a few words can describe. This is true especially for political propaganda.

This research is rooted in media studies and the exploration of media literacy among print images. One of the most widely cited sources for media studies is Stuart Hall, who identifies in this field with an approach known as “cultural studies” and focuses upon one of its central concepts: representation. Much of his work has been central to the formation and development of cultural studies as an international discipline. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* is an invaluable collection of writings by and about Stuart Hall and his academic achievements in this cultural playground (Chen and Morley, 2006). Many other sources include collections of Hall’s work. In his 1997 article, *Representation and the Media*, Hall laid a solid foundation for the concept of cultural representation, or the assessment of media as accurate or distorted reflections. As a Professor of Sociology at the Open University in England, he maintained the forefront of work concerning the media’s role in society. He argued for a new view that gives the concept of representation a much more active and creative role in relation to the way people think about the world and their place in it. This new view of representation is central to thinking about communication in much more complex ways. Hall proposed that an image can have many different meanings and that there is no guarantee that images will work in the way we think they

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will when we create them. He emphasized that communication is always linked with power, and that those groups who wield power in a society influence what gets represented through the media. Hall held fast to both these ideas: (a) that messages work in complex ways, and (b) that they are always connected with the way that power operates in a society. He examined our everyday world where knowledge and power intersect (Hall, 1997). One way he did that is through what he called interrogation of the image. The idea of interrogation normally brings to mind asking hard questions of a suspect. How do we interrogate an image? Examine it. Ask the hard questions about it rather than just accepting it at face value. Just as a good interrogator looks behind a suspect's story or alibi, so must we probe inside and behind the image. Why should we think this way about images? For one, interrogation offers a unique perspective to reading images as text. If all images could be "read" as Hall suggested, those messages would not be lost, but understood. When propaganda images are interrogated in this way, this in-depth probing becomes a catalyst to reading into political persuasion and other forms of social goals behind those imageries.

Another reliable reference for delving into media literacy is John Hartley. He offers some key concepts on the anatomy of images and the film through which we must look to understand and interpret such mediums. Steering from an inanimate realm and focusing more on a self-identifying standpoint, Hartley defines image as "the objectification of self-knowledge for communicative purposes" (2012). At an individual level, a person's "image" is made up of the cues by which other people make sense of the personal performance. These include visual attributes (looks and clothes) and intentionally communicative acts (speech and interaction with others), but also behavioral characteristics that project an image beyond the control of the self (a "tear-away," "self-confident" image, etc.). The term "image" has featured prominently in

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Western philosophy ever since Plato proposed that humans do not perceive truth directly, only in an indirect, distorted image. Humans cannot see themselves as they are, Plato argued.

Knowledge is perceived in distorted, indirect form, as if it were projected, like the “shadows of dancers grotesquely capering on the wall of a cave in the light of the campfire.” Such “shadow-in-the-cave” images of a reality that is located elsewhere and beyond experience are all that humans can hope for, thought Plato. Therefore, a conviction took hold of Western thinking that “images” were opposed to reality, coterminous with illusion (Durham, 2001).

Aufderheide & Firestone (1993) addressed media literacy in schools, and a positive correlation was exhibited in comprehension when incorporated into the educational system.

Their study defines media literacy as

the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms, which emphasizes the skills of analyzing, evaluating, and creating media and technology messages that make use of language, moving images, music, sound effects, and other techniques (p. 47–48).

Furthermore, their study continues to discuss the effects of having media literacy courses in schools, and the benefits of teaching such material to youth. The argument is that these literacy skills aid in overall improvement of critical thinking, claiming results suggested that media literacy instruction improves students’ ability to identify main ideas in written, audio, and visual media. They found statistically significant differences for writing quantity and quality. Specific text analysis skills also improved, including the ability to “identify the purpose, target audience, point of view, construction techniques used in media messages, and the ability to identify omitted information from a news media broadcast in written, audio, or visual” (Hobbs & Frost,

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2003, p. 59). These media literacy studies provide a groundwork for understanding how images can be “read,” and offer meaningful insights to the current study on Cuban propaganda posters.

Propaganda studies have shed much light on the role of image, and its power in this form of media. According to Castriota (1986) propaganda is “the aggressive dissemination of a distinct point of view for a specific purpose” (p. 5). This should not be confused with persuasion, which is a “communicative process, the purpose of which is to influence” (Jowett, 1986, p. 24). “Propaganda, the tool used to shape opinion and influence behavior in pursuit of governmental goals, has not only been employed by the Hitlers and Stalins of the world” according to Mahaney (2002). She demonstrates how democratic nations such as the United States and Great Britain used propaganda extensively when they felt the need to get the backing of the public for a significant purpose. Propaganda uses persuasive techniques, images, wording and messages to convince the target audience that the specific perspective endorsed by the propagandist is the correct vantage point in a particular situation and should be adopted, believed or acted on by the target audience. McCrann (2009) asserts that philosophically (and to some extent physically), political posters can claim descent from the 95 Theses that Martin Luther allegedly nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church.

Jowett and O’Donnell (2014) suggest that propaganda effects are “highly conditional, depending upon individual differences, the context in which propaganda and persuasion take place, and a variety of contingent third variables.” As examples, they discuss several previous cases of wartime research and the use of content and response analyses to determine the functionality of such content as newspapers, pamphlets, films, and radio programs. They further explain that semantic differential (which deals with giving meaning to words or concepts) can then identify why individuals use certain words to describe their experiences with certain

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theories, and reveals deeper meanings and intensities to their ratings. From these studies, we learn that the channels of propaganda include a variety of media used for the purpose of persuasion.

Specifically, academic literature on the roles of political posters in authoritarian governments has been significant. Beginning with Soviet influences from 1929-1953, Pisch (2016) compares Joseph Stalin's "cult of personality" to a "fairytale sycamore tree." Stalin's "cult of personality" became a prominent part of Soviet culture in December 1929. For the rest of Stalin's rule, the Soviet press presented Stalin as an all-powerful, all-knowing leader, and Stalin's name and image became almost "omnipresent." From 1936 the Soviet journalism started to refer to Joseph Stalin as the "Father of Nations" (Gill, 1980). The metaphor from Kazakh poet, Dzhabbul is that the portrayed Stalin—or Stalinism—is a construct. Pisch further explores the symbols and archetypes associated with Stalin in propaganda posters claiming that the party's propaganda apparatus tightly controlled the use of his image. He suggests Stalin's persona to have drawn on emblems of leadership and sacred imagery from universal archetypes, (including Russian, and European) but primarily from newly forged Bolshevik symbols.

Edele (1999) addresses the role of posters from WWII in the larger context of the war effort, focusing on how ordinary Soviet people made sense of the world according to this form of propaganda. He address this role through semantic analyses of wartime posters, emphasizing four exemplary motifs, (war machinery, cavalry soldiers, victims, and "Mother Russia") in their relation to both tradition and reality. Edele examines the functioning of these posters in the symbolic and real-life context of the war, suggesting that the wartime iconography was characterized by strong, polyvalent symbols which were open to many different "readings." He claims the analysis depends as much on what is not depicted as what is depicted. "As the most

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‘Bolshevik’ of all propaganda media, posters played a crucial role in the government’s efforts to influence people’s perceptions of the war, of what was at stake in it.”

In addition to media influence in the Soviet Union, Welch (2004) advocates that the role of propaganda posters in Nazi Germany played an important part in mobilizing support for the Nazi Party. He claimed there is considerable evidence to suggest that Nazi policies and propaganda reflected many of the aspirations of large sections of the population. The political aim of the Nazi regime, he claims, was to bring about the *Volksgemeinschaft*—the true harmony of classes—which highlights the remarkably ambitious nature of its propaganda. To this, he further asserts that this propaganda is as much about confirming as converting public opinion, claiming that “propaganda, if it is to be effective must, in a sense, preach to those who are already partially converted.” In other words, if the propaganda served as a means of reinforcing existing attitudes and beliefs, then the continuing “success” of propaganda during the Third Reich in creating a largely acquiescent public, points to the conclusion that a “consensus” of sorts had been achieved. In this sense, Welch suggests that the regime’s propaganda was pragmatic enough to recognize that its policies could be maintained, provided sections of the community who were opposed to Nazism remained dormant. Notably, coercion and terror would play an important restraining role here. He argues that once the Nazis were in power, the propaganda in a “closed” environment was enough to ensure at least “passive” support for the regime. Lastly, Welch adds that measuring public reaction to Nazi propaganda posters is “fraught with difficulties,” explaining that the absence of public opinion surveys weakens an accurate measurement of the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda. This comes as little surprise given that the requirements to measure media effects far outweigh the efforts to assess media

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communications. Nonetheless, Welch's study provides a significant contribution to the role of image, and its presence in wartime propaganda.

These research studies provide significant understanding on the roles of wartime propaganda, and are just a few of the many visual analyses done on political posters. Even so, visual studies analyzing the specific roles of Fidel Castro in political posters from 1959-1988 are limited. Additionally, a semiotic approach has thus not been utilized to analyze Cuban propaganda. Yet, the evidence suggests that there are many encoded messages in such media, that would provide an understanding of its communications regarding Castro's leadership roles from this time period, and other political and cultural themes that were evident in the era.

Theoretical Framework

What do post-revolutionary propaganda posters suggest about the roles of Fidel Castro? What do the posters communicate? How are they interpreted? This study is grounded in the belief that media carries with it encoded messages which contain meaning.

The research is informed by the work of 20th-century sociologist Erving Goffman and his theories about how the media use spin to imbue consumers with a certain point of view. Developed in 1974, Goffman's framing theory became a means of explaining the increasing influences of the media and their cogent schema (Bliss, 1991). His views describe two primary frameworks: natural and social. Natural framing deals with the raw perspective of life as it is without a filter, while social framing pertains to the interpretations of those natural frames—for example, the weather—natural framing—vs. the meteorologist who predicts or interprets the weather—social framing (Goffman, 1974). Similar to second-level agenda-setting and priming, framing theory conveys “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and

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suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Ghanem, 1991, p.3). In other words, the media may frame the news by reporting that a political candidate has extreme views on an issue, that a budget proposal is harmful to a particular group, that a new medicine is of questionable safety, and so on. The audience, in turn, interprets the story through this frame. Not only does this construction suggest that the media tell us what to think, but also what to think about, setting the premise for future reporting on the issue. Entman (1993) argues that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

Theoretic undertones of concepts such as priming and agenda-setting are also prevalent guides in this study. These theories are similar to framing theory in that they suggest other ways in which the media sways public opinion. For example, often in political campaigns, the media may not be effective in swaying public support toward or against a particular issue or candidate. However, by continually raising particular questions and issues (or simply by showing an interest in a particular political candidate or issue), the media can lead the discussion toward or away from issues important to the candidate and even to the public (McCombs, 1997). This is agenda-setting. Priming involves the frequency and intensity of construed information. Media reporting may be very strong leading up to an event such as the Olympics, Super Bowl or World Cup, making it almost impossible for audiences to ignore the event. Such aggressive reporting thus creates an audience of people at least temporarily interested in the sport, even though prior to the reporting many (perhaps most) members of the audience were not sports fans. Rather, they are people who got caught up in the moment. In

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essence, media provide a context for public discussion of an issue, setting the frame of reference for audience understanding.

These empirical theories offer a taxonomy of mores which guide the research. Goffman's philosophy bids relevance to a sound analysis of these propaganda posters. His claim that all information is framed in some form leads to the question, how? How does Cuban media frame Fidel Castro and his attitudes? How does the propaganda prime consumers with iterative icons?

Statement of the Problem

Notably, a semiotic approach has not thus been utilized to examine Cuban propaganda; this study aims to fill that gap in existing research and draws on framing theory as it attempts to determine how images communicate. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to determine what roles Fidel Castro portrayed in post-revolutionary Cuban propaganda. Insights to the transformations of his character over a thirty-year period following the Revolution of 1959 will be presented. A series of media literacy techniques and semiotic analyses are implemented for interpretation of the media. In addition to providing a unique perspective on interrogating visual images, this study offers a better understanding of the benefits and influential power of professional design. The research will be guided by the following questions:

Question one. What do post-revolutionary propaganda posters communicate about the roles of Fidel Castro from 1959–1988?

Question two. What sociopolitical and cultural themes does the propaganda exhibit?

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Methodology

This study employs adapted semiotic methods to analyze the communications of Cuban propaganda and identify the portrayed roles of Fidel Castro. Additionally, sociopolitical and cultural patterns are extracted using these modified methods. The emergences of the themes discussed are contingent on this particular research approach.

To execute these practices, the elements of a semiotic analysis are explained and ordered. This study mainly adopts Barthe's ideas of denotation and connotation by implementing his three message types. The steps of a semiotic analysis are informed by Saussurean methods and contributions from Maasik and Solomon as well. These approaches enable an explorative analysis of the sociopolitical and cultural themes that emerge from the data.

One form of media literacy that deals with meaning making in signs and symbols is semiotics. A classic source for obtaining a conceptual knowledge on this is Umberto Eco. As a well-known academic semiotician in the 1970s, he later achieved a degree of popular fame with his novel, *In the Name of the Rose*, a remarkable commercial exploitation of esoteric critical theories. Here, he outlines his basic approach to semiotics. While in this piece Eco's writing is indirectly applicable to film, he has had a significant influence on other semioticians.

Semiology is "a philosophical approach that seeks to interpret messages in terms of their signs and patterns of symbolism" (Eco, 1986, p. 15). In other words, semiotics studies what and how a composition communicates to the consumer. It implements a visual approach to interrogating or reading images as text and offers a unique channel for assessing power within that medium. Every aspect of the world contains signs in some form. Each of these signs contain encoded messages which can be examined to make arguments and understand argumentation. The most renowned semiologists are the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and and the

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American logician Charles Sanders Peirce. Though dually developed, there exist several differences in their methodological styles. Subscribers to the Saussurean perspective believe that a sign system consists of only two elements: the signifier (an object) and the signified (what the object stands for). The relationship between the two is arbitrary; it is understood by convention. On the other hand, Peirce defines signs in a broader way than language and focuses on how they are logically or semiotically linked to their objects. He provides a triadic relationship in the sign system, which include the signifier, the signified, and the interpretant (Al-Momani, 2017). These two philosophers inspired other semioticians, who have since contributed to the field of semiotics through their research and development of “the sign.” Communications scholar Roland Barthes is one of these semioticians. In his work, Barthes offers an attractive approach to viewing the sign in popular culture. In terms of its various meanings, he divides the system of signification into three parts: the linguistic message, the non-coded message (denoted), and the coded message (connoted). Semiotics observes broad patterns of behavior, and then develops abductive explanations for them. Abduction, as explained by Maasik and Solomon (2015), is the process of arriving at an interpretation by seeking the most plausible explanation for something.

Composition communication is a natural component of analysis when using semiotics. This particular approach offers a great assessment of communicative power. This type of semiotic coding can be more deeply explored through the work of Turkish professor Alev Fatos Parsa, at Ege University. He advocates that visual semiotics emphasizes the way images communicate, and how semiotic analyses of these communications (including but not limited to: cinema, television, video images, posters, magazine and newspaper advertisements) assist us in understanding their deeper meanings. “Of all the approaches used for the analysis of visual images, the most popular one is the semiotics” (Parsa, 2004). He references the correlation of

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media elements such as the object itself, the interpreter, and the interpretation from Charles S. Peirce's triadic model. In this model, Parsa illustrates the relationship between these factors, and the channeling process that takes place. Peirce categorizes these patterns of meaning in three identifiers: (1) iconic, (2) symbolic, and (3) indexical. He also introduces the idea that signs are both denotative and connotative. These are terms used to describe "the relationship between the signifier and its signified, and an analytic distinction is made between two types of signifieds" (Parsa, 2004). For example, in photography, the *denoted* meaning is conveyed through the digital or mechanical reproduction of the image: a dog is a dog. *Connotation* is the result of human intervention such as camera, angle, focus, color, lighting, depth-of-field, special effects, etc. (Tomaselli, 1996, p.31). As Fiske puts it, "denotation is what is photographed; connotation is how it is photographed" (1982). These concepts are the means through which directors draw attention to objects and ideas that are invisible.

Though the study of attitude and attitude change in media has received more attention than any other topic in social psychology or communication, scholars are still far from achieving conclusive links between attitudes and behavioral significance (Jowett, et al., 2014). Little scholarly attention has been fixed directly on Cuban studies, let alone taken a semiotic approach to analyzing Cuban propaganda and the behaviors of Fidel Castro. Thus, the combination of these elements, offers a unique exploration of the effects of the media on Castro's image over time, and provides meaningful insights to understanding the hidden messages these images have to offer. Additionally, this study hopes to fill any existing gaps in this field of research regarding media in Cuba and the portrayed roles of Fidel Castro through post-revolutionary propaganda.

The linguistic message, put simply, is any text-based content in the composition. Words have their own meaning and syntax. While these can be very clearly defined, they still carry

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hidden meaning such as humor, sarcasm, and wordplay. Situating these in a system will help with analyzing such text. The denoted message is what the content directly shows. This is the literal representation of icons at the surface level, also known as manifest signs. The messages portrayed in this dimension are the signifiers, which can include physical representations of drawings, animations, colors, facial expressions, gestures, clothes, objects, light, shadow, angle, and more. The connoted message draws from both the linguistic and denoted messages to create symbolic meaning of the exhibited signs. These then become the signified, showing not only the object, but what the object stands for. Based on its indirect suggestions, such content now has flexibility of definition, depth, and cultural significance. For example, in a photograph, we may see a man and a woman walking on a beach holding hands. These observances would be denotations. The connotative significance we draw is that they are most likely in a romantic relationship, or the situation would be an odd one to describe

The semiotic task then becomes to move a sign which is objective in nature to a subjective significance. In other words, the facts are transformed into cultural values. It is significant to note, that semiotic interpretations are never proven, yet the more material introduced into a system of signifiers, the more convincing the movement from denotation to connotation will be (Maasik and Solomon, 2015). Below is an analytical model of the semiotic steps:

1. Search for and situate signs within the related system/environment to which they belong. Draw from the history/background of that particular culture. Determine how many signs will be analyzed.
2. Identify the linguistic message. What does the text communicate? Where does it come from? (Translations are included here.)

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3. Describe the denotative elements. What physical representations/signifiers does the content directly show? (I.e. line, color, shape, light, shadow, illustration, photograph, clothes, gestures, facial expressions, body language, etc.) Literal or manifest elements are identified.
4. Interpret the signifiers using *abduction*. What do the manifest signs show? Linguistic and denoted messages are combined to arrive at symbolic significance. Connotative elements are identified.
5. Back interpretations with evidence. The objective should be to *persuade* by including this evidence in an abductive reasoning process; it is not to *prove* anything. This evidence should come from a knowledge of the “system” to which the interpreted object belongs. The more insights shared about the system, the more convincing the interpretations.
6. Draw conclusions. What does the signified really say about the society or system in which it resides? Do not simply describe the phenomenon(s); make connotative connections to culture.

While a considerable amount of Cuban media exist in the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami, the number of propaganda documents were limited. Dozens of post-Revolution posters were yet handled and photographed for possible use. Cuba’s capital of Havana, however, holds a vast archive of propaganda pieces in their national library. La Biblioteca Nacional sits in the city center less than one block from Plaza de la Revolución, where the author was granted private access to hundreds of digital copies of political propaganda used since the revolution.

There, an electronic search of all available artifacts for significant political figures was conducted. This yielded 424 digital propaganda posters of Camilo Cienfuegos, Ernesto “Che”

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Guevara, and Fidel Castro. All generated results were electronically saved, dated and labeled. Images of Guevara and Cienfuegos were then eliminated for later use, (as well as many posters used outside of Cuba for global solidarity), leaving 134 pieces containing at least some trace of Fidel Castro, excluding 62 associated profiles of soldiers who fought with him at Moncada. These were then distributed into three chronological frames: (1) 1959-1968, (2) 1969-1978, and (3) 1979-1988. The first was comprised of 16 posters, the second 65, and the third 49. From there, approximately six or seven posters were selected from each time bracket for a total of 19 pieces to be analyzed. These were chosen based on the inclusion of certain design principles for diversity. The following five qualifications were adapted from Jirousek's (1995) visual thinking guide: color, desaturation, text-based, image-based, and white space. With this selection method, a strong variety of visual principles were presented for each time bracket. Additionally, a variation of years were selected for equal chronological representations.

Though many justifications can be made for the selections in this study, the primary reason is that they heavily feature Fidel Castro at different points in his political career. Though the considerable influence Castro had over the Cuban people during his lifetime was channeled primarily through propaganda of all sorts, Cuban propaganda from 1959-1988 was limited mainly to print media. Thus, the retrieval of propaganda posters became the exclusive medium of analysis for this study. Additionally, studies using semiotics on Cuban propaganda, let alone on the roles of Castro portrayed in these mediums, are nonexistent. This poses a great opportunity to add value to existing research on a topic that has received little attention.

The reasoning for retrieval from La Biblioteca Nacional in Havana as opposed to the Cuban Heritage Museum in Miami is twofold. The documents at the museum, though valuable, did not contain enough propaganda for a sufficient analysis, and therefore constituted a more

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thorough search for greater archives elsewhere. Havana's posters not only contributed to the entirety of the sample numerically, but met specific requirements for the study. With a more focused channel of Cuban print media, La Biblioteca offered the ideal dataset for a practical and meaningful study. Brackets were divided based on chronology. This layout is not influenced by events, such as the Bay of Pigs or Cuban Missile Crisis, nor do they dictate the outcome of the analyses. To categorize the brackets by event would assume certain political and cultural changes in Cuba, which the study was to determine through the emergence of themes on their own. Therefore, an unbiased division—time, in this case—separates the artifacts equally between the 30 years of use. Within each bracket, data collected was chosen based on the inclusion of five design principles from Jirousek's visual thinking guide, as previously mentioned. Rationale for which posters were selected was that each bracket contains at least one of each of these elements and has a variety of representation throughout the 10-year bracket to ensure equal presence of design, as well as time.

For validity in the emergence of sociopolitical and cultural themes, these extractions were organized first by decade, then by semiotic message, and then by political events and cultural phenomena. This triadic relationship offers a number of various analyses to be drawn from the evident patterns in the selection: time, channel, social themes.

Limitations

One of the more apparent limits to this study is the abrupt end of propaganda posters in 1988. This expiration suggests a major archival loss from Havana's National Library. Extensive searches yielded more than 400 digital propaganda posters. This reveals a significant devotion to academic record-keeping. The lack of data, however, could simply be due to an absence of

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digital files—perhaps physical copies were deposited elsewhere. Another plausible explanation could be that with the welcoming of the 1990's, posters began to be a dying media. Shifts in channeling propaganda through alternative mediums could explain this abrupt stop. Due to space and time restraints, only propaganda posters were collected for analysis in this study, as opposed to other forms of propaganda in the media (i.e. radio recordings, television broadcasts, brochures, etc.).

Despite an abundant retrieval of such material in 2016, the fact remains that Cuba is not an easy place to access information. The scope of this study is therefore limited as to further gathering of data from the same source. While some similar print media of the time may be found via the Internet, it is unclear if those posters were actually used post-revolution or where they fall on a timeline. Along these lines, it is unclear where these posters were used, for how long, or if they were approved by Castro himself. We can assume, however, with such a rigid government, that they were endorsed by his administration.

Though efforts were made to ensure equal representation of dates, gaps may appear with the posters collected in each time bracket. For example, each bracket holds six to seven posters, where the frame is ten years. Therefore, there is not a poster to represent each individual year over the course of the three decades. Thus, the ratio is 19 posters for the 30 years. Achieving such a balance across time, as well as message, design, and analysis is too intricate for one study alone—the spectrum of variables is too broad to ensure thorough stability.

Another standing concern is to account for variety in the author's interpretations. Personal bias is not foreign given the nature of semiotic studies. Thus, the combined adaptation of many previous studies demonstrating a step-by-step process for semiotic analyses in the media

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are employed. Additionally, the reliability of the study not only depends on the relevance of analyzed data to established research questions, but the consistency of those analyses over time.

CHAPTER II: POSTER ANALYSES

The following figures were obtained from digital archives at the José Martí National Library of Cuba in Havana. Each illustrates the political and societal environment in Cuba from 1959-1988. For reading comprehension purposes, most English translations are placed in parentheses, and the linguistic message is contained in the denotative sections. Each poster will be described, noting features such as color, placement, expression, and text. Following each denotative description, the poster will be semiotically interpreted to provide connotative meanings.



1959–1968

Denotative. This 1959 poster dates back to just seven months following the triumph of rebel forces over President Fulgencio Batista. It depicts black and white cutouts of a young Fidel Castro (right) and Camilo Cienfuegos (left) both in baseball uniforms, smiling and appearing to be on the move. Their jerseys read “*Barbudos*” (“Bearded Ones”), which is in reference to the long facial hair featured. Their stance denotes a casual stroll, and Castro may even be sharing some light conversation with Cienfuegos as they walk. Notice still, Castro is slightly taller and

Figure 2. ¿Contra Fidel? ¡Ni en la Pelota! (National Library of Cuba, 1959).

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seems to lead Camilo along. The sky-blue background is complimented with bright orange block lettering reading “*Contra Fidel? Ni en la pelota!*” (“Against Fidel? Nor in ball!”) There are many significant yet subtle signs in this particular poster that could easily be missed without an understanding of some of the historical background to this imagery. We can draw meaning out of such cultural symbols by taking a closer look at the system wherein these images lie.

Connotative. For example, the men’s beards symbolize more than simply laziness or fashion; quite the opposite, as facial hair was much out of style during the 1950s. No, this was a symbol of the rebellion (Hughson, 2012). For members of Castro’s guerilla army, beard length was a measurement of time served in the July 26th Movement, which marked the beginning of the Cuban Revolution and change in Cuba. Therefore, a sizable beard was a token of pride. Citizens of Havana coined the phrase “Bearded Ones” for these soldiers, following the overthrowing of the government as a nickname for revolutionaries. This then became the team name by which Castro and his band of guerillas would be known. Seeing as baseball was such an integral part of Cuban culture, one of Castro’s first moves following the government overthrow—in fact, just five days after his victory—was to form a team for the purpose of playing exhibition games for fundraising. This would prove to be a significant societal tool of leverage for earning Cuban loyalty to the revolution. In an effort to keep baseball at the heart of Cuban nationalism, Los Barbudos were formed.

On July 24th, 1959, Castro staged an exhibition game between Los Barbudos and the Cuban National Police prior to a game between the Sugar Kings and the Rochester Red Wings. The event organizers decided that “The Hero of Yaguajay,” Cienfuegos, could represent the police as pitcher. (Cienfuegos earned this nickname after fighting one of the last victorious battles of the revolution, which took place in this Cuban city.) To this, Cienfuegos responded,

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“*Yo no estoy contra Fidel en la vida, ni en el juego de pelota*” (“I am not against Fidel in life, nor in the game of ball.”) The shortened caption “*Contra Fidel? Ni en la pelota!*” is included in this poster displaying the friendship Cienfuegos and Castro share as comrades in battle and on the field. Their posture and facial expressions connote a cheerful, friendly attitude, one which indicates a successful relationship and revolution.



Figure 3. To Santiago with Fidel. (National Library of Cuba, 1960).

and focused, his left arm resting at his side. The words, “*a Santiago con FIDEL el 26*” (“to Santiago with FIDEL 26”) are situated in the upper left corner and extend down half the poster.

Denotative. Here we see an animated image of Fidel Castro gazing out over what appears to be a vast valley. We can observe mountains in the distance, which gradually get farther away as color becomes more unsaturated. Greens and greys make up the majority of the scene aside from a few accents of orange. The direct sunlight on his face casts dark shadows down his figure and on the ground behind him. He is dressed in an army green uniform and carries his loaded backpack without hunching over. He stands tall, seemingly towering above the valley beneath him. We cannot see details on his face, only his profile. His brows are furrowed

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Connotative. This poster from 1960 contains many metaphorical signs, which add richness to the meaning. The greens and greys are soft, yet encouraging. Castro's erect posture, despite the fact that he is carrying a heavy load, shows strength. This "load" could contain the burden of establishing a new government, or leading the Cuban people to economic and social success. However, his slightly furrowed brow connotes determination and confidence. His military uniform exhibits the depth of his devotion to the revolution. As he casts his eyes out upon the land in front of him, Cuba's future is bright and promising. With the shadows of a broken government and Batista behind him, Castro's stance is a call to action. Notice how the shadows seem to even fall beneath him, showing he has vanquished the foe. Additionally, he stands taller than even the mountains and valley around him, symbolizing his growing power.

We can draw significant meaning out of the text included here as well. The phrase "to Santiago with FIDEL 26" may be somewhat confusing without an understanding of the history behind some of these words. Santiago is a southeastern Cuban province, which borders the Caribbean Sea. Its capital, Santiago de Cuba, is one of the largest cities in the country, second only to Havana. Contained there is the community of Moncada, the same area where Fidel Castro, along with other armed rebels, attacked the barracks on July 26, 1953. Most all the men were captured or killed. Castro himself was thrown in prison and would later be exiled to Mexico. Those who managed to escape pledged allegiance to the rebellion, and later joined Castro in overthrowing Batista. This famous onslaught would be known as *El Movimiento 26 de Julio*, the July 26th Movement (M-26-7), and would be a symbol of the revolution from that day forth. On New Year's Day of 1959, Fidel Castro proclaimed the victory of the Cuban revolution from a balcony on Santiago de Cuba's city hall. This poster marks seven years from the movement, and was used for propaganda purposes in rallying Cubans together in loyalty to the

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revolution. “To Santiago with Fidel,” is metaphorically calling Cubans to join with him in the rebellion, which began at Moncada.



Figure 4. Death to the Invader. (National Library of Cuba, 1960).

In the background, we see red and yellow flames reaching toward the sky. Thick black smoke billows from the upper right corner of the fire, and seems to climb up the poster’s edge. The bottom right contains a quote from Castro: “*¡Sepan que no se van a enfrentar a señoritos, ¡sepan que se van a enfrentar con hombres que conocen el trabajo y el sacrificio!*” In English this means, “Know that you are not going to confront young men. Know that you will face men who know the work and the sacrifice!”

Connotative. The dramatic elements in this poster command our attention in a more demanding way than the previous ones. Our eyes are drawn immediately to the carnage in the

Denotative. Unlike the previous posters, this one does not contain an image of Fidel Castro. Instead, it relays a visual message from him. The block brush-stroked text at the top left reads, “*Muerte al Invasor*” (“Death to the Invader.”) “*Al Invasor*” is slightly smaller than “*Muerte*” and is written in red. A giant fist extends into the brown-grey sky. In its tight clasp, the remains of many crushed planes are shown jabbing through the gaps in its fingers. It is interesting to note the sheer size of the fist in comparison to the tiny planes.

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center where we begin to make sense of the giant fist. The first obvious sign is the proportions; the size of the fist, in relation to the small planes it is crushing, is overwhelmingly large, signifying boldness, power, and strength. In order to understand the meaning of this domineering relationship, we must first determine the identity of the fist and the victims of its force. The word “*Muerte*” is a command, not a passive suggestion. It is evident that the fist is obeying this order to kill, which would inflict death to the “Invader.” Seeing as Cuba is an island nation, it makes sense that the invaders would come by plane. With Castro at the helm of leadership, we can assume the submissive first is Cuba’s military force, but whom do the planes represent?

In the months following the success of the revolution, Cuban government officials, with Ernesto “Che” Guevara at its head, began taking strides toward reclaiming privately owned masses of land and distributing them to the people. As well, the repossessing of privately owned industries became another common occurrence. Not coincidentally, these agrarian reforms and nationalizations were targeted toward U.S.-owned property. This put U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower on alert, and he began to impose gradual trade restrictions. As Cuban “take-overs” on U.S. assets increased, so did U.S. trade restrictions on Cuba. This positive correlation began to have a negative effect on U.S–Cuba relations. Although the United States embassy would remain in operation for several more months, Cuban began to perceive Americans as invasive. At the end of 1960, two U.S. diplomats were arrested and expelled from the island, having been charged with “encouraging terrorist acts.” From this brief history, we can infer that the obvious invaders are Americans; however, for rebels, an invader could mean anyone against the revolution (Pike, 2014).

The primary colors, although complementary, show an ironic relationship. While these significant shades combined can be used to create new hues such as purples, oranges, and greens,

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we see the cold isolation of blue characterizing the suffocation of victims, while the reds and yellows represent the growing strength of the advancer. The separation of red on its own is a symbol of power or dictatorship, which the propaganda uses to its advantage. The flames seem to entirely engulf the background, symbolizing utter destruction to any who cross these “men who know the work and the sacrifice.” This fear appeal is very different from the other posters. The combination of these elements offer a strong sense of warning, indicating to viewers which side they should take in order to live.



Figure 5. First National Congress of Culture. (National Library of Cuba, 1962).

Denotative. As noted at the bottom, this poster was used at Cuba’s First National Congress of Culture in December 1962, (see Figure 5). Here we see a realistic sketch of a smiling Castro on the right. It cuts off just below his bearded chin, revealing only a headshot. His eyebrows are relaxed and his expression content. His eyes look off to the distance. On the left, a

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red quote from Castro is printed: “*Una de las metas y uno de los propósitos fundamentales de la Revolución es desarrollar el Arte y la Cultura precisamente para que el Arte y la Cultura lleguen a ser un real patrimonio del pueblo.*” This translates to “One of the goals and one of the fundamental purposes of the revolution is to develop Art and Culture, precisely so that Art and Culture become a real patrimony of the people.” The simplicity of this poster is contained on a plain cream background.

Connotative. It is not uncommon to find smiling pictures of Fidel Castro. However, this is more of a rarity when it comes to propaganda. The soft features in his countenance are inviting and offer a calm sense of trust and reassurance. His eyes are not focused on the viewer; therefore, they do not pierce us. As such, Castro becomes less confrontational, allowing us to study him without feeling scrutinized or manipulated. In the quote we read about art and culture and how they are fundamental to the purposes of the revolution. Here we detect an appeal to culture, as Castro vocalizes his loyalty to aspects of Cuban society outside of military demands. The red words stand out on the cream background, calling for our attention. In this setting, red is a signifier of importance or priority. The lack of color elsewhere could be paralleled to a blank canvas. In any medium of art, one cannot start without some sort of canvas to begin, whether it is parchment, marble, or clay. With a brand new government in place, Cuba had every right to believe in building a bright and hopeful future.



Figure 6. Everyone to the Plaza with Fidel. (National Library of Cuba, 1968).

Denotative. One of the first notable traits of this poster is the lack of color. The sans serif text reads, “*Todos a la plaza con Fidel,*” which translates to “Everyone to the plaza with Fidel.” Two black and white images break up the phrase in a vertical layout. Our eyes read top to bottom: first “*Todos,*” then we scan to “*a la plaza,*” finally reaching “*con Fidel.*” The top image captures a cropped shot of a crowd of people brandishing Cuban flags and cheering. Many have hats that they’re excitedly waving. All are facing the same direction, some shielding their eyes from the sun, others slightly squinting to focus. The bottom image denotes three separate angles of Fidel Castro in uniform at a podium. In these images, he grasps the side of the stand as he speaks into

the multiple microphones in front of him. His face is stern and his eyes focused. Behind him, there is nothing but a black background, which fills the rest of the poster behind its content.

Connotative. The composition of this poster holds many meanings pertaining to Castro’s rise in power. Ironically, this “rise” is exhibited using backwards tactics. For example, unlike the previous posters, the top-to-bottom consumption of this propaganda leaves Castro at the foot of

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the poster, which could symbolize submission to the people, or humility. Yet, despite the unique layout and complete desaturation of color, our eyes are still drawn to the large bold lettering at the top. “*Todos*” (meaning “all” or “everyone”) holds significant meaning as it calls each of us to come and join with Castro. This statement is not only bold in text, but also in command. It was taken literally, as many tens of thousands physically gathered to hear Castro speak on multiple occasions. More significantly, it is suggesting, or rather, compelling us to join with Castro in purpose by continuing to support the revolution.

This poster was used at the end of 1968 in preparation for the tenth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution and as promotion for Castro’s great anniversary speech. This address would take place in the largest square in Cuba. Construction of La Plaza began during the presidency of Fulgencio Batista, and was originally called *La Plaza Cívica* (Civic Square). However, as it was not finished until after Castro came into power in 1959, the name was fittingly changed to *La Plaza de la Revolución*, or “Revolution Square.” Often shortened to *Plaza de la Rev*, this square also held a grand memorial to 19th century poet and political enthusiast, José Martí. Martí was known for his great influences and contributions to the Independence of Cuba and his monument stands tall and strong as a reminder of loyalty for countless Cubans today. Many of Fidel Castro’s speeches took place at this monument. On the tenth anniversary of the revolution, we see how the crowd shows its excitement and patriotism by brandishing Cuban flags in the air. Whether the crowd’s love is for Castro or Cuba, it stands supportive and anxious to hear his words. Note how everyone faces the same direction, symbolizing unity and compliance with Castro’s regime. The multiple shots of Castro signify strength from all sides and offer varying perspectives of his ideals, perhaps signifying efforts to portray transparency or trust. The clarity of Castro’s images against a black background as opposed to the chaos of the crowd displays a

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significant contrast. This drastic connotation reaffirms Castro's influence, power, and authority, despite the sheer size of the multitude. It sets the stage for focus.

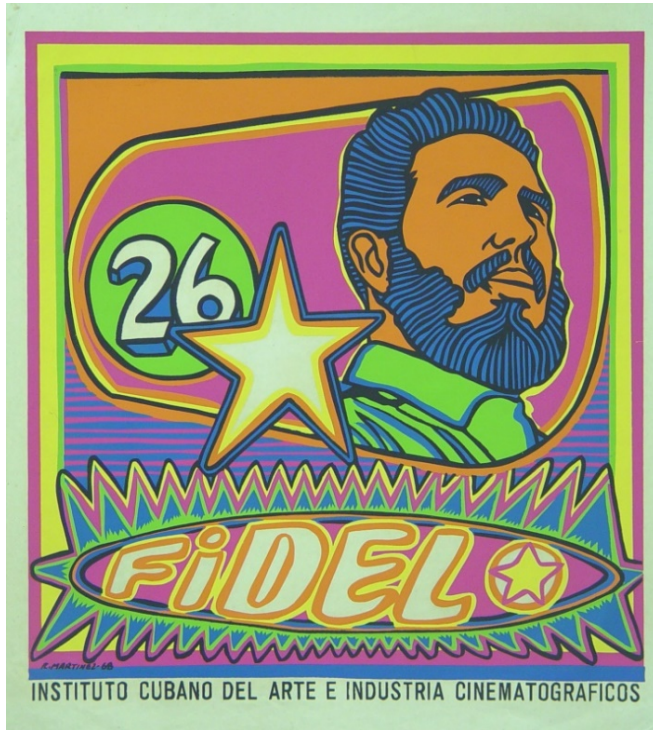


Figure 7. Cuban Institute of Art. (National Library of Cuba, 1968).

Cinematographic Industry.” The image prominently features the colors pink, yellow, orange, blue, mint green, and lime green.

Connotative. At first glance, this poster stands out from the rest simply because of its use of vibrant color. In striking contrast to the many other black and white propaganda posters of the same time period, the liberal use of playful tones adds a much more inviting appeal to its viewers. It suggests a more lively type of political ad, maybe even theatrical. The lack of red—which typically is seen as a domineering shade, signifying power or authority—portrays Castro in a more approachable light. The low angle however, suggests his superiority—for example, that we are beneath him, that he possesses leadership qualities, that he is wise, and that he can be

Denotative. This image dates to 1968, almost a decade after the revolution. It depicts an animated bust shot of Castro in the upper right corner with a block number 26 behind him to the left and a star which slightly overlays both. His name is included at the bottom in colorful artistic text surrounded by a jagged border. The typed text at the bottom reads: “*Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos,*” which translates to “Cuban Institute of Art and

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trusted. The block lettered “26” behind his right shoulder is a reference to the July 26th Movement, wherein a young Castro along with his rebel forces attacked the barracks at Moncada. This was intended to rally a cry for revolution throughout Cuba. Although a failed attempt at overthrowing the government, the July 26th Movement became a symbol of revolution throughout Castro’s journey to revolt and into his reign as Prime Minister of Cuba. The number 26 and star were included on a sleeve patch worn by revolutionaries to signify their loyalty to the cause. These symbols would also be used in the form of a sort of “freedom” flag for decades to come.

While this particular poster may have been used as more of a piece of art, its framing of Castro creates an exciting portrayal of his fame in the eyes of the Cuban people. Note the celebrity-like appeal of his name in thick, bright lettering. This, coupled with the dramatic border, almost seems to be a cinematic advertisement, making Castro appear more as a celebrity-type figure than communist ruler. The use of his first name alone, connotes a parasocial relationship between Castro and the consumers. It provides a familiar title, one which suggests an intimate connection.

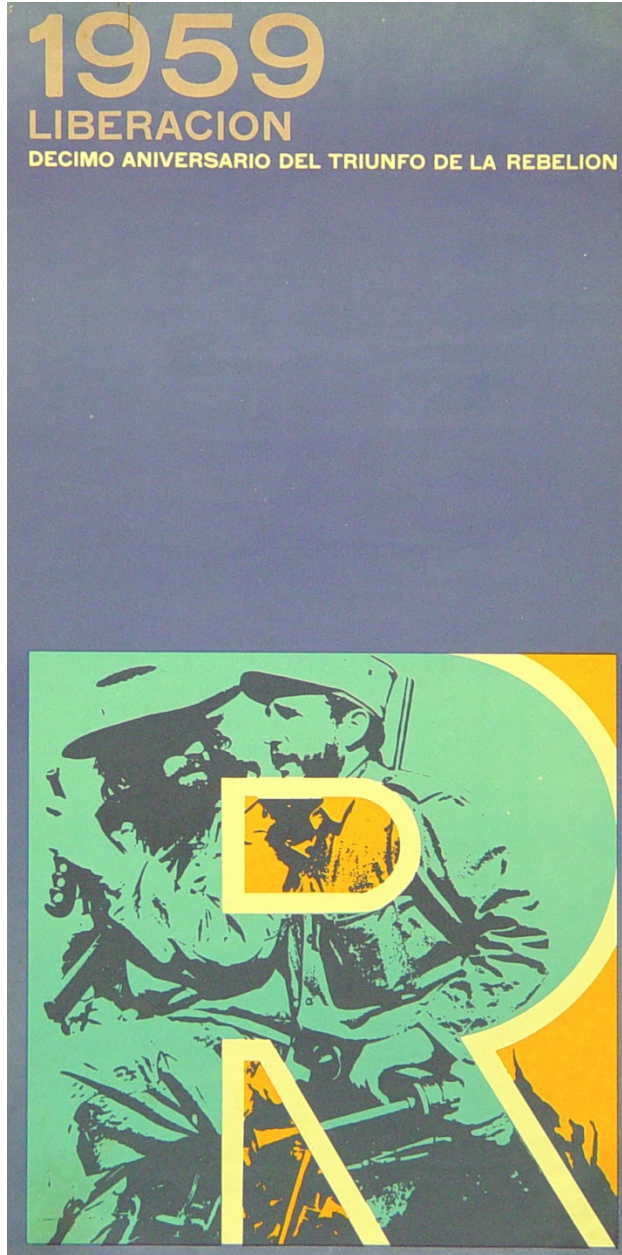


Figure 8. 10th Anniversary of the Rebellion. (National Library of Cuba, 1969).

1969–1978

Denotative. This poster may seem somewhat simple at first glance. Its elongated vertical orientation takes advantage of the space within grouped content, leaving a breathable distance between the information we consume. At the top it displays the year 1959 in a soft tan text with subsequent text reading, “*Liberación*” (“Liberation”). Underneath, “*Décimo Aniversario del Triunfo de la Rebelión*” (“Tenth Anniversary of the Triumph of the Rebellion”) is included in a smaller, cream script. As our eyes move down the poster, the next thing we notice is the giant teal “R” at the bottom. The negative space is filled with a mustard yellow, and the rest of the background a solid periwinkle. The transparency of the

letter reveals a monochromatic image of Cienfuegos (left) and Castro (right). Their figures are created by the use of shadow. We recognize Cienfuegos from his wide-brimmed hat and thick beard. He faces his slightly taller comrade, Castro, whose attention is fixed ahead, his expression

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anxious yet hopeful. With no others depicted in the image, we can assume he is speaking to Cienfuegos. Guns clutched in hands, they seem to be on the move.

Connotative. This 1969 poster commemorates the tenth anniversary of the revolution. With little text, save the anniversary reminder at the top, our focus is drawn across the empty space to the images at the bottom. The animated picture of Cienfuegos and Castro is taken from a photograph captured as they rode victoriously into Havana on January 8, 1959. Cienfuegos had arrived with Ernesto Guevara just six days previously. As Castro makes his entrance, Cienfuegos accompanies him for support. Castro's subtle height over him and fixed gaze ahead continues to show his anxious arrival into leadership. This exchange shows the friendship they share, as Cienfuegos would stay by his side for the next several hours during Castro's victory speech at La Plaza de la Revolución. In this famous address, Castro turns around to seek encouragement from his friend: "*¿Voy bien, Camilo?*" ("Am I doing all right, Camilo?") to which Cienfuegos famously responds, "*Vas bien Fidel,*" ("You're doing fine, Fidel.") This response was embraced by the people and became a slogan for the revolution. In this famous exchange, Castro's vulnerability demonstrates an element of trust in his comrade, revealing a humble and more human Castro to the public. It is significant to note that of all the images, this one was chosen to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the revolution. In October of 1959, Camilo Cienfuegos would board a small plane to return home from arresting a rogue military chief in Camagüey, by command of Fidel Castro. Cienfuegos would never set foot in Havana again, as his plane went missing over the Straits of Florida during the night. An immediate search was employed, but the rescue efforts were in vain. In November, the search was called off, and Cienfuegos was named a revolutionary hero. Che Guevara made the following remark after his disappearance:

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Few men have succeeded in leaving on every action such a distinctive personal mark. He had the natural intelligence of the people, who had chosen him out of thousands for a privileged position on account of the audacity of his blows, his tenacity, his intelligence, and unequalled devotion. Camilo practiced loyalty like a religion. (Barrio, 2003, p. 132)

The personification of Cienfuegos's loyalty to Castro and the revolution is captured in this poster. Their images seen through the transparency of the large letter "R" connotes the current revolution of the time. Furthermore, this depiction could signify a call to continue the fight alongside Castro. By illustrating the "friend" in Castro we desire to be like his lost comrade Cienfuegos.



Figure 9. A Revolution that Began with Céspedes. (National Library of Cuba, 1971).

Denotative. At first glance, this poster seems to just be depicting a band of cheering soldiers in uniform raise their fists and weapons of war into the air. As we look closer, we recognize the two men in front as Raúl Castro (left) and Fidel Castro (right), surrounded by the

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other “Fidelistas” behind them. Castro wears a beard and leads the troops in shouting. They look to him in high esteem. “*El 68 Céspedes, 10 de Octubre*” (“68 Céspedes, October 10”) fills the upper left portion of the poster. The text at the top reads: “*En Cuba sólo ha habido una Revolución: la que comenzó Carlos Manuel Céspedes el 10 de Octubre de 1868 y que nuestro pueblo lleva adelante en estos instantes*” (“In Cuba, there has only been one revolution: that Carlos Manuel Céspedes began October 10, 1868 and that our people [continue to] bring forth in these [days].”) The paragraph at the bottom reads:

A Céspedes, a los luchadores por nuestra independencia, el tributo de un pueblo que recogió el fruto de sus sacrificios, de un pueblo unido, de un poder del pueblo y de una Revolución victoriosa dispuesta a seguir invenciblemente, la marcha hacia adelante.

This translates to:

To Céspedes, to the fighters for our independence, the tribute of a people who collected the fruit of their sacrifices, a united people, a power of the people and a victorious Revolution willing to invincibly follow, *the march has gone forth* [continued].

To the right, we see the striking pose of Carlos Manuel Céspedes fill the height of the poster. He looks at us with no apparent emotion on his face. His eyes relaxed yet focused. His posture facing forward and upright. He towers over the soldiers, looking calm and confident in his suit. The unsaturated blacks and creams depicted in the individuals are contrasted by the burnt yellow background and pops of red text. There is a cool blue outline surrounding Céspedes.

Connotative. This 1971 propaganda piece holds great significance concerning the revolution. These cheering men are not just men—or even revolutionists—but rebels. This image, which portrays rebel leader, Fidel Castro, at the forefront of his band of followers, was taken in Havana on January 8, 1959, after they ousted General Fulgencio Batista and overthrew

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the government. Their shouts of triumph echo a similar victory by another great Cuban leader more than a century previous.

Carlos Manuel Céspedes was a rebel himself. More than a hundred years before Castro made his entrance into the presidency, Céspedes began the first Cuban Revolution, ushering in the fight for Cuban Independence from Spain on October 10, 1868. From this great event, he became known as the Father of the Country, admired and respected by all. Castro's acknowledgement above, that "the march has gone forth," indicates his utmost belief in a revolution that did not begin with him, but with Céspedes. Nonetheless, the parallels between these two rebels can be drawn from hidden signs in this poster. Not to be overshadowed as the Father of the Country, Céspedes towers above the rest of the elements in this piece, including Fidel Castro. This rarity of design connotes a sense of submissiveness and respect, which bodes well for Castro. Much like how Céspedes was the Father of the Country, Castro became known as the Father of the Revolution. From this, we can infer their union in purpose to bring to pass Cuban independence. The burnt yellow offers a very different feel from the saturated blacks and reds of other propaganda posters of the time. Yellow is much brighter, signifying sunshine and happiness. It connotes a new hope in both past and future.

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Figure 10. Only Socialism. (National Library of Cuba, 1972).

shadows on cream is mounted on a red background.

Connotative. It can be inferred that this quote spoken by Castro on September 28, 1972, was aimed to dissolve, rather than develop, social classes for the purpose of introducing a communist state to the people of Cuba. The orientation and size of the text shows its priority and rank in this particular poster. This is 13 years following the revolution. Political changes and other historical events would soon begin to envelop the nation, and Castro knew it. The fact that Castro is speaking into five microphones indicates the sheer scale of his speech, as there must

Denotative. Despite the inclusion of an image, this piece is a text-based artifact. As our eyes move down the poster we see a profile portrayal of Castro. The shadows create negative space and shapes, which, when placed correctly, allow our eyes to see his features. He speaks into five microphones. His gaze is fixed ahead, focused and determined. The text at the bottom reads “*Solo el Socialismo, solo el Comunismo, solo la sociedad sin clases puede resolver los problemas del hombre*” (“Only Socialism, only Communism, only society without classes can resolve the problems of man.”) The navy writing and

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have been many individuals present to hear his words. With so many listeners, Castro knew he must deliver his lines with power and authority. The colors in this poster coincidentally reflect the same colors in the Cuban flag, red symbolizing supremacy and rule.



Figure 11. Remembering the July 26th Movement. (National Library of Cuba, 1974).

Denotative. This is a very unique piece, in that it contains no text except the number “26.” The first image we see, hovering above a man’s head, appears to be a thought bubble. We can identify the man to be Carlos Manuel Céspedes because of his high forehead, thick eyebrows, and beard. Behind him, the Cuban flag fills the sky. To the right, the Moncada Barracks take up the rest of the space. Céspedes looks straight at us, eyebrows furrowed, stern-gazed. As the Father of the Country, he seems to invite us with his eyes to continue the revolution. We then venture down to whom the thought bubble ascends. A messy hay-stacking sketch reveals a man far down on one knee. This extremely abstract portrayal is unsurprisingly a

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depiction of Fidel Castro. The most obvious identifier is his rough beard and uniform. Another indicator is the subtle “26” on the armband he is wearing, commemorating the battle which took place at Moncada on July 26, 1953. His stance is unusual and seemingly disproportional. With his left foot much larger than his right, it almost appears as if he is lunging forward. Castro’s hard-to-read facial expression could be due to his coarse, thick beard. He is not only armed, but discharging his weapon. The final element of this poster is the exploding symbol of the rebellion: the number 26 on a background of red and black. The rest of the space is empty.

Connotative. The lack of text and replacement of imagery in this 1974 piece allows for personal interpretation, since we are not bound by words. Castro’s thought bubble is a direct gesture to the revolution. The same independence which Céspedes inspired more than a century previous is on his mind. The parallel here is that Castro’s quest for independence from Batista began at Moncada. More than 20 years later, the Barracks still stand as a symbol of the revolution. This memory of Moncada brings to surface the beginning of change in Cuba. It serves as a reminder that the fight still goes forth. Concerning Castro’s appearance in this particular propaganda piece, the unkempt presence is odd. His beard still stands as a token of rebellion, but it is longer than usual, perhaps connoting a larger-scale revolt or remind the Cuban people of his once soldier-like nature. His awkward stance and forward foot indicates an advance. We could consider it a surge toward continual rebellious movement. However, his low lunge could also show submissiveness to follow other great leaders, like Céspedes. His hard facial expression is not the Castro we know. The blank stare is vacant and empty of emotion. Could he be any one of us? Or could we then place ourselves in his shoes and identify with him? Though firing a weapon shows no mercy, the thought above him could symbolize how Céspedes

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pulled the revolutionary trigger more than a century previous, not Castro. The explosion of the July 26th Movement could mean no holding back. The movement is surging forward.

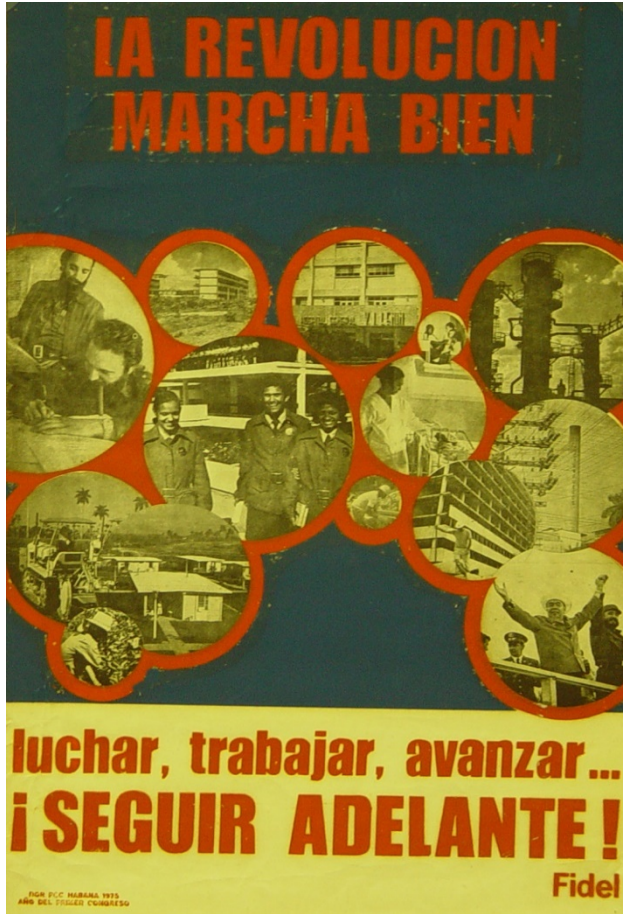


Figure 12. The Revolution Continues On. (National Library of Cuba, 1975).

At the top left, we see in the largest bubble, Fidel Castro with Cienfuegos behind him, signing a document. Six others reveal the development of structures, factories, and homes. To the bottom we see three portraying agricultural life with man and machine working side by side. A middle bubble shows three young Cubans on the street dressed in uniform, smiling; another, a nurse in the workplace, watching over the bedside of an infant. One small image includes three young children engaging in conversation. To the bottom right, a low camera angle captures Fidel Castro in uniform grasping hands in the air with another leader.

Denotative. Red white and blue are not uncommon colors to see on propaganda posters of this time. At the top, in bright red block lettering, we read, “*La Revolución Marcha Bien*” (“The Revolution Continues Well,” or even, “Marches On”), Below, 14 black and white images fill the middle section of this poster. Each is a represented in a bubble, surrounded by a red background. These vary in size and placement, appearing as if they spontaneously came to be, and depict a number of different scenes, which contain many signs and symbols. At the top left, we see in the largest bubble, Fidel Castro with

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A quote from him is included below, reading: “*Luchar, trabajar, avanzar...*,” then in capital letters, “*¡Seguir Adelante!*” (“Fight, work, advance...Continue on!”) A micro text beneath states “*Ano del Primer Congreso*” (“First year of congress”).

Connotative. Such a bold sans serif title effectively captures our attention. The bright red illustrates a high level of significance, which demands an added measure of consideration. Given the nature of this poster, the red, white, and blue together symbolize patriotism and Cuban pride. We then begin to process those captivating words: “The Revolution Marches On.” In the year 1975, it had been 16 years since the revolution. We are reminded of the great event which initiated a change in Cuba that would affect all its inhabitants.

“The Revolution Marches.” Here we have a visual of the personification of an event which, like a human, continues to march every day. It continues to go forth and spread change throughout the country. This poster is about the ripples. What has the revolution of 1959 done for the people of Cuba in 1975? How has it gone forth? Each image represents a facet of Cuba that has developed and thrived. More than a decade and a half later, we are shown the progressive side of Cuba. As our eyes follow the content down the page, we read from left to right, top to bottom. Thus the largest bubble, which contains an image of Castro is placed at the top left. This prominent design technique is no coincidence as we now focus our attention on him, remembering that it was because of him that each subsequent bubble came to be. With Camilo Cienfuegos behind him, it lets us know this is an old picture (Cienfuegos went missing in 1959).

There is no telling when the other images were captured, but we can connote many meanings from their depictions nonetheless. From this scene with Castro and Cienfuegos, we can infer Castro to be signing some sort of political document. His focus shows an eagerness and diligence to his presidency. The various structures and factories are a representation of civil

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development and growth. Homes reveal a state of security and family life. Similarly, the agricultural efforts can be assumed to provide tobacco and sugarcane for trade and foreign exchange. The hard labor of plowing, sowing, and harvesting provide much work for the Cuban people. Along the line of occupation comes education. The uniforms on three young Cubans connote their status as students. Their smiles are associated with their appreciation for education and can even be an indication of their success. It is also not by chance that this second largest image is placed in the center as the picture directly to the right depicts the young nurse in a hospital. The picture implies that she achieved her current status through an education that was provided to her. The final image in the bottom right corner is placed very strategically. Castro's stance and action of grasping this other man's hand in the air connotes a union or celebration with this other leader. The low camera angle reminds us that we are beneath him and must look up to him. It is also an indication of Castro's wisdom as a leader. The most fascinating interpretation of meaning behind these bubbles may be that they are contained, or bookended by Castro. While this poster shows how the Cuban people have benefited from a new government, it serves an even greater purpose: It is to reestablish faith in revolution, but most importantly, Fidel Castro. He is the reason for success in Cuba.

From industry to social awareness, political success to hard work, these revolutionary highlights are solidified in our minds with the closing phrase: "Fight, work, advance...Continue on!" With this choice in words, each conveniently correlates to the images above: "Fight [against democracy, for communism], work [to build up the trade industry]," and "advance [in making deals with other leaders]." This is a confident, enlightened, and reformed Cuba. The unique element in this poster is the inclusion of many images in one piece of content; because of this,

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the signs and symbols multiply drastically. They connote the many achievements and accomplishments of Cuba, but more significantly, the success and triumph of Castro.



Figure 13. Establishing Communities of Brotherhood. (National Library of Cuba, 1976).

Denotative. “*Aspiramos a crear comunidades de hermanos*” (“It is our aim to establish communities of brotherhood.”)

This bolded black title, pulled from the quote below spoken by Castro, is not flashy or loud. Rather, it is a simple statement of purpose. The rest of the statement is as follows:

Ha llegado la hora en que este proceso, por unas vías o por otras, llegará a establecer esa comunidad superior que se propone la humanidad de hoy: nuestros objetivos son los objetivos más dignos que se ha propuesto la humanidad. Aspiramos

a crear comunidades de hermanos, comunidades de verdaderos seres humanos.

This translates to:

The time has come, through one way or another, for this process to build the more advanced type of community, which is today the goal of mankind. Our objective is the most noble that mankind has set for itself. It is our aim to establish communities of brotherhood, communities of human beings at their best.

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This poster dates to 1976, just 15 years after the revolution. It displays a monochromatic color scheme of orange, black, and cream. On either side of the media piece, two tall unrecognizable structures stand mirroring one another. Fidel Castro smiles as he stands in a crowd of ten visible people. These individuals have no names or identity. The artistic style appears sketched. As our eyes move along the scene behind him the people become less and less defined, and eventually disappear into the background. Castro seems to look older. He still sports a uniform and thick beard. His gaze is not forward, but fixed on the people around him. He eyes are calm and content, his facial expression relaxed. Though still elevated amid the crowd, he walks among his Cuban people. Our attention then turns to the two young women in the front of the crowd. This is the first poster analyzed in this study which noticeably includes women. They are both smiling wide and seem cheerful. One looks down, the other gazes straight ahead.

Connotative. In order to understand the imagery in this piece of media, we must situate the signs in this culture. The first, most obvious source of interpretation comes from the text at the top of the poster: “It is our aim to establish communities of brotherhood.” This statement, spoken by Castro, communicates where he stands in his revolutionary journey. As he moves forward with his revolution, the connotation here is that he moves with the people. From this declaration, we learn that unity and comradeship are on his mind. Furthermore, this “advanced community” spoken of, is displayed in the sketch below. We learn from the imagery here that he is not on this journey alone. Though still in uniform and beard to symbolize the continual march of the revolution, we see a soft side of Castro. His gaze is on the people. His placement in the crowd shows that he follows, as well as leads. The two women in the front reflect a positivism in life, and a hope for a bright future. This could be a gesture toward the power that women have, as the only visible crowd members behind them are men. As well, an interpretive analysis could

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conclude that Castro has begun to seek equality among social interactions. For the 1970s, this was a significant phenomenon.

The design also carries meaning; for example, the monochromatic color scheme alone could describe enough of the purpose of this poster. The color orange radiates warmth and happiness, combining the physical energy and stimulation of red with the cheerfulness of yellow. Orange offers emotional strength in difficult times. It helps us to bounce back from disappointments and despair, assisting in recovery from grief. The color psychology of orange is optimistic and uplifting, rejuvenating our spirit. Orange brings spontaneity and a positive outlook on life and is a great color to use during tough economic times, keeping us motivated and helping



Figure 14. Becoming Internationalists. (National Library of Cuba, 1978).

us to look on the bright side of life (Scott-Kemmis, 2016). Knowing this, we can see how principles of design help to achieve the overall emotional pull we feel toward this poster, and Castro's aim in using such a propaganda piece.

Denotative. This is a very simple poster in that it contains very little content, but the design elements still have significant meaning. The title reads: "*Ser internacionalista es saldar nuestra propia deuda con la humanidad*" ("To be internationalists is to pay our own debt to humanity.") A shot of Castro fills the middle section of the poster. His features are highlighted in a flat cream color, using the negative space

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around him to create shadow and depth. From the shapes and angle, we recognize his profile.

Looking downward, his brow is furrowed and his eyes are stern. The curly lines around his face denote a thick beard. The background provides a sense of complexity, with the upper half of the page a bright red, and the bottom half a solid black. This divide falls right in the middle of Castro's countenance. A small piece of text sits in the bottom right corner: "Fidel 26/7/78." This indicates that the quote above was spoken by Castro. It also informs us of the date: July 26, 1978.

Connotative. This poster commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the July 26th Movement. The red and black symbolize the famous attack made by Fidel Castro and other rebels on the barracks at Moncada on July 26, 1953. This great episode ushered in the beginning of the rebellion which would become a revolution. The 26 of July Movement transformed into a revolutionary organization and later a party led by Fidel Castro to support the fight against the Batista regime. "The flag of the July 26th Movement is on the shoulder of the Cuban military uniform, and continues to be used as a symbol of the Cuban Revolution" (Faria, 2004, p. 96). It consists of the same red and black background, with an "M-26-7" positioned on the front, centered vertically on the line of red and black. By situating these signs in that culture, and using abductive reasoning, we can connote meaning out of the symbols displayed here. For example,

Internationalism is a political principle which transcends nationalism and advocates a greater political or economic cooperation among nations and people. Supporters of this principle are referred to as internationalists, and generally believe that the people of the world should unite across national, political, cultural, racial, or class boundaries to advance their common interests, or that the governments of the world should cooperate

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because their mutual long-term interests are of greater importance than their short-term disputes (Arora, 2011, p. 2).

Considering this principle helps us better understand where Castro was, politically, socially, and economically in his regime.

1979-1988



Figure 15. History Will Absolve Me. (National Library of Cuba, 1979).

Denotative. The denotations of this 1979 poster are as follows. “*¡Cuba, que seria de ti si hubieras dejado morir a tu Apostol!*” (“Cuba, what would have become of you if you had let your Apostle die!”) Beneath this thought-provoking question, the printed white words, “*Fidel, La Historia Me Absolvera*” (“History Will Absolve Me”) close the headline. The shadowed countenance of José Martí fills the right side of the poster. He stares off past us to the left, fixed on nothing in particular. His expression is serious and seemingly empty of emotion, yet his eyes appear focused and determined. He wears a thick mustache, so as to cover his mouth completely. The

negative space behind him is a bright vermilion. Beneath him, the amber image of Fidel Castro

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reveals a similar countenance. Unlike all previous posters, Castro is clean-shaven, save a mustache. As well, he has traded his uniform for a white collared shirt and suit jacket. He points downward, his eyes fixed on something below our vision while his hand rests on what appears to be a book of some sort. He is in the manner of talking and has a stern facial expression. With creased eyebrows, his façade is firm and unwavering. This professional, yet casual appearance is unusual, particularly because blends in with the people.

Connotative. While it may not be the first time another character has appeared larger or taller than Castro, this exception, like its predecessors, has a valid reason. José Martí has long been considered a national hero in Cuba. During his life, he was a poet, essayist, journalist, revolutionary philosopher, translator, professor, publisher, Freemason, and political theorist. Through his writings and political activity, he became a symbol for Cuba's bid for independence against Spain in the 19th century, and is referred to as the “Apostle of Cuban Independence” (Font, 2006). Considering this, the above quote holds more meaning than first meets the eye. We can infer that the “Apostle” Castro is referring to is Martí. To understand more deeply what Castro may mean from his statement—“Cuba, what would have become of you if you had let your Apostle die!”—we can turn to his famous courthouse defense on October 16, 1953. In this four-hour speech, Castro battled the charges against him for attacking the Moncada barracks. Though no record of Castro’s words was kept, he later reconstructed them for publication on January 1, 1958. There have been numerous additional publications since. He insists that he is innocent in the concluding lines of his statement to the court: “*Condenadme, no importa, la historia me absolverá*” (“Condemn me, it doesn’t matter, history will absolve me.”) This later became the title for his work and, the manifesto of his July 26th Movement. To draw more profoundly upon this oration, it is significant to mention that much of Castro’s discourse

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included passages of Martí's work recited from memory, as his prosecutors allowed him no resources. A particular portion helps us find the meaning behind the textual symbols found in this poster.

In Spanish, he said:

Parecía que el Apóstol iba a morir en el año centenario, que su memoria se extinguiría para siempre, ¡tanta era la afrenta! Pero vive, no ha muerto, su pueblo es rebelde, su pueblo es digno, su pueblo es fiel a su recuerdo; hay Cubanos que hay caído defendiendo sus doctrinas, hay jóvenes que en magnífico desagravio vinieron a morir junto a su tumba, a darle su sangre y su vida para que él siga viviendo en el alma de Patria. ¡Cuba, qué sería de ti si hubieras dejado morir a tu Apóstol! (Font, 2006, p. 85).

This translates in English to:

It seemed that the Apostle was going to die in the year of his centenary, that his memory would be extinguished forever. Oh, the insult! But he lives, he has not died, his people are rebellious, his people are worthy, his people are faithful to his memory; there are Cubans who have fallen defending his doctrines, there are youth who in magnificent reparation came to die near his grave, to give him their blood and their life so that he, (Martí), lives on in the soul of Patria. *Cuba, what would have become of you if you had let your Apostle die!* (M. A. Font, 2006, p. 85, emphasis added).

This piece, which most carefully articulates Castro's passion for Martí's influence, offers many insights to the meaning behind this poster. In 1953, with the Batista regime suffocating the economy and allowing outside influences to take over, Cuba's independence was yet again at risk. For Fidel Castro, this would not stand. He chose to act out in rebellion, much like the Apostle of Cuban Independence.

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José Martí was born on January 28, 1853, precisely one hundred years before the rebel forces attacked Moncada. Could Martí be the great intellectual author of the July 26th Movement? This was the implication Castro made in his speech. Martí, who advocated for the liberty of all Cubans and gave his life for such a cause, would die again for the same purpose; but he would die in vain if that purpose was not met, endorsed, and upheld by the people today. *La Patria Libre (The Free Homeland)* was a newspaper published by Martí campaigning for Cuban independence. Castro's allegation was that, as Cuba continues to fight for the cause of freedom, José Martí and all he stood for would live on in this publication.

The design elements in this poster also support these cultural symbols. Vermilion, has been considered the color of life and eternity (Bear, 2017). With this connection in mind, this propaganda piece suggests that Martí and his principles live on forever. Amber, which is the second prominent color in this poster and represents Fidel Castro, connotes fire and energy. It carries with it the positivity of yellow but the zeal of orange. His hand could perhaps be resting on a collection of writings from José Martí. He gently grasps it as if it were the Bible. Castro's appearance seems more celebrity-like. His lack of uniform and rough beard seem as if he has put his rebellious life as a soldier behind him, while yet focusing on the same objective of change. He almost looks as if he could be an ordinary man. This is not the Castro we are used to, yet somehow, there seems to be a peculiar parallel drawn between these two men.

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Figure 16. Fidel, Undaunted, Hits the Yankees. (National Library of Cuba, 1980).

her tunic and robes. There is no order or purpose to them. The plaque she holds in her left arm has no detail, only a large plateau which extends out of her left side. The colors seem dull and unsaturated, which is in stark contrast to the Cuban flag in the middle of the artifact. This is the only element that holds color in this poster with its bright red and blue. It appears to be a two-dimensional image with straight lines and no depth or shadow. It angles down to the left and the bottom right corner seems to penetrate the side of Lady Liberty. The only text on the document reads: "*Fidel Seguro a los Yanquis Dale Duro*," which translates to "Fidel, undaunted, hit those Yankees hard" (Eire, 2003).

Denotative. The black background on this poster provides a stark contrast for the content overlaying it. The poster's content is contained by a faded chartreuse border. In the center, a messy animation of the Statue of Liberty can be distinguished. She is white. She stands straight, though her figure seems awkward and unnatural. A grey flame gently ascends from her torch. She is bound around her chest at least seven times. The same band constrains her tightly around her right wrist. Her facial features are distorted, with no real shape or form. Her crown has five points, all variously spaced and oddly shaped. Bizarre lines fill

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Connotative. In order to understand the meaning behind the signs in this poster, we must first understand its cultural context. The year 1980 brought with it much change for Cuban-American relations. Two years previously, revolts against the Cuban government began to surface in Havana. Many individuals sought asylum in the South American embassies located in Cuba's capital (New York Times, 1979). Over the next 24 months, these attempts at asylum became more and more drastic, including the takeover of public transportation vehicles to crash through gated embassies (Thomas, 1980). A number of associated fatalities both from the Cuban government and the refugees were the unfortunate result of these insurgencies. By April 1980, the number of refugees on the grounds of the Peruvian embassy reached 10,000 (Thomas, 7 April 1980). Many countries began to debate how they may come to their aid. On April 14, U.S. president Jimmy Carter announced that the United States would accept 3500 Cuban refugees. Six days later, Fidel Castro agreed to this proposal, and consented to the emigration of anyone wishing to leave the island, as long as they had arrangements to be picked up by someone (Tamayo, 2008). This mass emigration took place from April to October that same year, and became known as the Mariel Boatlift. Refugees earned the name, *Marielitos* and were cared for at facilities lining the U.S. coast. Though it was short-lived, by October, 125,000 had arrived in the U.S. Upon the discovery that many of the "refugees" were sent from Cuban jails and mental facilities, this exodus was terminated by mutual agreement between both the U.S. and Cuba on October 31, 1980 (Silverstein, 2000).

To return to the significant meanings behind the signs in this poster, we can start with the phrase, "Fidel, undaunted, hit those Yankees hard." We can assume that a "Yankee" in this case would not just be a New Yorker, but any American; and who better to represent all Americans than Lady Liberty? Ironically, however, the symbol of liberty herself is bound. The Cuban flag in

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her side could have been placed or thrown based on its angle and deepness of penetration. Her torch's grey flames may even be the smoke of an extinguished blaze, a simple, momentary reminder of a once-burning hope now lost. She is shaped enough that we know who she is, but robbed of all detail, just as her freedom, signifying how American liberty is also tightly constrained. Castro, undaunted, fearless, and carefree, hit her with a wave. This wave may not have broken her, but sure overwhelmed her borders with a flow of refugees for months. This poster would have us fear not just the authority of the Cuban government, but respect the power of Fidel Castro.



Figure 17. *Fidel Castro*. (National Library of Cuba, 1980).

highlighting Castro's facial features. There is a light source, casting a golden glow on the left side of his face. These highlights are contrasted on the right side of his face with the appropriate

Denotative. Most printed propaganda contains some sort of text element for persuasion purposes. In this selection of samples, this is one of the few that is completely image-based. A headshot drawing of Cuban president, Fidel Castro, fills the poster. Despite his lifelike form, the medium used is not photography, but colored pencil. Each mark has its own precise stroke and style which, when combined, creates a visualization of texture and reality. Colors include red, orange, yellow, green, brown, white and black. The color scheme allows for shading, and

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shadows for depth and realism. Castro sports his famous green hat uniform yet again—it even almost seems even brighter than normal. His soft brown eyes look over our heads, past us, and toward the light. They are inviting and kind, and his brows are relaxed and show no strain. The subtle angle has us looking up to him. The details on his countenance denote he has aged significantly. We notice the earned wrinkles near the creases of his eyes, and the many white hairs growing out of his beard. Not quite smiling, he wears a calm, friendly expression. The background is dark, almost black. It has a deep green hue to it.

Connotative. The strong imagery in this piece of propaganda promotes a much more passive form of persuasion. Text and words can often be limiting or demanding. The drawing of Fidel Castro we view here does not dictate anything to us, but invites us to interpret the poster as we may. This freedom allows creative thought and offers a much more attractive form of influence than fear or power. With this in mind however, the low angle often symbolizes wisdom or intelligence. This is not the first time we have seen this design tactic in his propaganda as portrayed in *Cuban Institute of Art*, and *The Revolution Continues On* (see Figures 7 and 12, respectively). From his white beard and the soft wrinkles around his eyes, it's not difficult to see that time has worn on him. Castro's clothing still shows his devotion and dedication to the revolution, even in his old age. Though a uniform worn throughout his life should be distressed and faded, his hat seems to shine an even brighter shade of green. This could symbolize a renewed commitment to the revolution and Cuba. Just as well, the brightness could simply be coming from the light source playing off of it and down the side of his face. Light has many different meanings, the most common being hope. The richness and angle of the light would indicate it is either dawn, or sunset. Whether this connotes a new beginning for Cuba, or the peaceful end of a fruitful regime, Castro faces it, indicating confidence and optimism. The subtle

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green hues throughout Castro's image and even into the background hold an interesting significance. Green symbolizes life, renewal, growth, and harmony, a fitting combination of symbols for such a poster.



Figure 18. Preserving Peace. (National Library of Cuba, 1981).

represent violence or hatred, the universal symbol of peace behind them indicates that their manner of punching the sky is noble, patriotic, and triumphant. The fact that there are four fists as opposed to one shows that they are united in cause, symbolizing comradeship and brotherhood. Castro's exhortation to preserve peace stems from his famous victory speech in Havana on

Denotative. This 1981 black and white poster contains text, animation, and photography. The title above commands, "*Podemos y debemos preservar la paz*" ("We can and must preserve peace.") English and French translations are featured below. "Fidel 15-9-81," a reference to the date September 15, 1981, is included in the bottom right corner. The imagery reveals 12 animated doves in flight over four fists, punching the air beneath them.

Connotative. The photograph of the fists coupled with the animation of the doves behind them, create an intriguing parallel to the goals and achievements of Fidel Castro. While a fist could normally

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January 8, 1959. More than 22 years previously, Fidel Castro spoke to a crowd of thousands. As he delivered his oration, a number of caged doves were released behind him. At a particularly poignant segment, one dove landed on his shoulder, while several others came to rest on the podium. Below is one historian's description of the event:

As Castro assured Cuban mothers that he “would do everything in his power to solve all of the nation's problems without a single drop of blood being shed,” the dove (and the community of doves that stood beside it) entrusted the 32-year-old revolutionary with the power to lead them into a different state of affairs. In one totalizing moment, the natural seemed to yield to the discursive, the impossible seemed possible, and the mythic peacefully gave credence to the political. It is this last point whereby new power structures arose from what, at first glance, may have looked like thin air that holds particular salience for the course. (Fernandez, 2009).

This occasion, though speculated greatly by some, would provide a catalyst of faith in a new chapter for countless Cubans that would last for decades to come. The imagery represented here, portrays that symbolism and calls for all to join in this great cause. One indicator of this is the multiple translations, which would reach out to not only Americans, but many Canadians and Europeans as well.



Figure 19. Hands in Pockets. (National Library of Cuba, 1985).

has long flat feet and wears a white flat-brimmed sombrero with white cutoffs. His hands are in his pockets. Sticking his tongue out, he blows a raspberry at Uncle Sam who is jumping into the air. Three drops of sweat shoot off of his face. All around, there is no background, just a generous amount of white space. In the bottom left corner, we read the following quote from Castro: “*Y de verdad llevamos más de 20 años con el brazo extendido, eso cansa, eso agota entonces planteamos las manos en el bolsillo.*” This translates to “And in reality, we spent more than 20 years with our arms extended. That tires. That exhausts. So we put our hands in our pockets.”

Denotative. “*Deuda Externa*
¡Manos en los Bolsillos!” (“External Debt,
Hands in Pockets!”)—this is the giant title
we read when first glancing at this poster.
The large black lettering is a borderline
playful script. This is a new style of
propaganda from the other posters in this
sample. On the left side of the poster is a
startled Uncle Sam, who is easily identified
by his white hair, blue suit, and tall patriotic
top hat. A depiction of a small animated
character stands sure-footed in the bottom
right corner of the poster. His size is
dwarfed in comparison to Uncle Sam. He

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Connotative. This 1985 propaganda poster falls more in the lines of a political cartoon than any of the others. The exaggerated features of both characters displayed add to the dramatic effect of this media piece. Though the aesthetic is more energetic without right angles and straight lines, this font still communicates a noteworthy message, which draws our attention to the characters below. We can identify the little man on the bottom right as a Cuban. Though there are no features that immediately classify him as anyone in particular, we can ascertain him to be any Cuban. He stands firm on his giant flat feet, with a solid stare at Uncle Sam who in contrast leaps into the air in fear of the little guy. Despite his small size, we can assume from his stance that the tiny Cuban is not afraid. In fact, he even taunts Sam with a good long raspberry. This action of sticking out his tongue connotes a confident and haughty attitude. Castro's quote helps us to find the meaning behind this illustration—"And in reality, we spent more than 20 years with our arms extended. That tires. That exhausts. So we put our hands in our pockets." Here we learn of the perspective Castro is trying to communicate to the Cuban people. They had reached out with open arms to the U.S., but they were not be received. For years, the embargo continued and after a few months of permitted emigration in 1980 during the Mariel Boatlift, was reinstated in 1982 by U.S. president Ronald Reagan (Sullivan, 2003). In essence, the lack of cooperation from external relations sent a tired Cuba back into isolation, ready to make no deals.

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Figure 20. The Band of Honor. (National Library of Cuba, 1988).

Denotative. *Del Bando del Honor* ("The Band of Honor") stretches across the upper left of this horizontal poster. To the right, nothing but a black, hay-stacked background sits. The artistic style for this propaganda piece is a black and white sketch. Along the entire left side of the poster, a mural of many different individuals and scenes fill the space. The most prominent figure in this fresco is Fidel Castro. His face covers the entirety of the poster's height, to which the other artistic elements surround. They seem to envelope the back of his head, down to his beard, so that just his face is exposed. He stares to the right side of the poster, gazing into the black. His mouth is slightly parted; his eyes soft, and eyebrows relaxed. At the top of the mural, we see a small crowd of individuals waving Cuban flags. As our eyes move down the collage, six figures stand out among the rest. Depicted from top to bottom are: Camilo Cienfuegos, José Martí, Antonio Maceo Grajales, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Máximo Gómez, and Ernesto

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“Che” Guevara. In other detail, a white yacht sits in the middle of the scene. At the bottom, a number of doctors and nurses work in scrubs. Next to them, a woman dressed in army uniform holds a gun to her chest, standing strong and firm. She faces forward, gripping her weapon tightly. Three separate quotes from Castro line the right side of his face. Running down the height of the poster, they declare:

¿Cómo hicimos nosotros las grandes cosas que ha hecho la Revolución, desde ganar la guerra, desde la guerra, sin nada? ¿Con qué se hizo la guerra y con qué se ganó? ¿Y con qué se ha hecho la proeza de resistir 27 años aquí a Estados Unidos? Pues gracias a los factores morales... a los valores que enarbolo la Revolución... [...] La Revolución existe y subsiste...la Revolución existirá y sobrevivirá siempre, no por su poder económico, o su poder material, o su fuerza, sino por su moral, por su capacidad de inspirar respeto al enemigo. [...] En el terreno de la construcción del socialismo somos nosotros los que tenemos que evitar errores, somos nosotros los que tenemos que salvar siempre la Revolución. Y nuestra Revolución nunca se ha debilitado, siempre se ha fortalecido y cada vez ha sido más fuerte, y es por esto que tenemos que dar una llamada de alerta frente a cualquier cosa que tienda a debilitarla.

The English translation is as follows:

How did we do the great things that have made the Revolution? From winning the war, with nothing? What did the war do, and what was won? And what has become of the feat to resist the United States here for 27 years? Well, thanks to the moral factors...to the values that hoisted up the Revolution. [...]The Revolution exists and remains...the Revolution will exist and always survive, not because of its economic power, or its material power, or its strength, but by its moral, by its capacity to inspire respect for the

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enemy. [...] In the field of the construction of socialism, we are the ones who need to avoid error. We are the ones who must always save the Revolution, and our Revolution has never been weakened. It has always strengthened and each time gotten stronger. And this is why we must give a call of warning in front of anything that tends to weaken it.

Connotative. “The Band of Honor” suggests that those in the mural represent the highest respected contributors to Cuban liberty. Among these, Fidel Castro’s rank holds an even greater significance. From the size and placement of his image, we can assume his efforts were superior to that of his depicted comrades. His dark beard and eyebrows and lack of wrinkles suggest this is a young Castro. He appears calm and collected, with his band of supporters behind him. This symbolism typifies the sure backing he received not only from those living, but those revolutionary fighters long since passed away. This poster epitomizes those forces for Cuba in their peak influential years. Many more signs are contained in this collage of revolutionary participants. From the top, the crowds of Cubans with their flags propose a unity in the people, and a joint desire to maintain Cuban liberty. The fact that they carry these national banners symbolizes patriotism to their country and its leaders. Some smile, while some are sternly focused on the goal. Whatever their expressions, they support the cause.

As we pass through these images and begin to move down the collection of memories and time, our eyes fall on six different characters whose countenances pull more weight, drawing our attention. Their facial features are larger and more detailed than those in the background, indicating a higher prominence and worth. We can infer that each man’s contribution to the revolution was meritorious enough to receive a place next to Castro for the cause of freedom. The inclusion of Martí, Grajales, Céspedes, and Gómez indicate a reflective attitude toward the prominent influential men of 19th century Cuban Independence ambitions. These individuals laid

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a strong foundation for Cuban leaders of the 20th century, which would greatly aid them in their insurgencies against Batista.

One of those 20th century men was Camilo Cienfuegos (1932-1959). As one of Castro's top guerilla commanders, he joined the forces on *La Granma* expedition. And was one of the few who survived with Castro. Later, after winning a key battle during the Cuban Revolution, he acquired the name, "*Héroe de Yaguajay*" ("Hero of Yaguajay"). Last but not least, Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1928-1967) was an Argentine by birth, but later joined Castro's forces to fight for Cuba in 1955 after meeting him while exiled in Mexico that year. Despite their contrasting personalities, Guevara and Castro began to foster what dual biographer Simon Reid-Henry deems a "revolutionary friendship that would change the world," as a result of their coinciding commitment to anti-imperialism (Reid-Henry, 2009). As well, *Time Magazine* named him one of the top 100 most influential people of the 20th century (Dorfman, 1999). These men gave not only their time and efforts, but their very lives for a cause they believed in. This band of revolutionaries weaves a web of security and support for the continual fight for independence which Castro reinstated in 1959.

The yacht in the middle of the scene can be identified as *La Granma*, which launched Castro's armed insurgency against Fulgencio Batista in 1956 when it carried more than 80 rebels back to Cuba to fight a corrupted government (Arrington, 2006).

Additionally, another symbol of the revolution makes its debut, as we recognize a seaman aboard a craft participating in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Beneath these, the work of surgical doctors and nurses connotes the development of Cuban civilization, and refinement through the revolution. The image of a young military woman reveals a social equality and welcomed service from all to the cause of freedom. Each of these events and scenes played

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unique roles in the initiating and continuation of the Castro regime which perpetuates even into today's twenty-first century global society. If the text alone isn't enough, the unique framework of this propaganda poster visually displays the history of the revolution and highlights the leaders who made it happen. We can draw meaning out of these symbols in many ways. Above all, we see a Castro who has not yet exhausted all his resources, but who has sustained from the beginning his cause to fight for a new and transformed Cuba.

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS

A variety of patterns emerged in this study to illuminate the many roles of Fidel Castro, as his displayed character took a variety of forms over the decades. These findings relay a portion of those depicted roles over the 29 years following the Cuban Revolution of 1959 as well as the significance of those variations. Additionally, recurring patterns and themes are identified through semiotic analysis.

Portrayed Roles of Fidel Castro

In response to the first research question, a semiotic approach was adopted in the analysis of 19 different posters. These were selected based on the inclusion of specific design elements and the year they were printed. The encoded messages were then extracted from the selection and analyzed according to an adaptation of previous studies using semiotics. This includes a combination of the work of Barthes (1964) and Maasik (2015), namely, (1) *the linguistic message*, which includes verbal or textual language; (2) *the denoted message*, consisting of the literal representation of non-coded elements; and (3) *the connoted message*, involving symbolic or coded meaning. Using these three message types allow us to make inferences concerning hidden meaning within the posters.

Though Fidel Castro's representation differs with time and events, there exist many parallels and consistencies in his portrayal across the decades. The communications of this propaganda are explained and offer new perspectives on Castro's portrayals. Rather than measuring the influences of these artifacts on Cuban society, this study draws implications regarding what is conveyed.

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The political presence of Fidel Castro is most evident in the years preceding his presidency, which are contained in the first frame (1959-1968). Additionally, photographs and illustrations prior to this event tend to balance his wartime exertions, with his sociocultural efforts. For example, the first poster, *¿Contra Fidel? ¡Ni en la Pelota!* (see Figure 2), shows an animated and gregarious Fidel Castro with comrade, Camilo Cienfuegos, invested in the game of ball. This particular portrayal of Castro not only demonstrates his sociable charisma, but provides a familiarity that offers an insurance of trust among consumers. In contrast, there exists another poster in this bracket that does not include an image of Fidel Castro in which his voice is still heard: *“Death to the Invader”* (see Figure 4). Here, there appears to be a change in audience. While the obvious consumer would appear to be the “Invader,” this poster was truly meant to bolster Cuban people’s hatred and confidence to any who stand against the Revolution. The fear appeal in this poster plays strongly to Castro’s advantage. If someone is not with the Revolution, he or she is against it—in essence, that person is against Castro himself. The illustration of a hand crushing planes in its clutches, combined with the linguistic message, “Death to the Invader,” creates the image of Castro that is not literally contained in this propaganda piece. He is strong and powerful, with an ability to conquer his challengers, a trait that any authoritarian should possess.

In regards to opposing appeals, *First National Congress of Culture* (see Figure 5) reveals a smiling, friendly Castro who advocates for the arts. He appears kind and amenable. While this poster’s focus seems to lean toward the promotion of art and culture, the revolution is still carefully woven into its fabric; its persuasive purpose is the same, but camouflaged. With the linguistic message proclaiming the development of Cuban culture, consumers embrace the growth of creative values and mediums. This adulation tactic suggests the Castro regime’s

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astuteness in praising the public community to gain the trust of the people, and therefore, their loyalty to his purposes regarding the growth of the revolution. These dichotomies—the appeal to both fear and flattery—indicate a variety of pragmatic methods, to which Castro is no stranger. His sensible approach to politics is useful to note. Balancing such contradictory persuasion methods creates a synergy, allowing him to reach the ethos, logos, and pathos in each of his audience members. This phenomenology reveals a portion of the diverse complex mannerisms that make up his character. During this era, the use of combined approaches to influence public loyalty suggests the need for adoration and support, which begins to portray Fidel Castro as a political celebrity of sorts.

The second frame (1969-1978), reveals a new significance in Castro's image placement. In each figure thus far, he has been strategically placed higher than any other element or individual, suggesting his power and authority, which was necessary to establish rule, and maintain control amidst such a politically shaken people. However, as time goes on, we begin to notice a more approachable Castro. This transformation is made manifest in the posters from 1969-1978. *A Revolution that Began with Céspedes* (see Figure 9) is the first to show Castro in a “lesser light” by placing him beneath Cuban fighter for independence, Carlos Manuel Céspedes. To some, this may be perceived as weak. The hidden message, however, suggests this serves a much more tactical and advantageous technique. It reveals a submissive, encouraging, and inspiring Castro. While it is possible this is a coincidental phenomenon, one might conclude that his placement serves a very deliberate and unique purpose. Its aim was to reflect a new side of Castro—one we haven't seen yet. The powerful dictator now shows his capacity of respect for those great independence leaders, like Céspedes, who gave their lives for Cuba. It carries the connotation that Castro is capable of humility, despite his resolute passion for leadership. He

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cheers alongside his brother, Raúl, and seems to rally his followers in joint efforts with the ongoing war for independence, which is the revolution.

As the roles Castro plays become more familiar, Cubans begin to grow accustomed to images of his kind eyes and inviting smile, and feel drawn to his persona and charisma, almost as though they know him personally. This mediated, parasocial relationship, creates a sense of security in Castro that becomes a catalyst for his support system. Nonetheless, there are a number of posters scattered throughout the selection that depict a tough, unyielding image of Castro which offer a subtle reminder of his governing nature. For example, his hard facial expression seen in *Remembering the July 26th Movement* (Figure 11), is not the Castro we know, which may suggest a sense of anonymity. This obscure sketch of the leader we are used to seeing with full transparency alludes to another side of him. His more mysterious face allows the viewer to make their own inferences about their leader, and furthermore, permits the relatability of Castro to any other man who fights for the revolution.

Many propaganda pieces, such as *The Revolution Continues On* (see Figure 12), show Castro in social and political action. This poster displays 14 circular images containing photographs of development in Cuba. With the largest bubble at the top left containing an image of Castro, it proposes that because of him, each subsequent bubble came to be. The final image in the bottom right (which also contains a photograph of Fidel Castro) is strategically placed to capture the consumer's attention, suggesting that all growth in Cuba is because of him.

As previously stated, element placement in propaganda is key to understanding Castro's appeals to the public. The organization of this particular poster reveals a design tactic used to capture the eye and leave the viewer drawing parallels between success in Cuba and Castro's political regime. With Castro's face displayed on either end of the images, and a variety of

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accomplishments shown in between, this poster communicates his role as leader and president of Cuba by displaying the execution of his ideas. This persuasion method uses a visual appeal to demonstrate the effectiveness of Castro's management and administration. As the decades pass, we see Castro's transformation into a wartime hero who still marches triumphantly for Cuba, nearly 20 years after the revolution.

Moving into the final time bracket (1979-1988), we begin to see signs of a bigger conversion in the character of Fidel Castro. He takes on a much more paternal role through his representations. *Fidel Castro* (see Figure 17) exhibits the soft countenance of Castro peering over us. This may symbolize his watchful role over Cuba, not just as a political leader or a friend, but as a father. The angle connotes wisdom and intelligence. His iconic hat and uniform worn, almost adorned, at his elderly age, reveals a lot about his character. As we gaze into his eyes, one may recall the many war efforts and military actions executed to arrive at a state of communist rule. Cubans would know the history and the elaborate measures he took to expel a seemingly corrupt government and replace it with a new regime. Cubans remember the great men who fought and died for the cause of the rebellion, and are brought to a sense of reverence through these memories. These connotations are derived from signifiers such as the golden light on his face, or the noticeable grey in his beard. His wrinkles age him, and viewers can almost visibly see the years of leadership lived and sacrifices made. These subtle, yet significant signs offer deep semantic meaning to the poster that otherwise could be easily overlooked.

The iterative nature of these later posters offers a paradigm of vigilance in Castro that consumers begin to expect. Though he remains president of Cuba, Castro's nature in this last bracket feels almost familial, as we grow accustomed to his more domestic role as suggested in *The Band of Honor* (see Figure 20). From a linguistic standpoint, the cascade of words along the

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right side of Castro's face serve as a lexicon for references to the Revolution in all its forms, showing where Castro's heart truly lies. In this poster, we also observe several consistencies from the signified elements throughout this era: mainly his kind demeanor and paralleled role as "*Padre de la Patria*" ("Father of the Nation"), which was first given to Carlos Manuel Céspedes (depicted directly left of Castro's temple). These characteristics earned him a new respect from the Cuban people, solidifying his roles as both an authoritarian and "father." His transformation over time in such portrayals intends to demonstrate a commitment to leadership and control. Throughout each era, the linguistic syntagm of sarcasm and humor combined with connotative elements of nobility, nostalgia, friendship, and camaraderie form the persona Cuban's perceive of Fidel Castro.

Emergence of Patterns and Themes

In order to address the second research question, themes exhibited in the propaganda were identified by semiotically analyzing signs and organizing them into two categories within each message type: political events and cultural phenomena. Within political and cultural themes, the most common topics and events were selected based on recurring presence in the posters. For political events, this included Cuban Independence, the 26th of July Movement, and the Cuban Revolution. For cultural phenomena, analysis is based on economic development, entertainment, and history. It is significant to note that while these categories were created for a portion of the findings, they are for organizational purposes only and offer a visual index for sorting signs. A semiotic analysis allows us to make meanings and identify specific political and cultural patterns in Cuban society by observing denotative and connotative signs in the posters.

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These icons illuminate hidden messages and provide a sound springboard to understanding the significance behind such symbols.

With various modes of expressive demographics (for example, political and cultural, message type, and year), there are multiple ways to interpret the data. This study aimed to discover the sociopolitical and cultural themes communicated by the propaganda. Therefore, extracted themes will be categorized into these topics.

Given that these propaganda posters were political marketing, the majority fall into this category. The patterns that develop surround events such as the July 26th Movement in 1953 and the embargo beginning in 1962. Additional recurring topics include the fight for Cuban independence (which took place the century previous), and the ushering in of socialism after the Revolution of 1959. This abolishment of classes would set the administrative tone for the next fifty years as Castro strived to create a Communist regime, following the ousting of President Fulgencio Batista and his republican administration.

The analysis revealed that linguistically, over the course of all three time brackets, the revolution was mentioned more than any other political events, followed by references to Cuban independence, as well as the July 26th Movement. This is true for the denoted messages as well. Additionally, from a text-based-only standpoint, the July 26th Movement was cited more from 1959–1968 than it was in the other brackets. This could be because, at the commencement of the Revolution, it had only been a short six years since Fidel Castro and other rebels attacked the Moncada Barracks. This event ushered in the fight for a new revolution in the 20th century, and launched what would become an over 50-year change for Cuba. Once the revolution took off, the effects became the visual focal point in these propaganda, not necessarily what sparked it. In

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fact, across all message types, this movement was not referenced in this sample from 1979–1988, and by the end of this bracket it had been 35 years since the event.

From a denotative perspective, we begin to notice some of the manifest visual elements in the posters that very literally show each of these political events. The observation of these events, however, was limited to direct signs only. For example, if a poster contained the red and black colors of M-26-7, but no other indication of that event, it was categorized as representing that movement only in the connotative analysis. This is because we could not assume the signifier to symbolize something of connotative nature, as explained in the methodology. The connotative approach combines both the linguistic and denotive elements to create meaning. Direct signifiers of Cuban independence increased with time, surpassing even the revolution in the previous bracket. In fact, patterns revealing aspects from Cuban independence were higher than the other events, in both the linguistic and denotative message types, from 1979–1988. This could be attributed to Castro's efforts in rekindling loyalty to a revolution, which started 100 years previously. Themes relating to this event remind consumers of the parallels between Castro and those independence heroes of the 19th century.

Considering connotative patterns alone, the first observation is the greater presence of Cuban Revolution themes across the time brackets. This same event had more presence throughout each message type as well. Threaded throughout time and tone, reference to the revolution in these propaganda posters serves as anchorage for Castro's political regime. As mentioned earlier, the greater number of signified political patterns compared to the linguistic and denoted messages is significant. The amount of signs found through a connotative approach indicates how many concealed messages exist in the data. These require decoding and therefore suggest their obscure nature, making them easy to overlook without a knowledge of the culture.

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The abduction of these messages gives rise to not only sociopolitical, but sociocultural themes, offering significant insights regarding social life in Cuba.

Situating signs within the system they dwell is paramount to understanding the symbolic nature of these propaganda posters. From a cultural stance, this selection of posters revealed various phenomena which shaped the portrayal of Fidel Castro and other revolutionaries. The most prominent elements that arose from these artifacts linked to Cuban topics such as economic development, entertainment, and history.

Textually, the data presented more references to economic development than both entertainment and history from 1959–1988. However, in the first time bracket alone, this was surpassed by entertainment and recreational mentions. Manifest, or direct, signs also supported this claim. Such emergence submits that the propaganda advocated for amusement in its earlier influential aims in addition to toying with more pragmatic forms of persuasion. The promotion of fine arts as well as cinematographic culture assisted in creating this emphasis on higher education. Yet, the selection of linguistic messages communicated no mention of these from 1969 on. This proposes a shift toward social professionalism, and more rational forms of propaganda.

Some of the most notable differences from linguistic to denoted themes are the presence of depicted entertainment in the last 18 years and the greater inclusion of historical events in the third bracket. Such events tend to overlap with political references such as the July 26th Movement and the revolution. While these actions may represent sociopolitical themes, they hold historical value as well, which enrich the cultural communications in these posters. In the last decade of propaganda, we begin to see more patterns that refer back to great independence leaders like José Martí, and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, as well as their works. These draw

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attention to a state of reverence and rebirth, as we remember the cause of their reform, and in turn, suggest a recommitment to historical education.

Connotatively, signs of economic development were most common, followed by patterns of history and finally entertainment. This was true not only across message type, but for all three time brackets as well. These signs included scenes such as the construction of large factories, agricultural farming, academia, and the many faces of content Cubans. Such progress became eminent to include, as the U.S. embargo continued to strangle major trade opportunities outside Cuba. Such visual accomplishments could restore faith in the Revolution and therefore, the Castro regime. Concerning symbolic leitmotifs of amusement displayed, one scene that grabs our attention is that of Fidel Castro and Camilo Cienfuegos in baseball uniform, playing a game of ball. For Cubans, baseball is one of the most beloved sports on the island. Though it originated in the United States, it quickly became a strong symbol for Cuban nationalism, and it was even considered a symbol of freedom from Spain during the fight for Cuban Independence in the 19th century. It is interesting to note as well the strong parallel from displaying economic stability to encouraging a deeper appetite for Cuban history. From 1979–1988, symbols portraying 19th century leaders, doves of peace, and an elderly Fidel Castro, cause viewers to reflect on where Cuba has been, and where it is now. This return to national heritage could be tied to motives of patriotism in Cubans today, a topic for further study and investigation.

Implications

This study fills a gap in propaganda literature by semiotically analyzing the roles of Fidel Castro from a post-revolutionary propaganda perspective, and offers meaningful interpretations regarding his leadership transformation over nearly three decades. Previous research on propaganda posters has taken a pragmatic or historical approach; however, this limits the hidden information encoded in the media, specifically regarding image portrayal. A semiotic analysis, as demonstrated in this study, provides an illustration of this ideological phenomena, as well as emerging themes. Propaganda in Cuba is displayed in numerous ways: from billboards to home décor to street graffiti, a loyalty to the Revolution is bred into the island's culture. Among these, propaganda posters became the primary medium of analysis for answering the following research questions:

Question one. What do post-revolutionary propaganda posters communicate about the roles of Fidel Castro from 1959–1988?

Question two. What sociopolitical and cultural themes does the propaganda exhibit?

The conducted semiotic analysis responds to the first research question by asserting that post-revolutionary Cuban propaganda posters portray Fidel Castro in three major defining roles: a political celebrity, a wartime hero, and a father figure. These posters show the transformations of Castro's public image over time. In addition, this study will also categorize the sociopolitical and sociocultural themes which emerge from the propaganda.

This study found that from 1959–1988, three major aspects were made manifest in Castro's portrayal. The first bracket revealed him to be a sort of political celebrity, much to the

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adoration of the Cuban people. His new government, and his execution of change, earned him this lofty title, which was embraced and personified through his parasocial relationship with the public through the propaganda. This adoration would soon transform into admiration, as Castro took on the role of a wartime hero. The next decade would usher in a new era of nostalgia for the revolutionary efforts and for those who had given their lives for the cause. This reminiscence was evident in the representations of Castro in uniform nearly two decades following the uprising. Lastly, the adoration and admiration which was displayed in these years gradually developed into a high esteem, or respect. In the analyses, Fidel Castro exhibits signs of not just leadership, but paternal natures. This role of father figure communicated the significance of not only his political and military accomplishments, but the very essence of his character as caretaker of Cuba. Even in the face of dictatorship and power, Castro managed to achieve this status in the eyes of the Cuban people.

In response to the second research question, the analysis revealed a favorable iteration of influential leaders and events of the era. From a political standpoint, references to the Revolution, were most frequent, followed by references to Cuban Independence and the July 26th Movement. Throughout the 30-year period, there were cultural recurrences of economic development, history, and entertainment, where economic development exhibited the most exposure, followed by history and entertainment respectively. These patterns and themes, in turn, framed the portrayals of Fidel Castro; the visage who would inevitably become “the Face of the Revolution.”

In conclusion, this study aims to add to existing research by examining how linguistic and denotative signs in propaganda posters communicate to form meaningful connotative significance to its situated culture. By utilizing these forms of analysis to extract meaning from

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signs, this research affords new insights in this area. With the object to enhance media literacy among readers through the interpretation of propaganda, this study adds significant understanding to reading images and signs as text.

Future Research

Though this study provides a semiotic analysis of the meaning found in propaganda, the media specifically targeted Cubans; the consumers were from one source. Notably, however, much of the propaganda was used outside of Cuba, advocating global solidarity to the Revolution. These posters were geared toward audiences in countries around the world, including, but not limited to, Congo, Guatemala, Venezuela, Japan, Laos, Korea, Saudi Arabia and even Afro-Americans. Cuba's tri-continental efforts with oriental, Latino and African cultures revealed a much larger hoped for revolution. This greater sphere of influence demonstrates the sphere of influence Cuba (and Castro) aspired. An examination of these influences outside of Cuba would afford additional insights to existing research. Beyond geographical considerations, there is a chronological gap to be filled as well. A search for propaganda used subsequent to 1988 (and an analysis of that data) is sure to deliver new perspectives on the roles of Fidel Castro in his later life. Additionally, a search of Cuban propaganda posters containing elements of other independence and revolutionary leaders could avail itself to the semiotic analysis of many other roles played by these figures such as "Che" Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, and others.

While the communications of Cuban propaganda are outlined in this research, a study on the effects of this propaganda on Cubans would be valuable in measuring influences and persuasions on consumers. Media-effects research provides a solid foundation for such a study.

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However, these methods would most certainly require survey samples and human subjects, which may prove to be challenging as Cuba is unlikely to permit such public opinion to be voiced. Under the communist rule of Raúl Castro, any exploration of these effects may be limited to Cuban-Americans living in the United States. Nonetheless, an exploration of the effectiveness of print media and certain design tactics on these populations would provide scholars with a deeper understanding of successful branding techniques. These design strategies seem to have swayed the opinions of generations. In what ways have Cuban print media encouraged such deep dedication to Fidel Castro and the Revolution? How impressionable have Cubans become after over half a century consuming such material? How can they still chant in one voice, and on cement walls today, “*¡Vive Castro y la Revolución!*”

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