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Buena Vista Solidarity and the Axis of Aid: Cuban and Venezuelan Public Diplomacy

By
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and
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Eager to capitalize on the sensationalist appeal of a new anti-U.S. “axis,” the international press often perpetuates a perception that Cuba and Venezuela are, in spirit and in deed, inseparable. Such depictions diminish the significant differences in the ways and the success with which each country promotes its image abroad. Although Cuba and Venezuela employ many of the same public diplomacy tactics to advance their related anti-U.S. worldviews, the Cuban regime has proven much more successful at playing the role of the victim and using this position as a way to increase its international legitimacy. Likewise, Cuba is far more sophisticated at employing cultural products to support diverse political, diplomatic, and economic ends—many of which arguably serve a market-oriented purpose rather than a strictly anti-imperialist or antiglobalization agenda.

Keywords: Cuba; Venezuela; public diplomacy; medical diplomacy; foreign aid; solidarity; anti-Americanism

On August 30, 2005, two days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the U.S. Gulf Coast, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez announced his government’s willingness to provide food, water, and oil to the storm’s victims. Several days later, Fidel Castro followed suit, indicating that he was prepared to send more than a thousand Cuban physicians

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and accompanying medical supplies to support the recovery efforts (Rondon Espin 2005; Bachelet 2005a).

U.S. authorities were less than eager to welcome the assistance. Despite assurances from Condoleezza Rice that “no offer that can help alleviate the suffering of the people in the afflicted area will be refused” (quoted in Green 2005), White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan made it clear that political considerations would in fact influence the government’s readiness to accept international aid from certain sources. “When it comes to Cuba,” he declared, “we have one message for Fidel Castro. He needs to offer the people of Cuba their freedom” (McClellan 2005).

For many Americans, McClellan’s directive probably sounded harsh. More important, to citizens in Cuba and Latin America, it may have seemed heartless. Katrina’s path of destruction had vividly brought the United States’s class, racial, and socioeconomic fissures to the attention of the global media, and the extent to which freedom and justice actually existed in the United States had suddenly come into question. Even Florida Senator Mel Martinez, a Cuban American and a strong opponent of the Castro regime, urged Washington to accept Havana’s offer (Adams 2005). Yet as the storm’s victims languished and the government’s disaster response effort failed, Cuba’s doctors were told to stay home.

U.S. officials responded somewhat more pragmatically to the Venezuelan offer. The American ambassador in Venezuela, William Brownfield, announced on September 8 that the United States was willing to accept the \$5 million in fuel assistance that Chávez had authorized through the state-run oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA) and its U.S. subsidiary *Citgo* (Bowman 2005). But by this time, the delay in the American federal government’s response to Katrina had already caused significant damage to U.S. global standing (Sweig 2006, 78). Chávez seized the moment, not only criticizing U.S. officials for ignoring his offers for mobile health clinics and other supplies (Campbell 2005), but also launching strident critiques of U.S. capitalism and noticeably expanding his ties to low-income American communities. Within weeks of the storm, when damage to Gulf Coast refineries sent U.S. energy prices soaring, Chávez pledged to offer discounted heating oil to a number of U.S. cities, a program that continues to this day and has received the support of a number of U.S. congressional leaders.

Despite their own significant struggles against domestic poverty, Cuba and Venezuela positioned themselves as potential benefactors of the Gulf region’s dispossessed. This seemingly unselfish proposition, coupled with Washington’s refusal to accept its terms, embarrassed the United States and, by default, lent credibility to the Cuban and Venezuelan governments’ claims to altruism (Tobar 2005; Ruiz 2005; Smith 2005).

More broadly, this episode shows how Cuba and Venezuela use public diplomacy, especially in their own region, to create the impression that they present a united front against a common set of enemies. Capitalism, free trade, neoliberalism, and the aggressions of the U.S. “empire” are routinely denounced by both countries. In Havana and Caracas, Cuban and Venezuelan flags are commonly flown together. And throughout Fidel Castro’s prolonged illness, images of

Chávez embracing his mentor have been published worldwide, reinforcing a sense of unity and strength despite the elder's physical vulnerability. The U.S., South American, and international press, eager to capitalize on the sensationalist appeal of a new anti-U.S. "axis," further disseminates the perception that Cuba and Venezuela are, in spirit and in deed, inseparable. And although many citizens across the globe oppose aspects of the political models in Cuba and Venezuela, the two countries' critiques of global capitalism and inequality continue to find sympathetic ears, particularly in Latin America.

However, attempts to link Venezuela and Cuba as part of a common left-wing axis diminish the significant differences in the ways each country promotes its image abroad and the success with which they accomplish their goals. Although Cuba and Venezuela employ many of the same tactics, the Cuban regime has proven more successful at playing the role of the victim and using this position as a way to increase its international legitimacy. In part, this is the result of Cuba's longer experience forging links of solidarity with the third world and serving as a symbolic center of anti-U.S. resistance on the global stage. But it is also the result of circumstance. Cuba faces a U.S. economic embargo that, according to an August 2007 Zogby poll, is opposed by 56 percent of the U.S. population. Internationally, denunciations of the embargo policy have become routine at the European Union, the Ibero-American summits, and the United Nations General Assembly.¹ As a result, the cash-strapped island's international health programs, even when they earn the Cuban regime hard currency, appear all the more unselfish. Cuba has also proven to be far more sophisticated at employing cultural products to support diverse political, diplomatic, and economic ends—many of which arguably serve a market-oriented purpose rather than a strictly anti-imperialist or antiglobalization agenda.

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Discussions of Cuban and Venezuelan public diplomacy are often characterized by arguments over whether a given initiative represents a genuine gesture of solidarity or merely a propaganda ploy. Understanding that both positions hold a kernel of truth, this article examines (1) how Cuba and Venezuela mobilize

international solidarity for their domestic and international political agendas, (2) how Cuba and Venezuela leverage their international aid programs to gain influence and legitimacy, and (3) how cultural products like film and music are deployed by each state in international settings. In Cuba's case, our analysis will focus primarily on examples from the previous fifteen years, while for Venezuela we focus exclusively on the public diplomacy tactics of the Chávez presidency. Our intention is not to provide an authoritative historical narrative but to illustrate dominant trends and patterns.

The term *public diplomacy* traditionally refers to ways in which governments use aid, cultural, media, and exchange programs to influence the ways in which they are seen by citizens in other countries (Tuch 1990; Schneider 2005). Yet as the Cuban and Venezuelan cases demonstrate, an analysis of public diplomacy cannot be divorced from an understanding of more traditional types of state-to-state interactions. Not only is the line between the two often blurry, but the nature of traditional commercial or political diplomacy can impact the extent to which public diplomacy efforts are received positively. The Cuban and Venezuelan examples also show that successful public diplomacy is not just about what governments do to promote themselves abroad but also how they react to, take advantage of, or benefit from external circumstances and actors. These include the activities of citizens, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and corporations that generate ideas, culture, art, and other messages with the power to influence public perceptions (Nye 2002, 2004; Ruggie 2004).

Cuba *Solidaria*

Across the world, from Argentina to Andalucía, from small clubs of fifteen members to large conferences with hundreds of attendees, private citizens seem to voice their support for the Cuban Revolution's achievements and criticize current U.S. sanctions against the island with surprising consistency. T-shirts stamped with Che Guevara's image are ubiquitous. In 2007, the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that pluralities in Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and even Canada thought Fidel Castro had "been good for Cuba" (Pew 2007a, 75-82). Leaving aside the argument about the "gains" of the Revolution, and acknowledging that many of Cuba's achievements in health and education are impressive,² it seems worth examining to what extent this apparently sizable reserve of international public support is the result of concrete public diplomacy efforts on the part of the Cuban government. To what extent is it simply an expression of resistance to an apparently ineffective and widely unpopular set of U.S. policies?³ And to what extent do the visions of such people and groups matter politically?

From the moment they took power, Cuba's political leaders have supported left-wing movements across the globe in an effort to internationalize their own socialist and anti-imperialist goals. By the end of the 1960s, however, Cuba's attempts to directly sponsor armed insurrections had by and large failed. Particularly in the Western Hemisphere, Cuba found itself isolated diplomatically,

forbidden from participating in such bodies as the Organization of American States and threatened by U.S. intervention. As a result, seeking ideological allies beyond traditional diplomatic ties became vital to sustaining the revolutionary government's legitimacy in Latin America and preserving some semblance of independence from its increasingly dominant financial patron: the Soviet Union. This is not to say that state-to-state relations became irrelevant for Cuba. Quite the contrary: Many Latin American governments gradually reestablished direct ties, and of course, Cuba depended for decades on close diplomatic friendships with the countries of the Eastern bloc for its economic survival. In fact, by virtue of its close links to countries of the Warsaw Pact, many of Cuba's early public diplomacy efforts aimed at promoting international solidarity emulated those of the Soviet Union—from the work of the Communist International to the 1957 6th World Festival of Youth and Students held in Moscow (an event later hosted by Havana in 1978). Yet as a popular, subaltern movement still nominally removed from the bipolar cold war divide (Cuba itself was never a member of the Warsaw Pact and instead played an active role in the Non-Aligned Movement), the Cuban Revolution perhaps possessed a unique potential to forge lasting people-to-people ties with citizens across the globe. An uncertain and at times tense diplomatic environment in the Western Hemisphere only reinforced the strategic value of this approach (Domínguez 1989, 111-83).

Officials in Havana designed several initiatives to help Cuba achieve these goals. One prominent program was OSPAAAL, the Organization for Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Through a series of promotional campaigns and informational materials—including well-known and widely distributed political posters as well as the magazine *Tricontinental*—the group articulated Cuba's support for national liberation movements across the globe, some of which received Cuban economic, training, technical, and/or military assistance. Yet more important than its support for individual armed campaigns was the premise that disenfranchised citizens from different parts of the world could unite in spirit against the common oppression they all faced under the forces of colonialism, imperialism, and economic exploitation. Solidarity was reciprocal. OSPAAAL also helped organize a yearly "Day of Solidarity with Cuba" on which pro-Cuba activists across the globe demonstrated in defense of the Revolution's pursuit of national sovereignty and social justice (Cushing 2003, 67-99; Domínguez 1989, 268-72; Kunzle 1975).

Cuban officials also spent much time and energy attempting to show off the benefits of their social and economic model to foreigners. In the late 1960s, Havana began sponsoring the creation of international solidarity brigades to purportedly help discredit the misinformation reported about Cuba by Western governments. Eleven such brigades still exist under the aegis of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with Peoples, including the well-known Brigada Venceremos from the United States. The institute also runs Amistur, a travel agency that organizes trips during which visitors to the island explore the latest advances in Cuban health care, education, agriculture, and women's rights (Domínguez 1989, 269; Cuban Institute for Friendship with Peoples n.d.; Amistur n.d.).

To complement these efforts, Cuba works equally hard to promote its message in the international media. Between 1959 and 1961, the still-young revolutionary government founded *Prensa Latina* and *Radio Habana Cuba*, news outlets akin in purpose (though not influence) to the *Voice of America* or *Radio Moscow*. Today, *Prensa Latina* has correspondents in twenty-two countries around the world, its own active radio station with international broadcasts, and a Web site that promotes the Cuban state's anti-imperialist world vision (*Prensa Latina* n.d.). The advent of the Internet has likewise allowed *Granma* and other Cuban state publications to reach a broader international public while also supporting the efforts of "alternative" media outlets elsewhere in the hemisphere.⁴ It is in these venues that Cuba most often trumpets the successes of its universal health care and education systems, key selling points for the regime. Similarly, partnerships with sympathetic publishers such as Australia-based *Ocean Press*—the only foreign publisher with an office on the island—help Cuba diffuse the political thought of the Revolution's past and present leaders to the broader global public.

But a far more important element of the Cuban government's public diplomacy strategy has been the U.S. embargo itself. Without it, the narrative of victimization repeated by regime officials would lack credibility, and because of it, Cuba has received an inordinate amount of sympathy, not necessarily for the entirety of its political and economic programs, but for the government's defiance in the face of all U.S. efforts to undermine its stability. In a hemisphere with a long history of U.S. interventionism, resistance to the United States possesses intrinsic political value (McPherson 2003; Sweig 2006, 2-17). And for many citizens across the Americas and the world, Fidel Castro's perseverance after years of U.S. plots to unseat him merits tremendous respect, despite the Cuban government's widely recognized and continued failure to abide by fundamental international norms concerning freedom of expression and other basic political rights. Over time, Cuba's symbolic importance as the anti-U.S. rebel par excellence has gradually superseded its role as a practical revolutionary example (Norris 2006).⁵ The fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba's subsequent abrupt economic collapse (between 1989 and 1993, GDP plummeted 35 percent; Pérez Villanueva 2004, 49), the progressive strengthening of U.S. sanctions (in 1992 and 1996, as well as several occasions under the George W. Bush administration), and the Cuban government's ability to withstand all of these obstacles have only reinforced the gradual mythologizing of the island's resistance to U.S. aggression. By contrast, despite a shared political ideology and antipathy for the United States, the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries never enjoyed the same "underdog" status.

In the aftermath of the cold war, the pressures of economic recession forced Cuba to make a number of notable concessions to the global marketplace. Yet as the 1990s progressed, and new voices emerged protesting the inequalities, injustices, and other inadequacies of the Washington Consensus, Cuba came upon a new framework through which to sell its ideas to the broader public: the antiglobalization movement. Even as they opened the country to limited foreign investment and established joint ventures with foreign tourist enterprises, the island's

leaders also embraced the language of “sustainable development” and “biodiversity” (Medioambiente.cu n.d.; Pérez Roque 2002). They also expressed solidarity with nascent political movements like the *Zapatistas* in Mexico and the *cocaleros* in Bolivia;⁶ and they joined the chorus of regional actors denouncing U.S.-led free trade agreements (Harris 2003). In this context, Cuba’s education and medical programs have become increasingly important as symbols (and a material demonstration) of the island’s commitment to grassroots solutions for global problems. Solidarity has taken on a new meaning, and Cuba’s intransigence in the face of the capitalist West has garnered a fresh wave of sympathizers (Erikson 2004).

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Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the launch of the Bush administration’s campaign against global terrorism introduced yet another paradigm through which Cuba would seek to gain grassroots support abroad. Members of Fidel Castro’s government have long been the targets of violence and threats from their primarily Miami-based opponents, and on several occasions, even Cuban civilians have been attacked. The most well-known terrorist act was the bombing of a Cubana Airlines jet in 1976, widely suspected to be the work of former CIA agent Luis Posada Carriles. Posada has routinely evaded prolonged incarceration or capture. In the early 1980s, while being tried in a Venezuelan court for his involvement in the 1976 bombing, he escaped from prison. And despite being convicted by a Panamanian court in 2000 for his role in an assassination attempt against Fidel Castro, Posada received a pardon in 2004 from the country’s outgoing president Mireya Moscoso (Bardach 2002, 171-222, 2005).

Thus, when Posada reemerged on American soil in April 2005 and was only charged with minor immigration violations, Cuba was handed the perfect pretext to publicize its very own “war on terror.” After more than two years in prison, Posada was set free when a Texas judge found that he had been unlawfully interrogated by immigration authorities (a federal government appeal is still pending). In Havana, the quest to bring Posada to justice for the full extent of his crimes remains a key rallying cry promoted amply through government media outlets and in international forums (Cuba Contra El Terror n.d.).

Closely related to this initiative is Cuba’s international campaign to free five men imprisoned in 1999 for their alleged roles in La Red Avispa, a Cuban spy network in Miami. Cuban authorities claim that the so-called Cuban Five were only seeking to obtain information about the activities of exile organizations plotting terrorist attacks on Cuban soil, acts that have been historically sheltered and abetted by U.S. authorities.⁷ The Cuban government has responded aggressively to their incarceration, mounting a broad international media campaign. The wives of the imprisoned have gone on international tours to seek support, and a documentary about the case (*Misión Contra el Terror* [*Mission against Terror*] 2004) has been heavily circulated by Cuban diplomats and independent activists. Moreover, Committees to Free the Cuban Five have spread throughout the globe and have staged protests in prominent locations, including Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (National Committee to Free the Cuban Five n.d.; Antiterroristas.eu n.d.).

Cuba’s “war on terror,” while a clear and obvious political maneuver, has generated a considerable amount of support and even started to reap concrete rewards in more traditional diplomatic forums. For example, at the 15th Ibero-American Summit held in Salamanca, Spain, in October 2005, heads of state from across Latin America denounced Washington’s “selective approach” to terrorism and issued a statement demanding that Posada be tried for his crimes (Giles 2005).

In sum, Cuba’s approach to the concept of solidarity has proven to be enormously adaptable to changing times and situations. We can also see strong indications that Cuba’s public diplomacy is often not proactive but reactive to external conditions.⁸ In the case of the U.S. embargo, the regime actively works to disseminate a narrative of its victimization through the promotion of antiembargo campaigns, documentaries, and literature (Cuba vs. Bloqueo n.d.), but the opportunity to do so is sustained by factors outside of Havana’s direct control. Similarly, in the case of Luis Posada Carriles and the campaign to free the Cuban Five, an external series of events (the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the beginning of the Bush administration’s war on terror) provided a rhetorical space in which prior disputes gained new international relevance.

On the surface, it may seem that the political impact of Cuban public diplomacy remains somewhat limited. After all, the Cuban Five are still in prison, Posada Carriles has been released from custody, and the U.S. embargo persists. Yet solidarity has mattered for Cuba. Opposition to the embargo, even within the United States, and even, more remarkably, in the halls of the U.S. Congress, has

grown, and the policy is condemned almost unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly year after year (Bachelet 2007b; Mack 2005).

Other results are more indirect but no less important. From Michelle Bachelet, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and other members of the so-called “pragmatic left” to more traditional anti-U.S. voices such as Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, many current Latin American leaders share long-standing ties to Fidel Castro and other senior Cuban government officials that date back to the days when Cuba lent both moral and material support to left-wing activists of varying ideological persuasions persecuted by military dictatorships.⁹ While their ideas have certainly evolved, and in some cases depart significantly from their Cuban counterparts’ on questions of economic policy, human rights, and democratic principles, Cuba remains an important symbol for many members of left-of-center parties across the hemisphere. Consequently, any policy perceived to bolster the U.S. position represents a political risk.

The seeds of Cuba’s early outreach efforts have thus begun to bear fruit. By gradually cultivating deeply felt bonds of loyalty among many Latin Americans, the island’s leadership has successfully secured a source of sympathy within foreign electorates and thereby inoculated itself from most attempts to pursue more hard-line anti-Castro policies. For example, the notable cooling of Mexican-Cuban relations under the presidency of Vicente Fox outraged members of Mexico’s former ruling party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), who for years had prided themselves on their commitment to diplomatic noninterference and relatively close ties to Havana. The backlash was so large that incoming President Felipe Calderón has quickly moved to indicate his government’s willingness to reopen a bilateral dialogue with Cuban officials (Bachelet and Hall 2006). In this way, links of solidarity that Cuba has fostered over time, however superficial, do indeed affect political outcomes. Cuba’s approach to public diplomacy has thus provided the island’s centralized government with a layer of political and ideological protection simply not afforded to Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela.

Bolivarian Ideals

For years, Venezuela’s two-party democracy was revered by Washington as a model of moderate governance for the hemisphere. The meteoric rise to power of Hugo Chávez not only exposed the weaknesses of that system but also brought to power a leader inspired by Cuba’s example of anti-U.S. defiance. It is only natural, then, that the Chávez government has sought to duplicate some of Havana’s public diplomacy successes.

Of course, Chávez came to power at a much different time than Cuba’s now aging revolutionaries. While Cuba was forced to readjust its public posture to accommodate the realities of the post-cold war world, Hugo Chávez persuasively articulated the bankruptcy of neoliberalism and magnified the appeal of antiglobalization discourses for many poor Venezuelans long disenchanted with their

country's extreme inequality and endemic corruption. Chávez also came to power via much different means than did Castro. Despite a failed military coup in 1992, Chávez eventually gained the presidency, and has subsequently held onto it, in elections deemed by credible international sources to have been free and fair. The broadcast media have been sharply restricted—the forced closure of opposition television station RCTV in the spring of 2007 marked a new low—but Venezuelan newspapers remain largely free, and opposition parties continue to function openly.¹⁰ President Chávez has significantly curtailed the independence of the judiciary and submitted most branches of government to his personal influence. Nonetheless, his basic electoral credentials are a key selling point internationally, one constantly burnished by Venezuelan officials in the media and elsewhere to justify the executive branch's consolidation of control over all aspects of government (Gott 2001; Lapper 2006; Shifter 2007).

Like their Cuban counterparts, Venezuelan officials have sought to demonstrate to visitors and audiences abroad the advantages of their country's new social model. In collaboration with NGOs like San Francisco-based Global Exchange, Venezuela welcomes political tourists seeking to explore its approaches to cooperative ownership, land redistribution, regional integration, and the energy sector. Particularly important in this regard are the activities of the *misiones* (missions), public institutions that provide a number of health, education, and other services to neighborhoods and rural areas not thoroughly serviced by traditional state welfare mechanisms. Ordinary visitors and noteworthy guests alike are brought to the *misiones* to witness the communitarian spirit of the Bolivarian Revolution firsthand (Forero 2006b). Yet despite a significant level of debate over whether countrywide poverty numbers have improved substantially during Chávez's tenure, development scholars, celebrities (Harry Belafonte, for example), and others have raised awareness about the work of the *misiones* in their own countries precisely because these institutions seem to have provided tangible and visible benefits to the poor in one of Latin America's most inequitable nations (Weisbrot, Sandoval, and Rosnick 2006).

Through the Bolivarian News Agency, founded in 2005, the Venezuelan government has followed Cuba's example and attempted to lend its own perspective to the international media. Within the United States, the Venezuela Information Office, responsible for advertising the achievements of Venezuela's social programs, plays a crucial role in the Chávez government's public diplomacy efforts (see <http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com>). Venezuelan officials have also used ad campaigns in major international periodicals to highlight the successes of the *misiones* and sell the message that Venezuela is using its oil wealth for the betterment of the poor (Forero 2004). Yet more important and potentially influential on a larger scale was the 2005 creation of Telesur, a Latin American television network meant to compete with CNN and other dominant Western media outlets. By focusing on Latin American news and cultural programming, Telesur hopes to serve as a major platform to help "integrate a region that currently knows other parts of the world better than it knows itself" (Gould 2005). As a primarily Venezuelan creation (Venezuela holds a 51 percent stake while Argentina,

Cuba, Uruguay, and Bolivia own minority shares), Telesur has naturally been subject to accusations that it will become nothing but a propaganda outlet for the Chávez government. Yet so far the network has demonstrated a substantial level of independence. Despite an obvious leftward tilt and an awkward incident in which executives abided by Chávez's request to air video clips from closed-door meetings of regional leaders, the network's focus is much broader than most state-run, propagandistic news agencies. Maintaining this perception of independence while embracing a grassroots, prosocial change focus will be critical to determining Telesur's utility as a subtle public diplomacy tool of the Venezuelan government. In its first year on the air, Telesur reached seventeen Latin American countries, and network executives are increasingly eyeing the U.S. Hispanic market (Pearson 2006; Sreeharsha 2005).

On a more directly political level, Venezuela has attempted to mobilize citizens across the world to stand in solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution as it faces what Chávez describes as external threats and provocations, primarily from the United States. Much like Cuba's OSPAAAL in the 1960s, Venezuela has organized periodic "World Gatherings in Solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution" and forged relationships with international "Bolivarian Circles" as well as the "Hands Off Venezuela" network (<http://www.handsoffvenezuela.org>), founded after the United States was widely suspected to have colluded in the 2002 coup that unseated Chávez for several days. The Chávez government has also been a direct participant and sponsor of events with a broader goal of promoting sustainable development in the third world and resisting global neoliberalism. Most notable was Venezuela's role as host for one of the branches of 2006's "polycentric" World Social Forum—a conference established in 2003 to counter the yearly World Economic Forum in Davos. Officials took advantage of the occasion to appeal for the support of the more than sixty thousand conference attendees. On a principal avenue in Caracas, for example, a "festival of revolutionary democracy" highlighted the Chávez government's health, education, and other social programs, while outdoor video screens played pro-Chávez documentaries (Frasquet 2006).

Yet partly because the Chávez government is relatively new, and partly because Venezuela's economic fortunes do not seem so desperate (oil prices and revenues have hit all-time highs in recent years), the idea that the country is somehow drastically threatened and in need of moral support can be a tough sell. Venezuelan officials have used Washington's suspected collaboration in the 2002 coup to successfully stoke anti-U.S. sentiment internationally. But particularly since the appointment of Thomas A. Shannon as U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs in 2005, U.S. officials have taken a somewhat more moderate tone toward Caracas. Without something as concrete and consistent as the embargo to rally around, Bolivarian solidarity groups appear more fragmented and their message less urgent. Moreover, the fact that Venezuela continues to depend on the United States to purchase more than 50 percent of its oil exports casts a suspicious shadow over the authenticity of Chávez's anti-American credentials (Lapper 2006, 21-24).

This is not to say that Chávez himself is not popular as a personal figure in parts of the world. Among Palestinians, the Venezuelan leader has been treated like a celebrity (Khatib 2006). During President Bush's visits to Latin America, most recently during the spring of 2007, Chávez has presided at large outdoor assemblies convened to protest the U.S. president's presence (Cormier 2007). Nonetheless, Chávez also tends to behave and speak rashly, much more so than his Cuban counterparts, who are generally very precise in the statements they release to the media. For example, Chávez's melodramatic speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2006, during which he labeled President Bush "the devil," was widely deemed a public relations disaster that may have even cost Venezuela its chance at winning a seat on the UN Security Council (Hoge 2006). Likewise, Chávez's open favoritism for left-leaning electoral candidates in neighboring countries appears to contradict his demand that the United States cease its support for Venezuelan opposition groups. In fact, in Peru's 2006 presidential contest, Venezuela's vocal endorsement of leftist candidate Ollanta Humala provoked enough of a nationalist reaction to help Alan García reclaim the presidency (Romero 2006).

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As a result of these dynamics, Chávez's popularity across the globe has suffered. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, while a majority of Venezuelans and a plurality of Argentines express confidence in the Venezuelan President, 59 percent of Bolivians, 74 percent of Brazilians, 66 percent of Mexicans, 70 percent of Peruvians, and 75 percent of Chileans have "not much" or "no" confidence in his leadership. Outside of Latin America, trust in Chávez is similarly lacking. Although he has garnered considerable support in countries like France (37 percent), Lebanon (40 percent), the Ivory Coast (53 percent), and Mali (50 percent), by and large, Venezuela's leader "inspires little confidence

outside of his home country, either across Latin America or around the world” (Pew 2007b, 61, 64-65).¹¹

Chávez has, however, participated in and supported Cuba’s peculiar version of the war on terror with some success from a public diplomacy standpoint. Because Cuba lacks a formal extradition treaty with the United States, the Chávez government has petitioned to have Posada brought to Venezuela once again to face trial for his role in the 1976 Cubana Airlines bombing.¹² Thus far, all extradition requests have been denied. The United States’s apparent unwillingness to extradite Posada or charge him with more than minor immigration violations only tends to increase the moral authority of the Venezuelan position (Bachelet 2005b).

For officials in Havana or Caracas, simply asking for sympathy and solidarity is not enough. We now turn to how both countries *act out* their solidarity with those struggling for a better economic and social future in the developing world: international aid. Without these programs, Cuba’s and Venezuela’s rhetorical claims to serve as moral guideposts of the struggle against neoliberalism would appear far more superficial.

Cuba’s Medical Missionaries

Cuba, like many other countries across the globe, has long used foreign aid to garner international support. Yet it is not aid in and of itself that acts as a public diplomacy asset but, rather, the particular way in which it is deployed, marketed, and received as part of a greater humanitarian social project of third world solidarity. After all, although the U.S. government is among the largest donors of material assistance to many regions and countries of the world, its programs are often poorly publicized and inefficient (Easterly 2002, 223-50; Hollander 2004, 16-23). And while the efforts of private and faith-based foundations, NGOs, and other humanitarian organizations—the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and World Vision, for example—may boost the credibility of the United States generally, they have been unable, especially in Latin America, to overcome the anti-American sentiment generated by other controversial aspects of U.S. foreign policy. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, since 2002, the percentage of poll respondents with a favorable opinion of the United States has declined in twenty-six out of thirty-three countries surveyed (Pew 2007b, 3).

Together with scholarships and other forms of educational assistance, international medical programs constitute the bread and butter of Cuba’s foreign aid today. While many of Cuba’s previous technical assistance programs dissipated with the fall of the Berlin Wall, Cuba’s global medical presence has actually grown dramatically during the island’s protracted economic crisis since the end of the cold war. In 1985, roughly twenty-five hundred medical personnel were deployed overseas (Feinsilver 1989, 14); today the number is more than ten times as large. Though estimates vary, it is thought that between twenty-eight and forty thousand Cuban doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel work in roughly

seventy countries around the world. Between fifteen and twenty thousand staff President Hugo Chávez's domestic medical programs in Venezuela, while the others are assigned to a wide variety of posts in remote, impoverished regions of the globe with little or no affordable medical services. Cuba's medical corps is also well trained in disaster-response techniques, as demonstrated most recently in earthquake-ravaged Pakistan, Indonesia, and Peru (Bachelet 2007a, Goodman 2007).

Meanwhile, Havana's Latin American School of Medicine, founded in 1999, provides free tuition and board for more than ten thousand medical students from across the Americas, including close to one hundred from the United States. On the island as a whole, there are between twenty and thirty thousand foreign medical students, all of whom are trained in Cuba's unique and politically conscious approach to medicine (MEDICC n.d.). In addition, foreigners are often welcomed to Cuba to receive advanced medical procedures at low costs (Feinsilver 1989, 20; Morris 2005).

For many opponents of the Castro government, such widespread efforts represent merely a populist gesture intended to curry favor and distract citizens around the world from the regime's domestic failures and human rights abuses.¹³ To the regime's supporters, as well as many beneficiaries of its international assistance, Cuba's long-standing commitment to providing medical services to the third world forms an integral part of the Revolution's internationalism and its solidarity with impoverished peoples throughout the developing world. For Cuban doctors, the opportunity to serve abroad may very well provide a chance to fulfill a charitable vocation, but it also provides access to privileges and experiences few Cubans get the chance to enjoy: seeing another part of the world, earning a larger salary than they could at home, and purchasing consumer items not available on the island. It may be for this reason—this *quid pro quo* of sorts—that relatively few of those doctors who have served abroad (only 2 percent according to the Cuban government) are thought to have defected and emigrated to another country (Dudley 2006; *Salud* 2006). The reluctance of Cuban doctors to permanently leave their families behind also acts as a strong disincentive.¹⁴

Clearly, symbolism is also an important component and driver of Cuba's medical diplomacy. That one hundred U.S. citizens from poor, underserved communities are studying medicine in Havana for free and are quoted in international newspapers discussing the prohibitive costs of medical school in the United States lends credibility to the Cuban government's critique of economic inequality in the first world (Jiménez 2005; Griffith 2006). Cuba promotes its international medical work just as readily as it promotes the successes of the island's domestic health care sector. Interestingly, in this regard, Cuba occasionally benefits from foreign actors who are drawn to tell the story of the island's approach to health care. One recent example is the film *Salud* (2006), a documentary produced by the Atlanta-based organization Medical Education Cooperation with Cuba in close collaboration with Cuban medical authorities. By profiling the work of Cuban doctors in such remote locations as the Gambia, the film suggests

that the philosophy behind Cuban medical internationalism might serve as a new paradigm in the fight for global health. Michael Moore's popular 2007 documentary *Sicko*—in which 9/11 rescue workers are brought to Havana to receive medical treatment not easily available to them in the United States under existing health care and insurance frameworks—is the latest and certainly most high-profile example of this trend. Each act of promotion, whether generated inside or outside of Cuba, may help deflect long-standing U.S. objections to the island's domestic political and economic shortcomings. However, precisely because Cuba is seen as a nation under siege (references to the “embargo-stricken” island are popular in literature praising Cuba's third world assistance programs), what personnel, equipment, and supplies the country does offer abroad or to foreign citizens are often received as a valiant, genuine sacrifice.

The behavior of Cuban medical personnel on the ground also contributes to their success as a public diplomacy tool. Though outnumbered and under-resourced compared to Western relief efforts, Cuban doctors in earthquake-ravaged Pakistan earned the enduring respect of common Pakistani citizens because they lived in working-class neighborhoods or tents (when working in the countryside) and spent modest sums of money. By contrast, Western relief agencies drew criticism because large portions of the funds that had been raised went to covering overhead costs for the organizations themselves (Akhtar 2006). In fact, requirements that U.S. aid projects be entrusted to domestic contractors and that those contractors use their funds to purchase American-made materials or surplus agricultural goods rarely ensure that U.S.-funded development work is carried out in the most cost-effective manner (Berríos 2000, 35-52). A similar phenomenon has been observed in Bolivia since Evo Morales came to power. Although the United States remains the largest donor of bilateral assistance in the country, its programs tend to emphasize long-term goals that do not produce visible, easily-marketable results (Bridges 2006). As these cases demonstrate, Cuban medical missionaries across the world, trained to embrace a community-centered approach to their craft, have been adept at effectively winning hearts and minds while also providing effective services to the world's poor. The United States may devote greater total sums of money to aid and relief efforts globally, but Cuba clearly gets more bang for its buck.

Yet what is remarkable about Cuba's medical diplomacy is that what is marketed as charity is not purely charitable. Although the Cuban government foots the bill for scholarships and some of the physicians it sends abroad, in a number of cases, receiving countries pay for relief services. The most obvious example is Venezuela, where the Chávez government compensates Cuba for the services of its medical employees with subsidized supplies of oil. Likewise, since 1996, South Africa has paid for Cuban physicians to staff hospitals across the country (*Salud* 2006; Schweimler 2001; Feinsilver 2006). For each of its doctors deployed abroad under these conditions, Cuba charges substantially less than the cost of a private physician. Nonetheless, the financial aspects of this work are rarely publicized, and normally only a portion of the fees earned makes it to Cuban doctors themselves. In recent years, exports of Cuban medical services—including the

provision of medical treatment to foreigners in Cuba, the licensing and export of Cuban biotechnology, and the operations of foreign medical missions—have become an increasingly important source of revenue for the Cuban economy, on par, according to some estimates, with the income earned from tourism (Feinsilver 1989, 19; Morris 2005; Ernst & Young 2006).

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In these ways, the Castro government's foreign medical programs represent a successful marriage of internationalism, symbolic politics, and a much less visible commercial impulse. Each of these elements, in turn, helps Cuba generate a large reservoir of credibility in international forums.

Petrodiplomacy and Beyond: Venezuela's Use of Foreign Aid

Since coming to power in 1999, Venezuela's Hugo Chávez has dabbled in various forms of medical assistance. Most well known is Operación Milagro (Operation Miracle), a program, financed by the Venezuelan government but staffed largely by Cubans, that provides free eye surgery to patients who could not afford it otherwise. Thus far, the program has provided more than three hundred thousand cataract and other eye operations to patients from across the hemisphere, including many Venezuelans (*Miami Herald* Staff 2007). Following the Cuban model, President Chávez has also recently opened his own medical school to train community doctors from across the hemisphere (ELAM n.d.).

Overall, Venezuela's current international aid efforts have a much broader focus and reach than Cuba's due to the fact that Chávez has more money to spend. Buoyed by unprecedented global oil prices, the Venezuelan president has put an impressive portion of the government's petroleum revenues toward an array of international aid, financing, loan, and subsidy programs. In Bolivia, for example, Chávez has pledged to help construct a \$1.5 million rural radio network that will broadcast literacy lessons to the indigenous poor. Jamaica likewise stands to benefit from the nearly \$273 million in Venezuelan financing allotted to help pave a major highway and construct a sports complex and civic center. Meanwhile, in the West African nations of Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger, Chávez committed \$3 million to drought-relief efforts (*Miami Herald* 2006).

The most obvious asset that Venezuela can give away is oil itself, and it is in this area that the Chávez government has had the most success institutionalizing its foreign aid programs. In June 2005, twelve of the fifteen members of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), along with Cuba and the Dominican Republic, signed up to participate in PetroCaribe, an agreement under which the signatories receive preferential payment conditions for Venezuelan oil (Williams 2005). Two other proposed initiatives—Petrosur (uniting Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Brazil) and Petroandina (Colombia, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador)—offer similar financing benefits as well as expanded cooperation on subregional energy matters. Yet neither is as developed as the Petrocaribe framework, where Venezuela is virtually the only substantial energy producer and the patterns of collaboration are therefore more straightforward (Arriagada 2006; *The Economist* 2005).

In 2006, the Caracas-based Center of Economic Research estimated that the Chávez government had spent more than \$25 billion abroad since taking office, while other projections put the total at \$16 billion (Forero 2006a). According to the Associated Press, Chávez has pledged \$8.8 billion for various international aid and financing commitments in 2007, the majority of which is destined for his Latin American neighbors (Pearson 2007a). While it is uncertain that all of these pledges will be fulfilled, and while "financing" offers will theoretically be repaid, by any measure, Venezuela spends more on direct aid in Latin America than Washington. In March 2007, President Bush boasted that U.S. foreign aid for Latin America reached \$1.6 billion in 2006 (Bush 2007). Yet it is thought that the value of Chávez's regional oil subsidies alone may surpass this amount (Pearson 2007b). Moreover, large portions of U.S. aid are concentrated in the Andean region on antinarcotics initiatives rather than general development assistance.¹⁵

One might think that the size, scope, and financial generosity behind Venezuela's aid programs would be enough to outpace the public diplomacy benefits of Cuba's medical outreach. In practice, the results are not so clear. While size does matter, more important is how these diverse projects are perceived within Venezuela's broader foreign policy agenda. Some aspects of the Chávez government's international activism—providing free eye operations, granting housing loans to the poor, authorizing disaster-relief funds—create obvious and

clear gains for Venezuela's image and reputation among receiving populations. Yet, particularly when it comes to Venezuela's use of oil, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between community relations and a bold, though not necessarily intelligent, commercial strategy.

In addition to providing subsidized oil for the poor, Venezuela has dramatically expanded both energy and nonenergy negotiations with a variety of international partners. Since 2005, for example, Brazil and Venezuela have collaborated on the construction and upgrading of refineries as well as joint oil exploration off the Venezuelan coast (Wertheim 2005, 28). With Colombia's government, hardly an ally of left-wing *chavismo*, Venezuelan officials are pursuing the possible construction of a pipeline linking the two countries to facilitate Venezuelan exports to Asia (Marquez 2004). Venezuela has also substantially expanded the scope of its energy collaborations with China and Iran, developments that have provoked concern in the United States. Finally, although the project was put on hold in the summer of 2007, Chávez has worked closely over the past several years with a number of neighbors on plans for a ten-thousand-kilometer natural gas pipeline that would travel south from Venezuela across the entire continent (Lapper 2006, 14-18). Outside of the energy sector, Chávez has extended his financial reach as well, most notably in Argentina, where the Venezuelan government has purchased more than \$5 billion in Argentine bonds (Associated Press 2007; Barrionuevo 2007).

Chávez opponents see many of these programs as unfeasible, fruitless political investments that will bring few long-term benefits to the Venezuelan economy or its citizens. The Venezuelan government, on the other hand, frames these initiatives as part of a greater struggle to create a basis for independent regional development and, in a spirit of solidarity, further the economic and social integration of the hemisphere—rhetoric also used to characterize projects like Operación Milagro and PetroCaribe. Yet Venezuela's wide-ranging endeavors also reveal several practical, rather than strictly ideological, components of Chávez's foreign policy strategy: the desire to diversify the sources of Venezuela's revenue, decrease its dependency on U.S. purchases of its oil, and increase the country's influence as a major economic player in the hemisphere. Because Venezuela's international trade profile is so large, and because the government has aggressively sought to leverage its financial resources abroad (Chávez is known to be a price-hawk in OPEC), Chávez is seen in some quarters as more of a power broker than a third world revolutionary. Controversial diplomatic initiatives with Iran and Syria, deliberately intended to antagonize the United States, have only furthered this perception. By contrast, with the help of the U.S. embargo, Cuba has been content to portray itself as the little guy, the perennial David to the U.S. Goliath.

In this context, the size of Venezuela's charitable largesse exposes the country's leadership to accusations of clientelism and of attempting to simply purchase influence. More worrisome for Caracas, however, is the risk that those programs with a more straightforward humanitarian focus (where the potential public diplomacy gains are large) may be perceived as less than altruistic extensions of *chavista* global power politics. Cuban aid programs have been subject to similar

accusations. Yet because Cuba can more easily fall back on well-established and widely accepted narratives of its victimization at the hands of the U.S. empire, and because the island's stake in trade, energy, and commercial matters is relatively small, the politicking inherent in its international outreach may appear less threatening, while being no less strategic. While the positive public diplomacy effects of many of Chávez's aid programs throughout the world should not be discounted or underestimated, at the very least what this suggests is a point of vulnerability in Venezuela's public diplomacy strategy. If taken too far, populist generosity can appear openly patronizing, a conundrum the United States has often faced with its own foreign aid programs.

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Other vulnerabilities are more directly of Chávez's own making. In addition to publicly supporting candidates in foreign elections, on several occasions the Venezuelan government has been criticized for using international aid to influence electoral outcomes. One noteworthy case occurred in Nicaragua where Chávez donated fertilizer and subsidized oil to Sandinista-controlled districts in the run-up to the 2006 presidential contest. As before, for a government that constantly warns of U.S. interference in Venezuelan affairs, such clear favoritism struck many as hypocritical (Wyss 2006). Cuban aid programs, by contrast, have not been so obviously or publicly linked to domestic electoral politics.

Where Venezuela does possess a concrete advantage over Cuba is in its strategic and highly successful foreign aid programs within the United States. In addition to Venezuela's nine consulates across the country, Chávez possesses an important foothold in U.S. territory in Citgo, the subsidiary of PDVSA. As a result, shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, Chávez and Citgo partnered with former congressman Joseph Kennedy's nonprofit organization, Citizens'

Energy, to bring low-cost heating oil to poor U.S. families during the winter months. During 2007, the program expected to deliver 100 million gallons of oil to more than four hundred thousand households in sixteen states, including many in low-income neighborhoods in the heart of major American cities such as New York and Boston. Close to 163 Native American tribes were also scheduled to benefit from the program. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the initiative has created a forum for successful person-to-person exchanges, bolstered class solidarity, and fostered interest in the Chávez model among some recipients. Beneficiaries of the program have been flown to Caracas on exchange trips intended to demonstrate the achievements of the Chávez government. In early 2007, Citgo even launched a national television advertising campaign in which recipients of the subsidized oil are shown thanking the company and Venezuela for their generosity. U.S. congressmen whose communities participate in the program—including influential representatives Charles Rangel (D-NY), José Serrano (D-NY), and William Delahunt (D-MA)—have praised it publicly. While a majority of Americans continue to distrust Chávez's leadership (Pew 2007b, 64), the material and symbolic impacts of Chávez's generosity have been substantial. As one commentator put it, "By showing that the richest nation on earth requires foreign 'assistance' to meet its citizens' basic needs, Venezuela reveals our most profound failure as a system" (Featherstone 2007).

Public Diplomacy and the Politics of Cuban Culture

Cuba has also engaged in many cultural promotion activities that are not explicitly political in their orientation or purpose. Particularly in the post-cold war era, the promotion abroad of Cuban art, music, and film has helped the island fulfill other, equally important national interests: the attraction of tourists and hard currency, for example. Although nearly all Cuban cultural products sold or promoted abroad are channeled through state-run cultural institutions, their connection to political actors and traditional foreign policy objectives often appears indirect (Fernandes 2006, 9-16). Such state involvement in the domestic culture industry is not in and of itself politically motivated. Throughout Europe, state-sponsored film subsidies have helped directors confront Hollywood's tremendous economic and cultural power (Cowen 2002, 73-82). Yet from the early days of the Revolution, Cuban cultural authorities have heavily screened the types of narratives and messages that artists on the island are able to disseminate. As a result, painters, filmmakers, and musicians alike are by now familiar with the general parameters of what is and is not acceptable (Aguirre 2002; Fernandes 2006, 47-51).¹⁶

Still, notwithstanding notable and continuing instances of censorship, the relationship between the government and the artistic sphere is not strictly hierarchical. In other words, the themes that artists treat and the ways in which they are treated are subject to more debate and flexibility than in other realms of Cuban domestic politics. Since the end of the cold war, Cuba has been forced by

economic necessity to turn to foreign partners to help sustain domestic cultural production, a process that has naturally exposed the island to the commercial demands of the international market. The rebirth of tourism as a strategic sector of the Cuban economy has also helped introduce themes that were previously frowned upon by cultural officials. In many ways, then, what we are discussing here is the flow of cultural discourses in a globalized economy and how the Cuban state attempts to influence or benefit from their diffusion. Rather than simply mandating the type of art or music to be produced, Cuban cultural authorities help reframe and orient grassroots trends to match their own objectives (Fernandes 2006, 33-41; Moore 2006, 251-65).

One of the early noteworthy cultural movements to serve a public diplomacy purpose for the Cuban government was the rise of the Nueva Trova music style in the late 1960s. Observing the growing power of protest songs throughout the hemisphere (*nueva canción*), Cuban authorities recognized that music could play a powerful role in uniting domestic and international audiences alike in the fight against U.S. imperialism. Despite their origins as underground performers viewed suspiciously by the state, artists like Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez were eventually embraced by government institutions and came to be identified with the humanitarian and selfless spirit that ostensibly guided the Revolution, writing songs dedicated to Che Guevara and other noted revolutionary figures and events.¹⁷ Casa de las Americas, Cuba's well-known publisher and cultural house, created the Centro de la Canción Protesta (Center for Protest Song) to support their efforts (Fairley 1984; Moore 2006, 135-69). As Rina Benmayor (1981, 11) put it, even when the lyrics were not overtly political, singers of the Nueva Trova were often "seen by foreign audiences as live representations of the Revolution, and their songs [were] heard as documents of the history, struggles, loves, problems, and dreams of that social process." To this day, both Milanés and Rodríguez remain important cultural figures with domestic political influence, global artistic appeal, and sizable profit potential.¹⁸

Film is another arena in which Cuba has obtained notable international success. Motivated by the idea that a revolution in politics simultaneously required a revolution in culture, Fidel Castro's fledgling government established ICAIC, the Cuban Institute of Cinematic Arts and Industry, just eighty-three days after it took power. ICAIC-sponsored productions have demonstrated a striking degree of sophistication and independence over the years. In particular, the films of noted director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea have challenged simplified, triumphalist depictions of the Revolution and its progress. As uncomfortable as some Cuban officials may have felt about such films as *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*; 1968) (a nuanced account of a young man grappling to understand the rapid changes the Revolution has brought to Cuban society) or *La Muerte de un Burócrata* (*Death of a Bureaucrat*; 1966) (a caustic critique of the Revolution's inefficient bureaucracies), the richness of these works as compared to the social realism of other Soviet bloc countries helped sell the idea that Cuba's revolution, despite headlines about political prisoners and repression, could be seen as a vibrant, stimulating, and intellectually creative endeavor (Schroeder 2002).

In the post-cold war era, ICAIC has only been able to survive by partnering with international distributors and at times foreign directors. As a result, Cuban film today, though still rich in social content, also incorporates narratives that fulfill a market purpose. In line with the island's revived role as a prime tourist destination, Cuba is once again portrayed as an alluring land of music, dance, sex, and darkly pigmented skin. Yet these portrayals are often coupled with storylines that reinforce political discourses supported by the Cuban state (Soles 2000).

Take, for example, the 2005 feature *Habana Blues*, written and directed by Spaniard Benito Zambrano, coproduced by a Spanish company, and widely played in commercial theaters across Europe and Latin America, but filmed on the island with ICAIC's full input and a cast of well-known Cuban actors.¹⁹ The film tells the story of Ruy and Tito, two best friends frustrated with Havana's poverty and determined to achieve international success as rock musicians. As they had hoped, Ruy and Tito are offered a contract from a foreign record company, but the agreement includes provisions stipulating that they will be marketed abroad as antigovernment exiles, an approach with apparently more commercial potential. The quintessential dilemma between "making it big" and "selling out" is thus reconfigured as a choice between global commercialism and patriotism. Ruy eventually sides with his country and decides to stay behind. While the screenplay's frank portrayal of the problems Cubans face each day is revealing, the film's pulsating rhythms, sexually suggestive dancing, and romanticized depiction of Cuba's cultural underground reinforce common stereotypes of the island's exotic appeal and depict Cuba as a commodity to be consumed by tourist dollars. Of course, each of these narratives serves the public diplomacy interests of the Cuban state. In the end, Cuba is both a grassroots ideal that Ruy cannot abandon and a land that foreigners should visit as an escape (Del Pozo 2005).

Other contemporary Cuban films possess similar dualities. The critically acclaimed *La Vida Es Silbar* (*Life Is to Whistle*; 1998), for example, confronts the alienation that many Cubans feel in an economically deprived country struggling to find itself in the post-cold war wreckage. In the end, the film's various characters reconcile themselves to their pasts, and their faith in Cuba's future is restored. Yet at the same time, the film employs tropes of Afro-Cuban spirituality that have become highly marketable to international audiences as signs of Cuba's "otherness" (Fernandes 2006, 61-71).

Recent trends in Cuban music demonstrate many of the same contradictions and subtleties. The Buena Vista Social Club (1997), a Ry Cooder project that reunited long-forgotten musicians of traditional Cuban *son*, sold millions of records internationally in the 1990s, won a Grammy Award, and generated numerous spin-off albums. As the owner of the copyrights on each of the disc's tracks, Editora Musical de Cuba, a government-owned publishing company, has benefited financially from direct sales of the disc abroad. Yet the government has arguably gained more from the project's perpetuation of discourses and imagery that drive the tourist industry. An integral part of Buena Vista's success stems from the ways in which the disc as well as the subsequent documentary directed by Wim Wenders (*Buena Vista Social Club* 1999) "represent Cuba as a nostalgic

fantasy that has been preserved intact from the 1950s" (Fernandes 2006, 94). It is no casual coincidence, then, that in almost every café on Old Havana's tourist-friendly Obispo Street, small music groups dutifully replay the album's most well-known songs. In fact, the international orientation of the project was so important that the group did not give its first public performance in Cuba until 2000, a full four years after the initial recording was made (*New York Times* 2000; Neustadt 2002).

Less well known is the rise of Cuban rap music during the same period that Buena Vista achieved its success. As Sujatha Fernandes explored in her book *Cuba Represent!* (2006), rappers on the island generally fall into two categories. Commercial rappers, like the members of the hugely popular group Orishas (the members of which now reside in Europe), tend to portray Cuba as an exotic land of dance, rum, cigars, and sexuality, the ideal hedonistic tourist getaway, while shying away from explicitly political themes.²⁰ On the other hand, more politicized groups like Anónimo Consejo and Obsesión, popular internationally via grassroots networks, echo the Cuban government's critiques of materialism, globalization, and the United States. Many of these noncommercial groups, however, have also pushed the domestic envelope, boldly inserting racial issues into public discourse and suggesting that Cuba's leaders are complicit in the growing inequalities emerging in their own society as the island is slowly inserted into the global economy. Nonetheless, as Fernandes detailed, Cuban cultural institutions have proven to be quite effective at co-opting and containing these critiques at an acceptable level (pp 85-134).²¹

Cuba's government has clearly benefited internationally from the spread of certain cultural phenomena. While some of the island's cultural promotion activities took direct cues from Soviet precedents—for example, both the USSR and Cuba heavily promoted their respective National Ballets abroad, and Cuba continues to do so—Cuba was and remains unique among communist nations in the degree to which it has successfully mobilized more popular art forms (Nye 2004, 74; Gould-Davies 2003). Yet analyzing Cuban cultural politics as public diplomacy presents a number of unique challenges. It remains unclear how and to what extent the symmetries between the island's cultural, economic, and foreign policy needs are coordinated across governing institutions. While different branches of the island's government receive guidance from the central organs of the Cuban Communist Party, tacit understandings also are likely to influence the criteria cultural authorities use when assessing their approaches to the arts. On the other hand, the government is not all-powerful, especially when confronting the demands of the international market and the increasing pace at which artists themselves have pushed the thematic agenda in recent years. Nonetheless, whether by virtue of conscious manipulation, luck, or a bit of both, Cuba has successfully managed these competing imperatives in ways that both boost the government's reputation abroad and sustain primary sources of income. And despite their strong criticisms of Cuban society, films like *La Vida es Silbar* or the music of Obsesión indirectly reinforce the power of the state by suggesting that the ideals of the Cuban Revolution are constantly evolving but never entirely irrelevant.

Venezuela's National Cultural Revival

By comparison, Venezuela has made few inroads into the promotion of its culture abroad for public diplomacy purposes. Like Cuban officials in the 1960s, the Chávez government is trying to foster a renewed appreciation for national music styles. "Social responsibility" laws mandate that 50 percent of the content played by radio stations be Venezuelan in origin, including traditional styles not particularly attractive to teenagers in Caracas. The Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with museums and the foundation *Misión Cultura* (part of the network of *misiones* discussed above), is working to give local artists greater opportunities for performing or exhibiting their work. As a result of these policies, Venezuelan folk-style musicians such as Simon Díaz and Anselmo López are regaining popularity (Forero 2005). A national network of Venezuelan youth orchestras—founded thirty-two years ago but now funded and supported by the Chávez government—has also been successful at attracting goodwill through international performances (*The Economist* 2007). Perhaps following the Cuban example, the Venezuelan government has devoted resources to the creation of forums in which socially conscious rap and other popular music styles are welcomed (Brosnan 2006). Nevertheless, none of these figures or phenomena is yet internationally associated with the Bolivarian Revolution in the same way that the musicians of the *Nueva Trova* were seen as the Cuban Revolution's personal emissaries.

Venezuela has also recently endeavored to set up an organization akin to ICAIC to promote increased domestic film production. Known as "Cinema Village," the \$42 million project hopes to produce up to nineteen films a year that incorporate "themes of social empowerment, Latin history, or Venezuelan values." As might be expected, the project has met accusations that it is intended to simply be another propaganda device of the Chávez government. Its organizers, however, insist that the goal is noble: to counter the stereotypes of Latin Americans promoted in most Hollywood films (Llana 2007).

Overall, however, most of these projects are in their beginning stages, and they have thus far filled a more important role in Venezuelan domestic cultural politics than on the international stage. Few Venezuelan films can be said to have directly served the public diplomacy interests of the Venezuelan government or even achieved the same level of international popularity as their Cuban counterparts. One of the more admired and critically successful Venezuelan films in recent years, 2004's *Punto y Raya*, holds mixed implications for the Venezuelan regime. The story of a Colombian and a Venezuelan soldier who find unlikely friendship amidst a struggle at the border between their two countries, the film promotes the importance of solidarity "in a conflicted world with problems such as intolerance, the desire for power, and a lack of communication," humanistic values with which the Bolivarian Revolution certainly identifies according to its supporters (Press Book n.d., 4). At the same time, one cannot help but conclude that the film's critique of strident nationalism is also leveled partially at the Venezuelan state itself for its own role in perpetuating tensions with its neighbors. On the other hand, Venezuela's 2007 candidate for the Academy Award for best foreign film, *Maroa*

(2006), highlights the impact of a state-sponsored music program on the life of a poor girl from a Caracas slum. Nonetheless, any political overtones remain far less important than the personal dimensions of the film's story.

Successes, Failures, and the Search for Soft Power

While the Cuban and Venezuelan governments share many of the same ideological orientations and goals, their public diplomacy strategies differ. At the very least, President Chávez's penchant toward the dramatic, combined with his ostentatious largesse and reputation as a power broker, make Venezuela's public diplomacy presence more susceptible to accusations of grandstanding. Notably, a comparison of these two cases suggests that public diplomacy success is not always directly correlated with the amount of resources devoted to the effort. In fact, perhaps because Cuba appears more modest in its ambitions, it seems more genuine—an ironic result in some ways. After all, one would expect global opinion to be far more suspicious of the international promotional efforts of a one-party state than those of a government that, for all its difficulties, continues to answer to electoral politics and the free market.

Of course, as this article also suggests, the real root of the difference may be that Cuba can easily rally support behind the widely discredited U.S. embargo. Venezuela, on the other hand, depends heavily on sustained oil trade with the United States as well as other deepening commercial ties to the North.²² As a result, the Chávez government's opposition to the United States risks appearing less deeply rooted, less permanent, and more embedded in rhetoric than true revolutionary sacrifice. History may also be on Cuba's side in that the island's revolution has already acquired a certain mythic status, while for Venezuela, Chávez's long-term legacy has yet to be written. Havana's aid and other outreach efforts have remained at their core the same for nearly half a century. Consequently, the scope and ambitions of the island's public diplomacy efforts are well understood throughout the world. Venezuela, on the other hand, is a new, more geopolitically powerful player whose intentions are viewed with greater suspicion.

If we define public diplomacy as the quest to build symbolic capital on the world stage, both Venezuela and Cuba have achieved noteworthy levels of success. Yet Cuba, in addition to building symbolic capital, also demonstrates that public diplomacy can be used to earn important quantities of material capital. As we have seen, the island's international medical programs bring in substantial sources of revenue, and its influential and wide-ranging international cultural presence helps sustain narratives that boost the island's tourist potential. Cuba's historic defiance of the United States also undoubtedly contributes to its novelty as a vacation destination. Political tourists may travel to Venezuela, but thus far at least, such income flows remain irrelevant to the Venezuelan state's financial well-being.

Officials also frequently describe public diplomacy as an effort to build “soft power,” a term coined by Joseph A. Nye Jr. to denote “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye 2004, x). While Nye’s work has largely focused on projections of U.S. power, Cuba demonstrates the concept’s validity as clearly as any other example. With little military or economic might, especially after the disappearance of Soviet subsidies, Cuba’s diplomatic successes in recent years are almost wholly attributable to the island’s soft power—the gradual but persistent branding and projection of a series of intertwined discourses generating sympathy for Cuba’s culture, social achievements, and revolutionary mystique. In public, Cuban officials might resist the implication that their exchange programs, humanitarian aid efforts, or cultural activities are designed to help the island accumulate “power” of any kind on the world stage. Such a suggestion undermines the carefully constructed narrative of victimization so central to the regime’s public identity. However, Cuban leaders are also clearly cognizant that public diplomacy is a fundamental source of international legitimacy and influence, both of which are crucial to the preservation of the government’s power at home.

Cuban and Venezuelan foreign aid programs also elucidate one of the most insightful elements of Nye’s theory, namely, that the line between hard and soft power is rarely clear. The ability to provide foreign aid ultimately stems from economic resources and can therefore be considered a form of hard power. Yet Venezuelan and Cuban aid programs, marketed as more than just humanitarian gestures, are deployed to reinforce an association of each government with anti-imperialism, third world solidarity, and social justice, thereby enhancing each country’s national prestige on the global stage. A tool of hard power is thus used to pursue soft power. Conversely, in Cuba’s case, elements of soft power—film and music—sustain narratives that help Cuba earn sizable quantities of cash, a form of “hard power.”

When compared to the United States, another distinguishing characteristic of Cuban and Venezuelan public diplomacy is that many of the same tactics, tools, and messages used to promote each country’s interests abroad are equally popular as promotional tools at home. While an average U.S. citizen has little knowledge, for example, of the activities of USAID or may be unexposed to the Voice of America, Cuban and Venezuelan officials aggressively market their social achievements, cultural products, and narratives of revolutionary solidarity in pursuit of domestic as well as international support. Tensions do exist, however. Frustrated with the quality of health care, and without a public forum to voice their concerns, Cubans may privately object to the thousands of doctors being sent abroad by authorities on international missions. Similarly, in the run up to the 2006 election, many Venezuelans expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of money Chávez is spending abroad while poverty persists at home (Kraul 2006). In other words, for some nations, aggressive public diplomacy can be politically risky if it requires material sacrifices readily felt by citizens.

The Cuban and Venezuelan cases also point to the utility of approaches that incorporate framing theory, or a recognition that a country can actively advance

multiple public narratives at once. Cuba, for example, is alternately revolutionary, generous, victimized, cultured, tourist-friendly, sexy, and even antiterrorist. Equally important is an appreciation of the regional context in which these narratives operate. Though unique in Latin America in terms of their reach, sophistication, strident anti-U.S. focus, and, in Cuba's case, longevity, Cuban and Venezuelan public diplomacy efforts do not exist in a vacuum. The "misinformed" messaging of the American mass media is not their only target; nor are they ingested by passive Latin American publics. Within the region, states from Brazil to Colombia also have an increasing stake in seeking to influence the terms with which they are viewed. Often Latin American nations are involved in a complex balancing act between the polarized narratives of pro-U.S./promarket/prodemocracy viewpoints and pro-Cuba/pro-Venezuela/pro-social justice stances. Unfortunately, little systemic research has been conducted on Latin American public diplomacy outside of the Cuban and Venezuelan cases. Given both countries' stated commitments to, on one hand, anti-imperialism, and, on the other, multipolarity in world politics, comparative historical work on Soviet, Chinese, Indian, or Indonesian strategies of public diplomacy might also prove illuminating.²³

Cuban public diplomacy, though less vulnerable than Venezuelan approaches in many ways, is far from uniformly successful. The 2003 incarceration of seventy-five independent journalists elicited outrage internationally and motivated many long-time supporters of the regime to speak out in opposition to the government's repressive actions. Cuba's sustained material and human assistance programs combined with its geopolitical success at defying the United States may have helped the island's government earn enough clout to serve on the new UN Human Rights Council as well as its predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights. Yet the island's own deplorable human rights record is still regularly examined—not just by the United States, but by independent organizations, other countries, the European Union, the United Nations, and of course, the Cuban American community.

Still, in a period where basic democratic practices remain a litmus test of a country's acceptance in the international community, it is remarkable that Cuba's one-party government continues to be seen as a trusted and valued partner in many international arenas and institutions, including the United Nations, UNESCO, the World Health Organization, the Non-aligned Movement, and others. In the end, Cuba's public diplomacy, indeed its soft power, has been instrumental in helping Havana wield a degree of international influence far out of proportion to the size and relative strategic importance of the country.

Yet well beyond the embargo against Cuba or Washington's apparent endorsement of the 2002 Venezuelan coup, it is the United States's own international blunders that act as Cuba's and Venezuela's most powerful public diplomacy tool. No amount of solidarity campaigns or international aid does as much for Venezuelan or Cuban public diplomacy as the war in Iraq, the torture scandal at Abu Ghraib, or accusations of mistreatment at Guantánamo Bay. While the links are not direct, broad failures in U.S. foreign policy create important rhetorical,

thematic, and discursive spaces into which Cuban and Venezuelan critiques of U.S. leadership can thrive and find new converts. Soft power is thus not simply a matter of proactively cultivating attraction; it can also be gained indirectly through complex processes of triangulation responsive to established political discourses. Context is everything.

However Cuba and Venezuela's current political and economic models are judged or reviled, both countries will continue to seize upon the anti-American moment in which we live. Until that climate changes, Washington's calls for its regional and international allies to rally around the promotion of liberal democracy in Havana and the containment of Hugo Chávez will be received with ambivalence at best.

Notes

1. In an earlier February 2007 Associated Press–Ipsos Poll, only a plurality (48 percent) of respondents supported restoring full trade relations with Cuba, although 62 percent of Americans supported reestablishing diplomatic ties with the island. To the best of the authors' knowledge, there have been few comprehensive international polls conducted on opinions of the U.S. embargo.

2. Among the most commonly mentioned successes in the health arena are an infant mortality rate less than that in the United States (5.6 deaths per 1,000 births) and a life expectancy equal to that in the United States (seventy-seven years). Cuba is also highly regarded for having, as of 2005, 1 doctor for every 159 citizens (Feinsilver 2006). Cuba's educational system is widely praised for sustaining universal school enrollment, nearly universal adult literacy, proportional representation of females (including at the university level), and a strong technical base (Gasperini 2000).

3. Even Cuban Americans concede that the policy has been ineffective. According to the 2007 Florida International University Cuba Poll, 23.6 percent of Cuban Americans believe that the embargo has "worked well." Nonetheless, 57.5 percent support continued sanctions.

4. At the 2001 Congress of Latin American and Caribbean Journalists, for example, representatives of *Prensa Latina* won support for the creation of *Visiones Alternativas*, a Web page that gathers progressive viewpoints from across the hemisphere (<http://www.visionesalternativas.com>).

5. As Jorge Castañeda has stated, "I think that the Cuban Revolution lost any meaningful relevance, value, to the left in Latin America in practical terms . . . when it became perfectly clear that whatever successes they may have been achieving in education and health were only possible thanks to a huge Soviet subsidy—probably equivalent to 25 percent of GDP—and that that Soviet subsidy could not be extended to any other country in Latin America. Consequently it was just not a model to follow. . . . He became more an iconic figure, a figure mostly of Latin American nationalism and anti-Americanism. I think that's what the kids like. They know he's not a revolutionary, they know that the Cuban experience is a failure. They know that they would never accept the type of regime that exists in Havana. But they still say well, yes, but he stands up to the Americans" (quoted in Norris 2006).

6. At least in the case of the Zapatistas, it is important to note that Cuban officials let it be known that they were not providing material assistance to the rebels.

7. The work of the National Security Archives at George Washington University has been instrumental in exposing the varying links between the U.S. government and a number of Cuban exile terrorists. Recent work, for example, suggests that the CIA possessed concrete advanced knowledge in 1976 of plans to bomb a Cuban passenger airliner. For more information about U.S. knowledge of Posada's activities, visit <http://www.gwu.edu/%7Eensarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB153/index.htm>.

8. An additional case where the responsiveness of Cuban public diplomacy can be readily seen was Havana's reaction to young Elián González's arrival on American soil in late 1999. Cuban authorities took advantage of the ensuing custody battle to align themselves with narratives of "family values." Elián's eventual return to Havana represented a sizable public victory for the Castro government against its Cuban American foes (De la Torre 2003, 1-13).

9. For example, the former head of Brazil's Workers Party and former chief of staff for President Lula, José Dirceu, was trained as a guerilla in Cuba while in exile from Brazil's military regime (Maxwell 2003). Lula has also known Castro personally for more than twenty years. Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, whose father was a member of the Salvador Allende government, has expressed her desire to be the first Chilean head of state to visit Cuba since Allende. Sources say she intends this visit to be a gesture of gratitude for the Cuban regime's willingness to house Chilean refugees of the Pinochet dictatorship, many from her own political party: the Partido Socialista de Chile (Garland 2007).

10. Restrictions on the press include a 2004 punitive media law that places limitations on some broadcast content as well as cases in which fraudulent allegations of tax violations have been used to harass opposition journalists. The closure of RCTV ignited a wave of criticism and protest within the country and internationally. Nonetheless, strongly anti-Chávez newspapers such as *Tal Cual* continue operations.

11. It is important to note that opinions of Chávez's leadership may be distinct from opinions of Venezuela generally, or even of Venezuela's social progress and governmental programs. Polling data on these other dynamics are not available.

12. Venezuela's connection to the Posada case extends beyond the failure of his previous trial in Caracas. In the early 1970s, while still on the payroll of the CIA, Luis Posada Carriles served as chief of operations at the notorious Venezuelan intelligence agency DISIP, where he worked actively to repress guerilla movements with close ties to Havana.

13. Leading actors in the Cuban American community have argued that Castro's foreign legion of medical professionals helps conceal the inequalities of Cuba's widely praised domestic health care system. As evidence, they point to severe shortages in common medicines; the deplorable state of many medical facilities; as well as the phenomenon of "health apartheid," that is, hospitals, facilities, and medicines reportedly reserved for health tourists and government officials only. Cuban officials deny these charges, blaming the lack of medicines and equipment on the U.S. embargo.

14. Anecdotal evidence suggests that an upsurge in defections has taken place since the fall of 2006, when the U.S. government pledged to provide fast-track entry to Cuban medical professionals living abroad. As of March 2007, the program had reportedly received several hundred applicants, but many complained of bureaucratic delays in the processing of paperwork, causing them to be stranded in third countries without legal status (Bachelet 2007a).

15. A number of qualifications should be mentioned. First, the source of President Bush's numbers is unknown; nor is it entirely clear what portions of the foreign assistance budget he included in his estimates. According to a Congressional Research Service Report from January 2006, total requested U.S. foreign aid funding in Latin America and the Caribbean for 2006 was initially just over \$1.9 billion, with approximately 43 percent devoted to antidrug or military assistance (Veillette, Ribando, and Sullivan 2006). Before the addition of the Millennium Challenge program in 2005, allocations were even further skewed toward "guns" rather than "butter." Regardless of these discrepancies, direct Venezuelan aid still outpaces Washington's efforts. For 2008, the Bush administration has reportedly requested an 8.5 percent *decrease* in foreign assistance to the region (Oppenheimer 2007). In addition, American private investment and the activities of private charitable organizations undoubtedly contribute to the well-being of the hemisphere and easily surpass the aid provided by either the U.S. or Venezuelan governments, but these flows are not easily marketed for Washington's direct benefit.

16. The degree of censorship experienced by Cuban artists and writers has varied over time. Many consider the early 1960s to have been years of relative intellectual freedom characterized by an explosion of new ideas revolving around the theme of Cuban national identity—this despite Fidel Castro's famous 1961 dictum: "Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing." By contrast, between 1971 and 1975, years known as the *quinquenio gris* (five gray years), the Cuban state imposed a much harsher degree of artistic dogmatism (Del Aguila 1994, 53-55).

17. Rodríguez, for example, spoke openly of his admiration for the Beatles and Bob Dylan. In an era when Cuba's leaders were fighting to take back their culture from what they saw as the predatory consumerism of the West, such statements earned him obligatory work duty on a fishing boat. Milanés also fell into disfavor for a period and was sent to the infamous UMAP camp for political and social dissidents.

18. In more recent years, numerous incidents have tested the symbolic bond between Nueva Trova and the Cuban Revolution. One example surrounds the creation of the Pablo Milanés Foundation in 1990, an institution financed independently by Milanés's own earnings and dedicated to supporting young Cuban

musicians and artists. In 1995, Cuban officials abruptly closed the foundation's operations, likely due to unease over its relative autonomy from the government. Both Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez protested the decision strongly. A year later, the foundation reopened on a smaller scale, and Milanés appears to have reestablished his friendly relationship with the organs of government, accepting national cultural awards in 2005 and 2006 (Moore 2006, 303; *El Mundo* 1995; *La Ventana* 2007). A younger generation of Nueva Trova artists—typified by Carlos Varela—have also encountered difficulties with authorities over the politically charged content of their lyrics. Robin Moore (2006, 162) argued that Varela has “negotiated a fairly stable position . . . as a critic who supports the socialist government even as he finds fault with it.” In September 2007, however, it was reported in various Cuban American blogs that a Varela concert in Havana involved open protests of the Castro regime, including chants of “Freedom, Freedom!” (Cuba Watch 2007).

19. With such active international participation and broad commercial success (most Cuban films typically travel on the international film festival circuit), *Habana Blues* (2005) stretches the definitions of “Cuban cinema.” While the film may have been conceived by a foreigner, because it was produced in consultation with Cuban cultural officials at ICAIC, the Cuban Institute of Cinematic Arts and Industry, and (more importantly) because it participates in creating a distinctive imaginary of contemporary Cuba, it is relevant to a discussion of Cuban public diplomacy. In fact, it is precisely this interaction of public and private actors that makes the film an apt example of the complex sources of public diplomacy in the globalized world.

20. The relationship of the group Orishas to the Cuban state is perplexing. With origins in the influential underground group Amenaza, Orishas formed in Paris when two of Amenaza's members were permitted to travel to France on an educational exchange trip and joined forces with other expatriate Cuban musicians. While the group has continued to reside abroad, signing major record deals, collaborating on film projects from across the world, and undoubtedly amassing a fortune from touring and disc sales, they have performed in Cuba, sampled one of the Buena Vista Social Club's most well-known songs, and even, according to their Web site, met personally with Fidel Castro. They continue to be promoted by the Cuban press as legitimate representatives of Cuban youth culture abroad. Yet although nationalistic displays of the Cuban flag form an integral part of their act, they have generally refrained from overt political activity and have even collaborated with popular Cuban American rapper and outspoken Fidel Castro critic Pitbull (Fernández 2005; Orishas n.d.).

21. There are, of course, artists who fall outside of these two broad categories. See, for example, the 2006 documentary *East of Havana*, directed by Emilia Menocal and Jauretsi Saizarbitoria, which explores the lives of three young MCs from Alamar who embrace neither commercialism nor grassroots left-wing causes, preaching a highly individualistic and at times antigovernment message.

22. Despite the embargo, under existing exemptions from the policy, U.S. food exports to Cuba totaled more than \$340 million in 2006, making Cuba highly dependent on the United States for its domestic food security (U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council 2007). Nonetheless, in terms of overall trade in the year 2006, the United States accounted for only 5.9 percent of Cuban imports in 2006, while the United States was the source of 30.2 percent of Venezuela's imports (*CIA World Factbook* n.d.).

23. In fields as diverse as history, political science, and international relations, many scholars have studied elements of U.S. public diplomacy in Latin America (for example, see Kingsley 1967; Fein 1998; Roorda 1998; Fejes 1986). Scholars have even examined Chinese public diplomacy in the region (Ratliff 1969). Yet much work is needed to investigate the public diplomacy activities of Latin American countries themselves. From a historical perspective, it would be fascinating to look at the successes and failures of Nicaragua's Sandinista government in courting U.S. public opinion through media campaigns and other strategies. Brazil would make an equally compelling case study. Not only are its present and past cultural promotion activities quite active (see, for example, the 1995 documentary *Bananas Is My Business* about the global appeal of classic Brazilian/Portuguese film star Carmen Miranda), but Brazil is today entering the Latin American “aid” market as it were, leveraging its biofuels expertise to increase its soft power.

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