

Tomás Várnagy

Caricaturing the Twin Towers attack: The *New York Times* worldview through its political cartoons

Our task is to show that *The New York Times* political cartoons¹ since the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, might be a rich and singular material to look at the ways in which one of the most important newspapers in the United States constructs an image of the social and political reality of itself and of the world in the sense of the German term *Weltanschauung*².

PART I: INTRODUCTION

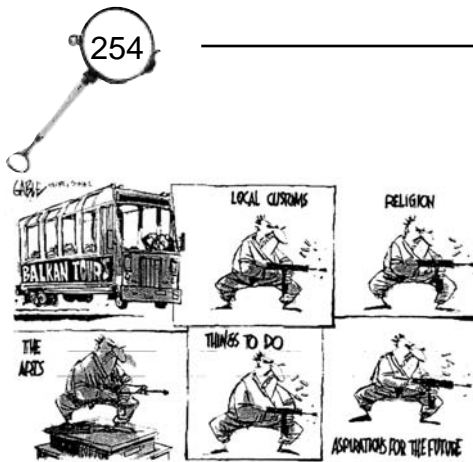
After the Second World War, the mass media have played an important political factor in all major international crises. All these situations have been widely reported and commented by the Western and local media, and this could be seen specially in the ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia, where everyone became witness of the overwhelming involvement of the media struggling to influence the result of such conflicts either by helping to produce and enhance them or by mediating and activating the peace process, as the following cartoon shows:



In the specific case of the conflicts in the Balkans the Western media has played a considerable role in shaping our behavior and disposing our positions towards these wars³. Truth or reality did not stop the process of creating images or meaning creation, based on the media versions of history, which often had very little to do with a systematic and careful selection and interpretation of the facts⁴. This process was also affected by old stereotypes and prejudices about the rest of the world, popular in the culture of the United States.

Another important aspect of the media are the visual dimensions which, as the text itself, are fully involved in the process of the meaning creation and –therefore– potential conveyors of dominant views. Political cartoons are a significant aspect as a special genre of graphic art which represent, at the same time, an important part of the visual dimension of the media. Cartoons are inseparable from the political texts in the press and are not just mere illustrations of the printed word but integral components of it; in fact, they are called “editorial” cartoons.

Therefore, political cartoons can be considered as independent from the printed device not only in bearing meaning but even as domains where meaning is created, changed or reproduced. As a specific realm of media meaning construction, political cartoons are a unique material through which to study the dynamics of creation and recurrence of Western (U.S.) dominant views about itself and the rest of the world. Centuries long prejudices about the Balkans are summarized in the following cartoon:



In some cases, the study of political cartoons has been disregarded because they have been treated only in relation to their humorous characteristics, therefore, within the realm of study of the sociology of humor⁵. Criticizing this point of view, on the one hand, we could say that this body of research failed to consider the role played by political caricatures as a vehicle of conveyance and reproduction of stereotypes; and, on the other hand, most of the cartoons analyzed in this paper have no “humor” at all. From our point of view, it can be asserted that the political cartoon is a special genre of political editorials that represent an excellent setting for the accumulation of commonly, and dominant, accepted views. The aim of our paper is to show the role of the U.S. political cartoons as a significant component of the media message in reinforcing predetermined views, stereotypes and, last but not least, some critical aspects on the aftermath of the Twin Towers terrorist attacks.

The subject matter of this paper is the image of the issues of the United States and the world as seen through *The New York Times* political cartoons during three months after September 11, as a significant part of the media discourse production. The discourse generated by U.S. cartoons relies rigidly upon visual dimensions that frame reality on the basis of a conflicting opposition between the Western world and the rest of the world seen as the *other*.

Symbols and metaphors, serving the structural and stylistic features of cartoons used by cartoonists, as expressive tools for

the political ideas conveyed, are direct consequences of commonly shared views and stereotypes embedded with a Western ideology of dominance on the non-Western world. The Western imagery places the rest of the world at the backward end of a continuum between different levels of civilizations, and this has remained unchallenged, at least, as we can look at the phenomenon through the political cartoon since the last decades.

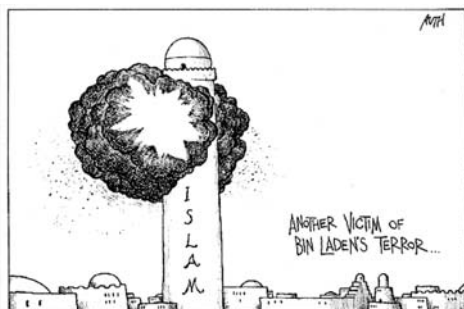
Images in the Political Cartoons

Cartoons, firstly, are a specific form of the media which can easily become conveyors of stereotypes and prejudices, and they also tend to disparage mostly communities different from those of cartoonists; secondly, political cartoons play a considerable role as conveyors of well identifiable political positions. Their principal mission in a political democratic system consists of promoting and developing critics so as to “bring order through governmental action”⁶, and to ensure an acceptable level of political debate as an indispensable element of democracy, but without rejecting the legitimacy of the system itself.

The mission of the political cartoon is to deal with the striving of the cartoonist to influence the viewer to a particular viewpoint and to predispose him/her to a particular action. In this sense, political cartooning is a function of the political system in spite of the tendency of depicting the political leaders in a negative way. Criticism towards the political system is guaranteed by law and even encouraged to contribute in increasing the legitimacy of the system. Therefore, the cartoonist critique of the system is usually benevolent because they consider capitalist democracy as basically fair, but susceptible of further improvement.

The advantage of cartoons is its universal and direct message and its ability to express in a synthetic way opinions and partisan views rather than being conveyors of objective news reports. Their directness and simplicity makes them strong and unique, not beautiful nor artistic. Their viewpoints on political issues are frequently presented through satire, caricature or allegory, assum-

ing a very intense tone, simplifying and condensing their political content rendering it powerful and easily understandable for the viewers. It is in this condensation of a complex idea “in one striking and memorable idea that we find the continued appeal of [...] great cartoon”⁷, for instance:



The immediacy of information and interpretation of the cartoons might be a powerful tool for attacking power and injustice, but exaggeration, the ephemeral and transitory nature of the message embodied in them creates a danger of using simplifications instead of a responsible and meticulous analysis. The political cartoons are a particularly well equipped cultural domain of stereotypes combined with prejudices plus dominant views coming from the circles of power. Pictorial imagery could be more virulent than the written text, and “the hackneyed phrase has it that a picture is worth a thousand words. We might suggest a new one to the effect that a million words may not be able to undo the negative impact of a bad picture”⁸. A good example of a very dangerous prejudice:



The cartoonist has an advantage over the editorialists that work with the printed word, because “humor” officially does not count, so unacceptable messages can be expressed, are more permissive and safer from possible social sanctions than any “serious” written text.

The cartoonists’ point of view is a mixture of artistic style and “imaginary” which helps the cartoonists to proceed in the selection of situations and characters as elements of the visual message, which gives the opportunity to present a wide variety of symbolic images. Cartoons serve as vehicles of transmission of an imaginary world linking the mythical with the real and creating a fusion, an amalgam that is very convincing to the emotional mind. In other words, everyday political events, either important or trivial, are presented to the viewers through the filter of a familiar mythological interpretation, like the following representation of History (note that she is a Western woman):



Analysis of an Example: the Terrorist

The cartoon of the XIIIth century warrior (see below) gives us, in a quick glimpse, an interpretation based on commonly accepted views: terrorists are not Westerners, they come from the East, probably from some Islamic country and, most likely, Arab. The message in this cartoon is activated with the help of a metaphor: an armed and primitive “Easterner” with a turban and a curved sword, waits for a victim in a XXIst century lower parts of a Western city. The cartoonist

explains the conflict in a very condensed way, but he assumes that terrorists are “Oriental” (whatever that is) and people who cannot be understood rationally because they have a XII century mentality.

The warrior is an archetype of violence, treachery and primitivism, and it is the cartoonist’s summary about reality: primitive East (which belongs to the worst part of modernity) versus developed West, showing an opposition which has been intentionally domesticated through the association with a familiar situation. The origins of today’s violence and savagery are to be found in ancient times, violence “is more violent because it is archaic, born of clan societies, whose archaic forms reveal the disharmonic clash between prehistory and the modern age”⁹, as brilliantly commented by Maria Todorova on the situation in the Balkans which applies perfectly in this case.

Violence and primitivism go together, and they are presented through a symbol of a firm contrast of two different periods in the history of man, trying to give incontestability to the thesis of backwardness of the inhabitants of the East (Near, Middle or Far). The condensation of a complex phenomenon is metaphorically simplified by the barbarous warrior, operating through the juxtaposition of two different realities that stand for two different historical periods or civilizations.



12/19 (week of 12/17 vacation 8/0)

The New York Times Political Cartoons and the Attack

Out of more than 400 cartoons published in the newspaper since September 11 until December 12, we selected and classified them to provide insights into the worldview which comes out from these caricatures. The major actors are Bin Laden, Uncle Sam and Bush; being terrorism, Taliban and Islam the main international issues; while the worries in the United States are the economic questions, intelligence and security, fear, patriotism and civil liberties. Metaphysics (in the sense of abstract, non-empirical beings) are not forgotten: evil, Satan, death, God and History are also present¹⁰.

The national outgroups (groups different from our own) are more homogeneous as compared to the ingroups regarding the typical characteristics endorsed to them which leads, inevitably, to stereotyped visions in a symbolic representation of a nation, or religious denomination (Islam) as a group of people sharing some common characteristics.

The purpose of this analysis is not to look for answers, neither to generate an exploration into the causes of the terrorist attacks, nor to discover the truth of an underlying social reality. Rather, we try to look at the way in which meanings are constructed through discourse and cartoons and how language (in this case images that caricatures convey) is used to represent different pictures of reality. In this specific case the question is how this attacks are explained and understood within *The New York Times* cartoons as a form of media discourse.

The language used by cartoonists is only to a small extent a picture of reality and most often is a mixture of symbolic images and metaphors drawn, mainly, from a collection of common beliefs. The cartoonists convey the mainstream political views, but differently from the reading of a newspaper editorial or opinion article, the cartoon, just by a quick glimpse, can easily give a short description and interpretation of reality.

When referring to foreign non-Western groups, countries or people, cartoons very frequently reveal the paranoia that is still an essential part of Western media rhetorics about the Balkans, the Middle East or

Afghanistan. The threatening antagonism between the *self* and the *other* is typical of many Western representations, be it cartoons, articles or books, like Huntington's now famous best-seller *The Clash of Civilizations*.

One of the major characteristics of the process of the enemy image construction is the identification of individuals with the idea of the nation or antagonistic group, there is the identification of the *self* versus the identification of the enemy with a unique figure who should be the embodiment of evil. This happened during the Gulf War with Saddam Hussein, during the war in Kosovo with Milosevic and now with Osama bin Laden.



The construction of an image of the enemy figure is usually a pre-requisite to war. There is obviously a need, before the war starts, to create the image of the enemy in which the political cartoons play a special role, mythologizing the world, stigmatizing the enemy and creating something like the struggle between good and evil.



PART II: ISSUES AND CARTOONS

In the lines below, we simply summarize in text what can be seen in some of the chosen more representative of the 400 cartoons of *The New York Times*. Nothing is added and no commentary is made.

METAPHYSICS

History and War

“History” has not finished, we can see in a cartoon two books together, one of them is *The End of History* by Francis Fukuyama, and the title of the other one is *History, Continued*, with a picture of the Twin Towers destroyed (T: 13 S)11. An image, or pictorial representation, of History is a (Western) cleaning lady who takes to the garbage (which already has “Slavery” and “Piracy” as trash) a bomb with a “Terrorism” sign on (S: 4 O).



War can take years, it is like going down with death/war in a roller-coaster at full speed (D: 29 O); the war on terrorism is endless, and it is worthless to nuke Afghanistan, obliterate all training centers or kill every Muslim militant (R: 23 S), because –even if it is done- there still are going to exist terrorists.

Evil and Osama bin Laden

A giant monster, "Terror", jumps on a little Earth (S: 19 S), but the incarnation of evil is Osama, who is a puppet in the right hand of Satan (A: 19 O), or is dictating a letter to a secretary which is Death (M: 23 O), and even worse than the Devil himself, when some hellish creature asks Satan if he has ever thought of spreading disease through the mail, he answers: "Good Lord, man! We do have limits!" (S: 17 O); letters sent to the U.S.A. are like flying carpets with Death sitting on them (A: 21 O).

When Osama opens an envelope which has the answer of "Who does God hate?" he finds a mirror in it (T: 11 O) and is struck by lightning when he says that "all infidels will d..." (B: 9 O). His footprints are nothing else but destruction (B: 7 O); Satan tells Osama: "Look, we gotta talk... you even make me look good!" (B: 27 S) and, on the other hand, the Devil criticizes Osama because he produced the unification of the Americans, bringing out the best in them (O: 14 S).

On a more terrenal situation, when Osama is making a propaganda campaign, he is shown talking to a microphone which is a machine gun (M: 12 O); and, instead of praying with the Koran he uses a terrorist manual (M: 20 S); spends money on guns instead of food for children (D: 26 O); a poster seen by young kids show him like the famous WW I poster of Uncle Sam with the following text: "Uncle Osama wants you to die. Join the martyrs!" (A: 14 O). But, at the same time, he is also shown as a hypocrit, having a revised edition of the Koran, when he presumes that he wishes to share the glorious fate of the dead warriors (O: 8 O).



Islam, Terrorism and Taliban

Islam is not guilty of terrorism, just Osama, who is using it as a tool and tries to have the Muslims on his side (S: 16 O); furthermore, another victim of Osama's terror is Islam itself (A: 11 O). Taliban are the protectors of Bin Laden and terrorism (M: 24 S and D: 24 S); they are depicted as vultures (O: 25 S), or as hijackers of a whole country like Afghanistan (A: 2 O). A Taliban warrior in Hell complains to the Devil because he thought that he was going straight up to heaven (M: 13 S).

At Taliban schools the teaching is not about maths, language, science or literature, but "how to hate Americans" (B: 2 O); and worst than that is the teacher telling young students that the Koran "tells us to kill all Christians, Jews, non-believers, Americans, Israelis, Russians" and "treat women as animals" (D: 9 O). A young student at a Taliban school does not know what to do with 70 beautiful women because he has never seen one (D: 1 O). The Taliban warriors burn Koran books to make a fire due to cold weather (A: 4 N).

After the attacks the Taliban were presumably looking for Osama, but they could only find "oppressed women, jailed Christians, hungry children, executed adulterers, terrified dissenters..." (A: 25 S). Their logic is to eliminate women to propagate the movement (D: 21 N). The Taliban are threatened with sending their women to college (D: 26 S). When the Taliban have to hide, one of them says that "it is no longer safe to show our faces", a woman in a *burka* thinks: "Welcome to the club" (M: 9 O).



The Taliban, and/or terrorists, live in holes and are like coward rats (T: 16 S), running away from the U.S. attacks disguised in burkas as women (D: 27 S and B: 9 D), or defectors (M: 14 N), being discovered by the spaceship Mars Odyssey in a cave in Mars (T: 28 O), or are depicted as vermins (M: 19 N). Terror, death, money and oil interests, are related (S: 26 S); money is one of the worries of Osama and the Taliban, they know that their assets could be frozen (O: 25 S), while the American soldiers "aim [their guns] for their wallets (of the Taliban)" (M: 26 S), and Osama's haunting nightmare is the loss of money due to the fall of the Twin Towers (B: 25 S). Terrorists are more interested in the \$ 25 million reward for Osama than "72 lousy virgins" (D: 20 N).

The image or representation of the terrorist is a XIIth century warrior in the worst part of a XXth century city (S: 15 O), as it is Osama's "Stone Age style" (T: 11 O). The terrorist are also shown looking at different religious books, like the Koran, Torah, Gospels or Vedas, a phrase like "Tou shall commit mass murder..." (S: 28 S), or yelling against Americans that bombed a Red Cross warehouse: "Only infidel barbarian scum would kill innocent...", and the next caricature shows the same fighter saying: "...never mind" (A: 18 O). Hamas protests the injustice of being labeled terrorist by blowing children with a nail bomb (T: 12 D).

The U.S. is criticized for the sanctions before September 11 against Iraq and Afghanistan and the bombing of Afghanistan because it produces more terrorism, more retaliation in something that "never ever ever the end" (R: 15 O). In an ironic twist, the eradication of terrorism starts at the sources: the world's largest oil reserves and the Taliban should be overthrown because they oppress women and because gas prices must be kept low (R: 4 O).

Preoccupation with the possibility of the terrorists getting nuclear arms is shown with a rat (terrorist) looking in a garbage can in Russia full with bombs (M: 16 N); or a rat with Osama's face looking around an abandoned Russian nuclear stockpile full of bombs (O: 22 N).



INTERNATIONAL

Afghanistan is depicted as a destroyed country, where the tallest buildings, among ruins, has only two or three floors (D: 15 S); after the victorious Northern Alliance enters Kabul it is seen among ruins and a destroyed city (D: 13 N), which is invaded by men in dark suits, who represent "[U.S.] big, fat corporations" (O: 26 N).

The non-Taliban Afghans image is of bloody and violent warriors (T: 2 N), chained by their long beards to the Taliban (A: 21 N); who play primitive and savage games (D: 30 O); or "honest and hardworking" farmers that produce heroin (D: 24 O). Afghans are considered totally ignorants on democracy (S: 14 N), admonished by Uncle Sam to have a democratic government, Western style (T: 18 O), or write a Constitution based on *The Federalist Papers* (T: 2 N); a run down U.S. urban school is showed together with uncle Sam, who says that "Afghanistan must educate all its children if it wants to become a great nation like us" (A: 2 D).

Refugees who flee to Pakistan are despised by the Taliban because they don't crave for martyrdom (A: 28 S) and ironized by the American cartoonist because it would be better for them to be Presbyterians or Methodists (O: 26 S). The Taliban left Afghanistan in a hurry leaving it completely destroyed with a thank you note (M: 7 D).



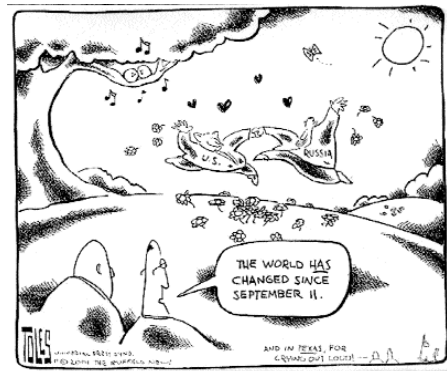
Friendship between **Israel** and the United States is clear when an Israeli soldier, fighting in a bunker, welcomes his “brother”, Uncle Sam (A: 13 S). The image of a crying baby, which represents Sharon and Israel, demands Uncle Sam for its support for a Palestinian state and asks for his allowance; the answer of Uncle Sam is that the allowance was given to the September 11 fund and that he should change his own diaper (O: 9 O). The relationship is changing and they have different positions: on the one hand, President Bush tells Prime Minister Sharon that their (Israeli) timetable for agreements in the Middle East is dictated by the U.S.A. (T: 27 S); while, on the other hand, a long line of Israeli tanks had fired their cannons and the officer in charge says to President Bush: “I couldn’t hear you... Don’t do what?...” (B: 26 O). A critic to Sharon’s policy shows the “two sides getting closer...” being Arafat policy the other side (D: 20D).



Arab governments are identified with terrorism (D: 13 S); even the “moderate Arab states” which support “moderately” the U.S. and, also, are “moderately” critical of terrorism (A: 12 O). The Arab press, pretending to defend their Muslim brothers, lies about the reality of happy and liberated Afghanis, accusing the Zionist-Imperialist bombing and the U.S. oppression (A: 21 N); all news from Al Jazeera are nothing else but bloody lies (D: 27 N). **Arafat** rides in a destroyed “terror bus” and says that “I’m not responsible... I’m just along for the ride” (A: 6 D); in another one he has signs: “don’t want to make peace”, but he “want but can’t” even though he “want to and can, but not yet” (T: 6 D). The **Palestinian** terrorist gun has two cannons, one which will fire against the shooter (S: 7 D).

The **Saudi** Arabs are a big burden for Uncle Sam (D: 13 O), but Americans must be cautious with them because they are treacherous (O: 22 O), their support is enigmatic (T: 7 N) unreliable (S: 29 O), and they are not much interested in fighting for the U.S.A. (D: 3 O). **Iraq** and **Iran** are the roots of Al Qaeda terrorism (A: 9 O) and Saddam Hussein, suspected of preparing biological weapons (T: 22 N), feels that he is going to be attacked by the U.S. (M: 22 O), or threatened to be bombed (B: 28 N), and is visited by Osama followed by fighting airplanes asking “Did I come at a bad time?” (T: 1 D).

Russia is seen as an ally, dancing in a paradisiac field with the U.S. and somebody comments that “the world has changed since September 11” (T: 22 N); Putin is roasting hot dogs in a campfire while Bush is burning the ABM Treaty in the same fire (A: 15 N).



In three different cartoons, Uncle Sam is criticized for not signing the **global warming** treaty; many people in a very long line ask him: “you’re either with us or against us” (T: 31 O). When he says “better safe than sorry” for the terrorist threat he is presented with the threat of global warming (T: 6 O); and when U.S. explains the need of a coordinated action of the global threat of terrorism and says to the people of the world that we’re all in this world together, they respond: “now you get it!” (T: 17 S).

THE UNITED STATES

Main Problems

The main problems and issues of the United States, according to a summarizing and highly critical cartoon are that: all Arabs are terrorists, the attack was God’s way of punishing bad Americans, it proves the case against globalization (or for it), the attack underlines the need to give the rich another tax cut, the U.S. don’t want to respond in a way that will make the terrorists angry, the need of leveling the Muslim world into one large parking lot, the attack proves the case for missile defense (or against it) (T: 4 O).

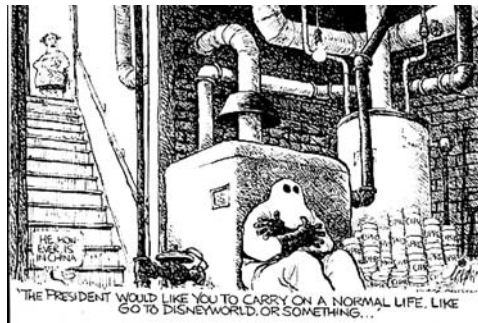
As far as the internal situation is concerned, a diagram made by “Generalissimo El Busho” reveals the El Qaeda conspiracy, composed by the “evil ones” or “bad people” who “lives in caves” like the disloyal Americans, flag burners, Nafta/WTO protesters, secular humanists, unions, democrats, cynics, journalists and innocent, gullible kids (R: 1 N). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), symbolized by a car has a decal with the following text: “Have you hugged a terrorist today?” (M: 29 N).

Fear

To scare people, Bin Laden does not need to disguise as the headless horseman in *Sleepy Hollow* (B: 30 O); a psychoanalyst tells her patient that she’s suffering from “Osamnia” (A: 31 O); children during Halloween are scared and sad under a shade of Bin Laden (O: 29 O); three drawings of

Osama as “Scary”, “Scarier” and “Scariest” show Osama, then Osama with a gas mask, and finally, Osama with an atom drawn on his hat (B: 9 N).

A suspicious looking customer in a store is welcomed because he is buying beer and, therefore, is not one of those Islam followers (D: 2 O). Life is not normal, people shelve themselves in basements (O 18 O), and they cannot sleep reading about terrorism, Bin Laden and anthrax (A: 24 O).

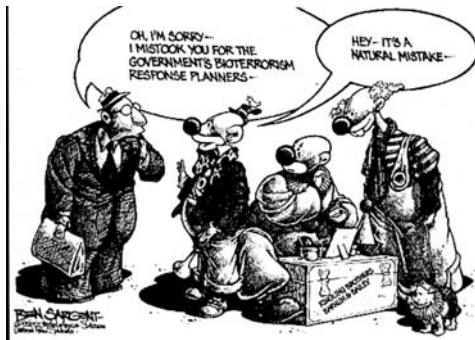


There is fright of flight, threat of debt due to unemployment, peace through war and suspicion of confusion when Bush says that: “the only fear we have to fear is fear, or not...” (R: 25 O). The fact is that a woman who has to pick up her kids and can’t work late in the factory is considered a terrorist (R: 29 O) while the Congress is seen as a “Chicken House” due to the cowardly behavior of its members as a whole (O: 10 O and 23 O). Somebody was considered a hero because he was a frequent flier (B: 18 N).

The great fear was aroused by anthrax and the mailmen were considered one of the most hazardous duties (B: 24 O); people were afraid of getting letters (M: 15 O; B: 16 O) and even dogs are afraid of mailmen (D: 8 N). The letters with anthrax are infectious agents not only of the disease but of fear (S: 18 O), being hysteria the most fearsome toxic, not anthrax (S: 11 O). Life should go back to normal, wearing a gas mask in front of a TV set (T: 25 O), or trying not to breathe (B: 18 O).

Intelligence

The CIA, FBI, the Armed Forces intelligence and security services of any kind have been very strongly criticized for their lack of information and response to the terrorist attacks: a group of clowns is mistaken for the government bioterrorism response planners (S: 26 O); clowns are also the responsables for airport security (O: 6 N); the whole region of Asia where Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are, is called *Kantunnerstan* (T: 23 O). Several high ranking military chiefs do not coincide on the correct time (O: 7 N); a miracle weapon made by the pentagon is a bomb of the exact size of Afghanistan (R: 17 N).



U.S. intelligence did not see the attacks coming because “they didn’t take terrorism seriously, didn’t know anything that was going on in other countries, didn’t speak any language except English” (T: 13 O). They are shown as inefficient (A: 26 S; O: 30 O; S: 20 S), dumb (M: 3 O), lazy and stupid (O: 24 O; D: 20 O; S: 25 S; T: 26 S), and ignorant (S: 5 O; D: 20S). In case of the beginning of the ground war, the U.S. soldiers are reassured by two bombs that they’ll be there: “Red Cross depot! Chinese Embassy!” (D: 3 N). The relationship of the U.S. soldiers with the Northern Alliance is shown as impossible due to lack of common sense on the part of the American military (D: 31 O).

Patriotism

It is “cool” again to be patriotic (M: 19 S), there are American flags all over the ruins (B: 25 O) and in the top of a giant apple, representing N.Y. (B: 16 S). Democrats and Republicans march together (M: 14 S), and people chants “U-S-A, U-S-A” (R: 27 S). A drawing, similar to the Iwo Jima monument with firemen and policemen, instead of soldiers, raising a flag (S: 17 S). Another American flag, instead of the stars, has faces of people: Sikh, African American, Muslim, Japanese, Chinese, Mormon, Jew, Buddhist, Hispanic, Catholic, Arab, Protestant and Indian (B: 14 S), mixing ethnic, national and religious groups.

Uncle Sam aims with a gun having a tear in his eye (B: 18 S), saves children among the ruins (S: 13 S), or puts up his sleeves as getting ready to fight or start working in the reconstruction in three different cartoons (M: 12 S; O: 13 S; A: 16 S). There is a fighting airplane called “Talibanisher” (B: 31 O) and it is dangerous to be ironic because you could be accused of treason (R: 1 O). A critical view of patriotism shows a contest: “Win the fashion war on terrorism”, and there are flags for dogs, condoms, Arab turbans, etc. (R: 20 O).

Civil Liberties

There is a great worry about the civil liberties, Americans try to teach them to the Taliban (S: 9 O), even with bombs (D: 11 O), but the main problem is in the United States because there is the fear of losing some liberties due to some kind of authoritarian moves supported by the right and inflamed patriotism. One of the oldest traditions of U.S. tribunals are the lynching mobs (S: 27 N). The Statue of Liberty looks on a poster with a picture of death with a “Hatred” sign (S: 14 S). A cat agrees with two birds about their right to fly out of their cages (B: 3 O), national security guards inspect and examine the Statue of Liberty (M: 28 S).

The dilemma is security versus freedom, shown as a business problem for a stocker, where security stocks have much higher figures than civil liberties (T: 15 O). The same

Attorney General Ashcroft

dilemma is for Uncle Sam, who has to choose between the path of freedom or security (T: 18 S), or when he advises a little child, representing civil liberties, to “watch out for the backswing” of his big sword (O: 19 S).

The light of the Statue of Liberty is almost lost amidst the smoke (A: 12 S), and everybody is required to have more vigilance than ever not only in office buildings and airports, but also for the Bill of Rights (S: 18 S). The representation or image of the Bill of Rights, a Founding Father, is considered suspicious –a terrorist- because it is a strange character, the *other*, due to his breeches and powdered wig (S: 27 S).

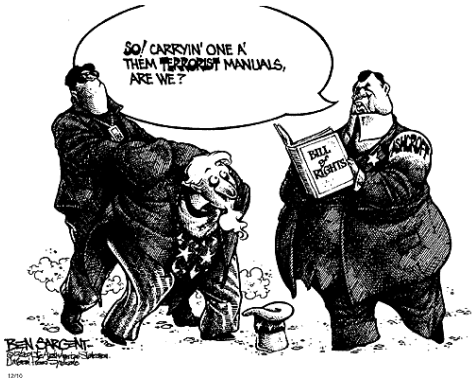


It seems that the need for security in the population is much higher than the maintenance of civil liberties when a man asks a policeman: “Why haven’t you arrested me? Look how suspicious I am! I’d feel much safer if you’d violate my rights” (R: 6 O). On the other hand, and with a strong critical view, Bush is considered a jerk because he abuses the Presidency asking the Americans “to learn to shut up... or else”, he is shown as a fanatic patriot with a big flag saying: “After the deluge, moi” (R:11 O). Everybody is suspect of being a terrorist, even somebody who “don’t pay their overdue parking tickets” (S: 28 N).

The Attorney General Ashcroft is seen as new Taliban because he can hold people for seven day without charges, listen to conversations, try and convict in secret and even execute without appeal (O: 19 N); the Mullah Ashcroft will tolerate music, kite-flying and women, but “questions and dissent are forbidden” (A: 5 D). His new security plans include warrantless searches, arrests of Muslims, unlimited detention, wiretapping lawyers, and secret military trials, to which Putin (former head of the KGB) comments: “Ahhh... Just like the old days...” (D: 16 N). Uncle Sam is arrested because he has a terrorist “manual” (Bill of Rights) (S: 10 D). A critical comment is that all this is OK because “the only way to save America is to destroy it” (R: 29 N).

Ashcroft can go through anybody’s mail (O: 12 N); kills the Rule of Law because in the war in terror, sometimes sacrifice is necessary (A: 13 N), condemns a man to be hanged because he have the look of a terrorist in “the name of civilization and the rule of law, of course...” (S: 19 N). When he prays he confesses to God that he arrested thousands of Moslems and even a few Jews, but no christians (D: 28 N) and considers the Statue of Liberty a suspicious French immigrant with a flaming torch too close to three major airports (S: 15 N). When a Founding Father writes that “Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech, or of the press”, Ashcroft tells him “Go ahead! Give aid and comfort to the enemy!” (T: 11 D).

When Bush is told by a bureaucrat that the next source of terrorism with global reach is the warming of the planet, “threatening every nation on it” and even though they [the U.S.] have been warned “but refuse to do anything about it”, Bush replies to the man taken away by policemen “enjoy your trial before a secret military tribunal...” (T: 2 D). When Ashcroft refuses to let FBI use gun registrations in terrorist investigations, thanks to the gun lobby, he says that “we have to protect at least ONE constitutional right” (D: 2 D). He searches for terrorists with a torch made with the U.S. Constitution (D: 5 D).



President Bush

In a fierce critique to Bush, he was considered –before September 11- a “big fat zero, a drunken frat boy who cheated and bullied his way into presidency” but, with the attack, desperate people looking for leadership considers him a great moral figure whose prestige and popularity will increase with the death of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan; the only drawback is that “everybody gets nuked, but the bright side is that his popularity rating is going to be 100%” (R: 29 S). Instead of spending time studying Arab and Afghan history, Bush is undecided to play golf or watch football (R: 10 N).

President Bush had a growth spurt after the attack (A:23 S), while most of the population agrees with him and 91 percent considers him the Son of God, even if there are people against him for whatever reason (R: 13 O). He is also compared to Atlas, holding the whole Earth on his back (M: 2 O), and Uncle Sam asks him to cut a Bin Laden tree making sure “to get all the roots” (M: 18 S).

When he divided the world into those who are for us and those who are against, the terrorists and Bin Laden saw this statement as “things are going according to plan” (D: 21 S). When somebody is asked to say nice things about the President because he is expected to be backed unreservedly, the answer is that “some people are even dumb-

er than Bush” (R: 27 O), or that “Bush’s war is stupid”, even though nobody knows anything about it (R: 8 N), including Bush (R: 15 N).



Economic Issues

Economic troubles coming out from the attacks include difficulties to get insurance (B: 4 O), layoffs and unemployment (T: 21 O; O: 4 O), slowdown of business and investments (T: 1 O), lack of sales (S: 1 O), but the most impressive is that the “synchronized global economy” is like an orchestra which is going to fall into a precipice (T: 14 S), and economy is like a giant turtle who doesn’t want to move (B: 4 N). The solution is showed by an Uncle Sam poster calling Americans to buy (A: 27 S), or Major Giuliani urging everyone to come to New York and buy something (D: 28 S). “The Consumer” is found, scared, in a cave (T: 6 N). To best way to defeat Islamic terrorism is to buy lots for Christmas and, thus, help the economy (T: 14 N).

Great criticism is made against the wealthy and powerful Americans and their corporations, when sacrifices must be made by the future retirees because the wealthiest one percent will have tax-cuts (T: 29 S). Part of the war efforts are, thanks to Republican camouflage, “huge tax cuts for the super rich” (A: 20 O); Republicans are identified with the tax cuts and do not worry about giving money to fight terrorism (S: 9 N); a message from the Commander in Chief (Pres. Bush) is: “ask not what you can do for your country!” while sitting on a cornucopia with

the inscription: "More tax cuts for the super rich", full of money taken by rich people (A: 6 N); or corporate tax breaks are disguised with the stars and stripes of the U.S. flag (S: 30 O). Scared Congressmen with the anthrax threat make it easy for big companies and rich people to get tax breaks (D: 25 O), and the real heroes of this war are the corporations who obtain tax cuts due to the world in turmoil (T: 26 O). The "patriotic" big corporations (IBM, Enron, GM) pick on the government pocket while Bush is distracted firing a gun against Bin Laden (O: 12 D).



Airlines

Airport security personnel gets very low wages (D: 17 S) and has no training neither benefits (D: 15 O); for Republicans, this "unorganized, underpaid cheap labor" is the "perfect work force" (S: 6 N); but airline companies try to get all kinds of help (B: 20 S) and, also, take advantage of Uncle Sam to bail out the industry (D: 19 S) getting funds from the Congress while the rail transportation system has a very low budget (O: 24 S). The only way for railroad companies to have a bail out would be to "hijack a train and drive it into a building" (T: 25 S). Airlines have a very powerful lobby and even President Bush helps them, acting like a cowboy similar to John Wayne riding an airplane (B: 29 S).



Government

The government has grown and is intervening due to that war factor: is like a monstrous genie coming out of a lamp and Uncle Sam tells him: "Now, remember. Once this terrorism problem is over I want you right back in the lamp" (M: 2 N). Two dark figures wait outside of the White House, which has a sign: "No salesmen till war is over", to privatize social security and make government smaller (D: 12 O).



Falwell and intolerance

Both, Bin Laden and Jerry Falwell, agree that God has punished the United States for its sins (A: 18 S); but some people consider that trying to explain the attack as God's work in punishing the way Americans live deserves bombing Falwell (T: 19 S). This intolerance is similar of those Americans who

go out to beat some Arabs full of evil and blind hatred (A: 14 S), or anybody because "I have to do something" (R: 22 O), or "kicking their murdering butts" (R: 27 S).



PART III: FINAL WORDS

In these cartoons we can clearly see the *Weltanschauung* coming out from the images: simplification and a Manichean view of the world, although also some criticism and non "official" points of view can be found. *The New York Times* political cartoons are a valuable material to study the ways the U.S. media construct the social and political reality of the world and of themselves.

We wanted to show that an often neglected media form such as political cartoons can potentially offer valuable insights on the role of the media, in general, as a producer and reproducer of distorted images, and stereotypical views that tend to validate the construction of the world (worldview) on the basis of a clear opposition between the civilized nations (The "West", the U.S. and its allies) and the *others*.

The dominant attitude of the U.S. media during the wars in former Yugoslavia, for instance, was closer a stigmatization of the Balkans rather than an analytical and cautious interpretation, and the same thing is happening after September 11 in reference to other parts of the world. That is why a question arises to a sad and angry Uncle Sam aiming to an enemy: who is and where is the enemy?



NOTES

1 *Cartoon* comes via French *carton* from Italian *cartone*, which meant literally "strong, heavy paper, pasteboard" (it was a derivative of *carta*, "paper", which came from Latin *charta*, source also of English *card*, *carton*, *chart*, and *charter*). Its meaning was in due course transferred to the preliminary sketches made by artists on such paper, the original and nearly for two centuries the only sense of the word in English. Its application to comic drawings in newspapers and magazines began in the 1840s. See John Ayto: *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Arcade, 1990), Paul Beale (editor): *A Concise Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), Robert Hendrickson: *Encyclopedia of Words and Phrase Origins* (New York: Facts on File, 1987).

2 *Weltanschauung* is the German word for "world-view", and it has a long philosophical tradition. It is a general view of the universe and man's place in it which affects one's conduct. For Dilthey philosophies are world-views which fall into different types. Husserl contrasted culturally and historically relative world-views with "scientific" philosophy. Scheler argued that we cannot avoid a world-view; but we should choose it reflectively and by a valid method. Jaspers investigated the roots of world-views in our subjective experience.

3 On this first part we relied heavily on the mimeo by Gent Gogaj: *Caricaturing the Balkans* (Budapest, 1999).

4 See Sadkovich, James J.: *The U.S. Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995*

(Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998). Xi-xx.

5 According to Dines, Gail: "Toward a critical Sociological Analysis of Cartoons". *Humor, Wheelock Coll.*, Boston, MA: 02215 8,3, N° 0933-1719, 1995.

6 Press, Charles: *The Political Cartoon* (Rutheford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981). 11. Some of the following ideas are taken from this book.

7 Gombrich, E.H.: *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985). 130.

8 Enteman, Willard F.: "Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination, in Lester,

Paul Martin (ed.): *Images that Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media* (Westport, Praeger, 1996).

9 Todorova, Maria Nikolaeva: *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). 137.

10 The following diagram shows the main persons, countries and issues. The figure represents the times they have been named or mentioned in the cartoons. The total figures are much higher than the total cartoons because, for instance, Bush and Bin Laden could be in the same cartoon but counted separately.

		PEOPLE/COUNTRIES	
US		NON-US	
Uncle Sam/Liberty	37	Bin Laden	41
Bush	38	Sharon - Arafat	3/6
Ashcroft	17	S. Hussein	5
Greenspan	3	Afghanistan	25
Clinton	2	Saudis	7
Giuliani	2	Arabs	10
Colin Powel	4	Israel	5
Falwell	4	Iraq	7
		Pakistan, India, Iran	1 each
		Russia/Putin	8
		Northern Alliance	9
		Hamas/Palestinians	5
		ISSUES	
US		INTERNATIONAL	
Economy/oil	54	Terrorism/Taliban	73
Intelligence/security	25	Islam/Muslim/Koran	14
Fear/mail/anthrax	23+14+14	Women	10
Patriotism	16	Refugees	3
Civil liberties	27	METAPHYSICAL	
Airlines	10	Evil/Satan	7
Railroads	4	Death	6
Globalization	5	God	4
Nuclear threat	5	History/Fukuyama	3
OTHERS			
Related	24		
Non-related	16		

The first non-related cartoons were published in late November.

11 The authors of the cartoons are identified by letters as follow: A, Tony Auth; B, Bill DeOre; D, Jeff Danziger; M, Glenn McCoy; O, Pat Oliphant; R, Ted Rall; S, Ben Sargent; and T, Tom Toles. As there are only three months involved: S is for September, O for October, N for November,

and D for December. The first letter identifies the cartoonist, the number the date, and the last letter the month; for instance: "O: 15 O" is a caricature by Pat Oliphant published in *The New York Times* on October 15th. Obviously, the year is 2001.