



Saturday, 28 May 2022

Stop Mel Blanc!

How could anyone be upset with the Man of a Thousand Voices, Mel Blanc? The man who gave us Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, Woody Woodpecker and Jack Benny's Maxwell?

Some people, it seems.

Like all kinds of actors in cartoons and on radio, Mel did dialects. People laughed. But then some stopped laughing.

One of Mel's voices was a Mexican. He claimed he based it on a gardener he met. It first got noticed when he was a regular on *The Judy Canova Show* starting in 1943. No one seems to have been bothered by Pedro's slow mangling of the English language at first, but as the world entered the 1950s and protests got louder and louder about some of the characters on *Amos 'n' Andy*, it seems Mel came in for some criticism. This is from *The Daily Worker*, Jan. 21, 1952.

Assail Radio Show's Slurs on Mexican People

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 20.—The Independent Progressive Party has joined the Mexican-American National Assn. (ANMA) is calling for a boycott of Colgate-Palmolive-Peet products until stereotype characterizations of the Mexican people on the Judy Canova radio show are ended.

In a letter to the soap company and the Canova show the IPP's county executive board condemned the stereotype presentation on the comedienne's show as one which "completely distorts and vilifies the true Mexican-Americans who have contributed immensely to the growth and development of our great nation, especially in the Southwest."

Art Takei, county legislative director of the party, called on all members and friends of the IPP to join ANMA's boycott campaign and to enter protests to the Colgate Co. and to the National Broadcasting Co.

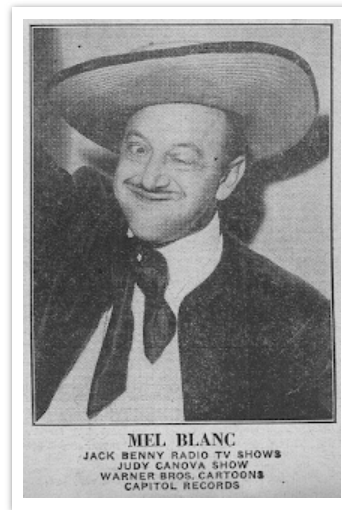
The letter, addressed to the Colgate Co., and the Judy Canova Show, said:

"It has been called to our attention that the Judy Canova radio broadcast sponsored by the Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Co. has as one of its main features Mel Blanc's characterization of what is purported to be a Mexican.

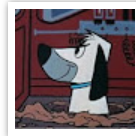
"Mel Blanc's characterization is an affront not only to the Mexican people, but also to all other democratic-minded Americans who believe in the fundamental dignity and the rights of all people regardless of race, color, religion or national origin."

Canova and her producers simply ignored it. In fact, *Broadcasting* magazine announced on April 7th that year that a TV pilot for Canova's show had been shot at Republic studios with Blanc in the cast (the show never sold; the radio show finally died in 1953).

The voice was brightened up by Blanc as radio gave way to television. Of course, Blanc played the heroic Speedy Gonzales for Warner Bros. in the '50s and '60s. He found a place for the voice (not sped up) as Go-



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Yowp
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Old TV History
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Go Gomez in the Dick Tracy cartoons of 1960 and again in the wildly successful Frito's Corn Chip TV ads as the Frito Bandito beginning in 1967.

Once again someone objected to Mel's Bandito, though he personally wasn't criticised. *Broadcasting* ran this story on August 19, 1968.

Mexican-American TV image challenged

Television's treatment of Spanish-Americans in both programming and advertising came under fire on two occasions last week.

One involved a request for "equal opportunity to explain . . . why Mexican-Americans find such characters as Jose Jimenez . . . demeaning and degrading after a performance by Bill Dana as Jose Jimenez on NBC-TV's *Tonight Show* Aug. 9.

Domingo Nick Reyes, a Mexican-American working with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Washington, suggested to the network in a telegram Aug. 10 that time be granted to Albert Pena, Bexar county commissioner in San Antonio, Tex., to replay. Following Mr. Reyes's suggestion, Mr. Pena, who has been working with a group called Involvement of the Mexican-American in Gainful Endeavor, also sent NBC-TV a telegram asking for time. The network said Thursday (Aug. 15) that no action had been taken on the request. A complaint to the Frito-Lay Co., Dallas, about its "Frito Bandito" television commercials also involved Mr. Pena. He and the Mexican-American group requested the commercials be discontinued. The company has the proposal under consideration, but meanwhile has altered the commercials "because of the recent concern regarding violence" by removing gun-firing scenes.

Mr. Reyes said his action was taken in hopes of mobilizing a sufficient number of Mexican-Americans to get their television image changed.

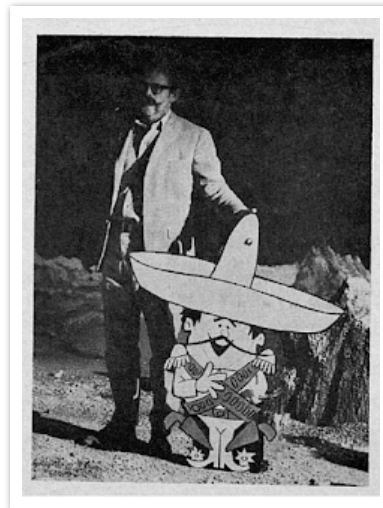
The criticism was ignored for a time. Frito-Lay took out full-page ads at the start of 1969 including the Bandito. That year, Nadeen Peterson of Foote, Cone and Belding proclaimed "I'm the mother of the Frito Bandito" as she was in charge of the Bandito ad campaign. Among her brainstorms was one proclaimed in *Broadcasting* of May 19, 1969 as the agency tried to find a way to shoehorn into the hype about the coming Moon landing. The story also revealed who was animating the commercials at the time.

Bandito tries shakedown to get into the chips

Scheduled soon after this week's Apollo 10 space mission is a shot to the moon by the Mexican bandit, Frito Bandito, in new 30-second commercials for Frito Corn Chips.

Produced for Foote, Cone & Belding, New York, by Pelican Films, that city, the commercials will be shown in Frito's network (all three networks) and spot schedules, starting later this month or in early June.

For the "moon set," the production studio built a reputation for a U.S. space ship and used space suits for the two "astronauts." In the rotoscoped—combination of live action and animation—sequence, the animated character, "Bandito," and his burro greet the astronauts as they arrive on the moon. Bandito announces he has the "parking concession" and demands payment—in Frito Corn Chips. Geoffrey Kelly produced the commercial for the agency, Jack Zander (shown in picture) was director, and David Hogoboom produced for Pelican.



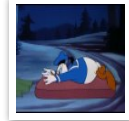
Frito Lay continued to defend the character, telling the Associated Press he was "a little part of all of us." But the National Mexican American Anti-Defamation Committee continued to talk of lawsuits and a complaint to the F.C.C. KNBC in Los Angeles decided, according to a UPI story of Dec. 10, 1969, to stop running what the group called "probably the most subtle and insidious of such racist commercials."

Finally, the Bandito was killed off. *Broadcasting* reported on Feb. 16, 1970:

'Frito Bandito' yanked

Three TV networks were notified last Friday (Feb. 13) by Foote, Cone & Belding, New York, that "Frito Bandito" campaign for Fritos corn chips will be replaced with alternate campaign because of opposition by certain leaders of Mexican-American organizations. Groups claimed commercials were derogatory and at one time, considered seeking relief from FCC under fair doctrine (*Broadcasting*, Dec. 15, 1969). FC&B letter said decision to develop new campaign had been reached several months ago.

Movies with Michael



Some
Cartoons
for
Saturday
Morning
#189 - Hello

my friends and happy Saturday morning. Once again it is time for some classic cartoons. Today's cartoon selection begins with a delightful Donald...

1 day ago

Cartoon Research

[The Problem with Pooh - Suspended Animation #385](#)
Oh bother! The bear with very little brain through no fault of his own certainly seems to be a troublesome bruin and for many yea...

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6 days ago

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- Until the mid 40s, Fox had many issues with the Terrytoons Studio, and over the years complaints were regularly sent. Particularly, the lack of true s...

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Dr. Grob's Animation Review

[Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbours Wife](#) - 'Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbours Wife' is the tenth and last of Phil Mulloy's Ten Commandment films. This installment is the longest of the ten, clocki...

2 days ago

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Frito-Lay's comment to the *Wall Street Journal* in reaction was that the character is liked by "the vast majority" of Mexican-Americans, according to independent research organisations. And with that attitude, it continued to pump out new animated spots that ran locally. At the start of 1971, a 610-million-dollar class-action suit against Frito-Lay and its agency was threatened. In April, about 50 protesters shouted "Muerte al Frito Bandito" outside the chip-maker's Dallas headquarters.

Still the commercials aired. In an article in *Back Stage* of March 22, 1974, it was revealed the Bandito had been handled at one time by—are you ready?—Tex Avery and

director Hal Mason at the Cascade studio.

Eventually, the spots disappeared, though the debates about stereotypes—some of them, anyway—have lasted long past Mel Blanc's lifetime. I suspect they won't end.

Posted by Yowp at 07:37



4 comments:



top_cat_james 28 May 2022 at 08:19

I suppose the W.C. Fields-esque spoketoon that replaced Bandito was offensive to teetotalers.

[Reply](#)

Howard Fein 28 May 2022 at 14:47

Go-Go Gomez was voiced by Paul Frees, not Mel- who did provide voices for B.B. Eyes and Flattop in some of their earlier appearances in the Dick Tracy cartoons. Mel's accident might have led to his being replaced as Frees in those roles. Maybe he was intended to voice Go-Go as well. (A prototype for Go-Go appeared in a TV Magoo cartoon. His design was identical, but HE was voiced by Mel.

[Reply](#)



Hans Christian Brando 30 May 2022 at 07:26

By Cancel Culture standards, Mel Blanc is a true monster, since he did Black and Asian dialects as well. (Presumably the European-based dialects, such as the fractured French of the Pepe le Pew cartoons, are okay.) And those Frito Bandido-shaped erasers that used to be found in the six-packs--replaced with W.C. Fritos and later by the Munch-a-Bunch--didn't erase so much as smudge.

[Reply](#)

Errol 31 May 2022 at 11:14

I remember up until a year before Benny passed, he and Mel were still doing the " Si-Cy-So " routine on national television. One of my high school science teachers had a " Frito Bandito " poster on his classroom door. That was in late 1973-early 1974. The poster disappeared around the time the commercials were pulled. " I *WANT* Frito's Corn cheeps..(Zoom in to sardonic smile)..I geet them from you! " Remember it well. You are correct, Yowp. I doubt the debate will ever end.

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