

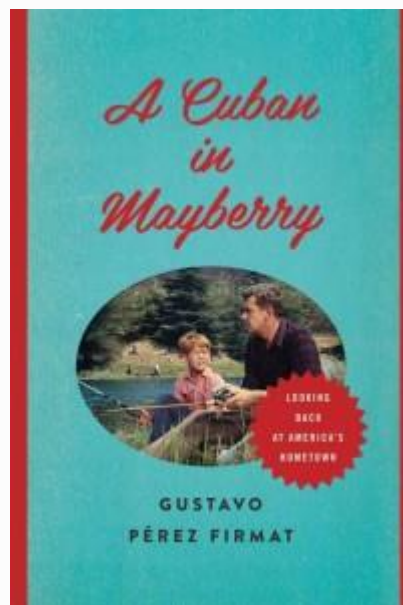
# ~~EBULLET~~

Official Newsletter of *The Andy Griffith Show* Rerun Watchers Club

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## Sneak Peek: A Preview and Quick Book Review

### [A Cuban in Mayberry--Looking Back at America's Hometown](#)



~~\$30.00~~ \$27.00

Pre-order now at Weaver's  
Shipping in early October

We're taking pre-orders now for a brand new and outstanding book about TAGS, the first book directly about the show itself in about a dozen years. It's titled ***A Cuban in Mayberry--Looking Back at America's Hometown***, by Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a native of Cuba who is a professor of humanities at Columbia University. (He also has lived and taught for decades in North Carolina.)

This well-written 194-page book from the University of Texas Press is a very scholarly discussion about TAGS. It's basically written from the perspective of somebody like "Stranger in Town" Ed Sawyer, someone who's not native

to Mayberry, but eagerly sees the joys and wants to understand and be a part of the friendly town. Gustavo Pérez Firmat (in Mayberry, he surely would be simply Gus) identifies with the Ed Sawyer experience. And he's also a lot like Howard Sprague, who makes his own relatively late appearance in our view of Mayberry, but is welcomed as one of the gang.

Indeed, this book is one that's more likely to be found on a bookshelf at Howard's house or maybe at Helen Crump's place rather than either up in Barney's room, where the reading tends to be breezy detective chronicles and fast-lens photography, or in Goober's collection of thinner books, such as *Crab Monster* (sorry, Goob--only 17 pictures in this book).

Professor Pérez Firmat makes keen observations about TAGS, its production, and its relevance in culture and social history. Fans may chuckle (or wince) at some of the "trivial trivialities" that trip up the professor. For example, he writes that Andy's favorite dish is lamb stew, a slight miscue likely caused by his sometimes relying on Andy Griffith's donated scripts in the library at UNC-Chapel Hill for reference rather than the filmed episodes.



MAN IN THE MIDDLE--Author Gustavo Pérez Firmat at the TV Land Landmark statue for TAGS in Raleigh, N.C. Maybe he'll soon also get to pose with the revered version of the statue in Mount Airy.

Those slips are easily forgivable, because the thrust of this book is not episodic trivia, but rather a broader examination of themes, such as the role of things like place and home and relationships, both in Mayberry and in American society. (It's also worth noting that there probably hasn't been a

Mayberry book yet without its share of trivial and non-trivial errors. There's just such a huge number of interesting facts to catalog. All Mayberry writers could benefit from access to that complete set of TAGS scripts for checking the spellings of names, etc.!)

While there might be a tendency among many in academia to too easily dismiss TAGS as just more TV fluff that's not worthy of their intellectual attention, Professor Pérez Firmat is not of that school. He has an obvious affection for TAGS and strives to enhance that affinity with a deeper understanding. He has definitely been wearing a bucket on his head and taking a think under there.

That said, sometimes the Professor might be guilty of over-thinking some observations about the show when he's trying to make a larger and valid point. An example of this would be his attaching significance to the headlines of the prop newspapers used on the show--suggesting that they were chosen to illustrate how provincial Mayberry is. Legions of modern-day "trained noticers" among us have also enjoyed spotting these headlines and similar little things visible on the show. But as proof that Professor Pérez Firmat is as much fan as scholar, he possibly gives them too much emphasis in supporting his themes.

Though some of the newspapers on TAGS were custom made for the show by a prop provider (such as when Mayberry goes Hollywood or when Barney cracks the Walker robbery case or is the hero in the cave rescue or when Floyd "captures" the lady convicts), most of the generic newspapers on TAGS were just the same props (or reconfigured versions with stock headlines and stories) used on all sorts of other film productions. (Or in the cases of the use of *The Mount Airy News*, the newspapers were just Andy Griffith's sly way of saying hello to the folks back in his hometown.)



"DON'T THE TREES SEEM NICE AND FULL"--The infamous "Chinese Living in Trees" headline, a favorite of "trained noticers." (Click to view larger, as with most photos in any eBullet.) This is the type of trivia that's far from the main themes of most of *A Cuban in Mayberry*, but still part of the fun of watching TAGS.

A fun instance of this topic is the Professor's reference to a small newspaper headline seen in TAGS that says "130,000 Chinese living in trees as result of flood." (The actual headline says 110,000, and is seen in newspaper props used in two TAGS episodes, but that could be just nitpicking!) This same headline is also visible in a copy of the *Daily Planet* used in an episode of "Superman." And it can even be spotted in *The Sitter Downers*, a 1937 Three Stooges short and other films as early as at least 1935. And more to the point, these filler newspaper stories in Mayberry usually weren't even supposed (or probably even possible) to be read by viewers given the picture quality of TVs during the original broadcasts. Only with the advent of later technologies such as VCRs, DVDs, HD-TVs and Blu-ray have many of these visual trivialities become part of TAGS consciousness, much less its lore.

So, like all of us who enjoy TAGS and gladly sometimes slide down the wonderfully enjoyable slippery slope of believing (or at least wanting to believe) that everything in Mayberry is *really* real, even Professor Pérez Firmat's rigorous scholarship occasionally succumbs to the lures of both Mayberry's fantastic realism and the pure fun of Mayberry minutia (including bloopers). That's a good thing.

And the helplessness that we all have (if we're lucky) in being drawn into the satisfying world of Mayberry is also where the incredible attention given to the fine details of the show by Andy Griffith, Aaron Ruben, Bob Ross, the writers and others--but most especially Andy Griffith--really works its magic. Unlike almost any other TV show, TAGS creates a believable fictional world that's so rich with interesting people, stories, and generally authentic details that we never tire of exploring, learning, and experiencing as much about that world as we can. And most of all, we just enjoy watching (visiting!) Mayberry and being entertained. All that, plus Barney's hilarious. Professor Pérez Firmat gets all these things.

So, for anyone who enjoys thinking about and understanding more about Mayberry, a description that likely fits most readers of this newsletter as much as any other community in the world, *A Cuban in Mayberry* is fascinating reading, maybe even essential. You probably won't agree with

all of Professor Pérez Firmat's observations and conclusions about TAGS, but you're sure to enjoy the journey.

Professor Gustavo Pérez Firmat, you have no worries. You should know that you are heartily welcomed as a fellow citizen of Mayberry. In other words, "Attaboy, Gus!"