

TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL MARKET: A CONCEPT FOR UNDERSTANDING
CULTURAL TRANSMISSION ACROSS THE MEXICO-UNITED STATES
BORDER, 1920-1946

by

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Abstract

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Between 1920 and 1946, the national cultures of Mexico and the United States entered upon a general path of convergence. This dissertation argues that three major agents were responsible for accelerating the transmission of culture across the border. Government officials, private businessmen, and common migrants usually pursued their country's or their own economic betterment, but as they did so they pushed or pulled culture into a new national setting. Often a combination of two or more of the group's efforts was necessary for cultural transmission to occur. Mexico's government, for example, contracted American corporate capital and construction expertise in the 1930s to develop the national highway system, which then enabled Mexican migrants to travel northbound and American tourists to come south. In the early 1940s, the American government welcomed Mexican "bracero" workers, who frequently then transformed the culture of their new localities. These confluences of government, corporate, and migrant activities produced a broad transnational cultural market in which people exchanged goods, practices, and ideas that originated from abroad.

The cultural market concept emphasizes the interplay of state and market forces for transmitting foreign culture in this case study of Mexico and the United States. As the

governments and peoples of both countries began to shed their historical mistrust of each other, more cultural interaction transpired within an increasingly connected bi-national capitalistic system. The concept also notes, however, the agency of individuals in the story. Ambassadors and presidents advanced or retarded cultural relations by showing more or less understanding of and respect for their counterparts' culture throughout the decades. Common individuals, meanwhile, often had the capability to accept or reject the cultural offerings advanced to them by government or corporate representatives. This freedom to act and thus exchange within a transnational cultural market seems generally to apply when societies are for the most part capitalistic and democratic.

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Introduction

In early 1941, George Ashley of El Paso, Texas wrote to Luis Romero Soto of Mexico City to purchase one of the machines Romero Soto had invented around the turn of the century and had perfected in the subsequent decades: the *tortilladora* or automatic tortilla maker. Ashley's plan of packaging the tortillas in "vacuum sealed cans which protect their flavor and freshness indefinitely" ultimately proved less viable than the now common method of using plastic bags, but his idea of selling "ethnic" food products to a growing ethnically Mexican community in El Paso made perfect economic sense. Canned enchilada sauces that could "be served in your home with all their unique piquancy at a minimum of trouble and expense" also proved popular with the surrounding Anglo community members, some of whom had visited Mexico recently as tourists.¹ Eventually various other canned food companies would copy Ashley's pioneering efforts and make "Mexican food" products available in grocery markets throughout the United States.² Mexican immigrants had created a market opportunity for businessmen, who in turn promoted the spread and mixing of the neighboring countries' cultures.

Ashley's and Romero Soto's example provides us with a window for viewing the broader question of what factors contributed most to the cultural transmission process from one country to the other. In this case, what caused parts of the United States to adopt significant aspects of Mexican culture and what allowed certain Mexican locales to

¹ Mexico City, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Luis Romero Soto to George Ashley, 30 April 1941, and Ashley's company brochure (n.d.), Luis Romero Soto Colección (Caja 5), Sección XIV No 1-5, Serie Correspondencia Comercial.

² For a brief account of the evolution of Ashley's, which opened in 1931 and eventually was purchased by Bruce Foods in 1980, see "Bruce Foods Corporation – Company History," www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/Bruce-Foods-Corporation-Company-History.html, [accessed 5 OCT 2007].

adopt particular American goods, ideas or practices? Are migrants mostly responsible for the changed flavors, both literal and figurative, that one began to find in the American southwest? In the years between the end of the Great War and the end of World II, were American businesses such as Ford or RCA agents of a cultural imperialism within Mexico that some observers now associate with “globalization” and “Americanization”? How significant a role did the respective governments play in transmitting culture north or south?

Historiography of Cultural Transmission

The existing research on these questions provides partial insights into answering these questions. Various books look at the Mexican migrant’s cultural contribution in the United States, particularly in the American Southwest. George Sánchez’s *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles*, for example, describes how Mexican immigrant culture evolved as it was buffeted by school and religious pressures to Americanize, new consumer fashions and entertainment options, cultural traditions from the homeland, and the economic dislocation of the Great Depression.³ But the work mostly ignores similar social, cultural and economic pressures that helped shaped culture in Mexico and thus overlooks the larger context of forces operating in both countries. It, and other books assessing the Mexican migrant experience in the United States, also illuminate little about the migrants’ cultural impact back home.⁴

³ George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). While Sánchez’s work mostly examines working class migrants, Richard Garcia’s focus on San Antonio during a similar period analyzes the interplay of working, middle, and upper-class migrants. Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1991).

⁴ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 147. This work, which focuses on the interplay between local/regional cultures and a national culture in Mexico, notes that “the experience of migration to the

Two anthropological works originally prepared in the late 1920s and mid-1930s respectively, Manuel Gamio's *El inmigrante mexicano* and Paul Taylor's *A Spanish Mexican Peasant Community*, provide useful glimpses of the motivations and cultural impacts of Mexican migrants in the southwestern United States or in Mexico.⁵

Works that analyze private businesses in Mexico expose the impacts of another of the important cultural transmission agents. Thomas O'Brien's *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* shows the coercive power American corporate culture had within certain Mexican enclaves such as mining centers and urban areas served by electrical utilities. O'Brien's work demonstrates the political and economic results of collaboration between Mexican government officials and American corporate heads. His overemphasis of American corporations' ability to change local culture, however, discounts the role of modern infrastructure and of public education as accomplices in the modernizing assault on "traditional" practices everywhere. And it ignores the average Mexican worker's agency to accept or reject the consumerism that corporations peddled.⁶ Julio Moreno's study of the impact of American advertising and other business methods, especially in the 1940s, upon Mexican culture explores the synthesis of American and Mexican cultural values. But the work hardly mentions the cultural transmission impact in Mexico of Mexican migrants who had worked in the United States or of American tourists who visited Mexico.⁷ The latter point

United States and exposure to non-Mexican habits in tourism or the media are points of reference" for an individual developing a nationalist ideology.

⁵ Manuel Gamio, *El inmigrante mexicano: La historia de su vida* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1969); Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community, Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, in *Mexican Migration to the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1976).

⁶ Thomas F. O'Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷ Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

is very effectively addressed, however, by Dina Berger's exploration of the Mexican tourism industry from the 1920s through the mid-1940s, which emphasizes the important collaboration of Mexican business and government officials as well as a smaller number of American business leaders.⁸

There are two fine books that address the cultural implications of American businesses throughout the world and that offer some references to Mexican examples. Emily Rosenberg's *Spreading the American Dream* details the sometimes supportive and sometimes conflicting attitudes of American government and business leaders who frequently came to rely on one another as the United States expanded its commercial footprint in the first half of the twentieth century.⁹ *Leviathans: Multinational Corporations and the New Global History*, edited by Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. and Bruce Mazlish, focuses more (but not exclusively) on the second half of the twentieth century and assesses non-American corporations, but it does offer useful ideas for application to the earlier period.¹⁰

A number of recent studies detail the modernizing effects of Mexico's revolutionary governments' multiple economic and social development campaigns from the 1920s through the 1940s. *The Eagle and the Virgin: National and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, edited by Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen Lewis, convincingly shows that public road construction, radio promotion, and education efforts enabled more

⁸ Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁹ Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

¹⁰ Alfred D., Chandler, Jr. and Bruce Mazlish, eds., *Leviathans: Multinational Corporations and the New Global History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Two of the collection's essays written by business historians provide particularly fruitful insights: Mira Wilkins, "Multinational Enterprise to 1930: Discontinuities and Continuities," 45-79; and Geoffrey Jones, "Multinationals from the 1930s to the 1980s," 81-103.

and more Mexicans to access and be more competitive in a national economic market. These social and economic openings in turn served as conduits for appropriating more aspects of American culture. This collection of essays for the most part ends its coverage on the eve of World War II. But the developments up to 1940 clearly prepared Mexico for the increasing consumerism and urbanization that followed upon the heels of a closer political and economic partnership with the United States during the war. And Vaughan's own essay on education shows that many of the Mexican governmental efforts promoting hygiene, literacy and sports in the 1930s were similar to the campaigns, described by Sánchez, of American officials working with Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles.¹¹ The United States' public school "Americanizing" instructors of the Great War era and the Mexican educational authorities in the 1920s and 1930s thus both should be seen as common modernizing agents rather than simply as distinct proponents of a racist or anti-*indigenista* program.

Several accounts of foreign relations between the United States and Mexico mostly focus on diplomatic, political and economic relations; they say little about cultural relations. Alan Knight's *United States – Mexican Relations: An Interpretation* develops a useful distinction between economic and political nationalism, with the first type being concerned with the improvement of the national economic standing and the latter focusing on issues of sovereignty.¹² As Julio Moreno notes, the American diplomats and advertising specialists who understood this distinction generally experienced more

¹¹ Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). Especially enlightening essays in this volume include Wendy Waters, "Remapping Identities: Road Construction and National Building in Postrevolutionary Mexico;" Joy Elizabeth Hayes, "National Imaginings on the Air: Radio in Mexico, 1920-1950;" and Mary Kay Vaughan, "Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s."

¹² Alan Knight, *U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940: An Interpretation* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1987).

success when they respected Mexicans' sense of sovereignty at the same time they—the Americans—promoted a greater place in the Mexican economy by suggesting that industrialization was good for the Mexican economy. Nora Hamilton's application of world systems theory to the Mexican governments'—especially Lázaro Cárdenas's—attempts to modernize in the 1920s and 1930s, emphasizes the structural constraints Mexico faced as a peripheral power in a larger capitalist system. Even with the famous land and oil expropriations of the mid to late 1930s, the Mexican presidents always sought to attract foreign capital and to increase their country's access to American markets. The populist Cárdenas had to meet American and Mexican businessmen midway on most issues or else face a severe financial shortage.¹³ For our purposes, Hamilton's work is useful not for any specific discussion of cultural relations but instead for its articulation of the growing capitalist connections between the two countries.

The work looking specifically at popular or common culture provides some useful insights, at least the material examining Mexican national culture.¹⁴ As for the United States, the relatively small percentage and regional concentration of Mexican immigrants in the country from the end of the Great War to the end of WWII results in other cultural agents, such as European immigrant groups or American corporations, receiving most of the focus. For example, Leroy Ashby's *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830*, makes only a few passing references to Mexicans' or

¹³ Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

¹⁴ The disproportional amount of space devoted to the neighboring culture's impact in most national histories of the two countries reflects a common aspect of nearly all the works whether their focus falls on political, economic or cultural topics. Many broad American history books, for example, hardly mention the 1938 oil nationalization, while in any Mexican history text it would enjoy a prominent place.

Mexican-Americans' contribution to national culture during our period.¹⁵ For Mexico, several chapters in the recent multi-volume *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México* (*History of Daily Life in Mexico*) show how Mexican cultural developments such as radio broadcasting or advertising for household appliances borrowed from earlier American examples. Each of the chapters in the collection, however, looks at a discreet topic and the books' cumulative effort does not provide an overarching framework for synthesizing the larger contributing forces.¹⁶ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler's anthropological analysis emphasizes the dynamic between regional and national cultures, but it too only touches on the impact of cultural influences from the United States.¹⁷ Perhaps the best, albeit brief, articulation of the combined impact of Mexico's governmental initiatives and America's commercial expansion upon Mexican comes from Alan Knight. Synthesizing ideas from various of his other works, Knight emphasizes the power of market forces and notes that "the motor of social change was to be found in the material rather than the ideological realm."¹⁸

Overall, then, there is not a wide body of literature dealing directly with bi-national *cultural* developments. Many books deal with the development of culture within either of the two nations, but these do not focus on the contributions of the neighboring land. Some recent good work does note the important role that the Mexican

¹⁵ Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006). Ashby's work looks at the country's national culture and the Mexican or Mexican-American contribution at this point was more regional. But the book exemplifies the note above (#14), since the terms "Mexico" or "Mexicans" are not present in the index, while "United States" or "Americans" often have a more prominent place in Mexican histories.

¹⁶ Aurelio de los Reyes, ed, *Historia de la vida cotidiana en Mexico, Tomo V Siglo XX, Vol. 1 Campo y ciudad* (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio de Mexico, 2006) and Vol. II, *La imagen, espejo de la vida?* (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio de Mexico, 2006).

¹⁷ Lomnitz-Adler.

¹⁸ Alan Knight, "Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74:3 (August 1994), 393-444.

Revolutionary state played in effecting modernity, which moved Mexican culture closer to that of the United States. But the existing literature shines light on discreet parts of the cultural transmission process, much in the way a spotlight displays the contribution of one actor on an otherwise darkened stage. My intent is to gather these independent secondary source glimpses and then add additional evidence from primary sources such as the national archives and newspapers. At that point, I can illuminate how the multiple agents of cultural transmission—government officials, businessmen, and migrants—complemented the activities of each other.

Significance of Understanding the Cultural Transmission Process

Gaining a more complete understanding of what contributed to bi-national cultural transmission will help us make sense of important historical and contemporary questions. Historically it is important to identify the key inflection points for cultural change, i.e., the national, regional, or global political and economic events that either enabled or obstructed the flow of culture. The United States' re-establishment of formal relations with Mexico in 1923 and the onset of the Great Depression at the end of the decade, for example, constitute two key points in cultural flow that depended on political or economic conditions. Normally more culture flowed back and forth across the border during good economic times, since demand for labor rose, material conditions improved, and new investments in infrastructure paved or wired the way for ideas to move more freely. The relationship between politics or economics and culture sometimes worked in the opposite direction as well, however, and both governments attempted to use cultural means to reach political or economic objectives. Mexico sponsored the great muralists' work to help form a nationalist identity for example, and the United States' promoted

propagandistic films in Mexico to gain support for the Allies during World War II and to create a fertile field for post-war trade.¹⁹

As these examples suggest, political, economic and cultural processes existed as three interdependent sides of a triangle. When one of the legs was weak or missing, it usually reduced the strength of the others. American businesses and tourists, for example, had more confidence interacting with Mexico after it was recognized by the United States government. And business activity in both countries was to some extent a function of the governments' investment in infrastructural advances such as highways and of their willingness to accept a relatively free flow of foreign capital or labor. The interaction between politics, economics, and culture did not, however, always conform to a simple model of close political and economic ties equating with increased cultural transmission. When we look at the Great Depression, for example, we might expect that great economic slump to produce a drastic reduction of cultural flow. Instead many governmental agents in American cities encouraged or coerced several hundred thousand Mexicans (including some Mexican-Americans) to return to Mexico. When the migrants returned south many brought home American goods, habits and ideas, some of which then took root in Mexico. Thus an analysis that incorporates the political, economic and cultural angles will provide a more accurate sense of the large forces at work and how they complemented or hindered each other at different points in the story.

Along with noting the interwoven nature of politics, business, and culture, we must also emphasize the capitalistic basis on which they stood. Although both countries pursued greater state regulation of the market—particularly with Progressive era and

¹⁹ The works of the great muralists also eventually attracted tourists, although that was not the primary motivation behind the Mexican government's support of the work.

New Deal legislation in the United States and the 1917 Constitution and subsequent attempts to apply it in Mexico—they also steadily encouraged capitalist development. Business and government leaders in both countries sought to attract or to invest capital and they supported the education of the labor force to increase the workers' productivity. Governments developed their highway systems to connect more rural locales, which earlier had been bypassed by the railroads, to the national and international markets. This shared economic system reduced the sort of friction that was present with the rejection of capitalism—and much capitalist culture—in the Bolshevik Revolution and later with the Cuban Revolution.²⁰

Another historical insight our study affords is the recognition of the role human agency had in the cultural transmission process. Individual decisions both at the leadership level and at the common level made (and still make) a difference. American ambassadors who demonstrated their respect for their Mexican hosts helped militate against the tensions of economic and political differences. President Lázaro Cárdenas's sincere antipathy toward the fascist regimes permitted him to align his country more closely with Mexico's historical nemesis, the United States, as World War II neared. Everyday citizens, meanwhile, also had a degree of choice that they exercised when they watched a movie and businesses responded to their preferences. Although some histories posit a dominating imperial nature for American corporate culture throughout Latin America, salesmen were not conquistadores from Madison Avenue or Detroit who overwhelmed a Mexican populace lacking immunity to infectious strands of foreign

²⁰ Transnational cultural transmission between the United States and communist Russia or Cuba presumably involved more disparate agents such as intellectuals, dissidents, black market peddlers, etc. since major corporations and government representatives were much more limited in their activities.

culture, advertising, or products.²¹ Most Mexican consumers, like their American counterparts, had the capability to select various cultural alternatives. My study relies on the existential notion that most humans have the possibility (and responsibility) to make meaningful choices, and it concurs with cultural critic John Tomlinson's conclusion that most critiques of cultural imperialism are "protests against the spread of (capitalist) modernity."²²

These historical findings, then, can inform our contemporary understanding of the complex and amorphous cultural components of globalization today. It does seem that most people still "vote their pocketbook" and try to assess the economic implications of a particular issue, but tariff rates, immigration policy, tourism etc. clearly have an important cultural component as well. Thus it is important for today's leaders and citizens to address the cultural implications along with the economic component of a particular activity. That in turn will help reassert a sense of personal and communal responsibility for cultural outcomes and will allow more people to appreciate that they are not simply "fated" to adopt a particular culture. Finally, an historical familiarity with the cultural transmission process will enable today's critics to construct a sounder argument when they confront the broad concepts of globalization and "cultural imperialism."²³

²¹ Two works emphasizing American cultural imperialism in Latin America are O'Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission* and Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. Legrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters with Empire: Writing the History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

²² John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1991), 160-179. Tomlinson writes that "culture is never 'fate' but always, ultimately, decision." Acknowledging the contributions of world systems or dependency theory, however, he also notes that people living in weaker, and usually peripheral, nation states will experience less of a sense of control over their environment since they and their government usually have fewer means to oppose advances from economic or political powerhouses.

²³ *Ibid.*, 173-179.

A Framework for Understanding

How then can we make sense of the multifaceted process of transmitting culture across borders? My framework relies upon proposing a concept called a “transnational cultural market,” which I define as a location where people can or do exchange goods, practices and ideas that originated abroad. A metaphor for this cultural market would be something like a farmers’ market. Just like the farmers’ markets, the cultural market I refer to needed access to a road or highway (today we might add the internet) so people could visit it. Perhaps it needed some sort of government regulation as to who could set up a stall, i.e. who was allowed to do business. Maybe it even needed some access to electricity or water. Businesses played a central role in forming the transnational cultural market. Someone needed to produce and supply the goods and services. And the markets needed people coming to them with their interests and habits, desires which the producers sought to satisfy. As the story of bi-national cultural relations between in Mexico and the United States from 1920 and 1946 unfolds, we will observe the establishment of dozens and dozens of transnational cultural markets. Government representatives, businessmen, and migrants were the most significant agents who helped create them.

The presidents, foreign secretaries or secretaries of state, ambassadors and other prominent government officials advanced or retarded cultural transmission in three particular ways. To begin with, they set up the rules for interaction. Formal recognition of each other’s governments, commercial treaties, tariff levels, enforcement or abrogation of property rights, immigration rules, tourist entry requirements, agricultural worker programs, and cultural exchange programs encouraged or discouraged people to consider interacting in a foreign land. Businesses and migrants acted without official sanction at

times, but a legal framework for activities certainly increased their levels of involvement in most cases.

Governmental representatives also influenced the public by the tone of their engagement with their counterparts across the border. From the 1920s to the 1940s, the general flavor of formal relations evolved from one of mutual tension and a Mexican fear of an American invasion to one of warm cooperation and mutual admiration for support during World War II. Within a generation, then, the officials' tenor helped to soften the wider public's historic mistrust or misunderstanding. To promote Pan-American solidarity in the months prior to Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt encouraged, and President Cárdenas welcomed, Americans to visit Mexico. It is within the realm of government officials where we can most clearly discern the importance of individuals. As Chapter Two will show, the replacement of the dyspeptic Ambassador James Sheffield with a much more personable and sympathetic Dwight Morrow almost immediately improved the environment for commercial and cultural exchange.

The third prominent way governments promoted cultural exchange was through their focus on internal social and economic improvements. Government reading campaigns enabled new literates to read the advertisements businesses produced. While parts of Mexico's "socialist" education campaign encouraged collectivist and anti-capitalist thinking, they nevertheless were anti-clerical and promoted a concern for the material betterment of the poor in this life. The Secretariat of Education's efforts at "stimulating economic activity for the poor," notes Alan Knight, were "a surrogate ideology to modernization."²⁴ Road construction enabled more migration in general and

²⁴ Alan Knight, "Mexico c. 1930-1946," *Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. 7, (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 26-30.

was critical to the development of Mexico's tourism industry. Electrification campaigns in both countries brought rural locales into the greater market and thus exposed long isolated communities to modern and sometimes foreign culture. Although capitalism served as the shared economic system in both countries, it took state initiative to push and finance many of the large infrastructural projects.

As formal relations improved and more commercial market opportunities emerged thanks to infrastructural development, businesses in turn added their inputs to the cultural market. Small manufacturers such as Luis Romero Soto and major ones such as the Ford Motor Company sold their products in the neighboring land. Small and large firms naturally also advertised their products or services. American entertainment companies at first dominated cinematic and radio production, but by the 1940s a strong Mexican film industry and radio conglomerate emerged and was even presenting films in United States theaters. Businesses such as American Foreign & Power Corporation themselves expanded the infrastructural foundation of the cultural market through their investment in the electrical grid. The Ford Motor Company's relatively high pay to its workers in Mexico City, meanwhile, tried to replicate a pattern that it had first tried in the United States and then in other manufacturing locales in the world: creating a consumer mentality in its workers by offering them high wages. And numerous Mexican business leaders, many with ties to their government, took the lead in promoting their country's nascent tourism industry.

Geographical proximity allowed migrants to emerge as the third main component of transnational cultural transmission between Mexico and the United States during this time. Railroad connections established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century

had allowed large numbers of migrants from Central Mexico to transverse the otherwise forbidding borderland and arrive in Ciudad Juarez, just across the river from the major southwestern American railroad terminus of El Paso. Then restrictive legislation the United States Congress passed in 1921 and further toughened in 1924 significantly limited the numbers of immigrants from Europe, but it did not place limits on migrants entering from the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, a loosely enforced American immigration policy—officials were supposed to collect \$18.00 for a head tax and visa surcharge upon the migrant’s entry—allowed thousands to settle in the ethnically Mexican communities in cities such as San Antonio, El Paso, and Los Angeles or in new rural enclaves. Soon after arrival Mexican migrants began creating a demand for some of the cultural world they had left.

The migrants’ food, newspaper, religious, and linguistic preferences led to the appearance of *panaderías* (bread and pastry shops), Spanish language advertisements in newly founded newspapers, and Catholic masses throughout much of the American southwest. Still, many migrants yearned to return home and when they did so they brought with them their exposure to American cultural habits and goods. Those who did not physically return to Mexico often sent remittances. This aspect usually receives little attention either in historical studies of immigration or of Mexico’s macroeconomic picture at the time, but the impact was significant. For example, remittances in 1927 were comparable to the amount of taxes Mexico collected from its export of petroleum, and from 1943 to 1945 they provided over one-eighth of the country’s “export” income.²⁵ At

²⁵ Compare tables in Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 5; Jean Meyer, “Mexico: Revolution and Reconstruction in the 1920s,” in Leslie Bethell, ed., *Cambridge History of Latin America, Vol. 5* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 178, and Paul S. Taylor, “A Spanish-

the personal level, these regularly wired blessings from the north afforded family members a higher standard of living in the short term and spurred some to migrate north themselves within an expanding network of families and friends.

The Mexican government in turn worked to attract American migrants who instead of bringing their labor would bring disposable cash. The number of tourist (mostly American) entries into Mexico jumped almost twelve-fold in a dozen years, from just under 14,000 in 1929 to over 165,000 in 1941, thanks in large part to strategic highway construction efforts, hotel investments, and promotional displays.²⁶ Because Mexico's government still lacked abundant capital, most of these efforts relied upon a combination of state planning and private Mexican and American investing and execution. As with the cities in the American Southwest, developing locales such as Acapulco and sectors of Monterrey and Mexico City began to exhibit a new culture catering to the needs and wants of migrants. Tourist dollars exerted a strong demand in the blossoming cultural markets of Mexican tourist destinations, and they even influenced the United States as well. Older hotels and restaurants in Mexico felt obligated to modernize their accommodations and many new facilities were constructed. Some workers in these establishments then learned English to enhance the prospects for earnings from the Americans. And the Americans' dollars injected more capital into the country for subsequent development. At home in the United States, radio listeners began to hear reports about the travel possibilities down south and Midwestern American railroad lines or highway stops saw increased traffic heading to Mexico. The cultural

Mexican Peasant Community, Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico", in *Mexican Migration to the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 32-34. Note that Taylor states that remittances in registered mail were probably more than those sent in postal money orders. For the 1940s figure, see Knight, "Mexico c. 1930-1946," 67.

²⁶Berger, 121.

market creation process truly was a fusion of governmental, commercial, and migratory activities.

In addition to spotlighting the key agents of change, this study also seeks to shed some light on the relative pull of economic or nationalistic forces upon these agents' decisions. In 1920 both Mexico and the United States had populations and corporate organizations with diverse interests. Many among the fifteen million Mexicans and one hundred million Americans were loyal to their country, and large numbers had recently shown their willingness to risk their well-being while fighting for a concept—with many different and sometimes competing values—of national ideals that were reflected (if not always readily apparent) in the Mexican Revolution or the Great War. But short of being at war, most were probably more willing to pursue their own individual or family welfare than to sacrifice heavily for their country. Individuals pursued higher wages, even if it meant migrating to a new country. Businesses likewise chased profits, even though that entailed encouraging the relative advancement of another country. Government officials, pledged to represent their various constituents' interests but also pulled by the realities of electoral politics, generally strove for the economic advancement of their nation or locality at the same time they espoused nationalist rhetoric. Thus in times of danger, nationalistic loyalties became stronger, but during more peaceful times economic considerations generally prevailed.²⁷

I consider the transnational cultural market concept to sit in an adjacent seat beside the prominent place that the long-standing economic conceptions of labor and price markets have occupied since at least Adam Smith's time. Nation-states and

²⁷ This idea also complements Nora Hamilton's contention that the "peripheral" Mexican state was able to assert its autonomy more effectively during periods of crisis. Hamilton, 280-290.

individuals “trucking and bartering” for their own economic advancement simultaneously bring about cultural change that they might not have initially anticipated. In recent decades, we have also come to appreciate that many of our macro- and micro-level economic and cultural activities produce an impact on the environment. So politicians and policy makers have proposed a market-based mechanism for tracking and regulating certain pollutants. These reformers hope that governments, businesses, and individuals will then come to consider the environmental consequences of their actions alongside the economic and political gains or losses associated with a particular activity. It is my hope that this study suggests a useful way to account for cultural change in the past, present and future. When assessing transnational cultural change that occurs within a predominantly capitalist and democratic environment—and thus not heavily restricted by the state—the cultural market concept affords us a means for considering the relative contributions of the state, the business sector, and migrants.

Chapter One: Establishing Structural Connections, 1920 to 1926

Geographically they were neighbors, but Mexico and the United States lived culturally apart from each other in 1920. Vast political and economic differences reinforced this cultural separation. The memory of recent tensions between the two countries, including military interventions and delinquent debt payments, informed many citizens' views of their counterparts in the nearby land. Indeed these sentiments shaped two of the most important components affecting diplomatic relations, Mexico's explicitly nationalistic Constitution of 1917 and the United States' refusal to recognize the government in Mexico City. And yet during the early to mid 1920s significant political, commercial, and social connections formed which in turn enabled more cultural exchange across the border. The countries adopted a *modus vivendi* that enabled the resumption of formal relations. Numerous business owners in Mexico and the United States worked to reduce trade barriers and counterproductive stereotypes that diminished commerce, and new products and organizational techniques entered as a result. Hundreds of thousands of migrants from Mexico fundamentally altered the culture of the American towns and cities in which they settled, at least temporarily, while pursuing economic and social security. The result of this political and economic activity was a structure strong enough to support a burgeoning transnational cultural market.

The broad efforts of government representatives, businessmen, and migrants narrowed the cultural difference, but only modestly in the period from 1920 to 1926. As the 1920s began, a fair amount of the dilapidated edifice that sheltered political, economic and cultural relations during the Porfiriato and through the Revolution still remained standing. Old memories or feelings of mistrust or exploitation made it easier for

minority factions in both countries to oppose bi-national integration for a variety of reasons, some based on nationalistic sentiment but most related to economic self-interest. The large difference between the two nations' socio-economic conditions and resources as well as the historical legacy of military tension also often worked against the spirit of cooperation. Although formal relations resumed in 1923, major sticking points remained to be negotiated and very frequently provided rhetorical ammunition for business or political leaders on both sides of the border to oppose friendly ties. Still, this period established social and economic linkages along migrant networks and electrical grids that would continue to transmit culture even through the challenges posed by depression and oil nationalization in the later 1920s and 1930s. Once formed, these migratory and commercial networks acquired ever more capacity for moving people, ideas, and goods in both directions and thus moving the two countries closer together culturally.

These political and economic structural changes gradually strengthened the capitalistic foundation of the two countries' relationship. This increasing presence of capitalism, in turn, meant that multiple instances of Adam Smith's "market" forces became freer to promote cultural transmission between the two countries.

¹ Inside the United States border, a general concept of the "free market" had long guided political, economic and cultural developments, including, for example, decisions concerning private versus public ownership of transportation and utility systems. Now a more faithful extension of the market to relations with Mexico enabled a greater cross-section of American businessmen—not just mining, railroad, or oil interests—to "truck and barter" within Mexico. This broadening commercial interest helped to counter the

¹ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991).

recent tendency of the United States to use its military might to pursue its political objectives, as had conspicuously occurred in 1914 and 1916.

The legacy of Mexico's colonial past may have cast a longer shadow of state direction of economic affairs, but more Mexican politicians and businessmen likewise adopted market thinking to work around or loosely apply the nationalistic implications of the 1917 Constitution. Usually they did so, however, with an underlying acceptance of a greater state role in the economy.² Mexican political and commercial elites sought access to capital, and American investors in turn assayed the potential risks and rewards of the Mexican market. On the lower rung of the economic ladder, Mexican migrants—and their American employers—enjoyed a relatively uninhibited exchange of their labor, with little to no regulation of their movement by either the Mexican or American governments.

Appeals for a free market were thus common and powerful throughout the emerging capitalistic system that tied together the two countries. They were, however, appeals circumscribed by international conditions, ideological debates about the role of the state, and domestic politics, which sometimes included nationalistic calls to be wary of interacting with a suspect nationality. Thus the market between the nations was never close to being “free.” But as the rules for commercial and social intercourse moved along the spectrum between more or less regulated, so too did the degree of cultural transmission.

The variations of free market ideology and historical memory helped shape cultural relations during this period, but so too did positive personal connections. When Americans and Mexicans interacting together established a greater sense of mutual

² Roderic A. Camp, *Entrepreneurs and Politics in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 16-18 and 28.

respect and shared purpose, then it often facilitated cultural transmission. We can document this phenomenon most convincingly at the diplomatic level, during times when more personable individuals established enough common ground to overcome nationalistic differences. But we will also note scattered examples of common migrants or businessmen commenting on how their positive (or negative) personal interaction with a citizen from the other country either countered or reinforced some of the other influential forces such as the market or historical consciousness. The point here is not that charm, sincerity, and a smooth tongue were enough in themselves to establish a durable bond between different nationals. It is just that their presence, especially at the higher diplomatic levels, often improved relations to the point where exchange could occur, and their absence similarly often dampened any hope of interaction.

This first chapter therefore will document the figurative construction (or retrofitting) of American and Mexican *mentalities* that both integrated the two lands into a broader capitalistic market and reduced some of the prejudices that inhibited cultural interchange. We will also chronicle the literal construction, with governmental and private initiatives, of both nations', but especially Mexico's, transportation and communications infrastructure. Together, the ideological and physical structural changes provided the basis for an enduring transnational cultural market where goods and ideas could be exchanged relatively freely.

A Statistical Snapshot

The great difference between the two nations' demographic, social, political, and economic levels in 1920 help explain the similar discrepancy in culture. The population

of the United States at the time was 107.4 million, that of Mexico 14.3 million.³ These gross numbers also contain a significant urban/rural division which determined the cultural options of the masses. For 1920 marked a demographic watershed in the United States, the first time more than half the population resided in communities of 2,500 or more. In Mexico, the rural figure was nearly seventy percent. As James Wilkie points out, though, the rural/urban threshold indicated by the 2,500 population figure, which is what the census bureaus in both countries used, could in many cases be raised to 10,000 for Mexico, since its larger rural locales often lacked the development found in smaller American counterparts. For the country as a whole, it is likely that over ninety percent of the Mexican population still lived in buildings without sewage disposal in 1920, and approximately half went barefooted.⁴

Both countries faced some political uncertainty, but Mexico's difficulties revealed how the threat of rebellion lingered and thus upset her ability to establish stability. Since the fall of 1919 President Wilson's recovery from an incapacitating stroke had been slow and limited, and the Red Scare and race riots disturbed certain cities. Meanwhile Mexico's political strife was in effect one in a series of revolutionary aftershocks, in which a succession crisis led to President Carranza's forced exodus from the capital and then subsequent murder in May 1920. The succeeding interim presidency of Adolfo de la Huerta, following the dictates of the Sonoran Plan de Agua Prieta, appointed numerous state governors depending on their loyalty. While Pancho Villa had been subdued with

³ United States, Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, No. 44 (1921)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 39; James J. Wilkie, *The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change Since 1910* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970), 299. Mexico's census figures are for 1921.

⁴ Wilkie, 215-231. Although the statistics for sewage only go back to 1939, in that year 86.5 percent of the population were living in buildings without inside sewage disposal. Likewise, Wilkie's figure for barefootedness in 1940 is 26.6 percent.

the provision of a personal hacienda, other generals still represented a threat. Shortly after Carranza's downfall, the United States withdrew its formal recognition of Mexico's government. Before it would reestablish relations, the United States indicated it must have guarantees of a claims commission for reimbursing Americans for losses, resumption of debt payments, and a commitment against applying retroactively the 1917 Constitution.⁵

In economic terms, the United States enjoyed an incredible advantage in comparison with Mexico. Financing and supplying armaments for the Great War allowed the United States to emerge from the conflict as the world's leading creditor and manufacturing nation, with a gross national product of \$91.5 billion in 1920.⁶ The years of revolutionary violence in Mexico, meanwhile, had left much of the economy (and society) literally in shambles. Describing the "year of hunger," 1917, and later noting that the next few years saw only modest improvement, Enrique Krauze writes

The government, with an enormous debt of almost 750 million pesos and no internal or external credit, could barely do more than meet its insatiable military budget. Unemployment was rising, and the country was in ruins. . . . Crops went unharvested, railroads had been destroyed, cattle were exported to buy munitions, mines and industries closed, banks failed, capital was stolen or hoarded. The cities were short of water, food, coal. Black markets were flourishing everywhere. The worldwide epidemic of influenza as well as typhus and other diseases were spreading through the country. The nation's agriculture was close to catastrophic. Subsistence crops failed; for lack of funds, grain could not be imported; hunger was rampant. The *campesinos* . . . had to overcome a great Mexican revulsion against killing and eating horses. Elsewhere they ate earth.⁷

⁵ John W. F. Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 17-92. While a few of the individuals involved in the *Primer Jefe's* death in Tlaxcalantongo attempted to present the gunshot wound as a suicide, Carranza died while his camp was attacked in the early morning.

⁶ Ben J. Wattenberg, *Statistical History of the United States: From Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 224.

⁷ Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, trans. by Hank Heifetz (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 366-367; Dulles, 106-108. For the first year of President Obregón's administration, Dulles notes that 1920-1921 represented a brief post-War "depression" in which

Government Relations: the Obstacles to and Opportunities for Recognition

The reestablishment of bi-national formal diplomatic ties has been well documented by other authors, but here it is important to review the politics of the recognition process because it provided the context for cultural exchange.⁸ As an acute intersection of politics and economics, recognition would fundamentally affect future investment in a wide range of fields and thus impact the average Mexican's life in many ways. Uncertainty about political stability and the implications of the 1917 Constitution for existing or future property and contractual arrangements slowed the process. What Stephen Haber has written concerning Mexican industrialists during this period applied at least as much to American investors: they wanted "confidence in the ability of the state to stifle challenges to the existing order effectively, and they must feel secure that the basic rules of the game will not be changed."⁹ Congressional and executive leaders who pursued closer ties risked alienating powerful constituencies whose jobs or businesses might be threatened by foreign competition. Recognition also involved other powerful countries that wanted to satisfy Mexico's desire to sell petroleum or to buy manufactured goods, a fact which piqued certain American economic and military/strategic sensibilities. Ideologies, especially the American emphasis on free enterprise and the Mexican concern for asserting national sovereignty, informed the relations as well. Thus multiple American and Mexican perspectives shaped events, and it is simplistic to assert simply that "Mexico" acted nationalistically or that the "United States" or "American

most of Mexico's mining and agricultural export levels fell between 50 and 75 percent. The country's one saving grace was rising demand for petroleum.

⁸ Linda B. Hall, *Oil, Banks, and Politics: The United States and Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1917-1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 131-154; N. Stephen Kane, "American Businessmen and Foreign Policy: The Recognition of Mexico, 1920-1923," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 90:2 (Summer 1975), 293-313.

⁹ Stephen H. Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890-1940* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), 194.

businesses” imperialistically “dominated” proceedings. Many hands on both sides pushed forward for closer ties, even as they sensed others pushing in the opposite direction.

One of the most important assists for closer ties came from Thomas W. Lamont, “widely conceded to be the most prominent international banker of his generation.”¹⁰ A partner in the J.P. Morgan firm, Lamont headed the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico (ICBM), formed in 1918 with the goal of negotiating a resumption of payments toward Mexico’s external debt.¹¹ Since the Mexican treasury depended heavily on taxes of exports, and as the country sorely needed infrastructural improvements to facilitate the trade, the ICBM came to view recognition as a necessary condition for Mexico to begin repaying its debts. Its primary responsibility, however, was to represent those who were trying to recover monies lent to Mexico. To realize this goal, Lamont pushed behind the scenes for recognition.

In addition to the large banking houses, many small to mid-sized firms lobbied for increased commercial exchange. Writing to his United States Senator, Sheldon Cary “want[ed] pressure brought to bear on the State Department to bring about some sort of relations that will help us get business and help us employ more labor.”¹² Cary, president of the Cleveland based Browning Company, a manufacturer of locomotive cranes and other earthmoving equipment, emphasized that “there is substantial business for our little company to work on and probably obtain as soon as a satisfactory treaty is negotiated.” Otherwise, he concluded, “the buyers of Mexico will turn to England, Belgium or

¹⁰ Hall, 85.

¹¹ Kane, “American Businessmen and Foreign Policy,” 302-303; Hall, 84-103. In some literature the ICBM is referred to as the IBCM, International Bankers Committee on Mexico.

¹² United States, Department of State, Record Group 59 (hereafter USDOS RG 59), Dec. File 612.1115/31, Sheldon Cary to Ralph S. Dodds (Clerk for Senator Frank B. Willis), 24 October 1922.

Germany for locomotive cranes if they cannot get them from us.”¹³ The threat posed by foreign competition—mostly from Europe but in the 1930s increasingly from Japan as well—was a nationalist point made again and again by American businessmen.

President Obregón presented the Mexican case for recognition. While nationalistic in deed—losing an arm while serving as one of Mexico’s most effective generals during the Revolution—and partially sympathetic to the agrarianism enunciated in the Constitution—Obregón also believed his nation needed foreign investment capital for infrastructure improvements and to prop up the economy. The Mexican president’s views were seconded by the Nogales Chamber of Commerce, which wrote that the “business interests of Ambos Nogales feel that their future expansion and continued prosperity depends, in a large measure, upon the completion of the line of the Southern Pacific of Mexico to Guadalajara.”¹⁴ Much money—an estimated \$30 million—would also be needed to pay the country’s military and thus maintain the stability required for investor confidence.¹⁵ Obregón’s desire to obtain new loans thus complemented the ICBM’s hope for a stable Mexican economy that could export its goods and then repay its debts.

Like his Revolutionary predecessors who served as president, Obregón had somehow to maintain access to American capital but without appearing to kowtow to the northern colossus. Mexican revolutionaries had to effect a nationalist stance, else they risked appearing as but another Diaz. One of Madero’s rivals, for example, had criticized the new president for “being an arm of the Washington government.” Carranza had made

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mexico, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Record Group Obregón-Calles (OC) 104-N-11, President of Nogales Chamber of Commerce to Alvaro Obregón, 21 June 1922.

¹⁵ Hall, 86.

it a point to avoid being beholden to the United States.¹⁶ Obregón thus continued to project outwardly a political nationalism to insulate his administration from charges of abandoning Revolutionary principles. At the same time he strove for a *modus vivendi* with the American oil companies, banks, and government.

Sensing an opportunity to take advantage of the differences between American bankers and the larger petroleum producers, Obregón began using increased taxes on oil to begin repayments of the Mexican debt. His executive decree, which took effect on July 1, 1921, placed a 10 to 12 percent export tax on petroleum.¹⁷ The American oil companies protested, using private property rhetoric to label the tax “confiscatory.” Almost immediately they asked the State Department to use its offices to obstruct implementation of the tax. The State Department rejected this course of action and encouraged the companies to negotiate directly with the Mexican government, but the companies first stopped their operations in an attempt to shut off Mexico’s badly needed revenue source.¹⁸ Several thousand oil workers in Tampico suddenly were jobless. It was at this point that the U.S. government briefly aroused Mexican memories of the “gunboat diplomacy” of the revolutionary decade.¹⁹

Gunboats That Did Not Fire

The gunboat *Sacramento* and the cruiser *Cleveland* anchored in Tampico on 7 July for the stated purpose of protecting American property in the event of civil unrest.

¹⁶ Lorenzo Meyer, *Mexico and the United States in the Oil Controversy, 1917-1942*, trans. by Muriel Vasconcellos, 2nd Ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 30.

¹⁷ *Excelsior*, 8 June 1925, p.1. The *New York Times* reported that the tax on exports was 25%, another indication of how national perspectives could make problematic the determination of even basic facts; *New York Times*, 7 July 1921.

¹⁸ N. Stephen Kane, “Corporate Power and Foreign Policy: Efforts of American Oil Companies to Influence United States Relations with Mexico, 1921-1928,” *Diplomatic History* vol 1:2 (Summer 1977), 176-181.

¹⁹ *Excelsior*, 2-5 July 1921.

As the situation on the ground was relatively quiet and their continued presence might itself produce an incident, the two warships departed the following day. Their stay thus was brief, but the sharp reactions it prompted reveal how historical memory and different ideologies informed the political perspectives of leaders and commoners alike.

In the United States, commentary ranged from anti-imperialist (or anti-executive) political maneuvering to mainstream editorial enthusiasm for applying the Roosevelt Corollary.²⁰ Even before the ships had arrived, Republican Senator Robert La Follette proposed a resolution that “no troops should be landed on Mexican soil or any other military action taken without express authority of Congress.”²¹ A *New York Times* editorial, however, viewed the naval presence as necessary due to the Revolutionary experience of “insurgents who levied on American oil properties,” and because the exporters were justified in protesting a tax that would “cause the producer to do business at a considerable loss.” A *Times* article that appeared a few days prior to the ships’ appearance, “When Mexico Will Pay Her Debt,” revealed the financial powers’ main objective in the controversy—protection of their private property. Taken together, the opposing views, combined with the fact that the ships came and left quickly and quietly, suggest that a more civil—i.e., less militaristic—approach to foreign relations increasingly informed American officials’ mindset. But the long-held insistence on the sanctity of private property still retained currency among powerful pro-business interests.

²⁰ It is possible that the progressive Republican LaFollette opposed the naval presence for its imperialistic appearance, its exercise of executive, rather than legislative, power, its expense, or some combination of these. The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine stated that the United States retained the option or obligation to use its military to promote political or economic stability in struggling Latin American nations.

²¹ *New York Times*, 7 July 1921.

The press reactions in Mexico revealed a common concern for national sovereignty and the citizens' painful memory of recent American challenges to it, although the Obregón administration's response mostly was one of calm and control. Rumors spread from Tampico that high officials in the United States Navy had received \$1,000,000 for sending the ships, which were said to be five in number and with the *Sacramento* alone caring 1,200 Marines. In actuality the number of Marines on the two ships was about fifty-five.²² The large footprint of America's historical legacy in the circum-Caribbean was still fresh, as an editorial in *Excelsior* made clear:

It is impossible to consider the arrival of the American warships in Mexican waters as an isolated case. . . . We are unable to forget . . . the sad development of the presence of American boats in Veracruz, which proceeded to occupy our finest primary port and was . . . the unjustified aggression from a country so rich and powerful as the United States.

When there already exists a definite plan, sketched in advance, the most insignificant happenings cleverly become powerful causes for a *casus belli*. The explosion of the *Maine* in Cuban waters was the pretext for an already inevitable war between the United States and Spain. . .

After the ships had left, the paper condemned the "pirate doctrine" exercised by the "jingoist" Secretary of the Navy Denby as yet another instance of the American "imperialist politics [seen] in Colombia, in Nicaragua, in Haiti, . . ." ²³

Continuing his desire to restore relations, however, Obregón steered away from talk of war. While the Mexican government would preserve its right to administer the nation's resources in the most beneficial way possible, he also noted that "the Companies are acting within their right by protesting against the payment of the tax, provided the price of oil in the United States had dropped to such an extent as to prohibit their making any profit." He coolly determined that the companies were trying to get him to back

²² *New York Times*, 8, 10 July 1921.

²³ *Excelsior*, 7, 9 July 1921.

down, but that this did not mean that relations with the United States government were threatened. Apparently Washington did not communicate directly to Mexico City early on in the episode about the ships' plans, but Obregón nevertheless conceded the benefit of doubt to the Americans. According to international law, the ships were entitled to refuel and refit in a friendly port as long as they left within twenty-four hours.²⁴ His determined but restrained approach ultimately helped diffuse the situation. The episode, which could have resulted in bloodshed and produced a real deterioration in relations, faded away. But while the Tampico incident has received much less historical coverage than the Veracruz intervention, it nevertheless revealed how a leader's personal disposition and willingness to account for multiple perspectives helped advance political, and therefore cultural, relations.²⁵

As with the various observers of the time, subsequent historians have assessed the Tampico incident with their own assumptions about imperialism, legalistic private property views, or national sovereignty. Lorenzo Meyer sees the presence of the ships as a continuation of the previous two-plus decades of American military interventions in the region. The American oil companies, military, and State Department were acting together to intimidate Mexico. The American diplomatic historian N. Stephen Kane, however, suggests that the State Department was taking "reasonable precautions" to avoid potential damages to the valuable oil equipment and wells. The quick exit of the ships shows that

²⁴ *New York Times*, 7, 9 July 1921; *Excelsior*, 7 July 1921.

²⁵ Veracruz does deserve much more historical coverage, since it involved significant loss of life and received much coverage at the time. But Tampico does serve our purposes in demonstrating that a shift had occurred over seven years in the American government's attitude toward relations with Mexico.

the U.S. Secretary of State Hughes “had no intention to permit the oil companies to precipitate acts.”²⁶

Was the appearance of the ships “imperialistic”? The great majority of Mexicans perceived it to be. As the *Excelsior* editorial noted, they were right to associate the event with the occupation of Veracruz that had occurred but seven years earlier and with the other instances of the United States sending in the Marines to circum-Caribbean ports. A smaller majority of Americans, on the other hand, would have agreed with having a presence to protect property. After years of banditry and political instability in the region, and not knowing that Obregón would survive, it made sense to strive for a preventive rather than reactive action. Synthesizing these two perspectives, it is fair to say that the incident was a form of “imperialism lite.” Although it was a far less forceful affair than the 1914 occupation of Veracruz, American officials could have handled the Tampico situation more deftly. Specifically the United States could have first asked for an increased Mexican police or military presence in Tampico. If Mexico appeared unable or unwilling to cooperate, then providing clearer communications about the intended purpose and length of stay would have been appreciated by the Mexican government. As it was, the situation might have erupted into something that resembled the occupation of Veracruz in 1914. That is just what had happened seven years prior: what should have been a minor misunderstanding between Mexican and American forces in Tampico

²⁶ Lorenzo Meyer, 77, 98-99; Kane, “Corporate Power and Foreign Policy,” 178. Assessing relations during the early 1920s, Meyer writes, “There was no sign of toning down the more notorious aspects of American imperialism that had prevailed at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.” This argument for continuity in effect categorizes the presence of ships (Tampico 1921) with their actual firing (e.g., Veracruz, 1914), a position which seems hard to sustain. Meyer’s insistence on the centrality of oil to the U.S. position also minimizes the sizeable influence that bankers, merchants, and manufacturers increasingly wielded with the State Department.

escalated into the eventual occupation of the port further south.²⁷ Of course, there was also a chance that in the absence of the navy the unemployed workers would inflict significant damage on the valuable property and equipment.

Ultimately, the real significance of the incident was that from this point on the United States would show more restraint with regard to demonstrating a military show of force in Mexico. The interpretations of Meyer and Kane noted above capture the nationalistic spirit of the Mexican view and the legalistic justification of the American side, but they miss the new and significant presence of civility that tempered the dispute. The boats had not fired. Obregón's calm had preserved the possibility of achieving recognition in the near future. More Americans realized that stability in such a local situation might be possible without military intervention, and Mexicans learned too that Americans could operate without military intervention. Some powerful business sectors such as the petroleum industry sought a hard line and there were still fundamental issues to solve, but the threat of confrontation would grow weaker with time. Indeed, the two militaries would soon be cooperating with each other. As diplomatic mechanisms improved, so too did the chances for stronger economic and cultural connections.

Recognition Achieved

With the ships gone but the disagreement between the Mexican government and the oil companies not, the Mexican Secretary of Finance, Adolfo de la Huerta, proposed that the newly increased export taxes on oil be paid with government bonds—the same ones that the ICBM was seeking to redeem at full value—that could be purchased on the

²⁷ John S. D. Eisenhower, *Intervention!: The United States and the Mexican Revolution 1913-1917* (New York: Norton, 1993), 79-108. After losing all patience with Victoriano Huerta's regime, President Wilson used the temporary seizure of a small boat of American sailors in Tampico as a pretext for preventing the shipment of German armaments to Huerta at Veracruz.

open market by the oil companies at between 40 and 50 percent of their face value.²⁸ This arrangement would, in Obregón's eyes, at least partially satisfy the needs of both of these larger American interests and therefore suggest the reestablishment of formal relations between the two governments. But although it made the tax increase more palatable for the oil companies, the scheme only stayed in effect from mid-1921 until early 1922 because the ICBM wanted the bondholders whom it represented to receive a better return on the bonds.²⁹

As a pre-condition for granting recognition, the United States State Department in 1921 proposed a Treaty of Friendship to exact certain guarantees from Mexico. Reflecting the American sanctity for private property rights, the formal United States' position held that the two countries should establish a general claims commission for settling property losses since 1868 and a special claims commission for losses suffered during the recent Revolution. Mexico must also not apply Article 27 retroactively. In his response to Sheldon Cary's inquiry mentioned above, Secretary of State Hughes stated that the United States must

maintain one clear principle which lies at the foundation of international commerce. When a nation has invited intercourse with other nations, has established laws under which investments have been lawfully made, contracts entered into and property rights acquired by citizens of other jurisdictions, it is an essential condition of international intercourse that international obligations shall be met and that there shall be no resort to confiscation and repudiation.³⁰

A recent, in-depth social science study of the topic corroborates the sincerity of Hughes's sentiment. "The United States enforced property rights because it was a limited

²⁸ Hall, 88-90; Jan Bazant, *Historia de la deuda exterior de México (1823-1946)* (Mexico City El Colegio de México, 1968), 186-187.

²⁹ Bazant, 187.

³⁰ USDOS RG 59, 612.1115/34, Charles E. Hughes to Senator Frank B. Willis, 8 November 1922.

government that had made a commitment to protect the property rights of its citizens overseas. No U.S. administration could easily renege on this agreement without suffering electoral consequences or difficulties in Congress.”³¹

American oil companies operating in Mexico shared this view. As one of their various tactics for preserving their opportunities to exploit the rich Mexican fields, the oil companies urged the State Department to take a hard line, including armed intervention if necessary, to ensure that the Mexican state would not threaten their assets.³² In fact the large American petroleum firms, including Standard Oil of New Jersey, Texas Oil Company, Gulf Oil, and Edward Doheny’s Huasteca, had been fighting a rear-guard action against the new Mexican constitution’s provisions since their inception. During the Great War American oil companies argued that application of Article 27 to their properties constituted a threat to the Allies’ cause and to American national security interests.³³ As the war concluded, however, the firms abandoned their nationalist arguments in favor of legalist appeals to the sanctity of public property and commercial contracts. To this end, they stoked anti-Bolshevik fears, which were heightened by the recent wholesale wave of expropriations in Russia.³⁴ They also relied on the support of Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall, a supporter of the oil interest, who had written, “So long as I have anything to do with the Mexican question, no government of Mexico will

³¹ Stephen Haber, Armando Razo, and Noel Maurer, *The Politics of Property Rights: Political Instability, Credible Commitments, and Economic Growth in Mexico, 1876-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 349.

³² Lorenzo Meyer, 46-74; 162; Kane, “Corporate Power and Foreign Policy,” 171-198.

³³ Lorenzo Meyer, 67.

³⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 62-63. Within the first year of the Bolshevik Revolution the new state nationalized banks, the oil industry in the Caucasus, the sugar industry, and many others. Mira Wilkins, “Multinational Enterprise to 1930: Discontinuities and Continuities,” in Alfred B. Chandler, Jr. and Bruce Mazlish, eds., *Leviathans: Multinational Corporations and the New Global History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77; Wilkins states that the Russian Revolution’s expropriations prompted a “major retreat” of multinational enterprise investment throughout the world.

be recognized, with my consent, which does not first enter into a written agreement promising to protect American citizens and their property rights in Mexico.”³⁵

The oil companies’ political influence in the United States gradually weakened as pressure from banking and commercial interests pushed harder to recover old debts or to uncover new business opportunities, both of which were hampered by the lack of formal recognition. The United States had not even sent an official representative to Mexico’s 1921 centennial celebration of its independence.³⁶ But the next year Lamont and De la Huerta met in New York to resume talks at settling the outstanding debt issue. The Mexican side also hoped to secure a loan for a central bank and irrigation projects, two instruments for stability that would improve the odds for recognition. The Lamont-De la Huerta Agreement, signed by the two parties in June 1922 and approved by the Mexican government that September, made Mexico responsible for repaying its bond debts with the exception of a series issued during the Victoriano Huerta regime. It also obligated Mexico to return the national railways to private control. The accord obligated the government to pay over \$500 million in capital and interest over the next fifty-five years, but Mexico received no significant loans nor did it secure recognition.³⁷ The American banking interests had won a temporary victory for their bondholders and for their ideology of the sanctity of contracts. As stipulated in the agreement, Mexico would make its first payment of \$15 million in late 1923.

As Linda Hall notes, however, De la Huerta’s inability to secure a loan contributed heavily to the eventual falling out between himself and Obregón. And the ICBM’s insistence on nearly full payment of the bonds at a time when the Mexican

³⁵ Dulles, 159.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁷ Bazant, 186-194; Hall, 84-103; Lorenzo Meyer, 90-9; Dulles, 145-147.

economy was struggling to pay its bills would stiffen Obregón's and his successor Plutarco Calles's sense of economic nationalism. A settlement of the debt question had been one of the obstacles to formal recognition, however, and its accomplishment was yet another indicator that the Obregón administration was moving its country closer to the capitalist "rules of the game." Lamont concurred, and offered in a letter to Hughes his assessment of the need for recognition:

Of course the whole situation hangs together as one; that is to say, unless the Mexican government is able to handle itself so as to obtain your recognition the chances are that it will never to be able to carry out the agreement with its external creditors. Likewise, unless it adopts a broad and far-sighted policy for oil development by the American companies, the Mexican government will very likely be unable to obtain revenues wherewith it can carry out the agreement with its creditors.³⁸

The United States finally warmed to formal recognition of Mexico after the Bucareli Accords were negotiated in the spring and summer of 1923. For about two years prior to this the United States had pursued its earlier quest to sign a "Treaty of Friendship and Commerce" with Mexico, but several points concerning private property protections remained as obstacles. Regarding expropriation of lands, Mexican Foreign Secretary Pani said that the U.S. could object less if it were to use a "human judgment [rather] than a legalistic one." Besides, by later 1922 Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes was coming to understand that President Obregón would not be able or willing to make agreements about Article 27 or land expropriations before recognition was offered. To do so would be a national insult. Thus in the spring of 1923 a mutual friend of both

³⁸ Michael J. Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 195-199, with quote appearing on 198.

Presidents Obregón and Harding, General James A. Ryan, encouraged the two executives to pursue talks in a more informal method.³⁹

Each country thus sent two representatives to No. 85 Avenida Bucareli “to exchange impressions about the Mexican-American situation in order to reach a mutual understanding between the two countries, and inform their government for a definite conclusion.”⁴⁰ The American representatives, with a “subtle quality of winning confidence and personal liking,” appeared to engage more “humanly” with their Mexican counterparts than had been the norm with the lawyers and the oilmen.⁴¹ After a few months of negotiations, the conference produced formal mechanisms for establishing general (non-revolutionary) and special (revolutionary, i.e. 1910-1920) claims commissions for alleged damages. The talks also yielded an “understanding,” which was recorded in “extraofficial minutes,” regarding petroleum and agrarian lands issues. Essentially, the Mexican representatives agreed that the Mexican government would follow the lead of five recent Mexican Supreme Court decisions which held that Article 27 would not be applied retroactively to oil companies’ lands that had been exploited prior to the Constitution’s adoption in May 1917. Payment and size guidelines were also established for the agricultural land expropriation and redistribution plans that comprised a central promise of the revolution. Most importantly, the Bucareli Accords sufficiently satisfied the American government’s basic criteria for reestablishing formal relations, although this fundamental point was not specified in writing. After three years of

³⁹ Hall, 131-140; Dulles, 162.

⁴⁰ Dulles, 158-172, with quote appearing on p. 164; Hall, 139-145. The Mexican representatives were Fernando González Roa, an oil lawyer and specialist in international law, and Ramón Ross, a merchant, farmer, and very close friend of President Obregón. The Americans were Charles Beecher Warren, a former ambassador to Japan, and John Barton Payne, a former interior secretary.

⁴¹ Hall, 150-151,

problematic limbo, the United States once again formally recognized Mexico's government as legitimate in September 1923.

We must now assess whether, as several historians have concluded, that Obregón and Mexico compromised much at the conference. Jean Meyer writes that Mexico made “weighty concessions favouring American interests.”⁴² Lorenzo Meyer, meanwhile, concludes that “Bucareli was no great triumph in terms of the long-range national interest as conceived under any of the various interpretations of the Revolution.”⁴³ A look at the results of the “concessions”—formal agreements to establish claims commissions and a “gentlemen’s agreement concerning petroleum and agricultural land expropriation issues—shows that it is a stretch of the imagination to hold that Mexico suffered unduly under United States pressure.⁴⁴ Mexico paid little or nothing for the great majority of damage claims heard by the two claims commissions. After seven years of operation, the General Claims Commission had approved 89 awards for the 2,781 American claims made, paying \$4.6 million of the \$516 million sought. During the same time, 1924-1931, the Special Claims Commission—dealing with damages incurred during the Revolution—made no awards for the 3,176 claims made asking for \$421 million in damages, although a \$500,000 generalized payment was eventually made in 1935.⁴⁵ Petroleum revenues in the immediate aftermath Bucareli were much less lucrative due to heavy exploitation from 1920-1923 and the companies’ reticence about investing further.

⁴²Jean Meyer, “Mexico: Revolution and Reconstruction in the 1920s,” ed. Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. V. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 159-161.

⁴³ Lorenzo Meyer, 100-104, with quote appearing on p. 102.

⁴⁴ Hall, 131-154; “Gentlemen’s agreement” is how Linda Hall describes the Bucareli Accords. Hall concludes that Mexico attained an “extraordinary bargain” in the process.

⁴⁵ A. H. Feller, *The Mexican Claims Commissions, 1923-1934: A Study in the Law and Procedure of International Tribunals* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1935), 56-82 and 315-318. In comparing the work of the General and Special Claims Commissions to that of similar bodies for disputes between Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and Germany, Feller concludes that the General Claims Commission had “serious difficulties” and the Special Claims Commission was a “complete failure.”

In any event, and regardless of the “understanding” or court rulings, the Calles administration, which came to power in later 1924, soon began to revise the petroleum regulations along more nationalistic lines. Obregón’s achievement of diplomatic recognition from the United States soon led to the speedy recognition from other countries as well. It also enhanced his ability to survive, as the United States supplied Obregón’s forces with arms during the de la Huerta Rebellion that occurred just months after the talks on the Avenida Bucareli concluded.

Recognition’s Implications for Cultural Exchange

Recognition and *the way it was achieved* were significant for cultural transmission. Although most of the large oil companies were not happy with the settlement and soon began to shift more of their attention to Venezuela, other businesses—American and Mexican—appreciated the stability that was established in a legal sense and subsequently in a military sense. Some of the legal issues regarding oil and agricultural lands still remained. These sticking points and other legal questions would linger in some cases for nearly two decades, but the settlement of the recognition problem was very important for legitimizing the two nations’ relations. The Bucareli Accord’s somewhat informal nature passed on the legal challenges to subsequent administrations, but those deliberations would be conducted by two nations that recognized each other’s legitimacy. It was important to settle the legal questions, but to get into the legal realm it was just as important to establish a more humane sense of respect as well. This is exactly what the negotiators at Avenida Bucareli achieved. With one major hurdle overcome, Mexico City celebrated with the “pealing of bells” after the announcement of formal diplomatic ties.

Obregón's focus, and political genius, thus was to fight incessantly for recognition while simultaneously insisting on American respect for Mexican sovereignty. His leadership enabled other figures, who also could envision a middle ground between legalism and nationalism, to advance the rapprochement process of 1922-1923. Secretary of State Hughes showed his willingness to accept recognition before a formal treaty was announced. The American representatives then repeatedly used personal tact to push through legalistic snags during the Bucareli negotiations. And Lamont and Pani subsequently exhibited this cooperative spirit during their debt re-negotiations in 1925. Combined, this balancing of legalistic and nationalistic concerns led to recognition, which allowed for greater market opportunities for a variety of businesses and individuals. Most investors wanted a more secure legal framework established before they would risk their capital. In short, politics established boundaries for economic exchange, and trade and investment would in turn transmit culture.

As the high-level negotiations proceeded at their stop and start pace through the early 1920s, numerous businessmen had continued their own parallel efforts to strengthen commercial connections. The American Chamber of Commerce in Tampico worked to help that city shed "its unenviable reputation of being one of the largest modern cities without telephone or fire protection." Here the Chamber surveyed its own and community members to determine their telephonic needs and to solicit public and private capital to initiate the construction of phone and water infrastructural systems. Their efforts "in actively furthering numerous civic improvements," the United States State Department noted, were "incidentally opening good markets for the American equipment

and supplies.”⁴⁶ In the process they were advancing a more urban culture based on electricity and networked connections to the greater capitalist market. The outbreak of the de la Huerta rebellion in the winter of 1923-1924, however, alarmed many businessmen and briefly slowed the cultural transmission process. The ACCM cancelled its February 1924 trade conference.⁴⁷

Coming into office in late 1924, Plutarco Elías Calles enjoyed two luxuries that his predecessor, Alvaro Obregón, had bequeathed to him: recognition from the United States and a less dangerous threat from his own military, since several generals had been eliminated during the Huertista uprising. This relative political stability enabled Calles to focus on economic development. His administration’s goals, in summary, were “economic independence from the colossus of the north, industrialization, the importance of a middle class, primary reliance on the private sector, and the need for vigorous action by the state to create the conditions for private sector investment.”⁴⁸ As such, the plan would once again pit against each other the two countries’ competing concepts of nationalism—private property and sovereignty—that had been broached, but not resolved, during the talks concerning recognition.

As a result partly of Mexico’s reenergized economic nationalism and partly of personality clashes, official relations soured in Calles’s first year.⁴⁹ In Washington, D.C., Frank B. Kellogg replaced Charles E. Hughes as Secretary of State. Kellogg was less

⁴⁶ USDOS RG 59, 612.11171, James B. Stewart (American Consulate in Tampico) to State Department, 20 March 1923.

⁴⁷ USDOS RG 59, 612.11171, Claude T. Dawson (American Consul General in Mexico City) to State Department, 6 January 1924.

⁴⁸ Douglas Bennett and Kenneth Sharpe, “The State as Banker and Entrepreneur: The Last Resort Character of the Mexican State’s Intervention, 1919-1976,” *Comparative Politics* 12 (January 1980): 173, quoted in Camp, 17-18.

⁴⁹ Robert Freeman Smith, “The Morrow Mission and the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico: The Interaction of Finance Diplomacy and the New Mexican Elite,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Nov., 1969), 149-166.

charismatic than Hughes, and his obtuseness was compounded by the hard line attitude of the new ambassador to Mexico. James Sheffield, who generally held Mexicans in low regard and believed that they responded better to the stick rather than the carrot, utterly failed to establish meaningful rapport with his diplomatic counterparts.⁵⁰ President Calles, meanwhile, took a more nationalistic tack with the oil companies than had Obregón, and the claims commissions were not relieving the stalemate that existed over Article 27 and agrarian lands. After consulting with Sheffield in Washington, D.C. in June 1925, Kellogg released a statement to the press that offered only luke-warm support to Mexico and even expressed dissatisfaction with the Calles administration. The Secretary of State acknowledged the Mexican government's desire to make indemnity payments for illegally seized agrarian properties and that it would take time to establish political and economic stability. But then he stated that the "Government of Mexico is now on trial before the world." The United States would not "countenance [Mexico's] violation of her obligations and failure to protect American citizens."⁵¹ The *New York Times* editorial viewed Kellogg's "unusual diplomatic action" as an unfortunate necessity given the rumors and reports of instability coming out of Mexico, but concluded that "it seems unhappily probable that our relations with Mexico are about to enter another troubled period."⁵²

Tensions increased through late 1925 and remained strained in 1926. Calles's drafting of a more stringent regulatory petroleum law, which disregarded the agreements

⁵⁰ L. Ethan Ellis, *Frank B. Kellogg and American Foreign Relations, 1925-1929* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 196), 1-47; Smith, 153. Sheffield frequently referred to Mexican officials as "ignorant Indians."

⁵¹ *New York Times*, 13 June 1925, pp. 1, 5. The Mexican Ambassador in Washington, D.C., Manuel Téllez confirmed Kellogg's statement that Mexico planned to pay American title holders for their property, but he did not respond passionately as Calles would do the next day.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 14.

made in the Bucareli Accords, and his escalating conflict with the Catholic Church in Mexico were both provocative. To make matters worse, Ambassador Sheffield continued to see many of the Revolution's state-sponsored initiatives as confirmation that Mexico was "the second Bolshevik country on earth."⁵³ Sheffield's temperament, which included the writing of "constant, severe notes . . . on small and unimportant matters" and the projection of mistrust and contempt for the Mexican government, nearly prompted Calles to ask for his recall.⁵⁴

The deterioration of national relations as a result, at least in part, of poor personal relations is illustrated briefly in an American consular assessment of a minor Mexican official in the middle of 1926. David Reyes Retana, who had been nominated as Mexican vice-consul in Philadelphia, was noted for being reasonably fluent speaking English and proficient at writing it. Most important to the American viewpoint, the nominee "was one of the extreme minority of Mexicans who thinks highly of the United States."⁵⁵ Adding to the tension, the two countries clashed diplomatically over their support of opposing factions in Nicaragua late in 1926.⁵⁶

As the year came toward an end, it was clear that the formal mechanisms for handling relations that had been achieved on Avenida Bucareli were being tested by old ideological differences and new personality conflicts among the diplomats—especially

⁵³ Krauze, 413-426, with quote appearing on 417.

⁵⁴ Ellis, 252, note 46.

⁵⁵ Mexico, AGN, Record Group Emilio Portes Gil (hereafter EPG), 347-17, translation of American correspondence Alexander W. Weddell to James R. Sheffield, 24 July 1926. This Mexican source document likely was translated from documents that Mexican espionage efforts had intercepted. In early 1927, the American press reported that Mexican officials had illicitly acquired a few hundred American documents. At the time this revelation embarrassed the State Department and came to be known as the Stolen Papers affair. For our purposes, Mexico's spying reveals the low level of trust that existed. American documentation of the affair is in a National Archives folder, "124.126 Stolen Papers." For more detail, see Ellis, 41-44.

⁵⁶ Krauze, 417-419; Dulles, 322.

the legalistic American ambassador. Sheffield made requests for handguns and for construction of safe-storage area below his embassy, and many expressed doubts that the two sides could find an amicable bypass around the impasse.⁵⁷

Overcoming Different Perceptions of Nationalism

Nationalism had a different shade of meaning for each country, and this difference has influenced relations for a century and a half. While American entities more often have sought a legalistic understanding of relations that stressed “due process,” Mexicans have emphasized the concepts of sovereignty and respect. To some extent the tension that existed in the 1920s was a continuation of the legalistic dynamic that preceded and followed the Mexican-American War. It will be recalled that the United States President, James K. Polk, used a skirmish and disagreement over the border location to state “American blood was shed on American soil” and thus to justify going to war. The Mexican viewpoint held that American troops south of the Nueces River were in Mexican territory. After the war, the United States government insisted that Mexico sign a formal treaty accepting \$15 million as compensation for the loss of nearly half of its territory.⁵⁸ The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in effect sanctioned the offer of conscience money for an imperialistic land grab. After the war thousands of former Mexicans, who with the treaty were now also American citizens, faced a legal onslaught against their land claims. Since the original titles had been based on a “poco más o menos” survey system, the *californios* struggled to prove their claims in court. As a result

⁵⁷ Smith, 155.

⁵⁸ John S. D. Eisenhower, *So Far From God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (New York: Random House, 1989), 49-68 and 360-368. We might also add that the American annexation of Texas and the Mexican reluctance to accept legally the *fait accompli* of the lost territory is yet another example of the legalistic/sovereignty split that has hampered relations.

they lost vast tracts of land in California to Anglo-Americans well-armed with lawyers.⁵⁹

The American land acquisitions may have been legal, but they certainly violated Mexicans' sense of justice and sovereignty.⁶⁰ The historical memory of these contrasting viewpoints, as well as some officials' continuing allegiance to them, preserved an element of mistrust in the bi-national relationship.

In the early to mid 1920s, disagreements over debt payments, property rights, damage claims, and the like highlighted the different nationalisms. When Adolfo de la Huerta was negotiating with the ICBM, he remarked about the legal wizards he was facing.⁶¹ Repeatedly, American governmental and business representatives emphasized "principles of law," "private property interests," and "contractual obligations" when discussing their relations. To some extent, these legalistic concerns reflected differences in the two nations' legal systems.

Constitutional provisions which in U.S. jurisprudence would have force of law prove in Latin jurisprudence to be without force and effect until implemented by statute. Duly enacted statutes which in the U.S. system would create legal rights and liabilities, enforceable in the courts, prove under Latin legal systems to require executive regulations before they can have judicial effect. . . . And the assumption that the courts will act as a branch of government wholly insulated from the executive—an assumption breached to some extent in every legal system that claims to honor it—clearly has less validity in Latin America than in the United States.⁶²

⁵⁹ Richard B. Rice, William A. Bullough, and Richard J. Orsi, *The Elusive Eden: A New History of California* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 204-205.

⁶⁰ This same dichotomous view of nationalism also complicates two of the central issues influencing political, economic and cultural relations today: Mexican migration to the United States and the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Mexican representatives often insist that migrants coming to the U.S. are treated disrespectfully, as are their truck drivers who try to import goods across the border. American officials counter that the migrants are "illegal" and that the Mexican vehicles do not meet the safety code standards. American political figures pursuing a compromise position concerning immigration have struggled to articulate a satisfactory legal status that affords long term residents legal "amnesty." Some Mexican commentators, meanwhile, consider the American insistence on safety or environmental standards to really be just legalistic rhetoric designed to limit economic competition from Mexico.

⁶¹ Hall, 100-102.

⁶² Raymond Vernon, *Public Policy and Private Enterprise in Mexico* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 11.

Thus the oil companies were not satisfied when President Obregón's administration assured them that Article 27 would not be applied retroactively to companies operating on pre-Constitutional claims, even when his position was backed up by five supreme court cases. Since a different executive might bring a new outlook—that included a new outlook for *his* supreme court—their entire legal basis might be challenged by a subsequent administration. Indeed that is what happened, as we will see in the next chapter.

History to this point only seemed to accentuate the difference in legal systems. Americans had long been keenly aware of Mexico's legacy of political instability and its implications for investors, travelers, etc. Mexicans, on the other hand, recalled memories of American imperialism, especially in 1846-1848 and 1914. From the Mexican perspective, it demonstrated an ironic extension of "might makes right" ideology for Americans to emphasize their legal "rights" after they had used military might to win them in the first place. The conflicting national perspectives appear in the mainstream press reactions to the arrival of U.S. naval ships after Obregón's tax decree went into effect July 1, 1921. *Excelsior*, as we have seen, vigorously opposed the apparent assault on Mexico's national sovereignty. The *New York Times*, meanwhile, considered the tax to be over twice as high as the Mexican sources did, 25 percent instead of 10-12. And the American paper wondered what the American companies could next expect, with "the wording of President Obregón's oil tax decrees that he expects no interference from any quarter with the 'extraordinary powers' which he proclaims."⁶³

⁶³ *New York Times*, 7 July 1921.

To an important extent for cultural relations, the Mexican president did conjure up an “extraordinary” power to help readjust and strengthen a structure of political relations built upon the competing, and therefore destabilizing, views of nationalism discussed in the preceding paragraphs. He partially satisfied the American need for protective legal guarantees for property rights and debts owed. At the same time he preserved the Mexican sense of self-respect, as when he instructed his finance minister de la Huerta to resist any American demands that challenged “our dignity as an autonomous people.”⁶⁴ President Obregón was assisted in this regard by American officials such as Thomas Lamont, lead negotiator of the ICBM and an influential advisor to President Coolidge, Secretary of States Hughes and Kellogg, and, Ambassador Sheffield’s effective replacement, Dwight Morrow. Lamont was “willing to negotiate on a give-and-take basis,” writes Robert Freeman Smith, “and emphasized specific issues rather than broad principles or legal technicalities.”⁶⁵ His experience as a powerful lawyer for J.P. Morgan betrayed an occasionally paternalistic attitude toward, in his view, his less sophisticated Mexican counterparts. But Lamont—like Obregón—understood the practicality of treating others with respect and humanity. “Friendliness counts with these people more than I can say,” he wrote to Kellogg a few months after the Secretary of State’s inflammatory declaration that Mexico’s government was “on trial before the world.”⁶⁶ When officials applied the right amount of subjective human elements to interpret the ostensibly objective elements written in the treaties and statutes, then people more readily exchanged goods and ideas across the border.

⁶⁴ Hall, 96-97.

⁶⁵ Smith, 152.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 152-153.

These events thus reveal the ambivalent role the law occupied within the transnational cultural transmission process in democratic and capitalistic countries. A certain legal structure reassures government officials, businessmen, and migrants that it would be relatively safe to venture into the foreign land. In our case study, the reestablishment of formal relations in 1923 provided an essential skeletal structure. But different national concepts of what was legal could still limit or strain relations or interactions between two peoples. A series of legal disputes over agrarian and oil property expropriations, tariff levels, and immigration rules, for example, continued to cause friction. For these specific cases, the “devil was in the details.” The quest for an objective rule of law encompassing two different citizenries inevitably required the application of subjective allowances for cultural differences.

Businessmen and Recognition

In the same year Mexico ratified its nationalistic constitution, many American businessmen were organizing themselves to pursue an increased share of the Mexican market, which they believed “under all economic laws should be inalienably theirs.” Conceived in the summer of 1917, the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico (ACCM) by December claimed eighty-five members, including Frank Sanborn of the famous Sanborn Brothers drugstore (and later restaurant). Monthly issues of the Chamber’s 1918 and 1919 journal contain articles for doing business in Mexico, including anti-German propaganda and analyses of the opportunities presented by the Great War. These issues display scores of advertisements for building and consumer products from corporate giants such as Du Pont and General Electric and from smaller enterprises such as the General Machinery and Supply Co, S.A. The articles also reveal

the Chamber's efforts to diminish stereotypes about the Mexican social and business climate and to promote the vast resources and market potential of the country. Thus emboldened to enter a new market, American businessmen promoted their own familiar products among themselves and associates by using English language advertisements. A modest new culture of "American" products thus circulated along the nascent network of owners and their businesses. The outlets' addresses on prominent Mexico City streets such as Avenida 16 de Septiembre and Avenida Francisco I. Madero indicate the changing look and feel of business in the capital, where one could now purchase a Harley Davidson motorcycle or contract for an Otis brand elevator. Branch locations in San Luis Potosi, Veracruz, and Tampico likewise reflect smaller ripples moving throughout the country.⁶⁷ By February 1920 the ACCM had grown to such an extent that it could host a week-long trade conference with about 500 bankers, manufacturers, exporters and importers from Mexico and the United States in attendance. According to the American Consulate General in Mexico City, this conference was the first of its type "ever organized by an American chamber of commerce in a foreign country."⁶⁸

Businessmen from both countries constantly lobbied for government support for their efforts to increase trade. Often their goals aimed at minimizing differences between the two nations' trade regulations and improving transportation and communication linkages. This drive to develop the commercial apparatuses, which would in turn transmit so much modern culture to Mexico, was clearly evident at the First International Trade

⁶⁷ USDOS 59, 612.11171, American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico, "Project for an American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico" and "The United States Southern Neighbor" (1917), *Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico*, vol. 1:4 (May 1918), vol. 1:5 (June 1918), and vol. 2:2 (March 1919). Dupont also was operating its first Mexico City plant by 1917. Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 179.

⁶⁸ USDOS 59, 612.11171, American Consulate General to State Department, 19 October 1921.

Conference organized by the Confederated Chambers of Commerce of Mexico. Held in Mexico City from June 20-26, 1921, the conference attracted some 700 attendees who addressed the following topics:

Recognition of the Obregon regime, commercial conditions in Mexico, good roads, transportation, telegraphic communication, passports, statistical information, methods of trade before, during and after the war, agrarian policy of the Mexican government, return of railroads to owners methods of selling agricultural implements in Mexico, advertising, methods of supplying salesmen traveling to foreign lands with funds in emergencies, bank collections on invoices, harbors at Corpus Christi and Tampico, retroactive and confiscatory laws, taxes on food commodities.⁶⁹

Large delegations from El Paso, Fort Worth, and San Antonio appeared at the conference, evidence of Texas's role as a centralized catalyst for commercial and cultural exchange.

The Mexican government's interest likewise is indicated by the presence of President Obregón, the Secretary of Foreign Relations, and the Secretary of Commerce, Industry and Labor.⁷⁰

The steady growth of the ACCM reflected an ever increasing flow of American goods and businesses in Mexico. In addition to listing many members from the financial and industrial manufacturing sectors, a 1921 membership directory also includes several producers and distributors of consumer products such as sewing machines, cars, medicines, mattresses, safety razors, photography materials, hair goods, corsets, motorcycles, sporting goods, etc. The Montgomery Ward Company was a member, and its wholesale catalog promised to other members of the ACCM "the best that the

⁶⁹ USDOS 59, 612.11171, American Consulate General George Chamberlain to Secretary of State, "Report on International Trade Conference," 27 June 1921.

⁷⁰ Ibid. The American government, in contrast, sent the Commercial Attaché from the United States embassy in Mexico to serve as the Special Representative of the Secretary of Commerce of the United States. Obviously it was much easier for higher level Mexican representatives to attend a function in their home city, but the disparity in rank of the two countries' representatives also reflected the disparate perspective that each country placed on reciprocal trade at the time. In subsequent chapters we will see a narrowing of the difference in terms of diplomatic representation levels at functions.

American market affords in general merchandise.” The roster now included members in most Mexican cities and in several American states. Some 411 of 670 members were residents of the United States, while most of the remainder resided in Mexico.⁷¹ As we shall see, while many in the press naturally focused on the more imperialistic demands of the large oil companies, scores of other businesses, large and small, bombarded the American Congress and State Department with pleas to promote commercial exchange.

Even though the fiscal year from July 1920 through June 1921 was a recession year for businesses throughout much of the world, the amount of trade between the United States and Mexico nevertheless increased by almost ten percent. During this period Mexico purchased some \$267 million in American products, including over \$10.5 million worth of automobiles, parts and tires. The United States, meanwhile, imported nearly \$155 million of Mexican goods, mostly in the form of natural commodities such as oil, silver, copper, cotton and henequen. If not for the XVIII Amendment, the United States would also have legally imported Mexican beer.⁷²

The figures for 1920-1921 also conform to a larger trend in which the destruction caused by the Mexican Revolution and by the Great War oriented more of Mexico’s import and export trade toward the United States. Mexican railways suffered much damage during the violent years, especially 1915-1916, and required large amounts of new timber, rails, and rolling stock to repair the transportation network. The fighting in Europe, meanwhile, disrupted European sources of capital and goods, and left the relatively unscathed United States sources in an advantageous spot for filling Mexican

⁷¹ USDOS 59, 612.11171, *Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico*, vol. 3:19 (September 1921) and American Consulate General George Chamberlain to Secretary of State with attached ACCM “List of Members”, 19 October 1921.

⁷² *Ibid.*, *Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico*, vol. 3:19 (September 1921), 16-19.

needs. For the upcoming fiscal year, two representatives of the Baldwin Locomotive Company had parleyed a week-long visit with Mexican officials, including President Obregón, into a contract for supplying sixty-five locomotives to Mexico's National railways. This sort of personal contact, noted the Journal of the ACCM, "is the way for American manufacturers to get business."⁷³

The early 1920s also saw the confluence of two important trends in the neighboring countries. In the United States the popularity of the car had risen from just over 2.4 million registered vehicles in 1915 to over 9.2 million in 1920.⁷⁴ This was good news economically for Mexico, where total production of crude petroleum reached 193 million barrels in 1921 and the amount exported, nearly 181 million barrels of 182 million barrels produced, peaked the following year.⁷⁵ In January of 1922, 83.3 percent of oil exported from Mexico went to the United States.⁷⁶ While the United States at this time produced about three fourths of the world's crude oil, the availability of the Mexican source added to the automobile's affordability, which Henry Ford had begun to pursue in earnest with his assembly line techniques in 1914. Now Ford and other producers hoped that a stable Mexico would provide another burgeoning market. In 1921 they exhibited forty-eight cars, eleven trucks, and six tractors at the first automobile show ever held in Mexico City, selling 250,000 pesos (125,000 dollars) worth of cars on the first day of the

⁷³ Ibid., 12-18.

⁷⁴ Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, No. 44 (1921)*, 354-355.

⁷⁵ Jean Meyer, "Mexico: Revolution and Reconstruction in the 1920s," 178; Jonathan C. Brown, *Oil and Revolution in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 122, cites slightly higher figures for Mexico's oil production: nearly 203 million barrels produced in 1921 and over 184 million barrels in 1922.

⁷⁶ Mexico, Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter SRE), 37-14-103, Secretaria de Hacienda y Crédito Público. Departamento de Impuestos Especiales "Destino del Petroleo Exportado Durante el Mes de Enero de 1922."

event.⁷⁷ Various articles appearing in *Excelsior* that same summer promoted plans for new highways and recent improvements in the performance of vehicles, which had become “one of the most necessary resources of every civilized country.”⁷⁸

Mexican and American business representatives, with modest support from their national governments, furthered the bi-national commercial connection in the winter of 1922. After immigration officials on both sides of the border granted waivers for the usual visa requirements, members of the Mexican Chambers of Commerce and the Chambers of Commerce of Texas held a joint conference in Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico in January 1922. The dedication of a new bridge over the Rio Grande River was one of the conference’s featured events.⁷⁹ As with a group trying to push-start a heavy truck, this sort of smaller-scale international business and intergovernmental cooperation at many points and times provided an important impetus to keep moving forward the establishment of new ties. Improved infrastructural connections such as the bridge helped the process, practically to the extent it improved transportation efficiency and symbolically in terms of a demonstrated willingness to work together. Had they wanted to or been instructed to, governmental officials could easily have delayed or completely obstructed the conference. Both sides in this example believed it advantageous to pursue a freer market between the two nations.

The growing range of American and Mexican businesses that wanted formal ties reestablished thus added weight to similar calls, discussed earlier in the chapter, for

⁷⁷ USDOS 59, 612.11171, *Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico*, vol. 3:19 (September 1921), 19.

⁷⁸ *Excelsior*, 3 July 1921.

⁷⁹ USDOS RG 59, 612.11171, Harry L. Walsh (American Consulate in Nuevo Laredo) to State Department, 16 December 1921 and Avery A. Adey (State Department Representative) to Harry L. Walsh, 29 December 1921.

reconciliation made by President Obregón and ICBM head negotiator Lamont. Besides recognition, the businesses (and key political leaders) also pursued the commercially and culturally powerful agenda of developing an infrastructure network that could exploit the Mexican market. While doing so, they naturally tried to advance their own interests in the burgeoning marketplaces and thus sometimes clashed. Nevertheless, the average citizens' cultural opportunities changed because businesses and governments both believed that pursuing infrastructural development would be beneficial—for profits, for productivity, for health, for getting reelected, etc.

Infrastructural Conduits of Culture: Electricity and Radio

Ideological differences about the respective roles of private or state intervention in large communications and transportation infrastructure projects affected the rate and type of cultural transmission through the differing conceptions. Private corporations assessed the profitability of installing electrical lines, for example, based on their perceptions of the market demand. Electrical consumers in areas that provided a large enough demand to allow for economies of scale generally received better rates and service, while those who did not either paid high rates or did without the utility. Municipal, state, and federal governments in both countries likewise looked at prospective costs and user demand levels, but they were much more appreciative of the considerable social benefits that might accrue from an otherwise expensive project. Improved health, productivity, and general welfare could, in the eyes of governmental officials and prospective consumers, justify either heavily regulating corporations or financing a project as a state expense. For different reasons, both the United States and Mexico relied rather heavily on private enterprise for the development of electrical and

telephone systems through the 1920s, although a more statist ethos would emerge in both countries with the onset of the Great Depression.⁸⁰

Entering the electrical grid was like walking through a gateway of new cultural possibilities. Electrical illumination was brighter and safer than light from kerosene lamps, making reading much more possible and thus increasing the number of books lent by libraries. Many household chores, most famously washing clothes, became far less onerous and time-consuming. Because it was also easier to heat water, people took more baths and public sanitation improved. The new power source entered into service of one of the most powerful of cultural constructs, language. Idiomatic expressions in English confirmed that “A musical performance could be “electrifying,” “recharging the listener.” An intelligent man could usually “make the connection” and seldom “got his wires crossed.” An effective organizer was “plugged in” to a “network.”⁸¹ In Mexico electricity brought to the middle and upper class consumers a whole range of entertainment options. Radio broadcasts included serialized shows and various dance programs featuring the “one step, fox trot, free happy [and] charleston.”⁸² Soon, electricity would power other contemporary and future entertainment options emanating from the north, such as movies and television.

Widespread use of a shared electrical system (as opposed to small, independent power generators) came to the United States in a series of phases beginning in the 1880s.

⁸⁰ Arturo Grunstein Dickter, “In the Shadow of Oil: Francisco J. Múgica vs. Telephone Transnational Corporations in Cardenista Mexico,” *Mexican Studies* Vol. 21.1 (winter 2005), 1-32; David E. Nye, *Narratives and Space: Technology and the Construction of American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 25-44, 61-74.

⁸¹ David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 17-19.

⁸² Julieta Ortiz Gaitán, “Casa, Vestido, y Sustento. Culturo Material en Anuncios de la Prensa Ilustrada (1894-1939),” in Aurelio de los Reyes, coordinador, *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México, Tomo V, vol. 2: Siglo XX. La imagen, ¿espejo de la vida?* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 144.

The first period saw electricity being used for city lighting, and then for public transportation systems in the 1890s. Initially many factories found it economical to develop their own independent sources of electricity. About 1910 power providers such as Samuel Insull began to sell cheap electricity on a large scale to industrial plants during the day, which helped absorb the system's capacity that was originally geared for public lighting at night. As more factories tapped into central systems and spurred increasing capacity levels, companies such as General Electric and Westinghouse aggressively marketed urban home wiring and appliances. From the time of the Great War through the 1920s, this campaign resulted in the great majority of urban American houses being connected.⁸³ During this entire time, however, rural areas were almost completely neglected.

It will be recalled that not until 1920 did the United States have more people living in urban rather than rural areas. Thus millions of Americans in that year still lacked access to the cultural wenders noted above because the physical isolation of country homes and farms dissuaded power companies from pursuing this market.

Cost was the real stumbling block to service. Rural lines cost \$2,000 or more per mile, and since there were usually only two to five dwellings per county, utilities anticipated low revenue to amortize investments. They preferred the urban market. Companies expected farmers, therefore, to bear the burden of the initial investment charging them with the cost of the line, or a \$500 to \$1,000 deposit. . .

Few rural homeowners could afford to pay for the lines or make the deposit, nor could they at first afford enough appliances to use the amount of electricity necessary to achieve the advantage of lower rates. The effect was an endless cycle of expense for both parties—recipients of service used little power because of high rates, and the utilities charged such rates because of low usage. After two or three years, families usually

⁸³ Nye, *Electrifying America*, 29-137, 185-286.

had enough appliances to enable them to use more energy, but the waiting time was a capital risk the industry was unwilling to take.⁸⁴

The cultural market within the United States was so limiting in 1910 that just two percent of American farms had electricity. And despite post-war efforts to establish local cooperatives and a few instances of the power companies themselves running lines to rural locales, by the late 1920s the figure had only climbed to about ten percent.⁸⁵

In Mexico, the public depended primarily on foreign private capital and expertise, especially from British and Canadian, and, to a lesser extent, American firms, for the early development of its electrical system.⁸⁶ During the Porfiriato, a limited section of Mexico City adopted the American pattern of electric (alongside gas) public lighting in the 1880s, an electrical tram in 1900, and electricity for the small strata of wealthier homes in the early 1900s.⁸⁷ As one social historian of material culture notes, however, in 1910 the densely populated neighborhoods outside of the city's core "completely lacked services—potable water, . . . transportation, illumination—and its inhabitants lived in rooms that did not have light, heat, ventilation, nor sufficient space or household goods."⁸⁸ In the last decade of Diaz's regime there had been significant investment for industrial electrical power throughout the republic, but still very little consumer usage. Municipalities and the foreign power companies clashed over differential rate structures

⁸⁴ D.Clayton Brown, *Electricity for Rural America: The Fight for the REA* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 5.

⁸⁵ Nye, *Electrifying America*, 287-297. For example, a \$94,000 power company investment effort to develop the electrical dependence of some 360 families in rural Pennsylvania in 1923 wound up losing \$8,000.

⁸⁶ Miguel S. Wionczek, "Electric Power: The Uneasy Partnership," ed. Raymond Vernon, *Public Policy and Private Enterprise in Mexico* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 21-33.

⁸⁷ Diego G. Lopez Rosado, *Los Servicios Públicos de la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1976), 193-194, 223-225.

⁸⁸ Elisa Speckman Guerra, "De Barrios y Arrabales: Entorno, Cultura Material y Quehacer Cotidiano (Ciudad de México, 1890-1910), in Aurelio de los Reyes, coordinador, *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México, Tomo V, vol. 1: Siglo XX. Campo y ciudad* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 17-47 with quote appearing on 41.

for industrial and home users, and they swapped complaints about poor service or failure to pay bills. Adding to the tension was a disagreement over the profitability of the public power enterprise. While the companies pointed to low and infrequently paid dividends, critics countered that the profits were simply being reinvested into the electrical system and therefore the companies were rich enough to self-capitalize.⁸⁹

The two sides revisited their arguments in the early to middle-1920s in a relationship that had more direct impact on urban Mexicans' lives, but received less attention in the press and in subsequent historians' conception of the period. Although the power firms generally lost money during the years between Madero's and Carranza's assassinations, they nevertheless intensified their investments with hopes for a bright future as the 1920s dawned. But as Mexico City and other urban locales likewise sought to reestablish social and economic growth, they resumed sparring with the power companies over the old issues of rates and service, bill payments and profits. Individual consumer and small-business rates were from fifteen to twenty-five times higher than those paid by the large industrial users. Often municipal bills went unpaid, however, and by 1921 the Canadian-owned Mexican Light and Power Company was trying to collect some 4.3 million pesos (about \$2.1 million) in delinquent accounts.⁹⁰ Mexican officials, now armed with the nationalism of the Constitution but still lacking capital, were determined to assume at least a greater regulatory position vis-à-vis the power companies. At the end of 1922 and after closely observing regulatory efforts made in

⁸⁹ Wionczek, 26-40.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-44

Europe, the United States, and Japan, government representatives established the Comisión Nacional de Fuerza Motriz (CNFM).⁹¹

The CNFM theoretically had the authority to coordinate and regulate hydroelectric services and rates, but it took several years for it to have any noticeable impact. Its staff and funding were limited. And the Obregón administration understandably did not want to add one more contentious issue to a diplomatic plate already filled with the recognition, debt, and oil property issues. Sensing this reluctance to fight, the foreign power companies resisted the push for public control reflected in the CNFM's creation and exhibited a "general hostility" to yielding their "industrial liberty" and their "rights of private property."⁹² During President Calles's term, with recognition now achieved, a more activist sentiment congealed and the CNFM was finally able to pass the Código Nacional Eléctrico in the spring of 1926.⁹³ This statute declared that the provision of electricity was a "public utility" and established an initial federal structure for regulating an industry that until this point mostly had been dealing with municipalities. Now a formal mechanism was in place establishing the federal government as the arbiter of rates and services, but legal questions, an economic downturn, and the political damage caused by the Cristero rebellion again limited the Mexican government's will to impose itself upon the foreign companies.⁹⁴ As the final years of the 1920s neared, both the companies and governmental regulatory

⁹¹ Lopez Rosado, 269-270; Wionczek, 35. Mexican Light and Power, operating in the Mexico-City Puebla area, recorded losses from 1914-1921; Vera Cruz Light & Power from 1913-1916; Guanajuato Power from 1913-1918; and Chapala hydroelectric company from 1913-1920.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁹³ *Excelsior*, 2 May 1926, 1.

⁹⁴ Wionczek, 40-44. Mexican legal practice usually requires that a statute, before it is implemented, be followed by an executive *reglamento*. President Calles did not issue the *reglamento* supplementing the Código Nacional Eléctrico until August 1928, nearly two and a half years after the original statute was approved.

representatives were confident about their futures in bringing more power to consumers. While the American and Foreign Power Company readied itself to invest heavily in Mexico's power system, Mexican officials prepared to test the power of the new regulatory system.⁹⁵

The relatively high price of household electricity and a lower level of discretionary income limited the amount of electric-based culture urban Mexicans experienced in the 1920s. The widespread establishment of home-wiring and appliance consumption that we saw in the urban United States had not yet reached Mexico, although subsequent chapters will trace its arrival. Through the mid-1920s, then, urban Mexican households shared the same predicament as rural American ones—prohibitive costs due to corporate concerns about a limited market. Power companies in both countries essentially applied the same market analysis to Mexican urban clients and American farmers. Thus it does not appear that foreign power companies in Mexico operated more “imperialistically” in Mexico than did companies operating in the United States. A freer market for utilities prevailed through much of the general prosperity of 1920s. The downturn that first hit Mexico and then the United States, however, partially discredited free market thinking in the later 1920s, and more assertive states confronted the private companies in the 1930s. The new ideology would result in more electrical culture for urban Mexicans and rural Americans.

Rural Mexico—which still characterized a sizable majority of Mexicans in the 1920s—was much farther yet removed from the “bright lights, big city” culture commonly portrayed in accounts of the “Roaring twenties.” In the rather typical village of San Jose de Gracia, Michoacan, for example, not until 1926 is there mention of an

⁹⁵ Wilkins, 60.

individual bringing a small generator “capable of lighting a few yellow bulbs in the church, the plaza, and two dozen houses.”⁹⁶ Nevertheless, other modern cultural developments overcame Mexico’s mountainous topography and slowly synthesized the traditional rhythms of village life with the cacophonous beat of the city.

Radio broadcasting was characterized by a relatively decentralized beginning in Mexico due to the country’s limited electrical infrastructure and the lower socio-economic conditions of the masses in the early 1920s. Relatively few people could afford to purchase or had the technical knowledge required to operate the large receiver sets of the era. The leading Mexican newspapers actively promoted radio, however, and the medium slowly spread through various private and public efforts to tap its potential. The cigarette giant Buen Tono, which owned one of the two leading stations in the early mid-1920s, used what we today would call ‘infomercials’ to highlight the advantages of their cigarettes and associated the pleasures of smoking with those of listening to the radio.⁹⁷ By 1926 there were still only about 25,000 sets among a population of some fifteen million, but the cultural impact was much greater than the small percentage of owners.⁹⁸

Radio possessed powerful and magical qualities, through which a transmitted voice, song, or advertisement could simultaneously reach tens of thousands (and later millions). It began to have transformative political and commercial effects on populations throughout the globe in the 1920s. The Mexican government, therefore, early on sought to control the distribution of radio broadcasts, with the hope of producing a nationalizing

⁹⁶ Luis González, *San José de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition*, trans. John Upton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 150.

⁹⁷ Roberto Ornelas Herrera, “Radio y Cotidianidad en México (1900-1930),” in Aurelio de los Reyes, coordinador, *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México, Tomo V, vol. 1: Siglo XX. Campo y ciudad* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 149-152.

⁹⁸ Joy Elizabeth Hayes, “National Imaginings on the Air: Radio in Mexico, 1920-1950,” ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 246.

and stabilizing impact on a populace still recovering from the turmoil of the Revolution. The initially low capitalization requirements and its relatively late emergence—after the Revolution had occurred—meant that radio broadcasting was an arena in which the Mexican government could more quickly assert itself against American corporations that had not already established themselves. But as with electrical delivery, radio’s cultural impact ultimately emerged via a blend of private and public initiative.

General Electric, ITT, RCA, and other major companies pursuing telecommunications-related markets often enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the United States State Department and Commerce Department. Corporate representatives lobbied hard and convinced American diplomats to seek international agreements favoring private sector control instead of state management of the radio broadcast spectrum. At a 1924 Mexico City meeting of fifteen Pan American nations, the U.S. delegation effectively forestalled the Conference’s convention calling for “the permanent establishment of a union designed to promote government ownership.” While four nations ratified this convention that was antithetical to the U.S. delegation’s position, the Americans’ tactics had helped to uphold the position of private enterprise within broadcasting. In a few years, as an RCA representative envisioned before the conference had even begun, “America’s position in the radio field will be so assured that we can more clearly dictate a new convention along lines which we regard as acceptable.”⁹⁹ This confidence may have been appropriate in terms of manufacturing, but the fight between private and state interests for control of broadcasting was taking place on a different field than was the case with oil and electricity firms.

⁹⁹ James Schwoch, *The American Radio Industry and Its Latin American Activities, 1900-1939* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 64-85, with quotations appearing on 71 and 73.

The Mexican government pursued a two-step approach that established its own programming and promulgated regulations that tried to limit foreign influence over national airwaves. The publicly-owned radio station XFX broadcasted children's educational programs as well as a variety of regional and classical music shows. The 1926 Law of Electrical Communications, meanwhile, "declared the airwaves to be a national resource, allowed only Mexican citizens to own or operate radio stations, and prohibited any transmissions that attacked state security, public order, or the established government." Thus commercial stations, although they often relied on American capital and technology, had to keep their content in line with the government's guidelines.¹⁰⁰

Radio in the early to mid-1920s was still a relatively small-scale affair in Mexico, and the Mexican government initially asserted a relatively strong state influence over the medium. As Joy Hayes shows, the government early conceived of radio from the start as a tool for promoting a nationalist ethos amid the "many Mexicos." The fact that some radios could run on batteries and that AM antennas could broadcast long distances at night meant that rural Mexicans experienced their magic sooner than they encountered other cultural developments. And as radio grew, so too did telephone, road and electrical systems. Rural villagers and urban Mexicans increasingly become interconnected in multiple ways to a capitalist system where advertising would challenge the cultural hegemony of the state.

Infrastructural Conduits of Culture: Telephones and Roads

Modern habits such as using the telephone also established firmer roots in Mexico, at least in urban areas, thanks to the capital infusions from American and

¹⁰⁰ Hayes, 243-253, with quote appearing on 247.

Swedish corporations. Beginning in the 1880s the American owned Mexican Telegraph and Telephone Company (Mextelco) slowly established itself as a near monopolistic provider of service in the Mexico City area. Late in the Porfiato, however, the Swedish company Lars Magnus Ericsson established Mexickanska Telefon AB (Mexeric) and began to challenge Mextelco in the capital and other urban areas. Mexeric navigated through the dangers of the Revolution more nimbly than Mextelco, and in 1920 the Swedish firm counted some 13,000 subscribers as opposed to 9,000 claimed by the apparently stagnating Mextelco. Then President Calles spurred on the competition by allowing a powerful new American firm to invest heavily into modernizing the telephone system.¹⁰¹

International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) purchased the American firm Mextelco in 1925 and immediately pursued plans for automatic switchboards and improved long distance service, investments it hoped would help to recapture the market from its Swedish competitor.¹⁰² As a result of the renewed rivalry between Mextelco and Mexeric, Mexico experienced a jump in the number of phones from 37,253 to 84,862 in the period 1925 to 1930. Competition had brought an increase in the quantity of phones and a concomitant decrease in rates. But its downside was a “dual-system” that resulted in duplicate lines and areas that sometimes offered services incompatible with that of the other provider’s.¹⁰³ The initial spread of telephonic culture thus saw private firms taking the lead and being encouraged in their activities by a Mexican government that hoped free market competition—as opposed to a monopoly contract or state ownership—would

¹⁰¹ Dickter, 8-13.

¹⁰² Robert Sobel, *ITT: The Management of Opportunity* (New York: Truman Talley Books, 1982), 45-47.

¹⁰³ Dickter, 10-14. Naturally the rate of increase was far higher than it had been from 1915 to 1925, but it would also prove to be much higher than the 1930s as well. There were 25,054 phones in 1915 and 110,595 in 1935.

produce the best results. Many common Mexican citizens lamented the quality and price, however, and thus the state would assert its role in the culture more vigorously in the near future.

Of all the infrastructural developments addressed in this chapter, roads comprised the most conspicuous component of President Calles's economic modernization program. "Medium-class highways" connected the capital to Puebla and Toluca while the neglected colonial era concourses ran between major cities, but otherwise Mexico "was practically without roads."¹⁰⁴ So in 1925 the Mexican president created the National Roads Commission, which sought to rely heavily on Mexican capital, labor, and technical expertise for development of the network. A shortage of experienced engineers, however, prompted the Commission to contract Americans to oversee certain projects. Because of its nationalist scope, with the initial limitations on capital and engineering skills, the grand road building project—which had an initial goal of ten thousand kilometers—completed just seven hundred kilometers by the end of 1926.¹⁰⁵

The Mexican state's impact on cultural transmission via its road building campaign thus provides another example of multifaceted causes and effects. Mexico's restricted use of American resources likely reduced the construction speed by a significant degree. Greater reliance upon Mexican planners, workers, and financiers, however, positioned those elements to develop their capabilities and then perform similar work in the future.¹⁰⁶ The delay meant that the roads would not have a significant impact

¹⁰⁴ Dulles, 290.

¹⁰⁵ Krauze, 416. Mexico's macroeconomic decline beginning in 1926 and the onset of the Cristero Rebellion also sapped resources from the road construction program.

¹⁰⁶ Wendy Waters, "Remapping Identities: Road Construction and Nation Building in Postrevolutionary Mexico," ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 221-242. A detailed study of the Mexican civil engineering and financing colleges and firms that blossomed as a result of the

on cultural transmission until the 1930s, when several major highways connecting Mexico City to outlying areas in the cardinal directions would be completed.¹⁰⁷ But the impetus for the project occurred under Calles's (i.e., state) initiative, and like the railroads before them, roads would serve as conduits for countless goods, ideas, and people heading north and goods and tourists moving south in the relative near future.

Summary: Cultural Implications of Infrastructural Changes

The national and then bi-national integrating effects of *incorporation* into large infrastructural systems was similar for both electricity and the road networks. As the root of the term indicates, communities became a part of a larger corporate whole. The economics and culture of the local, rural world would never be the same after they gained a consistent connection to the wider nation and world. This can be seen in a quick comparison of the analyses of two national historians looking at the effect of electricity in a small city in Indiana and a modern road in a Mexican village in Morelos. Reexamining the famous sociological assessment of "Middletown" for the evidence it provided in regard to electricity's effect, David Nye observes that

Electrification increased the city's integration into a network of national institutions, connecting Muncie irrevocably to a national culture, of which the movies, amusement parks, and radio stations were only the most obvious parts. Equally important were the new forms of productivity, which increased the city's integration into national markets as its factories produced more glass jars, transmission wire, vacuum cleaners, automobile parts, floor lamps, insulators, and electric cookers."¹⁰⁸

construction contracts presumably would corroborate this point. General Juan Almazán was one government organizer who converted the contracts into great personal wealth and fame that he tapped him when he ran unsuccessfully for president in 1940.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Nye, *Electrifying America*, 26.

Wendy Waters likewise revisited a famous locale, the Tepoztlán of anthropologists Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis, to discern the transformative power of a modern road network upon a typical Mexican village.¹⁰⁹

Roads facilitated the introduction of urban fashions and trends that entered via newspapers, visitors, and residents who returned from work experiences in other parts of Mexico and the United States. The exchange created new desires and tastes for manufactured goods such as packaged bread, Coca-Cola, canned foods, and shoes. Becoming a consumer required income, and the roads created employment opportunities. Many men abandoned agricultural work to take up traditional professions such as baking, carpentry, shopkeeping, and bricklaying. [Now part of a cash economy,] others entered newer areas of work making shoes, milling corn, teaching school, driving buses, and repairing vehicles.¹¹⁰

Waters notes that these changes could reinforce some traditional practices at the same time they were breaking down others. The gender patterns associated with the traditional and time-consuming production of tortillas were upset, for example, by the use of machines for grinding corn and eventually even for making tortillas automatically. However, “more money could mean finer dresses to wear to church or more candles to burn at the home altar,” and thus a women’s traditional religious role was strengthened.¹¹¹

The American example above suggests the literal and figurative power of electricity for increasing productivity when it was brought to the factory. Mexican cities and towns would gain similar increases in industrial productivity. For our purposes, however, the emphasis is on the transformative effect on culture that came with large and integrated infrastructural systems, which opened the door to modernity. The networks

¹⁰⁹ Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlán—a Mexican Village* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1963); Oscar Lewis, *Tepoztlán: Village in Mexico* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960); Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Revisited* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

¹¹⁰ Waters, 238.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

enabled a transnational cultural market to emerge. Towns and the individuals in those towns were not forced to enter through the doors of modernity; they did not have to participate in, and thus contribute to, the new cultural marketplace. Individuals could refuse to wash their clothes with the aid of electricity or could choose to grind their corn without the aid of a corn mill. Eventually most opted for the economy and efficiency of modernity, appreciating the individual advantage they might gain, not necessarily anticipating the weakening of a community will to negotiate larger national and international economic trends. Indeed many individuals chose to enter through the door and leave their local community altogether.

A look at some of *Excelsior*'s Sunday editions, with their more in-depth cultural coverage, provides us with a snapshot at how the interplay of government and commercial initiatives helped American culture grow in the Mexican capital during the mid-1920s. To begin with, the public education efforts had helped to increase literacy, a necessity for the newspaper's circulation hopes. Sufficient readership, in turn, made advertisers such as General Electric, Dodge Brothers, and others confident enough to pursue the market for their various products. Radio benefited both from modest governmental support and from promotion campaigns in the newspaper such as *Excelsior*'s *Sección de Radio*, in which one could learn how to construct a transformer.¹¹² There was also a piece on the "great Indianapolis road race," interest in which would have corresponded well with the nation's nascent highway construction program and the modest number of car sales during this period. A portent of things to come (and which we will take up in the next chapter), one article noted how Americans and Europeans exploited tourism in their nations and that Mexicans and their government would

¹¹² *Excelsior*, 7 June 1925, section 3, page 4.

someday take advantage of tourism through promotion. The paper also had one English language page per issue to reach the burgeoning American colony in the capital. These articles and the advertisers that support them thus remind us that new products and cultural activities were present thanks to the improvement of communication and transportation networks, some of which were state funded and others privately capitalized.

Migrants

While the national governments and businesses at times reached agreements that made the headlines or expanded power grids, tens of thousands of migrants connected the two countries in profound if less dynamic ways each year. Their movement was a function of three large factors: the wide disparity in socio-economic opportunities in the two countries; the high American demand for labor in the burgeoning southwest, a situation highlighted by the recent restrictions against European immigration; and the destabilizing legacy of and aftershocks from the armed revolutions in Mexico.¹¹³ From 1920 to 1926, it is estimated that about one million Mexicans migrated legally or illegally to the United States. This figure results from adding the 436,770 migrants officially tallied in United States immigration records to the estimated number of 100,000 illegal entrants per year suggested by the immigration historian Lawrence Cardoso.¹¹⁴ Table 1 presents these statistics, and also suggests the effect on legal immigration of two pieces of American immigration legislation. A 1917 law required new arrivals to pay an eight

¹¹³ Gilbert C. González, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, & Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 105-109. González suggests that northward migration was largely caused by the Porfiriato's land policies that enabled elite Mexican families and foreign investors to purchase large tracts at small prices. This led to the "de-peasanting" of rural areas and to the *campesinos'* eventual search for industrial work in the United States.

¹¹⁴ Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1897-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 94.

dollar head tax, and another passed in 1924 assessed an additional ten dollar fee to obtain a consular visa.¹¹⁵ The eighteen dollar total was usually more than the fee “coyotes” charged for smuggling, and thus the number of legal entries initially declined after the 1924 increase in fees.¹¹⁶

Table 1: Legal Mexican Immigrants Into the United States¹¹⁷

Year Ending June 30	Immigrants	Non-Immigrants	Total
1920	51,042	17,350	68,392
1921	29,603	17,191	46,794
1922	18,246	12,049	30,295
1923	62,709	13,279	75,988
1924	87,648	18,139	105,787
1925	32,378	17,351	49,729
1926	42,638	17,147	59,785
1927	66,766	13,873	80,639
1928	57,765	3,857	61,622
1929	38,980	3,405	42,385
decade totals	487,775	133,641	621,416

There are no reliable statistics tracking how many repeat visits are calculated into the number of one million or so migrations from 1920-1926. United States Census figures from 1920 and Immigration Bureau numbers from 1926, however, report an approximate increase of 400,000 legally counted “Mexican residents.” And an estimate made by Mexico’s Secretary of Foreign Relations in mid-1929 put the number of Mexican expatriates living in the United States at approximately two million, or one-eighth Mexico’s population at the time.¹¹⁸ This last estimate may be somewhat high, but it is safe to state that somewhere between five and ten percent of the Mexican population had

¹¹⁵ George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 57.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 10-11.

¹¹⁷ This is an adaptation of the table found in Cardoso, 94, which was compiled from the *Annual Reports* of the Commissioner General of Immigration.

¹¹⁸ Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 6; Cardoso, 94; Wilkie, 191.

lived in the United States. When they came they naturally brought their home-country's cultural predilections. When and if they returned home, many also took back new ideas and goods.

The respective governments' public policy statements regarding immigration usually projected an apparent nationalistic posture, but their actions indicated their true weighting of economic factors. The Mexican government, for example, embarrassed by the lack of confidence indicated by their citizens' departure, devised publicity campaigns that warned of the discrimination and unfulfilled dreams migrants would encounter. The Mexican people simply ignored the transparent propaganda and headed north. The Mexican presidents during the decade tacitly supported the migration, believing "that it was not in the best interest of their country to halt the labor exodus" since the departures served as a safety valve for releasing internal pressure and as a source of national income through remittances.¹¹⁹

Many American governmental representatives were for the most part as insincere about stopping illegal immigration as their Mexican counterparts had been. Congress had passed restrictive immigration legislation in 1921 and 1924 that placed quotas on European immigrants but for economic reasons omitted limits placed on Western Hemisphere countries. Throughout the rest of the 1920s there were restrictionists who wanted to extend the European quota system to help secure America's "back door." American Federation of Labor representatives said that Mexican migrants took away jobs from or depressed the wages of American citizens. Finally, eugenicists and their supporters in Congress made the most vocal complaints against the migrants, claiming that the inferior Indian peons would pollute America's racial composition. Powerful

¹¹⁹ Cardoso, 106-109.

agricultural, mining, and railroad interests, however, successfully argued that the southwestern economy would collapse without Mexican laborers. The employers' argument carried the day, as Congress passed no restrictive legislation in the 1920s.

While this context describes the “bigotry versus greed” dynamics present in the discourse for passing new legislation, for our purposes the most important point is that American officials on the border regularly discouraged enforcement of already existing laws.¹²⁰ In 1926, for example, the Chief of the Immigration Bureau acknowledged in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* that “illegal entrants had not been and would not be deported if they were apprehended by his employees.” In other cases the Immigration Department looked the other way when American farmers broke laws against recruiting foreign laborers, and the Departments of Labor and State decided that the immigrants' head tax, which was one of the requirements for legal entry, did not have to be paid if the visit was only going to be for six months or less.¹²¹ Basic enforcement of federal laws is a nationalistic imperative, but in this case it is clear that the United States government put a higher value on economic expediency. This policy of non-enforcement contradicts the earlier “rule of law” discourse that American diplomats had used with regard to property claims in Mexico. It also perhaps exemplifies the practical application of humanity, as opposed to strict construction of the law, to address the economic and social realities that existed between the two countries. What is undeniable, however, is that non-enforcement of the law had a profound impact on economic and cultural exchange between the two countries.

¹²⁰ Robert A. Divine, *American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 52-66.

¹²¹ Cardoso, 127-131, with quotation appearing on 127.

From a purely economic perspective, the contribution of migrants to both countries was significant. During the 1920-1926 period, the Mexican migrants in the United States remitted to family members back home approximately \$85 million dollars in postal money orders, bank drafts, and U.S. currency.¹²² Considering that the Mexican government collected approximately \$230 million from taxes on sales and production of oil during these same years, the number is substantial. In fact the money remitted in 1926 was about the same as the amount collected in oil taxes (US\$17 million), and the following year the amount remitted (approximately US\$19 million) would be twice as much as the Mexican government took in via petroleum taxes.¹²³

In the United States the Mexican migrant labor played an important role in several sectors of the economy, especially in the Southwest. The Southern Pacific, Atchison-Topeka-Santa Fe, and other railroad lines employed Mexicans for constructing branch lines, and for maintenance and operation of the lines. Of course railroad lines provided a natural means for migrants to settle in various places along their routes, and they also facilitated rather easy return access to Mexico. Mining firms, especially in Arizona, appreciated the experience, affordability, and willingness of Mexican miners.

¹²² This figure is an interpolation from several sources. Cardoso, on page 82, cites the United States Post Master General Reports for the years 1920-1929, which state that during the entire decade \$58 million were remitted in money orders, and that additional millions of dollars were sent via bank drafts and currency. Paul Taylor's analysis suggests that a somewhat larger percentage of money was remitted in bank drafts and currency. Thus I estimate that approximately \$120 million in total remittances was sent during the entire decade. Comparing figures from Taylor (page 33) and Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (pages 3-5), approximately 70 percent of remittances occurred in the years from 1920 to 1926 and 30 percent occurred from 1927 to 1929.

¹²³ Jean Meyer, "Mexico: Revolution and Reconstruction in the 1920s," 178.

Agricultural enterprises in Texas, California, Arizona, Colorado, the Midwest, and points further up the “migrant stream,” likewise employed thousands of Mexicans.¹²⁴

Migrants also left a strong cultural imprint in major cities such as San Antonio, Los Angeles, El Paso and in dozens of smaller towns. Migrants tended to house themselves in semi-segregated ethnic communities that formed a part of the larger city or community. In San Antonio they gathered mostly in the “Mexican West Side,” in Los Angeles on the East Side, and in El Paso it was the South Side. As throughout American history, the concentration of people with similar cultural backgrounds produced commercial opportunities for stores that catered to their desire for foods, images, and eventually music from the “old country.” These *barrios* (neighborhoods), however, also suffered in most instances from substandard housing and generally poor socio-economic conditions.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, Mexican food soon attracted adherents from ethnic groups—especially Anglos—in surrounding sectors of the cities, and other cultural elements achieved even farther effect. One prominent political migrant, Ignacio Lozano, who had settled in San Antonio in 1908, started two Spanish language daily newspapers that would attain national and international distribution. *La Prensa* was first published in Lozano’s adopted city in 1913 and then *La Opinión* began in Los Angeles in 1926.¹²⁶ A key north-south and east-west point for Mexican and American railways systems, El Paso attained similar growth and cultural dynamics as those in San Antonio and Los Angeles.

¹²⁴ For discussions of Mexican labor in the Southwest see Sanchez, 38-62; Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, and, for California in particular, Ernesto Galaraza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Charlotte, NC: McNally & Loftin, 1964).

¹²⁵ Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class, San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 20-25, 38-39; Sanchez, 63-83.

¹²⁶ Garcia, 35.

Mexican migrants who lived within nuclear families at times acculturated themselves through interaction with two important institutions: churches and public schools. Although the great majority of migrants were Catholic, Protestant ministers in Los Angeles, El Paso, and throughout the Southwest had a disproportionate cultural impact because they encouraged migrants to take English classes. Sometimes these classes were held in the migrants' houses, which meant that during the instruction periods addressing such topics as cleaning and childcare, mothers would learn not only the appropriate English words but also the prescribed soaps or nursing methods.¹²⁷ Schools in the 1920s also strongly pushed their immigrant pupils to speak only English while on campus. They also conveyed national cultural conventions by indicating the common way to celebrate holidays such as Thanksgiving.¹²⁸

While public institutions generated these cultural homogenizing forces, many parents within the migrant families consciously asserted countervailing pressures to preserve their national ethnic identities. Speaking only Spanish while at home thus became the rule in some households. Adults also struggled with combating the influence of American fashion upon their children, especially their adolescent and young adult daughters. "During the 1920s a woman's decision 'to bob or not bob' her hair assumed classic proportions in Mexican families." To maintain their ethnic awareness, many families made extended annual sojourns to their hometowns south of the border.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Robert McLean, "Getting God Counted Among the Mexicans," *Missionary Review of the World* (May 1923), 359-363, ed. Zaragosa Vargas, *Major Problems in Mexican American History: Documents and Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 234-236.

¹²⁸ Vicki L. Ruiz, "The Acculturation of Young Mexican American Women," ed. Zaragosa Vargas, *Major Problems in Mexican American History: Documents and Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 265-271.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Sociological and anthropological studies from the time document the cultural impact of the migrants who returned home. Manuel Gamio and his research staff began gathering statistics on the cross-fertilization of material culture after the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations announced a policy change in late 1926. Mexicans who returned home with the intent of settling in new colonized lands could now bring in articles duty-free from the United States. Gamio, examining lists of goods inspectors noted at crossing points across the border, tabulated the belongings of 2,104 immigrants who returned in 1927.¹³⁰ Many items were brought back with the intent “to raise the standard of domestic comfort.” On average, for every one hundred immigrants there were 38.19 bathtubs, 12.73 wood or metal toilets, 27.58 stoves, 82.88 beds, 16.57 sewing machines, and an unspecified but very large amount of American-origin clothing articles. Some of these items most likely would be resold in Mexico, but they nevertheless became a sort of undertow attractive force of the material culture (and economic opportunity) available in *el norte*.¹³¹

Gamio’s findings regarding the importation of cars underscore the importance of infrastructural investments for cultural transmission. While “the possession of automobiles [was] absolutely unheard of in the humble social class to which the immigrants generally belong[ed],” nevertheless nearly thirty-eight percent of the returning immigrants owned them. This number provoked an ambivalent response in the researcher’s eyes:

Many sections of rural Mexico where the repatriated immigrant goes to colonize have no suitable automobile roads, and either there is no gasoline

¹³⁰ The average amount of goods immigrants brought after the liberal decree most likely was higher than before, although there is no reference to earlier levels. This assumption provides another example of how the state’s actions affect the flow of culture across borders.

¹³¹ Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 66-68.

or else it is expensive or hard to get, with the result that automobiles are often useless. The good that results is that the possession of automobiles stimulates the owners to build roads, however poor these might be due to the humble circumstances of the owners.¹³²

Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, the Mexican government would significantly expand its road-building program. Until it did, however, one imagines that many of these cars brought back in the flush of the colonization scheme remained parked alongside the would-be road of cultural transmission.

Nationalistic pride and yearnings for the old country were common among many Mexican adults in the United States.¹³³ A new resident of Los Angeles, Miguel Chávez, regularly read Mexican newspapers such as *El Universal* and *Excelsior* to keep abreast of happenings in and to appreciate the beauty of his homeland, and he would cry when he heard the Mexican national anthem. Preferences for old foods and flavors contributed to the growth of stores selling Mexican goods in the burgeoning immigrant *barrios* of El Paso, San Antonio, and Los Angeles.

Few migrants expressed an inclination to become a naturalized American citizen, which suggests for them that at this time nationalistic considerations trumped strictly economic ones. In one example, an older migrant who had resided in the United States for more than twenty-five years remarked:

I would rather cut my throat before changing my Mexican nationality. I prefer to lose with Mexico than to win with the United States. My country is before everything else and although it has been many years since I have gone back I am only waiting until conditions get better, until there is absolute peace before I go back. I haven't lost hope of spending my last days in my own country.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid., 68-69.

¹³³ Manuel Gamio, *El inmigrante mexicano: La historia de su vida* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1969).

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Several respondents indicated that they opposed any sort of American interference in Mexican affairs. And if tensions between the two nations should ever reach a boiling point, the immigrants would readily take up arms to fight for Mexico.¹³⁵ These latent or manifest feelings of patriotic sentiment no doubt reflected the historical legacy of American invasions or occupations of Mexico. Although very few migrants in the 1920s would have personally remembered all the incidents (1847, 1914 and 1916), the great majority knew the stories or had heard references in political rallies, folksongs, or familial stories to heroic defenses made against the Yankee invaders. During the recent political infighting of the revolution, accusing an opponent of truckling to the gringos was a regularly and effectively used smear tactic.¹³⁶

Frequently there was clear tension between the migrants and American residents of Mexican descent. The new arrivals struck the Mexican-Americans as being uncivilized and as presenting unfortunate but accurate targets for the racial prejudice that Anglos directed at Mexicans. Meanwhile, the recently arrived Mexican immigrants considered those who became nationalized Americans—*Pochos* was the derogatory name for those who freely adopted American ways—to be traitors to the Mexican race.

Adult middle-class and upper-class migrants—especially those with property to return to after the revolutionary unrest had died down—anticipated a greater sense of social prestige back in Mexico. Once they had reached home, they would not have to face the ethnic discrimination that paralleled the popularity of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States. Because the wealthier and more skilled migrants tended to speak more English, however, they also experienced less direct racial hostility than poorer, and often darker,

¹³⁵ Ibid., 174, 191-193.

¹³⁶ Alan Knight, *U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940: An Interpretation*, Monograph Series 28 (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987), 31-32.

migrants did. After surveying naturalization papers of migrants in the Los Angeles areas, historian George Sánchez found that skilled migrants comprised a larger percentage of those who applied for U.S. citizenship. The market rewarded them more for their skills and had given them more positive social and economic acculturation experiences.¹³⁷

Chapter Conclusion

The establishment or strengthening of important political, economic, and social linkages during the seven year period from 1920 through 1926 spurred cultural transmission between Mexico and the United States. Most important had been the Obregón administration's achievement of formal recognition from the United States. This agreement in 1923 helped to secure credibility, credit, and stability. Mexico attained a more dignified position, investors gained more confidence in Mexico as a market, and the United States soon offered arms to Obregón during the de la Huerta rebellion of late 1923 to early 1924. The informal but respectful nature of the Bucareli "talks" helped bring recognition to fruition, although contentious legal issues remained to be addressed in the future. Less respectful moments such as when Secretary of State Kellogg declared Mexico was "on trial before the world" still presented an imperialistic tone, but it was telling that the American Navy no longer provided the words with an accompanying show of force.

Obregón's and especially Calles's desire to attract investors to Mexico had important implications for the country's citizenry. From the mid to late 1920s telephone and electrical companies increased their direct investment in the infrastructure of several cities. Mexican entrepreneurs, meanwhile, used American capital to develop a Mexican

¹³⁷ Sánchez, 191-195.

radio broadcasting industry that in turn promoted sales of RCA radios and a myriad of American products in subsequent years. Calles's nationalistic road-building program—relying heavily on Mexican capital and expertise—progressed more slowly than it would had he contracted with more American firms, but the highways nevertheless began to connect rural Mexico to the more capitalist-driven culture of Mexico City and abroad. The story of American multinational firms investing in Mexico was based on both corporate and government assessments of the market availability for profits, capital, or expertise. As Mira Wilkins observes, it “does not fit comfortably into a tale of ‘imperialism.’”¹³⁸ Certain American firms at times wanted more of their government's even veiled military support, but it was not forthcoming. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, the two countries' militaries even began to undertake rudimentary cooperation with each other.

The appearance of new manufactured products and electronic cultural wonders reached a relatively small proportion of the Mexican populace at the time. These initially small amounts nevertheless accelerated the modernization process that challenged rural, local, and traditionalist cultural rhythms. The pace and mobility of new communications and transportations developments created social and economic instability in both the United States and Mexico, but with a different chronology and at uneven rates. Disruptions or frustrations urban Mexicans encountered while trying to connect to electricity or telephone grids paralleled the delays and expenses rural Americans faced. The perceived sources of this shared consternation, corporations or their government regulators, usually used assessments of the market viabilities—costs and benefits—before they would or could approach a new technology. At times the Mexican government

¹³⁸ Wilkins, 45-79.

adopted a nationalist line to regulate or prohibit the implementation of new infrastructure and thus slowed the connection process. Public pressure for new, often foreign, goods and services eventually would challenge aspirations of nationalist control. The “market” proved relentless, filled with a mix of constant promise and pressure for improvement.

Mexican migrants crossing back and forth over the border served as conduits of cultural, as well as economic, transmission. Their movements usually did not capture the headlines in the sensational way that governmental or business exchanges did, but the impact on culture was nevertheless profound in southwestern cities such as San Antonio, El Paso, and Los Angeles. Their presence would only grow stronger in subsequent decades as the momentum of the migration network established in the 1920s brought more families to settle permanently in the United States. Southwestern employers and the migrants themselves constantly made the case for the demands of the labor market, despite occasional government efforts from both countries to enforce nationalistic restrictions on immigration. In Mexico, meanwhile, tens of thousands of returning migrants brought with them a new cultural awareness, and some material items, from their stays in the United States. Migrants naturally provided “word of mouth” advertising about their economic and cultural experience up north. Nationalist affinity to their mother country was still strong to the point that few wanted to nationalize even though that would likely result in an improved economic standing. As time generated more and more distance from the American military interventions of the Revolutionary decade, however, a stronger willingness to nationalize as American citizens would take root.

The changes outlined in this chapter have introduced three central ideas to follow subsequently in this dissertation. To begin with, the transnational cultural market that

government officials, business representatives, and migrants began to erect during this period exposed more and more people to market forces. An increasing number of rural Americans and urban Mexicans, as well as a small percentage of rural Mexicans, encountered new opportunities for efficiencies in their daily routines. They could, for example, use electrical power to complete a task more quickly, or they might purchase an article they had heard advertised on the radio rather than taking the time to produce it themselves. Cash purchases required that they procure money through selling their goods or labor in a market. Subsistence activities diminished, and when they did the skills, pace, and human relations associated with them began to disappear as well. This sense of cultural loss both by Americans and Mexicans exemplifies the theoretical premise advanced by the cultural sociologist John Tomlinson. He argues that “dominant” and “subordinate” cultures in the twentieth century have similarly faced disconcerting existential questions about their identity as they enter a modern, capitalist framework.¹³⁹ Framing the idea in physics terminology, we might say that the mass of all the major subjects in this study—government officials, businessmen, and migrants—added to the strength of capitalism’s gravitational pull when they opted to enter its orbit. In specific terms, the Mexican government’s road construction program, Ford’s offer to sell cars and trucks that run on the highways, and Mexican migrants’ use of the highways to head northward would all comprise interrelated components of the emerging transnational cultural market.

The shared experiences and challenges faced above and below the border serve as evidence for a second main claim: the transmission of American culture southward or Mexican culture northward from 1920 onward essentially were not instances of cultural

¹³⁹ John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1991).

imperialism. These transnational cultural transmissions were instead examples of capitalism's spread. The term "cultural imperialism" connotes some sort of national imposition from one country to another. It also usually suggests the collaboration of the "dominant" country's governmental and business apparatuses. And it implies a nearly forced, or at least involuntary, acceptance of the new culture by the "subordinate" power. One *dependista* author, for example, has written that "the structural relationships of imperialist domination [visible thanks to dependency theory are] within which all other inter-American contacts must be located and understood."¹⁴⁰ But the allegedly dominant "structural relationship" ignores the great amount of competing and contentious viewpoints operating in both lands (e.g. American banking interests versus American oil firms). Instead of monolithic national blocs there were multiple factions operating to improve their own position within the growing market and often in cooperation with government or corporate officials from the neighboring land. As noted earlier in the chapter, the American shift from employing gunboats or Marines to adopting Lamont's "give and take" negotiating approach marked a distinct turn from imperialism to acceptance of market mechanisms for achieving stability.

The third and final claim which this first chapter introduces is an acknowledgment of each of the main subject's agency. Mexican government officials and American corporate representatives of Mextelco, for example, alike sought the most advantageous position that the growing market afforded them when negotiating the details of providing

¹⁴⁰ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Dependency," in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations, 2nd Ed.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162-175, with quote appearing on 174. For more assertions of the cultural imperialism argument, see Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine Le Grande, and Ricardo D. Savatore, ed., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) and González, *Culture of Empire.*

telephone service for Mexican citizens. Thus Mexican regulators also negotiated deals with Mextelco's Swedish rival, Mexeric, and sometimes poor market conditions, including the government's lack of ability or willingness to enforce contracts, meant that powerful companies lost revenue for years at a time. When Mexican government officials negotiated with the American bondholders and government counterparts, they consistently achieved reductions of their debt load and ultimately—after two decades of negotiation—paid a mere fraction of what they originally owed.¹⁴¹ The degree of respect exhibited by government or business leaders has also been emphasized for its impact on advancing or retarding relations. Relatively “subordinate” Mexican migrants, meanwhile, very clearly had the agency and ability to change the culture of the American towns and cities in which they settled.

In 1926 the difference in percentages of Mexicans and Americans who had access to electricity, used a telephone, or listened to a radio was still significant. As we have seen, much of urban and nearly all of rural Mexico was similar to rural America in terms of enjoying household electricity or indoor plumbing. But the commercial, electrical, broadcast, and migratory networks established in this first period would come to transmit ever more culture—along with pesos, dollars, people, and ideas—in the future. The structural lines of communication and the improved political relations of this first period laid the bases for a growing and durable transnational cultural market. Not even a severe economic depression would short-circuit these new connections.

¹⁴¹ Smith, 166. The bondholders Lamont originally represented as head of the ICBM received only ten percent of their original claims. Other American claimants received similarly small percentages of their claims from the General and Special Claims Commissions. Some of the original claims, it should be noted, were greatly overinflated.

Chapter Two: Weathering the Economic Storm, 1927 to 1933

The bi-national institutional, infrastructural, and personal connections established from 1920-1926 continued to advance cultural transmission in subsequent years as first Mexico, and then the United States, entered severe economic depressions. A new American diplomat, Dwight Morrow, used his engaging personality to bridge the gap in diplomatic relations his predecessor had created.¹ Toward the end of the decade and early into the next, some infrastructure firms such as the American & Foreign Power Company and manufacturing firms such as Ford invested heavily in Mexico, often at the invitation of Mexican leaders.² About two hundred thousand migrants from Mexico entered the United States from 1927 through 1929, causing Los Angeles to trail only Mexico City as the largest city for Mexican residents.³ The transnational cultural market thus proved to be sufficiently resilient to expand thanks to the conscious or unconscious efforts of these government representatives, business leaders, and migrants.

As Mexico's economic strength began to wane in the second half of 1926 and the Wall Street crash in October 1929 eclipsed much of America's economic advancement during the 1920s, however, the market for cultural exchange likewise was pulled by countervailing forces. Both national governments raised tariff levels to try to protect their industries. Low demand levels and a lack of capital limited most businesses' willingness to invest abroad. And federal, state and local government officials in the United States encouraged Mexican migrants to repatriate to their home country. The general

¹ Harold Nicolson, *Dwight Morrow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935).

² American & Foreign Power Company, Inc., *The Foreign Power System: A Review of Foreign Power's Role in the Development of Modern Utility Services in Foreign Lands* (New York: American & Foreign Power Company, Inc., 1953) 7-10; *Excelsior*, 14 September 1932.

³ Colin M. MacLachlan and William H. Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo: A History of Greater Mexico, 3rd Ed.*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 286.

assumption is that diminishing economic activity slows down cultural transmission if it causes fewer products, ideas and people to circulate. But the Great Depression's barriers to cultural transmission—raising tariffs, curtailing migration, etc.—blocked only some of the flow of commerce, ideas and people between the two countries. Some large-scale investments made with an eye toward an eventual recovery occurred even during the depths of the economic crisis. Just as important, internal modifications of the broad cultural market, such as those brought by internal road construction programs or education campaigns, continued to develop within each country. They too would serve as powerful conduits of culture when the slumping economies improved.

While some of the cultural results might have been predictable given the macroeconomic collapse, others came as more of a surprise. Mass Mexican cultural transmission northward did slow significantly after 1929 as a result of much less immigration during the Great Depression. Nevertheless, Mexican artists such as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco scored tremendous successes with exhibitions in the United States that suggested a more colorful, rooted, and authentic alternative was possible.⁴ For some American intellectuals, the generally depressed economic climate at home fostered an appreciation for Mexican values that did not appear tainted with the excesses of the 1920s consumerism. The American national and local governments' efforts to stop immigration during a time of rising unemployment, meanwhile, resulted in tens of thousands of Mexican migrants returning home with products, values, and ideas they had recently acquired from the north. The poor masses thus brought American culture southward when many corporate giants lacked the will or capital to invest abroad.

⁴ Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 83-90.

Mexico's continued incorporation into the worldwide economy advanced more of its citizens' adoption of foreign cultural trends (such as baseball and consumerism), but the process was also framed by revolutionary perceptions of nationalism and economic growth. The federal government's effort to direct economic processes, in other words, partially regulated the amount of American culture the average Mexican could acquire. During Plutarco E. Calles's administration from 1924-1928, the state enhanced its capability to finance key economic sectors through the creation of the Bank of Mexico and the Bank of Agricultural Credit. To raise capital for these banks, the government modified the income tax structure.⁵ Leading Mexican bankers and members of Calles's government believed that the Porfiriato's reliance on American and European capital to finance an export-oriented economy had benefited foreign investors disproportionately. *Callistas* still accepted a broad capitalistic framework for commercial exchange, but their insistence on modernization that mostly enriched Mexico's coffers led to a heavier reliance on tariffs and state direction.⁶ These instances of economic nationalism, along with similar protectionist maneuvers in the United States, likely slowed cultural transmission temporarily because higher prices or limited quantities discouraged foreign trade.⁷ Despite this significant increase in the state's control of the economies in both countries, their economies still mostly relied on bi-national market mechanisms rather than focusing on autarky or subsistence. This spurred more economic and human

⁵ John W. F. Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 280-288; Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power, A History of Modern Mexico 1810-1996*, trans. by Hank Heifetz, (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 315-317. The income tax modification raised the lower and upper ranges of taxation on business income from 1 to 2 and 4 to 8 percent respectively.

⁶ Jean Meyer, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, vol 11: Periodo 1924-1928: Estado y Sociedad con Calles* (Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, 1977), 283-290.

⁷ With the Hawley-Smoot Tariff in 1929, the United States Congress also raised tariffs significantly for a perceived economic benefit. Economists have generally judged the action as a contributing factor to the duration of the worldwide depression and thus an overall brake on cultural transmission.

movement and cultural interaction. As Jean Meyer notes, “from the moment it formed under the influence of imports, this market converted itself into the focus for the propagation of north American cultural values. The foreign interests found themselves linked to the national capitalist group in such a way that solidarity functioned.”⁸

The tension between the American insistence on legalistic technicalities and a Mexican emphasis on their national sovereignty continued in the 1927 to 1933 period, but to a reduced degree. With recognition already achieved, the arena now shifted to specific disputes over property rights and how to apply Mexico’s interventionist Constitution. The presence of positive personal relations among high-level government officials helped to mitigate these diplomatic impasses. In particular, the American ambassadors Dwight Morrow and Josephus Daniels, who began their assignments in 1927 and 1933 respectively, quickly won the confidence of many Mexicans who were initially suspicious of the appointments.⁹ Both argued that American interests should eschew the short term pursuit of immediate profits and should instead focus on Mexico’s long term political stability and economic growth. Mexican interim President Emilio Portes Gil, who served from late 1928 to early 1930, likewise helped maintain stability and investor confidence. Working alongside Morrow, Portes Gil put down a military revolt and then

⁸ Jean Meyer, *Estado y sociedad con Calles*, 294-5.

⁹ Robert Freeman Smith, “The Morrow Mission and the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico: The Interaction of Finance Diplomacy and the New Mexican Elite,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Nov., 1969), 149; Dulles, 324-325. “After Morrow come the Marines,” was one newspaper’s prediction in September 1927. David E. Cronon, *Josephus Daniels in Mexico* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 3-39 and 52-64. After Daniels’s appointment, a right wing paper editorialized, “Daniels is not acceptable to the people.” Reaction from the far left was similarly alarmist, as indicated by a Mexican Communist Party handbill in Mexico City: “Refuse the affront of Yankee imperialism. . . . The appointment of Daniels is a slap at the Mexican people and the spitting upon the memory of the dead who defended Veracruz.” Daniels was Secretary of the Navy in 1914 when the United States intervened to stop the flow of arms to President Huerta.

effectively ended the Cristero rebellion.¹⁰ Few Mexican political or business leaders in 1933 any longer worried about an American military intervention, an activity which in the recent past would unite nearly all Mexicans' sense of devotion to the *patria*. Nor did many American corporate interests, with the exception of some of the oil giants, consider it feasible to send in the Marines to enforce property rights. Therefore most of the Mexican leadership's focus centered on how to generate economic opportunities by attracting competing interests from both in Mexico and from the United States. The transnational cultural market was freer to generate more back and forth exchange across the border now that most people assumed a more stable relationship was the norm.

Finally, the growing economic crisis meant that the ongoing ideological battle between free market and statist policies shifted in the favor of the latter. A public sympathy especially applied to the development and control of infrastructure projects, such as power and telecommunications systems, which enabled the spread of modern cultural activities. Somewhat ironically, the United States usually promoted free-market ideology abroad, but as the economic crisis worsened it increasingly injected state intervention into its own domestic economic projects. Meanwhile, the Mexican revolutionary ideology suggested strong state direction, but often governmental leaders accepted more of a market based orientation. Finally, market forces—supply for labor and capital, potential for new sales, the public demand for movies, etc.—always influenced the cultural transmission process, although the Depression weakened the appeal of *laissez faire* market notions in both countries¹¹

¹⁰ Dulles, 436-463, Nicholson, 338-347.

¹¹ Alan Knight, *U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940: An Interpretation*, Monograph Series 28 (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987), 11.

Government Relations and Activities during the Economic Crisis

Many sectors of the Mexican economy began to decline beginning in the second half of 1926.¹² This trend continued into 1927 and beyond due to the onset of a recession in the United States, which subsequently reduced demand for Mexican exports. Mexican tax receipts declined and the government reduced its spending; a contractionary cycle had set in. Compounding these problems in the macroeconomic sphere was a bad agricultural harvest in 1929. After the Wall Street crash in the United States, the country responded with an intensive effort to repatriate Mexican immigrants to their homeland. This reduced the flow of remittances from migrants and caused a drop in Mexico's aggregate money supply. Tight credit and limited demand caused most factories to limit production.¹³

Economic recovery, however, came more quickly to Mexico than to the United States. Beginning around the middle of 1932, mining and petroleum exports experienced a steady growth rate and attained their 1929 levels by 1934. The government accompanied this increase in foreign demand with an expansionary monetary policy to help jumpstart the economy.¹⁴ The American economy, meanwhile, would struggle to improve for several years to come and not attain sustained growth until the approach of World War Two helped increase overall demand. The two countries economies, in other words, deteriorated and improved at different times, only sharing a jointly depressed cycle during the years 1930 through 1932. Government relations, on the other hand,

¹² Enrique Krauze, Jean Meyer, and Cayetano Reyes, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, vol. 10: 1924-1928, La reconstrucción económica* (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1977), 211-268.

¹³ Enrique Cárdenas, "The Great Depression and Industrialization: Mexico," ed. Rosemary Thorp, *Latin America in the 1930s: The Role of the Periphery in the Great Depression* (London: MacMillan Press, 1984), 222-241.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 231-234.

began the seven year period from 1927 through 1933 at a low level, but within a year showed dramatic improvement that would endure thanks to the establishment of personal good will and mutual trust. Both sides came to feel comfortable exchanging goods and ideas at the cultural market even though the amount of currency they had was limited for a time.

The deteriorating diplomatic relations of late 1926 continued as 1927 began. America's lead diplomatic representation with Mexico, Ambassador James Sheffield and Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg, continued to clash at ideological and personal levels with the Calles regime. The situation reflected the United States' insistence on its legal rights, as President Coolidge stated, to "protect 'American lives and American rights' in accordance with International Law." The president's words echoed former Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes's earlier declaration that one nation could legally intervene when a neighboring country failed to perform the "functions of sovereignty and independence."¹⁵ The implications of this growing friction were evident in a letter Kellogg received in late 1926 from B.D. Davis of the American Manufacturers Foreign Credit Underwriters (AMFCU), an organization that insured the credit risk of multiple business ventures in Mexico. Davis, the AMFCU's managing director, relayed a recent inquiry from the Banco de México concerning the possibility of his firm suspending credits for Mexican merchants. The "political tension" between the two countries, warned Davis, threatened an "intensifying of the strain on the financial and credit resources of the Mexican nation."¹⁶

¹⁵ Nicolson, 306.

¹⁶ United States, Department of State, Record Group 59 (hereafter USDOS RG 59), Dec. File 612.1115/41, Banco de Mexico to B.D. Harris, 25 November 1926; B.D. Harris to Banco de Mexico, 9 December 1926; and E.B. Davis to Frank Kellogg, 9 December 1926.

Sheffield, who clearly sympathized with large American business interests and tended to dismiss the social goals of the Revolution as indicators of Bolshevik leanings, lacked the personal touch that in our first chapter we saw was important for working through differences. His mistrust and misunderstanding of President Calles were so strong that the latter, in April 1927, sent a message to President Coolidge suggesting that sincere but unofficial talks without Sheffield's presence might effectively address the impasse concerning application of Article 27. Kellogg in fact began to rely more on the counsel of one of the less abrasive negotiators of the Bucareli Accords, Charles Beecher Warren. In addition, the American government recognized that perhaps time was on its side as economic pressures mounted in Mexico in 1927. Oil production decreased in Mexico (as it increased in Venezuela), exposing Mexico's reliance on petroleum taxes for a significant share of its governmental revenue.¹⁷ Fortunately for bi-national relations, Mexico's deteriorating fiscal position coincided with Sheffield's worsening health. A window opened for the appearance of a new personality to reduce tensions.

In October 1927, Dwight Morrow arrived as ambassador and within weeks he had improved relations with President Calles. Although affiliated with the powerful J. P. Morgan banking firm, Morrow, following the very direct and usually abrasive Sheffield, understood that it would be more fruitful to pursue pleasurable personal contacts before trying to cement business deals. He and Calles spent time at the Mexican president's ranch, where the new ambassador listened to and learned about the Mexican perspective on such revolutionary topics as land reform. The two representatives, accompanied by American humorist Will Rogers, subsequently made a trip to the Mexican north. Next

¹⁷ L. Ethan Ellis, *Frank B. Kellogg and American Foreign Relations 1925-1929* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 23-49.

came a spectacularly popular long-distance airplane visit, which Morrow had instigated, from Colonel Charles Lindbergh.¹⁸ In itself, this flight constituted a cultural transmission of the enthusiasm for flight and the possibilities it promised and served to advance Morrow's successful resuscitation of bi-national relations.¹⁹ The new ambassador also believed that helping Mexico "stand on its own two feet" was the best way to support American business ventures there, since political and economic stability could provide decades of rewarding trade.²⁰ Morrow convinced his Mexican colleagues of the sincerity of this attitude by demonstrating his own personal interest in Mexican culture. He had inaugurated a new United States' attempt to base its diplomacy in Mexico upon "prudence, collaboration, and understanding."²¹ In Alan Knight's view, 1927 marked a true "turning point" towards normal and generally friendly relations.²² At the highest level, amicable personal relations, accompanied by the sharing of cultural icons such as Will Rogers and Charles Lindbergh, smoothed the way for more productive bi-national relations, which in turn would permit yet more cultural interaction.

These developments occurring at the end of 1927 began to fulfill in a surprisingly faithful way the hopes anthropologist Manuel Gamio expressed some two years earlier.²³

Speaking before a meeting in New York of the United States Council of Foreign

Relations, Gamio lamented that American ambassadors up to that point had mostly

¹⁸ Nicolson, *Dwight Morrow*, 311-313; Richard Melzer, "The Ambassador Simpático: Dwight Morrow in Mexico 1927-1930," in C. Neale Ronning and Albert P. Vannucci, eds., *Ambassadors in Foreign Policy: The Influence of Individuals on U.S.-Latin American Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 1-27.

¹⁹ Delpar, *Enormous Vogue*, 64. The following year the Mexican pilot Emiliano Carranza made a reciprocal flight to the United States. Sadly Carranza perished at the beginning of his return flight to Mexico after lightning struck his plane.

²⁰ Jean Meyer, *Estado y Sociedad con Calles*, 35-38.

²¹ Enrique Krauze, "Looking at *Them*: A Mexican Perspective on the Gap with the United States," in Frances Fukuyama, ed., *Falling Behind: Explaining the Development Gap Between Latin America and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 59.

²² Knight, *U.S.-Mexican Relations*, 2.

²³ Mexico, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Record Group Emilio Portes Gil (EPG) vol 30, 104-E-42, 12, Manuel Gamio, "Relations between the United States and Mexico," 20 November 1925.

concerned themselves with the political, military, commercial and religious elites of his country. Gamio encouraged American diplomats and corporations to have concern for the Mexican masses. He also praised the efforts of the Mexican Ambassador to the United States, Manuel Tellez, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Brookings School for Economics, and others, for attempting to use improved cultural understanding between the two countries as a means for enhancing economic exchange.²⁴ It is not known if Dwight Morrow knew of Gamio's sentiments, but his application of their underlying principles confirmed their veracity.

The efforts of Morrow and other leaders on both sides of the border helped maintain generally positive relations through the rest of the decade and into the next. In 1928 the American ambassador helped to arrange an easing of the religious tensions between Calles and the Catholic Church.²⁵ A liberal American Catholic, Father John Burke, and the Mexican president held a meeting at which the latter denied any desire "to destroy the identity of any Church." A year later this slight opening served as a stepping stone for ending the conflict.²⁶ Also in 1928 Undersecretary of State J. Reuben Clark prepared a detailed history of the Monroe Doctrine which concluded that the hundred-plus year old doctrine did not justify intervention in Latin American affairs.²⁷ Specifically, the long memorandum found that the Roosevelt Corollary, which at the turn of the century had added an offensive or pre-emptive element to the originally defensive

²⁴ Ibid., 7-11.

²⁵ Dulles, 329-330 and 459-463. For a detailed look at the Cristiada, see David Bailey, *Viva Cristo Rey!* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).

²⁶ Dulles, 459-460.

²⁷ Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 139. Clark later served as Ambassador to Mexico from mid 1930 to early 1933.

spirit of the Monroe Doctrine, no longer guided United States policy.²⁸ Since the middle of the 1920s, in fact, American administrations had attempted to mitigate growing anti-Yankee sentiment in Latin America by reducing the frequency of United States military interventions in the circum-Caribbean and by establishing explicit constitutional standards before it would recognize a new revolutionary government.²⁹

By the beginning of Herbert Hoover's administration in 1929 it was clear that the United States was approaching what President Franklin Roosevelt coined as the "good neighbor" policy. New or revised financial and military relationships had emerged or soon would. Negotiations between the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico (ICBM) and the Mexican government renegotiated Mexico's foreign debt structure. The 1930 Montes de Oca-Lamont Agreement forgave some \$211,000,000 of back interest Mexico owed and established a new schedule for payments.³⁰ In 1931 and 1932 Mexico conducted a military exchange with the United States for training in infantry, engineer, and aviation tactics.³¹ This trend of improved relations occurred at the same time that the Mexican government was assuming a more prominent role directing the economy. But

²⁸ Ellis, 101-104. The original 1823 Monroe Doctrine essentially stated that the United States would help the newly independent Latin American nations resist any European countries' efforts to reestablish colonies in the New World. Teddy Roosevelt's Corollary boldly set forth that the United States considered itself obligated to intervene in a Latin American (especially Caribbean) nation's political or economic affairs if that country were too unstable to take care of itself. The ostensible purpose was to prevent the emergence of conditions that might entice a European power to, for example, occupy a port to collect a debt. But the Corollary's effect was to engage the U.S. in a number of "stabilizing" interventions that appeared imperialistic and only temporarily improved conditions. For an excellent treatment of the two doctrines see David Healy, *Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean 1898-1917* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1988).

²⁹ Robert Freeman Smith, "Latin America, the United States and the European Powers, 1830-1930", ed. Leslie Bethell, *Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. 4, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 114-118.

³⁰ Dulles, 500-505; Jan Bazant, *Historia de la deuda exterior de México (1823-1946)* (Mexico City El Colegio de México, 1968), 201-211. Critics of the agreement noted that the devaluation of the Mexican peso meant that it had nevertheless become more expensive to repay the debt in U.S. currency.

³¹ Mexico, AGN, Record Group Emilio Portes Gil (EPG) vol 138, General José Beltrán to Pasqual Ortiz Rubio, 25 August 1932 and Major Davenport Johnson to General José Beltrán 2 September 1932.

although President Calles and the subsequent three short-term presidents regularly espoused revolutionary rhetoric, they still “intended to keep Mexico in the orbit of world capitalism.”³²

Emilio Portes Gil, the first in the line of three presidents who comprised the “Maximato,” focused first on achieving political stability and while doing so received valuable assistance from the United States. He built on the momentum Morrow had earlier generated for ending the Cristiada by effecting a formal end to the civil war. On June 30, 1929, Sunday services were held in Mexico for the first time in nearly three years.³³ Morrow’s quiet but clear contribution to the ending of the Cristiada, which had drained resources that would otherwise have gone to national reconstruction, helped improve relations between the two countries. Another costly affair that erupted earlier that spring and lasted about a month, the “Escobar Rebellion,” was defeated thanks to able military direction provided by former President Calles and \$1.5 million of planes and weapons purchased from the United States.³⁴ It was the last significant military revolt the Revolutionary governments faced. Looking back on the period some twenty-five years later, the *ex-presidente* Gil stated his belief that Morrow had actually initiated the famous “good neighbor” policy years before President Roosevelt employed the term.³⁵ The improved social stability derived from a relatively peaceful countryside was beneficial for commercial and thus cultural activity.

³² Lester D. Langley, *Mexico and the United States: The Fragile Relationship* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 17-19.

³³ Dulles, 462-463.

³⁴ Lorenzo Meyer, Rafael Segovia, y Alejandra Lajous. *Historia de la Revolucion Mexicana, vol 12: Periodo 1928-1934: Los inicios de la institucionalición* (Mexico, El Colegio de Mexico, 1978), 9-10; Dulles, 436-458. The Escobar Rebellion resulted in 2,000 lives lost and nearly forty million pesos in expenses and damages.

³⁵ Mexico, AGN, Record Group Emilio Portes Gil (EPG) 310-18, Emilio Portes Gil to E. David Cronon, 30 Jun 1955.

Prospective business investors were attracted by the political stability generally established in Mexico by 1930, but at the same time they worried about the growth of the Mexican state. Calles and his immediate successors increased state direction of labor relations, land distribution, transportation construction, banking, electrical provision, and many other aspects of the economy. The Mexican state emerged as “the largest Mexican business of the century,” according to Enrique Krauze.³⁶ This growth added nationalistic fuel to the ideological differences separating the two countries for it meant that Mexican government representatives would be directly confronting the American businesses engaged in or trying to enter those sectors of the economy. More confrontational in his style than Obregón had been, Calles determined that the Mexican state must assert its autonomy over any threat, whether it was the Catholic Church, the oil companies, or the United States government.³⁷

Protectionist sentiments in the United States Congress, meanwhile, produced the Hawley-Smoot Tariff, which took effect in 1930 and raised tariffs to “all-time highs.”³⁸ *Ad valorem* rates, which were already high in the 1920s due to the 1922 Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act, now rose to 40 percent. Mexico likewise assumed a more protectionist posture that would trend upward for the remainder of the decade.³⁹ Trade and thus the cultural transmission it promoted between the two countries suffered.⁴⁰ The tariff battle was a rather typical nationalist response and an unfortunately too common

³⁶ Krauze, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, vol. 10, 3.

³⁷ Meyer, Segovia, and Lajous, *Los inicios de la institucionalición*, 11-16.

³⁸ Rosenberg, 142-143; James A. Henretta, David Brody and Lynn Dumenil, *America: A Concise History*, Vol. 2: *Since 1865*, 2nd Ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 694. For a more detailed account, see Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1993).

³⁹ Dulles, 506; United States Tariff Commission, *Economic Controls and Commercial Policy in Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1946), 9-11.

⁴⁰ Mary Angeline Watrous, “Fiscal Policy and Financial Administration in Mexico 1890-1940,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, (Washington State University, 1991) 154-155.

occurrence during the early years of the 1930s Depression. But the history of America's 1920s tariff and trade policy also revealed an ideological difference between American and many foreign (including Mexican) commercial policies. Under the direction of Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, American policy in the 1920s generally did not object when one of its firms attained a monopolistic or at least dominant position overseas. But it did oppose the idea of a foreign government establishing controls over one of its national industries. Commenting on "the long forgotten relic of medievalism," Hoover warned that ". . . this intrusion of governments into trading operations on a vast scale . . . raises a host of new dangers—the inevitable aftermath of any such efforts by political agencies to interfere with the normal processes of supply and demand."⁴¹ Hoover's and the Americans' distinction between a corporate or national monopoly, however, appeared to many foreign governments merely as a guise for assisting powerful commercial expansion.

The Americans' increasing protectionism as the Depression set in also reveals the limiting or disabling effect that "nationalistic" sentiment in the economic realm could have in the cultural arena. Over one thousand economists warned President Hoover that the Hawley-Smoot Act would exacerbate problems with trade.⁴² President Hoover himself had doubts about its efficacy. Thomas Lamont, one of Hoover's close and respected advisors, foresaw its international implications. The leading American architect of various debt renegotiation pacts with Mexico in the 1920s, noted, "I almost went down on my knees to beg Herbert Hoover to veto the asinine Hawley-Smoot Tariff. That Act

⁴¹Rosenberg, 133-137, with quote appearing on p. 134.

⁴²McElvaine, 83-84.

intensified nationalism all over the world.”⁴³ This act and similar ones abroad “helped to clog the arteries of world trade,” which plummeted from \$36 billion in 1929 to \$12 billion in 1932. For Mexico, its exports’ purchasing power fell by over half between 1929 and 1934.⁴⁴ As a counter to the tenants of economic liberalism, the tariff exposed American ideology to charges of hypocrisy since clearly the government was intervening in the market. As a variable influencing cultural transmission, economically “nationalistic” activities such as raising tariffs obviously limited trade between the United States and Mexico and thus partially slowed the process. But the depressed economic results also spurred indirect effects such as the movement of people across the border and changes in moral values. Many Mexicans and Americans began to see themselves and their neighbors in a new light. In the United States, for example, a more communitarian and less individualistic ethos appeared in such diverse venues as public surveys, letters to the president and his wife, and movies.⁴⁵

Despite disagreements on economic ideology, the half dozen or so years after Ambassador Dwight Morrow arrived marked a watershed era in bi-national relations. Josephus Daniels, whom President Franklin Roosevelt appointed as ambassador to Mexico, maintained the momentum Morrow had established.⁴⁶ Initially many Mexicans on the left had concern about Daniels’s role as assistant secretary of the Navy when the Marines occupied Veracruz in 1914, and after he was nominated some protestors stoned

⁴³ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 49-50.

⁴⁴ MacLachlan and Beezley, 315.

⁴⁵ McElvaine, 196-223.

⁴⁶ J. Reuben Clark served as American ambassador for two and a half years from late 1930 to early 1933, but during this time did not participate in any political events comparable to those faced by Morrow or Daniels.

the U.S. embassy in Mexico City.⁴⁷ Soon after he arrived, however, the new ambassador quickly won the confidence of his hosts.⁴⁸ As the level of mutual trust rose, “cultural interchange” between the two countries also “reached its apogee” during this period.⁴⁹ Thanks in part to the more cordial diplomacy and the diminished sense of Revolutionary turmoil, “the always remote threat of armed intervention on behalf of American investors had apparently disappeared.”⁵⁰ Also promoting the high level of cultural exchange were the Mexican government’s promotion of learning and nationalistic folk art.

Schools and Artists

The Revolutionary governments viewed public schools as a means for modernizing and uniting the country. Among the various curriculum efforts launched in the countryside were campaigns to teach sports. Basketball and baseball, cultural imports from the United States, were taught in schools seeking to combat boredom and vice.⁵¹ These activities adopted by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) reflected the pedagogical ideas of Thomas Dewey, the American proponent of “learning by doing.” Boys and, in increasing numbers, girls planted gardens, participated in local festivals, and enjoyed regional dances.⁵² Schools also promoted various clubs that were “copies of the American Boy Scouts.” The code of conduct for the *tehuiias*, whose name comes from the

⁴⁷ Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don’t Go Home: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 52.

⁴⁸ Mexico, AGN, Record Group Emilio Portes Gil (EPG) 310-18, Emilio Portes Gil to E. David Cronon, 30 Jun 1955; Dulles, 550-558. Daniels did have to work through one awkward moment when President Roosevelt unintentionally slighted President Rodríguez by inviting former-president Calles to a function, but the matter passed without any major disturbance occurring.

⁴⁹ Delpar, *Enormous Vogue*, 55.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁵¹ Engracia Loyo B., “En el aula y la parcela: vida escolar en el medio rural (1921-1940),” in Aurelio de los Reyes, coordinador, *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México, Tomo V, vol. 1: Siglo XX. Campo y ciudad* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 292-252.

⁵² Mary Kay Vaughan, “Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s,” in eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 156-167.

náhuatl term for explorer, emphasized virtues such as loyalty, valor, sobriety and cleanliness. To realize the Revolution's goal of creating a Mexican (as opposed to a strictly local or regional) identity, leaders also expected *tehuías* to learn about three famous Mexican biographies and to know the history of the national flag and parts of the national anthem.⁵³ Clearly nationalistic in their emphases of Mexican heroes and cultural icons, these programs nevertheless exhibited American pedagogical and cultural influences such as Dewey's. Years in the future, of course, American schools would follow pedagogical theory and sponsor *Cinco de Mayo* celebrations throughout schools in the southwest and transport Mexican culture to the north.

The new values inculcated by the schools would, according to the SEP's theory, improve worker health and productivity. When accompanied by the improvement of road networks, irrigation systems, and the gradual installation of electrical grids, the new skills and values would also enhance the creation of regional and national markets.⁵⁴ The SEP's methodological approach thus provides an interesting parallel to the "Americanizing" classes that Progressive and religious reformers gave to Mexican immigrants in the American southwest.⁵⁵ In one Mexican northwestern town, federal educational policy aimed at modernizing the *campesino*'s mindset combined with the Sonoran presidents' emphasis on export-based agriculture and resulted in many conspicuous American cultural influences. Originally named for the leader of Yaqui

⁵³ Loyo B., 295. The transmission of values and activities similar to the Boy Scouts of America was somewhat of a worldwide phenomenon at the time, since the United States example was itself a copy of the British original launched after the Boer War.

⁵⁴ Vaughan, "Nationalizing the Countryside," 162-167.

⁵⁵ See Chapter One, 76.

indigenous resistance to Porfirian modernization efforts, the town of Cajeme appeared as might a typical city of its size in the United States.⁵⁶

Almost overnight in the 1920s, Cajeme, appropriately renamed Ciudad Obregón, became a showplace of modernity. Its stores displayed the latest tools, agricultural machinery, and lubricating oils from the United States, sewing machines, and fashions from Paris—or at least Tucson. Also available for everyone’s enjoyment was modern culture. Every weekend, the camps showed the latest films of Hollywood that enshrined new heroes and heroines: King Kong, Clark Gable, Charlie Chaplin, Tom Mix and Mae West. Every Saturday night there was a dance, neither folkloric nor religious but individualized and secular . . . Life in the [Yaqui] valley awakened hopes for betterment and dreams of modernity. It made schooling a necessity.⁵⁷

Government efforts to improve literacy facilitated the cultural transmission process in numerous other locales throughout the country. In his famous ethnographic study *Tepoztlán, A Mexican Village*, Robert Redfield described the “folk” of a Mexican village as those who “are the carriers of culture. This culture preserves its continuity from generation to generation without depending upon the printed page.”⁵⁸ But the government’s literacy, road building, radio projection, and other modernizing activities, competed with the oral or folk ways of maintaining culture at a local level. Access to a storyteller’s voice on the radio usually meant the eventual loss of local oral traditions.

The later 1920s and 1930s also marked a time when various institutes, artists and intellectuals north and south of the border became more interested in their neighboring land. American writers and artists especially had become enchanted with revolutionary

⁵⁶ For Cajeme’s efforts to maintain Yaqui autonomy, see Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Yaqui Resistance to Mexican Expansion,” ed. John E. Kicza, *The Indian in Latin American History: Resistance, Resilience, and Acculturation* (Wilimington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 213-241.

⁵⁷ Vaughan, “Nationalizing the Countryside,” 169-173, with quote appearing on 171.

⁵⁸ Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlán, A Mexican Village: A Study of Folk Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 2.

Mexico and its apparent authenticity.⁵⁹ The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation sponsored a series of academic sabbaticals for Americans and their counterparts in Latin America to improve cultural understanding. Simon Guggenheim, who had attained great wealth with mines in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, hoped to effect a “a similar commerce of things of the mind, of spiritual values.” Several Americans, including historian Lesley Byrd Simpson, and ten Mexicans, including educator Moisés Sáenz, received Guggenheim fellowships to study in one another’s land between 1930-32.⁶⁰ Hundreds of American school teachers attended the Summer School of the National University in Mexico City.

Within the realm of high culture, the musical composers Carlos Chavez and Aaron Copeland exchanged visits between New York City and Mexico City, and Mexican artists had a strong impact on their American hosts during multiple visits. José Clemente Orozco visited New York City, staying with friends and supporters who had recently spent time in Mexico, and painted a mural at Dartmouth University.⁶¹ Orozco’s rival, Diego Rivera, also enjoyed widespread popular success with San Francisco, Detroit, and New York exhibitions that illuminated the grandeur of the Revolution and challenged the power of capitalism and science. In New York, his rare single-artist exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art ran five weeks and attracted some 56,000 visitors.⁶² A number of factors might explain the popularity, but one of them had to do with the palpable economic uncertainty New Yorkers faced as the Depression showed no signs of relenting. “At a time of economic crisis that threw into question the benefits of

⁵⁹ Delpar, *Enormous Vogue*, 62-75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁶¹ Helen Delpar, “Mexican Culture,” in Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, eds. *The Oxford History of Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 555-557.

⁶² *Ibid.*

capitalism, the apparent ‘wantlessness’ of the Mexican peasant and the coherence of village life, despite its material poverty, exerted an even greater appeal than before 1929.”⁶³

These developments at the level of high cultural exchange connect to four related ideas in the transmission of culture at the mass level. To begin with, the Mexican muralists’ initial success in Mexico had much to do with the Secretariat of Education José Vasconcelos’s concerted effort to promote nationalistic art.⁶⁴ Government patronage enabled Rivera, Orozco, and others to gain widespread exposure to the Mexican masses and American visitors who viewed their murals on public buildings in the early to mid 1920s. The subsequent decades of public popularity and critical acclaim for the Mexican muralists suggest that this was an instance of successful governmental and nationalistic interference in the realm of cultural production and transmission.⁶⁵

Second, the interest the muralists and associated artistic efforts generated in the United States presumably increased American tourists’ interest in traveling to Mexico. For example, the Mexican government’s initial efforts to promote folk art helped to inspire the publication of the bilingual cultural travel journal, *Mexican Folkways*, which appeared with some breaks from 1925-1937.⁶⁶ The Mexican interest in native heritage also gave energy to a similar revival led by John Collier that occurred in the American southwest and spurred tourism there during this time and ever since.⁶⁷

⁶³ Delpar, *Enormous Vogue*, 83-90.

⁶⁴ Delpar, “Mexican Culture,” 549-555.

⁶⁵ David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 25-62.

⁶⁶ Delpar, “Mexican Culture,” 546.

⁶⁷ Delpar, *Enormous Vogue*, 91-124.

Third, it is hard to compare the acclaim a particular art event or movement receives from upper echelon critics to the reception it receives from the masses. José Clemente Orozco was himself skeptical of the folklore message, believing that while the bourgeoisie were excited about buying “clay pots and tin candlesticks during the 1920s, [Mexican] workers were eager to buy mass-produced modern objects for their home.”⁶⁸ This point is fundamental to the assessment of whether a particular cultural activity represents an instance of cultural imperialism or instead belongs to a category of mutual appreciation. And the fact is that we do not have any solid answer. John Tomlinson notes that most analyses of contemporary media imperialism (of the television show “Dallas,” Donald Duck cartoons, etc.) look at the content but not the audience reaction. He states that recent studies have shown there is a wide reaction to various messages, including the fact that many people simply enjoy, for example, viewing the image. My own conclusion is that people in open or relatively open societies enjoy a significant degree of agency or autonomy when they choose to read a book, listen to a song, view a movie or work of art. Governments, organizations, and corporations can influence the message to some extent by limiting the appearance of competing ideas, but even then the individual viewer often possesses a vast reservoir of experience and beliefs that prove resilient to quick dilution.⁶⁹

Finally, the Mexican artists’ popularity in the United States provides yet one more example of how a nationalistic argument was often used to advance an underlying economic point. In competition for limited funds during a Depression, some American artists began to complain about how much work Rivera was receiving in the United

⁶⁸ Delpar, “Mexican Culture,” 546.

⁶⁹ John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1991), 48-49.

States. One former student of Rivera's even noted, "in order to develop a national art, painters need the support of our political and educational leaders to see to it that they have opportunities for commissions, and thus avoid the importing of foreign artists."⁷⁰

Private Business and Cultural Transmission

Although the United States government generally espoused an ideological commitment to free enterprise, it nevertheless provided competitive advantages to certain of its national businesses. Government tariffs, for example, had sheltered many industries' growth in the late nineteenth century and the Hawley-Smoot Tariff attempted to do so as the depression unfolded. Since the turn of the century, the relatively small (compared to European) size of the federal government had grown to match a concomitant growing complexity in the administration of domestic and foreign affairs. "A big navy, the open door policy, currency advisers, and new executive-branch bureaucracies" helped America's industrial giants to compete more securely in world markets.⁷¹ During the Great War, the Committee on Public Information (CPI) emphasized the use of cultural diplomacy for expanding trade. The CPI's director, George Creel, promoted the "gospel of Americanism" in Mexico City by establishing reading rooms with American literature and by offering free classes in English. "Every one of the "English-language students in Mexico became an understanding champion of the United States," stated Creel.⁷² He and other CPI representatives assumed that more foreigners would be willing to enter the capitalist orbit once they had an understanding and appreciation of American organizational techniques and efficiencies.

⁷⁰ Delpar, *Enormous Vogue*, 125-164.

⁷¹ Rosenberg, 61-62.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 79-84.

American officials might also overlook their insistence on free enterprise if they concluded that a bit of state intervention would help American firms vis-a-vis their Mexican counterparts. The American consulate at Frontera, Tabasco, for example, recommended that five American firms purchasing mahogany timber there should use a “combined inspection service” when receiving logs from Mexican sellers who sometimes believed that “if one firm will not accept his logs, another will.”⁷³ This modest organizational adjustment would save labor costs since one team could perform the inspection duties for all five companies. Perhaps more important, it would demonstrate the “power which united action” gives. Regardless what Adam Smith might say, “the cooperation of American purchasers of raw materials in *foreign* markets” justified governmental tinkering with the exchange process.⁷⁴

American consulates hoped for and sometimes facilitated sales for their nationals in Mexico. The documentation in the U.S. State Department archives, however, shows that competitive market forces—price, service, and credit terms—regularly determined whether a sale occurred. Consulate records detail case after case where German, Swiss, Belgian, French, Spanish, Russian or Mexican firms gained the sale of machinery, tires, glass, etc. because they underbid American firms.⁷⁵ Overall the cultural changes that accompanied commercial exchanges in Mexico occurred within a relatively open trading field overseen by Mexican nationals, but with two exceptions. As noted earlier, the Mexican government regularly influenced the available prices through its tariff practices.

⁷³ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 612.11171, Harry B. Ott (American Consulate) to Secretary of State, 12 February 1925.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 612.115/31 to 612.11173, American Consul David J. D. Myers to State Department, “Report on Loss of Order for Flourmill Machinery,” 26 June 1928; American Consul John McArdle, “Loss of Business for American Firms Resulting from Unsatisfactory Credit Terms,” 20 February 1929.

And in some remote mining or oil company towns, American (or British) corporations sometimes used coercive practices that threatened employees' very limited housing or subsistence options if workers challenged company wage or labor policies. These cases received attention from "anti-imperialist" labor organizations at the time and from historians since.⁷⁶ For the majority of Mexican firms and individuals throughout the country, however, the encounter with "American" goods was not "cultural imperialism . . . [but] *the spread of the culture of modernity itself.*"⁷⁷ Americans did promote and peddle new goods, but so too did businesses from numerous lands including Mexico. The Mexican recipients in the 1920s and early 1930s, meanwhile, actively sought out the best or most cost-effective goods and services they could find. Thus "this is a discourse of historical change, of 'development', of a global movement towards, among other things, an everyday life governed by the habitual routine of commodity capitalism."⁷⁸

Consumer products appeared more frequently as roads and radios increasingly connected Mexican villages and towns to an urban cultural node. In 1927 Coca-Cola opened its first bottling plant in Mexico City.⁷⁹ Headquartered in the capital, the soda industry spread its modern wares to locales that otherwise mostly reflected Indian pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial dietary preferences. In the village of Tepoztlán, Morelos, anthropologist Robert Redfield conducted his 1927-8 field study and found, "several men are occupied with this enterprise, and the product is largely consumed."⁸⁰ In

⁷⁶ For specific examples in Mexico see Thomas F. O'Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 251-284. For a broader view on corporate imperialism see Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. and Bruce Mazlish, eds., *Leviathans: Multinational Corporations and the New Global History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷⁷ Tomlinson, 90.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power History: Latin America's Material Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 209.

⁸⁰ Redfield, 48-53, with quote appearing on p. 49.

this case, internal migration—occasional trips from the village to the city—combined with Coca-Cola’s corporate initiatives to sell a product. It seems fair to surmise that those villagers employed in distributing *refrescos* encouraged consumption of the drink as they incorporated themselves further into the market system.

A rising level of consumerism enabled Mexican advertising firms to increase their role in transmitting culture in the later 1920s and 1930s. In 1923 various advertising specialists formed the Asociación Nacional de Publicidad (ANP) “to mediate tensions in advertising, establish nationwide publicity standards, and provide a social and intellectual network for discussing different aspects of publicity.”⁸¹ In short, they wanted to be “professionals.” Their effort to professionalize themselves with established standards and a degree of autonomy reflected earlier efforts that doctors, lawyers, historians and countless other occupational groups had made in the United States at the end of the nineteenth and beginning decades of the twentieth century.⁸² In both of these movements that occurred in 1920s Mexico and a couple decades prior in the United States, industrialization and the growth of scientific knowledge in a society created an apparent need for “expertise.”⁸³ As more Mexicans and Americans promoted and the Mexican government accepted commodity capitalism in Mexico, the borrowing of social and cultural practices, such as the professionalization movement, from across the border increased as well.

American firms also imparted some of their cultural norms through the workplace environment. Thomas F. O’Brien writes that the 1920s were a period when American

⁸¹ Moreno, 87-90.

⁸² See Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 176-199.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 176-177; Moreno, 84-92.

firms in Mexico tried to militate against labor unrest by increasing productivity, reducing the number of workers, and then taking better care of the remaining, rationalized workforce. Mining firms improved the quality of company housing and added gymnasiums and movie theaters in the late 1920s.⁸⁴ The electrical conglomerate, American Foreign Power, sent some of its higher-skilled Mexican workforce to the United States for training. Despite these American companies' offers of improved material conditions or increased access to lower level management for their Mexican employees, the general trend toward an increasingly market-oriented economy produced a temporary solidarity among workers and the "petit bourgeoisie" who felt their livelihoods threatened by the large competitors. Numerous strikes occurred against mining, oil, and electrical companies in the 1920s.⁸⁵ A number of Mexicans, in other words, believed they saw a very visible hand of American business leaders coercing or co-opting them into a more pliable position. Interpretations of this relationship between management and labor vary widely, but one outcome is clear: relatively higher wages, modern workplace discipline and expectations, and new products or services were significant conduits of cultural transmission between the two countries.⁸⁶

Writing in 1926, the same year his company opened its first manufacturing plant in Mexico City, Henry Ford articulated his business philosophy and revealed how capitalists could promote a consumerist culture. "Our company is not without experience in the feasibility of raising the power of consumption" through the payment of higher

⁸⁴ O'Brien, 264-284.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 6-9, 280-284.

⁸⁶ Ibid.; Hobart A. Spalding, Jr., *Organized Labor in Latin America: Historical Case Studies of Workers in Dependent Societies* (New York: New York University Press, 1977); Michael M. Hall and Hobart A. Spalding, Jr., "The urban and working class and early Latin American labour movements, 1880-1930," in ed. Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Vol. IV* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 350-355.

wages. After noting how high wages—usually two to three times the prevailing average— significantly improved the standard of living everywhere in the world his plants had opened, Ford noted the same effect south of the United States border.

Our branches in South America tell the same story, of wages and progress, except that most of these branches have gone into territory that never before had other than the crudest of industry, and hence we had to draw our workers from unskilled peons, with the exception of Buenos Aires. Our other South American branches are at Santiago, Chile; São Paulo, Brazil; Pernambuco, Brazil; and Montevideo, Uruguay.

Our branch [in Brazil] is hardly more than a year old, but already the high wages . . . are beginning to have an effect. The workers have not yet made much change in their housing conditions but they are buying more clothing, they are buying a few furnishings. . . Soon they will begin to develop more needs, and the process of material civilization will start.⁸⁷

Ford de México opened a new manufacturing plant during the depression, even though it cancelled plans for similar openings elsewhere in Latin America.⁸⁸ On September 14, 1932, new President Abelardo Rodriguez attended the festive but serious opening ceremony for the new plant which would soon put new American cars on new Mexican roads.⁸⁹

Many small to mid-sized American businesses, witnessing the wide range of governmental and business activities down south, envisioned how the symbiotic connection between culture and business could simultaneously benefit Mexico and their own profits. The National Association of Commercial Organization Secretaries (NACOS), for example, stated that many new products and institutions had combined nicely with the Mexican character to improve the country. One of the NACOS affiliates

⁸⁷ Henry Ford, *Today and Tomorrow* (Cambridge, Mass.: Productivity Press, 1988), 262-266. The book was originally published in 1926.

⁸⁸ Mira Wilkins and Frank Earnest Hill, *American Business Abroad: Ford on Six Continents* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), 244. Ford cancelled or postponed the opening of new plants in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay.

⁸⁹ *Excelsior*, 14 September 1932.

and the Manager of Brownsville Chamber of Commerce, G.C. Richardson, sent an editorial to President Calles. After expressing appreciation for Mexicans' business acumen and potential, the piece noted: "The automobile, the airplane, more and better schools, better roads and a defined agricultural program are doing much for Mexico. We, here on the border, understand the Mexican people, we sympathize with them in their troubles, we admire their virtues and we believe that they will lead themselves out of their difficulties."⁹⁰

Mexican Cinema

The growth of cinema in Mexico depended on an array of economic, political, and technological developments within the transnational cultural market. During the Porfiriato there emerged a very limited native film industry, led by Salvador Toscano Barragán, who produced short documentary pieces of everyday life and celebrations.⁹¹ A handful of European producers also offered an occasional silent production for the few theaters that existed, mostly in the large cities. Soon after the Great War, however, several Hollywood production studios sought to capitalize on the weakened position of their European rivals and upon their own increasing productive potential during the "silent era" of filmmaking.⁹²

United Artists Corporation (UAC), a recently formed collaboration of three powerful stars and a noted director—Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and David W. Griffith—opened an office in Mexico City in 1922 but encountered

⁹⁰ Mexico, AGN, "Record Group Obregon-Calles (OC), 182, Our Mexican Brothers," NACOS News, Vol III, No 3 (Jan 1928) and G. C. Richardson to President Calles, 31 JAN 1928.

⁹¹ Peter N. Standish and Steven M. Bell, *Customs and Culture of Mexico* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 119-122.

⁹² Gaizka S. de Usabel, *The High Noon of American Films in Latin America* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 3-26, 40-41, 55-56.

numerous obstacles before it ever made a profit there. UAC officials complained about the “anti-American attitude” of the government and the difficulty of working with Luis Morones’s Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos (CROM), a leading union organization that “exercised power of life or death over every factory and shop as well as movie houses and theaters.”⁹³ UAC’s Mexican manager wrote in 1925 that “the union right now has the power to take any of our employees out of our office and send them to some other house and put another employee in that man’s place.” Nevertheless, the new media continued to expand throughout the country thanks to UAC’s and other American and Mexican firms’ efforts. By 1925, eleven theaters in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon boasted a seating capacity of 21,300, more than a fourth of the northern industrial city’s population. Their average daily attendance was 9,000 patrons.⁹⁴ Antonio and Adolfo Rodriguez also controlled several movie houses in the states of Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Zacatecas. In Monterrey, Mexico City, Guadalajara and other major cities, newspapers regularly featured articles about American stars.

To promote their industry abroad, cinema executives in the United States sometimes coordinated their efforts to match their government’s increasing preference for softer diplomacy through business and cultural ties. In 1924, American film producers transported diplomatic representatives of eighteen Latin American countries to the United States.⁹⁵ The next year the *Saturday Evening Post* ran an article declaring “trade follows the film.” Secretary of State Kellogg concurred, and added his belief that American movies contributed to progress. “I cannot help feeling that, in these days when the movie

⁹³ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 10-12.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 8-10.

is so vitally important in the life of every country that it, more than anything else, can create good understanding.” It could, in short, help “spread the American dream.”⁹⁶

Complicating this hoped for harmonious vision of progress was the Mexican government’s own vision, a nationalist sentiment that produced a range of challenging situations for movie producers and distributors. A small episode occurred when Mexican authorities complained about the movie *Don Q* being prejudicial to their country’s former colonial master Spain. But after the Spanish minister declared that the movie was not offensive, *Don Q*’s promoters learned that the complaint had been originated by a rival company that could not show the film.⁹⁷ In the early 1920s Mexican government officials complained to Hollywood studios that the typical portrayal of Mexican characters as “greasers” was offensive to the nation. In this instance, Hollywood saw the complaint as more legitimate and in the mid to late 1920s it toned down the stereotype.⁹⁸

Other government obstacles and a moderate degree of film piracy also limited Hollywood’s expansion in Mexico.⁹⁹ The tax on film distribution was raised from six to eight percent in 1927, partly to generate revenue and partly because some officials believed the film companies used creative accounting to avoid paying even the lower amount. Although Chaplin was a popular star, UAC did not turn a profit in Mexico until 1928. One year later, however, a technological innovation revolutionized the film industry and significantly challenged American studios’ early dominance of the Mexican market. Audio was joined to video, and soon Mexican actors and producers had both a

⁹⁶ Rosenberg, 99-102.

⁹⁷ Usabel, 79-80.

⁹⁸ Delpar, *Enormous Vogue*, 169-170.

⁹⁹ Usabel, 27-34, 55-56

literal and figurative voice that could appeal to their home audience's nationalist proclivities.

“Talkies” came to Mexico City about a year and a half after debuting in the United States. On May 14, 1929, *The Singing Fool*, starring Al Jolsen, opened. One of that night's prominent audience members, Mexico's provisional president, Emilio Portes Gil, “praised the film very highly.”¹⁰⁰ Sound dialogue soon became a common component of films, and Mexican audiences began to expect at least some of the movies they watched to have actors who spoke Spanish and with a Mexican dialect.¹⁰¹ The Hollywood studios therefore experimented with hiring Spanish speaking specialists who “dubbed” over the English dialogue, although this method did not appeal particularly to the audiences. UAC, Paramount and others also tried using separate Spanish speaking casts, but this proved to be expensive and the audiences at any rate wanted to see the real stars. On the other hand, using Spanish subtitles was problematic with a clientele that still had high levels of illiteracy. The theaters, meanwhile, required new wiring systems, which was good for the installation firms such as Western Electric and RCA, but which complicated the distribution efforts of the film companies. Sound had given American film makers an initial technical advantage over their Mexican (and Latin American) competitors, but overall the new dimension created more problems and led to a diminished market share in Hollywood's Mexican market.¹⁰²

The expense and technological requirements of producing sound movies prompted a modest number of Mexican producers to head to Hollywood so that they

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 77-81. The “talkie's” first American debut, *The Jazz Singer*, which also starred Al Jolson, opened in New York City on 6 October 1927.

¹⁰¹ It should be kept in mind that Hollywood was trying to reach Spanish speaking audiences throughout Latin America and Spain, and that often each country had its own particular dialect.

¹⁰² Standish and Bell, 122-123.

could learn the new dimension. In the meantime, with the hope of spurring its own national industry, the Mexican government passed a short-lived requirement that American companies that distributed fifty films in Mexico must also distribute at least one Mexican-produced film in the United States.¹⁰³ More ominous for the Hollywood producers in 1930, however, was their own concern for trimming expenses as the Great Depression worsened. Most Hollywood studios concluded that the above mentioned troubles with sound did not justify the expense of separate Spanish speaking casts, which the studios soon released. In turn, “Mexico became a natural outlet for some of the surplus talent Hollywood had trained, from actors and directors to cameramen and stage technicians.”¹⁰⁴ The relative liberty within the transnational cultural market, in other words, enabled enterprising individuals to transfer their cultural talents or acquisitions back and forth across the border.

The first successful Mexican “talkie,” the 1931 film *Santa*, dealt with the spiritual redemption of a prostitute and employed many who had worked in Hollywood. It marked the beginning of a genre that drew inspiration from both Mexico and Hollywood. The melodramatic nature of *Santa* and similar films that followed has caused some cultural critics to see them as evidence of Hollywood’s hegemonic influence.¹⁰⁵ According to some, the “Golden Age” of Mexican cinema from the 1930s through 1950s was “little else than a poor imitation [of American films], ‘which opened the floodgates to a manifold process of cultural colonization.’”¹⁰⁶ The Mexican cultural critic Carlos

¹⁰³ Usabel, 81-82.

¹⁰⁴ Standish and Bell, 123.

¹⁰⁵ Ana M. Lopez, “Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema,” in Ana Del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo, *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 441-458.

¹⁰⁶ Enrique Colina and Daniel Díaz Torres, “Ideología del melodrama en el viejo cine latinoamericano,” *Cine Cubano* 73/74/75: 15, quoted in Lopez, “Tears and Desire,” 446.

Monsiváis, however, characterizes films as a medium that both produces and preserves national “versions of reality” at the same time as it destroys some older cultural practices.¹⁰⁷ His ambivalent defense of the melodrama concludes, “If competition with North America is impossible artistically or technically, the only defense is excess, the absence of limits of the melodrama.”¹⁰⁸ Most important for the Mexican audiences and producers, the melodramas were popular and thus money-makers. They also expanded the transnational cultural market by paralleling concurrent developments occurring with the electrical grid and on the airwaves.

Infrastructural Conduits of Culture: Electricity and Radio

The movies, along with much of the new consumerism that advertisers and businessmen sought to promote, depended heavily on the growth of electrical infrastructure. A few companies in semi-rural locales had made half-hearted attempts to bring electricity to Mexican farms in the later 1910s and 1920s but with very limited success.¹⁰⁹ As of 1934, only 446 of the approximate 6,000 cities and towns with populations over 2,500 had access to electricity. Half of these locales were concentrated in the Federal District and its neighboring states. In more distant and sparsely populated areas, such as Sonora, just over one percent of the rural population had electricity. The government’s limited capital went more towards irrigation than electrification.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Carlos Monsiváis and Carlos Bonfil, *A través del espejo: el cine mexicano y su público* (Mexico: Ediciones el Milagro/Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía, 1994), as cited in Standish and Bell, 120.

¹⁰⁸ Carlos Monsiváis, “Reír llorando (Notas sobre la cultura popular urbana),” in *Política cultural del estado mexicano*, ed., Moisés Ladrón de Guevara (Mexico: Ed. GEF/SEP, 1982), 70, quoted in Lopez, “Tears and Desire,” 446. Monsiváis’s articulation of cinema’s destructive capacity echoes Tomlinson’s point that entrance into capitalist modernity always entails a sense of loss.

¹⁰⁹ Ernesto Galarza, *La Industria Eléctrica en México* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 1941), 195-197.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 194-197.

Additional capital investment, however, arrived just before the onset of the Depression as the American and Foreign Power Company expanded in Latin America. “Foreign Power,” which originally had acquired electrical generating systems in Guatemala in 1923, entered Mexico in 1928. The American conglomerate soon bought up smaller firms in Mérida, Saltillo, Jalapa and Durango.¹¹¹ The next year it purchased the Tuxpango Dam in the state of Veracruz, a facility which it “substantially improved” in subsequent years to increase electrical delivery throughout more of the country.¹¹² With the efforts of Foreign Power to develop a system connecting to Mexico City and those of the British-owned Mexican Light and Power Company in the capital itself, the reach of the electrical grid doubled between 1920 and 1934.¹¹³ Mexico still remained very rural, but urbanization and its concomitant world of modernizing culture increased notably in this period.

As they had done in the United States, electric companies sought to increase their market demand by promoting the industrial production of local firms in Mexico. Although foreign owned, the Mexican Light and Power Company stamped “Buy Mexican Products” on the invoices it sent to its customers in 1927. Various power companies belonged to the Confederation of Industrial Enterprises, whose motto was “defend and protect jealously the national interests.”¹¹⁴ American (and other) electrical companies wanted to sell their services to Mexican or American customers and firms. At their core, electrical executives were capitalists rather than nationalists. Their provision

¹¹¹ Ibid, 77.

¹¹² American and Foreign Power Company, *The Foreign Power System: A Review of Foreign Power's Role in the Development of Modern Utility Services in Foreign Lands* (New York: American & Foreign Power Company, Inc., 1953), 10-16.

¹¹³ Galarza, 30-32; O'Brien, 268.

¹¹⁴ Galarza, 192.

of electricity and then the new possibilities that sprang from (and supported) it—cinema, radio, kitchen appliances, etc.—was an instance of capitalism’s “invisible hand” helping to construct the transnational cultural market rather than business imperialists forcing vulnerable customers to shop there.

Radio’s entry into Mexico in the early 1920s included large, cumbersome equipment and limited programming, but by the end of the decade smaller sets and a variety of shows emerged. Music, *radionovelas* (radio “soap operas”), and special programs for children were scheduled throughout the day.¹¹⁵ An entrepreneurial pioneer operating in Monterrey, Emilio Azcárraga, promoted broadcasting’s growth by first selling RCA radios and then establishing a leading Mexican radio station. XEW—“La Voz de América Latina desde México”—emerged as the largest radio station in Mexico. The estimated number of sets in Mexico City nearly quadrupled from 26,000 in 1926 to 100,000 in 1930.¹¹⁶ Ninety percent of these sets had been manufactured in the United States.¹¹⁷

The impressive growth continued in the 1930s thanks to Mexican and American commercial and governmental efforts. Azcárraga increased XEW’s broadcasting power to 200 kilowatts, turning the Mexico City station into the most powerful transmitter in the western hemisphere.¹¹⁸ Azcárraga and other Mexican broadcast pioneers also founded stations in regional markets including the second largest city, Guadalajara. These

¹¹⁵ Roberto Ornelas Herrera, “Radio y Cotidianidad en México (1900-1930),” in Aurelio de los Reyes, coordinador, *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México, Tomo V, vol. 1: Siglo XX. Campo y ciudad* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 162-164.

¹¹⁶ Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 28-37.

¹¹⁷ Carlos Monsivías, “Would So Many Millions of People Not End Up Speaking English? The North American Culture and Mexico,” in Ana Del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo, eds., *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 208.

¹¹⁸ Standish and Bell, 104-105.

commercial operations applied suggestions from American advertisers such as Coca Cola, which recommended promoting its products during broadcasts of sporting events.¹¹⁹ Various laws passed during the “Maximato,” however, attempted to promote nationalist culture by requiring all stations to broadcast in Spanish. A 1926 law that had required station owners and operators to be Mexican citizens, for example, was amended by a 1931 measure stating that broadcasts must be in Spanish or else get a special permit. Also in that latter year, the recently formed Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) sponsored the station XEFO to promote the party’s political and cultural messages.¹²⁰

A station operated directly by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), XFX, introduced various new cultural strands to thousands of Mexicans. The station’s broadcasting mission was nationalistic and reflected the SEP’s goal of “uplifting” and “civilizing” poor Mexicans. The SEP’s director from 1931-1934, Narcisso Bassols, viewed education and radio’s contribution to it as a way to unite the large numbers of indigenous peoples with the mestizo masses:

“Our education must realize a synthesis of the two cultures, conserving the positive values of the indigenous races and taking from western civilization, with its technical resources and the possibilities that technology presents, all that which strengthen our Indians converting them into a race physically vigorous and mechanically capable of producing riches in great abundance.”¹²¹

A typical program schedule from XFX in 1933 included concerts of popular Mexican music, e.g., “las huastecas mexicanas,” as well as stories from Plato and classes in arithmetic. The governmental efforts promoted a strengthening of one national culture

¹¹⁹ Hayes, 32-34.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 37-40. Plutarco Calles led the formation of the PNR in 1929 to provide institutional political stability after president-elect Obregón was assassinated the year before.

¹²¹ Ibid., 42-43.

through a “selective tradition” that merged various European, indigenous and *mestizo* motifs. Officials hoped that the broadcasting of popular music from a radio would limit the number of people who frequented cantinas and *pulquerias* to hear music. “The objective of national education was always tied to a project of cultural improvement,” and thoughtful broadcasts, it was hoped, could help produce civic-minded citizens. But radio also exposed these same listeners to the world of modernity. Finally, Mexico’s cultural bureaucrats also believed that a weekly concert followed by the playing of the Mexican national anthem would help its citizens resist “the effects of American jazz.” Ironically, the programming also included a class for learning English.¹²²

While the SEP attempted, with limited success, to promote a nationalistic concept of Mexican popular music, it could not effectively control its citizens’ cultural preferences. In 1933 it sent an inspector to multiple rural villages to gauge the locals’ reactions to government sponsored programming. Luis F. Rodríguez Lomelí found that although the communities really appreciated receiving a free radio from the government, they did not feel obligated to keep the radio set on the XFX station, the position for which had been locked on each of the donated radio’s tuners. The campesinos in the states of Mexico, Puebla, Tlaxcala and Hidalgo had broken the locks and frequently preferred to listen to commercial radio stations. The managers of XFX could take heart, however from letters coming from more urbane listeners in Mexico City. In the city, where Mexico’s future was headed, many listeners stated their appreciation for the government’s effort to forge a nationalist concept of Mexican culture.¹²³

¹²² Ibid., 42-51.

¹²³ Ibid., 58-62.

Infrastructural Conduits of Culture: Telephones and Roads

The Mexican telephone industry through the Porifiriato and early revolutionary periods, it will be recalled, had been marked by a hodge-podge of competing concessions awarded by various government agencies. Early companies “fought it out . . . in terms of service, price and bribes to officials.” Multiple lines sometimes were strung in parallel by competitors; three different connecting lines existed, for example, between Veracruz to Mexico City.¹²⁴ International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) stepped into this chaotic operating environment in 1925 when President Calles approved its purchase of the Mexican Telephone Company (Mextelco), which during the Revolution had lost market share to the Swedish firm Lars Magnus Ericsson.¹²⁵ ITT and Ericsson each received fifty year concessions, tax breaks and a guarantee of federal (instead of the unpredictable local and state) oversight from the government.¹²⁶ The companies engaged in a “furious competition” with each other, lowering rates, improving service, buying up smaller competitors and rationalizing the system. ITT reportedly replaced eighty percent of the decrepit telephone poles it had inherited with its purchase of Mextelco. In sum, the two large companies “contributed significantly to the development of Mexico’s telephone system.” Between 1925 and 1935 their combined total number of subscribers jumped from just over 37,000 to over 111,000.¹²⁷

Although profits during this period of intense competition and into the depression were small, the cultural impact of the new systems went beyond the mere connection of the individuals on the line. People conducted business at an increasing pace, making new

¹²⁴ Robert Sobel, *ITT: The Management of Opportunity* (New York: Truman Talley Books, 1982), 44-46.

¹²⁵ Arturo Grunstein Dickter, “In the Shadow of Oil: Francisco J. Múgica vs. Telephone Transnational Corporations in Cardenista Mexico,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, vol. 21:1 (winter 2005), 8-13.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

connections with the nation and outside world that rippled throughout society. Mexico's total number of telephone users paled in comparison to that of its northern neighbor: just 82,000 in 1930 compared to over 20,000,000 (nearly 7,000,000 of which were added in the 1920s!)¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the companies, the Mexican government, and many desirous users all could see the expanded future for the telephone.

Just as the electric companies tried to boost their own business by encouraging others', so too did the telephone companies. ITT, for example, published a 1930 pamphlet entitled "Mexico," which it hoped would "make Mexico better known in the United States and to tighten the friendly bonds that unite us." Although the small project ostensibly was animated by ITT's "great admiration for the beauty and progress" of Mexico, certainly the proponents of the pamphlet sought to increase their profits in Mexico.¹²⁹ The larger point, however, is that the company's action complemented the concurrent efforts that we have seen being made at this time in the tourism and electrical industries. Telephones, hotels, roads, etc. increased productivity and the potential for profit, and they made the two countries look ever more alike. Now, even a relatively poor migrant might make advance arrangements for his travels north or south.

While most Mexican migrants trekking to the United States during this time used the railroads to head northward into the "land of plenty," some Mexicans moving within their country began in the 1920s to experience a nearly revolutionary change in their lives due to President Calles's commitment to constructing a modern road network. The

¹²⁸ Ibid., 7. Competition and low rates led the two companies to consider merging together later in the 1930s, a subject we will turn to in Chapter Three.

¹²⁹ Mexico, AGN, Record Group Pascual Ortiz Rubio (POR) 144-2551, Hernand Bend to Pasqual Ortiz Rubio, 10 April 1930.

construction effort and the changes it would effect in the following decades provide us a fascinating look at how nationalism influenced cultural transmission.

In 1925 the newly founded National Roads Commission began the ambitious task of building roads that would eventually reach out from the capital to Acapulco in the west, to Nuevo Laredo (via Monterrey) in the north, and to Veracruz in the east. Reflecting President Calles's desire for autonomous development, the project was to rely heavily on Mexican capital, labor and expertise. This approach also underscored many Mexicans' belief that the use of, and generous terms given to, foreign firms in the construction of the Porfirian railroad system had deprived the nation of much wealth.¹³⁰ As the scale of the project began to make itself evident, however, Mexican officials determined that they would need to hire an American firm for construction management and engineering expertise. Nevertheless, the contract insisted that the Americans train and then place an increasing number of Mexicans in high-skilled positions. In this case, a tempered nationalistic requirement in the contract—allowing some American involvement but insisting on Mexican participation as well—facilitated a transference of valuable skills. After several years, the Mexican government also shifted from relying solely on self-financing and decided to issue bonds to foreigners to raise capital for the roads.¹³¹ Had the government adhered to the more strict requirement of the original vision, then that would have slowed the completion of the road network and all the cultural changes that came with it.

During the early years of the project, when budgets were quite limited but nationalist enthusiasm was abundant, many communities called on voluntary labor to

¹³⁰ Wendy Waters, "Remapping Identities: Road Construction and National Building in Postrevolutionary Mexico," in Vaughan, *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 222-226.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

advance the cause. In the state of Veracruz, participants in the *faena* labor system had since the pre-conquest period contributed their free labor a few days per month when a communal project demanded it. When construction in various sections began in the later 1920s, many citizens again offered their free labor to scratch out crude roads. As the projects grew and became more capital intensive, however, more and more communities had by the middle 1930s begun simply to request the federal government build them the road. The Mexican government's original expansive vision for modern development altered its citizens' expectations of what they and their government could and should do.

Why did president Calles and members of many local communities want roads so badly in the 1920s and 1930s? They anticipated that roads would bring economic and cultural advances. Many cited the word "progress" in their letters of request or thanks for the roads, and several referred to the great prospects they saw for tourism. During the period this chapter addresses—when Mexico was mostly struggling economically—not as much "progress" was made as Calles had wanted, but by 1940 over 10,000 kilometers had been constructed.¹³² Most of the cultural changes began to appear in the later 1930s and 1940s and will therefore be examined in Chapters Three and Four. Wendy Waters concludes, however, that the roads and "the goods, people, and ideas that traveled along them helped individuals and communities to incorporate new notions of Mexicanidad." Their construction also

was eminently transnational. Roads were designed to lure foreign tourists to a land of pyramids, baroque churches. . . . They were also intended to transport Mexican goods to foreign markets in exchange for foreign products. As much as roads led to Mexico City, the principal highways led

¹³² Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 416; Waters, 224. Calles had hoped to complete the 10,000 km in two years.

as well to the northern border with the United States and to the nation's major ports.¹³³

This conclusion is sound, but it must also be synthesized with the concept of “Americanization” that some writers associate with the spread of Coca Cola, tourists or Hollywood cinema. “American” culture would now come on roads built by Mexicans who wanted trade, tourist revenues, and movie entertainment. The process was dynamic and bi-directional. Cultural transmission usually entailed cultural acquisition.

Migration

The number of Mexican migrants to the United States in the last third of the 1920s fell somewhat from its mid-decade high.¹³⁴ Although 1927 saw the largest one-year total, approximate reductions of one-third in 1928 and again in 1929 foreshadowed the reverse migration that accompanied the Great Depression in the early 1930s. Prior to this repatriation, however, there were signs that more Mexican migrants in the United States were open to establishing permanent residence in their new land rather than returning to their fatherland. In 1928 the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) formed in Texas, and encouraged the civic assimilation of mostly middle-class migrants.¹³⁵ The higher standard of living attainable in the United States had its impact in cultural adoption as well. A study taken in San Diego, California found that thirty percent of Mexican families' disposable income went toward the purchase of material goods such as “cars, radios, clothing, and homes.” Of the one hundred families surveyed, eighty had

¹³³ Waters, 226, 239-240.

¹³⁴ See Chapter One, p. 71, Table I.

¹³⁵ Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1897-1931* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 91-95.

secured various long-term stabilizing instruments such as life insurance or bank accounts.¹³⁶

The west side of San Antonio also exhibited a new cultural synthesis of customs and habits from the two countries. This merging was captured in a survey of some fifteen hundred Mexicans living in the barrio there in 1931:

The center of Mexican San Antonio is filled every evening and late afternoon and particularly on Saturday and Sunday with men with big sombreros, . . . , and with women with their heads wrapped in dark shawls, gliding along in a soft and shuffling walk. The on-coming generation, however, promenading up and down, presents a different picture. Young dandies put as much glitter in their attire as modern clothes will permit, while Mexican flappers wear the American flappers' garb of independence with more dash and grace than the originator. Here in the Mexican business district are the moving-picture theaters, the Nacional and Zaragosa, the leading and very important Spanish paper (*La Prensa*), restaurants, bookstores, . . . , grocery stores kept by Chinese merchants for Mexican trade, music stores emanating a constant stream of jotas and love songs along with the ever present music of the military band.¹³⁷

As Richard Garcia notes, San Antonio's *cultural* evolution paralleled the social and political changes that middle-class Mexican Americans in the city began to experience in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Their standard of living in the United States was clearly higher than what they would have in Mexico. The comparative improvement, however, contrasted with the possibilities available to Anglo-Americans, and thus prompted the middle class Mexican Americans to strive for a more equal political and social standing. This mental shift of attitude among San Antonio's middle class Mexican-Americans likewise influenced some of the working-class Mexican immigrants—those most likely to

¹³⁶ Constantine Panunzio, *How Mexicans Earn and Live, A Study of the Incomes and Expenditures of One Hundred Mexican Families in San Diego, California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933), pp. 48-49, 52, 55, 67, cited in Cardoso, note 48 on p. 93.

¹³⁷ Max S. Handman, "San Antonio: The Old Capital City of Mexican Life and Influence," *Survey Graphic* 66 (1931): 163, in Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1991), 46-47.

return to Mexico—to consider establishing themselves permanently in the United States.¹³⁸

More middle class Mexican Americans and the materially ambitious of the lower class migrants began to display cultural indicators of an intensive capitalistic push. Max Handman, author of the block quote appearing immediately above, determined from his study that “the [English] language was worth \$5.00 a week to them on the average; and American schooling also increased their earning capacity.” If accurate, Handman’s figure reflected 38 percent of the weekly average of \$13.00.¹³⁹ “We wanted the best for our children and this meant working hard, learning English and becoming American,” commented one of Handman’s survey’s respondents. The drive for improved material conditions weighed on many of the immigrants, though. It created tensions between different generations, especially between parents and their daughters. And the question of assimilation divided ethnic Mexicans who adopted the *americano* insistence on speaking English from those who preferred to speak Spanish and maintain their Mexican nationality.¹⁴⁰

Those migrants who brought their Mexican cultural preferences—language, dress, food, etc.—and attempted to maintain them in San Antonio, Los Angeles or El Paso, were not engaging in a widespread effort of cultural imperialism. Instead they were positioning themselves and their families to succeed as best they could. Nationalistic sentiments informed most of their decisions only to a limited degree, but the legal (and

¹³⁸ Garcia, 46-49.

¹³⁹ Handman, “San Antonio,” in Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 48-49.

¹⁴⁰ Garcia, 48-53. Garcia also notes that the wealthiest Mexican immigrants in San Antonio, the *ricos* who identified with Porfirio Díaz, refrained from entering the local political arena and harbored hopes of someday returning to Mexico where they might enjoy both their privileged social position and their familiar Mexican cultural preferences.

nationalistic) distinction between citizen and non-citizen would become important as the economy worsened. Certainly, national identity offered a sense of belonging, but most people's concerns revolved around daily routines for survival and advancement.¹⁴¹ Some American residents, meanwhile, felt irritated and threatened by the Mexican immigrants' culture, which they viewed as a threat to American national identity. As we have seen, however, the new arrivals' cultural choices depended on a variety of economic and social considerations such as seeking higher wages or a sense of acceptance. Similarly, the American communities' receptiveness relied to a large extent on their perception of the economic benefits the newcomers could bring. When this assessment soured along with the state of the economy, many Anglo-American residents' solution for dealing with the combined cultural and economic anxiety was to emphasize the nationalistic and legal distinction of citizenship. Hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrants realized that they were no longer welcomed. Mexican workers and *petit bourgeoisie* in Mexico had used nationalistic sentiment to highlight the threat posed by American businesses, and now American citizens living in southwestern towns and cities invoked nationalistic pleas for taking care of citizens first during the depression. In both cases, economic stress had provided threatened groups with a cause for invoking nationalistic sentiment.

Repatriation

At various times in the 1920s both the Mexican and American governments had expressed a desire to curb the number of Mexican migrants coming northward. Mexico

¹⁴¹ Tomlinson, 80-88.

had sought to fund repatriation programs for Mexican nationals in the United States. Many of those residing in *el norte* had responded enthusiastically to the idea of resettling in an agricultural colony in Mexico. Inevitably, though, the government's budgets lacked funds and the nationals' pleas went unsupported.¹⁴² In the American halls of power, meanwhile, immigration restrictionists launched a campaign to put quotas on Western Hemisphere immigration, but the proposed bills repeatedly failed to make it out of Congressional committees. Various other governmental activities, though, were effective in reducing the numbers of Mexican legal and illegal immigrants in the later 1920s. In 1925 Congress created a new agency, the United States Border Patrol, to assist in securing the border. Although the Border Patrol had a small number of officers to accomplish its task—472 in 1926 and 781 by mid-1928—it nevertheless apprehended over one hundred thousand aliens entering illegally in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this time American officials also began to enforce the 1917 and 1924 requirements that immigrants pay an eight dollar head tax and ten-dollar visa fee for entering the United States. Beginning in August 1928, United States consuls severely limited the number of visas they approved for Mexicans wishing to enter the United States. Legal immigration dropped to 40,013 for the year from July 1928 to June 1929, and then sank to just 11,801 and 2,457 in the following two years.¹⁴³ Following on the heels of these governmental efforts to reduce immigration, the macroeconomic effects of the Great Depression reduced even further Mexican migrants' efforts to migrate north and serve as conduits of their culture.

¹⁴² Mercedes Carreras de Velasco, *Los Mexicanos Que Devolvio La Crisis, 1929-1932* (Mexico: Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 1974), 48-53.

¹⁴³ Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 26-33.

With the onset of the Great Depression in late 1929, the United States rather quickly lost much of its economic appeal for Mexican migrants. Job opportunities disappeared, while local and state governments limited their offers of social welfare to the poor. California cut short its program to teach immigrants English, hygiene and other “progressive” subjects.¹⁴⁴ When these reduced opportunities were combined with stories that the Mexican government’s agricultural colonies provided an option to return to the homeland, several thousand Mexicans began a return southward. In the process many served as direct transmitters of material culture. American consular officials said about twenty-five percent brought back “farm implements, automobiles, trucks, farm animals, household furnishings, and a certain amount of money.” From 1931 onward there were larger numbers of destitute aliens who thus transmitted less material culture.¹⁴⁵ But even those who came with just the proverbial “shirt on their backs” still made a modest contribution in most cases. As one observer noted, “the effect of life in the United States could be most easily observed in its material sense. Overalls rather than white cottons, shoes rather than *guaraches*,” cars, and tools all transplanted some of the migrant’s experience in a foreign land.¹⁴⁶ In this case, the economic slowdown provided at least a temporary impetus to cultural transmission as the repatriates brought with them sundry bits of America’s material and ideological culture.

One of the better sources analyzing the returned immigrants’ impact on cultural transmission is Paul Taylor’s study of the *municipio* of Arandas, which is located in Jalisco. Based on field work conducted from late 1931 to mid 1932, Taylor’s work reveals changes in material culture, social attitudes, and economic opportunities back

¹⁴⁴ MacLachlan, 286.

¹⁴⁵ Hoffman, 36, 127-128.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

home. A common point affecting all these areas was the number of return trips an emigrant could make, or expect to make, to the United States, with more trips usually resulting in more adoption of American culture.¹⁴⁷ Many female repatriates also reported on the cultural difficulties of returning. Rising early to make maize tortillas, cooking without a gas stove, or having to wear Mexican fashions comprised some of the complaints women made.¹⁴⁸

Within the ambit of material culture, changes often lasted for a limited time—perhaps a few months—before older practices once again appeared, although the awareness of other possibilities lingered. For example, more emigrants wore dress shoes to Sunday services. And some unpacked their trunks and showed the investigator a tailored suit they had purchased in the United States. Such fancy ware was seldom worn in Arandas, however, because, as one immigrant noted, “here nobody use[s] it.” Nevertheless Taylor finds that “it was obvious that their [the returned emigrants’] standards of dress had been a factor in setting the standard for non-emigrants who could afford it.”¹⁴⁹ The social norms and material also affected women’s ideas about fashion. “Here the girls all dress alike, in black,” commented a girl who had attended high school in Utah. “But I’ll never dress in black in all my life. Here it seems that when a girl is married, it’s all over; then they don’t care about clothes any more.” Several respondents of the survey noted that the returned immigrant tried for two or three months to maintain some of the dietary and hygiene practices acquired in the United States, “but after he has

¹⁴⁷ Paul S. Taylor, “A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community, Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico,” reprinted in *Mexican Migration to the United States, with an Introduction by Carlos E. Cortés* (New York: Arno Press, 1976).

¹⁴⁸ Sanchez, 218.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

been here for a time, he loses his learning and his wishes [i.e., his ambitions] and makes his living as before.”¹⁵⁰

An important factor that influenced the applicability of American culture in Mexico was the setting to which the migrant returned. Rural locales that lacked electricity, telephones, modern farm implements and the like were not particularly fertile grounds for transplanting skills or habits learned in America. But returning to an urban environment was different. “The *norteños* [those who have gone north to the United States] gain from their experience,” noted one of Taylor’s respondents, “because they learn English. They can get good jobs in hotels in Mexico City, and other cities.”¹⁵¹ Thus, once again we see internal developments within Mexico enabling the pace of “Americanization” to increase during the twentieth century. Mexico’s own urbanization made it so the two cultures shared more and more in common.

A comparison with the American immigration context provides one last point for considering the impact of repatriation on cultural transmission in Mexico in the early 1930s and then back in the United States in the decades to follow. In numerical terms, the percentage of Mexicans who repatriated home between 1929-1932 (some 400,000 into a total population of 16 million) comprises approximately two-thirds of the number of immigrants who came to the United States during its peak period of immigration from 1908-1911 (some 3.5 million joining approximately 92 million residents). Relative to the Europeans who came from southern and eastern Europe to the United States in the pre WWI era, many Mexican repatriates—especially those arriving up until 1931—were fairly well materially endowed compared to the receiving population. A detailed analysis

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 57-58.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 60.

would be complex for a number of reasons, including the fact that Mexicans were returning to familiar surroundings. Still, the numbers and relative wealth of the new arrivals suggests the impact was significant. And since many of the repatriates did express a desire to return to the United States, it can be assumed that they added considerably to the migration network that grew increasingly stronger between Mexico and the United States for most of the twentieth century.

As hundreds of thousands of Mexicans migrated southward during America's early depression years, several Mexican public and private individuals, along with a handful of American entrepreneurs, initiated their plans for attracting thousands of Americans in their wake. These imagined migrants needed only to stay for a couple weeks or so at a time, but this would be long enough to transfer disposable income from the United States to a country that was starving for capital. Thus a vision emerged of tourism as a nearly perfect industry that could be developed at home and that would retain its profits there as well. But accompanying this image were two key questions. What would it take to entice Americans to visit their southern neighbor? And what would Mexican towns become once large numbers of Americans began visiting?

Tourism

Mexico used a mix of state support and private initiative to advance its tourism industry. The country's diplomatic corps first examined how other nations such as Cuba and Czechoslovakia had successfully developed their tourism industries. They found that the combination of cultural attractions and conference facilities provided two different venues for attracting foreign currency. Additionally the venture would require active promotion of Mexico's charm, and the construction of highways, rest stops, and the like

to enable motor tourism. An analysis of the impressive Canadian tourism industry concluded that the government ought to minimize the amount of paperwork necessary to cross the border and thus in 1928 Mexico did away with its requirement for a passport at the U.S.-Mexican border.¹⁵²

As the Cristiada subsided and political stability increased, Mexican officials expanded their effort to create a tourism industry. Widespread coordination between multiple government and private agencies, large amounts of government and private capital, and new infrastructure including railroad improvements and new road networks were required. Therefore in July 1929 provisional president Emilio Portes Gil created the Mixed Pro-Tourism Commission (CMPT), which coordinated the efforts of private individuals and several public agencies to develop the new industry.¹⁵³ This early effort produced only a small number of tourists, however, just under 14,000 official tourist entries (most from the United States) for 1929.

The nation's infrastructure for supporting tourism—highways, telephones, hotels—remained at a very rudimentary level. For example, a road connecting Acapulco to Taxco opened in 1927, but vehicles traveling it during the rainy season often got stuck in the mud; not until 1936 was it completely paved. A crude airfield was also constructed in Acapulco in 1928, but its dangerous approaches limited its usefulness to tourism for many years to come.¹⁵⁴ Adding to the difficulty was the Great Depression's drain on

¹⁵² Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 16-18. Mexican immigration officials insisted, however, on requiring tourists to purchase a Mex\$1 or Mex\$2 tourism card for several more years, a fact which likely limited vehicle-based tourism in the early years.

¹⁵³ *New York Times*, 8 July 1929.

¹⁵⁴ Stephen R. Niblo and Diane M. Niblo, "Acapulco in Dreams and Reality," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 24:1 (winter 2008), 34-36.

capital, government revenues, and the disposable income on which tourism would depend.¹⁵⁵

One of the early entrepreneurs who confronted these obstacles was the Bank of Mexico's Alberto Mascareñas. After having created a Department of Tourism within the bank in 1928, Mascareñas and his successors adopted a number of innovative approaches. They produced various brochures in English aimed at attracting Americans for pleasure visits or educational stays. They coordinated with Mexican state agencies to detail regulations and tips for the prospective traveler.¹⁵⁶ They made plans for weekly, English-language radio broadcasts entitled "Visit Mexico" to attract Americans with phrases such as the following: "From Dawn to Sunset Every Day New Miles are Added to our Highways—You Can Drive Now from Laredo to Monterrey and Ciudad Victoria—Within a Year You Will be Able to Motor all the Way Down to Mexico City." Finally, they produced international postage stamps depicting Mexican attractions and, it was hoped, generating within foreigners a desire to visit Mexico.¹⁵⁷

Other agencies added to the push to coordinate private and state efforts to increase tourism during this period. In late 1928 the Mexican Tourism Association (MTA), which included representatives from Mexican and American rail, ship, and leisure travel companies, met in New York City. They emphasized the importance of Mexican border officials increasing their efficiency and courtesy while processing Americans heading south. Just a couple months later, in January 1929, the Mexican American Automobile Association (AAMA) formed and devised plans to capitalize on the completion of the Nuevo Laredo to Monterrey highway. The government's CMPT encouraged Mexico's

¹⁵⁵ Berger, 11-12, 121.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

railroad stations to establish temporary storage areas for customers' luggage, "similar to 'Parcel Rooms' that exist in the United States," which would make tourism more practical and familiar for Americans visiting Mexico.¹⁵⁸ The Missouri Pacific Railroad Company coordinated with Mexican customs officials to expedite inspections for those heading south. The better service would of course be appreciated by the passengers, but would also "be of great value to Mexico" and was "just one more way of bringing our two countries closer together."¹⁵⁹ To attract tourists otherwise headed to Cuba or Europe, Yucatan's Governor Bartolomé García Correo negotiated with an American construction company to build highways from the state capital to important Mayan sites. Roads were contracted from Mérida to Uxmal and Chichén-Itza. The deal also included the building of a "modern wharf" at Progreso.¹⁶⁰

Mexico utilized a variety of new marketing practices from the United States. Two noted travel agencies, Wagons-Lit and Thomas Cook and Sons, opened offices in Mexico City in June 1929. The Missouri Pacific Railroad Company, which had connections with Mexican lines running to Mexico City, employed a publicity program it had previously used with success in the United States. Entitled "Mexico: Let's open our eyes to our opportunities next door," its March 1930 pamphlet praised "the basic stability of Mexican institutions" and the "marvels of engineering efficiency" which the Mexican railroads were. The pamphlet also offers a curious racial commentary. Beside a sketch of an Anglo-looking woman dressed in indigenous garb with what appears to be the pyramids of Teotihuacan in the background, the caption reads: "their hospitality and courtesy is

¹⁵⁸ *Excelsior*, 26 June 1919.

¹⁵⁹ Mexico, AGN, RG POR, 144-2551, C. D. Hicks to Fernando de la Garza, 21 July 1930.

¹⁶⁰ *Excelsior*, 14 September 1932.

developed against a background of 400 years of Caucasian civilization and culture.”¹⁶¹ In addition, the CNT hosted its first National Tourism conference in April 1930, and published a promotional magazine that projected President Pasqual Ortiz Rubio’s belief that tourism required modern transportation systems which “civilized a nation.” The Mexican Consulate in New York City met with the president of Ritz Carlton Hotels, George McAneny, who stated his interest to use American and Mexican capital to build a grand hotel in Mexico City.¹⁶²

In the west, the Automobile Club of Southern California petitioned Mexico’s new president, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, to coordinate the many faceted efforts that agencies such as itself and western Mexican states were then taking to promote roads and tourism.¹⁶³ As the club’s name implies, its focus would promote tourism that matched its members’ preferences, and automobile-based tourist opportunities began to supplant those geared around the train. The Mexican-American Automobile Association, which was founded in 1929 and headquartered in Monterrey, pleaded to the Mexican president for increased investment in highways to attract these American auto-tourists.¹⁶⁴ The following year, 1931, the radio station XFN aired programs that highlighted important national industries, a line-up that now included tourism.¹⁶⁵

The nascent Mexican tourist industry required political stability as well as new highways if it were to expand. Assessing the prospects for establishing a new lodging chain, a leading hotel entrepreneur in 1930 noted “The traffic to Mexico at present is

¹⁶¹ Mexico, AGN, RG POR, 144-2551, C. D. Hicks to Pasqual Ortiz Rubio, 12 March 1930.

¹⁶² Mexico, AGN, RG POR, 144-2551, E. D. Ruiz to Pasqual Ortiz Rubio, 10 October 1930.

¹⁶³ Mexico, AGN, RG POR, 144-2551, Carlos V. Ariza to Pasqual Ortiz Rubio, 16 July 1930.

¹⁶⁴ Mexico, AGN, RG POR, 144-2551, Santiago Cerna and Roberto G. Sada to Pasqual Ortiz Rubio, 25 June 1930.

¹⁶⁵ Berger, 22-34.

negligible, owing to lack of publicity, lack of satisfactory hotels and to a pretty general belief that travel in Mexico is unsafe.”¹⁶⁶ A traveler from California confirmed this sentiment after recently completing an enjoyable visit down south. “I, like the average American, labored under many delusions about Mexico. In fact, most of the people here seem to think it is a rather wild and only semi-civilized land, where you are in danger of being murdered or kidnapped at any minute.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, past American governmental actions that likely added to political instability—such as when Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson tacitly encouraged Victoriano Huerta’s coup against Francisco Madero or the American occupation of Veracruz that sought to destabilize Huerta—were now increasingly problematic with the closer economic integration of the later 1920s and that planned for the near future.¹⁶⁸ What was now needed was the support of the “good neighbor,” whether that be Morrow’s personable relations or the sending of arms to the established government during the Escobar Rebellion. Stable relations would support stable economic growth which in turn would facilitate new cultural ties.

Thus we see that the seeds of tourism’s growth in Mexico were planted by both public and private entities from Mexico and, to a lesser extent, the United States. At the macroeconomic level officials concluded that tourism provided a way to raise foreign currency, which in turn could be reinvested into other industries such as manufacturing. Mexican capital and engineering could support the endeavor instead of having to rely

¹⁶⁶ Mexico, AGN, RG POR, 144-2551, “Tentative Report of Mr. Frank A. Dudley: President of the United Hotels Company of America, Respecting the Establishment of a Chain of First Class Hotels in Mexico,” 28 November 1930.

¹⁶⁷ Mexico, AGN, RG POR, 144-2551, Millard F. Hoyle to Pasqual Ortiz Rubio, 1 March 1930.

¹⁶⁸ For a concise treatment of this American involvement in the Mexican Revolution, see John Womack, Jr. “The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1920,” in ed. Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. V (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 93-107. And for more in-depth coverage, see John S. D. Eisenhower, *Intervention!: The United States and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1917* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 7-150.

heavily on American investors or experts. This scheme maintained profits within Mexico's borders. Mexico had developed an apparent "win-win" enterprise that satisfied nationalistic and economic needs. But while retaining significant nationalistic control over the flavor and imagery of the industry, governmental and private commercial efforts to attract American tourists still had consciously pursued a path that contributed to the "Americanization" of Mexico.

Chapter Conclusion

The spread of culture between Mexico and the United in the early years of the depression mostly was the byproduct of governmental, commercial, or migratory activities initiated for economic or social motivations. Governments negotiated tariff policies to protect their nationals' business position or to increase their own dwindling revenues during a time of crisis. American businesses obviously wanted to sell goods or services, and they were mostly happy to see Mexico achieve the political and economic security that would help sustain the growth of markets there. The petroleum companies were some of the few that preferred a weak Mexico which could thus be more easily exploited. Mexican migrants moved themselves to improve their position economically, to be more secure, or to unite with family members who had earlier migrated. The small number of American tourists who came to Mexico during this period wanted to see and experience new lands, but rarely appreciated the reverberations their activities might have upon the places they visited. As John Tomlinson notes, these agents of cultural change focused mostly on "everyday life governed by the habitual routine of commodity capitalism." Few if any consciously embarked on an imperial project of spreading culture. But nearly all contributed to a strengthening transnational culture market that

united the two countries and enabled the transmission of goods, ideas and people back and forth across the border.

For a growing number of Mexicans in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the exposure to the market-based or capitalist world and its dizzying array of new products was a more recent phenomenon than it was for Americans. Still, it was an experience that residents, especially those migrating from the country to the city, shared in both countries, albeit with an approximate lag of two decades. Frequently Mexicans first experienced “American” culture, such as movies from Hollywood, as a result of Mexican governmental efforts to develop their nation’s infrastructure and American corporate initiatives. In time, however, some of the new cultural phenomena came to have a pronounced Mexican feel, with, for example, Mexican nationals taking direction from Mexican producers appearing in theaters owned by Mexican entrepreneurs.

This period witnessed an increase in cultural interchange even though the Great Depression crippled the economies of both countries for several years. In part this continued transmission of culture was a result of improved foreign relations, especially as the result of American ambassadors’ conspicuously personable efforts. Dwight Morrow, for example, softened the imperialistic or militaristic tone that had for many years conditioned Mexicans to anticipate a visit from the U.S. Marines. This new form of U.S. diplomatic intervention helped Mexico settle the disastrous Cristiada and American arms sales helped the interim president Emilio Portes Gil put down the Escobar rebellion in 1929. In turn, the Calles administration and the string of regimes during the period of the Maximato that followed could now welcome American businesses to a more stable political environment. The revolutionary and nationalistic setting often included more

state intervention than the American capitalists liked, but it was still a more or less capitalist setting.

American auto, electrical, phone, movie, and tourism corporations increased their investments within a setting shackled by an economic slump and protectionism (both Mexican and American) and partially threatened by revolutionary nationalism. The pursuit of profit underwrote these ventures, and a slowly growing consumer culture was one of the significant outcomes. The Mexican government generally encouraged these activities since they provided jobs and taxes. The infrastructural improvements to the electrical or telephone grids also enabled Mexican industries to improve their own productivity. Commercial and individual customers employed nationalistic sentiments when complaining about the “high rates” of the electrical or phone companies. But such complaints were similar to those made by utility customers during the initial stages of providing service in the United States. Low demand levels limited the possibility or profitability of service outside metropolitan areas, and thus once again the market ensured cultural change occurred more slowly in the countryside. Where competition was intense—in the city, especially Mexico City—cultural change came more quickly.

Nationalistic sentiment did or would soon produce some perhaps unexpected instances of cultural transmission. When American communities no longer welcomed the cheap labor provided by Mexican migrants and instead sought to repatriate them, many of the four hundred thousand Mexicans returned with either American goods or ideals. Some then made a relatively quick mental and material adoption of their older Mexican ways, but many were unsatisfied and looked to return to the United States. A migratory network had already been established prior to the Depression. But the jarring and initially

permanent sense of the “repatriation” experience, in comparison with the regular but unsystematic return visits of the pre-Depression years, motivated more migrants to try to settle permanently in the United States.

In 1933 Franklin Roosevelt became president of the United States and immediately instituted a New Deal program that dramatically increased the federal government’s role in society. He did this in large part to save the country’s economic system. Late in the following year Lázaro Cárdenas would become Mexico’s president and he too would redefine or emphasize the state’s role in the Mexican economy. Both of the new presidents shared a certain affinity in their economic and foreign policy understandings. In the following chapter, we shall examine how this understanding between two leaders furthered the growth of the transnational cultural market.

Chapter Three: Nationalist Intervention and Capitalist Integration, 1934 to 1939

Roberto F. García, the municipal president of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, surveyed the economic and social dislocation emerging during the Great Depression and devised a plan to confront it. Observing that the hard times were “due principally to the excess amount of importations we make,” he organized a campaign “to celebrate nationalist week.” Various activities would “show our [Mexican] people that in our country we have an endless number of articles. . . of the highest quality and which can be purchased cheaper than in the United States.”¹ García’s modest program for Matamoros included prizes for the winners of eight different categories, including “the best phrase advertising Mexican products” and “the store that consumes the most Mexican products.” These promotional efforts were duly noted by the American Consul in Matamoros, Joseph E. Holler, but what really caught the attaché’s eye was the prohibition of visits from Matamoros to Brownsville, Texas between 8 a.m. and noon and between 1 and 6 p.m. Designed to maximize spending on the Mexican side of the border, this action was merely one localized example of increasing Mexican and American government intervention in their interconnected economies during the 1930s.² Another example occurred between El Paso and Ciudad Juarez on the international bridge, which throughout the “roaring twenties” had served as a conduit both for American tourists wanting to partake in the liquor, brothels, and other sinful attractions south of the border and for Mexicans who purchased affordable and plentiful common American goods. During the depression, however, “great pressure [from the United States] was placed on Juarez officials to close the bridge at an earlier hour to reduce spending across the

¹ United States, Department of State, Record Group 59 (hereafter cited as USDOS RG 59), Dec. File 611.1223, Joseph E. Holler to State Dept., 22 August 1931.

² Ibid.

river.”³ “Mexican Border Towns Limit Access to Traffic as Retaliation Against United States Limitation of International Bridge Hours,” the title of Holler’s memo to the State Department, suggests that similar actions and counteractions occurred at other “twin cities” straddling the long cultural frontier.⁴ Indeed, when American cities on the border prohibited alcohol or prostitution, numerous cheap “dives” and brothels opened up in Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, and Tijuana to cater to the American customers’ desires.⁵ Thus it was that many modest governmental actions such as limiting the hours of a bridge crossing or major ones such as the Eighteenth Amendment’s proscription of alcohol commerce produced discernable, if sometimes unanticipated, impacts on the transnational cultural market during the depression.

At the national level, Franklin Roosevelt and Lázaro Cárdenas instituted reforms to deal with the immediate economic crisis and to make long term strategic shifts in their countries’ political and economic directions. Both administrations accepted greater levels of deficit spending to try to meet these two goals. The American president’s actions vis-à-vis Mexico sought to promote “neighborly” relations that could project America’s economic might without relying on military coercion. This cooperative tone of the president was amplified by his appointment of a close friend, longtime advisor, and former boss in the Department of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, as ambassador to Mexico.⁶ Roosevelt and especially Daniels considered Cárdenas’s nationalistic program as a sort of Mexican New Deal and were thus sympathetic to actions that a decade or two earlier

³W. H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History* (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1990), 226-238. Timmons’s use of the passive voice conceals who was applying the pressure, but one can surmise that it came from either American business or political representatives in El Paso.

⁴ Ibid.; Holler to State Dept.

⁵ John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico Since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 364-367.

⁶ Daniels was the Secretary of the Navy when Franklin Roosevelt served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy during President Wilson’s administration.

might have prompted American military intervention. Even the provocative seizure of American (and British) petroleum properties did not deflect the two Americans' emphasis on neighborly relations. They were inclined to meet Mexico more than half way when it came to settling differences. The American government's non-confrontational approach within its own hemisphere became even more apparent as its chief prepared for the possibility of war in Europe or Asia toward the end of the decade. The willingness to work together counterbalanced the nationalist and protectionist tendencies provoked by economic hard times and therefore produced more sharing of culture.

As Cárdenas enjoyed increased latitude to apply the more nationalistic articles of the Mexican Constitution, such as Article 27 with its assertion of sovereignty over land and subsoil rights, a larger number of Mexican land owners and plant managers emerged.⁷ These processes of political and economic "mexicanization" and nationalization nevertheless usually still resulted in spreading "American" consumer culture.⁸ This was because Cárdenas's reforms, like Calles's and Obregón's earlier efforts, pushed Mexico toward the development of industrial capitalism. At this time, the United States was a world leader in industrial production and of course geographically was situated right next to Mexico. The "best practices" impulse for attaining new and more efficient products and organizational techniques meant that Mexicans usually

⁷USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 612.0031/18, United States Tariff Commission, *Commercial Policies and Trade Relations of Mexico (Preliminary Draft)* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1941), 8. The report cites a "marked increase" in the number of small firms funded with Mexican capital.

⁸ Barbara Hibino, "Cervecería Cuauhtémoc: A Case Study of Technological and Industrial Development in Mexico," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 8:1 (Winter 1992), 23-43. Hibino distinguishes between the term "Mexicanization," indicating the replacement of foreign (often American) managers and technical workers with Mexican nationals, and "nationalization," reflecting the state acquisition of enterprises.

borrowed liberally from the American competitors.⁹ Local variations survived and likely lasted longer with the benefit of state protection, but ultimately the net result was a commercialized culture that increasingly looked like that of the United States. Joint preparation for a global war subsequently accelerated the cultural transmission process as the countries more closely integrated their transportation systems. Viewed from the wide lens of world history, the process was but another example of the *metropole* exerting a strong cultural pull upon a peripheral area. Those who controlled the transportation and communications infrastructure “benefited disproportionately from the faster and greater flows of information and goods.”¹⁰ Both national cultures changed in the process as they came to share more similar features and because more of Mexico’s society entered the capitalist orbit.

Government Relations

The two countries’ shifting macroeconomic approaches in response to the Great Depression and the international drift toward war preparations provided the backdrop for oscillating moments of neighborliness, tension, and then cooperation again between 1934 and 1939. At the personal level, one figure—Josephus Daniels—provided a humane conduit for encouraging understanding between, and defusing the sometimes competing visions of, the two countries. His sympathies complemented those of both countries’ presidents. By the end of the decade, Mexico and the United States were poised to enter an unprecedented wartime alliance together and thus enter a period of habitual cultural exchange that continues to this day.

⁹ J. R. McNeill and William H. McNeil, *The Human Web: A Bird’s Eye View of World History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 178-189. The McNeills employ the management terminology to capture one of the key forces encouraging the world’s cultures to homogenize.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 214-221. with quote appearing on 216.

In the depths of the economic depression in the United States, voters hoped that Franklin D. Roosevelt's vague but nevertheless inspiring offer of a "New Deal" could restore the country. The plan quickly launched a series of federally directed initiatives to regulate and direct the economy, put people to work, and, in a general sense, take on a larger governmental responsibility for its citizens' social welfare.¹¹ Roosevelt's relief policies in the early years resulted in a significant increase of the federal budget deficits. In 1932 Roosevelt had run on a platform that criticized president Hoover for running deficits, and for years he maintained some personal preference and hope for reinstating orthodox prescriptions of balanced budgets. But once in office the new president regularly resorted to high peacetime deficits to combat the real destitution his countrymen endured during the Depression.¹² He also initiated unprecedented acts of government intervention such as establishing agricultural and industrial price and production levels, although many of these initiatives were soon declared unconstitutional.¹³ The government's activism contributed to a modest recovery in employment and industrial levels and to the population's spirits. But then the United States suffered a severe economic decline from mid-1937 to mid-1938, with indices of stock values, industrial production, and profits all falling more precipitously than they had during the 1929-1933

¹¹ See Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1994), 138-139 and 250-263, and David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131-159 and 249-287 for clear treatments of the "first" and "second" New Deals.

¹² By the middle of 1935 even the Mexican paper *Excelsior* was noting the announcement of "another enormous annual deficit" in the United States. The deficit for that year was some \$4 billion. This meant that the American national debt then stood at nearly \$29 billion and had come close to doubling since the onset of the Great Depression. *Excelsior*, 3 July 1935, 2.

¹³ Kennedy, 273-279. The Supreme Court in 1935 struck down the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) and the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), but spared Roosevelt's Social Security Act.

period.¹⁴ Nevertheless, now there was at least a modest social safety net in place to help mitigate the economic pain of most people.

Roosevelt's sympathy for common people's problems and his willingness to enlarge the federal government's reach to address them provided him with a rough ideological appreciation for president Cárdenas's own efforts to raise the lower classes' lot through heavy state intervention. As Alan Knight notes, "distasteful though the *cardenista* reforms were [when they expropriated American properties], they fitted within a global trend towards social reform, *dirigisme*, and economic nationalism which had their echoes even in New Deal America. The U.S. government recognized the 'high social objectives' which its Mexican counterpart was pursuing."¹⁵ This recognition certainly was projected by Daniels, who seemed to want Cárdenas's program to succeed as much as he wanted his own president's. And the shared general philosophy meant that the two national states would attain a pronounced role in mediating cultural transmission across the border.

Warm personal relations in the 1930s thus extended the positive rapport that Ambassador Morrow had first generated beginning in late 1927. As soon as he arrived in Mexico City, Josephus Daniels showed sincere interest in Mexicans of both high and low social standing. He visited cabinet officials, congressmen, and the press. During a tour of *Excelsior's* production facility, Daniels impressed the editors with his energy, good will, and knowledge of the business—which he had worked in as an editor of a North Carolina newspaper for several decades—and thus likely helped achieve better press coverage for

¹⁴ Kennedy, 350-361; Frederick C. Adams, *Economic Diplomacy: The Export-Import Bank and American Foreign Policy, 1934-1939* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1976), 188-189.

¹⁵ Alan Knight, *U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940: An Interpretation* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1987), 141.

years to come with this very public display of interest in Mexican affairs.¹⁶ An especially touching moment occurred when Daniels and his wife visited the wife of Francisco Madero, an act which seemed quietly to atone for Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson's tacit approval of the tragic coup two decades prior.¹⁷ Having thus established a firm basis of good will and trust, the new ambassador soon set out to resolve an issue that had hampered relations for many years: settlement of outstanding debts.

Most of the "general" claims filed by private citizens against both of the respective governments since 1868, along with a host of additional "special" claims filed by Americans for losses during the chaotic and violent decade between 1910 and 1920, remained to be arbitrated when Daniels assumed the ambassadorship. As was often the case on the American side, the State Department generally believed Mexico could and should pay more than it had in the decade since the Bucarelli Accords had confirmed the creation of the two claims commissions.¹⁸ Many Americans wanted to pursue numerous individual claims for damages supposedly incurred during the Revolution.¹⁹ Mexican officials countered that many of these special claims had also been filed with the general claims commission.²⁰ Between these two positions but more in accord with the Mexican view, Daniels pushed for a bloc settlement that would pay the Americans approximately 2.65 percent of the special claims from both commissions, a figure that was similar to what several European governments had agreed to. He wanted the United States to "meet

¹⁶ *Excelsior*, 13 May 1933; Frank W. Fox, *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 544-584. Ambassador J. Reuben Clark, who served after Morrow and before Daniels (mid-1930 to early 1933) also visited Mexican cabinet officials and maintained satisfactory relations. But he did not have the charm of either his predecessor or successor.

¹⁷ David E. Cronon, *Josephus Daniels in Mexico* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 52-56.

¹⁸ See Chapter One, p. 38-39 and Fox, 455-502 for an initial discussion of the claims adjustment process.

¹⁹ Cronon, 75-81.

²⁰ John W. F. Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution, 1919-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 596-597.

Mexico more than half way on these controversies” because Mexico was poor and many of the claims were grossly inflated. He also believed that yielding some ground at this point in the bilateral relationship might facilitate faster agreement in future disputes. The State Department reluctantly accepted Daniels’s position and on 24 April 1934 the two countries instituted the above bloc settlement for the special claims from the Revolutionary period.²¹ The General Claims Commission would henceforth try to expedite the process by having one representative from each country examine the claims independently (instead of as a team) and then meet together to iron out the differences.²²

Another contentious issue which Daniels proved adept at handling was the American response to a flare up in the Mexican church-state relationship. Some five years after Ambassador Morrow had helped secure an end to the Cristero revolt, Church officials and countless laymen in Mexico began to resist federal efforts to “defanaticize” schools and communities. Their Catholic supporters in the United States loudly complained about what they perceived was their government’s hands-off policy based on the political considerations of being a “good neighbor.” They organized boycotts of Mexican goods, which proved ineffective, and sent hundreds of letters to Daniels and to the State Department from late 1934 through 1935 demanding either the ambassador’s resignation or a more forceful response from the United States. The House of Representatives passed over a dozen resolutions calling for some sort of action and Senator William E. Borah called for a full-scale investigation of alleged persecutions of

²¹ Cronon, 75-81; A. H. Feller, *The Mexican Claims Commissions, 1923-1934: A Study in the Law and Procedure of International Tribunals* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1935), 56-82 and 315-318.

²² Dulles, 597.

American Catholics in Mexico.²³ For nearly two years Daniels endured criticism at home, but in Mexico more and more people appreciated the American willingness to let Mexico work out things for itself. In sum, Daniels absorbed much of the anti-Mexican sentiment his own countrymen generated, and he minimized the anti-American feelings among Mexicans.

Relations between the two countries in 1936 thus reached a new highpoint, a strong position from which it was easier to navigate the difficult challenges emerging on the horizon. In Mexico City, Lázaro Cárdenas and Josephus Daniels had come to develop a strong affinity for each other both personally and ideologically.²⁴ The ambassador's track record as a voice of moderation and conciliation positioned him well for handling extensive agrarian nationalizations beginning in 1936 and then the high-profile and sensitive oil nationalization crisis between 1937 and 1938.

Mexico's nationalizations of large agricultural properties caused ongoing strain—but not a break—in relations with the United States. They also revealed a split between the committed “Good Neighbor” views of Ambassador Daniels and President Roosevelt and the legalistic, more traditional, views of the State Department and American land owners. Daniels believed in poor Mexicans having a “new deal,” but he knew that the Mexican treasury could not provide much compensation to American land owners for the lands Mexico expropriated. He therefore felt that the Americans, having in most cases already benefited from their holdings, should be willing to accept less than a full, market-based value for their seized lands. The State Department, on the other hand, recognized

²³ Cronon, 82-111. One congressional speech that captures the heated tenor came from Representative Claire Fennety who stated that President Roosevelt “knows Americans have been murdered in Mexico, but smiles and plays Pollyanna while men and women die and little children suffer in body and soul.”

²⁴ Luis González, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1934-1940: Los días del presidente Cárdenas*, Vol 15 (Mexico City: El colegio de Mexico, 1981), 80-82.

the Mexican right to nationalize lands but it usually fought for maximum compensation. It was concerned about Americans' property rights in Mexico, and also about the precedent that uncompensated seizures would indicate for American investors elsewhere in the world.²⁵

With the oil nationalization, Daniels moderated an initially stern message the State Department sought to convey to Mexico.²⁶ The tense but still sympathetic relations that occurred during the crisis shows the importance of the individual's personal influence upon outcomes, in this case the cultural transmission that might have slowed significantly but did not. Mexico's Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Ramón Beteta, believed that Ambassador Daniels "almost singlehandedly prevented a break between the United States and Mexico at this time."²⁷

From a wider view, the oil nationalization likely facilitated the trend of cultural transmission because it limited Mexico's options for radical nationalization in other spheres. Mexico could only afford to pay so much capital for nationalization. Before March of 1938 several million hectares of land had already been expropriated.²⁸ Then came the bill—who knew how big?—to buy the British and American oil companies. At his peak in political popularity, President Cárdenas therefore restrained similar sentiments for nationalizing parts of the mining industry.²⁹ Although he would have liked

²⁵ Cronon, 130-153.

²⁶ For a detailed account of the oil nationalization, see Lorenzo Meyer, *Mexico and the United States in the Oil Controversy, 1917-1942*, trans. by Muriel Vasconcelos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).

²⁷ Cronon, 185-198.

²⁸ Alan Knight, "Mexico c. 1930-1946," in ed. Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America Volume VII Latin America since 1930, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19-26. By 1940 Cárdenas had distributed some 18 million hectares of land to 800,000 recipients. Major expropriations occurred in 1936-37 period including those in La Laguna, the Yaqui River Valley, and the Yucatan Peninsula.

²⁹ Stephen R. Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development: The United States and Mexico, 1938-1954* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1995), 39-43.

to use internal capital, he simply could not access enough to finance the multiple prongs of his six-year plan. So the Mexican president incorporated some of the Porfirian strategy of using foreign investors to help fund his nation's development. And many of the industrialization projects that emerged in the years after nationalization continued to have a large share of foreign participants. Politically and rhetorically the times differed, but the larger economic trend was what most steered cultural development. The fact that Mexico was on the path to further capitalist integration with the United States meant that its culture would homogenize.³⁰

The appointment of another amiable ambassador (after Dwight Morrow in the late 1920s) also complemented the general temperament of United States relations throughout Latin America during Roosevelt's administration. In 1934 the United States renounced the legal right to intervene in Cuban affairs by nullifying the widely reviled Platt Amendment. That same year American marines withdrew from Haiti after nearly two decades of occupation. Meanwhile Roosevelt became the first sitting United States president to visit South America when he sailed to the continent in 1936.³¹ The next year, Secretary of State Hull went on record to oppose a Senate bill that would have limited Mexican migration to ten percent of that which was legally admitted in 1930. This action, Hull stated, would violate the spirit of Good Neighborism.³²

Mutualism was also reflected in the two neighbors' forging of closer military relations in the second half of the 1930s. Mid-way through President Cárdenas's first year

³⁰ This line of thinking is perhaps a twist on Fernand Braudel's idea that political events in the Mediterranean were like the sparkling ephemera in ocean waves when compared to the larger structural—especially geographic and economic—realities of the region. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the age of Philip II*, trans. by Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

³¹ Kennedy, 391.

³² *Excelsior*, 1 May 1937, 1. The bill, which did not pass, would also have imposed the same ten percent quota on Canadian and Latin American immigration into the U.S.

in office, a group of four Mexican aviators led by Colonel Roberto Fierro conducted a “good will” variant of Colonel Charles Lindbergh’s famous visit to Mexico City in late 1927. Fierro’s route was from the Mexican capital to an American air base in Minot, North Dakota, stopping at points along the way and ultimately participating in a Fourth of July celebration there.³³ Relationship-building actions such as these helped reduce anxieties of working together for actual military defense once the shooting started in World War II.³⁴

Roosevelt’s foreign policy in the 1930s, however, traced an inconsistent path between a nationalistic and isolationist course on the one hand and internationalism on the other. Domestic political considerations and protectionist economic thinking usually prompted the former while Roosevelt’s own personal proclivities animated the latter.³⁵ In 1933 the United States strictly limited its participation in international regulatory and trade liberalization plans proposed at the World Economic Conference in London. The following year the American Congress passed the Johnson Act which prohibited private (but not government) loans to countries that had defaulted on their debts to the United States. Later in 1934, however, Congress passed the Trade Agreements Act, which gave the executive branch the authority to reduce tariff levels by up to 50 percent. These were tools that the president believed could be used to produce global economic growth and international cooperation and thus counter a nascent fascist threat. It was “during 1934,” writes Emily Rosenberg, that “Roosevelt began to emphasize how national security was

³³ *Excelsior*, 1 July 1935, 1; 4 July 1935, 1; 5 July 1935. Contrasting with this neighborly U.S.-Mexican spirit at the time were headlines reflecting tensions between Russia and Japan and between Ethiopia and Italy.

³⁴ See Chapter Four, 206-212 and 225-227 for discussion of the joint military planning immediately preceding and during the war.

³⁵ Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 169-176.

dependent on a liberal world order that could be open to American goods, capital, and culture.”³⁶ Contemporary assessments agreed. Writing in a 1934 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Henry F. Grady noted “This new policy is of an importance that can hardly be exaggerated. We are to a greater degree than ever before meshing our domestic economy into the world economy.”³⁷ The New Deal’s increase of executive power also helps explain the president’s sympathetic view of Mexican centralization and his rather lower opinion of Mexico’s long term corporate nemeses—the oil companies. Their narrow, sectorial interests threatened to disrupt the overall trade and political relationships the president hoped to create with Mexico and the wider world.

Assessing the implications of nationalization upon cultural transmission requires a consideration of a spectrum of short term versus long term results and possibilities. One can argue that Daniels’s view, which ultimately prevailed in Mexico during this period, helped ensure overall positive relations between the two countries. This in turn enabled numerous other conduits of culture—tourists, investors, migrants, etc.—to enter the neighboring land and effect change. On the other hand, we must also note that business operators took their property rights very seriously, and there was a real chance that nationalizations would deter future investments.³⁸ U.S. direct investment in Mexico indeed decreased from \$480 million in 1936 to \$358 million in 1940 before once again trending upward after that.³⁹ In a recent work assessing the leading factors that have

³⁶ Rosenberg, 172-176.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁸ American & Foreign Power Company, Inc., *The Foreign Power System: A Review of Foreign Power’s Role in the Development of Modern Utility Services in Foreign Lands* (New York: American & Foreign Power Company, Inc., 1953). The electric conglomerate American & Foreign Power faced a number of nationalization challenges from Latin American countries in the 1930s and 1940s and thus its strategic review revealed a hesitancy and uncertainty about future investment plans there.

³⁹ James W. Wilkie, *The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change since 1910*, 2nd edition, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 265-266. It is unclear whether Wilkie’s statistics

inhibited Latin America's economic growth over the past half-century, Jorge I.

Dominguez notes that a policy of nationalization can foster "conditions of permanent insecurity for savings and investment and stimulates capital flight in search of the rule of law."⁴⁰ Culture seems to flow more freely in freer economic markets, whether the markets are for goods, people, or capital. The agrarian and petroleum nationalizations represented government incursions in the market that might have ruptured the political and economic ties between the countries.⁴¹ In our example, the American government's "neighborly" response to agrarian and petroleum nationalizations, plus the Mexican governments signal to a halt of subsequent seizures (e.g., in the mining industry) helped maintain positive relations and the cultural and economic ties ultimately grew stronger.

Trying to keep trade afloat in the wake produced by the very protectionist Hawley-Smoot trade act of 1930 involved conducting a political balancing act. Reflecting many of Roosevelt's policies, American pronouncements on tariffs were contradictory at times, although the eventual direction led toward freer trade. For example, when queried by one of his speech writers about which of two incompatible tariff positions should go into an upcoming address, Roosevelt replied, "weave the two together."⁴² By 1935,

reflect American capital lost in the agrarian and petroleum nationalizations. For much of the 1930s, American capital pulled back from its expansion during the decade after WWI.

⁴⁰ Jorge I. Dominguez, "Explaining Latin America's Lagging Development in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: Growth Strategies, Inequality, and Economic Crises," in Frances Fukuyama, ed., *Falling Behind: Explaining the Development Gap Between Latin America and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ The political-cultural relationship we are tracking for the United States vis-à-vis Mexico produced quite different results than what emerged in the story of the U.S. and revolutionary Cuba. The historical and international contexts, not to mention different personalities of the leaders involved, played a big role in the two different outcomes. The United States' influence over Cuban affairs was more pronounced than it had been over Mexico's recent development, and thus Castro believed it essential for his nation to break free from the U.S. grip. Mexico's revolution had already moved further along this path. Ideologically, it also was much easier for Castro to ally with the USSR than it was for Cárdenas to ally closely with the leading Axis powers. It is interesting to note, however, that both Mexico in the late 1930s and Cuba in the early 1960s would seem to have been vitally important for the U.S. to retain as allies.

⁴² Kennedy, 101-103.

however, most of the president's commercial advisors strongly advocated the use of a most favored nation trade policy to discourage preferential bilateral trade pacts that resulted in numerous trade wars. The State Department shared the view that a regeneration of international trade might stem the growing worldwide trend toward nationalism and militarism. "History offers abundant proof," said Secretary of State Hull, "that the development of order under law and the growth of international commerce have been among the principal forces which have shaped and nourished the progress of that civilization."⁴³ Roosevelt's and Hull's internationalism would be put to the test, however, by typical tariff battles and later on by the petroleum nationalization. These tariff negotiations show the fine line that national politicians walked as they balanced domestic political and economic considerations with the need for friendly international relations. American business and governmental officials at times opposed each other on the issue, and the same held true for their Mexican counterparts. Neither group was homogenous in its thinking, nor could any group (politicians, importers, or manufacturers in either country) say that it regularly was a winner in terms of having its interests protected. But what did emerge was a more integrated capitalist culture because the majority of the negotiators wanted to sell goods within a market based economy.

The complex intersection of tariffs and nationalization policies and their impact on government and business relations became clearer as tensions increased between the Mexican government and British and American oil firms. The companies had throughout 1937 begun to withdraw some of their capital so as to signal their willingness to leave the

⁴³ Adams, 87-92.

country and to reduce their exposure to expropriation.⁴⁴ Therefore on 21 January 1938, Mexico significantly raised a number of its tariffs in an effort to offset the total amount of foreign currency leaving the country as a result of the oil companies' capital withdrawals. According to the United States Consul in Veracruz, the new rates quickly caused arriving shipments of imported goods to drop by forty to fifty percent. He noted in particular the effect on autos and radios, with one vessel carrying none of the former when it normally brought "a fairly large number."⁴⁵ Such a drop off is understandable as the tariff rates on various configurations of radios receivers and transmitters rose between 250 and 600 percent.⁴⁶

The American government complained about these increases, but its position differed from that of some American firms. Ford and General Motors, for example, appreciated the tariffs since the auto giants had manufacturing firms in Mexico that would benefit from the protection. Even so, the government's official line was that "we are more interested in the export of automobiles to Mexico than the assembly of such cars in Mexico."⁴⁷ The response to tariffs of course depended on who would benefit or pay financially, but often there were clear cultural implications as well. For example, Mexican officials in 1938 eliminated duties on books and phonograph records. "This decree is considered of importance by educators and literary in Mexico," wrote the

⁴⁴ Meyer, *Mexico and the United States in the Oil Controversy*, 158-169. As the second half of 1937 rolled on, the companies and the Mexican government regularly negotiated but the mood only deteriorated. The early disputes revolving around labor issues escalated into an issue of national sovereignty.

⁴⁵ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 612.003/724, Joseph F. Burt to State Dept., "Effects of Increased Import Duties on the Port of Veracruz," 21 January 1938.

⁴⁶ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 612.003/735, Dept of Commerce Report, Mexican Duty Increases Affect Wide Range of Products," 21 January 1938.

⁴⁷ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 612.003/747, Boal to State Department, Mexican Duty Increases Affect Wide Range of Products," 20 May 1938; State Department "Memorandum of Conversation [between Ellis O. Briggs and Pierre de L. Boal]" 612.003/747, 21 May 1938.

American Consul General.⁴⁸ With these examples we can see that American officials cared most about the macroeconomics of the issue—what would provide their countrymen the most work or their coffers the most revenue in the short term. And the Mexican teachers wanted access to American (and other national) books, presumably to enhance their teaching options or personal knowledge. In either case, economic concerns trumped politically nationalistic considerations within the capitalist-oriented transnational cultural market.

The short-term cultural implications of tariff policy usually are readily apparent, but some historians either ignore or minimize their role. Thomas F. O’Brien’s study of American business activities in Latin America, for example, provides interesting insights into labor issues, nationalist regulation, corporate culture and more, but it places no emphasis on tariffs. Emphasizing the American corporations’ power, O’Brien writes:

American corporate culture was probably more pervasive in Mexico than in any other Latin American country. . . . Not only did American companies dominate key economic sectors, but American goods poured into Mexico, and American companies came to play a central role in creating a consumer culture.⁴⁹

Certainly the goods, their marketing, and the American industrial muscle producing them positioned them well to “pour” into Mexico. The Mexican government maintained control of the faucet—its tariff policy—through which these goods would flow, however, and so its role must be credited. In terms of cultural production, American firms did “play a central role” but they did not have the ability to “dominate” the story.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 612.003/756, George P. Shaw to Department of the Treasury, “Changes in Mexican Import Tariffs (Books, Music, etc.),” 8 July 1938.

⁴⁹ Thomas F. O’Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 310.

⁵⁰ The Mexican government had to consider how its tariff policy would impact other aspects of economic relations, but its hands were not tied (as the oil nationalization shows). Consumers buying goods also had sufficient agency in most cases, although they had less choice with public utility and transportation

The possible long term implications of a tariff policy upon cultural transmission are a different matter. High tariffs limit the access to new goods (and sometimes ideas), at least for a period of a few years or decades. In the somewhat longer-term (25-50 years), however, strategically placed protective tariffs sometimes have helped jumpstart national industries in their infancy, as occurred in the late nineteenth-century American and various East Asian economies post WWII. At that point, once competitive, these monetarily wealthier societies were able to access foreign cultures with less concern about becoming “dependent” on them.⁵¹ In Mexico’s case, the government protected industries for so long that by the 1970s they were no longer able to compete and Mexico’s wealth standing relative to its East Asian competitors dropped. Because “ISI [Import Substitute Industrialization] tend[ed] to exacerbate, rather than alleviate, inequalities of income distribution,” its application for a longer period in Mexico likely slowed cultural transmission.⁵²

One last small example from the period’s tariff maneuvering illustrates the potential impact tariffs could have in Mexico. In the late 1930s the Dupont Company was developing rayon, a synthetic material that would challenge the place of natural fibers such as cotton.⁵³ United States diplomats and commercial representatives worked to ensure that a new “mineral” textile material would qualify for the same tariff levels as that received by traditional “animal” textile materials. Like the Singer salesman visiting

systems, to decide whether or not they wished to purchase an American product. Thus O’Brien’s use of “dominate” is problematic when it suggests the ability to control a market, but it is fair if it merely describes the relative position of American corporations at the time.

⁵¹ Frances Fukuyama, “Conclusion,” in ed. Fukuyama, *Falling Behind*, 270-275. Fukuyama notes that Taiwan and South Korea began reducing their tariffs in the 1970s and then forced their companies to compete, while nearly every Latin American country at this time was clinging to protectionism.

⁵² Peter H. Smith, “Mexico since 1946,” in ed. Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America Volume VII Latin America since 1930, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 88.

⁵³ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 612.003/787, Josephus Daniels to State Department, 8 May 1939.

small Mexican villages a generation prior, these American governmental representatives wanted to see an increase in their nationals' business. Eventually the cultural outcome from all these product developments and tariff negotiations was access to a new product that would change how some Mexicans dressed.

Using tariff policy to help restore trade complemented the other aspects of the president's Good Neighbor policy, yielding a blend of economic and political tools that also generated cross-cultural returns. Along with the aforementioned diplomatic techniques, Roosevelt's team added the use of the Export-Import bank as a means for promoting capitalist growth in Mexico and numerous other developing countries.⁵⁴

Created in 1934 and subsequently tasked with helping bring economic stability to Cuba, the Export-Import Bank in the following year purchased bonds from the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Veracruz. Portions of the latter sale were used to enable the purchase of American infrastructural improvements. Several similar instances of the American government's support of Mexican governmental projects occurred until 1937 when tensions over the oil controversy produced a tentative halt. Despite the short term pause, an American government institution that could and would—especially aided by the spirit of wartime cooperation—directly finance changes in Mexico was now in place.⁵⁵ Since both governments pursued capitalist development and market integration, the waves of capitalist culture could reach an ever expanding shoreline.

Many state interventions such as providing short term tax or tariff protections for new industries, building highways, supporting electrification efforts, and promoting literacy have successfully helped markets grow. Private initiative and investments

⁵⁴ Adams, 135; Rosenberg, 171.

⁵⁵ Adams, 154-155; Niblo, *War, Diplomacy and Development*, 64-65-128-129.

likewise have spawned numerous new markets. Conversely, politically protected state industries or dominant private monopolies both can stifle markets and thus slow the spread of competing cultural entries through the cultural market. Thus a general conclusion is that cultural transmission does not directly correlate with the level of state or private control of the economy. It instead correlates with the freedom of market forces within the economy, and sometimes state action generates more avenues on which market forces can operate.

Mexico's Rise out of the Depression

Still more agriculturally than industrially focused, Mexico did not experience as severe a collapse during the world depression as did the United States. It also recovered more quickly than did its northern neighbor. Government revenues rose from 233 million pesos in 1933 to 296 million pesos in 1934, which after years of deficits, produced a budget surplus of 31 million pesos. The value of its exports jumped from 365 to 645 million pesos during the same period. And even annual petroleum production figures, which had trended precipitously downward between 1921 and 1932 (from 193 to 32.5 million barrels), expanded by roughly 13 percent to 38 million barrels in 1934.⁵⁶ Whereas consumer demand and the associated production levels remained low for years in the United States, Mexico began to exit the Great Depression by 1934 and while doing so adopted a more activist state posture to stimulate growth and to reduce the country's reliance on foreign capital.

President Abelardo Rodriguez's administration oversaw the creation of NAFINSA (National Financial Institution, S.A.) in the spring of 1934 to administer

⁵⁶ Dulles, 591-592.

properties that the government had bought during the Great Depression.⁵⁷ NAFINSA substituted government for foreign capital, and a group of important Mexican borrowers thus became economically and politically more tied to the state.⁵⁸ Soon after he assumed office in late 1934, President Cárdenas turned NAFINSA into an especially active institution. To complement NAFINSA's credit offerings, the state passed a law in 1935 that soon created the Banco Nacional Obrero de Fomento (Labor Industrial bank) which lent to small and medium sized producers.⁵⁹

Cárdenas's more activist role state for the central government included the establishment of a closer relationship with the Banco de México, the country's central bank.⁶⁰ Although legislation passed in 1932 had prohibited loans to the government except in relatively small amounts and for short periods, Cárdenas nevertheless increased by nearly six-fold the amount the government had borrowed from it between 1936 and 1937.⁶¹ These middle years of the *sexenio* witnessed Cárdenas's discarding of classic attempts to maintain a balanced budget (as had been achieved in 1934) and the acceptance of deficit financing to achieve his social, economic, and political goals. The 1937, 1938, and 1939 budgets included deficits of 28, 66, and 46 million pesos

⁵⁷ Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *A la sombra de la Revolución Mexicana: Un ensayo de historia contemporánea, 1910-1989*, (México: Cal y arena, 1991), 151-160.

⁵⁸ Mary Angeline Watrous, "Fiscal Policy and Financial Administration in Mexico 1890-1940," unpublished doctoral dissertation, (Washington State University, 1991) 161-162.

⁵⁹ Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 200-201, 212-214.

⁶⁰ President Calles's Finance Secretary, Alberto Pani, shaped the formation of the Banco de México in 1925. After studying the structures of the United States' federal reserve system, the Bank of France, and the Bank of England, Pani opted for a semi-independent institution that was the sole issuer of currency but was subject to government oversight on strategic decisions through the veto power of the Secretary of Finance. The spread of central banking systems throughout Latin America in the post World War I period is itself an instance of economic cultural diffusion. See Hamilton, 80-83 for specifics on the Mexican example.

⁶¹ Watrous, 165-6. In 1936 the federal government owed the central bank over \$15,000,000 and in 1937 the amount had risen to \$89,000,000.

respectively, representing 6.2, 15.1 and 8.6 percent of the years' government income.⁶²

This Keynesian approach allowed the Banco de México and other public lending institutions to finance more economic development. For our purposes—identifying the major forces promoting cultural transmission—this increased push from the government literally helped lay the infrastructural foundations for modern road, electrical, educational, industrial and commercial enterprises that steadily incorporated the masses into a growing capitalist economy.

Much of the Cardenista spending initiative went towards developing the Mexican economy or society instead of towards just operating the government. James Wilkie's study of the revolutionary governments' spending priorities notes that "administrative" spending, which had been between 70 and 77 percent during Obregon's tenure, 59 and 69 percent during Calles's presidency, and 56 and 64 percent in the "Maximato," fell to between 40 and 43 percent from 1936-1939. Outlays for "economic" developments such as highways, irrigation, and credit provision and "social" improvement through schooling and public health programs, meanwhile, assumed nearly 60 percent of the federal budgets in 1936 and 1937. In 1921, "economic" and "social" spending reached not quite 23 percent.⁶³

The reforms helped the large percentage of Mexicans engaged in agricultural work. Peasants received unprecedented levels of access to farmland and to credit, something which early land distributions had mostly neglected to do. In 1936 the Cárdenas administration committed 9.5 percent of the entire federal budget to the

⁶² Wilkie, 26-29. The large 1938 deficit reflects the effects of that year's expropriation of the foreign oil companies and the diminished receipts from oil revenues.

⁶³ Wilkie, 57-80.

agricultural credit program.⁶⁴ While the state technically retained title to the new collective *ejidos*, the *campesinos* nevertheless worked the properties as if they were their own and thus sought to improve the yields. The ultimate result of the expropriation of large estates such as La Laguna (Coahuila/Durango border) and Nueva Italia (Michoacan) was the movement of rural workers away from “feudal” peasantry and towards “capitalist development in the long run.”⁶⁵ The living standard of these workers generally improved. Throughout the country, “rural minimum wages, equal to the national average in 1934-5, were a third higher in 1939. There was . . . a perceptible increase in consumer spending, . . .”⁶⁶ The gross domestic product per capita rose 23.2 percent in the 1930s and the nation’s “poverty index” fell approximately 8 percent.⁶⁷ As they gained material improvement, these workers slowly moved beyond one of the age-old factors that had limited consumerism in the past—a lack of margin for discretionary spending on consumer goods. At the same time, new consumerist apparatuses such as advertising and new connections to the wider world via the highway and radio networks resulted in more exposure to new goods.⁶⁸ Thus, while Cárdenas’s goals mostly revolved around improving his country’s economic growth and his countrymen’s quality of life—there were also of course some political motives—the greater governmental efforts in

⁶⁴ Knight, “Mexico c. 1930-1946,” 18-20.

⁶⁵ Hamilton, 177-181.

⁶⁶ Knight, “Mexico c. 1930-1946,” 22.

⁶⁷ Wilkie, 204-245, 259-263. Wilkie’s poverty index measures the percentages of people who fall in one or more of the following seven categories: are illiterate; speak only an Indian language; live in a village of less than 2,500 people; go barefoot; wear sandals; regularly eat corn tortillas instead of wheat bread; and live without sewage disposal. Wilkie’s analysis shows that economic improvement (GDP per capita, etc.) increased at a ratio of between two or three to one from the 1920s through the 1960s.

⁶⁸ Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1-28.

these economic and social arenas concurrently served as *unintentional conduits* for American culture to spread and for Mexicans to access it.⁶⁹

The rush of state activity throughout the economy contributed to a strengthening of ties with the United States government and with American businesses, in part because potential partners in Europe or East Asia prepared for hostilities in the later 1930s. For a short while—until the invasion of Poland in September 1939—Germany and, to a lesser degree, Japan offered industrial trading partners that Mexico could engage should the United States emerge too overbearing after the oil nationalization. German trade with Mexico actually increased by 40 percent between mid 1938 and mid 1939, as some U.S. companies boycotted trade and Mexico looked for other markets to sell its oil.⁷⁰

As we have seen, however, the United States government mostly showed a posture of restraint during the oil nationalization crisis, while the Axis powers' increasingly aggressive actions overseas offended Cárdenas's sense of justice. England might have provided an additional alternative for Mexican trade. But the British had responded more brusquely to the nationalization of their petrol firms, and Mexico broke relations with America's prime European ally in May 1938.⁷¹ Thus Mexico, as a peripheral power operating within a greater capitalist system, had limited possibilities for asserting autonomy. Nora Hamilton writes:

The expansion of the role of the state in the economy, especially in the construction of infrastructure, also reinforced Mexico's commercial ties with the U.S. As the Cárdenas government expanded railroads, highways,

⁶⁹ Rural people in the United States likewise became more connected to electrical systems and to market mechanisms thanks to such federal hydroelectric efforts on the Columbia River and Tennessee River basins. The relative effect was less, however, because the United States was more urbanized than Mexico.

⁷⁰ Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 53-54.

⁷¹ Anita Brenner, *The Wind that Swept Mexico: The History of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1942*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971), plate 158.

municipal facilities, and other public works projects, it purchased increasing amounts of road-building machinery, construction material, and railroad cars and equipment from foreign, especially U.S. manufacturers.

Car manufactures such as General Motors and Chrysler likewise opened plants during this time.⁷² Along with the economic integration spurred by *agrarismo*, the state's accelerated spending on rural electrification, highways, and literacy—producing a “‘tremendous increase’ in newspaper circulation”—accelerated cultural integration with its northern neighbor that coincidentally was also pursuing programs such as rural electrification to connect its country population to the wider network.⁷³

The Mexican government continued but modified its impressive commitment to creating a national culture that would back the Revolution. Federal schools advanced the socialist education campaign through the mid-1930s. An important component of federal education supported Cárdenas's broader *indigenismo* initiative at reducing the social isolation of Mexico's numerous indigenous peoples by improving their material condition. “Cardenistas believed that once Indians had land, water, tools, markets, and access to credit, and once their local exploiters were reined in, they could be incorporated into the national society and economy (which, incidentally, remained capitalist.)”⁷⁴ Thus, many aspects of an ostensibly socialist and nationalist project also promoted a cross fertilization of cultures between Mexico and the capitalist United States. Lázaro Cárdenas's sincere regard for the country's indigenous peoples, for example, coincided with the building of highways that connected motoring tourists to more remote locales.

⁷² Hamilton, 198-200.

⁷³ Knight, “Mexico c. 1930-1946,” 22; Kennedy, 252. The Rural Electrification Administration contributed significantly to raising the percentage of electrified farms in the United States from less than 20 percent in 1933 to nearly 90 percent a decade later.

⁷⁴ Stephen E. Lewis, “The Nation, Education, and the ‘Indian Problem’ in Mexico, 1920-1940,” in Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 176-195 with quote appearing on 186.

Connected to—some might say exploited by—a newly created market opportunity, Mexico’s Indians assumed somewhat of a niche position and intensified their role as producers of regional craft goods.⁷⁵

The Ministry of Public Education’s promotion of muralism spurred cultural transmission in two ways. First, the murals of Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco became tourist attractions for many Americans. The Americans’ interest in turn contributed to the construction of hotels, restaurants, and so on to cater to their travel needs. Some of the murals were even painted by Americans such as Marion and Grace Greenwood who, inspired by the Mexican example, had only recently learned the public medium. Second, the popularity of the murals in Mexico translated into increased American interest in effecting a “mural renaissance” in the United States.⁷⁶ New Deal cultural programs, “enriched by the influence of modern Mexican muralists,” provided work for painters throughout the country including in many United States Post Office lobbies. Commenting on this work, some of which was controversial in subject—as the Mexican muralists’ had been—President Roosevelt opined that it was of varying quality, “but all of it native, human, eager, and alive—all of it painted by their own kind in their own country, and painted about things that they know and look at often and have touched and loved.”⁷⁷ Mexican communitarian values had anticipated, and lightly contributed to,

⁷⁵ Anne Rubenstein, “Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era,” in Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, eds., *The Oxford History of Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 638.

⁷⁶ James Oles, Sarah M. Lowe, and Adriana Zaval, “Painting in the Shadow of the Big Three: The Mexican Experience of Marion and Grace Greenwood”, in Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 79-80, and 89.

⁷⁷ Kennedy, 254-255.

a subtle but temporary Americans distancing from the consumerist, “amoral” values of the 1920s.⁷⁸

While the Cárdenas administration is justifiably associated with its agrarian sympathy and with the strongest record for distributing lands, it nevertheless began tacking even more strongly in the direction of industrialization in 1939.⁷⁹ Late in the year it passed a law providing five year tax breaks for industrializing companies to *import* machinery and primary products not available in Mexico. And the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM), the workers’ political arm within the governing PRM party, opted to minimize strike activity. The push for industrializing and national unity only strengthened after Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. And wartime, even though neither country was as yet directly involved, pushed Mexico and the United States still closer together.

The perceived solidarity helped smooth over lingering ideological differences, especially the embers still smoldering from the oil nationalization a year and a half prior. It created a “popular front” of sorts between the capitalist Yankees and Cardenas’s more socialized state, akin to the unity socialists and communists felt when confronting the fascist threat. This shared sense of commitment to a greater good facilitated transference of people, goods and ideas.

During the Cárdenas era, which coincided with the United States’ official Good Neighbor policy, the Mexican government had acted nationalistically while the US government had restrained itself from acting aggressively. Despite seizures of numerous land parcels and the oil companies’ properties, no military intervention or formal break in

⁷⁸ McElvaine, 196-223

⁷⁹ González, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, 265-273.

relations occurred. This contrasts with the period of the United States' heavy-handed intervention during the Wilson administration and threatening pronouncements during the Coolidge years. This more restrained response was due in large part to the sincere commitment of Ambassador Daniels, and general but quiet support of President Roosevelt, to Good Neighborliness as a principle. Daniels was conscious of the two nations' unequal relations in the past. Very desirous of avoiding a return to "Big Stick and Dollar Diplomacy" approaches, Daniels was willing to minimize somewhat Americans' expected application "for the sacredness of international law." Additionally, the United States wanted to maintain hemispheric solidarity in anticipation of war in Europe or Asia.⁸⁰ The Cárdenas administration, meanwhile, appreciated the United States' position. While first and foremost committed to its agrarianism and national sovereignty that tested the Good Neighbor policy severely, the Mexican government also made timely concessions that helped prevent relations from breaking.

Both countries' positions in the world had changed since 1920. The near decade of incredible productivity prior to the depression solidified the United States' position as the world's leading industrial power. The extended reach and power of military ships and aircraft as well as the growing importance of oil broadened the perspective of America's strategic thinkers. With the fascist powers posing serious threats to democracy and capitalistic markets in the late 1930s, the United States had to ally itself with partners who more or less shared a commitment to democracy and capitalism. Relatively minor differences within the region mattered far less than did having general solidarity on the global stage. Mexico's form of democracy in the 1930s still was of the authoritarian variety and suffered from occasional rebellions, but it was absolutely out of the question

⁸⁰ Cronon, 203-229, with quote appearing on p. 229.

for the United States to try a Wilson style intervention to impose a correction. For its part, Mexico had established political stability, asserted its national sovereignty, and launched multiple initiatives to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the masses that had been neglected during the *porfiriato* and then buffeted during the near decade of revolutionary violence. The state clearly asserted itself, but was “committed to a project of bourgeois capitalism.” With totalitarian and fascist regimes as alternatives, could Mexico really afford to “shut itself off from the greatest exemplar of bourgeois capitalism, with which it happened to share a 1,500 mile border?”⁸¹

Cross-Cultural Effects Stemming from Mexico’s Education Campaign

Mexico’s revolutionary governments from Obregón’s onward believed that the country needed a national culture to advance and that schools could serve as perhaps the most important means for forging a common set of values. President Cárdenas directed an increasing amount of resources toward producing the “imagined community.” His educational outlay in terms of pesos spent per capita was approximately double of what Obregón and Calles had spent.⁸² The country’s rural nature and isolated villages, however, long had served as obstacles to creating a sense of nationalism.⁸³ Thus the schools’ impact on culture—bringing modern values such as an emphasis on manmade instead of natural time—complemented but also depended upon the government’s concurrent road construction efforts.

⁸¹ Knight, *U.S.-Mexican Relations*, 140-142.

⁸² Wilkie, 160-163. Obregón spent 1.9 to 6.0 pesos (in 1950 value) per year from 1921 to 1924; Calles spent 4.7 to 6.1 during his time as president, 1925-1928; and Cárdenas spent between 8.4 and 11.3 pesos per capita per year from 1935-1940.

⁸³ Engracia Loyo B., “En el aula y la parcela: vida escolar en el medio rural (1921-1940),” in Aurelio de los Reyes, ed, *Historia de la vida cotidiana en Mexico, Tomo V Siglo XX, Vol. 1 Campo y ciudad* (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio de Mexico, 2006), 273-278.

In 1934 the Secretary of Public Education, Narcisso Bassols, launched what came to be known as “socialist education.” School administrators often designed their curriculum to complement government efforts in other parts of society such as agrarian land reform and to improve the citizens’ consciousness of these campaigns. Teachers emphasized that *ejidos* (communal land holdings) and *ejido* banks would organize the *campesino*’s production, instead of the *campesino* having to work for an *hacendado*. They also sought to improve the citizenry’s productivity. Teachers encouraged *campesinos* to read technical manuals and listen to government agricultural experts who visited locally or who broadcast advice over radio waves.⁸⁴ Schools instructed mothers how to maintain a hygienic household with an elevated hearth, the use of soap, and reliance on modern apparatuses such as *molino de nixtamal* (for grinding corn) and sewing machines.⁸⁵ The schools’ promotion of sports in the mid-1930s also corresponded with the revolutionary state’s twin-pronged attack against the church and “immoral” practices such as drinking and gambling. Physical education, President Cárdenas believed, “was a key to developing the potentialities of the masses.”⁸⁶ Basketball and volleyball provided healthy alternatives to what school and other governmental officials perceived as the pillars of anti-modern, and anti-developmental forces.⁸⁷

When viewed from a transnational lens and from a span of some seventy five years, most of these cultural approaches appear to be fairly similar to the Americanization

⁸⁴ A radio listener would then likely be exposed to a range of other modern ideas associated with advertisements and other attractions.

⁸⁵ Mary Kay Vaughan, “Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s,” in Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 159-165.

⁸⁶ Wilkie, 161-162,

⁸⁷ Alan Knight, “Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74:3 (August 1994), 409-410.

campaigns in the late 1910s and early 1920s.⁸⁸ The labels may have been different, with the American version constituting part of the “progressive” movement while the Mexican variety reflected “socialist education.” But the American reformers’ promotion of English in place of Spanish and their Mexican compatriots’ encouragement of Spanish instead of indigenous languages were simply variations of the same national impulse—to create a common tongue for civic discourse and for commercial exchange. The Mexican case did include a more secular, indeed anti-religious component, to it. While plenty of sincere and benevolent educators worked tirelessly on both sides of the border, there were many who expressed a bigotry against the culture of their “unhygienic” or “primitive” pupils. For some American educators this bigotry could assume a racist form, ascribing to the “Mexican” an ignorance of modern household techniques.⁸⁹ Mexican educators, in turn, betrayed a prejudice against rural folk, whose “unhygienic” behavior they associated with a “primitive” or “uncivilized” country upbringing.⁹⁰ In both cases, “traditional” practices provoked the bigotry, and in both cases the modernization campaign brought about a new culture.

In Tecamachalco, Puebla the school staged a festival that included ethnic dances, activities for “hygiene, first aid, anti-alcoholism,” and an assortment of patriotic stories and poems. “The Water Princess and the Soap King” was one play that students performed in the festival.⁹¹ Elsewhere local municipal governments tried to impart into the general community the spirit of the schools’ modernization campaign. In San José,

⁸⁸ See Chapter One, 76 for a brief discussion of some Americanization pedagogical efforts and George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 97-107 for more in-depth treatment.

⁸⁹ Sanchez, 97-107.

⁹⁰ Vaughan, 160-167.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 166.

for example, besides directing the paving of dirt roads and clearing of weeds, one *jefe de tenencia* (i.e., local ward leader) forbade men from wearing the customary sarape.⁹² Even in Mexico City, a leading daily newspaper called for instituting the “Day of Soap” to encourage bathing.⁹³

Overall, the socialist education campaign probably brought about a greater awareness of modernity than a consciousness of the class struggle (although leaders such as Bassols had hoped for the latter.) While parts of the “socialist” education campaign encouraged collectivist and anti-capitalist thinking, their parallel anti-clerical message promoted a concern for the material betterment of the poor in this life. Thus various historians’ assessment of Bassols’s education movement conclude that it was “a surrogate ideology of modernization.”⁹⁴

Although the Mexican Secretary of Public Education’s (SEP) curriculum emphasized agricultural production—via planted gardens, etc.—more than consumerism, the Tecamachalco school did not create particularly productive students until the town could join the wider national market after 1940. “Completion of a new highway opened new possibilities for crop diversification, marketing, migration, and alternative employment.” New cultural articles such as manufactured beverages “replaced *pulque* as drinks of choice, and basketball continued in its ascendance over blood sports.”⁹⁵ Socialist teaching may have allowed the Tecamachalcoans to imagine more readily a

⁹² Luis Gonzalez, *San José de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition*, trans. by John Upton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 197.

⁹³ *Excelsior*, 1 July 1935, 1, 7.

⁹⁴ Knight, “Mexico c. 1930-1946,” 27-28. Knight cites John A. Britton, *Educación y radicalismo en México: I: Los años de Bassols (1931-1934)* (Mexico, 1976), 17 and David L. Raby, *Educación y revolución social en México, 1921-1940* (Mexico, 1974), 38

⁹⁵ Vaughan, 166-167.

national community, but participation in the market allowed them to realize a new culture.

In his analysis of the Revolutionary state's cultural surge in the 1930s and its promotion of "socialist" values, Alan Knight writes "the battle for cultural hegemony was essentially a three-way struggle, involving church, state, and people; it was not a simple tug of war between church and state."⁹⁶ The cultural engagement Knight analyzes was very intentional. The cultural transmission process between Mexico and the United States during this time, however, was more unintentional. It was not, strictly speaking, a struggle for "cultural hegemony." It was instead the byproduct of mostly economic and some political considerations that likewise were advanced by three forces—government activities, business maneuvers, and migrant movements. Knight's three-pronged struggle makes sense within the limited national framework. But Mexico's overall cultural development might be better understood by considering how American policies, businesses, and migrants integrated with their counterparts from Mexico in an expanding capitalist network.

Private Business and Cultural Transmission Overview

Besides the oil companies, American businesses operating in Mexico during the Cárdenas years generally continued or modestly expanded projects begun in the 1920s. The national telephone system, relying heavily on one American and one Swedish firm, slowly but steadily connected outlying rural areas to urban areas where service already existed. San José de Gracia, for example, connected to the country in 1935.⁹⁷ Most of the

⁹⁶ Knight, "Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State," 416.

⁹⁷ González, *San José de Gracia*, 197. San José's connection came in 1935, although the service was so unreliable that "customers practically had to scream to be heard."

corporate projects benefited from the government's concurrent push to construct roads, to educate the citizenry, and to improve their social and economic well-being. American firms also appreciated, however, the potential power of the state, and most opted to tread sensibly within a country that was trying to develop its own manufacturing and service industries. Mexican and American firms recognized that the Mexican government had to admit multiple political and cultural sensibilities—traditional Catholic, modern capitalist, and socialist—to compete in the market place of ideas, but that it ultimately had determined upon a *dirigiste* capitalist arena. These corporations and individuals promoted their own preference or protested their ideological opponents' while the state acted as mediator.⁹⁸

The expansion of the nation's communication, electricity and transportation systems, along with the government's parallel efforts to teach reading, increased the ability of Mexican and American firms to push and pull for sales. In the daily newspaper ads one sees multiple listings for Frigidaire refrigerators, Delco radios, and other similar electric appliances that were so common in the electrified and materialist 1920s America. Other than running on electricity, these goods reflect the same sort of offerings that appeared in the first instance of nascent consumerism in world history—ads for household goods such as beds and tea sets that appeared in early eighteenth-century British newspaper advertisements.⁹⁹ In the same vein, Mexico increasingly was expanding the similar sorts of apparatuses that spurred consumerism three centuries earlier: credit, transportation networks, written advertisements, and literacy.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, & Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 6.

⁹⁹ Stearns, 21-24.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

According to a recent analysis of advertising in Mexico, two trends dominated the Mexican publicity realm in the 1930s and into the 1940s. “One appealed to different forms of Mexican nationalism and insisted on ‘Mexicanizing’ American or global products and culture,” writes Julio Moreno, “and the other stressed American and global leadership while encouraging the ‘Americanization’ or ‘globalization’ of Mexico.”¹⁰¹ Various advertisements for Monterrey Cerveza Lager illustrate how both these approaches appeared in *Excelsior*. A 1937 piece states that the beer goes with just about everything, including “delicious tacos, a torta compuesta, a canapé of caviar, or the most formal banquet.” The first shows a satisfied German saying “Vollmundig! [full-bodied!],” after drinking the beer “filled with flavor and aroma,” while a second emphasizes how the beer is cosmopolitan like art.¹⁰² Corona, meanwhile, claimed that its Cerveza Regia would give the connoisseur the same sort of harmony that Confucius emphasized.¹⁰³

Professional advertising’s growing place role in Mexico’s 1930s commercial culture provides several interesting connections to the government’s effort to direct the economy and develop a national community. The increasing role of the Cardenista regulatory state, for example, created tension among representatives in the National Association of Advertising (ANP) who believed the state’s clumsy, bureaucratic approach diminished their ads’ effectiveness.¹⁰⁴ ANP members also adopted advertising techniques developed in the United States and applied them in Mexico. As nationalist sentiment rose to a peak after the March 1938 oil expropriation, however, advertisers—

¹⁰¹ Moreno, 134.

¹⁰² *Excelsior*, 1 May 1937, 9; 5 July 1935, 8; 6 July 1935, 12.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1937, 10.

¹⁰⁴ Moreno, 87-92.

Mexican and American—carefully crated many of their messages to appeal to “Mexican values and practices.”¹⁰⁵

The government’s literacy campaign in the schools meant that print advertisers encountered an expanded market to which they could target their wares. While advertisers during the *Porfirian* era mostly aimed a focused message to upper class customers who could afford a specific product, promoters now began to emphasize “the general benefits of goods—appliances, automobiles, new forms of entertainment.”¹⁰⁶ Advertisers employed motifs that corresponded with some of the government’s revolutionary advances in schooling and indigenous pride. Electric lamp manufacturers, for example, emphasized how their product was necessary for completing homework assignments. Use of a product—in this case a table lamp—constituted a patriotic act since it contributed to the national education drive. “The simultaneous display of different forms of Mexican nationalism and the spread of American values and ideals,” Moreno concludes, “made it difficult to make a distinction between ‘Mexican’ and ‘American.’”¹⁰⁷

The confluence of national exhortation, professional advertising techniques, general material advancement within society, enticing goods, and new enabling apparatuses such as consumer credit, produced a powerful current. Cultural historian Anne Rubenstein notes that while few Mexicans at this time could actually afford, for example, a new refrigerator, the growing consumer ethos sparked the interest in acquiring at least a cold soda.¹⁰⁸ A General Motors advertisement claimed to offer something

¹⁰⁵ Moreno, 87-129, with quote appearing on p. 129.

¹⁰⁶ Rubenstein, “Mass Media,” 640.

¹⁰⁷ Moreno, 129.

¹⁰⁸ Rubenstein, “Mass Media,” 640-641.

“unprecedented in Mexico for sales of economy cars,” the use of monthly payments.¹⁰⁹ Therefore Chevrolets, Cokes or Pepsis could now reach into ever expanding corners of the republic thanks to the burgeoning road network. And previously isolated locales might refrigerate the soda with the aid of the governmental hydroelectric effort.

Mexican Cinema

In step with the lead of the national transportation and communication systems, cinema in the mid to late 1930s saw the expansion or evolution of existing networks and forms. More rural areas gained their first, exciting exposure to films. In San José de Gracia, “the greatest thing that happened in 1933 was the movies,” which for several months after their showing would be the talk of the town.¹¹⁰ American stars and films continued to assume a prominent place in the movie listings.¹¹¹ For the 1930s as a whole, 76 percent of films that opened in Mexico City were American made, but Mexico’s film industry nevertheless grew tremendously.¹¹²

A significant development was the advent of “ranch comedy,” a new genre which eventually assumed a central position in Mexican cinematography. In 1936, *Allá en el Rancho Grande* opened in a lavish new theater built by Emilio Azcarraga, who by now had established himself as the leader of the nation’s radio and movie business.¹¹³ *Rancho Grande* featured Tito Guizar, who provided yet another example of an actor who became a Mexican celebrity after first working in Hollywood. The film was the first Mexican effort to win international acclaim, the Venice film festival’s prize for camera work. And

¹⁰⁹ *Excelsior*, 1 July 1935, 8. The payment plan required eighteen monthly payments.

¹¹⁰ González, *San José de Gracia*, 197.

¹¹¹ *Excelsior*, 4 July 1935.

¹¹² Rubenstein, “Mass Media,” 648.

¹¹³ Peter Standish and Steven M. Bell, *Culture and Customs of Mexico* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 131.

it helped spawn a large number of similar efforts in the years 1937 to 1939. *Rancho Grande*'s director, Fernando de Fuentes, became a "prime mover" for Mexico's industry. Several cinema critics consider *Rancho Grande* to have provided the true beginning of Mexico's "golden age" of cinema, since the Mexican crowds clearly appreciated the work produced by their nationals.¹¹⁴

Rising Mexican nationalism also prompted more American corporations to employ larger numbers of Mexican engineers and lawyers in their firms.¹¹⁵ The universities' traditional production of lawyers was augmented by the granting of professional engineering degrees. By 1938, 42 percent of all university degrees were for the professions, a figure up from 27 percent in 1928. At the same time the Cárdenas administration began restricting the immigration of engineers to promote the employment of its own nationals. The American mining giant Phelps Dodge began to give Mexican engineers a greater role in its daily operations, although the firm still preserved its highest responsibility positions for Americans.¹¹⁶ Thus once again we see how one type of culture—in this case, professional expertise—emerged from the product of state education, legislative efforts, and the companies' desire to conform with (or defuse!?) a rising nationalist sentiment.

Infrastructural Conduits of Culture: Electricity, Radio and Telephones

The increased electrification of first Mexico City and then other urban locales spurred new culture in two significant ways. The new infrastructure enabled small and large factories to increase their productivity and it allowed customers to use their new

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ O'Brien, 291-293.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

electronic appliances and devices.¹¹⁷ Electrification also increased advertising efforts both through radio and through the use of modern signage. According to the ANP, Mexico City's use of neon lights for advertising in the 1930s made it "one of the happiest cities in the world."¹¹⁸

But the expansion of the power grid did not unfold at a pace or in a manner that satisfied the *cardenista* state. American & Foreign Power's expansion scheme ran into increasing public protests against high rates. So in 1937 the Cárdenas administration established a Federal Electricity Commission to increase oversight of the various companies' practices and to spur the system's capacity. The next year Congress passed a national electrical law that said only Mexican companies could receive new concessions and that increased the government's ability to regulate rates.¹¹⁹ The British-owned Mexican Light and Power sponsored an ad that pointed out how important electricity was and that practically begged the government not to take it over.¹²⁰ Still, electric workers in 1938 proposed to buy Mexican Light and form a cooperative, which they believed would convert profits into lower rates and higher wages. Although the move fit perfectly within the ideology of the then prevalent socialist education, its timing made it appear not "nationalistic" in the administration's eyes. The workers' action had come at the same time as the oil expropriation crisis was unfolding and creating stress on the overall Mexican economy. The state could not afford to pay for another large capital transfer, and therefore press and the federal government representatives labeled the workers as

¹¹⁷ *Excelsior*, 1 July 1937.

¹¹⁸ Moreno, 106-109.

¹¹⁹ O'Brien, 286-291.

¹²⁰ *Excelsior*, 1 July 1937.

unpatriotic.¹²¹ Nevertheless, a major strike at several power plants in five different states broke out in November 1938 and temporarily cut service to mines in Guanajuato and to tens of thousands of customers. Once again, the press and the government decried this “unpatriotic” act.¹²² In Thomas O’Brien’s analysis, the revolutionary state increased nationalist control over American companies to improve service and to provide increased material benefits to workers. But in doing so the state acquired a “nationalist” trump card which it readily played against radical syndicalists who wanted worker control of industries. In addition, the majority of non-radical workers “accepted certain precepts of the new culture, especially values such as individualism and personal achievement.”¹²³

Throughout much of the world, radio broadcasts assumed a greater political and commercial role in the 1930s. News, speeches, sporting events, music and advertisements reached listeners on a seemingly ever increasing scale. The United States had been the global leader in the 1920s.¹²⁴ Southward, an American government report noted the advancing trend’s implications for business at the beginning of the decade.

The audience in Mexico now hears of the qualities of an American radio; that an American insecticide will free their kitchens of roaches; that the Centro Mercantil has the best bargains in ladies hats; that a talking-machine hour is sponsored by the Mexico Music Company; that a well known light six is the car of their dreams; and many, many other statements which by repetition can not fail to build up a preference in the minds of consumers. . . . [Radio station] owners are impressing the large Mexican business organizations with their service, and they are soliciting American advertising . . . they are working hard to establish radio as an institution.¹²⁵

¹²¹ O’Brien, 308-311.

¹²² *Ibid.*; *Excelsior*, 13-14 November 1938.

¹²³ O’Brien, 310.

¹²⁴ McNeill and McNeil, 269-270.

¹²⁵ United States Government, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Trade Information Bulletin no. 771, “Broadcast Advertising in Latin America” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931), in James Schwoch, *The American Radio Industry and Its Latin American Activities, 1900-1939* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 119-120.

Cárdenas added his nationalistic political project to the airwaves from the very beginning of the administration when on his inauguration day, 1 December 1934, radio broadcast the ceremony for the first time in Mexican history.¹²⁶ Some three years later he made his powerful pronouncement of the oil nationalization also over the air and with dramatic effect. The contest between commercial drive and political control provides yet another example of the push and pull forces that private and public forces employed while constructing the cultural market.

Historian James Schwoch attributes the spread of radio to the “carpenters” out in the field rather than to leading “architects” of national radio companies or top level government directors. And he credits much of radio’s growth to the public’s genuine fascination with the magical new medium. Radio broadcasting, Schwoch writes,

is the story of State Department consular representatives, Commerce Department commercial attaches, midlevel government workers in such branches as the Electrical Equipment Division of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce or the Division of Latin American Affairs at the Department of State, traveling salesmen drumming up business for American radio equipment throughout the Western Hemisphere, operators of import-export houses in both the United States and Latin America and a worldwide audience whose enthusiasm for the product was unprecedented in modern history.¹²⁷

The Mexican state certainly aimed to regulate radio broadcasting, but with the goals of promoting the role of the state and creating a national consciousness rather than promoting business directly. In 1936 it created the Autonomous Department of Press and Publicity (DAPP), which could regulate most forms of media in the country.¹²⁸ Radio stations were required to broadcast programs ranging from ten-minute health bulletins to

¹²⁶ Rubenstein, “Mass Media,” 646.

¹²⁷ Schwoch, 96-97.

¹²⁸ Joy Elizabeth Hayes. *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950*. (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 66.

hour long samplings of regional music and culture.¹²⁹ Many Mexican officials believed radio would be especially important for reaching rural women and inculcating modern ways.¹³⁰

An interesting offshoot of radio broadcasting sprang from the promotion of comic book literature, material which itself had stemmed from American seeds but then blossomed with its own distinctive Mexican pedals. First, the comic book industry benefited from the government's promotion of reading as a "patriotic" activity, which thus pushed adults to join the market of readers.¹³¹ And a synergy emerged between comic books and radio broadcasting. Mexican writers provided very similar storylines for the comic strips and the *radionovelas*, with characters sometimes bouncing back and forth between the two related media. Radio's growth during this period—the large Azcárraga network alone encompassed 15 stations by 1938—began to reach to more rural locales at the same time that highways connected more villages to cities.¹³² When country folk visited or moved to the city, they then purchased, or frequently just shared, comic books that had the familiar heroes or heroines they earlier had discovered on the *radionovelas*.

Comic books, or *historietas*, quickly came to enjoy a widespread popularity in the second half of the 1930s. *Paquín*, *Paquito*, *Chamaco*, and *Pepín*, which all began between 1934 and 1936, contributed to an estimated daily circulation of a half-million sales per day in 1943.¹³³ *Pepín*, perhaps the public's favorite since its name came to serve as a synonym for *historieta*, was published three times per week in 1938 and daily by

¹²⁹ Rubenstein, "Mass Media," 645-646.

¹³⁰ Knight, "Popular Culture," 394, note 9.

¹³¹ Rubenstein, *Bad Language*, 15-16.

¹³² Rubenstein, "Mass Media," 644-645.

¹³³ Rubenstein, *Bad Language*, 18.

1940. The first books included serialized American strips but also resorted to a wide array of methods for increasing readership in a booming and highly competitive industry. In an effort to maintain customer loyalty, the inexpensive books were filled with contests, patriotic slogans, games, astrology, and solicitations for reader submitted story lines involving all types of life experiences. Characters or items from radio or cinema programs appeared in the *historietas*. In one humorous example of “transnational cultural appropriation,” Superman very briefly appears to rescue a Mexican heroine in her downward descent after falling from a cliff. And when economic times grew tough, the *historieta* producers simply cut back on their size instead of raising their ten centavo price. The Mexican comic book thus borrowed widely and achieved an impressive popularity among young and old, male and female, that dwarfed the traditional American comic’s target audience of young males.¹³⁴

In the telephone industry, the competition between the Swedish firm LM Erickson (Mexeric) and American corporate power ITT (Mextelco) eventually led to a significant expansion of the country’s phone network. But the nationalistic and socialistic policies of Francisco J. Múgica, President Cárdenas’s Secretary of Communications and Public Works (SCOP), strongly influenced this process and in a way that likely benefited the Mexican consumers.¹³⁵ The onset of reduced profits as a result of the Depression spurred the two companies’ leaders to consider a merger, but Múgica—the “Mexican Lenin”—was highly suspicious of the monopolistic potential of such a move. He wanted the companies to extend service even if the action might not initially be profitable. He also believed that the companies’ proposals in the mid-1930s would grant the new, larger firm

¹³⁴ Rubenstein, *Bad Language*, 19-27.

¹³⁵ Arturo Grunstein Dickter, “In the Shadow of Oil: Francisco J. Múgica vs. Telephone Transnational Corporations in Cardenista Mexico,” *Mexican Studies* Vol. 21.1 (winter 2005), 1-32.

too generous of concessions, such as tax reductions and tariff protection against new competitors. The SCOP Secretary and the head of Erickson grew increasingly combative toward each other through 1937 and into 1938. Múgica first announced the findings of earlier investigations that showed the companies had used accounting gimmicks to reduce their tax levels. With the oil nationalization in March demonstrating the resolve of the government, the companies decided to cooperate. “Finally recogniz[ing] the advantages of accommodating, at least selectively, pragmatic nationalist concerns,” they avoided nationalization and agreed to expand into rural locales where profits were lower.¹³⁶ State intervention and the threat of nationalization thus yielded a faster transmission of telephone service than would have occurred if corporate chiefs alone were deciding based on market conditions.

Mexican Migration: a Trickle Northbound

Trying to enter the United States while tens of thousands of their countrymen were repatriated home, few Mexican migrants came to the United States. With an annual average of about 3,500 legal entries during the 1930s, Mexican immigrants—including many students, clergy, and professionals—were far fewer in number than the American tourists heading southward for pleasure visits.¹³⁷ Thus the Mexican migrants’ role in cultural transmission was relatively negligible for most of the 1930s. The Mexican state’s inability to satisfy their returned citizens’ needs, on the other hand, meant that large-scale

¹³⁶ Ibid, 15-32, with quote appearing on 32. In 1937 Erickson’s president said his company had not paid stockholders any dividends during the 1930s.

¹³⁷ Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 151. There are no reliable estimates of the number of illegal entries during this time, but the number would certainly be a small fraction of what it was during the 1920s.

migration northward would soon emerge as an even stronger reality for hundreds of thousands of Mexicans.

The Abelardo Rodriquez administration's attempts to keep repatriates home met with limited success. One small, experimental effort sent twenty repatriates from Detroit, Michigan to the tropical state of Guerrero in the winter of 1932-1933. A few months later, some 500-700 repatriates formed Colony # 2, called "Pinotepa," in the state of Oaxaca. The sites were purposely selected for their distance from the United States (to limit the temptation to return northward) and from major industrial areas in Mexico (to limit the *repatriados* from competing for scarce jobs).¹³⁸ The newcomers complained about excessive administrative oversight, harsh discipline, and unfulfilled promises of support. Some sixty of the new settlers died in the harsh climate. By February 1934 Pinotepa was the home to just eight colonists and fifteen administrators, and soon after both colonies closed. In the north of the country, however, about fifteen hundred repatriates were able to sharecrop and a small number able to purchase irrigated lands that the government had made available to the general populace beginning in the early 1930s.¹³⁹

Having welcomed Spanish immigrants fleeing from their country's brutal civil war, Lázaro Cárdenas also hoped to welcome repatriated Mexicans back from the United States and then integrate them into his larger agrarian project. He sent Ramón Beteta, his undersecretary of state, to encourage Mexicans to return to new agricultural colonies to be established in San Luis Potosi, Baja California, and Tamaulipas.¹⁴⁰ But the land available and agricultural support offered mostly disappointed the newcomers. In

¹³⁸ Hoffman, 139-142.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Luis González, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, 240.

addition, the increasing social tension in 1939, which included hunger, electoral uncertainty, the unresolved nature of the agrarian and petroleum expropriations, and the relative poverty of Mexico, made most repatriates want to return northward.¹⁴¹ Despite the nationalist sentiments of the president and any natural affinity for their homeland that repatriates may have had, the relative material prosperity of the United States meant that more and more Mexicans would in the future place their faith in migration.

Two other points regarding the period's impact on future socio-cultural development deserve brief mention here. First, for many Mexicans and especially Mexican-Americans living in the American Southwest, the stress of economic depression and associated experience of repatriation heightened the sense of needing to organize politically. In Los Angeles, a "new politics of opposition" emerged that blended labor unionism with opposition to broader forms of social discrimination.¹⁴² Meanwhile in San Antonio, the difficulties of the 1930s and the Mexican government's inability to effectively welcome back the repatriates "had moved them more from a consciousness of "*mexicanos de afuera*" (outside Mexico) to "*mexicanos de adentro*" (inside the United States)." There groups such as the middle-class League of United Latin American Citizens determined to incorporate Mexicans and Mexican-Americans more effectively into the socio-economic future envisioned by city planners.¹⁴³ Second, Mexico's construction of its highway system in the 1930s would facilitate more future migration once the United States reopened its doors. The networking dimension of migration thus

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 240-245

¹⁴² Sánchez, 227-252.

¹⁴³ Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1991), 114-116, 204-217.

was being strengthened even though the actual number of migrants at the time was negligible.

Tourism: a Rising Current Southbound

Using a mix of public and private initiative, Mexico intensified its efforts to bring Americans south of the border even during a period of economic downturn and political crisis. The government funded road construction and coordinated financing for hotel construction. Meanwhile businessmen, including some Americans, actively promoted the newly accessible cultural wonders of Mexico.

Some tourism efforts served as a means for increasing trade. For example, a pamphlet published by the Houston Chamber of Commerce displayed the headline “Visit Romantic Mexico,” while the itinerary inside detailed the trade possibilities of the various cities to be visited. Guadalajara, “the Pearl of the Occident,” is also one of Houston’s “most valuable markets;” Queretaro’s markets and gardens sell fruits “valued [at] more than \$100,000 Mexican money;” in Saltillo, “Houston merchants are well known and established;” and San Luis Potosí is described as “a large consumer of Houston merchandise, machinery, etc.” The early signs of a proto “business travel” market began to develop.¹⁴⁴

But to stimulate its tourism industry, the Mexican government needed to streamline its procedures for tourists entering into Mexico. One aspect of the problem that had lingered since the start of the decade was the concern that a lessening of

¹⁴⁴ Mexico, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Record Group Abelardo Rodriguez (ALR) vol 505, exp. 2/54, T.L Evans to Abelardo Rodriguez, 21 August 1934.

inspections for tourists entering on train would take away jobs.¹⁴⁵ Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Relations in 1931, however, considered the lengthy and discourteous procedures a "true obstacle" to tourism.¹⁴⁶ As one visitor from Los Angeles noted in 1935, the government workers worked slowly and treated Americans poorly. The simple matter of completing a tourist entry card took five hours to complete.¹⁴⁷ In 1937, tourist complaints against Mexican customs agents made *Excelsior's* front page, which observed that "the Department of Tourism, the Railroads, Chambers of Commerce, hotel and other groups, official and commercial, have made active propaganda and glorified the natural beauty of Mexico, . . ., [the customs agents in Nuevo Laredo] seem to want to close the border with the United States and block tourists from entering the country."¹⁴⁸ As late as 1938, Mexican officials felt compelled to hold yet another meeting that focused on the need to stop bothersome customs inspections of foreign tourists.¹⁴⁹

While many tourists endured border hassles related to the Mexican inspectors' inefficiency or desire for job security, others encountered difficulties because of their skin color. One incident involving leading academics of the time shows that at least some Mexican border officials had racial prejudices. The matter was so serious that the sympathetic historian of Mexico, Frank Tannenbaum, wrote directly to President Cardenas about it.¹⁵⁰ Tannenbaum had recently received a letter from sociologist and

¹⁴⁵ AGN, Record Group Pascual Ortiz Rubio (POR), caja 35, exp. 144, Cesilio Perez to Pascual Ortiz Rubio, 4 AUG 1930.

¹⁴⁶ Mexico, Archivo Histórico "Genaro Estrada" de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (AHSRE), IV-494-33, Secretary of Foreign Relations to Pascual Ortiz Rubio, 29 AUG 1931.

¹⁴⁷ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548/14, Director of Migration Services at Nogales, Sonora to Lázaro Cárdenas 1 August 1935.

¹⁴⁸ *Excelsior*, 1 May 1937, 1.

¹⁴⁹ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548/2.1, Abraham Mejía, Director of Tourism Department to Lázaro Cárdenas 15 August 1938.

¹⁵⁰ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548/1.1, Frank Tannenbaum to Lázaro Cárdenas 16 February 1937.

founding member of the NAACP, W.E. B. Du Bois, who wrote to bring light to the “extraordinary difficulties which American Negroes have in visiting Mexico.”

Last summer three members of the staff of Atlanta University went to Mexico separately. One was a white man. He simply paid \$1.00 tourist tax and went in without further difficulty. The second was a brown man of Negro descent, an artist. He was compelled to post in New Orleans cash bond of \$250.00 and even then when he got to the border was held up for a considerable time and refused admission. . . . The third was a yellow man of Negro descent [du Bois], a doctor of philosophy from Harvard. . . . After some delay, and when he was already in California, he received tourist permission to enter which was endorsed “Permission granted in spite of the fact that person is of Negro descent.”¹⁵¹

Tannenbaum reminded Cárdenas, “If the American negroes made an issue of it, they could make it very difficult for Mexican laborers competing with negroes in this country.”¹⁵²

Most of the reports about tourism during this period were positive, however. The completion of the Nuevo Laredo to Mexico City Highway marked a milestone in the Mexican tourist industry. It exemplified the symbiotic relationship between the Mexican government’s road construction program, the American public’s burgeoning love affair with the car, government and private promotional efforts, the United States’ “Good Neighbor” diplomacy, and the building of hotels that brought more American culture to Mexico.¹⁵³

The new road was “one of the significant engineering achievements of modern times,” according to Frances Toor, one of the American pioneers in and boosters of

¹⁵¹ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548/1.1, W.E.B. Du Bois to Frank Tannenbaum, 13 February 1937. In the letter, Du Bois provides an interesting comparison and contrast with the tourist situation to the north, noting that “Negro immigrants to Canada are not welcome but Negro tourists have no difficulty what so ever.”

¹⁵² AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548/1.1, Frank Tannenbaum to Lázaro Cárdenas 16 February 1937.

¹⁵³ Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico’s Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 45-46.

Mexican tourism.¹⁵⁴ It cost some Mex\$62 million to build, but contributed to a rapid doubling of Americans who entered Mexico from Nuevo Laredo. Whereas 14,500 had entered in 1935, 29,000 came in 1937.¹⁵⁵ The Mexican road construction effort achieved a second major success in 1939 when it opened the Guadalajara to Mexico City highway, which included connections in Morelia and Jiquilpan.¹⁵⁶ Building highways was ideal for attracting Americans who, as the humorist Will Rogers noted, would constitute “the first nation to go to the poor house in an automobile.”¹⁵⁷ Mexico’s road system thus spurred the concurrent growth of an internal market for Mexican *campesinos* and merchants and a transnational cultural market spurred by the American tourists.

One cannot easily compare the quantitative levels of cultural transmission each group of working Mexican and vacationing American “migrants” left on the lands they visited, but certainly some interesting points are suggested. The longer stays and the long-term generational implications of the Mexican migrants in the United States brought undeniable linguistic, religious, and consumer changes to the American southwest. Spanish, Catholicism, and numerous *-rías* (*carnecerías*, *panaderías*, etc.) took lasting root and welcomed subsequent generations of migrants. Meanwhile, the amounts of money the relatively wealthy American tourists deposited in Mexico—and the desire of

¹⁵⁴ Frances Toor, *Frances Toor’s Guide to Mexico* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1936), 13.

¹⁵⁵ Berger, 45-46. In 1937, the number of American tourists who came to Mexico from all the ports of entry—approximately 115,000—most likely exceeded the highest annual total of legal Mexican immigrants to United States during the 1920s decade of heavy immigration. See Chapter One, p. 70, Table I and Berger, 121. The total number of registered tourist visits (from all countries) to Mexico in 1937 was 130,091, and Berger indicates that 85-90 percent of these were American. The peak year for legal Mexican migration to the United States was 1924, in which nearly 106,000 people came north. The number of illegal immigrants that year is uncertain, but between 40,000 and 60,000 is a fair estimate for that year when the expenses for legal entry were not regularly enforced

¹⁵⁶ Luis González, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, 268-269.

¹⁵⁷ Berger, 46. Even during the economically “depressed” 1930s, the number of privately owned automobile registrations continually rose. By 1940 there were some 27 million, or one car for every five Americans.

Mexican hotel operators, restaurant owners, etc. to gain more—likewise shaped many localized areas in Mexican destinations such as the capital, Taxco and, within a decade, Acapulco.¹⁵⁸

A few Mexican commentators worried that the roads would let in a flood of American culture. Antonio Caso, for example, called the Nuevo Laredo to Mexico City highway the “via appia del pochismo [pursuit of Americana].”¹⁵⁹ Most middle and upper class Mexicans likely agreed about the result, but not about its significance. They saw the road between Nuevo Laredo and Mexico City as yet one more means for accessing the northern culture that they had been reading about in magazines, seeing displayed in movies, or hearing about on the radio. Great celebrations occurred at various points on the new road, including one in Mexico City where Ambassador Daniels received three golden keys to the city.¹⁶⁰

Evidence confirming some of the critics’ concern about American culture entering as a result of the tourist trade is apparent throughout one of the leading tourist guides Americans consulted, *Frances Toor’s Guide to Mexico*. Toor, the editor of *Mexican Folkways*, had expanded her entrepreneurial reach by contracting a New York firm to publish the 1936 edition of her travel guide.¹⁶¹ In it, she notes that tourists coming from the United States did not have to post a bond to guarantee their departure from Mexico. And readers entering by car are told to look for Sinclair Oil’s stations with the trademark Red Rooster, where usually “one finds rest rooms, English-speaking attendants and

¹⁵⁸ Ever since Mexican migration levels to the United States began to soar in the 1970s, it seems fair to weight the Mexican migration impact more heavily. But as the number of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans residing in the United States has increased, so too has been their impact on Mexico in terms of remittances sent home and regular visits.

¹⁵⁹ González, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, 79-80.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁶¹ Toor, vi. The first three editions of Toor’s guide (1933-1935) were published in Mexico.

mechanics.” Toor’s 1936 guide reveals that the degree of tourist penetration was still limited, however. She specifically advises motorists to learn key phrases for securing vehicle or roadside assistance. And the relatively small number of hotels meant that “camping equipment, including sleeping bags or folding cots, may be useful, especially during heavy tourist seasons.”¹⁶²

Prospective Mexican hotel certainly operators lost no time in trying to eliminate this shortage and to capitalize on the growing tourism trade. One contractor requested from the treasury secretary an elimination of customs duties for hotel furniture.¹⁶³ Many Mexican elites who promoted tourism were members of the “revolutionary family” and thus used their political connections to help advance their businesses. Former president Pasqual Ortiz Rubio was one such connected individual, and so was his finance minister, Luis Montes de Oca. With strong ties in both the public and private sectors, Montes de Oca played a leading role in shaping Mexico’s tourism industry and he founded both the Asociación Hipotecaria Mexicana in 1936 and the Banco de Crédito Hotelero in 1937.¹⁶⁴

Most Mexican entrepreneurs and government officials naturally sought to maximize revenues from tourism, but some understandably also expressed concerns that the industry’s pursuit of profit would degrade Mexican culture. The nationalistic Luis Montes de Oca sought to allay these fears through a series of letters to the hotel operators articulating what the trade really demanded. Emphasizing that travelers mostly wanted a sense of authenticity and fairness, he exhorted hoteliers to provide “well organized,

¹⁶² Toor, 9-17.

¹⁶³ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548.2/16, Carlos F. Osuna to Secretario de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 7 September 1936.

¹⁶⁴ Berger, 45-50.

reliable and courteous service” that would not threaten the owners’ dignity.¹⁶⁵ “Service not servitude” was his prescription.

Publicity played an important part in the public and private campaigns to increase tourism. The MEXUSA Corporation’s “Publicity and Propaganda Program with the Object of Attracting a Strong Flow of American Tourists to Mexico” first noted how competitors such as New England, California, Florida and Puerto Rico all had effective publicity programs, and that the time to act was now.¹⁶⁶ Such a program was to include the wide and growing range of modern communications and transportation media that we have earlier addressed including radio shows, movies, use of Pan-American Airlines, the “affordable and attractive” international highway and motion pictures. No one approach encompassed overwhelming transmission of culture, but together these multiple agents brought Americans, their money, and their culture to Mexico. In particular, the program sought to attract “cultured” travelers interested in education, travelers solely interested in fun and diversions, and businessmen.¹⁶⁷

While many ideas were realized at this time there were also plenty of others that were not. One interesting proposal came from Bert Stiles, “a young American who can ski.” Writing directly to President Cardenás, Stiles proposed with the aid of some friends to “start a ski school up on ‘Popo’ or some other high mountain and offer skiing as an added attraction to the tourist in Mexico.”¹⁶⁸ Although this and certainly other money-making schemes failed, enough entrepreneurs on both sides of the border consistently sought to transplant a concept that had worked in one culture into the neighboring land.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 54-55.

¹⁶⁶ AGN, LC, vol. C921, exp. 548.2/1, Jorge U. Orozco, no date.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ AGN, LC, vol. 921, exp. 548/14, Bert Stiles to L. Cardenas, 10 February 1939.

Most of our focus on tourism has thus far been on efforts to attract Americans to Mexico, but modest efforts also were made in the reverse direction or to enable Americans to experience Mexican culture without having to take a vacation. Most Mexican tourists went to the American southwest where their countrymen worked and where their native tongue was well-established in certain communities. But even in distant New York City, the staff of the famous Waldorf-Astoria Hotel announced its special service for Latin Americans and noted that many of its staff members spoke Spanish.¹⁶⁹ Frances Toor's guidebook to Mexico also contained an advertisement for Fred Leighton's Mexican Arts and Crafts, "the only shop in New York" dedicated to selling Mexican and Native American clothing, pottery, and other folk goods.¹⁷⁰

The international geopolitical situation first took from and later added to Americans' enthusiasm for crossing south of the border. The oil nationalization crisis temporarily caused some disturbances in the Mexican tourism industry. Oil companies used negative press articles—"rotten oil propaganda," according to one American official—to discourage American tourists from visiting Mexico. Some reports claimed that Mexican gas was low-octane and thus bad for the motors.¹⁷¹ Press efforts encouraged some Americans to believe that Mexico was once again unstable and unsafe, although those who went learned that the negative images were overblown. One family that had made a motor tour from Belleville, Illinois to Mexico City reported that the conditions and hospitality were "directly opposite to what we had believed them to be after reading

¹⁶⁹ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548.2/8, Mrs. B. Lazo Steinman to Carlos F. Osuna to Lázaro Cárdenas, 20 July 1935.

¹⁷⁰ Toor, 319.

¹⁷¹ Cronon, 208-210.

about them in the press.”¹⁷² An October 1938 story in the *Chicago Daily News* titled “Rebels Plotting Openly for Big Day in Mexico,” for example, stated that “There are undoubtedly dozens of other Pedros out in the mesquite cooking up their own little messes for Mr. Cardenas.”¹⁷³ A brief rebellion had broken out in earlier in 1938, but Cárdenas was far too popular and quickly crushed it.¹⁷⁴ Regardless of the threat level that may have existed, as “un-official envoys of good will,” the Illinois family reportedly was planning a return visit.¹⁷⁵

The oil nationalization likely did hurt tourism for a short period. The overall numbers of tourist entries in 1938 declined, falling to 102,866 from the previous year’s total of 130,091.¹⁷⁶ Coming as it did just a couple years after the industry had started to ramp up its efforts, the downturn associated with the oil companies and workers resulted in “hotels closing or laying off workers, [and] commerce drying up.” To counter this trend, the Secretary of Gobernación proposed establishing stands at the New York World’s fair.¹⁷⁷ Some of the best advertising for Mexico, however, came from the growing report of fascist drumbeats across the Atlantic.

By May 1939, with the “European war scare keeping tourists away from the old world,” infrastructural and communications connections were well enough established to

¹⁷² AGN, LC, vol. C921, exp. 548/14, G. Lewis Barrier to Lázaro Cárdenas, 10 December 1938; Raúl G. Dominguez (Mexican Consul in Brownsville, TX) to Raúl Castellanos 29 October 1938.

¹⁷³ AGN, LC, vol. C921, exp. 548/14, G. Lewis Barrier to Lázaro Cárdenas, 10 December 1938; Raúl G. Dominguez (Mexican Consul in Brownsville, TX) to Raúl Castellanos 29 October 1938, with attached clipping from *Chicago Daily News*, 22 October 1938.

¹⁷⁴ Knight, “Mexico c. 1930-1946,” 56-57. Saturnino Cedillo, Cárdenas’s long-time friend from San Luis Potosí, launched this “last old-style rebellion” but was killed in the half-hearted affair. Mexico had achieved sustainable political stability.

¹⁷⁵ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548/14, G. Lewis Barrier to Lázaro Cárdenas, 10 December 1938.

¹⁷⁶ Berger, 121. In subsequent years as the tourism industry became a larger part of the Mexican economy, it would assume a larger place in the government’s political consideration.

¹⁷⁷ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548/14, Juan Gallardo Moreno to Lázaro Cárdenas, 27 February 1939.

allow more Americans to consider Mexico as a tourist destination.¹⁷⁸ The two countries' networks began to complement each other, as a National Broadcast Corporation (NBC) radio show promoted a "ride into utopia" on the recently completed highway connecting the United States to Mexico City. The program featured Tom Terriss, the "Vagabond of Romance," sharing a letter describing his recent stay in and around Mexico City. First he makes clear how easily Americans might transport themselves to Mexico. "Hello, folks at home. Well, here we are in Mexico City after as pleasant an automobile ride as we have ever had. All the way from Texas along the new National Highway that was once the old Camino Real, now as magnificent a route as any in the world." Following flowery descriptions of climbing the pyramids at Teotihuacán, gliding in a boat in Xochimilco, and experiencing other commonly visited sites, Terriss then notes the little things that will appeal to his American audience. "Smart automobiles jog side by side with carts and policeman wearing little miniature American flags on their arms, speak perfect English, to help the tourist on his way."¹⁷⁹ As a promoter, Terriss likely overplayed the extent to which Mexico City resembled a major American city, but his report suggests that a cultural convergence is discernable.

Promotion of tourism in Mexico spilled over into ancillary activities in both countries. A conference of Mexican businessmen, for example, met in San Antonio in 1939 to create a nationally focused Mexican Chamber of Commerce in the United States. This organization had arrived some twenty-two years after a similar organization of American businessmen formed in Mexico.¹⁸⁰ According to the Mexican Consul attending

¹⁷⁸ AGN, LC, vol C921, exp. 548/14, Walter Vincent to Lázaro Cárdenas, 17 May 1939.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ See Chapter One, 49-52 for a discussion of the creation of the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico.

the meeting, the new organization would also increase tourism in Mexico. The Conference Members added a tourist committee to the list of action-oriented bodies, which also sought to share commercial import and export information and to maintain a current directory of Mexican business members.¹⁸¹ One proposal may reveal an imbalance in the perceptions of the two nations' political and cultural muscle. The delegates proposed to lobby the Mexican government to acknowledge titles granted by accredited American universities, but they made no such proposal to lobby the United States government for a reciprocal recognition of titles from Mexican universities.¹⁸² A different proposal, however, shows how tourism within the United States could also help spread Mexican products in the north. In this case, members of the Mexican Chamber of Commerce in San Antonio had for years displayed Mexican made products to the visitors who came to their city. Presumably a modest number of these tourists then returned to their home locales with an acquired taste for, or at least curiosity about, Mexican products.¹⁸³

Chapter Conclusion

The Cárdenas-Roosevelt years advanced bi-national relations to the point where the countries were ready to entertain close economic and military cooperation in the subsequent war years. This was quite an achievement when we recall that as recently as 1923 the United States government did not even formally recognize Mexico. The two nations became closer at a time when both national governments increasingly assumed

¹⁸¹ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 611.12171, Romeyn Wormuth (American Consul in Nuevo Laredo) to State Department, 25 April 1939, "Meeting of Mexican Chambers of Commerce at San Antonio, Texas"

¹⁸² Ibid. It is possible that the Mexican delegates considered it appropriate to lobby their own Congress but not that of the United States.

¹⁸³ USDOS RG 59, Dec. File 611.12171, *Revista Social*, Number 9, 15 April 1939. The Mexican Chamber of Commerce in San Antonio had existed since 1928.

greater control for steering their respective economies. Greatly assisting the harmonization of relations was Ambassador Josephus Daniels, who served as a sort of shock absorber for dissipating the force and shock that Mexico's nationalization programs brought to select American property owners. His and his boss's view that a tolerant spirit of good neighborism would ultimately produce the best long term results probably was correct, and by 1938 it appeared politically sensible as war clouds appeared not far down the road.

Government efforts to spur the development of their infrastructural networks served as a boon for businesses operating in a more integrated world. While left-leaning politicians, such as Francisco J. Múgica, employed the state's powers to share cultural advancements with more of society, capitalists still were able to capitalize handsomely on the new entrepreneurial opportunities of the capitalist network. Road, electrical, and radio connections promoted trade in every direction. Similar dynamics were also occurring worldwide. "The cumulative effect of all these changes (and some others such as mass circulation newspapers) was to bombard people with new information, impressions, and ideas, and to allow more of them to travel further, faster, and more frequently than ever before."¹⁸⁴ In 1937, Mexico welcomed nearly ten times the number of tourists it had received in 1929 before the connection of the two countries' road networks.¹⁸⁵ As World War II brought the countries even closer, these same highways would serve as northward conduits for Mexican migrants to resume their transformation of American locales that were to receive them.

¹⁸⁴ McNeill and McNeill, 270-271

¹⁸⁵ Berger, 121. There were 13,892 recorded tourist entries in 1929 and 130,091 in 1937.

Chapter Four: The Transnational Cultural Market Blooms, 1940-1946

The movement toward a more integrated political, economic, and cultural relationship between Mexico and the United States had advanced with starts and sputters through the 1920s and most of the 1930s. Then the international threat posed by the fascist powers in the late 1930s moved first the American and Mexican governments and then their citizenries into a much closer alliance, the type forged while sacrificing together in battle. While the United States remained the more powerful of the partners during the war, more of its government and people came to view and treat their Mexican allies with a greater degree of respect. The war, meanwhile, provided Mexico with a number of opportunities for asserting more control over its industrial and commercial development. Tensions remained in the two allies' relationship and the gears of cooperation did not always mesh perfectly smoothly, but working together caused the two countries' cultures to employ more of the same material goods and intellectual practices.

Wartime cooperation required both countries to make significant concessions, and this mutual yielding in turn produced a greater sense of trust and confidence. At times common citizens in Mexico and the United States believed that their country was carrying more of the burden. Old nationalistic prejudices, whether of the economic or political variety, did not vanish overnight. But the leadership at the top—presidents Roosevelt, Cárdenas and Avila Camacho—and in key posts such as foreign minister or ambassador shared a firm commitment to opposing fascism. These prominent individuals provided an encouraging and at times domineering voice to overwhelm critics of the alliance. As a result, the countries attained a high degree of integration in the economic

arena which in turn spilled over into cultural spheres such as the two publics' cinema and food choices.

Cut off from many of their traditional European or Asian sources or destinations, tourists, movie stars, technical experts, raw materials and capital instead crossed northward or southward with the encouragement of the two governments. Multiple markets for cultural transmission emerged where Mexicans and Americans predominated as the main producers, consumers, or facilitators of the transactions. The experience of working together in wartime helped greatly reduce old and even recent memories of resentment or mistrust. This collective mood firmly established a bi-national cultural market which permitted cultural transmission to occur at an accelerated pace.

Government Relations

U.S.-Mexican governmental relations reached their historical peak during the conflict. Prior to preparing for war, the two countries' political relationship since the turbulence of the Revolution already had demonstrated a trend of generally increasing interaction interrupted by occasional disruptive crises. After diplomats took three years to achieve formal recognition in the early 1920s, Ambassador Dwight Morrow helped the two sides overcome the tension generated in the mid 1920s between Ambassador Sheffield and President Calles. The economic nationalism of the early Depression years then produced somewhat of a holding pattern. Next, Ambassador Daniels helped navigate the relationship through the rocky waves of the Cardenista land and oil nationalization projects. Nevertheless, at the end of the decade significant issues such as debt repayment and compensation for the oil companies' properties remained unsettled. But with overseas aggression producing a palpable threat to Mexico's and the United States'

national security, these lingering obstacles appeared much less significant and cooperation became official policy. “The war,” write Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, “created an exceptional atmosphere in which many of the problems between the two countries . . . could be speedily and definitively resolved.”¹

The rapidly shifting global geopolitical and combat situations influenced Mexico’s view of allying with the colossus of the north. After the oil nationalization and up until Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Mexico had sold or bartered petroleum to the three leading Axis countries. Germany and Italy received the largest amounts of its exports, providing an economic counterbalance to the Allied oil companies’ boycott of Mexican crude. The fighting in Europe quickly cut off the transatlantic trade, but small quantities continued to flow to Japan in 1940.² By June of 1940, however, as Germany conquered France, the Mexican ambassador, Francisco Castillo Nájera, told the American undersecretary of state, Sumner Welles, that “President Cárdenas was entirely favorable to the suggestion of this government that the secret conversations between appropriate military and naval officers of the two governments should be undertaken in order to determine what precise measures of cooperation both governments could take in the event of emergency.”³ And the Mexican president assured Welles that in the event of an Axis attack in the Western Hemisphere,

¹ Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History 1910-1989*, trans. by Luis Alberto Fiero (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 164.

² Lorenzo Meyer, *Mexico and the United States in the Oil Controversy, 1917-1942*, trans. by Muriel Vasconcelos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 209-213. Mexico at first used an American intermediary, William R. Davis, to facilitate the sales with Germany. The major American and British companies such as Standard Oil and Shell were boycotting Mexican oil.

³ Stephen R. Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development: The United States and Mexico, 1938-1954* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1995), 75.

the United States “could count on full military and naval cooperation from Mexico in addition to the use of Mexican territory and Mexican naval bases for American forces.”⁴

Mexico’s support of republican Spain during the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939 demonstrated Lázaro Cárdenas’s ideological opposition to fascism, but out of economic necessity he had traded with the Axis powers. Historian Stephen Niblo argues that the intensification of fighting was what propelled Cárdenas to believe that his country’s national security required an alliance with the United States. “The fundamental explanation of the policy followed by Mexico,” Cárdenas wrote just days before the fall of France, “is to be found in the experience of the weak countries of Europe which, by trying to maintain a self-centered attitude of neutrality and indifference to the major fight, had to suffer the invasion of their territories, and then found themselves in the midst of modern combat.”⁵ The avowedly nationalist and highly popular Cárdenas’s willingness to ally militarily with the United States would help diffuse anti-Yankee feelings within the country. The stage was now all but set for a closer economic and therefore cultural integration between the two countries under Cárdenas’s center-right successor, Manuel Avila Camacho, who won a closely contested election on July 1, 1940.⁶ As a precursor of the high level of American involvement in Mexican affairs, Vice-president Henry Wallace attended the inauguration of President Manuel Avila Camacho on December 1, 1940.⁷

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 76. This quote comes from a private letter Cárdenas wrote to Elena Vásquez Gómez, “a doubtful member of the ‘revolutionary family’,” on 21 June 1940.

⁶For coverage of Ávila Camacho’s bitter victory of General Juan Andreu Almazán, see Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, trans. by Hank Hiefertz (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 479-480 and *Excelsior* and *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7-8 July 1940. The “official” tally claimed Avila Camacho received 2,476,641 votes while Almazán gained just 15,101.

⁷ Blanca Torres, *Historia de la Revolucion Mexicana, vol 19: Periodo 1940-1952: México en la segunda guerra mundial* (Mexico, El Colegio de Mexico, 1979), 5.

The new president played a pivotal role in shaping the transnational cultural market by warmly embracing a strong relationship with the United States during the war. The American ambassador to Mexico, George Messersmith, noted both the immediate and longer term implications of Avila Camacho's presence. "We have in the president of Mexico a man who is thoroughly convinced of the necessity for the closest cooperation during and after the war, and he envisages this collaboration continuing in the political and economic field after the war."⁸ The war, in other words, was a catalyst for collaboration that was to produce a long-term strategic partnership.

The American movement toward a close relationship attained a greater sense of urgency upon receipt of the threatening reports emerging from Europe between September 1939 and Avila Camacho's election the following July. Prior to Germany's invasion of Poland, the United States already had lobbied Latin American countries to have a strong sense of hemispheric solidarity in preparation for war. The ferocity and swift success of the Nazi's blitzkrieg assaults through Scandinavia and the low countries in the spring of 1940 now prompted the United States to make more concessions itself. Regarding Mexico, Roosevelt, with frequent prodding from Ambassador Daniels, lost patience with American oil companies that were obstructing any settlement of the 1938 nationalization of their properties.⁹ The administration began in mid-1940 to pursue bi-national accords between the two governments which the oil companies could then accept or else be forced to proceed without governmental support in the matter. By November 1941 the United States and Mexico reached a tentative agreement, which would be

⁸ Jesse H. Stiller, *George S. Messersmith, Diplomat of Democracy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 175-176. Had a more radical politician such as Francisco Múgica won Cárdenas's endorsement for the 1940 election, then a number of the accords that the two countries signed would likely have been of a more limited nature and they may well have taken significantly longer to sign

⁹ Meyer, *Mexico and the United States in the Oil Controversy*, 209-221.

finalized the following April, on compensation for the oil companies' properties confiscated in March 1938.¹⁰ And the United States stepped up its efforts to coordinate military preparedness between the two nations.

But as he tried to ally more closely with Mexico, the American president also faced a real challenge in convincing his own citizenry of the magnitude of the crisis. Throughout the later 1930s and first two years of the 1940s, Roosevelt tried to steer his constituents and their representatives in Congress away from neutrality and toward more active support of the Allies. Obstacles to this task appeared in the form of powerful politicians such as Senator William Borah, who called the conflict a "phony war" in early 1940, and major celebrities such as Charles Lindberg, who vociferously advocated neutrality. In September of that year, Congress passed a Selective Service Act, instituting the first peace-time draft in the country's history. But most of the country still preferred to "wait and see." Late in the fall 1940 presidential campaign, Roosevelt even told a public weary of becoming involved in another "European" conflict, "your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars."¹¹ The following fall, some two years after Germany had invaded Poland and four years after Japan had invaded China, Congress renewed the Selective Service Act for another year. But the measure only passed the House of Representatives by one vote.¹² The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor some two and a half months later, however, shattered nearly all sentiment for neutrality. Congress voted 355-1 to go to war.

¹⁰ Colin M. MacLachlan and William H. Beezley, *El Gran Pueblo: A History of Greater Mexico*, 3rd Ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 360-361; Mexico agreed to pay approximately \$22 million to Standard Oil and another \$2 million to the other American oil companies.

¹¹ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 426-463.

¹² Kennedy, 459, 495-496.

In Mexico the initial lack of enthusiasm for direct involvement was even more pronounced. On the political right there existed a general sympathy for the fascist powers. The far left, meanwhile, accepted the logic of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and held that the war was one between capitalist imperial powers and thus Mexicans had no business participating in it. Both ends of the political spectrum and many in the middle maintained their memory of 1847 and of American military incursions during the Mexican revolution. Avila Camacho's administration nevertheless seized a dozen German and Italian ships in the spring of 1941 as a counter to potential acts of sabotage.¹³ Germany's June 1941 invasion of the U.S.S.R. immediately won over the left's support for the Allies. Labor leaders expressed their solidarity with the American people in the struggle and the Mexican press denounced the presence of an Axis "fifth column" operating in the country. The general public at this time, however, still required more convincing evidence before it would back a war effort.¹⁴

After Pearl Harbor and Germany's declaration of war on the United States four days later, Mexico immediately broke relations with all the Axis powers. Also in December 1941, President Avila Camacho shrewdly appointed his predecessor as commander of Mexico's Pacific coast. Lázaro Cárdenas's nationalist credentials helped allay concerns that the United States would impose itself militarily on Mexico.¹⁵

Using Axis tankers it had commandeered a year earlier and capitalizing on the recent indemnification agreement on the nationalized oil properties, Mexico in April

¹³ Torres, 65-70. The Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact was signed 23 August 1939.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85. United States pollsters examining public opinion in Mexico City in the late fall of 1941 found that only 39.9 percent of respondents favored allying with the United States.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 76-78. In a step that echoed the American response after Pearl Harbor, Mexico also relocated German, Italian and Japanese nationals from the coasts to inland locations. And some who were suspected of spying were sent north to American internment camps.

1942 began shipping oil to the United States. On May 14, a German submarine lying off the coast of Florida, torpedoed the *Potrero del Llano*, sinking it and killing five Mexican crew members. One week later a second tanker, the *Faja de Oro*, was sunk. These two direct assaults moved President Avila Camacho on May 28 to request a declaration of war, which the Congress approved unanimously.¹⁶ The government now supported close cooperation with the Allies, but much of the public still was “confused by the shift away from traditional friends Spain and Italy, toward age-old tormentors Britain and the United States.”¹⁷ To enhance national security and perhaps to enlist more broad-based support for the war, the National Service Act requiring military service went into effect in August 1942. Men 18 to 45 years old began registering for the draft in November.¹⁸

Thus in both nations, the chief executives led publics that were in large part skeptical of entering a war. And for both countries it took a direct attack from an Axis power upon their national property or territory to precipitate an actual declaration of war. The two presidents, Roosevelt and Avila Camacho, could appreciate the political constraints the other was or had recently operated under. More important, Ambassador Messersmith keenly appreciated the ambivalent views of many Mexicans. He was mindful of Americans’ wartime enthusiasm causing its leaders to take Mexican support for granted. Americans must be “always mindful that there is a past, which people here are trying to forget, which could easily be pushed into the foreground.” And he constantly reminded his associates in Washington and elsewhere who were working with the

¹⁶ *Excelsior*, 15 May 1942, 23 May 1942; Torres, 81-95. The president sought and received a declaration of a “state of war” rather than of “war.” This wording seemed to emphasize Mexico’s reluctant but necessary entrance into war and possibly diminished some Mexicans’ concerns about being drafted to fight in an overseas conflict.

¹⁷ Stiller, 175-176.

¹⁸ José Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana 1: La vida en México de 1940 a 1970* (Mexico City: Planeta, 1990), 36.

Mexican government to keep in mind the different perspective of the Mexican public. In a note to Secretary of State Cordell Hull in 1943, Messersmith wrote, “Some of our people have never realized that the declaration of war by Mexico was not an act of the Mexican people, but of its government. It is true that the people have acquiesced and are steadily and continuously more understanding of the meaning of war to them. This does not mean, however, that the government does not have its problems and I can assure [you] that these problems are very real.”¹⁹

The build-up for and then entry into war created an environment conducive to numerous instances of substantive and symbolic cooperation. Within the substantive realm, a number of bi-national organizations were created to coordinate defense measures, prioritize production levels, and facilitate the movement of products. Much of the emphasis, especially through 1942, revealed a wartime focus and an especial concern for protecting the Pacific coast. But after several allied victories in 1943, post war considerations began to assume a larger place. The most conspicuous instance of symbolic cooperation occurred when the two presidents met briefly but very publicly in April 1943. Revealing his keen political sense, Roosevelt told a confidante that “the big boy will have to go to see the smaller boy first.” And so for the first time in history, a sitting American president visited his Mexican counterpart on Mexican soil. The two leaders first united in Monterrey, Mexico and then met the next day in Corpus Cristi, Texas.²⁰ The timing of the visit helped, for it occurred when war time shortages or disruptions meant that “suspicion of the gringos was again on the rise” and “many a

¹⁹ Stiller, 176-207.

²⁰ Ibid., 195-196.

Mexican suspected that the U.S. meant his country no good.”²¹ The Mexican president made clear to Roosevelt that he wanted more capital and access to consumer products. With the highest level of Mexico’s authoritarian democracy wanting more consumer goods, more American material culture would head south. A couple weeks after their meeting, the Joint Economic Commission was created to coordinate the two governments’ activities.²²

The American most influential in ensuring that the new bi-national organizations functioned smoothly was Ambassador Messersmith. Sincerely committed to the concept of good neighborliness as had been his predecessor, Josephus Daniels, Messersmith believed that close cooperation with Mexico meant dealing with America’s neighbor “on the basis of full equality.” He protested, for example, when some American administrators wanted to require American labor code standards to be applied to Mexican firms before the United States would procure products from sectors with notorious work conditions such as rubber plantations.²³ “Some of our people at home . . . sometimes feel that we can do things in other countries just as we do them at home,” he wrote to Vice-President Wallace, but it was imperative to resist “interference in the internal affairs of the country.” Messersmith’s restraint at the top helped cool the latent overzealousness of many Americans.

The Battle for Production

Mexico’s primary contribution to the Allied effort occurred on the economic rather than military front. The country fed raw materials and labor to an enormous

²¹ *Time*, 19 April 1943, 33-37.

²² *Time*, 26 April 1943, 15; Stiller, 195-196.

²³ Stiller, 192-195.

American industrial and agricultural economy, which then sent processed goods and foods to the Allied armies overseas. With the multifaceted complexity and industrialized nature of warfare, Mexico's contribution was important. American and Mexican officials recognized this underlying fact and therefore attempted to make as efficient as possible numerous aspects of the economic relationship.²⁴

The vast American economy required a powerful and pervasive government bureaucracy to transform it from civilian to wartime production. As a result of this, the United States' economic relationships with key economic partners such as Mexico likewise were strongly influenced by new American organizations such as the War Production Board.²⁵ American and Mexican diplomatic officials therefore created additional institutions to integrate bi-national actions within the sprawling American "arsenal for democracy." The Commission for Mexican American Economic Cooperation was the most important of the new bi-national institutions. This effort to link one national economy to another prompted the Americans to staff their embassy in Mexico City with two hundred fifty professionals to coordinate activities in 1943.²⁶ Various groups on the staff then focused, for example, on the Mexican railroads' poor condition, which impeded the shipment of the ores and other strategic minerals America needed. Consequently the Americans sent a team to improve the railroads' efficiency.

The collaborative spirit generated within the wartime context initially helped reduce trade tensions for both primary and consumer products. Paralleling the efforts to settle the oil dispute and to lock in guaranteed prices for selling Mexico's strategic raw

²⁴ In a parallel effort to maintain the Mexican public's support for, or at least acceptance of, the economic role, American officials also sought to shape cultural relations.

²⁵ Kennedy, 627-630.

²⁶ Stiller, 180-183.

materials and beer in the north were 1942 talks aimed at moving American consumer goods south. Trade negotiators significantly lowered the tariff duties on powdered milk, wheat, lard, refrigerators, cosmetics, electric dryers, record players, radios, tractors and tires.²⁷ Nevertheless, the Americans' insistence on a strict wartime focus and their accompanying willingness to sacrifice consumer pleasures severely limited the average Mexican's access to products that were being rationed in the United States. The War Production Board's effort to direct strategic materials toward the manufacture of tanks, bullets, and planes made it hard to purchase, for example, rubber tires, iron furniture, or candles in Mexico. Restrictions on the use or export of copper temporarily limited Mexico's efforts to effect an electrical appliance industrialization. Of an even greater concern, however, was the shortage of food in Mexico in 1943, which resulted from a shortage of tractors and their repair parts and from the substitution of "strategic" crops for fields of food.²⁸

Mexico concurrently tried to develop its industrial base at the same time it was serving as a provider of primary products for the United States. This approach reflected both an attempt to seize a wartime opportunity and a shift in the government's desired strategic direction for the economy. With the high prices normally generated during a war, Mexico could secure from the United States foreign reserves from export sales.²⁹ At the same time it sought to capitalize on American appreciation for Mexico's wartime collaboration by securing government loans for industrial development. Meanwhile, the

²⁷ Torres, 154-161.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169-179. U.S. officials believed that winning the war trumped concerns about comfort or industrialization and that the American sacrifice of blood more than offset the Mexican sacrifice of economic growth.

²⁹ Mexico received guaranteed prices from the United States for numerous commodities. But as a contributor to the wartime effort, it did not seek the maximum prices that the market would bear.

Avila Camacho government directed a modest shift toward “economic” development and away from his predecessor’s heavier emphasis on “social” spending.³⁰

Cut off from European and Asian markets, Mexico increased its trade with countries closer to home.³¹ Most of the increase occurred with the United States. In 1937-8, for example, a third of Mexico’s trade was with Europe. By 1946 this had fallen to five percent of imports and two percent of exports. Meanwhile the United States took ninety percent of Mexican exports in 1940 and supplied the same percent of its imports in 1944.³² The industrial rate of growth was also impressive, with that sector expanding at an average annual rate of 10.2 percent in the years 1940 to 1945.³³ To help its industrialization program take off, Mexico began to increase its tariff rates in 1944. The Mexican administration’s effort to industrialize, along with assistance from American aid, produced new jobs which drew Mexican peasants into the cities.³⁴ The urban environments, in turn, exposed the peasants to more and more American cultural elements such as movie theaters and electrical appliances.

Transporting both the goods and urban migrants was the highway network, which Mexico worked feverishly to expand during the war. As early as 1941 the United States and Mexico agreed to transform \$10 million of Mexican revenues from the sales of war

³⁰ James W. Wilkie, *The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change since 1910*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 70-86. In 1940 Cárdenas spent 19.7 percent of the federal budget on “social” development and 34.1 percent on “economic” development. Six years later, in the last year of Avila Camacho’s *sexenio*, the respective figures were 16.0 percent and 45.4 percent.

³¹ Torres, 154-155.

³² Alan Knight, “Mexico c. 1930-1946,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America Volume VII Latin America since 1930, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean*, ed. Leslie Bethell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 66-67.

³³ Camín and Meyer, 167.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

resources into bonds for building roads in Mexico.³⁵ One of the highest priority efforts was to complete the Inter-American Highway. A continuation of the Nuevo Laredo to Mexico City highway, the Inter-American highway would when finished in 1946 stretch from Laredo, Texas (Nuevo Laredo) to the Guatemala Border.³⁶ To support this impressive effort, the United States Export-Import Bank (Eximbank) provided Mexico with access to a \$30 million loan, \$10 million of which Mexico had borrowed by 1943.

Some electrical infrastructure projects both fulfilled an immediate wartime purpose and prepared the country for the postwar era. The United States allocated eight million dollars to purchase equipment for power generation that would enhance Mexico's manufacturing capacity. Many of the seven generating plants were in locales, such as Veracruz and Jalisco, that "were targeted for tourism development."³⁷

These and other joint-development activities caused both the Mexican countryside and city to change rapidly and to become more interconnected during the war. Work on a highway connecting San José, Michoacan to the greater national network commenced in 1941 and soon the local culture began to change. Construction workers, including many San Joseans, visited bars and prostitutes. Soon the locals were visiting distant cities on a regular basis, for now "one felt that he could be anywhere in the twinkling of an eye." Connected to the largest market in the country, village producers started sending their goods to Mexico City in sizeable quantities.³⁸

³⁵ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 11-15; Torres, 206.

³⁶ United States, National Archives Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Record Group (RG) 229, Entry 20, Box 602, Folder: Mexican-American Commission, Public Works and Sanitation, "Mexico's Highway Program for 1943-1946 to Cost \$116,000,000," n.d. From the Mexico-Guatemala border, the highway would extend to Panama City.

³⁷ Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, 114-115.

³⁸ Luis Gonzalez, *San José de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition*, trans. by John Upton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 221.

The wartime emergency provided many official Mexican activities with an enhanced import, a greater sense of urgency that was partly real and partly rhetorical in that it could be used to attract American support. President Avila Camacho, for example, noted the “exceptional military and economic importance” of a new highway between Jiquilpan and Colima. Other proposals emphasized that electrical production or road construction projects could “help the defense of Mexico” in numerous ways and thus received a more sympathetic consideration from the United States funding authorities.³⁹ The United States directed tractors southward to increase Mexico’s agricultural productivity, a vital wartime necessity. New employment possibilities in manufacturing plants, meanwhile, were to lead to the production of new goods and thus a slowing of inflation. Health and sanitation conditions in the countryside would improve “with electric energy . . . [making it] possible to improve the drinking water and refrigerate food and meats.”⁴⁰ As late as December 1944 Avila Camacho pushed for another Eximbank loan for highways, railroad work, and rural electrification, and the United States tentatively approved a \$45 million advance on March 29, 1945.⁴¹ During Avila Camacho’s *sexenio*, Mexico received about \$90 million in American governmental aid which was (or would be) spent, primarily, on road construction, railroad maintenance, rural electrification, and strategic manufacturing plants.⁴² “In short, this was a period of extraordinary economic cooperation between the two countries; there was scarcely an

³⁹ NARA, RG 229, Entry 17, Box 59, “Federal Electricity Commission Diesel Plants,” 1 September 1944; Torres, 206.

⁴⁰ NARA, RG 229, Entry 17, Box 59, “Federal Electricity Commission Diesel Plants,” 1 September 1944.

⁴¹ Stiller, 217.

⁴² Torres, 205-211. At the war’s end, Mexico still had about \$30 million remaining in credits which it allocated to spend in the early post-war years.

area of industrial activity that was not touched by the U.S. commitment to support the industrialization of Mexico.”⁴³

American Governmental Efforts in the Cultural Arena

Geopolitical concerns enabled much cultural transmission outside the industrial and agricultural sectors as well. In particular, the United States sought to win the battle for “hearts and minds” along the cultural front. It did not want to see a repeat of what it considered to be Latin America’s uninspired participation during the Great War. So in October 1940 the State Department created the Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) to promote a more partisan effort this time around.⁴⁴ The OCIAA included a Motion Picture Division, which, working with Hollywood, had a mission to

formulate and execute the programs in cooperation with the State Department which by effective use of government and private facilities in such fields as the arts and sciences, education and travel, the radio, the press, and the cinema, will further the national defense and strengthen the bonds between the nations of the Western hemisphere.⁴⁵

To this end, the division itself and supporting commercial studios produced a flood of newsreels. For distributing the propaganda, the OCIAA sent out teams of trucks and projectors. Warner Brothers and other private producers used OCIAA slogans such as “United we will be Victorious.” And the United States Interior Department in 1941 helped to convey to American filmmakers a message that the Mexican government had for years been trying to get across: “Mexicans should not be screened as villainous,

⁴³ Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, 115.

⁴⁴ Gaizka S. de Usabel, *The High Noon of American Films in Latin America* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), 145

⁴⁵ Usabel, 157.

ridiculous, or poverty-stricken.”⁴⁶ In 1942 the OCIAA also worked with the Mexican government in the production of an informational film on the war, which was produced in Michoacan.⁴⁷ Besides their impact upon Mexicans’ sympathy for the Allies’ cause, these films also sometimes had a commercial impact. The mobile film projection trucks, for example, showed films that included advertisements for Colgate soaps. Soon after the American company’s product entered the market, Mexican artisanal soap producers saw demand for their handicraft labor dry up.

The American Eximbank also provided loans for the expansion of its neighbor’s radio broadcasting system. As this Mexican industry grew, so too did the fruits from the American capital planted in foreign soil. Toward the war’s end, the bank’s president, Warren Pierson, became president of two American cable and radio corporations with ties to Mexico. According to Stephen Niblo, Pierson’s influence as a public administrator facilitating wartime cooperation increased the business of the private companies he led after the war.⁴⁸

The wartime setting sometimes meant that cooperation could trump traditional nationalist economic concerns. Mexico, for example, fulfilled its end of the “battle for production” bargain by accepting fixed prices for the delivery of its primary products; had it tried, it might well have won higher prices in a war-starved market. For its part, the United States at times promoted future Mexican development over the maintenance of American control in a particular industry. The Commission for Mexican American Economic Cooperation, for example, supported the building of a brick plant in Mexico

⁴⁶ S. de Usabel, *The High Noon of American Films*, 158-161.

⁴⁷ Mexico, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Record Group Manuel Avila Camacho (MAC) vol 977, exp. 577.1/36, “Memorandum Para el. C. Presidente de la Republica del C. Embajador Francisco Castillo Najera,” 21 September 1942.

⁴⁸ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 334.

rather than delivery of bricks from the United States because the factory would later serve as a complement to Mexico's steel industry.⁴⁹

As Americans helped develop technical aspects of Mexican infrastructure including highways, rail lines, air routes, electrical provision, drainage and flood control, and telecommunications, they imparted their sense of modernity and efficiency.⁵⁰ In all these areas one of the frequent observations accompanying the offers of help was the way many technical observers assumed that the Mexican standards needed to be adjusted to the efficiency levels of typical American standards. The Mexican-American Commission's Subcommittee on Highway Transportation, for example, issued a report that criticized numerous Mexican practices that it believed were retarding Mexico's transportation system. After first noting that the national law regulating the system was cumbersome and too difficult to interpret, the report then offered several specific examples of inefficiency. Trucks were regularly overloaded at levels of between 50 percent and 200 percent, which caused great wear and tear on the vehicles, tires, and highways. Because of numerous middlemen adding their charges to the sales process, trucks sold in Mexico for as much as six or seven times the price paid in the United States. Highway patrol officers were "very good" but received far too low of a salary. With the truck operators, however, "one notes that a very low standard of training has been given to drivers and other personnel handling transportation over the highways in safety, maintenance and the most efficient use of the equipment. . ."⁵¹ In a separate

⁴⁹ NARA, RG 229, Entry 20, Box 602, "Annex to Report of Mexican-American Commission for Economic Cooperation," n.d.

⁵⁰ NARA, RG 229, Entry 20, Box 602, J. Stanton Robbins to Nelson A. Rockefeller, 28 June 1943.

⁵¹ NARA, RG 229, Entry 20, Box 602, "First Report – Subcommittee on Highway Transportation,," 3 April 1944. The report was filed by three Mexican and two American representatives. It cited the cost of a Ford truck which in the U.S. would cost the equivalent of 5,000 pesos but in Mexico cost between 30,000 and 35,000 pesos after various markups to the price.

example that is also reflective of the norm, another American team looking at Mexico's airway routes was instructed to make recommendations regarding management and suggestions for more efficient routes.⁵² Public pronouncements downplayed the specifics of efficiency problems and an emphasis always fell on cooperation. According to the *Washington Post*, "the days of exploitation or economic imperialism, whether by nations or by powerful private groups, are past—no future Mexican or United States Government will condone or permit their reappearance."⁵³ But the recommendations from the reports provided a noticeable push to creating a more efficient infrastructure. Better roads, airway routes, and distribution systems, in turn enabled a stronger market for cultural absorption and diffusion.

American officials aware of Mexico's more pronounced constitutional sanction of state action, acknowledged that both public and private mechanisms were needed to improve the infrastructure. Their ideological commitment, however, pushed them to emphasize the role of private investment wherever possible. Citing numerous instances of waste—"entire crops" of fruits and vegetables rotting and severe gasoline shortages—caused by Mexico's inefficient and politicized transportation system, the Highway Transportation Subcommittee recommended injecting both state and private influence at different spots in the system. The state should establish minimum training requirements for drivers and it should regulate the distribution of automotive vehicles and parts. The recent history of state nationalizations and the government party's close linkage to the

⁵² NARA, RG 229, Entry 20, Box 602, Folder - Mexican-American Commission Transportation, "Survey of Mexican Air Lines," 26 August 1943. An exception to the often low assessment of Mexican ways was J. Stanton Robbins's assessment of the head researcher for the Bank of Mexico, Daniel Cosío Villegas. The future dean of Mexican historians was cited for his objectivity, broad understanding of economic issues, and detailed analysis.

⁵³ *Washington Post*, "Good Neighbor," 23 July 1943.

Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM), however, had created an atmosphere where “capital does not feel that it has sufficient protection and, therefore, does not step in to strengthen transportation.” Thus, “equal guarantees should be given to the workers in the transportation industry as to their legitimate rights and to the companies with reference to safeguards which will encourage them to invest capital and to the possibility of making a reasonable profit.”⁵⁴ These and many other instances of Americans pushing for a more secure and prominent place for capital contributed to the trend toward economic development that had been occurring since the last two years of the Cardenás administration.

The high level of cooperation attained during the war produced changes that would last long after the guns had grown silent. In just a few years, Mexico was able to reduce a problem that had plagued the country since its independence: external debt. From the beginning, the country cancelled some debts it owed to Nazi Germany. Then the price agreements and guaranteed contracts with the United States, along with limited access to purchasing foreign goods, generated a positive balance of payments posture. By war’s end, Mexico had paid down its debt by almost ninety percent.⁵⁵ The countries also worked to settle a water-usage dispute that was significant at the time and that has remained so to this day.

As the post-war period appeared on the horizon, the United States pushed to create a treaty that would give more Colorado River water to Mexico. For since the completion of the Hoover Dam in 1940, California had taken the largest share of the

⁵⁴ NARA, RG 229, Entry 20, Box 602, “First Report – Subcommittee on Highway Transportation,,” 3 April 1944.

⁵⁵ Friedrich E. Schuler, “Mexico and the Outside World,” in Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, eds., *The Oxford History of Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 536-537.

river's water. Although their status proved less contentious, the Rio Grande and Tijuana rivers were also addressed in the negotiations. President Roosevelt and Ambassador Messersmith pushed hard for a treaty that would reward Mexico's service by improving its citizens' standard of living.⁵⁶ The *Washington Post* also weighed in favor of the U.S. guaranteeing Mexico a share of 1.5 million acre feet from the Colorado River flow. "Californian development is American development," the paper acknowledged, but "Mexico happens to be every whit as thirsty for water as California."⁵⁷ Writing that "the policy of the United States [is] to deal fairly and justly with all of its American neighbors," Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles added his own editorial that criticized California governor Earl Warren's opposition to the treaty. Two months later the Senate approved the treaty.⁵⁸

Another water project revealed that sometimes the flow of political favors was as big a consideration as the flow of water. The Valsequillo Dam, which was designed to irrigate 100,000 acres in President Avila Camacho's home state of Puebla, for example, switched from being a non-essential to an essential wartime project. Messersmith and his economic advisor at the embassy, Thomas Lockett, emphasized that the dam had important economic and political implications:

These officials are the ones that cooperated so very closely with Ambassador Messersmith and our government during the very darkest days of the present war and, in fact, by fomenting and enlarging the economic and political support of the United States, they assumed a great responsibility by taking measures in collaboration with us which were far in advance of the thinking of the great mass of the Mexican public.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Stiller, *George S. Messersmith*, 217-219.

⁵⁷ *Washington Post*, 13 February 1945, 8.

⁵⁸ *Washington Post*, 14 February 1945, 10; "The Mexican Water Treaty: Treaty Series 994 (59 Stat. 1219) Utilization of waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande," <http://crc.nv.gov/1944mexicanwatertreaty.htm>. Mexico ratified the treaty on 16 October 1945 and it went into effect on 8 November 1945.

⁵⁹ Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, 118-119.

This sort of politicizing of projects convinced later critics of the era that the cozy relationship with the United States contributed to a rise in corruption. The access to large sums of American money and the parallel effort to industrialize rapidly on a large scale caused the “revolutionary elite” to lose touch with the Revolution’s original goal of bettering the lot of the common laborer or agrarian worker.⁶⁰

The wartime context indeed nurtured the Mexican leadership’s goal of industrialization. Cut off from most imported manufactured goods, Mexico enjoyed an environment conducive to implementing the import substitute industrialization (ISI) model of development. The improved transportation and communications infrastructure enhanced the productivity levels of the nascent industrial complex. The irrigation projects, meanwhile, did the same for the agricultural sector, which was to play an important role in raising foreign exchange for further investment in industry. “The country’s new mission,” writes Enrique Krauze, “was to manufacture what it previously had to import.”⁶¹ That mission, and the myriad of cultural changes associated with converting from an agricultural to an industrial society, became much more feasible thanks to the tightened relationship with the industrialized United States.

The top leaders who pushed for the close relationship believed that both sides had benefited economically from the wartime cooperation. As some of the formal wartime mechanisms began to wind down in January 1945, Franklin Roosevelt noted “the very extensive contributions of Mexico” including the “continuous flow of strategic materials” and the “essential services” provided by the *braceros*. Then the American president

⁶⁰ Internal criticism came soon from Daniel Cosío Villegas in 1946 and then some fifteen years later in Carlos Fuentes’s 1962 novel, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. Critical accounts from recent historians include Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s* and Agustín, *Trajicomedia Mexicana*.

⁶¹ Krauze, 520.

proudly added that the United States in 1944 was “able to meet the requirements of Mexico for materials and equipment for the maintenance and development of its economy in amounts greater than it had received from all world sources in any year preceding the war.”⁶² President Avila Camacho provided a similar accounting. As usual, the leaders focused on the quantitative economic impacts of the relationship. But the qualitative cultural connections established by wealthy capitalists and striving *braceros* were just as pronounced.

Military Coordination

While most of Mexico’s contribution to the allied war effort was as a provider in the grand logistical effort, the country’s military also achieved a modest level of coordination with the United States. Joint planning and some associated reorganization for the war resulted in the acquisition of new equipment and training for the Mexican side. Of greater long term significance, the Mexican military’s adoption of some American military methods contributed to a greater level of “professionalization” and helped to remove the Mexican army even further from the political process. Finally, the militaries’ coordination advanced cultural transmission in a general sense because their institutional approach to negotiating “sidestepped” diplomatic niceties and directly focused on what each side wanted: “the United wanted to establish bases for its troops in Mexico, and Mexico wanted to obtain as much economic aid as possible from the United States.”⁶³

⁶² NARA, RG 229, Entry 39, Box 655, “Letter from President Roosevelt to President Avila Camacho,” 20 January 1945 and “Text of Final Report of Mexican-American Commission for Economic Cooperation,” 27 January 1945.

⁶³ MacLachlan and Beezley, 361.

The two countries first initiated tentative steps toward jointly planning their military preparedness in the summer of 1940. At the time Mexico's army had an organizational structure more suited for maintaining internal order than for repelling an external threat. The strike at Pearl Harbor noticeably accelerated the defense effort, with Mexican forces reorganizing their divisions and battalions to respond to a potential Japanese move somewhere along the Pacific coast. Shortly after the attack, Generals Cárdenas and John L. De Witt negotiated plans for placing radar stations and for responding to an invasion. American operators first manned the radar stations when they became operable in the summer of 1942, but within weeks Mexican personnel had taken over the responsibility. Throughout much of the first year of working together, top American military officials complained about what they perceived was General Cárdenas's slow and obstructionist approach.⁶⁴

There were other instances when American military officials projected a lack of trust and confidence in their Mexican counterparts. They believed that the Mexicans could not handle a large attack by German or Japanese forces. Some leading American officers believed that lend-lease equipment was all that the Mexicans wanted, and the Americans could not fathom why the Mexicans would not allow them to occupy more bases. As noted earlier with regard to other areas of bi-national cooperation, Ambassador Messersmith strove to counter these views and to mitigate the worst excesses.⁶⁵

Defense Minister Cárdenas wanted to maximize the amount of technical training he could get from the United States. By the middle of 1943, however, the threat of an

⁶⁴ Torres, 24-25, 65-121.

⁶⁵ Stiller, 178-181. The United States "lent" armored vehicles and aircraft, some of which participated in a large Mexico City parade on 16 September 1942. Relations finally improved after the threat of a Japanese invasion on the Pacific Coast appeared minimal from 1943 on.

attack on the Pacific Coast had greatly diminished and the Americans began to lose interest in training the Mexican forces. The Mexicans therefore began pushing for an offensive role in the fight, a move which would keep them engaged with the modernization process while simultaneously satisfying many Mexican generals' eagerness to fight. The Mexican political leadership also concluded that it might enjoy a greater role in the post-war era if its soldiers participated in combat, and President Roosevelt responded favorably. As a result, Mexico formed the 201st (Air) Squadron, which trained in Texas and other states beginning in the summer of 1944 and flew combat sorties in the Philippines during the last months of the war.⁶⁶

The major force for change during the first half of the 1940s certainly was the war, but other agents of change that had been at work in the years prior to the conflict continued to alter the cultural landscape. The revolutionary efforts to build roads and schools remained vital instruments for expanding and intensifying the cultural market. Education shifted away from the "socialist" model of the 1930s and focused instead on "democracy, moderation, and national unity," implementing the Law for the Elimination of Illiteracy in 1944.⁶⁷ The anthropologist Oscar Lewis captured the impact of these ongoing endeavors when he conducted several field studies of the village of Tepoztlán, Morelos in 1943 and 1944.⁶⁸ Surveying the same village Robert Redfield had studied in 1926 and 1927, Lewis captures the development of the maturing cultural market.⁶⁹

The primary influences for change have been the new road [paved in 1936], the granting of *ejidos*, and the expansion of school facilities. . . .

⁶⁶ Torres, 142-151.

⁶⁷ MacLachlan and Beezley, 359-360. The law required literate people to teach at least one illiterate how to read, and it provided various awards, ranging from theater passes, to presidential medals, to college scholarships, for those who taught large numbers of their fellow citizens how to read.

⁶⁸ Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1951).

⁶⁹ Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlán—a Mexican Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930).

Because these innovations occurred within such a short period, their effects were mutually reinforcing and the tempo of change was accelerated. The road broke down the barriers of isolation and gave Tepoztlán easy access to new markets; the granting of ejidos supplied a somewhat broader land base, thereby increasing production; the corn mills improved the lot of the women and gave them free time which they could devote to commerce and other gainful occupations. The villagers obtained a new source of income from the sale of their ciruelas [plums] and other fruits which gained commercial value after the means of communication were improved. The road was also responsible for the tourist trade, more frequent social contacts with *Cuernavaca*, and indirectly the changes in clothing styles.⁷⁰

Other changes during this period in the village's cultural life included a dramatic increase in newspaper circulation, expanded telephone service to complement passenger activity on newly established bus routes, and more emphasis on Spanish instead of Nahuatl (especially among the younger generation).⁷¹ While these changes mostly were a result of patterns established in the years immediately preceding the war, the conflict did directly affect some in the village. About fifteen Tepoztecan villagers worked as *braceros* in the United States. Conscription pulled an unknown number of men into the military, and one member fought with the 201st in the Philippines.⁷²

While the war provided a broad but dynamic context for change, we must again emphasize the significance of key individuals who greased the wheels of cooperation. The leading figures' commitment to cooperation contributed significantly to the strengthening of the cultural markets in both lands. President Avila Camacho's enthusiastic embrace of the *Bracero* program allowed tens of thousands of Mexicans to settle for extended periods in the United States. Similarly Ambassador Messersmith's strong advocacy for Mexican development initiatives undoubtedly helped more of the

⁷⁰ Lewis, 443-444. School enrollment in the village jumped from less than 100 in 1926 to over 600 in 1943.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31-35.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 36-38

projects receive approval from an otherwise win-the-war focused and highly bureaucratized American War Production Board.⁷³ Half-hearted or unsupportive leadership would have allowed historical prejudices or wartime exigencies to restrict significantly the interaction and associated cultural transmission. Wholly oppositional or obstructionist attitudes at the top levels of government might have reduced cultural flow to a trickle.

Private Business

Despite Mexico's push to develop its own manufacturing capacity and many American firms' limited access to materials for consumer products, American corporations' direct investment in Mexico still increased modestly during the war. A pronounced change occurred in the direction of the investment, however, with more going towards industry and commerce and a smaller percentage heading to electricity, transport and communications. In part this shift reflected the much greater presence of American governmental credit for hydroelectric and road projects, and in part the removal of key competitors such as German firms operating in the chemicals industry.⁷⁴ Industrial giants such as Ford made profit in Mexico throughout the war years, in some cases by focusing on the provision of spare parts.⁷⁵ And some firms used the wartime cooperative agreements to their advantage. Pepsi Cola, for example, purchased sugar at an agreed upon quota price as opposed to the market price and thus became more

⁷³ Torres, 181-184; Stiller, *George Messersmith*, 190-191.

⁷⁴ Torres, 240-245. In 1940 the total amount of private foreign direct investment was \$449.1 dollars, with 7.13 percent, 31.45 percent and 31.62 percent directed to, respectively, industry, electricity, and transportation. By 1946 the figures were \$575.4 invested, with the portions now at 24.42 percent, 23.73 percent and 18.41 percent.

⁷⁵ Mira Wilkins and Frank Earnest Hill, *American Business Abroad: Ford on Six Continents* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), 335. Ford Motor Company, S.A.'s profit in Mexico increased seven-fold from \$112,000 in 1939 to \$851,000 in 1945.

competitive in the Mexican market than it otherwise would have been.⁷⁶ Immediately after the war some corporations were able to maneuver within the new ISI orbit, such as Ford Mexico taking advantage of import quotas that Mexico established in 1947.⁷⁷ Some of the governments' cooperative agreements, such as the Eximbank's \$8 million loan for the Altos Hornos steel plant, however, contributed to Mexican manufacturers' ability to compete with their American rivals.⁷⁸ And in general, the Mexican embrace of internal development caused more American businesses investing in Mexico to do so in a low profile way so as not to draw the attention of protectionists.⁷⁹ The most significant private business conduits of culture during the war, therefore, were the American entertainment firms that took advantage both of the wartime solidarity and of the increasing electrification of Mexico. In addition, these entertainment firms received support from the American government because their broad message complemented the American government's cultural diplomacy effort and long-range plan for a strong commercial presence in the hemisphere. Mexican entertainment industries concurrently solidified their own market share and sold their customers on the charms of the modern life, and they even made some inroads into the American market.

Cinema and Radio

World War II was a boon time for the movie industry in both countries. Americans wanted—and were encouraged to seek—diversion from the stresses of war. Hollywood met this need with comedies, romances, and musicals, gaining record gate receipts in the process. “First grade war pictures,” noted the magazine *Variety*, “are

⁷⁶ Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, 116-117.

⁷⁷ Wilkins and Hill, 357-358. In 1947 Mexico prohibited the import of any automobiles.

⁷⁸ Torres, 206-207.

⁷⁹ Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, 191-247.

always grossers.” By July 1942 nearly one half of the films Hollywood produced were on “war topics,” although this percentage dropped and the amount for the entire struggle was closer to about one fourth. A similar early interest in and then flagging regard for American war movies occurred with Latin Americans, who for the most part had less of a vested stake in the conflict.⁸⁰ For Mexico these years constituted the “golden” period for its movie industry. A pantheon of Mexican cinema directors and stars emerged or secured their places during the war and Mexican films expanded their positions both in their own domestic market and abroad in Central and South America.⁸¹ The parallel success of American and Mexican film industries in their own countries produced a back and forth competition across the border as well.

With its European distribution hopes almost completely disrupted by the war, Hollywood hoped to make up for this loss by carving out a larger share of its already large Latin America market. In 1942 Paramount Studios hired the Mexican actor Arturo de Córdova for a six-year contract which included the following year’s production of Ernest Hemingway’s, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.⁸² As their titles suggest, many films coming from Hollywood now had an explicit Mexican theme: *Mexico Monumental*, *Song of Mexico*, *Mexicana*, *Strange Obsession in Mexico*, and *Masquerade in Mexico*. The overall quality of these films was mixed at best, and critics considered the genre to be the “usual extravaganzas of good intentions and bad art.” The OCIAA movie division’s first director, John Hay Whitney, tried to militate against the crassest aspects of “Hollywood’s macerating mills” by asking the studios to consult Latin American cultural experts.

⁸⁰ Usabel, 145-149.

⁸¹ Agustín, 27-31.

⁸² Usabel, 163.

Mexico was the only country to enjoy such input, with Manuel Reachi serving as an adviser.⁸³

Although Whitney grew frustrated with most of his attempts to instill a degree of cultural sensitivity among Hollywood producers, he did land one major success. In 1941 the OCIAA contracted with Walt Disney to produce twenty-four 16 mm short features with Latin American themes. Disney, Whitney, and a production team first took an extended tour of Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil to gain a sense of what cultural angles might work best there. Then in 1943 Disney released *Los Tres Caballeros*, which featured the Mexican actress Carmen Miranda, Donald Duck, “a cocky Mexican Casanova” named Panchito, and a Brazilian jitter bird named José Carioca. The film’s long run in Mexico City earned over \$120,000 in eight weeks, which was the most revenue earned in the capital to that time.⁸⁴ Eventually President Avila Camacho presented the highest award that his government could offer to foreigners, the Aztec Eagles, to the OIAA, Walt Disney, and Louis B. Mayer of MGM studios for their wartime publicity efforts.⁸⁵

The success of Mexican films domestically and in the greater Caribbean caused American studios to modify the films they exported. Through the late 1930s, American companies resisted dubbing their films into Spanish because of the expense and because they assumed that in the larger urban areas there was a fair degree of familiarity with English. But in 1941 several Mexican-produced films began to compete well against the American offerings in Havana and Mexico City. In the next two years, the “native

⁸³ Usabel, 157; 161-163. Before arriving at this post Whitney was serving as the director of the New York Museum of Modern Art’s film library.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁸⁵ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 333-334.

competition was becoming ever more significant and challenging,” with Mexican companies earning approximately forty percent of the gate receipts in 1943.⁸⁶ Mexican producers won market share in the greater Latin American market by employing Latin stars from throughout the region. The number of feature films produced in Mexico nearly tripled between 1940 and 1945, jumping from twenty-nine to eighty-five.⁸⁷ And while American-made films still were stronger in the largest urban areas, Mexican films gained a superior position in the newly connected rural areas that had fewer English speakers and larger percentages of illiteracy that prevented the reading of Spanish subtitles. Trying to reverse their slipping market share, several American companies resumed an approach they had briefly experimented with before the Great Depression.

Dubbing American works into Spanish, however, created a number of problems. One Spanish accent did not satisfy the multitude of Latin American linguistic proclivities, especially among art critics and the more educated viewers. Cinema trade journals complained about the mix of Castilian and Mexican accents and how the process distorted the original voices. “Dubbing creates an impression of falsehood,” wrote *El Cine Grafico* in 1944.⁸⁸ The Screen Actors Guild of Mexico, meanwhile, tried to protect the recent success that the national industry had achieved. It prohibited its members from working as dubbing agents in Hollywood or New York, blacklisting those who violated the decree. And it lobbied, unsuccessfully, the Mexican government to require that any dubbing be “performed in Mexican labs and by Mexican experts.” In the end, the complaints and expenses associated with dubbing—especially for a still developing

⁸⁶ Usabel, 182-183.

⁸⁷ Krauze, 521.

⁸⁸ Usabel, 188-189.

market—made it so the technique did not significantly improve the market for American films at this time.⁸⁹

In addition to the growing sales, 1943 marked a major year for Mexican cinema in terms of its artistic advancement. The director Emilio (El Indio) Fernández Fuentes released *Flor Sylvestre* and *María Candelaria* (starring Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz.) These films won much critical claim including awards at the 1946 Cannes film festival. Fernández’s success helped spur American interest in him, and in 1946 he collaborated with John Ford on *The Fugitive*.⁹⁰ That year also saw the creation of the Ariel Awards, a “local version of Hollywood’s Oscars,” by the newly formed Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences.⁹¹ By the end of the war, stars such as Del Río, Jorge Negrete, and Mario Moreno—a.k.a. Cantinflas—had attained near iconic status.⁹² Although Mexico’s “Golden Age” in cinematography would pass, at the end of World War II the national industry had arguably emerged as a legitimate producer of film culture. Hollywood had been so successful at developing a market for its products in Mexico that it spurred the creation of its own competition.

While most of Mexico’s industry’s success was due to the creativity of the actors, directors and private studios, it also received a modest financial boost from the Mexican state. In 1942 the Ávila Camacho administration created the Banco Cinematógrafo to

⁸⁹ Usabel, 187-190. The Mexican actors’ union also suggested a requirement that Hollywood dub into English and distribute one Mexican produced film for each American film that was dubbed into Spanish and shown in Mexico, and it sought a demand for 10 million feet of film stock. The Mexican government did not pass such regulations.

⁹⁰ Peter N. Standish and Steven M. Bell, *Customs and Culture of Mexico* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 133-136.

⁹¹ Anne Rubenstein, “Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era,” in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 648-651.

⁹² Krauze, 520-522.

provide low-interest loans to filmmakers. And in 1945 the government exempted Mexican filmmakers from having to pay income taxes.⁹³

All the critical and commercial success Mexican filmmakers enjoyed in the early war years gave them the confidence to attempt an entry into the American market. This effort was assisted somewhat by the dearth of European films and by the general American sympathy for Western Hemisphere solidarity. In 1943 two theaters in New York's Times Square began showing major Mexican releases which also were reviewed in the *New York Times* and *Variety*. Paramount and MGM affiliates began to dub their Mexican affiliates' productions into English for distribution in the states. In Texas, where Mexican migration had a long history, "there was a trend toward remodeling store buildings and converting them into Spanish movie houses." During the course of the war, about two hundred theaters eventually showed Mexican films in American theaters.⁹⁴

The desire of Mexican immigrants to see some familiar cultural themes in movies shown in the United States may well have helped American films to succeed subsequently in Mexico. The European cultural historian Donald Sassoon cites a few reasons why he believes the United States became, in his words, a "culturally dominant state" since 1945. Besides its powerful industrial capacity and the extent to which cultural production was industrialized, the size of its domestic audience has allowed it first to make money at home and then tap into overseas markets as a sort of bonus. And the fact that the domestic audience in the United States was so diverse—indeed reflecting the

⁹³ Rubenstein, "Mass Media," 652.

⁹⁴ Usabel, 186-187. Mexican companies also tried to integrate American directors and actors into some of their shows by offering higher salaries than were permitted by wartime limits in the north, but the Americans refused the offer out of concern for appearing "unpatriotic."

diversity of the world—meant that cultural strains intended for the home audience would also appeal to those living in the homeland.⁹⁵

The Mexican immigrant experience in the United States itself became a theme for one provocative Mexican cinema director's work aimed at his home audience. Alejandro Galindo's *Campeón sin corona* (1945) explores the difficulty that a successful Mexican boxer faces when he goes north and faces an English-speaking Mexican-American opponent. In the later forties, Galindo tackled the struggle between the traditionalism of a Mexican father and the modern ways of an appliance salesman who courts his daughter (*Una familia de tantas*).⁹⁶

In Mexico, the government's drive to electrify the nation allowed its citizens to partake in the cinema's seductive modernizing project. For example, completion of a nearby hydroelectric plant allowed the village of San José to see two movies per week starting in 1944. Movies featuring Cantinflas and romantic ranchers regularly brought a full house, and war movies and English-language westerns became very popular as well. Viewers "liked the advertisements that preceded the features, too." As urban moviegoers in the United States and Mexico had done before them, rural San Joseans began "to live in an imaginary other world."⁹⁷ Indeed, they could now participate vicariously in the urban world, and many soon would migrate to the attractions they saw.

Both countries, along with their allies and enemies, believed filmmaking could play an important role in rallying public support for the war effort.⁹⁸ In Mexico, the film *Simón Bolívar* (1941) suggested pan-American unity while *La Isla de la Pasión* promoted

⁹⁵ Donald Sassoon, "On Cultural Markets," *New Left Review* second series # 17 (September-October 2002), 113-126.

⁹⁶ Standish and Bell, 138.

⁹⁷ González, 222.

⁹⁸ Usabel, 145.

patriotism.⁹⁹ The OCIAA directed significant funding to friendly Mexican cinema efforts, which prompted Ambassador Messersmith to write that Coordinator Nelson Rockefeller's promotion of American movie stars "smacked of cultural imperialism."¹⁰⁰ In 1944 American firms distributed films in America to demonstrate how successful Mexico was. And after the war, MGM captured the American public's mood for a sunny post-war vacation with its release of the star-studded musical, *Holiday in Mexico*.¹⁰¹

The OCIAA also relied heavily upon radio broadcasting for its cultural diplomacy campaign in the Americas. "As a flexible and economical means of reaching mass audiences," radio provided a natural media for pursuing the Americans' twin objectives of winning the war and creating a post war environment well-suited to trading with the United States.¹⁰² For the first goal, the broadcast schedule initially included shows that sounded similar to those broadcast north of the border.

Along with news programs the networks produced dramatizations of war-related news such as *We Are at War (Estamos en guerra)*, *Ideas Cannot Be Killed (Las ideas no se matan)*, and *The March of Time (La marcha del tiempo)*, which summarized weekly news development and emphasized the physical and moral strength of the Allied nations. Programs such as *Counterespionage (Contraespionaje)*, *The Mysterious One (El misterioso)*, and *The Spirit of Victory (Espíritu de victoria)* presented serialized stories of pro-Allies heroes and anti-Axis wartime adventures and intrigues.¹⁰³

American commercial (and cultural) strength in Mexico, meanwhile, was nurtured by the advertisements for assorted American-produced products which conveniently

⁹⁹ Torres, 104.

¹⁰⁰ Stiller, 180-183.

¹⁰¹ Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 72. The film starred Walter Pidgeon, Jane Powell, and Roddy McDowall, and included an appearance of Fidel Castro as an extra. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0038606/>.

¹⁰² Joy Elizabeth Hayes. *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2000, 100-101.

¹⁰³ Hayes, 104-105.

accompanied these shows. Finally, the inclusion of American popular music via *El hit parade* provided Mexicans with a general exposure to American culture.

Various statistics and actions suggest how significant cultural diplomacy in the Western Hemisphere became for the United States in World War II. Just considering the government coffers, we note that the OCIAA's budget grew from just \$3.5 million in 1941 to a peak of \$60 million during the war. But the project was a joint public-private venture. Besides the well-connected Nelson Rockefeller as Coordinator, numerous powerful businessmen served on the OCIAA Communications Subcommittee, including the general managers of Coca-Cola and Colgate Palmolive.¹⁰⁴ Firms directly engaged in the war production effort, such as General Electric and General Motors, advertised that their advanced products were keys to winning the war.¹⁰⁵ Thanks in large part to Rockefeller's lobbying, businesses that sponsored the radio broadcasts were "for the first time in U.S. history, allow[ed] . . . to deduct from their corporation income tax, a 'reasonable amount' for advertising and promotional activities in foreign markets." At their peak, OCIAA's programs reached about 75 percent of Mexico City's radio audience and 50 percent of the country overall.¹⁰⁶

As military action began to turn clearly in the Allies' favor, the OCIAA leadership even became worried about projecting "any appearance of United States imperialism in Latin America." One directive from 1943 stated "in the cultural field, we should be careful not to emphasize moves which would indicate that we were imposing our cultural ideas, publications, or other media of expression upon those countries

¹⁰⁴ Hayes, 101-103.

¹⁰⁵ Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 72-80.

¹⁰⁶ Hayes, 106-113.

because of our superior technical and economic resources.”¹⁰⁷ The presence of such an internal directive suggests that some critics believed that Americans might be overstepping appropriate boundaries. Nevertheless, American public and private resources did not by themselves dictate developments in the radio industry.

Emilio Azcárraga, who continued to expand his position in Mexico’s cinema and radio industries throughout the 1930s, enjoyed a privileged relationship with the American executives.¹⁰⁸ Because of his powerful position within the Mexican market—XEW had by far the largest audience in Mexico City and his stations were strong in other large cities—Azcárraga could blacklist programs and their sponsors that appeared on competing stations. His group influenced the work of the OCIAA’s Coordination Committee for Mexico, which began using Mexican staff to make shows that would present a more authentic sound to listeners. This example of cultural syncretism to convey a message more effectively subsequently influenced the advertising techniques of American companies such as Sears and improved their sales.¹⁰⁹ To maintain Azcárraga’s support, the OCIAA and its supporting American network chiefs paid the Mexican mogul well and provided his growing network with high tech equipment from the United States, which only strengthened his competitive advantage over his rivals. American officials generally deferred to his decisions and only very carefully worked with his competitors.¹¹⁰ The Mexican government, meanwhile, now only played a minimal role in the broadcast industry. “By the early 1940s the Azcárraga organization,” concludes historian Joe Elizabeth Hayes, “had become the de facto representative of Mexican

¹⁰⁷ Hayes, 105.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter Two, pp. 120-122, for a discussion of Azcárraga’s early efforts in the entertainment field.

¹⁰⁹ Moreno, 81-82.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

national interests in the sphere of broadcasting and popular culture more broadly.” In the 1950s the mogul would transform his dominate position in radio into a similar place in television for decades to come.¹¹¹

The conspicuous advertising campaign jointly executed by the American government, American businesses, and the Azcárraga communications conglomerate produced important socio-economic and cultural effects. On the one hand, these advertisements obviously promoted American-style consumerism, albeit framed within a Mexican context. Advertisers capitalized on the theme of wartime cooperation and argued that consumption of industrial products, such as General Motors cars displayed in a 1945 ad, would strengthen Mexico’s future. The commercial aspects of two national cultures in Mexico, according to one study of the era’s business culture, merged ever closer. “The simultaneous display of different forms of Mexican nationalism and the spread of American values and ideals,” writes Julio Moreno, “made it difficult to make a distinction between ‘Mexican’ and ‘American.’”¹¹² The commercials, along with the extension of the nation’s road and electrical networks, also added to the accelerating trends of mobility and modernity. As San José, for example, became connected to cities near and far, and as its citizens regularly began to visit them, advertisements simultaneously displayed enticing snapshots of modernity. The appeal of “beers, Coca-Cola, liquors, clothing, gasoline, patent medicines, insecticides, cattle feed, and the hundreds of other products of an industrial society” caused many of the locals to crave city life and consider migration.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Hayes, 106-120. In 1995, *Televisa* controlled 80 percent of the Mexican television audience.

¹¹² Moreno, 121-129.

¹¹³ González, 223-225. González notes that politicians, doctors performing their required social service, thieves, and diseases traveling on the trucks from Mexico City also came with the completion of the

Migrants

Migrants between the two countries during the war produced ripples that continued to expand throughout each national culture for decades to come. The two governments' 1942 agreement to meet a labor shortage in the United States by transferring Mexican workers northward dramatically reinvigorated and expanded an earlier established migratory network. For over two decades, the *Bracero* program permitted Mexican workers to enrich their homeland with remittances and goods sent or brought home. At the same time these government organized workers—and their relative wealth—spurred even larger numbers of unorganized migrants to cross the border surreptitiously and to transform the culture of the countless American towns they settled in. Fairly large numbers of American tourists, meanwhile, motored along the growing network of Mexican highways during the war. This wartime flow of “good neighbors” almost immediately became a flood of festive tourists whose pent-up demand for fun likewise utterly transformed several destinations in Mexico.

World War II affected the United States' supply of agricultural labor in significant ways. The country's massive industrialization effort attracted large numbers of semi-skilled workers to jobs that usually paid higher wages than did agricultural work. The military effort—ultimately encompassing some twelve million men and women—likewise absorbed some of agriculture's traditional labor pool. Finally, in California the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the frightened and angry public's response resulted in the removal of skilled and efficient ethnically Japanese workers from certain specialty

highway. As for a quantitative sense of mobility, he states that 90% of the village's residents who were 15 years or older had traveled to Mexico City or Guadalajara during the period 1943-1956. Most “returned filled with wonder.”

crops. All these factors meant that growers who normally relied on an abundant supply of low-cost agricultural workers expected soon to pay more under wartime conditions.¹¹⁴

The growing need for labor became apparent nearly two years before the United States entered the war. A report from the Mexican consul in McAllen, Texas noting an increase in illegal immigration confirmed that the demand for Mexican labor had been picking up as early as 1940. The American economy at that time had begun to assume a larger responsibility for arming the allies, and many rural Americans headed to the cities for higher paying jobs. Thus western sugar beet growers made formal requests in 1941 for the importation of Mexican laborers.¹¹⁵ So too did citrus growers and the Southern Pacific Railroad, which requested the importation of 5,000 laborers for maintaining its track.¹¹⁶ The U.S. government did not yet feel the demand was high enough, however, and the Mexican government similarly expressed its concerns that the farmers' call was really just an effort to keep their labor costs low. By mid-1942, however, with the United States at war and with illegal immigration still at a high level—American officials had returned to Mexico some 6,000 illegal migrants in May 1942—it became clear to both countries that the demand was real.¹¹⁷

Therefore on August 4, 1942 Mexican and American officials signed an agreement that made Washington, D.C. responsible for the coordination between the *braceros* and individual farmers. The Mexican government was more comfortable with this arrangement because Mexicans laborers who had dealt directly with American

¹¹⁴ Ernesto Galaraza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Charlotte, NC: McNally and Loftin Publishers, 1964), 41-42.

¹¹⁵ Torres, 246-248.

¹¹⁶ Galaraza, 45.

¹¹⁷ *Excelsior*, 5 June 1942; Torres, 250-251.

farmers had been treated poorly in the past.¹¹⁸ The agreement guaranteed a minimum salary, work availability, and establishment of a savings account to avoid the threat of discontented and penurious *braceros* returning to Mexico.¹¹⁹

The response in Mexico City streets to the new program was enthusiastic. First hundreds and soon a couple thousand men were waiting in long lines to get the jobs. Many arrived at 4:00 a.m. and many were skilled workers hoping to switch from field work to an industrial position if the opportunity presented itself. Indeed, although the American government had tried to allay the concerns of its labor unions by promising the *braceros*' quick return to Mexico upon completion of the harvest, the demands for skilled railway and industrial workers only increased.¹²⁰ In March 1944 some 3,000 applicants went to the national stadium in Mexico City hoping to obtain the "precious *bracero* permits."¹²¹ The majority of the *braceros* came from just three Mexican locales that were now key nodes on both the migratory or national networks of mobility. Guanajuato, Michoacan, and the Federal District provided the great majority of *braceros*, with 87, 81, and 57 percent of the annual totals for the respective years of 1942, 1943, and 1944.¹²²

The pronounced federal interference in the job market through the provision of the *bracero* program provided a boost to the transmission of Mexican culture northward and American culture southward. Once in their new locales, migrants created the demand for the foods, clothes, newspapers, and radio programs to which they were accustomed. This cultural market effect became long term—it has continued to today—as the *bracero*

¹¹⁸ Stiller, 190-191.

¹¹⁹ Torres, 251-253.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 251-254. The great majority were single men. Women could only enter the program if they were accompanying their spouses.

¹²¹ Knight, 67-68.

¹²² Gonzalez, 218-219.

program intensified the network connection of migrants coming to the United States, both with government sponsorship and clandestinely. In 1946, for example, an estimated 130,000 migrants entered illegally. Although Mexico's standard of living had slowly improved during the war, the migrants still "preferred the gringo's dollars, loud sports jackets, and radios to working on their *ejido* parcels."¹²³ And the migrants provided a huge material boost to the Mexican economy. Between 1943 and 1945, their remittances accounted for nearly 13 percent of Mexico's "export" income (1.1 of 9.1 million pesos in 1945).¹²⁴ The United States' near dominant economic position at the time meant that its money and consumerist economic culture in effect overflowed its boundaries. And as it did so, Mexicans could see in advertisements or hear through the *braceros*' word of mouth about the riches of the latest *el dorado*.

The economic impact of war brought a two-way flow of migration to some of the large border city areas that contained American military facilities. In the greater San Diego area thousands of naval and Marine personnel training for combat had access to alcohol and brothels in nearby Tijuana. Meanwhile some 25,000 army personnel stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso looked to Ciudad Juarez as a "mecca" for its night life. Ciudad Juarez received much northbound traffic from "*braceros*" and from many of the *repatriados* who had gone south during the Great Depression.¹²⁵

¹²³ González, 218-219.

¹²⁴ Knight, 67.

¹²⁵ W. H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History* (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1990), 240-242. *Braceros*, entering at the rate of 2,000 per month, began to work in the cotton fields surrounding El Paso. Ciudad Juarez's population rose from 49,000 in 1940 to 122,000 in 1950. Texas did not receive "*braceros*" from the formal agreement between Mexico and the United States because of the many past incidences of poor treatment in that state. Many new Mexican agricultural workers nevertheless labored in Texas during the war, and some of the "*braceros*" Timmons reports may well have been simply enroute westward or northward from El Paso.

For middle class Mexican-Americans in major southwest cities in the United States, the war provided an opportunity for further integration into American society and culture. Serving in the armed forces provided many with a sense of honor,

as thousands of Mexican Americans displayed their patriotism in the struggle against the Axis Powers. The armed forces brought together Mexicans and Mexican Americans from across the United States and made them conscious of each other and their diversity in language, . . . , experience, origin, and occupation. The result was a greater awareness of the Mexican community in the United States.¹²⁶

The Roosevelt administration, meanwhile, emphasized the pluralistic culture of the country.¹²⁷ In his study of Mexican-Americans in San Antonio, Richard Garcia states that “World War II intensified the effort in San Antonio and throughout the Southwest to educate and Americanize the Mexican population.”¹²⁸ While some long-seeded racial prejudices lingered, Anglo leaders in the Texas city nevertheless increased their efforts to treat Mexican-Americans on a more equal footing. At the same time, Mexican-Americans began to insist more on political participation and improved educational opportunities. As they entered the American political and social orbit, they also interjected their Mexican cultural traditions.

Tortillas and beans provide us with two of but many popular culture transplants that were assuming a slightly new form amidst the mixing of a bi-national modernity. The Mexican inventor of the automatic tortilla maker, Luis Romero Soto, was by the mid

¹²⁶ MacLachlan and Beezley, 360-364 and 388-389. About 250,000 Mexicans served with the United States forces during the war, including 14,000 who participated in combat.

¹²⁷ The Roosevelt administration’s emphasis on pluralism was designed to present a contrast to the Nazis’ quest for cultural homogeneity in Germany.

¹²⁸ Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1991), 201-203.

1940s starting to increase sales of his machines to American food processors.¹²⁹

Presumably some of the demand was coming from Mexicans and Mexican-Americans working in the United States. In addition, there now was also demand for the efficiency of an automatic tortilla maker from Anglo restaurateurs and food processors who were selling their version of “Mexican” food to Anglos who perhaps had traveled to Mexico or who lived near Mexican-Americans or Mexicans. George Ashley was one such entrepreneur who operated a restaurant and food processing plant in El Paso. Ashley sold various Mexican food products that “can at last, be served in your home with all their unique piquancy at a minimum of trouble and expense, because Ashley’s famous Tortillas and Enchilada Sauce are now put up in vacuum sealed cans which protect their flavor and freshness indefinitely.” Ashley’s other canned food offerings included: “Original Frijoles Refritos (Fried Beans) [which] can be made by cutting the contents of the can in half-inch slices and then frying like potato patties” and “Ashley’s Canned Spanish Rice.”¹³⁰ Ashley’s American method of marketing canned tortillas did not survive, but canned beans have, and to this day they remain a staple in the “Mexican” food section of markets across the country.

Tourism

Active promotion combined with an improved highway system had enabled Mexican tourism to achieve impressive growth during the 1930s, so that on the eve of the

¹²⁹ AGN, Luis Romero Soto Colección (Caja 5), Sección XIV No 1-5, Serie Correspondencia Commercial, Luis Romero Soto to N.C. Barnes, n.d. and Luis Romero Soto to Sam Winkler, n.d. Soto received a U.S. patent for his device in 1903 and began selling models in the U.S. by at least 1926.

¹³⁰ Ibid., Luis Romero Soto to George Ashley 30 April 1941. Ashley contracted with Soto to purchase the latter’s tortilla maker but then subsequently canceled the deal for an unspecified reason. In subsequent years, Ashley’s Mexican foods became a leading producer of “Mexican” foods in the United States until it was acquired by Bruce Foods, Inc. in 1980. For a brief history of Ashley’s, see www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/Bruce-Foods-Corporation-Company-History.html.

war the industry attracted nearly ten times as many visitors as it had in 1929. As Table 2 indicates, this upward trend continued with a record number in 1941, suffered a moderate downturn in the year after Pearl Harbor, and then climbed steadily again in the last three years of the war. Immediately after the war the number of Americans coming to Mexico increased dramatically and by 1950 there were over 384,000 visitors—a near thirty fold increase over 1929 and about three times the peak number of *braceros* who worked in the United States during any year of the war. Also influencing this spike was the lost appeal for visiting Europe during the war or in the first years of recovery from widespread devastation.

Table 2: Annual Total Number of Tourists Visiting Mexico¹³¹

<u>year</u>	<u>number</u>	<u>year</u>	<u>number</u>
1929	13,892	1939	127,822
1930	23,769	1940	125,569
1931	41,271	1941	165,627
1932	36,964	1942	90,398
1933	39,541	1943	126,905
1934	63,739	1944	120,218
1935	75,432	1945	156,550
1936	92,092	1946	254,844
1937	130,091	1950	384,297
1938	102,866		

The growing tensions overseas and the American government's desire to encourage Pan American solidarity both provided Mexican tourism boosters with a magnificent opportunity upon which they effectively capitalized. The Mexican Tourist Association (AMT) took the lead. Under the direction of the former Minister of Finance and still well-connected Luis Montes de Oca, the AMT gathered prominent members of the revolutionary elite, such as Aaron Saenz, who could effectively unite the public and private sectors behind tourism. The Bank of Mexico, *Petróleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX),

¹³¹Berger, 121. Americans comprised the great majority (approximately 90 percent) of the visitors.

Mexicana Airlines (a subsidiary of PanAm Airways), various railroad lines and hotels, and several important commercial institutions that stood to make a profit all had representatives in the AMT. With this strong collection of networked commercial leaders, many of whom had former ties to the government, the AMT was much more successful than its government predecessors had been at attracting private energy and financing for the development and marketing of tourism.¹³²

The AMT employed a timely, creative, and aggressive plan to capitalize on the war's potential for boosting Mexican tourism. A study the group used suggested that motor tourism produced more ancillary spending for meals, gas, hotels, etc. than did rail travel, so the AMT began to emphasize automobile tourism.¹³³ In this regard, it collected some MEX\$207,000 in donations in 1939 and reported an expected collection of MEX\$665,000 for 1940. With that money, the group or its contracted agents produced hundreds of thousands of quality brochures, pamphlets, and posters which it distributed at strategic points in both countries. Train lines in the American Midwest, hotels in Texas and Mexico, consulates in several cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Mexico City, and a multitude of conventions received the glossy literature. The AMT enlisted the support of Mexico's Secretary of Communications and Public Works (SCOP) to produce 400,000 copies of brochures highlighting regional attractions in Oaxaca, Cuernavaca and other noted destinations. And it coordinated American publicity efforts on radio shows in New York and St. Louis. Finally, it sponsored free trips to Mexican tourist spots for American celebrities and journalists who would then report on the good times.¹³⁴

¹³² Berger, 75-77.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 79-84.

Government promotion helped as well. Both president Cárdenas and Roosevelt encouraged travel as an act of good will. The years 1940 and 1941 constituted a “Tourist Biennial” according to a proclamation Cárdenas signed in January 1940. The president’s statement was seconded by the Pan American Union, which selected Mexico City to host the second annual Inter-American Travel Conference in September 1941.¹³⁵ President Roosevelt, meanwhile, encouraged vacationing as a stress reliever and specifically advised taking the Inter-American Highway. In between the statement and the conference, more and more of Mexican propaganda adopted Roosevelt’s theme of being a good neighbor. The new Avila Camacho administration, which came into office in December 1940, also placed an individual who was most enthusiastic about tourism into a prime position. Miguel Alemán, as Interior Minister (and later on as president) became one of the strongest advocates for the industry.¹³⁶ Indeed many historians credit Alemán with the development of Mexico’s first modern resort destination, Acapulco, which attained an almost iconic status for about two decades after the war.¹³⁷

Dina Berger’s detailed study of the early development of the Mexican tourist industry summarizes the structure that had been created from the 1920s through World War II and who was responsible for creating it:

Although the construction of tourist infrastructure remained, at least until the mid-1940s, largely in Mexican hands and under Mexico’s control, tourist developers looked to Americans for know-how and support. What emerged was a wide network of cooperation between individuals, businesses, and government agencies in Mexico and the United States who rallied around or profited from tourist development.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Berger, 84-86. The first conference had been held in San Francisco in 1939.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 71-87.

¹³⁷ Knight, 68-69; Andrew Sackett, “The Two Faces of Acapulco during the Golden Age,” in *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 500-510; Krauze, 520.

¹³⁸ Berger, 119-120.

Together these agents of change constructed a cultural market. A sovereign and sustainable economic sector was their macroeconomic goal, but the industry led to the Mexicans' "adoption of foreign cultural practices" ranging from "democratic values to capitalist practices that include the consumption of new foods and drinks like hotdogs, soda pop, and cocktails, music and clothing styles." In smaller amounts, American tourists also brought home new cultural goods and understandings, such as "new trends like the embroidered Latin American folk dress that became popular in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s." The Mexican tourism project during the war realized its primary economic objective, but its cultural impact was also significant.

Conclusion

One year after the war ended, Miguel Alemán won Mexico's presidential election. As many historians have noted, Alemán's election resulted in a strong commitment to modern industrial growth and a clear step back from the agrarian project Lázaro Cárdenas had vigorously advanced in the mid 1930s.¹³⁹ In between these two powerful presidents, Manuel Avila Camacho steadily led the country through war by embracing a close relationship with the United States. The political and economic ties that bound the two countries closer together than they had ever been before likewise created strong cultural linkages that have for the most part remained to this day. Close American involvement in the coordination of production levels and distribution timetables produced a sharing of organizational management ideas. The accumulation of foreign currency and increased access to American governmental financing facilitated Mexico's drive toward industrialization and urbanization.

¹³⁹ See Krauze, 526-600 and Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development*, 191-277.

The two countries' political and economic cooperation to win a modern war and then enter the post war as allies affected Mexicans from all walks of life. The traditional social practice of the *siesta*, for example, now was deemed out of sync with the relentless demands of an industrializing society at war. So President Avila Camacho in June 1944 decreed an end to the mid-afternoon break.¹⁴⁰ "Good neighbor" collaboration earlier in the war resulted in Harvard College building and transporting a powerful telescope some 3,300 miles from Cambridge to Tonantlintza, Puebla. Thus Mexico's first modern astrophysics lab opened in February 1942.¹⁴¹ A jointly executed and robust propaganda effort via cinema and radio bombarded Mexicans from all walks of life with advertisements for American goods while it urged sympathy for the Allied war effort. *Braceros* and American tourists began visiting each other's country and creating demand for their cultural preferences. The war, in Ambassador George Messersmith's estimation, had "enabled us to make more progress in our relationships with this neighbor than fifty years of peace."¹⁴²

But this "progress" came at a price. Cultural critics at the time and historians in more recent decades commented on the results of the closer relationship that formed during the war. Perhaps the most important contemporary analysis came from the future dean of Mexican historians, Daniel Cosío Villegas, who wrote "Mexico's Crisis" in November 1946. Cosío Villegas's work was itself an example of the new collaboration, as he had applied for funding from the Rockefeller Foundation to help him understand the

¹⁴⁰ MacLachlan and Beezley, 371. Doing away with the *siesta* also eliminated the need for two bus runs in the afternoon and saved electricity for nighttime work and lighting.

¹⁴¹ Jorge Bartolucci, "Developing Science in Developing Countries: The Harvard College Observatory and the Establishment of Modern Astrophysics in Mexico," *Mexican Studies* Vol. 21.1 (winter 2005), 33-58. The Mexican government financed the project, but the United States' supportive diplomatic attitude helped overcome skepticism about diverting wartime materials and energy to the Mexican project.

¹⁴² Stiller, 175.

transition from the Revolution to “neo-porfirisimo.”¹⁴³ While the work mostly criticized the political direction the revolutionary leaders had selected, it also warned that the increasing borrowing of American culture would corrupt Mexican values.¹⁴⁴ Ironically, Cosío Villegas had himself participated in the financial collaboration the two countries shared during the war.¹⁴⁵ But as the path toward integration continued after the war, and indeed seemed to accelerate with the election of Alemán, the future historian became worried.

[Mexico] will end by trusting its major problems to inspiration, or to imitation and submission to the United States. . . . We would call on that country for money, for technical training, for patterns in culture and art, for political advice; and we would end by adopting unchanged its whole scale of values, so alien to our history, our interest, and our taste. . . . Many of Mexico’s problems would then be resolved; the country might even enjoy an unaccustomed prosperity. But are we sure that our people, ourselves even, would in truth be happier?¹⁴⁶

Subsequent historians have also commented on the changing cultural milieu, although without the distraught tone of Cosío Villegas’s warning. Alan Knight, for example, succinctly notes the comparative place Mexico shared with other parts of the world as the United States emerged as a superpower at the end of the war. “The penetration of American mores—the *pochismo* which Vasconcelos had been denouncing for years and which had grown with the roads, tourism and manufacturing of the 1930s—thus accelerated during the war, in Mexico as in Europe.”¹⁴⁷ At a more local level, Luis Gonzalez’s micro-history of San José de Gracia weaves together the many strands of modernity that seemed to emerge as a whole cloth by the end of the war.

¹⁴³ Krauze, 525.

¹⁴⁴ Daniel Cosío Villegas, “Mexico’s Crisis,” in Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson, eds., *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 470-481.

¹⁴⁵ NARA, RG 229, Entry 20, Box 602, Folder - Mexican-American Commission Transportation, “Survey of Mexican Air Lines,” 26 August 1943.

¹⁴⁶ Villegas, 480-481.

¹⁴⁷ Knight, 66-67.

Modern communications and transportation, and close daily contact with the outside world—especially with the city—gave rise to a consciousness of certain desiderata that were incommensurable, yet real and distinguishable: wealth, city life, new inventions, mobility, travel, and emigration. It was the younger men of the middle class who, in the forties, began to feel that they were living in a prison, that their village world was narrow, crude, and dull. They no longer enjoyed their lives. They wanted something more: to make money, to live more comfortably, to meet girls, to do anything they felt like doing, to escape to the “States” or even to Mexico City. An entire generation faced the alternatives of urbanizing San José or moving to the city. Acquisition of land was no longer the main subject of conversation. Instead of agrarianism and agrarianists, they discussed emigration and émigrés and talked of bringing home machines, comforts, and new ways of doing things.¹⁴⁸

Two thirds of Mexicans still lived in villages at the end of the war, but the trend toward urbanization or at least city-like cultural attractions was clearly established.

Electrification and improved infrastructure provided more possibilities for villagers to enter the capitalist market. For even if *campesinos* did not migrate and remained as producers on the land, they now were more likely to produce a surplus and to be able to sell it to the city. And their cultural world increasingly included movies, radio, and consumer products.

The much larger gravitational pull of the United States’ economy and its earlier entry into industrialization and urbanization meant that its culture was not as strongly impacted by the bi-national collaboration.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, wherever large numbers of *braceros* and their unorganized coworking brethren settled there eventually appeared the trappings of their linguistic, culinary, musical, religious, and other cultural preferences. Some of these “Mexican” practices then blended into the wider spectrum of American

¹⁴⁸ Gonzalez, 225-226.

¹⁴⁹ In 1947 the United States, with just 7 percent of the world’s population, enjoyed 42 percent of world income, manufactured 57.5 percent of the world’s steel, and possessed 75 percent of the world’s gold. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

culture, positioned to influence the next dialectical round of cultural transmission between Mexico and the United States.

Conclusion

Traveling to Mexico in 1933, Aldous Huxley remarked, “all civilization, and especially industrial civilization, tends to turn human beings into the mere embodiments of particular social functions. The community gains in efficiency; but the individual is maimed.”¹ Just a year earlier he published the futuristic *Brave New World*, and now the debilitating heat and jarring roads along the road through Oaxaca enroute to Puebla and Mexico City prompted him to reflect on the ambivalent synthesis of “primitive” Indian ways and “civilized” developments in the growing cities.² He praises, for example, the traditional man’s ability to “develop the means for doing everything reasonably well,” but expresses concern for the modern’s tendency toward specialization. Huxley also appreciates, however, the material and cultural opportunities (e.g., books and literacy) promised by increasing urbanization. Seconding the conclusions of Stuart Chase, an American cultural commentator who also had just visited Mexico, Huxley believes that better roads, more schools, and Ford automobiles will help Mexico advance. But such material progress will exert a cultural price. “The problem,” Huxley therefore suggests, “is to evolve a society that shall retain all or most of the material and intellectual advantages resulting from specialization, while allowing its members to lead to the full the life of generalized human beings.” Mexico must somehow harness the power of the market but not become a mindless slave to its drive for efficiency. For in Huxley’s view,

¹ Aldous Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay: A Traveller’s Journal* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950), 242-260, with quote appearing on 260. The work originally was published in 1933.

² *Ibid.*, 251-259; 284-286. Although Huxley’s comments illuminate key developments such as cultural homogenization that were to transform the Mexican countryside and cities within the coming years, several of his terms might today strike us as elitist or possibly racist. For example, he cites the primitive man’s lack of a “critical faculty,” a deficit which leaves him “at the mercy of influences coming from civilization.” Elsewhere he compares six contestants competing for Miss Etlá—a small pueblo in Oaxaca—to oxen.

modern citizens in the powerful Western nations practically had “succumbed to the suicidal ambition to resemble ants.”³

Huxley’s insights concerning the tradeoffs between material gain and cultural loss parallel conclusions one contemporary cultural sociologist makes in the 1991 book *Cultural Imperialism*. “Capitalist modernity,” writes John Tomlinson, “. . . is technologically and economically powerful but culturally ‘weak’.”⁴ Further incorporation into the world’s capitalist market inevitably evokes a sense of loss for those in traditional, usually less efficient and less productive, cultures. As people specialize their production and begin to purchase items they previously had produced themselves, they lose the diverse capabilities of the generalist. Sharing similar concerns as Huxley and Tomlinson do about the cultural power of capitalism, I have offered this study of the leading factors that promoted culture to flow between the United-States and Mexico between 1920 and 1946. Like these two authors, I believe that understanding the key agents of change might allow us to steer and combine their influences in a more conscious way, one that recognizes the cultural as well as economic or political considerations of “the market.”

My argument for understanding the bi-national cultural transmission process focuses on the contributions of three large groups and how they influence the marketplace for goods and ideas. Government representatives provided or strengthened the legal framework for trade, investment, tourist activities, and worker exchange programs to flourish. State direction and investment also were instrumental to build the infrastructural networks that facilitated cultural transmission. The second main group, businessmen, worked right beside governmental representatives in most of these

³ Ibid., 257-260.

⁴ John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1991), 173-175, with quote appearing on 174.

endeavors and provided essential capital and ideas. Their pursuit of profit yielded a catalytic energy that brought about cultural changes. Finally, there were migrants, who exerted a strong cultural impact through sheer numbers and whose influence reflected the two countries' geographic proximity. Mexican migrants made frequent return visits to their homeland, establishing a strong network that conducted ideas, goods, and remittances across the border. By the late 1930s, large numbers of American tourists (i.e. temporary but wealthier migrants) came with enough disposable cash to entice cultural changes in the locales they visited.

In its attempt to explain bi-national cultural transmission, the argument extends Adam Smith's concepts of political economy to the cultural realm. I propose the concept of a "transnational cultural market," a location where people can or do exchange goods, practices and ideas that originated abroad. This market for culture exists alongside more traditional—usually economic—accountings of market operations, such as the supply of or demand for goods, capital, and labor. The Mexican government's provision of credit for building hotels from the 1930s onward, for example, facilitated the growth of a tourist centered culture in multiple cities. This paper thus posits a form of "cultural economy" that encompasses the market mechanisms imbedded in Smith's ideas about political economy. But in addition to the general positing of "the market" in action, we can identify even more specific cultural applications of the economics and spirit that inspired a *Wealth of Nations*.⁵

In Book II's account of the "Nature, Accumulation and Employment of Stock," for instance, Smith notes how societies and individuals dedicate their "stock" to basic consumption needs, fixed capital (invested in such things as tools, buildings, internal

⁵ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991).

improvements and education), and circulating capital (money, services, products and the raw materials required to produce them).⁶ For our study, both countries improved their productivity and basic consumption levels after increasing their access to roads, their use of new machines, and their application of irrigation and electrical power. The investments in fixed and circulating capital, in other words, produced a wave of concurrent changes in people's daily food, clothing, entertainment, and occupational options. An example comes via the roads that Huxley placed his faith in for Mexican advancement. As Mexico's government spent more on developing the national road network, the Ford Motor Company gained more confidence in selling to the country's nascent automobile market. In 1926 it opened a factory in Mexico City, offering wages that were approximately double of the local average. About a decade later the improved networking of the roads enabled American tourists to enter in larger numbers and to contribute needed foreign exchange for further reinvestment.

Whereas Smith's work lauds the economic changes produced by unleashing market forces, this study assumes more of a neutral normative judgment. I do appreciate the material and social benefits that arose once communities gained access to electricity, roads, schools, and goods from distant locales. Many more people in Mexico and the United States came to have a far greater variety of options in life as they entered "modernity." But the drive toward specialization which resulted from incorporation into the expansion of capitalist markets meant that more individuals increased their (specialized) productivity while also losing some of their general cultural capability. Various artisanal, linguistic, and communitarian connections atrophied. Increased

⁶ Ibid., 224-232.

connection to the modern world also yielded a greater exposure to large structural forces such as the worldwide depression of the early 1930s.⁷ It became more difficult to address effectively political or economic issues at the local level.

Nevertheless, I claim that individuals and groups possessed cultural agency even as their localities, large cities, or countries became further enmeshed in the growing capitalist market. Mexican migrants to the United States, for example, were, at first glance, the least economically powerful of all the cohorts examined in this study. But they created new demand in small and large markets throughout the American southwest and in the process transformed countless neighborhoods. “Mexican” food, clothes, newspapers, and music became readily available. Migrants also remitted significant material support to their family members in Mexico and thus shaped cultural developments there. Rural Mexicans who remained in Mexico—arguably even less economically powerful than their migrating counterparts—demonstrated their own agency vis-à-vis the Mexican state’s efforts to shape culture by setting the dials of free radios to the government station. When government officials left, the peasants simply disassembled the free sets so they could tune into commercial stations as well.⁸

My findings also emphasize that individuals operating at higher levels of responsibility especially had the ability to influence the direction of cultural transmission between the two countries. American ambassadors such as Dwight Morrow and Josephus Daniels, who displayed more respect for Mexican sovereignty and appreciation of

⁷ Huxley, 302. Huxley makes a similar point in his comparison of the city and countryside. “In the country and the provincial towns the great masses of the population are almost untouched by the slump; the people look well-fed, reasonably healthy and only reasonably dirty. In the capital everybody, workman as well as capitalist, has been more or less seriously affected by the slump. I never saw so many thin, sickly and deformed people as in the poorer quarters of the metropolis; never such filth and raggedness, such signs of hopeless poverty. As an argument against our present economic system, Mexico City is unanswerable.”

⁸ Chapter 2, 116-117; Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 28-37.

Mexican culture, achieved more positive diplomatic relations. Allaying nationalist concerns, Luis Montes de Oca, a Minister of Finance and proponent of developing Mexico's tourism industries, encouraged new hoteliers in the 1930s to provide "service not servitude."⁹ Earning dollars or pesos was important for most everyone, but it did not have to trump other values such as family, respect, compassion, and dignity.

The dissertation's focus on three large groups operating in and across national boundaries for two and a half decades is admittedly an instance of painting with broad brushstrokes. I did so, however, because emphasizing just one of the agents without acknowledging its dependency upon the other key contributors would be telling an incomplete or inaccurate story. Businesses could not have asserted themselves strongly without state sanction and national governments likewise had to cooperate with private firms to produce jobs and tax revenue. Other large cohorts, such as labor or religious organizations, did not seem to have as prominent a role in the overall cultural transmission process however.

A number of possibilities exist for future research. The broad and bi-national aspect of the main subjects—government representatives, businessmen, and migrants—means that a large number of primary sources are available to mine and then add more precision or nuance to the general thesis. In a similar vein, this study's employment of secondary sources relied more on breadth than depth, trying to incorporate significant works from political, economic, social and cultural histories as well as anthropological, economic, and sociological works. For each of the agents there is undoubtedly much more secondary literature to plumb.

⁹ Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 54-56.

Besides enlarging the sweep of sources used, the work could also provide a number of different angles for expanded research. It currently provides only a very limited gendered analysis. While most governmental and business representatives were male, many of the migrants and tourists were female. Applying gender theory studies from political, business or migration studies would thus enrich our understanding of the male and female aspects of transmitting culture across national boundaries.

More quantitative analysis would also presumably fine tune our understanding of the *relative* importance of the three main groups studied. For instance, it would be fascinating (but quite challenging methodologically) to quantify the relative amounts of American adoption of Mexican culture in the southwest versus a similar accounting of American culture spreading to places in Mexico. The work explores cultural transmission within a broad, mostly capitalistic and democratic environment, so there is also room for useful comparisons to the bi-national process within socialist or authoritarian countries. Both capitalist and socialist ideas deserve some credit for the spread of culture between Mexico and the United States. While capitalists capitalized on multiple market opportunities, usually for their private good, socialists attempted to socialize the gains for the public good. It might prove fruitful, then, to create some sort of spectrum that assesses how a range of capitalist to socialist activities affects cultural transmission. Finally, a chronological revisiting of the same countries and actors in the post-World War II decades might also reveal worthwhile comparisons. For example, did the growth of wide-scale communication and entertainment networks such as television (and now the internet) increase the influence of businesses?

Much about the cultural transmission process is indeed left to explore. Working with the concept of the transnational cultural market, however, allows us to keep in mind the cultural as well as economic or political implications of considering new immigration rules, encouraging new businesses, or establishing a new set of network connections. We have to emphasize the import of all the key agents and to be careful about ascribing too much power to corporations. Certainly we should identify the marketing techniques, the coercive labor practices, and the results of all this—big profits, political power, etc. But it is just as important to highlight the government's role and the common people's ability in shaping culture. We write for the people, after all, and for roughly democratic states like Mexico and the United States from the 1920s through 1940s, we need to give them credit or *responsibility* for what they did. It is also just as important for us to acknowledge our own agency when confronting the challenge of cultural globalization and perhaps homogenization. It is my hope, therefore, that this work can contribute modestly to societies harnessing the power of markets but also still being able, as Huxley proposed, “to lead to the full the life of generalized human beings.”

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