Mexican Law Review
New Series
VOLUME VI
Number 2

RECIPROCITY IN MEXICAN RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES: PAST INDICATORS OF FUTURE DILEMMAS

Max Paul Friedman*

Abstract. *This note assesses the lessons for future Mexican relations with the United States of past episodes of conflict over border issues and U.S. intervention in Latin America. The author argues that Mexican officials have and should continue to present Mexican views and assert Mexican national interests in disputes with the United States without concern for the historically frequent tendency of U.S. officials and commentators to ascribe such positions to Mexican "anti-Americanism."*

Key Words: *Mexican foreign policy, border, labor migration, anti-Americanism.*

Resumen. *Este trabajo analiza las consecuencias para las futuras relaciones entre México y los Estados Unidos de episodios de conflicto en el pasado sobre problemas de la frontera e intervenciones estadounidenses en América Latina. El autor propone que funcionarios y líderes mexicanos deben seguir presentando las perspectivas mexicanas y reivindicando los intereses nacionales mexicanos sin preocuparse por la tendencia de funcionarios y comentadores estadounidenses de culpar al "anti-americanismo" de tales posiciones.*

Palabras clave: *Política exterior mexicana, frontera, migración laboral, antiamericanismo.*

* Professor of History and Affiliate Professor of International Studies, American University, Washington, D.C. Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Arts in History from the University of California at Berkeley. His research interests include U.S. foreign policy and relations with Latin America. He thanks the editors and anonymous reviewers of MLR for their suggestions on this article. This note was originally presented as a talk at the conference "Mexico's Future: In Search of a New Democratic Equilibrium" held at American University in Washington, D.C., April 1-2, 2013.

Table of contents

I. Introduction

1. *"Anti-Americanism" as an Explanatory Category*

The prospects for improvement in relations between Mexico and the United States after the return to power of the PRI will be determined in part by how far this transition is accompanied by a return to old patterns of conflict and misperception. The issues are well known and have been fairly consistent over the decades: the security and the ecology of the border, labor migration, trade and U.S. military intervention in Latin America. One obstacle to more balance in U.S.-Mexican relations has been the tendency of U.S. officials, academics and the media to blame Mexican "anti-Americanism" whenever Mexicans stand up for their own interests.

The use of *anti-Americanism* as an explanatory category for the behavior of peoples and governments outside the United States has a long history.[1] It is a term that suggests Mexicans are not behaving like anyone else —presenting their own demands based on their own analyses— and are perversely opposed to rational U.S. policies. Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin claim that anti-Americanism in Latin America stems from "hurt pride" and "ultrasensitivity to imagined slights," among other factors.[2] Michael Radu calls Mexican anti-Americanism "Pavlovian," invoking an animal's salivating instinct.[3] A leading history textbook still teaches U.S. students that Mexicans suffer from "virulent, almost pathological Yankeephobia."[4]

---

[1] See Max Paul Friedman, Rethinking Anti-Americanism: The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[2] Barry Rubin & Judith Colp Rubin, Hating America: A History 121 (Oxford University Press, 2004).

[3] Michael Radu, *A Matter of Identity: The Anti-Americanism of Latin American Intellectuals*, *in* Understanding Anti-Americanism: Its Origins and Impact at Home and Abroad 144-164, quoted at 146 (Ivan R. Dee, ed., 2004).

[4] Michael C. Meyer & William L. Sherman, The Course of Mexican History 335 (7th ed., Paul Hollander, ed., Oxford University Press, 2003 [1979]).

This approach follows a venerable scholarly tradition of looking down upon Latin Americans as inherently inferior, emotionally unstable and irrational. Yale's Ellsworth Huntington, author of *Civilization and Climate* (1922) and president of the Association of American Geographers, was a climatic determinist and later a leading eugenicist who held that "the high temperature…in tropical America presumably weakens the power of man's mind. This, perhaps, accounts for the fact that almost no great ideas have ever been born and perfected within the tropics."[5] One finds innumerable references in U.S. publications since the late nineteenth century to the "Latin-American 'republics,' hot-blooded and impulsive,"[6] populated by "the hot-blooded man of Latin race,"[7] governed by "ambitious, hot-headed, and excitable leaders"[8] whose prospects are limited by "the natural incapacity of the hot-headed Latin for self-government,"[9] which comes from unfortunate racial mixing by the "hot-blooded Creole… altogether unfitted for Parliamentary institutions,"[10] who has regrettably failed to overcome "tropical… hot blooded… human nature with its untamed passion,"[11] and so on. The hallmark of what we might be tempted to call anti-Latin Americanism is attributing political convictions to uncontrollable Latin American emotionality whereas North Americans believe they reach their own views through sober reasoning.

Viewing world affairs through the prism of a racial hierarchy explains only part of the tendency to denigrate Latin American opinion. The clash of interests that arises when the United States seeks preferential access to markets or resources has contributed both to interventionism from the North and resentment from the South. Equally important is "American exceptionalism," the notion that the United States is superior to other societies and is a divinely-ordained force for good in the world. To the many U.S. officials who reach positions of power with articulated or latent beliefs along these lines, the only normatively rational position must be for Mexicans to support the U.S. policy of the day, regardless of what that policy may be. For this reason, Mexican articulations of its national interests, its critiques of U.S. intervention in the Caribbean, or Mexico's protests over the treatment of its nationals in the United States have all been historically lumped into the category of unreasonable Mexican "anti-Americanism."

---

[5] Ellsworth Huntington, *The Adaptability of the White Man to Tropical America*, *in* Latin America: Clark University Addresses 360-86, here 381-2 (George Hubbard Blakeslee, ed., Stechert and Co., 1914).

[6] Charles Fletcher Lummis, *In the Lion's Den*, 4 Land of Sunshine 236 (May 1896).

[7] Grover Flint, Marching with Gomez 195 (Lamson, Wolffe and Company, 1898).

[8] *Mexico in Disorder*, The Outlook, Apr. 13, 1912, at 796.

[9] Archibald Ross Colquhoun, Greater America 201 (Harper, 1904).

[10] William Alfred Hirst, Argentina 122 (C. Scribner's, 1910).

[11] Robert E. Speer, Missions in South America 157 (Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, 1909).

2. *A Mexican Rejoinder: History Matters*

From time to time, Mexicans have tried to explain why congenital or racially determined irrationality is not a useful way to explain their independent views. Young economist José Iturriaga tried to convey the more relevant factors in a satirical article in *El Popular* in 1951 entitled "Why I Am Anti-Soviet and Anti-Russian":

> For more than one hundred years we have been the victims of that country.... How can a good Mexican forget that in 1846 the Czar of all the Russias, James Polkov, sent Winfield Scottisky to make war on us in order to annex the province of Texas to its immense Ukrainian steppes, in which conflict we lost not only Texas but more than half our territory.... A Mexican patriot cannot forget, either, that when we were in the midst of a civil war to oust Victoriano Huerta, the troops of the Russian fleet under Admiral Fletcherev trampled on our Mexican shores and occupied Veracruz from April to November, 1914.… We cannot ignore the humiliations suffered by our wandering farmers, who, because they want to earn a few rubles on the other side of the Volga, are discriminated against and ill-treated because they are guilty of not being Slavs…[12]

Thus did a talented young Mexican try to call attention to historical and material basis of rational Mexican critiques. It was hard to get the message to penetrate. The U.S. Embassy had considered Iturriaga "one of the brightest of the young stars in the Mexican intellectual firmament" but when he published his satire, a U.S. diplomat complained about his unreasonable "anti-Americanism" —thereby rather exquisitely missing the point.[13]

Iturriaga did not accept this notion. He sought to explain that Mexico's wariness towards its powerful northern neighbor did not spring from passion or prejudice, but from historical roots. Mexican nationalists had gone from *yancofilia,* their early admiration for the U.S. political system and its Constitution, to resentment under the impact of certain events. In 1833, Lorenzo de Zavala had judged that the glittering wealth and republican virtues of the United States represented "the final grade of human perfection." Fray Servando Teresa y Mier assured his compatriots that the United States would lead Mexicans "to the gates of happiness… Lifting the banner of liberty, they planted it in our hearts."[14] What soured Mexican opinion was the series of subsequent interventions at their expense. Had Russia committed those acts, Iturriaga implied, Russians would be the object of Mexican anger and

[12] José Iturriaga, *Porque soy anti-soviético y anti-ruso*, El Popular, Apr. 27, 1951.

[13] Raine to DoS, 4 May 1951, 611.12/5-451, RG 59, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

[14] José E. Iturriaga, La estructura social y cultural de México 217-218 (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951).

Russian analysts would be writing reports about the perplexing problem of Mexican anti-Russianism.

II. Lessons from the 1950s

Instead, U.S. officials were left with a distorted picture of Mexican thinking that affected the U.S. policy-making process on a range of issues. The two countries share a single ecological zone which should naturally allow for the free flow of people, animals and water, and where artificial breaks imposed by politics have caused all manner of dislocations. For decades, U.S. agribusiness drained off so much volume from the Colorado River that Mexicali farmers were left with cracked, dry earth and salinity too high for growing crops, and Mexican protests landed on deaf ears at the White House. During an outbreak of hoof and mouth disease in Mexican cattle in the 1950s, the Mexican government wanted to address the epidemic through vaccination, as it had done successfully during an earlier scare, while the United States pressed for the immediate slaughter of a million head of cattle.[15] President Dwight D. Eisenhower's longtime advisor, Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, blamed the problem on Mexicans' closeness to their animals. "The Peon loves his cow," Smith told the Cabinet. "If it were small enough it would sleep under the bed."[16] We do not read of Smith's "anti-Mexicanism" for espousing such an absurd view of why Mexican ranchers might not want to destroy their herds, yet we have grown accustomed to the claim that Mexican policies emerge from "anti-Americanism."

When the Eisenhower administration and the government of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines negotiated over how to regulate migration, the *New York Times* denounced the Mexican position —that the problem lay with U.S. employers who sought exploitable undocumented workers— as a sign of "anti-Yankeeism" in Mexico. In vain, Mexican officials tried to persuade the *Times* that pursuing the Mexican national interest "does not necessarily mean anti-Americanism."[17] Polls taken in the 1950s showed that 65% of Mexicans described their feelings toward the United States as "good" or "very good," whereas only 3% called their feelings "bad" or "very bad."[18] For all the heated reportage about "anti-gringo prejudice" and "hypersensitive pride" from the

---

[15] Josefina Zoraida Vázquez & Lorenzo Meyer, The United States and Mexico 166 (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[16] L. Arthur Minnich, 3 Jul 1953, Box 2, Cabinet Series, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas [hereinafter DDEL]; *U.S. Shuts Border to Mexican Cattle,* N. Y. Times, May 24, 1953, at 39.

[17] Sydney Gruson, *Anti-Yankeeism Is Seen in Mexico,* N. Y. Times, May 13, 1954, at 8.

[18] International Research Associates, SA de CV, *Barometer Study of Public Opinion – Mexico*, in folder MXUSIA56-LA** (Roper Center, Storrs, Connecticut, December 1956).

"violently anti-Yankee" Mexicans, there was little true hostility that could be measured.[19]

Meanwhile, Eisenhower decided on the expulsion of those who arrived without papers. Under the startling name "Operation Wetback," the Border Patrol apprehended and deported more than a million Mexicans, some of them living in the United States legally. More than a quarter of the deportees were repatriated via cargo vessels that a Congressional investigation likened to an "eighteenth century slave ship." Eighty-five Mexican workers died of sunstroke after thousands were unceremoniously "dumped" over the border in the desert by U.S. authorities.[20] "Anti-Americanism" in Mexico did not lead Mexicans to dump Americans in the desert; the allegedly urgent problem of "anti-Yankeeism" seems not to have produced any victims or costs of any kind.

Mexico and the United States also regularly clashed over foreign policy, especially U.S. interventionism to undermine governments that challenged economic arrangements favoring U.S. investors. The late Carlos Fuentes termed the June 1954 overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected reformist president, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, who promoted land reform at the expense of the United Fruit Company, "a glorious victory against democracy in the name of democracy."[21] The Ruiz Cortines government has been criticized for not opposing the coup more strongly in public, but the record shows that Mexican officials tried to warn the United States against going forward with the CIA's plans. In March 1954, with the invasion of Guatemala looming, the U.S. called a Pan-American conference in Caracas to gain hemisphere-wide support. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles trumpeted that he had gotten nearly all the countries of the region to sign on for a campaign against "communist Guatemala." In fact, the archival record of the conference shows otherwise. The United States bought votes with millions of dollars in concessions on oil, coffee, military aid and debt forgiveness. But that was not enough to get Latin American countries to sign on for intervention. Mexico and Argentina led a diplomatic offensive that got Dulles's text changed. The meeting's final communique gutted any possible interventionist justification. At Mexico's prompting, it adopted this language: "This declaration… is designed to protect and not to impair the inalienable right of each American State freely

---

[19] Alexander Holmes, *Mexicans Welcome American Aid but Resent Patronizing Attitude*, L. A. Times, Feb. 24, 1959, at F5.

[20] Mae M. Ngai, Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America 156 (Princeton University Press, 2004); Lester D. Langley, Mexico and the United States: The Fragile Relationship 46 (Twayne, 1991).

[21] Carlos Fuentes, *Farewell, Monroe Doctrine*, 263 (1575) Harper's 29-35, quoted at 29 (August 1981). On the 1954 coup and its significance, see Piero Gleijeses, Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Greg Grandin, The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

to choose its own form of government and economic system and to live its own social and cultural life."[22]

That turned a resolution for action against Guatemala into a resolution prohibiting action against Guatemala. So much for Dulles's victory. When the coup went ahead nonetheless, Mexico gave asylum to Arbenz's followers in its embassy in Guatemala City. The State Department urged Mexico to hand them over to the tender mercies of the coup leaders; Mexico declined.[23]

Mexico continued testing the limits of how far it could deviate from U.S. policy priorities by maintaining diplomatic relations with Cuba, criticizing the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 and serving as a diplomatic facilitator during the Central American wars of the 1980s. Even when this was partly rhetorical dissent to placate the domestic Left, it was a constructive role, and as Mario Ojeda demonstrated in a landmark study, although the power of the United States imposes limits on Mexican foreign policy, Mexico carved out substantial room for independent and often principled stands throughout the Cold War.[24] Indeed, as Paolo Riguzzi has shown, even from a position of relative weakness, since the late nineteenth century Mexico has been able to successfully pursue its interests in disputes with the United States across a range of bilateral economic and other issues, often by taking an unapologetically nationalist stance in negotiations.[25]

A new equilibrium would seek to move the United States closer to the official guidelines of Mexican foreign policy, enshrined in Article 89 of the constitution, including respect for international law and legal equality of States, non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Mexico retains its potential to serve as an independent voice in regional diplomacy, for example, as an intermediary between the U.S.-sponsored neoliberal free trade project (ALCA/FTAA) and ALBA, the Venezuelan-sponsored Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. There is no reason Mexico could not replicate Brazil's rapid rise to the posture of an independent actor in global affairs.

---

[22] *Declaration of Solidarity for the Preservation of the Political Integrity of the American States Against International Communist Intervention*, Box 72, Latin America (4), OCB Central File Series, National Security Council Staff Papers, DDEL.

[23] For a full account of the March conference, see Max Paul Friedman, *Fracas in Caracas: Latin American Diplomatic Resistance to United States Intervention in Guatemala in 1954*, 21 (4) Diplomacy & Statecraft 669-689 (2010).

[24] Mario Ojeda, Alcances y límites de la política exterior de México (El Colegio de México, 1984).

[25] Paolo Riguzzi, ¿Reciprocidad imposible? La política del comercio entre México y Estados Unidos, 1857-1938, 298 (El Colegio Mexiquense - Instituto de Investigaciones Doctor José María Luis Mora, 2003). This contrasts with what scholars have observed about the NAFTA process, when cooperation on shared goals yielded an agreement many thought unlikely. See, for example, Jorge I. Domínguez & Rafael Fernández de Castro, The United States and Mexico: Between Partnership and Conflict (Routledge, 2001).

III. The Price of True Reciprocity

Of course, equilibrium is not the same as even balance, or fairness or complete reciprocity. If it were, that would mean an equilibrium of fairness in U.S.-Mexican relations would look something like this:

It is the year 2023 and the United States has just ceded half its territory to Mexico in exchange for a cash payment to help alleviate its enormous debt. Unemployed U.S. factory workers from Ohio and Michigan wade across the Rio Grande or join guest worker programs to take jobs at assembly plants in Sonora, where the *federales* demand to see their papers if they overhear them speaking English among themselves. The chain of resorts known as "Club Mex" has opened a series of luxurious properties in the most beautiful landscapes from Yosemite to Cape Cod, where U.S. workers are welcome to wash dishes and clean toilets, but are excluded by armed guards from trespassing onto the beaches, entering the flashy nightclubs or walking on the manicured golf courses reserved for Mexico's vacationing elite. Fresh-faced young volunteers from Mexican universities have arrived under a government-sponsored program to spend two years in the decaying inner cities and stagnant rural areas of the United States, teaching Spanish, basic health care, and food production techniques to impoverished U.S. citizens. When the U.S. government faces a catastrophic devaluation of its currency, an investor group chaired by Carlos Slim steps in to arrange a bailout. Finally, NAFTA is renegotiated to allow not only for the free flow of goods and capital, but of labor.

That may all seem unlikely. But here is what one would have thought should be unlikely: It is the 21st century and a senior Republican congressman speaks nostalgically of the 50 to 60 "wetbacks" his family employed on their farm.[26] A presidential candidate wins the nomination of his party after suggesting that 11 million undocumented workers, mostly Mexicans, should be put under so much legal harassment and economic deprivation that they "self-deport."[27] His opponent, President Barack Obama, boasts of having exceeded the George W. Bush administration's record of a thousand deportations a day by reaching a high of 1,122 deportations per day.[28] For five years, America's leading cable news channel turns over an hour of prime time every weeknight to a program whose anchor, Lou Dobbs, devotes himself to arguing that Mexicans pose a mortal threat to the United States, spreading disease, committing crimes and draining the national treasury.[29] The lead-

[26] Dana Milbank, *Rep. Don Young Faces Backlash for 'Wetback' Slur*, Washington Post, Apr. 1, 2013.

[27] David Boroff and Roque Planas, *Mitt Romney Says He Favors "Self-Deportation" When Asked about Immigration during GOP Debate*, N. Y. Daily News, Jan. 24, 2012.

[28] The number of people deported in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012 was 409,849. Corey Dade, *Obama Administration Deported Record 1.5 Million People* [*i.e.* in first presidential term], NPR News, Dec. 24, 2012.

[29] The reference is to "Lou Dobbs Tonight" on CNN, a program that ended in 2009.

ing political scientist Samuel Huntington warns that Mexican immigration "threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages… rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream. The United States ignores this challenge at its peril."[30] Turning such sentiment into action, three white teenagers in Pennsylvania attack Luis Ramirez, a 25-year-old Mexican immigrant, and beat him to death, yelling that Mexicans should get out of their town.[31]

Here is what else seems likely. Until the United States listens to decades of Latin American advice and starts treating drug use as a public health problem on the consumption side, rather than a military problem on the production and transportation side, Mexicans will continue to fight and die as victims of a proxy drug war that we have offshored to the other side of the border. Unless the United States brings some regulatory sense to its out-of-control firearms market, Mexican gangs are going to continue to be able to outgun the police. Unless the Obama Administration has genuinely traded in its strategy of placating the right with skyrocketing deportations for a more auspicious effort at immigration reform that does not fetishize the further militarization of the border, we will continue to have millions of people living in the United States without basic rights.

We know how these problems work and we know what can be done to address them more effectively. We know that undocumented immigration is not something people do for fun or to annoy U.S. authorities and cable television hosts. We know that the fluctuating rate of undocumented immigration correlates closely with the unmet demand for low-wage labor and the unmet demand for visas, and that it was boosted under neoliberal strategies like NAFTA whose advantages for U.S. agribusiness devastated smallholder agriculture in the Mexican countryside. It would not be hard to figure out how to bring supply and demand more into line; these two factors are not susceptible to border control but are eminently manageable through sensible legislation.

Since the U.S. political system presently gives few signs of heading in the direction of sensible legislating, a new equilibrium is going to depend greatly on Mexican initiatives and whether a new Mexican polity, perhaps less dysfunctional than its worst predecessors, can communicate its views of shared interests and play a larger role in international affairs without being constrained by the spurious charges of Mexican anti-Americanism that will inevitably accompany such an approach.

[30] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Hispanic Challenge*, Foreign Policy, Mar. 1, 2004; *see also* Samuel P. Huntington, Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity (Simon & Schuster, 2004).

[31] *3 Coal-Region Teens Held in Hate-Crime Killing*, Philadelphia Inquirer, July 26, 2008.

Recibido: 24 de abril de 2013.
Aceptado para su publicación: 19 de agosto de 2013.