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José Angel Hernández

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

On September 6, 2001 – five days prior to the tragic events of 9/11 – Vicente Fox Quesada, then president of Mexico, addressed the United States Congress regarding the changing diplomatic relationship between Mexico and the United States. In that speech, which discussed the need for immigration reform and more trust between the two nations, President Fox Quesada made a call for Mexicans in the United States to return to Mexico and help “modernize” the country with the experiences and technology that they had learned during their tenure abroad. He stated: “And let me also salute the Mexican migrants living in this country and say to them, Mexico needs you. We need your talent and your entrepreneurship. We need you to come home one day and play a part in building a strong Mexico.”¹ This statement, which was followed by thunderous applause from the U.S. Congress, continued with the following remarks: “When you return and when you retire, we need you to come back and help us convince other Mexicans that the future lays in a prosperous and democratic Mexico. My dear countrymen, Mexico will not forget you and will support you. We will not fail you.”²

Fox Quesada would take these and other subsequent comments even further in the months and years to come, going as far as apologizing to Mexican migrants for years of neglect and rejection. During his first public ceremony at the presidential palace in Mexico City, for example, the incoming president was quoted in 2000 as saying: “The times are gone when Mexico viewed the emigrant and the emigrant’s children

¹ “Mexican President Vicente Fox Addresses a Joint Meeting of Congress,” Aired 6 September 2001; 11:13, ET <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0109/06/se.02.html>.

² *Ibid.*

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with resentment.”³ In fact, this particular president turned the tables in an even more direct manner when he referred to Mexican migrants as heroes and not as “sellouts,” “*pochos*,” or “traitors” to the nation.⁴ Clearly, these and other statements by Fox Quesada and other politicians are indicative of a long-standing relationship between the state of Mexico and its growing diaspora abroad – a relationship that has a long history, that has changed over time, and that is contingent on the economic and political influence of this particular community disproportionately situated within the territorial confines of the United States.

These statements and the benevolent notions of returning to Mexico, however, need to be examined critically and they ultimately require us to historicize this rapport in order to get at the contemporary significance of this particular discourse. The first observation that we can make from these public statements is that there is apparently an extended relationship between the nation of Mexico and its diaspora in the United States – a migratory process that now spans a century and a half and that has developed in some areas a certain “rite of passage” status because of its longevity. Second, the idea of returning to Mexico to help build a more “democratic and modern” Mexico is also not without precedent. And finally, these phrases echoed by the then president of Mexico are also misleading if we were to examine the social history of those Mexicans and Mexican Americans who actually did return to Mexico, particularly those who returned under government-sponsored repatriation and resettlement programs during the mid- to late nineteenth century.

One representative example of this discourse comes from noted Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio, which I believe will suffice for our purposes. He pointed out in a 1929 lecture on Mexican migrants in the United States, that “these individuals, who ethnologically are generally Indian or mestizo, have reached in our neighboring country a cultural level which is more advanced than that which characterized them in Mexico and *superior* to that of millions of their compatriots of the same social class who have never left their native soil.”⁵

³ Richard Rodríguez, “Prodigal Father – Mexico’s Change of Heart Towards Mexican Americans,” *Pacific News Service*, December 6, 2000, <http://www.pacificnews.org/content/pns/2000/dec/1206prodigal.html>.

⁴ Jorge Durand, “From Traitors to Heroes: 100 Years of Mexican Migration Policy,” *Migration Policy Institute*, (March 2004). <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=203>.

⁵ Manuel Gamio, “The Influence of Migrations in Mexican Life,” (Unpublished Paper, circa 1931), University of Texas-Austin, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books (hereafter cited as BLAC).

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In the eyes of Mexico's most famous anthropologist, these potential repatriates "could form an ideal group" to return and settle in Mexico. We know from secondary research that the repatriates who returned to government-sponsored colonies in the years following Professor Gamio's lecture did no better (at least economically) than their counterparts in Mexico who had never left. Historians Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez note about the repatriate colonies formed in post-revolutionary Mexico: "virtually all of the colonizing endeavors ended in dismal failure."⁶

The belief that migrants in the United States are somehow different than their compatriots who never left is a narrative trope that spans centuries. In the Mexican case, the United States was seen as "exceptional" and "modern," so the thinking went, and these characteristics and ideas could be "learned" or acculturated via less than exceptional and "premodern" Mexican peasants. Such ideas unwittingly reinscribe the idea that the United States is not just different, but exceptional.

Mexican migrants in the United States do not have a "higher cultural level" nor are they "superior" because of their residence in the United States, but because of their experiences as migrants. Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad notes about the changing political demeanor of Algerian migrants to France:

He lives in a cosmos that is very different from his own, a world which consists of a mode of relations, a mode of existence, a system of exchanges, an economy, a way of being, etc – in short, a culture and the comparisons to which the investigation gives rise provide an effective introduction to two differentiated social existences and to differences between them. . . . Emigration provides an experience of a social, economic, cultural and, in a word, political world that is different from the familiar world.⁷

Migrants and travelers throughout the world, judging at least from what we can cull from the literature, are transformed during their tenures abroad and now have a larger world to compare, can analyze different political systems, and are familiar with different ways of being in the world. A similar observation is made by historian Mark Wyman's study

⁶ Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006 [Revised Edition]), 202.

⁷ Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 90–1.

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that examines the many facets of return migration to Europe during a period of intense global immigration. Wyman notes that “One visible result of the immigrants’ immersion to the American environment was that remigrants seemed independent.”⁸ When it comes to the changes that take place during migration and return, the change that migrants undergo in the United States is not the exception but the universal rule.

In this context, therefore, I would like to pose the following questions in order to elaborate an explanation as to why I think these questions and polemics are important. Thus, what is the history of this relationship between Mexico and its diaspora? In other words, what has been the evolving relationship between the Mexican-origin population in the United States and the state of Mexico and how could we historicize this relationship with archival and empirical evidence? With respect to Mexicans returning home one day and “play[ing] a part in building a strong Mexico”: How did migrants fare under the Mexican system of governance once they returned to their country with their “entrepreneurship” and “talent”? Did they in fact help to modernize the country, or were calls to return to the homeland simply nationalist discourse intended to solidify and ultimately project the nation’s own sense of nationalism by extending its imagined boundaries beyond the international border? Have the recent enunciations of Mexican presidents Fox Quesada, Calderón Hinojosa, Salinas de Gortari, or Zedillo translated into cogent policies for migrants or to other social programs intended to assist the diaspora?

This monograph, therefore, is concerned with a number of these questions and themes and examines Mexico’s immigration and colonization policies as they developed throughout the nineteenth century by focusing primarily on that population of Mexican citizens that was “lost” after the end of the Mexican American War of 1846–1848 up to the close of the century.⁹ Under these programs and policies, various

⁸ Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 172.

⁹ I focus on this period due in part to the existing historiography on the return migration of ethnic Mexicans from the United States, which completely overlooks the period of the nineteenth century. Historian Robert McKay notes that the “most neglected era of Mexican repatriation from the United States is before 1930.” See “Mexican Americans and Repatriation,” in *The Handbook of Texas Online*. Texas State Historical Association. <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/MM/pqmyk.html>. Some key texts for repatriation

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governments in Mexico enticed potential migrants to “return to the homeland.” The aftermath of the Mexican American War and Mexico’s evolving immigration and colonization policies serve as the empirical basis of this research and as the source that attempts to answer a number of these questions.

The practice and process of repatriating Mexicans from the ceded territories after the Mexican American War, and the various colonies established thereafter, form the case studies that I examine in order to elucidate and answer a number of these concerns via a historiographical articulation of heretofore unexamined primary documents.¹⁰ These sources were gathered over the course of a decade and situated in over three dozen archives and libraries spread across the United States, Chihuahua, and Mexico City. Many of them have never been examined by historians, cited, or even considered as part of Mexican history,

after the 1930s are, Mercedes Carreras de Velasco, *Los mexicanos que devolvió la crisis, 1929–1932* (Tlatelolco, México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1974); Fernando Saúl Alanís Encino, “El gobierno de México y la repatriación de mexicanos en Estados Unidos, 1934–1940,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, El Colegio de México, 2000); R. Reynolds McKay, “Texas Mexican Repatriation during the Great Depression,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1982); Juan Ramon Garcia, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980); Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929–1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974); Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Francisco E. Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929–1936* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982). Other texts examine repatriation within their own studies and illustrate the impact of these processes in particular Mexican American communities. See, for instance, George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and the American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900–1939* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ When using the term *historiography* I employ Aviezer Tucker’s definition: “Historiography is the study of the way history is and has been written. In a broad sense, history refers to the methodology and practices of writing history. In a more specific sense, it can refer to writing about rather than of history. As a meta-level analysis of descriptions of the past, this latter conception can relate to the former in that the analysis usually focuses on the narrative, interpretations, worldview, use of evidence, or method of presentation of other historians.” See Aviezer Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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the history of the U.S. borderlands, or Mexican American studies. Indeed the historiography has scarcely mentioned this episode of repatriate colonies after the war.

After the end of hostilities, the inhabitants of several settlements in southern New Mexico, Texas, and California who wanted to remain within Mexican territory founded or resettled various towns along the northern frontiers of the fractured republic. In New Mexico Territory, for instance, individuals from San Elizario, Isleta, Doña Ana, and Socorro – communities that had found themselves on the U.S. side of the border after the war – established La Mesilla in the 1850s with the aid of a Mexican commission sent to the region after the war in a skirmish to try and settle Mexican-origin peoples on the newly established “Mexican” side of the international boundary. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century other important towns would be founded and repopulated right across the new international boundary like Nuevo Monterrey, Piedras Negras, San Diego, San Juan, Palo Blanco, Agua Dulce, La Ascensión, Santo Tomás, El Sauz, Los Olmos, San Luis, Pansacola, Zapata, San Ignacio, and Los Saenz, El Remolino, to name only a few.¹¹ These resettlements were backed legally by a decree signed on August 19, 1848 by the José Joaquín de Herrera administration (in office June 3, 1848 to January 15, 1851), which sought to repatriate and resettle Mexicans who wanted to return to the republic and remain citizens of Mexico. Article One of that decree read, “All of the Mexicans found in the territory during the celebration of peace that, because of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, remained in the power of the United States of [the] North, and want to come and establish themselves in that of the Republic, will be transferred to this one [Mexico] on account of the treasury and in the form established in the following articles.”¹²

¹¹ Arnoldo De León, “Life for Mexicans in Texas After the 1836 Revolution,” in *Major Problems in Mexican American History: Documents and Essays*, edited by Zaragoza Vargas (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 167–75.

¹² “Decreto de 19 de Agosto de 1848; para que familias mexicanas que se encuentren en los Estados Unidos puedan emigrar a su patria,” en *Código de Colonización y Terrenos Baldíos de la República Mexicana, formado por Francisco F. De La Maza y Publicado Según el Acuerdo del Presidente de la República, Por Conducta de la Secretaría de Estado y del Despacho de Fomento, Años de 1451 a 1892*, (México: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1893): 407–12; original: “Todos los mexicanos que a la celebración de la paz se encontraban en el territorio que por el Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo quedó en el poder de los Estados Unidos

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By looking at a number of colonies that were founded and how they fared under a Mexican system of governance once they were resettled, this study seeks in part to question Fox Quesada's call for Mexicans to return to Mexico by highlighting several cases of citizens who in fact returned to Mexico during the middle of the nineteenth century. After going over numerous examples of repatriate colonies founded after the end of hostilities, I conclude that these cases of repatriation illustrate that the discourse of nationalism enveloped in the language of "returning to the homeland" did not translate into practice. In effect, Mexico's nineteenth-century colonization policies were "determined by practical, rather than moral or ideological considerations."¹³

In fact, this study illustrates a more *longue durée* approach to many of the conclusions reached by other scholars of twentieth-century repatriation to Mexico. These conclusions, to a very large degree, add to our understanding of Mexico's historic relationship with this "lost population" via the growing, but temporally limiting literature on issues affecting U.S.–Mexican diplomatic relations. By examining these case studies historically, this burgeoning literature is further complicated by outlining the longer relationship between the state and its diaspora, thus contributing to ongoing debates situated disproportionately within the fields of political science, diplomatic history, and sociology. In short, I seek to historicize that literature by calculating into the equation examples of repatriate colonies.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEXICO AND ITS DIASPORA

The literature dealing with the relationship between states and their diasporas has seen an increase in production due largely to the economic, political, and social impact of the immigrants who have left their homelands for other places of residence. Due in large measure to their own economic and political influence in the countries where they reside, immigrant lobbies and the billions of dollars in remittances that contribute to the fledgling economies from whence they originated, are directly tied to this growing literature. In the case of Mexico, which shares a longer history with its diaspora, at least since 1848, this evolving rapport has occurred in both directions. The following

de Norte, y quieren venir á establecerse en el de la República, serán trasladados á ésta de cuenta del erario y en la forma que se establece en los artículos siguientes" (hereafter *Código de Colonización*).

¹³ See *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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historiography traces this evolution by examining a number of recent studies before going into a general overview of the same set of questions on the American side of this equation.

Hence, literature on the relation between Mexico and its diaspora emerged in a dialectical link that had much to do with the country's neglect of its citizens abroad, not to mention the historic disdain that it openly expressed for Mexicans who had opted to reside in the United States – the very nation deemed responsible for the loss of much of Mexico's claimed northern territories just prior to the Mexican American War. This disdain was initially articulated by military officials in Mexico that employed the term “Bad Mexicans” to describe those individuals who often threatened to secede from the splintered nation or who on their own accord convinced others that joining the United States would be more to their advantage than if they opted to remain citizens of the republic of Mexico.¹⁴ The term “Bad Mexicans” was employed during the war and signified those who encouraged “Good Mexicans” (read loyal) to secede from Mexico and therefore served as the antithesis of Mexican identity during a period of “changing national identities.”¹⁵

This continued disparagement of ethnic Mexicans in the United States also has a very long literary history in Mexico proper, and today one can still read such sentiments in the writings of several authors, most notably by intellectual and novelist Elena Poniatowska. In a speech presenting her new novel in Caracas, Venezuela in early July 2001, this prominent Mexican author referred to Mexican migrants as “cockroaches” and “lice ridden” individuals who were in the process of reclaiming the southwest for Mexico. According to her speech, which was carried by the Venezuelan magazine *El Imparcial*, “the common people – the poor, the dirty, the lice ridden, the cockroaches are advancing on the United States, a country that needs to speak Spanish because it has 33.5 million Hispanics who are imposing their culture.”¹⁶

¹⁴ See, for instance, “Circulares para la formación de una policía orgánica en cada Comandancia General, a efecto de perseguir a los malos mexicanos que excitan al pueblo a anexarse a los Estados Unidos. Año de 1853,” in *Archivo Histórico Militar Mexicano*, (hereafter AHMM), XI/481.3/3534.

¹⁵ My use of the term *Changing National Identities* is in reference to the work of Andrés Reséndez's excellent study of the first half of the nineteenth century. See *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ *El Imparcial*, “Elena Poniatowska dice que México va recuperando tierras en EU,” 3 Julio 2001.

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This disdain has a longer history than one might care to resuscitate, but one that would ultimately require an extended study of its own.¹⁷ To cite just one nineteenth-century example as background for Poniatowska's chauvinism: Guillermo Prieto noted this derision for the diaspora during his exile to the United States when describing the Mexican populace of California in 1877. According to his memoirs, written as he traveled throughout the United States, this intellectual and statesman commented on Californios (Mexicans from California) in the following manner:

He uses strong boots, wields a stupendous knife, with which he polishes and sharpens his nails, he whittles sticks and then cleans his teeth, he speaks little and then always in English, almost always goes to bed face up and then fixes his feet upon a table, or a bar, or the wall, drinks whiskey, chews tobacco, gives a hard squeeze of the hand to the first individual that speaks to him and then sprinkles his conversation after the greeting with shamelessness, calling attention to his battered and disheveled hat.¹⁸

For Poniatowska these “cockroaches” are imposing their language on the United States; for Prieto U.S. influence has “contaminated” the Californios. Prieto and Poniatowska apparently shared the notion that Mexicans who leave, those who live outside of the national territory, somehow *lack* the culture of those from the center of the republic, namely Mexico City.

Prieto's description of a California Mexican cowpoke is reminiscent of Octavio Paz's understanding of “duality” and the “extremes” at which the Mexican in the United States can arrive due to continued contact with American culture and modernity. In his illustration of the infamous *pachuco*, for example, this 1990 Nobel Laureate and Mexico's most celebrated intellectual noted that this individual was an “impassive and

¹⁷ An excellent starting point would be Richard Griswold del Castillo's “Mexican Intellectuals' Perceptions of Mexican Americans and Chicanos, 1920–present,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 27;2 (Fall 2002): 33–74.

¹⁸ Guillermo Prieto, *Viaje á los Estados Unidos*, 3 vols. (México: Imprenta de Dublán y Chávez, 1877–1878), I; 394; Original: “Usa bota fuerte, esgrime estupenda navaja, con la que pule y aguza sus uñas, labra palos y se limpia los dientes, habla poco y siempre en ingles, casi se acuesta boca arriba y fija los pies en una mesa, o un barrote, o la pared, bebe whiskey, masca tabaco, da sendos apretones de mano al primero que le habla y salpica con desvergüenzas desde el saludo, llamándose a los ojos su machucado y desgovernado sombrero.”

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sinister clown whose purpose is to cause terror instead of laughter.”¹⁹ His “will-not-to-be” converted the *pachuco* into a “symbol of love and joy or of horror and loathing, an embodiment of liberty, of disorder, of the forbidden.” In short, “he is someone who ought to be destroyed.” Much like Prieto’s and Poniadowska’s description of diasporic Mexicans, the *pachuco* is “also someone with whom any contact must be made in secret, in the darkness.” For these intellectuals, all “common people” outside the center are “the poor, the dirty, and the lice ridden, the cockroaches [that] are advancing on the United States . . .”²⁰

Recalling these “cockroaches” that Poniadowska described, it seems that the discourse of “darkness,” the fear of “cockroaches” and “lice,” and the loss of the Spanish language share a number of common characteristics that have subsequently been appropriated by the very individuals demeaned in these literary productions.²¹ For all these particular critiques, however, it is patently clear that the diaspora in the United States not only played a significant role in the formation of nineteenth-century Mexican national identity, but historically has begun to occupy (slowly) the center of this imaginary since the end of the Mexican American War.

After seeing such a disdain for the very people who merely seek to better their lot, it comes as no surprise to learn that some of the first studies to examine this relationship between Mexico and the United States emerged among the very population that bore the brunt of this disparagement: the Mexican American community situated in the United States. A 1976 publication of Juan Gómez-Quiñones, titled “Piedras Contra La Luna, México en Aztlán y Aztlán en México,” serves as the ideal point of departure.²² One of the first articles to examine the relationship between

¹⁹ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Essays* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 16.

²⁰ *El Imparcial*, “Elena Poniadowska dice que México va recuperando tierras en EU,” 3 Julio 2001.

²¹ The term *cockroaches* was a term of derision appropriated by the Chicano movement of the 1960s and then reinvented by one of its most famous activists and attorneys, Oscar Zeta Acosta. See *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973); the fear of losing Spanish is now celebrated with the invention of a “new language” and what are often referred to as *pochismos*. See, for instance, Rosaura Sánchez, *Chicano Discourse: Socio-Historical Perspectives* (Houston: Arte Público Press, University of Houston, 1994 co. 1983).

²² Juan Gómez-Quiñones, “Piedras Contra La Luna, México en Aztlán y Aztlán en México: Chicano-Mexican Relations and the Mexican Consulates, 1900–1920,”