

The challenge will be making the understanding of this relationship transcend the practical day-to-day difficulties of our long border, go beyond the often unilateral and sometimes insensitive solutions to problems like migration, drug trafficking, regionalization and trade integration, to anchor itself in real mutual comprehension of both cultures and mentalities. Aguilar Rivera's book is a very valuable contribution to carrying out this task. Not only has it found the strands of the dilemma that must be woven into a coherent whole. Not only does it propose alternatives for creating and strengthening communication that go beyond the barriers of language and combat "the isolation and narrow-mindedness that has congealed down through the years" (p. 186). Most of all, it inspires or should inspire researchers, academics and intellectuals from both sides to abandon their ivory towers and understand that it will be possible to build bridges only when "we recognize that the river is both the Rio Grande and the Rio Bravo" (p. 186).

Diego Bugeda Bernal
Senior Editor

Nueva agenda bilateral en la relación México-Estados Unidos

(New Bilateral Agenda in Mexico-U.S. Relations)

*Mónica Vereá Campos, Rafael Fernández de Castro
and Sidney Weintraub, comps.*

CISAN/FCE/ITAM

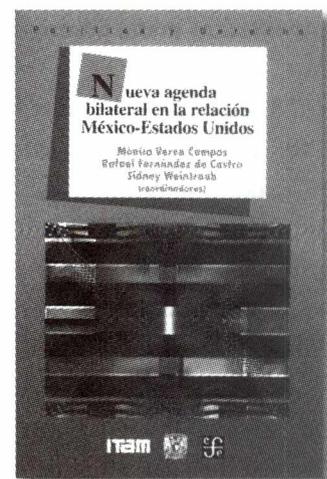
Mexico City, 1998, 484 pp.

Without any doubt, complexity is one of the most important features of today's Mexico-U.S. relations. And that is just what the reader will encounter when he or she explores the almost 500 pages recently published by the Center for Research on North America (CISAN), the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico (ITAM) and the Fund for Economic Culture (FCE). The publication is the outcome of joint efforts by a group of Mexican and U.S. specialists on the question.

The book offers up every conceivable slant on the issue. Some chapters are dedicated to a theoretical analysis and others deal with an empirical overview of the most important developments in bilateral relations until 1995. Most of the authors emphasize the positive side of Mexico's new relations with the United States, but others take a more critical stance. Almost all the issues on the bilateral agenda are dealt with: national security, migration, drug trafficking, energy, financial relations, NAFTA. There are also studies of the different actors: the NGOs, the U.S. Congress, Canada, multinational corporations, the regions and, obviously, the chief executives.

This abundance of material has been divided into four different sections. The first, "Bases for the New Model of Cooperation," includes two theoretical papers, one by Jorge Domínguez and the other by Rafael Fernández de Castro, dealing with general models and whether they are actually being applied to the bilateral relationship. Domínguez argues that political realism cannot explain the ups and downs in the relations and proposes other interesting models. Fernández prefers neoliberal institutionalism as a framework, pointing to the importance of institutions for stable Mexico-U.S. relations.

This section also includes a chapter by Sidney Weintraub about sovereignty which emphasizes its implications for Mexico, but also, and mainly, for the United States. The author concludes that, with NAFTA, both actors have ceded sovereignty, although, to paraphrase



George Orwell, some are more sovereign than others. This section noticeably lacks a Mexican author's view of the question.

The section "Current Views on Traditional Issues" includes a study about migration by Mónica Vereá and Manuel García y Griego who argue that while the United States has stepped up its anti-immigrant—and specifically anti-Mexican—measures, at the same time the governments have tended to establish "collaboration without agreement" which, while insufficient, is useful for maintaining relations. In an article that has turned out to be prophetic, given the events of 1998, Professor Celia Toro points out the difficulties in bilateral relations stemming from drugs and how Mexican policy should more actively try to avoid unilateral excesses by the United States. The recent Casablanca Operation and the vicissitudes around the certification procedure are an example of this. Toro's article also makes interesting theoretical points.

Rosío Vargas uses an excellent empirical basis to explain the nature of Mexico's relations with the United States with regard to oil, natural gas, petrochemicals and electricity, pointing to U.S. companies' interest in these sectors. John Bailey and Timothy Goodman attach similar importance to Mexican oil, although from a different perspective, citing it as one of the most important issues for U.S. national security in its policy toward Mexico, second only to the maintenance of political stability which goes hand in hand with the White House's on-going interest in a friendly government south of its border. It would be interesting to analyze more deeply the U.S.-strategy/Mexican-stability relationship, particularly since while politically, the U.S. government has sought to maintain the status quo, in the economic sphere, it has induced and pressured for the adoption of measures that have usually provoked instability.

The contribution of Mexico's former ambassador to the United States, Jorge Montaña, exemplifies the complexity of the workings of the U.S. political system through a study of congressional policy toward Mexico from 1993 to 1995. Montaña points out that in many cases, aggressive congressional behavior has served the interests of the administration in office to advance toward

its objectives; but he also points to the complications Clinton has faced because of an inexperienced, isolationist Congress. Montaña calls for a more diversified Mexican government policy toward all the actors in the U.S. political system.

This same pro-active logic is the thrust behind the work of Remedios Gómez Arnau, who analyzes the different angles in trilateral Mexican-U.S.-Canadian relations and proposes a more concerted effort between Mexicans and Canadians to further their agenda vis-à-vis the United States. The two countries' joint efforts in 1996 and 1997 regarding the Helms-Burton Act show that this possibility for cooperation does exist.

In the section called "New Issues, New Actors," Mexico's current foreign minister, Rosario Green, points to the importance of working with U.S. NGOs who defend the interests of Mexican immigrants, a problem which has sharpened since the United States adopted and implemented new immigration legislation.

This section also includes an article by Professor Blanca Torres about the environment and the increasingly conspicuous roles being played by California and Texas regarding the issue.

Special emphasis has been given—correctly so, in my opinion—to the role of businessmen and financial actors in current economic relations between Mexico and the United States, as well as to the study of the both the 1982 and especially the 1995 crisis in Mexico. Contributions by Hildy Teegen, Riordan Roett and Nora Lustig provide the reader with interesting food for thought about the new economic situation—characterized by Mexico's weakness and dependence—as the foundations for contemporary bilateral relations. It would have been interesting if a chapter on U.S. investment in Mexico and its role in U.S. policy making were included in this section.

Books like this one—regardless of any flaws it may have—are undoubtedly increasingly important for understanding the complex weave of relations between the two countries divided by the Rio Grande. ■■■

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