

The importance of cultural relations between the United States and Mexico, two societies that remain very different, continues to grow. Today, Mexicans are concerned with US cultural and economic dominance; they want to maintain their sovereign status while widening reciprocal exchange to benefit both countries.

Background

Cultural relations between human groups have constantly existed since the beginnings of history. As a result, it is almost impossible to find contemporary societies, however closed they may seem, that have not been influenced by other communities, to a greater or lesser degree.

Cross-cultural relations are everyday occurrences; scholars and politicians devote time and effort to identify, direct, stimulate, regulate and even attempt to manipulate them. Intercultural relations offer all manner of risks and opportunities for all participants, their positive and negative influences, events perceived as favorable and those felt as threats.

Over time, communities adopt patterns and form images of their environment and of themselves, giving meaning to natural and social phenomena and fashioning stereotypes, derived from the process of creating a view of the world. This results in diverse and complex cultural features giving each society its identity, different from others.

Culture is formed from a common origin, linked to the same soil and to the same physical and spiritual environment, from an accumulation of experiences, trials, triumphs and failures that are lived collectively. The possession of a common destiny and the will to face it portray a very personal way of seeing the world and of relating to it.

Culture makes us aware of ourselves and of our peculiarities, it causes us to feel different from others. This gives us a feeling of belonging to a specific human group, the basic ingredient of nationalities.

However, it is possible to detect regional subcultures even within consolidated countries. In societies basically composed of immigrants, cultural groups from diverse backgrounds retain, to a greater or lesser degree, a sense of loyalty to their roots and value them.

Cultural evolution is constant. History and Culture never end. Everything goes on forming and transforming. Change is a constant in human life.

Attitudes of sympathy or rejection emerge between different national cultures. Sympathy exists when the other culture's influence is deemed positive in some way, and does

Cultural relations between Mexico and the U. S.

*Miguel de la Madrid **

not compromise one's identity. On the other hand, rejection occurs when influences from another culture are considered negative or threaten the survival of the affected culture.

Today, due to great progress in transportation and in all types of communication, relationships are more intense, especially between neighboring countries like the United States and Mexico.

Both sides of our common border have been influenced by the great cultures of the world; at the same time, it is the frontier between the developed North and the developing South. It is also the line separating predominantly and highly dissimilar Anglo-Saxon and Latin American cultures.

Mexican and Latin American cultures are mestizo; over the centuries, they have contrived to combine and synthesize their diverse indigenous and Spanish cultural currents. Spanish culture was itself mestizo, due to extensive mixing on the Iberian Peninsula. African cultural influences also arrived in Latin America by the painful way of slavery.

* Former President of Mexico.

Even with all its past and present influxes from innumerable sources, the culture of the United States is mainly of European ancestry and, more precisely, Anglo-Saxon. This, in spite of obvious African influences and recent Latin American and Asian immigrations. Mexico has defined itself constitutionally as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, acknowledging the descendants of its indigenous peoples. Efforts are made to link them to the mestizo majority by respecting and preserving the fundamental characteristics of their culture, and by developing bilingual and bicultural education in specific communities of indigenous origin.

“Almost all societies have been culturally influenced by their neighbors”

Mexico-United States

Let us assume that, in spite of ethnic and cultural plurality in both countries, we can refer to certain predominant patterns that allow us to speak, in general terms, of US culture and Mexican culture, inasmuch as both countries have their own style of living.

Our turbulent history, and certain structural elements in our societies, have caused positive and negative currents in both directions. On several occasions, confrontation, dislike, and as a result, distrust and fear have prevailed.

Mexicans realize that their country is relatively weak in comparison to the US, mainly in economic and military matters. Maintaining Mexico sovereign and independent in the face of a powerful northern neighbor has been a constant concern since the First World War, when the US clearly endeavored to become the supreme power, not only on the American continent, but in the western world.

Since the tragic collapse of the Soviet Union, it is evident that the US has become today's undisputed power, primarily in strategic and military matters. Its economy is, in spite of its difficulties, a decisive conditioning factor in the world economy.

In Mexico's history as an independent state, relations with the US have been important, critical and, at times, traumatic. Let us not forget that Mexican independence at the beginning of the 19th century acknowledged the late 18th century American Revolution as one of its main influences. Mexicans of that time studied the new nation's political system, in particular its constitutional principles, and tried to imitate it in many ways.

Even after its tragic experience in the War of 1847, when Mexico lost more than half of its territory as a result of war with the US provoked by Texan independence, Mexicans did not lose their respect for nor their interest in their victorious

neighbor. Juárez admired Lincoln for his liberating struggle, and Lincoln admired Juárez for fending off French intervention and the European attempt to install an empire in Mexico using outside help.

Neither is it coincidental that the Mexican Revolution of 1910, which led to modern Mexico, had strong support in the north of the Republic, and that Francisco I. Madero, the apostle of democracy, renewed his political movement in San Antonio, Texas, after escaping from a San Luis Potosí prison.

Little by little, Mexican governments that emerged from the Revolution found their *modus vivendi* with the United States, after several episodes of intervention, including the invasion of Veracruz in 1914 and the unsuccessful punitive expedition by General John Pershing in search of the guerrilla leader Pancho Villa.

Mexico's most important and complex international problem in the 20th century has been US influence. About two-thirds of Mexico's foreign trade and almost three-fourths of its foreign investment and tourism is with the US, facilitating US technological dominance over Mexico.

Mexican migration to the US has reinforced this relationship, not only economically, but mainly socially and culturally too. On the other hand, I believe that since the thirties US administrations have basically respected Mexico's domestic affairs.

Naturally, Mexico has been subject to intense US cultural influence, as has the entire planet. Some even speak of the Americanization of the world: jazz, rock-and-roll, Afro-American music in general, are heard and danced all over the globe. First films, and now television and satellites have been powerful channels for US cultural influence on the



Americans visiting the 30 Centuries of Mexican Art exhibition.

to our mutual understanding through positive programming.

Proposals

Given irreversible tendencies toward wider and more intense cultural exchange, rational circles in both countries, acting in good faith, should be able to find fruitful topics for agreement and cooperation.

We should start with the premise of respect for our national identities. Mexicans are a strongly nationalistic people, and we want to remain Mexicans and masters of our destiny. The same is true of the people of the United States.

Let us recognize our nationalistic upbringing, and face it with an attitude of respect, and dignified and fruitful

praising both our countries' values. This implies revising curricula and plans for cooperation in scientific and technological fields as well as in the humanities and social sciences, beginning with the elementary levels of education.

Cooperative agreements already exist between our universities and research institutes. We must promote and support them. The first obstacle to overcome is mutual ignorance of the other's country which, while not absolute, is still great. Ignorance is not a firm foundation for friendship, but it does imply a danger of conflict by fostering prejudice and distrust.

The various Mexican cultural institutes operating in major US cities could be good meeting places for cooperative cultural projects. They should foster programs for systematic



Angela Caparoso.

A cultural tour about to start.

collaboration. Let us, at the same time, strive for both countries to remain open to today's world of growing globalization and interdependence and reject distressing trends toward isolation and fanatical tribal nationalism.

Let us research what might be called our common history and culture. Binational studies by combined groups could tackle these tasks. To this end, I suggest improved links between our academic and cultural institutions. These contacts exist already; they should be given more support. It would be interesting to broaden and publicize research and analysis on the former Mexican territories and societies that preserve and cultivate their ties to Mexican culture.

We need to systematically and, above all, positively disseminate the particular attributes of both our cultures,

communication between students, professors and researchers at all levels.

We must achieve an ever broader exchange of cultural products, assuring that not only negative or poor quality products arrive in both countries but, on the contrary, the kind that disseminate the best of both our cultures. We must resist the inertia that contributes to making what is most negative, the best known.

All this can only be achieved by systematic effort on the part of government and private citizens alike. The media hold special responsibility in this sphere by virtue of the written word in newspapers, magazines and books, and the electronic signals of radio, television and satellites.

Finally, we should promote bilingual language teaching in both countries and reject all discriminatory attitudes **M**