

OUR VOICE

Of all the possible options for its bilateral relations with Cuba, the United States picked a peculiar normative strategy: the Helms-Burton Act. This piece of legislation establishes that all companies which benefit from the use of property in Cuba confiscated from U.S. citizens (many of whom are former Cuban nationals) in the first years of the Revolution may be sued for damages in U.S. courts; among other things, it also denies visas to businessmen who invest in Cuba and blocks the importation of products with Cuban content. This law has been enacted during the U.S. election campaign, when quick answers are more "successful" than well-thought-out, long-term decisions. In this case, the dynamic of the ephemeral victory won out, reflected immediately in the electoral opinion polls. This is the only possible explanation of the passing of a law with extraterritorial effects in violation of international law, which was the reason behind the almost unanimous rejection of the Helms-Burton in the Organization of American States (OAS) (23 countries voted against it), particularly because of the threat to the sovereignty of the region's nations.

What is truly a concern is the power concentrated in the U.S. Congressional Foreign Relations Committee. It acted on demands by the powerful Miami-based Cuban interest group with a "hard line," directly affecting the interests of other countries and without taking into account the possible consequences. It is difficult to understand that in a 30-year obsessive drive to drown Cuba, the sovereignty of nations like Canada, France, Spain, England and Mexico has been compromised as well as the interests of U.S. multinational companies just to

pander to the Cuban-Hispanic vote in the U.S. One wonders what makes the world's largest power use such costly tactics against a little island in economic distress when many other strategies seemed to be at hand.

The democratic process in Mexico is a topic which concerns the country's diverse political actors and researchers in the social sciences. For that reason, in this issue our section on political issues takes up this question from two different standpoints.

Federico Reyes Heróles, in an illuminating and thought provoking article, explains how Mexico, although still immersed in an authoritarian culture, is going through an irreversible process of democratization. Education, the transformation of communication policies and the reform of electoral procedures are three key elements to accelerate that change.

In his article "The Political Reform of the Mexican State," Roberto Gutiérrez deals with the new groups and new demands which have arisen in the country and the need to create a new legitimate institutional arrangement in which all political and social actors participate.

In November 1996, the United States will hold presidential elections, which will necessarily affect our country. Barbara Driscoll underlines in her article that Mexico has been dealt with very negatively in the U.S. presidential campaigns and explains that this is unusual in domestic matters. Fortunately, the extremist candidates have not been favored by the voting public.

Also in our “United States Affairs” section, we include a study by José Luis Valdés-Ugalde alerting us to the role that ideologies of racial superiority play in the formation of the U.S. national identity. He also looks at the imperialist elements in the nature of U.S. foreign policy throughout its history.

One of the social phenomena always present in U.S.-Mexico bilateral relations is migration. In that context, Luz María Valdés writes in “The Discovery of Great Manhattitlan” about Mexican migration, particularly from the Mixteca region, to New York. She explains the success and mutual benefit of this migration because of how productive and efficient Mexicans from the Mixteca region are in filling jobs in that great northern city.

New discoveries about some aspects of the morphology of the brain and its functioning are reviewed by scientist Guillermo Gutiérrez Ospina in his article. He emphasizes how important environment can be in the development of certain brain functions.

The section “Science, Art and Culture” also includes an interesting article by Raúl Valadez Azúa, illustrating the important role that dogs played in pre-Hispanic societies, as evidenced in the legends and artifacts left to us from that time.

Voices of Mexico is proud to be able to publish an interview with the extraordinary Mexican painter Juan Soriano, whose paintings grace our pages and whose ideas, experiences and memories enrich them.

Jorge A. Vargas’ important article offers us a series of factors to help us think about the conflict over the legal interpretation of the recent discovery of fossil fuels in the Gulf of Mexico. Apparently, in the area where the newly discovered deposits are located, Mexican and U.S. legislation does not clearly establish the maritime limits.

Our “Economic Issues” section is completed with a pioneering study by Elaine Levine on the effects of NAFTA on the workforce both in Mexico and the United States.

“The Splendor of Mexico” once again offers an article about Mexican cuisine. You can almost taste the delicious Mexican candy that Lynn Wehnes describes. Her article gives a small taste of the wide variety of Mexico’s candy.

Oaxaca is one of Mexico’s most important colonial cities. In his article “Land Use and the Restoration of the Ex-Convent of Santo Domingo de Guzmán, Oaxaca,” Enrique Fernández offers us a panorama of the magnificence of that southern Mexican city and describes the efforts to restore one of its most historically and architecturally important colonial buildings.

This section closes with an article by Luis Roberto Torres Escalona, describing two great works by the painter, engraver and illustrator Albrecht Dürer. These works can be seen in Mexico’s National Library.

We have also included an interview with Barbara McDougall, foreign relations minister for the government of Brian Mulroney, who deals with the differences between the foreign policy of Canada’s Liberal and Conservative parties.

In this issue, Voices of Mexico also pays homage to three important public figures who died in the last three months, two Mexican and the other Mexican American: the outstanding ranchera singer Lola Beltrán, the extraordinary poet and untiring cultural promoter Jaime García Terrés and the Chicano activist and one of the pioneers in Mexican American studies, Julian Samora.

Mexico is one of the countries with the broadest biodiversity in the world, both in fauna and in flora. This issue dedicates its “Ecology” section to the great wealth of Mexican flora, rich both in its variety and its importance for the economy and science. Rodolfo Rizo’s article introduces the topic elegantly and simply, while “Medicinal Plants in Mexico” by Edelmira Linares and Robert Bye deals with the importance of this age-old use for plants, part of traditional wisdom, as the authors show by the references to the medicinal properties of plants in the pre-Columbian codices.

Lastly, in the “Museums” section, we offer a brief article about the Mexico room in London’s British Museum. The exhibit combines the architectural and museological mastery of architect Teodoro González de León, who designed the room, with a fortunate selection of pieces from the different pre-Hispanic cultures represented.

Paz Consuelo Márquez Padilla
Editorial Director