



Los mexicanos en los Estados Unidos
(Mexicans in the United States)

Roger Díaz de Cosío, Graciela Orozco and Esther González
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It is difficult to deal with a topic as complex as the contemporary history of Mexicans who have temporarily resided or settled for good in the United States. However, Roger Díaz de Cosío, Graciela Orozco and Esther González, in their book *Los mexicanos en los E.U.*, do a novel, up-to-date and complete overall analysis of the demographic, political, socio-economic and cultural situation of our fellow Mexicans who live within our northern neighbor's borders. To be sure, there are already many specialized academic texts on this topic that, for example, deal with these peoples' history (and what was Mexican territory before the U.S.-Mexican War); Mexican migration to the United States from the nineteenth century on; the Civil Rights Movement; the great wealth of cultural manifestations—which are increasingly revolutionary—of the Chicano movement; general educational questions and the growing number of studies on Chicanos in particular; the economic and social situation of Hispanics in different parts of the U.S.; the growing role of Spanish-language and bilingual media in these groups' self-expression; and finally, the impact on bilateral relations with the United States.

The originality of this book lies in its detailed description of these questions from a global, interdisciplinary perspective. That is what makes it an obligatory reference book with an up-to-date compendium of figures and timely interpretations.

I could go into more detail about all the topics the authors touch on. However, I will refer exclusively to the Mexican government's recent effort to get closer to the Mexican-American community it had forgotten for so many years, and the new activism stemming from that, an unprecedented period in Mexican foreign policy. In many essays, I have maintained that from the start of the NAFTA negotiations, the U.S. and Mexican governments adopted a more positive attitude which resulted in the development of a continual, constant dialogue and the formalization of the links between different actors in both countries. As a result, dozens of bilateral agreements about different questions were signed and officials of both nations met more and more frequently, creating the basis for our government changing its relatively passive foreign policy style.

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The positive impact this had on Mexican-U.S. relations, but particularly in Mexican relations with the Hispanic community, is indisputable. The Mexican government finally recognized that the population of Mexican origin in the United States was crucial and that it should try to establish ties with it. Mexican authorities became interested in the projections that this group will be the absolute majority in California and Texas in the year 2020, with the enormous attendant political potential.

Despite the always very intense personal relations between Mexicans living in both countries, generally Mexican institutional links with U.S. Hispanic groups have been quite weak. Negative stereotypes had even developed on either side of the border. The Mexican government, aware that there were only isolated projects, that very few meetings took place among federal agencies and that almost all the effort was going into defending our countrymen/women, set different goals for diversifying its relations with the Hispanic community. This growing activism was carried out in four basic stages:

1) *Getting closer to leaders of the Mexican-American community.* As I have already pointed out, in 1990 the Foreign Relations Ministry created the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad aimed at establishing a policy for getting in touch with these community organizations for different ends.

2) *Lobbying Congress and U.S. society.* Beginning in 1990, when the Mexican government decided to begin the NAFTA negotiations, it decided also to openly lobby Congress and U.S. society. It adopted this new political tactic despite the prior abandonment of its lukewarm, little publicized lobbying attempts due to the concern that the United States might feel that, tit for tat, it had the right to lobby in Mexico. The Mexican government lobbied all key political figures, but made a special effort to link up with Hispanic members of Congress.

3) *An energetic response to the California government on Proposition 187.* Greater government activism in defense of our interests clearly emerged as a new political tactic abroad when the campaign in favor of Proposition 187 began in 1994. Protests from both Mexican government officials to U.S. officials and as well as those from innumerable different groups and sectors of U.S. society are part of this new internationalization of our policy. It is important to point out that this stance is unprecedented in Mexican foreign policy, one of whose historic principles has been non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. Our diplomats have traditionally considered expressing an opinion of this type tantamount to intervention.

It is not surprising that the Mexican government was concerned about the approval of Proposition 187 given that it spurred a new anti-Mexican attitude that has injured our countrymen/women, added yet another irritant to an already conflictive bilateral relationship and affected the cooperation programs in place to jointly solve this sensitive problem.

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4) *The dual nationality law*. Formulated after the approval of Proposition 187, this law is an answer on the part of the Mexican government, since its main beneficiaries are Mexican immigrants who have lived and worked legally in the United States for several years and have not decided to become naturalized U.S. citizens. The approval of Proposition 187 in California showed up the weak position Mexicans who had not acquired U.S. citizenship found themselves in and the question of dual citizenship became relevant.

The legislation is also an answer to the anti-immigrant climate in the United States, mainly California, a climate which feeds into discrimination and threatens both the human and labor rights of our countrymen/women.

Because of Proposition 187, the anti-immigrant (particularly anti-Mexican) atmosphere in California, has made it possible for different sectors of U.S. society to exert pressure and propose changes in U.S. migration policy. In late 1996, U.S. congressional reforms to welfare and immigration legislation affected the right to different social services that both legal and undocumented immigrants had access to. These new laws evidence an increasingly aggressive and intolerant attitude on the part of conservative U.S. society to undocumented immigration, but also with regard to legal immigrants. This book analyzes this topic at length.

Lastly, I would like to mention that the authors have written an eminently readable book; it could easily be of interest not only to academics and specialists, but also to anyone who wants to be informed about the situation of our fellow countrymen/women in the United States, or who needs to look up a particular fact about the Mexican community there. The boxes featuring biographies of outstanding Mexican-American leaders are particularly attractive. I am sure that this book, with its wealth of material, will also spark interest in the Mexican-American community itself.

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