

OUR VOICE

Interesting times are coming to U.S. politics. Two candidates, two choices and countless questions in between, all of which should eventually and loudly collide to produce the forty-fourth president of the United States. At this stage of the presidential race, the electoral scenario is particularly different from the primary campaigns that amazed U.S. society last year. The most striking element being that the once-Democratic-front-runner, Senator Hillary Clinton, is officially out of the running for the Democratic nomination. In addition, a distinctive feature of this competition is the ideological definition of the candidates' platforms that from time to time tend to move away from their supporters' ideology. In any case, the dispute is raising interesting queries on what the right track for the direction of the country should be, what interests must be defended and whose character would allow the U.S. to recover from the last two periods of political obscurantism and, in line with both candidates, embrace its future and reposition itself in the international arena. The latter is of utmost importance if Washington wants to recover its lost legitimacy worldwide.

Unity for the Democrat and clarity for the Republican are the challenges for both candidates and their respective parties. Signals of Democratic Party reconciliation and reorganization were sent by Clinton in her memorable speech in New York when Obama secured the number of delegates for the nomination last June 3. Obama won, indeed, but Clinton may be very helpful —through remarkable subtlety and political wisdom— for launching a unified presidential campaign. Whether the list of possible vice presidents continues to grow or Obama finally decides to choose Senator Clinton as his running mate, they have decidedly teamed up. As intriguing as it may be, it is interesting to note that, some of Clinton's identified weaknesses that arguably led her to lose the democratic nomination have currently been rated as compensatory points favoring Obama *vis-à-vis* McCain. To mention only a few: her experience, her being part of the establishment, her economic and social projects, her traditional social base. Their first public appearance together in New Hampshire June 27 shows that first, Clinton is still one of the most powerful actors in the electoral race; second, her supporters (namely women, the working class, Latinos and traditional Democrats), donors and staff members, are critical for Obama's victory; and finally, that Obama is proceeding more cautiously, recognizing that even the political phenomenon he is cannot succeed without a solid and trustworthy party.

The ideological definition is another decisive feature. Obama is moving to the center, to the displeasure —or at least confusion— of some hard-left activists. The major problem is that this move is interpreted as ambiguous because of the contradictions and simplifications on central issues that have rarefied his campaign's atmosphere. The ambivalence on free trade, the reversal on accepting public funding limits, the ambiguous and impulsive foreign policy proposals ranging from an immediate withdrawal from Iraq to the normalization of relations with Cuba, the sudden focus on the economy, even Reverend Jeremiah Wright's controversial sermons and the excessive rhetoric are some of the confusing issues that may endanger Obama's victory.

It is no easier for McCain. He is also far from being considered fully to the right. Republican Party hardcore neo-conservatives do not completely identify with his candidacy: how can a neo-conservative feel identified with an immigration proposal like the McCain-Kennedy bill? (Even if McCain, at the end of the day, surrendered to his supporters by turning his back on his own bill.) Above and beyond all this, McCain is fighting to establish a clear difference between George W. Bush and himself. According to a recent *USAToday*/Gallup poll, almost 50 percent of the population is "very concerned" that John McCain would pursue policies too similar to those of George W. Bush. McCain's contradictory declarations on security and particularly on Iraq —I will not leave Iraq until we win the war, "even if this takes us 100 years!"— may stress the links with the sitting president, or perhaps place him dangerously closer to him than he thought. We'll see. Nevertheless, his maturity and caution may establish McCain in the minds of many citizens as a safe alternative to the perhaps bold and excessive "change" discourse.

Despite Obama being ahead with 47 percent of support over McCain's 42 percent, a lot is at stake. Clinton can ask in the Senate for support for Obama's campaign, while Obama and McCain fall into a debate not about platforms but about character and beliefs. The truth is that both candidates are unusual figures in their own parties, and until November, vulnerability will be the constant for both of them.

Mexico figures among the broad spectrum of issues in the U.S. presidential debate that will undoubtedly be deciding factors for voters. Foremost among them, of course, are regional security, migration, free trade and North American integration. We have dedicated most of this issue of *Voices of Mexico* to the last two, including several articles dealing with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP). Only a few months before the fifteenth anniversary of NAFTA coming into effect, when it was supposed to be fully operational, this issue's articles delve into an analysis of the results and balance sheet for each of the national actors involved or the region as a whole, or take a look at prospects for the probable, desirable future scenarios for regional integration.

Our political analysis section begins with a contribution from agrarian specialist José Luis Calva about the NAFTA balance sheet for Mexico's countryside. He demonstrates that not only is there notable unequal development among the three agreement partners, but also how the three government's agrarian policies have affected regional integration: while Mexico has applied World Bank and World Trade Organization free-market and non-governmental intervention policies to the letter, the United States has continued offering its farmers hefty subsidies and set high import tariffs. This explains the Mexican peasantry's justified anger and demand that the treaty be renegotiated immediately.

Our "Economy" section includes four contributions by respected Mexican and U.S. economists about different facets of integration: advances and what remains to be done, its advantages and disadvantages, and its insertion in the broad context of globalization. First of all, Monica Gambrill analyzes Mexico's programs to develop the maquiladora industry, focusing on how, despite NAFTA, the benefits have not remained in the country or even in the region due above all to the forceful participation and comparative advantages of the new economic actors on the world stage, particularly China and other Asian players. Secondly, Pablo Ruiz Nápoles tackles the issue of North American integration, focusing on the intra-regional trade balance, particularly between Mexico and the United States. While Mexico has clearly had a positive trade balance in recent years *vis-à-vis* the U.S., this has also meant an excessive —if not dangerous— increase in our dependence on the U.S. economy, putting on the agenda the imperious need to promote deeper integration including, for example, a customs union or free transit of workers, and above all making a priority of reducing the immense development gap among the three nations. Elisa Dávalos's contribution seeks to demonstrate how worldwide tendencies of foreign direct investment are not aimed today at North America, but mainly at the European Union, whose model of profound integration has made it more attractive for international investors, particularly the big multinational firms. Finally, William Glade first recognizes the great advantages and important benefits the treaty has brought to the three countries, but then goes on to outline the remaining obstacles to its full application and maximum efficacy. Among them, he points to the United States evading full compliance with the agreement by continuing to impose protectionist policies in spheres like agriculture or freight trucking, arguing collateral reasons like border security or Mexico's supposed lack of compliance with environmental standards and regulations.

The integration of North America has undoubtedly been *sui generis*: at the same time that it fosters trade opening, it hardens up border security and transit policies. Tariff de-regulation is accompanied by putting the brakes on initiatives to create greater flexibility on issues like intra-regional migration or joint policies for fighting terrorism or drug trafficking, except those clearly in the interests of the United States like the recently approved Merida Initiative or the construction of the border fence. Researchers Doris Provine and Michael Shelton, on the one hand, and Delia Montero, on the other, delve into these issues in their respective articles. Provine and Shelton outline the differences in local policing of undocumented immigrants in the three countries. Canada shows little tolerance for unauthorized foreigners since legal immigration is relatively accessible. In Mexico, police handling of migration is low profile, but also unsupervised and therefore fraught with abuses. In the United States, efforts have concentrated on strict surveillance along the border, though with a tendency to include immigration checks during any and all dealings between police and Latinos. Neither NAFTA nor the SPP have produced coordination or cooperation in this sphere. Delia Montero reviews the impact of a central, valued resource on relations between the United States and Canada: water. She goes into great detail about the treaties that have traditionally marked relations between the two countries, dealing with how to handle the Great Lakes, for example.

Both U.S. presidential hopefuls have voiced reservations about the viability of broad integration of North America, even questioning NAFTA, though for different reasons. Political scientist Rhina Roux may be right in suggesting that a European Union-type integration is impossible in this region, when she states in her article that historic and cultural reasons, different belief systems, and, above all, the disinterest of

the region's two most developed nations in establishing compensatory mechanisms to make up for the unequal development of the third partner, Mexico, render this goal highly improbable.

Lastly, we should make special mention of the contribution to our "Politics" section by energy expert Rosío Vargas Suárez, who offers her analysis of the recently presented government energy bill. Vargas not only clearly exposes the fact that the bill would privatize part of the oil and gas industry, but also takes on one by one the arguments claiming that it is necessary: the supposedly inevitable decline in Mexico's oil resources; the idea that deep-water drilling is the only viable option; or private funding as the only way of getting the technology required. For Vargas, current difficulties can be resolved by reforming Pemex's fiscal regime and, naturally, taking advantage of today's sky-high oil prices to modernize the country's oil and gas infrastructure.

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The central article in our "Art and Culture" section is about the Route of Friendship: 19 monumental, concrete sculptures placed along Mexico City's southern Beltway to celebrate the 1968 Olympic Games. This great body of work, abandoned for 40 years with no maintenance, left in legal limbo, has survived and is being recovered and readapted to the city of today. Mathias Goeritz, the project's director, brought to fruition in Mexico an idea that was popular among European sculptors of the time: building an Artistic Way, integrating their sculptures into the landscape along highways uniting several European countries to celebrate the friendship and peace among peoples. Another monumental, emblematic work is found on the walls of our university's Central Library. An idea developed by Juan O'Gorman, the library is perhaps the best known, most photographed building in University City. But few people are aware of the fact that it is also a colossal work of craftsmanship in which artisans covered 4,000 square meters with millions of colored stones to make a mural alluding to our country's deep cultural roots, which has not changed color or needed maintenance for 50 years. Lastly, we give our readers a first look at the photographs of Marco Antonio Hernández, who spent several years with the miners of Hidalgo learning what it meant to live underground and documenting their daily lives and their world to present them to the public in his recently published book.

"The Splendor of Mexico" is dedicated to the state of Hidalgo. We begin with the Tula archaeological site as researcher Alfonso Arellano tells us about the two Tulas: the archaeological and the mythical ones. Mythical Tula is the place of men of wisdom and lineage, the most important of whom was Quetzalcóatl, a figure central to understanding the cultures of several Mesoamerican peoples, among them the Mexica. The section continues with a series of Snapshots from Hidalgo, which succinctly show us some of the natural attractions and magical places to visit there. Last of all, we delve into Hidalgo's gastronomy, with its pasties, a legacy of nineteenth-century English participation in local mining, and *barbacoa*, the traditional dish for Sunday brunch made in earthen ovens.

Our "Museums" section takes in the Occupational Medicine Museum in the city of Real del Monte. Housed in the former first hospital for miners built in the early twentieth century by the U.S.-owned Compañía Minera Real del Monte y Pachuca, the building was donated a few years ago along with many of its original furnishings and turned into a place where visitors can see the difficulties and health risks that miners have historically encountered.

In our "In Memoriam" and "Literature" sections, we pay homage to one of the most emblematic figures of Mexican letters, the recently deceased playwright Emilio Carballido. The author of extraordinary works, he was famous for his ability to portray simply the most complex situations of the human condition; undoubtedly, this is the case of the prize-winning play *Rosa de dos aromas* (The Two-Scented Rose), a fragment of which we present to our readers. It is not by chance that in her article, playwright Sabina Berman, one of Carballido's favorite students, dubs him the writer who wrote most effectively and expressively about and for people.

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde