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GOODWILL AMBASSADORS ON HOLIDAY

Tourism, Diplomacy, and Mexico–U.S. Relations

In 1944, the head of Mexico's Department of Tourism, Alejandro Buelna Jr., met with officials from the Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) in Washington on his way to represent the Mexican government at various Pan American Day celebrations in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. At this meeting, Buelna told officials that Mexico "has given special attention to the development of tourism, not so much because of [its] pecuniary benefits . . . as of a desire to strengthen cultural relations and understanding between our two countries."¹ Echoing this sentiment in a report to Stanton Robbins of the same office later that same year, Buelna wrote, "We may say with satisfaction that we have been able to improve our friendly relations with the United States to a degree that would have required many years if it had not been for the tourist industry."² According to Buelna, and many others who repeated this message, tourism acted as a vehicle of foreign relations, as a nexus of cooperation between the United States and Mexico, particularly during World War II. This chapter illuminates the unofficial ways that people (tourists), like institutions (universities) and organizations (Rotary Club and Pan American Round Table), carried out broader policy agendas, diplomacy, and international affairs during the era of the good neighbor when friendship and cooperation toward Latin America replaced U.S. interventionism by the mid to late 1930s. By placing this study of Mexican tourism in a broader discussion of cultural relations and diplomacy, it demonstrates how a leisure-time activity like tourism, in which people from different nations encounter each other, can actually promote transnational and trans-cultural understanding and thus improve international relations. While it is impossible to prove the overall impact of such exchanges, it is worthwhile to

consider tourism as more than just a form of imperialism, exploitation, profit, and, instead, as a form of potentially positive encounters.

The development of tourism in Mexico by the 1930s was advantageous because it was profitable, modernizing, and democratizing. Since the mid-1920s, Mexico's revolutionary government began to consider tourism as a viable industry for economic growth. For the next decade, members of the revolutionary family—presidents, ministers, governors, and businessmen—devised strategies for its development.³ By the 1930s, a combination of domestic will, entrepreneurship, and partnerships with well-heeled, professional Mexico Americans from engineers to hoteliers resulted in widespread construction of highways, hotels, and a tourist infrastructure more broadly that could accommodate the burgeoning industry.⁴ It also laid the groundwork for widespread modernization in the 1940s and 1950s. Tourism's modernizing effect meant both profits and stability for Mexico and, ultimately, for the United States. For a far-from-stable nation prior to the 1930s, tourist development in Mexico was forecasted to bring in consistent revenues, particularly from the U.S. consumer-tourist.⁵ At the same time, the tourist dollar would drive what would become a mass tourism movement by the 1950s. Although ideologies like modernization theory shaped U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, there was indeed an understood connection between economic, political, and hemispheric stability that might explain why the U.S. Office of Inter-American Affairs, for example, studied the viability of tourist development in Latin America. (Profitable and stabilizing, because it is only viable in stable and hospitable conditions, requiring amiability in the domestic and foreign affairs of the host country.) It is no wonder that President Emilio Portes Gil publicly declared Mexico's intention to develop tourism in 1929 only as the Cristero conflict came to an end and as revolutionaries consolidated their power in the National Revolutionary Party.⁶ American tourists played a role in spreading democracy: on their holidays in Mexico, they not only disseminated their earnings but also their values of consumerism and leisure time—those highly treasured, American cultural practices. Tourism, then, was equally important to the U.S. and Mexican governments, for it meant economic and political stability.

Tourism also made strides toward fulfilling goals of hemispheric solidarity as outlined by Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy—a policy since the 1930s that swore off military interventions in Latin America and laid the groundwork for cultural relations—and by the promise of hemispheric de-

fense on the eve of World War II. As María Emilia Paz points out, the Mexico-U.S. military pact of the 1940s and broader hemisphere defense agreement made through the Lima Declaration of 1938 was uneasy given the historical rift and distrust between these neighbors.⁹ Outside of official capacities, tourism helped fill the gap of misunderstanding and even distrust to realize the goals of Pan Americanism, or a united Americas. Through the act of travel, by Americans vacationing in Mexico, Mexicans and Americans could get to know and understand each other. This mutual understanding, officials hoped, would build bridges of solidarity never before seen and, perhaps, ones that could not be built at state levels. Tourism, then, served a very real purpose: to massage and improve relations between Mexico and the United States, especially during World War II. Meanwhile, guests and hosts did the work of diplomats. As Mexican and U.S. officials worked out their disagreements behind closed doors, tourists and locals could do their part to ease tense relations, for example, on Mexico's beaches, in nightclubs, and at pyramids.¹⁰

The role that tourism has played as a vehicle of cultural relations and diplomacy is not new to scholars. In her study of U.S. tourism in Cuba and Hawaii, Christine M. Skwiot demonstrates how the politics and culture of tourism in these U.S. "appendages" shifted according to policy goals and, in the mid- to late nineteenth century, to the desires of constituent groups like American planters and nonplanters.¹¹ Tourism, for example, was used as a tool by annexationists to sell the idea of incorporating Hawaii and Cuba. In both cases, Skwiot shows how the way in which travel writers represented islands as deserving of the "civilizing mission" and hospitable to whitening played into political campaigns and eventually shaped foreign policy.¹² Tourists affected broader policy agendas at the time, which centered on annexation and race. In his study of U.S. tourism in France, Christopher Endy demonstrates how American tourists vacationed in France not only to escape the Cold War but also to play the role of ordinary ambassadors of friendship.¹³ To enhance the rebuilding efforts of the Marshall Plan and to model American values of consumerism and democracy more broadly, tourism promoters encouraged tourists to carry out "consumer diplomacy." A holiday in France, then, was as much about experiencing the "other" as it was about fulfilling a broader state agenda that sought to save postwar Europe from communism.¹⁴ Likewise, Helen Delpar explores the roles that artists, intellectuals, and institutions played in strengthening cultural ties between Mexico and the United States in the interwar years.¹⁵ Her study

shows how philanthropic organizations like the Guggenheim Foundation and journalists like Alma Reed brought together Mexican and American intellectuals and artists through fellowships and art exhibits.¹⁶ The coming together of minds and talents, she argues, helped foster cultural understanding, appreciation, and collaboration at a time when formal avenues did not exist.

As these works reveal, and especially in light of Emily Rosenberg's contention that ordinary people have always affected foreign relations outside of official capacities,¹⁷ by the late 1930s tourism was an unstated strategy of public diplomacy—those government-sponsored or private programs and activities that have an impact on foreign relations, whether purposeful or not.¹⁸ As this chapter and other studies show, diplomacy—whether cultural, economic, or political—can be performed officially or unofficially. In much the same way as the U.S. government today sponsors young people from the Middle East to study and live for a year in the United States, tourists, through pleasure travel, learned what made Mexico tick and learned to appreciate cultural difference and likeness. Since the Cold War, public diplomacy has been used by governments to win the hearts and minds of potential enemies. Programs like Voice of America, Worldnet Television, the Fulbright program, and Culture Connect Ambassadors are just a few examples of the ways in which the media, sports, dance, research, and music are used by governments to introduce foreigners to American culture and values. But these strategies had antecedents. One need only examine the activities of the Committee on Public Information during World War I or the programs of the Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs during World War II to see the way in which the state used culture and the media to shape public opinion.¹⁹

In comparison to such programs, tourism offers a unique case study as another form of informal diplomacy for a variety of reasons: first, it was not a unilateral project emanating from the United States. Rather, both the Mexican and U.S. governments encouraged American travel to Mexico as a way to build friendship between nations. Franklin Delano Roosevelt named 1940–41 the year of "Inter-American Travel" and Lázaro Cárdenas declared it "the Tourist Biennial."²⁰ Private individuals echoed their call. For example, Mexican and American hoteliers founded the Inter-American Hotel Association to serve as, in the words of its secretary, a "benefit to the [U.S.] government in its Good Neighbor Policy."²¹ Likewise, the Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs made some effort to study tourism,

as did the Pan-American Union's Travel Division.²² A second reason for its uniqueness is that tourism was far-reaching, because it includes the coming and going of tourists and the many people who made their stay possible, from the restaurant and hotel owner to the tour guide. In many ways, then, it is one of the most diffuse and recognizable forms of engaging and encouraging new people. Better yet, because officials and industry leaders imbued tourism with purpose, as something that could bring about hemispheric fraternity, those who enacted it seemingly played some role in forwarding foreign policy agendas, whether aware of it or not. Unlike purely state-driven propagandist efforts of, say, radio or film, tourists and their hosts carried out "the cause" alongside government agencies and private organizations. Taken together, tourism was a much more diffuse, subtle, and ordinary strategy of public diplomacy because it could be carried out in the course of a normal activity—vacationing—and by ordinary people.

Public Diplomacy, Cultural Relations, and Tourism

Diplomacy has traditionally been understood as formal negotiations between nations via diplomats—ambassadors, envoys, and consuls—representing governments who aim to foster communication and to promote cooperation between their home and host countries. Scholars have recently moved beyond this state-centered definition to consider more informal and pervasive mediums of international relations by pointing to the ways in which individuals and institutions such as writers, artists, businesspeople, advertising agencies, and brand-name corporations have acted as intermediaries through their contributions to culture and the economy.²³ Whether through flying, painting, acting, dancing, or music, the exportation of a craft abroad—as in the case of Charles Lindbergh, Diego Rivera, Carmen Miranda, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Martha Graham, and Alvin Ailey—served as a form of communication about culture in an effort to advance relations between people and nations. Likewise, the executives cum dollar diplomats of Firestone, Sears Roebuck, and others who established business ties and invested in new industries also did their part to communicate, negotiate, and ultimately shape corporate values abroad,²⁴ showing how diplomacy and its goal to promote understanding and cooperation can take place behind the most likely doors and against the most unlikely backdrops.

Tourism can be analyzed as a form of public diplomacy because it is a kind of exchange among non-state actors that, like more formal programs, can shape and even reorient perceptions of other people, cultures, and nations.

term coined at the height of the Cold War by a Tufts University dean, Edmund A. Guillon, at the inaugural opening of the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy in 1965 (one of the many centers in the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy), schools of public diplomacy have since opened, perhaps most notably University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy as part of the Annenberg Center for Communication. In the most traditional sense, public diplomacy includes "government-sponsored cultural, educational, and informational programs, citizen exchanges and broadcasts used to promote the national interest of a country through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign audiences."²⁶ Scholars of public diplomacy typically examine tangible programs like those run by government offices of information and cultural affairs bureaus. Understandably so, the state has proven to be the most central player in public diplomacy through agencies like the United States Information Agency, which since the 1960s created countless programs to wage the Cold War through culture and education.²⁶

These official programs of public diplomacy have long been used by nations to make friends, to shore up allies, and to alter popular beliefs. The Cold War in particular became a battleground to win hearts and minds and it was through the dissemination of culture that the East and West battled. The U.S. government, for example, embarked on a cultural campaign not only to fight communism and to build coalitions against the East but also to prove wrong the Soviet's characterization of the United States. Some of the most overt campaigns funded by Eisenhower's Emergency Fund and the State Department's Division of Cultural Relations were organized in response to Soviet condemnations of U.S. racism. Despite the obvious credibility of this accusation at the time of Jim Crow, the U.S. government funded tours of jazz greats Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong to perform throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Their goal, according to one scholar, was to "claim jazz as a uniquely American art form."²⁷ The U.S. government exported the talents of prominent jazz musicians, predominately black, in an effort to portray American society as colorblind, inclusive, and democratic.²⁸ These jazz ambassadors played an important role beyond their performances. After concerts, they jammed with local musicians at clubs and cafes, forging friendships through music that superseded race, culture, politics, and nationality.

More recent examples illustrate the continued role that artists and even athletes play in the war of ideas. In 2003, the U.S. State Department pub-

lished an anthology titled *Writers on America* that was neither for sale nor distribution in the United States but was circulated for free by U.S. embassies around the world. The goal was simple: as one contributor noted, the anthology aimed to "get non-Americans to discard stereotypes [of Americans]" after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent "War on Terror." In this work, writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Julia Alvarez and Michael Chabon reflected on their experiences as novelists in a "heterogeneous, democratic" nation. The writer-philosopher Charles Johnson commented in 2002 that he contributed to the anthology because he believed that "as Cultural Ambassadors we can help people abroad understand what American life is like."²⁹ Likewise, the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' Cultural Envoys Program sent two college graduates and NCAA basketball players on a tour to parts of South Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe in 2006 where they would, in the words of officials, use "basketball to increase mutual understanding and illustrate some of the positive aspects of American culture, including teamwork, free expression and hard work."³⁰

Like the arts and sports, education has been a premiere form of public diplomacy used by governments to promote relations, particularly as it relates to inter-American cultural relations. In cooperation with Latin American governments, the U.S. government funded in earnest student and scholar exchange programs by 1939, the most well known of which are the post-World War II Fulbright and Fulbright Hayes endowments. But even before the Fulbright Act of 1946 that formally established international academic exchanges, the State Department's Division of Cultural Affairs set out to develop a program that rested on individual Americans. As then Secretary of State Cordell Hull put it, more than the work of diplomats, politicians, and businessmen, mutual respect between nations "must also rest on contacts between teacher and teacher [,] between student and student[, and] upon the confluence of streams of thought."³¹ To fulfill this mission, Congress approved US\$69,000 in 1940 (equivalent to over US\$1 million in 2009) to support educational exchange programs that included funding for Latin American and U.S. students, professors, and artists.³² By 1942, some fifty Latin American students had received government funding to offset scholarships from American universities, which usually paid for their costly travel expenses to and from the United States.³³ Among the first American researchers and cultural leaders to receive awards to work abroad were three scientists, a novelist, a poet, and a geographer-geologist. Each

travel grant funded their missions to meet with Latin American colleagues and to lecture at Latin American institutions. The first graduate students awarded were two women in the disciplines of history and political science who would study in Santiago, Chile.³⁴ Finally, the Division of Cultural Relations, the Library of Congress, the newly established Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and the American Library Association began a book-exchange program to stock U.S. libraries with Latin American literature and vice-versa.³⁵

In much the same way, tourism can and has acted as a medium for improving Mexican-U.S. relations. After all, through the act of travel, members of different nations came face-to-face with one another in a potentially meaningful exchange. And like more formal programs of public diplomacy, a certain image of national identity was portrayed by both host and guest. But unlike these programs, tourism was a less formal, more pervasive way to improve relations, because it could be carried out by both celebrities and ordinary Mexicans and Americans, by the well-to-do and the middle class, often with only gentle urging from both the public and private sectors.³⁶ Like no other form of public diplomacy, tourism could bring together Mexicans and Americans, businesspeople, and government officials. Once given the impetus, tourism, unlike other formal programs, could operate on its own and flourish into the most diffuse means of exchange between peoples and nations.

Tourist letters and memoirs, official radio programs, tourist association publicity campaigns, and print advertising are some of the many places where one can locate the different players who enacted international relations along the tourism spectrum. It was these individuals who took on the broad task of building friendships and fostering mutual understanding between Mexico and the United States during the world war, which would ultimately pay off in the postwar, mass tourism boom.

"Know Your Neighbor" and Purposeful Travel

Since the formal founding of a modern Mexican tourism industry in the late 1920s, efforts to couch tourism as something that served a broader purpose than mere profit can be found in magazines, official documents, and organized trips to Mexico. In the midst of the Great Depression that gave rise to the Good Neighbor Policy, Mexico's earliest advocates and loosely organized tourist groups tried to promote the value of travel south of the border. In its short life, the National Tourism Commission (1928-1934), for exam-

ple, published a collection of essays in 1930 in the *National Tourist Magazine*, designed for Mexican and American readers. In it, contributors promoted U.S. travel to Mexico as the best solution for peace between nations. One writer invited Americans to take part in the new, working relationship between Mexico and the United States. Through travel, he argued, good will could replace ill will (i.e., interventionism, banditry, etc.). He carefully emphasized that official groups in Mexico understood the importance of tourism and gave their support to the industry by building modern highways, airports, and accommodations, while railroad companies improved passenger service to Mexico.³⁷ In the same issue, the president of Missouri Pacific Lines in Mexico, Colonel C. D. Hicks, assured travel-minded Americans that as they searched for new recreational spots, prominent members of Mexico's official and private sectors were going to great lengths to make their nation the top U.S. tourist destination. For Mexico, he wrote, tourism offered a route toward progress that left dollars in the budget to expand agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing as well as to provide employment. In turn, for Americans, tourism to Mexico offered a route toward peace and understanding because they would find a hospitable and welcoming people.³⁸

In a more hands-on attempt to promote travel as a way to improve cultural relations, Hubert C. Herring and friends in 1925 organized the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America, which offered Americans yearly seminars in Mexico. Through the meeting of open minds and subsequent tours following talks, Mexican leaders and intellectuals met with American professors, doctors, lawyers, teachers, clergymen, social workers, librarians, and businessmen in what Herring and his partner Katharine Terrill called "ventures in international understanding."³⁹ With great foresight, Herring encouraged the nearly two hundred participants in his closing speech at the seminar in 1930 to take what they learned and to share it with their audience in the United States. In short, Herring encouraged seminar participants to act as everyday emissaries of goodwill toward Mexico upon their return home.

In some cases this strategy worked. A participant in the "Seminar in Mexico" in 1929, Dr. Lincoln Wirt, delivered an address, "The Lure of Mexico," to the San Francisco Commonwealth Club, in which he shared his transforming experience with audience members and encouraged them to travel there.⁴⁰ These efforts and others by the likes of Dr. Alson B. Keller, who lectured on Mexico first-hand, and the women of the Texas-based Pan



1. Front cover of brochure from the U.S. State Department's Division of Information, Laredo, showing Uncle Sam and female Mexico in a friendly handshake. According to this advertisement, tourists could indeed build friendship between Mexico and the United States. DEFOLEYER LIBRARY, EPHEMERA COLLECTION, C2043, southern Methodist university, Dallas, Texas.

American Round Tables, who forwarded mutual understanding between peoples of the Americas, illustrate how ordinary Americans used their positions to promote a new understanding of Mexico. These individuals reached perhaps larger audiences than government officials.

World War II offered a unique opportunity for the promotion of tourism as a building block of goodwill because both Mexico and the United States, perhaps for the first time, shared similar wartime goals of preserving democracy and fighting fascism. Mexico was also on a high: the country was reeling from the effects of oil nationalization that promoted a sense of renewed confidence, self-sufficiency, and pride, and it had a proven tourist infrastructure in place—highways were built, hotels modernized, tour guides trained, restaurants and hotels regulated. Wartime was, as it is now, a period of propaganda machines, calculated language, ideological repetition, and purpose, all of which contributed to the promotion of tourism as a form of diplomacy.

One of the first ways in which this idea was promoted was through radio. In 1941, Mexicans and Americans helped organize and fund a radio program

titled *Know Your Neighbor*. With financial sponsorship from the Institute for Latin American Studies (ILAS) at the University of Texas at Austin and endorsement from National Railways of Mexico (FFCCN), the U.S. State Department, and Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Texas Radio House began to air the program on July 7, 1941,⁴¹ transmitting twenty-four radio programs, each fifteen minutes in length, that offered listeners traditional Mexican music and informative lectures on government and society.⁴² *Know Your Neighbor* broadcasts aired for only a short eight weeks (followed by a new program titled *Guardians of Freedom*) with two weekly programs in English and one in Spanish that were geared toward American and Mexican audiences.⁴³ According to Howard Lumpkin, then director of broadcasting at the University of Texas, their objective was to build solidarity between the people of Mexico and the United States through cultural programming that introduced listeners to those values, lifestyles, and history found on both sides of the border.⁴⁴

More than just cultural programming, though, guests of *Know Your Neighbor* acted as inter-American ambassadors to audiences on both sides of the border in their effort to illustrate more often than not that Mexicans and Americans were not so different after all and, as such, could be fast friends or cooperative neighbors at the very least. But how would they become friends? In the inaugural broadcast, Lumpkin placed the onus of friendship on ordinary people: "There must be certain responsibilities accepted by the average Mexican and the average American. They must help each other by their conduct and attitudes to learn the right things about each other. At the moment the best avenue for this learning is the tourist in Mexico."⁴⁵ Lumpkin continued with some advice for American tourists, asserting that they have a duty to behave appropriately by shedding typical habits of overeating and overdrinking, and that they should not believe false rumors of banditry and revolution. In short, Lumpkin encouraged the American tourist to think of oneself as "an ambassador of the United States . . . whose actions determine in a large measure the opinions to be formed by Mexicans about the United States."⁴⁶ While on holiday, tourists, much like formal diplomats, had the power to shape popular opinion of the people with whom they were in contact. Still more, tourism, according to *Know Your Neighbor* writers, creators, and government sponsors, could promote friendly relations and act as a bridge for understanding between nations.

Know Your Neighbor broadcasts prepared tourists for their mission south with knowledge about Mexico from program guests that included southern

celebrities like the folklorist and cowboy Brownie McNeil and athletes like Lt. Charlie Marr, the All-American football player and athletic and recreation officer for the flying cadets of Randolph Field, as well as a cadre of Mexican officials particularly from the Foreign Relations Ministry. To promote the notion of ambassadors on holiday, program content centered on explaining the differences and drawing on the similarities between Mexicans and Americans. Programs usually began with banter between characters Mexico and Uncle Sam, who set the stage for that day's lesson. In one such program Mexico and Uncle Sam chatted about contrasting concepts of time. In supposedly typical American fashion, Uncle Sam tells Mexico to apresurarse disminuye la alegría de vida" (We [Mexicans] think that hurrying spoils the joy of life). Uncle Sam retorts by telling Mexico that while in his country he will not spoil his vacation by being in a hurry but that while at home, in the United States, he must hurry to keep up with fellow Americans. They amicably agree to disagree, illustrating that values such as time do indeed characterize a difference between cultures.⁴⁷

In other episodes, though, writers went to great lengths to draw on cultural similarities, demonstrating the small divide between peoples. In one episode, for example, Marr, who also happened to be coach of the National University of Mexico's football team, dispelled the myth that bullfighting is that nation's most popular sport and instead reported that, like Americans, Mexicans are most interested in baseball, basketball, golf, polo, and jai-alai.⁴⁸ Similarly, in a Friday episode in Spanish, Ignacio García Zavala and Thomas Sutherland, both recipients of a Farmer scholarship that funded educational exchanges between Mexican and Texan students, spoke about the similar value systems held by U.S. southerners and Mexicans. Mr. Sutherland argued that both cultures upheld family values such as loyalty and honor, that both were warm, friendly, and good conversationalists, and that both were respectful and courteous in their treatment of women. García pointed out that people in Mexico misunderstand Americans because they think they are "dollar chasers," impolite, and devoid of family values. To this, the host, Alfredo Vázquez, responded that "it will be a bright day for both neighbors when they learn to accept each other and make use of the best in both cultures."⁴⁹ According to *Know Your Neighbor* programs, the best way to do so was through travel to Mexico.

Radio was not the only medium in which tourism was promoted as a way

to enact foreign relations. Print advertising—press releases, magazine ads, and tourist posters—promoted this concept too. In September 1942, the Mexican Tourist Association (AMT) sent a press release to U.S. travel agencies titled "Vacationing with a Purpose."⁵⁰ Signed personally by Lucas de Palacio, association manager and Mexico City hotelier, this press release made clear that travel to Mexico served a vital function during wartime because it allowed for what Palacio called "an interchange of spiritual values." In the aftermath of the "big test"—Mexico's declaration of war alongside the United States—it continued, their nations now shared a common destiny that could only be sustained through travel to Mexico. Attached to this press release was an advertisement meant for distribution to the general American public. Titled "Your Neighbor and Ally Mexico," it addressed in even greater detail the valuable relationship between tourism and diplomacy.⁵¹ Dotted with contrasting images of Mexico hard at work for the war and images of tourist offerings, this advertisement assured ordinary Americans like Johnny Adams, the foreman at a defense plant, Janice Meredith, female stenographer, and her boss that it was "patriotic to vacation in Mexico." Through diligence and duty, it read, all earned time off the job. Because Mexico offered a holiday that fit any budget it was the ideal wartime vacation spot. More importantly, as a U.S. ally, Mexico understood the strain of war. A vacation to Mexico, then, served spiritual purposes of rejuvenation, increased productivity, and international solidarity.

Tourists as Goodwill Ambassadors

More than mere rhetoric, the idea that tourists could act as goodwill ambassadors and could travel with a purpose was language adopted by both government officials and ordinary folks alike. As war raged in Europe and Asia, the relationship between Mexico's government, its tourism promoters, and its neighbor the United States bolstered efforts to promote tourism as a form of cultural relations. In large part, this became viable because of what the historian Osgood Hardy described to the Los Angeles Publicity Club as the rise of a "new Pan-Americanism."⁵² On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Pan-American Union, Dr. Osgood argued that the Good Neighbor Policy and war in Europe gave rise to this new sense of Pan-Americanism based on the need to create a moral union in the Western Hemisphere. By 1941, Mexican tourist promoters increasingly used to their advantage this cooperative atmosphere caused by war. One way in which the

Mexican government and tourist interests, namely, the Mexican Tourist Association, played on these sentiments by organizing what came to be called the "Presidential Tour," which was a great spectacle of goodwill.

Hardly a tour of political leaders, it brought together presidents of U.S. motor clubs, heads of travel agencies, and, of course, journalists to the "tour" Mexico beyond its border towns. The Mexican Tourist Association and the government's Department of Tourism organized this two-week Presidential Tour from March 30 to April 13, 1941, as a way to draw attention to and create publicity for the upcoming Inter-American Travel Congress to be held April 14–19 in Mexico City. Moreover, as one contemporary journalist pointed out, it served to foster friendship between two democratic nations as well as to convince participants that Mexico was "an ideal vacationland."⁵⁰

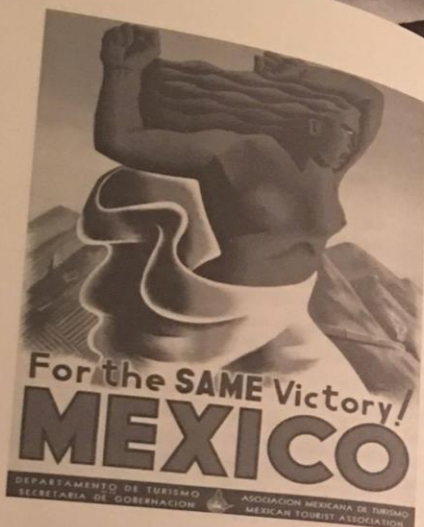
With funding from the Mexican government and a host of travel-related companies and civic groups, a nineteen-car caravan composed of U.S. and Mexican delegates as well as journalists from *Time*, *Fortune*, *Life*, and the *Christian Science Monitor* set off on April 1 from San Antonio to Mexico after an opening ceremony at which Alejandro Buelna Jr. (head of the official Department of Tourism) welcomed the U.S. delegates to Mexico on behalf of President Manuel Ávila Camacho.

For two weeks, Mexico's representatives dazzled the U.S. delegation.⁵¹ The Texas Highway Patrol escorted the caravan from San Antonio to the border, at which time the Mexican Highway Patrol guided it all the way to Monterrey. On the outskirts of Monterrey, the local Chamber of Commerce welcomed the party on the road to the Hotel Monterrey. After a luncheon, the caravan drove to the village of Valles, where Tamaulipas governor Magdaleno Aguilar met delegates too. On their way from Valles to Mexico City, they ate lunch at Ixmiquilpan while entertained by a mariachi band. They stopped once more to see the Monument of Good Friendship (el Monumento de Buena Amistad) located along the Pan-American Highway on the outskirts of the capital city; the monument was built in 1936 by members of the U.S. expatriate community in Mexico City known as the American Colony. At the gates of Mexico City, beside the Indios Verdes statue, Interior Ministry officials greeted the party on behalf of Governor Javier Rojo Gómez.⁵² Officials escorted delegates to a reception at the Hotel Reforma where some stayed, while others retired to their rooms at the Hotel Geneve, Hotel Ritz, and Washington Apartments. The Presidential Tour was pure spectacle. When delegates arrived by train to Fortín de las Flores, Veracruz, for example, a town famous for its gardenias and orchids, one hundred schoolchildren with bou-

quets of local flowers greeted the delegates as they disembarked. Veracruz governor Lic. Jorge Cerdan and his staff met the delegates as they arrived at Antonio Ruiz Galindo's recently opened ultraresort, Hotel "Ruiz Galindo."⁵³ That evening, Ruiz Galindo organized a "Tropical Festival," held alongside the hotel's pool, on which floated 2,000 gardenias. Behind the governor's table was a sign that read "Welcome," which was surrounded by both the Mexican and U.S. flags made entirely of flowers. Broadcast over the radio were speeches given by the governor, the *Christian Science Monitor* representative, Efraín Buenrostro of PEMEX and the AMT, and Lic. Horacio Casasus of the Mexican Automobile Association (AMA). Delegates enjoyed traditional Mexican music played by Veracruz's official, eighteen-piece orchestra, a marimba and dance band from Orizaba, Veracruz. Finally, friends, wives, and girlfriends of the local hosts dressed in regional costumes to give their guests a sense of colorful and diverse Mexico.⁵⁴

Indeed, Mexico's government officials and private entrepreneurs went to great lengths to please invited guests from the United States. The Presidential Tour served to transform Mexico's image from the unruly to good neighbor in an effort to attract U.S. tourists to Mexico. But it also erased any doubts that Mexico was both dedicated to hosting American guests and a U.S. ally of economic development and democracy. In a farewell telegram to U.S. delegates as they passed through Monterrey on their way back to San Antonio, General Enrique Estrada (vice-president of the Mexican Tourist Association and manager of the FCCN) reiterated the goals of Inter-American solidarity and travel: "Visits such as [this] of the Presidential Group serve the cause of Inter-American solidarity... since your honest interpretation of Mexico will bring about [an] interchange [of] spiritual values between our peoples through intensified large-scale travel."⁵⁵

This same sentiment was only reiterated after Mexico declared war on Axis powers in May 1942. The common war effort brought the two countries even closer together and made even more real the objective of tourism and diplomacy. In 1944, the AMT teamed up with the government's Department of Tourism to produce and distribute a wartime tourist poster in which Mexico appears as a symbol of power and ingenuity. With a subtitle that reads "For the SAME Victory! MEXICO," the artist, Francisco Eppens, designed the personification of Mexico as an indigenous woman draped in the typical white tunic that is meant to symbolize "the nation" as well as freedom, liberation, and democracy—all principles on which the United States was established.⁵⁶



2. Tourist poster produced by Mexico's Department of Tourism and the Mexican Tourist Association in the wake of World War II. In the war, Mexico remained the American public's her democratic ally and her modernity. It was hoped that many would choose to spend their postwar holidays in Mexico. FRANCISCO PENN, MEXICAN TOURIST ASSOCIATION. DEPARTAMENTO DE TURISMO. 1944. PRINTED AND PHOTOGRAPHY DIVISION. REPRODUCTION NUMBER, LC-USZCA-4271. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON.

An unlikely pair, wartime cooperation posed an ideal opportunity to promote travel to Mexico as patriotic and purposeful, especially given new shared values of sacrifice and democracy. The "same victory" alluded not just to the war but to the promise of a vacation spot that shared a similar future. Like the radio programs and other promotional materials, the spiritual purpose to which this advertisement alludes gave utilitarian-minded Americans a sense of mission on their holiday. They had an opportunity to not only spread American values and rest after their hard work but also to imbibe those values of their Mexican brothers who were on the road toward progress.

The success of this campaign to promote travel to Mexico as a form of diplomacy and as a way to complement the Good Neighbor Policy is hard to assess. Statistically, tourists seemed to have responded to efforts that linked travel to Mexico with Pan-Americanism and good neighborliness. There was a remarkable upsurge in entry numbers by 1941 (165,627) and again by the war's end in 1946 (254,844). More impressive than statistics, though, is the way in which tourists' language reflected the broader political message. One Ohio journalist who participated in the tour in 1941 stated: "We will

not only tell the folks back home that Mexico is the ideal vacation land... we will tell them that here one breathes the same invigorating air which makes mankind instinctively understand the value of friendship and true democracy." And, in one of my favorite letters, Dorothy Reinke, a young nurse from Oklahoma City, wrote about her trip to President Manuel Ávila Camacho, describing her experience in Mexico as transforming for her, "a sister will inside a package labeled "Mexican Vacation."⁶¹

Indeed, it appears that some tourists saw their role as ambassadors of goodwill on holiday. For most American tourists, Mexico likely became more commonplace and less unknown given the binational efforts to link travel there as something purposeful and to portray Mexico as the consummate good neighbor and ally during war. Without a doubt, though, the very nature of tourism—the heart of which is bringing faraway people together—advanced the cause of the Good Neighbor Policy by fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between Mexico and the United States.

There are more than a few questions raised here but the two most pressing relate to the underlying intention and consequences of promoting tourism as a form of diplomacy. The first is whether tourism as goodwill was merely fashionable sales rhetoric used to pay homage to the Good Neighbor Policy or whether people at the time really believed the concept. The second involves questions about power inherent in what seemed to be a one-way tourist exchange. Of the two questions, the first is difficult to quantify. Mexico's tourist promoters seemed to convey this concept more fervently than did American promoters at the time. At the same time, though, many American tourists recalled their experiences in Mexico along the same lines while others became outspoken advocates of building relations with Mexico through travel. It is safe to argue that this was not merely rhetoric or marketing but was seen as a new way of building transnational and transcultural bridges.

As for the second question, the seemingly benevolent cultural exchange through tourism was (and is today) not equitable.⁶² It was unbalanced because Mexico had to prove itself worthy and familiar to prospective U.S. tourists who associated the country with banditry, backwardness, and tumult. Mexico's tourist promoters, with the help of public relations firms, government agencies, and "friends of Mexico," worked hard to change Mex-

ico's image in the tourist imagination. Transforming its image was tantamount to asserting its national identity, or at least symbols of it. More importantly, Mexico acted as the recipient of a one-way tourist flow originating from the United States. Whereas studies found that fewer Mexicans had the means with which to vacation abroad, Americans could guarantee the success of such a program given the expected boom in wealth and leisure time which would produce a mass tourism movement at the war's close. But if Americans were encouraged to perform democracy as tourists in Mexico, what values did their Mexican hosts impart? Herein lays the unevenness. As displayed by those who are simply hosts, with little to no economic power to travel abroad, those enduring travelogue qualities of hospitality and those guidebook images of the *indígena* remain the sticking points of Mexican tourism today. Mexico continues to receive tourists—from college spring breakers to wealthy yachters—while sending disproportionately fewer abroad.

That said, for both the Mexican and U.S. governments at the time, tourism served political, economic, and cultural purposes. For the U.S. government, profits meant hemispheric stability as well as a venue in which to export American values, especially wartime values, abroad. For Mexico, tourist interests did not just cooperate but they spearheaded efforts to promote tourism as an act of goodwill, knowing full well of the profits to be made in improved cultural relations. Thus, tourism's many faces: it fulfilled goals of Pan-Americanism, it provided a language within which to sell a holiday in Mexico, and it served economic goals of modernization and stability. On the eve of and during World War II, tourism complemented the work of government officials and, in fact, buffered the distrust and misunderstanding between the peoples of Mexico and the United States.

Notes

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1. Anonymous, "Mexican Travel Bureau Head Foresees Increased Tourist Move-

- ment after the War (NARA), College Park, MD.
2. Letter and report from February 14, 1944, NARA.
3. See Dina Berger, *The Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night*.
4. Particularly under the later the Mexican Tourism: *Politics of Culture*, N.C.: Duke University.
5. See Berger, *Development*.
6. See various documents.
7. Kurt Weyland, "Record," *Latin America*.
8. "Mexico Making World War I."
10. See Dina Berger, *Seekers in the Past*.
11. Christine Littlefield.
12. Ibid., ch. 1.
13. Christine Hill: University of Illinois.
14. Ibid., ch. 1.
15. Delpy, Unit 199.
16. On ch. 1.
- 17.

BEHIND THE NOIR BORDER

Tourism, the Vice Racket, and Power Relations
in Baja California's Border Zone, 1938–65

One episode of the animated television comedy *The Simpsons* offers a clear idea of just how deeply interwoven associations of tourism are with Tijuana, in particular, and Mexico, in general. Speaking to the modern cultural value of organized recreation, Bart and Lisa Simpson exercise their American rite of youth by going to summer "Kamp Krusty." The experience proves to be bitter when the camp turns out to be more concentration camp than recreational escape. After thug counselors subject the campers to forced labor, Bart Simpson organizes an uprising, demanding that Krusty attend the camp in person as originally advertised. Meanwhile Krusty relaxes at Wimbledon, quaffing champagne, strawberries, and cream, until the mutiny forces his premature return to broker an armistice. The demented clown extends the olive branch, placating the insurgents with a sightseeing trip to "the happiest place on earth: Tijuana!!!!"¹ The show's final sequence captures Krusty leading the merry band of rebels as they dart through a fictitious border arch that demarcates their passage across the international boundary.² We hear Frank Sinatra's version of "South of the Border," recalling a paradoxical association whereby tourists and cultural consumers transpose fragments of Iberian culture as properly Mexican: Spanish lace, mission bells . . . , 'Cause it was fiesta, and we were so gay.³ Postcard snapshots enshrine this as an archetypal vision of American touristic engagement in Tijuana: muted *charro*-clad mariachis, Bart and Lisa Simpson posed on the zebra-painted burrow, and the *tiro de gracia*, Krusty face first in the Tijuana muck, a bottle of tequila having delivered the k.o. punch.

Evoking Disneyland by way of Tijuana, and Mexico by way of Frank

Sinatra's version of "South of the Border," the show's writers have captured with trademark irony the iconography of twentieth-century leisure culture. The Kamp Krusty episode poignantly demonstrates what scholars of tourism have been arguing for the last fifty years: tourism is both recreational stress relief valve and cultural practice.⁴ Moreover, economic growth generated in part by tourism helped transform otherwise unremarkable nineteenth-century backwater towns and *ranchos* such as Anaheim, Las Vegas, San Diego, and Tijuana into major cities that received daily injections of national and international visitors. Between the age of luxurious Pullman trains and the advent of the democratizing automobile, the California coastline, including Baja California's border zone, became a *pleasure periphery*.⁵ Tracing the evolution of business and pleasure travel, we see the unmistakable signs of an emerging organized tourism industry in the American Southwest by the 1920s. Leisure culture and American consumerism, which begat organized tourism, cooled during the Depression but reemerged with marked intensity after the Second World War.⁶

American tourists visited Mexico's border cities expecting risqué entertainment, sizzling-hot floor shows, glitzy casinos, and colorful racing culture. Sightseers enthusiastically frequented Iberian cultural attractions such as bullfights and jai alai matches. (Red-light tourism made Mexico's border cities magnets for bachelors and soldiers (after World War II), drawing a clientele that was predominantly foreign and male. Despite the coarse-grained, saloon milieu set, and well-publicized crimes that might dissuade them from Tijuana, women tourists frequented casinos and the horse and dog races, leading the consumerist charge in buying *curiosidades de lo mexicano*, as well as high-end imports. Mary Jane Brown often visited Agua Caliente as a part of regular trips to San Diego's Coronado Beach Hotel, referring to her dips below the border Mecca as the "proverbial cherry on the ice cream."⁷ Alas, Hollywood's players continued to make Baja California a Mecca for freedom-loving hedonism. Tijuana's Agua Caliente had lost the brass luster from its original casino hotel complex but continued to attract a steady stream of aficionados and horsemen like Bing Crosby and Jack Warner.⁸ Al Capone's patronage of the Agua Caliente resort set an early expectation for American mobsters, one that reflected a sense that there was a veritable gold mine of gullible gamblers to be extracted, and the introduction of telegraphed race results, pioneered at Tijuana's first hippodrome in 1919, created an opportunity to hedge wagering odds and thus manipulate payoffs. Also, the gangster element fused with the Hollywood set to create

an atmosphere that tourists relished, especially at Tijuana's casinos and racetrack. Mafia chic and Hollywood star power fueled the Tijuana mystique and imbued it with ersatz glamour.

What follows is an analysis of policy, action, and perception by Mexico's officials (federal and state) and intellectuals, and by foreign gaming concessionaires and tourists. While the profile of American tourism changed little after the Depression, Mexico's border zone experienced a dramatic change as border tourism became largely controlled and employed by Mexicans. Meanwhile, international migration, fueled by immigration to the United States, transformed the long under-populated peninsula between 1940 and 1965.⁹

After a meteoric rise during the revolution and the Jazz Age, the border and the consumer market that fed the sightseeing industry faced new challenges triggered by the Depression. Specifically, comprehending the United States–Mexico border as a geographic site and arena of social conflict is essential to understand the asymmetric division of power revealed in the unequal flow of goods, services, and humans across the border. Mexico's cal relations of power.¹⁰

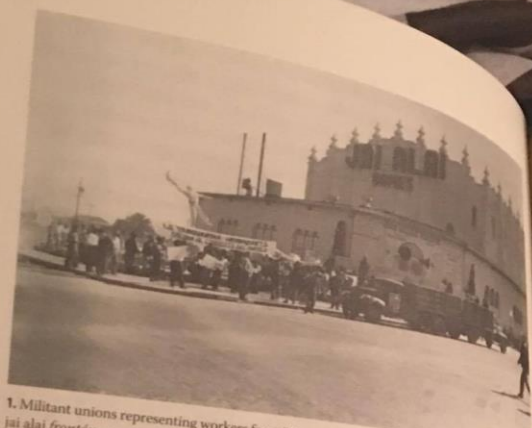
Although delayed in its impact, ultimately the Depression created tremendous economic and political strains in Baja California's border zone that were exacerbated by three factors: the mass repatriation of Mexican immigrants (1929–33), the repeal of prohibition (1933), and President Lázaro Cárdenas's ban on casino gambling (1935). Tijuana's gaming industry became the primary target that Cárdenas attacked because it was a lucrative economic base of his rivals, Plutarco Elías Calles and Abelardo L. Rodríguez. By expropriating and nationalizing the Agua Caliente casino and resort (1935–37), Cárdenas struck out at Calles and the Northwest Group, eliminating their access to liquid wealth.¹¹ In addition to the strategic attack on Calles and Rodríguez, Cárdenas's developmentalist philosophy featured zero tolerance for the mechanized gaming industry and the nefarious nexus of revolutionary generals and crooked foreign capitalists who were exploiting Mexico through the casino-cabaret sector. He and others could not so easily stomach the Sonoran clique's duplicitous discourse that exhorted nationalist reformation of society through moralization and education campaigns even as it openly promoted gambling investments along the border (the Agua Caliente and Foreign Club) and even near the capital (Cuernavaca's Casino de la Selva).

Inter-elite political struggles revolved around competing camarillas, and

the instrumental control, indeed, monopolistic control, of gaming reflects this process. Braulio Maldonado Sánchez received the nomination to be governor as Baja California Norte became Mexico's forty-ninth state to preempt General Rodríguez from making another attempt to seize power in Baja California. Nominated by Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and protected by Cárdenas after he left power in 1960, Maldonado Sánchez stood in his Michoacán exile in bitter defeat.¹² To understand the power relations that shaped Mexico's gaming industry after the Cárdenas ban, it is necessary to recall the legacy of foreign enclaves dating to the conquest but more recently fueling the nationalist policies of the institutionalizing stage of the Mexican Revolution.

The casino-cabaret complex developed within the insular confines of the foreign enclave. Repatriating capital, disavowing federal labor policies, and segregating membership, no wonder Mexico has yet to fully restore the casino business that fueled its border economies during the first third of the twentieth century. Because the revolution stimulated a nationalist backlash against foreign investment, the Constitutionalist governments that came to power (1917–40) imposed increasing restrictions on foreign investors. In particular, foreign businesses had to recognize labor's legal right to organize (greatly strengthened after the passing of a federal labor law in 1929) and accept a national hiring quota of 50 percent (increased to 80 percent after 1929).¹³ Adopting mixed partnerships of national and foreign capital was one way to placate Mexican officials and pass pesky labor inspections, especially if the principals wielded as much clout as General Rodríguez. Tourism projects often comprised mixed national and foreign investments, a favorite economic strategy that was pioneered in Sonora and adopted by Abelardo Rodríguez who employed this approach by forcing the casino-cabaret complex to open its doors to national workers as well as national elites who were seeking opportunities to invest in the border tourism economy. At once opportunistic and enabling, Governor Rodríguez's policies paved the way for Mexican officials to invest in Tijuana's premiere tourism resort, the Agua Caliente.¹⁴

Cárdenas's reforms attacked casino gambling but left untouched the gaming business that operated sporting wagers—horse races, jai alai, and American sporting events—through the Caliente Sports Book. President Miguel Alemán made the spirit of his policy law in 1947 as he introduced new restrictions on games and lotteries.¹⁵ It is said that Cárdenas had spared the racing operation, largely through the influence of his secretary of defense and presidential successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, who was a racing fanatic.



1. Militant unions representing workers from Tijuana's tourism sector protest in front of Tijuana's *jai alai frontón*, ca. 1950, against President Miguel Alemán and the PRI's hegemony in favor of one of Mexico's most impassioned opposition candidates to challenge the executive branch before 1988, General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán. This image speaks to the legacy of labor organizing in the Mexican North during and after the armed struggle, where camarilla politics and anticommunist antagonisms often pitted CROM affiliated locals in Baja California against the CTM and its official patronage by the PRI. OP 9866, PHO 04, 102. COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

Moreover, the findings presented in this chapter indicate that Rodríguez recruited both presidents Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán as investors in the track business, but, perhaps more significantly, they also became absentee owners of nearby agricultural estates.¹⁶ As landowners of the Tijuana hippodrome, Rodríguez and friends continued to reap substantial revenue from the gaming tourism sector. Gaming revenue enriched private wealth, but it also lightened the tax burdens on the dynamic economic sectors and subsidized public services.

The fact that Rodríguez and friends continued to operate Tijuana's Agua Caliente race track through an unsavory alliance with shady figures who were either once prominent officials of the old racing administration, such as James Nugent Crofton, or ascendant mafiosi, helped emboss the image of *Mexico negro*.¹⁷ After internal volatility and high rate of turnover in track administrative teams, Tijuana's racing industry experienced a marked resurgence in status and stability after the arrival of John S. Alessio. Perhaps more alarming to his critics and reflective of noir history were Alessio's ties to organized crime. Such was his rapidly consolidating ring of influence and social grace that he earned the trust of General Rodríguez and was named

manager of his own Banco del Pacífico in 1943. Later, through the lobbying efforts of Rodríguez and President Miguel Alemán, he was promoted to track manager at Tijuana's hippodrome.

Skepticism and dismay grew when the personal fortunes of public officials outpaced gains accrued to the public sector. An unsavory alliance between gangster elements and high-ranking officials generated symbiotic relations of political protection and economic plunder, which struck many Mexicans as patently unjust. The nefarious conduct of gangster elements and the degradation of state power by criminal syndicates generated legitimate political grounds for grievances.¹⁸ These groups jeopardized Mexico's sovereignty, corrupting officials and resorting to violence when needed. President Alemán's chief of security was suspected of drug trafficking. Alessio received expensive gifts from foreign investors, among which figured gaming interests, helping to define his reputation for corruption.¹⁹ Those who benefited most from gaming tourism were already power brokers of postrevolutionary Mexico. Less notice would have been taken had not the gaming industry rationalized gaming in terms of the functional benefits to civil society. Alessio himself fabricated his own myth of benevolent largesse by publicizing high-profile contributions made to schools, orphanages, and public hospitals. The newly recognized power of organized labor added another constituent force for a tourism industry fueled by regulated gaming. Some leaders even proposed restricting admission to wealthy foreigners in order to minimize the social ills of casinos and wagering.²⁰

A Sure Bet: Tourism and the Politics of Gaming after Cárdenas, 1938–1965

Before Cárdenas's ban on casino gaming, the casino-cabaret-hippodrome complex stood at the center of Baja California's booming tourism economy. Its very enclave nature made it a natural target for nation- and state-building efforts of the revolutionary leadership. No sooner had the ink dried on the presidential decree when interested parties from diverse angles of the gaming sector began lobbying behind the scenes for the repeal if not rollback of Cárdenas's antigaming policies. Repeated scandals over clandestine gambling between 1938 and 1959 and the continuous debate over the legalization of casino gaming underline just how central gaming has been for the tourism industry. The gaming industry produced tremendous wealth and hidden benefits for management as well as executive authority. Due to its seemingly boundless potential to generate revenue, the gaming sector actually subsidized public services and the productive economy by absorbing an extraordinary tax bur-

den. Whether in the form of sortilege, sports wagering, horse racing, or roulette, ground Chinese casinos, the gaming business also served well-provisioned officials and owners as a means of private enrichment. Inveterate gamblers and high-rolling Americans with no shortage of disposable income were attracted to play with their money. As the red-light and inebriant border functioned in the international imagination, the border of chance and action endowed Tijuana with a strategic if not comparative advantage that inspired and motivated American tourists to visit Baja California.

A look at the fate of the Agua Caliente racing complex and the sports book business it begat offers penetrating insight into the evolving relations of power that shaped Mexico's ruling party and Baja California's border economy. By way of conclusion I will discuss the Rosarito Beach Hotel casino and its closure to better understand the limits of "corruption" and extra-economic factors of doing business during the reign of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The fate of the Rosarito casino's widely suspected benefactor and patron, the populist maverick governor Braulio Maldonado Sánchez, speaks poignantly to intraparty power struggles that pitted left-leaning factions against the right wing of the PRI led by Abelardo L. Rodríguez. He became the inside candidate who spoiled General Rodríguez's attempt to name his own candidate when Baja California reached statehood in 1952.²¹ Just as Maldonado Sánchez rose to power under the patronage of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, with whom he shared "socialist ideals," he fell as Adolfo López Mateos took power. After nearly ten years of operating clandestinely, PRI party officials raided and closed the Rosarito Beach casino in 1959; many viewed this as a calculated indirect hit on Maldonado. Allowed to finish out his term, he fled to Michoacán, where Lázaro Cárdenas granted him a sort of internal exile.²² The demise of Maldonado Sánchez and the closure of the Rosarito casino point to the monopoly that Tijuana's race and foreign book operation enjoyed.

Because of its strategic recruitment of presidential investors, Tijuana's racing complex was virtually immune to federal tampering. The distinguished lineage of high-ranking public officials who wielded economic interest in the Tijuana race track included Calles and Rodríguez and then broadened to include Manuel Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán. While most constitutionalist reformers who emerged with the revolution favored a strictly regulated gaming sector, General Cárdenas headed up a minority faction of reformers who favored abolishing casinos and most organized

games of chance, including the sortilege or lottery. Cárdenas closed the complex despite pleas from workers who saw his anti-casino policies as attacks on their livelihood. After having won hard-fought battles to unionize workers across the border tourism sector including the Agua Caliente resort, track workers staged a lock-in protesting the loss of what had been a well-padded livelihood in 1935.²³ General Manuel Ávila Camacho, a racing devotee and fan of the Caliente track, allegedly persuaded Cárdenas to leave track management in the hands of the Alba Roja Union.²⁴ This ill-conceived and underfunded experiment with worker management soon floundered after only one year. It must have been a disappointment to the militant union. Having reminded Cárdenas that track operations had been handed over to Alba Roja by federal ruling in 1935, its leaders called on the president to intervene on their behalf a few weeks preceding the inaugural race.²⁵ After organized labor mounted a relatively successful campaign to desegregate the foreign casino-cabaret enclave, Alba Roja saw gaming as the key to attracting tourism to the border. Gaming tourism was fundamental for creating job security.²⁶

For the next ten years, track management witnessed high turnover as rival racing camarillas jockeyed for position. What is noteworthy during this period is the reinsertion of old hippodrome racing interests, after which the shadowy presence of organized crime could soon be detected.

Jockeying for Power after Cárdenas: Inter-Camarilla Struggles and the Agua Caliente Race Track, 1937–47

After ten years of fitful starts, interrupted racing seasons, and the cross-border constrictions caused by World War II, Tijuana's racing complex was finally restored to a level of equestrian respectability. The first management team of Eugene Normile, the track manager at the hippodrome who had preceded Agua Caliente, purchased the track operation from Alba Roja for a discounted \$132,000 in 1937.²⁷ Normile offered credible managerial experience that would rescue the Agua Caliente track from its Depression-era demise. The heavyweight pugilist Jack Dempsey even wrote President Cárdenas a letter of recommendation for Normile, his former manager and current business associate, emphasizing his unequalled honesty and ability to produce "high-class" racing events.²⁸ Racetrack scandals involving crooked management and mafia tampering were commonplace on both sides of the border. Caliente had its own tarnished reputation and Dempsey hoped that

Normile would be the polish.²⁹ Dempsey even included a word about Normile's symbolic respect for Mexican authority, noting that he had attended the funeral for General Álvaro Obregón at his house in Cárdenas. However, if the Depression made little impact on tourism and the border gaming industry between 1930 and 1934, the combined pressures of the repatriation and Cardenista casino policies effectively dampened the high life that Tijuana's tourism industry nourished.³¹ One smart decision Normile made to help Caliente's flagging business was to invite his "old friend" C. S. Hower and Seabiscuit to race the Agua Caliente Handicap in 1938. If one thing spoke to the decline in wealth witnessed in the ten years of racing at Agua Caliente, it was the radical reduction of purse money offered in the Handicap—from \$100,000 to \$10,000. Attending Seabiscuit's victory were Baja California's top officials (Governor Rodolfo Sánchez Taoboda and Baja California's district military commander General Manuel J. Contreras). Tijuana's mayor and chief of police, as well as the usual Hollywood race mile turf fanatics Mickey Rooney and Louis B. Mayer.³²

One of the first challenges that awaited Normile and the Tijuana hippodrome was restocking Caliente with quality horses. Tijuana's regional monopoly on horse racing had suffered when California began allowing pari-mutual racing and the Del Mar, Santa Anita (1934), and Hollywood Park (1938) tracks effectively cut into Caliente's market share. Agua Caliente responded by running on Sundays, a niche that Cuba's Oriental Park also carved.³³ However, consistent with what happened along the "red-light" and "inebriant border," World War II made its own pronounced impact on Tijuana's racing industry. First, the paucity of equestrian stock inverted as horses, trainers, and jockeys arrived at Tijuana en masse after being evicted from racetracks north of the border when they were converted to military purposes.³⁴ Then, U.S. security concerns in the wake of Pearl Harbor overrode border racing interests, and Mexico agreed to shut down border bookmaking and race operations. One such bookmaker, Eduardo Nealis Robles, protested to President Ávila Camacho that he had been given the president's very own assurance about running the business, not to mention prepayment of federal taxes to do so.³⁵ In a year Nealis Robles began managing the hippodrome, an indication that Ávila Camacho had listened and acted on his plea. An even deeper challenge to track business came when members of the Arguello-Olvera clan filed a lawsuit against General Rodríguez and the federal government's ownership of the land upon which the Agua Caliente resort was built.³⁶

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While the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff in 1938, the feds wanted to take decisive action until they received word of illegal gambling and swarming Hollywood soirees at the turf club and home of track manager Eduardo Nealis Robles. Apparently, much of the Agua Caliente casino's original gaming equipment had been relocated to the hippodrome grounds (the Turf Club) and Nealis's private cottage.³⁷ To execute the federal ruling in favor of the Arguello family, President Ávila Camacho sent federal troops to occupy the grounds on December 13, 1944. In addition to the gaming paraphernalia located in Nealis Robles's home, the government performed an audit that documented the annual losses racked by his racing administration.³⁸

The strategic intervention by President Ávila Camacho points to the legacy of presidential participation in Tijuana's race business. With the federal ruling in favor of the Arguello family, the president sent a relative, Agustín Silveira Ávila, as the new track manager for the new hippodrome. Not all Arguello family members were happy with the way the litigation evolved. Alberto and Alejandro Arguello, for example, complained to the president that when they refused to consent to the new management team of Silveira and James Crofton, they were excluded from receiving the proceeds of the new lease. Moreover, Alejandro and Alberto Arguello claimed that they represented 90 percent of the landholders of their clan. Such blatant disregard of their rights was equaled by the strong-arm tactics of the government. For example, they found disquieting if not intimidating the overbearing imposition of General Rodrigo Quevedo, the top military official in Baja California Territory, who was more than likely protecting General Rodríguez's interests in the hippodrome.³⁹ While General Rodríguez's interest as owner of the race track land seemed threatened by the ruling, he continued to collect rent from it and arranged for advantageous provisioning contracts of forage for the track business and grains for the Cervecería Tecate.⁴⁰ Another maneuver designed to establish financial continuity amid the rapidly changing landscape was the reinsertion of James Crofton, the former manager of the Agua Caliente Jockey Club.⁴¹ That Crofton had high-level access to the track's financial nerve center and was entrusted with monitoring accounting (*auditoria*) seemed to be an obvious step backward for the national autonomy. Retaining control over financial capital, however, was precisely the strategy that foreign investors would pursue after 1917, and especially after Cárdenas's expropriations of foreign property.⁴² Crofton ultimately did not last but was replaced by another powerful outsider whose ties to General Rodríguez and incoming president Miguel Alemán further

illustrate the operative strategy behind Tijuana racing business: recruiting presidents by inviting them to invest in the track business and the agricultural estates surrounding the Rodríguez-Calles holdings.

As World War II ended, President Manuel Ávila Camacho's secretary of interior (Gobernación) Miguel Alemán prepared to change the direction of Mexico's statist revolution. The *jarocho* president effectively tipped Mexico's postrevolutionary political equilibrium toward a more business-friendly government, one that was well received by General Rodríguez and the remnants of the enterprising Northwest Group. Alemán advanced the project of industrialization but dedicated special attention to tourism during his presidency. Not surprisingly, he would go on to lead Mexico's Department of Tourism after leaving office, setting down his thoughts about healthy recreation versus degrading leisure activities in *15 Lecciones sobre turismo*.⁴³

Alemán was in office for no more than a year when congress amended federal gaming statutes. As Ávila Camacho's secretary of interior, Alemán was familiar with gaming statutes and Tijuana's hippodrome business. At the heart of legislative change was the ambiguously defined status of legal gaming, especially under the auspices of a private social club or through a sports book.⁴⁴ Anxious to stage a comeback, casino concessionaires sensed change in Mexico's gambling climate when the Alemán administration amended the gaming laws that had been passed during the Cárdenas era in 1938. Judging by the avalanche of letters directed to the president, either condemning or extolling the gaming industry, a notable shift in expectations regarding the return of the casino-tourism economy was evident. Mexico's officials at all levels illustrated an ambivalent attitude toward tourism policies or development plans that featured a prominent role for casino gaming. Mexico's congressional debate suggests that this ambivalence persists today.

Like past debates on Mexico's legal gaming, arguments divided into two camps whose distinctive positions, however, nourished similar concerns about working-class welfare and community development. Labor unions with vested interests in expanding the tourism service sector formed one major lobby group in favor of a more relaxed gaming policy. Alba Roja, representing many of the Agua Caliente workers since the Depression, wrote to Alemán, urging him to reestablish greyhound racing at the Agua Caliente, which would resuscitate tourism and generate badly needed employment for workers of the livery and taxi service sector.⁴⁵ By contrast, national merchants associations warned of the social dangers (the ills gam-

ing posed to working-class welfare) that would revisit the border zone if Mexico City consented to organized gaming. A letter of endorsement from the Querétaro affiliate urged President Alemán to see through the hypocrisy of gaming "masquerading as sport." For even "if certain games of chance were permitted by law," these were still a parasitic drain on working-class wages.⁴⁶ A similar split over gaming policy between labor unions (pro) and commercial organizations (con) was evident during the 1920s and 1930s.

Various political groups took a position as well. The Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party or PAN) roundly criticized Baja California's state and local governments for consenting to powerful Chinese syndicates who were running clandestine gambling and opium operations in Mexicali and Tijuana. If most of Mexico's public officials energetically repudiated casino gaming, evidence clearly links Governor Alberto V. Aldrete to emulating a de-facto policy of using Chinese gaming and opium taxes to subsidize public works and other badly needed community services. *El Observador Objetivo* accused the Aldrete government of receiving hefty sums of money paid by the Chinese underground in exchange for continued gaming and opium businesses in Tijuana, Ensenada, and Mexicali.⁴⁷

Aldrete happily reported to Alemán that the practice of collecting fees (\$100,000 in Mexican pesos every quarter) from Chinese casinos and recreational centers, a euphemism used to describe opium dens, was an already established practice which his government eagerly accommodated. Most importantly, his government could meet budgetary expenses without raising taxes on so-called productive sectors.⁴⁸ Familiarity with the practice ran in the family. Aldrete's father had served as state treasurer when General Rodríguez was governor, and his duties included collecting taxes from the Chinese community.⁴⁹ Aldrete's report to Alemán detailed the Chinese exceptionalist formula that border officials used to exploit clandestine activities in order to subsidize their own interests in agriculture and manufacturing.

As founder of the Cervecería Tecate and one of a minority group of civilian executives to rule the federal territory of Baja California before it became a state in 1952, Aldrete possessed a business orientation that resonated with Alemán's rise to national power. In his pro-gaming policy, he further delineated the virtues of regulated gaming such as lotteries. Suppressed by Cárdenas's gaming statutes of 1938, Aldrete explained that the "lottery [was] not typical gambling." The sortilege or lottery was the oldest form of gaming to be systematically harnessed to the public weal.⁵⁰ Precedents date back to colonial New Spain where sortilege and bull and cock

fighting were used to finance public expenditures.⁵¹ Proceeds from the Caliente dog track (*galgódromo*) and jai alai wagers, according to Governor Aldrete, could effectively shoulder costs for operating hospitals, prisons, schools, orphanages, and other crucial public works. The issue was pressing due to an exploding population and the failure of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (ssa) to keep pace with such a demographic surge.

Aldrete's downfall came not from a casino scandal but rather from a different white collar crime that leads us back to General Rodríguez and his economic empire. Aldrete was run from office after a \$4 million loan from Rodríguez's Banco del Pacífico to Tecate drew unwelcome scrutiny from federal officials.⁵² The bank manager accused of having masterminded the shady loans was John S. Alessio, the Italian American, Horatio Alger-like figure who became manager of the Banco del Pacífico in 1943. Soon he became manager of the Tijuana race track, where he presided over Agua Caliente's most successful administration until he pleaded guilty to tax evasion in the United States in 1972. For his role in the Tecate loan fraud, Alessio and associates languished for six months in a Tijuana jail before President Alemán arranged for their release.⁵³ His tax-fraud conviction, for which he suspected Richard Nixon of exacting partisan vengeance, earned him two years at a Club Fed penitentiary for white-collar criminals.⁵⁴

Alessio became the track manager of Agua Caliente with President Alemán's blessing, a move that coincided with the jarocho's ascension into the club of presidential privilege symbolized by investment in the track business.⁵⁵ Further evidence of this ascension came when he received the "gift" of Rancho El Florido, an estate that stood alongside the ranches of past presidents Calles, Rodríguez, and Ávila Camacho. Alemán's property had contracts for provisioning forage cereals to the Caliente racetrack as well as grains for the Tecate brewery. The region had given rise to an interlocking web of business interests, and the Calles-Rodríguez properties led the way by fusing agricultural, industrial, and commercial investments; their seafood processing plant at El Sauzal best exemplified this intersecting enterprise.⁵⁶ The president's trusted agents made sure that he received two new Lincoln Continentals and a hangar for his B-52 aircraft, gifts the president took painstaking care to dissimilate.⁵⁷ Graft was one of the hallmark expressions of what many saw as a very corrupt Alemán administration.⁵⁸

Friendly relations with President Alemán proved key to the success of Alessio. It is also true that the Italian had the backing of San Diego's leading underworld figure and Alessio's godfather, C. Arnohl Smith, not to mention

Brownie "Bugsy" Siegel, the syndicate combination's West Coast point man until his murder in 1946.⁵⁹ It was Siegel who oversaw the extension of mafia businesses in California, none as lucrative as Caliente's wire service, which was essential for rigging the foreign book. Alfonse Capone's Chicago group had controlled the Tijuana racket dating to the prohibition years, and change in mafia control generated its expected violence.⁶⁰ Siegel and Alessio illustrated a fascination with Hollywood, and the feeling was mutual for many of tinsel town's leading players.

The nexus of mafia interests and Hollywood high-rollers endowed Tijuana with a noir flavor. Star-studded audiences traditionally gave Tijuana racing crowds a qualitative punch from the track's opening in 1916. Such patronage by Hollywood reached its fullest expression in 1938 with the opening of Hollywood Park by Jack Warner. Hyping the presence of Hollywood players renewed the association of glitz and Tijuana's fast-paced racing action. John S. Alessio, Caliente racing concession holder, understood the marketing power that came with star power. The eldest and the clan leader, John especially enjoyed taking care of his favorite guests, personally escorting Elizabeth Taylor, Ben Gazzara, and Victor Mature to their reserved "viewing suites."⁶¹ In fact, Caliente was just another stop on the leisure circuit, which headed south from Hollywood (including San Diego's Coronado Hotel, the fat farms of Baja California, the beach resorts of Acapulco) and eastward into the desert (starting with Palm Springs and ending with Siegel's novel experiment in Las Vegas). Siegel was himself obsessed with Hollywood star power.⁶² Alessio's criminal background probably enhanced rather than tainted the Caliente mystique.⁶³

Policing the Monopoly: Camarilla Politics and the Rosarito Beach Hotel Casino

Securing lucrative gaming concessions required arranging for the cooperation of important federal officials in Mexico City, and the case of the Rosarito Beach Hotel casino clearly illustrates this process. It also points to the powerful dynamic of patronage or *camarilla* politics; when regime change removed from power Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Governor Braulio Maldonado Sánchez could no longer buy off federal officials and prevent federal police from raiding the open secret that was Rosarito's illegal casino. Two casino concession petitions for the Rosarito Hotel illustrate the corrupt nature of doing business under PRI rule.

The attempt to resurrect the prohibition-era Rosarito Beach Hotel Casino spoke to the continued demand by tourists for such entertainment as

well as the degree to which these operations were protected by handsome kickbacks or special taxes to local officials in Baja California and Mexico City. Epitomized by the raid of the Rosarito Beach Hotel in 1959, clandestine gambling operations depended upon financial arrangements with local security and government.⁶⁴ Established in the 1920s, the Rosarito Beach Hotel featured a casino annex that had lain dormant since Cárdenas ordered the closure of gaming businesses. With Alemán as president who lent a sympathetic ear to casino tourism projects, gaming entrepreneur Pablo Sepúlveda wrote to his old friend, Rogerio de la Selva, who was Alemán's staff secretary. Sepúlveda stated up front that he hoped to obtain a gaming concession from gobernación, which was headed by Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Alemán's successor. Once it was secured, he would establish a Mexican company with American partners, the standard for reintroducing foreign investment into Mexico's nationalized capitalist development. They had selected the Rosarito Beach Hotel as the most promising site for such a casino. Perhaps this owed to proprietor Felipe Arce's aggressive campaign to restore the hotel to its prior splendor.⁶⁵ The casino would be operated as a private social club. Recalling the social clubs of the 1920s, it would comprise an exclusive membership. Sepúlveda stressed that it was the favorable publicity of the hotel's upscale guests that made it a popular getaway. Disclosing his personal stake in the casino at 25 percent of the profits, Sepúlveda hoped to persuade the right individual in gobernación with 15 percent of his cut if the concession was secured.⁶⁶ What is significant about the proposal is the clear understanding of the extra-economic factors for doing business.

Trying to massage the right contacts and grease the right palms could clearly become frustrating as evidenced in a similar letter written a decade later by a Los Angeles attorney, Max Gilford, to President Adolfo López Mateos. Gilford was married to the World War II pinup and horror film starlet Anne Gwynne in 1945,⁶⁷ and his Sunset Boulevard address epitomized the upscale Hollywood milieu referenced by Sepúlveda. Gilford articulated more clearly than Sepúlveda the restrictive social pact for the casino. It would be run as a "club" in order to save poor Mexicans from the suffering that gaming posed "to their families and . . . themselves." Here economic class trumped race/ethnic membership, as only Mexicans of "substantial wealth" would be allowed to participate.⁶⁸ López Mateos was unreceptive to Gilford's petition. This proved frustrating to the Hollywood player, who complained of having made several trips to Mexico City in order to wine and dine "Mexican nationals in their hotels . . . for the purpose of obtaining a

license to gamble under the specific conditions in the Country of Mexico." An air of dejection is detected in his petition when he states that he has been taken by coyotes—a trusted government intermediary who managed to acquire gaming permits, among other things, despite the daunting requirements of the Mexican bureaucratic state.⁶⁹ In fact, his desperate tone is readily understandable, considering that the final raid that would close the casino and send Maldonado Sánchez packing for Michoacán was less than two months away. From exile he echoed the popular belief that Las Vegas gaming interests were behind the move to close the hotel, as a way of protecting market share with the resurgence of casino gaming in Baja California.⁷⁰ A social club, whether agreed upon contractually or verbally with a wink and a nod, could not withstand the whims of change emanating from Mexico City.

During the span of time between Sepúlveda's and Gilford's letters, regime change had left Governor Braulio Maldonado Sánchez without his benefactor Ruiz Cortines. A combined force of federal agents and military raided the Rosarito Beach Hotel casino in January 1959. Consider the observation that Mexico's renowned geographer Ángel Bassols Batalla made in his exhaustive study of the Northwest. Leaving El Sauzal, the cornerstone of the Calles-Rodriguez seafood-packing business, Bassols notes in his diary inscription for December 25, 1958: "Today is Christmas and at the Rosarito Beach Hotel Americans suck down copious amounts of liquor, before going to the gaming parlor (closed days after our visit). Rosarito has a bit of everything . . . to entertain bored millionaires."⁷¹

Two letters written by aggrieved tourists to López Mateos protest the raid and unfair treatment of American gamblers.

A word in reference to 25 or more of our Americans, in a Dirty Jail in Tijuana Mex. For Gambling! Now I will advise you of one thing. After all the good, American Dollars that have been spent in your country for years, by the Americans, and You allow this thing to Happen! To allow Mex. Judge the Right to Jail Decent Americans to be Robbed and then Thrown, into a rotten hole, that you People, call a Jail.⁷²

Threatening to organize a border closure, American tourists followed the diplomatic cues from John and Allen Foster Dulles by staking notions of unbounded freedom for Americans pursuing business or leisure. The following letter draws the analogy more closely by comparing Mexico to authoritarian Guatemala:

Dear Sir,

I must strongly protest the arrest and imprisonment of the American tourists in Tijuana, B.C. This is nothing short of an atrocity!

What a miserable way to treat friends who come to visit. What a blow to the Good Neighbor Policy. I am particularly alarmed because I have made many trips to Mexico to enjoy your famous hospitality. I have always been treated kindly but now I fear to return, as but for the Grace of God, I would be rotting in a Tijuana jail, for I visited that very hotel just two days before it was raided.

Because this gambling casino was operating openly for many months it appeared to people that it was operating with the approval of the authorities. This is a fair assumption, otherwise why should it be allowed to operate?

Should the unsuspecting gringos then be arrested for gambling (some of them were only watching) and carted off to jail in a cattle truck, herded into a filthy jail without even a blanket to keep from catching cold or possibly pneumonia and then having an atrocious bail set at \$1,600... How would you like to visit a foreign country and be treated like these people are being treated in Tijuana? This is a terrible injustice!!

Do you approve of this? Are you not going to be embarrassed when our president visits you and your country is holding American prisoners in a manner similar to tactics of the Communist and Fascist?... This whole mess has shocked American and civilized people everywhere. It is worthy only of Guatemalans.

Please give it your immediate attention and justify my faith in a just and gracious Mexico.⁷³

López Mateos's presidency was expected to renovate and moralize the border zone, but as with many moralization campaigns before and since, much of it came down to the art of public relations maneuvers such as reinvention and symbolic law enforcement. Before concluding, let us examine the language of desire and imagination that reflected tourists' perceptions and experiences in Tijuana.

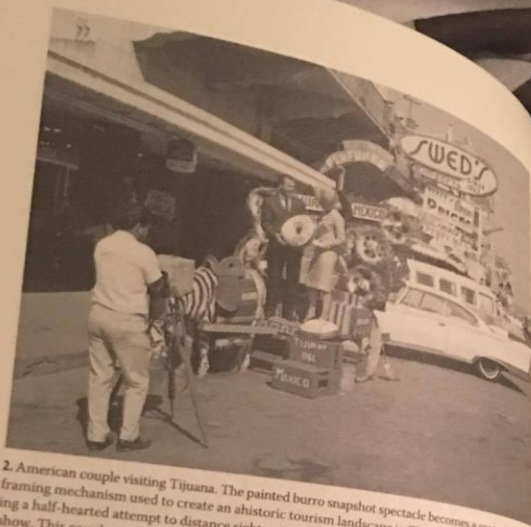
The Agua Caliente Hippodrome: An Island of Wealth amid a Sea of Poverty

From its turn-of-the-century inception, Baja California's border tourism industry was largely developed around the model of casino and racetrack gambling, combined with the hotel-spa resort. Even before the construction

of the Agua Caliente Casino and Spa (1927–29), Tijuana's short-lived luxury resort of international fame, Baja California's attractions were deliberately promoted as Old World, continental in their orientation, and liberal in their offering of gaming and entertainment services. Juxtaposed against the social conservatism that Midwestern migrants legislated in Southern California, Baja California's border created a hand-in-glove escape valve for hustlers, gangsters, and rounders. Evoked in the vernacular, the liberty Americans themselves searched for in Mexico was often cast in the disparaging moral geography of south of the border, "below the belt line." Whether it was a more relaxed attitude toward rye, sex, or roulette, most promotional writing hinted at the open-closed character with cultural codes that referred to a relaxed Old World (European) environment and an attitude free of judgment and censure. Borrowing a page from early promotional writing about Tijuana and its hippodrome, one piece in 1943 boasted the continental sophistication and gaming thrill that attracted well-heeled tourists to Baja California:

Nourished by North American tourism that grows each day, and by the impulse of its own inhabitants that have been attracted by the comforts and business opportunities they offer. . . . A center of first class tourism, Tijuana resembles the upscale resorts of Deauville and Biarritz, with its up-tempo pulse beating with affluent visitors; with its sumptuous sights and scenery, like the Hippodrome, with wealthy guests enjoying its luxurious installations and services.⁷⁴

This type of promotional writing effectively concealed the central tension of that bedeviled border tourism planners; despite the projected clientele of upscale tourists, most customers did not meet the idealized line of status and prestige. In fact, sustaining the illusion of upscale tourism became a challenge for industry promoters. With the A-list of Hollywood players, the presence of organized crime and the usual set of hustlers effectively gave the Caliente race track the glamour that endowed Tijuana with a deliciously cheap yet titillating ambience. Much apart from the glitz embodied by Caliente patrons like Al Capone or Dolores del Río, serious race fans lent a much more solemn air to the track environment. Neither blue-blooded nor threadbare, most casino and horse-racing tourists tended toward the middle-income bracket. Agua Caliente had a well-established reputation among racing circles for quality horse racing, exotic betting, and innovative safety procedures. However, its tourist appeal lies in its ability to generate racing excitement infused with a casual, anything-goes tenor.



2. American couple visiting Tijuana. The painted burro snapshot spectacle becomes a central framing mechanism used to create an ahistoric tourism landscape in Tijuana, curiously suggesting a half-hearted attempt to distance sightseeing from pornographic spectacles like the *desnudo* show. This couple posed in 1965, when a federally directed moralization campaign once again reformed Tijuana's image as a major destination for middle-class family tourism. OP 16552. COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

Gaming space has traditionally been segregated and the Tijuana race track was no different.⁷⁵ In the same way wealth and power determined seating in the *plaza de toros*, race-track audiences, largely foreign, sat divided in the sun and shade.⁷⁶ Gradually racing's aristocratic tradition as the sport of kings begrudgingly gave way to the democratizing spirit and liberal ethos of leisure culture. While the wagering business did not discriminate, perceptions of class and race mattered when it came to organizing social space. Old money mingled with Hollywood parvenu, and plebeian onlookers tried not to show their envy. Recalling the social mix at Tijuana's Caliente track, one hard-core race fan recalled it as racist if not classist.

The Clubhouse was occupied primarily by Americans and a few wealthy Mexican nationals. Locals were confined to the grandstand. At the cross-over, no one ever questioned you if you were American. But, Mexicans were regularly turned away and told that the Clubhouse was private. It

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wasn't until the evening, when dog racing took over, that the two crowds would mingle together—the action being confined to the Clubhouse.⁷⁷

The Sport of Queens—dog racing—was less pretentious and more inclusive. The notion that private space could effectively bar Mexicans was also with precedent. Mexican officials and foreign gaming operators resorted to the private social club to prevent objectionable clients from entering casinos. By making membership a private affair, the social club could insulate those on the A-list while excluding those looking in from the outside. Racing tourism produced prodigious concentrations of wealth and attracted a cast of Hollywood stars, mafia thugs, and leisure travelers. The message it sent was decidedly contrary to what Cardenista Mexico had imagined. As the pace and volume accelerated, migrating peasants who clustered around Tijuana and other border cities in their passage to *el norte* became situational participants in the larger political economy of border tourism.

Tourists were profoundly affected by the double movement of wealthy tourists and wealth-seeking migrants with whom they crossed paths at the border. The illusive search for a wildly adventurous experience at the border created an unusual predicament for them like race aficionado Ron Hale, who described the social contradictions of border tourism. "Pulling at your pant leg and yelling 'chick-lay, one penny,'" roving gangs of child *chiclé* vendors surrounded American tourists once they crossed the border.⁷⁸ Their tattered clothing and forlorn eyes melted the hardened disposition with which tourists typically inured themselves on trips to the third world. Passing on the piñatas, the velvet Elvis, or later, the ceramic Bart Simpson, Hale would typically hand over a nickel or dime for the worthless knockoffs of Adams gum. Displaying telltale signs of squatting and irregular housing, Tijuana was full of shacks, smoke from burning rubbish, drying clothes flapping from improvised clotheslines, and cemeteries of decrepit cars. The grandiose hippodrome set the juxtaposition of wealth to a heightened symbolism. "All of a sudden, you would turn a corner, and there would rise the huge grandstand of Agua Caliente," Hale notes. He started attending Sunday races because California tracks were closed on the reinstitutionalized Sabbath. This landscape of stark contrasts engendered in Americans like Hale a bewildering mixture of curiosity, affection, and repugnance.

My experience with different racetracks was extremely limited at the time but over the years, I came to find that Caliente was not quite like

anywhere else. Sure, much had to do with the fact that it was located in another country, but there was something strangely romantic about the place—even with its poor quality of racing. Here was kind of an oasis plopped down in the middle of miles of wooden shacks. . . . Just getting to Caliente was like an *E* ride at Disneyland.⁷⁹

Where the track stood out in an equestrian bettor's mind was the loose, casual, typically Mexican ambience of Agua Caliente. An informant, Richard Rossman, echoed this sentiment, having spent a considerable amount of time at the Caliente complex as a boy. He remembers the Caliente track not so much for the renowned horses or racing innovations that popularized it but for its extensive gaming parlor with wall-to-wall slot machines. In comparison to the freedom and loose enforcement that characterized Tijuana's Caliente, Las Vegas seemed overly conservative.⁸⁰ Caliente offered illegal games of chance.⁸¹ Loose enforcement, if not noncompliance, reflected multiple cultural, political, and social variables that made the border exceptionally popular for tourists. Rossman's father would load the family station wagon for monthly trips to Caliente, often returning noticeably lighter in the wallet and heavier in the spirit.⁸² Spent, hung-over, and penniless, tourists depict their return to the United States as a begrudging step out of the desacralized play of Mexico and back into the normative calendar of production that awaited them at home.⁸³

Next to loose enforcement stood Caliente's cosmopolitan nightlife to enhance its consumer appeal. Still considered "the pride of Tijuana," Caliente's Turf Club offered three shows daily.⁸⁴ The svelte Ruth Dieppe performed visually exciting dance routines while the Trio Tropicana offered a scorching blend of Caribbean rumba with flourishes of contemporary, "modern song." In addition, Amapolita sang *rancheras*, a reminder of how much border culture had transformed over the half century as well as bearing the unmistakable sign of opium and its migratory path north from Sinaloa.⁸⁵ Erudite *fronterizos* such as Frederico Campbell or Paul Vanderwood grasped the magnitude of change that had transformed the old Agua Caliente into a "laboratory of the *cardenista* revolution."⁸⁶

Discussions of Tijuana ignore its contribution to the formation of modern leisure and tourism. Like an illegitimate child, Tijuana is often disregarded as an aberration resulting from the penetration of foreign capital and enter-

prising national elites.⁸⁷ Not unlike the rise of Las Vegas as "sin city," Tijuana's black legend owed in part to the gangster-Hollywood nexus. A red line of diversionary leisure stretched from Tijuana to Vegas with Hollywood at its base. These depraved cities were forever set against a related development in the tourism economy—Southern California's amusement park business (Disneyland's Magic Kingdom or the Knott's Berry Farm). Much as in Vegas in the 1990s, Tijuana's commercial boosters reinvented their image by deploying tourism police and public relations campaigns to promote family tourism. Tourists could imbibe admittedly contrived attractions, often representing American visions of old Mexico—where they shop for curios, watch bullfights, or eat Mexican cuisine.⁸⁸ A visit today to Tijuana's aging Agua Caliente race track to see the greyhounds may not entirely be a shock but it nevertheless brings home three salient points about the political economy of the border and the power play by PRIsta scions like Mayor Jorge Hank Rhon: slot machines have been installed to prop up the flagging track business, which by all signs has experienced a secular decline measured in both attendance and wagers; side-show entertainment ranging from zoo exhibits (some of rare and nearly extinct animals) to motocross shows has revived interest in a dying tourist complex; and access to the hippodrome is the direct result of powerful connections in the federal government.⁸⁹ Racing attendance has dropped across the United States as the number of Indian casinos opened, suggesting a decline in the popularity of horse culture. Tourism to the border, however, shows little signs of decline other than the border-crossing delays associated with U.S. security policies after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Notes

1. David M. Stern, "Kamp Krusty," *The Simpsons* (20th Century Fox Film Corporation, 1992), <http://www.snpp.com>.
2. Reading the border as liminal space owes to the following scholarship on play, performance, and ritualized leisure: Kerwin Klein, "The Last Resort: Tourism, Growth, and Values in Twentieth-Century Arizona" (master's thesis, University of Arizona, 1990), 10, and "Frontier Products: Tourism, Consumerism, and the Southwestern Public Lands, 1890–1990," *Pacific Historical Review* 62.1 (February 1993): 39–71; William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club: and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 89–124; Daniel D. Arreola and James R. Curtis, *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press