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EL PASO - CIUDAD JUAREZ
A FOCUS OF INTER-AMERICAN CULTURE

JAMES LAWRENCE MC CONVILLE

IN MOST DISCUSSION of inter-American relations, the usual topics are: 1) relations between the governments of the United States and other American countries at the diplomatic level; 2) relations of United States investors with the Latin American elite; and 3) cross-relationships among these groups. Indeed, until recently these have been the major areas of inter-American cultural contact, but the traditional pattern is now undergoing a substantial change. For the first time there is a massive, "grass-roots" interchange in which the lives of millions of people are intimately involved. The focus seems to be shifting from the diplomats to the masses, from treaties, investments, interventions, and state visits to ordinary daily intercourse. In the future important decisions affecting the hemisphere will not be made by diplomats and policy makers alone, but by men who have had the unique experience of living with two often contrasting cultures.

For geographical reasons, the chief contacts between North Americans and Latin Americans have been in the Southern United States, Northern Mexico, and the Greater Antilles. The boundary between Mexico and the United States has always been particularly susceptible to cultural diffusion, because the line is essentially artificial. Northern Mexico and the Southwestern United States share a common geography, with similar climatic conditions and natural resources.

In 1964 more than four million persons were living within a few miles of the international boundary; sixty-four per cent on the United States side, thirty-six per cent on the Mexican side.

Since World War II the population explosion along the frontier has been spectacular in both countries. There are more than 28,000,000 inhabitants within a zone four hundred miles wide on each side of the border.

One especially prominent zone is the Meseta Central, stretching from Albuquerque on the north to Mexico City on the south. Unless we count San Diego, California, as a border town, El Paso-Ciudad Juárez is now the largest center of population. The growth of this area since 1950 is shown by the following table:¹

YEAR	EL PASO	CIUDAD JUÁREZ	METROPOLITAN AREA
1950	130,485	122,600	253,085
1960	276,687	261,683	538,370
1964	380,000	370,000	750,000
1970	585,000	610,000	1,195,000

One of the difficulties in attempting to study inter-American cultural influences is the widely-held and unfavorable stereotype of border cities. Ciudad Juárez, for example, evokes an image of squalor and depravity in the minds of many Americans. Some commentators claim that no city in the world can match it for corruption and immorality. El Paso has received similar abuse, being called "a dirty border town" or the "North Juárez Slums." This attitude has become so ingrained that any serious study of the problem is met with raised eyebrows or ridicule.

The stereotypes are grotesque distortions of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. Nor can we accept the slightly more sophisticated generalization that, since the two cities are atypical and unrepresentative of their countries, their inhabitants are a collection of Mexican-American mongrels unworthy of study.

Sociologists might be expected to be more objective about the two cities than historians. Here, the sociologist may say, is a zone of cultural contact, and cultural diffusion between the two countries can consequently be expected. If the confrontation of opposing civilizations results in the partial disintegration of the values and norms of these border inhabitants, what does this suggest about future inter-American relations? If Juarenses are not Mexi-

cans, and El Pasoans are not Americans, what are they? It is tempting to predict that the time may come when the two cities may share more characteristics with each other than they do with their parent countries. If so, how will compromises of the subtle but important difference between Anglo-American and Hispanic-American civilizations be made? An investigation of the culture of the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez area may shed some light on these questions.

*ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE
OF CIUDAD JUAREZ AND EL PASO*

THE FAMILIAR MISCONCEPTION of Juárez as a "tawdry community living off tourist trade and vice"² is hard to dispel because it is true that its industry is poorly developed, and tourism is undoubtedly the greatest single source of income. So popular is this border city that many people classify it as a resort. This rise to "resort" status is reflected in many other ways, and will be discussed later. Here it is sufficient to observe that many night clubs, motels and hotels, and restaurants with appeal for the tourist interested in, and able to spend large amounts for, entertainment have been built within the last five years.

In addition to stocking every conceivable item of Mexican handicrafts, Juárez merchants have also answered the demand of residents of the Upper Rio Grande Valley for traditional Spanish furniture, ornately carved doors, and numerous other items that are in harmony with Spanish, Mexican, and Spanish-Pueblo architecture and interior decor. Most of these items are handmade and the prices high, but active buying on the part of regional consumers interested in typically Mexican decorative schemes has created a sizeable demand for these items.

El Paso businessmen count on the Juarenses to patronize their retail stores, and also employ many Mexican nationals. In addition to the large number of Juarenses employed in El Paso industries, virtually all of the domestic help employed in El Paso homes is drawn from Spanish-speaking residents from both sides of the

border. Consequently there is a constant flow of people across the various international bridges.

Apart from sales to tourists in Juárez, virtually all El Pasoans who speak Spanish, as well as many of the English-speaking residents, regularly do a considerable part of their shopping in the Mexican city. El Pasoans and southern New Mexicans often do their Christmas shopping in Juárez. Besides the city's historic role as the logical place to buy alcoholic beverages, residents of nearby areas as Las Cruces, New Mexico, regularly look to Juárez for bulk Mexican sugar, flour, grains, coffee, and other food staples.

The two cities have historically served as an economic focus for their vast but sparsely-inhabited hinterlands. The existence of adequate railway facilities makes Juárez an outlet for Mexican lumber, ore, and cattle. Cattle raising and mining also gave rise to the need for packing plants and smelters. The most important industries in the city are meat packing, cottonseed oil refining, brick and tile manufacturing, distilling and brewing, textile weaving, and home building.³ The recent tapping of underground water and the utilization of water from joint irrigation projects along the Rio Grande now supports the cultivation of cotton and other crops in the previously unproductive Valle de Juárez.⁴

The number of persons employed in industry is relatively small, however, in proportion to the total population. Related industries were attracted north of the river by American capital. El Paso's industrial expansion has also been facilitated by its proximity to the large cheap labor force in Juárez:

. . . El Paso had become economically dominant, as a wholesale center, over an area which extended far into Mexico; it also had developed ore and oil refinement, cement, meat packing, clothing, and other industries. The demand for cheap labor became so great that ten to fifteen percent of the labor force of C. Juárez was regularly employed in El Paso.⁵

State and federal agencies are important factors in the economic life of both cities. U.S. military installations such as Fort Bliss and nearby White Sands contribute directly and indirectly to the

economic welfare of the entire region.⁶ The economic interdependence of the two cities is susceptible to statistical research, and perhaps any definite conclusions about the degree and kind of interdependence should await a comprehensive study of this nature. Generally speaking, however, Mexicans spend considerably less in money in our border towns than we spend in Mexican border towns. This may be misleading because of the large amount of money spent by non-border United States tourists, but it is clear that Juárez' large population could not be sustained without the economic influence of El Paso. Based on past performance, the economy of the Juárez area will probably continue to grow along with that of neighboring parts of the United States, assuming, of course, that no additional economic barriers are imposed and that the political climate of the two nations does not alter appreciably.⁷

INTER-CITY CO-OPERATION

OF MANY FACTORS which have prompted inter-city co-operation between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, perhaps those problems raised by the physical environment have been the most prominent. The best-known regional problem of the United States Southwest and Northern Mexico concerns the lower Colorado and the lower Rio Grande Rivers. Both have, at one time or another, been major areas of friction and of co-operation. The Valle de Juárez has not been the scene of heated controversies like the Colorado Delta, however, because definitive binational treaties were made in 1906 and 1944. Nonetheless both communities face the same water problems experienced throughout the Meseta Central and the American Southwest.

The twin cities have conducted a joint mosquito-control program for many years, and in April 1964, they embarked upon a joint rabies-eradication program with a concerted effort to destroy rabid dogs and inoculate others. The plan spread to Chihuahua and to those parts of New Mexico and Texas where the problem was also serious enough to require a co-operative effort.

The most publicized example of international and inter-city co-operation involved the settlement of the Chamizal dispute. It calls for canalization to prevent future meandering of the Rio Grande and the transfer of a large section of South El Paso to Juárez in return for the northern portion of Córdova Island, a Mexican enclave in East El Paso. The inconvenience in relocating American families in the zone has been offset by the prestige the United States gained in the eyes of Mexico—and particularly in the eyes of the Juarenses. Juárez intends to prevent this area from becoming a slum. It will contain attractive examples of contemporary Mexican architecture provided by a co-operative building program with the Programa Nacional Fronterizo.

Abrasive issues between the two cities are increasingly being solved by inter-city co-operation. A problem arose recently when El Paso citizens complained about the sale of liquor to El Paso minors in Juárez cantinas. In an unprecedented move, Juárez officials declared that any bar caught selling liquor to minors would be immediately closed. A "police check system" was established to carry out the order. Much to the surprise of El Pasoans, three bars were permanently closed the following day. This example was sufficient warning to other operators, and since then El Paso minors have found that they are no longer welcome in Juárez' bars.⁸

Formal recognition of community interdependence is manifested by regular joint meetings held by the Chambers of Commerce, service clubs, and fraternal, governmental, and many other organizations of the two cities. Moreover, a majority of the residents of El Paso are Spanish-speaking and many of them have family and other ties across the border.⁹

REFORM IN CIUDAD JUAREZ

NO DISCUSSION of recent relations between the two cities would be complete without taking into account the changes that have taken place in Juárez during the last three years. This is reflected

in the comments of visitors who knew the city in earlier years and have recently returned to find that a large part of the sordidness and squalor seems to have disappeared.

Municipal reform is the result of a determined effort on the part of local groups and authorities with assistance from the Mexican national government. Motivation for reform may be long-pent-up civic shame, or merely righteous indignation over slurs and abusive language heaped upon the city by El Pasoans and offended tourists. By no means was this criticism limited to U.S. citizens. Mexico City residents have also long regarded conditions in Juárez as a national scandal that should be remedied.

The success of recent reforms is reflected in the following commentary in a recent issue of a fine arts periodical printed in Mexico City:

Bulwark of the Reform and . . . cradle of the Mexican Revolution, in these days it [Juárez] is changing its appearance by the creation of new urban areas and by the construction of magnificent buildings. . . . Juárez, one of our principal frontier gateways, now presents to the foreigner an image of a city in evolutionary ascendancy, with great yearnings for excellence and dignity. . . .¹⁰

Reform in Juárez has only started and perhaps such a description is somewhat euphemistic and premature. Yet substantial changes have begun to alter the image that once evoked international censure and ridicule.

The local Chamber of Commerce, the Unión Cívica, and other civic groups have pressed for a cleaning-up of the city's main thoroughfares. A few years ago, Avenida Juárez, the main entrance into the city from El Paso, was cluttered with small stands selling novelties to tourists. The street was filled with refuse and dirt; scores of taxis lined the streets eagerly seeking customers for the city's brothels, and aggressive shopkeepers accosted passing tourists. Street stands were recently confiscated in cases where their owners refused to co-operate with civic authorities, and taxis relegated to back streets and alleys. Avenida 16 de Septiembre,

the main commercial artery of the city, has been improved by the demolition of many Porfirian structures and by the construction of new ones on lines reminiscent of modern Mexico City.¹¹

Visitors now remark about the clean, neat appearance of the city as compared to the past. The number of bedraggled children and beggars seems to have declined drastically, but this is perhaps due more to police threats than to improvement of their socio-economic status. Eastern and suburban Juárez now boasts a fast-growing, modern residential section, where most of the city's business, professional and governmental workers live. The city will also benefit from a twenty million peso appropriation for street paving made in early 1964.¹²

One important spur to civic improvement in the Mexican city has been the Programa Nacional Fronterizo. This program, a project of former President Adolfo López Mateos, was instituted to create a string of neat, clean showcases of Mexican culture all along the border from Tijuana to Matamoros. Ciudad Juárez was the primary target for reform, and plans toward this end were announced in 1961. The Avenida de las Américas, at the easternmost of the two bridges between the cities, has benefitted substantially from the federal government's program. Located here today is the Museum of History and Art. It contains copies of artifacts from Mexico's archaeological heritage, examples of painting and architecture from all periods of Mexican history, and displays of regional products, handicrafts, and recent industrial growth. Near the museum is a new auditorium intended to provide both Juarenses and tourists with dramatic productions, orchestral performances, and folkloric productions from all Mexico. From September 15 to October 13, 1964, the federal government sponsored its Eighth Feria del Hogar in Juárez. This large display of national art, handicrafts, housewares, and new developments in technology attracted attention from both sides of the border.

Not all of the changes in the city have been the result of city and federal governmental action. Juárez now supports a symphony orchestra, the Orquesta Sinfónica del Noroeste. A recent performance included works by Rossini, Mozart, Verdi, Puccini,

Mascagni, and others. Reviews have been very favorable on both sides of the border. The Orquesta now participates with similar groups in El Paso and Las Cruces, New Mexico, in a community concert program. Residents may purchase tickets valid for performances in all three cities.¹³ Juárez was recently made the seat of a bishopric. Dr. Manuel Talamas Camandari, the newly-appointed bishop, plans reforms in the religious life of the city, such as the construction of a seminary—a project already in progress.¹⁴

Many citizens of El Paso view these changes as a mixed blessing. Reform in the Mexican city is laudable, they say, but they add that many of the city's undesirable elements have now found it more profitable to move to El Paso.

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON THE RIO GRANDE METROPOLIS

ONE OF THE MOST difficult cultural aspects to assess is the importance of the spread of technological progress in both cities. This subject has already been mentioned in the discussion of the economic interdependence of the two communities. The question here is the extent to which modern transportation methods, scientific manufacturing techniques, and the products of technology have changed the lives and values of the inhabitants. This may be the most important consideration in determining the nature of the sub-culture which exists at this border center.

In this instance the international boundary between the two communities is not very significant. It is more important to recognize that all of the people in the area, except for approximately 100,000 El Pasoans, are of Mexican descent. They represent the original sub-culture, while the English-speaking dwellers of El Paso, most of whom arrived with the establishment of defense installations and industry, can be considered to be bearers of the "Technological Civilization" of the United States. The Spanish-speaking majority of El Paso-Ciudad Juárez has been more exposed to technological advances than any other Spanish-speaking group in Mexico. Many are employed in industry and have access to a wide selection of new products. Given the low standard

of living of most of the Spanish-speaking people in the area, many are unable to purchase more than a few of these products. What may be more significant, however, is the attitude of these people to technology and technological change.

The real influence of North American technology is hard to assess because of the set of values peculiar to the people of Northern Mexico before the arrival of Anglo-Americans. Northern Mexico is peopled by true heirs of the Bourbon Renaissance. With regional stress on utility, knowledge, industry, and science, the North has slight historical memory of the Hapsburg colonial period or its knotty problems. As a cattle, mining, and missionary frontier, its traditions are of a different order, in kind and degree, from those of central and southern Mexico.¹⁵

In view of their historical tradition and constant exposure to the standard of living found in the United States, it is probable that the Spanish-speaking people of this region will be among the first to adopt the material culture of North American technology. If this is true of Juárez, what does it imply about the future of Mexican civilization? With its large rate of population increase, the metropolitan area should exert greater influence on the Mexican economy, and could conceivably influence the values of other Mexicans. Even considering Mexico as a whole it is apparent that the North American way of life is rapidly replacing some European norms which once prevailed. Practicality, money, machines, and speed are the things which today provoke the greatest enthusiasm in many modern men.¹⁶

Nevertheless it would be premature to predict that Mexico will be smothered by North American culture. Novelists and social critics writing since the Revolution reflect the concern Mexicans feel on this topic. Perhaps the historical background of Northern Mexicans explains why they are particularly willing to accept certain aspects of American culture. By the same token many border-dwelling Americans seem to evince just as great an interest in many facets of Mexican culture. One of the major reasons for immigration to New Mexico from other parts of the United States is that the state offers a haven for thousands who

have a definite distaste for the way of life prevailing in the rest of the country.

EL PASO - CIUDAD JUÁREZ AS A REGIONAL CENTER

THE ECONOMIC INFLUENCE of Juárez and El Paso over New Mexico, West Texas, and Chihuahua is of long standing. Today the cities are the hub of a transportation wheel where seventeen railways and roadways converge to link the cities with their remote hinterlands.

Mention has already been made of the attraction the border cities have for residents of the Upper Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico. The cities also serve as a magnet for citizens of the city of Chihuahua and the smaller cities in the Conchos agricultural area to the south. Recent reforms in Juárez have helped make it the single most popular resort for Chihuahuan socialites. *El Herald*, Chihuahua's chief newspaper, carries advertisements for Aeronaves de México describing the "Attractions and excitement of the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Ciudad Juárez," accompanied by a sketch showing an attractive, well-dressed woman strolling down a broad avenue lined with large, exclusive-looking department stores! Ten years ago such an advertisement would have evoked great hilarity on the part of the inhabitants of the state capital.¹⁷

The city of Chihuahua has played an interesting role in this frontier region. Although it has only 200,000 inhabitants, Chihuahua resembles a city many times larger. Since Juárez has traditionally acted as a drain for the sordid elements of Chihuahua, the capital city has been spared the bad reputation and civic problems of the larger frontier city.

The capital has long been under the influence of American material culture, and to a substantial degree has shared in its prosperity. The following list of establishments in the city in 1964 is a reflection of American influence and of its prosperity: 6 dealers in air conditioners; 4 dealers in neon signs; 6 dealers in electric appliances; 15 automobile dealers; 3 airlines; 17 banks

and savings and loan institutions with 26 branches; 42 drug stores and pharmacies; 12 bus companies; 2 railroads; 42 hotels, motels; 3 large book stores.¹⁸

The economic prosperity of the city has a unique background. In addition to being a traditional market for goods distributed from El Paso, Chihuahua was an inviting area for United States investors. It now supports many large industries, such as Celulosa de Chihuahua, Cementos de Chihuahua, Viscosa de Chihuahua, Cervecería Cruz Blanca; and such important extractive industries as Canámex de Chihuahua, S. A.; Compañía Minera Guazapores, S. A., de C. V.; Compañía Minera de Peralta, S. A. de C. V.; Manganeso, S. A.; Minerales de Chihuahua, S. A.; Compañía Minera Asarco, S. A.; and Compañía Minera Venturosa. Much of the ore produced by these companies is refined in El Paso.¹⁹

So prosperous has Chihuahua become in recent years that a small but important group of its businessmen now provides an important source of capital for investment in Juárez' enterprises. In 1957 this group established the Banco Provincial del Norte, S. A., for the specific purpose of improving the economy of the state. They established branch banks in remote areas previously without banking services. In December, 1958, this group established the Financiera Provincial del Norte in Juárez, capitalized at 95,000,000.00 pesos, as a savings and loan institution. Its main function is to make loans available to owners of small businesses in Juárez.²⁰

In addition to the many millions who cross the border as tourists for several hours, many people living in the Rio Grande Valley from Las Cruces to Santa Fe frequently vacation in Juárez and Chihuahua. Chihuahua became a center of particular interest with opening of the Ferrocarriles Chihuahua al Pacífico, offering tourists from this region a quick, inexpensive and spectacular route to the Pacific coast. Expeditions visiting this area and the Barranca de Cobre en route have become increasingly popular, particularly among Albuquerque residents.

A very important link in fostering regional ties is radio station XELO, broadcasting from Juárez. Unrestricted by U. S. communications limitations, this 150,000-watt station, considered one of the best in Mexico, has many faithful listeners among more than two million Spanish-speaking people in New Mexico, Chihuahua, West Texas, and parts of Arizona, Sonora, and Coahuila. The station has become more and more bicultural, with frequent English broadcasts and American music interspersed with popular Mexican tunes and traditional Latin American music. Its news coverage is also binational. It attempts to attract listeners from both sides of the border and prides itself on the cosmopolitan role it plays. It has also participated in the Juárez reform movement by reminding listeners that it is now the fourth largest city of the republic, and by publicizing civic improvements. Many Spanish-speaking residents of Southern New Mexico listen to this station almost exclusively.

It is difficult to assess the importance of the cultural contacts between the inhabitants of this region, but it is clear that these contacts are increasing and that there is little ill will among the vast majority of the border-dwellers of the region which centers on El Paso-Juárez. The rationale behind old prejudices is breaking down with the movement toward economic and cultural synthesis.

CONCLUSION

IT WOULD APPEAR that a common history and common interests have tended to break down social differences based on nationalistic sentiments in the El Paso-Juárez area. This may indicate a trend all along the 1600-mile frontier, although the cities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and along the Baja California-California boundary have not yet reached this degree of cultural integration. Tijuana, for example, resents the federal government's reform overtures and insists that it wants to retain its present image.

There may be a pattern forming as a result of this cultural contact. The U. S. is supplying the capital, technological know-how, and products that make Northern Mexico resemble the United States more and more. At the same time, Mexico contributes to the population of the American Southwest to such an extent that Spanish is probably the chief language in San Antonio, Texas. Over two million Texans are of Mexican descent. The international boundary is indeed a "permeable membrane."

The traditional description of border towns as "mongrel" towns, neither Mexican nor American, perhaps takes on more significance when applied to the 28,000,000 who live near the frontier. The cultural experiences of the people of this region have been, and will continue to be, quite different from those of the people of either of the parent countries.

It would be interesting to determine what specific compromises or accommodations have been made between Northern and Southern European values (as modified by indigenous cultures and New World experiences) in the minds of individuals in the border region. The Mexican government is quite cognizant of this situation along the frontier. The main goals of the Programa Nacional Fronterizo are to make Spanish-speaking people on both sides of the border aware of their cultural heritage, and to bring them to look to Mexico City as their cultural and spiritual center. It is unlikely, however, that the pride of the Juarenses will make them enemies of the influence of the United States.

If the values held by the people in this region are a mixture of those of the two national cultures, perhaps the success of their mixture has meaning for the future of the two countries and the civilizations they represent. The *frontera* does not yet have any philosophers or poets who might express the spirit of such a cultural merger. But considering the growth of the area, the region will inevitably play a more important role as the place where cultures clash—and hopefully—will be reconciled.

NOTES

1. 1950 Ciudad Juárez figures: Mapa del estado de Chihuahua (Mexico, 1959), reverse side. 1960 Juárez figures and 1950 and 1960 El Paso figures: Harry Hanson, *World Almanac and Book of Facts* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), pp. 310, 779. 1964 figures are estimates made by the author on the basis of information from local sources. 1970 figures are mathematical projections computed by the author based on long-term growth rates.
2. W. H. Form and W. V. D'Antonio, "Integration and Cleavage among Community Influentials in Two Border Cities," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 24 (1959), p. 806.
3. James I. Culbert, "Manufacturing Industries of Juárez, Mexico," *Annals of the Association of The American Geographers*, vol. 51 (1961), p. 406; Form, p. 806.
4. Form, pp. 805-806.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*; Culbert, p. 406.
7. Culbert, p. 406.
8. Juárez *El Fronterizo*, April 1, 1961, p. 1.
9. Form, p. 806.
10. México, *México en la Cultura*, April 12, 1964, p. 1.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Juárez *El Fronterizo*, April 1, 1964, p. 1.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (New York, 1963), p. 111.
16. Samuel Ramos, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (Austin, Texas, 1962), p. 98.
17. Chihuahua *El Herald*, April 2, 1964, p. 6.
18. Teléfonos de México, S. A., *Chihuahua: Directorio No. 27*, April 1964, scattered references throughout.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Banco Provincial del Norte, "Banco Provincial del Norte, S. A.," Chihuahua, September 25, 1964.