

Yankee Don't Go Home! Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920–1950. By *Julio Moreno*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. xi + 321 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$59.95. ISBN: 0-807-82802-5.

Reviewed by Aurora Gómez-Galvarriato

This book takes a new and refreshing look at the history of the relationship between Mexico and the United States, particularly the cultural and private aspects of that relationship. Julio Moreno examines the “cultural middle ground” forged by American businesses and diplomats during the 1930s and 1940s, which enabled U.S. firms to survive, and even to prosper, in a nation whose government and population had embraced a nationalist and revolutionary ideology. According to Moreno, this arrangement required Americans to step away from their former practice of “missionary diplomacy,” which was based on the position that American values were superior to those of other nations, and to adopt a more respectful, conciliatory attitude toward Mexican values.

Moreno argues that this strategy enabled Americans to influence Mexican culture, shaping the ideology that emanated from the Mexican Revolution into a more hospitable arena for American business. The success of this policy was facilitated by the postrevolutionary Mexican government, whose various administrations were determined to transform Mexico into a prosperous and modern industrial nation. Although these leaders nationalized critical sectors of the Mexican economy, they nevertheless considered private enterprise and foreign investment to be critical for achieving national prosperity. In striving for “industrial modernity,” Mexican postrevolutionary governments embraced American technology and business practices, including “the art of publicity,” opening a window for American interests. Thus, room was made for both parties to build a “middle ground” that offered opportunities to both sides, provided that American business executives and diplomats respected the boundaries of this new ground. Americans quickly grasped the rules, and they were clever enough to expand the perimeters of the agreement by engaging in “friendly business practices” and initiating publicity strategies that simultaneously praised Mexican nationalism and “Mexican traditional values” and promoted a “consumer democracy” and “modern,” urban American values.

Moreno argues his point by presenting a collage of case studies, rather than relying on continuous narrative. The writing is uneven, making it sometimes difficult to grasp the relevance of some of the topics to the main argument. One example would be his digression, in chapter one, on the subject of the Mexican government's regulation of professions. For the most part,

however, he tells a compelling story. In chapter two, he describes Nelson Rockefeller's strategy, as head of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OIIA), to transform Mexicans' predominantly anti-American attitude in order to turn them into loyal allies of the United States during World War II. The case studies of J. Walter Thompson, the biggest American advertising agency of the time, and of Sears form the core of the book. Moreno analyzes the contrasting experiences of these two American companies when they arrive in Mexico. At one extreme, J. Walter Thompson initially endorsed "a form of arrogance and self-righteousness that echoed early-twentieth-century American imperialism" (p. 231) and hindered its ability to make profits. It took several years for the company to understand that it had to adapt to Mexican culture in order to be successful. In contrast, Sears' strategy was the paradigm of "progressive diplomacy," as the company entered the Mexican market "with a strong commitment to acclimating to local conditions, and filtered its corporate operations through Mexican nationalist and revolutionary rhetoric" (p. 231). Sears' ability to adapt to changing conditions in Mexico was indeed amazing, particularly as the company was faced with a strong increase in protectionism in 1947 that turned its original strategy upside down and forced the company to acquire and develop Mexican suppliers. The flexibility that Sears headquarters gave its Mexican branch allowed a completely different kind of store to develop in that country, ensuring its survival in the Mexican economic and political environment.

The case of Sears is so rich that the one chapter allotted to it seems insufficient. A deeper exploration of the economic context would have complemented and enriched Moreno's cultural approach. For example, the extraordinary success of Sears during its first months after opening could be partly explained by the severe overvaluation of the peso until the devaluation of 1948. It would also be helpful to know something about the effect of government changes in trade policy on Sears' profits and sales, which must have been severe despite the company's extraordinary adaptive maneuvers.

Paralleling the book's general argument is another theme that ties the book together in a different and fascinating way. *Yankee Don't Go Home* is necessary reading for anyone interested in the history of the profession of advertising and consumer culture in Mexico. Through a clever and careful analysis of advertisements placed in several magazines and newspapers during the 1940s and 1950s, Moreno argues convincingly that "advertising syncretized national cultural trends and global cultural trends stemming primarily from the United States" (p. 113). In chapter seven, he takes the argument further through an analysis of letters sent by different persons to *La Familia* magazine and to an archbishop, asking for advice on personal matters. In analyzing this

correspondence, Moreno shows how individuals experienced the difficult coexistence of tradition and modernity in mid-twentieth century Mexico.

This book is an excellent example of how a cultural perspective can provide rich insights into business history. However, it also reveals some of the flaws of this approach. Mexico's ability to combine nationalism and tradition with American values and modernity is presented as exceptional. Yet many nations have had a similar experience, and this study would have benefited from an international perspective. Perhaps this book will inspire new research that will seek to answer many of the fascinating questions it raises.

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