



Contextualizing Mexico: Four Things

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Contextualizing Mexico: Four Things

Michael Lauderdale

First: The Border

The United States and Mexico share a 2000 mile border with more than half, about 1200 miles, between Texas and Mexico. There are four Mexican Border States across from Texas: Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nueva Leon and Tamaulipas. Both nations are among the world's most populous with Mexico having about 115,000,000 and the United States, 310,000,000 people. America's population is substantially older with a median age of about 36.2 years and, by contrast, Mexico has a median age of 26.1 years. America is wealthy and well-educated while Mexico is relatively poor, less educated and needing education resources. (CIA 2011)

Examining a map of the two countries along the region where they meet advances an understanding of the border between United States and Mexico. From the far western edge in California where San Diego and Tijuana are about 20 miles apart, the border extends eastward until one reaches the Gulf of Mexico and the cities of Brownsville and Matamoros separated only by a narrow band of water, the Rio Grande. It is useful to use the metaphor of geology and think of two large tectonic plates that are colliding at the Texas-Mexico border. The northern plate is the United States and the southern plate is Mexico with the Rio Grande as the subduction zone where the two plates collide. Energies from this collision then radiate both north and south for at least 200 miles. Such a metaphor helps us to understand that cities like Houston, San Antonio and Austin in the United States and Matamoros, Monterrey, Durango and Chihuahua in Mexico experience the perturbations from these collisions.

The land, itself, is a high arid desert ecology that does not permit intensive agriculture but rather is best used for grazing sheep and cattle. (Dale 1960; Jackson 1986; Graham 2003) The

one exception is the region along the Gulf Coast that can have heavy rainfall and is often exposed to hurricane-based storms. Because of the ecology, historically, the population has been sparse but the pull of the markets of the States has changed that centuries-old reality of large ranches and small villages in the last 30 years. The entire 200 miles zone on either side today has approximately 20,000,000 people with almost all in urban areas. Far higher wages exist on the United States side incurring continual Mexican migrations to the north. Indeed more than ever in its history northern Mexico is oriented toward the United States like the needle of a compass to its magnetic north pole!

Second: Mexican History

When European explorers reached North and South America in the 1500's, they encountered not empty lands but substantially populated villages and highly varied, complex cultures occurring irregularly across both continents. (Fehrenbach 1979; Berler and Prescott 1988; Joseph and Henderson 2002) In the Central Highlands of Mexico, they found the Aztec culture then about 300 years old and existing as the region's most powerful colonial entity subjugating other Indian tribes miles to the north and south and east from the Gulf of Mexico to the western mountains of Mexico but blocked from the Pacific by the Tarascans people. In time it was discovered that the Aztecs had been preceded by three or four other older cultures dating back probably 2000 years. The Aztecs, themselves, appeared to have migrated around 1200 AD during a great drought from the Four Corners area of the American Southwest arriving in the Valley of Mexico initially as a poor, small tribe of hunters and gatherers. In about three centuries they achieved colonial domination in the Valley of Mexico using aq-

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uaculture in the great lake at the center of the Valley establishing the Aztec capital city of *Tenochtitlan* and having a population of 40,000. Thus the Aztecs were at the height of their empire about three centuries old when European contact occurred. (Fehrenbach 1979; Berler and Prescott 1988; Prescott 2000)

Europeans learned of the Aztecs through the reports of Hernan Cortez, the Spanish conquistador who invaded the Aztec empire in 1519, and that Indian empire was, simply, the latest in an ancient world of conquest, migration and conquered peoples in the Americas. The war against the Aztecs by Spain lasted about 50 years resulting in a new colonial power from Europe, the complete destruction of much of the Aztec culture and a population reduction from approximately 10,000,000 in Mexico to 1,000,000 Indians by the 1700's. (Banks and Prescott 1916; Paz 1950; Berler and Prescott 1988; Krauze 1990; Bonfil Batalla and Dennis 1996)

Patterns of Oppression and Revolt

Mexico then saw from first European contact for the next 450 years, oppression of the native populations and successive revolts against Spain, France, large Mexican landholders and the Roman Catholic Church and as late as the 1940's efforts to expel foreign interests, particularly American and British oil companies. Thus the history of Mexico is one of repeated wars and the imposition of one political power violently over existing societies. Much of the culture and political discourse of Mexico, even today, reflects concerns of domination by foreign interests and efforts by the Mexican population to secure independence.

This history also illustrates, returning to the geological metaphor, that change in Mexico comes not smoothly and progressive but rather through sharp discontinuities, earthquakes. Indeed Mexico sustains a revolution about every hundred years as it betrays a brittle response to change pressures.

Spain then spent the next nearly 200 years consolidating the colony of Mexico seeking to extend its control into South America and north to Louisiana and west to the Pacific Northwest. It sent armies accompanied by traders to secure wealth for Spain and Catholic priests to convert the residents

to loyal subjects of Spain as well as providing vast agricultural and mining grants to Spaniards choosing to come to the New World. (Frye 1996) The years were filled with bloody conflict and prepared the stage for successive revolts in these conquered territories over five centuries.

The First Attempt at Mexican Independence

The next most significant revolt after the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs in Mexico began on May 5, 1810 through the efforts of a Roman Catholic priest, Father Juan Hidalgo. Outraged at the treatment he saw of the Indians and *Mestizos* (the offspring of Spanish men and Indian women), he urged them along with Spaniards born in Mexico (*Corriolos*) to rise up against the European colonial power. Mexico like Bolivia and Venezuela to the south was moved by the powerful ideas of the Enlightenment and Reformation beginning in Europe had served to strip the British colonial powers of the American Colony. That American Revolution created the first full expression of those movements toward individualism of a society freed of the world of the *ancien regime* where power was vested in hereditary royalty, landed gentry and the Roman Catholic Church. Central to the appearance of American Exceptionalism in the 1700's is the sense of the authority of government rooted in the consent of the governed and that consent expressed through voting among other mechanism of social participation including free assembly, a free press and government structures representative and responsive to the will of the populace.

Much of Latin America sought similar freedoms and yet those lands like Mexico saw much of their revolutions' promises stalled or reversed. Father Hidalgo was executed by government forces and set a pattern in many successive revolts with the untimely deaths of revolution heroes. But some sense of democracy grew in Mexico with Spain agreeing to its independence in 1821 and reached its height in the 1860's with the election of Benito Juarez. During the years from Mexican Independence until the 1850's wars occurred with Texas and then the United States that severed the claimed territories of Mexico in much of North America. France attempted a re-

conquest of Mexico with an invasion of Mexico City in 1863 but was repulsed by 1864. Then a brief period of elections followed. However traditional forces regrouped and installed Porfirio Diaz via election, who ruled as a dictator though formally elected as President from 1876 to 1911. The agricultural and banking reforms achieved under Juarez were completely reversed and by 1910 a few land owners and once again the Catholic Church owned most of the land in Mexico leaving 90 percent of the people landless.

During most of the years of Mexico's existence the ownership of land was crucial as little factory or trade work existed and people secured their existence by farming and animal husbandry. In many parts of the country the land was not surveyed, registered and owned but rather held as a communal property with rights to use coming from tribal membership. European activities including property rights of land ownership and associated taxation were alien to the bulk of the Mexican population and in the early 1800's and then again after the 1860's the indigenous population saw land ownership stripped from them and concentrated in the hands of the few, the establishment of a landless peasant class with rights less than under a feudal system. Repeatedly in the 19th and into the 20th Century revolutions would attempt to meld the various groups in the Mexican population into a common national vision.

Third: Cultural and Economic Fundamentals of the Modern Mexico

The most recent significant Mexican revolution was between 1910 and 1920. This revolution began not in Mexico City but in the north, particularly the state of Chihuahua led by Pancho Villa and in the south by Emiliano Zapata. There were other leaders in this revolution but these two are significant in that they were viewed as coming from the peasant class, uneducated, illiterate and from the ranks of the Indian and Mestizo population of Mexico. Though both were killed and in treachery not combat at the end of the conflict, the revolution once again broke up large land monopolies by Mexican wealthy, remaining European families and the Roman Catholic Church ushering in the modern Mexican State as it exists

today.

A final paroxysm of the 1910 Revolution came with the Cristero War in the late 1920's. It was an effort by conservative Catholics in states north-west of Mexico City, Jalisco and Guadalajara, to reverse Federal government actions against the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church has long been a controversial institution in Mexican culture. Forced conversion by the Church of Indians began with the Spanish conquest though at other times such as the efforts by Father Hidalgo, the Church was a mechanism of efforts to better the conditions of the poor and landless. But during much of the 19th Century the Church worked hand-in-hand with the wealthy and politically powerful and, itself, became a wealthy landowner. Thus in the 19th Century the Roman Catholic Church appeared in Mexico as a powerful and conservative land and wealth monopoly much as it was viewed in the 1770's in France, Italy and Spain. Priests and the Church, itself, were among the focus of the 1910 Revolution and resulted in a sharp reduction of wealth holdings and power by 1920. The Cristero War was an effort to reverse that situation but ended in defeat though with the loss of 90,000 lives. An aftermath of this war was an even sharper curtailment of the presence and power of the Catholic Church with the Church being forbidden to own property, run schools and for priests and nuns to appear in public in clerical garb.

In the soul of the Mexican culture and state are concerns about foreign domination and wealth concentration. These concerns were expressed in the 1930s and 1940s with the expropriation of American and British Oil properties in Mexico by then Mexican President, Cardenas. During those years and significant throughout the 20th century are Mexican involvements with Marxist perspectives and in many ways the monopoly of the state in much of Mexican society in the 20th Century shows Marxist as well as state-controlled monopoly capitalism.

The experiences of Mexicans across hundreds of years extending far back beyond the Spanish conquest are those of cultural contact, war and conquest. Heroism and betrayal of the hero are common themes. Revolutions succeed, heroes are

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assassinated and dark powers reassert their control. Social classes, racial lines and exploitation are recurrent themes. Rather than building an optimistic culture with a belief in successful social engagements it is a cautious culture, often fatalistic and one where only the family exists as a true and safe harbor. Family ancestors are revered and remembered and the individual is forever faced with the security of family and the risks of the outside world. These cultural memories are part of the psychology of the individual Mexican and play a critical world in defining Mexico today and to varying degrees the thinking and behavior of those with Mexican heritages in the United States.

But there is another Mexico emerging from economic growth, more democracy and the vestiges of a middle class. It is a country still defined by hundreds of years of war and conquest. It is a country reeling from efforts in the 50's to the 80's to increase its population to thwart American interests in the north but unable to provide housing, education and jobs for its millions of youth. It is a country of great natural riches in minerals and fisheries but without businesses and institutions to tap these riches. It is a country of singular monopolistic institutions, powerful regressive unions, authoritarian leaders, extremes of wealth and grinding poverty and exploding passions. Long the dominant and autocratic Mexican political party, the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution, the PRI, lost its hold on Mexico at the end of the 20th century and genuine democracy began to appear in such persons as Vicente Fox and the National Action Party, the PAN electing in 2000 the first Mexican President in modern times that was not a creation of the PRI. (Fuentes 1996)

Oil Brings a Surprise

Daniel Yergen (2011) has noted that for most of human history, the labor of men and animals was the sole source of energy, and that placed significant limits on how much energy we could use. Two hundred years ago, people harnessed the power of steam and coal to run machines, and the result was an explosion of material abundance. In 1957 Adm. Hyman Rickover, the father of the nuclear Navy, calculated that a century earlier, in the early years of the industrial age, 94 percent of the

world's energy was provided by the labor of men and animals. Water and fossil fuels made up the remaining 6 percent. By the 1950s, those numbers had reversed, and coal, oil and natural gas supplied 93 percent of the world's energy. Rickover pointed out that without this energy revolution, most of the material advances of the modern age would be impossible. A car, he said, uses the energy equivalent of the labor of 2,000 men — a jet plane that of 700,000 men. Energy, particularly oil is vital to the modern world and vital to the United States and Mexico.

When oil hits about 150 dollars a barrel, a different calculus takes over and it includes a cost advantage to both the Mexican and American worker. Higher oil prices are a tariff on imported and exported goods. Less expensive labor in India and China is checkmated with the shipping cost of raw materials and the finished goods. More manufacturing and agricultural jobs will appear in the United States and Mexico. Higher resource costs will create a requirement to do things differently. Homes and autos will need to be constructed differently to conserve energy. A critical challenge for both countries is to address the current chaos and violence and that the same time take the steps toward higher local production and consumption attendant to the decline of globalization.

Impact of New Technologies

Fuller application of internet-type communication will have a profound impact on Mexico and it will be beneficial as candid informational flows will occur even as they do now in border cities where residents warn each other when violence flares using blogs, Twitter, Facebook and e mail, even as the cartels intimidate and depress the traditional print and electronic media.

The idea of the vote, self-determination, free assembly and free presses were radical notions in the 1700's that were part of what created the United States. It has been suggested that the widespread use of the fax machine where people could exchange information outside of government channels hastened the downfall of the Soviet Union. Certainly internet-type technologies have accelerated the downfall of dictatorships across the Arab World though what will take their place

is far from certain.

Mexico's greatest strengths may be its youth and antiquity and its greatest weaknesses are fatalism, lack of civic trust, brittle response to change and institutional corruption. That will begin to change in the face of freer flows of information with more of it outside of state control. Mexico does not have a strong, open civic culture and most Mexicans doubt that is possible for Mexico. Yet the experience of Mexicans working in foreign corporations from the United States, Japan and Germany may prove to create an opening there. After World War II, Americans like G. Edwards Deming from ATT taught Japan how to build quality, worker loyalty and participation in what had been an excessive authoritarian culture. A generation later, companies like Honda returned the favor to Americans in this country. Mexicans in the United States do not successfully create a Mexico in Iowa or even in Texas. People of Mexican descent, born and educated in Texas prove to be exceedingly independent, engaged in civic life, lacking in fatalism, preferring English and by the third generation wedded to American ideals of optimism and the importance of education.

Fourth: Building Economies and Cultures in the 21st Century

The challenge for both countries is to realize that the vision of much of the 20th Century is no longer applicable. For Americans consumerism and the consumption binge is ending. The country will need ten and perhaps twenty years to balance the books of the excesses of the end of that Century. The idea of an American Empire flung about the globe will end and with perhaps half of the national budget devoted to the military and foreign relations required to maintain that empire. Those resources then become available for domestic ends.

Individuals, states, corporations and finally the federal government are starting to deleverage. Deleveraging means lessening borrowing to support consumption. Convenient credit via cards is an innovation of the last 40 years, a generation innovation. Using credit, leverage, to build wealth via housing was the final credit binge for the indi-

vidual and the bubble burst around 2005. Municipalities and states binged on creating bonds that permitted borrowing for capital construction but also to pay current costs. It was leveraged based on the assumption of rising incomes of taxpayers and property values. Without the ability to borrow more money and with stagnant incomes and property values, individuals and governments have two choices though both have one identical result.

One choice is to declare bankruptcy and disavowal of debts. Individuals can do that and the result is life or at least several years on a cash basis matching expenses to income. Legal mechanisms for bankruptcy are less available for governments, but they can shut down. That has begun in states and municipalities as books must be reconciled, expenditures must match incomes. Central governments like the United States have a tool to delay such days of reckoning and that is simply printing more money when revenues are not sufficient. That will work for a few years but the result is always the same: explosive inflation, discrediting of the currency and government collapse.

The other choice is painfully aligning incomes and expenditures. Priorities get set and some things are postponed or never purchased. That is the more rational choice.

Challenges for America

America to have economic growth again must return to a place at the head of nations with the highest levels of education for all citizens and Mexico's challenge is far larger in that critical area. The infrastructure for public and private transportation demands attention and Mexico faces at least as large with a more deprived population in the 50 million in the nations to its south to Panama as the United States does to Mexico. America's greatest strengths are in its institutions of civic participation, openness, flexibility and innovation. These cultural properties are the key to the great rate of American inventiveness and competition that guided us through the past century and remain critically important today. A continuously educated citizenry is required to create both the jobs of tomorrow and to be ready to fill them.

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America must, as it balances its books, separate consumption from investment. Borrowing for consumption always brings pain. Borrowing for investment can be successful if the investments are wisely chosen. The investment areas are clear: energy, public infrastructure, education, civic participation, agriculture, public safety, defense and health.

- Energy-Prosperity and population growth since the 1700's came from the successive exploitation of timber, coal and petroleum. The cheap and convenient sources are gone. Basic and applied research will be needed for decades to secure petroleum, natural gas, wind, solar, geothermal and nuclear. The strategy should be toward multiple sources with careful conservation in transportation, manufacturing and home consumption.
- Public infrastructure-This includes water, transportation, roads, railroads, airports, waste processing, pipelines, waterways and electrical grids. Most have been neglected and built on the technology of the 1950's and 60's.
- Education-From 1890 to 1970 America led the world in the average educational level of all Americans. {Goldin and Katz, 2008} The minimum was a high school education. The 20th Century was a technology century with basic science, engineering, business and government ushering in factory manufacturing, tractor rather than horse drawn farming implements, gasoline powered cars, electricity in factories, homes and farms, air travel, hundreds of new substances created from chemistry, the computer, radio, television, the internet, space travel, deciphering the human genome and nuclear power. All these basic and applied discoveries called for brighter and more educated workers and the nation responded keeping pace of workers with new required knowledge. Today America is losing the race with several countries having higher educational levels and grinding failures with some groups leaving school at high rates before even high school completion.
- Civic participation-An unseen part of American wealth during the 20th Century were the high rates of civic participation from parents working with schools, to club and union memberships to voting. Americans, in general, trusted each other and were quick to come to each other's aid. People were generally optimistic and felt life's challenges could be met. A useful term for civic participation is social capital. Social capital comes down to trust and reciprocity. When social capital is high, there are high rates of innovation, better health and less crime. As late as 1970 America was as high in social capital as Mexico is low today. Social capital is built through social participation in the neighborhood, the larger community and the workplace. The current zeal for social networking software is a echo of a time when social capital was higher and specific steps are available to increase social capital. And social capital is the catalyst that propels innovation, education and prosperity.
- Agriculture-The productivity of America's farms, grasslands, fisheries and forests has like natural resources been the starting point of the country's great wealth. While all remain productive, single cropping, feedlots, questions about herbicides and genetically modified animal and plant strains raise questions. In recent years weather extremes have affected productivity. Much of fresh vegetables and fruits comes thousands of miles from farms and orchards to urban markets. A changing energy matrix suggests that local production and marketing will become imperative.
- Public Safety-Crime, fire, accidents and illness are addressed by specialized professions that increasingly require highly trained personnel and complex equipment. Crime includes the police officer, the courts and the correctional system. For thirty years Americans have had a great fear of crime and expanded police forces and radically increased the numbers of persons incarcerated to the extent that the nation has one of the highest rates of imprisonment in jails and prisons. Most of those imprisoned serve their terms or

are paroled and return to the community. Recidivism rates of 40 percent or so suggest a very costly burden and call for alternatives.

- Defense-In his final address to the American people, Dwight David Eisenhower warned of the dangers of a permanent military-industrial complex. The dangers were that vested interests would maintain themselves and create a great budgetary demand on the nation. In all previous years the United States had depended upon a largely volunteer military, mobilized at war and then scaled down. But with the Cold War the United States maintained a large ready military and assumed the protection of other states around the world including Europe, Japan, South Korea, the sea lanes in the South China Sea, the Mediterranean and Red Sea in the Middle East and much of the Arctic. Today after removing Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid, half of the budget is for the support of the military, one and one half trillion dollars. Yet in spite of this support homeless veterans as one example are a great national problem. The Southwest has an open border where contraband moves in both directions and citizens live in increasing fear.
- Health-the United States has the world's most expensive health care system but rank 16th in child mortality a measure of the quality of the system. Health access is irregular for much of the population and serious illnesses can bankrupt the individual.

These are then the major items on the American agenda for this decade.

Challenges for Mexico

Mexico's solutions like those of Americans must be to create millions more jobs. How these are met and solved will be part of the equation of how Mexico, in turn, addresses its national agenda. Mexico with its young, poorly educated population provides continuous recruits to organized crime until its economy recovers and that recovery waits on the American one.

- One priority for Mexico is to control the power of the cartels and not cede regions to

their control as exist now. American resources can play a careful, helping role but the responsibility is a Mexican decision.

- Mexico's largest challenge is to secure its people's belief in being able to change and having an honest and transparent state. That is an enduring puzzle for Mexico. For five hundred years heroes have emerged, reforms achieved and then heroes failed. Between these failed revolutions and the long effort of the Mexican people to reconcile the Indian past and European colonialism, there is a tendency to view the outside world with caution and distrust.
- That psychological inclination thwarts building the sort of civic trust and vigor that Mexico needs and rather lets the country repeatedly revert to its authoritarian past. (Paz, 1994; Krause, 1990; Preston and Dillon, 2004; Joseph, 2002; Meyer, et al 2010; Castenada; 2011)
- The elections in Mexico in the last two decades have offered that promise of a democratic, transparent and non-authoritarian Mexico, but it can be reversed in 2012. Events next year will be critical as will all of these choices in this decade.

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SURVEY CONSTRUCTS

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Climate | Work Group | Accommodations | Organization | Information | Personal |
| <i>Atmosphere</i> | <i>Supervision</i> | <i>Pay</i> | <i>Strategic</i> | <i>Internal</i> | <i>Job Satisfaction</i> |
| <i>Ethics</i> | <i>Team</i> | <i>Benefits</i> | <i>Diversity</i> | <i>Communication</i> | <i>Employee Engagement</i> |
| <i>Fairness</i> | <i>Quality</i> | <i>Physical Environment</i> | | <i>Information System</i> | <i>Job Satisfaction</i> |
| <i>Feedback</i> | | | | <i>External</i> | |
| <i>Management</i> | | | | <i>Communication</i> | |

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