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John A. Price

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John A. Price

Tijuana: A Study of Symbiosis

A Mexican city located on the U.S. border prospers through tourism and hand-me-downs. Californians find outdoor recreation and cultural contrast south of the border, but are disappointed if they search there for a past utopia based on love without materialism.

AN AVERAGE OF 29,000 Americans a day cross into Baja California at the Tijuana Border: 85% of these are tourists; the remaining 15% visit relatives or conduct business. Some 34,000 Mexicans cross into Southern California every day to work, to shop, and to visit their American kin. The traffic shows only slight seasonal changes, indicating the importance of continuing relationships. In 1967 the fewest crossings were in winter (20.9% of annual U.S. crossings, 23.4% of the aliens') and the greatest number in summer (28.9% of U.S., 28.1% of alien).

The border is a meeting place of two civilizations, each, to the degree of their difference, exotic to the other. This difference between the civilizations leads to a mutually advantageous exchange of goods and services so important that many ordinary laws are disregarded and a special informal "border town law" is created. Border crossing station procedures evolve as a compromise between border town law and national law, and officials use a loose working definition of national customs and immigration laws. The border crossing station becomes a kind of neutral screening zone, almost a third country, where only the official staff are the assured citizens. The citizenship of everyone else is questioned and ordinary civil rights are abandoned to such an extent that the border staff have full rights to search a person's body and to seize his goods without a warrant. Being at the periphery or frontier of its own civilization, the border town tends to be relatively free from legal restraints. It can therefore capitalize on catering to the needs of the people from the neighboring yet differing society.

There are pressures for and against this regional and international exchange. The different productivity, climate, and level of economic development of the two countries provide a real basis for exchange.

Pressures that oppose exchange come from language barriers, differing business practices, protective immigration laws, import-export restrictions, and other factors. Mexicans and Americans find difficulty in harmonizing their divergent values, but compromises are being worked out so that the American and Mexican societies in the border area, while distinct, are developing a symbiosis or interdependency. A striking feature of this symbiosis is that it is occurring between Mexico, a country moving from a preindustrial to an industrial stage, and the U.S., a country moving from an industrial to a postindustrial stage.

Northern Mexico is industrializing more rapidly than any other region of Mexico. This change is taking place in the shadow of a postindustrial civilization. Mexico respects the material wealth and power of the U.S., while the U.S. respects the preindustrial image of a slow, leisured life within communities where people are significant to each other as unique individuals. But neither society wholly accepts the other. When Americans see the industrializing and commercial border cities, they accuse these cities of not being typically Mexican. The American wants to see the leisurely town of his imaged Mexico. In fact, Americans seek out and eventually force the commercialization of the Mexican towns that come closest to their image. Postindustrial Americans want an artful life at an affluent level. Industrializing Mexicans want wealth and power without losing their primary communities.

While cultural adaptation is a two-way street in this case, with Mexican culture and society having an impact on America, the fact that America is the economically dominant partner predisposes that Mexican culture will change more than American culture and that Mexicans will generally be forced into socially subordinate roles vis-à-vis Americans. This inequality is the basis for much of the stress and poor adjustment (*i.e.*, poor social and psychological health) in the symbiosis. The crime rate in Tijuana appears to be partially correlated with this adaptive stress but appears to be declining as the two economic systems approach equality. Although figures on crime in Tijuana are difficult to obtain, there seems to be a progressive decline in the per capita crime rate since the 1940's, in spite of the tremendous increase in the size of the city, itself a factor that is generally correlated with a rising crime rate.

In the rapidly growing city a decade or even a year may produce great adaptive cultural shifts. The Tijuanese are filled with the sense of change, are excited by its possibilities. By drawing on American affluence, the population has more than doubled during each of the

last three decades. New arts, new crafts, new services, and new industries are everywhere. The Tijuanese are creative in language so that neologisms which defy a traditional Spanish dictionary flourish in their speech. The city has received migrants from all of Mexico so that a greater racial diversity and an acceptance of that diversity is now very evident.

While the sentiment exists that borrowing degrades the purity of pristine cultures, the historical fact is that the most incorporative cultures have been the most creative and most adaptive in their survival and growth. Tijuana borrows heavily from American culture, but the process of incorporating does not produce an American culture in Mexico but a third and unique culture by the syncretic continuation of American and Mexican elements. Tijuana's location at the border of Mexico, its frontier traditions, its recently arrived and diverse population, its hosting of millions of Americans annually, and its transitional position between the large Mexican-American population of California and the mainland Mexicans are all major factors in its cultural adaptation and creativity.

Looking at the history of Tijuana, we can see how this catering to the needs of richer neighboring Californians has developed from a small business to a major industry. By 1840 Ranchero de Tijuana was the largest of six cattle ranches that merged into one, thus forming a small pueblo. A customs port was established at the Pueblo of Tijuana in 1874 to collect revenue on the traffic headed toward Ensenada. "By 1889 Tijuana could display the baths of the Tia Juana Hot Springs Hotel at Agua Caliente, a cemetery, the customs house, a school, an adobe church, the curio store . . . and the ranches. . . . The beginning village consisted of some twenty buildings, grouped along a sandy street on the bank of the river."[1]

When the U.S. prohibited liquor in the 1920's, Tijuana grew rapidly as Americans were attracted initially by availability of alcoholic beverages. Prostitution soon flourished in response to the tastes of these American tourists. Although horse racing and gambling go back to the early 1920's, the large race track and gambling casino did not open until 1929, on the fringe of Tijuana at Agua Caliente. Gambling is also legal today in Tijuana in connection with dog racing and jai alai.

The legends about Tijuana multiplied during World War II. The large body of military men stationed around San Diego endowed Tijuana with the reputation of being one of world's wickedest cities. Today gambling facilities, bars, and brothels, with their

predominantly young, military, or college student patrons, are still in Tijuana. The race tracks are busy. However, Mexicans are much busier catering to the needs of a new group of Californians, the family tourists. The city that American tourists now visit stretches from the coast eastward along the U.S.-Mexico border for 15 miles to the Rodriguez Dam area. Tijuana's population was 21,000 in 1940; 58,000 in 1950; and 165,000 in 1960, with 65% born outside of the state of Baja California. In August 1968, Tijuana had an estimated population of 320,000 and the highest minimum wage level in Mexico (40 pesos or $3.20 per day in the city and 34 pesos or $2.72 per day outside the city).

The major factor in the growth of Tijuana and of Baja California is its proximity to Southern California, which has an estimated 1968 population of 12.7 million and which had a gross product of $43 billion in 1965—more than double that of the entire Republic of Mexico.[2] Over 95% of the cars driven by U.S. citizens who enter Tijuana have California license plates, so we are mainly talking about Californians and their guests. Forty per cent of the tourists are destined for Avenida Revolucion and other general tourism; 25% go to the spectaculars, such as horse racing, dog racing, bull fights, and jai alai; 20% go on to Ensenada or to parts of Baja California other than Tijuana. To show the impact on Tijuana, some city facilities can be listed: 93 hotels and motels, 120 restaurants, 65 bars, an 18,000-seat horse- and dog-racing stadium, two bullrings with capacities of 10,200 and 23,000 and a jai alai stadium. Ensenada has 47 motels and hotels, 35 restaurants, 30 bars, 19 trailer parks, and 51 boats which make regular trips on the Pacific carrying fishing enthusiasts.

Baja California is being used by Californians as a vast park, and its interior is now a favorite camping ground for those with four-wheel drive vehicles. A paved highway runs down the Pacific Coast for 140 miles, and then unpaved roads stretch for another 500 miles until the paved roads that run north from La Paz are reached. According to Mexico's Bureau of Tourism there is pressure from California naturalists and conservationists to keep the 500 miles unpaved, preserving Baja California as a primitive natural area. However, the road to San Quintin is now being paved, adding about 52 miles of pavement, and a land development company is building a shopping center and leasing house lots near the beach.

Leasing lots is a stratagem. According to the Mexican Constitution, foreigners cannot own real estate within 50 kilometers (31

miles) of a sea coast or within 100 kilometers of an international border. Since Baja California is extremely narrow (its average width is 70 miles) and long (750 miles), this excludes most of the peninsula from foreign ownership, leaving only a center strip, which averages eight miles in width, open to foreign ownership. Still, by long term liberal lease arrangements and by the new interpretation of an old law, foreigners are allowed to purchase property with usufruct, the right to use and enjoy. Californians are now rapidly acquiring property rights along the coasts. The property is usually leased for 99 years and may be passed on to heirs without probate until the end of the lease. Between Tijuana and Ensenada homes are being erected and mobile homes and trailers are being moved into five major settlements of Americans. A mobile home brought into Mexico needs no Mexican licensing and usually involves no import taxes when it is used as a residence. Foreigners who want to live in retirement in Mexico are given special consideration. There is a *pensionista* status for foreigners with permanent income which allows them to bring in their household goods and automobile free from import duties. The Mexican government also makes it easy for affluent Americans to enjoy visiting Tijuana and Baja California. Americans can drive into Baja without bonds, auto insurance, or Mexican driver's license. Mexico allows them to enter as tourists freely for up to 125 kilometers and for 3 days. With proof of citizenship, a U.S. citizen can obtain in a few minutes a permit to travel anywhere in Mexico for six months.

In 1933, because of the Depression and the repeal of Prohibition, Tijuana and Ensenada were declared to be free perimeters with the privilege of bringing in foreign goods without duties. Later this privilege was extended to the entire peninsula. Today, while many articles have been removed from the free list, most foreign products that would interest tourists can be imported without duties and resold at lower rates than are available in the U.S. Free port status is also an aid to the Mexican consumer in Baja California because he does not have to pay Mexican duty on such consumer items as most food and clothing and on used cars that are five or more years old. Limitations come more from U.S. Customs regulations and California laws than from Mexican regulations, though duty-free importation into the U.S. is allowed for souvenirs valued under $100.

It is difficult to collect accurate data on commerce and industry in Tijuana because of the high proportion of small operations which do not register with the Chambers of Commerce or Industry. The

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manufacture of goods for sale to tourists typically takes place in shops that are within or attached to private homes. Paper and plastic flowers, velvet paintings, leather goods, and piñatas are typically made in private homes, while wrought iron objects, plaster statuary, and glassware are made in larger shops. Produced in large quantities for a mass market, the competition in small-scale hand-crafting has led to some excellent workmanship and creativity in even such mundane areas as papier maché piñatas.

Even more than manufacturing, retailing and services are predominantly small operations. Tijuana has several professional beggars. Children sell gum or newspapers, shine shoes, and clean cars, while street vendors with carts sell ice cream, steamed tacos, fruits, soft drinks, and steamed corn on the cob. Some vendors simply buy a case of the fruit that is in season and then carry it around asking people to buy. These itinerant salesmen are persistent and high pressure, among Mexicans as well as among tourists.

The prices and the variety of goods, combined with easy access and easy entry, lure military personnel from San Diego, affluent Angelenos, and industrial workers from Southern California to shop in Tijuana. The most consistent and sophisticated shoppers, however, are Mexican-Americans who are U.S. citizens. There are about two million Spanish-surname people in California. These shoppers come south for medical care, haircuts and beauty parlor services, photographic equipment, clothing, auto repairs, and many other labor intensive goods and services that are 50% to 60% cheaper in Tijuana than in San Diego. The Tijuana Chamber of Commerce estimates that foreign visitors spent $60 million in the city in 1967.

Most of the average dollar spent by a tourist in Tijuana is eventually respent by Mexicans in Southern California. Housewives cross the border to buy chickens, lard, beans, rice, eggs, potatoes, and other food items that are less expensive in the U.S. Mexican retailers and wholesalers purchase heavily in the U.S., in part simply because of the relative inaccessibility of the markets of interior Mexico. In 1967 an estimated $76.7 million was spent by Mexicans in San Diego County, while San Diego firms sold more than $100 million worth of goods in Baja California. More than one-half of the goods consumed in Baja California are imported, predominantly from the U.S. The following figures detail the average total monthly consumption, in ten thousands of dollars, in Tijuana and Mexicali in 1962, as well as the proportion of that consumption which is imported from outside Mexico:

Monthly Consumption of Foreign Products in Tijuana and Mexicali in 1962[3]

	Total Consumption (X. $10,000)	Percentage Imported
Transportation equipment	114	99.9%
Paper and paper products	20	83.0
Machinery and appliances	91	68.3
Other manufactures	54	64.9
Food, Drinks, and Tobacco	644	62.7
Garments	91	58.8
Footwear	39	50.4
Non-Metallic mineral products	57	43.0
Metallic Products	57	42.7
Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals	161	40.3
Textiles	6	37.9
Magazines and books	22	18.0
Fuels and lubricants	199	12.8
Totals	1,555	54.0%

Tijuana is also a market for used and waste goods from an affluent California. A culture operating at a much lower economic level can raise its standard of living simply by putting discards to use. In the 1940's San Diego's airplane industry unwittingly helped to build several hundred homes in Tijuana through its discards—packing cases of airplane engines from the eastern U.S. I saw a large cardboard box that served as siding for a house in an Indian village in Baja California. The printing on it read, "This is another IBM computer." A strange sight in Tijuana is some 200 mostly empty houses on a hill in the La Presa area. The subdivider purchased abandoned barracks from Miramar Air Base in California, moved them to La Presa, cut them into small houses, placed them on hill sites, and put them up for rent at $25 a month. Despite this low rent, only a few families moved in, because the area is far from Tijuana Center and because there is no electricity, piped water, sewers, or paved streets. Second-hand American houses are transported to Tijuana in great number. The clearing out of old houses for urban renewal, for freeways, and for military projects is constant in San Diego, especially of those houses which do not meet San Diego's housing code. Such a house costs the movers about $300 purchase price, $700 to $1000 moving fee, and $140 in import

duties. There is a special crossing west of the main gate for houses, with areas on both sides of the border to park houses.

Used cars, used appliances, and used furniture are also purchased in Southern California. Sometimes such items are hand-me-downs from Mexican-Americans in the U.S. Californians today make wide use of Tijuana car upholstery businesses that seem to have developed initially to repair the seat covers of used cars purchased in the U.S.

A less happy result of the interaction of the two cultures is that prostitution is the highest paying form of employment for women in Tijuana. Depending on the clientele and the number of contracts, these women make from a few dollars a month to several hundred. Assuming an average net income of $3 per contract and an average of 30 contracts a month, a prostitute earns $90 plus an additional $60 per month from her B-girl and dime-a-dance receipts. I estimate that in July, 1968 there were about 1000 prostitutes in Tijuana. Of these, some 300 cater at least partially to foreign clientele. However, prostitution is being reduced by the growth of family tourism, the decline in numbers of salesmen, the expansion of jobs for women, and strong pressure from the Tijuanese themselves. Still, there is no law against prostitution, though there is a federal law against the procurer or liaison between customer and prostitute.

Moreover, industries that are not dependent on the tourist trade are beginning to play a larger role in the economy of Tijuana. Cigarettes, paints, iron and steel goods, and clothing are made from basic materials in Tijuana, and the city has assembly plants for clothing and electronic parts sent from the U.S. The average daily earnings of manufacturing workers in 1968 is about $27 in Los Angeles, about $6 in Tijuana, and about $4 for industrial workers in all Mexico. Thus the worker in Tijuana is closer to the golden goose. Many Mexicans get even closer by crossing into the U.S. every day, though U.S. policy has recently become stringent in regulating the flow of people and unwanted goods. In order to enter the U.S., Mexican citizens must now either obtain a Mexican passport with a U.S. visa, which takes from one day to about two years depending on the type of visa; or obtain a border crossing card, which takes about a year to secure, is limited to residents of the border area, and restricts travel to 150 miles within the U.S. for three days; or enter illegally, as several thousand Mexicans do annually, though many of them are caught and returned to Mexico.

Despite such difficulties, Mexicans enter by the thousands. About

10% of the Tijuanese enter the U.S. each day. At the latest count there were 8,050 Mexicans with "permanent resident alien" visas ("green cards") allowed to immigrate into the U.S. But instead of immigrating, they continue to reside in Tijuana and, in effect, use the card as a permit to work in the U.S. They thus serve as a population that is a solid link between U.S. and Mexican culture and they contribute very heavily to the economy of Tijuana, With an average household of about six, they give direct support to some 48,300 people. The "multiplier effect" of spending and respending this additional income within the community is very great because high U.S. wages are being spent in an area with low wages. A multiplier of two would be a conservative estimate. Even so, the average commuting green card worker provides support directly or indirectly for about twelve Tijuanese. And, according to the Tijuana Chamber of Commerce, a green card worker makes about $80 a week.

When we subtract the 8,050 green card workers from the 34,000 Mexicans crossing daily into the U.S., we have 25,950 aliens who are entering on border crossing cards ("blue cards") issued to permanent residents of Mexico who live near the border. A blue card allows a 72-hour visit within 150 miles of the border and it is not a working permit. Perhaps as many as two or three thousand of these blue card workers have jobs in the U.S. I have talked to dozens of people who know of maids, cooks, cleaning men, agricultural workers, and others who hold only blue cards and who work in the San Diego area. Certainly they too make some contribution to the income of Tijuana.

These people with a Mexican heritage who work in the U.S. or are citizens of the U.S. are contributing greatly to the symbiosis taking place in the border area. They tend to adapt to an industrial style of life but to retain strong cultural ties with Mexico. These ties and the commerce based on them have helped to integrate the border zone of northern Mexico with the southwestern U.S., and they add to that area's ethnic diversity.

Since, however, these people cross from a less highly developed economy, they can present a problem to the more developed economy. For instance, some Mexicans admitted as citizens may not be able to support themselves in the U.S. and become welfare cases. Thus, in order to secure a permanent resident visa, most aliens are required to have an affidavit of support from a U.S. citizen. The San Diego County Welfare Rolls recently revealed that 701 perma-

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nent resident aliens were receiving combined federal, state, and local relief of $397,000 a year. In October 1967 George Rosenberg, District Director of the U.S. Immigration Service, said that few of the 800,000 aliens in California had sponsors who might be held accountable for support, and that he doubted that such affidavits were legally binding. In response, the U.S. State Department instructed U.S. consular officials in Mexico to be more careful in issuing visas.

Further, the influx of workers from the less developed economy may eventually hurt workers in the more advanced. The more advanced then acts to restrict the influx. There has been only a 2.7% increase in the number of crossings made by Mexicans in the past five years. Considering that there has been an estimated 50% increase in Tijuana's population between the end of 1962 (200,000) and the beginning of 1968 (300,000), this is an extremely small increase. It reflects more restrictive U.S. policies, particularly the elimination of the "bracero" or Mexican agricultural worker program. Also, U.S. Senate Bill 2790 requires that permanent resident aliens be admitted to the U.S. only for those areas which the Secretary of Labor has certified would not be adversely affected in wages and working conditions.

With so much interchange between two differing cultures it is not surprising that many problems have arisen for the six million people who live in the vicinity of the border. These problems require attention by both national governments. In April 1966, the Presidents of the United States and Mexico created the U.S.-Mexico Border Commission to help solve such problems. There is also an annual Border Cities conference of public officials from the cities on both sides of the border. In January 1968, this group went on record as opposing U.S. Senate Bill 2790.

Ties between Southern California and Tijuana have developed through several cooperative associations. La Asociacion Cultural de Las Californias holds annual academic conferences, alternating meetings between Mexico and California. The Mexican-American Neighborhood Association and the International Labor Affairs Coordinating Committee (with members in both San Diego and Tijuana) are helping to provide funds for a school to be built by the residents of a Tijuana neighborhood. Another volunteer school in a colonia east of Tijuana is being helped by an informal group in San Diego. Several orphanages receive American support. An example of international cooperation was the bringing under control by 1968 of a severe rabies epidemic that began in 1966. Centers to vac-

cinate or to destroy dogs were set up in Tijuana, Tecate, Mexicali and San Luis del Rio Colorado with an initial $73,000 Mexican fund and a $97,000 grant from the U.S. Public Health Service.

These areas of mutual aid and cooperation are evidence that two civilizations at different economic levels, with differing values and languages, can achieve a working relationship which is mutually beneficial. The industrializing Mexican society acquires the wealth and knowledge of the more advanced technology and economy, while the postindustrialized U.S. society finds leisure activities, handicrafts, and a different culture to enjoy. The rebellious young Americans, however, who go to Mexico to search for primary social relationships that existed in a preindustrial society are probably greatly disappointed.

Mexicans tend to reject American beats and hippies. The long hair of the hippie men is an affront to the Mexican image of masculinity or *machismo*. The use of drugs, while widespread in Indian Mexico hundreds of years ago, is a criminal activity in modern Mexico. Urban Mexicans today are probably more materialistic and have less freedom than urban Americans. To the dismay of young Americans who search out an ideal culture, anti-materialism, liberty, and love seem to be luxuries of postindustrial societies rather than of industrializing societies. And to the extent that they exist in preindustrial societies, anti-materialism, liberty, and love are virtually limited to those who have been born and raised within the primary community.

NOTES

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2. Arthur D. Little, *Manufacturing in Mexico for the U.S. Market* (Mexico D.F.: Arthur D. Little), p. 4.
3. Banco Nacional de Mexico, *Review of the Economic Situation in Mexico*, 49, 461 (1964), 8.
4. Camara de Comercio, de Tijuana, B.C., *Directorio Comercial* (Tijuana, 1968), p. 6.