

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT FOR “ENDURING PERCEPTIONS OF MEXICO”

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On-screen text:

Enduring Perceptions of Mexico
a discussion with Juanita Darling

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Juanita Darling
Associate Professor and Director of the Latin American Studies Minor
San Francisco State University

Juanita Darling: It’s really remarkable that a century after the Mexican Revolution, many of the ideas that were formed at that time really shape the U.S. perceptions of Mexico.

One of the most obvious is that of course if we think of what person do—what Mexican person does every one in the U.S. know—and it’s probably going to be Pancho Villa. And even though he was not the ultimate winner of the Revolution, he was the person who was seen on movie screens across the United States because of his film deal with the Mutual Film Company. He was the revolutionary that all of the journalists wanted to cover because he was this incredibly colorful character.

But on a deeper level, what we see in the Mexican Revolution is this series of betrayals and shifting alliances. First, Díaz offers to open the elections, Madero offers himself as a candidate, Madero gets arrested, Madero declares a revolution and asks Villa and Orozco and Zapata to fight with him. When he wins, he turns around and betrays them. Then the same—in the same situation with Huerta being part of Díaz’s army. Then, when Díaz is overthrown, [Huerta] forms part of Madero’s army, then he throws Madero out in a coup and kills him. And so there’s a series of deceptions. It’s like *Game of Thrones*. And that perception of Mexico as a place where the leaders really can’t be trusted has also come down to us through the 20th century into the 21st century.

And finally, the disappearance even of Ambrose Bierce, who actually never wrote a word about the Revolution because he disappeared before he made contact with any of the revolutionary armies, has also created this air of Mexico as a very kind of mysterious and violent place that has persisted into the 21st century.

At the time that the Southwestern, what are now the Southwestern states, became part of the U.S. in 1848 after the Mexican-American War, the Mexicans who were living there were people who had been there for generations. They spoke a Spanish even that was more like old Spanish Castilian than 20th century Mexican Spanish. They were ranchers, they were farmers, they lived in small communities where they all knew each other. And they were very tied to their communities and somewhat isolated from the rest of the world.

The people who came during the Revolution were a mixture of revolutionaries, counterrevolutionaries, and refugees. The revolutionaries included people actually like Madero who after Díaz had imprisoned him, escaped, and he went to San Antonio. And from Texas he wrote the Plan of San Luis Potosí, which was the basis for the Revolution. And beyond him, there were also the Flores Magón brothers who came and put out and published newspapers that were published in the U.S. and sent back to Mexico. They formed an anarchist party for

Mexico, for change in Mexico, and were really scattered in communities throughout the United States drawing on many of the people who had left Mexico because of the Revolution.

In addition to that, there were the refugees who came and, even though their main reason for coming was the fact that they just—to protect themselves from the violence because they couldn't make a living in this war-torn country—certainly had developed some ideas about what it was...the impact that a government could have on you. And so they, and they were all of them, were people with strong ties to Mexico. Oh, I skipped the counterrevolutionaries. As the Mexican Revolution went on and different factions were in and out of power, they would try to regroup across the border in the U.S.

And so these were all people who had very close ties to Mexico, whereas the people who had been there for generations, if they felt any ties it was to Spain rather than to Mexico, because Mexico had governed that area for a relatively short time, only about 25 years. And so they [those who came during the Mexican Revolution] had much closer ties to Mexico. They were much more politically active. They—and there were large numbers of them. There were only about 75,000 non-indigenous people in the Southwestern states in 1848. And, but with the Revolution, there were large numbers of people crossing the border.

The people who came during the Revolution tended to be much more politicized. They're much more connected to Mexico. They felt their—they felt a Mexican heritage much more strongly. And they really became the basis of shaping the activism that we see now in the Mexican-American and broader Latino communities.