

Julio Moreno. *Yankee Don't Go Home: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. x + 321 pp. ISBN 978-0-8078-5478-5.



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This study of consumer culture in post-revolutionary Mexico by Professor Julio Moreno of the University of San Francisco explores an important but understudied subject. Indeed, consumerism was an integral component of Mexico's industrialization, but scholarship has placed much more attention on production (particularly capital-labor relations, Mexican industry, and import substitution policies) than consumption.

Moreno demonstrates that national consumption was a major concern of policymakers. In fact, he argues that the state, more than private interests, promoted advertising. During the 1930s the National Secretariat of the Economy (SEN)--a government agency--led a crusade, which included developing its own advertising campaign, to convince businesses about the importance of advertising to boost sales. Organizing a sale for over-supplied goods, SEN maintained that advertising alleviated supply-demand imbalances. Other government agencies, sponsoring commercial exhibits and contests, also played a role in the movement to urge businesses to advertise. Moreno maintains that these government-sponsored sales

and exhibitions enabled business and government to work together to increase national consumption.

Moreno shows that the government--motivated by its own ideological visions and pressure from interest groups--also played a significant regulatory role. A fascinating chapter on the professionalization of Mexican advertising broaches the theme of government control. During the 1920s, Mexican advertising representatives formed the National Association of Advertising (ANP) to professionalize their industry broadly along the lines of their U.S. counterparts. But a 1943 government regulation, which made the licenciatura degree the hallmark of professional status, worked against the ANP. However, this regulation did not thwart the ANP's bid to legitimize its profession, for the association established schools and certification independent of the government. Other conflicts between the ANP and the government revolved around acceptable content of ads. Public officials, responding to conservative interests, sought to uphold morality in advertising (by, for example, restricting the use of female sexuality as

a marketing device). Government officials also regulated, and even competed with, retailers. Working on behalf of consumers in the 1930s and 1940s, the government restricted retailers' practice of issuing trading stamps and also created government distribution centers that gave consumers an alternative to private retailers. The government also regulated international trade to promote national production (for example, the government imposed import restrictions, and foreign retailers such as Sears complied).

As the title suggests, Moreno's work highlights foreigners, especially U.S. interests. Moreno maintains that foreigners' success depended, in part, on their ability to adjust to Mexican nationalist post-revolutionary culture. Moreno's chapters on the retailer Sears and the ad agency of Walter J. Thomson support this claim. Despite Thomson's excellent reputation and past successes, his agency in Mexico City operated at a loss for the first five years. Moreno contends that Thomson's unwillingness to adapt to Mexican business culture, as evidenced, for example, by the New York corporate headquarters' control over Mexican operations and hiring North American managers for the Mexico City office, accounted for initial failures. Sears's department stores in Mexico (especially Mexico City), in contrast, had great financial success from opening day, in part, owing to the retailer's utilization of popular Mexican symbols (two examples: Sears' grand opening in Mexico City included a religious ceremony and the department store embraced Mexican nationalism by relying on local suppliers). A commonality between the two cases is that both Sears and Thomson eventually used their Mexico City operations as bases and models in their expansions into other regions of Latin America. Another chapter examines the foreign-national connection in the distinct context of the global geo-politics of World War II. Moreno shows that North American advertisers--by stepping up their pro-Allies and anti-Axis consumer ad campaigns in Mexico--worked in tandem with U.S. government agencies (partic-

ularly the Office of Inter-American Affairs) to promote pan-American unity and thereby minimize Germany's influence and appeal in Mexico. Not only did these American companies' ads make sense from a geo-political perspective, but also a business outlook.

In keeping with his treatment of the government and foreigners, Moreno explores another theme--the relationship that Mexicans had with advertisers, retailers, and consumer culture more broadly--from a variety of vantage points. Moreno dedicates an entire chapter to analyzing symbols in advertisements. The chapter provides insights into how companies--national and foreign alike--perceived the values of their prospective clients. Ads associated products with nationalism, science, technology, modernity, and material progress. Moreno nicely complements his analysis of the content of ads with a study of consumer preferences, a topic in the chapter on Thomson. Thomson offered its clients marketing research in the form of customer surveys, which was an innovation in Mexico. Not only did Thomson examine the Mexican market, but also compared it with other markets in Latin America (such as Argentina and Cuba). The Sears example provides a glimpse into innovations in retailer-customer relations. Sears represented its client-base as middle class, which contrasted with department stores like Palacio de Hierro that had upper-middle class customers. Whereas Palacio customers had their clothing tailor-made, Sears introduced low-cost ready-made clothes. Prices were not the only reason that Sears's goods were affordable. Sears set up a store credit system for its clients too. Big-ticket items, especially, were frequently purchased on credit. Sears's merchandise displays were another innovation. In contrast to established retailers, Sears's items were right out on the shelf for customers to look at and touch. Not all Mexicans reacted positively to the increasing commercialization of their country, however. Moreno dedicates

a chapter to studying "anti-modern" responses by religious authorities and others.

Moreno's book provides valuable insights into Mexican consumer culture, a significant but neglected theme. His study is particularly enlightening because of its broad scope. It highlights the roles that the state and private interests, foreigners and nationals, and advertisers and consumers all played in forging a consumer culture. And the numerous ads that are reproduced in the text give the reader a first-hand glimpse into the topic.

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