CHAPTER 12

Vice

The Mexican Revolution and immigration restrictions implemented in the 1910s made North America's international borders much more tightly policed and monitored than before. But that did not mean that central states were able to control who and what crossed their borders. By the 1920s, distinctive vice industries centered on liquor, prostitution, gambling, and illegal drugs had visible presences on both the Mexico-U.S. and Canada-U.S. lines. These industries were hardly new to the decade, but they increased dramatically because of burgeoning consumer demand from the comparatively populous and wealthy United States and the simultaneous banning of many products. Key here was Prohibition, the outlawing of alcoholic beverages in the United States, in effect nationally from 1920 to 1933. Mexican border towns had attracted tourists before this measure, but the American ban on alcohol did more than any other factor to create a dynamic entertainment and lodging industry in both Mexican and Canadian border towns. The ban, along with measures outlawing various drugs, also created powerful new incentives to smuggle across international borders.

This chapter explores the ways that the so-called vice industries shaped border life and the popular images of borders that circulated across the continent. On the one hand, these industries accentuated the extent to which national borders marked the edges of supposedly different societies. This was particularly true of the U.S.-Mexico border. Despite the revolutionary violence of the previous decade, by the 1920s, when most Americans thought of the border, they thought above all about liquor and sex. This border offered for easy money what they could only get at home with much greater expense and trouble. Countless trips into Mexico brought the border into American consciousness in another way: By the 1920s, pornographic cartoon books in the United States were popularly known as "Tijuana Bibles." The border's risqué reputation was further secured by a series of powerful radio stations, located just south of the river to avoid more restrictive American signal limits. Holding station names that began with the letter 'X', these were among the first to play the once-controversial hillbilly, country and western, Mexican ranchera, *and rock and roll music. The stations were so powerful that, like the other cultural echoes of the border, they could be heard across most of the United States. Americans did not generally thought of their border with Canada with the same mix of fear and fascination that their southern border held, but nonetheless many of the same industries drove the economies of towns on the Canadian border.*

If border vice industries traded in national difference, then at the same time they also revealed some of the divisions within *nations. Whereas some Canadian and Mexican entrepreneurs took great advantage of the American tourist dollar, other citizens resented the incursions of what they often encountered as rowdy, boorish, and even dangerous drunks. And who would benefit from this commerce was often in dispute; in the early 1920s, for example, the overwhelming majority of Tijuana bartenders, waitresses, and hotel staff were American citizens, but protests from Mexican unions led the state governor to mandate that hotels, bars, and clubs fill at least half of their positions with Mexican nationals. The extensive smuggling of consumer goods into Mexico, a pattern begun in the nineteenth century that continued throughout the twentieth, often pitted citizens of the Mexican North in search of bargains against the national government down in Mexico City and against many of their own industries. Americans were just as conflicted: Whereas Prohibitionists and anti-prostitution reformers attempted to extend their regulations into Mexican border towns, their fellow citizens were equally determined to escape such restrictions. The divisions within nations could be as pronounced as the differences between them.*

DOCUMENTS

In Document 1, former El Paso reporter Chester Chope recalls the El Paso-Juárez area in the 1920s, when both towns were marked by the open sale of alcohol, drugs, sex, and guns. Although El Paso reformers succeeded in getting the U.S. government to close its border crossings early in the evening, Chope's account suggests that they were unable to combat the deep allure that Juárez nightlife held for Americans of all walks of life. The Mexican Revolution and Mexican migration made Americans look on their southern border with fear and suspicion, and, indeed, Chope also remembers that violence accompanied smuggling, whether of arms into Mexico or liquor into the United States.

But this border had developed an allure as well. By the 1920s, Mexican border towns drew tourists from across the United States, who believed that they could have wild times there that they could not enjoy at home. In Document 2, writer Duncan Aikman satirizes American tourists in Juárez. Border towns, he implies, were not nearly as wild as their exaggerated reputations implied. Despite his mocking tone, Aikman's piece captures the enormous reach of the Mexican border's reputation in American life. In Document 3, C. D. Smith, a columnist for a British Columbian newspaper, described American tourists drawn to Canada for similar reasons. Smith pokes gentle fun at his neighbors to the south.

If the border vice industries provoked fascination, resentment, and ridicule, then for some they also prompted outright admiration. Document 4 is a *corrido,* or border ballad, lauding the exploits of Mexicans who smuggled tequila into the United States during Prohibition. One of a number of songs about the exploits of smugglers composed and sung in the lower Rio Grande Borderlands in the early twentieth century, "Los Tequileros" portrays American law enforcement agents as brutal murderers and the smugglers as honest men trying to make a living. For its singers and listeners, the song thus placed smuggling alcohol in the context of the long history of Anglo-Mexican conflict in the borderlands. In subsequent decades, drug smugglers became the subjects of similar ballads, which

came to be called *narcocorridos*. Like earlier corridos of border outlaws and heroes—or, for that matter, like Anglo-American ballads about notorious criminals or the American gangster rap of recent decades—narcocorridos generally expressed admiration and fascination with the lives of drug smugglers. Such is the case in "Contrabando y traición" ("Contraband and Betrayal"), a version of an older song made wildly popular by the then teen-aged group "Los Tigres del Norte" ("The Tigers of the North") in 1972, which is reproduced in Document 5. Widely purchased and played on radio stations across Mexico and the western United States, the song made Los Tigres enormously successful and marked the advent of what one writer has called "the narcocorrido boom."

Americans and their elected officials often view their country as the victim of the smuggling of goods banned in order to protect the public interest. In many ways, Mexicans and their government think of themselves in the same way. Mexican law, for example, is much more restrictive of private gun ownership than American law, and so, in recent years, most guns used in killings in Mexico related to the drug industry involve arms purchased north of the border and brought into the country illegally. Document 6, an account of the smuggling of electronics and other consumer goods from Laredo, Texas, into Mexico, reveals a similar dynamic at work. In the 1930s, after the consolidation of the Mexican political order created in the Mexican Revolution, the national government imposed high tariffs on many manufactured goods in the hope that they would foster domestic industry and keep the nation's employment rates and wages high. As writer Tom Miller describes, this created enormous incentives to smuggle such goods into Mexico, since their legal price was so much higher there than in the United States. Borderlanders from both countries thus undermined national policy.

In Document 7, Don Henry Ford Jr., a former drug smuggler, describes the circumstances that first drew Oscar Cebello, a prominent resident of Piedritas, Coahuila, into the drug trade. Marijuana farming seemed like one of the few options for residents of this remote and impoverished town, and, at first, growing the crop and smuggling it into the nearby United States seemed like a good strategy. But the violence and corruption that soon overtook Cebello made the high price of this plan clear. The appeal of the vice industries that were so critical to North American borders brought with them much danger and destruction.

1. El Paso Reporter Recalls Lure of Juárez in 1920s, 1968

Mr. Chester Chope
Interviewed by Wilma Claveland
July 27, 1968

CC: I came to El Paso to work in 1917. I went to work for the *El Paso Times* the day I got here. At that, El Paso was a city of about 75,000 people. In addition to that, there were numerous troops that had been brought

Chester Chope, interview by William Cleveland, July 27, 1968, interview 27, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, pp. 1–2, 13–20.

> here to the border following the Columbus Raid in which Villa attacked Columbus.

In those days, El Paso was a wide open town. The prisoners were primarily dope addicts, drunks, etc. Marijuana was common in those days and narcotics addicts came to El Paso because it was easy to get drugs. The drugs were manufactured across the border. There were frequent fights and killings; every Saturday night we espected to have a shooting before the first edition.

In the Roaring Twenties, Juárez was a Mecca for thousands of thirsty Americans. Bars and cafés—they were called cabarets in those days—stood wall to wall on the 16th of September Street. Owners imported bands and orchestras from the United States for the cabarets. People came here, especially on weekends, to make 'whoopee'. Part of the time the bridge closed at 10:00 or at 12:00, depending on the conditions at that time. At one time I was the only newspaper reporter who had a pass to return across the border after 12:00. It was issued by the Assistant Customs Collector, Mr. Warren Carpenter. Customs inspector, Louie Holzman, was in charge of the bridge at night. It was his duty to open the gate for me when I yelled for admission into the United States. On some occassions he was too busy to come down and open the gate, so I had to climb over. I recall that one time I tore the seat of my pants and became very angry. I reported the incident to Mr. Carpenter and then he issued strict orders that thereafter the gate was to be opened for me.

On many occasions, people were trapped in Juárez when the early closing hours were inaugurated. One time when the bridge was to stay open until 12:00 but orders came to close it at 9:00, El Pasoans didn't believe that the bridge would be closed at that hour and remained in Juárez. When they came to the bridge it was closed and they couldn't get over. I usually telephoned my office before returning from the Río Bravo, which was the best hotel in Juárez at that time, On this occassion, the lobby was filled with young women, most of them members of prominent families of El Paso, most of them wailing that they wouldn't get home at the time they had promised their families. They were using the phone and when they saw me using the phone they tried to get me to use my influence to get them through the gate, which I could not do, of course. On such occasions, some El Pasoans slept on tables, especially in the Big Kid Cáfe.

One of the most interesting people in Juárez in the twenties during the period when I was working there, was U.S. Consul John W. Dye. Mr. Dye was the tweed type. He was slender, quiet, and retiring. He was very courageous. He was the source of several interesting stories that I covered. One occasion he received a note that was brought to him by messenger from a young woman who said she was being held prisoner by a Chinese in an abandoned dance hall on the Street of the Devil, which was the zone of tolerance in Juárez. He asked me to investigate for him. I went to the place and found the woman lying on a mattress filled with straw in the back room of this building that was partially dilapidated. At one time it had been a huge house of prostitution and dance hall. I conferred with Mr. Dye and decided we had better get help. I contacted Mother Mary Warren of the Salvation Army. She had never been to Juárez prior to that time. She accompanied me to that place, and by candlelight as the vesper bells were

ringing in the old church in Juárez, she knelt on the ground beside the bed and took this dirty disheveled woman in her arms and prayed. She immediately arranged to take this woman to El Paso.

During Prohibition days, battles between the gangsters and the border guards were frequent. One time, it was not liquor that was the cause of the fight, but ammunition that was being smuggled to Juárez. Two smugglers attempted to carry two cases of ammunition across the river which was very low, immediately west of the Santa Fe Street bridge. U.S. soldiers, who were on guard at the bridge, saw them and shouted for them to stop. When the soldiers attempted to apprehend the men, they were fired upon by the men from the Juárez side of the river. The smugglers dropped the cases of ammunition and fled to the Juárez side of the river under cover of gunfire from men on the Juárez side of the river. The U.S. soldiers took refuge behind a pile of adobe brick on the river side. Customs agents and immigration men telephoned for police. Captain Bill Simpson of the police force and two other men including Charlie Wood, a patrolman, hurried to the Santa Fe Street bridge. Captain Simpson spoke Spanish fluently; he shouted across the river that he was going out into the river to recover the ammunition. At that time, no one knew what was in the cases. Later it was presumed that the ammunition was destined for the Juárez garrison. When he was fired upon, Captain Simpson retreated hurriedly behind the pile of adobe brick. The soldiers returned the fire and the gunfire across the river lasted several minutes.

2. American Journalist Satirizes American Tourists in Juárez, 1925

There are three kinds of legends about the fringe of frowzy hamlets and small towns that have been placed by Providence, working through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, just across the southern border of the Federal Union. They are said (mainly by railroad folders and the local guide-books of the American metropolises opposite them) to posses a 'piquant foreign atmosphere' and to wield a 'quaint Old World spell.' They are said to be unsafe for Americans visiting them who do not wear their oldest clothes, raise three-day bears and leave their jewelry behind. And they are said to offer Bacchanalian revels on such a lavish scale that only a millionaire's pocket-book can take care of the check.

Throughout the United States vast numbers of people believe in these droll sayings. In El Paso, where I am expiating the evil done in my youth, some stranger from the Corn Belt or the high Sierras drops into my office almost weekly to ask my advice as to whether he (or she) should risk a visit to Ciudad Juarez at all. Even in the border cities themselves there are hordes of Angles and Saxons no better informed. They are the men and women who, for fear of being seen in more than one half of one percent alcoholic surroundings by customers, clients, patients, pastors or rivals in local social-climbing, never cross the Rio Grande. Thus the life of the Mexican towns becomes as romantically remote to

Duncan Aikman, "Hell Along the Border," *American Mercury* 5 (May 1925): 17–23.
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them as the life of the Falkland Islands. And thus they take on faith the declaration of the Rev. Dr. Bob Jones, a favorite evangelist of the Southern backwoods, that "I would rather shoot my son and throw his body in the river than have him spend an hour in the raging inferno of Juarez," or the equally gorgeous fantasies of visiting inebriates who, having lost $7 in a Mexican gambling den, raise it to a robbery of $7,000 on complaining to the police on the American side.

The Mexican border towns, it is true, offer a certain show of moth-eaten adobe architecture, and have dark brown inhabitants who speak Spanish, and an occasional visitor from the interior flourishing a serape or the high-peaked sombrero by which Mexicans may be recognized in the movies. Mexicali, in addition, provides a few turbaned Hindus and black-pajamaed Chinese. Tia Juana sometimes—and not always veraciously—supplies a Hollywood star indulging publicly in his or her bacchanals. But the only "quaint old-world spell" really worth noticing is exactly the same spell which was cast by the row of two- and three-story "store construction" buildings on the west side of Court House Square in any bibulous middle western county seat on a Saturday afternoon 20 years ago. It is the spell of a noisy and confused babble mixed vaguely with drums and fiddles, and the whirr of swinging doors plied busily, and a rich alcoholic smell. The charm, the prosperity, the usefulness of the border resorts are all rooted in the fact that they are the only relatively accessible, reasonably inexpensive, all-year-round, snow-free life-saving stations for the arid population of the inland United States: in short, cheap Bahamas to which minor Babbits can come from Kansas by Ford.

Their charm for the conveniently located sociologist is that the minor Babbitts keep on coming. In Winter, the endless string of motor and train traffic seeking the snow-free routes to California strikes the border at El Paso and clings to it all the way to Tia Juana's near neighbor, San Diego. In general, this Winter visitation is mid-western in origin. The bar-room clamor at the Big Kid's Palace of Jimmie O'Brien's in Juarez, the feminine chatter from the immaculate tables at the Central or from behind the naughtily curtained booths at the Office or the Lobby, is shrill with the harsh, flat *a*'s and the insistent *r*'s of the Corn Belt. In Summer, when terror of the desert drives this migration over the northern routes, the same places are pleasant with the musical accents of the lower Old South, mixed with the whiny drawls of East Texas and Arkansas.

Either season the procession is made up, as to class, of much the same elements: small-town bankers and grocers seeking retirement and mild dementia praecox in the suburbs of Los Angeles; dissatisfied young clerks and mechanics seeking "new openings" somewhere "on the coast," and their pert young flapper wives seeking new ideas in bungalows and bathing suits in Long Beach and La Jolla; occasional sportsmen on their way to chase big game in Mexico; fairly well-to-do tourists, embracing all classes from church deacons to racing touts, seeing the country on long vacations; traveling salesmen and other special agents, often accompanied by their wives, and eager to enliven business with serious intervals of pleasure; floaters looking for jobs, locality of no consequence, that will not seriously inhibit their floating; semi-nomads in battered Fords bound from Nowhere to the same place. Either season, too, the outward-bound

procession encounters another flood—the thinner but constant ebb of the disillusioned from California back to where they came from.

In any case, they are bound from and for localities infinitely more arid than thirst-begetting desert. They have either sorrows to drown or pleasures to accelerate in a way that is relatively difficulty and expensive, and sometime socially inexpedient at home. Juarez, the first border resort encountered by probably seventy-five percent of them, is the place where more convinced Prohibitionists, including those from States where their cause triumphed a generation ago, gloriously escape from the régime they have made, than are to be found anywhere else. Even the trans-Atlantic liners, speeding north-eastward twelve miles of Sandy Hook, carry smaller passenger lists. Even on the Quebec border there is no spot where so many trails converge for rich and poor alike.

So it goes. The more one frequents the Mexican border resorts, the more one is brought to realize that the great American gift in depravity is for playing devilish rather than being it. Even in the wildly denounced gambling halls of Juarez, which are open or shut for months at a time according to the fluctuations of obscure arrangements with the Mexican officials, the frantic playing of nickels and dimes on mechanical devices is what takes one's breath away. Tia Juana draws on the wealth of southern California and is sometimes more thrilling, but more often not so. For, due to the regions and populations from which they border resorts mainly draw their customers, the very business of being devilish is mainly on the small-town, high-school alumnus scale.

The truth seems to be that the tourist from the American inland, whether he comes by Ford or Cadillac, by day coach or Pullman, is looking for thrills at a low price. So the establishments which are content to do most of their business in those bar-room simples, beer, gin, and whiskey, and which cut down about fifty per cent on the normal chile allowance in their Mexican viands, are the only ones that can pay the exorbitant Mexican license rates and still prosper. The real thrill, obviously and always sought in a border debauch, is to carry the memory of from two to nine drinks back to some town like Coon Rapids of Memphis, and to be able to say at the next gathering of cronies or lodge brothers: "Lemme tell you, li'l old Juarez is some town to raise hell (feminine equivalent: raise the roof) in. And, boy, we sure raised it!"

3. Columnist C. D. Smith Lampoons American Tourists in Search of Drink in Canada, 1925

Refugees from Albania have enlisted sympathy for generations. Refugees from Poland have aroused tender pity in the breasts of thousands. Refugees from Belgium were objects of extreme commiseration during the war. The exodus of the Israelites from the land of Egypt will never be forgotten. But none of

C. D. Smith, "Refugees From Volstead," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria, British Columbia), Aug. 30, 1925, p. 1.

these events exceed in sympathetic interest the refugees from Volstead, driven forth by the Eighteenth Amendment for a recompensing "life-saver." Their case is indeed a sad one.

Here in the wonderfully attractive Capital of British Columbia, in which place so many of the sufferers from the South of us fly for shelter, protection and safety from the rigors and aridity of their own country, their arrival has now become a commonplace. For two reasons its ceases to attract any particular attention; one, because we are used to it and the other from the fact that, living in the land of plenty—however we make look upon the Prohibition question—we take it as a matter of course. Every weekday sees the coming in of large numbers of these distressed exiles who, so to speak, turn themselves loose on the moistened ranges of the Canadian Pacific Coast to assuage the pangs caused by lack of the stimulating liquids of which they are deprived in their homeland.

The news has gone forth to the uttermost parts of the United States that throughout the haven of this Province there are located seventy-one hospices where the respective monks in charge dispense all brands of succor to the weary, travel-stained refugees. And also that there are two hundred and twenty-nine additional places, known euphemistically as beer parlors, where fermented liquors, made from malted grain with hops and other bitter flavoring matters, are dispensed at ten cents per glass, froth included. The result was a foregone conclusion.

This city [Victoria] possesses two of these fully-fledged refuge camps, or hospices, one close to the wharf at which tourists arrive by steamer, and the other in the centre of the shopping district. Residents, of course, are fully aware of this fact. It is pathetic indeed to see how quickly the parched arrivals from the weary treks over the intervening desert to this oasis discover the first-mentioned hospice and, bearing on their faces a look exceeding great gladness, make for its helping arms. It would, indeed, be difficult for them to miss their road, for waving in the breeze at the corner of the street the Stars and Stripes indicates the happy way.

This flag, which hangs from the first floor of the building in which is situated the offices of the United States Immigration Department, indicates a curious paradox. Under the shelter of the United States flag—"Old Glory"—is one of the legalized places where alcoholic drinks of all and every description can be procured. Yes, Old Glory is to many glory indeed.

Mostly, the refugees are men. It is naturally distressing in the extreme when women, children and helpless babes are the victims of cruel circumstance which cause them, through political crisis, to leave their native land. But when the sufferers are strong men it is heart-rending.

The pains of the strong who have battled long and manfully should, perhaps, make a greater sympathetic appeal than the afflictions of the weak who habitually endure submerged conditions of life, and never kick. These latter have capitulated without a struggle, whereas the others have fought, and some—resisting decrees they held to be aimed at their sacred liberty—have taken to moonshine and died.

Many of these refugees, however, have succeeded in bringing their womenkind safely with them through the arid deserts to the promised land. They reach this country flowing, not with milk and honey, but with more potent liquids, full details of which can be inspected in the tabulated lists prepared by the monks of

the hospices according to the rates at which the Providential Fathers of the Order are prepared to supply alcoholic goods without loss to Provincial revenues.

It is not found that the refugees arrive in trucks, trains, and moving lorries in regular refugee style. They are not huddled together, nor do they sleep on straw sacks. Their appearance does not all suggest privation in the sense of their being starved, hollow-eyed, with haggard faces, torn feet and bleeding hands, caused by the dangers and privations of the journey. Neither are they attired in conventional garb of harassed wanderers, subsisting on what they can beg from kind-hearted peasants in route. All that is not a bit like it. They are mostly clothed in plus-fours and their one look is of assured triumph and anticipation. Nothing else matters.

4. Ballad Praises Liquor Smugglers, 1920s

The Tequila Runners

On the second day of February, what a memorable day!
The *rinches* from the other side of the river killed three tequila runners.

They reached the Rio Grande and then they stopped and thought,
"We had better go see Leandro, because there are only two of us."

They asked Leandro to go with them, and Leandro said he could not:
"I am sorry, but I'm sick. I don't want to go this way."

They kept asking him to go, until Leandro went with them;
in the hills of Almiramba, he was the first one to die.

The contraband they were taking was tequila *anisado;*
the direction they were taking was toward famed San Diego.

They left from Guerrero in an easterly direction;
two cars with many men were waiting for them there.

When they crossed the river, they traveled along a canyon;
then they stopped and built a fire without any regard for danger.

The captain of the *rinches* was saying, speaking in measured tones,
"It is wise to stack the odds because these men are from Guerrero."

They fired a volley at them in the middle of the road;
Gerónimo fell dead, and Silvano fell badly wounded.

They shot Leandro off his horse, wounding him in the arm.
He could no longer fire back at them; he had several bullet wounds.

The captain of the *rinches* came up close to Silvano;
and in a few seconds, Silvano García was dead.

Américo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 101–102.

The *rinches* are very brave, there is no doubt of that;
the only way they can kill us is by hunting us like deer.

If the *rinches* were really brave and met us face to face,
then things would be quite different for us tequila runners.

So all three of them died, and these stanzas are at an end;
the *rinches* were able to accomplish the killings they wanted.

He who composed these stanzas was not present when it happened;
these verses have been composed from what people were saying.

Now here is my farewell, in the midst of three flower vases;
this is the end of the ballad, the stanzas of the tequila runners.

5. "Contrabando y tración" Marks Popularity of Narcocorrido, 1972

"Contrabando y traición" 1972, Los Tigres del Norte

They left San Isidro, coming
from Tijuana,
They had their car tires full of
"bad grass," (marijuana)
They were Emilio Varela and
Camelia the Texan.

Passing through San Clemente,
they were stopped by
Immigration.
He asked for their documents,
he said, "Where are you from?"
She was from San Antonio,
a woman with a lot of heart.

A woman so loves a man that
she can give her life for him.
But watch out if that woman
feels wounded,
Betrayal and smuggling do not
mix.

They arrived in Los Angeles,
they went to Hollywood.
In a dark alley they changed
the tires.

"Contrabando y traición," Los Tigres Del Norte. http://www.arlindocorreia.com/080604.html, accessed May 10, 2010.

There they delivered the grass,
and there also they were paid.

Emilio says to Camelia, "Today
is your farewell,
With your share you can make a
new life.
I am going to San Francisco
with the mistress of my life."

Seven shots rang out, Camelia
killed Emilio.
All the police found was the
discarded pistol.
Of Camelia and the money
nothing more was ever known.

6. Writer Tom Miller Describes Smuggling Electronics into Mexico to Avoid Duties, 1981

"I work in a small retail store. Someone comes in and buys twenty television sets. He pays cash, he gets a sales receipt, everything is clean. But he wants the TVs smuggled into Mexico, so he brings them to a man in town who seals them in a boxcar headed for Mexico City. I know the man smuggles because I deliver the goods to him. That's what I do for a living—I help Mexican shoppers get their purchases into Mexico."

The short man with the skin problem was explaining the facts of life, Laredo style. He had lived there since birth, seen generations of stagnant poverty among the townfolk, seen the wealth grow among the nouveau merchant class. Like so many others in this town of ninety-two thousand, he recognizes that shipping consumer goods into Mexico, in violation of that country's laws, can be a lucrative enterprise, condoned and even encouraged by pillars of the community. Mexicans spend so much money in Laredo that the city, whose residents earn among the lowest wages in the United States, ranks among the very highest in per capita retail sales. Mexican shoppers generally prefer U.S. products—televisions, clothing, stereos, appliances, blenders, furniture, cameras—to homemade ones. Superior American technology usually means a longer product life span. Many consumer goods are simply not manufactured in Mexico at all. Additionally, Mexican consumers often attach status to American products even if a similar item is available in-country. As the American town most accessible to the greatest number of Mexicans, Laredo, Texas, has become Mexico's shopping center.

Smuggling goods into Mexico is commonplace because of the prohibitively high import duties imposed by that country's government. The complex and

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Tom Miller, *On the Border: Portraits of America's Southwestern Frontier* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 48–51. Reprinted by permission.

well-established pipeline of Mexican smugglers imports items not only by freight train but over major highways as well. *Aduana*—customs—officials throughout the Republic receive systematic payoffs in the process. For Laredo merchants to sell goods to Mexican customers is perfectly legal. The merchandise becomes contraband only when it enters Mexico untaxed. Smuggled goods are called *fayuca.*

J. C. Penney, 80 percent of whose business is from Mexico, is located in River Drive Mall, a downtown shopping center virtually on the banks of the Rio Grande. *Chiveras,* or smugglers (literally, goatherds), come to town with shopping lists for a dozen or so families and fill the Penney's parking lot in the afternoons. They take their purchases out of the store wrappings and rip out any tags indicating they are new. Often clothes are worn immediately, two and sometimes three layers at a time. More clothes are crammed into suitcases—also just purchased for the return trip. The rest is concealed from the *aduana* in door panels, under seat covers, beneath trunk liners, and elsewhere. At La Posada, the city's best hotel, high-volume *chiveras* convert their rooms to warehouses, storing clothes for the return trip to the interior. Paper bags from shops all over town litter the hotel's hallways.

When the bridge is "tight"—that is, when high customs officials from Mexico are in town to monitor their underlings—Laredo department stores such as Montgomery Ward will keep purchased appliances destined for the interior until the situation returns to normal. Sales clerks and *chiveras* throughout the city maintain a cozy relationship, each profiting from the other. In Laredo, clandestine activity is business as usual. The town has become an American Andorra.

To spot the *chiveras,* simply cross the International Bridge to Nuevo Laredo and watch Mexicans pass their own customs. Shoppers on foot carrying paper bags of new purchases often leave a ten- or twenty-peso note on top as *mordida,* which is considered nothing more than a gift to speed things along. The *aduana* pocket the money, nod slightly, and move on to the next person.

Enrico, a friend from Monterrey, 150 miles south of Laredo, explained how the game is played when driving home. "You have to pull around to the rear of the port building where the *aduana* go through your luggage pretending they're looking for *fayuca.* Actually they are looking for their money. It's best to leave the *mordida* on top so they don't mess up your suitcase. For a little two hundred dollar television set, the *aduana* may get fifty dollars, but the total expense is still cheaper than buying a similar set in Mexico. Another *aduana* checkpoint is at twenty-six kilometers out, and another one as you drive into Monterrey. If Mexico City is the destination, there may be ten or twelve *aduana* payoffs along the way. The government is very lenient about this. These customs men retire very well."

Enrico's observations had historical precedent. John Russell Bartlett, the U.S. survey commissioner who traveled the border in the mid-nineteenth century, noted that "the duty ... imposed by Mexico on many items of merchandise amounts to a prohibition. Yet owing to the laxity of customhouse officials, the law has been evaded, and goods regularly admitted at a nominal rate. Each collector knows that if he exacts the legal duty, either the merchandise will be smuggled in or some brother-collector, less conscientious and anxious to pocket the fees, will be ready to compound for a smaller sum. It accordingly became

the practice ... to admit merchandise for the interior of Mexico by paying five hundred dollars on each wagon load."

In one major appliance store a twenty-four-inch color console television was tagged at $1,125. The store manager said he could deliver the set to Monterrey for another $315. "The bridge is still tight," he lamented. "When it loosens up, here's how we'll do it: You pay for the set here and we give you the receipt. When our *chivera* gets ready to deliver in Monterrey, he'll call you and you pay him the delivery cost. If the television is confiscated, we'll send out another one. We guarantee delivery."

In an office supply shop the story was similar. A new office-model electric typewriter cost $825. "Oh, you want it sent to Mexico? That will be an extra one hundred fifty dollars. Delivery guaranteed."

The pattern repeated itself in store after store. Each had its own *chivera,* each guaranteed delivery, and each undercut the legal Mexican price. At one store a salesman apologized that he had to delay smuggling because a new customs man was being broken in at the *aduana* station and the *chivera* had to negotiate his contract.

7. Former Smuggler Don Henry Ford Jr. Describes Why Border Community Drawn to Smuggling Marijuana, 2005

People around Piedritas dug fluorite out of the mountains by hand, earning in the vicinity of five bucks a day for a brutal day's effort. More than one man remains buried in a deep mineshaft which collapsed and crushed him. Others poisoned themselves digging cinnabar and extracting mercury destined for the United States, a practice which also yielded little money. Children suffered from curable diseases like a virulent form of conjunctivitis which leads to blindness, where a dollar's worth of antibiotic ointment would have saved their eyes. They suffered and died from dysentery caused by drinking out of contaminated water sources. There were no sewer systems. And nobody on either side of the river cared.

This is the world Oscar was raised in. Maybe because his dad did a better job of feeding him as a child, Oscar was more intelligent than his peers or even than his own father. Not only was he more intelligent, but he was bigger, stronger and more compassionate. Because of this, he inherited the burden of taking care of the needs of his community at an early age. He was elected their representative in the state legislative body that ruled the area, but that did little to bring aid to the community. Piedritas had nothing those in power wanted, and consequently they had nothing to offer Piedritas.

A few aborted attempts to help did take place. A water tower was built but the water system that should have accompanied it was not. So the tower stood rusting off in the distance, like some huge monument to the good will of the

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Don Henry Ford, Jr., *Contrabando: Confessions of a Drug-Smuggling Texas Cowboy* (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005), 58–60.

Mexican government, while women and kids pulled water to the surface from a well in the center of town, using ropes and buckets. A large dam and gravity flow system was built to collect rainwater for irrigation purposes and a lake-full of water accumulated. For a few years crops flourished, but the government screwed the farmers out of what they should have received. The people had no machinery to work the soil or harvest their crops. The Mexican government provided these things. Then, when the crops were harvested, they paid the people with a few sacks of flour and kept the money. The *ejiditarios* became disillusioned and quit.

Oscar made contact with the rich world of the United States at some point in his young life and discovered there was something Mexico had that the people of this country wanted and would gladly pay for: marijuana. Not only would they pay for it, they would pay a lot for it. Oscar didn't have any interest in getting high, but he did need money—desperately—more than he could earn working legally in the United States. He found the sources, and then American buyers found him.

Celerino [Oscar's father] had reservations about entering the marijuana business. He had heard all the propaganda but remained undecided about whether it would be a bad thing. Oscar entered the business nonetheless and gained his father's favor by investing profits into legitimate businesses for the community: cattle, horses, pickup trucks and a limited amount of farm equipment. In time, nearly the entire village worked for the Cabello family—farming, ranching and smuggling marijuana. Those who didn't starved, trying to make a living collecting candelilla or digging fluorite. Celerino fed the old, retarded and incapacitated of the town and paid a traveling doctor to come by on occasion.

Oscar began to move larger and larger loads through the region, and he made more and more money. Then came setbacks. One man, who had always been reliable, simply drove off with a ton of marijuana—bought on credit—and disappeared, never to be seen again. Oscar had to make good on the debt to those higher in the food chain who were supplying him with his product. If he didn't, the results could be tragic.

Then came the ill-fated shootout at the San Vicente crossing. An American narc set up a deal to buy a load of marijuana. The van to be used to haul the load concealed American drug agents. The agents jumped out after the Mexican vehicle containing the load arrived on the U.S. side. Shots were exchanged during the attempt to arrest the man. The Mexicans fled, leaving the marijuana behind. While this may be attributed to [cartel leader Pablo] Acosta, it happened on Oscar's turf, and he suffered much of the financial loss since most of the marijuana was his. But Oscar had nothing to do with any shooting that day. Perhaps Acosta's people did. In any event, Acosta was inclined to take credit for what happened, and smarter men were more than glad to let him.

It was about this time that Oscar began to look for new buyers. He needed someone he could trust in the United States. And I needed someone I could trust in Mexico. I had no money to speak of, but Oscar was willing to front me the dope. And a man with dope will soon find those willing to pay for it in this country. Matter of fact, they'll find him.

I did not want to sell to West Texas locals. To me it seemed like shitting in my own bed. Besides, no one out there had much money. Instead I approached Arnold Kersh and his crew in Plainview, who could supply the Lubbock area. Later I also contacted my cousin Phil who lived in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. So Oscar bought from his connections in Mexico, he sold the marijuana to me, and I carted it across the river and sold it to Arnold, Phil and others. Their job was to collect everybody's paychecks. Oscar—and the rest of us too—started to make lots of money.

All of this wealth eventually took its toll on Oscar. While he did continue to turn over healthy amounts to his dad for distribution into the poor community of Piedritas, he also developed a liking for cocaine and whores. It seems to go with the business. Oscar moved his family to Fort Stockton, Texas, and bought a small conservative home. His children learned English and enjoyed the privileges of most Americans. Oscar began to spend more and more time gone from home in the company of people like [cartel leader] Amado Carrillo and high-ups in the Mexican government—drinking brandy, snorting lines and screwing. No matter how much money a man makes, there's never enough for that lifestyle. Maybe there're days when, to him, the cash seems unlimited, but mark my words—the day comes when he'll look up and it's gone.

ESSAYS

In the first essay, Stephen T. Moore, a history professor at Central Washington University, analyzes the impact of the U.S. ban on alcoholic beverages on the border between Canada and the United States. Because Canada did not institute such a sweeping ban, in the 1920s Americans crossed the border in unprecedented numbers in search of alcoholic refreshment. Canadian entrepreneurs took advantage of this with a spate of hotel and other hospitality development. Moreover, the high prices for alcohol Prohibition created provided an irresistible lure for Canadian liquor smugglers. By the end of the 1920s, the alcohol-oriented American tourist trade was one of Canada's leading industries. American tourists and their often boisterous behavior strengthened the widespread Canadian belief in the border as a bulwark against their cruder, more philistine southern neighbors. At the same time, the violence and political corruption associated with liquor traffic led many Canadians to view the border as a threat, a "zone of peril" in Moore's words, perhaps similar to the way in which many Americans saw their border with Mexico after the Mexican Revolution. Moore concludes by arguing that the experience of Prohibition led Canadians to see the Canada-U.S. border as "a metaphor for everything that was significantly different about Canadians and Americans."

In the second essay, historian Gabriela Recio, a staff member at Mexico's National Archives, examines similar dynamics on the U.S.-Mexico border during the same period. In the late 1800s, the use of drugs such as cocaine and marijuana was legal and open in the United States. Recio describes the increasing regulation and outright banning of many of these substances, arguing that racial fears played a prominent role. These measures, and the banning of alcohol,

created strong economic incentives for the production and shipping of drugs and alcohol in Mexico, where anti-drug and -alcohol campaigns had enjoyed much less success. American Prohibition was, in practice, an enormous subsidy for the Mexican brewing industry, which rapidly expanded in the 1920s. The governors of Mexican border states were able to strengthen their hold on power and independence from Mexico City by skimming some of the profits of drug production and transportation. By the end of the 1920s, Recio concludes, the Mexican Northwest had become a key supplier and transportation hub for the enormous U.S. appetite for drugs. The American government viewed its long border with Mexico as an obstacle for its drug policies, but its inability to limit demand for these substances by its own citizens meant that its enforcement efforts met with little success—a pattern that continues in the twenty-first century.

Canadians, Americans, and the Multiple Meanings of Border during Prohibition

STEPHEN T. MOORE

Canada is a border nation. With over 75 percent or its population living within a hundred miles of the boundary, the border is a reality of virtually every Canadian's daily life. Not only does it define citizenship, it contributes to how Canadians think, what they believe, and how they work. It should come as no surprise then that the border is tied very closely to Canada's national identity. Even Canadian nationalists, quick to point out that being Canadian means much more than simply being "not American" (and it does), concur that the border plays an important role in shaping their identity. One of the English-Canadian writers with the greatest national and international reputation in the 1920s was the humorist Stephen Leacock who, not coincidentally, found much of his material in the border and Canada's relationship with the United States. He once observed, "By an odd chance the forty-ninth parallel, an astronomical line, turned out to *mean* something." But what? This question is not unimportant, even beyond the ways in which it informs the Canadian national identity, for it also helps to explain the relationship between Canadians and Americans more generally. To that relationship the border is central.

Never was this more true than during America's "noble experiment." Between 1920 and 1933, no issue in Canadian-American relations proved more contentious or more intractable than the liquor problem. When the Eighteenth Amendment took effect in January 1920, no longer could Americans make, sell, transport, or import any "intoxicating beverage" that contained more than 0.5 percent alcohol. They could, however, legally drink it, and thus it was left to the Amendment's enforcement mechanism, the Volstead Act, to insure that they didn't have access to it. Predictably, from the Pacific to the Atlantic,

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Stephen T. Moore, "Defining the 'Undefended': Canadians, Americans, and the Multiple Meanings of Border during Prohibition," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 34 (Spring 2004): 3–32.

American dollars promptly headed north, and (usually) pure, unadulterated Canadian whisky, south. Canadian distillers, brewers, export houses, rumrunners, and bootleggers were more than happy to assuage the parched throats of their American brethren. However, what was a boon to the Canadian economy was bane to American diplomats and enforcement officials who sought help from their Canadian counterparts in stemming this illegal torrent of booze. Part of the focus of this essay is to explore this problem and the reasons for its intractability.

The "undefended" border had always been a porous one. Yet during the 1920s there was an extraordinary increase in the pace and scope of what Marcus Lee Hansen referred to as the "mingling of the Canadian and American peoples." Its chief cause was the automobile and the ease with which travelers were able to cross the border. By the end of the decade, four million American cars and twenty million Americans crossed the border each year. The effect, according to one historian, was a "turning point" in the cultural history of Canada, as Americans—in pursuit of liquor, scenery, and other things "Canadian"—brought with them other (sometimes less desirable) aspects of American culture.

In ever-increasing numbers, it follows that they spent a greater amount of time thinking about that border and what it meant. One way of exploring the "fabric" of the prohibition-era relationship then is to explore how the shifting meanings of an increasingly permeable border factored into what would have otherwise remained merely a diplomatic problem. Did the border's various meanings magnify distinct sovereign loyalties or did they magnify shared cross-border loyalties? Ultimately, which mattered most?

Even beyond the prohibition question, a study of this sort has much to say about Canadians, Americans, and their respective values and institutions. While the casual (especially American) observer may see or cross the border without recognizing its significance, many academics too often see it as a definitive line and, in so doing, fail to make the valuable comparative discoveries the border offers. Both countries originated from European expansion and evolved from a common, largely English, heritage. Both adopted federal, constitutional democratic systems, place an emphasis on liberal values, and share many social, economic, and historical experiences. It is because Canada and the United States have so much in common that they help us understand not only the other, but ourselves as well. It places into question the notion of American "exceptionalism," or at least forces us to reframe it in a "North American" context.

During prohibition, the border assumed a variety of meanings. As scholars have shown in other contexts, these meanings are not exclusive to the prohibition era. Nonetheless, in examining these sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting meanings, we discover answers to why the prohibition problem remained so intractable for Canadian and American diplomats. In the meanings of border, we also discover a microcosm of the larger Canadian-American relationship and a window into the ever-elusive Canadian identity.

In North America, the quest for a temperate society lasted roughly a century, from the 1830s to the Great Depression. The movement's first upsurge coincided with the religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening, and urged voluntary individual temperance for spiritual and social purposes. Temperance

borrowed religion's proselytizing methods and emotionalism to convince followers that society's ills could be cured in a world without drink. It was World War I that propelled prohibition to the national stage in both Canada and the United States. With the war, prohibition became synonymous were patriotism. The results were the Eighteenth Amendment, approved by Congress in December 1917, and the War Measures Act, approved by Parliament in 1918.

National prohibition continued in force in the United States until 1932, but in Canada prohibition took a decidedly different turn. When the War Measures Act expired in December 1919, most provinces retained prohibition at the provincial level. Quebec and British Columbia, however, became the vanguard of a new experiment when they adopted a system of government monopoly of liquor sales.

While springing from the same movement and propelled by the same people, it is not accidental that Canada and the United States took different approaches in the temperance cause. Instead it reflects, at a deeper level, very different institutions and value systems.

For prohibition, this had significant consequences, not least of which was a tendency for Canadians to view the provincial or local level as the appropriate arena for social reform legislation, while prohibition advocates in the United States counted on the enforcement machinery of a powerful federal government. By statutorily regulating liquor at the provincial level, Canada enjoyed a degree of flexibility not found in the American constitutional experiment. It certainly confirmed to many Canadians that the Canadian political system was "far more responsive to the ebb and flow of public thought than the plan handed down by the fathers of the Republic." Neither was this irony lost on Americans, especially as the difficulties of enforcing prohibition on a national level became increasingly apparent. The *Boston Globe* commented enviously, "It seems so easy for Canadians to change their minds. We might be trying similar experiments if Prohibition were not a part of the Federal Constitution."

Canada's divergent approach also stemmed from a set of social values that were less likely to use the power of government to regulate social morality. As the Canadian Richard de Brisay commented during prohibition, "The Americans, as a nation, believe their souls can be saved by prohibitory laws. With Canadians it is not so.... We do not believe that there can be salvation by legislation for anyone, anywhere, anytime."

If it did nothing else, national prohibition in the United States convinced Canadians that they were somehow more thoughtful or more temperate in matters of reform. Sociological surveys of this period indicate that many Canadians tended to believe that Americans "resort hastily to extreme measures and yield to social forces which a tougher minded, or at any rate firmer-minded people might resist." Having rejected national prohibition themselves, they became rather cynical of the moral experiment in the United States, especially as a steady stream of American tourists looking for liquor in Canada clearly indicated that a large portion of the American population was not in accord with their own constitutional law.

As an interface, the border tied Canadian and American reformers together even while it reflected fundamentally different approaches toward a common

goal. They were different approaches that reflected different values and institutions, but nonetheless influenced each other. On another meaning of the border, however, Canadians and Americans could agree wholeheartedly. The border meant opportunity. It always had. Throughout the border's shared history, smuggling had always been a integral part of the relations between inhabitants, north and south.

But with national prohibition in the United States, the potential of border smuggling took on an almost surreal quality. Once the Volstead Act took effect, the border provided even the lowest of rumrunners with lucrative employment. A case of liquor wholesaling for sixteen dollars in Canada could easily fetch as much as eighty dollars in the States. Canadian or American, rumrunners found that liquor sent across the border in boats, automobiles, aircraft, hip flasks, tin corsets, hog carcasses, shipments of lumber, or farm screenings more than paid for the method of conveyance. The risks were few, but the profit almost without limit.

At the heart of the diplomatic intransigence American diplomats faced in their Canadian counterparts was the boost the liquor trade gave to the Canadian economy. It is impossible to calculate accurately the value of the liquor traffic. Smugglers were no more eager to report their exports to Canadian authorities than American, since Canada heavily taxed liquor exports destined specifically for the United States. Still, from official export figures, one can at least determine the lower limit of Canadian liquor shipped to United States. In 1920, Canada exported only \$707,099 worth of alcoholic beverages to the United States. Within only three years, official liquor exports increased to \$3,178,908 and, by 1925, to \$11,610,169. These figures continued to increase until, for the last three years of the decade, they routinely exceed \$30,000,000 annually. For Canada's distilling industry, this was no small change. Having a thirsty, captive audience to the South was a monopoly worth keeping, and distillers made certain that the politicians who represented them were well aware of it.

Entrepreneurs were especially quick to take advantage of the opportunity the border provided to attract American tourists. As with the earlier gold rushes, they recognized that the real profits lay not necessarily in liquor sales, but in providing comfortable places for Americans to drink. Hotels, roadhouses, and personal residences, many of them owned by Americans or financed by American dollars, sprang up all along the international border.

Like liquor exports, American tourism favorably affected Canada's balance of trade. As an "invisible export," if Americans spent \$150 million in Canada, it was like Canada sending to the United States goods of an equal value. At its high point in 1929, Commerce Department statistics suggest that American tourists spent \$300 million in Canada, and Canadian Department of Trade and Commerce figures place that value at an even higher \$309 million. By the late 1920s, the American tourist trade was so important that it ranked among the top three industries in the Dominion.

Whether for smugglers of the distant past, or the rumrunners, distillers, and hospitality industry of the roaring twenties, the border indeed represented unbridled opportunity. For American tourists the border also meant opportunity. But

for these travelers it held an overlapping meaning, one that Canadians believed the border to represent as well—refuge or sanctuary. Throughout American history, the border has served as a refuge for those seeking to escape some threat or oppression: for deserters in the War of 1812, for African Americans on the underground railroad, for Sitting Bull and Chief Joseph and their bands of followers, or for opponents of the Vietnam War. For each, the border is a place across which one may escape when internal pressures become too great. This version of the border as refuge most often manifests itself in a south to north direction; that is, it is held more often by Americans fleeing north than it is for Canadians fleeing south. As we will later see, Canadians also saw the border as a refuge, but in a different way.

Even before the Eighteenth Amendment, the concept of Canadian-American "relations" invariably brought to the American mind the vague reminder that Canada was sort of a northern extension of the United States. It was the one country into which American tourists could drive their own motor cars and, save for a brief examination at a customs station, barely know that a border had been crossed. The American tourist could continue to drive on the same side of the road, speak in English, use American money, buy American magazines, and drink "drinks that were his own once but are so no longer."

Ardent drinkers who lived near the Canadian border knew exactly why they were crossing the border, and it wasn't for the scenery. They followed the advice of a popular refrain,

> Forty miles from whiskey
> And sixty miles from gin
> I'm leaving this damn country.
> For to live a life of sin.

No sooner had prohibition taken effect in the United States than the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* began to joke about the northward migration: "One thing about prohibition, you don't need surveyors to find the boundary line of Canada." The trail left by migrating tourists clearly marked the way. Soon, even those who did not live near the border, and who may never have visited Canada before, found the trek irresistible. Americans sought Canada because of the refuge it afforded them, not only to drink, but to drink without worrying about spies or "stool pigeons." The border offered sanctuary from American temperance run amok and, as the *Chicago Tribune* noted, "freedom in the Provinces which [the tourist] is denied at home."

As Russell Brown notes, the view of Canada as a sanctuary or refuge is one of the "few places where an American version of Canada and the Canadian one correspond, but this apparent similarity actually arises from an important cultural difference." While for Americans the border is a line across which one may escape internal pressures, "In Canada, the border is seen as protecting the country, making it a place of safe refuge from the outside world." In this context, "outside world" most often refers to the United States and all of its excesses. Northrop Frye has noted that Canada's national identity is informed by a

"garrison state" mentality. One of the most enduring images of Canada, one that continues to inform the Canadian identity, portrays the Dominion as a tranquil kingdom. Its corollary is the belief that the border juxtaposes "Peace, Order, and Good Government" with "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Sociological studies conducted in the 1930s found Canadians believing Americans to be "lawless," "more corrupt," "less moral," and "less cultured." Other popular catchphrases created a picture of a country well on its way to hell: "companionate marriage," "easy divorce," "gangsters," "kidnapping," and "racketeering." On the other hand, words used to describe Canadians included "honourable," "law-abiding," "quieter, slower in tempo, and saner in quality."

In many ways, prohibition in the United States and the adoption of government control in most of the provinces reinforced in the Canadian mind the belief that Canada had found a superior route toward the temperance objective both nations otherwise shared. With reports of prohibition-related violence in the United States an almost-daily occurrence, Canadians tended to look upon their own untroubled waters with an air of smugness. One reader of the *Victoria Daily Colonist* commented that Chicago alone had more criminals in its penitentiary than in all the penitentiaries of Canada. "If this is the record of dry Chicago," he continued, "let us thank God we live in wet British Columbia, where we do not, like the U.S.A., have to build armored cars to transfer a little money or merchandise from one place to another."

American tourists who saw Canada as a wet refuge were, in turn, viewed by Canadians with a certain ambivalence, because American tourism occasionally threatened the Canadian version of border as refuge. While enamored by the profits, many were also wary about the negative effect tourists had on the Canadian social and cultural fabric. Not all Americans who came north in search of drink were congenial to Canadians of the steadier sort. When American tourists brought their philistine culture, they challenged the "peace, order, good government" mantra Canadians held so dear. They also kept the border from being the refuge Canadians needed it to be.

Clearly central to Canada's thinking was the belief that there was little incentive, but great expense, for helping the United States enforce the Eighteenth Amendment. By 1930, however, when the Mackenzie King administration finally found a consensus for cooperation, that illusion had been shattered. The border had taken on yet another, darker meaning. Borders, while they may be crossed, are nonetheless risky places either in a physical sense or, more subtly, for one's identity. Crossing the border means, at least for a moment, to make oneself vulnerable and to be dangerously between. One early traveler commented, "We were across the yet undefined survey line, the 49th parallel. Somewhere here it must run, and for a few miles we were in doubt as to where we were at."

It was when Canadians began to view the border as a zone of peril, that calls began to come from throughout the Dominion to rethink Canada's diplomatic position. Facilitating rumrunners, while profitable, began to seem inimical to Canada's best interests. The border had become a dangerous place for the nation's

physical well-being, for its way of life, and for its identity and reputation. A Vancouver daily alluded to this newly discovered reality:

> It is all very well to argue that the enforcement of the prohibition law in the United States has nothing to do with Canada and there is no reason why this country should make any special efforts to assist her neighbor. Up to a point this is technically correct; but the situation which has developed along the international border involves Canada's own vital interest and compels her to consider the question from a broad standpoint.

What the paper was referring to, at least in part, was a new understanding of just how dangerous the rumrunning traffic could be, as well as the corrupting nature of the liquor industry in the Canadian polity.

In the fall of 1924, an abandoned, blood-strewn rumrunning vessel by the name of the *Beryl* G was discovered drifting aimlessly in the Puget Sound, just south and east of the border. The investigation that followed, the most sensational in British Columbia's history, indicated the Canadian vessel had been hijacked and its disemboweled Canadian crew attached to the anchor and thrown overboard. The murderers, though American, had committed this heinous crime in Canadian waters. They had then fled across the border, were eventually arrested in the United States, extradited to Canada, and, after a lengthy trial, executed by hanging. For many years afterward, the hijacking of the *Beryl* G remained the defining incident of the rumrunning era in the Pacific Northwest. While inhabitants of the region recalled the specifics of the *Beryl* G with varying degrees of accuracy, common to all recollections was that the hijackers were Americans.

As the *Beryl* G incident made abundantly clear, the border was more an abyss than the impenetrable and protective barrier many thought. It could not protect Canada from the disorder that emanated from the American side. Not only was the violence associated with the liquor traffic contagious but, by participating in the traffic, Canada undermined her international reputation as well.

Many meanings of the border serve to define the ways in which Canadians and Americans differ. When one thinks of border, it is the idea of division that most quickly comes to mind. Borders divide states, peoples, and identities. But borders also serve as margins. As a border nation, Canadians have often felt as though they were *on* the margin of something else—merely a delightful northern playground for their more numerous neighbors to the south. At other times, to be Canadian means to actually *be* the margin—merely a second-tier power serving as interlocutor, interpreter, or linchpin between two greater powers. Used in these contexts, being on the margin means to be marginal or marginalized. By occasionally defining themselves as "not American," Canadians have had to deal with these mostly negative connotations of margin. More positively, however, margin implies a zone of transition, where interests on one side blend ever gradually with those on the other. The border as margin implies that Canadians and Americans share something positive in common, perhaps a "special," or at least a unique relationship and that the border need not be considered entirely perilous.

As we have seen, that is not to say that Canadians do not defend against American economic, political, or cultural intrusion. However, while myriad "pinpricks" occasionally disrupt the sense of neighborliness, the reality of the border is that it is physically undefended, more a porous fence than a brick wall.

As one American daily pointed out in 1922, "Our border is as open as the prairie just as it should be, for we like the Canadians and some of them have learned to put up with us." Many Canadians agreed but were concerned that prohibition threatened to undermine "three thousand miles of undefended boundary over which not a shot has been fired for a hundred years." This concern took on increasing importance in January 1930 when President Herbert Hoover proposed stationing ten thousand agents along the northern border. The proposal was a mixed blessing for Canadians. Many were glad to see the United States finally taking responsibility for its problems, or at least paying attention to the border for other than expansionist reasons. Others were more concerned. The *Chronicle Telegraph* of Quebec worried, "Experience has shown that the type of man employed as a prohibition agent is not conspicuous for his judgment or responsibility and even with the greatest care in selection, there are bound to be a number ... who are not fit to be trusted with firearms."

The more important concern over the border patrol was the damage a standing patrol would do to that most enduring symbol of the Canadian American relationship. A border patrol, noted the Vancouver *Daily Province*,

> Cannot fail to emphasize everything which divides Canada and the United States. It will give to our border an aspect which it has never had in a hundred years and more—the aspect of an armed frontier, where soldiers patrol the highways of international communication, where guns guard the line which, gunless and peaceful, has been the honorable boast of our friendship.

Even the sovereignty issues seemed to become less important as the border began to lose its characteristic meaning. The *Daily Province* noted, "We are jealous of our sovereignty. We insist that what we do within our borders is the business of nobody but ourselves, and we should resist any attempt on the part of an outside nation to interfere with our decisions."

Others soon began touting the importance of Canada being a good neighbor. Prohibition organizations and dry newspapers throughout Canada petitioned Ottawa to cooperate with the United States with a vigor equal to that expended on the earlier campaign for prohibition. Many in Ottawa at first discounted these petitions, for prohibitionists were not the majority in Canada. Yet with prohibitionists came a large segment of the population who agreed that, wet or dry, it was neither decent nor neighborly for Canada to undermine American public policy. Soon, these groups had attracted the support of Conservatives who saw in agitating for cooperation with the United States a moral high ground from which they could attack the slow-moving Liberals. Coming shortly before a Dominion general election, it would prove a compelling argument. In the end, the idea of the border as a neighborly margin won out.

U.S. Prohibition and the Drug Trade in Mexico

GABRIELA RECIO

In recent years the international community has been increasingly concerned with the rise in volume of illegal drug trafficking. The wide attention and media coverage that the issue has received might indicate that it is a relatively recent problem. However, the drug trade has been the subject of international concern and debate for almost a century. In 1909 the first international conference on opium traffic and control was held in Shanghai—under a joint British and US government initiative. This meeting, attended by delegates from thirteen different countries, marked the beginning of a series of multilateral conferences convened in order to eliminate the manufacture, consumption and trade of opium, initially, and in later years of morphine, cocaine and marihuana.

Although Mexico has been an important participant in the history of the drug trade, little is known regarding how and when the country began to specialise in such illegal endeavours. This article explores the nature of Mexico's involvement in the drug trade at the onset of the twentieth century, arguing that the role Mexico has played as 'bootlegger', the routes that have been developed and the states within the country that have been heavily involved in this traffic have roots that can be traced to 1910 at least.

Such an analysis would not be complete if it did not discuss regulations introduced by the United States regarding drug and alcohol consumption, marketing and production early in the twentieth century. The article will examine the transformation of the drug market between 1900 and 1930, by which time drug production and distribution were totally prohibited in the USA. By examining drug regulation changes that occurred within the United States between 1912 and 1928 and their effects on Mexico, we can begin to understand how drug distribution networks geared to supplying the US market with illegal substances developed in the latter.

How Drug Consumption and Distribution Became Illegal: Changes in U.S. Policies and Regulations

In 1900 opium and its derivatives (morphine and heroin), cocaine and marihuana were legal substances that could be purchased, sold and used without any difficulty in the United States. These drugs could be bought or ordered by mail through different stores. Additionally, their use was not restricted to reducing pain or countering insomnia. For example, until 1903 cocaine was an active ingredient of the Coca-Cola formula, and Parke Davis (the multinational pharmaceutical company, now part of Pfizer, inc.) sold cigarettes, liquor, tablets and an injectable liquid based on coca leaves. Similarly, Sears Roebuck's 1897 catalogue offered 'hypodermic cases' that included a syringe, two needles, two morphine bottles and a case for only $1.50.

Gabriela Recio, "Drugs and Alcohol: US Prohibition and the Origins of the Drug Trade in Mexico, 1910–1930," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34 (Feb. 2002): 21–42.

Nevertheless, by this date several groups were already indicating that the use of certain medications, such as morphine, could cause addiction.

By 1895, around three percent of the population of the United States was addicted to morphine. The majority were high-income women—known as habitués. These women were not considered outcasts nor socially ostracised. On the contrary, they were believed to have a physiological problem, which could be solved with certain medications. Nonetheless, other groups of addicts were feared by the majority: mostly poor minorities such as the Chinese and Mexicans (who lived mainly in the West) and the Blacks (mostly in the South).

In the South, public perception regarding cocaine was linked to racist prejudices against blacks. It was believed that cocaine consumption by the black community could make them disregard the barriers that society had established between different races. It was thought that 'cocaine transformed hitherto inoffensive, law-abiding negroes into a constant menace to the community ... sexual desires are increased and perverted, peaceful negroes become quarrelsome, and timid negroes develop a degree of "Dutch courage" that is sometimes almost incredible. Similarly, the West began an anti-Chinese and anti-opium campaign; in 1875, opium could not be smoked in the city of San Francisco and between the years 1877 and 1900, eleven western states proclaimed anti-opium laws. Correspondingly, the American Federation of Labour (AFL) warned in its brochures against the Chinese, who were portrayed as assiduous opium smokers.

By the 1900s 'racist anti-vice' groups joined forces with other groups that were fighting prostitution and alcohol consumption and began to lobby for drug and liquor control, inculcating a different view towards drug and alcohol consumption and commercialisation in United States public opinion. By the beginning of the twentieth century a new perception was emerging that drug consumption could not be morally accepted and therefore its use should be seriously restricted.... Both pharmacists and the medical profession wanted to regulate the use of drugs but were opposed to total prohibition. These conflicting views led to the formulation of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906. This law established that all patented medication containing narcotics in its formula should indicate this information on the label.

Nonetheless, the anti-vice groups were not satisfied with the new regulations and sought stricter laws, lobbying for total drug and alcohol control on a national scale.

The Harrison Narcotics Tax Act and the Volstead Act: Prohibition Begins

In 1914 the United States Congress approved the Harrison Act, which established three mandates for those who distributed or manufactured drugs:

1. All transactions should be registered with the Federal Government.
2. A sales tax was to be imposed on the sale of such substances.
3. A medical prescription was required to buy any drug.

By 1922 a range of different court rulings had transformed the Harrison Act into a totally prohibitionist law. However, drugs were not alone in the 'forbidden

substance' category, since the 1919 Volstead Act had already prohibited alcohol production and consumption. During those years addicts began to be considered as criminals and traffickers replaced physicians. Narcotics' markets had few restrictions at the end of the nineteenth century, but by the early twentieth century became illegal endeavours, producing millions of dollars in profits for those involved.

By the early 1920s an important interest group opposed to drug consumption had developed within the Treasury Department, with some sympathisers inside the State Department. This group not only started to fight consumption inside the United States but also believed that the problem could be solved by reducing production in the countries responsible for supplying different narcotics. It was hypothesised that if producer countries totally prohibited drug production, then prices would become exorbitant hence leaving US consumers unable to purchase drugs. Therefore, Mexico–which was a producer as well as distributor of different drugs and liquors–came under systematic Treasury–as well as State Department–surveillance during this prohibitionist phase.

The Effects of Prohibition in Mexico

The new regulations imposed by the US government on alcohol consumption and production as well as on drug consumption, import and manufacturing had profound consequences in Mexico. Total prohibition created black markets worth millions of dollars, and the long border shared with the United States encouraged the expansion of liquor and narcotic markets on the Mexican side.

Even though alcohol prohibition was repealed in the United States in 1933, it is important to analyse the effects of such prohibition on Mexico. Apparently, the Mexican states that were involved in smuggling this product were not necessarily the same as were engaged in drug production and distribution. In fact, there was a 'country' as well as 'state' specialisation in product manufacture and commercialisation. As a result, Canada began by exporting liquors to the United States while Mexico mostly specialised in opium and marihuana distribution. Within Mexico the states that engaged in drug production and distribution were those in the Northwest (Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Nayarit). The border states, however, were mostly involved with alcohol trafficking, illegally distributing beers and attempting—without much success—to distil some beverages.

By 1915, the states of California and Arizona had prohibited the establishment of alcohol vending saloons. Even though California had not been declared a 'dry state', the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Imperial Valley, California, was lobbying in favour of alcohol prohibition and hoped that regulations would be imposed and enforced promptly. The group's main concern was that the water that the Valley received originated closely to the town of Mexicali in the Baja California territory on the Mexican border. Mexicali as the women pointed out, was filled with numerous saloons that sold alcohol and could therefore pollute the water that they drank. They therefore demanded that if the state of California went 'dry', it should also include the city of Mexicali. The secretary

of state consequently instructed the person in charge of Mexican Interests at Mexico City to discuss the matter with the Mexican government.

At the time, not only were people in the USA worried about alcohol consumption. Some Mexican groups, including Venustiano Carranza (president 1917–1920), were worried about alcoholism in Mexico.

Even though Mexico and the USA were concerned about the consumption and production of alcohol in their territories, important differences also existed. Both countries wanted to solve the 'addictive' nature of the problem, but the groups that proposed more stringent regulations differed substantially in both nations. In the USA it was public opinion, in the form of different pressure groups–such as the Women's Christian Temperance Unions–that lobbied for more rigorous regulations. In contrast, in Mexico rules were imposed from top to bottom: the president and the governors issued regulations with apparent lack of public support. During the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) several states prohibited liquor production and consumption. For example, the state of Durango prohibited the sale and manufacture of alcohol and in Mexico City all *pulquerias* were forced to close down by decree. Sanctions for violating alcohol prohibition differed in kind, the most extreme being death in Chihuahua and Sinaloa.

Although the state governments issued laws prohibiting the production and sale of different liquors, these were often disregarded by officials due to their negative impact on fiscal revenues. The US consul at Durango explained that anti-alcohol laws had not been enforced because no other source had been found to compensate for the loss of fiscal income generated by alcohol sales. Although some members of Mexico's ruling elites favoured anti-alcohol laws, they were reluctant to apply them due to their inability to find alternative sources of fiscal revenue in the midst of the Revolution.

Fiscal earnings were not the only reason why some governors were unwilling to enforce these laws. On the other side of the border, Prohibition had created lucrative black markets, which could provide vast amounts of money to those willing to participate in them.

The passing in 1919 of the Volstead Act in the United States had different consequences in Mexico. As mentioned above, California and Arizona had prohibited saloons and casinos in their states prior to 1919, stimulating the opening of these businesses on the Mexican side of the border. After 1919, the saloon enterprises in Mexico were booming and alcohol trafficking into the United States had become even more profitable.

By the 1920s much of the brewing and distilling factories in the USA were closing down. Some, however, decided to move their entire factories to Mexico, as was the case of a new whisky plant inaugurated in the city of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, in 1920. The factory owners were Mexican and US citizens who planned to sell their product in Mexico and other Latin American countries.

In the years of 1922 and 1923 there were several projects by US brewery owners from the state of California—to establish a brewery in the border city of Nogales in Sonora. Prohibition had seriously affected these businessmen and they were trying to sell their factories or to relocate them entirely to Mexico so that they could resume production.

Prohibition in the United States had other important consequences. It tremendously encouraged the expansion of the Mexican beer industry during a dire economic period. By 1923 Consul Bowman in Mexico City reported that this industry was second in importance within the manufacturing sector. The consul observed that this expansion was due to an increase in beer demand, but most importantly to the absence of US beer within the Mexican market. Prohibition left Mexican brewers with no competition from imported US beers for more than a decade. Thus, a direct correlation existed between the industry's expansion and the imposition of the Volstead Act.

Liquor smuggling increased considerably during the 1920s. Most of this illegal traffic was handled by land, but maritime routes on the Pacific as well as the Gulf Coast were also important. The consul in Progreso, Yucatán, indicated that Pérez Island served as a storage place for liquors in transit that were finally transported by vessels from Florida to the United States. On the Pacific coast the port of Ensenada served as an important base for all the liquor in transit to the Western United States. The consul in that city reported in 1924 that US demand was quite considerable since most of the liquor that arrived in the city was rapidly shipped to US markets.

The Harrison Act and Its Impact on Mexico

The drug trade in Mexico has long been the focus of investigation of Mexican as well as United States government agents. Collaboration between the two countries to attempt to regulate the traffic can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century. By 1912—two years before the Harrison Act was passed—the Consul at Chihuahua was already working together with special agents of the Treasury Department in El Paso, Texas, and with the Governor of Chihuahua to capture opium shipments that had originated in the port of Manzanillo, Colima.

By 1916 the Treasury Department had begun exerting pressure on Mexico through the State Department to prohibit smoking opium imports. Mexico had signed the International Opium Convention, which had agreed to ban imports of such substances (Chapter 2, Article 7). Nevertheless, Treasury Department reports indicated that Mexico continued to import the drug through the port of Ensenada in Baja California. The Treasury Department was concerned since it had evidence that Mexico imported crude opium, converting it into the smoking version and later exporting it to the United States.

Governor Cantú: The Rent-Seeker

Governor Cantú not only obtained a considerable income from alcohol smuggling, but his earnings were also vastly increased by opium trafficking. It seems that Cantú's involvement in drug smuggling was associated with his authority as governor to issue different types of licenses and concessions. Clearly, Cantú had fruitful drug dealings; as Governor he single-handedly prohibited opium consumption and trade, thus legally allowing him to seize such substances. According to Treasury Department agents, confiscated drugs were sold by the governor or resold to the original owners at a much higher price.

The State Department correspondence suggests that in the period 1916–1920 all opium related traffic was circumscribed to Baja California and in some way or another involved the Cantú family. In terms of describing the opium market that developed in those years in the Baja California territory, it can be reasonably established that opium was imported through the Ensenada Port and later consumed locally as well as exported to the United States. Opium was not commercially planted in Mexico and was therefore imported from Liverpool, Geneva and Germany. The cargo ships travelled from Europe through the Panama Canal and had stopovers at Corinto in Nicaragua; Salina Cruz, Oaxaca; Manzanillo, Colima; Mazatlán, Sinaloa; and finally arrived in Ensenada, Baja California. Once the opium arrived in Baja California, Cantú sold the merchandise to the Chinese in the city of Los Angeles.

Some studies have evaluated Cantú's term in office as a by-product of the autonomy from central government in Mexico City that he enjoyed. These indicate that the distance separating the Baja California territory from central Mexico, as well as the lack of transportation such as railways explain the territory's lack of involvement during the Revolution. It is also mentioned that Cantú was able to obtain resources (which proceeded from cotton as well as canteens) within the territory and thus was relatively free to make decisions compared to other Governors at the time. The correspondence analysed so far suggests that the origin of Cantú's income derived mainly from vice-related operations and that this, in conjunction with the territory's isolation, probably allowed him greater freedom during his term in office. The Governor even affirmed that his government would gladly prohibit the opium trade once he could obtain alternative resources that would compensate the loss incurred from such a lucrative business.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that Cantú—and Mexicans in general—were not alone in the drug trafficking business of the time. It also involved US citizens, Chinese, Rumanians, Palestinians, Spaniards, French, Greeks and Japanese. The involvement of so many nationalities as well as the distribution routes in the opium traffic indicate that narcotic illegal markets have for a long time been international in character. It also points to the fact that Mexico and the United States—as supplier and consumer respectively—were already playing an important part in such a lucrative international market from the beginning of the twentieth century.

The 1920s: The Beginnings of Drug Production in Mexico and the Professionalisation of Trafficking

The 1920s saw the emergence of more stringent laws regarding drug consumption and commercialisation in the United States. Rigorous laws were imposed on a national and state level in Mexico and it was in this decade that traffickers became planters in several states. Smugglers took the offensive and began planting opium in the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Chihuahua and Durango. Along with planting, the northwestern territory consolidated itself as the most important drug distribution network in the country whose principal market was the United States.

During the decade the Mexican government established that special permits should be obtained in order to import marihuana and opium into the country. It was also ruled that drug stores should record all transactions that involved these substances in special books. In addition, in 1920 the government published the Provisions regarding the trade of products that can be used to encourage vices which degenerate mankind (or race) and on the planting and harvesting of plants that can be used for that purpose.

Provision five prohibited cultivating and marketing marihuana but the sixth established that 'opium poppies as well as extraction of its byproducts could only be handled with a Health Department permit.' At the state level, similar laws were imposed.

Not only the states were addressing the drug-smuggling issue, in 1921 the Mexico City newspaper *Excélsior* launched an intense campaign, informing its readers about drug trafficking operations that were taking place in different border states. The article indicated that several customs employees in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, were involved in drug smuggling. It also mentioned that a man had been captured because he had introduced a kilogram of heroin from the United States for his personal use. The newspaper disapproved of the way that the authorities had handled the case, since after spending only five days in jail and paying a small fine, the man had been set free. This article is interesting in that it illustrates how some groups in Mexico were already concerned about the drug problem, while others saw no harm in consuming heroin.

Some authors have claimed that the current United States government war on drugs has for some years been focused mainly on attacking the supply side, while the demand side problem has been seriously ignored. The correspondence analysed thus far indicates that, as early as the 1920s, the Treasury and State Departments considered that the 'drug problem' could be solved if the drug producer countries could be controlled. Moreover, this view received backing from different pressure groups, since they had been lobbying the Secretary of State to impose severe restrictions on those countries illegally exporting drugs to the United States. These groups viewed consumers as innocent and helpless victims that were being poisoned and killed by those countries that allowed the production of different drugs. According to this view, if the producer country did nothing to prevent drug production then the United States should impose severe sanctions in order to protect its citizens.

It is interesting to note that not only the United States government focused on solving the 'supply side' of the drug problem; Mexico, had adopted a similar strategy at both federal and state level. Nevertheless, it seems that the US strategy was somewhat incomplete since drug consumption was climbing among its own citizens.

Early measures should have been taken to fight both sides of the problem in such a way that coordinated policies by both countries could have been made more effective in curtailing drug trafficking and consumption. Nevertheless, the United States decided to deal with the problem by implementing the Harrison Act. This new prohibitionist atmosphere, as well as the lucrative black markets

that resulted from these, induced traffickers to take more aggressive measures. Thus in the 1920s opium began to be planted in the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Chihuahua and Durango and by the end of the decade the northwestern region had consolidated itself as the most important distribution drug network whose final market was the United States.

In 1923 the consul in Ciudad Juárez reported that marihuana seized during a police raid had been planted in the property of a rich local merchant. In 1924 the Federal Narcotics Control Board reported that opium poppies were being planted in the Sonoran towns of Caborca, Oquitoa and Pitiquito as well as in the city of Mazatlán in Sinaloa. Apparently most of these fields were in the experimental stage and research was been carried out to see if the land was suitable for opium production. Only four years later opium was planted regularly in these towns and the fields were spreading to the fertile Yaqui and Mayo Valleys in southern Sonora.

Another region that became appropriate for opium planting was the area extending from the city of Culiacán, Sinaloa, to the city of Tamazula in Durango (just a few kilometres east from Culiacán). In this territory the planting and manufacture was handled by a group of Chinese who were later arrested and sent to Mexico City for trial. Not only the Chinese were involved in this illegal market; some state public employees in northern Sinaloa played an important role in such a lucrative business.

This suggests that the opium illegal business was expanding and that poppy crops were spreading along several northwestern states. For example, there is evidence that in the 1920s the state of Nayarit was also producing opium and sending it to the United States, and in the city of Mulegé in southern Baja California, the drug started to be planted in 1927. Even though Mexico already had experience in planting and sending such drugs to the United States, the country was not self-sufficient in production; to judge from the reports on opium seizures, the drug entered Mexico illegally quite frequently.

There is evidence to suggest that the role that certain cities played in the drug smuggling markets was constantly changing, a fact that brings to mind contemporary trends in the drug business in Mexico and elsewhere. Whether or not a city or town was more permissive towards drug planting and smuggling depended mainly on the governor's and mayor's tolerance, as well as on the different state and federal controls imposed at various times.

Traffickers changed their *modus operandi* whenever certain routes became more restricted for their operations. This ability to quickly rearrange distribution routes suggests that different means of transportation were crucial in smooth day-to-day operations. As already mentioned, much of the drugs came from Europe through the Panama Canal, with different stopovers along the Mexican Pacific Coast. Once the merchandise reached Mexico it was transported to the United States by sea and land. There is also evidence that the Southern-Pacific Railway was unlawfully used to transport drugs through the states of Nayarit, Sinaloa and Sonora. Finally, it should be said that drug trafficking into the United States was becoming such a profitable business that technological innovations in transport, such as aviation, were also employed by various smugglers as early as the

1920s in order to transport drugs to the northern market. This technological innovation seriously hindered the security measures that the United States had been able to establish along the Mexican border in order to curb drug smuggling.

Conclusion

Whether a country decides to ban (or for that matter permit) narcotic and liquor distribution and production, the consequences are hard felt not only by its citizens but also by those living in adjacent countries. However, little is known about how regulatory changes imposed in the 1920s in the United States affected Mexico once prohibition was put into practice.

This article has explored Mexico's participation in the drug and alcohol trade once its northern neighbour implemented the Volstead and the Harrison Acts. It suggests that the country entered these illegal markets early in the twentieth century, mostly as a result of the new anti-vice regulations that the United States implemented during the 1920s. These stricter regulations—which Mexico also carried through—resulted in the creation of very profitable black markets.

Illicit operations enticed drug traffickers in Mexico to explore the possibilities of opium planting in the country's northwestern territory and also encouraged them to rearrange distribution channels on the Mexican side in a more efficient manner. Although, alcohol prohibition was only in effect between 1919 and 1933, it is interesting to observe how in this period Mexico also began manufacturing whisky to be exported to the United States and Mexican beer factories had an important boost in their activities.

Finally, and more importantly, what emerges as striking is the longevity of Mexican drug distribution channels. The Mexican states that now play an important role in drug trafficking began their activities in this trade around 1916. The northwestern states of Mexico have approximately ninety years' experience of developing and improving channels to distribute drugs into the United States.

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