

Mexican–Colombian Cultural Diplomacy in the 1930s and the Political Uses of the Past*

ABSTRACT: In 1938 and 1940 the governments of Mexico and Colombia exchanged statues of Benito Juárez and Francisco de Paula Santander. Through this exchange and the diplomatic ceremonies and cultural events that surrounded it, the two governments selectively interpreted their past to fortify their diplomatic relations in the present. Cultural diplomacy played an important role in inter-American relations, and this article demonstrates that rather than serving as empty gestures of goodwill, such exchanges were examples of governments’ political use of the past, pursued with the aim of advancing foreign policy goals. By constructing a narrative of the past based on anti-imperialism and evidenced by their dedication to nineteenth-century liberal heroes, they countered the conservative opposition they faced at home and abroad. Based on analysis of Mexican government documents and periodical sources from both countries, this article shows that the past was present in inter-American cultural diplomacy in the first half of the twentieth century.

KEYWORDS: Statues, Cultural Diplomacy, Foreign Relations, Anti-imperialism, Benito Juárez, Francisco de Paula Santander

The diplomatic corps and political class of Bogotá gathered at a park in El Nogal in 1938, on the anniversary of Mexican Independence, to unveil a statue of *Benemérito de las Américas* Benito Juárez, which was described by Mexican Minister to Colombia General José Domingo Ramírez Garrido as the largest and most “beautifully situated” statue in all of Bogotá.¹ The Mexican government reciprocated the Colombian gesture of goodwill in 1940 by unveiling a statue of *Prócer de la Independencia* Francisco de Paula Santander in Mexico City on the anniversary of Colombia’s Independence, in the centennial year of Santander’s death. During the ceremony, which took place on the Avenida de la Reforma adjacent to Lomas de Chapultepec, President Lázaro Cárdenas heralded the importance of the relationship between Mexico and Colombia, and the prescience with which Santander had believed that “solidarity between the

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1. Mexico, Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo Particular Lázaro Cárdenas, (hereafter AGN-APLC), rollo 14, expediente 72. Ramírez Garrido to Hay, 24 September 1938.

Mexican and Colombian *pueblos*, linked as they were by the same destiny, flowed from their shared understanding of the ideals of freedom and independence.”²

The Mexican and Colombian governments in the 1930s reinterpreted their common past to serve contemporary needs. This exchange of statues represents a high-water mark in the diplomatic relations between Mexico and Colombia. Its analysis provides an example of how Latin American governments in the first half of the twentieth century made symbolic use of monuments in the transnational construction of the past as a tool of foreign relations. The exchange of monuments was characteristic of cultural diplomacy in inter-American affairs in these decades and provides a telling example of the purpose such exchanges served. The ceremonies occasioned by the exchange served as celebrations of a selective retelling of the two governments’ history based on expressions of solidarity that legitimated their desire for increased cooperation in the present. They created a version of the past based on the anti-imperialism they claimed had bound them since the nineteenth century, and that mirrored their contemporary politics.

Rather than empty gestures with little lasting effect on foreign relations, analysis of this example of the exchange of statues between Mexico and Colombia shows that the practices of cultural diplomacy were central to the way in which Latin American governments conceived of their interests internationally. Building upon recent works on “diplomacy with memory” in the international relations literature, this article argues that governments used the past to “actively pursue international goals.”³ While much of the literature on the political use of the past focuses on how governments constructed narratives that contributed to nationalism and state formation, this article argues that governments engaged in cultural diplomacy that employed the past as a tool of foreign policy, thereby contributing to the character of the inter-American states system. While national histories have been quick to incorporate understandings of *lieux de mémoires*, physical manifestations of collective memory have received less attention in diplomatic history.⁴ Nevertheless, governments the world over expended significant funds and diplomatic capital bestowing and erecting monuments in each other’s honor and in commemoration of events and causes that bound

2. “Discurso del Presidente de la República con motivo del obsequio de una estatua del General Francisco de Paula Santander que hiciera el Gobierno de Colombia al de México. México, D.F., 20 de julio de 1940,” in *Palabras y documentos públicos*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1978), 432.

3. Kathrin Bachleitner, “Diplomacy with Memory: How the Past Is Employed for Future Political Goals,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15 (2019): 494; Kathrin Bachleitner, *Collective Memory in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

4. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7–24. Also see Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).

them.⁵ This article argues that we must take these examples of cultural diplomacy seriously and consider the advantages governments sought by pursuing them. As this article shows, the Mexican and Colombian governments engaged in diplomatic ceremonies that contributed to the transnational construction of a version of their shared past that was politically useful in the present.

The apparent similarities between the domestic and international policies of the Colombian Liberal Republic and those of revolutionary Mexico brought the two countries closer together in the 1930s, as the governments cooperated on bilateral projects and in multilateral organizations. Both governments were on the left of the political spectrum and were examples of the interventionist states that emerged in the 1930s in the context of rising nationalism, economic developmentalism, and the massification of politics that occurred in the interwar years, and especially following the onset of the Great Depression. Internationally, they shared opposition to foreign intervention and opposed the rising tide of fascism in Europe and its adherents in Latin America. Both also faced vocal opposition from vitriolic conservative sectors at home and abroad. Realizing that these shared experiences and ideological postures had echoes in their nineteenth-century relations and political projects, the governments reinterpreted early instances of cooperation for political ends. By constructing a narrative of common solidarity, liberal reform, and anti-imperialism, they glossed over the Conservative Hegemony in Colombia and the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico to present themselves as the inheritors of the ideals personified by the statues of Juárez and Santander. In so doing, they sought to legitimate their cooperation and safeguard their economic, political, and cultural projects by creating a transnational historical narrative of liberal anti-imperialism that guaranteed freedom from intervention in the present.

The exchange can be seen as part of the Latin American history of anti-imperial transnational struggle. Indeed, as Michel Gobat reminds us, “opposition to U.S. and European imperialism” “underpinned the idea of Latin America.”⁶ And the construction of nineteenth-century Latin American liberalism as the source of inspiration for the anti-imperial present was central to the Mexican and Colombian governments’ justification for and defense of their reform programs.

5. See for example, Simona Vittorini, “Modi and the Mahatma: The Politics of Statues and the Saffronisation of India–Africa Relations,” in *India’s Development Diplomacy and Soft Power in Africa*, ed. Kenneth King and Meera Venkatachalam (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2021), 79–97; Michael Patrick Cullinane, “100 Years of Peace Among English-Speaking People: Anglo-American Cultural Diplomacy, 1909–1921,” *Peace & Change: A Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 1 (January 2021): 5–34; Geoffrey Hicks, “Peace and War: Anglo-American Centenary Projects and the Lincoln Statue Controversy, 1910–1927,” in *The Age of Anniversaries*, ed. T. G. Otte (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 126–146.

6. Michel Gobat, “The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race,” *American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (December 2013): 1346.

Greg Grandin has characterized liberal traditions as being at the heart of a centuries' long competition with the United States over the definition of the idea of America.⁷ We can see in the case of the exchange of statues of Juárez and Santander that the liberal traditions of Latin American countries had particular relevance for Mexican–Colombian relations in the 1930s.

This article begins with an analysis of the Latin American historiography on the political uses of the past and then analyses the liberal anti-imperial past shared and selectively retold by Mexico and Colombia. Mutual aid during the Wars of Independence and the Reform Era provided the foundation for the construction of a shared liberal past that minimized the violence that had beset Colombia during the Conservative Hegemony (1885–1930) and the Mexican Revolution's armed phases, thereby naturalizing a cooperation based on nineteenth-century liberal ideals, including the separation of church and state, economic development, and public education. The article goes on to analyze the events and coverage surrounding the unveiling of the statue of Benito Juárez in 1938 and that of Francisco de Paula Santander in 1940. I close by analyzing how even conservative opposition forces were swayed by this cultural diplomacy and suggest that memory diplomacy provided one means by which reformist governments could defuse opposition to their projects and advance their foreign policy goals.

The exchange of monuments between Mexico and Colombia in 1938 and 1940 was not unique—both governments gave and received statues of other national heroes in these years, as did other countries in the Americas—and I argue that the political uses of this particular exchange are typical in that they demonstrate the benefits that governments hoped would accrue from such exchanges, and shows that this aspect of cultural diplomacy was pursued intentionally.⁸ The Mexican and Colombian governments assuaged their conservative detractors who sought to derail their reform programs by demonstrating that they were rooted in nineteenth-century liberalism, rather than “foreign-inspired” (read communist) ideology, and in this way they expanded upon the nation-building goals of their governments; but they were also constructed specifically to further the foreign policy goal of shoring up liberal anti-imperialism and the idea of nonintervention. The exchange of statues of Juárez and Santander enabled them to give substance to these ideals and perform their alliance, strengthening it through the construction of a shared past.

7. Greg Grandin, “The Liberal Traditions in the Americas: Rights, Sovereignty, and the Origins of Liberal Multilateralism,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (February 2012): 69.

8. Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales provides a comprehensive overview of these monuments in *Monumento conmemorativo y espacio público en Iberoamérica* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2004).

USE AND ABUSE OF THE PAST

The political uses of everything from postage stamps and street names to patriotic celebrations and funerals have been well documented in the historiography of Latin America, and this article builds upon the insights of these works.⁹ Historians of Latin America embraced Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities and took up Eric Hobsbawm's ideas regarding the invention of tradition. The historiography on the construction of national narratives is particularly well-developed as it relates to celebrations of Independence in Latin America.¹⁰ The literature on commemorations in Colombia emphasizes the centenary of Independence, and has also expanded to examine regional civic rituals.¹¹ Likewise, the literature on Mexico has focused on centennial commemorations, experiencing a notable boom during the bicentenario of 2010.¹² As Rebecca Earle argues in her examination of commemorations of Independence in nineteenth-century Spanish America, "the events commemorated, and the dates on which commemorations were held . . . reveal much about which aspects of the past were worthy of official recognition."¹³ More than mere festivals or entertainments, civic rituals, including those performed with the participation of foreign governments,

9. Rebecca Earle, "Sobre Héroes y Tumbas: National Symbols in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 85, no. 3 (2005): 375–416; Patrice Elizabeth Olsen, "Revolution in the City Streets: Changing Nomenclature, Changing Form, and the Revision of Public Memory," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920–1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 119–134; Matthew D. Esposito, "Death and Disorder in Mexico City: The State Funeral of Manuel Romero Rubio," in *Latin American Popular Culture*, ed. William H. Beezley and Linda A. Curcio-Nagy (Wilmington: SR Books, 2000), 87–103.

10. Javier Moreno Luzón, *Centenariomanía: Conmemoraciones hispánicas y nacionalismo español* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2021); Pablo Ortemberg, "Geopolítica de los monumentos: Los próceres en los centenarios de Argentina, Chile y Perú (1910–1924)," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 72, no. 1 (2005): 321–50. Françoise Martínez, "Un «monument de papier» pour célébrer et réinventer la Bolivie du Premier Centenaire de l'Indépendance," *Caravelle* 103 (1988): 85–106; Valeria Coronel and Mercedes Prieto, eds. *Celebraciones centenarias y negociaciones por la nación ecuatoriana* (Quito: Ministerio de Cultura, 2010).

11. Carolina Vanegas Carrasco, "Representaciones de la Independencia y la construcción de una imagen nacional en la celebración del centenario en 1910," in *Las historias de un grito: Doscientos años de ser colombianos. Exposición conmemorativa del Bicentenario 2010* (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2010), 104–129; Gabriel Samacá Alonso, "The Participation of the Santander History Center in the Centenary of the Death of the 'Condor of the Andes': Bucaramanga (1930)," *Historia y Sociedad* 27 (2014): 137–163; Sven Schuster and Laura Alejandra Buenaventura Gómez, "Imaginando la 'tercera civilización de América': Colombia en las exposiciones internacionales del IV Centenario (1892–1893)," *Historia Crítica* 75 (2020): 25–47; David Barrios Giraldo, "Avatars of Memory: Rituals and Commemorative Practices in Colombia, 1864–1913" (Ph.D. diss., University of Calgary 2021).

12. Tomás Pérez Vejo, "Historia, política e ideología en la celebración del Centenario mexicano," *Historia Mexicana* 60, no. 1 (2010): 31–83; Alicia Mayer, ed. *México en tres momentos, 1810–1910–2010: Hacia la conmemoración del bicentenario de la Independencia y del centenario de la Revolución Mexicana, retos y perspectivas* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007); Michael J. Gonzales, "Imagining Mexico in 1910: Visions of the Patria in the Centennial Celebration in Mexico City," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 3 (2008): 495–533; Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 1 (1996): 75–104; Amber Workman, "'Por fin, pasaron ya las fiestas del centenario': Centennial Celebrations of Mexican Independence in Rafael López's 'Commemorative' Crónicas," *The Latin Americanist* 54, no. 4 (2012): 47–58; William H. Beezley and David E. Lorey, eds. *¡Viva Mexico! ¡Viva la Independencia! Celebrations of September 16* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2001).

13. Rebecca Earle, "'Padres de la Patria' and the Ancestral Past: Commemorations of Independence in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 4 (2002): 780.

promoted specific national narratives that legitimated political structures and policies.

The role of ceremonies unveiling “monuments of progress” in encouraging foreign investment through the projection of stability and modernity has been cited as one of their most significant contributions to foreign relations in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ The Mexican government especially used pomp and circumstance to strengthen its prestige in the eyes of foreigners during the *Porfiriato*, but as Mauricio Tenorio Trillo showed in *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, this tendency to use ceremony to legitimate and celebrate national goals and programs for both domestic and international audiences continued well into the twentieth century.¹⁵ A rich historiography has emerged examining Latin American participation in world's fairs, which Paula Bruno and Sven Schuster refer to as “*mapamundis culturales*” in a recent collection on the topic.¹⁶ As well as public relations events, these can also be seen as examples of public diplomacy.¹⁷ This article builds upon these works to examine the political uses of the past in a specific bilateral diplomatic context, to demonstrate the ways in which the history of diplomatic relations was constructed transnationally to serve contemporary diplomatic policies. Rather than being seen as an end in and of itself, cultural diplomacy was pursued purposefully by the Mexican and Colombian governments because it served real policy goals. By constructing and celebrating a historical narrative of liberal solidarity with Colombia, the Mexican government countered accusations of radicalism and thereby protected their domestic and international achievements, a critically important task in the aftermath of the Mexican oil expropriation of March 13, 1938. Similarly, during the 1930s, Colombian politicians finally had the opportunity to implement Liberal ideals, as they began to put in place the scaffolding of a state that incorporated a broader base of society than had the Conservative politicians of the past.

The Mexican and Colombian governments constructed the version of the past that served their contemporary needs through the choices of Juárez and Santander as Liberal heroes, whose ideas and deeds resonated with their political projects. In each case, they selected from the locally-available pantheon of heroes, whose commemoration also served local purposes of nation-building. I argue

14. Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress: Modernization and Public Health in Mexico City, 1876–1910* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003): 95.

15. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 23.

16. Paula Bruno and Sven Schuster, eds. *Mapamundis culturales: América Latina y las Exposiciones Universales, 1867–1939* (PLACE: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2024). Also see Aida Rodríguez Campesino, *España, Estados Unidos y Latinoamérica: Un triángulo (des)amoroso a través de las Exposiciones Universales* (Alcalá: Universidad de Alcalá, 2022).

17. María Teresa Otero Alvarado, “Los grandes eventos como acciones de relaciones públicas del Estado: Las Exposiciones Universales,” *Sphera Pública* 7 (2007): 175–191.

that, in the international context, these choices also served specific foreign policy goals by contributing to the transnational construction of a shared Latin American anti-imperial liberal past that justified their cooperation in the present. Through the exchange of the statues of Juárez and Santander, Mexican and Colombian diplomats reinterpreted a selective narrative of nineteenth-century cooperation to strengthen their solidarity in the present.

La Revolución and La Revolución en marcha

The Mexican government considered Colombia's Liberal Republic a likely place for ideas and projects inspired by the Mexican Revolution to take hold, because President Alfonso López Pumarejo had declared his affinity with the Revolution immediately before taking office. The president-elect travelled to Mexico, in the company of Mexican Minister to Colombia Oscar E. Duplán, in the summer of 1934 to observe the achievements of the Mexican Revolution, before becoming president in August. Catapulted to power by his self-styled *Revolución en marcha*, López Pumarejo's election had marked a significant shift to the left along the Colombian political spectrum.¹⁸ He enacted Colombia's first agrarian reform law in 1936, which brought considerable change to the countryside, although it did not lead to the redistribution of land to peasants.¹⁹ He championed the rights of workers and the organization of the country's first nationwide labor confederation, the *Confederación de Trabajadores Colombianos* (CTC). His administration amended the constitution in 1936, giving the government authority over education, eliminating literacy requirements for voting, and espousing the principle that property rights were subordinate to the government's social obligations.²⁰ Although the election of the more moderate Eduardo Santos in 1938 tempered the radicalism of the Liberal Party, there could be no mistaking that the governments of the Liberal Republic had a great deal in common with that of Lázaro Cárdenas.²¹

18. On the presidency of Alfonso López Pumarejo see Pedro Acosta, *López Pumarejo: En marcha hacia su revolución* (Bogotá: Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, 2004); Alvaro Tirado Jekia, *Aspectos políticos del primer gobierno de Alfonso López Pumarejo* (Bogotá: Procultura, 1981); Richard Stoller, "Alfonso López Pumarejo and Liberal Radicalism in 1930s Colombia," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 2 (1995): 367–397.

19. As Catherine Le Grand has shown, the 1936 Land Act actually reinforced the power of large landholders. Catherine Le Grand, *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1830–1936* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), chapter 7.

20. Catalina Muñoz-Rojas, *A Fervent Crusade for the National Soul: Cultural Politics in Colombia, 1930–1946* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022).

21. Amy Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019). For classic accounts see Stephen James Randall, *The Diplomacy of Modernization: Colombian–American Relations, 1920–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); David Bushnell, *Eduardo Santos and the Good Neighbor, 1938–1942* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967).

During his *sexenio*, Cárdenas did more than any other president to fulfil the goals of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Between 1934 and 1940 he established rural schools, distributed an unprecedented amount of land to peasants, encouraged the organization of workers, and nationalized the oil industry.²² When he took up the presidency in December 1934, Cárdenas inherited a framework laid out in the Constitution of 1917, as well as the mantle of the revolutionary presidents who had come before him, and the specific policies laid out in the Six Year Plan, approved by the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) at the same 1933 congress where Cárdenas was chosen as the official candidate of the party for the election of 1934.²³ As my previous works, as well as those of Dafne Cruz Porcini and others, have shown, his government was also vocal on the global stage and made significant use of cultural diplomacy to further understanding of the Mexican Revolution and his government's reform program.²⁴

Cárdenas had been out of the capital on a tour of the Mexican countryside during the Colombian president-elect's visit, but López Pumarejo telegraphed him before arriving home. He wrote that he hoped that Mexico and Colombia's "mutual inclination" would lead to expanded relations between the two countries during their presidencies.²⁵ Although the radical nature of the Cárdenas government had not yet been revealed when Alfonso López Pumarejo visited Mexico in the summer of 1934, he made it known that he shared many of the goals and ideals represented by the Mexican Revolution and had left the country impressed by the progress previous administrations had made toward their realization.

An auspicious beginning to Mexican–Colombian relations during this period, López Pumarejo's visit to Mexico and his subsequent correspondence with Cárdenas indicate that the two governments shared similar views of domestic and international politics.²⁶ As a result, Cárdenas and his diplomatic representatives paid special attention to the Liberal government that seemed so eager to collaborate in the pursuit of domestic and international justice. One of the most

22. The literature on *cardenismo* is vast; for an overview see Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 1 (1994): 73–101.

23. Gilberto Bosques, *The National Revolutionary Party of Mexico and the Six-Year Plan* (Mexico City: Partido Nacional Revolucionario, 1937).

24. Amelia M. Kiddle, *Mexico's Relations with Latin America During the Cárdenas Era* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016); Dafne Cruz Porcini, *Arte, propaganda y diplomacia cultural a finales del cardenismo* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016); Elena Jackson Albarrán, *Good Neighbor Empires: Children and Cultural Capital in the Americas* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2025); Sebastián Rivera Mir, *Historias entrelazadas: El intercambio académico en el siglo XX; México, Estados Unidos y América Latina* (Zinacatepec: El Colegio Mexiquense, 2021); Pablo Yankelevich, *La Revolución Mexicana en América Latina: Intereses políticos e itinerarios intelectuales* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2003).

25. AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72. Alfonso López Pumarejo to Lázaro Cárdenas, July 17, 1934.

26. Further communication between the presidents-elect is also found in AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72.

significant ways that Colombian and Mexican diplomats attempted to cultivate stronger relations was by selectively reinterpreting the historical ties that bound the two countries. The close, if sometimes turbulent, Mexican–Colombian relations during the nineteenth century provided a foundation for the laudatory gestures of twentieth-century diplomats.

A TRADITION OF LIBERAL SOLIDARITY

Gran Colombia, which then included modern-day Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia, had been the first to recognize Mexican Independence and the first to send a diplomatic representative to Mexico City.²⁷ Miguel Santa María and Lucas Alamán signed the *Tratado de Unión, Liga y Confederación Perpetua* on behalf of their governments on October 3, 1823. Ratified by the Mexican Congress that December, and Colombian Vice President Francisco de Paula Santander the following June, the Treaty provided for the mutual defense of the newly independent former Spanish colonies. As a result of this treaty, the Colombian government agreed to assist Mexico in the expulsion of the Spanish from the fort at San Juan de Ulúa. Colombian representatives attempted to purchase ships in the United States for the confrontation, but before they could make the necessary arrangements, the Spanish troops finally abandoned their hopes of invasion and withdrew in November 1825. When Santander later served as president of Colombia (1832–37), he represented the Liberal Party and became the most identifiable Liberal statesman of the period. The statue the Colombian government gave to Mexico in 1940 therefore celebrated Santander's early support for the Mexican Republic in the face of Spanish imperialism and the threat of reconquest. As a liberal anti-imperialist figure, his actions and ideas provided excellent material for a Colombian government that aimed to balance relations with the United States and greater involvement in multilateral institutions, in hopes of forestalling further US meddling in Colombia's internal affairs, such as that which had resulted in the loss of Panama.

The Mexican Minister to London in 1826, Vicente Rocafuerte, had the opportunity to return Santander's support when he believed Colombia's independence was threatened. Rocafuerte extended a loan of £63,000.00 to Colombia when the failure of the House of Goldschmidt left Colombia unable to pay the dividends on the bonds it had issued to help raise capital for its recovery

27. For excellent overviews of the relations between Mexico and Colombia, see Felicitas López Portillo T. (ed.), *Bajo el manto del libertador: Relaciones de México con Colombia, Panamá y Venezuela, 1821–2000* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2004); and Ornán Roldán Oquendo, *Las relaciones entre México y Colombia, 1810–1862* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1974).

from the Wars of Independence.²⁸ Rocafuerte believed that because Colombia was the best-known Spanish American republic at the time, its default would by association drive down the performance of Mexican bonds. Although he negotiated the loan in the best interests of Mexico, his actions received considerable criticism in Mexico because of the fact that he had arranged it without instructions from the government.²⁹ His reputation suffered a precipitous decline,³⁰ and Mexican–Colombian relations soured when the Mexican government decided, against the advice of Rocafuerte, to refuse to accept the cash-strapped Colombian government’s offer of two ships in lieu of payment for the loan. Matters were complicated by the disintegration of Gran Colombia, and the Mexican government finally sold the debt for only 700,000 pesos. Once Mexican and Colombian Independence became assured, the importance the two governments had accorded to their diplomatic relationship declined, as both countries became consumed by the exigencies of nation-building. This incident provided an ambivalent legacy upon which to base Mexican–Colombian affinity in the present, and it was not highlighted in the selective retellings of Mexican–Colombian solidarity.

Instead, the Mexican and Colombian governments skipped ahead a few decades and celebrated that the Colombian government named Benito Juárez *Benemérito de las Américas* in 1865.³¹ Moved by Benito Juárez’s struggle against the French invasion of Mexico, Colombian Senator Alejo Morales proposed that his government bestow this honor on the Constitutional President of Mexico. The Colombian Senate approved Morales’s proposal on May 2, 1865. Once again, it is significant that the act of solidarity that the two governments chose to celebrate had an anti-imperial character. The French intervention in Mexico not only contravened the Monroe Doctrine, provoking the United States, which was otherwise occupied with the Civil War until nearly the conclusion of the conflict, but also animated anti-imperialist sentiment among Mexico’s sister republics in Latin America.³² As well as delivering Mexico from the last attempted European conquest of Mexico, Juárez was also the chief protagonist of the War of the Reform. The Reform Laws and the Constitution of 1857 that had given rise to

28. Joaquín Ramírez Cabañas (ed.), *El empréstito de México a Colombia* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1930). Jaime E. Rodríguez O. analyzed the incident in “Rocafuerte y el empréstito a Colombia,” *Historia Mexicana* 18, no. 4 (1969): 485–515; and in *The Emergence of Spanish America: Vicente Rocafuerte and Spanish Americanism, 1808–1832* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

29. Rodríguez, “Rocafuerte”, 214–215.

30. For contrasting contemporary interpretations see Mexico, Secretaría de la Hacienda, *Cuaderno que contiene el Préstamo hecho a Colombia por D. Vicente Rocafuerte* (Mexico City: Imprenta del Águila, 1829); and Vicente Rocafuerte, *Exposición de las razones que determinaron a D. Vicente Rocafuerte a prestar a la República de Colombia la suma de £ 63,000* (London: Macintosh, 1829).

31. Roldán Oquendo, *Las relaciones*, 24.

32. John Leddy Phelan, “Pan-Latinism, French Intervention in Mexico (1861–1867) and the Genesis of the Idea of Latin America,” in *Conciencia y autenticidad históricas: Escritos en homenaje a Edmundo O’Gorman*, ed. Juan A. Ortega y Medina (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1968), 279–298.

the war were documents that represented the clearest statement of the “myth of Juárez,” that he personified nineteenth-century liberal prescriptions for Latin America.³³ When President Cárdenas commissioned a bronze of the national hero from the well-known sculptor Guillermo Ruíz, he thereby commemorated both the honor the Colombian Senate had bestowed upon Juárez, and the liberal bona fides which animated his anti-imperialism.³⁴

Through the erection of the statues of Juárez and Santander, the two governments selectively reinterpreted the tradition of cooperation between Mexico and Colombia. These highlights would never have been celebrated during the Conservative Hegemony that had preceded the Liberal Republic in Colombia, for which the Mexican Revolution had been anathema. The Santander and Juárez statues symbolized the governments’ common commitments to the nineteenth-century liberal ideals of secularization, constitutionalism, justice, and equality. To be sure, the process by which these heroes were selected from their national pantheons for national celebration was also influenced by national processes of selective remembering and forgetting that elevated their status while diminishing that of other historical actors. Juárez’s contemporary proponents of the Reform Laws, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada and his brother and subsequent president Sebastián, were rarely celebrated. By contrast, it was in this period that the towering statue of Independence hero José María Morelos y Pavón was erected on the island of Janitzio in Lake Pátzcuaro. Different heroes served different national and international needs. In the case of Colombia, Santander’s Secretary of War José Hilario López (1832–33), who later became a Liberal president himself with the support of radical artisans, is rarely memorialized in bronze. Statues of Simón Bolívar abound, both in Colombia and abroad, but the Liberator was favored by Conservative governments, cementing Santander as the immortalized hero of the Liberal Republic. In addition to these national developments, the choice of Juárez and Santander fulfilled specific foreign policy objectives that interacted with national myths and collective memories to make them appropriate vessels for the international goals of the two nations. The exchange thereby celebrated the confluence of the two countries’ policies in the present and reinterpreted the past in terms that justified their revival. The next two sections of this article examine in detail the diplomatic ceremonies and historical narratives performed around the erection of each statue, to analyze the ways in which, rather than being mere diplomatic niceties, Mexican and Colombian cultural diplomacy made purposeful political use of the past.

33. Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (ed.), *Juárez: Historia y mito* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2010).

34. Archivo General de la Nación, Secretaría de la Presidencia de la República, Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (hereafter AGN-LCR), volumen 978, expediente 562.2/6. Eduardo Hay to the Secretaría Particular de la Presidencia, February 15, 1939.

JUÁREZ IN BOGOTÁ

Shortly after the beginning of his term in Colombia in 1937, Mexican Minister José Domingo Ramírez Garrido wrote to Cárdenas that “Mexico has offered Colombia a monument of Don Benito Juárez and that the statue should be cast and the pedestal carved so that it would arrive in time for the fourth centenary of the founding of Bogotá, which will take place in August of the coming year.³⁵ Furthermore, he suggested that, “to give the act greater solemnity,” they should do the same as had been done when the Cuauhtémoc monument was presented to Brazil for the centenary of its Independence, “which is to say, that a warship be sent along with a company from the Colegio Militar and another from the Colegio Naval.” He likewise recommended including the marching band of either the Estado Mayor or the Police, or especially the Orquesta Típica Miguel Lerdo de Tejada with its singers, noting that Mexican songs were very popular in the Colombian republic. He reported that he had visited the transport ship *Durango* on his way through Veracruz, and thought that it would “gracefully” fulfill such a mission and be “received with all kinds of honors.³⁶ In response to Ramírez Garrido, Cárdenas wrote that he had ordered the casting of the statue of Juárez to be sent for the fourth centenary of the founding of Bogotá and had passed along Ramírez Garrido’s suggestion of the military voyage, “as had been done when giving Brazil a copy of our monument to Cuauhtémoc,” to the Secretary of War.³⁷

The goodwill voyage of the *Durango* eventually took place in 1940, long after the dedication of the statue of Juárez, but it is significant that Ramírez Garrido made this suggestion in the context of his memory of the mission that had travelled to Rio de Janeiro to attend the 1922 Centennial Exhibition.³⁸ In Rio, the large delegation (which memorably included José Vasconcelos, who outlined there his ideas regarding the *raza cósmica* that would be published in 1925) featured the gift of a statue of Cuauhtémoc, a smaller-scale copy of that which occupies the *glorieta* of the same name on the Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City.³⁹ As Mauricio Tenorio Trillo has argued, the goal of the government of Álvaro Obregón in this case was the improvement of Mexico’s international reputation after years of revolutionary chaos.⁴⁰ The *Nicolás Bravo* sailed under the command

35. AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72, Ramírez Garrido to Cárdenas, April 28, 1937.

36. AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72, Ramírez Garrido to Cárdenas, April 28, 1937.

37. AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72, Ramírez Garrido to Cárdenas, May 19, 1937.

38. I analyze the voyage of the *Durango* in *Mexico’s Relations with Latin America*, 180–194.

39. Earle, “*Sobre Héroes y Tumbas*,” 409–410. Josefina García Quintana, *Cuauhtémoc en el siglo XIX* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1977); Barbara A. Tenenbaum, “Streetwise History: The Paseo de la Reforma and the Porfirian State, 1876–1910,” in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1994), 127–150.

40. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, “A Tropical Cuauhtémoc: Celebrating the Cosmic Race at the Guanabara Bay,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 16, no. 65 (1994): 101.

of General Manuel Pérez Treviño; and against the wishes of Vasconcelos, who Tenorio shows “did not agree with the idea of reproducing the image of an Indian hero of a nation which was, he thought, fundamentally Hispanic,” they brought with them the replica that Obregón had ordered from Tiffany & Co, just as the Porfirian government had done for Paris, Chicago, “and countless other places.”⁴¹ Because the statue had already been ordered, Vasconcelos thought it would have been futile to object, but the rest of the exhibit mirrored his thinking on the *raza cósmica* much more closely. The choice of subject for the statues exchanged between governments was sometimes contested, and the symbolic power of these monuments recognized at the time. The fact that Ramírez Garrido would recall this episode in his letter to Cárdenas 16 years later shows that these exchanges held an important place in diplomatic memory.

Unlike the Cuauhtémoc statue, the choice of a liberal hero such as Juárez was deliberate and part of a coherent strategy. The Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had reported to Congress on the imminent arrival of the statue prior to the ceremony.⁴² Ramírez Garrido wrote to the Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores Eduardo Hay in August of 1938 after witnessing a ceremony in which the government of Argentina presented a statue of San Martín to Colombia to suggest that President Cárdenas also make a live radio broadcast to present the statue,⁴³ and wrote to Cárdenas’s personal secretary to ask that the President consider the idea as soon as possible.⁴⁴ Cárdenas approved the proposal August 20, and a flurry of activity followed to organize the broadcast for September 16, 1938. Ernesto Hidalgo at the SRE had immediately set about drafting an address, while Ramírez Garrido made the arrangements for Cárdenas’s radio transmission and the broadcast by which President Eduardo Santos would return Cárdenas’s greetings. Radio was not only an important “exporter of national culture” akin to film at this time, but it was also used explicitly in pursuing foreign policy aims.⁴⁵ The Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad maintained a radio station, XEDP, for the purposes of broadcasting the Mexican government’s messages to the world. In the address, which was broadcast in Bogotá by Colombia Broadcasting, Cárdenas lauded Colombia’s progress toward a more democratic and just society.⁴⁶ He made an explicit comparison between the domestic projects underway in the two

41. Tenorio Trillo, “Tropical Cuauhtémoc,” 105.

42. Colombia, *Memoria del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores al Congreso de 1938*, 167.

43. AGN-LCR, volumen 978, expediente 562.2/61. Ramírez Garrido to Hay, September 24, 1938.

44. AGN-LCR, volumen 978, expediente 562.2/61. Eduardo Hay to Raúl Castellano, August 16, 1938.

45. I discuss the role of radio in *Mexico’s Relations with Latin America*, 97–100. Also see Priscila Pilatowsky Goñi, “La nación acústica: La radio y el Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad, México 1936–1939,” in *América Latina entre espacios: Redes, flujos e imaginarios globales*, ed. Stephanie Fleischmann, José Alberto Moreno Chávez, and Cecilia Toussounian (Berlin: Verlag, 2014), 84; and Sonia Robles, *Mexican Waves: Radio Broadcasting Along Mexico’s Northern Border, 1930–1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019).

46. “Los presidentes de México y Colombia hablaron en el solemne acto de ayer,” *El Liberal*, September 21, 1938.

countries and suggested that these similarities formed the basis of his desire for Latin American unity.⁴⁷ The use of radio made it possible to broaden the reach of the ceremony, although it is not possible with the sources available to gauge the reception of these efforts. Rather, the effort to share more widely the version of the past that the Mexican and Colombian governments constructed provides evidence of their intention to make political use of this narrative to legitimate their closer relations.

Photographic coverage in the weekly magazine *Cromos* shows it to have been an elegant affair, attended primarily by the diplomatic corps and government officials.⁴⁸ News of the ceremony also reached international audiences, and was described by Mexico's Minister to Panama as having been discussed in the Panamanian press.⁴⁹ Eduardo Santos, Ramírez Garrido, and the mayor of Bogotá all made speeches commemorating the unveiling, which were widely reported on in the Mexican and Colombian press.⁵⁰ *El Liberal* reported that Santos had concluded by wishing that "our *Amistad* friendship, which has such strong historical roots, may be ever more intimate and closer under the auspicious aegis of those like Juárez who were soldiers of a cause that throughout time continues to be common to us: that of freedom, that of justice, that of democracy."⁵¹ His words underscored the symbolic significance this ceremony held for the two countries.

After the ceremony, in a letter to Cárdenas reporting on the event, Ramírez Garrido suggested that the two governments' common cause would also be furthered by the aesthetic value of the statue itself. Guillermo Ruíz's interpretation was admirable in that the bronze statue suggested movement, "indicating Juárez's desire not to stop for anything or anyone, while marching the nation forward."⁵² The statue embodied the two countries' nineteenth-century history of cooperation and stood as tangible evidence of their common commitment to liberal ideals.

47. Lázaro Cárdenas, "Mensaje del Presidente de la República al pueblo de Colombia, en ocasión del descubrimiento de la estatua de Benito Juárez, hecho por el Presidente de Colombia and Bogotá," *Palabras y Documentos Públicos*, 328–329.

48. *Cromos*, Número 1139, 34–35.

49. Mexico, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Archivo Histórico Diplomático Genaro Estrada (SRE-AHDGE), 30-4-3 (V), "Informe del mes de octubre" 1938.

50. *El Universal*, September 17, 1938. See the Colombian newspaper articles included in Ramírez Garrido's report to the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores. AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72, Ramírez Garrido to Cárdenas, September 24, 1938.

51. "Los presidentes de México y Colombia hablaron en el solemne acto de ayer," *El Liberal*, September 21, 1938.

52. AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72, Ramírez Garrido to Cárdenas, April 28, 1937. Ramírez Garrido to Cárdenas, September 24, 1938.

Ramírez Garrido also remembered the ceremony fondly in his publication, *Homenaje a Colombia*, written upon the conclusion of his diplomatic posting, noting that it “in the opinion of Dr. Santos, is currently one of the most beautiful monuments in the Colombian Capital.”⁵³ The monument sculpted by Ruíz commemorated the honor bestowed upon Juárez in 1865 and demonstrated the importance the two governments accorded their relations in the present. Juárez stands tall and defiant, holding in his right hand a scroll of paper meant to represent the Constitution of 1857, as well as the Liberal ideals contained in it and the Reform Laws enshrined therein. For the Colombian Liberals who in 1930 had finally ended the Conservative Hegemony that had gripped the country since 1895, the statue was imbued with meaning.

SANTANDER IN MEXICO CITY

The gift of the statue of Benito Juárez strengthened ties between the two countries, and Ramírez Garrido recalled that the Colombian government decided to return this “act of fraternity” and have a statue of Francisco de Paula Santander cast, which he said would soon be displayed in one of the main plazas of Mexico.⁵⁴ The government of Colombia issued a presidential decree on February 9, 1940, in anticipation of the hundredth anniversary of the death of Santander on May 9 of that year, that the government “render to the memory of the greatest hero born on our soil a tribute worthy of his glory.”⁵⁵ The decree outlined detailed instructions on the civic ceremonies that would take place that day in Colombia, from the composition of civic committees to the exhortation that streets and plazas be renamed in the general’s honor. Article 11 called on the Minister of Foreign Relations, through the Embassies and Legations abroad, to take “measures related to tributes paid to General Santander in foreign countries,” especially Venezuela (as per the Decree of January 18, 1940) “and the inauguration of statues in Buenos Aires and Mexico, ordered by Law 75 of 1937, in exchange for those of General José de San Martín y don Benito Juárez, given by the republics of Argentina and Mexico, as well as the bust of General Santander in Miami, ordered by Law 139 of 1938.”⁵⁶

The Santander monument’s unveiling on July 20, 1940, in Mexico City opened an entire day of events organized by the Colombian Minister to Mexico Jorge

53. Ramírez Garrido, *Homenaje a Colombia*, 14.

54. Ramírez Garrido, *Homenaje a Colombia*, 14.

55. Colombia, *Commemoración del Primer Centenario de la muerte del General Francisco de Paula Santander* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1940).

56. Colombia, *Commemoración del Primer Centenario de la muerte del General Francisco de Paula Santander*, 7.

Zawadsky.⁵⁷ At 11:00 in the morning, Cárdenas unveiled the statue of the Colombian hero while the police band played the Mexican national anthem. Because the ceremony occurred on the centenary of Santander's death, the statue's unveiling was especially auspicious, and the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Relations reported to Congress in 1941 that the section of the Reforma where the statue was located would henceforth be known as the "Avenida Héroes Latinoamericanos."⁵⁸ In the end, the location chosen for the statue was less illustrious than Ramírez Garrido or the Colombian government had imagined—the statue was erected on the median on Av. Reforma in Lomas de Chapultepec. However, this was before Mexico City became the megacity it is today, and the location adjacent to the modern suburb of Chapultepec Heights—as Lomas was known during construction—right across from Chapultepec Park may have seemed like a place of honor to contemporary participants.⁵⁹

In the speech Cárdenas gave to the crowd assembled on Reforma, he once again appealed to both the historical and contemporary links between Mexico and Colombia.⁶⁰ He recounted how Santander had "offered his sword" to Mexico, when Spain had threatened reconquest. His speech served to reinforce the idea that the relationship between Mexico and Colombia had been based on the defense of their sovereignty and the right to freedom from intervention—whether it be from the Spanish, or the contemporary threat of intervention from the United States.⁶¹ The police band played several additional numbers including the Colombian national anthem, and two young girls recited poems by Rubén Darío, José Santos Chocano, and José Eustasio Rivera in homage to Colombia.

Mexican diplomat Anselmo Mena gave a speech as the official representative of the Pan American Union.⁶² The PAU had also celebrated the centenary of Santander's death that year by erecting a bust of the Colombian hero in the Hall of Heroes at their headquarters in Washington, DC.⁶³ An article published in the

57. These events received significant coverage in the Mexican press. See *El Nacional*, July 20, 1940; *El Nacional*, July 21, 1940; and *La Prensa*, July 21, 1940.

58. Colombia, *Memoria del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores al Congreso de 1941*, 105.

59. On the development of Chapultepec Heights, later called Lomas de Chapultepec, as Mexico's first "garden city," see Matthew Vitz, *A City on a Lake: Urban Political Ecology and the Growth of Mexico City* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 101.

60. Lázaro Cárdenas, "Palabras del Presidente de la República con motivo del obsequio de una estatua del General Francisco de Paula Santander que hiciera el gobierno de Colombia al de México," *Palabras y Documentos Públicos*, 431.

61. Lázaro Cárdenas, "Palabras del Presidente de la República con motivo del obsequio de una estatua del General Francisco de Paula Santander," *Palabras y Documentos Públicos*, 431.

62. AGN-LCR, volumen 979, expediente 562.2/84. Invitation to the inauguration. Zawadsky to Cárdenas, July 13, 1940. The day's festivities were also described in the *Boletín de Noticias de la Legación de Colombia en México*, No. 11. AGN-LCR, volumen 979, expediente 570/10.

63. Daniel Samper Ortega, "Francisco de Paula Santander," *Boletín de la Unión Panamericana*, May 1940. This article is accompanied by a photograph of the bust.

Bulletin of the PAU had described the ceremony as “simple and impressive.”⁶⁴ The vice president of the Consejo Directivo of the PAU, Héctor David Castro, Minister of El Salvador to the United States, noted in his remarks that, at this dark time for humanity, “the exaltation of the founder of democracy in Colombia is an act of faith in the highest aims of human conscience.” He argued that Colombia provided an example of freedom of the press, freedom of speech, of politics free from the intervention of the military, and political parties dedicated to alternating power according to the will of the electorate, “a regime of laws and not of men,” the values of liberal constitutionalism.⁶⁵ The Mexican newspaper *La Prensa* had also carried an article by the *canciller* of the Colombian consulate in Mexico on the May 6 anniversary of Santander’s death, ensuring that his accomplishments would be well known in the Mexican capital prior to the erection of the statue that July, on the date of Colombia’s anniversary of Independence.⁶⁶

After the ceremony, Zawadsky hosted a reception for the diplomatic corps where he conferred the prestigious Cross of Boyacá upon Eduardo Hay, Sub-Secretary Ramón Beteta, and several others. Hay presented Zawadsky with copies of the letter Santander had written expressing his readiness to aid in the Mexican struggle for Independence, as well as the letter informing Juárez of the honor the Colombian government had bestowed on him in 1865.⁶⁷ In the speech Hay gave at the ceremony, he stated that by conferring on them such a high honor, the Colombian government “not only performs an act of international courtesy, but ratifies its secular tradition of friendship towards Mexico.”⁶⁸ Colombia had been a friend with whom Mexico had shared in the joys and the sorrows of her tumultuous history, and for Hay the ceremony signified a confirmation of this long tradition. He highlighted the significance of the statue of Santander unveiled that morning for the relationship between the two countries, and emphasized the applicability of the Independence hero’s thinking for the present day. He reiterated that Santander believed that while the Independence of Gran Colombia had been achieved through force of arms, its liberty would be achieved through the creation and implementation of just laws.⁶⁹

In this framing, Santander’s words of wisdom also described the attitudes of the governments of both Colombia and Mexico, both of which pursued significant

64. “Centenario del General Santander en la Unión Panamericana,” *Boletín de la Unión Panamericana*, June 1940.

65. “Centenario del General Santander en la Unión Panamericana.”

66. “Primer centenario de la muerte del prócer colombiano d. Francisco de Paula Santander,” *La Prensa*, May 6, 1940.

67. Eduardo Hay, “La amistad entre Colombia y México,” *Discursos pronunciados en su carácter de Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores (1936–1940)* (Mexico City: Talleres gráficos de la Nación, 1940), 85–86.

68. Eduardo Hay, “La amistad,” 83.

69. Eduardo Hay, “La amistad,” 85.

social reform packages through legal means in this period. These sentiments were echoed in an article published in *El Universal* the same day. In “Colombia y su democracia,” Laura Victoria emphasized the liberal constitutional values of freedom of speech, free and fair elections, and the lack of military intervention in civilian politics, mirroring the rhetoric surrounding the erection of the bust in the Gallery of Heroes at the Pan American Union.⁷⁰ Later that evening, Zawadsky opened an exhibit of the works of Colombian sculptor Rómulo Rozo at the Galería de Arte y Decoración.⁷¹ During the vernissage, the Colombian trio “Hermanos Hernández,” whom Zawadsky described as Ambassadors of Colombian music in the Americas, played typical music from both countries, which was broadcast by special radio transmission to Colombia. As in the case of the unveiling of the statue of Juárez, special efforts were made to use radio to connect the two countries through sound. The Colombian Minister’s speech was transmitted to Colombia, as were examples of different popular musical styles, and a performance by the famous singer Toña la Negra.

Zawadsky laid out this musical program in the *Boletín* of the Mexican Legation in Colombia. An article that had appeared earlier in *Excelsior* described the newsletter as the initiative of Zawadsky, who was apparently “nostalgic for his time as a journalist,” and also emphasized Colombia’s liberal democratic principles.⁷² Writing in 1939, Ramírez Garrido had described Jorge Zawadsky as the former director of *El Relator*, “one of the most prestigious newspapers in Colombia.”⁷³ From his perspective, Zawadsky’s paper was undoubtedly second only to that of Eduardo Santos himself, whom Ramírez Garrido described as “all head and all heart,” and to whom he argued Mexico owed a particular debt of gratitude “because his newspaper has been the highest tribunal that we have had in which to nobly and selflessly defend the Mexican Revolution and its protagonists.”⁷⁴ By contrast, he described Laureano Gómez, the editor of the conservative paper *El Siglo*, as “one of the strongest columns of the Conservative Party, of which he is currently president.”⁷⁵ President Cárdenas wrote to Enrique Santos, the brother of the president and editor of *El Tiempo*, in March 1940 to thank him personally for the work his paper did to support Mexican and Colombian solidarity.⁷⁶ *El Tiempo*’s coverage of Mexico warranted the president’s thanks because of just how deeply it contrasted with the hyperbolic vitriol that

70. Laura Victoria, “Colombia y su democracia,” *El Universal*, July 20, 1940.

71. A program of the day’s events is found in AGN-LCR, volumen 979, expediente 562.2/84. Zawadsky to Cárdenas, July 13, 1940.

72. “Boletín de noticias de la Legación de Colombia en México,” No. 11, July 15, 1940. AGN-LCR, volumen 1067, expediente 570/10; “Periscopio,” *Excelsior*, March 9, 1940.

73. Ramírez Garrido, *Homenaje a Colombia*, 8.

74. Ramírez Garrido, *Homenaje a Colombia*, 9.

75. Ramírez Garrido, *Homenaje a Colombia*, 9.

76. AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72, Cárdenas to Enrique Santos, March 1, 1940.

appeared in *El Siglo*.⁷⁷ However, as will be seen below, it is remarkable that even Gómez's fiery rhetoric in the latter softened considerably as a result of Mexican-Colombian cultural diplomacy.

As Marcos Palacios has argued, President Santos "was convinced that the liberalism of Santander . . . was an inexhaustible fount of timeless doctrinal wisdom"; "Santander was his hero."⁷⁸ This is evident in the president's rhetoric surrounding the centenary of Santander's death. In his speech of May 6, 1940, Santos stated, "Death could, a century ago today, stop the worker; but it could not stop the work."⁷⁹ He recounted that in 1823 Santander had proclaimed in his message to Congress "the need for all the States of America to understand and join together, to be feared in war and respected in peace." Santos saw that Santander's ideas were based on his liberal anti-imperialism. Santander had supported Bolívar's proposal for the first Pan American Conference, and Santos reaffirmed his support for Santander's "ideas of fraternal collaboration and bonding solidarity."⁸⁰ This solidarity was possible, he argued in his speech before the presidential palace on September 21, 1940, because US Secretary of State Sumner Welles had disavowed US intervention, giving Pan-American politics the security they needed by "eliminating the resistance that resentments, memories (of past wrongs), and suspicions may have caused."⁸¹ Santos's support for US-led Pan-Americanism was conditional on the continued disavowal of intervention.

The centenary of Santander's death was, as Palacios has observed, simultaneously "the apex of a government-led civic cult," "but also the start of a counter-offensive by Gómez and the Conservatives, who embraced the figure of Simón Bolívar – first Santander's mentor, later his mortal enemy."⁸² Just as in the case of Mexico's gift of the statue of Cuauhtémoc, which had so vexed Vasconcelos, there were always alternative narratives, and figureheads who could be chosen to represent them. The choice of Santander for the statue exchanged with Mexico was a deliberate representation of the basis for collaboration between the Liberal Colombian government and the revolutionary government of Lázaro Cárdenas. During the events surrounding the unveiling of the statues of Juárez and

77. Gómez founded *El Siglo* in 1936. James D. Henderson, *Modernization in Colombia: The Laureano Gómez Years, 1889–1965* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001).

78. Marco Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875–2002* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 114.

79. Eduardo Santos, "Elogio del general Santander," in *Las etapas de la vida colombiana: Discursos y mensajes del Presidente Santos, 1938–1942* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Educación/Imprenta Nacional, 1946), 105.

80. Santos, "Elogio del general Santander," 112.

81. Eduardo Santos, "La situación internacional e interna de Colombia en septiembre de 1940," in *Las etapas de la vida colombiana: Discursos y mensajes del Presidente Santos, 1938–1942* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Educación/Imprenta Nacional, 1946), 137.

82. Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 115.

Santander, the governments revived the symbols of their common past for contemporary audiences. They performed their strengthened relationship, which they based on the similarities in their domestic programs and their shared liberal past, for the diplomatic corps, the people of Colombia and Mexico, and international audiences.

An extremely vocal opposition, embodied in the personality of Laureano Gómez and his conservative newspaper *El Siglo*, had consistently questioned the sagacity of closer relations with Cárdenas's Mexico, and many conservatives believed that Mexican influences were extremely dangerous. As I have shown elsewhere, this was particularly true after the Mexican oil expropriation of March 18, 1938, which galvanized both supporters and opponents of Mexican revolutionary nationalism.⁸³ Prior to the erection of the statue of Juárez, and in the days following the Cárdenas government's expropriation, Laureano Gómez's *El Siglo* had sounded the alarm, warning of the influence of the "semi-communist regime" of Mexico and its most "authentic interpreter" President Cárdenas.⁸⁴ Both *El Siglo*, and the center-right paper *La Razón*, which broke a story on a meeting of the most important members of the radical wing of the Liberal Party held at the Mexican Legation to discuss the defense of Mexico's expropriation in Colombia, called for Ramírez Garrido's expulsion on the basis of his intervention in the internal affairs of the nation.⁸⁵ The Colombian government supported Ramírez Garrido, but the incident raised in the public consciousness Gómez's criticism of the Mexican government.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, by the time Ramírez Garrido's suggestion of the civil-military tour of the destroyer the *Durango* occurred in 1940—long after Ramírez Garrido's post had ended—even Gómez was swayed by the symbolic ceremonies and demonstrations of friendship and allegiance he witnessed. Mexican Minister Carlos Darío Ojeda credited the positive results of this cultural diplomacy with Gómez's pro-Mexico position in his rejection of Cordell Hull's note of April 3, 1940, suggesting arbitration of the oil question.⁸⁷ Gómez went "so far as to say that all of the republics of South America should demonstrate their solidarity with Mexico."⁸⁸

Cultural diplomacy was central to the Colombian government's efforts to demonstrate its affinity with the goals of the Mexican Revolution, without

83. Kiddle, *Mexico's Relations with Latin America*, chapter 4. Also see Amelia M. Kiddle and María Cecilia Zuleta, eds. *La expropiación petrolera mexicana en la prensa de latinoamérica: Antología documental* (Mexico City: Pemex, 2014).

84. "Cosas del régimen," *El Siglo*, March 29, 1938.

85. AGN-APLC, rollo 14, expediente 72, Ramírez Garrido to Cárdenas, March 30, 1938. Relevant clippings are attached to Ramírez Garrido's letter. "El Ministro de México y la política colombiana," *La Razón*, March 30, 1938.

86. "Ahora. Mala fe de El Siglo y La Razón," *El Diario Nacional*, March 30, 1938.

87. Kiddle, *Mexico's Relations with Latin America*, 190–191.

88. Kiddle, *Mexico's Relations with Latin America*, 190.

sacrificing political stability at home. Moreover, by celebrating the liberal heroes of the past, they sought to assuage concerns that “foreign-inspired ideas”—a euphemism for international communism—were finding a foothold in Colombia and instead emphasize the government’s strongly rooted liberal ideals. As in the case of Mexico, where there were always other symbols available for celebration, such as Cuauhtémoc, the choice of Juárez and Santander over Bolívar—who was associated at the time with conservatism—shows that the version of the past they chose to highlight was constructed transnationally and purposefully, to represent the liberal anti-imperial tradition in Latin America.

CONCLUSIONS

The example of the exchange of statues of Juárez and Santander between Mexico and Colombia is but one of several such gifts that took place in the 1930s. Participants learned from exchanges of the past, such as Cuauhtémoc, and those of other Latin American governments in the present, such as San Martín, as they planned the speeches and events that accompanied each exchange. In these events, they presented a liberal anti-imperialist version of the past that served their contemporary needs. Significantly, among the other statues bestowed by the Mexican government in this period was yet another liberal hero, José María Morelos y Pavón, whose statue (also sculpted by Guillermo Ruíz) was later unveiled in Panama—another site of long-remembered foreign intervention.⁸⁹ Minister to Panama Estrada Cajigal listed the gift as one of the “pending issues,” of Mexican–Panamanian relations in an undated report he submitted in 1938,⁹⁰ and the cornerstone for the statue was finally laid in 1940 when the goodwill mission of the *Durango* passed through Panama to great fanfare.⁹¹ The Mexican government also gave a statue of Hidalgo, whom Mexican liberals considered the father of Independence, to neighboring Guatemala at the urging of the Sociedad Mexicana Cuauhtémoc, a society of Mexican residents in Guatemala.⁹² Although Guatemala’s Jorge Ubico was a dictator who decried the influence of the Mexican Revolution, he was also a Liberal, whose concerns the Mexican government sought to assuage. As we have seen above, the Colombian government also gave several other statues of Santander to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of his death. The exchange of statues formed part of a dense pattern of cultural

89. AGN-LCR, volumen 978, expediente 562.2/6. Eduardo Hay to the Secretaría Particular de la Presidencia, February 15, 1939. Guillermo Ruíz, completed the two statues for the price of \$5,000 pesos.

90. SRE-AHGE, 42-25-3, “Asuntos pendientes con la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores.”

91. SRE-AHGE, III-415-14, primera parte, 135–137.

92. See SRE-AHGE, III-151-9 and SRE-AHGE, 30-12-11, primera parte.

diplomacy that included Pan American Day celebrations, the unveiling of elementary schools in each other's names, and state-sponsored visits of artists and musicians, among many other activities. "Statuemanía," as Maurice Agulhon termed it, certainly contributed to state formation and imagined national communities: however, the exchange of statues between Mexico and Colombia provides a salient example of how international statue exchanges also served particular foreign policy goals.⁹³ Through memory diplomacy, governments made political use of the past to serve the diplomatic needs of the present.

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93. Maurice Agulhon, "La «statuomanie» et l'histoire," *Ethnologie française* 8, no. 2/3 (1978): 145–172.