

**REFLECTING THE OUTSIDE WORLD IN EVERYDAY CONSUMPTION:
MATERIAL CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY
URBAN LATIN AMERICA**

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History.

Chapel Hill
2008

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ABSTRACT

ELIOT P. SPENCER: Reflecting the Outside World in Everyday Consumption: Material Culture and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Latin America
(Under the direction of Dr. John Chasteen)

Following the end of the colonial period, Latin America became a thriving market for goods from the industrializing world, particularly the United States, Great Britain, and France. This thesis explores the sociocultural implications of importation into Mexico City and Caracas, Venezuela, situating the flow of commodities within cultural processes. It analyzes how ordinary people in the two cities interacted with goods from abroad. While most studies of this phenomenon focus on elites, this research suggests that they did not comprise the only group to desire, acquire, and display imported commodities. In Mexico City, non-elites could achieve upward mobility by displaying European items. In Caracas, powerful external commercial ties allowed city residents of most classes to obtain foreign commodities and construct their identity by way of them. Thus, people throughout the social strata associated with imported goods, leading to internal and external effects on cultural identity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research received generous funding from the Tinker Foundation, as well as from the Institute for the Study of the Americas (ISA), the Center for Global Initiatives (CGI), the Graduate School, and the Department of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I was pleased to have an opportunity to present part of this thesis at the ILASSA XXVIII Conference on Latin America at the University of Texas at Austin in February 2008.

Many individuals provided valuable assistance in the two-year process of researching and writing this thesis. First and foremost, I thank John Chasteen, my advisor and mentor, whose encouragement, enthusiasm, talent, and creativity in teaching and writing Latin American history have been indispensable for my motivation and growth as a scholar. I will carry his lessons on clarity, precision, and directness in writing with me throughout my career. I thank Louis A. Pérez, Jr. and Kathryn Burns for their willingness to serve on my committee and for their unwavering support for my academic progress.

I am very grateful to Lars Schoultz, Lisa Lindsay, Jocelyn Olcott, J. Pablo Silva, Jason Moore, Victor Macías-González, Jeffrey Erbig, Jeffrey Richey and Toby Nathan for their interest in my research, their scholarly engagement, and their useful feedback. Special thanks to Jennifer Donnally and Chris Cameron, whose attention to detail on my drafts made the editing process efficient and productive and did wonders to improve the clarity of my writing.

My fieldwork in Caracas, Venezuela in June 2007 received much-appreciated logistical support from Jorge Redmond Schlageter of Chocolates El Rey, C.A., and his staff. Dr. Carlos F. Duarte, Director of the Museo de Arte Colonial, and Lic. Juan Ignacio Parra shared their profound knowledge of Venezuelan history with me and provided wise counsel on how to maximize my research time in Caracas. Raiza Ron Andueza, a dear friend of almost twenty-five years, made herself available throughout my stay and helped me to navigate a perpetually confusing city with an even more bewildering transportation network. Her perseverance and acute knowledge of Caracas and its people helped me to overcome many logistical challenges.

Finally, I must acknowledge my parents for the opportunities that they have given me to allow me to reach this point. I appreciate their willingness to listen to my ideas, to comment on my work, and to provide unconditional support and encouragement. While I never could hope to reach the level of expertise or recognition that they have in their field, I do wish to follow their example by making a difference for students and colleagues who seek innovative explanations for happenings in the Latin American past.

--EPS, April 2008

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INTRODUCTION

I stood in the dense tropical foliage of a humid gully just outside Parque Los Chorros in metropolitan Caracas in June 2007. Facing north, with the Andes rising in front of me, and the cosmopolitan universe behind, I gazed at the moss-covered debris at my feet: a pile of discarded lithographic printing stones from Litografía del Comercio, Venezuela's first commercial printing press. As the largest printing operation of its time in the country, the company produced most of the stamps, paper currency, newspapers, magazines, and product packaging that ordinary people encountered in their daily lives by the late nineteenth century. As I studied the pile of stones in front of me, I noticed a curious image on part of one of the stones: a headdress of a Native American Indian. Incredulous, I scraped away some of the moss and saw the image from the wrapper of an "*El Indio*" chocolate bar. I saw another stone, this one displaying a label for "*Harinolina*" cooking oil. It featured an unmistakable bird of prey, the North American Bald Eagle. I pondered these curious product labels as I continued looking through the stones. In total, almost a third of them were emblazoned with unquestionable symbols of the United States. These images transported me to the historical moment, and made me want to understand the story behind them.

During my stay in Caracas in the summer of 2007, I recovered over one hundred lithographic stones and recorded images from their faces. As historical artifacts, they offer a remarkable and unprecedented window into the Venezuelan commercial culture of the 1880s and beyond. To my knowledge, records of nineteenth-century product packaging do not

exist in conventional historical archives. The continual, repetitive symbolic reference to the United States—the Bald Eagle, the Native American Indian, and even the Statue of Liberty—on Venezuelan product packaging inspired me to formulate a broader project: to understand how material culture, especially imported from overseas, defined cultural identity in Latin America by the end of the nineteenth century. I seek to understand how the introduction, adoption, assimilation, and integration of imported commodities affected the process by which Latin Americans constructed themselves in relation to each other and to the outside world. This thesis is an initial result of my efforts, exploring late nineteenth-century cosmopolitan life in two cities, Mexico City and Caracas, both of which enjoyed powerful connections with commercial “hegemons” after independence, especially the United States, Great Britain, and France.

Much scholarship explores the importation of commodities into Latin America. After the dissolution of colonial power in the 1810s-1820s, Latin American markets became saturated with products from major manufacturing powers in Europe, as well as the United States, all of whom sought to restructure the political geography of global commerce in order to supplant the displaced Spanish and Portuguese colonial machines. By the 1860s, Latin Americans increasingly engaged in exporting raw materials while importing manufactured goods, including tools, hardware, shoes, and even culinary innovations.¹ Both Mexico and

¹ E. Bradford Burns explains the cultural ramifications of the export-oriented economy: “The politicians approved foreign exploitation of the natural resources with the hope that some residue of the wealth created would enrich them and facilitate the transformation of at least the capital cities into citadels of European culture.” E. Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 10. Ciro Cardoso, comp., *México en el siglo XIX (1821-1910): Historia económica y de la estructura social* (México, D.F.: Editorial Nueva Imagen, S.A., 1980), 209-210. Giovanni Arrighi explores the process by which France and Britain developed a new mercantilism that drove the global power struggle through the nineteenth century. Arrighi argues that Britain in particular was able to turn its geopolitical handicap—its location and small land mass—into a remarkable competitive advantage for world commercial supremacy. Indeed, Britain developed as a global hegemonic power out of a new period of systemic chaos specifically by turning economic “conquest” into a revenue-generating business.

Venezuela are important cases—the former because of its geographic proximity to its oversized northern neighbor, and the latter because of its strategic location at the gateway to South America, the closest point on the continent to Europe and the United States, as well as the only large mainland port near the plantation economies of the Caribbean sugar islands. Statistical data from the nineteenth century confirm common scholarly perceptions that Mexico and Venezuela enjoyed strong commercial ties with major overseas economic powers that resulted in unprecedented, and often unrivaled, levels of importation of manufactured goods and raw materials. The individual chapters discuss these commodities and the importation statistics in greater detail.

However, my interest in material goods goes beyond the commodities themselves. I wish to situate these items within broader cultural processes. Therefore, this thesis assembles a *mélange* of source types—newspapers, government reports, travel writing, fiction, and even pictorial sketches—in order to analyze how ordinary people in the two countries interacted with goods from abroad as they struggled to construct a new social experience for themselves after independence. Several scholars have identified and discussed the “allure of the foreign” (the phrase that Benjamin Orlove coined in 1997) that permeated the culture and society of urban *criollo* elites and resulted in a heavily Europeanized and North Americanized upper class.² Most scholars of nineteenth-century Latin American history agree that well-to-do members of society sought to showcase their status by displaying, on their person or in their homes, the accoutrements of the modern and the progressive industrializing nations overseas.

Arrighi terms this process the rise of “free-trade imperialism.” Giovanni Arrighi, “The Three Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism,” *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London; New York: Verso, 1994), 47-58.

² Benjamin Orlove, ed, *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

The case studies in this thesis suggest the need for a revision—more specifically, an expansion or broadening—of the conventional understanding of this phenomenon. A range of historical evidence suggests that in Mexico City and Caracas, elites were not the only group in urban society to desire, acquire, and display imported commodities. Instead, people throughout the social strata came to associate with items from abroad, leading to both internal and external effects on cultural identity in Latin America. Chapter 1 shows that in Mexico City, the growing availability of imported commodities to a large sector of the populace led to a process of cultural egalitarianization. In the midst of the transportation revolution of the latter half of the nineteenth century, goods from abroad were not only desirable, they soon became affordable, and companies advertised them as such. Joining the “decent” class now seemed increasingly within reach for “ordinary people.” This process had clear implications for the internal social order. As more classes, occupations, and groups began to construct their own social images in relation to imported commodities, the line separating the lower and upper classes became blurred and even obscured. Eventually, the *appearance* of affluence—something one could demonstrate by owning just a token imported item—gave people in the plebeian class greater means to seek upward mobility. The case of Mexico City shows how imported material commodities transformed internal sociocultural dynamics by offering unprecedented opportunities for people to “dress to impress,” to define themselves in relation to other residents within their society.

Chapter 2 explores the effect of imported commodities on how residents of Caracas constructed their identity in relation to the outside world. It attempts to explain the presence of symbols such as the Bald Eagle and the Native American Indian on locally produced merchandise by the late nineteenth century. Despite limited official contact between

Venezuela and its northern hegemon, the United States, and despite ideological condemnations of North American “*yanqui* imperialism” from many Latin American intellectuals (including Venezuelan poet Rufino Blanco Fombona), trade flourished unabated between Venezuela and the United States and Europe, saturating the marketplace with the latest commodities from overseas. *Caraqueños* from all walks of life eagerly appropriated and integrated these imported items into their identity, transforming their city into an oasis of modernity that foreign visitors to the region found striking. Furthermore, people in Caracas showed a remarkable fascination with, and enthusiasm for, developments and innovations in the United States. A local newspaper fed this cultural appetite by showcasing North American ingenuity, modernity, and progress in both content and advertisements. Through this powerful commercial connection, an enduring cultural discourse developed between Venezuela and the United States that touched people from all walks of life.

Together, the two chapters show that imported commodities brought change and “progress” to Latin America in ways that affected both the internal workings of the independent nations and their relations with major industrializing powers overseas. In both cases, the change existed at the level of the ordinary consuming populace, or, at least, well beyond the level of what one could consider the elite. But if the consumption of imported commodities in these societies occurred in a broader sector of the population than one might think, just how widespread was it? The chapters that follow offer some indications of the extent of this phenomenon, using statistical data and other sources. However, a definitive and exhaustive quantification lies beyond the scope of this project. Instead, this thesis uses a more qualitative approach, exploring the outlines of what one could consider Latin America’s nascent consumer culture. What did imported goods signify to the proto-

consumers of nineteenth-century Mexico City and Caracas? This thesis attempts to begin to tell the story of the inextricable and often colorful relationship that developed between people and items from the external world during a particular phase in the history of independent Latin America.

CHAPTER 1

“MIRACLE-WORKING SATIN:” TRANSCENDING CLASS BOUNDARIES THROUGH MATERIAL CULTURE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO CITY

Rebecca Earle has argued that new material imports from Europe brought a rigidifying of society in Mexico City after the transition from colonialism to independence. Examining the relationship between clothing and identity in Mexico City, she points to growing condemnation and scorn for people—especially those with an indigenous or mixed-race background—who attempted to homogenize their dress with that of people of European ancestry to gain social mobility after independence, when the upper classes increasingly utilized imported materials. Earle cites examples from travel writers and *costumbrista* paintings that suggest that upper-class Europeans in Mexico City became infuriated with indigenous attempts to improve their position on the social ladder by appropriating imported commodities. She concludes that independence brought two effects based on material culture: a “vast sartorial gulf that separated the rich from the poor, and the failure of most attempts at dressing expensively” as a gesture of social mobility.³

Earle implies that that less social mobility existed in Mexico City after independence because travelers scorned it, and foreign painters satirized it. But evidence from outsiders

³ Rebecca Earle, “‘Two Pairs of Pink Satin Shoes!!’ Race, Clothing and Identity in the Americas (17th-19th centuries),” *History Workshop Journal* 52 (2001), 187-189, 178-179, 181, 186. Several other scholars have explored this relationship between clothing and identity. Central works include Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America’s Material Culture* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001); E Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1980); and Benjamin Orlove, ed, *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

offers little insight on the lived experience—the “social reality”—of the people *living in* Mexico City, especially those of the plebeian class who almost never wrote, much less published, accounts of the cultural universe surrounding them. Thus, one can see that Earle’s approach does not allow her to make persuasive a case for the sociocultural impact that imported material commodities might have had in Mexico City after independence.

The solution to this problem lies in a methodological revision. The complexity of Mexican society during the mid- to late-nineteenth century requires a closer scrutiny of the *internal* social experience. Scholars must transcend the limitations of the records of outsiders to explore documents that locals created on the ground. This chapter utilizes several different types of sources, all created in Mexico City and most appearing in mainstream newspapers, to explore the role that imported commodities played in shaping a new social experience after independence. These sources suggest that material culture held *internal* transformative power in Mexico City, especially by the late nineteenth century, perpetuating unprecedented social mobility across the social strata. Three reasons support this claim.

First, by the end of the 1800s, the presence of imported goods in Mexican society expanded dramatically. Statistical data from the period suggest that the marketplace in Mexico City was flooded with more and more European and North American commodities, from manufactured goods to fabric for clothing and other uses. The rate of growth of importation of several key commodities far surpassed the rate of population growth. Second, this new availability of goods meant more than just enhanced purchasing power for the wealthy; instead, the growing importation reached virtually all sectors of the population. Newspaper sources from Mexico City include ostentatious advertisements for products from jewelry to perfume, touting both their desirability and their accessibility to anybody who

sought to join the class that consumed these goods. The newspaper sources show that the market for these goods was expanding dramatically, and the notion of “luxury” was becoming more egalitarian. Goods from abroad no longer existed solely in the realm of the elite, but instead were accessible to the broader society; the commodities were *affordable*. The fixation on materiality created the potential for people to bridge the gaps between the two major social classes: the *gente decente*, or “decent people,” and the *plebe*.⁴ Residents of Mexico City defined and portrayed themselves in relation to imported European material culture. Biographical sketches of diverse Mexican “types” in a collection entitled Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos suggest that the expanding markets and affordability of foreign goods allowed people throughout Mexico City to wear clothing made from European cloth, regardless of their role in the modernizing society.

Third, these imported commodities allowed people to transcend, or at least distort, the distinctions between the plebe and the gente decente, sometimes with outrageous consequences. Evidence from José Tomás de Cuéllar’s novella “*Baile y cochino*” suggests that in Mexico City, the appearance of affluence could triumph temporarily over perceived class distinctions. In fact, both social classes recognized the new flexibility of the plebe based on material commodities. They understood that the European goods, especially dress, blurred and obscured the boundaries of class.

Together, these three reasons support the central claim of this chapter, that the increasing presence of imported material commodities in Mexico City over the course of the nineteenth century transformed society in practice and ideology by offering social mobility on an unprecedented scale. This chapter builds on the work of Rebecca Earle through its

⁴ Francie R. Chassen-López, From Liberal to Revolutionary Oaxaca: The View from the South, Mexico 1867-1911 (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 280.

methodological revision, looking at documentary evidence produced in Mexico, for Mexicans, and with the possible exception of the advertisements, *by* Mexicans, rather than outsiders. Although one might presume that the unprecedented flow of these goods into the country affected only the gente decente, the sources presented herein suggest a very different lived experience. This chapter argues that imported material commodities transformed the post-independence scene in Mexico City because people enjoyed unprecedented access to European cultural goods across the social strata, because this new sociocultural environment allowed the city's residents to define themselves in terms of imported materiality, and because this new emphasis offered unprecedented social mobility.

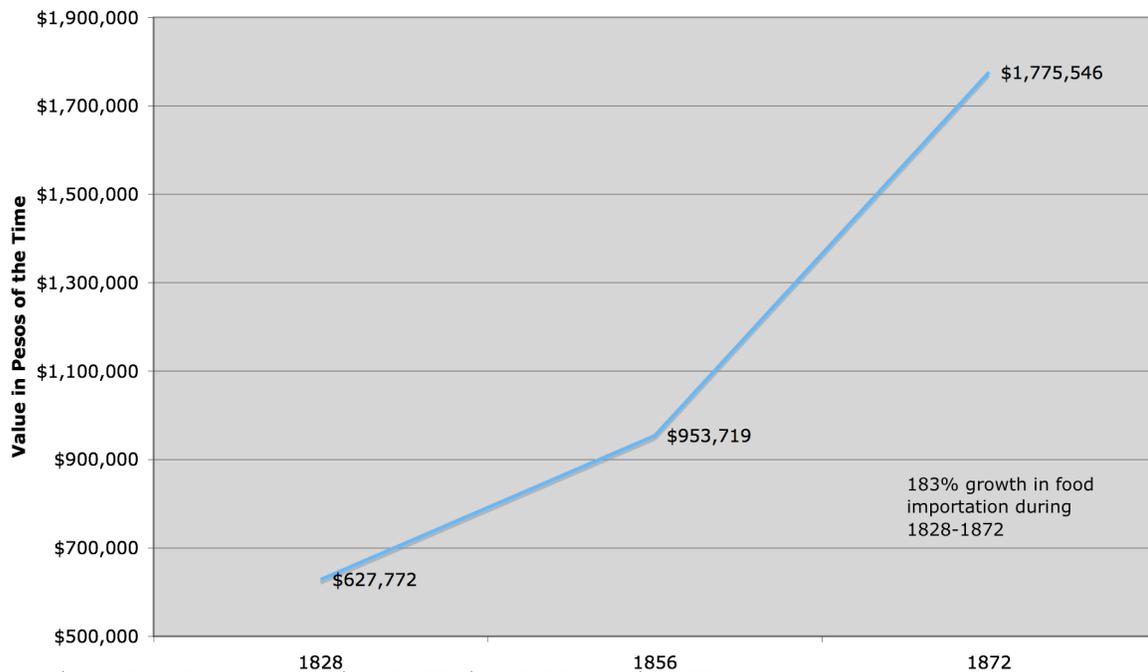
Unprecedented Growth in Importation

Beginning in 1821, with the end of the Spanish commercial monopoly over the territory, Mexico pursued new trading relationships with several European countries at a moment of significant commercial expansion, especially as Britain and France attempted to fill the manufacturing void that Spain and Portugal left behind following the collapse of the Iberian empires in the Americas.⁵ These new relationships allowed for unprecedented levels of importation of goods into Mexico, primarily from Britain, France, and Germany, as well as the United States. The countries exporting the goods competed with considerable intensity

⁵ Ciro Cardoso, comp., México en el siglo XIX (1821-1910): Historia económica y de la estructura social (México, D.F.: Editorial Nueva Imagen, S.A., 1980), 209-210. Giovanni Arrighi explores the process by which France and Britain developed a new mercantilism that drove the global power struggle through the nineteenth century. Arrighi argues that Britain in particular was able to turn its geopolitical handicap—its location and small land mass—into a remarkable competitive advantage for world commercial supremacy. Indeed, Britain developed as a global hegemonic power out of a new period of systemic chaos specifically by turning economic “conquest” into a revenue-generating business. Arrighi terms this process the rise of “free-trade imperialism.” Giovanni Arrighi, “The Three Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism,” The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times (London; New York: Verso, 1994), 47-58.

for access to the lucrative Mexican market.⁶ The imported items comprised finished or manufactured goods that included foodstuffs, wine, leather, furniture, and mirrors, as well as some raw materials, including spices, cacao, coffee, and tea.⁷ Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that during the course of the nineteenth century, the value of imported food items increased by 183% and the value of imported paper and books increased by 676%.⁸

FIGURE 1
Importation of Food into Mexico



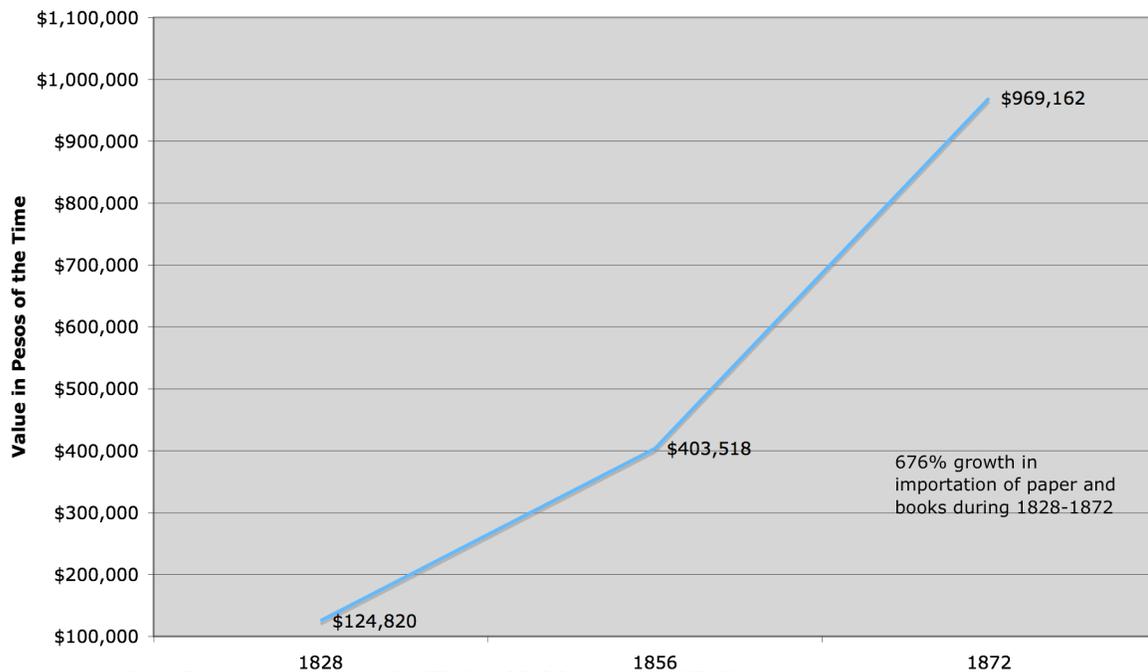
Source: Inés Herrera Canales, *El comercio exterior de México, 1821-1875* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1977), 26.

⁶ *Estadísticas Históricas de México*, Tomo II, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (México, D.F.: Dirección General de Estadística, 1985), 647; Walther L. Bernecker, “Between European and American Dominance: Mexican Foreign Trade in the Nineteenth Century,” *Itinerario* 21, no. 3 (1998), 120-122. Some disagreement exists among scholars about the centrality of the U.S. presence in Mexican external trade in the nineteenth century. In particular, Walther Bernecker seeks to “correct” the commonly held perception that the competition for trade with Mexico existed primarily among the European powers. He suggests that the United States participated in the struggle for the Mexican market as much as did Britain, France, and Germany. Bernecker, 115.

⁷ Bernard Kapp, “Les Relations Économiques Extérieures Du Mexique (1821-1911) D’Après Les Sources Françaises,” *Ville Et Commerce: Deux Essais D’Histoire Hispano-Américaine* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1974), 59-61; *Estadísticas Históricas de México*, 647-648.

⁸ Inés Herrera Canales, *El comercio exterior de México, 1821-1875* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1977), 26.

FIGURE 2
Importation of Paper and Books into Mexico

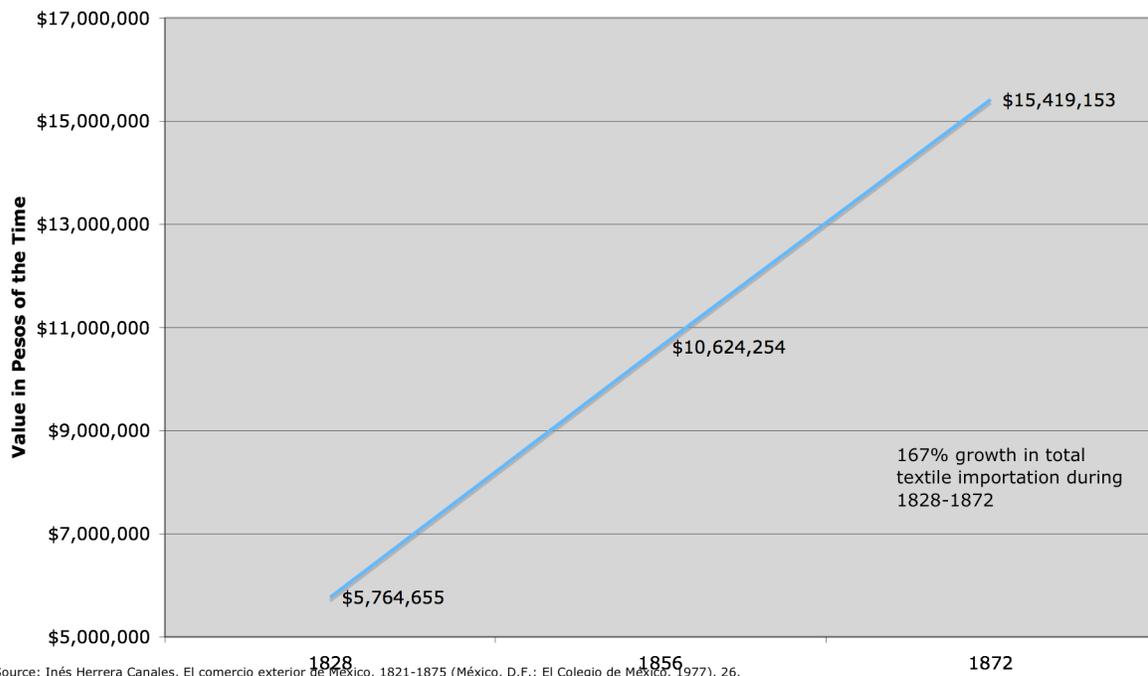


However, by far the most important foreign goods arriving in Mexico after independence were textiles, of many different forms and constructions, representing almost fifty percent of the total value of imports during 1821-1880. Cotton and linen were the primary ingredients in these textiles, but silk and wool appeared as well. In fact, some of them combined various ingredients into what one perhaps could consider a distinctively *mestizo* weave.⁹ The extraordinary prevalence of textile importation into Mexico after independence resulted from several factors, including increased productivity of textile manufacturing in Europe, lower prices—greater accessibility, and new efficient and economical technologies of transportation that moved bulky textiles across the Atlantic

⁹ The use of the term *mestizo* in the context of textile fabrics has no historiographical antecedent, but some scholars have appropriated the vocabulary of the caste system to describe the mixed composition of other material elements of the lived experience, including food items.

Ocean and distributed them across the Mexican state with astounding rapidity.¹⁰ Figures 3 and 4 show that the values of overall textile and overall fabric importation in Mexico increased by 167% and 155%, respectively, during 1828-1872. Within these broad categories, the values of specific types of textiles show even more remarkable increases. According to Figures 5 and 6, the value of woolen textile importation grew by 637%, while that of mixed-fabric importation increased by an astonishing 4012%, during 1828-1874.¹¹

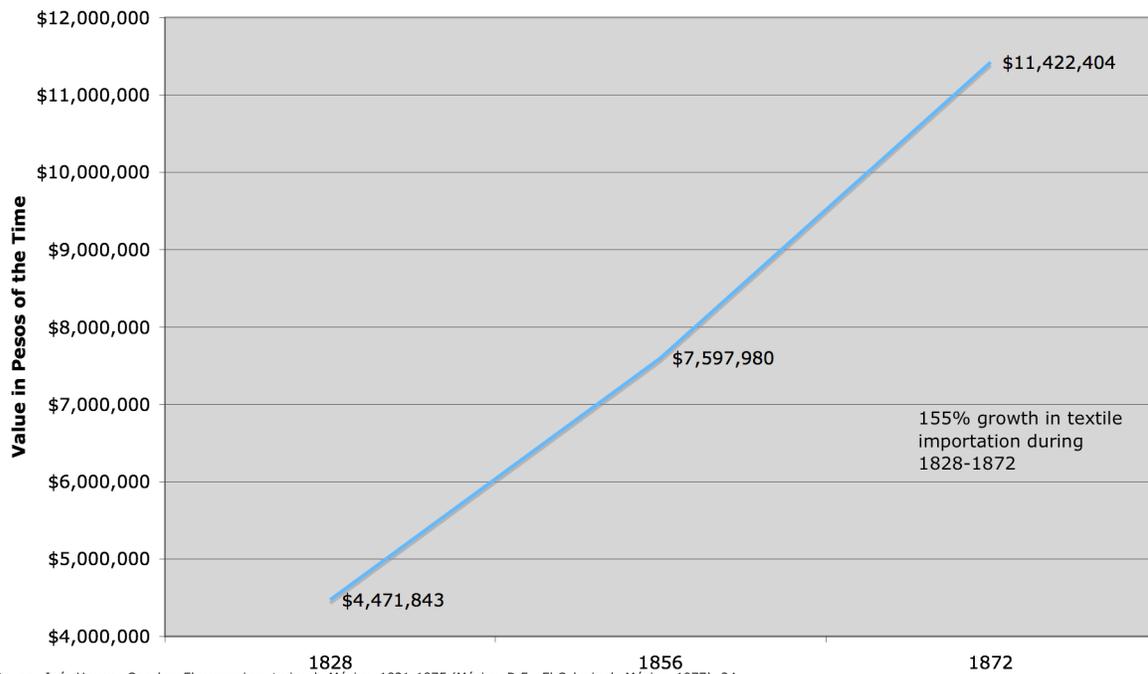
FIGURE 3
Importation of Clothing Articles into Mexico



¹⁰ *Estadísticas Históricas de México*, 647-648; Cardoso, 213. Cardoso provides a detailed description of the enhancements to transportation mechanisms and infrastructure on pages 198-209 and 218-224.

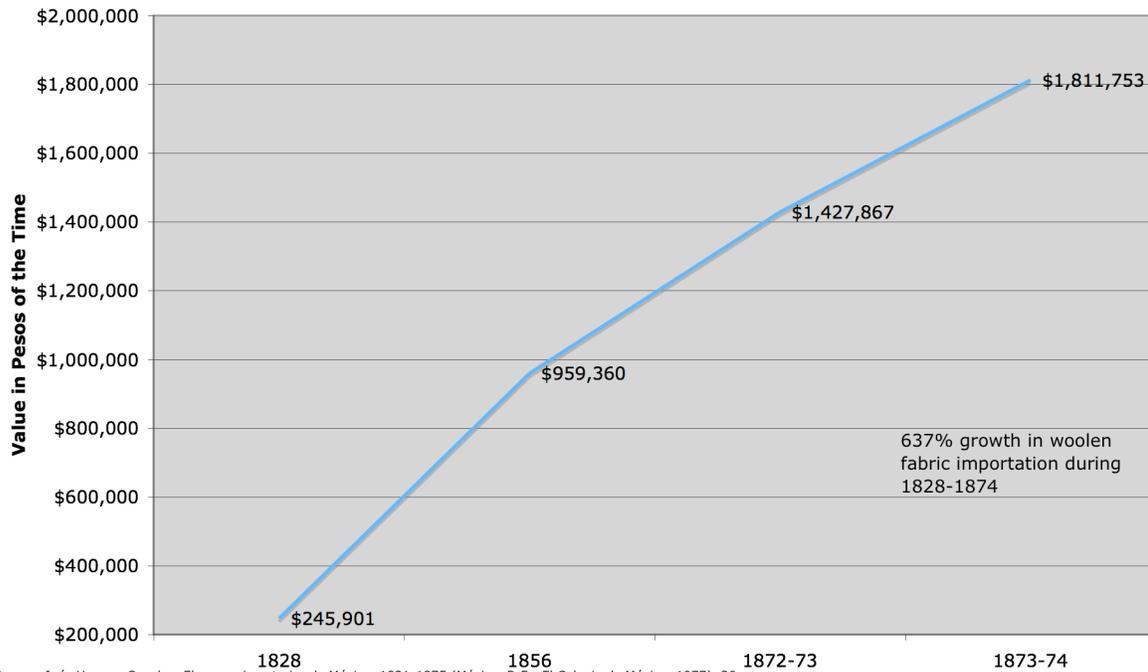
¹¹ Herrera Canales, 26, 30, 34. Part of the explanation for the extraordinary growth in mixed-fabric textile importation might include the invention and development of new weaves and combinations during the same time period.

FIGURE 4
Total Importation of Textiles into Mexico



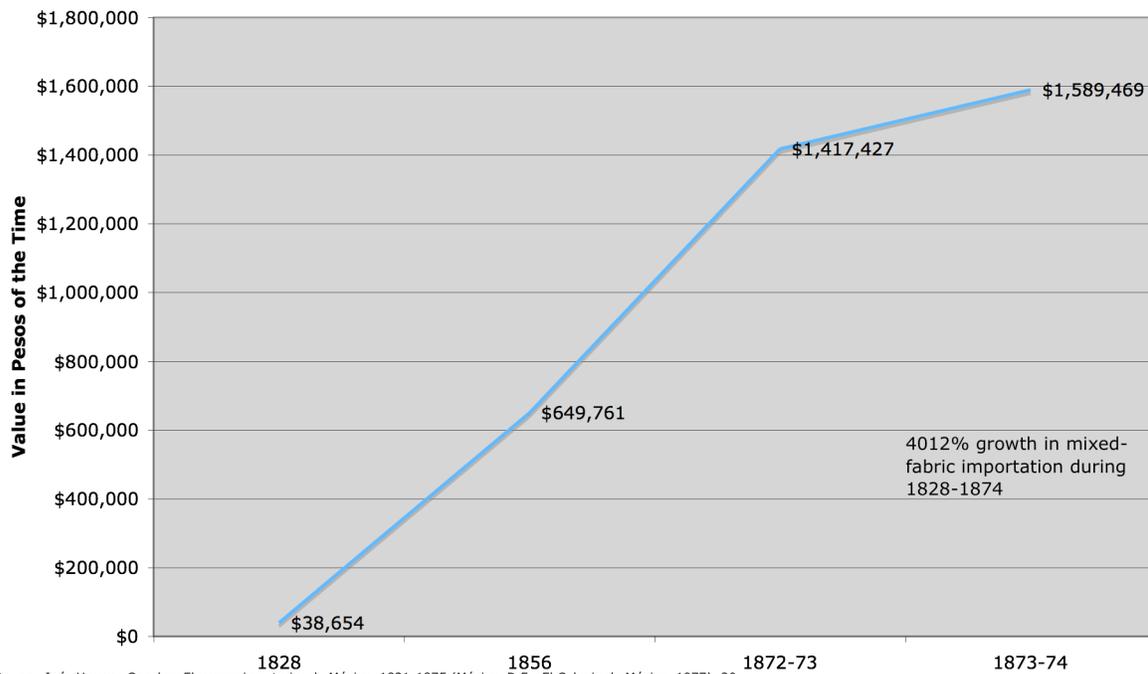
Source: Inés Herrera Canales, *El comercio exterior de México, 1821-1875* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1977), 34.

FIGURE 5
Importation of Woolen Textiles into Mexico



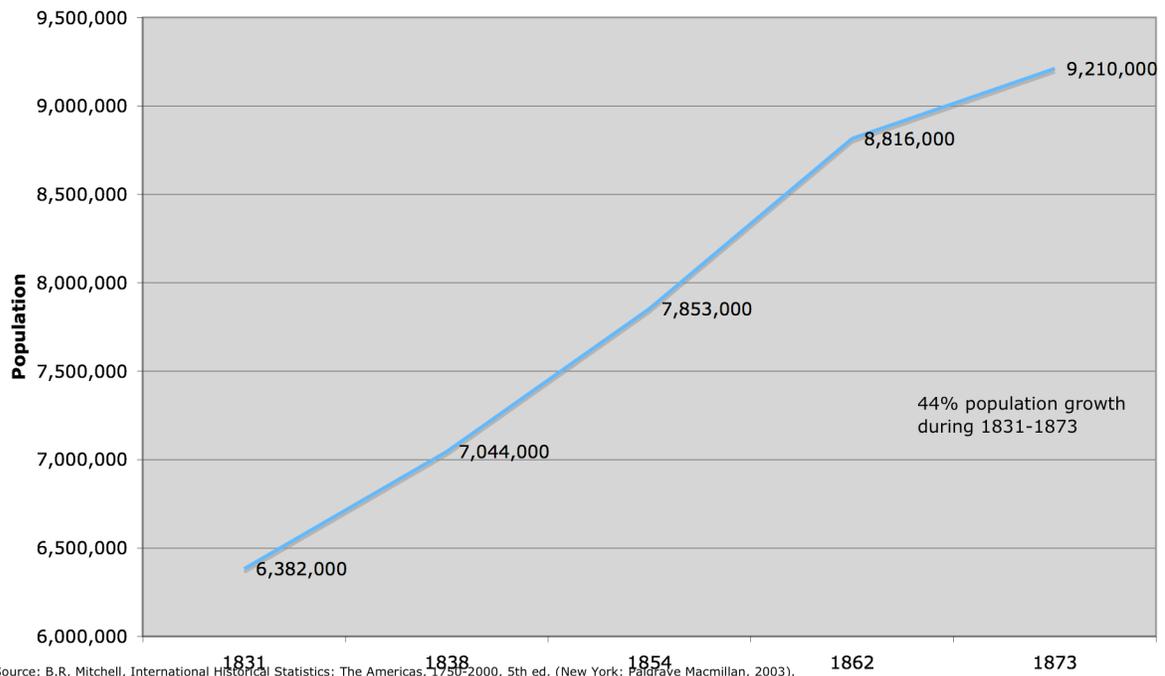
Source: Inés Herrera Canales, *El comercio exterior de México, 1821-1875* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1977), 30.

FIGURE 6
Importation of Mixed-Fabric Textiles into Mexico



These data suggest that after independence, unprecedented volumes of European merchandise arrived at Veracruz and other port cities for transportation inland to Mexico City and other major urban centers of distribution. The notions of circulation and dispersal pose an essential question: distribution to whom? During Mexico’s colonial period, only the wealthiest castes could participate on a voluntary basis in the European marketplace to acquire imported goods. After independence, the colonial restrictions dissolved, yet Mexican society remained heavily stratified. Furthermore, as Figure 7 shows, the total population of Mexico grew from around 6.4 million in 1831 to 9.2 million by 1873, an increase of only 44% in the decades following independence.

FIGURE 7
Total Population of Mexico



Thus, the population growth far from mirrored the triple-digit and even quadruple-digit growth percentages in the values of imported commodities. Given that imported goods were becoming, if anything, less expensive, the increase per capita in consumption of these items must have been substantial. Who was buying these newly plentiful imports? Did a small group of wealthy elites continue to absorb these goods from a saturated marketplace? Or did the prevalence of these goods have a deeper effect on society? To answer this quandary, one must look beyond the numbers.

Expanding Markets for Imported Commodities

Not only was the import market in Mexico City growing, it was developing and expanding in its sociocultural composition. This process coincided with the dissolution of the colonial race-based caste system into a more nebulous dichotomy between the gente

decente and the plebe. Wealthy individuals of European descent, fearful of losing their status, became increasingly concerned with appearance and behavior. They sought to replicate the colonial-era laws by prescribing “appropriate” material items that one should associate with the *gente decente*. Imported goods, such as top hats and woolen suits, took on significance as cultural insignias, even if they were not practical in tropical climates. Enchiladas and tamales, on the other hand, were “food of the lower orders.”¹²

At the same time, the proliferation of increasing volumes of imported goods encouraged entire sectors of the population to demonstrate their ideological support for liberal economic development. By acquiring and adopting the latest clothing fashions from Paris and London, Mexico City residents could showcase their enthusiasm to reject the past and look toward a modern future in Mexico.¹³ The plethora of Parisian fabrics and other paraphernalia that began to arrive in record quantities in Mexico City and other areas gave people the opportunity to demonstrate not only the presence, but the *abundance* of European culture in their lives.¹⁴

Thus, one must move beyond quantitative data in order to understand how imported commodities came to transform the day-to-day lived experience in Mexico City. A look at newspaper advertisements of these goods reveals how local shopkeepers introduced their wares into the sprawling urban center. The advertisements appearing in several newspapers published in Mexico City during the post-independence period share several approaches in their presentations of foreign goods. Along the lines of Benjamin Orlove’s notion of the

¹² Bauer, 132-133, 137-140; Pilcher, 46; Burns, 10. Francie Chassen-López explores culinary culture in Oaxaca, noting that elites sought to “emulate French haute cuisine,” often by putting on lavish feasts complete with French foods and wine, with no traditional Oaxacan delicacies, such as *tlayudas* or *quesillo*, in sight. In fact, the menus for these feasts often appeared in local newspapers. Chassen-López, 256.

¹³ Bauer, 146, 150.

¹⁴ Orlove, 13-14; Bauer, 152-153.

“allure of the foreign,” the advertisements celebrate the luxuriousness and desirability of certain goods because of their association with European culture, centered in Paris. They also portray these goods as innovative, the latest in cutting-edge fashion or technology. But in the nineteenth century, these advertisements incorporate a new angle: affordability. They emphasize the accessibility of European material—and cultural—imports to a broad sector of the populations by placing heavy emphasis on bargain prices.

The notion of an expanded market for imported goods implies that vendors could portray commodities from abroad as a modern, progressive, and *attainable* reality for Mexico City’s ordinary people. The advertisements present the imported goods and experiences not as expensive items out of the reach of the lower classes, but instead as economical ways of demonstrating one’s allegiance to the nineteenth-century material world.¹⁵ French perfumes, North American sewing machines, and British frock coats¹⁶ were not only symbols of European culture and exemplars of the proudest manufacturing innovations across the Atlantic, they also were an affordable reality for all but the most destitute members of society. The evidence suggests that the ways in which retailers introduced the ordinary consuming populace in Mexico City to goods from abroad contributed to the transformative power of those items by bridging perceived socioeconomic gaps in the population, emphasizing that imported commodities lay within the purview of anybody who had a few pesos to spare.

¹⁵ Bryan McCann discusses this tendency in his analysis of advertisements in popular culture in Brazil during the 1930s-1950s, that representations of imported goods often emphasized a middle-class audience: “[advertisements] promised a product of elite quality, but always with the caveat—either expressed or implied—that for the first time such luxury was available to all.” Bryan McCann, Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2004), 224.

¹⁶ A frock coat is a knee-length coat, usually black and made of elegant fabric, that one could wear open or closed. For an image, see Margarete Braun-Ronsdorf, Mirror of Fashion: A History of European Costume 1789-1929 (New York; Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company; London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), 75.

An examination of nineteenth-century newspapers from Mexico City reveals an evolution in the emphasis that advertisers placed on material imports that correlates with the increasing prevalence of those goods as the century progressed. A number of early post-independence newspapers, including the Noticioso general and El mosquito mexicano, from 1817—four years before independence—to 1834, place virtually no emphasis on advertising material commodities. Instead, the newspapers discuss political events in the outside world, especially in France, Britain, and the United States.¹⁷ In some cases, the editors published decrees and national legislation for popular distribution, particularly after independence, as the new government struggled to consolidate and legitimize its authority.¹⁸ For example, in the “Parte Mercantil” of the Noticioso general, sections on commerce limit the scope of their reporting to listings of current prices of various agricultural and manufactured products imported into Mexico.¹⁹

Newspapers from later in the nineteenth century place new emphasis on imported commodities, displaying them in prominent locations and even using pictorial advertisements. At this stage, the affordability of luxurious European goods emerges most clearly. The earliest examples appear in La opinión nacional, beginning in the late 1860s. In one advertisement, the imported commodities include jewelry, presented under manufacturers’ names such as “French, Losada, Gerard-Perregaux, Robert-Roskell, Robert-

¹⁷ Noticioso general, 15 October 1817, 1; *Ibid.*, 22 October 1817, 1; *Ibid.*, 27 October 1817, 1-2; et al.

¹⁸ El mosquito mexicano, 21 March 1834, 1-2; *Ibid.*, 4 April 1834, 1-2; et al.

¹⁹ These descriptions are similar to stock listings in contemporary periodicals. Noticioso general, 15 October 1817, 1-2; *Ibid.*, 17 October 1817, 1-2, 4; *Ibid.*, 20 October 1817, 1-4; *Ibid.*, 22 October 1817, 3-4; *Ibid.*, 27 October 1817, 1; *Ibid.*, 17 November 1817, 3; *Ibid.*, 3 December 1817, 3; et al. Benedict Anderson argues that many of the early newspapers to emerge in the Americas “began essentially as appendages of the market” and often provided information on shipping, political appointments, marriages of the wealthy, and other similar topics. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1983), 62.

Brandt.” The headline of the advertisement celebrates the “only watch and jewelry store that always has an immense collection of articles of good taste and cheapness . . . watches of perfect size, guaranteed, starting at 8 pesos.”²⁰ This description combines notions of a wide selection of foreign brands, and perceived social “good taste” from owning a watch, with affordability.

An examination of newspapers from the end of the nineteenth century, during the outward-facing, progress-and-modernity-minded dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, reveals even more explicit introductions of European material culture into Mexico City as being within reach for the mainstream population. El noticioso, a newspaper from the 1880s, includes colorful and often witty depictions of goods from abroad, emphasizing the availability and affordability of those goods.²¹ Many of the advertisements are for pharmacies, such as an “Antique French Drugstore . . . the only deposit of [therapeutic] acids and chemical products . . . at factory prices.” These establishments sold “aromatic oils” and other “cures” for various sicknesses and bodily ailments, as the same advertisement suggests: “the only deposit of tropical elixirs and pills against fever . . . superior quality, moderate prices!”²²

In some cases, the advertisements appear with large images, even on the front page, that combine visual elements of desirability with descriptions of affordability. For example,

²⁰ La opinión nacional, 1 September 1868; *Ibid.*, 2 September 1868; *Ibid.*, 3 September 1868; et al. All translations are by the author of this thesis unless otherwise indicated.

²¹ El noticioso also was one of the earliest bilingual newspapers in Mexico. It considered itself a specifically “mercantile” paper, as it proclaimed in the header at the top of every edition: “El noticioso is the only mercantile paper published in English and Spanish in the Republic of Mexico.” El noticioso, 13 March 1881, 1; et al. Benedict Anderson explains that by the early twentieth century, a bilingual intelligentsia “had access . . . to models of nation, nation-ness, and nationalism derived from the turbulent, chaotic experiences of more than a century of American and European history. These models, in turn, helped to give shape to a thousand inchoate dreams. In varying combinations, the lessons of creole, vernacular and official nationalism were copied, adapted, and improved upon.” Anderson, 128.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

one advertisement for a sewing machine appears with the brand name “Americana:” “The new ‘Americana’ sewing machines, Latin American collection . . . sales on credit and in installments, great advantages!”²³ This advertisement, with its image of a sewing machine on an ornate stand, would catch the eye of anyone who viewed the front page of the newspaper on a street corner, and the emphasis on its availability through credit mechanisms likely would have appealed to those struggling to enter the class that could consume these goods. Furthermore, the association of the words “Americana” and “Latin American Collection,” in English, with the image of the sewing machine could have enhanced its perceived desirability because it establishes a connection to the United States as the exemplar of modernity and technological development. In other words, anybody could own a piece of North American “progress” by purchasing this item.

Finally, among diverse types of European goods, including alcoholic beverages and pharmaceuticals, imported clothing from France and Britain received attention in newspapers such as El noticioso. One advertisement in particular highlights the accessibility to the general population of foreign clothing—regardless of origin—in addition to its luxury and intrigue: “THE EXPLOSION . . . Great sale of finished clothing! . . . Foreign cashmere, common sizes . . . [also] of linen cloth for summer!” The advertisement includes a list of clothing items and price ranges, such as pants for two to four pesos, vests for one to five pesos, jackets for four to six pesos, frock coats for eleven to twenty-four pesos, overcoats for eight to twenty-two pesos, and shirts for seventy-five cents to two pesos.²⁴ With such a wide price range, it would not be surprising if even struggling Mexico City residents could afford a

²³ Ibid., 11 April 1881, 1; Ibid., 27 June 1881, 1; et al.

²⁴ Ibid., 11 April 1881, 4. A correlation seems to exist between the price of specific types of garments and the amount of imported fabric and labor that one could hypothesize were involved in their creation.

shirt or a vest.²⁵

Indeed, this advertisement suggests that manufacturers might have presented imported clothing items with price listings in order to offer a catalogue of sorts to potential customers. Far from listing simply “elegant apparel from Europe” alongside a holistic image of a fashionably attired dame or gentleman, the advertisement deconstructs the materiality into its individual elements.²⁶ As a result, a certain transparency exists in the luxury and desirability associated with the commodities. Individuals viewing the notice who could not afford an entire European “costume” need not feel discouraged because they could see the prices of the specific articles of clothing and select an item or two that might fit their budget and still allow them to flaunt an artificial affluence, a sociocultural dedication to Europhilic cosmopolitanism.

In addition to tangible commodities, the newspapers advertise the importation of *cultural* commodities as accessible as well. For example, La opinión nacional celebrates the incursion into Mexico of literary accomplishments: “We have just received from Paris a magnificent novel that we soon will begin to insert into this newspaper—Gonzáles, Neve and company.” Imported theatrical drama received advertisements as well: “THE THEATRE! We will publish a weekly installment from the Dramatic Encyclopaedia that brings to light

²⁵ This conjecture might have to suffice in the short term. Stephen Haber explains that studies on average wages in Mexico during the mid-to-late nineteenth century are nonexistent, and the data sources are not very helpful because of the lack of a systematic approach in their collection. Furthermore, Mexico did not have a legal minimum wage prior to the 1930s. Haber suggests that the farthest one can go is to use certain indicators to point to “low and unequally distributed incomes.” Stephen H. Haber, “Assessing the Obstacles to Industrialization: The Mexican Economy, 1830-1940,” Journal of Latin American Studies 24, no. 1 (1992), 5, 17-18.

²⁶ For a comparison, see The Ladies’ Pocket Magazine: The Origin of Pantomime, published in 1834, for a more holistic style of advertising.

the best theatrical comedies of modern theatre for not a cent more.”²⁷ In addition, the newspaper advertises the “notes from the diary of a princess, Inés de Salm Salm” as a “most interesting book, translated from German, to be sold for FOUR REALES.”²⁸ The representations of these imported cultural “goods” clearly highlight the desirability and innovativeness of the entertainment and enlightenment that experiencing them can provide for a literate audience. More importantly, the advertisements emphasize that the experience of this imported culture was affordable. Thus, one can infer that the editors of these Mexican newspapers commoditized cultural imports to make them something tangible and appealing for their readership, and for mainstream Mexican society in general.

The evidence from nineteenth-century newspapers printed in Mexico City, especially when the government of Porfirio Díaz placed emphasis on modernization and replication of European cosmopolitan life in Mexico, suggests that the public encountered imported material commodities in advertisements with several primary designators attached. The advertisements depict foreign goods as not only luxurious and innovative, but also available and affordable. They no longer existed only for the wealthy, but rather for a broad sector of society. A strong example lies in the clothing advertisements that extrude the prices of individual imported garments into lists, offering an *à la carte* catalogue of sorts from which people who could not afford the entire European wardrobe at least could obtain a token item.

However, looking at advertisements offers little insight into how the new accessibility of imported commodities to the populace transformed the day-to-day practice of material culture in Mexico City. Understanding the sociocultural ramifications of the idea that goods

²⁷ La opinion nacional, 2 February 1869, 4; Ibid., 3 February, 1869, 4; Ibid., 4 February 1869, 4; Ibid., 13 April 1869, 4; Ibid., 14 April 1869, 4; Ibid., 1 June 1869, 4; Ibid., 2 June 1869, 4; et al.

²⁸ La opinión nacional, 1 June 1869, 4; Ibid., 2 June 1869, 4; et al.

penetrated most classes of society requires a close scrutiny of the internal lived experience. Unlike Rebecca Earle's approach that uses the attitudes of outsiders, this chapter does not appeal to European travelers' views of Mexico City residents. Instead, it examines how Mexicans constructed themselves through a metaphorical and literal self-portraiture: a collection of sketches of Mexican "types," originally published as a series of newspaper columns, entitled Los mexicanos pintados por si mismos. As the narrator explains in his animated "interview" with his first subject, the *aguador*, or water carrier, the collection emphasizes self-construction: "Please sit in that seat and tell me about your life . . . Think about the fact that today we Mexicans have taken on the task of depicting ourselves."²⁹

The collection is a supposedly autobiographical chronicle of life in Mexico City, told through the eyes of various Mexican interviewers and their subjects on the streets and in the shops. Mexicans would not be content to allow accounts of colonizers and outsiders to define them for a global audience, as the narrator tells the *aguador*: "You need to recognize that you, as a Mexican, now have the responsibility for informing the public about your customs, your habits, your vices, your qualities—everything that is particular to you . . . you have to tell the entire world."³⁰ The transparency of this process within the written descriptions suggests a larger comment on Mexicans' growing confidence to define and illustrate themselves in print—the medium of European communication and formality—in order to supplant the written views of outsiders such as those that Rebecca Earle cites in her article. By emphasizing the daily lives and everyday affairs of these "types," the collection celebrates the "heroes," the new protagonists, of Mexico's future.

²⁹ Los mexicanos pintados por si mismos: Tipos y costumbres nacionales, por varios autores (México, D.F.: Biblioteca Nacional y Estudios Neolitho, 1935, 1854), 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

The collection includes thirty-five pictorial sketches of the “types” of Mexicans in contexts of their life and work, along with a written interview or “encounter” with each protagonist. The style of the writing is highly conversational and animated, often with first-person narration. Many categories of Mexican “types,” all focusing on the materiality of everyday life, appear in the sketches. They include the plebeian class in traditional, service roles, including the *aguador*, a waitress at a cantina, a domestic servant, an animal herder, a rancher, a hauler, a laundress, a baker, a coachman, a barber, an innkeeper, and various ambulatory vendors. The narrators introduce the reader to individuals of the *gente decente* as well, including a government notary, an attorney, and several *ministros*, mid-level government bureaucrats.

The significance of this collection for discussing the transformative power of imported commodities emerges when one examines the contexts in which the artists depict the various “types.” The sketches engulf the protagonists from all walks of life in European material culture, often associated with their physical appearance and the paraphernalia of their work and lives. The plebe types appear in modest surroundings, yet their clothing and accoutrements are unmistakably European. Vendors such as the *mercero* (Figure 8) and the *cargador* (Figure 9) wear shirts and slacks of European style, made from European cloth, rather than loose indigenous weavings. The *mercero* also wears a form-fitting jacket of European style, and the *cargador* carries a plethora of imported wearable items for sale, including top hats, boots, and even an elegant sword. The *mercero* carries less distinguishable but similarly manufactured-looking commodities. The *aguador* (Figure 10) wears leather chaps over his light-colored European-style pants, and also wears helmet-like hat and dark leather shoes. The sketch presents a contrast between his physical appearance

and the accoutrements of his occupation, the latter of which includes a fairly traditional-looking ceramic jug strapped to his back.³¹

FIGURE 8
“El Mercero”³²



³¹ Ibid., 253-266, 279-280, 1-6.

³² Ibid., 253-266.

FIGURE 9
“El Cargador”³³

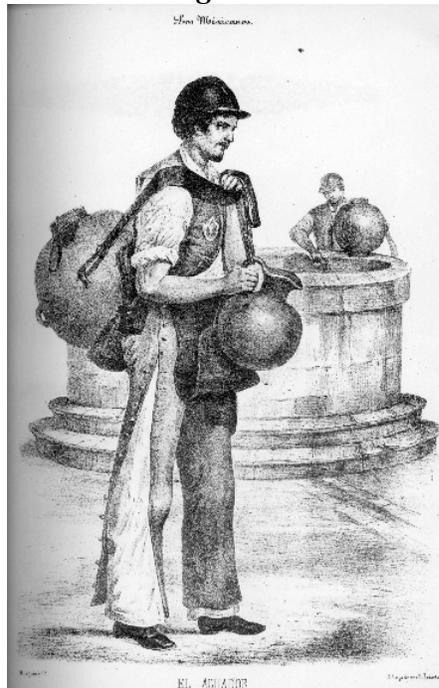
Los Mexicanos



EL CARGADOR.

FIGURE 10
“El Aguador”³⁴

Los Mexicanos



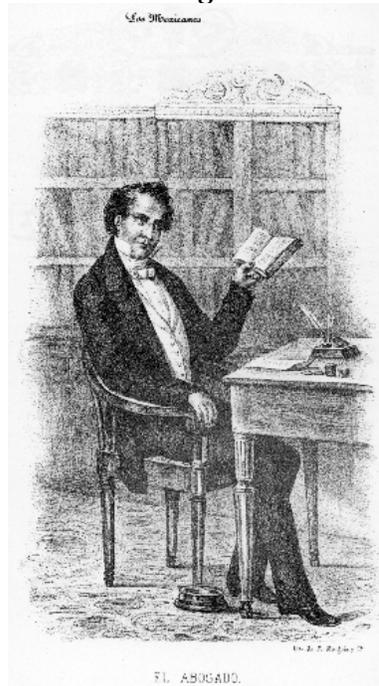
EL AGUADOR.

³³ Ibid., 279-280.

³⁴ Ibid., 1-6.

The sketches that depict Mexicans in the *gente decente* class show a proliferation of European material culture in a manner analogous to that of the depictions of the plebe. The *abogado*, an attorney (Figure 11), appears in a universe of imported items. His dress is elegant, from the black suit coat and tie to the vest and slacks. He sits at an ornately carved desk, in a chair of delicate construction, surrounded by his legal texts. The *ministro ejecutor*, a local government administrator (Figure 12), appears outside of his office in the requisite top hat, elegant dress shirt, and black long jacket, complete with handkerchief. However, his slacks appear identical to the ones that the *mercero* wears to sell his wares out on the street. Perhaps both pairs came from the same bolt of imported cloth, or even from the same tailor shop in Mexico City!³⁵

FIGURE 11
“El Abogado”³⁶



³⁵ Ibid., 141-148, 287-290, 253-266.

³⁶ Ibid., 141-148.

similarly defiant, proud postures and facial expressions, to the fullness of the skirts, to the cinches at the waists, both women embrace and radiate imported materiality in their idealized “type.”⁴⁰ Thus, European commodities seem to bring these two female archetypes together, though they come from opposite ends of the social spectrum.

FIGURE 13
“La China”⁴¹



⁴⁰ While questions of gender and gender analysis are not the focus of this chapter, they omnipresent within the discursive realm of Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos. Jocelyn Olcott discusses feminine archetypes that emerged in postrevolutionary Mexico, including the *soldadera* (camp follower), *soldada* (female soldier), *la madre* (mother, symbolically similar to La Malinche, conquistador Hernán Cortés’s mistress and translator, a symbol of Mexican femininity). Jocelyn Olcott, Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico, Next Wave: New Directions in Women’s Studies Series (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 17.

⁴¹ Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos, 89-98.

FIGURE 14
“La Coqueta”⁴²



Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos suggests that the new availability of imported goods in Mexico City did not allow the wealthy simply to acquire more items. Instead, the extraordinary growth of importation permeated through society, reaching everyone from street vendors to government administrators. The sketches illustrate that people from both the *gente decente* and the *plebe* incorporated European clothing and other accoutrements into how they portrayed themselves. In other words, a clear link developed between European commodities and Mexican identity, regardless of class status.

Despite their usefulness for gaining a sense of how new levels of importation broadened markets for foreign goods, the sketches of self-construction have methodological limitations. In order to complete the analytical exercise regarding the internal transformative power of European material culture in nineteenth-century Mexico City, one must explore

⁴² Ibid., 135-140.

how goods from abroad allowed upward mobility for members of the plebe. The sketches depict often-idealized archetypes, not people. As a result, they do not offer evidence to facilitate a discussion of social mobility. Thus, it is time to turn to a new type of source, created in Mexico City, from which one can extract evidence of the discourse of material culture and gain insight into the power of imported commodities to lift people out of the plebe.

The Power of Commodities for Social Mobility

Understanding how the new availability of imported goods from Europe transformed nineteenth-century Mexico City requires an analysis of qualitative data on the social experience in the metropolis. While Rebecca Earle uses outsiders' views to analyze the effects of material culture on society, this chapter concentrates on sources that Mexicans themselves constructed within the realm of quotidian life. A work of costumbrista fiction, written at the time, can provide a sense of the sociocultural experience that one could not obtain by examining external records and documents.⁴³ This section offers an analysis of a novella, "*Baile y cochino*," translated as "Having a Ball," by José Tomás de Cuéllar, to assess the effect that the permeation of goods from abroad might have had on everyday life in Mexico City in the decades following independence through the end of the nineteenth

⁴³ One cannot overestimate the power that seemingly "fictive" texts can have to enlighten scholars who seek a sense of social reality in a particular context. Natalie Zemon Davis argues that while ignoring creative and seemingly "fictive" aspects of texts and utilizing a "scientific" process of inquiry might allow one to understand historical *details*, to do so would be to miss the point, because the details themselves do not constitute a cohesive historical whole. In order to appreciate the full value of sources such as novels, one must focus on the fictional aspects of the documents—the process of shaping, forming, molding, and crafting a narrative. According to Davis, the way in which a historical actor *creates* a document such as a novel—the tone, rhetorical devices, and format—matters as much, if not more than, the concrete reality of the narrative. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 2-3.

century.⁴⁴

Using this source type for understanding the lived experience requires a disclaimer because its audience, by definition, was the small but growing literate sector of the population. Nevertheless, Cuéllar makes clear that despite his position as a snooty member of the *gente decente*, he sought to convey his social and cultural commentary on Mexican society to as broad a sector of the populace as possible. In his own words, “*Baile y cochino*” exemplifies the genre of “local human comedy, uniquely Mexican.” At the same time, Cuéllar takes a moralizing pedagogical stance in order to warn his readers of the dangers inherent to the coming of modernity, specifically the importation and penetration of foreign merchandise. He depicts the flow of European material culture as an invasion that could pose a real threat to the “feminine sphere” and subvert progress and modernization by making Mexicans dependent upon “products from Balzac’s country.”⁴⁵

Cuéllar’s moralizing bent comes across in his representation of material imports in Mexico City as a force of perversion. His scorn for the members of the plebe, and specifically, the new facility with which they incorporated European commodities into their personas, suggests that he perceived Mexico’s expanding markets as a real sociocultural threat. If society had remained “typecast” as the idealized sketches in *Los mexicanos* depict, then no threat would have existed because despite certain analogous items of materiality, the “types” would have remained firmly ensconced in their places as either “decent people” or plebeians. By contrast, in his novella, Cuéllar presents a vision of the day-to-day lived

⁴⁴ A rough literal translation of the title “*Baile y cochino*” is “the dance of the pigs,” or “dancing and piggishness.” José Tomás de Cuéllar, *The Magic Lantern: Having a Ball and Christmas Eve*, trans. Margaret Carson, ed. Margo Glantz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ A reference to the perceived Bohemian vulgarity of French culture.

experience in Mexico City that suggests that people *were* using imported material culture to engage in social mobility.

Cuéllar published “*Baile y cochino*” as part of a series entitled La linterna mágica, or The Magic Lantern, comprising twenty-four small volumes. “*Baile y cochino*” first appeared as a serial in a Mexican newspaper and later became a volume published in 1886 in Mexico City.⁴⁶ The plot of the novella seems deceptively simple in comparison to the wealth of underlying insight about the sociocultural impact of imported material goods. The story centers on a gente decente family that decides to host a party. The novelty of constructing a “high society” event in Mexico City during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz offers the major dilemma within the story—establishing who the family considers its social equals, or at least elevated enough in social standing to invite to the ball. In the representative world of Cuéllar’s text, the expanding availability of imported commodities across the social strata was changing Mexican society—tragically, in his view—based on material possessions rather than perceived status or upbringing. According to Margo Glantz, the resulting party, “where people of all social classes and racial types mix together in complete promiscuity,” suggests a brave new world in Mexico, one in which a party provides “a pretext to gather the whole of Mexican society under the same roof.”⁴⁷

Central to the new vision of Mexico is the notion that imported dress offered social mobility to those whose ethnic background or perceived class or race might have inhibited their ability to cavort with their social “betters.” The party in “*Baile y cochino*” serves as a social microcosm for all of Mexico City, a melting pot of sorts in which “an appearance

⁴⁶ Eventually, the Magic Lantern collection was reprinted in Spain.

⁴⁷ Cuéllar, xxx.

determined by dress eliminates class distinctions, and those who belong to classes thought to have no mobility are able to ascend. ‘To be’ and ‘to appear’ once again define reality; thanks to the artifice of cosmetics and shamelessness of fashion, a woman appears to be ‘the other.’”⁴⁸ Within the notion of promiscuity lies the satire driving Cuéllar’s word of warning: the result of this blurring of social classes would be social confusion and disorder—exactly what happens at the party.

These concepts materialize in the novella most clearly in the dramatic tension surrounding a pair of twins, the Machuca sisters, who receive an invitation to the ball despite the perceived indigenous background of the girls. Much of the dialogue among the members of the host family in the days and hours preceding the ball involves an almost-perverse fascination with these girls who were known to be poor, wandered the streets “barefooted,” yet received an invitation because they could keep up “the appearance of elegance” thanks to the new accessibility of European imported clothing to virtually all sectors of society. Cuéllar’s description of these sisters provides the clearest sense of the power of imported European materialism in Mexico City. He suggests that people came to determine class and race by appearance, something concealable and fluid. The Machuca sisters serve as caricatures of the new lived experience in which class had become a more flexible marker of identity.⁴⁹

The nature of this fascination with the twins—and their desirability for the likes of the party hosts—centers on the idea that people were conscious of the transformative power of clothing, in particular, that the sisters could switch from “Indian” to “Caucasian” by simply

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 29.

donning gloves and dresses, the appearance of affluence: “They appeared to belong to the Caucasian race, as long as they wore gloves, but when they took them off, the hands of La Malinche⁵⁰ appeared on the marble bust of Ninon de Lenclos.” Cuéllar implies that “miracle-working satin,” a commodity for sale, could transform the sisters in ways that defied their linguistic limitations, for “whenever they opened their mouths, the imperfect thread became visible.” He also places emphasis on the differences between the public—street—and the private—home—arenas in Mexico City, adding intrigue and even magic to the dramatic tension surrounding these ethnically-ambiguous twins: “they appeared to be beautiful at night, or in the street, but in the morning or at home, the Machuca sisters were nothing more than dark-skinned girls who had been slightly washed.”⁵¹

By including the Machuca sisters as prominent subjects in “*Baile y cochino*,” Cuéllar denies the legitimacy and authenticity of the transformative power of their strategy of class concealment. At the same time, his use of the Machuca sisters testifies to the efficacy, *as a deceit*, of adopting European clothing for mobility purposes. Thus, Cuéllar’s discourse suggests that the sociocultural power of goods was highly contested and polemical among social commentators who perceived that the “miracles” of satin and other European fabrics created the potential for members of the plebe to deceive society, and do so effectively.

The novella shows that women of indigenous and mixed-race ancestry were not the only beneficiaries of the new power of imported clothing.⁵² When Saldaña, a butler for the

⁵⁰ La Malinche, or Doña Marina, was an indigenous companion, mistress, and interpreter for conquistador Hernán Cortés as he made his way from Veracruz to the Mexica capital, Tenochtitlán.

⁵¹ Cuéllar, 29. This evidence suggests that undertones of race comprise an essential part of this type of discursive analysis of material culture. While this chapter does not utilize race as an analytical framework, its thematic prevalence indicates that future studies could employ it.

⁵² Cuéllar seems especially critical of the ways in which Mexican ladies felt driven to emulate what they perceived as European elegance. One could hypothesize that gendered threads might exist in the background of

family hosting the party, envisions owning a frock coat for the first time, his reaction suggests that the “appearance of affluence” offered perceived mobility, and sometimes real mobility, for the urban plebe: “It’s splendid! . . . I’ll look like a king. I’ll create a sensation!” Indeed, Saldaña tempers his exuberance only momentarily to acknowledge that he was allowing himself to place social mobility over the needs of his family: “I just remembered! My poor Lupe! The mother of my children! With all the excitement over the ball, she hasn’t received her daily allowance for three days!” Cuéllar establishes certain similarities between the characters of Saldaña and the Machuca twins in terms of the “inside” and “outside” appearances as well. In his “indoor” or private life, Saldaña is of the servile class, where he eats “turkey with mole sauce, enchiladas, tortillas and beans, and pulque to go with it all,” though he fantasizes about the comparatively elegant “outdoor” or public lifestyle because the nature of his employment gives him the opportunity to adopt the façade of affluence, even to the detriment of his family’s needs.⁵³

Cuéllar does not limit his discussion of the transformative power of European dress to the plebe. He seeks to illustrate that the fascination and preoccupation with imported dress was at the forefront of consciousness for the gente decente as well. In the novella, while the

the lens through which he viewed society, painting women as more susceptible and vulnerable to manipulation by advertisements and popular perceptions about elegance.

⁵³ Cuéllar, 39-41. Bryan McCann explains that this tendency reflects the overall attitudes of the growing middle class: “the advertisers of mass-market commodities were primarily attempting to reach the growing middle class. As Brian Owensby has shown, members of that class spent a far greater percentage of their income on the commodities of the expanding mass market than did the poor and the wealthy. They were willing to go into debt to do so, partly in order to bolster their social status through conspicuous consumption.” McCann, 224. Later in the text, Cuéllar points to the growing importance of pawnshops for Europhilic Mexico City residents such as Saldaña who saw the need to make “sacrifices” in basic household staples, such as food, in order to pour their resources into appearing as cosmopolitan and elegant as possible. For a discussion of the sociocultural role that pawnshops played in nineteenth-century material culture in Mexico City, see Marie Francois, “Cloth and Silver: Pawning and Material Life in Mexico City at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” *The Americas* 60, no. 3 (2004). By contrast, Cuéllar depicts Saldaña’s “mujer,” the mother of his children, as a highly pragmatic figure who sees through the artifice of “affluence” and views with skepticism Saldaña’s enthusiasm for attempting transformation to a higher class through material dress. Cuéllar, 78.

family hosting the party does not seek mobility in the same way as the Machuca sisters and Saldaña pursue it, its members nevertheless idolize European fashion. Cuéllar offers highly satirical descriptions of the ways in which this process materialized in everyday life:

“Fashion has dictates that proper girls obey like galley slaves. Paris has taken charge of correcting her figure, of enlarging, whittling, and streamlining it in order to distance her more and more from our first mother in Paradise.” He introduces the characters of Isaura and Natalia, both fashionable young ladies whose preoccupation with Parisian fashion trends precipitates a scene that illustrates the ludicrous extents to which high-class women went to conform to their perception of European high culture: “With the sharp eye of the young lady of fashion, these girls had noticed that today’s woman should display a protruding curve in the region of the coccyx, neither more nor less than the size of an abscess, an unusual fibroid, or the hump of a dromedary.”⁵⁴ The description provides clear indication of the moralistic undertones in Cuéllar’s narrative. The women’s obsession with perceptions of Parisian fashion constitutes an affront to nature and to intrinsic human beauty.

The most ostentatious example concerns the ball gown of the hostess of the party, Doña Bartola. In one scene, Cuéllar emphasizes, in his scornful, condescending tone, that the preoccupation with making a “dazzling” spectacle of oneself in reality suggests that Mexican elites did not know how to dress in *legitimate* European elegance, and instead developed their own fantastical imitations of it. For example, he describes Doña Bartola’s dress as a panoply of coloration that seems more an artist’s mistake than a majestic elegance: “The dress was made of satin and had an indefinable color, somewhere between mocha and cranberry and verging on rust . . . It contained enough yellow to make it seem neither red nor brown; and it wavered hesitantly toward leaf green.” Furthermore, the Jackson Pollock-style

⁵⁴ Cuéllar, 34-35.

ornamentation of the dress adds to the hilarity of the scene: “enameled beads of a thousand different colors which, in combination, formed a veritable riot of indescribable lights . . . these beads would create a great sensation.” The resulting ten-pound dress “radiated every imaginable color; it lit up like a chandelier and sparkled with the rarest tints and the most incredible hues.”⁵⁵ The satirical depiction of this overblown gown as representative of new trends in mock elegance—ludicrous and utterly un-Mexican—implies Cuéllar’s moralizing critique on the problematic direction of Mexican society as a result of the influence of European culture.

The evidence from Cuéllar’s *Baile y cochino* suggests that imported commodities, particularly clothing, transformed perceptions of class in Mexico City during the nineteenth century. The process by which the proliferation of European items reached members of the plebe and gave them the opportunity for social mobility—in this case, the ability to attend the party—lies at the heart of Cuéllar’s word of warning. He utilizes the outrageous circumstances surrounding the ball as dramatized “proof” that society was unraveling around imported materiality, a complete degeneration of the idealized Mexican “types” into a milieu of frivolity, disorder, unruliness, and debauchery. His depiction of this evolving cultural world suggests that the plebe had infiltrated the *gente decente* to an irreversible extent. The ability of the Machuca sisters to alter their personae by simply putting on gloves, and the fascination among the upper-class family about this process, indicates that in Mexico City society, the transformative power of imported European fashions of dress was significant enough to obscure and complicate the boundary between the plebe and the *gente decente*. Saldaña’s exuberance as he contemplates owning a frock coat, regardless of the expense, suggests that he considers joining the *gente decente* a tenable reality, within reach even for a

⁵⁵ Ibid., 78.

butler. In Porfirian society, a token material item, of clothing in this case, could offer social mobility, if for limited periods of time in the “outdoor” public world of display. Finally, Cuéllar’s description of Doña Bartola’s ostentatious dress suggests that imported commodities solidified and exacerbated elites’ desires to replicate European high culture, often to an outrageous extent.

It is important to return to the question of genre, to acknowledge that the discursive universe of Cuéllar’s storytelling is a fantastical creation that includes substantial embellishment and exaggeration for dramatic appeal and to address the author’s frequently reiterated purpose of satirizing the ludicrous, materialist Porfirian society and imposing his moralization over it. At the same time, the novella has evidentiary value for this chapter because, in comparison to the types of sources that Rebecca Earle uses, Cuéllar’s text exists in much closer proximity to the world that it describes. “*Baile y cochino*” is a social satire written in Mexico City; its original audience was the same group of literate Mexicans who it satirizes. Thus, both the dialogue and the overall circumstances of the plot must contain a certain level of fidelity to the lived experience in order for readers at the time to take the novella seriously. The fact that Cuéllar’s text went from a serial in a newspaper to publication in a volume, and later to an English translation, suggests that its audience in Mexico City thought that it made a legitimate and insightful social commentary. The fact that the novella exists in close association with the lived experience—certainly closer than Earle’s sources—validates using this source for analyzing the mobility that imported commodities introduced into the Mexican metropolis. Cuéllar’s scornful chronicle, by definition, shows that mobility through material culture was something real for Mexico City residents by the late nineteenth century.

Conclusion

Understanding how these foreign goods affected life in post-independence Mexico City is a challenging endeavor, replete with contradictions and inconsistencies that should be apparent by now. But it also is a worthwhile endeavor. By using a methodology that emphasizes sources created in Mexico City at the time, most for distribution to a broad popular, if literate, audience, this chapter hopes to offer an accurate reflection of the lived experience on the ground. The documentary records suggest that imported commodities from Europe transformed the sociocultural experience for the residents of Mexico City. Statistical sources indicate that the value of imported items, especially textiles, increased at a greater rate than the population. The abundance of goods did not continue to exist only in the realm of the wealthy, but instead reached most sectors of society. Newspaper advertisements of these commodities portray them as affordable, complementing the existing designators of luxury and innovativeness with a new sense of accessibility to a broad sector of the populace.

The pictorial self-representation of Mexican archetypes in the Los mexicanos collection suggests that, indeed, people from all walks of life, in both the *gente decente* and the *plebe*, incorporated European clothing and accoutrements into their identity and self-construction. Finally, the evidence from José Tomás de Cuéllar's novella "*Baile y cochino*" suggests that people consciously utilized the transformative power of imported commodities to obtain social mobility. Dresses, gloves, and frock coats allow characters to transcend the boundaries of the *gente decente* and the *plebe*. The example of the Machuca twins is particularly revealing in terms of the power of goods to drive social mobility by blurring existing class distinctions within people's sensibilities.

These findings have several implications. In particular, this chapter invites future studies on material culture in Mexico City to steer clear of sources of foreign origin, including those displaying outsiders' attitudes such as the ones that Rebecca Earle employs. Instead, using data, testimony, and discourse created in the area of study, and even for the subject population, can reveal aspects about sociocultural circumstances, especially involving social mobility, that outsiders might have missed because they were not ensconced in the day-to-day lived experience of the place. The tension and contestation surrounding the imported commodities, in particular, the notion of a "threat" to the established social classes that Cuéllar discusses, serves as a key example of the nuances that one can gain only from a close scrutiny of internal sources.

This chapter seeks to show that imported commodities can play a far broader role in defining sociocultural identity than one might think. And when placing the case of Mexico in conversation with that of other countries with similar transoceanic trade connections, one notes that internal social dynamics were not the only impact of foreign goods. As the next chapter shows, by the end of the nineteenth century, the penetration of items from abroad into society could represent the strongest association between the cosmopolitan Latin America and the outside world.

CHAPTER 2

SYMBOLS OF COMMERCE: EXPLORING THE PLACE OF THE UNITED STATES IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CARACAS

On a sultry afternoon in late 1899, Doña María, a hypothetical member of the consuming public in Caracas, visited her local *bodega* in Chacao for a package of “*Harinolina*” cooking oil, one dozen “*Velas Estéricas*” candles, a bottle of “*Alizo*” champagne, a box of “*El Águila*” matches, a package of “*Flor Patria*” cigarettes, and a package of lace ribbon. Let us imagine that at a store in the nearby neighborhood of Los Dos Caminos, Doña Dilia, another representative housewife, purchased a bar of “*Dos Flechas*” soap, a bar of “*El Indio*” Colombian chocolate, and two bottles of the latest curative *jarabes*, or liquid medicines, “*Quita Dolor Javillano*” and “*Jarabe de Tabonuco al Guayacol*.”⁵⁶ Upon their return home, both women might have encountered their husbands reading the advertising section of *El Cojo Ilustrado*, the local newspaper, gazing at the latest North American technological marvels that had just become available in Caracas.

Why imagine this seemingly unremarkable scenario? The answer is surprising. Every single item that Doña María brought from the *bodega* featured a proud, defiant, open-beaked, majestic-winged bird of prey on the packaging, and not just any one: the unmistakable North American Bald Eagle. In the case of the fabric packaging, the eagle appeared surrounded with a circle of stars, while in the cigarette and cooking oil packaging, the eagle clutched a ribbon with the statements “*Non omnia possumus omnes*” and “*No hay*

⁵⁶ See Doña María’s purchases in Appendix A, and Doña Dilia’s in Appendix B.

más allá,” respectively.

Doña Dilia’s purchases, on the other hand, featured images of distinctively North American “Indians.” The chocolate bar featured a side portrait of an Indian chief, complete with head adornments with feathers. The “Quita Dolor Javillano” featured an Indian warrior in a defensive position, clutching a spear, while the “Jarabe de Tabonuco al Guayacol” portrayed an Indian in a feathered headdress sitting atop a rock with a Davy-Crockett style musket at his side. Finally, the box of matches showed an Indian wearing a loincloth, aiming a taut bow and arrow.

This artwork contains unmistakable symbolic references to the United States. Even today, the Bald Eagle and the Native American Indian remain two of the most recognizable images associated with U.S. ideology, nationalism, and history. The eagle represents liberty, freedom, strength, and determination. The venerable tribal hero-warrior embodies honor, courage, nobility, and dignity. While the two matriarchs are products of our imagination, the product references are quite real. They raise a quintessential question: why would anyone in Venezuela appropriate these images? It seems clear that Venezuelan manufacturers believed that symbols of the United States enhanced the appeal of their products. Such appeal would require popular familiarity with the images. Therefore, the appearance of the Bald Eagle and the Native American Indian on Venezuelan product packaging suggests a fairly close relationship between the United States and Venezuela.

Today, this point seems unquestionable: the Venezuelan marketplace models U.S. consumer culture. Shopping malls similar to those throughout the United States dot the landscape of cosmopolitan Caracas. Judith Ewell argues that Venezuela is the most “Americanized” of any nation in Latin America: “Venezuelans watch *Dallas* on television as

avidly as *Cristal*; vacation in Miami as well as in Margarita; drink *guiski* [whisky] with Coca Cola; . . . dance equally to the beat of Oscar D'León and Michael Jackson."⁵⁷ The emergence of Venezuela as a "petroleum empire," in the words of Ewell, has solidified Venezuela's position as the nation in the hemisphere most inevitably and inextricably wedded to the United States, despite the often-turbulent "love-hate" relationship in the political realm.⁵⁸ But what common roots exist in the stories of the United States and Venezuela? In the nineteenth century, when it was developing as a nation, how did Venezuela engage with its powerful neighbor to the north? At the level of quotidian life, what type and extent of power did the United States have in the representative world, the cultural imaginary, of the Venezuelan populace?

The existing scholarship offers two perspectives on the relationship between the United States and Venezuela during the nineteenth century. A number of scholars describe the relationship as one that originated ostensibly in trade, yet had underlying romanticized notions of destiny. Janet Kelly and Carlos Romero argue that Venezuela's early independence story followed from the success of ideologies of liberty in North America. They point to George Washington and Simón Bolívar as analogous liberators, heroes of independence "link[ing] the historical traditions of both countries." They point to a close relationship between the United States and Venezuela in the nineteenth century that resulted from "their common birthright as countries born of the first wars for independence in the Western Hemisphere[,] . . . we can say that the United States and Venezuela are linked in parallel lives as the 'new nations' that . . . set out on a common adventure." Kelly and

⁵⁷ Judith Ewell, *Venezuela and the United States: From Monroe's Hemisphere to Petroleum's Empire* (Athens, GA; London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 5.

⁵⁸ See Carlos Rangel, *The Latin Americans: Their Love-Hate Relationship with the United States*, trans. Ivan Kats (New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977).

Romero synthesizes the notion by arguing that the United States and Venezuela had a shared destiny as both sought to liberate themselves from European imperialist control.⁵⁹ This collective ideology, while common to most of independent Latin America during the nineteenth century, held particular resonance in Venezuela.

Judith Ewell points to this romanticized, idealized relationship in her discussion of the “cult of Bolívar,” whom she associates with George Washington. She notes that during the reign of “strong-man” dictator Antonio Guzmán Blanco in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Venezuelans idolized Bolívar and equated him with the values of liberty and republicanism of the U.S. Revolutionary War: “The newly sanctified Bolívar . . . represented national unity, American republicanism, and glorification of the educated and racially pure elite hero.” Indeed, Ewell explains, Guzmán Blanco sought to establish a tangible connection in the Venezuelan imaginary between the two republics: “Guzmán Blanco also embraced the symbolic heroism of George Washington, encouraging the popular view of the historical parallels between the two American liberators.” Guzmán even dedicated a Caracas plaza to Bolívar’s North American counterpart, complete with a statue.⁶⁰ Primary evidence from outside the governmental realm shows consistency with Ewell’s work. In the early twentieth century, British traveler William Corlett visited Caracas and, noting the prominence of the “Plaza Washington,” he contemplated the underlying connotations about U.S.-Venezuelan relations: “The Republic of Venezuela has copied largely from her elder

⁵⁹ Janet Kelly and Carlos A. Romero, Introduction, *The United States and Venezuela: Rethinking a Relationship*, Contemporary Inter-American Relations Series, eds. Jorge Domínguez and Rafael Fernández de Castro (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), 6-7.

⁶⁰ Ewell, 67-68.

sister, the United States of North America.”⁶¹

In theory, this discourse of a romanticized relationship, if it existed in a broad sector of the population, could help to explain why symbols of North America were so pervasive in Venezuelan culture by the late nineteenth century. Elsewhere in the world, idealized symbols of independence and freedom enjoyed substantial popularity. For example, Karl May, a popular German novelist of the era, used the Native American Indian in his work. He created a fictional Apache chief, Winnetou, and wrote a series of novels discussing his adventures and exploits in the Wild West. Through his work, May contributed an image of North America to the cultural imaginary of the German population: the dignified “Indian” meeting the challenge of Manifest Destiny with honor and courage.⁶² The covers of the novels feature color illustrations of this chief in caricaturized, stereotypical postures of power and dignity very similar to those appearing on the Venezuelan products. May constructs Winnetou as the archetypal Native American warrior.⁶³

However, this stereotyped, romanticized vision of an irrevocable connection of destiny between the United States and Venezuela that Kelly and Romero offer, and of which Karl May’s work serves as an example, cannot explain why visual imagery associated with North America became so ingrained in the cultural universe of Venezuela’s ordinary people.

⁶¹ William Thomas Corlett, The American Tropics: Notes from the Log of a Midwinter Cruise (Cleveland, OH: The Burrows Brother Company, 1908), 98-99.

⁶² Michael Kimmelman, “In Germany, Wild for Winnetou” New York Times 12 September 2007, online, accessed 14 October 2007, <<http://www.nytimes.com>>.

⁶³ Karl May, Winnetou: Erster Band (Bamberg, Germany: Karl-May-Verlag, 1951); *Ibid.*, Winnetou: Zweiter Band (Bamberg, Germany: Karl-May-Verlag, 1951); *Ibid.*, Winnetou: Dritter Band (Bamberg, Germany: Karl-May-Verlag, 1951). These novels were part of a larger literary phenomenon associated with a fascination across Europe with the place of the “Indian.” José Miguel Salazar notes that stereotypes are an essential component of identity for any group, including Venezuelans: “Stereotypes settle on a very human characteristic of categorizing and simplifying in excess . . . like it or not, stereotypes exist, transmit, reinforce, and guide human conduct.” José Miguel Salazar, “Perspectivas psicosociales de la identidad venezolana,” Identidades Nacionales en América Latina, Coord. José Miguel Salazar (Caracas, Venezuela: Fondo Editorial de Humanidades y Educación, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2001), 117.

The rhetorical lens forces the scholar into the realm of metaphor and representation, even when discussing major political events and economic trends. It offers no major assistance in understanding the quotidian experience among the consuming populace in Caracas. Scholars have yet to uncover evidence on the extent to which these references circulated in the country.

A second major current of scholarship describes the nineteenth-century relationship between Venezuela and the United States from a diplomatic angle, highlighting major political events and interactions rather than quotidian life and commercial relations. In a 1964 dissertation, Benjamin Frankel argues that the intervention of North America in Venezuelan affairs did not result exclusively from the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary, but instead from Venezuela's continual requests for intervention. Furthermore, he claims that the nineteenth century experience fostered a negative image of the United States in Venezuela, a "rejection of United States cultural values . . . because . . . [they] are unique and therefore alien to the rest of the hemisphere." According to Frankel, the United States had trouble convincing Latin American nations of its benevolence because the "hemisphere . . . continue[d] to insist that the Yankee is soulless, materialist, and completely lacking in an ideology."⁶⁴ It seems apparent that Frankel's study emerged from a decidedly tense and polarized moment in U.S.-Latin American relations at the height of the Cold War. The study has so overpowering an ideological bent that it offers little insight into the quotidian, commercial relationship between the two countries by the end of the nineteenth century.

Other scholars employ a similar focus on diplomatic and political issues. Sheldon Liss offers an explicit argument about focusing on U.S.-Venezuelan relations through a

⁶⁴ Benjamin Adam Frankel, Venezuela and the United States, 1810-1880 (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1964), iii, vi.

diplomatic lens. He focuses on the dissolution of Bolívar's Gran Colombia, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States, and the U.S. intervention in the Venezuelan dispute with Great Britain over the eastern boundary with British Guyana.⁶⁵ Vilma Petráš analogizes the relationship between the United States and Venezuela to that between the United States and Canada. She argues that few countries in Latin America have sustained so close a relationship with North America, "not only at the level of state to state—in diplomacy and politics, economics, and culture—but also in non-governmental areas."⁶⁶ Nevertheless, she structures the substance of her narrative around describing major treaties and military offensives, including the War of 1812 against the British and the U.S.-Spanish negotiations over the relinquishing of Florida to North American control. She emphasizes events involving major politicians such as Bolívar, Francisco Miranda, and José Antonio Páez, another of Venezuela's independence heroes. When trade enters her analysis of U.S.-Venezuelan relations, it does so in the realm of international politics, such as her discussion of political turbulence associated with U.S. consular claims of discriminatory treatment of North American cargo vessels in comparison to that of British vessels.⁶⁷

Judith Ewell's discussion of the nineteenth century offers generous discussion of the development of political and diplomatic relations as well, though she puts a colorful twist on

⁶⁵ Sheldon B. Liss, Diplomacy & Dependency: Venezuela, the United States, and the Americas (Salisbury, NC: Documentary Publications, 1978), iv, 5, 9-11, 12-13, 16-17, 23-26. For a detailed discussion of the Venezuelan boundary dispute, see Lars Schoultz, Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁶⁶ Vilma E. Petráš, Venezuela y los Estados Unidos: Orígenes y evolución de una "relación especial" (Caracas, Venezuela: Edición por demanda/Comala.com/Galaxia.com, 2000), 13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21-23. On the shipping claims: "En efecto, [la precariedad económica] se trató de dificultades usualmente originadas por los daños sufridos por los norteamericanos como consecuencia del estado de turbulencia política que aquejaba al país, así como por la desatención del gobierno venezolano a los reclamos hechos por los cónsules de EE.UU. en La Guaira y Puerto Cabello en relación con esos daños, y por el presunto trato discriminatorio que Venezuela daba a los buques norteamericanos vis-à-vis el recibido por los que ostentaban pabellón británico." *Ibid.*, 31. The issue of claims regarding maritime vessels was central to discourse on Venezuela within the houses of the U.S. Congress, as the first major section of this chapter argues.

it. She invokes traditional Venezuelan folklore to describe the U.S.-Venezuelan relationship as a metaphorical connection between the clever rabbit, “*Tío Conejo*,” and the ferocious tiger, “*Tío Tigre*.” She characterizes the political relationship between the two countries as one in which the rabbit has tried to escape from the metaphorical claws of the tiger, without success: “Of course, *el conejo* could never definitively defeat *el tigre*, or alter the skewed power relationship between them. But his cleverness could ensure survival and a degree of independence beyond the reach of the tiger’s powerful claws.”⁶⁸ While Ewell’s intervention takes a unique form by acknowledging the folkloric, proverbial side of international relations, it remains wedded to the political realm.

In short, these scholars describe the Venezuelan-U.S. relationship through a lens of international politics and diplomacy, focusing on major events and leaders’ actions. They do not discuss the place of the United States in the imaginary of the Venezuelan mainstream population in the course of everyday life. Looking at the existing body of scholarship, one notes a methodological problem: treaties and political memoranda inform very little about the lived experience on the ground in Venezuela, and they tell even less about the mindset of individuals, such as the fictional Doña María and Doña Dilia, who confronted symbols of the United States around the beginning of the twentieth century.

The shortcomings in the current historiography in the realm of Venezuelan quotidian life offer a point of departure for this research. How, and to what extent, did representations of the United States enter the representative world of the Venezuelan populace? By moving away from describing the Venezuelan-United States connection through a political, diplomatic lens, and concentrating instead on evidence of an *unofficial* relationship, one can draw more specific conclusions about the coming together of the two countries. This chapter

⁶⁸ Ewell, 2.

utilizes a variety of forms of evidence, many from Venezuela, to examine the relationship in trade and everyday life. It seeks to illustrate the place of the United States in Venezuela as the ordinary population would have experienced it. The documentation suggests that the most powerful and enduring angle of relations between Venezuela and the United States during the nineteenth century was *not* in the realm of diplomacy and high politics, as some scholars imply. Instead, trade, especially the importation of products and symbols, shaped Venezuelan attitudes toward the United States and fostered the inextricable link that has become so powerful in the past century. Three lines of reasoning support this claim.

First, the official discourse between Venezuela and the United States was quite limited in scope and extent until the 1890s. A survey of the Congressional Record and its antecedents suggests that the only, and minimal, interest of the U.S. government in Venezuela, until the Guyana boundary dispute, centered on humanitarian aid, repayment of debts, and maritime claims. Furthermore, Latin American intellectuals, including Rubén Darío, Rufino Blanco Fombona, José María Vargas Vila, and César Zumeta, condemned, rather than praised, the influence of the United States—commercial, political, and otherwise—in Venezuela and other countries in the region. The evidence from these official and intellectual circles cannot explain the symbolic connections between the two countries that existed in the quotidian world.

Second, the substantial trade network between the two countries gave Venezuelans a window into U.S. materiality. Statistical evidence from Venezuela indicates that the level of importation of U.S. commodities far exceeded the potential demands of the miniscule population of expatriates. The data suggest that these goods entered the marketplace for ordinary members of society. On the export side, the United States was the most important

market for Venezuelan raw materials. In addition, newspaper advertisements, such as the ones in El Cojo Ilustrado that appears in the fictional opening vignette, suggest that the literate classes received constant reminders of innovative imported U.S. products.

Third, Venezuelans exhibited a fascination for North American developments—cultural, political, technological, scientific, and otherwise. A collection of articles in El Cojo Ilustrado describing localized and technological news from the United States suggests that ordinary Venezuelans grasped with enthusiasm for information about events taking place in the paradise of modernity to the north.

In sum, the evidence shows that one must look beyond official discourse and intellectual currents to understand how Venezuela and the United States came to enjoy the powerful commercial ties that the use of the Bald Eagle and the Native American Indian represent. This chapter argues that trade allowed Venezuela to develop a powerful and enduring cultural discourse with the United States, independent of sporadic official contact and cynical intellectual currents, because high levels of transoceanic commerce brought North American products into the mainstream Venezuelan marketplace.

Exploring Discourse in Official and Intellectual Circles

Much of the existing scholarship could lead one to conclude that Venezuela and the United States enjoyed substantive and regular diplomatic and political relations during the nineteenth century. Benjamin Frankel, Sheldon Liss, and Vilma Petráš all point to the political realm as the one in which the two countries engaged with greatest regularity after independence. Furthermore, the work of Judith Ewell, Janet Kelly, and Carlos Romero implies that, in order for such a link based on mutual ideologies and sentiments of destiny to

exist, diplomatic relations must have propagated and bolstered international cooperation between the two countries. Thus, one might expect to find substantial official discourse between Venezuelan and U.S. policymakers, building gradually over the course of the nineteenth century.

However, two collections of evidence suggest that that this assumption is far from the truth. A survey of the United States Congressional Record and its antecedent publications suggests that for much of the century, policymakers engaged in very little official discourse on Venezuela on the floors of the House and Senate. When Venezuela did receive attention, congressmen focused on the issue of maritime claims against its government, seeking “award” payment for damages that U.S. vessels suffered, for their detention at the major Venezuelan port of La Guaira and elsewhere, and for the preference that the Venezuelan government ostensibly gave to British commercial vessels over North American ones. The policymakers offered no indications that Venezuela held any significance for their purposes except as a debtor. The series of brief discussions on Venezuela did not enter the realm of trade in any substantive way. Furthermore, the writings of Latin Americans suggest that the intelligentsia throughout the region showed strong opposition toward, not support of, the notion of solidarity between Venezuela and the United States. They believed the United States was exploiting the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 to replace Europe as the hegemon of the Western Hemisphere. Therefore, official and intellectual exchanges were very limited and cannot explain how North American symbols enjoyed such visibility and acceptance among the Venezuelan populace.

Reparations from maritime claims against the South American country dominated rhetoric on Venezuela in the U.S. Congress until the 1890s. In particular, proceedings and

debates from the 1870s and 1880s focused on obtaining the “awards” that Venezuela owed the United States. On Tuesday, December 7, 1875, in his annual message to Congress, President Ulysses S. Grant declared that after much prodding, Venezuela had “practically abandoned its objection to pay” the awards to U.S. traders who brought the claims against the government for lost revenue and damages. He cautioned, however, that “its payments on account of claims of citizens of the United States are still so meager in amount” that Venezuela seemed to be disregarding its repayment obligations under treaties that the two countries had signed agreeing to the payment amounts and frequencies.⁶⁹

The U.S. government felt sufficient concern over this lack of payment that on April 25, 1866, it established a special joint convention with Venezuela to investigate the maritime claims that U.S. citizens and interests made against the South American country. The convention between the two countries emerged in print as a presidential proclamation the following year. The document explains the exact procedures by which commissioners from both countries would meet to discuss claims and order payments.⁷⁰ The commission also served as an independent entity to which United States citizens could submit their claims for arbitration by a joint panel, instead of submitting them to the Venezuelan government directly.⁷¹ The purpose of the commission was to ensure that Venezuela paid its claims so that relations between the two countries would remain cordial and productive.

⁶⁹ “Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Fourth Congress, First Session,” Congressional Record (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1876), 176-178.

⁷⁰ “Convention between the United States of America and the Republic of Venezuela,” 25 April 1866, (HeinOnline 16 Stat. 713 1848-1871), 713-715.

⁷¹ For a thorough discussion of the historical background leading to the creation of the commission, and also for several examples of these claims with dollar amounts, see a report to the Committee on Foreign Affairs reprinted in “Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Fourth Congress, First Session,” Congressional Record (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1876), 5467-5471.

Much of the discourse in Congress following this bilateral agreement, and the commission it created, concerned its enforcement and implications. Most of the references are extremely brief and contain only the title or a sentence concerning the commission. It is likely that these references involved no open discussion on the House floor, but rather were part of the endless shuffle of paperwork in Congress—receipts of payments and interest due on the U.S. claims from Venezuela, requests for information from the President or Secretary of State on accumulated revenues, and similar documents. In one discussion, members of Congress debated a request for the clerk to read a certain joint Congressional resolution concerning repayment from Venezuela aloud for the record, followed by a much more extensive report to the Committee on Foreign Affairs regarding the specifics of the claims issue in Venezuela.⁷²

The assembled representatives engaged in a lively debate over a Venezuelan contention that the commission was not a legitimate bilateral entity, but instead was under U.S. control that inflated the amounts of Venezuela's debts. One Congressman interpreted the situation in a very different way: "Venezuela is now a suitor against the United States and demands that the United States relinquish the claims which the arbitration has solemnly adjudicated in our favor." Another held a more tempered position: "The truth is that

⁷² Ibid., 1968, 2243, 2360, 3097, 5467. For similar discussions later in the century, see "Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Fifth Congress, Third Session," Congressional Record—Senate (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1879), 4491-4492, 4885; "Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Sixth Congress, Second Session," Congressional Record—Senate (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1880), 595; "Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Seventh Congress, First Session," Congressional Record—House (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1882), 4244; "Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Eighth Congress, First Session," Congressional Record—House (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1884), 1395, 2174, 2430, 3138, 5821; "Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Ninth Congress, First Session," Congressional Record—Senate (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1886), 808; "Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Ninth Congress, Second Session," Congressional Record—House (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1887), 1450, 1821; "Proceedings and Debates of the Fiftieth Congress, First Session," Congressional Record—Senate (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1888), 1866, 2873; "Proceedings and Debates of the Fiftieth Congress, Second Session," Congressional Record—Senate (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1889), 546, 1073, 1916; "Proceedings and Debates of the Fifty-First Congress, First Session," Congressional Record—Senate (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1889), 6008.

Venezuela has never refused to pay any portion of the claims . . . she has expressed her anxiety to pay them all just as fast as she had any money to do so.” In the end, the Congressmen concurred that Venezuela had paid only 15% of the \$459,000 that it owed in U.S. claims by August 11, 1876.⁷³

It is not surprising that Congress held concerns about the Venezuelan claims and the resulting revenue that it owed the U.S. Treasury. The United States was at a crucial stage in national recovery following the Civil War and sought to showcase its resolve on the international stage while engaging in the domestic economic recovery that it needed in order to move forward. The debate among Congressmen about whether to offer lenience toward Venezuela seems more a reflection on the attitude they took toward foreign relations in general, in an effort to show the strength of a fractured but healing nation. Indeed, none of the rhetoric acknowledges anything specific or unique to the South American country. Venezuela seems to have existed as merely a debtor for the Congressmen who discussed it. The relative paucity of occasions when the topic of Venezuela entered Congressional rhetoric, and the generalized nature of it, suggests that Venezuela itself was not a major interest or concern to the United States government for much of the nineteenth century.

The intellectual currents within Latin America during the late eighteenth century offer another possible interpretation of the role of the United States in Venezuela. Given that contemporary scholars have “almost completely ignored Latin American views of the United States,” as Jack Ray Thomas argues, one cannot expect a broad historiography to establish precise schools of thought among Latin American writers from the late nineteenth century.⁷⁴

⁷³ “Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Fourth Congress, First Session,” 5467-5475.

⁷⁴ Jack Ray Thomas, “Latin American Views of United States Politics in the Nineteenth Century,” Journal of the Early American Republic 12 (1992), 358.

However, Maurice Belrose offers a helpful compendium of the dominant perspectives among intellectuals in the region on the growing influence of “Uncle Sam” throughout Latin America.⁷⁵ According to Belrose, Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío led a cadre of thinkers who viewed the North American commercial and political incursions into Latin America with great concern. These intellectuals published their writings in El Cojo Ilustrado for public consumption in Caracas. In October of 1898, Darío analogized the U.S.-Latin American relationship to that between the characters of Caliban and Ariel in Shakespeare’s The Tempest.⁷⁶ He argued that the United States represented Caliban, a savage, cannibalistic menace that threatened Latin American progress and solidarity: “The image of Caliban is a caricature designed to inspire repulsion and fear. The North Americans . . . were ‘eaters of raw meat,’ ‘bestial blacksmiths,’ . . . ‘enemies of all identity.’”⁷⁷ Darío held that the United States had allied with England to reinforce and perpetuate the “Anglo-Saxon race” and utilized the Monroe Doctrine to establish mercantilist relationships with Latin American countries. Venezuela, in particular, appears in Darío’s prose: “The case of Venezuela reveals that when economic interests of a colonial and imperialist type are in play, the pertinence of

⁷⁵ Belrose explains that relations between Latin America and the United States were a central issue for intellectuals in the region before World War I, especially in the wake of the War of 1898, one of the earliest projections of U.S. influence—political, military, economic, and symbolic—into Latin America.

⁷⁶ Maurice Belrose, “Latinidad vs. imperialismo yanqui en *El Cojo Ilustrado*, 1898-1903,” Casa de las Américas 211 (1998), 72-73. The invocation of Shakespeare’s play enjoys some popularity among scholars, though some employ it to describe the earlier relationship between Britain and its colonies, pointing to the similarities between the plot of the play and the shipwreck account of Sir Thomas Gates in 1609 near Bermuda as he sailed from Britain to become the new governor of Virginia. Shakespeare himself was an investor in the Virginia Company. Others link the caricaturized figures of Caliban and Prospero in The Tempest to the process of Spanish exploration and colonization of the Caribbean islands. See Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); also, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ Belrose, 73.

the ‘Latin race’ . . . is insufficient to impede an alliance of Hispanic, Anglo-Saxon, and Germanic countries against a single unified Latin American nation.”⁷⁸ Darío likely was pointing to the political ramifications of the remarkable level of importation of U.S. commodities into Venezuela, as the data in the next section illustrate. The commercial relationship, he contended, reinforced a neocolonial relationship while hindering the development of solidarity between Venezuela and its sister nations in the region.

This current among intellectuals of Latin American solidarity against a “bestial,” imperialist United States continued during the transition into the twentieth century. Venezuelan intellectual Rufino Blanco Fombona denounced U.S. global dominance and the “‘practical [pragmatic] spirit’ of the Anglo-Saxon civilization” in 1899.⁷⁹ Blanco Fombona saw the United States as acting in opposition to the idealistic, patriotic spirit in Latin America that had begun with leaders such as Bolívar and continued to dominate intellectual rhetoric. Soon after, the French magazine Renaissance Latine conducted a survey of five Latin American intellectuals, Marcos Aurelio Soto from Honduras, José María Vargas Vila from Colombia, Blanco Fombona and César Zumeta from Venezuela, and Darío from Nicaragua, to determine the intellectual position within the region on the future of the Latin American republics, the influence of the United States in the region, and the concept of “Pan-Americanism.” Their responses suggest a clear focus on Europe in intellectual circles, using idealistic neocolonial sentiments as a means of resisting North American expansionism. The intellectuals strongly opposed invocations of the Monroe Doctrine by the United States to promulgate its influence in the region.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Soto concurred with Darío's "Caliban" analogy, arguing that the United States was an "imperialist and aggressive nation desiring to impose the domination of the 'Anglo-Saxon race' on Latin America." He also saw the Anglo-Saxon race as lacking in the "sentimentalism and idealism" present in the Hispanic-American race.⁸⁰ Vargas Vila called for large-scale resistance to the "silent invasion of the United States," in the curious form of "large rival confederations" in South America that would fight each other, one integrating Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, and another encompassing Argentina and Chile. He opposed the notion of "Pan-Americanism" because he thought that genuine Latin American culture "had no North American cultural and intellectual influence" and instead was "essentially French, and hostile toward the Anglo-Saxon spirit." Blanco Fombona held similarly critical sentiments regarding Pan-Americanism, considering it "an instrument in the hands of the United States." He opposed "*panlatinismo*," a term referring to Latin American, as opposed to full hemispheric, solidarity. However, he preferred to visualize a grand South America such as Bolívar's failed experiment of "Gran Colombia," instead of warring rival supranational factions.⁸¹

Darío condemned the notion of "Pan-Americanism" as well, considering it, in the words of Belrose, "an invention of the United States to inundate the markets of the 'new continent' with its products." He believed that South America should form a "vast empire that might be the 'savior of the *Latino* spirit.'"⁸² In his pessimistic view, César Zumeta

⁸⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid. Darío believed that the United States already had "conquered" Mexico and Central America, leaving South America as the new frontier of potential resistance. The term "*Latino*" in this context refers to the common understanding of its use during the nineteenth-century—in reference to the people of Latin America—not today's usage to refer to people of Latin American ancestry living in the United States.

labeled the entire continent “infirm” and claimed that “two Latin Americas” existed: the “extra-tropical” countries, Chile and Argentina, that were “out of danger” of U.S. expansionism, and the “intertropical” countries bordering the Caribbean that were “in immediate danger of absorption by the United States.” Zumeta deemed Pan-Americanism an “economic and political impossibility” and an “application of imperialism” that jeopardized Latin American solidarity.⁸³

Thus, while these intellectuals might have disagreed on the specifics of creating Latin American solidarity and unity, all resisted U.S. expansionist efforts. They saw the notion of “Pan-Americanism” as nothing more than the Monroe Doctrine in disguise, and called instead for unity in Latin America. It is important to acknowledge that not all Latin American intellectuals opposed North American intervention. According to Belrose, two Venezuelans, Juan Liscano and Andrés Vigas, published articles defending the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary as the only way to allow Latin America finally to complete its dissociation from Europe. Belrose explains that this pro-U.S. intellectual discourse arose from those who saw Latin America’s development as emerging only through a merging with North American interests. Imitation of the United States, and close ties to its commercial universe, offered the only model for emerging from underdevelopment and “barbarism.”⁸⁴

As this section shows, neither the official discourse in the U.S. Congress on Venezuela nor the writing of Latin American intellectuals offers an explanation for the ostensibly close relationship that the product packaging implies in its incorporation of the Native American Indian and the Bald Eagle. Until the end of the century, policymakers in the U.S. Congress treated Venezuela as nothing more than an occasional annoyance.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Furthermore, most Latin American intellectuals at the time viewed the United States with suspicion and called for an ideological and political distancing, not a romanticized commercial unification, of the region from the grasp of Uncle Sam. The data on importation in the next section show why distance might have been necessary. Venezuelans consumed more, not less, merchandise from the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century. Even within the pages of El Cojo Ilustrado, a taste for imported products overpowered impassioned anti-imperialist rhetoric.

Importation and Advertising in Caracas

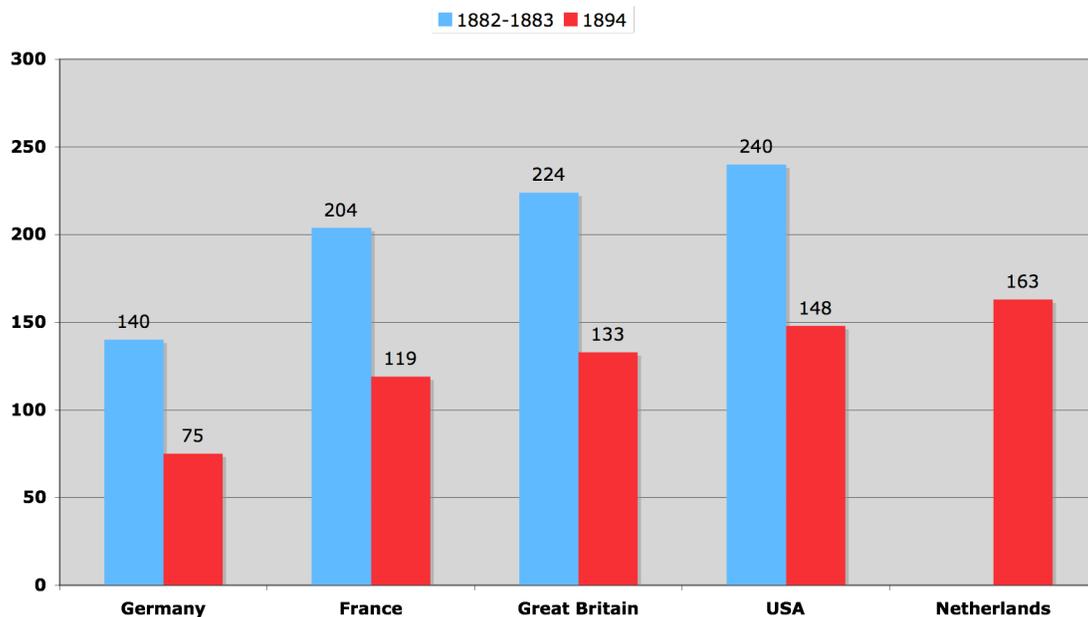
The economic relationship between the United States and Venezuela has strong documentation. Vilma Petráš argues that the initial contact between the countries during the eighteenth century was commercial, in which the United States acted as the supplier for Venezuela of products of all origins, including European and even African. These products included machinery, tools, wheat flour, and slaves. Petráš notes that this early trade relationship drove the establishment of one of the earliest U.S. consulates in South America in La Guaira, Venezuela, in 1800. The collapse of Spanish colonial power in the Americas precipitated further growth of U.S.-Venezuelan trade.⁸⁵

In her limited discussion of imported commodities, Judith Ewell explains that the commercial connections between the United States and Venezuela became even more solidified after independence. Steam power made Venezuela a central market for U.S. commodities by mid-century. Venezuela enjoyed a privileged position among the Latin American countries in its foreign trade with the United States. Its Caribbean ports were the only ones in South America to receive direct steamship service from the north, through the

⁸⁵ Petráš, 19-20.

Red D Line, a partnership of a Philadelphia shipping company and the John Boulton Company, a British shipping operation in Venezuela. Indeed, as Figure 15 illustrates, during 1882-1883, 240 ships of U.S. registry entered and departed from Venezuela, more than any other overseas power. In 1894, only the Netherlands slightly surpassed the United States as the dominant foreign commercial presence in Venezuela, no doubt because of Dutch bases in nearby Aruba and Curaçao.⁸⁶

FIGURE 15
Selected Foreign Vessels Entering/Departing Venezuelan Ports



Source: *Statistical Annuary of the United States of Venezuela* (Caracas, Venezuela: Government's Lithographic and Steam Printing Office, 1884), 7; *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1894* (Caracas, Venezuela: Tipografía Moderna, 1896), 225, 229.

Ewell also points to international expositions as central to the commercial relationship between Venezuela and the United States. Venezuela exhibited its products at North American expositions, while the United States sent delegations and products to Venezuela in 1883. By the end of the century, a permanent exposition of U.S. manufactured goods existed

⁸⁶ Ewell, 45; *Statistical Annuary of the United States of Venezuela* (Caracas, Venezuela: Government's Lithographic and Steam Printing Office, 1884), 7; *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1894* (Caracas, Venezuela: Tipografía Moderna, 1896), 225, 229.

in Caracas, representing the National Association of Manufacturers.⁸⁷ However, Ewell focuses on the negotiations of trading rather than on the quotidian effects of international commerce.

The relative lack of scholarly interest in the role of symbols in the U.S.-Venezuelan commercial relationship during the nineteenth century is not surprising. One might think that the images of the Bald Eagle and the Native American Indian present on packaging in Venezuela were not intended to appeal to Venezuelans. For instance, one could hypothesize that a significant number of U.S. citizens might have resided in Venezuela, and that the use of these representative symbols appealed to the materialistic sensibilities of expatriates living in Caracas, perhaps offering them a “taste of home.”

However, this presumption is incorrect for a number of reasons. By examining Venezuelan statistical data from the later part of the nineteenth century, one notes a considerable discontinuity between the levels of importation from the United States into Venezuela and the numbers of expatriate North Americans residing there. As Figure 16 illustrates, during 1886-1887, the United States was the largest source of imported commodities into Venezuela, with total imports valued at over 24.8 million bolívares, with Great Britain second at over 17.7 million bolívares. Importation from the United States continued to dominate all countries other than Britain during 1887-1888, when over 19.7 million bolívares worth of merchandise entered Venezuela from the United States, along with imports valued at 23.5 million bolívares from Great Britain.⁸⁸ These data suggest that the United States was a massive and dynamic commercial presence in Venezuela by the late

⁸⁷ Ewell, 70-72.

⁸⁸ Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1891 (Caracas, Venezuela: Imprenta y Litografía del Gobierno Nacional, 1891), 166-167.

nineteenth century, sometimes rivaling Great Britain with its expanding commercial sea power.

In addition to importation statistics, population statistics offer an understanding of Venezuela's commercial culture and base of purchasers that could have made symbols of the United States desirable. As Figure 17 shows, an astonishingly small number of North Americans resided in Venezuela, according to the local government census of 1881. Compared to tens of thousands of Spaniards and almost as many people from Colombia, as well as thousands of French, Italians, Britons, Germans, and Dutch, only 179 North Americans took up residence in Venezuela.⁸⁹ British traveler William Corlett noted in his travel account a paucity of foreign tourists in Caracas, and its effect on the types of industries that might cater to them: "Naturally a few Panama hats and some old pieces of jewelry were picked up, but so few tourists invade this mountain stronghold of discomfort that the merchant was scarcely alive to the lucrative possibilities of tourist traffic."⁹⁰

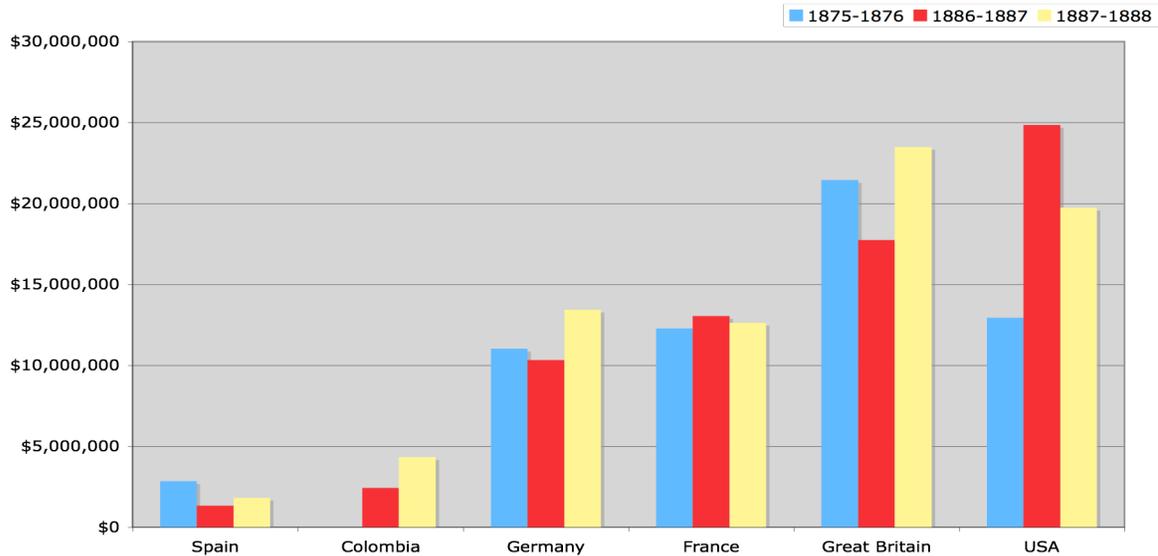
Ewell notes that in exchange for manufactured products, wheat flour, lard, rice, and corn from the United States, Venezuela exported coffee, cacao, indigo, and rawhides. Figure 18 shows that the United States was second only to Germany in values of exported materials from Venezuela in 1875-1876. By 1888, the United States enjoyed values of exports more than three times those of other overseas powers, including France, Great Britain, and Spain. Figure 19 shows that coffee was Venezuela's most lucrative export by far, earning Venezuela between \$70 and \$90 million Bolívares per annum during 1888-1894. Cacao, hides, and precious metals held importance in the export market as well. Figure 20 illustrates that the

⁸⁹ Segundo censo de la república: Decreto del ilustre americano General Guzmán Blanco, Presidente de la República (Caracas: Imprenta Bolívar, 1881), xvii-xx.

⁹⁰ Corlett, 100.

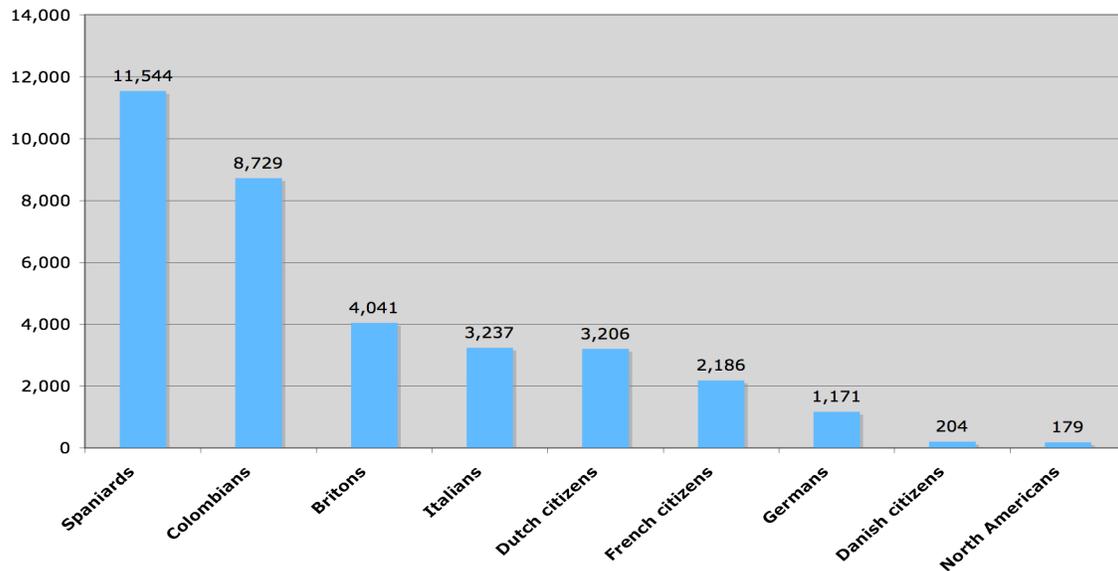
United States was the primary destination for exports of coffee and hides, while France imported the most Venezuelan cacao, during 1886-1888.⁹¹

FIGURE 16
Importation into Venezuela by Country in Bolívares



Source: *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1891* (Caracas, Venezuela: Imprenta y Litografía del Gobierno Nacional, 1891), 187.

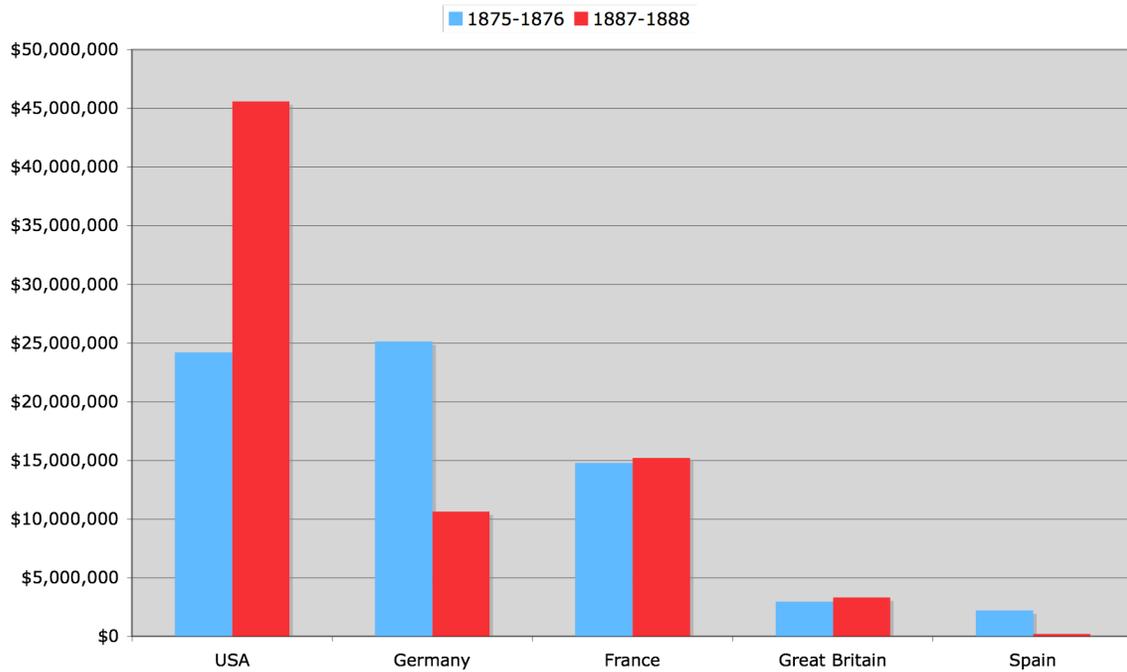
FIGURE 17
Foreigners Resident in Venezuela based on the Census of 1881



Source: *Segundo censo de la república: Decreto del ilustre americano General Guzmán Blanco, Presidente de la República* (Caracas: Imprenta Bolívar, 1881), xvii-xx.

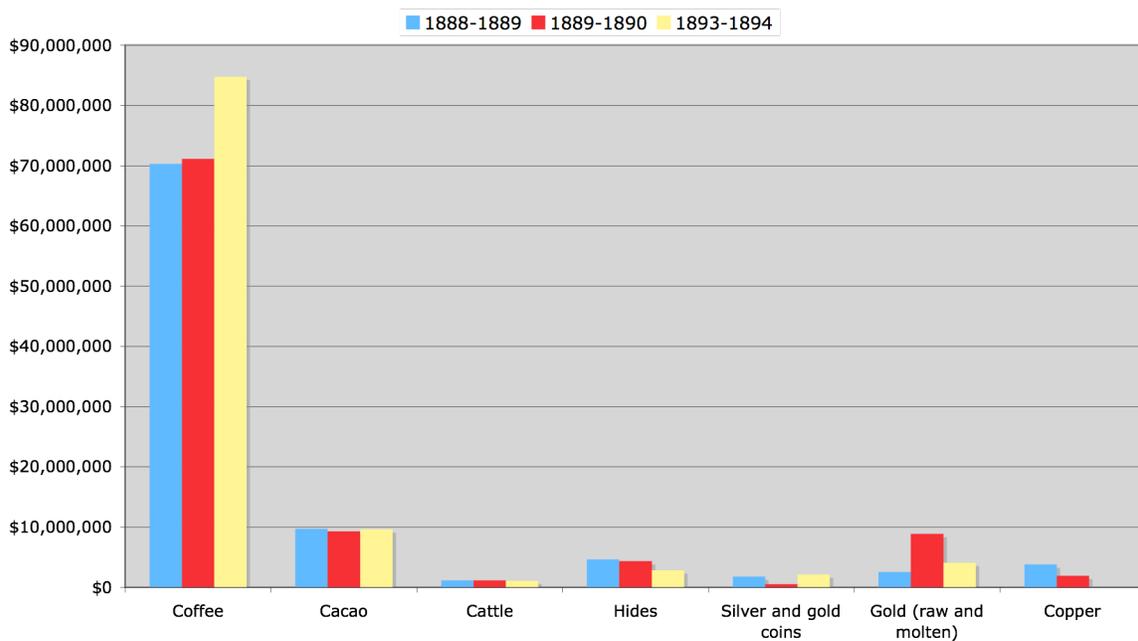
⁹¹ Ewell, 70-72; *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1891* (Caracas, Venezuela: Imprenta y Litografía del Gobierno Nacional, 1891), 166-167, 187; *Ibid.*, 169-180; *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1894* (Caracas, Venezuela: Tipografía Moderna, 1896), 199-200; *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1889* (Caracas, Venezuela: Imprenta y Litografía del Gobierno Nacional, 1889), 9.

FIGURE 18
Selected Exportation from Venezuela in Bolívares



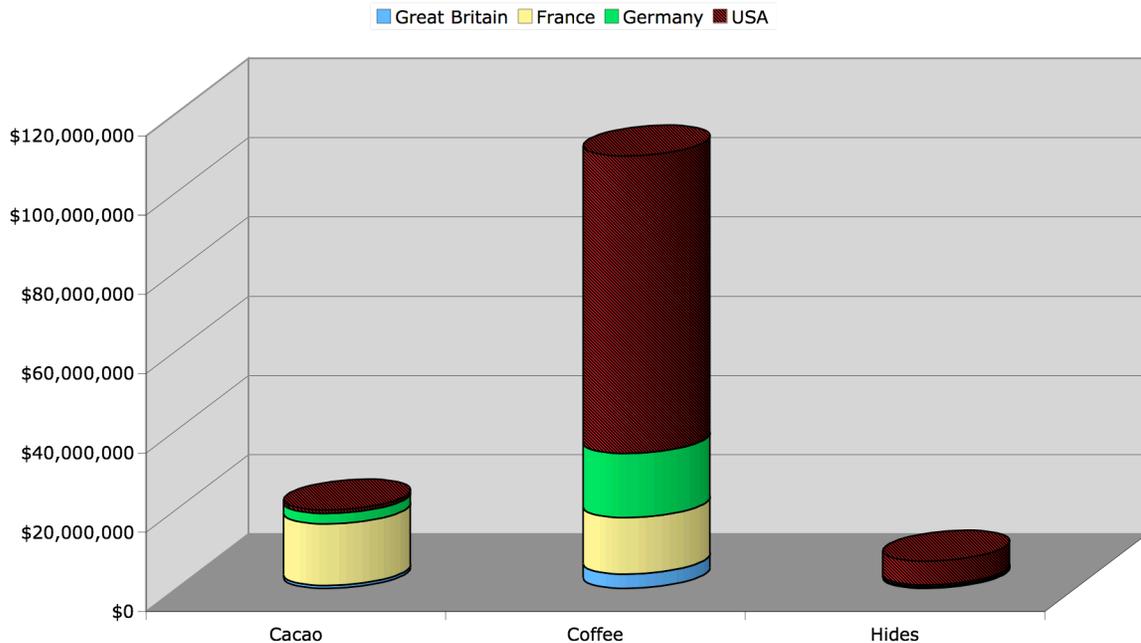
Source: *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1891* (Caracas, Venezuela: Imprenta y Litografía del Gobierno Nacional, 1891), 166-167, 187.

FIGURE 19
Value of Selected Venezuelan Exports in Bolívares



Source: *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1891* (Caracas, Venezuela: Imprenta y Litografía del Gobierno Nacional, 1891), 169-180; *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1894* (Caracas, Venezuela: Tipografía Moderna, 1896), 199-200.

FIGURE 20
Value by Destination of Selected Exportation in Bolívares, 1886-1888



Source: *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela, 1889* (Caracas, Venezuela: Imprenta y Litografía del Gobierno Nacional, 1889), 9.

The evidence furthers an understanding of the extensive trade between the United States and Venezuela. It suggests that the two countries enjoyed a powerful, dynamic commercial relationship by the late nineteenth century. For the most part, the United States was Venezuela’s dominant trade partner not only for the exportation of basic commodities such as coffee, hides, and metals, but also for the importation of manufactured products. Moreover, the remarkable levels of importation suggest that such products were not only luxury goods for a wealthy elite, but also included mass-market goods for sale to broad sectors of the populace.

Anecdotal evidence from travelers who visited Venezuela during the late nineteenth century supports this hypothesis. William Corlett, a British traveler in the Western Hemisphere, noted upon arrival in Caracas that ordinary Venezuelans appeared “much given to jewelry and cigarettes” of the type that appeared on the shelves of the bodegas that Doña

María and Doña Dilia visited. Edward Sullivan, another Brit, marveled at the cosmopolitan culture, especially the impressive selection of U.S. imports: “we promenaded the town, and visited the market; the shops seemed remarkably good, much finer than any I had seen in America since leaving New York.” He also spoke of the broader prevalence of imported goods in this market, items that seemed on display for all of Venezuela’s purchasers: “You may, if you like, dine off beefsteak and potatoes cooled down with French claret or real London stout; . . . In fact, there is no luxury you cannot enjoy at a moderate expense.”⁹² It seems clear that imported commodities, especially from the United States, Great Britain, and France, stood out as these newcomers experienced Caracas society for the first time.

One must acknowledge that these travelers wrote as outsiders, and therefore perhaps might be unqualified to offer a systematic, encompassing narrative of Caracas culture and society. However, in the context of their discussions of the presence of imported material goods in Caracas, Corlett and Sullivan might be, in fact, the *most* reliable source for the information. These gentlemen had personal familiarity with the items’ original culture and described them in relation to an alien metropolitan landscape. The presence and integration of imported material culture stood out more to them than it would have to any local observer. Travel writers in Caracas viewed the presence and availability of North American and European commodities in Caracas as evidence of a growing cultural connection to the outside world, in addition to the commercial ties that the statistical data substantiate.⁹³

⁹² Corlett, 88; Edward Sullivan, Rambles and Scrambles in North and South America, 2nd edition (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1853), 370-371.

⁹³ Indeed, the cultural connections had become so pronounced that by the mid-nineteenth century, Caracas youths were speaking rudimentary forms of French and English in everyday life, as Consejero Lisboa, the first ambassador to Venezuela from the Empire of Brazil, reported in 1853: “The use of the French language by young people is common in Caracas and that of the English language is becoming vulgarized [sic] as well. We can attribute this development to the facility of communication with Europe and the proximity of the United

However, quantitative records of commercial ties and anecdotal accounts from European travelers to the region provide only part of the story. To explain the phenomenon of the Bald Eagle and the Native American Indian on packaging in Venezuela, one must go beyond the numbers and the accounts of foreign observers. Furthermore, one must recognize that the products that Doña María and Doña Dilia selected were *not* imported, but made in Venezuela or Colombia. The symbolic use of these images suggests that the United States penetrated deep into the Venezuelan conscience and became linked inextricably to the most essential household and culinary staples of Venezuelan life, from cooking oil to candles. Thus, to explain how symbolic imagery of the United States entered the imaginary of the populace, one must turn to qualitative sources that explore the lived experience on the ground.

Advertisements for imported commodities in El Cojo Ilustrado offer one such line of evidence. They show a permeation of goods branded with references to the United States, suggesting that the appropriation of North American symbols on the packaging of Venezuelan products resulted from merchants' desire to capitalize on widespread sentiments of desirability associated with perceived modernity and innovativeness of the capitalist giant to the north.

Many of the advertisements in El Cojo Ilustrado present oils, liquids, and other homeopathic treatments with mysterious and remarkable abilities to "cure" a broad spectrum of illnesses and conditions, from rheumatoid arthritis to denture pain to the whooping cough, and some claim to cure all of these symptoms and more. Almost without exception, the advertisements for these products highlight an association with the United States or North

States..." Consejero Lisboa, Relación de un viaje a Venezuela, Nueva Granada y Ecuador (Caracas, Venezuela; Madrid, Spain: Ediciones de la presidencia de la República de Venezuela, 1954), 101.

America. For example, a product for dentures named “Sozodonte” appears with the following line at the end of the advertisement: “Sold at drug stores, perfumeries, and pharmacies throughout the world . . . Hall & Ruckel, New York, EE.UU.”⁹⁴ A product named “Talc-Boratado-Azufrados,” for gastrointestinal problems was “prepared by the Eminent . . . Dr. Rosa at his American laboratory in Montclair, New Jersey, EE.UU.”⁹⁵ A most unusual potion, the “Emulsión de Scott,” claims to offer “complete healthiness . . . [it] has no rival for curing Rickets in children . . . Anemia . . . and all forms of disability” through “hypophosphites.” The creator of this remarkable tonic: “Scott and Bowne, Chemists, New York.”⁹⁶ Finally, a product known as “Pond’s Extract” claims to “cure rheumatism, cataracts, eye afflictions, injuries, contusions, insect bites . . . and all types of pain, inflammation, and hemorrhoids.” The bottom of the advertisement features the location of this product’s creation: “Pond’s Extract Co., 76 Fifth Ave., New York, E.U. de A.”⁹⁷ Through their insistence in displaying the North American source, these advertisements seem to champion the United States as the center of medical breakthroughs, or at least exploit this perception among the consuming populace Caracas to increase revenues from these imported “miracle” pharmaceuticals.

The technological marvels of the United States appear in El Cojo Ilustrado as well. The February 1, 1898 edition of the newspaper ran an advertisement for the first gramophone to enter the Venezuelan marketplace: “The Great Gramophone, Speaking.” Venezuelans

⁹⁴ El Cojo Ilustrado 1 Feb 1892, 58; *Ibid.*, 1 Feb 1898, 130; *Ibid.*, 15 Feb 1898, 210; *Ibid.*, 1 Apr 1898, 284; *Ibid.*, 15 Apr 1898, 319; *Ibid.*, 15 May 1898, 390; *Ibid.*, 1 June 1898, 426.

⁹⁵ El Cojo Ilustrado 1 Feb 1892, 58; *Ibid.*, 1 Jan 1898, 94; *Ibid.*, 15 Feb 1898, 210; *Ibid.*, 15 Mar 1898, 245; *Ibid.*, 1 Apr 1898, 284; *Ibid.*, 15 Apr 1898, 318.

⁹⁶ El Cojo Ilustrado 15 May 1898, 94; *Ibid.*, 15 Mar 1898, 245; *Ibid.*, 15 Apr 1898, 319.

⁹⁷ El Cojo Ilustrado 1 Jun 1898, 426.

could place an order with the “Anglo-American Electrical M’Fg Co., 15 to 25 Whitehall St., New York City.”⁹⁸ As with the medical potions, this advertisement celebrates the United States as the leader in technological innovation and manufacture. The product seems to target upper-class buyers who might be able to obtain U.S. dollars and remit postage across the ocean for the privilege of receiving one of the fabled devices. However, for the most part, the goods in these advertisements were of the sort that already existed in the physical marketplace, where ordinary people could purchase them using Bolívares and obtain the commodity immediately.

These advertisements offer compelling evidence to suggest that the United States occupied a position in the Venezuelan commercial mindset. One can conclude that residents of Caracas in particular, the likely target market for the distribution of El Cojo Ilustrado, viewed the United States, and the commodities and ideas emanating from it, as cutting-edge in design and technology. The use of these advertisements as revenue generators for the newspaper suggests that a broad readership had exposure to the innovative commodities in specific relation to their “North Americanness”—their association with the United States and its values. Thus, the evidence from El Cojo Ilustrado suggests that late nineteenth-century Venezuelans had continual access to propagandistic rhetoric associated with the United States in close juxtaposition to material commodities, such as curative potions, described as innovative and desirable.

The United States in a Venezuelan Periodical

For the Bald Eagle and the Native American Indian to become part of the mindset of the Venezuelan population, these images would have to have become ensconced in the

⁹⁸ El Cojo Ilustrado 1 Feb 1898, 129; *Ibid.*, 15 Feb 1898, 169; *Ibid.*, 15 Mar 1898, 245.

mindset of Caracas residents in multiple contexts, beyond the shelves of stores. Looking at a newspaper from the period can offer insights into the representative Venezuelan quotidian culture. Scholars consider El Cojo Ilustrado one of the most important Latin American periodicals from the end of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth.⁹⁹ This newspaper includes substantial sections on current events, most occurring on other continents, with special emphasis on North America. Through them, one can begin to glimpse the place of the United States in Venezuela. Beginning in February of 1898, a series of eclectic articles presented an unusual compendium of U.S. news, some associated with science and technology, others in the political or “society” realms. The articles are far from what one might consider mainstream “global” reporting for ordinary Venezuelans. It is likely that the editors of El Cojo Ilustrado copied these short articles directly out of U.S. newspapers and translated them. The inclusion of these stories suggests that the editors in Caracas saw a competitive edge or potential profit margin by giving their readership a window into events thousands of miles away. The representational appearance of the United States in El Cojo Ilustrado by the late nineteenth century suggests that Venezuelans had a cultural fascination with the United States, contributing to their vision of North America as they encountered the Bald Eagle and the Native American Indian on the shelves of the bodegas of Caracas.

For example, one article discusses the “movement of the population in New York,” including detailed statistical data on New York City: current population levels, births broken down by sex and race, marriages—an aspect of “sanitary life”—and illegitimate births. The article exudes a fascination with “corrupt” North American conceptions of the institution of

⁹⁹ Maurice Belrose, “Latinidad vs. imperialismo yanqui en *El Cojo Ilustrado*, 1898-1903,” Casa de las Américas 211 (1998), 73.

marriage, highlighting the notion that “the majority [of births] result from mixed-race marriages (immigrant American and native American); thus, marriages between Americans each generation are less fecund.”¹⁰⁰ It is likely that in the context of such radical social transformation throughout Latin America, and especially in a place with such close commercial ties to the outside world—previously with Europe, and now with the United States—that Venezuelans appreciated an opportunity to express satisfying sentiments of scorn for the perceived immorality of the “other,” in this case, the United States. Despite these sentiments, Venezuela had a large proportion of mixed-race marriages as well, though the data likely were less available and reliable at the time.¹⁰¹

This enthrallment with the United States appears in articles regarding the natural world, science, and technology as well. For example, one article discusses the upcoming solar eclipse of May 28, 1900, pointing to the best North American locations to witness the event: “60 meteorological stations have been installed in the regions of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi and Alabama where the eclipse will be visible.”¹⁰² Another article points to a discovery of “naturally-occurring asphalt” in Utah, an event that will put Utah on the map as one of the states richest in “natural resources” and give the United States a “secure domestic reserve of asphalt for various centuries.”¹⁰³ Still another article points to the “attraction of the North Pole” within the academic and wealthy

¹⁰⁰ The significance of this statement is unclear. *El Cojo Ilustrado* 15 Jan 1898, 87-88.

¹⁰¹ Winthrop R. Wright discusses the sociocultural significance of nineteenth-century racial mixing in cosmopolitan Venezuela in *Café Con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), especially in “Whitening the Population, 1850-1900,” 43-68.

¹⁰² *El Cojo Ilustrado* 15 Feb 1898, 161.

¹⁰³ *El Cojo Ilustrado* 1 Apr 1898, 278. It is possible that the *Cojo* editors might have mistranslated or misinterpreted some naturally occurring mineral as “asphalt,” given that it is illogical under today’s definition.

communities, using as an example two “original” proposals for polar exploration, one in the Johns Hopkins University council to use a submarine to reach the North Pole. It also discusses a Californian speculator who seeks to construct a railroad above the ice.¹⁰⁴ Finally, a different sort of fascination with railroad technology comes across in an article describing a potential high-speed train service linking New York and Philadelphia: “Two American engineers, Mr. C.H. Davis and Mr. F.S. Williamson, present in a technical review their study of an electronic train service between New York and Philadelphia, a project that has not ceased to be considered daring...”¹⁰⁵

The use of these articles in El Cojo Ilustrado suggests that its editors sought to satisfy an insatiable thirst for modernity in Venezuela by bringing information on technological developments from abroad into the realm of the everyday purchaser. It does not seem coincidental that all of these articles came from the United States as opposed to Europe. While Great Britain and France might represent the ultimate “high culture,” the United States represented progress and modernity. Thus, the articles bolstered the commercial relationship between Venezuela and the United States—as the advertisements in the previous section make explicit—by highlighting the dazzling technological capabilities and aspirations in the United States. For the consuming public in Caracas, this discourse could have enhanced the desirability of North American commodities. While the precise function of this appropriation of North American news stories for consumption among the Venezuelan populace is not entirely clear, one can conclude that the editors of El Cojo Ilustrado saw a potential boost in readership, and therefore revenue, by including pieces of information about

¹⁰⁴ El Cojo Ilustrado 15 May 1898, 386.

¹⁰⁵ El Cojo Ilustrado 15 Feb 1898, 161. It is interesting to note the English spellings of “New York” and “Philadelphia,” strong evidence suggesting that the Cojo editors lifted the article directly out of a North American newspaper.

the outside world, especially the United States.

Conclusion

The argument and evidence in this chapter suggest a remarkable contradiction, one that remains at the forefront of scholarly and popular musings on the current political dynamic between the United States and the government of Hugo Chávez Frías in Venezuela. The dichotomy between the limited official diplomacy and “anti-yanqui” intellectual discourse on the one hand, and the powerful North American commercial influence on the other, makes one wonder how ordinary Venezuelan experienced it on the ground. El Cojo Ilustrado epitomizes this multidimensional relationship. This periodical might contain the writings of Blanco Fombona and Rubén Darío in the front section, condemning the United States for its supposed aspirations for imperial domination of the hemisphere. And yet, the very same issue containing the news briefs copied from North American newspapers, along with the imported commodities appearing in the advertising section, might present a triumphalist discourse on the United States, celebrating technological innovation, modernity, and progress. How might an ordinary member of the Venezuelan public reconcile all of these powerful and often contradictory currents?

The statistical data from late nineteenth-century illustrate that neither the lack of a substantive official relationship nor the impassioned pleas of intellectual skeptics had much influence on the mindset of the ordinary consuming public, people such as Doña María and Doña Dilia. Based on the levels of importation from, and exportation to, the United States during this period, one can conclude that the contemporaries of these fictional characters existed in a commercial world that already emulated North American consumer culture.

Thus, Venezuela's national obsession for purchasing U.S. goods had its origins in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Ewell's description of "Americanization" is accurate, but the process happened well before the "petroleum empire" began to take shape.

In some respects, one must return to those scholars who point to romanticized notions of destiny in the growing commercial cohesion of Venezuela and the United States. While these sentiments exist in an esoteric realm for which historical evidence often does not exist, the case of Venezuela suggests that, indeed, underlying fascination for the progress and modernity of the United States made purchasers in Venezuela seek a piece of it for themselves. This "piece" took the physical form of imported commodities but also existed in the subconscious realm because the bar of soap or a package of matches bore a symbol of the United States, such as the Native American Indian or the Bald Eagle.

Ultimately, this chapter points to a relationship based on trade, not official connections, between the two countries. By itself, this intervention is not a new one. However, using the product packaging from the Litografía del Comercio printing stones, this chapter shows that a dynamic cultural discourse in the realm of materiality provided a quotidian foundation for the broader macroeconomic relationship. Despite irregular and even contradictory official and intellectual connections to the United States, ordinary Venezuelans saw the oversized neighbor to the north as an inevitable and exciting part of their future, and they demonstrated their determination to fashion a modern Venezuela on it.

CONCLUSION

This thesis invites the reader to examine material culture—the relationship between people and goods—as it relates to cultural identity, and in particular, self-definition and self-construction at a particular historical time and place: late nineteenth-century urban Latin America. It proposes a reassessment of conventional understandings that emphasize the importance of imported commodities to only elite members of society. Based on evidence from statistical records, newspaper archives, literature, and more, this thesis suggests that a far broader cross-section of people enjoyed the ability to consume items from abroad. The two case studies suggest that they did so for various reasons. The discussion of Mexico City shows that people appropriated foreign goods into their personas because doing so offered unprecedented opportunities for social mobility. By appearing European, they could conceal their underlying class and status and reconstruct their identity within the local cultural universe to their advantage. The discussion of Caracas suggests that people engaged with imported commodities to affiliate themselves with the unbridled progress and modernity that emanated from North America. Despite a relative lack of official interest and considerable intellectual skepticism, trade with the United States flourished and goods from North America poured into the local marketplace.

The notions of self-construction and self-definition in cultural identity speak to the connection between the consuming populace and the goods themselves. Discussions of cultural identity might seem better suited to family and community-level histories. However,

the cases of Mexico and Venezuela suggest that even at its most intimate level, urban identity in late nineteenth-century Latin America involved elements of overseas culture. By placing oneself in the shoes of those ordinary members of society who consumed goods from abroad, one can understand how the commodities penetrated the farthest reaches of urban society, in some cases transforming the expectations and boundaries of the social hierarchy, and in others offering a thorough redefinition and reorientation of identity through a fixation on the external cultural universe. Thus, looking at imported material culture in this historical moment allows one to bridge the wide expanses between personal and family history, national history, and transnational history to show the inseparable and often unexpected connections that link them.

If the cases of Mexico City and Caracas point to the need to broaden conventional understandings of consumption among ordinary people, then one returns to the question of *how much* of a broadening occurred. While this thesis argues that consumption patterns were more widespread in these urban societies during the late nineteenth century than one might assume, it does not attempt to measure the extent of that broadening. Establishing definitive parameters for this class of ordinary people that consumed imported commodities remains a challenge. The relative paucity of data consistent in both availability and method of reporting across the neocolonial period makes it difficult to come to grips with the possible emergence of a “proto-consumer” during this period of Latin American history. At what point did entire urban populations begin to dress solely in imported cloth? What contrasts existed between capital cities and secondary cities? Between urban and rural areas? Unanswered questions often provide an effective conclusion because they offer an impetus and point of departure for future research.

APPENDIX A
Collage of Doña María's Purchases¹⁰⁶



¹⁰⁶ Digital photographs in 2007 by the author, of lithographic printing stones from Litografía del Comercio, Caracas, Venezuela.

APPENDIX B
Collage of Doña Dilia's Purchases¹⁰⁷



QUITA DOLOR JAVILLANO	<p>QUITA DOLOR JAVILLANO</p> <p>GARANTIZADO PURAMENTE VEGETAL</p> <p>CURA LOS DOLORES MAS AGUDOS</p> <p>PARA USO EXTERNO</p> <p>BOTICA AMERICANA JULIO VILLASMI C. & H. 200 SAN CRISTOBAL</p>	QUITA DOLOR JAVILLANO	<p>QUITA DOLOR JAVILLANO</p> <p>GARANTIZADO PURAMENTE VEGETAL</p> <p>CURA LOS DOLORES MAS AGUDOS</p> <p>PARA USO EXTERNO</p> <p>BOTICA AMERICANA JULIO VILLASMI C. & H. 200 SAN CRISTOBAL</p>	<p>Jarabe de Tabonuco al Guayacol</p> <p>Este Poderoso Balsámico y Antiséptico Pulmonar es recomendado por todos los médicos en los casos siguientes:</p> <p>En la tos, resfriados, bronquitis crónica, laringitis, catarros, ronqueras, tosferina y en todas las afecciones catarrales de las vías respiratorias.</p> <p>Para evitar falsificaciones e imitaciones exíjase en la marca de fábrica un indio, sentado con la faz vuelta a la derecha, que lleva una escopeta recostada en la pierna derecha.</p> <p>No debe considerarse como legítimo el frasco que no lleve esta marca y mi firma al pie.</p> <p>AUTORIZADO POR LA OFICINA DE SANIDAD NACIONAL</p> <p>El Jarabe de Tabonuco al Guayacol</p> <p>verdadero Balsámico Pulmonar - 25 años de éxito.</p>
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¹⁰⁷ Digital photographs by the author of lithographic printing stones from Litografía del Comercio, Caracas, Venezuela, 2007.

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