

The Image of Mexican Heroes in American Films

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As historical recreations of Mexican history, the motion pictures *Juárez* (1939) and *Viva Zapata!* (1952) can undoubtedly be faulted. Although some have argued that they capture the spirit or the essence of the dramas they depict, factual errors, as we presently seem to understand those facts, are obvious in each film, as is a misplaced overall emphasis which endows these Mexican heroes with characteristics and motives they hardly possessed. But such criticism comes easy and misses the point. The movies were never intended as near-factual historical representations. *Juárez* and *Zapata* were instead deliberately tailored to fit contemporary concerns in United States society and the movie industry itself, thereby making each film a fascinating document for the study of that period in which they were produced.

Hollywood in the late 30s was in a precarious position. Profits were off mainly due to increasing Axis domination of European motion picture markets which had formerly served American commercial needs¹. Craft unionization in Hollywood caused strife and disrupted production². The federal government was pursuing an anti-trust suit which threatened to divest production companies of their lucrative theater holdings³. And the House Un-American Activities Committee, then headed by Martin Dies of Texas, had begun to rant about supposed communist infiltration of the industry⁴. Militant and broadly influential censorship groups, such as the Catholic Legion of Decency and the American Legion, threatened to throw up picket lines around theaters, if film content did not meet their political and social designs⁵. And a number of states and municipalities exercised free-wheeling censorship which made life miserable for screenwriters and producers alike⁶. Hollywood, in short, was running scared and the threatening atmosphere underlined its necessity to be all things to all people, to entertain everyone and offend nobody⁷.

Although Hollywood and Washington strenuously deny it, the relationship between the industry and the U .S. Government exists in a vital way. The government seeks to avoid charges of federal censorship, while the industry strives to maintain its facade of artistic freedom and free expression. All the while, they seek and enjoy one another's support, and the relationship is often intimate at the highest levels. Most important in the long run, despite occasional conflict, in the main they scratch each other's backs.

For example, Washington learned in early 1939 that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer intended to dramatize the crash of the Imperial Airways flying boat *Cavalier* which had crashed on its recent New York City to Bermuda flight. Three of 13 passengers had been killed, pointing up the hazards of flying. But that very week Eleanor Roosevelt was to christen a Pan American 74-passenger clipper inaugurating a trans-Atlantic flight service which the government had heavily subsidized. G.S. Messersmith of the State Department, on March 1, 1939, hurried a note to Will H. Hays, president of the all- powerful Motion Picture Producer's Association saying:

"Keeping in mind that our government and our people have a very definite interest in the success of such trans-Atlantic flights, I believe that you will agree that it would be much more appropriate to dramatize the first successful flight by an American airliner than revive an already dead incident".⁸

Hays, of course, agreed; MGM reacted to the movie czar's subsequent suggestion and dropped plans to make the picture.⁹

The government rather quickly returned the favor. Harry Warner, who handled financial affairs for Warner Brothers, wrote confidentially to President Roosevelt on September 5, 1939, that he had just returned to New York from Great Britain, where blackouts, air raid precautions and the removal of urban population to rural districts had all but emptied motion picture houses in the big English cities. And with France falling into Nazi hands, "We will have to operate at a loss. For how long, who knows?" Warner

further explained that with Hollywood besieged by federal litigation (of which the anti-trust suit was the most worrisome part), preparations for the defense of such cases had further drained the company of money, time and manpower. "If we are to work out of the difficulties imposed by the European war, [we] must be freed of [the] burden of litigation. Two-hundred and forty thousand employees of the Industry and hundreds of thousands of stockholders desire to avoid bankruptcy."¹⁰

Warner's note to the President ended up on the desk of Henry Hopkins, secretary of commerce, who worked out a solution.¹¹ The anti-trust case ended in a consent agreement on November 14, 1940, and the government agreed to press the issue no more.¹²

Jack Warner had successfully managed Roosevelt's presidential campaign in California in 1932, the start of a friendship that lasted until the President's death. "It was no secret on the lot." Warner writes in his autobiography, "that I admired Franklin Delano Roosevelt, that I had a personal friendship with him any man would envy, and that I had been a guest many times at the White House."¹³ The tone of Roosevelt's correspondence with Warner contained in the former president's papers, does indeed indicate that they were good buddies.¹⁴ One film scholar states that the President frequently served as a technical advisor on Warner's political films, while Hal Wallis, the producer, still remembers Mrs. Roosevelt's frequent presence on the sets at Warner Brothers Burbank Studio.¹⁵

In payment for his campaign services, Roosevelt had in 1932 offered Jack Warner a diplomatic position. Warner declined saying he was flattered, "But I think I can do better for your foreign relations with a good picture about America now and then."¹⁶ Shortly thereafter Roosevelt seized the opportunity to exercise the cultural arm of the Good Neighbor Policy. Latin America had long been an important market for U.S. motion pictures. Despite occasional complaints by a Latin government that a particular film had offended that nation's sensibilities, Latin audiences continued to pay to see Hollywood's often derogatory stereotypes of themselves. The release of the movie *Girl of the Rio* in 1932, however, so outraged Mexican feelings that it became part of the agenda at the 1936 Inter-American conference in Buenos Aires.¹⁷ As a result of discussions about movies circulated in the hemisphere, the American nations agreed that pictures which insulted their national traditions or distorted history would not be shown in any member country.¹⁸ Jack Warner, meanwhile, awaited the opportunity to make his contribution to the Good Neighbor Policy. The needs of the studio and the government merged in 1938.

Hollywood during much of the 1930s avoided pictures with overt political themes. The Hays office enforced the policy of making pictures for entertainment, not propaganda¹⁹. But the industry could not quarantine itself against world events. Motion picture personnel, some of them active leftists, founded the Anti-Nazi League in 1936, and although the principally Jewish producers sympathized with the League's condemnation of Nazi anti-semitism, they despised the organization's flamboyance, because it focused political attention on the industry²⁰. The producers proved right. Congressman Martin Dies relished the opportunity to make easy 1938 the new House Un-American Activities Committee had nosed its way into the movie world²¹.

Congressman Dies charged that in their desire to combat European totalitarianism, the studios had gone soft on communism. Warner Brothers headed the producer's movement to defuse the attack. They cuddled up to the congressman. Dies claimed that Warners offered to make him vice-president of the United States, or at second best, to produce any sort of pro-American movie that Dies ordered. Asserting that he did not aspire to the vice presidency, Dies agreed to the idea of the \$1-million motion picture. Planning began in 1939, but World War II shelved the project and temporarily put the House committee out of business. Dies himself never gave up. He suggested in 1940 that "communist influence was responsible for subtle but very effective propaganda which appeared in such films as *Juárez*..."²²

Juárez was indeed propagandistic, intentionally so, but not because of communist influence. By mid-1938, when the script-writing process on the film was well underway, the nation had begun to budge from its passive isolationist stance. North Americans were by no means yet interventionist-minded, but neither were they any longer neutral. Hitler's persecutions and racial discrimination had, as William Langer and S. Everett Gleason, state, "grated against the dislike of Americans for totalitarianism and dictatorship. German fascism violated moral codes, Christian values and ordinary decencies by which all civilized peoples aimed to abide..."²³ While Roosevelt still faced substantial opposition in his endeavor to get the United States more actively involved in European affairs, most Americans, even the staunchest

isolationists, agreed that strong measures should be taken to preserve the Western Hemisphere as democracy's fortress²⁴. And the film industry was anxious to make a contribution.

Roosevelt planned to strengthen commitments among the American nations at the Inter-American Conference scheduled for December, 1938, in Lima, Peru. Through the Producers Association, the movie industry joined the planning at the highest level. Will Hays wrote to Roosevelt on November 18, 1938, that the industry would provide full motion picture coverage of the conference. After the meeting, the producers intended to send a camera crew around all of Latin America to produce sequences which could then be spliced into future newsreels. Hays worked closely with the State Department to refine the details and told the President that the industry's employees would photograph "such news as may be believed by the State Department to be of special value... Hollywood would, naturally, pay the bill. Furthermore, Hays assured that he had discussed other facets of Roosevelt's motion picture program for Latin America with the producers and reported that "all are enthusiastic to co-operate in every possible way."²⁵

Warners, it should be said, did not make *Juárez* only because of its affection for the administration. Other factors also generated the project. As Jews, the brothers were naturally concerned with Hitler's ravages. Their German agent, a Jew, had in 1935 been murdered by the Nazis²⁶. The onslaught by the Dies committee commanded a reaffirmation of their patriotism, something the Warners genuinely felt. In addition, with European markets closing, Latin America beckoned. The company's historical biography series which had produced *Zola* and *The Life of Louis Pastor*, had been well-received and merited extension. And Paul Muni, their most popular and expensive star, needed a new role²⁷. Nonetheless, it was fundamentally the mood of the times which established the tone of the movie and ultimately decided its content.

The script went through a dozen revisions, as the writers sought to make its arguments in the most simple, contemporary framework. Roosevelt warned the Nazis in his August 18, 1938, speech at Kingston, Ontario, that fascist adventures aimed at the New World would find the hemisphere united against them.²⁸ Orders to the screen-writers were: "The dialogue, as far as it is political and ideological, must consist of phrases from today's newspapers; every child must be able to realize that Napoleon in his Mexican intervention, is none other than Mussolini plus Hitler in their Spanish adventure."²⁹

While the writers had no problem lifting lines from the daily newspapers for the casual dialogue of the actors, they struggled with the ideological concepts which were the crux of the motion picture. Franz Werfel's 1926 play, *Juárez and Maximillian*, provided a dramatic framework for the motion picture, but failed Warner Brothers in its conclusion. In the play's climatic scene, Maximillian says. "My idea of a radical monarchy was unreal... The age of royalty is over. In the shipwreck of the privileged classes, poor little kings who are not kings, must perish. The house of dictators has come. Juárez [is here]"³⁰. Such unnerving sentiments, however, did not long deter the writers. First they had Maximillian detail the advantages of enlightened monarchy to Porfirio Díaz. and then let Juárez straighten out Díaz later on. "You see, Porfirio," says the Mexican President, "when a monarch misrules, he changes the people; when a president misrules, the people change him."³¹ Díaz emerged convinced, but would theater audiences?

Warners anguished over the crucial dialogue. It seemed to the producers that Maximillian kept winning the debate. The benevolence of Maximillian, said one executive, outweighed the tenacity of Juárez.³² Many reviewers of the movie also found the monarch more appealing than the president.³³ One British critic scored Mexico for embracing Juárez and rejecting Maximillian.³⁴ But the screenwriters faced a delicate problem. In their intention to make the picture contemporary, any denigration of enlightened monarchy reflected upon Great Britain, democracy's major deterrent to totalitarianism and, not incidentally, Europe's largest remaining movie market. It was a dilemma the writers never could resolve.

Similar concerns arose over the final and culminating speech of Juárez. Maximillian had been captured, and a delegation of European diplomats were pleading for his life. The President took them to task: "By what right, señores, do the great powers of Europe invade the lands of simple people, kill all who do not make them welcome, destroy their fields and take the fruit of their toil from those who survive " Maximillian, the President assured, had to die for the collective guilt of Europe. Then he continued: "The world must know that Mexico is not a spoil for the butchering, exploiting powers of your

European civilization. We know that civilization, señores! For three hundred years we have endured it.”³⁵. As the fascists were clearly contemporary Europe’s overt imperialists, the studio was certain audiences would put the blame where it belonged. But later the Cold War scrambled relations between the United States and the European states. So when the movie was re-released in 1952, Juárez’s entire condemnation of European civilization was removed.³⁶

The ever-growing menace of World War II further altered the script even as they shot the film. The studio in earlier treatments intended to reveal the humanitarian side of democracy. Díaz in a late sequence urged Juárez to pardon Maximilian. Gazing at a picture of Abraham Lincoln on the wall, Díaz asked the President, “What would he do. Don Benito? Democracy is a human thing... It is not cold, relentless justice.” Juárez with a cry of pain in his voice responded, “Do I not know ...? Do you think I want him to die?”³⁷ The Munich crisis at this point intervened and further hardened attitudes toward the Nazis. With Democracy further threatened, Warners decided that humanitarianism had to be sacrificed and that Juárez well understood his duty. In the final version of the movie he fretted no more about the fate of the imperialist.³⁸

Regardless of a supposed appreciation for the courage and accomplishments of Juárez, Warners could not in 1939 trust the safety of the hemisphere to an apelike Zapotec aborigine, as screenwriter Aneas MacKenzie had labeled him. In fact, in his personality sketch of the President, MacKenzie found Juárez rather obtuse. “It was typical of the Indian [Juárez]” the screenwriter explained, “that he did not foresee the obvious factor that was to make for him complete and final victory”- the intervention of the United States with its Monroe Doctrine.³⁹ Warners insisted that the present threat demanded similar leadership in the person of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the heritage of Abraham Lincoln. Actually, the analogy between Roosevelt and Lincoln was often made in the latter 1930s, and Warners aimed to make its characterization of Juárez unmistakably Lincolnesque. The Emancipator would rally audience support to Roosevelt, besides such distortion made good box office. Since the advent of militant fascism, Lincoln had replaced Napoleon as the most popular historical figure with American film spectators.⁴⁰ Muni was certainly ready for the part. In the 1935 picture, *Bordertown*, he had played the role of a Mexican-American attorney whose ideal was Lincoln, and in democracy’s darkening difficulties, studios increasingly turned to Lincoln for inspiration and determination.⁴¹ Warners was soon to release a stridently patriotic documentary entitled *Lincoln in the White House*, while Universal studios shortly thereafter starred Henry Fonda as *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) and RKO followed with a popular adaptation of Robert Sherwood’s *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940).⁴² Lincoln had once saved the stricken union and would do it again. Juárez was not only to emulate Lincoln, but to be Lincoln himself.



John Garfield and Paul Muni in *Juárez* (1939)



Anthony Quinn, Marlon Brando, Lou Gilbert and Harold Gordon in *Viva Zapata!* (1952)

Muni, who had direct control over his roles, himself insisted on the blend. Juárez, he said, must not only have a picture of Lincoln in his room, but the Presidents should directly correspond with one another. Juárez must not be an admirer from afar, but they should have actual contact. Muni dictated that when the assassination occurs, Lincoln's portrait be draped in black so that he, acting through Juárez, could extol the virtues of the martyred president.⁴³ This aura was reinforced by stage directions: "Omit the political expedience and cold calculation of the gesture and make it a movement of Lincolnian magnanimity," and insure that the letter which Juárez writes to Maximillian is a "model of Lincolnian simplicity"⁴⁴

A good many other specific factors influenced details of the film, but space does not permit an exposition of these intriguing facets of the film's final shape. Lines which might have offended British feelings were excised, as were references to the Catholic Church in deference to the Legion of Decency.⁴⁵ Mexican censors objected to sequences which indicated that the spiritual powers of the Catholic church superseded the temporal ones of the state.⁴⁶ In the end, all references to the church were deleted. The Production Code Administration, headed by the puritanical Joseph Breen, chipped away at matters concerning sexual propriety, violence and vulgarity.⁴⁷ Also, Muni's vanity ran amuck during the actual shooting of the movie. He successfully demanded the elimination of several long scenes which developed audience sympathy for the human qualities of Maximilian and Carlotta. Bette Davis, who played Carlotta, later wrote, "Mr. Muni's seniority proved our downfall"⁴⁸

Juárez opened on April 25, 1939, at the Hollywood Theater in New York City. A special train from Washington D.C., brought diplomatic representatives of 12 Latin American countries to the premiere, and audiences and critics generally praised the picture.⁴⁹ Two weeks later it previewed before ranking government officials in Washington D.C., and Lawrence Duggan, chief of the State Department's American Republics Division, in an unprecedented move, ordered the picture used to calculate Latin American attitudes toward the United States and democracy. He directed the nation's diplomats throughout Latin America to report on the film's reception in their respective districts, and for the next year the embassies and consulates reported the rich and varied reaction to the movie.⁵⁰ President Lázaro Cárdenas of Mexico thoroughly liked the picture, or at least thought it politically opportune to render the movie special treatment. Despite some adverse criticism, Cárdenas ordered the movie premiered in the nation's Palace of Fine Arts, the first motion picture ever to be shown in Mexico's foremost hall of culture.⁵¹ U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels publicly termed the movie a "perfect picture" and "faithful to history". Privately he told the State Department that he understood the North American version of the movie had been edited to meet Mexican attitudes. Specifically, a scene which had credited the Monroe Doctrine for the expulsion of the French was deleted in Mexico. Ambassador Daniels explained: "The omission of that scene was doubtless in deference to the Latin American lack of appreciation of how much all nations south of the Rio Grande owe to the [Monroe] Doctrine. Mexicans prefer to think Juárez won the victory over Maximilian by their own feats of arms rather than by American representations to Napoleon, though the picture clearly shows that Juárez was an admirer of Lincoln ..."⁵². So much for this country's Good Neighbor Ambassador, Josephus Daniels.

By this time, however, the employment of cinematic versions of Mexican heroes for political ends had moved toward the possibility of enlisting the agrarian rebel Emiliano Zapata in the fight for democracy. But Zapata proved to be a much more difficult character to control, and it took another dozen years of nervous hesitation before he finally emerged in movie theaters, by then a somewhat bedraggled victim of Cold War tensions.

Plans for a Zapata movie emerged in 1938 from the desires of a Zapatista to lionize his hero in the United States and the ambitions of an energetic British writer to crown his long-term study of the Mexican Revolution. The Zapatista was Gildardo Magaña, close associate of Zapata during the rebellion and in 1938 the governor of the state of Michoacan. He had collected relics, documents and other materials pertaining to the agrarian movement and had produced a two-volume biography of the guerilla chieftain. He wanted Zapata introduced to North Americans through an English translation of his work. Edgcomb Pinchon was the British author who intended to chronicle, as he put, "Mexico's 100 years of struggle for democratic government."⁵³ To the date he had produced three books on the subject, including *Viva Villa* from which the 1933 movie was adapted. But the lack of reliable source material had stymied Pinchon's work on Zapata. Now, in Magaña's collection, Pinchon saw the means of completing his project, and he approached Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to purchase the screen rights to his proposed book.⁵⁴ In his hard-sell to the studio, Pinchon stressed his long-time knowledge of revolutionary Mexico, his personal relationship with Governor Magaña and President Cárdenas, but most importantly the immense contemporary value of a motion picture about Zapata. In short, such a movie, he predicted, would both reinforce the democratic regime of Cárdenas and assure United States hegemony in Latin America. Pinchon's enthusiasm for the movie idea was unbounded. Listen to him:

"The World is teetering between the enticements of dictatorship and democracy. Show in the film a dictatorship at work -and Porfirio Díaz has Hitler and Mussolini back off the map! Show what happens- the final, mad desperate, heroic revolt. Then show the denouement- peace and home and

happiness, freedom to be a man, go one's own way and speak one's mind. Show smashed the terrible link between governmental power and capitalist interest- for that is Fascism that must depend on the vilest impulses of humanity for existence- Show that- and you [will] have...a world document of immense preachment at this moment. And I say -do it big. Make it the answer. Done in gay skirts, big hats and brown skins -it is again the story of the Magna Carta on which ail democracy is based.

...It could revivify the waning flame of Democracy in the English speaking world (witness England -and Fascism here [in Mexico]). It could light, like a torch, the almost unkind led fires of democracy in Latin America. It could be the answer – beautiful, sweeping, unanswerable to Mr. Hitler and Mr. Mussolini... Done in Spanish it could take Latin America for the U.S.A.! Let's do it right".⁵⁵

MGM leaped at the bait. Pinchon, wrote his eulogy, *Zapata, the Unconquerable*, and the studio planned its picture. But World War II intervened. With Europe engulfed by Hitler's blitzkrieg, Roosevelt on August 16, 1940, created by executive order the Office for Co-ordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics, later to become more simply the Office of Inter-American Affairs.⁵⁶ Its mission was to root out Axis trade and propaganda penetration in Latin America and to replace them with U.S. brands of the same. Nelson A. Rockefeller headed the new agency with John Hay (Jock) Whitney his assistant in charge of the motion picture division. Hollywood eagerly joined the team. And in what must have been one of Rockefeller's earliest decisions about motion picture potential in Latin America, he ordered the study of a movie about Emiliano Zapata.⁵⁷

The research assignment fell to Addison Durland, a Latin American specialist with the Motion Picture Producers Association, which was enthusiastically co-operating with government's intentions. History proved not so generous. After research in New York's Public Library and other resources, Durland reported Zapata far too controversial for cinematic treatment in Latin America. He counseled the Office of Inter-American Affairs to forget about Zapata as film material, and during the succeeding war years he gave similar advice to several studios which considered making a movie about the rebel.⁵⁸

Soon after the war the idea for a Zapata movie was revived through the spirited endeavors of Jack Cummings, one of MGM's premiere producers and the nephew of Louis B. Mayer. Cummings possessed a warmly romantic view of Mexico and in 1946 made several short pictorial movies which the Mexican government credited with increasing tourism in the country. The president, Miguel Alemán, wanted to repay the favor. Cummings asked to do a picture about Zapata, and in mid-1947 he went to Mexico City with the screenwriter Lester Cole to arrange the details. Cole carried along his proposed outline of the picture, and evidently enthused the Mexicans with its rather radical and decidedly altruistic beat. Ranking members of Mexico's cinema industry and the government agreed to Co-operate on the project.⁵⁹ Cummings and Cole returned to Metro ready to go to work, but the national temper had begun to change under the Cold War influence, and sensing their opportunities the politicians had determined to play rough. Many streamlets fed the mainstream of anti-communism which swept the country. As one facet, the House Un-American Activities Committee dusted off its old machinery and remounted its attack on Hollywood. And the Committee's yawning net soon caught Lester Cole.⁶⁰

The strategy behind and the results of the House Committee's attack on the movie industry are reasonably well-known and, at any rate, go beyond the intentions of this article. It suffices to say here that the Producers Association promised the federal government that the industry would not release movies which did not accurately portray American life and institutions, a deliberately vague catch-all that permitted arbitrary control of picture production. The State Department ordered its foreign missions to report on audience response to American films. Hollywood could then pitch its material accordingly. The industry also established a clearing house to furnish filmmakers with information about foreign cinematic concerns and to review screenplays and movies with an eye toward the elimination of material that might be offensive to foreign viewers.⁶¹ Hollywood had long engaged in assertive self-censorship in order to avoid outright federal government restriction. But the House Committee was not to be deterred. Cole claims that MGM's management was especially queasy about its Zapata movie. Eddie Mannix, the studio's manager, had once blurted, "This bastard Zapata is a goddamn Committee revolutionary." But the box office Potential of the Mexican drama calmed MGM's nerves, and the Studio decided to proceed. When the Un-American Activities Committee subpoenaed Cole, however, MGM became Convinced that Zapata had to go. Cole went on to defend himself as one of the Hollywood Ten, and on February 8, 1949,

MGM sold for some \$60,000 all its right to Zapata materials to Twentieth Century-Fox, which for several years had itself been considering a movie about Zapata, temporarily titled *The Beloved Rogue*.⁶²

Fox immediately hired John Steinbeck to write the screenplay, a project Steinbeck had been interested in for a number of years. While in Mexico in mid-1945, a film company approached Steinbeck to prepare just such a script, but the writer was already committed to other work. He still liked the idea, but asserted that he would only write it if the Mexican government assured him that he could accurately portray the historical events.⁶³ Somewhere along the way Steinbeck lost his zeal for historical accuracy.

As vice-president in charge of production, Darryl F. Zanuck guided Twentieth Century-Fox motion pictures with tight control and a strong hand. His influence pervaded the studio's movies often from their overall point of view to the smallest details. Zanuck's job was to make movies that made money, and with him commercial considerations most always superceded artistic designs. He found *Viva Zapata!* a troublesome picture from the start.⁶⁴ Although he engaged the highly regarded Elia Kazan to direct the movie, questions of content, financial potential, possible public criticism, and McCarthyite pressures continued to beset him. In fact, Zanuck lost faith in the movie soon after its release.⁶⁵

Steinbeck and Kazan began to collaborate on the screenplay in late 1949. Steinbeck wrote and Kazan rewrote. The novelist had during his recent years in Mexico collected a mass of material about Zapata which he molded into a storyline. Kazan and scenarists translated Steinbeck's prose into movie language.⁶⁶ No documents better reveal the mental confusion which had beset the intellectual Left in post-war America than the succession of Steinbeck/Kazan screenplays which preceded the filming of *Viva Zapata!* What began as an endorsement of revolution with determined leadership as the means to social change ended up as a rejection of power, strong leadership and rebellion in favor of a grass roots democracy which promises little, if any, change at all.⁶⁷ In discussing his shifting mind, Kazan said, "At the time, I was bewildered. I was anti-Stalinist and anti-McCarthy at the same time. It was difficult to reconcile the two"⁶⁸ Such a position, it has been noted, was standard fare for the unglued Leftist of the 1950s.⁶⁹ For certain; Kazan was vociferously pro-American at the time. Anyhow, Lillian Hellman calls it all, "Pious bullshit."⁷⁰

When he was working on the script in 1949, Kazan envisioned Zapata as a social climbing "snob" with a New Deal mentality, who needed to be "brought down to the bedrock of human circumstances." What Zapata lacked, it seems, along with post-war Americans, was a social consciousness. As Kazan wrote then on his Zapata script, "The very meaning of conscience today is responsibility for the unfortunate or the less fortunate of our fellow men. Zapata eventually understands this premise and leads his people's struggle for land and freedom."⁷¹ When the picture was released three years later, the director's entire perspective of Zapata had changed, as had Kazan's Cold War stance. The movie, he now said, concerned power, and how power corrupts even the best intentioned leadership. Zapata had been corrupted, although before riding to his destiny at Chinameca, he recognized that genuine power resides in the "people" and the values of democracy.⁷² Zapata, who in 1949, had led his people in triumphant rebellion, had by 1953 become a flawed human being, complex and beset by contradictions. He was heroic because he tried, even if he failed. "But then progress everywhere," explained Kazan, "comes only slowly and in small increments."⁷³

In the climactic sequence of Steinbeck's earliest script, a well-meaning hacendado, who had at first scorned Zapata's violence, says to the guerilla in the end: "You know, Emiliano, caught up in business, perhaps I did not think about things clearly... You were right, Emiliano." Zapata's head jerks up and he stares at the hacendado, who continues: "I know now you had to fight. You see, Emiliano, because the world moves on slowly and majestically, I forgot the thousand little agonies that make it move. Just as a man may rise from a chair because a single nerve twitches on his body. so perhaps is progress in the world stimulated by aching Emilianos. I know this now. And so I think you are a good man."⁷⁴

In later treatments, the hacendado is eliminated and Zapata tells his countrymen: "You've looked for leaders. Strong men without faults. There aren't any. There are only men like yourselves. They change. They desert. They die. There are no leaders but yourselves -a strong people is the only lasting strength"⁷⁵

If violence does not lead to change, Zapata, the violent, had to be cast as a failure at the end of the movie. Steinbeck eventually did just that. His original finale took place in an unspecified future. Townspeople filled their water jugs at a fountain topped with a small bronze bust of Zapata. In the background was a school called "Escuela Emiliano Zapata," and inside the children sang. "And so he was not dead. And no one was beaten anymore. And no one dared to steal the land again. And the crops grew freely. And the people were not afraid. And so he's alive."⁷⁶ But in the finished movie there is no such assurance of progress. Zapata is no more than a memory in the guise of a white horse retreating into the mountains. The people are miserable. The federal army is intact and entirely able to crush them, despite their new found defense in democracy. It is a very bad scene for the campesinos of Morelos⁷⁷

Darryl F. Zanuck had eventually had enough. It was late December, 1950, and filming was scheduled to begin the following spring. Steinbeck and Kazan continued to wallow in ideological confusion. Maybe the entire project should be cancelled. Zanuck asked the writers, "What are we trying to say in this story? Why are we particularly making this picture? What do we *finally* say when the story is over?" "Frankly, I do not know." Then a Zanuck concern: "I hope people don't get the impression that we are advocating civil war as the only means to peace."⁷⁸

The producer doubted that the movie should terminate saying, "Mexico turned into a very nice place devoid of political corruption." Mexico, he understood, had progressed. "Some of the recent elections sound almost like they are on the level. And whether it is true or not, I am certain we can attribute some of this to Zapata."⁷⁹

Noting that he had a particular stake in the financial consequences of the movie, Zanuck sensed the down-beat ending had to be changed. "I want to have the audience rooting for us and rooting for Zapata." While the hero dies, his ideals live. But what were Zapata's ideals? Zanuck had the answer: "Certainly it isn't communism, and we want to make this very clear because, frankly, in the present script there is inadvertently a peculiar air about certain speeches which might be interpreted by the communists to claim that we are subtly working for them." It seemed to Zanuck that Zapata had a few well-informed companions. One was Pablo, who had earlier been to Texas to see Francisco Madero. Zanuck surmised, "Pablo must have told Zapata about a little country known as the United States of America... It seems to me that Zapata must have heard about free elections and a government run by the people, for the people." Zanuck wanted emphasis put on "free elections" "It seems to me that Zapata has a pretty good pattern for a democratic government in his neighbor, the United States -only one civil war in 170 years. I am sure that Zapata must have asked the question many times: 'How do they do it in the United States?'"⁸⁰

So much for the intended message of *Viva Zapata!* Zanuck still had serious reservations about featuring a Mexican revolutionary hero during such tense times in Hollywood and the nation. He did not believe audiences would directly apply its story to world conditions of that time, nor would they learn any subversive lessons from it. Yet, the film, as history, would carry some significance for the viewers -and that could result in difficulties for the studio.⁸¹

"Of course" he said, "I suppose if it is a very great entertainment, loaded with theatre, and if the audience sits on the edge of the seats in the last act, and if underneath it all it has a small cry for democracy, audiences will love it and not ask any questions."⁸² Zanuck then told Steinbeck and Kazan to ponder his remarks and to help him decide whether or not the production should continue.⁸³

Well, it did get filmed, but under extreme duress, all the details of which we do not now have space to consider. The Mexican government in concert with the recommendations of the country's cinema industry refused to permit any part of the Zapata story to be filmed in Mexico. It simply did not appreciate the equivocal Zapata designed by Steinbeck and Kazan.⁸⁴ The studio had difficulty deciding who to cast in the film. Should the major parts be played by Mexicans speaking dubbed English, or by North Americans with an occasional dubbed Mexican accent?⁸⁵ Mexican censors forced numerous changes, including the title, from *The Tiger* to *Viva Zapata!* The censors thought *The Tiger* suggested a bloodthirsty Zapata. The Mexicans also objected to comparisons drawn between democratic practices in the respective countries. Zanuck agreed to a long series of changes in the Mexican version of the motion picture in order to meet that nation's requirements.⁸⁶ Even with the adjustments, the movie failed badly in Mexico, where it played to one week of jeers and then was withdrawn.⁸⁷

Characteristics of major figures in the movie underwent continuing adjustment as the filmmakers struggled to fit them in to an ideologically safe and dramatically sound framework. Emiliano's brother, Eufemio; his major intellectual prop, Pablo; Zapata's wife and mistress, and his president, Madero, all experienced changing interpretations as the writers suffered from one screenplay to the next.⁸⁸ None of them, however, underwent the manipulation experienced by the figure "Bicho", alias "Fernando", really Joseph Wiseman, that mysterious and sinister opportunist in black who surfaced periodically at the elbow of power. Bicho became Fernando only in the final stage of the film's production. Zanuck preferred the name Bicho, because it sounded harsh and mean. But when the Mexican censors explained that "Bicho" meant "bug" or some kind of vermin in Spanish, the producer retreated to Fernando.⁸⁹ There was no such character in Steinbeck's original treatments of the Zapata story. When Fernando first appeared, he was only an insignificant character in the plot, but as the Cold War heightened along with the pressures of the HUAC, Fernando grew in stature -as a villain. The studio felt that the public had to be assured beyond question that Zapata (Democrat) was right and that Fernando (Opportunistic totalitarian) was wrong. The argument had virtually been the same with *Juárez* in 1939. The Mexican heroes were all along good democrats, only by 1952 Stalin replaced Hitler as the raging dictator.

Before approving the U.S. release of *Viva Zapata!*, the Breen Office demanded cuts in scenes it considered too violent, vulgar or immoral.⁹⁰ Zanuck himself ordered further deletions. In a major sequence that has Zapata in the presidential palace, an old-time compadre and general in Zapata's army, advises his chief to make his peace with his enemies, meaning Venustiano Carranza. "We can't wipe out the opposition," says the weary fighter. "We must learn to live with it." Zanuck eliminated that entire scene. Locked in a Cold War with the Soviet Union, compromises, he explained, are not possible. "I don't pretend to know the answer", Zanuck said, "but it seems to me we are having a difficult time both in living with the Communists and in wiping them out. It seems to me that when the opposition decides to devour you, you have to do a little devouring yourself- or submit."⁹¹ Zanuck clearly reflected prevalent Cold War thinking, and so did his movie, not entirely by what it said, but just as importantly, by what was left out.

Zanuck also had immediate political and personal considerations. He objected to verbal slurs about military generals in the movie. Political reality invited discretion. "Our next President of the United States" he noted, "is very apt to be a General named Dwight Eisenhower, and this picture is apt to be out of line in addition, I myself am still a colonel in the reserves, and I may have to be taking orders from generals"⁹² Darryl Zanuck was ready to reject those communists, just like his Emiliano Zapata.

I must conclude. *Juárez*, it seems to me, was more directly bent by deliberate government intentions than was *Viva Zapata!*, although a study of yet closed State Department records could alter that opinion. And I certainly do not mean to imply that government pressure did not shape Zapata. The government's position vis-a-vis the film industry was quite different in 1939 than in 1952, but in both periods it exerted enormous pressure on Hollywood and significantly influenced the content of motion pictures. Needs and tensions within the industry itself further designed each film, as did the mental set of the filmmakers themselves. Warner Brothers and its filmmakers knew precisely what they wanted to say - and said it. Zanuck also had his mental set, but never could extract his picture from the intellectual morass in which Steinbeck and Kazan had become mired. But beyond these rather direct influences, the individuals who produced these two movies carried into them the tensions, values, attitudes and morals of the entire society in which they lived and worked. All of these factors combined, I believe, to give us two remarkable historical documents which help to illuminate the times in which they were made.

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