

Richard T. Arndt, *Culture or propaganda? Reflections on Half a Century of American Cultural Diplomacy*

In a self-critical attempt to analyze the successes and failure of the US in the context of global efforts to understand and relate to other nations, Richard T. Arndt tracks the course of formal US cultural outreach since World War II. Viewing the last century as a latter-day development in the history of formal and informal US outreach since 1776, he turns a searching light on the current state of play, suggesting that others look behind the pronouncements of policy to actual experience on the ground. A particular major US concern has been the ongoing tension between cultural outreach and the temptations of propaganda. He describes the US attempt to design a style of formal cultural diplomacy consonant with its preceding history of informal but activist cultural outreach. He notes, with a cosmopolitan and optimistic outlook, that culture is the end and education the means, hence that cultural diplomats, more artists than social scientists, aim at sharing educational experiences that offer opportunities to improve the lives of others, thereby opening avenues to a better future for their countries. Arndt differentiates between cultural relations, which happen by themselves, and cultural diplomacy, which attempts to shape elements of cultural relations to serve the interests of one or more nations, over time. There is as yet no end to the US debate between “culturalists”—who try to depict the US realistically on the basis of recognizable truths, honest dialogue, and the search for mutual understanding—and the “informationists”—who spin and shape information so as to mold foreign perceptions. Arndt be-

believes that honest dialogue contributes more to shaping lasting perceptions than the inevitable pamphlets or press-releases. Even if the US experience could be completely understood—no easy task, it can do no more than pose the probing questions each nation must answer before it reaches out in a consistent and constructive way—over time—to engage with the rest of the world.

Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Theoretical Considerations*

In his reflexion of public diplomacy and its theoretical shortfalls, Nicholas J. Cull supports his arguments with credible sources, referring to concepts, categories and taxonomies of history, international relations and the public administration apparatus. He begins his essay by differentiating the old brand of public diplomacy from the new, more globalized one. The emergence of new NGOs, the use of new technologies to communicate with international audiences, the blurring of the lines between national and international spheres of communication and the adoption of new concepts, such as country brand and soft power, are just some of the key factors he underlines and that have come to define the new brand of public diplomacy that has indubitably taken center stage. Cull then proceeds to analyze the evolution of public diplomacy as a concept and the main approaches it has taken. Each of its components—listening, the championing of causes, cultural diplomacy and exchange, international broadcasting, communications, etc.—are discussed at length, the conclusion being that our new public diplomacy is a response to recent changes in the area of international communications, particularly the role of new technology and the impact it has had on broadcasting and cultural exchange in

the era of YouTube, Second Life and virtual online worlds, etc. According to the author, public diplomacy remains important in international relations, where we should return to the art of listening as our starting point and draw on the experiences of the past as we forge a solid path forward, hence his emphasis on the need to conceptualize the work of the public diplomat as a creator and propagator of memes, and as a facilitator in the building of networks and relations.

Francisco M. Peredo Castro, *Celluloid Diplomacy between Mexico and the United States: The Mass Media, Paranoia and Image-mongering (1896-1946)*

In this article, Francisco Peredo Castro looks at a specific aspect of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States, namely how Mexico (and Latin America) have been depicted in American-made films, Mexico's diplomatic response and how we have taken the initiative, more so than other nations on the continent, to address this phenomenon. At certain moments in the past, during World War II for instance, Mexico was clearly unable to achieve a balance in its diplomatic relations and this was reflected in the films of the time, which "sacrificed" the image of our allies (mainly France) in the interests of the United States, the ally that had proven to be most hostile to Mexico, not just economically or in terms of territorial expansion, but in the way its movie industry had portrayed Mexico internationally since the days of silent films right up to the advent of talking films. Some countries involved in the war even went so far as to express their concern via diplomatic communiqués addressed to the Mexican government and Foreign Office over the distribution and screening in Mexico of films that portrayed them in a negative light and that could be construed as pro-

paganda. Drawing on an extensive collection of film and other cultural records, such as literature, diplomatic and journalistic documents (which are quoted extensively for the benefit of the reader), the author aims to illustrate how historic and audiovisual archives necessarily complement one another. His findings reveal a seemingly intangible diplomacy—that of journalistic and audiovisual messages—that often had a greater impact than official diplomacy, which, while plagued with tokenisms, formalities and political correctness on paper, had more in common with the ambiguous, contradictory or blatantly aggressive cultural discourse of the media when we read between the lines.

Luz Elena Baños Rivas, *Reflections on Public Diplomacy in Mexico: Looking to the Future*

The importance of culture in public diplomacy as a strategy for furthering foreign policy interests is the subject of this article, in which Luz Elena Baños discusses its potential to court favor and transform negative perceptions into positive images that facilitate dialog with other countries and reach out to diverse audiences. Establishing and maintaining such a dialog requires a constant, two-way flow of information that preserves trust and effectively communicates strong arguments in support of our foreign policy interests. And since public diplomacy is essentially intended to further political objectives, it relies on coherent, ongoing strategic communications aimed at target audiences and that forge enduring relationships both in and outside official spheres. In Mexico, strategies such as these have typically exploited the country's cultural wealth and while they could well be considered a form of public diplomacy, unfortunately this has not been the case. Lack of continuity, trained

professionals and resources has impeded the implementation of an efficient long-term strategy centered on our cultural diversity and values as a pluralistic, creative, humanist country with a millenary vision that promotes participation, dialog, social solidarity, that seeks human development and that is willing to shoulder its share of responsibility for the resolution of international problems. *Culture*, in the widest sense of the word, is Mexico's most treasured heritage and should be the touchstone of our international relations, says Luz Elena Baños, who believes that a brand of public diplomacy that reinforces the ties and admiration individuals and groups feel for Mexican culture is the surest path to success, and that the principles of self-determination and non-intervention that have traditionally guided Mexican foreign policy are an excellent starting point to understanding the Mexican experience as it applies to public diplomacy.

Carlos Ortega Guerrero, *Culture as a Sphere and Instrument of Mexico's International Relations*

Carlos Ortega's analysis of cultural diplomacy is based on the premise that this form of diplomacy has been underexploited by Mexico, a conviction that he backs with references to the role culture has played in diplomacy and the bearing it has had on the course of national life at certain periods in the past. He reflects on the deeper meaning of culture and cultural practices in our day, particularly how these have been increasingly undermined and overlooked, both in Mexico and abroad, as we concentrate on dealing with the economic obstacles of the modern world. After commenting on the function of the post of cultural attaché, he suggests ways in which staff members can be better trained to meet the degree of professionalism required of

them, but which he feels they do not currently meet. The model he recommends is that of a cultural institute to represent Mexico, conceived more as a concept, an official operating model, rather than a complex network of offices and staff, which he considers both non-viable and unnecessary. In Ortega's view, what we need are permanent efforts, both overseas and in Mexico, aimed at coming up with constructive ideas and solutions to the most pressing problems of our age, a task in which he feels culture plays an undisputable role.

Rebecka Villanueva Ulfgard, *Celebrity Diplomacy and the Challenges it Poses to Public Diplomacy*

Rebecka Villanueva Ulfgard approaches the issue of so-called "celebrity diplomacy" in terms of the challenges it poses to public diplomacy. Although not an officially recognized form of diplomacy, celebrities have come to wield increasingly greater political clout in traditional diplomatic circles and in the eyes of international society. According to the author, some of the factors that can explain the emergence of this new type of "diplomacy of immediacy" include the rise of information and communications technology, which has made it easier for celebrities to take up the cause of global problems that have not been addressed by governments, international organizations or conventional diplomacy. The phenomenon of celebrity diplomacy has developed with relative ease in the Anglo-Saxon world, but in recent years, it has become more popular in Mexico and Latin America, with celebrities like Lolita Ayala, Shakira, Miguel Bosé, Ricky Martin, Diego Luna, Gael García Bernal and foundations like Televisa taking up the gauntlet. One of the reasons Mexico's diplomatic authorities have been loath to venture into the terrain of celebrity diplomacy is because the agendas of

celebrities and companies like Televisa do not always coincide with the formalities and strict principles of foreign policy. On a more positive note, well-organized celebrity diplomacy that takes a non-official form of cultural diplomacy could be used to exploit the influence of internationally known public figures in Mexican cinema, television, sports and culture who have helped create a positive perception of Mexico abroad in the past.

Carlos García de Alba Z., *Public Diplomacy, Soft Power and Propaganda*

Public diplomacy is a series of government actions intended to project a certain image of the country in question among the citizens of other nations. As a result of the development of new communications and information technologies, governments are now armed with abundant tools with which to create a perception of their country in keeping with their political interests. The sheer amount of resources that are channeled into this endeavor underlines the close connection between politics and information, which only goes to confirm the importance of public diplomacy in the formulation of foreign policy. However, according to Carlos García de Alba, these tools have not been put to the service of Mexican culture, even though it has proven highly successful as a public diplomacy strategy on an international level. To ensure public diplomacy better serves national interests, Mexican culture needs to form part of a long-term government strategy that fully incorporates it as a diplomatic instrument. In this context, the Mexican Foreign Service plays a central role in the task of educating its young diplomats as to the strategic importance of promoting culture and how it ties in with the economic and political objectives of their profession. From the standpoint of public diplomacy, culture is an asset

that can work in tandem with educational, economic, trade, financial and foreign policy to help us achieve our economic development goals, and expand our trade and international political influence.

Andrés Fábregas Puig, *Meetings of Intellectuals from Chiapas and Central America: An International Cultural Policy Experience*

In this article, Andrés Fábregas Puig describes the dynamics of the meetings of intellectuals from Chiapas and Central America, held in Chiapas, Mexico in 1991-1993, a precedent that was set by the exchange meeting between Chiapas and Guatemala in 1990, which took place in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. According to the author, these meetings represent a chapter in international cultural policy that significantly bolstered Mexico's standing in Central America and facilitated its relations with countries in the region. Consequently, the author recommends that this cultural tradition be reinstated as a means of improving Mexico's diplomatic relations with Central American nations.

Eduardo Cruz Vázquez, *An Overview of Diplomacy and Cultural Cooperation in Mexico (1998-2008)*

There are many lessons to be learned from Mexico's contribution to international cultural cooperation in the past, yet its future is uncertain. The current crisis could prove to be a smokescreen that prevents us from making the changes needed to bring about a fully-fledged form of cultural diplomacy. That said, according to Eduardo Cruz, debate on the bill for an Inter-

national Cooperation Law on Matters of Development and the role a Mexican Agency for International Cooperation on Matters of Development would play is an opportunity to establish a model that more clearly outlines what Mexico can hope to obtain from such cooperation and what it can aspire to contribute in this area in the coming months and years.