

AMERICAN CINEMA THROUGH THE EYES OF MEXICO:
US-MEXICAN RELATIONS, SOFT POWER, AND AMERICAN FILM

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the effect that American film, as a form of soft power, has on bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States. Film is a deep representation of a country's culture and can give insight into the traditions, ideals, and customs of any particular country. By looking at how Mexican society views American life through its film, the potential for more peaceful relations between the U.S. and Mexico can be established through greater cultural understanding and awareness. Mexican reactions and sentiments toward American-made films were analyzed through online research of Mexican commentary on the ten highest grossing American films in Mexico as well as American films that portray Mexico and its people in the 21st century. Mexican people felt and reacted fondly to the United State's major blockbusters, while American film depictions of Mexican society were more harshly received, particularly for their disingenuous and stereotypical portrayals of Mexican life. This research shows that something as simple as American film can have a profound effect on Mexican attitudes and perceptions of Americans and the United States, which can affect the entire Mexico-U.S. relationship.

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Introduction

The power of film is undeniable. Films have the ability to influence the ideas and sentiments of their viewers. They can shape how people across the world see each other, how they feel about each other, and how they view each other. More specifically, film has soft power—the ability to get what one wants through means of attraction. Films are powerful, because if done right, they can influence the ideas of audiences, and ultimately bring audiences into the ideas of the film itself. The U.S. strength is in part driven by Hollywood’s international appeal and likability. The point of this thesis is to examine how film and soft power coincide with the larger U.S.-Mexican relationship, and to what extent the “power of attraction” truly has in international politics.

The idea of finding the connection between effective policymaking and culture, particularly film, first came to me after a study abroad trip to Costa Rica in the summer of 2014. During my time in the country I was struck by the sheer amount of American culture that Costa Ricans consumed. Everything from Lady Gaga to multitudes of American-indie bands, to the latest Hollywood blockbusters, Costa Rican people adored and cherished American cultural exports. Yet, what was most surprising was the great admiration that many Costa Ricans had for the United States, especially among the youth. They all wanted to visit the U.S., see the skyscrapers of New York City, take a “selfie” with the Hollywood sign in the background, and pose for a picture in front of the White House. What they had always seen only in front a screen they now wanted to experience in real life. Costa Ricans appreciated the American culture that they constantly saw in the movies and hear in their iPods.

That trip to Costa Rica left a lasting impression on me for many reasons. Growing up in El Paso, Texas, in a Mexican household, where Spanish is almost spoken as much as English, I grew to learn and appreciate the distinct Latino culture in which I was raised. But I never understood the animosity that my father or grandparents had for the country that they now called home. To them and many others, the United States represented a country that meddled into the affairs of other countries and only sought to enhance its already dominant role in the world. Many Mexican-American have grown accustomed to the constant bashing of all things American, and might expect to step on the ground of Costa Rica and hear the usual backlash against the United States. For this reason, I was shocked when I heard the appreciation for American film, music, and the desire to experience the rich cultural life in the United States. Such a divergence naturally leaves a lingering question: why were the people of Costa Rica accepting of the United States, while so many Mexican people were with rather cynical and harsh toward the United States?

Any time spent with family and friends from Mexico always resulted, at one time or another, in a conversation concerning those “gringos” or the “country to the north.” I could feel and hear the resentment of my family and friends in Mexico toward the country of my birth. Yet, as I heard more of these conversations and grew to understand more of it over time, I began to notice that the feeling of animosity from my Mexican relatives was primarily centered on two main subjects: the American government and racism. My family and friends felt that the United States involved itself in the affairs of other countries when it had no reason to do so, and that any trip to Arizona or Texas would surely result in an incident of racial backlash against them. The current drug-trade

violence, they would argue, was in large part the product of American consumerism and greediness. Their sentiments, although understandable, were narrow in their understanding of a country as large and as diverse as the United States. I wanted to show them that the United States was a place of great complexity, where no one clear-defined notion fully describes the uniqueness that is America.

As an American of Mexican heritage, I long to see a relationship between the United States and Mexico that is cooperative and invested in furthering diplomatic, political, and economic relations between both countries. I have seen the daily burdens that many Mexicans in Mexico and Mexican-Americans in the U.S. struggle with every day. Many work in careers that require exhausting manual labor such as in construction, custodial maintenance and other physically demanding jobs. For some, particularly those who are new to the U.S., the problems of language and cultural differences make living in the United States a significant challenge that it is not easy to overcome, especially for those who are trying to make a life for their families. Seeing the constant struggle that many Mexican families go through has led me to hope for continued cooperation, in many different aspects, between the United States and Mexico. Particularly, continued cooperation between both countries that betters the social and economic life of all Mexicans, while strengthening the bilateral U.S. relationship with Mexico.

The Importance of the U.S.-Mexico Relationship

The partnership between the United States and Mexico is one of the most significant relationships for the United States and the world economy a whole. Along with China, the United Kingdom, Israel, France, and Canada, Mexico is among the most

important partners for the United States in the 21st century. Due to Mexico's proximity and the vast cultural similarities between the two, the U.S. need for effective, friendly, and cooperative relations with Mexico is of vital importance to the United States and its regional interests. The United States and Mexico have many shared interests, ranging from trade to how to better handle the current drug-trade violence in Mexico, particularly northern states that border the U.S.¹ If both countries continue to work with one another on a wide range of issues, then greater ties can be forged between the two North American countries. It is crucial, not only for the region, but for the world that Mexico and the United States maintain a strong and open relationship. Mexico and the U.S. have come a long way since the Mexican-American War, but much work remains to be done by both nations.

In 1994, the landmark North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect for the participating American, Mexican, and Canadian governments, allowing for greater trade liberalization in North America. NAFTA—a free trade agreement that was signed by the governments of Mexico, Canada, and the United States—was created with the intention to reduce barriers to trade and increase the overall trade relationship between all involved countries. The implementation of NAFTA led to a reduction in protectionist policies such as tariffs, quotas, and Twenty years have passed since the passing of NAFTA, with many of its policies having had a profound affect on the major economies of North America. According to a report by the Hoover Institute, NAFTA led

¹ Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 1-3, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/txstate/reader.action?docID=10569004>.

to a trading increase of 84% between the United States, Mexico, and Canada.² NAFTA's creation has had a significant impact on all three economies, yet its true importance to the region lies on the effect that it has had on United States-Mexico relations.

While there have been many praises of NAFTA for Mexico, it has also been met with much criticism and backlash. NAFTA has seen disproportionate growth for some of its members, but has also led to a Mexican economy that has become too reliant on its American counterpart. According to Mark Weisbrot, Stephan Lefebvre, and Joseph Sammut:

As was well known at the time of NAFTA's passage, the main purpose of NAFTA was to lock in a set of economic policies, some of which were already well under way in the decade prior, including the liberalization of manufacturing, foreign investment and ownership, and other changes. The idea was that the continuation and expansion of these policies would allow Mexico to achieve efficiencies and economic progress that was not possible under the developmentalist, protectionist economic model that had prevailed in the decades before 1980. While some of the policy changes were undoubtedly necessary and/or positive, the end result has been decades of economic failure by almost any economic or social indicator. This is true whether we compare Mexico to its developmentalist past, or even if the comparison is to the rest of Latin America since NAFTA. After 20 years, these results should provoke more public discussion as to what went wrong.

Much of the criticism aimed against NAFTA has been that its goals for Mexico were never truly met because of its overdependence on the U.S., which was only heightened after Mexico's output loss due to the Great Recession.³ More specifically, NAFTA tied the economies of the United States and Mexico more closely than ever before.

² Michael J. Boskin, ed., *NAFTA at 20: The North American Free Trade Agreement's Achievements and Challenges* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2014), xi-xv, 4. Texas State-Alkek Library's Catalog, EBSCOhost.

³ Mark Weisbrot, Stephan Lefebvre, and Joseph Sammut, *Did NAFTA Help Mexico?: An assessment after 20 years* (Washington D.C: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2014), 17-18, <http://cepr.net/documents/nafta-20-years-2014-02.pdf?>

Mexico, possibly more than both the United States and Canada, had much to gain from the creation of NAFTA. Prior to NAFTA, Mexico was a relatively closed economy, with low levels of foreign trade, foreign direct investment and overall competition. NAFTA gives Mexico greater access to the sizable American market. However, Mexico's inclusion in NAFTA moved the country from a closed economy to an open, market-driven economy. For example, Mexican imports from the U.S. increased 119 percent after NAFTA, while Mexico's exports to the U.S. also went up by 108 percent. Furthermore, NAFTA created real wage increases in all three countries, but Mexico produced the largest real wage gains after the free trade agreement.⁴ A flourishing industrial sector coupled with a growing, young population has allowed the Mexican economy to thrive under NAFTA. Only time will tell if the policies implemented through NAFTA mean maintaining a sustainable, developing Mexican economy.

The gains for the United States under NAFTA, although significant, were not as pronounced as the gains made by Mexico. The United States, already being an industrialized country, had much to benefit from NAFTA but only in places where greater trade liberalization allowed for sharp economic growth. American exports to Mexico grew by 118 percent because of reductions in tariffs, while American imports from Mexico only grew by 49 percent.⁵ These numbers demonstrate that the economic relationship between the United States and Mexico is skewed toward a Mexican economy heavily reliant on its American counterpart. Whether good or not, NAFTA further established an American-Mexican economic partnership that is more closely tied together.

⁴ Boskin, *NAFTA at 20*, 69-78.

⁵ Boskin, *NAFTA at 20*, 77-78.

The economic ties between Mexico and the United States are significant and vast. Especially after the signing of the NAFTA, Mexico has undoubtedly turned into one of the most essential U.S. economic partners. Mexico is the third largest U.S. trading partner, behind China and Canada. Mexico accounted for 13.2 percent of all U.S. trade in 2013. American exports to Mexico are 14.3 percent of total U.S. exports, second only to Canada, while imports from Mexico to the U.S. are at 12.4 percent of total imports into the country.⁶ On the other hand, Mexico's trade relationship with the United States is even more significant and disproportionate. The U.S. is Mexico's largest trading partner, buying 77.5 percent of all Mexican exports in 2012. In addition, nearly half of Mexico's total imports came from the United States during the same period.⁷ The large bilateral trade relationship demonstrates the need for continued dialogue and cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico.

Mexico's bright economic future and its young population present plenty of opportunities for strategic U.S. engagement with Mexico. Jim Sachs, who originally coined the acronym "BRICS" (which stands for the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), has popularized the term MINT for a group of newly industrialized countries that are seen to be among the most rapidly developing and fastest growing in the world. Mexico, as a member of MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey) countries—which represent BRIC-like economies that are believed to see the highest percentages of economic growth in the coming decades—has enormous

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, "Top Trading Partners - July 2015," July Total Trade Table, <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/top/top1507cm.html> (accessed September 14, 2015).

⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Trade at a Glance-Mexico," United States Diplomatic Mission to Mexico, http://mexico.usembassy.gov/eng/eataglace_trade.html (accessed September 15, 2015).

potential for increased trade and investment.⁸ The United States should take advantage of the economic resources that Mexico can provide for its economy by continuing trade and directing investment into Mexican markets.

There are many political matters that are pertinent to relations between the United States and Mexico. Illegal immigration and the illegal drug trade are the two most important political issues that confront the U.S. and Mexico. Both countries have not always agreed on issues and at times have had resounding differences in opinions. Yet, since President Cardenas expropriated the national oil industry from foreign companies in 1938, the United States and Mexico have continued to work together on a range of challenges that are important to the region.⁹ The differences between both countries may not be fully be fully dealt with, but these differences can be worked on through shared communication and cooperation between the United States and Mexico.

One of the most defining issues facing the United States and Mexico today is figuring out how to deal with the challenge of illegal immigration. In American politics, illegal immigration is among the most repeated issues heard in the rhetoric of many politicians. Finding solutions to illegal immigration issue is a common theme that American politicians seeking the presidency have to answer. To summarize the importance of illegal immigration to the relationship between the United States and Mexico, Manuela Angelucci succinctly writes:

⁸ Adeolu Durotoye, "The MINT Countries as Emerging Economic Power Bloc: Prospects and Challenges," *Developing Country Studies* 4, no. 15 (2014): 99-106, <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/DCS/article/view/14420/14729>.

⁹ Catherine E. Jayne, "Diplomacy of expropriation: American and British reactions to Mexico's expropriation of foreign oil properties, 1937-1943" (PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 1998), 2-3.

Border enforcement is a cornerstone of US immigration policy. However, while its intensity has nearly tripled between the early 1970s and the mid-1990s, the size of the illegal Mexican migrant population in the United States has grown from 1.1 million in 1980 to 2 million in 1990 and 4.8 million in 2000, and it accounts for about 70% of the total unauthorized resident population of the United States.¹⁰

These numbers help explain why illegal immigration has become a centerpiece of modern American politics. The tremendous amount of illegal immigrants into the United States has become a concern for many. Needless to say, as illegal immigration from Mexico into the U.S. continues, political differences will continue between the two countries.

The illegal drug trade, particularly the ongoing violence that has engulfed Mexico and its people, has presented the United States and Mexico with one of the most devastating, important political matters facing both countries today. The violence in Mexico that has resulted from the illegal trade has become not only a national concern, but an international concern as well. According to Roberto Zepeda and Peter Watt, at the height of the violence in Mexico, 11,583 drug-trade related homicides were reported in 2010. In 2007, 438 kidnappings were reported in Mexico but grew nearly threefold in 2010 to 1,262 kidnappings. Since the election of President Felipe Calderon in 2006, a total of 39,274 deaths (until 2012) have been reported.¹¹ The violence in Mexico is a problem that must be dealt with by the Mexican government, but the violence is itself tied to the ongoing drug trade with the United States. Much of the demand for the illegal drugs stems from a huge number of consumers in the United States.

¹⁰ Manuela Angelucci, "US Border Enforcement and the Net Flow of Mexican Illegal Migration," *Economic Development & Cultural Change* 60, no. 2 (2012): 311, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://www.ebscohost.com/>.

¹¹ Watt and Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico*, 2-3, 181.

American consumption of illegal narcotics is a crucial factor behind the drug trade with Mexico and its closely associated violence. The U.S. is the world's largest consumer of illegal drugs, in addition to being the largest supplier of weapons, both of which are direct factors in the violence in Mexico. The United State's black market and the inflationary effect on prices that comes with prohibition has led to enormous monetary gains for Mexican suppliers of illegal drugs, with some estimating that the gross revenues range from \$6 billion to \$7 billion annually.¹² These numbers demonstrate why the drug-trade in Mexico has become such a problem for the American and Mexican governments. Increased cooperation on this front by both countries is necessary to reduce the influence of powerful cartels and the overall drug trade.

The U.S. role in expanding the scope of violence in Mexico and its hunger for narcotics is a major reason for the slaughter of thousands of innocent people. Many Mexicans in hope of finding a better life for themselves and their families exacerbate the illegal immigration issue in the United States. These political challenges are not easy to confront, but if both the United States and Mexico have the will to continue working together on these issues, then maybe one day they will cease to burden either Mexico or the U.S. Nonetheless, American-Mexican relations rely on the ability of both countries to remain strong against these powerful political challenges.

The importance of Mexico to the United States cannot be understated. Even foreign politicians recognize the importance of U.S.-Mexico relations. While running for Prime Minister of Canada in 2015, Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau felt the need to

¹² David A. Shirk, *The Drug War in Mexico: Confronting a Shared Threat* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2014), 13, <https://books.google.com>.

comment on how to improve Canadian relations with the United States. In doing so, he summarized the significance of the U.S.-Mexico relationship by stating:

Mexico is an important economy, with a burgeoning energy industry and a young work force. By some estimates, its economy will rival Britain and France in the next fifteen years. American leaders have long seen Mexico's problems and Mexico's progress as their own. Its time we understood that the road to real influence in Washington is to help solve big problems in areas of deep, shared interest."¹³

As Trudeau pointed out, the United States understands that its own future relies heavily on the political and economic development of Mexico. A stable, growing, and corruption-free Mexico means a more prosperous America.

Mexican-American Demographics in the United States

The importance of the U.S.-Mexico relationship can be seen in the shared demographics between both countries. Millions of Mexicans, whether here illegally or not, call the United States home. As such, cultural similarities are bound to exist and flourish with such a large Mexican community living in the U.S. The significant Mexican population in the U.S., especially as that number continues to grow, means that the U.S. relationship with Mexico will grow in importance. More Americans in the United States will have ties to Mexico and its culture. They will expect to see American policies that respect their culture, language, and Mexico itself. As the population of Mexicans grows in the United States, the political, economic, and cultural ties between both countries will only continue to loom larger.

¹³ Justin Trudeau, "Highlights of Justin Trudeau Speech on Canadian-American Relations," YouTube video, 14:24, posted by "FactPointVideo," June 23, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LDmn8GOSWQ>.

According to the latest Census Bureau data from 2012, it is estimated that 33.7 million Hispanics of Mexican origin live in the United States. Of these 33.7 million, 11.4 million are immigrants born in Mexico, while the other 22.3 million were born in the U.S. and self-identify as Hispanics of Mexican origin. Furthermore, people of Mexican origin made up the largest share of the entire Hispanic population in 2012. Two-thirds (roughly 64 percent) of all Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican origin.¹⁴ These statistics help show the enormous presence that all people of Mexican origin have in the United States.

The growth of the Mexican population in the United States has risen significantly over the past four decades. As Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Mark Lopez point out, “in 1970, fewer than 1 million Mexican immigrants lived in the U.S. By 2000, that number had grown to 9.8 million, and by 2007 it reached a peak of 12.5 million.” As can be seen, the Mexican population grew tremendously through immigration since 1970, but has since begun to decline with the Mexican-born population on a decline as new Mexican immigrants has slowed.¹⁵ What the decline in the arrival of new Mexican immigrants into the United States means for the future of United States-Mexico relations remains to be seen, but it is sure to have an effect in one way or another.

The cultural ties between both countries are essential to understanding the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. The culture of Mexico lives and thrives in the United States because of the large number of Mexican-born Americans who call the U.S.

¹⁴ Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Mark H. Lopez, “A Demographic Portrait of Mexican-Origin Hispanics in the United States,” *Pew Research Center* (2013), accessed September 8, 2015, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/05/01/a-demographic-portrait-of-mexican-origin-hispanics-in-the-united-states/>.

¹⁵ Gonzalez-Barrera and Lopez, “A Demographic Portrait.”

home in addition to those who self-identity as being of Mexican origin. We can see it in the Tex-Mex in Texas, in the Hispanic last names of players who grace the field for the U.S. Men's National Soccer Team, in the popularization of Mexican-based style restaurants like Chipotle, and in the rise of politicians of Mexican origin in states like California, New Mexico, and Texas. Understanding the importance of Mexican culture in American life is essential to understanding the U.S. relationship with Mexico and even the future of the United States and its people as a whole. The United States and Mexico have become intertwined culturally, politically, and economically over the past few decades, and understanding one country is crucial in understanding the other.

By working together on matters of great importance, both countries can do much to better the lives of its citizens, particularly Mexicans living in poverty in the United States and Mexico. The Mexican and American governments can do plenty to strengthen ties with each other. But, the role of governments can only go so far in improving relations and closing the stereotypes that are commonly held among Mexicans about Americans and Americans of Mexicans. Sometimes, as with many other issues, governments' reach and influence cannot solve all issues regarding diplomacy and bilateral relations with other countries. At times, the extra work of strengthening ties between countries lies in the hands of a country's own citizens, universities, corporate firms, and its popular culture.

The idea of "soft power" is at the heart of this thesis. As a component of soft power, film can be a powerful proponent of a country's culture, its beliefs, and what it stands for as a nation. The purpose of this thesis to view the impact of American film on Mexican society and what that means for relations between the United States and

Mexico. The core belief within this thesis is the idea that peace among nations can be accomplished through greater understanding of each other's differences and similarities, through better understanding of each other's cultures and beliefs. Film, as a direct representation of a country's attitude and culture, can demonstrate to its audience what a society believes and what it sees as normal or different. Film is soft power, and it has the power to radically affect how we all view each other. The hope is that film can be used a force for good and peace and that through this thesis, perhaps we will have better understanding of how film can be a catalyst for future cooperation among countries.

This thesis is meant to see how Mexican society at large, which includes all ranges of people from your average Internet user to highly influential public intellectuals, view American film and how that shapes the U.S. relationship with Mexico. In order to get a full grasp of what Mexican people are saying about U.S. films it is important that a wide spectrum of resources are used to fully grasp what they are thinking and saying about American films. These sources include Mexican government documents to simple comments made by Mexican Internet users on blogs, forums, popular internet websites, and the like. All possible Mexican reactions to American films, whether formal or not, are needed to find a cohesive and comprehensive Mexican sentiment toward the United State's movies.

A collection of America's highest grossing films in Mexico and American-produced films that portray Mexican society were used to measure how Mexicans view and feel about U.S. films. Mexican sentiments and reactions toward American films were highly varied, with no clear, unified Mexican feeling toward films made in the United States. For some American films, Mexican people had very negative views, while others

felt extremely appreciative of the creative work that many American filmmakers are producing. Overall, an analysis of Mexican people's reactions to American-made films indicates that U.S. filmmakers have made considerable headway into appeasing Anti-American sentiment in Mexico, but can also continue to build a stronger bilateral relationship with our neighbor to the south by representing Mexican society in a much less stereotypical and in a more realistic manner in American films.

This thesis is based on the belief that mutual understanding, particularly through increased cultural awareness, can go a long way in establishing peace and prosperity between nations. It is also centered on the belief that making small changes, no matter how seemingly insignificant or miniscule, can help create greater lasting diplomatic relations between countries. It is true, looking at the impact that American films have on Mexican society may seem like a concept that will do not anything to further U.S.-Mexico relations, but just taking the time to see the correlation between the two and making the possible adjustments to American films may help forge closer ties between Americans and Mexicans in the long run. This thesis is meant to move the conversation between Mexico and the U.S. relations from being a conversation of purely economic and political matters, to one that includes the social and cultural challenges that both countries face. After this study, maybe my family and friends in Mexico will view the United States as being a country of less greed and racism and more as a country of hope and democratic ideals

Chapter 1:

Soft Power and its Importance to US-Mexico Relations

First coined by Joseph Nye in his book *Bound to Lead*, soft power has come to change the study of international relations since Nye first began to use it. Many governments and statesman are starting to understand that a country's success on the world stage requires soft power as a source of influence and power. Unlike hard power, which attempts to persuade through hard factors such as militaristic or economic means, soft power relies on means of attraction and likability. The importance of soft power in achieving one's goals cannot be understated in today's world. In the 21st century, formulating an effective soft power approach to foreign policy is essential for all countries that seek to have a degree of influence in the international community.

In *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Joseph Nye defines soft power as being, "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced."¹⁶ In international relations, countries use soft power to persuade other countries through means of seduction and attraction. Soft power derives its influence from domestic (and foreign) policies, its institutions, and its culture. Soft power at its simplest is getting someone to do something that they otherwise would not have done because of attraction and charisma. The power of attraction is a particularly potent form

¹⁶ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), x.

of power because it relies on having a country do what you want them to do completely on their own accord, and not through means of coercion.

Soft power comes in many forms and shapes and can be difficult to explain as one cohesive source of power. Soft power can come from one single novel (such as the *Harry Potter* franchise in the U.K.) to a country's entire record of foreign involvement in international affairs (like the U.S. foreign interventions since the Vietnam War). Soft power can strengthen a country's influence, but can also harm a country's goals. For example, American music that is popular in Europe and Latin America may end up damaging the U.S. reputation in the Middle East. Most importantly though, unlike hard power in which the military and economic tools of coercion are in the hands of governments, soft power is usually placed outside of a government's influence and can be used and directed by cultural institutions, companies, universities, and the like.¹⁷

Political scientists when determining the strength and influence of a country now weigh the concept of soft power heavily. Countries, particularly in the age of terrorism and the Internet, can no longer simply rely on traditional forms of power to succeed in achieving their goals and aspirations. They must now take into account whether their domestic and foreign policies reflect badly on themselves, whether their cultural and religious beliefs are completely out of line with the rest of the world, or whether their cultural institutions are seen as attractive and truly representational of their own cultural beliefs. Today, a country deciding to invade another country must balance not only the reactions of its own citizens but also the reactions by other governments, foreign citizens, and international bodies such as the United Nations.

¹⁷ Nye, *Soft Power*, 11-15.

In 2015, Portland Communications released an index of the thirty countries with the best overall degree of soft power. Britain was ranked as the country with the most soft power, followed closely by Germany, the United States, and France. China was ranked dead last among the thirty countries surveyed. More importantly, though, the factors used to account for soft power provide valuable insight into what exactly soft power is. Amongst the categories compiled for soft power strength were international engagement, culture, government, education, digital capabilities, and enterprise. Each of these six categories make up the essentials of soft power. A country's global diplomatic network and contributions to global affairs, the international reach and attractiveness of its culture, a fair and responsible government, the education levels of its people and its contribution to scholarship, its digital and internet capacities, and the attractiveness of its economic and business models, all form the vital organs of soft power. Soft power resources are not coercive, but rather represent the very things that are important to a country's ideals and which can in turn influence the outside perception of that country's ideals. In essence, as Portland Communications simply states: hard power is push; soft power is pull.¹⁸

Soft power primarily stems from three main sources: the political values of a country, a country's foreign policies, and its culture. These three sources are what form the foundations of a country's soft power. All three are essential for successful execution of soft power. None are more important than the other, and all play an important role in establishing a strong soft power presence. In order for a country to attain its goals through soft power, it must have political values that are seen as universal and equal, a foreign policy that is just and that is not seen as being overpowering and selfish, and a culture

¹⁸ "Soft Power 30," *Portland Communications*, accessed October 31, 2015, <http://softpower30.portland-communications.com>.

that is representational of a country's beliefs and practices and which shares the interests of others.¹⁹

Essentially, soft power is derived from these three fundamental principles. In order for soft power to work effectively it must incorporate all three sources in unison. They are all vitally important for the successful development of soft power. For example, as David McConnell states:

How does this jibe with Joseph Nye's notion of soft power, which he defined as an attractive power: the ability to get what you want through attraction (rather than coercion or payment) that arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, ideals, or policies? As he noted, popular culture does not, in and of itself, equate with soft power. Rather, soft power rests primarily on three resources: a country's culture, political values, and foreign policy. The more universal the values it adheres to and the more global (or globally shared) its national policies, the greater a country's potential for influencing the behavior of others (i.e., exerting soft power), according to Nye. When such conditions are compromised, however— as when a culture is more parochial than universal and its values are narrow rather than broad— there is less potential for the generation of soft power even when a country's cultural goods are trafficking well outside national borders.²⁰

The political values of a country serve as the guiding ideals of a state, which can either strengthen or weaken the soft power of a country abroad. Political values that are universal and fair, such as democratic ideals and equal rights can be powerful sources of soft power. However, political values that are seen as being unjust and unfair to its own citizens can be detrimental to soft power because other countries may view them as being hypocritical. A country seeking influence abroad cannot hope to impose its own set of values of democracy and equality when it has corrupt elections and equal rights for only a

¹⁹ Nye, *Soft Power*, 11.

²⁰ Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell, ed., *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/txstate/reader.action?docID=10292193>.

select few of its people. Likewise, a country that treats its entire people—no matter their sex, social class, race, or sexual orientation—with equality and that has fair and open elections can have a voice on the international stage when it comes to issues of human rights and democracy. When a country's political values promote universal ideals and reflect the shared interests of all nations, then its soft power is strengthened through legitimacy.²¹

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the United States lost much of its international support, credibility, respect, and soft power due to its involvement in the affairs of a sovereign country. For the United States, instances like the wars in Iraq and Vietnam have resulted in loss of soft power because they represented foreign policies that lacked the international community's support, were seen as being illegitimate, and because they did not have the interests of all in mind.²² Foreign policies, such as unpopular wars, that do not have support home and abroad can be very costly for the soft power of countries. International policies such as foreign aid, sound diplomacy, participation in international organizations, and multilateral cooperation can enhance a country's soft power and its overall influence in the world. In order for the foreign policies of a state to assist in creating soft power, they must have the shared interests and the approval of the international community.²³

Culture comes in many variants and represents the beliefs, values, practices, and institutions that a country or society holds most dear. Cultural soft power is not as easy to quantify as political values and foreign policies, but maintains itself as an integral part of

²¹ Nye, *Soft Power*, 11-15.

²² Nye, *Soft Power*, 35-36.

²³ Nye, *Soft Power*, 14.

soft power. In addition, it is important to note that it has two distinct manifestations: high culture such as art and literature that is primarily aimed toward elites and popular culture that appeals to the masses. As Nye notes, a culture that contains universal values and works to further shared beliefs with other countries, can ultimately strengthen a state's chance of successfully attaining its goals because of its cultural attractiveness. If a country's culture has narrow or provincial values, then its soft power can be diminished or reduced. Even if a country's culture is widely respected and liked, it may not be enough to entirely influence the nature of international politics. Atrocities and wars still occur in areas of the world where American films are prominently watched or where people can eat at a McDonalds or enjoy a coffee at Starbucks.²⁴ This is to say that culture is an important source of soft power, but not one that can completely alter the major issues facing the world.

The soft power of a country can be very representative of its values, customs, and culture. As Yasushi Watanabe and David McConnell state, "what become the resources for soft power are the culture developed by and rooted in the people of a country and the ideas based on it."²⁵ Soft power is dependent on a country's principles. What a country deems as important will likely be embodied in some way through its soft power. France, for example, which has had a long and storied history in diplomacy, is presently among the leading countries in terms of soft power because of its large diplomatic network.²⁶ France's political culture has been highly influenced by its diplomacy, which today can

²⁴ Nye, *Soft Power*, 11-13.

²⁵ Watanabe and McConnell, *Soft Power Superpowers*, 193.

²⁶ "Soft Power 30"

be seen in the way that it implements its soft power. Soft power relies on the beliefs common to a country's culture, which is why it can be a very potent form of power.

Soft power, like any form of power, has its strengths and weaknesses. A state cannot solely rely on soft power for success in international politics. Just as hard power can no longer ensure that any country reach its goals through purely coercive means, soft power can only do so much for a state's success in foreign affairs. Together, soft and hard power—also called smart power when both are used in conjunction—are the two essential resources for a truly complete foreign policy. At times, the use of hard power can make more sense, especially in moments of extreme significance and quick decision-making, but at other times, soft power may be better suited for the situation. Hard power and soft power are equal in their significance, neither superseding the other in terms of their importance to the foreign policy of countries. Nonetheless, soft power must play an important role in the foreign policy of all states seeking to influence the affairs of the international community.

Soft power is mainly achieved in long-term goals and not by short-term aspirations. Hard power is more likely to ensure that a state gets what it wants, but may have possible repercussions for that state in the future. Soft power gives states the ability to get their desired outcomes in safer, less costly ways, albeit in a slower and less-sure manner. Because soft power relies on factors such as political values and culture to achieve its goals, states do not have to fear immediate reactions from governments and people to potentially unpopular policies that require uses of hard power. Even if others see a country's music as obscene, it is unlikely that any major international reaction will occur besides condemnation. Soft power gives countries the flexibility to influence

international affairs in ways that hard power cannot. That is soft power's greatest strength: its ability to persuade through attractiveness and charisma and not through forceful means.

Soft power has big flaws that are not easy to dismiss. For one, soft power does not have the power to immediately influence international affairs, especially those concerning war and aggression. Soft power cannot force an enemy state to give up its actions, but must do it through long and arduous processes. Hard power tools are much better suited for such endeavors. Secondly, soft power can at times be unreliable in providing the needed influence that is needed for effective foreign policy. Just because many Chinese students flock to American universities does not necessarily mean that they will return to China with a better view of the United States. Of course, such trends are not easy to observe, but they reflect the greater issue that the influence of soft power is very difficult to understand, even with public opinion polls. The flaws in soft power create many problems for policymakers hoping to use it, but its overall power and ability to affect international politics make soft power a necessary tool for conducting effective foreign policy.

Examples of Soft Power in Contemporary Use

In *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, Yasushi Watanabe and David McConnell argue that soft power has a major role to play for the foreign policy of both the United States and Japan. More specifically, the cultural institutions that both countries have created for themselves—such as anime for Japan and Hollywood films for the United States—can help aid in

nurturing and developing their reputations abroad. Using the United States and Japan as the prime examples, as Watanabe and McConnell did, one can see the influence that soft power can have for countries.

Two of the strongest cultural assets that the United States has its disposal are its world-renowned universities and academic system and its vast cultural influence. Because American universities are considered to be the best in the world, many international students flock to the U.S. to receive their degrees. As is noted by Philip G. Altbach and Patti McGill Peterson, “the experience of studying, either in one’s own country or abroad, helps to shape one’s worldview and attitudes toward society and culture.” As more international students study in the U.S., the American values and ideas instilled in them are sent back to their home countries once they complete their studies in the U.S. This can result in political, economic, and cultural changes for the countries of the returning students. For, example, in 1993 Hungary passed a higher education act that modeled Hungarian universities after their American counterparts, which was in part a result of the influence of Hungarian rector, six of which studied in the U.S. as Fulbright Scholars.²⁷

The U.S. cultural dominance, as stated before, can be a positive and negative resource for soft power. However, the attractiveness and recognition of American cultural institutions cannot be understated. Many countries, even ones with authoritarian regimes, consume American pop culture. Wielding pop culture as a force of political change is no easy feat, but it is possible. Like Matthew Fraser notes, “Iran’s ayatollahs banned satellite TV in order to keep out proscribed channels such as MTV, but no fiat or fatwa

²⁷ Watanabe and McConnell, *Soft Power Superpowers*, 37-43.

could prevent countless thousands of satellite dishes from mushrooming on rooftops throughout Tehran's suburbs. Twenty years after the 1979 revolution, not only were Iran's satellite laws liberalized, but also a pop concert in Tehran was permitted by religious authorities."²⁸ In Iran, the introduction of American culture not only helped give way to the liberalization of satellite laws, but also allowed cultural events, like concerts, to take place in a country known for its cultural conservatism.

Japan's soft power capabilities have been a result of its internationally adored anime culture. Fraser states, "the global popularity of Nintendo and anime characters from *Pokémon* are signs of Japan's growing soft power."²⁹ Only a few decades ago, Japan was still seen as an insular country by curious observers, yet it has now transformed itself into an open, popular country. Japan's rise as a "cool" country can be seen by the progressively annualized increase of Japanese cultural exports since 2003, like manga comics and animation films, bought by foreigners consumers. Anime mega-hits like *Pokemon*, *Dragon Ball Z*, and *Hello Kitty* have turned Japan into a highly popular country, with many visitors coming to Japan to enjoy its animation attractions.³⁰ This popularity has given Japan newfound soft power, rivaled by only a few countries.

The cultural capabilities of the United States and Japan have allowed them to use their soft power in ways that many other countries have not been able to. Universities in the U.S. have given the United States the ability to influence the hearts and minds of foreign students, while American cultural institutions have paved the way for political reform in places like Iran. Japan has seen its popularity and influence soar with the

²⁸ Watanabe and McConnell, *Soft Power Superpowers*, 173.

²⁹ Watanabe and McConnell, *Soft Power Superpowers*, 186.

³⁰ Watanabe and McConnell, *Soft Power Superpowers*, 132-137.

attraction of its beloved anime characters. Through these examples, one can see the influence that soft power can have.

Film as a Form of Cultural Soft Power

Film is an important part of cultural soft power. Viewers of film can visually see how a country thinks, how its citizens interact on a daily basis (sometimes), and the values that are embodied in its society. People usually watch movies with the intention of being entertained for an hour or two, yet films can be great educators as well. Through a screen, films give viewers an intimate insight into the customs of a society. Film is soft power because it is a part of culture, particularly, an aspect of culture that is very easy to understand and see. Understanding cultural soft power means understanding the importance of film. Harnessing the full power of soft power must at least in some way mean harnessing the power of film to establish even greater cooperation between nations. Nonetheless, this is no easy task, as Fraser points out, “pop culture is arguably the most fascinating, and controversial, instrument of American soft power.”³¹

Nye simply defines culture as being “the set of values and practices that create meaning for a society.”³² In many ways, films are a direct representation of states’ values and practices. As an extension of culture, film can embody the moral beliefs and views of a country, thus allowing it to serve as a driving force behind soft power. Film, like music and national brands, are one of the main forces behind cultural soft power. Due to the fact that films require audio and visual interpretation, they serve as a part of culture that is easy to comprehend and quantify. Films do not require literacy, only the understanding

³¹ Watanabe and McConnell, *Soft Power Superpowers*, 172.

³² Nye, *Soft Power*, 11.

of the film's language and the desire to watch cinema. As long as people can hear and see (and with a little money), then the wonders of film are open to them. Because soft power relies on likability and attractiveness, films provides the perfect way in which to attract world audiences to one's culture.

The power of film can be seen in how it embodies the most foundational rights of many countries. The mere fact that audiences with restricted civil liberties can see an America movie that pokes fun at the U.S. government and governmental officials, shows foreign audiences the very ideals that make the United States a free and democratic country. Indeed, just because a film is produced and made in a country does not necessarily mean that it represents the values and morals of that country, but it does indicate that those filmmakers have the liberty to make films as they please without fear of governmental intervention, which is in itself a vital value of many industrialized countries. Producers and filmmakers make films that they feel best represents the interests of their primary audiences. The environment in which they were raised forms their understanding of the world, which is oftentimes the country of origin of the film that they are producing. The films that they create are direct personifications of the minds of filmmakers, meaning that films are also the byproducts of the culture of their creators.

Film is important to soft power because of the power that lies in an audience watching a foreign film and through it, being able to better understand or even misunderstand that culture of the country that produced the film. Films provide viewers with the basic cultural proficiency of other countries that can lead to increased understanding and cooperation between peoples. Exposure to Nigerian culture is hard to come by for many, but if one wishes to learn about Nigeria and its people then

Nollywood is a good place to start. The same can be said about India and Bollywood and South Korea and its burgeoning film culture. Films offer relatively cheap opportunities to learn about other cultures, which is precisely why they are an important part of soft power. Today, many people in developed countries can tap into the culture of other countries by simply having access to YouTube or Netflix. Increased technological advancement has led to easier access to hundreds of films for millions of people. Undoubtedly, more knowledge and understanding of the world can only lead to greater dialogue between all people.

Film provides viewers with an opportunity to see how other people around the world live their lives, without having to go directly into that country. For example, the content of French films, like *Amélie* and the many films of Jean-Luc Godard, exposes viewers to the ways in which French people think about themselves and the world around them, while also demonstrating the lifestyles of people in Paris, Marseille, or the French countryside. Films assist in forming the opinions of their viewers. At times this can help in shaping positive and real views of countries, while at other times this can negatively impact the understanding that audiences have of countries. A person completely foreign to American culture watching any of the *Hangover* films may come to believe that all Americans adore debauchery, drugs, and finding trouble. When audiences begin to view a film like the *Hangover* films as a broader continuation of American culture, then misperceptions can cause diplomatic complications.

The rise of China as a major international actor has meant the spread of Chinese influence onto the rest of the world. However, Chinese culture is still very foreign to the outside world. Not only has China's tremendous economic growth allowed its hard power

capabilities to grow, but also demonstrated the need for stronger soft resources. The Chinese government is now determined to enhance Chinese soft power, and is looking to film as a way to strengthen it. Chinese officials understand that films can help spread Chinese culture to the rest of the world and have since started a “go abroad” strategy to spread Chinese soft power.³³

In 2002, the Chinese government, with Clauses 17 and 41, stated that the Chinese government should foster private and public investment in film production, exhibition, and distribution, through the updated “Film Management Regulations”. Two years later, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) issued three new regulations to enhance the commercialization and privatization of the film industry. Furthermore, the introduction of the Beijing Film Festival and the fact that the Chinese film market is now the second largest in the world have allowed China to become a global leader in film. Consequently, this decade has seen a great expansion in the production and consumption of Chinese films internationally. Of course, strict Chinese regulations on films and the global dominance of Hollywood will make it difficult for the development of China’s soft power, but China understands that its influence in the world relies not only on the size of its economy and its army, but its cultural attraction as well.³⁴

The United States is the leading exporter of films. One of the main reasons why the U.S. has maintained its position as the cultural hegemon of the world is due to its vast film production.³⁵ The United States has translated its leading role as a producer of films

³³ Yuxing Zhou, "Pursuing soft power through cinema: censorship and double standards in mainland China," *Journal Of Chinese Cinemas* 9, no. 3 (2015): 239-243, doi: 10.1080/17508061.2015.1049878.

³⁴ Zhou, "Pursuing soft power," 243-247.

³⁵ Nye, *Soft Power*, 33.

to a form of power and influence. As Hubert Védrine and Dominique Moïsi point out, America has the global advantage in soft power because the U.S. can “inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to the mastery of global images through film and television and because, for these reasons, large numbers students from other countries come to the United States to finish their studies.”³⁶ In many countries, the only exposure that some people have to the U.S. and American life is by what they see in films and television. This has led to many different interpretations of American culture in the eyes of foreigners, but this has also aided in cementing American culture as the primary popular culture of the world. Film can help the United States maintain its position as the world’s leading cultural hegemon, but must do so in a way that does not demean American values and beliefs, while continuing to attract the minds of all those who watch American movies and hope to one day see what the United States is really like.

Film, Soft Power, and U.S.-Mexico Relations

In 2009, Nigerian writer Chimanda Ngozi Adichie gave a powerful TED Talk over “the danger of a single story.” In her TED Talk, Adichie pointed out the necessity of having the open-mindedness and understanding to not single out people or individuals based purely on a “single story” heard or read about in the media. She argues that the knowledge we receive on other cultures and countries comes primarily from popular culture, that it shapes our understanding of the world around us in ways that may hinder true cultural proficiency. Adichie’s need to address the “dangers of a single story” stems

³⁶ Hubert Védrine and Dominique Moïsi, *France in an Age of Globalization* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 3, <https://books.google.com>.

from her own personal experiences as a Nigerian woman. One of her first experiences in the United States left a lasting impression on her:

My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my "tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey. She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove. What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals. I must say that before I went to the U.S., I didn't consciously identify as African. But in the U.S., whenever Africa came up, people turned to me. Never mind that I knew nothing about places like Namibia. But I did come to embrace this new identity, and in many ways I think of myself now as African. Although I still get quite irritable when Africa is referred to as a country, the most recent example being my otherwise wonderful flight from Lagos two days ago, in which there was an announcement on the Virgin flight about the charity work in "India, Africa and other countries." So, after I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, I began to understand my roommate's response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner.³⁷

Adichie's words shine a light on the effect that popular culture and media can have on peoples' perceptions of other cultures. More importantly, her words stress the need to remember that all peoples have more than a single story.

The understanding of many Mexicans and Americans of each other has become a single story. There are many Americans that view Mexicans as "dirty," "illegal," and

³⁷ Chimanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TED Talks video, 18:49, October 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

“violent” people, while many Mexicans view Americans as “racist,” “ignorant,” and “greedy” people. People in both countries have begun to view each other in ways that do not accurately reflect their entire countries. The larger problems in Mexican society of drug-related violence and governmental corruption have led to the belief in many Americans that the Mexican immigrants who come into the U.S. are also violent and corrupt. Mexicans have come to view Americans as being rude, self-righteous, greedy, and as having prejudicial beliefs of Mexico. Labeling an entire nation of people into narrow categorizations of stereotypes learned from the media can damage the relationship between countries. This has become evident between the peoples of Mexico and the United States. Undoubtedly, film has become a main instigator of promoting the “single story” of many countries. Yet, it also has the power to reverse the damage done by single stories and positively show the richness of all peoples and cultures.

The role that film can play in the relationship between the United States and Mexico can be of great importance to their bilateral relations both in the present and for years to come. Many, if not most, of the films that Mexicans watch are American-made films. By consuming so much American popular culture through movies, Mexican people are bound to form an opinion of the U.S. even if they have never stepped foot in the country. It is for that precise reason, that American-produced films can bridge the gap between the negative cultural perceptions that Mexicans have of the U.S. and the turbulent relationship that both countries currently share. By having American films present the United States and its people in a way that is truly representative of its culture, and not necessarily through the overly sexualized and violent culture that many see onscreen, then Mexicans may begin to see the United States in a more positive, genuine

manner. American film can either hurt or strengthen the U.S. bond with Mexico. The point here is not to necessarily suggest that the U.S. change how it makes films, but rather recognize and understand what Mexican audiences like and dislike about American films.

Of course, film can only play a minor, even slight, role in the affairs between the United States and Mexico. But changing something as small as cultural stereotypes in American films can ultimately do much to enhance the U.S.-Mexico relationship. Soft power means greater strength through means that are not coercive, but rather are likable and in which common values are shared by all. Soft power is influence by attraction. Films are arguably one of the most attractive and appealing forms of art. Through it the United States and Mexico can forge a new relationship is not solely based on political and economic ties, but that also takes into account the great cultural diversity that both countries share.

Chapter 2:

Anti-Americanism in Mexico

The people of border town of El Paso largely took great interest in the 2015 release of Denise Villeneuve's *Sicario*. The film largely deals with the ongoing drug-trade violence in Mexican border cities like Juarez and Nogales and the ways in which the United States, through its various governmental agencies, handles the current drug crisis. As the release of the film grew nearer, however, many citizens and leaders of El Paso and Juarez came out against *Sicario*, claiming that the film presented both cities negatively and inaccurately. Enrique Serrano Escobar, the mayor of Juarez, called for a boycott of the movie in the city, while various leaders of El Paso (including the local congressman) formed a panel in order for the El Paso community to have a discussion over the film and its portrayal of El Paso and its sister city.³⁸ When asked about his feelings toward the movie and its creators, Mayor Escobar stated:

It hurts the image of Juarez and its people. I invite (the people) not to see it, that plainly, because it is something that speaks ill of the city, not that we deny what happened. We don't have to speak ill of a family when there is a problem and here it is the Juárez family who feels aggrieved. We are looking at the possibility of suing them, those produced, promoted, because there is actual damage done against the community.

The backlash by Mexican politicians, and even of American leaders on the El Paso border, indicates that feelings of anger and frustration grow when American films portray Mexican communities in a negative fashion. Whether the film actually depicts Juarez and Nogales accurately is not necessarily the point, but rather the fact that the people of

³⁸ Luis P. Hernandez, "Chocan por 'Sicario' Autoridades de Juárez y El Paso," *El Diario* (Juarez, Chih.), Sept. 30, 2015, http://diario.mx/Local/2015-0930_041cf1d7/chocan-por-sicario-autoridades-de-juarez-y-el-paso/.

Mexico feel antagonized by an American film. More importantly, does Mayor Escobar's legal threat against *Sicario*'s producers represent discontent with the film itself or does it reflect the greater anti-American sentiment that is felt throughout Mexican society?

Sicario's relevance to anti-Americanism lies in the fact that many people in Mexico still grow angry and frustrated with the U.S., even for something as simple as a film. The reactions to Villeneuve's film demonstrate that Mexico is willing to take the necessary actions against the United States when it feels that the circumstances require action. Furthermore, the backlash from Mexican politicians and the Mexican community in El Paso against *Sicario* show that anti-American sentiment is still present in Mexican society. The release of *Sicario* was only one reminder that Mexico and its people continue to harbor feelings of anti-Americanism against the United States. Only time will tell if those feelings will remain or dissipate in Mexico.

Anti-Americanism in Mexico has long been a cause of concern for the United States, an issue that has proven difficult to overcome and tame. Anti-Americanism in Mexico has come about for many different reasons. Mexican people have come to resent the United States for many of its past actions against Mexico. American interventions in Mexico, such as the Mexican-American War (1846-1847) and the U.S. interference in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1919), have led to a rise of anti-Americanism in Mexican society. In addition, the sheer dominance and power of the U.S. in North America has also made the United States seem like a bully in a region where only the U.S maintains economic and political dominance. The U.S. has not been able to find an effective way of lessening the deep anti-Americanism that lives within Mexican society, but must continue trying in order to ensure that the ties between the two countries are never completely

severed. Anti-Americanism is not a problem that can be tackled head-on by aggressive American policies, but through a slow and gradual process that requires understanding and dialogue with Mexico.

Defining Anti-Americanism

Anti-Americanism has become one of the foremost U.S. problems in the 21st century. As defined by Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane in *Anti-Americanism in World Politics*, anti-Americanism represents “a psychological tendency to hold negative views of the United States and of American society in general.”³⁹ If other countries view the U.S. negatively, then the ability of the United States to influence and attract other states diminishes. Anti-Americanism, whether in Mexico or abroad, is the antithesis to U.S. soft power capabilities. More specifically, greater levels of anti-Americanism in the world means decreased soft power. If the United States is to remain as one of the leaders in soft power, it must face the challenges that anti-Americanism presents to formulating effective American foreign policy.

In order to better understand anti-Americanism, it is important to differentiate between “what the United States is”—the essential beliefs and values of the U.S.—and “what the United States does”—the policies, particularly the foreign policies of the U.S. People around the world are much more likely to resent the policies that the United States implements than they are what the U.S. believes in and stands for. Some people tend to criticize American values and beliefs, while others criticize American policies.⁴⁰

³⁹ Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert Owen Keohane, *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 12, <https://books.google.com>.

⁴⁰ Katzenstein and Keohane, *Anti-Americanisms*, 10.

However, recent history has shown that anti-Americanism has grown within the international community because of American policies at home and abroad. Of course, there are those, particularly Europeans, who attack American culture and the American way of life, but most recently anti-Americanism has flourished because of “what the United States does” and not by “what the United States is.”⁴¹

Katzenstein and Keohane elaborate further on the definition of anti-Americanism by dividing anti-Americanism into four typologies: 1) liberal; 2) social/Christian democrat; 3) sovereign-nationalists; 4) radicals. Liberal anti-American belief is generally in accordance with the values of the U.S, although it is very critical of the U.S.’ failure to successfully pursue actions that are in line with its supposed values. Social and Christian democrats, like liberals, share many of the same principles as the U.S., but differ on some beliefs, particularly the U.S. inability to provide a more extensive social welfare system to its people. Sovereign-nationalists are much nationalistic, and therefore, identify with their own nation, regardless of whether the United States poses a threat or not. Lastly, radicals are completely against the United States and the values in which it believes.⁴² Furthermore, it is important to note the difference between elite classes and public anti-Americanism. Anti-Americanism exists within both classes, but it takes shape in different ways depending on the class. The difference in how groups identify with anti-Americanism is vital to understanding how and why some people feel the way they do toward the United States.

⁴¹ Alan McPherson, *Anti-Americanism in Latin American and the Caribbean* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006). 37, <https://books.google.com>.

⁴² Katzenstein and Keohane, *Anti-Americanisms*, 28-31.

Anti-Americanism is a complicated and difficult matter. Anti-Americanism is not uniform throughout the world, nor is it the same for each individual country. Some countries may have higher degrees of anti-Americanism, while others may have minimal levels of anti-American sentiment. Also, global anti-Americanism may see periods of relative tranquility like in the 1990s, while at other times, anti-Americanism may surge in popularity after unfavorable policies are implemented by the United States or because of shifts in global opinion. Defining anti-Americanism is not an easy task, and figuring out how it affects American foreign policy is even harder task to accomplish. However, one thing is certain: the proliferation of anti-Americanism in the world does not bode well for American foreign policy.⁴³

Much of the information collected that pertains to anti-Americanism is primarily collected through polling. Polling can be a great way to get an initial reading of how the masses feel and react to the United States, its people, and the policies that it implements. However, polling, especially on such a grand international scale, can also lead to misconceptions about the true feelings that the international community has on the United States. In addition, the statistical challenges of biases are ever-present in polling and can hinder the effectiveness of finding true anti-American sentiment in the world. Nonetheless, even with all of their problems, polls do provide researchers with the necessary initial information to establish the groundwork for determining the level of anti-Americanism in the world.⁴⁴ Much of the information used in this thesis is because of extensive prior done on anti-Americanism.

⁴³ Katzenstein and Keohane, *Anti-Americanisms*, 6.

⁴⁴ Katzenstein and Keohane, *Anti-Americanisms*, 19-23.

Global Anti-Americanism

Sentiments of frustration and animosity toward the U.S. have been a result of many different factors. U.S. foreign policy actions, the economic and political dominance of the U.S., and America's cultural imperialism have all contributed to the rise of anti-Americanism throughout the world. The United States remains today as the strongest country in the world, with the world's largest economy and one of the most important political actors. As such, the decisions that the United States makes can weigh heavily on the rest of the world, which can at times render unpopular opinions in many countries. In addition, U.S. strength is not only limited to its great political and economic capabilities, but also exists because of the vast American culture that it exports to the world. Together, these factors have allowed anti-Americanism to develop and fester in nations where U.S. power and influence have become too overwhelming.

One of the most significant trends in the early 21st century was the growing anti-Americanism within various countries against the United States. Anti-Americanism rose significantly throughout the world due to policies that were seen unfavorably in many countries. In particular, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq greatly diminished the popularity that the U.S. had enjoyed with countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The wars in the Middle East not only cost the United States much-needed popularity, but also led to an increase in international anti-Americanism, and the loss of soft power.⁴⁵

In 2006, the Pew Research Center released its highly comprehensive "Global Attitudes Project" (GAP), which was the first study to document anti-Americanism in foreign countries. The GAP looked at the favorability of American policies abroad, how

⁴⁵ Nye, *Soft Power*, 35.

the international community viewed the American people and its culture. In its research, the GAP indicates that U.S. popularity first began to decline with the election of George W. Bush in 2000 and then fell sharply after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As the Pew Research Center notes, policies taken by the United States were unpopular, but favorability for the American people remained high. However, after Iraq, approval for the American people also began to decline in nearly every country that was polled. Furthermore, the reelection of George Bush in 2004 only cemented the American peoples' declining favorability in many countries. Andrew Kohut, author of *America Against the World*, points out that "in 2005, two years after the invasion of Iraq, anti-Americanism eased slightly... but the United States remained broadly disliked in most countries surveyed by Pew, and opinion of the American people continued to be less favorable than once was. Even popular U.S. policies and actions, like U.S. tsunami relief efforts to southeastern Asian countries after the 2004 disaster, did little to repair America's image." Of course, anti-Americanism predated the Bush era, but it did develop even further throughout the world after 2003. Nonetheless, U.S. actions in Iraq did damage America's global image and ultimately led to the anti-Americanism that is still rampant today in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and Asia.⁴⁶

The U.S. economic and political dominance has also been a factor in the rise of anti-Americanism in the world. The Pew Research Center's research indicates that majorities in most countries surveyed disliked the global power of the United States. The current, albeit fading, U.S. role as the sole superpower has led to international distrust

⁴⁶ Andrew Kohut, *Introduction: America's Image in America Against the World* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 1-31.

about the intentions of the United States.⁴⁷ The disproportionate influence that the United States has had on the global economy, particularly after the financial crisis of 2008, has caused many to be wary of relying too heavily on the United States on economic matters. Today, countries like China and India have seen increased levels of financial investment in their borders, at the expense of the United States. Further, and possibly more pertinent, has been the world's growing distrust with Washington's politics, especially as they pertain to international affairs. For example, the highly disproportionate amount of military spending by the U.S. compared to other states has been a major cause of concern for the international community. Many feel that the United States could use its military might for selfish, greedy, possibility even imperialistic reasons.⁴⁸ For the United States, simply being the strongest state in the international system has meant greater distrust against it. Its power has meant a rise in anti-Americanism.

Ineffective foreign policy decisions and strong military might, however, are not the only factors that have given rise to global anti-Americanism. The spread of American values and ideals have also become a point of concern for many nations. For many developing countries, the invasion of foreign influence, including American, into their national cultures is something that they have become very wary of and have tried their best to resist against. For example, as noted by the Pew Research Center, "almost nine out of ten Turks fearing being overwhelmed by foreign culture, followed closely by Indonesians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Senegalese, and Egyptians."

American cultural imperialism has become a major concern for many countries and a source of confusion for American policymakers. Most people in the world watch

⁴⁷ Kohut, *Introduction*, 46.

⁴⁸ Kohut, *Introduction*, 40.

and listen to American movies, television, and music, yet most people in the world also dislike the influence that the United States has had on their culture.⁴⁹ People throughout the world like the cultural exports that the United States produces, but also feel that they are receiving too much American culture at the expense of their own national cultures. Seeing nothing but American movies on the billboards and theaters, having American pop divas and bands invade the musical playlist of their people, and having franchises like McDonalds and Starbucks on every street corner can become an issue for states seeking to solidify their own national cultures. For many governments, the difficulty of balancing their own distinctive cultures with the frenzy of American culture has become too much handle.

Many governments around the world have begun to take measures to reduce the “Americanization” of their cultures. For example, countries like Australia and France have started to put in place protectionist policies to maintain their national cultures by reforming regulations and providing subsidies to local film industries. Instead of placing quotas on American films, the governments of Australia and France have fought back against the influence of American films by growing their national film industries. Elsewhere, countries like Japan maintain their local identities by viewing American culture through their own cultural lens. Providing the television show *Dallas* as an example, Muhammed Özekin and Zeynep Arioğuz argue that “the meaning and the impact of the show is not the same for every audience or for every locality it broadcasted but its

⁴⁹ Kohut, *Introduction*, 46.

meaning and impact was shaped by the framework of the audience`s local culture.”⁵⁰

Some states understand that directly targeting American cultural exports may not be the best answer to protecting their own cultures, so instead they consume American culture out of sheer necessity without fighting back against the dominant American movies, songs, and shows that are exported into their countries. Countries have started to protect their national cultures against the spread of “Americanization” by taking varied approaches to the growing presence of American culture in their countries.

Cultural American imperialism, like U.S. economic and military preponderance, represents the global cultural sway that the United States has over world. Countries cannot escape American culture, as it is present in everyday life for many people. Many young people have grown with Pixar films and Spider-Man movies, and have come to truly enjoy many facets of American culture. Yet, many other people hope to see their national films and music industries play a more important prominent role in their cultures. Some, like France and Australia, have taken adequate steps to grow their own national culture without demeaning American culture. Nonetheless, there is no easy way of combating the anti-Americanism that stems from U.S. cultural imperialism. People in other counties want less American culture, even as they tacitly enjoy what the United States sends over. As Kohut notes, “they resist American ideas and culture—even as they embrace them.”⁵¹

Much has changed since the Pew Research Center released its “Global Attitudes Project” in 2006. The policies of the Obama administration have differed greatly from the

⁵⁰ Muhammed Kürşad Özekin, and Zeynep Arioiz, “Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Globalization and Hybridization,” *Journal Of World Of Turks* 6, no. 3 (2014): 186, <https://www.ebscohost.com>.

⁵¹ Kohut, *Introduction*, 42.

policies of the Bush administration. The policies of President Barack Obama have taken a more multilateral approach to foreign policy, unlike the Bush administration, which favored unilateral policies. Under Obama, the United States has seen its international popularity rise once again. In addition, the rise of new global actors like China and India has taken some of the pressure away from the United States. However, the United States still remains disliked by much of the world. The United States cannot simply repair its damaged image through a new presidential administration and through the introduction of China as a world power, but by listening to and repairing the concerns of other nations.

Moving forward, global anti-Americanism remains as one of the greatest U.S. threats for its soft power capabilities. If anti-Americanism grows in scope and strength, then the U.S. ability to influence through attraction will be weakened, leading to greater American reliance on hard power resources. The U.S. already recognizes the power and sway that anti-Americanism can have for many people who feel belittled by U.S. power and influence, which is why the U.S. government must continue to do everything it can to reduce the causes of anti-American sentiment. Furthermore, anti-Americanism must be fought, not only for political purposes, but so that other countries can have a better understanding of the United States and its people. Only then can the United States form a greater, stronger partnership with countries throughout the world.

Anti-Americanism Throughout Mexican History

Anti-Americanism in Mexico started before Mexican Independence in 1821. Prior to Mexico becoming an independent country, an envoy from independence leader Miguel Hidalgo was sent to the United States. James Monroe, the Secretary of State at the time,

told Mexico that it would support Mexican independence if it adopted a constitution modeled after the American one. Monroe's intention was to have Mexico become an independent state, with a constitution similar to that of the U.S., in order for it to be annexed later in time into the United States. Even before Mexico became an independent state, the U.S. had already begun to view Mexico as a place of possible exploitation. Prominent Mexican statesmen, like the future president, Benito Juárez, noticed that the United States saw Mexico as an unequal partner: a neighbor to be used for the benefit of United States.⁵²

Following the Monroe Doctrine of 1823—which declared that no European countries were to settle or interfere in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere—many Mexicans began to wonder over the territorial ambitions of the United States. They soon realized that the United State's desire for territorial expansion among the American public made the U.S. one of the enemies. As Brian Bow and Arturo Santa-Cruz argue, “anti-Americanism thus started at home to a large extent because a weak, divided Mexico not only longed for external recognition, but also because it was easy prey for an industrious and ambitious neighbor. This fragility made of the nascent state fertile soil for resentment and fear toward a significant other, in this case the United States.” It was the American quest for territory that led to the Mexican anti-Americanism that still exists today.⁵³

⁵² Brian Bow and Arturo Santa-Cruz, “Mexican Anti-Americanism and Regional Integration in North America,” *Norteamérica, México* 6, no. 2 (2011), accessed October 15, 2015,

http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?pid=S187035502011000200002&script=sci_arttext.

⁵³ Bow and Santa-Cruz, “Mexican Anti-Americanism.”

The Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and its outcome remain as one of the most important historical reasons for the development of anti-Americanism in Mexico. After the fight for Texan independence and the Mexican-American War, Mexico lost nearly half of its territory to the United States.⁵⁴ What started as border dispute in the Mexico-Texas border turned into a war of territorial pursuit for the United States.⁵⁵ By taking its land, the power-hungry Americans not only took territory from Mexico, but a deep sense of pride, too. Many Mexicans (my father included) still cringe at the thought of states like California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas being American instead of Mexican. Much of the anti-Americanism that many Mexican people feel today, comes from the sense of a territorial “robbery” by the United States against Mexico.

The Mexican Revolution is one of the most significant events in Mexican history. The actions that the United States took during this bloody period in Mexico only exacerbated the previous feelings of animosity toward the Americans. Unlike in the past, the United States took more supposedly covert actions during the Mexican Revolution. They American government undermined, particularly through the efforts of American ambassador Henry Lane Wilson, many Mexican politicians and rebels like Pancho Villa during the early years of the revolution. Bow and Santa-Cruz point out “the United States’ overt—and offensive—intervention in Mexican politics, and then its refusal to recognize the regime that emerged from the armed conflict, were used by the contending Mexican factions to gain political support by exploiting the anti-Yankee sentiment latent in the country.”⁵⁶ The Mexican people felt that the United States was interfering in Mexico’s

⁵⁴ Bow and Santa-Cruz, “Mexican Anti-Americanism.”

⁵⁵ McPherson, *Anti-Americanism*, 39.

⁵⁶ Bow and Santa-Cruz, “Mexican Anti-Americanism.”

struggle for a better government for its own selfish purposes. To Mexicans, the U.S. was becoming a bully against whom they needed to stand up in order to protect their national interests.

Modern Mexican history tells a more cordial, if secretly tense, relationship between the United State and Mexico. Following President Lazaro Cardenas decision to expropriate the national oil industry, American and British business interests grew angry at the Mexican government's decision. To President Cardenas, protecting Mexico's national oil industry came before friendly relations with its Anglo-Saxon trading partners. Moreover, President Cardenas' oil expropriation ignited a newfound confidence in the Mexican people against its powerful northern neighbor. Never before had the Mexican government so blatantly done the opposite of what the United States wanted it to do.⁵⁷ The feeling of belittlement and anger toward the U.S. became a feeling of strong-handedness and triumph for the Mexican people. Anti-Americanism remained, but with it came the idea that Mexico was no longer completely at the whims of the United States government.

Anti-Americanism in Mexico

Anti-Americanism in Mexico has had a long history. Since the Mexican-American War, the United States and Mexico have at times had a tense, problematic relationship. Some of the anti-American sentiment in Mexico is derived by American policies that are not well received by Mexico. However, much of the current Mexican

⁵⁷ Catherine E. Jayne, "Diplomacy of expropriation: American and British reactions to Mexico's expropriation of foreign oil properties, 1937-1943," (PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 1998), 2-3.

anti-Americanism comes from the large shadow that the United States casts over its southern neighbor. Having such a powerful and influential state, like the U.S., right next door to your doorstep is sure to stir the emotions and fears among citizens. In short, Mexico's anti-Americanism stems from its insecurity, its ever-present need for respect from the U.S., and the long, troubled history between the two countries.⁵⁸

Anti-Americanism in Mexico, however, is in some ways similar to the international community's anti-Americanism but also differs in other ways. For example, as Alan McPherson writes in *Anti-Americanism in Latin America and the Caribbean*:

Anti-Americanism has a prominent place in Mexican history. The relatively harmonious relationship between the two nations in the 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century tended to obscure that fact that Mexicans have often been critical of the United States, especially concerning government and business policies that posed threats to the interests of Mexico. Anti-American in Mexico, therefore, often manifested itself in arguments against the specific policies and actions more so than the broad cultural and philosophical critiques of the United States typical of European anti-Americanism. One purpose of this thesis is to examine this theme in Mexican history—the quarter century following 1917 when the epic Revolution followed its irregular and often unexpected trajectory generated conflict with its powerful neighbor to the north.⁵⁹

Like global anti-Americanism, Mexican anti-Americanism is based on past American interventions in Mexican affairs, the fear that American governmental and business interests could harm Mexico, but not necessarily against American culture and American values. Mexico, like many other countries, has had to deal with the interference of the United States in its national politics. Since its birth, Mexico has always kept a careful watch over the U.S. and its intentions to ensure that Mexican social and political stability were maintained against possible American interference.

⁵⁸ Bow and Santa-Cruz, "Mexican Anti-Americanism."

⁵⁹ McPherson, *Anti-Americanism*,

Unlike global anti-Americanism, however, Mexican sentiments of anti-Americanism stem from the close proximity of Mexico to the United States. Because the United States borders Mexico, it has been able to directly meddle in the affairs of Mexico since Mexican independence in the 1800s. Furthermore, another interesting facet of Mexico's anti-Americanism is derived from its desire for respect from the United States. As Brian Bow and Arturo Santa-Cruz argue, "anti-Americanism in Mexico is a complex and subtle phenomenon, which consists of numerous currents running from a single wellspring: America's refusal to recognize Mexico as an equal partner."⁶⁰ The argument, at least, according to Bow and Santa-Cruz, is that some of Mexico's anti-Americanism comes from constantly living under the shadow of the United States. In addition, the apparent U.S. refusal to view Mexico as an equal partner furthers anti-American sentiment in Mexico.

Presently, controversies like the National Security Agency's (NSA) monitoring of Mexican presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto's phone conversation with Brazilian President Dilma Rouseff have caused further tension between Mexico and the United States.⁶¹ The U.S. decision to wiretap President Peña Nieto phone essentially told the Mexican people that the U.S. is not completely trustworthy of the Mexican government. More importantly, however, the NSA revelations indicated to Mexico that the U.S. could and would be a distant, if not invisible, presence in the affairs of Mexican society. Acts like these have given Mexicans reason to be suspicious of the United States and its interests, which only adds to further anti-Americanism sentiments in the Mexican public.

⁶⁰ Bow and Santa-Cruz, "Mexican Anti-Americanism."

⁶¹ Luisa Parraguez, Francisco G. Gonzalez, and Joskua Tadeo, "Latin America: Anti-US in Words, Not Deeds," *YaleGlobal Online* (2013), accessed October 15, 2015, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/latin-america-anti-us-words-not-deeds>.

If the United States continues interfering in the political affairs of Mexico, then the anti-Americanism that pervades throughout much of the country will not go away, but rather continue to grow. The U.S. must understand that it can no longer meddle in the affairs of Mexico if it wishes to create a better, more lasting economic and social union with its southern neighbor. When the U.S. behaves in ways that disparage Mexico, Mexicans feel justified in having anti-American beliefs. As stated above, much of Mexico's anti-Americanism comes from the U.S. refusal to see it as an equal. Doing such acts, like spying, only reinforces the idea that Mexico that it still remains on unequal footing with the United States.

Anti-Americanism in Mexico has long been a part of the relationship between the two countries. The historical background shows that the United States has interfered in most of Mexico's most significant political events. Yet, it has not acted in a way that has benefited Mexico and its people. The tremendous political and economic influence of the United States has always diminished Mexico's ability to become a major player in North American, and reduced it to live under the fame and glory of its powerful neighbor to the north. Above all, however, Mexico's need to be respected by the United States has and continues to be rejected by the U.S. Until the United States views and treats Mexico as a true political equal, then anti-Americanism in Mexico will continue to persist in Mexican society.

Chapter 3:

American Film and Mexican Society

There can be no denying that American film is very popular and widely seen in Mexico. The masses in Mexico storm the theaters when a major Hollywood blockbuster premieres in the country. Just like Americans, and people throughout the world, Mexicans also wait in agony for the release of their favorite superhero movies or the premier of a new cinematic franchise. American films have seemingly captivated the minds and hearts of many Mexican people. But have American films actually allowed the U.S. reputation to improve in Mexico or have they had no real impact on the U.S.-Mexico relationship? Undoubtedly, American cinema has grown very popular with the Mexican people and their views, thoughts, perceptions, and ideas of the United States has in some way been shaped by the American film industry. This examination of the cultural effect that American films have on Mexican society helps to show what the U.S. can do to strengthen its relationship with Mexico through its cinema.

In order to see how American films affect the Mexican public and how that in return influences relations between the United States and Mexico, two different sets of American films were used for this thesis: the top ten highest-grossing American films in Mexico and ten modern (21st century) American films that portray different aspects of Mexican society. The highest-grossing American films are meant to gauge how Mexicans perceive the major films produced in the United States. Most of the world watches many of Hollywood's biggest blockbusters, but many also gain different interpretations from

them. That is why it is important to see how the Mexican public reacted to the most heavily consumed American films. The observed American films that portray Mexican society were used primarily to understand how people in Mexico felt about their representations in films produced by foreign (American) filmmakers.

The Top Ten Highest-Grossing American Films in Mexico	The Ten American Films that Portray Mexican Society
1. The Avengers (2012)	The Book of Life (2014)
2. Toy Story 3 (2010)	Frida (2002)
3. Iron Man 3 (2013)	Man on Fire (2004)
4. Despicable Me (2013)	Traffic (2000)
5. Ice Age: Continental Drift (2012)	The Mexican (2001)
6. Maleficent (2014)	Nacho Libre (2006)
7. Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs (2009)	Casa de Mi Padre (2012)
8. Avatar (2009)	All the Pretty Horses (2000)
9. Monsters University (2013)	Bordertown (2006)
10. Spider-Man 3 (2007)	Once Upon a Time in Mexico (2003)

Figure 1: This table outlines both sets of American films that were used to gauge how the Mexican public reacted to American cinema.⁶²

For the purposes of this thesis, there are a few clarifications that must be addressed before analyzing American films and their effect on Mexican society. Firstly,

⁶² “Mexico Yearly Box Office,” *Box Office Mojo*, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/mexico/yearly/>.

the nationality of a film will be determined by its main source of financing, primarily the origin of the production company. This is to ensure that there is no confusion as to whether a film is American or not. A film can be directed by a Canadian, and written by a Frenchman, but if the money for the film comes from the United States, then the film will be counted as being American. Secondly, the films, particularly U.S. films portraying Mexican society, were chosen because of the information available for each film. Some films had little to no researchable information from Mexican sources, thus could not provide the necessary research that was needed for the thesis.

Mexican Reactions and Sentiments to American Blockbusters

One of the greatest U.S. strengths comes from the allure of Hollywood films. The biggest U.S. blockbusters are seen the world over, many seen by millions of people. Most of the U.S. films that foreign audiences see are primarily the major theatrical releases that Hollywood produces. America's blockbusters help establish the U.S. image to the rest of the world because Hollywood movies are watched and enjoyed by people across all continents. Moreover, much of America's cultural soft power arises from Hollywood because of the sheer international popularity of major blockbuster films.

Hollywood films form the backbone of American cultural exports. Whether you ask someone in Prague, Asuncion, or even Baku, they are likely to have seen or at least heard about the Star Wars franchise, for example. What this indicates is the international presence and recognition that American films have in the world. People know and get excited about the releases of popular movie franchises like *The Avengers* or *Toy Story*.

Arguably, no other country has the same international dominance in film as the United States does.

One of the greatest challenges that has risen out of the Hollywood's dominance in film, however, has been the backlash against that very dominance. Governments are realizing that their own national film industries are taking a back seat to American films. In addition, much of the content in American films is rejected as being too violent or too sexualized by many countries such as China. As mentioned earlier, the span of Hollywood's influence in other countries has led to other countries implementing protectionist measures against American films. Too much American culture through film has inevitably caused other countries to be wary of what the United States exports to their countries.

America's global preponderance in film has also affected Mexico. Mexico, a country with its own storied film culture, has been a large consumer of Hollywood films. Most of the films consumed in Mexico are from the United States. Mexico has not been immune to its northern neighbors cinematic influence. The Mexican public has enthusiastically supported many of Hollywood's films. Mexicans, at least monetarily, have been accepting of American movies. However, just because they have been willing to pay to see American films does not necessarily mean that they come out liking what they see on the screen. Is Mexico's apparent appreciation of American films simply a result of Hollywood's international dominance in films, could it be a façade of Mexican willingness to pay for American films that they do not like, or could they just truly enjoy watching American blockbusters?

In 2012, *The Avengers* became the highest grossing American movie in Mexico. The Mexican public anxiously anticipated the release of the Joss Whedon film in Mexico, with the film grossing over sixty million dollars in Mexico. *The Avengers*, however, was not only a financial success, but also a critical success with the Mexican people. For example, Luis Miguel Cruz, from *Cine Premier* (one of the leading film critic websites in Mexico), stated about the film, “it is with pleasure to say that *The Avengers* is not only everything that Marvel promised to its fans, but that it is effectively one of the best superhero films in history... with the promise of taking the franchise to levels that seemed unimaginable just a few years ago.”⁶³ Many in the Mexican public made comments like this, from average people praising the special effects of the movie to film critics giving rave reviews of Whedon’s production.

The Avengers was a film that Mexican people greatly enjoyed. It was widely praised by the public and the film critics alike for its eye-catching action scenes and the way in which it was able to give all the lead characters important roles in the film. Furthermore, one of the most significant results of *The Avengers* was the creation of a large fan base of Marvel’s beloved superheroes in Mexico. After the film, characters like Thor and Iron Man became household names in Mexico. Blogs and Internet comments were flooded with anticipation for the following *Avengers* film. Bloggers and commentators on public forums passionately argued why their favorite characters were the most important of the franchise. *The Avengers* started a dialogue about the film in Mexico.

⁶³ Luis Miguel Cruz, “The Avengers: Los Vengadores,” *Cine Premiere* (2012), accessed September 7, 15, <http://www.cinepremiere.com.mx/8359-review-cine-the-avengers-los-vengadores.html>.

Of course, there were a few in the Mexican public that did not like the film, but as a whole, *The Avengers* was a large success in Mexico. What was even more telling about the Mexican public's reactions to *The Avengers* was that there was not much dislike for the film solely because of its American roots. There was little to no bashing of the film because of its quality or because it was an American production. More than anything, *The Avengers* demonstrated that American films, if done well, could become massive hits in Mexico. All in all, Joss Whedon's *The Avengers* was a success in Mexico and a success for American films.

One of the most adored film franchises in the world has been Disney's *Toy Story*. Pixar's 2010 release of *Toy Story 3* was one of the biggest box-office successes in Mexico. Only grossing two million dollars less than *The Avengers*, *Toy Story 3* became one of the largest theatrical releases in Mexico. The two prior *Toy Story* films had already established a well-known presence in Mexico and many were eagerly awaiting the alleged final Pixar production. Like *The Avengers* though, *Toy Story 3* became not only a financial success, but a critical one too. The Mexican reactions to *Toy Story 3* indicated the critical and public adoration for the film.

Mexican film critics were very satisfied with *Toy Story 3*. Critics like Carlos Gómez Iniesta of *Cine Premier* stated, "the possible conclusion to the saga will not only make you yearn for the toys that have been by your side for the best moments of your life, but will remind you of the importance of keeping your friends through it."⁶⁴ In the review, Iniesta gave the film a positive rating of four out of five stars. Other film critics pointed out the film's success in properly ending one of the most beloved film franchises

⁶⁴ Carlos Gómez Iniesta, "Toy Story 3, *Cine Premiere* (2010), accessed September 7, 2015, <http://www.cinepremiere.com.mx/7882-review-cine-toy-story-3.html>.

in history. Nearly all critics' reviews of the Pixar film were positive to glowing recommendations.

Mexican public approval of *Toy Story 3* was even more pronounced than critics' reviews of the Pixar film. Many Internet commentators were nostalgic for the older *Toy Story* movies but found the newer edition equally as uplifting and heart-warming. For example, a public movie commentator on FilmAffinity.com stated on the website, "I give it a nine. With WALL-E, I believed that Pixar had reached the highest level and could not pass surpass itself anymore. And then they hit me with this, what do I have left, I have to bring down a point for WALL-E because I can't give Toy Story 3 an 11... even more, I have to confess that his been many years since a movie has been able to really make me emotional, and Toy Story 3 achieved it."⁶⁵ Public reviews of *Toy Story 3* were generally similar, with many describing the film as a tear-jerker that left them feeling with a sense of happiness after the movie was over.

Many in Mexico were wary of the release of *Toy Story 3*. They believed that the new film would not reach their expectations, given the success of the other two films. However, *Toy Story 3* not only reached those expectations for many in Mexico but exceeded them as well. To the Mexican public and critics, the film was heartfelt and ended the animated series in worthy fashion. Just as it was received in the United States, *Toy Story 3* became a cinematic hit in Mexico. *Toy Story 3* resonated with the people of Mexico, further demonstrating that critical and public success that American films can have on countries like Mexico.

⁶⁵ Neckriagan Omoide and Dreams, August 20, 2010, comment of FilmAffinity.com, "Odio Esta Pelicula," *FilmAffinity.com*, <http://www.filmaffinity.com/es/reviews/6/612761.html>.

Marvel's 2013 release of *Iron Man 3* was another American box-office hit in Mexico. Falling under *The Avengers* and *Toy Story 3* as the third most successful American film in Mexico, the third *Iron Man* installment exceeded financial expectations in the Latin American country. *Iron Man 3* was also praised by the Mexican people for its quality, yet did not receive the same glowing reviews that the other two films received. The film met all of its financial expectations but did not necessarily meet the lofty expectations that the Mexican people also set out for the Marvel film.

Critic reviews of *Iron Man 3* were generally positive but lacking the highly positive acknowledgement that other American films received. Adrian Andrade, from *El Mexicano* (a newspaper based out of Tijuana) wrote in his commentary "the third installment in the Iron Man series is new, fun, and exciting. Although the direction differs in technological aspects in the cognitive evolution, it easily surpasses the second and in some ways maintains itself on par with the original due to the large amount of characters and because of the obvious inspiration to *The Dark Knight*."⁶⁶ Luis Miguel Cruz, from *Cine Premiere*, explained, "in the end, *Iron Man 3* is an entertaining and spectacular movie... Its biggest problem is that it feels like a secure movie, incapable of taking risky decisions such as during Phase One and begin forming an elaborate franchise that has elevated the quality of cinema of superheroes to unimaginable heights, these strategies result in being insufficient to achieve for the expectations of the fans."⁶⁷ Comments like

⁶⁶ Adrian Andrade, "Crítica de Iron Man 3," *El Mexicano* (2013), accessed September 7, 2015, <http://www.elmexicano.com.mx/informacion/noticias/1/8/fama/2013/04/28/669283/critica-de-iron-man-3>.

⁶⁷ Luis Miguel Cruz, "Iron Man 3," *Cine Premiere* (2013), accessed September 7, 2015, <http://www.cinepremiere.com.mx/28388-review-cine-iron-man-3.html>.

this one help show that the Marvel film was generally a good movie, but did not meet the full expectations of critics who expected more of the film.

Many in the Mexican public felt that *Iron Man 3* did not do enough to please its fans. How Mexican people felt about the movie was much more balanced, with some feeling that the movie was a success, while others considered it a flop. Commentators like Anthony Gojira, from FilmAffinity wrote on May 7, 2013, “the movie is an overload of noisy action, top of the line effects and a constant evolution of its characters... it is a solid saga and most importantly it is fun.”⁶⁸ Others like Luis Mayo, who wrote on FilmAffinity on April 30, 2013, were much critical of the film, “come on, Iron Man 3 is less of a movie of ‘Iron Man,’ it is simply a ‘cop buddy movie,’ Lethal Weapon 5, Rush Hour 4, Miami Vice to the Extreme, you guys name it, but a movie of superheroes it is not... even my 8 year old brothers did not like the movie.”⁶⁹ The Mexican public was divided in its interpretation of the film, but generally it leaned toward a success as a whole. Mexican reactions to *Iron Man 3* are important in understanding the relationship that the American films can have with Mexican perceptions of American cultural imperialism. The film was well liked by many who saw it, yet did not have the same positive reviews that other American movies have had.

Amongst the most monetarily successful American films in Mexico has been *Despicable Me 2*. The first installment was an international success causing a sequel to be inevitable for DreamWorks. The film was well received by critics and by the Mexican

⁶⁸ Anthony Gojira, May, 7 2013, comment of FilmAffinity.com, “Una saga solida y muy divertida,” *FilmAffinity.com*, <http://www.filmaffinity.com/es/user/rating/980833/973071.html>.

⁶⁹ Luis Mayo, April 30, 2013, comment on FilmAffinity.com, “Un mal chiste y un truco barato,” *FilmAffinity.com*, <http://www.filmaffinity.com/es/userreviews/1/631683.html>.

people, yet the film also presented a potential issue for Mexican audiences. However, successful as it was on the big-screen, *Despicable Me 2* did not completely have the support of the Mexican people. The film's villain, El Macho, came to represent the stereotypical Mexican that has consistently appeared in American films.

Hugo Lara Chávez from correcamara.com.mx gave an interesting perspective of El Macho in *Despicable Me 2*. Chávez makes note of how El Macho, instead of being seen as a *luchador*, seems more like the stereotypical Mexican drug trafficker. He writes, “the character causes laughs but he should also trigger a reflection on the way Mexicans are often seen by Hollywood and foreign films (and even how Mexicans see themselves): sometimes dirty, sometimes fat, sometimes drunk and repeated as dangerous bandits... It would be worth rebelling against these stereotypes, which certainly, are far removed for most Mexicans.”⁷⁰ El Macho's inclusion in the film gives the portrayal to many Mexican viewers that if a Mexican is to be in an American film, he is to be the drug-trading “bad guy.” While most who saw the film did enjoy it, El Macho's personification of the Mexican drug-trader in a children's film unfortunately hurt its reputation with the Mexican public.

Of the ten movies observed, nearly all were in some way praised by the Mexican public and by film critics. Most of the films that were not as highly praised by Mexicans were less popular solely for lack of cinematic quality and not for any other reasons, such as their American origin or because of their dependence on sexual and violent imagery. *Despicable Me 2* was the only film that presented Mexican viewers with an image of

⁷⁰ Hugo Lara Chávez, “ ‘Mi Villano Favorito 2’: El Macho, un mexicano que parece más narco que luchador,” correcamara.com.mx (2013), accessed September 7, 15, http://correcamara.com/inicio/int.php?mod=noticias_detalle&id_noticia=4329.

themselves that they did not take well, even though the film was enjoyed by many audiences. Favorable critic reviews show that American-made movies like *Toy Story 3* and *The Avengers* can be very well received by the intellectual class of Mexican society, in addition to the general the Mexican public.

The success of Hollywood blockbusters in Mexico rests on their ability to attract millions of viewers because of great cinematography and recognizable, lovable characters. People in Mexico know of superheroes like Iron Man and Spider-Man and expect to be entertained when major films are released on their theater screens. Soft power is established as American film franchises gain popularity in Mexico. Now, kids on the streets of Mexico dress up with *Despicable Me*'s minions branded on their shirts and with Woody and Buzz Lightyear backpacks. Generally speaking, the largest modern U.S. blockbusters have been praised by both critics and the Mexican populace alike, which has allowed American culture to have a presence in the everyday life of many Mexicans. 21st century Hollywood films have not been victims of much anti-Americanism, and as such, have allowed the attraction of American cinema to further relations between the U.S. and Mexico.

Mexican Reactions and Sentiments to American Film Portrayals of Mexican Society

Mexico's rich culture, close relations to the United States, and the ongoing drug-trade violence have caused many American filmmakers to make films about Mexican society. Although it is in close to proximity to the United States, Americans at times see Mexico as a completely foreign land with foreign people. Its culture and history intrigues American people, who hope to learn more about the southern neighbor of the United

States. As such, American films have presented Mexico to the American people, and international audiences as well, through cinema. However, some of the films that have meant to describe Mexico and its people have done the complete opposite and given an image that is not accurate.

Mexican people have long been plagued by stereotypes that do not tell the entire story of Mexico. Much of the blame lies in American films portraying Mexicans as drug-trading, dirty, and poor people. Unlike major Hollywood movies that usually focus on settings and issues outside of Mexican society, American films that deal with other countries should tread very carefully when they hope to capture the life of another country like Mexico. At times, this is where the problem arises. Mexico, possibly more than any other country, has consistently been the victim of inaccurate American film portrayals. However, it must be noted that not all American films have been unsuccessful in properly representing Mexican society on the screen. Some films have actually done a great job in capturing Mexico, its people, and its way of life.

One of the most controversial American films about Mexico has been the 2002 adaption of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, *Kahlo*. Directed by Julie Taymor, the Kahlo biopic was dismissed by many in the Mexican public, and especially by Mexican elites and intellectuals. One of the harshest critiques came from renowned Mexican writer, Guadalupe Loaeza. In her criticism of the film, Loaeza writes that Kahlo would not have tolerated seeing an actress depict her “speaking nothing but English with a Spanish accent.”⁷¹ In addition, Loaza points out that she “fears that she [Frida] would not have

⁷¹ Aldo Magallanes, “Frida Kahlo las inspira,” *El Siglo de Torreon*, March 18, 2014, accessed August 29, 2015, <https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/963847.frida-kahlo-las-inspira.html>.

liked it. She would not have tolerated it. I'm sure that she would have left the theatre."⁷²

Loaeza's writing describes the fervent anger that many Mexican intellectuals felt at the American film's attempt to capture the life of one of Mexico's most beloved artists.

Furthermore, Mexican actress Salma Hayek, who played as Frida Kahlo in the film, was regularly questioned by the Mexican media for taking part in the film.⁷³

Mexican intellectual's perceptions of *Frida* were similar to the way that the Mexican public felt about the film. For example, in a comment posted to FilmAffinity on January 11, 2007, Pedro from FilmAffinity states, "this film in which Salma Hayek became very passionate for left a bad taste in my mouth, and its due to the fact that it does not really show what Frida was actually like, the magnificent painter and fighter for Mexican society, Salma leaves much to be desired in her acting and some moments seem forced. I believe that Frida deserves a better film."⁷⁴ Pedro's statement about Frida was very similar to how much of the Mexican public felt about the biopic. Frida Kahlo was not represented, they felt, as she truly was. The film left a lot to be desired for the Mexican people to whom Frida Kahlo dedicated her entire life.

⁷² "Salma Hayek sigue cosechando críticas por su papel en 'Frida,'" *Emol*, November 7, 2002, accessed August 29, 2015, <http://www.emol.com/noticias/magazine/2002/11/07/98054/salma-hayek-sigue-cosechando-criticas-por-su-papel-en-frida.html>.

⁷³ Salvador Franco Reyes, "Defienden a Salma de las críticas contra 'Frida,'" *El Universal*, November 9, 2002, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/espectaculos/41114.html>.

⁷⁴ Pedro, January 11, 2007, comment of FilmAffinity.com, "Una muy regular pero muy regular pelicula????," *FilmAffinity.com*, <http://www.filmaffinity.com/es/reviews/7/601562.html>.

Reviews of *Frida* in the United States were generally good, with many American film critics rating the movie positively.⁷⁵ However, because *Frida* dealt with one of Mexico's most important historical and artistic figures, Mexican people had a specific view of how she was to be portrayed. To their dismay, *Frida* did not do Frida Kahlo or the Mexican people any justice. As Loaeza pointed out, the real life Frida Kahlo would not have accepted a film version of herself talking in English and many in Mexico understood that too.

Mexican receptions of *Frida* are perhaps the most interesting of the films observed. The Mexican public and intellectuals both panned the film for not portraying Frida Kahlo as they expected her to be portrayed. *Frida*, perhaps more than any of the other researched films, showed the deep scrutiny that Mexican society can have over American films that portray Mexico. Most importantly, though, *Frida* demonstrated the fierce pride that Mexicans have about their country and cultural icons, and why they can be so critical of foreign filmmakers producing films about their beloved Mexico.

The Mexican, directed by Gore Verbinski, and starring an all-star cast of Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts, Gene Hackman, and James Gandolfini was a film that was not well-received by most in Mexico, mainly due to the film's poor direction. Mexican critics rejected the film because of its star-heavy cast, but underwhelming cinematic performance. However, some were also critical of the film because of its portrayals of Mexican people. Lorenza Munoz, from *El Pais*, pointed out, "in the romantic comedy *The Mexican*, from DreamWorks, the Americans are finally as corrupt as the

⁷⁵ *Frida*," *Rotten Tomatoes*, accessed December 4, 2015, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/frida/>.

Mexicans. Albeit, the Mexicans are mainly portrayed as being ignorant and poor.”⁷⁶ According to Munoz, *The Mexican* uses some of the oldest stereotypes about Mexicans: that they are poor and not particularly smart.

Jorge R. Gutierrez’s animated film *The Book of Life* was an overall success in Mexico. Critics like Ivonne Lara from hipertextual.com and Carlos Del Río from *Cine Premier* praised the film and lauded its cinematography. Del Río even went as far as saying that “with all the combinations, and efficient work in 3D, we are only left to wait for the beginning of the following year when *The Book of Life* is considered for an Oscar nomination for animated feature film. It deserves it.”⁷⁷ However, the movie was not able to please everyone, with some writing scathing reviews. Quique Mex of FilmAffinity.com gave a rather harsh review of Gutierrez and Guillermo del Toro’s *The Book of Life*, stating that, “in the construction of characters there is a sense that the designers of the film were American, completely foreign to Mexican culture, just as the character Manolo demonstrates, from his name to his profession of bullfighter, following the typical American that is likely to confuse everything east of the Rio Grande and that sounds Spanish instead of Mexican.”⁷⁸

Texas native Robert Rodriguez is one of the most critically acclaimed directors today. Being of Mexican ancestry, Rodriguez’s films often have to do with Hispanic culture and traditions. His *Mexico Trilogy*—the three films being *El Mariachi*,

⁷⁶ Lorenza Munoz, “México se rebela contra su imagen en Hollywood,” *El Pais*, July 1, 2001, accessed August 30, 2015, http://elpais.com/diario/2001/07/01/cultura/993938401_850215.html.

⁷⁷ Carlos Del Río, “el libro de la vida,” *cinepremiere.com.mx* (2014), accessed September 4, 2015, <http://www.cinepremiere.com.mx/39166-review-cine-el-libro-de-la-vida.html>.

⁷⁸ Quique Mex, October 15, 2014, comment of FilmAffinity.com, “Dia de muertos for export,” <http://www.filmaffinity.com/es/reviews/1/628725.html>.

Desperado, and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*—has become a cult favorite in the United States and has gained popularity in Mexico as well. *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* was ranked by Mexican mass media company Televisa as being one of Rodriguez’s best films.⁷⁹ Many in the Mexican public enjoyed the film and others had no problem with it. A commentator on Yahoo Answers wrote of the film, “if you are Mexican do not watch it. It is an insult to Mexicans. That damn Robert Rodriguez deserves an arrest warrant for the way in which he represents Mexico and Mexicans. Because of stupid people like him is why foreigners see us drunks and as drug traffickers.”⁸⁰ The divided reactions to a film like *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* are common within the Mexican public: many are highly approving of the films that portray Mexican life, while others simply cannot support these films.

The divided critical reception of *The Book of Life* and *Once Upon A Time in Mexico* signals that many in Mexico can support American-produced films about their country, albeit with possible detractors as well. Many will still find something wrong with a movie that many others enjoyed. For example, a common recurring theme among those who slam American-films about Mexico is the misinterpretation of language. In *Frida*, the issue was Frida Kahlo speaking English and in *The Book of Life* it is the characters sounding more Spanish than Mexican. Others take issue with inadequate dubbing for Spanish speakers. Some American movies, no matter how good they may be, will not be able to please all Mexican people. As obvious as this is, it is important to note

⁷⁹ José Luis Castilla, “La demencial filmografía de Robert Rodriguez,” *Televisa.com* (2015), accessed September 6, 2015, <http://www.televisa.com/canal5/noticias/852489/demencial-filmografia-robert-rodriguez/>.

⁸⁰ Citrico Supremo, 2009, comment on Yahoo. answers.mx, “Erase una vez en mexico?,” *Yahoo.answers.mx*, <https://mx.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090303181849AAwuM2G>.

because of the dismay that many Mexicans feel toward American films that portray Mexicans. Understandably, anything that may portray their country and people in a negative way (even if true) is sure to illicit strong reactions from the Mexican public.

Many American films have been able to successfully entertain domestic audiences without alienating Mexican people. For example, *Casa de Mi Padre* was panned film critically but was able to successfully poke fun at Mexican culture without actually offending Mexicans. *Casa de Mi Padre*, an American movie which was completely filmed in Spanish, is a rare movie that aimed to make humor out of Mexican cultural phenomenon such as telenovelas and the drug war. However, the film was able to attract two of the most influential Mexican actors today: Gael Garcia Bernal and Diego Luna. When asked about the film, Luna responded by stating that he “feels that this film not only talks about Mexico, but also talks a lot about the United States and more about who does it. There is dialogue over the perception and the prejudices that we as Mexicans have about the Americans and them about us.”⁸¹ The mere fact that some of Mexico’s greatest modern-day actors agreed to film a movie poking fun at Mexico says much about the U.S. relationship with Mexico.

Some in Mexico accepted American films like *Man on Fire* and *Traffic* as accurately portraying the drug-violence in their country. Although drug trafficking films represent a large portion of American-made movies about Mexico, these two films were at least able to demonstrate this aspect of Mexican life in a representative way. Mexican people understood that the plot of these films was about the drug-violence and had to tell

⁸¹ Martha Patricia García, “ ‘Las Críticas me devastan,’ ironize Will Ferrell,” *Eluniversal.com.mx* (2012), accessed September 5, 2015, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/espectaculos/113729.html>.

the story as it actually is. The manner in which the films told their stories allowed them to be accepted by the Mexican people without any sort of backlash.

Some American films can have very completely different effects on Mexico and its people. Gregory Nava's *Bordertown* directly affected the people it intended to represent in the film. As was reported by Ruth Rodriguez, from *El Universal*, "in May of 2008, after the premier of the film *Bordertown*, which describes the stories of women murdered in the region, various female members of the NHRC received an insulting emails and a threat."⁸² According to Franco Gómez, from *El Universal*, Maya Zapata, one of the actresses in the film, is excited to see that the world is finally starting to hear about the atrocities being committed towards women in Juarez. However, she also states that the film will premier in the U.S. but that the Mexican government is trying to censor the film in that country.⁸³

One of the most telling arguments someone made against Mexican stereotypes in Hollywood films came from Mexican-American actor Ricardo Montalban. In a gathering to honor Mexican president Vicente Fox, Ricardo Montalban stated to Fox:

Mr. President, if we are here, talking of a better understanding between our two countries, then I believe that Hollywood can do much to better that understanding. When I was in MGM and they wanted me to do a romantic script, it was always in the role of a Cuban. With Esther Williams, in *Latin Lovers*, I was Argentinian. With Lana Turner, I was Brazilian. They are nationalities that sound nice. Mexican is not a word that sounds nice, and that is Hollywood's fault, for capturing us in such an infamous way. We are the lazy pawn

⁸² Ruth Rodríguez, "Amenazan a activistas de Chihuahua," *El Universal* (2008), accessed September 6, 2015, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/sociedad/1360.html>.

⁸³ Franco Daniel Gómez, "Cierran paso a 'Bordertown,'" *El Universal* (2007), accessed September 6, 2015, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/espectaculos/75473.html>.

leaning on the cactus. Hollywood can do a lot to palliate the damage it has been doing for years.⁸⁴

In the eyes of Montalban, Hollywood is a main source for the stereotypes that are commonly given to Mexicans. However, relations can be strengthened between the two countries if Hollywood represents Mexico in a more real and fitting manner. Montalban's address gets to the center of the problem that arises from Mexican representations in American-made movies: Mexico and its people are continuously stereotyped into American perceptions of Mexicans.

Hollywood blockbusters and American-made films portraying Mexican society are both important in understanding the dynamic between American film and how that affects the general relationship between the United States and Mexico. Major American films are widely liked by Mexicans, while those that portray Mexico are divided in their reception. If relations are to improve between both countries, at least in terms of cultural understanding, changes can be made to some American filmmaking to help foster understanding and lessen negative Mexican perceptions of the United States.

⁸⁴ Lorenza Munoz, "México se rebela contra su imagen en Hollywood," *El Pais*, July 1, 2001, accessed August 30, 2015, http://elpais.com/diario/2001/07/01/cultura/993938401_850215.html.

Conclusion

The United States and Mexico have long had a relationship in which economic and political matters have taken center stage, but now, more than ever; the cultural ties among them are beginning to receive more recognition. From NAFTA to American intervention in the Mexican Revolution, Mexico and the United States have often had a tense relationship. Because of this, it is important that the onscreen cultures of the U.S. and Mexico truly reflect their national cultures so that audiences' knowledge of both countries do not become exaggerated stereotypes such as the self-important American or the "machista" Mexican. American films, in particular, have misrepresented Mexico and Mexican people in their films. This thesis has highlighted how American films can evoke strong reactions from the Mexican public, and ultimately how that can affect Mexico-U.S. relations.

Relations between the United States and Mexico have become one of the most important bilateral relationships in the modern world. How both countries interact with each other will have an effect on the global political and economic stability of the North American region, and the world as a whole. Both of their economies have become much more intertwined than ever before. Their cultures have become more alike and their politics increasingly divided. For these reasons, the United States and Mexico must interact in a much more cooperative manner. Film can help serve as an institution of unity for the U.S. and Mexico.

Mexico is fast becoming a major actor on the international stage and will need the help of the United States to ensure its successful entry into the elite group of world economies. The United States will need Mexico as it seeks to cure many of its domestic challenges. The welfare of many Mexicans and Americans will depend on the increasing economic cooperation between the United States and Mexico. In short, Mexico and the U.S. will need to work increasingly more with one another.

As the Mexican-American population continues to grow in the U.S., and as it begins to gain more influence within the United States, the negative stereotypes that are often said of Mexico can no longer be tolerated. Mexicans want closer ties to Americans, but this can only be done through better understanding and less negativity. This extends to the often ill-perceived portrayals of Mexico in American films. Mexicans are no longer accepting the stereotypes that American filmmakers have made of them, and have begun fighting back against them by producing their own films like *Amores Perros* and *Y Tu Mamá También* that show Mexico as it really is. In order for Mexico and the United States to get along better with each other, American filmmakers must stop portraying Mexicans as violent, ignorant, and corrupt people.

American soft power needs improvement in Mexico. Mexico is not a country that the United States can necessarily coerce through economic and military means. The United States and Mexico have become too economically and politically significant for each other that American hard power against Mexico is no longer an option. Instead, for American power to be strengthened in Mexico, it must be done through the means of soft power. American films, particularly major Hollywood movies, present the United States with a soft power alternative in Mexico. The most popular U.S. films are a main driver of

soft power for the United States. Mexican children that grow up watching American films grow up thinking about the U.S. as the creator of many movies that they have come to love. However, this image of the United States diminishes as they see movies that incorrectly portray their home country and people.

American blockbusters are enjoyed by most in Mexico. They usually do not offend people in Mexico and have been able to create large fan bases throughout Mexico. Popular film franchises like *Toy Story*, *The Avengers*, and *Despicable Me* are recognized and liked by most in the Mexican public. Not all Hollywood films are able to please the entire Mexican populace, but generally, these films have garnered widespread acclaim by both film critics and the Mexican public. American filmmakers must continue making films that popular to audiences in Mexico. By doing so, American filmmakers will be able to create American soft power in Mexico.

American film portrayals of Mexican society have been where most of the controversy from Mexican audiences has originated. Understandably, American filmmakers will continue to make movies about Mexico. However, it is important that these present Mexico as it really. A beautiful country, with beautiful people, a rich culture, but with many challenges such as the deadly violence that has ravaged millions and a highly divided class system with a few powerful elites and many in poverty. Of course, Mexico has many internal issues that have to be rightly addressed in films, but they must be accurate depictions and truthful depictions. Films like *Traffic* and *Man on Fire* are good examples of how films can make films about controversial issues in Mexico, while also entertaining American and international audiences.

Making small changes to American films will go a long way in furthering American soft power and possibly reducing the fervent anti-Americanism that is still present in Mexico. Making little changes such as using Mexican Spanish as the language of American films about Mexico or ensuring that the Spanish dubbing is adequate can help attract Mexican viewers. Most importantly, however, is the vital need for American films to stop portraying Mexican people as they are usually in movies. This is the central issue that must be fixed with American films: changing the stereotypes commonly portrayed of Mexico in American films into cinema that can entertain both Mexicans and Americans without offending Mexican people. These small changes in American movies can help make U.S. relations with Mexico friendlier, and possibly lead to greater economic and political cooperation between the two countries in later decades.

U.S. soft power has been already been established in Mexico through Hollywood's international dominance. But it can continue to be improved on by eliminating the very things that Mexican people view as ignorant. If American films are able to portray Mexicans as they really are, then the frustration and animosity that many feel because of it will be reduced. Mexicans will no longer come out of theaters and feel that El Macho, or some other similar character, was another unjustified embodiment of what Americans view them as, but instead they will see the true embodiment of Mexico and its people through film. Nonetheless, the relationship between the U.S and Mexico will be greatly helped as younger generations of Mexicans continue growing up with their favorite American films.

Hollywood films have become the personification of American culture to foreign audiences. The power that has come from exporting so many popular American films has

given the United States unprecedented international visibility that few other countries have. Mexico is a large consumer of American movies, yet Mexicans also often see themselves in these movies being reduced to stereotypes that do not truly represent them. As farfetched as it may seem, when American filmmakers understand that they can no longer portray Mexicans as they have been in many movies, then the United States and Mexico will see unprecedented diplomatic, economic, political, and cultural cooperation.

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