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Hollow Victory Won by U.S. in Dispute With Diaz

THE UNITED STATES VERSUS PORFIRIO DIAZ. By Daniel Cosío Villegas, University of Nebraska Press.

"It is an axiom in Texas history that when a Texan fights a Mexican he can win, but when he parlays he is doomed." These words from Webb's volume on the Texas Rangers are quoted on the fly leaf of this critique of U.S.-Mexican diplomatic relations during that colorful period after the revolt of Tuxtepec through the end of Díaz' first administration. In this year of a proposed reunion of Mexican-U.S. historians in the Aztec capital, it is worth reviewing.

It is difficult to imagine a greater diplomatic crisis than that which existed in the last months of 1896-1897. The U.S. Consul General, Marcus Otterbourg, openly sympathized with Maximilian and was suspected of receiving 7,000 pesos to bargain for his cause in Washington.

Concessions made to foreign countries for the construction of railroad lines, public works, and the telegraphy system were cancelled during the War of Intervention and in 1897, Secretary of State Seward proposed a commission to investigate the losses of U.S. citizens. There was little agreement between the Department of State and our Minister in Mexico, and our post-Civil War domestic issues were occupying most of our attention. When the old cacique Porfirio Díaz came to power in 1896, Mexico was in a financial state of misery and the people had been systematically dispossessed of their common lands and political rights. The large hacienda system with its feudal overtones prevailed. Díaz was

a member of the group known as the "científicos," whose beliefs centered upon positivism and scientific progress.

Even though the Mexicans obviously came out the material losers, the U.S. won a hollow victory. Our "good neighbors" ran the gamut from admiration for our success in creating a democracy in which there was the greatest good for the greatest number--not a small group of oligarchs--to outright suspicion and distrust. If the consular corps had taken a popularity poll during this era, they would have learned the obvious truth that once again, the determined Yankis had struck out! By 1910, the Díaz government had won sound diplomatic recognition, but it was too late to repair the initial damage.

Daniel Cosío Villegas is an exceptional scholar and former President of El Colegio de México. He successfully balances on the tightrope of sensitive pride and nationalistic feeling while giving an objective appraisal of the ticklish situation which existed. Dr. Nettie Lee Benson, who is in charge of the Latin American Collection at the Texas Library, did the carefully worded translation, and an excellent introduction is provided by Stanley Ross, chairman of the Latin American Studies Program at the University.