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OBITUARY

Daniel Cosío Villegas (1898–1976)

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Daniel Cosío Villegas, distinguished intellectual, died of a heart attack on March 10, 1976 in the Mexican capital where he had been born seventy-seven years ago. Thus death brought an end to the remarkable multifaceted career which had earned for Don Daniel a pivotal place in Mexican intellectual life for more than half a century. *Excélsior*, which had opened its pages to his critical political analysis and in so doing did honor to its journalistic integrity and rendered service to the Mexican people, could lament the passing of this historian, political scientist, economist, essayist, publisher, teacher, diplomat, and founder of cultural institutions.

Politicians, who more than once had felt the sting of his critical barbs, hailed him in death. President Echeverría spoke of the "honorable and courageous intellectual and teacher." And president-to-be López Portillo spoke of Cosío's "vigilant and alert critical sense, the essential ingredient for any objective work." However, it was the intellectuals of Mexico who best honored their own. Octavio Paz, noting Cosío's "incorruptible conscience," had defined what was most stimulating in Cosío as "the spirit which animated his criticism, the naturalness of his opinions, and the independence of his judgement." And Víctor Urquidi identified as Cosío's most noteworthy characteristics "his lucidity, his extraordinary intelligence, his analytical capacity, and his love for historical truth." The institutions he created are enduring testimony to his "wisdom and foresight."

The impressive thing about Don Daniel's long and productive life is the remarkable diversity of fields and endeavors to which he turned his skills with outstanding success. In an age of increasing specialization such versatility is all the more noteworthy. However, a second striking feature of this rich and varied intellectual life is the fact

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Cosío's multiple endeavors prove, on examination, to be very much interrelated and integrated. This is a life with direction and meaning, purpose and achievement.

Daniel Cosío Villegas was born in the Federal District on July 23, 1898. From the National Preparatory School he received Bachelor degrees in both Arts and Letters. He studied engineering briefly, philosophy under Antonio Caso, literature under Pedro Henríquez Ureña (with a paper entitled "The Theory of the Honorable Man in the Literature of the Golden Age"), and law in the National School of Jurisprudence from which institution he received his Law degree in 1925. He was to extend his studies abroad, doing work in economics at Harvard, agricultural economics at both Wisconsin and Cornell (where he received the M.A. degree), and advanced studies in economics at the London School of Economics and in political science at the École Libre de Sciences Politiques in Paris.

During those student years he also was a student organizer and leader, heading the student federation of the Federal District as well as national and international student federations. He also taught sociology, political economy, and economic doctrines in the National School of Jurisprudence and the School for Advanced Studies. Cosío began his public service in the Ministry of Education headed by José Vasconcelos, beginning his writing career and his publishing experience with the project to bring the classics to the masses.

Over the years Don Daniel taught in the National Preparatory School, in the Faculties of Law and of Philosophy and Letters of the National University, in the National School of Economics of that institution, in El Colegio de México, and abroad in the Law Faculty of the Central University of Madrid and the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Texas in Austin. His extensive writings include singularly outstanding contributions in history, important studies in economics, thoughtful contributions in international relations and extensive and potentially very influential essays of political analysis. He founded and served for a period of years as initial director of three journals, each viewed as outstanding within its discipline: *El Trimestre Económico* (director, 1934–1948); *Historia Mexicana* (director, 1951–1961); and *Foro Internacional* (director, 1960–1963).

As a creator of cultural institutions, Don Daniel was unusually productive. When Secretary General of the National University of Mexico he helped to found the section devoted to the study of economics which became an independent entity as the National School

of Economics under Cosío's direction in 1933. He founded the Fondo de Cultura Económica and served as its director for fourteen years from 1934–1948. The Fondo was to become the leading intellectual publishing house for the Spanish-speaking world. By 1975 it had twenty-six outlets in Mexico, South America, and Spain and published 365 titles with sales exceeding three million volumes. Cosío was co-founder of La Casa de España in Mexico which became El Colegio de México, the most prestigious institution for research and advanced study in Latin America. He was co-founder of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Nuevo León.

From his early days in the Education Ministry with Vasconcelos, Cosío had a long career of public and diplomatic service. He served as economic and financial advisor to the Secretary of Treasury and Public Credit, the Bank of Mexico, National Bank for Mortgages and Public Works, and the Mexican Embassy in Washington. He advised his country's delegations to the VIIth Interamerican Conference at Montevideo (1934), and the International Conference at Bretton Woods (1944). He served as Mexico's plenipotentiary delegate to the First International Conference of Statistics sponsored by the League of Nations (1928), IV Panamerican Commercial Conference (1931), the Economic Conference of Buenos Aires (1935), and as president of the Mexican delegation to XIIth General Assembly of UNESCO (1962). Cosío was in charge of the Mexican Legation in Portugal in 1936–1937, and from 1957 through 1968 was Mexico's special ambassador to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. In 1959 he was president of that international organization. He also served as president of the administrative council of the United Nations Special Fund and as president of the Coordination Committee of the U.N.'s Economic and Social Council.

Many honors came to Cosío Villegas, but only a few can be cited here. In 1951 he was elected as a member of El Colegio Nacional, a lifetime recognition limited to twenty members. In 1957 Cosío was designated as President of El Colegio de México, a post he held through 1963. And, in 1971, the Mexican Government honored him by the award of the National Prize for Letters.

Cosío Villegas' intellectual roots lead to Ortega y Gasset, and he was a protégé of Antonio Caso and Henríquez Ureña. He began seeking to find his way in life in a post-revolutionary romantic spirit. He started working in belles lettres, seeking to carve out a literary career for himself. Excepting for the essay form—which he cultivated with skill and exceptional effectiveness—Cosío soon returned to reality, as

he himself suggested. He moved along the path that would lead to professionalization and institutionalization so characteristic of his mature years as has been noted by Henry C. Schmidt in a recent study in the *Journal of Inter-American Studies.*

In the 1920s Cosío was filled with the desire "to do something for the new Mexico." Remembering those years Don Daniel would write with pride of "his generation," of those intellectuals whose youth coincided with the spring "of the good years of the Mexican Revolution." It was then that, applying his perspicacity, ironic sense and literary skill, Cosío employing a critical attitude contributed to the examination and growth of national identity. In the process he paralleled and anticipated the work of Samuel Ramos, his contemporary and friend.

Here are the beginnings of his analytical probing of the historical antecedents of the Mexican people and of his critical examination of the Mexican Revolution and of the institutional framework of Mexican society. As part of the process of national self-examination he sought to educate the people to their problems, puncturing myths about national character with well-aimed barbs. He summarized and symbolized the age and its preoccupation with national identity and the reconstruction and redirection of the Mexican nation.

Convinced of the importance of economics—both in terms of knowledge and trained practitioners—for the new Mexico, Cosío sought to remedy this deficiency through his teaching and through the creation and direction of what became the National School of Economics. The absence of Spanish-language economic texts led him to found the Fondo with its initial mission to make available Spanish language translations of the principal works in economics published abroad. It was but a short step to the creation of a quarterly journal, *El Trimestre Económico,* to be published by the Fondo and devoted to economic studies and discussions of economic questions. How interrelated were the seemingly separate activities of this man.

A similar interrelationship may be seen involving his creative ideas in another area. Mexican Chargé d'Affaires in Lisbon when the Spanish Civil War erupted, Cosío suggested that Mexico invite a selected group of Spanish intellectuals to renew their activities until the war should end. President Cárdenas accepted the idea, and there was created the Casa de España in Mexico presided over by Alfonso Reyes and with Cosío as its secretary. What had been viewed as a temporary refuge for Spanish intellectuals became a permanent Mexican institution when the Spanish Republicans suffered defeat. El Colegio

de México was created with a nucleus of the original group of Spanish refugees. El Colegio would serve to link the exiled Spaniards with Mexican intellectual life. Many were integrated in the Fondo as editors, directors of collections, translators, and even as administrators. And El Colegio also was to develop its research and teaching function and, as Cosío described it to Enrique Krauze, to create "the intellectual leader of Mexico"—a man capable of considering his reality with unlimited criteria and of "transforming the milieu in which . . . he is condemned to live in order to make it more propitious for really intelligent political action."

It was in the late forties—when the Mexican pendulum swung to the right, when industrialization and urbanization increasingly characterized Mexican society, and political stability and economic progress became the watchwords of the day—that Cosío wrote his seminal essay on the crisis of the Mexican Revolution and initiated his *Historia moderna de México* project as a part of what one writer has described as "a brilliant period of national introspection."

Cosío took pride in the rich expressiveness of the Spanish language and employed it with enthusiasm and effectiveness. His essays are a model of the genre, characterized by clarity of thought communicated with vigor and sprightliness in an incisive and elegant prose. Some of his essays evoked such debate and polemic that they marked true turning points in the evolution of thought in Mexico. Years later, Cosío introduced two volumes of his essays and notes with the following quotation from Ortega y Gasset: "The reader will discover, if I am not mistaken, even in the last lines of these essays the beat of patriotic concern." And, despite critical gloom, Cosío held out almost thirty years ago a ray of hope that from the Revolution itself might come a reaffirmation of priniciples and a purification of men. A dozen years later Don Daniel concluded that the Revolution had not survived its crisis, but even then he did not surrender his hope of doing something for Mexico.

One of the finest things he did do was to organize, direct, and write a major portion of the monumental ten-volume *Historia moderna de México (1867–1911)*. Begun in 1948, the ten volumes appeared over a seventeen-year period from 1955 through 1972. Combining monographic research with the broad sweep of a general history, this landmark of Mexican and Latin American historiography required not only scholarship, but organizational talent as well. Nettie Lee Benson noted, reviewing the initial volume, that the "interpretation flows naturally from the facts so skillfully and abundantly presented." John

Womack, Jr., reviewing the final segment, described the set as the "greatest historical work on modern Mexico." Lyle N. McAlister echoed those sentiments, noting that it is a "monumental work whether judged quantitatively or qualitatively" and "the most impressive product of modern Mexican historiography."

The work is noteworthy too for its collaborative, team research. Don Daniel provided the inspiration, the organizational ability, leadership and direction, and the identification of his scholarly prestige with the group's efforts. He sought, justified, and obtained the requisite financial support. He not only provided the investigators with the benefits of his knowledge, experience, and skill, but also coordinated and integrated the efforts of the individual authors. He criticized and encouraged, cajoled and prodded, directed and participated. His brilliant general and particular introductory essays set the tone of the series, summarized the conclusions of the particular volume, and pointed out the interrelationships between volumes. Cosío himself authored no less than five volumes of the *Historia moderna.* And he dedicated the final volume "To the Mexican Nation which endured the making of this history."

Anticipating the succeeding phase of his historical work, Don Daniel organized a Seminar on the Contemporary History of Mexico which produced a series of basic bibliographical guides to books and pamphlets, periodical articles, and documentary sources in key governmental archives as the foundation for undertaking a history of the Mexican Revolution. For the past half-dozen years, sustained by an independent trust fund established by the Mexican government, Don Daniel once again organized, directed and coordinated his *equipo* in the preparation of a multi-volume history of the Revolution. While the too foreshortened timetable and the lack of access to the personal archives of key individuals have been limiting factors, the initial volumes of what should represent a step forward in the historiography of contemporary Mexico are promised for later this year.

It was perhaps inevitable that, in 1968, amid the political and moral crisis of the suppression of the student movement and when the Mexican political system was showing signs of stress and its viability in a changing world was being questioned, Don Daniel should take pen in hand and endeavor to use the journalistic political essay to try to influence the direction of events by means of a critical analysis of the Mexican political process. His efforts attracted public attention, but evoked very little echo from others. His essays in *Excélsior* were followed by a series of booklets on the Mexican political

system, President Echeverría's personal style of governing (the first judgement of a Mexican president while he still exercised power), the process of presidential selection, and the resolution of the process in 1975. The fact that the sale of these volumes has warranted editions of between 50,000 and 80,000 copies, suggests that the Mexican public wanted and needed a voice like that of Don Daniel.

In a sense both of Cosío's principal activities these last few years—the history of the Revolution and the essays of political analysis and commentary—are simply different sides of the same coin. Both are trying to define the direction of the Mexican people through a scholarly examination of the nation's recent history and through stimulating and contributing to a serious evaluation of its political system. He worked to help make intelligible Mexico's past and present in order to open the way for a better future. Time alone will tell whether, in addition to everything else, Don Daniel also will be remembered as a political reformer. He clearly was an intellectual with a practical sense—an intellectual doer.

In writing a conclusion to a popular compact history of Mexico, Don Daniel concluded that Mexico was entering a new stage of life and that "each and every one of its citizens should do his best in his respective field of action to help solve the many and difficult problems confronting his country." Don Daniel did that and much more. He stimulated and encouraged institutions, programs, and individuals. As Antonio Alatorre remarked "he practiced with simplicity the marvelous art of helping others."

Alfonso Reyes once predicted with great perceptiveness that Cosío Villegas would best serve the country in the long run "with his pen, his intelligence, his wisdom and his discipline." And Octavio Paz added that Cosío "was a great historian of our nineteenth century and was a grand chronicler of our twentieth century, especially of our contemporary era. He was not a man of philosophical systems, but rather an historian of the old moral and psychological tradition dating back to Thucydides. Besides he was an excellent writer and among his great virtues he had that of a sense of humor, which is the sense of limitations. Cosío taught us to be conscious of human dignity." There can be no doubt that he will be missed.

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(The author is indebted to Marta Hernández, secretary to Lic. Cosío, and to the late Susana Uribe de Fernández de Córdoba of El Colegio de México for the compilation of his bibliography on which

the following selected listing is based. Excluded have been book reviews [but not review articles], newspaper articles—including the hundreds on political themes published in *Excélsior* beginning in 1968—and those appearing in popular magazines, prologues and introductions to the books of others, and reprintings [but not translations of his books]. Also excluded are reviews of Don Daniel's works, writings about him or his work, and translations of volumes [particularly economic studies] which he did for the Fondo de Cultural Económica.)

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BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

Central America: A Nation Divided. By RALPH LEE WOODWARD, JR. New York, 1976. Oxford University Press. Maps. Chart. Tables. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 344. Cloth. $12.95.

A worthy addition to the fine series of Latin American national histories edited by James R. Scobie, this survey of Central American history must be counted as the most thorough yet written. It is a sound combination of original research and thinking, and synthesis of other published works. The long and detailed bibliographic essay shows that Woodward knows his source materials, and the coverage given to often neglected eras in this type of book, such as the pre-Columbian period and the Bourbon eighteenth century, should surprise and please most scholarly readers.

Woodward admits that a history of Central America is a difficult task. While "the concept of a united isthmus of Central America" is quite old, union "repeatedly eludes the peoples of the isthmus" (p. i). In fact the author's conclusion is rather pessimistic. "The hopes of Francisco Morazán and Salvador Mendieta for a single Central American republic do not appear any nearer fruition than when these men struggled for union" (p. 258). How then to solve the problem of writing a cohesive history of five nations which may, or may never, be one? Woodward avoids the difficult task of writing five parallel histories, and decides against a chronological political history. Instead he seeks trends and dominant events on which to hang his generalizations about the whole area. (And to help those who may lose the thread he appends a "Political Chronology.") Some may complain that Guatemala receives disproportionately large attention, and Woodward's reply to this charge is not wholly satisfactory; but there is some truth to his claim that "Guatemala is the largest and traditionally the most important of the Central American states" (p. ii).

The author is not afraid to pass judgement after a review of the evidence. He finds Liberalism (both the early post-independence variety and the later Positivism) to have been badly wanting. It "had promised both political freedom and material progress." But