

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: FORGING A NEW WORLD NATIONALISM:
ANCIENT MEXICO IN UNITED STATES
ART AND VISUAL CULTURE, 1933-1945

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Between 1933 and 1945, Americans redefined their cultural identity within a hemispheric context and turned toward Mexican antiquity to invent a non-European national mythos. This reconfiguration of ancient Mexican history and culture coincided with changes in U.S. foreign policy regarding Latin American nations. In his inaugural address on March 4, 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt launched the Good Neighbor Policy, hoping to build an international alliance with Latin American countries that would safeguard the Western hemisphere from the political and economic crises in Europe. As part of these efforts, the government celebrated Mesoamerican civilization as evidence of a great hemispheric heritage belonging also to United States citizens. These historical circumstances altered earlier American

views of ancient Mexico as simultaneously a preindustrial paradise of noble savages and an uncivilized site of idolatry, revolution, and human sacrifice.

My dissertation examines this official reinterpretation of American past and present reality under the Good Neighbor Policy. Specifically, I consider the portrayal of ancient Mexico in United States art as a symbol of pan-American identity in order to map the ideological contours of U.S. diplomacy and race relations. The chapters of the dissertation present a series of case studies, each devoted to a different facet of the international discourse of U.S.-led pan-Americanism as it was internally conceived and domestically disseminated. Specifically, I examine the works of four American artists: Lowell Houser, Donal Hord, Charles White, and Jean Charlot. This ethnically and regionally diverse group of artists, whose art production ranged from sculpture to mural art to children's book illustrations, reveals the broad scope of the discursive apparatus restructuring North American perceptions of Latin America during this period. My analysis investigates the pictorial strategies of hemispheric identity formation; the domestic limitations of the Good Neighbor Policy as demonstrated in the clash of local and global politics; the agitation for equal recognition and full rights of citizenship among minority groups in the United States; and, finally, the international limitations of U.S.-led pan-Americanism as evidenced by persistent racism and U.S. cultural hegemony in hemispheric affairs.

FORGING A NEW WORLD NATIONALISM:
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1933-1945

By

Breanne Robertson

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

To my husband, Ray.

Acknowledgements

The idea for this project began with an exhibition. In the summer before my first semester of graduate school, I attended the retrospective of American modernist Marsden Hartley at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. I immediately became intrigued by Hartley's Mexican paintings, which conflated Christian mysticism and pre-Columbian mythology, and I returned to these paintings as a potential dissertation topic a few years later. By that time, I had developed a sustained interest in American artists' imaginings of ancient Mesoamerican civilization, and I enlarged the scope of my research to include other American artists as well. I soon noticed a marked shift in the treatment of Mexican subject matter that coincided with interwar developments in U.S.-Mexico diplomatic relations. The focus of my dissertation shifted accordingly, moving from religion and primitivism to the politics of pan-Americanism. Although Hartley's semi-abstract canvases no longer made sense for inclusion in my final project, these vibrant compositions remind me of the intellectual journey I have taken and of the individuals who have helped me along the way.

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Introduction

The official U.S. reinterpretation of American past and present reality under the Good Neighbor Policy is the subject of this dissertation. Specifically, I consider the portrayal of ancient Mexico as a symbol of pan-American identity in United States art and visual culture to map the ideological contours of this diplomatic discourse. In the years leading up to and including World War II, the United States government attempted to build a sense of hemispheric unity by manipulating existing notions of American civil and cultural nationalism to meet present exigencies of inter-American affairs. No longer divided into North/South or Latin/European dichotomies, the American continents appeared as a singular territorial body whose origins and ideologies established a uniquely “American” character distinct from European precedents. In this way, the U.S. government attempted to foster a cosmopolitan, or multinational, patriotism grounded more in “loyalty to democracy” than “loyalty to country.”¹ I employ the phrase “New World Nationalism” in the title of this study to mean the bonds of affection that the Good Neighbor Policy strove to engender toward this utopic vision of hemispheric community.

In approaching the question of pan-American identity formation, I have chosen to examine closely the work of four American citizens: Lowell Houser, Donal Hord, Charles White, and Jean Charlot. This ethnically and regionally diverse group

¹ My understanding of “America” as a socially constructed ideal vis-à-vis the state polity of the United States draws upon studies of U.S. national identity by Lauren Berlant and Nadine Dolby. See Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Nadine Dolby, “Encountering an American Self: Study Abroad and National Identity,” *Comparative Education Review* 48, no. 2 (May 2004): 150-173.

of artists, whose art production ranged from sculpture to mural art to children's book illustrations, reveals the scope of the discursive apparatus restructuring North American perceptions of Latin American history and culture during this period. Although not all of the artworks under consideration in this dissertation were federally sponsored projects, they nevertheless share a conceptual grounding in the specific diplomatic interests of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. An examination of the circumstances surrounding the creation of each artwork, the distinctive ways that each artist incorporated pre-Columbian figuration and motifs, and, when possible, the public response reveals the ideological scaffolding behind U.S. claims of pan-American identity and international allegiance. My analysis investigates the pictorial strategies of hemispheric identity formation; the domestic limitations of the Good Neighbor Policy as demonstrated in the clash of local and global politics; the agitation for equal recognition and full rights of citizenship among minority groups in the United States; and, finally, the international limitations of U.S.-led pan-Americanism as evidenced by persistent racism and U.S. cultural hegemony in inter-American affairs.

The Good Neighbor Policy and the Exigencies of War

In August 1941, *Fortune* magazine published the results of a public survey about World War II. Although the United States had not yet entered the conflict, the recent fall of France to German forces amplified public concerns over U.S. national security. *Fortune Survey* attempted to evaluate American attitudes through a series of questions about the current and future role the United States should perform in the

war. Respondents viewed a world map and selected which geographic areas they thought the United States should defend “if Germany or her allies tried to take it.”² Divided into five geographic zones, the map represents regions deemed potentially relevant to U.S. domestic security (figure 1).³ Public support for armed defense largely corresponded to an area’s geographic distance from the United States. While the continental United States elicited nearly unanimous support for military defense against Axis invasion, nations in the South Pacific and East Atlantic received far fewer favorable responses, totaling 59% or less. Proximity trumped even U.S. governance in this regard. Mexico ranked a higher priority than did either Alaska or Hawaii, both U.S. territories.⁴ This advantage, albeit slight, is telling since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, became the catalyst for U.S. entry into the war only four months later. In addition, more than 72% of those interviewed professed a belief that “Hitler won’t be satisfied until he has tried to conquer

² Public opinion polls were a relatively new phenomenon. *Fortune Survey* marked the first national poll based on the statistical method of survey sampling. Only six years earlier, Elmo Roper and George Gallup had introduced their pioneering survey techniques for measuring public attitudes and behaviors. While not infallible, the statistical method of survey sampling imparted a respectability of scientific measurement to public opinion polling. Roper secured widespread credibility for his polling technique when his prediction of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s victory over Alf Landon in the 1936 presidential election was accurate to within 0.9%. His 1940 election assessment proved to be even more accurate, prompting President Roosevelt to hire the pollster to evaluate public opinion of Lend-Lease prior to its implementation. Roper directed *Fortune Survey* from 1935 to 1950, during which time he also worked with the United States Office of Strategic Services and Office of War Information.

³ The Western hemisphere figured prominently in this equation, with the United States itself forming Area 1; the rest of North America, including Hawaii, Mexico, and the Panama Canal, constituting Area 2; South America, Area 3; Australia and the South Pacific, Area 4; and the East Atlantic, including Great Britain, Dakar, and Iceland, representing Area 5.

⁴ Whereas Mexico garnered interventionist responses from 84.3% of those interviewed, Alaska and Hawaii elicited 84.2% and 83.1%, respectively. Elmo Roper, “Fortune Survey XXXIX,” *Fortune* (August 1941): 75-77.

everything including the Americas.”⁵ Taken together, these statistics suggest the strategic importance that Latin American nations in general and Mexico in particular held for United States citizens in the period immediately prior to and during the Second World War.

Between 1933 and 1945, the United States worked to build a hemispheric alliance with Latin American nations to prevent Nazism from entering the New World.⁶ Weaker than the United States both militarily and economically, Latin American nations ostensibly offered Germany, Italy, and Japan easy entry to the hemisphere and a staging ground for attacks against the United States. Pan-American solidarity formed a significant component of the U.S. government’s plan for national defense. In his inaugural address in 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt introduced the Good Neighbor Policy, which implemented standards of nonintervention, cultural respect, and free trade in Latin American foreign relations. The president framed his foreign policy initiatives to rehabilitate imperialist images of the United States and to secure Latin American cooperation in economic and political affairs.

⁵ Ibid, 75-77. This survey response denotes not only the perceived threat of Nazi imperialism for the New World but also the belief that the United States and Latin America comprise a single geographical unit.

⁶ The hemispheric scope of the Good Neighbor Policy excluded Canada, presumably because the United States believed that its neighbor to the north was strong enough militarily and psychologically to deflect an Axis advance. For greater analysis of U.S.-Canada relations under the Roosevelt administration, see Galen Roger Perras, *Franklin Roosevelt and the Origins of the Canadian-American Security Alliance, 1933-1945: Necessary, but Not Necessary Enough* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1998).

As the wealth of scholarship devoted to U.S. foreign policy attests, the history of United States-Latin American diplomatic relations is tumultuous and complex.⁷ By the 1930s, a century of U.S. military intervention and economic dominance had bred widespread resentment among Latin American citizens toward the United States, the so-called “Colossus of the North.”⁸ Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros captured the stringent anti-Americanism that he and many of his compatriots harbored against the United States in his fresco *América Tropical* (figure 2). Painted on the exterior wall of a Los Angeles restaurant in 1932, *América Tropical* depicts a crucified native Mexican, whose bound body and awkwardly angled neck evokes both lynching photography and traditional Christian iconography. The indigenous figure represents the nation of Mexico, where the federal government and cultural leaders recently had embraced *indigenismo*, or the celebration of native history and culture, as a mechanism for consolidating national identity after the Mexican Revolution.⁹ An elaborately carved ruinous temple and broken statuary evinces an

⁷ The literature on U.S.-Latin American foreign relations is extensive. For general historical overviews of inter-American politics, see Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Lester D. Langley, *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*, 2nd ed., (London and Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Henry Raymond, *Troubled Neighbors: The Story of US-Latin American Relations, from FDR to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2005); Don M. Coerver and Linda B. Hall, *Tangled Destinies: Latin America and the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Michael C. Desch, *When the Third World Matters: Latin America and United States Grand Strategy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁸ José Martí, “Nuestra America,” September 27, 1893, in José Martí, *Obras completas* (La Habana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963-1973), 3: 109.

⁹ See Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (New York: Universe, 1994); Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Tace Hedrick, *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation, and Identity in Latin American Culture, 1900-1940* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); and Rick Anthony López, *Crafting Mexico:*

esteemed indigenous past, while two armed peasants garbed in the traditional costumes of Zapatista rebels crouch on a nearby rooftop, poised for battle. Their feathered enemy appears at the center of the composition, its wings outstretched and perched atop the double-cross. This menacing eagle symbolizes the United States, whose persistent military intervention and economic exploitation has “double crossed” the Mexican people and resulted in American industrial and territorial expansion, most notably in the Southwest.¹⁰

To be sure, Siqueiros was expressing a sense of cultural nationalism and a political critique of U.S.-Mexico relations through this mural; yet *América Tropical* must have resonated with local viewers in Los Angeles as well. Olvera Street in the 1930s – as today – was part of a neighborhood called “Old Sonoratown” for its large population of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Although many of these neighborhood residents were California-born (some families had even lived in the area since before 1848, when the United States seized control of it in the Mexican-American War), they nevertheless endured racial discrimination at restaurants, schools, movie theaters, and other public venues on a daily basis.

Along with North American Indians and African Americans, Latin Americans have long fulfilled the role of the exotic “other” against which the United States defined its identity and culture. As Helen Delpar and James Oles have demonstrated

Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ A second mural by David Alfaro Siqueiros, titled *New Democracy* (1944), serves as a fitting counterpoint and bookend to the period under investigation in this dissertation, since the artist’s allegorical depiction of the impending Allied victory over the Axis powers celebrates U.S.-Mexican cooperation in defeating European fascism. As this work of art demonstrates, Siqueiros’ attitude toward the United States evolved over the course of the interwar period.

in their surveys of U.S.-Mexico cultural exchange, American artists and intellectuals of the 1920s and early 1930s generally interpreted Mexican culture with an evolutionary bias resulting in romantic speculation and disdainful condescension, often at the same time. Such verbal and visual representations adhered to a prevailing “orientalizing” discourse that Delpar has termed “romantic primitivism.”¹¹ Such characterizations derived from prevailing theories of scientific racism, which drew a correlation between inherited racial traits and cultural advancement. In this anthropological paradigm, northern European and Anglo-American societies ranked at the top of the racial hierarchy for their perceived physical and intellectual superiority over Latin Americans and other nonwhite races.¹²

Although Los Angeles city boosters disapproved of Siqueiros’ political critique and soon whitewashed the mural, the U.S. government was at the same time growing increasingly worried that Latin American antipathy would be detrimental to American interests, namely peace and economic prosperity.¹³ Grappling with the

¹¹ See Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1992); James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947* (London and Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); Frederick B. Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); John J. Johnson, *Latin America in Caricature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

¹² “Race” refers to physical traits such as skin color, while “ethnicity” refers to cultural traits such as nationality, language, religion, and culture. For many Americans in the early twentieth century, racial characteristics presumed a shared ancestral heritage; thus the term “race” absorbed connotations of ethnicity as well. Despite the actual ethnic diversity of Latin American populations, U.S. citizens tended to regard “Latin Americans” (or “Mexicans,” as many Latin Americans were designated regardless of their nationality) as a monolithic racial category. As I discuss in Chapter Two, the introduction of the racial category “Mexican” to the U.S. Census in 1930 institutionalized this discursive practice.

¹³ President Herbert Hoover attempted to thaw inter-American relations with a goodwill tour of Latin America shortly after his election in 1928; however, public perceptions of his presidency focused on the disastrous effects of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff and economic depression rather than on these nascent contributions to inter-American diplomacy. See Bryce Wood, “The Making of the Good

hardships of economic depression and reeling from disillusionment following the First World War, the United States set out to repair relations with Latin American nations and to obtain their assistance in building a hemispheric defense against European fascism. Defensive collaboration with Mexico, the United States' nearest neighbor to the south, became particularly important in this context.

Inventing a Hemispheric American Identity

To enhance national security, the U.S. government needed to restore Mexican confidence in the ideals of pan-Americanism. Since the early 1880s, the United States had spearheaded a movement to organize the countries of the Western hemisphere into an international confederacy of friendly nation-states.¹⁴ This U.S. vision for inter-American exchange, commonly referred to as “pan-Americanism,” avowed hemispheric political cooperation and peaceful exchange in cultural, educational, and scientific arenas; however, many Latin Americans expressed dismay at persistent U.S. military intervention and “dollar diplomacy,” which seemed to privilege a U.S. agenda for political, cultural, and economic dominance and territorial expansion. Argentine writer Manuel Ugarte, for example, disparaged U.S.-led pan-

Neighbor Policy,” in *Neighborly Adversaries: Readings in U.S. Latin American Relations*, eds. Michael J. LaRosa and Frank O. Mora (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 101-108.

¹⁴ This movement had its origins in the Monroe Doctrine of 1820, which strove to limit European influence in the Americas. For a fuller account of the history of pan-Americanism, see David Sheinen, ed., *Beyond the Ideal: Pan Americanism in Inter-American Affairs* (London and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

Americanism in his 1911 book *El Porvenir de América Latina* by referring to the Pan American Union as the U.S. “Ministry of Colonies.”¹⁵

The Roosevelt administration deployed the Good Neighbor Policy to renew faith in and inspire patriotic attachment to the concept of pan-Americanism. Militaristic inaction and favorable trade agreements helped ameliorate diplomatic relations and instill Latin American confidence in a “reformed” United States, but this method of demonstrating U.S. goodwill demanded time that the current economic turmoil and impending war did not provide. In addition to instituting non-interventionist patterns of diplomatic procedure, the Good Neighbor Policy also reframed the discourse of pan-Americanism to proffer a revisionary construct of the Americas.

In the years leading up to and including the Second World War, the U.S. government invented a hemispheric American tradition inclusive of North, Central, and South America. As historian Eric Hobsbawm has demonstrated, societies do not faithfully record history but rather “attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” to meet the needs of contemporary culture.¹⁶ An effective inter-American alliance depended not only on formal agreements forged between the United States and Latin American governments, but also on the voluntary allegiance of citizens on both sides.

¹⁵ Manuel Ugarte, *El Porvenir de América Latina* (Valencia: F. Sempere y Compania, 1911).

¹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14. See also Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

The heterogeneity of the American nations necessitated claims of pan-Americanism based on territoriality, shared ideologies, and historical experience rather than notions of common ethnic descent. In this dissertation, as in the historical U.S. context of the Good Neighbor Policy, “pan-Americanism” refers to the multiple ties – historical, cultural, and ideological – that generate a sense of group consciousness across the geopolitical borders of the Western hemisphere. Like “nationalism,” pan-Americanism relies on mythologies of culture to delineate the membership of one community of people from another. These imaginary bonds, constituted from socially constructed values and histories rather than ethnic or geographic affiliation, foster feelings of loyalty and belonging among diverse populations.¹⁷

The Roosevelt administration needed to convince not only foreign audiences of the benefits of inter-American unity, but domestic citizens as well. This discursive reconfiguration of American identity sought to overturn negative stereotypes of Latin Americans by presenting them to domestic audiences as willing and capable allies in the fight against European fascism. Adapting nation-building strategies for both domestic and hemispheric audiences, the U.S. government sponsored cultural programs that celebrated pre-Columbian civilization as the basis of a modern hemispheric culture and represented contemporary Latin Americans as virtuous, hard-working people whose capitalist endeavors and republican spirit revealed them to be true “Americans” – that is, just like citizens of the United States.

¹⁷ The phrase “hemispheric imaginary,” then, extends the scholarly definition of “national imaginary” by referring to the system of beliefs and images that permit an individual to self-identify as belonging to a multinational or, in this case, hemispheric citizenry.

Several factors contributed to this favorable U.S. reassessment of Latin American culture in the 1930s and early 1940s. Growing immigrant populations and renewed attention to the plight of Native Americans foregrounded the plurality of race and ethnicity among U.S. citizens, while the stock market crash and Great Depression ruptured American confidence in commerce and industry as markers of civilization. New Deal projects including the Index of American Design, the Federal Writer's Project, and the Indian Arts and Crafts Board searched for "authentic" expressions of American identity rooted in the New World.¹⁸ These programs introduced the notion of a unique and potentially unifying "folk art" that prepared American audiences for the extended application of this idea under the Good Neighbor Policy.

At the same time, archaeological discoveries, museum exhibitions, and high-profile international art commissions inundated the American public with ample evidence regarding the rich artistic traditions of Mexico.¹⁹ Mexico's modern muralists, especially, garnered immense fame and popularity exhibiting and working

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, Virginia Tuttle Clayton and others have discussed the notion of the "folk" or a "usable past" in binding diverse populations to a singular national construct. Van Wyck Brooks coined the phrase "usable past" in his 1918 article "On Creating a Usable Past" in *The Dial*. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); Virginia Tuttle Clayton, Elizabeth Stillinger, and Erika Lee Doss, *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002); and Jennifer McLerran, *A New Deal for Native Art: Indian Arts and Federal Policy, 1933-1943* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

¹⁹ For example, Holger Cahill, future director of the WPA, organized the exhibition "Sources of American Art" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1933 to showcase ancient Mexican art as a precursor to modern American masters, both from Mexico and the United States. Holly Barnet-Sanchez dedicates a full chapter of her dissertation to this exhibition, since it marked "the beginning of a broad-based and long-lasting attempt to represent the cultural remains of ancient and fundamentally foreign civilizations (originally located within the geographic borders of modern Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras) not only as works of fine art, but also as a small but very significant portion of the U.S. patrimony." See Holly Barnet-Sanchez, "The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art: U.S. Museums and the Role of Foreign Policy in the Appropriation and Transformation of Mexican Heritage, 1933-1944" (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Los Angeles, 1993), 78-89.

in the United States. Between 1930 and 1934, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco executed major mural commissions across the nation, including the controversial and highly publicized fresco panels at Rockefeller Center and Dartmouth College. Moreover, the Mexican example of mural painting offered a salient model for U.S. government sponsorship of public art.²⁰

Reversing more than a century of racial discrimination and asymmetrical power relations still remained an ambitious and difficult task, however. The U.S. government initiated a large-scale public relations campaign to aid in this endeavor. A wealth of cultural programs under the Good Neighbor Policy attempted to inculcate new value systems and conventions of behavior that would encourage Latin Americans and U.S. citizens to accept the recently invented narratives of pan-Americanism. Political speeches, art exhibitions, musical concerts, radio programs, festivals and fiestas all functioned as hemispheric symbols that, collectively, refashioned communal memory and fostered emotional attachment to the pan-American construct.²¹

Art and visual culture functioned as particularly potent vehicles of U.S. Good Neighbor ideology, by which I mean the complex system of attitudes and beliefs that undergirded federal efforts to build hemispheric solidarity between 1933 and 1945. As Naoki Sakai has argued in his study of Japanese nationalism, visual imagery plays

²⁰ For a more complete overview of the U.S. fascination with Mexican culture during this period, see Helen Delpar's *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (1992) and James Oles' *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947* (1993), cited above.

²¹ Historian Michael E. Geisler has described this process as a historical "bookmark," a flashback reminder of a shared past that bestows on the individual a sense of collective identity. Michael E. Geisler, ed., *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative* (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College Press, 2005), xiv-xxxvi.

a significant role in formulating collective identity because the tangibility of symbols effectively conceals the underlying artificiality of the imaginary construct. Sakai explains, “Because it is not defined in practical terms, because there are no procedural rules by which to evaluate the appropriateness of the expression of the general will, [the construct] is given as if it were always and already there.”²² In the international context of pan-Americanism, artistic depictions of pre-Columbian civilization largely strove to establish, or at least symbolize, social cohesion throughout the Americas by lending concrete form to hemispheric narratives of historical continuity and cultural tradition.

Concerning the historical parameters of my project, the dates 1933 to 1945 correspond to the period of Roosevelt’s tenure as president. This bracketing does not mean that no efforts of inter-American cooperation preceded Roosevelt’s inauguration or that Americans of the 1930s were the first to link archaeology and national mythmaking. On the contrary, the United States already had an established track record of appropriating ancient Mexican civilization as part of its national patrimony.

Western Cultural Appropriation and the Discourse of Empire

In the nineteenth century, American adventurers and archaeologists understood pre-Columbian artifacts in an imperial mode. Whereas European-American society represented desirable values like masculinity, civilization,

²² Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On ‘Japan’ and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 110.

industriousness, and intellect, Native American and other colonized peoples symbolized “weaker” traits associated with femininity (or infantilism), nature, idleness, and emotion. This evolutionary cultural hierarchy, initially employed as an ideological justification for Western colonial domination, constructed an image of non-Western civilization that had little to do with the lived realities of these cultures. Rather, as literary critic Edward Said has argued, the discourse of primitivism projected cultural fantasies that defined the West and the non-West in adversarial terms.²³ The racialized character of colonialism provided further rationalization for European-American territorial expansion, economic exploitation, and severe mistreatment of nonwhite populations.

Under the guise of scientific exploration, nineteenth-century American adventurers and collectors presumed a lack of interest on the part of Latin American populations and recovered indigenous artifacts on behalf of the United States. This accumulation of material wealth ostensibly enhanced the cultural standing of the young nation by supporting nationalist claims of Manifest Destiny and by spurring economic expansion and territorial protectionism in foreign lands.²⁴ When these objects appeared in exhibitions as part of an American cultural lineage, they typically

²³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1-28.

²⁴ The Monroe Doctrine (1823) is arguably the most historically significant expression of U.S. imperialist attitudes toward Latin America. Issued in response to continued European interest in the Americas as prospective colonies, the document outlined the premise that any external interference in the Western hemisphere would be considered an affront to the United States and thus provided justification for U.S. territorial and economic protectionism in Latin America. See David W. Dent, *The Legacy of the Monroe Doctrine: A Reference Guide to U.S. Involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean* (London and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993).

provided an evolutionary baseline from which to measure modern U.S. scientific progress and technological achievement.²⁵

American artists' complementary interests in modernist primitivism and cultural nationalism marked a new phase of cultural appropriation in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s, the mechanized destruction of the Great War had catalyzed American disillusionment with Western "narratives of progress."²⁶ The critical stance of modernist primitivism provided a conceptual model for American artists seeking to reject European cultural supremacy after World War I. Modernist primitivism, as expressed in the works of European avant-garde artists like Pablo Picasso and Wassily Kandinsky, inverted this cultural dichotomy, borrowing non-European or native folk idioms in their paintings as a corrective to the perceived aesthetic and spiritual fatigue of modern society.²⁷

The dismantling of European cultural hegemony during this period encouraged American artists and writers to seek alternative, and preferably vernacular, source material for their creative efforts. In 1918, *The Dial* carried

²⁵ As historian Robert W. Rydell has argued, world's fairs functioned as nationalist enterprises through which exhibitions of peoples and raw materials of the non-European world joined with technological and scientific displays of industrialization to instruct fairgoers about the history and splendors of the modern nation-state. See Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century of Progress Expositions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1-43; R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination, 1820-1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); and Curtis Hinsley, "In Search of the New World Classical," in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research and Library Collection, 1993), 105-121.

²⁶ This phrase was coined by Shelly Errington to describe colonialist discourse in her book *The Death of the Authentic Primitive and Other Tales of Progress* (1998, cited above).

²⁷ Wendy Grossman provides an excellent discussion of U.S. modernist primitivism in her book *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens* (Washington, D.C.: International Arts and Artists, 2009), 11-27. For an overview of European and American modernists' engagement with pre-Columbian sources, see Barbara Braun's *Pre-Columbian Art in the Post-Columbian World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993).

literary critic Van Wyck Brooks' seminal essay, "On Creating a Usable Past." Brooks lamented what he called the cultural "void" of the present and attributed this dismal literary condition to American writers' lack of a vibrant national literary tradition upon which to draw. He proposed a nationalistic search for an unacknowledged native tradition that could serve as a muse for contemporary authors. Failing this, the United States should invent a "usable past" to invigorate and distinguish its artistic heritage.²⁸

Adjacent to the United States, Mexico offered a distinguished indigenous past that contributed to American artists' expressions of cultural nationalism during the interwar period. Wanting to establish a uniquely American style of modernism, artists turned toward ancient Mexico for design inspiration.²⁹ Francisco Cornejo, a Mexican-born architect who lived and worked in Los Angeles, voiced his enthusiasm for pre-Columbian art in 1921:

We talk about having an American art, but our architects, our sculptors, our painters, our craftsmen look for inspiration to Egypt, Greece and the Orient. Sad to say, they neglect what we possess on our own continent. If we are to be influenced by any form of art, why not make use of the wealth of ornamentation and decoration from our primitive sources? Maya and Aztec art bears no real resemblance to that of any other ancient nation and is our heritage.³⁰

Numerous architects working in California also believed that Mayan tradition served as a more appropriate model for American architecture than European styles. These architects, including Robert Stacy-Judd, John C. Austin, and Frank Lloyd Wright,

²⁸ Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *The Dial* 64 (April 11, 1918): 337-341.

²⁹ Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican*, 130.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 130.

eagerly adopted the Mayan Revival style, which emphasized smooth planes and geometric ornament derived from pre-Columbian forms.³¹

These two cultural projects – modernist primitivism and cultural nationalism – transformed the dominant discourse surrounding indigenous American civilizations from evolutionary racism to a celebrated “usable past” and avant-garde critique of mechanized society.³² This is not to say that racial biases dissolved during this period. On the contrary, virtually all of mainstream society maintained a primitivizing view of Latin Americans and other nonwhite populations. For example, many Americans during the Depression era perceived the “backwardness” of rural Mexico as providing an idyllic retreat from the quick pace and economic turmoil of modern life.³³

Although conceptually rooted in earlier ideas, the artworks under consideration in this dissertation exhibit a more consciously diplomatic treatment of

³¹ Generated by the reproductions of ancient Mexican ruins at national architecture competitions and exhibitions, the Mayan revival style originated around 1910 and gained popularity, especially in southern California, after World War I. See Marjorie Ingle, *The Mayan Revival Style: Art Deco Mayan Fantasy* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1984); and Barbara Braun’s study of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Mayan-inspired buildings in her book *Pre-Columbian Art in the Post-Columbian World* (1993; cited above).

³² Ruth Benedict’s seminal study *Patterns of Culture* (1934) also helped to dismantle scientific racism by providing a new anthropological model in which diverse racial and ethnic groups could productively coexist through tolerance and mutual respect. Even so, notions of cultural relativism circulated primarily in scientific circles and did not impact prevailing racist ideologies in the general public until the atrocities of Nazi Germany during World War II rendered eugenicist thought untenable. See Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds., *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006).

³³ James Oles presents an insightful analysis of Americans’ romanticized view of Mexico between the World Wars in his book *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947* (1993; cited above). According to Oles, American artists emphasized Mexico as a timeless and idyllic rural world, often excluding in their depictions items that offered a sense of modernity, mechanization, or industry. Instead, they worked within a narrow thematic range that included the Mexican Revolution, rural populations, folk art, and the pre-Columbian past. While Oles is correct to note that a romantic vision of Mexico persisted with some American artists throughout the Good Neighbor era, he does not adequately distinguish the currency of pan-Americanism or its distinctive modes of representation from modernist primitivism.

pre-Hispanic Mexico, one consistent with the egalitarian discourse and pointed political aims of U.S.-led pan-Americanism. As such, these images remained external imaginings of Mexican antiquity. The primary difference in this mode of appropriation was the discursive frame in which it circulated. Whereas a Eurocentric binary schema of race undergirded both nineteenth-century colonial discourse and twentieth-century modernist primitivism, discussions of cultural nationalism absorbed pre-Columbian civilization into the fabric of U.S. history and art, albeit as a tool for modern cultural revitalization. The Roosevelt administration's foreign policy of pan-Americanism took this process one step further by initiating a discourse of hemispheric cultural nationalism. In other words, U.S. officials attempted to break down hierarchical assumptions about pre-Hispanic (and, by extension, modern) Latin American civilizations by proclaiming Mexican antiquity part of a *shared* American history and culture. Following these rhetorical strategies, individual artists celebrated pre-Columbian civilization as the basis of a modern pan-American culture.

Post-Revolutionary Mexico: Nationalism, Resistance, and Accommodation

How did Mexico respond to this unauthorized use of its patrimony and the political motives it advanced? For the most part, Mexican leaders Lázaro Cárdenas and Manuel Avila Camacho welcomed Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy and its strategies of nonintervention, cultural respect, and free trade for the potential benefit such practices could bring to both Mexico and the United States. Nevertheless, they did so with caution and a large dose of skepticism. To be sure, the U.S. government faced considerable challenges in establishing a diplomatic alliance with Mexico. As I

mentioned above, the U.S. defeat and territorial conquest of Mexico during the nineteenth century loomed large in the minds of twentieth-century Mexican nationalists, who viewed the United States as an aggressive, imperialistic, and ruthless Yankee nation. Subsequent instances of U.S. economic imperialism and militaristic intervention, including the occupation of Veracruz during the 1910 revolution, only served to amplify Mexican distrust and antipathy toward the United States.³⁴

Furthermore, the Mexican Revolution cast a long shadow over Mexico's national cultural and political landscape. This decade-long struggle against the Europeanized Mexican ruling class mobilized the populace with democratic rhetoric and zealous nationalism. Following this prolonged period of internal violence, the emergent post-revolutionary government initiated programs of political and cultural renewal to bolster national unity and economic recovery. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Mexican government experimented with liberal initiatives such as economic protectionism, populism, and the celebration of indigenous culture to consolidate national identity and government support.³⁵ Nationalist interests, buttressed by revolutionary rhetoric, also dominated Mexico's foreign policy in the interwar years. The global devastation of World War I and the Great Depression

³⁴ William H. Beezley and Colin M. Maclachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 22-42.

³⁵ Mexico engaged in a rigorous period of cultural nationalism between the world wars. The federal government sponsored educational reforms and public art projects that reclaimed Mexico's pre-Columbian heritage as the foundation for a new national identity. This endeavor produced a powerful modern art movement that garnered international acclaim and also profoundly influenced art-making in the United States.

reinforced this isolationist impulse as many Mexicans sought to break economic and cultural ties with Europe and the United States.

In 1934, less than a year after Roosevelt had launched the Good Neighbor Policy, revolutionary veteran Lázaro Cárdenas assumed the Mexican presidency. Over the next six years, the Cárdenas administration instituted several progressive reform programs borne out of the populist rhetoric of the 1910 revolution. For example, the Mexican president implemented a large-scale agrarian program to strengthen the national economy and to improve living conditions for poor laborers and farmers. Cárdenas seized millions of acres of land and reallocated parcels to Mexican peasants. Such reformist policies made Cárdenas immensely popular with his constituents, who regarded him as a champion of Mexican national sovereignty and domestic labor policy.³⁶

During the 1930s, Mexico and the United States witnessed a growing trend of fascist and communist leadership in European nations. Mexicans interpreted these political ideologies through their recent national experiences during the 1910 revolution, and a small but vocal group of pro-fascist cultural leaders drew parallels between the postwar circumstances of Europe and the political landscape of post-revolutionary Mexico. Nazi propaganda also began targeting German nationals living in Mexico during this same period. This relatively small but strategically significant segment of Mexico's population engendered suspicion in the United States, where U.S. government leaders worried that the country would become a haven for Nazi sympathizers and thus a springboard for fascist espionage and subterfuge throughout

³⁶ Burton Kirkwood, *The History of Mexico*, 2nd ed. (Denver, Santa Barbara, and London: Greenwood Press, 2010), 162-167.

the hemisphere. In reality, Mexico became an important destination for antifascist European refugees during both the Spanish Revolution and World War II. However, this fact did nothing to alleviate U.S. concerns.³⁷

U.S.-Mexican relations became especially strained in 1938, when Cárdenas expropriated foreign-owned oil companies. After American and European oil companies refused to comply with a Mexican Supreme Court ruling during a labor dispute, the Mexican president intervened and nationalized the industry. The subsequent United States boycott of Mexican oil and silver exacerbated the situation, since Cárdenas formed commercial agreements with Germany and Japan in response. Alarmed at this international development, the U.S. State Department attempted to broker a monetary settlement on behalf of the privately-owned American oil companies but to no avail. Negotiations between the United States and Mexico remained contentious until 1940, when the fall of France to German forces compelled the U.S. government to refocus their attention on hemispheric security and thus adopt a more accommodating stance.³⁸

In his incisive analysis of such bilateral conflicts, historian John J. Dwyer has argued that Mexican officials devised a sophisticated diplomatic toolkit that leveraged the Good Neighbor Policy to Mexican advantage. Cárdenas faced domestic challenges such as regional political opposition and a weakened economy that required him to allocate Mexican resources to national rather than foreign obligations. Furthermore, any agreement to meet U.S. demands for reparations represented, for

³⁷ Monica Rankin, *¡Mexico, la patria!: Propaganda and Production during World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 37.

³⁸ Kirkwood, *The History of Mexico*, 165-168; and Rankin, *¡Mexico, la patria!*, 68-75.

many, a betrayal of revolutionary ideals. Most Mexicans rejected assumptions of U.S. hegemony and responded with intensified pronouncements of Mexican nationalism. Cárdenas coordinated his negotiations with the United States accordingly. Dwyer described the land dispute thusly:

The Cárdenas administration seized American-owned property and avoided indemnification by repeatedly agreeing to compensate U.S. landowners and halt the expropriation of American-owned estates. Such pronouncements made it appear that Mexico City took seriously Washington's concerns over payment, even though land continued to be taken without compensation.³⁹

Dwyer further explains that the Cárdenas administration mitigated Mexican recalcitrance by repeatedly demonstrating a national solidarity with the United States in issues of hemispheric defense. In November 1939, the Mexican government agreed to allow U.S. military to conduct air surveillance over Mexican territories, and the following year Cárdenas announced that Mexico would join the U.S. in a military alliance. These security agreements pleased U.S. officials and granted the Mexican government greater latitude in negotiating the terms of land and oil reparations. Using what Dwyer has termed diplomatic “weapons of the weak” – evasive tactics such as foot-dragging, deception, and noncompliance – the Mexican government was thus able to avoid compensating American landowners until the United States provided a lucrative aid package that allowed Mexico to make reparations without undermining its weak economy.⁴⁰

Cárdenas' successor, President Manuel Avila Camacho, was much more willing than his predecessor to establish formal agreements with the United States.

³⁹ John J. Dwyer, “Diplomatic Weapons of the Weak: Mexican Policymaking during the U.S.-Mexican Agrarian Dispute, 1934-1941,” *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 377.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 375-395.

During the 1940s, the Mexican government openly regarded opportunities for U.S.-Mexican collaboration favorably, since international cooperation on trade and security initiatives could benefit both sides. Avila Camacho looked to the United States to advance his national economic platform, in particular, and he employed the rhetoric of hemispheric security to attract U.S. assistance and investment for Mexican industrial development. This diplomatic tack marked a substantial break from Cárdenas' foreign policy stance, which publicly disparaged such international arrangements as a compromise of national interests. However, Avila Camacho faced considerably less political risk than did Cárdenas, since the Second World War generated mutual concerns around which the United States and Mexico could unite. The Mexican government consolidated its national rhetoric with the pro-democracy discourse of the United States and other Allied countries to appeal to its citizens' post-revolutionary patriotism.⁴¹ After Mexico declared war on Germany, Italy, and Japan on May 22, 1942, the Avila Camacho administration became an unwavering ally to the United States and an influential advocate of U.S.-led pan-Americanism in its dealings with other Latin American nations.

Although careful to resist U.S. economic and political dominance, Mexico nevertheless voiced its support for Roosevelt's foreign policy initiatives throughout the Good Neighbor era. The Mexican government appreciated U.S. commitment to nonintervention and free trade and strove to implement these international policies to national advantage. As part of its own diplomatic efforts in this vein, Mexico permitted the United States access to its pre-Columbian heritage.

⁴¹ See Rankin, *¡Mexico, la patria!* (2010), cited above.

Unlike earlier periods of American cultural appropriation, Mexican officials largely approved of U.S. arrogation of its patrimony because the Good Neighbor Policy allowed nationalist traditions to coexist in tension with unifying hemispheric narratives of pan-Americanism. The most prominent example of this collaborative framing was the 1940 exhibition “Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art,” held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Sponsored jointly by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, the Mexican government, and MoMA, the show displayed more than 5,000 Mexican objects with the avowed aim of strengthening pan-American friendship. The single-country scope of the exhibition illustrates how intercultural programs contained both nationalist and pan-Americanist meanings. A central component of the show’s curatorial vision was the presentation of a continuous two-thousand-year history of creative expression in Mexico. By foregrounding the “unbroken” aesthetic sensibility characteristic of Mexico’s pre-Columbian, colonial, modern, and folk art, the exhibition adhered to nationalist conceptions of Mexican identity in the post-revolutionary era. At the same time, museum officials advocated a familial connection among American states that legitimized U.S. cultural appropriation by absolving the practice of colonialist pretense. Mexican scholar and curator Alfonso Caso expressed his hope that pre-Columbian artifacts, as examples of a collective American antiquity, would provide a creative wellspring for U.S. artists much as it had for Mexico’s modernists.⁴² Such instances of Mexican accommodation were highly consequential in fostering

⁴² Museum of Modern Art, *Twenty Centuries of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1940), 23. Holly Barnet-Sanchez provides an insightful analysis of the inherent contradictions operating within the collaborative and diplomatic circumstances of this show. See Barnet-Sanchez, “The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art,” 110-134.

widespread acceptance of the Good Neighbor Policy and its accompanying U.S. appropriation of Mexican antiquity.

The Art of Inter-American Diplomacy

I have elected to focus on United States images of Mexico created by and for U.S. citizens because this approach permits me to consider the positional superiority that the United States maintained throughout the Good Neighbor era. In addition to theories of nationalism and memory, this dissertation bases its analysis on the assumption that the imagistic inversion of negative Latin American stereotypes by the United States stems from the Western discourse of power that Edward Said has termed “orientalism” and thus also reveals American racial attitudes and cultural beliefs. The discursive power of U.S. representations of Mexico centered on their exteriority, or their imaginings of Mexico by and for the United States.⁴³ As this project demonstrates, U.S. artists’ pictorial treatment of ancient Mexico reveals prevailing American attitudes and beliefs about Latin America that both underpinned and undermined the intercultural endeavor of the Good Neighbor Policy.

The chapters of the dissertation present a series of case studies, each devoted to a different facet of the international discourse of pan-Americanism as it was

⁴³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 5. In addition to publications cited elsewhere in this dissertation, the following books have informed my thinking on themes of nationalism and patriotism: John Bodnar, ed. *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona, *Nationalism in the New World* (London and Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Larry J. Reynolds and Gordon Hutner, eds., *National Imaginaries, American Identities: The Cultural Work of American Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

internally conceived and domestically disseminated.⁴⁴ Chapter One, “Mayans, Maize and the Midwest: Remaking American Identity in the Ames Mural Competition,” introduces the persuasive strategies of U.S.-led pan-Americanism and analyzes the U.S. government patronage of Lowell Houser’s *The Evolution of Corn* (1938) as a mechanism of hemispheric identity formation. Mirroring the rhetorical arguments of the U.S. government, Houser’s mural compositionally and thematically constructs a visual argument claiming a seamless historical lineage in which the modern Iowan farmer descended, culturally at least, from the ancient Mayan. My chapter examines photographic records of the Ames Post Office competition entries and analyzes the larger political and cultural climate to explain why the U.S. Treasury Department’s Section of Painting and Sculpture – despite a professed preference for local subjects – awarded Houser the contract.

Chapter Two, “Guardians of San Diego History: Challenging Pan-Americanism in Donal Hord’s Civic Center Fountain,” considers how geographic location, site specificity, and mode of representation determined the relative success of an artwork in promoting notions of hemispheric citizenship. The dominant discourse of U.S.-led pan-Americanism turned a blind eye to the unjust treatment of blacks, Native Americans, and Latin Americans past and present, at home and abroad.

⁴⁴ As a consequence, this dissertation presents only a partial history of the Good Neighbor Policy. It is my hope that the current study will encourage future scholars to take up other facets of this complex period of intercultural dialogue and identity formation. The international scope and collaborative government/private mobilization of inter-American cultural diplomacy poses a rich field for scholarly inquiry. United States visual representation of non-Mexican indigenous cultures, Latin American colonial histories, and contemporary Latin populations merits equal scholarly attention, as does Latin Americans’ critical response to U.S. initiatives of cultural diplomacy. These areas invite development as studies in their own right, as recent publications by Monica A. Rankin and Pennee Bender attest. See Rankin, *!México, la patria!* (2010; cited above); and Pennee Bender, “Supporting Dictatorship in World War 2 News: ‘Flash From Brazil’ – 1940s’ Newsreels Present Latin America,” in *American Visual Cultures*, ed. David Holloway and John Beck (New York: Continuum, 2005), 116-124.

Indeed, one of the primary advantages of turning to ancient Mayan civilization in this diplomatic context was its geographic and temporal distance from the modern nation-state. While Houser's mural received a welcome reception in the predominantly white community of Ames, Iowa, the Good Neighbor Policy and its hemispheric configuration of American identity encountered greater resistance in regions with large populations of Mexican descent. By minimizing the racial distinctions between Anglo Americans and Latin Americans, the discourse of U.S.-led pan-Americanism ostensibly threatened to upset domestic paradigms of white social and economic supremacy. Despite having achieved popular and critical success in San Diego with *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* (1935) and *Aztec* (1937), Donal Hord nevertheless endured public scrutiny in 1937 when the Daughters of the Golden West protested the supposed Aztec ethnicity of the carved figure in *Guardian of the Water* (1937-1939) as being unsuitable and inaccurate for the San Diego region. My analysis of this heated, yet contrived controversy foregrounds the clash of local and global politics in order to reveal the domestic limitations of the Good Neighbor Policy.

Minority activism in response to persistent racial discrimination in the United States during the Good Neighbor era is the subject of Chapter Three, "America Past and Future in Charles White's Hampton Mural." This chapter examines how African American artist Charles White's *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* (1943) extended the multiethnic redefinition of American identity under the Good Neighbor Policy to apply to black Americans as well. Following the rhetorical and pictorial strategies of pan-Americanism, White inserts the contributions of

African Americans into the national narrative, thereby demanding recognition and equal treatment under the law.

Not surprisingly, the critical disconnect between ancient and modern Mexicans in domestic race relations also affected U.S. foreign policy initiatives. As film historian Eric Lott has noted, “the connection between internal and international is intimate. If national esteem in racial matters is related to international prestige—the ability to wield power among foreign races—it is also (or therefore) the case that representations of national racial difference often provide displaced maps for international ones.”⁴⁵ Chapter Four, “Patrimony and Paternalism in *The Story of Chan Yuc*,” demonstrates how latent racism persisted even among the most progressive proponents of pan-Americanism and how these ethnocentric assumptions of United States superiority manifested in collaborative inter-American cultural and economic endeavors. My examination of the storyline and illustrations in Dorothy Rhoads’ and Jean Charlot’s *The Story of Chan Yuc* (1941) interprets the picture book as an allegory for U.S. cultural custodianship and economic hegemony in hemispheric affairs.

This dissertation is not intended to be a chronological, linear narrative of the Good Neighbor Policy. Rather, the above case studies offer an aggregate picture through which the inconsistencies between egalitarian claim and hegemonic practice unfold. By uncovering prevailing U.S. attitudes about race, this study illuminates the inherent limitations of U.S. inter-American diplomacy during this period and helps to

⁴⁵ Eric Lott, “White Like Me: Racial Cross-Dressing and the Construction of American Whiteness,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 476.

explain the deterioration of U.S.-Latin American relations after World War II, a topic that I explore briefly in my conclusion.

Chapter 1

Mayans, Maize, and the Midwest: Remaking American Identity in the Ames Mural Competition

In fall of 1935, the United States Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture awarded Iowa artist Lowell Houser a mural commission for the newly built post office in Ames, Iowa. Houser's winning design, *The Cultivation of Corn in Mayan and Modern Times*, joined contemporary Iowan corn culture with a mythic Mayan past (figure 3). A broad range of North American tribes – ancient Mound Builders, Sioux, Algonquians, Sauk, and Iowans – inhabited the grassy plains and lush river banks of the future state. Yet at no point in its long history did Iowa serve as a homeland to Mayan civilization. Houser's sketch nevertheless devotes an entire panel to ancient Mexico. His mural composition juxtaposes ancient and modern examples of corn cultivation. The left scene portrays a Mayan Indian in a jaguar pelt loincloth tending maize before a large stepped pyramid. The pendant panel depicts his modern equivalent, a contemporary Iowan farmer, husking ears of corn. Unlike the Mayan figure, the fair-skinned Midwestern farmer stands erect and sports a neatly trimmed moustache, protective overalls, gloves, boots, and a brimmed cap. Behind him, a wagon waits ready to carry the harvest to Ames, whose landmark campanile at Iowa State University appears in the distance. A central third panel condenses the compositional timeline in a heraldic design composed of a Mayan corn deity, a seed kernel, and a scientific microscope.

This chapter examines the circumstances surrounding the Ames mural competition to elucidate federal efforts toward instituting an official reconfiguration of U.S. cultural origins under the Good Neighbor Policy.⁴⁶ To foster a sense of hemispheric identity and pan-American patriotism in the years leading up to and during World War II, the U.S. government encouraged the collection and dissemination of Mesoamerican artifacts as evidence of a shared American heritage distinct from European culture. Houser's pictorial characterization of Mayan history complemented the discursive apparatus of these diplomatic efforts. Unlike Marsden Hartley and other contemporary practitioners of modernist primitivism, Houser depicted ancient Mayan civilization as a noble cultural forebear to the modern Midwest.⁴⁷ Recognizing that public artworks often help to codify collective memory, or its selective sense of the past, and communal identity through authoritative narratives of past and present, I argue that the federal selection committee chose

⁴⁶ The Ames mural project was one of thousands executed nationwide under the New Deal. In December 1933, the administration established a short-lived pilot program to employ artists, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). The success of this initial project allowed for additional funding. After the PWAP closed in the summer of 1934, the government created the Section of Painting and Sculpture (the Section), the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), and the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA) to administer federal art patronage. For a history of New Deal federal art programs, see Virginia Mecklenburg, *The Public as Patron: A History of the Treasury Department Mural Program* (College Park: University of Maryland, 1979); Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969); Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Francis V. O'Connor, ed. *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972); and Kathryn A. Flynn, *The New Deal: A 75th Anniversary Celebration* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2008), 24-45.

⁴⁷ Modernist primitivism was the appropriation of non-Western cultures by European and American artists that served as both a critique of and solution to the supposed aesthetic and spiritual fatigue of Western civilization. See Wendy Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens* (Washington, D.C.: International Arts and Artists, 2009); and Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art in the Post-Colonial World* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993).

Houser's mural design for its perceived contribution to the exigencies of inter-American relations at this time.

Pan-American Solidarity and Culture

The Ames mural contest coincided with portentous developments in European politics. In 1934, Chancellor Adolf Hitler announced Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations, its rejection of the Versailles Peace Treaty, and its ambitious program of rearmament and military expansion. Violent attempts by Italy to expand its colonial empire in 1934 and 1935 added to public apprehension. Foreign war seemed imminent, and the United States wished vehemently not to become involved. Ernest Hemingway gave voice to his fellow citizens' isolationist stance when he wrote: "[O]f the hell broth that is brewing in Europe we have no need to drink. Europe has always fought; the intervals of peace are only armistices. We were fools to be suckered in once in a European war, and we should never be sucked in again."⁴⁸

A foreign policy of isolationism was not enough to preserve the physical security of the United States, however. For strategic planners and political leaders in the United States, Latin American nations appeared particularly vulnerable to Axis

⁴⁸ Ernest Hemingway, "Notes on the Next War: A Serious Topical Letter to *Esquire*," 4 *Esquire* (September 1935): 19, 156. Strong anti-war sentiment in the United States stemmed from more immediate concern for domestic recovery and severe disillusionment with World War I. Many Americans came to believe that greedy and corrupt business leaders were largely to blame for the nation's involvement in the war. A series of publications in the mid-1930s reinforced this perception. In response the Senate established a special committee to investigate the munitions industry. Between September 1934 and February 1936, the Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry held over ninety hearings churning up evidence in support of the conspiracy theories. In August 1935 – the same month that the Treasury Department announced the Ames mural competition – the House and Senate passed the Neutrality Act of 1935, which imposed trading restrictions in arms and war supplies against any country, aggressor or victim, engaged in warfare.

invasion. Strong trade relationships with Germany and sizeable German immigrant populations in Latin American countries seemed to pose a very real danger of Nazism penetrating the New World.⁴⁹ Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson predicted that Latin American political allegiance would follow trade routes, while Roosevelt's economic advisor Bernard Baruch warned, "German economic penetration could bring [Latin America] under her control without firing a shot."⁵⁰

Pan-American solidarity formed a major component of the United States' mission to maintain peace. In his inaugural address of March 4, 1933, President Roosevelt introduced the Good Neighbor Policy, under which the U.S. government would conduct itself as a nation "who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others."⁵¹ The president initially intended his foreign policy to apply to the entire world; however, he soon reframed his concept of the "good neighbor" to apply specifically to Latin America. The following month he appeared before the Governing Board of the Pan American Union and pledged his

⁴⁹ The German government initiated an economic offensive in 1934, when that nation sent a commercial delegation to South America. Notably, German exports to Latin America doubled in the following two years. Brazil was particularly receptive to German trade initiatives during these years. Not only did the large nation contain a substantial population of German extraction – amounting to almost one million – but the Brazilian government readily exchanged agricultural goods like coffee, rubber, cotton, and cacao for German weapons and munitions. Joseph Smith, *The United States and Latin America: A History of American Diplomacy, 1776-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 98.

⁵⁰ Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 4. Friedman's book provides ample evidence of American apprehension over Nazi infiltration in its analysis of an inter-American cooperative security program through which the United States and fifteen Latin American nations placed more than 4,000 German expatriates in a Texas internment camp during World War II. The United States showed concern for Nazism within its own borders as well. Dorothy Thompson, the most prominent American commentator on Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, warned United States citizens that "it could happen here" too. Congressman Samuel Dickstein launched a formal investigation of Nazi propaganda in the United States in 1934.

⁵¹ Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (New York: Random House, 1938), 14.

commitment to non-interventionist cooperation and open trade with the American republics:

The essential qualities of a true Pan-Americanism must be the same as those which constitute a good neighbor, namely, mutual understanding, and . . . a sympathetic appreciation of the other's point of view. It is only in this manner that we can hope to build a system of which confidence, friendship, and goodwill are the cornerstones.⁵²

By implementing policies of nonintervention, cultural respect, and free trade, the U.S. government hoped to repair relations with Latin American nations and to secure their cooperation in building a hemispheric defense against European fascism.

To establish a defensible hemisphere, the Roosevelt administration set out to convince Americans at home and abroad of two related theses: first, that the American continents formed a single geographical unit; and second, that the Western hemisphere stood culturally and ideologically distinct from Europe. One approach to binding Latin American and United States populations to a singular hemispheric imaginary was to emphasize a shared colonial past. Government officials called upon history to aid this endeavor. Just as the American colonies were once the possession of England, so too were Latin American lands and Caribbean islands the colonies of Spain, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands. Threats against liberty, democracy, and free trade had always come from sources outside the hemisphere, and Americans, both north and south, shared a commitment to individual freedom and democracy and naturally wanted to protect these social ideals. Bound by proximity and a shared colonial past, Roosevelt proposed, the American republics should forge a universal alliance to safeguard the hemisphere from foreign war.

⁵² Ibid, 130.

Another strategy the government adopted as part of these diplomatic efforts was to celebrate ancient Mexican civilization as evidence of a mythic hemispheric heritage belonging also to U.S. citizens. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, the Roosevelt administration sponsored cultural activities ranging from fine art exhibitions to Disney animated films to advocate an “imagined community” spanning the hemisphere. In 1934, the Civil Works Service undertook a project to construct “Maya temples and civic palaces, miniature in size but perfect in shape and decoration” for an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. Curator Herbert Spinden, who supervised the construction of the pre-Columbian casts, claimed that Mayans were good Americans because they had “skyscraper instinct.”⁵³ Such public avowals of pan-Americanism played a significant role in the formation of hemispheric unity, since their rehearsal of historical and cultural continuity transformed pre-Columbian civilization into a shorthand symbol for contemporary inter-American solidarity. By providing a distinctly American heritage of which to be proud, ancient Mexico helped the United States government to promote the notion of a singular, pan-American cultural base that united the American republics not only in a distant, mythic past but

⁵³ Herbert Spinden quoted in Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art in the Post-Columbian World: Ancient American Sources of Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 42. With stepped pyramids marked by smooth planes and geometric patterns, Mayan structures resembled modern design in the Art Deco style and ostensibly offered a creative wellspring for a uniquely American strand of modern art. In this way, the culture and history of ancient Mexico offered the public New World accomplishments that rivaled the established intellectual and cultural marvels of Europe. Although architectural models of Pre-Columbian monuments ranged from perfectly-rendered copies executed to scale to creative reconstructions, curators throughout the United States shared a common purpose: to present to the museum-going public the former glory of ancient American civilizations. For more information on the practice of recreating pre-Columbian architecture in plaster, see Diana Fane, “Reproducing the Pre-Columbian Past: Casts and Models in Exhibitions of Ancient America, 1824-1935,” in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), 141-76.

also in an immediate, interdependent future. Iowa artist Lowell Houser was an early and avid proponent of this interpretation of ancient Mexican civilization.

Lowell Houser and the Influence of Mesoamerican Art

Lowell Houser's formal art training and firsthand knowledge of Mexico informed his conception for the Ames mural. Born in Chicago in 1902, Houser moved with his family to Ames, Iowa, when he was just seven years old. The son of a streetcar conductor, he spent the remainder of his youth in Ames and in 1921 graduated from Ames High School. He attended Iowa State College for one quarter but withdrew at the end of the term to pursue a career in painting. Houser then commenced his formal training at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied painting, mural design, and illustration. His attendance at the conservative art school instilled in him conventional ideas about the didactic function and elevated status of history painting, ranked at the top of the hierarchy of academic genres. In its most traditional form, history painting depicted historical or mythological events for the purpose of teaching moral and civic virtues. Artists typically selected noble, yet dramatic narrative incidents from textual accounts and worked tirelessly to incorporate accurate details to bolster credibility and a perception of truth. These impressive images, the argument went, possessed sufficient rhetorical agency to inspire higher thoughts, proper modes of conduct, and patriotic feelings in the public.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Among Houser's teachers were noted Chicago artists Louis Grell, Albert H. Krehbiel, and Harry I. Stickroth. *Art Institute of Chicago School Catalogue, 1922-1923*, Art Institute of Chicago Archives, Chicago, Illinois. My discussion and terminology with regard to history painting relies heavily on

Upon graduation, Houser embarked on a series of extended trips to Mexico. During his travels, he worked two seasons as a field artist at Chichén Itzá, creating scale drawings of ancient Mayan stelae and mural paintings. He gained through this work an appreciation for Mayan culture as a noble example of antiquity. “When I came I thought Maya art was primitive,” wrote Houser in a 1927 letter to friend and fellow artist Everett Gee Jackson, “now I think it is the most civilized that I know.”⁵⁵ He also visited Mexico City to view the well-publicized mural efforts of Diego Rivera, Jean Charlot, and others.⁵⁶ This early exposure to Mexican art, both ancient and modern, had a profound and lasting influence on his art production, particularly with regard to style and subject matter. Houser demonstrated throughout his career a sustained interest in ancient Mayan culture. In addition to the Ames mural, he published Mexican-style woodcuts in *Dial* magazine and illustrated children’s stories on pre-Columbian themes, including Alida Malkus’s *The Dark Star of Itza: The Story of a Pagan Princess* (1931).

The widely publicized government embrace of pan-Americanism naturally led Houser to believe that a mural design incorporating Mesoamerican history would hold special appeal for the federal selection committee. Cultural diplomacy during this period gained extensive newspaper coverage and institutional support, especially

Patricia M. Burnham’s and Lucretia Hoover Giese’s definition of the genre and its component parts in *Redefining American History Painting* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-14.

⁵⁵ Mary L. Meixner “Lowell Houser’s Poetic Glass Mural in Des Moines,” *The Palimpsest* 73, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 34.

⁵⁶ Although it is unknown which Mexican murals Houser saw during his sojourn, he probably visited the National Preparatory School. The public high school included numerous government-sponsored frescoes by prominent artists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Jean Charlot, to name a few.

in major cities like New York and Washington, D.C. Municipal leaders and private organizations, including the Pan American Union, the International Institute of Education, and the Carnegie Foundation, touted existing inter-American programs and inaugurated new ones, while favorable newspaper editorials fostered the impression of popular consensus in support of the Good Neighbor Policy. For example, New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia renamed Sixth Avenue “the Avenue of the Americas” in a symbolic gesture heralding a new era of U.S.-Latin American friendship. Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* lauded Roosevelt’s endorsement of the International-Pacific Highway, which would run from Alaska to Mexico City. “The affairs of the Orient are troubled and those of both Europe and Africa are threatening,” the newspaper observed, but the “successful bringing together of the various elements that go to make up the New World promises to provide an important haven where peace can thrive, no matter what happens elsewhere in the world.”⁵⁷

Further, exhibitions of Mexican art surged in number. These shows, which ranged in focus from ancient artifacts and plaster reconstructions of Mayan temples to Mexican folk art and modern painting, presented the American public with ample evidence regarding rich artistic traditions south of the border. Holger Cahill, future director of the WPA, organized the exhibition “Sources of American Art” at the Museum of Modern Art to showcase ancient Mexican art as a precursor to modern American masters, both from Mexico and the United States.⁵⁸ Mexico’s modern

⁵⁷ “Linking the Continents,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1935.

⁵⁸ Holly Bernet-Sanchez, “The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art: U.S. Museums and the Role of Foreign Policy in the Appropriation and Transformation of Mexican Heritage, 1933-1944” (Ph.D.

muralists, whose work Houser had viewed in Mexico City, also garnered immense fame and popularity exhibiting and working in the United States. Between 1930 and 1934, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco executed major mural commissions across the nation, including the controversial and highly publicized fresco panels at Rockefeller Center and Dartmouth College.⁵⁹ Moreover, the Mexican example of mural painting offered a salient model for U.S. government sponsorship of public art. George Biddle, an old schoolmate of Roosevelt, employed this precise line of reasoning in his appeal to the president in support of a federal art program. On May 9, 1933, he wrote: “The Mexican artists have produced the greatest national school of mural painting since the Italian Renaissance...The younger artists of America are conscious as they have never been of the social revolution that our country and civilization are going through; and they would be eager to express these ideals in a permanent art form if they were given the government’s cooperation.”⁶⁰

Although the federal art projects generally tried to avoid overt political symbolism in public art, Washington officials nevertheless supported murals whose positive portrayals touted the successes of Roosevelt’s programs. In 1935, for instance, the Section asked George Biddle to paint a mural for the Justice Department in Washington, D.C. Dedicated to the social realism of Diego Rivera and other Mexican muralists, Biddle chose as his theme: “The sweatshop of yesterday can be

diss., University of California-Los Angeles, 1993), 78-89. Baret-Sanchez’s thoughtful analysis of United States museum exhibition practices considers the role of U.S.-Latin American foreign policy initiatives to explain the aestheticization and contextualization of pre-Columbian objects as works of fine art between 1933 and 1945.

⁵⁹ Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican*, 144-145.

⁶⁰ George Biddle, *George Biddle: An American Artist’s Story* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939), 268.

the life ordered with justice tomorrow.” The socially and aesthetically conservative Commission of Fine Arts warned Section officials of Biddle’s political leanings and decried his Mexican-influenced painting style as “intrinsically un-American and ill-adapted to express American ideas and ideals.” The Section circumvented the Commission’s objection and awarded Biddle the contract without restraining his social message or modern style. Rowan requested only that Biddle correct figural distortions and make his liberated family look happier so that his optimistic social message would be clear.⁶¹

The Treasury Department federal art programs took an interest in artworks supporting pan-Americanism as well. In 1941, for instance, the Section awarded Boris Deutsch a federal contract for the Los Angeles Terminal Annex Post Office, where he executed an eleven-panel mural cycle depicting the cultural contributions of North, Central, and South America. In October 1935, the Section’s sister program TRAP also commissioned a mural cycle that paid tribute to the richness of ancient and modern “American” cultural traditions. Installed at the federal courthouse in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the mural panel “Inherited Culture” by Harry Donald Jones incorporated scenes of a modern scholar marveling over the precision of Mayan astronomy, an archaeologist studying Southwest Indian pottery, and the modern Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco painting his murals for Dartmouth College (figure 4).

⁶¹ Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 56-57.

The Ames Mural Competition

In August of 1935, the United States Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture held a mural competition for the newly erected post office in Ames, Iowa. Unlike other New Deal art programs such as the Treasury Relief Art Project and the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, the Section did not require artists to be eligible for financial relief. The government agency focused instead on aesthetic concerns in determining its public art patronage, which consisted chiefly of the construction and decoration of new federal buildings. This emphasis on artistic merit came directly from Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau, who mandated that the Section's first task was to secure "suitable art of the best quality for the embellishment of public buildings."⁶²

As a general guideline, the Section designated one percent of construction costs for the decoration of new federal buildings. The Ames contest promised the winning artist a government contract in the amount of \$1,300 to cover costs for both the production and installation of the post office mural, while other worthy submissions received smaller commissions in other Iowa towns. This monetary award was not insignificant; \$1,300 in 1935 translates to roughly \$20,500 in 2010.⁶³ For regional artists, many of whom struggled financially in the hard economic climate of the Great Depression, such an opportunity – to earn a steady paycheck and to work

⁶² Section of Painting and Sculpture, *Bulletin No. 1*, March 1, 1935, Records of the Public Buildings Service, Record Group 121, Entry 130, Box 215, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as RG 121, Entry 130, Box 215).

⁶³ This information is based on the CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor.

under the aegis of the federal government on a public building – was a highly attractive prospect.

To encourage lesser-known artists and to maintain agency standards, the Section developed a selection process based on state, regional, and national competitions. Artists participated anonymously to ensure a fair assessment of their work. A local committee of art experts and patrons reviewed the submissions and recommended top designs to Section officials, who then determined the winner. The parameters of the Ames competition stipulated that eligible artists reside in Iowa or its adjacent states and that the theme of the mural relate to local activities and town history. Local subject matter formed a key component of the agency's public relations strategy. With the controversy surrounding Diego Rivera's privately funded Rockefeller Center mural still fresh in public memory, art officials in Washington wanted to avoid similar debacles for government-sponsored works.⁶⁴ The Section drew up a general statement on topic selection and monitored each artist's progress, at times requiring design revisions before a project could proceed.

The formal announcement for Ames was typical in its directive that: "subject matter should have some relation either to the Post; local history, past or present; local industry, pursuits, or scenery."⁶⁵ Official pronouncements justified this narrow

⁶⁴ In 1932, Nelson Rockefeller hired Rivera to paint a mural in the Radio Corporation Arts Building at Rockefeller Center. The resulting painting, *Man at the Crossroads* (1933), conveyed a strong socialist message in its portrayal of a May Day demonstration of marching laborers and portrait of Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin. Rockefeller asked Rivera to remove the offending portions of the mural, but the artist refused. The dispute elicited public protests and garnered attention in the press. Rockefeller arranged for the mural to be destroyed in the early weeks of 1934.

⁶⁵ Formal announcement from the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture regarding the Ames mural competition in the folder "Iowa Competitions," Case Files for Embellishment of Federal Buildings, Records of the Public Buildings Service, RG 121, Entry 133, Box 28.

thematic focus, stating that “a work of art carries more meaning for the people for whom it is intended when it deals with familiar subject matter and reflects their local interests, aspirations, and activities.”⁶⁶ Accuracy of descriptive detail was essential in this regard, and the Section anticipated a hostile response to mural designs that did not have clear grounding in local fact. When Superintendent Edward Rowan discovered that Marion Gilmore’s prizewinning *Band Concert* sketch depicted a scene in Hendrick, Iowa, rather than Corning, he sternly admonished the artist to correct the design:

In this program of embellishing public buildings we . . . feel that the public should be given full consideration. This is achieved by the artist incorporating subject matter appropriate to and reflective of the locale, particularly when an artist selects the activities of the people for subject matter.⁶⁷

Lowell Houser interpreted broadly the Section’s recommended subject matter and devised an original theme for the Ames mural competition. By adhering to traditional notions of history painting and by displaying firsthand knowledge of Mexican art and culture, Houser crafted a mural design to showcase his artistic skill and to distinguish his work among a strong pool of applicants in the Ames mural competition. First, he selected for depiction a scene from ancient history. Since its inception as a *grand genre* in the seventeenth century, history painting relied heavily on figures and events from classical antiquity as a model for admirable actions and ideal civic traits. Houser did not choose ancient Greek or Roman subject matter, but he did stay true to the spirit of conventional history painting by choosing New World

⁶⁶ Section of Fine Arts, “Exhibition of Photographs and Sculpture,” RG 121, Entry 137, Box 3.

⁶⁷ Edward Rowan to Marion Gilmore, December 15, 1939, quoted in Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America*, 87-89.

equivalents. Archaeologists and scholars at this time often compared the achievements of the ancient Maya to those of other esteemed civilizations, especially ancient Greece. Houser's archaeological supervisor at Chichén Itzá was a strong proponent of this mode of assessment. Between 1922 and 1936, Sylvanus G. Morley published several articles for *National Geographic* proclaiming the Maya "The Greeks of the New World."⁶⁸ Implicit in this sobriquet is the notion that the ancient Maya were a sophisticated, civilized, and relatively peaceful people who provided a model for contemporary society to emulate.

In keeping with such characterizations of Mayan culture, Houser in his mural sketch represented the Mayan Indian figure peacefully and industriously engaged in agricultural pursuit. The muscular anatomy and graceful movements of the scarcely clad Mexican native recall the heroic nudity often employed in conventional history paintings to denote moral purity. The artist even made explicit reference to Morley's point of view by modeling the Mayan Corn God in his mural after an illustration in one of the archaeologist's *National Geographic* articles (figure 5). Houser's stone idol closely resembles the line drawing of "Yum Kax, Lord of the Harvest." Shown in profile, the Mayan deity is seated cross-legged and holds before his chest a small, round pot from which emerges the curled leaves of a young maize plant and an oversized seed kernel, the Mayan glyph for corn. The pre-Columbian god wears large jade earspools, a beaded jade necklace, and an elaborate headdress representing "a conventionalized ear of corn," all symbols of his divine status.⁶⁹ He exhibits a

⁶⁸ Sylvanus Griswold Morley, "The Foremost Intellectual Achievement of Ancient America," *National Geographic* 41 no. 2 (February 1922): 126-129.

⁶⁹ Carol Phelps, "From ISU Halls to Post Office Walls," *Ames Daily Tribune*, May 11, 1985.

sharply sloped forehead, pointy chin, decorative wrist cuffs and an elaborately woven skirt. Houser so precisely quoted Morley's illustration in his competition sketch that he reproduced even the figure's pronounced arch, claw-like thumbnail, and rounded toes.

The modern scene in the mural sketch depicts an equally industrious Iowan farmer. Corn production formed a major base of the state economy; Iowa cultivated over nine million acres of corn in 1935. Residing in the north-central region of the Midwest known as the "Corn Belt," Iowans had long associated the crop with local and regional identity. In 1912, George Hamilton of the Des Moines Chamber of Commerce composed the "Iowa Corn Song" to advertise the state's chief product; the rousing chorus proclaims: "We're from I-O-way, I-O-way. / That's where the tall corn grows."⁷⁰

Houser's earlier participation in the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) no doubt also informed his decision to center his mural design on an agricultural theme. He was among the earliest American artists to receive government support when he assisted Grant Wood on the ambitious mural cycle, *When Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow* (figure 6). Premised on the idea that "farmers . . . are the founders of human civilization" – a quote borrowed from Daniel Webster's 1840 speech on agriculture – Wood's epic multi-panel composition depicts agriculture, the practical arts, and the fine arts.⁷¹ For several months Houser contributed to the mural from a distance,

⁷⁰ *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* also noted the prominence of corn in Iowa culture by naming the giant corn palaces of Sioux City state landmarks. Federal Writers Project, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* (1938, repr., Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986), 299-312.

⁷¹ Although the expiration of the PWAP left the work incomplete, glowing reviews in the national press declared Wood's cooperative mural a success. See, for example, *Fortune* magazine's coverage of the mural in its January 1935 issue.

working from his home in Ames and consulting directly with Iowa State College faculty for the *Engineering* panel.⁷² The collaborative nature of the project required Houser to emulate Wood's celebrated style of realism. This experience left a lasting impression on the younger artist, whose naturalistic handling of the human figure and careful attention to detail in the Ames Post Office mural follows Wood's famous example.

In his competition sketch, Houser portrays the modern Iowan fully clothed in contemporary garb and standing upright among mature cornstalks. In contrast to his ancient Mayan counterpart, who stoops to plant seeds early in the growing season, the modern Iowan harvests ripe ears of corn to send to market. He represents a model farmer of the present day. As noted in *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa*:

The modern Iowa farmer is more than a simple tiller of the soil . . . The conception of a 'hay-seed' is being replaced by a truer picture – that of a progressive, business-like producer who sells almost 90 percent of his product and studies politics, weather reports, improved methods of production and marketing, crop control and conservation.⁷³

The campanile of Iowa State College in the background not only locates the scene in Ames, but also alludes to the scientific experiments carried out at the school in order to advance agricultural practice. The microscope and transparent corn kernel in the central panel reinforce the enhanced role of science to Iowa farming at this time. In the 1930s, the Iowa State College agricultural experiment station developed a

⁷² Lowell Houser to Dorothy Rhoads, December 31, 1933, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 33, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 33, BYU).

⁷³ Federal Writers Project, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa*, 65-72.

successful hybrid corn technique and began growing the crop on an extensive scale.⁷⁴

The oversized kernel at center most likely symbolizes this new breed.

Nevertheless, Houser's conception of Iowa history differed considerably from Wood's example. While the earliest scenes in the Iowa State College mural cycle portray sturdy pioneers of European stock chopping down trees and plowing the prairie, Houser looked beyond the geopolitical borders of state and nation to depict pre-colonial American antiquity in Mexico. His painting style also evokes Mexican precedents, since his introduction to public mural art occurred south of the border.⁷⁵

Although Houser emulates the naturalistic figuration of American Scene painting, his mural design avoids the wooden stiffness and decorative flatness typical of Wood's painting. Instead, Houser's prizewinning sketch exhibits the distinctive monumentality, bold outline, compositional movement, and roundness of form seen

⁷⁴ Ibid, 72.

⁷⁵ Jean Charlot's philosophy about mural design was particularly influential to Houser's thinking. While in Mexico, Houser had the opportunity to befriend the muralist as the two worked side-by-side as field artists at Chichén Itzá. In an essay for *American Scholar*, Charlot exhorted artists to adopt a peculiar "mural style" in response to the architectural and optical challenges of that medium. A mural artist must take into consideration not only the obvious architectural limitations of a building such as doors and windows, he argued, but acknowledge that "there is a fitness when the space enclosed between the walls of a given room opens into a painted space similarly limited and ordered." Charlot also instructed artists to employ earth tones, simple modeling, and geometrically rendered figures on a heroic scale to ensure legibility in their mural paintings "from both centered and lateral vision." Although Charlot's article on mural painting did not appear in print until 1941, six years after Houser conceived of his design for the Ames mural competition, the two artists maintained a lasting friendship and probably discussed these issues while Houser was painting his first mural, *The Evolution of Corn*. In early May 1937, Charlot traveled to Iowa to visit Houser, who at that time was reworking his mural design for the Ames Post Office. A testament to their enduring mutual admiration resides in the fact that Charlot chose to include a reproduction of Houser's *The Evolution of Corn* in his 1945 article "Murals for Tomorrow" for the journal *Art News*. See Jean Charlot, "Public Speaking in Paint," *American Scholar* 10 (Autumn 1941): 455-468; Jean Charlot, "Murals for Tomorrow," *Art News* 44, no. 9 (July 1945): 20-23; and Jean Charlot to Zomah Day (Charlot), May 10, 1937, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

in the murals of Jean Charlot, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, all artists whose work he had admired in Mexico City.⁷⁶

Houser eventually won the Ames mural competition, but his mural design did not fare well in the first round of jury deliberations. Pan-Americanism had not taken hold in rural Iowa to the same degree as in Washington, D.C. As historian Michael E. Geisler has noted, national symbols require constant rehearsal in order to sustain or, as in this case, to overwrite earlier concepts.⁷⁷ Nationwide radio broadcasts, magazines, and newspapers disseminated reports promoting inter-American solidarity and understanding; however, most of the government and private organizations campaigning for pan-Americanism focused their efforts on metropolitan centers such as New York and Washington.⁷⁸ Although media played an important role in spreading pan-Americanism across the nation, Iowans simply did not receive the same level of cultural bombardment as their fellow citizens, whose urban infrastructure and diverse populations generated a wealth of organizations, events, and publications that more quickly fostered a sense of pan-American cultural identity.

⁷⁶ Houser expressed renewed admiration for Orozco in 1933, when he received a book on the Mexican artist as a gift. Lowell Houser to Dorothy Rhoads, January 17, 1933, and Lowell Houser to Dorothy Rhoads, January 24, 1933, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 33, BYU.

⁷⁷ Michael E. Geisler, ed. *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative* (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College Press, 2005), xxvi-xxxi.

⁷⁸ The Pan American Union, American Association of University Women, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and American Association of University Professors – all organizations involved in international educational exchange – were located in Washington, D.C. In addition, the Washington-based American Council of Learned Societies established a Committee on Latin American Studies in 1934. The following year, the People’s Mandate to End War founded a Committee for Western Hemisphere to voice public opposition to war and to carry out inter-American cultural activities in the nation’s capital, and M. Alice Matthews, a librarian at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Library, compiled a bibliography of books, pamphlets and periodical articles with annotations on “Intellectual and Cultural Relations between the United States and Latin America.”

Twenty-seven artists participated in the Ames mural contest. Few dared to stray from the recommended themes of local industry and history. The majority of design entries represented idyllic scenes of Iowa farm life or tributes to pioneer settlers.⁷⁹ Dorothea Tomlinson, for example, in her competition entry chose to depict three stages in the lifecycle of Iowa residents (figure 7). Divided into three panels, the mural design presents a trio of college-bound students, a married couple with young children, and an older set of retirement-aged individuals. A continuous rolling landscape unites the three scenes, and accoutrements such as books, fresh eggs and milk, and small children attest to the abundant prosperity of Iowan pursuits, be they intellectual, agricultural, or interpersonal. Robert Allaway, Vernan Etler, Felix Summers, and others similarly portrayed Iowa as an idealized, pastoral paradise of virtuous farmers, handsome livestock, and fertile lands.

Houser was not alone in his decision to highlight Iowa agriculture, nor was he the only artist to incorporate Native Americans in his design for the Ames mural competition. Ernest Freed, Elizabeth Lochrie, and others featured North American Indians in their pictorial renderings of pioneer settlers and westward expansion. David Warren Sexton and E. L. Allen even combined the themes of agriculture and indigenous history in a similar fashion to Houser. Allen's mural design, in particular, bears a resemblance to Houser's mural (figure 8). In both works, two scenes of corn cultivation, one ancient and one modern, flank a central partition depicting an oversized piece of corn. Conceptually these works both construct a visual argument claiming a seamless agricultural lineage in which the modern Iowan farmer

⁷⁹ Formal announcement for the Ames mural competition, Case Files for Embellishment of Federal Buildings, Records of the Public Buildings Service, RG 121, Entry 133, Box 28.

descended, culturally at least, from an indigenous source. What distinguished Houser's composition from this and other designs in the Ames mural competition was the Mesoamerican identity of his native figure.

On November 2, 1935, an appointed local committee consisting of cosmetic magnate and art collector Carl Weeks, art librarian Louise Orwig, and architect John Normile met in Des Moines to perform a preliminary evaluation of the mural entries. Their task was to determine the relative aesthetic merit of contest submissions using two major criteria: technical execution and subject. The top designs were those which "best solve[d] the problems of scale and color in relation to the architecture" and which were "most suitable in theme and subject matter."⁸⁰ Louise Orwig notified Rowan by letter that the Iowa committee selected entries 17, 12, 10, 22 and 16. The designs belonged to Richard Haines, Robert Allaway, Ernest Freed, Felix Summers, and Dorothea Tomlinson. Houser's entry was not among the finalists.

The local jury probably rejected Houser's mural design for straying too far afield of Iowa history. Houser subscribed to a particular Native American mythos, in which indigenous cultures spanning the entire continent shared a singular, distinct history and culture. He did not distinguish ethnicity among various American Indian groups. Instead, he believed that ancient Maya civilization was the source of all the other Native American cultures. In 1938, when the artist again proposed a Mayan Indian as the primary subject for a glass mural commission at the Bankers Life building, his clients insisted he modify his design using a Plains Indian instead.

⁸⁰ The Corcoran Gallery of Art, *Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture Designed for Federal Buildings* (Washington, D.C.: Section of Fine Arts, Public Buildings Administration, Federal Works Agency, 1939): 1, Still Photographs, RG 121-CGA, Box 1, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

Houser complied with regret, stating: “I am a little sorry to move out of the Maya field...if the building committee only knew it, [Maya civilization] has real meaning for their midwest [sic] building because it was the fountainhead of all Indian culture, just as the Greek was of most European.”⁸¹ Unfortunately for Houser, the jurists of the Ames mural contest (like their Bankers Life counterparts) did not share his view of Native American cultural origins. The artist’s inaccurate portrayal of the state’s indigenous inhabitants would have been immediately apparent to the Iowa committee. As authors of *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* noted, the “first Americans” of Iowa were the ancient Mound Builders, not the Maya.⁸²

The Des Moines committee exhibited a strong preference for contemporary scenes of farming and small town life. Dorothea Tomlinson’s conception of “Life” was a finalist, as was Robert Allaway’s composite of modern Ames farm life and university education. The jury’s top pick belonged to Richard Haines (figure 9). Consisting of three vertical panels teeming with vibrant scenes of daily Iowa activities, Haines’s design assembled ordinary locations and events – furniture shopping, dancing, socializing at a soda shop, buying meat from the local butcher – and elevated them to the status of fine art. Remarking on Haines’s design in a letter to Rowan, Carl Weeks enthusiastically exclaimed: “Our first choice is a honey.”⁸³

⁸¹ Meixner, “Lowell Houser’s Poetic Glass,” 34.

⁸² Federal Writers Project, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa*, 32-40.

⁸³ Carl Weeks to Edward Rowan, November 7, 1935, RG 121, Entry 133, Box 28.

All twenty-seven mural sketches arrived in Washington, D.C. for final review by mid-November. Assistant Superintendent Olin Dows described the judging process as follows:

The Section holds them on view for at least a week. It gives particular consideration to the local committee's recommendation, but it studies these designs not at one set period, but has them standing around a room where the various members of the Section go in and look at and discuss them

Dows heralded this method as being “the fairest and the most decent under a democratic government,” adding that there had been “very few differences of opinion” between local and government officials.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the Section did not follow local recommendations for the Ames mural contest. After several days of deliberation and study, the agency awarded the mural commission to Lowell Houser. R. F. Gates and Richard B. Tabor received smaller mural projects for the post offices in Harlan and Independence, respectively. Of the preliminary finalists, only Richard Haines received government support. Even then, Washington eschewed the local committee's selection of Design 17 in favor of another of Haines's submissions, Design 6.

Washington's disregard for the preliminary jury may have resulted, in part, from Louise Orwig's personal correspondence to Rowan. In a letter composed the same day as her official dispatch of juried selections, Orwig expressed strong reservations about the artworks the committee endorsed. “I feel that our judgment was hasty,” she told Rowan. She then offered her unqualified support for Houser, stating:

⁸⁴ “Federal Murals: Two Executives Discuss Results,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1935.

I consider Lowell Houser outstanding in ability and would consider it a “coup” for the Treasury [Department] if they would use him for designing the Ames mural. I believe that he would make something of great value to the community in which he lives and is interested. I really hope that it will be so.⁸⁵

Orwig assured the superintendent that the competition remained anonymous.

However, her letter raises the question: how did she know that Houser’s sketch was *not* chosen as one of the finalists? Orwig probably recognized his handiwork from local exhibitions and art classes. Houser had taught life drawing at Iowa State College and the Des Moines Art Student’s Workshop since 1934, and his Mexican paintings and woodblock prints hung in galleries from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to New York City. In addition, the librarian knew that Houser had contributed Mayan-themed illustrations to Alida Malkus’s *Dark Star of Itza: The Story of a Pagan Princess* (1931) and Dorothy Rhoads’s picture book *Bright Feather and Other Mayan Tales* (1932).⁸⁶

Superintendent Rowan judiciously replied that he was glad to know the competition remained absolutely anonymous; yet Orwig was not the only jury member familiar with Houser’s art prior to the Ames mural contest. Between 1928 and 1934, Rowan was an active promoter and leader in the Iowa arts scene. He established the Community Art Center of Cedar Rapids with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation in 1928. He also owned and operated the Little Gallery in

⁸⁵ Louise Orwig to Edward Rowan, November 9, 1935, RG 121, Entry 133, Box 28.

⁸⁶ Houser and Orwig met sometime before 1933, but archival records suggest that they were only acquaintances. In July 1933, Houser mentioned Orwig in his correspondence with Rhoads. Describing the librarian as “very friendly and nice,” Houser suggested that she might assist them in publicizing the juvenile book. There is no further mention of the librarian in Houser’s personal correspondence with Rhoads to know whether Orwig did in fact help to promote the book or even whether Houser had any additional contact with her. Lowell Houser to Dorothy Rhoads, July 15, 1933, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 33, BYU.

Cedar Rapids and served as an advisor, lecturer, and promoter at the Stone City Art Colony. Notably, the Little Gallery carried an exhibition of Houser's woodcuts in 1931. A local newspaper published two reproductions of Houser's prints in conjunction with the show (figure 10). Acknowledging that these same works had appeared in *Dial* magazine, the author noted the "exotic and bizarre influence of Central American art" upon Houser, one of Iowa's renowned artists.⁸⁷ Three years later Rowan accepted the position of Assistant Technical Director of the PWAP, under which program Houser appeared as one of a select group of artists the advisory committee recommended for work. Rowan must have been quite familiar with the Iowan's art, then, when Grant Wood wrote about hiring him for the PWAP mural. In a letter to Rowan, Wood penned: "Wish I could have Lowell Houser, and may be able to, if the work is extended beyond February 15th. He doesn't like to give up his half-time job unless he is sure. I am hiring him, at assistant's pay, to do some designing at Ames."⁸⁸ Rowan agreed. He wrote in his reply: "You did wisely by adding Lowell Houser to your list. He is a master at designing, I think, and I hope that he will be able to join you for full time at an early date."⁸⁹ In his role as Section administrator during the Ames competition the following year, Rowan no doubt recognized the unsigned Mayan-themed sketch as belonging to Houser.

Curiously, Des Moines committee chairman Carl Weeks also made an unsolicited bid to sway the Section, although his goal differed from Orwig's. While it

⁸⁷ Newspaper clipping (Iowa), November 18, 1931, Edward Beatty Rowan Papers, 1929-1946, Microfilm Reel 103, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁸ Grant Wood to Edward Rowan, January 15, 1934, RG 121, Entry 105, Box 2.

⁸⁹ Edward Rowan to Grant Wood, January 18, 1934, RG 121, Entry 105, Box 2.

is unlikely that Orwig announced her epistolary action to her fellow committee members, Weeks may have sensed her dissatisfaction and so followed her missive with one of his own. On November 20, 1935, he appealed a second time to Rowan on behalf of Richard Haines's sketch. "Believe me," he wrote, "the longer you look at it, the more you will find our No. 1 recommendation for Ames is a honey, and folks will really go places to see it as time passes."⁹⁰

Weeks' words fell on deaf ears in Washington; the very next day Rowan penned his letter of congratulations to Houser. Recognizing the sensitivity of the situation in Des Moines, Rowan also drafted a lengthy explanation for Weeks defending the competition results. He tried to soften the news by telling the committee member that the Section agreed "largely, if not completely, with your estimate of Haines' work" and had awarded him the mural project in Cresco. However, the agency had granted the commission on the basis of a sketch different from the one Weeks admired. While the artist's spirited scenes would surely carry "wide local interest," the Section preferred his other design for its greater organization. Rowan elaborated:

[Haines] seemed more successful in simplifying his material for the smaller sized panels than in letting it run all over the wall. In preparing his design for the new space we are suggesting that he use as much of the same material keeping it more carefully composed for the smaller space.

Houser's winning sketch, on the other hand, was "better suited to the mural problem" of the Ames Post Office in scale and color. His design also presented an "unusually intelligent conception tying together the Mayan and American corn agriculture." For its simpler composition and innovative subject matter, Rowan concluded, Houser's

⁹⁰ Carl Weeks to Edward Rowan, November 20, 1935, RG 121, Entry 133, Box 28.

mural sketch “seemed to us the only design in the competition with a really significant theme.”⁹¹ The superintendent reiterated these points in his award notification letter to Houser. He commended the artist for his handsome design, but stressed, “the thing which particularly struck the Section was the outstanding intelligence of the conception.”⁹²

The Pre-Columbian Past in a Pan-American Present

What did Rowan mean in his assessment that Houser’s design stood out for its “really significant theme”? For one thing, the Section appreciated his adherence to conventional modes of history painting. Art project officials openly subscribed to academic notions on the civilizing capacity and educational benefits of fine art, and post office murals were particularly well suited to this aim. Located both in large cities and small rural towns across the nation, post office buildings served as social centers for the community. As almost everyone visited his or her local post office on a regular basis, the art installed there would reach the greatest number of people and, it was hoped, inspire in them lofty thoughts about their community and the past.⁹³

Forbes Watson, the official voice of the Section in publications, stressed the educational mission of the mural program when he posed the question: “[W]hen the farmer, the laborer, the village children and the shopkeepers go to the nearest Post Office and see there . . . a distinguished work of contemporary art depicting the main

⁹¹ Edward Rowan to Carl Weeks, November 26, 1935, RG 121, Entry 133, Box 28.

⁹² Edward Rowan to Lowell Houser, November 21, 1935, RG 121, Entry 133, Box 28.

⁹³ Park and Markowitz, *New Deal for Art*, 37.

activities, or some notable events in the history of the town, is it too exaggerated to suggest that their interest will be increased and their imagination stirred?”⁹⁴

The Section especially wanted public art to inspire thoughts of security and prosperity. The harsh realities of the Depression necessitated a social agenda for federal art programs beyond mere work-relief. The Section’s mission was to acquire “the best available American art” and to make it available throughout the country so that it might uplift public morale during lean economic times. Since paintings portraying religious, mythological, literary, historical, and allegorical subject matter most easily carried a moralizing message or intellectual theme, the genre of history painting (which might include all of these) was generally the preferred mode for creating didactic works of art. History paintings based on local themes were particularly successful in this regard. As Karal Ann Marling has astutely observed: “Mural history is usable history.”⁹⁵ Portrayals of people hard at work, communities banding together, and material prosperity fixed the idyllic past in the minds of viewers living in an uncertain present. By showing a visual continuum between past and present, these murals elided current economic and social struggles in a narrative that also anticipated a comfortable future. In this way, public murals could perform a kind of “social therapy.” They calmed public anxieties by reminding viewers that history “chugged along placidly and predictably toward tomorrow.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson, *Art in Federal Buildings: An Illustrated Record of the Treasury Department’s New Program in Painting and Sculpture*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Art in Federal Buildings Inc., 1936), 23-24.

⁹⁵ Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America*, 21.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

Many submissions in the Ames mural contest fulfilled this social purpose. Elizabeth Lochrie, for instance, juxtaposed an ox-drawn plow and a modern tractor in her pendant scenes of Iowa farming, while Preston Flemiken combined the histories of westward expansion, technological progress and mail delivery in a design contrasting scenes of “Pioneer Mail Transportation” and “Modern Mail Transportation.” Earnest Freed’s composition, earmarked by the local jury for further consideration in Washington, also represented westward expansion (figure 11). In his portrayal of progress, European-American settlers, oxen, and flourishing fields of wheat on the right displace the Plains Indians, bison, and teepee villages shown on the left. Above, vehicles from various eras form a frieze-like procession that marks the steady march of time, from past to present and beyond.

Designs such as these were exceedingly common in the early years of the Section. As the 1936 picture album *Art in Federal Buildings* attests, the majority of winning mural designs commemorated postal servicemen and pioneers, new technologies, and modes of transportation. Section officials already by late 1935 had grown bored with the plethora of postal service and transportation sagas arriving in Washington. The following year the agency modified its iconographic instructions for post office mural competitions in hopes of inspiring new approaches to the prescribed themes. Acknowledging that communication lie at the heart of the postal service, the Section cautioned artists to avoid clichéd representations derived from “the more obvious symbols of airplanes, trains, [and] packet ships.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Ibid, 146.

Houser's mural design was remarkable in that it not only avoided trite depictions of streamlined vehicles and heroic mail carriers but expanded the scope of mural history in both geography and time. He did not confine his composition to United States events of the previous century. Instead he presented a grand historical narrative of agricultural practice in the New World from its first practitioners in ancient Mexico to the present day. His pan-American conception of Iowa history must have stood out to Washington officials, who surely appreciated his design for its resonance with United States foreign affairs.

Houser's hemispheric vision of American agricultural history aligned perfectly with the U.S. government's specialized interpretation of Mayan civilization. The cultivation of corn progresses from the earliest Americans in Mexico to the modern United States, seemingly without European intervention, while the central design of overlapping motifs neatly summarizes these centuries of progress in maize cultivation in its decorative heraldic design of an indigenous deity, seed kernel, and scientific microscope. In this way, the ancient farmer prefigures the modern Iowan. Significantly, both maintain a peaceful, agrarian lifestyle. Houser's prominent portrayal of the stepped pyramid and Mayan stone deity further challenges the assumed hegemony of European antiquity, while the microscope and hybrid corn kernel celebrate continued American achievement and progress into the future.

The Washington committee, unlike the Iowa jury, valued Houser's composition for its alliance with government efforts to improve foreign relations and trade with Latin American countries. For the Section, Houser's prizewinning mural design offered a particularly potent dose of "social therapy" by alleviating public

apprehensions about domestic *and* foreign affairs. Houser's mural, with its long span of history and promise of plentiful harvest, conveyed an appropriately soothing message for Iowa viewers – for whom, federal officials presumed, economic uncertainty and the prospect of war were primary concerns. By displaying a continuity of tradition across modern geopolitical boundaries and over millennia, his mural sketch surpassed other designs in the competition by shrinking current economic and political concerns to mere blips in the march of time. His harmonious fusing of past, present and future conveyed the reassuring message that life would continue much as it always had – not only in Iowa, but also in all of the Western Hemisphere.

Upon receiving the Ames mural commission, Houser faced the arduous task of modifying his competition design in order to accommodate a set of bulletin boards installed next to the Ames postmaster's door. The artist made extensive revisions to his composition with guidance from the Section. Over the next sixteen months, he merged the panels of his preliminary drawing into a single, frieze-like composition and inverted the modern Iowa farmer's pose to create greater balance and symmetry (figure 12).

Measuring roughly eighteen feet by six feet, the oil painting retains the original juxtaposition of two figural scenes, one ancient and one modern, depicting the cultivation of corn. However, Houser's modified composition strengthened its social message. The left section of the mural shows a tawny, muscular man bending forward at the waist (figure 13). Fully nude except for a white loincloth, cylindrical cloth headdress, and simple thong sandals, the man strides forward in a wide-legged

stance that accentuates his well-defined muscles and toned body. He holds a short wooden staff tipped with an obsidian blade, which he plunges into the fertile soil. Lush vertical shoots of green cornstalks, markers of his agricultural prowess, envelop his curved form, while a stone deity representing the Maize God of the ancient Maya presides over him from the base of a mature tree. A white stepped pyramid adorned with geometric relief carving recedes into the distance; its sloped sides direct the viewer's gaze upward toward a stormy sky. A large sun disc bearing the frightful visage of the Mayan Rain God fills the heavenly expanse, while ominous gray clouds containing jagged lightning bolts, a sinuous serpent, and a second, ghostly image of the Rain God dispense dense streams of precipitation upon the maize crop below.

In the right half of the composition, a modern Iowan farmer dressed in sturdy denim overalls, a long-sleeved button-up shirt, work gloves, boots, and a brimmed denim cap mirrors his Mayan counterpart in wide stance and bent posture (figure 14). Surrounded by tall, golden stalks and dry, bristling leaves, the fair-skinned figure leans forward with a sharp-bladed sickle to manually harvest ripe ears of corn. Cascading strips of tickertape mimic the curling tendrils of tropical foliage in the Mayan scene, while a scientific microscope replaces the ancient stone deity at the base of the tree. White arrows of evaporating water molecules rise above familiar landmarks of the Ames cityscape, again leading one's attention to the sky. A diagrammatically-rendered sun emblazoned with surface temperature and other astronomical data looms beside a bank of clouds inscribed with scientific instruments disgorging heavy rains upon the fields below. The central panel dividing these two scenes depicts a monumental ear of corn, a transparent kernel sprouting roots, and a

superimposed cornstalk, encapsulating the full growth cycle of the Iowa crop, from seed embryo to ripened ear, against a vibrant red background (figure 15).

The final painting forms an explicit one-to-one correlation that underscores the similarities of the two figures. Notably, Houser modeled both the farmer and the Mayan Indian on the same individual: Frank J. Linn, a student at Iowa State College.⁹⁸ Facing one another in identical bent postures, the Mayan and the Iowan exhibit shared agricultural interests and equal standing – both literally in the picture frame and figuratively in their respective societies. The methods of farming have advanced, as the title suggests – the crude Mayan farming implement becomes a modern machine-made tool and Mayan deities yield to scientific calculations – but the symmetrical scenes stress continuity of tradition and equivalent results.

The yellowed leaves of corn make explicit reference to the recent droughts of 1934 and 1936, while ticker tape with stock prices and a diminutive hobo figure on the train allude to the economic hardships of the Great Depression. Notably, the market price for corn records the good crop price of 1935 and serves as an optimistic sign for future recovery.⁹⁹ In addition, the cyclical nature of the seasons, visible in the left-to-right progression from planting to harvest, holds an implicit promise of future prosperity. The mirroring of past and present enhances the viewer's sense of stability by underscoring both temporal and cultural persistence, while the modified central motif, with its overlapping images of corn, illustrates the various stages of the

⁹⁸ Phelps, "From ISU Halls to Post Office Walls," *Ames Daily Tribune*, May 11, 1985. The Ames Historical Society recently has proposed that Houser employed a second model, John Ellsworth Jones, during the fall of 1936. This claim is based on recollections from Jones' daughter, Corinne Jones. Ames Historical Society, accessed August 31, 2011, www.ameshistoricalsociety.org/exhibits/civic/po_mural.htm.

⁹⁹ Mary L. Meixner, "The Ames Corn Mural," *The Palimpsest* 66, no. 1 (January/February 1985): 27.

growth cycle and forms an ideological hinge upon which the mural message turns. Fixed permanently in the post office mural, the crop continually evolves from seed to mature plant to harvest; the growth cycle renews and advances, forever carrying forward the culture of corn.

Further, Houser toiled to incorporate additional “authentic” descriptive details in his final composition. In the field of history painting, the accurate portrayal of costume and accoutrements lent legitimacy to the overall scene. The perceived “truthfulness” of a painting was fundamental to its success, since viewers would only be inspired to greater civic virtue if they believed in the two-dimensional models before them. Moreover, the general art-viewing public of the 1930s exhibited a marked preference for naturalism and, by extension, absolute truth of representation. As art historian Virginia Mecklenburg remarked in her insightful analysis of New Deal art patronage: “Most communities demanded unflinching accuracy in their art, and several cities refused to accept murals that violated this precept.”¹⁰⁰ While preparing his mural for installation, Houser incorporated several references to specific Mayan and Aztec objects. According to the *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, the pre-Columbian deity in the sky was a conflation of two monuments. “The face and square of the ancient sun, from one of the earliest known Guatemalan steles or square monuments, are imposed on the round sun shield of the Aztecs, the later people who conquered the Mayas.”¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, the local landmarks in the modern half permit Ames viewers to find immediate personal relevance in the painting, while imbuing

¹⁰⁰ Mecklenburg, *The Public as Patron*, 16.

¹⁰¹ “Postoffice Mural Hung Here Today,” *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, April 20, 1938.

the scene with lasting value for future generations as well. In addition to the recognizable campanile of Iowa State College, Houser updated the Ames skyline to include the Marston water tower, Ames grain elevator, power plant, and train depot.

Depictions of scientific instruments, molecules, and calculations reinforced the artist's original reference to agricultural studies undertaken at the college by making explicit reference to photosynthesis, evaporation, and weather phenomena. Iowa State College collaborated with and received financial support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In addition, Iowa represented the agricultural publishing center of the nation, and several of the state's agricultural authorities went on to serve as the Secretary of Agriculture – including Roosevelt's agricultural secretary Henry A. Wallace. Iowa advice on crop rotation, seed selection, and better farming methods functioned essentially as “farm gospel” to the rest of the nation.¹⁰² Significantly, these circumstances suggest that local farming in Iowa, both broadly speaking and in Houser's mural, could effectively stand in for the nation as a whole. In this way, the ancient Mayan Indian and the modern Iowan both typify and transcend a specific locale to depict exemplary “American” types.

In late April 1938, Houser witnessed his completed mural *The Evolution of Corn* (1938) being installed above the postmaster's door at the central post office in Ames, Iowa. According to the *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, “a stream of curious people” visited the post office for the express purpose of viewing the mural. Reactions were favorable. Ames resident Dora Oberg, for example, called the painting “a beautiful piece of work,” while C.L. Smith, an entomologist at Iowa State

¹⁰² Federal Writers Project, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa*, 71.

College, declared: “It surely is nice.” Local residents praised Houser's skillful coloring and balanced composition but debated his accuracy of portrayal regarding the modern half of the painting. Viewers puzzled over the abstracted water molecules and deplored the “unrealistic” portrayal of the modern Iowa farmer. “If that’s the way you pick corn, I’d hate to live on a farm,” announced S. A. Nichols, a local Ames resident who felt that Houser had represented the harvesting farmer in an exaggerated pose.¹⁰³

No one questioned the appropriateness of the Mayan Indian in a mural dedicated to the local history and activities of Ames, Iowa. Tellingly, the *Ames Daily Tribune and Times* echoed the rhetoric of pan-Americanism in its description of Houser’s mural as depicting “corn cultivation as practiced by the Maya Indian, which marks the very beginning, so far as is known, of American civilization.”¹⁰⁴ By 1938, local concerns and national concerns had become one and the same. In the years since the competition, Iowans had grown much more conscious of the government call for inter-American unity as a means of hemispheric defense. Less than two months after Houser received the Ames commission, President Roosevelt proposed a special Inter-American Conference “to determine how the maintenance of peace among the American republics may be best safe-guarded.”¹⁰⁵ Held in Buenos Aires in December 1936, the conference advanced measures of economic amelioration and cultural unity to cultivate throughout the hemisphere a mutual will for peace and

¹⁰³ “Postoffice Mural Hung Here Today,” *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, April 20, 1938.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “President Roosevelt’s Letter to Latin-American Presidents,” *World Affairs* 99, no. 1 (March 1936): 2.

understanding. The U.S. delegation voted affirmatively on initiatives for the exchange of publications, art exhibitions, and educational films; for the revisions of textbooks to eliminate negative portrayals of neighboring countries; and for the use of radio broadcasting in the service of peace.¹⁰⁶ Non-government activities also continued to play a prominent role in disseminating a message of pan-Americanism. Hemispheric solidarity commanded ever greater attention throughout the nation as events in Europe continued to unfold. In March 1938, Germany annexed Austria by force, presenting U.S. citizens with additional evidence of Hitler's aggressive tactics and imperialist designs. With such international news fresh in the minds of Ames residents, Houser's post office mural conveyed a timely message of pan-American solidarity and peace.

While Houser's Mayan-themed mural received a favorable reception among Ames residents, this was not true for all U.S. depictions of pre-Columbian subjects under the Good Neighbor Policy. In San Diego, for example, regional mythology and Anglo desire to retain white hegemony clashed with the official discourse of pan-Americanism. In the next chapter, I highlight this regional resistance to pan-Americanism to show how factors such as geographical location, demographic diversity, and site-specificity shaped viewer perceptions of an artwork. My analysis centers on Donal Hord's sculpture *Guardian of the Water* (1937-1939), a public

¹⁰⁶ Despite this explicit promise for action, the U.S. government feared being perceived as distributing propaganda (like Nazi Germany was doing) and so largely limited itself to a behind-the-scenes role in organizing pan-American cultural activities. These diplomatic efforts became more transparent after 1938, when the U.S. Department of State established the Division of Cultural Relations to oversee international activities and coordinate with private agencies in the field of cultural relations in order to "establish the conditions of a friendly cooperation and peaceful existence in the Western Hemisphere." Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Latin American Policy of the United States: An Historical Interpretation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), 326.

monument that became ensnared in controversy over its supposed “Aztec” subject matter.

Chapter 2

Guardians of San Diego History: Challenging Pan-Americanism in Donal Hord's Civic Center Sculpture

In June 1937, the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project and the San Diego Fine Arts Society commissioned sculptor Donal Hord to create a fountain for the new Civic Center Building.¹⁰⁷ Titled *Guardian of the Water*, Hord's design consists of a monumental female figure standing atop a circular drum adorned with mosaic designs (figure 16). The woman wears a headscarf and a long pleated dress, and she holds a traditional water jug or *olla* on her shoulder. The drum and concentric basins beneath her depict San Diego's citrus orchards and harbors through mosaic and relief carvings. According to the artist, the fountain reflected the desert city's need for water conservation, and the central figure represented a pioneer woman guarding the region's most precious resource, water.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ The WPA was by far the largest and most diverse New Deal art project. Although the primary purpose of the Federal Art Program was to provide work-relief to unemployed artists, the unprecedented government support for the arts encouraged cultural producers to strive for a national cultural renaissance. Writers, artists, and cultural historians employed by the government embarked on a patriotic quest for an existing, yet unacknowledged vernacular tradition. Folk music, decorative arts, pioneer history, and Native American traditions were singled out for special attention in this endeavor. The WPA Index of American Design, for example, hired thousands of artists to inventory decorative arts nationwide in hopes that a visual record would spur a rebirth of uniquely American artistic impulses in the modern era. Pre-Columbian cultures represented another potential wellspring for modern American culture. American antiquity was especially attractive to advocates of the Good Neighbor Policy, who celebrated ancient Mexican civilizations as evidence of a great hemispheric heritage that belonged to United States citizens.

¹⁰⁸ "Statue of Aztec? Not by a Jugful, Protest," *San Diego Tribune*, August 25, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, Microfilm Reel LA 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Donal Hord Papers, AAA).

Hord received official approval for his design based on a scale model of the main figure, and he proceeded with plans to carve the statue from granite quarried in the nearby town of Lakeside, California (figure 17). Yet two months later, on August 25, 1937, a local women's club of pioneer descendants filed a formal complaint against Hord's work-in-progress. Convinced that the main allegorical figure represented an Aztec, the Native Daughters of the Golden West argued that Hord's artwork was unsuitable and inaccurate for the San Diego region. The women explained: "Since Aztec civilization was not endemic to San Diego or California we feel that the proposed statue is not suitable and would create the wrong impression so that the public would be misled relative to historic fact."¹⁰⁹

This charge against the geographical and historical inaccuracy of Hord's proposed female figure points to contemporary debates about the role of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in American culture and society. Indeed, the "wrong impression" in the complaint letter referred to race. The Native Daughters passed over the symbolic meaning that Hord had intended the "water bearer" to convey and interpreted the woman's non-classical physiognomy, clothing, and water jug as factual visual cues denoting "Aztec" ethnicity. This racialized reading generated an alternative set of associations challenging San Diego's "civic imagination," or sense of cultural pedigree, and sparked a heated debate among San Diego municipal leaders and residents about the perceived cultural identity of Hord's statue and its planned installation in a public plaza.

¹⁰⁹ "Statue of Aztec? Not by Jugful, Protest," *San Diego Tribune*; and "Aztec Woman Statue Protested by Local Group," *San Diego Union*, August 26, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

The controversy over *Guardian of the Water* is the subject of this chapter. At a time when the Roosevelt administration was promoting pre-Columbian civilization as shared patrimony belonging to the United States and Latin America, San Diego citizens resisted such an idea. They contested the supposed Aztec ethnicity of Hord's allegorical figure and its appropriateness for a civic monument. The present examination seeks to explain why the *Guardian* statue was objectionable, given Hord's earlier acclaim for Aztec-themed sculptures at Balboa Park and San Diego State College. In the first part of this chapter, I situate Hord's sculpture within his oeuvre and within the contentious political landscape of nativism and pan-Americanism to reveal how the Native Daughters interpreted the statue as "Aztec." I then consider the debate surrounding the *Guardian* figure in relation to regional mythology and border race relations. Finally, I examine how urban geography established a particular social and spatial frame for viewing public art. By uncovering the reciprocal relationship between site and meaning, my analysis elucidates the clash of local and global politics to expose the domestic limitations of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy in demographically diverse regions such as Southern California.

Native Daughters, Guardians of San Diego History

Established in 1886, the Native Daughters of the Golden West was an upper-class women's society dedicated to the veneration of early California settlers. Although prospectors had arrived from all corners of the globe during the California Gold Rush, the Native Daughters celebrated their European-American ancestors for

transporting with them “the mighty American spirit of democracy” and Western civilization.¹¹⁰ Their avowed aim was “to perpetuate in the minds of all native Californians the Memories of one of the most wonderful epochs in the world’s history, the Days of ‘49.”¹¹¹

Like other elite California Anglos, the Native Daughters adhered to an idealized view of Spanish missionary history in order to laud American settlement and U.S. military defeat of Mexico at mid-century. Since 1850, when California attained statehood and thousands of Mexicans became Americans by force, San Diego has occupied a demographically diverse borderland where Anglo Americans historically have worked to assimilate and segregate non-Anglos (often called “Mexicans” and “foreigners,” regardless of birthplace or citizenship) in order to establish and maintain U.S. political legitimacy and cultural hegemony in the region. This consolidation of power and deliberate erasure of Mexican heritage developed alongside a romanticized view of California’s mission history in which Spanish priests benevolently ruled over the local natives. In the late nineteenth century, romantic portrayals in citywide pageants and the influential literature of cultural leaders Charles Fletcher Lummis and Helen Hunt Jackson fashioned a narrative of public history that cast Spanish Franciscans as industrious and pious forefathers to contemporary California culture. Mexican populations, by contrast, appeared as the

¹¹⁰ Peter Thomas Conmy, *The Origin and Purposes of the Native Sons and Native Daughters of the Golden West* (San Francisco: Dolores Press, 1956), 4. The Native Daughters of the Golden West was a companion organization to the fraternal order of the Native Sons of the Golden West. Notably, the history of the Native Daughters of the Golden West has received scant attention beyond its membership. The existing literature on the organization exhibits a favorable bias and so must be read critically. Notably, the controversy over Hord’s statue was absent in all of the Native Daughters literature I consulted.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

morally and racially inferior spoilers of this imagined colonial idyll. This regional “invented tradition” thus delineated a racial paradigm that served to legitimate the American military conquest in 1848 as a redemptive act of moral rectitude.¹¹²

The official club seal of the San Diego chapter attests to the prominent place of regional mission mythology in the Native Daughters’ celebration of California’s pioneer history (figure 18). Although the design at first seems to portray nothing more than a serene beach landscape at sunset, each motif carries specific allusion to a historically important person, place, or event from the Spanish colonial era. For example, the primary emblem on the seal depicts the Serra Palm, named after Junípero Serra, the Franciscan monk who planted it. Heralded as the earliest tree planted in California, the palm supposedly marked the burial site of soldiers from the “Sacred Expedition” of José de Gálvez in 1769 as well as the starting point of the California Mission Trail.¹¹³ Furthermore, the palm overlooks the setting sun across the bay at Point Loma, where Spanish explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo landed in 1542.¹¹⁴

A boon to state tourism, the Mission myth required California Anglos to tolerate a certain degree of cultural pluralism. Throughout Southern California, municipal leaders and civic boosters embraced elements of Mexican culture mediated

¹¹² The Mission myth emerged only after 1869, when the transcontinental railroad established the Southwest as an exotic tourist destination for United States citizens. For greater analysis of the California Mission myth, see Anne Farrar Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1990); and Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹¹³ The California Mission Trail, also called *El Camino Real*, was a road connecting the twenty-one missions of Alta California.

¹¹⁴ Native Daughters of the Golden West, *Native Daughters, 1886-1986* (Fresno, CA: Pioneer Publishing Co., 1986), 134.

by Spanish influence or at a safe historical remove. For example, Santa Barbara officials deliberately adopted a stylized Spanish colonial architecture to redefine the character of their city in the wake of the devastating 1925 earthquake. Evoking the idyllic era of Spanish rule, the new, fanciful architectural vocabulary offered “historic charm” that local residents and tourists alike associated with affluence and exoticism.¹¹⁵ This phenomenon, which historian Eduardo Obregón Pagán has termed “symbolic diversity,” allowed Anglo Americans to retain social control by harmonizing a sanitized version of Mexican heritage with an existing paradigm of white hegemony.¹¹⁶

By the turn of the century, the Native Daughters had established a tradition of dedicating historic markers and providing annual contributions for the preservation and repair of Spanish missions throughout the state. Through their activities in historical preservation and place marking, the Native Daughters constructed a physical environment that supplanted pre-Hispanic history with Spanish colonial and Anglo settler feats. In 1934, the Native Daughters honored Junípero Serra as “the padre who founded civilization in California” and proclaimed the sesquicentennial of his death the “Serra Year.” The association installed plaques at missions and historic sites statewide, sponsored a parade, performed literary exercises at the Serra Museum

¹¹⁵ Roberto Lint Sagarena, “Building California’s Past: Mission Revival Architecture and Regional Identity,” *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 4 (May 2002): 439. Prior to this economic development, California inhabitants perpetuated disparaging images of Spanish dons to justify their removal from the land and moved to eliminate all traces of “Spanish” dwellings, civic buildings, and urban structures, whose decaying adobe construction California Anglos interpreted as an outward manifestation of Spanish immorality. The profitability of California’s distinctive built environment in domestic tourism soon transformed adobe buildings into valued historical treasures. Anglo preservation and idealization of adobe architecture restructured regional identity by privileging the Spanish colonial era over Mexican rule (1821-1848) and Native American prehistory.

¹¹⁶ Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 29.

in San Diego, and unveiled a statue of the esteemed Spaniard at the mission in Carmel, California.¹¹⁷

By whitewashing Spanish colonial history, the Native Daughters created and sustained a discursive apparatus that validated U.S. expansion and subsequent rule over Mexican inhabitants in the region. The conscious elision of pre-Hispanic history and the intervening period of Mexican rule asserted the political legitimacy of contemporary American occupation by crafting a collective impression of the landscape as barren wilderness before the arrival of European-American civilization. Further, the installation of historic markers functioned as a method of defining, securing, and maintaining zones within the city on behalf of California Anglos.¹¹⁸ As historian Yolanda Venegas has noted, the Spanish-heritage mythology of California, “complete with its missions, pious priests, and ‘humble Indians’,” consolidated Euro-American identity under the collective designation “white” and thus provided “an epic antiquity, a California Plymouth Rock as ancient (and pure-blooded European) as the nation’s traditional cultural centers in Boston and New York.”¹¹⁹ In this way, the Native Daughters promoted a unifying civic identity grounded in assumptions of white Anglo homogeneity.

¹¹⁷ Native Daughters of the Golden West, *Native Daughters*, 204.

¹¹⁸ My discussion of the political implications of urban place-marking in San Diego has benefited from scholarship on Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, including Sagarena, “Building California’s Past,” 429-444; and Greg Hise, “Border City: Race and Social Distance in Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (September 2004): 545-558.

¹¹⁹ Yolanda Venegas, “The Erotics of Racialization: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of California,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 25, no. 3 (2004): 63.

The Perceived Social Threat of Pan-Americanism

The inclusive multiethnic discourse of pan-Americanism posed a direct challenge to the Native Daughters' exclusionary conception of San Diego identity. Under the existing system of social and political inequality, the Native Daughters and other elite Anglos maintained an emphatically racial vision of California history premised on Anglo supremacy. Populations of Mexican descent had a role to play in the civic imagination as builders and agricultural laborers, but white Californians expected them to remain out of sight, tucked away in segregated "Mexican" areas such as poverty-stricken *barrios*, rural *colonias*, and citrus farms. California Anglos alternatively visualized Mexicans as part of a frozen past, where their exotic culture could be safely appropriated in the context of Spanish heritage fantasies.¹²⁰ The Good Neighbor Policy, by contrast, posited historical continuity from the pre-Hispanic past to the present day, thereby raising the profile of contemporary Mexican residents in civic consciousness.

Even more unsettling, for California's white ruling class, was the deliberate collapse of racial categories under pan-Americanism. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Good Neighbor Policy called attention to parallel histories of pre-Columbian antiquity, European colonialism, and modern independence in order to promote a shared "American" character and culture distinct from European precedents. This imaginary construct of hemispheric citizenship attempted to dissolve racial distinctions among North Americans and Central and South Americans

¹²⁰ William Deverell, "Privileging the Mission over the Mexican: The Rise of Regional Identity in Southern California," in *Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity*, eds. David M. Wrobel and Michael C. Steiner (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 248.

by stressing art and democratic ideology as the foundations of pan-American identity. Although the discourse of pan-Americanism received a positive reception in relatively homogeneous white cities and towns such as Ames, Iowa, the San Diego controversy demonstrates that, in cities with significant Mexican and Mexican American populations, the racial leveling of the Good Neighbor Policy stirred deep concerns among white elites committed to preserving their elevated class and group status.

The U.S. government's professed adherence to racial equality was first and foremost a *foreign* policy directed at repairing international relations. Discrimination remained a daily reality for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the United States, especially in the South and Southwest. Joshua Hochstein, the former Chairman of the National Education Association Committee on Inter-American Relations, observed in 1942 that "there are many who, born in this country, are technically Americans in our sense of the term. Factually, they are rarely so regarded."¹²¹ The domestic limitations of pan-American equality and fraternity were nowhere more apparent than in Southern California, where local border politics came into direct conflict with the global aims of the Good Neighbor Policy. As historian William Deverell has noted, Southern California's regional consciousness reflected not only the proximity but also the permeability of the U.S.-Mexico border.¹²² The reality of transborder movement and ethnic heterogeneity in Southern California, especially after 1920, fueled

¹²¹ Joshua Hochstein, "Educational Implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 16, no. 3 (November 1942): 176.

¹²² Deverell, "Privileging the Mission over the Mexican," 243.

denigrating racial ideologies that attempted to establish local Anglo cultural dominance and social control over all things Mexican.

Nativism and the “Mexican Problem” in San Diego

In the early decades of the twentieth century, San Diego Anglos became increasingly concerned with maintaining their collective well-being and class status against the rising tide of foreign immigration, particularly from Mexico. Unlike Los Angeles, the Mexican communities in and around San Diego remained an impoverished and comparatively small minority of laborers until the mid-1920s. Between 1900 and 1930, the Mexican-origin population in San Diego surged from 638 to 9,266, a growth rate that nearly doubled the population boom of the city as a whole.¹²³ Moreover, local officials estimated that there were closer to 20,000 Mexican inhabitants in San Diego by 1928. This discrepancy reflected a large community of migratory day laborers as well as American-born children of Mexican parents, groups that did not count as Mexican-born U.S. residents on the 1930 census.¹²⁴

Two major factors contributed to this population boom. First, a nationwide movement of nativism in the 1910s and 1920s fundamentally reshaped the national origin and flow of immigrants to the United States. In 1924, U.S. Congress passed

¹²³ “San Diego City and County Population from U.S. Census Bureau,” San Diego History Center, accessed April 7, 2012, www.sandiegohistory.org/links/sandiegopopulation.htm.

¹²⁴ Richard Griswold del Castillo, “Revolution to Economic Depression,” in *Chicano San Diego: Cultural Space and the Struggle for Justice*, ed. Richard Griswold del Castillo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 92.

the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act. A touchstone of eugenic thought and racism, the law implemented a restrictive immigration system in which quotas capped foreign entry to the United States at two percent per group. This formula, which relied on national origin and population statistics tallied in the 1890 census, significantly curbed the number of admissible immigrants.¹²⁵ Second, the only geographic region where the restrictive quota did not apply was the Western hemisphere. Southwestern employers, including railroad, agricultural, and mining industries, had mounted formidable opposition to nativist efforts to limit Mexican immigration. Although most of these lobbyists were no less racist in their attitudes toward Mexican populations, they defended immigration for the economic advantage Mexican labor afforded their businesses.¹²⁶

As large industrial-sized farms began to dominate the surrounding landscape and as numbers of Chinese, Filipino, and other ethnic laborers began to dwindle, Mexican immigrants became the major work force in the San Diego region. This consolidation of agricultural and industrial laborers engendered a burgeoning community awareness and political activism among Mexican residents, who formed mutual aid societies, labor unions, and other community organizations in San Diego *barrios* and rural *colonias*. In April 1928, Mexican-origin farm workers mobilized politically to challenge the low wages and abusive living and working conditions they endured in San Diego's Imperial Valley. An outgrowth of the *mutualista* or mutual

¹²⁵ Alexandra Minna Stern, "Eugenics and Racial Classification in Modern Mexican America," in *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, eds. Iona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 168.

¹²⁶ George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 96.

aid society called the Sociedad de Benito Juarez, the newly formed Imperial Valley Workers Union sent letters to all the growers demanding higher pay, injury compensation, and improvements such as outhouses and picking sacks. The strike stirred Anglo fears about a possible Mexican uprising, and local officials attempted to quash the labor dispute by arresting the striking workers, as well as other Mexican residents, in the fields, on the streets, and in pool halls.¹²⁷

Another important instance of Mexican activism during this period occurred in Lemon Grove, a rural town near San Diego. When the local school board decided to build and institute a separate school for Mexican students in 1931, immigrant parents openly opposed segregation and refused to send their children to school. They formed a group called La Comite de Vecinos de Lemon Grove and, with support from the Mexican consul in San Diego, filed a class action lawsuit to prevent the school board from forcing their children to attend the Americanization school. Ten students of Mexican ancestry testified during the trial to counter the school board's claim that Mexican schoolchildren were educationally and linguistically deficient. In the end, Judge Claude Chambers ruled against the Lemon Grove school board, concluding that the differential treatment of Mexican students was ill-founded and would probably hurt them academically in terms of learning American customs and the English language. A landmark episode in Mexican and Mexican American resistance, the Lemon Grove case marked the first successful legal challenge to Mexican segregation in U.S. public schools.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Griswold del Castillo, "Revolution to Economic Depression," 81-83.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 84-88. While the Lemon Grove Incident was a victory for local residents of Mexican descent, the court case failed to set a precedent for other districts. The case also had no impact on African

These events coupled with the onset of the Great Depression and additional labor strikes in October 1933 and June 1934 exacerbated racial tensions in San Diego. One way that San Diego's white residents responded to this perceived threat was to "uplift" Mexican immigrants through cultural assimilation. During the 1920s and 1930s, Americanization programs in California targeted Mexicans to foster patriotism and cultural allegiance to their adopted country. Women's clubs were especially active in these outreach efforts. The Neighborhood House of San Diego, for example, instituted programs for public health, language instruction, and socialization both to alleviate the economic and social plight of the estimated 5,000 Mexican immigrants in the city and to facilitate the naturalization process.¹²⁹

Less tolerant California Anglos proposed stringent legal restrictions against Mexican immigration to the United States. In the popular imagination, foreign-born Mexican residents competed for welfare services and jobs that, many believed, belonged by birthright to (white) U.S. citizens. During this period, Mexican immigration and destitution became known as the "Mexican Problem" and reflected a nationwide nativist belief that the influx of "inferior" racial stock fundamentally weakened the country's economic and cultural supremacy over other parts of the world.¹³⁰ Kenneth L. Roberts, for example, predicated nativist claims of American racial decline on the poverty and progeny of Mexican immigrants, whom he described as an "acute plague sore on the [American] body politic." Writing in 1928

American and Native American schoolchildren, who continued to attend separate schools based on a state law allowing racial segregation.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 88-92.

¹³⁰ Stern, "Eugenics and Racial Classification," 168.

for the *Saturday Evening Post*, Roberts penned a vivid picture of the racial contamination he perceived in Los Angeles:

the endless streets crowded with the shacks of the illiterate, diseased, pauperized Mexicans, taking no interest whatever in the community, living constantly on the ragged edge of starvation, bringing countless numbers of American citizens into the world with the reckless prodigality of rabbits....¹³¹

Widespread governmental abuses of civil liberties and institutional changes to racial classification further stressed the tenuous border politics of Southern California during this period. Although the U.S. Congress refused to institute legislation against Mexican immigration, the federal government did introduce a new racial category, “Mexican,” to the decennial census in 1930. Previously, the U.S. censuses had classified Mexican-origin residents as white.¹³² By codifying Mexicans and Mexican Americans as explicitly nonwhite, the modified racial status of Mexican-origin populations on the U.S. census made Mexicans even more vulnerable to segregation, deportation, and mistreatment at the hands of employers and local authorities. In addition, the U.S. government initiated a large-scale repatriation movement that forced more than a million Mexicans, regardless of their citizenship status, to move to Mexico. The official repatriation program engendered broad public support for supposedly alleviating white unemployment; however, it carried devastating

¹³¹ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 95-96.

¹³² Stern, “Eugenics and Racial Classification,” 152-153. This shift in classificatory practice reflected the pervasive influence of eugenic thought at this time. As Alexandra Minna Stern has argued, the “Mexican” classification functioned as a mixed-race category that further refined the definition of “whiteness” using oppositional racial terms. She notes that scholars and scientific experts began to question the reliability of external markers – skin color, phenotypic traits, clothing – in positively identifying an individual’s race. In addition, the growing popularity of eugenics, a scientific theory and method of genetic reform based on selective heredity, emphasized genetic inheritance as the most truthful indicator of racial classification. The bio-national category of “Mexican” on the U.S. census, then, emerged in response to Anglo anxieties about the varying visibility of racial traits among Mexican populations whom, many believed, represented an “unfit” mixed racial strain that threatened to contaminate and ultimately destroy the nation’s superior Anglo racial stock.

consequences for Mexican communities in the United States, which endured police raids, intensified racism, divided families, and massive depopulation. In San Diego, even charitable Anglo organizations and the Mexican consulate aided deportation efforts by arranging transportation to Mexico, while nativist organizations such as the National Club of America for Americans, Inc., drafted discriminatory legislation and anti-immigrant ordinances for local government.¹³³

The Politicization of the Pioneer Mother

Amid these troubling developments in racial politics, the Native Daughters strove to preserve a narrow interpretation of San Diego history based on California's Mission mythology. Indeed, the specialized meaning of the word "native" in the organization's name underscores their limited purview of regional history and inclination toward nativist ideologies. In their early history, the Native Daughters repeatedly affirmed a policy limiting its membership to white, native-born Californians. The filial designation in the social club's title further highlights the presumed racial purity and social privilege that pioneer heredity bestowed on its membership. In 1935, the Native Daughters initiated the Pioneer Roster project in an effort to document the arrival of pioneers to the state as well as establish concrete genealogical ties among its modern members to this distinguished pioneer past. The program registered the names of men, women, and children who had immigrated to or

¹³³ Ibid, 94-96.

were born in California prior to 1869.¹³⁴ As historian Brenda D. Frink has observed, such exclusionary practices were typical of patriotic organizations nationwide, including the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Colonial Dames and Sires of America.¹³⁵

Cultural leaders of the 1930s believed that public art had the power to endow viewers with specific values and ideals, thereby cultivating a common civic culture. The west plaza of the San Diego Civic Center Building provided a particularly rich opportunity for edifying the public through art, since visitors could stroll through its attractive park-like setting and enjoy the view of the fountain and San Diego Bay. This public space, located at the base of the city's new administrative center and architectural emblem of law and order, demanded a work of art sufficiently noble in content and appearance to complement its prestigious surroundings.

In their petition against *Guardian of the Water*, the ladies' organization recommended that Hord choose a subject from "some early phase of early California life," by which the members no doubt meant either Spanish colonial or Anglo pioneer history.¹³⁶ The Native Daughters probably envisioned a public monument to the American pioneer mother, not unlike Charles Grafly's *The Pioneer Mother* (1915) in San Francisco (figure 19). Commissioned as sculptural decoration for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, Grafly's monument depicts an ideal white woman

¹³⁴ To this day, the Grand Parlor in Sacramento houses a library collection of early pioneer biographies.

¹³⁵ Brenda D. Frink, "San Francisco's Pioneer Mother Monument: Maternalism, Racial Order, and the Politics of Memorialization, 1907-1915," *American Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (March 2012): 89.

¹³⁶ "Statue of an Aztec? Not by a Jugful, Protest," *San Diego Tribune*, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

dressed modestly in traditional pioneer clothing. Garbed in a lace-front shirt, a long full skirt, cloak, bonnet, and sturdy boots, the figure stares confidently ahead while gently guiding two classically nude children, one boy and one girl, with an outstretched arm.

The pioneer woman emerged as a popular sculptural motif in the early twentieth century, particularly in monuments erected by women's clubs. In her analysis of this imagery, Brenda D. Frink has asserted that the pioneer figure symbolized a politicized concept of "maternalism," which extolled virtues of domesticity such as nurturance and morality and potentially legitimized women's contributions in the public sphere.¹³⁷ As part of a widespread reform movement borne of Progressive Era politics and women's suffrage efforts, these monuments promoted an idealized narrative of white women's traditional and moral influence over middle-class men and children. Grafly conveyed the pioneer mother's virtuous character through her classical visage and capable rearing of two children, whose nudity speaks to their corruptible innocence and inherent virtue. Yet Grafly's *Pioneer Mother* represents only one possible conception of the heroic "pioneer mother" theme, which proliferated in California monuments during the 1920s and 1930s. Pious morality was often more explicitly rendered. In numerous statues, the stolid pioneer woman carries a bible and a rifle, tools that assisted in bringing "civilization" to the American frontier. Thus the idealized construct of the pioneer mother also symbolized white cultural conquest of Native Americans and other nonwhite people. For contemporary viewers, California's pioneer mother monuments

¹³⁷ Frink, "San Francisco's Pioneer Mother Monument," 88.

not only honored an idealized local history but also argued for the modern implementation of stringent anti-immigration policies.¹³⁸ As Frink explains, Grafly's monument and others like it evoked nostalgia for the pioneer mother, who "harked back to what [Anglos] imagined as a simpler, more moral time, when gender, race, and class order had been strictly maintained."¹³⁹

Preeminent local sculptor Donal Hord was a desirable choice to execute a distinguished public monument for the San Diego Civic Center Building. The award-winning artist was not only a resident of the city and thus familiar with its local history and culture, but he was also already registered with the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project.¹⁴⁰ In late June 1937, San Diego newspapers reported that the Civic Center architects, the planning commission art committee, and city council's board of supervisors, and the Fine Arts Society had approved Hord's design proposal. The theme of the fountain was "the city's quest for and dependence on an adequate water supply," a topic that presumably held resonance for residents of the semi-arid agricultural region.¹⁴¹ However, city leaders and the artist both failed to anticipate the virulent response that an olla-bearing woman would elicit in the volatile political climate of 1930s San Diego, particularly in regard to race.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 103.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 89.

¹⁴⁰ The San Diego Fine Arts Society contributed nearly one third of the total cost for the project, which local newspapers tallied at \$20,000. The remaining funds came from the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Program (WPA).

¹⁴¹ See "Statue for Civic Center Fountain Wins Approval of Committees," *San Diego Union*, June 24, 1937; "Committees to Pass on Location, Design for Civic Center Fountain," *San Diego Union*, June 29, 1937, Historic Buildings—County Administration Building, San Diego History Center (formerly San Diego Historical Society), Box 42, San Diego, California (hereafter cited as Historic-Buildings-County Administration Papers, San Diego History Center); and "Huge Central Figure Approved for Civic Center Fountain," *San Diego Tribune*, July 1, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

Trappings of Mexican Ethnicity: Reading Race in Guardian of the Water

Hord's Civic Center fountain became embroiled in controversy in late August 1937, after the Native Daughters called into question the racial identity of Hord's symbolic "water bearer." This wealthy group of San Diego women had anticipated Aztec subject matter where, at least according to the sculptor, there was none. Like other decorative artworks planned for the new government building, *Guardian of the Water* took local subject matter as its central theme.¹⁴² As San Diego reporter Edward T. Austin had noted in early July, Hord had undertaken "long and ceaseless study of San Diego country history" and settled on the concept of water in order to emphasize the importance of rainfall and the harbor to local agriculture and industry.¹⁴³

The silver-gray color of the granite used for *Guardian* may have been a contributing factor in the Native Daughters reading race into the sculpture; however, this seems unlikely as the full-scale stone statue remained unfinished at the time of the controversy. Although stone had been quarried for the commission, the monumental granite block required nearly two years to carve into its finished form.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² See "Tile Patterns Will Tell Story of San Diego, Symbolize Majesty of Government," *San Diego Union*, July 5, 1937; "Jean Goodwin and Arthur Ames Arrive in San Diego to Start Painting Murals for Civic Center Chamber," *San Diego Sun*, September 11, 1938; "Phases of County Life Depicted in Civic Center Murals," *San Diego Sun*, August 2, 1938, Historic Buildings—County Administration Building, San Diego History Center.

¹⁴³ Edward T. Austin, "Donal Hord to Tell S.D. Water History in Granite Art Fountain for Civic Center," *San Diego Union*, July 2, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

¹⁴⁴ The official dedication took place on June 10, 1939. Hord used a trailer to transport the monumental statue the ten miles from his studio to the Civic Center. Construction cranes at the site installed the work atop the fountain pedestal.

Only preliminary plaster and clay mock-ups had appeared in the newspaper coverage of the commission up to this date, and both the *San Diego Tribune* and the *San Diego Union* described to the color of the stone as “white” when explaining the planned fountain commission.¹⁴⁵

The schism between the sculptor’s intended meaning and the Native Daughters’ interpretation more likely arose from the prevailing discourse of pan-Americanism combined with Hord’s previous success in sculpting pre-Columbian themes. To be sure, the contradiction between the federal government’s national narrative of pan-Americanism and local realities of exploitative labor practices and racial discrimination meant that many San Diego residents were more sensitive to a racialized reading than to an abstracted allegory in their public art. Moreover, the Native Daughters had grown accustomed to viewing monuments of their pioneer ancestors employing a standardized iconography and stylistic vocabulary of classicism. Despite official claims that the figure depicted a pioneer woman, Hord’s “water bearer” figure diverged from established pioneer imagery in every regard – in her clothing, in her physiognomy, and in her personal attributes – and so encouraged an “Aztec” reading rooted visually in this alternative set of associations. As a consideration of Hord’s artistic record demonstrates, the sculptor’s established reputation as an artist of Mexican themes amplified this interpretative stance.

Born in 1902 to parents Riley Merton Horr and L’Aurore (Laura) Beaudin in 1902, Hord spent his early childhood in Prentice, Wisconsin. When he was only six

¹⁴⁵ “Committees to Pass on Location, Design for Civic Center Fountain,” *San Diego Union*; “Woman in White to Guard ‘Center’ Fountain,” *San Diego Tribune*, November 12, 1937, Historic Buildings-County Administration Building, San Diego History Center.

or seven years old, his parents divorced and his mother decided to change her surname to Hord. According to family friends, Laura devised this name by removing the final “d” from Donald, her son’s birth name, and adding it to the end of Horr.¹⁴⁶

Hord and his mother moved briefly to Seattle, Washington, but the young Hord contracted rheumatic fever and so they relocated to a warmer climate. When Hord’s mother asked her son where he would like to live, the fourteen-year-old chose San Diego for its proximity to Mexico. As a boy, Hord already exhibited a keen interest in pre-Columbian history. He read numerous books on the subject and even named his pet bull terrier Manco after the ancient Incan ruler.¹⁴⁷

Arriving in San Diego in 1916, Hord began studying sculpture under Anna Valentien at the San Diego Evening High School.¹⁴⁸ The heart damage the young artist had sustained from rheumatism forced him to work in a small scale until 1920, when he met and formed a lifelong companionship and collaborative working partnership with Homer Dana. Hord was able to execute larger pieces with Dana’s assistance, and in 1926, he resumed his formal study of sculpture by learning bronze casting under the tutelage of Archibald Dawson at the Santa Barbara School of the Arts.

Hord’s talent attracted the attention of Clara S. Gould, an art patron of Montecito, California, and in 1928, he received a Gould Memorial Scholarship to study ancient and modern art in Mexico. He spent eleven months traveling and

¹⁴⁶ Jennifer Luksic, *Donal Hord: Transcending the Solid* (Carlsbad, CA: Kales Press in association with the San Diego Historical Society, 1999), 25.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 26.

¹⁴⁸ Bruce Kamerling, “Anna and Albert Valentien: The Arts and Crafts Movement in San Diego,” *Journal of San Diego History* 24, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 359.

working in Teotihuacan, Mexico City, Tehuantepec, and Chocomcuae.¹⁴⁹ During his sojourn, the American sculptor embraced Mexican peasant culture. He adopted native dress, traveled by burro, and visited local villagers at their place of work (figure 20). He also met and became friends with modern Mexican muralists Jean Charlot and Diego Rivera, whose international reputations, sturdy figural style, and celebratory depictions of pre-Columbian history left an indelible impression.¹⁵⁰

Upon his return to San Diego, Hord rose to regional prominence as a sculptor of Native American and Mexican subject matter. In a review of Hord's first one-man show at the Dalzell Hatfield Gallery in 1933, Los Angeles art critic Arthur Millier praised the sculptor's original interpretations of the Southwestern desert, North American Indians, and "their relation to that ancient indigenous culture which reached from Mexico to Arizona and New Mexico." Millier highlighted Hord's activities as an amateur archaeologist and underscored the prominence of pre-Columbian subject matter in his oeuvre. "Whether making Aztec masks, or the various portraits, figures and bas-reliefs shown," the critic wrote, "[Hord] is always the artist and the loving craftsman, delighting in his thoughts, his tools, his materials, and skill in using them."¹⁵¹

San Diego critic Katherine Morrison Kahle similarly characterized Hord's oeuvre as predominantly Mexican in theme. Noting the completion of the sculptor's polychrome ebony statue *Virgin of Guadalupe* (1935), Kahle remarked that, "like all

¹⁴⁹ Mexican artists undertook similar travels during this period.

¹⁵⁰ Helen Ellsberg, "Donal Hord: Interpreter of the Southwest," *American Art Review* 4, no. 3 (December 1977): 83.

¹⁵¹ Arthur Millier, "Sculptor Hord Digs Own Ideas Out of Desert Wood," *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1933.

of Donal Hord's work, the subject matter is again Mexican" (figure 21). She no doubt had in mind Hord's recent depictions of pre-Hispanic and modern Mexican themes, including *Mayan Mask* (1933), *Aztec Bride* (1933), *Peon Praying* (1932-1933), and *Family on the Curb* (1932-1933). Moreover, Kahle explained that the Virgin of Guadalupe was "the Virgin of the Mexican Indians" and that Hord's sensitive rendering of the religious figure recorded "a rare insight into the Mexican soul."¹⁵²

While the publicity and critical acclaim surrounding these earlier sculptures affiliated the artist with native Mexican subject matter, Hord's inclusion of an olla and a *rebozo* in *Guardian of the Water* also aligned his Civic Center fountain with contemporary artworks depicting Mexican peasants. For example, California modern artist Henrietta Shore combined the imagery of Mexican ollas and *rebozos* in her 1927 painting *Women of Oaxaca* (figure 22). Inspired by her travels in Mexico, the artist depicted a procession of five Mexican women against a barren desert landscape. Reduced to decorative forms, the faceless women wear similar flowing skirts and loose blouses, balance water jugs on top of their heads, and hold the same sway-back posture with their left arms hanging freely in a graceful arc. Three of the women wear dark shawls or *rebozos* around their shoulders, proclaiming their adherence to traditional Mexican fashion while also fusing their bodies to the undulating earthy landmasses on the horizon. The copper skin and bare feet further harmonize the group of women with their natural surroundings, as do the mirrored cloud formations, aprons, and blouses. Upon her return to California, Shore garnered the attention of

¹⁵² Katherine Morrison Kahle, "San Diego Art and Artists," unidentified newspaper clipping [San Diego], n.d. [1935], Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

Reginald Poland, the director of the San Diego Museum of Art, who organized a solo exhibition of her work in 1927. Poland's enthusiastic championing of Shore must have brought her work to the attention of San Diego residents, including Hord.¹⁵³ The sculptor, who had long been interested in Mexican art and culture, undoubtedly attended the show of this well-traveled artist.

The visual lexicon of *rebozos* as distinctly Mexican garments certainly was familiar to Hord, who not only traveled to the interior of Mexico but also probably saw women of Mexican descent wearing the traditional shawls in San Diego. Hord himself created a small marble sculpture of a Mexican woman wearing a *rebozo* in 1938, while he was carving *Guardian of the Water*. Titled *Mexican Mother and Child*, the piece depicts a young peasant woman with long braids and a flowing dress (figure 23). Her infant child, swaddled in a *rebozo*, rests against his mother's back as she transports him with a purposeful stride. Significantly, the resonance of this imagery for viewers in the Good Neighbor era rests with the fact that President Franklin D. Roosevelt acquired this sculpture and insisted that it be placed on his office desk in Hyde Park, New York.¹⁵⁴

Two prominent public sculptures – *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* (1935) and *Aztec* (1937) – confirmed Hord's status as San Diego's preeminent sculptor of native Mexican subjects. These works propelled Hord to national prominence in the art

¹⁵³ In addition to declaring Shore's art worthy of a single artist show, Poland published positive reviews of her work. See, for example, Reginald Poland, "Henrietta Shore's Paintings," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 13, 1927.

¹⁵⁴ The details of Roosevelt's acquisition of *Mexican Mother and Child* are not known; however, the president came into possession of the statue sometime after September 17, 1938, but before 1941, when he donated the sculpture to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. The statue was among the first 500 objects to enter the collection (Michelle M. Frauenberger to the author, electronic correspondence, April 9, 2012).

world and further associated his oeuvre with the national discourse of pan-Americanism. Analysis of these two sculptures helps to illuminate the charged political context in which Hord's Aztec subject matter circulated and assumed diplomatic meaning.

Aztecs as Symbols of Pan-Americanism

In November 1934, Hord received a contract through the State Emergency Relief Act for the design and execution of a sculptural centerpiece at Balboa Park's House of Hospitality. Intended to adorn an open-air patio modeled after a convent in Guadalajara, Mexico, the commission stipulated that the statue depict "a Mexican woman."¹⁵⁵ Hord, who already had executed several sculptures on Mexican themes, must have seemed a natural choice. Despite encountering numerous soft spots in the construction-grade limestone, he completed *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* in just ten weeks so that it would be ready in time for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition.

Like *Guardian of the Water*, the sculpted woman of *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* exudes monumentality through rounded form and coarse facial features, and she holds a traditional native water jug (figure 24). The barefoot figure wears a traditional *huipil*-style blouse, and her long hair falls in two braided queues joined at the center of her back. The porous limestone creates a rough surface texture that complements the woman's distinctive costume and hairstyle in conveying her

¹⁵⁵ Contract for *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec*, Donal Hord Papers, San Diego History Center, San Diego, California.

indigenous ethnicity and peasant status. Perched cross-legged atop an octagonal drum, she cradles the *olla* in her lap and pours a slender stream of water into a colorful tiled basin below. Downcast eyes and pursed lips infuse the sculpted woman with quiet strength. Despite the constant movement of water, the solidity and stoicism of her posture fosters an impression of modest dignity and enduring resolve.

Exposition architecture created a specific context within which fairgoers viewed Hord's *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec*. Unlike many other sculptural works at the world's fair, Hord's statue did not appear at the museum-like Palace of Fine Arts as part of a temporary exhibition of the visual arts. Rather, its function as a decorative fountain required permanent installation in San Diego's Balboa Park. As outlined in the sculptural contract, municipal leaders designated the House of Hospitality courtyard for *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec*. This pavilion served as the welcome center for visitors to the 1935 world's fair. Its richly appointed interior, decorated by the Women's Committee, contained meeting and banquet rooms, offices of exposition officials, and a 600-seat auditorium.¹⁵⁶ Hord's fountain, a prominent fixture in this reception villa, quickly became a symbol of the world's fair in exposition photographs and souvenir postcards (figure 25).

Furthermore, the placement of *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* at the 1935 fairgrounds situated the statue alongside principal architect Richard Smith Requa's

¹⁵⁶ Women's Committee member and art critic Katherine Morrison Kahle selected contrasting peach and teal upholstery, gold draperies, and gold rugs for the Sala de Oro on the first floor. She designed a reception room on the second floor using a similar color scheme and decorated the men's lounge with earthy hues like brown and lacquer red. Richard Amero, "History of the House of Hospitality Building in Balboa Park," Richard Amero Collection, San Diego History Center, accessed October 31, 2011, www.sandiegohistory.org/bpbuildings/hospitality.htm.

hemispheric portrayal of American cultural heritage.¹⁵⁷ The leading architect in San Diego throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Requa helped to establish a “Southern California” architectural style that combined Mediterranean and Mission designs.¹⁵⁸ Perhaps inspired by the Mayan-Revival style buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright and Robert Stacy-Judd, he expanded his visual vocabulary for the new pavilions at the California-Pacific International Exposition to include pre-Columbian architectural sources as well. Requa also harbored modern aspirations for his Mayan-inspired architectural program. Describing his aesthetic motivation for the fairgrounds, he wrote: “The rebirth of [Mayan and Aztec] art is inevitable and whatever may be done to foster it will be a step well taken, for surely this great classical architecture, the only true American style cries out for life.”¹⁵⁹

Surrounding a central square called “Plaza of the Americas,” Requa’s aesthetic program presented a visual timeline of New World architecture from an imagined pre-Columbian past to the present day (figure 26). The inspiration for Requa’s aesthetic program was the New Mexico Building, a Pueblo-Revival Style structure designed by Bertram Goodhue for La Via de los Estados at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition (figure 27). Requa viewed the adobe construction, stepped massing, and projecting wooden roof beams of this pavilion as a fitting tribute to Native American structures of the American Southwest. He initiated his

¹⁵⁷ Richard Requa, *Inside Lights on the Building of San Diego’s Exposition, 1935: The Dramatic Story of the Organization, Planning and Construction of the California Pacific International Exposition* (San Diego: 1937), 51-52.

¹⁵⁸ Requa drew inspiration from home videos from his travels to Spain, San Francisco, Monterey, and Southwestern Pueblos. See Richard Requa Motion Picture Collection, 1920s-1930s, San Diego History Center, San Diego, California.

¹⁵⁹ Requa, *Inside Lights*, 51-52.

imaginary chronology of American architecture with Goodhue's building and added two structures in an identical style: the Hollywood Hall of Fame and the Palisades Café (figures 28 and 29).¹⁶⁰ The other buildings on the plaza derived their ornament from ancient Mayan and Mixtec sources. For Requa, the monumental scale and elaborate surface decoration of Mesoamerican structures demonstrated a progression in technical ability and aesthetic design. He envisioned his Mayan Revival-style pavilions as representing the zenith of pre-Columbian architectural achievement. The Standard Oil Company's Tower of the Sun featured clean geometric sculptural patterns reminiscent of pre-Columbian reliefs found at the Palace of the Dead in Oaxaca (figure 30).¹⁶¹ Similarly, the U.S. government's exhibition hall, the Federal Building, reproduced ancient Mayan motifs from the Governor's Palace at Uxmal and the Nunnery at Chichén Itzá on its ornate frieze (figure 31). Requa also employed an oversized corbelled arch to mark the pavilion's entrance, and he installed a glass mural rendition of a Mayan carving at the Palenque Temple of the Sun. The hybridized pre-Columbian/Art Deco style of the California State Building, the Palace of Electricity, and the Palace of Travel, Transportation and Water round out Requa's architectural program by providing an intermediary link between ancient and modern

¹⁶⁰ Hollywood would have been an enthusiastic exhibitor within this context, since movie studios collaborated with the U.S. government in inter-American diplomacy by producing numerous good-neighborly films about Latin America. This period also marks the dawn of the so-called "golden age" of Mexican film. See Brian O'Neil, "The Demands of Authenticity: Addison Durland and Hollywood's Latin Images during World War II," in *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 358-369.

¹⁶¹ The Standard Oil Company, owned by future OIAA director Nelson A. Rockefeller and his family, conducted significant business with Latin American countries, especially Venezuela. Given the Rockefellers' economic investment in the region, it is hardly surprising that their corporate pavilion should embrace the hemispheric tenets of the Good Neighbor Policy. See Peter Bales, "Nelson Rockefeller and His Quest for Inter-American Unity" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Stony Brook, 1992).

architectural motifs (figures 32, 33, and 34). These pavilions combined decorative bands vaguely reminiscent of American Indian motifs with blank expanses of wall in a restrained Art Deco style.¹⁶² Finally, Walter Dorwin Teague's Ford Building formed the apex of this cultural progression (figure 35). The only structure on the plaza designed by another architect, the streamlined Ford Building exemplified the latest visual vocabulary for world's fair pavilions in its evocation of an industrial gearwheel resting on its side.¹⁶³

Requa's architectural program carried significant weight with regard to United States foreign policy initiatives at this time. Through Requa's visual timeline, the United States appeared before millions of fairgoers as the modern heir of an esteemed pre-Columbian past. This hemispheric interpretation of American cultural development coincided with the U.S. government's assertions that pre-Columbian civilization formed part of a uniquely pan-American patrimony. The architectural program replicated another facet of Good Neighbor discourse as well. In addition to presenting a common artistic heritage, national narratives of pan-Americanism called

¹⁶² Requa's goal in blending ancient and modern American architectural styles was to demonstrate the contemporary applicability of indigenous motifs. In doing so, the architect worked to unhinge pre-Columbian civilizations from the prevailing evolutionary discourse that relegated them to a "primitive," premodern past. Robert A. González also makes this point in his essay "Beyond the Midway: Pan-American Modernity in the 1930s," in *Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s*, eds. Robert A. Rydell and Laura Burd Schiavo (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 65. In his study of pan-American architecture at American world's fairs of the 1930s, González argues that architects increasingly moved toward a streamlined aesthetic that helped to free Latin American nations, at least temporarily, from the established cultural hierarchy of U.S. imperialism. González recently expanded this argument in his survey of pan-American architecture in his recent book *Designing Pan-America: U.S. Architectural Visions for the Western Hemisphere* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

¹⁶³ Requa viewed his Mayan-inspired Federal Building – not the Ford Building – as the architectural masterpiece of the fair. He nevertheless incorporated the Ford Building into his design trajectory to create a harmonious whole. Richard Amero, "History of the Federal Building in Balboa Park," Richard Amero Collection, San Diego History Center, accessed August 24, 2011, www.sandiegohistory.org/bpbuildings/federal.htm.

attention to shared histories of colonialism and revolutionary independence among Latin American nations and the United States. Requa's modern adaptations of indigenous architecture differed markedly from Bertram Goodhue's Spanish Colonial structures at the older section of the fairgrounds. This contrast underscored American culture and political ideology as being separate and distinct from that of its former European rulers.

Hord's statue operated within this visual program as a symbol of pan-Americanism. Like Requa's Mayan-inspired Federal Building, *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* highlighted artistic achievements rooted in American soil and implied cultural continuity between pre-Hispanic civilization and contemporary society. Indeed, San Diego viewers surely associated *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* with examples of modern Mexican art also on display at the world's fair.¹⁶⁴ First, Hord's voluminous treatment of the body in *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* resembled the figuration of Mexico's muralists, especially Diego Rivera. Secondly, Rivera had featured a woman balancing an *olla* on her head in his 1923 mural *Political Vision of the Mexican People: Tehuana Women* at the Ministry of Education in Mexico City (figure 36). Since Hord had met Rivera during his sojourn to Mexico, he probably was familiar with the mural. Moreover, the famous muralist had referred to Hord's Mexican sculptures as "pretty toys." This early criticism left a lasting impression on the sculptor. For this reason, it is not unreasonable to assume that Hord consciously

¹⁶⁴ The fine arts exhibition featured two galleries of Mexican art, including numerous paintings and prints by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and Jean Charlot. See *CalPac Official Guide, Souvenir Program and Picture Book* (San Diego: G.R. Wolcott, 1935); and *Illustrated Catalogue, Official Art Exhibition, California Pacific International Exposition* (San Diego: Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, 1936).

emulated the Mexican artist's figural style and iconography for his public monument, especially given the proximate subject matter.¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* reminded fairgoers that Latin Americans too fought for democracy and independence. Hord's statue calls specific attention to the Mexican Revolution of 1910 through its portrayal of an indigenous woman from Tehuantepec, a region famous for its *soldaderas*, or female soldiers, who fought against the Díaz regime. The physical setting of Hord's sculpture reinforces this visual subtext, since visitors encountered the Aztec-themed fountain in a Mexican-style patio at the House of Hospitality, a Spanish Colonial-style structure. This interpretative framework was no accident. As Hord's longtime assistant and friend Homer Dana recalled, the sculptor's inspiration for *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* had come from his fellowship travels to Mexico in 1928-1929, when a renewed outbreak of revolutionary skirmishes had forced him to remain in the city of Tehuantepec for safety.¹⁶⁶

The San Diego chapter of the Native Daughters must have viewed and understood Hord's fountain within the pan-American context of the California-Pacific International Exposition. Not only was there probably considerable overlap in membership among the Native Daughters and the Women's Committee responsible for decorating the House of Hospitality, but the Native Daughters also participated in world's fair programming. In September 1936, the Native Sons and Native Daughters staged a pageant, "California under Four Flags," as part of the closing

¹⁶⁵ Luksic, *Donal Hord: Transcending the Solid*, 30.

¹⁶⁶ Phyllis Van Doren, "Heritage," *San Diego Home & Garden*, June 1982, Donal Hord Papers, San Diego Museum of Art Research Library, San Diego, California.

ceremonies for the fair's second season.¹⁶⁷ Yet even if the culturally-minded ladies did not view *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* in the firsthand, they must have known that Hord received a "Gold Medal for Sculptural Excellence" for his Mexican-themed fountain during the 1935 exposition season. Indeed, that summer the much-admired statue even graced the cover of the nationally distributed magazine *Art Digest* (figure 37).¹⁶⁸

Two years later, Hord achieved even greater acclaim for *Aztec*, a diorite sculpture he created for the quadrangle at San Diego State College (figure 38). The life-size statue depicts a man squatting with his knees to his chest, wrapped tightly in a native blanket. The figure wears a modest headdress and large earspools, symbols of his royal status. He turns his head in profile and clasps his hands against his right shoulder, actions that animates the otherwise restful pose and accentuate the diamond-shaped composition. The pronounced cheekbones, hooked nose, and furrowed brow imbue the statue with emotional gravity and a physiognomy so "decidedly Aztec" that, according to fellow artist and art department chair Everett Gee Jackson, an "anthropologist would testify" to its accuracy.¹⁶⁹

San Diego State College administration and students, who helped to finance the sculpture with a dime drive and a subscription "Aztec War Dance," venerated the

¹⁶⁷ Richard Amero, "California Pacific Exposition San Diego, 1935-1936," Richard Amero Collection, San Diego History Center, accessed October 31, 2011, www.sandiegohistory.org/calpac/35expoh5.htm.

¹⁶⁸ R.D. Perry, *Art Digest*, July 1, 1935, California-Pacific Special Number. Other statues by Hord appeared at the world's fair as part of the fine arts exhibit. These works included *Tropic Cycle* (1933), *Young Maize* (1931), *Man with a Sheaf of Wheat* (1934), and *Mayan Mask* (1933).

¹⁶⁹ "State College Dedicates Aztec Statue by Hord," unidentified newspaper [San Diego], May 3, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

statue as an expression of school spirit and as an emblem of campus identity.¹⁷⁰ The student body, whose football team was called the Aztecs, christened the diorite figure “Montezuma” and invented rituals incorporating the statue in their collegiate and private lives. Installed on the campus quadrangle, the sculpture served both as a meeting place for friends and as an academic altar where students deposited pennies for good luck on exams.¹⁷¹ The stone statue also served as the inspiration for the university’s first mascot performance during the football halftime show. The campus community was so fond of its sculpted warrior that in 1942, when the Museum of Modern Art wanted to borrow *Aztec* for an exhibition, students stood guard over the statue to delay its removal (figure 39).¹⁷²

Hord received national recognition both for design and for technical achievement with *Aztec*, since the hardness of the material required a pneumatic drill for carving and the composition imbues the crouched, wrapped body with dynamism, expression, and anatomical accuracy. The pre-Columbian content of the statue also surely contributed to its success, since government programs frequently celebrated Aztec civilization as the basis of a modern hemispheric culture during this period. This political context certainly would have been evident to officials in Washington, D.C. WPA Director Holger Cahill, for example, pronounced *Aztec* one of the finest

¹⁷⁰ “Aztec War Dance Will Obtain Statue for Campus,” *San Diego Union*, August 8, 1936, Donal Hord Papers, AAA; and “Aztec War Dance Saturday to Bring Out Indian Squaws, Braves: Statue Benefit Draws Many,” *State College Aztec*, April 7, 1937, *State College Aztec* Newspaper Collection, San Diego State University Archives, San Diego, California.

¹⁷¹ “Frosh Homework: You Should Know . . .,” *San Diego State College Aztec*, February 11, 1942, *State College Aztec* Newspaper Collection, San Diego State University Archives, San Diego, California.

¹⁷² “Loan of Monty to N.Y. Museum Bitterly Opposed by Students,” *San Diego Union*, n.d. [1942], Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

pieces of stone carving he had ever seen. In a move prefiguring the cultural initiatives of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (1940-1946), Cahill sponsored terracotta replicas of Hord's Aztec-themed statue for display first in Washington and then in traveling exhibitions throughout the country (figure 40).¹⁷³

Through *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* and *Aztec*, Hord's sculptural imagery garnered unprecedented exposure and praise in the years leading up to the *Guardian of the Water* controversy. These two statues remained at the forefront of San Diego citizens' minds when news broke that Hord had received the Civic Center Building commission. In fact, the laborious carving process for *Aztec* meant that the university had held its dedication ceremony for the completed sculpture on May 2, 1937, less than four months before the San Diego chapter of the Native Daughters would file their complaint against *Guardian of the Water*.

Raising the Race Issue: Native Daughters and Public Debate

Local newspaper coverage of the *Guardian of the Water* controversy reveals the profound influence that San Diego's elite women wielded as arbiters of regional culture and history. In the months prior to the Native Daughters' letter of complaint, the San Diego press routinely described Hord's subject as a "pioneer woman" and a

¹⁷³ Sherman Trease, "Aztec Statue, To be Dedicated Today, Assures Fame for Hord," *San Diego Union*, May 2, 1937; and Edward T. Austin, "Year of Work Required to Carve Aztec Sculpture," unidentified newspaper [San Diego], n.d. [1937], Donal Hord Papers, AAA. In 1941, the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs developed a program of traveling exhibitions of pre-Columbian, colonial and modern Latin American art demonstrative of a shared pan-American past for distribution in smaller U.S. venues including university galleries, public libraries, WPA art centers, and town halls.

“water bearer.”¹⁷⁴ One reporter even noted that the sculptor had designed his composition after undertaking serious study of San Diego history. The story, published in early July, explained that the woman’s simple dress conveyed her symbolic role as a water bearer and that the olla resembled an indigenous vessel that the artist had unearthed near his home as an amateur archaeologist.¹⁷⁵ Despite this early interpretative consensus, local newspapers gave extensive treatment to the Native Daughters’ protest and continued to publish conflicting reports on the statue’s ethnicity even after its formal dedication in 1939.¹⁷⁶

The bulk of the debate over *Guardian of the Water* occurred between August 25 and September 13, 1937. WPA Art Director Thyrasis Fields responded to skeptics early in the controversy by noting that the sculpted woman was dressed like a pioneer, not an Aztec. Furthermore, he explained, the ruggedness of her features

¹⁷⁴ See “Statue for Civic Center Fountain Wins Approval of Committees,” *San Diego Union*; “Huge Central Figure Approved for Civic Center Fountain,” *San Diego Tribune*; “Committees to Pass on Location, Design for Civic Center Fountain,” *San Diego Union*; Marg Loring, “20-Ton Granite Block for Donal Hord’s Civic Center Figure to be Cut at Lakeside; Fountain Cost \$20,000,” *San Diego Sun*, July 11, 1937; and “U.S. Gift,” *San Diego Sun*, July 1, 1937, Historic Buildings-County Administration Building Papers, San Diego History Center.

¹⁷⁵ Edward T. Austin, “Donal Hord to Tell S.D. Water History in Granite Art Fountain for Civic Center,” *San Diego Union*, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

¹⁷⁶ While the majority of journalists eventually agreed that the fountain depicted an “American pioneer woman,” others still identified the figure as “an Indian woman,” “a Mexican woman with an olla,” and “a composite, typifying the races which have pioneered the Southwest” nearly two years after the Native Daughters filed their complaint. See “Hord Statue to be Placed this Week,” *San Diego Union*, June 4, 1939; “Hord’s Statue in Center: San Diego to Dedicate a Memorable Sculptural Contribution to America,” *North Shores Sentinel*, June 10, 1939; Thornton Boulter, “Statue Unveiled at Civic Center,” *San Diego Union*, June 11, 1939; “Dedication Set for Statue,” *San Diego Tribune*, June 9, 1939; “Donal Hord,” *Municipal Employee*, December 1939; “Famous Sculptor to Create Series of Relief Panels,” *Coronado Citizen*, n.d. [ca. 1939]; and “Modern,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1939. The above newspaper articles may be found in the Historic Buildings-County Administration Building Papers, San Diego History Center and the Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

merely reflected the hardy stock of early California settlers.¹⁷⁷ One newspaper summarily dramatized the public exchange as follows: “‘We don’t want an Aztec in front of the Center,’ [the Native Daughters] said. ‘We want a pioneer woman.’ ‘That’s what you have,’ said Fields.¹⁷⁸ Dorothy Hubert, the Anglo American woman who posed for the *Guardian of the Water* figure, also weighed in on the controversy. Defending her physiognomy, Hubert affirmed that Hord had made “a minute study” of her body, face, and hands. “People who say [the statue] in any way resembles an Aztec have never seen an Aztec!” she declared.¹⁷⁹

Hubert was right to challenge local officials’ knowledge of Aztec physiognomy. None of the San Diego City Council members professed to know whether Hord had intended the statue to represent a figure of Aztec origin. Even Councilman John Siebert, who two months earlier had reported to the press that Hord’s composition represented an allegorical water bearer, added fuel to the debate when he remarked that the Native Daughters’ complaint might have merit but that he couldn’t be certain “as he had never met [an Aztec].”¹⁸⁰

At least one city councilman defended the importance of Aztec history. Although Supervisor Harvey D. Hicks believed that the statue depicted a pioneer woman, he argued that an Aztec figure would be “even more commendable” for San

¹⁷⁷ “All Mistake! Central Figure Isn’t Aztec,” unidentified newspaper clipping [San Diego], August 31, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

¹⁷⁸ “Supervisors to Have Nude at Next Meeting,” unidentified newspaper clipping [San Diego] September 11, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

¹⁷⁹ “‘Never Was I an Aztec,’ Says Center Model,” unidentified newspaper clipping [San Diego], September 13, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

¹⁸⁰ “Kissable Aztec, Wansley Choice for Center,” *San Diego Tribune*, August 31, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

Diego County. He reminded his fellow councilmen that pre-Columbian civilizations deserved “our unbounded respect” as they had given “the North American continent an early culture that was far in advance of its day.”¹⁸¹ Hicks reiterated this stance a few weeks later:

I know it is my impression and I believe it is the preference of the board of supervisors, and I hope the committee in charge, that the statue radiates respect to pioneer women and the vital need for water. So long as it does not make any courtesy to a controversial subject, I think the proper end will have been obtained—particularly when water and its delivery [are] so prominently featured.¹⁸²

What the councilman meant by a “controversial” subject is unclear. However, given the terms of the debate, Hicks probably referred to race. He acknowledged the sensitivity of the issue by voicing his hope that the monument would exhibit “respect” for white pioneer women, but unlike his associates, Hicks did not disparage Hord’s mode of representation. Drawing a parallel between the daily tasks performed by nineteenth-century women of all races, Hicks observed that the pioneer chore of carrying water was “nothing more than squaws did for their buck associates, along with the service of collecting wood and building fire without matches.”¹⁸³ Whatever his sympathies, Hicks perpetuated the denigrating racial hierarchies of colonialism through his choice of language. His usage of the racial epithets “squaw” and “buck” to refer to Native Americans belies entrenched racial biases rooted in the imperialist ideologies of American westward expansion.

¹⁸¹ Hicks explained that ancient Mexican achievements in mathematics and astronomy “still have modern savants in wonderment.” See “Prefers Fittings to Statues for Civic Center,” *San Diego Tribune*, August 30, 1937; and “Aztec Woman’s Statue Defended by Supervisor,” *San Diego Union*, August 31, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

¹⁸² “Manhattan Girl is Statue Model; Water Stressed,” *San Diego Union*, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

Responding to Hicks's impassioned defense of Aztec civilization, the city council board instructed the councilman to write a letter to the Native Daughters, explaining that the statue was the a gift to the city from the WPA and that the board had no authority over the project.¹⁸⁴ Yet the controversy did not end there. Public dialogue about the statue persisted in the local press, no doubt due to the lighthearted tone and verbal jabs the city councilmen exchanged in conversation with one another. Councilman Raymond Wansley, for example, wanted to know if Hord's statue would have "kissable lips." His offhand remark was directed at Councilman Siebert, who recently had judged a kissable lips contest. Meanwhile, another councilman – perhaps annoyed with what he considered a frivolous debate – asked flippantly: "Why not decorate the place with a model of the Sutherland dam, if you want to depict water development?"¹⁸⁵

At the Base of the Matter: Imagery on the Drum and Basins

Although the debate surrounding the Civic Center fountain centered on the monumental granite female statue, the iconography included on the drum and basins allow for a more complete understanding of Hord's thematic design since the artist did, in fact, depict a dam. Originally conceived as six bronze plaques cast in bas-relief, the circular drum is divided into four horizontal bands illustrating the water

¹⁸⁴ "Hicks Oration Lost Forever," unidentified newspaper clipping [San Diego], August 31, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA. The tendency of government officials to deny responsibility and refute action is common to public art controversies. See Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster, eds., *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

¹⁸⁵ See "Kissable Aztec, Wansley Choice for Center," *San Diego Tribune*; "Aztec Statue Protest Filed Amid Blushes," *San Diego Union*, September 1, 1937; and "Aztec Woman's Statue Defended by Supervisor," *San Diego Union*, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

cycle from rainclouds and precipitation to field irrigation to water collection in the oceans and, finally, to evaporation and condensation which will start the process anew (figure 41). The top register depicts an unbroken chain of kneeling nude females pouring water from jars over a dam into a fruit orchard.¹⁸⁶ Evoking the “modern archaic” figural style of Art Deco, Hord simplifies the female body to a decorative pattern of sensuous lines.¹⁸⁷ The nudes, seated on their knees, bend their torsos completely forward such that their bodies become abstracted, undulating layers of swelling calves, round buttocks, and falling hair.

Visually, the “water bearers” on the drum serve as a unifying motif in Hord’s composition, linking the two-dimensional mosaic design to the three-dimensional figurative sculpture above. Rendered entirely nude, the kneeling women conflate classical allegory and associations of “primitive” non-Western culture. The women cradle the water jug in their arms and rest their head on the vessel’s ceramic surface, thereby enhancing the visual and conceptual linkage of the female body and the olla. For centuries, the image of the vessel has served as a symbol of fertility and motherhood. Connotations of fecundity and nurturance certainly correspond to a reading of this register as containing figurative portrayals of Nature; however, olla maidens also carried strong associations with indigenous cultures of Mexico and the American Southwest. According to anthropologist Barbara Babcock, the prevalence of photographs, postcards, paintings, and advertisements depicting native women

¹⁸⁶ Marg Loring, “20-Ton Granite Block for Donal Hord’s Civic Center Figure to be Cut at Lakeside; Fountain Cost \$20,000.” *San Diego Sun*, July 11, 1937. San Diego History Center.

¹⁸⁷ Penelope Curtis, “Deco Sculpture and Archaism,” in *Art Deco, 1910-1939*, eds. Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (Boston, New York, and London: Bulfinch Press in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2003), 52.

shaping or carrying an olla has transformed the scene into a synecdoche for Native American culture. She further asserts that this act of stereotypical portrayal demonstrates a prevailing colonialist perspective through which an entire civilization becomes feminized and objectified.¹⁸⁸ While Babcock centers her analysis on representations of the Pueblo, olla maidens also appeared frequently in early twentieth-century paintings of Mexico. Like their North American counterparts, the Mexican women routinely wear traditional garments and carry the large rounded vessels upon their shoulders and heads. For example, Henrietta Shore's painting *Women of Oaxaca* conveys both the prominence and romance of European-Americans' colonial gaze (figure 22). Expressive daubs of paint and visual rhythm present the women as decorative objects; their fetishized, faceless bodies become objects of desire, analogous to the black ollas beside them. In *Guardian of the Water*, Hord likewise employed simplified modeling, graceful line, and visual rhythm to underscore the archaic beauty of his olla maidens.

In the second highest register, Hord crafted a continuous dam upon which the nude "cloud" figures rest. Rendered with varying shades of gray tile and punctuated with vertical white shafts to resemble structural supports, the dam symbolizes human intellectual achievement and physical mastery over the forces of nature. The dam also represents agricultural living, since its ability to harness rainwater and deliver it via irrigation canals allows San Diego farmers and large agribusinesses to cultivate fertile orchards and fields.

¹⁸⁸ Barbara Babcock, "'A New Mexican Rebecca': Imaging Pueblo Women," *Journal of the Southwest* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 400-437.

The middle register depicts steeply rolling hills whose semi-arid landscape has been transformed by irrigation. Mature trees with full foliage form a decorative grid along the hillside, while diagonal lines denoting field rows and seedlings crisscross the warm earth. The orderly pattern of these stylized agricultural features flattens the picture plane and thus serves as an aesthetic framing device for the broad vertical column of water flowing from the dam. The swelling orchard hills form an inverted triangle whose dark gray surface is bisected by a cascade of curving parallel lines in white and blue. A pool of concentric semicircles collects at the base of the fall before tapering to a sinuous stream. The irrigation canal traces the edge of a diamond-shaped field and finally empties in the open sea, depicted in a narrow bottom register of repeated horizontal bands of mottled blue, white, and silver tile.

Two circular water basins surround the central drum (figure 42). Hord arranged the basins concentrically in order to evoke the idea of water rippling outward from a central point, “as though a pebble were dropped in the water.”¹⁸⁹ The tiled portrayal of water on the mosaic drum flows from the celestial water jugs through the semi-arid landscape, transforming the region into a citrus-growers’ paradise, to the open sea. A functioning water feature as well as a sculptural monument, *Guardian of the Water* features three sprays of arcing water at strategic points around the drum, immediately beneath the stylized bands of ocean waves where the irrigation canal meets the sea. The fountain water fills an inner basin, which measures 17 feet 6 inches in diameter, before flowing to an outer basin measuring 32 feet. Molded first in plaster and then cast in concrete, the façade of the

¹⁸⁹ “Dedication Set for Statue,” *San Diego Tribune*, June 9, 1939. San Diego History Center, San Diego, California.

inner basin contains a repeated design of stylized dolphins and skipjacks (figure 43). An earth-hued mosaic of sea snails adorns the upper surface of the outermost basin wall, suggesting that the water's journey spans the ocean and arrives at a distant shoreline, where the water cycle can begin anew.

On the surface, the fountain and base of *Guardian of the Water* support the publicized interpretation of the artwork as a celebration of water. The imagery of clouds, dams, orchards, and ocean relate a triumphant narrative of human ingenuity and economic success. The desert landscape appears lush and fertile, and the streams of water and schools of fish, abundant. However, it is also important to note what the artist has omitted from his decorative program. As the primary labor contingent for San Diego industry, Mexican workers toiled ceaselessly in factories and fields. The exploitation of Mexican laborers permitted Anglo-owned farms and businesses to expand. They worked nine to ten hours a day in agricultural fields and tuna canneries; they cleared land for farming; and they constructed new irrigation canals.¹⁹⁰ Understood in this context, the racial character of Hord's central figure held significant sway over the fountain as a whole. As a pioneer woman, the figure reinforced the prevailing social hierarchy because she stands, literally, on the backs of an exploited labor force whose sweat and tears – water -- have converted the desert wilderness into a pastoral paradise. Conversely, an “Aztec” woman carrying an olla would invert the social order, empowering Mexican laborers by highlighting and legitimizing their contributions to the city.

¹⁹⁰ Griswold del Castillo, 68-114.

It is difficult to discern Hord's opinion about the charges leveled against his art, since newspaper reportage always quoted the artist "on the record." Nevertheless, Hord's decision to "go native" during his travels to Mexico and his lifelong fascination with indigenous cultures suggest that the artist espoused a romanticized view of pre-Columbian civilization. In addition, he had already established a pattern of sculpting allegorical subjects in the guise of Native American peoples. For example, *Tropic Cycle* (1933) conveys the tropical weather system as a "fictitious Maya god of spring" who, partially disrobed, peels away a jaguar pelt to signify the turning of the season (figure 44).¹⁹¹ In light of this evidence, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that Hord in fact intended his "water bearer" to remain racially ambiguous so that the woman would transcend cultural associations and more fully embody an abstract concept.

Even so, Hord steadfastly maintained that his fountain depicted a pioneer woman throughout the controversy. Pointing to the supposed absurdity of the Native Daughters' claim, Hord expressed amusement over the debate. He explained to reporters that the woman who posed for his statue was Dorothy Hubert, a New Yorker of North Prussian ancestry who was now living in San Francisco. Although he confessed to giving nationality "very little thought" in preparing his design, he was careful to describe his sculpted figure as wearing pioneer attire:

The work is intended to be a tribute to water development and depicts a woman, garbed in the manner of our pioneer women, bearing a water olla on

¹⁹¹ Richard W. Amero, *Balboa Park History*, accessed April 9, 2012, <http://balboaparkhistory.net/chapter18.pdf>.

her shoulder. Water was the theme; racial characteristics were given almost no thought.¹⁹²

By identifying the style of costume as belonging to “our pioneer women,” Hord employed coded racial language that designated the allegorical figure as a white Anglo woman. His verbal assurances were not enough to quiet dissent, however. The debate raged on.

The Visual Typology of Race

When the controversy over *Guardian of the Water* still refused to die down after several weeks, WPA official Thyrsis Field organized a private preview for the San Diego City Council, the Board of Supervisors, the Native Daughters, and the press. Those in attendance scrutinized Hord’s preliminary nude study to ascertain the figure’s nationality (figure 45). After lengthy discussion, the city council dismissed the complaint by a vote of 8 to 1. Only Mayor Percy J. Benbough dissented in the vote, stating: “I cannot go back on the women.”¹⁹³

This decisive conclusion to the debate is revealing, since it points to a widespread belief in race typology or the visual classification of race. This anthropological approach focused on visibly observable physical traits such as head shape, skin color, hair, and body type to divide the human species into biological categories of race. Generally speaking, white races such as Anglo-Saxon and Nordic

¹⁹² “Manhattan Girl is Statue Model; Water Stressed,” *San Diego Union*, September 7, 1937, Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

¹⁹³ “Kissable Aztec, Wansley Choice for Center,” *San Diego Tribune*; “Supervisors to Have Nude at Next Meeting,” unidentified newspaper clipping [San Diego]; and “‘Never Was I an Aztec,’ Says Center Model,” unidentified newspaper clipping [San Diego], Donal Hord Papers, AAA.

types exhibited a perfectly round head, a vertical facial profile, and harmonious physical proportions. Nonwhite races had swaying contours and heavy traits, which varied by ethnic type.¹⁹⁴ Although some scientists began to discredit anthropometric measurements and visual analysis as a reliable method to discern race, the typological approach remained popular throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Eugenics, a scientific theory and method of genetic reform based on selective heredity, also reinforced notions of visual typing through published manuals and popular exposition displays featuring “better baby” contests.

American sculptor Malvina Hoffman’s “Races of Mankind” series exemplifies popularized notions of racial typology at this time. Composed of 104 bronze busts, heads, and life-sized figures, the series combined anthropometry, or fixed anatomical structures, and pathognomy, or mobile features of the body such as habitual behavior and facial expressions, in order to artistically depict racial “types” from around the globe. Between 1933 and 1969, Hoffman’s bronze statues formed an anthropological display in the Field Museum’s Hall of the Races of Mankind, where they functioned as three-dimensional models for public instruction on race (figure 46).

Hoffman’s typological approach to human biodiversity highlighted visual differences between diverse populations. Further, the installation of the exhibition hall posited a hierarchical understanding of these racial stocks with the white *Nordic Type* prominently displayed in a centrally located niche (figure 47). In addition to its

¹⁹⁴ Assumptions about the visibility of race meant that photographs and sculptures became valid tools for classification. In his analysis of nineteenth-century monuments, art historian Kirk Savage observed that the proliferation of public statuary after the Civil War produced and standardized “whiteness” through the visual contrast of classical (white) and grotesque (nonwhite) bodies. See Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 12.

privileged placement, the *Nordic Type* proclaims its racial superiority through external visual markers including its well-defined musculature, facial expression, and gesture. As Marianne Kinkel contends in her study of Hoffman's *Races of Mankind*, the *Nordic Type* conforms to the classical ideal of sculpture in its athletic proportions and contrapposto pose. In addition, the sculpture is the only instance in the display in which the figure appears fully nude and without ethnographic objects. Furthermore, Hoffman opted to depict the idealized male with his raised arms, a slight upward tilt of the head, arched eyebrows, and a tight-lipped expression of determination in order to convey the Nordic striving to transcend its present condition through intellectual mastery and physical control. As such, the *Nordic Type* signifies the ideal racial specimen and pinnacle of human progression.¹⁹⁵

Hoffman based her depiction of the *Maya Male* on photographic records she borrowed from the Eugenics Record Office (figure 48).¹⁹⁶ Unlike the *Nordic Type*, the Mayan bust portrait portrays a native adult male with coarsely textured hair that messily falls across his low forehead and crown. The figure furrows his brow and squints his almond-shaped eyes, thereby creating bulges, creases, and hollows that enhance the underlying eye socket. The man's nose exhibits a pronounced hook, a characteristically Mayan trait, and proportionally it is shorter and broader than the classically rendered visage in the *Nordic Type*. The man also manifests stereotypically native cheekbones, which protrude as pointed knots on each side of

¹⁹⁵ Marianne Kinkel, *Races of Mankind*, 96-98.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 58. An Aztec example was not exhibited in the Hall of the Races of Mankind. Kinkel explains that Hoffman's *Aztec Male*, which she based on Frederick Starr's 1902 photographic series *The Physical Character of the Indians of Southern Mexico*, did not meet approval of museum anthropologists. Notably, the sculpture encountered resistance not because of its asymmetrical facial traits, but rather because its skull did not showcase a stereotypically high domed shape (64).

the face just below the eyes. The face then tapers to a narrow chin, which supports pursed lips tugging at the muscles at each corner of the mouth. The man's overall expression conveys a sense of anxious contemplation.

Noting the differences between Hoffman's sculptures, museumgoers performed a lay version of visual typing that educated them on the phenotypic appearance of each race and that instilled confidence in their ability to discern race visually even beyond the museum walls. To facilitate this didactic process, the guidebook to the Hall of the Races of Mankind instructed visitors to superimpose an imaginary grid across the face to improve their assessment of essential racial traits. By comparing the proportional relations between anatomical features such as the nose, chin, and forehead, viewers could ostensibly read the racial character of each statue. As curator Henry Field explained: "In profile the face may project markedly forward from the line of the forehead, as among the Negroes (prognathism), in contrast to the normal projection among European peoples."¹⁹⁷

The Native Daughters and city officials probably employed a similar approach in their visual assessment of Hord's clay model. As LeRoy Robbins' documentary *Symphony in Stone: The Story of a Civic Fountain* (1939) shows, Hord based the central figure in *Guardian of the Water* on Anglo American model Dorothy Hubert (figures 49).¹⁹⁸ Hubert's body manifestly exhibits slender proportions, pale skin, blue

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 100. Rooted conceptually in nineteenth-century scientific theories of evolutionary cultural advancement, these ethnographic sculptures suggested morphological divisions that roughly equated the three primary stocks of black, white, and yellow races.

¹⁹⁸ Produced under the auspices of the WPA's Federal Art Project, *Symphony in Stone: The Story of a Civic Fountain* is a fourteen-minute film that narrates Hord's technical execution of *Guardian of the Water* from quarry to dedication ceremony. No mention is made of the controversy between the Native Daughters and the artist over the racial identity of the monument.

eyes, arched brows, and fine brown hair. Like Hoffman's *Nordic Type*, Hubert gazes upward in an expression of intellectual and spiritual aspiration. However, these recognizable Anglo traits become almost invisible in the context of Hord's statue. Draped in a *rebozo* and costumed in a pleated floor-length skirt, the woman's hair texture and body type are subsumed by Mexican clothing and a native water jug (figure 45). In addition, the uniformly white plaster surface conceals Hubert's pale skin and eye color. These conditions placed greater emphasis on Hord's rendering of the woman's facial profile and bone structure to denote her race, and the Native Daughters would have noticed immediately that the sculpture did not conform to the classical ideal of feminine beauty. Instead of a spherical head with a vertical profile and smooth, harmonious facial forms, Hord's maquette betrays coarser, naturalistic contours including sunken eyes, hollowed cheeks, stubby nose, and protruding jawline. Dramatic lighting in the photograph of Hord's scale model amplifies these ostensible physical deficiencies.

Hord's sculpted woman does not exhibit standardized phenotypic traits of indigenous Mexicans either. Indeed, a comparison of facial traits in *Guardian of the Water* to the more explicitly racialized visages in *Aztec* and *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* indicates that the Native Daughters did not find Hord's monument offensive because it resembled an "Aztec." Rather, the real issue was that Hord's figure did not adequately resemble contemporaneous pioneer mother monuments, whose classicized faces made their European-American heritage and moral piety visually self-evident. *Guardian of the Water* did not look sufficiently idealized and therefore did not read typologically as "white." For the Native Daughters, the racial

designation of “Aztec” was convenient shorthand for “not white” or, perhaps more accurately, “not us.”

San Diego residents would have thus understood the *Guardian* debate as an indictment of the "Aztec" figure's potentially deleterious effect on the prevailing social order. The Mission mythology of Southern California established a racial ordering that relegated Mexicans and other nonwhite populations to the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, and *Guardian of the Water*, representing a woman dressed in a *rebozo* and holding an olla, seemed to the Native Daughters to embody the racially and morally inferior “conquered” populations of the California borderlands. As part of this colonialist regional discourse, California Anglos assumed that nonwhite people, particularly Mexicans, lacked scruples. This derogatory impression gained in popularity as San Diego Anglos witnessed Tijuana, a Mexican town just south of the international border, emerge as a touristic playground for vice in the early decades of the twentieth century. Many of the recreational activities available to Anglo visitors in Tijuana were illegal in California. Although the establishments providing gambling, drinking, and prostitution were owned and operated by Anglo American entrepreneurs, Tijuana’s booming economy engendered many negative stereotypes about Mexicans in the minds of Anglo tourists. Moreover, California Anglos often generalized these attitudes to condemn Mexican Americans living in San Diego as well.¹⁹⁹ Considered in this context, even Councilman Wansley’s jibe about whether the sculpted figure possessed “kissable lips” carried entrenched cultural connotations regarding the purportedly sexualized nature of Mexican women, whose lax morality

¹⁹⁹ Griswold del Castillo, *Chicano San Diego*, 76-77.

served as a justification for the initial violence and subsequent marginalization of Mexican populations.²⁰⁰

By initiating a formal protest over the figure, the Native Daughters endeavored on behalf of the dominant Anglo culture to maintain “whiteness” in San Diego’s public spaces. Members of the patriotic pioneer organization maintained that the “Aztec” ethnicity of Hord’s statue posed a corrupting moral influence and undermined regional constructions of the past by portraying a group that traditionally had been relegated to the margins of official San Diego history. Yet, given the more pronounced ethnographic facial traits and explicit titling of Hord’s earlier Aztec-themed sculptures, what made *Aztec* and *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* permissible for public display and *Guardian of the Water* not? As apparent expressions of pan-Americanism, all three artworks contained cultural and historical connotations that contradicted the established racial schema of California Mission mythology. An examination of the spatial and social contexts reveals that the installation of *Guardian of the Water* in front of the Civic Center Building was the flash point of controversy.

Sighting/Siting San Diego History

As Rosalyn Deutsch has convincingly argued in her study of public art, the social and spatial siting of an artwork constitutes meaning through a reciprocal exchange of ideas with the public. Although this process invariably alters the identity

²⁰⁰ Venegas, “The Erotics of Racialization,” 63-89. During World War II, the Pachuca or female zoot suiter came to symbolize a combined threat of Malinche (the native mistress of Cortez) and “Victory” girls, whose promiscuity with soldiers ostensibly posed a threat to the health of the nation due to miscegenation and venereal disease. See Elizabeth R. Escobedo, “The Pachuca Panic: Sexual and Cultural Battlegrounds in World War II Los Angeles,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 38, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 133-156.

of both the artwork and its site, this change is most perceptible in instances where public art revises existing spatial contexts.²⁰¹ By contrast, a harmonious relationship between artwork and location often concealed underlying social relations and histories by mutually reinforcing a socially agreed-upon image of the city as a unified, well-ordered space. In San Diego, the world's fair and the university settings of *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* and *Aztec* mediated their celebratory depictions of nonwhite subjects. Although these sculptures evoked the discursive circumstances of pan-Americanism, the large-scale cultural appropriation of nonwhite civilizations at each venue placed the artworks in tension with racist Spanish heritage and colonialist fantasies. In each instance, Hord's Aztec-themed sculptures upheld civic fictions about local Mexican populations by situating ethnic portrayals at a safe geographical and temporal remove from contemporary San Diego viewers.

Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec appeared at the California-International Exposition fairgrounds where, in addition to Requa's hemispheric architectural vision, San Diego residents and tourists marveled over spectacular technological achievements, natural oddities, controversial entertainers, arcade games, and concessions. Some of the highlights at Balboa Park included the Firestone Singing Fountains, Robert Ripley's "Believe It or Not," a silver robot named Alpha, a midget village, and "Sensations," a light show that created the illusion of women ascending and descending on jets of water while other women swam around them.²⁰² The most

²⁰¹ Rosalyn Deutsche, "Public Art and Its Uses," in *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*, eds. Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 160.

²⁰² Richard Amero, "Exposition Exhibits," Richard Amero Collection, San Diego History Center, accessed November 1, 2011, www.sandiegohistory.org/calpac/35expoh3.htm.

popular exhibits, particularly among male visitors, were burlesque shows by fan dancer Sally Rand, a nudist colony called Zorro's Gardens, and the daily performance of Gold Gulch Gertie, who rode a horse through the fairgrounds a la Lady Godiva (figure 50).²⁰³ As these scintillating shows suggest, the world's fair functioned as an escapist theme park where visitors could find respite from the financial uncertainty and moral strictures of modern life.

Further, costumed "Mexican" and "Spanish" performers at the California-Pacific International Exposition reinforced the heritage fantasy of the Southwest. Strolling troubadours and pretty señoritas pinning boutonnieres on the lapels of male visitors traversed the fairgrounds in ethnic regalia (figure 51). These cultural reenactments allowed California Anglos to exert control over communal memory of the Southwest by animating a romanticized image of the Spanish colonial past. At the same time, the transparent artificiality of these performers reminded visitors that this colorful regional history was unrecoverable. Steeped in nostalgia, "the fantasy past thus affirmed the Anglo-American present."²⁰⁴ Hord's *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* added to this aura of living history at the fairgrounds. In addition to the physical placement of this statue in a reproduction Mexican patio, *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* stood surrounded by tropical palms, banana trees, and flowering plants suggesting the exotic allure of "primitive" Mexico.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Matt Bokovoy, "City Beautiful: Balboa Park and the San Diego Expositions," *Perspectives on History* 47, no. 7 (October 2009): 16.

²⁰⁴ Phoebe S. Kropp, "Citizens of the Past? Olvera Street and the Construction of Race and Memory in 1930s Los Angeles," *Radical History Review* 81 (Fall 2001): 42.

²⁰⁵ *California-Pacific International Exposition Official Guide: Souvenir Program and Picture Book* (San Diego, 1935), 19.

Similarly, the symbolic function of *Aztec* as a mascot at San Diego State College relegated it to an imaginary context in which Anglo students, faculty, and administration celebrated an irretrievable pre-Columbian past. Within four years of its dedication, Hord's sculpture provided San Diego coeds with the creative stimulus to devise a football halftime show starring "Monty Montezuma." Beginning in 1941, a male college student clad in a native dress and war paint chased four maidens from a smoking teepee.²⁰⁶ The conflation of Aztec and North American cultural traits in the students' appropriation of pre-Columbian civilization is problematic but telling. Their blatant disregard for cultural accuracy in the Aztec abode and costume belies an imperialist ideology in which all nonwhite populations belong to an inferior racial category. As such, the students' external imaginings of Aztec identity trumped historical realities in their discursive capacity to define pre-Hispanic Mexicans as distinctly *not* Anglo. Like the spectacular world's fair exhibits at Balboa Park, the mascot performance portrayed American natives as belonging to a savage, exotic civilization of a bygone era. During the performance, the mascot exhibited characteristically "primitive" carnal urges and aggressive behavior. The "native" women appeared equally sexualized in this charade as the objects of the Aztec emperor's lecherous pursuit. Moreover, the curls of smoke rising from the teepee call to mind stereotypical images of Native American peace pipes and smoke signals.

The San Diego State College mascot performance further buttressed notions of a homogeneous Anglo campus identity by ritualizing this cross-racial masquerade.

²⁰⁶ This halftime tradition was discontinued in 2003, when San Diego State University (formerly San Diego State College) abolished "Monty Montezuma" in favor of a more generically titled mascot, "Aztec Warrior." In 2010, the university administrators introduced "Zuma the Puma" as an alternative mascot presence at college football games.

As Phoebe S. Kropp has argued in regard to Olvera Street in Los Angeles, “the very act of putting on a costume implied that it could (and would) be taken off.”²⁰⁷ In other words, this prominent display of racial mimicry affirmed students’ whiteness first by transgressing cultural rules of behavior and dress in order to imitate another group and again later by reinscribing their Anglo identity through a reversion to their normal, civilized selves. In addition, this process of cultural appropriation permitted California Anglos, more broadly, to create, adopt, and understand Aztec history within a narrow interpretative framework that simultaneously celebrated the warrior spirit of San Diego State College and segregated it, consigning it to the mythic past of a supposedly now-vanished race.

To be sure, hemispheric interpretations of Mexican heritage found wide acceptance in Southern California during this period largely because Anglo Americans associated pan-Americanism with the fantasy and spectacle of football halftime shows and the world’s fair. However, when the imaginary construct of hemispheric citizenship threatened to override local norms of community identity and behavior, California Anglos jealously guarded the economic and social advantages their whiteness afforded them. The placement of *Guardian of the Water* imbued Hord’s fountain with the ability to formulate – or, it was feared, to reformulate – a new community identity.

Unlike *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec* and *Aztec*, which resided permanently at the fairgrounds and the university, respectively, *Guardian of the Water* occupied a public plaza in front of an official administrative building. While municipal plazas

²⁰⁷ Kropp, “Citizens of the Past?,” 43.

traditionally have served as metaphorical expressions of civic power, this particular plaza, located on the west side of the Civic Center, was especially meaningful to the civic imagination because it functioned as a symbolic gateway, linking the city to the ocean and, by extension, to the rest of the world. In addition, the Civic Center, envisioned as an anchor for San Diego's urban landscape, functioned as the primary site of governance for both the city and county of San Diego. At the groundbreaking ceremony, civic booster George W. Marston described the important status he envisioned the architectural complex would hold in the civic imagination:

This site, on the shore of the most southwestern harbor in the United States, fronts the Pacific Ocean and marks the point of contact between the western world and the orient. Here, on this historic spot, beautiful for situation and appealing to the imagination, will arise an impressive group of buildings, in fulfillment of our long time hope of a noble civic center. Here will be the seat of community government, the physical center of the laws and rights of our people. Therefore my fellow citizens, let us think of the dignity and surpassing value of this great enterprise.²⁰⁸

Designed by architect Sam Hamill, the art-deco style structure faced the San Diego Bay and included a large tower, decorative tile accents and domes (figure 52). Hamill constructed the building using reinforced concrete in hopes that it would be earthquake resistant. The red Mission tile roof, glazed Franciscan inlaid pottery tile, arched door and window openings and the bright white wall surfaces demonstrate Hamill's focus on retaining characteristic elements of Southwestern architecture in accordance with California's Mission mythology.

Notably, the Civic Center and its plaza remained under construction at the time of the *Guardian of the Water* controversy, meaning that the geographical and

²⁰⁸ "Center; Contact Point between Nation and Orient, says Marston," *San Diego Tribune*, December 5, 1935.

social parameters of the site had not yet established the space as exclusively “white.” The Native Daughters had expected Hord’s *Guardian of the Water* to complement Hamill’s architecture and thus reaffirm regional mythologies of white hegemony. Instead, the monument’s ostensible portrayal of an “Aztec” highlighted the deliberate historical erasure and contemporary subjugation of the city’s Mexican inhabitants. From this perspective, Hord’s sculpture threatened to expose the segregated urban space it occupied as an artificial and malleable social construct.

Although *Guardian of the Water* contained visual elements (*rebozo*, olla) typically used to delineate Mexican populations as distinct from dominant society, Hord’s portrayal of the woman defied derogatory categorization. Larger than life-size, the twelve-foot figure exudes nobility and monumentality through her position atop a pedestal and her fully erect posture. She hefts the substantial jug on her sturdy shoulders, and she serenely overlooks the city’s harbor and the sea beyond. Such a racialized embodiment of civic identity was incompatible with prevailing regional mythologies because it blurred social and spatial boundaries in a racially segregated city.²⁰⁹ Aztecs belonged to history, where they could remain safely cloaked in Spanish heritage fantasy, but modern Mexicans represented urban poverty, social inequality, and political disenfranchisement. As the controversy surrounding Hord’s statue demonstrates, San Diego Anglos wished to keep these injustices hidden and, by doing so, to keep Mexican residents in their “proper” place.

²⁰⁹ Setha Low, *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 155. Spatial boundaries mark a transition from one sphere of control to another. These delineations, whether conceptual or physical, provide logic for inclusion and exclusion in situations of political and social inequality.

Certainly, their primary concern was that Hord's fountain would ignite a social revolution by issuing an open challenge the racial status quo. Unfortunately, there is no record of Mexican residents' reaction to the Civic Center fountain or the controversy surrounding its central figure, but the growing social consciousness and community activism evident in Mexican American labor strikes, the Lemon Grove case, and mutual aid organizations suggest that San Diego's Mexican viewers would have gladly assumed cultural ownership of the monument's "Aztec" imagery. Indeed, at least one historian locates the ideological and artistic seeds of the Chicano Arts Movement in an Aztec-themed mural in the Mexican barrio of Logan Heights. Completed in 1934, the mural adorned the interior walls of the Aztec Brewing Company building until 1989, when the structure was demolished to make way for new construction. After moving the brewery equipment from the original plant in Mexicali, Mexico, brewery owners Edward Baker and Herbert Jaffee commissioned San Francisco artist José Moya del Pino to paint scenes of Mexico on the interior walls of the Logan Heights building. Imagery included a large Aztec calendar, scenes from the daily lives of the Mayans and Aztecs, and the flora and fauna of Mexico.²¹⁰ In the brewery's Rathskeller taproom, Moya executed a mural depicting an Aztec ritual of human sacrifice (figure 53). Hand-painted wooden rafter beams featuring pre-Columbian geometric motifs and framed history paintings of Aztec mythological and cultural events such as the founding of Aztec capital Tenochtitlan added further to the brewery's indigenous Mexican décor. Local neighborhood residents, who were predominantly of Mexican descent, probably frequented the bar and absorbed the

²¹⁰ Griswold del Castillo, *Chicano San Diego*, 94.

cultural lessons conveyed through its decorative program until 1953, when the company folded.²¹¹ Hord's monumental olla-bearing figure, stationed prominently before the seat of government, must also have been a source of communal *Mexicano* pride.

Conclusion

The San Diego debate over *Guardian of the Water* provides considerable insight into the racial tensions both driving and undermining U.S. efforts to build a hemispheric defense. The disconnect between the idealized national discourse surrounding pan-Americanism and the local desire to preserve existing paradigms of white dominance exposes the limits to which Americans were willing to go in pursuit of these diplomatic aims. Despite government claims to the contrary, many U.S. citizens were unwilling to relinquish their economic dominance and perceived racial superiority over Latin Americans, both at home and abroad. In Southern California, especially, the tenuous border politics of race meant that the prominent placement of a Mexican figure, even a sculpted one, posed a potential threat to Anglo hegemony.

By casting into sharper relief the discrepancy between U.S. claims of democracy and the reality of domestic social injustices, official narratives of pan-Americanism spurred activism among disenfranchised nonwhite populations in the

²¹¹ Armando Acuna, "History on Tap: Barrio Artists Work to Save Long-Forgotten Brewery Murals," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1988. Notably, Salvador Torres, chairman of the Chicano Park Arts Council Inc., expressed reverence for the brewery decorations upon their rediscovery in the 1980s. Remarking on the temple-like architecture and elaborate design program of the taproom, Torres suggested that the languishing murals had been "entombed, waiting to be rediscovered again by the very descendants of the Aztecs and Spanish *conquistadores* whose likenesses grace the rathskeller's walls" (Acuna, "History on Tap," March 13, 1988).

United States. Mexican Americans and African Americans, especially, capitalized on the inclusive wartime rhetoric of the Good Neighbor Policy to mobilize regional and national efforts aimed at attaining equal treatment and recognition as American citizens and patriots. In the following chapter, I address this minority response to persistent racial discrimination in the United States through a consideration of Charles White's mural *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* (1943).

Chapter 3

Hemispheric Heritage at Hampton University: Charles White's *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America*

On June 25, 1943, African American artist Charles White unveiled his mural *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* at Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia (figure 54). Measuring roughly twelve feet by eighteen feet, the mural is a complex mosaic of prominent African American men and women, past and present, whose military, political, intellectual, and artistic achievements had gone largely unnoticed by blacks and whites alike. Revolutionary War heroes Crispus Attucks and Peter Salem appear in the lower left corner and mark the beginning of a chronological arc tracing African American history from the colonial era to the twentieth century. White depicted Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, both of whom led armed revolts against slavery; abolitionist and statesman Frederick Douglass; Underground Railroad guides Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth; and runaway slave Peter Still, who waves a flag bearing his famous declaration “I will die before I submit to the yoke.”²¹² The lower right foreground records the recent accomplishments of Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute; scientist George Washington Carver; labor leader Ferdinand Smith; and performers Marian

²¹² This statement was actually the declaration of Peter's father Levin to his young master on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. See William Still, *The Underground Railroad: A Record Of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &C., Narrating the Hardships, Hair-Breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom, As Related by Themselves and Others, Or Witnessed by the Author; Together with Sketches of Some of the Largest Stockholders, and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisers, of the Road* (1872, repr., Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970).

Anderson, Paul Robeson, and Leadbelly. Hampton Institute lauded the work, calling it “an important documentary addition to the much-neglected role of the Negro in the common man’s struggle for full democracy.”²¹³

Since its presentation to the college more than sixty years ago, White’s mural continues to be recognized primarily for promoting public knowledge and pride in African American history.²¹⁴ Art critics, historians and scholars uniformly have interpreted the painting as a didactic corrective to the predominantly white historical narrative taught to schoolchildren. For example, art historian Stacy I. Morgan recently described the Hampton mural as a vehicle for social criticism, race pride, and interracial working-class coalition building.²¹⁵ The educative character of the Hampton mural certainly is one major component of its overall meaning and purpose.

Three years earlier, in 1940, White had completed his first public mural under the

²¹³ “Hampton Mural is Contribution to History,” Press Release, Charles White Papers, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, Virginia. The Hampton Institute’s press release shaped much of the newspaper coverage of White’s mural, since most authors characterized the painting as a protest against anti-democratic forces. See newspaper clippings from the *New York Times*; *Chicago Bee*; *New York City Amsterdam News*; *Raleigh Carolinian*; *Richmond News-Leader*; and *Daily Worker* (New York); Charles Wilbert White Papers, [ca. 1930]-1982, Box 1, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

²¹⁴ For example, a full-page color handout explicating the mural, produced by the Hampton University Art Museum, literally numbers the portrait figures and provides a brief statement identifying each person, as though the resulting list of men and women somehow encapsulates the full meaning of the picture. The university has reinforced this understanding of the mural as a visual textbook by adopting the image as a symbol of its African American Studies curriculum and even distributing reproductions of the mural in recruitment mailings to prospective students. Interestingly, Acacia Rachele Warwick convincingly argues that White designed his labor-themed mural as a critique of the university’s conservative ideologies. The black press in the 1920s and 1930s frequently criticized the college for its social and political conservatism. The administration subsequently appropriated the mural and its progressive message as a means to improve the school’s reputation. Admissions Mailing, Charles White Papers, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, Virginia; Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1975), 230-275; Acacia Rachele Warwick’s “Charles White’s *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* at Hampton University: Radical Politics and the Black University” (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1999), 29-43.

²¹⁵ Stacy I. Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature, 1930-1953* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

Works Progress Administration (WPA) for the Cleveland branch of the Chicago Public Library. *Five Great American Negroes* (1940) depicts Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Marian Anderson, and George Washington Carver (figure 55). The artist's decision to feature these same five individuals in the Hampton mural supports prevailing interpretations of the painting as a visual textbook advocating racial pride and social change.

Nonetheless, such readings overlook the colossal being looming over this densely populated image. Relatively little attention has been given to this background figure, despite its oddly cropped visage and enormous scale. Most scholars and critics have accepted that the figure represents "anti-democratic forces," although at least one art historian has characterized it as a protective "Coatlucue-like pre-Columbian deity."²¹⁶ This chapter deepens our current understanding of the Hampton mural by decoding this allegorical figure and, in so doing, bringing to light unexplored facets of White's socially-minded rendering of African American history and culture. Specifically, I situate the Hampton mural project within the international

²¹⁶ Lizetta LeFalle-Collins suggests that in White's mural "Coatlucue protects the plaid-shirted working man in the lower part of the composition as he presents his plans for building a new nation." Acacia Rachelle Warwick also describes the monumental figure as a "pre-Columbian deity with glowing eyes"; however, unlike LeFalle-Collins, she sees the figure as menacing. By contrast, several contemporary press releases described the mural as depicting "those heroes of Negro history who have fought against anti-democratic forces which are symbolized by the figure in the background clutching in a stranglehold laborers and machinery, the means of protection, and by the Colonial Tory in the lower left-hand corner, who destroys a bill by which the Provincial Congress in 1775 sought to outlaw the sale or importation of slaves in America." Even the didactic handout vaguely describes the figure as "clutching the machinery of an industrial society, symbol of opposition confronting African Americans' efforts to gain equality." It is unclear whether the "symbol of opposition" in this case is the industrial society or the figure, or whether they are the same. See Lizetta LeFalle-Collins, "Contribution of the American Negro to Democracy: A History Painting by Charles White," *The International Review of African American Art* 12, no. 4 (1995): 39-41; Lizetta LeFalle-Collins, "African American Modernists and the Mexican Muralist School," in *In the Spirit of Resistance: African American Modernists and the Mexican Muralist School*, ed. Lizetta LeFalle-Collins and Shifra M. Goldman (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1996), 37; Warwick, "Charles White," 4; and Charles White Papers, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, Virginia.

cultural and political context of the Good Neighbor era to demonstrate that White adapted ideas and imagery from the dominant discourse to fashion collective identity, or a sense of group consciousness, for viewers at the historically black college. Borrowing thematic and iconographic elements from ancient Teotihuacan and from muralist Diego Rivera, White employed the visual vocabulary of pan-Americanism to locate black achievements on this continent. He acknowledges this setting as both immensely challenging and fruitful for African Americans. He celebrates black Americans' past achievements, and he anticipates their future successes. But most importantly, he integrates black contributions into a larger metanarrative of pan-American unity and democracy. In so doing, White extended the rhetoric of pan-Americanism to assert that marginalized populations within the United States had the right to self-identify as "American."

Pan-Americanism, Patriotism, and Race Pride

White's three-page proposal for the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship outlined his plan for the Hampton mural. First, he would travel throughout the South painting the daily lives of African American farmers and laborers. Following this tour, he hoped to refine the skills he had gained under the WPA's mural division by studying at the National Academy of Art in Mexico City, where he would be able to "take advantage of the best mural techniques available to an artist." Finally, he would complete a large fresco at a southern university. He intended the theme of the mural, "the role of the Negro in the development of democracy in America," to counteract the "plague of distortions, stereotyped and superficial caricatures of 'uncles,' 'mammies,' and

‘pickaninnies’” that represented black subjects in Hollywood and in popular culture. Such images, he contended, prevented African Americans from realizing their integral role in the development of American culture, because they “dissociate the Negro’s real position from the total life of America, disparage his contributions to the life, and place him in an inferior category.”²¹⁷

White’s stated goal of overturning racial stereotypes echoes Harlem Renaissance leader Alain Locke’s earlier proclamation in his influential essay “Enter the New Negro”:

The day of “aunties,” “uncles” and “mammies” is . . . gone. Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on, and even the “Colonel” and “George” play barnstorm roles from which they escape with relief when the public spotlight is off. The popular melodrama has about played itself out, and it is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys and settle down to a realistic facing of facts.²¹⁸

Locke exhorted African Americans to celebrate their ancestral heritage and to embrace the “new psychology” and the “new spirit” he perceived in Harlem. He believed that art and literature would play a crucial role in the formation of the “New Negro” and “race pride,” and he directed artists to foreground black experience both in the American South and on the African continent.²¹⁹ His emphasis on the African

²¹⁷ Charles White, quoted in Andrea D. Barnwell, *Charles White*, The David C. Driskell Series of African American Art: Volume 1 (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2002), 29. See also William C. Haygood to Charles White, April 18, 1942, Charles Wilbur White Papers, Box 1, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

²¹⁸ Alain Locke, “Enter the New Negro,” *Survey Graphic* (March 1925): 631. For greater analysis of Locke’s optimism for a harmonious cultural pluralism, see Everett Helmut Akam, *Transnational America: Cultural Pluralists Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 139-166.

²¹⁹ Locke, “Enter the New Negro,” 631-634. Locke states: “Our greatest rehabilitation may possibly come through such channels, but for the present, more immediate hope rests in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective” (634). Anne Elizabeth Carroll provides greater analysis of racial identity construction during the Harlem Renaissance in her book *Word, Image, and the New Negro*:

continent reflected the popular currency of Pan-Africanism, the concept of a global black African diasporic community. Locke, like African American leaders W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, maintained that the growing awareness of race conflicts worldwide and the cooperation among peoples of African descent could hasten cultural change by “giving the Negro valuable group incentives, as well as increased prestige at home and abroad.”²²⁰

White, an avid reader who had spent much of his childhood in the public library and Chicago Art Institute, first became interested in African American history after reading Locke’s anthology *The New Negro* (1925) at the age of fourteen. “This book opened my eyes,” White later recalled, “because I . . . read of people that I’d never heard of before . . . I became aware the Negroes had a history in America.”²²¹ Stimulated by this early introduction to African American culture and history, he began to search for other books on the subject. White also grew frustrated with the conspicuous absence of African Americans in his high school curriculum. These

Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005).

²²⁰ Ibid, 634. Emerging transnational histories reveal that the appeal of Pan-Africanism persisted well into the 1930s and 1940s. For example, historian Frank A. Guridy has traced the transnational interactions between African Americans and Afro-Cubans during this period. In addition, W. E. B. Du Bois, Irene Diggs, and Mercer Cook worked to enhance coverage of race in other parts of the Americas in the journal *Phylon*. As evidence of these efforts, African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier contributed a report on race relations in Brazil to the journal in 1942. See W. E. B. Du Bois, “Pan Africa and New Racial Philosophy,” *Crisis* 40, no. 11 (November 1933): 247; E. Franklin Frazier, “Aspects of Race Relations in Brazil,” *Phylon* 3, no. 3 (1942): 249, 287-295; Ben F. Rogers, “William E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Pan-Africa,” *The Journal of Negro History* 40, no. 2 (April 1955): 158-160; Frank A. Guridy, “From Solidarity to Cross-Fertilization: Afro-Cuban/African American Interaction during the 1930s and 1940s,” *Radical History Review* 87 (Fall 2003): 19-48.

²²¹ Charles White, interview with Betty Lochrie Hoag, March 9, 1965, transcript, Oral History Interview, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

formative experiences had a tremendous impact on the young artist, leading him consistently to choose African American subjects for his public mural projects.²²²

Although he found Locke's writings profoundly moving, White's professed interest in Mexico and the American South for the Hampton mural suggests that he sought a particularly *American* strain of black expression.²²³ He eschewed indigenous African precedents in favor of modern Mexican muralism, which he blended with imagery from the so-called "black belt" culture of African American farmers, sharecroppers, and laborers in the southern United States.²²⁴ This inward refocus corresponds to the government-sanctioned doctrine of pan-Americanism. As discussed in previous chapters, the Roosevelt administration embraced a policy of hemispheric unity to combat the threat of European fascism before and during World War II. Cultural programs under the Good Neighbor Policy celebrated indigenous American cultural achievements, underscored the injustices of Spanish colonialism, and highlighted Latin Americans' revolutionary actions and modern republican spirit.

²²² White completed his first public mural, *Five Great American Negroes*, for the Cleveland branch of the Chicago Public Library in 1940. Later that year he executed two additional large-scale murals, *Technique to Serve the Struggle* and *A History of the Negro Press*. The latter mural was a private commission from the Negro Associated Press, to be exhibited at the Negro Exposition held that year in Chicago. In an interview for the National Urban League's magazine *Opportunity* in 1940, the artist explained his dedication to painting African American history: "I do know that I want to paint murals of Negro history. That subject has been sadly neglected. I feel a definite tie-up between all that has happened to the Negro in the past and the whole thinking and acting of the Negro now. Because the white man does not know the history of the Negro, he misunderstands him." Willard F. Motley, "Negro Art in Chicago," *Opportunity* 18, no. 1 (January 1940): 22.

²²³ White was not alone in this decision. With the crippling economic conditions of the Great Depression, many African American artists shifted their attention inwardly and began to rely more heavily on the American South for inspiration.

²²⁴ White's proposed travel throughout the American South would have fulfilled Locke's prescription that artists turn to Southern folkways for authentic black subject matter and modes of expression. However, the Communist Part of the United States of America (CPUSA) also advocated black vernacular forms as a means of African American self-determination, which would take the form of a separate state within the "black belt" region of the southern United States.

In their overlap with existing conceptions of United States history and thought, these feted cultural traits revised the ideological schema of American-ness to include citizens throughout the hemisphere, regardless of nation or race.

As historian Justin Hart has demonstrated, this multiracial configuration of American identity carried profound implications for domestic race relations during World War II. Because the U.S. government justified its participation in the conflict as a fight for freedom and cast German Nazism as the antithesis of American democracy, domestic racial prejudice threatened to damage U.S. relations with other nations, especially in Latin America. Secretary of State Sumner Welles acknowledged this foreign relations quandary when he observed that the unequal treatment of Latin Americans in the United States “is in a very definite sense a negation of the Good Neighbor Policy and is frequently cited as such in the other American republics.”²²⁵ Worse still, in his opinion, was the prospect of enemy propaganda utilizing American racism to expose the contradiction between President Roosevelt’s “four freedoms” and U.S. domestic policies on race.²²⁶

Germany and Japan, in fact, did make use of American racial discrimination in its campaign to discredit the United States in world affairs. For example, the German propaganda cartoon “Our Proposal” highlights the prevalence of racial

²²⁵ Hart, “Making Democracy Safe for the World,” 50.

²²⁶ In his State of the Union address on January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt articulated the necessity of war in order to secure the American ideal of individual liberties for people throughout the world. He identified four essential human freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Illustrator Norman Rockwell’s paintings celebrating these abstract ideals circulated widely in *The Saturday Evening Post* and later as promotional imagery for a U.S. war bond drive.

lynching in the United States (figure 56).²²⁷ The image depicts a white Army officer hoisting a noosed black man to hang from a tree limb. A crumpled white hood and robe symbolizing the Ku Klux Klan rests at the soldier's feet. Yellow and orange tones predominate, suggesting that the lynching tree and figures are cast in bronze, while the inscription "General Lynch" on the square base honors the actions of the white "hero." The caption underscores this point, explaining that the United States plans to erect a monument to American blacks. Although Nazis considered black people an inferior race – the heavily stereotyped physiognomy of the lynched man stands as evidence of this fact – the Third Reich called upon American racial violence to underscore the hypocrisy in U.S. condemnation of the Jewish holocaust.

To counter the effects of Axis propaganda, the U.S. federal government established information agencies to bolster American unity and wartime morale internationally and on the home front. As historian Frank Guridy has explained, these face-saving measures were also a response to growing anti-imperialism around the globe: "With the increasing influence of anticolonial movements in Asia and Africa, the U.S. government was forced to project a positive portrait of race relations within its own national borders so as to legitimize its sought-after position as a leader of the democratic world."²²⁸ Domestically, the Roosevelt administration worried that Nazi

²²⁷ This cartoon appeared in the German-language weekly magazine *Lustige Blätter* in 1943.

²²⁸ Guridy, 41. Transnational racial ties further complicated the federal government's public relations efforts with Latin American nations. The black press reported on Cuba's version of the Double V campaign and its accompanying antidiscrimination movement spearheaded by the interracial group of activists in the Communist Party, while Afro-Cubans drew inspiration from African American participation in the war effort in the United States. The U.S. federal government took note of transnational interactions among peoples of African descent. During World War II, the government produced propaganda targeting black citizens of both countries.

messages of anti-Americanism would appeal to disenfranchised racial minorities, thereby creating ideological inroads for enemy subterfuge.

In propaganda materials targeting Latin American citizens, the United States employed persuasive strategies similar to those directed at white Americans. War posters, for example, strove to appeal to Latin American viewers' commitment to democracy and sense of American-ness by evoking parallel histories of colonial resistance as evidence of shared hemispheric identity and values. Because the U.S. government justified American entry into the Second World War as a fight for democracy, the American Revolution appeared often in propaganda posters and other materials supporting the war. Bernard Perlan's poster *1778-1943. Americans Will Always Fight for Liberty*, completed under the U.S. Office of War Information (OWI), juxtaposes soldiers from the American Revolutionary War and World War II servicemen to assert a continuity of democratic ideology from this colonial struggle to the present conflict (figure 57). Similar ideals applied to Latin Americans, since they too had fought European tyranny to obtain their national independence. Addressing the National Convention of the Daughters of the American Revolution in April 1939, Ben M. Cherrington of the U.S. Division of Cultural Relations reminded his audience that "each of us in this Western World has paid a dear price for liberty, but if need be we are ready to pay that price again to maintain it."²²⁹

Leon Helguera's OWI poster *Americans All* (1943) exemplifies the persuasive aims of this inclusive wartime rhetoric (figure 58). The image shows two arms, one holding Uncle Sam's top hat and one holding a traditional Mexican sombrero,

²²⁹ Ben M. Cherrington, "Cultural Ties that Bind in the Relations of the American Nations," *The Modern Language Journal* 24, no. 6 (March 1940): 404.

extended side-by-side in a friendly salute. The red, white, and blue suit jacket and top hat of Uncle Sam form a sharp contrast to the earthy brown leather coat and Mexican sombrero of the Latin American, yet, remarkably, the poster proclaims both to be legitimate examples of American-ness for their shared love of freedom. Intended for domestic American viewers, the poster appealed to Mexican American and Anglo American citizens, asking both groups to set aside racial and cultural prejudices to form a united front against European fascism. The bilingual inscription in English and Spanish reads: “Americans All! Let’s Fight for Victory!”

The United States government employed similarly themed posters and films to galvanize African American support for the war effort. For example, the OWI issued the poster *United We Win* (1942) to advance interracial solidarity in war manufacturing plants (figure 59). The poster features a photographic image of two employees, a black man and a white man, cooperating to build defense materials at a Republican Aircraft Corporation plant. An American flag dominates the upper half of the composition, while the patriotic motto “United We Win” appears in a large font at the bottom. As historian Sarah Schleuning has observed, the appropriation of Harold Liberman’s photograph imbued the poster with a sense of documentary “truth” that presumably strengthened the public’s perception of and support for the war.²³⁰ In actuality, U.S. segregation and racism prohibited African Americans from obtaining full citizenship and the right to vote.

²³⁰ Sarah Schleuning, “Manipulating the Masses: Design Strategies in Wartime Propaganda,” in *Weapons of Mass Dissemination: The Propaganda of War* (Miami Beach, FL: The Wolfsonian-Florida International University, 2004), 25.

To be sure, the federal government showed greater interest in disseminating the perception of interracial equality and cooperation than in instituting actual social reform – a distinction that did not go unnoticed among racial activists in the United States. Despite conscripting African Americans into military service, the federal government restricted black soldiers to segregated units, the most famous being the all-black Army Air Corps 99th Pursuit Squadron trained at the Tuskegee Institute. Blacks also faced discrimination in shipbuilding and aircraft factories. War industry jobs went to unemployed white men first, which often prevented qualified black persons from working in careers suited to their university training. As a result, African Americans did not enter the war industry workforce in large numbers until 1943, when the labor shortage became critical. Even then, black Americans encountered resentment from white employees, who rioted and staged “hate strikes” in protest.²³¹ Continued discrimination practices and the proliferation of racial violence exposed white Americans’ trenchant prejudices. Despite wartime exigencies of national unity and patriotism, many citizens fought viciously to maintain the American status quo of white dominance. The Roosevelt administration, fearful that civil unrest would invite enemy subversion, defanged many of its reform measures by preserving local precedents.²³² In so doing, the United States consigned nonwhite

²³¹ Ibid, 25; and Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), xvi-xvii, 37, 67.

²³² For example, Emilio Zamora argues that the Fair Employment Practice Committee privileged wartime demands over hiring reform. As he puts it, the agency “promoted racial understanding and goodwill as long as such initiatives did not interfere with the high production levels that the war effort required.” Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2009), 3.

citizens to persistent injustice by publicly cloaking the national citizenry in a unified wartime ideal.

Axis countries were not alone in pointing out the discrepancies of U.S. wartime rhetoric and domestic inequality. Black Americans, in particular, felt conflicted about participating in a war the U.S. government justified as a fight for freedom and democracy while they still lacked equal treatment and full rights of citizenship at home.²³³ For example, African American poet Waring Cuney called attention to hypocrisies of the United States war effort in “Headline Blues” (1942). Recounting instances of domestic discrimination and racial violence culled from newspaper reports, Cuney remarks, “Turn to the Negro papers see what they have to say / You’d think they were talking about Hitler’s Germany not the U.S.A.”²³⁴

African Americans patently rejected the accommodationist philosophy black leaders had espoused during World War I. Two decades earlier, African Americans had suspended what W. E. B. Du Bois called their “special grievances” for the sake of national unity.²³⁵ The humiliating treatment of black soldiers in military service and ensuing racial violence upon their return home proved that unconditional alignment with the national cause had failed to secure African Americans even minimal social improvements. With this bitter lesson still fresh in their collective memory, black

²³³ See Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

²³⁴ Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*, 36.

²³⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Closing Ranks,” *Crisis*, 1918. See also Mark Ellis, “‘Closing Ranks’ and ‘Seeking Honors’: W. E. B. Du Bois in World War I,” *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (June 1992): 96-124.

citizens in the 1940s resolved to continue their efforts for racial equality even in wartime.

As historian Lawrence R. Samuel succinctly put it: “With German Nazism cast in government propaganda as the antithesis to the American founding principles of pluralistic democracy, black leaders saw an opportunity to convincingly demonstrate the contradictions between America’s rhetorical democracy and African American experience.”²³⁶ Black Americans also utilized the plight of other racial minorities, especially Mexican Americans, to advance their cause. In 1942, African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier criticized the domestic limitations of the Good Neighbor Policy, observing that “[d]espite the improvement in our relations with Mexico and the good-neighbor policy, Mexicans are still the subject of much discrimination, requiring the attention of the President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice.”²³⁷

In February 1942, the African American newspaper *Pittsburgh Courier* launched the “Double V” campaign to express black citizens’ qualified support for the Second World War. As the name of the movement suggests, the “Double V” advanced a dual agenda of defeating fascism abroad and racism at home. The first “v” referred to the wartime axiom “V for Victory,” which had originated in Europe

²³⁶ Lawrence R. Samuel, “Dreaming in Black and White: African-American Patriotism and World War II Bonds,” in *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism*, ed. John Bodnar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 197.

²³⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, “Ethnic and Minority Groups in Wartime, with Special Reference to the Negro,” *American Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 3 (November 1942): 372. Mexican Americans likewise called attention to government hypocrisy during the Second World War in hopes of securing greater civil rights. José de la Luz Saenz, a prominent Mexican American leader in Texas and founder of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), wrote numerous newspaper articles reminding his Mexican American readers that the avowed democratic principles of the war effort justified their call for equal rights. See Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas*, 17.

the previous year as a rallying emblem against Nazi Germany. While the first “v” affirmed African American patriotism in the war effort, the second “v” announced a domestic platform calling for equal rights and an end to racial violence. To appeal to readers’ sense of nationalism and to underscore the projected rewards of a double victory, the newspaper proclaimed, “WE HAVE A STAKE IN THIS FIGHT....WE ARE AMERICANS TOO!” (emphasis in the original).²³⁸

The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America echoes the sentiment of black leaders and black newspapers during World War II. White, who had experienced racial violence firsthand in the American South, crafted a sophisticated mural advocating both national solidarity and racial advancement.²³⁹ As part of this endeavor, White appropriated the U.S. government’s inclusive wartime rhetoric to align African American claims for equal rights with wartime efforts to build national and inter-American racial accord. While the notion of pan-American heritage circulated primarily in the context of inter-American foreign relations and so referred principally to United States and Latin American citizens of European and Native American descent, the symbolic rather than hereditary nature of cultural lineage as

²³⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 14, 1942, quoted in Wyman, 2010. Paul Robeson’s hit song “Ballad for Americans” (1939) carried a similar message. Invoking a sequence of historical events, the lyrics draw an inclusive image of America: “I’m just an Irish American, Negro, Jewish American, Italian, French and English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Polish, Scotch, Hungarian, Litwak, Swedish, Finnish, Canadian, Greek and Turk and Czech and double-check American – I was baptized Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Atheist, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist, Mormon, Quaker, Christian Scientist – and lots more.”

²³⁹ A group of white men severely beat him for entering a segregated restaurant in New Orleans, and a white streetcar conductor once pulled a gun on him while ordering him to the rear of the car in Virginia. Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*, 72.

promoted under the Good Neighbor Policy invited nonwhite peoples to lay claim to pre-Columbian and Latin American materials as part of their patrimony as well.²⁴⁰

Pre-Columbian Art in American Culture

White would have seen pre-Columbian art in popular press coverage of archaeological excavations. The nation's recent interest in Latin America brought Mesoamerican archaeological research and exploration to a new height in the decades before World War II. Since European nations struggled economically after World War I, the United States was the only nation in a position to undertake major archaeological projects in Mexico. With *National Geographic* and city newspapers like the *New York Times* reporting on archaeological activities and discoveries in Mexico, the public gained greater exposure to images of pre-Columbian objects. Adding to black Americans' interest in archaeology was the 1922 discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb, which provided evidence of an esteemed African past and became a source of race pride.²⁴¹ Furthermore, the archaeological discoveries of

²⁴⁰ Whether disenfranchised groups adopted this mythic past voluntarily, as Charles White did, or encountered it as a tool for assimilation, the appropriation of pre-Columbian history in the pan-American imaginary knit together diverse populations as members of a single hemispheric culture. For example, the curator of ethnology at the Brooklyn Museum, Herbert Spinden, responded to the influx of Eastern European immigrants to the United States by developing educational outreach programs that employed the museum's Native American collection as "an instrument for the socialization and assimilation of its large . . . immigrant constituency." Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art in the Post-Columbian World*, 42.

²⁴¹ Among the notable cultural leaders celebrating this event was Alain Locke, who considered ancient Egyptian culture a viable alternative to Classical civilization for African American artists. He was present at the reopening of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1924. Upon his return to the United States, he lectured widely about the cultural advancement of ancient Egyptian civilization. See Alain Locke, "Impressions of Luxor," *Howard Alumnus* 11 (May 1924): 74-78; and Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 145-147, 210.

several Olmec Colossal Heads during the 1920s and 1930s may have renewed African American interest in Mexican scholar José Malgar's Afrocentrist reading of these objects.²⁴² Matthew Stirling's 1938 discovery of Olmec Colossal Heads, for example, received prominent coverage in *National Geographic*, while Franz Blom's and Oliver La Farge's earlier "Tulane Expedition to Middle America" resulted in a two-volume book called *Tribes and Temples*. If Olmec origins were indeed African, as Malgar contended, pre-Columbian art and culture provided black Americans with an indigenous heritage and visual vocabulary that was both African and American.

White also gained exposure to Mexican art through his African American colleagues. In 1939, Sargent Johnson created two large, cast-stone Incas for the "Court of Pacifica" at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco (figure 60). Depicted in these eight-foot-tall sculptures are two figures sitting astride llamas; one plays the panpipe, an ancient South American musical instrument, while the other wears large ear spools, a marker of elite status in many ancient American

²⁴² When Malgar unearthed the first Olmec Colossal Head at Tres Zapotes in 1862, he interpreted the thick lips and wide flat nose as African and concluded that "the Gulf Coast of Mexico had once witnessed colonization from Ethiopia." Ethiopia held special significance for African Americans, since the country had never been colonized. For this reason, Malgar's assertion offered a potential solution to W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness, which he defined in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903): "One ever feels his two-ness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled stirrings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." In other words, African Americans possessed a fragmented identity that pointed to the inherent contradiction of American social ideals (democracy and individualism) and institutionalized racism. Because they often perceived themselves through the racist lens of white dominant society, black Americans struggled to reconcile their individual identity and the national body politic. Malgar's theory, then, provided a mythic past upon which black Americans could invent a racialized version of American-ness. By dismantling racist assumptions of blacks as "other," this imaginary construct ostensibly would help to heal the psychic fissure of black consciousness and permit individuals to develop a stronger, truer sense of self. Such Afrocentric readings of Olmec civilization have since been discredited. See Gabriel Haslip-Viera, Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, and Warren Barbour, "Robbing Native American Cultures: Van Sertima's Afrocentricity and the Olmecs," *Current Anthropology* 38, no. 3 (June 1997): 419-441.

cultures.²⁴³ In 1945, Johnson made the first of many trips to Oaxaca and southern Mexico, where he became particularly interested in the local arts of the Zapotec Indians and the archaeological sites of Monté Alban and Mitla.

Elizabeth Catlett, White's wife when he painted the Hampton mural, also maintained a great interest in Mexican art. She particularly admired Mexican modern artists, including Diego Rivera and Miguel Covarrubias. While still an undergraduate student at Howard University, Catlett received a commission to paint a mural in the basement recreation room of a prominent Washingtonian. For the subject of her mural Catlett chose images from Covarrubias's *Caricatures of Harlem*, a compilation of drawings from his years in New York during the Harlem Renaissance.²⁴⁴

Significantly, Catlett shared her husband's desire to travel to Mexico. Three years after White completed the Hampton mural, she received a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship and chose to study abroad in Mexico. While there, Catlett studied sculpture with Francisco Zuniga, who taught her the traditional hollow ceramic technique of the pre-Columbian period.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ White could have read about these sculptures in *Art Digest*. This special issue of the magazine, dedicated to the San Francisco world's fair, included a photograph of the Court of the Pacifica. The African American magazine *Opportunity* also published a story on Sargent Johnson and his Incan-themed sculptures. See "Murals and Sculptures at Golden Gate," *Art Digest*, Golden Gate Special Number (March 15, 1939): 43; and Verna Arvey, "Sargent Johnson," *Opportunity* 17 (July 1939): 213-214.

²⁴⁴ Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 16.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67. White joined his wife in Mexico and the two lived in the same house as Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros for nearly a year (White, Interview with Betty Lochrie Hoag, March 9, 1965, Oral History Interviews, Archives of American Art). Later Catlett would relocate permanently to Mexico to be with her second husband, Mexican graphic artist Francisco "Pancho" Mora.

Although White drew inspiration for the Hampton mural from multiple sources, the public works of Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who spent much of the 1930's working in the United States, seem to have been particularly influential to his thinking. White felt an affinity with the Mexican muralists in their commitment to public art, their desire for social change, and their search for indigenous roots. He also found their radical politics enthralling and appreciated their sympathetic depictions of African Americans. Like other African American artists, including Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff, White emulated the muralists' stylistic and thematic strategies for promoting social change and cultural pride.

Social Activism and the Mexican Muralists

Born in Chicago in 1918, White was too young to participate in the Harlem Renaissance; however, a subsequent florescence of African American creativity in literature, art, music, social science, and journalism had emerged in the South Side of Chicago by the time he entered adulthood. Unlike the New Negro Movement in Harlem, the so-called "Chicago Renaissance" emerged from two distinct social and economic conditions: the "great migration" of Southern blacks to Chicago and the Great Depression. As a result, the artists and intellectuals of the Chicago Renaissance, including White, professed the desire to create a more just society and often embraced radical political ideologies like Communism as a means to do so.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*, 1-41; William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Unlike other political organizations, the Communist Party actively spoke out against “Jim Crowism,” segregation, discrimination, and lynching, which it viewed as “part and parcel of capitalist exploitation” to keep African Americans “chained to the wheel of profit.”²⁴⁷ The Party’s promise of complete racial equality by uniting workers of all races was particularly appealing to disenfranchised African Americans during the Depression. As P.B. Young, editor of the African American *Norfolk Journal and Guide* observed:

The Negro is patriotic and loyal, if he is anything, and Communism has gained adherents, and will continue to do so, only because traditional American conditions with their race prejudice, economic semi-enslavement, lack of equal opportunity, and discrimination of all sorts have made the Negro susceptible to any doctrine which promises a brighter future, where race and color will not be a penalty.²⁴⁸

Although there is no documentation of his membership in the Communist Party, White certainly sympathized with the group’s aims. In 1934, White contributed an article describing the oppressive forces of racism for a booklet designed to recruit young Communists. He also participated in a three-day strike to protest the unfair treatment toward black WPA artists, and he produced numerous illustrations for Communist publications like the *Daily Worker*, *Freedom*, and the *New Masses*.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Warwick, “Charles White,” 15. See also Helen Langa, *Radical Art: Printmaking and the Left in 1930s New York* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2004); Marlene Park, “Lynching and Anti-Lynching: Art and Politics in the 1930s,” in *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere*, ed. Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Linden, and Jonathan Weinberg (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 155-180.

²⁴⁸ P.B. Young, “Negro Editors on Communism (1932),” in *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States: 1910-1932*, ed. Herbert Aptheker, 4 vols. (1973, repr., New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1990), 3:701.

²⁴⁹ LeFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 85, note 216. White’s article, “Free Angelo Herndon,” addressed the unfair arrest of Herndon, a black Communist worker and organizer who was sentenced to eighteen to twenty years in prison for “insurrection.” Herndon had organized black and white unemployed people in Atlanta. A campaign of appeals won his release in 1936. For more on White’s art activities and their connection to the Communist Party, see Andrew Hemingway,

White found in the works of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros models for promoting cultural pride and social change. Like their African American counterparts, the Mexican muralists hoped for a world free from class oppression and racial injustice. In 1924, Siqueiros, Rivera, Orozco, and five other artists published in *El Machete* a manifesto, which stated: “The art of the Mexican people . . . is great because it surges from the people; it is collective, and our own aesthetic aim is to socialize the artistic expression, to destroy bourgeois individualism.” The artists also denounced “so-called easel art” as aristocratic and expressed their preference for “the monumental expression of art,” reasoning that “such art is public property.”²⁵⁰

Mexican muralists’ examination of local traditions and celebration of national heroes also provided an important model for black artists seeking to achieve in their art a “racial expression” of their heritage. In 1921, Siqueiros wrote:

An essential part of strengthening our art is bringing back *lost values* into painting and sculpture and at the same time endowing them with *new values* Understanding the wonderful human resources in ‘black art’ or ‘primitive art’ in general, has given the visual arts a clarity and depth lost four centuries ago. Let us, for our part, go back to the work of the ancient inhabitants of our valleys, the Indian painters and sculptors²⁵¹

Alain Locke likewise exhorted black artists in the United States to turn to African arts and to southern folk expressions for authentic black subject matter. The Mexican public art movement of the 1920s and 1930s paralleled the Harlem Renaissance in its

Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 260-263; and Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*, 23-24; 42-72.

²⁵⁰ David Alfaro Siqueiros, ed., “Manifesto of the Union of Mexican Workers, Technicians, Painters and Sculptors,” *El Machete* (June 1924), quoted in LeFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 45.

²⁵¹ David Alfaro Siqueiros, “Vida Americana,” Barcelona, May 1921, quoted in LeFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 68.

belief that art, by providing visual expressions of shared values and cultural heritage, would play a crucial role in social transformation and the formation of a collective identity. Diego Rivera, for example, hoped that his murals would help to make his country's youth familiar with "figures of great thought, and [in] knowing them all, be led to cultivate the holy attitude of veneration."²⁵²

White first learned about the Mexican muralists as a teenager through his association with fellow Arts and Crafts Guild artist Lawrence B. Jones, who had traveled to Mexico and met Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros.²⁵³ The young artist gained further exposure to the Mexican modernists during his tenure with the WPA. Although White initially had joined the easel division of the Federal Arts Project, he switched to the mural division after only a few months, preferring the public accessibility of mural paintings over the limited exposure of easel paintings, which hung "in museums and galleries where they are apt to be seen only by the privileged few."²⁵⁴ In the mural division, White assisted Mitchell Siporin and Edward Millman, who had worked on murals with Orozco and Rivera. Like Rivera, White hoped that his murals depicting African American martyrs and heroes would uplift and teach black students to be proud of their cultural heritage. Early in his career, White proclaimed, "Paint is the only weapon [that] I have with which to fight what I resent.

²⁵² M. Akua McDaniel, "Reexamining Hale Woodruff's Talladega College and Atlanta University Murals," *The International Review of African American Art* 12 no. 4 (1995): 16.

²⁵³ LaFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 55.

²⁵⁴ Press Release, Charles White Papers, Hampton University Archives, Hampton Virginia.

If I could write I would write about it. If I could talk I would talk about it. Since I paint, I must paint about it.”²⁵⁵

The Communist leanings of Siqueiros, Orozco, and Rivera further earned them the admiration of black artists, since these beliefs prompted each to incorporate positive representations of African Americans into his mural compositions in the United States. In 1930, Orozco executed for the New School for Social Research in New York *The Table of Brotherhood* mural, in which allegories of world revolution led by Gandhi, Lenin, and others, flank an imaginary gathering of the “universal brotherhood,” comprised of people of all races and “presided over by a black.”²⁵⁶ Rivera also included African American workers as part of a brotherhood of workers in his murals at Rockefeller Center and in Detroit. The Detroit murals also feature four allegorical figures, each of whom represents one component of educator Jose Vasconcelos’ “cosmic race,” a blending of the Caucasian, Asian, Negro, and Indian “races” of the Americas (figure 61).²⁵⁷ A few years later, Siqueiros created a pair of

²⁵⁵ Willard F. Motley, “Negro Art in Chicago,” *Opportunity* 18, no. 1 (January 1940): 22.

²⁵⁶ José Clemente Orozco, quoted in LeFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance: African American Modernists and the Mexican Muralist School*, 11. In his autobiography, Orozco recalled: “The black presiding and the portrait of Lenin were the reason that the New School lost the contribution of several of its richest donors, a serious matter, since the institution maintained itself exclusively by the monetary aid of its friends. On the other hand, it earned other, more numerous, feelings of sympathy.”

²⁵⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of the Detroit murals, see Linda Bank Downs, *Diego Rivera: The Detroit Industry Murals* (New York and London: The Detroit Institute of Arts in association with W.W. Norton & Co., 1999); Anthony W. Lee, “Workers and Painters: Social Realism and Race in Diego Rivera’s Detroit Murals,” in *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere*, ed. Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Linden, and Jonathan Weinberg (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 201-222.

large, paint-enhanced photographic portraits in support of the 1936 U.S. Communist Party presidential candidates Earl Browder and James Ford, a black man.²⁵⁸

The racism many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans experienced in the United States provided another way in which the social activism of the Mexican muralists resonated with African Americans. During the so-called “Zoot-Suit Riots” of 1943, white civilians and servicemen assaulted Mexican American and African American youths in Los Angeles by beating them, stripping off their clothes, and cutting their hair.²⁵⁹ *The Crisis*, the organ of the National Association of American Colored People (NAACP), noted the glaring racial injustice. That July the magazine published an eyewitness editorial, titled “Zoot Riots are Race Riots.” In a pronouncement of sympathy and interracial solidarity, the author concludes that “the South has won Los Angeles.”²⁶⁰

Mexican Art as Inspiration

Although White’s grant proposal to study in Mexico indicates his admiration of all the muralists, the artist probably harbored hopes of studying with Diego Rivera, in particular. White would have read about Rivera’s revolutionary politics in journals like the *New Masses*. A Marxist Communist, Rivera’s political views garnered

²⁵⁸ LeFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 73-75.

²⁵⁹ The Zoot Suit riots are also known as the serviceman riots. For more information regarding the racial tensions in the United States from 1933 to 1945, refer to Holly Barnet-Sanchez, “The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art in the United States: Appropriation and Transformations of Heritage, 1933-1945,” in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone, 177-207 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993).

²⁶⁰ Chester B. Himes, “Zoot Riots are Race Riots,” *The Crisis* (July 1943): 222.

attention in the papers as early as 1931, when the press expressed outrage at a Communist foreigner being chosen over a local American artist for the Pacific Stock Exchange Mural.²⁶¹ Two years later, Rivera's depiction of Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin in his Rockefeller Center mural again caused a furor in the papers. Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, the patron of the mural, immediately asked Rivera to stop painting the mural and in February 1934 had the mural destroyed. Supporters and detractors both filled the newspapers debating issues of censorship and patriotism. Reproductions of Mexican murals circulated widely in United States publications, as did cartoons lampooning the scandals their works caused. In 1933, *Forbes Magazine* published a caricature by Miguel Covarrubias imaginatively depicting the dramatic moment when Rockefeller, having snuck into the RCA Building with a flashlight, discovered the reviled portrait of Lenin in his commissioned mural (figure 62).

Two of Rivera's murals were especially important to White: *Allegory of California*, completed in 1931 for the Pacific Stock Exchange Luncheon Club of San Francisco, and *Pan American Unity*, commissioned for the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1940 (figures 63 and 64). In *Allegory of California*, Rivera depicts a monumental woman wearing a necklace of golden wheat. Her left hand offers ripe fruits, while her right arm cradles important historical figures, including pioneer James Marshall and horticulturist Luther Burbank. Although the woman holds the rich agricultural and mineral resources of the state, she is surrounded by industrial oil derricks, ocean liners, refineries, and machines. According to Rivera, the

²⁶¹ For a more complete examination of Rivera's politics, see Anthony W. Lee, *Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and San Francisco's Public Murals* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

monumental figure represents the state personified: “California . . . is symbolized by a large figure—a woman of tanned skin and opulent curves modeled after the rolling hills of the landscape, with one hand offering the subsoil to the miners, and with the other offering the ripe fruits of the earth.”²⁶²

The central panel of the *Pan American Unity* mural also features a large figure. Based on a pre-Columbian sculpture of an Aztec deity, the figure fuses Mexican antiquity with United States industry (figure 64). On the left side of the figure, Rivera depicts the anthropomorphic face, snake-skirt, and carved stony appearance of the Aztec sculpture. The right half of the body, however, closely resembles the Detroit Motor Company stamping machine, with its gleaming mechanized parts echoing the abstracted sculptural forms to the left (figure 65). Surrounding the monumental figure are “artists of the North and South, Mexican and North American,” who work together to complete its construction. Rivera explained that the figure, not yet fully realized, represented Pan-American Unity: “Symbolizing this union (between North and South) was a colossal Goddess of Life, half Indian, half machine. She would be to the American civilization of my vision of what . . . the great mother of Mexico, was to the Aztec People.”²⁶³ This figure represented for the

²⁶² Masha Zakheim, “Articulate Art: San Francisco of the 1930’s,” Architectural Tour Handout, The City Club of San Francisco. Rivera’s portrayal of California may have been of particular interest to White, since some interpreted the figure as Califia, the legendary black Amazon queen for whom the state of California is named. This mythology was not a concern to Rivera, however. The Mexican artist modeled his allegorical figure of California after tennis star Helen Wills Moody, whom he believed represented “California better than anyone I knew—she was intelligent, young, energetic and beautiful.” In addition, Moody’s “Grecian features” further embodied Rivera’s understanding of California as a Mediterranean land, “a second Greece.” Moody won eight Wimbledon titles (1927-30, ‘32, ‘33, ‘35, and ‘38).

²⁶³ Diego Rivera, interview by Dorothy Puccinelli, San Francisco, 1940; transcribed in part at City College of San Francisco’s The Diego Rivera Mural Project website, accessed on May 14, 2006, www.riveramural.org.

artist a harmonious fusing of the best arts of Mexico and the United States: “From the South comes the plumed serpent, from the North the conveyor belt.”²⁶⁴

White, whose 1940 WPA murals already demonstrate his desire to emulate the Mexican muralists’ social agenda and volumetric style, surely kept informed on the progress of Rivera’s *Pan American Unity*. The prestigious location of the mural at the Golden Gate International Exposition and the nature of the “Art in Action” program, in which visitors could witness firsthand the artist’s progress, made the commission an attractive news story.²⁶⁵ The magazines *Time* and *Life* both featured illustrated stories on the mural in early 1941. *Life* even included four full-page color illustrations showing the mural in its entirety, as well as a key identifying the various figures depicted therein (figure 66).

Through popular publications like *Time* and *Life*, White would have seen Rivera’s *Pan American Unity* project and read descriptions of its “serpent-fanged machine god.”²⁶⁶ For this reason, it is not unreasonable to propose that this half-Indian, half-machine deity served, conceptually at least, as the basis for White’s

²⁶⁴ Rivera elaborated further on the mural, explaining that its theme is “the marriage of the artistic expression of the North and of the South on this continent.” Explaining the message of the mural, he wrote: “I believe in order to make an American art, a real American art, this will be necessary, this blending of the art of the Indian, the Mexican, the Eskimo, with the kind of urge which makes the machine, the invention in the material side of life, which is also an artistic urge, the same urge primarily but in a different form of expression” (City College of San Francisco’s The Diego Rivera Mural Project website; cited in note 41). See also Merrill E. Barden, *Understanding the Evolution of Diego Rivera’s Message to the United States: An Explication of the Pan American Unity Mural* (M.A. thesis, Brown University, 1992).

²⁶⁵ The popular appeal of Rivera’s mural is evidenced in the fact that an estimated thirty-thousand people returned to the Exposition nearly two months after its closing to view Rivera’s completed project. In addition, the Golden Gate International Exposition produced an official catalogue to record and to celebrate the art on display. The Diego Rivera Mural Project, City College of San Francisco.

²⁶⁶ “Diego Rivera: His Amazing New Mural Depicts Pan-American Unity,” *Life* 10 (March 3, 1941): 52.

colossal being in the Hampton mural. Like Rivera's allegorical hybrid, the figure towers over the other individuals depicted in the composition (figure 54). It dominates the central axis of the mural; yet all that is visible of the character is its face and hands. Significantly, the being clasps in its right hand modern industrial machinery, whose close resemblance to the stamping press in *Pan American Unity* suggests that White modeled the machine from reproductions like those featured in *Life*. In addition, White's looming figure, shielded by the gleaming silver machinery, seems equally part-human, part-machine.

Unlike Rivera's hybrid deity, though, the exposed hands and face of White's colossus appear undeniably human. The giant, blocky hands are curled tightly into fists; the bulging joints of the knuckles exaggerate the underlying skeleton. Its right hand, extended forward and palm down, has wrapped around its middle finger the chains of slavery. Dangling from its left hand is another link of chains; however, the open manacle and the awkward kinks in this string reveal that it is inoperative and will no longer hinder African American progress. The most cryptic aspect of the monumental figure is its face, which the artist depicted slightly upturned and hidden, both by the massive machinery and the picture's upper edge, so that only the mouth is fully visible. Nevertheless, the decidedly human physical traits of this figure bear only slight resemblance to Rivera's Pan-American hybrid, suggesting that White may have consulted *Allegory of California* for an alternative model. Indeed, the compositional and iconographic similarities in the Hampton mural to Rivera's famous precedents indicate that White almost certainly combined the two figures—the female

personification of California and the Aztec-inspired emblem of Pan American Unity—to craft an allegory all his own.

Inspired by Rivera's vivid re-use of ancient art, White also probably turned directly to pre-Columbian artifacts to aid his conception of the Hampton figure. Although a last-minute decision of the draft board in 1942 prevented his departure for Mexico, White undoubtedly was familiar with pre-Columbian objects through archaeological discoveries reported in journals and newspapers; through major art exhibitions; and through the Mexican muralists' painted and textual descriptions of ancient artifacts. Indeed, Rivera's emphasis on hemispheric unity in San Francisco reflected not only the overall theme of the Exposition, but also the growing concern in the U.S over the threat of European fascism. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Good Neighbor Policy promoted hemispheric unity as a strategic defense against this perceived threat. The United States government actively promoted the collection and dissemination of pre-Columbian artifacts in order to demonstrate an all-American heritage that was not derived in any way from European culture.

Moreover, White surely recognized the Aztec source for the deity in Rivera's *Pan American Unity* mural from press coverage of both the San Francisco exposition and the exhibition "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art" running concurrently in New York. In August 1940, the same year as Rivera's mural, the Council of National Defense passed an order for the creation of The Office for Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics. As the name suggests, the agency sought to promote strategic, commercial, and cultural unity throughout the Western hemisphere. Less than a year later, the office was replaced

by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), which maintained the basic responsibilities of the previous office, but functioned under the Office for Emergency Management in the Executive Office of the President. Nelson A. Rockefeller, a prominent collector of both modern and “primitive” art, served as the first and only coordinator of the OIAA. The exhibition presented an expansive two-thousand-year history of Mexican art and represented a collaborative effort between the federal agency, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Mexican government. The installation filled the new museum building with over 5000 objects, including a full-size plaster cast of the very Aztec sculpture upon which Rivera’s hybrid deity is based.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, White may have seen newsstand copies of *Vogue* magazine, which featured a cover illustration by Miguel Covarrubias showing throngs of caricatured individuals around the replica Aztec sculpture (figure 67).

Emulating Rivera, White also selected a pre-Columbian deity as the visual source for his allegorical figure. In the summer of 1942, archaeologists from Tulane University discovered the vibrant murals at Tepantitla, an apartment compound at Teotihuacan, and identified the deity seen here as the Rain God.²⁶⁸ Although a thorough excavation of the site was not yet complete, White was living in New Orleans at the time and likely heard news of the discovery.²⁶⁹ The striking

²⁶⁷ Alfonso Caso, one of Mexico’s most prominent archaeologists helped to direct the exhibition from Mexico by selecting the works of art and writing the catalogue entry for pre-Columbian objects. Barnet-Sanchez, “The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art,” 180-183.

²⁶⁸ This discovery renewed archaeological interest in Teotihuacan mural art, which had flagged in the decades since Leopoldo Batre’s excavations of stuccoed walls and floors at the Pyramid of the Sun between 1900 and 1912. New projects suddenly emerged in the 1940’s targeting other apartment compounds. Excavations began at Tetitla and Zacuala in 1944 and at Atetelco in 1945.

²⁶⁹ White and Elizabeth Catlett, his wife at the time, moved to New Orleans in 1941. Catlett served as director of the art department at Dillard University, and White worked as an instructor.

compositional similarities between White's monumental figure in the Hampton mural and the pre-Columbian god raises the possibility that the artist viewed photographs or drawings of the newly discovered ancient wall paintings. Yet even if he did not have access to reproductions of Tepantitla, White may have seen illustrations of Teotihuacan art unearthed during previous excavations. For example, the publication of *Mexican Highland Cultures*, also in 1942, made available the adventures of archaeologist Sigvald Linné. Featuring more than three hundred illustrations, the book provided for armchair archaeologists a wealth of visual information on Teotihuacan art.

Teotihuacan representations of the Rain God typically show the pre-Columbian deity frontally, in full ritual regalia and surrounded by emblems of agricultural fertility (figure 68).²⁷⁰ He holds his arms outstretched, while streams of water issue forth from his hands. An elaborate costume covers his body and a massive nose ornament covers the lower half of his face. Like the Hampton figure, only the hands and part of the face are revealed. For this reason, we may read the Hampton figure as a modernized version of the Rain God, since it too stands with its hands held out, surrounded by the fruitful talents of African Americans throughout history, and hidden behind a surrogate ceremonial dress of machinery, perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to capitalist America's reverence for commerce and

²⁷⁰ Today this figure is generally identified as the Great Goddess; however, I have in my analysis tried to recreate a 1940's understanding of the deity, as this is how White would have seen it. Even as late as the 1970's, many archaeologists and art historians accepted Mexican scholar Alfonso Caso's 1942 identification of the being as the rain god Tlaloc. Esther Pasztory provides a historiographical summary and analysis of the frontal deity in her published dissertation *The Murals of Tepantitla, Teotihuacan* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976). See also Jorge R. Acosta's *Teotihuacan Official Guide*, translated by Evangelina D. de Tentori (Cordoba, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1966).

industry. Moreover, the chains in the Hampton figure's hands closely mimic the stylized streams of water falling from the Rain God's outstretched hands. Two ribbons of water winding through the Hampton mural on either side of the central figure complete White's quotation of the deity.

"United Front of All Races of People"

White's fusion in the Hampton mural of a pre-Columbian deity with modern machinery represents an allegorical figure, just as Rivera's hybrid does in *Pan American Unity*. Yet an allegory of what? The landscape in this painting is a key component in identifying this figure. Following Alain Locke's prescription that black artists should turn toward traditional Southern culture in order to find a distinctive African American heritage, White expressed in his grant proposal a desire to travel through the South and to execute his mural at a southern university. African American writers and artists at this time, including muralist Hale Woodruff, also emphasized the bond many black Americans felt toward the Southern landscape. For many African Americans, the Southern landscape evoked a complex set of emotions related to home ties, escape routes of slaves, friends and loved ones left behind, and violence.²⁷¹ The haunting lyrics of Billie Holiday's 1939 rendition of "Strange Fruit,"

²⁷¹ White's family also had roots in the South. His parents had moved from the rural South to the urban North during World War I as part of the Great Migration. In an autobiographical sketch, White later recalled: "They [his parents] had no resentment against the southern land itself. In fact, they were deeply attached to it, for practically everything useful that had come out of soil was largely a product of their toil. And they had no illusions that the North was a place free from prejudices. But in cities like Chicago factories were growing, and workers were needed, the demand growing with the war production boom. The employers discovered that a Negro's two arms could serve a machine or open hearth in a steel mill as well as those of anyone else." Charles White, "Path of a Negro Artist," *Masses and Mainstream* 8 (April 1955): 35-36.

for example, conjured for listeners the familiar visual image of the Southern tree as a lynching site. Woodruff's painted portrayals of the South were equally bleak.

Woodruff, who returned to the South after more than fifteen years away, later recalled:

I was back in The Southland once more . . . I realized that here was my country again. So this is why we set out to paint the red clay of Georgia and the red clay of Alabama, you know, the erosion, etc. I spent a whole summer in Mississippi on a Rosenwald grant – part of my grant enabled me to paint the soil erosion in Mississippi. This was a sort of comment on the terrible state to which the land had come in those years.²⁷²

Woodruff highlighted the devastating effects of soil erosion in *Southland* (1936), a desolate landscape with jagged reddish-yellow outcroppings, blasted trees, a ruined home, and an ominous, cloud-filled sky (figure 69).²⁷³ In the Hampton mural, White also depicts a barren landscape of reddish-brown soil, deep crevasses, and gray-black sky that, as in Woodruff's painting, locates it in the South.²⁷⁴

The title of White's mural, *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America*, further emphasizes the importance of this scene to the United States.

Employing wartime rhetoric similar to Helguera's OWI poster (figure 58), White made special note of African American military service and personal sacrifice to underscore black Americans' ideological consensus with the U.S. war effort and to

²⁷² Albert Murray, "An Interview with Hale Woodruff," in *Hale Woodruff: 50 Years of His Art* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1979), 78.

²⁷³ LeFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 52. The purpose of this painting was to show the devastating consequence of human intervention in the natural cycle of soil erosion. Southern farmers had cleared and overworked much of the land, acting as a catalyst for soil erosion. During the 1930s, soil erosion had become such a problem that the government had instituted a program to inform farmers about the reasons for the erosion of Southern lands and the need to restore fertility to the farmlands. Tugaloo College in Mississippi, Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, Hampton Institute, and Georgia State College all initiated agriculture programs designed to help stop erosion.

²⁷⁴ White previously had employed a gloomy, leafless tree to situate Harriet Tubman and Booker T. Washington in the South in *Five Great American Negroes*.

affirm their status as “true” Americans. By including black soldiers from the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the Hampton mural demonstrates the longevity of black Americans’ national patriotism and commitment to freedom, legacies that held special resonance during wartime for black and white viewers alike.

To be sure, the federal government and mainstream society both remained unconvinced of black citizens’ loyalty. Testament to this fact resides in the OWI pamphlet *Negroes and the War* (1942) and related OWI films, cartoons, and publications directed at strengthening African American allegiance. In 1943, the same year that White painted his mural, the OWI released a brief documentary film detailing the response of American black colleges to national demands for military recruits and defense industry training. Titled *Negro Colleges in War Time*, the film sought to boost public morale and support with the message that African Americans, too, were donating to the war effort. Notably, the final segment highlights war-related activities at the Hampton Institute. Audiences learned that black students at the university received training as engineers, nurses, and other defense industry professions, while the Army and Navy from nearby military bases benefited from access to the campus grounds and vehicle maintenance services.²⁷⁵

In his report and application for a fellowship renewal, White made explicit the conceptual link between his mural and the dilemma facing African Americans during the Second World War. Aligning his labors with those of the OWI and other

²⁷⁵ Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*, 1975, 2nd ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993), 84-85. Notably, the U.S. Department of Agriculture produced a similar film for export to Latin America. Like *Negro Colleges in War Time*, the film *Henry Browne, Farmer* (ca. 1943) stressed the military and civilian contribution to the war by tracing the journey of food products from the humble efforts of one black family in the South to the hungry mouths of troops and war factory workers.

consensus-building organizations, the artist ascribed nationalistic aims to the Hampton mural. He explained that the composition worked to raise a “united front of all races of people” against fascism. In a statement analogous to the “Double V” campaign, White clarified that the fight had two fronts. He noted that the “forces in America that would oppress the Negro” were not unique to the United States, but rather constituted “the same element we are fighting in Europe and the far east.”²⁷⁶

Furthermore, White’s mural fits within a larger cultural trend of the 1930s and 1940s, when numerous government murals, films, and other visual media highlighted the contributions of marginalized populations to mainstream American society. New Deal federal art programs commissioned several such murals for government buildings. For example, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Section of Painting and Sculpture sponsored a series of artworks illustrating the theme of “The Contribution of the Negro to the American Nation” to adorn the Recorder of Deeds Building in Washington, D.C. Millard Sheets’ three panel composition for the Department of Interior Building likewise celebrates African American activities in religion, art, and science as gifts to a pluralistic national culture (figure 70). In the spirit of pan-Americanism, the Roosevelt administration subsidized artworks celebrating Latin Americans as well. In 1940, the government awarded contracts to artists Verona Burkhard and Boris Deutsch to execute murals on the theme of “The Cultural Contributions of North, South, and Central America” for buildings in Los Angeles. In addition, White’s celebration of black entertainers takes its cue from the official

²⁷⁶ “Report of Year’s Progress and Plan of Work for a Renewal of Julius Rosenwald Fellowship,” typescript, Charles Wilbert White Papers, [ca. 1930]-1982, Microfilm Reel 3191: 320-324, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. White’s renewal proposal also indicates a desire to create a related series of works recounting African Americans’ participation in the war effort.

rhetoric of pan-Americanism, since government-sponsored fiestas and Latin American art exhibitions further publicized a pluralistic native American cultural tradition. As with United States war propaganda, such projects grew out of the need to bolster national unity and public approval for government policies, first under the New Deal and Good Neighbor Policy and later during World War II.

To my mind, White's monumental figure represents an allegory of "America" itself. Considered within the context of the United States' push for inter-American unity and leading role in engineering skyscrapers and factories, the allegorical figure, derived from pre-Columbian art yet clutching industrial machinery, encompasses American history from its ancient civilizations to its modern industrial era and beyond. The figure not only possesses in its hands emblems of industry and slavery, but also stands in a southern landscape among historical figures significant to the United States' past.

The dual nature of the Rain God, who controlled both rain and war, helps to decode another layer of meaning in the Hampton mural. The personification of America, capable of both oppression and generosity, holds in its left hand the chains of slavery. Scenes of war, rebellion, and violence tell the history of African Americans in the United States before the Civil War. An avenging angel soars overhead, her sword poised to slay the central figure. Yet America's right hand presents an open manacle signifying Emancipation. The notable personages of recent history hold books, flasks, and musical instruments. White contrasts the difficult, often violent past of slavery on the left against modern intellectual and creative achievements on the right. This shift from past to present, violence to intellect, is

significant. White presents America not only as a site of past oppression, but also a site of future promise.

Bridging these two sides of the mural, representing past and present, hardship and success, is a central vignette of the ideal African American family. The stability associated with the family is significant, since slavery frequently divided loved ones. In 1939, E. Franklin Frazier observed that the patriarchal, nuclear family—like that depicted in the Hampton mural—still was not the current status of African American families in the United States, but rather a projected ideal for a better society.²⁷⁷ The father in the mural kneels, presenting a scroll of blueprints that mimics the winding streams of water below. He is the architect of the future, working to build for his infant son a utopian society free from social injustice.²⁷⁸ While the landscape around him yet remains a barren wasteland, signifying African Americans' enduring struggle for equality, the flowing rivers below promise geological transformation and social change to come.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, "The Present Status of the Negro Family in the United States," *The Journal of Negro Education* 8, no. 3 (July 1939): 382.

²⁷⁸ "Negro Mural," *Magazine of Art* 42, no. 9 (August/September 1943): 37; Art Council, "Art Today," *Daily Worker*, August 28, 1943. The symbol of the blueprint also probably refers to Richard Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing," which appeared in *New Challenge* magazine in the fall of 1937. White met Wright at the South Side Community Art Center in Chicago, where a mixture of artists, writers, and musicians gathered for social events. Stacy I. Morgan also notes that the blueprint as a symbol for a better, more just society also appears in Orozco's mural *Allegory of Science, Labor, and Art*. Charles White, interview by Sharon Fitzgerald, 159; Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*, 69.

²⁷⁹ The avenging angel in the upper left corner of the composition highlights the duality of the Hampton Mural by recalling medieval conceptions of the Last Judgment. White, however, reverses the traditional left/right associations in his mural. According to the Gospel of St. Matthew, the blessed should be to God's right side, while the damned are to his left. The monumental figure in the Hampton mural is not a Christian god, despite the angel's presence. Nevertheless, White seems intentionally to want to evoke associations with the Last Judgment with his contrasting halves depicting a "hellish," violent past and a peaceful, flourishing present. The relationship of White's mural to Christian iconography merits further research. By contrast, Acacia Rachelle Warwick has identified the avenging angel as "inspiration for Denmark Vesey." Warwick, "Charles White," 3.

A Hybridity of Style

Given his political leanings and the proximity of Detroit to his boyhood home in Chicago, White almost certainly was familiar with Rivera's frescoes on *Detroit Industry*. The younger artist also may have had the opportunity to view Rivera's New Workers School murals firsthand while he was in New York; however, White probably saw most of the Mexican painter's works through reproductions. While White easily could have adopted iconographic motifs or compositional strategies from photographs of Rivera's murals, he would have had a more difficult time emulating the Mexican artist's style. White seems to have received the most exposure to Rivera's style secondhand, filtered through his mentors Mitchell Siporin and Edward Millman and his peers Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff.

From Siporin and Millman White learned the stylized, volumetric treatment of figures, bold colors, shallow space, and dynamic compositions typical of Mexican murals.²⁸⁰ In *Five Great American Negroes*, for example, White depicts a distinct vignette for each figure that is clearly legible, yet the swirling composition leads the eye from one figure to the next in an unending cycle (figure 55). The figures' bodies are comprised of bulging, rounded forms that are accentuated by the dramatic shading of color and clinging fabric. While the receding trail of runaway slaves behind Harriet Tubman suggests spatial depth, the tilted tabletop before George Washington Carver collapses space and creates a shallow stage-like setting for the tableau. In

²⁸⁰ LaFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 56.

addition, the simplified palette of red, green, yellow, blue, and brown emphasizes the boldly outlined composition.

The increased complexity of the Hampton murals suggests greater confidence on the part of the artist, perhaps a result of his recently completed six-months of study under Harry Sternberg at the Art Students League in New York City. Sternberg's commitment to fighting social inequality and the plight of the worker likely appealed to White, as did his interest in lithography. Sternberg produced gritty compositions of social realism, showing dignified, lower-class workers against imposing architecture and industrial technology.²⁸¹ In addition, White surely saw Charles Alston's mural *Magic and Medicine* at the Harlem Hospital while he was in New York (figure 71). Alston's two-panel mural, completed in 1936, exemplifies the stacked composition and naturalistic, yet simplified rendering of figures typical of Rivera's early murals. Alston had visited Rivera frequently while the Mexican artist was painting *Man at the Crossroads* at Rockefeller Center. Though neither artist spoke fluently the other's language, Alston recalled, they managed "between his broken English and my broken French" to communicate. Alston admitted that, as a result of these encounters, he "was very much influenced by his [Rivera's] mural work."²⁸²

Hale Woodruff, like Alston, was directly influenced by Diego Rivera. In 1936, Woodruff received a fellowship permitting him to travel to Mexico to serve as

²⁸¹ Langa, *Radical Art*, 106-107; 117; 152; 226.

²⁸² Charles Alston, interview with Albert Murray, October 19, 1968, transcript, Oral History Interview, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Stacy I. Morgan suggests that Alston modeled his mural after Rivera's 1929 mural *Aztec Medicine and Modern Medicine* at Mexico's Ministry of Social Security. Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*, 76.

an apprentice to the Mexican muralist. He spent six weeks preparing the walls and grinding fresh color for Rivera's mural at the Hotel Reforma in Mexico City. Later reflecting on his decision to go to Mexico, Woodruff said: "I wanted to paint great significant murals in fresco and I went down there to work with Rivera to learn his techniques."²⁸³ During his stay in Mexico, Woodruff most likely viewed the muralist's other frescos, including *Enslavement of the Indians* (1929-1930) and *History of Mexico: From the Conquest to the Future* (1929-1930). He later adopted Rivera's shallow stage-like setting, monumental forms, bold areas of color, and decorative patterning in his *Amistad* murals, completed in 1939 for Talladega College (figure 72). As art historian Edmund Barry Gaither has noted, Woodruff's *Amistad* mural represents "perhaps the earliest example of the complete assimilation of the influences of the Mexican muralists in African American art."²⁸⁴

The close resemblance in passages of the Hampton mural, such as the colonial Tory in the lower left corner, to Hale Woodruff's 1939 *Amistad* mural at Talladega College suggest that White intentionally sought to reproduce that artist's sculptural handling of form and use of color. Indeed, Woodruff's attendance at the unveiling of White's mural at Hampton Institute indicates that White must have been familiar with the older artist's work. Even if he had not seen Woodruff's murals *in situ*, White certainly would have known that Du Bois had praised the *Amistad* mural and even

²⁸³ Winifred Stoetling, "Hale Woodruff, Artist and Teacher: Through the Atlanta Years," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1978) quoted in William E. Taylor, "Echoes of the Past: Artists' Biographies," in *A Shared Heritage: Art by African Americans*, eds. William E. Taylor and Harriet G. Warkel (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art in association with Indiana University Press, 1996), 175.

²⁸⁴ Edmond Barry Gaither, "The Mural Tradition," in *A Shared Heritage: Art by African Americans*, eds. William E. Taylor and Harriet G. Warkel (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art in association with Indiana University Press, 1996), 142.

raised money for Atlanta University's literary journal *Phylon* to produce color inserts of it to accompany a related article.²⁸⁵ In addition, Woodruff agreed to participate in a round-table discussion on "Art and Democracy Today" following the dedication ceremony at Hampton Institute. Other participants included White, Viktor Lowenfeld, head of the Hampton Institute Art Department, Harry Sternberg of the New York Art Students League, James V. Herring, head of the Howard University Art Department, and Hans Weeren-Griek of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Given the established professional relationships White and his wife held with Lowenfeld, Sternberg, and Herring, it is probable that White and Woodruff also had corresponded, if not met in person, before the event.²⁸⁶

White's experimentation with multiple spatial planes and his alternate handling of rounded, volumetric and planar, flat forms demonstrates a tentative engagement with abstraction, perhaps also filtered through Rivera and Woodruff. Both artists had studied in Europe and painted in a cubist idiom before embracing the *retardataire* realist style of public murals.²⁸⁷ Another possible inspiration for these abstract passages is Teotihuacan art. The blocky, geometrized forms of Teotihuacan

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 135. *Life* magazine also planned a feature on the mural; however, the German invasion of Poland preempted publication of the spread. Du Bois called *The Amistad Mutiny* "the most important work done by a black artist" when it was unveiled in 1939.

²⁸⁶ White studied with Harry Sternberg at the Art Students League as an alternative to Mexico City, when the local draft board thwarted his proposal to study under the Mexican muralists. Notably, Lowenfeld organized a conference on the Mexican muralists during White's residency at the Hampton Institute. Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*, 62-64; LeFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 90-91.

²⁸⁷ See Ramón Favela, *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Years* (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1984) and Valerie Fletcher, *Crosscurrents of Modernism: Four Latin American Pioneers, Diego Rivera, Joaquín Torres-García, Wilfredo Lam, Matta* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in association with the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) for a fuller examination of Rivera's engagement with Cubism.

sculpture, in particular, may help to explain the angular appearance of areas like the Hampton figure's left hand. However, White most likely found inspiration closer to home. During White's 1942 stay in New York City, his wife Elizabeth Catlett studied briefly under Ossip Zadkine, who encouraged her to experiment with abstraction. Catlett did not abandon representation, but rather worked to eliminate all nonessential details to concentrate on form. Her resulting sculptures emphasized angles and curves, concavity and convexity, solids and spaces.²⁸⁸ The mixing of planar forms with curving ones in Catlett's terracotta sculpture *Mother and Child* (1942-1944) seems to have had a pronounced influence on White's mural composition (figure 73). Just as the concave, angular leg of the figure contrasts with the gently curving right shoulder in Catlett's sculpture, so too does Denmark Vesey's planar backside or Leadbelly's blocky right arm contrast with the more naturalistic rendering of the nuclear family at the center of White's mural.

The resulting fusion of social realism and cubism in the Hampton mural creates a visible tension between realism and abstraction, anti-modernism and modernism. By 1943, many artists had abandoned social realism due to the heightened nationalistic atmosphere sparked by World War II, preferring instead to produce abstract pictures with a limited, more personal resonance. White's stylistic hybridity may well record this historic moment of shifting artistic current. If such is the case, his stubborn commitment to a style rapidly becoming outmoded for the sake of maintaining clarity and legibility is telling. Certainly the critical social

²⁸⁸ Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 31.

commentary and desire for action expressed in the Hampton mural is all the more radical for the wartime environment in which it was produced.

Conclusion

In the Hampton mural Charles White supplied a revisionist, visual textbook of American history. Highlighting the heroic deeds of African Americans, White hoped to teach the students at the historically black Hampton Institute to be proud of their cultural heritage and strive toward a better future. White's desire to institute social change is evident in the central axis of this painting. The family vignette, and the man in the plaid shirt specifically, actively challenges every student, every viewer to join in building a better society and a brighter future. But this is not all. White asserted a long tradition of African American patriotism and love of freedom to restate the *Pittsburgh Courier's* wartime pronouncement that blacks are Americans too. By appropriating thematic and iconographic elements from both pre-Columbian and modern Mexican mural art, White employed the visual vocabulary of pan-Americanism to situate black accomplishments on this continent. Like Diego Rivera, whose artworks routinely merged themes of cultural pride and social activism in cogent and visually compelling ways, White achieved a masterful compositional balance of conflict and consensus both stylistically and ideologically conceived. America in the Hampton mural is no longer the traditional Indian Princess or Greek-inspired Columbia, but rather a fierce, Mesoamerican god ready both to bless and destroy. This dualistic rendering of America more fully expresses the range of black experience in this country. White sought to firmly weave black contributions into the

fabric of American culture, and he used the international, multiracial stance of pan-Americanism to do so.

As Charles White's Hampton mural demonstrates, the Good Neighbor Policy provided a discursive apparatus for marginalized populations to press for domestic racial equality. In 1941, author Dorothy Rhoads and illustrator Jean Charlot undertook a parallel mission by imparting Good Neighbor ideology in children's literature for the purpose of elevating American attitudes toward its foreign neighbors in Mexico. In the next chapter, I investigate the intractable ideological challenges of this endeavor for mainstream American society and its consequential influence upon U.S. foreign policy and public relations initiatives.

Chapter 4

Patrimony and Paternalism in *The Story of Chan Yuc*

In 1941, the Junior Books division of Doubleday, Doran and Company issued the lavishly illustrated picture book *The Story of Chan Yuc* (figure 74). Written by Dorothy Rhoads and illustrated by Jean Charlot, the small publication relates the real-life adventure of a young brocket deer from her orphaning at the hands of Mayan Indian hunters to her eventual installation at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. After witnessing the tragic death of her mother at the beginning of the story, Chan Yuc enters the home of an American woman at the archaeological site of Chichén Itzá. There she accepts the goodwill and affection of her human companion and adapts to civilized society, sleeping indoors, and drinking from a bowl. Her domestication makes her unfit to return to the wilderness of her birth, but with the help of her American benefactor, the deer happily leaves behind the dangers of the Yucatán jungle for security and privilege at a zoological park in the United States. Thirty-two lithographic illustrations in pink, green, white, brown, and olive augment the story by visually transporting readers to tropical Mexico, where miniature deer, indigenous hunters, and American scientist-explorers appear against an exotic backdrop of pre-Columbian monuments and dense forest brush.

As literary agent Bernice Wheeler explained in a letter to Rhoads, Doubleday, Doran and Company had taken a particular interest in *The Story of Chan Yuc* for its

Latin American content.²⁸⁹ When the publishing company launched the book in the fall of 1941, the United States was a nation on the brink of war. Efforts to engender a genuine and lasting friendship between the United States and Latin America seemed particularly urgent at this time.²⁹⁰ On January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had delivered his famous “Four Freedoms” speech before Congress. The nation was not yet at war, but developments in Europe, including the fall of France to Germany, made American neutrality increasingly difficult to sustain. Roosevelt articulated an ideological justification for United States involvement. He identified four essential human freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear, and he declared the necessity of securing these individual liberties for people throughout the world. In addition to outlining this international humanitarian mission in his speech, Roosevelt delineated the security risks the United States currently faced via the other American republics:

It is not probable that any enemy would be stupid enough to attack us by landing troops in the United States from across thousands of miles of ocean, until it had acquired strategic bases from which to operate . . . The first phase of the invasion of this Hemisphere would not be the landing of regular troops. The necessary strategic points would be occupied by secret agents and their dupes—and great numbers of them are already here, and in Latin America. As long as the aggressor nations maintain the offensive, they, not we, will

²⁸⁹ Bernice Wheeler to Dorothy Rhoads, May 29, 1941, “Dorothy Rhoads Writings and Notes,” Dorothy Rhoads Papers, MSS 1587, Box 5, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter as: Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 5, BYU).

²⁹⁰ Brazil and Argentina were the primary focus of U.S. concern, since these nations’ large German populations and patent refusal to sever economic relations with Axis countries gave the impression of Nazi sympathies. The U.S. debate about German strategic interests in Latin America came to a head in late October 1941, when Roosevelt announced that he had in his possession “Hitler’s secret map” (a forgery by British intelligence) that confirmed Nazi imperialist designs on South America and the Panama Canal. See Michael C. Desch, *When the Third World Matters: Latin America and Untied States Grand Strategy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 46-88.

choose the time and place and the method of their attack. That is why the future of all the American Republics is today in serious danger.²⁹¹

United States citizens could improve national defense by adhering to the tenets of the Good Neighbor Policy.

The Roosevelt administration's public proclamations of inter-American goodwill generated a tremendous zeal among Americans for all things Latin. Politicians, corporations, and citizens' organizations eagerly volunteered their services to aid the government call for hemispheric solidarity.²⁹² Observing this trend in 1941, historian Hubert Herring wrote, "Affection for Latin Americans has broken out like a speckled rash on the skin of the North American body politic." He explained:

Club-women read papers on the Humboldt Current, dress up as Aymarás, listen to guitarists strum tunes reputed to come from the Amazon. College presidents substitute courses on the Incas for those on the Age of Pericles.²⁹³

Publishing firms also contributed to this widespread popularity of pan-Americanism by increasing their production of books on Latin American subjects. Mobilized as containers of inter-American political thought, children's books like *The Story of Chan Yuc* sought to overturn negative stereotypes and establish hemispheric solidarity

²⁹¹ Transcript of "Franklin Roosevelt's Annual Address to Congress – The 'Four Freedoms'," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, accessed August 16, 2011, www.ourdocuments.gov.

²⁹² Michel Fortmann and David G. Haglund, "Public Diplomacy and Dirty Tricks: Two Faces of United States 'Informal Penetration' of Latin America on the Eve of World War II," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 6, no. 2 (July 1995): 549-550.

²⁹³ Hubert Herring, *Good Neighbors: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Seventeen Other Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 327. Hollywood film studios contributed to this vogue by producing an unprecedented number of Latin American-themed movies for domestic and foreign distribution during this period.

as a bulwark against European fascism. However, these books often replicated the conceptual limitations of U.S. diplomatic efforts as well.

This chapter uncovers the U.S. government's preservation of asymmetrical power relations with Latin America in the Good Neighbor era through a case study of Dorothy Rhoads' and Jean Charlot's picture book *The Story of Chan Yuc* (1941). The picture book medium, typically directed at beginning readers, relies heavily on visual art to assist in telling stories. Text and illustration in these books work together, serving roughly equivalent roles in advancing the narrative and reinforcing principle ideas.²⁹⁴ Careful analysis of Mexican representations in the storyline and illustrations of *The Story of Chan Yuc* reveals both the professed pan-Americanism and latent racism undergirding U.S. inter-American diplomacy under the Good Neighbor Policy. As allegory, the narrative arc of *The Story of Chan Yuc* justifies United States custodianship of Mexico's natural and cultural resources by foregrounding the Mayans' inability to properly care for it. Charlot's illustrations, which make frequent allusions to ancient pre-Columbian monuments, further suggest that American custody be granted not only to the orphaned Yucatan deer of the story, but to ancient Mayan artifacts as well. In the final part of this chapter, I examine the diplomatic consequences of these prevailing attitudes by exploring the paternalism inherent in U.S. economic initiatives in Latin America, despite the avowed egalitarian aims of the Good Neighbor Policy.

²⁹⁴ Typically this genre features sixty-four pages or less; a single, simple story; interrelation of text and image; and careful attention to design features such as two-page spreads, binding, and dust jacket. Illustrated books, by contrast, privilege the text and incorporate images whose primary function is decorative rather than narrative. Ellin Sterne Jimmerson, "The Social Artist and the Picturebook Medium: Twentieth-Century American Career Biographies" (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1990), 174-175.

Books are Weapons

To offset anti-American propaganda from Axis nations and enhance hemispheric solidarity, the American Library Association (ALA) and the OIAA collaborated on a project to establish libraries in Latin America. Government administrators and the ALA envisioned the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin in Mexico City and other institutions as vital cultural centers that would advance inter-American friendship by providing Latin American scholars, students, and the general public with a collection of American books and periodicals.²⁹⁵ Additional federal support funded archaeological expeditions in Central and South America, artistic and educational exchanges, and exhibitions of pre-Columbian, colonial, and modern art from throughout the hemisphere. U.S. government officials, scholars, and museum professionals heralded these activities for their educational value, believing that inter-American cultural programs would not only encourage domestic American audiences to adopt a more sympathetic attitude toward neighboring nations, but also reassure Latin Americans “as to the sincerity and reliability of our Pan American protestations during this world crisis.”²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Héctor J. Maymí-Sugrañes, “The American Library Association in Latin America: American Librarianship as a ‘Modern’ Model during the Good Neighbor Policy Era,” *Libraries & Culture* 37, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 311. Historian Peter Bales has noted that American books underwent careful screening before being approved for translation and distribution in Latin America. For example, officials felt that John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* did not portray a positive image of the United States and so they determined not to include it in the inter-American book exchange program. Peter R. Bales, “Nelson Rockefeller and His Quest for Inter-American Unity” (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Stony Brook, 1992), 89.

²⁹⁶ Joshua Hochstein, “Educational Implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 16, no. 3 (November 1942): 176.

Children's literature proved an especially popular medium for disseminating Good Neighbor political ideology, and American authors and publishers often mirrored the rhetorical strategies of pan-Americanism to foster inter-American goodwill. The publisher D.C. Heath and Company, for instance, produced a line of twenty social studies textbooks titled The New World Neighbors series to introduce the "history and spirit" of Latin American cultures to United States schoolchildren. Brief introductions provided a basic overview of the geography, climate, natural resources, industries, and indigenous populations of each country, while one or more short stories, based loosely on historical fact and local custom, aimed to familiarize and endear young readers to their Latin American counterparts. For example, *Along the Inca Highway* sent United States schoolchildren on a virtual journey to South America (figure 75). Published in 1941 as one of the first eight volumes in The New World Neighbors series, the textbook contains three short stories drawn from Peruvian history. Similar in tone and format to other books in the series, *Along the Inca Highway* celebrates indigenous cultural achievements, underscores the injustices of Spanish colonialism, and highlights Latin Americans' revolutionary actions and modern republican spirit. In so doing, the book assimilates Latin Americans to a United States ideal of American-ness and fosters a sense of unity across the American continents.²⁹⁷

The OIAA likewise sponsored publications on Latin American subjects and coordinated academic exchange programs, curriculum workshops, and public cultural programs to reach out to students and educators throughout the hemisphere. Two

²⁹⁷ Breanne Robertson, "Textbook Diplomacy: The New World Neighbors Series and Inter-American Education during World War II," *Hemisphere: Visual Cultures of the Americas* 4 (2011): 67-93.

OIAA comic-style pamphlets in Spanish and Portuguese targeted Latin American youths, in particular. *Heroes Verdaderos* (True Heroes) and *Nuestro Futuro* (Our Future) celebrated the achievements of wartime Americans and warned of Nazi imperial interests in the New World, respectively (figure 76).²⁹⁸

By introducing American children to the cultural wonders of the ancient Maya as well as the natural riches of modern Mexico, *The Story of Chan Yuc* worked in tandem with OIAA and non-governmental programs to foster hemispheric unity through intercultural understanding. However, the status of this publication as a *book* and its distribution to American children endowed it with special significance in the psychological battle against European fascism. On May 10, 1933, German national student associations in Berlin staged an elaborate book burning ceremony to destroy the volumes they held responsible for their nation's economic and martial decline after World War I. This event incited international condemnation, especially in the United States where the book fires emerged as a cultural symbol denoting Nazi totalitarianism.²⁹⁹ Many Americans perceived Nazi censorship and education as having an especially tragic effect upon schoolchildren.

²⁹⁸ Jordan Braverman, *To Hasten the Homecoming: How Americans Fought World War II Through the Media* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1996), 226. Peter Bales has noted that these patriotic comic books proved so popular that many children would pay their admission to the theater for the comic book giveaway and then leave without staying to view the movie. Bales, "Nelson Rockefeller," 86.

²⁹⁹ Book burning came to be mobilized as a political tool in American wartime propaganda. The U.S. Office of War Information published multiple posters on the theme for national distribution. Steve Broder's 1942 poster "Books are Weapons in the War of Ideas" employs a stark color palette of red, black, and white to evoke the barbarism and brutality of Nazi soldiers, who toss armfuls of books onto a raging bonfire beneath an enormous tome inscribed with Roosevelt's famous and often reprinted aphorism: "Books are weapons." Matthew Fishburn provides an excellent analysis of the American use of books in wartime propaganda in his essay "Books Are Weapons: Wartime Responses to the Nazi Bookfires of 1933," *Book History* 10 (2007): 223-251.

In 1943, Walt Disney Studios released the educational short film *Education for Death*, an adaptation of Gregor Ziemer's bestselling novel of the same title (figure 77). The animated film dramatizes the effects of Nazi indoctrination upon German youth by showing the harrowing transformation of a single boy, Hans, from innocent child to brainwashed Nazi soldier. Stephen Vincent Benét also warned of the potentially dire consequence of Nazi reeducation in his popular radio play *They Burned the Books* (1942). The plot follows the ideological struggle of Joe Barnes, a U.S. student, whose Nazi instruction subverts the fundamental tenets of democracy. The play thus imbued the foreign threat with immediacy and relevance by transplanting Nazism to American soil. For American audiences, many of which included school-age children, the stories in *Education for Death* and *They Burned the Books* made plain the formative influence that educators and books had on young minds.

Many U.S. cultural leaders called for adjustments to American book publishing and educational curricula in response. Chief Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish was an outspoken critic of the German book fires and demanded that his fellow American scholars and authors respond with “words as weapons” against this threat.³⁰⁰ U.S. Commissioner of Education John W. Studebaker also advocated using books to counter Axis propaganda: “When people are burning books in other parts of the world, we ought to be distributing them with greater vigor; for

³⁰⁰ Archibald MacLeish wrote several essays and speeches on this subject. See Archibald MacLeish, *The Irresponsibles* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940); Archibald MacLeish, “A Free Man's Books,” in *Britain Needs Books*, ed. John Brody (London: National Book Council, November 1942), 67; and Archibald MacLeish, “The Power of the Book,” in *A Time to Act: Selected Addresses* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 143-55.

books are among our best allies in the fight to make democracy work.”³⁰¹ Among the books Studebaker promoted were texts on Latin American affairs, since he believed that intercultural understanding would strengthen hemispheric defense. Under his leadership, the U.S. Department of Education, the Division of Cultural Relations, and the OIAA collaborated in a nationwide effort to translate Roosevelt’s foreign policy initiatives into popular attitudes and modes of conduct.³⁰²

As I have demonstrated in the previous two chapters, domestic racism and discrimination posed a serious challenge to implementing the Good Neighbor Policy within the United States. Acknowledging the potentially serious diplomatic consequences of this fact, Joshua Hochstein of the National Education Association’s Committee on Inter-American Relations prescribed inter-American curricula for elementary and secondary public schools as a means of social reform. This specialized focus on school-age youth reflected his belief that “beyond high-school age, people are too set in their ways to change.”³⁰³ A scarcity of unbiased writings on Latin American subjects made children’s instruction difficult, however. Children’s literature, like other forms of cultural production, inculcated United States readers with an Anglo-centric sensibility of moral and intellectual superiority over Latin Americans, both ancient and modern. Latin Americans stereotypically embodied the

³⁰¹ Fishburn, “Books Are Weapons,” 234. Fishburn notes that this quotation followed every editorial in *Library Journal* between October 1940 and June 1942.

³⁰² The U.S. government sponsored curriculum workshops, university professor and student exchange programs, and meetings for county superintendents to discuss inter-American affairs and the implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy in public school curriculum. These educational initiatives gained a greater sense of urgency after the United States entered World War II. John C. Patterson, “Activities of the United States Office of Education in the Inter-American Field,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 16, no. 3 (November 1942): 131-134.

³⁰³ Hochstein, “Educational Implementation,” 183.

worst traits of the Spanish and the Indian “races” and appeared in United States art and literature as primitive, lazy, exotic, brutal, and superstitious.³⁰⁴

The Dark Star of Itza: The Story of a Pagan Princess (1931) exemplifies the prevailing primitivism surrounding Mexico in American juvenile literature. Author Alida Sims Malkus relates the harrowing tale of a seventeen-year-old Mayan girl, who volunteers to be the human sacrifice that will save Chichén Itzá after the city has fallen to the Toltecs. The girl’s actions are noble, but the follies of her society counteract her civic duty and bravery. Chichén Itzá is fighting an unjust war, caused by the khan of the city kidnapping the betrothed of another Mayan chieftain. Having already exhibited telltale traits of so-called “primitive” culture including greed, sexual desire, theft, and warfare, the ancient inhabitants of Chichén Itzá further damn their civilization in the eyes of modern readers through their willingness to commit human sacrifice for the benefit of pagan gods.

Artist Lowell Houser, whose pan-American-themed mural I discussed in chapter 1, derided Malkus’ text as a “highly inflated romantic affair, the sort of thing for half-grown girls.”³⁰⁵ Nevertheless, he accommodated the author’s stereotypical characterization of pre-Columbian Mexico in his illustrations for the juvenile novel by imitating the elaborate costumes, squat figural proportions, and curvilinear style of ancient Mayan mural painting (figure 78). His contrived naïve style harkens to the modern primitivism of European avant-garde artists like Pablo Picasso and Paul Gauguin, who borrowed non-Western or prehistoric visual forms in their paintings for

³⁰⁴ See Fredrick B. Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1992).

³⁰⁵ Lowell Houser to Dorothy Rhoads, January 5, 1930, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 33, BYU.

aesthetic and expressive effect. Working within the pictorial constraints of a monochromatic woodblock print, Houser depicts the chaotic siege on Chichén Itzá as a tightly composed tangle of contrast line drawings. Crisp geometric forms delineate the monumental temple at the center of the composition, orienting the viewer's perspective and providing a stark juxtaposition to the heavy plumes of smoke, roaring flames, and mass of enemy soldiers swarming its exterior. Chichén Itzán warriors, portrayed as white forms in black outline, attempt to defend their temple and their loved ones, but they are far outnumbered by the advancing Toltecs, whose black forms in white outline dominate the scene. Houser signals difference between these warring groups through his use of color only; the indigenous figures uniformly exhibit disproportionately large heads, sloped foreheads, ornate costumes, and exaggerated facial expressions. Flattened spatial perspective amplifies this animated distortion and contributes to an overall impression of native Mexicans, both Mayan and Toltec, as belonging to an earlier, savage state.

The Story of Chan Yuc represents a concerted effort on behalf of author Dorothy Rhoads and illustrator Jean Charlot to overturn prevailing negative images of Mexico by portraying the preservation and development of indigenous products as a mutually beneficial inter-American cooperative endeavor. Rhoads and Charlot met in the late 1920s during the Carnegie Institute of Washington's archaeological expedition at Chichén Itzá, and both demonstrated a sustained interest in pre-Hispanic culture and strong support for the Allied war effort during World War II. In the following section, I situate this publication within Rhoads' and Charlot's respective

political and artistic activities to gain a clearer understanding of the personal philosophies informing *The Story of Chan Yuc*.

Politics in Paint: Jean Charlot, Aztec Sympathizer

Born in France in 1898, Jean Charlot was a prolific artist, teacher, and critic whose peripatetic lifestyle allowed him entry in prominent art circles in Mexico City, New York, Los Angeles, and later Hawaii, but whose multinational identity has left him relatively unstudied. A lifelong advocate for ancient Mesoamerican culture, Charlot gained an early exposure to pre-Columbian art through his family's collection of Aztec codices and other pre-Hispanic antiquities in Paris.³⁰⁶ In 1920 he moved to Mexico City, where he painted murals alongside Diego Rivera and absorbed the political atmosphere of post-Revolutionary Mexico, which stressed cultural nationalism through *indigenismo*, or the valorization of pre-colonial Indian culture.³⁰⁷

Between 1926 and 1929, Charlot enlarged his knowledge of pre-Columbian art as a field artist on the Carnegie Institution expedition at Chichén Itzá (figure 79). The artist's professional affiliation with American archaeologist Sylvanus G. Morley

³⁰⁶ The artist professed a lifelong interest in Aztec culture and credited his personal fascination and respect for the pre-Columbian civilization to his Aztec racial heritage, which he claimed constituted one-sixteenth of his bloodline. See John Charlot, "Jean Charlot as Paul Claudel's Ixtlilxochitl," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* nos. 17 & 18 (1990-1991): 67; Jean Charlot, interview by unidentified interviewer, n.d. [1960s], transcript edited by John Charlot; and Jean Charlot, interview by John Charlot, May 19, 1971, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

³⁰⁷ In Mexico City, Charlot joined a cosmopolitan circle of avant-garde writers and artists including Anita Brenner, Diego Rivera, Edward Weston, and many others. He was a founding member of the Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico, and he assisted Diego Rivera in painting the 1922 mural *Creation* at the National Preparatory School. He also published numerous articles for Mexican and French publications and served for a time as the art editor for the magazine *Mexican Folkways*.

must have reinforced his already favorable perspective of pre-Columbian culture, since the archaeologist regularly referred to the ancient Maya as “the Greeks of the New World.”³⁰⁸ The two men regarded one another with mutual respect and maintained a lasting friendship until Morley’s death in 1948. Charlot even contributed the dust jacket illustration and other small drawings for Morley’s popular tome *The Ancient Maya* (1946; figure 80).³⁰⁹

In 1929, Charlot moved to the United States, where he continued to publish extensively on Mexican art and to portray Mexican subject matter in his art.³¹⁰ He applied for and received United States citizenship in 1940, less than one year before illustrating *The Story of Chan Yuc*. A dual citizen of France and the United States, Charlot contributed to the French war effort by taking orders for military equipment at a New York Liaison office. He ceased work in this capacity after the fall of the French government to Germany later that year. Charlot nevertheless remained committed to the Allied cause, and in 1942 he participated in a group exhibition of American war posters titled “The Walls Have Ears,” which warned of the potentially serious consequences of war-related gossip.

³⁰⁸ I discussed Morley’s 1922 article in *National Geographic* in Chapter One. Another strong example of Morley’s laudatory view of the Maya is his dedication speech for the Fisher Theater in Detroit, reprinted in Marjorie I. Ingle, *Mayan Revival Style: Art Deco Mayan Fantasy* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1984), 81-83.

³⁰⁹ Although the book would not be released to the public until 1946, Charlot already had completed his illustrations for the book by 1944. Sylvanus G. Morley to Charles Scribner’s and Sons, October 5, 1944. Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 67, BYU.

³¹⁰ His first book project in the United States involved fellow Carnegie Institution of Washington field artist Ann Axtell Morris, with whom Charlot illustrated the two-volume tome on the excavations, titled *Temple of the Warriors* (1930). Over the next decade, he illustrated several picture books on Mexican themes for both children and adults, including French playwright Paul Claudel’s *The Book of Christopher Columbus: A Lyrical Drama in Two Parts* (1930), Amelia Martinez del Rio’s *The Sun, the Moon, and a Rabbit* (1935), Melchor G. Ferrer’s *Tito’s Hats* (1940), Gregorio López y Fuentes’ *El Indio: Novela Mexicana* (1940), and Dorothy Rhoads’ *The Story of Chan Yuc* (1941).

Charlot's tireless championing of Mexican art and his anti-Axis political leanings suggest that he was particularly sympathetic to the Good Neighbor Policy and its rhetoric of pan-Americanism. To be sure, his 1923 fresco at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City served as an important precedent for *The Story for Chan Yuc* in its celebration of pre-Columbian civilization and its coded allusion to the First World War. Titled *Massacre in the Main Temple*, the mural depicts a turning point in the Spanish invasion, when Spanish soldiers attacked and killed unarmed Aztecs during a religious festival (figure 81).³¹¹ The artist's son John Charlot has demonstrated that his father wanted this painting to convey a message not only about the Spanish Conquest, but also about his own experience in World War I. Modifications to two figures between the preparatory sketch and the final work make explicit allusion to the recent conflict (figures 82 and 83). A falling Aztec man becomes a young woman, whose ambiguous ethnicity and calm demeanor indicate that she no longer represents an indigenous victim, but a universalized allegory for grace and gentleness. Charlot also changed a lanced Aztec woman into a blonde child, who resembles the Belgian victim of an anti-German propaganda cartoon (figure 84).³¹²

³¹¹ Charlot's interpretation of this event derived from the Franciscan chronicler Bernardino de Sahagun's account of the slaughter, which described in graphic detail how the Spanish fell upon the defenseless Aztec dancers, chased them to the top of the main temple, and killed them. See Bernardino de Sahagún *Conquest of New Spain: 1585 Revision* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989).

³¹² It is unclear whether the artist had this particular cartoon in mind, since his son, John, described the source image as a Belgian child with severed hands in his 2001 essay and later reiterated this description in personal correspondence with the author. To my mind, the lanced child in the cartoon seems a much closer visual parallel. Furthermore, the younger Charlot noted that his father began collecting World War I propaganda imagery in 1914, suggesting that the artist was familiar with numerous anti-German propaganda images on this theme. John Charlot, electronic correspondence with the author, February 23, 2011; and John Charlot, "Jean Charlot's First Fresco: *The Massacre in the Main Temple*," 2001, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu,

Charlot wisely adapted the irregular stairwell to his frescoed portrayal to underscore Aztec innocence in this uneven encounter. He conceived of the mural design as two intersecting rectangles, each representing one side of conflict. The left rectangle, composed of vertical and horizontal lines, characterizes the peaceful nature of the Aztec religious festival, while the right-hand, tilted rectangle encompasses the dynamic charge of the Spanish attack.³¹³ In addition, as historian Ellin Stern Jimmerson has observed, *Massacre in the Great Temple* resembles the picture book medium for its integration of visual storytelling and captioned text. Quoting a passage from an eyewitness account of the Spanish Conquest, the inscription reads: “The confusion was so great and the clamour which arose from it, that it reached as far as the hills, and the rocks split from pain and compassion.”³¹⁴

Charlot again combined the themes of pre-Columbian history and modern warfare in 1943 and 1944, when he designed and executed an ambitious multi-panel mural cycle in the Journalism Building at the University of Georgia (figure 85). The project, co-sponsored by the School of Journalism and the *Atlanta Journal* newspaper, stipulated that the fresco must address the theme of news reporting, but it did not specify particular subject matter. In his diary, Charlot expressed a desire to return to the topic he had painted twenty years earlier, the Spanish Conquest. He approached the dean of the Journalism School with this idea, and the two agreed that

Hawai'i, accessed August 16, 2011, http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/charlotcoll/J_Charlot/johncharlot.html.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Jimmerson, “The Social Artist and the Picturebook Medium,” 179.

a World War II scene would provide a fitting complement to the proposed Mexican panel.

Charlot's journalism-themed epic, with its juxtaposition of old and new modes of pictorial reportage, mirrors U.S. governmental discourse of pan-Americanism by chronicling a continuous cultural tradition spanning from pre-Hispanic Aztec civilization to the modern United States.³¹⁵ The left half of the mural, titled *Cortez Lands in Mexico*, shows the earliest known instance of American pictorial journalism in 1519, when Aztec scribes recorded the arrival of Hernando Cortez and his troops in Veracruz, Mexico (figure 86). The right half, *Paratroopers Land in Sicily*, heralds the latest journalistic technologies in its portrayal of news correspondents at the 1943 Allied invasion of Italy (figure 87).³¹⁶ Charlot underscores this journalistic legacy with frescoed captions along the bottom edge of each panel. Large block letters inform viewers that "EMPEROR MONTEZUMA'S SCOUTS COVER AMERICA'S FIRST SCOOP" in the Mexican scene, while "PRESS AND CAMERAMEN FLASH ON THE SPOT NEWS" of World War II in the modern half.

³¹⁵ "Propaganda and fresco mix well," Charlot had written two years earlier in his article "Public Speaking in Paint." According to the artist, the placement of murals in public buildings such as hotels, restaurants, post offices, and schools allowed them to serve a broader, more diverse audience than easel paintings. Frescoes composed of heroic characters and historic events could benefit society by spreading religious, political, and social ideals. Their propagandistic power, however, hinged upon the artist's ability to enunciate a didactic lesson. "[W]hatever the axe that the painter grinds," Charlot had warned, "it is his job to grind it fine." Jean Charlot, "Public Speaking in Paint," *The American Scholar* 10, no. 4 (Autumn 1941): 455-468.

³¹⁶ For the first time in World War II, photographic wire transmissions and improved shutter speeds permitted reporters to capture and send up-to-the-minute news coverage from the front lines. In the weeks leading up to Charlot's commission, newspapers and magazines including *Life* and *Time* carried continuous coverage of Operation Husky, in which the 81st Airborne Division and the Seventh Army seized Sicily from German and Italian troops. Charlot's portrayal of this military success imbued the Journalism Building mural with temporal immediacy and local resonance, since the only American Army base to implement parachute training was Fort Benning in Georgia. See, for example, "Troop Landings at Gela in Sicily," *Life Magazine* (July 26, 1943): 32.

The University of Georgia and the *Atlanta Journal* extended the rhetoric of pan-Americanism by honoring several South American journalists at the mural's dedication ceremony. The honored guests included Alfredo Silva Carvallo of Chile, Luis Leon Plaza of Peru, Jorge Fernandez of Ecuador, Julio Hernandez of Colombia, Pedro Paz Castillo of Venezuela, and Hugo L. Ricaldoni of Uruguay.³¹⁷ Don Glassman, a representative of the OIAA, also attended the ceremony. In addition, artist Gustav von Groschvitz delivered a speech commending Charlot's mural for its contribution to hemispheric relations: "With a Latin-American cultural background, Mr. Charlot combines in his work two viewpoints, that of South America with that of North America."³¹⁸

Although World War II does not overtly appear in *The Story of Chan Yuc*, the story's narrative lesson of United States-Mexico collaboration carried significant meaning for inter-American affairs. Charlot, who just the previous year had witnessed the nation of his birth fall to Nazi Germany, must have appreciated the diplomatic efforts of his adopted country in forming an American hemispheric alliance. In addition, book illustrations, like public murals, represented for Charlot a powerful venue for disseminating political and social ideas. Even juvenile picture books, the artist noted, could reach a large and diverse audience, since parents frequently read illustrated stories aloud to their children.³¹⁹ Charlot maintained a

³¹⁷ Mural Dedication Program, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

³¹⁸ "The Journalism Murals," *The Editor's Forum*, February 1950, Jean Charlot Papers, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens.

³¹⁹ Mural art and printmaking, especially lithography, were Charlot's preferred mediums. He expressed a personal mission that identified storytelling in a legible and monumental figurative style and public accessibility as core components for making socially useful art. Book illustrations, like

close watch on the war while preparing illustrations for Rhoads' book. On June 22, 1941, he recorded in his diary the outbreak of war between Russia and Germany; below, in the same entry, he noted his progress on "Chan Yuc."³²⁰

Politics in Prose: Dorothy Rhoads, Author-Activist

Illinois author Dorothy Rhoads was another vocal proponent for Mexican culture and the Allied war effort. Like Charlot, she combined these two interests in her creative output during the Second World War. Many of Rhoads' stories derived from personal experience or the experiences of her friends and relatives in the Yucatán. The sister-in-law of American archaeologist Sylvanus G. Morley, Rhoads visited Chichén Itzá regularly throughout the 1920s and 1930s, spending several months each year at the archaeological site. The manuscript "Dorita," for instance, narrates the life story of a young Mayan Indian girl who also happened to be the goddaughter of Rhoads' sister Frances.³²¹

Rhoads kept a close watch on events in Europe, even before the United States entered the war in December 1941. Earlier that year, while negotiating her contract with Doubleday, Doran and Company for *The Story of Chan Yuc*, Rhoads saved

murals and lithographs, presented an alternative venue that permitted the artist to bypass the fine art marketplace and reach large groups of people. Charlot wrote, "Small children will read the book. If they are smaller ones, they will be read the book. If they [children] are smaller still, they will try and eat the book." Jean Charlot, "Illustrating Children's Books," in Charlot, *An Artist on Art*, vol 2 (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972), 365.

³²⁰ Jean Charlot's Diary, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

³²¹ Dorothy Rhoads to Robert L. Crowell, December 10, 1948, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 7, BYU.

newspaper clippings about war bonds.³²² She incorporated wartime events and themes into her writing as well. In the non-fiction short story “I Dream of Death,” Rhoads recalled how she had suffered a nightmare while visiting her sister and brother-in-law at Chichén Itzá. She had witnessed the aerial bombing of a strange city in her dream, only to learn upon waking that German forces had bombed Rotterdam.³²³

In the spring of 1942, Rhoads received a letter of Rex Stout, Chairman of the Writers’ War Committee, enlisting her help in the war effort. Stout explained:

This committee has been appointed at the suggestion of the government departments – Army, Navy, Treasury, OFF [Office of Foreign Funds], OCD [Office of Civilian Defense], Red Cross – for specific writing jobs, and to arrange with writers to do them. Also we solicit from writers any and all ideas they may have regarding the use of words as tools or weapons in the war.³²⁴

Rhoads intensified her literary efforts accordingly. She drafted “Letter from Belgium,” a short story about an American girl who receives a coded letter from her Belgian penpal, whose false signature “Valerie” refers to the popular axiom “V for Victory.” Rhoads also composed “Aunt Mame Wins a War,” a morality tale in which

³²² Unidentified newspaper clippings [*Chicago Tribune* and *Rock Island Argus*], n.d., Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 5, BYU.

³²³ Dorothy Rhoads, “I Dream of Death,” Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 4, BYU. The bombing occurred on May 14, 1940. Rhoads likely updated her manuscript to reflect the latest war news. Correspondence in the Dorothy Rhoads Papers indicates that the author had submitted versions of this story to several magazines in 1939, more than one year before the German air raid in Rotterdam.

³²⁴ Rex Stout to Dorothy Rhoads, April 16, 1942, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 6, BYU. That fall the Authors’ Guild also contacted Dorothy Rhoads to notify her that the government had ordered all obsolete book plates be melted down to aid the country’s metal supply. Members of the Authors’ Guild to Dorothy Rhoads, September 8, 1942, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 6, BYU.

the patriotic zeal and anti-German sentiment of the author's aunt during the First World War serves as a model for American citizens in the current conflict.³²⁵

Rhoads took particular notice of the interracial cooperation of U.S. military efforts throughout the war, especially the service of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Among Rhoads' wartime clippings was the article "Spanish-Speaking People in the U.S. and the War," which appeared in the March 1945 issue of *Magazine War Guide*. In the article, the OIAA highlighted the "very real contribution" of Spanish-speaking residents to the Allied war effort. The article assured readers that "most" of the two and a half million Spanish-speaking people in the United States were patriotic and, more importantly, legal citizens. "Along the U.S. side of the Rio Grande, one out of every two Spanish-speaking males between the ages of 15 and 65 is either in the armed forces or has left his home to farm, to mine, to build ships and planes," the article reported. In addition, the report noted the collaborative effort of the United States and Mexico under the *Bracero* program, writing, "From Mexico has come a total of 180,000 agricultural workers during the years 1943-1944, and an equal number of railroad workers, to help relieve the serious manpower shortage in the United States under a cooperative emergency program between the United States and Mexico."³²⁶ Rhoads, who equated Mexican valor with Mayan civilization, inscribed the words "Mayan Indian" next to the article's title.

³²⁵ "The country needs more people like my aunt," Rhoads exhorted. "People who are angry. We are still too complacent. We have not learned to throw off our peacetime habit of personal indulgences, nor the feeling that war, life football, is a sort of game," she warned. "Aunt Em and the Huns," Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 6, BYU.

³²⁶ "Magazine War Guide," March 1945, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 4, BYU.

Perhaps inspired by this publication, Rhoads composed “The Maya Indian Who Fought in the American Revolution,” a piece of historical fiction aimed at adult readers that honored the Mexican Indian Pablo Xiu as a soldier in the American Revolution. According to the author, Morley had uncovered this bit of trivia while conducting genealogy research on the Xiu dynasty, an ancient family of rulers at the Mayan site of Uxmal. Between 1776 and 1783, Pablo Xiu did not appear in government records in the Yucatán, presumably because he had joined a company of *pardos* or “brown skins” under Spanish officers and fought for American independence at the sieges of Pensacola and Mobile. For Rhoads, this record of service entitled Xiu’s living descendants to membership in the exclusive heritage clubs of the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution.³²⁷

The most explicit of Rhoads’ wartime writings was an essay titled “Peace? The Responsibility is Yours!” The author composed the piece in response to a local instance of domestic racism. Two Belgian-born Americans had registered a formal complaint at city hall over Mexicans moving to their neighborhood. Rhoads ardently defends the newcomers, explaining that there was “no question of the character or personal habits” of the Mexican family. The father had graduated from a large university, held advanced degrees, and currently worked in a defense factory. In addition, he spoke English “with a better accent” than did the Belgian-born citizens. “But—he and his family are ‘foreigners.’ Their skin is dark,” Rhoads bitterly explains. She chastises the reader to recognize that “difference does not mean

³²⁷ Rhoads tempers this notion by explaining that Xiu’s descendent, Dionisio Xiu, had no interest in joining the organization because “his ancestors are dead.” Instead, he reserved concern for “what is happening today.” Dorothy Rhoads, “The Maya Indian Who Fought in the American Revolution,” Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 4, BYU.

inferiority” and that “even children are fighting other children who are of a different race or nationality or creed” in the recent riots in the United States. Although she easily could have meant the racially motivated “hate strikes” angry white war workers staged at integrated factories nationwide, Rhoads probably was referring to the spate of racial violence following the so-called “Zoot-Suit Riots” in downtown Los Angeles.³²⁸ In a series of violence lasting more than a week in June 1943, nearly three thousand soldiers and civilians severely beat Mexican and Mexican American youths.³²⁹ Journalist Carey McWilliams later described the incident in his survey of Mexican American history, *North from Mexico* (1949):

Marching through the streets of downtown Los Angeles, a mob of several thousand soldiers, sailors, and civilians, proceeded to beat up every zoot suiter they could find. Pushing its way into the important motion picture theaters, the mob ordered the management to turn on the house lights and then ran up and down the aisles dragging Mexicans out of their seats. Streetcars were halted while Mexicans, and some Filipinos and Negroes, were jerked from their seats, pushed into the streets and beaten with a sadistic frenzy.³³⁰

While the contemporary newspaper coverage of the event lauded the behavior of U.S. servicemen, Rhoads clearly took a more progressive view of inter-American race relations. “This war is not entirely the fault of Hitler,” she bravely asserts. “If we, as

³²⁸ Emilio Zamora provides a detailed discussion of racial prejudice and “hate strikes” against Mexican workers in Texas in his book *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2009).

³²⁹ During the summer of 1943, race riots broke out in several cities across the nation. In June, racial violence in Detroit killed twenty-five blacks and nine whites and injured more than 700 people. Rhoads specifically mentions San Francisco, Boston, Chicago in her text. Dorothy Rhoads, “Peace? The Responsibility is Yours!,” Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 6, BYU. Historical accounts of the Los Angeles “Zoot-Suit Riots” may be found in Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984).

³³⁰ Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (1949; repr., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 224.

individuals, cannot live with our next door neighbors . . . without quarrelling, how can we expect our nation or any nation to live with neighbor nations without war?”³³¹

The Good Neighbor Ideology of The Story of Chan Yuc

Published in support of Roosevelt’s foreign policy, *The Story of Chan Yuc* ostensibly imparts an anti-racist ideology regarding Latin American populations. The picture book alleges authority and cultural authenticity through the extratextual circumstances of its publication.³³² Supplementary information, such as the author’s and illustrator’s professional qualifications and firsthand knowledge of Mexico, effectively assures adult readers that its narrative content is reliable. In its 1941 catalogue of Junior Books, Doubleday, Doran and Company carried a full-page promotion for *The Story of Chan Yuc* that publicized the book as a “true story” based on the author’s visit with “her sister and Dr. Morley, director of the Carnegie Mayan excavations as Chichén Itzá.” The publishing firm further stressed the archaeological experience of “the distinguished artist” Jean Charlot, who “was an official artist for this Chichén Itzá expedition.”³³³

³³¹ Rhoads, “Peace?,” Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 6, BYU.

³³² My discussion of discursive elements in *The Story of Chan Yuc* follows the model set forth by Robyn McCallum and John Stephens in their essay “Ideology in Children’s Books,” in *Handbook of Research on Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Shelby A. Wolf, Karen Coats, Patricia Enciso, and Christine A. Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 2011), 359-371. Tools of ideology formation include 1) narrative discourse, or the creation and telling of stories; 2) linguistic discourse, or the particular use of language to impart social values and attitudes; and 3) extratextual context, or the circumstance beyond the literal content of the book.

³³³ *Doubleday Doran Junior Books*, Pamphlet, 1941, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 7, BYU.

The linguistic discourse of the book further aligns its inter-American content with the diplomatic aims of the Good Neighbor Policy. For example, Dorothy Rhoads refers to the American woman in the story using the same Spanish-language title by which the Mayan Indians address her, “Señorita.” In addition to enhancing the readers’ perception of narrative accuracy, this textual language reduces the racial and cultural distinctions that traditionally separate the Anglo American woman and her Mayan Indian counterparts. The appellation “señorita” closely associates the American character with the Spanish-speaking peoples of Mexico and the other American republics. This discursive tactic further serves to reposition the domestic audience in relation to the book’s foreign subject matter, since U.S. readers who identify with the American woman also implicitly accept this hemispheric status for themselves. Moreover, as the indigenous Mexican Chan Yuc adjusts to her new civilized lifestyle at Chichén Itzá, she considers the señorita and scientists her “friends” and enjoys many “happy days” in the enclosed garden outside the house.³³⁴ Furthermore, the author invites the reader at the end of the story to “see and love” the Yucatán brocket deer, too, since the animal and her “little brother” have moved to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.³³⁵ By employing a language of friendship, Rhoads advocates openness and cooperation as desirable behaviors for readers to adopt in their dealings with different individuals, whether animal or human, Mexican or American.

³³⁴ Rhoads underscores the significance of these human relationships, when she tells the reader that the proud turkey gobbler became friends with Chan Yuc only with time and persistence and that, despite the deer’s best efforts, the old hen in the yard “would not make friends” with her at all. Dorothy Rhoads, *The Story of Chan Yuc* (Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1941), 24-26.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

Abundant illustrations seek to strengthen this impression of inter-American relations. Ranging from monochromatic half-page vignettes to colorful double-page spreads, images appear on nearly every leaf of the book. Charlot, an early exponent of color lithography, associated book illustrations with original art prints. He oversaw many of the details of the design and production of *The Story of Chan Yuc*. He cut the galley proofs, arranged the dummy, and approved the type.³³⁶ He also selected an alternative reproduction process that would yield higher quality images. Avoiding the dotted patterning of the four-color halftone process, Charlot employed a line reproduction technique for the illustrations in Rhoads' book. In the early 1940s, this method carried technical limitations that dictated a hard-edged style of solid color, clear outline, and no tonal gradation. Broad areas of green, pink, and brown dominate the illustrations, although Charlot occasionally overlapped pink and green in the offset lithography printing process to create a fourth color: olive. The artist further chose dark brown for the text color to establish greater visual harmony between word and image.³³⁷

Charlot adopted a faux-naif style to imbue his images with greater legibility and childlike vigor. He believed that children would better appreciate images that resembled their own creative output, so he routinely employed a simplified aesthetic for his children's book illustrations, regardless of subject matter.³³⁸ Meanwhile, Charlot's careful attention to detail in these portrayals reflects the prominent

³³⁶ Dorothy Rhoads to Bernice Wheeler, May 5, 1941, Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 5, BYU.

³³⁷ Peter Morse, "Jean Charlot's Technique in Children's Book Illustration," Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i, accessed January 11, 2011, http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/charlotcoll/J_Charlot/charlotmorse.html.

³³⁸ Charlot, "Illustrating Children's Books," 365.

storytelling role he understood his illustrations to perform. He later recalled the challenge he faced as an illustrator deciding which scenes to depict. “In the case of stories that I prefer which are for children, age four to six,” he explained, “I read every word of text because there is so little of it. Usually I receive two sheets of type written in those short lines – that is the whole book – and a note from the publisher saying, ‘Do 32 full page drawings in full color.’ So, I have to mull over the texts to find out how I can make those drawings.”³³⁹ Charlot’s working process produced images that corresponded closely to events in the text.

Charlot judiciously selected double-page illustrations, which typically crossed the gutter and accompanied only a single line of text, to signify three crucial moments in the plot: the removal of Chan Yuc to Chichén Itzá after her mother’s death, Chan Yuc’s subsequent exploration of the archaeological site, and her arrival at the Smithsonian zoo. In the final scene of the book, Charlot depicts Chan Yuc and her adopted little brother frolicking in their new zoo habitat (figure 88). An elephant and a giraffe, probably chosen for their monumental scale, greet the tiny Mexican refugees. A simple wrought-iron fence separates the animals from two chubby American children, who grasp the bars and lean eagerly toward the deer with apparent interest. Below, the text concisely explains, “AND SO they came to the zoo! Everybody at the zoo is very pleased to have them.”³⁴⁰ Printed on the folio and verso of a single page, these pendant images help to propel the story toward to its conclusion, while also summarizing the narrative lesson of the plot. Charlot’s

³³⁹ Jean Charlot, Interview with Miriam Lesley, 1961, “Jean Charlot Interviews,” Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai`i, Honolulu, Hawai`i.

³⁴⁰ Rhoads, *The Story of Chan Yuc*, 41-42.

portrayal of the transplanted deer living harmoniously in their new urban habitat teaches readers the importance of United States-Mexico cooperation and cultural exchange for the security and happiness of residents in both countries.

While the Good Neighbor message of *The Story of Chan Yuc* strove to supplant stereotypically negative portrayals of Mayan Indians in children's books, both text and image reveal lingering American prejudices. Although Rhoads and Charlot professed a desire to portray indigenous Mexican populations as possessing noble values and personality traits, they also preserved a subordinate tier for Mexicans as citizens of the *other* American republics. This discursive ambivalence derived from anthropological theories of scientific racism, which posited a racial ordering of Anglo-American supremacy over Latin Americans and other nonwhite races.³⁴¹ For all their compassion and progressive social inclinations, Rhoads and Charlot nevertheless remained steeped in these racist assumptions and subconsciously adopted them as part of their ideological stance.

For example, Charlot's illustration of the American señorita, U.S. archaeologists, and Mayan Indians gathering to watch Chan Yuc leave the house for the first time purportedly records a cohesive interracial community in support of the small deer (figure 89). After crying and sleeping for several days in the woman's hacienda, the fawn "began to take an interest in the world" and stepped out of her basket-bed to walk around. Rhoads already united the Americans and the Mayans in

³⁴¹ Influential American proponents of scientific racism and eugenics during the Interwar Period included eugenicists Charles Benedict Davenport, Harry H. Laughlin, Madison Grant, Lothrop Stoddard, and Carlton S. Coon. See *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*, ed. Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006); and Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

her text through their shared pessimism and concern for the listless animal. In this scene, she further binds the two groups by describing their spontaneous celebration over Chan Yuc's emotional transformation. Rhoads explains that a crowd of "scientists and Indians" assembled to witness the deer's behavioral change and to rejoice in her decision "to live." Charlot portrays this pivotal moment in the plot with a large, colorful illustration spanning two pages. Like Rhoads, he conveys the significance of the event through the diverse gathering of people. A Mayan laborer holds a shovel at the far right, reinforcing the idea that everyone has ceased working to focus on the little deer. This expression of mutual interest and international cooperation encapsulates the overarching Good Neighbor message of Rhoads' book; however, Charlot also reveals the unequal terms of this partnership.

Divided structurally by the central gutter, the cluster of people ruptures easily into two segregated camps: the white Americans gather on the left page, the brown-skinned Mayans on the right. Two Americans – the señorita and the lead archaeologist – eagerly approach Chan Yuc. Kneeling low, the pair thrusts forward their arms in parental gestures of encouragement, while a third American, whose spectacles, boots, and pith helmet identify him as another archaeologist, stands behind his bearded colleague in an authoritative pose, his arms crossed tightly against his chest as he surveys the scene. A crisp white temple, newly restored to its former glory, forms a stately backdrop for this illustrious grouping. The three Mayan Indians, by contrast, lounge casually against a grotesque serpent column whose snarling mouth and monstrous body dwarfs the tiny deer and provides a menacing contrast to the gentle, protective demeanor of the American man and woman to its

left. In addition to their association with the savage deity, the native Mexicans exhibit bared feet, exposed stomachs, and cleavage that convey in physical terms their presumed “primitive” state. Their skin tone further distinguishes them from the pink-hued Americans, who dress modestly in shoes and long pants. The juxtaposition in this image of culture versus nature; white versus brown, American versus Mexican, typifies the ambivalent attitude that the United States maintained toward Latin America under the Good Neighbor Policy.

Tellingly, Chan Yuc peers up at the American woman, not the Mayans, for reassurance and instruction for what to do next. The *señorita*, whose name already suggests her hybridized national identity, forms a visual and cultural bridge linking the American scientists and Mexican natives. Her left-facing profile, simple garment, and loose bun hairstyle correspond to the styling and dress of the Mexican Indian woman standing behind her. The *señorita*’s position opposite the scientist, on the other side of Chan Yuc, further affiliates her with the Mexican figures. At the same time, her pale physiognomy and compositional placement in front of the restored temple and on the same book page as her compatriots underscores her advanced learning and social refinement. This dual reading of the *señorita*’s character offers a model for U.S.-Mexican relations. The woman exemplifies intercultural understanding and respect as key components in facilitating international unity and diplomatic trust; yet, as the primary caregiver of Chan Yuc, the *señorita* also affirms the presumed righteousness of U.S. leadership in international affairs.

A Lesson about U.S. Paternalism

Charlot's illustration of the humans and Chan Yuc next to the serpent column is not unique in *The Story of Chan Yuc*. Rhoads and Charlot consistently portray the Americans in a positive manner, while they render the Mayan Indians in a correspondingly negative light. The storyline and images delineate an evolutionary national hierarchy that establishes the United States as superior to Mexico and thereby legitimates U.S. stewardship of Chan Yuc. In this way, *The Story of Chan Yuc* presents a racialized model for understanding and managing inter-American affairs. Like Chan Yuc, Mexico and other Latin American countries should accept U.S. leadership and guidance.

The plot begins with a blissful, nursery idyll. Chan Yuc, like any average deer, is born in a soft nest of leaves in the forest. She forms an instantaneous bond with her mother and eats, sleeps, and lives in an idyllic world. Her mother gently licks her coat as "her way of loving," and the pair cuddle and snuggle close while Chan Yuc listens to stories about the excursions they one day will make.³⁴² Charlot's accompanying full-page nursing scene reinforces this bucolic vision of Chan Yuc's youth (figure 90). The tiny fawn appears comfortably shielded within her mother's legs amidst tall bushes, flowers, and birds.

Chan Yuc's edenic nativity does not last, however. Two pages later, gunshots ring out. Mayan Indian hunters have entered the forest and Chan Yuc's mother, recognizing the inability of her young offspring to run, nobly sacrifices herself so that Chan Yuc might live. Rhoads tells her readers that "there was a sound louder than all

³⁴² Rhoads, *The Story of Chan Yuc*, 3-6.

the other sounds and a flash of something very bright” and Chan Yuc’s mother became very still.³⁴³ Chan Yuc, having witnessed her mother’s murder, stands helpless before her mother’s killers. The Mayan Indians do not show remorse for their actions, but they do spare the fawn’s life and deliver her to the American archaeological camp at Chichén Itzá. Rhoads concisely summarizes this life-altering sequence of events, writing:

One minute Chan Yuc was snuggled warm and soft beside her mother on her bed of leaves. The next minute she was in the bottom of a hunting bag one of the Indians carried on his back. Her adventures had begun.³⁴⁴

In the dichotomous world of children’s literature where happiness is “good” and sadness is “bad,” the emotional trauma of this event firmly establishes the Mayan hunters as the antagonists of the story.

Fortunately for Chan Yuc, a benevolent American woman adopts her as a pet. The deer ceases to be the moral responsibility of the Mayan Indians, since they gladly abandon her for someone else to rear. Rhoads reinforces this point in her text, when the señorita says, “Poor little baby deer. The hunters have taken away your mother. Now it is up to us to us to take care of you.”³⁴⁵ This statement reminds readers that the Mayan Indians are to blame for Chan Yuc’s orphaning, but assures them that “we” will intervene on the fawn’s behalf. Since the pronoun “us” certainly does not refer to the hunters, “we” must denote the American woman and her compatriots.

³⁴³ Ibid, 7.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 7-9.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 10.

The reader thus associates modern Mayan natives with wilderness and pain, while the white Americans come to represent knowledge, security, and civilization.

To be sure, the story and illustrations in the picture book contain ample evidence of the superior wealth and moral character of United States citizens, whose physical appearance, clothing, dwellings, and behaviors contrast with those of the Mayan Indians. Charlot crafted a double-page spread that simultaneously captures the tragic aftermath of the mother deer's death and the subsequent dislocation of Chan Yuc (figure 91). In the book, four Mayan hunters stride across the page with game and weapons in tow. Pressed up against the picture plane on a single, low horizon line, the hunters' chocolate-hued skin and bright white clothing contrast strongly with the undulating contours and decorative patterning of background foliage. Charlot's drawing style reiterates the apparent primitiveness of his subjects. He reduces the figures to simplified line drawings filled with solid bands of color. The stylized physiognomies of the hunters uniformly exhibit stereotypically Mayan features, including a protruding lower lip, a beak nose, and a sloping forehead. In addition, Charlot depicts the men using composite profile and frontal poses that evoke the hieroglyphic figural style of ancient Egypt; their knee-length sheaths and the upraised arms further associate the Mayan hunters with this archaic pictorial precedent. The lead figure even turns his head completely backward in an impossible gesture that underscores Charlot's deliberate rejection of academic naturalism. In addition, all of the hunters, except one, appear barefoot with exposed legs and midriffs. The hunter carrying Chan Yuc's dead mother on his shoulders wears the least clothing; only a loincloth preserves his modesty.

The dissimilar treatment of these native Mexican hunters and the American señorita reinforces this bifurcated impression of the humans in Chan Yuc's world (figure 92). While the men tote guns and actively thrust legs and elbows in pointed triangular poses, the American woman first appears as a solid, yet soft figure whose kneeling body forms a hemispherical shape that mirrors the arc of the woven basket holding Chan Yuc. The female figure raises one hand to delicately pet the bridge of Chan Yuc's nose, while her round face, in three-quarter profile, exhibits downcast eyes and a sweeping lock of hair that gives an impression of humility, femininity, and tenderness. Her repeated actions of lifting, caressing, and feeding Chan Yuc in the story create a personal relationship between woman and deer, while the Mayan hunters and their bullets remain distant and arguably indifferent to the animal's fate. The señorita's gentility likewise distinguishes her from the American scientists, whose stiff countenances and relative absence from the story render them socially distant and distinct. And yet, as I discussed above, the hairstyle and dress of the American señorita links her to the native Mexican woman. A hybridized figure embodying the best traits of both races, the American señorita represents a cultural conduit for international cooperation and goodwill.

Chan Yuc responds to the American woman's kindness. From the moment Chan Yuc enters the archaeological camp, she begins to "progress" from her natural, undomesticated state to a more civilized way of life. Although she initially exhibits fear and sorrow over her new circumstances, Chan Yuc quickly adapts to living in a house, drinking water from a bowl, and eating flowers. The American woman provides the deer with everything she needs; her new quarters surpass even the grass

huts where the Mayan Indians live. Without losing her animal appearance or mannerisms, Chan Yuc abandons her instincts and follows the lessons of the human world that has given her refuge.

Rhoads conveys the desirability of civilization through Chan Yuc's social interactions. Because the deer heeds the lessons of human society, she garners the attention and affection of everyone around her. The señorita, the scientists, and the Mayan Indians all spoil Chan Yuc by bringing her flowers and special greens to eat. "Everybody loved her," Rhoads explains. "And whatever Chan Yuc wanted, that was what Chan Yuc got."³⁴⁶

On the surface, this narrative encourages young American readers to conduct themselves in a similar manner. Since human childhood presumably begins with a lack of propriety analogous to Chan Yuc when she first enters the camp, young readers should emulate the deer by cultivating habits that will transform them into responsible, civilized members of society. However, the author's message becomes more complex for the fact that Chan Yuc is neither American nor even human. She is a wild deer from the Yucatan jungle; yet Chan Yuc transcends her primitive origins to attain civility as defined by U.S. standards. For this reason, we may understand Chan Yuc's social development as an exemplary model of the *mission civilisatrice*, or the Westernization of indigenous populations, that France and other European nations traditionally invoked as a rationalization for colonial subjugation.³⁴⁷ Rhoads

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 27. Rhoads reinforces this point with an anecdote about the camp's cook, who does not feel angry when Chan Yuc eats his favorite chop suey ingredient from his garden. Instead, the cook "grinned and grinned because Chan Yuc liked HIS flowers best of all" (30).

³⁴⁷ I am indebted to Ariel Dorfman's and Herbert Kohl's post-colonial analyses of *Babar the Elephant* (1932) as interpretive models for the present study of *The Story of Chan Yuc*. See Ariel Dorfman, *The Emperor's New Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babar, and Other Innocent Heroes Do to Our Minds*

encourages such a reading by creating textual linkages between Chan Yuc with the Maya Indians. First, Chan Yuc is born in the Yucatán, which Rhoads describes as the place “where Maya Indians have their homes.”³⁴⁸ Secondly, Chan Yuc’s name comes from the Mayan language, suggesting that the deer and the Maya Indians belong to a common cultural and linguistic group. According to Rhoads, the translation of “Chan Yuc” reads “Little-Deer-Who-Never-Grew-Up.”³⁴⁹ The author introduces Chan Yuc by her proper name from birth, further indicating that the deer’s first language is Mayan. The full weight of this knowledge emerges only once we realize that Chan Yuc and the other deer, Baby Chan Yuc, are the only characters in the book with given names. Rhoads identifies the human characters only by their ethnicity, profession, or gender.

The images in *The Story of Chan Yuc* also unite the Mayan Indians and the brocket deer through color. Charlot employs a reddish-brown hue to portray both Chan Yuc and the native Mexicans. Although the visual relationship between the animals and the Mayan Indians appears frequently throughout the book, the physical proximity of the two groups in Charlot’s hunting scene underscores this association (figure 91). The figure at the far right, especially, merges visually with the body of Chan Yuc’s mother, since only a thin, white outline distinguishes where one begins and the other ends.

(New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); and Herbert Kohl, *Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children’s Literature and the Power of Stories* (New York and London: The New Press, 2007).

³⁴⁸ Rhoads, *The Story of Chan Yuc*, 1.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 2. This was not an accurate translation, since the Maya word for deer is “ceh.” The phrase-for-a-name was, however, a common narrative device in Western film and literature to emphasize the apparent exoticism of indigenous American civilizations.

Nevertheless, Rhoads also acknowledges cultural dislocation as a probable consequence of assimilation. In the final sequence of the book, the American woman worries about Chan Yuc's ability to survive in the wild. The deer's personality and behavior have changed irrevocably, and her animal instincts have vanished. "What is going to become of you, Chan Yuc?" the woman ponders, adding, "You wouldn't last a minute in the bush. You are too used to human beings. When the Indians go hunting, you would never run away from the guns."³⁵⁰ Although social advancement remains a desirable aim in the book, Chan Yuc now confronts a hostile environment that has not evolved with her; she can never return to the culture of her birth.

The American woman must obtain special permission from the U.S. government to transport and install Chan Yuc in the National Zoo. The United States had recently passed a law banning the importation of foreign livestock, since a domestic outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease in 1929 had originated in infected meat scraps from Argentina.³⁵¹ Despite this legislative hurdle, the American señorita never considers a Mexican zoo as an alternative destination for Chan Yuc, suggesting Rhoads' belief that the modernity and wealth of the United States surpasses Mexico in this arena as well. Fortunately, the U.S. government makes an exception for the brocket deer, permitting the small animal to live the remainder of her life in the artificial wilderness of the National Zoo.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 31.

³⁵¹ See C. Langdon White, "The Argentine Meat Question," *Geographical Review* 35, no. 4 (October 1945): 634-646; and W.G. Campbell, "Quarantine Measures as Trade Barriers," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 141 (January 1929): 30-35.

At the end of the story, readers learn how Americans love and appreciate the deer. This warm reception contrasts with the danger and grief of Chan Yuc's early life and underscores the fact that the Mayan hunters did not value the animal, except as a source of food. Furthermore, the Mayan Indians refuse to modify their behavior, thereby sanctioning their evolutionary inferiority for perpetuity. Near the end of the book, the native Mexicans once again kill a mother deer, orphaning a fawn. A Mayan boy brings the baby deer to Chichén Itzá under the pretense that Chan Yuc will need a friend in the United States.

Notably, Rhoads does not dwell on this life-altering event. The orphaning trauma of this deer appears only in passing reference, suggesting that he will forget his savage past even more quickly than Chan Yuc did. Charlot supports this narrative elision by showing the first meeting between Chan Yuc and the other deer (figure 93). The artist depicts the Mayan youth cradling the fawn in a paternal gesture that emphasizes the training and care the animal will receive in his new life. Moreover, the instantaneous bond between the now domesticated Chan Yuc and the younger deer, who echoes her former self, suggests optimism for the wilderness community in which they both were born. The other deer adapts easily to the custom and decorum of human society.

Charlot's cover illustration, which also appears on the title page, neatly summarizes the central lesson of the book, which touts the benefits of American guidance and intervention in Mexican affairs (figure 84). The oval vignette depicts the diminutive deer, representing Mexico, cradled neatly in the palm of an oversized white hand, symbolizing the United States. Chan Yuc drapes one front leg over the

hand, suggesting her comfort and intimacy with the benevolent, if disembodied, human presence. The deer turns her head, forming a “c” curve that mirrors the bend in the fingers and raised thumb of the outstretched hand. Her ears frame the tip of the thumb, while her tail forms a graceful arc that mimics the rose stem at the far left. Other illustrations highlight the protective and care-giving capacity of human hands as well. In one image, a disembodied white hand administers milk to the baby deer using a dropper. Another depicts the American woman holding Chan Yuc against her chest with both hands near the animal’s face, while a second deer looks on (figure 94). The woman gazes lovingly at Chan Yuc, who seems content to be in her care. As a parable of U.S.-Mexican relations, *The Story of Chan Yuc* teaches readers that the weaker, less civilized country (Mexico) may attain material gain and sophistication by ignoring its natural/national instincts and submitting to the ministrations and guidance of the United States.

An Allegory for U.S. Cultural Stewardship

Rhoads’ decision to situate the narrative events at Chichén Itzá suggests that the moral of *The Story of Chan Yuc* can extend to “orphaned” monuments as well. While the setting for the book derived largely from the author’s travels to the Yucatán, the archaeological backdrop imbues the narrative with a subtext about pan-Americanism and U.S. cultural imperialism. The Good Neighbor Policy precipitated a hemispheric reconfiguration of “American” identity that included the absorption of indigenous artifacts as part of U.S. cultural patrimony. *The Story of Chan Yuc*

exposes the ideological underside of this discourse, which asserted the primacy of the United States as heir apparent to this distinguished past.

The Story of Chan Yuc provides a justification for U.S. cultural custodianship by portraying modern Mexican populations as being, at best, disinterested in or, at worst, inept at preserving artifacts of their exalted pre-colonial past. By demonstrating the intellectual and moral superiority of American citizens, the storyline perpetuates the notion of contemporary Mayan Indians being primitive moderns, frozen at an earlier stage of civilization. The indigenous populations presumably have lost the intellect and sophistication of their ancient ancestors. Although they work as laborers at Chichén Itzá, the Mayan Indians in *The Story of Chan Yuc* do not express an overt interest in preserving the ancient monuments. Rhoads addresses this lack of concern more explicitly in her unpublished novelette “Marti.” In that story, several Mayan laborers speculate about the unusual industriousness of American archaeologists, who “did not believe in the old gods but . . . came every year[,] leaving their own fine country to bush and dig and sort the stones, rebuilding the temples.” When the title character, Marti, says that he does not understand why the Americans care, an older boy tells him, “We do not need to understand. They are rich, the Americans, and they pay us well for our work.”³⁵²

For Rhoads, the so-called “black legend” helped to explain the apparent cultural disconnect between modern Mayan populations and their accomplished ancestral past. The trauma of Spanish colonialism had created a psychic fissure that erased the collective memory and traditions of the ancient Maya. Aside from their

³⁵² Dorothy Rhoads, “Marti,” Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 4, BYU.

biological link to antiquity, contemporary Mayan Indians possessed no real sense of their accomplished ancestral past. As Rhoads explained in another manuscript, the modern Mayan Indians were “the descendants of the old people who had lived in the city [Chichén Itzá], but this they did not now. For the Spaniards had burned their books and killed their priests and all their art and wisdom had passed away.”³⁵³

This widespread cultural amnesia and its resultant apathy places Mexico’s pre-Columbian cultural history at risk. Like Chan Yuc, the ancient monuments at Chichén Itzá are orphans. In *The Story of Chan Yuc*, Rhoads acknowledges the site’s previous abandonment by basing her story around the local presence of American archaeologists and the recovery and restoration project currently underway. It should come as little surprise, then, that these Americans — who already serve as surrogate caretakers for Mexico’s pre-Columbian artifacts — also will assume responsibility for the orphaned Chan Yuc.

The reverse logic applies as well. Charlot’s images make explicit allusions to ancient Mayan art, thereby encouraging the reader to extend the story’s lesson of American benevolent custodianship of Chan Yuc to pre-Columbian material culture as well. By foregrounding American preservation efforts and Mayan disinterest at the same time, *The Story of Chan Yuc* justifies United States cultural stewardship of Mexican artifacts.

Since the sixteenth-century, the acquisition, removal, and display of pre-Columbian objects has functioned as part of an imperialist claim-staking process in which European and American nation-states exerted control over and thus rightful

³⁵³ Dorothy Rhoads, “The Iguana Who Lived in a Temple,” Dorothy Rhoads Papers, Box 4, BYU.

possession of a particular locale and its former occupants.³⁵⁴ Admittedly, the United States was not the only country to make nationalist claims based on pre-Columbian history at this time. Mexico, in particular, had been calling upon indigenous culture to coalesce its national identity in the post-revolutionary era. In the contractual agreement with the Carnegie Institute of Washington, the Mexican government insisted that no pre-Columbian artifacts should leave the country. Yet even while adhering to the terms of this international agreement, the Carnegie Institute and its scholars asserted symbolic ownership over the history and objects of ancient America through scientific study and publication. The United States government and other institutions likewise claimed possession of ancient Mayan material culture through archaeological expeditions, museum exhibitions, and artistic and photographic reproductions.³⁵⁵ As historian Curtis M. Hinsley has demonstrated in his analysis of nineteenth-century collecting, even when an artifact was not physically removed from its original location – as was the case for Chichén Itzá under the Carnegie Institution expedition – its mobility through visual representation or cast reproductions permitted an alternative, and equally effective, means of cultural claim-staking. For example, French photographer and collector Désiré Charnay contributed to the technological

³⁵⁴ Curtis M. Hinsley, “In Search of the New World Classical,” in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 105.

³⁵⁵ Hinsley, “In Search of the New World Classical,” 105-121. Holly Barnet-Sanchez has observed that the willing collaboration between the Mexican government and American institutions ranging from the Carnegie Institution of Washington to the Museum of Modern Art demonstrates a willingness on the part of Mexico to share its cultural heritage within the celebratory framework of pan-Americanism. Holly Barnet-Sanchez, “The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art: U.S. Museums and the Role of Foreign Policy in the Appropriation and Transformation of Mexican Heritage, 1933-1944” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1993), 110-146.

conquest and consumption of pre-Columbian culture through his photographic expeditions to Mexico.³⁵⁶

Charlot was intimately familiar with the history of collecting and depositing artifacts in museums. His great-uncle had assembled an impressive collection of pre-Columbian codices, sculptures, and other items, which he later donated to the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. As a youth in France, Charlot had spent numerous hours at the library poring over the collection. In addition, the artist knew Désiré Charnay's work very well, since he had met the explorer-photographer personally. Charnay, the neighbor and friend of Charlot's grandfather, would often reenact his "jungle adventures" for the young Charlot, and on the occasion of Charlot's first communion, the elder Frenchmen presented him with a clay whistle. Shaped like a coyote, the whistle resembled a Mesoamerican artifact the archaeologist had found near Popocatépetl.³⁵⁷ As an adult, Charlot contributed to American efforts to preserve and restore Mayan antiquity through his participation in the Carnegie expedition. By appearing alongside U.S. scholarship that asserted intellectual ownership over pre-Columbian materials, Charlot's archaeological drawings – like Charnay's photographs – circulated within the context of Western cultural appropriation. *The Story of Chan Yuc*, although targeting a more youthful segment of the population, functions as an extension of this process.

Charlot incorporated multiple allusions to pre-Columbian monuments in his illustrations for *The Story of Chan Yuc*. For example, the artist's rendering of the

³⁵⁶ Hinsley, "In Search of the New World Classical," 112-115.

³⁵⁷ Barbara Bader, *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 265.

Mayan Indian youth cradling Baby Chan Yuc closely recalls the carved image of K'an Joy Chitam on the ancient Mayan Palace Tablet (figures 93 and 95). The eighth-century king of Palenque appears on this coronation panel at center. Seated frontally in a cross-legged pose with his head turned in full profile to the right, the carved figure overlaps his arms, bringing his right hand to rest on his left elbow, while leaning his shoulders toward his right side. The nearly identical pose of the Mayan Indian boy in Charlot's illustration suggests that the artist probably modeled his drawing after the ancient carving. Charlot, who was an avid student of pre-Columbian art, certainly knew the monument. Less than one year after designing illustrations for *The Story of Chan Yuc*, the artist discussed the temples at Palenque in a radio interview for a July 1942 installment of "Pacific House of San Francisco."³⁵⁸

Similarly, the serpent column and the temple in Charlot's double-page illustration correlate to actual Mayan objects at Chichén Itzá (figures 89 and 96). In addition to lending cultural authenticity to Rhoads' narrative, these monuments provide a visual testament to the benefit of American intervention. Recently restored, the ancient remnants celebrate the cultural apex of Mayan civilization rather than its ruinous demise. The sloping pyramid walls and its square superstructure resemble the largest monument at Chichén Itzá, El Castillo. The Carnegie Institute of Washington had executed the reconstruction of the pyramid between 1925 and 1928, during which time Charlot also worked with the expedition as a field-artist. The artist also found inspiration in his own archaeological drawings from the site. His depiction of the serpent column in *The Story of Chan Yuc* quotes directly from the

³⁵⁸ Jean Charlot, Interview transcript for Pacific House of San Francisco, July 26, 1942, Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

colored image Charlot had made more than a decade earlier (figure 96). Although somewhat stylized, Charlot's book illustration maintains the squared "L" shape, swirled eyebrow, and feather detailing of the original. The similarity between the illustration and the drawing becomes even closer when we recall that the lithographic printing process reverses the left-right orientation of the original design.

The pristine appearance of these monuments sharpens the cultural fracture between ancient and modern Mayan societies, since the contemporary Mayan Indians of *The Story of Chan Yuc* exhibit moral turpitude and a propensity for violence that affirms their savage state. Not only do the native Mexicans hunt and kill a mother deer without consideration for her offspring, they also fail to assume responsibility for or learn from their actions. In this way, the Mayan Indians differ also from Chan Yuc, who progresses easily from nature to culture through American edification.

An Allegory for U.S. Economic Hegemony

The Story of Chan Yuc proffers another layer of meaning if we understand the deer to be just that, a deer. As a native animal of Yucatán jungle, Chan Yuc stands as a representative for all of the natural resources of Mexico. Rhoads' story justifies a paradigm of U.S. economic dominance in the hemisphere by promoting an imagined ideal of benevolent American oversight and development in Latin American affairs.

Under the Good Neighbor Policy, the United States government believed that increased trade would enhance inter-American cooperation and trust, as well as cultivate a self-sustaining hemisphere that would insulate the Americas from foreign instability and aggression. American investment and reciprocal trade agreements

with Latin America were not philanthropic endeavors, however. The U.S. government and private corporations expected to reap substantial economic gains from Latin American trade. By substituting transatlantic trade with inter-American commerce, the United States hoped to facilitate its economic recovery from the Great Depression and consolidate its economic influence in the region. Since the United States government had agreed to a policy of military nonintervention in Latin American countries under the Good Neighbor Policy, economic investment presented an alternative, yet equally persuasive means to exercise political influence in the affairs of the other American republics.

Even before the United States entered World War II, hostilities in Europe highlighted the strategic importance of Latin American countries as suppliers of wartime materials. Bilateral trade agreements with Latin American nations permitted the U.S. government to secure exclusive access to raw materials considered vital to the war effort. The United States exhibited particular interest in the extraction of Latin American natural resources, including rubber, cotton, oil, tin, and manganese. The U.S. Mineral Reserve Company signed purchasing agreements to lock in advantageous prices, while the OIAA implemented technical assistance programs to foster industrial development in Central and South America.³⁵⁹

Government officials also pushed an agenda of preclusive buying, in which the United States absorbed surplus production of strategic Latin American raw

³⁵⁹ Thomas O'Brien, *Making the Americas*, 143. In addition to programs to improve Latin American food production and hygiene, the OIAA sponsored geological surveys and production studies to aid in the procurement of raw materials for the Allied war effort.

material to prevent Axis powers from gaining access to them.³⁶⁰ Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. was one of the most vocal opponents of Hitler in the Roosevelt administration. Morgenthau championed hemispheric financial ties to help counter the Nazi threat, and even purchased Mexican surplus of silver to stabilize the international market and restrict European investments.³⁶¹

By centering on an indigenous product of Mexico (a deer), *The Story of Chan Yuc* foregrounds the abundant natural resources in Latin America. The international transfer of such native materials, whether agricultural, mineral, or animal, ostensibly strengthened inter-American relations, enhanced hemispheric self-sufficiency, and supplied the United States with materials for ammunition and military equipment. The public discourse of the Good Neighbor Policy frequently linked U.S.-Latin American trade to pan-Americanism and hemispheric security. For example, the OIAA-sponsored Walt Disney Studio documentary *The Grain that Built a Hemisphere* (1943) instructs viewers on the importance of corn to the war effort (figure 97).³⁶² The narrator explains that “corn is the symbol of a spirit that links the

³⁶⁰ Monica Rankin, *¡México, la patria!: Propaganda and Production during World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 83.

³⁶¹ Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 36. Although these actions had little effect on the United States economy, they had a huge impact in Mexico.

³⁶² This animated film formed part of a series the studio produced in collaboration with the OIAA to promote hemispheric goodwill. That same year Disney released the animated film *Saludos Amigos!* (1943), a tremendously popular movie featuring short stories about Donald Duck, Goofy, and other Disney characters traversing the American continents. Julianne Burton provides an excellent critique of the Disney Studios’ Latin American films in “Don (Juanito) Duck and the Imperial-Patriarchal Unconscious: Disney Studios, the Good Neighbor Policy, and the Packaging of Latin America,” in *Nationalism and Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 21-41. J.B. Kaufman, the resident historian at Disney Studios, recently issued a meticulous, if sympathetic, chronicle of Walt Disney’s contributions to inter-American diplomacy in *South of the Border with Disney: Walt Disney and the Good Neighbor Program, 1941-1948* (New York: The Walt Disney Family Foundation Press, 2009).

Americas in a common bond of union and solidarity.”³⁶³ This native crop held important meaning for the current world conflict in Europe, since it offered tangible evidence of a hemispheric cultural base. The animated film promotes hemispheric unity and traces the evolution of corn from the ancient Maya, Aztec, and Inca civilizations to the modern United States. Bound not only by proximity but by a shared culture of corn, the United States and Latin America formed natural allies in defeating the Axis threat. Moreover, the viewer learns in the final sequence of the film that corn, more than a mere foodstuff, has practical application in the manufacture of explosives, parachute fabrics, tanks, and other essential war materials.

Furthermore, *The Story of Chan Yuc* naturalizes the uneven dynamic of hemispheric economic exchange, which privileged U.S. goals and interests. As I have already mentioned, the dominant social structures and narrative conclusion of the book reveal an underlying ideology linking racial attributes to societal advancement. For instance, it is the American woman, not the Mayan Indians, who possesses the knowledge, the money, and the motivation to care for Chan Yuc. The Mexicans, by contrast, excel in preindustrial pursuits like hunting and physical labor. In addition, the Mayan Indian hunters lack any real prospect for social advancement and so perpetually threaten to deplete the local natural resources through their poor extraction techniques. As a consequence, the narrative discourse of this book advances the claim for Americans’ superior insight into the local industries of Latin American countries. In this context, the exportation of Chan Yuc to the United States serves as a model for the kind of economic exchange that the U.S. government and

³⁶³ Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1997), 230.

private corporations aimed to establish in Mexico under the Good Neighbor Policy. Because the industrialized United States possessed greater knowledge and infrastructure for the transformation of native raw materials into manufactured goods, Mexico and other Latin American countries should submit to United States leadership in economic affairs.

Conclusion

Dorothy Rhoads and Jean Charlot consciously attempted to transform discriminatory attitudes regarding Latin Americans; however, their efforts remained grounded in contemporary ethnocentric assumptions about race and society. While narrative depictions of Latin Americans as innately natural or violent may seem relatively obvious and offensive to the modern eye, the implicit ideology of *The Story of Chan Yuc* was entirely unremarkable to period readers, who instead focused on their firsthand knowledge of Mexican culture. A reviewer for the *New York Times*, for example, praises Rhoads for her simple manner of storytelling and “fine feeling for an animal’s reaction to changing conditions.” Meanwhile, Charlot’s illustrations garnered acclaim for being “characteristically suggestive of Mayan art.” Notably, the reviewer did not observe any disparaging treatment of the Mayan Indians in the image or text. On the contrary, the author lauded Charlot’s imagery as “humorous and imaginative, combining grace with strength and dignity.”³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ Unsigned review of *The Story of Chan Yuc*, by Dorothy Rhoads. *New York Times*, February 15, 1942, Book Review section.

Such critical oversight suggests the implicit ideology of *The Story of Chan Yuc* corresponded to prevailing American attitudes and beliefs about Latin Americans. When narratives and images reproduce values that the author and the reader both share, these ideas function as accepted truths. As scholars Robyn McCallum and John Stephens have perceptively argued in their analysis of children's books:

Ideologies can...function most powerfully in books which reproduce beliefs and assumptions of which authors and readers are largely unaware. Such texts render ideology invisible and hence invest implicit ideological positions with legitimacy by naturalizing them.³⁶⁵

Although its portrayal of modern Mexicans strove to produce social change by adopting the discursive strategies of the Good Neighbor Policy, *The Story of Chan Yuc* unconsciously reinforced prevailing American prejudices of U.S. racial superiority and social dominance. These conflicting intercultural visions necessarily restricted the transformative social effect this book could engender. Moreover, we must remember that Rhoads based the storyline of *The Story of Chan Yuc* on actual events. The American author carried out the paternalistic rescue of a native commodity in Mexico and then brought it to the United States for scientific and cultural enhancement. These actions mirrored the concurrent paternalism, exploitation, and extraction of natural resources that the United States performed in Latin America under the guise of good neighborly economic development and industrial modernization.

³⁶⁵ Robyn McCallum and John Stephens, "Ideology in Children's Books," in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Shelby A. Wolf, Karen Coats, Patricia Enciso, and Christine A. Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 2011), 360.

The asymmetrical power relations of U.S.-Mexican relations foreground the contradictions inherent in the Good Neighbor Policy as a discursive ideal and as a diplomatic practice. At the same time that the U.S. government strove to engender Mexican trust and allegiance to a hemispheric construct, policymakers refused to relinquish nationalist assumptions of American superiority and implemented procedures to meet current U.S. military and economic needs. Grounded in the historical circumstances of the Roosevelt era, U.S.-led pan-Americanism served varied nationalist interests until 1945, when it quickly lost currency with both U.S. officials and the general public. I now conclude with an examination of the malleable and, ultimately, temporary nature of pan-Americanism to excavate its social impact on U.S. race relations both during and after the Good Neighbor era.

Conclusion

In the years leading up to and during the Second World War, the Roosevelt administration embarked on a large-scale public relations campaign to improve foreign relations with the nations of Latin America, especially Mexico. To generate a sense of patriotism and loyalty to a hemispheric imaginary, the U.S. government invented a mythic pre-Columbian past and evoked core values like democracy to demonstrate that Latin Americans possessed these same defining traits. This strategic discourse attempted to revise the established schema of American-ness to include citizens of Central and South America, thereby alleviating negative racial and cultural assumptions and securing mutual cooperation in U.S.-led commercial and military endeavors.

As federal patronage of Lowell Houser's *Evolution of Corn* demonstrates, American art and visual culture played a central role in this myth-making process. U.S. government agencies and private organizations like the Carnegie Foundation inundated the public with cultural programs and symbols designed to overwrite previous conceptions of Latin America with a revisionary narrative of pan-Americanism. Geographic and temporal distance permitted American citizens to embrace the history and culture of ancient Mexico as a unifying symbol denoting shared hemispheric patrimony. However, as the public debate surrounding Donal Hord's *Guardian of the Water* reveals, the avowed egalitarianism of the Good Neighbor Policy was palatable to Anglo Americans in conception much more than in

practice. Since multiethnic constructions of American identity challenged civic imaginings of white homogeneity and hegemony, visual representations of pan-Americanism in ethnically diverse border regions like Southern California required contextualization in the spatial and experiential realm of fantasy to obtain Anglo tolerance and approval.

Persistent racial discrimination and the Roosevelt administration's limited application of the Good Neighbor Policy in internal affairs spurred American minorities to advocate for full rights of citizenship. Charles White's mural at Hampton University, for example, adapted ideas and imagery from pan-Americanism to insert black history and culture in the national narrative and to demand equal treatment and civil rights for blacks. Yet even the sincerest exponents of pan-Americanism exhibited latent paternalism in their discussions of Mexico. Jean Charlot and Dorothy Rhoads, both of whom traveled extensively in Mexico and wielded their firsthand knowledge to advance intercultural understanding, pointedly distinguished the impressive accomplishments of ancient Mayan civilization from the rural simplicity of indigenous Mexicans in the present day. Policy makers and cultural leaders in the United States similarly characterized contemporary Mexico as technologically and intellectually "backward," thereby legitimizing paternalistic policies of economic and cultural exploitation.

Despite aggressive rhetorical claims of inter-American equality, the Good Neighbor Policy functioned primarily as a social lubricant for U.S. economic expansion and strategic defense in Latin America. Roosevelt unabashedly framed his foreign policy initiatives to achieve national gains. The projected U.S. aims of inter-

American diplomacy shifted in concert with developments on the home front and in Europe. In the early and middle part of the 1930s, the U.S. government sought to hasten domestic economic recovery from the Great Depression and preserve peace. Later in the decade, the administration placed greater emphasis on hemispheric security as essential to national defense. Once the United States entered World War II, the Good Neighbor Policy facilitated inter-American martial collaboration and, as the Allied nations approached certain victory, plans for postwar economic development.

As I discussed with *The Story of Chan Yuc*, racist cultural assumptions about American superiority over Mexico continued to circulate even amidst U.S. claims of pan-Americanism. United States paternalism toward Latin American nations was especially evident in U.S. war propaganda produced for international distribution. Historian Monica Rankin has shown in her analysis of OIAA foreign propaganda that the federal agency advocated hemispheric cooperation abroad not by portraying American and Mexican soldiers on equal terms, but rather by showcasing U.S. modernity and military strength to convince Mexican viewers to join “the winning side.” The glossy large-format Spanish-language magazine *En Guardia*, for example, published numerous articles about U.S. military and political leaders, describing how their training and expertise would ensure an American victory.³⁶⁶ The OIAA poster “As One Man” similarly stressed Latin American cooperation with the United States as an essential component of wartime security. The graphic print personifies the military fortitude of a united hemisphere through an idealized monolithic armed

³⁶⁶ Monica Rankin, *¡México, la patria!: Propaganda and Production during World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 159-206.

soldier straddling the American continents amidst a serene, jewel-hued sea of green and blue (figure 98).

By flexing military and economic muscle, the United States made an appeal for hemispheric solidarity within an existing paradigm of American hegemony. Another OIAA poster, which shows a giant Nazi skeleton looming menacingly over a diminutive Mexican peasant, underscores this point (figure 99). The unarmed Latin American man cowers behind a series of spikes and barbed wire spanning the Atlantic Ocean and eastern seaboard of both North and South America, suggesting that he would be ineffective in thwarting the enemy's advance without the assistance of his stronger American neighbors. This implicit denial of Latin American military strength undermines the fundamental premise of hemispheric defense under the Good Neighbor Policy. If the United States believed that Latin American nations possessed the philosophical conviction and military capacity to ward off European fascism, an inter-American alliance would be less necessary for preserving hemispheric security.

Mexicans, like other Latin American citizens, bristled at such heavy-handed rhetoric. Nevertheless, the United States achieved some success in strengthening its commercial and defensive ties with Mexico. For the most part, the Mexican government accommodated U.S. foreign policy and its accompanying cultural and economic initiatives in hopes that intercultural exchange would dismantle American hegemony by placing the two nations on more equal diplomatic footing.

Although Mexico maintained neutrality in the global conflict until May 1942, the Mexican government contributed critical raw materials including rubber, copper, and tungsten for American production of military supplies. Mexico also performed

air and sea patrols of Baja California at the behest of the United States and agreed to the formation of the Mexican-United States Defense Board to foster international dialogue about wartime defense. After Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho officially declared war on Germany, Italy, and Japan, he entered into an arrangement with the United States for the reciprocal conscription of resident nationals. The Mexican government also initiated the Bracero Program, which authorized the importation of Mexican workers to the United States to resolve wartime labor shortages. For the remainder of the war, Mexico emerged as an important and reliable partner to the United States in promoting an inter-American alliance with other Latin American republics.³⁶⁷

The exigencies of war even encouraged Mexican officials to overlook blatant U.S. mistreatment of Mexican Americans during the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial of 1942 and infamous Zoot-Suit Riots of 1943. The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, had heightened U.S. concerns on the West Coast about more attacks to follow, and in the spring of 1942, the U.S. government removed all Japanese residents from Los Angeles and placed them in internment camps.³⁶⁸ Soon after, racial tensions in the city focused on the so-called “Mexican problem” and soon erupted in a media frenzy over the Sleepy Lagoon murder case. Local newspapers

³⁶⁷ See María Emilia Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies: Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Michael Mathes, “The Two Californias during World War II,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (December 1965): 323-331; and David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 133-155.

³⁶⁸ President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. Motivated by fears that Japanese-origin Americans posed domestic threats including espionage and sabotage, the executive order authorized the U.S. War Department to remove “all persons” from designated military areas. The U.S. government moved 100,000 Japanese American citizens, many of them born in the United States, to internment camps for the duration of the war.

carried extensive coverage of the trial, which involved the arrest and indictment of twenty-two Mexican-American youths for the murder of José Díaz in 1942.

Although the prosecution did not produce the murder weapon nor place any of the defendants at the scene of the crime, sixteen were convicted and sent to prison, apparently because of their “violent” Aztec-Mexican heritage, their supposed gang affiliation, and their preference for zoot suits.³⁶⁹

As Luis Alvarez, Elizabeth R. Escobedo and others have argued, zoot suits functioned in wartime as cultural signifiers of youthful defiance and racial consciousness. Mexican American teenagers expressed their dissatisfaction with racial discrimination and policies of segregation by refusing to conform to conventional fashions and mores. The stark difference between the conspicuous self-indulgence of zoot suiters and the wartime sacrifice of mainstream society translated, for many white Americans, as a deviant and un-American zoot subculture that imperiled national security.³⁷⁰

In the United States, the OIAA recognized the potentially serious diplomatic fallout of domestic racism but did not actively seek to institute legislative reform.³⁷¹ This reluctance to pursue national policy change underscores enduring U.S. attitudes about Anglo American superiority. Furthermore, U.S. engagement in active combat

³⁶⁹ See Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

³⁷⁰ See Luis Alvarez, *The Power of Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008); Elizabeth R. Escobedo, “The Pachuca Panic: Sexual and Cultural Battlegrounds in World War II Los Angeles,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 38, no 2 (Summer 2007): 133-156; and Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984).

³⁷¹ Justin Hart, “Making Democracy Safe for the World: Race, Propaganda, and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy during World War II,” *Pacific Historical Review* 73, no. 1 (February 2004): 49-84.

tacitly granted the government political license to defer addressing problems of domestic discrimination until after the war.

U.S. impetus for the Good Neighbor Policy remained rooted in the economic and political circumstances of the interwar period. As Homi Bhabha has asserted in his study of cultural identity, periods of social crisis allow for the emergence of ex-centric revisionary configurations that situated previously marginalized populations at the center of the national fabric.³⁷² During the interwar period, the economic upheaval of the Great Depression and widespread disillusionment with the First World War destabilized national identity in the United States. Through the Good Neighbor Policy, the Roosevelt administration deliberately adopted a revisionary narrative of hemispheric historical and cultural heritage in order to advance diplomatic relations with Latin American countries. Art and visual culture was an essential ingredient in this diplomatic mythmaking process. Lowell Houser, Donal Hord, Charles White, and Jean Charlot all created artworks depicting pre-Columbian subject matter as a significant part of American heritage. By transforming political rhetoric into powerful visual symbols, these artists encapsulated prevailing U.S. attitudes and beliefs about Latin Americans in their art. Careful analysis of these objects uncovers the inherent ideological ambivalence of U.S. pan-Americanism and its revisionary constructions of race.

The specific interwar aims of the Good Neighbor Policy rendered its inclusive inter-American discourse obsolete following the Second World War. After wartime industry occasioned a rebound in the U.S. economy and Latin American nations

³⁷² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 254.

joined the United States in defeating Nazi Germany, the U.S. government determined that pan-Americanism was no longer necessary for national security or prosperity and began dismantling federal agencies devoted to that cause. The transitory nature of the Good Neighbor Policy and its multiethnic refashioning of American identity had little enduring impact on either U.S.-Latin American relations or domestic race relations in the postwar years. Indeed, as the case studies in this dissertation reveal, U.S. diplomatic promises of equality under the Good Neighbor Policy were never more than an illusory ideal.

Illustrations

Figure 1. "Fortune Survey XXXIX," *Fortune* (August 1941): 76.

Figure 2. David Alfaro Siqueiros, *América Tropical*, 1932. Olvera, Los Angeles, California. Restored to full color by Judith F. Baca and Martha Ramirez-Oropeza, 2008.

Figure 3. Lowell Houser, Preliminary Sketch, 1935. Photograph No. 121-MS-1HOUS-20, Photographs of Paintings and Sculptures Commissioned by the Section of Fine Arts, Records of the Public Buildings Service, Record Group 121-GA, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

Figure 4. Detail, “Inherited Cultures” by Harry Donald Jones. Francis White, Harry Donald Jones, Everett Jeffrey, Don Glassell, *Law and Order*, 1936. Federal Courthouse, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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Figure 8. E.L. Allen, Competition Entry 15. Photograph No. 121-MS-1ALLE-15, Photographs of Paintings and Sculptures Commissioned by the Section of Fine Arts, Records of the Public Buildings Service, Record Group 121-GA, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

Figure 9. Detail. Richard Haines, Competition Entry 17. Photograph No. 121-MS-1HAIN-17C, Photographs of Paintings and Sculptures Commissioned by the Section of Fine Arts, Records of the Public Buildings Service, Record Group 121-GA, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

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Figure 11. Ernest Freed. Competition Entry 10. Photograph No. 121-MS-1FREE-10, Photographs of Paintings and Sculptures Commissioned by the Section of Fine Arts, Records of the Public Buildings Service, Record Group 121-GA, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

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Figure 13. Detail. Lowell Houser, *The Evolution of Corn*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 18 x 6 feet. Ames Post Office, Ames, Iowa.

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Figure 15. Detail. Lowell Houser, *The Evolution of Corn*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 18 x 6 feet. Ames Post Office, Ames, Iowa.

Figure 16. Donal Hord, *Guardian of the Water*, 1937-1939. Lakeside silver gray granite, tile mosaic, and cast stone, 22 feet 3 inches. West plaza of the Civic Center Building (now San Diego County Administration Building), San Diego, California. Photograph by the author.

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Figure 24. Donal Hord, *Aztec Woman of Tehuantepec*, 1935. Bedford Indiana limestone, 4 feet x 2 ½ feet x 5 ½ feet. Courtyard of the House of Hospitality, Balboa Park, San Diego, California. Photograph by the author.

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Figure 31. Richard Requa, Federal Building, California-Pacific International Exposition, 1935. Balboa Park, San Diego, California. Photograph from the California Pacific Exposition Collection, Booth Historical Photograph Archive, San Diego History Center, San Diego, California.

Figure 32. Richard Requa, California History Building, California-Pacific International Exposition, 1935. Balboa Park, San Diego, California. Photograph from the California Pacific Exposition Collection, Booth Historical Photograph Archive, San Diego History Center, San Diego, California.

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Figure 56. "Our Proposal," *Lustige Blätter*, no. 45 (1943).

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Figure 58. Leon Helguera, *Americans All*, 1943. Poster, 20 x 28 inches. Commissioned by the U.S. Office of War Information, Washington, D.C. Reproduced from University of North Texas Digital Library, <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc426/> (accessed December 2, 2010).

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Figure 65. Detail, stamping press. Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry: South Wall*, 1932-1933. Fresco, 43 x 67 feet. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan.

Figure 66. "Diego Rivera: His Amazing New Mural Depicts Pan-American Unity,"
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Figure 67. Miguel Covarrubias, *The Museum of Modern Art Presents Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*, 1940. Watercolor on paper, 15 3/8 x 22 1/2 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

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Figure 73. Elizabeth Catlett, *Mother and Child*, 1942-1944. Terracotta, 16 inches.
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Figure 77. Film still from Walt Disney Studios, *Education for Death*, 1943.

Figure 78. Illustration by Lowell Houser for Alida Sims Malkus' *The Dark Star of Itza: The Story of a Pagan Princess* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931).

Figure 79. Photograph of Jean Charlot at Chichén Itzá, 1926. Reproduced from Donald McVicker, “The Painter-Turned-Archaeologist: Jean Charlot at Chichen Itza,” The Jean Charlot Collection, http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/charlotcoll/J_Charlot/charlotmcvicker.html (accessed July 20, 2010).

Figure 80. Dust jacket illustration by Jean Charlot for Sylvanus G. Morley's *The Ancient Maya* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1946).

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Figure 88. Recto and verso. Illustrations by Jean Charlot for Dorothy Rhoads' *The Story of Chan Yuc* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1941).

Figure 89. Illustration by Jean Charlot for Dorothy Rhoads' *The Story of Chan Yuc* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1941).

Figure 90. Illustration by Jean Charlot for Dorothy Rhoads' *The Story of Chan Yuc* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1941).

Figure 91. Illustration by Jean Charlot for Dorothy Rhoads' *The Story of Chan Yuc* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1941).

Figure 92. Illustration by Jean Charlot for Dorothy Rhoads' *The Story of Chan Yuc* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1941).

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Figure 95. Palace Tablet (Maya), Palenque, Mexico, 8th c. C.E.

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Figure 97. Film still from Walt Disney Studios, *The Grain that Built a Hemisphere*, 1943.

Figure 98. "As One Man." Poster commissioned by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, ca. 1941. Special Collections Department, Drawer D, Poster number 156, Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore, Maryland.

Figure 99. Poster commissioned by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Records of the Office of Inter-American Affairs, Record Group 229, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

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