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Tourist-Technicians: Civilian Diplomacy, Tourism, and Development in Cold War Yucatán

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Tourist-Technicians: Civilian diplomacy, tourism, and development in Cold War Yucatán

by

Katherine Warming

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: History

Program of Study Committee:
Bonar Hernández, Major Professor
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2018

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ABSTRACT

In 1964, the United States Agency for International Development created the Partners of the Alliance for Progress to match state-level civilian volunteer organizations in the United States and Latin America. Local Partners of the Alliance chapters coordinated cultural, technical, and material exchanges between civilians in two sub-national regions to increase the visibility and perceived efficacy of the Alliance for Progress within Latin American communities. Previous works on Cold War diplomacy in Latin America have focused on the Alliance for Progress as a largely-ineffective federal program. These studies have neglected the role of the civilian Partners volunteers in supporting Alliance activity. This thesis examines the United States' Partners of the Alliance for Progress program, specifically the formation and activities of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Alliance from establishment in 1965 to privatization in the early 1970s.

The Iowa-Yucatán Partners largely focused on the technical and economic development of Yucatán, which required the transportation of American civilian experts and their supplies across the United States-Mexico border. The Iowa-Yucatán Partners relied on their civilian status to avoid political obstruction, scrutiny, and costs that might be incurred by moving development supplies across the border in an official diplomatic capacity. Tourism became a useful tool for the Iowa-Yucatán Partners' activities to lure technical experts and American consumers to Yucatán and to transport supplies as personal luggage, which subverted Mexico's control over imported materials. Blending tourist, technician, and diplomat identities, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners reinforced American perceptions of Latin America as a space for Americans to consume "exotic" cultures and transform "deficient" environments. This research invites further historical study of the political and cultural implications of civilian diplomacy and "voluntourism," which have perpetuated the United States' informal empire in Latin America.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

On February 2, 1969, a quiet conspiracy was carried out in the border town of Laredo, Texas. More than three hundred gleaming Air Stream trailers flocked around Laredo's Civic Center. The trailers' occupants, mostly retired American couples, filed inside for a final "Rendezvous Program" before commencing their journey across the United States-Mexico border. The group was bound for the distant Mexican state of Yucatán, on the sixty-third caravan trip of the Wally Byam Caravan Club. These Rendezvous Programs allowed the caravan members to prepare for their two-month excursion through 12 states, 21 cities, and over 4000 miles on a "Caravan to Antiquity."¹ Among the crowd of retirees and trailer enthusiasts in Laredo were Jeanette Westfall and Kay Schlacks. The two women shared a great deal in common: both lived in small-town Iowa, both were retired but highly-active travelers, and both were members of a private philanthropic society, the PEO Sisterhood.² They also shared a secret plan.

Jeanette Westfall took the lead on the clandestine recruitment plan. Westfall was not a member of the Caravan Club, but she was invited by her PEO "Sister" Kay Schlacks to give a presentation at the Rendezvous on their destination, the Yucatán Peninsula. She brought along hundreds of vibrant photographic slides to display the "ancient" beauty of Chichen Itza and Isla Mujeres, and the region's more modern attractions. Westfall's slides depicted project sites where missionaries were working to introduce American-style medicine, education, infrastructure, and

¹ Flyer for "Airstream Wally Byam Caravan to Antiquity – Yucatán #63 – Rendezvous Laredo, Texas, February 2, 1969," Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Americas Papers, Box 18 Folder 1, Iowa State University Special Collections, Ames, IA (hereafter cited as ISU MS 034). The flyer is hand-labeled "Caravan #1" like other documents in this file related to this trip, suggesting that the Iowa-Yucatán Partners association with the caravan group continued in later trips.

² Kay Schlacks to Jeanette Westfall, November 21, 1968 - ISU MS 034 Box 18 Folder 1.

agriculture to Yucatán. For years, Westfall had been promoting development projects in Yucatán and her slides were always accompanied by a well-rehearsed script on the various problems and advancements of the region. After the Rendezvous concluded, Westfall and Schlacks quietly approached members of the Caravan Club to ask if they had a little room in their cramped Air Streams for a few extra pieces of cargo.³ The women packed up six boxes of medicine, two boxes of hearing aids, powdered milk, over a dozen electric sewing machines, and heaping bags of donated clothes to distribute among the Air Streams.⁴ Just a few weeks later, after crossing the border with “no trouble at all” and reaching the distant capital city of Mérida, Yucatán, the caravanners delivered their goods to the U.S. Consulate and visited a number of the local missionary clinics.⁵ Unbeknownst to the caravan club’s leaders, these two Iowa women had turned their “caravanners” into smugglers.

Given the financial and practical barriers to transporting donated goods from the United States to Mexico, Schlacks and her fellow caravanners were “like an answer to a prayer” for Jeanette Westfall. Westfall was an active member in the Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Alliance for Progress, a transnational diplomatic and development program. The Partners were constantly searching for faster and cheaper ways to move donated goods to distant Yucatán.⁶ The Iowa-Yucatán Partners were part of the United States’ nation-wide Partners of the Alliance for Progress program, which existed as a federally-administered program between 1964 and 1970 and continues to this day as an entirely private organization. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Partners program was intended to create “people-to-people diplomacy” between Latin America and the United States. The Partners’ efforts to carry out development projects in Mexico were

³ Jeanette Westfall to Kay Schlacks, December 3, 1968 - ISU MS 034 Box 18 Folder 1.

⁴ “Notes from Dr. and Mrs. Westfall” to William Harben, February 2, 1969 - ISU MS 034 Box 18 Folder 6.

⁵ Kay Schlacks to Jeanette Westfall, March 5, 1969 - ISU MS 034 Box 18 Folder 1.

⁶ Jeanette Westfall to Kay Schlacks, December 3, 1968 - ISU MS 034 Box 18 Folder 1.

constantly stymied by the politics and logistics of getting necessary materials across the border, as shipment and posting were “prohibitive in cost, and customs officials are not so generous about shipments of items.”⁷ By getting these goods across the border in their personal luggage, the caravanners were allowing small-scale development projects to continue in the Yucatán Peninsula, while also subverting the authority of the Mexican government. This caravanning trip, and the repeat trips that followed, was just one of the many ways the Iowa-Yucatan Partners took advantage of civilian and tourist identities to expand the technological, economic, and political influence of the United States. These types of activities created a “tourist-technician” model of development, in which civilian diplomats simultaneously carried out the transformation and consumption of a foreign space. They did so by attracting experts and donors to support development through rhetoric which cast Yucatán as an exotic and backward place. Through a wide array of projects intended to exert a cultural and technological dominance on Yucatecan civilians, the Partners’ civilian diplomats and experts perpetuated the United States’ “informal empire” in Latin America.⁸

The Iowa-Yucatán Partners wished to carry out multiple simultaneous modernization and development projects to improve the faltering economy in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, which they perceived as geopolitically vulnerable to communist threats. Transportation costs, the inaccessibility of remote rural villages, and the significant resistance by the Mexican government of “hand-me-down” American supplies were major challenges to the Partners. The group therefore used their public-private structure to channel resources of various civic organizations

⁷ Jeanette Westfall to Kay Schlacks, December 3, 1968 - ISU MS 034 Box 18 Folder 1.

⁸ This thesis draws upon the definitions of “informal empire” and “contact zones” laid out in Gilbert Joseph, “Close Encounters: Toward a New Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations” in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* ed. Gilbert Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 3-46. Joseph’s work defines the United States’ imperialism as a dynamic constantly produced through cultural and political ‘encounters.’

into their projects and avoid the bureaucratic challenges of international development and diplomatic border-crossing. As the caravanning incident illustrates, the blending of tourism and development often had a covert purpose. Moving development supplies under the cover of civilian identity and tourist activity subverted the import-restricting development policies of the Mexican government, which the Americans viewed as obstructive and limiting. The Partners wished to transform Yucatán, a state historically isolated from the rest of Mexico, into a modern state *and* promote the region as an ancient, exotic place that could draw international tourism, believing that these measures would stabilize the economy and lessen the perceived communist threat in the region. These goals reflected how American citizens saw themselves in Latin America, paternalistically driven to impose their visions of modernity and antiquity onto Mexico's countryside and its people. While the growing field of tourist studies has recognized how closely tourism and development interlinked during the twentieth century, few works have discussed development experts as tourists, or how the touristic appeal of "exotic" sites has driven the movement of experts into certain regions like the Yucatán Peninsula. The tourist-technician strategy and the Iowa-Yucatán Partners' projects illustrate how civilian diplomacy and development methods adopted during the Cold War blended identities of "citizen," "consumer," and "expert" in ways that furthered the United States' informal political and cultural authority.⁹

⁹ The study of tourism and tourist-oriented development is growing quickly. Within the recent literature on twentieth century American tourism, there appear consistent central themes of cultural and economic imperialism and Cold War diplomacy. Recent scholars studying American Cold War tourism have suggested that Americans abroad were driven by the desire to present a self-conscious image of the United States as racially- and culturally-tolerant while also interpreting non-American peoples and spaces as inherently backward, deficient, and "underdeveloped." The exoticizing and paternalistic treatment of non-Western cultures is famously laid out in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). For recent examples of how historians discuss tourism in the context of globalism and American imperialism, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Christine Skwiot, *The Purposes of Paradise: U.S. Tourism in Cuba and Hawai'i* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). For a study of tourism, modernization, and US-Mexican relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Jason Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House: Travel to Porfirian Mexico and the Cultural Politics of Empire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014). While Ruiz's work focuses on the period of Porfirio Diaz's rule (1877-1911) in

The Partners' civilian members helped to perpetuate an American informal empire in Latin America that was most overtly powerful and visible at the level of federal policy. The Alliance for Progress was spearheaded by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 as a hemispheric effort to promote economic and social development in the Americas and curb the perceived rise of communism in Latin America. At the time, Latin American and U.S. politicians alike criticized the Alliance for Progress for its emphasis on large-scale infrastructural projects and unclear goals. Most famously, Chilean president Eduardo Frei Montalva wrote a critical article on the Alliance for Progress in 1967, stressing that "one of the most serious criticisms of the Alliance [is] that the people have not been able to participate in it."¹⁰ The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) developed the civilian-led structure of the Partners of the Alliance in response to this type of ideological and practical critique of the Alliance. The Partners of the Alliance intended to address these criticisms by focusing civic interest and expertise on small-scale development by pairing state-level chapters in the United States and Latin American countries.¹¹ Iowa's partnership with Yucatán produces a useful case study of the

Mexico, his study establishes that the process of modernization and infrastructure-building in the early twentieth century allowed for increased American access and exposure to Mexico and these tourists developed a belief that foreign intervention by the United States would lead to Mexico to a desirable state of modernity. Ruiz' argument that the exceptional appeal of Mexico was its mixture of familiar modernity and exotic antiquity is particularly relevant to this study of Yucatán's tourist appeal in the post-war period (Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House*, 54-55).

¹⁰ Eduardo Frei Montalva, "Urgencies in Latin America: The Alliance that Lost its Way," *Foreign Affairs* (April 1967).

¹¹ Other partnerships through the Partners of the Americas have followed different historical paths. For example, a close and lasting relationship formed between civilian diplomats in Wisconsin and Nicaragua through the Partners of the Alliance in 1964. Growing discontent within the Partners chapter in Wisconsin led to a split in the early 1980s, because the Wisconsin-Nicaragua Partners promoted an officially 'apolitical' stance on partisan issues in their partner country. Those members who openly criticized policies to funnel aid toward "right-wing opposition" formed the independent Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN) to educate the American public about U.S. foreign policy in Nicaragua. While the WCCN continued to use the language of citizen diplomacy and draw upon the principles of the Alliance for Progress, the Council heavily criticized the Partners' claim to 'neutrality' as inconsistent and inaccurate. For more information on this alternative path for the Partners, see Clare Weber, *Visions of Solidarity: Peace Activists in Nicaragua from War to Women's Activism and Globalization* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006). Further research is needed to know the breadth and variety of experiences within the Partners system, given that there were eventually at least 40 Partners chapters in the United States.

transnational coordination of expertise and resources in Mexico, a nation where Cold War historians have often overlooked the impact of the Alliance for Progress.¹² The Iowa-Yucatán Partners illustrate how civilians used their private status to transform local conditions while upholding the disproportionate political and economic power of the United States in Latin America.

¹² Renata Keller, *Mexico's Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 135-136. Keller mentions the general agreement between President Kennedy and President López Mateos over the tenets of the Alliance for Progress amidst tense negotiations over Cuba.

CHAPTER 2. HISTORIOGRAPHY

Given the contentious nature of the international role of American citizens, the issue of civilian diplomacy remains an understudied element of American Cold War policy, especially in regards to the Alliance for Progress. Historical study of the Alliance for Progress has focused on the ideology and strategies of Kennedy and Johnson's presidential administrations and the U.S. Department of State, often contrasted with the more civilian-focused activities of the Peace Corps.¹³ Major works on the Alliance for Progress in recent years have focused particularly on the ideological underpinnings of Kennedy's 1961 pledge to the countries of Latin America and how that has shaped American influences on the Western Hemisphere. Stephen Rabe's work, for example, asserts that President Kennedy and Johnson's policies prioritized the strength and stability of anticommunist governments in the Americas over democratic ideals.¹⁴ Likewise, Michael Latham's book *Modernization as Ideology* limits its focus to the actions of the executive office and its policymakers. While Latham discusses the role of informal networks of expertise within President Kennedy's advisors, his chapter on the Alliance for Progress does not address how "deeply rooted cultural assumptions about America's ability to project a nation-building power" could shape civilians as well as government policymakers.¹⁵ This recent body of work on

¹³ There have been several recent works which have discussed the Peace Corps as part of U.S. foreign policy. For example, see Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Latham contrasts the Alliance for Progress' focus on government-level reform and funding, where the Peace Corps represents the citizen involvement aspect of the Kennedy administration's policies on modernization. For further reading on the history of civilian activity in the Peace Corps, see Elizabeth Cobb Hoffman, *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Molly Geidel, *Peace Corps Fantasies: How Development Shaped the Global Sixties* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

¹⁴ Stephen Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 196-198.

¹⁵ Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 70. One should also note that Latham's work, and much of the work on the Alliance for Progress is fixated on the Kennedy administration, but discuss in much less detail the Alliance during Johnson and Nixon's time in office. One exception is Jeffrey Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge Press, 2007). This work discusses the continuities of foreign aid strategies from Eisenhower to Nixon and the Alliance's shift towards more pragmatic policies during the Johnson administration. This discussion includes a brief mention of the Partners of the Alliance, describing the

U.S. foreign policy in the 1960s does not closely investigate the practical execution of the Alliance programs, tending to focus on “government-to-government” interactions, especially during the Kennedy administration.¹⁶ Recent works on the Peace Corps, which do emphasize civilian development activity, are largely focused on the Corps’ traditional demographic: young college students who were able to spend several years at a single development site. By contrast, Partners of the Alliance activity was carried out by a broad cross-section of the American civilian population, who had a variety of interests, resources, and levels of expertise. Further exploration of how civilians of many ages and vocations shaped the nature of transnational development reveals a more multifaceted view of American development activity in the Cold War than previous works on the Alliance for Progress and Peace Corps programs.

Historians of development, relief, and humanitarianism around the world have raised similar questions on the ideology and practice of civilian outreach, tracing a continuous growth in civic involvement over the course of the twentieth century. For example, Bruno Cabanes argues that beginning in the First World War, U.S. citizens interpreted food donations to relief efforts in famine- and war-stricken regions as their personal contribution to America’s international relations and the food itself as a “weapon against Communism.”¹⁷ With the emergence of Cold War competition for international power and legitimacy, this civilian

program as a publicity-seeking venture to attract support for the Alliance (Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy*, 45).

¹⁶ Two thesis projects on the Partners of the Alliance for Progress were produced while the publicly-sponsored program was still active in the early 1970s. These studies focused largely on the national coordination of the Partners program and Boren’s role in guiding the state-level chapters. Both works take a “birds-eye view” of the program, emphasizing its self-help approach, but fails to address the historical context of the program or the roles of civilian participants at the state level. Also, as both works were completed by 1971, they were unable to discuss the Partners’ development into a private program, which was an important shift in their identity. Rosemary J. Winslow, “Partners of the Alliance, Inc: The grassroots approach to the Alliance for Progress,” (Master’s thesis, University of Maine, 1970); and William P. Avery, “The Partners of the Alliance: aspects of private participation in inter-American relations” (Master’s thesis, University of Tennessee, 1971).

¹⁷ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 208-10.

involvement grew increasingly valuable to the federal government. President Dwight Eisenhower promoted people-to-people diplomatic programs as a way to bolster Americans' national pride and anti-communist beliefs. This blending of international humanitarianism with anti-communist nationalism was almost certainly no less intense among Americans in the wake of the 1959 Cuban Revolution.¹⁸ In fact, historian Michael Barnett links the Cold War with international aid activities and organizations that prioritized “nationalism, development, and sovereignty,” arguing that post-war humanitarian agencies and their civilian participants were often driven by the belief that crisis and ‘underdevelopment’ around the world threatened the security of the American nation-state. American expertise and foreign aid were viewed as tools of national security, as “development and modernization became intertwined in doctrines of anticommunism.”¹⁹

Global histories of the Cold War have also explored the ideological and political motives of scientific outreach and civilian experts.²⁰ Nick Cullather and Christopher Sneddon have discussed the United States' global efforts to impose expertise and remake landscapes in politically sensitive regions. These works explicitly describe development as foreign policy carried out by networks of civilian experts and diplomats alike to transform the politics, economy, biology, and infrastructure of “undeveloped” nations.²¹ In order to achieve these

¹⁸ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

¹⁹ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 9, 104-106.

²⁰ In the last decade, historians of the Cold War have increasingly adopted transnational and global lenses, arguing that previous historical study has excessively emphasized bilateral conflict between the United States and Soviet Union. Many of these histories have since argued that American and Soviet interventionism in other regions was driven by the Cold War geopolitical context. For the definitive work on interventionism and adopting a global approach to the Cold War, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²¹ Christopher Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution: Large Dams, Cold War Geopolitics, and the US Bureau of Reclamation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

transformations, development experts of the post-war period relied on strategies that blended international “universal” expertise with localized knowledge. For example, historians Donna Mehos and Suzanne Moon have asserted that post-war global experts formed partnerships with institutions and experts in developing countries in order to provide local knowledge to make their projects more effective.²² Partnership between global experts and local representatives had the practical value of sustaining the development process after experts had moved on and the political value of appearing more inclusive and equitable than simply imposing development by sheer force or will. The conclusions of these global histories of aid and international expertise invite study on small-scale civilian partnerships that spanned across national borders.²³ As the Iowa-Yucatán Partners illustrate, the cultural and political context of the Cold War motivated citizens to participate in global networks of expertise, networking, and institution-building. The activities and ideals of these civilian diplomats can give historians a more granular sense of how negotiations for national power were experienced by individuals and small communities.

Studying the Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Alliance illustrates the significance of commodity movement and knowledge exchange to local civilians’ experiences within the realm of international relations. As noted above, the Partners’ activities can be understood through the lens of “informal empire,” in which the United States exerted intense cultural, political, and economic power on regional government actors and citizens, but without asserting formal

²² Donna Mehos and Suzanne Moon, “The Uses of Portability: Circulating Experts in the Technopolitics of the Cold War and Decolonization,” in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Cold War*, ed. Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 43-74. A similar concept of partnering governmental and technical institutions in developed and developing nations was introduced in 1984 in a technical paper by Lauren E. Cooper, “The Twinning of Institutions: Its Use as a Technical Assistance Delivery System” *World Bank* technical paper, no. WTP 23 (Washington, DC: The WorldBank, 1984).

²³ The field of religious and missionary outreach has examined the issue of civilian cultural exchange and the negotiation for power. For a focused and detailed study of how missionaries and local indigenous people negotiated for power and experienced the process of international development during the Cold War, see Susan Fitzpatrick-Behrens, *Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru, 1943-1989: Transnational Faith and Transformation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

sovereignty.²⁴ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American politicians and investors had established this type of power within the Yucatán Peninsula to sustain henequen production, a raw material for binder twine which was integral to American wheat-processing. Studies of informal empire in the Yucatán region have therefore fixed on the commodity-export dynamic established by American agribusinesses and how the movement of those goods linked Yucatán into broader systems of trade and international power during the early twentieth century. This focus has led most historians to conclude their analysis at the precipitous decline of the henequen industry in the 1930s to 1950s. The links between the Yucatán Peninsula and the United States, however, persisted beyond this downturn in trade.²⁵ In the tense political climate of the Cold War, U.S. policymakers saw exerting their cultural and economic influence on Yucatán and its citizens as a viable strategy for containing communism. Once again, the movement of commodities sustained America's informal political influence over this Mexican region. In this case, however, the commodities were flowing south rather than north. Border-crossing, private networking, and touristic appeal became tools for American civilians, like those in the Iowa-Yucatán Partners program, to spread their development supplies. The Partners

²⁴ The literature on informal empire in Latin America is extensive, ranging across the entire region and the entire post-colonial historical period. While the term was initially applied to Latin America in relation to its trade with the British empire, multiple scholars of Mexican and Latin American history have referred to the United States' efforts to build hemispheric power through economic and cultural dominance in the nineteenth and twentieth as 'informal empire.' For further reading on the subject in relation to Yucatecan commodity production, see Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); and Stephen Topik and Allen Wells (Austin: University of Texas, Austin Press, 1998).

²⁵ Allen Wells, *Yucatán's Gilded Age: Haciendas, Henequen, and International Harvester, 1860-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); and Sterling Evans, *Bound in Twine: The History and Ecology of the Henequen-Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880-1950* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007). Though they choose slightly different end points during Yucatán's history, both works focus on the intense monopolistic production of henequen in the Yucatán Peninsula, as it defined the region's relationship to the rest of the Mexico and the United States. Both authors conclude their works by arguing that new competitors in the global fiber market displaced its relationship with its trading partners and destabilized the region's export-reliant economy.

therefore acted as agents of the United States' informal empire by upholding a long-standing system of environmental, economic and political control over the Yucatán Peninsula.

Close examination of documents from the American side of the Partners provides insight into this process of negotiated influence and informal imperialism. Records from the Iowa Partners of the Alliance and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reveal that American citizens interpreted the “mutual self-help” aims of the Partners organization in ways which rarely considered Yucatecan perspectives on development. These archival collections do not contain much material focused on the Yucatán Partners or the Mexican recipients of development projects, and therefore their perspectives must be represented here largely through moments and spaces of contact with the Iowa Partners, the U.S. Consulate, and USAID, who largely viewed Yucatecans through a paternalistic and exoticized lens. This precludes comprehensive study of the Partner states of Tabasco, Campeche, and Quintana Roo, which received relatively little attention from the American side. Partners in the United States tended to interact mostly with Yucatán Partners who were perceived to have local authority and who wished to direct resources into their own work for the purpose of regional development. In many cases, Iowans and Yucatecan elites shared goals, such as developing tourism and agricultural diversification, which did not consider the needs or interests of rural, poor and indigenous Yucatecans. These few glimpses reveal how the complex political and social conditions within the Yucatán Peninsula helped shape the policies and strategies of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners program.

CHAPTER 3. THE POWER OF PEOPLE: EMERGENCE OF THE CIVILIAN PARTNERSHIP MODEL

The Partners of the Alliance for Progress emerged as a multi-pronged and flexible solution to the inefficient and overly-bureaucratized administration of the Alliance for Progress.²⁶ The Partners' oft-repeated origin story suggests that its civilian development model sprang fully-formed into the mind of its administrator. While riding in the back of a truck in Peru in 1963, USAID coordinator James Boren arrived at the idea that the Alliance administrators' efforts to complete projects could be improved through the practice of "mutual self-help."²⁷ The agency needed to corral the civic resources of the United States and Latin America, whose civilian participants could coordinate small-scale transnational projects without significant federal involvement.

In fact, Boren believed such an approach had strategic and political advantages. This structure would allow for numerous small-scale projects, instead of relying on high-profile and high-cost infrastructural projects. Boren promoted a "mutual self-help" approach as more practical and more equitable than the federal sector of the Alliance for Progress. USAID administrators argued that a program with a "two-way nature" would allow the United States to provide aid and modernizing technologies, while Latin American states could provide cultural

²⁶ Interestingly, the Peace Corps, the development program known for its civilian involvement, also attempted to form a similar partnership and exchange structure in 1967. The Peace Corps administration proposed creating a Volunteers to America program. The program was designed to allow young people from developing countries around the world interested in community service and education to come to the United States to provide services, often as a component of domestic American anti-poverty programs. The program ended in 1970 after the Peace Corps funding bill was amended to prohibit use of funding to bring volunteers to the United States. "64 Volunteers to U.S. Begin their Training," *The Washington Post*, July 25, 1967; "Volunteers from Abroad," *Volunteer* 6 no. 9 (July/August 1968); House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Survey of Activities of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, January 3, 1969 – January 2, 1971*, 91st Cong., 1971, 19.

²⁷ "A Special Performance of Traditional Dances," *The News*, March 16, 1967. Many documents from both the national and state-level Partners use the term in their publications, particularly press releases and Congressional statements.

and educational experiences to Americans.²⁸ This system complemented the United States' continued endorsements of "self-help" in Latin American development, expressed through the Act of Bogotá under President Eisenhower, the Charter of Punta del Este under President Kennedy, and the theories of Walt Rostow, President Kennedy's influential economic and policy advisor.²⁹ Rostow argued that the United States needed to provide technical and economic aid to help "transition" developing countries into an American-style industrial capitalist democracy, stimulating developing nations' interest in "self-help."³⁰ Thus, Kennedy introduced programs like the Alliance for Progress and Peace Corps, both of which were intended to provide nations and communities the resources needed to modernize according to the U.S. example.

Boren's proposal to the Alliance for Progress administration argued that the development process could be presented as a mutually-beneficial and equitable partnership between the United States and Latin American countries and avoid criticisms that the Alliance for Progress was condescending and paternalistic. Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann, lead coordinator of the federal Alliance for Progress program, approved Boren's proposal to administrate the Partners of the Alliance for Progress through USAID in October 1964, marking the official founding of the program.³¹ With these federal administrative resources, the Partners of the Alliance for Progress could now foster support for "mutual self-help" partnerships across the 50 American states and countless provinces and states in Latin American nations.

²⁸ *Cong. Rec.*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969, 15, pt. 24: 32969-32970.

²⁹ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Punta del Este Conference, January 1962: Report of Senators Wayne Morse and Bourke B. Hickenlooper to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate*. 87th Cong. 2nd sess., March 5, 1962, 7-16

³⁰Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*; Kimber Charles Pearce, *Rostow, Kennedy and the Rhetoric of Foreign Aid* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2001); John Lodewijks, "Rostow, Developing Economies and National Security Policy," in *Economics and National Security: A History of their Interaction*, ed. Craufurd D.W. Goodwin (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); and W.W. Rostow, *View from the Seventh Floor* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

³¹ Tad Szulc, "U.S. Sends Latins Grass-Roots Aid," *New York Times*, October 11, 1964.

The Partners of the Alliance administrators believed that their program's strength was its ground-level focus on carrying out many projects simultaneously, which would increase their visibility and allow for greater civilian engagement. In their first *Partners* newsletter, the national Partners of the Alliance organization announced that "100 small projects are preferable to one large program" because they would elicit broader public engagement with the Alliance.³² This approach responded to the common criticism of that the Alliance for Progress was too focused on the federal level and complemented President Johnson's notion that the United States "must bring to bear on the problems of the developing world the knowledge and skills...of people from all walks of American life."³³ The Partners regularly stressed that the "major resource U.S. Partners [could] supply is U.S. expertise," channeled into regions of Latin America where "progressive elements" requested help. USAID saw the "Partners as a flexible mechanism to try out new techniques, devices, unique approaches."³⁴ James Boren presented this model as a way to experiment with modernizing techniques, so that civilian development teams could achieve "immediate visible progress" that would "buy time in Latin America for the longer term, impersonal government activity aimed at institution-building."³⁵ Projects like "completing a one-room schoolhouse in a small village or getting a tractor for a farm cooperative," though modest in monetary value, legitimized the presence of American citizens in Latin America as experts. Civilians in the Partners propagated the informal technical and political power of the United States within important communities and regions of Latin America. James Boren described the

³² "32 State Partnerships Working with Latin American Nations" *Partners* Newsletter, 1967 - ISU MS 034 Box 4, Folder 1.

³³ "Johnson's Message to Congress, Outlining His 1966 Foreign Assistance Program," *New York Times*, January 15, 1965.

³⁴ "32 State Partnerships Working with Latin American Nations" *Partners* Newsletter, 1967 - ISU MS 034 Box 4, Folder 1.

³⁵ James Boren, "Toward a Nation-Based Aid Program: Businessmen, Communities, and Local Governments as Aid Donors," June 15, 1964 - National Archives UD WW 1174 Carton 125 Folder Partners of the Alliance 1963-66.

effectiveness of civilian diplomacy with an electoral metaphor, “to really get people involved you’ve got to go to the grass roots level, like putting a roof on a guy’s house. Look, you let me organize the precincts, I’ll win the election.”³⁶ The Partners of the Alliance for Progress emerged in 1964 with the belief that civilian diplomats would be able to effect real political change through their ability to network, build professional ties and friendships, and their ability as private citizens to bypass bureaucratic and political obstacles.

³⁶ Gordon Chaplin, “The Red Tape Baron,” *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1975.

CHAPTER 4. “AN AREA SEETHING WITH SUBVERSION”: INSTABILITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE IN YUCATÁN

The Partners of the Alliance, and the Alliance for Progress more broadly, wanted to establish positive relations with regions which were perceived to be vulnerable to communist threats and economic instability, such as the Yucatán Peninsula. American diplomats and developers shared an interest in grassroots development and intervention on the Yucatán Peninsula, in part because of its proximity to communist Cuba and its economic and political instability. This section will briefly discuss the political conditions and concerns which drove the United States’ promotion of the Partners’ program in Yucatán.

Mexico’s resistance to official American development efforts likely made the civilian focus and rhetoric of “mutual self-help” of the Partners seem appropriate to bolster relations in the valuable Yucatán region. The American interest in the Yucatan Peninsula was fueled in part by the Mexican government’s relative disinterest in the development programs promoted by Kennedy’s administration, such as the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps. Cold War historian Renata Keller has observed that Mexico used a continued diplomatic relationship with post-revolutionary Cuba to retain its sovereignty and autonomy from American political influence and economic dominance.³⁷ Mexican President Adolfo López Mateos was therefore hesitant to participate in the Alliance for Progress and wished to “deflect US interference” because it believed the Alliance’s “mechanisms of co-ordination...were too intrusive.”³⁸ At the

³⁷ Renata Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War*, and Renata Keller, “A Foreign Policy for Domestic Consumption: Mexico’s Lukewarm Defense of Castro, 1959–1969,” *Latin American Research Review* 47 no. 2 (2012): 100-119. Keller asserts that part of this political maneuvering included drawing on Mexico’s revolutionary history and rhetoric to defend Mexico’s continued links to Cuba. Mexican politics were dominated for much of the twentieth century by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and PRI derived enormous political cachet from their historical association with the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). For further reading on this subject, see Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico’s Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

³⁸ Vanni Pettinà, “Global Horizons: Mexico, the Third World, and the Non-Aligned Movement at the Time of the 1961 Belgrade Conference,” *The International History Review* 38, no. 4 (2016): 743.

same time, the Mexican government also declined to invite Peace Corps volunteers into the country as representatives of American expertise and cultural influence.³⁹ Though Mexican officials rejected the Peace Corps' overt civilian interventionism, Presidents Kennedy and Lopez Mateos generally agreed that economic development and improved cultural relations would benefit the US-Mexico relationship.⁴⁰ The Partners of the Alliance, who stressed a goal of "friendship" between civilian communities, may have appeared sufficiently un-intrusive to escape the disapproval of the Mexican government and was therefore able to pursue their development goals in Yucatán.⁴¹

Yucatán's long-standing political instability, unusual environment, and distinctive racial make-up created a highly interdependent relationship with the United States, the Caribbean and Central America and limited Yucatán's connections to the rest of Mexico. Located at the very southeastern edge of Mexico, the Yucatán Peninsula was an exceptional region, isolated from the broader national economy and culture from independence onward. During the Mexican War of Independence in the 1810s, the Yucatán region had formed a sovereign state, the Republic of Yucatán, which later joined the Mexican federated states. The Republic again withdrew from Mexico in 1840, only to experience a lengthy and brutal Caste War from 1847 to 1901. This conflict arose over the desire of Yucatán's Mayan population for autonomy from the local *mestizo* elite, whose interest in henequen production threatened indigenous communal land

³⁹ Elizabeth Cobb Hoffman, *All You Need is Love*, 66. Relatively unique within Latin America, the Mexican government refused to allow Peace Corps volunteers to establish a permanent presence in Mexico until 2004.

⁴⁰ Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 135-136.

⁴¹ Much of the Partners of the Alliance public rhetoric stresses the importance of friendship to their goals. For example, Partners President William Brown proclaimed that the primary purpose of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners organization was to maintain "bonds of friendship" between Mexican and American people. William Brown, "Resolution by President William Brown," June 30 1970 – ISU MS 034 Box 4 Folder 1.

ownership.⁴² After the Mexican military forcibly ended the Caste War by taking Yucatán's capital, Mérida, in 1915, Governor Salvador Alvarado implemented reforms to improve political, economic and social conditions for working and indigenous peoples and regulate the powers of the local henequen-producers.⁴³

In both practical and cultural terms, the Yucatán Peninsula of the twentieth century was largely defined by its isolation from Mexico. While it had its own rail system, the Yucatán Peninsula was not integrated into the standardized national rail system until 1957 and the Mexican highway system did not reach Yucatán until 1961.⁴⁴ The Peninsula's economic activity therefore relied heavily on transporting goods to the United States by the Gulf of Mexico and island states by the Caribbean Sea. As noted in a 1969 State Department briefing, "Yucatán has always looked more toward the U.S., Cuba and Europe than toward the Mexican heartland."⁴⁵ Yucatán was, in fact, intimately tied to the American heartland through commodities that linked the two regions' economy and environment.

Yucatán's regionalism and unique cultural and geographic conditions attracted a great deal of interest from Americans who wished to develop a model for modernizing remote and indigenous communities. For example, in the early 1920s, the Rockefeller Foundation coordinated with Mexico's federal government and Yucatán's state officials in their campaigns to eradicate tropical diseases in Maya communities and make the region more appealing to

⁴² There is a good deal of recent historical research on the subject of the Caste War of Yucatán, its precursors and its historical consequences. For further reading on this subject, see Nelson A. Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatán* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Terry Rugeley, *Yucatán's Maya Peasantry and the Origins of the Caste War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

⁴³ Edward Moseley and Helen Delpar, "Yucatán's Prelude to Globalization," in *Yucatán in an Era of Globalization*, ed. Eric N. Baklanoff and Edward H. Moseley (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 21-40.

⁴⁴ Jeffery Brannon and Eric Baklanoff, *Agrarian Reform and Public Enterprise in Mexico: The Political Economy of Yucatán's Henequen Industry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987).

⁴⁵ Amembassy Mexico, US Government, "Airgram A-445 from Amembassy Mexico to the Department of State August 19, 1969" *National Security Database*, George Washington University, 12.

investors.⁴⁶ Yucatán's prominent Mayan population drew the interest of American scholars throughout the twentieth century. In 1950, 48 percent of the state's population spoke Yucatec-Maya.⁴⁷ The Carnegie Institution established their Mayan Research Project in 1913 to study Yucatán and Guatemala's indigenous communities. Through this project, anthropologist Robert Redfield produced the now-classic regional study *Chan Kom: A Maya Village* in 1934. From this study, Redfield and his colleagues began to develop the concept of "acculturation," asserting that small indigenous communities peacefully transition into the modern economy through existing traditions of industrious and communally-oriented behavior.⁴⁸ The decades of research done by the Carnegie program, while shaping American scholarship on modernization and community traditions, also labelled Yucatán as a source of knowledge on cultures perceived as exotic or primitive.⁴⁹

Part of Yucatán's political and economic instability derived not just from its remote location but the exceptional nature of the Peninsula's environment within Mexico. Henequen had been a miracle crop for Yucatán, uniquely suited to its unusual 'karst' topography and climate.⁵⁰ The region contained no major rivers; its rainfall was not retained by the rocky and thin soil, but

⁴⁶ Heather McCrea, *Diseased Relations: Epidemics, Public Health, and State-Building in Yucatán, Mexico, 1847-1924* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2011); and David Sowell, "Multiple Colonizations, State Formation, Public Health, and the Yucatec Maya, 1891-1960," in *Crossing Colonial Historiographies: Histories of Colonial and Indigenous Medicines in Transnational Perspective* ed. Anne Digby and Waltraud Ernst (New York: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 77-98.

⁴⁷ Paul Sullivan, "The Yucatec Maya," in *Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians, Volume 6: Ethnology* ed. John Monaghan and Barbara Edmonson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 207-223.

⁴⁸ Robert Redfield, *Chan Kom, A Maya Village* (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1934); and Robert Redfield, *A Village that Chose Progress: Chan Kom Revisited* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950). Several works have discussed the relationship of this research in the Yucatán Peninsula to American attitudes towards global development and modernization. For further information, see Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Clifford Wilcox, *Social Anthropology: Robert Redfield* (New York: Routledge Press, 2017).

⁴⁹ Paul Sullivan, *Unfinished Conversations: Mayas and Foreigners Between Two Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

⁵⁰ John Gunn, *Encyclopedia of Caves and Karst Science* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2004), 70-75. A karst topography is characterized by a bedrock that has been degraded by acidic water and soil that is highly-permeable, allowing for the formation of sinkholes, underground caves, and underwater drainage systems.

accumulated in underground caverns called *cenotes*, making irrigation a particular challenge in Yucatecan agriculture. Henequen, a hardy and deep-rooted agave plant, thrived on the Peninsula's mineral-rich calcareous earth and needed little water to survive.⁵¹ The plant's fibers could be spun into binder twine for wheat-binding machinery, which made it a valuable commodity to the mechanizing wheat farms of the American and Canadian Great Plains. To meet the growing henequen fiber demand of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, expansive plantations called *haciendas* cleared the vegetative mosaic of the region to maximize henequen production.⁵² The North American Great Plains and Yucatán Peninsula merged into an interdependent environmental and economic exchange, forming what Sterling Evans has termed a "henequen-wheat complex"⁵³ But as American wheat farms began to adopt the use of combines, and later synthetic binding fibers, demand for Yucatán's primary cash crop plunged in the 1940s and 1950s. The Mexican federal government created a state-sponsored binder twine industrial corporation called "Cordemex" to bolster the regional economy in 1961.⁵⁴ The advancement and mechanization of American agriculture freed the United States from economic interdependence with the Yucatán Peninsula. Despite the Mexican government's efforts, Yucatán was seriously destabilized by the loss of American demand which had reshaped its economy and environment.

In addition to the region's economic problems, Yucatán's relationship to the federal Mexican government during the 1960s grew increasingly distant and antagonistic. Corrupt state and local officials in Yucatán had failed to complete a public water infrastructure project, causing the state to default on an Inter-American Development Bank loan. As punishment for

⁵¹ Sterling Evans, *Bound in Twine*, 33-34.

⁵² *ibid.*, 47-48.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 32-35.

⁵⁴ Evans, *Bound in Twine*, 226-228.

this inefficiency and corruption, the national government temporarily withdrew funding and support for public works in the early 1960s.⁵⁵ Amidst these clashes between federal and state authorities, Yucatán's rural peasantry and Maya population came to support for the National Action Party (PAN), a Catholic and socially-conservative political party which opposed the policies and political control of the dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).⁵⁶ American foreign intelligence reports from the mid-1960s suggested that Yucatecan peasants' support for the PAN was driven by a growing frustration with the state government's continued fixation on henequen production and allegiance to the federally-controlled and undemocratic PRI.⁵⁷

These experiences in the early 1960s left Yucatecans isolated from the rest of Mexico, financially imperiled by the collapsing henequen market, and unhappy with the national control of their regional politics, which was all the more concerning to American analysts because of the Peninsula's proximity to Cuba and the revolutionary activity brewing in Guatemala and Nicaragua during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1961, *New York Times* correspondent Paul Kennedy reported that the Mexican military was patrolling the coastline of the Yucatán Peninsula to fend off guerilla activity or training, claiming that "the core of the [1959] Castro invasion movement

⁵⁵ Amembassy Mexico, US Government. "Airgram A-445 from Amembassy Mexico to the Department of State August 19, 1969" *National Security Database*, George Washington University, 8; and Donald Mabry, *Mexico's Accion Nacional: A Catholic Alternative to Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973) 83. The name of para-state industrial enterprise Cordemex was ordinarily styled as 'CORDEMEX' in print.

⁵⁶ The PRI was founded in the 1930s to institutionalize the policies of the Mexican Revolution and controlled the federal government through its party machinery. Through mass media, appeals to a "revolutionary mythos," and outright voting fraud, the PRI maintained a stronghold over Mexico's federal, state and local electoral politics for decades and dictated the policy positions of candidates from the centralized hub of the president's office in Mexico City. Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 17-18.

⁵⁷ Amembassy Mexico, US Government. "Airgram A-445 from Amembassy Mexico to the Department of State August 19, 1969" *National Security Database*, George Washington University. Resistance to PRI's political authoritarianism would lead to a cycle of indigenous pro-left and Catholic-organized political protests in the 1970s in many parts of Mexico, though Yucatán, Tabasco, and Campeche experience only low levels of protest. The low-level of indigenous collective political activity is a trend which Shannan Mattiace attributes to the conservatism of the Catholic Church in Yucatán and the weakness of peasant worker political associations in the state. See Guillermo Trejo, *Popular Movements in Autocracies: Religion, Repression and Indigenous Collective Action in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 62-63; and Shannan Mattiace, "Ethnic Mobilization among the Maya of Yucatán Today," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 4 no. 2 (2009): 137-169.

was launched from the peninsula.”⁵⁸ In 1964, AID administrator Frank Coffin noted that “the threat of Cuba [was] pointed like a saber at the Yucatán Peninsula.” By Coffin’s analysis, influencing the political loyalties of the Yucatán Peninsula and Central America was an urgent priority for the United States. If this area could “develop constructively,” it would allow the United States to maintain its own national security and its relationships within the Western Hemisphere. If the region were instead captured by communist subversives, it would “sever” the hemisphere’s political unity and become a “beachhead for operations both north and south.”⁵⁹ The threat of Yucatán’s instability seemed to loom large in the minds of USAID administrators.

Even before the Partners program was officially initiated, the Iowa chapter of the Partners struggled to balance its partnership between powerful institutions and the regional populace within a divided Yucatán Peninsula. Shortly after Iowa and Yucatán formed their official connection, Partners director Jim Boren and USAID administrator Ted Tenorio expressed a mutual concern that Iowa had been drawn to Yucatán as a potential partner by representatives of the para-state henequen corporation Cordemex. The administrators expressed concern because some degree of “enmity existed between [Cordemex] and the governments” of Yucatán and Tabasco.⁶⁰ Political analysts in Mexico also noted this conflict, stating that the federally-funded Agrarian Bank and Cordemex were suspected of corruption and its leaders were termed “Mexicans and not Yucatecs” by peasants.⁶¹ The internal conflicts and issues within the

⁵⁸ Paul Kennedy, “Mexico Guards Against Cubans: Yucatán Patrol Aims to Halt Any Moves by Castro’s Forces or His Foes,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1961. It is unclear what formed the basis for Kennedy’s claim about Castro’s invasion launching from Yucatan. Fidel Castro and his group of revolutionary leaders launched their small invasion force from a port in Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico.

⁵⁹ Frank Coffin, *Witness for Aid* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Press, 1964), 256. The quote in the title of this subsection “an area seething with subversion” is also drawn from this page of Coffin’s book.

⁶⁰ November 5, 1965 - Reftel to Jim Boren from Ted Tenorio – National Archives UD-1174 Box 124, Folder “Mexico 65.”

⁶¹ Amembassy Mexico, US Government. “Airgram A-445 from Amembassy Mexico to the Department of State August 19, 1969” *National Security Database*, George Washington University, 13-14.

Yucatán Peninsula would shape the perspective of the Iowa Partners in their development projects. As a consequence of their shared interest in development and modernization, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners focused on the goals of Yucatán's economic and political leaders over the interests of the rural Yucatecan populace. Iowan and Yucatecan members in the Partners would continue to negotiate the best way to accomplish their development and diplomatic goals as their Partnership officially began.

CHAPTER 5. IOWA'S MODERNIZING MISSION: ESTABLISHING A PARTNERSHIP

The Midwestern agricultural state of Iowa seemed to USAID administrators like a perfect political and technical fit for a partnership with the Yucatán Peninsula. Elected in the Democratic Party sweep of 1964, Iowa Governor Harold Hughes saw Iowa's agricultural prosperity as integral to President Johnson's international outreach platform. Hughes gave the keynote speech at a statewide conference on the Food for Peace program in October 1964, proclaiming that "using our surplus food to help feed the undernourished and underprivileged people of other nations is something that has a natural appeal to [Iowans]."⁶² To further promote Iowa as a source for technical expertise and diplomacy, Governor Hughes invited the formation of an Iowa Partners of the Alliance chapter in October of 1965.

Iowa and Yucatán seem to have been matched by the State Department and Governor Hughes on the basis of their shared interest in agricultural production and community development.⁶³ In October of 1965, Governor Hughes announced that after a "request of the State Department," he would invite Iowans to form a Partners chapter to be paired with Yucatán.⁶⁴ In their public declarations, the Iowa Partners and Governor Hughes emphasized a "strong historical and geographical link" between Mexico and the United States, and between the interests of the two states.⁶⁵ Governor Hughes also used the partnership with Yucatán to promote Iowa as the source of America's international agricultural expertise. As Hughes proclaimed a few months into the Iowa-Yucatán program, "Iowa has long been recognized as a center of

⁶² Kristin Ahlberg, *Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 48.

⁶³ USAID Report "Partners of the Alliance," June 30, 1966 from Tyson Fain - National Archives UD-WW-44 Box 19.

⁶⁴ Iowa Partners News Release, "Comments by Governor Harold Hughes on Trade Development Conference," March 27, 1967 - ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 3.

⁶⁵ Iowa Partners Statement of Purpose, "The Iowa Partners: Objectives and Organization, 3 May 1970" - ISU MS 034 Box 4 Folder 1.

learning, research, and special emphasis in this field of agriculture” and its relationship with Yucatán allowed for the transfer of knowledge and information.⁶⁶

From its formation, Iowa-Yucatán Partners viewed personal travel as a consistently effective method for engaging more civilian-experts in development activities. The first project for both the Iowa and Yucatán Partners consisted of planned tours of the Yucatán’s proposed project sites by a group of volunteers led by Lt. Governor Robert Fulton in late 1965.⁶⁷ Among the volunteers was Monsignor Edward O’Rourke, who returned to Iowa with eleven project proposals, ranging from building low-income family housing to acquiring lab equipment for Yucatán’s engineering college.⁶⁸ A group of Iowan agricultural experts and doctors followed O’Rourke’s lead one year later, traveling to Yucatán to assess conditions on the ground. These early visits to Yucatán informed the priorities and interests of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners committees in the following years.

The national Partners’ administrative office endorsed development projects in the fields of agriculture, economic diversification, cultural education, and medical outreach. The earliest civilian participants in the Iowa Partners reflected this interest in American development expertise. Within the first year of its incorporation, the Iowa Partners membership included a Catholic missionary, economics and agronomy professors, nurses and doctors, bank presidents, local business owners, and agricultural specialists. Information on the Yucatán Partners is more limited, but the Partners program was supported by Governor Luis Torres Mesías and included prominent figures such as agribusiness executives, judges, priests, agricultural union leaders,

⁶⁶ Harold Hughes, “Proclamation: Fifth Anniversary of the Alliance for Progress,” August 22, 1966 - ISU MS 034 Box 4, Folder 1.

⁶⁷ Harrison Weber, “Iowa Group to Visit Mexico’s Yucatán Area,” *Carroll Times Herald*, December 23, 1965.

⁶⁸ Edward O’ Rourke, “Project No. 1: An Appeal to Credit Union Members and Officers, February 15, 1966 - ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 8.

professors, the secretary general of Yucatán, and the State Director of Planning.⁶⁹ The leaders of the two Partners groups met in January 1966, in Mexico City and Mérida, Yucatán. The American Partners were briefed in Mexico City by U.S. Ambassador Fulton Freeman on political and economic issues in Yucatán, and later met with Yucatán's Governor Torres Mesías and the U.S. Consul's office to discuss possibilities for development. Torres Mesías and his State Director of Planning, Manuel Mier y Teran, were invested in the agricultural modernization and the integration of Yucatán into Mexico's economy, which motivated them to support a closer relationship with USAID through the Partners of the Alliance.

From the inception of the program, American members of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners often viewed Mexican members of the program as recipients of charity, rather than equal partners in an exchange. After his visit to Yucatán, Monsignor Edward O'Rourke published an editorial in the *Catholic Rural Life* newsletter on life in Yucatán that revealed a mix of concern and paternalistic condescension:

Life is hard for the people of Yucatán. Their land is very rocky and thin. Most of their agriculture is primitive. They have little industrial development. Almost all their drinking water is contaminated. Dysentery, anemia, tuberculosis and various tropic diseases abound....But the people of Yucatán are diligent and gentle. Most of them are of the Mayan Indian stock...They are quick to love anyone who shows interest in them.⁷⁰

This patronizing belief that Yucatán's populace would receive American missionaries and experts with open arms suggests that Iowa members truly expected that their help was needed and desired. Despite this rosy paternalistic view, the Iowan Partners faced many barriers, both practical and ideological, to their modernizing mission.

⁶⁹ Memo Edward O'Rourke to Kenneth Miller, "Re: Persons to Contact in Yucatán & their Areas of Interest," September 13, 1966 - ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 8.

⁷⁰ Edward O'Rourke, "Walking and Searching," *Catholic Rural Life* XV, no. 3 (March 1966) - ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 3.

CHAPTER 6. “UNOFFICIAL PEOPLE” ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS: THE CONTRADICTIONS OF CIVILIAN DIPLOMACY

The activities of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Alliance revealed the tensions between the Iowans’ paternalistic attitudes toward Yucatecans and their desire to uphold the “mutual self-help” mission of the Partners of the Alliance. The Iowan Partners were confronted by the contradictions inherent in the Partners model and struggled to reconcile ideological support for self-sufficiency clashing with their pragmatic desire to lead development in directions that benefited American political and economic interests. The strategies and communication about these projects also give some insight into Yucatecan leaders’ attitudes towards their state’s modernization, as well as the role of the United States and their own rural population in that process. The projects of the Partners therefore reveal the complexities of negotiating control over technology and aid in a transnational development network.

Both Yucatán and Iowa Partners were invested in improving Yucatán’s regional economy through modernization and technological advancement. By 1965, Yucatán’s economy and environment had served American demand for henequen for over 80 years, but the collapse of that market had led to severe economic decline in the region. Manuel Mier y Teran, Director of Planning for Yucatán and key member of the Yucatán Partners, had organized a pro-industrialization round table conference in 1966 to discuss strategies to bolster the state’s economy. Yucatán, with the help of USAID funding, planned to drill around 80 wells between 1966 and 1967 for the purpose of growing oranges and vegetables for the American winter produce market. While these crops required more extensive irrigation than henequen, they were also more profitable. Other key agricultural industries included dairy cattle, pork and egg

production, which could reduce Yucatán's reliance on foodstuffs from the rest of Mexico.⁷¹

These projects were often planned by the Mexican government and funded through Mexico's federal Agrarian Bank.⁷²

Manuel Mier y Teran's industrializing and diversifying approach to agriculture received enthusiastic support from his counterparts in Iowa, leading to a number of immediate projects to share agricultural knowledge. In June of 1966, the Iowa Partners committee formed a team of Iowan and Yucatecan experts to examine henequen-growing practices and find alternative uses for the region's major crop. The team visited henequen-growing estates and experimented with using a pulpy byproduct of henequen, called *bagasse*, as roughage for cattle feed and as fiber for roofing and carpeting.⁷³ In the same few months, the Iowa Partners chapter invited several representatives from the Yucatán Partners to visit the farms of Roswell Garst to study "modern" cattle-feeding methods.⁷⁴ Garst, an Iowa hybrid-seed corn farmer famed for visiting the Soviet Union and hosting Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev on a goodwill agricultural exchange trip, was happy to promote the image of American agricultural superiority and generosity to Mexican farmers as well.⁷⁵

While the Partners attempted to modernize Yucatán's agriculture according to the model of Midwestern American farms, they began to develop transnational networks of knowledge and

⁷¹ "La Industrialización en El Estado de Yucatán," *El Mercado de Valores* 2 (January 1967) - National Archives, UD-WW-44, Box 19, Iowa-Yucatán Briefing Materials, 1967-1968.

⁷² Brannon and Baklanoff, *Agrarian Reform and Public Enterprise*, 162-163.

⁷³ "Re: Persons to Contact in Yucatán & their Areas of Interest," September 13, 1966 – ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 8. Miguel Olea Enriques and Jose Palomeque proposed this project to discuss with Iowa Partners President Kenneth Miller when he visited Yucatán in 1966. Monsignor O'Rourke also mentions the loss of henequen demand as a "severe blow to the economy of Yucatán" in "Project No. 1: An Appeal to Credit Union Members and Officers," – ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 8.

⁷⁴ "Yucatacans [sic] Honor Iowa Governor," *Catholic Rural Life* XV no. 4 (July 1966) – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 3.

⁷⁵ Harold Lee, *Roswell Garst: A Biography* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1984).

exchange. The Iowan Partners held unexamined, paternalistic assumptions about the perceived deficiencies and backwardness of the people in Latin America, a problem inherent to their drive to reform and remake subaltern spaces. In August 1967, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners attempted to coordinate with the U.S. Consul William Harben, Yucatecan agronomist Otto Peniche, and Mayor Francisco Medina Nuñez in their efforts to irrigate agricultural land around the city of Valladolid, which was historically home to a large Maya population. Consul Harben informed the Partners that Peniche had discouraged the Partners from funding a complex fixed-irrigation system and large land plots because, in Harben's words, "though [the new irrigation system is] efficient and modern, is unlikely to spread because the Indians are not ready for it." Peniche suggested a system in which artificial cisterns would be placed in the center of several small plots of land distributed to peasants, which could be irrigated by hand-drawn bucket. Echoing the paternalistic views of Yucatecan elites toward Mayan workers, Consul Harben called the plan "more primitive and less efficient, but therefore more adaptable to the peasant mentality." Despite the Partners' extensive consultation over this project, including correspondence with leaders from the U.S. State Department's Water for Peace program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's research services, there seems to have been no direct correspondence or consultation with the peasants themselves about which methods were most suited to their technical and personal needs.⁷⁶ The primary concern for the Iowa-Yucatán Partners seems to have been the perceived backwardness of rural Yucatecans and their willingness to provide labor for these "self-help" projects than their preferences or attitudes towards modernizing.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ William Harben to Agricultural Research Service, October 18, 1967; William Harben to Richard Hagan, August 30, 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Box 18 Folder Iowa Partners Folder 1 of 2.

⁷⁷ William Harben to Kenneth Miller, August 18, 1967- National Archives UD-WW-44 Box 18 Folder Iowa Partners Folder 1 of 2; Ted Tenorio to William Harben, July 20 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Box 18 Folder Iowa Partners Folder 1 of 2.

Young Iowans and Yucatecans played a central role in the Partners connection between travel for pleasure, diplomacy and knowledge exchange, which were central to the U.S. informal empire. Like the Peace Corps, the Partners of the Alliance saw young people as a valuable resource for transmitting goodwill and technical information between the United States and Latin America. However, the U.S. Consul warned the Iowa-Yucatán Partners against “anything resembling a Peace Corps operation” because it would require diplomatic approval and Mexican officials had already declined to allow Peace Corps activity in their country.⁷⁸ A simple student exchange, by contrast, would not be subjected to the same level of resistance or scrutiny. As this communication suggests, the Partners viewed young people as an important and politically sensitive population for diplomatic outreach, especially in a vulnerable region like Yucatán. During a 1967 meeting of the Iowan Partners committee, Yucatecan priest Father Alvaro García described the ongoing economic crisis in the state and then warned, in the words of an Iowa Partners memo, “about the increased activity on the part of the Cuban Consulate [in Mérida]. He said that many and varied programs are being offered by the Cubans to appeal to young people.” He encouraged the Iowa-Yucatán Partners to focus their efforts on intervening among poor and disenfranchised Yucatecan youth in order to prevent them from developing communist sympathies with the nearby Cubans. García suggested that educational exchanges and transnational vocational training for young people could improve the diplomatic effectiveness of the Partners’ organization.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ William Harben to Gene McCoy, April 5 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Box 18 Folder Iowa Partners Folder 1 of 2.

⁷⁹ William Brown to Members of the Iowa Partners Board of Directors, January 3, 1967 – ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 8. Unfortunately, this source does not specify what types of programs Father García believe the Cubans were carrying out in Mérida.

The Partners' success in youth programming translated into one of its largest and most active programs: its student exchanges. The students' travel experiences were transmuted into a form of development expertise, as they were meant to absorb the other region's cultural and technical activities and become advocates for exchange. In 1966, Iowan geology professor Dr. Harriet Heusinkveld spearheaded a scholarship program to bring students from the Yucatán to Iowa and send Iowan students to Yucatán to study its famed archaeological sites.⁸⁰ The exchange program also included opportunities for art and language teachers in Yucatán to visit Iowa and teach high school and university students about Yucatecan culture.⁸¹ The exchange program was intended to teach language skills, expose young people to one another's cultures, and most notably, let young people "observe first-hand the vocation of their choice in a foreign setting." Young men were brought to Iowa farms to give them the "opportunity to compare methods of farm production with those of their own farms in Yucatán."⁸² The student exchange program received positive reception from the U.S. Department of State and was publicly honored by USAID administrator James Boren in a 1966 recognition ceremony.⁸³ During their presentation to the public, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners stressed that it was important to use young people to build a closer relationship between the two states, especially given that Yucatán, in Jeanette Westfall's words, was "located only a little more than 100 miles from Communist-controlled Cuba."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ "Iowa Aids Yucatacan [sic] Credit Unions and Schools," *Catholic Rural Life* (July 1966) – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 3.

⁸¹ "Imaginative Programs Increase Interest in Partnerships," *The Partners* Volume 1 No. 1 (1967).

⁸² Jeanette Westfall, "Commentary to Accompany Slides, Yucatán Youth Exchange Programs," August 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Box 18 Folder "Iowa Partners" 1.

⁸³ State Department, "Press Release: Iowa College Wins Aid Award," September 2, 1966 - ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 3.

⁸⁴ Jeanette Westfall, "Commentary to Accompany Slides, Yucatán Youth Exchange Programs," August 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 18 Folder "Iowa Partners" 1.

While these programs met with relative success, internal debates and friction within the Iowa Partners reveal the complexities of both “mutual self-help” diplomacy and the public-private status of civilian diplomats. The Iowa and Yucatán Partners committees often worked in isolation, without communicating about one another’s plans. The two committees finally sat down for a meeting in 1967 at the American Consul in Mérida to hash out some logistical issues. The Yucatán Partners asserted that Iowa’s Governor Harold Hughes treated their partnership as a “governor-to-governor program” by planning exchanges without Yucatecan civilian input, and argued for a more equitable management of the exchanges. A young boy from Iowa had been delivered to a Yucatán Partners member’s home without prior notice due to miscommunication by the Iowa Partners. In response to this error, Iowan Partner David Rieger stated that he “[didn’t] see how the Yucatán Partners Committee [could] be held responsible for mishaps to unofficial people.” In response, Yucatán Partners Chairman Rios-Covián stated that regardless of an Iowan’s official or unofficial status, “the press would hold [the Yucatán Partners] responsible if there were any link whatever to the program.” Expanding on the importance of communication for effective program management, Manuel Mier y Teran put forward the idea that the Yucatán committee should be informed whenever any Iowan tourists came to Yucatán, so that the Partners could help the tourist network “with residents in his special field.”⁸⁵ Both the Iowa and Yucatán Partners clearly wrestled with the ambiguities of civilian diplomacy and what constituted the “official or unofficial” status of their student exchanges and tourists.

When they were faced with balancing the roles of national representative and goodwill ambassador, the students involved in the Partners exchanges experienced significant scrutiny and

⁸⁵ “Meeting Minutes for Reps of Iowa-Yucatán Partners Committee,” Aug 28, 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 18 Folder “Iowa Partners” 1.

cultural clashes. Several Iowan students expressed disappointment that they would not have the opportunity to work during their stay in Yucatán, as the exchange had been promoted as work training, and the Yucatecan students were apparently unaccustomed to doing labor on American-style farms, if they had worked at all. In fact, the program was criticized in Yucatán's local press for selecting students from "prosperous backgrounds or the social elite" to visit the United States.⁸⁶ During their 1967 meeting in Mérida, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners agreed that the program needed to be more effectively integrated between the two Partners committees and student placements chosen according to complementary economic and personal interests.⁸⁷ After this meeting, previous exchange students Michele Conway in Iowa and Nidia Baquero in Yucatán spearheaded the formation of Junior Partners committees to advise in selecting future exchangees and to provide them with advice on fitting in with their host families, appropriate behavior in their host-state's culture and interaction with their peers. For example, one Junior Partners letter to future exchange students warned Iowa students about Yucatán's conservative culture and that students should be careful about drinking and dating, because it might cause offense to their host families.⁸⁸ The students needed to be careful about their conduct, as their daily behavior represented constant American diplomatic presence in Yucatán. The symbolic political value of the student exchange forced Iowan and Yucatecan youths into the difficult position of acting as students and diplomats at once.

In addition to cultural friction, the Partners' border-crossing project was also beset with logistical and political concerns about moving development supplies from the United States to

⁸⁶ "Meeting Minutes for Reps of Iowa-Yucatán Partners Committee," Aug 28, 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 18 Folder "Iowa Partners" 1.

⁸⁷ "Meeting Minutes for Reps of Iowa-Yucatán Partners Committee," Aug 28, 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 18 Folder "Iowa Partners" 1.

⁸⁸ Michele Conway to Junior Partners, May 30, 1970 - ISU MS 034 Box 4 Folder 5.

Mexico. In 1966, within the first months of the partnership, the Iowa Partners decided it was not feasible to purchase equipment and send across the border into Mexico for some of their development projects. The Mexican government viewed imported equipment as a deterrent to the nation's industrial growth and the import duties were therefore prohibitively expensive. For example, one of the first projects developed by the Iowa committee focused on purchasing agricultural fertilizer sprayers for a farming cooperative in Sotuta, Yucatán, but it was determined that the cost of shipping made the project untenable. Instead, the Partners decided to donate funding for the purchase of the sprayers to the Sotuta farm.⁸⁹ From their earliest projects, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners discovered that imposing their vision of agricultural modernity on the Mexican hinterlands came with a number of logistical obstacles. Monsignor O'Rourke believed the Iowa-Yucatán Partners needed to "seek more substantial assistance from the National Partners committee [and] State Department...in regard to import permits and similar matters which are outside our competence."⁹⁰ In 1967, one Iowa Partner even requested that the US Embassy make arrangements for Partners project materials to be shipped duty-free, but the Embassy and USAID denied the request on the principle that this would discourage the Partners from focusing on their private resources and network.⁹¹

The early years of the Iowa-Yucatán Partnership were fraught with various challenges. Despite the support of Iowan civic leaders for the organization, the Iowa Partners president Bill Brown struggled to acquire funding for projects that required coordination across national borders between two groups of volunteers. Brown and his fellow Iowa Partners found these

⁸⁹ Edward O'Rourke, "Project No. 2," February 15, 1966 - ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 8.

⁹⁰ Edward O'Rourke, "Objectives of the Iowa Partners of the Alliance," November 7, 1966 - ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 8.

⁹¹ Theodore Tenorio to William Harben, May 3, 1967 – National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 18 Folder Iowa Partners 1.

transnational projects especially difficult to maintain because the Yucatán Partners organization seemed to lack consistent leadership and was forced to disband and re-form several times.⁹² As a result of this inconsistent Yucatecan activity, the Iowa Partners found it “distressing to note the social disorganization which prevails in Yucatán,” but felt they needed to “avoid the posture of dictating to [the Yucatecans].”⁹³ USAID administrator Ted Tenorio reported to Boren in 1967 that Yucatán Partners Chairman Ríos-Covián was “somewhat annoyed” that the Iowa Partners had been organizing work training and student exchanges without consulting their counterparts; he also noted that the Iowa Partners had violated Mexican federal policy about the importation of used clothing.⁹⁴ The Iowa Partners seemed to find it difficult to strike a balance between their impulse to impose their preferred forms of assistance and the principle of “mutual self-help” that governed the Partnership system.

This internal conflict about the purpose of the Partners is best illustrated through the attitudes of the Iowa Partners committee on how to approach the issues of disinterest and uneven exchange. While Iowan and Yucatán chapters were able to coordinate on issues affecting Yucatán, few projects were ever undertaken to stimulate “self-help” in Iowa. At a 1968 board meeting, the Iowa committee directors identified a lack of Yucatecan investment and participation as the organization’s primary concern. The Iowa committee admitted that they had not expressed any real interest in help that the Yucatán committee could provide to Iowa. However, the Iowa Partners diverted away from this issue and asserted that the major obstacle to getting Yucatecans invested in the program was the Mexican government’s obstruction. In their

⁹² Theodore Tenorio to Kenneth Miller, December 6, 1967 – National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 18 Folder 1.

⁹³ Edward O’Rourke, “Objectives of the Iowa Partners of the Alliance,” November 7, 1966 - ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 8.

⁹⁴ Theodore Tenorio to James Boren, “Iowa/Yucatán Partners of the Alliance,” August 28, 1967 – National Archives, UD-WW-44, Container 18 Folder 1.

view, Mexico discouraged its citizens from participating in transnational partnerships so that the Mexican government could bolster its political legitimacy as the sole provider of social welfare and modernizing technologies in Mexico.⁹⁵ The Iowa Partners committee concluded that “[Iowa Partners are] confronted with two obstacles....the intense national pride of the Mexican citizens; and, the disinclination of the Yucatan state government to be interested in foreign intervention where the government itself desires and needs the credit for doing good works.”⁹⁶ Of course, the Iowa Partners did not consider the long history of U.S. intervention in twentieth-century Mexico, which might validate the Mexican government’s desire to regulate American influences in Yucatán.⁹⁷ The Iowa Partners committee asserted that any political differences between the two nations should be a secondary concern to the threat of “communist propaganda and the persuasion of revolutionary leaders” they saw endangering the Western Hemisphere. The Iowa Partners did not consider that stimulating further Partners activity or “self-help” in Iowa might increase Yucatecan interest and overcome Mexican resistance to the program. These discussions make it clear that the in the eyes of the Iowa Partners, the program focused on development in Yucatán and preventing communist activity in Mexico, much more than pursuing mutual aid or friendship.

⁹⁵ Phil Brown to Iowa Partners of the Alliance Chairmen, “Consensus of Special Committee for Partners Concept Evaluation,” March 15, 1968 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 1.

⁹⁶ Phil Brown to Iowa Partners of the Alliance Chairmen, “Consensus of Special Committee for Partners Concept Evaluation,” March 15, 1968 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 1.

⁹⁷ Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don’t Go Home: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War*.

CHAPTER 7. “CHAC-MOOL WANTS YOU!”: RECRUITING THE TOURIST-TECHNICIAN

In order to accomplish their development goals in the face of logistical and political challenges, Iowa-Yucatán Partners relied upon the draw of the Yucatán Peninsula’s unique and historic environmental attractions to build up its civilian development resources and ability to transport goods. From the inception of the Partners program, federal administrators planned to incrementally reduce funding and management support for the state-level chapters until the program was entirely based on private civilian activity. To this end, the Partners shifted from James Boren’s leadership to the National Association of the Partners of the Alliance (NAPA) in 1967.⁹⁸ NAPA and its state level Partners organizations became more focused on public outreach and engagement as it became a private non-profit voluntary agency.⁹⁹ Over the next several years, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners used the appeal of the Yucatán to develop a network of experts and missionaries that allowed it to expand its programs despite shrinking public funds.

Iowan Partners used images and ideas about the exotic and remote nature of Yucatán to spur interest and to encourage American civilians to participate in the Partners’ cultural and technical exchange. In order to drum up support for the Iowa-Yucatán Junior Partners’ student exchange program, high school and college students in Iowa sent out flyers emblazoned with the image of a *chacmool*, a famous style of pre-Columbian statue found in Chichen Itza, Yucatán, and widely-considered a “masterpiece” of indigenous Mexican art.¹⁰⁰ To this ancient icon, the American students added their own cultural symbols of youth and civic service. The statue was drawn wearing high-top sneakers, with his arm extended and finger pointed at the reader,

⁹⁸ Iowa Partners, “The Iowa Partners: Objectives and Organization, 3 May 1970” - ISU MS 034 Box 4 Folder 1.

⁹⁹ James Boren, “The Partners of the Alliance – A Short History” *The Partners* 1 no 1 (1967) - ISU MS 034 Box 4 Folder 1.

¹⁰⁰ Christina Bueno, *The Pursuit of Ruins: Archaeology, History and the Making of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 172-173.

declaring “Chac-Mool Wants You!” in a clear allusion to the iconic imagery of Uncle Sam recruiting for the U.S. Army. The flyer stated that “Chac – the part-time Mayan rain god and our full-time recruiter” wanted to “chac-up a few new members,” and invited potential host families and exchange participants to attend one of the Junior Partners events to learn about “all things Yucatecan.”¹⁰¹ This document reveals a fascinating, if facetious, intermixing of “exotic” indigenous religion and art, youthful enthusiasm, and symbolic appeals to American militarism and civic duty. This type of promotional strategy became an important part of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners’ development efforts, drawing the interest of experts and donors toward the Partners’ projects through touristic cultural appeal blended with a sense of global citizenship.

In order to send the message to experts that Yucatán was a desirable place to do humanitarian work, the promotional material for the Iowa-Yucatán program often paired the perceived deficiencies and backwardness of Latin America with descriptions of the cultural and environmental appeal that Yucatán offered to visitors. Iowa Partners announced in one of their publications that “Latin America, while unbelievably poor by our economic standards here, has a wealth of other things to offer us: art and archaeology, cultural background, fascinating history, tourist and vacation spots, warm and lasting friendship, and good-will.”¹⁰² Opportunities for sight-seeing and cultural education in Yucatán were used by the Partners to lure development experts and American civilians into participating in the Partners’ projects. Study of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners therefore demonstrates an often-overlooked link between development expertise and touristic consumption. While historians have researched and written on large-scale development efforts to promote a tourism-based economy in the Yucatán Peninsula, this research

¹⁰¹ Doug Syverson, “Chac Mool Wants You,” December 1971 – ISU MS 034 Box 4 Folder 5.

¹⁰² Boone Regional Partners, “Organization Meeting Welcome Information,” May 17, 1970 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 4.

often views tourists simply as consumers who benefit from this model of foreign-market-oriented modernization.¹⁰³ The Iowa-Yucatán Partners illustrate that tourists could be not just observers or beneficiaries of development but active participants in the remaking of foreign spaces, imposing American ideas about correct and modern ways of living on remote developing regions. These tourists' self-formed identities as consumers of exotic environments and reformers of deficient landscapes were inseparable, making them 'tourist-technicians.'

Yucatán's leaders also saw great economic possibility in the region's history and environment. Several historians have noted an interesting relationship between Yucatán's success as a tourist site, its remoteness and unique culture, and its integration into an informal imperial economy.¹⁰⁴ State political leaders within Yucatán recognized and wished to capitalize on the exotic appeal and touristic potential of Yucatán for both Mexican and American tourists. As Director of Planning Manuel Mier y Teran noted, the region's picturesque beaches and rich archaeological sites made it perfect for attracting visitors, but the lack of personal transportation infrastructure had kept tourist numbers down to only 130,000 people annually. The Yucatecan planners believed that constructing modern amenities and building roads to improve accessibility to major Mayan archaeological sites would improve the state's income. One such project was

¹⁰³ There is a growing and fascinating historiography on Mexican tourism development, and tourism in the Yucatán region has a particularly rich literature. For discussion on state-directed modernization and the diplomatic role of tourism between the United States and Mexico, see Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2006). For other works on the subject, see *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*, ed. Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, (Durham: Duke University, 2009); Michael Clancy, *Exporting Paradise: Tourism and Development in Mexico* (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, 2001); and Holly Renee Pelas, "Tourism Development in Cancun, Mexico: An Analysis of State-Directed Tourism Initiatives in a Developing Nation," (master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2011). For further information on the sociocultural impact of commodifying experiences and inhabited spaces, there is also a great deal of research in the field of tourism and hospitality studies; for examples of this analytical framework, see John Urry, *Consuming Places* (New York: Routledge Press, 2002); and Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt, Michael Haldrup, and John Urry, *Performing Tourist Places* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ Gabriela Vargas-Cetina, "Through the Othering Gaze: Yucatecan Trova Music and 'the Tourist' in Yucatán, Mexico" in *Cultural Tourism in Latin America: The Politics of Space and Imagery*, ed. Michiel Baud and Annelou Ypeij (Boston: Brill Press, 2009), 69-92; and Lisa Breglia, "Hacienda Hotels and Other Ironies of Luxury in Yucatán, Mexico," in *Cultural Tourism in Latin America*, 245-262.

already in progress by 1966 for “modernizing and adapting The Gran Cenote Zaci of Valladolid” with the construction of restaurants, parks, and an outdoor theatre around the ancient Mayan cultural site.¹⁰⁵ Building from this desire to capitalize on ancient cultural values and environmental conditions, the Partners activities often intensified this push towards both antiquarian and modernizing impulses.

Jeanette Westfall, committee secretary of the Iowa Partners chapter, spearheaded efforts to link touristic appeal with development within the Iowa-Yucatán Partners. In mid-1967, the Iowa Partners sent Westfall to Yucatán to check ongoing projects and to generate positive news stories for the *Des Moines Tribune* about the Iowa Partners’ work. In her first article for the *Tribune*, she paints an appealing and exotic picture of the Peninsula:

As the shimmering jet *Azteca de Oro* (Golden Aztec) touched down in Mérida, Yucatán, we were greeted on every side by flaming tropical color – jacaranda, bougainvillea, flamboyant, and a multitude of other exotic flowers and trees. Jungle birds screeched a welcome, and overhead the *zopilotes*...circled by the hundreds. Windmills, instead of television antennas, towered above every house and it was truly like stepping into another world.¹⁰⁶

Westfall’s description, which emphasizes both the beauty and perceived backwardness of Mérida, encapsulates the Partners’ efforts to draw in “tourist-technicians” and other voluntary organizations for their development endeavors. Westfall was an extremely active community member and political organizer, conversant in Spanish with family in both Mexico and the United States and a keen interest in travel. With this combination of qualities and interests, Jeanette Westfall was a consummate transnational networker. Called “Iowa’s First Compañero

¹⁰⁵ “La Industrialización en El Estado de Yucatán,” *El Mercado de Valores* 2 (January 1967) - National Archives, UD-WW-44, Box 19, Iowa-Yucatán Briefing Materials, 1967-1968.

¹⁰⁶ Jeanette Westfall, Draft of *Des Moines Tribune* (article 1 of 10) n.d. - National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 19 Folder Iowa/Yucatán Briefing Material 1966-67.

[sic]” by the Partners committee, Westfall wrote over a dozen letters each day to Iowa and Yucatán Partners as well as other private voluntary agencies who might be able to support the Partners’ activities.¹⁰⁷ As a result of her tireless networking and leadership within the Iowa-Yucatán Partners organization, Westfall was elected to the Executive Committee of NAPA in 1970 and served as a representative on the Board of Directors of the Inter-American Partners of the Americas, positions which allowed her to promote tourism as a tool for effective transnational development.¹⁰⁸

The Iowan Partners stumbled upon tourism as a solution to the challenge of traversing the Yucatán Peninsula to provide aid in small and isolated villages. For example, one of the greatest challenges of the Partners’ development project consisted of providing medical care and moving expensive medical supplies to furnish field clinics across the Peninsula. Jeanette Westfall and her husband Dr. R. William Westfall led the initiative to create the first medical-dental teams which had traveled across the Yucatán Peninsula and attended to thousands of patients in small rural field clinics and missionary sites. Medical staff volunteering for the Partners often needed to hire “bush pilots” to fly them into remote and unreachable villages to provide medical care and stock clinics with medical supplies.¹⁰⁹ In order to overcome increasingly strict travel and transport requirements from the national Partners organization, the Westfalls created a “Partners Travel Program” by recruiting friends and acquaintances to visit as tourists and reserve luggage space for medical supplies and medicine for the Yucatecan clinics.¹¹⁰ After the success of these initial trips in the late 1960s, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners began to view tourism as a useful tool for development and began to lead multiple annual tours across Mexico to the Peninsula starting in

¹⁰⁷ Iowa Partners Newsletter 2 no. 1 (August 1971) – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

¹⁰⁸ Iowa Partners News Release, September 13, 1971 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

¹⁰⁹ Partners of the Americas, “Christmas Tour Itinerary,” 1971 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

¹¹⁰ Partners of the Americas, “A Salute to Jeanette and Bill Westfall,” 2004 (online - accessed April 25, 2017).

1970.¹¹¹ Westfall guided her tour groups to the famous archaeological sites of Chichen Itza and Dzibilchaltun, the beaches of Progreso and Isla Mujeres, and the project sites of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners. Iowa Partners circulars promoted the tours as a way “to visit Partners project areas and to help transport goods” needed to keep the projects going.¹¹² The Partners advertised and exploited Yucatán’s unique history and environment to enact its modernizing designs. This approach shaped Iowa Partners’ network of supporters to view Yucatecan environment as consumable and changeable by American experts and tourists. This tourist-technician strategy helped to form what historian Ricardo Salvatore has referred to as “the enterprise of knowledge” the United States developed to understand and control Latin American countries and spaces.¹¹³

As the federal administrators of the Partners program gradually reduced the program’s resources, the Partners became increasingly reliant upon their civilian status and tourism to accomplish their development goals. A constant source of delay was the cost and logistical challenge of moving donated equipment and materials across the border into Yucatán. As the Iowa Partners announced in their newsletter, “costs...particularly for transportation of our shipments is killing us.”¹¹⁴ These financial pressures allowed unorthodox methods like the 1969 Airstream Caravan trips to emerge. Using private networking and their civilian status, the Partners could bypass the financial and political obstructions they would face by importing goods in their official capacity as an international aid program. The Partners moved medical and

¹¹¹ Boone Regional Partners, Bulletin #2, September 1970 - ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 4.

¹¹² Boone Regional Partners, Bulletin #7, June 1971 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 4.

¹¹³ Ricardo D. Salvatore, “The Enterprise of Knowledge: Representational Machines of Informal Empire,” in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S. Latin American Relations*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 69-104. A similar theme is explored in the work of Diana K. Davis, who discusses colonial controls over “the environmental imaginary,” a view which attempts to transform subaltern environments which are perceived as deficient. See Diana K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2016).

¹¹⁴ *Iowa Partners Newsletter* 2 no. 1 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

agricultural supplies through similar methods. For example, the National Association publicized a private cargo-moving strategy adopted by the Iowa-Yucatán Partners: “one Iowa family has made 36 trips to Yucatán, 15 by car, transporting medical supplies and pharmaceuticals.”¹¹⁵ The Partners celebrated this activity as a way to transform development into a process that blended diplomacy and adventure for an average Iowa family. At the same time, this strategy fulfilled the Partners of the Alliance’s directive to draw upon the resources and abilities of civilians to streamline development in Latin America.

The use of civilian status was also a means to subvert what the Iowan Partners viewed as an obstructive and inefficient Mexican bureaucracy surrounding imports. Iowa Partner Jeanette Westfall did much of the networking with civilians and voluntary organizations, communicating key information about how to transport development supplies. In one letter to a Missouri doctor who planned to come along on a Partners medical mission trip, Westfall noted that the Partners “have had no trouble bringing in medicines for these programs but have done it on an ‘unofficial,’ personal basis, lying a little when necessary to emphasize that they are for personal use.” Westfall gave the doctor advice on how to evade scrutiny and onerous paperwork, saying “I think your best bet is to operate as a ‘private citizen’ and nothing should be said about connections with a government program or other organized groups, which could then become more complicated.”¹¹⁶ It seems that the Iowa-Yucatán Partners often viewed ‘civilian’ or ‘tourist’ as the most useful identities, where the roles of ‘diplomat’ and ‘expert’ could become strategic liabilities in the face of Mexican political resistance or bureaucratic inertia.

¹¹⁵ “Cargo Transportation Methods Used by the Partners” n.d. - ISU MS 034 Box 2 Folder 8.

¹¹⁶ Jeanette Westfall to Dan Cotner, April 25 1970 – ISU MS 034 Box 18 Folder 6.

At times, it was not only import costs but concerns about corruption and graft that encouraged the Partners to transport aid supplies privately. During a medical service trip, Nurse Eileen Kruse packed “as many medicine samples and disposable syringes and needles as possible in her personal luggage” to avoid confiscation by the Mexican authorities. The customs officials sent the rest of their medical supplies to a warehouse in Mérida, where the Partners had to offer a small bribe of money “plus vitamins for all the officials’ families” to get their equipment back.¹¹⁷ The Iowa Partners also transported their fertilized chicken eggs as personal luggage on airplanes. Though the Partners did not fear confiscation, they reported that their eggs and luggage had to be inspected by customs to ensure that they did not contain concealed weapons that could be used for hijacking the plane, given the proximity of the Yucatán coast to Cuba.¹¹⁸ Through this improvised method, the Partners’ poultry project had distributed over 7,500 fertilized American chicken eggs by 1971, largely through private travelers across the Peninsula.¹¹⁹ At the end of the same year, the Iowa Partners circulated a report of the year’s projects and announced that “eight tours groups went to Yucatán during the year, to visit Partners project areas and to help transport goods, as well as to enjoy the incredible tourist attractions of our Partner state.”¹²⁰ These methods of combining tourist travel and transnational shipping, while effective in overcoming transport obstacles, also illustrate the Iowa-Yucatán Partners’ distrust of the Mexican government and their desire to bypass government oversight of their activities.

As the technician-tourist approach continued and grew in the early 1970s, the Iowa Partners continued to argue that regular exchange of tourists and experts was key to reshaping local conditions in Yucatán. As one newsletter noted, “in many instances, [providing aid] is a

¹¹⁷ “Eileen Kruse Takes Part in Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Americas” *Ackley World Journal*, November 4, 1971.

¹¹⁸ “Poultry Improvement Projects for Iowa’s Sister State, Yucatán,” *Moravia Union*, February 11, 1971.

¹¹⁹ Partners of the Americas, “Christmas Tour Itinerary,” 1971 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 3.

¹²⁰ Boone Regional Partners of the Americas, “Bulletin #7” June 1971 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 4.

losing battle. Clear up the tropical parasites and within a month they are re-infested. Start a baby on vitamins and food-supplement formula and a month later the supply is exhausted.” They promoted increasing the number of regular trips and shipments of supplies from the United States to Mexico, but most notably, stressed more training for Mexican personnel to carry on their projects.¹²¹ In order for their Partnership to have a lasting impact, the Iowa Partners argued, the organization should aim to reshape Mexican experts and locals in the image of American technicians. For example, the agricultural experiment stations saw closer interaction of Iowa and Yucatán Partners with international NGOs. The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, founded by Rockefeller Foundation’s experiments with Mexican wheat production in the 1940s, donated four varieties of corn for experimentation across Yucatán under the direction of Iowa Partner Walt Goeppinger. The varieties were spread across the Peninsula to be planted and tended by *campesinos*, or peasant farmers, under the direction of American agriculturalists and the Yucatán Partners leadership.¹²² Through these small-scale projects, Iowans worked to train Mexican participants to carry out agricultural experiments for modernizing the region’s agriculture. The trips that Iowan technicians made to Mexico served the purpose of transporting development goods and expertise, but also served as training missions to establish a local source of American-style technical expertise in the Yucatecan population.

While the Partners provide an excellent case study of how civilian diplomacy used their private status to reshape foreign spaces and politics, this type of civic expertise exchange and missionary work became an increasingly prominent diplomatic model over the 1960s and 1970s. Much of the United States’ “people-to-people diplomacy,” development outreach, and travel

¹²¹ “Medical Team to Yucatán and Quintana Roo,” *Iowa Partners Newsletter* (November 1972) – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

¹²² “Agriculture Team Makes Inspection Tour,” *Iowa Partners Newsletter* (November 1972) – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

during this period provoked criticism of an American imperialist mindset.¹²³ One direct and famous critique of civilian volunteers and travelers came from Catholic reformist Monsignor Ivan Illich. His famous 1968 address at the Conference on Inter-American Student Projects in Cuernavaca, Mexico, to American volunteers asserted that student “mission vacations” were “benevolent invasions.”¹²⁴ These missions reflected American citizens’ belief that they possessed kind of innate expertise on the virtues of modern living. Illich criticized the missionaries’ assumption that they could “help Mexican peasants ‘develop’ by spending a summer with them.” Speaking directly to a group of American student-volunteers, he argued that “by definition, you cannot help being vacationing salesmen for the middle class ‘American Way of Life.’” Illich believed that American civic outreach and tourism were bound to disseminate political values, economic strategies, and technical expertise to Latin American communities in ways that primarily benefited the American volunteers and the United States.¹²⁵ While Illich addressed his speech to an audience of young Catholic missionaries, it was often civic organizations like the Partners of the Alliance that recruited and led these “vacationing salesmen” into transnational travel and development activity.

¹²³ “People-to-people diplomacy” was a model of civilian outreach adopted in 1956 under President Dwight Eisenhower, establishing a “People-to-People Program” a set of international civilian exchange committees on cultural and educational issues. This system of Cold War cultural outreach inspired the formation of the Partners of the Alliance for Progress, the Peace Corps, Food for Peace, and other civilian diplomacy programs in Latin America during the 1950s to 1970s. People-to-people programs are discussed in a number of works on the Cold War and U.S. foreign policy. For an overview on the emergence of this program and its place within a broader history of cultural diplomacy, see Michael Krenn, *A History of United States Cultural Diplomacy: 1770 to the Present Day* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017). For a more comprehensive discussion of Eisenhower’s emphasis on tourism and civilian outreach in the context of Cold War Asia, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*. Klein’s work, while discussing US-Asian relations much more broadly, has significant parallels to this project on US-Latin American relations. Her work thoughtfully explores the connections between American global expansionism and the consumption of ‘exotic’ cultures in the Cold War within the framework of Edward Said’s work.

¹²⁴ Ivan Illich, “Yankee, Go Home: The American Do-Gooder in South America,” in *The Church, Change and Development*, ed. Fred Eychaner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 45-53.

¹²⁵ Illich, 46-47.

CHAPTER 8. FLYING DOCTORS AND EGG-LIFT MISSIONS: DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BORDER-CROSSING

The tourist-technician represented a central part of the Partners' development strategy and reflected the power the Partners saw in civilian mobility and networking as methods for developing Yucatán. Across the late 1960s and early 1970s, networking with other volunteer, non-profit, and missionary organizations provided the Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Alliance with more resources and broader civilian engagement in their medical, educational and agricultural projects. For example, Monsignor Edward O'Rourke spearheaded much of the Partners' activity, in part because it complemented his work as president of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, a missionary organization which promoted politically conservative but technologically-modern agricultural policies. The NCRLC often had a paternalistic bent in its outreach to other nations; the organization's preceding president had argued that colonialism by Western developed nations had benefits to the colonized and believed that "some strong ties with a real 'mother country are necessary" for a 'developing' country to achieve stable self-rule.¹²⁶ Though his views were not so overtly paternalistic, O'Rourke promoted international outreach for both his missionary and civilian work and continued to stress the importance of introducing advanced agricultural technologies.¹²⁷ For example, in 1972, he headed a project to transport \$15,000 worth of donated dairy-pasteurization equipment from a farm in Iowa to Mérida, Yucatán. O'Rourke coordinated the equipment's transport with Yucatán Partners member Lina Esquivel and the wife of Yucatán's governor, who wanted to install the equipment at the state's Institute for the Protection of Children. The Iowa-Yucatán Partners promoted the project as one

¹²⁶ David Bovée, *The Church and the Land: the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and American Society, 1923-2007* (Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 216.

¹²⁷ David Bovée, "The Middle Way: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference and Rural Issues in the 20th and 21st Centuries," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 75 no. 3 (May 2016): 779.

of their greatest successes, as it provided pasteurized milk to an estimated 11,000 children in Yucatán.¹²⁸

The Partners networked with several religious missionary organizations for logistical and cultural support. The primary religious missionary presence in the region were Maryknoll Catholic priests and Presbyterians. Both missionary organizations had longstanding relationships with local communities and the Iowa Partners believed that these missionaries held expertise on local conditions that could help the Partners in their development mission. For example, Maryknoll parish priests Father Robert E. Lee and Father Peter Petrucci, who were both conversant in Yucatec-Maya, had already helped establish an agricultural production cooperative and secondary school during the 1960s.¹²⁹ The Partners therefore solicited project suggestions from the Maryknoll priests and the U.S. Consul in Mérida, who recommended that the Partners build farm-to-market roads in rural towns and provided practical support in moving equipment and supplies.¹³⁰ The United States Presbyterian missionaries in Yucatán had been active for over 50 years and were running a youth camp and medical center, *Clinica La Esperanza*, both of which were falling into debt and serious disrepair. Starting in 1968, the Iowa Partners coordinated regular medical-dental team trips across Yucatán to help treat patients at these remote clinics.¹³¹ The Iowa Partners wished to support these missions due to their educational and medical focus and tap into existing transnational networks for diplomatic purposes.

¹²⁸ Jeanette Westfall to Jim Graham, "Newsletter Draft," nd – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

¹²⁹ "Biographies: Father Peter J. Petrucci, MM," Maryknoll Mission Archives, www.maryknollmissionarchives.org/?deceased-fathers-bro=father-peter-j-petrucci-mm (accessed December 15, 2017); and "Biographies: Father Robert. E. Lee, MM," Maryknoll Mission Archives, <https://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?deceased-fathers-bro=father-robert-e-lee-mm>, (accessed December 15, 2017).

¹³⁰ "Iowa and Yucatán – Person to Person," *Des Moines Tribune*, September 14, 1967; and "Have You Heard?" *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, October 14 1967.

¹³¹ Jeanette Westfall, Draft of *Des Moines Tribune* (article 2 of 10) June 26, 1967 - National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 19 Folder Iowa/Yucatán Briefing Material 1966-67.

In order to improve educational development, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners formed relationships with educators in both Iowa and Yucatán to provide supplies to existing Yucatecan schools and to support vocational and secondary education in urban areas. Under the direction of Iowan Partners member and Central College dean James Graham in 1970 and 1971, the Partners constructed a satellite campus associated with Central College in Mérida and “sent over 100 faculty and students” to operate this branch campus.¹³² The Partners also constructed “social-educational centers” where Mérida’s youth were instructed in English and trade skills and received medical and dental examinations from Yucatecan trainees.¹³³ In accordance with Father García’s warning about the threat of Cubans fomenting communist sympathies among vulnerable youth, the Partners attempted to reach out to youth in urban areas of Yucatán and provide them with leadership and vocational training to advance economic development in the region.

As a civilian organization, the Partners of the Alliance had the power to network with many other international programs and organizations without the scrutiny such programs received in Mexico when their research was funded and controlled by the U.S. government. In order to improve conditions for rural Yucatecans and demonstrate the goodwill of Iowa’s experts, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners focused much of their development effort in modernizing livestock and grain agriculture into Yucatán. Iowan experts in soil and crops, livestock and poultry, well-digging and pump design, and farm machinery traveled in working groups to Mexico to share their expertise with local engineers and agronomists in Yucatán and to advise local agriculturalists on ongoing poultry, cattle, and grain-growing experiments.¹³⁴ The Iowa Partners’ agricultural chairman was Walt Goeppinger, who was President of the National Corn

¹³²“Summary of Partners Projects, 1970-71,” *Iowa Partners Newsletter*, August 1971 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

¹³³Jeanette Westfall, “Report of Visit 10,” January 1970 - ISU MS 034 Box 2 Folder 6.

¹³⁴H.C. Erbe, Boone Regional Partners Newsletter from 1972 – ISU MS 034 Box 5, Folder 2.

Growers' Association and was nationally-known for his previous agricultural outreach in both public and private capacities. He had served as advisor to the Foreign Agricultural Service, and in 1960, Goeppinger had personally developed a mission to airlift 36 Iowa hogs to the typhoon-struck Yamanashi Prefecture in Japan, and thereby create a market for U.S. grain exports.¹³⁵ In Yucatán, Agricultural chair Goeppinger wanted to introduce American-developed high-protein corn seed as a way to overcome the Peninsula's rocky and low-yielding soil conditions. Goeppinger corresponded with scientists in the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations already working to develop wheat and alfalfa breeds for Yucatán's soil conditions.¹³⁶

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the informality of the Partners' volunteer approach meant they could also be flexible in directing multiple international humanitarian organizations and experts into their preferred projects. Much of the activity undertaken by the Iowa-Yucatán Partners network were directed into small villages to be completed simultaneously. For example, the Partners directed the resources of the Yucatecan government, missionaries, local volunteers and donors in Boone, Iowa, and both Partners committees into the small village of Yaxachen. Volunteers for the Partners installed a well and pump irrigation system, started a seed and poultry project, shipped in 4 tons of food and irrigation pipe, and brought in a team of doctors and nurses to establish a local immunization and public health program.¹³⁷ In Xocenpich, another small rural town, the Partners started a poultry production project, dug irrigation wells for an agricultural experiment station, constructed a dental clinic and

¹³⁵ Philip Brasher, "35 Hogs Sent Overseas in '60 Fattened Iowa, U.S. Exports," *Des Moines Register*, April 8, 2010; and Kristin Leigh Ahlberg, "'Food is a Powerful Tool in the Hands of this Government:' The Johnson Administration and PL 480, 1963:1969" (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2003), 259.

¹³⁶ David Luria to William Brown, July 16, 1970 – ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 2.

¹³⁷ "The Yaxachen Project," *Iowa Partners Newsletter* II no. 2 (November 1971) – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

supplemented the “woefully inadequate” local medical clinic.¹³⁸ This pulled together the support of the Mexican and American Presbyterian churches, the women’s private voluntary Altrusa Club, the Women’s Guild and Men’s Brotherhood of Pella, professors from Iowa universities, the Partners committees, and Promise, Inc., an international clinic-building organization.¹³⁹ Promise, Inc. had a particular interest in this site due to its involvement in the Missionary Aviation Fund, a program for flying medical and missionary teams into remote locations in Yucatán. The Iowa Partners worked closely with Promise, Inc. leadership to resurrect this program, precisely because it complemented the Partners’ desire to make their program increasingly mobile and less centralized.

Without regular networking with organizations based in Yucatán and consistent border-crossing trips, communication between the two Partners committees was limited to a lethargic mail delivery system and the restricted use of Telex (networked electro-mechanical printers) between Cordemex executives and the Iowa Governor’s office, a dynamic that undermined the civilian focus of the Partners program. In fact, in 1967 the National Association of the Partners attempted to address this problem by creating a hemispheric amateur radio station network operated by civilian Partners to allow for more active and regular communication between Partners committees separated by huge distances.¹⁴⁰ The system was enthusiastically adopted by the Iowa Partners, who hoped that it would help make project management and training easier. Several Yucatan Partners even successfully proposed that a radio system could be used to transmit recorded teaching materials across remote parts of the Peninsula. Thus, the Iowa

¹³⁸ “Regional News: The Dental Center at Xocenpich,” *Iowa Partners Newsletter* II no. 2 (November 1971) – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

¹³⁹ *Boone Regional Newsletter* 14, November 1972 - ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 2.

¹⁴⁰ James Boren, “A Note to All Partners Committee Chairmen,” Sept. 25, 1967 – National Archives UD-WW-44 Container 19 Folder “Partners of the Alliance, General, 1967/68.”

Partners worked with Yucatecan Partners and the local school Colegio Peninsular who wanted to develop a system of “cultural diffusion by radio broadcast,” similar to methods adopted by the Catholic Church and the American government during this same Cold War period.¹⁴¹ While the radio network was designed to reduce logistical barriers to transnational cultural interaction and communication about development, even the creation and maintenance of this network relied upon the relative ease of movement of technicians and equipment across the United States border with Mexico to purchase and install radio station equipment.

Though the American Partners considered free movement of supplies and experts between the United States and Latin America to be an effective development strategy, some critics of the program stressed that it created opportunities for corruption and excessive spending. In 1968, USAID and the National Association of the Partners of the Alliance reduced their annual travel funding by more than fifty percent as a result of federal budget cuts.¹⁴² The following year, Delaware Senator John J. Williams publicly scolded the National Association’s administrators for its misuse of travel and discretionary funding from a USAID grant.¹⁴³ NAPA began to impose much stricter policies regarding travel funding for its “volunteer technicians.” While the National Association still promoted the idea of using travel as “a magnet, a catalyst to involve new people” in the program, it began to encourage technicians to pay their own way as a

¹⁴¹ Kenneth Miller, “Comments regarding the Iowa Partners of the Alliance” March 27, 1967 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 1; and Manuel Mier y Teran to Iowa Partners, Jul 3, 1969 – ISU MS 034 Box 5 Folder 6. This system of spreading cultural values and ideals by radio network has obvious precedents in both missionary and diplomatic history of Latin America, particularly during the 1940s and Cold War. During this period, the radio was frequently used to spread information and ideologies across national borders and to reach people living in rural areas. For example, see Mary Roldán, “Popular Cultural Action, Catholic Transnationalism, and Development in Colombia before Vatican II,” in *Local Church, Global Church: Catholic Activism from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II* ed. Stephen Andes and Julia Young (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2016), 245-274.

¹⁴² Grover Kincaid to Philip Brown, October 15, 1968 – ISU MS 034 Box 2 Folder 8.

¹⁴³ US Congress. *Cong. Rec.*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969. Vol. 115 pt. 20: 27632-27636. “Nonprofit Unit Called Millionaire Tax Dodge,” *The Washington Post*, October 1, 1969.

way to avoid excessive bureaucratic burdens.¹⁴⁴ Every travel funding request required the completion of a lengthy application subject to committee approvals and a reimbursement system which required detailed reports on each trip.¹⁴⁵ While some Iowa-Yucatan Partners did complete this onerous process to get their travel funding, others looked for alternative ways to make technician travel feasible and appealing.

The Partners sought to improve this transport and travel situation by working through both their public and private networks of supporters. In 1972, the Mexican and American Presbyterian churches agreed that the American missionaries would withdraw their resources from Mexico, leaving community development projects in the village of Xocenpich unfinished. The Iowa-Yucatán Partners reached out to the Christian missionary organizations Promise, Inc. and the Missionary Aviation Fund to direct resources into areas like Xocenpich and continue regular medical and missionary flights from urban areas to rural outposts of the Peninsula.¹⁴⁶ Public members of the Partners of the Alliance amplified these efforts to sustain travel activity and technician mobility. Florida Congressman Dante Fascell, an active proponent of his state's Partnership with Colombia, promoted a resolution requesting that President Richard Nixon allow a U.S. military plane to be used for moving technicians and development supplies from the United States to the countries of Latin America, creating a hemispheric network of civilian

¹⁴⁴ Alan Rubin to All U.S. State Chairmen, "Re: Partners Travel Criteria and Procedures," August 16, 1971 – ISU MS 034 Box 2 Folder 8.

¹⁴⁵ Partners Travel Request form - ISU MS 034 Box 14 Folder 7. This folder contains a series of applications filed by agricultural specialists from Iowa State University to get funding for their extension services from the National Association in 1971.

¹⁴⁶ Roger De Young, "The Practice of Mission Partnership in Chiapas, Mexico," *The Reformed Review* 58 no. 1 (2004); James Graham to Mildred Passler, July 13, 1972 – ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 4; and James Graham to Donald Anderson, April 27, 1972 – ISU MS 034 Box 7 Folder 4. De Young notes that the global Presbyterian church leadership adopted a "missionary moratorium" in the 1970s out of a desire to foster stronger local and indigenous involvement in developing countries, which led to the agreement between the US and Mexican Presbyterian churches that American missionaries would officially withdraw from Mexico.

development.¹⁴⁷ Widely-touted within the Partners organization as the solution to constant transportation bottlenecks, the proposal was enthusiastically supported in editorials across the United States from Partners members.¹⁴⁸ The Iowa Partners, for their part, promoted the proposal by lobbying New York Senator Henry P. Smith during his visit to Yucatán to support the donation of an Air Force plane to promote the movement of volunteer technicians and their equipment with greater speed and mobility.¹⁴⁹ Though the “Plane for Peace” resolution was never achieved, this proposal illustrates the Partners’ desire to create a more comprehensive contact network within the Americas and expand their sphere of informal influence.

¹⁴⁷ *Cong. Rec.*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969, 115 pt. 14: 18703-18705.

¹⁴⁸ *Cong. Rec.*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969, 115 pt. 14: 18703-18705. Rep. Fascell lists several editorials published in Idaho, Delaware, Wyoming, Colorado, and Tennessee and asked for the inclusion of their full text in the Congressional Record.

¹⁴⁹ Jeanette Westfall, “Report of Visit 10,” January 1970 – ISU MS 034 Box 2 Folder 6.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION: PRIVATIZATION AND SHIFTING VALUES

By 1973, the Organization of American States disbanded the committees leading the Alliance for Progress, dissipating the last of the program's dwindling economic and technical support efforts.¹⁵⁰ Around this time, the National Associations of the Partners of the Alliance shifted into totally private status, becoming Partners of the Americas and shedding its previous association with the Alliance for Progress name. The organization was able to sustain itself through this period of reduced funding through a donation of an airplane by Summa Corp., an American manufacturing and holding company. The airplane was not used by the organization for technician travel or equipment transport, as might be expected from the Partners' previous political endeavors. The plane was sold and the funds were pooled with a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. As the result, the Partners were able to accumulate resources and eventually distribute funding to project proposals, rather than acting as a networking organization for other private voluntary agencies.¹⁵¹ The Iowa-Yucatán Partnership persisted under this new privatized system, with more regular visits and student exchanges. However, the Iowa-Yucatán's program's interest and emphasis on agricultural development and industrialization declined over the 1970s and took greater interest in cultural and educational relations.

Around 1972 and 1973, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners' shift away from a public diplomacy role altered their focus and strategies in their transnational relationship. This was an important shift away from the guiding technocratic principles that drove their involvement in the Alliance for Progress. Even at the grassroots level, the Alliance had shaped the interests, strategies, and investments of American civilians in a remote region of Mexico. Mexico's resistance to the

¹⁵⁰ Alan Dobson and Steven Marsh, *U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1945* (New York: Routledge Press, 2007), 92.

¹⁵¹ Partners of the Americas, "Our Legacy," Partners of the Americas, <http://www.partners.net/our-legacy> (accessed September 23, 2017).

Alliance and desire to develop economic and political autonomy also shaped the Iowa-Yucatán Partners' development strategies, as the Partners needed to avoid intense criticism and build positive relationships within the Yucatán elite in order to maintain diplomatic relations. The Partners used every public and private resource at their disposal to overcome logistic and political obstacles and to build relationships with Yucatecan leaders and technicians who aligned with their development projects. As these technical goals began to shift and Iowa's interest in a global political role grew more prominent, the transnational network that had been improvised to facilitate Yucatán's development became less important.

The origins and development of these development strategies reveal the nature and purpose of civilian diplomacy. The Partners mobilized a broad network of volunteers and private citizens in service of a diplomatic mission, but civilians at times viewed their actions as immune from diplomatic consequence and acted with strategic flexibility to overcome what they perceived as bureaucratic red tape. The Iowa-Yucatán Partners' strategies for maintaining a network of contacts led them to a "tourist-technician" system, in which Yucatecans were often treated as recipients and Americans were treated as both propagators of universal expertise and consumers of local curiosities. The dynamics of this transnational relationship reflect what could be labeled as "informal empire," the same dynamic which the Mexican government worried would develop through the Alliance for Progress. In this way, the Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Alliance allow us to examine a less overt but still intense form of political power exerted by the United States in Latin American countries, despite the Alliance's limited role in Mexico. These developments manifested themselves in a desire to transform Yucatán's relationship to Iowa and to the United States through networks of transportation, communication, and expertise. The story of this transnational connection illustrates that histories of shifting political, cultural and

technological power in the Cold War can be found in their most granular forms in the actions of ‘civilian-diplomats.’

To explore the complex motivations that drove Yucatecan civilians to support or resist the interventions of the Iowa-Yucatán Partners of the Alliance, it would be necessary to draw upon local sources from Mérida and the surrounding rural spaces. Of course, much of the material on tourism in the Yucatán Peninsula focuses on the international project and local activity that transformed Cancún into a profitable and successful tourist site in the 1970s. The limited space and resources of this project do not allow for discussion of the political attitudes and experiences of Yucatecans in the Partners of the Alliance projects, as most American sources offer only brief glimpses into how the simultaneous processes of development and tourism were experienced by local communities and actors. In many cases, these sources’ descriptions of Yucatecan people are shaped by the same paternalistic, consuming lens which drove the spread of the tourist-technician model.

While this project cannot provide a synthetic picture of how Washington administrators, Mexican federal policymakers, Yucatecan elites, Mérida residents, and Iowan tourists exchanged power and knowledge through these decades of transnational exchange, this initial project invites further examination of civilian diplomats from both sides of the border. This thesis begins to explore the motives of those representatives of transnational exchange who traveled by land, air and sea with the intention to transform the political consciousness and environments of other nations. More research on the Partners’ Latin American participants can shed light on the motives and experiences of people who were cast into the role of “civic diplomat” as a result of where and how they lived, even if they did not consent to participate in that exchange. Further study on civilian voluntary organizations and tourists as drivers of development will allow

historians to develop a more complex picture of how civilian diplomacy makes political and cultural demands of people who, willingly and unwillingly, become involved in networks of power and exchange.

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