

Asymmetry

Ramón Eduardo Ruiz

Occasional Paper No. 16

June 1997

ABSTRACT

This report considers through an economic lens the asymmetrical power relations that define the United States-Mexico border region. At the Mexican border, two nations colossally unequal in wealth and military might face off in a modern version of David and Goliath. Nowhere else in the world does the asymmetry loom greater, as the huge gap in per capita income and production between the two neighbors verifies. Economics dictate this asymmetrical relationship. But for the distorted capitalism of Mexico that confronts the financial and industrial capitalism of the United States, the trade and commerce that joins them together would not exist. The disparity stimulates economic exchange, giving rise to border cities that handle dissimilar exports and imports. The United States provides the finished products and the financial capital, while burgeoning populations in Mexican border enclaves serve as markets and as reserve pools of cheap labor for factories and farms on the other side. The transnational economy is anything but equal, given Mexican reliance on the United States, due largely to the absence of wealth-creating alternatives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ramón Eduardo Ruiz is Professor Emeritus at the University of California, San Diego and has taught in both the United States and Mexico. He is a Scholar-in-Residence at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Mexico, and was the former Chair of UCSD's History Department. Ruiz, a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Force from 1943-46, received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in 1954. Ruiz has published numerous books that received much acclaim; he is the author of the classic work, "The Making of a Revolution," which was named one of the best history books ever written on Mexico. He received the Pacific Coast Council on Latin American Studies' Hubert C. Herring prize in 1981. Throughout his career, Ruiz has been part of numerous academic and public committees, administrations, and Chicano activities.