

Column on Mexico and NAFTA Misunderstood

As a writer, it is occasionally nice to see a response come in about one of your writings. Not for ego-feeding reasons but just to know

Moderately Speaking

DAVID KANAAN

that some people are actually reading your stuff. Last Friday I was greeted at the office by not one letter, but several letters concerning my column on Mexico entitled "Mexico Showing its True Colors," (*The Rebel Yell*, March 30, 1995). My eagerness turned to disappointment as I read through the letters, each one seemingly more nasty than the last.

I had thought that only our outspoken Opinion Editor, Scott Gulbransen, was privy to this type of heated reaction. Instead, I was the new member in the evil fraternity of *Rebel Yell* thought provoking writers. The letters were an eye opener in some ways,

and made me think about how I should approach future columns. However, there are a few things implied by the letters that certainly are not true of myself, my beliefs, nor the intent of the column itself.

Let me start by saying that none of the things I wrote or addressed in the column were meant to be offensive. I have come to realize that several of my examples of the small town I visited in Mexico were offensive. What I was trying to accomplish was a dramatic setting in which to illustrate the conditions of the town coming from the view of an outsider (myself), and, since I have a tendency to overstate a point in order for it to stick in one's mind, I can see how one can become offended. I realize the United States has several poor areas that may rival the condi-

tions in the small town, but my article was not a comparison of the United States and Mexico. It is unfortunate some people had to be so sensitive as to become instantly defensive in assuming this was the point I was making.

I am from a minority group myself and have no wish of making one group look bad in order to bolster the position of the core culture (of which I am similarly loosely attached to). The intent of the article was not to make Mexico look bad as a people or culture. As a matter of fact, I felt I was on the side of Mexican people as I felt they had a similar distrust of their Government and NAFTA. The point I was making was that the United States shouldn't recreate Mexico into a nation of exploited workers beholden to the United States. I also tried to show how NAFTA is not really helping as most people in the United States assumed.

By using the town of Nuevo Progreso, I meant only to illustrate my point, and did not ignorantly assume that because one town, in a country full of larger and more developed towns and cities, was poverty stricken therefore all of Mexico was similar. My column is based on my opinions on the state of Mexico from magazine articles in *Newsweek*, *USA Today* and other sources. Granted they may be slanted in one way or another but are usually a fair barometer of the facts. Once again I was writing from my viewpoint at the time.

Lastly, I regret that my column may have offended some Latinos around campus. I am deeply saddened that these people think that I would write an article only to offend a group and thusly gain attention to myself. The truth of the matter is that I have only the utmost respect for the Latino community and their

culture.

Being an American, of Arab decent, I have seen propaganda and stereotypes in several incarnations. A couple of weeks ago I wrote a column stressing the need for affirmative action and received no letters of praise from the minority community. Coming from an immigrant family myself, I have learned to look past the stereotypes and not become overly sensitive.

I try to write something each week that presents a topic of discussion to spur debate among the students of this university, as well as myself. I feel I have learned something from your response, and will look forward to addressing other issues that relate to all students — no matter their racial background.

—David Kanaan is an opinion columnist at *The Rebel Yell*.

Letters to the Editor

Kanaan's column another case of bad stereotyping

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to the opinion column "Mexico Showing Its True Colors," by David Kanaan dated March 30, 1995. As a Mexican-American I was outraged by the comments and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes. While I realize Mr. Kanaan's intent was to discredit the NAFTA agreement, his title and description of the people implied otherwise.

I believe it was needless to describe the "filthy children and parades of sweat drenched peddlers," if your intent was to evaluate the process of Mexico and NAFTA. This statement just reinforces the negative stereotype of Mexican people. Why not evaluate how NAFTA has impacted other more developed cities such as Monterrey, Nuevo Leon or Guadalajara? Or is it much easier to criticize the weak and the vulnerable?

It seems that Mr. Kanaan has shown his "true colors" by being insensitive in his writing and showing a lack of appreciation for the people of Mexico.

Magda Martinez
Senior
Business Management

To the Editor:

I am responding to an article in the March 30, 1995 issue entitled "Mexico Showing Its True Colors". Being that I am Mexican, I was very offended by this article, and I didn't understand the writer's specific point. I felt it was a very ethnocentric article that had nothing but negativity about Mexico. Phrases like "nothing prepared me for this absolute destitute" and that the houses he saw were such that "people in the United States wouldn't even keep their livestock in." Were these statements really necessary for his article? Did he empathize with the actual human beings that live in these houses? Did he speak of the beautiful culture of Mexico and it's beautiful people? No! He failed to mention that this "first world country" that he lives in has its own absolute destitute.

Let me tell you that Mexico's rich culture and history and it's beautiful people are really its *true colors*. Too bad Mr. Kanaan hasn't taken the time to find this out.

The media is constantly trying to generalize Mexico saying it is all run down, dirty, and poor. If this is the case, then why do so many Americans make a big deal about taking vacations to Mexico and even buying property over there?!

Mr. Kanaan also stated some of Mexico's political and economic problems, but he didn't go into detail about the origins of these problems or why they

exist. Does he even know? Obviously not. There are reasons deeply rooted in Mexico's political and economics state.

Granted, it is his right to write his "opinion" in *The Rebel Yell*, but hopefully next time he can do it with a little bit more tact. Hopefully, he can take the time to educate himself on the picture as a whole instead of trying to paint just a one-sided picture of something. In the future I hope that Mr. Kanaan can be a little bit more sensitive to that part of the student body whose family came from Mexico.

Marisa Vasquez Cox
UNLV Student

To the Editor:

In regards to the column "Mexico Showing Its True Colors," my first question to Mr. Kanaan is: what's your point? The argument Kanaan sets forth is not very clear.

First, Mr. Kanaan bases his idea that his experience in Mexico was complete "culture shock" and nothing could have prepared him for the "absolute destitute (he) observed there." He based this opinion after visiting one town. Next time you're going to insult a whole country's people and culture please be more knowledgeable about the subject and do not make such strong statements based on one experience.

Kanaan's next argument is that NAFTA has not really helped Mexico and that Mexico faces many economic and political problems. What government throughout history has not had these problems? Kanaan is right in saying that NAFTA does not help Mexico. It is only U.S. corporations that are exploiting the humble people of Mexico. Because they are a humble people, that is not a reason to insult them.

What could have been a very good column turned into one that could only offend the people of Mexico. The title of the column itself sent many negative connotations.

As a student writer at this university, Mr. Kanaan should be more knowledgeable about the topic—especially when he is offending a whole country and culture.

Africa Tellez-Rios
Sophomore
English

To the Editor:

This letter is in response to the article "Mexico Showing Its True Colors" by David Kanaan dated March 30, 1995. I believe in one's right to express their opinion, but I also think that it is not necessary to offend people in doing so. I am writing this because I felt very offended when I read this article. It bothers me that someone can submit an article to a newspaper about a country that he obviously does not know and unethically uses the negative aspects of this country to convey his not so clear point.

First, the "blankets and trinkets" that David says he went to buy are not "for virtually nothing." These objects besides having domestic use, are very important elements in Mexico's culture. They are

part of the art work of this country. Culture is something that makes a country distinct from other countries (at least this is true for Mexico). Unfortunately, in this country we do not have many things that reflect our culture, and we hide the few that we have. I think that customs and traditions are far more important than how a country looks on the outside.

Another aspect that bothered me was that David judges Mexico's economic progress with his impression of a single town on the US-Mexico border. He mentions that he visited Nuevo Progreso with the intention of judging Mexico's progress after NAFTA. In his opinion, this was the perfect place to do so, but I believe that visiting any town of any country is not enough to form an impression or to measure the success of an entire country.

Regarding NAFTA, I do believe that Mexico "is getting the short end of the stick" but the treaty was made to work that way for the convenience of the rich people on both sides of the border and not for the poor who sell goods in the "Nuevo Progreso's" of Mexico.

My intention in writing this letter is not to offend David or disrespect his right to have an opinion about the subject, but to correct the bad impression that was left of Mexico in those individuals who were falsely persuaded by this article and to encourage them to discover Mexico's True Colors: the beauty of its history, tradition, art, human values, and abundant resources.

Eduardo Samuel Meza
Junior
Electrical Engineering

To the Editor:

In the editorial dated 30 March, 1995, "Mexico Showing Its True Colors," David Kanaan has succeeded in offending many members of the Latino community. Before you congratulate yourself, let me explain.

As a Chicano, there are elements in this article that offend me. The statement "any run down United States Woolworth or strip small sloopshop would have clearly been the hottest part of town" makes me question your intentions. I, myself, realize that there are "filthy children selling bubble gum, as well as parades of sweat drenched peddlers shoving things in your face."

The thing that separates me from you, Kanaan is that I, having lived in and seen parts of Mexico that you perhaps have never seen, realize that this is only one part of Mexico — a very small part. Mexico, in my opinion, is by far the richest country in the world in culture and tradition. That is something not found in the United States. By *Mexican* standards, the United States looks weak in this aspect.

I invite you (if you have the courage) to go down to any barrio in the United States and ask the people there (again, if you have the courage to approach them) why it is the way it is. The answers you get would make a better article than the opinionated, limited viewpoint you offer.

I know, because I lived in a barrio in Norwalk, Calif. for 16 years. There are better places to judge Mexico's progress than a small border town just south of the Rio Grande. Just as there are better places to judge this country's progress than the barrios. The fact is that neither the United States nor Mexico enforce truly regulatory efficacy concerning the borders, which is one of the reasons NAFTA was introduced. The border towns do indeed fall within Mexico's political geographic boundary, but it does not in any way represent Mexico as a country.

Now, I realize that you have a Constitutional right to write opinionated articles. I, feel, however, that as a Chicano that knows the truth, it is my responsibility to respond. And I'm not being paid for it.

You want to see Mexico's colors, look at the flag! Do yourself a favor, and do a little objective research on NAFTA. You, judging by the content of your article, will be surprised.

Mateo Eduarda Nares
Sophomore
Applied Physics

Bayno a good selection for UNLV

To the Editor:

Congratulations on the hiring of Bill Bayno as your men's head basketball coach. I have had the pleasure of working closely with coach Bayno in the past and I truly believe UNLV has found the coach who will rebuild the program to its former glory.

Bayno worked for seven seasons under the tutelage of John Calipari, who in 1988 came to UMass as, like Bayno, a young assistant with no head coaching experience — just the drive and desire to make it a reality.

Calipari caught the attention and imagination of the university community, alumni and fans. He convinced both the team and the university itself to believe that we could succeed, despite being among the nation's worst basketball programs for decades. He also brought in spectacular recruits with the help of Bayno.

Although he learned from him, Bill Bayno is not John Calipari. He has his own unique style and approach that will undoubtedly bring many great victories to the Runnin' Rebels over the next few seasons.

UNLV has already been there; and while the glory days may seem distant now, you have already taken a giant leap toward another national championship. Congratulations on the signing of a great basketball coach. With your support and enthusiasm, he will guide the UNLV basketball program back to the successes of the past.

Kevin W. Newman
UMass Board of Trustees
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