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Title: “Evolution of Frank Tannenbaum’s views on the Economic Progress of Mexico Following the Revolution”

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Iseah Hurtado will be graduating this May with a degree in History. His areas of interest in history include the early American Republic, presidential politics, and American political and diplomatic history. He is currently contemplating graduate school and aspires to leave Fort Wayne to further his education and career.

Abstract

American academic and activist Frank Tannenbaum (1893-1969) was highly esteemed in post-Revolutionary Mexico, and was good friends with President Lazaro Cardenas, one of the most influential Presidents in the nation’s history. This paper traces the evolution of Tannenbaum’s views on the Mexican Revolution from the 1920s to the 1960s, a period of significant change during which Mexico evolved from an agrarian to an industrial nation. Similarly, in 1959, the Cuban Revolution altered the situation in Mexico and all of Latin America. This paper argues that despite all this change, Tannenbaum’s views remained fairly consistent. Tannenbaum supported a small-scale economy and an agrarian program that would provide people with land they could farm and establish a self-sufficient existence. Tannenbaum believed that Mexico’s future lay in an agrarian economy that was self-reliant, community oriented, and free from the burdens and responsibilities of relying on other nations. He urged the government not to industrialize for fear that it would exacerbate inequalities, stir animosity between social classes, and make the country dependent on industrial nations that had resources that Mexico lacked. This would in turn result in another revolution. He championed his agrarian vision for decades, starting with Mexico’s reconstruction era of the 1920s, through Mexico’s agrarianism of 1930s, and during the Mexican Miracle of the 1940s. Only in his last works did he begin to accept that his agrarian ideal was not going to come to fruition as Mexico pursued a modern economy, far from what Tannenbaum envisioned when he first became enamored with the Revolution. His work on the Revolution and its aftermath was initially well received but over time he became less regarded because Mexicans viewed his opinions on Mexico as restrictive of the country’s economy and future.

Bibliographical Note

This essay focuses on historian Frank Tannenbaum’s agrarian interpretation of the Mexican Revolution and his consistent views that spanned decades as well as the shift from agrarianism to modernization that took place in Mexico. Primary sources aided the majority of my research, which included several books written by Tannenbaum about the Revolution. These books were all written in thirty-year time and provide insights into his views on the Revolution and the evolving economic climate. I also consulted secondary sources that analyzed Tannenbaum’s
views on agrarianism, modernization, and labor but used those mostly for reference and as an aid to understand the different eras of the Mexican Revolution and agrarian and industrial movements.