

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Duke Ellington, *El Rey del Jazz* and the Mexico City Massacre of 1968

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Abstract

From September 24 to October 2, 1968, two apparently unrelated events took place in an area of less than two square miles in downtown Mexico City: Duke Ellington performed in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, and the Mexican army massacred hundreds of protesting students. The student-driven movement of 1968 attracted people from different backgrounds in Mexican society. Their desire for freedom of speech and civil liberties echoed the struggles of the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Received as *El rey del jazz* (the King of Jazz), Ellington's visit to Mexico constituted a musical place of cultural encounters. In this essay, I explore the connections between jazz, cultural diplomacy, race, and social justice. I argue that neither paradoxes nor seeming contradictions account for the fluidity of social activism on both sides of the border and its connections with playing and listening practices of jazz; rather I look at this social phenomenon as an example of an audiotopia, borrowing Josh Kun's term for a musical space of differences where contradictions and conflicts don't cancel each other out—a kind of identificatory contact zone. I do so by setting aside nationalistic approaches to music and viewing jazz as more than an emblem of U.S. national identity; rather, I explore the transnational aspects of the cultural artifacts resulting from these exchanges and the dynamic processes that took place in Ellington's visit with and among Mexicans.

It was the evening of October 2; the sun was bright and the air felt fresh. The students had gathered to walk toward the *Casco de Santo Tomás* to protest the recent violence provoked by the army and the police occupation of university facilities. My father and his friend were walking around the plaza that day selling small pieces of student propaganda, the revenue of which was used to support the movement. As they were walking, event organizers took the microphone to address the crowd, and one of them said, "Attention, we are surrounded by the army... there are [army] buses parked in the streets ... In order to avoid provocation, we are ending this rally, and let's disperse."¹ The rally continued and, shortly after that, flares lit up the sky while a line of army soldiers appeared at the edge of the plaza and opened fire on the students. Those who were close to the avenue ran toward the building where the speakers were; however, after a few seconds, my father and his friend noticed that no-one was falling. Instead of scattering wildly they slowed down to help some people in the crowd, asking them to be careful and keep moving. They noticed on the other side of the plaza a group of people that they had seen earlier in the evening. These men were muscular with an army-style haircut, but curiously wearing jackets with the university logo, a fashion not often sported by students at that time. More interesting, my father said, was that they had a white ribbon tied on one of their hands. They fired guns toward the army but seemed careful to show their white ribbon-wrapped hand first. My father and his friend continued running, but protesters were lying on the ground to

This project grew out of an interest in my own family's participation in Mexico's student movement of the late 1960s. My father was present at the Tlatelolco massacre on October 2, 1968, and I would like to express gratitude to him for being willing to speak about the events of that day. I also want to express special gratitude to the reviewers who made this article significantly better, including: Emily Abrams Ansari, David F. García, Carol A. Hess, Ana Alonso Minutti, and Stephanie Stallings, as well as the journal's anonymous reviewers.

¹Felipe de Jesus García Pedroza, interview with the author, August 2, 2018.

protect themselves and they could not run anymore, so they went to one side of the plaza and entered a small building. As they entered, he remembers hallways full of people and lots of heads moving. All doors inside the building were closed and they couldn't move forward. They made their way outside and encountered a classmate who was crying. A couple of soldiers were helping her and they left her with them. It was then that he saw that other soldiers were mounting tripod-based machine guns, a development quickly followed by the loud bursts of bullets. The soldiers shot at and into the building and, in contrast to the earlier shots, these sounds were followed by the distinct whistling noise of the bullets traveling through the air. It was then, of course, that people really started to fall.²

In Mexico, the saying “dos de octubre no se olvida” (don't forget October the second) resounds in the collective consciousness of young and old alike, evoking the memory of the student massacre on that date in the plaza of Tlatelolco in Mexico City. Three days before, on September 28, and only a few blocks away, Duke Ellington—already known in Mexico as “El rey del jazz” (The King of Jazz)—inaugurated a series of concerts in the Palacio de Bellas Artes as part of the cultural programming to accompany the Olympic Games. These concerts were promoted by the Mexican government and sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, which partnered with the U.S. State Department to promote American music abroad as a tool of cultural diplomacy. As many among Mexico's political elite attended the concert, tensions in Tlatelolco brewed, resulting in a clash between students and police three days later.

I learned about both jazz and the Tlatelolco massacre from my father. He was a first-year student of medicine when the events took place. A self-identified Marxist and an avid jazz listener, my father in his younger years was both antimilitary and anti-American, someone with a leftist political ideology who on one hand spent time in his early career as a fellow at the National Institutes of Health in Washington D.C., and on the other denounced U.S. interventions in the world and its political influence in Mexican domestic affairs. I asked him once how he negotiated these mixed feelings about Mexico's northern neighbor, in particular his liking of jazz music that, at least in the United States, is considered a truly American art form. To my surprise, he replied: “Well, jazz is not music of the United States. Music of the U.S. is country music. Jazz is music from the black community in the U.S.”³ His response illuminated the path for this research. Students during 1968 were subject to many political and cultural forces, different versions of leftist politics, some moderate and some more radical. Much has been written about the student movement, the year 1968, and in general about the global sixties. Grand narratives around student movements have prevailed, yielding simplified or positivistic approaches to what Allier-Montaño describes as the “historical centrality” of the 1968 student movement.⁴ Often these narratives and discourses are co-opted by a few prominent voices or by institutions. These grand narratives regarding the 1960s have failed to identify the nuances I describe in this essay regarding the complex political orientation of Mexican students, and also the similarities between discourses about race on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border. I aim to contribute to what Susan Draper refers to as “constellations of freedom and democracy.” In her book, *1968 Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy*, Draper invites us to “blaze new paths through figures and voices that have been pushed to the margins, with the aim of configuring another kind of constellation that would encompass points that these other memories of continuation of '68 made possible.”⁵ I incorporate lengthy accounts of the events that week in Mexico, not only to provide the reader with a sense of the time and the issues at stake, but also to contribute to the reconfiguration of historical memory, one that incorporates figures pushed to the margins, participates in a field of struggle for conflicting modes of signifying the past, and that interrupts and influences the present with a more expansive, singular past.⁶ In doing so I examine how students such as my father reconciled their civil

²Felipe de Jesus García Pedroza, interview with the author, August 2, 2018.

³Felipe de Jesus García Pedroza, interview with the author, June 3, 2010.

⁴See Eugenia Allier-Montaño, “Memory and History of Mexico '68,” *European Review of Latin American & Caribbean Studies* 102 (2016): 7–25, where the author explores official discursive practices and historiography around the 1968 Mexican student movement.

⁵Susana Draper, *1968 Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 19.

⁶Draper, *1968 Mexico*, 9.

activism against U.S. interventionist policies with their attraction to some aspects of American popular culture; how the United States federal government tried to convey the idea of an inclusive and fair society by sending musicians who themselves were victims of social inequity; how the American Civil Rights movement connected with the Mexican Student Movement of 1968; and finally, how Mexico's own racist heritage informed the reception of (mostly) African American musicians in Mexico. I argue that neither paradoxes nor seeming contradictions account for the fluidity of social activism on both sides of the border and its connections with playing and listening practices of jazz; rather I look at this social phenomenon as an example of what ethnologist Josh Kun calls an *audiotopia*, a musical space of differences where contradictions and conflicts don't cancel each other out, creating identificatory "contact zones" that are:

both sonic and social spaces where disparate identity-formations, cultures, and geographies historically kept and mapped separately are allowed to interact with each other...[and where] music functions like a possible utopia for the listener [that is] experienced not only as sound that goes into our ears ... but as a space that we can enter into, encounter, move around in, inhabit, *be safe in*, [and] learn from.⁷

I take Kun's concept a step further and propose that these contact zones can occur in different areas of the social, media, and political spectrum, where individual political and artistic longings contrast, intersect, and sometimes collide with other utopian longings. Such longings are enacted, embodied, perceived, and reciprocated aurally through the construction of a complex web of idyllic scenarios produced not only by musicians, but also by politicians and political activists, in which protest chants in the streets and/or calls for political action contribute to an overarching aural landscape. In exploring how this takes place in this case study, I divide the rest of this essay into two sections. The first examines issues of race and ethnicity, the student movement and its connections with the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and how jazz diplomacy converged with these. In exploring issues of race and ethnicity in Mexico, I focus on the marginalization or negation of Mexico's African heritage, driven by nation-building efforts that were fueled by ideas of *mestizaje*, in order to understand Ellington's positionality as a Black musician playing for Mexican audiences. In my exploration of the student movement and its connections with the Civil Rights movement, by no means do I equate the long and painful history of Jim Crow-era injustices with the students' experience in Mexico; I do, however, highlight shared concerns of social inequality and lack of economic opportunity that fueled the fights for social justice in each community. The second section is a recollection of events during the week leading up to Ellington's main concert in Mexico City on Saturday, September 28, and the student massacre on Wednesday, October 2, a week when Ellington traveled through Mexico learning about the culture and playing and composing music for it, while the students protested in the streets. In this section, I provide significant details about the students' activities and Ellington's trips and performances. Here my intention is twofold: first, to bring together stories often explored separately, and second, to show how both Ellington, through his performances and compositions, and the students, through their protest, contributed to the creation of an aural landscape that in turn formed part of a complex process of knowledge construction shaped by localism, ethnic and racial tensions, and national, musical, and political identities. In exploring the students' contributions to this aural landscape, I frame their activities as what Martin Daughtry refers to as *belliphonics*: "the agglomeration of sounds that are generated by weaponry ... but also encompass[ing] sonic material that is less directly or conventionally associated with warfare ... the sirens and other warning signals that punctuated life on military bases and urban areas during the war; the propaganda recordings, made by all the major parties to the conflict."⁸ The sounds of sirens and gunshots comprised the aural landscape in the nearby neighborhoods of Mexico City's *Zócalo*. For many it was the sound of a battleground, but also a sonic reminder of the

⁷Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 2, 23. My emphasis.

⁸J. Martin Daughtry, *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.

struggle for freedom. Ultimately, this section highlights how issues of race and social justice on both sides of the border converged in this particular time and space in history. I end where I began, with my father's memories of the events, followed by my conclusions.

Race, Political Activism, and Jazz Diplomacy

In Mexico, ideas of race and ethnicity gravitate around the concept of *mestizaje*, a term used during post-revolutionary times (1920 onward) to produce national and social cohesion, rather than the perceived potential divisions derived from the acknowledgment of diverse ethnic groups. Although useful as a cultural artifact during the nation-building process, *mestizaje* produced its own social issues, blind spots, and contradictions. It has three pillars: (i) the embracing of race mixture and lauding of the *mestizo*, (ii) the contention that racism does not exist in Mexico, and (iii) nonblackness, or the marginalization, neglect, or negation of Mexico's African heritage.⁹ Instances of this blindness toward blacks in Mexico persist today.¹⁰ In her exploration of nonblackness in Mexico, Christina A. Sue explains:

The nonblackness pillar signals both a marginalization of the historic role of blacks in Mexico and a negation of the African heritage of Mexico's mixed-race population... . [A]s with the other two pillars, because the nonblackness ideology was consolidated in the context of nation-building efforts, it has implications for understandings of nation—being Mexican means not being black.¹¹

Mexicans therefore perceived Ellington and his band (most of them African American) on three racial levels: (i) as representatives of an ethnic/racial group mostly absent from Mexican national life and discourse; (ii) as neglected members of their own society, as evidenced by the Civil Rights movement led by the African American community in the United States; and (iii) as leading exponents and authentic representatives of jazz.¹² In Mexico, young people during the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the transformation of their political and economic system into one that benefited only a few. As I have stated elsewhere, for most of the 1940s and 1950s Mexico experienced the abandonment of its agricultural industry, the increase of its foreign debt, and the depreciation of its currency, contributing to and perpetuating inequality in society. Ironically, rather than fueling social activism (as in communities in the United States), these events were packaged in commercial products for the nascent mass media.¹³ During the first half of the 1960s, however, U.S. interventionist practices in Latin America and the increasing influence of leftist political ideologies energized a politically engaged youth that was not afraid to take to the streets to protest events such as the Cuban embargo in 1960 and the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1963.¹⁴ The movement also coincided with the presidential term of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970), who signaled a change in foreign and domestic politics, particularly in the U.S.–Mexico relationship. While previous Mexican administrations (such as that of Adolfo López Mateos) had to some extent negotiated with those on the Left, a legacy of the Cárdenas years, the Díaz Ordaz administration was characterized by a significant shift toward intolerance and the repression of dissent, and the fulfillment of a U.S.-led political and

⁹Christina A. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race, Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14.

¹⁰According to Chogo el Bandoño, a Mexican musician from Oaxaca, while traveling through Mexico City in 2016 he was stopped by the police under the suspicion of being an illegal alien. He was asked to sing the national anthem and name governors of at least five states. Several Afro-descendant Mexicans have been detained and some deported to Central America under the insistence by the police that “in Mexico there are no black people.” Arlene Gregorius, “The Black People ‘Erased From History,’” *BBC News Magazine*, April 10, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35981727>.

¹¹Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race*, 17.

¹²See for example, Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015); David F. García, *Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's Origins* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

¹³León F. García Corona, “Music, Politics, and Sentimentalism in Bolero,” *Latin American Music Review* 40, no. 2 (2019): 138–68.

¹⁴Eric Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor: Mexico in the Global Sixties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 250.

economic agenda.¹⁵ This political shift, the ever-growing influence of leftist ideologies, and the upcoming 1968 Summer Olympic Games created the singular conditions for the events in question.

The student movement began in July when an altercation between two sports teams from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and the National Polytechnic Institute, the two largest public universities in Mexico City and historic rivals, was suppressed by the *granaderos* (riot police) with brutal force. This event ignited a movement that not only denounced the government's authoritarianism, but that also became an outlet to voice the lack of opportunities and adverse economic effects of the previous decade.¹⁶ The impact of an authoritarian government was felt in both the lack of freedom of speech and a deteriorating political system, which in turn affected the economic opportunities of the people. The students demanded the dissolution of the *granaderos* and the resignation of the chief of police of Mexico City. Their movement escalated rapidly, and students from different institutions organized in what they called *comités de lucha* (fighting committees). These committees orchestrated a national strike that effectively shook the Mexican government just at the moment it was preparing for the Summer Olympic Games, the first to take place in a Latin American country. Being chosen to host the Games signified a vote of international confidence as the country joined the ranks of Germany, which hosted the games in 1936, the United Kingdom (1948), Italy (1960), and Japan (1964), to mention just a few.¹⁷ The eyes of Olympic spectators watching televisions around the world were focused not only on the athletes but also on Mexico's culture and society. Hence, it was paramount for the Mexican government to convey to the world a social stability that did not exist in reality. Officials at the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recognized in the student movement's demands for justice and freedom referents to the African American struggle for civil rights, and as similarities between these two disenfranchised communities arose and became evident, FBI field officers actively monitored the situation.

In an FBI memorandum from W. R. Wannall, addressed to W. C. Sullivan, then director of the FBI, Wannall states: "While there have been no allegations of direction of current Mexican students' unrest by U.S. subversive elements, we do know that individuals from this country with subversive backgrounds have been arrested for participation therein. Arrested have been members of militant Black Panther Party, representatives of the National Lawyers Guild and persons active in facets of peace and 'New Left' movements in the United States" (Figure 1).¹⁸ The FBI was not only aware of the presence of militant members of "subversive elements," it also understood the racial nature and adverse political implications for the United States of an association between the U.S. Civil Rights movement and the Mexican student movement. As Wannall continues in his report:

The current tensions in Mexico City point toward [the] possibility that Olympic games will be used as a focal point for demonstrations and activity favoring leftist, subversive and militant racial elements. It is not impossible persons from the United States may gravitate to Mexico City in furtherance of these demonstrations and activity. The field should be alert to such movement and appropriately advise Bureau instituting investigations called for if current investigations are not being conducted regarding individuals involved.¹⁹

Esmeralda Reynoso, a former member of the 1968 student movement and current coordinator of the 1968 memorial at the *Centro Cultural Tlatelolco* (cultural center of Tlatelolco), explained to me in an interview: "We were very aware of struggles around the world, and the African American struggle for

¹⁵Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor*, 250.

¹⁶More information on the authoritarian regime of Díaz Ordaz can be found in Elena Poniatowska, *La noche de tlatelolco: Testimonios de historia oral* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1998); and Sergio Aguayo, *El 68: Los estudiantes, el presidente y la CIA* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Proceso, 2018).

¹⁷In fact, after Mexico's Olympic Games in 1968 they were not held in any other Latin American country until 2016 when they were convened in Brazil.

¹⁸W.C. Sullivan to W.R. Wannall, "Olympic Games, Mexico City, Mexico," memorandum, September 26, 1968, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB10/docs/doc13.pdf>. Accessed January 17, 2020.

¹⁹W.C. Sullivan to W.R. Wannall, "Olympic Games, Mexico City, Mexico," The National Security Archive.

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MAY 1962 EDITION
GSA GEN. REG. NO. 27

2010-104

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

DECLASSIFIED BY SP3 BTJ/Ban
ON 6/4/97 39606-6

DATE: 9/26/68

TO : Mr. W. C. Sullivan *Law*

FROM : W. R. Wannall *Wannall*

SUBJECT: OLYMPIC GAMES, MEXICO CITY, MEXICO
OCTOBER 12-27, 1968

Teleson _____
DeLoach _____
Mohr _____
Bishop _____
Casper _____
Callahan _____
Conrad _____
Felt _____
Gale _____
Rosen _____
Sullivan _____
Tavel _____
Trotter _____
Tele. Room _____
Holmes _____
Gandy _____

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

per G. Guide
ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 3/29/81 BY sp7 mac/ddl

3/28/81
Classified by sp7 mac/ddl
Declassify on: OADR
per G. Guide

PURPOSE:
To seek approval of Letter to All Special Agents in Charge (SACs) alerting them to furnish information indicating involvement by persons in United States in attempt to disrupt games or use games as situs for espionage directed against United States.

BACKGROUND:
Current student riots in Mexico City, influx of large number of communist contingents to Olympic games and racial overtones of current boycotts of the games give weight to fears by Mexican Government of leftist attempts to disrupt the international proceedings.

U.S. RAMIFICATIONS:
While there have been no allegations of direction of current Mexican student unrest by U. S. subversive elements, we do know that individuals from this country with subversive backgrounds have been arrested for participation therein. Arrested have been members of militant Black Panther Party, representatives of the National Lawyers Guild and persons active in facets of peace and "New Left" movements in the United States.

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Enclosure - *detached*
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EX 110
REG-1

62-112471
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CONTINUED - OVER

1 - Mr. DeLoach *DeLoach, PL*
1 - Mr. Sullivan
1 - Training Division
1 - Mr. Wannall

1 - Mr. C. D. Brennan
1 - Mr. G. C. Moore
1 - _____

12 SEP 30 1968

61 OCT 7 1968

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED EXCEPT
WHERE SHOWN OTHERWISE.

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Figure 1. First page of the FBI memorandum assessing and recommending action regarding the 1968 student movement in Mexico City. Memorandum, September 26, 1968, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB10/docs/doc13.pdf>.

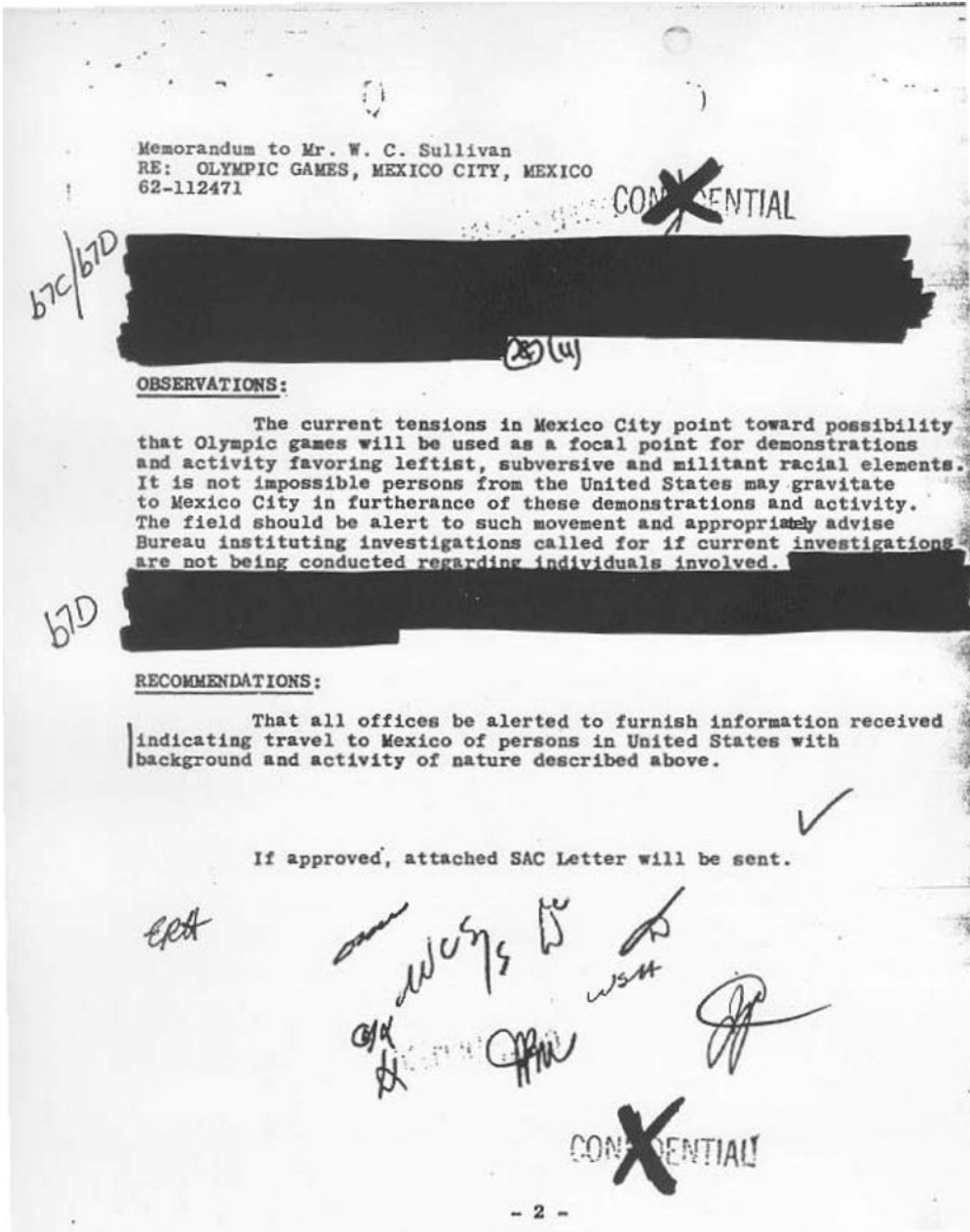


Figure 1. Continued.

democracy and freedom in the U.S. resonated with our own.”²⁰ As she accompanied me through the memorial, we walked into a darkened exhibit space with video, pictures, and items such as the articles of clothing of massacred students. We stopped at the display of the famous picture of John Carlos and

²⁰In 2007 a new museum/memorial was inaugurated, dedicated to the student movement. This represented “a strong act of government support for the generation of 1968.” (Allier-Montañón, “Memory and History of Mexico ‘68,” 18). The museum has provided visibility and relevance to the movement for newer generations, but it has also put into question who shapes the discourse and the historiography of the events. Esmeralda Reynoso, interview with the author, March 15, 2013.



Figure 2. Gold medalist Tommie Smith (center) and bronze medalist John Carlos (right) showing the raised fist on the podium after the 200 meter race. Both were barefoot on the podium and wore Olympic Project for Human Rights badges (October 16, 1968, AP Photo/File).

Tommie Smith raising their fists as a symbol of Black power associated with the Civil Rights struggle, at the podium during the 1968 Olympics (Figure 2).

As evidenced in the FBI memorandum above, intelligence agencies within the U.S. government were aware of certain political and emotional connections between the African American community and the Mexican student movement. The FBI saw an opportunity to avoid or at least minimize political turmoil by employing cultural programming that would portray a more positive image of the United States. Part of the students' protest was an implicit and explicit disdain for the foreign policies of the United States and its influence on the Mexican government.²¹ This posed a challenge for the U.S. government: on the one hand it needed to suppress the student movement by providing logistical support and training to the Mexican armed forces, and on the other it sought to portray an inclusive, friendly culture through the use of jazz and cultural diplomacy—part of a foreign policy strategy that dated back to at least 1954.²²

²¹Recently declassified CIA and FBI documents show the involvement of several U.S. government agencies working in tandem with the Mexican government. See Aguayo, *El* 68, 17.

²²Danielle Fosler Lussier, "Music Pushed, Music Pulled: Cultural Diplomacy, Globalization, and Imperialism," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 1 (2012): 53–64.

Although other musics dominated the top of the charts in early 1968,²³ jazz held an increasing share of consumer attention in Mexico during the sixties, particularly among young people. As Alain Derbez explains in his book *El Jazz en México*, a series of important jazz festivals took place during the sixties. These were organized by journalist and jazz aficionado José Luis Durán and began in 1966 in the auditorium of the School of Medicine at UNAM,²⁴ whose students would later form the most vocal section of the student movement. These festivals were international events that included high profile jazz performers. The third concert of the series took place in Puebla in May 1968 and included performances by Dave Brubeck, the Herbie Mann Quintet, and soloist Clea Bradford, among others.²⁵ Hence, paradoxically, jazz created an emotional connection with younger generations, which was useful for the State Department, while the African American struggle for civil rights simultaneously resonated with them because of its parallel struggle for a free and just political system.

By the end of World War II, the United States had proven its status as the new superpower in the world; however, it had also acquired an image problem. Aware that the United States was perceived as an industry-driven nation of mighty military power, Congress approved funds for artistic display overseas. The message differed from place to place, however; while in Europe the United States aimed to demonstrate its artistic achievements, in much of the developing world officials highlighted the importance of non-material values along with economic progress.²⁶ After the U.S. market crash of 1929, the flow of international trade effectively stopped. Latin American countries, once avid participants in the emerging free market, started to promote protectionist economic practices that coincided with populist and nationalist ideas of the time. The apparent failure of the U.S.-driven economic model made several Latin American leaders receptive to other economic and social approaches. In Mexico, President Lázaro Cárdenas famously nationalized the U.S. and British oil companies operating in Mexico. Cárdenas had also distributed more land than any of his predecessors; his administrations focused on fulfilling the promises of the revolution, but not without criticism from the conservative opposition.²⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt's "good neighbor" policy was still a recent addition to U.S. foreign policy, and it was significantly tested by Cárdenas's oil expropriation of 1938.

A year later, Ben Cherrington led the U.S. State Department's new Division of Cultural Relations. He asserted that "cultural exchanges would not build strong ties unless they reflected mutual relationships."²⁸ In the beginning, the United States tried to portray an image of artistic excellence by sending classical musicians abroad. Reportedly, classical musicians from the United States did not always have the impact desired by the State Department; jazz, on the other hand, was favorably received in many countries.²⁹ Jazz had been popular throughout the world since the beginning of the century due to the increasing number of records available and musicians touring. Louis Armstrong toured extensively in Europe in the 1930s, not yet as an official cultural ambassador of the United States but as a performing

²³According to the "Hits of the World" charts published by *Billboard Magazine* during 1968, the top ten songs in Mexico included a wide array of musical genres, among these: "Norma," a mambo by Perez Prado; "Musita," a Cuban derived song by La Sonora Santanera; "Quinceañera," a cumbia tune by Los Vlamers; "Carabela," a Mariachi song by Javier Solis; "Esta tarde vi llover," a ballad by Armanado Manzanero; "Tu, yo, y las rosas," a song set in close polyphony by Los Piccolinos; "Cierra Los Ojos," a romantic ballad by Marco Antonio Muñoz; "Tengo," a romantic ballad by Carlos Lico; and "Juan Tatachun," a corrido-like song with modern instrumentation including organ, electric guitar, and drum set by Los Zorros. Among this eclectic repertoire of Latin American music, however, two songs by the American rock band The Monkees stayed for many months at the top of the chart: "Look Out" and "Theme of the Monkees." "Hits of the World," *Billboard Magazine*, January 13, 1968, 42; February 10, 1968, 41; March 9, 1968, 48; March 23, 1968, 50.

²⁴Alain Derbez, *El Jazz en Mexico: Datos para una historia* (México, D.F.: Fondo de cultura económica, 2001), 74.

²⁵"3rd Puebla Arts Fest in Mexico Off & Running," *Billboard Magazine*, May 18, 1968, 52.

²⁶Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, 4.

²⁷Aaron W. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 15.

²⁸Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, 11.

²⁹Fosler-Lussier notes that as "the rapid decolonization of states formerly ruled by Europeans and elites called attention to the power of the masses [. . .] embassies sent word that classical music simply could not attract the socially and economically heterogeneous audiences the department had begun to seek." Jazz, on the other hand, "contained popular elements that also encouraged thoughtful connoisseurship." *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, 18.

artist in the music industry.³⁰ In the 1950s, radio broadcasts from the “Voice of America” radio network, such as “Jazz Club USA” and “Music USA,” garnered millions of listeners and contributed to the emergence of jazz ambassadors.³¹ Several well-known musicians from African American communities had been recruited to spread the American spirit through music; these became known as the “Jazz Ambassadors.” The State Department designed their tours between 1956 and 1971 to counter Soviet portrayals of the United States as culturally backward and images of racist behavior in the U.S. South. The jazz ambassadors presented a narrative of freedom and inclusion in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. These performers included Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington, among many others.

In Mexico, jazz production, consumption, and popularity can be traced back to orchestras like the Garden Jazz Band in Yucatán, and the Jazz Band Belén in Mexico City during the 1920s.³² Figures such as Armstrong and Ellington were regarded as the most representative performers of the genre. As many of the newspapers presented here show, however, jazz musicians were first and foremost identified as members of the African American community and not as representatives of the American people, partly due to the difficulty jazz faced in finding legitimacy in its own place of origin.³³ The popularity of jazz music and musicians in Mexico enabled the State Department to implement its jazz diplomacy programs there, and Duke Ellington and his band were put forward as “cultural ambassadors.” Ellington’s popularity in Mexico, as evidenced in the concert reviews below, made him a logical choice to connect with Mexican audiences and convey a positive image of the United States during one of the most uncertain times in recent Mexican history.

Duke Ellington in Mexico

Duke Ellington started his first Latin American tour at the beginning of September 1968. The tour was divided in two parts: first, he visited Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile; a second portion covered Mexico, after a week-long break in the United States. Ellington’s first encounter with Latin American culture was a positive one. Journalist Stanley Dance, who traveled with Ellington and his band during his Latin American tour, quotes the bandleader, capturing his impressions of the trip: “My first visit to South America has been a tremendous experience, far greater than I ever anticipated, and one that I can never possibly forget.”³⁴ Ellington arrived in Mexico on Monday September 23 at 11:25 am.³⁵ According to Stanley Dance, the arrival of Ellington and his band coincided with the arrival of several Olympic teams. The band traveled from the airport to downtown Mexico City to check in at the Aristos Hotel, then after a quick stop they traveled east to the city of Puebla (a three-hour bus ride).³⁶ In Puebla, they performed at *Auditorio de la Reforma* where they were warmly received by the audience. According to a reporter for the newspaper *El Sol de Puebla*, the audience, most of them youth, enjoyed themselves during a three-hour concert of Ellington’s music.³⁷ Another reporter for the newspaper *El Universal de Puebla*, asserted: “Yes, Ellington came to Puebla and decisively succeeded. He succeeded because there was expectation to see him, and because his music, which has gone around the world, is widely known by a numerous sector of *poblanos*.”³⁸

³⁰Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, 102.

³¹Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World*, 13.

³²For more on the history of jazz in Mexico, see Derbez, *El Jazz en Mexico*.

³³Fosler-Lussier reports that the State Department received letters from citizens and members of Congress opposing Armstrong as a cultural ambassador, partly because of his strong remarks regarding the desegregation incident in Little Rock, Arkansas, but also because jazz and jazz musicians were still not considered to have the status of high art music, but rather were “drivel.” Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, 108.

³⁴Quoted in Stanley Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington* (New York: Scribner, 1970), 275.

³⁵Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 275.

³⁶Stanley Dance reported that they checked into the Aristos hotel (Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 275), but Ellington in *Music is My Mistress* reported that he checked into the “Maria Isabel on the attractive Paseo de la Reforma.” Duke Ellington, *Music is My Mistress* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 356.

³⁷“Duke Ellington Hizo Vibrar al Público,” *El Sol de Puebla*, September 25, 1968.

³⁸“Ellington Triunfó en Toda la Línea en la Angelópolis,” *El Universal de Puebla*, September 27, 1968. *Poblanos* are residents of Puebla. Author’s translation.

Ellington's success in his very first concert did not mean that Mexican reporters and critics ignored the ethnicity of his band. In the review in *El Universal de Puebla*, the reporter notes that the music was a "great spectacle with his fifteen musicians; all of them of black race, except the bassist."³⁹ According to Monson, "everyone in the world of jazz had to cope with the politics of race in one form or another, whether through denial, engagement, withdrawal, strategic confrontation, cathartic rage, resentment, celebration, or sublimation."⁴⁰ The racial attitudes that Ellington, his music, and his musicians brought to the surface in Mexico posed a challenge and were disjunctive for everyone (musicians, audiences, and U.S. officials). As Radano and Bohlman remind us, "the imagination of race not only informs perceptions of musical practice but is at once constituted within and projected into the social through sound. Intersecting the musical and discursive, it becomes a 'soundtext' that circulates within as well as across national boundaries."⁴¹ While the State Department hoped to control the discourse generated by this "soundtext," perceptions of musical practice dominated the discourse among Mexicans. Ellington, on the other hand, used his Latin American tour to impart nuance to perceptions of his band's musical, ethnic, and national identities. During the intermission of his concert in Puebla, some reporters were able to interview Ellington briefly and ask him if the music they heard was considered jazz, to which he responded: "It's not jazz music that we played tonight; it is my music ... and since I was coming to Mexico I have composed a piece that I dedicate with pleasure to this beautiful country."⁴² Ellington had made similar claims throughout his State Department-sponsored tours. As explained by Penny Von Eschen:

A master at the politics of representation, Ellington had long resisted the restrictive categorization of black music by white critics, maintaining that "the music of my race is something more than the American idiom." His resistance to being defined contributed to the irony of this highly successful jazz ambassador's repeated rejection of the term "jazz." During one State Department-sponsored tour, Ellington explained that "we stopped using the word in 1943." Ellington consistently told audiences listening to his State Department lecture demonstrations that "jazz" was a misnomer, and American officials cringed as he denied the very existence of their prized cultural export.⁴³

Ellington's rejection of the jazz concept during the very beginning of his tour in Mexico, and the reported success of his music among audiences, sheds light on the contradictions taking place during this tour. It is here that the concept of audiotopia can be useful as, in this context, differences and/or contradictions don't cancel each other out. The outcome, however, with regard to U.S. cultural diplomacy efforts is not readily evident. As Fosler-Lussier asserts, often "what Foreign Service officers believed they were accomplishing could differ dramatically from what the programs' planners in Washington had in mind."⁴⁴ From the early days of jazz diplomacy, Ellington had had to negotiate his position as a cultural ambassador, his positionality as a member of the African American community during the civil rights movement, and his own artistic agenda. As David F. García explains in his

³⁹According to Stanley Dance, the "racial" perception of Ellington's band on several occasions provided uncomfortable yet amusing situations for bass player Jeff Castleman. In his book, Dance writes: "At the airport, a section of our plane is being loaded with crates of melons. When this is completed, it is proposed that another section be loaded with musicians. I am stopped courteously but firmly at the exit gate by an official. Having checked his bass through, Jeff Castleman, the only other white in the party, now witnesses my predicament with a great deal of amusement. 'That's happened to me several times,' he says, 'and for the same reason.' We call on interpreter Gonsalves and are permitted to pass." Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 265.

For Ellington and his band to have the discourse of race and music lurking over them during their Latin American tour was not new. In fact, in their recent visit to Brazil, several São Paulo newspaper headlines advertised: "Liberdade de Expressão" (Freedom of Expression); "A Musica Negra No Municipal" (Black Music in the Municipal [Theater]); "Um Artista Sempre Atual" (An Always Current Artist); "Papa do Jazz" (Father of Jazz); and "Mister Jazz." Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 265.

⁴⁰Monson 2007, 7.

⁴¹Ronald M. Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, *Music and the Racial Imagination* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

⁴²"No es Jazz, es mi Música, Aclaró Duke Ellington," *Novedades de Puebla* September 26, 1968, author's translation.

⁴³Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World*, 125.

⁴⁴Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, 3.

book *Listening for Africa*, “Ellington’s consternation over the economic contingencies of tactics used by civil rights organizations, in regards specifically to his and his musicians’ livelihoods, places further doubt as to the notion of American Negro group identity and Ellington’s contribution to it.”⁴⁵

After performing in Puebla, Ellington and his band traveled back to Mexico City in the middle of the night.⁴⁶ The same night, and less than a mile north from where Ellington and his band were staying, Mexican armed forces and students sustained a fierce fight in what is now known as the battle of Casco de Santo Tomás. The area is a conglomerate of university buildings that are part of the *Instituto Politécnico Nacional*, or IPN (National Polytechnic Institute). Students had used this building as a refuge and barracks, and as meeting sites for their *comités de lucha* (committees of struggle). Hundreds of soldiers commanded by general Gustavo Castillo entered and searched all the buildings to remove hundreds of students.

As reported by the *Excelsior* newspaper, the events began when students of the IPN set ten buses and a police jeep on fire, whereupon a truck from the Federal District government opened fire against the police. Fourteen people were hurt on both sides of the conflict. Later, infrastructure from the *Compañía de Luz y Fuerza* (electric company) was destroyed with gunfire, darkening the surrounding area. Several injured students were taken to the nearby *Escuela de Medicina Rural* (school of rural medicine). Photojournalist Mario Aguilera arrived at the scene but was not allowed to enter.⁴⁷ At least 3,000 students were inside the school installations, nearby houses, and other buildings. Under the dark sky, students ran everywhere, throwing improvised Molotov bombs at the *granaderos* (riot police), several of whom suffered burns. Students ignited bonfires in areas where they had established their barracks. Streets were closed to traffic and residents were encouraged to stay home. The riot police were overwhelmed and overpowered by the students who overcame the police tear gas with their Molotov bombs and gunfire. In another fight nearby, both sides were armed with guns, which had them *pecho a tierra* (lying on the ground). Fifteen-hundred *granaderos* arrived at the scene and immediately fired against the students. More students from nearby buildings threw Molotov bombs at arriving police cars. Several passersby were hit by the police. A car in which two journalists were traveling was also set on fire. Hector Piña, sub-chief of the press for the Federal District, was hit by a bullet on his left leg. Several other vehicles were set on fire. In the end, at least 350 students were captured and taken to the police station.⁴⁸ As in the *Excelsior*’s description above, newspaper reporting on these events evokes the aural landscape of those turbulent days.

That same morning, Ellington and his band traveled south to the state of Morelos, where they performed at the historical Hacienda de Cortés near Tequesquitengo. The band performed in the dining room, surrounded by colonial architecture and furniture, in a semi-open space to which dogs would come occasionally to explore beneath the tables.⁴⁹ Ellington remembers: “The guests evidently found nothing incongruous in the contrast between our music and the architecture, and I tried out sections of the *Latin American Suite* on them. Originally, this was to have been titled *Mexicanticipation*, because I had promised to premiere a new work in Mexico City.”⁵⁰ Ellington’s own reflection regarding the potential incongruity between his music and the Spanish Colonial architecture of the Hacienda points toward the tacit binaries and/or dichotomies that accompanied Ellington’s tour in Mexico.

After performing in Morelos, the band continued south through the mountains to the coast of Guerrero. Ellington had originally planned to return to Mexico City and fly to Acapulco, but he decided instead to ride on the bus with the rest of the band.⁵¹ Of that trip Ellington remembers,

The bus is taking the band through the mountains to Acapulco, and by the time our performance is over it seems easier to go that way than to return to Mexico City and fly to Acapulco next day,

⁴⁵García, *Listening for Africa*, 177.

⁴⁶Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 276.

⁴⁷“La vocacional 7 fue ocupada por la policia,” *Excelsior*, September 24, 1968, 23-A.

⁴⁸“La vocacional 7 fue ocupada por la policia,” *Excelsior*, September 24, 1968, 23-A.

⁴⁹Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 276.

⁵⁰Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, 356.

⁵¹Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, 356; and Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 276.

as I had intended. So, I assume my navigator's seat at the front of the bus, and we have an interesting ride. It rains in the mountains and I am thankful we have such a good driver, because he also has to reckon with all kinds of animals—domestic and otherwise—who are making use of the road at night.⁵²

Ellington's bus ride during his first forty-eight hours in Mexico allowed him to examine the two prominent volcanoes known as Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl. The Mexico City–Puebla route provided great northern and eastern views of the two volcanoes, while the Mexico City–Morelos route gave him southern and western views (Figure 3).

These mountains are prominent landmarks and cultural icons that have inspired countless generations of Mexicans, who know and refer to the northern-located Iztaccíhuatl as *la mujer dormida* (the sleeping woman), since the landscape resembles the image of a woman lying down, and the southern-located Popocatepetl as *popo* (short for Popocatepetl), which is said to resemble a kneeling warrior watching over the sleeping woman (Figure 4).

Ellington had been working on a composition to be premiered during his Mexican tour with a working title of *Mexicanticipation*, sometimes called the *Mexican Suite*, which was meant to reflect his impressions of Mexico. He said, "For years and years we have wanted to come to Mexico, and we have thought of her as a beautiful woman. This is a musical reflection of our mental anticipation."⁵³ By the end of his tour, the piece became the *Latin American Suite*, which included pieces inspired by all the countries Ellington visited. In it, *Mexicanticipation* had become the movement "The Sleeping Lady and the Giant Who Watches Over Her." Ellington's perception of Mexico as a beautiful woman mapped onto the majestic views of the Iztaccíhuatl and Popocatepetl, and the legends associated with them.⁵⁴ In his memoirs, Ellington wrote:

Mexicanticipation, alias the *Latin-American Suite*, is enthusiastically received, especially the section written in honor of the two snowcapped volcanic peaks that tower over the city. Their names are Popocatepetl and Ixtacihuatl, but I am not one to court disaster unnecessarily and don't wish to risk pronouncing those words, so my fairy-tale title is "The Sleeping Lady and The Giant Who Watches Over Her."⁵⁵

Ellington and his band arrived in Acapulco on Wednesday, September 25 at 8:00 am after an overnight bus ride. Later that night there was a dinner dance party where the band performed. The following morning, they traveled by plane to Guadalajara.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, in Mexico City, students had intended to march silently from the *Museo de Antropología* (Museum of Anthropology) to the *Zócalo*, but they were stopped by army soldiers with tanks.⁵⁷ The *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) officers took control of the university buildings, finding and accounting for damaged structures and missing equipment. Several rifles, handguns, ammunition, and improvised Molotov bombs were found and confiscated (Figure 5).

⁵²Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, 357.

⁵³Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 281.

⁵⁴This is the story of Xochiquetzal, which means "goddess of the flowers," and an Aztec warrior whose name we do not know. The warrior is sent on a military campaign. Days and months go by and the man does not come back. Meanwhile the village, in need of a labor force, brings men from nearby towns. Among them was one man whose desire for Xochiquetzal burned him from the inside. The man, in his attempt to woo her, tells her that her beloved had died in combat and that he was never coming back. She, devastated by the news, loses hope and accepts the other man's offer to marry her. Shortly after that, Xochiquetzal's husband returns. Full of rage, she goes to see the deceitful man who lied to her. The returning warrior pursues the other man; the two fight for hours until the Aztec warrior strikes the villain and then flees. When the warrior returns he finds Xochiquetzal lying dead, having taken her own life. The warrior sits next to her to watch over her as if she were asleep. In time, flowers, debris of trees, and earth cover them, creating the two big volcanoes that overlook the valley of Anahuac, known today as Mexico City.

⁵⁵Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, 358.

⁵⁶Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 278.

⁵⁷"Impidio el Ejercito una Manifestación Convocada Para Partir de Chapultepec," *Excelsior*, September 26, 1968.

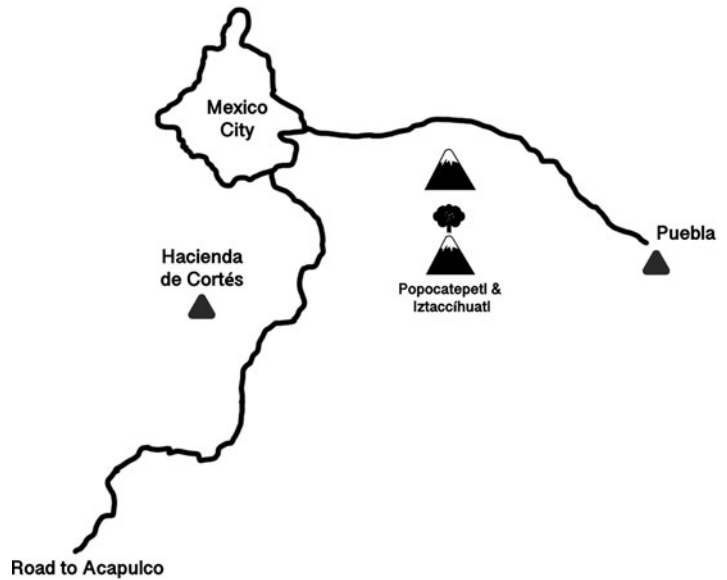


Figure 3. Routes covered by Ellington and his musicians during their first 48 hours in Mexico. Map produced by author.

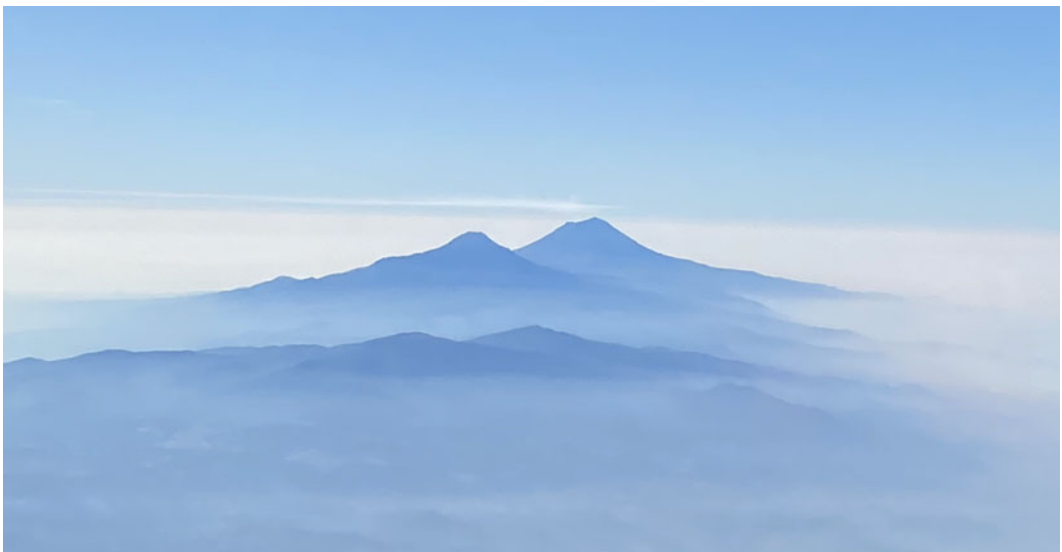


Figure 4. Image of the two prominent volcanoes near Mexico City. Photo by author.

Students were taken to the police station where, during their initial testimony, they hurled insults at the judge and delivered improvised political discourses. In an attempt to re-establish order and to prevent the army invading university buildings again, several student leaders urged other students to vacate the buildings. In various street protests throughout the city, vehicles were burned. U.S. Ambassador Fulton Freeman expressed his absolute confidence in the Mexican government’s capacity to resolve the student conflict.⁵⁸

⁵⁸“Su Presidente Insta a la paz y Condena el uso de la Fuerza,” *Excelsior*, September 25, 1968.



Figure 5. Newspaper image with weaponry allegedly confiscated from students. *Excelsior*, September 25, 1968, 1.

The following day (September 26), Ellington and his band arrived in Guadalajara, where they were received by a group of female college students supervised by two matrons.⁵⁹ Of this encounter Ellington writes in his memoirs:

There [Guadalajara] I am met by two delightful señoras who have been appointed, along with a bunch of college girls, to act as our guides and escorts. I find another incredible suite, another king-size bed, and an appetizing collection of lush fruit in a handsome native basket awaiting me at the Guadalajara Hilton. Nearby is the small town of Tequila, and by now I have had several introductions to the national liquor, so that I can take it with salt and lemon and not grimace too shamefully. We play two concerts in a splendid old theatre, and what makes them memorable is a superb, well-tuned piano. There is much enthusiasm here, and Guadalajara impresses as an alert, musical town.⁶⁰

Ellington and his band offered two concerts that night, one at 6:00 and another at 9:00 (Figure 6). Prior to their performances several newspaper articles and advertisements highlighted Ellington's accomplishments, one of them stating: "the way in which Duke Ellington features the magnificent tonal qualities of each of his individual stars, to then mix them in a superb way, has not been matched successfully because it carries his unmistakable genius."⁶¹

Ellington's performances in Guadalajara offer a singular opportunity to observe the diverse listening practices and the contrasting processes of construction of knowledge through sound. Citizen Gonzalo Robles, in a letter to his friend Fidencio Llamas published by *El Informador*, wrote:

⁵⁹Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 278.

⁶⁰Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, 357.

⁶¹[Untitled article], *El Informador*, September 25, 1968, 10-B, author's translation.

And speaking of *retintines* (sounds), resounding was he who gave [a concert] in our greatest theater, the very famous King of Jazz, Don Duke Ellington, last week; whose nocturnal performance I had the enormous joy of taking in and whose delights I will not have to tell you ... since you told me you were also drooling before such a display of musical talent, full of rhythmic cadences and harmonious inspirations, performed by that lucid and pleasant young grandpa, lord of the keys, of the blues, of the dixie, and the syncopation ... He made us remember those noble times of our heroic youth.⁶²

In this audience member's account, Mr. Robles highlights the fame and importance of Ellington in jazz, his musical abilities, and most importantly his ability to encourage remembrance of Robles' own "heroic youth." Nostalgia plays an important role in this account, as it connects Ellington's music with Mr. Robles's biography and his identity, transcending ethnic, national, and musical identities. In contrast, well-received though they were, Ellington's Guadalajara concerts did not escape racial commentaries, as the local newspaper reported: "His music is strictly individualistic, and while it cannot be said that it is popular, it faithfully and consciously translates the sentimental and spiritual life of the American Black."⁶³ These two contrasting reviews of Ellington's performances in Guadalajara account for the variability in how Ellington's music was received. While some in the audience were inspired to remember their youth, as in Mr. Robles account, others could not separate the music from racialized characterizations of it.

According to Dance, the concerts went as planned and the new suite was adjusted during the first performances by the composer, who shouted instructions during each performance. Saxophonist Paul Gonsalves descended from the stage to serenade a young lady who he believed was the daughter of the mayor.⁶⁴ Between concerts, musicians were accompanied by their female escorts to sidewalk cafés to listen to Mexican popular music.⁶⁵

The following day, Friday, 27 September, students in Mexico City organized a rally in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*. The events of the previous Monday at *Casco de Santo Tomás* had revealed how far both sides were willing to go. On one hand, it was clear that the government was willing to use extreme force against the students, and on the other, the students were armed, emboldened, and willing to fight. While some students saw the need to keep fighting, others were willing to concede. The Mexican government had hoped that the demonstration of force would discourage the student movement. For most of that week, newspapers reported on government officials reiterating that the armed forces would withdraw from the university buildings and streets. When Luis Echeverría, then *secretario de gobernación* (secretary of government), was asked when the army would abandon university buildings, he replied, "the federal troops will leave the university buildings in the moment that authorized university personnel and its high officials are present to take possession."⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the students' representative acknowledged that while violent acts had to stop, rallies would continue to take place, and students convened several new rallies, including the one on Friday, September 27 at the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*.

That day, while the massive student meeting was taking place, Ellington traveled from Guadalajara to Mérida, Yucatán. There were transportation issues, and the band and their luggage had to be split across multiple separate flights, which delayed the scheduled concerts for more than an hour.⁶⁷ Ellington and his band had planned to play two concerts on the same day, one popular and another a gala (Figure 7).

Although the "popular" concert started an hour late, the crowd was "stupefied by the music."⁶⁸ According to a reporter for the *Diario de Yucatán*, "sympathy and good humor provoked the

⁶²"Correspondencia Particular, Gonzalo Robles," *El Informador*, October 6, 1968, 4-C, author's translation.

⁶³"Pentagrama Musical," *El Informador*, October 1, 1968, 10-C, author's translation.

⁶⁴Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 279.

⁶⁵Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 279.

⁶⁶"El Ejercito Entregará la C.U. al Pedir la sus Autoridades," *Excelsior*, September 28, 1968, author's translation.

⁶⁷Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 280.

⁶⁸Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 280.

PROGRAMA CULTURAL DE LA XIX OLIMPIADA y CONCIERTOS GUADALAJARA, A. C., tienen el honor de presentar al mundialmente famoso



DUKE ELLINGTON

"El Rey del Jazz"

¡¡Y SU SENSACIONAL ORQUESTA DE 18 PROFESORES!!
Hoy jueves 26: tarde a las 17:30 horas función popular.
Noche a las 21 horas función de gala.

TEATRO DEGOLLADO

Figure 6. Newspaper advertisement of Duke Ellington in Guadalajara, Mexico. *El Informador*, September 26, 1968, 8-C.



Figure 7. Newspaper advertisement of Duke Ellington in Mérida, Mexico. *El Diario de Yucatán*, September 27, 1968, 7.

performance of the famous jazz interpreter, but something was missing, something that could be called musical identification of the Yucatecan audience with the shrillness of Ellington's music, where the jazz roots seem unmistakable."⁶⁹ The Yucatan Peninsula, although part of Mexico, has historically and culturally been influenced by Caribbean culture. During the eighteenth century many musicians from Cuba traveled across the Caribbean to Mexico, bringing with them musical traditions such as *guarachas*, *puntos Cubanos*, and *rumba*, among others.⁷⁰ Mérida, the city where Ellington performed, has a long tradition of poetic and sentimental singing known as *trova yucateca*. In her book *Aurality*, Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier highlights the construction of knowledge through diverse listening practices, often shaped by localism. As she states, "In Latin America and the Caribbean, different moments and processes of aural perception and sonic recontextualization have always been accompanied by an intense debate about the meaning of sonic localisms and temporality and its place in history."⁷¹ Although well-received in Mérida, Ellington encountered a stronger emphasis on musical localism there, which elicited a different reception to his music than in other Mexican urban centers.

After the concerts in Mérida, Ellington and his band returned early the next morning (Saturday, 28 September) to Mexico City, where they held two concerts in Bellas Artes and where the official premier of *The Latin American Suite* would take place (Figure 8).

What originally had been a composition exclusively inspired by and dedicated to Mexico had expanded into the *Latin-American Suite*, incorporating ideas and experiences from Ellington's trip to South America.⁷² The suite is comprised of seven movements: "Oclupaca," "Chico Cuadrado," "Eque," "Tina," "The Sleeping Lady and the Giant Who Watches Over Her," "Latin American Sunshine," and "Brasilliance."⁷³ The suite is recognized as "one of Ellington's happiest creations and [it] reflects a tour during which the band was greeted by almost overwhelming hospitality and warmth. The music glows with a sense of happiness and well-being."⁷⁴

Two movements were inspired by iconic Mexican landscapes. "Oclupaca" (Acapulco spelled backwards) opens with the heavy use of drums, which captures the jovial spirit of this coastal town and the good times that Ellington and his band enjoyed there.⁷⁵ "The Sleeping Lady and the Giant Who Watches Over Her" opens with a motive based on minor thirds, which musicologist Robert Stevenson believes was the most common interval in music from the Aztec empire due to its use in

⁶⁹"Vida Social," *Diario de Yucatán*, September 28, 1968, 5, author's translation.

⁷⁰García Corona, "Music, Politics, and Sentimentalism in Bolero," 142.

⁷¹Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

⁷²Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, 356.

⁷³For more musical and recording details on the suite, see Eddie Lambert, *Duke Ellington: A Listener's Guide* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 291.

⁷⁴Lambert, *Duke Ellington: A Listener's Guide*, 291.

⁷⁵Ellington and his band enjoyed a time of relaxation and fun on the beach, drinking, eating, swimming, and taking parachute rides. Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 276.



Figure 8. Program provided to attendees in Ellington's concert in Bellas Artes. Box 5, Folder 13, Duke Ellington Collection, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C.

horns and seashells.⁷⁶ Whether or not Ellington knew this or intentionally used it as a reference to Aztec culture, he employed this melodic technique throughout the entire piece based on thirds. Having introduced the motive, he plays with the qualities of the interval, passing it among the saxophones and the brass over the groove of a mild swing. Little piano riffs appear here and there as a signature of Ellington's playing. There are no defined solos; the climax is reached when the majority of the orchestra plays around the original melodic motive. After the successful concerts offered in Bellas Artes, the band spent the night at the Aristos Hotel. On Sunday at noon, the band was scheduled to perform in the small hotel's auditorium, to the displeasure of some of the musicians.⁷⁷

This concert marked the final hours of Ellington's Latin American tour. It also represented the convergence of U.S. diplomatic efforts and music. In it, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Fulton Freeman not only honored Ellington, but played music with him in an improvised jam session (Figure 9). The ambassador introduced Ellington by saying: "We have no ambassador of goodwill better than Duke."⁷⁸ An *Excelsior* article narrated this important event:

Duke Ellington the king of jazz ... and Fulton Freeman, ambassador for the United States and his trombone, offered at the Aristos Hotel auditorium yesterday two hours of musical joy in a concert of North American music from the "fabulous twenties." There was also some modern music, but always in a jazz tempo, such as the "Mexicanticación," the first part of the "Mexican Suite"

⁷⁶Robert Stevenson, *Music in Mexico: A Historical Survey* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1952), 2.

⁷⁷Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 282.

⁷⁸Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 282.

composed by Duke Ellington in honor of the Olympic games. Freeman got onstage to applause ... Smiling, he borrowed Lawrence Brown's trombone and began to play "Star Dust." He was wearing a brown silk vest with shiny flower ornaments. The fifteen soloists smiled, however, and per Duke's request they accompanied the North American ambassador. At the end, Freeman and the king of jazz hugged each other and kissed four times on the cheek. The smiles and applause of the six hundred people in the audience rewarded the diplomat's performance.⁷⁹

After this performance Ellington and his band played two final concerts at the *Auditorio Nacional* with accessibly priced tickets.⁸⁰ The next day, September 30, Ellington and his band left Mexico, and all military army forces left the university. Faculty returned to the university in an attempt to recover normality, but leaders of the *consejo de huelga* stated that returning to classes would be effectively killing the movement and called for a second massive rally for Wednesday of that week (October 2) in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* in Tlatelolco.

"Dos De Octubre no Se Olvida" ("Do not forget October 2 ")

The evening started with students, families, and some police officers gathering near the plaza for what seemed to be another student rally. The plaza was surrounded by apartment buildings with small balconies overlooking the central square. Many students and some paramilitary personnel took advantageous high ground. Several student leaders took turns addressing the crowd while army tanks started to surround the area. Throughout the years many have voiced their own stories about what occurred that day. I grew up knowing that both of my parents were involved in the movement, particularly my father, who, as I shared earlier, was a medical student at UNAM. I had never heard his story until one day while camping we were all sitting around a bonfire trying to make up scary stories. After some laughter followed by a failed attempt to tell a scary story, my father paused and began by saying: "I will tell you a real horror story." Part of this horror story is the opening paragraph of this essay, in which protesting college students suddenly found themselves the targets of military weaponry. The following is what happened next, as my father tells it:

It was then when we all ran like rats trying to hide. How many people fell? We don't know because once they fell, they did not move. We got out and we were able to relocate to another building behind the plaza. We entered the house of a professor who was about to leave and told us "get out of here." We returned, and by then it was dark. We were able to reach the corner of the building where the army was shooting, and many students were trying to enter the building. Some police officers saw us and yelled at us, "Get the fuck out of here, you are going to get killed," and we did not follow his instructions. We turned around and saw on the next street that students had set a *tranvía* (trolley) on fire; many were caught. Then it started to rain, and the SRE building was surrounded by soldiers and we walked in front of them on the other side of the street. On that corner, the soldiers had just killed a student. The ambulance arrived, but they had shot him in the head. After that we turned around and decided to leave. When we were leaving I remember seeing families, who the army had kept in the SRE building, running as fast as they could to get away.

I remember that during the meeting of the *comité nacional de huelga*, leaders said that it was necessary to provoke a repression in order for the people to rise and that it didn't matter if 50 or 100 fell if that was going to facilitate that the people rise, and next day... nothing. Newspaper, television, radio...nothing. That was the story.⁸¹

⁷⁹"Duke Ellington y Freeman," *Excelsior*, September 30, 1968, 22-A, author's translation.

⁸⁰Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington*, 282.

⁸¹Felipe de Jesus García Pedroza, interview with the author, August 2, 2018.



EL EMBAJADOR de Estados Unidos, Fulton Freeman, sonriente, obsequia a Duke Ellington, “El Rey del Jazz”, a la izquierda, un cuadro que representa un rostro azteca con un gran plumaje. “Por su participación en la Olimpiada Cultural”, le dice el diplomático.

Figure 9. Duke Ellington and Ambassador Fulton Freeman. *Excelsior*, September 30, 1968, 22-A.

My father’s recollections of the events on 2 October provide a useful window into the soundscape of that day and the contrasting aural experiences of the week leading up to it. He described the leaders using the PA system to dissuade the crowd from protesting, the plaza full of people talking and chanting political demands, the noise of “fake” gun shots in a first attempt to disperse the crowd, and the eventual real gun shots followed by the whistling noise of actual bullets. In parallel, we can imagine the sounds of the active week that Ellington, his band, and their fans had during the days preceding the massacre—the sounds of joyful music and cheering audiences. That day, however, after an active week of sounds, noise, music, and individual and collective expectations and with the celebrated musicians now departed, silence pervaded the radio waves (at least regarding the student movement) and the empty streets. No more sounds of protests or bullets whistling through the air, no more jazz concerts or people cheering and applauding: as my father puts it, “[the] next day... nothing.”

Jazz has often been linked to U.S. national identity and is often claimed as a U.S. art form. This essay, however, shows how jazz and its social implications went beyond issues of national identity and race and established common ground on issues of social justice. As Alejandro Madrid reminds us, “music has always been linked to the construction of regional and national identities. However, current theoretical and critical scenarios that coincide in the importance of globalization have failed to

account for how real or hypothetical postnational musical identities are.”⁸² Duke Ellington had visited Mexico under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State in an attempt to curb animosity toward U.S. capitalism and imperialism, to improve the U.S. image abroad, and to deter Mexican youth from gravitating toward communism. Ellington had come to feature what he called *his* music, rejecting its direct association with jazz. From his perspective, he visited Mexico as a composer, not as an African-American composer; as an artist and not as a token of cultural diversity. Ellington had to negotiate his own political and artistic beliefs from within his positionality as a cultural ambassador. Conversely, in Mexico, a country with a long history of anti-black racism, he did not escape judgments, opinions, and sympathies based on race. He and most of his band were African-American musicians who were perceived as representatives of that community’s culture and struggle. At the same cultural moment, students filled the streets protesting the Mexican government and demanding freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and a just political system, demands that attracted people from many sectors of Mexican society, primarily the urban middle class. Their demands, however, were never met: freedom for political prisoners (instead, the number of political activists incarcerated increased); respect for the institution of the university and its autonomy; the strengthening of democratic values and life in Mexico; and lastly, the dismantling of the brutal police force.⁸³

The students did not act in isolation: they were exposed to and aware of other political movements of the time, including the civil rights movement in the United States. They connected their struggle with the U.S. civil rights movement and the sectors of U.S. society that advanced it, primarily the African-American community. Members of the U.S. movement for civil rights joined them in their protest. Ellington’s performances constituted the sonic and social spaces in which identity-formations, cultures, and geographies, historically mapped separately, interacted with each other and where music and sound “function[ed],” as Kun writes, “like a possible utopia for the listener ... experienced not only as sound that goes into our ears but as a space that we can enter into, encounter, move around in, inhabit, *be safe in*, and learn from.”⁸⁴

Ellington’s visit during this complicated time in Mexican history was not a coincidence but rather a strategically planned event by the U.S. State Department. His concerts, media interviews, news clips, and musical compositions inspired by Mexican landmarks, and the expectations around his visit, constituted an unprecedented cultural moment in which music and the struggle for social justice (on both sides of the border) converged. Today, Ellington’s personal musical testimony of his visit to Mexico in 1968, as well as the students’ personal emotions, seem to sit alongside one another quietly in the archives of museums. Raymond Williams reminds us that “analysis is centered on relations between these produced institutions, formations, and experiences, so that now, as in that produced past, only the fixed explicit forms exist, and living presence is always, by definition, receding. [However, social forms become social consciousness] only when they are lived, actively, in real relationships, and moreover in relationships which are more than systematic exchanges between fixed units.”⁸⁵ Such relationships continue to be lived actively every October 2 in Mexico, when hundreds of young people take over major streets in Mexico City to claim justice for the events that took place in 1968 and for the many injustices that have occurred ever since.

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⁸²Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario* (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2008), ix.

⁸³Hugo Hiriart, “Luz de Bengala, Las Cuatro Culturas, Hugo Hiriart,” *Excelsior*, October 4, 1968, 7-A.

⁸⁴Kun, *Audiotopia*, 2.

⁸⁵Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 130.

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