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Claremont McKenna College

Mexico '68:
An examination of Mexico's Olympic Project and its Effects on the Tlatelolco Massacre

Submitted to
Professor Roderic Ai Camp

By
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For
Senior Thesis
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 1990, Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa traveled to Mexico to participate in a series of debates and discussions regarding Latin-American politics. At the time, Mexico's *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) had been in power for sixty-one years, and would continue to rule the country for ten more. During a discussion with Mexican intellectual Octavio Paz, Vargas Llosa commented on how the PRI crafted "a dictatorship camouflaged in such a way that it [did not] appear to be a dictatorship." This concealed authoritarianism, in which power was monopolized not by a single individual, but by a party as a whole, was described by Vargas Llosa as "the perfect dictatorship."¹

The PRI exerted almost complete control over Mexican politics from its founding in 1929 until the beginning of the 21st Century. In 2000, Vicente Fox became the first opposition candidate in more than 70 years to win a presidential election. The PRI's dominance over political and economic matters was so extensive that some have labeled it a "state party" – a term intended to capture the inextricable link between the party and the Mexican nation-state.²

The party's origins trace back to the Mexican Revolution, and this is a crucial aspect of the PRI's identity. Porfirio Díaz's 35-year dictatorship – which resulted in vast economic inequality – led to the eruption of a major civil war in 1910. The armed struggle lasted until 1920 and was characterized by ubiquitous violence.³ Even after the conflict ended, political leaders faced constant challenges from regional revolutionaries, and power passed from one *caudillo* to another. The instability that the country faced during this time led to the assassination of

¹ "Vargas Llosa: 'México es la dictadura perfecta'" *El País*, September 31, 1990.

² James Russell, *Class and Race Formation in North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 155.

³ Enrique Krauze, *Mexico, Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1966* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 120.

president Álvaro Obregón in 1924. In 1929, his successor Plutarco Elias Calles founded the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) with the intent of gathering the surviving political and military leaders of the Revolution and solving the grave instability that had afflicted the country since the outbreak of armed struggle. Calles fell into political disgrace and was exiled in 1936, but the party he founded would continue to rule the country until 2000 – changing names twice before it became the PRI.⁴

The party's seventy-one-year rule makes it the fourth longest-lived autocratic regime of the twentieth century, only surpassed by Liberia's True Whig Party (102 years), the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (75 years) and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (72 years).⁵ However, unlike its counterparts in Mongolia and the Soviet Union, "the PRI held regular elections during all these years for all levels of elected office" and allowed other parties to compete.⁶ The PRI's rule over Mexico is unique compared to other autocratic regimes of the 20th century because it sustained power while continuously replacing government officeholders, including the president, through elections.

Given the discussion above, Vargas Llosa's description of Mexico as a 'dictatorship', although helpful to characterize some of the PRI's practices, is not entirely accurate. The PRI's regime is better characterized as a hegemonic party autocracy, a regime where "one political party remains in office uninterruptedly under semi authoritarian conditions while holding regular multiparty elections."⁷ Unlike dictatorships, hegemonic party autocracies do not aspire to

⁴ Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 122.

⁵ Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 47.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 89.

dominate individuals in every sphere of life and use methods other than repression to obtain political support.

The literature on the PRI's dominance over Mexico emphasizes the party's actions to ensure support from the masses and prevent internal conflicts within the party. Unlike other hegemonic regimes, the PRI did not rely on force, coercion, or election-rigging to ensure political domination. Instead, the PRI achieved electoral thanks to a dense network of patron-client relationships in which it exchanged material goods for political support. The PRI's patronage-dispensing machine afforded it loyalty from the masses, and this widespread support allowed the party to constantly win elections by huge margins.⁸ Additionally, scholars argue that the PRI's enormous electoral margins helped deter party members from defecting the party by conveying the message that electoral success could only be attained by running as a PRI candidate.⁹

The PRI's political stability was also aided in large part by its economic policies. PRI governments, especially those after the end of World War II, adopted an economic model called *desarrollo estabilizador* to deliver sustained periods of economic growth while controlling inflation. These policies can be understood as a 'division of labor' between government, economic elites, and urban and rural workers. The government provided the appropriate circumstances to incentivize private investment, protected the nascent domestic manufacturing industry through import-substitution policies, provided basic social goods and stable wages, and helped rural workers modernize their agricultural techniques. In return, economic elites left matters of economic policy to the government, union leaders committed to maintaining worker discipline and wage demands within a specified limit, and rural workers committed to working

⁸ Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*, 91.

⁹ *Ibid*, 102.

diligently and minimizing social unrest in the fields.¹⁰ The coupling of a growing economy and a stable political environment led to the so-called *milagro mexicano*, a period between 1954 and 1970 in which the country's GDP per capita grew at an average annual rate of 3.4%.¹¹ However, these economic gains were not equally distributed among the population.

During the *milagro mexicano* years, Mexico City solidified its position as the country's preeminent political, economic, and cultural hub. Ernesto P. Uruchurtu became the regent of the *Departamento del Distrito Federal* (now named *Ciudad de México*) at the beginning of the administration of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines in 1952, and remained in the post until his resignation in 1966.¹² Uruchurtu supervised large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the construction of major avenues like *Viaducto* and *Periferico*, and implemented beautification campaigns in different parts of the city. During this time, Mexico City became a symbol of the country's modernity and prosperity, and also represented the success of the PRI's post-revolutionary project.

Political stability and economic development enabled and motivated the government and economic elites to promote Mexico, and specifically Mexico City, as a place of worldwide relevance and deserving of hosting world-class events. These efforts were successful: Mexico hosted three major sporting events during the 20th century, and they all occurred within a 20-year period: the 1968 Olympic Games, the 1970 FIFA World Cup, and the 1986 FIFA World Cup. At the time, football did not have the degree of commercialization and worldwide

¹⁰ Carlos Tello, "Notas sobre el Desarrollo Estabilizador," *Economía Informa*, 2010, no. 364: 66.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 67.

¹² Carlos Villasana, "El regente de hierro que modernizó al Distrito Federal," *El Universal*, May 24, 2017.

viewership that it has today. Hence, the Olympic games prevailed over the World Cup as the world's most important global sport spectacle – both in terms of viewership and prestige.¹³

Given Mexico's social, political, and economic advances in the 20th century, the Olympics were planned as a celebration of the country's development – the athletic competition would mark Mexico's 'graduation' into the realms of industrialized nations. The opening ceremony of this celebration of the PRI's post-revolutionary success took place on October 12, 1968 at the Olympic Stadium inside the campus of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM). Just ten days before, on October 2nd, the Mexican government had massacred hundreds of peaceful protesters – most of which were students – in the Tlatelolco district of Mexico City.¹⁴

The Olympic Games and the student movement of 1968 (which culminated with the Tlatelolco massacre) are inextricably linked due to circumstances of time and place. The Mexican student movement began in response to police brutality used to suppress a spontaneous street fight, but it quickly evolved into an organized movement that demanded increased political freedom. The marches and rallies took place predominantly in Mexico City, and the movement largely unfolded in the Summer of 1968, concurrently with the final preparations for the Olympic Games.¹⁵ This is a particularly interesting conjuncture. On one hand, the Olympics were planned as a celebration of the PRI's post-revolutionary success. On the other, the marches signaled the population's dissatisfaction with the ruling party and indicated that their political demands were not being met. More importantly, the government's violent response to the

¹³ John J. MacAloon, "The Theory of Spectacle: Reviewing Olympic Ethnography," in *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup*, ed. Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 17.

¹⁴ Kevin B. Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World : Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008) : 105.

¹⁵ Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 680.

movement is considered a crucial event in the party's eventual demise, as its massacring of innocent civilians seriously undermined its oft-cited claim of being the standard-bearer of the Mexican Revolution.¹⁶

Without delving too much into the dangerous waters of counterfactual speculation, it is possible that the government would have opted for a different strategy to suppress the movement if the forthcoming Olympics had not been in the back of decision-makers' minds. What is certain, however, is that when evaluating the government's response to the movement, top government officials such as Secretary of the Interior Luis Echeverría Álvarez and President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz did consider the effects that the movement could have on the upcoming athletic competition.¹⁷ For example, in a series of briefs sent to Washington D.C., the American Embassy in Mexico City observed that President Díaz Ordaz had "intense pressure" to resolve the dispute "because of Mexico's desire to project a good image internationally."¹⁸ As the summer wore on, U.S. intelligence officers' mention of the "Olympic deadline" to end the movement grew more frequent. They also noted that the "preparations for the Olympics [had] involved a tremendous investment" and that the government "expect[ed] it to pay off in prestige as well as in enlarged tourist receipts."¹⁹

The American Embassy's assessment of the considerable weight that the Olympics played in the government's decision-making process is validated by other accounts. Judith Hellman, a student that attended the rally in Tlatelolco, claimed that "the government was

¹⁶ Shannan Mattiace, "Social and Indigenous Movements in Mexico's Transition to Democracy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mexican Politics*, ed. Roderic Ai Camp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 408.

¹⁷ Claire Brewster and Keith Brewster, "The Mexican Student Movement of 1968: An Olympic Perspective," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 6 (2009): 815.

¹⁸ Thomas L. Hughes, "Mexican President's Decision to use Force Against Students may Exacerbate Differences," U.S. Department of State, August 29, 1968, 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

pressured to act quickly because of the impending Olympic Games” and hence was forced to conceive “a final solution to the problem it faced.”²⁰ The leaders of the student movement were also aware of the importance of the Olympics to the government. In September 1968, the National Strike Council (an organization of student leaders from various Mexican universities) declared that “time was on their side because the Mexican government had to show the International Olympic Committee that political stability could be maintained” leading up to the Olympics.²¹

President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s *Informe de Gobierno* on September 1, 1968 is the clearest demonstration that the impending Olympics played an important role in the government’s response to the student movement. In his opening remarks, the chief executive stressed Mexico’s obligation to host the games in an atmosphere of peace and stability. The president highlighted that organizing the Olympics was a commitment from Mexico to the international community, and that the country would not shirk under any circumstances. More indicative, however, was his comment that the government had been “excessively tolerant” of the students and “could no longer permit the breaking of the judicial order before the eyes of the world.”²² Whether it was pure coincidence, or an act of masterful rhetoric, Díaz Ordaz’s comment made the link between the student movement and the Olympics very clear – while there were many slogans associated with the Olympics, one of the most widely used was “*ante los ojos del mundo*” – “before the eyes of the world.”²³

²⁰ Judith Adler Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983): 182.

²¹ Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World*, 119.

²² Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, “IV Informe de Gobierno del Presidente Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos,” *Servicio de Investigación y Análisis del Congreso de la Unión*, September 1, 1968: 23.

²³ Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World*, 6.

At first, the degree to which the Olympics played a role in the governments' response to the student movement may seem striking and even exaggerated. After all, the Olympics are, in essence, an athletic competition. However, they meant so much to the government that it considered it necessary to use to force to suppress the student movement and prevent disturbances during the Olympics. If, as experts consider, the party signed its own death certificate on that October evening, people may wonder – justifiably – why the Olympic games played such an important role in that decision.

In an attempt to answer the question above, this thesis examines Mexico's Olympic project. By analyzing the reasons why Mexico sought to host the Olympic games, the process through which the bid was secured, and the preparations undertaken for the competition, this thesis finds that the Olympics were an integral part of the PRI's political project, and not a simple sporting competition. Through hosting the Olympic Games, the PRI sought to announce the undeniable social and economic progress that Mexico had achieved since the Revolution to the rest of the world. The PRI's vision of the role that the Olympics would play in its project is best explained through the metaphor of a graduation. In the same way that a college graduation celebrates the end of a period of preparation and marks the beginning of a new stage in one's life, the athletic competition was intended to celebrate the PRI's post-revolutionary project, and mark Mexico's transition into realm of industrialized nations. This vision of the Olympics was present throughout the duration of Mexico's Olympic project: from the initial motivation to seek the bid, to the arguments made to sway the vote in Mexico's favor, to the preparations process, and finally, in the government's response to the student movement.

The analysis proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 examines the reasons behind Mexico's decision to seek the Olympics, the individuals that led such efforts, and the reasons for which

Mexico won the right to host the games. The chapter finds that this effort was largely driven by politicians, and that it was motivated by a desire to showcase the effects of the *milagro mexicano* to the world. Despite the lack of an official rationale for the selection, evidence suggests that the IOC chose Mexico because of the economic and political stability that it had experienced in preceding decades, and because of the country's neutrality in international affairs. Chapter 3 explores the *Comite Olímpico Organizador*, the organization tasked by the government to undertake the necessary preparations to host the Olympic games. Through an examination of some of its most notable initiatives between 1963 (when the games were secured) and the opening ceremony in October 1968, this chapter argues that the Committee went to great lengths to craft a very specific image of Mexico as a developed, industrialized, and harmonious nation. The Committee's preparations demonstrate that the Mexican government was determined to use the Olympics to create a lasting and positive impression of the country and its people. Chapter 4 discusses three particularly notable crises that Mexico faced during its preparations for the Olympics. The chapter argues that the success of the Organizing Committee in dealing with these crises had an important psychological effect on the decision-makers when they encountered the fourth and final crisis, the student movement. Chapter 5 reflects on how the different developments throughout Mexico's Olympic project influenced the government's response to the student movement and serves as a conclusion.

Chapter 2 – Securing the Bid

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) held its 60th annual session in October 1963, in Baden-Baden, Germany. The IOC's most important task was to select the host city of the XIX Olympic Games from among the bids submitted by Buenos Aires, Detroit, Lyon and Mexico City. The results of the first voting round surprised the conference's attendees and observers abroad: Mexico City obtained 30 votes, while second place Detroit garnered just 14, followed by Lyon's 12 and Buenos Aires' 2. By obtaining an unusual majority in the first round, Mexico eliminated the need for a second round of voting and secured the right to host the 1968 Summer Olympic Games.²⁴

Mexico City's selection during the Baden-Baden conference was unexpected. Weeks after the vote, IOC President Avery Brundage commented that "[he] was still stunned at the success of Mexico."²⁵ Given the locations of past Olympic games (a list dominated by European nations) Brundage's surprise was justifiable – the outcome of the vote at Baden-Baden signified an important departure from the IOC's previous host-selection practices. When it won the right to host the Olympics, Mexico became the first developing, Spanish-speaking, and Latin-American country to be selected as an Olympic host.²⁶

Although Mexico City's success may have been unexpected, its selection was not unwarranted. This chapter examines the developments that led to Mexico becoming the first developing country to host the Olympic Games. The *milagro mexicano* is the unifying theme between the different facets of this process. The chapter begins by discussing how the

²⁴ David Goldblatt, *The Games: A Global History of the Olympics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 363.

²⁵ Claire Brewster and Keith Brewster, "The Rank Outsider: Mexico City's Bid for the 1968 Olympic Games", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 6 (2009): 748.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

socioeconomic advances that resulted from the PRI's national project provided the motivation for the Mexican government to seek the right to host the games. Then, it examines the individuals at the helm of Mexico's Olympic project and shows that the politicians that directly contributed to the *milagro mexicano* were also heavily involved in the organization of the Olympics. Lastly, the chapter analyzes the reasons for which Mexico won an overwhelming majority of votes at the Baden-Baden conference; chief among them was the economic and political stability provided by the PRI's political model.

Why did Mexico Seek the Bid?

A city's bid for the Olympic Games is motivated by a variety of reasons. Despite the intentions of Baron de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, the desire to celebrate athletic excellence is not chief among them.²⁷ The Olympics offer cities an opportunity to boost tourism, increase foreign investment, display national pride, and receive international media coverage; the Olympics are a means to an end. The ends are unique for each bid, but despite their singularity, they can be divided into material motives and symbolic motives.²⁸

The material motivations that drive an Olympic bid consist of tangible benefits brought about by preparing for, and hosting, the Olympic Games. These include the economic windfall caused by the influx of athletes and tourists, the modernization of the city's infrastructure through construction of sporting venues, and the 'olympic-facelift' – the beautification of certain parts of the city in the lead up to the athletic competition. Viewed this way, material motivations do not differ much from one bid to another – all potential host cities are attracted by the prospect of increased economic activity and infrastructure modernization, albeit to a different degree. Hence, one can learn a lot more about the reasons underlying a bid for the Olympics by focusing

²⁷ Goldblatt, *The Games*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 363.

on its symbolic motivations. In fact, the idea that hosting the Olympic games brings a net economic benefit to the host city – a once undisputed notion – is now subject of debate among economists and scholars.²⁹ The possibility that a country may not benefit economically from hosting the Olympics further highlights the preeminence of symbolic motives.

Symbolic motivations are markedly unique from one bid to another. The Olympics, with all the attention and media scrutiny that accompany a spectacle of such importance, are an effective platform to diffuse a message to domestic and international audiences. This message is unique for each city, and its content is largely affected by its respective country's history, its reality at the time of seeking the bid, and its ambitions for the future. For example, Nazi Germany used the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games as a powerful propaganda tool to make its brutal treatment of Jews and political opponents "seem benign."³⁰ In 1964, Japan used the Olympic Games in Tokyo to show the world that it had transitioned from military humiliation towards becoming agents of peace.³¹

Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's words during his 1968 presidential address suggest that Mexico's primary motivation for seeking and hosting the Olympic games was of a symbolic nature. In the speech, the president reflected upon his first days in office and mentioned that "the financial implications of hosting the games were causing [him] great concern." Ordaz continued by noting that "only after long discussions with leaders of political, economic, labor and financial institutions had the government committed itself to the project."³² In his personal diary, Avery Brundage reflected upon the discussions that Ordaz mentioned in his speech:

After making a detailed study and a careful financial estimate of the requirements, our statements were confirmed, and he decided to proceed. It was the humanitarian aspects of the Games and the

²⁹ James McBride, "The Economics of Hosting the Olympic Games", *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 2018.

³⁰ Goldblatt, *The Games*, 363.

³¹ Brewster and Brewster, "Mexico City 1968: Sombreros and Skyscrapers," 104.

³² Díaz Ordaz, "IV Informe de Gobierno del Presidente Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos," 14.

fine objectives of the Olympic Movement for national development and international goodwill, however, which had finally convinced the president.³³

Whether Díaz Ordaz was an ambassador of international goodwill and peace can be debated.

What is evident, however, is that given the lack of clear financial benefits to the nation, the Mexican government's decision to host the games must have been driven by something other than potential economic gains.

Similarly to Japan in 1964, Mexico City's hosting of the 1968 Olympic Games served as an announcement of the culmination of a long process of domestic transformation. Beginning in the 1940's, Mexico experienced unprecedented economic growth and international trading success thanks to the *desarrollo estabilizador* economic model. This set of policies diversified the economy, promoted industrialization, and increased the availability of capital. The oil industry, nationalized in 1938, boosted the government's revenues, and the domestic manufacturing sector benefited greatly from the country's import substitution policies.³⁴ This economic model allowed Mexico to transition from a mildly industrialized nation towards an emerging economic power in less than thirty years.³⁵

Mexico's post-war economic arrangements resulted in the *milagro mexicano* – a long period of industrial growth and prosperity. During this time, Mexico City was transformed through large-scale infrastructure projects – the capital became a symbol of the country's development, modernity, and the overall success of the PRI's political economy. However, despite Mexico's growing economic stature, its reputation remained one of political instability, laziness, and corruption.³⁶

³³ Claire Brewster and Keith Brewster, "Pride and Prejudice: Foreign Perceptions of Mexico as an Olympic Host," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 6 (2009): 766.

³⁴ Tello, "Notas sobre el Desarrollo Estabilizador," 66.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Goldblatt, *The Games*, 410.

In the early 1960's, Mexico's economic and political elite were eager for an opportunity that allowed them to showcase the results of the *milagro mexicano* and dispel the negative stereotypes that had long accompanied the country's national image. The Olympic Games presented an ideal opportunity to achieve both of these goals. Through hosting the Olympic Games, the PRI could commemorate its inimitable national project, present its successes to the world, and "re-brand not only the capital but an entire nation that they felt had not received due recognition for its achievements."³⁷

Who orchestrated Mexico's bid for the Olympics?

Mexico first expressed interest in obtaining the right to host the Olympic Games in 1948, when the Mexican Olympic Committee sent a telegram to the IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland to inquire about the host-selection process.³⁸ However, Mexico's Olympic project did not begin in earnest until Adolfo Lopez Mateos won the presidency in 1958. The evidence points to President Adolfo López Mateos as the true father of Mexico's Olympic project for three reasons. First, López Mateos' presidential style was characterized by a desire to raise the country's international prestige. This desire manifested itself through state visits by prominent foreign mandataries such as John F. Kennedy and Charles de Gaulle, and in the president's trips to Europe and East Asia to establish economic and political partnerships.³⁹ Second, López Mateos was an avid sports fan – he boxed regularly at a Mexico City sports club in his teenage years, and as president, was directly involved in sports regulation policy.⁴⁰ Third, according to Lopez Mateos' life-long personal driver Gabriel Castillo, the president discussed his desire for

³⁷ Brewster and Brewster, "The Rank Outsider: Mexico City's Bid for the 1968 Olympic Games", 753.

³⁸ Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, "Hacia México 68. Pedro Ramírez Vázquez y el proyecto olímpico," *Secuencia* 56 (2003): 41.

³⁹ Michael S. Werner, *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2001): 223.

⁴⁰ Clemente Díaz de la Vega, *Adolfo López Mateos: Vida y Obra* (Toluca: Editorial Terra Nova, 1986): 110.

Mexico to host the Olympics or the World Cup as early as 1952, when he was Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare. Moreover, Lopez Mateos considered winning an Olympic bid as a prize conferred by the international community upon the host city's government. He was a firm believer that the IOC did not award the games to a "country's sportsmen or the county's sporting federation, but to the country's government."⁴¹

Most candidacies for the Olympic Games, and the subsequent efforts to organize the competition, are directed by a mix of local businessmen and government officials.⁴² Mexico's Olympic project departed from this tradition – it was a small group of politicians that orchestrated Mexico City's efforts to obtain, host, and prepare for the Olympic Games. This unique aspect of Mexico's Olympic project is of great importance to the argument that Mexico sought the Games as a way to showcase the results of the PRI's post-revolutionary project. Given that the individuals that steered the country through the *milagro mexicano* also directed Mexico's efforts to obtain and host the Olympic games, it is not only plausible, but also likely, that their actions were motivated by a desire for Mexico to obtain due recognition for achievements that they were directly responsible for.

Mexico's Olympic project was directed by two different organizational bodies: the Preparatory Council on Mexico's Candidacy for the Site of the XIX Olympic Games (henceforth 'Council') and the *Comité Olímpico Organizador* (henceforth 'Committee'). The Council was charged with compiling the "White Book" – Mexico City's official petition for the games – and submitting this document to the IOC. The Council was dissolved after the bid was submitted, and was replaced by the Committee. The Committee's responsibilities included lobbying to ensure Mexico would be awarded the right to host the games, and directing the preparations in case the

⁴¹ Interview with Gabriel Castillo, May 8, 2020.

⁴² Brewster and Brewster, "The Rank Outsider: Mexico City's Bid for the 1968 Olympic Games," 753.

bid was successful. Despite differences in their purpose and temporality, these organizations shared one notable characteristic – they were composed mainly of PRI politicians.

The Council was composed by President Adolfo Lopez Mateos, Minister of the Interior Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Minister of Public Education Jaime Torres Bodet, Minister of Finance and Public Credit Antonio Ortiz Mena, Minister of the Presidency Donato Miranda Fonseca and Chief of the Federal District (Mexico City) Ernesto P. Uruchurtu.⁴³ Some of the names in this list belong to individuals whose contributions were integral to making the *milagro mexicano* possible. For example, Antonio Ortíz Mena – the architect of *desarrollo estabilizador* – was in charge of the Council’s financial matters, and Jaime Torres Bodet – central figure of the PRI’s public education efforts – was the Council’s operations director.⁴⁴ The names, titles, and faces of each of these individuals are prominently featured on the first page of the famous “White Book” sent to the IOC.⁴⁵

The Council registered Mexico City’s candidacy for the site of the XIX Olympic Games with the IOC on December 7, 1962.⁴⁶ In accordance with IOC guidelines, the Council submitted a comprehensive document (White Book) where it outlined the reasons why Mexico deserved to host the competition and the specific steps the country would take if the petition were to be accepted. The document also contains responses to a set of questions that the IOC requires all prospective host cities to answer. The most telling response is the one provided to the following question: “Are there any laws, customs, or regulations in your city or your country that would limit, restrict, or interfere with the games in any way?”⁴⁷ The council responded:

⁴³ Mexican Olympic Committee, *Mexico Petitions for the XIX Olympic Games*, (Mexico City, 1963) 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

No, on the contrary, Mexico enjoys the best legal, social, and administrative conditions for a proper staging of the Olympic Games. Mexico City's position, with its ranking abroad as one of the ten most important capitals in the world, due to its modern municipal services, its growing cultural activity and its spirit of a city open to the highest and noblest ideas, provides abundant material from which to select many arguments in favor of Mexico City as aspirant to the site of Games.⁴⁸

The Council's response, while certainly influenced by the need to paint Mexico and its capital in the best possible light, reflects pride towards the country's political and economic accomplishments as well as confidence in its ability to host a world-class event.

Apart from answering the IOC's questionnaire, members of the Preparatory Council also had to take specific actions within their respective government agencies to enable Mexico to formally request the right to host the Olympic Games. For example, Minister of the Interior Gustavo Díaz Ordaz coordinated with Mexican immigration authorities to grant free and unrestricted entry into Mexico to athletes, officials, members of teams, judges, and IOC officials. Díaz Ordaz communicated the success of his immigration initiative to the IOC in a letter where the quote "*Sufragio Efectivo, No Reelección*" featured prominently in the letterhead.⁴⁹ This quote was President Francisco I. Madero's campaign slogan in 1910, when he competed against dictator Porfirio Díaz for the presidency. Madero became one of the integral characters of the Mexican Revolution, and his campaign slogan became synonymous with the movement's pro-democracy efforts. The fact that Madero's quote was included in the letter to the IOC demonstrates the extent to which the PRI portrayed itself as the standard-bearer of the Revolution, and also highlights the link between the Olympics and the government's desire to celebrate its state-building process that had materialized the promises of the Revolution.

⁴⁸ Mexican Olympic Committee, *Mexico Petitions for the XIX Olympic Games*, XXI.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Senator Manuel Moreno Sánchez's coordination of the legislative branch is another example of the work that members of the Preparatory Council had to complete before Mexico sent its request to the IOC. Senator Moreno Sánchez was Chairman of the Permanent Committee of the Congress of the Union, which represented the Legislative Power of Mexico during constitutional adjournments of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.⁵⁰ As such, Moreno Sánchez had the power to speak on behalf of Mexico's legislature and sent a letter to the IOC informing it that his branch of government fully supported and approved the executive branch's Olympic project. Diaz Ordaz's and Moreno Sanchez's actions suggest that while the Council's existence was short lived, it conducted enough work for its members to feel a sense of personal connection to the games.

The Council was dissolved after it submitted Mexico City's petition to the IOC in late 1962. The Council was replaced by the Olympic Organizing Committee, which was created via presidential decree on May 28, 1963. While this body had a much more numerous composition than the Council it replaced (it had approximately 7000 individuals in its payroll in September 1968) its hierarchy was also composed by individuals that were integral to the *milagro mexicano*.⁵¹ A more in-depth examination of the Organizing Committee can be found in the next chapter.

Why was Mexico City Chosen?

The IOC's host selection process requires candidate cities to receive a majority of votes during the IOC annual session to be awarded the right to host the Olympic Games. All votes for this process are cast through secret ballots, and the IOC does not publish records of its sessions.

⁵⁰ Mexican Olympic Committee, *Mexico Petitions for the XIX Olympic Games*, XIX.

⁵¹ Comité Organizador de los Juegos de la XIX Olimpiada. *Official Report of the Organizing Committee of the Games of the XIX Olympiad*, vol. IV (Mexico City, 1969) 103.

However, even in the absence of an official rationale justifying Mexico City's selection, the Mexican bid's margin of victory can be explained by two main factors: Mexico's neutrality in the context of Cold War politics and the PRI's political model.

Despite the Olympic founder's desire for the Olympic movement to remain insulated from politics, the IOC's 60th Session was heavily influenced by the developments of the Cold War. The meeting took place in October 1963 with major international events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion, the construction of the Berlin Wall, and the Cuban Missile Crisis still fresh in the memories of the IOC's member delegations.⁵² Hence, IOC members from the Soviet bloc were extremely unlikely to support bids from cities in NATO countries.⁵³ This significantly weakened the candidacy of Detroit (United States) and Lyon (France).

The geopolitical context at the time of voting made Buenos Aires and Mexico City the two frontrunners to secure the bid. Mexico and Argentina embraced similar policies of non-alignment in international affairs, which made the candidacies from each country's respective capital city an attractive option for IOC members looking to cast a politically neutral vote. However, while the similarity between Mexico and Argentina's foreign policy may have brought their candidacies to the forefront, it was differences in their domestic policies that shifted the scales in Mexico City's favor.

Mexico and Argentina experienced a diametrically opposite political culture and domestic situation in the decade prior to the 1963 conference in Baden-Baden. While Mexico enjoyed unprecedented economic growth and industrial development, Argentina experienced a series of attempted coups, economic stagnation, high inflation, and critical levels of

⁵² Rodríguez Kuri, "Ganar la sede. La política internacional de los Juegos Olímpicos de 1968," 250.

⁵³ Brewster and Brewster, "The Rank Outsider: Mexico City's Bid for the 1968 Olympic Games," 764.

unemployment.⁵⁴ Argentina's situation in the 1950's and 1960's epitomized the negative stereotype of an unstable and corrupt Latin American nation. On the other hand, Mexico had a long history of civilian government and respect for the electoral mechanisms established by the Constitution. The disparities between Argentina and Mexico's domestic situation provided a lethal blow to Buenos Aires's aspirations, and made Mexico City the most prudent choice for members of the IOC.

The stability produced by the PRI's political model was not the only way in which the PRI's regime contributed to Mexico City's victory in Baden-Baden. The particular structure of Mexico City's local government, which at the time was directed by a presidential appointee, was an important factor to ensure IOC members that Mexico had the necessary financial backing to successfully host the games.⁵⁵ With Mexico City's administration virtually under the president's direct control, IOC members were assured that Mexico's federal government would act as the ultimate guarantor and executor of the Olympic Games. This was markedly different from prior Olympic editions, where the host city's local government played the leading role. Additionally, the concentration of power in the hands of the president ensured that there would be no budgetary disputes between different levels and branches of government – an issue that had frustrated the preparatory process of prior Olympic Games.⁵⁶

The Mexican media attributed Mexico City's success in Baden-Baden to two factors: the country's political stability and Lopez Mateos' personal character. *El Universal*, a prominent newspaper based in Mexico City, reflected on the IOC's vote in the following manner:

Mexico managed to win...because our nation has clearly been able to demonstrate that it is a progressive nation enjoying a totally stable political situation. For this reason, the triumph does not

⁵⁴ Brewster and Brewster, "The Rank Outsider: Mexico City's Bid for the 1968 Olympic Games," 764.

⁵⁵ Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, "El Otro 68: Política y estilo en la organización de los Juegos Olímpicos de la Ciudad de México", *Relaciones* 76, no. 19 (1998): 120.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

belong exclusively to Mexican sport: it belongs to all the active forces in Mexico, beginning with the President, who in addition to having always supported sporting initiatives, has been singled out for the outstanding nature of his domestic and international policies...⁵⁷

This excerpt highlights the importance that Mexico's respect for constitutional procedures had on the bid's success. More tellingly, however, *El Universal's* mention of the president suggests that Lopez Mateos was directly involved in the lobbying efforts to secure the bid. This means that the president – who became head of the Olympic Organizing Committee after his term ended – was involved in all stages and aspects of Mexico's Olympic project. Lopez Mateos' ubiquitous presence demonstrates his predilection for sports, and is also an indication of the extent to which the PRI's regime concentrated power in the hands of the executive.⁵⁸ Similarly to how the president was often the initiator of legislative projects and had enormous leverage over the other constitutional organs, Lopez Mateos initiated the Olympic project and oversaw it until his health no longer permitted him to do so.⁵⁹ Given Mexico's model of executive leadership in the 20th century – where the president served as the pivot of the government machinery – it is no surprise that President Lopez Mateos also acted as the centerpiece of the Olympic project.

President Adolfo López Mateos' comments after Mexico was awarded the 1968 Olympics show that the IOC's reasons for choosing Mexico were the very same reasons that led Mexico to seek the bid in the first place: economic success and political stability. The president claimed that Mexico City's success at Baden-Baden was “a worldwide acknowledgement of the strength of the Mexican people in maintaining and raising their international standing” and a “recognition of the economic and political stability” that the country enjoyed.⁶⁰ Lopez Mateos' comments show that the PRI viewed the Olympics as a graduation ceremony for Mexico; the

⁵⁷ Brewster and Brewster, “The Rank Outsider: Mexico City's Bid for the 1968 Olympic Games,” 750.

⁵⁸ Benito Nacif, “The Fall of the Dominant Presidency: Lawmaking Under Divided Government in Mexico,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mexican Politics*, ed. Roderic Ai Camp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 235.

⁵⁹ Rodríguez Kurí, “El otro ‘68: Política y estilo en la organización de los Juegos Olímpicos de la Ciudad de México,” 115.

⁶⁰ Brewster and Brewster, “The Rank Outsider: Mexico City's Bid for the 1968 Olympic Games,” 754.

Olympics would serve to celebrate past achievements, but also to mark the beginning of a new era – an era where Mexico competed with top economic powers for the world’s tourism and investment.

Chapter 3 – Preparing for the Games

Mexico's preparations for the Olympic Games began shortly after the culmination of the IOC's conference in Baden-Baden. The process lasted approximately five years from October 1963 all the way through the competition's closing ceremony on October 27, 1968. The seamless transition from the process of securing the bid to the process of preparing for the Olympics was possible because of president Lopez Mateos' fervent desire to host the games and his confidence that Mexico City would ultimately be selected host – nearly five months before Mexico won the right to host the competition, on May 28, 1963, Lopez Mateos founded the *Comité Olímpico Organizador* (Olympic Organizing Committee) via presidential decree.⁶¹ This meant that by the time the Baden-Baden conference took place, Mexico already had a fully formed organization specifically created to oversee the arduous task of preparing to host the Olympic games. From this moment onwards, the Committee became the main steward of Mexico's Olympic project.

Foreign criticisms and doubts regarding Mexico's ability to successfully organize and host the Olympics surfaced within weeks of its victory at Baden-Baden. Some of the most notable comments included doubts about Mexico's ability to afford the games, worries that the installations would not be ready in time, and even a suggestion that the country ought to give up the responsibility of hosting the competition because of its 'gross ineptitude' to organize an event of such magnitude.⁶² These comments demonstrate some of the negative stereotypes that afflicted Mexico's international image, and provide important context to understand the Committee's work in the five years between the Baden-Baden vote and the opening ceremony.

The Committee's commitment to the idea that the Olympics were an ideal opportunity for Mexico to rid itself from pervasive negative stereotypes was largely driven by its president,

⁶¹ Mexican Olympic Committee, *Mexico Petitions for the XIX Olympic Games*, IX.

⁶² Brewster and Brewster, "Pride and Prejudice: Foreign Perceptions of Mexico as an Olympic Host," 764.

Pedro Ramirez Vázquez. Shortly before the Olympics began, Ramirez Vázquez reflected about all that was at stake for Mexico in hosting such a high-profile competition and said that:

“The rest of the world has taken a long time to forget an image of Mexico, that of a figure covered by a poncho and a sombrero sleeping soundly beneath the shadow of a tree. The new international image of Mexico is being created this Olympic Year. It is, of course, entirely different, but by no means is an effort being made to create a false image.”⁶³

This quote encapsulates the philosophy underpinning the more than five-years of preparations that the Committee directed. As this chapter shows, the Committee actions were driven by two main goals – to promote a positive image of Mexico and to eradicate non-desirable elements of Mexican culture. The chapter first examines the Committee’s early stages and analyzes the reasons for which Pedro Ramirez Vázquez was chosen as the Committee’s president. Then, the Cultural Olympiad is discussed as an example of the Committee’s attempt to craft an image of Mexico as a mature and developed country. The chapter ends by discussing the Committee’s public education campaign and its attempt to prevent street selling during the Olympics as an example of the organizers resolve to suppress non-desirable elements of Mexican culture.

The Committee’s Early Stages

The Olympic Organizing Committee was formed in 1963, but it was not until 1965 that preparations for the competition began in earnest. The Committee’s work during this two-year period consisted mostly of inspecting existing sports facilities and determining which venues could be remodeled and which ones needed to be built entirely from scratch.⁶⁴ The Committee’s low-intensity work during this time was due to the fact that the Olympics were more than four years away. However, Mexico’s upcoming presidential elections in July 1964 also played an important role. The incumbent president, Adolfo Lopez Mateos, refrained from filling the top

⁶³ Luis Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2014), 1.

⁶⁴ Brewster and Brewster, “Pride and Prejudice: Foreign Perceptions of Mexico as an Olympic Host,” 765.

offices of the Organizing Committee because the competition would take place during the next *sexenio*. Therefore, the Committee had vacancies in various top positions during its first two years of existence, which inhibited its ability to conduct meaningful preparatory work.

Lopez Mateos' decision to allow his successor to decide the composition of the Committee's hierarchy was not well received by international observers. One month after Gustavo Díaz Ordaz assumed office in December 1964, Art Lentz – the executive secretary of the United States Olympic Committee – expressed concern that the change in government would complicate Mexico's preparatory process. He told the *Detroit News* that:

The problem this time, like it is so often when you try to count on Latin-American countries, is a shift in the government. Mexico has a new president and from what we can gather, the guy who was promoting the Olympics in Mexico, Gen. José Clark Flores, is now out in left field someplace and things are really messed up.⁶⁵

Given that the 1964 presidential elections happened in accordance with constitutional procedures, it may seem odd for Lentz to mention the “new president” and the “shift in government” among his worries. The reason for Lentz's concern was not that the shift had been occasioned by a coup or a similar attempt to usurp power. His concern stemmed from the turnover in personnel at all levels of government that happened at the beginning of each *sexenio*. Mexico's political model in the 20th century relied heavily on patronage, and once an individual reached the top, he was expected to repay those that had helped him get there – namely through appointing them to different government posts.⁶⁶ Hence, Lentz's preoccupation, while alarmist to a certain extent, found justification in the fact that government officials and career civil servants were completely renewed at the beginning of each *sexenio*. This practice impeded continuity, and in doing so, could potentially frustrate the preparation process.

⁶⁵ Brewster and Brewster, “Pride and Prejudice: Foreign Perceptions of Mexico as an Olympic Host,” 766.

⁶⁶ Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World*, 47.

On June 28, 1965, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz took an action that signaled Mexico's commitment and ability to organize a flawless Olympic games – he named Adolfo Lopez Mateos president of the Olympic Organizing Committee. In doing so, Díaz Ordaz gave due recognition to an individual that had been integral to Mexico's efforts to secure the bid and repaid Lopez Mateos for selecting him as the PRI's candidate for the 1964 presidential elections. This decision also helped assuage the international community's concerns. Lopez Mateos was a shrewd statesman with an international reputation and naming him the steward of Mexico's Olympic project demonstrated the country's commitment to making the 1968 Olympics a successful athletic competition.

Lopez Mateos' tenure as the Committee's president lasted less than one year. The former chief executive asked for an indefinite leave of absence from his role in October 1966 due to deteriorating health.⁶⁷ This left the Committee's presidency vacant, and Díaz Ordaz had to find a successor quickly. On the same day that Lopez Mateos resigned his post, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez – a self-proclaimed outsider to the world of sport – was announced as president of the Olympic Organizing Committee.⁶⁸

The New Steward

Pedro Ramírez Vázquez was a prominent architect and public figure, but unlike Adolfo López Mateos, he was not an avid sports fan. When Gustavo Díaz Ordaz designated him as the Committee's president, Ramírez Vázquez famously told the chief executive that he had never watched the Olympic Games, that he didn't know anything about sports administration, and that he had barely exercised throughout his life.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Ramírez Vázquez's background made

⁶⁷ Rodríguez Kuri, "Hacia México 68. Pedro Ramírez Vázquez y el proyecto olímpico," 38.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Tania Ragasol. *Diseñando México 68: una identidad olímpica*. (Ciudad de México: Landucci Editores, 2008) 25.

him a worthy successor to the former president. Prior to his involvement in the Committee, Ramírez Vázquez had been the lead architect of various large scale public infrastructure works. This gave him the reputation of a “dynamic leader with a proven record of driving ambitious projects to successful conclusions,” and meant he was familiar with the government’s administrative culture and decision-making processes.⁷⁰ Moreover, Ramírez Vázquez also had intricate knowledge of Mexico City’s terrain and infrastructure needs; in 1958 he completed a diagnostic study for president Adolfo Lopez Mateos where he included recommendations for the capital’s urban development.⁷¹ This project placed Ramírez Vázquez very close to holding governmental office – he was among the leading contenders for Mexico City’s regency, but Ernesto P. Uruchurtu was ultimately re-appointed over him.

While Pedro Ramírez Vázquez never held elected public office, he was no stranger to the PRI’s goals and philosophy. Ramírez Vázquez was an integral part of the government’s efforts to expand public education to marginalized areas – he developed a revolutionary modular design for classrooms in rural areas which could be built with prefabricated materials. More than 35,000 modules of such kind were built between 1958-1964. Moreover, Ramírez Vázquez was also the regime’s ‘go-to’ architect for different kinds of projects. For example, Ramírez Vázquez was the chief designer of Mexico’s national pavilions for the Expo ’58 in Brussels and the 1962 and 1964 World’s Fairs in Seattle and New York. This meant that he had experience with crafting an image of Mexico for international consumption. Additionally, the PRI also relied on Ramírez Vázquez to plan and execute major public infrastructure projects, such as the medicine building at the National Autonomous University, Mexico City’s museums of anthropology and modern

⁷⁰ Brewster and Brewster, “Pride and Prejudice: Foreign Perceptions of Mexico as an Olympic Host,” 766.

⁷¹ Rodríguez Kuri, “Hacia México 68. Pedro Ramírez Vázquez y el proyecto olímpico,” 43.

art, and the foreign relations secretariat in Tlatelolco.⁷² These publicly-funded buildings were intended for collective use and to serve as spaces for the development and promotion of education, public health, and culture. So, while Ramírez Vázquez may not have been directly involved in the formation of the regime's values, he was directly involved in the execution of the policies inspired by such values.

Despite not being a formal party member, Ramírez Vázquez held the same vision for the Olympics as the politicians that secured the bid. In an interview, the Committee's president stated that "of the least importance are the Olympic competitions; the records fade away, but the image of a country does not."⁷³ Ramírez Vázquez saw the Olympic Games, first and foremost, as an opportunity to display Mexico's development to the world – the athletics were relegated to the background.

Ramírez Vázquez was always blunt when expressing his vision of the Olympics as an advertisement opportunity; the same holds true for his attitude when discussing *what* he wanted to showcase. In an interview he said that:

people already know all about the folkloric Mexico, the scenic Mexico and its ancient origins. But now, Mexico is beginning to be recognized for its political and economic stability, the strongest in Latin America; yet no one knows the high levels of efficiency and technical expertise that Mexico has achieved. This is the Mexico that we wish to demonstrate through the medium of the Olympics."⁷⁴

This statement makes clear that Ramírez Vázquez's actions as Committee director were motivated by a desire to fulfill the vision held by the originators of the Olympic project – to use the Olympic games to showcase Mexico's undisputed economic success and social development.

⁷² Luis Castañeda, "Beyond Tlatelolco: Design, Media, and Politics at Mexico '68," *Grey Room* 40, (2010): 101.

⁷³ Goldblatt, *The Games*, 469.

⁷⁴ Brewster and Brewster, "Pride and Prejudice: Foreign Perceptions of Mexico as an Olympic Host," 765.

Pedro Ramírez Vázquez served as Committee president for the remainder of Mexico's Olympic project, allowing him to imbue his personal vision for the Olympics into the Committee's actions. Apart from the customary preparations associated with hosting a global-sports competition, such as building sporting facilities and residences for athletes, the Committee's particular vision of the Olympics required it to engage in non-traditional preparations. In its attempt to showcase Mexico as a mature and refined nation, the Committee created the Cultural Olympiad, a nine-month cultural program in the lead up to the competition's inauguration and hired world renowned designers to craft the competition's graphic identity. On the other hand, in order to hide non-desirable sights and behavior from tourists' view, the Committee created a mass-public education campaign. The following subsections individually examine each of these initiatives.

Cultural Olympiad

The *Olimpiada Cultural* was a series of more than 1500 events where countries competing in the upcoming Olympics sent a delegation to display their unique customs, ideas, and lifestyle. This program ran for nine months before the games began, and it attracted top performers and artists from all continents of the world. The program was conceived by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez as an attempt to restore the cultural tradition that characterized the ancient Olympic Games. Prior to Baron de Coubertin's reformulation of the Olympics as a competition primarily focused on sports, the Olympic Games in ancient Greece featured a cultural festival where poets, sculptors, and playwrights had an opportunity to display their work.⁷⁵ Ramírez Vázquez's initiative sought to rekindle the cultural aspect of the Olympics, and in doing so, he

⁷⁵ Goldblatt, *The Games*, 466.

allowed the organizers to advertise Mexico 1968 as the edition of the Olympics that re-established culture as a key part of the games.⁷⁶

While previous editions of the modern Olympic Games included cultural programming, Mexico City's *Olimpiada Cultural* represented a significant increase in the size, scope, and duration of the games' cultural component. This ambitious undertaking forced the Mexican government to incur additional expenses that did not directly relate to the core essence of the Olympics – athletic competitions. When asked by Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to justify the time and cost required to organize the nine-month cultural festival, Ramirez Vázquez responded that the event was intended to honor the PRI's humanist ideals, and pacifist tradition.⁷⁷

The explanation of the Cultural Olympics as homage to the PRI is plausible, but a more practical justification exists – the decision to expand the purpose of the games beyond athleticism can also be interpreted as a form of reputational insurance 'purchased' by the Organizing Committee. Preoccupied by the prospect of Mexican athletes being ridiculed by the sporting world's elite – a justifiable worry given Mexico's poor performances in past Olympics – the Committee ensured that Mexico would earn a "victory" by displaying its rich cultural heritage to the world.⁷⁸ With the cultural program now an integral part of the Olympic games, failure by Mexicans to perform athletically would not be taken as a complete disaster. Even President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz seemed preoccupied by the potential negative effects to Mexico's reputation (and consequently to his administration) that would result from Mexican athletes' inability to win any medals. In his September 1, 1968 Presidential Address, the chief executive mentioned that:

⁷⁶ Castañeda, *Spectacular Mexico*, 10.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 14.

⁷⁸ Brewster and Brewster, "Mexico City 1968: Sombreros and Skyscrapers," 110.

It would not be correct to think that because the games will be celebrated in our own home, we are obligated to win numerous events, and that if we do not obtain any victories, it will mean that we have performed poorly...we must always bear in mind the Olympic motto, that it is always more important to participate than it is to win.⁷⁹

While the organizers could not control the outcome of the different athletic competitions, they could influence the public's understanding of what success at the Olympics looked like. The Committee's extensive cultural program, which consisted of more than 1500 individual events (far more than the number of athletic competitions) sent the message that the cultural component of the games was at least equally important as the athletic component, if not superior. Moreover, the different cultural events, which took place throughout 1968, were an opportunity for the organizers and Mexico City's residents to gain organizational experience in a low-stakes environment.

The Cultural Olympiad also served to promote Mexico's noninterventionist stance in global affairs. While cultural programs at other editions of the games had focused solely on exhibiting the host nation's customs and traditions, Mexico gave all nations an opportunity to display their unique cultural heritage. In the same way that Mexico's actions in foreign affairs demonstrated a profound tolerance for political differences (such as being one of the few nations that had maintained diplomatic relations with the United States and Cuba), the Committee demonstrated tolerance and appreciation of the world's cultural diversity by inviting all nations to showcase their best scientific, artistic, and folkloric expressions. In fact, the Cultural Olympiad enabled the Vatican to participate in the Olympic Games for the first (and only) time. The city state took part in the Cultural Olympiad by lending Pindar's Odes for display at one of the many exhibitions comprising the program.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Díaz Ordaz, "IV Informe de Gobierno del Presidente Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos," 21.

⁸⁰ Comité Organizador de los Juegos de la XIX Olimpiada, *Artistic and Cultural Program of the Games of the XIX Olympiad*. (Mexico City, 1967) 14.

Despite initial doubts regarding the willingness of other nations to send a cultural delegation to Mexico, the Cultural Olympiad attracted ninety-seven participating countries.⁸¹ More importantly, the delegations were comprised by some of the world's top artists and performers. For example, the United States sent Duke Ellington and Dave Brubeck while France sent a ballet company directed by renowned choreographer Maurice Béjart.⁸² This was the first time that such accomplished individuals performed in Mexico, and the public's excitement throughout the program showed the world that Mexico appreciated cultural events and had become a worthy destination for the world's top performers.

Ramírez Vázquez's initiative was an effective medium to show Mexico's neutrality and its appreciation for culture, but most importantly, it succeeded in its aim to distinguish Mexico's Olympic Games from all other editions of the competition. Reflecting on the Cultural Olympiad after the games, Avery Brundage commended the program by saying: "In the history of the Olympic Games, it will always be remembered that Mexico, a relatively young country, first opened the way to a return to the purity, beauty and simplicity of the ancient Olympic Games."⁸³

Graphic Design Campaign

The main principle underlying Pedro Ramirez Vazquez's actions as president of the Organizing Committee was that the Olympic Games should create a positive and long-lasting impression of Mexico among the world's audience. Ramirez Vázquez and the rest of the Committee chose to portray an image of Mexico as a nation that embraced its rich pre-Hispanic heritage, but simultaneously continued its development towards a modern and industrialized nation.

⁸¹ Comité Organizador de los Juegos de la XIX Olimpiada, *Official Report of the Organizing Committee of the Games of the XIX Olympiad*, vol. IV, 8.

⁸² Ragasol, *Diseñando México* 68, 25.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 8.

The syncretism that the Committee chose to highlight is represented in the logo of the 1968 games, which was designed by Lance Wyman. The logo incorporates black and white patterns found in Huichol artwork – an ethnic tribe in Western Mexico – with elements of the Op Art movement that was gaining popularity in the Western world in the late 1960s.⁸⁴ The mix of pre-Hispanic and modern artistic techniques resulted in an internationally renowned logo in which the word ‘Mexico’, the number ‘68’ and the five-ringed Olympic symbol come together via concentric lines. This logo is also a testament to Ramirez Vazquez’s adherence to the vision of the Olympics established by the initiators of Mexico’s Olympic project – the bid sent to the IOC described Mexico City as “a modern metropolis faithful to its ancient spirit”, and that description is perfectly encapsulated in Wyman’s design.⁸⁵

Ramirez Vázquez and the Organizing Committee used graphic design for other purposes as well. For example, the Committee addressed concerns of looming violence in Mexico City (which the IOC became particularly worried about after a brawl at a boxing match in 1966) by making images of a white peace dove visible throughout many parts of the city.⁸⁶ Ramírez Vázquez negotiated with advertising companies to replace existing commercial ads with images of the white dove. This campaign began nearly seven months before the inauguration of the games, which meant that the city was replete with state-sponsored peace-promoting images as the 1968 student movement developed. Apart from providing the backdrop for ironic images (a famous photograph from July 1968 shows a military tank in the streets with a massive white dove banner in the background), the peace campaign may have also contributed to the escalation of tensions between the government and protesters – this initiative was yet another example

⁸⁴ Brewster and Brewster, “Pride and Prejudice: Foreign Perceptions of Mexico as an Olympic Host,” 770.

⁸⁵ Mexican Olympic Committee, *Mexico Petitions for the XIX Olympic Games*, 7.

⁸⁶ Keith Brewster, “Teaching Mexicans How to Behave: Public Education on the Eve of the Olympics,” *Journal of the Society for Latin American Studies* 29, no.1 (2010): 56.

government's focus on crafting an artificially embellished image of Mexico for international consumption while simultaneously neglecting its domestic situation.

The Committee also used its popular design campaign to turn attention away from certain impoverished parts of Mexico's capital. In February 1968, an Organizing Committee member informed one of his counterparts at the *Departamento del Distrito Federal* that "at Rio Churubusco [a major avenue in Mexico City where various Olympic venues were located] there [were] various shanty towns that [would] give a depressing image to the tourists and athletes."⁸⁷ The organizers' response was to 'sanitize' these impoverished dwellings by providing buckets of paint for inhabitants to paint their façades in the "same color palette as the Olympic branding campaign."⁸⁸ The organizers claimed that the purpose of this initiative was to create a sense of harmony between the buildings in Avenida Churubusco's roadside and the Olympic venues in this same street. However, the fact that the Committee only provided paint to the shanty town's residents and did not do the same for other edifications suggests that the true purpose was to hide the impoverished conditions in which many of Mexico City's residents lived.

Educating the Citizenry

The Organizing Committee's resolve to present Mexico in the best possible light meant that its beautification campaign went beyond the usual polishing and spiffing up of public spaces and extended into the Mexican population itself. The Committee went to great lengths to ensure that foreigners' perception of Mexico was consistent with the image that the games sought to promote – that of a developed and modernized nation in which all citizens had a decent living standard. This meant that it was not enough to simply paint over impoverished areas with the

⁸⁷ Luis Castañeda, "Choreographing the Metropolis: Networks of Circulation and Power in Olympic Mexico," *Journal of Design History* 25, no. 3 (2012): 288.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Olympic color palette, it was also necessary to remove beggars and informal merchants off the street, and organizers had to educate the public about the appropriate modes of interacting with foreign visitors.

The Committee removed the unsightly citizens and beggars from the streets in collaboration with the DDF. In October 1967, the capital city's government passed by-laws prohibiting street selling in certain parts of the city.⁸⁹ While the decree did not make any specific references to the upcoming Olympics, the fact that the law only applied to parts of the city with a high concentration of hotels and to areas near the Olympic stadium suggests that this measure was specifically taken as preparation for the Olympic Games. Moreover, this measure is a demonstration of the aforementioned advantage that Mexico's highly centralized political system gave to organizers. The passage of such a law, which in all likelihood was directly suggested by Organizing Committee, would have been more complicated in a political model where such decisions require deliberation and approval by a legislative assembly. The Organizing Committee was especially proud of this measure, to the extent that it discussed some of its results in the official report of the Olympics, which was published after the games. The report mentioned that:

In the not too distant past, a great variety of peddlers, hawkers and pitchmen – never difficult to spot because of the large crowds they attracted – made their living in Mexico City's many plazas and parks. These elusive itinerants are now only found at small town fairs and circuses, and today people fill the plazas and parks in search of public attractions of a different nature: plays sponsored by the National Institute of Fine Arts, poetry readings, concerts, ballets, recitals, painting exhibitions and lectures – things that enrich the cultural life of Mexican people.⁹⁰

This passage demonstrates two of the Committee's priorities – to hide citizens whose demeanor was not consistent with the image of a modern and developed nation, and to promote cultural

⁸⁹ Keith Brewster, "Teaching Mexicans How to Behave: Public Education on the Eve of the Olympics," 50.

⁹⁰ Organizing Committee of the Games of the XIX Olympiad, *Official Report of the Organizing Committee of the Games of the XIX Olympiad*, vol. I, 189.

appreciation. While the Committee's claim that street sellers disappeared almost entirely is hard to prove, its claim that Mexico City experienced a flourishing of cultural activity towards the late 1960's is true. However, this was not a permanent change in attitude towards art and culture, but a result of the more than 1500 events that comprised the nine-month Cultural Olympiad.

The government's prohibition of informal commercial activity in areas with high tourist density signaled its willingness to prioritize self-image over the well-being of its citizens. However, this was not the only measure of such kind. During a meeting of the Chamber of Deputies, Representative Francisco Ortíz Mendoza raised concerns regarding newspaper reports that slum clearances were taking place to remove them from the sight of foreign visitors. The government did not explicitly associate this measure with the Olympics, but Ortiz Mendoza noted that "these actions [were] concerned less for the poor conditions in which people live and more by what such a sight [would say] about Mexico to foreign visitors."⁹¹ While this was not the first time in which Mexico's Olympic project prioritized the country's international reputation over the well-being of its citizens (consider the Committee's campaign to provide paint to shanty town residents), the events of October 2, 1968 would sadly demonstrate that it would not be the last.

The PRI's association with the Mexican Revolution helps understand why the Committee went to such great lengths to hide the inequality and the poverty. Since the creation of the party, politicians often claimed that the PRI had helped materialize the Revolution's goals of eradicating class and ethnic tensions. Moreover, the PRI often boasted about the effectiveness of its social welfare programs. Hence, inviting people to a country with such stark inequality would have been a self-defeating blow.

⁹¹ Claire Brewster and Keith Brewster, "Cleaning the Cage: Mexico City's Preparations for the Olympic Games," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 6 (2009): 798.

The Committee's efforts to beautify Mexican society also included a massive public education campaign. Even if the Committee had considered it desirable, removing all Mexicans from the streets was an impossible task. Therefore, the organizers had to educate the citizenry and modify certain aspects of their behavior to ensure that they would know how to interact with foreign tourists. The committee launched a public media campaign designed to "establish a sense of national responsibility" and to "awaken the natural hospitality of Mexicans towards foreign athletes and visitors."⁹² The education campaign consisted of radio broadcasts, T.V. commercials and the handing out of leaflets. In the final year of preparations, 200,000 leaflets were distributed offering advice on how to act as proper hosts, while more than 700 radio broadcasts and 144 T.V. advertisements diffused a similar message.⁹³

The public education campaign carried out its mission through different forms of rhetoric. In its early stages, it broadcasted direct, paternalistic messages. An example is the phrase "*portate bien mexicano, porque va a venir la olimpiada*" (Mexican, behave yourself because the Olympics are coming), which was used at the end of various radio broadcasts.⁹⁴ The Committee also used more subtle and ingenious methods to diffuse its message. The most remarkable was a series of shorts played by actor Mario Moreno, commonly known as Cantinflas. Moreno was one Mexico's most beloved public figures at the time, and his character *Patrullero 777* – a policeman that used the call sign 777 – was a household name.⁹⁵ In the Committee-sponsored broadcasts, *Patrullero 777* brings a series of characters that engaged in behavior that would not be permissible during the Olympics into the local police station. For example, the policeman brings a taxi driver who has overcharged a female tourist from the

⁹² Brewster and Brewster, "Cleaning the Cage: Mexico City's Preparations for the Olympic Games," 807.

⁹³ Brewster, "Teaching Mexicans How to Behave: Public Education on the Eve of the Olympics," 49.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 64.

United States and admonishes him to change his behavior and “be honest so that foreigners will think of Mexicans as gentlemen.”⁹⁶ In another short, Cantinflas arrests football fans that participated in a violent altercation outside Estadio Azteca. The policeman warned the hooligans about the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption at sporting events, and asks: “If this sort of thing can happen at a local football match, what’s going to happen at the Olympic Games?”⁹⁷ This specific short, while directed to domestic audiences, also served as part of the Committee’s response to concerns of looming violence in Mexico City, which arose following a series of fights during a boxing match and prompted the Committee’s white dove peace campaign.⁹⁸

The Committee’s public education efforts reverberated throughout Mexican society to the degree that its core message was diffused through mediums it did not directly control, such as newspapers. In June 1966, an article in the newspaper *El Día* expressed hope that “in the two years we have left before the Olympics, there will be an intense campaign to instill within the public a sense of punctuality, so by the time of the games, it will have become a habit.”⁹⁹ An editorial in another major newspaper, *El Universal*, made a reference to the stereotype of Mexico as a country where it is common to put off work on an issue for a later date. The editorial mentioned that while this belief may be false, Mexicans did engage in “much talk and little action,” and that this kind of mentality would hamper Mexico’s ability to successfully host the games.¹⁰⁰ Despite the range of situations they depicted, and the various modes of diffusion, the Committee’s media campaign’s message was clear: “Mexicans needed to modify their behavior

⁹⁶ ESPN Deportes México, “Cantinflas: Embajador Olímpico,” October 12, 2018.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Brewster, “Teaching Mexicans How to Behave: Public Education on the Eve of the Olympics,” 56.

⁹⁹ Brewster and Brewster, “Cleaning the Cage: Mexico City’s Preparations for the Olympic Games,” 807.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

to create a good impression, to present Mexico in the best possible light, and to lend dignity to the Mexican nation.”¹⁰¹

The Committee’s preparations for the Olympics involved many more responsibilities that are not explicitly mentioned in this chapter. For example, the Committee oversaw the construction of two separate housing complexes (one for athletes and one for members of the press), negotiated sponsorship contracts, and made sure that the sporting venues were in appropriate condition to host the games. This chapter focuses on the Cultural Olympics, the creation of the logo, and the efforts to beautify Mexico City and Mexican society because these initiatives are the most representative of the Committee’s objective to craft an image of Mexico as a modern, developed, and prosperous nation. Whether this image was truly representative of Mexico’s reality at the time is beyond the scope of this work, but what is evident from the Committee’s actions is that Mexico spent considerable time and money to present itself in a very specific manner.

¹⁰¹ Brewster and Brewster, “Cleaning the Cage: Mexico City’s Preparations for the Olympic Games,” 807.

Chapter 4 – Overcoming Adversity

At different points in the organizational process, the Committee encountered roadblocks that threatened its ability to stage the games in the manner that it desired. While the Committee had to address myriad issues in order to ensure the games ran smoothly, there are three particular situations that stand out – the U.S. Olympic Committee’s request for the games be moved to a different date, the international community’s doubts regarding the safety of holding the games at an altitude of more than 2200 meters above sea level, and the dispute between the Committee and the IOC regarding South Africa’s invitation to the games. In all three cases, the Organizing committee prevailed over its challengers, and maintained local control over the organization of the games.

This chapter examines each of these developments and discusses the actions that the Committee took to resolve these issues. The reason for this in-depth examination is that each of the three victories set an important precedent in the organizers’ minds – namely that it was capable of fending off any challenge that threatened its ability to deliver its vision for the games. The Committee’s victories in disputes against some of the world’s most powerful countries and institutions established the notion that it could overcome any adversity, and this precedent played an important role in the organizers’ response to the student movement of 1968.

Mexico vs United States Olympic Committee

The first adverse event in the Committee’s path to organize the Olympics began in December 1964. The Organizing Committee received two separate letters, one from the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States, and one from United States Olympic Committee. Both letters asked for the same thing: that the calendar for the games be modified so that the competition would not take place in October. The Americans suggested holding the games in

April, September, or November, claiming that this would make it possible for more tourists to travel to Mexico. However, the true motivation behind the request was to provide relief to American broadcasting companies, who had a full programming schedule for October including the World Series, the NFL Season, and coverage of the November 1968 presidential elections.¹⁰²

The Committee dealt swiftly with this crisis thanks to General Jose de Jesús Clark Flores's shrewd response. A member of the Organizing Committee from 1963 to 1966, Clark Flores wrote back to the Americans and made clear that hosting the games earlier in the year would be disadvantageous to countries above parallel 30, like the U.S.A. This was because the harsh winter would reduce the period in which athletes could train outside in preparation for the games. Moving the games later in the year was also not an option, given the increased chances of rain in Mexico's capital. Flores also sent a copy of the American letters to the Olympic committees of Japan, Italy, France, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom asking them for input regarding the request. They all responded that they would send a delegation to the games no matter what Mexico's organizers decided. In the end, Clark Flores' artful handling of the situation – invalidating the Americans' requests with scientific claims and simultaneously gathering international support for Mexico's decision – allowed the Organizing Committee to fend off the United States and continue with the preparations as it had originally planned.¹⁰³

Mexico vs Altitude

The second crisis encountered by Mexican organizers relates to Mexico City's high altitude – 2,250 meters above sea level. From the beginning of the bidding process to the competition's closing ceremony, organizers had to demonstrate that competing at such high altitude would not cause damage to competitors. Throughout the duration of Mexico's Olympic

¹⁰² Rodríguez Kuri, "Hacia México 68. Pedro Ramírez Vázquez y el proyecto olímpico," 41.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 43.

project, the organizers relied on scientific evidence to assuage alarmist worries expressed by the international press and national Olympic committees. In the White Book sent to the IOC, the Preparatory Council mentioned that “due to certain reports in the newspapers, [it felt] compelled to mention that the altitude of Mexico City in no way affects persons of normal health.” To back these claims, it included a special section titled “Medical Opinions about the Altitude of Mexico City” where it collected opinions expressed by professors of the Medical School of the University of Mexico and by Raul Cicero, head cardiologist of Mexico City’s General Hospital.¹⁰⁴ The experts concluded that Mexico City’s altitude “does not impair in any way the capacity to carry out physical work or sporting events” and that “it does not cause a pathology of any kind in the human being.”¹⁰⁵

Mexico’s victory at Baden-Baden demonstrates that the Preparatory Council’s remarks in the White Book convinced the IOC that Mexico City’s altitude did not represent a major problem for Olympic competitions. Nevertheless, both the international press and national Olympic committees began to express concern regarding Mexico City’s altitude as soon as it won the right to host the games. In 1964, the *Berlin Ausgabe* claimed that “if athletes have only one week to acclimatize to an altitude of over 2,200 meters, they are going to fall like flies.”¹⁰⁶ In 1965, Danish newspaper *Extra-Bladet* took an even more extreme attitude when it asked the IOC to “change the site of the Olympic Games” because competing athletes would be “in danger of dying.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Mexican Olympic Committee, *Mexico Petitions for the XIX Olympic Games*, 99.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰⁶ Claire Brewster and Keith Brewster, “Mexico City’s Hosting of the 1968 Olympic Games,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 6 (2009): 847.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Now in charge of Mexico's Olympic project following the dissolution of the Preparatory Council, the Organizing Committee sought to reassure the international community that competing at high altitude would not only be safe, but also provide a potential edge for the breaking of previous Olympic records. The committee translated a publication titled *La Ciudad de México: El mito de la altura* ('Mexico City: The Myth of Altitude') to French and English. The book downplayed the question of altitude by citing a French medical report that claimed "that an acclimatization of 15 days is more than enough for the body not to suffer from the lack of oxygen at high altitudes" and that once this period had passed, "nothing [would] prevent the records established in Tokyo from being pulverized in Mexico."¹⁰⁸ The Committee distributed the book throughout Mexico and sent a copy to every national Olympic committee. Additionally, the committee invited international scientists to conduct on-site tests to confirm the publication's results. The British Olympic Association accepted this offer and conducted physiological investigations in Mexico City in October 1966. The British Olympic Association concluded that Mexico City's altitude did not constitute a major health risk, and that a 15-day acclimatization period would allow athletes to feel as if they were competing at regular altitude. Given the reputation of the organization that produced it, the British study convinced many other Olympic associations that competing in Mexico City would not signify a health risk for the athletes.

Although the possibility of cancelling the games due to altitude was very unlikely, the Committee demonstrated its organizational ability through its handling of the crisis. The committee understood that it could not do anything to change Mexico's altitude – all that was in its power was to change foreigners' perception. The Committee could have opted to ignore the criticisms as they were largely unfounded, but it decided to respond to the claims with respect

¹⁰⁸ Brewster and Brewster, "Mexico City's Hosting of the 1968 Olympic Games," 848.

and with arguments backed by scientific evidence. In the end, the altitude did not lead to any problems during the athletic competitions. In fact, quite the opposite happened – the altitude provided the perfect background circumstances for the breaking of more than 300 Olympic records.¹⁰⁹

Mexico vs Apartheid South Africa

The third and last roadblock faced by the Committee was much more contentious and had potentially disastrous implications. The crisis revolved around the possible boycott of the games by more than forty countries and was prompted by South Africa's reinstatement to the IOC. However, the Organizing Committee worked to ensure that the South Africans did not attend the games and that the boycott would not take place.

On February 16, 1968, South Africa was reaccepted to the International Olympic Committee after a five-year expulsion. The country had been expelled from the IOC in 1963 because its apartheid practices violated the Olympic Charter, but the IOC re-admitted the country after it sent a commission to verify South Africa's progress on alleged racial integration in sports.¹¹⁰ The committee, led by Irish journalist and Columbia Pictures executive Lord Kilanin, determined that South Africa was making progress on its promises and recommended the country's reinstatement. South Africa's re-admittance to the IOC required Mexico's Organizing Committee to formally invite the South Africans to the competition.

The IOC's requirement that Mexico invite South Africa to the games presented the organizers with a grave problem, both on philosophical and practical terms. Philosophically, Mexico could not legitimately invite an overtly racist country to the games. In its responses to

¹⁰⁹ Brewster and Brewster, "Mexico City's Hosting of the 1968 Olympic Games," 860.

¹¹⁰ Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, "Geopolítica de la raza. Sudáfrica, Estados Unidos y boicot en los juegos olímpicos 1968," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México* 50 (2015): 47.

the International Olympic Committee's Questionnaire (part of the White Book that constituted Mexico's official petition for the games) the Committee made specific references to Mexico's tolerance of people of all races:

Our Political Constitution, in Articles 2, 3, and 6, forbids slavery and supports the ideals of brotherhood and equal rights for all men regardless of the privileges of race, religion, groups, sex, or individuals, and guarantees fully a freedom of ideas and expression.¹¹¹

Although Mexico's government had tried to apply its non-interventionist stance in global affairs to its organization of the games and boasted about its tolerance for different political models, the text of the Mexican Constitution prevented the organizers from remaining neutral in this affair. Moreover, since the creation of the party in 1929, the PRI depicted the Revolution as a movement that eradicated the class and ethnic tensions that afflicted the country in its nascent stages. As such, the Mexican government could not be seen to condone such behavior elsewhere.¹¹²

On the practical side, inviting South Africa to the games would significantly reduce the number of participating countries. Following the announcement of the apartheid nation's reinstatement, a massive boycott movement ensued. The 32 nations composing the Organization of African Unity (OAU) were joined by Syria, India, Jamaica, Yugoslavia, Italy, Sweden, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Brazil, Belgium, Mongolia, and black American athletes in their threat to not attend if South Africa was allowed to compete.¹¹³ Eduardo Madero, Mexico's ambassador to Ghana at the time, travelled to the OAU's headquarters in Brazaville, Republic of Congo alongside two members of the Organizing Committee (Eduardo Hay and Roberto Casellas). The Mexican delegation discussed the IOC's decision with members of the OAU, and on February 23, 1968 it

¹¹¹ Mexican Olympic Committee, *Mexico Petitions for the XIX Olympic Games*, 32.

¹¹² Brewster and Brewster, "Pride and Prejudice: Foreign Perceptions of Mexico as an Olympic Host," 770.

¹¹³ Rodríguez Kuri, "Geopolítica de la raza. Sudáfrica, Estados Unidos y boicot en los juegos olímpicos 1968," 50.

sent a letter to Mexico City confirming the bloc's intention to boycott the games if South Africa was allowed to participate.

Pedro Ramírez Vázquez held an emergency meeting with Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to discuss Mexico's response to the OAU's boycott announcement. During the conversation, Díaz Ordaz famously told Ramírez Vázquez that "those [South African] bastards will not come to the games."¹¹⁴ This phrase encapsulates Mexico's stance towards this issue – both the government and the Organizing Committee agreed that South Africa's participation in the games would severely hamper Mexico's international reputation and the boycott would tarnish the legacy of the 1968 Games. Consequently, they began a joint effort to ensure that the IOC would reverse its decision.

At the time, the Olympic Charter determined that the host country, and not the IOC, had the ultimate responsibility of sending the official invitation to participating nations. This meant that Organizing Committee was charged with mailing South Africa's invitation, and the Committee delayed this action for as long as it could to gain time to convince the IOC to reverse its decision. On February 28, 1968, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez wrote to the IOC requesting its Executive Council to have an extraordinary meeting and re-evaluate its decision. Ramírez cleverly pointed out that the results of the vote that led to South Africa's reinstatement did not add up to the required 2/3 majority. The IOC conceded Ramirez's request and established that the extraordinary meeting would take place on April 24 in Lausanne, Switzerland.¹¹⁵

Following the OAU's boycott announcement, various IOC Executive Council members changed their minds and considered that South Africa should not participate in the Olympics. However, Lord Kilanin, the individual in charge of the IOC inspection that led to South Africa's

¹¹⁴ Rodríguez Kuri, "Geopolítica de la raza. Sudáfrica, Estados Unidos y boicot en los juegos olímpicos 1968," 50.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

reinstatement, remained committed to his original decision. The Committee determined that Kilanin's support was crucial to ensure the IOC's revote would be in Mexico's favor. The Mexican organizers secured Kilanin's vote thanks to the assistance of an individual that they had previously collaborated with: Cantinflas. Kilanin's employer, Columbia Pictures, was in the midst of a dispute with the Mexican actor, which threatened the ability of the American film studio to distribute Cantinflas' latest movie. The Committee offered Kilanin and his studio the rights to produce the 1968 Olympic Games commemorative film, but most importantly, it offered to negotiate with Cantinflas so that Columbia Pictures would be able to distribute *Por Mis Pistolas*.¹¹⁶ The Committee's efforts were successful, and on April 24, 1968 the IOC voted to prohibit South Africa from participating in the games.

Whether the Committee's operation to prevent South Africa's participation was prompted by a commitment to the equality of all races, or by the prospect of a boycott of more than forty countries, is debatable. What is certain, however, is that this series of events demonstrated the Committee's ability to overcome adversity and its willingness to mobilize a vast amount of resources in order to achieve its goals. The international press praised the Committee for its resilience and characterized its challenge to the IOC as "unprecedented".¹¹⁷ In fact, Mexico's challenge to the IOC was so consequential that the international organization modified its procedure for inviting participants to the Olympics; the 1968 edition was the last time where the host, and not the IOC, had ultimate responsibility for sending invitations to participating nations.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ ESPN Deportes México, "Cantinflas: Embajador Olímpico," October 12, 2018.

¹¹⁷ Rodríguez Kuri, "Geopolítica de la raza. Sudáfrica, Estados Unidos y boicot en los juegos olímpicos 1968," 52.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

The Committee's dispute with the IOC was the penultimate roadblock that the organization encountered as it prepared Mexico to host the Olympic Games. The next issue would be the student movement, which began to unfold in early 1968. This meant that the Committee's latest 'victory' was fresh in the organizers' mind as they decided how to address the protests, and therefore may have contributed to the government's decision to devise a final solution to end the protests once and for all.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

On October 3, 1968, U.S. ambassador to Mexico Fulton Freeman wrote to Washington D.C. expressing his view that “there did not seem to be any connections between the shootings and the Olympics.”¹¹⁹ While Freeman’s understanding of the events may have been constrained by the Mexican government’s lack of transparency with regards to the massacre, his assessment could not have been more wrong – the impending Olympics played a determining role in the government’s violent response to the student movement.

The most obvious reason for why the Olympics led to the government’s violent handling of the October 2nd demonstration is that the competition’s inauguration was less than 10 days away. Preoccupied by the prospect of having to simultaneously deal with student protests and the world’s most prestigious athletic competition, the government devised a ‘final solution’ to suppress the student movement once and for all.

This thesis approaches the relationship between the Olympics and the massacre from a different perspective – it argues that the process of preparing for the Olympics *itself* contributed to the government’s decision to use violent means to suppress the demonstration. The work done to secure the bid and the consequent preparations to host the games had direct influence in the Mexican government’s response to the movement. This is for two reasons. The first is that the rhetoric describing the Olympics as a celebration of the PRI’s post-revolutionary project and Mexico’s transition into a developed nation aggrandized the organizers’ ego and gave them a false sense that the country was prospering in all respects. This in turn made them less receptive to citizens’ complaints and made them willing to take drastic measures to realize their vision of a Mexico that was approaching the first world. The second reason is that the Committee’s

¹¹⁹ Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World*, 118.

successful handling of major crises created a dangerous precedent that it could overcome any sort of adversity, no matter who was behind it.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the socioeconomic advances of the *milagro mexicano* gave Mexico the confidence that it could successfully host the world's most important athletic competition. Moreover, these advances were also one of the main reasons for which the IOC gave Mexico the right to host the Olympics. The victory of Mexico City's bid at the Baden-Baden conference was interpreted by the organizers as international commendation of the party's national project and as a confirmation of Mexico's imminent entry to the realm of first-world nations. Hence, the organizers worked tirelessly to ensure that the Olympics would showcase Mexico as a modern and industrialized nation where citizens thrived thanks to the government's political economy and social welfare policies. This affected the government's response to the demonstration in Tlatelolco in two ways. First, it made the organizers (which includes both the Organizing Committee and the federal government) less receptive to the students' demands for increased political freedom. By working so hard to craft a near-perfect image of Mexico, the organizers' beguiled themselves into believing that the image they were crafting was truly representative of Mexico's reality at the time, and it made them impervious to the students' woes.

Second, the organizers' duty to present Mexico as a country that was enjoying the fruits of more than thirty years of political and economic stability required them to take drastic measures to suppress the protests. They hoped that the Olympics would represent the final victory of the Mexican Revolution and signal Mexico's entry into the realm of first-world nations. However, the potential failure to stage a successful competition could ruin Mexico's reputation and confirm the doubts of skeptics who argued that Mexicans were too lazy,

disinterested, and were not ready to to organize such a monumental event. The student movement threatened to expose the reality that, although Mexico experienced monumental socioeconomic advances in the preceding decades, that progress did not translate into citizen satisfaction with the government. The demonstrations were evidence that Mexico was ready to join the ranks of first-world nations as it once seemed. Therefore, in the same way that the Committee removed evidence of Mexico's poverty and inequality by painting over shanty towns and prohibiting street selling, the organizers removed the evidence of social discomfort and unrest, albeit in a much more brutal way.

The second major way in which Mexico's Olympic project affected the government's response to the student movement was by setting the dangerous precedent that the Organizing Committee could confront any challenge that threatened its ability to realize its specific vision for the Olympic Games. Throughout its more than five years of existence, the Committee faced various meaningful complications that challenged its sovereignty in the organization of the games. The Committee prevailed in each of these three disputes, which created an environment in which the organizers understood that nothing would be allowed to threaten the smooth running of the games. The victories in each of these challenges, in which the Committee faced off against some of the world's most powerful countries and institutions, set a precedent that the organizers could resolve any complication regardless of who was behind it. This made the organizers much more willing to take drastic measures when their own people began to threaten the smooth running of the games.

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