

# Tensions between the empire and the nation essay sample

[History](#), [Empires](#)



“ The Old Gringo” by Carlos Fuentes brings out two main themes of tension between the empire and the nation with U. S involvement in Latin America as an imperial power, and notions of civilization and progress in Latin America. The three main characters Ambrose Bierce, Tomás Arroyo, and Harriet Winslow all are in Mexico for a sense of redemption from their past and each of their stories resemble United States and Mexico during the times of the Mexican Revolution. The Mexican Revolution occurred around the 1930s to the 1990s and during this time the United States imperialism and notion of civilization and progress was taking place in Mexico. The three main characters each have different stories and different reasons for being in Mexico to achieve redemption. Ambrose Bierce also known as the old gringo was a journalist for William Hearst in the 1900s. His whole family left him because they were so shamed by what he wrote. He describes his writing as mocking God, his Homeland, and Money; and his family thought when would they be next for him to go against them, judging them, telling them their no exception, they prove the rule, and are all part of the ludicrous filth, the farts of God, we call humanity. (Fuentes, p. 75)

Some of the family left him through death and others left by just choosing to never see him again. The old gringo joked, “ I think my sons killed themselves so I wouldn’t ridicule them in the newspapers of my boss William Randolph Hearst” (Fuentes, p. 73). Through his journey of redemption he met up with General Tomás Arroyo’s revolutionary group on the Miranda hacienda in northern Mexico. His plan of redemption was through death, “ He wanted to die because everything he loved died before him” (Fuentes, p. 37)

The general Ambrose Bierce met up with was Tomás Arroyo. He lived on the

Miranda Hacienda in Northern Mexico for his whole life. He was a product of rape by the hacienda's owner and grew up as a poor peasant. He received "papers" from an old man that would give him ownership of the hacienda that had been passed down from generations to generations. Arroyo took his opportunity of redemption when the Revolution came around.

He destroyed the hacienda when the Mirandas left for safety and declared himself General under Pancho Villa's Revolutionary army. His actions were in hopes of revenge over the Miranda family, from how he was treated in his childhood. Even though he hated the hacienda he could never leave it.

Harriet Winslow's character came to Mexico to be a teacher on the Miranda hacienda. She came all the way from Washington D. C. to teach the children of the Miranda family English. Harriet ended up getting caught up in the drama of the Mexican Revolution, especially involving General Tomás Arroyo. She felt the need to stay at the hacienda when the Miranda family fled for safety because they had paid her upfront. She had a strong passion to teach and civilize the people still left on the hacienda. By the end of her quest though and arguing back and fourth with Tomás Arroyo she will accept that she will never be able to change Mexico but accept Mexico for what it is. U. S. imperialism can be resembled through Harriet and the Gringo's relationship towards Arroyo.

Harriet and the old gringo act as the "United States" and Arroyo acts as "Mexico." US interferes in Mexico 34 times (Murphy 3/20/2103) and has a blindness of things going on in Mexico because they were acting off their own needs and wants instead of what Mexico needed. Although the U. S had

every right to intervene if a country is misbehaving and especially if there were European powers also trying to intervene; so the United States tries to modernize the Latin America government systems in such a way where they were only doing things from U. S. point of view rather than including Mexico's Point of view. (Murphy 3/20/2013) The characters, old gringo and Tomás Arroyo in a way resemble the interference between the United States and Mexico.

The old gringo had a strong belief of private property and ownership just as U. S has strong beliefs in freedom and democracy. Arroyo beliefs were that men proved themselves through battle or in bed and not in some election (Fuentes p. 165). Old gringo ended up burning Arroyo's precious land ownership papers. This occurrence led to the old gringo being shot in the back by Arroyo and dying. The old gringo wanted to burn these papers to try and " set Arroyo free" to able him to leave the hacienda, and gain more power amongst the Revolutionary forces in Mexico. Although this was the most important thing to Arroyo he states, " I screwed the gringa women, but that wasn't important, nothing was important but to own the land, everything else owns you, and its bad enough to go through life thinking about what you own and being afraid to lose it, instead of living like a man and dying with honor and dignity." (Fuentes p. 165)

Word got back to Pancho Villa that Arroyo shot an American then Pancho Villa killed Arroyo. Obviously the old gringo had good intentions for burning the papers because he wanted to help Arroyo, but in the end Arroyo didn't get any closer to his goals. Although in a since of liberalism unlocking keys to

progress and civilization the United States and Latin America came together through new forms of production and huge economic growth and expansion. (Murphy 2/27/2013) The biggest form of production that made an impact on economic growth was bananas. They started in Latin America and grew big in production from all of the banana plantations. These banana plantations also known as, enclaves housed many of Latin American's lower economic class. People did labor work on the enclaves and started working in their youthful years. Census data confirm that the North Coast's population during the first half of the twentieth century was a youthful one (Soluri p. 133 online).

Banana enclaves were huge and many people stayed there because it was about all anyone could really do and benefit from it in some way. The enclaves had education there for your children, provided a source of healthcare, gave opportunity to own a small portion of land, and because so many people were there gave you a fun environment to socialize and interact with friends (Murphy 2/27/2013) Although the enclaves had some benefits it was still a very hard enduring life plantation workers lived and received very little back in return. Although workers revealed that they were constrained but not immobilized by the weight of being on the bottom of the plantation hierarchy. (Soluri p. 159) After bananas thrived for a while only in Latin America by 1910 they went from a very rare source of fruit to the second most consumed fruit next to apples in the United States. (Soluri p. 49) The word banana took off into the popular lexicon via phrases such as “

top banana," " banana boat," " to go bananas," and the tragically powerful metaphor, " banana republic" (Soluri p. 49).

The banana culture was made up of sexual suggestion, " going crazy", the Caribbean, being wild and loose, the tropics, and Ms. Chiquita. (Murphy Lecture 2/27/2013). All these reasons started to make Latin America such an attraction to American tourists including the beautiful beaches and gave U. S many reasons to expand and get more involved in Latin America countries bringing tensions between the United States and Mexico for power and dominance. The U. S saw opportunity to expand Latin American countries to send progress and educate the Mexican people, which is what Harriet's character in *The Old Gringo* came to Mexico to do. Harriet Winslow's character was a good way to resemble how the United States wanted to help civilize and create progress amongst Latin America and the Latin American people.

The U. S. was known as a place of " civilization and authority" that wanted to help build nations and governments, which was exactly what Harriet Winslow was trying to do on the Miranda hacienda. When the Miranda family left in search of safety, Harriet felt that that she should stay and educate those left. One day Harriet called the people of the hacienda into the ballroom. She told them " they were to meet here regularly once a week and that they would elect their own officials, a secretary, a treasurer; they would form committees to be in charge of raising cattle, educations maintenance, and also supplies" (Fuentes p. 94). This shows how Harriet was trying to change the Mexican people and the way they lived. Forcing American ways to

educate them to live in democracy. While the Mexican people knew they didn't want to live that way and weren't going to anytime soon. By the end of the book Harriet learned to accept Mexico and not change it, she said, " I want to learn to live with Mexico, I don't want to save it." (Fuentes p. 187)

This showed the tensions between empire and nation through how America was trying to change the Mexican people into something they weren't rather than do things that would be in the best interest for Latin America as a whole. The United States involvement as imperial power and progress and civilization in Latin America were shown through " The Old Gringo" main characters personal stories, interactions and involvement between each other. They all represented parts of United States intervening during the Mexican Revolution whether it dealt with expansion in Latin America or trying to educate and change the ways of Mexican People. Although America tried to bring their way of democracies, government systems, civilization, and education to Mexico they learned it was better to except Mexico for what it was and not change it into something it is not.