

Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Lorenzo de Zavala's *Viage a los Estados-Unidos del Norte de América*

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ABSTRACT

In late 1829, Lorenzo de Zavala, an influential Mexican statesman, writer, and editor, fled Mexico and traveled to the United States as a political exile. In 1834 he published *Viage a los Estados Unidos del Norte de América* [Journey to the United States of North America], one of the earliest known meditations on U.S. democracy. While ostensibly written about the United States, *Viage* is directed at his fellow Mexicans and is intended as a tool for learning about democratic ideals and their potential realization in Mexico. In this article, I examine Zavala's ideas about degeneracy and barbarism as presented through his discussion of slavery and slave-like imitation in both the U.S. and Mexico. Throughout his narrative, Zavala points to different types of slavery as part of each country's past and present that continue to impede the realization of republican ideals and national democratic projects. I argue that Zavala uses a comparative mode, highlighting the similarities between Mexican and U.S. degeneracy. He thus presents both countries as young republics embroiled in similar fights for "civilization" as part of a hemispheric community moving away from barbarism and towards a broadly American concept of "progress."

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RESUMEN

A finales de 1829, Lorenzo de Zavala, hombre de estado además de escritor y editor influyente, huyó de México a los Estados Unidos como exiliado político. En 1834 publicó *Viage a los Estados Unidos del Norte de América*, una de las primeras reflexiones conocidas sobre la democracia estadounidense. Aparentemente escrito sobre los Estados Unidos, *Viage* se dirige a sus compatriotas mexicanos y tiene la intención de ser una herramienta para aprender sobre los ideales republicanos y su posible realización en México. En este artículo, examino las ideas de Zavala sobre la degeneración y la barbarie tal como las presenta en su discusión de la esclavitud y la imitación servil tanto en los Estados Unidos como en México. A lo largo de su narrativa, Zavala señala diferentes formas de esclavitud como parte del pasado y del presente de cada país que siguen impidiendo la realización de ideales republicanos y proyectos democráticos nacionales. Arguyo que Zavala emplea la comparación, resaltando las semejanzas entre la degeneración mexicana y estadounidense, para poder presentar a ambas naciones como repúblicas jóvenes sumidas en luchas parecidas en su camino hacia la “civilización”, como parte de una comunidad hemisférica que se aleja de la barbarie y avanza hacia un concepto ampliamente americano del “progreso”.

Palabras clave: relatos de viaje, literatura mexicana, Lorenzo de Zavala, liberalismo, republicanism, esclavitud, colonialismo, civilización/barbarie

1. COMPARATIVE BARBARITIES

In one of the early chapters of Lorenzo de Zavala’s 1834 narrative about his travels as an exile in the United States, *Viage a los Estados-Unidos del Norte de América*, he recounts his time passing through Missouri, remarking on a “hecho curioso” which he says “da idea asimismo de la situacion civil de aquellos remotos paisés” (51).¹ He describes how during an attempt to drive a squatter off, a landowner decides to take matters into his own hands through violence. Zavala reports that the landowner ultimately decides not to fire on the squatter only because he is worried that his

daughter, who had retrieved his gun for him, might be found guilty as an accomplice if the squatter were killed. Zavala explains to his readers that this sort of occurrence is “muy comun en los estados y territorios occidentales de los Estados-Unidos, y en Tejas, California y Nuevo-Méjico de nuestra república, el que los primeros venidos tomen posesion de un terreno sin ningun título, le cultiven y vivan en él hasta que un propietario legal venga á ocuparle” (52). He also notes that “los habitantes de esta parte de los Estados-Unidos son generalmente poco civilizados, y hay muchos que se aprocsiman á nuestros Indios, aunque siempre son más orgullosos” (50). During this “hecho curioso,” Zavala thus uses a comparative mode to show the “uncivilized” people, frontier zones, and impediments to “progress” that exist in both the U.S. and Mexico.

Zavala employs this comparative frame throughout his narrative of exile. He writes about U.S. customs, political governance, and daily life; and then he compares these practices, institutions, and lifestyles with places, people, and customs in Mexico—familiar faces and places for his Mexican readership. His encounters as an exile with other cultures and ways of life in the host country help to generate and develop this comparative approach. In *The Politics of Exile in Latin America*, Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger explain that exile typically entails a confrontation with “new models of organization that transform them [exiles], willingly or not” (5). This exposure to new ideas and forms of social and political organizations in turn transforms exiles and “challenges the displaced persons to reconsider the ideals they came with and their notions of both the host country and the homeland that they left behind” (Sznajder and Roniger 5). Sznajder and Roniger also reveal that exiles played an important role in reimaging and (re)defining national identities and boundaries in nineteenth-century Latin America (8). Exiles became more aware of their identity as belonging to a nation and helped to more clearly define the boundaries and borders of a nation when they were, as Sznajder and Roniger call it, “translocated” outside of their homeland (8). At the same time, the experience of “translocation” and displacement also made individuals more aware of their nation’s image in and relationship to a broader transnational public sphere; Sznajder and Roniger explain:

The very exclusion of exiles from the domestic public arena shaped, however, a transnational public sphere and multistate politics in the Americas and beyond, in which some of the exiles learned how to play their national politics from afar and the states were drawn into play politics on an international and, later, global scale. (8)

Zavala’s constant use of comparison between the U.S. and Mexico, then, is about more than just teaching his fellow Mexicans about democracy and republicanism

through concrete and local references that they could more easily grasp. It is also about defining a new concept of the Mexican nation and creating (or at least imagining) a meaningful link between U.S. Americans and Mexicans in a broader international and transnational arena. In *Viage*, this connection is established through a mutual lack of civilization (in certain areas/aspects of the national imaginary) and a common history of moral as well as political degeneracy. Zavala shows how both countries are embroiled in similar though not completely analogous fights against “degenerate” and “blackened” components of their cultures and histories that continue to haunt each country in different ways. But Mexico and the United States also share a desire to move towards civilization and a future of moral and political progress.

In this article I look at how Zavala’s negative representations of both Mexico and the U.S. can be understood as links between the two nascent republics, which are portrayed as similarly fighting forces of barbarism in an attempt to move towards progress and true liberalism. I will examine how Zavala links Mexicans and Anglo Americans in his exilic travel narrative through a shared history of slavery, colonialism, and degeneracy, as well as an emergent republicanism. Ultimately, I argue that Zavala, one of the first authors to write explicitly about the intimate geographical, philosophical, and political connections between the United States and Mexico, articulates an alternative imagining of an inter-American relationship between Anglos and Mexicans based upon historical similarities and common cultural values. His perspective from exile frames his experiences, allowing him to critique his homeland from afar, confront new (U.S.) models, and envision a new Mexico that is intimately connected to other young American republics within a larger transnational community.

2. BLACKNESS, SLAVES AND SLAVERY

Zavala was an influential Mexican statesman, writer, and editor; within Mexican historiography, he remains a key figure in early independence history.² Yet his role in U.S. history, literature and politics is less well documented, despite his contributions to culture and politics on both sides of the border. In late 1829, Zavala fled Mexico and traveled to the United States as a political exile. Labeled a liberal traitor by his fellow Mexicans because of his federalist stances and liberal policies, Zavala traveled throughout the United States as an exile until late 1832, when power shifted back to federalist allies and he returned to Mexico and resumed his position as Governor of the State of Mexico.³ He was named as the Yucatán’s representative to Congress in 1833 and immediately recommenced implementing liberal and anticlerical reforms in state and national government (Henson 9-10). Later in 1833, he was named by

President Santa Anna as the first Mexican minister to the French Court. Zavala was honored by his nomination and accepted the position, but, in reality, angry supporters of the Church had urged Santa Anna to do so as a way of removing Zavala, if only temporarily, from Mexico City and Mexican politics (Henson 10). His stint in France was thus a type of what Sznajder and Roniger call a “translocation,” a mechanism of political exclusion frequently employed in the early independence era in Latin America as a way of removing dissenting parties without bloodshed, therefore avoiding outright war, which could weaken or topple already unstable governments and leaders (66).

Zavala’s political tenure in France would be short. In 1834, upon learning about Santa Anna’s installation of a new cabinet, election of a new centralist congress, and restoration of special privileges to both the Church and military back in Mexico, Zavala resigned from his political appointment, having served only six months as the minister in France (Henson 10). While he was in Paris in 1834, Zavala published *Viage a los Estados-Unidos del Norte de América*, a travel narrative reflecting upon his earlier experiences as an exile in the United States and one of the earliest meditations on U.S. democracy (before Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* [1835]).⁴ Although Zavala published *Viage* before leaving France as an exile (for the second time), he was surely contemplating the possibility of future exile: as he wrote and prepared his narrative for publication, he became increasingly aware of the fact that he had been sent to France as a way of limiting his involvement in Mexican politics. In early 1835 he sailed for New York as an exile once again, eventually relocating to Texas, where he planned an attempt to oust Santa Anna with Federalist support (Henson 10-11). The plan failed. He became active in Texas politics, where he urged separation (not necessarily independence) from Mexico, later helped to draft the first Texas constitution, and served as Texas’s first vice-president.⁵

In his prologue to *Viage*, Zavala explains that he was driven to write *Viage* because “nada puede dar lecciones mas útiles de política á mis conciudadanos, que el conocimiento de las costumbres, usos, hábitos y gobierno de los Estados-Unidos” (1). Thus, while ostensibly written about the United States, Zavala’s narrative is directed at his fellow Mexicans, and is intended as a tool for learning about republican ideals and their potential realization in Mexico. The future of liberalism and republicanism in Mexico was indeed a principal concern for Mexican statesmen and intellectuals during this time period. While Mexico was formally organized as a federalist republic with the Constitution of 1824, Mexicans were split on how to actually enact those republican ideals within their country. Moreover, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Mexican leaders and thinkers hotly debated (and sometimes waged military

battle) over whether the Mexican masses were ready for or capable of participating in a nation that adhered to republican ideals. Although at first glance it may seem odd that Zavala claims to be writing about his homeland and to his fellow Mexicans in a book published outside of his homeland and which focuses on his time spent traveling outside of Mexico, this gesture directed back at his native land is actually typical for exiles and other dislocated individuals who “lose the entitlements attached to citizenship but, at the same time, [...] become even more attached than before to what is perceived as the ‘national soul’” (Sznajder and Roniger 4). In fact, this sense of national belonging is often discovered, recognized, or deepened through the process of dislocation, leading many exiles and displaced individuals “to reconstruct their bonds of solidarity in terms of the collective home identity” (Sznajder and Roniger 4).

Reflecting upon his past (and perhaps future) experience as an exile in *Viage*, Zavala recognizes his unique and somewhat distanced vantage point, which permits him to critique his homeland while simultaneously attempting to affect changes in and shape his country from afar. In the early independence period in Latin America, exiles are important political figures and strong voices of dissent, writing from their position outside the control of ruling national party or individuals in power. It is during this time that the “expatriation of central political figures [...] starts a tradition in which the absent leader becomes the pole of attraction and political consultation for actors in the home society” (Sznajder and Roniger 58). Thus, it is no coincidence that Mexico’s cultural, political, and moral shortcomings emerge as primary preoccupations in *Viage*. In the very first chapter of his narrative, he notes, for example:

El Mejicano es ligero, perezoso, intolerante, generoso y casi pródigo, vano, guerrero, supersticioso, ignorante y enemigo de todo yugo. El Norte-Americano trabaja, el Mejicano se divierte; el primero gasta lo menos que puede, el segundo hasta lo que no tiene: aquel lleva á efecto las empresas mas arduas hasta su conclusion, este las abandona á los primeros pasos: el uno vive en su casa, la adorna, la amuebla, la preserva de las inclemencias; el otro pasa su tiempo en la calle, huye la habitacion, y en un suelo en donde no hay estaciones poco cuida del lugar de su descanso. En los Estados del Norte todos son propietarios y tienden á aumentar su fortuna; en Méjico los pocos que hay la descuidan y algunos la dilapidan. (iv)

Zavala in fact critiques Mexican politics and culture so often, especially in comparison to the United States, that he preemptively answers his readers’ outrage in his very first chapter: “Parece que oigo á algunos de mis paisanos gritar: ¡Qué horror! ved cómo nos desacredita este indigno Mejicano, y nos presenta á la vista de los pueblos civilizados” (v). He responds to their imagined outrage: “Tranquilizaos, señores, que ya otros han

dicho eso y mucho mas de nosotros y de nuestros padres los Españoles. ¿Quereis que no se diga? Enmendaos” (v). Writing to and about his fellow Mexicans, Zavala appears to be aware of the weight his critiques will continue to have in his homeland and in a more international arena, despite (and perhaps because of) his location outside of the nation.

Contemporary critics have tended to focus on either Zavala’s very negative portrayals of Mexico, such as the examples I just mentioned, or his panegyric representations of the U.S., but few put have looked at the similarities between the U.S. and Mexico in *Viage*. John-Michael Rivera, for example, understands the negative portrayals of Mexico as re-inscribing “the racial stereotypes of Mexico and Mexicans that fueled the [U.S.] expansionist rhetoric of 1830s” (23). Historian Stephen J. Mexal, on the other hand, analyzes what he calls Zavala’s “tourist pose,” which he contends allows Zavala “to interrogate both US and Mexican liberalisms,” ultimately concluding that *Viage* is really a meditation on how “a utopian liberalist philosophy can never translate into a functional liberal praxis” in either the U.S. or Mexico (80). In *Chicano Nations: The Hemispheric Origins of Mexican American Literature*, Marissa K. López reads *Viage* as a commentary on the unlikelihood of further developing inter-American or Pan-American connections. She further contends that Zavala’s comments about the cultural, racial, and political differences between Mexico and the U.S., such as those previously mentioned, speak to the ways in which the body politic is inherently different in Mexico and the U.S., thus demonstrating the error in emulating the United States.

Each of these critics, in different ways, gives special attention to Zavala’s depictions of race and racial others within the U.S. as either examples of the shortcomings of U.S. liberalism or commentaries on the inherent differences between the U.S. and Mexico. These discourses are certainly present in *Viage*, but his nearly constant use of comparison between the U.S. and Mexico often ends up highlighting the similarities between the two countries. Indeed, his depictions of both countries can be characterized as much more nuanced than either outright rejection or ecstatic praise, as many other critics have contended.

Zavala’s representations of the U.S. North (or at least many parts of it) in particular are indeed often panegyric and strongly contrast with his disparaging comments on Mexican governance and culture. But the careful reader will also note many ambivalent or sometimes explicitly critical portrayals of the United States, as well. Zavala’s first impressions as his ship approaches his first stop in the United States, New Orleans, for example, are not very positive. He observes:

Las playas son tan bajas que no se perciben [...] mas que unos montones de tierra al nivel de las aguas, sobre los que hay unas miserables chozas en donde apenas puede concebirse como habitan seres racionales. [...] El aspecto de esta entrada y aun el curso del rio hasta el fuerte Placamino es desagradable, pues solo se ven juncos y arbustos miserables, cuya vista aparece tanto mas fastidiosa cuanto que solo presenta montones de lodo y una innumerable cantidad de lagartos que semejan trozos de madera seca. (6)

The environment is not only ugly but also feeds upon Zavala and his fellow travelers, causing them bodily harm and contributing to an unhealthy atmosphere. He notes, for example, that they are constantly bothered by “el zumbido de infinidad de mosquitos que nos chupaban la sangre” (7). And when he finally reaches the city itself, he explains that “[E]l aspecto de la ciudad no ofrece nada que pueda agrandar la vista del viajero [...] Su situacion, mas baja que la superficie del rio y rodeada de lagunas y pantanos, la hace sombría y en extremo malsana” (8). Although he does have favorable things to say about the city, as well, he does not hold back his criticisms.

In the narrative as a whole, however, Zavala’s positive representations of the Northern states in the U.S. stand out to the reader as that much more effusively admiring because of a contrast with his earlier more critical comments about the U.S. South and frontier. In other words, I contend that Zavala’s renderings of the U.S. are much more ambiguous, his depictions of Mexico are much more complex, and his portrayals of both countries share more common threads than previous critical analyses of *Viage* have acknowledged. I suggest that for Zavala, whom might be characterized as somewhat obsessed with what he saw as Mexico’s inferiority and its political and cultural shortcomings, the thought that a fellow new republic like the United States might also still be overcoming its own pockets of barbarity or backwardness (as we saw in his descriptions of both Missouri and New Orleans) and might have been a comforting thought. These negative comments and portrayals of the U.S. and Mexico link these countries through a common fight against degeneracy and, subsequently, a call to move towards a true liberal democracy of moral, political, and cultural progress. In this article, I will focus on one particular image of barbaric degeneracy that appears in multiple guises throughout Zavala’s narrative and that would have provoked particularly strong reactions for nineteenth-century readers and writers: slavery.

His narrative intimates that both the U.S. and Mexico are linked by histories of slavery, as well as constant battles against slavery. Abolitionists throughout the Western world viewed and portrayed slavery first and foremost as a moral and humanitarian problem, and Zavala likewise highlights this aspect in his critique of U.S. slavery.⁶ When

reflecting upon his time in New Orleans (also, significantly, the first city in the United States that he visits), he voices one of his most forceful critiques of U.S. democracy, the continuation of slavery, which he describes as “degradante” and “humillante,” enforced by “leyes que contienen principios sumamente antiliberales” and “medidas de represion tan ofensivas á los derechos del hombre” (32–36). Moreover, he argues that slavery leads to moral decadence and political as well as cultural stagnation. He writes that laws permitting slavery have “una influencia extraordinaria sobre el progreso moral y la civilizacion de los Estados que permiten esclavos” (36). As evidence, he compares the current state of publishing in free and slave states. In free states, he shows, the numbers of newspapers have increased dramatically over the last 20 years, while in slave states the numbers have remained somewhat static (or even decreased in the case of Louisiana) (37). Zavala equates literacy, publishing, and education as proof of progress. His critique of slavery in the U.S. thus clearly highlights one more impediment to the realization of a truly liberal republic in the United States.⁷

Abolitionists from throughout the Western world critiqued slavery first and foremost on moral grounds, but they also portrayed it as an economic issue. In *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights*, Robin Blackburn notes that “abolitionists claimed that the labour of free men was always more productive than that of slaves” (295). In fact, the abolition of slavery was seen (and represented by abolitionists) as “the cause defining progress in the Atlantic World” (Blackburn 283). Moreover, the concept of “progress” also contained an economic aspect, with the main thrust of the argument against slavery being that it “was incompatible with a rising industrial capitalism and that this explained why abolitionism appealed not only to the idealistic, and those capable of great empathy, but also to hard-headed—and hard-hearted— governments” (305). Zavala’s discussion of publishing in the U.S. South, while certainly voicing a moral critique, also underscores the financial aspects of publishing and the economic setbacks in slave states; he concludes that the Southern slave states are following “un curso contrario al progreso de la civilizacion y comercio” through their lack of development of the printing industry (37). For Zavala, as for other critics of slavery, slavery is an obstacle for not just political or moral but also economic progress. And in fact, economic progress is inseparable from moral or political progress; they are complementary factors that must all be present in order to achieve “true” civilization for the early nineteenth-century intellectual and statesman.

Zavala also denotes that slavery continues to disrupt liberal projects in the U.S. even after Blacks are formally freed. For example, Zavala portrays colonization efforts in Liberia as a necessity. He explains that freed slaves might be civilized in

Liberia, “una nacion de negros civilizados en las costas de Africa”, because they have been given the tools to be economically successful and the opportunities to move towards republicanism (262). But in the U.S., where there is no mixing of the races, they would be doomed to be “una clase distinta, degradada é infeliz” (262). In this last example, Zavala quotes a Mr. North, president of Union College, whom Zavala sees as representative of public opinion in the United States.⁸ Although these are not Zavala’s original words or ideas, Zavala offers no contradictory remarks to North’s assessment, indicating a tacit agreement. Again quoting North, Zavala reports the general feelings in the U.S. about the situation of free Blacks:

De consiguiente cuando se hayan roto sus cadenas, [...] es claro que este pais se encontrará cubierto con una poblacion tan inútil como miserable; una poblacion que con su aumento disminuirá nuestras fuerzas, y su número solo traerá crímenes y pobreza. Esclava ó libre siempre será para nosotros una calamidad. (262-263)

Zavala suggests that the effects of slavery will linger in the U.S. because Blacks, even once freed, are not being incorporated into the civilizing and modernizing process. More significantly, however, it does not appear to be possible or desirable to incorporate Blacks into the United States. Indeed, politicians, statesmen, and even abolitionists throughout the Americas worried about how to incorporate (or the impossibility of incorporating) racial others into the nation, and particularly a republican nation, after emancipation. As Blackburn explains, one of “the difficulties in winning elite support for emancipation was explaining what would then become of the freedmen and women. Many abolitionists feared that slavery had degraded the slaves and that it would take a long time to teach them how to handle liberty” (333).

According to Zavala’s narrative, U.S. democracy and the very roots of its civilization, its moral as well as economic cornerstones, are similarly undermined by the racial “other” (the slave as well as the ex-slave) whom it refuses to incorporate into its (supposedly) liberal project. Reflecting upon the colonization efforts in Liberia and the current situation of free Blacks in the U.S., Zavala concedes that “No es cierto que mezcladas las castas jamas desaparecerian sus estigmas naturales” (263). But he also ponders other options for the U.S. besides waiting for racial mixture to erase, smooth over, or whiten the Black “other”:

Pero ¿cuántos siglos se necesitarian para que esto se verificase? Y entre tanto los inconvenientes de la permanencia de la casta negra en los Estados-Unidos son de mucha consideracion, para que un pueblo previsor y que calcula

admirablemente sus intereses deje de tomar providencias que le libren de los males ó que al menos los disminuyan. (263)

For Zavala, the answer to the question of what to do with the uncivilized racial other in the U.S. does not seem to be incorporation of Blacks into society. Liberia, for example, is presented in very positive terms and seems to be at least one good option for “overcoming” and moving towards a more civilized nation in the United States.

The free Blacks who remain excluded from national projects in Zavala’s depiction of the U.S. thus reveal a fundamental shortcoming of U.S. liberalism. But on the other hand, this racial other is simultaneously portrayed as an (or perhaps *the*) insurmountable impediment to the realization of U.S. liberalism. The paradox unfolds: Blacks (the embodiment of the racial other) cannot be incorporated into the national project of progress because U.S. liberalism is incomplete and flawed; but liberalism and progress will never be realized if uncivilized Blacks remain in the United States. In broader terms, Zavala once again highlights how slavery and its legacy will continue to haunt the U.S. and impede its move towards progress (economic, moral, and political).

In his discussion of both freed and enslaved Blacks, Zavala confronts one of the main (perceived) obstacles to the implementation of liberal ideals in both Mexico and the United States: racial difference. Throughout the Americas and Western Europe, equality was a concept which liberals found difficult to incorporate into their democratic institutions when it came to racial others, especially Indians and Blacks. As Beatriz Urías Horcasitas explains in “Ideas de modernidad en la historia de México: democracia e igualdad,” for liberals in Mexico in the first half of the nineteenth century, equality, and how that would play out in the Mexican context, was a constant source of conflict and debate: “Si bien la libertad y el derecho a la vida fueron aceptados [en México] sin discusión, la posibilidad de que el orden democrático igualara a criollos, mestizos e indios causó profundo rechazo” (45). For many liberals, racial difference represented an essentially insurmountable barrier to the development of liberal ideals.

The racial(ized) other surfaces as a central preoccupation in Zavala’s descriptions of Mexico as well as the United States in *Viage*. He uses the vocabulary and images of slavery on a more metaphorical level when he talks about blind imitation and lack of originality as other forms of slavery and degeneracy in his narrative. In the section about Missouri previously mentioned, Zavala compares the uncivilized U.S. frontier to his homeland, remarking, “En nuestros pueblos los mas recónditos, se palpan los efectos de la esclavitud en que hemos vivido bajo la antigua dominación” (50). It is not true civilization, he explains, but rather “los efectos del terror impreso en los ánimos de los

habitantes” that makes Mexicans merely appear civilized (50). He suggests that Mexico is not really civilized—at least not in all regions. Democratic institutions have been imposed in Mexico, but the true character of the Mexican people remains uncivilized. Zavala explicitly links this lack of true civilization with Mexico’s Spanish colonial history: Mexico’s backwardness is the result of hundreds of years of oppression (which he labels a type of slavery), imposed and sustained by its mother country, Spain.⁹ When Zavala describes this history in Mexico and the resultant lack of civilization in the present, he articulates another central dilemma liberals confronted: the contradiction between liberalist ideals of equality and the impossibility of implementing those ideals in a society structured by inequality. In short, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Mexican liberals perceived that they had formally instituted a democratic system that did not match up with their social reality, a vastly diverse society marked by severe economic and social inequalities which they saw as a reflection and product of centuries of colonial domination.¹⁰

In *Viage*, a past history of Spanish colonial domination continues to impede Mexico’s democratic venture much like how slavery continues to trouble the U.S.’s liberal project. In the conclusion to *Viage*, for example, Zavala describes the Mexican nation as “jóven, sin experiencia, llena de vida y deseosa de sacudir los restos de sus antiguas cadenas” (365). Mexico’s “antiguas cadenas,” still in the process of being dismantled, reference this other type of slavery, a cultural degeneracy inherited from and imposed by Spain, which continues to impact Mexico’s development as a liberal republic even in his present.

Zavala’s portrayal of Spain as a degenerate or “blackened” empire reproduces a well-known trope in the Americas and Europe by the nineteenth-century that painted Spain and its colonies as part of an anti-modern empire. The image of the morally, politically, and culturally backwards Spanish empire—the barbaric and black empire—has its roots in the Black Legend, which was propagated by economic and religious enemies of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and centered on the brutalities and violence that accompanied both Spain’s conquest of indigenous populations and its religious Inquisition in the New World and the Old.¹¹ While this view of the blackened Spaniard and the degenerate Spanish empire was certainly prevalent in the U.S. and Northern Europe, criollo elites in Spanish America also internalized this discourse, often pondering their (supposed) inherited degeneracy and resultant lack of modernity.¹² In addition, intellectuals, politicians, and nation builders throughout the Western world used the terms “civilization” and “progress” to articulate this idea of modernity. So, when Zavala talks about civilization and progress, he is

also talking about modernity and confronting a quandary faced by nineteenth-century Spanish American leaders, writers, and cultural workers: modernity was something they desired but also a discourse from which they were constantly excluded, in part because of their links with an anti-modern Spanish empire.¹³

As María DeGuzmán, Alejandro Mejías-López, Walter Mignolo, and others have shown, the exclusion of Spaniards and Spanish Americans from modernity was also cast in racialized terms. The anti-modern Spanish legacy is likewise linked to racial(ized) others for Zavala (and other Mexican liberals). During colonial rule, indigenous communities in Mexico had been legally considered minors and restricted from many rights of full citizenship.¹⁴ This long history of oppression at the hands of the Spanish colonial system, had created, in the minds of many Mexican liberals, a community that was ill prepared for participation in democratic governance. When documenting the state of printing and education in the U.S., for example, Zavala contrasts it with the situation in Mexico. He notes the low literacy rates and lack of educational opportunities for the masses in Mexico, concluding,

Añádase á esto que en Yucatan hay á lo menos un tercio de los habitantes que no hablan el castellano, y en el Estado de Méjico un quinto. Los que cuentan por nada el grado de civilizacion de las masas para dar *instituciones* á los *pueblos*, ó *son sumamente ignorantes*, ó *son estremadamente perversos*. (emphasis in original, 302-303)

Zavala indicates that Mexico's colonial history has created subjects—in this case, the indigenous masses who do not speak Spanish— unfit for participation in many democratic institutions.

Many Mexican liberals like Zavala who originally fought for indigenous rights and inclusion within the national body politic eventually came to perceive this move for inclusion and integration of the masses (particularly the indigenous masses) as a threat of social disintegration.¹⁵ Zavala's reflections upon Mexico's slave-like past tap into a discourse that portrayed Spain and her colonies as morally unsound and, as biological definitions of race gained precedence throughout the nineteenth century, increasingly racially degenerate. Mexico, in this view, is an imitation of an already degenerate empire that has created morally, culturally, and racially degenerate communities. Like in his discussion of Liberia and freed Blacks in the U.S., Zavala indicates that Mexico too must confront its own racial others—the remnants of hundreds of years of slave-like oppression and a moral and political blackness akin to the U.S.'s continued support of human slavery. Through this comparative mode, Zavala thus points to commonalities in their histories. These histories of slavery and colonization have created racial(ized)

others who are not seen as very compatible with or ready for the demands of a responsible citizen within a democratic nation. Slavery and political, moral, and racial degeneracy exist in both countries: they are similar young nations fighting anti-liberal legacies and pondering what to do with the racial(ized) others in their midst.

3. CONCLUSIONS: A SHARED FUTURE AND AN UNFINISHED PROJECT

Although contemporary critics have pointed to *Viage* as a key example of both the early Hispanic presence in the U.S. and Hispanic contributions to U.S. literature and culture, very little has been written in more depth about the content or the deeper ambiguities and intricacies of this text. In addition, critics have largely failed to take into account how Zavala's experiences as an exile frame his narrative and how his vantage point from exile in fact increases his symbolic capital back at home. As I have shown in this article, through representations of slavery, slave-like imitation, and racial(ized) others in both the U.S. and Mexico, Zavala creates a sense of shared, very American barbarism and degeneracy that is the result of centuries of colonialism —both external (Spanish) and internal (U.S. slavery). My analysis of *Viage* highlights a discourse that considers the common ground between Mexicans and Anglos throughout the nineteenth century. Because of his prominent public voice as an exile, his critiques carry importance as an interlocutor in both the Mexican national political arena and also in a broader international community.

Explicitly writing to his fellow countrymen from outside the nation, Zavala's text is nonetheless deeply involved in imagining a new nation and its place in relationship to other young American republics. He offers lessons, through comparison, about the similar histories and challenges both countries face; he posits that they must learn from one another, support one another and offer guidance. But they must also think critically about their relationship with one another. They must not blindly and servilely follow one model. As Zavala concludes his narrative, he describes the U.S.'s influence on Mexico and reiterates the need to avoid blind imitation. With the same complex ambiguity with which he characterizes the U.S. throughout the text, he ends his narrative with a warning for his readers: "el modelo era sublime; pero inimitable; [...] los artistas originales no copian ni imitan á los otros; inventan, crean sobre los modelos de la naturaleza y estudian sus secretos y misterios divinos" (Zavala 363-364). Once again highlighting the importance of originality, Zavala suggests that the U.S. is a model that Mexicans must not simplistically copy. The U.S., like Mexico, has its own imperfections. As Zavala ponders the future of democracy in Mexico, he also

recognizes the dangers of reading his own travel narrative too literally and warns his countrymen against blindly following the U.S. as a model.

In this same concluding chapter, Zavala also describes the United States as “Aquel pueblo, lleno de vida y movimiento, [que] continua su curso á un fin,” implying that the U.S. hasn’t yet reached that goal of progress and civilization (357). Thus, even as he praises the U.S. for all it has accomplished, he also acknowledges that its project of civilization and progress, like Mexico’s, is incomplete. The U.S.’s future, as Mexico’s, has yet to be written. For Zavala, the moment for reflection and change is now. In *Viage*, his experiences in exile confronting new forms of political and social organization press him to consider alternative possible futures for Mexico and help him to critique, imagine, and (re)define his homeland in the present. Through comparison, he shows how both the U.S. and Mexico are working towards a liberal republic. Both countries must be wary of barbarism and corruption in all of its forms, both past and present. Even as he points out many of the important differences between these countries, he sees them joined together in a similar though still incomplete move towards a truly liberal Republic —what he calls civilization and progress— and in a fight against barbarism in all of its many guises.

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NOTES

¹ All quotations of are from the original 1834 edition, I have maintained antiquated spellings, accent marks, etc. from the original text.

² Zavala was a principal architect of the Mexican Constitution of 1824; during his lifetime he also served as Governor of the State of Mexico on multiple occasions, Secretary of the Treasury in Vicente Guerrero's government, and as the first minister plenipotentiary of the Mexican legation in Paris. Urías and Henson provide a great deal of more detailed biographical information on Zavala and his political viewpoints.

³ See pp. 83-89 in Mexal for more on Zavala's fall from popularity and his decision to flee Mexico; see Chapter 18 in Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds for more general information on the clash between centralists and federalists in Mexico in the late 1820s through early 1830s.

⁴ The travel narrative was published in Mexico only posthumously, in Mérida (Mexico) in 1846, under the title *Viaje a los Estados-Unidos del Norte de América*. A print edition of the travel narrative was published in 2005 in a bilingual edition, translated into English by Wallace Woolsey and with a critical introduction by the editor, John-Michael Rivera.

⁵ Henson notes that Zavala initially urged Texas's separation from Mexico "not for independence, but to encourage the formation of a north Mexican federation of states favoring the Federalist system" (10).

⁶ Foner notes the centrality of morality in abolitionist discourses, explaining that "morality, not economics, was always paramount in their [abolitionists'] minds" (22). See pp. 150-159 in Blackburn for more on the humanitarian origins of abolitionist movements in Europe and the Americas.

⁷ Other critics have also noted how Zavala's narrative highlights many of the inconsistencies and shortcomings of the supposedly "liberal" U.S. democratic project. Historian Stephen J. Mexal, for example, argues that *Viaje's* "net rhetorical effect is to establish a critical, and not utopian, assessment of US liberalism" (80).

⁸ Zavala writes that North is representative of the voice of the people regarding Blacks in the U.S.: “Tal es el espíritu general de los habitantes de los Estados-Unidos sobre esta clase tan diferente en color, como en cualidades morales de las otras” (263).

⁹ Zavala expresses this same concern in other works as well. As Urías Horcasitas explains in her analysis of Zavala’s *Ensayo histórico de las revoluciones en México desde 1808 hasta 1830* (published in Paris in 1831), for Zavala, as for many other of his contemporary liberals, there was a disjuncture between the appearance of democratic institutions and the reality of their implementation (1991: 51). Throughout *Ensayo*, Zavala shows how “lo que las doctrinas abstractas habían transformado era el marco jurídico y las instituciones, pero esto había repercutido sobre la naturaleza misma del orden social” (Urías Horcasitas 1991: 51). In *Ensayo*, Zavala describes Mexico’s political system as “instituciones democráticas con elementos monárquicos,” stating that “falta mucho para que las cosas, la esencia del sistema [democrático], la realidad corresponda a los principios que se profesan” (Urías Horcasitas 1991: 51).

¹⁰ I am paraphrasing Urías Horcasitas contention that “Desde los primeros años del siglo XIX los liberales enfrentaron la difícil tarea de conciliar el proyecto democrático que formalmente había sido instituido, y una realidad social que era percibida por éstos como el producto de tres siglos de atraso colonial” (1991: 50).

¹¹ As María DeGuzmán explains in *Spain’s Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire*, it was through the Black Legend (at least in part) that Spain and the Spaniard came to be looked at as “a typological emblem of religious and political intolerance, tyranny, misrule, conspiracy, cruelty, barbarity, bloodthirstiness, backwardness, slothfulness, and degeneracy” (5).

¹² See pp. 44-45 in Mejías-López for more on this internalized discourse of inferiority and the reactions to it within Spanish American literary history.

¹³ See pp. 70-71 in Mignolo for more information on how modernity was viewed by Latin American intellectuals, politicians, etc. and how these discourses of modernity became linked to the Spanish and Portuguese languages, thus eventually leading to the racialization of these languages.

¹⁴ See pp. 199-200 in Meyer, Sherman and Deeds for more information on the legal status of Indians during the colonial period in New Spain.

¹⁵ Urías Horcasitas explains:

El hecho de que a partir de la Independencia las clases desfavorecidas gozaran de lo que Zavala llamaba ‘los estímulos de una libertad ilimitada’, fue percibido por los mismos liberales que habían apoyado los principios de la Constitución de 1824 —que abolió las diferencias raciales en relación con la participación política y generalizó el sufragio— como un peligro de desintegración social. (1991: 52)