

Mexico City: March 13-20, 2004

Sat., Mar 13: Leave Chicago, American Airlines, 7:05 p.m. Arrive in Mexico City, 11:30 p.m. Flying in at night is impressive—a vast panorama of endless lights, broken by dark patches which must be mountains. Shannon Shea meets me, takes me to the Fiesta Inn and gets me checked in.

Sun., Mar 14: Breakfast at the Fiesta Inn, a huge buffet. Taxi to the Frida Kahlo's "Blue House," (where she was born--1907--and died) where I meet Shannon and her roommate Michelle (another American teaching at Tec). Not many works by Kahlo, but a curious one entitled, "Marxism Gives Health to the Sick," and stranger still, several honorific portraits of Stalin. (She has been, after all, Trotsky's lover for a short while.)

We walk to the Trotsky house, where Michelle peels off. This is a moving exhibition, with many photos, including graphic ones of the assassination (August 20, 1940), a bedroom with bullet holes still in the wall from the first attempt (led by painter Siqueiros), the study where Trotsky worked so assiduously. Pictures of his children, (all?) killed by Stalin.

I return to the hotel, rest up, prepare for tomorrow's lecture, then am joined by Shannon. We have a drink in the bar (Negra Modela), then Kande Mutsaku joins us. He takes us to a large, upscale mall nearby (Perifico Sur?), where we have dinner at an Italian restaurant. Kande, who is Nigerian, is clearly progressive, but a little hard to follow. He gives me a copy of his book,

Mon., Mar 15: Kande picks me up at the hotel, accompanied by Paco, one of the students, and am taken to the Tec campus, which is quite impressive. Enclosed by a large wall (no admittance without a pass), walkways connecting the buildings, sculptures in the courtyards, including a life-sized chess set. The complex includes a high school. This is a private institution, mainly for the wealthy. (The humanities program graduate students, however, are competitively selected, fully funded, and not so upper-class. These are the students who will be attending my lectures.)

Shannon is there, and gotten everything ready. I show the two-hour video "Commanding Heights," take a break, then lecture on Friedman's Capitalism and Freedom. There are thirteen students in attendance. I lecture in English, of course. Most of the students ask questions in English, but those who prefer ask them in Spanish and they are translated by Ivon (who has an M.A. from York University).

The lecture goes until 12:30. I then go with Shannon and some of the students to have lunch at the university cafeteria, which is quite nice.

We return to Kande's office, where I meet briefly with Arturo Hernandez, to whom I give a book from Tom. Kande then takes me, some students and Shannon the the campus

coffee bar, where we sip coffee out of doors. Shannon then puts me in a cab, which takes me back to the hotel.

I take a nap, then go out for a walk, walking along Periferico to (Avenida) Tlalpan, which I explore for a few blocks.

I return, have dinner in the hotel, prepare my lecture for tomorrow.

Tues., Mar 16: I'm picked up by Mago, one of the students. I show the video, "Profit and Nothing But," then, after the break, lecture on The Communist Manifesto.

After class I'm taken by Roderigo, Ivon, Blanca and Shannon, first by bus, then by subway, to the center of the city. We go to the Belles Artes, where an opera is in session. We are unable to see the famous Diego Rivera that is there. We walk past the Catedral Metropolitana, to the huge plaza, the Zócalo, then to Templo Mayor, an Aztec ruin. We have dinner at a local restaurant.

Back at the hotel, I go to the guest services area to check e-mail. I compose a nice card for Anita, who will be 36 tomorrow and send it off (but she never gets it).

I take a walk from the hotel to a large shopping mall nearby, bordered by a multiplex theater.

Wed., Mar 17: I'm picked up by Ivon and Roderigo. I show the video "Global Banquet," then lecture on Wallerstein's Historical Capitalism.

I go home and rest, then go with Shannon for a St. Patrick's Day dinner at a cheap, outdoor restaurant. We try to go to an Irish pub afterwards, but it is impossible to get in. I locate a bar not far away. We are shortly joined by Shannon's roommate, then by Roderigo and Mariana. I ask the latter two about the Zapatistas. Both had been much taken by them, and see them as important in dramatizing the plight of Chiapas, but neither sees them as particularly dynamic at the moment.

Thurs., Mar 18: I'm picked up by Paco. I show the video, "The Mondragon Experiment," and the short promotional film on Mondragon, then lecture on After Capitalism. Kande attends part of the lecture, asks some questions. It's not clear to me where he's coming from.

Mago, Mariana, Xochitl, Ana and Roderigo take me back into the city. We see the amazing "Flying men from Veracruz" in a park, then go to the Anthropological Museum, with its wonderful fountain and huge collection of artifacts from the various regions of Mexico. I'm then taken for dinner at the Jardin de St. Augustin in the Tlalpan district. We have drinks outside nearby. It's a very pleasant evening.

Fri., Mar 19: I'm picked up at 11 by Mago. We meet Mariana and Ana at the Belles Artes. This time I do get to see Rivera's magnificent mural, "El Hombre Controlador del Universo," the one originally commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller, then ordered destroyed. We look at a number of other murals in the building, by Siqueiros, Tamayo and Orozco, then go to a large market nearby, where do some shopping, mostly for Lauryn. We return by subway and bus. I nap, then spend some time working out an outline for Shannon's dissertation.

Shannon had been planning to have a farewell party for me, but she began feeling sick the day before, and decided to cancel. Instead she comes to the hotel in the evening. We sit in the lounge area for several hours, discussing her dissertation. I tell her I'm willing to play an active role, in hopes that she can finish it this summer. (If she does, she'll be offered a tenured position at Tec. Currently, David Ingram is directing the dissertation. TomWren and Femi are the other committee members.)

Sat., Mar 20: I take an early taxi to the airport, checking out at 6:15. Leave Mexico City at 9:35. Back in Chicago, 1:30.

The students I got to know:

Mago (Margarita Torres): short, vivacious, parents both leftists as students, one of her uncles was killed by the gov't. Currently living with his wife, her aunt. She is a graduate of a prestigious school, and went to work, at 23, in the government's environmental agency. She became disillusioned and quit. She then went to work for a major TV station, but quit that also.

Roderigo Moreno: Worked by United Airlines for a time. He used to be Left, but has become disenchanted. His father died recently. He is currently involved in some legal battles with his brothers concerning the estate.

Mariana Castro Alvarez: b. 1978, raised by her grandmother, has a degree in International Affairs. Serious, intelligent, very nice.

Blanca Haidé Cruz : degree in Economics

Ivon Cepeda: best English, has an M.A. from York University

Ana Salaiza: b. 1974, a psychologist from the Pacific Coast

Xochitl Martinex: loves to dance, from Veracruz, has degrees in philosophy, economics

Paco Diaz: former priest, educated by the Jesuits, has spent time working with the poor