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COMMENTARY

Cinco de Mayo: a binational celebration

By Juan Carlos Mendoza Sánchez
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Cinco de Mayo is one of the most important national holidays in the history of Mexico, because it allows us to make memory of the Battle of Puebla. It occurred on May 5, 1862 when a smaller and poorly equipped Mexican army under the command of General Ignacio Zaragoza stopped and defeated the powerful French army of Napoleon III, one of the most professional and best equipped of that time. This celebration is also held in the United States, making it a binational party. If you, dear reader, do not know why Cinco de Mayo is a bi-national holiday, I will briefly describe it to you.

The Battle of Puebla occurred while the American Civil War was going on. At that time, the army of the Confederate States had caused a great deal of trouble to the military forces of the industrialized North. The survival of the Union, which was defended by President Abraham Lincoln through values such as democracy, equality and freedom, were threatened by the pro-slavery Southern States that had the sympathy of the European monarchies. The events after the Battle of Puebla revealed the link between the French invasion of Mexico and the United States Civil War.

In 1865, when the American Civil War was over, Mexico was still occupied by French troops supporting Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg against the Mexican resistance led by Benito Juárez. In May of that year, General Ulysses Grant sent General Sheridan to occupy the banks of the Río Bravo, not only to prevent slavers from fleeing to Mexico and joining Maximilian, but because he feared that French soldiers occupying Mexico could support the defeated Southern States.

In his memoirs, General Sheridan wrote the following about General Ulysses Grant: He looked upon the invasion of Mexico by Maximilian as a part of the rebellion itself, because of the encouragement that invasion had received from the Confederacy, and that our success in putting down secession would never be complete till the French and Austrian invaders were compelled to quit the territory of our sister republic. This quote is historical evidence of the relationship between the French invasion of Mexico and the Civil War. It is well known that European monarchies have always opposed the democratic model of government in the United States.

The defeat of the French army in Puebla on May 5, 1862 was not only a triumph for the Mexican military forces, smaller in number and poorly equipped, but it represented the victory of the values of independence, democracy and freedom that Mexicans and Americans both share. Although the de-

feated French regrouped and imposed Maximilian as Emperor of Mexico with the help of reinforcements arriving from Europe, the resistance of Mexicans led by President Benito Juárez allowed the complete defeat and expulsion of the French from Mexico after 5 years. The culmination of this passage in Mexican history was the execution of Maximilian Habsburg at Cerro de las Campanas in the state of Querétaro on June 19, 1867, along with his Mexican collaborators, generals Miguel Miramón and Tomás Mejía.

Thus, on May 5th, 1862, while the Americans were living their Civil War, it was the Mexicans who detained the invading troops of France in Puebla; it was the Mexicans who defended the common values of independence, freedom and democracy. That is why the Cinco de Mayo celebration turned into a binational festivity over time.

Cinco de Mayo was first celebrated in California before anywhere else in the United States, just a few weeks after the historic Battle of Puebla. Dr. David Hayes-Bautista documented in his book *Cinco de Mayo* an American Tradition that the first celebrations occurred in the suburbs of Fresno, California. Those first celebrations made a lot of sense because for California, a non-slave state, the victory of the pro-slavery Southern States represented a threat to their way of life, more in line with that of the North. For California, the triumph of slavers was a threat to its values of democracy, equality and freedom which emerged from a population whose origin was Hispanic-Mexican.

For this reason, the news of the sound defeat of the powerful French army at the hands of the tiny Mexican army was considered a triumph of democracy and freedom, values that until today we Mexicans and Americans have in common.

Cinco de Mayo's extraordinary military action is a symbol of the union of Mexicans in adversity to defend our territory and our country from foreign invaders. It reminds us of what we Mexicans are capable of doing, even in the worst conditions, when we leave aside our differences to join a united fight for collective well-being.

Due to the ongoing health emergency there will be no Cinco de Mayo celebration this year, but we hope that the traditional guacamole of this bi-national festivity is not missing in any home. And in the face of COVID-19's pandemic, Cinco de Mayo should also serve to remind us that the total defeat of this virus and its extermination in North America can only be achieved with coordination and cooperation between countries and peoples that are neighbors, friends and strategic partners.

Juan Carlos Mendoza Sánchez is the Consul General of Mexico in Laredo.



We can't sacrifice another woman for political gain

By Lynn Lewis

It's a story we know all too well. A woman says a politician has raped her. He denied her, she's coming forward with the worst people to know what this man is made of, what he's capable of.

And we know the rest of the story, too. People question her motives, people question her character. She is part of a partisan conspiracy to discredit the person she's accusing. It might be she's just wrong. Maybe it wasn't that bad. It can't be that bad.

It's the story cycle we use to work, close and then ultimately pronounce as clear-cut male politicians how we justify placing them in positions of power.

It happened with President Bill Clinton after the allegations of sexual misconduct from Monica Lewinsky, Paula Jones, Kathleen Willey, Leslie Miller and Monica Lewinsky. In light of the Clinton scandal, Lewinsky has come to describe her relationship with Clinton as a "great abuse of power."

It has happened with President Trump, who has been accused of sexual misconduct by dozens of women. In a recent, viral example, it happened in July 2018, when Christine Blasey Ford accused then-Supreme Court nominee Brett M. Kavanaugh of having sexually assaulted her at a high school gathering.

Ford is still effectively being after her moving testimony, while Kavanaugh sits on the high court.

And now we have the case of Tara Reade, who has accused former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, of assaulting her when she worked in his Senate office in 2015. Reade's brother and a friend who prefer to remain anonymous have both said she recounted the incident to them at the time. Biden, who left the race before long, has flatly declared, "It never happened."

Many Democrats are treating themselves to historical precedents to justify ignoring Reade's allegations. Tom Hironaka, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, says that because the allegation didn't turn up when Biden was voted as the Democratic vice presidential selection in 2020, it couldn't have happened.

It's a cycle that has already seen the impeachment of the sitting

president and a global pandemic that Trump is often criticized for handling. Lives hang in the balance of the outcome in November.

And yet Democrats should still insist that Biden step aside. Democrats must apply the standards we elaborated during the Kavanaugh case to our own side in his defense. Biden's campaign is emphasizing his support of women's rights. But as Justice Sotomayor argues in *OBAMA v. THOMAS*, "President must not fall to the trap of ignoring individual women's stories in exchange for broader political power. It not only runs counter to our most fundamental values around treating women, but it's also a strategy that has never and will never result in the progress we're actually after."

And it's not just Democrats, but Democrats. If we want the change we say we do, if we truly stand for women, we cannot silence yet another woman's voice for political gain.

"Biden or Trump" is a false dichotomy designed to force us to hypocrisy. It's false because it ignores that there are so many qualified candidates who could just as effectively vote against Trump in the general election.

Faced with credible accusations of sexual assault against their man, the Republicans could have substituted another judicial conservative for Kavanaugh. Democrats, too, can replace Biden with an ideologically similar figure. Or we risk becoming hypocrites.

It is only Max Blumenthal, who he denied the nomination at or before the August convention, would hardly face jail time, as there's no need to apply a standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt" to Reade's assertions. Many Democrats and political leaders have called for an independent investigation of Reade's claims. Lewis, who this call, but it's not enough. Anyone who has been assaulted knows that there is never a credible enough witness, never enough proof. Biden should be investigated and replaced.

Before Reade went public with her allegations, I had been committed to voting for the Democratic nominee, even if that person wasn't my preferred candidate. And I intended to vote for Biden despite having had an unpleasant experience with him on the campaign trail. In September 2018, in my role as a

columnist for the Cedar Rapids Gazette, I moderated a forum on LGBTQ issues with several presidential candidates. In the forum, I asked Biden about his history of voting for the military policy known as "Don't ask, don't tell," and he replied, sarcastically, "Well, aren't you nice?"

I replied, "Just asking what people want to know." The audience applauded. Later, as we walked off the stage, he walked by me and said, dryly, "Well, aren't you a real sweetheart?"

I received the exchange and it went viral. I spent that weekend looking to my home from the harassment and death threats - people accusing me of making it up, of misunderstanding him, of attacking him. He never apologized. I bring this up not just for transparency, but because Clinton, in a very small way, what it's like to be part of an inconvenient political narrative.

I contacted Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., in Iowa's first in the nation primary contest. But as the primary cycle dragged on, and both low-polling and formidable candidates dropped out, we were finally left with Biden. The Democratic electorate was apparently so afraid of having another election to Trump that they settled on the safest option: the conservative white male politician. And now, he is yet another white male politician shielded by sexual misconduct allegations.

I do not want to be forced to balance the accusations against Biden and Trump - playing the "Which is worse?" game. But that is what I'm being told I will have to do.

November is six months away, and we still have time to tell a different story. I want to believe that at least in some small way the world has changed that all the work the Third Wave of feminism has done to elect more women, and to restore the culture of shame and silence around assault, has shifted how we handle accusations like Reade's.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., could write his campaign; other candidates could keep back to party leaders; eight women could be named as Democratic nominees; we do not have to sacrifice yet another woman on the altar of political expediency.

Lynn Lewis wrote the commentary for the Washington Post.

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