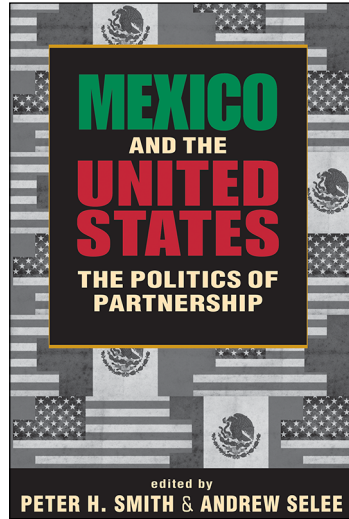


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**Mexico and
the United States:
The Politics of Partnership**

edited by
**Peter H. Smith
and Andrew Selee**

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1800 30th Street, Ste. 314
Boulder, CO 80301
USA
telephone 303.444.6684
fax 303.444.0824

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1

Challenges of Partnership

Andrew Selee and Peter H. Smith

The relationship between the United States and Mexico presents enduring puzzles. It is of great importance to both countries, but it receives lopsided attention—not enough in the United States, sometimes too much in Mexico. Economic cooperation and joint endeavors frequently give rise to mutual suspicion and distrust. Intensive informal exchanges often take place outside the framework of the law. Soothing diplomatic communications mask underlying tensions and occasionally prevent substantive progress in bilateral policy. Issues of inherent complexity are shrouded in oversimplification. We are neighbors but not always friends. What can account for such anomalies?

In this book we seek to unravel such puzzles within a contemporary context of accelerating political and global change. Over the past decade or so, the advent of democracy has dramatically transformed the landscape of Mexican politics. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 have altered geopolitical priorities for the United States. The rise of China and other countries has reshaped the global economy and the prevailing world order. Each of these processes—plus an upsurge in drug-related violence, the polarization of US politics, and the onset of global financial crises—has led to further complications in the bilateral relationship.

How have the two countries responded to these developments? Have they become more adept at working together? Have they developed institutional mechanisms for achieving genuine cooperation? If there exists a binational “partnership,” as public officials are wont to proclaim, how effective has it been? Can it be strengthened?

At the heart of this book is the central question of whether the United States and Mexico can improve their ability to manage shared challenges. On one hand, this is a question about how well the two governments cooperate on issues of mutual concern. On the other hand, it is a question of how the two societies are coming to terms with each other through multiple encounters in the worlds of business, politics, and everyday life. We look for patterns in official policy and public opinion that shed light on the degree to which cooperation and mutual understanding are possible in a highly asymmetrical but deeply interdependent relationship.

We begin with a normative assumption that cooperation is preferable to conflict, especially between democratic neighbors sharing deep economic, social, and cultural ties. At the same time, we recognize that multiple forces within the bilateral relationship can pull in divergent directions. Cooperation could well emerge from the perception of mutual threats from external forces or from a hardheaded calculation that engagement can produce positive-sum benefits for both countries. With respect to some issue areas, however, policymakers and citizens may perceive such broad differences in national interests that engagement would yield a zero-sum or negative-sum result. This has sometimes been the case in debates about migration and economic integration. Understanding the factors that underlie cooperation and conflict is a central goal of this volume.

Beyond concerns about policy *process*, we seek to focus attention on policy *content*. Have the United States and Mexico succeeded in forging optimal policies? Have they established “best practices” or settled instead for lowest-common-denominator forms of compromise? We suspect that the latter is too often the case, and for this reason we present a broad range of policy options at the end of this book. Our intention here is to stimulate constructive debate and, in the best of worlds, to help lay the intellectual foundations for lasting improvements in bilateral policy.

What’s New?

Changing Interpretations of US-Mexico Relations

This volume builds upon a rich tradition of scholarly literature on US-Mexican relations.¹ Over time, academic studies have shifted from an emphasis on asymmetry and dependence to a greater focus on the management of interdependence and the multiple issues, actors, and points of engagement across the border. Yet at present there exists no comprehen-

sive and up-to-date book to account for the impacts of democratization in Mexico, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and seismic upheavals in the world economy and geopolitical order.²

Debt and Dependency

A generation ago, scholarly concerns about US-Mexican relations reflected two factors: the debt crisis of the 1980s, which inflicted serious socioeconomic costs upon Mexico, and the prevalence of “dependency theory” in social science. These preoccupations often came together in emphases on asymmetries of power and latent societal incompatibilities. A further sense of conflict derived from foreign-policy differences over the socialist regime in Cuba and civil wars in Central America.

Characteristic publications of that era sought to comprehend the paradoxical underpinnings of an increasingly close, but still quite distant, relationship between the two countries.³ Broadly speaking, they reveal a notable difference between Mexican authors, who emphasized asymmetry in the relationship, and US authors, who focused instead on the notion of “interdependence.” Mexico’s then recently discovered oil wealth was seen as a key element in growing ties between the two countries. Only one prominent work at this time, by economist Sidney Weintraub, suggested the desirability of free trade with Mexico; most US analysts saw this as unlikely, and most Mexican analysts saw it as undesirable.⁴

A major interpretive study by Mexican scholars Josefina Vázquez and Lorenzo Meyer sought to explain how history had shaped the bilateral relationship, especially its inequalities, and how this development conditioned attitudes on both sides of the border. As they state at the outset, “Viewed from the north of the Rio Grande, the relationship between Mexico and the United States is one of interdependence. But viewed from the south of the same river—Mexicans call it the Río Bravo—the relationship with the United States is one of dependence.”⁵ Vázquez and Meyer go on to address the internal dynamics within each country that led to the divergence in their economic and political fortunes and the ways that conflicts created markedly different views of the relationship.

Later in the 1980s, the Bilateral Commission on the Future of United States–Mexican Relations produced a book-length policy report plus a five-volume series of background papers by academic experts from both countries. A central premise of this project was that the US-Mexico relationship was becoming increasingly interdependent, with policymaking driven by “intermestic” factors (i.e., simultaneously international and domestic). One of the contributors, the late Carlos Rico, summarized the

relationship as one of “complex interdependent asymmetry.”⁶ This interpretation remains surprisingly pertinent even today.

Tension formed a persistent theme in writings of this time. In his aptly titled book *Distant Neighbors*, journalist Alan Riding sought to explain the “essence” of Mexico through an analysis of politics and social life. And in *Limits to Friendship*, Robert Pastor and Jorge Castañeda exposed everyday obstacles to mutual understanding—ranging from elementary-school curricula to foreign-policy formulations.⁷ Both works concluded that fundamental differences in cultural attitudes and historical experiences would complicate mutual understanding and pose long-term challenges for productive engagement.

Focusing on NAFTA

The 1990s witnessed a remarkable shift in emphasis from conflict to cooperation—in light of partial relief from the debt crisis, the ending of the Cold War, and, especially, the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which joined Mexico together with Canada and the United States. Formally implemented in 1994, the treaty represented a calculated decision by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari that only such an agreement could spark investor confidence and stimulate sustained growth. NAFTA has generated continuing debates about its consequences, economic and political, and has stimulated competing strands in the scholarly literature.⁸

One current, associated mostly with economists, tended to praise the agreement and emphasize its predicted long-term benefits to participating countries. Especially prominent in policymaking circles were the writings of Gary Hufbauer and Jeffrey Schott, who offered econometric projections about the societal benefits of NAFTA.⁹ Mainstream views throughout the 1990s reflected underlying optimism about the conceptual origins and economic consequences of the treaty.¹⁰

There were dissident voices as well. US organized labor denounced what it saw as a loss of American jobs, while Mexican nationalists decried what they saw as a loss of sovereignty. Among social scientists, John Audley and Eduardo Zepeda and their respective associates provided skeptical assessments of NAFTA’s economic impact on Mexico and the United States.¹¹ A thoughtful critique from a Canadian perspective raised concerns with how NAFTA was reshaping the internal workings of the three countries and called for a modified, low-key North American agenda.¹²

Political discussion focused on two central issues, democratization and management of the bilateral relationship. Convivial relations between

national leaders (e.g., Bill Clinton and Ernesto Zedillo) sparked interest in the idea of societal and cultural convergence. Indeed, a multiauthored study of large-scale public opinion surveys suggested that fundamental values in the three societies were trending in a common direction, a so-called North American trajectory in favor of democracy and tolerance.¹³ As both cause and consequence, NAFTA could thus be interpreted as a logical expression of this structural development.¹⁴

Fundamental debates centered on the role of NAFTA in Mexico's democratic transformation. The treaty took effect in the early 1990s and Mexico held a democratic election by the end of the decade: advocates perceived clear and self-evident support for a causal connection between freer trade and freer politics. Other analysts dissected the inherent ambiguity in NAFTA's political orientation and stressed instead the importance of domestic factors behind Mexico's democratization.¹⁵ From the present standpoint, a general consensus appears to regard domestic forces as predominant, while acknowledging that NAFTA had a marginal (but positive) effect on the trend toward democracy.

Additional controversy mounted over NAFTA's impact on the bilateral relationship and, more generally, on Mexican foreign policy. As Ambassador John Negroponte wrote in a now famous cable to the US State Department in the midst of negotiations over NAFTA, "Mexico is in the process of changing the substance and image of its foreign policy. It has switched from an ideological, nationalistic and protectionist approach to a pragmatic, outreaching and competitive view of world affairs. . . . The proposal for an FTA [free trade agreement] is in a way the capstone of these new policy approaches. From a foreign policy perspective, an FTA would institutionalize acceptance of a North American orientation to Mexico's foreign relations."¹⁶ Would NAFTA oblige Mexico to provide unstinting support for US foreign policy?

Not entirely. Guadalupe González González has analyzed Mexico's changing location in the global political order and highlighted the greater pragmatism of Mexican foreign policy, its shift toward economic diplomacy, and the acceptance of international institutional constraints on traditional notions of sovereignty. These changes both drove and resulted from Mexico's greater emphasis on economic ties with the United States. Lorenzo Meyer has looked anew at the origins of Mexico's defensive nationalism and suggested that Mexico may be better off being more proactive in its relationship with the neighbor to the north, as long as it takes into account the underlying power differentials.¹⁷ Sidney Weintraub, meanwhile, has argued that Mexicans have often gained the upper hand in the bilateral relationship by taking advantage of Washington's preoccupa-

tions with distant points on the globe.¹⁸ Notwithstanding significant differences in nuance, these authors suggest that Mexico may hardly be powerless in the face of its large neighbor to the north.

The increased engagement between political leaders, the expansion of trade, and the rhetoric of partnership led analysts to reassess how far apart the two countries really were. Perhaps the most significant study from this era was *The United States and Mexico*, by Jorge Domínguez and Rafael Fernández de Castro, who argued that increasing institutionalization was structuring the US-Mexico relationship in new ways and influencing a broad swath of issues. Alterations in the international context were “differentially mediated through the bilateral institutions that were created in the 1990s,” in their estimation, with conspicuous impacts on economic policy but less on public security and cross-border migration.¹⁹ In a comparable way, Clint Smith observed that the relationship was coming together, notwithstanding the inertia of asymmetrical and highly divergent histories.²⁰

A central theme concerned the ways that a democratic Mexico might reposition itself in the global political order, and in its relationship to the United States. Recent writings have generally assumed that asymmetry matters, but that Mexico is able to hold its own in shaping the course of bilateral decisions. Major studies of foreign policy by Olga Pellicer, Luis Herrera-Lasso, Gustavo Vega, and others have tried to situate the country’s relationship with the United States within a framework of proactive foreign policy.²¹ These analysts share a basic conviction that a more assertive foreign policy vis-à-vis the United States is useful and important, while they also express reservations about Mexico’s capacity to realize this potential in light of existing asymmetries and, in some cases, mismanagement of the foreign-policy agenda.

Aftermaths: NAFTA and 9/11

Since the turn of the century, scholarly efforts have tended to focus not on the relationship in general but on specific issue areas.²² Migration has formed a central axis in the academic literature. Binational studies proposed serious policy options for the two governments in 2001. As a new decade began, a seminal book by Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan Malone helped provide a theoretically based exploration of migration patterns and underlying forces at work.²³ Additional studies analyzed trends in migration at the state level in Mexico.²⁴ Others have looked at US immigration patterns, Mexican migration policy, and the politics of

remittances.²⁵ Journalists have written compelling accounts of the migration process itself and its impacts on communities along the border.

The diversification of participants in bilateral relations (and in Mexican politics) has led to a new focus on nongovernmental organizations and on citizens in general. Sergio Aguayo, in 2005, produced a comprehensive almanac that tracks everything from trade and bilateral aid to Mexican citizens residing in the United States.²⁶ Other recent books have focused on the increasing roles of civil society, immigrant organizations, and cross-border journalism.²⁷

Reflecting these developments, the new millennium has witnessed a surge in studies of public opinion. Andrew Selee has assessed the political impact of citizen perceptions in the two countries.²⁸ Extensive surveys have shed innovative light on evolving attitudes in Mexico toward the United States. According to studies by Guadalupe González González, Alejandro Moreno, and others, Mexican citizens have become remarkably pragmatic in their views of American society and processes of bilateral integration, while expressing suspicion about the motives and actions of the US government.²⁹

There has emerged a burgeoning literature on the US-Mexico border and surrounding areas. Joan Anderson and James Gerber have explored the social and economic challenges faced by border communities, while other work has portrayed the border region as a microcosm of the overall US-Mexico relationship.³⁰ Peter Andreas has challenged the notion that the US government can close the shared border without producing perverse effects for both countries.³¹ Journalists have chronicled day-to-day aspects of border life and underlying conflicts. From the Mexican side, Carlos González Herrera has produced a study of Ciudad Juárez and its links to El Paso.³²

Extensive violence and organized criminal activity have spawned a growing literature on public safety and prospects for bilateral cooperation. John Bailey and his collaborators have analyzed the collapse of traditional means of protecting public security and the challenge of building institutions to uphold the rule of law.³³ Raúl Benítez Manaut and colleagues have focused on the need for US cooperation against arms trafficking and money laundering and in support of law enforcement.³⁴ In a similar vein, another recent study points to significant challenges to the implementation of collaborative bilateral policies against organized criminal violence.³⁵ Various authors have urged the United States to intensify efforts to help Mexico strengthen law enforcement and judicial institutions,³⁶ while a series of articles in *Foreign Affairs* has suggested alternative strategies for curbing drug trafficking and drug-related violence.³⁷

In the meantime, there has been remarkably little attention to the US-led “global war on terror” and its implications for the relationship with Mexico.³⁸ This oversight might stem from the impression that the US-Mexican relationship responds to and reflects its own internal dynamics, apart from transformations and dislocations in a seemingly distant global arena. We think this view is understandable but incorrect. Surely, the tightening of US border policy has arisen in large part as a response to 9/11. Just as surely, the invasion of Iraq evoked a strong and negative reply from civil society in Mexico. Then, too, the US government’s antiterrorist campaign has drawn attention and resources away from Mexico (and Latin America in general). In short, the notion of “security” has come to mean different things on different sides of the border. It is essential to disentangle this concept.

Generally speaking, the quantity and quality of writings on US-Mexican relations have vastly increased in recent years, while the range and variety of empirical research offers eloquent testimony to the depth of interdependence between the two countries. Even so, there is a conspicuous absence of efforts to tie together the different strands of inquiry in such a way as to provide a general assessment of where the relationship stands and is heading. That is where this book comes in.

Why This Book?

Our volume seeks to reevaluate the state of US-Mexico relations in light of recent changes in the global political and economic order and the economy, politics, and society of the two countries. We begin with analyses of thematic patterns affecting the management of the relationship.

In Chapter 2, Peter Smith compares diverse conceptions about the prevailing world order—unipolar, multipolar, flat, or pyramidal—that have determined the relative priority that US governments have (or have not) given to the bilateral relationship. Mexico has in contrast subscribed to a single and consistent view of global power arrangements, although analysts have derived differing recipes for policy alternatives. A central question is whether and how such different perceptions influence policy.

Focusing on the bilateral arena, Andrew Selee and Alberto Díaz-Cayeros in Chapter 3 explore underlying dynamics of the US-Mexican relationship, which they describe as intense, complex, and asymmetrical. Increased trade, migration, security challenges, and demographic concentrations in the border region have amplified the intensity of the relationship. At the same time, the number of participating actors—from federal

agencies to state governments to nongovernmental organizations—has multiplied significantly, making the relationship increasingly complex and multifaceted. Asymmetry persists between the two countries. While US priorities tend to provide the overall framework for what is possible, however, Mexico can often shape the content of specific items on the bilateral agenda.

In Chapter 4, John Bailey and Tonatiuh Guillén-López address policy processes in the two countries by exploring the changing balance between multiple “policy baskets” in bilateral affairs. Each of the baskets has different constituencies within the two governments and different networks within society at large. The authors show how policymaking has become focused on the border region, where all of the baskets come together, and they call for better balance in the relative importance of policy priorities.

The second section of our volume examines specific issue areas that have dominated the bilateral agenda in recent years—economic integration, drug trafficking, cross-border migration, and environmental protection. The intent is to understand how the structural dynamics of the relationship play out in day-to-day interactions in these different areas. In each case, contributors evaluate the effectiveness of existing channels for resolving conflicts and developing creative solutions.

In Chapter 5, Robert Blecker and Gerardo Esquivel examine the causes and consequences of economic integration. Contrary to much conventional wisdom, they find that NAFTA has done little if anything to promote structural development or reduce inequality between the two economies. National governments have failed to adopt complementary policies to promote education, improve infrastructure, or invest in less-developed areas.

David FitzGerald and Rafael Alarcón then provide a detailed analysis of demographic flows between the two countries and argue that prevailing US migration law is out of line with laws of supply and demand for labor. They demonstrate that current US efforts to “seal the border” have not only failed to accomplish their goals but also generated perverse and harmful effects, while Mexico’s recent tendency to overlook the issue has wasted political opportunities for change. Long-term solutions lie in changing US policies and in supporting international agreements that seek a more equitable, fair, and efficient management of the migration process.

On the subject of environmental protection, Roberto Sánchez-Rodríguez and Stephen Mumme describe the growth of a well-developed matrix of binational institutions that seek to harness cooperation across the border—including the North American Development Bank (NADB), the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC), and the Inter-

national Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). And yet, as the authors show, future problems in border communities will far outpace existing structures and require a rethinking of the current institutional architecture.

Turning to illicit economies in Chapter 8, Luis Astorga and David Shirk trace the rise of organized criminal groups in Mexico that are linked to the trafficking of drugs to the United States. They highlight shifts in the US market, resulting from changing policies and consumption patterns, and shifts in Mexican politics, within the context of democratization. The authors emphasize the need for more robust law enforcement, stronger institutions, and imaginative reconception of the idea of “war on drugs.”

In conclusion, Smith and Selee distill and present a range of policy alternatives derived from chapters in the book. The goals are twofold: to outline the intellectual foundations of current debates, and to offer productive suggestions to policymaking communities in the two countries.

In sum, our book purports to make a variety of contributions to current understanding of US-Mexican relations:

- by placing the relationship within the context of a rapidly changing world order
- by identifying underlying dynamics that drive the relationship and its policy processes
- by taking a comprehensive view of issues and themes and thus enabling a focus on interconnections between them
- by identifying strengths and weaknesses in the management of the relationship
- and by offering realistic policy recommendations for both the US and Mexican governments that could provide a new framework for future management of the relationship.

We are looking for ways to improve the content of bilateral cooperation. We believe that partnership can be consistent with the preservation of sovereignty and national identity. We advocate practical policies that can meet outside threats, produce positive-sum outcomes, and enhance the security and welfare of citizens in both societies.

Notes

1. References to scholarly literature in this section are illustrative, and by no means comprehensive. See the bibliography at the end of this volume for an extensive listing of relevant works.

2. A partial exception is the second edition of Domínguez and Fernández de Castro, *United States and Mexico*, which includes a prologue addressing these shifts. The first edition appeared in 2001.

3. Purcell, ed., *Mexico–United States Relations*; Vásquez and García Griego, eds., *Mexican-U.S. Relations*.

4. Weintraub, *Free Trade Between Mexico and the U.S.*

5. Vásquez and Meyer, *United States and Mexico*, p. 2 for quote.

6. Rico, “Making of U.S. Policy Towards Mexico.”

7. Riding, *Distant Neighbors*; Pastor and Castañeda, *Limits to Friendship*.

8. On the origins of NAFTA see Mayer, *Interpreting NAFTA*; Chambers and Smith, eds., *NAFTA in the New Millennium*; and Mexico Institute, *NAFTA at Ten*.

9. Hufbauer and Schott, *North American Free Trade*; Hufbauer and Schott, *NAFTA: An Assessment*; Hufbauer and Schott, *North American Economic Integration*; and Hufbauer and Schott, *NAFTA Revisited*.

10. Weintraub, *NAFTA’s Impact on North America*; Gambrill, *Diez años del TLCAN en México*.

11. Audley et al., *NAFTA’s Promise and Reality*; Zepeda et al., *Future of North American Trade Policy*. See also Bacon, *Children of NAFTA*; and Faux, *Global Class War*.

12. Clarkson, *Does North America Exist?*

13. Inglehart, Nevitte, and Basáñez, *North American Trajectory*.

14. Hard-headed political analysis argues that the United States was willing to withdraw support from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and embrace bilateral integration on the ground that it would promote the long-standing goal of stability in Mexico. See Aguayo, *Myths and [Mis]Perceptions*; and Mazza, *Don’t Disturb the Neighbors*.

15. Peter H. Smith, “Political Impact of Free Trade on Mexico”; and Cameron and Wise, “Political Impact of NAFTA on Mexico.”

16. Quoted in Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 216.

17. González González, “Foreign Policy Strategies in a Globalized World”; Meyer, “Estados Unidos y la evolución del nacionalismo defensivo mexicano.”

18. Weintraub, *Unequal Partners*.

19. Domínguez and Fernández de Castro, *United States and Mexico*.

20. Clint Smith, *Inevitable Partnership*.

21. Pellicer, *México y el mundo*; Herrera-Lasso, *México ante el mundo*; Vega, ed., *Alcances y límites de la política exterior de México*.

22. Within the policymaking community, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Woodrow Wilson Center (both in Washington, DC) have produced numerous reports recommending greater cooperation across a range of issues.

23. Massey, Durand, and Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*.

24. Cornelius, FitzGerald, Fischer, and Muse-Orlinoff, eds., *Mexican Migration and the U.S. Economic Crisis*. See also Escobar and Martin, *La gestión de la migración México–Estados Unidos*.

25. Bean and Stevens, *America's Newcomers and the Dynamics of Diversity*; Rosenblum, *Transnational Politics of U.S. Immigration Policy*; Merz, *New Patterns for Mexico*.

26. Aguayo, *Almanaque México-Estados Unidos*.

27. Brooks and Fox, eds., *Cross-Border Dialogues*; Bada, Fox, and Selee, eds., *Invisible No More*; Fuentes-Berain, Selee, and Servin-Baez, eds., *Writing Beyond Boundaries*.

28. Selee, *Perceptions and Misconceptions in U.S.-Mexico Relations*.

29. González González, Schiavon, Crow, and Maldonado, *México, las Américas y el mundo 2010*. See also Moreno, "Mexican Public Opinion Towards NAFTA and FTAA."

30. Anderson and Gerber, *Fifty Years of Change on the U.S.-Mexico Border*.

31. Lorey, *U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century*; Papademetriou and Meyers, eds., *Caught in the Middle*; Andreas, *Border Games*.

32. González Herrera, *La frontera que vino del norte*. See also Ramos, *La gestión de la cooperación transfronteriza México-Estados Unidos en un marco de inseguridad global*.

33. Bailey and Chabat, eds., *Transnational Crime and Public Security*; Bailey and Dammert, eds., *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas*.

34. Benítez Manaut, ed., *Crimen organizado e Iniciativa Mérida en las relaciones México-Estados Unidos*.

35. Olson, Shirk, and Selee, eds., *Shared Responsibility*.

36. Elizondo and Magaloni, "Rule of Law in Mexico."

37. O'Neil, "The Real War in Mexico"; Bonner, "New Cocaine Cowboys"; Kleiman, "Surgical Strikes in the Drug Wars."

38. Private communication to Peter Smith from Mariano Bertucci, University of Southern California.