

## **Railroad Rehabilitation, Infrastructure, Development, and the Making of an Ambivalent U.S.-Mexican Partnership, 1940-1946**

Mexico and the United States have long had an antagonistic relationship, and relations between the neighbors are still ambivalent and often complicated. However, their economies are highly integrated today, and they strongly influence each other politically, culturally and socially.

The tracks – figuratively and literally – towards this ambivalent partnership were laid during World War II. In that period, Mexico pursued ambitious plans for industrialization and the United States needed raw materials and work force for their wartime industry. By cooperating closely for the first time, the unequal neighbors could satisfy each other's economic needs. The rapprochement was characterized by bilateral agreements as well as various cooperation projects, of which the *United States Railway Mission in Mexico* was the most important one. The railroads were the basis and bottleneck of any exchange between Mexico and the United States and therefore crucial in expanding such exchanges of people, goods, capital, and ideas that would ultimately transform both countries. They exemplified reciprocity and mutual dependence and were the subject of intervention. Through joint railroad rehabilitation, more than 1900 miles of railroad tracks in Mexico were repaired and extended. Furthermore, a contested reorganization of the National Railways of Mexico was launched and pushed ahead with a modernization discourse that placed the railroads at the center of a nation seeking economic development through foreign investments and state intervention.

I examine a turning point in Mexican history – the end of the Revolution and the beginning of what has been described economically as *Milagro Mexicano* and politically as *Dictablanda* – from a transnational perspective. With my focus on transnational cooperation and infrastructure, I can show that the U.S.-Mexican wartime rapprochement was not just about wartime needs, but also about a long-term development model for Mexico and continued partnership between the two neighbors. In my investigation of joint Mexican-U.S. railroad rehabilitation, I pursue the following research questions: How did the cooperation between Mexican and US actors work? And what were the material, economic, social, environmental, and political impacts and outcomes of their wartime cooperation?

I answer these research questions by taking into consideration the various levels of cooperation, as well as the different actors and their perspectives. The latter include Mexican railroad workers, U.S. American engineers, Mexican managers, as well as supplier companies, politicians, and diplomats from both countries. It is crucial not to neglect either of these groups or the different levels of cooperation, to show the connections and points of integration, as well as to assess power structures, conflicts, and ambivalences.