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THE STUDENT MOVEMENT OF 1968 (1980)

In 1968, a kind of silence pervaded the country. Then suddenly a movement broke out that was dynamic, autonomous, and—why not say it?—infuriatingly unexpected, a movement of pure and incorruptible men . . . , and of thousands of young people united by an indissoluble bond: courage. The people marching in the streets were not peasants or workers. This was a rebellion made by readers and writers. Against what? The apparent pretexts could have been anything, but fundamentally they protested against misery, imposition, and corruption.

In 1968 Mexico was young, and it made everyone young. The student movement did this. It was the most intense period in many years and, once things calmed down, many came to appreciate that it was the most intense moment of their lives. Something was irremediably lost in 1968 (death is always irremediable), but something was won . . . This chronicle tries to follow the trajectory of the student movement of 1968, not to redeem its errors, but . . . because no homage to that great moment in our history is excessive.

What did the student movement of 1968 do? In the first place, it destroyed the official image of Mexico. That image was lustrous, full of blue skies and promises. Above all, it suggested that we were different from the rest of Latin America; we were proudly Mexican. . . . The Second World War gave a great boost to the Mexican economy. The closure of foreign markets restricted imports, and Mexico was able to accumulate an enormous quantity of foreign reserves that it later invested in machinery, so as to begin its industrialization. . . . Of course, the Revolutionary Family not only established the foundations but also set the rules of the game. It was renovated every six years, although its members were always the same Never did an opposition party (officially) win an important election They used terms and expressions like “democracy,” “effective suffrage/no reelection,” “economic growth”; slogans like “Only one road: Mexico,” “God helps those who are early to rise,” “Twenty million Mexicans cannot be wrong,” “There is no place like Mexico,” “Fair distribution of wealth,” and all the other “postulates and principles emanating from the Revolution.” According to statistics—and plain sight—the Revolution had produced thousands and thousands of prominent millionaires. . . . This pleasant and prosperous image lasted nearly forty years. There was no organized political criticism, and very few truly dissident intellectual positions.

In that atmosphere—prosperity, peace, evident economic growth, the absence of social conflicts, the permanence of the PRI which ensured the political stability of the country—the student movement of 1968 was the political awakening of the young.

In 1968, the government’s terror continued to rise till it reached a boiling point. The eyes of the world, it was said, were upon us. What kind of spectacle were we creating? Three billion pesos had been invested in the Olympics; the problems in the countryside, the frightening public debt, the labor problem, the housing problem, all had been put to one side so that Mexico could be transformed into a showcase While the

students were young and impetuous, the government never abandoned the paternalistic posture that characterizes our presidential regime. The president is the father, our little papa, and in 1968 he reached out to us, . . . an angry father who smashed a chair over our head and killed his disobedient child. Everyone knows the consequences of governmental anger and fear; a still-not-established number of students, men, women and children (325 according to the English newspaper, *The Guardian*) fell murdered in the Plaza of Three Cultures on October 2, 1968. From that moment on, the lives of many Mexicans were divided in two: before and after Tlatelolco.

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