AS OTHERS SEE US...

Mexican Sociologist
Notes U.S. Hypocrisy

By SANDY SHENK

Both candidates for president regard foreign policy as the central issue confronting our country. A successful foreign policy depends partly on a correct estimate of how the people in other countries think: the dissatisfactions and ambitions that lead them to act as they do, and their picture of us and our will toward whatever role we play in their affairs.

But certain "turns of events" seem to take us by surprise. For example, the Cubans, who we feel should look to us for friendship and support as allies, instead show mostly antagonism and even hatred toward us and run to our (and we feel their) chief enemy Russia for support. Similarly, we are shocked to see how much of the rest of Latin America tends to sympathize with Castro.

Perhaps it would be of value to have access to some thoughts expressed by people who do not have our exact point of view, and who do see us from the outside—comments which have not been rehearsed by a fellow-American editor or columnist for our easier consumption.

It is important to note that many of our critics abroad are at the same time sincere friends. It might be beneficial— for us — to give them a hearing.

We are presenting below such an expression of sentiment by a Mexican sociologist, Octavio Paz. We have chosen and translated these selections from El Laberinto de la Soledad, a book discussing the Mexican personality. From our experience they are typical of prevalent impressions that Mexicans have of us, "North Americans."

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"When I arrived in the United States, I was struck by the security and confidence of the people, their apparent happiness, and their apparent conformity with the world around them. This satisfaction doesn't prevent... valid and decisive criticism... But this criticism respects structure of the system and doesn't attack its foundations... Almost all the criticism that I heard from North Americans was of a reformatory character: They left the social or cultural structure intact and only intended to limit or perfect this or that procedure.

"IT SEEMED to me then—and it seems to me now—that the United States is a society that wants to realize its ideals, doesn't want to change them for others, and that, no matter how threatening the future seems to it, has confidence in its survival... This confidence in the natural kindness of life or in the infinite richness of its possibilities is certainly not found in the most recent North American literature, which rather is satisfied with a picture of a gloomy world, but it was visible in the conduct, in the words, and even in the faces of almost all the people that I met."

(Author's note: "These lines were written before public opinion realized clearly the danger of universal annihilation which nuclear weapons present. Since then the North Americans have lost their optimism but not their confidence, a confidence based on resignation and obstinacy. In reality, although many realize this danger verbally, no one believes—no one wants to believe—that the threat is real or immediate.")

"ON THE OTHER hand, I had been told of the North American realism... Wouldn't it be better to say that the North Americans don't want to know reality as much as to use it? In comes cases—of example, in reference to death—they not only don't want to know it, but visibly avoid the idea itself... Thus North American realism is of a very particular type and doesn't exclude pretending and even hypocrisy. A hypocrisy which, if it is a character weakness, is also a tendency of thought, since it consists in the negation of all those aspects of reality which seem disagreeable, irrational, or repugnant..."

"It seems to me that for the North American the world is something to be perfected; for us it is something to redeem... We, like their puritan ancestors, believe that sin and death constitute the ultimate basis of human nature... The North American system wants to see only the positive part of reality."