

# Consolation Prize

A podcast about consuls from the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media

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Episodes , Season 1

## Episode 1: Burroughing into Mexico

September 1, 2020 By Abby Mullen

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In our first episode of Consolation Prize, we go to Mexico to investigate how Americans tried to maintain their rights as Americans while sometimes subverting Mexican authority. In particular, we focus on Marmaduke Burrough's relationship with one American merchant, John Baldwin.

Episode 1: Burroughing into Mexico

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### This episode's experts

David McKenzie



[David McKenzie](#) is a public historian currently finishing his History Ph.D. at [George Mason University](#). He studies 19th-century U.S. and Latin American history, currently focusing on U.S. citizens who moved to Mexico's interior between 1821 and 1846. David previously worked at the Alamo, an exhibition design firm, and a local Jewish historical society. He currently works on digital history and exhibitions at [Ford's Theatre](#).

## Nicole Phelps

Nicole M. Phelps is an associate professor of History at the [University of Vermont](#). She holds a BA summa cum laude from The Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University and a MA and PhD from the University of Minnesota. Her first book, *U.S.-Habsburg Relations from 1815 to the Paris Peace Conference: Sovereignty Transformed*, was published with Cambridge University Press in 2013 (paperback 2015). She is an active member of the [Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations](#) (SHAFR) and the [Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era](#) (SHGAPE), as well as holding a leadership position in the Alpha of Vermont Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

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# Episode 1. Burroughing into Mexico: V

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## Transcript

“I herewith return to you your letter received by this Days mail, which is of a character that must terminate all personal intercourse between us And I enjoin it upon you never to address me again on any subject [whatsoever] not strictly relevant to the discharge of official duty to my countrymen.”

Marmaduke Burrough to John Baldwin, January 6, 1838

**Abby Mullen:** When Marmaduke Burrough wrote these words in 1838, he was angry. He was the American consul in Vera Cruz, Mexico, and his constituents were trying to take advantage of him. Or rather, one particular constituent: John Baldwin. Burrough’s disagreements with Baldwin would become so heated that the dispute would end up being heard in the U.S. House of Representatives.



I'm Abby Mullen, and today on Consolation Prize we take a look at Americans in Vera Cruz. We'll look at how they asked their consuls to uphold their rights as Americans. For consuls like Burrough, sometimes the line wasn't quite clear between legitimate intervention on behalf of an American citizen and diplomatic, or personal, overreach. So how do these consuls draw that line?

Before we get to the consuls, we need to talk about the Americans in Mexico. These days, when we think about people traveling back and forth from the United States and Mexico, we're focused on people coming from Mexico to the United States. But in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s, Americans were heading into Mexico.

**David McKenzie:** Mexico interestingly was a land of opportunity for many U.S. Americans. And U.S. Americans were moving all over the continent at that time. And many moved right over the international border, quite a few moved into Texas. Several thousand. In the 1820s and in the early 1830s moved into Texas. They established really their own settlements there. And really was almost like a Western extension of Louisiana. Many moved as merchants, engaging in international trade, living in port cities, some living in interior cities. But, as I got into my research I was really surprised by how many moves for other things as well. So you had quite a good number of artisans moving to Mexico. For example, Robert Plummer opened up a cabinet making operation in Zacatecas in the late 1820s. And you had carriage makers in Mexico City. And then in the 1830s and especially in the 1840s, there were people moving to Mexico to work in industrial operations whether U.S. owned or Mexican owned. The Paterson Machine Company from Paterson, New Jersey, actually opened up a factory in Puebla in the 1840s. Also even had U.S. Americans join the Mexican Army and Navy in the, particularly, in the 1820s and 30s.

**Abby Mullen:** David McKenzie studies the history of Americans in Mexico in the nineteenth century. Most Americans who moved to Mexico moved into the borderlands with the United States, into places like what we know as Texas and California. But David estimates that at least a thousand Americans moved further south, into the land that is still Mexico today. And they came into Mexico because the Mexican government invited them.

**David McKenzie:** The Mexican government wanted immigrants in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s really for two purposes. One was to colonize land like Texas and Isthmus of Tehuantepec where the Mexican government felt like there were too few loyal citizens there. But the other purpose was

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also to bring in skills and capital. So artisans, merchants, and people with money, there was really a vacuum after the end of the colonial period, and especially when Mexico expelled a lot of its Spanish born residents in the late 1820s. The Mexican government wanted foreigners who would assimilate as Mexican citizens. And who would not have their loyalties to their home countries. So, 1828 the Mexican government passed two immigration laws that stayed in effect throughout the rest of this period. And really it was kind of a carrot and stick approach. They made citizenship pretty easy. You just had to live in Mexico for two years, or just one year if you were in an area like Isthmus of Tehuantepec or Texas. That was designated for colonization. And then all you had to do to become a Mexican citizen was submit some letters of reference from local officials where you were, declare your intention to be a Mexican citizen, and this might have been the hindrance for a lot of U.S. Americans. Be a Catholic.

**Abby Mullen:** The Americans who moved into Mexico in response to the Mexican government's invitation didn't follow the plan, though. Some stayed for a few years, some for decades. A few did indeed file for Mexican citizenship. But many didn't. Instead, they continued to live as American citizens abroad. And that's where consuls come in.

**David McKenzie:** Yeah, really a lot of the U.S. Americans who moved to Mexico, took after British and French nationals, where they found in a lot of ways they were in a privileged position by living in Mexico as foreigners, because they had the backing of their country's diplomatic and consular Corps.

**Abby Mullen:** First, let's just define a few terms. What is a consul? Well, Historian Nicole Phelps, who's writing a history of the U.S. Consular Service explains that "consular officials facilitated trade and protected the lives and property of U.S. citizens abroad; their tasks were myriad, and they carried them out wherever there was need, often in port cities." Like Vera Cruz. These tasks could include ceremonial appearances, legal intervention, the issuing of paperwork, the care of sick Americans, and so much more.

Nicole Phelps points out that the wide-ranging jobs of a consul meant that they needed considerable diplomatic skill—but many didn't actually have much diplomatic training before they got to their job. Consuls aren't the same as ambassadors or ministers; there are a lot more consuls. There's only one minister per country or imperial center, but there can be a consul anywhere there's American trade. In the republic of Mexico, there were consulates in more than

20 cities in 1845. Just by way of contrast, in 1845 there were around 11 consular posts in France, though the numbers are a bit fuzzy.

So, why might an American in Mexico need a consul? Well, consuls are the first line of defense when an American gets into trouble. Americans tended to look with disdain at the laws of the Mexican republic, and when Mexican officials tried to enforce the law against Americans, those Americans reached out to the closest government representative, which was, their consul.

American officials in Mexico were paying close attention how the Mexican government treated other foreign nationals, like the British and the French. And they were very sensitive about Americans' rights, identity, and honor. Many times, they saw differences in how the British and the French were treated, and they cried foul.

William Taylor, who was a consul in Vera Cruz before Marmaduke Burrough, complained in a report that Americans were going to be unfairly singled out to help reinvigorate the Mexican economy after the Spanish tried to reconquer Mexico in 1829. The Mexican government tried to collect "forced loans" from foreign nationals to help prop up the government's financial needs. Taylor wrote that the British had a favorable treaty, so they probably wouldn't be subjected to this indignity. The French had a warship in Vera Cruz harbor, so they probably wouldn't get subjected to this indignity. When Taylor was writing, no Americans had yet had to provide a forced loan. But Taylor suggested that perhaps an American warship in Vera Cruz would give their honor the necessary boost to prevent these injustices. This was way outside his purview as a consul.

This was, I think, particularly ironic, since the commander of the Mexican Navy, in 1829 was David Porter, who had left the American Navy to come and be the commander of the Mexican Navy.

This desire for a warship illustrates the difficulty of maintaining the line between legitimate diplomatic intervention and illegitimate overreach.

By the way, the United States did not send a warship—at least, not in 1829. When an American sloop of war, the Natchez, came into port in Vera Cruz in 1836, eight of its seamen ended up in

prison after getting into a fight with the Mexican dock workers. Guess who had to get them out of jail? Yep, Marmaduke Burrough, the consul. [editor's note: the US Navy had already been considering sending a ship to the Mexican coast, though not necessarily to Vera Cruz. The [ship they sent](#) sank before arriving, and they didn't send another.]

To illustrate the tangled webs consuls could get into, we turn back to John Baldwin. He and Marmaduke Burrough had a dispute, and the dispute was all about whether Burrough's consular authority could get an American out of trouble with Mexican law. So let's talk about John Baldwin.

**David McKenzie:** John Baldwin moved to southern Mexico in the early 1820s, apparently moving there with quite a bit of capital. Bought this huge chunk of land on the Coatzacoalcos River. It was an area with a lot of interest in both the U.S. and Mexico at that time for a canal between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific. So Baldwin bought this estate right on that river, and set up a coffee growing operation, sawmill, and eventually buys a ship. They're exporting, he and his brother, exporting lumber and cochineal to the United States. He does international business with merchants who come in, that got sued in New Orleans in 1828 by a couple of merchants, with whom he had a business dispute. And also in that time admitted to bribery of Mexican officials in the court filings there, since he couldn't get in trouble in the New Orleans court for bribery in Mexico.

**Abby Mullen:** These run-ins aren't the only time Baldwin clashes with the Mexican government—but he also clashes with Burrough when he believes Burrough is taking advantage of him. You know a little bit about Baldwin, but what kind of a guy was Burrough? He was, in some ways, a career consul. He actually didn't intend to be a consul—he trained as a physician in Philadelphia, but he also an avid naturalist. He was a member of the American Philosophical Society. Vera Cruz wasn't his first consular appointment—he was first consul in Lima, Peru, and then in Calcutta, India, before his appointment to Vera Cruz. While in Lima, he found a new kind of vulture, the lesser yellow-headed vulture.

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Auguste Edouart, "[Dr. Marmaduke Burroughs](#)," 1843. National Portrait Gallery.

The scientific name of this vulture recognizes Burrough's contribution: *Cathartes burrovianus*. By the way, I think the *Cathartes burrovianus* is quite pretty, as vultures go. While he was in Calcutta, Burrough purchased and shipped a rhinoceros back to the United States—this rhinoceros may have been the first rhino to ever set foot in the USA.

Even while he was in Mexico, Burrough was involved in naturalist pursuits. But he also had to make a living. So in addition to collecting his consular fees, Burrough was a merchant.

**David McKenzie:** John Baldwin and Marmaduke Burrough were associates in two different ways. One of those was in Burrough's role as the U.S. consul in Vera

Cruz. But Burrough, like many other consuls, is a merchant as well. A consul was essentially a side gig, for a lot of U.S. merchants in different cities. So Marmaduke Burrough is also working there as a merchant. He and Baldwin are involved in business together in some way.

So that, in 1837, when Baldwin is arrested in Minatitlán in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Burrough tries to intervene in the case and he even says this in two different capacities. One is, as the U.S. consul defending his citizen. The other is as an associate who is part of the venture that Baldwin is engaged in. Both Juan Sanchez, who is the judge, and Luis Gonzaga Cuevas, who's the foreign minister of Mexico, will really have none of it and they basically call Burrough out on this. They say that you really don't have the right as consul to be intervening at this stage of the case anyway. and especially intervening as directly as you do. And then they also say and you don't have the right as his associate to take part in this case. And they say you trying to have your cake and eat it too, really disqualifies you from taking part in the case this way.

Not long after this, Baldwin and Burrough's relationship really breaks down. Baldwin is eventually released, Baldwin gets upset with Burrough. The ability of the way that consuls make a lot of their money is through charging fees for certain services including for, in this case intervention in the case. So Burrough even charging for the paper, and stuff like that. And



Baldwin believes that Burrough has overcharged him and Baldwin is very good at raising a stink. He is amazingly litigious.

**Abby Mullen:** Baldwin is a somewhat unique case in that he takes out his aggression on both the Mexican government and the American consul who's trying to help him. Eventually this grievance between Burrough and Baldwin arrives at the U.S. House of Representatives. At that point, Baldwin's complaint seems to have been dismissed. But Baldwin is not alone in trying to assert his right to be an American in Mexico—and what that looks like for him and for others is the ability to skirt or outright defy Mexican law or procedures when it suited him. In fact, in one of his suits against the Mexican government, he explicitly tried to make it a national issue, rather than just a battle between one man and one jurisdiction, and American officials helped him make his case. However, Jose Maria Ortiz Monasterio, Mexico's minister of foreign affairs, didn't buy it.

Consuls are not only allowing Americans to defy Mexican authority; they're actively encouraging it in many different ways. Along with the minister in Mexico City, consuls issue certificates of citizenship for Americans who stay in Mexico for decades. They repeatedly attempt to undermine Mexican authority both in Mexico and to the government back in Washington.

You may have noticed that all the people we've talked about in this story have been white. But they're not the only Americans coming to Mexico. Black Americans are also coming to Mexico in the mid-1800s. Sometimes they're coming for opportunity, but they're also sometimes fleeing for their lives and liberty. How American consuls dealt with black Americans, particularly fugitive slaves, looks quite different from how they dealt with affluent white businesspeople. This will be the topic of a future episode of Consolation Prize, so stay tuned.

Now why does this matter?

**David McKenzie:** This is really establishing, really a lot of U.S. business interests in the future. The U.S. nationals who moved to Mexico in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s really laid the seeds for future U.S. interventions in Mexico and other parts of Latin America. And particularly how U.S. nationals lived abroad with backing from their government. Now I mean this wasn't an original U.S. idea, the British and French were very active in this. They really set a lot of precedent

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the future. They really laid the groundwork for the extensive interest that the United States would build in Mexico by the late 19th century. Also, they were part of the lead up to the U.S. Mexican War to, including the way that the consuls backed them up, that the claims against Mexico that U.S. Americans who lived there and who did commerce there, these started to really rack up to the point where in 1839, the U.S. and Mexico established a claims commission to resolve them. The U.S. State Department was also encouraging these claims, with the hopes that Mexico's debt on these claims would accumulate so much that the United States might be able to say, well, how about you just give us Alta California in exchange and we'll pay those claimants off. Now the annexation of Texas and the border dispute between the United States and Mexico that resulted was the main cause, but these claims really also fed into narratives that the U.S. was expounding of Mexican treachery, things like that. I mean, some of the language of the consul's and U.S. nationals is very much of the idea of we're superior civilization. We don't need to obey Mexican laws because the Mexican legal system is inferior to ours and the British system. Also that in some ways the U.S. Mexican War is also partially making the interior of Mexico quote unquote safe for business. It's setting a lot of precedents a lot earlier than we usually see them. These people there are laying the seeds for that future expansion in Mexico.

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**Abby Mullen:** So let's return to Marmaduke Burrough. Burrough firmly believed in helping thwart the Mexican government when he thought Americans were being mistreated. He fought hard for Americans—sometimes too hard. But you don't win every fight. In fact, American consuls like him maybe didn't even win most of them. But he kept trying. Since these battles sometimes involved personal entanglements, Burrough had to decide whether he cared more about his own commercial network or about his duty to help U.S. commerce expand into Mexico. In the case of his most irritating constituent, John Baldwin, Burrough eventually made his choice.

I herewith return to you your letter received by this Days mail, which is of a character that must terminate all personal intercourse between us And I enjoin it upon you never to address me again on any subject [whatsoever] not strictly relevant to the discharge of official duty to my countrymen.

Consolation Prize is a podcast of the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media. At George Mason University. This week's episode was produced by me, Abby Mullen, and Me Brett. The music is by Andrew Cote and voice work by Mills Kelly. A special thanks to our

experts, David McKenzie and Nicole Phelps. This is our very first episode so if you enjoyed it, let us know by leaving us a review or rating on your favorite podcast platform. And we will see you in three weeks for episode two.

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## Credits

Host: Abby Mullen

Producers: Abby Mullen and Megan Brett

Music: Andrew Cote

Voice acting: Mills Kelly

Production assistant: Brenna Reilley

Experts: David McKenzie and Nicole Phelps

Images in our chapter art:

- Phelps, Humphrey, 19th cent. *Ornamental map of the United States & Mexico.*, map, 1847; New York.  
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- “Lesser Yellow-Headed Vulture” By Charles J Sharp – Own work, from Sharp Photography, sharpphotography, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=44086379>
- *Map of the United States and Mexico, including Oregon, Texas and the Californias.*, map, 1846; [New York].  
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## Further reading

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George Oberle

December 6, 2021 at 8:46 am

I just re-listened to this and I found the podcast very informative and helpful for my own research interests. Marmaduke Burrough was a fascinating character. The production was very nicely done. The images were helpful additions.

Thanks!

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Header image: Miner Kilbourne Kellogg, "[Port of Larnaca](#)," 1844.

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