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Self-made Men
David Crocket and Benito Juárez
Constructing Themselves in Autobiographies

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1. Introduction

When one reads and compares Frederic Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) and José Martí's "Nuestra América" (1889) some things become apparent: the constructions of what "makes" an American in these texts differ, these constructions are not entirely new, and these constructions are deliberate. Many historical figures could be said to represent exactly the Americans described in Turner's or Martí's text. Two of these will be more closely analyzed in this paper: David Crockett and Benito Juárez. The basis for this analysis will be their autobiographies. Juárez and Crockett are part of a line of famous Americans, both North and South, that wrote autobiographies with different intents and varying degrees of success. The following paragraphs will discuss the construction of their public personas through their autobiographies, the purpose of the autobiographies, and to what extent the intended result was achieved.

2. Turner and Martí – their main points

Although Turner and Martí did not write or publish their texts at the same time, they wrote about the same era. Turner described an era that had already ended when he sat down to describe it. Meanwhile, Martí described the political situation as he saw it and even had a specific audience in mind: the participants of the first Pan-American Conference that took place in Washington in 1889.

2.1. Turner's *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*

In this text Turner postulated that the frontier was where Americans – US-Americans – were "made". By going to the frontier, Europeans would be stripped of their Europeaness and the Americanization could begin. But according to Turner, America's frontier did far more than mold her formerly European inhabitants into a new people: it subsumed all kinds of conflicts. According to him, those who held differing world-views would meld them into one, or at least ignore their differences in order to pursue a more noble goal: westward expansion. Turner's expansion is the prerogative of white Americans of British or German stock. The French, he says, do not understand its power; the Negro slaves play no role in the expansion, except as the source of one of those conflicts that must be suppressed; and the Native Americans are displaced along with the rest of the wilderness. The frontier, as Turner sees it, also serves as the place where individuals can overcome the elements and thereby achieve greatness.

2.2. Martí's *Nuestra América*

Martí was a keen observer of the United States and in his essay he sought to encourage the Americans in the Southern hemisphere to assert themselves as different from their Northern neighbors. His Americans do not lose their Europeanness in a struggle with the New World, but by mixing with its inhabitants. They do not wrestle the riches from the land, instead they accept what gifts it offers. Unlike Turner's Americans, they do not roll over the continent like waves, but dig roots into it and grow strong with it; instead of dominating their slice of the New World through violence, they become a part of it. Martí's ideal Americans are of mixed heritage (or at least adopt a "more indigenous" mindset), abhor subjugation and slavery, and seek to overcome conflicts peacefully. The sentiments in *Nuestra América* are sometimes criticized as utopian or naïve because they do not take into account the mostly violent Conquista and the Roman Catholic Church's role in it; they ignore the division of society through racism and class structures, and the very different histories of the various countries within the Latin American group.

3. American Autobiographies

Juárez and Crockett are part of a large and illustrious group: famous Americans and European visitors to America who wrote autobiographies or at least autobiographical accounts of their experiences in the Americas. This group includes the very early arrivals, such as Columbus, John Smith, and Hernán Cortés; those who witnessed the founding of independent nations, for example Benjamin Franklin; and those who are part of the more modern history of the Americas, such as Ernesto Guevarra.

The texts produced range from letters and diaries, to complete recounts of entire lives. They cover every possible aspect of the New World: discovery, conquest, colonization, slavery, independence, and all developments afterwards are chronicled in personal accounts by more or less trustworthy authors. The agendas of these authors are varied. Columbus, for example, wrote his texts for those funding his exploratory travels: the Spanish Crown. He did so, among other reasons, in order to justify the expenses and the repeated voyages across the Atlantic. Benjamin Franklin recounted his life and his rise from rags to riches, possibly in order to educate and inspire others. Whatever their motivations, the authors often attempted to place themselves in a certain context and to construct a favorable image of themselves. The autobiographies by David Crockett and Benito Juárez are no exception. What follows is a close look at their texts and the public personas they constructed in them.

4. David Crockett

The reason David Crockett was chosen for this paper, is his fame as someone who lived on the frontier, someone who according to Turner's text could be described as essentially American. The fact that David Crockett and the myth surrounding him are inextricably linked, makes this assumption worth looking at. His autobiography reveals, through the constructions and stylizations of its subject, how the author wished to be perceived and what his audience thought of as "American".

4.1 Historical Data

Born on a mountain top in Tennessee,
Greenest state in the Land of the Free,
Raised in the woods so's he knew ev'ry tree,
Kilt him a b'ar when he was only three.

Davy, Davy Crockett,
King of the wild frontier.

("The Ballad of Davy Crockett", lyrics by Tom Blackburn, music by George Bruns (© 1954 Wonderland Music Co., Inc.) found in Lofaro)

The bare historical facts of David Crockett's life that can be confirmed are not all that unusual. What sets his story apart from countless others is the legend of Davy Crockett that David himself helped construct and that developed a life of its own. The autobiography *The Life of David Crockett* was, according to the author himself, written in response to a biography that had already awarded him much fame, and in writing it, Crockett added to the myth that surrounded him. This segment shall recount only the most relevant and confirmed data of David Crockett's life.

David Crockett was in fact not born on a mountaintop. Nor was he born in Tennessee. At the time, August 1786, the jurisdiction of the cabin he was born in was in question. Nevertheless, its geography was certain. Crockett was born along the banks of the Nolichucky River, "a site that was by some accounts in North Carolina and by others in the State of Franklin." (Jones, p.2) Tennessee did not become a state and join the Union until 1796.

Crockett's father hired him out to more prosperous backwoods farmers, and Davy's schooling amounted to 100 days tutoring with a neighbor.

Crockett married twice, in 1806 and 1816. His first wife was Mary (Polly) Finley, with whom he had two sons, John Wesley and William, and a daughter, Margaret. Polly died soon after giving birth to Margaret in 1815. Crockett's second wife was Elizabeth Patton, a widow with two children of her own, George and Margaret Ann.

David's political career did not start until 1821 when he resigned his position as town commissioner of Lawrenceburg Tennessee in order to run for a seat as the

representative of Lawrence and Hickman counties. He won this election to state legislature. Crockett ended his state political career in 1824 and ran for a seat in Congress in 1825 but was defeated. He was more successful in 1827, when he was elected to the United States House of Representatives. He was reelected in 1829. David split with the recently elected President Andrew Jackson on several issues, including the Indian removal bill and Crockett's desire for preferential treatment of the squatters occupying land in western Tennessee. In his bid for a third congressional term, Crockett was defeated by William Fitzgerald in 1831. Two years later, however, Crockett returned to Congress. Crockett published his autobiography *The Life of David Crockett* in 1834, using it to campaign for a fourth term in Congress. He was not reelected and decided to set out for Texas with several others. He died at the Alamo in 1836. It is disputed whether he died in battle or whether he was executed after the battle by the Mexican army under Santa Anna. (Lofaro)

4.2. Crockett's self-fashioning in his Autobiography

David Crockett wrote his autobiography in order to support his bid for a fourth term in Congress, and the author therefore cast himself in a specific and calculated way. A previous biography had been published and Crockett felt that it wrongly depicted him as a coarse and rude person by putting "into my mouth such language as would disgrace even an outlandish African" (Life, p.4). In the preface he expresses his wish to rectify this by giving his own "plain, honest, homespun" (Life, p.6) account. This correction and self-fashioning of his public persona will be examined in the following paragraphs.

It should be noted that

[...] the historian who insists that the 'true' Crockett can be defined only by the facts of his life is inevitably thwarted, and dismayed, by the sheer density of the labyrinthine legend. Paradoxically, the facts of Crockett's life, by themselves, would hardly justify an exhaustive historical investigation. He was a perfectly ordinary pioneer who had a brief flirtation with greatness. He was a minor hero and a colorful campaigner, but it is no secret that he was ineffective as a state legislator and national congressman. [...] The researcher who tries to retrieve the factual historical details about the man from beneath the enormous overlay of invention should keep in mind that he would not be searching for the 'real' Crockett at all if it were not for the magnitude of the legend. (Hauck "The Man in the Buckskin Hunting Shirt" in Davy Crockett, p. 7-8)

4.2.1. Construction of Persona

David Crockett published his autobiography with a specific aim, namely to support his bid for another term in Congress or maybe even a presidency. This suggests that his intended audience was relatively heterogeneous and that the author intended to endear himself to his readers, making a conscious construction of a public persona by the author more likely. The episodes from his autobiography will be closely examined in

order to determine how David Crockett intended to cast himself in the minds of the American public.

4.2.1.1. Statement of Purpose and Justification for Writing an Autobiography

David Crockett's autobiography begins with a preface in which he starts by stating

Fashion is a thing I care mighty little about, except when it happens to run just exactly according to my own notion; and I was mighty nigh sending out my book without any preface at all, until a notion struck me, that perhaps it was necessary to explain a little the reason why and wherefore I had written it. (Life, p.3)

He thereby depicts himself as truly independent from other people's opinions and expectations. He says that the preface was not written in order to conform to any norm, but to explain to the reader why the autobiography was written at all. And that reason, he claims, is not fame but justice and truth "[...] a holier impulse than ever entered into the ambitious struggles of the votaries of that fickle, flirting goddess" (Life, p.3). According to the preface, Crockett feels unjustly portrayed as a crude and uncouth individual in one of the earlier biographies. He wishes to right that perceived wrong by giving his own "homespun" account and letting the reader judge for himself. This statement is meant to justify the autobiography, ennobling and lifting it from any mundane function it might have had and thereby making it more than just an opportunity for vain self-presentation.

The description of the injustice he has suffered and the accusation of the author of that unsanctioned biography are followed by an apology to the reader:

I am perfectly aware, that I have related many small and, as I fear, uninteresting circumstances; but if so, my apology is, that it was rendered necessary by a desire to link the different periods of my life together, as they have passed, from my childhood onward, and thereby to enable the reader to select such parts of it as he may relish the most, if, indeed, there is any thing in it which may suit his palate. (Life, p.6)

This apology is part of the ennobling of the manuscript. In fact, its humble tone suggests that Crockett knew such humility was part of the style of an autobiography. (See *My Own Life* by David Hume 1776) The stories recounted by the author may be of little consequence to the reader but the author asserts that they constitute a part of the big story that the reader is interested in. This interest is assumed by the author because of the feedback he has received:

Go where I will, everybody seems anxious to get a peep at me; and it would be hard to tell which would have the advantage, if I, and the "Government", and "Black Hawk", and a great eternal big caravan of wild varmints were all to be showed at the same time in four different parts of any of the big cities in the nation. I am not sure that I shouldn't get the most custom of any of the crew. (Life, p.7)

This attention also plays a role in Crockett's decision to write an autobiography. "I can't understand it, and I therefore put all the facts down, leaving the reader free to take his choice of them." (Life, p.7) This statement of observation positions David Crockett's text in the genre of the apologetic autobiographies in which the author acknowledges "I am, at least in part, a product of circumstance; and my reputation, a product of discourse, deserves to be cultivated, corrected or defended, through textual intervention." (Fernández, p.7)

Finally, David Crockett ends his preface with a preemptive strike against possible critics. "But I don't know of any thing in my book to be criticised on by honourable men." (Life, p.8) He says that any criticism of the book will not bother him, as the only things that could be criticized are what make it unique: the style, the grammar, and the spelling. He will not apologize for either of those three because "Big men have more important things to attend to than crossing their t's-, and dotting their i's-, and such like small things." (Life, p.10) Also, he thinks he will have the critics on his side when it comes to questions of style. The style, he says, is all his own and confirms his authorship.

With this preface David Crockett has made it clear that the autobiography was not written to satisfy his vanity, and that he is not concerned with formalities such as spelling or grammar. These claims might be refuted by pointing out several things: the work seems to have been published for the explicit purpose of earning its author fame while he is campaigning; Crockett had friends proof-read the text before publishing it; Crockett claims that in some places he "wouldn't suffer either the spelling, or grammar, or any thing else to be touch'd" by the proof-readers, which suggests that the entire text is meant to be a direct representation of Crockett "the exact image of its Author" and therefore, in a sense, does cater to his vanity.

4.2.1.2. Depiction of Self in Stories

The Life of David Crockett contains many stories. The author begins with his childhood years in the wilderness, continues with his adventures out in the world, recounts his return home and how he paid off his father's debts, reminisces about his unsuccessful attempts at courting two women before getting married. The account of his adult life begins with several moves further West, his involvement in the Creek war, the death of his first wife and the marriage to his second wife, hunting stories, and an account of his political career.

The style in which these stories are told is a simple, straightforward account, reminiscent of an oral storytelling. There are many turns of phrases and idioms in this text. The author states his opinions, both good and bad, of the people in the stories, he tells the reader his feelings at the time, and often he will work in a punch-line or something he feels makes the story stand out. Especially in the hunting stories, Crockett insists on the veracity of his statements by asking to be shot down if what he says is not true.

The simple, casual style with which David Crockett tells the story of his life, gives the impression of an honest, down-to-earth man. The witty interjections and punch-lines, such as “if a fellow is born to be hung, he will never be drowned; and, further, that if he is born for a seat in Congress, even flour barrels can’t make a mash of him,” (Life, p.36) make the author seem like a humorous storyteller and enliven the individual episodes.

The early childhood stories in chapter one give the reader a general family history of David Crockett and the author tells some of his earliest childhood memories of living in the backwoods, such as an uncle mistaking a neighbor for a deer and accidentally shooting at him. This scenery gives the reader an impression of life in the remoteness that Crockett grew up in.

In chapters two and three David Crockett recounts his childhood and adolescent years. He runs away from home because he refuses to go to school. Having to earn his own living, he works for several employers, some of them better than others. Crockett is lucky when it comes to most of the acquaintances he makes and he often relies on the kindness of strangers. When, two years later, David returns home, he diligently works to pay off his father’s debts. These chapters highlight Crockett’s adventurous spirit, his self-sufficiency, and his diligence.

Chapter four highlights Crockett’s determination in finding and marrying a wife. In order to reach this goal he is not above disobeying his employer, and he is not afraid to stand up to his future mother-in-law.

In chapters five, six, seven, and eight David Crockett tells of his adventures in the army. He recounts meeting several respectable men, including General Jackson. He also describes the hardship the soldiers in the army have to deal with and how his hunting abilities occasionally save the day. These chapters show the reader David Crockett as a leader, as someone who will help those in need, who can plan ahead, and who will watch out for those in his charge.

Chapter nine is most remarkable for the presidency-fantasy Crockett openly entertains in it. He gives the story of a heavy illness

[...] not because I believe it will interest any body much now, nor, indeed, do I *certainly* know that it ever will. But if I should be forced to take the “white house,” then it will be good history; and every one will look on it as important. And I can’t, for my life, help laughing now, to think, that when all my folks get around me, wanting good fat offices, how so many of them will say, “What a good thing it was that that kind woman had the bottle of draps, that saved PRESIDENT CROCKETT’S life, – the second greatest and best”!!!! (Life, p. 131)

The end of chapter nine tells the reader of how, living in a remote area, Crockett and others living close by set up a make-shift administration and called it a corporation, so as to keep some order and that he was appointed as a judge by this “corporation”. When this settlement was later added to a county, Crockett was made “a squire according to law” and found that he needed to at least learn to read and write in order to issue warrants and keep a record of proceedings. This casts David Crockett as a responsible man who diligently fulfills his duty and whose judgments are just because

I gave my decisions on the principles of common justice and honesty between man and man, and relied on natural born sense, and not on law learning to guide me; for I had never read a page in a law book in all my life. (Life, p.135)

In chapter ten Crockett points out his former ignorance of all things political, saying that if anybody had told him that General Jackson was the government, he would have believed them. (Life, p.139) He admits that when asked to give a speech as a candidate he was as ignorant “as an outlandish negro.” (Life, p. 147) Nevertheless, he is able to hide his ignorance. He goes on to give examples of how he defeated professional politicians and educated men during his campaigns by making the audiences laugh or getting drinks with them instead of giving a speech. Through this original style of campaigning Crockett set himself apart from others and won many sympathies. These admissions of ignorance and Crockett’s unorthodox way of getting people’s votes cast him as a regular person and an unconventional politician. He sways the audiences by giving them the impression he is one of them. The written account of these events gives a similar impression.

Chapters eleven and twelve tell of Crockett’s removal further West and of his successes as a huntsman. He gives a detailed account of every bear, deer, or elk he shoots. By regaling his readers with these stories David Crockett highlights his self-sufficiency and his ability to live off the land.

Crockett’s election to Congress and his work there are described in chapter thirteen. He also describes how he voted against Jackson despite political pressure.

In chapters fourteen to sixteen Crockett is no longer in Congress and he gives the reader more accounts of his hunting and also of a failed boating venture. These chapters serve to reinforce the image of David as a frontiersman.

Chapter seventeen is the last chapter. In it David Crockett describes how at first he worked well with Andrew Jackson's party because he agreed with Jackson's principles as he understood them (Life, p.205). However, he needs to defend his vote against Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act. He insists on having the obligation to vote according to his own judgment and not according to what may or may not be popular. This highlights Crockett's willingness to stand up for his opinion and his unwillingness to do what he feels is wrong, no matter how popular it might be. He casts himself as someone who will stand up to the President and endanger his political career, because he wants to do what his conscience tells him is right. Crockett ends his autobiography by declaring himself "the people's faithful representative, and the public's most obedient, very humble servant" (Life, p. 211).

4.2.1.3. Summary of Self-Description

In his autobiography David Crockett uses many anecdotes to describe himself as self-sufficient, adventurous, and amiable. He casts himself as assertive, humorous, and down-to-earth. He says he is a straight shooter, both literally and figuratively. He is determined, hard-working, self-educated and uses his natural born sense to fulfill his duties.

4.3 Did it work?

After the campaign, of which the autobiography was a part, David Crockett was not re-elected to Congress and his political career was over. However, his fame lived on in the so-called Crockett-Almanacks, in some musical theater plays, and much later in the 1950s Disney series. Every year the Davy Crockett Birthplace State Historic Area receives many visitors and the circumstances surrounding his death are cause for discussion and speculation.

Through the other narrations it becomes obvious that Crockett's aim to cast himself as a likeable character with admirable and exciting qualities was indeed successful. He has been declared a hero because of the traits attributed to him.

During the course of the twentieth century the historical and legendary figure of David Crockett has been re-examined to determine why and how he has managed to fascinate the North American public for so long. Scholars have concluded: "[...] he reflects the range and diversity of the country whose hero he became and documents as well the ever-changing mental image we have of ourselves as a nation and as individuals."

(M.A. Lofaro in his Preface to *Davy Crockett, The Man, The Legend, The Legacy 1786-1986*, p. xvi) More specifically,

the set of facts constituting the legend reveals a few things about the man, largely because he made concrete contributions to it, but its primary value is that it tells us a great deal about the sensibilities, both noble and detestable, of the Americans who have expanded the Crockett story by investing it with their own mythos. (Hauck "The Man in the Buckskin Hunting Shirt" in *Davy Crockett*, p.8)

5. Benito Juárez

Benito Juárez was chosen for this paper because he seems to fulfill some of the criteria for a leader that Martí mentions in *Nuestra América*: he is of indigenous stock and he rejects European or North American involvement in his country. The legend surrounding Benito Juárez is less obvious because, in a way, his life was far more unusual than that of his fellow countrymen or that of David Crockett. Nevertheless, there is a certain stylization in his autobiography that is worth examining.

5.1 Historical Data

Because he is so well thought of, Benito Juárez's life is well documented and has been thoroughly commented upon. This segment will deal only with the bare historical data. Benito Juárez was born in San Pablo Guelatao in the State of Oaxaca in 1806 and was orphaned at the age of three. His uncle, Bernardino Juárez, raised him and gave him some rudimentary education. As a teenager Benito ran away to the city, in order to go to school. After some struggles he found a kind benefactor, Antonio Salanueva, who helped him get more than just a basic education and encouraged him to study for the priesthood. However, in 1829 he entered the Oaxaca Institute of Arts and Sciences, where he was given the opportunity to change his studies from theology to law. In 1834 Juárez earned a law degree and commenced work as a lawyer, often taking the cases of poor Indios. In 1841 he was made a judge. His social and economic position gradually improved, and in 1843 he married Margarita Maza, daughter of a prominent family. At the age of forty he is appointed Governor of the State of Oaxaca. Benito Juárez is forced into exile in 1853 by the government of Santa Anna. In New Orleans, La., he participated in the plotting against the military dictator and joined the successful revolt of Ayutla, led by Juan Álvarez and Ignacio Comonfort, which drove Santa Anna into exile and then evolved into the Reform movement. As Ministro de Justicia e Instrucción Pública Juárez drafts the Juárez law (1855), which abolished the judicial immunities of the clergy and the military. After the abdication of president Comonfort in 1857 Juárez

becomes president. A revolution takes place but in 1861 Juárez is re-elected for another four years. However, the government was without funds and Juárez suspended payment on all foreign debts for two years. In response, France, among others, seized the Veracruz customs house. In 1862 Napoleon III launches the French intervention in Mexico. In 1863 the elected government under president Juárez is forced to retreat to Chihuahua City. On April 10 in 1864 Maximilian von Habsburg is declared emperor of Mexico. For many reasons the French troops started to retreat in 1866 and in 1867 Maximilian's forces were defeated and he was executed.

Juárez returned to Mexico City in 1867 and was re-elected president. As he undertook the difficult task of reconstruction he faced factional opposition. In 1871 the Liberal party split into three factions, with Porfirio Díaz and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada opposing Juárez for the presidency. When Juárez was declared re-elected in 1871, Díaz immediately headed a rebellion. The movement failed and shortly after in 1872, while sitting at his desk, Benito Juárez died. (Encyclopædia Britannica)

5.2. Juárez's self-fashioning in his Autobiography

The title of Benito Juárez's autobiographical text *Apuntes para Mis Hijos* gives an indication as to its intended audience. The tone throughout the text, however, is less personal than one might expect just from going by the title.

Though his autobiography and his life are not quite as outrageous as that of David Crockett, Benito Juárez is not without controversy.

En la historia, en la literatura, en la plástica o en el derecho, la figura del Benemérito ha sido centro y motivo de múltiples y valiosas manifestaciones de la inteligencia humana. También ha sido motivo de encono y de odio, de calumnia y de críticas. Y todo ello sirve para confirmar su colosal estatura, su condición de figura extraordinaria. (Túlio, p.13)

This autobiography is worth examining because despite apparently writing a very private document, the author nevertheless constructs an image of himself that is meant for a more public posterity.

5.2.1. Construction of Persona

Apuntes para mis hijos does not encompass all of Juárez's life but it does recount the essential developments in his life, describing how he became an avid proponent of reform and how his morality evolved.

5.2.1.1. Poverty, Diligence, and Perseverance

Benito Juárez stresses his humble and poor background. In the second sentence of his autobiography he describes his parents as “indios de la raza primitiva del país.” He goes on to describe how, after both his parents died when he was three, he went to live with his uncle Bernardino Juárez. This uncle taught him to read and encouraged him to learn Spanish – they were Zapotec Indians who spoke their own language and there was no school he could attend. This rudimentary education instilled in Benito a desire for more. In fact, the way he describes it, it sounds like an epic quest for higher learning that includes an escape, failures, evil schoolmasters, a saviour figure – Antonio Salanueva – who helps him attain higher education, and finally, by pure coincidence, the chance to study exactly what he wishes to study, instead of pursuing a career as a priest which was apparently the only option available to the poor indigenous population then. This chance to switch studies is indeed very fortunate and part of the circumstances surrounding Benito. He did not wish to be ordained as a priest, because he thought the teachings were silly, if not misleading, he also thought the training most priests received was severely lacking in in-depth theological theory:

mi padrino manifestó grande interés porque pasase yo a estudiar Teología moral para que el año siguiente comenzara a recibir las órdenes sagradas. Esta indicación me fue muy penosa, tanto por la repugnancia que tenía a la carrera eclesiástica, como por la mala idea que se tenía de los sacerdotes que sólo estudiaban Gramática latina y Teología moral y a quienes por este motivo se ridiculizaba llamándolos Padres de Misa y olla o Larragos. Se les daba el primer apodo porque por su ignorancia sólo decían misa para ganar la subsistencia y no les era permitido predicar ni ejercer otras funciones, que requerían instrucción y capacidad; y se les llamaba Larragos, porque sólo estudiaban Teología moral por el padre Larraga. (Apuntes p.3)

Juárez leaves the seminary and attends the Instituto de Ciencias y Artes in order to study law. He describes how fathers refused to send their sons to this establishment, how the few students that did attend were treated with contempt, and how many of his fellow students left the institute out of fear “del poderoso enemigo que nos perseguía” (Apuntes, p.5). He claims that this popular mistrust of the school was due to the clerics feeling threatened by it because of its independence from the Church. Yet he and a few fellow students sustain the establishment by bravely attending. Through this episode Juárez depicts himself as someone who does not fear contempt and is willing to stand up to the powerful. This image is reinforced with his account of the unfair treatment he and some of his clients suffered when several citizens from a small town sued their town’s priest. He describes how his clients are jailed for no reason and how he himself is arrested and detained for no reason, how his complaints are not registered, and how all of this is because the Church has too much power. This claim of a power imbalance

is repeated throughout the text and leads to a law that Juárez hastily drafted during his time as Ministro de Justicia e Instrucción Pública.

las reformas que consigné en la ley de justicia fueran incompletas, limitándome sólo a extinguir el fuero eclesiástico en el ramo civil y dejándolo subsistente en materia criminal, a reserva de dictar más adelante la medida conveniente sobre este particular. A los militares sólo se les dejó el fuero en los delitos y faltas puramente militares. Extinguí igualmente todos los demás tribunales especiales, devolviendo a los comunes el conocimiento de los negocios de que aquéllos estaban encargados. (Apuntes, p.14)

It is worth pointing out, that even when he feels unfairly treated, Juárez always refers to the law. He seems intent on following protocol and expects everyone else to do so too.

5.2.1.2. Democracy, the Military, the Church, and the State

In this autobiographical text Juárez expresses his wish for a just and democratic nation in which every citizen's rights are protected by law. It is therefore not surprising that he chooses to draft a law to limit the Church's power and to strengthen the power of democratically elected governments.

His expressed belief in democracy is supported by his exile during Santa Anna's regime. Like José Martí, Benito Juárez chose not to keep silent and, as with all other perceived injustices, voiced his concerns and complaints. He also condemned those who switched political alliances for personal gain. However, it is important to him to always give a reasonable and balanced account "en honor de la verdad y la justicia [...]" (Apuntes, p.15) and to not appear extremist.

5.2.1.3. Setting an example

In this text there are three instances, where the author refers explicitly to setting an example: the first, when he declines to have his daughter buried in a church – an exception granted to the families of governors; the second, when he goes through with the unpopular secularization; and the third, when he decides that what should set a governor apart from other citizens is his respectability and not the way he dresses or that he has bodyguards. All three instances are significant, as they highlight what is important to Juárez: the first one makes it clear, that he does not wish to make use of the exception offered to him by the Church (Apuntes, p.10); the second one shows how important it is to him that the law be followed (Apuntes, p.16); the third instance lets the reader know that Juárez does not believe in symbols of power (Apuntes, p.17). These episodes emphasize Juárez's point throughout the text: that those in power should not enjoy any privileges, that the law must be followed, and that those governing are nothing special and serve the people instead of the other way around. By setting these examples, and by retelling these stories, Benito Juárez casts himself as a humble, law-

abiding servant of the public.

5.2.1.4. Summary of Self-Description

In this autobiographical text Benito Juárez describes himself as humble, diligent, law-abiding, determined, and sensitive to injustice. He casts himself as someone who, because of these attributes, works hard at the betterment of his nation through reform and does not seek personal glory.

5.3 Did it work?

Whether or not Benito Juárez sought personal glory, he attained it. He is invoked as an example of the self-made man, he is cited as an example of good governance, and the positive development of Mexico in the late nineteenth century is attributed to him. The Encyclopædia Britannica of 1965 describes him as follows:

Juárez was the dominant figure in Mexican history from 1865 to 1872. He tried to destroy Mexican feudalism and to make Mexico into a democratic, federal republic. He was determined to save the nation from its internal and foreign enemies. While Juárez did not completely achieve his objectives, the Reform movement brought a new class, the *mestizo*, to power, and it is only at the end of this period that one can properly begin to speak of the Mexican nation.

The fact, that he overcame the obstacles he faced as an orphan and as an Indio, and later became President, despite this seemingly insurmountable handicap, and achieved reforms that are regarded as positive, has awarded him the title of *Benemérito* or “meritorious”.

Ulick Ralph Burke, in his book *A life of Benito Juárez: constitutional president of Mexico*, credits Benito Juárez with working a “magnificent change” in Mexico by transforming it from a nation whose name “was almost synonymous with disorder and disgrace” (Burke, p.1) into a country with a “well settled Government, respected not only at home but abroad.” (Burke, p.3-4)

In his essay *Nuestra América* Martí says that Latin Americans need to remember their indigenous roots and create their own version of everything in order to have a chance at successfully asserting themselves as nations and as a continent. Born in Mexico, of indigenous stock, educated in Mexico, and adamant in defending his country from outside influences, Benito Juárez fulfills many of Martí’s requirements for a political leader in Latin America. He also shares many of Martí’s views on Europe and the “blonde neighbours to the North”. By repelling the French-led attempt to re-claim Mexico for Europe, Juárez places himself firmly on the side of those who support the Monroe Doctrine, as does Andrew Johnson when he recognizes Juárez’s exiled government as the only legitimate Mexican government at the time.

6. Comparison/Conclusion

When comparing Benito Juárez and David Crockett and their respective autobiographies the differences and similarities are striking. The length of the texts is very different: Crockett's autobiography is roughly 200 pages long, while Juárez's *Apuntes para mis hijos* is only about 17 pages long.

While Crockett's tone is informal, Juárez's text is very formal. Though the title of Juárez's account suggests a more personal approach, it is Crockett's text that is actually more personal by giving a more vivid and involved narration.

In their self-descriptions they both point out their love of justice and honesty and their insistence on doing what they feel is right. Both of them describe themselves as simple and humble.

Unlike Juárez, Crockett does not strive for a higher education, in fact, he barely receives a formal education at all. Crockett uses his lack of any formal training to highlight his natural common sense and thereby cultivate his image as a simple backwoodsman who tells it like he sees it. Juárez, on the other hand, uses his formal education and his law degree to support his opinions with rational argument.

Juárez, unlike Crockett, actually achieves some changes in his country's government by drafting laws. David Crockett's life, however, is more open to fantasy and his eccentric character offers more opportunities for fascination. Both of them certainly rose out of obscurity and gained fame and some success. What differentiates them is that Crockett stresses personal success, whereas Juárez's emphasis is on the betterment of his nation as a whole.

Both Crockett and Juárez are self-made men, certainly in the sense that their autobiographies depict them in a very carefully constructed way. This construction is part of the autobiographical genre. These two personas have held for very long and have been expanded upon by others. They have become part of their nations' heritage and thereby assumed new functions, such as a marker by which other leaders are measured, or a canvas on which to project nostalgic or patriotic sentiments.

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