In the 1930s and 40s, recording technology and music research were increasingly put to work in the documentation of local musics as a representation of regional, national, or universal human heritage in the Americas. This work was carried out under the auspices of national and international organizations that crafted cultural policies along with hierarchies of difference and value. The intellectual, political, and artistic interaction between Mexico and the United States was especially intimate and multilayered due to their shared history and border. In this presentation, I will examine how U.S. music researchers such as Charles Seeger, Henrietta Yurchenco, and Alan Lomax engaged (or failed to engage) with Mexican music, and how their projects intersected with broader inter-American politics. I argue for a more nuanced view of a history that is usually reduced to either celebratory homage of disciplinary forebears or critical dismissal of cultural imperialism. This analysis helps to recover the role of Mexican and other Latin American musics in the development of ethnomusicology as a discipline and practice. More broadly, it historicizes the contemporary discourse of Latino influence in the U.S. by emphasizing the deep roots of Latin American music in U.S. territory, and the long-term mutual influence between the U.S. and Mexico in cultural and political realms.

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