Mexico celebrated the bicentennial of its independence Thursday, and it's remarkable how much of that experience it has shared with the United States.

Our success as "the first new nation" helped inspire that first grito in 1810 and the costly struggle of Mexican patriots to free themselves from Spanish tyranny. And though the new state started with a monarchy, the appeal of U.S.-like republican and federal institutions soon became a central part of a long, debilitating conflict for control of the government.

Of course, some of the sharing was not welcome. U.S. ambitions soon collided with Mexican weakness and vulnerability, and the drive of Manifest Destiny led to the Mexican-American War. Energized by industrialization and our first great wave of immigrants, the invasion by U.S. forces overpowered heroic resistance, and in 1848, Mexico was forced to concede the territory that now makes up the entire Southwestern U.S.

Then the drive for political reform in Mexico and against the injustice of slavery in the U.S. created nobler common ground. When the French invaded Mexico, President Abraham Lincoln supported Benito Juarez and his popular resistance. Mexico's dramatic victory at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, offered Mexicans in the U.S. a reason to rally the support of all the anti-slavery forces for the beleaguered Union side in the Civil War and explains why Cinco de Mayo celebrations are still greater in the U.S. than in Mexico.

Interests in the U.S. and Mexico came together less happily during the Gilded Age drive for industrialization on both sides of the border. Yet, as the profits of American investments in Mexican ranches, mines and railroads spurred our prosperity, the corresponding exploitation of Mexican workers under the long dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz in Mexico erupted 100 years ago, on Nov. 20, 1910, in the Mexican Revolution.

Then it was the revolution itself that drove mutual experience. Turmoil and conflict in Mexico provided the rationale for new U.S. invasions and started the first of many waves of migration to the U.S. Before long, we returned the favor of sharing misery with our neighbor as we enacted policies that helped ensure that our Great Depression would spread there with most of the fury that had started here.

Mexican support for the U.S. cause in World War II finally permanently reversed the pattern of our relations. When our men went to war and our women to factories, the 5 million Mexican workers recruited
for the Bracero Program enabled us to feed the Allies and make U.S. agriculture profitable. They also ignited the pattern of migration that has made Mexican-Americans the most numerous of all the people who now proudly make up our nation of immigrants.

The growing cooperation between our governments has made the relationship between our countries among the most productive on the planet. Nearly all U.S. Cabinet members meet with their Mexican counterparts every year, closer collaboration than we have with any other country. Independent Mexico is today a great nation of 111 million people, will soon have the 10th largest economy on the planet and is the second leading consumer of our exports.

Yet, as great as the cooperation between us has become, understanding our interdependence remains a challenge. For almost a decade, Mexico has been our leading ally in the war on drugs, and former Drug Enforcement Administration chief Raymond Bonner believes they are winning. Of course, the price is terrifying, especially the flow of U.S. guns, but rather than take actions to stem it, restrictions on automatic weapons have actually been relaxed in the U.S.

Now we Californians are debating Proposition 19 to legalize marijuana, without considering the ramifications for Mexico. Wouldn't it be nice for us to follow the example of President Felipe Calderon, who, despite the terrible violence there, cautions his countrymen not to consider the subject of legalization without carefully examining its impact on the U.S.?

Mexican Consul General Carlos Gonzalez Gutierrez came to University of the Pacific on Friday to lead our celebration of Mexico's bicentennial at Raymond Great Hall. The public came and learned more about how much Mexico and California have shared in their 200 years together.

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