

LOVE AND LUST: AMERICAN MEN IN COSTA RICA



Jacobo Schifter, PhD

In Costa Rica, sex work is legal and the country has a strong tradition of tolerance toward prostitution. In 1894, the first laws (*Ley de Profilaxis Venérea and Reglamento de Prostitución*) were enacted to regulate and control the activity under the rationale that it was important for guaranteeing “hygiene and public morals.” From then on, sex workers were subject to a weekly medical check-up in order to detect sexually-transmitted diseases (STD’s).¹ The states that legalized prostitution and took it upon themselves to protect “society from prostitution’s evil influence,” became directly involved in the sex trade.²

Although prostitution is legal in Costa Rica, pimping³ (*proxenetismo*) is not. Many practices can be considered pimping and thus be illegal. According to a strict reading of this law, an individual who owns a nightclub that promotes prostitution can be prosecuted for pimping. Massage parlors, hotels that cater to prostitutes, and bars with private rooms, can all be legally prosecuted as well. Furthermore, the manner in which sex workers are paid can determine what is considered legal and illegal. Dildoman, for example, explains to other sex tourists that Art y Sauna, a massage parlor, was closed by a “technical” interpretation of the Law: Since the receptionist would “collect all the money from the client and then pay the ‘chicas’ the authorities considered that as pimping.”⁴

In addition to pimping, establishments and individuals are often prosecuted for other reasons. The police and the Ministry of Health may crack down on places that employ HIV-positive sex workers and illegal residents, detain American tourists who do not have their papers at hand and imprison owner

¹ Asamblea Legislativa de Costa Rica. Código de la niñez y la adolescencia. Ley N° 7739. San José, Costa Rica, 1998.

_____. "Código Penal", Ley N° 4573. San José, Costa Rica, 1970.

² Kamala Kempadoo, **Sexing the Caribbean. Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor**, Routledge: New York and London, 2004, ebook, p.1652.

³ Pimping: the act of a third party benefiting from the prostitution of another individual or group of individuals.

⁴ <http://www.costaricaticas.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=1176>

and managers if there is a minor on the premises. This vulnerability to police harassment and blackmail is one of the worst fears among those involved in the sex industry.

The first warning usually comes from newspaper articles. A.M., a newspaper, tells mongers that the Ministry of Health will make sure that the Massage Parlors are not being used for prostitution and that it will take measures to "avoid the camouflage of places of prostitution that function under the name of massage parlors." ⁵ A few days later, the police raid the Massage Parlors and their clients are imprisoned. In other circumstances, the arrival of a questionable individual is the trigger. Jeff99 –for example- is aware of the danger that “Easy”, a sex tourist, is in San José. This man is looked for the police for “his Sex Wax scam he perpetrated last November”. Since he is in town he thinks, “new raids are to be expected this week.” Mongers or sex tourists –he believes- will pay collective punishment. “The smart thing to do” he adds “is to remember that Easy is a long time member of this Forum” and to “carry your passports this week if you are in town, especially if you’re in the vicinity of Mr. Easy. Easy arrives on June 28th. Be on the lookout. Be careful out there gentlemen.” ⁶

Romulus, for example, is coming to town and wants to know if there have been any raids recently. If the answer is affirmative, he asks other mongers what to do: “Do you run for the elevators or exit doors? How about stairways or inside the kitchen downstairs?”⁷

Paco Loco, another sex tourist, does not understand why there are raids if prostitution is legal in Costa Rica. ⁸ Romulus explains to him that the harassment is “irrational” and that American tourists are not immunized to police raids.⁹ The Government wants, for its part, to show that “they are fighting prostitution.”¹⁰

There is an ongoing debate among experts on how the illegality of sex work affects both the sex tourist and the sex worker. Ryan and Hall in their work on Southeast Asia view sex tourism as an interaction between two groups of equally positioned yet marginalized people - tourists and prostitutes. The authors argue that tourists and prostitutes both occupy a position of power, the “working girl exercises the power to earn cash; the tourist exercises power due to the possession of money.”¹¹ Conversely, Kempadoo, in her studies of sex tourism in the Caribbean, views sexual tourists as part of a dominating culture treated with respect by the country’s police and by everyone in the sex industry. Sex tourists, mostly white, are seen as members of a distinguished and powerful group that provides work for millions of people. ¹²

The Costa Rican case seems to follow more Ryan and Hall’s model of liminality. Sex tourists are afraid of the police and with good reasons. Examples of this are a monger who had to dress as a Chef in a

⁵ <http://www.costaricaticas.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=1399>

⁶ <http://www.costaricaticas.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=2651>

⁷ <http://www.costaricaticas.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=1399>

⁸ <http://www.costaricaticas.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=2651>

⁹ <http://www.costaricaticas.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=2031>

¹⁰ <http://www.costaricaticas.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=2031>

¹¹ Chris Ryan and Michael Hall, *Sex Tourism and Liminalities*, Routledge, New York- London, 2001, p.4.

¹² Kamala Kempadoo, *Sexing the Caribbean. Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*, London: Routledge, 2004, ebook, p. 2024

hotel to avoid being taken to prison; another who hid in the garbage to avoid the police; a third jumped over a fence, and broke his leg to avoid being caught inside a brothel. Contrary to the experience in the Caribbean where being white is a historical prerogative, it is not a passport to exercise power in Costa Rica. The Catholic Church has a much stronger influence in Costa Rican politics (It is the State Religion) than the protestant churches in the English Caribbean. Mongers¹³ in Costa Rica, may be more apprehensive about publicly participating in the sex trade and do not feel so powerful as to do whatever they wish with regard to sex workers. They know that in case of getting involved with minors, they might land in jail.

The vulnerable sexual industry implies that sex researchers are not welcomed and that none of the club owners are to volunteer information that could eventually put them in prison. Sex workers themselves are afraid of those whose motivations are not sexual. If the interviewer turns out to be a journalist or a policeman and gathers evidence that sex is being performed on the premises, the place can be closed down and foreign sex workers can be deported. In the case where the sex worker is a mother, she can lose custody over her children.

Nevertheless, with the present situation it is impossible to tell who is a researcher and who is an undercover agent and anyone who asks too many questions might be either one of them. Monger's fear makes it difficult to gain accessibility to the world of Costa Rican prostitution. The RAPID ASSESSMENT or RAP¹⁴ is a good tool to counteract the tendency to lie since it approaches this universe from different angles and different sources of information. By using triangulation it lessens the distortions expected from a community that is liminal, hidden and secretive, and wants to remain as invisible as possible. Despite our efforts, the RAP is a short intervention that lasts a couple of months and aims at gathering as much information as possible. The number of informants, focus groups, ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews are kept small.

In 1997 and in 2000 ILPES (The Latin American Health and Prevention Institute) carried out a Survey funded by USAID/PASMO on Central American and Costa Rican sex workers. The objective of the research was to study the use of condoms and related factors. The Surveys provided invaluable information on sex workers from brothels, nightclubs, massage parlors and from street workers. It did not include sex workers who work at the major hotels that cater to American tourists. Nevertheless, 75% of sex tourists in the poll taken at www.costaricaticas.com, a sex forum, also cater to the places studied in the ILPES surveys.¹⁵

The sample size was established according to time and economic constraints. It was agreed to have a sample of 400 female sex workers both from the street and from brothels, bars or discos in San Jose, Costa Rica.

¹³ Mongers: name that refers to sex tourists

¹⁴ Sex- RAR Guide, The Rapid Assessment and Response Guide on Psychoactive Substance Use and Sexual Risk Behavior, Mental Health: Research and Evidence, Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2002.

¹⁵ <http://www.costaricaticas.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?t=1863>

An estimate was made of the number of sex workers who work in the establishments and in the streets.¹⁶ The random nature of the sample was established by the choice of hours for interviews.¹⁷ Finally, 400 interviews were carried out at the different social centers in San Jose.¹⁸

A sample of 10 sex workers were invited to participate in focus-group discussions held at ILPES in San Jose, Costa Rica. These were carried out on July 29, 2000 from 8 pm to 10:30 pm.¹⁹ The discussions focused on participants' perception of the data gathered with regard to sexual risk-taking in association with substance use and possibilities of behavior change.²⁰

A sub-sample of 20 sex workers was invited to take part in individual semi-structured in-depth interviews about their perceptions and behavior concerning psychoactive substance use and sexuality. These interviews had an average duration of one hour and were conducted in three nightclubs in San Jose, Costa Rica. Five interviewers participated during the month of September 2000.²¹

¹⁶ The estimates cannot represent an exact number of sex workers since the women who frequent these places are not always the same, nor do they arrive with the same frequency. In addition, the opening hours of these places differ, and the number of sex workers can fluctuate due to the clients' patterns of attendance.

¹⁷ Once an hour was randomly selected, the interviewer had to interview the first five sex workers that walked in the establishment. In the case of those who worked in the streets, different spaces and times were selected randomly and the interviewer had to select the sex worker who was present at that specific time.

¹⁸ In this case, the sampling procedure was applied with probability proportional to the size of the establishment (number of people visiting a given place-PPS). For this reason, each woman was weighed up in a proportionally inverse relation to the number of times she frequents the place. This variable was included in the questionnaire: "How many days a month do you attend these premises?"

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¹⁹ The group was briefed on the purpose of the discussion, the background of the study, benefits to participants and others, the time it would take to take part in the discussion, steps taken to protect anonymity, how to access psychosocial support during and after the discussion, and whom to approach to discuss and explain details of the study. Participants were asked to put down a 'code-name' on the informed consent sheet instead of signing it personally. They were also handed out a copy of the informed consent sheet that did not specify their code name.

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²⁰ Two interviewers received special training on how to respond to potentially sensitive information given by the participants. They used participatory methodology to conduct the sessions. Focus group discussions were taped and transcribed. All tapes were erased after the conclusion of the study. There were no material inducements for participants, beyond free refreshments.

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Another five interviewers (not the same ones conducting the focus-group interviews) received special training on how to respond constructively to possible sensitive information given by the participants and possible feelings of embarrassment and shame.²²

In 2000 two nightclubs were selected for ethnographic observation: Puro Placer and Elías²³. Puro Placer is a club located near the Coca Cola Market in San Jose, Costa Rica. The area is part of San Jose's red-light district. The observation took place on March 24, 2000 and was conducted by two ethnographers, one male and one female. They spent five hours in this bar. Elite is a similar club located in Paseo Colon, a more commercial section in the city of San Jose. The same ethnographers conducted the observation during May 26, 2000 from 10:30 pm to 1 o'clock in the morning.

The nightclubs have approximately from 20 to 40 female dancers and a clientele of approximately 100 to 200 men per night. The bars are meeting places for prostitutes and their clients who, after several drinks, retire to nearby motels, private apartments or houses. The main activity in both places is dancing and drinking.²⁴

To update the data, another RAP was conducted in 2004, during the months of September, October and November. This time the emphasis was placed on sex workers who cater to American clients and on the clients themselves. The following interventions took place:

- Mapping of the most important sexual establishments in San Jose and in Jaco Beach that cater to American tourists.
- A study on sex forums and websites that promote sexual tourism to Costa Rica in Internet.²⁵
- In-depth interviews with 10 sex workers at Hotel Del Buey and Tea Amargo.
- Ethnographic observation in Hotel Del Buey and Tea Amargo
- In-depth interviews with 15 waiters and taxi drivers.
- Ethnographic observation in massage parlors and nightclubs.
- Two focus groups with 10 sex workers.
- In depth-interviews with 10 sex workers in Tango India nightclub.
- Five in-depth interviews with Ministry of Health officers.

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²³ These are not their real names. All bar, hotel, night-club and Massage Parlor's names have been changed.

²⁴ Confidentiality was maintained through the use of code names when writing field notes, storage of data in lockable filing cabinets, and limiting data-access to the research team.

²⁵ We decided to leave the citations from the sex forums just as they were, without changing the spelling and the grammar.

BACKGROUND

In general terms, Costa Rica is definitely the nation with the highest rate of development in Central America. It has the best reputation on many levels to that of its neighbors²⁶. With a long history of democracy, tolerance, republicanism and pacifism, Costa Rica offers a level of education, economic development and better standard of living than the other countries in the area. Since its origin as an independent nation, Costa Rica wanted to isolate itself from the social and political torment of its neighbors. For decades it was an oasis of relative tranquility and stability in the midst of a region torn by militarism and war, and played a fundamental role in the pacification process that spread through Central America beginning in the middle of the '80s. Since the 19th century, Costa Rican leaders have been concerned about how to capitalize on the social advantages of the country, whose attributes have become part of traditionally accepted mythology, illustrated in names describing Costa Rica as “the Switzerland of Central America” and the “Garden of Peace.”

Having been part of the Spanish Empire for close to three centuries, Costa Rica gained its independence in 1821. At the time of initial contact with the European colonizers, the indigenous population of what is now Costa Rica did not exceed 25,000 souls, making it one of the most sparsely populated regions of Central America.²⁷ During much of the Colonial period Roman Catholicism enjoyed a monopoly over the minds and souls of the country's inhabitants, as it was the only religion tolerated by Costa Rica's Spanish rulers.²⁸ In the field of economics, the era of Spanish rule was characterized most notably by chronic poverty, with a lack of human resources and mineral wealth ensuring that there was little in the way of sustained growth. This placed the country in the same disadvantaged position as other regions in Latin American without mineral. Costa Rica attracted little immigration throughout the three centuries of Spanish domination.²⁹

The country's peasant-based economy did establish sporadic links with the world market thanks to crops such as cocoa and tobacco. During the cocoa “boom” in the XVII Century, Black-enslaved labor was brought in from the Caribbean. Nevertheless, once the exports started to fall, these workers were freed and let to marry within the mostly white population. Both Indians and Blacks, as it happened in the rest of Latin America, saw intermarriage as an avenue for upward social mobility. “Whitening” became part of the sexual culture as it provided the key to obtain better jobs and access to the dominant Spanish society.³⁰

With the advent of widespread coffee cultivation in the mid-nineteenth century, Costa Rica was integrated into the global chain of commodity production and consumption on a more permanent basis. Costa Rica for one had some of the fastest growth and development in Latin American during the nineteenth century. In the post-World War II period, government policies of import substitution galvanized the industrial sector while attracting large numbers of European immigrants, whose presence contributed in turn to an expansion of the country's ethnic and religious composition. At present, roughly 85 percent of Costa Rica's population calls itself Roman Catholic, while the rest self-identify with a range of Protestant and non-Christian religions. The population is mostly white and

²⁶ Costa Rica, for example, has a reputation for being a safe and peaceful country with an educated population.

²⁷ León Fernández, **Historia de Costa Rica**, San José: Imprenta Lehman, 1939.

²⁸ James Backer, **La Iglesia y el sindicalismo en Costa Rica**, San José: Editorial Costa Rica, Second Edition, 1975.

²⁹ Charles F. Denton, **Patterns of Costa Rican Politics. The Allyn and Bacon Series in Latin American Politics**. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971.

³⁰ León Fernández, **Historia de Costa Rica**, San José: Imprenta Lehman, 1939.

mestizo, with the exception of those descendants of Jamaican immigrants who came in the late 19th Century to work in the banana plantations and a small native aboriginal population.

The country today has a higher standard of living than many Latin American nations. Its per capita income is six times larger than Nicaragua, three times larger than Bolivia's and two times larger than the Dominican Republic's. Costa Rica has one of the highest literacy percentage rates in Latin America, one of the lowest children's mortality rates per 100,000 people and one of the highest life expectancies in the world.³¹

Despite the undoubted contribution made by coffee to Costa Rica's economic growth, it also served to make the country extremely vulnerable to the boom and bust cycle of the world commodity market. Economic recessions led to the famous military interventions during the 1900s in numerous Latin American republics such as Mexico and Peru. This was not true of Costa Rica, where the existence of an agricultural frontier zone until roughly the middle of the twentieth century contributed to the emergence of a large middle class and to the establishment of a democratic tradition that was interrupted only twice in this century. In 1948, following the second of these interruptions, Costa Rica's government abolished its armed forces.

In this way, the country was able to weave a social fabric where polarization and anomie were never permitted to reach the levels seen in other parts of Latin America, where military dictatorship was the rule rather than the exception. The program of social reform first embarked upon by the government of Calderón Guardia in the 1940s, subsequently deepened and strengthened by José Figueres Ferrer's Social Democratic Party, laid the groundwork for a welfare state that put Costa Rica on par with First World countries in such areas as literacy and health. Notwithstanding the good achievements in health and social security, approximately one-third of Costa Rica's population lives below the poverty line. The country shares problems with the rest of the region such as unemployment, urban decay, increasing crime rates, and drugs.

Sexual Culture

When the American sexual tourist writes that Costa Rican sex workers act "irrationally" or "lie compulsively", there is a hermeneutic problem. Latin American sexual culture is different from her Anglo-Saxon counterpart and it can be misunderstood by those who ignore its history. First, we need to take into account that Spain was able to dominate Latin America for three centuries without having to use a strong military force. Notwithstanding the imposition of high taxes and of prohibitions against developing local industries, there was little political armed resistance against Spain. The reason was simple. The Spanish Crown might have wished to exploit her American colonies, but in reality she was a declining power, unable to compete with England and with other European rivals, and incapable of supplying the New World with the needed industrial goods. She did not take advantage of such captive markets and instead of investing in her own development, the Spanish Crown squandered her wealth on European military interventions.³²

³¹ Jacobo Schifter, **The Construction of Latino Youth. Implications for the spread of HIV/AIDS**, New York: Haworth Press, 2000, p.8.

³² Hugh Thomas, **Rivers of Gold: The Rise of the Spanish Empire, from Columbus to Magellan**, New York: Radom House Publishing Group, 2004.

Being unable to provide what in theory she declared as her monopoly, the Spanish Crown could not impose its will on the region. It learned to compromise and to look the other way both economically and politically. Despite the monopoly on manufactured goods, the local populations were left in practice to trade with the emerging powers. The same would happen in the political arena. Spain declared that the most important political posts had to be filled by “*Peninsulares*” or Spanish-born citizens. Nevertheless, the Crown was unable to pay for their salaries and started to sell these posts to those with money. In this way, many Latin American -born Spaniards or “*Mestizos*” (mixed Indian and Spanish) were able to purchase public office and acquire political power.

This created a culture of “I obey but do not comply.” This meant that local authorities decided not to confront the system openly but –at the same time- did not follow the law. Since the Colonial power was so removed from the day-to-day affairs, so slow to respond because of its centralizing ideology, and so incapable of enforcing the enacted legislation, it became easier to ignore it. ³³ The *mestizo*’s ability to exert influence on the Crown by refusing to implement any counterproductive legislation, lessened their need to break away from the Empire. The independence movements arose precisely when the Napoleonic Wars disrupted this system. This led to the Borbon’s (The French side of the family) attempt to control Latin America by forbidding contraband and eradicating corruption in political offices. Only then did new Latin American elites decide to wage the wars of independence.³⁴

The same dichotomy between theory and practice characterized the social. Latin America was taught a very radical form of Christian sexual ethics by a Spanish Crown that emerged victorious after 800 hundred years of war against the infidels, i.e. the Muslims who had invaded the Spanish Peninsula. As the war dragged on, so did religious fanaticism, military chauvinism and a version of masculinity called “machismo.” As Spain became more militaristic and “feudal”, social minorities and women came to be more oppressed.³⁵ The war against the infidels culminated in 1492 when the Catholic Kings managed to launch the conquest of the New World as well as the expulsion of the Jews and the Muslims from Spain. The Colonization of the Americas would take place within a climate of religious fundamentalism and of social and ethnic intolerance. As Spain emerged victorious against her “internal” and “external” enemies in the Old World, she insisted in tightening her control over the New World. The feared Inquisition was transported to the Americas to oversee the minds and souls of the conquered populations.

Catholicism was imposed in the same manner as the export economy and political authoritarianism. People were to follow the new principles without having the right to question them. Jews and Protestants were forbidden to migrate to the Spanish colonies and the indigenous populations were forced to convert to Christianity. Heretics and false converts were put to death. The sexual ethics of Catholicism was strict: sex was acceptable only within marriage; divorce was outlawed; erotic pleasure was perceived as the devil’s temptation. Prostitution and infidelity were severely punished. Children begotten outside marriage had no rights. Sodomites were burned at the stake. ³⁶

³³ John R. Fisher, **Economic Aspects of Spanish Imperialism in America, 1492-1810**, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997.

³⁴ Don Paul Abbott, **Rhetoric in the New World: Rhetorical Theory and Practice in Colonial Spanish America**, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.

³⁵ Ann Twinam, **Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

³⁶ [John Frederick Schwaller](#), [Colin M. MacLachlan](#) (Editor), [William H. Beezley](#) (Editor), **Church in Colonial Latin America**, Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2000.

Notwithstanding the Catholic's position on sex, Latin America faced the same problems in the spiritual as in the economic realm: the impossibility of compliance. The region needed to develop through labor and labor was the main factor of development. Given the lack of immigration to the region, this could only take place through lax sexual mores, crossbreeding and high fertility. The countries that could increase the labor pool were the ones to develop faster. Thus, even as the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Colonial San José condemned divorce and fornication, it was pragmatic enough to recognize its own powerlessness to enforce these edicts. In the face of these contradictions, the Church became increasingly concerned with form rather than substance, while turning a blind eye to the burgeoning population of illegitimate children. Married men would set second houses for their mistresses and have as many children as possible.³⁷

Given that the Catholic principles were not faithfully followed and that the Church itself unofficially accepted the particular sexual realities in the Colonies, there was no need to rebel. People learned to live with the contradictions between theory and practice. This is the historical "Compartmentalization" of Latin America. Catholic sexual prudishness survived its usefulness and the people's loyalty without having to be debated, questioned or abandoned. A new sexual ethic was developed: "Have sex but do not talk about it." People were let alone to live their sexualities without interference as long as the forbidden sexual practices were not made public. The population learned that as long as it was discreet, people would ignore sexual transgressions. This sexual ideology developed stronger from the periphery to the center. As economic resources dwindled among the poor and the marginal classes, the ideals of marriage, chastity and sexual control waned even further. Marriage became a mostly middle and upper class institution and cohabitation and sexual promiscuity were widespread.

As the country became wealthier after the 1950's, the nuclear family became the ideal sexual model. Young people were supposed to marry young and stay together for the rest of their lives. The high cost of living made it more difficult for men to keep more than one family and the second house became a relic of the past. The women's movement also started to demand more gender equal relationships and the abandonment of Latin machismo.³⁸

³⁷ **Robert H. Jackson, Race, Caste, and Status: Indians in Colonial Spanish America**, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1999.

³⁸ Jacobo Schifter, **The Construction of Latino Youth. Implications for the spread of HIV/AIDS**, New York: Haworth Press, 2000, Chapters 6 and 7.

US-Costa Rican relations

Tourists prefer to travel to friendly foreign countries where they are not subjected to hatred or disdain from the locals. After 9/11, Americans are more aware of where they are headed for their vacations. Today, they favor countries that are closer to home, Christian and not hostile to the US. There is no mystery then that Costa Rica has become one of the new favorite spots. In 2004, the number of tourists that traveled to Costa Rica rose by 25% and by another 20% in 2005.³⁹ American sex tourists are also on the rise and as we will see later, they find Costa Rica to be one of the friendliest places in Latin America.

This perception has historical roots. The US and Costa Rica share in common some important traditions which have set them apart from the more turbulent relations in the rest of the region. The Marines, for example, have never invaded the country, as has been the case in the rest of Central America and in the Caribbean. Costa Rica has economically and politically supported America during World War II, in all her regional and global conflicts, including the Cold War and the current struggle against Islamic fundamentalism. Furthermore, Costa Rica was one of the few Latin American countries that supported the war against Hussein in Iraq. This is not simply the result of America's bullying Costa Rica due to her overwhelming power as might have been the case with other nations in Latin America. San Jose has felt that their national interests have been closely linked to the American's since their independence and that both countries are "natural allies." This in turn has created a social and political atmosphere of true respect and liking toward American citizens.

One important reason for Costa Rica's close relation to the US is her "isolationist" policies with regard to Central America.⁴⁰ This means that she has refused to follow the other Central American countries' attempts to reunify the former Republic of Central America. Costa Rica distrusts Guatemala, the former capital of the Republic, and has fought against all her attempts to re-impose unification by force, which in practice meant endless wars. In this stand, Costa Rica has stood in common with America, who has also opposed to Central American unification since this would neutralize her influence in the Isthmus. During all the Central American wars that had as their goal to impose a new Central America Republic, the US and Costa Rica have stood together as military allies. Since Costa Rica has had a weaker military force than the other countries in the region, the strategic dependence on America has been of great importance. After dissolving her armed forces in 1949, Costa Rica relies entirely for her independence on the Rio Treaty, and in practical terms, on the US. During the 1980's with the Sandinistas in power in Nicaragua, Costa Rica relied more than ever on the US for her sovereignty.⁴¹

Costa Rica's isolationist policies were a result of many factors. Firstly, Costa Rica is geo-politically distant from the rest of Central America. Its only common border is with Nicaragua, and much of its international trade during the Colonial Period was carried out through the Panamanian province of Chiriquí. This geographical separation has been aggravated by the awful conditions of communication

³⁹ La Nacion, "Aumento de turismo en 20%" San Jose, Costa Rica, December 15, 2005, p.5A.

⁴⁰ Chandler, P., Anderson, "Central American Policy of Non-Recognition." **The American Journal of International Law**, XIX (1925), 164-166.

⁴¹ Charles E. Chapma, "The Failure of Central American Union," **The American Review of Reviews**, LXV (July-December, 1922), 613-617.

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