



# Carnival in Veracruz

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## **Tulane**

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# Carnival in Veracruz



Veracruz was the first Spanish colonial town founded in what would later become the nation of Mexico. Still the country's premiere port, today the city is famous for its rich historical and cultural heritage, including the most famous and elaborate celebration of carnival in Mexico.

## Historical Background of Veracruz

The Spanish *conquistador* Hernán Cortés and his men sailed in 1519 from the Spanish base in Cuba and landed on the Gulf coast of Mexico on April 21. They designated the spot as “La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz de Cristo” (“The Rich Town of the True Cross of Christ”); this name was quickly shortened to Veracruz. From Veracruz Cortés launched his famous expedition against Tenochtitlan, the heart of the Aztec empire in the central valley of Mexico. Although Cortés commanded fewer than 700 men (reinforcements increased their numbers to about 1,000 men in 1520), he was able to form an alliance with the Tlaxcalan Indians, longtime enemies of the Aztecs. This alliance was one of two factors instrumental in the eventual defeat of the Aztecs. The second factor was an epidemic of smallpox, a European disease brought to the region by the Spanish.

Cortés first entered the Aztec capital in 1519 and was warmly received by the ruler Montezuma. However, tensions soon developed, and the ensuing battle in July 1520 resulted in the death of more than 800 Spaniards and some 4,000 of their Tlaxcalan allies. Cortés retreated, and in 1520-21, an epidemic of smallpox decimated the population of Tenochtitlan. After regathering his forces, Cortés returned to lay siege to the capital in May of 1521. Devastated by disease, starvation, and war, Tenochtitlan fell to

the Spanish in August of that year. The Spanish destroyed Tenochtitlan and built Mexico City on its ruins. Thus the area which had formerly been ruled by the Aztecs and other Native American societies became the viceroyalty of New Spain.

The route that Cortés' forces followed from Veracruz to Tenochtitlan became the commercial route for all that Europe exported to New Spain, including not only merchandise, mail, and supplies, but also immigrants and slaves. Virtually all of the huge quantities of goods that Mexico sent to Spain also passed through Veracruz. After Spain incorporated the Philippines into the empire, a second important port was established on the Pacific coast at Acapulco, but Veracruz remained the vital link with Spain. Goods from the Philippines were transported overland from Acapulco to Veracruz, then reloaded onto ships for transport to Spain. During the three centuries of Spanish control of Mexico, Veracruz served as the main port for most of the viceroyalty.

As a result, much of the colonial history of the city of Veracruz revolved around the comings and goings of the Spanish fleet. Although virtually all immigrants to Mexico disembarked in Veracruz, the Spaniards in general considered the very tropical coastal climate to be inhospitable and did not settle there. Most preferred to move to Mexico City, the viceregal capital and seat of political power, or to another area with more temperate weather. Therefore a significant portion of the population of Veracruz was not permanent. This temporary population swelled twice a year when the Spanish fleet arrived and hundreds of Mexican colonists flocked to the city for a huge, spectacular trade fair where newly arrived merchandise was sold.

The rich cargo of the Spanish trade fleet not only lured merchants to Veracruz; it also enticed pirates. The ships that had carried expensive manufactured goods from Spain to Mexico returned to Europe as heavy-laden as they had come to the Americas. In addition to the profits from the sale of the original cargo, they carried silver and other exports from Mexico, as well as the taxes that the colony paid to Spain. This cargo included the *quinto real*, a special tax levied upon the colonists. This tax amounted to one-fifth of the production of all industries. Hence, the ships were extremely attractive targets for pirates from other European nations, especially England, France, and the Netherlands. Pirates attacked Veracruz at least twice in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, even though the viceregal authorities built the best fort in the territory, San Juan de Ulúa, to defend the city.

Mexican independence from Spain, achieved in 1826, did not spare Veracruz from further attack by foreigners. The city has been invaded by several countries; the United States has invaded twice.(1) Although the port is no longer threatened by pirates and invasions, the old Spanish fort of San Juan de Ulúa can still be seen at the edge of the harbor. Today, Veracruz is famous for its tropical ambience, seafood, traditional music, and the largest and best-known carnival celebration in Mexico.

## Origins of Carnival

Traditionally a three-day period of celebration before the beginning of Lent, (2) Carnival has its origins in European pagan customs. In pre-Christian European societies, there was an important celebration of the beginning of spring and the planting season. In the Christian tradition, carnival allowed a time of relaxation before the solemn penitential period of Lent. Carnival season permitted feasts, revelry, and drunkenness; it also allowed for the established

social order to be relaxed, mocked, and even completely turned around. Historically, it has been described as a time when the masses reigned and the traditional roles of vassal and lord were reversed. In medieval times, many rulers believed that carnival was an acceptable way to allow potentially disgruntled masses the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with an oppressive social order. However, by the late Renaissance era, rulers began to worry that the mockery inherent in carnival celebrations, in combination with excessive consumption of alcohol, could actually lead to subversion and rebellion. Several cases of rebellion associated with carnival festivities took place in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Germany and France.

## Carnival in the Spanish Colonies

Despite its potential for social upheaval, the carnival tradition arrived in the Americas with the European settlers. The Hapsburg monarchs who ruled the Spanish dominions until 1700 in some cases even encouraged festivals such as carnival, in hopes of acculturating the indigenous population. In fact, carnival under the Hapsburgs appears to be closely associated with the masses, particularly the Native Americans. During this period, tremendous alcohol consumption characterized the festivities of carnival. Individuals roamed the streets in masks to hide their identities, and this anonymity afforded them a sense of freedom to say and do things that were otherwise not socially acceptable. Men frequently dressed as women, and some women joined in the charade as men. Revellers also dressed as the clergy, conquistadors, and government officials, but they never went so far as to mock the Inquisition. The elite watched festivities from their balconies and engaged in verbal mockery with the revellers on the streets.

The festivities also included dancing in the streets and the dance of the

*huehuenches*. This particular indigenous dance called for young men to dress as old men and to perform for the crowd. No complete description of the dance is known, but colonial officials who mentioned it in their reports consistently associated it with pre-Columbian dances. One of the *huehuenches* volunteered to play the part of a character known as Juan Carnival. On carnival Tuesday, a mock trial took place, and Juan Carnival was found guilty of a crime and “hanged.”

Carnival as described above, however, did not fare well under the Bourbon monarchs who controlled Spain and its dominions from 1700 until the independence movements of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning in the early 1700s, laws were decreed with the express purpose of altering the nature of carnival in the viceroyalty. Eventually the festival was completely banned in the capital, and it was not introduced in the new northern frontier settlements. Carnival was perceived as a tradition that encouraged licentiousness, scandalous behavior, and even subversion. Carnival celebrations were eventually reinstated on a much smaller scale in some communities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Contemporary Carnival Celebrations in Veracruz

No definitive written history of the carnival tradition in Veracruz exists. During the colonial period, carnival was celebrated in Veracruz in much the same way as in other towns in New Spain. The largest and most elaborate carnival celebration in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries took place in Mexico City, the viceregal capital. When the government allowed the celebration to begin again at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the festivities in Veracruz gained importance.

The carnival celebration in Veracruz has grown increasingly in size and scope since

that period. This growth is due in large part to recent economic successes of the state of Veracruz. Much of the petroleum, Mexico’s main export, is located off the coast of the state. In addition, the state is the source of much of Mexico’s sulphur, sugar, cattle, vanilla, tropical fruits, seafood, and coffee.

Each decade marks the expansion of the carnival celebrations in the city. The state and municipal governments are active participants and sponsors of many of the cultural events and activities that round out the festivities. Carnival season begins in Veracruz one week before Shrove Tuesday. The festivities of this first day include a parade of costumed children and the *desfile de mal humor*. The *mal humor* is an effigy figure designed to represent all the “negative spirits” that might inhibit the fun of carnival. At the end of the parade, it is ceremoniously burned in the central plaza, marking the official beginning of the Veracruz carnival.

The selection and subsequent crowning of the *Reyes infantiles* (child king and queen) form an important part of carnival in Veracruz. The state governor’s wife, the *Primera Dama del Estado*, officiates this ceremony which usually occurs on the second day of carnival. Other regal individuals chosen for this festive season are the *Rey de la alegría*, a position requiring much laughter and a propensity towards mockery and devilishness, and the official king and queen of carnival. They reign over all festivities and parades. In almost all cases *Su Gran Majestad de Carnival* (His Royal Highness of Carnival) is crowned by the state governor on the Friday before carnival.

On the Saturday before carnival the first large parade takes place. Most of the large parades begin around 10:00 a.m. and pass along through several streets of downtown Veracruz before moving onto the *Avenida de los Insurgentes Veracruzanos*, the large

street which follows the harbor. They follow this street toward the main square, the *Plaza de la Constitución*. The *grandes desfiles* (great parades) are composed of individuals, *comparsas* (dance clubs), and *carros alegóricos* (floats) that are officially registered with the carnival commission. Also in attendance are the royal court of carnival as well as *Señorita Veracruz* (Miss Veracruz).

The *carros alegóricos* of Veracruz are primarily large trucks (or in some cases, platforms on wheels pulled by tractors) which are elaborately decorated according to a particular theme. All floats carry singing and dancing individuals; these revellers usually wear some sort of costume. Most float riders occasionally throw candies or other small prizes to the crowd. Almost all floats are sponsored by commercial or municipal entities. For example, in carnival 1990 the corporate sponsors included a group of Veracruz merchants, the Coca Cola company, the *Tiburones* (Sharks) soccer team, and the Fiesta cigarette company (which threw packs of cigarettes rather than candy to the crowd), and the department store, *Comercial Mexicana*. In all, about 20 floats participate in each *gran desfile*. There is a *gran desfile* each day of carnival beginning on Saturday, and the same *carros alegóricos* participate in all parades.

Although the floats are beautiful, perhaps the best part of Veracruz carnival is the participation of *comparsas*, or dance clubs, in the parades. Approximately 16 *comparsas* perform during carnival and are interspersed with floats in the parades. Dance clubs can be composed of adolescents, adults, or a combination of the two groups. Dancers may be members of the same neighborhood, parish, school, or workplace; but in general, there are no restrictions to membership other than dedication, physical endurance (since they dance several miles virtually non-stop on the parade route), and some financial

resources to provide the costume. Costumes vary from the comical (bumble bees) to the elegant (sequined jackets and derbies). The groups always have lively musical accompaniment from a live band or sound equipment, usually playing salsa or merengue.

*Comparsas* practice intricate dance steps all year long in order to perfect their performance for the season. *Comparsas* officially compete against each other in terms of costume design and choreography on carnival Monday. On carnival day (Tuesday) the winning *comparsas* carry special banners in the final *gran desfile*. Although it is an honor to win the prize banner, the greatest achievement of a *comparsa* may be to animate the crowd with its dancing. Dance clubs actively encourage audience participation, making for some rather spontaneous and exciting dance moves.

Along with the dance clubs, musical entertainment is provided by invited foreign and/or national guest bands, usually high school or university marching bands. A highlight of the parades is the Mexican National Naval Band (the Mexican Navy has a large base in Veracruz).

A carnival parade in Veracruz would not be complete without informal groups of costumed revellers who, in the traditional spirit of carnival, engage in a bit of mockery and social commentary. There is almost inevitably a group of men dressed as either prostitutes or nuns. In 1990 a favorite group included about eight men dressed as women wearing work-out tights and performing a slapstick aerobics class. A regular tradition in Veracruz is the appearance of a licentious Hernán Cortés and an extremely flirtatious *Malinche*.<sup>(3)</sup> Political commentary is also a part of carnival and international events such as the 1990 United States invasion of Panama were not exempt from critique.

Although the parades of *comparsas* and *carros alegóricos* comprise a large portion of the festivities, carnival in Veracruz also includes a wide array of nightly dance and musical performances in the main square or in the sports complex. Folkloric groups from various regions of Mexico participate along with many international groups, particularly from Central American and Caribbean nations.

Throughout the carnival season, Veracruzanos are active participants, dancing and singing and showing their approval or disapproval of *comparsas*, floats, or performances. The visitor, too, is quickly initiated and may experience firsthand the “egg ritual”. For the “egg ritual”, eggs are carefully emptied by making a small hole at the top. They are then filled with flour or tiny pieces of confetti and recapped with glue. Although many people make their own confetti eggs, they can also be purchased from street vendors, along with larger quantities of confetti in plastic bags. At any given moment the innocent spectator can become the victim of an egg onslaught. Egg and confetti attacks take place in the spirit of good fun, and Veracruzanos always claim that attractive women are never showered with flour eggs. However, spectators are advised not to wear their best clothing or to dress in black because they will then surely become the targets of flour bomb.

Ash Wednesday marks the end of carnival in Veracruz, and the festivities take a more serious tone. In the main plaza, the royal carnival court and the *Rey de la alegría* lead the funeral procession of Juan Carnival. He is ceremoniously buried, in reference to the ritual trial and lynching of Juan Carnival during the colonial period. All bid him a solemn farewell and proceed to nearby churches to attend mass and receive the ashes that give the day its name.<sup>(4)</sup> As part of the Lenten tradition of piousness, revellers

renounce (at least in theory) their carnivalesque activities. All are assured, however, that Juan Carnival will dance to the salsa beat once again next year and all manner of fun will be had.

## ENDNOTES

1. The phrase in the United States Marine anthem that cites the “halls of Montezuma” is a reference to an attack by the Marines on Veracruz in 1846. This invasion was part of U.S. military action in the Mexican-American War.
2. The explanation of precisely when Carnival happens is rather complicated because the dates are based on the date of Easter. The date of Easter is determined by a lunar calendar rather than the solar calendar that most Western societies use today. Carnival must always end by dawn on Ash Wednesday, forty days before Easter. The last day of Carnival is known as Shrove Tuesday, Fat Tuesday, or Mardi Gras. While Carnival was originally a three-day period, it has expanded in some traditions. In New Orleans, for example, the Carnival season begins as early as January. In Veracruz, Carnival generally lasts a full week.
3. Malinche was Cortés’ Native American interpreter, advisor and companion. She was the eldest daughter of a noble Aztec family, but her mother sold her into slavery to ensure that Malinche’s younger brother would receive an inheritance. When Malinche was 14, the leaders of a conquered Indian city gave her to Cortés as a gift. Because her skills as an interpreter were instrumental in the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs and because she became Cortés’ mistress, she is considered by many Mexicans to be a traitor to her people and also a temptress figure similar to Eve.
4. In Catholic tradition and among some Protestant groups, the faithful attend church on Ash Wednesday to be marked on the forehead with a dot or cross of ash. Marking the face or body with ashes has long been a symbol of mourning or penitence, and thus the ashes applied on Ash Wednesday are a symbol of the beginning of Lenten penitence. Often the ashes are obtained by burning the palm fronds that decorated the church on Palm Sunday of the previous year.

## Slide Descriptions



1. **PLAZA DE LA CONSTITUCIÓN.** This slide shows the beauty and tranquility of the main plaza in Veracruz. The plaza is lined with cafés and restaurants, as well as the municipal government building (the *ayuntamiento*). The arcaded side of the plaza houses some of the best seafood restaurants and is known as *los Portales*. Upon entering the plaza, visitors meet a group of vendors selling the famous Veracruz ice balls (or snow cones) made from fresh tropical fruit. This same plaza is not quite so calm during carnival time when it is home to many coronations, musical performances, and carnival merriment.
2. **EL CAFÉ LA GRAN PARROQUIA.** Veracruz is known for its lively tropical atmosphere, and the best location for feeling the pulse of the city is the nationally renowned café pictured here. Continuously packed with people from early morning to late evening, *la Gran Parroquia* offers visitors and locals some of the best coffee in Mexico. Harried waiters pour coffee *esencia* (concentrate) into the customer's cup. The best way to request the milk for *café con leche* (coffee with milk) is by clinking a spoon against the glass. This signals another waiter who roams the large café. He approaches and rapidly pours the hot milk into the cup.
3. **PORT OF VERACRUZ.** First and foremost, Veracruz is Mexico's premiere port. It serves as the main base of the Mexican Gulf fleet and also frequently serves as a second home for many foreign sailors and merchant marines. The city has an international quality to it due to the many foreigners and immigrants that have passed through its harbor. The ethnic composition of the citizens and their culture testify to that diversity. In the background of this photo, the old Spanish castle and fort, San Juan de Ulúa, can be seen. After Mexican independence from Spain and before it became a major tourist attraction, the fort served as a prison.
4. **PLAZA DE LA REFORMA.** Veracruz is home to many beautiful plazas and fountains. The *Plaza de la Reforma* is dedicated to the 19<sup>th</sup> century reform leaders who wrested control away from the French invaders. The French had attacked and seized Veracruz in the 1860s. Once Benito Juárez and his Liberal compatriots gained power, they implemented a series of reform laws that they hoped would modernize Mexico.
5. **MUSEO CULTURAL DE LA CIUDAD AND BIBLIOTECA DEL PUEBLO** (Municipal Cultural Museum and Public Library). Veracruzanos are proud of their cultural contributions and the role that their city has played throughout Mexican history. The museum presents pre-Columbian, colonial, and national period history to visitors. In addition, the museum serves as a gallery for new works of art and presents changing historical exhibits.
6. **AVENIDA INSURGENTES VERACRUZANOS.** This wide avenue follows the harbor and is locally referred to as the *malecón*. The word *malecón* refers to the wall built to protect the old port, where ships can still dock. In this early morning photo, the usually busy street is calm. However, during carnival season, the *malecón* is the grand avenue of the parades. The sides of the street are lined with people armed with eggs and ready to sing and dance along with the *comparsas*.

7. *STREET VENDORS*. The very first people to line the *malecón* on carnival days are the ambulatory hawkers of those items necessary for a successful carnival experience – ice cream, flour and confetti-filled eggs, bags of confetti, soft drinks, and beer. The central female figure in the photo is selling confetti bags and eggs from her small pushcart.
8. *STREET VENDORS*. An important consideration while watching the 3-hour parades is the heat and intensity of the tropical sun. Even in February, temperatures in Veracruz average about 70°F. To alleviate this problem, especially for young children and the elderly, Veracruz street vendors sell *sombrillas* (parasols) made from gum wrappers, as shown in this slide.
9. *GRAN DESFILE – LUAU FLOAT*. Most carnival floats are oriented toward a particular theme. As seen in this slide, Polynesian culture is the inspiration for this *carro alegórico*. Drum music and “hula girls” defined the dance on this popular float. This slide shows that the floats are highly decorated truck beds.
10. *LUAU FLOAT – DETAIL*. This slide provides a closer view of the float. Notice the details of the decoration, including the large, colorful dinosaur.
11. *SEÑORITAS VERACRUZANAS FLOAT*. As this photo shows, some *carros* are simple constructions designed to present prominent citizens or beauty queens.
12. *FIESTA CIGARETTE FLOAT*. An appropriately-named cigarette for the occasion made its appearance during the carnival. This float supplied and decorated by the cigarette company featured young women in matching outfits. These young women danced to salsa music and threw packs to enthusiastic smokers. Most floats have commercial sponsors who help defray the cost of the design and decoration of floats. Float riders are primarily young women, usually volunteers.
13. *BALLET FOLKLÓRICO VERACRUZANO FLOAT*. This float was one of the highlights of the many parades. Beautifully designed, the float paid homage to the sea, essential to the economic and cultural life of the port. The dancers performed the exciting *huapango*, including the customary step known as the *zapateado*. The traditional Veracruz music that accompanies the *huapango* is known as the *Son Jarocho*. The music is fast and light, derived from African, Totonac Indian, and Spanish influences. Dancers are accompanied by a small ensemble of musicians who are usually dressed in white *guayabera* shirts, white pants with a red sash, and white hats. The ensemble is composed of guitars of various sizes, including the *requinto* (a high-pitched guitar), the *jarana* (similar to the ukelele), and a unique harp light enough to be carried. The singers in the band rely heavily upon improvisation and are famous for extemporaneously composing songs about the bystanders – their clothes, looks, and possible amorous adventures. The word *huapango* means fiesta, and a prominently featured element is the *zapateado*, a foot-stomping dance with many variations. Perhaps the most famous variation is *La Bamba*, a traditional Veracruz wedding dance in which dancers tie a long ribbon into a bow using only their dancing feet.

14. *COMPARSA – ABEJAS*. Dance clubs devise elaborate and interesting costumes as well as intricate steps in order to win the *comparsa* championship during carnival. This group, dressed as bumble bees, did their buzzing to classic salsa songs and were prone to step out of line to attempt to “sting” rambunctious children and attractive women.
15. *COMPARSA – ESCOLA DA SAMBA*. Elegantly dressed in blue and white satin, the members of this *comparsa* take their inspiration from their counterparts in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This group performed to samba music rather than salsa or merengue.
16. *MISCHIEF, MAYHEM AND MOCKERY*. Two gypsy fortune tellers (actually men) battle over the appropriate way to view the romantic future of their clients. As there are frequent stops in the parade so that the float and *comparsa* members can perform, there is ample time for other acts, such as the hilarious skit of this team.
17. *MALINCHE*. Also known as Doña Marina, La Malinche was the interpreter and mistress of Hernán Cortés. Originally a noblewoman sold into slavery by her mother, La Malinche today is seen by many Mexicans as a traitor to her people because she assisted in the conquest. The Malinche here made flirtatious and suggestive moves to the crowd, which in turn responded with good-natured insults. Look closely; this Malinche is actually a man.
18. *ELABORATELY MASKED REVELLER*. These heavy masks are customary attire for many traditional Veracruz festivals, including carnival. The heads are made of cardboard and papier mache, and some are four times the size of those pictured in this slide. This reveler completes the costume with the traditional ruffled sleeve shirt and sash. This same attire can be seen in other Caribbean nations during their festivals.
19. *LA NEGRA TOMASA AND COMPANY*. This group of carnival devotees pays tribute to various ethnic groups that have contributed to Veracruz’s culture over the centuries. A large portion of the port’s population is of African descent.
20. *UNCLE SAM AS A CALAVERA*. Carnival would not be complete without some social or political commentary. In this case, Uncle Sam appears in the form of a giant *calavera* (skeleton). The *calavera* is most commonly seen during the Day of the Dead celebrations (October 31-November 2) and has strong pre-Columbian antecedents. The *calavera* in this photo was used to criticize the 1990 United States invasion of Panama and the resultant civilian casualties.

# Questions and Activities

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## DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Discuss the importance of port cities. What are some major U.S. port cities? Is their culture different in any way from that of other cities? As you look at a map of Mexico, try to identify other port cities. Why did Veracruz become the most important of Mexico's ports?
2. If some students in the class are Christians, do they observe Lent in any way? What about Carnival? Do students of other religions know of a similar tradition observed by their own faith?
3. If carnival is not celebrated in your community, is there any similar festival? Can students think of any time when the social hierarchy is reversed? Does your community have a public festival? How is it similar to or different from carnival?
4. How could the Hapsburg governments use carnival as a tool for acculturating the indigenous (Native American) population? Are there any celebrations in the U.S. that might once have been used to acculturate the diverse population of this country?
5. Why did colonial officials finally ban the celebration of carnival in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? The text mentions that carnival was considered scandalous or subversive. Do you think that the nature of carnival had changed since the previous century when it was encouraged, or was it just the official perception of the festival which changed? Why? Why was carnival allowed to resume in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Students may have to research Mexican history to answer this question thoroughly.
6. Why and how would the Mexican economy affect modern carnival celebrations in Veracruz? Why do local governments support it? Why do commercial interests such as department stores and cigarette and soft drink companies get involved? What is the role of the local government or businesses in festivals in your own community?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Have students investigate carnival traditions in other countries. Of particular interest are the festivities in the following places:
  - Dominican Republic
  - Haiti
  - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
  - Venice, Italy
  - Cádiz, Spain
  - Cologne, Germany
  - Oruro, Bolivia
  - New Orleans, Louisiana
2. Individuals or groups of students might each choose a particular country to study and then present a report to the class, discussing the following:
  - The country, including location, language spoken, population, major industries, exports, and the capital city
  - The history of the carnival tradition in the country or city
  - A description of the carnival celebration today, especially its most important characteristics (floats, dance groups, foods, traditional pranks, costumes and masks)
  - A general commentary on how the current festival may be different from the festivities of previous centuries or decades
3. The class as a whole should then discuss the information in the individual reports. What characteristics and traditions do these festivals have in common? How are they similar to or different from carnival in Veracruz? How do all of them attempt to maintain the original spirit of mockery and social inversion associated with the ancient celebration?
4. The instructor may simply wish to lead a class discussion on the topics presented above. Slides of large carnival celebrations are usually available for sale. The cultural attaché of embassies or the tourist board of many countries may be able to supply information and posters and can provide you with the addresses of associations or companies that produce videos or pictures of carnival.
5. Have students discuss and write about the role of festivals in society. Why are celebrations such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the Mummers Parade in Philadelphia, and the Rose Bowl parade in Pasadena, among others, so important in our society? Ask students to describe some aspects of one or all of these festivals. How do the masses participate in each? What role does the concept of tradition play in these festivals? National and local pride? Economic considerations such as commercialism? Does your town, city, or neighborhood have a specific and unique festival? How does it differ from the larger festivals mentioned above? What is the history of that festival? Students should be encouraged to visit older relatives or friends to ask about ways in which the festival may have changed over the years. Students might want to submit their essays for publication in the school newspaper or literary magazine as the date of the festival they described approaches.

6. Have students write an imaginary diary entry for a day at Veracruz carnival. They should include information regarding food, costumes, music, carnival merriment, pranks, and parades.
7. Like the mariachis of Jalisco, the *huapango veracruzano* is a particularly well-known Mexican musical tradition. Several excellent videos of Mexican dance performances are available at low cost from companies that produce educational videos. The instructor should select and preview one of these videos and direct the students' attention to examples of at least two styles of dance and music. The students may then discuss some of the following questions: How are the two traditions similar and different? Who are the participants and the musicians? How are they dressed? Does the style of dress indicate the music's geographic or climatic origin? What type of dancing accompanies the music? What role do women play in each segment? Does the dance remind the students of any other dance step? Discuss the costumes worn by the performers. What might be the history of this style of dress? What elements have been added to that historical dress?
8. After studying the slides which accompany this text, students can make a *carro alegórico* of their own. This can also be done in miniature using shoe boxes. Students can either work individually or form their own carnival clubs for group work, and a competition can be held in which small prizes are awarded for best theme, best presentation, etc. For a more complex project, students could involve the whole school in putting on a carnival celebration including a parade, either at Carnival time or during a school celebration such as Homecoming.

## Additional Readings

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