

Peace still proved elusive. As the country confronted bankruptcy, Juárez declared a two-year moratorium on Mexico's foreign debt—thus earning the wrath of European creditors. Seeking to expand its empire and influence, France, under Emperor Napoleon III, commenced a five-year war of occupation. With Juárez out of office Napoleon III installed the Austrian archduke, Ferdinand Maximilian von Hapsburg, as emperor of Mexico (thus enacting the Conservative prescription for national redemption). Arriving in May 1864, a naive Maximilian tried to ingratiate himself with his new subjects by touring the provinces, declaring freedom of the press, and proclaiming a broad amnesty for political prisoners. Juárez nonetheless resisted, and civil war ensued. Distracted by concerns in Europe, Napoleon eventually decided to withdraw French troops from Mexico. Hopelessly exposed by this betrayal, Maximilian surrendered in May 1867. An unforgiving Juárez ordered his execution the following month. Thus ended Mexico's experience with monarchy.

The resumption of power by Liberals ushered in what has come to be known as the "restored republic." Juárez and his republican cohorts earnestly attempted to set Mexico on the path of modernization. Reelected to a third term as president in July 1867, Juárez promoted extensive economic and educational reforms. Things went so well that he ran for a fourth time in 1871, in one of the most hotly contested elections of the nineteenth century. As Congress sealed Juárez's triumph, one of the losers, Porfirio Díaz, refused to accept the result and angrily proclaimed that indefinite reelection of the chief executive endangered the country's principles and institutions. The Díaz uprising was quickly put down, however, and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada easily succeeded to the presidency after Juárez suddenly died of a heart attack in 1872.

Lerdo's term in office was relatively tranquil and constructive, but problems arose when the president announced plans to seek reelection in 1876. A self-righteous Díaz once again revolted in the name of effective suffrage and no-reelection. After only one decisive military encounter, Díaz occupied Mexico City in November 1876. Directly or indirectly, he would dominate the country for decades to come.

The Díaz Era: Progress at a Price

For the thirty-five years from 1876 to 1911, Díaz proved himself to be a master of politics. He began with his military colleagues and followers and from there went on to create a broad coalition. He gave the regional *caudillos* room to maneuver, encouraging them to fight among themselves. As his presidency matured, he steadily built up the army. In order to maintain control of the countryside, where the vast majority of Mexicans lived, Díaz relied heavily on the feared *guardias rurales*, or rural police. In short, Díaz patiently built up the power of the federal government where it counted—in military and police power.

At first Díaz did not seem to represent anything new in politics. He was, after all, a product of the liberal movement. As time passed, it became clear that Díaz was a Liberal with a difference. He cultivated neutrality on the crucial question of the church, neither attacking it (like most Liberals) nor defending it. He conspicuously allowed his devoutly Catholic second wife to serve as a symbol of reconciliation toward the institution the Liberals had pilloried.

In other respects Díaz stuck to liberal principles. In one of his most important and far-ranging measures, he ruled that the ban on corporate land-holdings, a liberal measure of the 1850s aimed primarily at the church, should apply to Indian villages. This opened vast new areas to speculators, ranchers, and political favorites. In 1894 Díaz helped the landowners even more by decreeing that unused lands, or *terrenos baldíos*, could be taken over for private exploitation. The crucial source of new capital was to come from abroad. Díaz and his leading ministers sought out prospective foreign investors, especially U.S. and British, and offered them generous concessions. All this was an obvious application of the principles of economic liberalism that had captured most Latin American elites in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. In Mexico the writers, technocrats, and intellectually inclined politicians who articulated these doctrines earned the label of the *científicos*, underlining their supposed link to Positivist philosophy.

Díaz proved his command of politics in that most fundamental of ways: he stayed in power far longer than any would have dared to predict. For three and a half decades he held the presidency, with only one interruption (Manuel González: 1880–84). He believed that he was giving Mexico the precious gift of political stability, which he saw as indispensable for economic growth. If that required some repression, it was for a good cause. A shrewd politician, Díaz had the constitution amended, time and again, so that he could be reelected to the presidency—blithely contradicting his prior denunciations of self-perpetuation in office. Díaz knew how to appeal to the privileged sectors, how to make them loyal, how to orchestrate their support for the economic schemes that would raise their country to a “civilized” level.

Economic development was impressive. Railroads were a striking example. Díaz first tried to build them with public funds, but by late 1880 he was granting concessions to foreigners. In only four years the track in operation grew from 750 miles to 3600 miles. Mexico reached 12,000 miles of track by 1900. (On the other hand, paying interest and dividends on this foreign investment was a burden on the balance of payments.) Originally foreign built, most railroads were taken over by the state in 1907.

As elsewhere in Latin America, foreign trade rocketed: ninefold between 1877 and 1910. The United States became Mexico’s leading trade partner, as mineral exports expanded to copper and zinc, as well as silver and gold. Modest industrialization occurred, centered in textiles, cement, iron, and light consumer goods. Díaz set great store by the need to pursue economic

policies that would maintain Mexico's creditworthiness in the United States and Europe. In 1895 the federal government produced a budget surplus, and for the rest of Díaz's regime all budgets were balanced. As celebrations for the independence centennial of 1910 approached, Díaz and his lieutenants could claim that they had realized in Mexico the Positivist ideal of "order and progress."

Economic activity varied in character from region to region, and this led to differing social structures. The north was primarily a mining and ranching area, where the workers were hired laborers—miners, for instance, and cowboys. The central valley, by contrast, produced wheat and grain on medium- and large-sized farms. Sugar was raised in the south-central region, particularly in the state of Morelos, where traditional peasant lands were being seized for use by the mills. Vast henequen plantations prospered in the Yucatán, where local natives were compelled to work as peons.

Under Díaz, Mexico never developed a strong entrepreneurial class. Concessions and favors came from the state, and capital came from abroad—England, France, and, of course, the United States. The middle sectors were extremely weak as well.

The Apostle of Conservative Liberalism

A gifted intellectual and prolific writer, Justo Sierra (1848–1912) embodied the aspirations and contradictions of pre-revolutionary Mexico. Born in the modest province of Campeche, he studied law in Mexico City and became deeply influenced by liberalism. As director of the newspaper *La Libertad* between 1878 and 1880 and later, in one historian's phrase, as "the high priest of the liberal patria during the last decades of the Porfiriato," Sierra promoted a "conservative liberalism" of social order, material progress, and national unity. He was also a leader of the *científicos*, a group of prominent citizens who championed the idea of "scientific politics."

But if Sierra helped construct the ideological foundations of the Porfirian regime, he could be critical as well. On at least two occasions he expressed public opposition to Díaz's continued reelection. In 1902 he wrote a majestic book entitled *La evolución política del pueblo mexicano*, arguing that "the political evolution of Mexico has been sacrificed to her social evolution. This is proved by the plain fact that not a single party exists in Mexico, nor any group organized around a program rather than a man." He was also a fervent supporter of public education and as minister of education oversaw the founding of the modern National University in 1910.

These social factors bore deep political significance. Elsewhere in Latin America, middle-class professionals provided pressure and leadership for reformist movements, as in Argentina, and on occasion they drew support from fledgling industrialists, as in Chile. Not so in Mexico. Turn-of-the-century Mexico had the social ingredients for a revolution, but relatively little material for reform.

The economic progress of the Díaz years also had its cost. While the wealthy prospered and duly copied the ways of the European aristocracy, the vast majority of Mexicans faced grinding poverty. Given its labor surplus, Mexico's wage rates remained very low. Indeed, one estimate (doubtless exaggerated) showed that the average purchasing power in 1910 was only one-quarter the 1810 level. Mexico exported agricultural products, while production of most Mexicans' dietary staples—corn and beans (*frijoles*)—barely kept up with population growth. There could be no improvement in the notoriously low per capita consumption levels prevailing at the outset of the Díaz era. Vital statistics were alarming. In 1900, 29 percent of all male children died within their first year, and many of the survivors ended up working twelve hours a day in a sweatshop. Only a quarter of the population was literate.

This highly unequal economic "progress" drew repeated protests from workers, both urban and rural. There were strikes, sometimes fierce, especially where wage labor worked under industrial-type conditions. Between 1906 and 1908, for example, Mexican workers at the Cananea Copper Company repeatedly protested the higher wages given to U.S. laborers. Significant strikes occurred also among the railroad workers and at the Río Blanco textile mills. Labor protest was intensified by the international financial crisis of 1906–8. In the rural sector, peasants in the Morelos area bitterly resented losing their land to commercial cultivation of sugar and other market crops. In the north there was a similar reaction to the loss of land for railway construction.

Díaz and his advisers could pursue a consistent economic policy because they had created the most effectively centralized government that Mexico had seen since independence. Decision making was concentrated in Mexico City, at the expense of local or regional *caudillos*. Political office, especially at the federal level, was sought after by the higher level of society. Those who made it were envied, since economic gain so often required contact with the government. Díaz himself knew full well the kind of system he had promoted. Near the end of his regime he explained: "We were harsh. Sometimes we were harsh to the point of cruelty. But it was necessary then to the life and progress of the nation. If there was cruelty, results have justified it. . . . Education and industry have carried on the task begun by the army." Many of Díaz' opponents agreed on the need for national power, but denounced the way Díaz used it. Pressure was mounting as frustration grew among the younger elite who were excluded from the Díaz coterie. Time was working against Díaz, but who could have predicted how his carefully constructed house would come tumbling down?

The Mexican Revolution

Few revolutions are precipitated by the oppressed. Far more often they begin with a split within the dominant elite. Disgruntled dissidents, frequently young, become angry enough to attack the system. So it was in Mexico in 1910.

One of the leading critics was Francisco I. Madero, scion of a family that had made a fortune in cattle and mining and that was linked to Díaz' political machine. Evaristo Madero, Francisco's grandfather, had been governor of the state of Coahuila from 1880 to 1884, and the Madero family had cultivated a close friendship with José Y. Limantour, Díaz' long-time finance minister. Francisco got the best of a foreign education, studying in Paris and at the University of California. He returned to apply his skills in commercial agriculture, especially on the family's cotton plantation. He was a strong liberal in economics, which fit the Díaz era, but also in politics, which did not. His belief in political democracy soon alienated him from the rigidities of the late Díaz regime. He became an outspoken opponent, arguing that Mexico was ready for liberal democracy and that if Díaz chose to run for re-election in 1910 (as everyone expected), then the vice-presidential candidate must come from outside the presidential clique.

Díaz was by now the captive of his own success. Why should he take seriously the lamentations of an ambitious and spoiled young oligarch? When the president failed to heed his message, Madero did the unthinkable: he entered the 1910 campaign as the candidate of the Anti-Reelectionist Party.



Emiliano Zapata gave determined leadership to the revolutionary peasant movement that began in the state of Morelos.

Díaz now faced greater opposition than at any time in decades. His machine produced another victory, but it was far from effortless. The police had to jail 5000 of the opposition, including Madero. The young rebel, now emboldened, refused to recognize the legitimacy of Díaz' reelection. Instead, he issued (while in jail—which suggests that Díaz hardly had an iron grip) his famous *Plan de San Luis Potosí* and called for armed resistance. The rebel movement grew rapidly, as its troops took Ciudad Juárez (across the border from El Paso). Díaz now dropped the mask of the infinitely resourceful autocrat. In a surprising show of weakness, he capitulated and left the country in May 1911. A new presidential election was held, and Madero triumphed. In 1912, he became the nation's president before delirious crowds in Mexico City. Democracy, it seemed, was on its way.

Francisco Madero and his fellow dissidents may have started the Mexican Revolution, but they did not long control it. Other rebels had larger goals: Emiliano Zapata, for example, emerged as the rock-hard leader of landless peasants in the southwestern state of Morelos. They were the country dwellers who had seen their traditional land rights taken away by the smooth-talking lawyers and speculators using the new laws of "liberal" inspiration. These *zapatistas* (as they became known) saw the rebellion as a chance to restore justice. That meant regaining their lands.

The *zapatistas* quickly became disillusioned with Madero, and with reason. Why should this son of a great landholding family sympathize with their cause any more than the Díaz gang? In November 1911 Zapata and his followers in Morelos angrily attacked Madero in their *Plan de Ayala*. "Having no intentions other than to satisfy his personal ambitions, his boundless instincts as a tyrant, and his profound disrespect" for the Constitution of 1857, they said, Madero "did not carry to a happy end the revolution which gloriously he initiated with the help of God and the people." Instead, he let the Porfirian political machine continue, thereby showing his indifference to the plight of the people. The rural dwellers now had only one option: direct action. "We give notice that . . . the *pueblos* or citizens who have the titles corresponding to those properties will immediately enter into possession of that real estate of which they have been despoiled by the bad faith of their oppressors, maintaining at any cost with arms in hand the mentioned possession." The *zapatistas* were as good as their word. These rural smallholders had believed the Revolution would help them regain their lands. When Madero failed to deliver, they contemptuously dismissed him and declared their own revolution.

Madero was hardly a true revolutionary. He was a would-be parliamentarian who thought Díaz' abdication would open the way to true democracy. Madero flinched at the thought—suggested to him by less squeamish rebels—that he should strike at his opposition before they struck at him. The mistake cost him his life in 1913. His killer was his own military chief of staff, Victoriano Huerta, a high-ranking general under Díaz. Huerta dragged the indiscreet U.S. Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson into his plot,



In the north Pancho Villa created a powerful military juggernaut, but his personal flamboyance earned him a dubious reputation in Mexico and the United States. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

thereby ensuring that the United States would continue its notorious role in Mexican politics.

Huerta was a crude figure, who thought he could reestablish a version of the Porfirian regime. He tried to impose his authority across the aroused country, but soon met resistance. Many Mexicans who had been caught up in the revolt against Díaz now saw Huerta as the usurper. Opposition began to build, and as it gathered force it coalesced into the genuinely “revolutionary” phase of the Mexican Revolution.

One of the most powerful centers of resistance to Huerta was the northern state of Chihuahua, where Pancho Villa gained control. Villa was a rough-hewn ex-cattle rustler who had mobilized a small army. Unlike Zapata, with whom he was often compared, he led no peasant rebellion. Villa’s supporters, at least initially, were small ranchers, unemployed workers, and cowboys: men who wanted jobs, not small plots of land. So it was not surprising that when Villa pronounced an agrarian reform, in December 1913, he called for confiscation of large haciendas, but not for their subdivision into plots. The state would administer the haciendas, and their commercial crops would help finance Villa’s military machine.

Villa quickly put this idea into practice. It may have created administrative problems, but it achieved its goal. Money was produced and supplies were obtained (mainly from the United States, which remained the great arms supplier for all Mexican revolutionaries). Villa’s army was well fed and well equipped. Indeed, Villa’s followers now had a sure source of employment in his army, which emerged as a well-paid professional mercenary outfit.

There were other challenges to Huerta's bloody accession to power. One was in Madero's home state of Coahuila, where governor Venustiano Carranza mounted a strong resistance movement. Carranza, like Madero, was a dissident member of the elite, having risen to the level of senator during the regime of Díaz. A wealthy landowner, he had also been an interim governor. As the anti-Díaz forces slowly gathered strength in 1910, Carranza first cast his lot with Bernardo Reyes, another opposition candidate for president. During the campaign, however, he joined the "Anti-Reelectionist" group. Once in power, Madero rewarded Carranza by naming him governor of their home state, Coahuila.

Carranza contested Huerta's usurpation with little more than a counterclaim. Carranza's *Plan de Guadalupe* (March 1913) simply declared that Huerta held power illegitimately and that he, Carranza, should be recognized as "First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army." Once established, the new president would then convoke new elections. The plan included no attempt to discuss larger socioeconomic or ideological questions. The *carrancista* movement looked like another *caudillo*-type rumbling. Support was scattered, mostly rural, obviously limited to the north.

All attention now centered on Huerta: Could he hold power? The opposition hammered away from the southwest (Zapata and the agrarian rebels) and the far north (Villa and his roaming army). Huerta's most dangerous enemy, however, was Carranza, the ultra-respectable elite politician. Mexico was now plunged into a bloody civil war that saw the federal army swell to more than ten times what it had been at the end of Díaz' rule. The *zapatistas* drew off Huerta's forces by their stubborn rebellion in Morelos, while the Constitutionalist in the north kept up their pressure. Eventually it was foreign intervention, not Mexican arms, that doomed Huerta. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, determined not to recognize Huerta's government, had sent marines to occupy Veracruz after an incident involving the arrest of U.S. sailors. To counter the U.S. marines, Huerta had to pull troops out of the civil war. Soon he saw his situation was hopeless. In early July 1914 he resigned, accusing the United States of having overthrown him.

By mid-1914 the Revolution was up for grabs. All of the forces that had overthrown Huerta gathered to discuss a possible coalition government. Carranza was immediately suspicious of the agrarian origins of the Zapata and Villa forces. He withdrew from the negotiations, attacking the legitimacy of that putative "government," and set up his own regime in the eastern seaport of Veracruz.

The social fissures in the Revolution were now becoming painfully obvious. Villa, and especially Zapata, represented claims for radical social change. Carranza sensed that he would have to offer more than the liberal rhetoric that had sustained Madero. In a December statement Carranza began to edge leftward. He promised, without details, "legislation for the improvement of the condition of the rural peon, the worker, the miner, and in general the proletarian classes." The following month he pro-

nounced an agrarian reform, calling for the restoration or creation of agricultural communities (*ejidos*), requesting procedures for restoring legal titles, and establishing a national agrarian commission. In February 1915 Carranza made his move toward labor: he got the anarcho-sindicalists—the best organized of the small urban labor movements—to agree that in return for favorable labor laws their Red Batallions would back the *carrancista* cause.

During 1915 the issue was joined. Villa, the most formidable of Carranza's military enemies, pressed forward for a quick victory. He met his match in Álvaro Obregón, Carranza's brilliant army commander from the northern state of Sonora. In mid-1915 Obregón decisively defeated Villa, who retreated to the hills of Chihuahua to continue a guerrilla war but no longer to offer a national threat. The *zapatistas* could not mount a sustained challenge to Mexico City and withdrew into their native Morelos to hold out against federal incursions.

With his principal enemies safely at bay, Carranza could afford to call a constitutional convention in late 1916. In May 1917 he formally assumed the presidency. The stage was now set for the writing of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, a premier document of the Mexican Revolution.

Carranza himself had no radical ideas. He drafted a pale imitation of the Constitution of 1857, little more than a restatement of principles of classical liberalism. The convention delegates had other thoughts. They promptly took control and wrote a charter that was startlingly radical for this pre-Bolshevik era. Article 27 empowered the government to redistribute land. Article 123 announced rights for labor that had certainly never been heard of in North America. Article 3 subjected the church to new restrictions, which imposed a virtual straight-jacket. Socialist overtones permeated the constitution. Suddenly it became obvious that what had started as a mere revolt of dissident elitists against Díaz was threatening to become a social revolution, to change significantly the power and property relationships in Mexico. After 1917 every aspiring political leader had to adopt at least a rhetorical posture in favor of Mexico's workers and the peasants.

The agrarian rebels—Villa and Zapata—continued to hold their strongholds and represent a possible threat to Carranza. Zapata was taken care of in 1919, murdered by *carrancista* troops in an ambush. The following year Carranza faced his own problem: he wanted to impose a little-known politician, Ignacio Bonillas, as his successor. In this Carranza was short-sighted. The "no-reelection" slogan of the 1910 campaign had been its most powerful rallying call, and it found explicit expression in the new constitution. Now Carranza was violating that rule in spirit by imposing a successor who would be his stooge. The Revolution reverted to its bloody practice: the valiant Obregón, the architect of victory over Villa, led an uprising. Carranza was forced to flee and, while on the run, was assassinated by one of his own guards, probably acting on behalf of Obregón. The succession problem, which had led to Díaz' fall, was still far from solved.

The Revolution unleashed a torrent of creative energy in literature and the arts. One especially prominent outlet came through public murals, as a trio of gifted painters—Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco—sought to inform and educate the country's largely illiterate masses. "Art must no longer be the expression of individual satisfaction," they declared in a manifesto, "but should aim to become a fighting, educative tool for all." Through massive murals in such public buildings as the Agricultural School in Chapingo and the National Palace in Mexico City, they idealized the pre-Hispanic past, empathized with Mexico's masses, heaped derisive scorn on Spanish conquerors and Yankee capitalists, and elevated popular leaders like Zapata to a pantheon of heroes. Marxist in varying degrees but nationalist to the core, the muralists played a major role in reshaping the popular history of revolutionary Mexico.

Commitment to Indianism, or *indigenismo*, became a common motif. It was the central theme in Gregorio López y Fuentes's 1935 novel *El Indio*. It permeated the musical works of Carlos Chávez, a brilliant conductor, pianist, and composer who went so far as to score his *Sinfonía India* (1935) and *Xochipili-Macuilxochitl* (1940) for pre-Columbian instruments. It also became an integral part of the official political creed, and as such it offered inspiration for the magnificent National Museum of Anthropology and Archeology in Mexico City.

The revolutionary novel, too, became a genre of its own. As early as 1915 Mariano Azuela published *Los de abajo* (translated as *The Underdogs*), a story of characters entangled in a meaningless war: "The revolution," says one, "is like a hurricane; if you're in it, you're not a man . . . you're a leaf, a dead leaf, blown by the wind." In the 1920s Martín Luis Guzmán wrote *El águila y la serpiente*, a tale of idealistic revolutionaries and venal politicians that also contained a firsthand portrayal of Pancho Villa. "When he fires, it isn't the pistol that shoots, it's the man himself. Out of his very heart comes the ball as it leaves the sinister barrel. The man and the pistol are the same thing." A generation later, Carlos Fuentes presented skeptical views in two acclaimed novels, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* and *Where the Air Is Clear*. For these writers the defining characteristic of the Revolution was its violence; their goal, and that of their characters, was to ascertain the purpose of it all.

Institutionalizing the Revolution

Obregón succeeded to the spoils of the presidency. The need was for reconstruction after years of civil war, but the world recession after World War I sharply reduced Mexico's export earnings and deepened a domestic economic slump. Nonetheless, the government launched an ambitious rural education campaign under the leadership of the noted intellectual José Vasconcelos. In the area of labor, the Obregón government bet heavily on the newly founded *Confederacion Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM),