The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1946

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Summary and Keywords

The Mexican Revolution was the first major social revolution of the 20th century. Its causes included, among others, the authoritarian rule of dictator Porfirio Díaz, the seizure of millions of acres of indigenous village lands by wealthy hacendados and foreign investors, and the growing divide between the rich and the poor. As a result of these varied causes and Mexico's strong social and regional divisions, the revolution against Díaz lacked ideological focus. The revolutionaries ousted Díaz within six months but could not agree on the new social and political order and—after a failed attempt at democracy—ended up fighting among themselves in a bitter civil war. In 1917, the victorious Constitutionalist faction crafted a landmark constitution, the first in the world to enshrine social rights and limit the rights of private, and particularly foreign capital. Although never fully implemented and partially repealed in the 1990s, the document remains the most significant achievement of the revolution. After 1920, a succession of revolutionary generals gradually centralized political power until the election of a civilian presidential candidate in 1946. This effort at state building confronted significant resistance from popular groups, regional warlords, and disaffected leaders who had lost out in the political realignment. In the end, the symbolic significance of the revolution exceeded its political and social outcomes.

While fundamentally agrarian in nature, the revolution thus ultimately produced a new national elite that gradually restored a strong central state. One can easily divide the revolution into a military (1910–1917) and a reconstructive phase (1917–1946). However, the latter phase witnessed an important generational shift that transferred political power from the leaders of the military phase to their subordinates as well as civilian representatives, with the formation of a revolutionary ruling party in 1929 serving as the most important watershed moment in this process. Therefore, this essay distinguishes among three separate phases: insurrection and civil war (1910–1917); reconstruction (1917–1929); and institutionalization (1929–1946).

Keywords: Mexico, revolution, social upheaval, nationalism, agrarianism, social rights, land reform, expropriation, Old Regime, indigenismo

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The Crisis of the Old Regime, 1905–1910

The roots of the revolution lie in the global dislocations wrought by industrialization and modernization, combined with the local factors of social inequality and the dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz in the last six years of his rule. During the Porfiriato, an expanding Atlantic economy targeted Mexican raw materials for export to the industrializing economies in the United States and Europe. The resultant foreign investments into infrastructure, banking, mining, and agriculture brought impressive material improvements, including the construction of almost fifteen thousand miles of railroad track and the revitalization of the mining industry. But these investments also brought an unprecedented degree of vulnerability to global markets. In 1906–1907, a worldwide economic crisis depressed the price of silver, the most important export commodity, and the crisis produced more profound economic and social effects than in most of the rest of the world. In addition, modernization increased social inequality. Although it created a sizable middle class, especially in the growing cities, it also contributed to the alienation of peasant land by rapacious landowners and the increased marginalization of the urban poor. The aging dictatorship itself also contributed to the coming of the revolution. Díaz became more repressive over time, and he refused to groom a successor even though he had turned seventy in 1900. At the turn of the century, national politics had become a closed shop in which his closest advisers, the *científicos*, enjoyed a virtual monopoly on power.

Opposition to Díaz began to coalesce within this context. The first opposition group was the anarcho-syndicalist Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party) under the leadership of the brothers Enrique and Ricardo Flores Magón. Particularly strong in the mining centers of the north, the PLM protested miserable working conditions and capitalist exploitation. The movement found especially fertile ground among the workers of the Cananea copper mine in northeastern Sonora. In 1906, the Cananea workers organized the first large-scale strike of the Porfirian era, a strike brutally repressed by authorities. Campesinos stood in opposition for different reasons. For example, Emiliano Zapata, an indigenous leader from the southern state of Morelos, led an effort to reclaim the communal lands lost to large sugar-producing estates. In the northern states of Chihuahua and Durango, poor rural dwellers such as Pascual Orozco and Pancho Villa had different grievances, seeking autonomy from a central government that had established its iron-fisted rule by means of the railroad, which brought with it rapid modernization of agriculture and mining. Intellectuals and artists began to oppose the Díaz regime as well: José Guadalupe Posada’s *calaveras* remain popular representations of the corrupt upper class until this day.

While popular ferment ate away at the foundations of the Porfiriato, powerful regional leaders excluded from political power became restless as well. Hacendados such as Francisco I. Madero and Venustiano Carranza opposed the Porfirians for blocking their political ambitions. In 1908, they appeared to get their chance, when a published interview with U.S. journalist James Creelman quoted Díaz as announcing his retirement. When Díaz nonetheless declared his intentions to run once again in the 1910 elections, Madero decided to challenge the dictator. In January 1910, he founded an opposition political par-

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ty and subsequently toured much of the country canvassing support for his candidacy. When large crowds turned out for his speeches, Díaz moved to suppress this challenge, jailing his opponent on fabricated charges. After Díaz's triumph was secure, the dictator released Madero, who went into exile.

Madero's abortive campaign was at once innovative and limited. His was the first presidential campaign in which railroad travel facilitated speeches in remote corners of the republic. Madero also effectively skewered the Porfirians for selling out their country to foreign investors, speaking to an audience that recognized the favored treatment of foreign workers, who often earned a multiple of the wages of Mexican workers with the same skills. Nevertheless, his message focused on political rather than social issues. When it came to redressing social inequality, and particularly the abject poverty of the majority of the rural population, the candidate limited himself to vague promises that demonstrated his own status among the elite. Thus, when Madero called for a rebellion against Díaz to begin on November 20, 1910, many Mexicans were ready to revolt, but they did not know what to expect.

Insurrection and Civil War, 1910–1917

Madero's revolution was primarily fought in the northern state of Chihuahua. Independently from Madero, his partisans in that state mobilized and armed makeshift rebel armies. These forces had a lower-class base, including rural wage laborers, cowboys, and miners. Three leaders emerged to direct the Chihuahuan movement: the lawyer Abraham González, the cattle rustler Doroteo Arango, better known as Pancho Villa, and the former muleteer Pascual Orozco, who assumed military leadership. Under Orozco's direction, the rebels seized much of the countryside in Chihuahua in the spring of 1911. The turning point came in May, when Orozco's forces seized the border town of Ciudad Juárez. The defeat led to the desertion of thousands of federal troops. On May 25, Díaz and Vice President Ramón Corral resigned. Foreign Secretary Francisco León de la Barra became interim president and called national elections for October 1911.

This rebel victory had come too easily. Under the terms of the treaty with Díaz, Madero agreed to leave the Porfirian military high command intact while insisting on the disarmament of all rebels. Likewise, most office holders remained in place until the elections. Thus, de la Barra was able to use his six-month term as interim president to ensure the survival of the Porfirian machine. Moreover, the rebel alliance fractured. Madero found himself at loggerheads with Orozco, whom he had omitted from his transition team. In Morelos, Zapata expressed his impatience with Madero's failure to put land reform on the front burner, and his men also refused to comply with Madero's order to lay down their arms. Madero underestimated the serious nature of these disagreements. He viewed free elections at all levels as a panacea that would facilitate the eventual solution of the nation's vexing social and economic problems.

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Madero easily won the election, but his delight at reaching the pinnacle of power did not last long. Within his own ranks, he faced opposition from his vice presidential candidate of 1910 whom Madero had passed over as his running mate in his second campaign in 1911. In Morelos, fighting had already begun following de la Barra's attempt to disarm the Zapatista rebels by force. And weeks before the election, Maderista supporters had attempted to rough up a Porfirista opposition candidate, General Bernardo Reyes, who went into exile bitter about what he saw as a betrayal of Madero's democratic principles.

Madero therefore took office on November 6, 1911, facing a host of powerful enemies who wasted no time pressing their grievances on the battlefield before the new government could even consolidate. Zapata's "Plan of Ayala" of November 25 sought the overthrow of Madero and the restitution of campesino land. In mid-December, Reyes unsuccessfully tried to foment a rebellion in northeastern Mexico from his self-imposed exile in San Antonio, an attempt that ended with his imprisonment in Mexico City. At the same time, Madero also confronted the rebellion of Emilio Vázquez Gómez, brother of the man he had passed over for vice president. Each instance forced Madero to call upon the federal army, the Federales, and its Porfirian officers such as General Victoriano Huerta.

Delays and political missteps compounded these difficulties. The Maderistas created a National Agrarian Commission and a Labor Department to address the needs of campesinos and workers but did not fund either agency sufficiently to accomplish progress. Madero also showed that he would not lead an honest government when he awarded several senior government posts to members of his immediate family. In an atmosphere in which the political process had opened up enough to encourage citizens to express their grievances freely, Madero's government found itself besieged from many different quarters.

In March 1912, Orozco heeded Zapata's call, expressed in the Plan of Ayala, to lead a national movement for Madero's overthrow. His program assailed the nepotism in the government and then turned to social and nationalist goals such as a ten-hour workday, agrarian reform, and the expropriation of the foreign-owned railroad system. But at the same time, Orozco drew support from Porfiristas and landowners, including the infamous hacendado, Luis Terrazas, owner of acreage larger than the U.S. state of Maryland. In April, Orozco's eight thousand troops inflicted a disastrous defeat upon the Federales. The Orozquistas advanced until General Victoriano Huerta, a veteran Porfirian military officer, defeated them in open battle, flanked by the forces of Madero loyalist Pancho Villa and those of a band of young military leaders from the northwestern state of Sonora led by Colonel Alvaro Obregón.

Orozco's unsuccessful rebellion led to the emergence of three new important forces: Villa, now the primary military leader in Chihuahua; Obregón and the Sonorans; and Huerta. The Villistas represented the agrarian wing of the Orozco coalition, while the Sonorans were a middle-class coalition dominated by professionals and small landowners. Joining the fight to defend the sovereignty of Sonora from the Orozquistas, this group was primarily interested in political stability and economic development. Huerta's victory over

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Orozco at Casas Grandes made him an indispensable prop of the Madero regime. He was once again instrumental in the survival of the government three months later, when don Porfirio's nephew, Félix Díaz, rose up in Veracruz. Díaz was escorted to federal prison in Mexico City, where he established contact with another imprisoned rebel, General Reyes.

It was ironic, but not surprising that General Huerta finally conspired in the defeat of the Madero government. On February 9, 1913, Félix Díaz and Bernardo Reyes launched a coup d'état from their prison cells with the help of federal troops who rebelled. Initially, Huerta appeared to support his president, but on February 18, he joined forces with Díaz in an agreement brokered by U.S. Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson. Huerta ordered the arrests of Madero and Vice President José María Pino Suárez, and a few hours later, Congress confirmed him as president. After ten days, the violence in Mexico City finally ceased, save for the fateful shots that killed Madero and Pino Suárez while Huerta's men were transporting them to prison a few days later.

In part because of the murders of Madero and Suárez, Huerta's coup began a new and more destructive phase of the civil war. The governors of the northern states of Coahuila and Sonora denounced the coup, as did Pancho Villa. The three rebel units joined forces in the Monclova Convention, supported from afar by Emiliano Zapata, who had not stopped fighting since taking up arms against Madero sixteen months prior. Once again, the coalition arrayed against the government in Mexico City had little in common beyond the dictator's removal. Under the leadership of Venustiano Carranza, the Coahuilan faction wished to restore Madero's short-lived democracy; the Villistas sought local autonomy and freedom from powerful landowners; the Zapatistas desired land reform; and the Sonorans fought for the freedom of their state from the interference of the central government.

Over time, Huerta's authority eroded just as Madero's had. Initially, Huerta held firm against the rebels, and he enjoyed the backing of many state governors, members of the old Porfirian oligarchy and the high clergy, foreign investors, and all of the European Great Powers. He did not count on the support of the foreign leader who mattered the most for Mexico's political future—U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. In the absence of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States, the rebels managed to turn the area of their greatest strength into an effective supply zone. On the border, rebel troops attacked federal garrisons and claimed large swathes of territory, including several border crossings. In turn, the government's need to divert its forces toward the border provided greater opportunities to the guerrilla warfare of the Zapatistas in southern Mexico. Immortalized in popular music and art, women soldiers, or *soldaderas*, played an active role in the fight against Huerta. In Mexico City, workers took up arms against the Huerta regime under the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World's Worker), a radical labor union affiliated with the Industrial Workers of the World. In early 1914, the northern armies began to march on central Mexico, led by Villa's División del Norte, or Division of the North, the largest rebel army of the revolution. The coup de grace of the Huerta dictatorship came when U.S. Marines occupied the nation's principal Gulf port city, Veracruz, in order to prevent the landing of a German ship with weapons for Huerta.

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The U.S. occupation of Veracruz deprived the government of access to supplies and boosted the prospects of the Carrancista faction and their military commander, General Pablo González, who set up headquarters in Veracruz even while the Marines held the city. But it was Villa and Obregón whose armies did the bulk of the fighting, and Obregón's faction made it to the capital first, forcing Huerta to surrender in July 1914.

Unfortunately, the war against Huerta had still not forged any kind of consensus among the rebels beyond overthrowing another dictator. The principal revolutionary leaders expressed rancor toward one another, and relations between Carranza and Villa were particularly fraught with conflict. In October 1914, the four primary factions convened a meeting of military officers in the city of Aguascalientes, with each faction represented by a number of delegates that corresponded to its numbers in the field. As the División del Norte, the largest army, was stationed menacingly close to Aguascalientes, the convention obeyed Villa's wishes and thwarted the presidential aspirations of First Chief Carranza. Claiming that the convention had acted under duress, the Carrancistas abandoned the convention and would have become a footnote to the revolution if not for Obregón's faction, which joined them after unsuccessful negotiations with Villa. Zapata allied with Villa. Four factions merged into two: those representing the majority at Aguascalientes (Villistas and Zapatistas), and those opposing the regime installed by the convention, the Constitutionalists (Carrancistas and Obregonistas).

This final phase of the civil war marked the bloodiest year in modern Mexican history. Although it would be simplistic to reduce the complex alignments to a few salient differences, the war pitted a rural-based alliance that sought a weak central government against a city-based alliance with clear plans for a strong national government. While the Conventionists never defined common objectives, Carranza's provisional government passed laws ending debt peonage and promising labor reform to workers. These laws earned the Constitutionalists the support of the Red Battalions, armed workers who had played an important role in defeating the Huerta regime. The end game came in the spring of 1915 in the Bajío region in central Mexico, where Obregón's forces defeated a much larger Villista army: in part because of superior tactics that included the use of barbed wire against cavalry; and in part because Obregón had lured Villa into an ill-advised campaign far away from his home base.

While the Constitutionalist victory at last put an end to the worst of the fighting, it would take fourteen more years to banish the specter of large-scale rebellions. The following two years saw the Carranza government slowly but surely extend its authority, an endeavor hindered by the activities of Villa and the U.S. military. Incensed about Wilson's recognition of Carranza, Villa decided to provoke a conflict between the United States and Mexico. On March 9, 1916, he led his few remaining men in an attack on the town of Columbus, New Mexico. This attack led to the last U.S. invasion of Mexico, the so-called "Punitive Expedition" designed to bring Villa to justice. The invasion force failed in this objective and only managed to enhance the prestige of its target. In addition, it led to an upsurge in nationalism that proved of decisive importance in the formulation of the new

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revolutionary constitution. Not surprisingly, Wilson withdrew the expedition after the U.S. entry into World War I in April 1917.

Consolidation and Reconstruction, 1917–1929

The victorious Constitutionalists understood that reconstruction would need to transcend the narrowly political realm. For example, their alliance with the Casa del Obrero Mundial had promised assistance to labor unions, and in January 1915, Carranza had proclaimed his support for a comprehensive land reform. Constitutionalist state governors such as Salvador Alvarado of Yucatán and Plutarco Elías Calles of Sonora had gone even further, issuing decrees favorable to labor and levying taxes on foreign-owned companies. The Constitutionalists had made more concrete promises than Madero, and their rank and file expected fulfillment.

But the winners disagreed on how to address these demands from the grass roots, and this discord manifested itself during the Constitutional Convention held in Querétaro beginning in December 1916. The convention was composed of Constitutionalist delegates from all states, including many civilians with university degrees but also representatives of the lower classes. Carranza charged the convention with updating the liberal constitution of 1857 and to codify his presidency before general elections could be held. However, a progressive majority, which called itself “Jacobin,” viewed the new constitution as a vehicle of economic and social change. The Jacobins sought to provide guarantees for workers and campesinos while abrogating the privileges of the Catholic Church and foreign investors. For example, a revised Article 3 forbade the political role of the church (and even individual clergy); Article 27 proclaimed land and the subsoil the patrimony of the nation, for use by foreigners only upon application to the federal government, and Article 123 guaranteed the right of collective bargaining. Approved on February 5, 1917, the new constitution was the first in the world that codified social rights.

These good intentions notwithstanding, proponents of social reform needed to await implementation of the new constitutional provisions by means of enabling legislation—and Carranza’s government dragged its feet on empowering these provisions. Implementing Article 27, for instance, would antagonize foreign investors and Mexican proprietors, and threatened serious discord with the U.S. government, which would surely protect the investments of its citizens. These difficulties aside, Carranza was not interested in making powerful enemies at a moment when his government remained too weak to defy the warlords who had taken advantage of civil war to carve out independent spheres of power. Nevertheless, Carranza found an opportunity to eliminate Zapata, probably the most inveterate enemy of every single national government since Díaz. On April 10, 1919, Carrancista allies cowardly assassinated Zapata at the hacienda of Chinameca, Morelos.

The president then moved against Obregón and González, both of whom had expressed their ambitions for the presidential elections slated for July 1920. Aware of the constitutional prohibition of multiple terms in office, Carranza found a candidate in his ambassador to the United States, Ignacio Bonillas, in order to forestall what he viewed as

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Obregón’s inevitable triumph. In April 1920, Carranza sent a military expedition to Sonora to quash the faction that had delivered triumph to him in 1915. In doing so, however, Carranza provoked the last violent overthrow of the national government. Within a month, Obregón and González had chased the Carrancistas out of the capital. Accompanied by a vast entourage, Carranza fled by train in the direction of Veracruz. But the rebels had blown up the track, and the group had to disembark and continue the trip on horseback. In the wee hours of May 21, 1920, unidentified assassins killed Carranza in a mountain village. It was the last murder of a sitting Mexican president.

Carranza’s death left the three Sonoran leaders—Governor Adolfo de la Huerta, General Obregón, and General Plutarco Elías Calles—in charge of the task of national reconstruction. The three leaders were the most notable protagonists of a dynasty that dominated the national governments of the 1920s and early 1930s. Their task involved nothing less than coming to terms with the U.S. government, which expressed its determination to protect foreign property rights; confronting armed challenges from disaffected revolutionary leaders; meeting the heightened expectations of workers and campesinos; and promoting a national consciousness to displace regional loyalties.

For the purposes of periodization, de la Huerta, Obregón, and Calles—but not Carranza or Madero, products of the mid-19th century who numbered among the oldest members of the original revolutionary coalition—belonged to what we might call the first revolutionary generation. Like Zapata and Villa, their erstwhile enemies before they turned on the older Carranza, the three Sonorans were born in the late 1870s or early 1880s. All of them came of age in the Porfiriato and entered the revolution in full adulthood. During Carranza’s regime, they stood ready to take the reins of power. While many of their members fell victim to assassination and ongoing violence, starting with Zapata in 1919, this generation constituted a disproportionate share among the political leadership in the 1920s.

The Sonorans and their peers faced a momentous task. The violence had destroyed haciendas, mines, roads, railroads, and port facilities. Much of the country lay in ruins; and ongoing banditry and violence made overland trade difficult even where rebels had not blown up the infrastructure. Estimates of the total population loss (including missed births, emigration, and deaths caused by the “Spanish” influenza epidemic of 1918–1919) run as high as two million.

As inhabitants of a border state that had experienced rapid demographic and economic growth rapidly during the Porfiriato, the Sonoran leaders intended to reform rather than eliminate the capitalist system. National reconstruction was their priority, a project that included the centralization of power, the taming of the revolutionary military, the repair and expansion of infrastructure, and the provision of basic education to rural Mexicans. As an important part of this project, they desired to forge a new national consciousness and counteract the pervasive influence of the Catholic Church, which the Sonorans regarded as a foreign-led, reactionary institution. They aimed to implement Article 27 of the new constitution to put Mexicans on an equal footing with foreigners, as well as to foster

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the growth of a salaried urban middle class. As part of their strategy to weaken their enemies and to reward their supporters, they pursued agrarian reform in areas where either objective could be achieved by means of redistribution. But—crucially—they did not intend to implement the constitution to its fullest extent, which would have amounted to significant limits on the private property ownership they espoused.

The first Sonoran president was de la Huerta, interim president from May to November 1920. During his brief tenure, de la Huerta strove to make peace with the remaining insurgent leaders. Most importantly, he negotiated an end of the conflict with Pancho Villa, who agreed to disarm in exchange for the grant of a hacienda in his native state of Durango. In July, de la Huerta presided over the first national elections since 1911, in which Obregón emerged as an easy winner. In Obregón's cabinet, de la Huerta became Finance Secretary and Calles, Secretary of Gobernación, the powerful arbiter of electoral disputes and the head of a newly created internal intelligence apparatus.

Initially, Obregón's strategy was cautious, as the Wilson administration refused to tender diplomatic recognition to a regime it considered a product of a violent coup d'état, an effort to seek leverage in order to force the Sonoran governments to relinquish implementation of the nationalist provisions of the constitution. Even as Obregón reassured U.S. bankers and investors that his government would meet its international obligations, he also allowed organized labor and agraristas an ever-increasing role. He also promoted public education under the leadership of José Vasconcelos, a primary representative of the idea of *indigenismo*, which sought to redeem, at least in theory, the marginalization of indigenous people since the Spanish conquest. In the end, the status quo prevailed. In August 1923, the president won recognition from the U.S. government of Warren G. Harding in exchange for a promise not to apply the constitution retroactively to U.S. investors in Mexico.

By that time, jockeying for the presidential succession of 1924 was already in full swing, focusing attention on Calles, the third major Sonoran leader. The scion of a once-wealthy family, Calles spent his early adulthood trying his hand at a variety of occupations, serving as a teacher, hotel manager, farmer, and mill operator. Upon Madero's triumph, he became police chief of a border town, and in 1915, Carranza named him provisional governor of Sonora. His position as Secretary of Gobernación gave Calles the inside track for the presidential succession in 1924. Yet he faced opposition from two powerful groups: military leaders who believed themselves more worthy of the presidency, and civilian opponents of Obregón who resented the imposition of a president from above. These opponents encountered an opportunity when the relationship between Obregón and Finance Minister de la Huerta deteriorated following the July 1923 assassination of Pancho Villa. In November, de la Huerta resigned from his post, and in December, he headed a rebellion that included almost 60 percent of senior officers in the army. However, serious divisions among the Delahuertistas, Obregón's tactical genius, and the free flow of weaponry from the United States to the regime that Harding had just recently recognized saved the

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government. In May, the government vanquished the rebellion, and two months later, Calles won election with more than 82 per cent of the vote.

With the benefit of U.S. recognition and a mending economy, Calles decided to press ahead with a slate of reforms. Some of his programs aimed to perfect capitalist development, including the balancing of the federal budget; the creation of the Banco de México, the country's first official bank of issue; and comprehensive road building and rural electrification programs. The Calles government also dramatically increased spending on public health. Other reforms sought to enact some of the reforms promised in the constitution. For instance, new legislation forced the foreign-owned oil companies to apply for confirmatory concessions to renew their drilling rights, as well as to accept higher taxes. Not surprisingly, U.S. business interests demanded that the Calles administration fulfill its international obligations. Calles also redistributed more land than his predecessors combined and struck a strategic alliance with labor boss Luis N. Morones, his Secretary of Labor who had authored the new Petroleum Law. Morones's Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM, or Mexican Regional Workers Confederation) constituted one of Calles's most important sources of support. Following a precedent set by Obregón, Calles also continued to reduce the federal army in size.

Historians primarily remember the Calles presidency for its campaign against the Catholic Church. Indeed, Calles hastened to apply the anticlerical provisions of the constitution even as he displayed less enthusiasm for implementing its social programs. Incensed at the fact that Mexico City Archbishop José Mora y del Río had publicly announced his opposition to the constitution, Calles regarded the Church as public enemy number one due to its overt opposition to the constitution (as opposed to negotiations behind the scenes to delay its implementation). The government struck back with the Calles Law, which required all priests to register with local authorities and limited their number to one in ten thousand inhabitants. On July 31, 1926, the Church retaliated by suspending all masses and sacraments. This escalation brought about the Cristero War, the bloodiest conflict of the 1920s and 1930s. By the end of 1926, approximately thirty thousand rebels had taken up arms and soon thereafter controlled much of rural Jalisco and Michoacán.

The Cristero War constituted only one facet of a multifarious crisis besieging the government. A protracted war against the Yaqui in Sonora forced the army to put more than half of its troops in the field. Meanwhile, U.S.-Mexican relations plunged to a new low, as U.S. Ambassador James R. Sheffield alleged that the government was "Bolshevik" and Mexicans openly worried about the possibility of a U.S. invasion. Finally, the price of silver and other export commodities plummeted, thrusting the nation into a serious economic crisis two years before Black Friday would inaugurate the Great Depression on a global scale.

This crisis precipitated the reemergence of Obregón, who had retired to Sonora as the unofficial master of the army and politician in the background. In violation of the constitution, which forbade anyone from serving a second term in office, Obregón desired to return to the presidency in 1928. His allies in Congress pushed through an amendment just in time to permit Obregón to run again, eliciting protests from two other Sonoran presi-

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dential candidates, Generals Arnulfo Gómez and Francisco R. Serrano. The government assassinated both of these challengers. As soon as he had won election, Obregón fell himself victim to the bullets of a fanatical Catholic on July 17, 1928.

Obregón's assassination marked the beginning of the transition to a new generation. Obregón's death eliminated the star of the Sonoran solar system, and also the primary caudillo of the revolution. The multiple wars of the 1920s—the de la Huerta rebellion, the Cristero and Yaqui Wars, and, in 1929, an uprising of a discontented Sonoran faction under the leadership of General José Gonzalo Escobar—had thinned the ranks of the first revolutionary generation, and especially among the divisional generals. Only Calles remained among the generation's representatives in the ruling dynasty from Sonora. Born in 1891, the only other Sonoran leader of significance, General Abelardo L. Rodríguez, belonged to the second revolutionary generation. These leaders, whose ranks also included future President Lázaro Cárdenas, did not have any firsthand political experience with the Porfiriato. They entered the revolution as minor officers and enjoyed far closer ties with their subordinates than their superiors. They made their most important contributions as state governors, military leaders, or cabinet ministers in the 1920s. Unlike the previous generation, the group many Mexicans referred to as the "cubs of the revolution" understood the cost of unbridled personal ambition, as they watched the opponents of the Sonoran regimes felled one by one in the course of the great rebellions of that decade.

In February 1929, Calles and his allies founded a new ruling party, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR, or National Revolutionary Party), which combined the many small revolutionary parties in existence. This party would rule under three different names until the end of the century. The creation of the party allowed Calles to play an informal political role as the so-called *jefe máximo*, or Supreme Chief, of the Revolution. In the period commonly known as the Maximato (1928–1934), three different presidents—Emilio Portes Gil, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, and Abelardo L. Rodríguez—shared power with Calles. A noteworthy case is Calles's personal intervention in Ortiz Rubio's cabinet in August 1932, which ended in the president's resignation the following month.

Initially a weak "club of caciques" under Calles's sway, the PNR crafted a powerful myth of the revolution: the idea that the party represented the "revolutionary family," with the jefe máximo at its head. The notion of the revolutionary family implied a unified purpose of the revolution that had never existed, and it claimed that the PNR and its leaders represented this purpose. To be sure, the main protagonists of the fiesta of bullets—Madero, Zapata, Villa, Carranza, and Obregón—had met a violent death, but the martyrdom of these heroes had not been in vain, as the ruling party purported to represent all of their aspirations: democracy, social justice, nationalism, and economic development.

Revolutionary art told a different story from that advanced the PNR. For example, consider the mural paintings of Diego Rivera, Pascual Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Rivera adorned the interior of government-owned buildings with colorful murals that depicted a revolutionary vision of Mexican history. In the 1930s, he painted his most grandiose work inside the National Palace, a historical canvas from the Aztecs to the 20th

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century. Visitors to the National Palace viewed the greatness of Tenochtitlán, the bloodshed of the conquest, and the oppression and social injustice of the Porfiriato. The mural provided adult education to Mexicans, many of whom could not read and write. The work of Frida Kahlo constitutes another example of revolutionary art. The victim of a crippling accident at age seventeen, Kahlo drew on religious folk art. The paintings—many of them self-portraits—display fractured and broken human bodies. Her work rejected traditional notions of gender in challenging the idea that women must bear suffering silently.

Fulfilling revolutionary promises became ever more difficult during the Great Depression (1929–1939). This implosion of the U.S. and European economies drastically decreased demand for raw materials from Latin America. In Mexico, the crisis aggravated an already dire fiscal situation. Between 1930 and 1932, federal revenue dropped 25 percent in real terms. Real wages fell dramatically, producing hundreds of wildcat strikes in a country in which the Sonorans and the CROM had long managed to quell labor discontent.

The Great Depression coincided with a low point of the revolution, as Calles and his allies confronted the crisis by means of repression, while flaunting their own fortunes. The great heroes of the revolution were dead, and those who had survived had amassed great wealth. Several leaders, including President Rodríguez, who held a significant stake in a posh casino in Tijuana, had become multimillionaires. Calles himself bought a swanky mansion and steadily moved toward the right. In 1931, he announced that land reform had failed and that the party needed to embrace commercial agriculture rather than collective farming. He also increasingly clashed with workers' organizations, and particularly those independent of the CROM, such as the powerful railroad workers' union. Nevertheless, Calles's power declined as the recession deepened. The *jefe máximo's* health deteriorated, and he spent months at a time in distant locales far away from Mexico City. As a result, President Rodríguez and the PNR leadership struck out into new directions, recognizing the degree to which the party had abandoned the goals for which so many had lost their lives. In 1933, the party adopted a Six-Year Plan promising to bring greater benefits to campesinos and workers and also picked a presidential candidate for the period 1934–1940: Calles's protégé Lázaro Cárdenas.

Cárdenas surprised everyone with his verve to invigorate the revolution. He was born in 1895 in the town of Jiquilpan, Michoacán. As governor of Michoacán (1928–1932), he pursued an aggressive campaign for rural education, opening more than a hundred new schools in remote areas, and he also redistributed some land to campesinos. As president, Cárdenas demonstrated that he would direct a much more progressive administration than his predecessors. When Calles embarked on a six-month trip to Los Angeles to tend to his ailing health, Cárdenas seized the opportunity. He supported the workers' right to strike, and within six months of his inauguration hundreds of strikes and demonstrations bore witness to the new freedom of organized labor. In June 1935, Calles returned and openly criticized the demonstrations, implying that Cárdenas had lost control of the situation. The president responded by purging his cabinet of all Calles supporters. Calles's

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days at the helm of the revolution were over. On April 9, 1936, Cárdenas sent the Jefe Máximo to exile in San Diego.

In control of the revolutionary state, Cárdenas embarked on an ambitious reform program. He redistributed more than 49 million acres of land to campesinos; more than twice as much as his revolutionary predecessors combined. His government awarded most of this land to campesinos as *ejidos*, or communal land, and it organized the campesinos in a new umbrella organization, the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC, or National Campesino Confederation). The ejido structure paid instant dividends in the form of a rapid increase in food production. Cárdenas also took steps to help labor. Under his leadership, the Marxist labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano created a nationwide labor movement, the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM, or Confederation of Mexican Workers). Unlike the CROM, the CTM had ideological focus as a socialist organization. The most significant example of Cárdenas's support for labor came in the case of the foreign-owned oil companies. Following the companies' refusal to heed a decision of the Supreme Court favorable to the oil workers, Cárdenas expropriated the sixteen largest foreign-owned oil companies on March 18, 1938. The expropriation found widespread acclaim among the lower and middle classes, and the new national oil company—Petróleos Mexicanos, or PEMEX—was a source of national pride. Among projects that failed to come to fruition during his tenure, his government also sought to give women the vote.

The Cardenista system was a corporatist state in which the president played the role of arbiter of social conflict. Immediately after the oil expropriation, Cárdenas restructured the PNR along corporatist lines. So far, the ruling party had been a confederation of regional parties. Now, the party renamed Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM, or Party of the Mexican Revolution) included the CTM and the CNC. The new party—and, by extension, President Cárdenas—mediated social conflicts. Thus workers found many of their goals realized in official policy, but they also failed to gain the independence in collective bargaining that they desired. The result of these policies was an increase in the standard of living for many workers and campesinos at the price of co-opting their organizations.

Yet Cardenismo was not a radical break from the past. Most of the workplace laws came from the Maximato, during which time the government had chosen to ignore the legislation it had approved. Cárdenas's populism also built on the work of his predecessors: the notion that the ruling party represented the revolution, the idea of the revolutionary family, and the rhetoric of economic nationalism. Finally, the president willingly entered into alliances with more conservative political leaders. In Sonora, for instance, Cárdenas installed a conservative Catholic Mayo Indian in the governor's palace, for the primary reason that the new governor was an archenemy of former Jefe Máximo Calles. Similarly, in Baja California, Nuevo León, and Puebla, wealthy families directed their states. Finally, Cárdenas turned away from reform during his last years in office. After the oil expropriation, Lombardo Toledano lost influence within the national government in favor of Finance Secretary Eduardo Suárez, who advocated capitalist development. Thus, a significant feature of the Cárdenas years is the growth of new, privately owned agricultural es-

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tates. In Baja California, for example, former president Rodríguez owned newly planted vineyards.

The rise of U.S. influence provided another example of the contradictions of the Cárdenas years. To be sure, the oil expropriation had eliminated one particular area of foreign influence, and the government had also succeeded in limiting the privileges of foreign residents, many of whom had long been able to count on the protection of their embassies in order to obtain preferential treatment by government authorities. Foreign investment actually increased in the course of the Cárdenas administration, especially due to new investments in mining, the consumer market, and tourism. Even more important was the growth of U.S. cultural influence in an era defined by the coming of mass media. Hollywood exported its films south of the border, and Mexicans built cinemas to view them. In turn, Mexico developed its own movie industry, which entered its golden age in the 1940s.

The presidential elections of 1940 took place against this backdrop, accompanied by the rumblings of World War II from distant Asia and Europe. Three generals vied for power, each with a different power base. To Cárdenas's left, Francisco Múgica from Michoacán represented a commitment to ongoing social reform. To his right, Juan Andreu Almazán from Nuevo León enjoyed close ties to the Monterrey industrialists and considerable wealth of his own. Finally, Manuel Avila Camacho from Puebla appeared the middle-of-the-road candidate. Of the three, Avila Camacho enjoyed the best connections in the form of his brother, Maximino, the strong man of Puebla and one of the wealthiest and most corrupt men in the country. Múgica withdrew, and Avila Camacho triumphed in the presidential elections over Almazán.

The victorious Avila Camacho immediately portrayed himself as a moderate who would attempt to mend political divisions. Just a few days after his election, he proclaimed that he was "a believer" in Roman Catholicism in a clear break from his anticlerical predecessors. He also deposed Lombardo Toledano, the leader of the CTM labor union and a close friend of Cárdenas's. The new labor leader, Fidel Velásquez, had no use for radical ideologies and advocated gradual improvement of wages and benefits. In response to these signs that the government was swinging back to the right, the U.S. government commenced negotiations that resulted in a settlement of the oil controversy and other pending matters.

This agreement paved the way for Mexican participation in World War II on the side of the Allies. The day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Avila Camacho broke diplomatic relations with the Axis powers. Five months later, German submarines sank two Mexican tankers, and the president responded by declaring that a state of war existed. Unlike Brazil, the Mexican government did not send troops to Europe, but a squadron still remembered by schoolchildren as Escuadrón 201 participated in the fighting in the Pacific theater, and thousands of Mexicans joined the U.S. army.

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World War II signified the end of the Mexican Revolution. As its swan song, Avila Camacho orchestrated a show of national unity in December 1942, when he invited six ex-presidents, including Calles and Cárdenas, to join him at a rally for national unity at the Zócalo in Mexico City. Thereafter, the government focused on collaboration with the United States and political centralization. On January 18, 1946, the PRM reformed as the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, or Institutional Revolutionary Party). The reference to institutionalization marked the transition from process to memory and coincided with the passing of the torch to a new generation. The new president, Miguel Alemán, a college graduate and civilian, remembered Madero's 1910 rebellion as a ten-year-old. The participants had retired for good, and a new generation—the postrevolutionary generation—had arrived on the scene.

Discussion of the Literature

The Mexican Revolution has engendered an enormous body of scholarship that has progressively engaged its political, economic, social, and cultural aspects, including the implications of the nation's regional diversity for summary analyses of a historical process that looked very different on the ground than from a national point of view. Most of this scholarship derived from Mexico and the United States, although European historians have also made important contributions to the debate. We can distinguish among several different historiographical stages, and, in these pages, will only have space to discuss some of the most important English-language works.

Historiographical surveys of the revolution in its various phases include David C. Bailey, "Revisionism and the Recent Historiography of the Mexican Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 58.1 (1978): 62–79; Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, "Popular Culture and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico," in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 5–15; Mary Kay Vaughan, "Cultural Approaches to Peasant Politics in the Mexican Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79:2 (1999): 269–305; Alan Knight, "The Myth of the Mexican Revolution," *Past and Present* 209 (Nov. 2010): 223–273; and Jürgen Buchenau, "The Sonoran Dynasty and the Reconstruction of the Mexican State," in *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, ed. William H. Beezley (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 405–419.

We can divide the historiography of the Mexican Revolution into three broad phases. The first phase, the populist historiographical tradition, combines the works from the 1940s to 1960s that view the revolution as a broadly popular and ultimately successful uprising. The second phase, which scholars have referred to as the revisionist school, shattered the complacency of the populists regarding the supposedly favorable outcome of the revolution and posited that the revolution replaced one oligarchic elite (that of Porfirio Díaz and his supporters) with a succession of new elite factions that seized control of an increasingly authoritarian state that came to resemble the Porfirian Old Regime at the time. The third and final phase—the deconstruction phase, which paid close attention to the agency

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of *agraristas*, workers, and women, incorporated the "cultural turn" found in recent historiography more generally—eschewed both the populist and revisionist tendencies, taking aim at national-level generalizations that often focused on Mexico City.

For example, historians who studied the revolution at the regional level found vast differences. To mention just some of the most notable monographic work: Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880–1924* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Stephen Lewis, *The Ambivalent Revolution: Forging State and Nation in Chiapas, 1910–1945* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Timothy Henderson, *The Worm in the Wheat: Rosalie Evans and Agrarian Struggle in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Region of Mexico, 1906–1927* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Mark Wasserman, *Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Heather Fowler Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920–1938* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978). Important collections of essays focused on regional history include David A. Brading, *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Jürgen Buchenau and William H. Beezley, eds, *State Governors in the Mexican Revolution: Portraits in Conflict, Courage, and Corruption* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); and Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman, *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1910–1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990).

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Mexico's public archives—both at the federal and at the state and local levels—contain copious information about the revolutionary era. The Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City is the largest archive of the nation and a treasure trove of documents on Mexican history. Of particular interest are Ramo Presidentes (organized by presidential administration), the holdings of Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, the archive of the

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Secretaría de Educación Pública, and the archive's collection of private papers, including the microfilm copy of the personal archive of President Lázaro Cárdenas. The archive is being digitized, and several collections in the AGN still await cataloguing and indexing. Also significant are the Archivo Casasola, the nation's most important photo archive; the Cineteca Nacional, the national repository of Mexican cinema from its earliest origins; and the Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México.

Foreign archives also hold many important accounts on the Mexican Revolution. By far the most important collection available in microform are the two monumental document series published by the U.S. Department of State, "Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910–1929," (243 reels) and "Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1930–1939" (166 reels). Based primarily on material submitted by U.S. embassy and consulates in Mexico, this series goes far beyond diplomatic history, documenting issues such as labor disputes, agrarian reform, and the church-state conflict, as well as many issues at the state and local levels.

Among private archives, the single most important collection for the history of the Revolution is the Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca in Mexico City. The archive not only contains the papers of the principal protagonists of Alvaro Obregón's Sonoran alliance, including correspondence with participants high and low, but also tens of thousands of photographs available for reproduction.

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