

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Beyond the Revolution: New Perspectives on Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Mexico

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This essay reviews the following works:

Sons of the Mexican Revolution: Miguel Alemán and His Generation. By Ryan M. Alexander. Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 2016. Pp. vii + 239. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780826357397.

A Sentimental Education for the Working Man: The Mexico City Penny Press, 1900–1910. By Robert M. Buffington. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. Pp. vii + 287. \$25.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822358824.

Radio in Revolution: Wireless Technology and State Power in Mexico, 1897–1938. By J. Justin Castro. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. Pp. vii + 270. \$30.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780803286788.

Working Women, Entrepreneurs, and the Mexican Revolution: The Coffee Culture of Córdoba, Veracruz. By Heather Fowler-Salamini. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. Pp. vi + 403. \$45.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780803243712.

Industry and Revolution: Social and Economic Change in the Orizaba Valley, Mexico. By Aurora Gómez-Galvarriato. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. Pp. 351. \$49.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780674072725.

For God and Revolution: Priest, Peasant, and Agrarian Socialism in the Mexican Huasteca. By Mark Saad Saka. Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 2013. Pp. ix + 177. \$50.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780826353382.

Pesos and Politics: Business, Elites, Foreigners, and Government in Mexico, 1854–1940. By Mark Wasserman. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. Pp. viii + 249. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780804791540.

Este lunes dos de julio ... hubo cambio de horario; no olvides retrasar tu reloj ... 83 años. (This Monday, July 2 ... there was a time change. Do not forget to set your clock back 83 years.)

—Popular joke making the rounds after the PRI's return to power in the 2012 presidential elections in Mexico

Throughout the 2010s, Mexicans and Mexicanist historians have celebrated the milestones of the revolution, especially its outbreak (November 20, 1910) and the promulgation of the first constitution in the world that guaranteed social rights (February 5, 1917). Not coincidentally, the historiography of the Mexican Revolution—already an extremely rich body of scholarship at both the national and regional levels—has received important additions in the course of the last decade. As a consequence, this review of books is the third in the last ten years to appear in the pages of the *Latin American Research Review* on books related to

the Mexican Revolution.¹ As a collective, the seven books analyzed here represent two important tendencies of recent scholarship: to extend the revolution both backward and forward in time; and to qualify the role of the Mexican Revolution in the country's social, political, and economic transformation since the mid-nineteenth century. The result is a broader chronological scope that contextualizes the revolution within the processes of globalization and modernization during the Second Industrial Revolution.

The books analyzed in this essay thus contribute to a skeptical interpretation that downplays the impact of the revolution on Mexican politics, society, and culture. Like the revisionist paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s, current scholarship emphasizes regional over national analyses. However, where the revisionists saw a resurgent "Leviathan state" that resumed the practices of the authoritarian Porfirio Díaz regime (1876–1911) with modernized capitalist structures, recent studies acknowledge the profound political, social, and economic changes from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.² Most critically, the books highlight the role of popular agency in these transformations, as well as the significance of global history. Perhaps as a result of the ascendancy of the political right in Mexico, as manifested by the neoliberal turn of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) of the 1980s and 1990s and the triumphs of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) in this millennium's first two presidential elections (2000 and 2006), historians have also turned their attention to the study of conservative movements, politicians, and entrepreneurs on their own terms, thus contributing important nuances to our knowledge of modern Mexico.

Harbingers of Revolution

Two books under review (those by Mark Saad Saka and Robert Buffington) offer reevaluations of the era of General and President Porfirio Díaz, the Old Regime against the backdrop of which the revolution occurred. Saka's *For God and Revolution* analyzes an important but little-known precursor movement to the revolution in the Huasteca region in northeastern Mexico: the Huasteca Peasant Revolt (1879–1884). The revolt took place in the first years of the Porfiriato (for the most part, during the presidency of General Manuel González, who succeeded Díaz after his first term, only to yield to don Porfirio, who then went on to enjoy almost twenty-seven years of uninterrupted rule).

Led by a local parish priest, Padre Mauricio Zavala, what the author calls "the Huastecan revolution" (xi) illustrated opposition to efforts led by the national and state governments to concentrate landholdings in the hands of wealthy *hacendados*. In his political plan that inaugurated his successful Tuxtepec Rebellion of 1876, Díaz had vowed to stop this assault on peasant lands, but after he took power, he not only allowed it to continue, but intensify. According to the author, the rebels pursued a "subaltern nationalist ideology" (xi) informed not only by local agrarian consciousness, but also the influence of anarchist ideas from Mexico City and the legacies of three patriotic wars in the Huasteca—the independence movement (1810–1821), the war against the United States (1846–1848), and the war against the French Intervention and Maximilian's short-lived empire (1863–1867). Of key geographic importance, the Huasteca played an important role in all three of these wars (and in the twentieth century, in the revolution as well). Saka sees peasant militancy at least partially as a result of popular involvement in these wars, which produced an "unprecedented awareness of national destiny among the Huastecan fighters" (vii). In the footsteps of scholars such as Peter Guardino, Saka's analysis of patriotic popular liberalism in the Huasteca is an important contribution.³

Unfortunately, we learn less about the Huastecan peasants and their worlds than about the political and military history of the region. Most of the book (six out of eight chapters) is devoted to the background of the revolt, leaving only two chapters for an analysis of the actual uprising. In these last two chapters, the reader becomes acquainted with Father Mauricio Zavala, an outspoken critic of Liberal economic reforms who sought to defend the pueblos from the depredations of private landowners. Although many studies date the majority of these depredations to the last two decades of the nineteenth century, following the passage of the federal Baldíos Law, Zavala blamed the Liberals generally, and even the vaunted Benito Juárez, Mexico's only indigenous-born president, whom he considered "worse than [Spanish conquistador Hernán] Cortés because under his reign, the Mexican government and the wealthy monopolized even more land and political power than the Spaniards" (105). Zavala taught his flock an alternate, indigenously inspired version of Catholicism: as he preached, "Indians" were the first humans in divine creation, and God "taught

¹ Mark Wasserman, "You Can Teach an Old Revolutionary Historiography New Tricks: Regions, Popular Movements, Culture, and Gender in Mexico, 1820–1940," *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 260–271; Jürgen Buchenau, "The Mexican Revolution at Its Centennial," *Latin American Research Review* 48, no. 2 (2013): 184–192.

² For a concise summary and critique of the revisionist argument, see David C. Bailey, "Revisionism and the Recent Historiography of the Mexican Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 58, no. 1 (1978): 62–79.

³ Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750–1850* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

his Indian language to Adam and Eve" (113). Unfortunately, due to the abbreviated discussion, the reader is left to wonder about the local religious traditions that contextualized Zavala's preaching.

The decision to condense the analysis of the revolt into one chapter is a peculiar organizational choice. Despite the book's title, which promises a discussion of "agrarian socialism," the chapter is really about a religiously inspired peasant revolt that projected an alternate modernity. We learn little about the secular leaders of the Huastecan revolt, or even about either religious or peasant militancy in northeastern Mexico more generally, and Saka provides little evidence for his claim that we should consider this revolt a "revolution." The book makes an important contribution to rescuing this forgotten revolt from historiographical oblivion; further research will be necessary in order to understand its significance and legacy.

The second work under review that focuses on prerevolutionary Mexico, *A Sentimental Education for the Working Man*, follows in the tradition of the "new cultural history."⁴ Unlike much of the new cultural history, however, Robert Buffington's book is easily accessible to the lay reader and remarkably free of jargon. The book analyzes the Mexico City penny press in the decade leading up to the revolution (1900–1910). This inexpensive literature, available on street corners of the working-class barrios for one *centavo*, fulfilled important needs among the urban poor in a city that grew from 230,000 inhabitants in 1877 to 471,000 by 1910. It was not very good literature but excellent satire and social commentary, written for the consumption of a burgeoning class of working poor males that enjoyed a much higher literacy rate than its counterparts in the rest of the nation, approximately 50 percent (8). By the "working class," Buffington means a cultural rather than Marxian grouping; he includes the entire lower strata of Mexico City society, including laborers, the urban poor, and even parts of the petite bourgeoisie.

In the first three chapters, the author uses the penny press as a vantage point to analyze working-class aspirations for full citizenship, through the lens of patriotic cults that sought to rehabilitate national icons such as Miguel Hidalgo and Benito Juárez from the critical, if not cynical eyes of elite Porfirian critics. In doing so, the writers invoked popular liberalism to reclaim these icons as working-class heroes as well as examples to follow. The last two chapters explore "masculine subjectivity . . . as reflected in their work, leisure, and relationships with women" (5), as seen through the pages of the penny press. These chapters probe well beneath the stereotypical *macho*, described in Octavio Paz's famous essay *El laberinto de la soledad*, and theorized in Matthew Gutmann's ethnography of working-class masculinity.⁵

Drawing upon James C. Scott's concept of the modern state's obsession with rational planning, as described in that author's seminal work, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve Humanity Have Failed*, Buffington posits working-class inhabitants of Mexico City as important targets for reform, whether by the national government, social reformers from among the Mexico City elite, or the nascent workers organizations in the capital (16).⁶ The author derives further theoretical insights from Judith Butler's account of the formation of "culturally intelligible" and gendered subjects formed by political and linguistic representation. As Butler insists, the "stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality"⁷ produce what Buffington calls "coherent subjects with recognizable social identities." In other words, the penny press "validate[d] working class men as *men*" as well as citizens (22).

Most importantly for our purposes, Buffington constructs the Mexico City penny press as an important contributing factor in the formation of the patriotic working-class consciousness that would later play an important role in the Mexican Revolution. The author argues that the penny press forged "working-class populism as an incipient revolutionary political act" (134). The revived popular cults of Hidalgo and Juárez pointed to the late nineteenth-century rise of social Darwinism and positivism, philosophies privileging white elites and oppressing the working poor and people of color. The resurrection of patriotic Liberal cults charged the corrupt and authoritarian Díaz regime with a betrayal of the values of Mexico's greatest nineteenth-century heroes. Buffington therefore joins other recent scholarship, including that of historian John Lear and that of Aurora Gómez-Galvarriato discussed below, in stressing the significance of the urban poor for the Mexican revolutionary project beginning in 1910, and long after the penny press lost

⁴ For assessments of the "new cultural history" at the beginning of its ascendancy, see Mary Kay Vaughan, "Cultural Approaches to Peasant Politics in the Mexican Revolution"; Stephen Haber, "Anything Goes: Mexico's 'New' Cultural History"; and Claudio Lomnitz, "Barbarians at the Gate? A Few Remarks on the Politics of the 'New Cultural History of Mexico,'" in "Mexico's New Cultural History: Una Lucha Libre," special issue, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (1999): 269–305, 309–330, 367–385.

⁵ Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950; London: Penguin Books, 1997); Matthew Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁶ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 23.

importance. One question emerging from this important book is to what extent the penny press *contributed* to the emergence of working-class consciousness, and to what extent it *reflected* the formation of such consciousness—a question difficult to answer.

Social Change and the *longue durée*

Four books (those by Mark Wasserman, Heather Fowler-Salamini, Aurora Gómez-Galvarriato, and Justin Castro) present expanded time frames of social change and revolution, questioning the significance of the revolution as a singular watershed event. Mark Wasserman's *Pesos and Politics* studies Mexico's political economy in a broad time period (1854 to 1940). The work covers four distinct periods: Reform and French Intervention (1854–1867), Liberal modernization under the Restored Republic and the Porfiriato (1867–1910), the military phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), and the beginning of reconstruction (1920–1940). Wasserman posits that the revolution did not occasion a significant change in the relationship between foreign capitalists, national entrepreneurs, and the Mexican government. He calls this relationship an “evolving elite foreign-enterprise system.” In this system, “no one entity—neither the national government/regime, nor any national or regional elite faction, nor the military, nor foreign investors, collectively or individually—was so powerful as to dominate the relationships” (2). The book is based on a lifetime of work on entrepreneurs and politics in Chihuahua, scholarship that has defined Wasserman as the foremost authority on this topic.⁸ Individual chapters analyze Mexican entrepreneurs and foreign investments in railroads, land (two chapters), and mining (two chapters).

The author advances a number of tenets that follow in the footsteps of recent research on Mexican business and economic history.⁹ For example, far from being a powerless tool in the hands of foreign capitalists, as historians influenced by dependency analysis liked to argue, the Mexican government—whether Porfirian, revolutionary, or postrevolutionary—found itself able to shape the context in which foreign business operated. The government affected the environment of doing business in Mexico in various ways, for instance, by means of setting or revising a regulatory framework, not to mention its fiscal, monetary, and tax policies. In a few cases, it resorted to nationalization, as in the case of the Porfirian nationalization of the railroad companies (which followed many years in which the Mexican government acquired shares of the railroad companies) or President Lázaro Cárdenas's expropriation of the foreign-owned oil companies in 1938. Similarly, Wasserman argues that foreign investment in Mexico did not typically yield high profits, and that most foreign entrepreneurs acted in concert with rather than in opposition to the national bourgeoisie. He also shows that favoritism, or the spoils of *personalismo*, by itself seldom landed an entrepreneur a business deal. Instead, playing by the rules imposed by the Mexican bourgeoisie paid off. For example, the success of the Guggenheims' American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) owed to the fact that the company agreed to abide by revolutionary-era labor and tax legislation. According to Wasserman, the influx of foreign investment did not arrest or impede Mexican economic development—but it served and reinforced the existing power structure, ensuring the survival of an authoritarian, capitalist system into the postrevolutionary period.

All in all, the book issues a strong rebuttal of older scholarship that embraced the dependency paradigm, such as that of Ramón Ruiz and John M. Hart.¹⁰ As Wasserman states, “Mexicans controlled their own economy” (182). This conclusion relies on case studies from the Mexican north, and especially the Terrazas-Creel and Madero families on the Mexican side and mining consortia like ASARCO and the Cananea Consolidated Copper Company on the US side. The focus on the north and northeast makes a difference to the interpretation, as the Creels, Terrazas, Maderos, and Garza Sadas (of Monterrey) were all unusually powerful Mexican clans. One particularly important case in which foreign investors did not encounter similar Mexican counterweights—the foreign-owned petroleum industry—does not receive much attention. Nor

⁸ For example, Mark Wasserman, *Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, 1910–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), and *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1854–1911* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

⁹ For some examples out of many, see Sandra Kuntz Ficker, *Empresa extranjera y mercado interno: El Ferrocarril Central Mexicano, 1880–1907* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1995); Stephen Haber, Armando Razo, and Noel Maurer, eds., *The Politics of Property Rights: Political Instability, Credible Commitments, and Property Rights in Mexico, 1876–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Stephen Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of Mexico, 1890–1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *The People of Sonora and Yankee Capitalists* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988); John M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and John M. Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

are tropical export economies included in the analysis. For example, witness the control that International Harvester wielded over the henequen crop from Yucatán before and during the revolution.

In *Working Women, Entrepreneurs, and the Mexican Revolution*, Heather Fowler-Salamini examines a similarly broad time period (1880s to 1950s) in her pathbreaking analysis of female coffee sorters in Córdoba, Veracruz. Her time period ranges from the beginning of the mass-scale production of coffee, the region's primary export crop, to the mechanization of coffee processing in the 1950s and 1960s. The first chapter of the book is devoted to a tour de force of the Córdoba coffee sector from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century that places its production in an Atlantic context and also provides new insights on the coffee entrepreneurs, initially Spanish immigrants. For the remainder of the book, Fowler-Salamini turns to the female workers in the large-scale *beneficios*, or coffee processing plants, at the center of her study. For more than seven decades, thousands of *escogedoras* cleaned and sorted the coffee beans prior to roasting and shipping. In an industry otherwise dominated by men, cleaning and sorting was almost exclusively done by women, who consequently occupied a crucial place in the chain of coffee production and, over the decades, developed a strong working-class consciousness with clear feminist aspects. This first-rate book joins a body of scholarship on women workers in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mexico that also includes contributions from Jocelyn Olcott, Susie Porter, Mary Kay Vaughan, and many others.¹¹

Within this framework, the revolution opened up new opportunities for the *escogedoras*, who “participated in the body politic as labor officials, municipal councilwomen, and active suffragettes. They also served as cultural brokers, organizing union dances and theatrical and band performances to create a more cohesive sorter community, while solidifying their own legitimacy” (13). Prior to the advent of mechanization, without the *escogedoras*, there was no coffee production. For example, in 1915—long before the arrival of federal labor legislation—the coffee sorters won one of the first collective labor contracts in Mexico. In the 1920s, even as low prices and tough global competition beset the coffee economy, the *escogedoras* used the new industrial arbitration boards to pressure their employers and the state government to grant higher wages and health care benefits. At the same time, also successfully resisted efforts by the male-dominated Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM), the largest labor organization of the 1920s and allied with the national government, to incorporate the women workers of the coffee sector. At times, the *escogedoras* even formed female *cacicazgos* that featured strong female leaders who practiced union boss rule, just as their male counterparts in the CROM.

To complement her archival work on the revolutionary decades, the author uses oral histories to reconstruct the last years of the *escogedoras* in the *beneficios* prior to the arrival of mechanization. As the author argues, coffee sorting afforded women the opportunity for “more secure employment, guaranteed wage work, and better working conditions than ever before” (281). Despite this optimistic note, she draws some bleak conclusions. The *escogedoras* were not able to translate their power as coffee sorters into “any significant socioeconomic mobility over the past fifty years.” After the women lost out to the machines, they found employment as “street vendors, waitresses, owners of small stores, and food preparers” (286).

The book that makes the strongest case for a reconsideration of the revolution is Aurora Gómez-Galvarriato's *Industry and Revolution*. The work provides a provocative business, labor, and social history of the Orizaba Valley, the site of one of Mexico's two most important industrializing projects in the Porfiriato and also the location of major labor unrest during the early 1900s. The city of Orizaba is located in the state of Veracruz, just 20 kilometers west of Fowler-Salamini's Córdoba. During the 1890s, the Orizaba Valley became the home of the nation's nascent textile industry. The author's focus on the years 1890 to 1930 includes the beginnings of Orizaba's French-owned textile industry, its rapid growth during the middle and late Porfiriato, a decade of civil war and revolution in which both Veracruz and the neighboring state of Puebla served as important theaters of operation, and finally, a decade of reconstruction. During the last two decades, and in this region, the Industrial Revolution interlocked with the Mexican one.

The consequence, the author argues, was “the story of workers who made a revolution without taking up arms” (269). Based on a close, quantitatively minded reading of business records from the Compañía Industrial Veracruzana, S.A. (CIVSA), as well as a gamut of secondary sources, the book shows that the Mexican Revolution played only a limited role in changing the working condition and political capital of

¹¹ For example, Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, eds., *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879–1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); Stephanie J. Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women and the Realities of Patriarchy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

textile workers. The author demonstrates successfully that workers reaped the rewards of labor activities under way since the 1890s, culminating in the last five years of the Porfirian dictatorship. It was in the Orizaba Valley where agitators from the anarcho-syndicalist Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) found one of their best audiences. Although CIVSA bosses frequently complained to Porfirian prefects and governors, they often got indifferent responses; as a result, companies and workers reluctantly collaborated in devising labor reforms that most historians have hitherto ascribed to revolutionary legislation. Of course, many advances proved short-lived, as evidenced by the bloody suppression of the Río Blanco strike in 1907, but the fact that industrial workers in the Orizaba Valley achieved social reform from the bottom up prior to the revolution is most significant. At a time when many historians eschew quantitative analysis altogether, it is refreshing to find a work that convincingly puts such analysis at the service of historical interpretation.

One of the author's most important methodological innovations is the intent to practice "business and labor history together" (4), something facilitated by a source base dominated by CIVSA's company records. As Gómez-Galvarriato demonstrates, viewing both business and labor history through an econometric prism reveals important insights into the nature of work and the transformation of working conditions over time. Founded by French Barcelonnettes, CIVSA showed the hybrid nature of the textile industry between traditional, personally owned firms and modern companies. The absence of national banks limited the company's access to investment capital, and Mexico lacked a political, institutional, and legal framework that established stable and predictable conditions for businesses, large or small. The ad hoc and arbitrary framework in which CIVSA and all other industrial enterprises operated in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexico adversely affected both bosses and workers. The author deftly weaves an understanding of this context into her close reading of CIVSA's company records at the heart of the book's methodology.

CIVSA's workers played a much greater role in the revolution than hitherto imagined. After the outbreak of the revolution, textile workers utilized the disintegration of political authority to press their agenda with renewed vigor. As a result, Mexico's first labor organization with national aims, the aforementioned CROM, had its greatest strength in the Puebla/Veracruz region, demonstrating the significance of textile workers in a strategic area located along the railroad from Mexico City to the Atlantic coast. In addition, the legal benefits for workers under the revolutionary Constitution "did not come out of nowhere. . . . Legal changes would become effective only in those regions where there already were substantial popular organizations strong enough to enforce them, or to ensure that they were enforced" (271). Unfortunately, the reliance on company sources does not always allow for a full analysis of the workers' perspective, but this shortcoming does not detract from the significance of this book.

Justin Castro's *Radio in Revolution* examines an important but understudied issue: the role of radio communications. This work is a pioneering study of communications technology in Mexican history, and it is especially notable for its contributions to the historiography of the Porfiriato and the military phase of the revolution. It is a commonplace that the advent of radio "unified" the nation, and also that it allowed the governments of the 1920s and 1930s to spread their message to rural Mexicans in a way that their predecessors had not been able to do. But Castro shows that radio played a role much earlier in Mexican history. Both Díaz and the Porfirian military took a great interest in securing control over the far-flung northern frontier and realized the value of wireless communications in achieving this goal. This effort aimed at both quelling internal rebellions and forestalling US imperialist ambitions. As Díaz knew well, US radio transmissions reached northern Mexico. In the end, as Castro argues, "radio technologies were crucial to certain attempts to centralize state power . . . during the late Porfiriato" (4).

In assessing the role of radio communications in the 1910 revolution, Castro stresses its significance for the logistical infrastructure of rebel groups, and in the eventual victory of the Constitutionalists under Venustiano Carranza and General Alvaro Obregón. The advisers of the erstwhile head of the rebellion against Díaz, Francisco I. Madero, used radio to coordinate rebel movements, as did those of Obregón and Pancho Villa, the two greatest generals of the war between the factions. Both US and Mexican forces also used radio communications during the so-called Punitive Expedition, the final US military venture on Mexican soil following Villa's attack on Columbus, New Mexico, in March 1916. Wireless communications also figured into the strategies of the Great Powers as they jockeyed for influence during World War I, in what Friedrich Katz has called the "secret war in Mexico."¹² Castro highlights the important role that imperial Germany played in helping build Mexico's wireless capabilities in support of First Chief and then President Venustiano Carranza,

¹² Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

even at a time when its defeat in the war appeared likely (93–94). Castro's analysis invites additional work on the subject of radio communications as a sideshow of the war. The warring European nations enlisted their nationals living in Mexico City in their efforts to take advantage of the nation's official neutrality in the war for the purposes of espionage. For example, the owners of a German hardware store allowed German agents to install a wireless station in the tower of their building, located only two blocks from the Zócalo, Mexico City's central square.¹³

Once the rule of the revolutionaries consolidated in the 1920s, radio became even more important in consolidating the nation-state. Castro's book starts out with an anecdote that revealed the significance of radio communications in advancing the de la Huerta rebellion (1923–1924): as one pro-government military leader put it, radio was "the principal enemy of the government" (1). Yet radio was an even more powerful tool in the service of the government. Only months later, after the defeat of the rebellion, the government's official presidential candidate, General Plutarco Elías Calles, launched the first-ever campaign that heavily relied on radio communications, a populist campaign that proclaimed the candidate's alliance with campesinos and workers' organizations. Most importantly, radio became a preferred means to spread government propaganda via broadcasting. The government realized not only the potential of radio for strengthening its own rule but also the importance of exercising tight control over the medium. Although they allowed private interests such as the Azcárraga family and "El Buen Tono" to operate radio stations, they kept close tabs on their transmissions.

After the Revolution

The final book on the list, Ryan Alexander's *Sons of the Mexican Revolution*, makes a case for a new periodization of the end of the revolution. Alexander argues for a generational model in viewing the succession of governments following the Plan of Agua Prieta of April 1920, the last successful coup d'état in Mexican history. Revolutionary generals dominated the presidency for the next twenty-six years, with the exception of two interim presidents (Adolfo de la Huerta and Emilio Portes Gil). Although these generals differed from each other with regard to their political views, they governed from a shared experience of military conflict that had socialized them as members of a revolutionary generation. The 1946 elections produced the victory of Miguel Alemán Valdés, the first in a long line of civilians that have held the presidency since then. Alexander sees Alemán's election as the true end of the revolution, a more important watershed than the election of 1940, which produced the pro-business government of General Manuel Avila Camacho—a government that began to mend fences with the Catholic Church and led Mexico into World War II as an ally of the United States. Alexander is not the first historian to propose the 1946 watershed,¹⁴ but his work is the first to make an evidence-based case for the political disjuncture caused by the ascendancy of Alemán's generation.

Alexander makes important contributions to the political history of mid-twentieth century Mexico by undertaking a dispassionate analysis of Alemán's administration, often described as both corrupt and authoritarian. Alemán and his associates were products of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (ENP). Honed during José Vasconcelos's unsuccessful presidential bid in 1929, this background imbued them with a pragmatic desire to "work with the instruments of power, not against them" (44). They also abhorred the military violence of the past. Alemán himself was influenced by the fate of his father, General Miguel Alemán González, a revolutionary general who had opposed the ambitions of General Obregón to serve a second presidential term starting in 1928. In March 1929, at the height of the Escobar Rebellion, the elder Alemán had committed suicide rather than allowing government forces to take him prisoner. Alemán and his generation chased the "modernity" that, as they believed, had eluded their parents. In particular, they poured their efforts into commercial agriculture and industrialization, reinforcing trends that had begun in the late Porfiriato and the revolutionary years. The Alemán administration partnered with private business to a far greater extent than the revolutionary generals (and particularly the populist President Lázaro Cárdenas) had done.

A different political landscape aided these endeavors. Under Alemán's predecessor, Manuel Avila Camacho, the bosses of Mexico's ruling party, the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) had restructured the party into the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), eliminating the so-called "military sector"

¹³ Henry P. Fletcher to Secretary of State, Mexico City, May 29, 1917, National Archives, College Park, MD, Record Group 59: General Records of the U.S. Department of State, 862.20212/348.

¹⁴ See Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexican Mosaic: A Brief History of Mexico* (Deerfield, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2008), chap. 4; and William H. Beezley and Colin MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910–1946: An Introduction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

and concentrating power in its National Executive Committee at the expense of the three other sectors vertically integrated into the party: campesinos, labor, and government employees. At the same time, the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) had swung to the political center under its leader, Fidel Velázquez Sánchez, who in 1948 expelled Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the former CTM boss and an exponent of the organization's Marxist wing.

The Alemán administration oversaw the beginning of the so-called Mexican Miracle, a period of high economic growth that also featured the creation of megacities. Below the surface of the "miracle" lay the brutal repression of workers and campesinos, unprecedented environmental destruction, burgeoning corruption, and a massive foreign debt accrued to pay for the industrialization project. While Alexander does not deny the downside of the PRI state, mocked elegantly in the 1999 feature film, *La ley de Herodes* (*Herod's Law*), he argues that its strategies resembled similar policies in the other major Latin American nations and praises the regime for staying within the bounds of civilian government. Indeed, during the ensuing decades, Mexico's *dictablanda*, or soft dictatorship, avoided the open military rule that marked countries like Argentina or Brazil, even though recent scholarship has demonstrated that authoritarianism *à la mexicana* came at great human cost, especially during the dirty wars of the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁵ Alexander also concludes that the Alemán government was guilty of "cooptation, fraud, graft, cronyism, nepotism, bribery, and patronage" (179), while cautioning that it is difficult to quantify the extent of Alemanista corruption compared to the administrations preceding and succeeding Alemán's time in office. Alexander's plea for viewing the Alemán administration in this perspective will not convince everyone, but it will invite further research on this subject.

As portrayed in these seven books, the Mexican Revolution appears more complex, more drawn out chronologically, more intertwined with global political and economic trends, and less significant as a stand-alone event than the "epic Revolution" that dominated earlier generations of scholarship. Perhaps most importantly, the Porfiriato has undergone a significant reevaluation in the new millennium, beginning with Paul Garner's biography of Porfirio Díaz.¹⁶ What long appeared like a centralizing Leviathan imposing a harsh *pax porfiriana* on a recalcitrant populace now appears a far more dynamic period. Mexicans, both rich and poor, negotiated the terms of their engagement in the emerging North Atlantic economy as well as in the Porfirian dictatorship. The dictator and his *científico* allies never dominated Mexico to the extent that they would have desired, nor did foreign investors wield influence to the extent that dependency analysis had argued. As a result, some of the social changes that scholars had exclusively ascribed to the revolution in fact had deep origins in the late nineteenth century.

Recent scholarship is not alone in engaging in such a reevaluation. In 2010, the bicentennial of independence overshadowed the centennial of the revolution. Visitors to Mexico's famous Museo Nacional de Historia who recall the museum's impressive representation of the revolution in the 1970s will now find it condensed in Room 11: "Las Revoluciones," where it shares space with other twentieth-century rebellions and insurgencies. Similarly, historians have come to view the revolution as one of an array of transformations that affected the lives of ordinary Mexicans. As a result, our understanding of Mexico's great twentieth-century upheaval is richer than ever.

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Jürgen Buchenau is Chair of the Department of History at University of North Carolina, Charlotte, where he is also director of the Latin American Studies MA program. He received his PhD in History from UNC, Chapel Hill, in 1993. He has authored, coauthored, or edited nine books, most recently *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Duke University Press, 2013, with Gilbert M. Joseph), as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters. His work has been supported by fellowships and grants from the National Endowment of the Humanities and the American Philosophical Society, along with several other funding sources. Buchenau is currently co-executive secretary of the Conference on Latin American History as well as an associate editor of the *Latin Americanist*, the journal of the Southeast Council of Latin American Studies.

¹⁵ Benjamin T. Smith and Paul Gillingham, *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Alexander Aviña, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Paul Garner, *Porfirio Díaz* (London: Routledge, 2001).

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