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978-0-521-10209-4 - Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution

Edited by D. A. Brading

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CAUDILLO AND PEASANT
IN THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

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D. A. BRADING

*Lecturer in Latin American History
University of Cambridge, and Fellow of
St Edmund's House*

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CONTENTS

	<i>Preface</i>	Page vii
	<i>List of contributors</i>	ix
	<i>A brief chronology of events</i>	xi
	<i>Map of revolutionary Mexico</i>	xii
1	D. A. BRADING Introduction: national politics and the populist tradition	1
2	ALAN KNIGHT Peasant and caudillo in revolutionary Mexico 1910–17	17
3	FRIEDRICH KATZ Pancho Villa, peasant movements and agrarian reform in northern Mexico	59
4	IAN JACOBS Rancheros of Guerrero: The Figueroa brothers and the revolution	76
5	HECTOR AGUILAR CAMIN The relevant tradition: Sonoran leaders in the revolution	92
6	LINDA B. HALL Alvaro Obregón and the agrarian movement 1912–20	124
7	DUDLEY ANKERSON Saturnino Cedillo: a traditional caudillo in San Luis Potosí 1890–1938	140
8	HEATHER FOWLER SALAMINI Revolutionary caudillos in the 1920s: Francisco Múgica and Adalberto Tejeda	169
9	GILBERT M. JOSEPH Caciquismo and the revolution: Carrillo Puerto in Yucatán	193
10	RAYMOND BUVE State governors and peasant mobilisation in Tlaxcala	222
11	HANS WERNER TOBLER Conclusion: peasant mobilisation and the revolution	245
	<i>Notes</i>	256
	<i>Index</i>	307

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

The aim of this book is to explore the basis of caudillo power in Mexico during the period 1910–40. Most of the leaders who emerged out of the revolutionary turmoil of these years came from a rural background. What was the nature of their relation to the peasantry? Admittedly, the figure of Emiliano Zapata, for many historians the most representative of peasant leaders, is not here discussed anew: his movement has been already described in great detail by Professor John Womack and other scholars. In any case the concentration on the Zapatistas of Morelos has distorted the interpretation of the Revolution, a distortion all the more accentuated by Jean Meyer's monumental survey of the Cristeros, the catholic rebels. For here we encounter a history of the Revolution written from the viewpoint of the defeated. In both cases the Constitutionalist coalition which subdued the Zapatistas and Cristeros is depicted in dark, almost demonic colours. Yet the caudillos who led that coalition eventually forged the Mexican state which still presides over its country's destiny. In this respect the words of E. H. Carr are surely pertinent: 'History is, by and large, a record of what people did, not of what they failed to do: to this extent it is inevitably a success story.' If the Bolshevik Revolution had been approached from the same perspective as that employed to describe the Mexican upheaval, we would have narratives written from the angle of the Social Revolutionaries or of the White Russians, accompanied by a certain vein of Cossack romance. In short, if historical balance is to be achieved, the victors require at least as much attention as the defeated.

Obviously, at this stage of the debate it would be foolish to expect any definitive interpretation of the events in Mexico: the essays which compose this book do not subscribe to any one point of view. But it is worth emphasising that without a comprehensive definition, the Mexican Revolution becomes a mere label, a chronological catch-all, a simple description of a confused period of civil war. A peculiarly

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Preface

Mexican temptation lies in the 'convergence' approach in which all competing factions and leaders are assembled together in a national pantheon to figure as allies in the creation of the modern state. The purpose of this book is to follow the careers of a variety of caudillos and to analyse the methods by which these men slowly forged a coherent political system. The viewpoint is agrarian and hence other aspects of the Revolution, such as the role of the workers or of the intellectuals, are not discussed.

This book originated in the suggestion of Dr Raymond Buve that the Centre of Latin American Studies at Cambridge University should organise a conference on caudillo and peasant in modern Mexico. With the assistance of a small subsidy from the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology at Leyden, the conference was duly held, in May 1977, at Christ's College, Cambridge. Participants came from several countries, including Mexico, the United States, Switzerland and the Netherlands, as well as England. The Chairman then asked contributors to revise their papers with a view to publication. Professor Tobler agreed to write a conclusion for the volume and the Chairman offered to provide an historical introduction. Professors Katz and Fowler Salamini, who were unable to attend the Conference, sent in further papers. It should be emphasised that if some of the chapters summarize dissertations or books in preparation, the more general papers have been written specially for this volume, which thus brings together the most recent work on the Mexican Revolution. I wish to thank Miss Patricia Hawley, Secretary of the Centre of Latin American Studies, for helping to organise the Conference and prepare the manuscript for publication, and Mrs Helen Clements who typed several of the revised scripts.

Cambridge, Easter 1978.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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IAN JACOBS studied at Downing College, Cambridge, where he received a BA in Modern Languages and a PhD on the Figueroa Brothers and the Mexican Revolution. At present he is working for Macmillan's Publishing House.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

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HANS WERNER TOBLER is Professor of History at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich. He received his doctorate from the University of Zurich and later was a visiting Research Fellow at the Colegio de México. In addition to articles on the Revolution, he is co-author with Manfred Mols of *Mexiko: Die institutionalisierte Revolution* (Böhlau, Köln–Wien, 1976).

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

A brief chronology of events

- 1810 The Insurgency led by Padre Miguel Hidalgo
- 1821 Independence
- 1856–57 The Liberal Reforma
- 1858–61 The War of the Reform
- 1858–72 Presidency of Benito Juárez
- 1876–1910 The ‘Porfiriato’, the rule of General Porfirio Díaz,
President 1876–80, 1884–1911.
- September 1910 Centennial Celebrations of Grito de Dolores. Díaz
elected President for the seventh time.
- November 1910 Francisco Madero calls for armed uprising against
Díaz.
- April 1911 Fall of Ciudad Juárez to rebels.
- May 1911 Díaz resigns and leaves country.
- May–November 1911 Interim presidency of León de la Barra.
- November 1911 – February 1913 Presidency of Francisco Madero.
- November 1911 Plan de Ayala of Emiliano Zapata in Morelos.
- March 1912 Rebellion of Pascual Orozco in Chihuahua.
- February 1913–July 1914 Presidency of General Victoriano
Huerta, civil war between regular army and the northern forces
led by Venustiano Carranza, Pancho Villa and Alvaro Obregón.
- October 1914 Convention of Aguascalientes.
- November 1914 Zapata and Villa enter Mexico City.
- April–June 1915 Villa defeated by Alvaro Obregón.
- November 1916 Convention of Querétaro.
- February 1917 Promulgation of new Constitution.
- 1917–20 Presidency of Venustiano Carranza.
- 1920–24 Presidency of Alvaro Obregón.
- 1923–24 Rebellion of Adolfo de la Huerta.
- 1924–28 Presidency of Plutarco Elías Calles.
- 1926–29 Rebellion of the Cristeros.
- 1929 Establishment of the PNR (Partido Nacional Revolucionario).
- 1928–34 ‘Maximato’ of Calles.
- 1934–40 Presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas.

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