

HISTORY 461

The Mexican Revolution: Birth, Life, Death?

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Wednesday, 7-9 pm (Mudd 052)

Office: 309 Rice

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11-12; Wednesdays 3-4; Thursdays 1:30-2:30 (or by appointment)

The Mexican Revolution has long been considered one of the 20th century “iconic” revolutions, preceding revolutions in Russia, China and Cuba. Like the other three, it gave rise to a long-enduring, single-party, highly controlled state, re-imagined the economic role to be played by various sectors, and actively called forth a new (national) identity. Unlike the other three, it was not exclusively or even primarily socialist in orientation or Marxist in inspiration.



“Calavera Zapatista,” José Guadalupe Posada, c. 1910
Courtesy of www.symbolism-in-art.org

From its inception, the Revolution was bound up in an emergent sense of what it meant to *be* Mexican (not to be confused with what it meant to be a Mexican). Mexican identity, often called *mexicanidad* (“Mexican-ness”) or “lo mexicano,” emerged from a set of competing narratives that defined the Revolution (i.e., what it represented or should represent; who was included, and who marginalized; the metrics by which one measured its successes and failures, etc.). The narratives emerged from the most tumultuous phase of the Revolution, its *birth* in the violence that convulsed the country for nearly a decade between 1910 and 1920. To speak of the *life* of the Revolution, on the other hand, is to

observe the consolidation (and institutionalization) of a single dominant narrative that could then be deployed locally, nationally, and internationally by means of state-supported cultural and political apparatuses (public art, education, a crafts industry, tourism, cinema, political discourse, the selection and veneration of party leaders, etc.). As this revolutionary narrative became more and more discordant with actual events on the ground, the Mexican Revolution (i.e., the *narrative* that was supposed to be shared by all) began to splinter and disintegrate; the Revolution, in that sense, *died*.

Needless to say, there are myriad ways to study the Mexican Revolution. Here, through a focus on the historiography, literature, and cultural production of the Mexican Revolution, more than on its primary texts, we will consider the shaping, consolidation, and fragmentation of this narrative framework. This approach is not the best for those interested in a “just-the-facts-ma’am” consideration of the political history of 20th century Mexico (although I can suggest some texts to help in that regard), but it can provide insight into how enduring narratives are fashioned and why they can survive beyond the point at which they have ceased to describe reality.

We will focus, then, on the tropes that helped fashion the enduring narrative(s) of the Mexican Revolution. These include the centrality of war, warrior-heroes, and machismo; the new markers of identity (*indigenismo*, nationalism, the cult of *la raza cósmica*), secularism (in conjunction with popular Catholicism), the centralization of power in the state and in the official party leader (in conjunction with heightened regional identity); and national sovereignty, among others. The final part of the course will focus on the collapse of the narrative, a collapse foreshadowed by *Jaramillista* movement and embedded in the continual “re-sightings” and re-imaginings of the most iconic of the revolutionary leaders, Zapata. For all its enduring strength, the Revolutionary narrative could not withstand the combined force of the 1968 Plaza de Tlateloclo massacre, the 1985 earthquake (and non-response by the government), implementation of the NAFTA agreements, banking crisis, and Zapatista uprising of 1994, and the PRI’s electoral demise in 2000. The narrative utterly shattered.

Course Goals/Learning Objectives

1. Content: Students should be conversant with:
 - Mexican history in the revolutionary period;
 - A general historiography of the Mexican revolution;
 - The general chronology of the Mexican revolution;
 - Some basic debates in 20th century Mexican history;
 - Mexican political geography.
2. Cognitive skills: Students will be working at the level of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as they work with (mostly) secondary texts. This includes an ability to:
 - To better understand how narrative works in the study of history;
 - To understand the specific relation of narrative formation to national identity;

To be able to skillfully analyze the strengths and weaknesses of historical argumentation;

To understand how different “textual” forms (art, cinema, literature) help shape historical analysis.

3. Communication skills:

To become effective writers, capable of analytic sophistication and synthesis;

To become better speakers, able to present clearly, persuasively, and on topic.

4. Collaborative skills:

To work effectively with colleagues and in group settings.

5. Metacognitive skills:

To reflect on one’s own learning (metacognition) and to begin to think about how the skills learned in the seminar can be transferred to other areas of work.

Assignments, Grading, Feedback:

Assignments in this course will be determined by the class within the first two weeks of the start of the semester. Once the class has determined what it wants for assignments, I will post a complete syllabus on line. In the meantime, here’s what you need to know in order to think about selecting assignments for the course:

1. Assignments are the only way I can assess whether you are reaching the goals I have set for the course. So, for example, since I have set “becoming better speakers” as one of the learning goals of the class, I need some way to assess that. This will probably mean that I will grade your participation in class, both in terms of weekly presentations (should you chose to have groups of students prepare each week’s discussion) and in the general discussion in class. I will prepare a grading rubric by which I can assess your verbal participation in class.
2. Assignments should be a way for you to get feedback on how you are doing in the areas of greatest importance to the class (the learning goals I have set) and your own learning goals. They are a way for you to think about how to evaluate your own learning.
3. Assignments are always trade offs: do you prefer shorter, weekly papers, as a means of guiding you to work more effectively week by week, or a longer project at the end of class? Do you want the chance to present your findings to the class as a whole? Are you more interested in extended review and critique of the readings or do you want to use the readings to instigate your research into other areas?
4. You will get a grade at the end of the class, so you’ll want to think of whether you want grading to be relatively equal throughout the class (each assignment

getting approximately the same weighting) or one larger project which counts for more?

Regardless of what assignments you determine, there are some general rules:

Late papers turned in without **prior permission** — you must request an extension **before** the due date of the paper — will be reduced by one grade-step for each day that an assignment is late.

You may request an Incomplete in the class ONLY to complete the final paper/project. To be counted, *all other work* which had yet to be turned in must be submitted by 4:30 PM on the last day of the Reading Period, May 17. The final paper/project in the course must be turned in by Sunday, May 22 at 11:00 AM.

All work must be completed for you to receive a passing grade in the class; this is true whether you are taking the course for a letter grade or the Pass/Fail option. In other words, to pass the course, you must do all the assignments.

Plagiarism and the Honor Code:

All students must sign an “Honor Code” for all assignments. This pledge states: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.” For further information, see the student Honor Code which you can access via Blackboard>Lookup/Directories>Honor Code. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, particularly in the context of joint or collective work, please see me or raise it in class.

Attendance, Tardiness, Class Behavior, Accommodation

I expect (and require) that you will attend the class regularly because you want to, because you understand that you can't fully participate in your own learning if you're not there; and because you understand that in a class of this nature you have a responsibility to your classmates to contribute. I also understand that you may have to miss a class; I will trust that your reason is a valid one (health, family emergency) and do not require documentation. If you miss more than 2 classes, I will begin to deduct from your grade. (Please see me if you have a legitimate reason for missing more than 2.)

If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible.

Readings:

Books that are recommended for purchase will be on reserve at the library or can be obtained at the bookstore, via OHIOLink, or an on-line bookseller such as Amazon.com. Two of the books (Padilla and Womack) are also available electronically. All other required readings will be found on BLACKBOARD (they are NOT on EREs).

Background Reading:

The Mexican Revolution is one of the best studied of the 20th century national revolutions. Over the course of the semester, we will be engaging with some of the trends in Mexican historiography. Because it is a rapidly changing field, and because that field itself is the subject of our inquiry, it is hard to assign a single text as a “backbone” text in the course. Still, understanding that you might be looking for one (or more) texts to which you can refer when in need of more grounding, and preferring that you use a text rather than Wikipedia (which is absolutely fine, by the way, for quick facts: dates, identification of individuals, places, events, etc.), I would recommend any of the following:

Alicia Hernández Chávez, *Mexico. A Brief History*, trans. Andy Klatt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), particularly chapters 9-12.

Michael J. Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 2002.

Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1986.

Books Recommended for Purchase:

Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs: A Novel of the Mexican Revolution*, trans. Sergio Weisman, intro, Carlos Fuentes, New Edition (NY: Penguin Classics), 2008.

Samuel Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata. Myth, Memory, and Mexico's 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2008.

Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *An Easy Thing* (Poisoned Pen Press), 2002. [PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS HAS NOT BEEN ORDERED AT THE BOOKSTORE]

Tanalís Padilla, [*Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata : The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax-Priista, 1940-1962*](#) (Durham: Duke University Press), 2008. [Book available electronically]

John Reed, *Insurgent Mexico: With Pancho Villa in the Mexican Revolution* (Red and Black Publishers), 2009.

John Womack, [*Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*](#), reprint ed. (NY: Vintage), 1970. [Book available electronically]

Syllabus

Introduction

Feb. 9: Mexico, Historiography, Mexicanidad, Narrative and the Work of the Class

Background: For those who haven't taken HIST 110 or another course on Mexican history, please read Chapters 6, 7, 8 in Alicia Hernández Chávez, *Mexico. A Brief History*, trans. Andy Klatt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006). Alternatively, please view the following video lectures:

Mexico: Liberalism and the Porfiriato (<http://vimeo.com/10311626>)

Mexico: The Porfiriato (<http://vimeo.com/10324813>)

Shaping the Narrative: Inside the Whirlwind

Feb. 16: In the Thick of it All – The View From Inside: *Los de Abajo*. Key question to answer: What is the “Revolution” when you are directly inside it? How does your past history impact how you will see what is happening around you?

“Chronology of Events, 1911-2006,” from Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución. Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), pp. 25-29, 79-83, 153-156 [Blackboard]

“Political Parties and Heads of State, 1911-2006,” from Benjamin and Wikipedia [Blackboard]

Map of Mexico (showing the country divided by states) [Blackboard]

I expect you to become familiar with the above three documents. You will be quizzed on the map (needing to identify the states) and on Mexican heads of state. This will help us all be on the same page as we discuss events, places, and people so that when I mention that Zapata was from Morelos, you can identify both with some degree of accuracy.

Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs: A Novel of the Mexican Revolution*, trans. Sergio Weisman, intro, Carlos Fuentes (NY: Penguin), 2008.

Feb. 23: In the Thick of it All – The View From Outside. Key question: To what extent does Reed providing a “template” for how we (those outside of Mexico; those inside of Mexico) will come to see the Mexican revolution? What are the traditions (historical experiences and frameworks) that shape Reed's work? How do those categories determine what he sees? How does Reed's investment in Pancho Villa impact his narrative of the unfolding Mexican revolution?

John Reed, *Insurgent Mexico* (NY: International Publishers), 1988 [1914]

Time Out for Theory

March 2: History, Chronicle, Narrative, Myth and the Theory of History. A week in which we think about history, History, historiography, narrative, identity, myths, theory, and memory. Central to our on-going discussion will be the way in which we understand the interaction of history, History, and historiography, and the particular role that narrative has in the telling of “history’s” stories.

Alun Munslow, “Introduction,” *The New History* (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2003), pp. 1-23. [Blackboard]

Samuel Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata. Myth, Memory, and Mexico’s 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), Introduction (1-20).

The Revolution and its (Armed) Heroes. Key question: To what extent is the Mexican Revolution narrativized through the prism of its (designated) heroes? Cinema needs heroes to provide a dramatic arc to their stories. Does history? And to what extent does history follow the rules of dramatic narrative?

Of all the leaders of the Revolution (I think here of Madero, Carranza, Obregón, Calles, etc.), only three have become “iconically” associated with the Revolution itself. Two (Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata) not only never exercised national power, but were assassinated by those who *did*. The third, Lázaro Cárdenas, is often described as coming closest to embodying the beliefs of the revolution from a position of power. We will consider Villa and Zapata over the next two weeks; Cárdenas later in the semester.

[Arrange for screening of “Vamonos con Pancho Villa” (dir. Fernando de Fuentes, 1936, 92 min) and “The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa” (dir. Gregorio Rocha, 2003; 49 min.) before March 9]

March 9: Villismo: Pancho Villa and the Mexican Revolution: Vision and Re-Vision. Key question: What is the revolution of Pancho Villa (compared to that of Zapata, or others)? How is Villa represented from his earliest portrayals (that we have read in *The Underdogs* and *Insurgent Mexico*), to his appearances in Rafael Muñoz’s novel and Fernando de Fuentes’ film of the same name, “Vamonos con Pancho Villa” (1936), one part of a trilogy devoted to Villa, to his re-imagination in Gregorio Rocha’s 2003 documentary, “The Lost Reels of Pancho Villa”? What does Villismo lend to our reading of the Mexican Revolution and what is left out?

Max Parra, “Soldierly Honor and Mexicanness in Rafael F. Muñoz’s *Vámonos con Pancho Villa!*,” in *Writing Pancho Villa’s Revolution. Rebels in the Literary Imagination of Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), pp. 98-119. [Blackboard]

Zuzana M. Pick, "Pancho Villa on Two Sides of the Border," in *Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution: Cinema and Archive* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), pp. 69-96. [Blackboard]

Rubén Osorio, "Villismo: Nationalism and Popular Mobilization in Northern Mexico," in Daniel Nugent, *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention in the Domain of Subaltern Politics*, Expanded Ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 89-103. [Blackboard]

OPTIONAL: Andrea Noble, "The Mexican Revolution as Moving Memory," in *Mexican National Cinema* (London and NY: Routledge, 2006), 48-69. [Blackboard]

NOTE: Villa has found his consummate and, maybe ultimate, biographer in Frederick Katz whose massive (985-page) biography should satisfy even the most ardent fan.

March 16: Zapatismo: Biography and Revisionism. Key question: Why is it that Zapata, more than anyone else, has come to represent *the* Mexican Revolution? Zapata has filled a plethora of representational spaces in both Mexico and among the Mexican American population north of the border. We will examine John Womack's seminal 1968 biography as a way to explore his enduring importance and to understand how History, more often than not, tells us more about the period in which it is written than the period about which it is writing. Samuel Brunk's *Posthumous Career* looks at the emergence of the Zapata legend and how it changes over time.

Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata*, Chapters 1-2.

John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (NY: Vintage), 1970. Read Prologue, Chapters 1-3; 8; and 10-Epilogue.

The Mexican Revolution as Identity. Key question: To a large extent, Mexican national identity is tied to the Revolution; one's "Mexicanness" is directly tied to that process. The questions we ask here are (1) how does that happen? And (2) what are the elements of identity which become represented as "Mexican"? Ironically (or maybe not), not only is the Revolution about more than political transformation, but some of the central elements of *mexicanidad* are directly challenged by political developments in the Revolution, certainly after 1940.

[The Allen Memorial Art Museum owns some of the most iconic prints of the Mexican Revolution, prints by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Siqueiros. Since the museum is closed, we will get an opportunity to see these prints in the library (Mudd 202). We will go from noon-1:00 PM *either* Friday, March 11 or Tuesday, March 15.

March 23: *Nacionalismo*: Muralism and Art in the 1920s-1930s. One of the characteristics which ties the Mexican Revolution to the other great 20th century revolutions is the development of a very determined cultural and educational apparatus intent on describing just what it means to *be* Mexican. Here, we'll examine how this happens.

David Craven, "The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940," in *Art and Revolution in Latin America*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 25-73. [Blackboard]

Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata*, Ch. 3.

Desmond Rochfort, "The Sickle, the Serpent, and the Soil: History, Revolution, Nationhood, and Modernity in the Murals of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros," in Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 43-57. [Blackboard]

Steven S. Volk, "Frida Kahlo Remaps the Nation," *Social Identities* 6:2 (June 2000): 165-188. [Blackboard]

Spring Break

April 6: *Indigenismo*. Key question: How it is that *indigenismo* (which we will define in due course) comes to be one of the central elements of the Mexican Revolution?

The Constitution of 1917: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexico/1917-Constitution.htm>: Titles I, VI, VII. [On-line]

Rick A. López, "Introduction: Nation Formation, Popular Art, and the Search for a Mexican Aesthetic," "Ethnicizing the Nation. The India Bonita Contest of 1921," and "Popular Art and the Staging of Indianness," in *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-94. [Blackboard]

The Mexican Revolution and its (Political) Heroes. As suggested before, the Mexican Revolution produces many fewer political heroes than militant/armed heroes. Why was that?

April 13: *Cardenismo*: Was Cárdenas the Mexican Revolution We Were Waiting For?

While Carranza, Obregon, and Calles are credited with constructing the most enduring product of the Mexican Revolution, the state, it is Lázaro Cárdenas who, for the left, represents the narrative of the person who came closest to combining the revolutionary aspirations of Zapata with the hard-nosed institutionalism of Calles. Key question: To what extent is Cárdenas the closest embodiment of the Revolution and to what extent has his representation been over-extended?

Alan Knight, "Mexico, c. 1930-46," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. VII (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 3-58. [Blackboard]

Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata*, Ch. 4.

Mary Kay Vaughan, "Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s," in Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 157-175. [Blackboard]

Marjorie Becker, "Torching La Purísima, Dancing at the Altar: The Construction of Revolutionary Hegemony in Michoacán, 1934-1940," in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 247-264. [Blackboard]

Capitalism Ascendant: Consolidation and Challenge (1940-1968) With the 1940 election of Avila Camacho, it is widely accepted that the capitalist wing of the Mexican Revolution consolidated its grip on power. After that time, and to this day, Mexico has gradually picked away at the gains made by popular forces after 1910. Here we're interested in the nature of that history and why that happened.

April 20: *Oficialismo*. Avila Camacho, and the Narrative of Capitalist Consolidation. Key question: How do we understand the victory of capitalism and its hegemony over the state and the Mexican revolutionary process?

Alan Knight, "Mexico, c. 1930-46," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. VII (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 58-82.

Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata*, Ch. 5.

Arthur Schmidt, "Making It Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940," in Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov, *Fragments of a Golden Age. The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 23-68. [Blackboard]

April 27: *Jaramillismo*. Revolutionary Challenges and Capitalist Consolidation. The victory of *oficialismo* was not an easy one. The challenge of the Jaramillista movement (led by Rubén Jaramillo) in the state of Morelos as late as the early 1960s suggests that capitalist consolidation was not unchallenged. Here we will examine this movement in order to determine some of the ways that the earlier representations of the Mexican Revolution, and its Zapatista framework,

continued to animate rural populations in Mexico long after the death of Zapata. (That is, if he actually is dead!!)

Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata : The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax-Priista, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2008.

Challenges and Crisis. If the radical hopes (rural, indigenist, social justice oriented, egalitarian) that were born with the Mexican Revolution were sidetracked with the victory of the capitalist state in 1940, the hopes of the Revolution's political machine of staying alive forever were dashed in 2000 when the PRI was voted out of power. Our key questions here will be to understand how this powerful state lost control...but not to its original radical foes, rather to more staunchly neoliberal forces.

May 4: Things Fall Apart. An examination of three key moments in the unraveling of the PRI. Key question: How does the PRI lose control and why do popular forces remain marginalized?

Julia Preston and Samuel Dillon, *Opening Mexico. The Making of Democracy* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004): Chapter 3 (Tlatelolco, 1968); Chapter 4 (Earthquake, 1985); Chapter 8 (1994); and Chapter 15 (Chiapas). [Blackboard]

Brunk, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata*, Ch. 8, 9.

[NOTE: Arrange for a screening of *Amores Perros* (dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000; 154 mi.) prior to May 11]

May 11: Now What?

Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *An Easy Thing* (Poisoned Pen Press), 2002.

Vicent T. Gawronski, "[The Revolution is Dead. “¡Viva la revolución!” The Place of the Mexican Revolution in the Era of Globalization.](#)” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 18:2 (Summer 2002): 363-397. [JSTOR]