

“TODOS QUIEREN SER PRESIDENTES”:  
Mexico from Independence to Revolution

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- THE ORIGINS OF MEXICAN NATIONAL POLITICS, 1808–1847.* Edited by Jaime E. Rodríguez O. (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1997. Pp. 127. \$16.95 paper.)
- FORGING MEXICO, 1821–1835.* By Timothy E. Anna. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. Pp. 330. \$40.00 cloth.)
- MEXICANS AT ARMS: PURO FEDERALISTS AND THE POLITICS OF WAR, 1845–1848.* By Pedro Santoni. (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1996. Pp. 323. \$29.50 cloth.)
- NATIONAL POPULAR POLITICS IN EARLY INDEPENDENT MEXICO, 1820–1847.* By Torcuato S. Di Tella. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. Pp. 383. \$55.00 cloth.)
- THE MEXICAN NATIONAL ARMY, 1822–1852.* By William A. DePalo, Jr. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1997. Pp. 280. \$39.95 cloth.)
- MILITARY POLITICAL IDENTITY AND REFORMISM IN INDEPENDENT MEXICO: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEMORIAS DE GUERRA (1821–1855).* By Will Fowler. (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 1996. Pp. 55. \$10.00 paper.)
- YUCATAN’S MAYA PEASANTRY AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CASTE WAR.* By Terry Rugeley. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. Pp. 243. \$40.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- THE MACHETE AND THE CROSS: CAMPESINO REBELLION IN YUCATAN.* By Don E. Dumond. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. Pp. 571. \$57.50 cloth.)
- SUMMER OF DISCONTENT, SEASONS OF UPHEAVAL: ELITE POLITICS AND RURAL INSURGENCY IN YUCATAN, 1876–1915.* By Allen Wells and Gilbert M. Joseph. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996. Pp. 406. \$55.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)

“Y más temible: la multiplicación geométrica de las sublevaciones, cada sargento se cree emperador en potencia, cada general calcula los metros o kilómetros que lo separan del Palacio de Gobierno.”

Carlos Monsiváis, “Prólogo”  
to *El gallo pitagórico*

Jaime Rodríguez uses as the frontispiece of his book a political cartoon published in an 1853 issue of the Mexican newspaper *El Universal*, captioned “Todos quieren ser presidentes.” The caption expresses clearly one reason for the persistent instability that pervaded nineteenth-century Mexican national and regional politics. Another reason was illuminated in the satire *El gallo pitagórico* by Juan Bautista Morales, nineteenth-century political commentator, federalist politician, and briefly governor of his natal state of Guanajuato.<sup>1</sup> In it Morales trenchantly berated the likes of Santa Anna and all other power-hungry and dictatorial types who stirred up rebellions in the name of liberty for *el pueblo* and then exacted from those they had “liberated” a high price in repression, corruption, and robbery of their meager means. For his pains, Morales ended up spending time in jail at the invitation of Santa Anna.

Explaining the political instability and chaos that characterized Mexico from the outset of the independence movement through most of the following century and beyond is the task undertaken by the authors of the works to be reviewed here. Allen Wells and Gilbert Joseph cite Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* in characterizing politics in the Yucatán Peninsula during the Porfiriato and the early years of the Mexican Revolution: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (p. xi). This statement also applies in part to Mexican national and regional politics of the entire century from the independence movement of the 1810s through the Revolution of the 1910s—a century of discontent and upheaval in which Mexico seemed to have come full circle. One of the morbid symptoms was the constant struggle that politicians, whether archetypal caudillos like Santa Anna or ideologues like Lucas Alamán and Benito Juárez, engaged in to seize and hold power, to become *presidente*.

The nineteenth century in Mexico proved to be so chaotic and complex that historians can scarcely study it, much less understand it. The best work on the nineteenth century written earlier in the twentieth, notably the monumental studies directed by Daniel Cosío Villegas and Moisés Gon-

1. Juan Bautista Morales, *El gallo pitagórico*, with a prologue by Carlos Monsiváis, facsimile reproduction of the original edition printed by Imprenta Tipográfica y Litográfica Ignacio Cumplido in 1845 (Guanajuato, Mexico: Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato, 1987).

zález, focused on the era of the Restored Republic and the Porfiriato, a quiescent period in comparison with the earlier decades. Yet Cosío Villegas, González, their colleagues, and subsequent historians (including some of those reviewed here) have demonstrated that the Porfiriato was as conflictive as the earlier part of the century.<sup>2</sup> At least many of the archival sources were more accessible for the Porfiriato than for the earlier part of the nineteenth century. Because of this problem, historians of Mexico have generally considered independence through the early republic to be a forgotten era.

One key to understanding nineteenth-century Mexico is to study its various regions. Only in the last thirty years or so have archives at the state and local levels begun to make their documents accessible to researchers and national archives opened new sources. Now historians are beginning to make sense of the political chaos that plagued the emergence of the Mexican nation. The 1990s in particular provided a rich trove of works, as noted in the reviews published in this journal at least every other year or so. Such works go beyond the emphasis on caudillos and caciques seen in publications of the 1970s and early 1980s. Those ubiquitous characters, who all wanted to be president, still appear but are now more deeply embedded in their contexts and interactions with other individuals and groups.

The nine books under review here span the period from the first disruptions of colonial authority in 1808 that led to Mexican independence to the year 1915, when the conflagrations of the revolution finally took hold in the Yucatán. Collectively, these works help scholars understand some of the political and social processes that have shaped Mexico, thanks to the authors' careful use and interpretation of a variety of sources. The continuing influence of federalism and regionalism in the nineteenth century and even throughout the twentieth emerges as a major theme as the authors try to determine how simultaneously destructive and constructive the political conflicts actually were. How did the perpetuation of contending forces prevent "the birth of the nation," assuring instead that the process of upheaval would begin over and over, regionally and then nationally? Who were the villains? These works discover quite a few. And who were the heroes? Most of the major independence leaders did not survive the war for independence or succumbed to violent ends during the following few years. Thus no coherent generation or group of "founding fathers" survived to provide continuity in the process of nation building from those first moments of the independence movement into the succeeding decades. Some of those involved

2. Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México: La república restaurada, la vida política* (Mexico City: Hermes, 1955); Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México: El porfiriato, la vida política interior*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Hermes, 1970); and Moisés González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México: El porfiriato, la vida social* (Mexico City: Hermes, 1957). The other multi-authored volumes of *Historia moderna de México* and numerous individual works by this group of historians also included the work of Emma Cosío Villegas and Luis González y González.

in finally securing independence, such as Agustín Iturbide, had actually been part of the opposition royalist forces and thus had not participated in the process of “forging a new nation” during the independence period, leading to a politically chaotic and contentious setting. Perhaps more important, the continuation of a strong patriarchal and hierarchical society in which the new republicanism with democratic impulses was implanted impeded the progress of democratization and equality.

### *Blaming Federalists or Centralists?*

Jaime Rodríguez emphasizes these arguments in the introduction to the collection of essays he edited, *The Origins of Mexican National Politics, 1808–1847*. These pieces were selected from a 1990 colloquium to provide a succinct and affordable text for Scholarly Resources to distribute to college classes, and they will work well for that purpose if the instructor combines them with pertinent background information for students. The essays were previously published with additional articles in *The Evolution of the Mexican Political System* (1993), also edited by Rodríguez, who is noted for illuminating the complex period of Mexican history during and after independence.<sup>3</sup>

Rodríguez maintains that early interpretations of Mexican independence and the first years of nationhood, which were made by participants in the events and contributed to the ideological conflict, have persisted in the historiography and obfuscated understanding of the process of nation building in Mexico. The image resulting from traditional interpretations is constant conflict, a nation mired in its colonial past, on the verge of chaos when not in it, unable to cope with the crises that beset Mexicans in their everyday lives. Rodríguez seeks to show that despite the crises, a new political process emerged beginning with the juntas that formed throughout the empire in 1808 in response to Napoleon’s invasion of Spain. Rodríguez and most of the authors of the essays and other books reviewed here acknowledge their debt to the late Nettie Lee Benson, professor of Mexican and Latin American history and director of the famed Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas. Her work on provincial deputations showed that despite war and conflict, Mexico was forming its own political system based on Hispanic tradition as well as modern ideas and innovation.<sup>4</sup>

3. Rodríguez has edited another important work on this period: *The Independence of Mexico and the Creation of the New Nation* (Los Angeles and Irvine: UCLA Latin American Center Publications and the Mexico-Chicano Program, University of California, Irvine, 1989).

4. Nettie Lee Benson, *The Provincial Deputation in Mexico: Harbinger of Provincial Autonomy, Independence, and Federalism* (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas Press, 1992); originally published in Spanish as *Diputación provincial y el federalismo mexicano* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1955).

*The Origins of Mexican National Politics* includes an essay by Christon Archer, "Politicization of the Army of New Spain during the War of Independence, 1810–1821." He explores how the royalist army became politicized during the course of the independence period as its commanders usurped more power over territory, individuals, and resources in New Spain. Archer argues that Spanish royalist commanders disagreed among themselves over strategies and resources, discriminated against creole officers, and alienated civilians with their strong-arm tactics. Despite all its efforts, the royalist army could not defeat the various insurgent bands operating in many areas of the country. When the army in Spain rebelled against the Crown in 1820, the army in New Spain was disempowered and quickly lost control.

In perhaps the most engaging essay in this short collection, "The First Popular Elections in Mexico City, 1812–1813," Virginia Guedea explains the importance of the first popular elections in Mexico City. Using election reports and instructions from the Spanish Cortes, Guedea delineates the electoral process, the groups involved, their preelection politicking, their manner of carrying out the vote, the winners, and the conflicts surrounding the first election with significant popular participation that included Indian men. Although the elections stipulated by the Spanish Cortes were indirect and ultimately elitist, they still involved a large segment of the male population for the first time. Guedea found in the extensive documentary records of the 1812 constitutional town council elections in Mexico City that the electoral juntas in some parishes did not enforce restrictions against blacks, *castas*, and others who were supposed to have been excluded from the franchise in the Constitution of 1812. What Guedea does not discuss about this or subsequent elections to the provincial deputation and the Cortes is exactly who voted, how many votes they cast, and for whom. The specifics may never be known, but the evidence indicates that the elections of 1812–1813 greatly broadened the formal political participation of the populace and set an important precedent for the future. As is shown in the works by Terry Rugeley and Torquato Di Tella, once men had the right to vote, they would not be easily denied that right later on.

Rodríguez's contribution to *The Origins of Mexican National Politics*, "The Constitution of 1824 and the Formation of the Mexican State," examines the roots of the Constitution of 1824. He argues, following Benson's work on the provincial deputations, that the constitution resulted from an evolutionary process based on late-colonial political organization and the political experience of Mexican home rule since 1808 and briefly under the Constitution of 1812. That previous experience, as well as the disastrous experiment with a centralized empire under Agustín Iturbide, convinced most Mexicans that a federalist system was the only acceptable form of government. Rodríguez concurs with Benson that the government formed

under the Constitution of 1824 prevented Mexico from fragmenting into many smaller states. The federalist organization did not, however, stem the political conflict that would continue to plague the nation and cause some regions to secede. Yet in the subsequent conflicts, the centralizing forces were the ones that caused parts of the country to fragment, as in the case of Texas in 1833 and the Yucatán temporarily (a theme more fully developed in Timothy Anna's book).

Barbara Tenenbaum's contribution to *The Origins of Mexican National Politics*, "The Making of a Fait Accompli: Mexico and the Provincias Internas, 1776–1846," supports the argument that federalism was rooted in the late-colonial experience and suited the new nation. Under the colonial regime, the northern provinces, organized as the Provincias Internas, were sparsely populated by natives, missionaries, and a few settlers. They received little attention from colonial authorities except after 1776, when the Spanish Crown attempted to improve their territorial security. Many thought at the time that the provisions defending the north drained the treasury—that these colonies were costing more than they were worth. This attitude toward the northern provinces continued even after independence. Tenenbaum shows nevertheless that the northern provinces paid for themselves and on balance returned profitable revenues to the treasury in Mexico City. Before independence, mining and the tobacco monopoly had provided most of those revenues. After independence, trade through the customhouses in the region, especially from the port of Tampico, contributed significantly to the national coffers. Tenenbaum argues that Norteños were loyal Mexicans in general, even when they could not make their voices heard in Mexico City. Often they paid for services that Mexico City should have provided but did not, perhaps the price of the relative autonomy they enjoyed.

In *Forging Mexico, 1821–1835*, Timothy Anna attempts to explain why federalism failed to provide a stable political system on which to build the nation despite its early attractiveness to most Mexicans, its historical roots, and its suitability for the national project. He blames the centralists, naming centralist-conservative leader Lucas Alamán, another native son of Guanajuato and contemporary of federalist rival Juan Bautista Morales, as the villain here. In their active resistance to federalism and to the states, the centralists contributed in major ways to political instability, Anna asserts. Centralists constantly resorted to force to control the federalist impulses of the states, thus undermining the centralists' own argument that federalism would lead to disunity and chaos. Instead, the centralists made chaos inevitable by constantly intervening with the country's armed might in the "natural process" of federalism (a familiar scenario). Conservative authoritarian leaders like Alamán resort to force and violence because they fear the impulses of the disorderly criminal plebe. Their usual argument for preventing chaos is to take up arms. Ironically, Anna's argument echoes that of

Michael Costeloe, except that Costeloe blames centralists for undermining with their constant bickering their own centralist regime after it replaced federalism in 1835.<sup>5</sup>

Anna argues in *Forging Mexico* that federalism grew out of imperatives and demands by the provinces and states. The municipal and provincial governments established by the Bourbon reforms in the form of intendancies assumed greater importance than before. After Napoleon invaded Spain in 1808, municipalities and provinces assumed a crucial role in claiming the right to rule until the legitimate ruler returned. Later, provincial participation in the Cortes de Cádiz and subsequent negotiations over the Spanish Constitution of 1812 allowed the provinces to voice demands for autonomy. Finally, after the Iturbide regime fell, the most radical federalist provinces (especially Jalisco) argued that the country had once again reverted to a "state of nature," and therefore the municipalities and provinces had the right to rule again in concert with other provinces until they constituted a new government for the nation. Under the new government, the provinces would have internal sovereignty and be equal among themselves, leaving to the national government only the governance of external affairs. Federalism, then, was neither imposed by the center nor imported as a foreign model but emerged in the 1820s out of necessity and prior experience. In making these arguments, Anna supports those made by Benson and Rodríguez, but he comes to these conclusions via his own extensive work on the period.<sup>6</sup>

Taking his argument further in this most recent work, Anna shows that the centralists led by Alamán constantly sought to thwart the federalist impulse and succeeded by dominating the writing of the new constitution in 1823 and 1824. In the second congress formed to write a new constitution, the Congreso General Constituyente, the centralists promoted representation based on population, which sounds very democratic. But they knew that the most populous central states of Mexico and Puebla, where the centralists predominated, could easily command the most votes. The resulting constitution provided for a federal government but limited the power of the states despite proclaiming that the separate states were sovereign—an unworkable mix. Further, the interim central government of the Supremo Poder Ejecutivo, of which Alamán was a member, did not hesitate to employ force by using the army to defeat the most ardent radical federalist opponents during the transitional period from empire to constitutional republic.

5. See Michael Costeloe, *The Central Republic of Mexico, 1835–1846: Hombres de Bien and the Age of Santa Anna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). In Costeloe's account, Santa Anna comes out as a sometime mediator among all the contending political forces rather than just an opportunistic caudillo.

6. Anna's earlier work on this period includes *The Fall of the Royal Government in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); and *The Mexican Empire of Iturbide* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

After the constitution was written, the states were left to protect and develop federalism, a task at which they only partially succeeded.

The question of the balance of power between the Mexican central government and the states remained a contentious issue throughout the nineteenth century and is still being worked out today, as the recent elections have shown. Anna captures the essence of Mexican political conflict in the early republic and demonstrates in *Forging Mexico* that it was part of the process of forging a nation. He reminds readers that the view from the states differs greatly from that promoted by the primarily centralist historiography that has prevailed in the literature. Even so, Anna did not venture into provincial or state sources except in relying on those available in the national archive and library.

Alamán and his centralist-conservative colleagues were not the only villains here. Anna brackets the centralists with the usual caudillo types like Santa Anna and Iturbide, the military, the Spaniards, and the Catholic Church as joint perpetrators of political instability in early national Mexico. Not all of these players were opportunists, however, as Morales claimed. Alamán remained true to his political roots. Like Morales, he was a political ideologue who was determined to impose his conservative political agenda, which he thought would best serve the nation or at least its dominant classes.<sup>7</sup> Despite Anna's attempt to rescue the reputation of the federalists from the damage inflicted by the centralist perspective dominating the literature, the federalists, especially the more radical ones, still deserve some of the blame.

Federalists too resorted to arms in their political zeal, as Pedro Santoni clearly shows in *Mexicans at Arms: Puro Federalists and the Politics of War, 1845–1848*. All the works under review reveal federalists and liberals resorting to arms as often as centralists and conservatives throughout this entire period, even before war with the United States loomed imminent. The federalists contributed to political violence by stirring up popular support, using local militias, and wielding the army when they managed to hold power.

By the 1840s, three political parties had emerged out of the many factions of liberals, federalists, conservatives, and centralists. The Puros were radical liberals and mostly federalists. The moderates wanted a centralized regime and restrictions on political participation as did conservatives, but the moderates wanted to restrain the military and the Catholic Church, a decidedly liberal agenda. Conservatives wanted to resurrect the colonial

7. Donald Stevens has argued that political leaders like the conservative Alamán and the radical Gómez Farías remained politically consistent in their actions, but their political zeal and determination drove them to any lengths to impose their own political will on the nation. See Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).



regime. Led by Valentín Gómez Farías, the Puros advocated war against the United States in 1845 and sought to direct that effort. To garner military support for war when President José Joaquín de Herrera (himself a general) opposed it, the Puros presented themselves in their newspaper, *La Voz del Pueblo*, as friends of the regular army concerned about the welfare of soldiers and worried that the Herrera administration had squandered treasury funds that should have gone to provision soldiers with food and clothing. When military commanders would not support the Puros' way of prosecuting the war or opposed them politically, the Puros sought to deactivate parts of the regular army and replace them with reactivated *cívicos*, the civilian militias more sympathetic to federalist politics. Eventually, political and military opposition undermined the Puro federalists' efforts to prosecute a coherent defense against the devastating invasion. Mexico lost, and centralists successfully blamed not just the federalists but federalism per se. Santoni, like Anna, attempts to rescue the federalists' reputation. He argues that the federalists had a popular mandate to prosecute the war, but centralists and military commanders undermined the federalist effort, divided the nation, and made defending the country impossible.

*"The Dangerous Classes"*

None of the contending political parties or factions could have carried out their incessant armed struggles or even survived without popular alliances. Torcuato Di Tella explores these "complex and bewildering alliances" in *National Popular Politics in Early Independent Mexico, 1820–1847*. He finds that political factions of all persuasions involved considerable popular participation. Di Tella's larger purpose in his ongoing effort to interpret Latin American politics in general is not to explain the Mexican case per se but to determine why Mexico, unlike the other large countries that emerged during the independence era such as Brazil and Argentina, did not develop a strong dictatorship or centralized government early in its national experience.<sup>8</sup> Di Tella explains, "I have tried to see Mexican events as a sample, so to speak, of what was happening in other parts of Latin America. Not that the situation was similar everywhere; rather the contrary. Mexico was at one extreme of variation, due to its sheer size, the severity of its decay, and the violence of its attempts at independence" (p. viii).

In Mexico, he argues, popular participation mitigated against any one faction dominating the political landscape because of the constant shifts in alliances and coalitions, which were facilitated by involving everyone. Drawing on his previous work, Di Tella further maintains that the "most dangerous class" was the lower middle class, which he defines in urban areas

8. See Torcuato S. Di Tella, *Latin American Politics: A Theoretical Framework* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

as master artisans (who owned their own shops), shopkeepers, owners of mule trains, and other self-employed persons (excluding economically marginal ones like street vendors) and in rural areas as small landholders and prominent members of Indian communities. These groups were dangerous because of the constant economic insecurity in which they lived, straits that worsened during the last decades of the colonial period.<sup>9</sup> Always on the verge of losing their economic independence, sinking into penury, and becoming dependent laborers, members of this class formed shifting alliances. To protect their corporate economic interests invested in artisan guilds, confraternities, or Indian communities, they allied with conservative elites of the old regime, especially members of the Catholic hierarchy, who worked to protect corporate interests against the modernizing and secularizing policies of liberals.

But when those same conservative elites attempted to limit political participation to property owners, members of the lower middle class on the verge of losing property or rights flocked to the liberal camp. Liberals generally advocated broader political participation and definitions of citizenship. Di Tella argues in *National Popular Politics* that three issues explain the shifting alliances that fomented political unrest and prevented the development of dictatorship or a strong central regime during the first four decades of Mexico's national existence: economic security, the extent of political participation (couched in upper-class fears of an unruly populace), and the role of religion and the Catholic Church in politics. These issues, rather than the conflict over federalism or centralism emphasized by Anna and Santoni, were the causal factors according to Di Tella. By integrating social and political history, Di Tella presents a sophisticated analysis, although he does not include the voices of the populace, which are filtered through the documents left by the political elite.

### *Politics and National Identity: The Military's Role*

Will Fowler in *Military Political Identity and Reformism in Independent Mexico: An Analysis of the Memorias de Guerra (1821–1855)* and William De Palo Jr. in *The Mexican National Army, 1822–1852* provide a better understanding of the role played by the military in early national Mexico. DePalo presents a traditional military history based primarily on government documents on the military and the papers of significant military and political

9. Di Tella first used the term *dangerous classes* to refer to various popular Mexican groups that tended to participate in revolts and uprisings in "The Dangerous Classes in Early Independent Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 5, pt. 1 (1973):79–105. In the work under review here, he explores their continuing involvement in Mexican politics after independence. For an explanation why these groups became politicized and insecure and thus bound to participate in insurgent, rebellious activity, see Brian Hamnett, *Roots of Insurgency: Mexican Regions, 1750–1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

figures. He summarizes military policies passed by the various governments after independence until 1852 as well as the organizing and funding of the regular army and civic militias that resulted. DePalo emphasizes major military campaigns and the problems involved in carrying out military responsibilities. The campaigns that the army lost, the Texas Revolution and the War with the United States, receive the most attention. Difficulties included lack of resources, poor training and education of commanders and soldiers, forced recruitment often among Indian communities, and a contentious political climate that precluded coherent and well-executed policy and strategy.

DePalo cites the *Cuerpo de Sanidad Militar* as one example of the many problems plaguing the military. It was supposed to have been part of the effort to modernize and reform the military by providing soldiers with health care and treatment of injuries. During the Texas campaign, however, the corps was so ill-equipped and understaffed that soldiers continued to rely on *curanderas* (traditional healers) and their own *soldaderas*, the women who customarily provided logistical support to Mexican armies.<sup>10</sup> DePalo claims that the *curanderas* were often more skilled than many of the trained physicians assigned to the corps, which languished for lack of staff and funding.

Fowler's purpose in *Military Political Identity and Reformism in Independent Mexico* is to determine the basis of identity among the military elite, specifically the officers who served as war ministers from 1821 to 1855, by means of their reports to the nation, the *Memorias de Guerra*. The military *fuero* (privilege) formed a significant basis of the military elite's identity, and protecting it was a major reason that officers were constantly getting involved in politics. Yet the *Memorias* reveal a desire and efforts to reform the army, not just for its own sake but to improve society. War ministers promoted engineering and medical education for officers as well as basic education for all soldiers, which DePalo shows had some impact on the educational level in Mexico City but little effect elsewhere. These ministers also advocated reforms to make recruitment fairer. They sought to encourage retention of skilled and educated engineers and medical personnel by assuring officers salaries and pensions as well as pensions for their widows and families. Many of these reforms went nowhere, as did the *Cuerpo de Sanidad Militar*, for lack of attention and resources.

Fowler's argument that the military elite was reformist rather than traditional is based primarily on the *Memorias* of the most reformist of war ministers, General José María Tornel y Mendivil. Perhaps the lack of real reformist activity on the part of the remaining war ministers explains why the reforms that Tornel worked for so passionately were seldom carried out.

Taken together, these two works show how seldom policy on the

10. Elizabeth Salas has explored the role of *soldaderas* in greater detail in *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

military was actually carried out, even when the military received substantial funds from the national treasury. In 1833 Tornel received a budget increase of forty-six thousand pesos, a tremendous sum of money in those days. He intended to use it to regenerate the Medical Corps, although he contended that it was not nearly enough. For a few short years beginning in 1834, he revived the unit, but by 1843, it was languishing again.

Other questions about the military remain. Scholars have only a vague idea how troops were raised, supplied, and paid. Coercion played a role in raising troops, but certainly that was not the only way. For example, historians are often left with the erroneous impression that Santa Anna had the ability to raise suddenly, as if by magic, a large force to support whatever scheme he was involved in at the moment. It is evident from local sources, especially town council deliberations, that troops garrisoned locally were often a burden.<sup>11</sup> They harassed women, destroyed property, and often had to be fed, clothed, and otherwise supplied by local governments. Nor have the relations between the permanent regular army, the active militia, and the civic militias and their particular roles been delineated. References made to the military in most of the works reviewed give readers no idea of which of the three distinct forces is meant. In particular, the role of the active militia, a national force intended to supplement the regular army, needs to be clarified. Another area that deserves careful analysis is the military budget, especially the politics behind it and how the military spent the money it actually received.

### *The Yucatán: A Regional Case Study of Political Conflict*

The final three works reviewed here focus on the Yucatán, a region racked by endemic ethnic and political violence for most of the nineteenth century and beyond. Whereas the other works considered emphasize conflicts that the authors believe derived largely from ideological and economic differences, these three works demonstrate the ethnic dimension of political conflict in one region. While the experience in the Yucatán may have been extreme in the level of ethnic involvement in political violence there, it was not unique to Mexico in the nineteenth century. As the Caste War raged in the Yucatán in the 1840s, an Indian uprising flared in north-central Mexico in the Sierra Gorda. Some of the grievances that sparked the two conflagrations were similar, particularly the problem of land tenure.

Terry Rugeley set out to discover in *Yucatán's Maya Peasantry and the Origins of the Caste War* (which began as his dissertation) the origins of grievances that led to the Mayan peasant revolt against whites that came to be known as the Caste War. Nelson Reed's classic account, *The Caste War of Yu-*

11. This comment is based on my own reading of *ayuntamiento* records for the city of Guajuato in the 1820s.

catán (1964), had provided a narrative of the war and analyzed the land and tax issues involved in the revolt.<sup>12</sup> Reed posited a great social and cultural gulf between the various racial and ethnic groups on the peninsula: the creoles or whites, the mestizos, and the Mayan peasants all regarded themselves as worlds apart, as distinct castes. Rugeley, in contrast, found in notary and church records and in court transcripts a far more complex situation in which relationships between whites and Indians were not always based strictly on ethnicity or cultural distance. Mayan communities were fully integrated into colonial society, not apart from it. Mayan peasants owned land and participated in agrarian capitalism, particularly those who were native officeholders in Mayan communities. These prominent members of Mayan society benefited handsomely from their role as mediators between their communities and white authorities, for whom they collected taxes and from whom they received a percentage. Rugeley also found that to protect their interests, the Maya developed ties of patronage with creoles.

Rugeley's sources for *Yucatán's Maya Peasantry* confirm that land tenure was an issue of contention after independence, especially the privatization of the *terrenos baldíos*, the common or public lands on which Mayan communities had traditionally relied for subsistence. Civil as well as church taxes may have caused more conflict. The Maya in some communities also resented the power wielded by creole priests, the punishments they meted out, and the constant demands they made. Creole priests demanded not only taxes like the hated head tax on all adults but also fees for religious services, forced-labor services, and food and produce. These were all traditional obligations that Indian communities "owed" to their religious protectors and had apparently complied with except when priests exceeded acceptable limits. Civilian creoles too exacted taxes and labor from Indians and after independence conscripted them into the armies and militias of the new nation. While the Maya tolerated the demands to a certain degree, they did not hesitate to use the Spanish justice system to seek redress of grievances when limits were violated or to negotiate conflicts among themselves. The Maya thus were active agents in protecting their interests before magistrates, in the courts, and before the Catholic Church.

Rugeley argues in *Yucatán's Maya Peasantry* that the War for Independence offered the promise that the Maya would assume the privilege of citizenship alongside whites—as the Cortes and the Constitution of 1812 stipulated—and thus opened the possibility of formal political participation and the abolition of the hated church head tax and other forced demands and services. Yet independence resulted in the abandonment of some protections that the colonial regime had afforded Indian communities, par-

12. See Nelson Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatán* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1964). Another work emphasizing the land question is Moisés González Navarro, *Raza y tierra: La guerra de castas y el henequén* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1970).

ticularly access to public lands. The Catholic Church, despite its weakened position after independence, resisted abolition of the head tax and forced-labor service. In the latter demand, the clergy was supported by creoles who relied on Indian labor, leaving the Maya disappointed. When creole federalists promised once again in the 1830s to abolish the head tax in return for Mayan support in their struggle against the centralists of the national government, Indians joined in large numbers, only to be let down again. Once they obtained arms and fighting experience, they took up their own fight and revolted. The larger national armed struggle between federalists and centralists thus provided both opportunity and initiative for this regional conflict to escalate into the Caste War.

By finding Mayan voices in notary and court records, Rugeley was able to study specific Mayan towns and villages and the various conflicts troubling them. While land tenure was indeed the major issue in some areas, conflicts with clerics predominated in others. This nuanced approach helped Rugeley determine why some Mayan communities and regions were more rebellious than others and why certain communities in the east and south assumed leadership of the rebellion.

Perhaps because of the exigencies of academic publishing, Rugeley's account stops in the middle of the action, ending just as the war begins. Although his purpose is to analyze the origins of the war rather than its course, readers are left hanging, wondering how it all worked out. For that part of the story, one must go back to Reed—or with lots of time and patience, read Don Dumond's *The Machete and the Cross: Campesino Rebellion in Yucatán*. More than twenty years in the making and over four hundred pages in length, this book has been marketed on the jacket as "the anticipated complete history of the Caste War." Dumond tells readers everything they might want to know about peasant rebellion in the Yucatán in the nineteenth century—and more. Yet despite the billing, studies of the past can never be complete or completely known. History always leaves us with mystery.

An anthropologist, Dumond covers the Caste War, its origins, and the colonial roots of ethnic and class relations in the peninsula in great detail. His narrative extends from 1511 to 1903, from the first contacts between Europeans and Maya until the defeat in 1903 of Chan Santa Cruz, "the Indian capital" during the war. Dumond emphasizes the nineteenth century nonetheless. Despite the length and detail of the work, *The Machete and the Cross* is decidedly incomplete, as can be noted in examining the sources that Dumond used. Most of his information comes from contemporary historical accounts written primarily by members of the creole elite, the major sources being Eligio Ancona and Serapio Baqueiro, both nineteenth-century historians from the Yucatán. Dumond relies heavily on newspapers, official periodicals, and diplomatic dispatches (including commercial reports and travel accounts) from the archive of British Honduras (now

Belize), where the Maya secured weapons, sold produce, and found work. None of these sources provide much of the Mayan peasant perspective, except for a few letters sent by the Mayan caciques (*batabs*) of Chan Santa Cruz to the governors of Belize. Although the book is a tedious read and a bit annoying in its frequent signposts (“as will be seen in the next chapter” or “as will shortly be seen”), *The Machete and the Cross* presents a wealth of detailed information not always provided in previous accounts.

Allen Wells and Gilbert Joseph, veteran historians of the Yucatán, provide a sophisticated analysis in *Summers of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatán*. They culled a wide range of sources from newspapers to notary documents to penal and court records in determining why conflict in the Yucatán was quelled in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and why the Mexican Revolution did not arrive there until 1915.<sup>13</sup> Wells and Joseph focus on the *camarillas*, the regional political factions formed by kinship and patron-client ties and dominated by the prominent Yucatec planter families. Two *camarillas* had competed for control of the Yucatán since the second empire under Maximilian. The liberal Molina-Montes family controlled one faction, while the conservative Cantón family headed the other. The competition between them often became bitter, although they were not that politically different by the late nineteenth century. Both families participated in the henequen economy. As long as the two factions were bickering, the struggles between Maya and whites continued and the economy suffered. Porfirio Díaz curbed the rivalry by “selecting” military commanders as candidates for governor, alternating candidates favored by the two strongest political factions, and providing favors to both camps. His manipulations succeeded in bringing the most intense manifestations of rivalry under control.

To end the Caste War, Díaz severed the sparsely populated southeastern part of the Yucatán, where the war continued, made it the territory of Quintana Roo, and sent in his most ruthless commanders and troops to pacify and develop the area. In perhaps the most interesting part of *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval*, Wells and Joseph show that as rebellious Mayan communities were pacified or obliterated, the henequen planters moved in simultaneously to develop further the east and upper south of the peninsula. To control labor and maintain peace, the planters initiated a policy of isolation to limit workers’ communication outside their communities (particularly given a growing labor movement in Mérida and beyond). Isolation involved restricting the movement of workers on planters’ estates and in the villages from which they drew additional labor, encouraging en-

13. Some of their works include Allen Wells, *Yucatan’s Gilded Age: Haciendas, Henequen, and International Harvester, 1860–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); and Gilbert Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880–1924*, rev. ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1988).

dogamous marriages, keeping workers dependent through debt, and using bounty hunters and threats of severe punishment if workers ran away. As the demand for henequen increased internationally, more and more villagers were absorbed into the permanent labor force on the estates. This trend ultimately weakened or destroyed many Mayan villages and assured they would no longer serve as the locus of resistance and revolt. Indians continued to present their grievances, now mostly directed against their planter masters, before the justice system. Increasingly, the courts failed them. On the few occasions when peons dared to protest overtly with violence against labor abuses, authorities quickly repressed their protests. Resistance continued intermittently as “seasons of upheaval” but did not break out as widespread revolt against the planter elite until 1915, when the Mexican Revolution came to the Yucatán from the outside, the place the oligarchy had correctly feared.

### *Something Must Be Missing*

Taken together, these works deepen our understanding of the sources of political conflict in nineteenth-century Mexico, but the almost exclusive focus on political conflict and the men who fueled it distorts historians’ view. One might ask how a country could survive, much less build the institutions necessary to serve its people, under such violent conditions. How did Mexico sustain significant population increase during the nineteenth century? Something must be missing from the story. Women, for example, are virtually invisible in these accounts or are patronized. Nor does one find any discussion of the development of local institutions: town governments, school systems, public works, and public health. DePalo mentions the soldaderas and gives them their due in a few sentences. Anna recalls the role of Leona Vicario but patronizingly calls her by her first name, while using surnames for men. A few Mayan women make brief appearances in the works on the Yucatán. More were surely there, neither invisible nor inactive. Women became teachers and nurses and helped build the public school systems and hospitals crucial to a modern state. Women performed other social welfare functions such as raising funds for orphanages, schools, and hospitals. In Guanajuato at least and probably elsewhere, women formed a patriotic society during the war against the United States to help supply the troops. And how much worse the military would have fared during its various campaigns without soldaderas to gather food and supplies, prepare meals, move and set up the camps, care for the injured and sick, and bury the dead. If the soldaderas’ services had not been available, the military might not have survived as a fighting force.

After reading these works, one cannot help but wonder that if there had been no military or armed force for politicians to rely on, perhaps they would have negotiated more rather than involve the country in constant



armed conflict and destruction.<sup>14</sup> These works suggest a broader commentary not just on Mexico in the nineteenth century but on modern nations and their proclivity to destroy others and themselves through violence, force of arms, and military might, all in the quest to get rich, to impose one's ideology, or to be president. It may be fitting if somewhat ironic that a woman has written one of the few works on nineteenth-century Mexico that illuminates a more constructive process of building a republican nation and civic society, one that was occurring despite the violence.<sup>15</sup> Alicia Hernández Chávez's *La tradición republicana del buen gobierno* avoids the common over-emphasis on political conflict and makes one hope that more works like hers will be reviewed in these pages over the next decade. To be sure, the process of building the Mexican nation in the nineteenth century involved considerable political conflict, and the works reviewed here help explain the pervasiveness of the violence surrounding that conflict through innovative approaches, a wealth of sources, sophisticated analyses, and a focus on regions. What is needed now to provide what is missing is to develop an approach that can integrate the constructive and destructive processes of nation-building in order to understand Mexico since independence more fully.

14. Even in the case of the Yucatec Maya, the availability of arms contributed to their ability to mount a revolt and maintain it. It was not until the Maya were forced into the military that they gained the right to carry firearms. Once they obtained this right, the Maya sought arms from whatever source, whether smuggling or legitimate commerce, often through British Belize. It seems doubtful that they could have carried out their revolt for so long with only their machetes.

15. Alicia Hernández Chávez, *La tradición republicana del buen gobierno* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1993).