Meyer, Michael C. *Huerta: A Political Portrait*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972.
———. *Mexican Rebel: Pascual Orozco and the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1915*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967.
Raat, William D. "The Diplomacy of Suppression: *Los Revoltosos*, Mexico and the United States, 1906–1911." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 56 (1976): 529–60.
Ross, Stanley R. *Francisco I. Madero, Apostle of Mexican Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1955.
Shadle, Stanley F. *Andrés Molina Enríquez: Mexican Land Reformer of the Revolutionary Era*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994.
Sherman, John W. "Revolution on Trial: The 1909 Tombstone Proceedings against Ricardo Flores Magón, Antonio Villarreal and Librado Rivera." *Journal of Arizona History* 32 (1991): 173–94.
Truett, Samuel. *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006.
Turner, John Kenneth. *Barbarous Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969.
Womack, John, Jr. *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. New York: Knopf, 1968.

CHAPTER 27

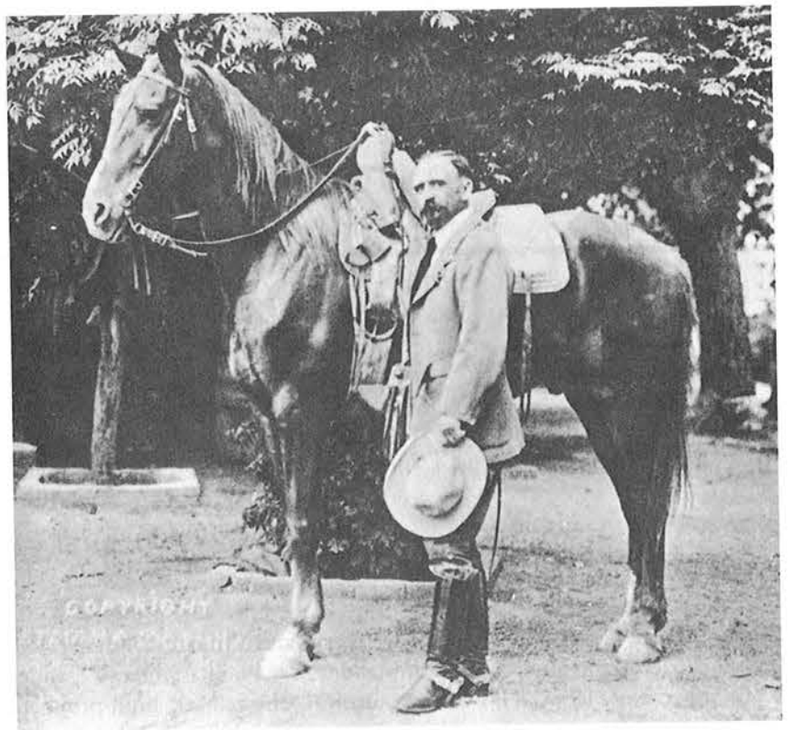
Madero and the Failure of Democracy

In late May 1911, on his way to Veracruz and ultimate exile, Porfirio Díaz reputedly told Victoriano Huerta, the commander of his military escort, "Madero has unleashed a tiger. Now let's see if he can control it." The remark, both prophetic and reflective of Díaz's keen perception of his fellow countrymen, augured ominous consequences. For the next decade Mexico would be torn apart, and the catharsis would be slow in coming. There would be little time to repair the devastation of war or to refashion the contours of society. Politics would undermine altruism.

DISAPPOINTING REFORMS

Bursting with optimistic idealism, Madero approached his presidential challenge with all the fresh enthusiasm of the novice. Mexico was embarking upon a democratic era, and democracy, Madero contended, would be equal to the task. But Madero the president, unlike Madero the revolutionary, found himself quickly besieged with demands from all sides. Only when established in the presidential office did he begin to realize fully that the revolution had profoundly different meanings to different groups of Mexicans. The spurious alliance began to break up irretrievably. Of the disparate elements he had previously counted in his ranks, those of nineteenth-century liberal persuasion, interested in political reform and the growth of democracy, supported him with unabashed devotion. But both the aristocratic elite he displaced and the social revolutionaries he embraced were increasingly displeased with the modest steps he undertook. The press began to assail him mercilessly, but, in the best democratic tradition, he gave it full rein and stoically accepted the barbed criticism and cruel satires.

It was only natural that Madero should be more responsive to the prodding of his former supporters. Although he could defy anyone to show him where he had ever promised sweeping reform, he did, nevertheless, embark upon a meager and imperfect



Francisco I. Madero (1873–1913). President of Mexico in the crucial period following the overthrow of Díaz, Madero had a faith in democracy that proved ill suited to the political realities of the day.

program to restructure the prevailing social order. Though unwilling to accede to Zapata's urgent demand that land be immediately restored to the villages, the president appointed the National Agrarian Commission, under the chairmanship of his conservative cousin Rafael Hernández, to study the land question. Hernández urged that the government begin purchasing a few private estates for subdivision and sale to the small farmer. But only ten million pesos were allocated to the project, and the hacendados demanded such high prices for the land that even this modest plan was soon abandoned in favor of restoring some of the ejido lands that had been seized illegally during the late Porfiriato. The burden of proof, however, fell on the villages, and few village leaders were able to cope with the bewildering legal arguments thrown in their faces by the hacendados' lawyers. A handful of cases were settled in favor of the villages, but progress on the agrarian question was meager.

The story was much the same in the field of labor reform. Late in 1912 the congress authorized the formation of the Department of Labor but placed it, too, under the jurisdiction of conservative Hernández, a man whose quixotic faith in the law of supply and demand was never shaken. The budget for the Department of Labor was a paltry

forty-six thousand pesos. After a convention with government officials in Mexico City, a group of textile factory owners promised to initiate a ten-hour day; but in practice the working schedules did not change.

Perhaps the greatest benefit accruing to labor during the Madero presidency was that labor organizers no longer felt so intimidated as they had in the past. Encouraged by the possibilities of revolutionary change, a group of radicals under the leadership of Juan Francisco Moncaleano, a Spanish anarchist, founded the Casa del Obrero Mundial. Not properly a union, the Casa served as a place where labor leaders could meet, exchange views, and, through their official newspaper, *Luz*, disseminate propaganda favorable to the cause. But the government, caught between business interests and labor demands, was jittery. Madero feared labor strikes, and, although no labor massacres on the scale of Cananea and Río Blanco were recorded, government troops and local police authorities were used to disperse striking workers on a number of occasions. Hernández interpreted the strikes as inspired by agitators rather than resulting from intolerable conditions and finally had Moncaleano expelled from the country. But the strikes continued, and labor unrest began to disrupt the Mexican economy, growing shaky once again. The gains by labor as a result of these strikes were negligible.

In the field of education the social reformers were again disappointed. Although Madero had promised to broaden the educational base during the presidential campaign, the annual budget for 1911–12 allocated only 7.8 percent for educational programs, as opposed to 7.2 percent during the last year of the Porfiriato. The new president did manage to build some fifty new schools and to initiate a modest program of school lunches for the underprivileged. But his education program is really more notable for what it did not do. No dramatic increase in expenditures was requested, nor was any project for revising the científico curriculum advanced.

In sum, the liberals of the twentieth-century stripe felt swindled by Madero as the administration failed at both the national and state levels. As the disappointed asked themselves why the president did not do more, some most assuredly must have realized that he believed that reform should proceed at a slow and gradual pace so as not to disrupt the fragile economy. But another factor was involved as well. Madero's hands were tied and his energies diverted by a series of revolts that broke out against him before he even had a chance to make himself comfortable in the presidential chair. The revolution's lack of ideological cohesion had begun to exact a terrible toll and in the process imperiled the administration itself.

REVOLTS AGAINST THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Emiliano Zapata was the first to pronounce against the new regime. In November 1911 the Zapatistas promulgated their famous *Plan de Ayala*. The general principles were those of Zapata himself, but the development and articulation were the work of Otilio Montaño, a schoolteacher from Ayala. After withdrawing recognition of Madero and recognizing Chihuahuan Pascual Orozco as titular head of the rebellion, the plan spelled out its program of agrarian reform.

> The lands, woods, and water that the landlords, científicos, or bosses have usurped... will be immediately restored to the villages or citizens who hold the corresponding titles to them.... The usurpers who believe they have a right to

> those properties may present their claims to special courts that will be established on the triumph of the Revolution. Because the great majority of Mexicans own nothing more than the land they walk on, and are unable to improve their social condition in any way... because lands, woods, and water are monopolized in a few hands... one-third of these properties will be expropriated, with prior indemnification, so that the villages and citizens of Mexico may obtain ejidos, townsites, and fields.[1]

The armed conflict began immediately and quickly spread from Morelos to the neighboring states of Guerrero, Tlaxcala, Puebla, Mexico, and even into the Federal District. When Madero's federal commanders were unable to contain the spread of the rebellion, they were replaced by others who promised to conduct a more vigorous campaign. But the Zapatista army continued to grow, and Madero was unable to thwart it. By early 1912 Zapata had disrupted railroad and telegraph service and taken over a number of towns; he had repeatedly defeated the federals and had the government on the run.

At approximately the same time General Bernardo Reyes launched a second movement in the north. In some ways Madero was more concerned with the Reyistas than with the Zapatistas. He feared that General Reyes still enjoyed a wide base of support among the army. Reyes crossed over into Mexico from the United States in the middle of December 1911 but found few Mexicans willing to rally to his banner. Unlike Zapata, Reyes was associated in the public mind with the old regime, and the northern Mexicans were not prepared to embrace his movement, even if many believed that Reyes had been treated unfairly in the recent presidential elections. Realizing that his sluggish revolution was not garnering sufficient support, on Christmas Day Reyes surrendered to a detachment of rurales. The commander of Mexico's third military zone, General Jerónimo Treviño, sent him first to prison in Monterrey and then had him transferred to the Prisión Militar de Santiago Tlaltelolco in Mexico City to await trial for treason.

At the end of the year a third revolt broke out against Madero in Chihuahua. Emilio Vásquez Gómez, believing that he and his brother Francisco had been unfairly treated in the last elections, launched his movement calling for Madero's ouster from office. At the end of January Madero was shocked to learn that the Vasquistas had captured Ciudad Juárez. The president knew full well the significance of this border city—he had seen his own revolt triumph there. Realizing the popularity that Pascual Orozco enjoyed in the north, Madero commissioned the Chihuahua commander to take charge of the government campaigns. For the rank and file of the Vásquez Gómez army Orozco—not Madero—had been responsible for the overthrow of Díaz. Orozco had recruited the troops and led them in battle. He was the symbol of Chihuahua manhood and living proof that a poor, indifferently educated northerner could humble a professional army trained in the big city. The Vasquistas did not want to fight Orozco, so they agreed to meet with him. In the simple, folksy idiom of the north, Orozco made an impassioned speech calling for national unity in an hour of crisis, and he persuaded the rebel army to lay down arms without firing another shot.

1. The entire plan is quoted in Jesús Silva Herzog, *Breve historia de la revolución mexicana* vol. 1 (Mexico City, 1962), pp. 240–46.

But a few months later the most serious antigovernment movement broke out in the north. Its leader was the same man who had just called for national unity and saved Madero from the Vasquista offensive—Pascual Orozco. The Orozco rebellion was complex. While it combined nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberalism, it enjoyed the conservative financial support of the Terrazas clique in Chihuahua, who believed they could control the movement once it triumphed.

The *Plan Orozquista*, dated March 25, 1912, was the most comprehensive call for reform yet voiced from Mexican soil. It caustically attacked Madero for failing to abide by his own principles as set forth to the Mexican nation in the Plan de San Luis Potosí. Government corruption was still in evidence at the state and local levels, and nepotism and favoritism were more exaggerated in 1912 than they had been at any time during the Porfiriato. Not only had Madero's cousin, Rafael Hernández, been awarded the critical cabinet position of secretary of development but his uncle, Ernesto Madero, had been made secretary of the treasury; a relative by marriage, José González Salas, was secretary of war; brother Gustavo Madero and four other members of the family were in the congress; brother Raúl Madero was given a series of government-supported military assignments; another relative was on the Supreme Court; two were in the postal service; and yet another was an undersecretary in the cabinet. Government army uniforms came from cotton cloth manufactured in Madero mills, while ammunition was purchased from cousin José Aguilar's munitions plant in Monterrey.

The Plan Orozquista, however, was more concerned with social than political reform. Drawing its inspiration from the Liberal Plan of 1906, it called for a ten-hour workday, restrictions on child labor, improved working conditions, higher wages, and the immediate suppression of the tiendas de raya. Anticipating the surge of economic nationalism that would sweep over Mexico in the next two decades, it called for the immediate nationalization of the railroads and the utilization of Mexican nationals in their operation. Agrarian reform also figured prominently. Persons who had resided on their land for twenty years were to be given title to it, while all lands illegally seized from the peasantry were to be returned. All lands owned by the government were to be distributed, and, most important, land owned by the hacendados, but not regularly cultivated, would be expropriated.

With alarming speed Orozco amassed a large army—some eight thousand strong—and began marching south to Mexico City. Capturing federally held towns along the way the rebels prepared themselves for a major showdown. The anticipated battle occurred at Rellano, close to the Chihuahua–Durango border. Madero's secretary of war, José González Salas, opted to command the government forces personally; and the army career officer was humiliated by Orozco's untrained rebels. As the federals retreated in disarray, González Salas, fearful of public rebuke, committed suicide. With panic growing in Mexico City, Madero named Victoriano Huerta to head a new government offensive. Huerta planned his campaigns with much deliberation and by late May 1912 felt strong enough to meet the rebels face to face. By sheer chance the artillery duel once again occurred on the fields of Rellano, but on this occasion the results were different. Not only was Huerta a better field commander than his predecessor, but the Orozquistas were handicapped by lack of ammunition. Huerta pushed them back to the north and in the process temporarily saved the teetering Madero government.

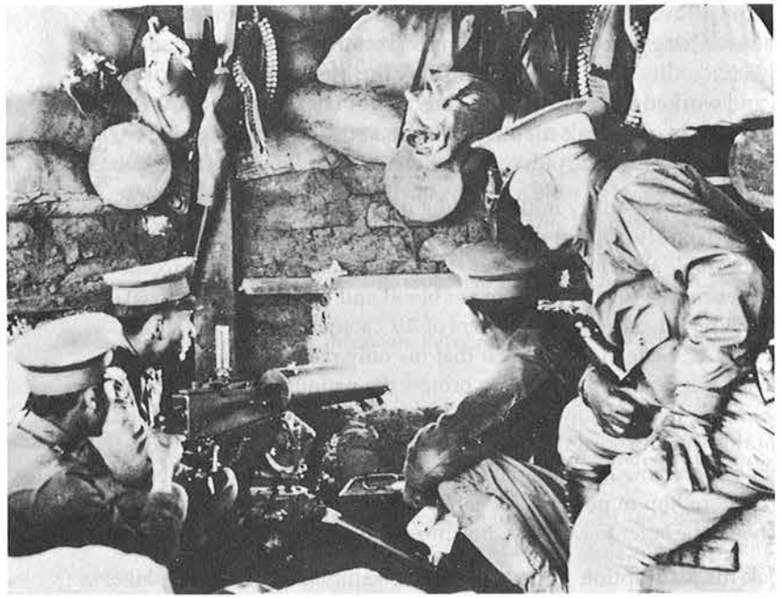
Madero had no time for rejoicing, for his woes were not yet over. In early October 1912 a fifth serious rebellion broke out against him. This time it was Félix Díaz, the nephew of Don Porfirio, who called an army together in Veracruz. The Felicista movement was clearly counterrevolutionary in orientation and comprised many disgruntled supporters of the former dictator. Félix Díaz appealed to the army and suggested that Madero had trampled on its honor by passing over many competent career officers and placing self-made revolutionary generals in charge of key garrisons. The troops stationed in Veracruz came to Díaz's support, but his appeal to other army units throughout the republic went unheeded. Late in October loyal army troops isolated the rebels in Veracruz and forced their surrender. A hastily conceived court-martial found Díaz guilty of treason and sentenced him to death. But Madero reviewed the sentence and, believing his enemies to be pitied rather than executed, commuted it to imprisonment. Díaz was taken under arms to the capital and placed in the Federal District penitentiary. Madero's generosity was in no way reciprocated. Within two months Félix Díaz in one Mexico City prison had established contact with Bernardo Reyes in another, and the two were plotting to overthrow the government. This sixth rebellion would succeed, and Madero would lose not only his office but, a victim of his own ideals, his life as well.

THE OVERTHROW OF MADERO

Planned for several months, the military coup that began in Mexico City on February 9, 1913, drastically altered the course of the Mexican Revolution. The capital had thus far been spared the ravages of the war that had engulfed much of the nation since November 1910. Now Mexico City residents would be given practical instruction in the full destructive significance of civil war. Early in the morning of February 9, General Manuel Mondragón, supported by several artillery regiments and military cadets, released Bernardo Reyes and Félix Díaz from their respective prisons and marched on the National Palace. Reyes, sporting a fancy military uniform and mounted on a white horse, led the charge and was felled by one of the first machine gun blasts. The rebel leadership then devolved on Félix Díaz. When loyal government troops repulsed the assault on the National Palace, Díaz led his troops westward across the city and installed his army in the Ciudadela, an old and well-fortified army arsenal. Madero, disregarding the advice of several confidants, named General Victoriano Huerta to command his troops. It proved to be a momentous decision.

For the next ten days—the *Decena Trágica*—Mexico City became a labyrinth of barricades, improvised fortifications, and trenches. Artillery fire exchanged between the rebels in the Ciudadela and the government troops in the National Palace destroyed buildings and set fires. As commercial establishments were forced to close their doors for the duration, consumer goods became scarce and people panicked. Downtown streets were strewn with burning cars, runaway horses, and abandoned artillery pieces. Live electric wires dangled precariously from their poles. Looters broke store windows and carried off wares with complete impunity. On one occasion an artillery barrage opened a breach in the wall of the Belén prison and hundreds of inmates scurried through the opening to freedom. A few surveyed the chaos outside and decided to remain.

With neither side able to gain a clear military advantage, civilian casualties mounted into the thousands and bodies began to bloat in the streets. Foreign residents



A federal machine gun nest awaits the rebel advance.

sought the sanctuary of embassies, but not all made it in time. Most traffic came to a halt as only ambulances, military vehicles, and diplomatic automobiles, identified by special flags, moved on the streets. On February 17, after nine days of constant fighting, Madero summoned Huerta and asked when the fighting could be expected to cease. Huerta assured him that peace would be restored to the beleaguered city the following day. The residents of the capital were awakened early on the morning of February 18 by the sounds of artillery and machine gun fire, just as they had been for the previous nine days. But in the afternoon the clamor of war stopped. Huerta had decided to change sides. He withdrew recognition of the federal government and dispatched General Aureliano Blanquet to the National Palace to arrest the president. Blanquet encountered Madero in one of the patios and, with revolver in hand, proclaimed, "You are my prisoner, Mr. President." Madero retorted, "You are a traitor." But Blanquet simply reaffirmed, "You are my prisoner."[2] Within a half-hour Vice President Pino Suárez, Madero's brother Gustavo, and most of the cabinet had been arrested as well.

The agreement according to which Huerta joined the rebels is known as the Pact of the Embassy because the final negotiations were conducted under the aegis of the American ambassador in Mexico City, Henry Lane Wilson. A typical diplomat of the age of dollar diplomacy, Wilson saw his role as protector of U.S. business interests. Throughout the Madero presidency he had meddled shamelessly in Mexico's internal affairs, and during the Decena Trágica he played an active part in charting the course of

2. Quoted in Michael C. Meyer, *Huerta: A Political Portrait* (Lincoln, 1972), p. 57.

events. On one occasion, in concert with the British, German, and Spanish ministers, he even demanded Madero's resignation, alleging as his reason the tremendous damage to foreign property in Mexico City. After being rebuffed by the Mexican president, Wilson changed his tactics and worked actively to bring Huerta and Díaz to an accord. On the evening of February 18 the two generals met with Wilson at the American embassy and hammered out the pact that was made public the following day.

> In the city of Mexico, at nine-thirty in the evening on February 18, 1913, General Félix Díaz and Victoriano Huerta met in conference.... General Huerta stated that because of the unbearable situation created by the government of Mr. Madero, he had, in order to prevent the further shedding of blood and to safeguard national unity, placed the said Madero, several members of his cabinet, and various other persons under arrest.... General Díaz stated that his only reason for raising the standard of revolt was a desire on his part to protect the national welfare, and in that light he was ready to make any sacrifice that would prove beneficial to the country.... From this time forward the former chief executive is not to be recognized. The elements represented by Generals Díaz and Huerta are united in opposing all efforts to restore him to power.... Generals Díaz and Huerta will do all in their power to enable the latter to assume... the provisional presidency.[3]

Wishing to cloak his assumption of power in some semblance of legality, Huerta first secured the official resignations of Madero and Pino Suárez and then convened a special evening session of the congress. The resignations were accepted by the legislative body with only five dissenting votes, and the presidency legally passed to the next in line, Secretary of Foreign Relations Pedro Lascuráin. Sworn into office at 10:24 p.m., Lascuráin immediately appointed General Huerta as secretary of interior and at 11:20 p.m. submitted his own resignation. The Constitution of 1857 provided that in the absence of a president, a vice-president, and a secretary of foreign relations, the office passed to the secretary of interior. Huerta, clad in a formal black tuxedo, was sworn into office shortly before midnight. Madero-style democracy had ended in derision as Mexico had its third president in one day.

The political charade perpetrated before the congress was not the greatest indignity Mexicans were called upon to suffer in February 1913. On the evening of February 21, Francisco Madero and José María Pino Suárez were transferred from the National Palace, where they had been held prisoners since the day of their arrest, to the Federal District penitentiary. The capital city newspapers the following day blared an improbable tale. A group of Madero's supporters attacked the convoy escorting the prisoners, attempted to free them, and during the ensuing melee both the former president and vice president were killed.

Virtually no one believed this official version, but few Mexicans knew what really happened. Madero and Pino Suárez had been taken to the penitentiary under the guard of Francisco Cárdenas, a major in the rurales. When the convoy reached the prison, Cárdenas ordered the captives out of the cars and, by prearranged signal, the spotlights high on the wall were turned off. The hapless men were then shot point-blank. Perhaps Victoriano Huerta ordered the assassinations, or perhaps it was Félix Díaz or

3. The Pact of the Embassy has been translated and included in its entirety in ibid., pp. 235–36.

even Aureliano Blanquet. The nature of the available evidence simply precludes positive determination. But what cannot be doubted is that the senseless murders of Madero and Pino Suárez set the tone of the revolution for at least the next five years.

RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER STUDY

Beezley, William H. *Insurgent Governor: Abraham González and the Mexican Revolution in Chihuahua*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973.

Calvert, Peter. *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1914: The Diplomacy of the Anglo-American Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Cumberland, Charles C. *Mexican Revolution: Genesis under Madero*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1952.

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

Harris, Charles H., and Louis R. Sadler. "The Underside of the Mexican Revolution: El Paso, 1912." *The Americas* 39 (1982): 69–84.

———. "The 1911 Reyes Conspiracy: The Texas Side." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 82 (1980): 325–48.

Hart, John Mason. "The Mexican Revolution 1910–1920," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*. Edited by Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, pp. 435–65. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Henderson, Peter V. N. *Félix Díaz, the Porfirians and the Mexican Revolution*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981.

LaFrance, David G. *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland: Politics, War, and State Building in Puebla, 1913–1920*. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2003.

Meyer, Michael C. *Huerta: A Political Portrait*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972.

———. *Mexican Rebel: Pascual Orozco and the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1915*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967.

Ross, Stanley R. *Francisco I. Madero, Apostle of Mexican Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1955.

Turner, Frederick C. "Anti-Americanism in Mexico, 1910–1913." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 47 (1967): 502–18.

Wilson, Henry Lane. *Diplomatic Episodes in Mexico, Belgium and Chile*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1927.

Wolfskill, George, and Douglas W. Richmond, eds. *Essays on the Mexican Revolution: Revisionist Views of the Leaders*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.

Womack, John, Jr. *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. New York: Knopf, 1968.