

## ❁ Preface

### *Debating History to Face the Present and Imagine the Future*

JOHN TUTINO ❁

This volume began with a challenge. Leticia Reina and Elisa Servín invited me to lunch, an idea, and a proposal. At the end of the eighteenth century and again at the end of the nineteenth century, Mexicans faced periods of economic boom and state-led reform. Each of those times of boom and change was celebrated, the first as enlightened, the second as liberal—the prevailing definitions of progress. Yet each of those eras of progress led to deep civil conflicts: the wars for independence, beginning in 1810, and the revolution that began in 1910. Now—it was 1998—Mexicans faced another time of celebrated progress promoted by a reforming state. This time it was globalization sanctioned by neoliberalism. And once again, amid times of boom and bust, crisis and reform, Mexicans faced deepening inequalities and political uncertainties. Could a new round of civil conflict follow? Could it possibly begin in 2010?

Elisa and Leticia invited me to join a group of scholars from Mexico, Europe, and the United States, historians and others whose works had engaged Mexico over the long term. Each would be challenged to write an essay exploring a key aspect of Mexico's history of crises, reforms, and revolutions. The goal was to probe the developments that led to the conflicts of 1810 and 1910—and to think historically about the present and the century soon to begin. There would be no search for a single approach, no pressure for a common analysis. Each participant would aim to illuminate the larger questions as she or he saw fit. The group would meet to discuss and debate understandings that would inevitably differ. The goal was a book.

The key to the project—and this volume—is the participants. The original group gathered in July 1999 at the Center for Historical Studies of the National Institute of Anthropology and History in Mexico City. Friedrich Katz, Enrique Semo, Alan Knight, François-Xavier Guerra, Antonio Anino, and I joined Leticia and Elisa. All had published key studies of Mexico's history. All were known for taking on big problems, the long term—or both. Each presented a preliminary paper. The resulting discussions focused on diverse, sometimes divergent, ways of understanding Mexico's two great revolutions. They generated the most challenging engagements I have experienced as a historian. Never have I learned so much in a few days.

At the end of the first sessions, we reached two conclusions: we needed to meet again with revised essays for continuing discussions, and we should invite new participants to address key questions none of us had explored in depth. Invitations went to Eric Van Young to bring us strength on popular communities in the eighteenth-century crisis; to Lorenzo Meyer to examine liberalism and neoliberalism, seeking continuities and changes between the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth; and to Guillermo de la Peña to analyze popular mobilizations in the late twentieth century. Our analyses and this volume are stronger for their participation.

The group gathered for a second time in June 2000 at Georgetown University. Again there were days of engagement, debate, and learning. At the end, we offered a first public presentation of our studies at a symposium hosted by the Mexican Cultural Institute in Washington, D.C. Two points became clear: we were struggling with issues of wide interest, and the debates among the participants were modest compared to the reactions of some in our audience. Placing the uncertainties of Mexico's present in the context of its conflictive past raised issues discomforting to some—and debated by all.

All the more reason, the group concluded, to push our essays to completion and to publish a volume of challenge and debate. The first result was an edition in Spanish, *Crisis, reforma y revolución: México, historias de fin de siglo*, edited by Leticia Reina and Elisa Servín, and published by Editorial Taurus and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in 2002. That book is already provoking continuing discussions.

We also sought an English edition—addressed to the students, scholars, and politically aware others who know the importance of Mexico to the United States and the wider world. Working with Valerie Millholland of Duke University Press brought the participation of scholarly reviewers. They probed our debates and suggested ways to sharpen our analyses and strengthen our presentation. Most of the essays are revised and expanded, thanks to the reviewers' suggestions and our own continuing analyses.

(Sadly, François-Xavier Guerra passed away in the fall of 2002, as the Mexican version went to press. The loss to those who knew him—and to Mexican history—is immense. His essay is translated, but not revised—a testament to a scholar who among us, as always, was a formidable thinker.)

We offer this volume, expanded, reorganized, and revised, as *Cycles of Conflict, Centuries of Change*. It is an invitation to join and continue our discussions and debates, to ask how explorations of a long history of conflict and change can illuminate an uncertain present—and an unknown future. We aim to bring history to bear on the present in three linked ways. We begin with communities, because they have been constant, important, and too-often-ignored participants in Mexico's history, and because when Mexican political contests became revolutions, popular communities mobilized to make them revolutionary. We turn to revolutions because they marked the pivotal transformations that made Mexico a nation in 1810 and 1910. Too often, those decades of conflict have been hailed as utopian or condemned as destructive. Our essays see those conflagrations as simultaneously destructive and creative, at once arising from the popular and leading to new concentrations of power. We conclude with studies of the history of the second half of the twentieth century—histories of ideology, of popular mobilizations, and of political conflicts and accommodations. It is time to accelerate serious historical analysis of the regime, society, and culture once credited with generating the “Mexican Miracle,” and recently condemned as the cause of the crisis that led to Mexico's current and uncertain democratic transition.

Our essays were generated during the Mexican presidential election season of 2000, celebrated by many as the key transition to democracy. The authors most focused on contemporary politics have added a few lines to note recent events. Enrique Semo addresses the election season of 2006, succinctly, from the perspective of the Left. Elisa Servín suggests that the uncertainties of Mexico's transition to democracy persist. Alan Knight offers his views of a changing yet enduring political landscape in a post-script. The election of 2006, the challenges to its legitimacy, and the absence of anything like a revolutionary mobilization combine to suggest that the questions we explore and debate remain open and important.

We offer this volume knowing that what happens in Mexico is pivotally and increasingly important to life in the United States. The histories of these neighboring nations, begun in conflict soon after independence, have become increasingly linked since World War II. The North American economy is deeply integrated; migrations and cultural interactions abound. States and politics, citizenship and justice, however, remain separate. Yet what happens in both polities profoundly affects every aspect of life in both

nations (something that most Mexicans know, yet few in the United States grasp).

When U.S. political analysts look to Mexico, they normally ask why Mexicans don't live by "our" standards of economy and democracy. And when U.S. readers seek to learn something of Mexico's history, they often turn to works like Enrique Krauze's *Mexico: Biography of Power* (Harper Perennial, 1998) and Julia Preston and Samuel Dillon's *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004). Both are important works; both have taught me much. Yet both are written as if a few powerful men make Mexican history.

We seek to offer a more comprehensive perspective, exploring Mexico's complex history and political traditions. Popular communities, rural and urban, have been regular participants in the nation's history. Mexico's revolutions were conflicts with deep historical roots that mobilized every sector of society: the powerful and others seeking power; middling peoples struggling to find advantages; and diverse communities fighting for survival and better lives. The crisis of the late twentieth century mobilized peoples from every walk of Mexican life in, to date, nonrevolutionary conflicts that led to the electoral transition of 2000. A more thorough democratic transformation remains a goal that engages and challenges Mexicans: the powerful and prosperous few, those struggling to maintain lives in the middle, diverse working majorities, and expanding marginal communities. Thus we also seek a more historical, dynamic, and uncertain understanding of Mexico's present. That is the only way to prepare for the challenges ahead.

No one here thinks that history will repeat itself in any simple way. Should conflict explode precisely in 2010, none will be more surprised than the authors of this volume. Still, conflict may come in the new century. If it does, our studies suggest that it will emerge in ways we cannot now perceive. Our analyses also remain open to the possibility that Mexico's cycles of boom, crisis, and reform—leading to revolutions—have ended. The new century may begin an era in which globalization, even with periodic crises, can persist in Mexico without generating social and political conflagrations. If stability holds in the new century because globalization's neoliberal promises of shared prosperity and effective democracy become Mexican realities, celebration should follow. But what if globalization persists as it now operates, as "progress" that concentrates wealth and power among a few, while misery and insecurity proliferate among Mexico's majority, elections remain of uncertain legitimacy—and no popular mobilization challenges the powers that promote the prevailing order? Then we may pause, wonder, and worry about life in the century to come.