Emiliano Zapata and the Old Regime: Myth, Memory, and Method

William Schell, Jr.
Murray State University

Four decades after its publication, John Womack’s masterpiece _Zapata and the Mexican Revolution_ remains the definitive account of the man and his movement and the basis of the generally agreed upon facts. It is also perhaps the most cited work of Anglophone Latin American history. This is not hyperbole. The index of Alan Knight’s highly regarded _Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants_ lists thirty-seven pages under “Zapata, Emiliano.” Womack is cited fifty-six times on twenty-three of them. Not infrequently, when Knight cites other accounts of Zapata’s rebellion, Womack is the underlying source. And underlying Womack’s account is that of John Steinbeck and Elia Kazan’s film ¡Viva Zapata! The cinematic influence of their true invention is most evident in Womack’s account of Zapata’s Porfirian period, with which this piece is largely concerned.

Cuatro décadas después de su publicación, la obra maestra de John Womack, _Zapata and the Mexican Revolution_, sigue siendo el recuento definitivo del hombre y de su movimiento y la base de lo que generalmente se cree son los hechos reales. También es, quizás, el trabajo más citado de habla inglesa de la historia de América Latina. Esto no es una hipérbole. El índice del tan admirado libro de Alan Knight, _Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants_ cita treinta y siete páginas en “Zapata, Emiliano.” Womack es citado cincuenta y seis veces en veinte y tres de ellas. No es infrecuente que cuando Knight cita otras referencias de la rebelión de Zapata, Womack es la fuente ulterior. Sin embargo, en la historia de Womack se puede discernir a la vez la influencia de John Steinbeck y la película de Elia Kazan, ¡Viva Zapata! Este documento explora esta influencia como un llamado a reconocer y ejercer las poderosas fuentes no verbales (pictóricas, cinematográficas y musicales) que dan forma a nuestra percepción del pasado.

**Key words:** Arau, campesino; charro; científico; Creelman; Cuernavaca; Flores Magón; Juárez; Kazan; Leyva; López González; Morelos; myth; Rivera; reyeista; Steinbeck; Womack; Zapata.
Some twenty years ago in Cuernavaca, I was introduced to local historian Lic. Valentín López González, a semi-official keeper of Emiliano Zapata’s legacy. He agreed to an interview and invited me to his home that evening. He was with two clients when I arrived, and one told a story about his Zapatista grandfather. Some months before Zapata’s assassination, when things were bad, the leader of the grandfather’s band brokered an uneasy truce with the Constitutionalists that included shared security. One evening as the grandfather reported for guard duty, he was challenged by the Constitutionalist sentry he was to relieve.

“What is the password, cabron?”

“¡Chinga su madre!” spat the Zapatista.

López González laughed as he scribbled in a notebook on his desk. “People tell me their stories,” he said after his clients had left, “and I write them down; some are even true.” I asked how he knew which were which, but he just smiled and launched into an exposition of Mexican history from Restoration to Revolution as internecine liberal struggle. Some hours later he bid me farewell with copies of his books and pamphlets, having never answered my question. How did he know which stories were true? Now, older if not wiser, I realize it didn’t matter whether the stories were true; what mattered was he wrote them down. Collected, catalogued, and archived, Zapata’s mythology became grist for scholarly mills.

Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre.

Walter Benjamin

1. Valentín López González’s works include Como nació el estado de Estado de Morelos a la vida institucional, 1869 (Cuernavaca Mexico: Editorial Tlahuica, 1969); El Pacto de Xochimilco entre Zapata y Villa (Cuernavaca Mexico: Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de Morelos, 1979); La Muerte del General Emiliano Zapata (Cuernavaca México: Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de Morelos, 1979); Los Compañeros de Zapata (Cuernavaca México: Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de Morelos, 1980). He also facilitated publication of François Chevalier’s El Levantamiento de Emiliano Zapata, 1911–1919 (Cuernavaca México: Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de Morelos, 1979).

2. On Zapata’s early emergence as a living legend, see Eyler N. Simpson, The Ejido: Mexico’s Way Out (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1937), 52; Jose de la Luz Valdes, El mito de Zapata (Saltillo, Coahila: Espigas, 1974), and as an object of prayer, see Baltasar Dromundo,
Over the past twenty years, New Cultural History (NCH) has emerged as a dominant field in Mexican studies largely concerned with the formation of the Porfirián state, the chaotic Revolution, and the subsequent congealing of its successor state around human, structural, and intellectual remnants of the old regime. 3 Eric van Young has called NCH a “biography of the state by other means centrally concerned with a meta-narrative of power.” 4 Or, as Gil Joseph succinctly calls it, “everyday state formation.” 5 Joseph was one of the first to raise the issue of how myth figured in this process, how the state attempted to manage myth, and how Mexicans received, accepted, interpreted, and/or frustrated those efforts. Both Porfirián and Revolutionary authorities attempted to manipulate myth to shape national memory and identity in the service of


state formation. Porfirian myth managers built a national cult around Miguel Hidalgo, father of Independence, Benito Juárez, father of the republic, and Díaz, keeper of the peace. The 1910 Revolution and the potency of the land reform issue forced the emerging elite to do the same for Zapata—legend in life, martyr in death, whose myth became a source of political legitimacy for a string of triletter ruling parties culminating in the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).6

Topics of mentality move historians from the empirical to squishier realms, something that disturbs those who seek the certainty of facts and numbers. This problem is as old as philosophy; there are two ways of approaching the truth: mythos and logos, yin and yang; the former is dark, intuitive, artistic, and emotional, the latter light, logical, rational, and scientific. The debate over the place of myth in history (a narrative of the past), dates from at least the eighteenth century and was even then linked to the selection and omission of fact. Although myth itself constituted a legitimate object of investigation, professional standards required it be distinguished from fact in constructing historical narratives. By the mid-twentieth century, however, although most historians had come to accept that the selection of fact was not objective, they continued to attempt fact-based narratives.7 They had no alternative. The


7. An AHR topic search lists 180 articles dealing with myth. On the antiquity of the issue, see Josine H. Blok, “Quests for a Scientific Mythology: F. Creuzer and K. O. Muller on History and Myth” in Anthony Grafton and Suzanne L. Marchand, eds., Proof and Persua-
problem of objective relativism was papered over by creating synchronic structural models of the past based on quantitative analysis and social history. The Annales School exemplified this approach, yet, although they tried, its disciples found they could not abandon narrative. Instead they wove findings derived from their methodology into masterful historical narratives of material life. All the while Hayden White and others like-minded steadily eroded the boundary between myth and fact in our narrative-dependent profession by asserting the impossibility of accurate historical narrative. In 1996, William McNeill embraced the reality of uncertainty in his presidential address to the AHA, coining the word *mythistory* to describe our postmodern enterprise. Shortly thereafter Peter Novick asked the profession if, given postmodernist acceptance of cognitive relativism and the existence of multiple, equally valid realities, its raison d’être, objective history, was not itself a myth. So began the “objectivity debate.”

Postmodernism’s key tenants are at once troubling, liberating, and contradictory. The proposition that accurate historical narratives are impossible because all narratives refer not to objective reality but to other narratives is troubling; its corollary—everything is discourse to be read, interpreted, and narrated—is liberating; the inherent contradiction is obvious. The idea that “knowledge is neither objective nor final” also pen-

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etrated popular culture in short order with political satirist Stephen Colbert’s [re]creation of the word “truthiness.” Narrative’s defenders refuted postmodernists by asserting that narrative “inheres in the events themselves.” As David Carr observes, “Stories are told in being lived and lived in being told,” fashioning a community “where a narrative account exists of a We.” But narrative accounts of We are ultimately based on memory, individual myths that, like all myths, “abolish the complexity of human acts [and] . . . establish a blissful clarity.” Thus the first task facing historians in fashioning objective historical narratives is to restore complexity and context. David Hackett Fischer suggests there exists “a tacit logic of historical thought[,] . . . a process of adductive reasoning in the simple sense of adducing answers to specific questions so that a satisfactory explanatory ‘fit’ is obtained.” The key to Fischer’s pragmatic finesing of the mythos-logos conundrum lies in framing questions free of internal logical fallacies of the sort he encyclopedically (and maddeningly) lays out in his book Historians’ Fallacies.

By 1997, cyberspace discussions of these postmodern “cutting fringe” issues had made the journals and so merited a joint panel of the American Historical Association and the Conference on Latin American History. The audience, gathered to hear “Trends and Transformation in Mexican History: Reflections on the New Cultural History,” spilled into the hall outside as William French opened with a historiographical overview. Mary Kay Vaughn followed by laying out the essential characteristics of NCH grounded in specific cases, to wit: the deconstruction and interpretation of texts written, unwritten, and nonverbal, which might include national ritual, public spaces, ceremonies and rhetoric, dress, art, music, myth, or any aspect of culture recognizing at

tempts by the state to manipulate culture as a tool of hegemony and everyday efforts by society’s subalterns to negotiate the shape of that hegemony by action and non-action. Van Young played devil’s advocate, warning his fellow NCHistas of the pitfalls of “rehydrating” fragmentary nonverbal evidence and chided them for “navel-gazing” and “compulsive theorizing” before throwing off his critic’s sheepskin with the bold “imperialist assumption that all history is cultural history.” Finally came Stephen Haber, invited critic and advocate of New Institutional Economic History (NIEH), who provoked outrage, bewilderment, and (for some) delight. In a paper drawn from one given at the previous AHA meeting, Haber brushed aside Van Young’s imperial claims and accused (there is no other word) NCHistas of the sins of dependency theory: obtuse rhetoric, lack of clarity, indifference to empiricism, failure to frame testable falsifiable hypotheses, and having politically driven agendas that compromised their objectivity. Then, invoking Florencia Mallon’s lament (“What is a progressive scholar to do?”), he dismissed the conceptual category of subaltern, which underpins much of NCH, as too broad to be useful.16

My summary of the meeting, posted on H-LATAM, fomented a wide-ranging debate. Two years later, the official “lucha libre” was held in the institutional arena of the *Hispanic American Historical Review* (HAHR), which added to the original papers contributions by Florencia Mallon, Claudio Lomnitz, and Susan Socolow.18 Mallon rebutted Haber’s criticism


of her work by recalling the shortcomings of Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman’s *Time on the Cross* to illustrate the fallibility of cometrics and then accused (there is no other word) Haber of seeking to impose “party discipline” on the profession. Although underwhelmed by NCH and predicting its “short life,” Lomnitz disapproved of Haber’s methodological authoritarianism, likening him to “a scientific Torquemada” ready to torch those guilty of postmodernism.\(^19\) Although Socolow slammed NCH as a “cult” of “intellectual pretension” and chastened its acolytes for substituting “opaque language” and “pomo-speak” for analysis, she did not join Haber’s criticism of NCH for failure to frame falsifiable logical-empirical hypotheses. On the contrary, she found such inapplicable to the writing of history.\(^20\)

Strictly speaking, historical narratives cannot be falsified in the scientific sense because they do not “uncover scientific laws but are only capable of pointing to a *specific cohesion* [my emphasis] that might exist in the data they present.”\(^21\) Indeed, Haber’s cult of the falsifiable logical-empirical hypothesis omits the first and “most fundamental” of NIETH’s four levels of analysis—that “being culture in which all else is embedded.”\(^22\) Haber’s neglect of the yin of culture is mirrored by the neglect of the yang of economics by practitioners of NCH. The pragmatic historian would integrate culture and economy, intuition and empiricism, mythos and logos, borrowing that deemed useful to frame questions without internal contradictions while simultaneously “suppress[ing] significant epistemic questions” raised by postmodernism.\(^23\) That is, although creating accurate historical narratives may not be possible, the pragmatic

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\(^22\) Oliver Williamson, *The Mechanisms of Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Socolow’s point as well, see “Putting the ‘Cult’ in Culture,” 364.

historian must act as if it were. While appealing, this leaves the same problems of mythos and logos on the table. Who’s telling the story? Whose story is being told? What is fact? What is myth? How do we know? Does it matter?

I’ll Be Mything You

The past that influences our lives does not consist of what actually happened, but of what men believe happened.25

Gerald Johnson

Four decades after its publication, John Womack’s masterpiece, Zapata and the Mexican Revolution, remains the definitive account and the basis of generally agreed upon facts about the man and his movement. The book is at once a late example of populist historiography and an early example of revisionism, combining essential elements of Gildardo Magaña’s seminal Zapata y el agrarismo with the research of Jesús Sotelo Inclán’s Raíz y razón de Zapata whose expanded second edition, informed by interviews with Zapatistas by Programa de Historia Oral, was a friendly dialogue with Womack. Womack’s Zapata may be the most cited work of Anglophone Latin American history. This is not hyperbole. The index of Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants, Alan Knight’s highly regarded synthesis of populist and revisionist historiographies, lists thirty-seven pages under “Zapata, Emiliano.” Womack is cited fifty-six times on twenty-three of them. Not infrequently when Knight cites other accounts of Zapata’s rebellion, Arturo Warman’s for example,


26. Brunk, Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal, 237 and fnt 12, 331, hints at this duality when he characterizes Womack’s work “as in many respects an early example of revisionism.” Gildardo Magaña, leader of the Army of the South after Zapata’s assassination, wrote Emiliano Zapata y el agrarismo en México, 3 vols. (Mexico: n.p., 1934–1941), which was expanded to five volumes by Carlos Pérez Guerrero (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1951–1952). Jesús Sotelo Inclán’s Raíz y razón de Zapata, Anenecuilco investigación historia, 1st ed. (México: Anenecuilco, 1943) was expanded from 236 pages to 588 in the second edition, Raíz y razón de Zapata (México: Anenecuilco, 1970). There was also a third edition for the Zapata Centenal. In 1973, Programa de Historia Oral, Instituto Nacional de Antropología Historia, Instituto de Investigaciones interviewed then surviving Zapatistas. Interviews were conducted by Alicia Olivera Bonfil, Eugenia Meyer, Pastor Maria Alba, Laura Esoejel, and others. This program may have been the motivation for Pablo Gonzalez’s publication of Zapata, reaccionario y tradaidor, the following year.
Womack is the underlying source. In effect, when Zapata’s biographer, Samuel Brunk, praises Knight for “put[ting] Zapatismo back into the context of the larger uprising as “a genuinely popular movement,” he praises Womack indirectly. When Knight announces that Zapatismo “might be extended to cover a legion of peasant revolutionaries,” he is referring to Womack’s description of the movement.

Amazingly, until Brunk no scholarly biography had been written about Zapata. Neither Gildardo Magaña, Sotelo Inclán, nor Womack (by their own admissions) set out to write an “objective biography” of Zapata; rather they sought to tell the story of the movement first and of its leader second. Although Brunk’s “political biography,” Revolution and Betrayal, does sometimes subordinate Zapata’s narrative to that of his followers as “conscious shapers of their own history,” he does not stray from the beaten scholarly path. What is new is Brunk’s explicit focus on Zapata’s myth and its impact on the “formation, or reformation, of national identity after the revolution.” Brunk uses traditional biography primarily to “disentangle the real Zapata [logos] from his mythical twin” in order to prepare the way for his exploration of Zapata’s “posthumous career” [mythos]. He identifies two main currents of Zapata’s mythology stemming from his followers’ reactions to his betrayal and ambush by the ironically named Jesús Guajardo at Chinameca—realistic and mystic. Realists accepted their hero’s death at the hands of the traitor, honoring their martyr by pilgrimage to his grave. Zapatistas whose beliefs were grounded in the mystical refused to believe that the bullet-riddled body the authorities put on


29. Few other biographies have been published since Brunk’s, only a children’s book by travel-writer R. Conrad Stein, Emiliano Zapata (Mankato, MN: Child’s World, Inc. 2004) and a popular specialty work by Pedro Angel Palou, Zapata (Monroe Township, NJ: Planeta Publishing Corporation, 2007). For Brunk’s ambiguity about calling his work a biography, see his response to Drew Halevy’s review of Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal. Brunk objected to his own words quoted by Halevy (H-LATAM, April 5, 1996): “The primary goal of this book, then is to provide a much needed political biography of Zapata, and to demonstrate in the process that his choices and actions did have a historical impact” (Brunk, xvi). See Brunk’s response, H-LATAM, April 3, 1996.

display was his. Zapata had escaped, been resurrected or reincarnated to roam the mountains until they needed him again.31

After his assassination, Zapata’s mythology quickly bifurcated into two major icons—the charro mortal hero and the campesino immortal hero—neither associated exclusively with one current or the other.32 Working from photos, David Alfaro Siqueiros created a lithograph accurately depicting Zapata as a charro, the potent symbol of mestizo Mexican national identity. Somewhat dandified, decked out in tight-fitting silver-trimmed outfits, silk scarves, and felt sombreros, and seen promenading around the zocalo on Sunday afternoons on their best mounts, sitting atop carved leather saddles, charros were nonetheless working cowboys who proved their toughness in charreadas—racing, roping, and stock-working competitions that required a centaur’s skills such as coleando (grabbing a bull by the tail from horseback and throwing it to the ground) and gallo (reaching down at a full gallop to grab a rooster buried to its neck in the ground).33 Siqueiros’s lithograph shows Zapata astride his black gelding, Relámpago, which he rode, carbine in hand, up and down the stairs of Jojutla’s municipal palace. Or perhaps it was the “dark chestnut” given to him by the priest of Axochiapan, which Zapata rode in a parade in Mexico City on a windy day in early December 1914 when witnesses say he swung down, as in gallo, to recover Pancho Villa’s hat which had blown onto the street. One thing is certain: no photograph or film shows Zapata with a white mount nor do early reports of the legend mention such:34 Diego Rivera gave Zapata the white stallion he never had.35


32. On Zapata’s iconography, see Alba C. de Rojo, Rafael López Castro, and José Luis Martínez, eds. Zapata, Iconografía (México City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).


35. Diego Rivera, Zapata, Revolutionary Hero, Museum of Modern Art (donated, 1931), a copy of Zapata as he appears in the Palacio de Cotes fresco, Historia de Morelos, Conquista y Revolución, 1929.
Although there was little revolutionary about his art, Rivera was a revolutionary artist who by illustrating the Mexican Revolution sought to shape both popular memory and the ideology of the emerging state. Rivera’s icon, Zapata, Revolutionary Hero, began as his reworking of a scene from his fresco Historia de Morelos, Conquista y Revolución at Cuernavaca’s Palacio de Cortes. At its exhibition in New York City in 1932, critics hailed its association of the campesino with the immortal hero of high-European culture, comparing its white stallion to those ubiquitous in the paintings and frescos of fifteenth-century painter Paolo Uccello, as in his St. George and the Dragon. Zapata, Revolutionary Hero depicts an indigenized Zapata, clad in calzones (campesino field clothes), his left foot on the sword of the dead overseer, a sickle in his right hand (perhaps invoking Russia’s Bolshevik Revolution as well as Mexico’s), and the reins of his enemy’s white stallion, the hero’s prize, in his left. Rivera’s synthesis appealed to those whose bellas artes tastes were shaped in the Porfiriato and whose intellectual currents had romanticized pre-Columbian native civilizations while simultaneously declaring their descendants degraded indios whose uplifting was necessary for national progress. Anenecuilco’s villagers elected Zapata as “a man with pants on,” but Rivera depicted him wearing calzones (peasant field pants). Was he making a statement about campesinos’ ability to protect their rights? Or was he illustrating a revolutionary reversal of the Porfiriian solution to the so-called Indian problem—embracing indos rather than seeking their integration into the national mainstream, culturally, by education, and biologically, by mestizaje? Or was it more of the same, a framing of the indo by European culture?

And how did those who wore calzones see Zapata? According to journalist H. H. Dunn, indios saw Zapata as a mystic charro who had merged in death with Quetzalcoatl, who would return someday to restore cos-
mic moral order. The thoroughly unreliable Dunn, whose tarring of Zapata as *The Crimson Jester* inspired John Steinbeck to make his own study of the revolution in Morelos, reported that roadside artisans tried to sell him carved stone figures of Zapata-Quetzalcoatl, “machete in hand, astride his great black horse”—as Siqueriro had depicted him.39

Although the progress of Zapata’s iconography seems plain, what evidence exists for the divergence of his mythology into two currents, realistic and mystic? Dunn reported the appearance of the Zapata-Quetzalcoatl legend fifteen years after Zapata’s death. Although members of Zapata’s own family identified his corpse, some believed Zapata had escaped the ambush. López González locates the origin of the legend of Zapata’s survival in the refusal of Zapatista *jefe* Eusebio Jáuregui to identify the body because he could not locate Zapata’s distinctive mole (*luna de bola*). Yet despite the fact that Jáuregui twice declared the body was Zapata’s, this story was repeated. Perhaps General González was premature in ordering Jáuregui be executed, for the rumors continued. To squelch the rumors, González put the corpse on display, filming it and the funeral for the newsreels as thousands of mourners passed.40

But some campesinos were not convinced—the body lacked a mole, a birthmark, a facial scar, or a missing finger. Brunk presents the list that seems to derive from Womack, who seems to have taken it from—no one. Womack doesn’t cite a source.41 One thing is certain; two of the so-called identifying marks said to be absent—the facial scar and the missing finger—may be ruled out as no photograph of Zapata show either.42 Perhaps the legend of Zapata’s survival was so pervasive that it


40. López Gonzáles, *La Muerte del General Emiliano Zapata*, 51, which was written in part in response to the defense of Pablo González by his son and namesake in *Zapata: reaccionario y traitor* (Saltillo, Coahuila: Textos de Cultura Historiografica, 1974). For the film of Zapata’s body and funeral, see http://youtube.com/watch?v=5cmEIMv-f0&mode=related&search=. Also, see the photo in Brunk, *Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal*, 228, fig. 8.


42. For example, see the widely reproduced photo of Zapata facing quarter left, wearing a sash and two bandoliers of bullets across his chest, with his left hand on his saber
didn’t require evidence; it was simply in the air, in the expressions on
the faces of the campesinos in General González’s propaganda films,
who decades later would tell their stories to the popular press and to
researchers who recorded their recollections for oral history projects.
Perhaps proof of the legend’s influence, rather than proof of the leg-
end, is that Zapata’s son Nicolas consistently “maintained that the man
killed [at Chinameca] was not Zapata, but some jerk [pendejo] from
Tepoztlan.”

Thinking in Pictures: Montage, Memory, and Moving
History

History decomposes into images, not narratives.44
Walter Benjamin

Steinbeck wrestled with the problems of myth, memory, and truth while
researching what would become the screenplay for Elia Kazan’s film ¡Viva
Zapata! As Steinbeck observed, Zapata had been mythologized so quickly
even those who knew him confused the man with the legend. After inter-
viewing hundreds of Zapatista veterans, he admitted he wasn’t sure
which, if any, of their accounts were true.45 Over the years Steinbeck’s
research produced a dissertation; what Kazan needed was a screenplay.
To that end, Steinbeck partnered with Edgcumb Pinchon, author of Za-
pata the Unconquerable, but the resulting script was too long.46 Be-
ning again, sans Pinchon, Steinbeck turned to the PRI’s official myth of

and a lever-action rifle in his right; the iconic photo of Zapata in the presidential chair be-
side Villa, and the head shot showing him wearing a tweed jacket and light silk scarf (re-
produced for the over of Womack’s book).

43. The quote is from O’Malley, Mytth of Revolution, 44, who cites Uno Mas Uno,
April 10, 1979. There is rich psychological literature dealing with this phenomena, for in-
stance, see Graham Davies and Sarah Hine, “Change Blindness and Eye Witness Testimony,”
The Journal of Psychology 141: (2007): 423–434. For an example of delayed testimony,
see Salvador Martínez Mancera, “Pendente en el sur la leyenda de que Emiliano Zapata no
ha muerto,” El Universal Gráfico, April 13, 1938. On the universality of the sleeping hero
see, Américo Paredes, “Yamashita, Zapata, and the Arthurian Legend,” Western Folklore
44. Quoted in Vivian Sobchack, “The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and Historical
Consciousness,” History & Tbeory 36 (1997): 4–21. The phrase “thinking in pictures” is
John Sayles’s.
of eyewitness, see Graham Davies and Sarah Hine, “Change Blindness and Eye Witness
46. John Steinbeck and Edgcumb Pinchon, Zapata. Screenplay for Twentieth Cen-
tury Fox Film Corp., 1949; and Edgcumb Pinchon, Zapata the Unconquerable (New York:
Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1941).
the Revolution embedded in its then dominant populist (pro-revolution) school of historiography, whose ready-made narrative of the Revolution as spontaneous, popular, and peasant-led achieved the cinematic virtue of simplicity by “blurring the contradictory experiences and projects of different figures within the Revolutionary Pantheon.” 47 The result was a “truthie” cinematic telling of the official myth. Zapata and Francisco Madero were star-crossed allies torn apart by the machinations of ambitious real-life evil-doer, General Victoriano Huerta, and a fictional amoral advisor loyal only to logic, Fernando Aguirre, who in retrospect seems an archetype of the intellectuals who attached themselves to Zapata’s movement. Brunk dubbed them “the City Boys” (e.g., Manual Palafox and Díaz Soto y Gama). 48

Zapata first appears on screen as a campesino standing before Díaz with others of Anencuico’s delegation. He fights first as a campesino mounted on his white stallion charging to the defense of fellow villagers attacked by hacienda guards while trying to take possession of their fields. Thereafter, in open revolt Zapata is a charro. It is Zapata the charro who “draws a strong moral” by taking Madero’s watch at rifle point and then returning it; who executes his trusted follower, Pablo, the embodiment of campesino wisdom for daring to compromise for peace; who gives up the presidency “in the name of everything we fought for” to return to Ayala to support campesinos abused by his brother Eufemio. As Zapata is gunned down in the final sequence, his white stallion bolts through the gates of Chinameca hacienda into the mountains. Concerned that the stallion’s escape might give the campesinos hope (“These people are very superstitious”), the traitorous Aguirre advises the assassins to dump Zapata’s body in the plaza so the villagers might see him dead. As the people gather round the body, an old man spits, “Who do they think they’re fooling? Shot up like that, it could be anybody. I rode


with him. I fought with him all these years. They think they could fool me? They can’t kill him.” A young man interjects: “They’ll never kill him. Can you capture a river? Can you kill the wind?” But the old man silences him: “No! He’s not the river; he’s not the wind; he’s a MAN! He’s in the mountains. You couldn’t find him now. But if we ever need him again he’ll be back”—a sleeping hero like Arthur, Barbarossa, Bran the Blessed. The movie then cuts to Zapata’s white stallion in the mountains, proud and free; roll credits.

Although critical of the “so-called official history” embedded in Steinbeck and Kazan’s film, director Alfonso Arau (Like Water for Chocolate) borrowed freely from it in making Zapata, el Sueño del Héroe. Arau’s magically realistic Zapata is a Nahuatl-speaking shaman, Quetzalcoatl reincarnated, a “mythic hero, a predestined leader who passes through a series of tests that end with death and his passage to eternal life.” Starring teen idol and singer Alejandro Fernandez as Zapata and gorgeously filmed on location in and around the massive stone hacienda of Coahuixtla and its sugar fields by Oscar-winning cinematographer Vittoria Storaro (The Last Emperor), el Sueño del Héroe was, at a ten million dollars, the biggest budget Mexican movie then made. Arau modestly predicted an Oscar or two for his film, but it bombed. Mexican critics panned it as pretentious, self-indulgent, confused, and confusing, weighed down by nonsensical lines such as “Un soldado sin rifle, es como un taco sin tortilla” (“A soldier without a rifle is like a taco without a tortilla”).

Arau claimed to have spent thousands of hours researching his film and consulting prominent Mexican historians, just as Televisa had done for its series of popular historical telenovelas. Televisa intended its multipart series as “kinetic murals,” an “official history of official heroes,”


51. Jo Tuckman, “Not the Whole Enchilada,” The Guardian Unlimited, August 28, 2003. For an interview with the director, see http://www.archive.org/details/Macsd-InterviewWAlfonsoArau725. Fernandez’s father, Vicente, starred in a string of popular charro movies in the late 1960s. Indeed, Arau’s effort has more in common with Walter Doehner’s Zapata: Amor en Rebeldia made about the same time for Telemundo than with Kazan’s effort.

presenting a revisionist but positive view of national history in the service of PRI hegemony, just as Rivera’s frescos had done for its tri-lettered predecessors in the late 1920s. Notable was El Vuelo del Aguila (Flight of the Eagle), whose screenplay by historian Enrique Krauze humanized Díaz and put a positive spin on his Pax Porfiriana as a “metaphor” for decades of PRI rule. 53 Tellingly, no Televisa “kinetic mural” dealt with Zapata. To fill that lacuna, Telemundo aired Amor en Rebelde with a screenplay by Arau—the same year he released el Sueño del Héroe, the first major film on Zapata since Steinbeck and Kazan’s.

To give the film historical legitimacy, Arau made a show of his research pilgrimages to Morelos to gather “testimonies from Zapata’s surviving family members and townspeople.” 54 Which of Zapata’s compañeros he interviewed and what those interviews produced are uncertain, but he did stir controversy among Zapata’s surviving and feuding children. Ana and Diego endorsed Arau’s project, but Zapata’s youngest son, Mateo, vehemently opposed it because of rumors Fernandez would play Zapata as being gay. Mateo hired a lawyer to halt production, and, when legal action failed, he and machete-brandishing octogenarians from the Instituto Pro Veteranos Revolucionarios e hijos de la Revolución del Sur threatened to march on the production location. 55

Of course, the rumors were false. Zapata’s sexual orientation was a bottom-line issue for Arau’s investors; no film seen as portraying Zapata as other than macho would recover costs much less show a profit. Indeed, Zapata’s blatant heterosexuality is critical to the film’s cheerfully ahistorical narrative. 56 Arau did show the existence of a gay Porfirian subculture, however. In a sequence evoking an Errol Flynn swashbuckler, Zapata, disguised as a federal officer, enters the Principal Theatre backstage to meet a collaborator, General Huerta’s fictional chanteuses-mistress, as belle epoch show girls entertain Díaz and the cream of Porfirian soci-


54. Hecht, “Mexican Filmmaker Has Revolutionary Idea.”


ety, a scene echoed later by Zapata’s slightly hallucinogenic encounter with a drag-queen chorus line as he escapes Belem Prison. Arau’s decision to put Porfirian gay culture on the screen (even if through his lens of magical realism) called attention to this until recently neglected aspect of Mexican history. Díaz’s son-in-law, Ignacio (Nacho) Torre y Mier was one of Mexico City’s so-called Gilded Youth implicated in the Club 41 scandal that broke when police raided a cross-dressers’ ball. This new research plus Zapata’s well-documented patron-client relationship with Nacho is perhaps what prompted speculation that Arau’s Zapata might be gay.57

If Arau’s foray into gender history bolsters his research claims, his decision to adapt Steinbeck’s fictionalized version of Eufemio’s death belie them. In Steinbeck’s invention, Eufemio dies at the hand of a campesino whose land and wife he had stolen. When confronted by Zapata, he defies his brother and drags the woman away in front of her husband. As the villagers gather around Zapata, he reminds them, gesturing, gun in hand, that they must protect their land and resist oppression no matter its source. “About leaders. You’ve looked for leaders. For strongmen without faults. There aren’t any! There are only men like yourselves . . . I will die, but before I do I must teach you that a strong people is the only lasting strength.”58 At this, the offended campesino goes after Eufemio, shoots him, and reclaims his wife.

In Arau’s postmodern retelling, the aggrieved husband shoots Eufemio as he is having a roll in the hay (literally) with the man’s willing wife. As in Steinbeck and Kazan’s version, Eufemio dies in his brother’s arms, but Arau’s fiction, unlike that of Steinbeck and Kazan, holds no lesson, no greater insight. For his purposes any random act would have done equally as well—such as the truth, for instance, easily found in histories, popular and scholarly, and even on Wikipedia. Eufemio was shot in the street by one of his own officers, Col. Sidronio Camacho, whose father he had beaten in one of his drunken, increasingly unpredictable rages. Camacho sought out Eufemio, shot him and staked him, mortally wounded, on an anthill and then deserted with his men to the Carrancistas.59 In Enrique Krause’s alternate version, the incident was provoked when Eufemio, a militant teetotaler, beat Camacho’s father as part of his concerns.57

personal anti-alcohol initiative. Either version of the “real” facts would have better served Arai’s postmodern vision than his version of Steinbeck and Kazan’s invention. But to use the facts one must know them, whatever they are.

Steinbeck and Kazan knew the facts but changed them to illustrate Zapata’s idealism and commitment to the villagers while preserving the essential truth of Eufemio’s abuses and psychological breakdown. But why did they choose to add the sin of despoiling the villagers to Eufemio’s actual sin of abuse of authority? Womack gives no indication that Eufemio used his position to take either land or women, while López González credits him with initiating land redistribution. Yet the theme of Eufemio’s greed runs through ¡Viva Zapata! Why? It could be seen as a comment on contemporary affairs in Morelos where Zapata’s son Nicolás acquired land and power at the expense of villagers or a veiled criticism of the PRI’s institutional revolution. Was it a foreshadowing of the revisionist failed revolution that Raymundo Gleyzer would bring to the screen in his 1971 film, Mexico: the Frozen Revolution?

Because history on film, unlike history in print, unfolds in real time, it requires a literal revisioning by directors. Gleyzer’s Frozen Revolution was a documentary—hence regarded as factual—yet it rearranged time, interspersing Echeverría’s 1970 presidential campaign with interviews of ancient disillusioned Zapatistas (presumably many of the same veterans interviewed by Steinbeck) and closing with footage of the Tlatelolco massacre two years before. Print historians also rearrange time but have the luxury of nuance, digression, and explanation. Film directors, on the other hand, must employ compression, alteration, and metaphor to sum up historical events too complex or lengthy to depict otherwise. Yet film overcomes the “fiction of written history [which] fractures the past into distinct chapters, topics and categories.” Film provides an integrative image . . . [in which] all aspects of the past [sight, sound, language, costume, and manners] . . . are interwoven simultaneously as in life, a feat beyond written history.

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60. From Krause, Mexico, Biography of Power, 301, citing José González Ortega, “Cómo murió Eufemio Zapata,” Todo, January 13, 1944, ftnt 62. In this version his death is suspect, not because it relies on an article written decades after the fact but because it contradicts Womack.


inventions, like the narrative inventions of written history, are of two sorts: “true invention” that preserves essential truth and engages historical discourse, and “false invention” that does neither. Steinbeck and Kazan’s fictionalization of Eufemio’s death is an example of the first, Arau’s of the second.

Although historians recognize, if reluctantly, their own subjectivity in selecting and assembling oft-disputed facts, many tend to be intolerant of the “carefully crafted lie” of cinematic invention, perhaps because they realize (if only subconsciously) that they are sometimes influenced by those inventions. Historians also acknowledge (and fear) film’s power to shape “the basic historical knowledge of a society . . . [and its] basic historical culture” and so hold filmmakers to the discredited standards of dragnet (just the facts, ma’am) history. Accordingly, they often attempt to act as gatekeepers, hoping to influence public reception of historical films and to shape historiophobiya (as Hayden White named the historiography of “filmic discourse”). This gatekeeper predilection contributes to unsophisticated reviews of historical films by historians. As Robert Rosenstone observes, “No matter how serious or honest the filmmakers, the history that finally appears on the screen can never fully satisfy the historian as historian (although it may satisfy the historian as filmgoer).” More troubling than this-and-that-was-wrong reviews are those born of resentment springing from a realization that audiences of even mediocre films “based on a true story” will be larger by magnitudes than the readership for excellent scholarly works on the same topic.


67. Ibid., and Robert A. Rosenstone, “History in Images/History in Words: Reflection on the Possibility of Putting History into Film,” AHR 93 (1988): 1173–1185, and Visions of the Past, 7. This may explain why the film review section of the AHA was so short-lived, although the journal Film and History, still going strong after thirty years, has frequently addressed this problem; see Scott A. Metzger, “Pedagogy and the Historical Feature Film: Toward Historical Literacy,” FH, 37 (2007): 67–75.

68. On how films influence memory, point of view, and ranked importance, see Michel Foucault, “Film and Popular Memory,” in Sylvère Lotringer, ed., Foucault Live (New York: Semiotext, 1989), 92–94. For a particularly egregious example of an overwrought gatekeeper, see Joan Hoff’s hysterical review of Nixon, AHR 102 (1996): 1173–1174, which accuses Oliver Stone of raping his audiences and U.S. history; my letter of objection and her response in Communications, AHR 103 (1997): 966–967, in which she defends her “hatchet
Interestingly academic concerns about Araú’s misrepresentation of Zapata did not revolve around the gay *caudillo* issue, which so titillated the Mexican public, but around issues of language, ethnicity, myth, and memory raised by Araú’s invention of a Náhuatl-speaking Zapata, which invoked indigenous spirituality to reference the ongoing Mayan rebellion in Chiapas. Alan Knight, identified by the press as “an authority on the creation of the Mexican revolutionary myth,” expressed concerns that by taking “liberties” with iconic figures like Zapata, Araú would cause revolutionary icons to “lose[] their political resonance.” Womack dismissed Araú’s vision of a Zapata-Quetzalcoatl, along with his claim to have learned of it from a shaman while doing research in Morelos, as “hogwash.” “People who live in Los Angeles, like Araú, have fantasy views of what Mexico is about. Zapata was no witch doctor and probably didn’t speak Nahuatl.” Rather, said the doyen of Zapata studies, Zapata and his followers were “Spanish-speaking, village-living, corn-farming, sugar-working Mexican ‘country people’” 69

While authoritative, Womack’s description is not undisputed. Some revisionists say his estimate that only 9.29 percent of Morelos’s population spoke Náhuatl is too low. 70 While not contradicting Womack, the popular textbook *The Course of Mexican History* by Michael Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan Deeds edges toward the notion of an indigenous Zapataismo as does Krause’s *Mexico, Biography of Power*. Both rely on the testimony of the same witness, who, as a young girl, heard Zapata address the people of Milpa Alta in Náhuatl. “All his men spoke Nahuatl,” she recalled, “almost as we spoke it (almost like us).” Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds offer her testimony without comment whereas Krause mitigates her account by calling attention to Zapata’s use of the priest of Tepoztlán to translate Anenecuilco’s ancient Náhuatl land titles. 71

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job” on the film as “protect[ing] the public” by “prevent[ing Nixon] from becoming a blockbuster hit.” She also suggests her collaboration with Stephen Ambrose to this end. See his review of *Nixon: an Oliver Stone Film*, Eric Hamburg, ed., in JAH 82 (1996): 1530–1533.


In fact, indirect evidence suggests a persistent, even growing, Náhuatl-speaking population in Morelos. In 1896, Father A. M. Hunt Cortés founded an Indian boy’s school to teach indigenous language, history, and culture. Hunt Cortés, a Jesuit from New Orleans, learned Náhuatl, developed a Náhuatl-English grammar, and won the name Mazahuiaoyotl (White Indian) for organizing a petition to Díaz on behalf of villagers involved in land disputes with hacendados. But, as Womack points out, the Zapatistas drafted no Náhuatl documents until quite late in their struggle and then only to reach a few villages in Tlaxcala and Puebla. All Zapata’s speech proves for sure is that he could master a brief address in Náhuatl. No doubt Subcommandante Marcos, the Brunckian city boy intellectual guiding Chiapas’s current Zapatista movement, learned as much Mayan.

Araú responded to academic criticism with the *auteur’s* universal rebuttal (aka the Oliver Stone Defense). “I am a storyteller, not a historian. Who officialized the history of Zapata? A government that for 70 years told nothing but lies to this country? Why should I believe the official story? Why should I believe Womack?” Why indeed?

**Womack, Steinbeck, Zapata, and Generally Agreed Upon Facts**

*The truth of the revolution in Morelos is in the feeling of it.*

John Womack

Almost two decades after Steinbeck finished his research, Womack found himself in Morelos at the end of an unsuccessful search for a dissertation topic in Colombia. Having done a thesis on a 1917 Oklahoma sharecroppers’ revolt, he had hoped to write on Mexico’s revolution, but his advisor informed him “that Mexico had already been done” and suggested Colombia, which presumably had not. In Colombia, Womack considered *la violencia* but was dissuaded by rebel killings around Cali. He then decided to investigate a 1928 banana company strike only to be stonewalled by the company (Strike? What strike?). Womack then wisely decided to ignore his advisor and “do” Mexico’s revolution. He made his way to Morelos, the heart of Mexico’s struggle for land and justice, and found himself reflecting on Steinbeck and Kazan’s film *¡Viva Zapata!* Or was it the other way around? Was it the film that sparked his original

72. William Schell, Jr., *Integral Outsiders; the American Colony of Mexico City, 1876-1911* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001).
interest in the Revolution? Although he would later criticize Steinbeck and Kazan for “telescoping the revolution into one dramatic episode” and for distorting some people and events, Womack found the film’s “portrayal of Zapata, the villagers, and the nature of their relationship and the movement subtle, powerful, and true” and an opinion seconded by later historians who continue to find it “relatively faithful to the historical record” and useful in the classroom for its depiction of “popular leaders often in conflict with ruling elite.”

One reason Womack’s work endures is that he didn’t burden it with methodology. He constructed “a story, not an analysis, of how the experience of the Morelos villagers came to pass,” weaving what analysis he “thought pertinent” into the narrative “so that it would issue at the right moment for understanding it.” As one reviewer wrote approvingly, he “rigorously excluded from [its] universe any semblance of a paradigm.” While Womack’s emphasis on narrative over analysis may seem naïve by postmodern lights, his clear tight story-telling made the book a classic work.

That Womack was influenced (if only unconsciously) by Steinbeck and Kazan’s iconic film is suggested by his decision to include the legend of Zapata’s survival, rebirth, and/or reincarnation, white stallion and all—writing that “odd stories” circulated among the “country folk” that Zapata’s sorrel horse had turned “white as a star [and] . . . had been seen galloping riderless through the hills.” Steinbeck and Kazan had accepted, or chosen to accept, the legend as authentic Zapatista lore. Womack, eschewing critical analysis, included the myth as a poetic conclusion to his narrative of the man and his movement and as an overture to the movement without the man. Not all, or even most historians, choose to mention the legend but, of those who do, most cite Womack (if anyone). The most significant instance of Steinbeck and Kazan’s influence


76. Womack, Zapata, x.


78. Womack, Zapata, 330.

79. Interestingly, while both choose to end with the same quote from Womack, Zapata, neither Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, Course of Mexican History, 528–529, nor Jonathan Kandell, La Capital: The Biography of Mexico City (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1988), 439, use the survival/resurrection myth. For example, Krause, Biography of Power, 303, ftnt 67 citing Womack.
on Womack, however, is crystallized in his most artistic, even cinematic, moment (adapted from Sotelo Inclán) into which he wove one of his rare analyses—of Zapata’s transformation into a revolutionary.80

First here is some background. Zapata had a special relationship with Porfírio Díaz’s son-in-law, Ignacio (Nacho) de la Torre y Mier. The relationship’s exact nature is unclear, but polemicist Pablo González (hardly a disinterested party) called Nacho, “amo de zapata” (master of Zapata).81 Perhaps their relationship began the day of Nacho’s wedding to Amanda Díaz when Zapata leapt to stop her bolting carriage horse.82 Subsequently, Nacho took an interest in Zapata and rented him land to grow watermelons and other market crops. Zapata also trained Nacho’s horses for Jockey Club competitions and other events where noble honor, pride, and prestige were the real stakes. At one time, he also trained Pablo Escandón’s mounts but stopped at some point because he could not stomach him. Or had Nacho pressured Zapata? Escandón’s stables were Nacho’s only real competition in a friendly but serious rivalry, which likely intensified as the 1910 Centennial competitions approached. With stables so closely matched, a skilled trainer could mean the difference between the grand prize and second place. Nacho had expected to employ Zapata so when Zapata was drafted to the military, Nacho did something he was loath to do—he groveled before his presidential father-in-law. Díaz agreed to have Zapata released but warned Nacho that Zapata was going to be a big pain in the ass.83 Managing Nacho’s stables was the price of Zapata’s freedom.

While Zapata was away, Anenecuilco’s lawyers made progress in the village’s court case against Hacienda Hospital and hoped for a favorable decision. Yet only days after Díaz’s reelection and the end of his indenture to Nacho, a “cranky” Zapata led eighty armed men and took possession of the disputed land. Hacienda managers did nothing, no doubt expecting the authorities to uphold them as always. Instead two rapid rulings were issued in favor of the village, the second by Díaz himself. From that point, Zapata enjoyed a de facto alliance with the local jefes. When one jefe was reassigned, Zapata threw a farewell fiesta and continued his virtual alliance with the next, Eduardo Flores.

80. This narrative is from Womack’s Zapata, 63–67.
Following Francisco Madero's *pronunciamiento*, Flores set out to gauge what support (if any) there was for the revolt in his district. When he rode up with his small escort, he probably expected Zapata to be supervising division of land recently returned to his villagers by order of Díaz, yet Womack paints this as a highly charged encounter:

What mattered was what always matters in such confrontation—firepower. Zapata had over a hundred armed men; Flores escort numbered ten. Put on the defensive, Flores bad to explain his interference. He told Zapata the word was out that he and his men were revolting as Maderistas. Zapata denied the reports and said they were only dividing up the fields that belonged to them. On that score Flores made one complaint; be asked only if he could count on his people if the Maderistas did turn up in the area. Zapata assured him he could, Flores left, and the farmers went back to their business.

Womack then introduces his analysis:

...the government would have certainly suppressed the ...disturbance in Morelos, and Zapata would have been lucky to escape alive—if the Maderista revolution bad not succeed. 84

Yet Womack’s own account of events leading to the encounter does not support his interpretation of it as hostile, nor does the subsequent course of events support his supposition as to Zapata’s fate absent a Maderista victory.

Perhaps influenced by Steinbeck and Kazan’s portrayal of Zapata and Francisco Madero as star-crossed allies, Womack “privileged the revolution as event.”85 Once Madero’s revolt begins, Womack overrules his own evidence to transform Zapata’s virtual alliance with the jefes into an anti-Díaz uprising to be crushed at the earliest opportunity. In effect, he peers over the historical horizon to the inevitable Revolution, denying Zapata’s Porfirián consciousness and vesting him with the consciousness of a Revolution yet unformed—*cum hoc, ergo propter hoc* (with this, therefore because of this) and *pro hoc, propter hoc* (before this, because of this).86


86. Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies*, 167–169
The error of Womack’s authoritative narrative appears in almost every subsequent account of Zapata’s turn to revolution. For instance, Brunk commits the logical error of *cum hoc, ergo propter hoc:* “Zapata’s rebellion against Diaz . . . primarily motivated by the desire for land reform that would reverse the alienation of village resources . . . occurred when it did largely due to the opportunity provided [by] Francisco Madero.” Colin M. MacLachlan and William Beezley, however, commit the error of *pro hoc, propter hoc:* “. . . Anenecuilco and Emiliano Zapata had to wait some eighteen years before taking revenge” on Díaz for an adverse ruling in 1892.87

There is disagreement as to why Zapata was drafted into the local army unit. Some say an irate well-connected father arranged it with authorities when Zapata refused to marry his pregnant daughter. Others say Hospital Hacienda did it to solve its problem with the village by decapitating its leadership. Womack suggests Zapata’s impressment reflected official concern that he had retained Jesús Flores Magón, whom Womack characterizes as an opponent of the regime, to represent the village. But this, too, is uncertain. Brunk finds no evidence that Zapata had anything to do with Jesús Flores Magón, whose reputation as a critic of the regime rested on his support as a student for Zuniga y Miranda’s quixotic 1900 presidential bid and the activities of his radical brother.88

I don’t know who is right, but I do know Flores Magón was the Third Vice-President of the Mortgage and Loan Banking Co. (formerly Mexico Building and Loan Company), which was then heavily invested in Morelos real estate development and whose board included John R. Davis of Waters-Pierce Oil; E. N. Brown of the Mexican National Railroad; Julio Limantour, brother of the finance minister; Jockey Club director Rafael Elguero; developer Walter B. Hull; and Mexican Herald owner, Paul Hudson.89 Even if Jesús Flores Magón had not been the village’s attorney, his real estate ventures gave him a vested interest in the state’s political stability. No evidence indicates that Díaz regarded the well-connected banker as an opponent of his regime, and given the decades of official inaction, Anenecuilco’s pursuit of legal options, heretofore ineffective, should have caused the planters little concern.

While the he-done-her-wrong scenario is plausible, explanations as-


summing political motives for Zapata’s forced induction require looking just over the historical horizon. A more likely explanation for Zapata’s induction is Escandón’s desire to deprive his rival Nacho of Zapata’s services for the Centennial equine events. What is suggestive is that immediately after completing his commitment to Nacho, Zapata took more forceful action against Hospital Hacienda and that the last of two rulings legitimating his action came from Díaz personally, possible a qui pro quo courtesy of Nacho. No more evidence exists for this explanation than the others, but it better bears the facts and does not look over the historical horizon.

A final flaw in Womack’s logic concerns official responses, or lack thereof, to Zapata’s initial actions once Madero’s revolt did break out. Why was Zapata’s small inchoate group operating so close to the capital not crushed? Womack’s explanation is that the regime was stretched too thin. But Zapata’s ad hoc land reform was underway well before Madero’s revolt required significant troop commitments and might have been crushed quickly. In short, the assertion that “all that counted was firepower” in Zapata’s encounter with jefe Flores does not withstand logical review. Flores knew exactly where to find Zapata and what he was doing. If Flores believed rebellion was imminent, prudence dictated taking more than a personal escort. Zapata operated in political networks that originated in the gubernatorial election surrounding the creation of the state of Morelos in 1869; Zapata was not eliminated early on because he was the agent of an ad hoc Porfirian land reform sanctioned at the highest level.

**Political Archeology: The Creation of Morelos, 1869**

*It is the theory that determines what facts we may observe.*

Albert Einstein

In tracing the roots of Zapata’s insurgency, Womack begins in 1869 with Díaz’s attempt to become the first governor of the newly created state of Morelos. Womack describes a fair election in which Francisco Leyva, war hero and popular native son, defeated ambitious interloper Porfirio Díaz, thus depriving the future dictator of a base from which to challenge President Benito Juárez. However, according to Porfirian truth-teller Francisco Bulnes, until 1867 or so, Díaz was “one of those imbeciles who believed in liberty.” Only later did the real Díaz emerge

90. In addition to Womack, Zapata, 65–66; of course, see Brunk, Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal, 29–30; also Knight, Mexican Revolution, 1, 191–192.

91. Womack, Zapata, 10–36.

92. Womack, Zapata, 21–22.
as a “relentless disturber of the peace,” his previous “loyalty, honor and devotion to the Republic” having been only a façade. Díaz’s rapid transformation from Juárez’s most loyal and trusted general to a politically ambitious power seeker, which is taken as fact by most historians, thus would appear something of a mystery. But possibly most historians, following Bulnes and Womack, are wrong. Rather than recklessly pursuing political power immediately following the Intervention, Díaz was a reluctant candidate for governor of Morelos. He did not “horn in” (as Womack put it) but was continually pushed and pulled into Morelos’ politics by those who made themselves his followers, creating a Porfirista movement to achieve regional political goals and to express their discontent with Juárez.

At a basic level, Mexican politics were then (and to some extent still are) organized by camarillas, dyadic networks of amity and interest that integrate politics in specific geographic areas (patrias cibicas). Whereas scholarship dealing with camarillas tends to emphasize the patron’s influence upon followers, the reverse is often as important. A patron’s power relies on charisma as much as coercion. Followers are not mere pawns of their patron for “if the patron could simply issue commands, he would have no reason to cultivate a clientele in the first place.” The creation of the state of Morelos and Díaz’s participation in the subsequent election provide a nuts-and-bolts example of the influence of regional antagonisms in state politics and on national political outcomes—the very sort of relationships that shaped Zapata’s movement in the critical period leading to the 1910 Revolution.

In 1867, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, acting for Juárez, ordered Díaz, commander of the Eastern Army, to divide the state of Mexico into three semi-autonomous military districts, each with its own capital, courts, and military governor. The Third Military District, a natural geographic unit traditionally recognized as a distinct region, later became the state of Morelos whereas the second became the state of Hidalgo. Morelos,

in turn, was made up of two distinct subregions of Mesoamerican origin, one centered on Cuernavaca with its Aztec garrison and the other on Cuautla, which had resisted Aztec domination by alliance with the Tlaxcalans. Cuernavaca district split Cuautla in two, isolating Cuautla’s center from its eastern section.\textsuperscript{97} From ancient times Cuernavaca represented central authority whereas Cuautla represented local rights and autonomy. This arrangement was perpetuated after the conquest when lands of the defeated Aztecs were incorporated into the \textit{Marquesado del Valle} and those of the Spaniard’s Tlaxcalan allies made subject to royal authority.\textsuperscript{98} Centuries later, Zapata placed his headquarters between east and west, a testament to the rivalry’s durability.

Díaz appointed Francisco Leyva as military governor because Leyva kept order in the ranks and expected public officials to maintain high standards. Leyva also understood local prejudices against outsiders and so, to avoid disorder, gave no local political offices to “extranos.”\textsuperscript{99} But as military governor, Leyva made Cuernavaca, the former French capital, the seat of his administration, thus raising one rival municipio over another and the level of popular discontent as well.\textsuperscript{100}

Wartime autonomy produced a peacetime pro-statehood movement (\textit{separatismo}) in the Third District. Juárez, eager to split Mexico state and to place his own men as governors, issued an executive order as part of the \textit{convocatoria} of August 1867 that created the states of Morelos and Hidalgo. He proposed Leyva as governor of Morelos, and, in return, Leyva used his final months as military governor to support Juárez’s ministerial candidates.\textsuperscript{101} Opposition to Leyva’s attempts to encourage a “correct” election outcome developed immediately and, not surprisingly, that opposition came from Cuautla district. Also, as might be expected, rival Cuernavacan and Cuautlan factions emerged in the Third Military District—the former led by Leyva and the latter by Col. Rosario Aragón. Interestingly, Aragón’s slate of candidates for local office mirrored that of Leyva, differing in its candidates for national offices by proposing Díaz for president against Juárez.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{97} Peter Gerhard, \textit{A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain} (London: Cambridge U. Press, 1972), 91–98


\textsuperscript{99} Archivo de Leyva, \textit{Archivo General de la Nación} (hereinafter cited as \textit{AL}), Legajo VIII, carta 19 and carta 15.

\textsuperscript{100} Benítez to Díaz, June 14, 1869, \textit{APD}, VIII: 34–36.

\textsuperscript{101} There are several accounts of the \textit{convocatoria} and its consequences for Juárez’s government. I find the clearest is Walter V. Scholz, \textit{Mexican Politics During the Juárez Regime, 1855-1872} (Columbia, Miss. 1957).

\textsuperscript{102} Rosario Aragón to Díaz, September 23, 1867, V: 131–133; Aragón to Díaz, October 4, 1867, V: 197–198; Aragón to Díaz, October 13, 1867, \textit{APD} V: 64–55.
Leyva won a seat in Congress where he led the separatista fight for statehood. The government’s backing of the separatistas virtually assured legislative approval, and in December 1868, resolutions were passed creating Hidalgo and Morelos.103 But the ease of the separatistas’ legislative victory did not unite them. Indeed, Leyva declared fellow separatistas Aragón to be his enemy.104 Bad blood between Leyva and Aragón dated from the Intervention and Aragón’s request to arm certain Tehuantepec villages under his control. Predictably, Leyva refused his request, for those who armed villages had the makings of a political base should they exploit it.105

Three candidates were put forward for the governorship of Morelos: Leyva, representing Juárez’s ministerales; Díaz, drafted by the anti-Leyva/anti-ministerial opposition; and Lic. Anastasio Zerecero, a magistrate with almost no support.106 As directed by the articles of transition, Baranda set up state administrative, judicial, and legislative machinery and drew the electoral districts, which he skillfully gerrymandered to water the Porfirian vote in its eastern stronghold.107 In addition to their patrias chicas, Leyva’s and Díaz’s supporters were distinguished by occupation to some extent, as revealed by public letters written in support of the two candidates. A majority of bureaucrats and government officials were leyvistas.108 Díaz’s support is usually said to have come from soldiers disgruntled by Juárez’s demobilization of the army but it is equally likely that soldiers welcomed discharge from active service. Porfiristas identified themselves on campaign signature lists as “agricultores, comerciantes y propietarios” who lived by industry, not government employment.109 Government officials in the Porfirista ranks

103. López González, Nacio Morelos; and Francisco Leyva Arciniegas: Primer Gobernador Constitucional de Morelos, 1869–1876 (Cuernavaca, nd).
104. Aragón to Díaz, December 4, 1867, APD V: 376.
106. El Siglo Diez y Nueve 25, January 25, 1869; Suplemento 112 to El Siglo Diez y Nueve 122, April 1869. Also Hipolito Rios to Díaz, March 8, 1869, APD VII: 237; and Juan López to Díaz, March 8 1869, APD VII: 238. El Globo III: 83, April 17, 1869; and El monitor, April 18, 1869. El Constitucional, IX: 1290, April 24, 1869.
108. Town-by-town membership lists exist for the opposing camarillas as lists of signatures at the bottom of letters of support for Díaz and Leyva, which appeared in Siglo XIX, January 25, January 27, February 5, March 3, March 29, April 2, April 22, April 23, May 4, May 12, and June 9, 1869.
were fewer and of lower rank and office than those supporting Leyva, who used government employment and favor to secure allegiance and employed force or threats of force to stifle dissent. In this way, Díaz became a political symbol for the “outs” everywhere.\textsuperscript{110}

The combination of official intimidation and Baranda’s gerrymandering of voting districts was too much to overcome without an active, personal campaign by Díaz, which he refused to undertake. Only one Porfirista delegate was elected and only because José Coria, a Díaz adicto, commanded Cuautla’s national guard. On July 28, the electoral college of the state legislature met at Yautpec and elected Leyva as governor of Morelos.\textsuperscript{111} Morelos’ political geography, reflecting antipathy between notables of unequal power (and their camarillas) and exacerbated by long-standing inter-municipio rivalries, was expressed at the national level in the form of a “Díaz for President” boom in 1869.\textsuperscript{112}

In 1909, Díaz could connect with the regional networks rooted in 1869, of which Zapata’s people were a part, to achieve national goals. Díaz allowed Zapata to operate an ad hoc regional land reform for two reasons: First, it relieved popular discontent in Morelos created by the expansion of commercial agriculture, primarily sugar. Second, it served to undercut científico camarillas at the national level, a process Bulnes described as Díaz’s “blackening” of the científicos.\textsuperscript{113} Zapata’s activities contributed to that “blackening” by undercutting a governor identified with that group, Pablo Escándon of Morelos.\textsuperscript{114}

Such tactics were not unusual for Díaz who preferred to deal with discontent locally by defusing tensions and negotiating cases as they arose, which was less likely to open cans of political worms than formal legislative action. The dual agents of Díaz’s negotiation of hegemony were the jefe político and the cacique. Nominally jefes answered to state governors, but in practice, Díaz often selected them for reasons relating to local and regional balances of power—as with jefe Flores and his predecessor in Morelos. Caciques were traditional (or natural) leaders


\textsuperscript{113}. Francisco Bulnes, \textit{The Whole Truth About Mexico} (New York: M. Bulnes Book Co., 1917), 120.

\textsuperscript{114}. I examine Díaz’s attempt in the last years of his regime to weaken the científicos and their response in “The Creelman Conspiracy: Towards a Reappraisal of the Fall of the Porfiriato,” \textit{South Eastern Latin Americanist} 24 (1986): 47–65.
recognized as having “connections to those on top and those on the bottom, insiders and outsiders.” Although Díaz could not appoint caciques, he could use friends and favors (the credit and currency of *personalismo*) to influence the makeup of the pool of potential candidates, even if the pool sometimes included those who, like Zapata, were potential trouble.

**Porfirian Triangulation: Hemispheric Context**

*The inevitable failure of benevolent tyranny...*¹¹⁶

The Nation, 1911

By 1907, concerns about Díaz’s age inside and outside Mexico gave rise to a hemispheric cabal basically sympathetic to “the old lion” but dedicated to changing the main cog of the Porfirian machine without shutting it off.¹¹⁷ The scheme to coax Don Porfirio into retirement, from whence, as Mexico’s grand elder statesman, he would preside over and legitimate the upcoming 1910 elections, thus insuring a smooth transition of power, had two parts. First, U.S. Secretary of State Elihu Root visited Díaz in Mexico and, with rounds of banquets and toasts, set the stage for an interview with the famous North American war correspondent James Creelman in *Pearson’s Magazine*. Second, Mexico’s foreign minister Ignacio Mariscal and his deputy Manuel Calero (both anti-científico like Reyes) collaborated with American Ambassador David E. Thompson to prepare a script for Díaz’ interview with Creelman. In Washington, Theodore Roosevelt and Root laid the groundwork in the press by planting articles in *Harper’s Weekly* and elsewhere, suggesting that Díaz “surrender his authority.” Simultaneously, foreign investors were promised that, should he do so, no revolution would occur, as Díaz had “surround[ed] himself with men who...will be fully capable of continuing his policies.”¹¹⁸


At first everything unfolded as planned. In his (in)famous interview with Creelman, Díaz said he would surrender the presidency and that he “welcome[d] the formation of an opposition party,” referring to his liberal regime’s only real opposition, Catholic conservatives, whom he hoped to bring into the Porfrián system from which they had been effectively excluded.119 At that time, the economy was strong, but by the time the interview appeared in March 1908, Mexico’s economy was in recession.120 Díaz’s commitment to retire, never strong, faltered as various “friends” (as the regime’s insiders were known) begged him reconsider. Now hedging his bets, Díaz sent Bernardo Reyes, a popular general with presidential ambitions and an opponent of finance minister José Ives Limantour whose científico clique then dominated the government, to explain away his unfortunate remarks.121 In an interview published in La República, which was owned by his supporter Heriberto Barrón, Reyes declared the president had only given the interview under pressure from Washington and that Díaz had reserved the option of serving again, which Reyes urged him to do.122

Whatever Díaz had hoped to do, the democratic cat once out of the bag could not easily be put back in. Mariscal and Calero (the latter just returned from visiting Roosevelt at his Oyster Bay home) carried on by creating the Centro Organizador del Partido Democrático (COPD) and encouraging Díaz to retire and oversee a transition to democracy.123 Essentially an umbrella organization for those committed to a political solution to the Porfrián succession (one that did not include Limantour’s científicos), the COPD soon split into two factions: reyistas and not reyistas. Whereas before governors were routinely chosen in advance of their (putative) elections, in 1908 a series of “independent movements ... [got] so out of hand that the federal government eventually had to drop its pretense of neutrality and revert to the imposition of candidates” in Sinaloa, Yucatán, and Coahuila. In Morelos, a heavy hand was unnecessary, for its governor Manuel Alarcón was, as Womack put it, a

121. “Yet Another Term For Díaz,” Mexican Herald, August 1, 1908, from an article in La República.
“popular policeman.” When Alarcón died just before the 1909 presidential election, there was no reason to assume Díaz would not impose his replacement in Morelos had he chosen to do so. Instead he allowed a contested election. What had changed?

A contested gubernatorial election with the appearance of democracy triangulated a set of foreign and domestic problems for Díaz. Internationally, the election demonstrated Díaz’s democratic intentions even as he dropped his promise to retire that he made in the Creelman interview. This positioned Díaz in opposition to Washington’s hemispheric unilateralism, something a new president might not have been able to do. From 1905, Washington and Mexico City, though enjoying outwardly cordial relations, were engaged in contentious negotiation of hemispheric *yanqui* imperium that turned on two axes. First was Roosevelt’s obsession with the security of the Panama Canal, then under construction, and his desire for Díaz’s assistance in ending Central America’s chronic instability; second was Díaz’s obsession with his regime’s opposition in exile, the Magonista movement of Ricardo Flores Magón (*Partido Liberal Mexicano*) and his desire that Roosevelt suppress it in the United States. Eventually they reached a quid pro quo. Díaz would cooperate with Washington in Central America short of annexing Mexico’s neighbors (which Roosevelt had pressured Díaz to do) while Roosevelt would invoke the neutrality acts against PLM members in the U.S. In addition, Roosevelt desired one other thing of Díaz—that the aged president oversee a smooth semidemocratic transition of power to reassure foreign investors that their hundreds of millions of dollars invested in Mexico would be safe from revolution. Alarcón’s death provided Díaz an opportunity to demonstrate that such a smooth semidemocratic transition was possible in Mexico.

Domestically, the election solved several problems for Díaz. By approving Pablo Escandón, the gubernatorial candidate put forward by sugar planters hostile to Finance Minister Limantour for thwarting their attempts to fix prices, Díaz dispelled fears that he was in thrall to his finance minister and the científicos. Though not of military temperament, Escandón was a colonel and his candidacy threw a bone to General Reyes and his followers who were carrying Díaz’s water by explaining away the Creelman interview. The management of Escandón’s campaign fell to Reyes’s chief political operative, Barrón, whom Díaz despised but who had the virtue of being an enemy of Limantour and the

científicos.\footnote{Peter V. N. Henderson, \textit{In the Absence of Don Porfirio: Francisco de la Barra and the Mexican Revolution} (Wilmington, DE.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 84, states Díaz “decided to let the planters’ choice stand.” Also see Knight, \textit{Mexican Revolution}, I, 24; Percy F. Martin, \textit{Mexico of the Twentieth Century} (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1908), II, 248–251; and Francisco Bulnes, \textit{El Verdadero Díaz y la Revolución} (México: Editoria Nacional, 1960), 134–135.} As for Zapata, his activities provided Díaz an excuse, should it become necessary, to replace Escandón with a governor more attuned to popular reform, one who was not a reyista—Leyva, for instance. Thirty years after the 1869 election, camarillas remained the basis of political organization in Morelos, and a many local Porfirian political clubs, including that of the Zapata brothers, supported Patricio Leyva for governor. Yet what would have been different had Leyva been elected? To see his candidacy as one of opposition to Díaz and his regime is a misreading; even if Leyva had become governor, he was effectively a Porfirian loyalist.

Leyva organized his campaign along traditional lines using personal clubs, but he also had links to the emerging modern sector of the Mexican economy in the person of Jesús Flores Magón, vice president of the Mortgage and Loan Banking Co., who organized levista clubs.\footnote{Womack, \textit{Zapata}, 21–22; Francisco Bulnes, \textit{El Verdadero Díaz}, 38–39.} A partner in a number of real estate ventures in Morelos with Julio Limantour (the finance minister’s brother), W. O. Staples (contractor and vice president of the Mexico, Cuernavaca, and Pacific Railroad), and other importantes of the American colony, Jesús Flores Magón had something other than sugar-planting in mind for the Land of Eternal Springtime whose climate, exotic beauty, and, of course, accessibility by rail made it a perfect tourist destination. The collaboration of local elites and foreigners (largely American) in these sophisticated marketing schemes to sell lots and vacation homes to the wealthy epitomizes the transformation of Mexico under Díaz. The Revolution merely postponed their plans.\footnote{“New Mortgage and Loan Bank to Open...”\textit{Mexican Herald}, November 2, 1909; and “Jockey Club Names Officers,” \textit{Mexican Herald}, August 13, 1909. Also see Schell, \textit{Integral Outsiders}, “Yanqui Commercial Banking” in chapter 5.}

Escándon’s support came from absentee planter landlords (like unto the landlords of colonial British India) who claimed modernity while seeking government price supports for their sugar to insure profits to finance European vacations. Having no popular political base (camarillas) for his candidate, Barrón gave Escándon’s campaign the trappings of a modern political party whose slogan “a square deal for Morelos” seemed aimed at Washington as much as Morelos. His promises to upgrade water and sewer services, to improve the hospital and army barracks, and to regulate liquor sales and saloon hours mimicked the “pro-
gressive" rhetoric of ex-president Roosevelt, as did his promotion of wage labor, which he said would reduce drunkenness and result in fewer arrests and fewer prisoners to be “leased” by sugar planters. The planters feared no shortage of labor, however, for they could hire villagers dispossessed by the expansion of their plantations, turning semi-serfs having traditional usufruct land rights into cheap modern wage laborers having none. Very tidy.\footnote{130}

Seen in this context, Zapata’s increasing influence in Morelos did not threaten the regime’s security, but rather guaranteed it. By legitimizing Zapata’s ad hoc land reform, Díaz secured Zapata’s loyalty, thus vesting his and Anencucilo’s interest in perpetuating the regime. Díaz’s tactics were effective. When Francisco Madero launched his revolt and disorder came, Zapata pragmatically kept his options open, maintaining the Porfirián peace locally while dispatching a representative, Pablo Torres Burgos, to the Apostle’s camp to see if his plan addressed land reform. Even after Torres Burgos returned with Madero’s assurances, Zapata, a conservative revolutionary, took no action until he was certain Díaz was done.

Zapata was not a precursor of the Revolution but rather was pulled into revolution when his privileged relationship with the Porfirián regime no longer served his ends. But this truth did not square with PRI’s myth of the Revolution which was integral to its “democratic Bonapartism,” essentially a Porfirián without Díaz or \textit{la misma mierda con otras moscas}. For decades, the PRI state attempted to conceal the neo-Porfirián reality of its hegemony by manipulating the myth of Zapata and other revolutionary icons to suit its changing political agendas.\footnote{131} As land reform waned after its climax under Lázaro Cárdenas, the preferred iconography of the official revolutionary myth shifted from Rivera’s immortal campesino hero to Zapata the charro. In 1979, on the centennial of Zapata’s birth, President José López Portillo inaugurated a massive bronze equestrian statue in Cuernavaca, \textit{Caudillo del Sur}, which resembled the carved stone Zapatas being hawked to turistas in the local markets. The program notes for the occasion confirm the change by delivering a backhanded criticism of Rivera and early revolutionary art: “Esta obra escultórica no es una figura sacada de estatuaria europea, sino del

\footnotetext{130}{"Improvements by Escandón," \textit{MH}, April 27, 1909.}

\footnotetext{131}{Although he might disagree, this is essentially the point David LaFrance makes in the last paragraph of his review essay, “Agrarian Conflict and the State in Mexico” in \textit{Latin American Perspectives} 19 (1992): 102, in reviewing Thomas Benjamin, \textit{A Rich Land, a Poor People}, James B Greenberg, \textit{Blood Ties: Life and Violence in Rural Mexico}, and Frans Schryer, \textit{Ethnicity and Class Conflict in Rural Mexico}. On democratic Bonapartism, see Roger Batra, “Peasants and Political Power in Mexico: a Theoretical Approach,” \textit{Latin American Perspectives} 2 (1975): 140-142.}
arte popular mexicano.”\textsuperscript{132} That year the PRI brought heretofore independent campesino organizations together and mobilized them under its watchful eye as the \textit{Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala Popular}. And as Mexico’s land reform ground to a halt, the PRI regime erected more monumental statues of Zapata the charro along the martyr’s pilgrimage route: one equestrian at Chinameca and two standing, one at his grave where he holds a rifle and a copy of the \textit{Plan de Ayala}, and the other fronting the tiny Cuautla museum where he holds a sword and rifle. “My father doesn’t need commemorations,” grumbled Emiliano’s youngest son Mateo. “He’s already had plenty of speeches. Nothing but demagoguery. Nothing but empty promises, and the campesinos are still screwed over as before.”\textsuperscript{133}

In 1992, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari took the Institutional Party’s revolutionary mask off the neo-Porfirian state it had fashioned. Citing the potential benefits of globalism, he signed the North American Free Trade Agreement, setting aside Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution and ending land redistribution and legal protection of the \textit{ejido} system, cynically doing so in Zapata’s name. Simultaneously a rebellion erupted in Chiapas led by urban intellectuals “under the supreme banner of the millenarian legend of Emiliano Zapata,” now refashioned and (re)indigenized.\textsuperscript{134} Thus, in a near almost cinematic historical narrative arch, the national cult of Zapata fashioned by the PRI with the tacit collaboration of artists, Hollywood, and scholars is challenged by a postmodern peasant Indian alternative of a mystical Votán-Zapata fashioned in tacit collaboration with artists, Hollywood, and scholars.


Comeuppance: My Mythistory

...to use the facts one must know them whatever they are.

Bill Schell

How much easier it is to be critical than to be correct.

Benjamin Disraeli

I began this piece with a story of an event as I remember it and had thought to close with some playfully smug generalization about the need to recognize and engage the powerful nonverbal sources (pictorial, cinematic, and musical) by acknowledging their power to shape our perceptions of the past and by dealing forthrightly with them so that the intellectual constructs we call *history* might rise to the level of true invention. But I cannot write that self-congratulatory conclusion now.

An anonymous reviewer of the first version of this article pointed out an error that derived from my book *Integral Outsiders* and from my dissertation. ¹³⁵ There, I had written that *Pearson’s Magazine*, which published the Creelman interview, “existed mainly to promote the business interests of Sir Weetman [Pearson] (known in Britain’s Parliament as the member from Mexico).” ¹³⁶ I was wrong. Although Sir Weetman’s multifaceted interests did include S. Pearson and Son Publishing Company founded by his father in 1844, its activities were unrelated to those of publisher, liberal reformer, and philanthropist Sir Arthur Pearson, whose *Pearson’s Magazine* covered literature, politics, and spiritualism. However, my earlier work on Porfíriano press operations and the fall of the Díaz regime (“The Creelman Conspiracy”) did not contain that error.¹³⁷ How had I come to confuse the two Pearsons? I had relied on information from John Mason Hart’s *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution*. Where did Hart get his information? He cites Madero’s *La sucesión presidencial en 1910*; although Madero’s chapter “¿A Donde nos Lleva el General Díaz?” deals with the Creelman interview, neither Pearson is mentioned.¹³⁸ Wikipedia, however, deni-

  
  
  
grated by so many scholars, did get the facts right. My error serves to illustrate the observation with which I began: It doesn’t matter whether or not stories are true; what matters is that they are written down, for once collected, catalogued, and archived, mythology becomes grist for scholarly mills. Although creating an accurate historical narrative may be impossible, in the end, the pragmatic historian must act as if it were. We really have no other choice.