

Photographers of the Mexican Revolution: Conflict and Diversity in Pictures

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(1 IMAGE, Title Slide, Revolutionaries with Swords, unknown)

It's a pleasure to be here today to speak to you about the Mexican Revolution and those who documented the civil war. Mexico is a geographically diverse and picturesque country that has been depicted by many photographers over time. The DeGolyer Library in Dallas is home to more than 8,000 photographs of Mexico, and this talk is based on DeGolyer collections.

(2 IMAGE, Church View)

Beginning with the conquest by Spain in the 16th century, Mexico has had a tumultuous and often violent history. After almost three centuries of colonial rule, in September, 1810, an uprising against the Spanish began, and Mexico finally gained independence with the Treaty of Córdoba in 1821. In the new republic, however, diverse political groups struggled for leadership.

(3 IMAGE, Diaz pc, Cruces)

Eventually, one man became leader, Porfirio Díaz. He was a dominant force and controversial figure in the history of a changing Mexico. Díaz rose to power through the military and ruled as a virtual dictator almost continuously from 1876

to 1911. (4, IMAGE, Diaz Military, Ramos) His regime, called the *Porfiriato*, reigned with a strong military hand and ushered in economic development, a road and railroad infrastructure, and increased exportation of tropical produce.

Modernization came with a price though, with heavy foreign investment, particularly by Great Britain and the United States, in mining, oil and railroads.

(5 IMAGE, Hand car going back to Linares)

In addition, large tracts of land were owned by relatively few, and peasants were exploited, living in a system of dependency and debt.

(6 IMAGE, Centennial, and Diaz group, 2 panoramas, Downing)

The year 1910 marked the Centennial of Mexico's independence from Spain, and there were weeks of celebrations in September. Diaz triumphantly showcased Mexico City transformed into a Europeanized stage of Second Empire architecture and opulence. For Díaz, "appearances" were of the utmost importance, even if Mexico's underlying social structure was unstable.¹

Naturally, the great fanfare of the Centennial was exhaustively covered by such professional photographers as Eugenio B. Downing who produced a unique series of large panoramas using a cirkut camera.

¹ Olivier Debroye, *Mexican Suite: a History of Photography in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 171-173.

(7 IMAGE, Armed Americans, Cananea, Great Western View Co.)

The miners' strike at the Consolidated Copper Company in Cananea in 1906 is considered pivotal in the beginnings of unrest during the final years of President Díaz's rule. This important event in the history of Mexico's civil war is documented in a photographic series of the strikers at Cananea, located in Sonora in northern Mexico near the Arizona state line. (8 IMAGE, Col. Greene, Cananea, Great Western View Co.) Protected by armed American vigilantes, mine manager Colonel William C. Greene, addressed crowds of striking Mexican miners who wanted equal pay to the Americans. The uprising was put down with force, 23 people died, and no changes were made at the mine.

While the Cananea images are significant in their historical documentation, earlier photographers had, perhaps unknowingly, recorded Mexico's development and shaped our view of the country.

(9 IMAGE, Rurales, Diaz's local police, Briquet)

Of the numerous professionals active in Mexico in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some of the major photographers were: Abel Briquet, Lorenzo Becerril (1837-1904), C.B. Waite (1861-1929), and Hugo Brehme (1882-1954). Their photographs furnish evidence of a visually changing Mexico.

(10 IMAGE, [Girl by river], Scott)

Transitional photographers in a time of change, Americans Charles B. Waite and Winfield Scott targeted a turn-of-the-century audience of investors, publishers and the growing foreign tourist trade. They often posed native subjects, creating romantic, sometimes seductive, pictorial renditions of daily life of common people, but also depicted agriculture and industrial development.²

(11 IMAGE, Torreon, Waite)

As with so many others, the Revolution dramatically affected Waite and his family. His brother, manager of a Mexican mining company, was decapitated by laborers in April 1912,³ and the Waite family left Mexico for good the next year.⁴

The Mexican Revolution was one of many revolts in Mexican history, but it became, without doubt, the most far-reaching. The Revolution started in 1910 with Francisco I. Madero's (1873-1913) uprising against the long-standing stronghold of the Díaz government, and lasted until 1920.

(12 IMAGE, Madero on train, 1911, Gutiérrez)

² Debroise, *Mexican Suite*, 82-83.

³ Francisco Montellano. *C.B. Waite, Fotografo. Una Mirada diversa sobre el Mexico de principios del siglo XX* (Mexico: Editorial Grijalbo, S.A. de C.V., 1994) 65.

⁴ Rosa Casanova and Adriana Konzevik, *Mexico: a Photographic History*. (Mexico City: INAH, 2007) 172-175.

In 1910, Madero opposed Díaz in the presidential election. Díaz had said he would not run for president again but changed his mind. Madero spearheaded the revolutionary movement that followed. Heliodoro J. Gutiérrez (1878-1933), and those in his agency, photographed Madero and events surrounding his campaign and election.⁵

(13 IMAGE, Pro-Madero group waiting for the resignation of President Díaz. 1910, Gutiérrez)

Another skilled Mexican professional, Mauricio Yáñez documented the Revolution in Culiacan, Sinaloa on the Pacific Northwest coast of Mexico.

(14 IMAGE, Alfredo Campos y su guerrilla, entrando a Culiacan, Abril de 1912)

His carefully composed images portray those who were caudillos, leaders of the anti-Díaz re-electionist movement in the west.⁶

(15 IMAGE, Conrado H. Antuna, Jefe. 1912, Yáñez)

Feeling pressured by insurgents, at age 80, Díaz eventually resigned and departed for Europe in May, 1911. While the Mexico Díaz left had advanced in many ways, the country was still predominantly rural, large haciendas were owned

⁵ John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution: Commitments, Testimonies, Icons*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012, 73.

⁶ Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution*, 73.

by the wealthy few, there was a 77 percent illiteracy rate, and uneducated peasants lived at the lowest level.

(16 IMAGE, Un Centavo, Señor! Unknown)

There were many revolutionary factions in Mexico with different leaders, some together in this photograph taken after the battle of Juárez, April, 1911.

(17 IMAGE, Leaders of the Revolution. Madero (front center), Villa (back left), Carranza (front left), Orozco (front right), 4-30-1911 by E.O. Goldbeck)

The main leaders of the Revolution were agrarian land reformer, Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919) and supporters in the state of Morelos south of Mexico City.

Francisco “Pancho” Villa (1878-1923) and Pasqual Orozco (1882-1915) led different rebel forces in the north. Constitutionalist Venustiano Carranza (1859-1920) was Governor of Coahuila and later president of Mexico. General Álvaro Obregón (1880-1928) was a brilliant military strategist, later president.

(18 IMAGE, Galveston News War Map, 1914. Illustrates rebel locations.)

Although some were forced to serve, their armies were largely untrained volunteers. All these leaders were eventually assassinated.

(19 IMAGE, Orozco standing with Madero) with (Orozco dead)

Both radicals and conservatives quickly became disenchanted with Madero, who was a weak leader and ineffectual in creating change.

(20 IMAGE, Huerta, center)

His administration was overthrown by General Victoriano Huerta (1850-1916) with Madero's imprisonment and assassination in 1913.

(21 IMAGE, Felicistas en la ciudadela, 1913. Rebels, supporters of Felix Diaz, note mixed uniforms)

The resultant fighting between Federal troops and Revolutionaries is known as *La Decena Trágica* or the Ten Tragic Days, February 9-19, 1913. It was a chaotic time of killing and destruction in Mexico City. Although dangerous to be in the streets, many photographers covered the fighting.

(22 IMAGE, Revolutionists, during Action. February, 1913, Mexico View Co.)

The death of Madero and Huerta's rise to power launched a tailspin of events with several revolutionary groups warring for leadership.

(23 IMAGE, Leaving the danger zone. Refugees from the violence during the day of truce, Feb. 16, 1913. Mexico View Co.)

(24 IMAGE, Yncineracion de cadavers. Photographer unknown perhaps Samuel Tinoco) Cremation of corpses. Widespread death, bodies were piled up and burned to avoid an epidemic.)

An established photojournalist, Manuel Ramos (1874-1954) recorded the uprising against President Madero during the Ten Tragic Days.

(25 IMAGE, Dead Outside Palace, Ramos)

He began his career working for newspapers in Mexico City and functioned as something of an “official” photographer for the Porfírate.⁷

(26 IMAGE, Madero’s House) with (Place Where Madero Fell, Ramos)

His striking, beautifully composed images show the death and terrible destruction in the city as well as crowds revering the place where Madero and his vice-president were assassinated.

The Mexican Revolution was a drawn-out, violent and bloody affair.

(27 IMAGE, Executed at Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico, unknown)

Photographers captured on film the devastation and brutality that occurred during the civil war that claimed one to two million dead and led to the emigration of some 890,000 persons to the United States. Photography played an unprecedented role in the war, depicted by seasoned professionals and those without expertise who had only recently picked up a camera.

(28 IMAGE, Mexican man kneeling beside dead body, unknown)

⁷ Casanova and Konzevik, *Mexico*, 28.

At the outbreak of the Revolution, there were relatively few real news photographers, but by 1920, more than 150 identified individuals and firms and countless others had chronicled the war in Mexico.⁸ Although their pictures remain today, finding information about the many cameramen is sometimes difficult. Pirating photographs was rampant, and authorship of images is often debatable.

(29 IMAGE, Mexican youths on horseback, unknown)

Newly available equipment facilitated making photographs. Kodak issued a postcard-size photographic paper in 1902 and the following year the affordable Kodak 3A folding camera. The negatives were exactly the proper size for contact printed postcards.⁹ The more sophisticated professional photographer carried the new Graflex and larger format cameras. The quality of the photographs and level of expertise during the Revolution varied greatly. Some images, snapshots really, witness spontaneous news events while others are staged close-ups and posed views.

(30 IMAGE, Execution in Mexico, unknown)

⁸ Anne E. Peterson, unpublished list of photographers of the Mexican Revolution, March, 2014.

⁹ Paul J. Vanderwood and Frank N. Samponaro. *Border Fury: a Picture Postcard Record of Mexico's Revolution and U.S. War Preparedness, 1910-1917*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 4.

Motion pictures also came into play during this era documenting the generals, camp life and battles.

It is important to remember that the Mexican Revolution was not a single, united effort but a series of uncoordinated attempts by disparate forces. Although some were allied, often they were not, and allegiances changed.

(31 IMAGE, Orozco's camp by Jim A. Alexander (1863-1926))

The complexity of various Revolutionary groups, confusion and tensions they provoked, brought about isolated movements of the political factions, and it affected all age groups and genders. Mexico became a huge battleground peopled by different armies. Guerrilla warfare was practiced in some areas, and what would be considered war crimes today were widespread.

As I'm sure you all know, this year marks the centennial of the beginning of World War I, and it's also part of the continued centennial of the ten year Mexican Revolution, so different in scope. Fighting in Mexico was unlike WWI, so close in timeframe, where the nationalistic sides were delineated and battle lines clearly drawn.¹⁰

(32 IMAGE, Notre Dame sentimental soldier pc) with (ruined town)

¹⁰ Debroise, *Mexican Suite*, 177.

In Europe during the Great War, cameras and the media were restricted and not permitted the same access to the front by the military as in Mexico. Unlike the grim reality of war portrayed in North America, few photographs that could be considered controversial were circulated in Europe.¹¹ Sentimental, nationalistic postcards, staged views, snapshots and pictures showing destruction after a battle were the norm.

(33 IMAGE, Villa, pc, Carlos (Charles C.) Harris. Worked in Chihuahua City, founded “La Rochester” agency documenting Orozco and Villa.¹²)

For the conflict in Mexico, however, photographers had almost unlimited access, as leaders saw the potential for propaganda in images and motion pictures. Executions and even battles were sometimes scheduled, so they could be photographed. To help finance their cause and to purchase arms, General Villa and others signed contracts with firms for exclusive rights to document these events for which they were paid. Constitutionalist photographer and filmmaker Jesús H. Abitia (1881-1960) traveled with General Obregón, and, at the Battle of Celaya, he

¹¹ The exception perhaps is the record provided by stereograph photographers illustrating graphic battle scenes and trench warfare; however, they were mostly published well after the war ended in the 1920s.

¹² Miguel Angel Berumen, *Mexico: Fotografía y Revolución*. (Mexico City: Fundacion Televisa y Lunweg, 2009), 383.

apparently even went into the operating room to document the removal of his arm.¹³

(34 IMAGE, Andres Garcia. Gen. Alvaro Obregón. Ca. 1916, Horne)

Photographers of the Revolution were committed to different revolutionary groups that were at war with each other.

Photographs of some of the rebels like bandit leader Pancho Villa became iconic, depicting larger-than-life, swashbuckling personalities.

(35 IMAGE, magazine page, *The Graphic*, Villa, 1914)

Wearing wide-brimmed hats and draped with heavy cartridge belts, they evoked mythical, romanticized figures that stirred the public's imagination and desire for pictures. Zapata as charro presented another iconic image.

(36 IMAGE, Zapata, *Tierra y Libertad*, print, woodcut)

Women also joined the revolutionary forces. They often left their homes, because of the constant threat of danger and rape there.

(37 IMAGE, Women soldiers. Juárez, unknown)

¹³ Debroise, *Mexican Suite*, 179, 181.

Soldaderas were essentially camp followers who cooked and assisted the men; only occasionally were women soldiers.¹⁴

(38 IMAGE, Rebel Troop Train) with (Mexican Troops leaving for the front)

Railroads were particularly important during the Revolution. Federal advances were made along rail lines and major battles fought there. But Rebels sometimes simply blew up lengths of track, halting any possible advance. Villa moved troops on the railroad, and photographer Robert Dorman fitted up a freight car and hitched it to Villa's train following the fighting.¹⁵ Abitia was also given a caboose for his equipment.¹⁶

(39 IMAGE, Mexican Soldiers in camp under a flat car, unknown) with (Mexican Family Riding the Rods, Horne)

Supplies often filled the cars, and soldiers and women rode on top.¹⁷

(40 IMAGE, Zapatistas, Nacional de Mexico train, 1911, Brehme)

German-born Hugo Brehme photographed the Zapatista movement including this view of a train with rebels in Cuernavaca, 1911.

¹⁴ "Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution." Andrés Reséndez Fuentes. *The Americas*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Apr., 1995), 545.

¹⁵ Anita Brenner and George R. Leighton, *The Wind that Swept Mexico: a History of the Mexican Revolution 1910-1942* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976) 297.

¹⁶ Mraz, 196.

¹⁷ "Battleground Women," 539-542.

While there were many battles during the Revolution, location was particularly important, and border towns held critical positions during the conflict.

(41 IMAGE, Municipal Bldg. & Arsenal in Main Plaza, Nuevo Laredo, 1914, Garcia's Studio) with (Ruins of City Hall, Juárez, Mex. Rebels in action, ca. 1911)

Early in the war years, El Paso in west Texas became a gathering place for newsmen and photographers and gateway to Mexico. In May, 1911, Ciudad Juárez, across the Rio Grande, was the site of fighting between insurgents led by Madero and Mexican Federal soldiers. The battle could be viewed across the river from El Paso, and photographers documented the fighting. In addition, thousands of American troops were stationed at nearby Fort Bliss providing a ready-market for photograph sales.

(42 IMAGE, US Artillery going into action in Mexico, Horne) with (On the March Somewhere in Mexico, Horne)

El Paso was the base for several established photographers as well as amateurs, often crossing the border to follow the war action. The most successful of these was Walter H. Horne (1883-1921), who arrived virtually penniless in a railroad boxcar in 1910. At first, he took odd jobs, but with the war in Mexico, he soon saw the potential for money-making in the postcard business.

(43 IMAGE, Burning Dead, Ojinaga, across from Presidio, TX, Jan., 1914, Horne)

Between taking pictures of military maneuvers, battle sites, and soldiers in camp,

Horne made thousands of photographs, and the sale of his real photographic postcards (which are true photographs) was profitable. Starting with a Kodak postcard camera, he invested in the more expensive Graflex in 1913.¹⁸ The postcard craze had peaked, but, with American interest in the fighting in Mexico, at one point, Horne produced 5,000 postcards a day selling them across the country.

(44 IMAGE, Dead Bodies on Battlefield, Horne) with (One Grave for 63, Horne) His stark photographs graphically portray the reality of war and its human toll.¹⁹

The public had a fascination with the macabre, and postcards of the dead proved particularly popular. In fact, Horne's best-selling group was the execution series he made in Juárez in 1916, known as the "triple execution."

(45 IMAGE, Triple Execution series, four at once)

Horne bribed the Mexican officer in charge for the exclusive right to photograph the event. After the executions by a Constitutionalist firing squad, Horne had employees take postcard orders in the crowd.²⁰ Given the numbers produced,

¹⁸ Charles Bennett. "The Mexican Revolution Postcards of El Paso's Walter Horne," *El Palacio*, v. 115, Spring 2010, 59-65.

¹⁹ Paul J. Vanderwood and Frank N. Samponaro, *Border Fury: a Picture Postcard Record of Mexico's Revolution and U.S. War Preparedness, 1910-1917* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988) 63, 70.

²⁰ Vanderwood and Samponaro, *Border Fury*, 68.

inexpensive postcards, for which postage was low, may have been as important as the press in dispersing pictures of the Revolution. Horne was just one of many who understood their impact.

(46 IMAGE, Columbus ruins, 1916, Horne)

News of the raid on the border town of Columbus, New Mexico, March 9, 1916, reached El Paso, located just 75 miles away, in the early morning. Horne and Otis A. Aultman were among the first photographers to arrive at Columbus after the raid into New Mexico of approximately 485 “Villistas” on horseback. Aultman and Dorman later claimed that Villa was not responsible for the attack as speculated. Dorman said he was with Villa west of Chihuahua at the time of the raid.²¹ No one had actually positively identified Villa among the raiders who burned and looted the town, killing 18 Americans, mostly civilians.

After the raid, photographers also covered the resulting organization of the American Punitive Expedition, led by General John J. Pershing in 1916-1917.

(47 IMAGE, Gen. Pershing, unknown) with (Marching into Mexico, Horne)

For almost a year, Pershing headed an expeditionary force of more than 14,000 troops in northern Mexico in pursuit of Villa with no success. In addition,

²¹ Mary A. Sarber, *Photographs from the Border: the Otis A. Aultman Collection*, (El Paso: El Paso Public Library Association, 1977) vii-viii.

President Woodrow Wilson deployed nearly 200,000 National Guardsmen and regular troops along the border from Texas to California.²² Since American soldiers were not actually engaged in combat on the border, they readily bought postcards of violence for albums and to send home to testify they were near the action. Americans were outraged by the Columbus attack, but, conversely, Mexicans universally resented the presence of troops and invasion of their land by soldiers from the states.

(48 IMAGE, Agua Prieta, Villa's man killed in battle. 1916, Cal Osbon)

Other border towns were also affected by the war generating additional images of destruction. The battle of Agua Prieta across from Douglas, Arizona, Nov. 1, 1915 between Villa and Constitutionalist General Plutarco Calles provided the locale for some of the most graphic images of the war. Calvin Osbon (1849-1924), who came from California to document the battle, held nothing back in his coverage.

(49 IMAGE, Young Villista prisoners, Agua Prieta. 1915, unknown. Image shows young age of soldiers)

Strongly opposed to Huerta, President Wilson refused to recognize his government. Following a series of diplomatic blunders, Wilson authorized the

²² Vanderwood, *Border Fury*, 12.

American occupation of the port city of Veracruz in April, 1914. American, Walter P. Hadsell (1880-1967) owned a photographic supply store in Veracruz and also made photographs.²³ Hadsell photographed the city during the invasion as did seasoned British war photojournalist, James “Jimmy” Hare and others. The following photographs are examples of image pirating which was rampant.

(50 IMAGE, Federal Mexican firing line, by Flores Perez, pirated by Hadsell)

(51 IMAGE, Veracruz, Killed in front of Hotel Diligencias. April, 1914) Pirated image, photographer unknown, sometimes attributed to Hadsell, also Flores Perez and Casasola) with (Hadsell version Hotel Diligencias)

(52 IMAGE, Muertos por la Laguna. Dead by the lagoon, Veracruz, by Samuel Tinoco or Ernest J. Trenkle, 1914) Note verso, mentions locals fighting there, mostly civilians, killed by American troops.

With a different perspective, Mexican Ponciano Flores Pérez took somewhat grittier pictures of the wounded and bloody victims of the Veracruz invasion, images of a more personal nature.²⁴

(53 IMAGE, Hospital de la Cruz Blanca, 1914, Flores Perez, Powell Col.)

All political factions in Mexico opposed the U.S. invasion. Pressured by revolutionary groups, three months later, Huerta resigned, and Constitutionalist Carranza became president. (54 IMAGE, portrait Carranza, unknown)

²³ Berumen, *Mexico: Fotografía y Revolución*, 383.

²⁴ Casanova and Konzevik, *Mexico*, 167.

Stories of the action in Veracruz made headlines in U.S. newspapers and increased American interest in the conflict south of the border. While Americans were present in Mexico, in all, a total of only 300 to 400 Americans were killed during the 10 years of the revolt.

(55 IMAGE, Constitutional Soldiers in Action. Robert Runyon)

Other photographers and studios further illustrated the Revolution with images of the life and death of peasants, revolutionaries, Federal troops, and American soldiers along the border. Among those whose imagery is notable are the large Casasola firm, Félix Miret, Sabino Osuna, International Film Service, Kavanaugh's War Postals, Max Stein Company, and Underwood & Underwood.

(56 IMAGE, Men of the 11th Inf. with Trenches & Wire Entanglements, AZ. ca. 1915, unknown) with (Douglas/Agua Prieta Trenches. 1915, Osbon)

When the U.S. entered World War I in April, 1917, American interest in Mexican politics significantly waned, and the demand for pictures dramatically declined.

However, the experience on the border inadvertently trained American military for trench warfare abroad.

Although there is much to be discovered about the photography of this era, there remains today an important photographic record of the Mexican Revolution, the political leaders and common man for whom the war was so costly.

(57 IMAGE, Two Men. Unknown. Digitization link)

For me this image of two men, one barefoot, and, spattered with what looks like blood, says it all about the Revolution and how it affected Mexicans. These men look exhausted, worn-out, and, to a certain degree, victimized. Thank you.

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