

RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

GUY P. THOMPSON with DAVID G. LA FRANCE: *Patriotism, Politics, and Popular Liberalism in Nineteenth Century Mexico: Juan Francisco Lucas and the Puebla Sierra*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999.

The mountainous regions of Mexico's central state of Puebla seethed with political contentiousness and social rebellion through much of the nineteenth century on through the Revolution of 1910. Liberal ideals unleashed by the national government's intention to create a modern nation-state, foreign military intervention, and civil war combined with the area's *caciquismo*, traditional village feuding, and social and racial inequities to fuel the unrest which reflected the tensions, streets, and uncertainties that existed throughout the country. Waves of change not only battered traditional arrangements and behavior but opened immense gaps of opportunity for those who sought to escape the old entanglements and to better their lives as they saw fit.

Through years of very meticulous research, much of it in municipal and local archives, Professor Thompson pulls together the disjointed segments of this tumultuous scene to clarify the myriad ways in which people of the sierra dealt with the momentous events swirling about them. Few generalities can be drawn. The promises of Liberalism presented in the federal Constitution of 1857 – municipal freedoms, direct elections, the principle of no reelection, an independent judiciary, free and lay education, criminal law reform (e.g. no imprisonment for debt), legislative controls over state and federal executive power, sharp separation of Church and State, restrictions on public aspects of religious activities –, people accepted none, a few, most or all of these in varying degrees and multiple ways, so that all shades of Liberalism were represented: from radical through moderate to rejection. Where the country broke into warring camps of Liberals and Conservatives, Puebla's *serranos* did the same, at times among fault lines established by long-time, customary feuding, and on other occasions in accordance with their ambitions to embark upon new directions. The same sort of thing occurred when the French imperialists invaded in the 1860s. Some municipalities remained loyal republicans, others cast their lot with the French, rarely for ideological reasons or out of national concern, but more normally to try to gain the

upper hand in a sharp local dispute, often of long-standing. Thompson has found that this fracturing not only occurred between *pueblos* and municipalities, but also among *barrios* within the population centers themselves, all of which adds to the complexity of an already kaleidoscopic scene.

Three *caciques* from the region, Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla, Juan Nepomuceno Méndez, and Juan Francisco Lucas, led the more "radical" cause during the last half of the nineteenth century, with Lucas hanging on during the early decade of the twentieth. By "radical" Thompson means steadfast insistence on clauses of the constitution that guaranteed municipal autonomy, the right for communities to organize national guard units, lay education, and controls over federal executive powers. Bonilla was not so "radical" as to endorse the anarchist *Ley de Pueblo* advocated by Alberto de Santa Fe in the same general region. Still, the *caciques* fought doggedly, both through political channels and periodically on the battlefield, to sustain *serrano* independence, alas, to no avail. By the last half of the 1880s, the national dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz had taken shape, even if neither well stabilized nor devoid of challenge. National guard units, the defenders of local rights, were demobilized, costing the people of the sierra their military arm. According to Thompson, by the 1890s, inter and intra village conflicts, often based on class and racial differences, diminished to their profit. "Once the National Guard, the guarantor of the new freedoms, came under pressure to disband, the pendulum swung back in favor of the old order (p. 259)," signaling an end to that brand of egalitarian Liberalism which had promised self-government and constitutional guarantees.

With the help of David LaFrance's expertise on the 1910 Revolution in Puebla, the author concludes by tracing the political maneuverings of Juan Francisco Lucas – last of the *caciques*–, who by this time had attained a mystical standing among his people. Even while pragmatically shifting from one revolutionary leader to the next, Lucas continued to strive for regional autonomy in the sierra, equality of citizenship, and other guarantees embedded in the constitution. For his lifelong endeavors, today he stands enshrined in *serrano* lore.

This fine book follows the important and needed trend toward regional studies that now marks so much Mexican historiography. Few works do it, however, in such admirable detail. True, the strong focus is on political history, and the weighty burden (at times bewildering labyrinth) of the place names, battle sites, and personal identifications might have been leavened by additional cultural and social insights. However, one can only admire the author's scrupulous attention to local resources, which leave no doubt as to where the history of the sierra was being made and can be investigated. The

book is a solid building block towards our understanding of this tempestuous period in Mexican history.

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ROBERT WOODMANSEE HERR (In collaboration with Richard Herr): *An American Family in the Mexican Revolution*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999.

The Mexican Revolution, a series of full-scale rebellions and civil wars between 1910 and 1920 and a succession of experiments and upheavals from 1920 to 1940, was enormously bloody and destructive. More than a million Mexicans died. Agricultural production took decades to recover. The conflicts set back industrialization at least ten years. Mining, the engine of the Mexican economy for four hundred years, in general endured less damage and recovered more rapidly than other sectors.

Prior to the Revolution, foreign investors controlled most of the mining industry. Large multinational corporations, such as the American Smelting and Refining Company (the Smelters' Trust), which owned and operated many of the richest mines and virtually monopolized smelting, dominated. During the Revolution, United States companies used their enormous resources to purchase an even larger share of the industry.

Through the eras of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) and the Revolution, Mexico was a siren's song for foreign miners and engineers in search of adventure and riches. Some worked independently. Others worked for large firms. Irving Herr, an American engineer, managed the El Cubo Mining Company, located in El Cubo, Guanajuato state, seven miles from the city of Guanajuato, a center of the colonial mining industry. The estate of Potter Palmer, the Chicago-based tycoon, was the owner. Irving, his wife Luella, and sons, John, Robert, and Richard lived in Mexico almost the entire period from 1904 to 1932. In their letters, diaries, and other papers, all put together by Robert and edited by Richard, a distinguished historian of Spain, the Herr family has left us a fascinating account of what it was like for Americans in Mexico in the most tumultuous of times.

Herr adeptly steered his way through the complicated and dangerous conditions of the Revolution. His negotiations with the various military officers, who sought horses, guns, and other materials, reveal reasonableness on all sides. Daily journal entries reveal the helter-skelter of life during the turmoil and an underlying tension, if not fear, despite the humdrum of work and home life. The Herrs did not experience the "unpleasantness of the