

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

Revolution" until 1914, when they were "living in a condition of being continually expecting to be held up or raided." (79) In February 1915, for a few days Irving was stuck in Guadalajara with no way of returning to or communicating with El Cubo. The family fled in June 1915, embarking on a hair-raising journey on horseback and mule train to Veracruz, and eventually north to the United States. On their way, in a box car in the railroad yards of Aguascalientes, Irving, John, and Robert encountered Pancho Villa face to face! Irving stayed in Mexico for six more months until Villa's troops killed sixteen American mining engineers and miners. The Herrs did not return to Mexico until 1920.

The Herrs, like most Americans in Mexico, while recognizing good qualities in their employees, generally had an unfavorable view of Mexicans. In an article published in *The Advance* magazine in 1914, Irving wrote: "Liquor and the Catholic Church are far more responsible for their low condition. Of self-government they have no idea whatever. If they have any idea of liberty, it is that liberty means license and the right to do as they please... For such a democratic government is not possible, except they grow up to it; and this means a matter of years, and of struggle." (60-62) Irving continued to hire foreigners for supervisory positions even though foreigners who worked in Mexico "had few roots." (186)

Also revealing was the fact that although Irving had an excellent command of Spanish, he spoke it with a pronounced American accent. "I want them to know I am an American." (64) He believed Mexicans trusted Americans and this gave him an advantage in business.

It is clear that life was quite good for the Herrs in Mexico. The family had servants, a cook and a gardener. Money went further than in the United States. There were parties, tennis, poker, and other social gatherings among the American community. In 1925 the foreign colony of Guanajuato even formed a golf club. The family was quite unhappy during the four years the Revolution forced them from Guanajuato.

Running through the narrative is a sense of prejudiced naiveté, almost the stereotypical American innocents abroad. Robert Herr states: "To us there was great beauty in Mexico that lay partly in the uncomplicated way of life. we never experienced directly the primitive life of the people who lived in Cubo, but my impression is that they were happy people who accepted their poverty with fatalism and fortitude." (164) We can see this, too, in Robert's referring to the household servants as "friends."

The El Cubo mine avoided most of the upheavals during the 1920s, with the exception of incidents in 1928 and 1929 as a result of the Cristero revolt. Nearly three decades in Mexico ended, however, with the Great Depression. Mineral prices plummeted. It became uneconomical to operate the mine. The

Herrs left Guanajuato in 1932. Irving left embittered. "I do not like working in Mexico any more. I feel as though our company, instead of being a business concern, were simply a sort of institution for the purpose of supplying work for a lot of down-and-out Mexican workmen." (242) All in all though, it had been a good run.

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ELÍAS JOSÉ PALTÍ (comp.): *La política del disenso. La "polémica en torno al monarquismo" (México, 1848-1850)... y las aporías del liberalismo*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998.

La antología que nos ofrece Elías Paltí analiza un tema fundamental para la historia mexicana del siglo XIX: la polémica sobre los fundamentos del sistema político, de las instituciones sociales y de la nacionalidad mexicana (1849-1850). He de confesar que el abuso que se ha hecho en nuestro medio de la publicación de selecciones documentales me ha convertido en su enemiga, pero la revisión de la presente antología me lleva a reconocer que se trata de una antología bien realizada y con una introducción que ofrece interesantes reflexiones sobre el pensamiento político del siglo XIX mexicano. Por su concepción y organización resulta, además, de utilidad para la docencia.

La introducción de Paltí no tiene desperdicio. La polémica con motivo del monarquismo se generó al aparecer el periódico *El Universal*, que se convertiría en órgano de difusión del partido conservador. El sofisticado marco conceptual del compilador le hace hilar fino al analizar las ideas que se discuten, y su buen conocimiento del contexto histórico le permite comprender hasta qué punto la polémica que le ocupa contribuyó a definir los partidos que se enfrentarían en la guerra de Reforma.

El compilador comienza por recordarnos que en México —al igual que en Estados Unidos— el liberalismo, sin perder su vocación de ideología universal, se transformó en sinónimo de la nacionalidad mexicana. Para ello, sus principios tuvieron que adquirir una vaguedad que les permitiera abrigar a "las más diversas corrientes políticas". Este fenómeno, tan útil para la vida política, iba a convertirse en un gran obstáculo para la comprensión del siglo XIX, pues al alcanzar el triunfo en 1867, los liberales patrocinaron una interpretación "oficial" de la historia que enraizara a su partido en el pasado "mexicano". Esta versión, transmitida a través de la escuela, ha hecho necesario que los investigadores mismos tengamos que desaprender afirmaciones que, machacadas por la historiografía de más de un siglo, han