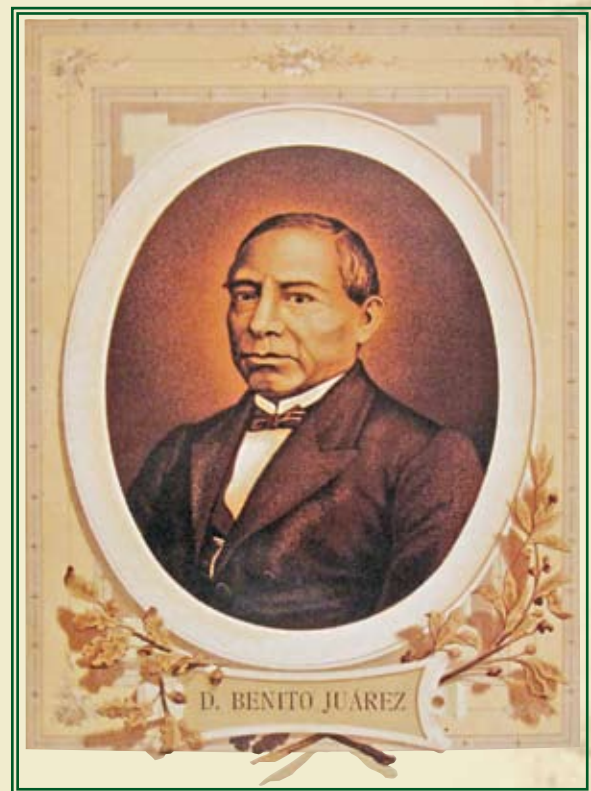
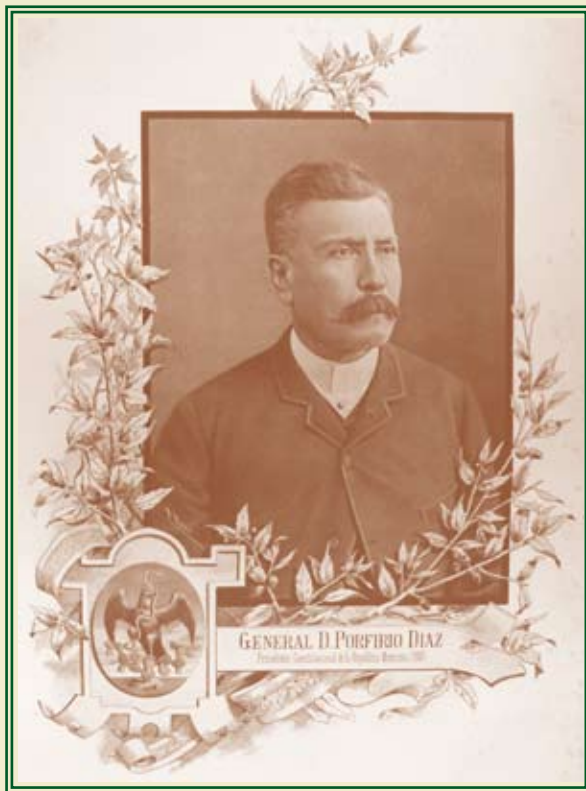


From the Restoration of the Republic to the Dictatorship Of a Single Man

(1867-1910)

Evelia Trejo*



The period known in Mexico as the “Restored Republic” began in 1867. It was called that because for the nine years from 1867 to 1876, the task of Mexico’s rulers centered on consolidating a long yearned-for dream:

* Researcher at the UNAM Institute of Historical Research and professor of historiography at the UNAM School of Philosophy and Letters.

Photo Credits: Porfirio Díaz (p.47), Justo Sierra, ed., *México, su evolución social* (Mexico City: J. Ballezá, 1900-1902); Benito Juárez (p. 47), Vicente Riva Palacio, comp., *México a través de los siglos*, Vol. 5 *La Reforma* (Mexico City and Barcelona: Ballezá and Espasa, respectively, 1887-1889); lithographs (pp. 48 and 50), Decaen, ed., *México y sus alrededores* (Mexico City: Establecimiento Litográfico de Decaen, 1855 and 1856).

creating a republic in the full meaning of the term, with a division of powers and guaranteed independence and national sovereignty, just as the nations considered models of development like the United States and France were seen to have, with a society well on the road that would inevitably lead to a higher level of civilization and progress.

In the judgment of the liberals, who had finally managed to hold on to power, Mexicans had something that guaranteed the achievement of these goals: the Constitution passed a decade before, in 1857, held in the highest esteem. Once the Laws of Reform were incorporated into it in 1873, it be-



The period known as the Restored Republic tested the imagination and political strength of those who wanted to organize Mexico according to liberal principles.

came a firm basis upon which to organize a country that had left behind the tutelage of the Church, an institution inherited from the time when Spanish domination had marked the country's history and that was understood as a constant prop of the Conservative Party, and therefore, responsible for Mexicans' backwardness.

Once the national and foreign military forces that had supported the empire were defeated, the most important liberal caudillos felt themselves masters of the situation and enthusiastically looked forward to tracing the nation's destiny. This historic moment was so significant that one of the most famous histories of Mexico, the five-volume set of *México a través de los siglos* (Mexico Down through the Centuries), published between 1882 and 1889, traced the march of the people of Mexico from their pre-Hispanic origins to the exact date when Mexico City celebrated the triumphal entrance

of the liberal victors. Six decades later, in the mid-twentieth century, the impression of these times had not substantially changed.

When one of Mexico's most renowned intellectuals, Daniel Cosío Villegas, wrote and coordinated his *Historia moderna de México* (Modern History of Mexico) dealing with different political, economic, and social facets, he did not doubt a moment about beginning his narrative precisely in 1867. He thought that examining the process begun in that year would lead him to fully understand his own time. From then on, study and the generation of knowledge has never ceased about a decade that put to the test the imagination and political strength of a large group of individuals who for a long time had wanted to organize Mexico based on liberal principles. The challenge was enormous, given that they were facing the task after years of civil war and, in addition, they were divided as they arrived at their goal.

The most prestigious figures, Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz, both from Oaxaca, were the protagonists in clearly opposing episodes: one represented the civilian forces and the other, the military. Both came to the fore during the years of the Wars of the Reform and the Intervention and had the opportunity to consecutively head up political life. First

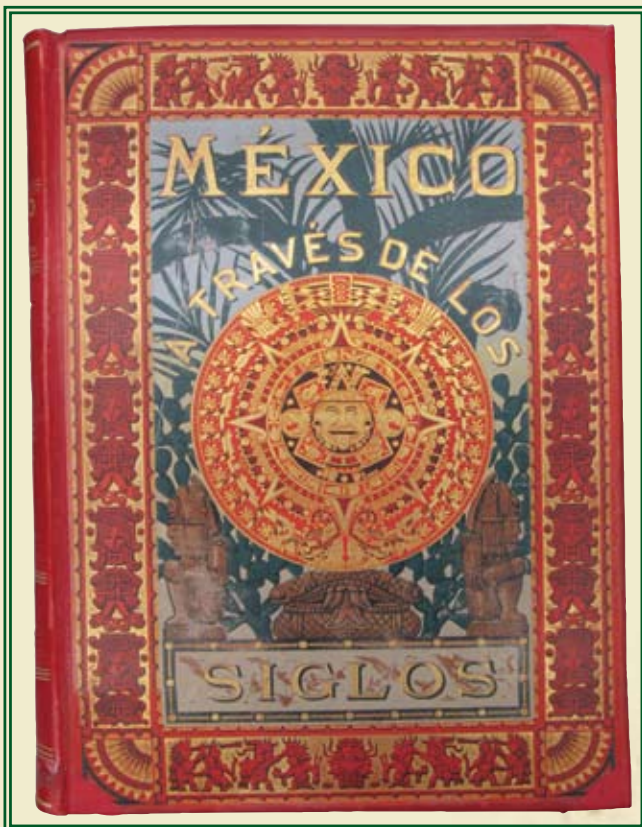
came Juárez, and later, his former student at the Oaxaca Scientific and Literary Institute, Porfirio Díaz, who would shoulder the government of Mexico from 1876 to 1911. Between the two of them, there would be only the four-year interval from 1880 to 1884 when Manuel González was president. Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz have filled the pages of the history books, one as the highest expression of republican liberalism and the other as a dictator, the shameful example of a man who centralizes power and stays in the presidential seat without respecting the principle of non-re-election that had been the slogan which ushered him into office in the first place.

Both were ingenious enough to govern with the 1857 Constitution, changing the laws to allow them to stay on as first executive. In the case of Juárez, this was done to deal with the urgent need to consolidate a very fragile power structure. Díaz invoked the need to maintain political order to foster economic growth, applying a maxim that was useful for a very long time: "Little politics and lots of administration," taking care that local power structures did not grow too much and that political bosses always went along with his decisions.

If it had been easy to keep a population in line, a population that grew in many ways precisely because of the country's stability, Díaz's long period in power would not have ended until his death. However, even given those circumstances, a large number of problems that Mexico had been accumulating for a long time were not resolved. Perhaps the most pressing was the inequality among its inhabitants. The dearth of mechanisms for alleviating the economic straits of the poorest classes, as well as the lack of opportunities for incorporating interested individuals and groups into the sphere of political decision-making would exact a high price for the apparently invincible government that gives its name to a whole era: the Porfiriato. All this caused the discontent that in different ways would gradually give rise to the 1910 Revolution.

For more than four decades of Mexico's history these two and other figures (Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada [1873-1876], and Manuel González [1880-1884], or illustrious men like Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, Justo Sierra, and José Yves Limantour) would have an impact on the life of Mexico. However, none of them alone can explain the changes in society

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Cover of a modern reprint of *Mexico Down through the Centuries*.

that spurred a transformation big enough to conclude that the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth had situated the country closer to the models of modern nations, concerned with the enlightenment of men and women, trusting that increasingly widespread education would guarantee the longed-for progress that some of the world's most famous thinkers had talked about.

Among other factors favoring the creation of a modern world in the times of the Restored Republic was, for example, the acceptance of religious tolerance. This meant opening the doors of a traditional, majority-Catholic nation to new creeds, above all Protestant denominations, rather a good fit with the political aspirations of liberals who wanted to limit the powers of the Catholic Church without necessarily de-Christianizing Mexicans. The proliferation of propaganda from different churches and their establishment in Mexico became more and more unmistakable starting in 1872 under the Lerdo de

Tejada administration. To expand, the Protestants used schools and periodicals, two means welcomed by those who wanted to see Mexicans creating a secularized, modern society. Nevertheless, their progress could not be effective in the short term, since the majority of the population resisted the changes and remained faithful to the doctrine disseminated for more than three centuries.

The conservatives, who had supposedly been defeated in the Wars of the Reform and the Intervention, far from disappearing, found the way to regroup and gain strength. Like the liberals, they were not homogeneous, but they did react in the face of what they saw as a threat to the country's traditions, even using the same weapons as their enemies. They continued to be present in schools and journalism, even though official policy stipulated something else.

In addition to fulfilling the need for elementary instruction, it was proposed, particularly during the years of the Díaz administration, that nationwide, education be mandatory, secular, and free in order to overcome backwardness and integrate the nation. From the time of the restoration of the republic, a very firm step forward had been made in the field of intermediate education with the founding of the National Preparatory School, an institution inspired in Auguste Comte's positivist doctrine that attempted to channel young students into the fields of science, putting to one side the shadows of what were considered traditional teaching, akin

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to metaphysics. This school soon became the seedbed for what would turn into the intelligentsia and the scientific vocations that years later, in September 1910, would promote the inauguration of the National University under the Díaz administration, but very shortly before the outbreak of the Revolution.

Although positivist thinking and the new creeds seemed to be at odds with the older models of thinking that had forged the Mexican people's mentality, the reality is that they only had an impact among a minority of the population. In any case, little by little, down through this period, society developed in such a way that all these elements coexisted together without eliminating the profoundly entrenched previous traditions. This can be seen in acts like the coronation of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1895 in sumptuous celebrations, and the plethora of fiestas and religious activities that continued to be carried out, particularly after the Díaz government implemented a conciliatory policy toward the Catholic Church.

Journalism, long considered the ideal vehicle for forging public opinion among the citizenry, also underwent interesting changes in the period in question. It went from enjoying almost unrestricted freedom during the Restored Republic, to greater control under the Porfiriato, when, in addition, journalists' attention turned from the doctrinaire nature of previous publications to focusing on getting out the news. So, even when publications were the mouthpieces of specific interests like the Catholics, the positivists, or others, the lifespan of newspapers and magazines depended more on continuing to capture the public's interest (a readership increasingly inclined to seek in their pages national and international news) than on government sponsorship or commercial publicity, which also was becoming more and more widespread. In addition, the gradual incorporation of women into this area of the generation of public opinion became more and more evident. The history of newspapers like *La Voz de México* or *El Imparcial* and magazines like *Violetas del Anáhuac* show an important part of these changes.





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Inauguration of the National University of Mexico in September 1910.

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New developments came in from all sides, often fostering an exaggerated perception of the modernity that some sectors wanted to create in Mexico. What cannot be doubted is that those who were analyzing the situation based on the evolutionist theories in vogue at the time sought to show Mexicans' capacity for achieving the well-being they legitimately aspired to. This was the case of the so-called *científicos* ("scientists") who surrounded Díaz's administration and who, like many others, were proud that the advances in the economy were palpable: foreign investments, particularly from the United States and England, had helped extending the railroad lines until they covered a large part of the nation's territory; communications fostered commerce and the growth of cities and ports; there was a bonanza in public finances and mining productivity and an increase in the number of banks and powerful entrepreneurs; and the cities even festooned themselves with buildings as modern as downtown Mexico City's Palacio de Hierro, the country's first depart-

ment store, just to mention one of the architectural works erected at the height of the Porfiriato.

Certainly these and other elements were proof that the longed-for road to progress had already been built in Mexico. But it is also true that many of these achievements were based on an acutely fractured social and political structure. The living conditions of a population that was by far mostly rural and the limitations of political liberties would very soon open the floodgates for different kinds of demands that in a few years would bring about the defeat of Porfirio Díaz and give way to an authentic Revolution. **MM**

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