



Railroads and the Mexican Imagination during the Porfiriato and Revolution

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Summary

Throughout the 19th and early 20th century, the Mexican populace demonstrated a fascination with the nation's railroads. Newspapers, literature, poetry, music, and art focused their attention on the symbolic power of the locomotive, revealing its capacity to reshape people's social and cultural worlds. As the most potent symbol of progress and civilization, the arrival of the iron horse offered both powerholders and ordinary individuals the opportunity to imagine new possibilities for their nation and themselves, musings that could be highly optimistic or dreadfully distrustful. The locomotive emerged as a ubiquitous symbol throughout the restored republic (1867–1876), the Porfiriato (1876–1911), and the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) that inspired individuals to reflect on the meaning of an array of issues: modernization, cosmopolitanism, citizenship, sovereignty, and national identity. During the restored republic and Porfiriato, government officials and the press celebrated the railway as the dawning of new age of peace and prosperity, discourses that often sought to legitimize and justify sitting presidents and their policymaking. At the same time, popular and opposition groups used the symbolic power of the railway to question the decision-making of the elite that had resulted in extreme social inequality and foreign economic domination. These divisions were a portent of the conflicts that would spark the 1910 Revolution, a popular struggle where railroads and railway workers played principal protagonists. As such, the railroad emerged in a new context as a symbol to represent the heroism, violence, and disorder of those years.

Keywords: [railroads](#), [modernity](#), [corridos](#), [gender](#), [travel literature](#), [railroad accidents](#), [railroad workers](#), [Porfiriato](#), [Mexican Revolution](#)

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Northern Mexico” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at San Diego, 1981); and Schmidt, Arthur P. Jr., “The Railroad and the Economy of Puebla and Veracruz, 1877–1911. A Look at Agriculture” (Paper delivered meeting of Southwest Social Science Association, Dallas, 1973, mimeo.). 2 Phillips, Ulrich B., *A History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt* (New York, 1908), pp. 1–20. 62 Calderón, Francisco, “Los ferrocarriles,” *El Porfiriato, La vida económica*, Vol. 7 of *Historia moderna de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (Mexico City, 1965), pp. 539–40, 564–68, 624–28; McNeely, John H., *The Railways of Mexico* (El Paso, Texas, 1964), pp. 12–13; Powell, Fred W., *The Railroads of Mexico* (Boston, 1921), p. 1. 63 Calderón, , “Los ferrocarriles,” pp. 488–500. The Mexican Revolution began with a contested election in 1910 and ended a decade later with hundreds of thousands dead and the country in tatters. His time in power is referred to as the "Porfiriato." During those decades, Mexico modernized, building mines, plantations, telegraph lines, and railroads, which brought great wealth to the nation. It came, however, at the cost of repression and grinding debt peonage for the lower classes. Díaz's close circle of friends benefited greatly, and most of Mexico's vast wealth remained in the hands of a few families. Díaz ruthlessly clung to power for decades, but after the turn of the century, his grip on the nation started to slip. The people were unhappy: An economic recession Weaving the Past: Mexico in the Era of Porfirio Díaz. Mexico 1910 Porfiriato. Within several years of taking power most European and Latin American countries recognized Diaz's government, but the US held out The US had several claims against Mexico over debts and banditos crossing into US territory .These raids almost led to war with the US in 1877. Gonzalez strove to modernize the country, but the strain was too much for the treasury .During his administration, the railway from Mexico City to El Paso, Texas was inaugurated and the Banco Nacional de México was founded He felt he could not cut back on foreign repayment and railroad construction, so he cut the salaries of government officials.The administration of Gonzalez was. Apart from the standard textbooks on Mexico, for the Porfiriato see. T. Benjamin & W. McNellie (eds.), *Other Mexicos: essays on regional Mexican history, 1876-1911*, esp. Introduction, Part I, and Chap. J.M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: the coming and progress of the Mexican Revolution*. F. Katz (ed.), *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: rural social conflict in Mexico*, esp. chaps 1-2 and 11-16. A. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, early sections. S. Miller, 'Land and Labour in Mexican Rural Insurrection', *BLAR* 10 (1991), 55-80. A. Ouweneel, 'What was behind Mexico's Peasant Revolution?', *Eur. Indeed*, during the discombobulating years from 1911 through 1940 assassination of political leaders and coup d'états were commonplace in Mexico. This brief essay acts as an overview of the Mexican Revolution, hopefully thus avoiding a headache that might come if you further research the topic. When Porfirio Díaz (his administration was known as the Porfiriato) was ousted from power in 1911, so began the Revolution. What did Díaz do that made him lose power in the first place? Well, lots of things. First, he suffered from chronic dishonesty. He was elected president in 1876 and soon afterwards