The Mexican Revolution: Background, Development, and Consequences

With the election of Vicente Fox in 2000, the 80-year reign of Mexico’s revolutionary party officially came to an end. But rumors of its demise had been circulating for quite a while before this moment. Since the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), political officials had been busily dismantling the structures put in place by the revolutionary process, amending the Constitution in order to reverse the promises originally made by the first postrevolutionary governments. Rebels in the southern state of Chiapas rose up on January 1, 1994 in the name of revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata, echoing many of his original demands for land, social justice, and political democracy. Suddenly, the Mexican Revolution--a violent upheaval which lasted ten years and cost perhaps a million lives--seemed both dead and newly relevant to the present day. The need to explain this event, the first social revolution of the twentieth century, and its consequences for Mexican history more broadly, is not simply academic.

In this course we will examine some of the enduring themes and trends in nineteenth and twentieth century Mexico: regionalism, social conflict, and the emergence of a modern state; agrarian unrest and the land question; the nature and consequences of capitalist development; Mexico’s unique political system; and Mexico’s relationship with the United States. The Revolution of 1910, and the changes set in motion in the past fifteen years, will serve as the two conceptual centers around which these themes are developed. Our ultimate purpose will be to combine reading, lectures, discussion and debate in order to explore--from a variety of viewpoints--the significance of recent transformations in the overall process of modern Mexican history.

Course Assignments

1) There will be two in-class debates about issues raised in class readings, lectures, and discussions. Each student will be expected to participate in these debates in the following ways:
   a) an oral presentation in one of the two debates;
   b) one written (5-8 page) summary and analysis of the other in-class debate, which includes a discussion of the student’s own opinions concerning the issues involved.

2) There will be a take-home midterm, composed of one essay question: “Why did the Chiapas rebels call themselves Zapatistas rather than Villistas?” This question will allow you to compare and contrast the two popular movements in the 1910 revolution, while also comparing the 1910 revolution to the 1994 Zapatista uprising.
3) There will be a final exam composed of two parts: a comprehensive essay question taken from a review sheet handed out ahead of time; and a section of short essays on key concepts and terms (a list will be provided as part of the review process).

3) All students are expected to participate actively in discussions.

4) Grading system: Oral debate presentation, 15%; Written assessment of debate teamwork, 10%; Debate paper, 20%; midterm, 20%; final, 35%.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND LECTURES

UNIT I: The End of the Mexican Revolution

Week 1- Mexico Today
Sept. 3- The End of the PRI: When, How, and What It Means
Sept. 5- The Chiapas Rebellion, 1994-2001: An overview
Reading: Stephen, pp. xxi-88.

Week 2- Chiapas and the Indigenous Question: Historical Background
Sept. 10- The 1910 Revolution Comes to Chiapas
Reading: Stephen, pp. 91-215.

Week 3- Chiapas in Broader Perspective
Sept. 17- Indigenous and Rural Peripheries in Revolutionary Mexico
Sept. 19- Earlier indigenous experiments: Juchitán's COCEI
Reading: Stephen, pp. 219-315.

UNIT II: The Emergence of the Liberal Nation-State

Week 4- The Triumph of Liberalism
Sept. 24- From Independence to the French Intervention, 1810-1867
Sept. 26- Liberalism Uncontested: The Emergence of the Porfiriato, 1872-1890
Reading: Documents handed out in class:

Week 5- The Porfiriato in Crisis and the Road to Revolution
Oct. 1- The North
Oct. 3- The South
Reading: Hodges and Gandy, pp. 1-38;
Week 6- The Violent Decade, 1910-1920
Oct. 8- The Popular Revolution, 1910-1918
Oct. 10- The Victors: The Constitutionalists through 1920
Reading: Reed, entire.

Week 7- Voices along the Edges of the Crowd
Oct. 15- Revolution at the Periphery
Oct. 17- Gender and the Revolution
NO NEW READING; MIDTERM ESSAY DUE FRIDAY, OCT. 18TH, 5:00 P.M.

Week 8- Picking up the Pieces, 1920-1930
Oct. 22- Periphery Against the Center: The Strange Case of Yucatán, 1915-1925
Oct. 24- The Puzzle of Institutionalization: Crisis in the 1920s
Reading: Hodges and Gandy, pp. 39-83.

Week 9- Cultural Contestations, 1920-1930
Oct. 29- The New Revolutionary Culture: Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera
Oct. 31- The Cristero Rebellion
Reading: Bantjes, pp. xi-85.

Week 10- Cardenista Institutionalization, 1934-1940
Nov. 5- Cárdenas: Mobilization as Institutionalization
Nov. 7- Cárdenas: The Limits of Mobilization
Reading: Bantjes, pp. 89-172.

UNIT III: Rise and Fall of the Liberal Welfare State, 1940-1968

Week 11- Quick Reversals?
Nov. 12- DEBATE. Was the Mexican Postrevolutionary State a Welfare State?
Nov. 14- Mexico after Cárdenas: The "Economic Miracle"
Reading: Bantjes, pp. 135-226.

Week 12- The Unraveling Continues
Nov. 19- Mexico after Cárdenas: The Political System
Nov. 21- The First Agrarian Counterreform: Agribusiness and the Green Revolution
Reading: Hodges and Gandy, pp. 83-126;
*Document: Rubén Jaramillo, "Plan de Cerro Prieto."

Week 13- Glimmerings of a New Future
Nov. 26- Border Society, Culture, and Economy: Export Processing Begins
*****THANKSGIVING BREAK*****

UNIT IV: Crisis in Slow Motion, 1968-2000

Week 14- The Erosion of Prosperity and Democracy
Dec. 5- The Salinas Counterreform and Neocardenismo
Reading: Hodges and Gandy, pp. 127-187;
*Article: Rubén Martínez, “Corazón del Rockol,” in Gilbert M. Joseph et al.,
Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940
Week 15- The End of the PRI  
Dec. 10- DEBATE: Is the Revolution Dead Yet?  
Dec. 12- Mexico After the PRI

LIST OF REQUIRED READINGS:

Books are available ONLY at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, 426 W. Gilman, 257-6050, and on reserve at Helen C. White. The titles are listed in the order assigned:


4) Adrian A. Bantjes, As If Jesus Walked On Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1998).

AND OCCASIONAL DOCUMENTS OR ARTICLES HANDED OUT IN CLASS