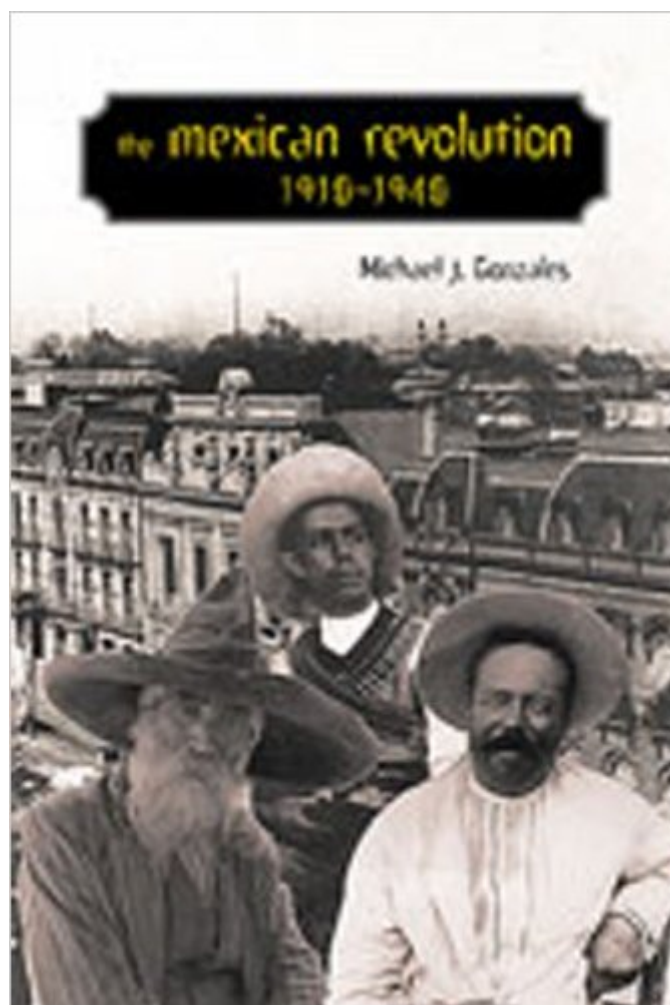


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The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940 (Diálogos Series, No. 12)



Synopsis

This judicious history of modern Mexico's revolutionary era will help all readers, and in particular students, understand the first great social uprising of the twentieth century. In 1911, land-hungry peasants united with discontented political elites to overthrow General Porfirio Díaz, who had ruled Mexico for three decades. Gonzales offers a path breaking overview of the revolution from its origins in the Díaz dictatorship through the presidency of radical General Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) drawn from archival sources and a vast secondary literature. His interpretation balances accounts of agrarian insurgencies, shifting revolutionary alliances, counter-revolutions, and foreign interventions to delineate the triumphs and failures of revolutionary leaders such as Francisco I. Madero, Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, Alvaro Obregón, and Venustiano Carranza. What emerges is a clear understanding of the tangled events of the period and a fuller appreciation of the efforts of revolutionary presidents after 1916 to reinvent Mexico amid the limitations imposed by a war-torn countryside, a hostile international environment, and the resistance of the Catholic Church and large land-owners.

Book Information

Paperback: 307 pages

Publisher: University of New Mexico Press; 1st edition (February 4, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 082632780X

ISBN-13: 978-0826327802

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.9 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (12 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #409,148 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #234 in [Books > History > Americas > Central America](#) #299 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America](#) #325 in [Books > History > Americas > Mexico](#)

Customer Reviews

Gonzales' mastery of details is excellent. He puts the Revolution in historical context, outlining both the longterm trends leading up the Revolution and the momentum of the revolutionary project even after the bloodshed had subsided. However, the weakness of Gonzales' account is his interpretation of the Revolution as inevitable. Relying on a traditional method of examining key historical events, Gonzales depicts a near linear progression towards a Revolution. Seemingly every fault of the

Porfiriato is added to the mountain of evidence that suggested a violent social upheaval was the only possible outcome in turn-of-the-century Mexico. Gonzales does not consider the possibility that there were fluctuations in pressure in the years leading up the Revolution, and that only a confluence of several factors made the event possible. The Diaz regime was not as universally 'bad' as Gonzales makes it out to be: there was not such a precipitous decline in the conditions of the poor. While the conditions of the masses did deteriorate during the liberal dictatorship, it was the coming together of a recession and a devastating drought, and the failure of Diaz to provide an adequate response, that led to the revolutionary explosion of 1910.

I recently found myself in the situation of having to give myself a crash course in the Mexican Revolution for a presentation. I rushed to the library and scanned the shelves for a fairly detailed analysis of the Revolution that wouldn't be a dense read. This fit the bill and basically saved my hide. Gonzales really has a fine prose style. The read isn't dense, but at the same time it is detailed and accurate. You get a really thorough overview without just being bogged down. And of course, the Revolution itself adds enough narrative power to keep up the interest for the somewhat casual reader such as myself. The only problem I had with the work, as compared with others I consulted is that Zapata seems too distant and unimportant in this account. This isn't a biography, though. This is a survey of the Revolution's basic happening and a fairly brief analysis of their causes and effect. And as such a survey, the work succeeds. I would definitely recommend this for the casual history reader or for the student needing an introduction to a fascinating and important period.

Gonzales knows his material and covers it well in this history of the Mexican revolution. He begins with the rise and fall of Porfirio Diaz and then on to the main events of the Mexican revolution and its chief actors: Madero, Zapata, and, of course, Pancho Villa. He then describes the first twenty years of the establishment of the modern Mexican state and its leaders: Calles, Cardenas and others. The author brings in a lot of the economics that stood behind the politics of the revolution: the disparity of income between rich and poor, the domination of foreign capital, and the role of the Catholic church. There are ample photographs, maps, and charts to illustrate the story. This should be a fabulous book about a fascinating cast of characters in one of the bloodiest and most colorful of 20th century events. However, it doesn't quite measure up. It's a bit hard to put your finger on why it's good rather than outstanding -- but I think it is because the author doesn't distinguish clearly enough between what is merely important and what is transcendental. For example, in chapter one I never quite figured how and when the Mexican revolution began. The author says, quite plausibly, that it

was a botched election in 1910 but there's no countdown to the revolution, no crucial moment described in which it began, no small dramatic detail that would bring the moment to life. The story needs a bit more showmanship that Gonzales brings to it. For the general reader, the book is too much of a survey that might go along with a college course. Criticisms apart, this is a perfectly good and interesting book about the revolution and one that is informative and seems solid in its scholarship. Smallchief

This is a book every American should read and heed - everyone on the continent, that is. It's set up in such a way that it could serve as a textbook, which helps. The author writes always factually, seldom critically, in a clear, readable style. There are one or two (very rare) malapropisms which seem to derive from literal translation of Spanish idioms or homonyms - easily unscrambled. The maps do not display well on my Kindle Keyboard, but are not really needed once you learn which states are near the northern border, which near the Yucatan, and which near Mexico City. In summary (though the author doesn't summarize it this way), Mexico can have only one party and a one-term president because if there are two parties there's a war, and if a president can succeed himself there's a dictatorship-for-life (said life not always terminated by natural causes) with corruption-squared. The current three-party equipoise (late 2013) is thus an interesting experiment: will the outcome be escape from the one-party straitjacket, or just a worse-organized war?

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