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## The Image of Emiliano Zapata in the United States 1911-1988

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THE IMAGE OF EMILIANO ZAPATA IN THE UNITED STATES

1911-1988

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

Deborah Gronich Tate

1989

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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For these considerations we declare the aforementioned Francisco I. Madero inept at realizing the promises of the revolution of which he was the author, because he has betrayed the principles with which he tricked the will of the people and was able to get into power: incapable of governing, because he has no respect for the law and justice of the pueblos, and a traitor to the fatherland, because he is humiliating in blood and fire Mexicans who want liberties, so as to please the científicos, landlords, and bosses who enslave us, and from today on we begin to continue the revolution begun by him, until we achieve the overthrow of the dictatorial powers which exist.

*Plan de Ayala*

Men of the South: It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.

Emiliano Zapata

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## ABSTRACT

Emiliano Zapata is today a truly legendary figure. His myth in the United States has been over seventy five years in the making. It continues to be an inspiration to rebels and revolutionaries, not only in Latin America, but in the U.S. as well. In 1976, for example, a group calling themselves the "Emiliano Zapata Unit" blew up the San Francisco branch of the Bank of America.

This thesis traces the building of the Zapata legend in the United States. The process has been both unconscious and explicit as Zapata's actions, goals, and significance were explored in books, news stories, diplomatic dispatches, memoirs, music, novels, and film.

Those on both the right and left of the U.S. political spectrum have attempted to reinvent Zapata as a symbol of their beliefs. Taking Zapata out of context, however, neither side grasped the essential element of *Zapatismo*, its localist motivations and scope. In the end, whether it was a filmmaker trying to create a peasant cold warrior or a scholar searching for Ho Chi Minh's ideological forefather, Zapata refused to serve any man's purposes but his own.

THE IMAGE OF EMILIANO ZAPATA IN THE UNITED STATES

1911-1988

## INTRODUCTION

Through the twentieth century Emiliano Zapata's reputation has gone through dramatic changes. He has been labelled bandit, Robin Hood, social revolutionary, agrarian reformer, localist, nationalist, anarchist, communist. He has been underestimated and overrated and ignored entirely. Many in the U.S. have contributed their version of the nature of Zapata's life and career. There are as many Zapatas as there are people to tell his tale: journalists, diplomats, ex-patriots, intellectuals, scholars, novelists, filmmakers, and musicians.

In *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, Benjamin Keen described a characteristic of the studies of Aztec civilization that also holds true for the work on Zapata:

The extreme diversity of views expressed by writers who drew upon much the same body of facts, and the passion they displayed, arose not only from the inherently controversial nature of the subject but from the premises and partialities they themselves brought to the subject. Inevitably, in debating the nature of Aztec society men debate contemporary issues--economic, social, and ideological.<sup>1</sup>

The image of Zapata has been involved in this century's debate over the proper role of the U.S. in Latin America,

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image In Western Thought* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 564.



and by extension, in the rest of the world. Within this larger question, portraits of Zapata have been used to support positions on race relations, fascism, communism, capitalism, United States presidential politics, and other issues that guide United States foreign relations.

The early twentieth century was the heyday of United States "big stick" policy and gunboat diplomacy in Latin America. Among other adventures, the U.S. had "detached" Panama from Colombia and secured the treaty for the canal. Cuba was living under the Platt Amendment and Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua endured occupations of various lengths by the U.S. marines. These policies were a product of the notions of the "white man's burden" and the rejection of earlier Romantic ideas of the "noble savage" and the greatness of the Incan and Aztec civilizations whose descendants currently peopled Latin America. As the century progressed there were, of course, those who opposed gunboat diplomacy and the racism that supported it. These were reform-minded people, like Ernest Gruening who wrote for the *Nation* and worked on the presidential campaign of Progressive Robert LaFollette. What is interesting about the writing on Emiliano Zapata by members of these two camps is that they both came to negative conclusions about Zapata, although for very different reasons.

As World War II approached, many in the U.S. began to see Latin America less as a treasure trove to be mined by

those of superior race and intellect, and more as an exposed flank. First frightening ideologies, then even more frightening armies, came out of Europe and they could infiltrate the U.S. by way of Latin America if we were not watchful. At this time Zapata's U.S. reputation underwent a dramatic rehabilitation as those who wrote about Zapata did all they could to enlist him on the side of truth, justice, and the "American" way. The U.S. government, press, and several authors turned their best efforts to recreating Zapata as a symbol of the fight between democracy and dictatorship. Ultimately, this role as a supporter of U.S.-style democracy against the fascist and communist hordes fit Zapata no better than the role of bandit chief. Zapata, unlike Francisco Madero, believed that "the people want bread, not democracy."

Through the 1960s and 1970s, as U.S. and European empires crumbled and "peoples' revolutions" fought and sometimes won, the U.S. took a new interest in these types of movements, especially as they affected our role in Latin America. Did they have a historical precedent? Was violence a legitimate way to gain social justice? For the first time, trained professional historians joined in the study of Zapata as a way to explore these issues. John Womack proved beyond a doubt that Zapata was no Jeffersonian yeoman farmer fighting for an abstract concept of democracy. Womack's work led many who opposed the U.S. role as world

policeman to adopt Zapata as a symbol for their particular banners. For example, in San Francisco in 1976, a group within the New World Liberation Front, a terrorist organization fighting for "a Socialist revolution in order to serve the interest of poor people,"<sup>2</sup> named themselves the Emiliano Zapata Unit and bombed four Bay Area Safeway grocery stores, demanding that Safeway cut its prices by 25%.<sup>3</sup> Before their arrest on charges of possession of unregistered destructive devices, the Unit also bombed the community "parasites" at the San Francisco branch of Bank of America.<sup>4</sup> When they discovered that the blast had broken windows in the homes of some low-income families nearby, the Unit sent \$75 in money orders to repair the damage.<sup>5</sup>

By the late 1970s, the setbacks and repression of revolutionary movements such as the Cultural Revolution in China and the restyling of the Cuban revolution on the Soviet model, had led to disillusionment with the revolutionaries of the 1960s. In the U.S. a more romanticized, heroic recreation of Zapata surfaced. So far, however, this new image has met with little encouragement or approval. In 1981, for example, the San Diego Opera

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<sup>2</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 8 February 1975.

<sup>3</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 1976.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, 20 January 1976.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

commissioned an work based on the life of Zapata to commemorate the company's twentieth anniversary. The composer, Leonardo Balada, has characterized the Zapata of this opera as a social revolutionary and a tragic hero.<sup>6</sup> *Zapata*, however, has yet to be performed in its entirety. Although the opera was finished, the performance "never got beyond the planning stages" in San Diego.<sup>7</sup> When the librettist, Tito Capobianco, became General Director of the Pittsburgh Opera he tried to stage *Zapata* there, but lack of funding and a feeling that "the subject matter is not as appropriate for members of the Pittsburgh community as it would have been for the San Diego community" have kept the opera waiting in the wings.<sup>8</sup> In the U.S., only the music from the "Wedding Dance" of the opera has been performed, appearing on the program of American Music Week at the National Symphony Orchestra in November 1985. The reviewer for the *Washington Post* found the piece "wild, <and> rather disjointed."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Leonardo Balada to the author, 9 May 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Lizbeth Persons, Marketing and P.R. Assistant, San Diego Opera, to the author, 7 March 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Wolff, assistant to the General Director, Pittsburgh Opera, to the author, 11 April 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph McLellan, review of "Wedding Dance," by Leonardo Balada (National Symphony Orchestra, Washington, D.C.), *Washington Post*, 8 November 1985.

Until the debate over the U.S. role in Latin America, and the world, flares up again, Zapata will probably remain on the cultural and political back burner in the U.S. His struggle, his methods, and his goals were almost entirely outside the U.S. context. Since 1911, Zapata has been periodically recreated as a symbol of the ideological agenda of one U.S. group or another, undergoing gross distortion in the process. With these exceptions, however, Zapata has been, and will probably remain, an alien figure to the U.S. mind.

## CHAPTER I

### THE NOTORIOUS CHIEFTAIN

The United States government had approved of the dictatorial Porfiriato, those years from 1876 to 1910, when President Porfirio Diaz had created "Order and Progress" in Mexico with his policy of *pan o palo*. Diaz had welcomed U.S. investment with open arms and investors found there was much money to be made. Never looking below the surface at prosperity's cost to the average Mexican, the U.S. applauded the "miracle" Diaz had wrought in the previously chaotic Mexico. By 1908, however, Diaz was an old man. He gave an interview to U.S. correspondent James Creelman in which he said he would not run in the presidential election of 1910. Francisco I. Madero, an idealistic wealthy hacendado from Coahuila, took the President at his word. In 1910, Diaz ran after all and defeated Madero in an extremely questionable election. Madero led a revolt against Diaz and defeated him in battle at the key border town of Ciudad Juarez in 1911. With the Treaty of Ciudad Juarez in May, Diaz and Vice-President Ramon Corral resigned and Secretary of Foreign Relations Francisco Leon de la Barra became the provisional president, pending new elections in October.

The Zapatistas of Morelos had supported Madero based on Madero's promise of agrarian reform in his Plan de San Luis Potosi. These *campesinos* had been losing their land to the quasi-legal maneuverings of the local hacendados throughout the Porfiriato. Now that the Revolution was won, however, Madero filled the government with men from the Diaz regime and backed off immediate action on his agrarian promises, saying the government needed to study the problem. In addition, he asked the Zapatistas to lay down their arms. Zapata actually had begun to comply when in August 1911, Provisional President de la Barra sent General Victoriano Huerta to Morelos to "subdue" the Zapatistas. Zapata felt completely betrayed by Madero, who so quickly had been coopted by the Porfirian *cientificos*, bureaucrats, and his fellow hacendados, and led the Zapatistas in revolt against the government.

Those in charge of the United States' Mexican policy at the time of the 1911 Zapatista revolt were squarely on the side of "dollar diplomacy." They believed that the U.S. had a right to intervene in Latin America on behalf of U.S. investors. President Taft's Secretary of State Philander C. Knox had spent many years practicing corporate law, and the *Dictionary of American Biography* records that, "In the conduct of foreign relations one of Knox's chief policies was the encouragement and protection of American investments

abroad . . ."<sup>10</sup> The U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Henry Lane Wilson, was also "a vigorous defender of American interests."<sup>11</sup> The Secretary, the Ambassador, and other U.S. diplomats, evaluated Zapata based on his likely effect on U.S. holdings in Mexico. Charge d'Affaires Fred Morris Dearing sent Secretary Knox a telegram from Mexico City in August 1911 describing Zapata as:

. . . a self-instituted revolutionary chief, whose following consists of several thousand outlaws, criminals, and other undesirables . . . his purpose, if he can be said to have one, seeming to be to establish a band of outlaws such as existed in Morelos and Guerrero from 1840-1870, to prey upon the people and property of those states and to force his election as governor of Morelos at the next election.<sup>12</sup>

Dearing thought highly of the interim government of Francisco Leon de la Barra, Porfirio Diaz's former Secretary of Foreign Relations, and communicated this regularly to Secretary Knox. Dearing felt confident that the Provisional President "would swiftly wind up the present difficulties"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1933 ed., s.v. "Knox."

<sup>11</sup> *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1933 ed., s.v. "Wilson."

<sup>12</sup> Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1911, (Washington, 1918), 513.

<sup>13</sup> Gene Z. Hanrahan, ed., *Documents of the Mexican Revolution* (Salisbury, N.C.: Documentary Publications, 1976), vol.3, *The Election of Madero, the Rise of Emiliano Zapata and the Reyes Plot in Texas*, 48.



with Zapata and bring "peace and normal conditions"<sup>14</sup> back to Mexico. "Normal" conditions, of course, meant security for U.S. investments in Mexico, which in 1911, totalled \$646.2 million.<sup>15</sup>

Ambassador Wilson shared Dearing's sentiments on Zapata. Wilson felt that Mexicans needed to be ruled with an iron hand. In his dispatches, Wilson never considered that Zapata may have had a legitimate grievance against the government. Zapata was simply the "notorious chieftain, . . . one of the malcontent and depredatory elements."<sup>16</sup>

The telegrams between Ambassador Wilson and Secretary Knox in May of 1912, illustrate the official Taft administration attitudes toward Zapata. On May 24, Wilson informed Knox that Zapata had sent a letter to the U.S. Consul General warning all Americans to leave Mexico City because Zapata was about to attack. The Ambassador asked Knox for guidance.<sup>17</sup> The next day Knox replied that plans should be made for gathering members of the American colony

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<sup>14</sup> Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1911*, 513.

<sup>15</sup> Josefina Zoraida Vazquez and Lorenzo Meyer, *The United States and Mexico, The United States in the World: Foreign Perspectives Series*, ed. Akira Iriye (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 97.

<sup>16</sup> Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1911*, 518-519.

<sup>17</sup> Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1912* (Washington, 1919), 811.

in a safe place if necessary, but that the Consul General definitely should not send a reply to Zapata.<sup>18</sup> Wilson wrote back that same day saying no one was very worried since "it is believed his <Zapata's> forces are insufficiently armed to undertake a considerable movement."<sup>19</sup> Officially the United States government's only concern with Zapata was the minor threat he posed to the lives and property of the American Colony. Taft administration diplomats may have been unhappy with Madero's revolution, but it was because they wanted Diaz back, or at least wanted Madero to bring back Diaz's "Order and Progress."

In the first half of 1913, events occurred which brought changes in the official U.S. position on Zapata. Throughout 1912, Ambassador Wilson became increasingly frustrated with President Madero, as Madero did not feel:

. . . compelled by the force of circumstances <the continued Zapatista rebellion, among others> to more and more revert to the system implanted by General Diaz, thus paying mute and tardy but eloquent tribute to the wisdom of his great predecessor."<sup>20</sup>

From 9 February 1913, to February 18, a period known as the "Ten Tragic Days," Generals Bernardo Reyes, Felix Diaz (nephew to Porfirio), and Victoriano Huerta led a coup which

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 812.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Hanrahan, *Documents*, 297.

resulted in many civilian deaths and the assassination of President Madero. Ambassador Wilson played a shamefully active role, consulting with the plotters. On February 18, Wilson, Huerta, and Diaz met at the U.S. embassy and hammered out the details of the plan, known as the Pact of the Embassy, by which President Madero and Vice President Pino Suarez would be arrested and Huerta would become the provisional president. The plan was carried out the next day. On February 21, as Madero and Suarez were being transferred to the penitentiary, they were "shot while trying to escape."<sup>21</sup>

One month later though, Woodrow Wilson took office as President of the United States. His moralistic approach to foreign policy necessitated new diplomats and new diplomacy. William Jennings Bryan, an opponent of "dollar diplomacy," replaced P.C. Knox as Secretary of State on 5 March 1913. Henry Lane Wilson was asked to tender his resignation, since the new President considered him, "a moral accomplice to the violent overthrow of a constitutional regime and to the assassination of its leaders."<sup>22</sup> Fred Dearing gave way as charge d'affaires to Nelson O'Shaughnessy, an astute, efficient, aristocratic, and conservative professional

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<sup>21</sup> Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 520-521.

<sup>22</sup> Zoraida and Meyer, *The United States and Mexico*, 110.

diplomat.<sup>23</sup> Most importantly, President Wilson refused to recognize Huerta's government. Instead, the administration chose to contact Zapata and other anti-government leaders through a few letters and through agents sent to Mexico to gather information. In July, O'Shaughnessy passed on to Washington a letter from Zapata to Wilson, thanking the President for refusing to recognize Huerta's government. O'Shaughnessy expressed his belief that the letter was authentic, which was the first slightly positive word about Zapata ever forwarded to Washington.<sup>24</sup>

In August, President Wilson sent Minnesotan John Lind to Mexico as his personal representative. Lind, who spoke no Spanish and knew nothing about Mexico,<sup>25</sup> sent back his observations on Zapata, whom he never personally met. In Lind's opinion, "It is absolutely futile to hope for orderly government at the hands of the Mexicans of the South."<sup>26</sup> Holding many of the common racial views of U.S. whites of his day, Lind believed that the "backwardness of the Southern Indians was comparable to that of the Negroes in

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<sup>23</sup> *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1933 ed., s.v. "Nelson O'Shaughnessy."

<sup>24</sup> This is based on my survey of *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* for the years 1911-1919.

<sup>25</sup> Larry D. Hill, *Emissaries to a Revolution* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 64.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

the Southern United States" and favored U.S. support of the northern Mexican rebels (Francisco Villa or Venustiano Carranza) against Huerta since the former must have advanced politically by their geographical proximity to superior U.S. institutions and ideas.<sup>27</sup>

In the spring of 1914, Hubert L. Hall, an American resident of Mexico, began haunting the corridors of the State Department. Born in New England, Hall had been a resident of Morelos since 1892. He had lost his investment in a Cuernavaca hotel and timber land near Santa Maria during the Zapatista revolt in 1911, and his attempts to start a colonizing company in Morelos failed in the upheavals after the 1913 Huerta coup. In the spring of 1914, a Mexican named Jacobo Ramos Martinez approached Hall with faked Zapatista credentials and said he was empowered to negotiate for arms and supplies. He convinced Hall to speak to John Lind at Veracruz and then follow Lind back to Washington. While in D.C. Hall filed with the State Department many favorable reports on the Zapatistas, which the State Department largely ignored because they were preoccupied with the April invasion of Veracruz. In September Secretary Bryan sent Hall to Mexico to meet personally, but unofficially, with Zapata in the hopes that Carranza and Zapata could unite their forces and bring an

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 127-128.

end to the Huerta government. Bryan was probably hesitant to give Hall full credentials because of Hall's connection with the suspicious Ramos Martinez. Hall was almost certainly motivated to undertake this mission by his desire to gain the goodwill of Zapata in order to further his scheme for a new colonizing company in Morelos, The Liberating Army Cooperative Colony.<sup>28</sup> Hall's mission was complicated by "First Chief" Carranza's desire to deal with Zapata without U.S. interference and the attempts of Ramos Martinez to use Hall to extort money from the U.S. government under the guise of securing Zapatista supplies. In January of 1915, Hall went into Morelos and tried to drum up subscribers for the cooperative and convince Palafox to grant him the land as a concession. Hall continued to report favorably on Zapata and conditions in Morelos to the U.S. government. Later, during the Convention of Aguascalientes, Hall wrote letters glorifying the Zapatistas, stressing their "revolutionary virtue" in refusing to back down on their principles. All of this did the Zapatistas little good, however, since Hall discredited himself by his association with Ramos Martinez and by pretending to the Zapatistas to be a credentialed representative of the U.S. government, which Secretary Bryan

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<sup>28</sup> John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969; Vintage Books, 1970), 237.

discovered when a suspicious Manuel Palafox, one of Zapata's top aides, inquired about Hall's status. After April 1915, Hall played no further role in the relations between the Wilson administration and the Zapatistas.<sup>29</sup>

The final blow to Zapatista credibility with the U.S. government came from the report of Duval West, a San Antonio lawyer who was the last of President Wilson's representatives to the Zapatistas. West visited Zapata in Morelos for one day in April 1915, during the height of Zapata's land reform program. Carranza had his hands full pursuing Villa, so the Zapatistas, under the nub of the Convention government in Cuernavaca, were steadily accomplishing the division of the land they had fought for over five long years.<sup>30</sup> West did not approve, and reported that Zapata "believes that it is perfectly right that the property of the rich shall be taken and given to the poor."<sup>31</sup> West also brought back the news that Zapata wanted to send a commission to Wilson "with a view to secure recognition from the United States."<sup>32</sup> Wilson refused to see such a commission, but said he was willing to look over

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>30</sup> For details see Womack, chapter 8, "The Pueblos Carry Out a Revolution."

<sup>31</sup> Hill, *Emissaries*, 324.

<sup>32</sup> Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915*, (Washington, 1924), 688.

any documents Zapata sent him. Wilson actually received a copy of the Plan de Ayala, but there is no evidence to suggest that either he or the Secretary of State took it into consideration in their final assessment of Zapata. West finished his report with his impression, based on his very brief meeting in Morelos, that the Zapatistas were only minor players on the national scene. While it was true that Zapata was not active militarily at the time, his proximity to Mexico City and his guerrilla tactics made him a much sharper thorn in the side of the Mexican government than the number of troops or square miles under Zapatista control might have implied. As events during the Madero and Huerta administrations had shown, any Mexican government would have to pacify Zapata, either by land reform or a long-drawn, costly campaign, to have any kind of firm hold on the agriculturally rich South of Mexico. President Carranza and General Pablo Gonzalez eventually spent three and a half years and many more thousands of pesos than the strapped treasury could afford in attempts to subdue Zapata. In the end the federal government resorted to assassinating Zapata, but the Zapatistas, under Gildardo Magana, were still fighting when Carranza met his own violent death in May 1920.

Six months after West's return, with Zapata discounted and Villa decimated after the battles at Celaya, President Wilson recognized Carranza, who had been a Senator during



the Porfiriato, as the leader of the de facto government of Mexico. Robert Lansing, who had replaced Bryan as Secretary of State in June 1915, was mainly concerned with preventing the Germans from building a base of support in Mexico, and was less bothered by the tactics by which Mexican leaders came to power. Once the U.S. had recognized Carranza, Zapata was once again relegated to the status of anti-government outlaw. There was no further mention of Emiliano Zapata in the *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*.

It was not altogether damaging to the Zapatistas that the U.S. government did not actively support them. The U.S. and the Zapatistas would have been very tenuous allies. Zapata was not trying to make over Morelos in the image of the U.S., with individual homesteaders on their own plots of land. His demands for the restoration of the *ejidos* offended the sensibilities of Duval West as "socialist,"<sup>33</sup> as they would have seemed to many in the U.S. government. The Zapatistas also would have been lukewarm to granting concessions and special privileges, as Palafox was with Hall, to their U.S. "allies," seeing this as simply replacing one set of men who would operate at the expense of the *campesinos* with another.

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<sup>33</sup> Hill, *Emissaries*, 312.

By raising a hue and cry over Villa's activities, especially after the attacks at Santa Isabel, Chihuahua and Columbus, New Mexico, the U.S. pushed Carranza's government to focus on pacifying northern Mexico first. This bought the Zapatistas valuable time to accomplish their own agrarian revolution in Morelos.

During his lifetime the U.S. press covered Emiliano Zapata mainly as just an interesting sidelight to the Mexican Revolution. Unlike northern Mexico, there was little U.S. investment and few U.S. citizens in Morelos to demand protection for. It is possible that if Zapata had revolted in Chiapas, instead of just outside of Mexico City, the U.S. public may never have heard of him at all. Accounts of Zapata largely reflected the view, influenced by the philosophies of Positivism and Social Darwinism then in wide circulation, that the U.S. had a right to intervene in Latin America and the belief in the racial inferiority of Latin Americans. The stories in the U.S. press came from journalists in New York, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, El Paso, or Mexico City who relied on "private advices," members of the "American Colony," refugees wealthy enough to come live in Mexico City or the United States, Mexican federal army press releases, agents of various revolutionary factions in the U.S., and, based on some of the wild stories of Zapatista debauchery, possibly journalists' own fertile imaginations. These sources all tended to reinforce either

interventionist or racist sentiments. The highly placed, wealthy Mexicans of "the better class," who had run Mexico's business and government during the Porfiriato and who members of the American Colony would have known socially, looked down upon the "Indian" population of their country every bit as much as U.S. whites did. For example, the last Porfirian governor of Morelos, Pablo Escandon, wrote in 1912 that if the Zapatistas took over Morelos, "surely we will retrogress to our former position as A NATION OF THE LAST ORDER, A TRUE NIGGERDOM"<sup>34</sup> (his emphasis).

As John L. Johnson has pointed out in his flawed, but still useful 1980 work, *Latin America In Caricature*, popular notions of a "civilizing burden" to raise up the "inferior" peoples of Latin America were reflected and reinforced in U.S. newspapers through editorial cartoons showing Latin Americans as unruly children, subordinates, or horribly stereotyped blacks. Zapata, as an "Indian," could only be considered as barely civilized, certainly not as having a legitimate grievance against the "Order and Progress" of the Porfiriato. The *New York Times*, for example, acknowledged that some farmers of Morelos, unlike Zapata, fought for land rather than loot, but the paper never believed that the farmers had a legitimate claim to the land. Their rights were always described as "alleged." Although the stories

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<sup>34</sup> Womack, *Revolution*, 142.

showed no evidence of the reporters having been to Morelos, the *Times* did not hesitate to categorically state that the followers of Zapata included "the majority of the discontented plantation laborers" and "the criminal element released from the state prison at Cuernavaca last May."

These men were characterized as uncivilized, non-Christians:

The population of Morelos numbers 175,000, a majority of whom are of pure Indian blood, descended from the old Tiahuicas, the primitive Otomis in some portion, and the Aztecs. These people of the Sierra of Ajusco and other ranges of the state retain their old language customs and, it is said, much of their old religion. The most stubborn resistance has come from these mountain men . . . <sup>35</sup>

The press also denigrated Zapata's mental abilities as a military leader, insisting that he acted from irrational motives. For example, the *Times* suggested that Zapata's 1913 attack on Cuernavaca was motivated, not by strategic considerations, but by his desire to loot the homes of the town's wealthy residents because, " . . . <Zapata's> campaigns are conducted more in accordance with cupidity than strategy."<sup>36</sup> Zapata was rarely the subject of magazine articles, but a 1912 story in the *Independent* by former Rough Rider Edwin Emerson also claimed that Zapata launched the Morelos revolution from strictly personal motives. Supposedly Zapata wanted revenge on President Diaz for having Zapata forcibly drafted into the army as punishment

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<sup>35</sup> *New York Times*, 11 March 1912.

<sup>36</sup> *New York Times*, 8 Dec 1913.

for killing a man at a cockfight in a quarrel over a woman.<sup>37</sup> Even the liberal *Nation*, because it heavily supported Madero's proclaimed reform platform, had decided as early as December 1911 that, "there is no one for Madero to deal with but petty local chieftains obviously out for plunder."<sup>38</sup>

The bandit Zapata and his "Indian" followers were considered newsworthy mainly because they might be capable of sensational atrocities and were a threat to the security of the lives and property in Mexico City. There were notices of Zapatistas having defiled women, shot innocents, and burned, looted, and pillaged towns in Morelos, Puebla, and Mexico City suburbs. As early as June 1911, the *El Paso Herald* reported that Zapata had gone to Mexico City to answer to Madero for charges by citizens of Morelos that Zapata "was leading his men in an orgy of anarchy . . ." <sup>39</sup> A *Harper's Weekly* article described the Zapatistas in 1912 as a "bloodthirsty horde."<sup>40</sup> Under the 20 December 1913 headline "Zapata Threatens to Attack Capital," the *New York Times* printed a notice, supposedly from Zapata, saying he

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<sup>37</sup> Edwin Emerson, "Mexican Bandits At Close View," *Independent*, 1 August 1912, 233.

<sup>38</sup> *Nation*, 28 Dec 1911, 619.

<sup>39</sup> *El Paso (Texas) Herald*, 21 June 1911.

<sup>40</sup> Elisha Hollingsworth Talbot, "The Disruption of Mexico," *Harper's Weekly*, 19 October 1912, 7.

would hang Huerta from the National Palace balcony, execute the Cabinet and execute without trial the officers of the federal army. He gave civilians five days to evacuate. On 6 April 1914, the paper reported that Zapata was holding Bishop Jose Ocampo for ransom and had threatened to crucify him on Good Friday. In April 1916, the *New York Times Magazine* included a story on Zapata by Guillermo Ojara, an ex-reporter for the Constitutionalist newspaper, *El Democrata*, who had supposedly spent three months held in the Zapatista camp before he "escaped."<sup>41</sup> The *Times* took great pains to inform its readers that Ojara's name translated to "William O'Hara" and that his father was Irish, thus establishing his "white" credentials and therefore his reliability. "O'Hara's" tale was full of thrilling details about the illiterate, drunken braggart, "Attila del Sur," who hid out in the mountains, surrounded by his ill-gotten gains and his 900 man "Death Legion."

As far as the press was concerned, if the government of Mexico could not control Zapata, then the government of the United States, as a stronger and wiser nation, had a

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<sup>41</sup> Ojara claimed that he had been captured off of a train by Zapatistas and held for three months. He says he returned to Mexico City after his escape, but Carranza had him arrested as a Zapatista spy. He was released only on his promise to leave the country. I have found no record of this in any other source. It is possible that Ojara was a Constitutionalist propagandist hoping to lessen the likelihood that the U.S. would recognize the Zapatista faction in the coming struggle for the government of Mexico.

paternal duty to intervene on the behalf of its own citizens and to save the Mexican people from themselves. Emiliano Zapata just proved that Mexico needed "discipline" of the kind provided by Porfirio Diaz and that the U.S. had a long and difficult mission ahead if it intended to "civilize" Mexico. In September 1912, the *New York Times* noted that, "Zapata still eludes the not overvigilant police and regulars."<sup>42</sup> A year later they said:

The great embarrassment to the Constitutionalist cause flowing from Zapata's activities is that he operates so near the Mexican capital that his misdeeds are almost certain to be noticed by the civilized world.<sup>43</sup>

If Zapata had posed a direct threat to significant amounts of U.S. property and lives, it would not have been unlikely for the press to advocate intervention, as it did in the cases of Huerta and Villa.

There was one period of exception to this standard portrait. As the Huerta government crumbled under the pressures of Zapatista, Carrancista, and Villista revolution and the U.S. occupation of Veracruz, the press considered the possibility that Zapata could end up in control of Mexico. They attempted, briefly, in late 1914 and early 1915, to take him seriously, referring sometimes to his followers as "troops" rather than "hordes," and to Zapata as "General." The *El Paso Herald*, closer to the scene and in

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<sup>42</sup> *New York Times*, 4 September 1912.

<sup>43</sup> *New York Times*, 8 December 1913.

contact with a Zapatista agent in San Antonio, sometimes carried fairly accurate assessments, in addition to the standard purple prose. The paper did report in May 1914, that Zapata was preparing to take Mexico City and had sent threats to "leading citizens and their wives and daughters" including one man who was told that "Zapata would cut off his ears and 'eat them fried.'"<sup>44</sup> The *Herald*, however, seemed to have a good grasp of the relations between the Zapatistas and other factions, noting that Zapata had repudiated Carranza because Carranza would not accept the "Plan of Ayala, the original agrarian proclamation of the southern leader."<sup>45</sup> The paper described, several months later, the believable Zapatista suspicions of a coalition with Villa because too many ex-Huertistas, Felicistas, and federals had joined Villa and would soon "control" him.<sup>46</sup> A surprising account of the much-dreaded Zapatista occupation of Mexico City came out in the 16 January 1915 *Harper's Weekly*. Allene Tupper Wilkes, a foreign resident of Mexico City, reported that "the gentle Zapatistas" peacefully controlled the city without looting or rampaging.

Soon, however, the coalition Convention government proved itself a shaky institution, with three presidents in

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<sup>44</sup> *El Paso (Texas) Herald*, 11 May 1914.

<sup>45</sup> *El Paso (Texas) Herald*, 30 June 1914.

<sup>46</sup> *El Paso (Texas) Herald*, 3 Oct 1914.



less than a year. Carrancista General Pablo Gonzalez took Mexico City in August 1915, and the Convention fled to Toluca, where by October it had disintegrated, its nub retreating to Cuernavaca. On 19 October 1915, the Wilson administration recognized the Carrancistas as the de facto government of Mexico and in the press Zapata fell back into the category of marauding bandit, when he was mentioned at all.

From this point up to Zapata's assassination in April 1919, the Morelos revolutionary surfaced only occasionally in the press, in an article such as "William O'Hara's" or a notice of a Zapatista defeat or defection to the Carrancistas.<sup>47</sup> The U.S. public was more concerned with Villa's depredations, the Pershing Expedition, and especially the progress of the war in Europe. Zapata's death, when mentioned at all, was noted as the demise of a "Rebel Chief," "Leader of Indians," or "Bandit Leader."

Reinforcing and reflecting the press image of Zapata and the outlook of the day were the two volumes, published in 1916 and 1917, of the correspondence of Edith O'Shaughnessy. O'Shaughnessy went to Mexico twice as the wife of the U.S. charge d'affaires. Her first stay, as chronicled in her letters to her mother, during the fall of

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<sup>47</sup> For example, between 1916 and 1919 the *New York Times* ran a total of only 22 articles on Zapata, including three covering his assassination. In 1917 Zapata appeared only three times and in 1918 not at all.

the Diaz administration, the de la Barra interim, and the first part of Madero's presidency, is recorded in *Diplomatic Days*. *A Diplomat's Wife In Mexico* covers the middle period of Huerta's government, until the O'Shaughnessys were handed their passports after the U.S. invasion of Veracruz in April 1914. Unlike many who wrote about Mexico, O'Shaughnessy was fairly well-read in the country's history. In her letters she makes references to reading Walter Webb Prescott's and Alexander von Humboldt's histories of Mexico, the letters of Fanny Calderon de la Barca, the wife of the Spanish minister to Mexico City in the 1840s, Cortes' letters, and Bernal Diaz.

O'Shaughnessy shared the racial views of her day and social class. She saw the Mexican Indians as a "passionate, tenacious, mysterious, gifted, undisciplined race" and felt that they needed a dictator to rule them.<sup>48</sup> At one point she scoffed at the idea, suggested in a New York newspaper, that Diaz's dictatorial rule actually caused the rebellions in the north and south of Mexico. Emiliano Zapata she saw as a bandit, a marauder, not as a revolutionary. She granted that he claimed to have a cause, aside from personal gain, but doubted that cause's justness and Zapata's sincerity. In *Diplomatic Days* she said:

Those who know tell me that Zapata is atavistic in type, desirous of Mexico for the Indians . . . "Mexico

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<sup>48</sup> Edith O'Shaughnessy, *A Diplomat's Wife In Mexico* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1916), 17.

for the Indians" really means a sponging out of everything between us and Montezuma . . . <sup>49</sup>

Three years later she expressed her opinion even more strongly:

Zapata has been the terror of every President -- Diaz, de la Barra, Madero, and Huerta -- for nearly five years. His crimes and depredations are committed under the banner of "Land for the People" . . . but that he has, after these years of bloodshed, rapine, and loot, rendered conditions more tolerable for any except the rapers and looters, is most debatable.<sup>50</sup>

Like the press, in her letters home O'Shaughnessy paid only a little attention to Zapata, usually when he had attacked a Mexico City suburb. Generally she made light of his activities, surely in part to avoid alarming her mother, but perhaps also because her reading of Mexican history had led her to see Zapata as just a continuation of 19th century banditry that only had been held in check during the Porfiriato.

Although the *New York Times Review of Books* disliked both works and the *Nation* faulted *A Diplomat's Wife in Mexico* for the "indiscretion" of revealing inside diplomatic maneuvering so soon after the fact, O'Shaughnessy's books were otherwise well-received as interesting and informative reports from an eyewitness to the recent Mexican upheavals. The *Literary Digest* said, "Chiefly significant, however, is

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<sup>49</sup> Edith O'Shaughnessy, *Diplomatic Days* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1917), 101.

<sup>50</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *Wife*, 218.

the light she throws on the somewhat perplexing career of Madero."<sup>51</sup> The *North American Review* appreciated O'Shaughnessy's "plain-speaking" with "no appearance of bias," and her presentation of Huerta:

. . . he <the reader> will find sympathy hard to withhold from this shrewd, deep man <Huerta>, to all appearances not avaricious, to all appearances striving for peace and order, heavily burdened, cruelly handicapped. Certainly Huerta seems to shine by contrast with such men as Villa and Zapata.<sup>52</sup>

In September of 1919, five months after Zapata's assassination, Republican Senator Albert B. Fall called for hearings to "investigate the matter of outrages on citizens of the United States in Mexico." His primary purpose was to embarrass the Wilson administration in the midst of the fight to ratify the Versailles treaty and to produce propaganda for the Republicans in the upcoming presidential elections. Fall himself owned property in Mexico<sup>53</sup> and was later convicted in the Teapot Dome oil scandal of accepting a \$100,000 bribe from Edward L. Doheny, owner of two oil companies located in Mexico.<sup>54</sup> Given this background it is

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<sup>51</sup> Review of *Diplomatic Days*, by Edith O'Shaughnessy, *Literary Digest*, 8 December 1917, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Review of *A Diplomat's Wife In Mexico*, by Edith O'Shaughnessy, *North American Review*, August 1916, 302.

<sup>53</sup> Robert E. Quirk, *Mexico*, The Modern Nations in Historical Perspective Series, ed. Robin W. Winks, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), 94.

<sup>54</sup> Ernest Gruening, *Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening* (New York: Liveright, 1973), 108.

not surprising that Fall was willing to give credence to the negative portraits of Zapata and his movement provided by most of those who testified on the subject.

William Frank Buckley, who had worked in real estate and oil leases in Mexico since 1908, was typical of many who testified. He despised the reform Constitution of 1917, and characterized it as, "the principal reforms being the destruction of private property and the expulsion from the country of the Americans."<sup>55</sup> He had no use for Zapata or land reform and disdained those, such as H.L. Hall, who attempted to present the Zapatista case. Buckley testified:

Mr. H.L. Hall was another discredited American living in Mexico and was appointed a special representative to Zapata. He is now and has been for several years a Zapatista propagandist.<sup>56</sup>

Eber Cole Byam, who had lived and worked in Mexico during the Porfiriato from 1895 to 1907, also testified, rather erroneously, on land reform. He claimed that Mexico had had for years a U.S.-style Homestead Act which the *campesinos* refused to take advantage of. He felt this was to their benefit, however, as it relieved them of having to pay land taxes and of the "burdens" of land ownership. Byam implied in his testimony that "Indians" were not able to deal with

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<sup>55</sup> Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs, Preliminary Report and Hearings of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 8 September 1919, 769.*

<sup>56</sup> Senate, *Investigation, 814.*

responsibility and needed the discipline of a strong president like Porfirio Diaz, ideas that were also common in the U.S. media. Diplomat Nelson O'Shaughnessy, who served at the U.S. embassy in Mexico City during the Diaz, Madero, and Huerta regimes, was inclined to agree with Byam. He testified, ". . . I think the whole Mexican land situation has been very much exaggerated."<sup>57</sup> Like many of the wealthy Mexicans he would have met in his work in Mexico City, O'Shaughnessy did not believe there was a land distribution problem in Mexico. Since there was no real cause for a grievance, Zapata was little more than a bandit. George C. Carothers attempted to bring a little positive information to light on Zapata during his testimony, but, as the Wilson administration's special representative to Francisco Villa, the subcommittee found his information on the Zapatistas' peaceful occupation of Mexico City highly suspect.

The only North American ever to meet Zapata who testified extensively before the subcommittee was William E. Gates. Gates was a very wealthy Cleveland businessman who, in the middle of his life, moved to a theosophical community near San Diego and took up the study of Mayan hieroglyphics, linguistics, and archeology. He achieved some measure of success in his new field, publishing articles in the Peabody Museum's bulletin at Harvard and for an anthropological

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 2706.

congress in Geneva.<sup>58</sup> Through his California acquaintance, and long-time Morelos resident, H.L. Hall, Gates became interested in the current Mexican political situation. In July 1917, Gates traveled to Mexico and spent the next nine months in Yucatan, Oaxaca, and Morelos, where he met with Zapata. On his return Gates wrote several glowing articles on Zapata for the *North American Review* and *World's Work* in January and April 1919, just before Zapata's assassination, which, had they come sooner, might have sparked more media interest in Zapata. As it was, news of Zapata's assassination crossed the U.S. during the spring and summer of 1919, after which the Morelos rebellion was considered resolved. Gates had also attempted in the first half of 1919, to interest President Wilson in the Zapatistas, now led by Magana, who Gates said were willing to form a coalition government with Felix Diaz, and several other "moderate" chiefs to replace the "anti-American, bolshevist, syndicalist"<sup>59</sup> Carranza who ruled, as Gates said, not by the Constitution, but by "fiat decrees."<sup>60</sup> From January to August 1919, Gates wrote a series of letters to Secretary of War Newton Baker, who he had known from college and from Cleveland, asking Baker to speak to President Wilson about

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<sup>58</sup> Womack, *Revolution*, 298.

<sup>59</sup> Senate, *Investigation*, 2844.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

supporting the Zapatistas when Carranza's government fell. Gates was a staunch anti-interventionist and believed that if the U.S. supported the coalition it would assure some kind of orderly transfer of power and eliminate the need for intervention. The Californian was also motivated by his belief that the problems of Latin American were rooted in the struggles of the native peoples:

I did it <tried to support the coalition> . . . because I care for my Indians; because they can come back; because they are the great bulk of the population and are not an "inferior race" -- only a suppressed one; and because their economic regeneration means the peaceful solution forever of the Mexican - Central American problem. And I do not suppose I have to say that Carranza will never do it.<sup>61</sup>

Gates tried to go through Baker, instead of the State Department, because he felt that State was thoroughly pro-Carranza and would refuse to hear anything against him. Baker, however, refused to get involved in bringing Gates' information to the President. Gates testified before the subcommittee that on 9 September 1919, he delivered to the White House a document signed by Magana, Diaz, and several others explaining why they were against Carranza and giving their pledge to form a coalition. There is no evidence to suggest that Wilson took this into consideration, because probably he held with Duval West's interpretation that the Zapatistas just were not very important, and the president supported Carranza to the end of the Wilson administration.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 316.



With the Versailles Treaty ratification fight on his mind, Mexico was not his top foreign policy priority.

Although Gates' testimony was favorable to Zapata, it was generally accepted by the subcommittee because Gates was able to prove he was entirely independent, financially and politically, in his research and because, for his own reasons, Gates shared the subcommittee's antipathy for Venustiano Carranza. Gates was convinced that Carranza's ties to the Casa Del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker) and Yucatan's governor Salvador Alvarado marked Carranza as a "Bolshevik." The Zapatistas, on the other hand, simply wanted, "Land for the people of Morelos, for the common people of Morelos, and nothing else."<sup>62</sup>

Chairman Fall thanked William Gates for his "interesting and intelligent testimony,"<sup>63</sup> but the subcommittee's final report reflected the political considerations that had led to it being convened in the first place. The report supported the bulk of the testimony gathered and recommended that the U.S. government should declare inapplicable to U.S. citizens all of the reform provisions of the Constitution of 1917, especially Article 27 that stated, "The nation shall at all times have the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 2814.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

right to impose on private property such limitations as the public interest may demand, . . . "64

It is telling to contrast the majority U.S. diplomatic and media reaction to the fight of the Zapatistas with their reaction to the struggles of Rosalie Caden Evans. Evans had married an Englishman in Puebla in 1898, and lived in Mexico until just after the assassination of Francisco Madero in February 1913. The Evanses had all their money invested in Mexico, however, so Harry Evans was forced to return to Puebla to avoid bankruptcy in 1917. While there he died and in 1918, Rosalie Evans returned to Mexico and attempted to settle at the large estate she and her husband had owned, hacienda San Pedro Coxtocan.

The hacienda had been partially broken up, in accordance with the new land laws. Parts had been granted as *ejidos* and another part President Obregon was in the process of taking "in the public interest" to use for an agricultural school. Evans would have none of this and battled agrarians, bandits, and Presidents Carranza and Obregon, to regain full possession. She went through the Mexican government and English diplomatic channels, tried bluffing and bullying local officials, and eventually resorted to arms to combat a seige of her property.

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<sup>64</sup> Meyer and Sherman, *Course*, 544.

Finally, in August 1924, Evans was shot and killed while bringing a payroll back to the hacienda.

Like Zapata, Evans fought the Mexican government, ". . . to prove it's mine <the land>, government or no government."<sup>65</sup> Like Zapata, she did not shy away from violence when the established system offered no remedy. Besieged at the hacienda in June of 1924, she wrote, "I almost hope we fight it out before they <rescuers> arrive. Nothing will ever teach them, unless we do."<sup>66</sup> And, like Zapata, the land she fought for did not belong to her in the strictly legal sense. Once Evans took to arms, however, the U.S. media hailed her as a heroine.

The case of Rosalie Caden Evans highlighted the assumptions that motivated the U.S. government and press to almost uniformly ignore or reject Zapata and his movement. Had these people simply been opposed to Zapata because he rejected the law; or because he used violence to stand up for his rights, there would have been a similar outcry against Evans. They had, however, a certain vision of the U.S. role in Latin America. They would shoulder the "white man's burden" to be builders and shapers, and for their pains deserved privileges and respect from properly grateful

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<sup>65</sup> Rosalie Caden Evans, *The Rosalie Evans Letters From Mexico*, ed. Daisy Caden Pettus (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Publishers, 1926), 65.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Times*, 22 June 1924.

governments and peoples. Emiliano Zapata and his agrarian goals absolutely did not fit into this picture. As a non-white his leadership ability was denigrated, and as a man rebelling against a system that had welcomed U.S. investment and supported U.S. privilege he was called a bandit. "The courageous Mrs. Evans," on the other hand, was described in the press as a lone fighter for justice:

This woman is a widow, who for several years has blocked, often with arms, the efforts of Bolshevik politicians of Puebla to seize a fine estate jointly developed by herself and her late husband. The buildings on the estate were burned by the Obregon soldiers and the lone woman defender escaped only because of the fidelity of her servants.<sup>67</sup>

She had come to Mexico and built up San Pedro Coxtocan out of the "wilderness," providing jobs to the Indians from the surrounding villages:

The hacienda was farmed by Indians, who received a large share of the produce. These small farmers were satisfied with the terms on which they occupied the land under the management of the Evanses . . . .<sup>68</sup>

The *Literary Digest* had the last word on Zapata and his men, characterizing them as men "who preferred the life of bandits to honest toil."<sup>69</sup> Several days after Evans' death, however, the *New York Times* published her last letter which the paper said, "showed that Mrs. Evans realized that

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<sup>67</sup> *New York Times*, 23 Feb 1924.

<sup>68</sup> *New York Times*, 22 June 1924.

<sup>69</sup> "Is This The End of Emiliano Zapata, The Mexican Rebel?" *Literary Digest*, 5 July 1919, 79.

her life was unsafe at her ranch, but stated that it was a matter of sacred duty for her to stay and uphold the law and justice."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *New York Times*, 6 Aug 1924.

## CHAPTER II

### A REVERSION IN FORM

It was not just gunboat diplomatists and old reactionaries nostalgic for the Porfiriato who objected to Zapata. Many "liberals" in the years before World War II also found it hard to side with Zapata, although for much different reasons. The works of Frank Tannenbaum and Ernest Gruening reflected the views on Zapata of many of those who supported a reform agenda of the type described by a 1913 reader of the *Nation* as "clean honest government, equal rights, incorruptible judiciary, abolition of the spoils system, universal suffrage, and representative, republican institutions."<sup>71</sup>

The career of Ernest Gruening (1887-1974) spanned the fields of medicine, journalism, and politics. After graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1912, Gruening

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<sup>71</sup> *Nation*, 25 Dec 1913, 615. This letter to the editor was in protest of an article in *Nation*, 11 December 1913, 555, that, while saying it could not defend the actions of "bandits" such as Zapata, understood that these men were motivated by the feeling that, "the 'law' as administered from above is intended not for their benefit but for their subjection." The letter writer was appalled that the magazine could suggest that Zapata had any right on his side at all.

began his journalism career in Boston. As managing editor of the *Boston Traveler* he crusaded for women's suffrage, advocated dropping advertisements for "quack" cures, and wrote editorials criticizing the film *Birth of a Nation* as racist. Gruening was an early member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and made it *Traveler* policy to:

Refer to the color of the individual only when it is of particular and special interest and when the story is manifestly incomplete and inaccurate if the color of the person involved is concealed.<sup>72</sup>

Gruening's personal exposure to Latin American issues began with his work shortly after World War I on *La Prensa*, a U.S. Spanish-language daily. Then, on becoming managing editor of the *Nation* in 1920, Gruening fought for the end of "gunboat diplomacy," especially in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. During the Senate hearings on the possibility of ending the U.S. military occupation, Gruening went to Haiti at the request of chairman Medill McCormick to screen witnesses for the hearings to be held on the island.

In December of 1922, Gruening left the *Nation* to do a series on Mexico for *Colliers* magazine, which had a wider circulation. He travelled to Mexico with his wife and two sons to research the country which was very much in the U.S. news at that time. President Harding had refused to recognize the Obregon regime and article 27 of the

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<sup>72</sup> Gruening, *Battles*, 51.

Constitution of 1917 had provoked much resentment among U.S. oil companies and citizens with interests in Mexico. Gruening was favorably impressed with President Obregon and the other "revolutionaries" he met, including Diego Rivera, Jose Vasconcelos, Elena Torres, and Manuel Gamio. He also contacted the U.S. embassy and members of the U.S. business community in Mexico, but noted, "I could not but feel that these 'eyes and ears' of our State Department were singularly defective,"<sup>73</sup> with their attitude of nostalgia for the Porfiriato. In preparing his articles Gruening also interviewed many Mexicans in government positions "since virtually all the Mexican officialdom had been participants and eyewitnesses to the events of the revolutionary decade."<sup>74</sup>

Once back in the U.S. Gruening decided to write a book about the Mexican Revolution, ". . .--the book, I hoped-- describing the roots of the Revolution deep in the past, its present accomplishments, and its prospects for the future."<sup>75</sup> In this description of the Revolution, *Mexico and its Heritage* (1928), Emiliano Zapata played a small and somewhat negative role, for several reasons.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 118.



Gruening was a personal friend of both Obregon and Calles and got much of his information from government officials of these men's administrations. So quite naturally, the 1910 to 1920 portion of Gruening's story emphasized the Carrancista faction that Obregon had come from and described other groups, including the Zapatistas, mainly in relation to the Constitutionalist. In the chapter titled "The Revolution" Zapata is mentioned only twice, in passing. To Carranza, Zapata was a problem, a rebel, someone who stood in the way of the government.

At the time Gruening wrote his book, documentation on Zapata and his movement was difficult to come by. Much of what has become the Archivo de Zapata was in the personal possession of Gildardo and Octavio Magana until the early 1960s.<sup>76</sup> Gruening did not appear to have read a complete copy of the Plan de Ayala or else he misinterpreted it. Throughout *Mexico and its Heritage* he represented it simply as calling for "immediate expropriation of one third of the land of the haciendas, and its division among the landless."<sup>77</sup> It is certainly true that the Plan stated:

" . . . there will be expropriated the third part of those monopolies from the powerful proprietors of them, with prior indemnization, in order that the pueblos and

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<sup>76</sup> Womack, *Revolution*, 414.

<sup>77</sup> Ernest Gruening, *Mexico And Its Heritage* (New York: The Century Co., 1928), 142.

citizens of Mexico may obtain ejidos, colonies, and foundations for pueblos, . . . "78 (my emphasis)

The Plan de Ayala, however, was much more than a short declaration of expropriation. It presented the just grievances of the Zapatistas, set up a plan to form a new government of Mexico, and organized the beginnings of an agrarian reform program. In his failure to understand this key document, Gruening failed to locate the lens through which Zapata's actions and importance could be viewed in perspective. Without it, Zapata was saved from becoming just another minor caudillo or bandit leader only by Gruening's recognition that, ". . . the simon-pure bandit, the bandit who posed as a revolutionist, the revolutionist who behaved like a bandit, and the poor peasant who had to maraud in order not to starve, were often indistinguishable . . . "79

The main reason why Gruening did not believe Zapata to be a positive, important force in the Revolution has to do with Gruening's standard of measurement of a society's "progress." Gruening subscribed to the ideal of a democratic society based on a healthy middle class and a backbone of yeoman farmers, as well as effective universal suffrage and "clean government." To his credit, he applied his standards just as strongly to the U.S. and often

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<sup>78</sup> Womack, *Revolution*, 402.

<sup>79</sup> Gruening, *Heritage*, 105.

supported, in print and in personal actions, causes such as women's suffrage and progressive candidates for office such as Robert LaFollette. Throughout *Mexico and its Heritage*, however, it is clear that Gruening measured Mexico's progress by these U.S. standards.

In his large chapter on "The Land" he praised the *rancheros*, characterizing them as "the only rural middle class Mexico has known."<sup>80</sup> Unlike either the hacendados or *peones* they paid taxes and were almost completely self-supporting. He bemoaned the fact that circumstances severely limited the expansion of this group:

The growth of this class would have been highly beneficial to Mexico. Although usually situated on the poorer hillsides, these *ranchos* were intensively cultivated. In the wide uplands that encircle the Valley of Toluca the deep green patches and scattered white farm houses, so unlike the rambling hacienda or huddled pueblo, tell unmistakably of independent effort and small ownership. . . . Had the small holding been successfully encouraged from the start how different might have been Mexico's history!<sup>81</sup>

Zapata did not fight for the *rancheros*, however. He fought for the *peones* and for their *ejidos*. Gruening only accepted *ejidos*, "a reversion in form,"<sup>82</sup> as a stepping stone to individual land ownership. The *ejido*, in and of itself, was not the future, but rather a key to the future, "an equal opportunity to start and protection in a fair subsistence in

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 166.

exchange for hard work; an initial paternalism -- an early tutelage to be grown out of by directed self-help, individual and common effort."<sup>83</sup> Measured by Gruening's own standard of progress, Zapata appears to be at worst, a reactionary or at best, advocating a half-way measure.

To sum up Mexico's political progress Gruening wrote, "In the larger aspects of politics, it may be asserted flatly that no progress whatever has been made since Mexican Independence."<sup>84</sup> He blamed continuing personalism, certainly an aspect of Zapatismo, and the chaotic state of local politics, citing Morelos as a particularly bad example. The only possible salvation of Mexico for "democracy" would be through agrarian reform, not as Zapata envisioned it, but a remodelling along U.S. patterns:

If this reform can be continued uninterruptedly through a generation, Mexico will be transformed -- from a nation of serfs to one of small independent landholders.<sup>85</sup>

Frank Tannenbaum (1893-1969) was a noted U.S. scholar of Latin American history. He began his career in the 1910s attending night classes at the Ferrer School, "the first institution devoted to the constructive side of anarchism"<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 662.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 663.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Maier and Richard W. Weatherhead, *Frank Tannenbaum: A Biographical Essay* (New York: University Seminars, Columbia University, 1974), 3.

and was an IWW activist. In 1914, Tannenbaum, then 21 years old, served a year in jail for leading a sit-down strike of 189 unemployed men at a New York City Catholic church.<sup>87</sup> He wrote several books on labor and prison reform and then became interested in Mexico through his work with *Century* magazine and *The Survey*. In the wake of the de la Huerta rebellion, he put together the May 1924 issue of *The Survey* devoted solely to Mexico and the future of its revolution, including articles by Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Plutarco Elias Calles, Manuel Gamio, Jose Vasconcelos, Diego Rivera, and Tannenbaum's own article, "Mexico--A Promise."

Throughout his career Tannenbaum was interested in the broad issue of institutional reform: what type of reform to strive for and how it could best be achieved. When his jail term was up and Tannenbaum went on to Columbia University he soon discovered alternatives to radical activism. He later said:

Until I went to school I thought there was only one way to accomplish an end. Now I know that there are many ways. The study of history is dangerous to radicalism.<sup>88</sup>

Tannenbaum, however, never denied the people's right to armed revolt if that was what it would take to start reform. In "Mexico--A Promise" he described the Mexican Constitution of 1917:

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 11.

. . . a promise which needs fulfillment. If the promise remains unfulfilled, it will again, as the constitutions in Mexico have been before, become a good and legitimate excuse for revolution.<sup>89</sup>

It was this view of reform and the role of revolution in achieving reform that influenced Tannenbaum's views on Emiliano Zapata. Of all his books on Mexico, the 1930 *Mexican Agrarian Revolution* devoted the most concentrated attention to Zapata and his movement. Zapata stood for economic change first and foremost with his insistence upon land reform, but he also provided, and continues to provide, ethical and spiritual leadership. Tannenbaum points out, "The importance of Zapata lies in the fact that he had but one basic aim and that he died fighting for it,"<sup>90</sup> rather than insincerely adopting a reform platform, as Carranza did in Veracruz, or selling out the revolution for personal gain. Not only did Zapata win Tannenbaum's approval with the ethical example he set, but also with the continuing spiritual invigoration Zapata gave to the "Indians" of Mexico:

Another important phase of the Zapatista influence is what is known as *indianismo*. . . it was the fact that Zapata held Mexico at bay, that the Indian fought and won, that has given the present Mexican movement its

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<sup>89</sup> Frank Tannenbaum, "Mexico--A Promise," *Survey*, 1 May 1924, 131.

<sup>90</sup> Frank Tannenbaum, *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1930), 162.

strong racial flavor. Zapata wrote the Indian note into contemporary Mexican history.<sup>91</sup>

Tannenbaum believed the Zapatistas had the right to revolt and made important contributions to reform through their revolt. In his 1933 book *Peace by Revolution*, he stressed that the Constitution 1857, founded as it was on U.S. and European notions of a single, homogeneous nation, could never be applicable to Mexico until the "social disequilibrium" there was brought into balance, probably by violent revolution.<sup>92</sup> Zapata's attempts to bring the *campesinos* of Morelos within the Porfirian system, attempts to gain for them land and justice, were consistently thwarted, leading to Zapata's participation in the Madero rebellion. Then, when Francisco Madero proved no more amenable to change, Zapata was again justified in taking to the field. Tannenbaum held that in these rebellions Zapata did important work to break down the "social disequilibrium," by becoming a nationwide symbol of the revolution, although this was a delayed reaction, and by articulating the unifying theme of the revolution, *Tierra y Libertad*.

Tannenbaum did not, however, see a successful revolution as the ultimate goal. In *The Labor Movement: Its*

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Frank Tannenbaum, *Peace By Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 111.

*Conservative Functions and Social Consequences* (1921),

Tannenbaum wrote:

It is the ideal aim of the labor movement to abolish revolutions. It aims to eliminate the cost of human sacrifice due to social change by making change a pragmatic and deliberate thing.<sup>93</sup>

This belief is the reason that Tannenbaum, although he admired Zapata and condoned his actions, focused mainly on the achievements of Obregon, Calles, and those who came after them in *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution, Peace by Revolution*, and *Mexico: The Struggle for Peace and Bread*. Zapata is too far toward the radical end of the spectrum to be one of Tannenbaum's real heroes. Although Tannenbaum recognized the insincerity of Carranza's reform agenda, he noted in *Peace By Revolution* (1933), "It gave him the support of *agraristas* who believed in Zapata's cause, but who, for one reason or another, did not follow Zapata in his ruthless and violent struggle against great odds."<sup>94</sup> In this book Tannenbaum reiterated his belief that Zapata's biggest contribution was as part of the "profound spiritual and social change"<sup>95</sup> in Mexico, the new awareness and respect for the "Indian" and his culture. Tannenbaum saw an

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<sup>93</sup> Frank Tannenbaum, *The Labor Movement: Its Conservative Functions and Social Consequences* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921); quoted in Maier and Weatherhead, *Tannenbaum*, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Tannenbaum, *Peace By Revolution*, 162.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.



important progression away from revolution toward government sponsored reform after 1920. The leaders of the 1920s managed to associate the government with social reform and redefine, as reactionary, anti-government rebels like de la Huerta. Obregon was able to make peace with the Zapatistas, and in so doing was able to take steps toward agrarian reform in a "pragmatic and deliberate" way, rather than at gunpoint. Tannenbaum was always ready to admit the shortcomings of the government programs, but contended that the true heroes of Mexico's recent history were the men who reformed the peace that had been won by the revolution.

Men such as Gruening and Tannenbaum truly wished to see Mexico progress. They wanted to see a respect for Mexico and its people, racially and diplomatically, grow in the U.S. But their goals for Mexico, and their standards of measurement of achievement of those goals, came straight out of the U.S. context. Zapata was a violent social revolutionary, not a U.S.-style liberal who had wandered a little too far south. To Gruening and Tannenbaum, who applauded reform as the ultimate goal, Zapata's violent revolution seemed reactionary, or at best still left a lot of work to be done.

"Liberal" opinion of this period, of course, was not monolithic. Journalist and author Carleton Beals dropped the U.S. agenda and explored Latin America on its own terms, beginning with a 1918 trip to Yucatan. From there he went

on to Mexico City and established the English Preparatory Institute, taught at the American High School, and tutored President Carranza's military staff in English.<sup>96</sup> His 1923 work, *Mexico: An Interpretation*, was one of the first books in English to analyze at length the 1910-1920 period of the Mexican Revolution.

Beals believed that the main issue of the revolution was land reform. He had specific ideas about what the goals of the reform should be and these colored his opinion of Zapata. He wrote:

It is doubtful, therefore, if the Mexican land problem can be solved entirely in the "American" and Fascist manner, by the creation of small proprietors.<sup>97</sup>

Beals, unlike Gruening, who advocated the building of a Mexican rural middle class of small landholders, was willing to judge the Mexican Revolution in the Mexican context and measure it by Mexican standards. This led him to a positive assessment of Zapata's role as an agrarian reformer with legitimate goals and some influence.

Beals cited Francisco Madero's "*inability to institute adequate reform*," (Beals' emphasis) and his waste of precious financial resources in attempting to crush those, especially Zapata, who demanded reform, with bringing about

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<sup>96</sup> *Twentieth Century Authors*, 1942 ed., s.v. "Carleton Beals."

<sup>97</sup> Carleton Beals, *Mexico: An Interpretation* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923), 92.

the downfall of the Madero administration.<sup>98</sup> For Beals, it was clearly Madero, not Zapata, who was responsible for undermining the government and making possible the coup d'etat of General Victoriano Huerta. Beals made the same case about Carranza's resistance to Zapata's legitimate reform agenda. Beals pointed out that President Alvaro Obregon, who implemented a combination of demobilization with land reform in the form of military colonies, only needed to station thirty *federales* in Cuernavaca, in the heart of Zapata country "--where some six months previously Carranza had been conducting a campaign that was costing his Government for a time over \$300,000 (pesos) a day."<sup>99</sup>

Not only did Zapata have legitimate goals, but Beals maintained that Zapata had an influence on the direction of the revolution. Beals was the first U.S. writer to elaborate on the Zapatista influence at the Queretaro constitutional convention of 1917. He believed that the radical clauses on land reform that modified the conservative constitution Carranza had originally presented to the convention resulted in part from "the pressure of Zapata in the south."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 55.

*Mexico: An Interpretation* provided the U.S. public a very early and positive look at the concrete progress made by Zapata in his lifetime in Morelos. In Mexico Beals met and talked to Antonio Diaz Soto y Gama, a Mexico City lawyer who had fled from the Huerta administration to work with the Zapatistas. From the lawyer Beals learned the details of agrarian reform in Morelos and found much to praise. He described the formation of agrarian commissions to organize land surveys and land distribution and a rural credit bank to help farmers get started with seed and tools. He concluded:

Hand in hand went the work of creating a rural bank . . . and through this and provisional land repartition, the state of Morelos beneath the "Convention Government" <in Cuernavaca> achieved comparative prosperity.<sup>101</sup>

All three of these men, Gruening, Tannenbaum, and Beals, in describing Zapata, continued to examine the proper role of the U.S., in Latin America. Beals approached the Zapatista revolution the way he hoped the U.S. would approach relations with Mexico in general. He went to the source, got the facts, and judged them in the Mexican context, instead of trying to make over Mexico into a junior United States. He came away from his study of the Zapatistas, not with a head full of romantic notions about "saving" Mexico like William Gates, but with a healthy

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 97.

respect for what Zapata tried to accomplish. Gruening and Tannenbaum each represented Zapata according to their views on the issue of reform in the U.S. Beals, while he shared many of these opinions on reform at home, had a fundamentally different view of the role of the U.S. in Latin America. Gruening and Tannenbaum saw the U.S. position as role-model and teacher, rather than exploiter with a "big stick," but their view was still essentially a paternalistic one. Gruening later served the administration of Franklin Roosevelt for several years as the chief U.S. administrator on Puerto Rico. Tannenbaum eventually came to support the extension of this paternalism around the globe saying:

. . . had we followed the traditional and expected policy of the great nations in regard to little ones then our present role in the world as champions of the small state against direct or indirect subversion could not have had the force of public approval it now carries . . . <sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Frank Tannenbaum, *Mexico: The Struggle For Peace and Bread* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950; reprint 1960), 291-92.

## CHAPTER III

### SYMBOL OF IMMENSE PREACHMENT

At the end of 1927, U.S.-Mexican relations began to thaw. President Coolidge reached a settlement with Mexico on the claims of the oil companies, and he replaced the abrasive Ambassador James Sheffield with Dwight Morrow. Ambassador Morrow worked hard to improve relations with Mexico and to popularize the country back in the U.S. The pro-German President Venustiano Carranza, who had ordered Zapata's assassination, was now dead, assassinated in 1920 as he fled to exile. Positive accounts of the administrations of Obregon and Calles by writers such as Gruening and Tannenbaum sparked interest in visiting Mexico and by the beginning of the 1930s, U.S. citizens were vacationing in Mexico, in record numbers.<sup>103</sup> These travelers brought back favorable reports of the interesting people and culture to be found.

The 1930s and 1940s saw a dramatic rehabilitation of Zapata's reputation in the United States. The U.S. media, government, and residents of Mexico, groups who earlier had

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<sup>103</sup> Zoraida and Meyer, *The United States and Mexico*, 144.

been at pains to vilify Zapata, began to represent him in an almost heroic light. There were no new sources of information on Zapata discovered at the time to provoke this reevaluation. Gildardo and Octavio Magana still privately held all of the main body of papers that eventually became the Archivo de Zapata.<sup>104</sup> Rather, this reinterpretation of Zapata and its general acceptance reflected a fundamental change in the U.S. perception of Latin America and the U.S. role there. Before the early 1930s, Latin America, particularly Mexico, had been a place to exploit, a place to go and get rich in oil or agriculture or mining. It was a place where white U.S. citizens could have a houseful of Indian servants and a sense of superiority, even if back home they were "nobody." The rise of fascism and the Depression changed all that.

In 1933, the Roosevelt administration initiated the Good Neighbor Policy and the U.S. supported the principles of nonintervention and collective action at the Seventh Conference of American States in Montevideo. This action, unthinkable policy a decade previously, was motivated by the U.S. need to assure a united inter-American front against German and Japanese expansionism. The perception of Latin America as an adjunct to the U.S. had not changed, but it was no longer our private sphere of influence to be

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<sup>104</sup> Womack, *Revolution*, 414.

exploited. Now Latin America seemed to Roosevelt to be a long flank dangerously exposed to the threat of fascism. New, positive symbols of Latin America, such as Emiliano Zapata, had to be created to bind that flank within our protective circle.

By the early 1930s too, the U.S. had lost some of its faith in its inherent superiority over Latin America. The Depression left some, now in doubt about the "blessings" of technology and progress, nostalgic for simpler times. Interest in and approval of the "primitive" was reflected in works like Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*.<sup>105</sup> As an "Indian," Zapata came in for a reinterpretation. Several new books appeared, by people who had been present during the 1910-1920 revolution, which offered a new slant on Zapata's role and importance. The more positive portraits of Zapata in these works paved the way for "official" U.S. attempts to coopt Zapata as a symbol in the 1940s.

Leone B. Moats went to Mexico as the young bride of a wealthy man, and at the writing in 1932 of *Thunder In Their Veins*, her memoir, she had lived in Mexico for over twenty years. Moats wrote that Zapata was no bandit. She believed that he was sincere in his call for agrarian reform, even if she did not completely understand what it was he wanted to accomplish when she labelled him "a sort of village

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<sup>105</sup> Keen, *Aztec Image*, 463-64.



Bolshevik."<sup>106</sup> Zapata remained true to his cause, *Tierra y Libertad*, and "He would fight for any one who promised that, then fight against them when, in power, they reneged."<sup>107</sup>

As Carleton Beals pointed out in his scathing review of *Thunder In Their Veins*, Moats was not without her biases and shortcomings, including hearty praise of the Porfiriato. While she personally admired and respected Zapata, she also found the Zapatista soldiers rather laughable as a fighting force. Hardly ever mentioning harsh threats or severe raids, Moats described at length practical jokes involving Zapatistas, either as the pranksters or as the butt of them.

In these memoirs, she painted a picture of Zapata as a country man, uncomfortable with the city and its manners, but said he had "the hill man's native sagacity"<sup>108</sup> and his followers a "rural naivete and honesty of demeanor."<sup>109</sup> In her view, these men held a spiritual superiority over "modern" men of the cities:

They do not live to be very old. The hot chile food and the exposure soon kills them off. Poor wretches! But then they seem so happy and contented. They want nothing. They are not eaten with ambition . . . Are

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<sup>106</sup> Leone B. Moats, *Thunder In Their Veins: A Memoir of Mexico*, ed. Russell Lord (New York: The Century Co., 1932), 82.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 84.

these Indians wise, and we the shallow and defeated,  
for all our striving?<sup>110</sup>

Due to the new attitude toward Mexico and the new appreciation of the "primitive," Moats' book was, barring Beals, well-received in the U.S. So, too, was *Tempest Over Mexico* (1935), the work of another foreign resident of Mexico, Englishwoman Rosa E. King. Although at the time of the 1910-1920 revolution King supported the Mexican federal government and feared and hated Zapata and his "bandit horde," looking back, she expressed doubts about her earlier beliefs. She wrote that after the break between Zapata and Madero in 1911, she had thought that the Zapatistas were "harmless and valiant children" exhibiting a "burst of destructiveness <that> seemed to me a childish reaction to the slight they had suffered," but that she now realized that Zapata was passionately committed to his ideal of land reform and he knew that Madero's choice of Ambrosio Figueroa as governor of Morelos would block the agrarian program.<sup>111</sup> King also changed her mind about federal soldiers who defected to the Zapatistas during a seige of Cuernavaca, saying she could now respect their decision to abandon the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>111</sup> Rosa E. King, *Tempest Over Mexico* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1935), 76-77.

murdering dictator Huerta and serve Zapata, who remained "true as steel to the Revolution."<sup>112</sup>

Like Leone Moats, Rosa King praised the "primitive" qualities of the Zapatistas. She described the peaceful Zapatista occupation of Mexico City, which she lived through, noting that the "modern" city residents laughed at Zapata's followers for asking for tortillas instead of fancy city food. She wrote, "I was sure that they must have laughed in their turn at the soft city folks who could not understand anything outside their own way of doing things."<sup>113</sup> King expressed admiration of Zapata's decision not to take the Presidency in 1915, not because she thought him evil or stupid, but because he was smart enough to know his support and strength came from his roots in Morelos:

It was, I sensed, the essence of their trust in Zapata that he stayed close to the soil of his *tierra*, whose needs were part of him; eschewing honors and wealth . . . <sup>114</sup>

*Tempest Over Mexico* won uniformly positive reviews in the U.S. press. The tone of King's book was one of reevaluation that mirrored the 1930s. Mexico was now a neighbor, not an unruly child, and King's new respect for Zapata fit in with this new perception.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 180-81.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 294.

The extent to which this reevaluation of Zapata took hold shows in the reactions of the reviewers to the first Zapata biography, Harry H. Dunn's *The Crimson Jester: Zapata of Mexico* (1933). Dunn was a correspondent in Mexico for the International News Service and the National News Association. He claimed to have ridden with the Zapatistas and personally interviewed Zapata many times. This, however, is highly questionable since there is no mention of Dunn's association with Zapata in any other record of the Morelos revolution and, as Dunn himself admitted, he was expelled from Mexico in late 1912.<sup>115</sup> Another clue that Dunn's imagination carried his book farther than his experience is in a photograph in his book captioned, "The Zapata brothers and the author on a secret mission to Veracruz, during American intervention, 1914," showing Emiliano, Eufemio, and Dunn standing together in the jungle. Comparison of this photo, however, with one credited to the Archivo Casasola appearing in the 1969 *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* captioned "Eufemio and Emiliano Zapata, 1911," suggests that Dunn's photo is the product of some clever work with scissors, not a camera. Dunn admitted in the book that several others of his illustrating photographs were actually composites. It seems much more likely that Dunn added himself to the photograph, producing the single

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<sup>115</sup> Womack, *Revolution*, 422.

piece of hard evidence in support of his story, than the idea that the highly reputable Archivo Casasola cut him out. Dunn seems to have been influenced by the April 1916 "William O'Hara" story in the *New York Times Magazine* of a journalist's adventures riding with the Zapatistas and interviewing Zapata. Dunn is also the only other writer to use O'Hara's term "Death Legion" to describe Zapata's personal troops.

In *The Crimson Jester* Dunn presented Zapata as an illiterate, but cunning, bandit with a wicked sense of humor displayed in frequent, and deadly, "practical jokes." Dunn used the image of a cobra to describe Zapata, calling him "fearless, implacable, deadly, the only American reptile that carries the fight to man whenever and wherever it finds him."<sup>116</sup> Dunn called the Plan de Ayala a "savage Bill of Rights" and maintained that it was concocted only as window dressing for Zapata's bandit activities and to support his final goal:

. . . the return of *all* the land to *all* the Indians. In a word, the ultimate plan of Emiliano Zapata was the restoration of the wild, laborless, carefree life they had lived for centuries to the *Indios puros* . . . He and his brown-skinned followers were seeking to reestablish the earthly Happy Hunting Grounds . . . <sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Harry H. Dunn, *The Crimson Jester: Zapata of Mexico* (New York: The National Travel Club, 1934), 32.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Dunn's biography of Zapata was also heavily laden down with his virulent racism. As the Zapatistas attacked the Morelos town of Yautepec, their supposed war cry was "Death to the Whites!"<sup>118</sup> Dunn's description of Francisco Villa also illustrates this point:

He was simply a fat, child-minded, mixed border bully. Unarmed, he would have been undressed and afraid. The negro blood<sup>119</sup> in him whimpered of servility to a white man . . .

While the reaction to *The Crimson Jester* was hardly resounding condemnation, reviewers would no longer swallow whole the story of Zapata as the "Attila of the South." In the *New Republic* Carleton Beals wrote, "Zapata was no angel. But . . . the legitimate General Pablo Gonzalez probably laid the state of Morelos more waste than all Zapata's campaigning."<sup>120</sup> *The Saturday Review of Literature* said:

Much of his narrative, detached from the purple verbiage in which all of it is couched, is doubtless fact. But no reader can be asked to accept seriously, either as history or biography, a story so persistently and luridly melodramatic.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>120</sup> Carleton Beals, review of *The Crimson Jester: Zapata of Mexico*, by Harry H. Dunn, *New Republic*, 18 October 1933, 286.

<sup>121</sup> Review of *The Crimson Jester: Zapata of Mexico*, by Harry H. Dunn, *Saturday Review of Literature*, 16 September 1933, 118.

Even the *New York Times*, which had put out O'Hara's story as absolute truth, now called Zapata "a killer, but he killed to right wrongs that were often confoundingly valid."<sup>122</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, the new attitude was firmly in place. Latin Americans were to be fellow democrats in the coming war against expanding fascism. When President Cardenas nationalized the Mexican oil industries in 1938, as a result primarily of the recalcitrance of the U.S. companies on labor matters, President Roosevelt refused to consider the oilmen's demands for reprisals. In the 1940s Zapata became part of a new pantheon of Mexican "heroes," including Benito Juarez and Lazaro Cardenas, created by journalists, authors, and government officials to introduce U.S. citizens to our new neighbors and prove to the neighbors that we were not so bad to live next door to. Of course, many of these new, more flattering portrayals failed to accurately represent Zapata and his movement, just as the old "Attila of the South" materials did. Old dollar diplomatists had made Zapata into a marauding bandit. The new Zapata stories, just like the old ones, were created to support the current thinking about the role the U.S. should play in Latin America.

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<sup>122</sup> C.G. Poore, review of *The Crimson Jester: Zapata of Mexico*, by Harry H. Dunn, *New York Times Book Review*, 3 September 1933, 5.

After Harry Dunn's pathetic joke of a book came out in 1934, Zapata was not again the subject of a biography until Edgcumb Pinchon's 1941 work, *Zapata the Unconquerable*. Pinchon, the author of an earlier work rehabilitating Francisco Villa, was partially motivated by a desire to debunk Dunn's *Crimson Jester*. Pinchon wrote that he had personally talked to five Zapatistas including Magana and Diaz Soto y Gama and that they all denied Dunn ever having had contact with the Zapatista camp. Although the book claimed to be only a historical novel, it was the product of Pinchon's reading the works on Zapata by Octavio Paz and Gildardo Magana, the "brotherly aid" of Antonio Diaz Soto y Gama, the reminiscences of Zapata's *secretario particular*, Colonel Serafin Robles, and a year of "field research" in Morelos.<sup>123</sup> The book certainly used some novelistic techniques such as dramatic language, descriptions of persons' inner feelings and some fictional characters and scenes. Pinchon also subscribed to a distasteful anti-semitism, which was not unusual for an Englishman of his day, but did weaken his credibility. He consistently referred to Madero as "the little Jewish upstart." Despite this, Pinchon had a clear understanding of the Plan de Ayala and Zapata's role in the big picture of the Revolution which helped Pinchon accomplish the task he set for himself,

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<sup>123</sup> Edgcumb Pinchon, *Zapata The Unconquerable* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1941), v.



". . . to rescue from the back of a mule where once it hung, bodiless and bloody the head of one of the greatest human beings of modern times."<sup>124</sup>

Pinchon was obviously influenced by his times. *Zapata The Unconquerable*, is spiced with references to "blitzkrieg" and the "fascist phalange." He had very definite ideas as to the use of his story of Zapata. In 1938, as he was starting the novel, Pinchon approached Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios in Hollywood with an offer of screen rights to his forthcoming book. From the beginning of their association, Pinchon saw a Zapata movie as a propaganda vehicle. He wrote:

The World is teetering between the enticements of dictatorship and democracy. Show in the film a dictatorship at work. . . . Show what happened--the final, mad desperate, heroic revolt. Then show the denouement--peace and home and happiness, freedom to be a man, go one's own way and speak one's mind. . . . Show that--and you have . . . a world document of immense preachment at this moment.<sup>125</sup>

MGM bought the rights and Pinchon wrote his book, but movie plans were derailed by the outbreak of World War II.

U.S. journalist Betty Kirk did her share, too, to enlist Zapata in the war on fascism. Kirk covered Mexico for most of the Cardenas administration and the elections

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>125</sup> Paul J. Vanderwood, "An American Cold Warrior: Viva Zapata!," in *American History/American Film*, ed. John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979), 185.

that put Avila Camacho in the presidency in 1940. In 1942, she wrote a book analyzing the current state of Mexico titled, *Covering the Mexican Front: The Battle of Europe versus America*. Fascism, she wrote, was making dangerous inroads in Mexico. This European ideology was fighting to take root in the soil of the Americas. Kirk was extremely impressed with President Lazaro Cardenas. She applauded his efforts at land reform and his battle against "fascist" uprisings such as Saturnino Cedillo's. Her respect for Cardenas' land reform led her to investigate Zapata and she found much to praise. Turning what had previously been held against Zapata into a virtue, she called him a visionary saying, "Zapata knew that the old world had to be destroyed before the new world could be built."<sup>126</sup> She defended both Cardenas and Zapata against charges of communism by noting that Zapata started his revolution well before the 1917 Russian Revolution and that division of the land in Mexico was a return to a "native" system of landholding centuries older than communism. Zapata was actually a savior, not despoiler, of Mexico:

It has been a revelation to see Mexico's rebirth from the soil, made possible by land division and collectivization on the principle of "The land belongs to him who works it" <a saying Kirk attributes to

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<sup>126</sup> Betty Kirk, *Covering The Mexican Front: The Battle of Europe versus America* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), 106.

Zapata>. There have been two heroes of this renaissance. The first was Emiliano Zapata.<sup>127</sup>

It was the work of Zapata that made possible Cardenas' presidency. Kirk wrote, "Before the realist can act the dreamer must give him a vision for his deeds."<sup>128</sup>

Both Pinchon and Kirk explicitly created a Latin American hero who fought for the same goals as the U.S. Both praised Zapata in an effort to create common ground between the U.S. and Latin Americans. The man who resorted to violence to protect his rights from exploitation certainly could no longer be considered just a marauding bandit when thousands of U.S. men were in arms around the world in defense of democracy. Especially when those men needed the support of the rich resources of Latin America.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 80.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SHARPEST WEAPONS OF ALL

After the war, the enemy became communism instead of fascism, but the concept of the U.S. role as protector in Latin America remained the same. Actually this role expanded to include much of the developing world. We must protect ourselves from the "red scourge," and convince others to put themselves under our protection, too. More than ever, the U.S. needed to create "heroes" from Latin America to tie us together in the fight against tyranny. The history of the 1952 movie *Viva Zapata!* clearly illustrates the most elaborate U.S. attempt to coopt Zapata.

In June of 1945, while in Cuernavaca working on the script for *The Pearl*, John Steinbeck wrote to his literary agents that he was interested in writing a movie about Emiliano Zapata:

I would only make it straight. I would require gov't (sic) assurance that it could be made straight historically. This will have to be an iron bound agreement because Zapata could be one of the great films of all time as by a twist or a concession it

could be a complete double cross of the things Zapata lived and died for.<sup>129</sup>

The movie, *Viva Zapata!*, was eventually made and released in 1952, but unfortunately reflected the past history of the project in Hollywood as a potential propaganda vehicle, precious little of Steinbeck's original intentions for a "straight" movie about the Mexican revolutionary and his movement, and the Cold War tensions of the early 1950s. In its final form the movie was an attempt, in the words of one reviewer, "to represent Zapata's simple cause, *Tierra y Libertad*, in terms of present-day *cliches* about democracy and dictatorship."<sup>130</sup> It was a gross mismatch between vehicle and theme.

Hollywood's interest in a Zapata movie had always been motivated by a desire to use his story as a frame on which to nail a none-too-subtle political message. Pinchon's efforts were only the first. During the war the U.S. government's Office for Co-ordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics, responsible for squelching Axis propaganda in Latin America and spreading U.S. propaganda, asked Addison Durland of the Motion Picture Producers Association to investigate the

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<sup>129</sup> John Steinbeck, *Steinbeck: A Life In Letters*, ed. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 282.

<sup>130</sup> Catherine de la Roche, review of *Viva Zapata!*, by John Steinbeck, *Sight and Sound*, April-June 1952, 4.

possibility of using the story of Zapata as a vehicle for the Office's message. Durland, however, concluded that the conflicting images of Zapata in the minds of Latin Americans and the difficulties of maintaining historical accuracy would make it impossible to produce a useful movie.<sup>131</sup>

Unlike the Hollywood establishment, Steinbeck's original motivations to do a Zapata movie were intensely personal. Steinbeck began the project in an acute state of mental distress. His closest friend, scientist Edward Ricketts, died in a car accident in May 1948. As Steinbeck wrote to another friend, Swedish artist Bo Beskow, he was starting on the Zapata script because, "Resting I could not do. I need violent work, and violent play, and I am going to have both."<sup>132</sup> In addition to this, his second marriage, to Gwendolyn Conger, was disintegrating and in August 1948 she filed for divorce. After a November visit with Steinbeck, Annie Laurie Williams, an old friend and his literary agent, wrote:

He is deeply disturbed and frightened about his work. If it doesn't go well in Mexico <where Steinbeck was going to work on the script> I honestly don't know what will happen.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Vanderwood, *American Cold Warrior*, 186.

<sup>132</sup> Steinbeck, *Letters*, 318.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

It did not "go well" in Mexico and the Zapata script "went to pieces"<sup>134</sup>, but by the spring of 1949 life was again looking up for Steinbeck. He looked forward to the summer visit of his two sons, who he missed intensely, and had begun an affair with Elaine Scott (wife of actress Zachary Scott) who would soon become his third wife. At the end of the summer he began again and by November had produced a complete first draft.

Except for the fact that both this script and the 1952 movie were about Emiliano Zapata, they had almost nothing in common. The main theme of the 1949 script was "Can social change be accomplished through violence and what responsibility does the leader of a violent revolution bear to his followers and to his society?" The story of the Zapatista movement is relevant to an examination of this question. Zapata led a social revolution, and the resulting violence had devastating effects on the people of Morelos.

Throughout this first script, Zapata wrestles with these issues. When the villagers, led by Zapata, attempt to locate their boundary stone, which has been fenced in by the neighboring hacienda, the *Rurales* open fire on them with machine guns and many villagers are killed. Zapata must flee to the mountains as an outlaw where he is found by Pablo, an emissary from Francisco Madero. Pablo wants

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 345.

Zapata to join the revolution, but Zapata refuses, saying, "I tried these things. Because of my planning many people who might still have been living are dead -- and I was the cause of their deaths."<sup>135</sup> He attempts to reject violent methods and accepts the pardon and job offered by Don Nacio, a liberal-minded hacendado. Don Nacio tells him:

Emiliano, I understand you. I know that your intention was good, but what you did was bad. Changes must come, but they must be slow. Violence will bring only pain to your people and death to yourself.<sup>136</sup>

However, after seeing a poor little girl beaten for eating some of a horse's food and a peon dragged to death behind the horse of a *Rurale*, Zapata realizes he must fight fire with fire to achieve his goals of *Tierra y Libertad*.

Although he has accepted the need for violence, Zapata still questions the extent of his responsibility to his society. As they ride through the ruins of Don Nacio's hacienda and their home village Zapata and his brother Eufemio discuss it. Eufemio wants to leave Morelos with Emiliano, "Then we could have some peace, and there might be peace here,"<sup>137</sup> but when Emiliano tells him to go on alone Eufemio refuses to leave him. In spite of the devastation,

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<sup>135</sup> John Steinbeck, "Zapata," Draft of script, 26 November 1949, Papers of John Steinbeck, The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, 41.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 137.



his brother is more important than any sort of "peace."  
Zapata finds his wife Josefa hiding in the burned out shell  
of her father's home. He asks her if she wants him to stop  
fighting. She asks, "Would there be peace Emiliano?" and he  
replies:

I don't know. Maybe. But it would be peace with our  
people beaten and hopeless, with no heart to fight  
against anything anymore.<sup>138</sup>

Making "peace" with the federal government at this point  
would be to forfeit any chance of achieving social change.

In the end, just before Zapata goes to meet his death  
at Chinameca, he visits Don Nacio, who is now held in  
Zapata's protective custody. Don Nacio tells Zapata he  
realizes that Zapata was right, that violence is the only  
way to achieve justice for the people. Throughout  
Anencuilco people are rebuilding their homes and replanting  
their fields. Zapata tells one man to make sure he has  
built a safe place to hide a gun in his house because, "The  
land laws aren't passed yet. The wolves aren't dead.  
You'll only have it <the land> as long as you're willing to  
fight for it."<sup>139</sup>

The 1949 script concluded that social change could be  
achieved through violent revolution. Although this demanded  
a stiff price in terms of human suffering, Zapata, as the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 157.

leader of such a revolution could still be considered a "good man," as long as he remained uncorrupted, because he taught the people to be strong and demand their rights. Don Nacio says:

. . . Just as a man may rise from a chair because a single nerve twitches on his body, so perhaps is progress in the world stimulated by aching Emilianos. I know this now. And so I think you are a good man. . . The new armies <Carranza's> will not find the same kind of people they used to.<sup>140</sup>

What had begun as an intensely personal project, born of Steinbeck's admiration for Zapata and the chaos of the writer's private life, soon collided with the atmosphere of hysteria and suspicion that characterized the post-war U.S. In 1947, MGM producer Jack Cummings and screenwriter Lester Cole revived the idea of a Zapata film, created a script, and secured the approval of the Mexican government. Had this movie been made, it may or may not have coopted Zapata as a symbol for any particular agenda. Cole, however, was subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee and became one of the blacklisted "Hollywood Ten." MGM, whose general manager Eddie Mannix had once said, upon seeing Cole's work, "Get rid of this f----- script, this bastard Zapata's a goddam commie revolutionary,"<sup>141</sup> sold the rights

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>141</sup> Peter Biskind, "Ripping Off Zapata--Revolution Hollywood Style," review of *Viva Zapata!*, by John Steinbeck, *Cineaste*, April 1976, 14.

to the Zapata story to Twentieth Century Fox for \$60,000.<sup>142</sup> It was Fox that hired John Steinbeck to write the screenplay and Elia Kazan to direct.

Through 1950 Steinbeck polished and tightened the script until he had what he called "a little double action jewel of a script . . . a classic example of good film writing."<sup>143</sup> Fox producer Darryl Zanuck was not as sure. With a weather eye on the HUAC he decided to sanitize Zapata's message:

Certainly it isn't communism, and we want to make this very clear because, frankly, in the present script there is inadvertently a peculiar air about certain speeches which might be interpreted by the Communists to claim that we are subtly working for them. . . . It seems to me that Zapata has a pretty good pattern for a democratic government in his neighbor, the United States -- only one civil war in 170 years. I am sure that Zapata must have asked the question many times: 'How do they do it in the United States?'<sup>144</sup>

The switch to the theme of democracy vs. communism may have been politically safe and sound at the time (and is certainly a legitimate issue to be explored in films), but it wreaked havoc on Steinbeck's script. By the time it had been reworked to the point that the action and dialogue effectively reflected the desired thesis, the script no longer came even close to reflecting the life and times of

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<sup>142</sup> Vanderwood, *American Cold Warrior*, 188.

<sup>143</sup> Steinbeck, *Letters*, 407.

<sup>144</sup> Vanderwood, *American Cold Warrior*, 191.

Emiliano Zapata in the "straight" manner Steinbeck had originally insisted on.

Any of Zapata's actions that could be construed as "communist" had to be purged from the movie. In the 1949 version Zapata and Villa discussed the possibility of one of them becoming President of Mexico. Villa rejected the post because he wanted to retire to his ranch in Chihuahua and Zapata felt that he himself did not have the experience or education to be president and that his place was in Morelos working for land reform. They then both pulled their armies out of Mexico City and returned home to work on their separate local goals. By 1952, this scene had gone from Zapata's realistic appraisal of his somewhat tenuous position in Mexico City to a grand, idealistic renunciation of evilly corrupting power as Zapata finds himself circling the name on a list of petitioners of a young man who has come to protest Eufemio's takeover of a hacienda that had been distributed among a group of peones. Zapata realizes that the gesture is identical to Diaz circling Zapata's name on a list of protesting villagers at the beginning of the movie. He immediately rejects his position and prepares to return to Morelos. When told, "Thousands of men have died to give you power and you're throwing it away," Zapata replies, "I'm taking it back where it belongs; to thousands

of men."<sup>145</sup> As Kazan said, "No Communist, no totalitarian, ever refused power. By showing that Zapata did this, we spoiled a poster figure that the Communists have been at some pains to create."<sup>146</sup> Of course, as Carleton Beals rightly pointed out at the time and John Womack later confirmed in great detail, Zapata never had power to renounce.

In his 1949 draft Steinbeck never hesitated to show the devastation of the people and the country that was a result of the violent social revolution. He also emphasized, however, the rebirth of Morelos and its people as they won each victory. When Zapata returns from Mexico City he leads the *Morelenses* in rebuilding their homes, replanting their fields, and recovering their boundary stone. Steinbeck left the last scene unwritten in this draft, except for a note:

The required scene will show very quickly countryside being brought to fruitfulness. It will indicate that Zapata did not live and die in vain. I will discuss this scene with the director <Kazan> before writing it.<sup>147</sup>

In the 1952 version Zapata is stripped of his role as a builder, so that the movie would not seem to be advocating the "communist" tactic of civil war as a means to social

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<sup>145</sup> John Steinbeck, *Viva Zapata!: The Original Screenplay by John Steinbeck*, ed. Robert E. Morsberger (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 102.

<sup>146</sup> Elia Kazan, "Elia Kazan On 'Zapata,'" *Saturday Review of Literature*, 5 April 1952, 22.

<sup>147</sup> Steinbeck, "Zapata," 175.

justice. Just before Zapata executes Pablo, his long-time compatriot, for the "treasonous" act of attempting a reconciliation with Madero, a scene not in the 1949 script, Pablo praises Madero:

He was a good man, Emiliano. He wanted to build houses and plant fields. And he was right. If we could begin to build -- even while the burning goes on. If we could plant while we destroy . . .<sup>148</sup>

In fact, Madero was quickly coopted, once he became president, by his fellow hacendados and Porfirians who felt the *Morelenses* needed discipline, not land reform. It was Madero who sent in General Juvencio Robles to pacify Morelos. Robles took as hostages four women from Zapata's family, rounded up much of the population into "concentration camps" and burned the emptied villages to keep them from becoming Zapatista strongholds.<sup>149</sup>

The cold, power-hungry, intellectual revolutionary Fernando Aguirre was added to the script as a representative of what Kazan called the "Communist mentality":

He typifies the men who use the just grievances of the people for their own ends, who shift and twist their course, betray any friend or principle or promise to get power and keep it.<sup>150</sup>

It is Fernando who goads Zapata into executing Pablo, it is Fernando who begs Zapata not to throw away his "power" in

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<sup>148</sup> Steinbeck, *Viva Zapata!*, 86.

<sup>149</sup> Womack, *Revolution*, 138-39.

<sup>150</sup> Kazan, "Elia Kazan on 'Zapata,'" 22-23.

Mexico City, and it is Fernando who ultimately defects to the Carrancistas and organizes Zapata's assassination. The 1949 script did not make any reference to Zapata's possible illiteracy, but by 1952 Steinbeck had added a scene where Zapata begs his new wife to teach him to read. At several points in the 1952 script Fernando has to correct or advise Zapata on points of strategy that in the earlier draft Zapata had figured out for himself. Steinbeck had long distrusted intellectual politicians of this type. In a 1935 letter to his literary agent concerning criticism of *In Dubious Battle* he wrote:

. . . the reasons given against the book are all those I have heard from communists of the intellectual bent and of the Jewish race. . . . My information for this book came mostly from Irish and Italian communists whose training was in the field, not in the drawing room. They don't believe in ideologies and ideal tactics.<sup>151</sup>

A "communist" character such as Fernando is ridiculously out of place in the Zapata story. At that time there was no communist party to speak of in Mexico, and certainly not in the mountains of Morelos. The "intellectuals" of the Zapatista movement were Antonio Diaz Soto y Gama, a liberal lawyer who had fled the Huerta government, Gildardo Magana, an sometime anarcho-syndicalist, and Otilio Montano, a schoolteacher from Villa de Ayala. Most recent scholarship suggests that the Plan de Ayala, the manifesto of Zapatismo,

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<sup>151</sup> Steinbeck, *Letters*, 109.

was written by Zapata and Montano. As Carleton Beals noted, "I have known nearly all the Mexican intellectuals, honest or dishonest, who attached themselves to this or that armed leader, and Fernando corresponds to none of them."<sup>152</sup>

The new democracy vs. communism thesis shifted the film's interpretation of Zapata almost a full 180 degrees. Instead of the responsible, intelligent leader of a largely successful revolution, he became a reluctant, manipulated leader of a violent outburst that must fail in its goal of social justice. Zapata goes from strong revolutionary leader to confused democrat.

The question must be asked, "How could Steinbeck have allowed such tampering with his 'jewel'?" Zanuck and Kazan's motivations for imposing the democracy vs. communism thesis on *Viva Zapata!* are fairly clear. Kazan had been active in left-wing theater during the 1930s and was a member of the U.S. communist party from 1934 to 1936, when he became disillusioned with Stalin. He knew he might be called to testify before the HUAC, where his work would surely be examined. Zanuck also had no desire to join with the "Hollywood Ten" and was mainly concerned with "questions concerning content, financial potential, possible public criticism, and McCarthyite pressures."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Carleton Beals, "'Zapata' Again," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 24 May 1952, 25.

<sup>153</sup> Vanderwood, *American Cold Warrior*, 188.



Steinbeck had not always been a rabid anti-communist.

Back in 1935 he wrote:

That is the trouble with the damned people of both sides. They postulate either an ideal communist or a thoroughly damnable communist and neither side is willing to suspect that the communist is a human, subject to the weaknesses of humans and to the greatness of humans.<sup>154</sup>

He was deeply disturbed, however, by his 1947 visit to the Soviet Union. He and photographer Robert Capa had gone to the U.S.S.R. for the *New York Herald Tribune*. He liked the country farmers and workers he met, but found Moscow depressing, "after a while the lack of laughter gets under your skin . . ." <sup>155</sup> To Steinbeck the worst part was the heavy restrictions being placed on artists, writers, and thinkers. As a writer whose own works, such as *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, had been heavily criticized for their political content, the policies of the Soviet government hit too close to home. He wrote to Bo Beskow:

I have been horrified at the creeping paralysis that is coming out of the Kremlin, the death of art and thought, the death of individuals and the only creative thing in the world is the individual. . . . God knows you and we are far from perfect but we are far better than that.<sup>156</sup>

Steinbeck did not just sit back passively and let Kazan and Zanuck alter the script. He had been converted to their

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<sup>154</sup> Steinbeck, *Letters*, 108.

<sup>155</sup> Steinbeck, *Viva Zapata!*, xxxi.

<sup>156</sup> Steinbeck, *Letters*, 403.

point of view. At a conference with Mexican film officials in Cuernavaca, according to Kazan, in the face of the officials' strenuous objections to the revised script, "John said, 'I smell the Party line.'"<sup>157</sup> Later, when Kazan chose to "name names" for the HUAC, Steinbeck was very supportive. In a letter Steinbeck mentioned that Kazan had sent him a copy of the statement he had made to the Committee, "which I thought good. It must be a very hard decision to make. . . . I hope the Communists and the second raters don't cut him to pieces now."<sup>158</sup>

Steinbeck's change of heart was short-lived. Although he praised Kazan's decision to name names for the committee in 1952, in a April 1957 letter to *Esquire* magazine he strongly attacked the committee for its grilling of Arthur Miller. As he told Covici, "It should have been said a long time ago."<sup>159</sup> A month later Steinbeck wrote Covici saying that U.S. writers had been like rabbits and that it was time to stand up as Edward R. Murrow had done. "You see, we <writers> have had all along the sharpest weapons of all, words, and we did not use them, and I for one am ashamed."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Kazan, "Elia Kazan on 'Zapata,'" 22-23.

<sup>158</sup> Steinbeck, *Letters*, 443.

<sup>159</sup> John Steinbeck, Note attached to "A Clear and Present Danger," LS by Steinbeck, April 1957, Papers of John Steinbeck, The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>160</sup> Steinbeck, *Letters*, 555.

John Steinbeck originally saw Zapata as a great man, a strong, responsible leader, and chief of a violent, but progressive revolution. The influence of Darryl Zanuck and Elia Kazan, Steinbeck's response to the fate of his fellow artists in the Soviet Union, and the tense political atmosphere at home encouraged Steinbeck to mold Zapata into a usable symbol in the war on communism. As much of the critical response to the movie pointed out, the message and the man were extremely ill-fitted for each other.

## CHAPTER V

### A GREAT GUERRILLA WARRIOR

By the end of *Viva Zapata!*'s run, it was clear that Zapata would no longer serve as a symbol useful to Cold Warriors anxious to sign up Latin Americans for the good fight. In fact, the U.S. government feared that, despite our "neighborliness" parts of Latin America had already slipped into the enemy camp. Stronger measures were in order, measures like the 1954 overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala and the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. These actions stirred up opposition at home and abroad, and the proper role of the U.S. in Latin America, and the rest of the developing world, was argued with more passion than ever before.

Was violence a legitimate way to gain social justice? This was the question many thinking men and women asked themselves as the globe exploded in violent protest, revolutionary uprisings, and guerrilla warfare. If not, then did not the U.S., as a powerful nation, have an obligation to "police" the world? Were not the leaders of violent social revolutions men to be condemned? This was the position taken by the U.S. government. What if,

however, the violent revolutionary was a man or woman trying simply to gain social justice for their people in the only way possible?" Then what was the proper U.S. role? Was it not a violation of our own standards of freedom and democracy to support Batista and Somoza and the others? Many who objected to U.S. adventures in Guatemala, Cuba, and elsewhere, tried to establish a historical precedent, to legitimate, and to analyze past successes of the guerrilla response. This led to studies of earlier social revolutionaries, including Emiliano Zapata.

Eric Hobsbawm set the stage with his analysis of rural protest in the form of social banditry. In *Bandits* (1969) he discussed this traditional form of protest and showed how it could evolve, as it did in the case of the Zapatistas, into a social revolution. Then came John Womack's masterful study, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (1969). Womack was the first professional U.S. historian to devote his full attention to Zapata (Frank Tannenbaum at Columbia had only limited, scattered references in his works). Womack made full use of the newly available Archivo de Zapata and thoroughly searched the Mexican, as well as U.S., newspapers, government documents, and other primary materials. The Zapata that Womack discovered was no bandit, but he was no U.S.-style democrat either. First and foremost he was a man of his people, of Anencuilco, and of Morelos. He took to arms to demand a solution to the

problems of his people, within the context of the local life. Zapatismo largely became entangled with the "national" revolution due to the proximity of Morelos to Mexico City and the Zapatista realization that active involvement would be the only way to guarantee the local revolution. When the choice had to be made, however, between the regional and national goals, Zapata withdrew to Morelos to assure the local revolution. Womack's Zapata was an honorable, intelligent man and a talented guerrilla leader, whose revolution ultimately met with a good measure of success. Womack's book touched off an explosion of interest in Zapata. Those who argued for support of violent social revolutions found in Zapata material to create a new hero.

The year 1969 saw the publication of Robert Millon's *Zapata: The Ideology of a Peasant Revolutionary*. This book came out as part of the New World Paperbacks series, which included, among other titles, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Dubois*, *Ten Days That Shook The World*, Henry Winston's *Strategy for a Black Agenda*, and the works of Marx and Lenin. Millon tried to recreate Zapata as a communist revolutionary on the order of Lenin or Mao. He thoroughly refuted the idea that the Zapatistas fought only for their locality because they had a "circumscribed peasant outlook," and suggested that only a lack of arms prevented a farther-

reaching field of battle.<sup>161</sup> If Zapata had been a localist, Millon reasoned, then Zapata would have traded his retirement for reform in Morelos either with Huerta in 1913 or Carranza in 1914. He did not deny that the Zapatistas stood first for agrarian reform, but insisted that they saw it as only the first step in a broader social, political, and economic revolution. Millon went to great lengths to prove that Zapata only failed to build a national base of support among groups other than peasants because city workers and the bourgeoisie had vested interests in keeping prices of food and raw materials low, which could only be accomplished while the countryside was weak and divided.<sup>162</sup>

Unfortunately for Millon, Zapata made no better communist revolutionary than he had democrat. While Millon's arguments in favor of the intelligence of Zapata and his followers are convincing, he never covered the possibility that the Zapatistas were both smart and localists. For Millon, the only intelligent choice was a national revolution. As for trading his retirement for reform in Morelos either with Huerta in 1913 or Carranza in 1914, once Zapata was betrayed by Madero he knew he could not trust the federal government to protect, or even allow,

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<sup>161</sup> Robert P. Millon, *Zapata: The Ideology of a Peasant Revolutionary* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1969), 88.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

local reform, especially not so close to Mexico City. Millon got much of his support for his belief in Zapata as a nationalist from documents of the Convention government in Cuernavaca. Naturally, these documents would take a broader, national view, since the Convention saw itself as the legitimate national government. It was not strictly the mouthpiece of Zapatismo, although Zapatistas were active in it. Zapata's main use for the Convention was as a tool to support agrarian reform in Morelos. Zapata, if he truly was a nationalist, surely would have taken the presidency of the Convention. As for the urban "conspiracy" which kept Zapata from building national support, what Millon overlooked, of course, was the possibility that Zapata's program really was local in scope and appeal, and therefore unattractive to outsiders.

Millon's efforts, which the reviewers generally considered "small and lightweight"<sup>163</sup> compared to Womack, were certainly not the last attempt to recreate Zapata as the patriarch of this century's revolutionary leaders. Forty-seven years after *Mexico, An Interpretation*, Carleton Beals took a second look at Emiliano Zapata with his 1970 book *Great Guerrilla Warriors*. It was a much altered world in which Beals now wrote. The war to end all wars had

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<sup>163</sup> Charles C. Cumberland, review of *Zapata: The Ideology of a Peasant Revolutionary*, by Robert P. Millon, In *American Historical Review* 75 (February 1970): 964.



turned out to be only the first of many. China was "lost," Korea divided, Africa exploding, Vietnam struggling, and Latin America in the throes of revolution. The United States now played in much of the world the kind of role it had long held in Latin America, a role that Beals had long criticized. The United States' foreign policy was guided by the belief, as Frank Tannenbaum pointed out, that leaders who declared themselves anti-communist, by default represented democracy. Beals wrote *Great Guerrilla Warriors* in an attempt to describe the history of the guerrilla response and show that the issue of social revolutions was much more complicated than a simpleminded case of "democracy vs. communism."

Beals' position on Zapata in this book did not change so much as it expanded. He now identified Zapata as a guerrilla fighter. Not only did he feel Zapata was an important leader with legitimate goals within the Mexican Revolution, but Zapata was also identified as a leading figure in the history of twentieth century guerrilla movements worldwide. These movements have not been random outbursts of violence to satisfy the personal ambition of a few men. Beals suggested that this century's surge of guerrilla activity was due to a combination of "imperialism in its various aspects" and a revolution of rising expectations brought on by modern communications which

highlighted the gross inequality of the majority of the developing world's standard of living.<sup>164</sup>

Beals tried to legitimate the guerrilla response by establishing its "history" with a pantheon of heroes, important victories, tragic defeats, and a continuity which proved that these movements were not just random outbursts of violence. Zapata, with other early leaders such as Emilio Aquinaldo and Augusto Sandino, therefore set the pattern for later guerrillas. Beals wrote:

The United States, with its maintenance of neo-colonialism status quo and its policy of armed intervention anywhere, has come to be considered a chief offender <by guerrilla fighters of the 1960s>. The early Mexican agrarian guerrilla leader Emiliano Zapata saw his enemy not merely as the Carranza government but also as the United States embassy."<sup>165</sup>

Quoting Zapata's speech on the day of Francisco Madero's inauguration in which Zapata stated, "This same society that today curses us for the 'crimes' which we commit to obtain the resources to carry on our fight, will bless us," Beals suggested that it "was the forerunner of Castro's 'History Will Absolve Me' speech."<sup>166</sup> To Beals, Zapata's work definitely had an influence far beyond the mountains of Morelos.

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<sup>164</sup> Carleton Beals, *Great Guerrilla Warriors* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 4.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 61.

The passage of almost fifty years between the two books also allowed Beals to take a longer view of Zapata's accomplishments. In 1923, Beals credited Zapata with forcing the inclusion of Article 27 into the 1917 Constitution, though he had to admit that the article remained unenforced. By 1970 he could see that the guerrilla's victory was much more far-reaching and substantial. He observed, "In good part, the long struggles of Zapata and Villa ushered in a new and more just era of peace. In due time, the hoped-for great land reform was carried out by President Lazaro Cardenas."<sup>167</sup> For Beals, the history of Zapata made it clear that the U.S. must choose to support the social revolutions, rather than the "anti-communist" entrenched heads of state, because the revolutions represented the groups that really stood for the "new and more just era of peace."

Interest in Zapata as a symbol for the revolutionary banner peaked in the mid-1970s. In 1975, Roger Parkinson, a former war correspondent and a military historian, wrote *Zapata*. Among the several aspects of Zapata's leadership, Parkinson quickly moved to point out Zapata's "brilliance" in guerrilla warfare. He emphasized Zapata's use of his knowledge of the terrain, his caution in picking and choosing his engagements, and the organization and

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 73.

discipline of his army. High praise went to his ability to outmaneuver General Victoriano Huerta in the Morelos campaign of Fall 1911:

His army showed itself to be disciplined, and Zapata accomplished one of the most difficult military tasks for a leader of insurgent forces; he could detach sections of his army to undertake different duties, widely separated from each other, yet could retain cohesion for the conduct of his campaign as a whole. Operations in October 1911 form a classic example of the flexibility, rapidity, and decisiveness of first-class revolutionary tactics and strategy.<sup>168</sup>

Parkinson also stressed that a good portion of Zapata's military success relied on another element of his leadership: his close identification with his own *campesino* origins and followers. The fact that Zapata continued throughout his career to dress "as a typical village chief wearing his best clothes for the local fair"<sup>169</sup> suggested that Zapata truly thought of himself as one of "the people," instead of a military ruler who should wear a general's gold braid and epaulets. Zapata knew that the *campesinos* were the strength of his army, both as fighters and as a combat-support network (commissary, transportation, intelligence), and he was careful not to alienate them, issuing orders for his soldiers to protect villagers and support them in their land claims. On no account were Zapatistas to loot, pillage, or terrorize the pueblos.

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<sup>168</sup> Roger Parkinson, *Zapata* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975), 112.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Unfortunately, Parkinson then followed Millon into the "nationalist vs. regionalist" swamp. In order to draw completely the parallel between Zapata and the revolutionaries of the 1970s, Zapata had to be shown as a nationalist. Parkinson had no more luck than Millon. Both men were sidetracked by the language of the Plan de Ayala, which denounced Madero "for defaulting on his promises to the Mexican people," and called for the overthrow of the federal government. What neither man took into account was that Zapata's antipathy toward the federal government stemmed from local causes, named in the Plan de Ayala as Madero's appointment of the anti-Zapatista Ambrosio Figueroa as governor of Morelos and the terror tactics of federal Generals Huerta, Robles, and Gonzalez within the state.

In a 1975 article for *Mankind*, a popular history magazine, Steve Ross steered clear of the "nationalist" argument, which could only be supported weakly, and concentrated on the common desperate economic conditions that motivated the Zapatistas and the social revolutionaries of the 1970s. He described the struggle of the Zapatistas as the universal struggle between the "few 'haves' and the many 'have nots.'" He blamed the growing Morelos "sugar producing industry" for the usurpation of village lands which brought on the crisis:

Zapata and the natives of the State of Morelos were fighting for their expropriated ancestral lands. They

were fighting the fight of a native people against interlopers and exploiters . . . <sup>170</sup>

Ross's article included the photograph taken at Cuatla of the dead body of Emiliano Zapata. The caption placed Zapata within the tradition of revolutionary "heroes." The caption read, "Reminiscent of the death photographs of Ernesto Che Guevara a few years ago . . . The dreams of the hungry could now remain what they had always been, mere dreams . . ." <sup>171</sup>

A year later, Britton Bloom wrote an essay, "The Heirs of Zapata," which described social revolutionary movements in 1970s Mexico, with particular emphasis on Lucio Cabanas and the 23rd of September Communist League. Bloom, too, emphasized the fact that miserable economic conditions promoted the rise of leaders like Zapata and Cabanas. The modern Mexican revolutionaries "have served notice" that the government must help "a great part of the population -- the poor, the illiterate, the isolated country farmer . . ." <sup>172</sup>

Bloom unsparingly assessed the chances for success of the new Mexican revolutionaries as slim, and did not "glamorize" their violent methods. He also, however, recognized that a certain amount of myth had grown up around Zapata, myth that he used to strengthen the idea of Zapata

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<sup>170</sup> Steve Ross, "Zapata and the Revolt of the Morelos 'Indians,'" *Mankind*, June 1975, 29.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>172</sup> Britton Bloom, "Heirs of Zapata," *Progressive*, March 1976, 33.

as the forefather of late twentieth century revolutionaries.

He wrote:

The romantic image of a mustachioed Pancho Villa or Zapata suddenly riding into a Mexican village, banderoles <sic> flying, to "arrest" a corrupt official and return stolen money to the peasants is far enough removed in time to be heroic now.<sup>173</sup>

In 1977, photographer Tom Nebbia presented this explicitly "created" Zapata to a wide U.S. audience. He went to Cuatla for the *National Geographic* and photographed a group of Zapatista veterans. He paid each Zapatista ten dollars, had white *campesino* clothing made for them in the marketplace, rented hats and bandoleers from a Mexico City movie studio, borrowed rifles from the Cuatla police station, and then posed the men as in an early 1900s photograph.<sup>174</sup>

From this point on, the myth took over the presentations of Zapata. Disillusionment with the harshness and repression of revolutionary movements such as those in Vietnam and China, created a need for a more "heroic" guerrilla. In 1979, Peter Newell wrote *Zapata of Mexico*. Pulling back from the earlier analyses that stressed Zapata's fight against the ill effects of capitalism, Newell attempted to show Zapatismo's anarchist tendencies, anarchism being a somewhat more "romantic" philosophy.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>174</sup> Tom Nebbia to the author, 22 September 1988.

Unfortunately, while Newell did manage to illustrate some libertarian leanings in the decentralized nature of the Zapatista movement, his book was severely undermined by reliance on Harry Dunn's "eyewitness" accounts, indulgence in fantastic fictions, and substantial amounts of plagiarism. Work on Zapata of this poor quality had not been seen, with the exception of Dunn, since 1920.



## CONCLUSION

The presentation of Emiliano Zapata in the United States has always been heavily colored by the debate over the proper role of the U.S. in Latin America. Until the 1930s the major argument was over U.S. exploitation of Latin American resources. How far should the government go to protect U.S. investments? What was the proper role of the native peoples and governments? Were "Americans" abroad to carry the white man's burden as businessmen or teachers? Interestingly, portraits of Zapata by those on both sides of the issue, with very few exceptions, were negative. To the dollar diplomatists and those nostalgic for the Porfiriato, the "Attila Del Sur" was a good argument for the need to protect vigorously U.S. investments abroad and to "discipline" the inferior peoples of Latin America. To the liberals Zapata made a good comparison, as a reactionary, to show how much the reform administrations of Obregon and Calles accomplished.

In the mid-1930s the U.S. underwent a fundamental reevaluation of its role in Latin America. As German, Italian, and Japanese fascism expanded across Europe, Africa, and Asia, the Roosevelt administration looked at Latin America and saw a long, exposed flank. The government

had to find symbols to promote inter-American unity. Improving relations with Mexico and a new artistic and philosophical appreciation for the "primitive" brought on by Depression-induced doubts about the blessings of progress made the U.S. public ready to welcome a rehabilitation of Zapata as one of those symbols. Journalists, authors, and the U.S. government enlisted Zapata in the war on fascism.

Zapata, however, was no more a democrat than he was a bandit. After the 1952 movie *Viva Zapata!*, the credibility of Zapata as a U.S.-style democratic freedom fighter was stretched beyond repair. The Cold War enemy was communism, rather than fascism, but the government perception of Latin America as a long unguarded flank exposed to a dangerous foreign ideology remained. John Steinbeck wholeheartedly allowed his original conception of a movie exploring the value of violent social revolutions to be drafted into service in the war on communism. The resulting film only proved how poorly suited Zapata was as a banner figure for this point of view. Zapata simply did not fight for democracy in the sense that a 1950s U.S. citizen defined the word.

Over the next decade, vocal opposition rose to the view that the U.S. had a duty to protect the world, especially the developing world, from "communist-inspired" violent social revolutions. U.S. liberals studied the history and leaders of people's revolutions in an attempt to justify

support for them. After over ten years of silence, Zapata was rediscovered in the late 1960s and recreated as the patriarch of twentieth century revolutionaries. This new image, of course, required some editing of the Zapata story, just as earlier reincarnations had. Zapata made a fairly effective revolutionary role model except for the fact that he did not lead a national revolution. The current rebels, men like Mao and Castro, were nationalists. By the end of the 1970s many were disillusioned with violent revolutionary movements. Repression and setbacks in Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the Cultural Revolution in China cooled a lot of enthusiasm. A search for a more romantic Zapata began, but never really caught on with the U.S. public.

What is the future of Emiliano Zapata in the U.S.? As long as the perception of Latin America as susceptible to the "Red Menace" and in need of U.S. guidance and protection remains, Zapata has probably run the course of his usefulness as a symbolic figure in the United States. He has proved ultimately unadaptable to the purposes of both the Right and the Left in their debate over the proper role of the U.S. in Latin America. And given the history of his career, fighting uncompromisingly for his own goals of *Tierra y Libertad*, it should really come as no surprise.

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