

MEXICAN EXODUS

EMIGRANTS, EXILES,
AND REFUGEES OF
THE CRISTERO WAR

JULIA G. YOUNG



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To Spiro, and to our children

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Acknowledgments

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Mexican Exodus

Introduction

A DESERT UPRISING

SIMÓN TENORIO WAS in serious trouble. It was August 13, 1927, and the thirty-six-year-old resident of Del Rio, Texas, had been sweltering for the past week in a jail cell in the hot and dusty *pueblo* of Villa Acuña, just south of the US-Mexico border. When the agents finally came to interview him—first, a group of Mexican government officials; and later, men from the US Department of Justice—he tried weakly to deny his involvement in any crime. He never actually intended to lead a religious revolt against the Mexican government, Tenorio insisted. Hadn't he turned himself in, back on August 7, in Coahuila? No, it was the other men, not him, who had started everything. It was their fault. They were, he said, simply “ignorant and fanatical men that go about praying all day long.”¹

Before long, however, the prisoner began to confess his own role in the failed uprising. It probably wasn't hard for his questioners to get the story out of him: two of Tenorio's companions had already been shot dead in the desert, and he was scared. Over the next few days, he told the agents everything they wanted to know.

The narrative that Tenorio recounted in Villa Acuña revealed not only that he and his co-conspirators had tried to participate in a border revolt, but also that the men had intended to help support the Cristero War, a brutal conflict between Catholic partisans and the Mexican government that was currently raging some eight hundred miles to the southwest in the west-central Mexican heartland, a region that included the states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Michoacán.

The entire episode had started, Tenorio confessed, with his next-door neighbor. Since 1923, when he left the small, mountain-ringed village of

Monclova in the Mexican state of Coahuila, Tenorio had lived with his mother and several siblings in a scrappy *barrio* called Chihuahua, directly south of the railroad station on the outskirts of Del Rio, Texas.² The dwellings there were tiny—little more than shacks—and so it would have been easy for Tenorio to meet Pascual Robles, the firebrand Catholic priest in the next house over.

Father Robles, an exile from Mexico, had probably resettled in Del Rio around 1926. Within a year, he was well known throughout south Texas. He was a vocal opponent of the current Mexican president, Plutarco Elías Calles, and published a newspaper, *La Razon*, whose pages pulsed with invective against the “tyrannical” Calles government. Its uncompromising motto was “Victory or Death.”³ His other activities were more clandestine: he served as a recruiting agent for the US-based branch of the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty (Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa; known simply as the Liga), a Mexican Catholic organization that supported armed rebellion against the Calles regime. In Simón Tenorio, Robles saw a potential soldier for his holy cause. And Tenorio must have felt the same, for when Robles invited him to help plan an armed uprising in northern Mexico, he accepted.

During the midsummer months of 1927, as Tenorio recounted, the two men had driven to San Antonio to meet with a group of powerful political exiles from Mexico, including Luis Bustos, head of the Liga at the time; Juan Lainé, the organization’s purchasing agent; and Bishop José de Jesus Manríquez y Zárate, an exiled Mexican bishop and key ally of Catholic militants.⁴ The group convened in the Robert E. Lee Hotel, a recently built ten-story “skyscraper” in the heart of the city. There, they gave Tenorio his assignment: he was to recruit a gang of men, bring them into Coahuila, and then meet with a larger expedition in the foothills of the Sierra del Burro, at the northern edge of Mexico’s vast eastern mountain range, the Sierra Madre Occidental. Together, they would proceed deeper into Mexican territory. Then, they would join up with several larger bands of armed men from Laredo and El Paso, and launch a Catholic military uprising that would, they hoped, bring down the Calles government and restore the rightful place of the Catholic Church in Mexican society.⁵

The plan was grandiose and utterly impractical, but Tenorio was apparently convinced it would work. After the meeting in San Antonio, he returned with Father Robles to Del Rio and began collecting war materials: rifles, cartridges, pipe bombs, saddles, and bridles. They also recruited a group of seven men: Genaro Valadez, Merced Godinez, José Guerra,

Jesús Elizondo, Agustín L. Guerra, Plácido Sánchez, and Graciano Vélez. By August 6, the preparations were complete.

That evening, the priest escorted Tenorio and Valadez to a remote spot about six miles west of Del Rio. They met the rest of the men on the riverbank of the Rio Grande (called the Río Bravo in Mexico).⁶ Then, notwithstanding all of his fiery rhetoric, Father Robles turned back; unlike numerous priests in the Cristero armies to the south, he didn't join the soldiers as they mounted their horses and crossed the shallow river into Mexico. Instead, the men proceeded without him, eventually making camp in the desert.

In the quiet night, the men perhaps reflected upon their reasons for going to war. We cannot know exactly what they thought, but they carried some evidence of their ideology with them: numerous pieces of religious and political paraphernalia. Tenorio had a manifesto signed by all seven men, as well as Father Robles, stating their intention "to overthrow the Bolshevik tyranny in its most recent incarnation, Callismo" and recognizing the exclusive authority of "the Roman, Catholic Apostolic Religion." He also carried several other religious texts: a long sermon written by the militant bishop Manríquez y Zárata, and a clipping from Father Robles's newspaper, *La Razon*, about the exploits of Catholic soldiers in the northern state of Coahuila. One of these stories—surely meant to be inspirational to readers—ended with two young men in front of a firing squad, crying out "We are soldiers of Christ the King . . . Long live Christ the King! Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe!"⁷

Tenorio was not the only one who had brought along religious items. Genaro Valadez carried with him a suitcase containing scapulars, rosaries, mass books, and portraits of the Virgin of Guadalupe. (Figure 1.1 depicts one of the scapulars).⁸ The suitcase also held three letters. The first was from the men's patron, Father Robles, who underscored the divine motivations for their uprising and declared that "God wishes that all your preparations bear the fruit that He . . . has prepared for you." He also alluded to a broader community of supporters, stating "We pray daily for you all" and asking Valadez "to commend us to God, since you are so close to Him because of your good work."⁹

The other two letters were from acquaintances of Genaro Valadez. The first wrote from San Angelo, Texas, and the second from Detroit, Michigan; both writers offered prayers for the men.¹⁰ But the latter, written by a man named Simón Muñoz, also sounded a strong word of caution. Muñoz urged Valadez to wait until he could acquire more guns and



FIGURE 1.1 Scapular found at the scene of the Tenorio revolt, August 1927

Source: AGN, IPS, Volume 231, Expediente 30.

bullets. Otherwise, he wrote, “you are going to sacrifice your lives without advancing the cause, without hope of triumph, without glory.”¹¹

Only a day after Tenorio’s band set out, this dire warning would prove wholly true. After breaking camp in the early hours of August 7, the men proceeded south toward the Sierra del Burro, as they had been instructed to do. It was at this point that things began to go wrong. First of all, their horses were too slow. The men from the Liga had promised them good war mounts; these horses, the band of insurgents soon realized, were weak, worn-out nags (they may not have known that, in fact, the organization was chronically short of funds). Even worse, Tenorio and his gang couldn’t find the other band of men, who were supposed to be waiting for them near the hamlet of San Vicente. After searching for a while, Tenorio assumed that the Liga had simply failed to send reinforcements.

Feeling thwarted, Tenorio decided to abandon the mission. He deserted the rest of his group and headed alone to the village of San Miguel, right outside of Monclova, his hometown. There, he used the town’s telephone

to turn himself in to the police. In an act of great betrayal—or perhaps simple desperation—he also told them where the other men could be found. On the following day, Mexican federal troops caught up with the gang and opened fire, killing Placido Sánchez and Genaro Valadez. The surviving recruits fled in disarray for the hills, abandoning the rest of their arms, munitions, horses, and saddles at the scene.¹²

After giving his prison confession, which was written up and filed away in investigative bureaus on both sides of the border, Tenorio was taken further south, to the small city of Torreón in Coahuila. What happened to him afterward is unknown. Someone in the United States inquired to the Mexican military about his whereabouts in December 1927, but there is no record that he was found, and the authorities in the United States presumed that he was dead.¹³ In any event, his activities were no longer a concern to Mexican federal agents. Tenorio's religious rebellion had ended, and any potential threat was neutralized. Indeed, shortly after Tenorio's arrest, the garrison chief in charge of the Tenorio case received a letter of commendation congratulating him for closing the case so rapidly, and thus preventing any "alarm or scandal that could besmirch the good name of the Supreme Government."¹⁴

Tenorio and the Cristero War

Despite these plaudits from his superiors, the garrison chief probably knew better than to rest on his laurels. By capturing Tenorio and his men, the Mexican army had stopped only one uprising in a series of small but significant border rebellions that continued throughout the late 1920s. Tenorio, Valadez, and the other would-be insurgents, along with the peripheral characters in the drama—the exiled priest and his prayerful flock in Del Rio, the emigrant friends of Genaro Valdez in Detroit, and the group of men in the Robert E. Lee Hotel—were among thousands of Mexican emigrants, exiles, and refugees who were taking part in Mexico's Cristero War from numerous cities and towns across the United States.

The Cristero War, a widespread effort by Mexican Catholic militants to overthrow the Mexican government that began in 1926 and formally ended in 1929, is known in Mexico as *la Cristiada* or *la Guerra Cristera*. The war had begun when Catholic loyalists—called *cristeros* for their battle cry of ¡Viva Cristo Rey! or "Long live Christ the King!"—took up arms in order to resist a set of anticlerical reforms promulgated by the

government of Plutarco Elías Calles and his handpicked successors. (In fact, the conflict had much deeper roots in several centuries' worth of Church-state tension in Mexico; Chapter 1 will provide an overview of this history.)

With the backing of militant parish priests, some members of the Catholic hierarchy, and Catholic lay organizations such as the Liga, the Mexican Catholic Youth Association (Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana, or ACJM), the Union of Mexican Catholic Ladies (Unión de Damas Católicas Mexicanas), and the Mexican Knights of Columbus (Caballeros de Colón), Cristero soldiers fought guerrilla-style battles against Mexican federal troops and their rural supporters, the *agraristas*. Although there were outbreaks of violence throughout Mexico, the fighting was most intense in the densely populated, agriculturally productive west-central region, which included the states of Jalisco, Guanajuato, Michoacán, and others. As a result, the conflict ravaged the Mexican heartland, destroying villages, disrupting agriculture, and claiming the lives of an estimated hundred thousand people.¹⁵ Although the war would formally end in 1929, when Church and state leaders forged a series of compromises known as the *arreglos*, Cristero militants would continue to launch sporadic uprisings throughout the 1930s. (These are known collectively as the Second Cristiada, or *la Segunda*.)

Historians generally regard the Cristero War as an event that occurred within Mexican territory. Yet in fact, as the planned uprising of Simón Tenorio demonstrates, the war also involved participants from beyond the Mexican border. The reason for this was simple: by the mid-1920s, there were hundreds of thousands of Mexican emigrants living in the United States, many of whom had been directly or indirectly affected by the Cristero conflict.

Mexican migration had first become a significant phenomenon at the turn of the twentieth century, as Mexican laborers, drawn by new transportation networks and comparatively higher wages north of the border, had started to migrate in ever-larger numbers to the US Southwest.¹⁶ With the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, thousands of refugees joined these labor emigrants. By the next decade, the number of emigrants had risen to unprecedented heights. This period (1920–29) saw Mexico's first "Great Migration," larger in scale than any movement that had come before it, and not to be surpassed until the bracero program migrations of 1942–64.

Migration during the 1920s was different not only numerically, but also geographically. For the first time, most of the emigrants came from the densely populated west-central region. And by 1926, the Cristero War would contribute new waves of emigrants, exiles, and refugees to this flow. As the war continued, entire towns in Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and other west-central states emptied of working-age inhabitants, while Mexican *barrios* in cities and towns across the United States filled with thousands of new arrivals from the Cristero region. By 1930, there were approximately 1.5 million Mexicans (both people born in Mexico as well as people with Mexican parents or ancestry) in the United States.¹⁷

The temporal and geographic overlap between the Great Migration and the Cristero War meant that many emigrants had experienced the religious conflict. And in fact, by the late 1920s, there were tens of thousands of Mexican emigrants across the United States who, like Tenorio and his co-conspirators, supported the Catholic uprising from the United States. Ultimately, their actions would not change the course of the war: neither they nor their co-religionaries in Mexico would succeed in their goal of overturning the anticlerical government or even reforming the Mexican constitution. Nevertheless, their activities would have a profound and enduring resonance, both for the development of the Cristero conflict in Mexico and within Mexican communities in the United States.

This book examines the history and the legacy of these emigrant Cristero supporters. This group, which I refer to collectively as the Cristero diaspora, included tens of thousands of labor emigrants, more than two thousand exiled priests and nuns, numerous members of the Mexican hierarchy, and dozens of middle-class lay political activists. These emigrants participated in the conflict in a variety of ways, many of which were non-violent: they took part in religious ceremonies and spectacles, organized political demonstrations and marches, formed associations and organizations, and planned strategic collaborations with religious and political leaders in order to generate public sympathy for their cause. A few of them, like Tenorio and his co-conspirators, even participated in militant efforts that included arms smuggling, recruitment, espionage, and military revolts. Despite the fact that these emigrants supported the same cause, they did not always act in perfect accord; throughout the war years, they sometimes competed with each other—occasionally quite intensely—as they attempted to determine the best way to further their cause from abroad. Yet by and large, they shared a broad political vision for the Mexican

nation: one that advocated a restored role for the Catholic Church in the Mexican public sphere, and therefore diverged sharply from the nationalist project of the Mexican government.

Defining Diaspora

Mexican internal conflicts have a long history of spreading beyond the Mexican interior and spilling into the United States. Since the nineteenth century, hundreds of political dissidents from Mexico have sought a safe haven across national lines, and then continued to campaign from US territory. Such men included national politicians such as Benito Juárez in the early 1850s and Porfirio Díaz in 1876; dissidents such as Catarino Garza in the 1890s; the anarchist Flores Magón brothers in the 1900s; Francisco Madero in 1911; and countless other Mexican revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries from 1911 to 1920, including Victoriano Huerta and Pancho Villa. For them, crossing the border meant not only that they could escape from their enemies in Mexico, but also that they could regroup, refresh their depleted stocks of war materiel, and plot new military campaigns from the relative safety of the United States.¹⁸

The Cristero religious movement in the United States shared some similarities to previous efforts by Mexican political exiles. Yet here, religion played a unique role. While earlier dissident activities were organized primarily by political exiles, the Cristero diaspora included hundreds of religious leaders—exiled priests, high clergy, and nuns—who worked to organize their communities in support of the Cristero cause. Additionally, the Cristero diaspora was more geographically widespread than many of these previous movements, which had been largely limited to the border states (particularly Texas). In fact, Cristero activity in the United States was fueled by thousands of religious emigrants, exiles, and refugees in multiple locations around the Southwest and Midwest. And many people within these communities connected with each other across great distances in order to advance a common set of political and religious goals in their home country. As a result, these emigrants formed a religious diaspora within the larger Mexican population in the United States.

In using the term “diaspora” to describe Mexican Cristero supporters, I am building upon recent scholarship that has applied this descriptor to the broader Mexican emigrant community. Although there has been extensive debate about the meaning of diaspora—and about whether

Mexicans can be classified as a “true” diaspora, like the classic historical cases of the Jews or Armenians—I agree with scholars such as Alexandra Délano, who argues that the term is useful because it more accurately conveys “the complex transnational identities and relationships that [Mexican] emigrants and their organizations have developed with their home country.”¹⁹ Indeed, the members of the Cristero diaspora held specific conceptions and notions of themselves that were inherently transnational, since they were intricately related to the politics, government, and history of Mexico. Sociologist Stéphane Dufoix describes such diasporic groups as “antagonistic,” since they “refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the current regime in their country of origin” and simultaneously form “a political space” for opposition in their destination country. The goal of such opposition is “to liberate their country, nation, people, or land.”²⁰ For the Mexican members of the Cristero diaspora, those political spaces were often church pews and pulpits, and the liberation they were seeking was infused with religious meaning. Even after arriving in the United States, these emigrants continued to see themselves as members of a persecuted religious group; as supporters of a specific political movement; as victims of the anticlerical Mexican government; and even as martyrs for their faith.

The Mexican emigrants who supported the Cristero cause also formed these identities *in contrast to* other groups of Mexican emigrants. Certainly, many Mexican emigrants remained apolitical, or left no record of any political activities. Many others vocally supported the anticlerical policies of the revolutionary Mexican government, and the voices of this group, which several other historians have researched, will appear in the chapters that follow.²¹ Yet it is the history of the Cristero diaspora—its formation, activities, and beliefs—that has gone untold, and that this book seeks to recover and reconstruct.

Thus, the Cristero diaspora comprised a smaller group within the wider population of Mexican emigrants—all of whom, following Délano, can collectively be considered a diaspora as well. Here, though, I must present an important caveat: it is impossible to determine the exact size or demographic characteristics of this “diaspora within a diaspora,” for there is no concrete way to measure the number of Mexican emigrants who supported the Cristero cause from the United States. Emigrants were not required to state their political affiliations when crossing the border, and in fact, many wished to hide their sympathies for the Cristeros (and their antipathy for the Calles government) in the United States. And of

course, most Mexican emigrants who supported the Cristero side of the conflict did not devote their entire lives to the Cristero cause. The majority of Mexican emigrants during the 1920s came from working-class and rural backgrounds, and much of their time was taken up by earning the money they needed to survive and to support their families.²² Nevertheless, as this book will document, there were tens of thousands of Mexican Catholics in the United States who found the time and energy to publically support the Catholic cause in Mexico: this is most evident from the number of people who attended the numerous pro-Cristero marches, rallies, and demonstrations held in different cities during the war years. Furthermore, these emigrants came from a variety of racial, ethnic, and class groups: the archival materials used for this study provide clear evidence that there were male and female Cristero supporters; Indians, *mestizos*, and people of exclusively European descent; wealthy landowners, middle-class urban workers, and rural laborers.

Archival Discoveries and the Structure of the Book

I first discovered the story of the Cristero diaspora not in the United States, where these emigrants lived and operated, but in the Mexican National Archives in Mexico City. Sitting at a long table in the dim and permanently chilly Gallery 8 (the AGN is the former Lecumberri prison, which was designed as a panopticon, and historical documents are housed within the former prison cells that line each of the long galleries), I came across a voluminous collection of letters addressed to President Calles from people living in the United States. The majority of these letters, written by Americans as well as some Mexicans living abroad, applauded Calles for his stance against the Catholic Church. Yet there was one that was different from the rest.

Handwritten in rough, slanted script and dated April 23, 1926, it was a petition signed by a group of Mexican emigrants living in Perris, California, a small inland town that lies roughly between San Diego and Los Angeles. In the decorous language so common to Mexican letters of the period, the writers addressed the president directly:

The Mexican Mothers and Fathers that comprise this Colony
Elevate ourselves towards You a protest against the unjust persecu-
tion that has been made against the Catholic Religion. Today . . . we
unite [as] brothers in Race to appeal for our rights, for our religious

ideals to be respected and for our Churches as well as its ministers to be respected.

After reminding the president of the historical contributions of the Catholic Church in Mexico, the writers asked the president, “with all respect,” to “modify the Articles that attack our religion.”²³

The letter raised a number of questions in my mind. Who were these emigrants in Perris? Were there others like them? Why were they rebuking the Mexican government, when so many were praising its anticlerical reforms? To answer these questions, I soon realized that it would be necessary to conduct archival research on both sides of the border. In a way, I had to follow the trail of the emigrants themselves, who had left Mexico for multiple US destinations, and had then collaborated with allies—and confronted opponents—in both countries.

In Mexico, I visited government, private, and Church archives, mostly in Mexico City. There, I found information about the interactions between Cristero supporters and their allies and enemies at home in Mexico. The archives of the Liga, for example, revealed that the Catholic organization’s leadership in Mexico maintained constant contact with exiles in the United States, and eventually even established a US headquarters. And through the records of the Mexican government, particularly officers at the Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Confidential Department of the Ministry of the Interior, it became apparent that numerous state officials—especially consular officers, army officials, and intelligence agents—had collected ample information about Cristero activism abroad.²⁴

In the United States, my research was more peripatetic, reflecting the variety of destinations that Mexican emigrants chose during the 1920s. Consulting government, private, and Church collections across the country, I found thousands of newspaper articles, personal letters, petitions, photographs, and other documents that revealed that numerous Mexican emigrants in widespread locations supported the Cristero cause through collective and individual actions.²⁵

The story that emerged from this archival research is a transnational narrative of migration, militancy, defeat, and resilience. It begins with an analysis of the two events that formed the Cristero diaspora. Chapter 1, “A History of Faith and Conflict,” offers a broad overview of the struggle between Church and state in Mexico, as well as a detailed discussion of the chronological and geographic intersections between the Cristero War and the great migration of the 1920s. Chapter 2, “Religious Refugees, Political

Exiles, and the US Catholic Church,” explains how a smaller group of Cristero War-era exiles and refugees arrived in the United States (the latter with the help of US Catholic officials). In the United States, they would play a crucial role in directing the formation and activities of the Cristero diaspora. During the period between 1926 and 1929, Mexican Cristero supporters in the United States began participating in a variety of actions in order to support the religious uprising in Mexico. Chapter 3, “In Defense of Their Brothers Beyond the Rio Grande,” discusses and analyzes these forms of transnational Cristero activism. Chapter 4, “Bishops, Knights, Border Guards, and Spies,” demonstrates how the efforts of the most militant members of the Cristero diaspora were ultimately thwarted by a number of internal and external impediments that precluded the possibility of a successful armed revolt along the border.

In June 1929, the Mexican hierarchy signed an agreement with the Calles government that ended the armed uprising in Mexico. Chapter 5, “After the *Arreglos*,” describes the activities of the Cristero diaspora from the 1930s to the early 1940s, as Mexican Cristero supporters in the United States continued to organize—albeit in a less militant way—in opposition to the Mexican government. The sixth and final chapter, “Memories, Myths, and Martyrs,” jumps ahead in time to the present day, examining how Cristero supporters and their descendants retained family memories of the martyrdom, persecution, and exile that they had perceived and endured during the conflict. In the Epilogue to this book, I present a closing case for the importance of the Cristero diaspora for an understanding of contemporary Mexican religious and political identities on both sides of the border.

Contributions to the Historical Literature

The main purpose of this book is to reconstruct an important historical narrative that has gone largely untold. This story also aims to extend and build upon the rich and fascinating historical scholarship in three areas: the Cristero War, Mexican emigration during the 1920s, and Mexican American religion.

My primary argument about the Cristero War is that, because of emigration, it had a much wider geographical impact than most scholars have assumed. Essentially, Mexican emigrants who supported the Cristero cause reenacted and reproduced Mexico’s Church-state conflict within

their communities, while encountering and opposing the representatives and adherents of the anticlerical Mexican government in the United States. In doing so, they transnationalized the Cristero conflict, bringing it out of the Mexican heartland and into the Mexican barrios of El Paso, San Antonio, Los Angeles, Chicago, and other locations. Furthermore, the activities of the Cristero diaspora also impacted the development of the war itself. In particular, emigrants who sent money and weapons to the Cristero battlefields strengthened the position of the Cristero resistance by providing critical material assistance to the Cristero movement's political and military operations; political exiles contributed to the logistical operations of the war; religious refugees promoted support and loyalty for the Cristero cause in Mexico; and militants such as Simón Tenorio participated in several uprisings along the border that, although they were unsuccessful, drew the concern (as well as time and resources) of Mexican and US government officials.

To be sure, I do not claim that the activities within the Cristero diaspora were directly equivalent to the violence and bloodshed in Jalisco, Michoacán, or other war-torn areas. I do argue, however, that the transnational forms of popular activism and resistance that occurred within the Mexican emigrant diaspora must be considered within the historical context of the Cristero War, and that the Cristero War must likewise be understood as a transnational conflict as well as a regional, national, or international one. In that sense, the Cristero War shares similarities with the Mexican Revolution, or even with the current drug war in Mexico: all three of these conflicts began in Mexico, and became transnationalized by emigrants, refugees, and exiles in the United States.

By arguing that historians' conception of the geographic area of the Cristero War should be expanded to include the territory of the Cristero diaspora in the United States, I am following historian Adrian Bantjes, who called on scholars of the religious conflict to conduct new historical investigations of the Cristero War in order to include less-studied regions and actors, as well as wider variations of popular resistance. And indeed, as the scholarship on the popular dimensions of the conflict has proliferated in recent years, it has also expanded beyond the traditional investigations of the west-central states of Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato, and into regions of Mexico formerly regarded as peripheral to the conflict.²⁶ In addition, there is also a large body of historical literature that narrates the international development of the war, particularly as it involved diplomats, representatives of the Vatican, international Catholic organizations,

and members of the Catholic hierarchy in the United States, Europe, and Latin America.²⁷ Nevertheless, none of these narratives include a thorough investigation of emigrant Cristero activism and its impact on the Cristero War.²⁸

The story of the Cristero diaspora has the potential to shed new light not only on historical understandings of the Cristero War, but also on the nature of Mexican migration, particularly the massive migration of the 1920s. Most importantly, it shows that, as a result of the Cristero War, Mexican emigrant communities were deeply affected by the religious conflict that was ongoing within their homeland. The members of the Cristero diaspora collaborated with each other across cities and regions in the United States in order to advance their particular political vision: the restoration of religious rights in Mexico and the defeat of Calles and his successors. In the process of promoting their political goals, they confronted other Mexican emigrants who supported the revolutionary government; they also quarreled among themselves about the direction their movement should take. Thus, this book, while primarily focused on uncovering the actions and ideologies of the Cristero diaspora, also explores the political divisions and factionalism that affected emigrant community formation during the 1920s and 1930s.

As a result, this study presents a different picture of the Mexican emigrant community than much of the existing historical scholarship on Mexican migration during this period, which, although it has uncovered fascinating stories about questions of race and ethnicity, gender, labor, and community-level organizing, has not yet fully assessed the impact or legacy of the Cristero conflict.²⁹ This is not to say that historians of Mexican emigration have ignored the Cristero War; numerous regional studies have noted the impact of the religious conflict on emigrant communities within a particular city or region.³⁰ Yet that same regional focus of the most recent literature may have steered scholars away from investigating diasporic politics during the Cristero War years. In particular, the regional studies do not demonstrate how some emigrants connected across distances to advance their particular political causes; likewise, they generally do not compare the experiences of emigrants across different regions.

This book aims to provide that multiregional scope, focusing on Mexican religious and political activism across multiple urban emigrant communities, particularly (although not exclusively) in the cities of El Paso, San Antonio, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Additionally, it examines