

CHARLES A. HALE

The Transformation
of Liberalism in Late
Nineteenth-Century Mexico



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Charles A. Hale

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For Elizabeth, Charles, Roger, and Caroline

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Preface

THIS BOOK began as an exploration of the intellectual transformation that took place in Mexican political life following the Reforma, the great civil and ideological conflict of 1854 to 1867. My initial conception was that the transformation could be traced in the rise of positivism, which had frequently been labeled the official philosophy of the regime of Porfirio Díaz from 1877 to 1911. As I proceeded, I came to realize that positivism, while of immense importance in late nineteenth-century Mexico as a set of philosophic and social ideas, was not precisely a theory of government. Thus my focus changed to the contemporary concept of “scientific politics,” which was drawn ultimately from European positivism but also from other intellectual sources and political models, mostly of liberal orientation. In fact, I increasingly discovered that to understand Mexican politics after 1867 it was necessary to begin with liberalism, a subject that had already engaged my attention for many years.

My new project became an attempt to unravel the tangled relationship between liberalism and scientific politics in an intellectual environment permeated with positivism or “positive philosophy.” Although my central concern (and thus the conceptual heart of the book) was the relationship between liberalism and scientific politics, I also found that I had to study positivism itself in depth, that is, the philosophy of the era as it was manifested in the refashioning of higher education and in aspects of social policy. My initial pursuit of political ideas therefore led me into philosophical and social topics rather than into economic thought and policy, which many would regard as the more pertinent direction for the historian of Porfirian Mexico to take. In making this choice, I in no way denigrate the importance of economics, but rather I hope to bring into relief other aspects of the period that may be of roughly equal importance.

As a work that purports to aid in understanding post-Reforma politics and policy assumptions, it departs from most existing studies in two principal ways. First, it places at center stage the ideas of the intellectual and quasi-governmental elite, which I term the “liberal establishment,” rather than the actions of major politicians, particularly presidents. Benito Juárez, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, José María Iglesias, Manuel González, and Porfirio Díaz do not loom large in this work as political actors and personalities. Second, this book approaches the period from the point of view of the liberal and conservative past rather than from the perspective of the revolutionary future. Most studies of the post-Reforma era treat it implicitly or explicitly as an old regime, a prelude to revolution.

This is true even of those studies that emphasize (quite properly) the continuities between the Porfirian and the postrevolutionary state. To examine late nineteenth-century Mexico without being cognizant of the Revolution, if indeed it were possible, would be of course to engage in pure antiquarianism. At the same time, the revolutionary lens can be distorting, and it may be that a perspective from the past can provide a useful corrective. Thus the substantive treatment of ideas in this book virtually ends in the 1890s, the moment at which scientific politics and positivist higher education reached their ascendancy, and also the moment at which the consensus within the liberal establishment began to break down. Nonetheless, the intellectual legacy of this moment for contemporary Mexico is significant and I will return to this legacy in chapter 8.

In approaching the nineteenth-century political process through ideas, I have drawn recurrent inspiration from a traditional source, the work of the French historian Élie Halévy (1870–1937). His method as a historian of ideas is a model. Halévy proceeded with exceptional analytical rigor, he penetrated to the heart of a conception or idea that gave form to doctrines and even to political or social movements, and he repeatedly identified the contradictory elements or the dialectic existing within a body of thought. Not only have I found Halévy's method inspiring, but his substantive contributions have been useful as well. His discovery of the dialectic within utilitarianism (or philosophic radicalism) between the natural and the artificial identification of interests helped me see the contradiction within classic Mexican liberalism between laissez-faire and statist anticorporate reform. In the present study, Halévy's essay on Saint-Simonian doctrine provided the point of departure for probing the conflict between scientific politics and liberalism in post-Reforma Mexico. Halévy's work was a fine blend of the internal and external analysis of ideas. He argued the schematizing and stylizing usefulness of ideas for understanding events. Yet he did not ignore the role of economic and social circumstances in shaping those ideas. Although he was basically an idealist, he was, to quote one perceptive critic, "not a crude idealist." If anything, he was "even less sympathetic to Hegelians than to Marxists." Half-a-century after his death, historians still have much to learn from Halévy, even historians of Latin America.¹

The following are a few of my many obligations to individuals and

¹ Élie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism* (London, 1928), 1st ed., 1901–04; "Saint-Simonian Economic Doctrine" (1907–08), in *The Era of Tyrannies* (New York, 1966). For a defense of his method, see Halévy's response to the socialist Max Lazard in 1936 (*ibid.*, pp. 272–77). The quotation is from Charles C. Gillispie, "The Work of Élie Halévy: A Critical Appraisal," *Journal of Modern History* 22 (1950): 234. See also Myrna Chase, *Elie Halévy: An Intellectual Biography* (New York, 1980).

institutions. Throughout my entire scholarly career, Hugh M. Hamill, Jr., has been generous with his encouragement and constructive criticism. Alan B. Spitzer has served as my consultant on Mexico's French connection. Josefina Zoraida Vázquez and Enrique Krauze have taken a keen interest in the project and have aided me in innumerable ways. Sections of the manuscript have been read and ably criticized at various stages by Mitchell G. Ash, Mílada Bazant, Roderic A. Camp, the late Charles Gibson, Joseph L. Love, Florencia E. Mallon, Peter H. Smith, and William B. Taylor. The project has been supported by the American Philosophical Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Joint Council on Latin American Studies of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, and by the May Brodbeck Award from the University of Iowa. Armand Arriaza and Patrick J. McNamara have provided valuable research assistance. My four children, to whom I dedicate this book, grew up with it and have all contributed greatly in their individual ways. Finally, my wife Lenore has given judicious criticism and constant devotion throughout the two decades it has taken to bring this book to completion.

The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico

Introduction: The Problem of Liberalism after 1867

THE SUBJECT of this book is liberalism in Mexico from 1867 to 1910, an era that was governed by the experience of midcentury civil war and the heroic struggle against foreign intervention. Nineteenth-century liberalism was a set of political ideas that saw its classic formulation as an ideology in the 1820s and 1830s and its implementation in the Constitution of 1857 and the Laws of Reform. With the victory of Benito Juárez in 1867 over Emperor Maximilian and the native Conservative party, liberalism was triumphant. Thereafter, it became irrevocably identified with the nation itself, a nation that in the words of Juárez had won its second independence. The years following 1867 were ones that saw the establishment of an official liberal tradition, a tradition that was further solidified with the Revolution of 1910. In other words, liberalism after 1867 became transformed from an ideology in combat with an inherited set of institutions, social arrangements, and values into a unifying political myth.

However, liberalism after 1867 also encountered a new intellectual environment, influenced in part by the introduction of the philosophy of positivism. A major characteristic of European positivism at its origin in France in the 1820s was its repudiation of central elements of liberal theory. Though positivism first entered Mexico in the 1860s, its initial impact was not in politics, but rather in the reorganization of higher education. Its effect on political ideas came a decade later in 1878 with the enunciation of scientific politics, a doctrine presented by a self-styled "new generation" of intellectuals in *La Libertad*, a newspaper subsidized by the fledgling government of Porfirio Díaz. Scientific politics came increasingly to provide the intellectual basis of policy assumptions during the long authoritarian Díaz regime, yet ultimately remained in tension with it. Therefore, the focus of this study will be on the definition of this purportedly new and regenerative concept and its complex relationship with liberalism, the dominant political myth.

Whatever Mexican liberalism became after 1867, its ingredients must be sought in the formative years of the previous half-century.¹ At the

¹ A definition of liberalism in its formative years was the subject of my earlier work, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821–1853* (New Haven, 1968).

heart of the liberal idea was the free individual, unrestrained by government or corporate body and equal to his fellows under the law. In the political sphere this ideal was first to be achieved by placing limits on central government authority through the legal constraints of a written constitution. The protection of civil liberties, representative institutions, the separation of powers, federalism, and municipal autonomy became important liberal goals. These constitutional guarantees and institutions would serve to protect the individual from “despotism.” In short, constitutionalism was a major ingredient of the liberal program.

Second, individual freedom could only be realized within a society where traditional corporate entities—church, army, guilds, and Indian communities—would be replaced by a regime of legal uniformity. The principal corporation was of course the church, with its vast wealth, its judicial privileges, and its control over education and the events of life itself. Thus the liberal anticorporate struggle was directed primarily against the temporal power of the church in order to achieve the ends of secularization. The free individual in a modern society must become a citizen whose primary loyalty was to the nation or secular state and not to a corporation under the control of clerics. The supremacy of the secular state was a basic tenet of liberal ideology. Moreover, the secular state must be a republic. Since traditional governmental and corporate restrictions on individual freedom were a legacy of the Spanish monarchical system, Mexican liberals by the mid-1820s were uniformly republicans. The heroic struggle of the 1860s against two emperors and the monarchist conservatives became first of all a struggle to restore the republic.

Liberalism also embraced a vision of social progress and economic development. If enlightened individuals could be left to their natural inclinations, that is, to pursue their own interests freely, the result was supposed to be a spontaneous identification of common interests and social harmony. Individual interest was based on property, the right to which was an extension of the individual’s right to life itself. If property, including the property of traditional Indian communities, could be freed from corporate, monopolistic, or governmental restrictions, then individual initiative, a natural division of labor, and free exchange between individuals and nations would flourish, leading ultimately to the general enhancement of wealth. These classic liberal assumptions guided article 27 of the Constitution of 1857, which reaffirmed the inviolability of private property; article 28, which abolished monopolies and prohibitive tariffs; and the many anticlerical decrees issued between 1856 and 1863, which first disentailed and then nationalized ecclesiastical wealth. These socioeconomic measures, even the ones that were extreme because they were issued in a time of armed conflict, became embedded in the Mexican liberal tradition.

The new intellectual environment encountered by triumphant liberalism had scarcely taken form by 1867; there were only scattered indications of the major changes to come within the next decade. One such early indication appeared in what had been a conventional vehicle of the liberal era, an independence day oration delivered on 16 September 1867, in Guanajuato, the fount of Mexican patriotism.² The orator was Gabino Barreda, leader of the educational reform commission, newly appointed by President Juárez. Barreda's famous *Oración cívica* repeated all the liberal pieties, putting the most emphasis on the recent war to regain national independence, the conflict between "American civilization" and "European retrogression."

Barreda's address was novel in that he saw Mexico's heroic struggle since 1810 as the culmination of a centuries-long movement toward "mental emancipation," that is, the gradual decline of old doctrines and their replacement by new ones. Political emancipation cannot be separated from religious and scientific emancipation, he said; "for in the domain of the intelligence and in the field of true philosophy nothing is heterogeneous, everything is joined together (*solidario*)."³ For Barreda the efforts of the great liberators Hidalgo, Morelos, and Juárez were made understandable only by multiple precedents and cumulative influences over three centuries. These included: Galileo's "simple scientific hypothesis"; the Protestant challenge, "whose banner was the right of free inquiry"; the assertion by the Spanish Crown of regalian rights at the expense of the Papacy; and the Dutch, American, and French Revolutions, from which sprang the doctrines of popular sovereignty and equality. Did it not follow, asked Barreda, that just as supernatural explanations were being replaced by natural laws and as human intervention was growing in all the sciences, so "the science of politics would also go forward, freeing itself increasingly from theology?"³

However, Barreda emphasized that mental emancipation had also brought with it an anarchy of ideas, "painful collisions" from which great social lessons could be drawn. Moreover, such anarchy would continue until "a truly universal doctrine unites all intellects in a common synthesis." Barreda's acknowledged guide was the philosopher of positivism, Auguste Comte, whom he quoted at the outset and whose influence is apparent throughout the *Oración cívica*.⁴ However, this influence is most evident in Barreda's conclusion, the theme of which was "social reconstruction." Because of the sacrifices of two generations, he maintained,

² Gabino Barreda, "Oración cívica pronunciada en Guanajuato el 16 de septiembre del año de 1867," in *Opúsculos, discusiones y discursos* (Mexico, 1877), pp. 81–105.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴ Barreda identified the epigraph as from Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1842), 6:622. However, I have been unable to locate it.

the obstacles to reconstruction have been cleared and its bases laid—the Laws of Reform and the constitution. “Let our motto henceforth be Liberty, Order, and Progress.” Liberty of conscience and expression now reigns and “makes unnecessary and impossible any disturbance that is not purely spiritual, any revolution that is not merely intellectual.” Let “material order,” he concluded, protected at all cost by the governors and respected by the governed, be the sure road to progress and civilization. Barreda had set the tone for the coming era, but true to his charge, he himself turned away from politics and devoted the next decade to instituting a new system of scientific preparatory education, as we shall see in chapter 5. The full political implications of his message were not formally articulated until 1878. These political implications are the subject of chapter 2.

Although the first appearance of positivism in Mexican politics came with Barreda’s dramatic address of 1867, some of its assumptions can be discerned in political writings as early as the 1840s. Positivism was only one of several European intellectual currents that in the aftermath of the French Revolution challenged the validity of the doctrines of natural rights and utility, those two variants of Enlightenment political philosophy that made up classic liberalism. French literary romantics, political conservatives inspired by Burke and De Maistre, legal scholars of the historical school of Savigny, and the early socialists all judged these eighteenth-century doctrines to be abstract, legalistic, and of questionable universal application. Like the contemporary positivists, Henri de Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, they rejected the notion of the autonomous individual as the root element in society and instead construed him to be an integral part of the social organism, conditioned by time and place and as ever-changing as society itself.

In Mexico the shift away from classic liberal doctrines can be seen, of course, in Lucas Alamán, who by the early 1830s had become a frank political conservative. It can be seen even more pertinently in Mariano Otero, a young liberal politician and jurist of the turbulent 1840s. In his *Ensayo* of 1842, Otero emphasized historical inevitability, the progress of civilization, and the interrelated nature of all society. Unlike the classical liberal, José María Luis Mora, Otero believed that the method of social science must be historical. He opened his essay with a quotation from Mme. de Stael that asserted that the French Revolution was not an accidental occurrence, the work of specific men, but rather the work of history, the culmination of past events. He criticized the anticlerical reformers of 1833, for whom Mora was the major theorist. Otero maintained that the economic power of the church was being undermined by social changes and the spread of enlightenment, and that the extreme measures of the reformers only caused an unnecessary political schism in

the country. He argued that civilization could only triumph if there were a "general change" in society, if "the diverse elements that compose it . . . change in the form necessary for that new state."⁵

Otero combined acute analysis by which he identified property as the "generating principle" of society with a marked optimism about Mexico's future. His optimism, including an apology for federalism, appears to have been inspired by the "associative socialism" of the school of Charles Fourier, which maintained that voluntary association according to a pre-arranged plan was the key to social problems. Otero saw the adoption of federalism in Mexico as a response to a "universal law." From families to nations, men organize, he said, in "diverse associations" to best serve their needs. His philosophical attachment to federalism and his conviction that the power of the church would naturally decline led him to become a political moderate, someone reluctant to seek a strong reformist state acting against corporate privilege. The affinity of Otero's thought with French positivism can be seen in his general approach to the individual and society, in his emphasis on social reconstruction, and in his adoption of the historical method in social analysis, and not in his attitude toward the state. Statism was central to the ideas of both Comte and Saint-Simon. With this significant limitation, Otero may be seen as a precursor of positivism in Mexico.

Mariano Otero (b. 1817) was a precocious and short-lived member of what might be called the "romantic generation" of Mexican liberals, which was also the intellectual generation of the Reforma, including such men as Ponciano Arriaga (b. 1811), Miguel Lerdo de Tejada (b. 1812), Melchor Ocampo (b. 1814), Ignacio Ramírez (b. 1818), and Guillermo Prieto (b. 1818). A study of the intellectual orientation of these men might reveal that they were exposed to many of the same ideas as Otero, and that under other circumstances they might have moved gradually away from classic political liberalism, as did their contemporaries in Argentina and Chile, for example, Domingo F. Sarmiento (b. 1811), Juan Bautista Alberdi (b. 1810), José Victorino Lastarria (b. 1817) and Francisco Bilbao (b. 1823). However, in contrast to Argentina and Chile, political polarization in Mexico after 1846 inhibited the application of the new ideas, such as the organic view of society and the historical approach to social analysis; and the suppositions of classic liberalism continued to hold sway.⁶

⁵ Mariano Otero, *Ensayo sobre el verdadero estado de la cuestión social y política que se agita en la república mexicana* (Mexico, 1842), p. 77. See also the detailed study of Otero's ideas by Jesús Reyes Heróles in Mariano Otero, *Obras*, 2 vols. (Mexico, 1967), 1:1–190.

⁶ I have argued this point further in "Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870–1930," in *Cambridge History of Latin America*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1984–86), 4:373–77.

In Mexico, the dichotomy within earlier political liberalism between doctrinaire constitutionalism and a strong reformist state was perpetuated in the incongruous juxtaposition of the Constitution of 1857 and the Laws of Reform. The Mexican constitution, with its emphasis on natural rights, popular sovereignty, and a limited executive was quite different, for example, from the Argentine Constitution of 1853, which was imbued with the pragmatic and conciliatory spirit of the historical school of law, as espoused by Alberdi. The Argentines regarded all three constitutional doctrines as abstract and radical. Ideological conciliation in midcentury Argentina and Chile was also enhanced by the absence of the church issue that so dominated politics in Mexico. The difference between the situation of Mexico and that of Argentina and Chile was dramatized by the travail of the *moderados* during the Reforma era. Otero might have become one of those tormented political moderates, like for example José María Lafragua or Manuel Siliceo, had he not died prematurely in 1850.⁷ Mexico's midcentury civil war not only made political moderation impossible, but it also disrupted the gradual transformation of political and social thought. In Chile and Argentina the grafting of new ideas onto old ones came about more gradually and imperceptibly than it did in Mexico. In Chile, it was Lastarria, Otero's intellectual counterpart and an outspoken political liberal of the 1840s, who introduced positivism in 1868. Whereas in Mexico, positivism found its first champion in Barreda, who, though he was a contemporary of Otero and Lastarria, was an apolitical physician and scientist.

Although Barreda's *Oración cívica* of 1867 introduced positivist concepts that would later be used to attack cherished liberal principles, his address also signaled the beginnings of the official liberal tradition. The elements of this tradition can be found in the public policy of the next two decades; its formal expression came subsequently in the historical writings that flourished from 1888 to 1906, even though most of this historiography revealed an infusion of positivist ideas.

One major policy objective of the years after 1867 (pointed to in Barreda's address) was political reconciliation, which meant both reconciliation of the parties in conflict during the recent civil war and reconciliation of the factions in conflict within the triumphant Liberal party. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the regime of Benito Juárez (1867–72) dedicated itself particularly to the first task, the regimes of Porfirio Díaz (1877–80, 1884–88) and Manuel González (1880–84) to the second.

⁷ On Lafragua, see José Miguel Quintana, *Lafragua. Político y romántico* (Mexico, 1958); see also Jan Bazant, *Antonio Haro y Tamariz y sus aventuras políticas, 1811–1869* (Mexico, 1985), which provides insights into the political environment faced by the *moderados*. Siliceo served as minister of *fomento* (development) under Ignacio Comonfort from 1855 to 1857 and later as minister of *instrucción pública y cultos* under Maximilian briefly in 1865.

Within a month of the liberal victory in 1867, Juárez proposed that voting rights be extended to the clergy and that distinctions of degree be made in punishing those who had collaborated with the French or with Maximilian. The proposals caused much controversy, but a broad amnesty law was passed on 10 October 1870. These political measures were supplemented by the efforts of Ignacio M. Altamirano to reunite the Mexican literary community by extending a hand to those writers who had sympathized with the conservative cause. He saw such reconciliation as necessary in order to create a truly national literature, and this became the theme of his weekly periodical, appropriately entitled *El Renacimiento* (1869). Nonetheless, Altamirano made it clear that this national literature was to be based on liberal principles.

It proved less difficult to conciliate former conservatives than to bring together the various liberal factions. The principal division within the liberal ranks was between the followers of Juárez, including his chief lieutenants from wartime days, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada and José María Iglesias, and the followers of Porfirio Díaz, an ambitious Reforma general. After several unsuccessful challenges, both electoral and military, Díaz finally led a successful rebellion in 1876 against both Lerdo, who had been president since the death of Juárez in 1872, and Iglesias, who as chief justice of the Supreme Court challenged the legality of Lerdo's reelection. Once in power Díaz pardoned and then openly recruited the partisans of his three former opponents, a policy that was continued by Manuel González. The reuniting of the Liberal party was a major theme of the official rhetoric of the early Porfirian years. This policy of reconciliation reached a climax in the second Díaz administration. On 15 February 1885, soon after his inauguration, there appeared *El Partido liberal*, a semiofficial newspaper devoted to liberal "fusion." The glorification of Benito Juárez began during these years, and *El Partido liberal* helped make 28 July 1887, the fifteenth anniversary of Juárez's death, a great ceremonial occasion. Díaz could thus be portrayed as the indispensable perpetuator of national unity within the Liberal party, and the way was cleared for revisions in the constitution to legalize his successive reelections. One of the ironies of Mexican history is that the emergence of Benito Juárez as the central figure in the official liberal tradition was the work of his nemesis, Porfirio Díaz.

The first of the several histories that gave formal expression to the liberal tradition was the monumental *México a través de los siglos*, commissioned by the government and published in 1888–89 after at least a decade of planning and labor. By devoting an entire volume to the pre-Hispanic period, as well as one to the colony, the work became the first major history to identify the roots of the Mexican nation as equally Indian and Spanish. To these two volumes that demonstrated the fusing of eth-

nic traditions were added three others (*The War for Independence*, *Independent Mexico*, and *The Reforma*), which celebrated the progress of liberal ideas and institutions and their ultimate victory over the forces of reaction.

The five great tomes, all written by prominent men of letters, might be considered a major contribution toward realizing Altamirano's dream of a national literature. In fact, it is possible that the project had its remote origin in Altamirano's literary gatherings of 1868–69: four of its six authors, Vicente Riva Palacio (also the director), Alfredo Chavero, Enrique Olavarría y Ferrari, and José María Vigil had been collaborators on Altamirano's *El Renacimiento*. The work as a whole also provides evidence of the successful efforts to reunite the Liberal party, because the climactic volume 5 was entrusted to Vigil, who, as we shall see later, was philosophically at odds with the positivist intellectuals whose influence was on the increase in governmental circles. In fact, the positivist Justo Sierra, while praising the other authors, found Vigil too passionate, too much an accuser of the reactionary and imperialist party. Sierra would have preferred a treatment of the Reforma that was more "organic and formal" and less like a "polemical pamphlet," a treatment that was more scientific and less purely political.⁸

Sierra's reaction to Vigil's partisan zeal may have guided the writing of his own brilliant and influential history, to be entitled a generation later *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano*. His essay was embedded in the three volumes of another Porfirian monument, *México, su evolución social* (1900–02), whose several authors extolled the elements of Mexican progress. Sierra approached the heroic age more serenely than had Vigil, identifying it as the second of Mexico's two revolutions, or accelerations in the normal process of social evolution, a revolution that freed Mexico from the remnants of the colonial regime. Though Sierra's work generally followed the plan of *México a través de los siglos*, he did add a final chapter on the post-1867 period, which he characterized as an era of peace, when the Mexican nation under Porfirio Díaz had acquired its "international personality." Yet his concluding sentence was disquieting, for it suggested that the Díaz regime despite its material accomplishments and

⁸ Justo Sierra, "México a través de los siglos," *Revista nacional de letras y ciencias* 2 (1889): 120–21 (also in Sierra, *Obras completas*, 14 vols. [Mexico, 1948], 9:188–89). On the government's role in the work, see José C. Valadés, *El Porfirismo, historia de un régimen. El Nacimiento* (Mexico, 1941), pp. 414–15. See also Daniel Cosío Villegas, *Historia moderna de México*, 9 vols. in 10 (Mexico, 1955–72), 8:660–66, who argues that the work grew out of an invitation by President Manuel González to Riva Palacio to write a history of the war of intervention. Much of Riva Palacio's volume was supposedly written in 1883–84 while he was imprisoned for an attack upon González in the Chamber of Deputies. On Riva Palacio's literary career after 1867, see Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, introduction to Vicente Riva Palacio, *Cuentos del general* (Mexico, 1968), pp. xv–xxiv.

its self-identification with the liberal tradition might be losing sight of underlying ideals. "The entire social evolution of Mexico," wrote Sierra, "will have been vain and fruitless, if it does not lead ultimately to liberty." Sierra's muted criticism revealed mounting disagreement within the Porfirian establishment about the elements of the liberal tradition and the regime's relation to it, but the tradition itself remained unquestioned.

Disagreement turned into outright controversy in the avalanche of publications that accompanied the simultaneous preparations for the sixth reelection of Porfirio Díaz in 1904 and for the celebration in 1906 of the centennial of the birth of Benito Juárez. The controversy was initiated by Francisco Bulnes, a positivist deputy who denounced the "Jacobins" of Mexican history, especially those present-day "false Jacobins" who were promoting the reelection of Díaz in the name of democracy, a democracy that was for them a continuation of the ideals of Juárez. In his dramatic speech of 21 June 1903, Bulnes also called for Díaz's reelection, but as a matter of practicality; and he presented Díaz as a modern Caesar Augustus, who had brought order out of factional strife. He followed up his speech with two lengthy polemical works attacking Jacobinism and denigrating Juárez as the supreme leader of the Reforma, works that provoked an angry and voluminous response.⁹

The polemical writings in defense of Juárez became mingled with the winners of the 1906 centennial contest for the best "sociological study of the Reforma," serious and balanced essays by Ricardo García Granados, Andrés Molina Enríquez, and Porfirio Parra. All three upheld the orthodox view of Juárez, but García Granados went further than the others by identifying within the liberal tradition two distinct elements, the Laws of Reform and the Constitution of 1857. He concluded that the Laws of Reform, which had ushered in the modern secular state, had been a brilliant success. On the other hand, the constitution had been a "partial failure," because its framers had been blind to "the Mexican people's incapacity to adapt to the democratic system." García Granados did not recommend abandoning the constitution, but rather revising it to conform with social reality.¹⁰

The argument of García Granados was not new. It had been stated

⁹ Francisco Bulnes, *Discurso pronunciado por el Sr. ingeniero D. Francisco Bulnes delegado del estado de Morelos, en la sesión del 21 de junio de 1903, presentando y fundando la candidatura del señor general Porfirio Díaz* (Mexico, 1903); idem, *El Verdadero Juárez y la verdad sobre la intervención y el imperio* (Mexico, 1904); idem, *Juárez y las revoluciones de Ayutla y de reforma* (Mexico, 1905). On this entire episode, see Charles A. Weeks, *El Mito de Juárez en México* (Mexico, 1977), chaps. 4–5; also pp. 133–36 of this work.

¹⁰ Ricardo García Granados, *La Constitución de 1857 y las leyes de reforma en México. Estudio histórico-sociológico* (Mexico, 1906), pp. 132–33.

implicitly by the proponents of scientific politics since 1878 and it was embedded in Bulnes's recent diatribe. It constituted an elitist current within Porfirian historiography that reached its climax in *La Constitución y la dictadura* (1912) by Emilio Rabasa. Rabasa argued that unrealistic constitutional limitations on executive authority had been in defiance of "sociological laws" and thus had produced the extralegal but necessary dictatorships of Juárez and Díaz. However, Rabasa did not abandon the liberal tradition; rather he, like Sierra and even Bulnes, optimistically saw authoritarian rule as the prelude to a true liberal regime, one that would entail the revival of institutions and the harmonizing of the written and real constitutions.

The Revolution of 1910 occasioned a strong reaction against these Porfirian views, yet it only served to strengthen the liberal myth. Revolutionary leaders and programs, whatever the differences between them, almost universally sought inspiration in the ideals of the Reforma, which they judged to have been betrayed by the Díaz dictatorship. The anti-clerical and secularizing tenets of the Laws of Reform were reaffirmed and made even more extreme, following an era of de facto accommodation with the church. Even stronger was the impulse to restore the constitutional principles of 1857. Not only had Díaz made a mockery of the traditional constitutional restraints on central authority, but his dictatorship had received intellectual support from those like Bulnes and Rabasa who attacked the "Jacobin" constitution-makers. The slogan of Francisco I. Madero, "effective suffrage, no reelection," was constitutionalist, as was the name of Venustiano Carranza's faction, the *constitucionalistas*, which emerged as dominant in the power struggle following Madero's death in 1913. Even the radicals, the Flores Magón group (before 1910), the Zapatistas, and the followers of Pancho Villa sought precedents for their programs in the "popular" midcentury liberal struggle.¹¹

The adherence by leaders of the early Revolution to the heroic liberal tradition has been perpetuated as a permanent feature of Mexican public life, integrally related to the official doctrine that the Revolution itself is a continuing affair. This integral relation between the liberal tradition and the Revolution has guided the writing of history in Mexico during the last generation. Most of it is centennial historiography, commissioned by the government to commemorate the heroic anniversaries of the nineteenth century. The output was particularly large during the centennials

¹¹ On the use of liberal precedent by the Flores Magón group, see Arnaldo Córdova, *La Ideología de la revolución mexicana. La Formación del nuevo régimen* (Mexico, 1973), pp. 87–96; by labor, see Rodney D. Anderson, *Outcasts in Their Own Land: Mexican Industrial Workers, 1906–1911*, pp. 323–26, by the *zapatistas*, see John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York, 1969), pp. 399–400; by the Villistas, see Robert Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution, 1914–1915* (Bloomington, 1960), pp. 157–58.

(and sesquicentennials) of the mid-1960s, which led Luis González y González to comment that “our present government . . . only recognizes as relatives figures and episodes of the Revolution for Independence and the Reforma.”¹² Most centennial historiography is mere patriotic rhetoric, but not all of it, in part because the government recruits distinguished as well as undistinguished historians to write it, but also because the subject itself—the political history of the nation—has wide appeal beyond governmental circles.

The predominance of officially encouraged political history within Mexico (and elsewhere in Latin America) has quite justifiably drawn criticism from foreign professionals. In characterizing professional Latin American history as a “truly international endeavor,” Woodrow Borah argues that unlike European history, the leadership in empirical, analytical, and objective scholarship on Latin America has generally not come from within the region but from abroad. Native historians, he adds, are too frequently “caught in the need to create the national legend and strengthen the emerging national state.” Or as John Womack, Jr., has recently put it, most Mexican historians “still do *historia patria*. . . . History for them is what it was to the Romans. It’s civics.”¹³ Borah and Womack are suggesting that while a small minority of Mexican historians are sophisticated and innovative by international standards, the majority are “intellectually old-fashioned” (Womack’s phrase) and parochial. It should be noted that their criticism applies to topics of study as well as to method, and (one senses) may apply to non-Mexican historians as well as to Mexicans. One of the purposes of this book is to demonstrate, to the contrary, that traditional political themes, approached critically and yet sympathetically, are appropriate for sophisticated modern scholarship.

The continuing attraction of the political history of the nation as a topic of study in Mexico can be demonstrated by the work of two recently deceased historians, very different one from the other, Jesús Reyes Heróles and Daniel Cosío Villegas. Their work reveals the continuing strength of the liberal tradition in Mexican public life and represents a mature commentary on that tradition. The attraction of the topic can also be demonstrated by the work of Arnaldo Córdova, which diverges sharply from the liberal tradition and provides a distinct contrast to that of Reyes Heróles and Cosío Villegas. Let us examine the three briefly, focusing our

¹² Luis González y González (as editor for Mexico) in *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, 48 vols. (Cambridge, Austin, Gainesville, 1936–88), 28:94. See also Robert A. Potash, “Historiography of Mexico Since 1821,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 40 (1960): 395.

¹³ Woodrow Borah, “Latin American History in World Perspective,” in *The Future of History*, ed. Charles F. Delzell (Nashville, 1977), pp. 151, 153; Womack (interview) in *Visions of History*, eds. Henry Abelove et al. (New York, 1984), pp. 255–56.

attention on their interpretations of the critical era 1867 to 1910, which lies between two landmarks of the heroic liberal tradition, the Reforma and the Revolution. Such an examination can provide a point of departure for my own analysis of the political ideas of the period.

The work of Jesús Reyes Heróles, particularly his magisterial *El Liberalismo mexicano*, is the finest example of official history in contemporary Mexico. The three volumes were published from 1957 to 1961, clearly to celebrate the centennial of the Reforma but also to respond to critics, presumably of the late 1940s and early 1950s, who, according to Reyes Heróles, made it seem that the revolutionary process was coming to an end.¹⁴ Reyes Heróles reaffirmed the continuity of the Revolution by asserting the continuity of liberalism, that is, the rich legacy provided by liberal ideas for contemporary Mexico. Although he studied nineteenth-century theories in detail and identified foreign influences, Reyes Heróles argued that Mexican liberalism ultimately shunned doctrines that were unrelated to Mexican reality. Rather, he argued that liberalism was forged from the specific problems of the country and thus acquired a degree of originality. While including standard doctrines, such as the defense of civil liberties, federalism, and supremacy of the secular state, the legacy of liberalism for the twentieth century also embraced democracy (as opposed to “enlightened” or elitist theories), “economic heterodoxy” (as opposed to laissez-faire), and particularly “social liberalism” (as opposed to rigid adherence to the right of private property). In short, this legacy was the body of doctrines that Reyes Heróles associated with present-day policies. We must remember, he urged his countrymen, that “our generation is not its own offspring.” Liberalism for Reyes Heróles provided the basic ideological orientation for the ongoing Revolution.

One of the most notable features of *El Liberalismo mexicano* is that it ignored the years 1867 to 1910, particularly the era of Porfirio Díaz. Reyes Heróles made it clear that he saw no relation between liberalism and the Porfiriato. The latter did not represent “a continuity [of liberalism], but rather a substitution, a veritable discontinuity.”¹⁵ As interpreted by Reyes Heróles, liberal ideas developed after 1808, became “integrated” by 1857 (or 1861), then remained in suspension until 1910 when they descended triumphant. What emerges in the three elaborately documented volumes is a sophisticated restatement of the standard

¹⁴ Jesús Reyes Heróles, *El Liberalismo mexicano*, 3 vols. (Mexico, 1957–61), 1:xiv. His vague reference may well have been to Daniel Cosío Villegas. Cosío’s essay (in 1947) preceded at least three others that were similar by José Iturriaga (1947), Jesús Silva Herzog (1949), and José R. Colin (1950). See Stanley R. Ross ed., *Is the Mexican Revolution Dead?*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia, 1966), pp. 87–114.

¹⁵ Reyes Heróles, *Liberalismo*, 3:xvii. I have pursued this point further in “Liberalismo mexicano,” *Historia mexicana* 12 (1963): 457–63.

political ideology advanced after 1910, namely that the Porfiriato was an oppressive old regime that the Revolution destroyed. Moreover, it was a regime that had cast aside the ideals of liberalism, which then were re-activated with the Revolution.

When Reyes Heróles died in March 1985, he was eulogized more as an "ideologist" than as a historian, which reflected his status as the leading intellectual in high government circles for more than twenty years. During this time he directed *Petroleos Mexicanos*, headed the official Partido Revolucionario Institucional, and was minister of *gobernación* (internal affairs) and of public education. Reyes Heróles was an advocate of the intimate relation between history and action, the necessity for policymakers to look to history for guidance. In his own career, he showed that this conviction could stimulate criticism as well as apology; for in the decade before his death he became the architect of the "*reforma política*," the now problematic effort to liberalize the rigid structure of politics in Mexico under the PRI. Unfortunately, this critical stance was not reflected in his historical writings. Although as a historian Reyes Heróles dealt primarily with the nineteenth century, Arturo Arnáiz y Freg suggested in 1968 that the reader of several decades hence might find in the writings of Reyes Heróles the best elaborated defense of "the historical significance of the Mexican Revolution."¹⁶ But because his historical writing was essentially ideological, because it perpetuated the official view that the Revolution can only be seen as the antithesis of the Porfiriato, it gives little direct guidance to the analyst of political ideas in post-Reforma Mexico.

Jesús Reyes Heróles would seem to have little in common with Daniel Cosío Villegas, the dean of professional Mexican historians at the time of his death in 1976. The former was the consummate centennial historian and ideologist, the latter the consummate critic, who shunned the centennial impulse. One epitomized the powerful intellectual within the government, the other the powerful intellectual outside the government, constantly at odds with ministers and presidents yet tolerated and respected by both. What Cosío Villegas and Reyes Heróles had in common was their belief that history should serve a public purpose, their adherence to the liberal tradition, and their counsel that policymakers should look to the liberal past for direction and guidance. Following a multifaceted career, Cosío in midlife turned to history out of disillusionment with

¹⁶ *Uno más uno*, 20 March 1985; Carlos Monsiváis in *Proceso*, 25 March 1985; Arturo Arnáiz y Freg, "El Liberalismo mexicano y su significación social," *Cuadernos americanos* 27 (1968): 91-92 (a response to Reyes Heróles's lecture "La Historia y la acción," delivered 7 August 1968, on his reception into the Academia Mexicana de la Historia, and reprinted in *Cuadernos americanos* 27 (1968): 65-85); Arnáiz's point was in a sense reemphasized by Enrique Krauze in *Proceso*, 25 March 1985.

the direction of policy in the 1940s. In his famous essay, *La Crisis de México* (1947), he argued that the ideals of the Revolution had been exhausted, that the term “revolution” had lost its meaning, and that the country was entering the “Neo-Porfiriato,” that is, it was returning to the characteristics and many of the priorities of the Díaz era.¹⁷ In fact, it might have been primarily in response to Cosío’s criticism that Reyes Heróles wrote his study of liberalism.

The result of Cosío’s public concern was the massive *Historia moderna de México* (1955–72), a nine-volume, multiauthored work covering the political, diplomatic, social, and economic history of the country from 1867 to 1910, the very years that Reyes Heróles ignored. Cosío’s focus was on politics, and he wrote the political volumes of the *Historia moderna* himself. While Cosío was sensitive to the changing economic and social priorities of the 1940s, his attack on current governments emphasized their mounting authoritarianism as revealed in the monolithic revolutionary party, an enhanced executive, a weakened legislature and judiciary, and a general atmosphere of corruption and servility. Cosío Villegas turned to the liberal tradition for inspiration, but not to the protean “integrated” liberalism of Reyes Heróles, which could be used to justify current policies, but rather to the specific liberal principle of constitutional limitations on central authority. He wrote his only centennial essay on the Constitution of 1857, defending its architects against their Porfirian detractors, Sierra and Rabasa.¹⁸ However, Cosío’s substantive history began with the Restored Republic, the era from 1867 to 1876 when Juárez, Lerdo, and Iglesias worked against great odds and with only partial success to implement the principles of the constitution. According to Cosío, these constitutional principles became subverted during the regime of Porfirio Díaz, but then they reemerged with Francisco I. Madero in 1910. The “ideals of the Revolution,” whose decline Cosío so lamented in 1947, were mainly the constitutional and democratic ideals of Madero, drawn directly from the mid-nineteenth century.

Though Cosío held up the regimes of the Restored Republic as models for his contemporaries, his overall historical vision was balanced and comprehensive. The objective of his project was to treat in detail “modern Mexico,” which also included the years 1876 to 1910 when constitutionalism was in decline. To understand the Neo-Porfiriato, he argued, one must know the original Porfiriato. Cosío’s conception of using history for a public purpose led him not to ignore the Porfiriato but to investigate it in depth. It is ironic that Cosío Villegas, who began with an opinion of

¹⁷ I have considered Cosío’s career and historical writing in more detail in “The Liberal Impulse: Daniel Cosío Villegas and the *Historia moderna de México*,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 54 (1974): 479–98.

¹⁸ Daniel Cosío Villegas, *La Constitución de 1857 y sus críticos* (Mexico, 1957).

the Díaz regime that was similar to the official one, ended by making his two volumes on its internal politics his masterpiece. As he immersed himself in the copious and unstudied documentation of the era and sought to unravel its complexities, his appreciation for its leaders and even for Don Porfirio himself increased. In volumes 8 and 9 he explicitly discarded the epithet "tyrannical," used in volume 1 in favor of the milder "authoritarian." Throughout the *Historia moderna*, Cosío's passion for thorough documentation, his attention to detail, and his shrewd observations on political motivation make his work the essential starting point for any analysis of the political ideas of the post-1867 era.

However, we must be wary lest we be mesmerized by Cosío's detail, his documentation, and his objective tone and thus unwittingly take on his interpretation. Moreover, we must remember that Cosío's history is a history of politics and not of ideas, and that therefore he does not subject ideas to severe analysis. Cosío discovered that "political life" (a questioning of arbitrary government by courts, legislatures, and particularly by the press), which was so vibrant during the Restored Republic, persisted during the Porfiriato, even as dictatorship increased. Thus, despite Cosío's appreciation for the Porfirian regime, he put particular emphasis on the opposition, particularly the journalistic opposition, which doggedly defended the constitutional principles of 1857. The opposition press for Cosío was "liberal," "independent," or "democratic"; the press that supported the government "official" or "officialist." This distinction oversimplifies the realities of political debate during this era of ideological consensus. In a period that was governed by the liberal myth in which all those with political aspirations had to be "liberals," Cosío confuses us by applying that term only to a small opposition. Moreover, since Cosío did not focus on ideas, he does not help us understand what the advocates of scientific politics meant when they stoutly maintained that they were both liberals and constitutionalists. It is not useful simply to label their position "officialist."

Cosío's interpretation also raises the problem of continuity, that is, the relation between the ideas and programs of the Porfirian era and those of the Revolution. By bringing into relief the "liberal" and "democratic" opposition to Díaz, Cosío implied that it formed a direct precedent for Madero's program and thus for the ideals that he would see revived in his own day. Yet it is also possible that the assumptions of the constitutionalist movement of the Revolution derived in part from scientific politics and its version of liberalism. The *Historia moderna de México* can be seen as a critique of the official liberal tradition, as put forth in the work of Jesús Reyes Heróles. Cosío and his colleagues broke through the ideological barrier thrown up by the Revolution of 1910 and initiated the serious investigation of the Porfiriato on its own terms. Yet for all of Co-

sío's criticism of the official view, the *Historia moderna* is still very much a liberal history, guided by the conviction that the ultimate goals for a modern nation are political, namely constitutional limitations on authority, the functioning of representative institutions, and the exercise of a free press.

Cosío Villegas and Reyes Heróles seem to be close together (as liberals) when they are compared to Arnaldo Córdova, whose interpretation of the national political tradition is guided by Marxism and the dependency perspective. Córdova's point of departure in the *La Ideología de la revolución mexicana* (1973) is a direct attack on the liberal myth. He exposes the official view that "Mexico's *true past* is its liberal tradition," the Porfirian regime "its negation"; and he then goes on to discard 1910 as a critical turning point in Mexican history.¹⁹ The broader theme of his study, he tells us, is "the ideology of development in dependent societies"; in the case of Mexico this ideology of development had its roots in the Reforma and became dominant by 1876. This ideology was the set of ideas that provided the rationale for the promotion of capitalism, which, Córdova insists, continued with the Revolution, despite the addition of "*una problemática social*." Córdova refutes the common view that capitalist economic development began in 1940; on the contrary, he says, it began in 1867.

Córdova's interpretation is disarming and therefore poses a challenge for the non-Marxist historian. By laying bare the liberal myth, he clears the ground for a systematic examination of the ideas of the Porfiriato. He emphasizes a continuity in ideas between the liberalism of midcentury and the positivism of the Porfiriato and between the ideas of the Porfirian intellectuals and those of the revolutionary intellectuals, especially the *constitucionalista* group that supported Venustiano Carranza. Moreover, he is keenly aware of the social context of ideas.

The challenge of Córdova's book arises from his view of liberalism itself. Córdova accords little significance to liberalism as a political idea, which follows naturally from his deemphasis on political change and his emphasis on socioeconomic continuity. He regards liberalism as merely one element in the ideology of capitalist economic development. Moreover, although Córdova's subject is ideology, he fails to subject ideas themselves to rigorous internal analysis. Córdova tells us that the task of the historian of ideologies is to reconstruct ideas and the function they fulfill in society. The Porfirian intellectuals (the advocates of scientific politics and the later *Científicos*—both of whom will figure prominently in this book), "prepared the way ideologically for the coming of the [Díaz] dictatorship" and then provided it with "a consciousness of its mission in

¹⁹ Córdova, *Ideología*, pp. 87–88.