

Porfirio Díaz

PROFILES IN POWER



Paul Garner

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PORFIRIO DÍAZ

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The informal and hierarchical systems of personal authority, and the complex networks of kinship and patronage which characterise political and social life in Latin America are apparent to any student or perceptive visitor to the region. What is less obvious to the visitor, and often perplexing to the student, is the clash of political cultures which has been the reality of political life in Latin America for nearly two centuries. The clash is manifest most clearly in the paradoxical relationship between Latin America's tradition of constitutional principle and liberal democratic ideals, and the parallel, but contradictory, traditions of authoritarianism and personal power. One recent analysis of Mexico's political culture has succinctly described this phenomenon as a clash between the 'culture of citizenship' and the 'culture of the pyramid'.¹ It is by appreciating the aspirations, disillusionments and inevitable tensions which this relationship has generated that the political history of Latin America can best be understood. The format offered by the series *Profiles in Power*, with its examination of the relationship between personal power and political structure, is therefore an entirely appropriate vehicle for an exploration of the political history of the region.

The difficulties encountered in the management of contrasting political cultures can be clearly identified in the long political career of Porfirio Díaz, President of Mexico from 1876 to 1880, and subsequently, without interruption, from 1884 until his forced resignation in 1911. Díaz succeeded in manipulating Mexican political life for the best part of three decades. He thus holds the record, and the dubious honour, of being the longest-serving constitutional leader during the often painful evolution of the Mexican state since 1821, the year in which 300 years of Spanish colonial rule formally came to an end (1521–1821).

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The significance of Díaz's long tenure of office can only be properly understood in the context of Mexico's early experience as an independent state. In the 55 years between the consummation of independence in 1821, and the accession of Porfirio Díaz to the presidency for the first time in 1876, Mexico's political history was nothing if not turbulent. It would be no exaggeration to suggest that the new republic experienced almost permanent crisis throughout most of this period. Indeed, given the extent of domestic tensions and the external threat posed by the territorial and colonial ambitions of Mexico's European adversaries (Spain and France) and her immediate North American neighbour (the USA), it is remarkable that Mexico survived at all as an independent state.²

The transition from colonial status to independence and nationhood was inevitably protracted and painful. Ethnic, cultural and regional tensions, and the fragmentation of central political authority which accompanied the process of independence itself (1808–21), severely hampered the establishment of a strong central state. The struggle for power after 1821 between Mexico City and the provinces, and the conflicts which arose from the attempt to extirpate Mexico's colonial legacy (represented above all by the Catholic Church) dominated the politics of the first half-century after independence.

Mexico's early national history was pock-marked by bouts of constitutional proclamation and reform, military *pronunciamientos* and *coups d'état*, factionalism and civil war, and punctuated by wars of resistance against foreign invasion (from the USA in 1847–48, and from France between 1862 and 1867). Political stability, as measured by the frequent turnover of governments and occupants of the presidential chair, was the most obvious casualty of this degree of turbulence. The contrast represented by Porfirio Díaz's almost continuous occupation of the presidency for 31 years after 1876 is, therefore, remarkable in itself. The central purpose of the book is to explain why and how this was achieved.

But the Díaz era is significant not only for the longevity of presidential authority, but also for the fact that so many of the roots of Mexico's identity as a modern nation in the twentieth century – its political system, its economic structure, its cultural projection – are to be found during this period. This is still a somewhat controversial view outside the rather confined world of professional Mexican historiography, since it has long been argued, particularly in the official, popular and post-Revolutionary version of Mexican history, that Mexico's status as a modern nation-state was not defined in the

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Díaz era, but during the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) which removed Díaz from power. Another of the aims of this book is, therefore, to continue the process of re-evaluation of a regime which has been subjected to persistent historiographical and political distortion. It is for this reason that the book begins with an evaluation of the various ways in which the image of the Díaz regime has been manipulated over the past century, before examining in detail its origins, character and evolution.

I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to many friends and colleagues both in Mexico and the UK who have assisted me in my pursuit of Don Porfirio in recent years. I would like to mention in particular my fellow *oaxacólogos* Brian Hamnett and Colin Clarke, who formed the nucleus of the now-dormant Oaxaca Seminar which was inaugurated at the Institute of Latin American Studies in London in 1989. During my years at the University of Wales, Swansea, my colleagues David George and Rhys Williams were always a source of encouragement and support. I must also thank the University of Wales, Swansea, and Goldsmiths College, University of London, for granting me a period of sabbatical leave to devote to the project. In Mexico, the assistance and friendship of the staff of the Porfirio Díaz archive at the Iberoamerican University have been invaluable. I would particularly like to thank Teresa Matabuena, María Eugenia Ponce and Georgette José for their many kindnesses. Without the generosity and hospitality over many years of my *compadres* in Coyoacán, Eduardo Antúnez and Amparo Maza, this book would never have been written. I must also express my gratitude for the support and patience of the editorial staff at Pearson Education, who have heard more excuses for the late submission of the manuscript than they would care to remember. The book is dedicated to my children, Daniel, Tessa and Dominic, who, while they have not exactly accelerated its completion, have always been its major source of inspiration.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. W. Pansters (ed.), *Citizens of the Pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture*, Amsterdam, 1997.
2. B. Hamnett's profile of President Benito Juárez, in this series, describes this process in detail; B. Hamnett, *Juárez*, Harlow, 1994.

For Daniel, Tessa and Dominic

Chapter 1

PORFIRIO DÍAZ AND MEXICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: PORFIRISMO, ANTI-PORFIRISMO AND NEO-PORFIRISMO

History is history. There can be no 'patriotic history', in the same way that there can be no patriotic chemistry, patriotic astronomy, nor anything scientific which is not governed by laws based upon the truth. (Francisco Bulnes, 'Rectificaciones y Aclaraciones a las *Memorias* del General Díaz', 1922)¹

Few dictators in the history of Latin America are better known than Porfirio Díaz. It is one of the premises of this book that, until very recently, few have been more misunderstood or maligned. It is therefore crucial to any survey or analysis of the career of such an important but controversial figure to examine some of the ways in which the image of Díaz has been fashioned, denigrated and, above all, appropriated over the last century. This is a topic of intrinsic interest to any political biography, but it is of special interest in Mexico, where political mythology has been particularly powerful over the last three generations since the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

While this pervasive revolutionary mythology has made an important contribution to Mexican political stability in the twentieth century – for example, by promoting Mexico's identity as a *mestizo* nation and by linking post-Revolutionary nationalism to the nineteenth-century liberal state-building project – this has been achieved at the cost of distorting the analysis of Mexican history. This chapter argues that those distortions have been particularly acute in the case of the regime of Porfirio Díaz. At the same time, however, the contemporary (i.e. late nineteenth-century) interpretations of the Díaz regime before 1910 were no less distorted. In effect, the different representations of the Díaz era can be seen as a clear example of changes in both historiographical fashion and in national politics

over the course of the twentieth century.² These conflicting interpretations have made it very difficult to find a balanced interpretation of either the man or his regime.

Porfirian historiography falls into one of three broad categories, each of which has a specific chronology and approach to its subject: these are, in turn, *Porfirismo*, *anti-Porfirismo* and *neo-Porfirismo*. The favourable portrayal of Díaz (*Porfirismo*) dominates the historiography of the period before the Revolution of 1910, although some notable contributions to *Porfirismo* were made during and after the Revolution. *Porfirismo* emphasises, above all, the longevity of the regime, especially in contrast to its predecessors in nineteenth-century Mexico, and its success in achieving political peace and stability for a period of nearly 35 years. *Porfirismo* also stresses the personal qualities which justified Díaz's monopolisation of political office for over 30 years: *inter alia*, his patriotism, heroism, dedication, self-sacrifice, tenacity and courage.

The typical frontispiece of the numerous biographies of Díaz which were published during the latter years of the regime was chosen with the specific purpose of portraying an image of the austere but benign patriarch, the military hero, the nation-builder and the elder statesman fully in control of the destiny of the nation: in short, a hero in the classical republican mould. This deliberate cult of personality was actively promoted throughout the lifetime of the regime, especially after Díaz's third re-election in 1892, and saw its apotheosis in the lavish celebrations in September 1910 which marked the centenary of Mexican independence from Spain.³ With supreme irony, the celebrations of 1910 also represented the regime's nemesis. Less than two months later, in November 1910, the Revolution which would remove Díaz from power was launched. Six months later, Díaz had resigned and had been forced into exile, from which he would never return.

One of the many consequences of the Mexican Revolution was the destruction of the cult of *Porfirismo* and its replacement by an equally powerful *anti-Porfirismo*. *Anti-Porfirismo* was not, however, exclusively a product of the Revolution, although it was most forcefully expressed after 1911 in what became the standard, orthodox, pro-Revolutionary interpretation. According to *anti-Porfirismo*, the Díaz regime was the supreme example of tyranny, dictatorship and oppression, and Díaz himself was condemned for his corruption, his authoritarianism and his betrayal of national interests.

Anti-Porfirismo dominated Mexican historiography for almost two generations after the Revolution. However, over the course of the

1990s there have been strong indications that the image of Díaz and the interpretation of his regime have undergone a distinct transformation. The Díaz era has, as a result, been interpreted in a much more positive light. Indeed, it could be argued that *neo-Porfirismo* now constitutes the latest form of historiographical orthodoxy. An important stimulus to this profound re-evaluation has been the scope and sophistication of recent research carried out by the current generation of both Mexican and non-Mexican historians. As a consequence, new trends in social, regional and cultural history have profoundly altered the traditional depiction of Porfirian Mexico. Equally important has been the transformation of national politics since the 1980s.

In this wider political context, the change in public and official attitudes towards the Díaz regime in contemporary Mexico is clearly a reflection of the radical restructuring of Mexico's political economy which took place in the wake of the devastating impact of the debt crisis during the 1980s.⁴ It is obviously no coincidence that the recent positive re-evaluation of Porfirian economic strategy, for example, coincides with the neo-liberal strategy of successive administrations after 1982. Neo-liberal economics in Mexico and Latin America have been characterised by a return to the positive endorsement of foreign investment, a renewed stimulus to export-oriented development and the drive towards de-regulation and privatisation – the hallmarks of Porfirian policy before 1910 – in stark contrast to the post-Revolutionary orthodoxy of state intervention, nationalisation and import-substitution.

There is abundant anecdotal evidence of the shift in perceptions within Mexico over the 1990s. In August 1992, for example, the influential Mexico City political journal *Proceso* published a benign, avuncular portrait of Díaz on its cover, accompanied by a feature article titled 'The Return of Porfirio Díaz'. Even more striking was the decision by President Salinas de Gortari in the same year to grant permission to the television company *Televisa* to film part of a new historical soap opera on the life of Díaz, in the National Palace. This constituted clear evidence of official endorsement of *neo-Porfirismo*. The series, which ran to over 100 episodes at an estimated cost of 30 million pesos, was finally shown in 1994 under the enigmatic title *El Vuelo del Aguila* (The Flight of the Eagle). While it received a mixed critical response, the extensive publicity which it received and generated, and the award of a prime daily broadcasting slot, were further indications of a profound revision of previous prejudice.⁵

Also in the summer of 1992, considerable public debate and controversy was stimulated by the proposed publication of new compulsory primary and secondary school history textbooks. The new texts substantially revised the 'official' view of the Díaz era and portrayed it not as a negative period of tyrannical and oppressive dictatorship, but as a positive and constructive period of modernisation and economic development. The controversial text was withdrawn by Minister of Education Ernesto Zedillo prior to his election as President in 1994. It must be emphasised, however, that this act of official censorship was not carried out primarily because of the *neo-porfirista* interpretation of the Díaz era. Rather, it sought to suppress criticism in the new textbook of the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party), which had won all presidential elections in Mexico since its creation in 1946, and of the army, especially for its role in the massacre of hundreds of student demonstrators in the Plaza de Tlatelolco in Mexico City in 1968.

Throughout the 1990s there has been a pervasive sense of imminent and profound transformation in Mexico, to which the events during the term of office of President Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) have clearly contributed. During that time, Mexico has seen the direct challenge posed by the EZLN (The Zapatista Army of National Liberation) to the PRI's rhetoric of social redistribution. In addition, the country has suffered the resurgence of economic crisis and a series of political assassinations and scandals. It has also been the period in which the remarkable electoral domination of the PRI has finally been broken, with the loss of the presidential elections in July 2000. These significant shifts have been identified for some time. In the prophetic words of two of Mexico's leading contemporary historians and political commentators, Lorenzo Meyer and Hector Aguilar Camín, in the preface to their survey of post-Revolutionary history, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution*, published in 1993:

we have – as many Mexicans do – the impression that Mexico is moving forward to a new historical period, which will dispel some of the most cherished traditions and the most intolerable vices of the historical legacy that we know as the Mexican Revolution.⁶

It is the contention of this profile that one of those most cherished traditions, and one of the most intolerable vices of the historical legacy of the Revolution, has undoubtedly been the vilification and

satanisation of the figure who was removed from power in its wake. The portrayal of Porfirio Díaz as brutal dictator followed a very clear logic, a logic directly related to the process of mythification of the Revolution itself.⁷ In the context of post-Revolutionary Mexico, the principal justification for Revolution became the overthrow of what became perceived as an oppressive, tyrannical dictatorship. Under these circumstances, a balanced evaluation of Díaz or of his regime was, at best, difficult and, at worst, impossible.

. . .
ANTI-PORFIRISMO

From the perspective of 'official' pro-Revolutionary and *anti-porfirista* history, Díaz became, in the famous phrase of journalist Filomeno Mata, 'the monster of evil, cruelty, and hypocrisy'.⁸ For the outside world, Díaz was portrayed as a ruthless tyrant, 'the most colossal criminal of our times . . . the central prop of the system of slavery and autocracy', as defined by North American journalist John Kenneth Turner in his influential and widely-read *Barbarous Mexico*, first published in 1909.⁹

Turner's portrait epitomised *anti-Porfirismo*: he accused Díaz of conspiracy and treason, inhumanity, brutality and duplicity. According to Turner, Díaz was 'the assassin of his people . . . [and] . . . a base and vile coward. . . . The President of Mexico is cruel and vindictive, and his country has suffered bitterly.' It was a grossly distorted picture, and Turner was quite prepared to use unsubstantiated and even ludicrous anecdote for sensational effect. Turner's distortions were little more than caricature. As evidence for his personal penchant for cruelty, Turner cited what he claimed was an 'incident' from Díaz's childhood: 'annoyed with his brother Félix over some trivial matter, he placed gunpowder in his nose and set fire to it'.¹⁰

The most virulent examples of *anti-Porfirismo* in Mexico are to be found in the 1920s. Typical of this period is Luis Lara Pardo's quasi-historical account, *De Porfirio Díaz a Madero*, published in 1921. According to Lara Pardo:

Under the trappings of wealth and benevolence, cruelty, intransigence, unlimited ambition, and self-centred despotism began to appear . . . the true characteristics of the regime were then exposed: extermination and prostitution. . . . General Díaz believed firmly in

extermination as the principal tool of government . . . [and] . . . few leaders, even kings, emperors, pharaohs or sultans have done more to prostitute their peoples than General Díaz has done to degrade Mexicans. . . .¹¹

The pervasive influence of *anti-Porfirismo* is also to be found in other parts of the Hispanic world during this period. The Spanish essayist and dramatist Ramón del Valle Inclán's classic and widely-read novel of dictatorship, *Tirano Banderas*, first published in 1926, took Díaz as one of the models for an archetypal nineteenth-century Latin American dictator, a merciless and cynical tyrant characterised above all by his cruelty and sadism.¹² Other Spanish writers of the period shared this view and were clearly more interested in demonisation than in historical accuracy. In an essay on Mexican militarism written in 1920, novelist and essayist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez described the *pax porfiriana* which Díaz had brought to Mexico as no more than 'a series of unwitnessed shootings and assaults on individual liberty . . . more people were silently and clandestinely exterminated over a period of 30 years than in all the battles of the subsequent revolution'.¹³

Within Mexico, *anti-Porfirismo* continued to exercise a powerful influence over what became the 'orthodox' interpretation of the Díaz regime. The orthodox view emphasised the authoritarianism and tyranny of the regime and argued that it represented a distortion of Mexico's nineteenth-century liberal traditions. Traces of this orthodoxy continued to predominate even in the more scholarly and incisive analyses which appeared in Mexico after 1940, such as the influential studies of Mexican historians José Valadés, Jesús Reyes Heróles and Daniel Cosío Villegas, and the *Historia Moderna de México* project.¹⁴

José Valadés, whose three-volume study of the Díaz regime, *El Porfirismo: Historia de Un Régimen*, was published between 1941 and 1948, stated that he was seeking, with an 'open mind', to investigate the predominant perception of the Díaz regime as 'an almost textbook manifestation of tyranny'. His conclusion, nevertheless, was unequivocal:

It is true that the President [Díaz] had the qualities of a statesman: that his word was law; that he combined energy with perseverance; that he possessed undeniable personal qualities; and that he loved his country intensely. However, because his power was unconstitutional,

the Republic was plagued by sorrow and disaffection, and its foundations lacked solidity and balance . . . [his power] was, ultimately, sinister and bitter.¹⁵

Daniel Cosío Villegas, the co-ordinator of the *Historia Moderna de México* project which published a ten-volume history of the Restored Republic (1867–76) and the Díaz era (1876–1911) between 1955 and 1972, was more circumspect, and even expressed admiration, albeit grudgingly, of Díaz's political skills. He recognised that Díaz 'was neither an angel nor a demon, nor even a mixture of the two'. But he nevertheless endorsed the broad thrust of post-Revolutionary *anti-porfirista* historiography by explaining the Revolution of 1910 in terms of a reaction to the regime's accumulation 'of a degree of power, which cannot be called absolute, but which, it can be safely asserted, was incontrovertible'. In Cosío Villegas's view, the Díaz era (or, as he called it, the Porfiriato) should be seen fundamentally as an aberration in Mexico's slow evolution during the nineteenth century towards political liberty. According to Cosío Villegas, 'Porfirio Díaz raised the banner of material progress . . . [while] failing to secure, and even sacrificing political freedom'.¹⁶

The Cosío Villegas project, the single most important contribution to our understanding of the Díaz era, thus qualified, but did not fundamentally challenge, the prevailing historiographical orthodoxy. The orthodox view was more forcefully expressed by Jesús Reyes Heróles, who, in his survey of Mexican liberalism, published between 1957 and 1961, denied Díaz or his regime any place within the nineteenth-century liberal tradition. Reyes Heróles's view was that 'the Porfiriato did not represent the continuity of liberalism, but was instead a substitution and a real discontinuity'.¹⁷

. . .
 PORFIRISMO

The work of Valadés, Reyes Heróles and, especially, Cosío Villegas provided important insights and qualified some of the worst excesses of *anti-Porfirismo*, but they did not challenge its basic approach, nor its fundamental conclusions. An obvious parallel exists, therefore, between the distortions of post-Revolutionary *anti-Porfirismo* and the distortions of *Porfirismo* provided by the apologists of the regime at the end of the nineteenth century.

Díaz emerges from the pages of contemporary accounts, written for both domestic and international consumption, as a wise patriarch, a republican patriot and positivist statesman, awarded such accolades as the 'Master of Mexico' (in the 1911 biography by US journalist James Creelman) or the 'Master Builder of a Great Commonwealth', as in the biography published by Mexican diplomat José Godoy in 1910.¹⁸

Contemporary reverence for Díaz as patriarch and national hero is most clearly to be found in a series of hagiographies which appeared with increasing frequency between 1900 and 1910. Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the most extreme manifestations of *Porfirismo* came from the pens of *oaxaqueños*, natives, like Díaz himself, of the state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. In a commemorative volume to mark the centenary of Mexican independence (1810–1910) compiled by Andrés Portillo as a celebration of the material progress of Oaxaca, and the contribution made by *oaxaqueños* (most notably, Díaz and Benito Juárez) to national development, we find the following anonymous tribute to Díaz, as patriotic and romantic hero:

De las playas del Sur en las ignotas y vírgenes regiones,
Albergues de panteras y leones,
Una pleyade heroica de patriotas sola con su valor, sin experiencia,
Desnuda y desarmada
Pudo emprender la épica cruzada,
Que obtuvo la segunda independencia.
¿Quien en aquella lucha de gigantes,
Dio senales de arrojo y de talento,
Más dignas de la pluma de Cervantes y la lira dorada de Sorrento?
Himnos de gloria, cánticos fervientes,
Patrióticas y justas alegrías
Declararon espejo de valientes
Al noble General Porfirio Díaz.¹⁹

(From the unknown and virgin beaches of the South, the home of panthers and lions, an heroic constellation of patriots, naked, inexperienced, armed only with their courage, led the epic crusade for Mexico's second independence [the struggle against the French Intervention between 1862 and 1867]. Who, in that titanic struggle, showed more boldness and talent more worthy of the pen of Cervantes and the lyric poets of Sorrento? Celebratory hymns and passionate songs, patriotic and worthy celebrations declare the noble General Porfirio Díaz to be the very image of valour.).

Examples of adulation and deference to Díaz the patriarch were to be found across the social spectrum of Porfirian Mexico, from the inhabitants of remote rural *pueblos* to cabinet ministers and intimates of the President. In Díaz's private correspondence there are numerous examples of petitions for patriarchal favour, expressed in highly deferential and emotional language. These range from requests for Díaz to act as godfather (*padrino*) to numerous children to begging letters for pensions or employment from the President's numerous *compadres* and to petitions from *pueblos* and village authorities for the patriarch to intervene in search of a solution to a broad spectrum of local problems.

The language of deference also permeated the discourse of the Porfirian political elite. For example, Díaz's former Finance Minister, José Yves Limantour, one of the most influential figures during the last two decades the regime, was moved to respond to the unflattering obituary of Díaz published in the London *Times* in July 1915. The original text of the obituary had highlighted not only the mixture of ignorance and racial and cultural prejudice frequently demonstrated by British observers of Mexico, but also the fact that *anti-Porfirismo* had already become well established by 1915:

Porfirio Díaz has shared the fate of numbers of South and Central American rulers. He has outlived his greatness and died in exile. He ruled Mexico with practically despotic power from 1876 until his downfall in 1911, and to that rule his country owed the first and only prolonged period of fairly settled government which she has enjoyed since she overthrew her allegiance to Spain. Under Republican hands, Díaz governed with an iron hand, but only an iron hand could have imposed respect for public order and fear of the constitutional authorities on a nation four-fifths of whom were of mixed or Indian blood, and who had been demoralised by over 60 years of anarchy, corruption and massacre.²⁰

Limantour's indignant riposte was unapologetically *porfirista*, describing Díaz as the consummate patriot who single-handedly brought peace, order and material progress to his country:

General Díaz was indeed the creator of modern Mexico. After the sixty years of turmoil which preceded his administration the country was brought by him to a state of progress unsurpassed by any of the Latin American countries. . . . Under his guidance order was brought

out of chaos, prosperity was consistently developed among all classes, and a new country was made. The greatness of General Díaz [was] as a statesman, a ruler of men, and a patriot. . . . General Díaz was a tireless worker, devoting the whole of his time, his remarkable ability, and his great strength of character to the welfare of his people, and the advancement of his country. No ascetic cared less for his own interests, pleasures, or comforts.²¹

Praise for Díaz from his contemporaries did not come exclusively from his political supporters. Perhaps the most unlikely source of praise for Díaz was Francisco Madero, the wealthy landowner (*hacendado*) from Coahuila who initiated the Revolution which toppled Díaz from power in 1910 and who became the first President of Revolutionary Mexico after Díaz's exile in 1911. In his influential and widely-read critique of the Díaz regime published in 1909 (*La Sucesión Presidencial de 1910*), which subsequently launched the Anti-Re-electionist Movement and his own candidacy for the presidency in 1910, Madero wrote:

I admire General Díaz, and can only reflect with respect on a man who has been one of the most staunch defenders of the nation's territory, and who, after wielding for more than 30 years the most absolute power, has exercised it with such moderation.²²

Outside Mexico, contemporary praise for Díaz also came from some surprising sources. In 1894, José Martí, the radical Cuban intellectual and leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Party in its protracted struggle for independence from Spain, wrote to request an interview with Díaz during a fundraising visit to Mexico. While bearing in mind that Martí was seeking financial assistance and moral and political support for the Cuban cause, and therefore was hardly likely to insult a potential benefactor, Martí nevertheless openly revered Díaz as a wise patriot who had struggled consistently on behalf of the independence of the Americas:

A cautious Cuban has come to Mexico, trusting the profound and constructive wisdom, and absolute discretion of General Díaz, to explain in person to one of the foremost thinkers in the Americas . . . to the brave man who has made many sacrifices in the defence of the liberty of this continent and who today governs Mexico, the significance and scope of our sacred revolution for independence.²³

Some of the most effusive and extravagant contemporary prose in praise of Díaz originated in the Anglo-Saxon world. As Robert

Skidelsky comments, 'the Victorian age was an age of hero-worship. In a period of religious doubt, morals increasingly needed the support of exemplary lives: lives, which, in particular, stressed the strong connection between private virtue and public achievement.'²⁴ Nevertheless, it is also clear that many of the accounts were based upon a combination of ignorance and an uncritical regurgitation of much of regime's own self-projection, self-promotion and propaganda in the international arena.²⁵

Mrs Alex Tweedie, one of that indefatigable band of Victorian travellers from the British Isles, described Díaz in her 1906 biography simply as 'the greatest figure in modern history', and compared him to the Tsar of Russia and the Pope: 'yet', she affirmed on the same page, with a less than sure grasp of either political science or Mexican political realities, he was a 'democratic ruler'. Her description of Díaz as 'a fine, strong, handsome man . . . with deep, dark, penetrating eyes' also suggests that she may have been one of the many victims of what José Valadés later described as Don Porfirio's sexual magnetism.²⁶

North American contemporaries were equally fulsome in their praise. José Godoy, the Mexican *chargé d'affaires* in Washington in 1909, solicited the opinions of prominent congressmen, senators, officers in the armed forces, civil servants and university presidents across the United States for his biography published in 1910. In the text which resulted, a remarkable mixture of purple prose, unadulterated fantasy and pure ignorance, Díaz emerges as a mythical figure of quasi-divine status, who had created the Mexican nation single-handedly. His US contemporaries compared him, variously and simultaneously, to Moses, Joshua, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon, Bismark, Lincoln, Washington, Grant, Gladstone, Disraeli and, even, to the Mikado.

The descriptions and references most frequently used by Díaz's US admirers in Godoy's hagiography follow a predictable pattern. The most frequent reference was to Mexico's achievement of progress under the wise stewardship of Díaz. Other references emphasise the qualities of patriotism, personal morality, abnegation and humility, emphasising Porfirio's humble origins and citing his career as an example of rags to riches, the Mexican equivalent of the log-cabin to White House story. Congressman Charles Landis from California provided perhaps the most evocative expression of the apotheosis of late nineteenth-century *porfirista* mythology: 'we speak the name of Mexico, and think of Díaz . . . Díaz is Mexico, and Mexico is Díaz'.²⁷

Ultimately, of course, the concerted and orchestrated efforts to promote both Díaz and the regime in a positive light both at home and abroad collapsed in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1910. Hagiography was rapidly replaced by the vilification and character assassination as *anti-Porfirismo* became the norm. Yet *anti-Porfirismo* itself was not an exclusive product of the post-Revolutionary period, and had clear pre-Revolutionary roots. The most striking example of the challenge to the cult of *Porfirismo* prior to the Revolution is the polemic which ensued from the decision to commemorate the centenary in 1906 of the birth of Benito Juárez, Mexico's mid-nineteenth-century liberal hero.

Given the heightened political tensions surrounding Díaz's sixth re-election in 1906, the attempt by the regime to exploit the myth of Juárez by casting him in the role of precursor to the Díaz era was bound to be controversial.²⁸ The historiographical outcome of the controversy was distinctly unfavourable to Díaz, and has been so ever since. While Juárez became firmly identified with nationalism and self-determination, political democracy and civil liberty, the rule of law and the secular state (and, subsequently, with indigenous rights and resistance to colonialism), Díaz became firmly associated with their antithesis: dictatorship and repression, the abuse of constitutional authority, pro-clericalism and the wilful violation of Mexican sovereignty, with Díaz in the role of arch xenophile and traitor.²⁹ The mud has subsequently stuck very firmly.

NEO-PORFIRISMO

The demonology of Díaz and the Porfiriato has proved stubborn and resistant throughout the twentieth century, despite some superficial indications of relaxation of official condemnation. President Avila Camacho (1940–46), for example, allowed Díaz's second wife, Carmelita, to return to Mexico. Despite the efforts of the family, however, Díaz's remains are still buried in Paris, in the cemetery at Montparnasse. This, above all, symbolises of the failure of the post-Revolutionary state to come to terms with the legacy of the Díaz regime.³⁰

Nevertheless, the re-evaluation of the Porfiriato during the 1990s has finally begun to restore a degree of balance to both the *porfirista* and *anti-porfirista* interpretations. As indicated earlier, the roots of

contemporary *neo-Porfirismo* are not only to be found in the official response to political and economic crisis, but also in the re-evaluation of the Díaz era by a new generation of Mexican historians. One of the central tenets of what is now classed as 'revisionist' history is the emphasis on the continuity (rather than the rupture) between the Porfiriato and the Revolution, and the consequent recognition of the debt which is owed by the post-Revolutionary political system to its Porfirian predecessor.

Neo-porfirista revisionism is not, however, a new phenomenon in Mexican historiography, and itself owes a good deal to the biographies of Díaz by Francisco Bulnes (1921), Angel Taracena (1960) and Jorge Fernando Iturribarría (1967). In recent years the case has been restated with renewed vigour, most recently in the revisionist biographies by Enrique Krauze (1987) and Fernando Orozco Linares (1991).

The maverick intellectual Francisco Bulnes, who managed to be both an active collaborator and a trenchant critic of the regime, provides the following assessment of the Díaz regime in 1921:

Whatever the enemies of *Porfirismo* may say, the dictatorship was welcomed as a tremendous benefit by all social classes. Peace was a novel and attractive development for the country, and [the regime] inspired loyalty and gratitude amongst the people for the *caudillo* who had pacified his *patria*, in the belief that peace would be ever-lasting.³¹

Angel Taracena's biography of Díaz, published in 1960, could also be seen as a precursor of *neo-Porfirismo*:

The Mexican people in general, and Mexican youth in particular . . . ought to be familiar with all of the details of the life of Porfirio Díaz, in order to be able to appreciate both his failures and successes, of which the latter were of significant benefit to the *patria*.³²

Fernando Orozco Linares, in his 1991 biography, succinctly summed up revisionist *neo-Porfirismo*:

Since 1930 the campaign to defame Porfirio Díaz has increased in intensity. There is no historical account or text book in which the author has failed to revile his memory. This is not only a travesty of the truth, it has also distorted the education of thousands of students, who are absolutely certain that Díaz was a tyrant, a murderer, a traitor, and a thief.³³

Of the contemporary generation of historians, Enrique Krauze has been the most prominent and the most eloquent advocate of a balanced interpretation of the Díaz era. Krauze was one of the main promoters of the project for the television series on the life of Díaz, and in his 1987 biography he was highly critical of *anti-porfirista* interpretations. Krauze is not only interested in historical accuracy, however, since his revisionism also has overtly political overtones. He has been an influential member of the group associated with the cultural journal *Vuelta* (which included, before his death in 1998, Nobel laureate Octavio Paz) which has opposed the continued domination of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in contemporary politics. Krauze sees significant parallels between the Díaz era and the PRI's stranglehold on Mexican politics since 1946. For Krauze, the continuities between *Porfirismo* and *Priismo* lie in the maintenance by both of a pernicious form of anti-liberal authoritarianism. He argues that Mexico has experienced since the Revolution only a superficial transition from a personal dictatorship to dictatorship of the party, or to what the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, on a visit to Mexico in 1990, controversially called 'a perfect dictatorship'.³⁴

For Krauze, both the Porfirian regime and the PRI are analogous in terms of their 'political inertia' and of their 'stifling paternalism', both of which have long outlived their usefulness. As he commented most perceptively and, perhaps, prophetically in 1992:

the (post)-Revolutionary regimes cannot condemn Díaz without condemning themselves . . . there are two most appropriate courses of action; the return of [Díaz's] remains to Oaxaca, and the death of the PRI: a common epitaph should be inscribed on both graves: they served their *patria*, but they corrupted its civic life and denied its citizens their legal rights for a hundred years.³⁵

The inherent danger of the new revisionism manifest in the recent outbreak of *neo-Porfirismo* is that, by transforming the image from diabolical dictator back to that of patriot and benign patriarch, Díaz will find his place once again in the pantheon of national heroes. This would represent a missed opportunity. As those who have grappled with the question of myth and history in Mexico and elsewhere have consistently identified, mythification tends to suffocate, if not entirely obliterate, the historical context. As Roland Barthes reminds us:

myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them . . . purify them, make them innocent, give them a natural and external justification. . . . It abolishes the complexity of human acts . . . it does away with all dialectics . . . it establishes a blissful clarity . . . myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things.³⁶

In the case of Porfirio Díaz, the restoration of this elusive 'historical quality' to the myth has been long overdue. It is not without irony that, in 1911, the staunch *porfirista* Enrique Creel, Governor of Chihuahua and former Mexican Ambassador to the USA, wrote to Díaz in his Parisian exile and, in a vain attempt to console the exiled President, made the following prediction: 'you can be sure that history and the Mexican people will treat you with the utmost fairness'.³⁷ It has, however, taken a very long time for Creel's prediction to come true. One of the central purposes of this profile is to extend the process of historical re-evaluation.

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