

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT FOR “GLOBAL CONNECTIONS OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION”

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On-screen text:**Global Connections of the Mexican Revolution
a discussion with Graciela Márquez Colín****On-screen text:****Graciela Márquez Colín****Professor, Centro de Estudios Históricos (CEH), Colegio de México**

Graciela Márquez Colín: Mexico was already a well-integrated country into the global economy before 1910, before the start of the Revolution. So, Mexico joined the community of trading partners in the U.S., in Europe. It also adopted the gold standard in 1905. It exported lots of materials, lots of raw materials, gold, silver, but also industrial metal, industrial minerals, henequen [a type of agave plant], vanilla, and other agricultural products. So in general, Mexico was part of the global economy before 1910.

And [it] was precisely in 1910 when celebrating the centennial of the independence that Mexico wanted to show [off] its material progress, wanted to exhibit how modernized, how it was a modern economy, and in a way it was appealing to foreign investors to channel resources to mines, to agriculture enterprises. In that sense, Mexico in 1910 was a very global economy in a sense.

The start of the Revolution did not stop those flows. Quite the contrary, by 1910–1911, Mexico experienced a boom in oil production. Because of earlier discoveries, Mexico was able—foreign oil companies were able—to export Mexican oil to the United States. And throughout the decade from 1910 to 1920, Mexico became a major player in oil markets. By 1918, it was the second largest oil producer in the world, just because of all the investments that were taking place between 1910 and 1920.

However, the country was engulfed in a Revolution. The revolutionary armies, foreign diplomats, and foreign powers did not want to damage that oil industry. And they, in a sense, all protected the oil investments. There were major players like Mr. Doheny from the United States or Mr. Weetman Pearson from Great Britain. So, Mexico enjoyed this oil boom while revolutionary armies were fighting for the control of the executive power in the country. Oil was not booming just because there [were] all these rich deposits along the Gulf of Mexico, but also because of increases in demand. World War I increased the demand [for] oil. And therefore, Mexico joined these efforts to provide oil to Europe.

There were other connections of the Mexican Revolution that started in November 1910, and these other connections had to do [with] how the war was fought. [Whereas] in Europe, [the] entire societies contributed to the effort—to the war effort—by providing not only soldiers, but also all kinds of resources and moving women to the labor force. In Mexico, the idea of a “total war,” that is the involvement of the society into the war effort, was also present at least for the years 1914 to 1916.

There were innovations in how armies fought in battles, especially with generals setting up new techniques, new tactics, in the war itself, but also Mexico experienced high demographic costs. Approximately seven million—excuse me—approximately 1.4 million deaths occurred in the decade [to] 1920, from 1910 to 1920. Thus, in a sense, the Mexican Revolution is connected to

World War I in the way the war was fought. It was a total war, it was a huge effort in terms of resources and lives.

So, another connection of the Mexican Revolution with World War I, and perhaps one of the best-known episodes of this international interaction between the Mexican Revolution and the global context, is what is called the Zimmermann Note. Foreign—German—diplomats in Mexico were trying to find ways in which the Mexican involvement in the war would help them, maybe not directly but in indirect ways. And one of these paths could be the organization of a war between Mexico and United States so that the American army would be involved in Mexican territory rather than being involved in European soil. For that end, in early 1917, the foreign office in Berlin decided to send a note to [then] Venustiano Carranza, the leader of the winning [faction] of the Revolution. So by 1917, Carranza would be able to wage war on the United States.

So, they sent a coded message through London, then Washington, and then in Mexico City. The coded message was intercepted in Mexico City by British spies. What [the] Germans didn't know was that the British already had the codes from the beginning of the war and they were able to decipher the Zimmermann Note.

What does—what was the content of such a note? Germany proposed [to] Venustiano Carranza to wage war on the United States, and in return, Mexico would acquire—if they were victorious in such a war—Mexico would acquire the territories of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. They would also extend such an alliance to Japan. If Japan joined this alliance between Germany and Mexico, Japan would have California as a booty in that war. Once known, the Zimmermann Note was repudiated by the United States and the British government.

The United States entered World War I not only because of the Zimmermann Note—but it was an important factor—but also because Germany had decided to initiate unlimited U-boat warfare. So, there's this connection between the Mexican Revolution and World War I. So, that is another connection: we have the connection that Mexico was already an economy well-integrated in the world economy, that the Mexican oil was part of the supply of energy demanded by the contending parties in Europe, and the Zimmermann Note was certainly one of the more important elements in these global connections that Mexico had.

And finally, there was another connection related to artists. Many Mexican artists were not living in Mexico during the Revolution, the revolutionary years. In part, some of them were exiles, but some others were living in Europe and were absorbing in Europe all the new techniques, the vanguard settings of Paris, of London, of Italy or Spain. One of these artists was Diego Rivera.

With Rivera, there were other artists living abroad. But also at the end of the Revolution, at the end of the armed phases of the Revolution, and at the end of the World War I, by 1919 when finally the World War I was over and huge fighting in Mexico City was also over, many foreigners visited Mexico City. Mexico City became a city of utopia, a city of the Revolution, a city of dreams, a city of those who were being prosecuted elsewhere. They found refuge in Mexico.

All these foreigners interacted with some intellectuals in Mexico. They founded the [Mexican] Communist Party. They came from all over the world. They came from India, from Romania, from Germany, from Spain, certain from the United States. All these intellectuals living in Mexico interacted, shared some dreams, and transformed themselves, lived their dreams themselves. And then they left the city once the city no longer was the center of this utopia, no longer was the center of this place in which new ideas and experimentation took place.

So, it's really important to understand the Mexican Revolution within an international context. It's not only about battles among Mexicans, it's not about Mexican heroes, it's about a revolution, a social revolution that predated the Russian Revolution, predated the Chinese Revolution of [1911 to] 1912, and that showed that the 20th century was really beginning.