

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT FOR “LEGACIES OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION”

online at <https://spice.fsi.stanford.edu/multimedia/legacies-mexican-revolution>

On-screen text:

Legacies of the Mexican Revolution
a discussion with Aurora Gómez-Galvarriato

On-screen text:

Aurora Gómez-Galvarriato
Professor, Centro de Estudios Históricos (CEH), Colegio de México

Aurora Gómez-Galvarriato: The legacies of the Mexican Revolution are really difficult to define. It depends on when in time do you consider them. I think there were some immediate legacies and there are some legacies that last until today. There are also some legacies that were thought to be a result of the Revolution that nowadays we think they really, they really didn't exist or were just a myth.

So, talking about the immediate legacies, the Revolution was not a unified process. What really changed from 1910 to, let's say, 1920 was the elite in power. Whereas before 1910, it was more like an oligarchy, old even in terms of generation and more...even regionally, it was more localized around Mexico City. In 1920, it was a different elite. It was more middle class, it was, there were more people that were from the north of the country. And it was also more interested into, or because of the Revolution, required to bring some of the demands of the working classes, of the peasants, into the issues it had to deal with and the policies they implemented and the rules they developed. Because the experience of the Revolution showed that if they wanted to be in power, they needed to take into account the masses. So I think this really changed.

And even, of course, it was not only in Mexico that the world changed. It was also, well, all over the world because of the First World War that the countries, many countries, had to take into account the popular masses a lot more, because they, in Europe, they had required them to fight and many of them had died. So in general, the governments either became more democratic or at least took into account the popular demands more, and this also happened in Mexico.

And another important difference that is related to this is the ideas about race and about who are Mexicans. After the Revolution, it became like more of a consensus that Indians were part of the nation, and that Mexico was a *mestizo*, like a mixed blood, nation and that this was something like an attribute. It was something that made us Mexicans better. There was the idea of forging the “cosmic race”—that Mexico had European, African, and Asiatic blood—and that this made Mexicans really special. So even in the arts, [they] like the Indian culture was embraced, perhaps in a very mythical way or idealistic way, but it happened.

And I think this is one of the legacies that has lived longer. Because although there's racism in Mexico, of course, it is not ... there is not an idea of race like there is in the U.S., for example, that it's something that you even write down in forms, right? In Mexico, there is the idea that everyone is some kind of mixed blood and that that is okay. There is a very, of course, it's a very unequal society and race is related to class, so it doesn't mean that there are no differences. But I think this makes Mexico so like more integrated than countries like Peru or Bolivia or Ecuador, countries that also have a large indigenous population.

Another important legacy was nationalism. And this was—this is still important—but it lasted at least until the 1980s and globalization came, came in and now it's not so—like there's—it's

some issue at debate in Mexico. But at least until the 1980s, nationalism was something very important for all governments to embrace, and it was related also to industrial development and the attitude of Mexico towards trade and economic growth. But also in terms of culture, in terms of education, and...well, after the Mexican Revolution, governments were a lot more nationalistic than before. Although, in many ways, this is something really that you can also find in the *porfiriato*. But at least in the way it was framed, it was stronger afterwards.

Something that was not a legacy of the Revolution was a democratic government. It was something that Madero and the first revolution, the first revolutionary heroes, were like the ideal of having a democratic government was one of the goals that the Revolution sought. And it was not something it achieved. Although the governments that came after the Revolution, like embraced and [were in] embraced more social classes and this legitimized them more, it was not really democratic governments—although it can be said that until 1940, there were some kind of democracy or like, if it was like a matter of degrees, Mexico was more democratic than it became after 1940 at least until the 1990s. And also, there was some separation of or some role of Congress and freedom of press larger than after [the] 1940s. So sometimes we think that the way the government, the Mexican government, was in the 1960s–1980s was the way, was exactly the same as in the 1930s. But this really changed.

Another legacy of the Mexican Revolution was that for the working population, either rural or industrial/urban, there was really an important improvement in their standards of living, at least in the short and medium run. For industrial workers, there were, there was, an important increase in real wages that came about because of the new freedom of organization in the labor movement. And also, they got different benefits that are stated in the Mexican Constitution and then placed in labor laws.

And for the rural population, well, land was distributed. There was an agrarian reform that was particularly important in the 1930s. And those families in the 1930s—either of workers, urban workers, or rural workers—really lived an improvement in their living conditions. They got better access to education, better access to health. So, I think if we looked at the Mexican Revolution around 1940, we would see that there were many changes that were really good for the people. And then if we look at it from like a more recent year, this starts to fade away.

Many of the benefits that the popular masses got as a result of the Revolution were in many ways diluted after the 1940s because of an extreme population explosion that took place between 1940 and 1960. And this basically meant that the land that was distributed was not enough anymore for the size of the families. So their plots became very small and unable to support the population.

And then in the industrial sector, the urban jobs, there were just not enough for that quantity of people demanding jobs. So, a very large percent[age] of the population started working in the informal sector, just selling things on the streets or doing jobs that were not really productive. And at the end, this meant that although the laws for workers were very good, at least half of the population is not really...does not have a formal job. So those laws really don't—doesn't matter anything for them—don't matter anything for them. So, in many ways when we look at the Mexican Revolution from today's standpoint, it seems that nothing...that all those benefits didn't really take place. But they did.

Another problem, and this is a problem that is perhaps like one of the more difficult junctures, one of the most difficult problems that we need to solve in the whole world, is how are we—like what sort of regime do we build—in order for workers to be able to have a decent standard of living, and at the same time produce things that can compete internationally, that are good

enough in quality and in price in order to be able to be sold everywhere. And this was also the case in Mexico.

Many of the benefits that came about during the first decades of the Revolution had to do with a protected economy in which workers had wages and had benefits that didn't allow the country to use the best technology or to produce goods that were cheap and competitive enough in global terms. So when the economy opened up, these factories went bankrupt and these jobs were lost. And then in order to produce things that are globally competitive, we just have to be very low. So, this is really something that is like a trap that is not only Mexico but the whole world that is facing it. And well, these are also some of the reasons why the legacy of the Revolution diluted through time and does not last until today.

However, I think the Mexican Constitution of 1917 is still a legacy of the Revolution that in some ways survives until today. And that is a document that in a way has been able to keep together the nation in a more or less peaceful environment for all these years. And in contrast to other Latin American countries that in the 1950s, '60s, '70s faced military coups and periods like very harsh military dictatorships, that was not the case in Mexico. So I think that was like, through Mexican history, part of the legacy.

At the same time, when one compares Mexico to other countries, for example Brazil, that did not have a revolution like the Mexican Revolution, then one realizes that many of the changes that we attribute to the Mexican Revolution perhaps would have taken place anyway. And perhaps also through like a slower more like reform process rather than a revolutionary process, these changes are able to be adopted like in a more long-lasting way.

So, I think it is always better to be able to solve the problems that a nation has in a peaceful way. And when a country gets to the point when only things can be solved by weapons, it's always something that costs a lot, costs a lot in terms of lives, in terms of economic development. So, it's really not the best way to solve problems. And I think that's another legacy of the Mexican Revolution in some ways: that it is better for Mexico, at least that's how we understand it, to try to provide channels of negotiation, channels of change and reform, that do not lead to another civil war.