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“The Three Human Races”

Francisco Bulnes

Formally trained as a civil engineer, Francisco Bulnes (1847–1924) came to be widely known as a leading Mexican historian of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His extensive travels took him to Japan at a time when American and English merchants were in the process of securing a foothold there. His experiences and ruminations led him to categorize human races by the kind of staple foods they consumed, a notion which is reminiscent of racist theories quite in vogue at that time. In fact, some writers have categorized Bulnes a reactionary, an evaluation which loses ground when his published works are submitted to a rigorous examination. Difficult to classify ideologically, Bulnes unflinchingly recognized the need for order, stability, and the restructuring of Mexican society as a means to national reorganization made necessary by international power struggles. In this regard he was particularly sensitive to the new and vibrant United States imperialism flourishing at the cost of weaker nations, a concern anything but irrelevant in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The present reading, composed during the *porfiriato*, not only calls for continued order but it also supports the strong-handed regime. Curiously reminiscent of Barreda's views, Bulnes more boldly and unmistakably calls for the formation of a “new” Mexican and for the total emancipation from a colonial mentality. Collectively learning how to kill efficiently, instead of being killed, is proof of independence and self-sufficiency, he affirms. The following selection is taken from *El porvenir de las naciones latinoamericanas ante las conquistas recientes de Europa y los Estados Unidos* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Mariano Nava, 1899) as quoted in Abelardo Villegas ed., *Positivismo y porfirismo* (Mexico City: Sep/Setentas, 1972), pp. 140–43.

History also teaches us that the race of wheat [Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Spaniards, North Americans] most easily conquered the race of corn [Aztecs, Incas], and with even greater ease has subjugated the race of men who eat mostly rice [Chinese]. It is necessary to point out

that the race of corn could, in turn, dominate without grave resistance the race of rice which expresses supreme weakness.

Persons who are little prone to study, meditation and reason, wildly confuse weakness with cowardice. Every coward is a weakling in an armed struggle, but this does not mean that every weakling is a coward. The weakness of the races of corn and rice cannot be attributed to the numerical factor because millions of individuals have been conquered by small handfuls of ferocious bandits gifted with an epic audacity and an astonishing energy. One can say of the aboriginal American Empire that thieves made off with it as with a mare, or as with prizes in a small-town carnival. The races of corn and rice have always held in their favor the numerical factor.

What does that weakness depend on? On the climate? China is the most populated country and the weakest, and it enjoys a climate similar to Europe's with the exception of a small tropical region.

The Inca and Aztec empires possess immense extensions at high altitudes whose climate is far from being an exhilarating one. The weakness of the corn and rice races has not depended on the lack of population density. The weakness of the Aztecs and the Incas did not stem from a lack of resources either, because they demonstrated an access to a metallic wealth superior to the most powerful nation in Europe in the sixteenth century.

In war it is not enough to know how to die;
it is necessary to know how to destroy.

The weakness of the races of corn and rice is not due to their soldiers not knowing how to die, rather it is due to their ignorance about killing in sufficiently large quantities in order to destroy their enemies [editor's emphasis]. More specifically, it is the lot of the barbarous or savage men to die like flies, to use a vulgar expression; an unfortunate art of the weak nations. The strong nations know how to kill, militarily speaking, by economizing on their own blood, as much as possible, and wasting the blood of the enemy to the fullest extent. The strong nations understand and practice the science of killing and leave the employment of the science of knowing how to die, based on rigorous military discipline, for exceptional cases.

At times, the art of knowing how to die in the weak nations serves the purpose of safeguarding a sense of honor. . . . The art of knowing how to die is cheap when placed next to the high science of learning how to kill, a science which is exclusive to the rich and progressive nations.

Knowing how to kill and knowing how to reduce national life to a juridical formula was the only science . . . which permitted the Romans to exploit the world like a honeycomb. To know how to kill militarily is in modern times a science as precise, as profound, as astronomy and celestial mechanics; to know how to kill militarily is to apply and to perfect the most direct means of exterminating the enemy and forcing him to display his talents of knowing how to die in the shortest time possible, the least cost, the least possible fatigue, and the most minimal self-employment of the art of dying.

In order to know how to die when there is no discipline among the combatants, personal will is all that is necessary; in order for a nation to know how to kill as required by modern war methods, it needs leaders who are trained and skillful, it needs officers who are trained, it needs soldiers who can manage and control their arms, their movements, their emotions, and above all, it requires a lot of discipline in the soldiers, much more in the officers, and exaggeratedly so in the leaders. . . . In order to know how to kill in the nineteenth century it is indispensable to have become outstanding in peacetime, to dominate one's environment with admirable science and exuberant labor.

. . . .

In a civilized nation, the State must educate leaders and officers, and society must spontaneously form its militias in the same way that it admirably prepares swimmers, hunters, experts in fencing, target shooting, billiard players, amateur bullfighters, daring horsemen, and champions at boxing and gymnastics. A good soldier must be a vigorous and healthy man with a lot of love for his profession, he must be intelligent so that he might obey like a Jesuit, and he must be a connoisseur in a field of art commended to him by military science. It is the duty of the good citizen to become a good soldier even when there is no state of war, because the qualities of a good soldier are very healthy and useful for the maximum development of muscular work.