



SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1223 07808 9639

# BANDIT NATION

A HISTORY OF OUTLAWS  
AND CULTURAL STRUGGLE  
IN MEXICO, 1810-1920

[REDACTED] In one way or another, all narratives about Mexican banditry, whether contemporary or historical, are linked to social and political struggles—continuing to this day—about what it means to be a Mexican.

Consider, for example, how the best-known of Mexican bandits,

Francisco "Pancho" Villa, came to enter the pantheon of officially sanctioned heroes of the revolution. Villa is now interred, along with other revolutionary contemporaries, in the Monumento de la Revolución. But this was a long-belated acknowledgment. For forty-three years after Villa's death in 1923, the Mexican state refused to recognize his revolutionary credentials. In 1915, when revolutionary unity collapsed into a fratricidal civil war, Villa ended up on the losing side. Afterward, the victorious faction coalesced into a ruling clique known as the Revolutionary Family. The winners anathematized Villa as a counter-revolutionary bandit until 1966. In a culture where patriarchal relations and patronage still dominate social and political life, Villa was the black sheep, the unrecognized bastard son of the revolution. So why is he now a hero? There can be little doubt that his rehabilitation was an attempt to shore up an increasingly unpopular regime. But it was also a triumph for the tenacity of the rural and urban poor, who refused to forget a man they regarded as a more ideal patriarch than most of Mexico's post-revolutionary leaders. Vast numbers of lower-class Mexicans insisted on remembering Villa as a champion of the poor, a man who protected the interests of his *gente*, or *los de abajo*. They ignored the official censure of Villa and clung to his memory, inscribing a popular mythology about him in corridos that are performed in Mexico to this day. These memories are so closely intertwined with the post-revolutionary aspirations of Mexico's dispossessed classes that oppositional movements of the political left and right have identified themselves with Villa's legacy throughout the twentieth century. No other historical figure in Mexico can lay claim to such enduring popular appeal, with the exception of Emiliano Zapata, whose name is now invoked to impart meaning and prestige to the indigenous peasant guerrillas in Chiapas.

The Lerdo government completed construction of a railway line linking Mexico City with Veracruz in 1876. This encouraged the heralds of Mexican progress, but doubt returned the minds of foreigners when Díaz overthrew Lerdo that same year. This raised concern that Mexico might return to instability, but Díaz turned out to be a masterful politician who quickly consolidated his power and continued the campaign for Mexican modernization. All the same, Mexico's negative international image was a thorny problem for Díaz and his colleagues, for their nation required European and North American investment and loans to rebuild the economy. Most potential investors were unwilling to export significant amounts of capital without stronger evidence that Díaz could provide internal security. Díaz achieved this by building on the foundations established by Juárez and Lerdo. He strengthened the rurales and promoted an image of improving order in Mexico. Díaz also sought to burnish the credibility of his regime abroad by emphasizing the European genesis of the national elite. Soon foreign entrepreneurs and their agents began to visit Mexico in search of investment opportunities. Among them was a New York promoter named William Henry Bishop, who spent several months touring Mexico in 1881. The experience so surprised and impressed Bishop that he published an account of his journey in an effort to persuade investors to export their capital south of the Rio Grande.

Bishop understood that the dominant Anglo-Saxon discourse linked Mexico's reputation for banditry to a cluster of stereotypes that portrayed Mexican men as inherently backward and lazy. Anglo-Saxon elites assumed that "half-savage" Mexican males were incapable of civilized behavior and the work ethic needed to transform capital into profit. Anticipating the reluctance of investors, Bishop's counterargument acknowledged Mexican deficiencies but denied that they were "the result of a native incapacity or lack of appetite for gain." Instead, Bishop blamed "the physical conformation of the country," which could be surmounted with adequate capital and the construc-

tion of an expanded railroad network. This would employ idle men, reduce banditry, and facilitate the movement of people and goods in a land that lacked navigable rivers and safe roads. Bishop reminded his readers that their negative impressions of Mexico were fashioned by "school geography, and the brief telegrams in the morning papers announcing new revolutions . . . dimly isolated pistol-shots fired by brigands, and high-sounding *pronunciamentos* [*sic*] . . . accompanying the overthrow from the Presidency of General this by General that." Bishop insisted that such notions may have been true in the past, but Mexico was rising anew, soon to be traversed with railways built by a liberal government in collaboration with U.S. capital. Once a backwater of bandits and revolutionaries, Mexico had reached the borders of modernity and civilization and was becoming a land where "brigands were . . . dislodged from their fastness, the revolutions had ceased, and a reign of peace and security had begun."<sup>43</sup>

Like Evans, Bishop was helping to shape a new Anglo-Saxon discourse. It did not abandon patriarchal values or racial prejudices, but it did argue that Mexico had progressive potential—even if it never reached a level of civilization equal to that enjoyed by the United States or England. This argument turned on two paternalistic assumptions: first, that race mixture had not erased the Mexican affinity for European culture, since the presence of Spanish blood meant that the nation still produced strong and civilized men ready to lead Mexico to modernity; and second, that these men required cultural and political support from civilized nations along with capital, judiciously invested. However, the old discourse proved durable, for even in retreat it still appealed to doubters who dismissed Mexico's potential. After a visit in 1879, Canadian lawyer H. C. R. Becher wrote that Mexico was a beautiful but unhappy land burdened with "turmoil, robbery, bloodshed, [and] misgovernment" which "left its people seemingly yet unfit, rightly to govern their country or themselves." He admitted that, under Díaz, "[perhaps] Mexico was never so free from robbery and brigandage as it is now, but the material for both are present in city and country, and both exist." Yet he felt that even if Mexico avoided slipping back into its turbulent past, the

country could never do better than offer a fine field for the romantic escapades of adventurers. It certainly would never compare with Canada, where "life and liberty are safe; the law is always supreme and carried out by its own officers; the people God-fearing, law-abiding." The temperate Canadian climate, if a little cool in winter, made "its people strong, hardy, energetic," quite unlike the torrid heat and natural abundance of Mexico, which only induced laziness and a lack of enterprise among its citizens.<sup>44</sup>

The Porfirian regime was quite mindful that opinions like Becher's still carried weight abroad, so Díaz and his supporters organized an international public relations campaign to reinforce the regime's apparent durability with a veneer of cultural credibility. For this they recruited foreigners and Mexicans to lobby opinion makers and policy makers abroad and to write foreign-language "books, pamphlets, and articles that were directly or indirectly subsidized by Porfirian authorities."<sup>45</sup> They wanted to show the world that Mexico was becoming more European and less "Indian," more civilized and less dangerous. The Mexican elites felt ambivalent about their mestizo heritage. Many intellectuals—and especially the literary elites—used *mestizaje* (race-mixture) to elaborate a national origin myth that privileged the glories of Aztec civilization as a fount of *lo mexicano*. However, most of the elites also shared the Anglo-Saxon disdain of nineteenth-century Mexican indigenous people as a relic of barbarism. As Mark Wasserman points out, the Mexican elites "labored mightily to disguise the nation's Indian heritage."<sup>46</sup> A case in point was the chameleon-like transformation of Díaz in the 1880s. Born to a Mixtec mother and a mestizo father, Díaz was adept at "whitening" himself for foreign audiences. He could embody mestizo nationalism within Mexico while simultaneously presenting an acceptably European visage to the outside world. Thus, if the bandit represented a mestizo atavist to the Anglo-Saxon world, Díaz symbolized the assertion of Mexico's European heritage and the hope for civilization and progress. Soon, the success of his own publicity as a cultured man and a stable ruler helped unleash the flow of foreign capital into Mexico.

Ultimately, the lure of profit also overwhelmed the apprehensions

of doubters. Díaz showed enough stability to encourage risk-taking entrepreneurs. During the Porfiriato, about one-third of foreign investment went into building and operating the twelve thousand miles of track that sprouted between 1880 and 1910. This dramatic expansion of railways sparked a process of uneven economic development that left some regions untouched but transformed other areas into a showcase of progress for the Mexican government. Accompanying the rush to invest, a chorus of voices in England and the United States joined William Henry Bishop in praise of Mexican progress. Some, like Frederick Ober, a former ornithologist and explorer, acquired new careers lecturing on the advantages of investing in Mexico. Ober wrote in 1887 that this country was developing rapidly "on the lines of progress and prosperity" and offered a "field for *ultimate emprise* of exceeding value to the United States." In a similar vein, the veteran English travelers Rev. E. E. Hale and Miss Susan Hale enthused over the expansion of railroads, which assisted the "energetic efforts of wise and liberal statesmen of Mexico to put their country on a level with the most prosperous and civilized nations of the world." Foreign boosters of Mexico energetically lauded Díaz especially for reducing the plague of banditry that had long since been one of the greatest fears confronting anyone who visited Mexico or contemplated investing there. Some, however, were careful not to completely gild the lily. Ober cautioned potential tourists that they would still encounter hordes of beggars, known as *léperos*, whom he described as the "vil-est specimen of humanity, the most degraded, most devoid of principle and honor, to be found on the American continent." However, other promoters effortlessly crossed the line from effusive enthusiasm to hyperbole and wishful thinking. Thomas L. Rogers, commissioned by U.S. investors in the Mexican Central Railroad to encourage commerce and travel on their line, minimized the danger of crime. Rogers urged his fellow citizens to leave their fear at home when they visited Mexico. Although everyone packed a pistol for personal security in Mexico, he explained, "the ratio of criminals is not large." In fact, Rogers found that most Mexicans were good-natured and polite, assuring his readers that they would "never find a more quiet

and orderly crowd anywhere” than in the markets of Mexico City. Even Rogers, however, could not match the unrestrained optimism of Charles Lummis, a U.S. promoter and author, who declared in 1898 that, from “a state of anarchy tempered by brigandage . . . [Mexico] has graduated to be the most compact and unified nation in the New World.” To the disbeliever, Lummis insisted that “today Mexico is . . . the safest country in America” and that only “those who seriously knew the country in the old days can at all conceive the change. . . . There was no touring back then, and nowhere was travel more unsafe. By every country road . . . the *bandido* robbed and murdered. Naturally. There was nothing else for him to do. . . . There were even Lady Turpins, and some of them were geniuses. . . . There were no railroads, no telegraphs, practically no commerce; at the bottom of all, no security.”<sup>47</sup>

These late-nineteenth-century promoters and adventurers did not deny that Mexico had been a half-barbarian nation of bandits. However, they did insist that this reputation was no longer so well deserved. As personified in the figure of Díaz, Mexican manhood was approaching redemption, while the bandit, long a familiar figure in the Mexican landscape, stood on the brink of extermination. This apparent advance toward civilization gratified foreigners who were now able to travel by train, in much-enhanced security, across great expanses in Mexico, including the once-hazardous route from Veracruz to Mexico City. Bishop informed his reading public in the United States that “the ordinary traveller runs little more, if any, danger of robbery than at home.” The Hales agreed with Bishop, observing that it “is moreover only within a few years that travelling has been at all safe in Mexico, on account of brigands and robbers who infested the mountain passes. . . . A liberal government, wisely encouraging the civilizing influence of railroad construction . . . [made] travelling in Mexico . . . as safe as anywhere. Travellers’ tales of bold robberies in diligences still float in the air, but these may safely now be considered as tales of the past. . . . Banditti and locomotives do not belong together.”<sup>48</sup>

Still, even the most ardent boosters of the “new” Mexico were not

always fully inoculated from fear of bandits. During Bishop’s first railroad trip from Veracruz to Mexico City, he and other foreigners experienced a brief panic when “[all] at once there entered . . . so lawless and bizarre-looking a figure that the French engineer sent out to report on mines to his principals in Paris thought it prudent to descend hastily and seek quarters elsewhere. The rest of us . . . were . . . in no small trepidation.” The object of such alarm was a young and wealthy Mexican hacendado outfitted in the classic charro gear, “a short black jacket, under which showed a navy revolver, in a sash; tight pantaloons, adorned up and down with rows of silver coins; a great felt sombrero, bordered and encircled with silver braid . . . a red handkerchief knotted around his neck . . . [and] silver spurs, weighing a pound or two, upon boots with exaggerated high and narrow heels.” This was, of course, the costume favored by the Plateados, romantic images of whom had circulated widely among foreigners since 1861. As it happened, the new passenger was an amiable chap who offered cigars and pleasant conversation to his much-relieved companions. A chastened Bishop excused his initial reaction by remarking that the “traveler is rare who arrives in Mexico for the first time without a head full of stories of violence.”<sup>49</sup>

The scale of banditry had diminished, but it had not disappeared, and some travelers were unable to shed their fears and prejudices. A. F. Bandelier, a U.S. historian and anthropologist who worked in Mexico in 1883, deeply despised the Nahuatl people, whom he described as natural thieves and murderers. He also dismissed the Mayas as “man-eating apes.” Overall, though, most Anglo-Saxon travelers applauded the Díaz regime for its effort to reduce crime. Ober had the pleasure of stating that “the present government has taken energetic measures looking toward a gradual reformation, if possible, of this worst portion of the criminal class, and the beneficial bullet has disposed of many of those who indulged in the pastime of the highwayman.” The ley fuga, judiciously applied by the rurales, was removing bandits from this world and discouraging others from pursuing an increasingly dangerous profession, or at least so it seemed to Ober and like-minded foreigners who were busily crafting a new discourse that

credited Díaz with single-handedly eliminating banditry and putting his nation firmly on the path of progress and civilization.<sup>50</sup>

In 1906, a hagiographic version of the Porfirian myth appeared in a biography of the Mexican president authored by Mrs. E. Alec-Tweedy, a middle-class Englishwoman associated with the network of foreign publicists sponsored by the Mexican government. When Díaz came to power, she wrote, Mexico was characterized by "ruin, absolute and complete, an entire contempt for the law, the public highways controlled by outlaws, all authority ignored, the treasury depleted." Díaz was determined, however, to rebuild Mexico without resort to the large-scale violence that had hitherto characterized its history throughout the nineteenth century. He consolidated his regime peacefully, although he did reserve violent measures for dealing with the dangerous classes. "Outlaws captured red-handed were shot with no ceremony," and riots "were put down with severity." She justified these heavy-handed measures, since "Mexico required not only confidence abroad but internal peace. This would never be assured so long as bands of outlaws and assassins roamed the land." However, Díaz wisely realized that violence alone could not stem the tide of lawlessness. "Dealing with these men was a problem of difficulty. They were the product of their time and country. They were bandits because their fathers and grandfathers had been bandits before them, and had known no other life." Consequently, Díaz happened upon another strategy, "which would have been impossible in any other country." As a former general, he realized that these men might be excellent recruits for service in defending law and order: "They were men of fine physique, used to a hard life, trained to withstand the most tiring marches, and knowing every hill and dale in the land." The wily Díaz therefore gambled on a bold measure and "offered amnesty, with something they had never experienced before, namely, regular employment. They would be drafted into a rural police, and given pay at a higher rate than any other cavalrymen in the world. These men, the fomenters of disorder, revolution, theft and riot, were henceforward to devote their energies to subduing disorder."<sup>51</sup>

In this myth, Díaz embodied the masculine ideal of a new Mexico

confidently striding toward modernity at the dawn of the twentieth century. His credentials were as perfect as Anglo-Saxon elites could hope for. He was strong, intelligent, civilized, and officially dedicated to liberal economic and political principles. His regime even embraced positivism as an official creed to express the state's commitment to order and progress. Foreign observers seized on the president's personal history as evidence that the masses of Mexican people themselves might be capable of progressive development. Díaz had been born to a humble family and was orphaned at a young age, but he prevailed over these disadvantages to acquire an education and to become a decorated general and military hero. This was the classic rags-to-riches tale much beloved in the Anglo-Saxon world, and it allowed Díaz to play his role on the international stage as the personalized epitome of Mexican manhood. In 1908, U.S. journalist James Creelman wrote that "there is no figure in the whole world who is more romantic or heroic than that soldier-statesman whose adventurous youth outshines the pages of Dumas and whose iron hand has transformed the warlike, ignorant, superstitious and impoverished Mexican masses . . . into a strong, progressive, pacifist and prosperous nation that honors its debts."<sup>52</sup>

In the new Anglo-Saxon discourse, the myth of Díaz the nation builder finally began to displace the older discourse which had linked banditry to notions of inevitable backwardness. Moreover, this was a discourse that the Mexican elites had helped to shape. Over the decades, the Mexican ruling class had developed its own critique of banditry, partly from the need to answer the Anglo-Saxon view, but also from the necessity of charting its own path out of a quagmire. By the late nineteenth century, the Porfirian regime went on a propaganda offensive against foreign hostility and met with success. All the same, the Anglo-Saxon discourse remained foreign property. Even though it now reached more positive conclusions about Mexican progress, it still measured Mexico by gender and ethnic hierarchies that privileged the Anglo-Saxon world. The new discourse no longer dismissed Mexico as irredeemably backward, but it still entertained the conceit of Anglo-Saxon superiority. It continued to imagine the



Mexican national character as a masculine entity, but it no longer insisted that Mexican manhood was inherently degraded. With the bandit in decline and with mounting foreign investments fueling economic growth, Mexico seemed ready to embrace the standard of civilization set by Europeans and North Americans. But elements of the old Anglo-Saxon discourse still hovered over Mexico. Indeed, it would return with renewed vigor and drive the Mexico boosters into a headlong retreat when the Mexican Revolution erupted in 1911. Therefore, the last word must belong to Hans Gadow, an English naturalist who toured Mexico between 1902 and 1904. He published his memoirs in 1908, the same year that Creelman's article appeared in *Pearson's Magazine*, and three years before the Mexican Revolution reduced the Porfirian edifice to rubble. Gadow appreciated Díaz's achievements, but he hedged his bets when it came to his personal safety, advising his readers, "[You] do not need any arms whilst travelling in Mexico, but when you do, you want them badly."<sup>53</sup>

## 4. With Her Pistols in Her Holster

### *Bandits and Corridos*

The usurers trembled and the cowards ran  
from the well-aimed attacks of Bernal and his band.

—“Corrido de Heraclio Bernal”

Pantoja the bandit had a bestial nature;  
he dishonored maidens, and ordered their whipping.

—“Corrido de Guadalupe Pantoja”

As we have seen, nineteenth-century Mexican novelists saw banditry as an icon of the backwardness that obstructed the nation's progress. As members of the elite, these writers used the imaginary bandit to measure the readiness of the masses for citizenship in a modern republic. However, the rural and urban poor had different notions. Whereas novelists saw the bandit as an object for suppression, many lower-class Mexicans entertained a more flexible attitude that led them to celebrate the bandit as a heroic figure. The lower classes embedded their ideas in *corridos* (popular ballads) that challenged the narrative strategies of the elite discourse on outlawry. An analysis of *corridos* shows that the rural and urban poor were less concerned about their own readiness for citizenship and more interested in asserting lower-class notions of justice that often defied the authority of the state. In moralizing about the imagined exploits of outlaws, *corridos* voiced the grievances, hopes, and expectations of the lower classes. Although *corridos* often portrayed bandits as heroic figures, this was not always the case. Lower-class Mexicans also reserved the right to condemn the behavior of brigands who violated popular norms of right behavior.

Bandit corridos are not accurate chronicles. They embody memory and opinion and tell tales that suit the subjectivity of the author. Thus, for historians, corridos are valuable documents because they offer insights into lower-class opinions, values, and practices. Since most of the rural and urban poor were illiterate, they left behind few written documents about their lives and feelings. Corridos emerged out of the oral tradition in Mexico, and we would not have access to them were it not for publishers and folklorists who transcribed and published lower-class ballads during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These remnants of oral culture reveal that lower-class Mexicans mobilized notions of gender, class, and ethnicity to discuss bandits and to elaborate their ideas about justice. [REDACTED]

## The Corrido as Source and Vox Populi

Most of the bandit ballads analyzed in this chapter are corridos, with the exception of two in the style of a *decima*, also a popular form of ballad but structured in ten-line stanzas rather than the four stanzas that typified the corrido. Since these ballads were primarily an oral form of culture, our knowledge about them derives from two main sources in literary culture. The first are collections of broadsheets (known as *hojas sueltas*, loose-leaves, or *hojas volantes*, handbills) that were published in Mexico City print shops operated by Antonio Vane-gas Arroyo (from 1880 onward) and by Eduardo Guerrero (from the Mexican Revolution onward). Many are available through reproductions that have been studied for this chapter.<sup>1</sup> Other corridos were preserved by musicologists and folklorists, such as Higinio Vázquez Santa Ana, who began transcribing popular music during the revolution. These sources are invaluable for any researcher seeking insights into the mentality of the lower classes during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but this does not mean that they are unproblematic. They are fragmentary, incomplete, and divorced from the immediacy of composition and performance. Consequently, we cannot simply assume their authenticity as a complete and unequivocal vox populi.

Nineteenth-century corridos are available only in published form, which means that this stock of artifacts survived to the present day by passing through the hands of intermediaries. This includes printers who transcribed and published the material, enthusiasts who collected it, and archivists who preserved it. We have to assume that the existing stock is incomplete and that some of it has been distorted in the process of publication and preservation. This does not mean that

these artifacts are unreliable but only that caution is warranted in analyzing them. Thus we need to know something about those who published corridos. Vanegas Arroyo is the most important source, since his broadsheets constitute by far the largest share of preserved corridos. In addition, scholars have studied Vanegas Arroyo more than any other nineteenth-century printer, so we know somewhat more about his business.

There was a very high public demand for corridos in broadsheet in the late nineteenth century, so these items constituted a large volume of sales for Vanegas Arroyo's business. This had to do with the appeal and effectiveness of corridos in communicating news and opinion to the lower classes. Vanegas Arroyo knew this, and he made sure that his business kept pace with demand and maintained its share of the market. He employed a stable of writers who supplemented his stock of lower-class favorites with a steady supply of new and original ballads, including bandit corridos. These authors knew their audience and were able to compose corridos that resonated with lower-class sensibilities. At the same time, it would be misleading to describe Vanegas Arroyo as a radical or populist printer. There were elements of that in his personality, but he was also an entrepreneur who published pro-government propaganda sheets that mythologized Porfirio Díaz and the rurales. The politics of this famous printer are still a matter of debate. Some scholars see Vanegas Arroyo as a critic of the social order, while others see him as an opportunist.<sup>2</sup> The truth probably lies somewhere in between. At the least, we can conclude that Vanegas Arroyo balanced the plebeian sensibilities of his market against the limitations of Porfirian censorship. On more than one occasion, authorities closed down his shop and jailed his writers and artists for publishing materials that were too critical of the government. However, Vanegas Arroyo's survival also depended on satisfying a market that was mainly plebeian, illiterate, and predisposed to embrace the bandit corrido and its heroes. Whatever Vanegas Arroyo's actual politics, this had the effect of turning his shop into an arena of ideological and cultural struggle between the elites and the lower classes.

The market circulation of broadsheets involved direct sales to the

public and wholesale distribution through peddlers, merchants, and performers, who then retailed the broadsheets to audiences in markets, at bullfights and cockfights, or anywhere else that lower-class Mexicans gathered in large numbers.<sup>3</sup> Mexico City was the largest single market, due to its population and its function as a center for the pilgrimages of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans. It is believed that some printers had access to an even more "vast and complex market" that reached into "the farthest corners of the nation."<sup>4</sup> If so, this meant that broadsheets played a role in cultivating the development of shared values among communities of lower-class Mexicans who were otherwise geographically dispersed and isolated from one another. It is certainly the case that corridos from distant regions migrated into Mexico City and then found their way into print. Paradoxically, most broadsheet consumers were illiterates who depended on friends or neighbors with enough education to recite or sing the verses. Mexicans purchased broadsheets as mementos of notable events such as executions, disasters, or the death of a famous personality. It was also common for unlettered Mexicans to buy broadsheets simply because they liked the illustrations that accompanied the verses. Vanegas Arroyo and other printers employed artists such as José Guadalupe Posada to enhance broadsheets with visual images to complement the written narrative. They were also quick to produce broadsheets for any event that was sure to attract large crowds. This is why the U.S. traveler Bayard Taylor saw young boys hawking broadsheets in Guanajuato on the eve of a bandit's execution. In any event, these sheets were inexpensive and sold briskly at one or two centavos. In producing and circulating corridos, printers and performers surely influenced the message and the medium, but their relationship to the market was never one-sided. The corrido developed out of complex interactions among publishers, performers, and market demand.

According to musicologist Vicente T. Mendoza, "the corrido is a genre of the epic-lyric narrative in quartets of variable rhymes . . . a literary form that is supported by a musical phrase generally composed of four parts, which related those events that are of powerful interest to the masses." The term *corrido* is the past participle of the

verb *correr* (to run, or to flow), but the actual origins of the name remain obscure. Scholars have debated various theories, the most amusing (and undoubtedly apocryphal) of which are offered by folklorist Edward Larocque Tinker, who writes that the name may have emerged during the colonial period when the Holy Tribunal of the Mexican Inquisition denounced these popular ballads for “scandalously *running* through the city.” Tinker also points to a more “vulgar explanation” which proposes that the “verses were so libelous that the *cancioneros* sang them and then had to run for their lives.” Somewhat more prosaically, Mendoza believes that the term derived from its melody, which typically “ran or flowed so easily and gaily,” while Alvaro Custodio found that the “etymology of *corrido* comes from the Andalusian *corrió* even though the two are quite distinct musical forms.”<sup>5</sup>

It is rather more certain that the *corrido* evolved structurally from the Castilian *romance* and maintained the latter’s emphasis on an epic-lyric type of narrative dealing with a wide range of subjects that constitutes an oral form of reporting and commentary on current affairs and historical events. In Mexico, where the population was overwhelmingly illiterate throughout the nineteenth century, the *corrido* served multiple functions, acting as a de facto oral newspaper; a source of entertainment and gossip; an instruction manual on behavior, morality, and religious instruction; and a repository of popular history. Mendoza went so far as to describe the *corrido* as a vehicle that created “a history by and for the people.” Most *corridos* circulated orally, although print assumed an increasingly important role in the late nineteenth century when small publishing firms began to issue *corridos* as broadsheets.

The *corrido* developed its recognizably modern form between 1875 and 1910, but it emerged from a longer tradition of narrative ballads that diffused throughout Mexico via diverse channels. Many ballads were composed by soldiers during the various conflicts that convulsed Mexico, and these songs not only traveled with armies as they marched back and forth across the country but also followed soldiers home when they were demobilized. *Corridos* were still a part of sol-

diering when the radical U.S. journalist John Reed traveled with Pancho Villa's army during the Mexican Revolution. Reed's account is filled with vivid portraits of soldiers singing ballads, both traditional and extemporaneous, while marching, fighting, resting, and dancing. In one passage, Reed describes a man who "broke out into a droning, irregular tune, such as always accompanies the lower-class ballads that spring up in thousands on every occasion." Equally important were the *cancioneros* (singers) who made their living by traveling from town to town, performing anywhere they could find a crowd. One might appear in a market at an opportune moment and simply sing, while his helpers circulated through the gathering crowd selling broadsheets. In larger cities these troubadours formed bands of *mariachis*, who dressed as charros and who played the *violines*, *jaranas*, *guitarras*, and *guitarrones* which still typify these performers. According to Tinker, mariachis acquired their name during Maximilian's Empire because they performed at marriages between French soldiers and Mexican women; the French term (*mariage*) for *wedding* became corrupted in the Spanish tongue into *mariachi*, and the name apparently stuck.<sup>6</sup>

However, we also need to ask what happened when the patrón turned out to be dishonorable and reciprocity could not shield subalterns from abuse. Periodically, conditions became so dire that they provoked outbursts of rebellion. The honor codes then drew lower-class men and women into insurgency and helped them to justify their acts; they rebelled in order to provide for their dependents. Authorities inevitably crushed these revolts and criminalized some or all of the participants. In an urban setting, too, the honor codes allowed lower-class men and women to justify theft if this meant providing for one's dependents. For many lower-class Mexicans, life itself blurred distinctions between criminality and right behavior. More broadly, then, these were the social conditions and power dynamics that made it possible for lower-class Mexicans to associate some outlaws with acts of justified rebellion. When official justice so plainly seemed to advantage the privileged classes against the poor, it was not difficult for many Mexicans to accept the idea that banditry offered them more justice than did the formal legal mechanisms of the state. Bandit corridos codified and expressed such beliefs.

All the same, it is curious that lower-class culture imagined most of its bandit-heroes at a time when, in the late nineteenth century, real-life banditry was in decline. However it might be explained, the cultural popularity of the bandit-hero irritated and dismayed elite intellectuals, who saw this as proof that the lower classes were ignorant, backward, and credulous. For example, when Ignacio Manuel Altamirano wrote *El Zarco* in 1888 he was partly motivated by a desire to inoculate against lower-class enthusiasm for bandits such as the Plateados. Yet it proved difficult to exorcise the spirit of the bandit-hero from lower-class culture. Eighteen years later, an intellectual such as Francisco Bulnes still complained that "the popular bandit—crowned with real or imaginary feats—is held in the highest reverence. . . . These brigands have taken the place of the ancient

Lares, and the people have fallen on their knees before the influence of the bandit."<sup>19</sup> Bulnes, of course, was referring to the popularity of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution. The notion that Zapata was a bandit was hyperbolic, if commonplace among the elites; however, Bulnes was closer to the mark in the case of Villa, a bandit-turned-revolutionary who inspired a popular mythology that has never been equaled. What is more, the bandit career of Villa followed a line of descent from Heraclio Bernal, the nineteenth-century bandit-hero who was the most celebrated outlaw in Mexico prior to the revolution. When assassins killed Bernal in 1888, leadership passed to his lieutenant, Ignacio Parra, who recruited the young Pancho Villa in the 1890s.<sup>20</sup>

Both Zapata and Villa enjoyed immense popularity at the height of their respective careers as revolutionary leaders, and both were immortalized in countless corridos during the Mexican Revolution. However, even these two icons received hostile treatment from troubadours who sympathized with competing revolutionary factions. The authors of anti-Villa ballads such as "Los combates de Celaya" and "Las esperanzas de la patria por la rendición de Villa" supported Villa's archrival Alvaro Obregón and his Constitutionalist revolutionaries.<sup>21</sup> Constitutionalist sympathizers also penned anti-Zapata corridos, including one which claimed that "The hordes of bandoleros who flock to his banner / were no more than bandidos chasing after *dineros*."<sup>22</sup> This shows that corridos offered a heterodox body of stereotypes, belying the notion that the lower classes simply exalted or romanticized bandits. In actuality, corridos judged bandits on a scale that identified villains and heroes, and they also permitted an ambiguous rendering of still other bandits.

In order to imagine a bandit-hero, the balladeer and the audience had to assume that it was possible in real life for someone to be pushed into outlawry by circumstances beyond his or her control, usually by way of unjust persecution by corrupt politicians and officials, the police, a rich hacendado, or some other exploiter. The hero's imagined conduct also had to meet an ideal standard of masculine behavior. Finally, the bandit-hero's feats had to demonstrate his ca-



*With Her Pistols in Her Holster*

capacity as a people's champion. Heraclio Bernal was the epitome of the bandit-hero because Mexicans believed that El Rayo de Sinaloa (the Thunderbolt of Sinaloa) robbed from the rich, gave to the poor, and punished those who oppressed the downtrodden. Not every imagining of bandit-heroes met the same high standards invested in Bernal, but all such outlaw-heroes were imagined as individuals worthy of moral esteem.

criminality had become the province of sociologists, anthropologists, criminologists, and other social scientists who proposed public policy measures in the hopes of constraining deviant behavior and delinquency. However, few were prepared to link outlawry to the deplorable living conditions that most rural and urban Mexicans still endured. Even fewer were prepared to countenance reforms that might ameliorate social tensions or address lower-class grievances. This turned out to be a dangerous error of omission, for the same desperation that drove many of the rural and urban poor into outlawry also inspired political rebellion against the authorities who exploited, oppressed, and then criminalized them. When a dissident member of the elite named Francisco Madero rebelled against Díaz in 1910, the lower classes were mobilized by lower-class notions of right behavior, justice, and honor that had been inculcated through decades of struggle and tradition. The bandit-hero and the corrido had played an integral part in forging and preserving these lower-class ideas and in providing a paradigm for rebellion.

Huerta's coup ushered in a more radical phase of the revolution and precipitated the mercurial rise of Francisco "Pancho" Villa. While the Zapatistas continued their struggle in Morelos, in the north a new coalition of dissidents rallied behind Coahuilan governor Venustiano Carranza to form a rebel army. Carranza was a conservative Maderista, a rich hacendado who condemned the illegality of Huerta's government. According to the constitution, Carranza, as the most senior of state governors, was the legal successor to the presidency. However, he was no social revolutionary. He had cut his political teeth under Díaz and had been at best a moderate supporter of Madero. His primary goal was to reestablish a legitimate government based on the Constitution of 1857. Yet his movement ended up with a Jacobin flavor that exceeded Maderismo and his own wishes. This happened in part because the Huertista coup winnowed away support from middle-class and elite reformers. Of those who did declare for Carranza, most preferred to remain in civilian roles. This left the leadership of the Constitutionalist Army in the hands of populist middle-class commanders such as Alvaro Obregón, a chickpea farmer from Sonora, and plebeians such as Villa, the outlaw from Chihuahua.

If Zapata was not a bandit, Villa had been until he joined Madero's army in 1911. It is difficult to separate the facts of his outlaw career from legend. He was born Doroteo Arango in the state of Durango to a family of sharecroppers. It is said that he became a bandit in 1894 after shooting the son of a hacendado who molested his sister. He became Pancho Villa after joining Ignacio Parra, the successor of the legendary bandit Heraclio Bernal. Although he once worked as a miner, Villa kept mainly to his bandit ways and made a career of rustling cattle from the vast herds owned by the Terrazas family. It is not clear why he joined Madero in 1911, but some suggest that Villa was driven by a raw hatred for hacendados, particularly for the Ter-

razas clan. But there was the additional fact that his rustling career led to personal and "business" ties with Abraham González, a minor member of Chihuahua's marginalized elites. González was also an intimate of Madero's, and it was widely believed that González himself recruited Villa. Still, Villa remained a minor figure in the revolution until 1913. By all accounts he was complex and enigmatic, given to brutality as well as generosity. This helps to explain why dichotomous legends surrounded his career. Most myths depict Villa as a champion, but a significant body of legends portrays him as a cold-blooded monster. Either way, he possessed unquestionable charisma and audacity that earned undying loyalty from his followers and passionate hatred from his enemies.<sup>47</sup>

After Madero came to power, Villa went into exile in Texas. This was the fallout of a clash with Huerta while the two were fighting Orozco's rebellion in 1912. Huerta was, at this point, still a professional military officer serving Madero's government. Orozco was among Madero's former insurgent leaders who had lost faith with Maderismo and returned to the field of battle. To suppress this revolt, Madero assigned Huerta along with irregular forces led by Orozco's former lieutenant, Villa. Both were effective commanders, but Huerta regarded Villa as nothing but a bandit and therefore dispensable once they had turned back Orozco. As a result, Villa found himself facing a firing squad, charged with insubordination. He would have died but for a last-minute telegram from Madero that stayed his execution. Villa went to jail, where he allegedly learned the rudiments of reading and writing before escaping across the border to Texas. It is said that he never forgot his debt to Madero, and when he learned of Huerta's coup and the murders of González and Madero he recrossed the Rio Grande with revenge in mind; he had a very personal score to settle with Victoriano Huerta. Along with Villa came eight followers, nine horses, nine rifles, two pounds of coffee, two pounds of sugar, one pound of salt, and five hundred cartridges per man.<sup>48</sup> From this he proceeded to build the famous Division of the North, nearly seventy thousand strong at its height. As it turned out, Villa's forces carried the main burden of fighting for Carranza and made it possible for

the Constitutionlists to drive out Huerta and retake Mexico City in 1914. These and other feats, too numerous to recount, earned Villa the sobriquet "Centaur of the North" and spread his fame throughout Mexico and abroad. As John Reed told it, after traveling with Villa's troops in 1914, "an immense body of popular legend grew up among the peons around his name. There are many traditional ballads celebrating his exploits—you can hear the shepherds singing them around their fires in the mountains at night, repeating verses handed down by their fathers or composing others extemporaneously. . . . Everywhere he was known as The Friend of the Poor. He was the Mexican Robin Hood."<sup>49</sup> Villa's enemies did not see it that way. Huertistas and the diplomatic corps subjected Villa to the same aspersions they cast upon Zapata, depicting the Centaur of the North as a cold-blooded killer who led "pillaging, ravishing hordes" bent on plundering Mexico.<sup>50</sup> Carranza and his intimates regarded Villa in the same light, but they muted their opinions until they defeated Huerta. Thus, in 1915 the anti-Huerta coalition split apart, pitting Carrancista partisans against Villa and Zapata. Constitutionalist propaganda portrayed Villa as a "common bandit [and] the tool of reactionaries."<sup>51</sup> Carranza himself used every opportunity to characterize Villa and Zapata as savages who "rob, injure, kill, and destroy in order to prove their strength."<sup>52</sup>

For a few months, Villa and Zapata occupied Mexico City and seemed poised to triumph. Shortly after entering the capital, they posed for a photograph that showed a jovial Villa on the presidential throne, accompanied by a taciturn Zapata. This image surely represented the worst nightmare of the elites, but neither Villa nor Zapata could hold the capital for long. For one thing, there were frictions between Villa's army and Zapata's. Each represented country people with distinctly different traditions and values. The Villistas were closer to the cowboy tradition of the open range, mobile, individualistic, and rough-hewn; the Zapatistas were sedentary peasant farmers, tied to the land and rooted in the more communal traditions of village life. Aside from a shared disdain for Carranza and for the landed oligarchy, the two forces had little in common. Beyond this, though, there

were also pragmatic issues that loosened their grip on Mexico City. Zapata's peasants were more interested in returning to their untended fields in Morelos than in occupying a city that seemed an alien world. As for Villa, his army was a long way from Chihuahua, and his supply lines were difficult to maintain. This became a critical problem when Constitutionalist forces, led by Alvaro Obregón, devastated Villa's army in a series of battles in the Bajío between April and June 1915. However, the decisive turn came in October 1915, when the United States recognized Carranza's regime, headquartered at Veracruz, as the de facto government of Mexico. This gave Carranza access to weapons and financial resources that Villa and Zapata simply could not hope to match.

Villa and Zapata retreated to their bases in Chihuahua and Morelos, respectively, to carry on a guerrilla struggle for five more years. However, their capacity to resist was in decline; as indiscipline and frustration settled in among their forces, the line between guerrilla fighting and banditry became increasingly blurred, and rural communities began to pay the price. Popular support fell as Villista and Zapatista commanders became ever more aggressive in their demands for men and supplies. However, privation had taken hold in Chihuahua and Morelos; for instance, in 1918, starvation helped to reduce the population of Morelos by one-quarter or more. Conditions in Chihuahua never grew this dire, but they were bad enough. The incapacity of country people to comply with rebel needs led to impressments, the confiscation of food, and sometimes even killings. The receding tide of Villismo cast off former adherents, and some of them became completely unhinged. In Michoacán, the ex-Villistas José Inés Chávez García and Luis Viscaíno Gutiérrez (El chivo encantado [The Enchanted Goat]) waged a campaign of terror that devastated rural communities until 1918, when the Spanish influenza inflicted its own deadly attrition on the Chavista brigands. The "Corrido de Chávez García" remembers this rampage as the "rage of hell."<sup>53</sup>

Still, Villa himself managed one last feat that guaranteed his immortality in popular culture. On March 8, 1916, for reasons that remain obscure, he raided Columbus, New Mexico. Some suggest that he

was exacting revenge for U.S. recognition of Carranza; others suggest that he was trying to demonstrate Carranza's inability to maintain a secure border; still others speculate that he was trying to spark a war with the United States. Whatever the explanation, it did provoke the U.S. government into sending a punitive expedition into northern Mexico that pursued Villa fruitlessly for eleven months. This cat-and-mouse game temporarily refurbished Villa's aura of invincibility and elevated his stature in the eyes of many Mexican nationalists.

Villa unquestionably attracted more attention abroad than any other revolutionary figure. Indeed, to foreign opinion he came to personify the Mexican Revolution. For one thing, his charisma and flair imparted a romantic quality to reporting on the revolution. Villa himself actively encouraged this, even arranging for Hollywood filmmakers to record his army in action. But he also inspired loathing among diplomats in Mexico. Patrick O'Hea, the British vice-consul in Torreón, Coahuila, described Villa in terms appropriate to the assumptions of a British imperialist, as a "dog in rabies, a mad mullah, a Malay running amuck." O'Hea's superiors were more sanguine—not that they disagreed, but they did not think Villa was all that different from other revolutionary leaders.<sup>54</sup> The image of Villa and the revolution was more complex in the United States. Among the radical left he counted John Reed and Mother Jones as personal friends, and they helped to promote a positive imagining of Villa in radical and progressive circles. However, other radicals dismissed Villa as tool of Wall Street. This had to do with the effectiveness of Carrancista propaganda, but it was also fueled by Washington's courtship of Villa when, at the height of his power, it appeared that this bandit-turned-revolutionary might actually become president of Mexico. As for the mainstream U.S. media, they had two, and sometimes three, minds about Villa. At different moments they depicted him as a hero or a villain, but always within a framework of condescension toward Mexico. As Mark Anderson points out, "Villa fell into the category of the 'unusual type' of Mexican, as the *New York Times* labeled him, situated on the outer reaches of the stereotype" that otherwise depicted Mexicans as "backward, racially limited, or morally decrepit."<sup>55</sup> It

was as if Villa was Joel Poinsett's redoubtable *arriero* reborn a century later.

After Columbus, the consensus on Villa in U.S. newspapers was more uniformly negative, but the issue was also moot, for the revolution was drawing to a close. In 1917 the Carrancistas adopted a constitution that reflected the still-tenuous balance of power. The old elites were in irrevocable decline and the middle classes were in ascendance, but the latter did not have a decisive hold on the state. This compelled populists such as Obregón to cultivate the support of workers and peasants, who demanded labor rights and land reform. Consequently, the Constitution of 1917 appealed to middle- and lower-class interests. It was nationalistic and anticlerical and protected the rights of property holders, but it also guaranteed labor rights and land reform. Like the Constitution of 1824, this was a compromise of political interests, but this time it tipped the balance away from the old elites. It also reinforced popular support for the Constitutionalists, who gained strength even as Villismo and Zapatismo weakened. For all sides, the most important factor was the sheer exhaustion of the population, who could no longer sustain armed conflict. It could only be a matter of time before the Constitutionalists prevailed.

Then, the Zapatistas received a stunning blow when Carranza and Gen. Pablo González arranged an ambush that killed Zapata in 1919. Many residents of Morelos refused to believe the news, and the rumor spread that Zapata had escaped the ambush to a mountain fastness in Guerrero, waiting for the right moment to resume the fight. As Alan Knight notes, "this was the classic resurrection of bandit myth, following the classic death of bandit reality."<sup>56</sup> But Zapata was gone, and leadership of the movement passed to Gildardo Magaña, who began reaching out to the left wing of the Constitutionalists, including Obregón, in search of an exit from the labyrinth. This transpired in 1920 when long-simmering tensions between Carranza and Obregón came to the surface. Barred by the constitution from seeking reelection, Carranza tried to install a puppet president, but his victory in the elections required the elimination of a more popular candidate—Alvaro Obregón. Carranza fabricated charges of treason

against Obregón, who then fled Mexico City with the aid of Magaña and the Zapatistas. Obregón enlisted other Constitutionalist generals, including Adolfo de la Huerta, who rebelled against Carranza. The former first chief fled Mexico City and headed to Veracruz, but he fell to an assassin before reaching his destination. Quickly thereafter, control of the state fell into the hands of Obregón and other middle-class revolutionaries who were willing to bargain with Magaña and Villa in order to bring the armed conflict to a close. Thus they agreed to recognize Zapatista political hegemony in Morelos, and to give them a voice in shaping agrarian policy, in exchange for incorporating Zapatista fighters into a new Mexican army.<sup>57</sup>

Obregón and the Constitutionalists got the better of the deal, for it would be another fifteen years of struggle before serious land reform got under way. But meanwhile, the inclusion of Zapatismo within the terms of peace allowed for the rapid political rehabilitation of Zapata after 1920. This was more than a mere consolation prize. Zapata's entry into the official pantheon of revolutionary heroes had three important consequences. First, it erased the stigma of banditry that had attached to his name. Second, it provided the ideals of agrarian reform with an authority that they would not have otherwise enjoyed. And third, it allowed the post-revolutionary elites to mobilize the mystique of Zapata to impart an aura of authenticity to their efforts to reconstruct the Mexican state. However, except for the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), the post-revolutionary elites were loath to fulfill the promise of land reform. Country people did not forget the promise so easily. The "Corrido de Emiliano Zapata" treated Zapata's death as a great tragedy, but the lesson of his life and the struggle for land and liberty was not to be one of despair and hopelessness. It helped to preserve the dream of a better world: "Our memories of Zapata will forever be a part / of the future for Morelos, and in every Mexican heart."<sup>58</sup>

The outcome was rather different for Villa. He received a pension and a hacienda in Durango in return for disbanding his fighters and retiring from political and military life in Mexico. However, he survived the revolution only to die in 1923 at the hands of an unknown

assassin.<sup>59</sup> This too was the classic bandit's death, and as with Zapata, it would help to ensure his immortality in popular memory. But it did not propel Villa into the official pantheon of revolutionary heroes. He was excluded for the next four decades, for the post-revolutionary state insisted that, in his heart, Villa was only a bandit.

Popular culture had a different story to tell. During the revolution, the lower classes created ballads about momentous events and battles and about leaders and heroes who embodied their hopes and aspirations. There were no ballads more numerous and widespread than those dedicated to Zapata and Villa. Not all corridos gave these two men a positive review, but those that did enter into popular memory depicted Villa and Zapata as popular champions and heroes. The Villista cycle recalled Villa's campaigns to capture Chihuahua, Torreón, and Zacatecas as well as his raid on Columbus. They celebrated his legendary genius, describing him as a "second Napoleon,"<sup>60</sup> but also insisted that Villa's exploits had a noble motive: "I strike out for justice, and also for liberty / I want these for the people, eternally." It is this, rather than Villa's military prowess alone, that imparted a profound sense of loss and anger in the "Corrido de Pancho Villa." Lamenting Villa's death, this ballad condemned the treachery of his murder. But it also defended Villa in terms that recalled Zapata's rebuke to those who condemned Zapatista "banditry": "Those who amassed fortunes on the backs of the poor / they dared call him a bandit, depraved, and a traitor."<sup>61</sup>