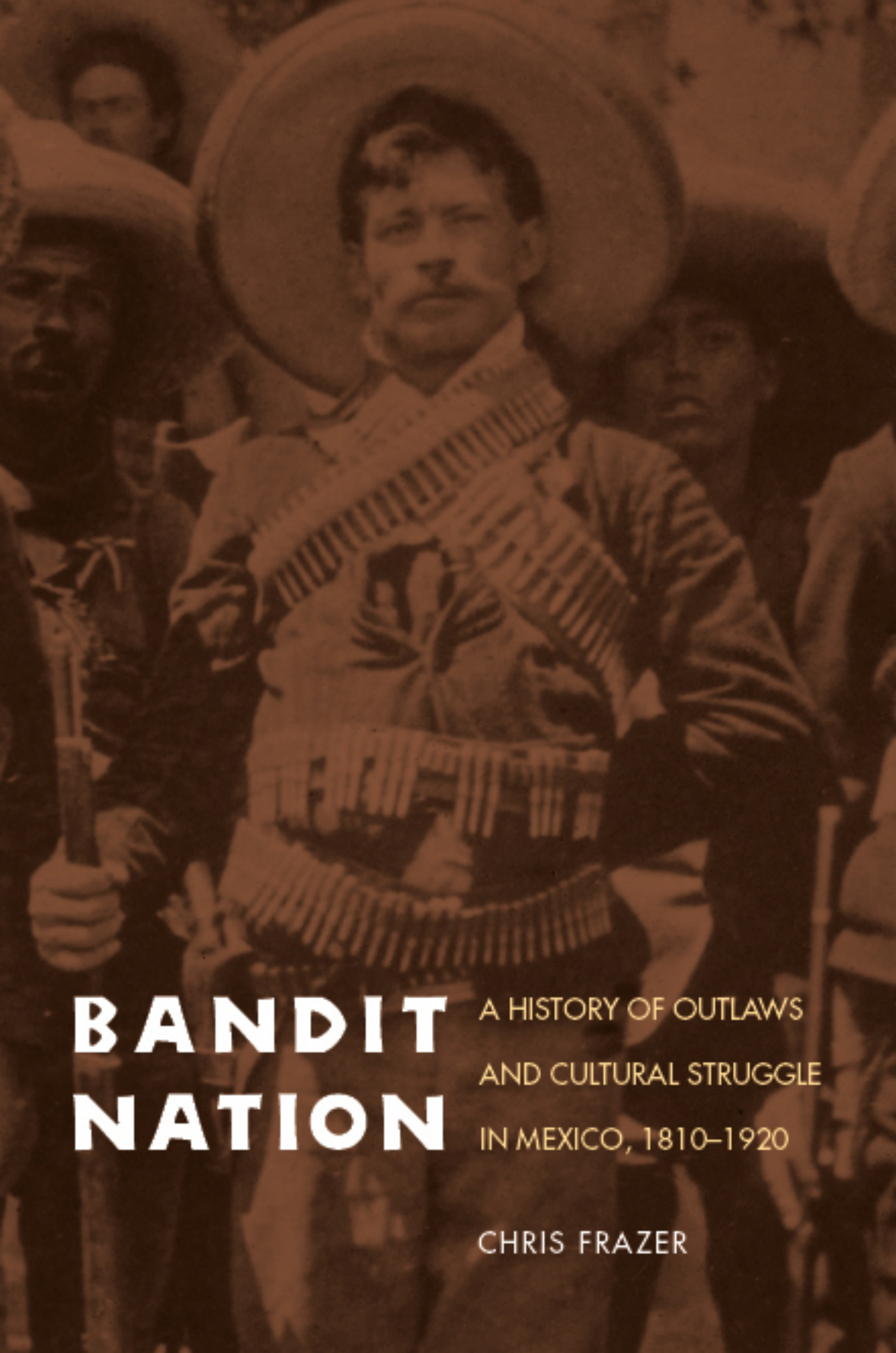




BANDIT NATION

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

CHRIS FRAZER

Bandit Nation

Chris Frazer

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A History of Outlaws and Cultural
Struggle in Mexico, 1810–1920

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Preface

Ostensibly concerned with banditry and culture in Mexico, this study is, above all else, a narrative about the struggles of oppressed people for justice, dignity, and redemption. For more than a hundred years, Mexican and foreign elites waged war in Mexico to secure their access to power, privilege, and wealth. They glossed their behavior with stirring rhetoric, appeals to patriotism and destiny, and the assertion of moral principles. At the end of the day, however, their conduct resembled little more than banditry organized on a massive scale. Yet they are not remembered as such, for among the perquisites of victory is the right of the winners to demonize their opponents and to decide who among them is or is not a bandit. Most often, the Mexican and foreign elites pinned the label of “bandit” on lower-class outlaws and rebels who resisted exploitation and oppression—not merely because most bandits emerged from among the poor, but also because these elites generally assumed that plebeian Mexicans were prone to criminal activity. It is small wonder, therefore, that lower-class Mexicans, when confronting systematic social injustice, often identified with bandits in popular culture as heroes who opposed the excesses committed by social superiors. This is not to assert that all bandits, or even most of them, were in fact popular champions; it is to recognize and understand the class-based character of banditry and the narratives that foreigners and Mexicans created about it in the decades that spanned the achievement of Mexican independence and the outbreak of the revolution.

Today in contemporary Mexico, many of these bandit-heroes live on in popular memory, and some are now lauded as national heroes by a state eager to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the people. This is not a uniquely Mexican phenomenon. Perhaps like most other children in the English-speaking world, I first encountered the figure of the bandit in the form of the Robin Hood myth. I knew the name

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even before I understood what it represented, for in Canada the imagined Anglo-Saxon profile of this legendary outlaw was, and still is, emblazoned on the packages of every product sold by Robin Hood Multifoods Inc.¹ There is a curious juxtaposition between, on the one hand, the mythical reputation of an outlaw who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor, and on the other, the marketing strategies of a corporation devoted to acquiring profit by exploiting labor and accumulating capital. But this illustrates well how the elites can maintain hegemony by appropriating and co-opting elements of oppositional popular culture. Most readers will probably be able to identify similar examples from their own experience, for this dynamic—the production of bandit-heroes in popular culture and their appropriation by the dominant culture—operates in almost every society. At the same time, this strategy can have the unintended consequence of helping to preserve in popular memory a narrative that—at historical moments when social tensions are sharp and conflictive—authorizes banditry as a form of rebellion. This, for example, is what lent such resonance to ballads such as Woody Guthrie’s “Pretty Boy Floyd,” which, in the midst of the Great Depression of the 1930s, celebrated the exploits of an outlaw who provided “Christmas dinner / For the families on relief.”² This logic continues to operate to this day. The corporate-run television and cinematic industries in North America profit from dramas that feature outlaws and antiheroes; but these coexist and compete with more-critical narratives that continue to circulate. Even as I was researching this book, Billy Bragg and Wilco released a critically acclaimed compact disc that featured another Woody Guthrie bandit ballad, “The Unwelcome Guest,” while author Peter Carey won the Booker Prize for his novel about the legendary nineteenth-century Australian bandit Ned Kelly.³ None of this would exist or have any particular appeal if, at some level, people did not feel the need for a Robin Hood.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to everyone who helped make this study happen, above all to Mena Enxuga and our daughters, Rachelle and Daniella, who patiently endured and encouraged my efforts. I am likewise indebted to Derrick Fulton, whose unwavering friendship has sustained me through many a difficult moment on the way to this book. However, this book is dedicated to my parents, Alice Beryl Frazer and Clive Dale Frazer, for their remarkable patience and their confidence that the peregrinations of a prodigal son might yet amount to something worthwhile.

This project began as research for my doctoral dissertation at Brown University, where I had the very good fortune to work with Thomas E. Skidmore. Tom has been as excellent a mentor and teacher as anyone could be. His enthusiasm and encouragement convinced me this project could be done. I also benefited enormously from the two other members of my dissertation committee, Robert Douglas Cope and Mari Jo Buhle, also excellent editors and teachers, whose comments on my drafts were always encouraging and incisive. I am likewise indebted to other scholars who reviewed my proposal at its earliest stage and helped to focus my thinking: Gilbert Joseph, Richard Slatta, Linda Lewin, and Paul Vanderwood. I do not know them personally, but they responded generously and promptly when I wrote to solicit their comments. I must also thank Christon I. Archer, my master's thesis supervisor at the University of Calgary. He too was an excellent mentor and teacher, and he first encouraged my interest in Latin American history and bandits. This book has also benefited from the insights of Tom Langford at the University of Calgary, whose work in sociology on oppositional labor movements influenced my understanding of cultural struggle in Mexican history.

Much of my thinking about history, Mexican bandits, and Latin America developed in the course of discussion and debate with fellow

Acknowledgments

graduate students who have now gone on to other careers or have begun to make their presence known in the academy. I am particularly grateful to Troy Fuller and Doris Dirks, who sharpened my ideas and restrained my excesses while at the University of Calgary, and to an illustrious crowd at Brown that included Brian Bockelman, James Woodard, Charles Beatty, Harry Rothschild, Nancy Burns, Jonathan Hagel, and Sheyda Jahanbani. They have been excellent colleagues and friends.

This book would not have been possible without support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, in the form of a dissertation fellowship from 1997 to 2002, and from the Graduate School at Brown University, which provided additional fellowships to enable my research in Mexico. Nor would it be a book without the encouragement of Elizabeth Demers, acquisitions editor and interim editor in chief at the University of Nebraska Press. Elizabeth saw something useful in a rather raw manuscript that landed on her desk in 2003, and I am deeply thankful for her unflagging support and faith in this project. It is likewise with the readers at the press for their careful reading and suggestions for improving the manuscript. I can only hope that I have managed to do justice to their good faith and excellent observations.

Finally, I would like to salute my brothers and sisters in the Brown Graduate Employees Organization–United Auto Workers, who waged a splendid struggle to organize and give more dignity to the work of graduate employees during the final three years of my work at Brown University. In particular I need to acknowledge UAW organizers Connie Razza, Peggy Shorey, and Donna Becotte. In the course of that struggle they all offered inspiration, advice, and assistance that have since found their way into this book, one way or another.

There are many other individuals who merit acknowledgment but cannot be mentioned here. To them I offer my apologies. They have all given generously; the rest was up to me. Any mistakes or shortcomings that appear in this book are therefore mine. All translations from Spanish to English are also mine, unless noted otherwise, and I accept full responsibility for any errors contained therein.

Introduction

Memory, Legend, and History

The serious historical study of banditry is only just beginning.

—Eric Hobsbawm, *American Historical Review*, 1988

There is no doubt that history is written by the victors. But it is also true that legends are written by the people.

—Speech at Pancho Villa's grave, from Oscar W. Ching Vega, *La última cabalgata de Pancho Villa*, 1977

Postcolonial Mexicans have been telling stories about their bandits ever since they won independence. So too have foreigners, both travelers and those who observe Mexico from afar. Narratives about the “Mexican bandit” have appeared in almost every form of culture since the early nineteenth century: novels, memoirs, travel accounts, newspapers, academic literature, movies, ballads, and the graphic arts. For the most part, we have grown accustomed to thinking about these tales and images as historical relics or curiosities, just like the bandits they purport to represent, but they continue to cast a long shadow over the Mexican present. Literary narratives still circulate widely, speaking to intellectuals who aspire to understand historical bandits, or influencing debates about the character of real and alleged outlaws in contemporary Mexico: narco-traffickers in the Gulf of Mexico, taxicab hijackers in Mexico City, or latter-day Zapatistas in Chiapas. Narratives from the past also survive in the oral traditions of popular culture, such as *corridos* (ballads). These are preserved in audio recordings, in archives, and in published collections, but they are also alive today on the streets, in the cantinas, and in the homes of Mexi-

cans. Sometimes, memories and images of historical bandits are resurrected in expected ways, as in the performances of the mariachi bands that gather daily in Mexico City's Garibaldi Square. At other times, the shadows of historical bandits are lurking and unanticipated. A scholar researching bandits can spend long days plundering criminal records in the former prison that now houses the Archivo General de la Nación, then return to his or her apartment near the Monumento de la Revolución, where Pancho Villa's remains are interred, and later dine in the San Angel market at the Restaurante Chucho el Roto, which bears the sobriquet of a celebrated nineteenth-century bandit. It is no exaggeration to assert that the imagined bandit is ubiquitous in Mexican culture. But what does this mean?

This book is a cultural history of banditry in Mexico from independence to the end of the revolution, based on narratives produced by Mexicans and English-speaking foreign visitors during this period. Rather than arguing whether or not certain outlaws were social bandits, or Robin Hoods, I will examine why and how people told stories about them during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these narratives now constitute part of the national heritage of Mexico, forming the tradition that helps to express a sense of being Mexican, *lo mexicanidad*. Meanwhile, narratives by visitors from three English-speaking countries—Great Britain, the United States, and Canada—helped to shape Mexico's image abroad and its relations with foreign countries. This study argues that bandit narratives were integral to broader processes, involving Mexicans and foreigners in forms of national and class struggle, to define and create the Mexican nation-state. These narratives have not come to the present effortlessly, as a seamless and unchanging process, without conflict and sacrifice. Nor do they have any meaning free of the contradictions, explicit or submerged, that continue to fracture Mexico along the fault lines of class, ethnicity, and gender. 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 tension between popular myths about Villa and the exclusions of official history were such that it was quite impossible for intellectuals and artists, in Mexico and abroad, to refrain from debating this bandit’s legacy. By no means have they all given Villa a positive review. The corpus of intellectual and popular literature dealing with Villa is not only polemical but also vast. According to Friedrich Katz,

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Villa has been the subject of several thousand newspaper and magazine articles, more than one hundred works of fiction and history, and numerous movies produced in the United States and Mexico. This outpouring is more than just an obsession with the enigmatic personality of Villa; it is a discourse on the nature of modern Mexico and its historical development. And it is a debate that remains open-ended, for as Katz has observed, “it would take a book as long as this one [nearly a thousand pages] to analyze, describe and assess the enormous development of the Villa legend.”¹ Even so, at least one thing is clear. Popular fealty to the legend of Villa as a Mexican Robin Hood and revolutionary leader, however mythical his reputation may or may not be, corresponds to an abiding belief that the post-revolutionary state has yet to fulfill the ideals or to equitably confer the benefits that, in the eyes of lower-class Mexicans, Villa and the revolution had embodied.

One might assume that the struggle over Villa’s legacy is an anomaly among narratives about banditry in Mexico, but it is not. The case of Villa is the contemporary manifestation of a much longer cultural struggle. Bandits attended the birth of Mexico as an independent nation, and they plagued authorities for much of the rest of the century. As a result, the figure of the bandit was prominent in nineteenth-century discourse on the nature of postcolonial Mexican society. This period is thoroughly pocked with debates over the character of numerous bandits who preceded Villa: Chucho el Roto, Heraclio Bernal, and Santanón, to name but a few. If to foreigners these names are less famous and evocative than Villa’s, these bandits are still well known as heroes to many Mexicans today. Their reputations stand at the interstices of memory, legend, and history in contemporary Mexico. And they secured their place in Mexican culture for reasons similar to those that also inspired popular memories and myths of Pancho Villa.

Social Bandits and Historians

But how much do these memories and myths tell us about the actual behavior of outlaws? Are any of them really the social bandits that Eric Hobsbawm described in *Primitive Rebels* (1959) and *Bandits*

(1969), or is this just wishful thinking? Hobsbawm relied heavily on literary evidence to argue that some banditry was a prepolitical form of rural rebellion.² His critics have argued that these kinds of sources are unreliable and that Hobsbawm simply depended too much on them.³ In the case of nineteenth-century Mexico, Paul Vanderwood attributes the popularity of stories about bandit-heroes to myth-making by romantic Mexicans who were “yearning for escape from drudgery.”⁴ At best, tales of Robin Hood made for good entertainment; at worst they distracted Mexicans from struggling for more meaningful change. For Vanderwood and others, these bandits were villains or ambitious outsiders who turned to outlawry for reasons of self-interest and upward mobility rather than from sympathy for oppressed peasants.⁵ There is no doubt that social banditry is rarer than Hobsbawm supposed, but the skeptical minds of his critics have not foreclosed the issue. Other historians think that Hobsbawm was on to something. Alan Knight has argued that both banditry and rebellion are mutable over time and geography. During the revolution, for example, traditional village culture provided a basis for “politically . . . coherent movements” such as Zapatismo in Morelos but not for the banditry that more often appeared in regions where this traditional culture was weak or nonexistent; this was the case in the Bajío, where “banditry was . . . a suitably modified variant” of rebellion. In some cases too, rebellion simply degenerated into banditry in the face of defeat. Thus, writes Knight, “the social bandit of 1911 became the terrorist of 1917; the social bandit of one valley crossed the mountains and terrorized another.”⁶ This is one reason why some bandits have been surrounded by contradictory legends. Again, Villa is a case in point. Friedrich Katz points out that Villa inspired “black legends” that demonized him as well as “white legends” that lionized him. But either way, Katz notes, Villa’s bandit career is so shrouded in myths that “we shall probably never know exactly why Villa became an outlaw.”⁷ What we do know is that Villa abandoned his outlaw past to lead a revolutionary struggle and that this helped to ensure that the white legend dominated popular memories of him after his death.

It is clear that literary and cultural sources require careful han-

ding, but this is also true of evidence from more traditional historical sources. Laura Solares Robles analyzed mid-nineteenth century criminal statistics from central Mexico and found that rates of arrest for banditry correlated to poverty and unemployment among lower-class rural Mexicans. She believes that many—if not all—bandits were pushed into outlawry by social conditions. But Solares also adds the caveat that “we do not know his [the bandit’s] arguments, because history has only preserved the views written by authorities.”⁸ And there are good reasons to be wary about subjectivity in the documents produced by Mexican authorities. For example, Mexican archives are filled with documents from nineteenth-century officials who used the term “bandit” to criminalize bona fide political rebels. This was a common practice in a century filled with civil wars and uprisings, conflicts where the lines between banditry and rebellion were often blurred. For this reason, historians such as Gilbert Joseph are critical of scholars who “play the state’s (and the dominant classes’) game when they define banditry solely along traditional legal lines.”⁹ Mindful of the need to “maintain the distinction between the social term ‘bandit’ and the events it signifies,” Joseph and others have turned to scholars in other fields for alternative modes of analysis. For example, Ranajit Guha and his colleagues in subaltern studies reverse “the terms of elite discourse” in official documents, working from the assumption that acts considered criminal by the state are often viewed as legitimate forms of protest by peasants.¹⁰ This is a useful corrective for biases that are present in official documents, but it is no universal panacea; it would be as unwise to see a political rebel behind every official reference to a bandit as it is to accept at face value every sighting of Robin Hood in popular culture.

In his research on Malaysian peasants, anthropologist James C. Scott has taken another approach. Scott argues that most peasants prefer to resist oppression with mundane forms of “everyday resistance” (e.g., “foot-dragging, dissimulation, or desertion”). When peasants abandon these techniques “in favor of more quixotic action,” such as banditry or other forms of “outright confrontation,” “it is usually a sign of great desperation.” Scott also argues that folk

culture plays a role in legitimizing forms of resistance, that “tales of bandits, peasant heroes, [and] religious myths . . . underwrite dissimulation, poaching, theft, tax evasion, avoidance of conscription, and so on.”¹¹ In this, Scott hit upon the same conclusion as Mexican historian Nicole Giron in her study of nineteenth-century corridos about Heraclio Bernal, a famous outlaw from Sinaloa and Durango in the 1870s and 1880s. Bernal was a rebel-turned-bandit who opposed Porfirio Díaz when he seized power in 1876. When Bernal died, popular corridos preserved his heroic reputation and celebrated his exploits to portray him as a champion of the poor. The factual inaccuracy of these corridos makes them unreliable and problematic for any historian seeking to assess Bernal. However, Giron argues that these corridos are outstanding sources when it comes to answering a different kind of question: What social function did these ballads serve by lionizing people like Bernal and legitimizing banditry as a form of resistance to authority? For Giron, the significance of bandit corridos is not that they provided an accurate record of the deeds and motives of Bernal and other bandits but that they articulated the values and aspirations of the rural and urban poor and offered them an imagined “paradigm of rebellion.”¹²

But imagining bandits was not exclusive to the culture of the rural and urban poor. Literate and elite Mexicans also imagined bandits, and so did many foreigners who visited Mexico; their narratives did not often romanticize banditry. So why did banditry prove to be such an attractive topic for them? Narratives about banditry no doubt made for great stories, but there is more to it than this. The short answer is that bandits were so commonplace at a time when the Mexican nation-state and even *lo mexicano* were being forged. Narratives about banditry were part of a larger effort to grasp, interpret, give meaning to, and shape the reality of postcolonial Mexico. At the same time, it is crucial to understand that these narratives did not speak in a single, totalizing voice. Quite to the contrary, they expressed conflicting and mutually exclusive ideas about banditry and the national character of Mexico. Negative representations of banditry competed and collided with other imaginings that cast the bandit in positive

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and heroic roles. Moreover, narrative disagreements were patterned, rather than arbitrary or random, so that over time specific narrative forms (e.g., novels, corridos, or travel accounts) tended to arrive at a consensus, or range of understandings, about the meaning of banditry. For example, all narratives explained banditry by mobilizing gender, ethnicity, and class as organizing concepts, but authors used these notions to interpret banditry in ways that corresponded to their own subjectivities, especially to their national and social identities. Consequently, the bandit-as-hero usually only appeared in popular ballads, as a trope for idealized masculinity through which lower-class Mexicans articulated grievances against injustice and oppression. It was otherwise in the novels written by Mexican elites and in the travel accounts written by English-speaking foreigners, who more commonly imagined the bandit as a metaphor for degraded masculinity and backwardness. The Mexican elites used this imagery to express their nationalizing desires and to justify their dominant position over the lower classes, while English-speaking travelers used it to explain their own sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority. This, then, is a history of cultural struggle that proceeded on the basis of class conflict and national identity.

Imagining Bandits as Cultural Struggle

That class differences were fundamental to the development of *lo mexicanidad* is not an original idea. Nor is the notion that Mexican national identity was shaped in crucial ways by foreign threats or by perceptions that Mexico was inferior to North America or Europe. But sustained attention to class differences is relatively new. One of the pioneers is William H. Beezley, who sketched the incongruity and conflict between the modernizing values and practices of the Porfirian elite and those of the rural and urban poor, who mobilized traditional values and practices to resist the pressures of social transformation and economic development. One such practice was the Judas burning, organized every Easter. For the rural and urban poor, this was an occasion to “turn the world upside down” by symbolically representing some hated official as a mock Judas whom they then hung in

effigy and burned. Like the narrative logic of bandit corridos, Judas burnings expressed a set of values that legitimized resistance and opposition to domination and exploitation by the upper classes. For their part, the Porfirian elite regarded the Judas burnings in much the same light as they saw banditry and the popular corridos that celebrated bandits—as evidence of lower-class tendencies to disorder and backwardness, attitudes that were also abundantly expressed in travel accounts written by North Americans and Europeans.¹³ Taken separately, one might see the conflicting narratives about banditry or the controversy over the practice of Judas burnings as curious incongruities in an otherwise unified culture and national identity, but the evidence suggests that the forging of *lo mexicano* was characterized by class conflict and struggle. Burning Judases and making myths about bandits were not mere pastimes or escapist forms of entertainment for the lower classes; rather, they exemplified self-conscious processes that set the parameters of resistance. Inversely, the “Porfirian persuasion”—the elites’ self-conscious desire to embrace intellectual and cultural fashions from North America and Europe—represented the terms of elite domination in the late nineteenth century. But it is likewise evident that the state and the ruling classes failed to incorporate the lower classes into an effective and durable system of hegemonic relations. The Porfirian state (1876–1911) enjoyed an unparalleled stability compared to its predecessors, but even it could not erase the plebeian persuasion—a desire for justice and traditional values.

And so it happened in Mexico that during the decades which spanned independence and the Mexican Revolution, narratives about banditry came to articulate a broad cultural struggle to define the meaning of being Mexican. Between 1810 and 1821, Spain’s imperial crisis and the end of colonialism in New Spain compelled men and women to begin reinventing themselves as members of a new nation called Mexico. This proved to be more difficult than anyone had imagined, for it liberated Mexicans from Spanish rule without bringing them to a consensus on what this meant in practice. The elites tried to dominate this project from beginning to end, reserving for themselves the

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right to create new rules, laws, and institutions to unite Mexicans as a nation and to codify the norms of social behavior. As they did for the subaltern classes—peasants, artisans, laborers—the interests and composition of the elites changed during this period. In various combinations at different historical moments, the elites were composed of merchants, large landowners, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, military officers, high clergy, intellectuals, politicians, and high-level bureaucrats. But in general we can speak of a dominant class of Creoles and mestizos who sought to assert hegemony over the subaltern classes. Most of the latter were mestizo and indigenous peasants, as well as the smaller number of artisans in rural and urban settings, and proletarians who appeared with the onset of industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century. A small but significant number of Mexicans occupied intermediate social positions, such as small proprietors, intellectuals, and petty officials who congealed into a stable middle class toward the end of the nineteenth century.

What held these Mexicans together? To the extent that we can speak of a common culture and identity during this period, this cannot be defined only in terms of integrative processes such as language, ethnicity, religion, patriarchy, and aesthetics. The elites found it necessary to mobilize all of these (and more besides) to mitigate the antagonisms of a rural society where the most common conditions binding Mexicans were relations of exploitation and an inequitable distribution of property, wealth, privilege, and political power. For the elites, the possession of political power and social dominance on a national scale often depended on techniques of coercion as well as of incorporation.

The creation of a Mexican nation-state necessarily entailed a struggle that was cultural as much as it was economic, social, or political. The elites were keenly aware of this, although none expressed it as cogently as Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, who defined the nationalizing mission of Mexican novelists as “initiating the people into the mysteries of modern civilization and of gradually educating [them] for the priesthood of the future.”¹⁴ However, this effort faltered on a national scale for more than sixty years, undermined by discord

among the dominant classes, foreign interventions, and outbursts of resistance by the lower classes. These and other factors, including the dissemination of liberal ideas concerning equality, exerted tremendous pressures on noncoercive cultural processes holding different classes together in relationships of exploitation. One of the most important elements was patriarchy, understood here as a process of incorporation that structures and patterns relationships of inequality between men and women as well as among men of different social positions and status. Patriarchy helped to naturalize hierarchies and inequalities by invoking the logic of a reciprocal relationship in which a social superior—whether a landowner, employer, or the male head of a family—assumed responsibility for the well-being of his dependents or subalterns in exchange for obedience and service. The onset of instability and insecurity after independence weakened the utility of this (and other) social understanding as a unifying process. But patriarchy did not disappear; to the contrary, it thrived, and at times its persistence even hastened fragmentation and conflict. For example, all through this period the elites relied on patriarchal assumptions to underwrite their dominant position, but commonly accepted notions about patriarchy also helped to justify rebellion against social superiors who abused privileges or failed to protect dependents.

Not until the late nineteenth century were the elites, having resolved their factional differences, able to arrive at anything like effective domination through a stable state. Not accidentally, this coincided with economic modernization, industrial expansion, and new techniques of exploitation and oppression. Prosperity helped to solidify elite unity, but the onset of social transformation also intensified differentiation, insecurity, and impoverishment for the lower classes. As for arriving at a hegemonic consensus, the necessity of governing through authoritarian techniques and a constant readiness to use repression against the lower classes are sufficient evidence that this goal was only partially achieved at the turn of the century. Even this accomplishment collapsed when the regime of Porfirio Díaz was incapable of resisting the pressures of social contradictions that resulted in the Mexican Revolution.

Through all of this, real and imagined Mexican bandits were a constant presence on the social and cultural landscape. Other historians have already shown that nineteenth-century Mexican elites were fixated on the problem of criminality.¹⁵ But it is also clear that banditry preoccupied elite thinking, probably more so than other forms of crime. Thus banditry had a pronounced influence on Mexican society and culture; this much is evident in the images of banditry that abounded in popular and literary culture. But banditry—and attitudes about it—was also central to the development of an authoritarian praxis in the process of state formation. From 1821 onward, the elites never deviated from a belief that lower-class Mexicans were backward and dangerous. As a result, they saw the state as a vital instrument of social control. However, for nearly sixty years, differences within the elites pitted liberals against conservatives, royalists against republicans, federalists against centralists. Endemic political hostility ruled out the possibility of governing through a stable state until the late nineteenth century. This produced a half-century of disorder and conflict and a prolonged epidemic of banditry that only hardened elite convictions that the lower classes were innately criminal. Elite efforts to suppress outlawry were as constant as they were fruitless. This reinforced authoritarian tendencies and led the elites to doubt the capacity of lower-class Mexicans to be citizens of a modern republic. This was also decisive to the appearance of an extensive body of narratives about banditry, all of which were, in one fashion or another, normative claims about what it meant to be a Mexican.

Among these were numerous travel accounts written by English-speaking visitors to Mexico—nearly four hundred from the United States and Great Britain alone. Many of these were best-sellers and appeared in more than one edition. Most were written by male members of the elite in Great Britain and the United States: diplomats, military officers, scientists, explorers, and adventurers. Their views reflected the gendered and classist biases then inherent in the literary world as well as Anglo-Saxon chauvinism toward the Hispanic world. During the nineteenth century, Mexico was an object of intense curiosity and scrutiny in the English-speaking world. But why

did Anglo-Saxon travelers write so frequently about Mexico? Much of it had to do with the culture of expansionism and imperialism and a desire by political and economic elites to know as much as possible about a country that might be profitable for capital investment and trade—or also, in the case of the United States, territorial annexation.¹⁶ For this alone, the problem of banditry and political instability in Mexico was no small concern, so English-speaking travelers paid a great deal of attention to this topic in their writings. And as befits the worldview of imperial elites, these writers consistently expressed an attitude of Anglo-Saxon superiority. They generally ascribed banditry to the degenerated quality of Mexican manhood, which they believed was the inevitable result of race mixture and an enervating climate.

The attitudes of English-speaking writers were hardly incidental to the Mexican elites. For one thing, the elites measured Mexico's progress by a standard that looked toward Europe and North America. For another, they needed access to foreign capital in order to build a modern nation-state and modernize their country. This reinforced their resolve to deal with banditry and other disorders by developing more effective techniques of repression. They finally experienced success in this by the end of the nineteenth century. However, the Mexican elites also rejected aspects of Anglo-Saxon narratives which implied that Mexico was—and would always be—second-rate and half-civilized. As a result, the Mexican state launched an international propaganda effort to burnish its image abroad; it also encouraged the development of a nationalizing discourse on banditry, which, prior to the rise of scientific criminology, achieved its highest form of expression in the romantic nineteenth-century novel. The Mexican novel represented banditry in negative terms—as an expression of lower-class backwardness and as a force that undermined progress—but it was also a narrative of national redemption that called on the elites to fulfill their historical mission of leading lower-class Mexicans into modernity.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the reduction of banditry coincided with the consolidation of an authoritarian liberal state and the onset of economic modernization, but these developments failed

to resolve cultural struggles about the meaning of banditry. If anything, the discourse on banditry became more complex and problematic in an atmosphere of mounting social contradictions, both new and long-standing. Modernity intensified the exploitation and dislocation of lower-class Mexicans, so that the worsening of their conditions tended to affirm the narrative logic of bandit corridos. The impact of modernization also encouraged a bifurcation in attitudes among the elite and middle classes. The dominant tendency appeared in positivist criminology, which imagined banditry as an atavistic expression of indigenous savagery in the lower classes. In this, many of the elites shared the outlook of Anglo-Saxon foreigners. But we also see the first significant signs of fragmentation in literary culture about bandits. Sometimes this appeared as an imagining of bandits as nationalist heroes, and always in the context of relations with the United States; sometimes it appeared as an ambiguous reading of historical bandits as part of a dissident critique of social injustices, past and present. Either way, the emergence of these narratives in literary culture corresponded to a broader dissolution of elite unity. The outbreak of the Mexican Revolution consummated this process, and once more Mexicans and Anglo-Saxon observers were compelled to consider what it meant to be a Mexican.

The Cultural History of Mexico: Determination and Hegemony

As a cultural history, this study proceeds from ideas and assumptions based on Marxian theories and methods. However, since there is minimal discussion of theory and method in the chapters that follow, I will say something here about this and about how this study stands in relations to recent scholarship on the cultural history of Mexico. During the 1990s an upsurge of interest in this field gave rise to a trend known as the “new cultural history of Mexico.” This has been described as a “scholarly community” rather than a formal school with its own “unified or novel approach.”¹⁷ Despite this rather vague description, definite characteristics identify this historiographical current. In the words of Claudio Lomnitz, it represents an “older social history that has taken a cultural turn . . . provoked by the realiza-

tion that the study of forms of domination [and therefore hegemony] demands cultural analysis.”¹⁸ So, as William French has observed, it is devoted to “giving voice to those previously considered inarticulate.”¹⁹ To this extent, at least, this study has an affinity with the new cultural history. There is a shared interest in the ascent of the postcolonial Mexican state, in the formation of elite and subaltern identities, and in the struggles of oppressed people. Yet, in making a cultural turn, many cultural historians have borrowed from postmodernism and poststructuralism, so that what remains of class analysis and theories of hegemony are more often refracted through these conceptual prisms than through those of historical materialism. Since the latter informs this study, this is a point of departure, in theory and method, between this study and some of the new cultural history.

Now, critics of the new cultural history of Mexico object to what they see as an attack on the epistemological foundations of historiography. These arguments have been widely aired and need not be revisited in much detail, except to say that they resemble the controversy around the social bandit thesis; they revolve around political agendas, the handling of evidence, and interpretation. The fact is, however, that practitioners of the new cultural history have produced works of fine scholarship that belie the worst fears of their critics. To my knowledge, there has been no abuse of evidence, no efforts to reduce all social reality to texts, no attempts to erase the distinction between fiction and fact. There are shortcomings and weaknesses that inevitably appear in any scholarship, but overall the new cultural history of Mexico has made important contributions to the historiography, most notably in signaling the need to rethink concepts such as “culture” and “the state” and to make them the object of a historically grounded discursive analysis.

However, in so doing, many of the new cultural historians tend toward cultural determinism and radical idealism.²⁰ That is to say, some of them privilege cultural explanations over what they call materialist or economically determined structures. One cannot disagree with criticisms of economic determinism, but it is erroneous to conflate materialist explanations with economic determinism, which holds

that the superstructure of society (including culture) is determined by the economic base of society (material production).²¹ Economic determinists dismiss culture as nonmaterial and therefore epiphenomenal and a minor force in causality. This reductionist and rather rigid approach to materialism fails to understand that thinking and consciousness—and therefore ideas, feelings, and values—are as material as the means of production.²² Ironically enough, cultural determinists also seem to deny the materiality of culture, seeing it as something located in an internal sphere of ideas, or symbolic and mental processes, which are prior to and even autonomous from social relations. It is important to demystify the state and to analyze subaltern identities; it also important to break with economic determinism. But it will not advance historiography to simply invert the priority of explanatory mechanisms, to leap, if you will, from one form of reductionism with another.

This might seem abstract or overly philosophical. But it is unlikely that any search for ultimately determining cultural explanations—rather than ultimately determining economic causes—will bring us closer to understanding how elite and subaltern identities or nation-states develop and operate, or why their formation has given rise to such intense struggle and sacrifice. In the end, reductive explanations end up obscuring as much as they reveal. Cultural determinism, just as easily as its economic variant, can be mobilized to deny agency to subalterns or to affirm the alleged incapacity or inferiority of other peoples and nations. Surely most of us are familiar with arguments that have explained the conquest of the Americas, or the present neo-colonial exploitation of Latin America, by privileging the cultural deficiencies of the oppressed.²³ And as we will see in the chapters that follow, it was this form of argumentation that the foreign and Mexican elites relied upon to explain the degradation of Mexican subalterns.

So, in contrast to economic or cultural determinists, this study assumes the materiality of culture to argue that imagining and consciousness are social processes that manifest themselves in very real and concrete ways. In other words, culture is the constitutive pro-

cess in social production and reproduction. This perspective owes an enormous debt to the insights of Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, and E. P. Thompson. Gramsci's position on the determinative power of culture turns on an argument for a reciprocal relationship of causation between the economic base and its superstructure.²⁴ Similarly, Thompson argues that identities such as class are "a cultural *as much as* an economic formation" (my emphasis).²⁵ Williams pushes the argument further and defines culture as "a system of practices, meanings and values" and "a constitutive social process" in which the "creation of meanings . . . is a practical material activity; it is . . . a means of production."²⁶ Rather than being a nonmaterial force that somehow influences social reality, culture is itself a tangible productive process. So, culture determines, and is determined by, relations and struggles between contending social forces, the most important of which are those arising from class.

In any society characterized by class differences, the process of social constitution—the forging of identities and the relations between them—gives rise to a system of dominant meanings and values according to which people organize and live their lives. I am, of course, referring to hegemony. In the case of imagining bandits in Mexico, I argue that the Mexican elites failed to develop an effective hegemony and that the existence of bandit corridos—like the Judas burnings—represented an alternative system of values that resisted modernization and state building. However, historians influenced by James C. Scott will object that such manifestations of resistance demonstrate the absence of hegemony and may even indict the concept of hegemony itself. Scott has argued that notions of hegemony "fail to make sense of class relations . . . and mislead us seriously in understanding class conflict in most situations." He insists that "the concept of hegemony ignores the extent to which most subordinate classes are able, on the basis of their daily material experience, to penetrate and demystify the prevailing ideology."²⁷ A similar view has been taken by sociologists Nicholas Abercrombie, Bryan Turner, and Stephen Hill; they acknowledge a dominant ideology in class societies but argue that its effective reach is limited to the dominant classes.²⁸

In the case of postcolonial and pre-revolutionary Mexico, the evidence does not support the critics of hegemony; it does support an argument for a weak and underdeveloped hegemony at the national level, and it is suggestive of stronger hegemonic relations at the regional and local levels. To paraphrase Raymond Williams, hegemony is a “lived system of meanings and values” that arises from and influences social and economic production and reproduction.²⁹ For Mexico, we can point to the system of patriarchy as but one set of shared values and practices that determined patterns for, and helped to make sense of, social experiences that extended well beyond the family or male-female relations. For example, patriarchal values helped to naturalize the transformation of peons into the political and economic clients of *hacendados* (large landowners); they also informed the social function of a *hacendado* as a *patrón* (patron/boss) and even as a *compadre* (godfather) for the children of peons. Patriarchal values and patronage likewise helped authorize the influence of *caudillos* (political bosses) in local and national politics. Not for nothing did so many aspirants to national leadership, including Porfirio Díaz, assert their personal authority as a national patriarch and in the fashion of a *caudillo*. It was a mode of wielding power that everyone understood, because it made perfect sense in the context of Mexican culture.

But hegemony is not something that appears fully formed at birth; it has to be made and continually revised over time and in the face of resistance and the pressure of change. In some conditions the effort will succeed, but in others it will fail. After 1821 the Mexican elites mobilized patriarchal notions to justify their dominance in building a nation-state, but they failed for decades to create effective hegemony at the national level. One of the contributing factors was the absence of consensus among the elites, a circumstance that forestalled any possibility of incorporating the subaltern classes on a national scale. The experience was different at the local and regional levels, where the immediacy of personal relations blended with the traditions of patriarchy to legitimize the authority of *caudillos* and allow some local elites to rule more effectively by means of consensus.

But this is not, and never was, a totalizing process. A hegemonic

consensus never erases the different experiences imparted by the realities of social position or identity. Men and women exist in circumstances that determine how they live their lives and acquire a set of meanings, values, and practices that, in turn, allow them to understand and act upon their world. So, when bandit corridos justified rebellion, they did not do so by abandoning patriarchal values but by mobilizing them, that is to say, by accusing a social superior of violating the patriarchal pact or by portraying a bandit-hero as an ideal patriarch. We can even see this as expressing an alternative form of culture, especially at the end of the nineteenth century when Mexico was vulnerable to the pressures of modernization. The rapid and sudden transformation of the economy, and the equally rapid rush by the elites and middle classes to all things foreign, opened wider the chasm between the values of dominant classes and the lower classes. But except in moments of social crisis, the impact of alternative forms of culture is often muted or marginalized. Some forms, such as corridos or Judas burnings, may derive from values and practices received from the past (or what Williams called residual culture). Other forms of alternative culture are new and original, conceived in the face of new conditions (emergent culture). But either way, there are always forms of culture that fall outside the terms of the dominant system. And as happened in Mexico after 1900, moments of social upheaval create the opportunity for oppositional and alternative forms of culture to move from the social margins and become a significant material force for change.

1. Armed Bodies of Men

Banditry and the Mexican State

I have the honor to inform you . . . that today Congress . . . suspended constitutional rights for highwaymen and kidnappers . . . the prompt extirpation of this gangrene from society . . . requires strict adherence [to the law].

—Secretary of State Castillo Velasco to judicial officers, May 18, 1871

For seventy years, neither the walls of Mexico's cities nor the vast solitude of its countryside could guarantee the security of life, honor, liberty or property.

—Julio Guerrero, *La genesis del crimen en México*, 1901

After Mexico won its independence in 1821, banditry plagued authorities for more than seventy years. We do not yet know its precise magnitude, but banditry clearly thrived in the turmoil that followed independence, leaving a deep impression on the development of postcolonial society. Mexican authorities devoted considerable effort to suppressing banditry, but as the century dragged on the problem proved intractable, rooted as it was in the factionalism that divided the elites and frustrated postcolonial reconstruction until 1867. This created the very conditions—the weakening of integrative social processes, economic stagnation, warfare, and the militarization of politics—that nurtured endemic banditry. Deprived of any other effective means to maintain order and suppress banditry, the Mexican state therefore responded with increasingly harsh measures. To enable the prosecution and extermination of bandits, one government after another suspended civil liberties, passed emergency laws, built or expanded

prisons, authorized summary execution, and granted extraordinary powers to courts and tribunals. That the war on banditry reinforced an authoritarian and coercive reflex in Mexican statecraft is clear. This impulse reached its apex with the long regime (1876–1911) of Porfirio Díaz, which consolidated elite unity, stabilized the state, and experienced success in reducing banditry. However, the tenacity of the bandit problem had in the meantime contributed to the rise of imaginings that transformed outlaws into cultural icons. These narratives reveal that even the Porfirian elite enjoyed no more than a tenuous and incomplete hegemony over the lower classes; they express a range of understandings about banditry and Mexico that competed and collided, perhaps more often than they agreed: bandits were primitives, criminals, or rebels—depending on one's taste in matters of class and nationality. In short, bandits—and the stories people told about them—were central to imagining and making Mexico. In this respect, the elite's articulation of laws and criminal justice structures was not only a response to the real problem of banditry; they also constituted a discursive strategy that mobilized a broader understanding about banditry as an acute form of disorder among the lower classes. In this manner, the elite discourse on banditry intertwined with the struggle to create a durable state and national identity in postcolonial Mexico.

The elite's legal discourse on banditry was therefore a core element in state formation, and it developed through two broad stages in the nineteenth century. The first stage began with independence in 1821 and concluded with the restored republic in 1867. During this period the elites saw the lower classes as morally corrupt and criminally inclined—in essence, as the main source and cause of banditry. However, they disagreed over whether this condition was inherent to the lower classes or environmental. Different elite perspectives on the nature of the lower classes followed broader patterns of political and ideological conflict that cleaved the elites into hostile republican factions—federalists and centralists. These factions later evolved into the liberal and conservative parties that would wage civil war from 1858 to 1867. Federalism attracted some provincial conservatives

who feared the erosion of local power by centralized state, but it was mainly a home for liberals who wished to emulate the constitutional system of the United States. On the other hand, centralist republicans were often ex-monarchists and royalists who wanted a strong state that resembled, as much as possible, the old colonial system. This included the vice-regal penal codes and judicial procedures, a framework that suited those who believed in the naturalness of inequality in the distribution of rights, privileges, social status, and justice. On the other hand, liberal-minded elites argued for a legal system that embodied the principle of equality before the law. As it turned out, elite factionalism prevented comprehensive legal reforms and ensured that the colonial-era penal code and judicial system remained intact until the 1870s. However, it is also unlikely that any legal system would have proved adequate to stop a free fall into lawlessness, banditry, and disorder. Factional strife within the elite class was the root cause of the chaos that gripped Mexico between 1821 and 1867. The disarray in elite politics compelled every regime to govern through a more or less permanent state of emergency, dealing with banditry and disorder by supplementing the colonial penal code with ad hoc decrees and temporary measures. Over time these measures grew increasingly severe, so that even liberal governments became accustomed to suppressing lower-class disorders—including banditry—with repressive measures that exceeded the severity of the colonial penal code.

The second stage of the legal discourse appeared after 1867 with the triumph of Mexican liberalism. In this period, the liberals began building a state based on republican principles enshrined in the Constitution of 1857. Thus the legal discourse on banditry continued its development in the context of a unified ruling class and economic growth. The violence and chaos that had earlier characterized elite politics diminished and nearly disappeared so that it became possible—in fact, preferable—to negotiate differences among the elites rather than to decide them by force of arms. This was a necessary precondition for political stability and economic modernization in the late nineteenth century. However, modernization during the Porfiriato also led to the expropriation of the peasantry, the spread of debt pe-

onage, and the appearance of an industrial proletariat. The consequent impoverishment of the rural and urban poor not only drove up crime rates but also provoked the lower classes to resist the impact of modernization. This reinforced and even magnified the long-standing elite perception that disorder emanated principally from the lower classes. To the Porfirian elites, banditry represented a serious menace to modernization and progress, and as they confronted this danger their discourse privileged an authoritarian state as a necessary instrument for controlling the lower classes.

Independence, Banditry, and the Colonial Heritage

Independence came to Mexico in 1821 when a mutinous force of the royalist army allied with liberal insurgents to sever ties with Spain. This ended eleven years of fighting, but it did not represent a sudden change in the worldview of royalist and conservative Creoles. Theirs was a pragmatic response to events in Spain, where a liberal uprising had deposed King Ferdinand VII and replaced the monarchy with a constitutional republic. This was simply too much for royalists in New Spain, who had dedicated themselves to defending the status quo against republican and liberal insurgents since 1810. Rather than submit to rule by Spanish liberals, Mexican royalists preferred to live with the devil they knew in New Spain. Thus a Creole colonel named Agustín Iturbide and his royalist cohorts chose to compromise with insurgent leaders Vicente Guerrero, a mestizo, and Guadalupe Victoria, a Creole. The negotiations produced the Plan de Iguala, or the Treaty of the Three Guarantees, which provided a minimum basis for uniting those who aspired to govern Mexico. These were the *hombres de bien* (men of property and status), a mostly Creole stratum of professionals and intellectuals, military officers, merchants, and hacendados. During the war for independence, the *hombres de bien* had divided into royalists and insurgents, although probably most had remained loyal to the monarchy. In the aftermath, their ideological differences did not disappear. Royalists still hoped to salvage the wreckage of colonial society, while former insurgents remained dedicated to liberalism and republican institutions. However, almost all agreed that

state building—whatever the framework—was a purview of the elites. This paternalistic inclination was second nature, conditioned by three centuries of patriarchal colonial culture and governance. There is no surprise that ex-royalists endorsed political exclusivity, but the notion even gripped the minds of radical liberals such as Valentín Gómez Farías, who argued that few of the lower classes possessed “sufficient aptitude and understanding to be able to carry out the arduous and difficult task” of governing the nation.¹ Liberals optimistically predicted a wider franchise as the lower classes acquired education and political maturity, but most of them agreed with ex-royalists that indigenous and mestizo plebeians were still an ignorant and dangerous class, prone to irrational behavior, criminality, and vice. As a group, then, the *hombres de bien* had no doubt that an effective state required not only executive, legislative, and judicial offices occupied by civilized men but also specialized bodies of “armed men . . . prisons and other coercive institutions” to enforce order.²

Forging such an instrument proved more protracted and difficult than the *hombres de bien* anticipated. The Plan de Iguala brought about independence, but it was inadequate for sustaining elite unity. The plan guaranteed independence under a constitutional monarchy, recognition of Catholicism as the only state-sanctioned religion, the protection of clerical and military *fueros* (privileges), and legal equality between Creoles and *peninsulares* (Spanish-born residents). It also merged royalist and insurgent forces into the so-called Army of the Three Guarantees. With Iturbide at its head, the new army de facto exercised power until a constitutional congress could meet to design a new government. However, the plan also cleared the way for Iturbide’s imperial ambition. On May 19, 1822, Iturbide coerced the constitutional congress to declare him emperor. His regime collapsed after only eight months, however, mortally wounded by economic stagnation, financial mismanagement, political intolerance, and a domineering centralism that angered pro-Spanish monarchists and republicans alike. These disparate forces rallied behind the military commander of Veracruz, Col. Antonio López de Santa Anna, who rebelled when Iturbide tried to relieve him of his command. The uprising forced

Iturbide to abdicate on March 19, 1823, and ruled out the possibility of a new monarchy in Mexico. The experience with Iturbide had discredited this option, and Mexican royalists would not mount another serious attempt to restore a monarchy until the 1860s. Instead, the fall of Iturbide led to the Constitution of 1824. Many historians see this constitution as the start of republican rule, but the arrangement was little more than a rejection of the monarchist plank in the Plan de Iguala and a reformulation of the program that won independence. It satisfied conservatives and centralists by protecting military and religious *fueros* and by affirming the Catholic monopoly on religion. With respect to executive powers, centralists and federalists compromised: the constitution invested the president with extraordinary emergency powers, but it allowed state legislatures the right to elect the president and vice president. Finally, it satisfied liberals, who believed that the constitution pushed Mexico in a republican direction by abandoning the monarchist project. The factions tried to sustain balance in the executive power by alternately electing federalists and centralists to the presidency and vice presidency. However, by 1827 civil conflict reappeared when Vice President Nicolás Bravo, an ex-insurgent, led a centralist revolt against his former comrade-in-arms, the liberal president Victoria. The uprising failed, but it was an ominous sign of the elite fragmentation and political conflict that were about to engulf Mexico. The next year, another ex-insurgent leader, the radical federalist Vicente Guerrero, rebelled against president-elect Manuel Gómez Pedraza, a moderate federalist, and Vice President Anastasio Bustamente, a centralist. Bustamente retained his post, but two years later he overthrew Guerrero and removed federalist influence from the executive to establish an “openly conservative” regime.³ Bustamente persecuted all political opponents, centralized power at the expense of the states, and reaffirmed the privileges of property owners, the military, and the church. This marked the beginning of a conservative domination in national politics—linked to the career of Santa Anna—that lasted to midcentury as well as a centralist praxis that survived, in one form or another, to the twentieth century.

The collapse of the federalist-centralist accord had several causes

besides divergent principles of state building. One factor was the survival of hostility between former foes. Another was the habit, acquired during the war, of resolving differences through military means. Together, these gave elite unity a brittle character that shattered in the first decade of independence. Perhaps more crucial, though, were the pressures arising from economic stagnation and anxiety over the danger of unrest by the lower classes. The war for independence had generated unprecedented destruction, including guerrilla fighting, banditry, and acts of terrorism. Among other things, warfare wrecked the core of the old colonial economy—silver mining—and left the countryside in ruin by 1821. The end of the war brought little relief, for it wiped out personal savings and left the country saddled with enormous debts to foreign lenders. Trade and commerce were at a standstill, and the scarcity of credit delayed economic recovery until the 1830s. This reduced the wealth and power of mine owners, merchants, and the landed elites and weakened the ties among them that might have helped to preserve unity after independence.⁴ As a result, the center of the economy shifted toward agriculture, giving greater weight to provincial *notables*—hacendados and merchants who competed with their counterparts in Mexico City for political eminence.⁵ Provincial elites gravitated toward federalism and forged links with urban-based liberal intellectuals, believing that regional autonomy would best preserve their interests against those of the old urban-based aristocracy of miners and merchants.⁶

However, the altered political economy was not decisive enough to make federalism and liberalism the dominant force in postcolonial politics. For one thing, centralists continued to enjoy an institutional and ideological advantage in the support they received from the military and the Roman Catholic Church; most military officers endorsed the centralist desire to retain the *fuero militar*. This clearly gave the centralists a military edge. However, centralists also found that appeals to the religious sentiments of the masses often made an effective counterweight to federalist nationalism and anticlericalism.⁷ For another thing, provincial landowners still faced uncertain economic prospects. Commercial agriculture was more important in the

national economy, but producers still faced low demand in foreign and domestic markets for grains, livestock, and sugar. Profits were marginal, and inadequate financing and credit made estate ownership quite unstable. Economic insecurity among the provincial elites also generated rivalry within federalist ranks. This helps to explain why, for example, Santa Anna—an ex-royalist officer and a hacendado—flirted briefly with federalism in 1822, or why Nicolás Bravo—a wealthy landowner and former insurgent—could embrace centralism by 1824.

It was within this context that elite mobilization of the lower classes became an important factor. This was hardly exclusive to federalists; in his bid for empire, Iturbide himself had relied on support from the lower classes in Mexico City as well as from the military. However, for ideological and practical reasons, liberals were more disposed to adopt this strategy than were conservatives. For instance, liberals were committed to political equality, and this is why the Constitution of 1824 enshrined universal male suffrage. This lasted until 1836, when Santa Anna imposed a conservative constitution that denied suffrage to most males. Yet for liberals and federalists, the matter of popular mobilization involved more than simply endowing lower-class men with the right to vote. The masses were also their main pool of recruits for the provincial militias that counterbalanced military support for centralism. Two cases in point were the roles played by Lorenzo de Zavala and Juan Alvarez in the turmoil that brought Vicente Guerrero to the presidency in 1828. Originally hailing from Yucatán, Zavala was a leading liberal intellectual and political leader in Mexico City during the 1820s. He vigorously pursued social reforms to improve the conditions of the urban poor, and this gave him a strong base of lower-class support when he agreed to organize the revolt that toppled the centralist president-elect Manuel Gómez Pedraza.⁸ However, Zavala's success in the capital city depended on the mobilization of rural militias where figures like Alvarez played a crucial role. Alvarez was an ex-insurgent who became a hacendado in the *tierra caliente* (hot country) near Acapulco on the Pacific coast. He enjoyed local supremacy based on support from indigenous and

mulatto peasants, for he protected their lands and their autonomy. In exchange, the rural poor joined his militia and followed him when he rose in support of Guerrero's bid for power.⁹

The cross-class alliances that characterized this kind of relationship typically followed older patterns of patronage politics and patriarchy. That is to say, caudillos and plebeians accepted the logic and utility of patron-client dependency so long as both sides fulfilled their obligations. The persistence and frequency of these arrangements are strong evidence that elite hegemony, such as existed, was functionally more effective on a regional or provincial level than on a national scale. Yet, as the events of 1828 also demonstrated, the efficacy of such pacts had their limits and could quickly unravel. At the height of unrest in Mexico City, the lower classes erupted into the "Parián riot" and looted upscale merchants located near the *zócalo* (main plaza). Nor was this an isolated occurrence. Urban crowds not infrequently rioted against high food prices, while in the countryside the rural poor in some areas responded with violence when local notables infringed on village lands or tried to usurp peasant autonomy. For centralists, these manifestations of disorder exposed the folly of liberals and federalists in trying to dismantle colonial institutions of social control, reinforcing their own conviction that Mexico required a strong centralized state and authoritarian praxis that rested on the Roman Catholic Church and the military. Lucas Alamán believed that only vigorous and severe justice could restrain what he regarded as the natural inclination of the lower classes toward theft and disorder and revive the colonial spirit of respect for authority.¹⁰ Alamán's nostalgia for the colonial order was rooted in his pedigree as the scion of a Mexican family of mine owners who boasted a title of Spanish nobility into the bargain; he was, in fact, the Marquis of San Clemente. However, his fear of the lower classes also had to do with his experience as an adolescent eyewitness to the slaughter visited upon the Spanish and Creole defenders of Guanajuato when Miguel Hidalgo and his rebels razed the city in 1810.

Many federalists, who remained uneasy at the necessity of mobilizing the lower classes, shared Alamán's convictions. As a class, the

hombres de bien regarded the poor as a dangerous and unstable mass. There was a slice of truth in their view: the war for independence had inculcated a spirit of disobedience and rebellion among significant portions of the lower classes, and this clearly animated their reaction to the economic crisis. In the 1820s the rates of vagrancy and petty crime continued to rise, and so did banditry. Postwar demobilizations reduced the Mexican army from 68,363 soldiers to 36,000 so that, according to Laura Solares Robles, thousands of men, “literally abandoned to their fates, looked for the most viable ways to survive [and] they became bandits.”¹¹ For many, banditry was a way of life to which they had become accustomed during the war. Some bandit gangs had been auxiliaries to insurgent or royalist forces, and they continued to ply their trade after the war.¹² Other bands were newcomers, demobilized soldiers or noncombatants who had been dislocated by the conflict. On their own accord, these bands contributed to Mexico’s postcolonial disarray, but some bandits also played a more direct role in intra-elite conflicts. Players in both elite factions counted on their ability to mobilize dependents from among the rural and urban poor in the struggle for power. This included postwar bandits who, in the most literal sense, became a “reserve army of the unemployed.” However, in the early years of independence, few imagined that banditry would become such a stubborn problem.

Assuming that the rapid consolidation of a new state would keep criminality under control, the *hombres de bien* were at first content to rely on the penal codes and techniques of law enforcement inherited from the old colonial administration. On February 7, 1822, the provisional government restored the colonial practice of requiring municipal officials to police their own communities. It directed each *ayuntamiento* (municipal council) to appoint a magistrate and two *vecinos* (residents) to apprehend lawbreakers. These officials were obliged to maintain a registry that recorded vital statistics about each resident in the community: name, address, date of birth, date of death, marital status, age, and ethnicity. These few public security officials often relied on assistance from the army or local militias.¹³ This system of law enforcement established the basic framework for law enforcement

and policing in Mexico until the late nineteenth century. Although the deficiencies of this system became obvious to both liberals and conservatives, no government could afford more than police on the cheap until Porfirio Díaz consolidated his hold on the state in the 1880s.

The same observation is true for the penal code. Alamán and other conservatives were favorably disposed toward colonial criminal law, but for much of the century even liberals had to rely on a code that “institutionalized social inequalities by punishing convicted criminals according to their legally defined social, racial, or corporate status.”¹⁴ The colonial system of criminal law derived from medieval notions about patriarchy, social hierarchies, and the antisocial character of criminality. It assumed that the lower classes were more prone to criminality than persons of privilege were. In practice, this meant that the legal system distributed punishments unequally. The courts punished lower-class convicts, mainly mestizos and other castas (mixed races), with incarceration, death by hanging, and corporal punishment such as torture, whipping, mutilation, and amputation. On the other hand, persons of wealth and nobility could expect special consideration and lighter punishments, while those who enjoyed corporate privileges—military officers, clerics, and indigenous people—were exempt from the jurisdiction of the regular courts. The patriarchal orientation of the codes was also manifest in the practice of imposing lighter sentences on convicts considered weak or irrational. Thus the legal system defined indigenous people as juveniles who faced trial in separate courts that usually punished them less severely than convicts of other ethnic categories. The elites also believed that women were more likely to commit crimes of sex and morality, such as prostitution and infidelity, than more serious offenses that required “physical exertion,” such as armed robbery or murder.¹⁵ Consequently, women and juveniles merited trial in courts appropriate to the status and privileges of their family patriarch, where they often received special consideration in view of their gender and age. Such were the contours of the penal codes inherited after independence. Conservatives like Alamán wanted to keep them, while liberals like Zavala wanted a code that expressed more humanitarian principles and rationalist

theories.¹⁶ Nevertheless, political crises and instability forced all governments, liberal or conservative, to retain the colonial codes and to supplement them with “stop-gap criminal legislation intended principally to restore public order.” This remained the case until the Juárez regime overhauled the codes in 1871.¹⁷

As an alternative to revamping the criminal justice system, the liberals tried prison reform in order to rehabilitate the “dangerous classes.” The intellectual and political theorist José María Luis Mora argued that continued inequality before the law combined with degrading social conditions to make lower-class Mexicans into criminals. He believed that lower-class criminality was culturally heritable, but he did not propose broad social reforms to ameliorate plebeian living conditions. Mora embraced laissez-faire economic doctrines to assert that the rise of a “natural economy” would increase prosperity and improve life for the lower classes.¹⁸ Until that distant day, Mora advocated the permanent incarceration of adult criminals and the systematic rehabilitation of imprisoned youth.¹⁹ No nineteenth-century government ever went to such an extreme. A more typical approach to reform was the 1825 effort by the liberal minister of justice, Pablo de Llave, who sought to improve the security and conditions of existing prisons. Llave described Mexican prisons as institutions that “afflict, torture [and] destroy the health and manners of those detained . . . [in] an atmosphere thick with corruption, dimly lit or completely dark, with walls always black, the ground always damp, the nakedness, the hunger, the swarms of insects.” Obviously, such places could never be instruments of rehabilitation. Indeed, Llave and other liberals worried that prisons functioned more like schools that trained prisoners in the criminal arts. Consequently, Llave ordered construction of a new prison in Mexico City, in the building formerly occupied by the colonial *Acordada*. A lack of finances delayed construction until 1833, but when it was finally completed its most significant reform feature was the compulsory employment of prisoners in the workshops that subsidized the prison.²⁰ This was hardly cutting-edge prison reform, for it replicated a late-colonial practice in a more sanitized environment. Nor did its cleanliness remain a permanent

characteristic. It never became a den of horror equal to San Juan de Ulúa in Veracruz, but the conditions in the Acordada prison declined as its population grew. In 1843, U.S. ambassador Brantz Mayer called the Acordada prison the “most splendid school of misdemeanour and villainy on the American Continent,” filled with “robbers, murderers, thieves, ravishers, felons of every description, and vagabonds of every aspect.” At midcentury the English traveler R. H. Mason described the prison as a “giant receptacle of vice.”²¹

Reformed or not, the system was inadequate. Therefore, the elites relied on extraordinary decrees, a practice that began during the first republic. The first and most stringent of these laws targeted bandits on the highway from Veracruz to Mexico City. Promulgated as a temporary four-month measure in 1823, the decree empowered the military to arrest and convict highway robbers (*salteadores de camino*), thieves who operated in unpopulated or isolated areas (*ladrones en despoblado*), thieves in gangs of four or more persons, and any suspects who resisted arrest. Regular army units or local militias who arrested bandits no longer transported outlaws to a civil court but tried them on the spot or at the nearest pueblo. Many bandits faced execution, but most went to prison. In 1825, Victoria’s government opened a special prison in Mexico City for these bandits in the former headquarters of the Inquisition. In one three-month period, from October 1825 to January 1826, military courts consigned 176 convicts to this “bandit” prison.²²

The decree also aimed at reducing judicial corruption. The Victoria government believed that corrupt and inept justice officials were encouraging criminal impunity. The penal codes provided severe penalties for banditry, punishing first-time offenders with jail time, torture, mutilation, or amputation of a limb. The courts could punish repeat offenders with hanging, garroting, or burning at the stake (although the postcolonial courts never imposed death by fire). The problem, according to Zavala, was that regular courts were slow, inefficient, and corrupt. “Many of these criminals were arrested and sent to jail,” he wrote, “but they nevertheless remained untried. Their cases often remained pending for two or three years, during which they always

seemed to find an opportunity to escape; it was not unusual to find, in the jails of Mexico, individuals who had been captured two or three times for the same crime, without ever having been sentenced for the first offense.”²³ The 1823 decree tried to remedy this problem, but liberals thought this set a dangerous precedent. Zavala himself lamented the difficult position of legislators who found themselves trapped between the need for order and the inefficiencies of the legal system. They were, Zavala felt, trying to cure the ills of a backward nation. This not only included the lower classes but also the corruption of the courts, which liberals linked to the influence of colonial-era practices and attitudes.

Many prisoners did indeed languish in jail for months or years awaiting trial, a situation for which liberal critics blamed the “inertia” and “venality” of judges and the incompetence of court officers.²⁴ Charges of corruption and ineptitude were true enough, but they did not tell the entire story. Mexican prisons were something akin to human warehouses that stockpiled an excess population, including those whom the elites considered too ruined or defective to become truly productive citizens. No doubt prisons were shelters of the last resort for the destitute, but incarceration was truly horrifying, especially when it removed male breadwinners from families or separated mothers from their children. Jail often meant ruin, not only for inmates but also for loved ones and dependents. When the realities of judicial corruption threatened indefinite incarceration, it is easy to understand that prisoners learned to manipulate the system to escape. However, this was easier for affluent lawbreakers. Success depended on the ability to mobilize friends and family to marshal resources and social connections. In this sense, the judicial system was an extortion enterprise that milked victims to enrich judges, court officials, prosecutors, guards, or anyone else who possessed the keys to freedom.²⁵

If liberals such as Zavala recognized this, it was only dimly and from a distant and gilded perch. When confronted with the confusion then prevailing in Mexico, Zavala and other liberals reflexively emphasized order over social justice. They looked down at Mexico from the heights of privilege to see a general condition of backward-

ness which they blamed on the influence of the colonial heritage. To liberals, the past continued to cast its shadow on Mexico. The liberals did not abandon their faith in the redemptive potential of the masses, but liberal thinking did proceed in a linear fashion that presumed the prior necessity of disciplining the lower classes before beginning their cultural transformation. Thus we find Zavala insisting that circumstances compelled lawmakers to “issue laws of exception that contradicted constitutional principles.” Zavala and other liberals believed that the efficiency of the military courts justified the 1823 decree.²⁶ Conservatives agreed. Alamán acknowledged the corruption of the postcolonial judicial system, and he likewise complained that bandits were evading arrest, incarceration, and execution. However, he traced the problem of criminal impunity to leniency among government and judicial officials who pardoned criminals or commuted their sentences. He lamented that partisan politics were “overriding and enervating the rule of law.”²⁷

The extraordinary decree increased convictions, but economic distress and political turmoil ensured that the crisis of banditry did not abate. On April 6, 1824, the Victoria government extended the extraordinary decree indefinitely. It subsequently survived two liberal presidents and Anastasio Bustamante’s conservative dictatorship, remaining in effect until December 18, 1832. In 1826, Victoria’s government permitted regular and military courts to consign bandits and other criminals to military service. In 1829, President Guerrero allowed the military courts to sentence bandits and thieves to public works, fortifications, and the navy or to banishment to the Californias. In so doing, Guerrero hoped to kill two birds with one stone: to reduce banditry and to augment national defenses to ward off a Spanish invasion of Mexico.²⁸ The Spanish were repulsed, but Guerrero refused to relinquish the emergency powers he wielded during the military crisis. This was the pretext that conservative vice president Bustamante needed to rebel in 1830. Bustamante executed Guerrero and imposed his own authoritarian rule. The 1823 decree on banditry finally lapsed when Santa Anna rose against Bustamante and returned the liberals to power in 1832. Although Santa Anna officially became

president, he returned to Veracruz and left the administration to his liberal vice president, Valentín Gómez Farías. Two years later, Santa Anna rebelled against his own vice president and reinstalled a conservative government.

The governments of Bustamante, Gómez Farías, and Santa Anna all continued the practice of consigning convicted bandits to military service. This ended in 1836, when it became obvious that many bandits simply donned uniforms and continued as before. The result had been a sharp rise in holdups along the highway linking Veracruz to Mexico City. A steady stream of reports by Mexican and foreign travelers complained that military escorts disappeared when they reached the most dangerous legs of their journey or that they failed to resist whenever bandits appeared. Suspicious travelers claimed that the bandits who robbed them resembled too closely the troopers who were supposed to protect them. At first the Santa Anna government responded with an extraordinary decree, on October 29, 1835, that revived the spirit of the 1823 measure. This time, however, the decree gave the military courts jurisdiction over anyone guilty of robbery or homicide, with the exception of *rateros* (petty thieves). Santa Anna also systematically used capital punishment to deter other bandits. For a time the government executed two or three convicted bandits each week. At first the military carried out these killings, but at the end of 1835 the government appointed a public executioner who used the garrote to dispose of his victims. By mid-1836 these events had become a public spectacle, attracting such enormous crowds that on execution days Mexico City businesses began to shut down for lack of customers and employees. In March 1836, the congress finally ordered the executioner to kill his prisoners before nine o'clock in the morning so that his work did not become an excuse for unofficial holidays.²⁹

Even these harsh measures failed to reduce banditry. The outbreak of rebellion in Texas complicated matters in 1835. Once again, the army impressed jailed bandits and other criminals into the force sent to put down the uprising. However, the diversion of soldiers to the northern frontiers meant fewer troops to provide security against

bandits and thieves elsewhere. Incidents of banditry multiplied and then continued to do so when veterans of the Texas campaign demobilized in the wake of their 1836 defeat. Mexico's troubles deepened two years later when the United States, France, and Great Britain pressed the government to repay foreign nationals who suffered damages caused by this latest bout of banditry, rebellion, and warfare. Mexico settled with the United States but faced a joint British-French blockade of the Veracruz port—its most important source of customs revenue. As a result, the Mexican government had to borrow to settle the claims. This only increased an already unmanageable debt, fueling financial speculation and inflation and aggravating economic insecurity for the lower classes.

Then, in 1839, during Bustamante's second presidency, the robbery and murder of the Swiss consul led to an investigation by the municipal authorities of Mexico City that revealed something of the true extent of banditry. It turned out that Santa Anna's military aide, Col. Juan Yáñez, had used his position to create and protect a vast network of urban and rural banditry. Yáñez recruited well-placed informers who were able to learn the itineraries of well-heeled travelers and then passed on this intelligence to bandits-cum-troopers who waylaid their victims on the highway. Yáñez also orchestrated a string of burglaries that afflicted wealthy *capitalanos*. These revelations naturally scandalized polite society in Mexico; Yáñez and four other principals were executed, while another fifty went to prison.³⁰

The destruction of the Yáñez ring excised a significant piece of banditry from the Mexican body politic, but it also coincided with a renewed upsurge of regional revolts against conservative centralism. Between 1839 and 1842 the state once more assumed liberal and federalist colors, only to fall to rebellious conservatives led by the familiar duo of Santa Anna and Bustamante. This time they closed down congress, and for the next two years Santa Anna ruled entirely by decree and imposed a new constitution, known as the Bases Orgánicas. Adopted in 1843, this document provided the framework for a state that was even more highly centralized and authoritarian than was provided for in an earlier conservative constitution, the Siete Leyes

of 1836. This time, conservatives were determined to pacify the nation with an iron fist. The Bases Orgánicas gave the president nearly unlimited powers and further narrowed the franchise by raising property and income qualifications for male voters. The new constitution also enabled special tribunals as an instrument to suppress criminals. This was another revival of colonial-era procedures, based on the tribunals of the *Acordada*, a “special law enforcement agency created in 1719 to deal with the serious problem of rural banditry.” The colonial *Acordada* had extralegal powers—including summary execution—and succeeded in wiping out banditry.³¹ More than one hundred years later, the Mexican state was again prepared to establish these courts. Preparations for an extensive antibandit campaign began in 1842, when Bustamente instructed the state governors to forward statistics on the prison population in their regions.³² The government wanted a good grasp on the geographic distribution and rates of banditry as well as vital statistics on bandits themselves. However, Bustamente abandoned the effort in 1844 when liberal insurgents overthrew the conservatives and installed a government under Gen. José Joaquín Herrera.

The political tumult of these years erased the possibility of making gains in the struggle against banditry. The cycle of revolts made it impossible for any government to exercise power effectively. Moreover, the nation teetered on the brink of insolvency as military costs consumed the treasury. Meanwhile, new storm clouds gathered on the northern horizon as Texas negotiated annexation to the United States. Faced with internal chaos and the possibility of war with the United States, Herrera desperately tried to maintain unity. He wooed conservatives by keeping Santa Anna’s constitution, even as he attempted to mollify federalists and liberals by expanding the scope of regional autonomy. At the same time, he turned his attention to the problem of banditry by invoking article 192 of the Bases Orgánicas, which provided for extraordinary criminal tribunals.³³

The circumstance that precipitated the liberals’ resort to tribunals was a sudden proliferation of banditry in Puebla and Tlaxcala, athwart the highway from Mexico City to Veracruz. On July 21,

1845, the president of Puebla, Luis Gutierrez Corral, urgently appealed for aid in suppressing bandits who had been plundering the region since January. These criminals, he wrote, were attacking stage-coaches, robbing mule trains, raiding towns, and had even entered the capital to loot the city's magnificent and ornate churches. The state militia attempted to repulse these invaders but had met with little success. Puebla officials were growing desperate, for they lacked the resources to handle the crisis themselves. Corral urged the national government to intervene with special courts to "prosecute and punish these gangs of thieves." He was confident that this would produce the same result that the *Acordada* had during the colonial period.³⁴

The national congress referred this request to a special commission, which returned with a favorable recommendation on September 20, 1845. The report noted that "armed gangs were attacking travelers, threatening their lives, despoiling them of their goods and creating a level of insecurity that is the worst enemy of commercial progress." It also noted that the crisis in Puebla had more than local implications, for this "serious evil directly influenced the general state of the country" by generalizing a sense of insecurity, undermining commerce, and causing damage to public wealth. Moreover, the impunity of these bandits threatened to bring disrepute to the government and the nation, since they made a mockery of constitutional guarantees that protected the security of life and property. The commission declared that congress had no choice but to act, and two days later it submitted its proposal. It expressed reluctance to propose extraordinary tribunals, which suspended guarantees of due process, but argued that "evils of such serious and unhappy consequences, such as repeated acts of banditry, demand a quick, energetic, and efficient remedy." At the same time, the commission insisted on provisions to minimize abuses such as malicious prosecution. The commission also wanted to ensure that the tribunals did not become a permanent feature of the criminal justice system. It therefore limited the duration of special tribunals in Puebla to no more than six months. The commission insisted on a rigorous process of selection and post hoc review (*residencia*) of each judge appointed to hear cases. The commission also warned that this

measure was a short-term expedient and was not a permanent solution to the problem.³⁵

The commission insisted on other medium- and long-term reforms as well. It situated banditry in a social context and observed that “the general misery of all classes, the decline of agriculture, the feeble development of the arts, the absolute lack of employment . . . [and] the many revolutions, political and armed, [have] multiplied the numbers of vagrants, deserters, [and] thieves.”³⁶ The commission did not propose any specific measures to ameliorate the social conditions that created bandits, but it did contemplate medium-term structural reforms that might constrain the extent of outlawry. It noted that highway robberies in the states of México, Puebla, Veracruz, and elsewhere were a daily occurrence but that authorities rarely apprehended the perpetrators. For this the commission criticized the failure of Puebla and other state governments to organize rural police forces. Turning finally to the issue of prison reform, the commission noted that “the dreadful state of the jails, from which prisoners escape by the tens, is another source of these gangs of wrongdoers, who can live on nothing else but the fruits of their crimes; the insecurity of the presidios allows convicts to escape on the very day they arrive, and turns them into bandits, since they are accustomed only to crime and fleeing from justice, and they can become nothing else. No less influential is the ease and frequency with which prisoners and criminals sometimes receive pardons; this they accept as permission to repeat their crimes.”³⁷

Congress established the extraordinary tribunals on November 3, 1845, but expanded their duration and jurisdiction. They were to be effective for two years and operate in Mexico City, Puebla, and Veracruz.³⁸ In the meantime, congress revived Bustamente’s survey and instructed all state governments to forward statistics on convicted bandits and other criminals.³⁹

A Portrait of the Bandit as a Criminal Statistic

The results of this survey are incomplete, but they offer the best source to date for reconstructing a social profile of banditry in nineteenth-century Mexico. Nine states sent reports that listed prisoners

by name, age, marital status, occupation, literacy, the crime committed, and, in some cases, the sentence received. Most reports included a summary that generalized data. Seven states (Aguascalientes, Durango, Guanajuato, México, Michoacán, Puebla, and Sinaloa) sent complete lists from seventy-nine prisons. Morelos sent figures for the prison in Cuernavaca, while Veracruz sent data for the small prison in Cordova but not for the penitentiary of San Juan de Ulúa or the smaller prisons and jails. The government did not request data on the ethnicity of convicts, nor did it express any interest in the gender of convicts. This may have reflected a liberal belief that gender and ethnicity should be irrelevant to the principle of equality before the law, but it more likely reflected assumptions that paid less heed to female criminality and presumed that most criminals were male and *casta*. At midcentury, most criminals, including bandits, were young males in semiskilled or unskilled occupations. Most were married and illiterate. The statistics also show that women committed more “serious crimes” than the elites supposed.⁴⁰

The total sample included eighty prisons and jails, holding 2,984 prisoners. Of these, seventy-nine were women, representing 3 percent of the sample. This small number underrepresents the female convict population, as most prisons did not forward data on gender. Only fifteen prisons listed women convicts, but even these data were inconsistent.⁴¹ It is clear that prison officials decided for themselves whether to report on female criminals, and that when they did so they lacked guidelines on how to proceed. Roughly half the prisons that reported women prisoners segregated the data and appended it to the list of males. This paralleled the physical segregation of women and men in the prisons, but nearly half the officials did not even feel it was necessary to represent this reality in their data. The practice of segregating women statistically implies a valorization that prioritized male criminality. One can conclude that prison officials literally and figuratively regarded female criminals as appendices to male criminals.

It is also certain that these reports underrepresented aggregate totals for the prison population and therefore for the number of bandits incarcerated. However, they are reasonably complete for seven states,

including the core states of México and Puebla, which had, in addition to Veracruz, the worst reputations for banditry. These figures provide us with the geographic distribution and rates of banditry. Nearly four hundred convicts (13 percent) went to prison for banditry, while twenty-two were *receptidores* (receivers of stolen goods) or *encubridores* (accomplices). Another fifty prisoners were smugglers. Altogether, bandits, receptidores, encubridores, and *contrabandistas* were 16 percent of the sample. This group was the third-largest portion of prisoners. Only those convicted of petty theft (29 percent) and homicide (23 percent) were more common. Not all were men. Three women were convicted of banditry (in Morelos), three were receptidoras (two in Puebla and one in Michoacán), and two were smugglers (one each in Morelos and Michoacán). Of the remaining offenses, few crimes reached or surpassed a rate of 1 percent.⁴²

Women went to prison more often than men did for moral and sexual offenses, but contrary to elite assumptions, the most common female crime was murder (20 percent). The largest proportion of women convicts were married (44 percent), but most had no husband: 37 percent were single, while 19 percent were widows. A majority (71 percent) were between twenty and forty years old. Eighty-one percent of women were illiterate. Finally, the vast majority of women offenders (96 percent) were considered *sin oficio* (without an occupation). Only three had recognized employment: a midwife, a washerwoman, and a seamstress. The small sample of women prisoners renders conclusions provisional, but the figures nevertheless suggest that female criminality had a significant linkage to poverty in the absence of a male provider.⁴³

The figures confirmed that midcentury rates of banditry were high in relation to other crimes and that banditry was very common in central and north-central Mexico. Nearly half the bandits (48 percent) were from states—México, Puebla, and Veracruz—located along the nation's most infamous bandit corridor. This was the highway from Mexico City to Veracruz, which carried the highest volume of travelers, commerce, and specie. However, the picture changes when we consider rates of banditry as a proportion of the prison population.

The largest prison populations were in Puebla (776), México (776), and Guanajuato (622). These states had a reputation for being more infested with brigands than elsewhere, but they did not have the highest rates of banditry. The rate in Puebla corresponded to the national average at 15 percent, while the rates in México (8 percent) and Guanajuato (7 percent) were below the average. The samples from Veracruz and Michoacán approximated the average, while Sinaloa had a rate of 9 percent. The highest rates, and well above the average, were in Durango at 32 percent, and in Morelos and Aguascalientes, at 27 percent.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the statistics offer only a glimpse at the sentences bandits received. The prison in Chalchicomula, Puebla, reported that three bandits received ten years in a presidio, while a fourth had to perform two years of labor as a field hand. Meanwhile, judges handed down lighter sentences to smugglers, ranging from two years in a presidio to one- or two-month terms, and three murderers received sentences of five years' service in the army. The courts punished banditry more severely than homicide, even though murder rates were higher. However, the courts also handed down lighter sentences to younger bandits.⁴⁵ This indicates a degree of judicial discretion that corresponds to the logic of the colonial penal code. It is worth noting that these sentences were more lenient than the general law on banditry passed by the reform liberals in 1857 and also lighter than penalties prescribed in the 1871 code.

The sample confirms that most bandits were young, lower-class men in the countryside, married (57 percent) and illiterate (75 percent). The most common occupations were farmhands (23 percent), estate day laborers (19 percent), and peasant-farmers (15 percent). Four percent were *sin oficio*. The rest were cobblers, mule skinner, carpenters, shopkeepers, tanners, blacksmiths, tailors, and cowboys. The only significant anomaly was in Morelos, where more bandits were younger, single, and literate. According to the report, young men age twenty to thirty years were 83 percent of bandits. Of these, 57 percent were single and 17 percent were able to read and write.⁴⁶

For the purposes of comparison, three women convicted of ban-

ditry in Morelos were all part of the same gang. Two were married, one between the ages of twenty and thirty, the other thirty to forty. One woman was single, in the age range of twenty to thirty years. Of two female accomplices in Puebla, one was thirty to forty years old and married, while the other was twenty to thirty years old and single. The lone receptidora imprisoned in Michoacán was twenty-three years old and married. All were *sin oficio* and illiterate.⁴⁷ The figures affirm that banditry was primarily a male crime but suggest that women were involved as accessories, likely based on kinship. Since the majority of imprisoned bandits in midcentury Mexico were married, one may surmise that many relied on family members and supporters, including females, to provide refuge or alibis or to assist with concealing stolen goods.

It is also worth noting that the profiles of bandits corresponded to those of inmates convicted of other crimes. The main difference was that a significant number of lower-class men opted for banditry. In the absence of more concrete evidence, such as the transcripts of court trials, why they did is a matter of educated guessing. Whatever future research may reveal, the profiles of these bandits are suggestive for those who argue for environmental explanations. Laura Solares Robles, who unearthed this survey to study banditry in the state of México, noted that outlaws were “young, married, uneducated, and for the most part compelled to work on lands that they did not own.”⁴⁸ She believes that they were “oppressed by a scarcity of work” but had “many mouths to feed.”⁴⁹ She locates the causes of banditry in “misery, lack of education, unemployment, and the corruption and poor administration of justice.”⁵⁰

This conforms to the analysis of midcentury liberals, who offered explanations that focused on poor upbringing, poverty, and political instability. Nevertheless, the different views of conservatives and liberals on matters of causation narrowed to a consensus when it came to repression. The elite discourse at midcentury understood the bandit as a threat to commerce and constitutional order. As a result, both factions were prepared to make bandits a special object of repression and to exempt them from constitutional guarantees.

Liberalism and the Death of the Bandit Foretold

However useful the 1845 survey is for historians, it had little value for Herrera, as the campaign against banditry came to naught. On December 14, five weeks after congress agreed to establish extraordinary tribunals, Gen. Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga toppled Herrera with a pro-monarchy rebellion. This pushed the country toward civil war on the eve of conflict with the United States. Paredes's rash behavior in the face of an external war threat led to the evaporation of support for his regime, and he resigned the presidency in July. Liberals returned to power and restored the Constitution of 1824. They also invited Santa Anna back from exile to lead the defense against a U.S. invasion that began in August 1846. The war was a disaster for Mexico. It opened a chasm into which half of the country plunged, annexed to the United States at war's end. But the worst was still to come. The humiliation of defeat left liberals and conservatives more divided than ever.

The next ten years brought escalating strife that finally unleashed a civil war which, from 1858 to 1867, surpassed the death and destruction wrought by the struggle for independence. When it was over, the liberals emerged with a republican constitution and an authoritarian political culture. This set the stage for the final campaign to eradicate banditry, but none of this was yet apparent in 1848. As Mexico emerged from the wreckage of war with the United States, the liberals returned to power under consecutive presidents José Joaquín Herrera and Mariano Arista. Both were generals and moderate liberals, inclined to compromise with conservatives. However, the war had erased the political middle ground. Militants on both sides blamed the other for Mexico's defeat. The country seethed with unrest, but the national treasury was so bankrupt that the government had no choice but to abandon state governments to their own devices.

Not a few governors found themselves in situations similar to that which Benito Juárez faced in Oaxaca. From 1848 to 1853, recurring waves of rebellion and banditry swept through the state. Much of the unrest had to do with the maneuvers of regional conservatives, allied with Santa Anna in neighboring Veracruz, to unseat Juárez and gain

a strategic foothold in Oaxaca.⁵¹ To achieve this, they forged alliances with peasant villages that were attempting to protect their access to local resources. One intense conflict erupted in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, under the jurisdiction of Juárez in Oaxaca. Large landowners began to encroach on coastal salt beds that Isthmus villagers relied on for their own dietary needs and for trade.⁵² Conflicts between villagers and hacendados turned into a local rebellion that Juárez vigorously suppressed, but banditry and killings—the usual fallout from failed revolts—continued to plague the region. Juárez responded by strengthening the militia. He also announced plans to form “an armed rural police force.” The state’s straightened finances frustrated this, but Juárez met with more success in curtailing criminal impunity in the courts. He ordered the courts to expedite criminal proceedings to within ten to fifteen days after the arrest of a suspect. At the same time, he wanted to ensure that accused criminals had legal counsel, so he fined lawyers who refused to represent a prisoner. For a short time Oaxaca enjoyed relative tranquility, but in 1850 conservatives allied with José Gregorio Meléndez, from the village of Juchitán, who once more led the Tehuantepec region in an uprising against Juárez. The ensuing confrontation destroyed the village and caused many civilian deaths, but Meléndez remained free to continue a campaign of raiding. This destabilized Oaxaca and strained relations between Juárez and the national government. Fearing that the revolt might spiral out of control, the national government pressed Juárez to settle the affair with an offer of amnesty to the rebels. The Oaxacan governor refused. By July 1852, Juárez subdued the insurgent-bandits of Juchitán and apprehended the leaders of other bands that had been active near the capital of Oaxaca.⁵³ However, Juárez found himself expelled from office not long afterward when Santa Anna orchestrated a military coup against President Arista. This was to be the old military caudillo’s last intervention.

The liberals immediately fought back under the leadership of Juan Alvarez, and when they returned to power in 1855 it was with a more radical edge. Following a brief stewardship under Alvarez, the presidency went to a moderate liberal, Ignacio Comonfort. However, Al-

varez made sure that intransigents like Juárez, known as *puros*, dominated the government. At the core of the radicals were younger men, mainly mestizos and a handful of *indígenos* like Juárez and Manuel Ignacio Altamirano, who were replacing the old-guard Creole liberals. They concluded that efforts by moderate liberals to accommodate conservatives merely invited a backlash and guaranteed disorder. For them, the time had arrived to consummate the republican principles of the struggle for independence. With Juárez as minister of justice and Miguel Lerdo de Tejada in the finance portfolio, the *puros* abolished military and religious *fueros* and put an end to the right of corporate entities to hold land. Although this law affected indigenous landholding, the primary target was the Roman Catholic Church, which liberals regarded as a conservative prop that monopolized land, inhibited the development of a class of small property holders, and stunted the growth of commercial agriculture. The liberals enshrined these laws in their new constitution.

The Constitution of 1857 was a hallmark in Mexican history. Its adoption led to the War of the Reform and the War of the French Intervention, but afterward it remained the fundamental law until 1917 and offered the first genuinely republican framework for the principle of equality before the law. Although the constitutional convention rejected trial by jury and religious freedom, neither did it endorse Catholicism as an official creed. On the other hand, the constitution restored universal male adult suffrage. Paul Vanderwood has described the constitution as a “negative document in that it outlined what the government could not do and reflected a fear of autocratic centralism.”⁵⁴ For example, article 22 prohibited the courts from punishing convicts with mutilation, branding, flogging, beatings with clubs (*palos*), torture, excessive fines, or the confiscation of personal property. The constitution also abolished the death penalty for political crimes, but it did not abolish capital punishment. Article 23 reserved the death penalty for bandits and pirates and anyone convicted of treason, arson, parricide, murder, or military crimes.⁵⁵

The inclusion of banditry as a capital offense in the constitution was a liberal innovation that reflected frustration with the stubborn

persistence of this phenomenon and an unambiguous hardening of attitudes toward imposing order on the lower classes. It also reflected their recent experiences that linked banditry as a mercenary adjunct to political rebellion. The liberals were determined to secure their dominance by ending outlawry and conservative opposition. However, it is revealing that they hoped to accomplish each by quite different means. They aimed at weakening conservatives by political means—that is to say, by undermining institutions and conventions that sustained the conservatives as a political force. On the other hand, the liberal discourse recognized banditry as a form of lower-class criminality with dangerous political uses. This does not mean they saw banditry as a form of political rebellion itself, or even that the lower classes had much capacity for independent political mobilization. Rather, it shows that the liberals were refining an older discursive strategy that criminalized lower-class rebelliousness. In addition, the liberals continued to handle banditry within the terms of the colonial-era penal code, even though this contradicted their own constitutional principle of equality before the law. Until it could revise the codes, the liberal government was content to rely on temporary decrees that superseded sections of the penal code. One of the first edicts in 1857 was a *General Law on Prosecuting Thieves, Murderers, Injurers, and Vagabonds*.⁵⁶ With respect to banditry and theft, the reform liberals proposed harsher punishments for banditry than what had been the practice and accepted standard under the colonial penal code after 1821.

According to this law, primary criminal responsibility implicated anyone who was involved in planning or committing banditry or who compelled dependents to do so, including parents, guardians, tutors, masters and employers, or social superiors. A second degree of responsibility involved accomplices who made banditry possible, including encubridores and receptidores. Finally, the law absolved accomplices if they had no knowledge of the crime or if they withheld information from authorities from fear or irresistible compulsion. This exemption applied to spouses, parents, children, siblings, or in-laws of the culprit. The law also absolved those who were insane or

mentally incapable, were minors younger than ten and a half years, acted in response to irresistible force or insuperable fear, or were completely inebriated, but were not habitual drunks, and had not become inebriated to commit the crime.⁵⁷

The penalties for banditry were more severe than before. Capital punishment automatically applied to *cabecillas* (leaders) of a bandit gang. Otherwise, the courts could impose death when robbery with violence led to murder or when it occurred in an isolated area and involved torture, violation, mutilation, or serious injury. Subordinate gang members faced an automatic ten years in a presidio. Banditry in populated areas carried an automatic sentence of ten years in a presidio whenever the crime involved torture, violation, mutilation, or serious injury. The law regarded all individuals who were present at the crime as guilty of every act, unless clear evidence showed that they tried to prevent the acts. In the absence of proof, the courts assumed that all members of a gang were present at the crime. With respect to minors, the law prohibited capital punishment for anyone less than eighteen years old and banned sentencing to presidios or public works for those younger than sixteen years. The law mandated incarceration for minors older than ten and a half years but required prison authorities to segregate them from adult prisoners.⁵⁸

The reform liberals did not get much further than adopting their constitution and issuing enabling legislation before the country plunged into the War of the Reform (1858–61). The new constitution inspired bitter opposition from the military, the Roman Catholic Church, and other conservative forces. Then, in December 1857, President Comonfort caved in to pressure and joined with conservative general Félix María Zuloaga to topple his own government. The conservatives wasted no time in placing Zuloaga in the presidency. The liberals rallied behind Juárez, who, as head of the supreme court, was in line to succeed Comonfort. By 1860 Juárez and the liberals regained control of the state, but they were hard-pressed. Conservative forces remained in the field, supported by guerrillas and bandits. Meanwhile, Juárez faced a fiscal crisis. Mexico's foreign debt exceeded eighty million pesos, and government revenues had all but disappeared. Britain

held most of the receipts, but the conservatives had also borrowed heavily from France to finance their parallel government. Juárez repudiated the conservative debt, but his crisis deepened in 1861 when insolvency forced him to suspend debt payments for two years. Mexico's creditors—Britain, France, and Spain—immediately seized the customs house at Veracruz. Meanwhile, Mexican conservatives conspired with Napoleon III of France to use the financial crisis to their mutual advantage. Napoleon wanted a foothold in North America to satisfy his expansionist desires, while the conservatives wanted the support of the French army to defeat Juárez. The quid pro quo rested on an agreement to import a European monarch to Mexico. Thus, the War of the Reform segued into the War of the French Intervention (1862–67); the civil war entered its bloodiest phase when French troops arrived to topple Juárez and install Austrian archduke Maximilian von Hapsburg as emperor.

To that point the civil war had been brutal and ruthless, but French intervention escalated the savagery. Conservative and liberal forces criminalized their opponents as bandits. Thus the French army and its Mexican allies summarily executed Juarista combatants and any non-combatants suspected of sympathizing with Juarista “bandits.” The liberals returned the same treatment. Juárez decreed that all Mexicans who aided the French were outlaws and traitors who merited execution. These charges and countercharges were deliberate tactics to demonize political enemies, but they were not always disingenuous hyperbole, as each side firmly believed it was the legitimate representative of law and order in Mexico. Strictly speaking, one's opponents were in fact outside the law. From this it was but a small step to abolishing any distinction between bandits and military opponents. The reflexive nature of this attitude is readily apparent in the military and political correspondence on both sides. For example, in 1863, liberal general Porfirio Díaz had difficulty provisioning his forces in the Bajío, a situation he blamed on a gang of “four hundred bandits,” most likely the very same conservative guerrillas who later attacked a convoy protecting Comonfort, killing the ex-president and his escort.⁵⁹ It was similar on the imperial side, where internal cor-

respondence conflated Juarista rebels with bandits. Typical is a report by Jesús María Aguilar, prefect of Nuevo León in 1865, who wrote to his superiors in Mexico City and described a campaign to crush one “Méndez and his guerrillas . . . of less than two hundred men.” Three hundred infantry and a force of cavalry pursued “the bandits” and defeated “the dissidents, pursuing them until they were exterminated.”⁶⁰ This is an excellent example of how the rhetoric of demonization automatically erased any difference between “guerrillas,” “bandits,” and “dissidents.” Since these documents were not for public consumption, we may assume that the use of terms like “bandit” expressed sincere perceptions of fact. For in reality, the line between guerrilla fighting and banditry almost disappeared during this conflict. Both sides recruited known bandits to augment their forces. The best-known case—but certainly not the only one—was the concord between Juárez and the Plateados who wrecked havoc on the highway from Mexico City to Veracruz. This was a war to the death, and both sides were determined to win by any means. Aside from the involvement of bandit mercenaries, the military operations of regular forces on both sides acquired a predatory character that made it meaningless to distinguish them from bandits. When it was all over, the French were defeated, Maximilian was dead, and the conservatives were finished in nineteenth-century Mexico. More than three hundred thousand Mexicans were dead in a landscape dotted with razed villages and ruined haciendas.

Endgame: Authoritarian Liberals and Brigands

The legal discourse on banditry entered its last stages in the aftermath of French intervention. Out of this experience, the liberals acquired a republican constitution and a tendency toward authoritarian practices, both of which they used to begin building a stable national state. They did not accomplish this easily, for the social and political aftershocks of the war reverberated for several years. For example, the government reduced the army from sixty thousand to twenty thousand to reduce military expenses, but this had the consequence of augmenting the armed bands who roamed the countryside. The

famous Plateados, formerly allies of the liberals in the civil war, returned to plundering Morelos. Meanwhile, regional caudillos maintained private armies to fend against the intrusions of the national government and local competitors alike. These forces sometimes participated in the local rebellions that continued to flare into the 1890s. Few ever gained momentum, but several did degenerate into political banditry that bedeviled authorities until they crushed them. This was fate of the famous Tiger of Nayarit, Manuel Lozada, who perished in 1873 under the *ley fuga* (i.e., he shot while trying to escape), and for Heraclio Bernal, the Thunderbolt of Sinaloa, who died in an ambush in 1888.

The liberals of the restored republic were now dominant, but they did not exercise effective national hegemony. This began to change by the 1880s, but it did not extend far beyond a thin stratum of elites and an emergent middle class. As a result, to the very end of the Porfirian era the elites were compelled to rely on coercive techniques to establish and maintain order over the lower classes. One of the first decisive steps toward achieving order was reconciliation among the elites. This began as early as 1869 when I. M. Manuel Altamirano founded a literary journal devoted to nationalizing Mexican culture, *Renacimiento*, and opened its pages to liberal and conservative intellectuals. Reconciliation moved more slowly in political circles, but it continued apace, so that by the 1880s most of the elites were absorbed into networks over which the liberals exercised hegemony. In the meantime, Juárez desperately needed foreign capital to revive the economy. However, foreign lenders and investors were reluctant to act without confidence that the liberals could actually rule. Therefore, upon winning election in 1867, Juárez strengthened the presidency with powers that exceeded the provisions of the constitution and governed with an authoritarian hand. This reinforced the efforts of his treasury minister to reorganize the fiscal structure and stimulate the economy. Before he died in 1872, Juárez suspended constitutional guarantees nine times and exercised emergency powers for “all but 57 days of this period.”⁶¹ Even so, economic progress proved slow. The most significant achievement of the Juárez regime was to convince

the British-owned Imperial Mexican Railway Company to resume building tracks from Mexico City to Veracruz. For this, Juárez had to swallow a bitter pill. First, he exempted the firm from a law that confiscated the assets of individuals and companies that had supported Maximilian. Then he greased the wheels by promising the company “an annual subsidy of 560,000 pesos for twenty-five years.”⁶² Despite these efforts, most other foreign investors kept their money out of Mexico until after the mid-1870s.

Of all the obstacles to stabilizing the state, building investor confidence, and restoring the economy, it was banditry that most preoccupied Juárez and his government. Bandits not only disrupted commerce but expanded their repertoire to kidnap and ransom wealthy citizens. Some accepted amnesties, but bandit ranks continued to multiply with new recruits driven to outlawry by economic distress, social injustice, or pure greed. Juárez therefore tackled the problem of banditry with his customary directness, drawing upon his experiences as governor of Oaxaca and as president during the War of the Reform and the War of the French Intervention. First, Juárez established a rural constabulary, known as the *rurales*, in 1867, and filled its ranks with ex-soldiers and amnestied bandits. By the mid-1870s, the *rurales* numbered some one thousand men who patrolled the highways, served as auxiliaries to the army, and escorted convoys transporting bullion, specie, and merchandise.⁶³ They helped to maintain order, but they were also a small and undisciplined force prone to excess or even of reverting to banditry.

The Juárez administration also produced a modern penal code and issued emergency edicts aimed at eradicating banditry. The new code appeared in April 1871 and was the work of a commission headed by Martínez de Castro. The commission relied extensively on the 1848 and 1870 Spanish penal codes for a model, but the drafters also drew from the 1857 general law.⁶⁴ The new code amended the 1857 definitions of criminal responsibility, simplified formulas for punishing accomplices, increased prison terms for bandits, and set more stringent criteria for imposing the death penalty. Gone, for example, was the 1857 provision that permitted the automatic execution of a bandit

leader. Nevertheless, this did not mean a more lenient attitude toward banditry in practice. When bandits raided a community and no deaths resulted, the penalty was twelve years in prison. When bandits carried out an attack on a public road that resulted in death, violation, torture, or injury, the penalty was death. Otherwise, the code prescribed twelve years in prison, two years more than in either the 1857 general law or the standards of the colonial-era code. The code also added a new wrinkle, targeting judicial corruption with measures that penalized officials who failed to prevent crimes or punish offenders, received stolen goods, or obstructed an investigation. Functionaries convicted of these crimes faced suspension from work, fines, restitution, and dismissal from government service. These articles aimed to disrupt networks that supported bandits and fostered their impunity.⁶⁵

However, these measures did not exhaust the legal remedies for banditry. Kidnapping (*plagio*) had been a minor problem in 1857, but ten years later it was widespread, since many bandits found this form of extortion more profitable and less dangerous than highway robbery. In fact, kidnapping became so problematic that Porfirio Díaz amended the constitution in 1901 to make *plagio* a capital offense.⁶⁶ Already in 1871, the Juárez government understood the link between banditry and kidnapping, and it designed the penal code to reflect this reality. Kidnappers faced four to twelve years in prison or death. Those who escaped the death penalty were subject to fines of five hundred to three thousand pesos in addition to prison, as well as the loss of any right to hold a position of responsibility or receive public honors.⁶⁷

By 1871 the liberals had the main legal instruments in place to impose law and order on Mexico. They had effective control of the state, a republican constitution, and a revised penal code. In the military and the rural police they had armed bodies of men to pursue and apprehend outlaws. They were even making headway in unifying the Mexican elites. Yet none of this was quite enough. The anemic economy continued to stress social fault lines, aggravating banditry and igniting flares of unrest. Worst of all, it kept government finances so

precarious that banditry and disorder sometimes seemed to outstrip the resources needed to curtail it. Juárez decided to seek reelection and to end the impasse with more draconian measures. On May 18, 1871, he suspended guarantees for highway bandits and kidnappers and issued an extraordinary decree to last for a period of one year. Its measures were harsher than any adopted by a Mexican government since independence. After defeating Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada and Porfirio Díaz in a three-way contest for president, Juárez turned his full attention to Mexico's outlaws. All *salteadores* and *plagiarios* caught red-handed faced execution without trial. All those apprehended after the fact faced trial by the arresting officers. The extraordinary decree prohibited these impromptu trials from lasting more than three days, and a guilty verdict was automatically punishable by death. Only a pardon from higher authorities could commute the sentence, but there were no precautions against abuse, other than requiring the arresting officer to file a report with his superiors prior to executing his prisoner.⁶⁸

The campaign failed to reduce banditry. Outlaws were too numerous and well armed for the *rurales*. It also became obvious that some bandits benefited from the indifference, fear, and sometimes outright sympathy of many citizens. On May 23, 1872, Juárez extended the decree for another year and reinforced it with measures to compel civilian cooperation with authorities. The extraordinary decree required hacienda owners, estate managers, and *rancheros* to file twice-monthly reports and alert authorities to the presence of bandits. Those who failed to obey faced fines of two hundred pesos or twenty-five days in jail as well as charges of criminal complicity. The decree also obliged citizens to serve in posses or else face a fine of twenty-five pesos or five days in jail. When no police or military forces were available, the decree required landowners and estate managers to pursue bandits on their property or suffer a fine of two hundred pesos or thirty days in jail. Juárez also cracked down on authorities who obstructed justice or failed to organize posses; they faced fines of two hundred pesos. Anyone who warned bandits risked a charge of criminal complicity.⁶⁹

Juárez never lived to see the effect of these measures, as he died of

a heart attack two months after extending the extraordinary decree on banditry. Popular myth attributed his death to poison administered by a female bandit named Leonarda Emilia—also known as La Carambada—but this is certainly apocryphal. In any event, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada became acting president until new elections were held in October, in which he defeated Porfirio Díaz. As president, Lerdo hewed to the same course as Juárez but achieved better success. The peaceful transfer of power helped to calm the elite classes, who welcomed a nonviolent transition. It also encouraged the normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States and Europe. In turn, this buoyed foreign investors and lenders, who began to export capital to Mexico. The first stirrings of economic recovery generated government revenues that permitted Lerdo to continue fighting banditry. In this he relied on the extraordinary decree on banditry and kidnappers throughout his term as president. The Plateados disappeared during these years, as did the guerrilla-bandit movement led by Lozada. The Mexican state began to turn the corner in its struggle against banditry by the mid-1870s.

Even so, the elites were not out of the woods, for Mexican politics still carried a volatile charge. When Lerdo sought reelection in 1876, Díaz rose in rebellion. Wielding a plank lifted from the 1855 liberal Plan de Ayutla, he accused Lerdo of violating the principle of “no reelection.” The matter came down to a brief battle that elevated Díaz to power for the next thirty-five years. He presided over the modernization of Mexico and supervised the final stages of the campaign against banditry. Using policies and instruments forged by Juárez and Lerdo, he gave final shape to an authoritarian state adorned with liberal and republican values. There is no doubt that the stability of his tenure benefited from an accelerated influx of foreign capital and rapid economic expansion, featuring a frenzy of railroad building, the construction of telegraph lines, and modest industrialization. This consolidated the unity of the elites, who put behind them the rancor of previous decades. They developed a sense of cohesion that Díaz skillfully reinforced by co-opting or quietly exiling opponents, thereby further short-circuiting the potential for elite-led revolts.

However, the diminished prospect of intra-elite conflict also amplified anxieties about the threat of disorder from the lower classes. Such fears were no mere phantoms, for the onset of modernization resulted in the impoverishment and dislocation of the rural and urban poor. The impact was greatest in the countryside, where Porfirian expropriations and the expansion of commercial agriculture combined to intensify the exploitation of peasants. Thus peasant unrest increased, but so did agitation among workers employed in resource extraction and the newly emerging light-manufacturing sectors. Consequently, the elites continued to privilege repression as the most efficacious means to maintain order. The consolidation of elite unity made this task more manageable for the Díaz regime than it had been hitherto in the nineteenth century; the Porfirian government was the only one to rule in the nineteenth century without suspending the constitution or issuing extraordinary decrees against banditry. Increased investment and trade also led to rising revenues, which permitted Díaz to strengthen and improve the rurales. Nor did he hesitate to criminalize and crush uprisings by peasants protesting the pressures of agricultural commercialization, or revolts by workers resisting exploitation.

Along the way, Díaz cultivated a national and international reputation as the man who pacified Mexico. This was more than mere puffery and pride; it was essential to waging the war against banditry. As Juárez learned in 1871, banditry sometimes inspired popular sympathies that made it difficult to apprehend outlaws. It also reflected the persistence of a popular counterhegemonic discourse that challenged the authority and legitimacy of the state. Therefore, in addition to repression, the elites tried to develop a discourse to inculcate loyalty and obedience. This included pageantry, public spectacles, and other cultural forms that imagined bandits as enemies of civilization and circulated romanticized images of Díaz and the rurales as defenders of order and progress in Mexico. Thus, negative portraits of banditry became a staple of late-nineteenth-century novels and state-sponsored ballads. The Porfirian regime also pressed this discourse into service in the international arena in order to challenge foreign perceptions that denigrated Mexico as a backward nation of bandits. The regime

encountered greater success in moderating foreign opinion than it did in changing the minds of lower-class Mexicans, however, for in the end, Porfirian liberals differed from their postcolonial precursors in one crucial aspect: they no longer hoped to redeem the lower classes, but only to convince them to obey.

2. The Nest and Nursery of Brigands

Travelers and Bandits

This pestilence of robbers, which infests the republic, has never been eradicated.

—Fanny Calderón de la Barca, 1843

[You] do not need any arms whilst travelling in Mexico, but when you do, you want them badly.

—Hans Gadow, *Through Southern Mexico*, 1908

In the nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxon travelers were fixated on Mexican bandits. In writing about Mexico, these travelers used images of the bandit as a metaphor for Mexican society and to measure the country's progress, or lack thereof. Imagining Mexican bandits according to gender and ethnic hierarchies that privileged Anglo-Saxon males, these travelers concluded that banditry was a basic characteristic of "*soi-disant* nations" like Mexico where race mixture and geographic determinism led to a degraded form of masculinity. Informed by such prejudices, these travel accounts played an important role in constructing a nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon discourse on Mexico. Many were written by U.S. and British diplomats who helped shape their governments' foreign policy toward Mexico. At the more mundane level of public opinion, these accounts informed the expectations of future travelers, who used them much as today's travelers rely on modern travel guides. They proposed itineraries, described conditions, and offered a miscellany of useful tips. Many of these accounts were best-sellers in their day, and they influenced nontraveling readers by telling tales of adventure, intrigue, and danger. Over time, these

accounts accumulated into a vast corpus of literature that became increasingly self-referential as it settled into a consensus on Mexico. By midcentury most of these books acquired a narrative structure and strategy that portrayed Mexico as a dangerous and semicivilized land in which political opportunists ran the government while bandits ruled the road.

Anglo-Saxon opinions about Mexico and banditry naturally provoked a reaction from Mexicans, especially the elites who constituted the political class and the intelligentsia and who were more sensitive to foreign opinion than were the lower classes. The rural and urban poor had plenty to say about banditry, but they were far more concerned with how banditry expressed social relationships within Mexico than they were with foreign views. The elites had a different attitude. For them banditry was a serious problem that undermined order and progress and complicated Mexico's political and economic relations with other countries. They shared foreign perceptions that banditry proved the low level of culture among the lower classes, but the elites could not accept the Anglo-Saxon proposition that banditry and the backwardness of the masses condemned Mexico to remain in this condition. Throughout the century they clung tenaciously to a faith in their country's potential for civilization and modernity. For the most part, Mexican elites insisted that banditry and disorder would decline as the nation overcame the legacy of colonialism. To many foreign observers, this was a misplaced optimism in view of the chronic disorder that afflicted postcolonial Mexico until 1867. However, even Anglo-Saxon skepticism declined in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, when the regime of Porfirio Díaz achieved notable success in bringing stability to Mexican society. The shift in foreign attitudes also had to do with the efforts of literary figures such as Ignacio Altamirano and Manuel Payno, both of whom served as diplomats for the Porfirian state and helped to reshape the image of Mexico abroad. For example, Payno was the Mexican consul in Barcelona, Spain, when he wrote *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, one of the most famous fictional accounts of banditry in Mexico. Spanish newspapers published the work serially well before it appeared in

Mexico. In the 1880s, Payno and other intellectuals signed on when the Porfirian government launched a propaganda campaign to dispel foreign notions that Mexico was a “violent, uncivilized, insecure, and wild country” plagued with revolution and banditry. The government wanted to portray Mexico as a “promised land,” and it carried this message to international events like the world’s fairs. Altamirano and Payno were both key figures in organizing Mexico’s participation at the 1889 Paris Exposition.¹ Eventually, their efforts had the desired effect. The end of the century witnessed a favorable shift in the Anglo-Saxon discourse, which began to trumpet Mexico’s readiness for modernity.

The struggle for Mexico’s international image was primarily a discursive battle between national elites. Most Anglo-Saxon travel accounts were written by male members of the elites in the United States and Great Britain: diplomats, soldiers, scientists, and the like. A very few women from the same Anglo-Saxon elites also contributed to the literature. Women travelers offered insights and greater detail on the lives of some Mexican females, mainly the women of the Mexican elite with whom they interacted. Still, their assumptions about banditry coincided with the views of their male counterparts. Fanny Calderón de la Barca, the Scottish wife of a Spanish diplomat, produced the most famous travel account. She detailed the appearance and roles of elite Mexican women, but her literary sketches were often still-life portraits that failed to confer much agency. Like other travel writers, Calderón de la Barca portrayed the masculine gender as the active and dominant figure in Mexican society, and this included the image of the bandit. However, these narratives also treated the bandit as a character divorced from affective and formal social relationships with women. This contrasted sharply with the images of banditry in Mexican novels and popular culture. Mexicans used the figure of the bandit to argue out the rights and duties of citizenship. For this reason, interactions between masculine and feminine ideals were central to the logic of bandit narratives in Mexico. Of course, readers of Anglo-Saxon accounts were left to imagine that Mexican bandits had mothers, wives, lovers, and sisters, but these women rarely made an appearance in the narratives.

This discursive omission suggests an Anglo-Saxon reluctance or inability to imagine affective male-female relationships in the context of outlawry. However, there was more to the issue. Mexican imaginings involved a discourse that also expressed itself in a civil struggle over the nature of their society and the place of men and women in it. For Mexicans, the figure of the bandit evoked a more nuanced discursive triad of gender, race, and class. These issues also concerned Anglo-Saxon narrators, but they were framed in a broader international context that juxtaposed generalized—and therefore less nuanced—notions about the cultural systems of distinct nation-states—in this case, Mexico, the United States, and Great Britain. Since travelers inevitably imagined national identity or character as a masculine entity (as opposed to the nation itself, imagined as feminine), the bandit mediated relationships between Anglo-Saxon men and Mexican men. In the Anglo-Saxon narrative, the Mexican woman, passive and inactive, receded into the background and did not constitute a decisive element in imagining the bandit. However, a different dynamic applied to the figure of the Anglo-Saxon woman and her relationship to the Mexican bandit. Nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon notions about feminine weakness and vulnerability were pressed into service to accentuate the menace of Mexican masculinity. There were, of course, allusions to bandits who carried off Mexican women and abused them, but this rhetorical maneuver was more compelling for Anglo-Saxon readers when it offered up foreign women as the potential victims. None of the travel accounts reported an actual assault on a woman, foreign or Mexican, but the fear of such was palpable. Calderón de la Barca's narrative left the impression that she was constantly exposed to this danger. Calderón de la Barca was no wallflower, nor did she lack courage, but her account left no doubt in the minds of readers that the security of an Anglo-Saxon woman in Mexico depended at all times on the presence of civilized men and their male retainers. Male travelers agreed, although some also suggested that women take the precaution of bearing arms to ward off robbers.² Travel accounts assumed the dependence of Anglo-Saxon women upon men, but they also endowed them with more agency and significance than Mexican women.

To a person, these travelers shared a belief in the superiority of their culture. While some believed that Mexico had potential, most felt it would never catch up with Europe and North America. The most negative views were frankly racist and anti-Catholic, freely expressed in the newspapers of the United States and England. In 1860, for example, the *New York Tribune* argued against recognizing the liberal government during the War of the Reform (1858–61) on the ground that Mexico was a “huge rotten mass of slunk civilization” inhabited by a “priest-ridden, mongrel, ignorant, dwarfed, and semi-savage population.” Similar sentiments appeared in the *London Saturday Review*, which viewed the civil war in Mexico as a “struggle between the European and the Indian—the man of culture and the savage.” This British publication imagined Mexican conservatives as an embattled minority of Europeans resisting extermination by mongrel savages and “Indians.” The corollary was that most Mexicans, steeped in their “Indian” heritage, were naturally inclined toward banditry and outlawry and that the “barbarous chiefs of Mexican radicalism,” as the liberal leaders were described by the Paris *Revue des deux mondes*, had no more excuse for waging civil war than a desire to “commit all sorts of depredations.” This view linked degenerated masculinity to race mixture and banditry and became the dominant perception in North America and Europe between 1821 and 1867.³

Foreign travelers were rarely impressed with Mexican authorities’ ability to maintain security on Mexico’s highways. Those who visited immediately after 1821 assumed that Mexico required time to overcome restore order. However, time did not favor either Mexican authorities or the goodwill of travelers, for Mexico soon collapsed into five decades of instability and turmoil. Before long, the mere mention of Mexico evoked images of endless revolution and endemic banditry.

Introducing the Mexican Bandit to the World

The Anglo-Saxon discourse began to develop after 1821 when Mexico received an influx of diplomats and officials from abroad who were

charged with evaluating the new republic. Most were open-minded about Mexico's prospects for progress, although a few were so poorly impressed that their observations anticipated later anti-Mexican hostility. In 1823, U.S. congressman Joel Poinsett led a fact-finding mission to Mexico (he later accepted an appointment as the first U.S. ambassador to that country). He was appalled by Mexican beggars, who were "more miserable, squalid human beings, clothed in rags, and exposing their deformities and diseases, to excite compassion, than I have seen elsewhere." Poinsett did not link this evil to exploitation, oppression, or the destructive consequences of a ten-year war for independence. Rather, he subscribed to a common Anglo-Saxon prejudice that "in countries like this, the people rarely possess habits of industry" because the "mild climate and fertile soil, [yielded] abundantly to moderate exertions." He observed that Mexico's climate and geography made the "Indians" childish, indolent, and blindly obedient and therefore mired in abject misery. It even deformed the character of the Creole elites, whom Poinsett found to be unremarkable in ability and moral probity. However, to his own surprise, Poinsett discovered that the laboring classes, at least, had managed to evade the consequences of geographical determinism. To him, these Mexicans were still too encumbered with docility, ignorance, and superstition, but at least they were more "American": industrious, orderly, and sober. Poinsett's secretary, Edward Thornton Tayloe, found that Mexicans were a "mild and amiable people," although he concurred that the country was only half-civilized. Tayloe ascribed this to the pernicious effects of Spanish colonial policy and the Mexican climate. "They are indolent," he wrote, "because industry meets with little reward, and nature supplies their wants so bountifully they are compelled to do little for themselves." Tayloe felt that these were serious defects, but he believed that "the improvement of the Mexican people is daily taking place." British traveler Mark Beaufoy agreed. A scientist and soldier who toured Mexico in 1825 and 1826, he asserted that the civilizing of Mexico would follow from "a few years of uninterrupted intercourse with European nations, and the consequent influx of education and intellectual improvement." This, he be-

lieved, would stimulate enterprise and reduce idleness, vagrancy, and a tendency toward theft and banditry among the lower classes. These pioneer visitors were burdened with prejudices, but their antipathy commingled with a belief that Mexico had already embarked on the path of progress and civilization.⁴

All the same, these early travel accounts identified negative features of Mexican society that became increasingly prominent in the minds of subsequent writers. Not the least was the problem of personal security, an issue that travelers necessarily emphasized, for there was no easy or safe way to visit Mexico in the 1820s. In every case travelers disembarked at Veracruz, so their narratives began with describing efforts to surmount two immediate challenges to their safety: disease and banditry. Veracruz was infamous for the dreaded *vomito*, or yellow fever, an infectious disease carried by mosquitoes that could induce jaundice, the vomiting of black bile, and an all-too-frequent failure of the heart. Since the true vector of this disease was then unknown, everyone blamed the coastal climate. Having survived this threat, and having adjusted to the torrid humidity, travelers prepared for the journey inland to the capital city over roads infested with bandits. In choosing a mode of transportation, they had to balance security with speed and comfort. Until the late nineteenth century, when a railroad connected Veracruz and Mexico City, *literas*, *volantes*, and *diligencias* were the primary modes of transportation for those who did not fancy horseback, muleback, or walking. The *litera* was a covered litter, or sedan chair, suspended on two poles attached to the saddles of two braces of mules, one pair fore and the other aft. The passenger reclined on a mattress, a luxurious experience according to Poinsett, except for those moments when mules expressed their contrary nature. The *litera* exposed its passenger to the elements and required ten days to reach Mexico City, but it had the advantage of greater security, since it carried only one person and very little baggage or specie to tempt bandits. The *volante* was modeled after the French *cabriolet*, a light, hooded carriage drawn by a team of mules and conducted by a postilion, someone who rode the lead mule or horse. It was faster than the *litera* and relatively secure from attack,

since it carried only one or two persons. However, it was exposed to the elements and not always sufficiently sturdy for the rough road. The most popular choice was the diligencia, or stagecoach, normally drawn by ten mules driven from the front box, and sometimes accompanied by one or two postilions. It was faster (requiring only four days to reach Mexico City), sturdier, and more comfortable during inclement weather. However, the diligencia was the preferred target of highwaymen, who appreciated the convenience of robbing several passengers in one attack.⁵

Bandits were more often discussed than encountered by foreign travelers, but the expectation of attack was not unreasonable. Passengers were prudent to avail themselves of measures to protect themselves. Many foreigners opted to carry pistols and shotguns, although this often aroused the protests of Mexicans, who thought it was foolhardy and might lead to unnecessary violence in the event of a holdup.⁶ The alternatives were to travel unarmed and trust to the restraint of would-be bandits or to hire an escort of cavalry. Many opted for the latter, but as often as not the physical appearance of the escort—bedraggled, badly armed, and poorly mounted—failed to inspire confidence. Charles Latrobe, an English traveler who visited from 1834 to 1836, dismissed the notion that his escort would discourage a dedicated bandit. Examining their carbines, he found that they lacked flints and ramrods and that triggers and locks were broken. He reported that “an escort in Mexico is never expected to fight, not only because I have never heard of a well-accredited case of their doing so, but from the peculiar style and character of the arms wherewith they are furnished.”⁷ Whatever the effectiveness of escorts, passengers on any mode of transport enhanced their safety by sending baggage separately by *conducta* (mule trains) led by *arrieros* (mule skinnners). Mexican operators encouraged this for reasons of space and convenience, but even more so as a proven measure to reduce holdups.

For Poinsett, whatever hazards he anticipated from “banditti” or cantankerous mules, he felt confident in trusting his possessions to *arrieros*, whom he found to possess the best qualities among Mexican

males. Muleteers, he wrote, “are a patient, hardy race of men—sober, attentive to their mules, and careful of the goods committed to their charge. They are remarkably honest, and are always cheerful and ready to serve their employer.” Poinsett’s observations were seconded by nearly every foreign traveler who visited Mexico in the nineteenth century. Twenty years later, U.S. ambassador Brantz Mayer ascribed to arrieros the qualities of “devoted honesty, punctuality, and patient endurance.” Mayer, who was not overly fond of Mexicans, noted, “I have never been more struck with the folly of judging men by mere dress and physiognomy, than in looking at these arrieros.” To Mayer, the typical mule skinner looked no different from a beggar or bandit, “with wild and fierce eyes, tangled hair, slashed trowsers, and well-greased jerkin that has weathered many a storm—a person, in fact, to whom you would scarcely trust an old coat when sending it to your tailor.” An English traveler at midcentury, R. H. Mason, described the wild look of arrieros in similar terms and likewise averred that a “less trustworthy person, in appearance, it would be difficult to imagine.” However, the arrieros depended on their reputation for honesty to maintain steady employment. Mason found that their “faithfulness, indefatigable perseverance, constant care, and self-denying endurance, are all beyond praise, and form a remarkable exception to the general character of the Mexican populace.”⁸

Despite appearances, arrieros formed a complete masculine counterpoint to the Mexican bandit, against whom they were placed in the front lines of a ceaseless battle to protect the goods of passengers and entrepreneurs alike. The arrieros were a rough lot who enjoyed a reputation for their ability to consume vast quantities of tequila with “apparent impunity.”⁹ When not employed, they were quite capable of engaging in behavior as unscrupulous as anyone else’s, but they excelled at negotiating a living between the demands of travelers and bandits. Of the latter, arrieros survived holdups by never resisting, nor even remembering the faces or names of their assailants. One arriero explained his refusal to fight by protesting that “I am known to every robber in the country, and I should be stabbed secretly, if not shot openly!”¹⁰ Stagecoach drivers followed the same principle, although

this sometimes aroused suspicions that *cocheros* and bandits operated in collusion. Some stagecoach drivers were U.S. citizens, such as the former military officer, mercenary, and mountain man James Hobbs, who drove a diligencia for five months between the cities of Aguascalientes and Zacatecas. "So long as the drivers did not expose the robbers," he explained, "their lives were safe enough; but in case of exposure, their death was certain,—in consequence of which the drivers' policy was to keep silent."¹¹

The dangers of the road did not visit Poinsett, Tayloe, or Beaufoy, even though all three had to journey through Pinal, described by Poinsett as "the most dangerous passage in the mountains," and then to traverse another stretch of "country notoriously infested with banditti." If their journeys passed without adventure, they nevertheless offered a landscape suited to the romantic imagination of the age. "The scene," wrote Poinsett, "only required a few banditti and a skirmish, to have rendered it worthy of the pen of Salvator Rosa, or the pen of Mrs. Radcliffe."¹² However, like most other travelers, Poinsett arrived safely at his destination, Mexico City, perhaps a little worse for wear but with his baggage and person secure. Whatever relief the sight of the capital inspired in the traveler, it dissipated when the dangers of Mexico City became evident. During the 1820s, the specter of highway banditry often paled in comparison to the insecurity of life in this crowded and noisy metropolis. The capital swarmed with *léperos*, whom Poinsett regarded as a "dangerous class" of vagrants. Poinsett's prejudices were not unusual for those of his privileged status, but one is left to wonder at his insistence that such an underclass was a Mexican phenomenon that did not exist in a "well regulated society" like the United States. Poinsett described the *léperos* for his readers back home as the beggars, idlers, and drones that "prey upon the community, and who, having nothing to lose are always ready to swell the cry of popular ferment, or to lend their aid in favour of imperial tyranny." Meanwhile, an astounded Tayloe illustrated the *léperos* in a letter to his brother: "So much filth, so much vice, and so much ignorance are no where else—not among the lazzaroni of Italy, whom you have seen." Tayloe crowned the Mexican lower classes as

“the greatest thieves in the world—never omitting an opportunity to rob.” The city was lit at night by torches and patrolled by watchmen, but it was still risky to venture out alone by daylight or without arms by night. Friends warned Poinsett that “robberies and assassinations were frequent, and that not less than twelve hundred assassinations have been committed, since the entrance of the revolutionary army into the capital.” The Englishman Beaufoy likewise found Mexico City more dangerous and destitute than the countryside. He noted that the most hazardous locations were in the capital’s ruined suburbs, which were haunted by bandit gangs composed of army officers whose preferred method of robbery was to lasso victims and drag them from their mounts. Still, foreigners at this time assumed that disorder would soon be a thing of the past. Tayloe believed that policing had improved and that the government showed evidence of greater stability.¹³

Such optimism faded as Mexico approached the 1830s and entered a long cycle of armed conflict between liberals and conservatives. The quarrel revolved around competing visions for Mexico, pitting liberal republican values—federalist and anticlerical—against conservatives who desired a strong central state. Their antagonism continued through the Mexican-American War in 1846–48 and culminated with the War of the French Intervention of 1862–67. As conflicts mounted, so did disorder, notably the increased presence of bandits on the nation’s highways. As a result, the years between 1830 and 1867 hardened the attitudes of foreign visitors, who came to doubt the Mexican capacity for civilization and increasingly portrayed Mexico as a nation of bandits and other lesser men.

This consensus was already emerging in 1828 when an English military officer, Capt. G. F. Lyon, published an account that accused the Mexican government of countenancing the evils of banditry and smuggling. As a commissioner for the British-controlled Real del Monte and Bolaños mining companies, Lyon arrived in Tampico in 1826 for an eight-month tour of established and potential mining properties in the states of San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, and Jalisco. Based on his experiences at the east-coast port of Tampico, Lyon asserted that

smuggling thrived because customs officials accepted bribes from foreign and domestic merchants. He related the story of an official who retired after serving for eight months, on a salary of two thousand dollars per year, with savings in excess of one hundred thousand dollars. Worse than official tolerance of contraband, however, was the lawless character of the countryside beyond the capital city and the Valley of Mexico. Lyon traveled in constant fear for his life, although his only experience with bandits amounted to no more than his alarm at rumors of banditti lying in wait for luckless passersby. Nonetheless, Lyon fashioned a harrowing account, laced with anecdotal evidence of Mexican lawlessness, and left readers with a chilling impression of the Mexican countryside.¹⁴

The most lurid of Lyon's tales dealt with a bandit named Gómez, described as a "monster in human shape" who served both the rebels and the royalists during Mexico's war for independence. Lyon's readers learned that in this conflict Gómez "committed every refinement of cruelty, mutilating them [his victims] in a manner too shocking to describe, and killing them by lingering torments." When rebel superiors ordered him to desist from so much bloodshed, Gómez simply buried his victims alive. After independence, Gómez turned to banditry unvarnished by political pretensions and "became master of the road from Mexico to Vera Cruz" until he was captured and exiled to California. However, this was not the end of Gómez, for the bandit chieftain raised a new "army of Indians and desperate men." Lyon used this terrifying imagery to underscore the dangers that he felt but did not encounter. Thus he explained that "when I was in Mexico, news arrived that he [Gómez] was devastating the coast of the Gulf, burning, robbing, and murdering, and threatening an advance into the interior." Lyon portrayed this bandit as a latter-day Hannibal whose depredations would endanger the entire country "should he reach any of the wavering and discontented North-western provinces, and be joined by any large force."¹⁵

In the 1820s, foreign travelers found that Mexico was a dangerous and disordered place. While they agreed that a handful of men, such as the redoubtable *arrieros*, possessed admirable masculine qualities

by Anglo-Saxon standards, they also found that men of a lesser breed dominated the nation: bandits and a corrupt ruling class. Thus, these travelers defined the character of Mexico in a bipolar opposition between two tendencies in Mexican masculinity: one was a forward-looking minority, energetically engaged in productive labor and enterprise, while the majority was mendacious and parasitic.

The Sinister Countenance of Expression

By the 1830s, foreign readers of Mexican travel literature acquired the impression that banditry and revolution were characteristic rather than incidental features of a “semi-barbarous country, where law was but imperfectly understood, and still more imperfectly administered.”¹⁶ This decade inaugurated the era of Santa Anna, who entered and left the presidency of Mexico on numerous occasions between 1833 and 1855. The turnstile nature of the presidency speaks eloquently to the political instability of this period, which featured more than three hundred *pronunciamientos* (military or political coups) and revolts, the loss of Texas in 1835, and disastrous defeat in war with the United States.¹⁷ In the presidency or out, Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna excited passions—for against him—in Mexicans and foreigners. Brantz Mayer, U.S. ambassador in 1841–42, endorsed Santa Anna’s persecution of bandits, which involved garroting two or three suspects each week. Mayer’s successor, Waddy Thompson, admired Santa Anna’s “energy, [which] had nearly cleared the road of banditti.” Others were less convinced of the president’s dedication to law enforcement, pointing out that his aide-de-camp, Col. Juan Yáñez, had been convicted and executed for acts of banditry, including the murder and robbery of the Swiss consul M. Mairet in the 1830s. They did not believe that Yáñez’s misconduct was an aberration in Santa Anna’s government, for several foreign visitors reported having been robbed on the highway shortly after an audience with Santa Anna in which they discussed their itineraries and calculated the value of their possessions. These luckless travelers agreed with Charles Latrobe when he opined that “of all countries I have ever seen, New Spain contains the largest proportion of *canaille* [scoundrels].” None but

the humble Mexican arriero escaped Latrobe's indictment. "The arriero," he wrote, "is the carrier of New Spain, and the little honesty and uprightness to be found in the country seem to have fallen exclusively to the share of those of his rank and profession." Of the rest, including the elite and political classes, Latrobe summed up Mexico's condition as a "want of system, want of public and private faith; want of legitimate means of carrying on the government, of enforcing the laws, or maintaining order, total absence of patriotism; a general ignorance; indifference to the value of education, linked to overweening arrogance and pride; an incredible absence of men of either natural or acquired talent . . . intolerant support of the darkest bigotry and superstition [in the Catholic religion]." ¹⁸

Latrobe's perspective was quickly gaining ground when, in 1839, Mexicans received their first-ever ambassador from Spain. Along with the Spanish minister, Angel Calderón de la Barca, the country also welcomed one of the most famous visitors to write an account of life and travel in nineteenth-century Mexico, Fanny Calderón de la Barca. Born in Scotland, in 1831 Frances Erskine Inglis migrated to the United States, where she met and married Calderón de la Barca, who was then Spain's ambassador in Washington. She published *Life in Mexico* in 1843, one year after she and her husband transferred from Mexico to another diplomatic post. With exquisite detail and lively narrative, this book became one of the most widely read accounts of Mexico. Well-worn copies could be found on diplomatic bookshelves as late as 1912, when Edith O'Shaughnessy, married to the U.S. chargé d'affaires, poured over its pages seeking insights into the enigmas of Mexican politics.¹⁹ Upon its publication, however, *Life in Mexico* ignited a storm of protest in Mexican newspapers, which objected to the negative characterization of their country. Regardless of Madame Calderón de la Barca's Anglo-Saxon heritage, she was still the wife of a Spaniard, and critical words from an official of the former colonial master still touched raw nerves among the Mexican elites in the 1840s.

Fanny Calderón de la Barca found much of Mexico enchanting, observing that "there is not one human being or passing object to be

seen that is not in itself a picture, or which would not form a good subject for the pencil." She likened Mexico to a paradise, but one in which "man in his fallen state is not fitted." Certainly she believed that Mexicans had abused the privilege of living in an earthly Eden. As she explained it, the Mexican people too easily acquired indolence and failed to progress, since "enough to support life can be had with little trouble, [and] no trouble is taken to procure more." The great abundance produced by Mexico's natural endowments was, in her view, the primary obstacle to the country's advance, since a great deal of "moral energy would be necessary to counteract the physical influences of the climate," but Mexicans had "neither education nor necessity to teach or impart it." Lacking the spur of necessity, Mexicans languished in moral turpitude and laziness, chasing after easy fortunes through gambling at cockfights or at gaming tables, through government corruption, or through banditry. "The evil begins," she wrote, "with the government, and goes downwards. The most flagrant abuses are passed over—either from indolence or corruption, for one leads to the other." The bandit was one of the greatest expressions of this "evil," she wrote: "[This] pestilence of robbers, which infests the republic, has never been eradicated. They are in fact the growth of civil war. Sometimes in the guise of insurgents, taking an active part in the independence, they have independently laid waste the country and robbed all whom they met. As expellers of the Spaniards, these armed bands infested the roads between Veracruz and the capital, ruined all commerce, and—without any particular inquiry into political opinion—robbed and murdered in all directions."²⁰

Although bandits never victimized Calderón de la Barca, she formed her impressions at an early point during her visit to Mexico. Describing banditry as a "rather fertile theme of discussion" among travelers, she confessed that her stock of knowledge about bandits came from the lips of others. After one journey, she recalled that when the stagecoach entered a stand of dark pine woods, "the stories of robbers began—just as people at sea seem to take a particular delight in talking about shipwrecks."²¹ None of this discounts the real hazards that travelers faced, but it is a useful reminder that the threat of ban-

ditry was not always immediate and that the impression of danger frequently lay more in the telling of tales than in reality.

This did not detain Calderón de la Barca from imagining the appearance of the bandit immediately upon arriving at Veracruz. Traveling by diligencia and accompanied by an escort of lancers, her party passed through the noted bandit haunt of Perote without incident and climbed into the mountains of the *mal país* (bad country). Here the countryside became barren and dreary, with “but a few fir trees and pines covering the hills, dark and stunted, black masses of lava, and an occasional white cross to mark either where a murder has been committed or where a celebrated robber has been buried.” In the midst of this isolated, bleak, and untamed scenery, the group pulled into an equally wild-looking inn near Santa Gertrudis operated by a tavernkeeper who, “if not a robber certainly had all the appearance of one; so wild, melancholy, and with such a sinister countenance of expression. He was decidedly a figure for Salvator, who never drew a more bandit-looking figure, as he stood there with his blanket and slouched hat, and a knife in his belt, tall and thin and muscular, with his sallow visage and his sad, fierce eyes.” It is evident that Calderón de la Barca was predisposed to invest bandit characteristics upon any Mexican who conformed to preconceived stereotypes. However, the closest she ever came to a bandit was at the end of her residence in Mexico, when members of the Spanish mission toured the state of Michoacán. On the road from Pátzcuaro to Uruapan, the delegation found itself joined by a detachment of five lancers who were transporting “a celebrated robber named Morales” to Uruapan for execution. Feelings of dread and pity overcame Calderón de la Barca at the sight of these prisoners, chained together by one leg and marching on foot behind the mounted party and escort. She “could not help thinking what wild wishes must have throbbled within” the robbers’ breasts as they approached their doom, step by heavy step. Yet she was horrified by their physical aspect, which, in her mind’s eye, betrayed the barbarity of their crimes. “The companion of Morales was a young, vulgar-looking ruffian, his face livid, and himself nearly naked,” she wrote, but “the robber captain himself was equal to any of Salvator’s

brigands, in his wild and striking figure and countenance. He wore a dark-coloured blanket, and a black hat—the broad leaf of which was slouched over his face, which was the colour of death—while his eyes seemed to belong to a tiger or other beast of prey. I never saw such a picture of fierce misery.”²²

If Calderón de la Barca found the countryside filled with such wild and dangerous male predators, she did not find much greater security in the capital city, where she was besieged with “various reports of robbers and frights, some true, some exaggerated, and some wholly false.”²³ She and her husband finally hired two armed Spanish soldiers to live in the house to protect it against the *léperos*, who, she assumed, posed the most immediate threat to their safety. Curiously, Calderón de la Barca did not offer the reader a physical description of the dangerous classes who abounded in Mexico City, but her contemporary Brantz Mayer did, and he found them disgusting:

Blacken a man in the sun; let his hair grow long and tangled, or become filled with vermin; let him plod in the streets in all kinds of dirt for years, and never know the use of brush, or towel, or water even, except in storms; let him put on a pair of leather breeches at twenty, and wear them until forty, without change or ablution; and, over all, place a torn and blackened hat, and a tattered blanket begrimed with abominations; let him have wild eyes, and shining teeth, and features pinched by famine into sharpness; breasts bared and browned, and (if females) with two or three miniatures of the same species trotting after her, and another certainly strapped to her back; combine all these in your imagination, and you have a *recipé* for a Mexican *lépero*.²⁴

Of these poverty-stricken denizens, Calderón de la Barca merely noted the “opportunity which both *serape* and *rebozo* afford for concealing large knives about the person, as also for enveloping both face and figure,” a function to which she ascribed “many of those murders which take place amongst the lower orders.”²⁵

Calderón de la Barca did not doubt that the *léperos* of Mexico provided the raw material of banditry, but she believed that these robbers were led by military officers and other well-to-do citizens who had

fallen into corruption. However, she also recognized that a handful of Mexican males had resisted the eviscerating effects of climate to acquire a masculinity characterized by honor and courage. Among these she counted the Conde de la Cortina (José María Justo Gómez de la Cortina), who earned a reputation for zealously persecuting robbers when he served as governor of Mexico City. It was Cortina who apprehended Colonel Yáñez after the murder of the Swiss consul. For his part, Cortina felt that his foreign friends complained too much about Mexican robbers, on one occasion objecting that “the city of London is full of organized gangs of ruffians whom the law cannot reach” and that “English highwaymen and housebreakers are the most celebrated in the world.” Rather defensively, Cortina added that “Mexican robbers are never unnecessarily cruel, and are in fact very easily moved to compassion.” Calderón de la Barca conceded that Mexican bandits were occasionally moderate and sentimental, if certain anecdotes were to be believed. According to one popular tale, a bandit relieved the distress of a female victim when he left behind one piece of a china set so that she could replace it with exact replicas; in another tale, a bandit returned the cherished spurs of an English gentleman. Calderón de la Barca otherwise doubted the chivalry of bandits, insisting that “their cruelties to travellers are too well known to bear [Cortina] out in it as a general remark.” Besides, “whatever measures have been taken at different times to eradicate this evil its causes remain, and the idle and unprincipled will always take advantage of the disorganized state of the country to obtain by force what they might gain by honest labour.”²⁶

Fanny Calderón de la Barca did not propose a solution to the Mexican dilemma, but other travelers concluded that Mexican incapacity doomed the nation to conquest by more “energetic” and “civilized” countries. In 1846, British explorer and ethnologist George F. Ruxton debated the logic of geographical determinism when he observed that natural obstacles counterbalanced Mexico’s natural advantages; the most fertile lands were isolated, there were no navigable rivers to promote greater commerce and trade, and malaria haunted the eastern coastline where most goods and passengers entered and left

the country. Nevertheless, Ruxton insisted that the greatest obstacle to progress was the Mexican people, who “rank decidedly low on the scale of humanity. They are deficient in moral as well as physical organization . . . treacherous, cunning, indolent, and without energy, and cowardly by nature.” He believed that independence from Spain had ruined Mexico and concluded that the nation would “never progress or become civilized until its present condition is supplanted by a more energetic one.” Ruxton did not predict which nation might seize Mexico, but U.S. ambassador Waddy Thompson had few doubts that U.S. dominion would soon improve the Mexican condition. On the eve of the Mexican-American War, he wrote that “[no] other country presents equal temptations and facilities to highwaymen to those which exist in Mexico,” not the least of which was a lazy, ignorant, vicious, and dishonest population that produced a steady stream of recruits for highway robbery. Thompson thought that the country could be a paradise but that achieving earthly perfection required an “American” hand. He speculated that “[no] spot on earth will be more desirable for a residence whenever it is in the possession of our race, with the government and the laws which they carry with them wherever they go. The march of time is not more certain than that this will be, and probably at no distant day.”²⁷

War came in 1846 when Mexico refused to recognize the absorption of Texas into the United States. As a result, force of arms compelled Mexico to “stand and deliver” half its national territory to its northern neighbor. In the aftermath, former U.S. soldiers who served during the war published a small flood of memoirs that heightened Anglo-Saxon perceptions of Mexico as a land of bandits and dictators. Capt. William Carpenter described Mexico as one of the richest and poorest countries in the world, dominated by a despotic government and inhabited by a population that was “nearly as ignorant as savages” and whom he judged to be as “deficient on the score of morality and honor.” Carpenter blamed these shortcomings on the superstitious Catholic character of Mexicans, who, were they “not so excessively lazy . . . might produce anything they chose and in any quantity; but when the seed is in the ground, they think they have

done enough. If it should not come up, or the plant not thrive, they call on the Virgin Mary, or fall on their knees before the priest at the altar.” Carpenter had been a volunteer with the Kentucky regiment that crossed the Rio Grande to advance on Monterrey, capital of the northern state of Nuevo León. There he fell into the hands of Mexican forces who marched him to San Luis Potosí, where he remained imprisoned until after the end of the war. For reasons unexplained, the Mexicans failed to repatriate Carpenter and a handful of other prisoners when Santa Anna capitulated. Carpenter escaped to the west coast and, from there, northward to the United States. It was rough travel by foot for Carpenter, who lacked protection against robbers and hostile Mexicans. Bandits attacked the military fugitive twice in the state of Jalisco. On the first occasion, five men robbed Carpenter and his companion, an expatriate army deserter who had served in Mexico’s San Patricio battalion.²⁸ They bound the travelers and took all that they possessed—five dollars, two blankets, and what clothes they were not wearing. Carpenter recalled that “during the operation not a word was said; they had us perfectly secure and knew it.” The experience had been harrowing, but Carpenter remembered the strange feeling of elation afterward: “How much lighter a man feels after being robbed, even if it is but little that he has to lose. We certainly did; we breathed freer, and were certainly lighter by some ten or fifteen pounds a piece; but we were glad to come off so well.” Not long afterward, six men robbed Carpenter and his companion near Tepatatlan, but this time the bandits left blankets, meat, and tortillas so that their victims would not starve or freeze on the road.²⁹

Carpenter’s experiences with bandits were more typical of those of civilian travelers than of fellow soldiers serving in Mexico; they more often encountered bandits and alleged bandits as combatants. Jacob Oswandel arrived in Mexico with Gen. Winfield Scott’s forces, which carried out the bombardment and amphibious landing at Veracruz. The regular Mexican army disintegrated rapidly, leaving Oswandel and his comrades to fight against Mexican guerrillas. Their toughest opponents were “desperadoes . . . outcasts and highway robbers” under the leadership of a Spanish-born priest, Francisco Jarauta. Accord-

ing to Oswandel, these bands numbered two thousand fighters who fiercely resisted U.S. forces with ambushes and sniping. They were highly effective, but Oswandel dismissed their claims to patriotism. They were, wrote Oswandel, just as happy robbing fellow Mexicans as they were attacking Yankees. He claimed that “law-abiding Mexicans fear these guerrilla-thieves more than they do us Yankee soldiers.” A naval lieutenant, Henry Augustus Wise, actually encountered Jarauta while on a confidential mission that brought him to Mexico City. He described the guerrilla-priest as “striking in expression, perhaps thirty years old, with fine, fierce dark eyes, and little beard: he was about the middle height, dressed in a round jacket and cloak, with a short straight sword on his hip.” Dressed in civilian attire, Wise escaped the padre’s attention, a fact for which the Yankee lieutenant felt thankful, since he had “heard much of the villain’s atrocities, both from the papers and individuals . . . [Jarauta] boasted of killing fifty-three Americans with his own cuchillo . . . [he was] nothing but a student who had taken to arms ‘con amore.’ To say the least of this good padre, he possessed unparalleled courage and audacity, had done immense mischief to small corps and trains of our army, and he was, in fact, the boldest, bloodiest guerrilla chief in all Mexico.” Soldiers like Oswandel and Wise found it difficult to accept that they were fighting Mexicans motivated by patriotism or any other principles. They dismissed the guerrillas just as they denigrated Mexico. Oswandel sneered at the idea that Mexico was a republic, writing, “It is no Government of any progress or advancement; its history is full of war and bloodshed, superstition and arrogance, revolution upon revolution, and anarchy holds sway. There is constant discord among the people, and [they] are only happy when their land is drenched with human blood.” He found the contrast between the United States and Mexico striking, for “America is a progressive country,—a land of education, science, art, civilization and enlightenment,” while Mexico was a natural beauty but “poor and priest-ridden.”³⁰

The Universal Theme of Bandits

By midcentury the United States had humiliated Mexico in war. In the eyes of Anglo-Saxon Protestants, this most masculine of contests had

proved conclusively the superiority of Yankee progress and manhood. In the aftermath, and hard on the heels of the California gold rush of 1849, Bayard Taylor, later poet laureate of the Gilded Age, set off to visit the newly acquired U.S. territories. The young writer included a brief foray into Mexico. He traveled south from California, across the Bajío and into Mexico City, and then exited the country through Veracruz. Titled *El Dorado*, Taylor's account was enormously popular in the United States and ran through ten editions between 1850 and 1882. In his narrative, the image of Mexico appears every bit as savage and lawless as North Americans imagined their "wild west" to be. Of course, Taylor expects that the new territories would succumb to the onward march of U.S. civilization, but he anticipates that Mexico's remaining provinces will continue to stagnate in a semibarbarous condition. He confirms this with a sketch of Mexican banditry and backwardness, including the spectacle of an outlaw's execution in the city of Guanajuato. One day at sunset, the bells of every church began to peal, announcing the prisoner's final hours. The resulting din kept Taylor frantic for two hours. Music amplified the commotion as a crowd gathered in the city's main plaza to view a procession that accompanied the bishop to the prison. There the condemned man received his sacraments. Companies of soldiers, a military band playing dirges, a contingent of priests, and a double line of eminent citizens paraded before a multitude of onlookers who dropped to their knees in reverence. When the procession returned to the cathedral, Mexicans thronged the church and "constantly repeated their paternosters, and seemed to feel a deep sympathy for the convicted." Finally, Taylor succumbed to compassion, although "now and then a wicked feeling of rejoicing would steal in, that another of the tribe was soon to be exterminated." The whole experience seems alien and exotic, but Taylor finds that the "most curious feature of the scene was a company of small boys, carrying bundles of leaves on which was printed the 'Last Dying Speech and Confession,' in poetry, the burden being 'Adíos, Guanajuato amado!' These boys were scattered through the crowd, crying out: 'Here you have my sentence, my confession, my death, my farewell to Guanajuato—all for a *cuartilla*!'"³¹

In itself, the spectacle of an execution did not excite comment in the United States, where such events were an occasion for public holidays and picnicking. However, Taylor's description of the scene at Guanajuato emphasizes its outlandish nature, not least of which included the image of a superstitious and primitive horde of witnesses. Among other things, his portrait panders to anti-Catholic prejudices that most of his readers entertained. Nor did Taylor omit savagery and insecurity from his anecdote, for as he departs by an evening stagecoach from Guanajuato for Querétaro he notes how the "clumsy leaves of the cactus . . . seemed liked the heads of robbers peering over the rocks." White crosses lining the road, marking scenes of robbery and murder, were fearsome reminders that holdups could be deadly. Suddenly, the coach encounters "a company of about twenty wild-looking men, whose weapons glittered in the moonlight," who "hooted at us as we passed." Taylor and his companions suppose these men are bandits hurrying to witness the death of their comrade in Guanajuato. Taylor reinforces the impression of widespread lawlessness with his description of a hanging tree at the gates of Querétaro—a tree with "many lateral branches" that were "probably used when a whole company [of bandits] is caught at once"—and with his portrait of Perote, where he rested en route to Veracruz. Taylor explains that he dared not wander far from his domicile, for the "squalid look of the houses, and the villainous expression of the faces, seen by the light of a few starving lamps, offered nothing attractive, and the wind by this time was more piercing than ever. Perote bears a bad reputation in every respect: its situation is the bleakest in Mexico, and its people the most shameless in their depredations."³²

In the years that spanned the Mexican-American War in 1848 and the War of the French Intervention in 1862, the Anglo-Saxon view of Mexico as a bandit nation crystallized into its highest form. Fewer books came from diplomats than from travelers who were smitten with a desire to seek adventure in strange and exotic lands. From the tone of their narratives it is evident that most arrived in Mexico expecting to meet bandits, regarding this encounter as a test of their manhood in which Anglo-Saxon courage, resourcefulness, and intelli-

gence would be pitted against the barbarism, savagery, and indigence of Mexican outlaws. English explorer Edward Burnett Tyler noted that aboard the ship from Havana to Veracruz he encountered Spanish and French artisans who “talked of nothing but the dangers of the road.” In 1853, English ambassador William Parish Robertson confirmed that travelers prepared for bandits even before sailing to Mexico and that discussions continued long after they arrived: “The universal theme of conversation between Vera Cruz and Mexico City is that of ‘The Robbers!’ We began, in fact, to hear of them in London, for there, by our Mexican friends, we were told that, ‘*of course*,’ we must be prepared to be robbed. . . . Nobody escaped; we must take no valuables with us; only forty or fifty dollars, as a peace-offering to inevitable robbers.”³³

Mexicans themselves reinforced such expectations when visitors arrived at Veracruz. There, transport operators solicited prospective customers by volunteering the wisdom that “banditti” never rob literas and that they rarely attack diligencias after the town of Jalapa. Naturally, such news frightened foreigners, who were torn between a desire to vacate the unhealthy climate of Veracruz and their dread of highwaymen beyond the city gates. English explorer R. H. Mason advised his readers to “quit Vera Cruz as soon as possible” and to join “an armed troop of merchants and arrieros to travel to the Valley of Mexico.” He believed that this was safer than traveling in any kind of public conveyance, whether litera or diligencia. Nevertheless, he reminded his readers that it was also necessary to be well armed with rifles, knives, and revolvers. Tyler preferred the diligencia but suggested that passengers delay their departure for a day, since “the robbers would know of the arrival of the steamer, and would probably take the first diligence that came afterwards.”³⁴

Most travelers chose the diligencia and girded themselves for the bandit gauntlet. They already knew the hotspots through which they must pass: Jalapa, the “bandit-resorts” of Pinal and Perote, the “nest-and-nursery” of brigands at Río Frío, and the village of Huamantla with its “evil reputation for thieves and vermin.”³⁵ Sometimes travelers armed themselves, but most were satisfied to hire an escort—at

least until they met the escort. Robert A. Wilson, a former judge from Sacramento, contemptuously labeled his escort of six lancers as cowards who only appeared when the road seemed safe. Ambassador Robertson described his escort at Perote as a “dirty assassin-looking fellow.” Veteran travelers warned newcomers that “although they [escorts] take the title of National guards they are in reality gentlemen of the road. . . . [I]t is best to pay them moderately in their former capacity.” Whether or not this was true, nervous travelers often mistook escorts for bandits. This was Tyler’s experience on the road from Mexico City to Cuernavaca when “he caught sight of some twenty wild-looking fellows in all sorts of strange garments, [with] the bright sunshine gleaming on the barrels of their muskets.” To Tyler these cavalrymen looked more like bandits than guardians of law and order, with their “thick matted black hair hung about over their low foreheads and wild brown faces.”³⁶

Notwithstanding their anxieties, most foreigners suffered nothing more than the discomforts of traveling a miserably maintained highway. There were a few exceptions. A dozen armed *ladrones* robbed R. H. Mason during a hunting trip, relieving his party of their money, serapes, hats, belts, fowls, and fowling pieces and leaving them bound and prone on the ground. Edward E. Dunbar was one of a few travelers who met robbers on the highway. Just beyond Perote, a party of seven well-mounted and armed brigands halted Dunbar’s diligencia. Three bandits dismounted and ordered the passengers to leave the coach. One mounted bandit circled the coach, reconnoitering, while another trio on horseback trained their muskets on the luckless travelers. After relieving the victims of their valuables, the bandits forced them to the ground, with their noses in the dust, while the outlaws ransacked the luggage. Then the robbers searched their victims’ boots, an operation that proved the most lucrative of the entire encounter. Finally, the bandits ordered the passengers back into the coach and urged the driver to make a hasty departure. According to Dunbar, who relished the experience afterward, this “was being robbed in Mexico after the usual and most approved fashion.”³⁷

News of such incidents spread quickly through the foreign com-

munity and encouraged a tendency to glimpse bandits behind every bush and cactus. "Mexico, as everybody knows, is a thievish place," declared Tyler, although he admitted that he "never lost anything except a great brand-new water-proof coat." R. H. Mason, who did lose his possessions, remained jittery for the remainder of his stay, writing that a "residence in Mexico is likely to impress even the most obtuse with a sense of insecurity." He found that *léperos* still thronged the cities and continued the unique practice of lassoing their victims, while "troops of mounted *ladrones*" so infested the countryside that it was "unsafe to travel, unless armed to the teeth." He bitterly assailed authorities for failing to curb crime even as they disingenuously assured the public that "every precaution is taken to prevent the depredations of both *ladrones* and *léperos*." Mason ultimately blamed the influence of the Roman Catholic Church for the state of insecurity and disorder in Mexico, since it kept the wealth of the nation "locked up in either the cathedrals, or the strong boxes of the priests," and left the government without the resources it needed to combat crime. These foreigners not only believed that banditry was widespread and chronic but concluded that the "public scandal of universal robbery on the highway seems to be increasing." By way of a haphazard comparison, Ambassador Robertson surmised that "if the statistics of Mexican population could be accurately drawn out, perhaps the most startling line would be that of robbers. In London we have two millions of inhabitants; in Great Britain and Ireland, twenty-five millions. How many highway robbers could we count in that vast population? In London, scarcely one; in the empire, a most insignificant number. Certainly, in Mexico it is otherwise." If Mason blamed the Roman Catholic Church, Robertson indicted Mexican authorities. Referring to a local outbreak of unrest in the state of San Luis Potosí, Robertson commented that it "is a question of banditti and lawless hordes *on a large scale*, with which the imbecile local authorities are afraid to come into contact." Other foreigners cheered when authorities applied severe measures to control banditry, but they lamented police ineptitude. Tyler applauded the government's decision in 1856 to impose summary execution upon brigands, but

he decried the lack of effort in pursuing them. "You may do justice on him [the bandit] when caught," Tyler wrote, "but really you must catch him yourself." This English traveler reported that even sober Mexicans were beginning to long for Santa Anna. "He was a great scoundrel . . . but he sent down detachments of soldiery to where the robbers practiced their profession, and garroted them in pairs, till the roads were as safe as ours are in England." This, Tyler concluded, held a great lesson for Mexico's rulers, present and future.³⁸

Tyler penned his advice for Mexico's ruling classes on the eve of the most tumultuous internal conflict to rend the country since the war for independence. Beginning in 1857, long-standing tension between liberals and conservatives engulfed the nation in ten years of fighting that started with the War of the Reform and ended with the defeat of the conservative-backed empire of Maximilian in 1867. By all accounts this period stimulated the greatest upsurge of banditry the country had ever known, including the famous Plateados, or "Silvered Ones," who emerged from Morelos to interdict travel and commerce across central Mexico, including the road to Veracruz. Numbering in the thousands, these bandits, who had once served as auxiliaries to the liberal forces led by Benito Juárez, effectively harassed the combined French and conservative armies. The fighting ended with the withdrawal of the French, the execution of Maximilian, and the political obliteration of the conservatives. At this point, the Plateados and other bandit gangs became the primary target of the Juárez administration, which bent its effort toward imposing stability and order on the country. The campaign for postwar pacification gave rise to two of the most enduring and romanticized images to revolve around tales of Mexican banditry: the *charro* bandido and the *rurales*, or rural police.

Porfirio Díaz, Charro Bandits, and Rurales

President Juárez originally founded the rurales in 1861, at the interstice between the War of the Reform and the War of the French Intervention, by recruiting Plateados who were ready to abandon the hazards of an outlaw life. However, the civil war prevented the ru-

ral police from fulfilling their intended mission. This had to await the restoration of the republic in 1867. Meanwhile, Mexican bandits returned to service under the political banners of each opposing side, only to face off once more against Juárez and the rurales after 1867. The next ten years produced modest results, but under Díaz the rurales achieved international acclaim as one of the most effective mounted police forces in the world. This was more often a matter of effective publicity than of actual fact, and a good part of this reputation resided in the glamour associated with the official rural police uniform, modeled after the charro outfit worn by the Plateados. The rurales were armed with Remington rifles and sabers and outfitted with parade uniforms comprising gray bolero leather jackets, tight-fitting leather pants “embroidered with ornate braiding and studded with silver buttons,” leather boots with jangling spurs, red serapes, and an enormous felt sombrero.³⁹ The Plateados affected a similar appearance, but with greater attention to intricate silver embroidery and buttons (hence their name). The emergence of these charismatic bandits diversified, but did not supplant, the older image of the bandit as a wild, savage, and unkempt figure. Between 1873 and 1910 both images would populate the accounts written by travelers to Mexico, but the dashing masculine appearance of the Plateados would help to promote a romantic image of banditry that allowed travel writers to soften the edges of the Anglo-Saxon discourse.

When Juárez died in 1872, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada replaced him as president. Lerdo’s administration moved quickly to lay the basis for modernizing Mexico. A flurry of reforms followed, among them legislation that accelerated the termination of corporate land ownership by the Roman Catholic Church and indigenous communities. The object was to stimulate the emergence of a new class of small landowners who, according to liberal economic reasoning, would promote economic development. Lerdo also courted Washington, hoping to encourage the export of capital and technology to help Mexico develop railroads and telegraph networks. In addition to lobbying U.S. policy makers, Lerdo cracked down on Mexicans who victimized U.S. nationals, hoping to demonstrate that his government was dedicated

to protecting U.S. lives and property in Mexico. His efforts bore fruit in 1873 when Secretary of State William Seward arrived in Mexico on a four-month fact-finding mission. Timing was fortuitous, for Lerdo's efforts coincided with the completion of the transcontinental railway in the United States and a new desire by railroaders and manufacturers to exploit markets beyond the United States. Moreover, both the United States and Great Britain were entering a period of transition from foreign policies predicated on territorial expansion to one based on capital export. It became possible, even necessary, to reformulate a discourse that might otherwise discourage entrepreneurs from transferring technology and capital to Mexico. This, of course, depended on more than a discursive shift. A positive discourse would have no enduring substance unless the Mexican elites demonstrated sufficient stability and control over their nation.

Seward returned to the United States with reservations about Mexico, but the delegation included a journalist, Col. Albert A. Evans, who found reason for optimism. In his account, Evans noted that, "but for brigands, and revolutions, and foreign invasions, this would be an earthly paradise." Encouraged by the liberal politics of the Lerdo government, Evans predicted that "some day, not far distant, will . . . see these people becoming small land-owners, and fully informed of the right with which the Republic has invested them." He saw evidence of progress in the government's efforts "to educate the youth, and ameliorate the condition of the people." However, the key element in modernizing Mexico, wrote Evans, would be the construction of a vast network of railroads. He believed that this would "put an end, forever to revolutions and civil wars" and banditry.⁴⁰

Evans ranked banditry as one of the immediate difficulties confronting the Mexican government, yet his remarks on the subject challenged the negative pitch of the dominant Anglo-Saxon discourse. Where his predecessors found barbarism and degraded masculinity, Evans found evidence of progressive potential. "These gentlemen of the road are still numerous and daring," he observed, adding that the government was earnest about eradicating the gangs but that its task

was complicated by the extensive organization that supported bandit activities, including close ties with influential members of the old "Imperial regime" (meaning conservative supporters of Maximilian). Evans likened the "strict and effective" bandit organizations to those of the Thugs of India,⁴¹ adding that Mexican bandits had adopted modern business practices insofar as they "kept regular accounts of their profits and losses, and made dividends to the stockholders on the best and most liberal commercial system." While Evans fully supported the necessity of eradicating these enterprising bandits, his observations betrayed a romantic admiration for their *élan* and daring. His attitude toward Mexican bandits recalled that of Count Cortina's during his exchange with Fanny Calderón de la Barca in 1839. Evans wrote: "In justice to the 'gentleman of the road' in Mexico, I must say that as a rule they are the most polite people on earth, and even in taking a man's money and watch, do it with a certain courtesy and grace that makes the operation comparatively easy to bear on the part of the victim. They always apologize for the act. . . . I have a prejudice against being robbed by anybody, but if I must be robbed, let it be by a Mexican robber, by all means." This was, of course, much easier to assert in the absence of personal experience with a Mexican bandit, and it goes without saying that Evans did not suffer the indignity of being separated from either his money or his watch.⁴²

Notwithstanding Evans's myopic romanticism about Mexican bandits, his views offered hope that a revived Mexico would be a suitable home for U.S. investments. Evans believed that the Mexican elites were the decisive factor, but he realized that even the most civilized leaders were doomed if the masses were incapable of abandoning a barbarous existence. Therefore he rendered a portrait of Mexican bandits that tried to undermine the prevailing Anglo-Saxon stereotype. In this, the romantic masculine allure of the *Plateados* assisted Evans. He softened the image of Mexican bandits by imagining them as innate gentlemen and crediting them with modern business acumen. This was a deft maneuver that acknowledged Mexico's problems with banditry and backwardness even as it disposed of notions that geography or race mixture made Mexican inferiority inevitable.

In Evans's mind, the solution lay with education, economic development, and employment.

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.”⁴³

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.⁴⁴

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.”⁴⁵ 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.”⁴⁶ 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.”⁴⁷

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.”⁴⁸

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."⁴⁹

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 highway-man." 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.⁵⁰

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 cavalymen in the world. These men, the fomenters of disorder, revolution, theft and riot, were henceforward to devote their energies to subduing disorder.”⁵¹

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."⁵²

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."⁵³

3. Unsolved Mysteries of Civilization

Banditry in the Mexican Novel

The novel is nothing more than a way of initiating the people into the mysteries of modern civilization and of gradually educating for the priesthood of the future.

—Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, 1868, quoted in Jean Franco, *Introduction to Spanish American Literature*

The fight would be to the death, without truce or mercy: the bandits did well to tremble, for Martín Sánchez was the personification of the people's anger.

—Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit* (1901)

Foreign travelers were hardly unique in their fascination with Mexican bandits. The Mexican people were also so captivated that banditry became one of the most common themes in literary and popular culture during the nineteenth century. Outlaw tales abounded in the oral tradition, especially in the *corridos* (ballads) that entertained the unlettered rural and urban poor.¹ Bandits also became a staple in the literature of the elites, particularly in the romantic novel. Two factors hastened the rise of the literary bandit. For one thing, bandit narratives excited the sentiments of writers and readers who had been steeped in the aesthetics of romanticism. This alone might have assured popularity for the fictional bandit, but the turbulent social realities of nineteenth-century Mexico imparted these figures with an even stronger discursive appeal. The persistence of real-life banditry seemed to defy, and even burlesque, efforts by the elite classes to civilize their nation. This gave the subject of banditry considerable utility

for liberal authors, who believed they were producing a nationalizing literature for postcolonial Mexico. The project of crafting a nation-building narrative corresponded to political struggles to forge the nation-state. In the context of postcolonial Mexico, the articulation of a nationalist narrative involved more than simply imagining the future; it also required novelists to criticize the conditions that undermined progress. To Mexico's romantic novelists, the literary bandit served this purpose. As a consequence, Mexican authors did not come to praise the bandit, but to bury him.²

Like Anglo-Saxon travel writers, Mexican novelists deplored the reality of banditry in Mexico. However, the latter were less prepared to ascribe banditry to innate defects in the Mexican national character. Painfully aware of their nation's failures in the nineteenth century, they even agreed with Anglo-Saxon writers that banditry represented a form of debased masculinity. However, they could not accept the sweeping generalizations that characterized much of the Anglo-Saxon narrative. Mexican writers situated the bandit in a broader historical context and insisted that outlawry and other symptoms of backwardness were the negative heritage of Spanish colonial rule. They accepted the need to forcefully suppress bandits, but they also insisted that Mexican society could be redeemed. For this reason, their construction of the literary bandit mobilized notions of gender, ethnicity, and class in greater nuance than did Anglo-Saxon travel narratives.

From the inception of the novel in Mexico, liberal thinking shaped its development and therefore the making of the literary bandit. This was a consequence of the protracted struggle between liberals and conservatives from 1821 to 1867. The contending factions projected their political discord onto the sphere of literary culture, with conservatives more devoted to neoclassicism than were liberals, who embraced romanticism. Since conservative writers tended to eschew the novel as a vulgar mode of narrative, the novel spoke in a voice that was radical and populist until 1867. If afterward the liberal voice grew conservative, this was the result of liberal dominance in politics and reconciliation with conservative intellectuals. After 1867, liberals came to realize that stability and modernization required unity of the

national elite. During the presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911), this transpired under the hegemony of a liberalism infused with the positivist spirit of “order and progress” and an abundance of foreign capital. The Porfirian elites conjured the expansion of railways and telegraph networks to support economic growth based on the export of raw materials and commercial agriculture. However, their success in creating an export-driven economy also required the expropriation of the peasantry and the exploitation of urban and rural proletarians. The lower classes responded to their impoverishment with strikes, rebellions, banditry, and other forms of resistance. Meanwhile, the literary elite repositioned itself around a program to wean the masses from traditional culture and transform them into obedient, educated, and modern citizens with a strong sense of national identity.

Broadly speaking, the literary discourse on banditry moved through two stages. The first emerged from the war for independence and ended by 1867. Images of banditry in early novels expressed the insurgent liberalism of a Creole middle class that critiqued colonial society and postcolonial conservatism. These writers argued that the vices of post-colonial Mexico were habits rooted in the colonial past. None of the early novelists wrote “bandit narratives” per se, but they did mobilize images of banditry to indict the failures of the *ancien régime*. The social critique shifted after 1867 when liberals emerged triumphant in the War of the French Intervention. With liberalism dominating politics and the economy, intellectuals could no longer simply blame past regimes for banditry and other disorders. Instead, writers turned their critical gaze toward the bottom of the social hierarchy, to discover that the backwardness of the lower classes was the last remaining obstacle to modernization. In their eyes, the “dangerous classes” were a reserve army of bandits-in-waiting who menaced the frontiers of civilization. Under the weight of their apprehensions, literary empathy for the bandit became an increasingly difficult purchase.

Conceiving Banditry: Itching Parrots and Other Rogues

In nineteenth-century Mexico, the preferred form of the novel was romantic, for a posture of exaggerated passion and idealism appealed to

the “structures of feeling” common to the literate classes.³ Moreover, the affinity of romanticism with liberalism in Europe made the romantic novel a perfect fit for Mexican writers.⁴ The historical pitch of romanticism had an additional advantage in that it permitted authors to criticize the colonial past while constructing a myth of national origin that privileged a Mexican identity in opposition to the Spanish Other. If at first the paragon of *lo mexicano* was the Creole, the ideal Mexican was becoming mestizo after midcentury.⁵ Either way, the liberal metanarrative needed to define the rise of Mexican culture on its own terms while minimizing Spanish influences. Therefore, Mexican writers appropriated a literary technique known as the *costumbrista* sketch, which is the localized depiction of “people, places, customs, and usage.” This allowed them to press the historical romance into service as a kind of cultural map of the nation.⁶ Through the novel, writers introduced literate Mexicans to a reimagined history and a reinterpreted culture, helping their readers to measure the distance Mexico had yet to travel toward modernity.

José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi (1776–1827) set the standard in the first Mexican novel, *El periquillo sarniento*, published in 1816. Born in Mexico City to a Creole family of modest means, Lizardi experienced the frustrating ambiguity of his social status, perched between the poverty of the masses and the opulence of Creole and peninsular elites. However, he did not join the insurgent forces during the war for independence, and his precise loyalties during that conflict remain in dispute to this day. What is clear is that Lizardi embraced liberal ideas and promoted these in a newspaper he launched in 1812, *El pensador mexicano*. For this he acquired his reputation as the “chief pamphleteer” of independence by agitating for free trade, religious tolerance, free speech, and the abolition of *fueros* for the clergy and military. At the same time, though, his republican vision included a hierarchy of liberation in which Creole males occupied the highest niche. He believed that women should be educated and have the right to vote, but he balked at abolishing gendered distinctions; although his ideal woman learned a useful trade, her most important vocation was managing the domestic sphere. Lizardi’s brand of

liberalism did not challenge patriarchal relations or the paternalism that characterized most other Creole liberals. This is evident in his attitudes toward the mestizo and casta masses; he felt that tutelage by right-thinking Creoles would eventually prepare the lower classes for citizenship and productive labor. Lizardi was less hopeful for indigenous people, whom he felt had been too degraded by colonial rule to be revived. His views on these and other issues attracted a wide readership and sparked debate, but he irritated royal authorities, who imprisoned him several times in the 1810s. Lizardi also ran afoul of Iturbide's regime after independence, but he persevered. His fortunes changed in 1824, when a liberal government awarded him a pension for services rendered during the war for independence and named him editor of the government newspaper.⁷

Lizardi was a prolific writer, but his best-remembered work is *El periquillo sarniento*. This was not a "bandit novel," but it did enlist the figure of the bandit as a critical element in an argument that condemned the moral decay of late-colonial New Spain. The narrative follows the life of Pedro Sarmiento, who acquires the nickname Periquillo Sarniento (the Itching Parrot) from his school chums. This fictional character is born—like Lizardi himself—to a modestly situated Creole family in Mexico City in the late eighteenth century. The title of the book is a double entendre that refers to the nickname of the protagonist and to a then-popular stereotype of vain and grasping Creoles who wanted status and wealth without having to work.⁸ Thus, Periquillo is a *pícaro*, a literary type whose roguish conduct usually leads to his personal downfall. However, Lizardi situates his *pícaro* in a redemptive narrative in order to show that it is possible to surmount the parasitism encouraged by the colonial system.

Lizardi criticizes the immorality of his Creole brethren, but his main targets are the Roman Catholic Church, the legal system, the army, and the university. In his narrative, these are the very institutions that fail to nurture positive values in Periquillo after he is orphaned. The protagonist becomes a rogue because he lacks proper guidance from his family and the main institutions of colonial society. In a world where opportunism underwrites social advantage, it is inevitable that

Periquillo will fail to find an honorable vocation. He therefore sinks into a marginal social status, cast beyond the borders of decent society. Faced with few other alternatives, Periquillo embraces citizenship in the *hampa* (the underworld of vagabonds and criminals) and becomes adept at womanizing, drinking, gambling, theft, and fraud. Lizardi uses Periquillo's descent as a costumbrista tour de force that explores and condemns colonial society from its highest stations to the lowliest. But it does more. By making his protagonist into a vagabond unfastened from society, Lizardi positions Periquillo to become a "Creole pilgrim" who escapes the stifling borders of colonial New Spain.⁹ This is the first step toward Periquillo's rehabilitation, for through this device Lizardi introduces Periquillo (and his readers) to a wider world where he discovers ideas and practices that endorse a republican alternative to the colonial system. Thus, after spending time in prison, Periquillo joins the Spanish army and travels to the Philippines. There he encounters an African who explains the environmentalist logic behind liberal demands for political equality and national self-determination: "The essence of man is sown equally with the seeds of vice and those of virtue; his heart is the soil equally disposed to germinate one or the other according to his inclination or education. On the former act influences of climate, food and the particular organization of the individual; on the latter religion and government, national customs and the better or worse care of his parents. Therefore, there is nothing strange in that nations are so varied in customs, when their climates, ceremonies, customs and governments are so diverse."¹⁰ The author follows this theoretical exposition with an imagined application of what a liberal future might mean for Mexico. Lizardi arranges this by shipwrecking Periquillo on a Pacific island utopia inhabited by productive and happy indigenous people. In the absence of an idle aristocracy, their world is egalitarian and just. This imagining permits Lizardi to link his vision for Mexico with a facsimile of what he presumes to be a golden age in Mexico's pre-Hispanic Aztec past. Still, Lizardi could not allow his pilgrim to remain in exile, however idyllic. Even a foreign paradise could have no better effect on Periquillo's corrupted nature than to stimulate the

temptation to exploit his generous hosts. The Creole pilgrim has yet to experience his moment of catharsis, which will transform his experiences into liberal enlightenment. For Lizardi's purposes, this has to occur in Mexico. Until that moment arrives, Periquillo continues to collect knowledge and experience like so many snatched purses; he acquires these things without understanding their true value.

Therefore, Periquillo abandons paradise and returns to New Spain, where the unhealthy environment of colonial society tempts him into misadventure once again. Soon the pícaro finds himself on the road to Río Frío and banditry. Lizardi uses the appearance of bandits to signal the approach of crisis and redemption for the Creole pilgrim. Overtaken by a mounted and well-armed *caudrilla de ladrones* (gang of thieves), Periquillo recognizes an old friend from the hampa in the bandit captain Aguilucho. As a result of this chance encounter, Aguilucho invites Periquillo into his criminal enterprise. Periquillo, who normally feels averse to risking his skin for personal gain, reluctantly joins the bandits, but his obvious preference for "safe robbery" earns a rebuke from Aguilucho: "What do you want? To have money, to eat and dress well, and to mount fine horses, but remain behind a shop window and take no risks? This is naive, brother. We pay our rent with risk. You say that there are thieves who rob without the least danger, and that is true, but we can't all rob in the same way. Some of us have to rob in a military fashion, in the countryside, risking our necks while others rob politely in the city, living well and without fear of losing their lives. But we can't all rob that way, no matter how much we desire it."¹¹

With Periquillo's arrival at the outlaw hideout, Lizardi introduces his readers to the harsh realities of bandit life. Although these characters are the flotsam and jetsam of society, they enjoy the close camaraderie of a brotherhood and take pride in the "masculine" qualities of fierceness and bravery that are born of a fatalistic acceptance of their destiny. As exiles from official colonial society, the gang forms its own community within the nation of the hampa. A leader by virtue of his paramount masculinity, wisdom, and charisma, Aguilucho rules in the manner of a caudillo. The bandits are all Creoles or mestizos,

consistent with Lizardi's racial hierarchy in which indigenous people are too degraded to be men of action. The bandits also commanded a sexual hierarchy in which women are the men's domestic and sexual auxiliaries. Although subordinate to men in general, these "wild" women scorn emasculated men like Periquillo (*amujerados*), who fail to measure up to the standard of masculine qualities these women expect. The most important of these qualities is honor.

The bandits measure honor according to how well a man demonstrates bravery and loyalty to the brotherhood, qualities that the protagonist seems to lack. The wealth of these bandits impresses Periquillo, but he is torn between desire for booty and fear of dying in the acquisition. He knows that the Acordada (colonial police) are in close pursuit of the very bandits he has joined. This only heightens his fear and the ambiguity of his membership in the gang. One tense evening, while the rest of the gang are on the alert for nearby authorities, Periquillo remains alone in his quarters, brooding over his predicament. His self-pity and reluctance to fight enrage one of the women. She brandishes a pistol and accuses him of being "a womanly faggot" (*amujerado, maricón*). Chasing him out of doors, she shouts: "The authorities are after us and everyone else is out there protecting the camp. But you are totally shameless, hiding like a filthy pig!"¹² A chastened and humiliated Periquillo spends the next two months tending to wounded bandits with the medical skills he had acquired in the army. While this is a manly vocation, the bandits confirm Periquillo's compromised masculinity by assigning him the eunuch-like task of supervising the female "harem of my masters, friends, and comrades."¹³ Eventually, the bandits offer Periquillo an opportunity to redeem his honor. One of the bandits had been killed while robbing some travelers. Seeking vengeance, the gang conscripts Periquillo for a second assault on the *viandantes*. However, the intended victims once more gain the upper hand and wipe out the bandits, save Periquillo, who flees for Mexico City. En route, he stumbles across the dead body of a bandit hanging from a tree; it is an old friend from his youth, Januario. Recovering from the shock of this grisly sight, Periquillo takes out his knife and carves a melancholy sonnet into the tree:

Are crimes then punished in the end?
Will felony no longer lift its head
Up high in pride? Januario, lifeless now,
Proclaims thus to the public from this mast.

Oh, ill-starred friend! How long these regions have
Endured your robberies, your homicides;
But now your death—so hateful, so deserved—
Has cut the wicked thread of your excess.

You taught me many maxims that mislead,
Which I too often followed, to my grief;
Yet hanged from this noose now, you dispel
All misconceptions. Here, your rigid corpse
Does preach an end to lies, and I will learn
The truthful lessons you give now in death.¹⁴

This is a moment of catharsis for Periquillo. The body of a dead bandit marks a crossroads for Lizardi's disconsolate pilgrim, and fundamental choices now present themselves to the pícaro. He might continue his travels along the road of false honor and arrive at an equally miserable fate, or he could renounce the past and choose the road to redemption. The lessons of practical experience have conspired with fate to force Periquillo into his final resolution. For Lizardi, writing in the heat of the war for independence, there could be only one real choice. The Creole pilgrim must abandon roguery and transform himself into a truly honorable man: a pious, hardworking entrepreneur, a loving husband, and a devoted father—in short, an exemplary middle-class liberal patriarch.

In Lizardi's narrative, the imaginary bandit makes a brief but decisive appearance at the end of Periquillo's descent into the last stage of moral dissipation. Metaphorically, the point is striking. Banditry was a minor phenomenon of the late-colonial period, and nothing in *El periquillo sarniento* distinguishes the moral qualities of bandits from those of any other member of the dangerous classes. Lizardi simply saw banditry as a criminal profession that only the most desperate

men would pursue. His narrative did not excuse bandits, just as it did not absolve any colonial subjects from personal responsibility for their choices in life. However, he did regard banditry and other forms of corruption as symptoms of a broader malaise that characterized colonial relations in New Spain. As Lizardi saw the matter, the colonial system corrupted and dishonored men, but it did not distribute the consequences equally; a few libertines rose to the top of society, but many more sank to the bottom.

Lizardi was not alone in lamenting the moral desiccation of Creole society. Even Lucas Alamán agreed that his generation of Creoles had become vice-ridden and dissolute by the eve of the war for independence. However, Alamán and other conservatives condemned liberal insurgency for this very reason, arguing that their ill-conceived rebellion could have no outcome other than to dissolve the moral and institutional constraints that had checked the natural propensity of the masses for banditry, theft, and murder.¹⁵ To Alamán, this was irrefutable proof of liberal folly and reckless irresponsibility. However, liberal novelists of the early postcolonial period, such as Manuel Payno, picked up where Lizardi left off and responded to the conservatives by insisting that the influences of social environment predominated over inherent traits. In *El fistol del Diablo*, published in 1845–46, Payno portrays criminality and corruption as the product of a morally compromised order, by which he means the colonial regime and the habits it bequeathed to postcolonial Mexico. The novel contains interesting descriptions of bandit tactics, but banditry is epiphenomenal to the narrative, which follows its well-heeled central character—Satan, known as Rugiero—on a costumbrista tour of society, satirizing the hypocrisy and greed that seemed to infect all Mexicans. Payno argues that corruption could hardly be a trait unique to the lower classes, since it also infects the *hombres de bien*, whom he likens to parasites feeding on the Mexican body politic. In his view, the cynical conduct of the elites betrays their claims to piety and civilized culture and undermines efforts to dispel the fog of superstition and backwardness that blight the urban and rural masses, and only encourage criminal behavior in all the social classes.

Manuel Payno (1810–94) was born to a comfortable Creole family in Mexico City on the eve of the war for independence. Payno had been a civil servant in the *hacienda pública* (treasury department) before becoming a politician, diplomat, journalist and scholar. *El fistol del Diablo* was the first novel published in Mexico since the early 1820s and the first to be published serially, in the format known as *novela de folletín*. Payno's narrative expresses liberal frustration with conservative domination in the 1830s and 1840s. By then, factional strife had completely divided the *hombres de bien*, making it impossible to arrest the centrifugal forces tearing apart Mexico. The appearance of *El fistol del Diablo* coincided with a renewed liberal insurgency that expelled Santa Anna from the country and placed Gen. José Joaquín Herrera in the presidency. Shortly afterward, Payno put aside his pen to join the defense of his country during the Mexican-American War (1846–48). Four years later he became finance minister in a liberal government, but he fled to the United States in the wake of a conservative coup by Santa Anna. Payno then returned to government service when the liberal Revolution of Ayutla ousted Santa Anna in 1855 and inaugurated the period known as La Reforma. However, Payno was a moderate in a regime where radical liberals (*puros*) like Benito Juárez dominated. Payno resisted *puro* reforms that abolished military and religious *fueros* and terminated corporate landholding by the Roman Catholic Church and peasant communities. As a result, Payno supported a *moderado* coup against the *puros*, an act that sparked the War of the Reform between liberals and conservatives in 1858. This segued into the War of the French Intervention and the conservative-backed monarchy of Maximilian. The monarchist adventure ultimately misfired for the conservatives and left the liberals in complete control of the state.¹⁶

Meanwhile, *El fistol del Diablo* was one of the last novels to offer any empathy to the bandit. After midcentury, the country was completely disordered, and banditry reached epidemic proportions. When the liberals eventually triumphed, one of the first orders of business was to eradicate the bandits who infested the highways and disrupted commerce. Efforts to stabilize the nation-state and pacify the coun-

tryside coincided with a reorientation among novelists, who self-consciously sought to uplift and “nationalize” the Mexican people. This, however, was easier said than done.

Mexican liberalism had never been a monolithic ideology. Disagreements among liberals had been serious enough to trigger civil war and to inspire such heated passions that Ignacio Altamirano once demanded the execution of alleged traitors like Manuel Payno.¹⁷ For a time, internal conflict among liberals threatened to send post-restoration Mexico into a new round of instability and bloodshed. Events came to a head when Díaz came to power in 1876 and gradually unified the elites in support of his regime. The Porfirian elites embraced an urban-centered and cosmopolitan brand of liberalism that looked to Europe for ideas, culture, and capital. Nevertheless, there remained in rural Mexico liberal dissidents of another stripe. This reflected another long-standing set of contradictions within liberalism, which frequently expressed itself as a conflict between urban and rural Mexico. Many of the rural poor and middle classes had associated with liberalism for reasons quite removed from the theorizing of urban-oriented intellectuals and politicians. Commonly, these were rural folk who wished to protect their communities and traditions from outside domination, and for them the most compelling liberal notion was the *laissez-faire* of federalism, which they figured, by a rustic calculus, would be less intrusive than the centralism favored by conservatives. Theirs was a pragmatic liberalism that privileged community over nation and cherished traditional values over the uncertainties of progress and change. Often enough, communities that fought for independence and supported the liberals during the civil war also resisted liberal anticlericalism or the termination of communal landholding. At any rate, rural support for liberalism was never a *carte blanche*, and liberal politicians and intellectuals took rural resistance to reform as proof that backwardness and superstition still ruled the countryside. After 1867, liberal politicians concluded that only a centralized state could guarantee the order necessary to transform the countryside. Moreover, intellectuals and politicians like Payno and Altamirano believed that popular liberalism and its cul-

tural manifestations belied a rural conservatism that was out of synch with modernization and cultural nationalism. This is one reason why, when Altamirano compiled his compendium of Mexican novelists, he lauded Lizardi but excluded any mention of Luis Gonzaga Inclán and his novel: *Astucia, el jefe de los hermanos de la hoja ó los charros contrabandistas de la Rama*.¹⁸

A Rustic Interlude: Popular Liberalism and Cowboy Smugglers

Published in the final months of Maximilian's empire, *Astucia* was the first novel to integrate the theme of banditry throughout its narrative. It also broached the issue in a way that distinguished it from other fictional imaginings of the bandit. *Astucia* was a novel *from* the countryside rather than *about* it. It articulated the struggle of rural Mexicans to overcome oppressive conditions imposed by political conflict and war between 1834 and 1863. In this era rural banditry surged to its apex, and *Astucia* expressed a popular form of liberalism that identified banditry with the systemic avarice of state authorities and urban culture. While other authors had censured official corruption for encouraging criminality, they were urban-oriented intellectuals who coupled their demand for better government with an appeal to subdue and transform the countryside. The author of *Astucia* vigorously disagreed. For all the turmoil that characterized the early post-colonial period, there had been one unanticipated benefit for country people in many regions: the low demand in foreign and domestic markets for commercial agricultural products allowed them to avoid the pressures of expropriation and exploitation that afflicted rural communities in the late nineteenth century. As a result, by midcentury, traditional patterns of life remained relatively untouched in many rural areas. Two exceptions to this were the fiscal exactions imposed by central authorities in the form of taxes and government monopolies on crops like tobacco. These provided an important source of revenue for the state, but they also became an instrument for corrupt officials to enrich themselves by extorting country people. These were serious grievances in the minds of Mexicans like Inclán who cherished autonomy and traditional rural values. He therefore turned the dominant

liberal proposition on its head to suggest that civilization and urban culture were the wellsprings of corruption.

Luis Gonzaga Inclán (1816–75) was a mestizo steeped in the traditions and values of the rural middle class. He was born during the war for independence on a rancho in Tlalpan (now the Federal District). His father was a ranchero and an insurgent veteran of the struggle for independence who bequeathed his liberal views to his son. The latter received a primary education in the countryside and studied philosophy in Mexico City before pursuing his ambition to acquire his own rancho. Inclán worked as a hacienda foreman in Tlalpan and then relocated to a hacienda in Michoacán, where he remained for seven years. He saved enough money to buy a small property in Tlalpan and marry in 1837, but personal tragedy and national disaster shook him from his rustic bliss. His wife died in 1842, and when the U.S. Army razed his property in 1847, Inclán fled to Mexico City. The displaced ranchero sold his land to finance a publishing firm that specialized in portraits of saints and prints of profane and sacred literature. Inclán published *Astucia* on his own presses, and it is believed that the venture was inspired by nostalgia and the need to provide work for his shop.¹⁹

Inclán set *Astucia* in Michoacán during the era of Santa Anna, and his narrative follows the adventures of a band of *charros* who trade in contraband. However, these cowboy smugglers are not bandits. They are country gentlemen and enterprising rancheros who form a secret brotherhood to defy the *alcabala* (sales tax) and the government monopoly over tobacco. Both of these institutions were leftovers of colonial practices and were much hated by rural Mexicans as well as by liberal advocates of free trade. Under the slogan “all for one and one for all,” the brotherhood battles bandits, the police, and abusive officials who symbolize the oppressive nature of the world beyond rural Michoacán. Inclán also uses the costumbrista sketch to celebrate the traditions of the countryside and to justify the officially illegal behavior of his fictional heroes. The narrative logic of *Astucia* privileges locality over the nation-state, personal and community loyalty over political affiliation, and a popular sense of justice over government

laws. The brotherhood derives its legitimacy from its adherence to the traditional values of the countryside. This is what distinguishes the smugglers from bandits. The brotherhood is not out to relieve others of their property but to resist a distant and impersonal government that exploits their labors to enrich an urban-based elite.

Inclán inscribes idealized rural virtues into his novel. Therefore, the narrative takes shape around moral oppositions that offer little opportunity for character development. There are few shades of gray in his fictional personalities. They are either good or bad, with the defining element based on the extent of personal fealty to rural traditions, above all honor. In one passage, an elderly patriarch instructs his son in the meaning of honor for men and women: "A woman is valued according to her virtue and purity, an oxen according to his horns, and a man according to his word; the honor of a woman is a mirror that must always be clean in the eyes of the world."²⁰ Thus the rural protagonists of *Astucia*, and the women they love, are paragons of virtue. There is nothing of Lizardi's pícaro here—no loss of honor, no personal struggles to reclaim morality. The individual and his or her nature are static and unchanging, as are the oppositions between rural and urban life. Naturally, Inclán denies a positive moral character to his antagonists and to the urban world they represent, since in his mind their presence in the countryside is an intrusion that unsettles a traditional balance. However, in so characterizing his fictional wrongdoers, Inclán departs from the neat symmetry of gender and morality that one might otherwise expect from his narrative. There are dishonorable and corrupt men aplenty in *Astucia*, but among his multitude of bandits, for example, there are few of the wild women that Lizardi imagined in *El periquillo sarniento*. An example appears in the portrait of a Plateado named Apolonio Reyes, whom Inclán endows with characteristics that make him as "bad and ugly as Lucifer himself." Interestingly, though, Inclán renders the bandit's wife in a different hue, so that Josefina Reyes is a faithful "lover and wife, cherished and respected, the guardian angel of my [Reyes's] daughters, and the owner of my home."²¹ Inclán's ideal woman might easily have appeared in the pages of Lizardi's narrative forty years earlier.

Yet, in the case of Inclán the incongruous pairing of Apolonio and Josefina functions to emphasize the symmetry of traditional rural values in contrast to the asymmetry of values and social relationships that emanate from urban Mexico.

Inclán also flattens ethnic distinctions between mestizos and Creoles in his narrative. In contrast to the *hombres de bien* of early postcolonial Mexico—including liberals like Lizardi and Payno and conservatives like Alamán—alleged differences between mestizos and Creoles have little meaning for Inclán. He evidently presumes their essential equality, so that personal moral probity rather than bloodline or social station is the crucial instrument of valorization. At the same time, it is evident that Inclán is writing about a rural society in which mestizos are predominant. For example, among the charro brotherhood only one member is Creole. This corresponds to the demographic realities of Inclán's rural world, but it also signals an important departure from earlier narratives whose protagonists were Creoles drawn from the urban world of the *hombres de bien*, and where the term “mestizo” was very nearly synonymous with “lower classes” (recall that in *El periquillo sarniento*, Lizardi's protagonist was an urban Creole whose corruption led him into a world of moral decadence populated by the *casta* underclasses). In this respect, Inclán anticipates a literary element that characterizes narratives in the late nineteenth century: the appearance of the mestizo—rather than the Creole—as the embodiment of *lo mexicano*. However, Inclán writes from a perspective that flattens, but does not abolish, ethnic hierarchies. This is evident in his treatment of indigenous people. As in Lizardi's narrative, but unlike those of Altamirano or the later Payno, indigenous people in Inclán's narrative remain conspicuous by their near absence and passivity. Inclán introduces them to provide background or to serve as helpless victims, but he does not give them agency. This is a novel about men of action, and Inclán only imparts an active personality to his imaginary mestizos and Creoles.

The main protagonist is Lorenzo (Lencho) Cabello, who becomes “Astucia,” the chief of the brotherhood. As a young man, Lencho tries to earn his living as an *arriero*, transporting *aguardiente* (brandy

distilled from sugarcane). However, he suffers at the hands of officials from the hacienda pública, who put the *mordida* (bite, or bribe) on local entrepreneurs, in addition to collecting the hated alcabala. When Lorenzo refuses to pay an exorbitant bribe, the “wasps, pests and drones” of the *aduanas* (customs agency) ambush, arrest, and jail the would-be muleteer and seize his cargo for their personal enrichment. Even this does not satisfy these corrupt local officials. When the authorities release Lorenzo, they complete his ruin by imposing penalties that force the sale of his mules, his beloved horse, and various other possessions. Disgusted by the cowardice and avarice of the local officials, Lorenzo exclaims, “These are not men, they are some loathsome entities who take advantage of the law to rob and despoil those unfortunate enough to fall into their hands. . . . [T]hey were quite brave, more than twenty against three. What worried them? That the mules would resist? . . . [T]hey attacked us while armed to the teeth, hiding with their muskets in the manner of highwaymen. What cowards!”²²

Finding himself destitute, Lencho joins the Hermanos de la Hoja (Brothers of the Tobacco Leaf), a society of “charros who united for mutual self-defense” against the bandits and abusive officials who torment the community and persecute smugglers. Since tobacco is a monopoly contracted out by the national government (it remained so until 1856), smuggling was a high-risk business. The Resguardia (hacienda police) and Seguridad Pública (public security officials) persecute smugglers with penalties that include summary execution. Therefore, the lives of smugglers depend on group loyalty and community solidarity. This is why the brotherhood inducts Lencho with secret rites that test his willpower and strength and then consecrates his membership with an oath of loyalty that binds him to his compadres, their families, and dependents. This fictive kinship (*compradazgo*) unites the charros in a community of honor and tradition, governed by a popular sense of justice that supersedes any laws passed and enforced by a dishonorable government. This system of rural values affirms Astucia when he asserts: “With respect to the laws prohibiting the free trade of tobacco, I do not believe they are any more legiti-

mate than those imposed by the Spanish when we were under their domination. . . . [After] so many years of war and blood spilled by good Mexicans who struggled to escape this despotic yoke and win our independence, it is an evil thing to maintain such bad laws.”²³ He likens the state of affairs in Mexico to a feudal society, where the government and the tobacco monopolists are “men of the gallows and the knife, who own our life and labor, and maintain paid killers in order to satisfy their greed.”²⁴ Not only do the rural police forces act like thieves when they kill, rob, and defile their victims, but these armed guardians of the state often are bandits themselves. The worst offender is El Bulldog, jefe of the Resguardia, a bandit who receives a judicial pardon after betraying his outlaw *compañeros*. Then, having been commissioned as *comandante* in the Resguardia, “the rat became a cat, and grew more terrible . . . he once hanged a group of Indian porters on the highway because he could, thinking he was a big-shot, but he is a coward of the first order. He never arrives on the scene when bandits are attacking coaches, or he deliberately takes the wrong road when he pursues them. He is a blustering, fawning low-life . . . and a double-dealer . . . [who] only pretends to maintain order. . . . He is shrewd and malicious, fatuous and pompous . . . [and] capable of the most vile felony.”²⁵

Foreshadowing Payno’s allusion to the Yáñez affair in *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, Inclán portrays El Bulldog as a police commissioner who uses his position to facilitate and cover up his activities as a salteador. His method is to identify his “marks” and have his accomplices ambush their victims on the highway. He boasts that a network of spies “serves as my hands and feet without knowing it, [and] that the work is theirs and the glory is mine.” There is not the slightest remorse in his personality, only undiluted self-interest that even poisons his relationships with his superiors, for he regards the tobacco monopolists and the government as “ungrateful wretches who do not adequately compensate those who serve their interests.”²⁶ El Bulldog is a complete *malhechor*, the last link in a chain of wrongdoers that began with the political and economic elites in distant provincial and national capitals. Therefore, in the patriarchal logic of Inclán’s nar-

rative, these authorities are ultimately responsible for corruption and rural banditry.

While much of this argument echoes Lizardi or Payno, the conclusion receives a twist, for Inclán's riposte arises from a defense of traditional rural values and the desire to free the countryside from its oppressors. Inclán's problematic is the urban elite, which has fastened onto country people like leeches in order to finance the cultivation of its civilized lifestyle. In the process, he believes, they are undermining and destroying the republic. Therefore a far greater despotism looms behind the figure of El Bulldog, who is merely the sharpest end of oppression in rural Mexico. The charros of the brotherhood stands in sharp contrast to this tyrannical alliance of politicians and bandits-cum-police. They cut fetching figures mounted on splendid horses and armed to the teeth, while using mule trains to move their goods along secret routes. Unlike their foes, however, the charros are honorable and honest with tobacco growers and merchants alike. Their word is their bond, and they are loyal to their community. In turn, neighbors and business partners support the brotherhood, acting as their eyes and ears. These charros represent the salvation of the countryside-cum-republic, and they are proud to follow in the tradition of their fathers, all of whom had fought for an independent Mexico. Astucia himself conspicuously displays his rebel patrimony by wearing his father's sombrero, still emblazoned with the revolutionary slogan "¡Independencia ó muerte!"²⁷

Since Inclán portrays the cowboy smugglers as tribunes of the people and paragons of virtue, he cannot allow them to act from caprice or spite. As Astucia tells one of his spies, "I am the mortal enemy of bandits, but I do not hang them unless they attack me on the road."²⁸ Inclán illustrates the importance of Astucia's moral rectitude with a graphic description of El Bulldog's gruesome end, demonstrating that his kind eventually hang themselves if they are given enough rope. At one point in the narrative, the brotherhood finally captures El Bulldog, but rather than serving him with rough justice and killing him in cold blood, the charros characteristically free their captive with a stern warning. However, El Bulldog's natural perfidy reads this lenience as

a warrant for treachery. As he remounts his horse, El Bulldog draws a pistol and tries to kill Astucia. He fails, and this might have led to his death in a hail of bullets but for the discipline of the charros, who obey Astucia's command to hold their fire. Astucia's mastiff, however, cannot be so restrained. He attacks El Bulldog and rips him to bloody shreds. After this horrifying scene, Astucia turns to his compañeros—and to the reader—to interpret this parable: "Señores, you are all witnesses to this incident. Neither the Hermanos de la Hoja, nor their brave arrieros, took the life of this unhappy man. This is a clear case of God's punishment."²⁹

Still, the Lord seems to work in mysterious ways, and only Astucia survives when the Seguridad Pública exterminate the brotherhood and capture their chief. Astucia escapes from jail, and after a series of adventures he returns to the Valle de Quencio, where he resumes his old identity as Lorenzo Cabello. Elected by the prefect to head the local detachment of the Seguridad Pública, Lorenzo eradicates the remaining bandits and, for good measure, overthrows the governor of Michoacán before retiring to a tranquil life in the countryside, where he lives in peace to the age of eighty.

Written during the struggle against Maximilian, *Astucia* marks a watershed in the literary images of banditry. Inclán's rigid moral essentialism owes more to the logic of postcolonial conservatism than to the liberalism of Lizardi or the early Payno. As a result, Inclán's narrative rules out any prospect of redemption for those who occupy the wrong side of his moral binary. This, of course, includes the literary bandit. However, Inclán's hostility toward the bandit also signals a shift in the liberal narrative that would become increasingly dominant during the Porfiriato. On the other hand, Inclán also overturns the assumptions of both postcolonial conservatives and liberal authors like Lizardi and Payno, which tend to privilege Creoles over castas, the urban landscape over the countryside. This authorizes his sympathy for the charro smugglers, but it also expresses a liberal populism that most writers reject after 1867. Inclán privileges the countryside, and no doubt this resonated with many readers, but however many shared Inclán's bucolic republican vision, his narrative was a last hurrah for

popular rural liberalism in nineteenth-century Mexican literature. With the restoration of the republic, the initiative passed to writers with urban-oriented and modernizing liberal sentiments.

**The Long March to Civilization: Blue Eyes
and the Bandits of Cold River**

The stability of the Porfirian state encouraged a unified elite culture that presumed to assert hegemony over the rural and urban masses. However, the impetus behind this process began somewhat earlier, in 1869, when Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834–93) invested his military back pay to establish a journal devoted to literary nationalism, *Renacimiento*. From this beginning, Altamirano became the maestro of literary culture in Mexico, establishing cultural and literary societies, founding and editing newspapers and journals, writing novels, and publishing scholarly treatises. He also remained politically active and served as a deputy in the national congress, sat on the supreme court, held an appointment as attorney general, and headed the Departamento de Fomento (Department of Development) before ending his career as a diplomat in Spain and France. Altamirano's stature and achievements were quite remarkable, for like Benito Juárez, he emerged from a humble indigenous background to lead Mexican liberals in the consolidation of their republic.

Altamirano was born to a poor indigenous family in Tixtla, which is today located in the state of Guerrero. He spoke no Spanish until he was fourteen years old, but his father used his influence as Tixtla's mayor to enroll his son in a local school normally reserved for mestizos and Creoles. Altamirano's persistence and ability won him admission to the Literary Institute of Toluca in 1849. There he studied under Ignacio Ramírez, from whom he acquired a taste for puro liberalism. Altamirano later attended the Academy of Letrán, but political upheavals forced him to leave Mexico City to join insurgents fighting Santa Anna. When the Revolution of Ayutla deposed Santa Anna, Altamirano resumed his studies while teaching Latin and working as a journalist. However, the War of the Reform found him fighting against conservatives once again.³⁰

These experiences transformed Altamirano into an idealistic yet demanding liberal. He had a deep sympathy for indigenous people, but he was convinced that they needed an education that would facilitate their assimilation into the modern world. This corresponded to his belief that, since the vast majority of Mexicans were illiterate, education was the best means for creating a national culture and investing the state with lasting stability. In other words, Altamirano clearly understood that the Mexican elites did not exercise effective hegemony over the lower classes. He therefore insisted that novelists had a duty to inculcate the masses with “virtuous and wholesome attitudes” and to teach them “patriotism, chastity, industry, honesty, and order.”³¹ Ironically, Altamirano’s charge to writers elicited enthusiasm among intellectuals, but his pleas for education fell on deaf ears among politicians, whose efforts to expand public school spaces paled in comparison to the monies lavished on the military. The benefits of education still redounded to the elite and middle classes, while 80 percent of Mexicans remained illiterate in 1910. Thus the romantic novel reached maturity in the late nineteenth century, but its nationalizing discourse was no more than a conversation among initiates. Along the way, the production of fictional bandit narratives approximated the status of a cottage industry. Some were inspired by contemporary bandits, while others drew upon material from earlier historical periods. Most if not all of them shared a desire to justify the authoritarian nature of an ostensibly liberal republic, such as it was under Porfirio Díaz. This included the novels written by Altamirano and Payno.³²

Altamirano wrote *El Zarco* in 1888, but it was not published until 1901. Based on events in Morelos in 1861, it narrates the struggle against the infamous Plateados, so-called because of the silver that adorned their charro outfits: bolero jackets, tight pants with side slits, leather boots fastened with spurs, and holsters with a brace of pistols. These bandits had helped the liberal army defeat the conservatives during the War of the Reform, but afterward they returned to Morelos to extort hacendados, raid villages, and waylay travelers. Numbering in the hundreds, these bandits were powerful enough to engage the military and rural police in open battle. *El Zarco* (“Blue Eyes”)

was the sobriquet of a Plateado chief whose depredations inspired Altamirano's novel.

Altamirano portrays El Zarco and his Plateados in the darkest terms possible. In the narrative they commit heinous crimes without remorse; this later justifies the harsh measures employed by Benito Juárez to exterminate them. Altamirano's purpose is to establish an implicit historical parallel to Porfirian efforts to maintain order in the countryside. At the same time, Altamirano popularizes the struggle against banditry by placing ideal representatives of the lower classes at the vanguard of the crusade. He achieves this by inverting the racial hierarchy and opposing the Creole bandit chief to the heroic figures of an indigenous protagonist, named only Nicolás, and a mestizo ranchero named Martín Sánchez. Thus, El Zarco enters the narrative as a handsome man with fair skin and blue eyes, European features that were much admired in fashionable society. However, the bandit's attractive exterior is an illusion that disguises a black heart. Although El Zarco was raised by honest and decent parents, his mind became infected with "greed and envy of those around him," so that "he could feel nothing but hatred." As the narrative unfolds, readers find El Zarco at the height of his powers as a bandit, extorting haciendas "by threatening to burn fields of sugar cane" and murdering peasants whenever he wants to terrorize the villages.³³

To make matters worse, the corruption and cowardice of local officials and the army have left the citizens of Morelos undefended. Altamirano contrasts official corruption with the upright and assertive nature of his indigene protagonist, Nicolás, who, exasperated with the situation, publicly berates the military commander of Yautepec for the impunity enjoyed by the bandits: "[The] government issues fierce orders to local authorities who send out their small forces, many of them hand-in-glove with the bandits and able to warn them of any danger."³⁴ The commander promptly jails Nicolás for disrespecting authority. Meanwhile, the Plateados continue to pillage the region, unchecked until the mestizo Martín Sánchez steps into the breach. The bandits had murdered his family and torched his home and cane fields. With no recourse, Sánchez arranges an audience with

President Benito Juárez to tell him that “until the people saw that government is prepared to wage war to the death against the bandits, they would not support the forces of law and order.” The nation’s first indigenous president endows the *ranchero* with weapons and a free hand in exterminating the bandits: “You will be serving your country, Sánchez, for the government must be free to concentrate on the war and safeguard our national independence. Act honestly; you have been given unusual powers on the condition that you use them in the name of justice. Necessity forces me to grant you this authority with its tremendous responsibility. Don’t let me regret it.’ The two men stood up, the dark-skinned Indian facing the sallow mestizo, and shook hands gravely.”³⁵

Altamirano balances this symbolic gesture of unity between Indians and mestizos with another representation that inverts the racialized and gendered metanarrative of *mestizaje*. After midcentury, intellectuals like Altamirano began to reimagine and idealize the mestizo as the essence of *lo mexicano*. They traced the origins of *mestizaje* to the carnal union of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés and his indigenous consort Malinche. This revised liberal myth of national origin privileges the offspring but denigrates the parents—the former because he destroys indigenous civilization, the latter because she betrays her people. As an expression of gender, the figure of Malinche epitomizes the fallen woman. However, there is also another figure representing feminine purity: the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico’s dark-skinned version of the Virgin Mary.³⁶ Altamirano does not subvert masculine dominance in *El Zarco*, but he does recast the racial aspects of these gender categories to imagine two sexual unions that represent opposite paths for Mexico. This bold move situates the “Indian” Nicolás at the center of a love quadrangle with three Creoles: El Zarco and two sisters from a middle-class rural family, Manuela and Pilar. The pairing of El Zarco and Manuela suggests that the rejection of *mestizaje* can lead to Mexico’s degeneration into barbarism and immorality, while the union of Nicolás and Pilar affirms the positive valuation of race mixture between an indigenous male and a Creole female.³⁷

This was a highly charged—even scandalous—proposition, but Altamirano makes it work by imagining Nicolás as an active and heroic indigenous personality, fully assimilated into the mainstream of Mexican life. Nicolás appears in this tale as an honorable man who taught himself to read and write. He is also a skilled blacksmith, which makes him a valued hacienda worker and a productive citizen. To some of Altamirano's readers, this surely makes it easier to accept that Nicolás might extend his ambition to amorous interest in the daughters of an established Creole family. At first, Nicolás loves Manuela, who is the most beautiful young woman in the town of Yautepec. His overtures please Doña Antonia, who reminds her reluctant daughter that “we taught you to put honor before wealth and beauty” and urges Manuela to accept Nicolás, for “he may only be a blacksmith, but he is all of a man. If you marry him, he'll protect you.”³⁸ However, Manuela is vain, impulsive, and disobedient. It is her fate to play the Creole Malinche to El Zarco's conquistador. She spurns the “horrible Indian” because she has been blinded by El Zarco's good looks and seduced by his lies. Secretly in love with the bandit chieftain, Manuela abandons decent society to flee with the outlaw to his lair. She believes that “the bandits were rebels at war with society,” no different from “political leaders in revolt against the government.” However, she is horrified by the realities of bandit life. Her unmasking of El Zarco's deceptions ultimately dash her romantic illusions, but not before they trap her in a filthy den, “little better than a prison, which she has to share with drunken, ragged, slatternly women and unscrupulous bandits.”³⁹ As Manuela slips into despair she is tormented by visions that, for the first time, reveal the true Nicolás “clothed in his leather apron, his strong hands swinging the hammer at the anvil, the red sparks from the forge flying round; he seemed to her an example of all that was noble and fine compared to these idle, vice-ridden bandits, living in the shadow of the gallows and finding the only pleasures of their detestable existence in drunkenness and gambling.”⁴⁰

But, of course, Manuela has already lost Nicolás to her sister Pilar, who personifies the Virgin: modest, obedient, humble, and pious. She has secretly loved Nicolás for a long time, but she selflessly

masked her feelings out of respect for her sister and mother. The flight of Manuela and the arrest of Nicolás change the circumstances and compel Pilar to act, for she discovers that the comandante plans to kill the “indio” who dared to challenge him in public. He plans to make Nicolás a victim of the *ley fuga*, a scheme that Pilar frustrates by assembling a group of worthy citizens to escort Nicolás to court and testify on his behalf. After his salvation and exoneration in court, Nicolás declares his love to Pilar, explaining that “My forebears may have been poor Indians, but they lived according to a strict code . . . to us, love without honour is impossible. How could I continue to love a girl who ran away with a thief and murderer?”⁴¹ In Altamirano’s world, there is no sympathy for the bandit and no redemption for the fallen woman. Therefore, the novel concludes with the deaths of the corrupt Creoles El Zarco and Manuela. El Zarco perishes at the hands of the mestizo Martín Sánchez, who captures and executes the bandit on the highway. Meanwhile, Manuela succumbs to shock and dies after witnessing the death of her lover. Sánchez merely gazes at her corpse and tells his men somberly, “Then let us bury her and end this business.”⁴²

When Altamirano conceived his narrative in 1888, liberalism had traveled a long, hard road since Lizardi first imagined the bandit as the result of a corrupt social order. Colonialism and its conservative specter were defeated, but the bandit remained, and his presence could no longer be blamed on the past. But if not the past, what then? Given a choice between criticizing the current regime or reducing the bandit to an icon of evil, the decision was clear for Altamirano: the bandit was responsible for his own depravity, and his continued existence now endangered the republic. However, the reductive logic of this narrative came with a price, for it ultimately warranted the abuses that characterized the Porfirian regime as it expropriated the peasants and suppressed their protests. Violence and moral turpitude were by no means the exclusive property of bandits; these things arose from a system of class and racial oppression that continued to saturate the countryside and served to enrich the elite. If *rancheros* and peasants had an interest in disposing of bandits during the Porfiriato, they were

also engaged in an increasingly desperate struggle against exploitative hacendados and abusive politicians. Of this there is no hint in Altamirano's narrative. These abuses remained unchecked and would help to kindle the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

The portrait of the bandit in Manuel Payno's masterpiece, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, published between 1888 and 1891, is more nuanced and empathetic than Altamirano's. Payno's compassion is directed toward the bandit of a bygone era, when Mexico was independent but not yet liberal. However, by situating his narrative in this historical milieu, Payno—like Altamirano—mobilizes the literary bandit to confirm the “progressive” nature of the Porfiriato by criticizing the failures of earlier conservative regimes. The narrative is woven around an actual scandal in 1839 that placed Santa Anna's military aide, Col. Juan Yáñez, at “the head of an association of criminals that reached into most of the families of Mexico City. The water-carrier, the cook, the coachman, the doorman, all were spies, accomplices, and thieves.” The affair implicated officials and prominent citizens, and altogether more than 150 individuals of all classes were jailed. Yáñez and “three or four compañeros were condemned to death, while another fifty were sent to the *presidios* of Perote and San Juan de Ulúa.” Payno wrote that his fictionalized account of this incident was an opportunity to portray the passing of an old social order, “the features of which are foreign today, since the habits and customs of all classes have changed so dramatically that it can be said, without exaggeration, that since the middle of century, Mexico has fundamentally changed from what it was in 1810.”⁴³

This novel also articulates a more mature rendering of the emerging liberal metanarrative of Mexico's national origin, so that the tale begins at an unspecified date early in the century, on a rancho in Tlaxcala where a Creole woman is pregnant with the child of her Aztec husband. The pregnancy has been long and difficult, and the expectant mother, Doña Pascuala, fears the worst, since the efforts of the best physician from Mexico City have proven futile. So, the husband, Don Espiridión, summons two indigenous midwives, described as *brujas* (healers, or witches), who conclude that a safe birth requires the sac-

rifice of an infant child in order to supplicate the Virgin of Guadalupe, whom they also call Tonantzin (the Aztec mother-goddess). The midwives kidnap an orphan and abandon him in a garbage dump, expecting that wild dogs will devour the helpless infant. In this manner they secure the birth of Moctezuma III, a mestizo child directly descended from the Aztec ruler who was murdered by the conquistadores. With this lurid opening, Payno intends not only to shock his readers but also to underscore the great distance that mestizo Mexico has traveled since its own difficult birth. A people born into superstition and ignorance, who confused the Mother of Christ with the Aztec mother-goddess, stood on the brink of modernity in 1888.

Likewise, Payno's decision to place the bandit at the core of this narrative is no mere device. The Porfirian elites regarded the reduction of banditry as evidence of Mexico's advance toward modernity. Thus, a narrative that portrayed banditry as endemic to the conservative era would help to confirm the legitimacy of the Porfirian state. Payno designs *Los bandidos de Río Frío* to illustrate how the parasitism of the conservative ruling class has encouraged and perpetuated an environment where lawlessness is normative. He does not absolve bandits of their moral accountability, but, contrary to Inclán and Altamirano, he does insist on the possibility of redemption.

In *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, a character named Relumbrón represents the fictionalized Yáñez. As the epitome of government corruption, Relumbrón runs a network of bandits that radiates outward from Mexico City to Veracruz, Morelos, and the Bajío. This bandit mastermind is a cynic who anticipates the conclusions of social Darwinism in his belief that "half the people of the world were born to rob the other half, and the second half, when they open their eyes and think about it, dedicate themselves to robbing the first half, not only of the goods that were originally stolen, but also of those goods that they legally possess. *This is the fight for existence.*" For Relumbrón and his associates, the point of political power is not to guide the nation into modernity but personal enrichment. Relumbrón's "plan [was] to make money by all means possible, to rob on a grand scale, to exercise, if you will, a monopoly of theft."⁴⁴ He achieves this by

recruiting and protecting bandits from prosecution, by suborning secretaries and officials in government offices and ministries, by bribing servants in the homes of wealthy citizens, and by infiltrating criminals into the ranks of the police. This is how the bandit chief of Río Frío, Evaristo Lecuona, becomes a captain of the police and runs a protection racket on the highway from Mexico City to Veracruz. Relubrón's malfeasance generates a moral rot that percolates through every level of society, wrecking such havoc that it even provokes England, France, and Spain to threaten military intervention to protest the impunity with which their nationals are assaulted and murdered. The onset of a diplomatic crisis finally forces the president to uncover and destroy this criminal empire. While Payno avoids implicating the president in Relubrón's intrigues, it is clear that he finds this unnamed head of state guilty of negligence for allowing the situation to deteriorate.

Payno uses the literary bandit to indict a corrupt regime, but he carefully distinguishes bandits from government officials and elite members who possess social advantages that could not possibly justify their own criminality. On the other hand, he devotes considerable ink to showing how men and women from the middle and lower classes are driven into banditry by circumstances beyond their control. Payno most frequently cites poverty, ignorance, institutional injustice, and parental despotism as the instigating culprits. At the same time, he is not a hard determinist. He allows circumstances to constrain, but not obviate, the capacity of his literary bandits to choose between right and wrong. This is central to his analysis, for he wishes to demonstrate that the lower classes are worthy of civilization. Payno therefore imagines two opposing bandit archetypes, invested with antipodal moral charges. He then deploys these "models of bandit development" to illustrate alternative and competing paths toward Mexico's future. One model is negatively charged and manifests itself in Evaristo Lecuona, whose bad decisions lead him to dishonor and death. The other, positively charged, appears in Juan Robreño, who struggles to preserve his honor, escape outlaw life, and achieve redemption.

The moral evolution of these bandits develops through their per-

sonal histories, and it is powerfully expressed in terms of gender and ethnicity. The son of a mestizo guard employed by the customs house, Evaristo Lecuona is an exceptionally talented woodworker who makes several attempts to live honestly by his trade. However, his success is frustrated by a lack of capital and an inability to compete with the lower prices of manufactured European imports. He soon abandons these efforts and succumbs to the pícaro in his personality, the unfortunate outcome of excessive pampering by his father. Evaristo becomes obsessed with promoting his own advantage at the expense of others, usually those who occupy an equivalent or lower social status. Most often this meant women of his social class or indigenous people. Payno casts Evaristo as an abuser of women and sums up his behavior in the phrase “quererla y aburrirla” (to use and discard women). The author describes this as a practice that is customary to men of all classes. Payno writes that when a man says “‘I want her,’ the possession is total. They cling to each other in public, and are never apart in private. . . . But it is another thing when a man wants to discard his woman: he quarrels about food, about sleep, [and] about wrinkled shirts.” So it happens when Evaristo forces his first lover, Casilda, from their home and marries another woman, Tules, whom he later murders in a drunken rage.⁴⁵

These savage acts denote Evaristo’s decline into barbarism and precipitate his flight from Mexico City to Río Frío, where he launches his career as a bandit. However, it is also in Río Frío that Evaristo meets Cecilia, an entirely different sort of woman who refuses his advances and does so with an assertiveness that flummoxes her would-be suitor. Cecilia is a successful fruit vendor, and Evaristo hopes to exploit the profits of her enterprising spirit. Cecilia will have none of his nonsense, however, advising him frankly that “I’m not going to beat around the bush. I am not going to marry you or anyone else. I love my work and my freedom. I do what I please and enjoy my money without having to share it with anyone else. . . . If you like, we can part as friends, but you had better leave me alone.”⁴⁶ Enraged, Evaristo tries to murder Cecilia, but she drives him off with a sound beating. The confrontation with Cecilia is an endorsement of strong

and independent women, in defiance of the idealized feminine stereotype that obtained in nineteenth-century Mexico. However, this encounter also operates powerfully at other cultural levels. The nature of Evaristo's conduct with all three women impugns his masculinity in a very potent fashion for Payno's readers, and it drives home the point that men and women required unusually strong personalities to fend off exploiters like Evaristo or Relumbrón.

The desiccation of Evaristo's masculinity erases the last of his moral conscience and triggers a turn to barbarism that culminates in his decision to become a bandit. This carries Evaristo across the threshold and beyond the borders of civilization. His transformation also hints at atavistic tendencies thanks to the indigenous blood that flows through his mestizo heart. Evaristo confirms this when he recruits his bandit gang from a *cuadrilla* of Otomí men, women, and children who have been reduced to *vagabundaje* as they scour the countryside for work. They are credulous, superstitious, and half-starving, but Evaristo—bolstered by the presence of a European bloodline—transforms this ragged troop into competent brigands. In this way, Payno conjures forth the image of an atavistic mestizo leading indigenous bandits. This was a potent and frightening prospect to many of his readers. It derived its rhetorical strength from the ambivalence that many literate Mexicans felt toward the "Indian." The myth of national origin appropriated the glories of pre-Hispanic indigenous civilization, but it denigrated its descendants as a deadweight on progress or as an outright threat. The condescension and indifference that many felt toward indigenous people commingled with a fear that, left to their own devices, they were as likely to be recruits for rebellion and criminality as they were for indigence and sloth. But for Payno, like Altamirano, the solution to this problem lay in the assimilation of indigenous people through mestizaje and education. Thus, Payno moots the potential danger of indigenous people by providing them to Evaristo as bandit material, but he gestures toward a solution through the mestizo character of Moctezuma III, who reappears as an educated and civilized adult at the end of the narrative to lead the cavalry detachment that finally apprehends Evaristo.

The counterpoint to Evaristo is Juan Robreño, who becomes leader of the bandits of Morelos, known in this narrative as the Dorados (the Golden Ones), an allusion to the Plateados. Juan is also a mestizo, the son of a hacienda administrator, but his trajectory into banditry is completely different. Upright and honorable, he has made a good career as a cavalry captain, only to lose everything to the prejudices of his father's employer. Juan Robreño and Mariana Melchor y Baltasar have fallen deeply in love, but Don Diego Melchor y Baltasar sunders the affair. This aristocratic Creole, a throwback to the colonial era, places more importance on social status and appearances than on his daughter's happiness. Refusing to let his daughter "marry down," Don Diego separates the young lovers. He banishes Mariana to Mexico City and arranges Juan's military transfer to the northern frontier. Unbeknownst to all, Mariana is pregnant with Juan's child, a fact that Juan discovers only after Mariana had given birth to a son and surrendered the infant for adoption. While this preserves the public face of her honor, Mariana is suffering the darkest moment of her life, and Juan realizes that he must be at her side. He deserts his post and rushes to Mexico City, knowing that this act will lead to his disgrace as an officer and even to his execution. However, there is nothing more important in his life than Mariana. When they are reunited, Juan proclaims that "I may have lost my honor, my future and my career, and I may even lose my life, but . . . I would surrender everything for you, Mariana. I have seen you again and I am content."⁴⁷

Juan's integrity and his love for Mariana could not possibly contrast more sharply with Evaristo and his misogyny. Nevertheless, the purity of Juan's character also precipitates his transformation into a bandit just as surely as the pícaro Evaristo follows his path to outlawry through *uxoricidio* (wife-murder). The romantic sensibilities of Payno's narrative require Juan to leave Mariana and return to his military detachment on the frontier to face the consequences of his desertion. The penalty is death, but Juan's commanding officer cannot bear to execute his best subaltern and dearest friend. He spares Juan by feigning an execution and allowing the young officer to escape. Juan adopts a new identity as Pedro Cataño, but he pays dearly for

the indiscretion of seeking true love in a corrupt world. He is now a fugitive separated from everything he loves: his father, Mariana, his son, his career. Juan has arrived at the borders of banditry, and it will not be long before he falls into the calculating hands of Colonel Relumbrón. The two meet at a rural fair, where Relumbrón recognizes Pedro Cataño as the former captain Robreño, presumably deceased. Relumbrón uses the knowledge of Cataño's true identity to coerce Juan into a new career as the chief of his bandits in Morelos. However, the fearsome and implacable Pedro Cataño was not to be the bandit that his patrón expected. Cataño concentrates on raiding the properties of the hated *gachupines*, Spanish hacendados and merchants who remained in Mexico after independence. Even worse, no profits flow from Morelos into Relumbrón's coffers, because the Dorados are redistributing the spoils among the rural poor. This sets the stage for a final showdown when a furious Relumbrón summons Cataño to the hacienda that fronts Evaristo's operations in Río Frío. Payno's penchant for improbable coincidence turns this dramatic encounter into a joyous reunion when Juan Robreño/Pedro Cataño discovers that the hacienda administrator is none other than his long-lost son! This is the moment of redemption for Juan Robreño, who has retained his sense of honor in the face of misfortune. It also coincides with the downfall and death of Relumbrón and Evaristo, enabling Juan and his son to ascend from banditry. And, in completing the romantic cycle of descent and resurrection, both are restored to Mariana. The security and happiness of this long-suffering but honorable family are finally guaranteed when the truth of Pedro Cataño's identity dies with Relumbrón and Evaristo before the firing squad.

In *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, the deaths of Relumbrón and Evaristo signify the passing of an old and bankrupt social order and, along with it, the anachronistic personalities, practices, and customs that had been Mexico's inheritance from its colonial past. Thus, Payno's final and most ambitious novel exudes a triumphant tone that captures the enthusiastic mood of the Mexican elites as they witness the onset of modernization in the late nineteenth century. The birth of Mexico had been difficult, attended by competing tendencies, positive and

negative. When the country had thrown off the shackles of colonial domination, the liberal insurgents anticipated the rise of a modern republic. For too long, however, the future of the young nation had been clouded afterward with uncertainty, as negative phenomena—elite corruption, banditry, civil war, and foreign intervention—threatened to overwhelm Mexico. Anglo-Saxon travel writers blamed Mexico's troubles on defects in the national character, but Mexico's liberal novelists clung to their hopes for progress and civilization. Through the medium of romantic fiction they helped to fashion a metanarrative in which the bandit represented anachronistic obstacles that stood in the way of Mexican progress. Payno and other novelists could not allow themselves to imagine any outcome other than the defeat of the bandit. Thus, in *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, the disappearance of Pedro Cataño and the resurrection of his *true* mestizo identity as Juan Robreño affirm the survival and triumph of the nation against barbarism and ignorance, but the novel also issues a warning against the possible reappearance of these phenomena. This was a sober caution. The bandit was in decline in 1888, but he still stalked the countryside, arousing the passions of many Mexicans, especially among the rural and urban poor, who continued to resist the logic of progress and order. They sang the praises of bandit-heroes in countless corridos and often looked to their exploits as a model of rebellion. The civilizing mission of the national elite was not yet complete.

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. Mexican novelists did something similar when they wrote about banditry. This reflects the fact that the lower and elite classes often argued to different conclusions, even while starting from some common assumptions. This is not surprising, for the lower and elite classes did not develop in isolation from each other. Most Mexicans shared a mestizo identity as well as patriarchal values that privileged men over women and encouraged subaltern obedience to social superiors. These points of commonality denoted a part of the limited field over which the elites exercised hegemony over the lower classes. However, we also know that elite hegemony was weak when it came to these and other values, practices, and meanings, including the discourse on banditry. For one thing, the elite disunity and turbulence that characterized Mexican history to 1867 meant that noncoercive integrative processes were underdeveloped into the late nineteenth century. For another thing, relations of exploitation were perhaps the most common social processes linking all Mexicans, so that Mexican culture produced fundamental disjunctions between elite and lower-class perceptions; in other words, the rural and urban poor interpreted reality according to life experiences that were radically different from those of the elite classes. These differences were accentuated by the elites' reliance on coercive means to maintain their domination. Poverty, exploitation, and oppression produced social differences and conflict, which in turn encouraged the lower classes to articulate alternative and oppositional systems

of values. Thus the images of banditry in corridos corresponded to a complex of tensions that not only existed within lower-class culture but also characterized the relationship between lower-class and elite cultural processes. At some moments lower-class representations of banditry appeared to reinforce elite domination, while at other times they justified rebellion against authority.

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-leafs, 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.¹ 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.² 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.³ 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.”⁴ 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 *corrío* even though the two are quite distinct musical forms.”⁵

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.⁶

As ballads circulated over time and distance, they acquired distinct features according to subject matter and purpose as well as expressing unique regional flavors in the performance. For example, in the Huasteca (a subregion located at the intersection of the states of San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo, and Veracruz) ballads appeared in a form known as *huapangos*. They featured *gritos de vaqueros* (cowboy whoops) and were typically sung in distinctive falsetto voice, whereas in most parts of Veracruz ballads assumed a form called *jarochos*, a term derived from the indigenous name for a traditional spear. Appropriately enough, jarochos were usually quite satirical and sarcastic. In addition to regional variations in performance, the corridos and other ballads became stylized even further according to general subject matter and purpose, although one hastens to add that these categories were neither absolute nor inviolable. Frequently the subject matter of narratives crossed the borders of style and form. The liveliest were *sones*, which were intended for dancing, while *tragedias* assumed a slower,

more plaintive minor key and lamented disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and train derailments or personal misfortunes arising from betrayal, death, or some other loss. Situated between the emotive extremes of sones and tragedias were *relaciones*, which told fables, praised towns or regions, or narrated adventures. *Coplas* and *versos* narrated the fortunes of romantic love or burlesqued and satirized someone. *Ejemplos* broached moral and religious matters. Most corridos dealing with banditry were tragedias or relaciones, although they occasionally slipped into the ironic and satirical modes of the verso. When the elements of style, tone, and subject matter were combined, they supported a wide range of moral and emotional postures toward a multitude of topics.⁷

As an expression of lower-class values and practices, corridos could be vehicles for transmitting the values of an alternative or oppositional culture. However, this character of corridos was fluid and conditional. Perhaps the majority of corridos portrayed the joys and sorrows of everyday life for lower-class Mexicans: love and family, disasters and accidents, work and leisure, eulogies to home, and so on. Insofar as they described a way of life that was distinct from the lives of middle- and upper-class Mexicans, corridos embodied an alternative to the culture of the dominant elite. They were also integrative within subaltern culture, providing instruction in the expectations of men and women and idealizing relationships between genders and social classes. However, corridos that dealt with bandits, wars, national heroes, and notable historical events were of another order altogether. Aside from the fact that these tended to have an explicitly political character, they were chameleon-like in terms of their integrative character. Everything depended on the historical moment in which they were composed or performed. For example, numerous ballads emerged from the war for independence and the War of the Reform, and they typically lauded personalities like the insurgent priest Miguel Hidalgo or the liberal leader Benito Juárez. At the moment of composition, these ballads went beyond expressing alternative values to posit those that were profoundly oppositional. When these historical moments passed, these corridos became integrative in relation to elite

domination and hegemony, but they were potentially unstable. To the extent that the state and the ruling classes could claim the political legacy of a Hidalgo or a Juárez and therefore assert the legitimacy and authority of the state, these corridos helped to fashion a lower-class historical memory that encouraged the lower classes to accept elite domination. Yet these corridos also contained latent elements of instability, for they implied the legitimacy of rebellion against injustice and bad government. Whether or not such corridos were composed by lower-class Mexicans, they became embedded in plebeian culture and had the potential to animate and justify resistance to injustices that exceeded the acceptable boundaries of social relations between dominant and subaltern classes.

Ethnicity and Gender in the Corrido

Most corridos assumed that their bandit-subjects were mestizos and did not often explicitly broach the social and cultural significance of other ethnic identities. Of more than two dozen corridos analyzed for this chapter, only two identified their protagonists as non-mestizos. Of these exceptions, one was a Creole and the other a Spaniard. “Indians” were mentioned in three corridos, and only as secondary actors. Interestingly, one corrido about a female indigenous bandit—“La Carambada”—does not even mention her ethnicity. This curious omission may have been due to public fascination with the more sensational fact of Leonarda Emilia’s sex or her alleged role in the death of Juárez. As for the remaining stock of corridos, the relative absence of indigenous people probably reflects the numerical preponderance of mestizos in nineteenth-century Mexico. By the end of the Porfirian era in 1910, Mexico had a population of about fifteen million, of which indigenous people constituted some two million. Creoles were a tiny minority and were even less present in the corridos than indigenous people. This does not mean that lower-class culture lacked ethnic prejudices and preferences or that ethnicity was a meaningless category. To the contrary, corridos reveal considerable ambiguity about the issue. This derives from the reality of social relations and the ethnic hierarchies that governed nineteenth-century Mexico. Mes-

tizos and a handful of Creoles dominated the national elite, while the indigenous population occupied the lowest socioeconomic positions. Between these two poles, mestizos were predominant among workers and artisans, rancheros and peons, and small entrepreneurs and professionals. This is why lower-class culture invested greater social meaning and power in the figure of the mestizo. Even so, this did not determine the valuation of other ethnic identities. It simply meant that most corridos were composed from a distinctly mestizo perspective. The positive or negative valuation of non-mestizo personalities depended on whether the lower classes perceived a threat from others who occupied different ethnic or class positions.

Perhaps nothing better captured mestizo ambiguity toward ethnic identities better than relations between mestizos and the indigenous population. As discussed in chapter 3, the elites created a myth of national origin in the nineteenth century that celebrated mestizaje as the essence of *lo mexicano*. As a representation of the ideal Mexican, the mestizo was born out of the carnal union between indigenous women and Spanish conquistadores. However, the elite metanarrative itself contained a great deal of ambiguity toward the mestizo's parents. It denigrated the Spanish father as a colonial oppressor and despised the mother as a traitor to indigenous people. At the same time, the elite mythology needed to endow the mestizo offspring with heritable potential for progress and civilization. For better or worse, the elites located this in the mestizo's combined Spanish and Aztec heritage. Although the father was Spanish, he represented a blood link to European culture and civilization. Meanwhile, the mother represented the glories of pre-conquest Aztec civilization. Of course, the subsequent debasement of the indigenous people was no inspiration for the elites, but they found it convenient to blame Spanish colonialism for this condition. Whether or not lower-class mestizos subscribed to this version of the national myth, it is clear that they had their own contradictory attitudes toward "Indians." For example, a corrido about the Veracruz outlaw Santanón represented its hero as a defender of exploited "Indians." This ballad adopted a paternalistic posture toward indigenous people, reflecting a mestizo perception

that “Indians” needed protection but could not manage it themselves. This form of lower-class paternalism paralleled elite assumptions, but it also illustrated how the lower classes sometimes manipulated dominant values in order to overturn existing social relations: this ballad was an attempt to justify Santanón’s rebellion with a class-based logic that endorsed cross-ethnic unity against a common oppressor.⁸

Conversely, a much different image of mestizo/indigenous relationships appears in the corrido about Macario Romero. In this instance, frontier warfare against Apaches and Yaquis support a heroic imagining of Romero by giving him the reputation of a fierce Indian fighter. This ballad moots the logic of intra-ethnic unity against the “Indian” as a dangerous Other, but this did not mean it subsumes the logic of class relations. The basic purpose of this ballad was to protest against elite members who framed and assassinated a popular local hero. In this case, lower-class culture relied on a dominant prejudice against indigenous people to endorse rebellion against perceived injustice.⁹ It should also be noted that most Mexicans distinguished between “wild Indians” like Yaquis and Apaches and “tame Indians.” Unlike descendants of Aztecs, Mayas, and other long-ago-conquered people, Yaquis and Apaches had never achieved highly developed sedentary societies. Nor had they accepted incorporation into the economic, cultural, and political boundaries of the Mexican nation-state. Therefore Mexicans regarded Yaquis and Apaches as foreigners outside the borders of social and cultural inclusion.

A perceived threat from foreigners could also be a potent force in promoting interclass unity around a mestizo/Mexican identity. North Americans sometimes played this role in the corrido. By 1848 the United States had already seized half of Mexico’s national territory, and for the rest of the century the U.S.-Mexico border was the scene of friction and conflict. Mexican national feelings were often inflamed by reports that Yankees were abusing and oppressing Mexicans who lived on both sides of the border. When Mexicans fell afoul of the law in the United States and fled across the border, U.S. authorities typically accused them of banditry. Not infrequently, Mexicans denied these charges and accused the North Americans of persecuting

innocent victims. Perhaps the best-known case involved Gregorio Cortez, whose life and myth have been well aired by Américo Paredes.¹⁰ In 1901, Cortez shot and killed a Texas sheriff. For this he received a fifty-year sentence for second-degree murder. The Texas governor pardoned Cortez in 1913. At the time, the case inspired corridos in Mexico, insisting that Cortez had acted in self-defense. Paredes points out that the ballads composed in Mexico City displayed a kind of flag-waving nationalism that was not evident in ballads from the border region. He argues that along the border, and especially on the northern side, *lo mexicano* connoted a general cultural affiliation more than a sense of national identity. Nevertheless, all the corridos lionized Cortez by displacing class antagonisms with conflict between Mexicans and North Americans. Moreover, the Cortez cycle of ballads inscribes the hero with a quintessential Mexican masculinity. That is to say, with his pistols in his hand he defends his honor against injustice.

In general, then, the construction of the bandit in lower-class culture took shape around the figure of the mestizo male, but this was no guarantee that an outlaw would receive a positive imagining. For this the bandit also had to embody the characteristics of a popular champion. We will examine this more closely below. For the moment, it is enough to note that corridos almost universally portrayed the bandit-hero as an idealized figure of mestizo masculinity and relied on specific notions of gender to explicate and interpret the character of individual bandits. These ideas were grounded in patriarchal structures, which privileged masculine identities over feminine ones. Legal and extralegal social codes reinforced the subordination of women to men and tried to limit women's sphere of action to motherhood and the household. This sort of sexual hierarchy had existed in Mexico since colonial times, but even in the late nineteenth century civil law affirmed the right of a husband to administer property, to concede or withdraw permission for his wife to seek work, and to assert his authority over his children.¹¹ Of course, legal and social codes were one matter; social reality was another. Many Mexican women found ways to challenge circumscribed boundaries and to compel men to

negotiate a better deal than the law required. Resistance took many forms and could include a refusal to marry, taking employment independently of a husband's wishes, filing lawsuits, fleeing from bad marriages, or even confronting the husband physically.¹² In this women did not necessarily seek to overthrow patriarchal relations, but they did manipulate gender ideals to their benefit as best they could. This is what happened, for instance, when wives threatened public shaming to alleviate "the worst kinds of physical abuse" by husbands.¹³ In practice, then, gender and sexual relationships could not conform exactly to the masculine and feminine ideals posited in both lower-class and elite culture.

Nevertheless, masculine and feminine ideals retained their prescriptive power and acted to constrain deviations forced by the pressures of everyday life. These ideals revolved around the notions of honor and shame. As Florencia Mallon points out, these ideals organized "hierarchies among men, and between young and old, as much as between men and women."¹⁴ For a man, honor meant publicly fulfilling his responsibilities as the patriarch of a household: providing for his family and protecting the virtue of the women under his roof. For this reason, sexual possessiveness and valor were both integral components of a man's honor. At the same time, notions about acquiring or augmenting honor varied according to class and social station. For example, elite males could enhance their honor by achieving a social status that conferred authority over women and other men. Lower-class men rarely had this opportunity to bolster their public reputation, so they might seek other routes, such as visible demonstrations of courage and skill. This, along with proof of sexual prowess, was a common resort for young men who had not yet married or established their reputations as patriarchs. For women, honor derived from two sources. The first was the reflected honor of a patriarch, whose status depended on women who were loyal, submissive, and virtuous. The second was "to cultivate a well-developed sense of shame" and modesty.¹⁵ This meant that a woman had to avoid any circumstance that hinted of sexual impropriety. The honor of a woman depended on the character of her male patriarch (i.e., father or husband) and

on her own public reputation for virtuous behavior. Patriarchal relations were therefore reciprocal, but it was an unequal exchange that assumed male dominance. Within this framework, the logic of gender ideals paralleled and complemented the logic of class and ethnic hierarchies that governed relations between the elite and lower classes.

Corridos relied on these notions of gender to evaluate the bandit. A positive imagining meant investing the bandit with unimpeachable honor. He was courageous and powerful and capable of protecting his male and female subordinates. In return, these dependents reciprocated with loyalty and devotion to the bandit. In contrast, a negative imagining of the bandit always invoked the absence of honor in an imperfect masculinity. The bandit might be courageous and fierce, but he lacked the desire and the ability to protect the weak, nor did he command lasting respect and loyalty. Quite often a bandit's relationship to women was a decisive factor in his devaluation. The corrido might express this through omission; that is, it would make no effort to imagine a loyal female dependent. Other corridos might achieve this by characterizing the bandit as a sexual predator who threatened the honor of other men by endangering the virtue of their women.

The Making of Masculine Virtue: The Bandit as Hero

Corridos did not always imagine the outlaw as a hero, but the analysis has to begin with this figure since it is palpable evidence of a counter-hegemonic discourse. Scholars have long puzzled over the "anomaly of the heroic criminal" in lower-class culture and have offered a range of hypotheses to explain this phenomenon. Some posit a psychological need to "vicariously release rebellious feelings generated by the restrictions imposed by authority." Others emphasize the correspondence between cherished values and the behavior of some criminals. Finally, some argue that criminal-heroes "appear when large numbers of people become disenchanted with the quality of justice represented by law and politics."¹⁶ These approaches are valid as far as they go, but the social production of criminal-heroes is a more complex phenomenon that will resist reductive analysis. In the case of nineteenth-century Mexico, the rise of the bandit-hero depended on a belief that

some people were forced into criminality involuntarily. This thinking was a consequence of lived experiences with social inequality and oppression. When the lower classes articulated notions of lower-class justice, they were asserting alternative values that challenged the dominant notions embedded in the state and the legal system. Thus the bandit-hero was a potent symbol for lower-class Mexicans precisely because they lived at the sharp end of oppression. The rural poor and small landowners suffered when hacendados exploited their labor and expropriated their lands. In the cities and towns, the urban poor struggled in conditions of squalor, poverty, unemployment, and alienation.

There is no question that many opted to steal simply to survive. Pablo Piccato has demonstrated the correlation between economic distress and theft in turn-of-the-century Mexico City, noting that peaks in the incidence of robbery coincided with “hard times for the capital’s population.” He also found that the Mexico City police created many criminals simply by arresting anyone who seemed suspicious.¹⁷ This pattern conforms to anecdotal and archival evidence available for rural areas and at other periods in the history of nineteenth-century Mexico. It is reasonable to conclude that a pervasive sense of social injustice born out of personal experience made it possible for lower-class Mexicans to view the bandit sympathetically. Still, this does not fully explain why they imagined some bandits as popular heroes and “paradigms of rebellion.”¹⁸

This part of the answer lies in understanding the patriarchal and paternalistic nature of Mexican culture and the influence of the honor codes. Viewed from the bottom rails of society, the idea of “the hero” reflected a sense of disempowerment and alienation in which subalterns were compelled to rely on more powerful individuals for protection and guidance. In a male-dominated society, not only did great men get things done, but their evident ability made them into models of masculinity. In Mexico, paternalism involved a reciprocal relationship in which a patrón assumed responsibility for the well-being of his subalterns in exchange for obedience and service. For example, in some regions the logic of rustic paternalism encouraged resident

estate peons to accept the domination of a hacendado in exchange for a minimum level of material security. This was certainly an unequal trade-off, but it helped to mitigate the more extreme consequences of oppression and exploitation. 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.”¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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*.”²² 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-

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.

Many corridos simply implied that their heroes were unwilling outlaws, but others were quite explicit about the matter. The "Corrido de Carlos Coronado" recounts the exploits of a Bajío outlaw whom government forces killed in 1902. One version insists that Coronado was neither a thief nor a killer but rather a *vengador* who wanted to punish his oppressors. His outlaw career began at the age of sixteen when he killed an abusive hacienda foreman. The ballad assumes that this was a justifiable homicide. The authorities did not; they arrested Coronado and sentenced him to service in the army, where he became deadly accurate with a rifle and a gun. Years later, Coronado returned to the Valle de Santiago to avenge his honor with a wave of assassinations that terrorized the police and their *esbirros* (henchmen). His campaign continued until he was betrayed by a *compadre*. This traitor led federal troops to Coronado's mountain hideout, where they ambushed the outlaw. In portraying his death, the corridos emphasize Coronado's honor and courage in contrast to the cowardice and treachery of the federales. According to one account, the federales are "trembling with fear" when they approach Coronado's lair, even though they outnumber the outlaw. They catch him by surprise, unarmed, alone, and asleep. Coronado cannot resist effectively, but the soldiers open fire anyway. One corrido recalls that "Carlos Coronado tried to defend himself quite bravely / but without his weapons or men, the battle was over quickly." The "Corrido de Carlos Coronado" imagines the protagonist as "one of those brave young men" ("uno de esos hombrecitos valientes a toda prueba") who are propelled into outlawry by the injustice of social relations. He has defended himself against the abuses of a social superior, only to find himself criminalized and humiliated. His personal pursuit of

justice and defense of his honor brings him into an inevitable conflict with state authorities. For this, the logic of lower-class justice could find no fault in Coronado. The ballads endorse his conduct and impugn the authorities and those who cooperate with them. They are not men of honor; they are cowards and traitors who victimized a subordinate. They have violated a cardinal element of the patriarchal code by failing to protect someone who is less powerful socially. On the other hand, the corridos lionize Coronado, since his conduct—although legally criminal—corresponds to a lower-class code of honor and masculinity. For this reason, the corrido sees Coronado's death as a malicious act by the Porfirian regime: "In nineteen-hundred and two Carlos Coronado was killed / by bad government—how cruel!—in nineteen-hundred and two."²³

In the world of corridos, Coronado's fate was common for most bandit-heroes. Certainly this was destiny for the protagonist of the first-known bandit ballad in Mexico, the "Corrido de Leandro Rivera."²⁴ This corrido recalls the death of a local hero at the hands of the Resguardia and bounty hunters in 1841 during the era of Santa Anna and centralist domination. The few surviving fragments of this corrido begin by dating and lamenting the death of its hero: "In the year of 1841, so the story goes / Leandro Rivera died; if only it were not so!" In the usual formula for exalting bandit-heroes, the ballad affirms Rivera's masculinity by emphasizing his courage and his nature as a faithful son, husband, and father. The ballad also seizes on an ancient image of regality to imagine the hero as a "lion poised over the sierra," who "with his pistols in his hands, did not fear any man." The corrido heightens the rhetorical effect of this imagery by contrasting Rivera's selfless courage to the greed and cowardice of bounty hunters who want the five-hundred-peso reward offered by corrupt officials who want to advance their careers by killing Rivera: "Fernando said to Moyano, We can both advance our careers / If you give me five hundred pesos, I'll use them to hunt down Rivera." The fragments of this ballad do not detail the death of its hero, but they do imagine Rivera's last words: a sad farewell to his mother and father, to wife and children: "Leandro Rivera wondered: "How did

this come to be? / Goodbye to my father and mother, my wife and my family.”²⁵ In the world of Mexican patriarchy, this farewell evokes an emotional reaction. It blames the avarice of corrupt officials for the assassination of a family patriarch and community patrón. Listeners would have understood that this threatened the well-being of those related to the Rivera by kinship, fictive kinship (*compradazgo*), and service. The loss of a provider and protector was a tragedy that nearly every Mexican feared. Unfortunately, the corrido reveals nothing about Rivera’s exploits or the cause for which he fought, perhaps because this corrido has been incompletely transcribed and only fragments remain. Therefore we know very little about this obscure hero, except that Rivera was a regional caudillo who turned to banditry after the failure of a local uprising in Nuevo León. From the historical moment identified in the opening we can surmise that Rivera was probably a federalist partisan who fell afoul of a centralist *jefe político* (political chief). Even so, the narrative describing Rivera’s descent from rebel to bandit is significant in its own right, for not a few of the bandit corridos were about individuals who became outlaws as the result of a failed insurrection.

This was the case with another early hero, Padre Francisco Jarauta, remembered in a pair of decimas dated to 1848 from the state of Veracruz (“La Gente de Valenciana” and “¿Donde estás, Jarauta amado?”). Jarauta was a most unusual character, a Spanish-born priest who led Mexican guerrillas in Veracruz during the Mexican-American War of 1846–48. When the Mexican government capitulated, Jarauta joined with other patriots to renounce the Treaty of Hidalgo Guadalupe, which ceded half of Mexico to the United States. Jarauta participated in a bloody plebeian uprising in Mexico City that the occupation forces quickly crushed. The government of José Joaquín de Herrera denounced the priest as a *bandolero* and cooperated with the U.S. Army in pursuing Jarauta. Pressed by U.S. and Mexican troops, Jarauta and his allies retreated to Guanajuato, where Mexican units led by Gen. Anastasio Bustamente captured the bandit-priest. From there, they sent him to La Valenciana, Veracruz, where he faced execution on July 8, 1848.²⁶ Soon afterward, decimas appeared that eulogized Jarauta as a patriotic martyr and expressed outrage at the

government's "insane arrogance" in killing him.²⁷ These ballads confirm Jarauta's masculinity by stressing his qualities as a protector of common people: he is patriotic, courageous, and loyal. In this case, however, the ballads magnify the effect of this loss to a national scale, since they tie Jarauta's defeat and death to a betrayal of the country by its own ruling class. The decimas are also fascinating for the strategy they follow in validating Jarauta's masculinity. Since Jarauta was a priest and presumably celibate, "La Gente de Valenciana" mobilizes piety and idealized femininity to insert his grieving mother into the narrative. This conjures up an imagined parallel with the Virgin Mary grieving over the body of her martyred son:

On that day, your mother
had no peace of mind
or comfort of any kind
nothing but endless grief;
I gave you my blessings
for defending the nation,
but now on this day
I regret what I've done.
I cry out, weeping, my dear son
where is Jarauta, beloved one?²⁸

The reliance on emotive Catholic imagery helps to make sense of a curious omission in these two ballads. That is to say, neither makes the slightest mention of the United States. This contrasts with the "Corrido de Gregorio Cortez," which displaces Mexican authorities with the United States as the object of lower-class opposition. The ballads about Jarauta do something different, imagining the Mexican government as a Judas who betrays the nation's savior. Of course, the logic of this metaphor might have alluded to the United States as an imaginary Rome and Pontius Pilate. However, these ballads are primarily concerned with narrating the opposition between loyalty and betrayal; they not only reject the government's charge of treason against Jarauta but invert the accusation to condemn the behavior of the Mexican government.

As in the case of Jarauta, ballads commonly mobilize gendered ideals as well as treachery as elements to bolster the reputation of their protagonists. These techniques work effectively in a corrido about the death of Macario Romero in 1879. Romero had participated in a Cristero revolt that erupted in 1873 when President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada abolished the privileges of the Catholic Church. Romero later supported Porfirio Díaz in the 1876 revolt that overthrew Lerdo. Three years later, an old political rival, Jesús Aceves, assassinated Romero and reported to Díaz that Romero had been executed for banditry.²⁹ The “Corrido de Macario Romero” rejects this version and insists that jealousy and political intrigues had motivated Aceves to commit murder. According to the corrido, Romero and Aceves share a love interest in Jesuita Llamas, daughter of the state governor. Aceves wants to remove his rival from this amorous competition, which also involves access to political power. Therefore, Aceves lures an unarmed Romero to a dance where thugs gun down the unsuspecting hero. The corrido denies the accusation of banditry that Aceves leveled against Romero, instead turning the indictment against Aceves. It also bolsters the Machiavellian portrait of Aceves—and the legitimacy of Romero’s love interest—when it imagines Jesuita’s grief-stricken reaction to the murder. According to the corrido, she begs to be killed along with her suitor: “You bandits! I want to die! Kill me! Kill me also! / I have no reason to live without Macario Romero.”³⁰ Jesuita’s imagined desire to die with Romero has a twofold significance: it constructs an image of Jesuita as an ideal woman and captures the essence of a dependent’s loyalty to his or her patrón and, in so doing, affirms Romero’s masculine reputation. In this respect, this rhetorical maneuver was an essential element in creating a thoroughly heroic image for Romero. The corrido remembers him as a man of courage and an effective protector who earned his reputation fighting Yaquis and Apaches. Jesuita’s desire to die with him confirms that he was worthy of fidelity and respect, even after death.

Lower-class Mexicans also enjoyed corridos about bandit-heroes who were famous for exploits that were simply too incredible or outlandish to ignore. One representative ballad of this type was about

a female bandit known as La Carambada. The term “carambada” suggests a woman who causes amazement or astonishment, and it was an appropriate soubriquet in the case of this woman who dressed like a man and robbed highway travelers in the state of Querétaro between 1870 and 1873. She was Leonarda Emilia, an indigenous woman from a village called La Punta, close to the capital city of Querétaro. According to legend, Emilia fell in love with a soldier of the French army during the War of the French Intervention. In the final stages of the conflict, her lover became a prisoner of the Juarista army, at that time encamped in Querétaro after having defeated and captured Maximilian. When the Juaristas condemned Emilia’s lover to death, she appealed for clemency to the liberal governor of Querétaro, Benito Zenea, and to President Benito Juárez. When both refused Emilia’s request, she vowed to avenge her lover; this precipitated her transformation into the most famous bandolera in Mexican history. By 1870, Emilia gained renown as La Carambada for her manly appearance, her skills with a pistol and machete, and her poise on a horse. However, the legends also credit La Carambada with taking the lives of both Zenea and Juárez by means of a poison derived from milkweed tea. According to this tale, La Carambada either relied on her skills as an herbalist or enlisted the services of an indigenous bruja to prepare the concoction, which allegedly induces a death by heart attack twenty-one days after its consumption. Both Zenea and Juárez died of seizures within a short span of time in 1872. As for La Carambada, the end came in 1873 when a detachment of rurales led by Vicente Otero tracked Emilia and her accomplices to the Hacienda de Capilla in the state of Guanajuato. In the gun battle that ensued, La Carambada sustained five bullet wounds and fell captive along with two other bandits. She survived for three more days, long enough to confess to a priest before passing away from her wounds.

In view of La Carambada’s putative role in the death of Juárez, it is quite remarkable that the corrido mentions nothing about this. Instead, the ballad transforms her into a local hero, suggesting perhaps that in the Bajío the bloom had fallen from the rose with respect to Juárez in 1872. Indeed, the corrido opens with stanzas that set up

La Carambada as a classic bandit-hero who robbed from the rich and distributed her spoils to the poor: "The Bajío will remember La Carambada's deeds forever / This woman and her courage, a generous bandit." All the same, the sensational core of the corrido and the true fount of Emilia's fame rested on public obsession with a bandit who lived outside the law and the gendered stereotypes of her sex: "Here comes La Carambada; La Carambada's already here / Saint Apapuchó protect us, she's going to make us blush / La Carambada was wild, too wild to wear a skirt / When she revealed her sex, we lifted our eyes to the sky."³¹ This corrido is laced with colloquial expressions that pun on the cultural tension between La Carambada's sex and her fame as the cross-dressing leader of an outlaw band. It also alludes to her reputed penchant for taunting her male victims by baring her breasts after robbing them.³²

There can be no doubt that La Carambada's appearance and exploits excited people and livened up their days, but her behavior also presented a problem for placing her within the narrative patterns of the bandit corrido. The ballad alludes to Emilia as wild and coarse, but this defies conventional stereotypes of female behavior and would not have appeared in any corrido dealing with a male bandit-hero. So what to make of La Carambada and her deeds? The corrido cannot ignore her sex, and it cannot imagine her as an ideal woman, for her conduct is positively mannish: "I am the terror of this zone, La Carambada once said / Have no fear for my life, for you have made me a queen / With pistols in her holster and a well-sharpened dagger / Brave Carambada fought even the Acordada."³³ The corrido acknowledges that La Carambada is as brave and bold as any male bandit, but it is necessary to account for a woman acting like a man. The corrido handles this with two maneuvers. The first, already mentioned, is to describe her as a coarse woman. This negates the possibility of imagining La Carambada as a role model for other women. Possibly for this reason, the corrido also departs from the usual formula of pairing its protagonist with an idealized love interest. This is hardly possible in the case of La Carambada, for the ideal woman is supposed to be chaste, modest, pious, and pure. In the popular imagination, a female

bandit cannot possess these qualities. On the other hand, the corrido has to square La Carambada's sex with her unusual career and heroic reputation. The corrido solves this dilemma by using a regal metaphor to generalize her character: the people, it says, had made her a queen. Had the hero been male, the narrative might have described him as a "lion" or "game-cock," both of which were standard assignments. However, in the case of La Carambada, the allusion to her regal nature opens a vista where exceptional women could be permitted the cultural latitude to exhibit manly characteristics.

The conventional feminine stereotypes in bandit corridos are either women who remain loyal to the male heroes or Malinche types who betray these men to the authorities. Both of these appear in the "Corrido de Benito Canales," which relates the sensational death of Canales after a gunfight with the federal army in 1900. The outcome of this narrative turns on roles played by two women who are moral opposites. The first woman, Isabel, is the bandit's love interest, and her behavior confirms his masculinity and heroism. The tragedy begins to unfold when Canales insists on returning to Isabel, even though he knows that the authorities are on his trail. The bandit ignores this danger and returns to his lover in Zurumutato, Guanajuato. Isabel learns that the army is on his trail and warns Canales, who then summons his band and prepares for battle. But he does not have enough time, for the army has its own informant in the character of an anonymous woman who leads them to Canales: "When the government came, they asked everybody: / Where is Benito Canales, for whom we are searching? / And a woman from Guadalajara gave him away: / He just came into town and you can take him right away." As a result of this betrayal, the army traps Canales. Alone and facing death, he chooses to fight in defense of his honor. He mounts his stallion, draws his pistols, and charges his would-be captors, wounding or killing several soldiers. However, according to the corrido, when it seems certain that Canales will die, a priest convinces the military to cease fire so that he can administer the sacraments to Canales. The priest crawls to the bandit, who dismounts, puts down his weapons, and repents for killing so many people. Yet, even after making his peace

with God, Canales refuses to surrender to “worthless villains” like the federales, and so: “Benito Canales said, when he had confessed: / I want to finish this fight, now I’ve had a good rest / But the chaplain wouldn’t let him, to Canales he said: / My son, if you fight, then we’ll both end up dead.” Knowing that his own death is inevitable, Canales resolves to at least save the cleric, so: “He straightened up and smiled, and to the Acordada, said / I’m a true son of Guanajuato, and soon I will be dead.”³⁴

In this corrido, the bandit-hero is pious, courageous, and loyal to his *patria chica* (region). It does not ascribe his downfall to his banditry, to the disloyalty of dependents, or to the residents of Zuru-muato, his hometown. Instead, it places the blame on an outsider, a woman from Guadalajara, Jalisco, who has no ties to the community or to the brigand. According to the ballad, Canales dies like a man. As he faces the firing squad, he refuses a blindfold and tells his executioners: “You are killing a fine game-cock, respected by even the Government.”³⁵

With the Devil in His Soul: The Bandit as Villain

Lower-class Mexicans did not regard all bandits as heroes. Balladeers also composed corridos that imagined outlaws as villains. They might have been courageous, but bandits were also dangerous men, indiscriminate in their banditry and indifferent to the harm they caused. In such instances, corridos portrayed these characters as antiheroes whose outlawry expressed a flawed or imperfect masculinity. In this respect, bandits were ordinary men, prone to the failings and temptations of everyday life, except that in succumbing to their vices, bandit-villains placed themselves outside the normative boundaries of lower-class culture. As a result, they were a threat to communities and innocent people and could not be portrayed as positive role models. Like bandit-heroes, these characters inevitably died. However, in the case of villains, their fate was not a lesson in how to live with honor and die like a man but rather a cautionary tale against the reckless behavior that transgressed lower-class norms. These corridos, then, were commentaries on flawed masculinity and dishonorable behavior.

Martín Herrera and his band were train robbers and highway bandits who captured headlines in the late nineteenth century with a series of heists on railways and roads from the state of Durango to the state of Hidalgo. These bandits were famous for derailing locomotives and disguising themselves as women while they looted the coaches. The “Corrido de Martín Herrera” admires the audacity and skills of Herrera and his young protégé José. However, they are indiscriminate and too dangerous to warrant lionization. Nor do they enjoy a reputation for generosity with the poor. Eventually their crimes prompt a betrayal to the police: “A prudish old woman, they called “La Maruca” / helped the police catch them in the city of Pachuca.” Of interest is the corrido’s ambiguity about this aspect of the story. On the one hand, the corrido makes clear that Herrera and his partner deserve to be caught and punished, but it also sketches the informant in unflattering terms, as if to uphold a cultural sanction against betrayal. This suggests that the overarching moral of the narrative is that wrong behavior—as defined by lower-class norms—leads to dishonor and tragedy. This indeed is the fate awaiting Herrera and his accomplice, for they are condemned to die. However, the corrido emphasizes the tragedy of this by imagining José’s father begging the judge to spare his son’s life. To no avail, he defends José as a young man and a good worker whom Herrera led astray. The pair face the firing squad like men: singing, defiant, and unrepentant. The narrative does not intend this show of bravado to condone their misdeeds but rather to reinforce the notion that Herrera’s outlawry—and La Maruca’s treachery—lead to a tragic waste of life. And so it recounts this as “A sad end for Herrera, the bandit who lost his life / For although he was a game-cock, he had to pay the price / He was a famous bandit, but he caused a lot of grief / and at the hour of death, he was too proud to confess.”³⁶

This corrido does not portray Herrera as an inherently bad man. However, tragedy results when he chooses to follow the wrong path. A similar story about a man-gone-wrong appears in the “Corrido de Ignacio Parra.” Parra had been a follower of the celebrated Heraclio Bernal and then assumed leadership of the band when two ex-

members ambushed and killed Bernal in 1888. Parra died four years later in a gun battle with rurales in Durango. He also made a unique contribution to bandit lore when he recruited a then-obscure outlaw named Pancho Villa. According to the corrido, after Bernal's death, Parra robbed "without pity or compassion" and sometimes killed simply for pleasure. However, the narrative insists that this had not always been the case. When he rode with Bernal, Parra had been "brave and upright." Then he became jefe, and his behavior changed when rurales killed his lieutenant, Refugio Alvarado. At that point, "With the death of Alvarado, Parra began his foul deeds / He couldn't get it out of his head, for the devil was in his soul." Parra had once basked in the reflected glory of his former chief, but not even Bernal's long shadow could redeem Parra. He allowed vengeance to blacken his heart, and the people of Durango came to fear this murderous bandit. His fate, they agreed, was tragic, but their own lives were more secure with Parra dead. Thus the corrido concludes: "Parra has passed into history, and his fate, a tragedy / but society is better off, since this vandal is gone / May the Eternal Lord forgive him, now that he's gone from this life / and may other misguided souls see how bad men eventually die."³⁷

The people of Guanajuato felt a similar sense of relief when rurales killed Guadalupe Pantoja in 1900. Pantoja was one of the most reviled villains in the corridos, and he and his gang operated from a lair near a hacienda named Semental. They were infamous for robbing *arrieros* (mule skinnners), who still transported goods across the countryside. This was hardly the worst of it for, according to the "Corrido de Guadalupe Pantoja," this bandit had a vile reputation for abducting, raping, and whipping young women: "Pantoja the bandit had a bestial nature / he dishonored maidens, and ordered their whipping." Whatever the truth of this accusation, the charge compromised Pantoja's masculinity and opened the door for an attack on his courage, for the corrido interprets his fearlessness as an attitude of arrogance that led to his death. The end comes when mule skinnners report Pantoja's whereabouts to the rurales. The rural deputy chief and twenty-seven troopers hide near the Hacienda de Semental and

wait for Pantoja. When the bandit appears, he is alone; his men were nowhere in sight. The rurales challenge him, but the bandit ignores his disadvantage and starts gunplay. The rurales kill Pantoja and tie his bullet-ridden corpse to the back of a mule. When they return to nearby Valle de Santiago, a curious crowd wants to know whom the rurales have caught: "The deputy answered with a joyous cry / It's Guadalupe Pantoja, who thought he couldn't die."³⁸ The corrido celebrates the death of Guadalupe Pantoja because his banditry exploited the poor as well as the rich. If Pantoja had been well regarded rather than reviled, his defiant stand against the rurales would not have been read as arrogant. It would have earned him admiration for his courage and audacity, if not immortality as a people's champion.

Bandit-Heroes as Champions of the Lower Classes

The corridos devoted to Heraclio Bernal represent a paradigm for the bandit-hero as a champion, offering the lower classes an "idealized evocation of the bandit" that satisfied their desire for an "audacious leader of outstanding masculinity." In so doing, they articulate a model of rebellion that incorporates notions of "generosity, solidarity . . . and loyal fraternity among *los de abajo*."³⁹ Heraclio Bernal (1855–88) was born on a rancho in the municipality of San Ignacio, Sinaloa. As a young man he worked as a miner, but in 1875 he landed in jail for stealing a bar of silver.⁴⁰ After a short sentence, Bernal led a small band of outlaws, composed of family members, who robbed highway travelers and pillaged the homes of authorities and wealthy citizens. At about the same time, Porfirio Díaz overthrew the Lerdo government. However, Sinaloa was a hotbed of anti-Porfirian agitation. In 1879, when Gen. Ramírez Terrón mobilized Lerdistas against Díaz, Bernal became one of his most effective guerrilla leaders. The revolt failed, but Bernal was able to resume his bandit career with a political banner that gave legitimacy to his exploits in the region. His band swelled to more than two hundred men who robbed and sometimes killed prefects, mayors, judges, and other representatives of Porfirian authority. On two occasions, Bernal issued political tracts that demanded respect for the Constitution of 1857 and adherence to

the principle of no reelection. These statements also denounced Díaz and his Sinaloan supporters. Whether or not these statements were a political gloss on his criminality, Bernal carefully selected his victims. These were mainly well-heeled citizens and members of the local Porfirian *camarilla* (network). The politics of his banditry seemed to resonate with many Mexicans. This compelled authorities to send more than one hundred suspected Bernalistas to jail. In 1886 Bernal responded with a campaign that led to the release of his followers. This enhanced his reputation as a caudillo and patriarch who could provide for and protect his followers. However, it also forced Díaz to intensify the pursuit of this bandit. The government placed a bounty of ten thousand pesos on Bernal's head. In 1888 the end came when two ex-Bernalistas, Crispín García and Jorge Ayón, cashed in their loyalty and killed their chief in an ambush.⁴¹

Bernal's death coincided with the historical moment when Díaz was beginning to develop and institutionalize his myth as the civilizer who eradicated banditry and modernized Mexico. This began after 1884 and matured by 1900; in many respects the killing of Bernal was a key foundation in building Díaz's reputation. However, this was not unchallenged, for Bernal's anti-Porfirian exploits had generated a fund of lower-class myths that continued to accumulate even after his demise. In other words, lower-class imaginings of Bernal represented a counterhegemonic reply that competed with the Porfirian legend. Díaz had prevailed against the bandit's physical presence, but he never erased his reputation. In the mythology of lower-class culture, Bernal survived as a model of rebellion.

However, many of the corridos about Bernal are notoriously inaccurate about the details of his life and death. For example, the earliest-known version was written in the late 1880s or early 1890s and came from Tepic (today Nayarit). When Vanegas Arroyo reproduced this ballad in a broadsheet, he incorrectly dated the composition to 1882.⁴² This error influenced later versions of the ballad, which continued to wrongly date Bernal's death. It is also worth noting that post-revolutionary versions identify Crispín García as Bernal's assassin, while the Tepic version does not.⁴³ Also, the Tepic version wildly

inflates the bounty on Bernal (from ten thousand to five hundred thousand pesos) and incorrectly attributes his death to the federal army's Twentieth Battalion. As we can see, these corridos were fictionalized and erroneous. However, they retained their value as testaments to lower-class beliefs and values.

These corridos view Bernal as an exemplar of masculinity, meaning that in their imaginings he fulfills the requirements of a patriarch. In exchange for his protection, the poor and other dependents reciprocate with devotion and loyalty. Several corridos explicate this with anecdotes that credit Bernal with saving poor families from destitution. For example, the Tepic corrido describes Bernal as a "true lion of the sierra," a brave and bold bandit who robs the rich in order to sustain the poor. Thus, in the lower-class imagination, Bernal is "The protector of the poor, the terror of hacendados / and the flower and cream of the coast."⁴⁴ Not only that, the corrido also imagines Bernal with a sense of honor so complete that he is willing to sacrifice his life to save his followers. The first fourteen stanzas of this ballad, of a total of thirty-one, are devoted to setting up a dramatic final confrontation in which Bernal single-handedly fends off the Mexican army while his men escape. This scenario invests its hero with superhuman courage and contrasts this to the behavior of the army and the rurales who usually fled at the mere mention of Bernal's name. In the logic of this corrido, only an overwhelming force could capture and kill Bernal. Perhaps this is why the ballad ascribes his death to an entire battalion rather than to the treachery of two ex-followers.

The Tepic corrido laments Bernal's death as a tragedy for his mother and wife, for the people of Sinaloa, Durango, and Tepic, and indeed for the country as a whole: "He is needed all over Mexico, alive, or dead, or in likeness / Everybody still wants to know this young man, with so much courage."⁴⁵ The melancholy of this stanza plainly expresses the link between patriarchal social relations, gender ideals, and the cultural function of the heroic figure. It not only celebrates Bernal's masculinity but assumes that the oppressed need and long for a champion to defend their interests.

Until the rise of Pancho Villa, no other pre-revolutionary bandit

equaled Bernal's stature as a hero, but two came reasonably close: Jesús Arriaga (Chucho el Roto) and Santana Rodríguez Palafox (Santanón). Unlike most other bandits celebrated in the corridos, Jesús Arriaga was a thief who plied his trade in Mexico City and other urban centers in central Mexico from 1873 to 1884. Most days he earned a modest living as cabinetmaker, but his taste for expensive clothing and high culture earned him the sobriquet Chucho el Roto.⁴⁶ According to one source, the nickname "*el Roto* refers to men of humble condition who like to dress well" and who manifest an "affected elegance."⁴⁷ However, there is no reliable evidence other than legend to show that Arriaga ever adopted a posture of politically motivated rebellion against the government. On the other hand, his extraordinary flair—and a reputation for never killing—helped to inspire a perception of Chucho as a latter-day Robin Hood. Thus, the "Corrido de Chucho el Roto" describes the bandit as a noble-hearted *caballero* and "a brother to the poor" who inspired the loyalty of the downtrodden with his generosity: "Brave conquistador / you never once betrayed us / Compassionate to the humble, you saved us a thousand times."⁴⁸

One of the many legends surrounding Arriaga insists that his outlawry resulted from a disastrous love affair with a young woman from an aristocratic family. When her parents' class prejudices threatened their romance, the pair eloped and she became pregnant. However, her family abducted her and arranged for the authorities to arrest Arriaga, who landed in Belén prison on charges of kidnapping and rape. According to this tale, Arriaga's parents died from the shock of this scandal, leaving the young Jesús orphaned, destitute, and imprisoned. One late-nineteenth-century author surmised that Arriaga learned radical ideas from socialist-minded prisoners and that this inspired Chucho to wage a personal class war against the rich.⁴⁹ While this tale is certainly apocryphal, Chucho and his gang did become famous for robbing lending houses and wealthy citizens. On occasion, they kidnapped and ransomed priests. Whether or not Chucho redistributed the spoils of his thefts among the poor, ordinary Mexicans believed that he did and called him "el bandido generoso."⁵⁰ The authorities

also had difficulty keeping Chucho in jail, and this only augmented his mystique. Even when they caught him, he seemed adept at escaping. Lower-class wisdom attributed their hero's elusiveness to his intelligence and skill with disguises. Sometimes, it was said, Chucho escaped detection in the guise of an attractive woman.⁵¹

One of the most famous episodes credited to Chucho involved Joaquín de la Piña y Pizarra, the jefe político of Zacualipán in the state of México. This official placed a bounty of 2,000 pesos on Chucho, dead or alive. The bandit returned the favor by circulating posters that offered "3,000 pesos for the head of each jefe político that you bring me, and 5,000 pesos for the head of don Joaquín Piña y Pizarra."⁵² Two days later, Chucho encountered Piña y Pizarra on the highway. Both men were armed and mounted. A furious gun battle ensued until the jefe político ran out of bullets. Most other bandits might have taken this official's life, but not Chucho. He would not kill an unarmed man, so he allowed Piña y Pizarro to escape. This was precisely the sort of exploit that fueled legendary respect for Chucho's intelligence, integrity, and sense of honor. Chucho's reputation for honor and generosity naturally inspired the adoration of women, whom the corrido describes as his "loyal captives." Nevertheless, Chucho's good fortune ran out in 1884 when the police caught him in Querétaro. The court sentenced him to Mexico's most notorious prison, San Juan de Ulúa in Veracruz. One year later, at the age of forty-three, Arriaga died of dysentery.⁵³

With the deaths of Bernal and Arriaga, the Porfirian government gained a decisive edge in its struggle to pacify Mexico. To be sure, a few bandit gangs persisted here and there, and bandit-heroes continued to populate corridos. However, for many Mexicans, and certainly to the outside world, it appeared that Díaz and his police were winning the fight to pacify the countryside and civilize Mexico. By the turn of the century, the Porfirian state extended this struggle into the cultural arena and began to combat lower-class notions about bandit-heroes with government-inspired corridos that glorified the president and the rurales. One remarkable example of this campaign emerged after the election of 1904, when the regime published a lengthy pan-

egyric of twenty-seven stanzas devoted to Díaz titled “Corrido 1904 ¡¡Glorias de Mexico!!” It celebrated the military and political career of the president reelect. The corrido noted that Díaz “finished off the bandits who blocked the crossroads / He gave us railroads, and abolished the sales tax.”⁵⁴ According to official mythology, the president’s main instrument for repressing outlaws had been the rurales. The regime went to great lengths in promoting a heroic and romantic reputation for the police force. It sponsored newspaper articles and circulated pamphlets to impress the public at home and abroad. It ensured that the rural police corps was conspicuously present in all their finery during national celebrations in the capital or even at foreign spectacles like the 1901 International Exposition in Buffalo, New York.⁵⁵ The regime also inscribed the rurales’ deeds in ballads and marches. For example, the “Corrido de los rurales” romanticizes the rural police as dashing charros who make young women swoon with desire: “How handsome are the rurales with their braided sombreros / With their bright red serapes and their jackets of leather.”⁵⁶ In another example, the “Marcha dedicada a los valientes rurales” casts the rural police in the role of invincible warriors, ready to defend the nation against traitors and invaders: “Long live the Mexican rurale who spends a life campaigning / His laurels come from Victory; his spirit comes from Mars.”⁵⁷

However, like the impressive facade of the Porfirian state, these images concealed much about the reality in Mexico. The recession of banditry was not only due to the efficiency of the rural police; it also had to do with technological change, the unity of the elite classes, and the recruitment of bandits into the police forces. The rapid expansion of rail transportation meant that precious metals, payrolls, and other goods began to move more frequently by rail than along the highways. This made robbery more difficult for bandits, involving greater effort and resources than when travelers and commerce moved exclusively with mule trains, in horse-drawn coaches, on horseback, or on foot. Robbery was also becoming more urbanized as expropriations drove country people into large cities. In the past, local and national leaders would have recruited many of these refugees to fight in wars

or rebellions. This practice had fueled Mexico's chronic problems with banditry, for many plebeian fighters transformed themselves into outlaws after demobilization. The onset of elite unity during the Porfiriato led to a decline in elite-led revolts and a consequent decrease in the bandits that such conflicts produced. However, the accumulation of social tensions and class conflicts produced other forms of lower-class resistance—millenarian uprisings and jacqueries—that started to flare with intensity during the 1890s. The most serious of these was an uprising at the village of Tomochic, Chihuahua, in 1892.⁵⁸ The Tomochic tragedy grew out of a crisis spurred by agricultural commercialization, and it acquired the character of a millenarian revolt based on the cult of a local saint. It posed a direct challenge to the Porfirian state and the regional elites, but the bloody suppression of this rebellion was a harbinger of things to come. Between 1900 and 1910 the lower classes edged ever closer to revolution as exploitation and oppression began to inflame the lower-class sense of injustice.

Along the way, the lower classes continued to acquire new and more contemporary bandit-heroes, whom they imagined as champions. One of them was Santana Rodríguez Palafox, otherwise known as Santanón, who grew up in a peasant family on a sugar plantation near San Juan Evangelista, in the state of Veracruz. Conflict with his employers led to Santanón's arrest and sentence to army service in Oaxaca. He deserted in 1903 and turned to banditry in southern Veracruz, where he preyed on foreign-owned sugar plantations and mills. Over the next few years, myths grew up around Santanón's invincibility and his reputation for killing brutal exploiters. At one point the government commissioned a congressional deputy, Salvador Díaz Mirón, to pursue this bandit. However, as Paul Vanderwood has noted, Díaz Mirón was a better poet than politician.⁵⁹ Apparently his talent for writing also surpassed his military abilities, for Díaz Mirón was not long in the field against Santanón before returning to the comforts of the national capital. This episode only enhanced Santanón's reputation. Not long afterward, the radical Flores Magón brothers began organizing a revolutionary army to overthrow Díaz. In September 1910 they offered to commission Santanón as a com-

mander in Veracruz.⁶⁰ Santanón accepted, but the rurales cut short the career of this would-be bandit-turned-revolutionary. On October 17, 1910, Santanón died in a firefight with a unit commanded by Lt. Francisco Cárdenas, the same man who later murdered President Francisco Madero in 1913.⁶¹ The Díaz government wasted no time announcing Santanón's death and praising Cárdenas in *El imparcial* and other newspapers. Almost immediately, Vanegas Arroyo published a broadsheet entitled the "Corrido de la vida de Santanón." Most likely government-inspired, the corrido rejoices in the death of the bandit and lionizes Cárdenas. It describes Santanón as a "terrible bandit" who robbed rich and poor alike. It acknowledges his fierce reputation, but only to praise the rurales who brought him down: "They said it's impossible to attack this bandit / too fierce and terrible, and brave in a fight / But the rurales were primed for a final battle / with Santana and his criminals."⁶² One cannot dismiss the possibility that this corrido reflected lower-class sentiment, but the ballad so closely corresponds to other forms of government propaganda which were then circulating about Santanón that skepticism is merited. With the exception of Santanón's reputation for invincibility, the corrido ignores the body of mythology that surrounded his exploits. Nor did this corrido contain narrative detail that typified most corridos; it simply denounces Santanón and praises the rurales. Finally, this corrido appeared at precisely the same historical moment as the outbreak of Madero's revolt. Thus, the pages of government-sponsored newspapers like *El imparcial* brimmed with articles and editorials that dismissed all rebels as bandits. The tone of this corrido simply dovetails too neatly with an official propaganda campaign that hoped to induce public fear of Madero's bandit-rebels and to inspire faith in the abilities of the army and the rurales.

More likely, lower-class sentiment approximated the attitude expressed in a different ballad, the "Corrido de Santanón." This more faithfully follows traditional narrative structures, so it includes stanzas that laud the hero, detail his deeds and death, and conclude by bidding farewell to the audience. It is also evident that the composer drew from a fund of lower-class beliefs about Santanón rather than

from factual reporting about his death. This is suggested by erroneous details, including misnaming the bandit as Santa Ana and identifying him as a Creole when he was actually a mestizo. Finally, the corrido attributes the killing of Santanón to Díaz Mirón rather than to Francisco Cárdenas. In imagining Santanón as a popular champion, it also resorts to discursive devices that are similar to those employed in other bandit ballads. That is to say, the corrido fashions its narrative to affirm Santanón's masculine virtues and to link these qualities to his actions on behalf of the downtrodden and indigenous people. Thus, in his final soliloquy, the corrido imagines that "Santa Ana told the rurales: I am not a thief / I'm a brother to the Indians; so come on up and get me / Señor Díaz Mirón, you smooth-talking gringo / Long live my state, the state of Veracruz; may it never disappear! / I'm a native-born Creole, Santa Ana Rodríguez, from San Juan Evangelista." This corrido also imparts to Santanón a superhuman courage, asserting that Díaz Mirón needed five battalions of rurales to bring him down. Moreover, it accuses these armed representatives of the state of being the real scourge of the population, killing and abusing everyone in their path. Of course, none of this frightened Santanón, who was prepared to meet his responsibility as an avenging patriarch and to give the rurales the rough justice they deserved: "Santa Ana told them: I'm the essence of poison / and I have enough of these "pills," all of them tipped with steel."⁶³

It is easy to imagine that Santanón's death deflated his admirers and encouraged the government. In the end, however, it seems that the Santanistas got the better of it. The "Corrido de Santanón" brimmed with defiance and lacked the melancholy that appeared in the corridos about Bernal. Perhaps this had to do with the historical moment; it coincided with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, when the ideological and institutional superstructures of the Porfirian state began to collapse in the face of an agrarian insurgency. The revolution was a stunning blow to the Porfirian elites, who had believed that the bandit and the countryside had been subdued. After 1900, most elites assumed that the problem of lower-class criminality was a question of management and control. In keeping with the scientific spirit that

swept over the educated classes at the turn of the century, 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.

5. Survival of the Fittest

Modernity and the Mexican Atavist

Numerous bands have sprung up . . . animated solely by a spirit of banditry which has begun to develop afresh and is spreading . . . terror.

—Porfirio Díaz, President of Mexico, April 1, 1911

Those who amassed fortunes on the backs of the poor;
They dared call him a bandit, depraved and a traitor.

—“Corrido de Pancho Villa”

At the turn of the century, Mexican elites looked upon their country with satisfaction commingled with trepidation. Gone were the decades of turmoil and upheaval, of unrestrained banditry and revolution, when the country seemed ready to consume itself in chaos and disorder. Porfirio Díaz had governed Mexico since 1876, save for the interregnum of Manuel González in 1880–84, and during these years he perfected an authoritarian liberal state that preserved stability with a skilled combination of repression and co-optation of dissidents. Under his regime Mexico experienced a transformation that seemed, to many, nothing short of miraculous. Railroads and telegraph lines transected the country in every direction, industrialization had begun, and mining had revived, driven by the same hydroelectric sources that lit Mexico City streets and powered its streetcars. Production was climbing, and profits were high. The Mexican state was balancing its budgets for the first time since independence, and a surplus was showing in its ledgers. Even the governments of the United States and Europe, which had once denigrated Mexico as hopelessly backward, now praised Díaz and his nation's progress and continued to export

surplus capital at record-breaking levels. In 1900, as Mexico prepared to enter a new millennium, the elites were poised expectantly on the doorstep of modernity and civilization. Yet even as they celebrated their prosperity and good fortune, many of Mexico's elites kept one cautious eye on the past, watching for any signs of slippage that might presage a return to disorder and turmoil.

Self-identified as the *gente decente* (decent class), the elites mainly worried about lower-class mestizos and indigenous people and their alleged propensity for criminal behavior and rebellion. The occasional rural bandit still caused anxiety now and then, but banditry no longer commanded their attention the way it once had. Almost everyone agreed that bandits were a vanishing and mostly irrelevant breed. Of greater concern were high rates of urban crime and the violence that often characterized protests by peasants and workers. Mexico's economic miracle had been accomplished on the backs of Mexican workers and peasants, but they were hardly the beneficiaries of Porfirian progress. By 1910 only 10 percent of indigenous communities still held land, while the vast majority of mestizo peasants had been expropriated to make way for commercial agriculture. The rural poor ended up laboring on haciendas or as unskilled workers in mining or light industry. Whether toiling as peons or as industrial proletarians, the rural and urban poor worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week, for daily wages that averaged thirty-five centavos. Their misery generated protests by agrarian rebels and striking workers, but these were crushed with violence by the military and the rurales. Meanwhile, country people displaced by modernization migrated into urban centers in such large numbers that Mexico City grew by 90 percent between 1876 and 1910. Miserably low wages, unemployment, and mass illiteracy aggravated their poverty and drove up rates of theft and violent crime.¹ Mexico City, with nearly five hundred thousand residents, had by far the highest volume of *léperos* and other marginalized plebeians. They numbered in the tens of thousands, and their constant presence in the streets of the capital reinforced a dominant elite prejudice that the majority of Mexicans were still backward and uncivilized.

In measuring Mexican progress, the gente decente relied on a handful of instruments. Perhaps the most important were economic indicators that showed a steady rise in investment, production, and profit. But also of consequence were statistics on crime, which allowed the elites to compare Mexican stability and law enforcement to those of other nations. However, this numbers game had its hazards; the figures often alarmed the elites, as happened when authorities discovered in 1897 that Mexico City had a higher homicide rate than Calcutta.² Three years later, the government learned from the report of the Procurador de Justicia that homicide rates in the Federal District were still far higher (at 20 per 100,000 inhabitants) than in most European nations. The lowest rates were in England (0.48 per 100,000), while Spain had the highest European rate (4.77 per 100,000). The procurador, Emilio Alvarez, tried to put the best possible spin on the figures. Not only had convictions for banditry disappeared in the Federal District, but he noted that “happily there have not appeared, as there have in some European countries, rebellions, uprisings, or associations formed for the purpose of attacking the principle of authority.” Moreover, Alvarez took pains to point out that petty crimes were the most common offenses in the district. Quoting anonymous experts, he invoked a “scientific” law which postulated that “the appearance of serious crimes in the heart of modern societies is in inverse proportion to petty crimes.” Alvarez pointed out that even though Mexico’s homicide rates were extraordinarily high in comparison to those in Europe, serious crime was “in fact inappreciable” in the Federal District. Perhaps the best news of all, for those of the elites with a long memory and a heightened nationalistic sensibility, was his discovery that rates of serious crime were steadily rising in the former Mexican territory of California. In view of these and other particulars, Alvarez was “profoundly satisfied to conclude that in our country, and especially in the Federal District, *serious* criminality is neither endemic nor contagious.”³

Still, this rosy tint could not evade the extent to which these rates alarmed the elites. The procurador acknowledged that poverty and unemployment influenced crime rates, but he argued that lawlessness

resulted from social issues that were more serious and basic. The most significant, according to Alvarez, were “the lack of moral education among the criminal classes, . . . vices inherited or acquired by the same . . . [and] the indolent condition of the social class to which I refer.” He noted that crimes such as robbery, homicide, wounding, and public disorder were committed by “individuals from the weak classes of our society; these things are rare in classes where culture dominates, or at least, a regular education.” Alvarez attributed plebeian indolence to the low cost of food and basic necessities in Mexico: “Their most common foods are corn tortillas, chiles, frijoles, rotten meat, and pulque, which is, for this class, like manna from heaven was for the people of Israel.” He pointed out that five or ten centavos were enough to feed a single person, while fifteen or twenty-five centavos could feed a family of four to six persons. Continuing, Alvarez wrote that “people belonging to this social class can earn fifty to seventy-five centavos for a day’s work, but generally they do not, since, being as they are, they do not worry about providing for themselves.” Moreover, he asserted that lower-class Mexicans “have no notion about the importance of a legitimate domestic home . . . because they have no thought about tomorrow.” Instead, the lower classes were driven by only one ambition, which consisted of “satisfying . . . their hunger and thirst, and for this they require the smallest amount of money; if they have it, they enjoy pulque . . . if they don’t have money . . . they rob to satisfy their needs. This is the sad but undeniable reality of things, the result of the way of life of our lower classes.”⁴

Alvarez saw the urban and rural poor as a “dangerous class” that was trapped in squalor largely of its own making. In his view, poverty and crime were not caused by exploitation and oppression but by the cultural backwardness of the lower classes. It is tempting to dismiss this view as a cynical sleight of hand that simply absolved the elites of responsibility for lower-class degradation. However, there was more to it than that. Alvarez himself, like most other members of the elites, was locked into a patriarchal logic. To blame the elites for the condition of the lower classes would have also implicated the elites—as a class—for failing to live up to their obligations. To do otherwise

would have required the elites to abandon assumptions and values that were central to their worldview and were the main props that legitimized their privileged station within Mexican society. Neither Alvarez nor most other members of the elites were prepared to make such a radical break with received wisdom. But this also meant that if elite patriarchs were blameless for lower-class squalor, it was necessary to assign responsibility to a different set of males. Reasoning deductively from patriarchal assumptions, Alvarez therefore pointed the finger at the degenerated figures of plebeian men. This emerged most clearly in his discussion of prostitution and the degradation of lower-class women, which Alvarez tied directly to the indolence and incapacity of lower-class males:

The Mexican woman in general, now as in the past, has not been educated in the struggle for life; we have always believed, and this is an honorable aspect of our character, that the role of the man is to conquer daily for the goods and resources that can satisfy the needs of his family, so that the woman is only burdened with the sovereignty and charm of the home, and the education of the children, to prepare for the future, beautiful generations of useful citizens; but not all men are providers, not all of them think of tomorrow, not all are strong enough to sustain their families; and in this profoundly selfish century, unfortunately insensible or indifferent, yet abundant in pressing needs, the woman who has to live from her labor, who has to sometimes support a large family, but who cannot acquire the resources needed to meet her needs, is generally divorced from her virtue and falls into the repugnant abyss of prostitution.⁵

For the elites, family was a cornerstone of the patriarchal order, an institution they regarded as a measure of civilization and culture. They therefore interpreted the alleged inability of plebeians to create stable families as evidence that the lower classes were closer to a condition of savagery than to civilization. The elites' tendency to identify poverty with savagery also led them to reconceive mestizaje by using economic class as a biological marker that indicated one's position on an imaginary evolutionary scale. For example, they assumed that elite

mestizos had a stronger strain of European blood and were therefore capable of civilized behavior, while lower-class mestizos had a stronger strain of indigenous blood, which hindered their ability to acquire advanced levels of culture. In this way the *gente decente* began to flatten the distinction between lower-class mestizos and indigenous people and to sharpen the ethnic distinction between the elites and the lower classes in general. This is why the elites found little comfort in Alvarez's rationalization that serious crime was neither endemic nor contagious. Even if it was true, the elites now saw themselves living on an island of civilized culture in a sea of primitive savages. Thus, few members of Mexico's privileged classes disputed the need for a strong, centralized state to keep order until the mestizo and indigenous masses were sufficiently evolved to participate fully in the political life of the nation.⁶

The Porfirian regime captured the essence of elite attitudes with its official state slogan: order and progress. Ostensibly, the regime was liberal. It observed the letter—if not always the spirit—of the Constitution of 1857 and touted the efficacy of *laissez-faire* economic doctrines. However, the regime was interventionist in its own fashion, acting to ensure Mexican progress by protecting elite economic interests. On the one hand, this meant keeping control over the lower classes; on the other, it meant ensuring that foreign capital continued to flow into Mexico without threatening national sovereignty or subordinating elite interests to the interests of foreign governments and investors.⁷ To justify these state functions, intellectuals reinterpreted liberalism in order to incorporate positivism and social Darwinism into the elite worldview. Derived from the thinking of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, these theories asserted that “progress was the highest social law, the virtual equivalent of evolution or development.”⁸ From Comte the elites acquired a belief that human intellectual development advanced to successively higher stages through an evolutionary process, to the point where “men” were able to scientifically apprehend the principles that guided social development. Comte speculated that at its highest stage of development the human intellect would produce a new form of social authority, invested in men

of science. Apropos of the Comtean persuasion, in 1892 a group of liberal intellectuals and technicians formed a network known as the *científicos*, whose members acted as informal advisers to the Porfirian state. Among them were influential figures such as Yves Limantour, who headed the government's finance department. The elites also supplemented positivism with the Spencerian notion that human social development proceeded on the basis of a natural law that mandated "the survival of the fittest" in everyday competition among "individuals, sexes, firms, classes, nations, and economic systems."⁹

It was not difficult for turn-of-the-century liberalism to absorb these ideas, for Mexican liberals had always subscribed to a theory of gradual social evolution. However, positivist notions had the advantage of allowing late-nineteenth-century intellectuals to retheorize the need for an authoritarian state—something that old-school liberalism had not done. In addition to resolving a theoretical disjunction between long-standing liberal commitments to a weak federal state and the necessity of governing through a strong centralized state, these notions offered a new intellectual basis to justify a repressive and patriarchal social order. They could point to inexorable scientific laws to explain the continued domination of men over women and of the elites over the lower classes. And yet the elites were still confronted with a dilemma, for this same logic could easily explain why Mexico lagged behind the pace of development set by the United States and the nations of Europe.¹⁰

The elites were not prepared to concede the inevitable superiority of other nations, but it was impossible not to acknowledge Mexico's vulnerable posture. The course of Mexican history in the nineteenth century had imbued the elites with a sense of nationalism that commingled with anxiety about the fragility of their nation-state. France, Spain, and the United States had all attacked Mexico in the first forty years of its existence. Mexicans lost half their territory to the United States in 1848, and they very nearly lost their country to a foreign monarch imposed by Napoleon III in 1861. On two occasions, European nations had blockaded Veracruz to force payment on outstanding loans. To the elites, these experiences affirmed the Spencerian view

that international politics was a zero-sum game in which stronger nations victimized weaker ones. In this context, they concluded that Mexico's survival required a strong, interventionist state that would attract foreign capital to stimulate economic development, but do so without sacrificing national sovereignty.¹¹ This was a pragmatic response to problems of statecraft and diplomacy, but it begged the larger question of whether Mexico could gain ground on, let alone surpass, the pace set by Europe and the United States. The elites comforted themselves with the notion that they, as a class, had achieved a level of sophistication worthy of a civilized nation, even if much of it derived from Europe. Therefore a different question was at issue, and it was an old one: Did the mestizo and indigenous masses have the potential to acquire cultural levels necessary to sustain Mexico's advance to modernity?

Until late in the nineteenth century, Mexico's myth of national origin had offered the elites an unequivocally affirmative answer. The literary germs of this liberal metanarrative had begun to develop in the wake of the restored republic, privileging the mestizo as the essence of *lo mexicano*. This reading of Mexico's destiny idealized the mestizo as the legitimate heir of two great world-historical civilizations: the Spanish and the Aztecs. The comforting logic of this metanarrative fit neatly with liberal evolutionary theories, but the positivist tenets of Comte and Spencer began to cast doubt on its scientific validity. The appeal to positive science to confirm Mexico's destiny was a double-edged sword. For one thing, the assumptions of positive science produced theories of criminality that questioned the redemptive potential of Mexico's lower classes. In the 1870s, Italian physician Cesare Lombroso elaborated a hypothesis of criminal anthropology which argued that a large minority of lawbreakers—some 40 percent—were innate criminals and recidivists. Lombroso asserted that these “born criminals” were atavistic, or “throwbacks to a previous evolutionary stage” of human development. To support his case, he relied on the notion of recapitulation, drawn from theories of scientific racism, which postulated that “individuals, in their own embryonic and juvenile growth, repeat the adult stages of their ancestors.” In essence,

Lombroso argued that some individuals were born with an excess of ancestral traits that were appropriate in a savage society but anachronistic and criminal in a modern age. Fortunately for civilized society, Lombroso also “discovered” that it was possible to identify atavists, since the workings of recapitulation endowed them with distinctive physical and behavioral characteristics, or stigmata.¹²

Lombroso’s theory was not the only spin on scientific criminology, but it resonated in Mexico, where the struggle to create a modern nation-state was intimately related to the problem of suppressing criminality, and above all banditry. Attempts to adapt Lombrosian ideas to the Mexican context began as early as 1885 with a study of criminal insanity by Rafael de Zayas Enríquez. By 1892, Francisco Martínez Baca and Manuel Vergara published *Estudios de antropología criminal*, in which they argued that heredity was the decisive factor in criminality. They measured the skulls of dead prison inmates, analyzed biographical data, and studied mug shots to identify the features of born criminals. To their consternation, however, they discovered that Mexican criminals did not fit the physical profiles of their European counterparts. Nor could Baca and Vergara differentiate the appearance of Mexican criminals from other lower-class citizens. But this did not convince them to abandon the enterprise. Instead, they fell back on the thin assertion that unusual somatic features “might indicate criminality.”¹³

For all the problems of bending data to fit theory, the scientific credentials of positivist criminology continued to carry weight, for it corresponded to the classist and ethnic prejudices of Mexico’s intellectuals. In 1901 the noted criminologist and lawyer Julio Guerrero published *La genesis del crimen en México*, in which he blended Lombrosian theories with the liberal metanarrative to analyze the evolution of Mexican criminality. Guerrero devoted an entire chapter to atavism and emphasized the significance of banditry as an instance of environmental adaptation and recapitulation. Reviewing the history of Mexico since independence, he wrote that for “seventy years, neither the walls of Mexico’s cities, nor the vast solitude of its countryside, could guarantee the security of life, honor, liberty or property.” This,

he argued, had been the consequence of the war for independence, a noble and magnificent enterprise that went terribly wrong because the “vast majority of Indians, creoles, and castas, raised in the old society of New Spain, were ignorant in the art of governance.” The collapse of the Plan de Iguala, which had united liberals and conservatives in winning independence, fostered a “spirit of anarchy and the rise of bandit gangs who defied authority and imposed their will on everyone.” According to Guerrero, most of the bandits “who robbed and killed and burned” were soldiers who escaped punishment by virtue of the *fuero militar*. As a result, the numerous uprisings that pocked the political landscape acquired a “semi-bandit and semi-political character.” The continuous defeat of rebel groups and the chronic lack of employment intensified the upward spiral of banditry by pushing the excess population into armed bands that “marauded from the southern Sierras to the frontiers of Coahuila.” The combination of banditry, political rebellion, and raiding by indigenous “savages” along the northern frontiers, Guerrero concluded, created a social environment that stimulated the reappearance of barbarous tendencies that could be traced through mestizo bloodlines to the ferocity of pre-conquest Aztec society.¹⁴

Guerrero did not extend his analysis of banditry and atavism beyond midcentury, but his discourse implicitly credited the policies of post-1867 governments with achieving a decline in banditry and containing the most dangerous manifestations of recapitulation. Yet he also warned his readers that the danger was not past, for the effects of enervating climate, race mixture, and overpopulation still stirred atavistic tendencies toward violent behavior and crime. “In this epoch of peace and political apathy,” he wrote, “the phenomenon of atavism still appears among common criminals,” for even after “ten generations, the barbarous soul of the worshippers of Huitzilopochtli beats anew in the bosoms of some of our compatriots.”¹⁵

Guerrero’s study and other meditations on positivist criminology heightened elite anxieties about the success of their modernizing project. If the positivist persuasion was correct, it meant that thousands upon thousands of atavistic felons were at large, but undetected,

among the Mexican population. This horrifying prospect led some of the elites toward explicitly racist conclusions about lower-class mestizos and indigenous people and prompted many to call for massive European immigration to Mexico. At the same time, it motivated a renewed desire to identify the stigmata that distinguished atavistic criminals from those who committed offenses of occasion and environment. This inspired Carlos Roumagnac's 1904 study in criminal psychology, *Los criminales en México*. Roumagnac, a member of the Mexican Geographic and Statistical Society and of the International Association of Police Chiefs, applied his experience as a police inspector and his scientific training to investigate the characteristics of criminals incarcerated in Mexico City's Belén penitentiary. He delved into case files and conducted personal interviews with imprisoned men, women, and children to construct individual profiles, complete with photographs, descriptions of eye and hair color, detailed body measurements (from teeth to toes), and distinctive bodily marks such as tattoos. Finally, Roumagnac attached a "dictionary of Mexican criminal slang" as an appendix. These were analytical elements that Lombroso advocated for discovering born criminals: individuals with "apish" physical features, as well as behavioral characteristics such as tattoos (which recalled the bodily adornments of "primitive" tribesmen) and criminal slang (which replicated speech patterns of "primitive" people, such as "onomatopoeia and personification of inanimate objects").¹⁶ Like Baca and Vergara, however, Roumagnac hesitated before the gates of Hades and refrained from declaring conclusively which of his subjects belonged to the categories of born, environmental, or occasional criminals. He was prepared to gather data, but he felt that the business of analyzing and categorizing properly belonged to more specially trained criminologists.¹⁷

Reality was a stern taskmaster, and it would not readily permit an analysis to unmask the atavistic criminal. Still, this did not deter Roumagnac from proposing prophylactic measures to reduce and contain crimes of occasion and environment. Roumagnac organized his material according to sex and age, so that the first data set dealt with juvenile criminals, the second with female criminals, and the last with male

criminals. This deliberate ordering of categories reflected his belief that the corruption of lower-class family life was a primary determinant in crimes of occasion and environment. Even if it was difficult to identify atavistic criminals with certainty, it was still possible to reduce crime by nipping juvenile crooks in the bud. Most of the convicts Roumagnac interviewed came from homes where poverty and begging, disease and alcoholism, ignorance, and child abandonment were typical. These, he argued, were the causes of environmental criminality, and certainly of juvenile criminality. At the same time, he noted that rising rates of juvenile crime in Mexico compared favorably to rising rates in most European countries (a sure sign that Mexico was in step with the onward march of European civilization!). The only exception was in England, where rates of juvenile crime had declined between 1864 and 1894. According to Roumagnac, the English case proved the benefits of prevention and repression. As for Mexico, he proposed reforms based on already-existing programs in Europe and the United States. These included anti-alcohol campaigns, charitable societies to protect and educate homeless and orphaned children, prison reforms to isolate recidivists and dangerous criminals, and the segregation of juvenile offenders from adult offenders.¹⁸

Roumagnac's analysis corresponded to the broader elite discourse, which emphasized the degenerate character of the lower classes and the need for educational and prison reform as indispensable weapons in the fight against crime. Still, most of this was pouring old wine into a new positivist bottle. Such measures had been debated since the first decade of independence. The Porfirian state distinguished itself by making more funds available for education, especially for indigenous people, but this was mainly intended for technical training to make indios into productive workers.¹⁹ On the other hand, the state practiced its own "political recapitulation" by directing a much larger share of resources toward building new prisons and augmenting the police force in Mexico City. By the end of the century, "Mexico City had far more policemen per capita than any other big city in Europe or the Americas," and they were catching more criminals than the old Belén prison could handle.²⁰ In 1900 the regime opened the new

Lecumberri penitentiary in the capital city, the most advanced feature of which was a regimen of “rewards and punishments designed to modify and direct an inmate’s behavior.”²¹ However, “scientific” prison reform did not produce any better results than a similar effort in 1825 by Mexico’s first liberal justice minister, Pedro Llave. At that time Llave’s model prison had been touted as an instrument of rehabilitation, but observers soon came to regard it as little more than a school of crime and a “receptacle of vice.”²² In 1910, observers were describing Lecumberri in similar terms, as “the most repulsive sore of the capital.”²³ Despite the high-flown rhetoric of reform, the government continued old practices, rooted in the colonial and early postcolonial past, including the consignment of prisoners to the army and forced-work camps to cleanse the cities of criminal elements and provide cheap labor on plantations in the Valle Nacional and the Yucatán Peninsula.²⁴ Five years later, the government expanded its system of transported prison labor when it purchased the Islas Marías on the Pacific coast and built a penal colony that received its first felons in 1908.

The Unsafe Borders of Nationalist Bandits

The Porfirian regime relied primarily on repression to control criminality, but this was not its only resort. It also launched a public relations campaign to improve Mexico’s image abroad. This endeavor involved recruiting foreign writers to mass-produce pro-Porfirian literature aimed at a foreign reading audience. This campaign also engaged popular culture in an ideological struggle. This included the mass circulation of state-sponsored corridos that lauded Díaz and the rurales. Most of these were published in the same print shops that issued broadsheets of popular corridos dedicated to bandit heroes such as Heraclio Bernal, Chucho el Roto, and Santanón. This effort undoubtedly had some effect, but it failed to suffocate popular images of banditry. Not only did the production and circulation of old and new bandit ballads continued apace, but broadsheet printers began to feature an entirely new genre of corridos that complemented images of rural bandits with more modern ones of urban thieves of Mexico City.

One such was the “Corrido de los pelones o los rateros de México,” which exuded a defiant posture of braggadocio and fatalism: “And if we hang out, getting high, and go out to rob / it’s because we’re the wretched of this beautiful capital, ay ay ay!”²⁵

The tradition of popular outlaw balladry survived the decline of real-life banditry, adapted to the new face of urban crime, and resisted the regime’s counter-mythology of law and order. At the same time, a bifurcation appeared in middle-class and elite attitudes toward bandits, suggesting that some of the values inscribed in popular culture were making inroads into literary culture. Some of this may have been linked to the expansion of the penny press and sensationalist newspaper reporting on crime around the turn of the century.²⁶ Respectable newspapers, scandal sheets, and broadsides all increased sales with lurid depictions of crimes by sociopaths like Francisco Guerrero, also known as Mexico’s “Jack the Ripper.” No doubt these reports augmented the fear that people of all classes felt toward dangerous criminals. However, Pablo Piccato has also suggested that the elites took a certain perverse pride in such scandals, since they “conveyed the progress of the capital, which brought not only the technology, architecture, and fashion of the most advanced European countries but also their new forms of crime.”²⁷ Be that as it may, the rising interest in criminal news increased the circulation of broadsheets that commented on gruesome criminals like Guerrero on one day and then published corridos about famous bandits the next day. Almost certainly, some of the middle-class reading public would have been influenced by the contrast between portraits of brutal urban killers and heroic images of popular bandits. It is even more certain that geography and time past helped render some bandits safer and more appealing to middle-class Mexicans, and even to some of the elites who occasionally pressed the historical memory of these outlaws into service for their own purposes.

Such was the case with the fictionalized biography of Joaquín Murrieta, republished in 1904 by Ireneo Paz, a former liberal general who had served with Juárez and Díaz. It seems likely that this text is based on an 1854 account written by Henry Rollins Ridge, an American

Cherokee also known as Yellow Bird.²⁸ The factual details of Murrieta's life are sufficiently vague that scholars still dispute whether he ever existed, and if he did, whether he was Mexican or Chilean. In any event, the narrative published by Paz, *Vida y aventuras del más célebre bandido Joaquín Murrieta*, describes this outlaw-hero as a native son of Sonora who migrated to California in 1850, during the gold rush.²⁹ This was a time when tensions between Mexico and the United States were still inflamed; Mexicans living in this territory faced a great deal of hostility. As the story goes, Murrieta endured a whipping for a crime that he did not commit, and later he witnessed the murder of his family. His quest for revenge led him into outlawry, and he became a Robin Hood figure on behalf of his fellow Mexicans. It was easy for Ridge to sympathize with Murrieta, for Ridge himself had arrived in the California gold fields as a fugitive from Anglo-American prejudice and legal persecution for his inability to pay his debts.³⁰ In any event, the historical context of the Murrieta tale made it a useful instrument for promoting nationalist sentiment and venting Mexican grievances against the United States at the turn of the century. That it had been written by a U.S. citizen, and originally published in the United States, is a curious and ironic twist.

The resurrection of Murrieta as a nationalist bandit-hero in elite culture was not an anomaly. Something similar happened in the more contemporary case of Gregorio Cortez, a Tejano who fell into outlawry in 1901. He resisted when authorities tried to arrest him for a crime he did not commit. The ensuing gunplay led to the death of an Anglo sheriff, and Cortez had to flee. His capture, trial, and imprisonment generated vociferous nationalism in Mexico. It inspired corridos and moved the Mexican government to intervene in the clemency hearings that led to his release in 1913. Like Murrieta, Cortez was a safe outlaw for the elites, since his behavior was defined against Yankee injustice and prejudice rather than against the Mexican state.

The elite mobilization of safe bandit images may have usefully served short-term political purposes, but it also helped to create a de facto boundary of permissible outlawry. Even as the elite attitudes hardened toward the "dangerous classes" in general, the figure of

the imaginary bandit became more ambiguous and therefore problematic in literary culture. As a final example, one can point to a biography of Jesús Arriaga, *Chucho el Roto, o la nobleza de un bandido mexicano*, penned by an anonymous author around 1900. In the prologue, the author declaims that “it is not our purpose to make this present work into an apology for a man whom popular fantasies have crowned with a luminous halo of sympathy and admiration.” He acknowledges that Mexicans admire men of ability and audacity, as well as magnanimity and noble-heartedness, but insists it is equally lamentable that such “beautiful qualities had been manifested in such an abominable and repugnant career as banditry.” He cannot therefore sanction Arriaga’s turn to criminality, but at the same time he recognizes that Chucho was the product of a society that could be, “at times, cruel and unjust,” and which pushed men into crime and lives of shame. His purpose is to render an objective account of this famous outlaw and to leave his readers to wrestle with the problem of determining whether Arriaga or society merits blame or absolution.³¹ The ambivalence expressed by Chucho’s anonymous biographer corresponds to a mounting restlessness among Mexico’s middle classes and some of the marginalized elite.

The middle classes were a product of Porfirian progress. They were bureaucrats, professionals, small entrepreneurs and industrialists, merchants and shopkeepers, teachers, and supervisors, most of whom had emerged in the wake of economic development, and their ranks had expanded rapidly by 1900. They were well educated and dedicated to the modernization of Mexico. For the most part they shared the worldview of the elites, although a minority embraced radical and critical ideologies, including socialist and anarchist ideas. During the heyday of Porfirian progress, many middle-class Mexicans were able to satisfy their ambitions for upward mobility. However, the boundaries of their social status were still circumscribed. They were not members of the elite, and most did not have access to the heights of political and economic power. As they reached the upper threshold of their potential for social advance, they became disenchanted with the status quo and more conscious of the injustices that accompanied Porfirian development.

Over the years, the social basis of the Porfirian regime had become increasingly narrow, to the point where it rested almost entirely on two distinct elite groupings. The first was the científicos, prominent intellectuals, technocrats and bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and landowners based in the capital city. The other was a network of old generals, state governors and local caudillos, regional business leaders and landowners, and some government officials. Both groups kept control over access to the councils of power and influence, and to them redounded the lion's share of benefits that derived from controlling the state. They had privileged access to government contracts and economic monopolies, received preferential credit for their businesses, and dominated the roster from which Díaz selected nominees for appointment to political offices. These individuals accumulated vast fortunes. For example, the Terrazas clan completely dominated politics and banking in Chihuahua, owned fifteen million acres of land and five hundred thousand head of livestock, and operated an assortment of factories, mills, mines, and other enterprises. Every state had its own oligarchs who maintained close ties with foreign investors and pursued their interests at the expense of lesser elites and regional notables.

However, the dynamics of progress began to generate social friction that eroded Porfirian authority and stability. The first significant signs of crisis appeared within the political elite and were associated with the presidential succession. Díaz turned seventy in 1900, and it was clear that the national patriarch was not destined to remain in power much longer. Even as the elite factions jockeyed for position, Díaz rejected the favored candidate of regional bosses, Gen. Bernardo Reyes, then governor of Nuevo León. This tipped the balance toward the científicos, who supported the nomination of Ramón Corral from Sonora to the post of vice president in 1904. Rather than settling the issue, this set into motion an increasingly bitter struggle that divided the governing classes, even as other conflicts and crises began to unfold. In many regions, peasants and rancheros struggled to curb the expropriation of their lands by powerful hacendados. In states such as Chihuahua, ranchero communities resisted the Terrazas, while in

states such as Morelos, peasant villagers resisted plantation owners. Meanwhile, tensions between organized labor and employers erupted into a series of strikes in the textile, railroad, and mining industries between 1906 and 1908. The state brutally repressed all of them, but perhaps none evoked more shock than the events at the Cananea Consolidated Copper Company, a mining operation in the state of Sonora owned by U.S. entrepreneur William Greene. Thirty Mexican miners died when authorities crushed their strike with federal troops, reinforced by U.S. Rangers summoned from Arizona. The Cananea affair, and especially the involvement of a U.S. force that had a reputation for persecuting Mexican Americans, inflamed nationalists and aroused the protests even of middle-class and elite Mexicans who otherwise had little sympathy with unions.

The fallout from these struggles might have settled without undue complications, except for the onset of an economic depression in 1907. The constriction of credit and a decline in trade resulted in layoffs and wage cuts for laborers and in bankruptcy for middle-class Mexicans. It also endangered some of the elites, especially those who were excluded from local and national power networks. This included the Maderos of Coahuila, who had extensive agricultural and industrial interests. Like other elite families outside the orbit of Porfirian favor, the Maderos had already felt the pinch of preferential treatment accorded to more powerful elite and foreign interests. The economic crisis exposed the vulnerability of broad social sectors and focused attention on the need for political change, but because there was not yet a common alternative to unite disparate social elements into an organized opposition, dissent remained inchoate. The middle classes and marginalized elites urged protectionism and greater political openness. A tiny minority, such as the Flores Magón brothers, became enthused with an eclectic brew of radical notions that blended anarcho-syndicalism with Marxism and liberal populism. Some labor leaders also embraced revolutionary ideologies, but the majority of organized workers remained within the limited bounds of unionism and mutual aid societies. Meanwhile, most peasants and rancheros were trying to put the brakes on modernization.

The political landscape suddenly heaved when Díaz announced in 1908 that the time had come for Mexico to elect a new president. Political outsiders, dissident elites, and ambitious insiders started maneuvering to occupy the political space they saw opening up. Some of the elites turned once again to Reyes, whom they now promoted as a presidential contender. Díaz concluded that his decision to retire was badly timed and tried to backpedal. He announced his intention to seek reelection and nipped the Reyista mobilization in the bud. But it was already too late to dampen the enthusiasm of other political forces. Dissident elite and middle-class elements organized an anti-reelection movement and named Francisco Madero as their candidate for the presidential election of 1910. At first the Porfirians did not take Madero seriously, but the challenger roused visible support when he toured the country in the lead-up to voting. The authorities decided to take no chances with Madero, so they arrested him and charged him with sedition only sixteen days before the election. A heavily rigged balloting system returned Díaz to power on June 21. Authorities released Madero the next day, but the contest was hardly over. Madero fled to the United States and, issuing his famous Plan de San Luis Potosí in November 1910, called for an armed uprising. His platform was minimal, focusing on democratic political reforms summed up in the slogan “no reelection and the end of boss rule.” He did not intend to overturn the social order but merely to inject it with more democracy, which suited the dissident elite and middle classes who responded to his call. However, they also realized that they could not succeed without mass support. This Madero accomplished with a minor plank that promised the restitution of lands illegally obtained from indigenous communities. This was no cry for land reform, but it was enough for embattled peasants and *rancheros*, who, although mainly *mestizos*, were determined to make of it what they could.

Madero’s summons followed the logic of patriarchy, but it was mediated through the interplay of distinctly class-based cultural values with the particularities of social relations and political struggles in different regions. Madero himself relied on his family and its network of retainers to establish the infrastructure of his revolt. As other dis-

sident elite and middle-class Mexicans adhered to Madero, the rural poor did likewise. This was very much in the tradition of Mexican *caudillismo* (political bossism) and reflected an implicit understanding that linked the welfare of dependents to the success of the patriarch. Thus, poor rural folk from Sonora to Morelos—Yaqui and Mayo farmers, mestizo rancheros, peons, and peasant villagers—followed caudillos to join the revolt. They owed allegiance to their own patrons first and to Madero second, but this was not blind obedience to paternalistic authority. Popular culture laid out a paradigm of rebellion that justified rebellion against the unjust behavior of a patriarch—perhaps Díaz or more local power holders—and invested authority in alternative figures, often selected from within their own ranks. As it turned out, many peasant rebels were quite independent of the ambitions of elite rebels like Madero. The best-organized and persistent were in Morelos, led by Emiliano Zapata, a ranchero from the village of Anenecuilco. When the Maderista coalition toppled Díaz in 1911, peasants and rancheros continued to fight for land. Ultimately, their determination transformed an elite revolt into a social revolution that incorporated agrarian reform in the Constitution of 1917, the first fundamental law of any country to do so.

Attila and the Centaur: Atavists of Revolution

At the outset, few observers believed that Madero's revolt imperiled the Porfirian regime. Even when serious fighting broke out in northern Mexico, the regime dismissed the insurgents as mere outlaws. The tone of the official response was imbued with the sensibilities of positivist criminology. The main pro-government newspaper, *El imparcial*, insisted that Madero and his followers were worse than European anarchists, who at least "justify their criminal acts with a set of principles." The newspaper decried "rebel outrages" as "a manifestation of banditry, a surge of lust and disorder by the scum of society."³² However, unconcern turned to alarm when the rebellion took root and spread. The U.S. government expressed unhappiness at the disorder on Mexico's northern frontier; meanwhile, Díaz started to sense danger in the unexpected rising of peasants in the south.

From firsthand experience he knew that control over such a revolt might easily slip from the hands of the elite and middle-class dissidents who nominally headed the insurgency, so he was determined to end it quickly. In March he opened negotiations with Madero's representatives in New York City. At the same time, he reached into the past to seize an old weapon of social control. For the first time in his tenure, Díaz suspended guarantees and threatened "bandits" with summary execution. The measure had little appreciable effect, so on April 1 he mounted the rostrum of the national congress and announced sweeping political and agrarian reforms. He told his legislators that radical measures were necessary to forestall a disaster, for rebellion had unleashed the primitive instincts of the lower classes. "Numerous bands have sprung up," he said, "without any political motive and animated solely by a spirit of banditry which has begun to develop afresh and is spreading through the country greater terror, perhaps, than was caused by those who started the revolt."³³ The message was unambiguous: whatever the cost, the elites had to close ranks and settle their differences before the country plunged anew into the disorder that had once plagued Mexico.

On this point Maderista leaders and Porfirian elites agreed. So did foreign governments with an interest in the stability of Mexico. Thus the contending sides observed a truce in northern Mexico while negotiations continued, but elsewhere plebeian rebels ignored the armistice. The elites and the diplomatic community grew anxious at the spread of peasant raiding and banditry. In early May, Wilfred Bonney, the U.S. consul in San Luis Potosí, observed that "the repression of many years has resulted in a reaction, hastened by the disturbed conditions elsewhere, that no ordinary peace can stop, and there is a danger of a prolonged period of reprisal and accounting."³⁴ Six days later, the military commander of the northern rebels, Pascual Orozco—a former muleteer—disobeyed Madero and took Ciudad Juárez in Chihuahua, the first major city to fall into rebel hands. This hastened the progress of negotiations and led to the Treaty of Juárez.

This was end of Porfirian order and progress, but it was just the beginning of the revolution. The Treaty of Juárez removed Díaz from

power but left his state machinery intact. As each side maneuvered for position, all branches of the government continued to function as before. The dynamics were reminiscent of the Plan de Iguala, which had united royalists and republicans to achieve independence ninety years earlier. This was enough for Madero, who had achieved his primary goal: the removal of Díaz. He believed that it was time to restore social peace and implement democratic reforms. Looking ahead to the presidential elections in the fall, Madero was eager to reconcile with his Porfirian opponents and made one concession after another to this end. This included a caretaker government headed by Porfirian officials. It also included an agreement to maintain the Porfirian army and to decommission the Liberating Army, above the angry protests of its radical commanders. Madero forced the issue in the summer of 1911 when he backed a decree by the provisional government declaring that all revolutionary soldiers who resisted mustering out would be considered bandits. However, many rebel commanders preferred outlawry to handing over weapons to an army they had defeated on the field of battle. Some went to prison, while others fled to the countryside and resumed guerrilla operations.³⁵ The crisis deepened when Madero rejected Zapata's demands for land reform and insisted that his forces also surrender their weapons. The Zapatistas refused. Consequently, Madero backed the provisional government when it ordered federal troops into Morelos. Madero won the presidential election in November, but his government faced renewed warfare with former followers in Morelos and the Bajío.

To the elites and the diplomatic corps, Madero's revolt had unleashed a war of banditry against civilization. This opinion was not limited to the old guard, who viewed Zapata and other insurgents as savage, atavistic bandits. Many Maderistas also saw the issue in these terms. In 1911 a pamphleteer named Lambert Popoca y Palacios compared the Zapatistas to the Plateados of old and found that the Zapatistas were worse. "Fifty years have passed [since the Plateados]," he wrote, but the "sickly germs" of those bandits, with their "perverted idiosyncrasies . . . have risen from the revolting muck and mire of their graveyards, and are rabid with the decomposed appearance of

Cain and the savage ferocity of jackals!" He condemned the Zapatistas for transforming themselves into bandits who exploited the people they claimed to defend. To those seduced by Zapatista propaganda, Popoca y Palacios insisted that these rebels "are worse than bandits; they are savages . . . hordes of kaffirs . . . [who] murder wounded soldiers in their hospital beds." He asserted that even the Plateados had not committed such vile acts, for unlike the Zapatistas, the Plateados had not been addicted to anarchist and socialist ideas; such radical notions could only inspire men whose minds were degenerate. He therefore reminded his readers who might have forgotten the tenets of scientific criminology that "degenerates are criminals." Popoca y Palacios portrayed the conflict in Morelos as a struggle between honorable men of sound mind who "heroically defend justice, progress, and the welfare of the people" against degenerates who "have no ambition other than to seize booty through robbery and violence."³⁶

The specter of a popular revolution evoked a visceral fear among the elites, who regarded Zapata as the "Attila of the South," as atavistic recapitulation personified.³⁷ The unfolding struggle also demolished the image of Mexico abroad which had been so assiduously cultivated by the Porfirian regime. The flight of Díaz and the renewal of civil war breathed new life into the old Anglo-Saxon discourse that imagined Mexicans as natural-born bandits and criminals. In the United States, newspaper coverage emphasized, over and over, three themes: Mexicans are backward and childish; race mixture made Mexicans inferior to Anglo-Saxons and prone to barbarism; and Mexicans are corrupt and dishonest, inclined to violence, cruelty, and theft.³⁸ These notions were *au courant* in the U.S. diplomatic corps from early on. Edith O'Shaughnessy, wife of the U.S. *chargé d'affaires* in Mexico City, noted that the "ever-increasing banditry all over the country, murders of people on isolated haciendas, and general dislocation of business and lawlessness are what worry them [the Mexican elites and diplomats]. A swift sliding down into the old pre-Díaz brigandage is feared. The slopes are so attractive to the dissatisfied and uncontrolled." She wrote that the "disbanding of the famous Liberating Army, financially and morally, continues to be the great difficulty, as

from it have sprung all these flowers of banditry whose roots lie too deep, apparently, for plucking." O'Shaughnessy asserted that Zapata was "atavistic in type, desirous of Mexico for the Indians *à la* a celebrated Indian chief of the Sierras de Alica [Manuel Lozada]." To her, the most terrifying aspect of the peasant rebellion was that the Zapatistas were waging an incipient race war with the intention of "sponging out . . . everything between us and Montezuma."³⁹

The Zapatistas were neither indigenous people nor bandits. They were mostly mestizo peasants determined to save their lands from expropriation and to preserve a traditional way of life based on subsistence agriculture. There were bandits among their ranks, but they were not easily tolerated by this movement, and when they violated Zapatista norms they were punished—often executed.⁴⁰ Banditry became more problematic in the last stages of the Zapatista resistance, but Zapata himself responded angrily to accusations that he and his followers were nothing but outlaws. His village had a long and well-remembered history—reaching back to the sixteenth century—of defending itself from usurpers who tried to oppress them and take their lands.⁴¹ Anenecuilco had been a haven for insurgents during the war for independence. Zapata's own grandfather had fought for Juárez during the War of the French Intervention; afterward, his uncle Cristino Zapata had been among the peasant volunteers who hunted down the Plateados.⁴² The residents of Anenecuilco, like those in many other villages in Morelos, possessed a collective identity that been forged in struggles against Spaniards, French invaders, bandits, and large landowners alike. Thus, in a manifesto to the Mexican people issued at the end of 1911, Zapata responded to his critics by arguing that "one cannot call a person a bandit who, weak and helpless, was despoiled of his property by someone strong and powerful, and now that he cannot tolerate more, makes a superhuman effort to regain control over that which he used to own." He reversed the accusation and charged the hacendados with banditry, exclaiming that "the despoiler is the outlaw, not the despoiled!"⁴³

In view of the spreading unrest and disorder, the U.S. diplomatic corps and the old-guard elites developed deep enmity toward Madero.

They held him personally responsible for triggering the latent atavism of Mexico's lower classes, and they ridiculed his conviction that democracy was appropriate for Mexico. As O'Shaughnessy saw it, Mexico's indigenous heritage was the main obstacle to progress. She believed that there had only "been three civilizing processes in Mexico: the Spanish conquerors, the Church . . . *and* invested capital" from Europe and the United States. Of these three, each "evolved inevitably out of the elements of the other" to a higher stage of development. This had culminated in the person of Díaz, who, "when he formally invited foreign capital and gave guarantees, was the expression of it [civilization]." ⁴⁴ Like their friends in the Mexican elite, O'Shaughnessy and her compatriots in the diplomatic mission longed for the return of a strongman like Díaz, and none more ardently than U.S. ambassador Henry Lane Wilson. Wilson actively encouraged the revanchist ambitions of the old guard and was deeply implicated when Gen. Victoriana Huerta toppled Madero in a military coup d'état in February 1913. Huerta proclaimed a return to peace and prosperity, but the general and his associates were vengeful and bloody-minded. They imposed a dictatorship more ruthless than any Mexico had seen since independence. Huerta ordered the murder of Madero, his vice president, and other members of the Maderista inner circle. They persecuted dissent so mercilessly that Maderista leaders elites retreated into the safety of silence or fled the capital. Some simply abandoned hopes for reform and closed ranks with the traditional elites in support of Huerta. However, Huerta's brutality offended U.S. president-elect Woodrow Wilson so deeply that, to the chagrin of Ambassador Wilson, Washington refused to recognize Huerta. Other nations had no such scruples. The German ambassador found Huerta possessed of "a corruptibility and depravity that exceeds anything known in the past," but the Germans proceeded to establish diplomatic ties anyway. So too did the British, the French, and the Spanish. This was, after all, good for the business of exploiting Mexico's abundant resources, including recently discovered oil fields. ⁴⁵ President Wilson was no less concerned with preserving Yankee access to Mexican resources, but he was also ready to shoulder the "white man's burden" and "teach

the South American republics to elect good men!”⁴⁶ This was a paternalistic reflex rooted in the old Anglo-Saxon discourse on Mexico. It drove the president into a policy that angered his own ambassador in Mexico City, but there can be no doubt that both Wilsons shared a fundamental arrogance in their attitudes toward Mexico.

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.⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸ 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 Constitutionals 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.”⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹ Carranza himself used every opportunity to characterize Villa and Zapata as savages who “rob, injure, kill, and destroy in order to prove their strength.”⁵²

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 Viscaino 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."⁵³

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.⁵⁴ 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."⁵⁵ 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."⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

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."⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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,"⁶⁰ 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."⁶¹

The Struggle Continues: Los de abajo

The revolution demolished the Porfirian edifice, but to borrow a phrase, there were more than a few "ghosts in the machine."⁶² It brought to power a new revolutionary elite. They were prepared to go further than Madero or Carranza, but they were still fundamentally bourgeois in their outlook. Their vision for Mexico revolved around modernization and capitalist development, and to this extent they followed a path first charted under Díaz. They also intended to create a more effective state apparatus in order to achieve their ends. However, at the cost of two million lives, the revolution had also transformed

workers and peasants. Although the habits of paternalism remained deeply ingrained, they expected something rather more than a stable state and capitalist development. As a result, the revolutionary elites became populist patriarchs and set about to create new instruments and methods of social control. It required two decades of experimentation, but it finally acquired the form of a democratic populist veneer that glossed an older tradition of authoritarian, centralized government. This much clearly found a parallel in the experience of creating the Porfirian state, but there was one important difference. The post-revolutionary elites could no longer ignore and exclude the masses. Unlike the Porfirian elites, they found the means of incorporating the masses and thereby established an effective system of hegemony that has helped to underwrite the stability of Mexican politics to this day.

There were two keys to their success. First, the post-revolutionary elites survived the tumult of the 1920s to achieve a remarkable degree of unity. This is best captured in the system of political brokerage that kept state power within the so-called Revolutionary Family—the networks of supporters and dependents that coalesced around various revolutionary factions. Second, the revolutionary elites draped themselves in the symbols and mythology of the revolution and granted concessions to popular demands that were necessary to sustain an aura of legitimacy and authority. It was enough to convince peasants and workers that, however incomplete, change was possible within the system.

The appropriation of Zapata to the official pantheon of revolutionary heroes was crucial to this process, yet it still required two decades to give a convincing quality to state authority. To achieve this, “Mexican revolutionaries carried on an uninterrupted discourse of memory” that began in the 1910s and carried through to the 1930s.⁶³ A central aspect of this project was the appearance of a new form of literary imagining, the so-called novel of the revolution. It aimed at no less than the creation of a new national identity, based on the centrality of the revolution. However, it also required a deliberate picking and choosing of who and what belonged to the revolutionary tradition. One outcome was to exclude Villa and Villismo.

The foundational narrative in this enterprise was Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* (*The Underdogs*). Although it was first published in Texas in 1915, it did not receive acclaim in Mexico until 1924. Azuela had been a medical student from a middle-class family in Guadalajara, Jalisco. He was an idealistic urban liberal who supported Madero's rebellion. In 1911 he served as a political chief and then as director of education in his home state. After the murder of Madero in 1913, Azuela joined one of the Villista chieftains, Julian Medina, to serve as a physician. When the defeat of Huerta sundered revolutionary unity in 1915, Azuela abandoned the armed struggle, disillusioned with the "barbarism, opportunism, lack of respect for human life and property among the revolutionaries, [and] the tragic internecine strife between rival revolutionary generals."⁶⁴ He left for El Paso, Texas, where he wrote *Los de abajo*. He places a bandit named Demetrio Macías at the heart of the narrative, as a general in Villa's Division of the North.

Los de abajo is filled with ambiguities that call to mind those of the anonymous author of *Chucho el Roto* some fifteen years earlier. Azuela was sympathetic to the plight of the rural poor, and he rendered evocative portraits of their wretched condition. Thus, in Azuela's hands, Macías is driven to outlawry by his conflict with a local political boss. He subsequently joins the revolutionaries, not out of abstract ideals, but to save his family. However, the narrative is also saturated with pessimism, for Azuela's protagonists—the underdogs of Mexican society—are swept along by the whirlwind of the revolution, unable to control their fate except within the narrowest of options. One could either fight or run, but one could not hope to escape the fury of senseless and endemic violence. When the revolutionary civil war breaks out between Villa and Carranza, Macías and his men degenerate into a marauding band with ambitions no loftier than to pillage and loot. Therefore, at the end of the novel, Macías's wife asks him why, when it all seems so pointless, he continues to fight. Macías picks up a stone, casts it down a canyon slope, and replies: "Look at that stone; how it keeps on going." And so Macías continues. He returns to the struggle and dies in the same canyon where his revolutionary career began.⁶⁵

Azuella published *Los de abajo* nearly one hundred years after José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi published *El periquillo sarniento*. Both wrote in the heat of a revolutionary struggle and used the figure of the bandit to criticize the societies in which they lived. However, the redemptive spirit that moved Lizardi was nowhere to be found in Azuella. To the contrary, in Azuella's narrative the struggle for power no longer had any liberating potential; it could only corrupt. For Azuella the motion of Mexican history was circular, always returning to its point of departure, rather than progressive and linear, and certainly not dialectical. As much as Azuella empathized with the downtrodden, he—like other members of the Revolutionary Family—believed that the underdogs would always remain the underdogs.

Conclusion

The Spirit of Popular Banditry

By the edge of the river, from Reynosa to Laredo,
the bandits are finished . . . they are finishing off the gunfighters.
But here we remember and sing their corridos.
They died because they were men, not because they were bandits.
—Julián Garza, “Corrido de los pistoleros famosos,” 1972

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Mexican elites had finally gained an upper hand in their fight against banditry. It had taken more than seventy years, during which time banditry left a lasting impression on Mexican society and culture and on the country's image abroad. When English-speaking foreigners wrote about Mexico, they inevitably conjured forth images that linked banditry with revolution and disorder, and not without reason. Banditry had been a major contributor to the disorder that undermined elite efforts to forge a durable state after the country achieved independence in 1821. Banditry therefore contributed to the development of an authoritarian praxis that dominated Mexican politics throughout the century, up to the era of Porfirio Díaz. Since banditry had such a profound impact on social and political developments, it is understandable that it became a prominent theme in Mexico's literate and oral cultural traditions. It was highly topical for novelists who saw banditry as an expression of plebeian backwardness, just as it captured the imagination of lower-class Mexicans who celebrated outlaw heroes in popular corridos. In short, while banditry influenced the elites' struggle to create a Mexican nation-state, this struggle in turn generated bandit stereotypes

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that foreigners and Mexicans mobilized in a three-sided struggle over what it meant to be Mexican.

By the turn of the century, the establishment of an authoritarian liberal state, glossed with a republican veneer, coincided with an apparent reduction of banditry. However, the Mexican elites had not achieved an effective hegemony. As a result, the dynamics of Porfirian progress unleashed a revolution in 1910. It began as a bourgeois rebellion to democratize the *ancien régime*; it became a popular and agrarian mobilization that demolished the Porfirian state in pursuit of justice, freedom, and land for the rural and urban poor who had suffered the most from Porfirian modernization. The popular revolution acquired these characteristics under plebeian leaders such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, and as it did, foreign diplomats, the old oligarchy, and the bourgeois revolutionaries watched in horror. It seemed to them that the froth of Madero's revolt had given new life to atavism and banditry. The bloodiest phase of the revolution occurred from 1915 to 1920, when the bourgeois leaders of the Constitutionalist factions struggled to suppress Villismo and Zapatismo. They finally succeeded and began to reconstruct a more populist version of the authoritarian state.

The rise of an authoritarian state before and after the revolution was not an innovation imposed on Mexicans by Díaz or by post-revolutionary elites. They added their own unique ingredients, but the basic framework had been long in the making, from the moment that royalists and insurgents united to achieve independence from Spain in 1821 to the moment that Benito Juárez became president of the restored republic in 1867. From the very start, the elites saw the state as an instrument of control over the lower classes. The conservative and liberal elites, whether they advocated for a monarchy, a centralized state, or a federal republic, believed that the upper classes had a duty and an obligation to govern Mexico's lower classes. This corresponded to paternalistic and patriarchal ideas that privileged upper-class males in a gendered hierarchy and which structured patterns of inequality between men and women and among men based on social position. These assumptions helped to naturalize social inequalities

and exploitation with an understanding that social superiors were obliged to protect and provide for dependents in exchange for obedience and respect. However, the elites vehemently disagreed about how these hierarchies should be inscribed into the nation-state. Lucas Alamán, the foremost conservative intellectual until his death in 1853, typified the thinking of conservative Creoles when he argued that Mexico needed a centralized authoritarian state in order to constrain the vices of mestizo and indigenous lower classes. Early post-colonial conservatives believed that plebeians were weak-minded and irrational and naturally inclined to immorality, crime, and disorder. As a result, they insisted that independent Mexico needed to preserve the institutions, hierarchies, and corporate privileges of the colonial system. Liberals such as José Mora and Lorenzo de Zavala agreed that the lower classes were backward, ridden with vice, and given to crime, but they argued that this was the result of a corrupting environment—the unhappy legacy of colonialism itself. They insisted that liberal values, which emphasized status and rewards based on merit as well as equality before the law, ought to guide the development of the nation-state. They anticipated a process of gradual social evolution in which the elite classes would act as enlightened mentors and inculcate the lower classes with education, civilization, and discipline. However, early liberal thinkers also had few reservations about the need to suppress lower-class disorder and criminality. They were convinced that harsh repressive measures were a temporary but necessary expedient that would become redundant as liberal reforms raised the cultural standards of Mexicans.

The inability to reconcile these competing visions for Mexico led to decades of internecine strife. Ironically, the cycles of elite conflict also prevented the state from becoming an effective vehicle of social control. Indeed, these struggles helped to create more banditry and other forms of criminal behavior. For one thing, liberals and conservatives both recruited bandits as mercenaries in their armed conflicts. When one side prevailed and tried to restore order, these bandits returned to their outlaw status. Not infrequently, they were joined by new groups of brigands composed of displaced civilians and demobilized

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soldiers. While in power, liberal and conservative governments tried to cut through this Gordian knot with increasingly harsh methods. They promulgated special decrees, suspended constitutional guarantees, and established extraordinary tribunals. Yet these measures had little effect other than to thicken an atmosphere already laden with repression and intolerance.

The elites finally resolved the dilemma of state formation after the War of the Reform and the War of the French Intervention, which destroyed the conservatives and left the liberals in control of the state in 1867. But Mexico was in ruin after fifty years of strife, and it took the liberals another two decades of state building and economic reconstruction, under four different presidents, before the government reduced banditry to manageable proportions. To accomplish this, the liberal elites continued to rely on authoritarian methods. This experience helped to transform liberalism into a more conservative ideology by the latter half of the century. Thus, when Díaz came to power in 1876, authoritarian tendencies already saturated elite political culture and were intertwined with patriarchal values.

Meanwhile, the problem of banditry came to dominate the national and international discourses on Mexico. Banditry riveted the attention of Anglo-Saxon travelers who visited Mexico. Most of these were members of the elites in the English-speaking world—diplomats, military men, explorers, adventurers, and scientists—who published accounts of their experiences. In writing about Mexico, these travelers created images of banditry that corresponded to gender and ethnic hierarchies that privileged Anglo-Saxon males. They believed that banditry was inevitable in a half-civilized nation like Mexico where race mixture and geography led to a degraded masculinity. They portrayed Mexico as a nation of corrupt politicians and dangerous bandits who could never measure up to civilized standards. Many of these writers helped shape public opinion and foreign policy in the United States and Great Britain, thereby reinforcing ethnocentric and racist attitudes toward Mexico. The Mexican elites reacted against these stereotypes. Such images were not only offending, but as the century wore on they complicated efforts to normalize diplomatic relations

and obtain foreign capital and loans. Mexico's poor image abroad only aggravated its crisis of state building, but little changed until the government reduced banditry and launched a public relations campaign to promote Díaz as the man who pacified Mexico.

In Mexico, the crisis of state building likewise ensured that imagined bandits proliferated in oral and literary culture. As with the Anglo-Saxon discourse, Mexicans used patriarchal notions about gender, ethnicity, and class to shape their imaginings about banditry. However, Mexican novels and ballads used these notions to fashion narratives of redemption, and then they mobilized these understandings in a cultural struggle that arrayed elite values against those of the lower classes.

Since most Mexican novelists were liberal partisans, the novel became a vehicle for articulating a discourse on banditry that complemented liberalism's broader political vision. Mexican novelists generally depicted bandits in a negative light, as masculinized expressions of lower-class degradation and vice. But they did not regard plebeian backwardness as inherent to the rural and urban poor, nor did they accept the sweeping denigration of Mexico that characterized the writing of so many Anglo-Saxon observers. Instead, they represented banditry as the by-product of a social environment that corrupted the lower classes. In the early postcolonial period, novelists such as José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi and Manuel Payno used banditry to help shape a critique that attacked the values and practices of the *ancien régime*. These early narratives struck a radical and populist tone that positioned bandits—and the lower classes in general—as objects of redemption by enlightened Creoles in a future republican nation. By midcentury, at the height of the struggle to expel Maximilian and the French army, a different version of populist liberalism appeared in a novel by Luis Gonzaga Inclán, who draped his narrative in a rustic garb that defended traditional rural values against the intrusions of the urban elites and other outsiders. Since Inclán envisioned a mestizo-dominated agrarian republic, he linked banditry to the corruption and greed of urban-oriented politicians who oppressed the countryside. He made no effort to depict bandits as objects of re-

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demption. After 1867, modernizing urban-based liberal intellectuals eclipsed Inclán's rural nostalgia. Fin de siècle authors such as Payno and Altamirano repositioned their writings around a program of literary nationalism that replaced Creole-centered liberalism with a new vision that promoted the progressive rise of a new mestizo republic. These writers depicted banditry as an anachronism of pre-republican culture that had to be eradicated. If Payno now and again lapsed into empathy with bandits, believing that they could be redeemed, these sentiments were absent in Altamirano, whose hostility toward lawlessness corresponded seamlessly with the authoritarian posture of the Porfirian regime.

The narratives of corridos depicted the imaginary bandit in an altogether different light. These ballads were a distinctly mestizo form of lower-class oral culture that rarely broached issues of ethnicity. They were mainly concerned with the values and life experiences of mestizo plebeians. By celebrating the exploits of outlaw heroes, these ballads offered a vision of the "world turned upside-down," but they did not do so by overturning or abandoning the logic of patriarchal relationships. To the contrary, they manipulated this logic to justify banditry as a form of rebellion against superiors who overstepped the accepted bounds of domination and exploitation. They suggested that when social superiors—landlords, employers, or state officials—violated this social pact, their caprice and immoral behavior might undermine the precarious status of lower-class males and bring disaster to their dependents. Traditional honor codes required lower-class males to fulfill their own patriarchal obligations and protect the interests of kin and other dependents. In this fashion, corridos articulated popular notions about justice and moral behavior and authorized a portrait of the bandit as a champion. But by the same token, this strategy also condemned bandits whenever they violated popular morality.

The construction of the bandit-hero in popular culture followed a clearly defined pattern that addressed a need by lower-class Mexicans to find champions to protect them against the abuses they faced in everyday life. In this way, bandit corridos also helped to preserve alternative cultural values that might be transformed into a paradigm

of rebellion at moments of profound social crisis. Such crises emerged and escalated after 1900 and exploded into the Mexican Revolution. If, in the end, the revolution failed to meet the hopes and expectations of the poor, it nevertheless produced Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, as well as a popular memory that continues to regard these two men as the embodiment of a dream deferred.

Notes

Preface

1. Robin Hood Multifoods Inc. was founded in 1909 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, by Francis Atherton Bean, president of the International Milling firm located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Dean wanted to expand his market northward at a time when Canada was rapidly expanding agricultural colonization in the prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. The company began with milling and processing wheat into flour, but it has grown into a large enterprise based on the production of a wide range of convenience foods and baking products.

2. Woody Guthrie, "Pretty Boy Floyd," in *The Woody Guthrie Songbook*, 186–87.

3. Billy Bragg and Wilco, *Mermaid Avenue* (Elektra 62204-2, 1998); Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*.

Introduction

1. Katz, *Pancho Villa*, 792–93.

2. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 13–18; Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 19.

3. Slatta, *Bandidos*, 190–99; Slatta, *Gauchos*, 180–92; Slatta, "Folklore, Fake-lore, Hobsbawm, and Banditry."

4. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, xvii.

5. Paul Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992), xv; Archer, "Banditry and Revolution"; W. B. Taylor, "Bandit Gangs," 28–57; and Brunk, "'Sad Situation.'"

6. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 1:355–56.

7. Katz, *Pancho Villa*, 805.

8. Robles, "El bandidaje en el estado de México"; see also Robles, "Bandidos somos."

9. Joseph, "On the Trail of Latin American Bandits," 22.

10. Joseph, "On the Trail of Latin American Bandits," 21, 23.

11. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xvi, 300.

12. Giron, *Heraclio Bernal*, 128.

13. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*, 88.

14. Quoted in Franco, *Introduction to Spanish American Literature*, 72.

15. Haslip-Viera, *Crime and Punishment*; Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*; Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*; Piccato, *City of Suspects*; Salvatore, Aguirre, and Joseph, *Crime and Punishment in Latin America*.

16. Gunn, *Mexico in American and British Letters*; Arbeláez, *Mexico in the Nineteenth Century*, 2–3.

17. Deans-Smith and Joseph, “The Arena of Dispute,” 206.

18. Lomnitz, “Barbarians at the Gate?” 373–74.

19. French, “Imagining and Cultural History,” 266.

20. Eric Van Young explains in “New Cultural History” that, in radical idealism, “cultural ideas would be antecedent to [material] interests, interpretation to social object.” He explains that in his own work he has inverted his previous materialist interpretation to fashion a new argument that “social conflict that at first appeared exclusively or primarily economic in origin might well have had deeper roots of a symbolic and ideational nature” (240–41).

21. Schmitt, *Introduction to Marx and Engels*, 32–35.

22. Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” 143.

23. For examples see Todorov’s *The Conquest of America* and Harrison’s *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind*.

24. Gramsci, “Hegemony, Relations of Force, Historical Bloc,” 193.

25. E. P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 9–10, 13.

26. Williams, “Base and Superstructure,” 413; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 19, 38.

27. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 317–18; see also Scott, *Domination*, 72.

28. See Abercrombie, Turner, and Hill, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*; and Abercrombie, Turner, and Hill, *Dominant Ideologies*.

29. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 110.

I. Armed Bodies of Men

1. Quoted in Wasserman, *Everyday Life*, 51.

2. Engels, *Origin of the Family*, 229–30.

3. J. Bazant, “From Independence to the Liberal Republic,” 12.

4. Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution*, 224–26.

5. Wasserman, *Everyday Life*, 48–49.

6. Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution*, 244–45.

7. J. Bazant, “From Independence to the Liberal Republic,” 7, 10.

8. J. Bazant, “From Independence to the Liberal Republic,” 11.

9. J. Bazant, “From Independence to the Liberal Republic,” 30; Wasserman, *Everyday Life*, 57–58.

10. Alamán, *Semblanzas e ideario*, 45, 166.

11. Robles, “Bandidos somos,” 15.

12. For studies on banditry during the war for independence, see Archer, “Banditry and Revolution”; and W. B. Taylor, “Bandit Gangs.”

13. Macedo, *Historia del derecho penal*, 257.

14. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 111.

15. Haslip-Viera, “Criminal Justice and the Poor,” 110.
16. Macedo, *Historia del derecho penal*, 213.
17. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 111–12.
18. Hale, *Mexican Liberalism*, 258–61.
19. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 20.
20. Macedo, *Historia del derecho penal*, 263–64.
21. Mayer, *Mexico as It Was and as It Is*, 169; Mason, *Pictures of a Life*, 183.
22. Macedo, *Historia del derecho penal*, 213–14, 251–60.
23. Zavala, *Ensayo histórico*, 1:289–90.
24. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 28; Haslip-Viera, *Crime and Punishment*, 87.
25. Haslip-Viera, *Crime and Punishment*, 87, 96.
26. Zavala, *Ensayo histórico*, 1:289–90.
27. Alamán quoted in Robles, “El bandidaje en el Estado de México,” 33.
28. Macedo, *Historia del derecho penal*, 213–14, 260–62.
29. Macedo, *Historia del derecho penal*, 261–62.
30. Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, 5:391–92.
31. Haslip-Viera, *Crime and Punishment*, 45.
32. Robles, “El bandidaje en el Estado de México,” 52.
33. Puebla, Gobernador de Puebla, “El Gobernador de Puebla acompaña la exposición de aquella Asamblea pidiendo el establecimiento de Juzgados especiales para la persecución y castigo de ladrones en cuadrilla, July 28, 1845,” Documentación de la Administración Pública, 1821–1910, Justicia, box 300, file 14, sheet 189, AGN.
34. Puebla, Gobernador de Puebla, “Exposición de aquella Asamblea,” sheets 190–91.
35. Puebla, Gobernador de Puebla, “Exposición de aquella Asamblea,” sheets 190–92; Mexico, Administración Pública, “Proyecto de ley presentado por la Primera Comisión de Justicia de la Cámara de Diputados,” Documentación de la Administración Pública, 1821–1910, Justicia, box 300, file 15, sheets 200–208, AGN.
36. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Proyecto de ley,” sheets 200–208.
37. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Proyecto de ley,” sheets 200–208.
38. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Diario del Gobierno, December 12, 1845,” Documentación de la Administración Pública, 1821–1910, Justicia, box 300, file 16, sheet 215, AGN.
39. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Circular para la estadística criminal, October 18, 1845,” Documentación de la Administración Pública, 1821–1910, Justicia, box 300, file 18, sheet 242, AGN.

40. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Estadística criminal, 1845,” Documentación de la Administración Pública, 1821–1910, Justicia, box 300, file 18, sheets 256–379, AGN.

41. These were León (Guanajuato); Mexico City, Ajuchitlan, Sultepec, Jilotepec, and Pachuca (México); Citacuaro and Maravatio (Michoacán); Cuernavaca (Morelos), Tehuacan, Matamoros, Villa de Tuspam, Yzucar, and Tepeji (Puebla); and Cordova (Veracruz). Mexico, Administración Pública, “Estadística criminal, 1845,” sheets 268–379.

42. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Estadística criminal, 1845,” sheets 268–379.

43. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Estadística criminal, 1845,” sheets 268–379.

44. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Estadística criminal, 1845,” sheets 268–379.

45. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Estadística criminal, 1845,” sheets 320.

46. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Estadística criminal, 1845,” sheets 256–379.

47. Mexico, Administración Pública, “Estadística criminal, 1845,” sheets 271, 345–51, 379.

48. Robles, “El bandidaje en el Estado de México,” 54.

49. Robles, “Bandidos somos,” 18.

50. Robles, “El bandidaje en el Estado de México,” 59.

51. Juárez, *Documentos, Discursos y Correspondencia*, 1:545–51.

52. Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution*, 254.

53. Juárez, *Documentos, Discursos y Correspondencia*, 1:552, 595–97, 646, 699, 747.

54. Paul Vanderwood, “Betterment for Whom? The Reform Period: 1855–1875,” in Meyer and Beezley, *Oxford History of Mexico*, 374–75.

55. Mexico, Congreso General Constituyente, *Constitución Federal de los Estados-Unidos Mexicanos*, 14.

56. Mexico, Ministerio de Justicia, *Ley general para ladrones*.

57. Mexico, Ministerio de Justicia, *Ley general para ladrones*.

58. Mexico, Ministerio de Justicia, *Ley general para ladrones*.

59. Díaz, *Memorias*, 330.

60. Mexico, Tranquilidad Pública, “La Prefectura comunicando que el cabecilla Gregorio Galindo efectua un movimiento revolucionario en Piedras Negras, January 1–12, 1865,” Gobernación, dossier 1161, box 1, file 18, AGN.

61. Wasserman, *Everyday Life*, 129.

62. Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 389–90.

63. Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 390; Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 58.
64. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 116.
65. Mexico, Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, *Codigo penal*, 22-24, 63-64, 102-7, 108-10.
66. Wheless, *Compendium of the Laws of Mexico*, 1:7.
67. Mexico, Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, *Codigo penal*, 160-62.
68. Mexico, Secretaría de Estado, "Leyes sobre salteadores y plagario."
69. Mexico, Secretaría de Estado, "Leyes sobre salteadores y plagario."

2. The Nest and Nursery of Brigands

1. Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, xii, 50, 53.
2. Evans, *Our Sister Republic*, 135.
3. Dunbar, *The Mexican Papers*, 30, 63, 96.
4. Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico*, 55, 160-64; Tayloe, *Mexico*, 69-70; Beaufoy, *Mexico*, ix.
5. Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico*, 24, 39, 49.
6. Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico*, 27-28.
7. Latrobe, *The Rambler in Mexico*, 283-84.
8. Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico*, 236; Mayer, *Mexico as It Was and as It Is*, 17-18; Mason, *Pictures of a Life*, 9.
9. Evans, *Our Sister Republic*, 113.
10. Latrobe, *The Rambler in Mexico*, 87.
11. Hobbs, *Wild Life in the Far West*, 474.
12. Salvator Rosa (1615-73) was an Italian painter, etcher, and poet, best known for his battle scenes and romantic landscapes. Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) was a British novelist, best known for her gothic novels, including *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.
13. Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico*, 49-50, 108-9, 163; Tayloe, *Mexico*, 53-54; Beaufoy, *Mexico*, 74-76.
14. Lyon, *Journal*, 36, 102-3.
15. Lyon, *Journal*, 171-72.
16. Latrobe, *The Rambler in Mexico*, 9.
17. Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals*, 277-87.
18. Mayer, *Mexico as It Was and as It Is*, 33; W. Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico*, 22-23; Latrobe, *The Rambler in Mexico*, 49, 302-3.
19. O'Shaughnessy, *Diplomatic Days*, 277.
20. Barca, *Life in Mexico*, xxi, 69, 414-15, 449-50.
21. Barca, *Life in Mexico*, 413.
22. Barca, *Life in Mexico*, 79-81, 570-71. The Salvator to whom Calderón

de la Barca referred is the same Salvator Rosa (the Italian artist) mentioned by Poinsett.

23. Barca, *Life in Mexico*, 173.
24. Mayer, *Mexico as It Was and as It Is*, 41.
25. Barca, *Life in Mexico*, 256.
26. Barca, *Life in Mexico*, 415.
27. Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico*, 104–6; W. Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico*, 13, 23–24.
28. The San Patricios, or Saint Patricks, were Irish Catholics recruited from Ireland and the United States to fight on the Mexican side. Many were deserters from the U.S. military.
29. Carpenter, *Travels and Adventures in Mexico*, 145–50, 198–99, 288.
30. Oswandel, *Notes of the Mexican War*, 259, 367–68, 459–64; Wise, *Los Gringos*, 248–49.
31. B. Taylor, *El Dorado*, 292–93.
32. B. Taylor, *El Dorado*, 294–95, 323.
33. E. B. Tyler, *Anahuac*, 15; Robertson, *A Visit to Mexico*, 1:300–301.
34. Mason, *Pictures of a Life*, 7; E. B. Tyler, *Anahuac*, 19.
35. Tayloe, *Mexico*, 36–37; Lyon, *Journal*, 171; Mayer, *Mexico as It Was and as It Is*, 34; E. B. Tyler, *Anahuac*, 31–32.
36. Wilson, *Mexico*, 123; Robertson, *A Visit to Mexico*, 1:308–9; E. B. Tyler, *Anahuac*, 177–78.
37. Mason, *Pictures of a Life*, 175–77; Dunbar, *The Mexican Papers*, 113–14.
38. E. B. Tyler, *Anahuac*, 171–77; Mason, *Pictures of a Life*, 4, 13–14, 57; Robertson, *A Visit to Mexico*, 2:104, 372.
39. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 53.
40. Evans, *Our Sister Republic*, 98, 218–19.
41. The Thugs of India were a religious organization accused of being murderers and robbers. They existed from the thirteenth century until they were suppressed by British imperial forces between 1828 and 1835.
42. Evans, *Our Sister Republic*, 96, 136–37, 203–4.
43. Bishop, *Old Mexico*, 3–4, 98.
44. Becher, *A Trip to Mexico*, 6, 37, 140.
45. Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, 58.
46. Wasserman, *Everyday Life*, 161–64, quote on 164.
47. Ober, *Travels in Mexico*, v–vi, 281; Hale and Hale, *A Family Flight through Mexico*, 263; Rogers, *Mexico? Sí Señor*, 121–35; Lummis, *Awakening of a Nation*, 4–5. The reference to Lady Turpins is an allusion to Dick Turpin, a famous eighteenth-century English highwayman. Lummis evidently had in mind such female Mexican bandits as Leonarda Emilia (La Carambada).

48. Bishop, *Old Mexico*, 92; Hale and Hale, *A Family Flight through Mexico*, 93.
49. Bishop, *Old Mexico*, 26–27.
50. Bandelier, *A Scientist on the Trail*, 98; Ober, *Travels in Mexico*, 285.
51. Alec-Tweedy, *The Maker of Modern Mexico*, 272–79.
52. Creelman, “President Díaz,” 232.
53. Gadow, *Through Southern Mexico*, v.

3. Unsolved Mysteries of Civilization

1. It is estimated that only 14 percent of Mexicans could read or write as late as 1895. By 1910 that number had increased to 20 percent. M. Bazant, “Lecturas del Porfiriato,” 238.
2. Gerald Martin has suggested that Mexican romantic writers had a tendency to exalt the bandit, but I have found little evidence of this. Martin, “Literature, Music, and the Visual Arts,” 37.
3. Peña, *History of Mexican Literature*, 201. Marxist cultural historian Raymond Williams coined the term “structures of feeling” to refer to “meanings as values as they are actually lived and felt . . . characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feelings against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought.” Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.
4. Martin, “Literature, Music, and the Visual Arts,” 3.
5. Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 68; O. Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 88.
6. Bell, “Mexico,” 377–82.
7. Antonio Benítez-Rojo is one of the few to dissent from the majority that Lizardi supported the independence cause. See his “The Nineteenth-Century Spanish American Novel,” 435–39. For additional biographical information on Lizardi see Bell, “Mexico,” 378–79; Brushwood, *Mexico in Its Novel*, 64–68; González, *Trayectoria de la Novela en México*, 27–34; Martínez, *La expresión nacional*, 82–91; Millan, *Literatura mexicana*, 127–29; Peña, *History of Mexican Literature*, 185–90; and Peña, *Novelas y novelistas mexicanos*, 16–30.
8. Franco, *Spanish American Literature*, 22.
9. Benedict Anderson argued that colonial absolutism encouraged Creole nationalism by preventing its functionaries from making administrative “pilgrimages” beyond the colonial capital to the Spanish metropolis; it is curious therefore that Lizardi resorts to the device of making his protagonist into a pilgrim who does get beyond the borders of New Spain, even if it is only to another administrative center, Manila, in Spain’s empire. See *Imagined Communities*, 47–65.
10. Lizardi, *El periquillo sarniento*, 319.
11. Lizardi, *El periquillo sarniento*, 379–80.

12. Lizardi, *El periquillo sarniento*, 379–80.
13. Lizardi, *El periquillo sarniento*, 377.
14. Lizardi, *The Mangy Parrot*, 484–85.
15. Alamán, *Semblanzas e ideario*, 45, 166.
16. For biographical information on Payno and discussions of his novels see Bell, “Mexico,” 382; Brushwood, *Mexico in Its Novel*, 73–74; Glantz, *Del fistol a la linterna*; González, *Trayectoria de la novela en México*, 42; Martínez, *La expresión nacional*, 291–94; Millan, *Literatura mexicana*, 179–81; Peña, *History of Mexican Literature*, 307–9.
17. When the liberals won the War of the Reform in 1861, Altamirano was elected to the Congress of the Union and opposed an amnesty, demanding the heads of conservatives and liberal “traitors” like Payno, whom he mentioned by name. Peña, *History of Mexican Literature*, 269.
18. Brushwood, *Mexico in Its Novel*, 92–93.
19. For biographical information on Inclán, see Bell, “Mexico,” 382; Benitez-Rojo, “The Nineteenth-Century Spanish American Novel,” 462; Brushwood, *Mexico in Its Novel*, 92–93.
20. Inclán, *Astucia*, 1:100.
21. Inclán, *Astucia*, 1:386.
22. Inclán, *Astucia*, 1:165–67.
23. Inclán, *Astucia*, 3:122.
24. Inclán, *Astucia*, 3:123.
25. Inclán, *Astucia*, 1:387–88.
26. Inclán, *Astucia*, 1:414–15.
27. Inclán, *Astucia*, 1:191.
28. Inclán, *Astucia*, 1:351.
29. Inclán, *Astucia*, 2:451.
30. For biographical information on Altamirano see Bell, “Mexico,” 384–96; Brushwood, *Mexico in Its Novel*, 94–95, 101–4; Franco, *Spanish American Literature*, 70–73; González, *Trayectoria de la novela mexicana*, 45–47; Martínez, *La expresión nacional*, 145–202; Millan, *Literatura mexicana*, 145–46, 190–92; Peña, *History of Mexican Literature*, 311–13; Peña, *Novelas y novelistas mexicana*, 69–81; Read, *The Mexican Historical Novel*, 159–77.
31. Quoted in Franco, *Spanish American Literature*, 72; J. Lloyd Read, *The Mexican Historical Novel*, 173–74.
32. For one of the first comparative discussions of the bandit in *El Zarco* and *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, see Salvador Ortiz Vidales, *Los bandidos en la literatura mexicana*.
33. Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit*, 57–59.
34. Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit*, 56.

35. Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit*, 149–52.
36. Franco, *Plotting Women*, xviii–xix; Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 9–11.
37. See also Margarita Vargas's excellent and detailed discussion of gender domination and Altamirano's representations of Manuela and Pilar in *El Zarco*. Vargas, "Romanticism."
38. Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit*, 30–31.
39. Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit*, 103–4, 114.
40. Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit*, 122.
41. Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit*, 99.
42. Altamirano, *El Zarco, the Bandit*, 160.
43. Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, 5:391–92, 1:xvi.
44. Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, 4:164.
45. Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, 1:200–201.
46. Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, 3:185.
47. Payno, *Los bandidos de Río Frío*, 1:115.

4. With Her Pistols in Her Holster

1. Custodio, *El corrido popular mexicano*; María y Campos, *La Revolución Mexicana*, vol. 1; Maganda, *Corridos y cantares*; Mendoza, *El corrido mexicano*; Mendoza, *El corrido de la Revolución Mexicana*; Mendoza, *Lírica narrativa de México*; Mendoza, *Glosas y decimas de México*; Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido*; Tinker, *Corridos and Calaveras*; Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*. Also see prints reproduced in Frank, *Posada's Broadside*s; and in R. Tyler, *Posada's Mexico*.
2. Frank, *Posada's Broadside*s, 9; R. Tyler, *Posada's Mexico*, 12.
3. Tinker, *Corridos and Calaveras*, 15–16.
4. Charlot, "José Guadalupe and His Successors," 34.
5. Mendoza, *El corrido mexicano*, ix; Tinker, *Corridos and Calaveras*, 8–9; Custodio, *El corrido popular mexicano*, 16; Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido*, 8.
6. Custodio, *El corrido popular mexicano*, viii; Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 58; Tinker, *Corridos and Calaveras*, 10.
7. Tinker, *Corridos and Calaveras*, 9.
8. "Corrido de Santanón," in Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, 222–24.
9. "Corrido de Macario Romero," in Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares, y corridos mexicanos*, 314–17.
10. Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*.
11. Pablos, *Women in Mexico*, 74–75.
12. Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City*.
13. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*, 69.

14. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*, xix.
15. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender*, 14.
16. Kooistra, *Criminals as Heroes*, 10.
17. Piccato, “Cuidado con los Rateros,” 237–39.
18. Giron, *Heraclio Bernal*, 128.
19. Bulnes, *The Truth about Mexico*, 21.
20. Katz, *Pancho Villa*, 75.
21. María y Campos, *La Revolución Mexicana*, 1:348–50; Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido*, 258–65.
22. “Pormenores del entierro de Emiliano Zapata,” in Giménez, *Así cantaban la Revolución*, 193.
23. “Corrido de Carlos Coronado,” in Mendoza, *El corrido mexicano*, 192–98. This corrido was originally published by Eduardo Guerrero as a broadsheet (n.d.). *Ibid.*, 196–98.
24. The precise age of this corrido is disputed. John and Ruby Lomax, who discovered it in 1939, date it to 1841 based on the date given in the opening stanza. Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido*, 14. The same ballad also appeared in Gustavo Duran’s 1942 study, *Fourteen Traditional Spanish Songs from Texas*, under the title “Corrido de la muerte de Leandro Rivera,” and the opening stanza dates it to 1881. Mendoza, *Lírica narrativa de México*, 229–30. Mendoza published yet another “Corrido de Rivera,” which originated from Nuevo León and can be traced definitively to 1909. However, this version is completely different in its lyric and details, nor does it identify the date of the event it recounts. Mendoza, *Lírica narrativa de México*, 228–29.
25. “Corrido de Leandro Rivera,” in Simmons, *The Mexican Corrido*, 14–15.
26. Rodríguez, “El Padre Jarauta,” 37–43.
27. “La Gente de Valenciana,” in Mendoza, *Glosas y decimas de México*, 199–201.
28. “La Gente de Valenciana.”
29. See the reproduction of the Vanegas Arroyo broadsheet, illustrated by Manuel Manilla, in R. Tyler, *Posada’s Mexico*, 149; Frank, *Posada’s Broadsheets*, 81–84; Mendoza, *El corrido mexicano*, 176.
30. “Corrido de Macario Romero,” in Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares, y corridos mexicanos*, 314–17.
31. “Corrido de La Carambada,” in Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, 162.
32. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 8.
33. Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, 162.
34. “Corrido de Benito Canales,” in Mendoza, *Lírica narrativa de México*, 188–90.

35. “Corrido de Benito Canales.”
36. “Corrido de Martín Herrera,” in Mendoza, *Lírica narrativa de México*, 210–11.
37. This corrido was printed by Vanegas Arroyo in 1905 and was illustrated by José Guadalupe Posada. It is reproduced in R. Tyler, *Posada’s Mexico*, 148; see also Mendoza, *Lírica narrativa de México*, 212–13.
38. “Corrido de Guadalupe Pantoja,” in Mendoza, *Lírica narrativa de México*, 212–13.
39. Giron, *Heraclio Bernal*, 141, 149.
40. Marín, ¡*Aquí está Heraclio Bernal!* 26–27.
41. Giron, *Heraclio Bernal*, 33–46, 64–88.
42. This corrido was printed as a broadsheet by Vanegas Arroyo and illustrated by José Guadalupe Posada; it is reproduced in R. Tyler, *Posada’s Mexico*, 146; see also Giron, *Heraclio Bernal*, 97; and María y Campos, *La Revolución Mexicana*, 1:94–95.
43. Giron, *Heraclio Bernal*, 91–101.
44. Giron, *Heraclio Bernal*, 91–101.
45. Giron, *Heraclio Bernal*, 91–101.
46. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 95.
47. Quiros, *El bandolerismo*, 347.
48. “Corrido de Chucho el Roto,” in Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, 266; see also Custodio, *El corrido popular mexicano*, 140–41.
49. *Chucho el Roto, o la nobleza de un bandido mexicano*, 68–71.
50. Quiros, *El bandolerismo*, 351.
51. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 44.
52. Quiros, *El bandolerismo*, 355.
53. Quiros, *El bandolerismo*, 355.
54. This corrido was printed as a broadsheet by Vanegas Arroyo in 1904 and illustrated by José Guadalupe Posada. It is reproduced in R. Tyler, *Posada’s Mexico*, 160. See also María y Campos, *La Revolución Mexicana*, 1:104–6.
55. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 133.
56. “Corrido de los rurales,” in Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, 244–45; María y Campos, *La Revolución Mexicana*, 1:91–92.
57. “Marcha dedicada a los valientes rurales,” in María y Campos, *La Revolución Mexicana*, 1:91–92.
58. See Vanderwood, *Power of God*.
59. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 102.
60. *El imparcial*, February 24, 1911.
61. *El imparcial*, January 22, 1911; Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 102.

62. “Corrido de la vida de Santanón,” printed as a broadsheet by Vanegas Arroyo and illustrated by José Guadalupe Posada. It is reproduced in Frank, *Posada’s Broadsheets*, 104.

63. “Corrido de Santanón,” in Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, 222–24.

5. Survival of the Fittest

1. Piccato, “*Cuidado con los Rateros*,” 234, 237.
2. Robert Buffington and William French, “The Culture of Modernity,” in Meyer and Beezley, *Oxford History of Mexico*, 406.
3. Mexico, Ministerio Público, Procurador de Justicia del Distrito Federal, *Cuadros estadísticos*, 6–13.
4. Procurador de Justicia del Distrito Federal, *Cuadros estadísticos*, 13–16.
5. Procurador de Justicia del Distrito Federal, *Cuadros estadísticos*, 19.
6. Hale, *Transformation of Liberalism*, 216–21.
7. Weiner, “Battle for Survival.”
8. Hale, *Transformation of Liberalism*, 206.
9. Weiner, “Battle for Survival,” 647.
10. Weiner, “Battle for Survival,” 646.
11. Weiner, “Battle for Survival,” 647–52.
12. Gould, *Ever since Darwin*, 216–24.
13. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 43–51.
14. Guerrero, *La genesis del crimen en México*, 184–236.
15. Huitzilopochtli was the main deity to whom pre-conquest Aztecs offered their human sacrifices. Guerrero, *La genesis del crimen en México*, 235, 247.
16. Gould, *Ever since Darwin*, 224–25.
17. Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México*, 10.
18. Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México*, 37–55.
19. Weiner, “Battle for Survival,” 666–67.
20. Johns, *The City of Mexico*, 72.
21. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 97.
22. Mayer, *Mexico as It Was and as It Is*, 169; Mason, *Pictures of a Life*, 183.
23. Johns, *The City of Mexico*, 73.
24. Piccato, “*Cuidado con los Rateros*,” 246.
25. Santa Ana, *Canciones, cantares y corridos mexicanos*, 224–26.
26. Castillo, “Prensa, poder, y criminalidad.”
27. Piccato, “El Chalequero.”
28. Ridge, *Vida de Joaquín Murrieta*.
29. I. Paz, *Joaquín Murrieta*.
30. Ridge, *Vida de Joaquín Murrieta*, 14–15.

31. *Chucho el Roto, o la nobleza de un bandido mexicano*, 5–6.
32. *El imparcial*, January 31, 1911.
33. “Message of President Díaz to the Twenty-fifth Congress, second session, April 1, 1911,” enclosed in the report of the American Ambassador to the Secretary of State, April 5, 1911, in U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1911, 445–47.
34. Wilfred Bonney, U.S. consul in San Luis Potosí, to the Secretary of State, May 4, 1911, in U.S. Department of State, *Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910–1940*, Record Group 59, Series 812, file 1774.
35. *El imparcial*, June 20, 1911; *Mexican Herald*, August 4, 1911; “Acuerdo de los Principales Jefes del Ejército Libertador Apoyando el Plan de San Luis Potosí,” in González Ramírez, *Planes políticos y otros documentos*, 54.
36. Popoca y Palacios, *Historia del bandalismo*, 92–96.
37. O’Shaughnessy, *Diplomatic Days*, 137.
38. M. Anderson, “‘What’s to Be Done with ’Em?’” 26.
39. O’Shaughnessy, *Diplomatic Days*, 55, 101, 131.
40. Brunk, “‘Sad Situation,’” 334–37, 344.
41. Krause, *Mexico*, 274–78.
42. Popoca y Palacios, *Historia del bandalismo*, 77–90.
43. Zapata, “A Todos los Pueblos en General,” 58–59.
44. O’Shaughnessy, *Diplomatic Days*, 245.
45. Katz, *Secret War in Mexico*, 119; Raat, *Mexico and the United States*, 108; Gilderhus, *Diplomacy and Revolution*, 8–9.
46. Eisenhower, *Intervention!* 32–33.
47. Katz, *Pancho Villa*, 2–8, 74.
48. Katz, *Pancho Villa*, 206.
49. Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, 122–23.
50. O’Shaughnessy, *A Diplomat’s Wife*, 90, 105, 159, 237.
51. Katz, *Pancho Villa*, 466.
52. Carranza, “Informe de C. Venustiano Carranza,” 233.
53. “Corrido de Chávez García, 1919,” and “El Chivo Encantado, 1918,” in Flores, *Corridos de la Revolución Mexicana*, 184–87, 236–37.
54. Katz, *Pancho Villa*, 631.
55. M. Anderson, “‘What’s to Be Done with ’Em?’” 69.
56. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2:370.
57. Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, 331–70.
58. “Corrido de Emiliano Zapata,” in Maganda, *Corridos y cantares*, 102–8.
59. Katz, *Pancho Villa*, 719–71.
60. Mendoza, *El corrido de la Revolución Mexicana*, 114–18.

Notes to pages 201–203

61. “Corrido de Pancho Villa,” in Maganda, *Corridos y cantares*, 27–28.
62. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2:494.
63. Benjamin, *La Revolución*, 37.
64. Ana Castillo, “Introduction. *The Underdogs*: A Revolutionary Glimpse at a Mexican Novel,” in Azuela, *The Underdogs*, xi.
65. Azuela, *The Underdogs*, 158–61.

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