

BIOGRAPHIES

VENUSTIANO CARRANZA (1859 - 1920)

Carranza was an aristocrat, born into a wealthy family of cattle ranchers in the northern state of Coahuila. As a young man, Carranza served as a senator during the Porfiriato. However, after being slighted by Díaz during a campaign for the governorship of his home state, Carranza joined Madero in San Antonio when Madero issued the revolutionary Plan of San Luis Potosí. In exchange, Madero named Carranza the provisional governor and commander-in-chief of Coahuila. Unlike Villa and Obregón, Carranza was never a frontline leader and left much of the responsibilities of the battlefield to others.

When Huerta overthrew Madero, Carranza declared a state of rebellion against the federal government, calling for a return to the Constitution of 1857 and promising liberal ideals like freedom of speech and the right to bear arms, without any ention of labor and land reform—which Carranza considered to be unrealistic and unnecessarily divisive. For these reasons, Carranza has been labeled a constitutionalist.

Carranza served as the elected president of Mexico from 1917 to 1920, when he was assassinated in Tlaxcalontongo.

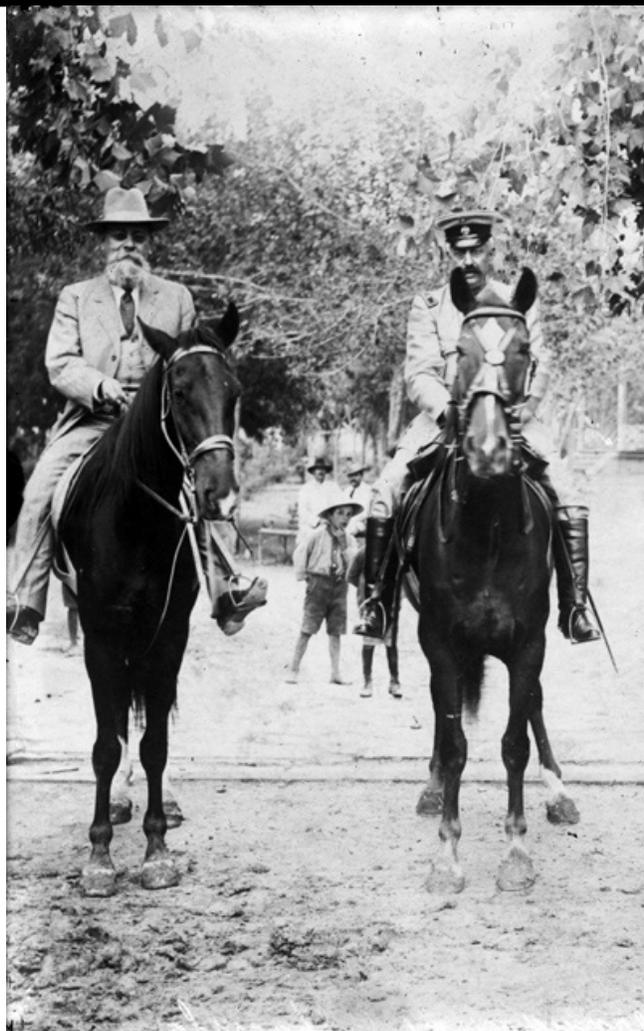


Image: Provided by Fototeca-INAH. Núm. 10996 |
“Aureliano Blanquet con Venustian Carranza montado a caballo. ”

PORFIRIO DÍAZ (1830 - 1915)

Porfirio Díaz served seven terms as President of Mexico, periodically from 1876 until 1911 when he was overthrown in the first stage of the Revolution. Díaz was born the eldest son of a Oaxacan middle-class, mestizo family. As a young man, Díaz was a Liberal supporter of Benito Juárez during the nineteenth-century struggles against Conservative anti-reform policies. The Liberals won the War of Reform by 1861, but Conservatives induced the French intervention, which installed the archduke Maximilian of Hapsburg as emperor of Mexico. Díaz fiercely resisted the French monarchy during the 1860s and challenged Juárez and the Liberals for the presidency of Mexico after Juárez ousted the French. In 1876, Díaz defeated federal troops and declared himself President.

While Díaz had cemented his base of support on the principle of no-reelection, his guiding principles apparently changed when he assumed the presidency. He modified Mexico's constitution in 1884 to eliminate term limits. He then ruled Mexico as a dictator until Madero's supporters initiated the Revolution and won the famed Battle of Juárez in 1911.

The Porfiriato was marked by Díaz's accomplishments in expanding the industrial sector, modernizing the economy, and building thousands of miles of railroad track. However, Díaz's policies primarily benefitted the wealthy, exacerbating the gap between the poor and the rich. During the Porfiriato, Díaz reportedly powdered his skin white to appear less and less mestizo. After resigning from the presidency in 1911, Díaz set sail for Europe as throngs of Mexicans mocked and cheered his departure.



Image: Provided courtesy of Nevada Observer; identified as in public domain by Wikipedia. "Photograph of young Porfirio Díaz."

VICTORIANO HUERTA (1845 - 1916)

Referred to as El Usurpador (“the usurper”), Victoriano Huerta is near universally considered a traitor to the Mexican Revolution. Huerta, born in Jalisco, built a notable military career under Díaz, campaigning against the Yaqui and Maya rebels in Sonora and Yucatan.

Huerta aided in the war against Díaz and defended Madero during the early days of the Madero presidency until U.S. Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson worked with Huerta to orchestrate a coup. During the coup, Madero and his Vice President were arrested and murdered on the way to the penitentiary. Huerta became the widely-reviled President of Mexico. Huerta’s presidency was short-lived, as the combined forces of Carranza, Obregón, and Villa, defeated federal troops and forced Huerta into exile, where he died of cirrhosis of the liver.



Image: Victoriano Huerta. Identified as public domain by Wikipedia.

FRANCISCO I. MADERO (1873 - 1913)

Francisco Madero, who was born to one of the wealthiest families in Mexico, studied in the U.S. and grew up idolizing Benito Juárez. In 1910, he was imprisoned for writing *La sucesión presidencial en 1910*, sharply criticizing Díaz's perpetual rule of Mexico. Madero escaped from prison and fled to San Antonio, Texas, where he wrote the Plan de San Luis Potosí, calling for Revolution. Madero's forces, commanded by Villa and Orozco, defeated federal troops at the Battle of Juárez in 1911, causing Díaz's resignation and securing a Madero presidency. Madero's short term as President failed to satisfy competing reformers, like Zapata, who demanded the immediate restoration of indigenous lands. Madero also lacked support of the U.S. Department of State, which worked through its Ambassador, Henry Lane Wilson, to orchestrate a military coup that would unseat Madero and install Victoriano Huerta as President. Madero was arrested and murdered during the coup.

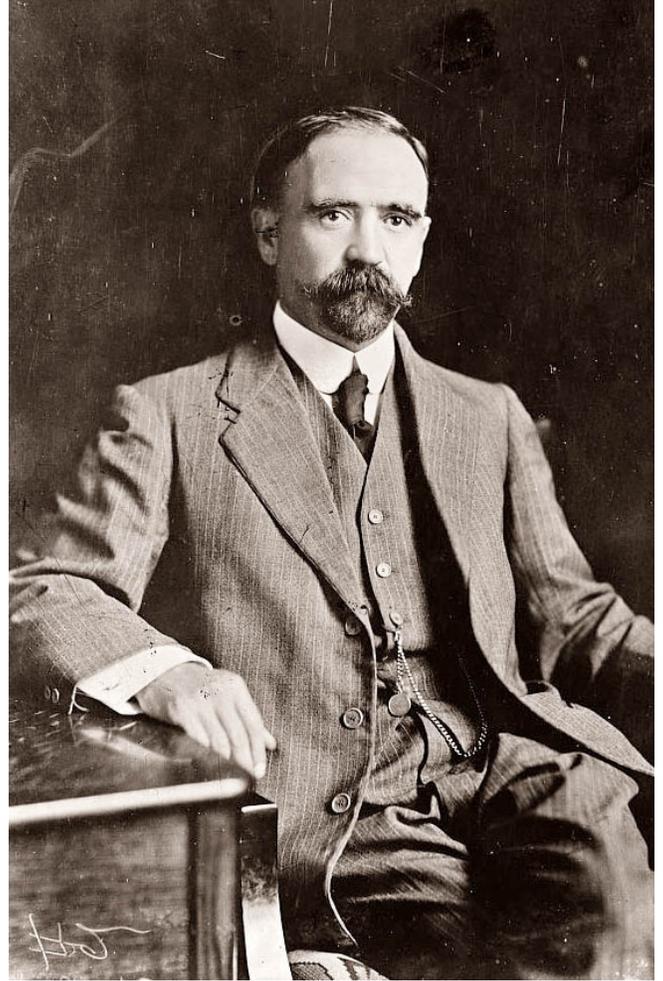


Image: Francisco I. Madero. Identified as public domain by Wikipedia.

ÁLVARO OBREGÓN (1880 - 1928)

If Villa was the greatest warrior of the revolution, Obregón was the greatest general. One of eighteen children from a middle-class Sonoran family, Obregón came to prominence during the second phase of the revolution as a skilled battlefield tactician and commander in the rebellion against Huerta. At the Aquascalientes Convention, Obregón sided with Carranza's constitutionalist agenda, articulated in the Plan of Guadalupe, and rejected the competing Zapatista Plan of Ayala, which called for wide-ranging and immediate social reform, including land reform. This led to the legendary Battle of Celaya in 1915, where Obregón's carefully nested machineguns massacred much of Villa's Division of the North, in a battle in which Obregón personally lost an arm.

After Carranza's death, Obregón served as president of Mexico from 1920-1924. Obregón was an extremely charismatic consensus-builder who knew how to offer the right things to the right people. He ultimately used his connections to wind down the violence, sign a peace treaty with Villa, and institutionalize Mexico. Most importantly, Obregón included agrarian reform within his framework for national reconstruction.



Image: Alvaro Obregón. Identified as public domain by Wikipedia.

PASCUAL OROZCO (1882 - 1915)

Pascual Orozco was born to a middle-class family in Chihuahua in 1882. When Madero declared a Revolution against the Porfiriato, Orozco joined Madero's army. Despite lacking any military experience, Orozco proved to be a formidable commander, ultimately seizing the city of Juárez in a battle that turned out to be decisive in the fight against Díaz. Orozco eventually rebelled against Madero, either because Madero failed to uphold the Plan de San Luis Potosi, or simply because Madero named Carranza, rather than Orozco, to a desired cabinet post. When Huerta assumed the presidency, Orozco joined him as a general in the federal army. Huerta and Orozco were both later exiled by the armies of Carranza, Obregón, and Villa.



Image: Pascual Orozco. Identified as public domain by Wikipedia.

FRANCISCO VILLA (1878 - 1923)

A common bandit from the northern state of Durango, Pancho Villa was a man of contradictions. He has been portrayed as uneducated and coarse, yet he was a military genius who had a major impact on the course of Mexican history during the entire revolutionary period.

Villa joined Madero in the early days of the revolution, winning a critical battle in Juárez that ultimately secured Díaz's defeat and Madero's presidency. After Madero was betrayed by Huerta, Villa's widely feared Division of the North won battles in Zacatecas and Ojinaga, contributing to Huerta's resignation in 1914.

After the Aquascalientes Convention, Villa allied with Zapata in rebellion against Carranza's government. In one of the most well-known battles of the revolution, Villa was defeated by Obregón's machineguns at the Battle of Celaya in 1915.

Angered by U.S. support for his opponents, Villa turned his attention to Columbus, New Mexico, crossing the border, killing nineteen New Mexicans, and leaving the town in flames. The U.S. would use this invasion to justify General Pershing's "expedition" into Mexico to search for Villa. Never located by U.S. troops, Villa would eventually sign a peace agreement with then president Obregón. On July 20, 1923, Villa was assassinated in his home in Chihuahua.

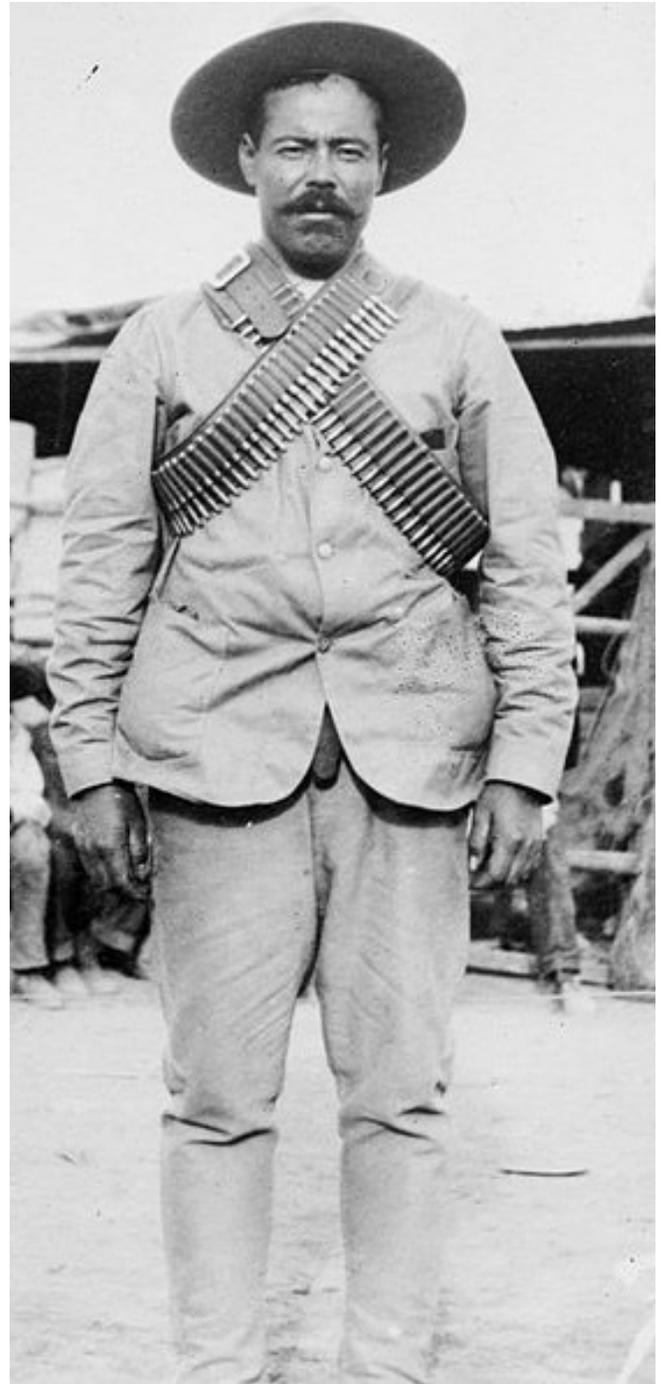


Image: Francisco "Pancho" Villa (1877–1923), Mexican revolutionary general, wearing bandoliers in front of an insurgent camp. Identified as public domain by Wikipedia.

EMILIANO ZAPATA (1879 - 1919)

Zapata was born to a peasant family in Morelos in 1879. Today, he remains a legend within and outside of Mexico. While he was not particularly involved in the fight against Díaz, he put immense pressure on Madero and all of the revolutionary leaders to return land to the people that had been stolen during the Porfiriato. Disenchanted with Madero's slow moving reforms in 1911, Zapata drafted the Plan of Ayala, calling for comprehensive and immediate land reform. His rebellion in the south was critical in the defeat of both Madero and later, Huerta.

After Huerta's defeat, Zapatista delegates made a scene at the Aguascalientes Convention, criticizing the pretext of the revolution, refusing to sign the Mexican flag with the other delegates, calling attention to the oppression of indigenous peoples, and pointing out that without land, abstract concepts important to the constitutionalists, like "effective suffrage" and "no re-election" meant nothing to the vast majority of Mexicans. Zapata allied with Villa and rebelled against Carranza's government until he was assassinated in cold blood on April 10, 1919.



Image: Provided by Fototeca-INAH. Núm. 33343 | “ Emiliano Zapata en su cuartel de Cuernavaca, retrato ”