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A New Factor in American Destiny: Visions of Porfirio Díaz and the Politics of "Logical Paternalism"

JASON RUIZ

> Now, one president for twenty years. Some will say that this is not republican. Possibly not, but it is business.
>
> —Charles F. Lummis (1902)

For an elderly foreign dictator, Porfirio Díaz was tremendously popular with American travelers and observers in the wake of the Spanish-American War. As the United States grappled with its growing power in the hemisphere, well-to-do Americans traveling in Mexico clamored to meet the President and Carmen, his sophisticated young wife.[1] The presidential couple indulged a surprising number of meeting requests, and their lucky American guests described meeting Díaz with an almost palpable sense of awe. "As you wait in the anteroom to meet the president," wrote one American supporter, "you are about to meet what is probably the greatest figure—as it is unquestionably the most romantic—in the world's politics this half century . . . and before you know it you are seated vis-à-vis with the creator of a new factor in American destiny."[2] Those who could not secure a personal audience with "the foremost man of the American hemisphere" sent home postcards featuring official-looking photographs of the President or pasted *cartes-de-visite* in scrapbooks commemorating their journey to a "strange land near home," as one primer for American schoolchildren called Mexico in 1902.[3] Some Americans wrote travelogues crediting him with the amazing transformation of Mexico from a dangerous and unknown backwater into a country that closely resembled American prescriptions for a progressive, modern "sister republic." Newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* called him a "hero of peace" or the "lion-hearted son" of Mexico. In other words, Díaz had star power.

It is well established that Díaz opened Mexico to foreign investment, creating a move towards modernization that depended on US and European firms to finance the mines, heavy industry, and thousands of miles of railroad tracks that brought disparate parts of the nation together and linked Mexico with the United States. Gilbert G. González has referred to the *Porfiriato* (the era of Díaz, 1876–1911) as a period of "economic conquest," characterized by the massive movement of US capital into Mexico—more than $1 billion by the time that Díaz was exiled in 1911—and an emerging sense in the United States that Mexico, a nation with dazzling natural resources and a large, exploitable labor force, was an open field for economic, if not territorial, expansionism.[4] In this essay, I contend that American proponents of the Díaz regime played a crucial but overlooked role in popularizing the image of Mexico as an object of the cultural and economic forms of US imperialism that flourished around 1898. Specifically, I turn to the image of Díaz himself as a marker of imperialist relations between the United States and Mexico, for he embodied both an idealized colonial leader (and father) who could facilitate the economic takeover of the country and, crucially, the mestizo subject whose modernization would ensure the political stability of the nation. As I will show, travelogue writers and other American makers of travel discourse popularized a view of Díaz that reflected Progressive Era ideas about "political manhood."

The circulation of Díaz's image in American popular culture provides a rich case study for understanding Mexico's relationship to "the American 1898" and, more broadly, the cultural dimensions of US economic and political expansionism.[5] Though Mexico's status as an object of US imperialism has been mostly eclipsed in the American scholarly imagination by the acquisition of Spain's last remaining imperial "possessions," many Americans saw Mexico as a logical place to revive the North American frontier, a factor in American destiny and character whose "closure" Frederick Jackson Turner famously lamented in 1893. Travelers who were sympathetic to the politics of economic conquest developed patterns of representation, explored below, that constructed Díaz and his wife as ideal colonial subjects by translating and adapting the Díaz myth—already dominant in Mexican historiography and popular culture—for American audiences. My task here is not to recount the intricacies of US–Mexican relations during the Porfiriato but to understand how American visions of Mexico, especially those created by the writers of travelogues and magazine and newspaper accounts of the President, used Díaz's image to promote the cultural politics of economic conquest. Although "colonies" of US citizens thrived in Mexico City and other parts of the country throughout the Porfiriato, this essay is concerned instead with Americans who traveled for short periods of time and then reflected upon their journeys in published works. These short-term visitors came from disparate parts of the United States, but all were white and would have considered themselves middle-class. Many became enthralled with Porfirio Díaz.

Díaz's image appeared in a wide variety of popular media in the United States, including postcards and *cartes-de-visite,* magic lantern and stereoscope slides, brochures promoting tourism on the new train routes, and newspaper and magazine writing. Perhaps no popular form was better suited to Porfirian boosterism than the travelogue, a medium that allowed its writer to construct his or her personal vision of Díaz's Mexico, still a relatively unknown country to most Americans despite its close proximity to the United States. Formerly the domain of the wealthy or very adventurous, Mexico was a newly accessible destination for the growing American middle class who both produced and consumed the hundreds of travelogues published during the Porfiriato. Travelogues from this period barely resemble either the contemporary guidebook, which provides practical information for the traveler in addition to commentary on the history and culture of the place, or the travel memoir, which tends to focus on the traveler's self-discovery rather than providing a real understanding of the destination's culture and politics. Instead, historical travelogues blended memoir, photography, political commentary, and reportage, all presented in an accessible and entertaining manner.

A veritable boom in Mexican travelogue writing occurred in the United States after workers linked US and Mexican rail lines in the 1880s and accelerated railroad construction in the first decade of the twentieth century, as Americans became more economically invested in Mexico and curious about the roles that their government and capital might play in shaping its future. The year 1898 marks a turning point in representational practices associated with Mexico, as the question of American empire became increasingly important to US citizens abroad. These travelogues inherited much from older forms of imperialist travel writing, from Bartolomé de las Casas to Alexander von Humboldt, but also developed subtler forms of intervention in response to new forms of "soft" or "informal" empire.[6] Their ideas about informal imperialism were also consistently projected onto the image of Mexico's President.

Díaz's portrait graced the frontispieces to hundreds of travelogues during the Porfiriato, from woodcuts presenting him as a dashing young soldier to photographs depicting the President, in military regalia, as an august elder statesman. In 1897, at the apex of the Porfiriato, Marie Robinson Wright dedicated *Picturesque Mexico,* a large and lavish book of photographs, "to Señor General Don Porfirio Díaz, the illustrious President of Mexico, whose intrepid moral character, distinguished statesmanship, and devoted patriotism make him the pride of his country," and claimed that Mexico's "importance as a nation is due to the patriot under whose administration Mexico now flourishes and holds its proud position among the republics of the world." The frontispiece featured a studio photograph of the standing president, clad in military regalia and sporting huge whiskers, looking somber and powerful (*see Figure 1*).

Described as the "most traveled woman in the world," Wright was one of only a handful of American women who built careers as "globetrotters" in the adventuresome (and masculinist) Victorian fashion, writing for the *New York World*

and *National Geographic* and publishing a number of travelogues. According to her obituary in the *New York Times,* Wright had journeyed two thousand miles on mule-back in Mexico and Bolivia. The *Times* also noted that Díaz made her an honorary citizen of Mexico during her travels there. Like many American proponents of the regime, Wright returned the President's affections and explicitly conflated Díaz and the nation. "Díaz's life," she wrote, "has been identified with that of the Mexican republic for the last forty years."[7] Fourteen years later, on the eve of the dictator's flight to France, Wright ironically claimed in another book that, "among the names of the wonder-workers of the world the name Porfirio Diaz will shine and remain imperishable."[8]

Charles F. Lummis, the founder of the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles (now part of the Autry National Center), was one of Díaz's most outspoken supporters in the United States by the late 1890s. A Harvard graduate, Lummis had achieved fame by walking from Ohio to California to accept a position as the first city editor of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1884, the same year that US and Mexican rail lines were linked in El Paso. Los Angeles had a population of just over 12,000 at the time and was experiencing a rapid growth in its Anglo population. The city's romanticized (and recent) Mexican past entranced Lummis, as it did many new arrivals. Just forty years earlier, the city, like all of California, had been part of Mexico, but the cultural politics of Manifest Destiny and white nativism imagined Mexican California as a thing of the past. The city's boosters now saw its future in the ever-growing Anglo community. Lummis, whose job at the *Times* required him to promote white settlement, nonetheless became a proponent of Indian rights, and, perhaps contradictorily, an ardent supporter of Porfirio Díaz.

In *The Awakening of a Nation* (1898), Lummis praised Díaz in a chapter titled simply "The Man." Like many of the Americans who traveled to Mexico during this period, the author simultaneously championed American convictions about democracy and suspended them in his homage to the President. Díaz infamously had the nation's constitution amended to remove all restrictions on reelection and subsequently stayed in office through a combination of manipulation, violence, and savvy political maneuvering. Afraid to upset the delicate balance of friendly political and economic relations across the US–Mexico border or loosen Mexico's seemingly tenuous grasp of modernity, travelogue writers found it extremely difficult to criticize the regime. Writing in 1899, in a magazine that he founded, Lummis described Díaz as "the autocrat of fifteen millions of people—and not merely autocrat but idol. The Czar has no more power; but no czar ever used his power so wisely and none was ever so beloved."[9] Despite the fact that Díaz faced constant criticism, Lummis even claimed that there was no opposition to Díaz in Mexico, reinforcing the common assumption among American promoters and speculators that Mexico's new stability was well worth the suspension of democracy and the squelching of dissent. It wasn't until the publication of *Barbarous Mexico* more than twenty years later that Díaz himself would become closely associated with debt

peonage, the endurance of the hacienda system, the subjugation of the Yaqui and other indigenous groups, and countless wrongs against the people he ruled. Throughout the Porfiriato, however, Americans proved themselves adept at idealizing the Díaz regime at the same time that they promoted Mexico's move towards American political and economic systems.

Even the few observers who were critical of the economic and governance systems that kept the regime afloat could not help but admire the transformation of Mexico under the "great soldier." John Rice, for example, wrote a scathing indictment of debt peonage within the hacienda system in *Mexico: Our Neighbor* (1888). An incensed Rice compared the hacienda to slavery decades before muckraking journalists turned their attentions to President Díaz's role in perpetuating oppressive labor practices.[10] But Rice was hesitant to write anything negative about Díaz, focusing instead on the President's military prowess and concluding that the "democratic oligarchy" that ruled the nation was the only stable form of power in a nation as racially diverse as Mexico.[11] A careful observer of the nation's political economy, Rice would have known that Díaz allied himself with powerful *hacendados* and created policies that expanded the hacienda system despite its apparent contradiction to the ethos and practices of modern capitalism. Nonetheless, he critiqued the hacienda while celebrating the fabulous "progress" of Mexico under Díaz. A heroic-looking line etching of the President in younger days served as the frontispiece to the book.

Newspapers and magazines also expressed deep affection for Díaz throughout the Porfiriato. The *Los Angeles Times* ran dozens of stories from the 1880s to 1911 that glorified the President as modernizer, peacemaker, and plucky bounder who traveled, as one headline read, "from poverty to a palace."[12] The paper published three special sections between 1903 and 1909 dedicated to Mexico's development and the role of US capital in shaping the nation's future. Illustrated with dozens of photographs, each features articles and advertisements emphasizing the opportunities for pleasure and profit available to US citizens in Díaz's Mexico. Even following the President's exile, the *Times* and other papers held firm to the idea that the "Gray Eagle of Mexico" would return and restore order to his country. Coverage of his ceremonious departure from Veracruz in 1911, for example, focused on his dignified appearance, the crowd's apparent love for their deposed leader, and Díaz's prophecy that he would return to and die in Mexico.[13] He never did go back, but after his death in Paris in 1915, the *Los Angeles Times* eulogized him, probably accurately, as "the creator of modern Mexico." Couching its praise for Díaz in anti-revolutionary, anti-socialist, and anti-democratic terms, the paper wrote that "he was a dictator because it would have been folly to intrust [sic] the government to the wobbling masses; he was a great and good President for Mexico because only a spirit and will and a mastery like his could keep Mexico from falling where it has now fallen. . . . Another Diaz—that is what Mexico needs today! But is there another?"[14]

James Creelman's interview with the President from *Pearson's Magazine,* published late in the Porfiriato, endures as one of the most famous representations of Díaz that appeared in the United States before journalists like John Reed and John Kenneth Turner sharply reversed American impressions of Díaz.[15] Creelman was, by then, one of the most famous journalists in the United States, having captured the nation's attention with his daring (and yellow) journalism during the Spanish-American War. Just one month before the Díaz interview, in February of 1908, he published in *Pearson's* a profile of J.P. Morgan, titled "Morgan the Magnificent." Like Marie Robinson Wright, Creelman presented Díaz as the human embodiment of Mexico. "There is not a more romantic or heroic figure in all the world," Creelman claimed, "Nor one more intensely watched by both the friends and foes of democracy, than the soldier-statesman, whose adventurous youth pales the pages of Dumas, and whose iron rule has converted the warring, ignorant, superstitious, and impoverished masses of Mexico . . . into a strong, steady, peaceful, debt-paying, and progressive nation."[16] The words used to describe the nation in this description—*strong, steady, debt-paying, progressive*—might also apply to Díaz himself. Creelman's article famously contained Díaz's announcement that he would not seek another term (a promise that he later reversed), but it also deserves recognition for how well it captures dominant American views of the President during the Porfiriato, as we will see below.

Creelman closed the piece with a statement from US Secretary of State (and former War Secretary) Elihu Root, a lawyer, statesman, public intellectual, and enthusiastic Díaz supporter who would go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1912. Root's description underscored Díaz's popularity outside of Mexico: "It has seemed to me that of all the men now living, General Porfirio Diaz, of Mexico, was the best worth seeing." Root went on to describe Díaz's "commanding character" and "singularly attractive personality," concluding that "as I am neither poet, musician nor Mexican, but only an American who loves justice and liberty and hopes to see their reign among mankind progress and strengthen and become perpetual, I look to Porfirio Diaz, the President of Mexico, as one of the great men to be held up for the hero-worship of mankind."[17] Root helped to improve relations with Latin America during his tenure as Secretary of State, and, like many elites on both sides of the border, saw Díaz as a stabilizing factor necessary for US economic inroads in the resource-rich nation. According to Gilbert G. González, Díaz's receptiveness to foreign investment "presaged the 'globalization' schemes of the late twentieth century sponsored under the mantra of neoliberalism," and Root's hagiographic language probably reflected his interest in opening Mexico to American markets.[18] Creelman provided the necessary medium for these sentiments to reach a popular audience.

Mexico's modernization was a wide-scale social and economic project involving, over several decades, countless members of its national political elite—especially the *cientificos,* a circle of technocratic advisors and ministers who adhered to positivist "scientific politics" and were deeply committed to modernizing the

nation. Some historians argue, for example, that José Yves Limantour, Mexico's Finance Minister from 1893 to the fall of the regime, played a momentous role in the production of the modern Mexican economy. Even so, Creelman, Root, and countless American boosters stubbornly refused to see modernization as a group effort. "Under [Díaz's] stern rule," wrote traveler W.E. Carson, "the progress of Mexico has been marvellous [sic]. The old Mexican cities have suddenly become busy places, with new public buildings, fine shops, asphalted streets, electric lights, electric street cars, and other visible evidence of modern progress."[19] According to Carson and other makers of Mexican travel discourse, "modern progress" could be measured in architectural and infrastructural innovations. Carson called these improvements to the cities—along with new sewers, waterworks, and electrical plants—the "adjuncts to civilization" and credited Díaz's collaboration with foreign investors for such advancements. Thanks to Díaz, he claimed, "men with money are swarming into Mexico from all parts of the world to engage in business."[20] According to the *New York Times,* Carson "saw mainly the bright side of the country and of the life of the people."[21]

As Carson's description suggested, it was not only infrastructural improvements that dazzled travelers and "men with money." Díaz himself was also an attraction. Many of the Americans who wrote about their adventures in Mexico (especially those carrying diplomatic papers) claimed to have personally met Díaz. Wallace Gillpatrick, an American expatriate who wrote for the English-language *Mexican Herald* and published *The Man Who Likes Mexico,* represented his encounter with the President as a celebration of diplomatic relations between their two countries, a moment that echoed the author's frequent references to Mexico as a grateful younger sibling to the United States. A lunch shared with the President and some American friends, for example, provided an opportunity for the author to reflect upon Mexico's debt to the United States. Relating the words of Díaz himself, Gillpatrick claimed that "[h]e said that it was our revolution and achievement that had heartened Mexico to cast off the yoke of Spain; that Mexico's government was modeled, so far as possible, after ours."[22]

Despite the fact that Díaz spoke very little English, travelers found him to be polite and hospitable. They saw his formal but slightly aloof manner as distinctly Mexican and part of his overall charm. Perhaps above all, however, travelers presented the President as a man with an almost religious zeal for his country. "We felt that we were in the presence of a great and holy passion," Gillpatrick wrote, "—the passion of a patriot for his country. . . . [H]is eyes filled with tears as he talked of his hopes for Mexico. But I saw the great compelling motive of his life, his love of country."[23] The trope of patriotism, reinforced by countless photographic illustrations of the President in military regalia, helped to rationalize the Porfiriato for the readers of American travelogues. Díaz was known to be a despot, but patriotism helped to elide any questions about whether he was good for the country.

Travelers who lacked the social connections to meet with the President collected his image in the form of postcards, newspaper clippings, or *cartes-de-visite* (tourist or social cards meant to be collected rather than mailed). While it was common in this period for heads of state to have their images commodified in these ways, the photographic image of Díaz—construed to suggest that he embodied the nation at the intersection of the romantic past and the modern present—took on meanings that went beyond the ordinary. The practices associated with representing Díaz tell an important part of the story of the American fixation with Mexico during the Porfiriato. They offer insight into the ways that the image of one man and his family opened the discursive space for some Americans to imagine Mexico's modernity as a feasible project, one to be facilitated by US capitalist investment south of the border.

Díaz, Manliness, and Civilization: Revising the Official Image

The photographic conventions associated with Díaz were mostly developed on the Mexican side of the border, in a constellation of images that embodied what we might call Díaz's "official image." American travelers and other media makers circulated the official Díaz image ad nauseam but also revised it in a number of important ways. By offering glimpses of Díaz playing with his grandchildren or talking sweetly to his wife, some visitors to Mexico presented a friendlier, warmer President than the stern official image suggested. However, depictions of Díaz as a *masculine* head of state most powerfully illustrate American revisions of the official Díaz image. In magazines and travelogues, Díaz's image appeared alongside countless representations of nameless Mexican Indians and mestizos, described as "small of stature, uneducated, and poverty stricken, but docile, submissive, [and] polite."[24] Indeed, American writers and photographers, especially those working later in the Porfiriato, began to present Porfirio Díaz as an alternative to "deteriorated" Indian and mestizo masculinities. In these new representational patterns, Díaz's masculinity served as both a model for his subjects and a metaphor for Mexico's changing relationship with the United States.

The masculine image of Díaz frequently began with surprisingly candid descriptions of his body. "His countenance was handsome and rather impassive, his dark complexion fresh and sanguine" Gillpatrick enthused in a description of meeting the President. "His hand-shake was firm and cordial and his hand warm and dry, denoting perfect circulation."[25] Upholding the image of Díaz as a model of healthfulness and self-control, scores of Americans like Gillpatrick offered firsthand accounts of the President's physical strength and personal commitment to what Theodore Roosevelt famously called "the strenuous life" in an influential 1899 speech. Even as Díaz neared eighty years of age toward the end of his rule (at least one historian has referred to this period as a "gerontocracy"), they continued to describe him as a physically strong stabilizer for Mexico, one whose vigor and

"rugged endurance" could ensure the continued success of Americans in that nation. "His astounding good health and strong constitution are . . . distinctive of this wonderful leader of men," wrote one biographer of the elderly Díaz in 1910, claiming that "at an age where most people would be incapacitated from work, either through disease or the impairment of some of their faculties, President Diaz attends to his business, takes violent exercise, goes out hunting, endures fatigue, and does a vast amount of work. Undoubtedly his regular and abstemious habits greatly contribute to . . . the result to which we refer."[26] The author went on to describe the President's daily ritual of rising at six, bathing, and beginning work at an early hour—all qualities that he hoped would convince readers that Mexicans were able to follow the rigors of modern life if properly trained. Despite the intense interest in Mexican modernity that travelers espoused, many wondered whether the Mexican people were really ready for modern life. The focus on his personal habits suggested that they had a model in Díaz. "President Diaz should have a long life," Gillpatrick decided. In an interesting rhetorical turn, the author discussed the President's capacity for self care in relation to his racial difference and his status as a metonym for the nation: "He comes from a hardy race and his habits are conducive to longevity. . . . His identity is merged completely with the national life."[27]

Talk of the President's body and health not only offered hope for his continued rule but also connected him to popular discourse about the rugged new brand of politics at play in the United States. Roosevelt became president when William McKinley was assassinated in Buffalo in September of 1901. As Gail Bederman, Kristin L. Hoganson, Kevin P. Murphy, and other historians of the Progressive Era have shown, Roosevelt owed his early political success (he was only forty-two when he became President) at least partly to his self-styling as a rugged frontiersman in the 1880s and his public image of hawkish manliness in the later years of the nineteenth century.[28] Although reared in a privileged Manhattan family, he had fled to the Dakota Territory to recover from the almost simultaneous deaths of his wife and mother in 1884. Refashioning himself as the "Cowboy of the Dakotas" upon his return to public life, Roosevelt established a persona that would influence American conceptions of masculinity and politics for the better part of the early twentieth century. Roosevelt parlayed his history as an Indian hunter and his military prowess against the Spanish at San Juan Hill into political success in the age of American empire. As Bederman argues, Roosevelt's brand of masculinity was intimately linked to the culture of white supremacy at the core of American imperialist thought. "It is of incalculable importance," Roosevelt famously wrote in *The Winning of the West,* his four-volume history of western expansion and the frontier, "that America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races. [29]

Díaz, as a mestizo with an aristocratic air, did not fit very neatly into the racial and political schemas around which Roosevelt's image was built. Mexico was not in

the hands of one of the "dominant world races," but of a man who clearly had mixed indigenous blood. How could Mexico modernize and prosper under a mestizo leader when modernity and state power were, in the American imagination, so intimately linked with whiteness? In order to prop up a mestizo-headed regime—especially to an audience that abhorred the very idea of "race mixing"—many writers attempted to convince their fellow Americans that Díaz, and by extension the mestizo, was a hybrid that manifested the best qualities of the Indian and the Spaniard. Consider, for example, Lummis' physical description of the President:

> A man of five feet eight, erect as the Indian he is disproportionately confounded with, quick as the Iberian that he far more nearly is, a fine agreement of unusual physical strength and still more unusual grace, with the true Indian trunk and the muscular European limbs, Diaz is physically one man in twenty thousand. The...infusion of Indian blood . . . is an inheritance much more visible in his figure than in face. The features and expressions are essentially of Spain; it is only in full repose that the face recalls that certain hauteur and inscrutableness of the first Americans. . . . This man seems to have taken the best from both types.[30]

With his Indian body and Spanish face and limbs, Díaz served as an ideal symbol of not only Mexicanness but of *mestizaje*. It is telling that the author downplayed his indigenous appearance, rendering his Indianness a mostly invisible aspect of his countenance and character, only visible "in full repose." Like many depictions of an admirable, even noble articulation of *mestizaje* like Díaz's, indigeneity is a condition of the blood and the mind, not a threatening phenotype. The conclusion that Díaz could "take the best from both types" exemplified hopes that the mestizo was not the tragic mulatto in the American style, but represented a population whose admixture might be turned to the advantage of aggressively capitalist foreigners. As Thomas Benjamin and Marcial Ocasio-Meléndez have noted, "the mestizo was . . . the protagonist of Mexican progress, and this group's greatest representative was Porfirio Díaz."[31]

To downplay racial difference and emphasize the connections between Roosevelt and his Mexican counterpart, Americans and other foreign travelers sometimes paired the Presidents' images. In *The Maker of Modern Mexico* (1906), her second travelogue celebrating the Díaz regime, British travel writer Ethel Tweedie juxtaposed strikingly similar signed and dated portraits of the presidents in her chapter on the daily life of Díaz (*see Figures 2 and 3*). Each featured a mustachioed and formally dressed head of state.[32] The exposure of Díaz's photograph lightens him considerably, and its soft focus makes him appear closer in age to the American

president. Though the photographs closely resemble one another in terms of composition, the men's faces underscore Tweedie's claim that they were politically similar but possessed opposite personalities. Díaz looks serious and aristocratic in profile, while Roosevelt appears heartier and more approachable. Tweedie claimed in the text that, despite their dissimilar personalities, each man told her that he greatly admired the other. Americans living in Mexico also paired the images of the Presidents, as evidenced by an image of an office at the El Coco rubber plantation taken around 1904. Paired portraits of Roosevelt and Díaz seem to loom over A.A. Morrell posing in his tidy office (*see Figure 4, at upper left*).[33] This image captures the sense that prevailed among Americans doing business in Porfirian Mexico that their efforts to "develop" Mexico's natural resources would benefit, and were sanctioned by, both nations.

In an interesting twist, Creelman even applied some of the tropes associated with Roosevelt's self-styled cowboy image to Díaz. In contrast to the highly formalized conventions of the official Díaz image, Creelman included a series of three casual-looking (though probably quite purposefully staged) snapshots, attributed to Díaz's son, which depicted the President on a hunting expedition in some mountainous terrain.[34] The first depicts Díaz, with rifle, dog, and a few of his companions, in a clearing (*see Figure 5*). The second shows the larger hunting party in front of an open building in which the hanging carcasses of slain deer are clearly visible.[35] In each of these images, the President wears a Victorian hunting costume, replete with a cap and high boots. The third hunting scene reminds the viewer of Díaz's purportedly high level of personal taste and cultivation, for it depicts the President and his companions dining *alfresco* in the forest. Together, these images suggest that Díaz, like Roosevelt, was attuned to the lavish but strenuous life required for turn-of-the-twentieth century political manhood. Lummis, for one, described Díaz as "a real hunter—as frontiersmen count hunters, and not by the category of titled trigger-pullers who butcher tame, fenced game."[36] His sporting life, as depicted by travel writers, was simultaneously aristocratic and masculine (requiring exertion, phallic guns, and killing). Despite offering a rare glimpse of Díaz as a man of leisure, Creelman was careful not to diverge too completely from the official image of the dictator; facing the page that includes the photograph of the hunting party at the table is the full-page photo of "the master of Mexico in his official chair."[37]

The inclusion of these hunting photographs might be read as a response to the US President's self-styling as a sturdy outdoorsman. As Hoganson has argued, the strenuous life that Roosevelt advocated for American men was related to his imperial aspirations and US involvement in Cuba and the Philippines.[38] Díaz had no such goals, but positioning him as an adherent to the strenuous life aligned him with the American President. Writing in another venue, Lummis made an even more explicit connection between the Mexican President's soldierly experience and hyper-masculine American war heroes, including those who were famous for invigorating

masculine ideals in the United States from the Civil War to 1899. "In battle," he wrote, "Díaz showed the directing power of a Grant, with the crusading dash of a Custer, a Roosevelt, or a Funston."[39]

Whether or not styles and tropes employed in the hunting scenes were conscious references to the American President on the parts of Díaz and his advisors, we do know that Díaz publicly and emphatically praised Roosevelt when addressing the controversy over a potential third term for the American President. "I believe that he has thought more of his country than of himself," Díaz told Creelman, "He has done and is doing a great work for the United States, a work that will cause him . . . to be remembered in history as one of the great Presidents. . . . Mankind understands the meaning of his attitude and its bearing upon the future. He stands before the world as a statesman whose victories have been moral victories."[40] This feeling was apparently mutual, as demonstrated in Creelman's 1911 book *Diaz, Master of Mexico.* "The opinion of responsible men everywhere was summed up by President Roosevelt," Creelman claimed, "when he wrote from the White House on March 7, 1908: 'President Diaz is the greatest statesman now living, and he has done for his country what no other living man has done for any other country—which is the supreme test and value of statesmanship.'"[41]

This mutual admiration raises the question of Díaz's status as a mestizo. Although Roosevelt had built his reputation partly on his adventures as a killer of American Indians, Díaz was such a flexible public figure that, even as an Indian-mestizo, he could appropriate some of the tropes associated with Roosevelt's highly cultivated Anglo manliness without erasing his own Indian heritage. This fact helped to rationalize the regime and to distance Díaz from leaders in other former Spanish colonies, such as Emilio Aguinaldo in the Philippines, who American newspapers frequently represented in child-like, feminized terms. But at the same time, the racialized Díaz did not pose a serious threat to American influence in Mexico. While he looked convincingly masculine and authoritarian in Victorian hunting garb, predominant ideas about race in the United States (concerning the supposed inferiority of Mexican culture and character) assumed that he would facilitate rather than prevent economic conquest. This ultimately non-threatening persona allowed the makers of American travel discourse to champion the dictator instead of positioning him as an obstacle to US empire building, as they might have if he had been white.

"Logical Paternalism": Staging the National Family

Like those of her husband, portraits and descriptions of Carmen Díaz, known as "Carmelita," proliferated in American travelogues and magazine writing that appeared throughout the Porfiriato. "Señora Doña Carmen Romero Rubio de Díaz, besides being one of the most beautiful women in Mexico, is the best loved," Wright claimed in *Picturesque Mexico*, where she depicted the first lady as a popular and

glamorous celebrity who loved to receive American visitors.[42] Lummis, in *The Awakening of a Nation,* called her "Carmelita, the idol of Mexico," and included a picture of the First Lady looking sober but pretty in high Victorian garb.[43] Neither Lummis nor any of the Americans who wrote about her mentioned that Carmen Romero Rubio wed Porfirio Díaz when she was seventeen and he, fifty-one. Instead, authors focused on her role as a helpmate to her husband and the most popular woman in the nation. "Gracious and unspoiled, prominent in all benevolences, and a model in the exigent Spanish traditions of the homekeeper," Lummis wrote, "she has won love beyond any woman in Mexican history."[44] Creelman's famous article included a large portrait of Carmen Díaz, in which "the beautiful and stately young wife of President Diaz" appears in a diamond tiara, situated opposite "the powerful and suggestive profile of Mexico's great president" (*see Figure 6*).[45]

Señora Díaz's image also served as the frontispiece to a few travelogues, all written by women who exalted her as the ideal of Mexican womanhood. Harriott Wight Sherratt, from Rockford, Illinois, was one of the women who did so. The entire first page of Sherratt's *Mexican Vistas* (1899) is dedicated to her, clad in black and looking staid, while her husband is relegated to a portrait buried on page 115 of the book. Sherratt's description of Carmen Díaz was glowing, and she used an encounter with the first lady to paint relations between the United States and Mexico in simultaneously patronizing and sororal language:

> The most popular woman in the country is Señora Díaz, the sweet-faced wife of the president. . . . She received us with the most graceful courtesy, paying the greatest compliment possible to pay a stranger by addressing us in our own tongue, and I blushed as I responded to her elegant English, knowing that I could not speak fifty words in her language. Señora Díaz spoke in the kindliest manner of the United States, and I was glad to answer her honestly that we were proud of our young sister republic and anxious to be on sisterly terms with her.[46]

At the same time that Sherratt uses Carmen Díaz's hospitality as a metaphor for US–Mexican relations, she does not claim that the "young sister republic" is as democratic as her own country. The author acknowledges that Mexico is a republic in name only and then, like so many other writers, gratefully credits the current regime for bringing progress to the United States' wayward younger sibling. "He has," she wrote in reference to the President, "given the country railroads, telegraphs, free schools, and libraries."

State portraits have always tended to represent not only the individual leader, but also the nation that he or she is meant to embody. In this respect, American interest in the Díaz family is fairly unexceptional. Nonetheless, during the Porfiriato,

representations of the Díaz family stood not only for Mexico's status as a nation at the cusp of modernity, but also for Mexico's relationship to the United States. "One admires his delightful, lover-like behaviour to his wife, his fatherly goodness to his children, his boyishness with his grandchildren, and his extraordinary power of turning acquaintances into friends, and friends into staunch allies," Tweedie wrote.[47] Americans like Tweedie saw Díaz as a tenderhearted family man, but also used this fatherly trope to construct him as a patriarch who would facilitate rather than defend against American intervention in the life and wellbeing of the *national* family.[48] Representing Porfirio Díaz as a stern but loving father also assuaged American audiences concerned that Mexico was too unruly a place to conduct business, further extending the cultural politics of economic conquest.

Explicitly refuting the notion that Díaz's rule should be called despotism or dictatorship, Charles Lummis described Díaz as a benignly autocratic father. "It is logical paternalism—a scheme frightfully dangerous under a bad father, incalculably beneficial under a good one," he claimed. For Lummis, patriarchal familial relations became a model for ruling Mexico, a nation whose subjects, like children, would thrive under a "strong, heavy fist": "Mexico is . . . free . . . as we are, but less licensed; happy, safe, prosperous under precisely the same system as that by which we administer our own homes—for in the family we are not yet ready to turn our minors over to their own heads and the ward-heeler. And it is proud of the remarkable man who has done what no other ruler of modern times has even dreamed of being able to do, and who still keeps a quiet, steady fist in the waistband of the youngster he has taught to walk."[49] In the author's view, following Darwinian views of culture that were widespread at the time, Díaz was the guardian of a nation that had not yet reached its full maturity. Positioning Díaz in a paternal role (after all, he taught the nation to walk, according to Lummis) meant safety, stability, and prosperity for the nation, just as the family's success was supposed to be guaranteed by a strong and rational father in the dominant worldview of the Progressive Era. It also meant that Díaz, as the nation's patriarch, could facilitate relations between Mexico and its more developed northern neighbor as part of his fatherly duties. This is typical neocolonialist logic, which presumes that outside influence will be heightened if a native leader (read: dictator) will mediate between the outside power and underdeveloped native populations.

With a strong father at the head of the family and nation, Americans were free to admire Carmen Díaz, who neither had any children of her own nor looked the part of a wizened elder, on purely aesthetic terms. Percy F. Martin, a British visitor to Porfirian Mexico and author of exceptionally dry travelogues according to the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books,* was careful not to let Carmelita's description interfere with the paternalistic underpinnings of Díaz's public image: "The President's wife is regarded as the power behind the throne, and as a matter a fact, she very often is. Not so, however, is or ever has been Madame Carmen Romero Rubio Diaz. Possessed of many natural charms and sterling virtues, not the least of these has

been her rigid abstention from interfering with or attempting to influence in any way the public actions of President Porfirio Diaz."[50] Like many American travelogue writers, Martin claimed that the nation's populace was dedicated to the First Lady, but makes it clear that one of her "sterling virtues" is to stay out of the political sphere, unlike the New Women and suffragists of the United States and Great Britain.

Tweedie's chapter about Carmen Díaz, titled "The Influence of a Woman," toes a similar line, relegating the first lady's influence to familial relations. After establishing Carmen as the most educated woman in Mexico and her husband's social superior, the author suggests that her importance to the nation is as a support to her husband: "'I never ask anything about politics or that sort of thing,' she said to me one day. 'If my husband tells me, I know he wants me to know, and if he does not, or seems tired or bothered when he comes in from the Palace, I feel instinctively that something has gone wrong, and the best medicine is change of thought, so we talk of other things.' This shows the wisdom of the woman . . . and she heals as many family breaches in a year as he negotiates affairs of state."[51] In Tweedie's view, Mrs. Díaz's influence was limited to her home and the social scene in Mexico City that so dazzled foreign visitors. While Porfirio Díaz represented a vigorous nation that welcomed the invasion of foreign capital(ists) but maintained its masculine dignity, Carmen Rubio de Díaz stood in for a passive Mexico whose charms were exploitable but merely aesthetic. As a couple, they provided gendered models not only of proper subjecthood, but also of how men and women might differently but ideally acquiesce to economic intervention. Images of the elegant dictator and his charming wife represented for these travelers the articulation of a state power whose autocratic self-styling was exotic to American democratic sensibilities, but nonetheless appealing.

Epilogue: "After Díaz, What?"

This essay has argued that many producers of American travel discourse turned to the image of Porfirio Díaz—an image they imbued with their own conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality—as a powerful symbol of the nation's potential to modernize with the help of US capitalist investment. It is not surprising, then, that many travelogue writers would wonder what would become of the nation when this US-backed dictator died or was ousted by a revolution (since he would probably never step down or acknowledge democratic defeat). Carson, for one, asked the question explicitly: "After Diaz, what?" The author did not worry that Mexicans would remove their leader, suggesting rather ironically that "no prolonged revolution will ever undo the good that Diaz has done." Carson even claimed that nearly all of the nation's revolutionaries had died, leaving no opposition to the regime. But most fascinatingly, he ultimately predicted that Mexico's ongoing stability would result from the threat of US imperialism: "The people have learned the benefits of tranquillity [sic], and they are alive to the most serious danger which

would menace them were there to occur any grave civil strife. Under those circumstances it is practically certain that in the interest of American capital and American residents the United States would occupy and possibly ultimately annex Mexico. This forcible destruction of their national integrity patriotic Mexicans are resolved to prevent; and if for no other reason than this, they will bury the hatchet and continue to support the stable government which will be President Diaz's legacy to the country."[52] Here, then, is another rationale for US empire: American hegemony would be feared by weaker nations, who would choose stability to avoid annexation.

Some writers were less confident that the dictatorship had established a long-lasting precedent for Mexico's "peace and prosperity." "[A] common supposition," wrote Percy F. Martin in 1907, "is that with the disappearance of General Porfirio Diaz, either by reason of his voluntary retirement *or other cause*, the present condition of peace and prosperity must come to an end."[53] Unlike Carson, Martin seemed to anticipate the coming revolution and to suggest that without Díaz at its heart, the nation would revert back to its pre-Porfirian state of chaos and poverty. In his famous interview with journalist James Creelman the following year, Díaz himself said that he had "defended the theory" of democracy but admitted that he had "adopted a patriarchal policy in the actual administration of the nation's affairs."[54] In a shocking reversal, he claimed that his nation was now ready for democracy. "I have waited patiently," Díaz told Creelman, "For the day when the people of the Mexican Republic would be prepared to choose and change their government at every election without danger of armed revolutions and without injury to the national credit or interference with national progress. I believe that day has come."[55] In what followed, Díaz and Creelman provided patronizing depictions of Mexican peoples and their capacities for democracy, reiterating themes of Indian backwardness while at the same time suggesting that the masses had thrived under Díaz's firm hand and his modeling of proper subjecthood. Although Creelman continued to linger upon Mexicans' apparently antagonistic relationship to modernity (he conjured images of their "monstrous hats" and childlike devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe), it appeared that the dictator, satisfied that the nation's modernizing path had been secured by his own antidemocratic practices and fatherly guidance, was now committed to democracy in practice as well as in theory. This added a new dimension to the question of what would come after Díaz. Were Mexicans ready to rule themselves?

The photographs that appeared in the article suggested a burgeoning dynasty. On one page, Díaz appeared in a photograph with one of his daughters and a tiny grandson.[56] The gray-haired dictator looked grandfatherly in a three-piece suit and bowler hat, his hands in his pockets in a rare relaxed moment. His daughter looked serenely down upon the infant. On the opposite page, two more images suggested Díaz's legacy.[57] In the left column, Major Porfirio Díaz, Jr. appeared in full military regalia. He was regally seated in a chair, his sword upon his lap, and looked strikingly like his father, both in physical appearance and in the photographic

conventions that frame him. Even more remarkable is the image of another of the President's grandsons that appeared in the right column. The young Porfirio Díaz III was pictured in military costume complete with shiny knee-length boots and a Roman helmet and armor. (Marie Robinson Wright published a photograph of the same smiling boy in a sailor suit in 1911.)[58] The images of the boy and his father suggest that each had the mettle to sustain the order that the eldest Díaz established more than three decades earlier. The young boy's militaristic image simply echoed those that his father and grandfather had each cultivated for himself, but the overall effect of these three images is telling, for they convey the story of a retiring dictator with at least two generations of progeny to fill his very large shoes. This is a fantasy of the continuation of the logical paternalism with which Porfirio Díaz was associated.

The image of Díaz as a national stabilizer, patriarch, and unproblematic ally came to an abrupt end in the last years of the Porfiriato, as everyday Americans became increasingly aware of and concerned with the human cost of Mexico's apparent progress. In 1909, Carlo de Fornaro, a former journalist and caricaturist who worked in Mexico City's American colony, published a scathing English-language "arraignment" of the regime, indicting the President with evidence ranging from the outrageous behavior of his son-in-law ("a well-known homosexual") to the assassinations of his political adversaries.[59] This author's voice was marginal, however, and his work created only a minor stir, in large part because a New York judge found him guilty of libel against a Mexican politician and sentenced him to one year in a hard labor camp.[60] Activist journalists like John Kenneth Turner and John Reed popularized the image of Díaz-as-tyrant that dramatically countered the benevolent patriarch that had captured the American imagination, so that, by 1911, the representational practices examined in this essay were no longer the dominant ones.[61] These newer perceptions of Díaz—especially those introduced by Turner's famous exposé, *Barbarous Mexico*—have endured, while the quite large body of work that valorized Díaz has all but faded from the popular and scholarly imaginations of the United States, if not from Mexico.



Figure 1.
Wright's frontispiece featured a typical image of Díaz in military regalia (*Picturesque Mexico*).





Figures 2 and 3. Like many of her American counterparts, British traveler Tweedie juxtaposed images of Díaz and Roosevelt (*The Maker of Modern Mexico*).



Figure 4. Portraits of Roosevelt and Díaz are paired, at top left, in the office of A. A. Morrell (Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas).



Figure 5.
The image of Díaz's hunting party would have resonated with Americans' perceptions of their own President and his relationship to civilized manliness (*Pearson's Magazine*).



Figure 6.
Like Wright and other authors, Creelman depicted Madame Díaz as a glamorous and gracious celebrity. Here, due to the composition of the images in Creelman's article, she appears to gaze upon Porfirio Díaz (*Pearson's Magazine*).

Notes

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Usage Note: In order to maintain the historical integrity of quoted material, I do not include the accent mark in Díaz's name where it did not appear in the original sources.

[1] I refer to Fabiana Sebastiana Maria Carmen Romero Rubio y Castelló, the first lady of Mexico, as simply "Carmen" or "Carmelita" in accordance with the custom among Mexican and American observers of Mexico from the Porfiriato to the present.

[2] Charles F. Lummis, *The Awakening of a Nation* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishing, 1898) 103–4. Among Lummis' personal effects archived at the Autry National Center is his cherished personal correspondence with the President.

[3] *Strange Lands Near Home* (Boston: Ginn and Company Publishers, 1902).

[4] *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880–1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

[5] The broader cultural politics of travel to Mexico is examined in my forthcoming book, titled *Americans in the Treasure House: Travel to Mexico in the Popular Imagination of the United States, 1876–1920* and currently under revision.

[6] On older forms of imperialist travel writing, see especially Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995). For an elegant examination of "soft empire" and the politics of representation, see Robert D. Aguirre, *Informal Empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[7] Marie Robinson Wright, *Picturesque Mexico* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1897) 101.

[8] Marie Robinson Wright, *Mexico: A History of its Progress and Development in One Hundred Years* (Philadelphia: George Barrie and Sons, 1911) 144.

[9] Charles Lummis, "The Mexican Wizard," *Land of Sunshine* Vol. 11, No. 6 (Nov. 1899), 309.

[10] John H. Rice, *Mexico: Our Neighbor* (New York: John W. Lovell Co., 1888). "*Peonage,*" wrote Rice, "is very nearly the equivalent of *slavery*, and exists, not by force of law, as formerly, but by the prescriptive claims of the landlord and the helpless ignorance and dependence of the *peon*" (92).

[11] *Ibid.,* 119. Rice concluded that Mexico's only hope for true democracy was to institute an intelligence test.

[12] "From Poverty to a Palace," *Los Angeles Times,* October 6, 1907.

[13] "Gray Eagle of Mexico Sails to Make New Home in Spain," *Los Angeles Times,* June 1, 1911.

[14] "Porfirio Diaz," *Los Angeles Times,* June 3, 1915.

[15] Creelman was a major contributor to the American edition of the magazine. The article did not appear in the original London edition of *Pearson's Magazine.*

[16] *Pearson's Magazine* (March 1908), 232.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] González, 7.

[19] W.E. Carson, *Mexico: Wonderland of the South* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 206.

[20] *Ibid.,* 207.

[21] *New York Times,* July 2, 1916.

[22] *The Man Who Likes Mexico* (New York: Century, 1911) 117.

[23] *Ibid.*, 118.

[24] John H. Rice, *Mexico, Our Neighbor* (New York: John W. Lovell Company, 1888), 24.

[25] Gillpatrick, 111. This is in contrast to depictions of Indians as cold-blooded. "Indian blood must be thin and poor," wrote Tweedie in *The Maker of Mexico,* for I have never shook hands with any native who felt warm—they always seem to be icy and clammy" (294).

[26] Godoy, *Porfirio Diaz, President of Mexico* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1910) 98.

[27] *The Man Who Likes Mexico,* 125.

[28] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Chapter Five. Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Kevin P. Murphy, *Political Manhood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[29] Vol. 3: 45–46, qtd. in Bederman, 182–83.

[30] Charles F. Lummis, *The Awakening of a Nation: Mexico of To-day* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1904) 104–5.

[31] Thomas Benjamin and Marcial Ocasio-Meléndez, "Organizing the Memory of Modern Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 64.2 (1984) 329.

[32] Mrs. (Ethel) Alec-Tweedie, *The Maker of Modern Mexico Porfirio Diaz* (New York: John Lane Company, 1906) 354–55.

[33] Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin. Tabasco Rubber Plantations Photographs, "El Coco" Folder, Photograph #4.

[34] Creelman, James, 240–42.

[35] *Ibid.*, 241.

[36] *The Awakening of a Nation,* 114.

[37] Creelman, 242.

[38] *Fighting for American Manhood,* Chapter Six.

[39] *Land of Sunshine* Vol. 11, No. 6 (Nov. 1899), 310.

[40] 235–36.

[41] James Creelman, Diaz, *Master of Mexico* (New York and London: D. Appleton Company, 1911) 6.

[42] Wright 118.

[43] *The Awakening of a Nation,* 114.

[44] 116.

[45] 257.

[46] Harriott Wight Sherratt, *Mexican Vistas Seen from the Highways and Byways of Travel* (Chicago: Rand, McNally, and Company, 1899) 114. This metaphor of sisterly relations echoes Sherratt's call, in the book's introduction, for greater American interest in Mexico. "I have in these pages . . . endeavored to bring our neighbor over the way a little nearer to us, hoping that we might someday know her better and learn to feel for her the interest of a sympathizing elder sister" (19).

[47] Tweedie 349.

[48] Including, literally, the structure of the family in Mexico. As I argue in my forthcoming book, some Americans in Mexico, especially Protestant missionaries, became increasingly curious and nervous about Mexican familial relations that did not adhere to the standards of the North American nuclear family. Using the Diaz family as a model, these observers advocated for the conversion of the Mexican family. See, for example, James G. Dale, *Mexico and Our Mission* (Lebanon, PA: Sowers Printing Company, 1910).

[49] *The Awakening of a Nation,* 5.

[50] Percy F. Martin, *Mexico of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1907), 64. Book review from January 26, 1907.

[51] *The Maker of Modern Mexico Porfirio Diaz,* 289.

[52] Carson, 207.

[53] *Mexico of the Twentieth Century,* Vol. 1, vii, emphasis mine,

[54] "President Diaz, Hero of the Americas," 237

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] p. 258.

[57] p. 259.

[58] *Mexico: A History of its Progress and Development in One Hundred Years,* 143.

[59] Carlo de Fornaro. *Diaz, Czar of Mexico; an Arraignment* (Philadelphia: International Publishers, 1909).

[60] "Mother Jones Speaks Out for Convicted Caricaturist," *New York Times,* 29 November 1909.

[61] This is despite the fact that some American supporters of Díaz continued to support his regime in retrospect. For example, Creelman's *Porfirio Díaz, Master of Mexico* was published in 1911 (after the start of the Revolution) and presented a view of the dictator that was as glowing as the one that he presented in *Pearson's* in 1908. The book received a favorable review in the *New York Times* (5 March 1911).