

Seminar / DBQ: The Mexican Revolution

What was the significance of the Revolution for contemporaries?



General Emiliano Zapata with staff, 1911. [Library of Congress.](#)

Introduction

The legacies of the Mexican Revolution are many and contested. The disjuncture between the popular promises of the Revolution and the one-party state's attempt to "institutionalize" it has touched off protests, armed uprisings, and social movements for over a century. The meaning of the Mexican Revolution thus remains indeterminate, in flux, and historically contingent: the Revolution has meant different things to different people at different moments in time. What did the Revolution mean at a given moment in time? To whom?

This seminar discussion and DBQ asks these questions about the revolutionaries themselves, exploring the changing and conflicting meanings of the Revolution while it was still an unfolding event. **Drawing on the Plan de San Luis Potosí, the Plan de Ayala, the Constitution of 1917, and photographic materials from the Revolution, you are asked to assess what the Revolution meant to some of its most significant contemporaries: the people who led it, articulated its purpose, and attempted to enshrine it in the law of the land.**

In this seminar/DBQ, you will read and analyze 6 documents:

1. Excerpt from Plan de San Luis Potosí, Francisco I. Madero, 1910
2. Excerpts from Article 1 of the Plan de Ayala, Emiliano Zapata, 1911
3. Articles 6-8 of the Plan de Ayala, Emiliano Zapata, 1911
4. Excerpt of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917
5. Excerpts from Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917
6. Photograph of Francisco (Pancho) Villa and Emiliano Zapata in Mexico City, 1914.

Specific evidence from these documents, as well as your own knowledge of the Mexican Revolution, should be used to support your argument. An organizer is provided at the end of this packet to help you analyze the sources.

Document 1: Excerpt from Plan de San Luis Potosí, Francisco I. Madero, 1910

"For many years profound discontent has been felt throughout the Republic, due to such a system of government, but General Díaz with great cunning and perseverance, has succeeded in annihilating all independent elements, so that it was not possible to organize any sort of movement to take from him the power of which he made such bad use. The evil constantly became worse, and the decided eagerness of General Díaz to impose a successor upon the nations in the person of Mr. Ramon Corral carried that evil to its limit and caused many of us Mexicans, although lacking recognized political standing, since it had been impossible to acquire it during the 36 years of dictatorship, to throw ourselves into the struggle to recover the sovereignty of the people and their rights on purely democratic grounds. . . .

In Mexico, as a democratic Republic, the public power can have no other origin nor other basis than the will of the people, and the latter can not be subordinated to formulas to be executed in a fraudulent manner. . .

For this reason the Mexican people have protested against the illegality of the last election and, desiring to use successively all the recourses offered by the laws of the Republic, in due form asked for the nullification of the election by the Chamber of Deputies, notwithstanding they recognized no legal origin in said body and knew beforehand that, as its members were not the representatives of the people, they would carry out the will of General Diaz, to whom exclusively they owe their investiture.

In such a state of affairs the people, who are the only sovereign, also protested energetically against the election in imposing manifestations in different parts of the Republic; and if the latter were not general throughout the national territory, It was due to the terrible pressure exercised by the Government, which always quenches in blood any democratic manifestation, as happened in Puebla, Vera Cruz, Tlaxcala, and in other places.

But this violent and illegal system can no longer subsist."

Document 2: Excerpts from Article 1 of the Plan de Ayala, Emiliano Zapata, 1911

"Taking into consideration that the Mexican people led by Don Francisco I. Madero went to shed their blood to reconquer liberties and recover their rights which had been trampled on, and for a man to take possession of power, violating the sacred principles which he took an oath to defend under the slogan "Effective Suffrage and No Reelection," outraging thus the faith, the cause, the justice, and the liberties of the people: taking into consideration that that man to whom we refer is Don Francisco I. Madero, the same who initiated the above-cited revolution, who imposed his will and influence as a governing norm on the Provisional Government of the ex-President of the Republic Attorney Francisco L. de Barra [sic], causing with this deed repeated shedding of blood and multiple misfortunes for the fatherland in a manner deceitful and ridiculous, having no intentions other than satisfying his personal ambitions, his boundless instincts as a tyrant, and his profound disrespect for the fulfillment of the

preexisting laws emanating from the immortal code of '57 [Constitution of 1857], written with the revolutionary blood of Ayutla;...

For these considerations we declare the aforementioned Francisco I. Madero inept at realizing the promises of the revolution of which he was the author, because he has betrayed the principles with which he tricked the will of the people and was able to get into power: incapable of governing, because he has no respect for the law and justice of the pueblos, and a traitor to the fatherland, because he is humiliating in blood and fire, Mexicans who want liberties, so as to please the científicos, landlords, and bosses who enslave us, and from today on we begin to continue the revolution begun by him, until we achieve the overthrow of the dictatorial powers which exist."

Document 3: Articles 6-8 of the Plan de Ayala, Emiliano Zapata, 1911

"6. As an additional part of the plan, we invoke, we give notice: that [regarding] the fields, timber, and water which the landlords, científicos, or bosses have usurped, the pueblos or citizens who have the titles corresponding to those properties will immediately enter into possession of that real estate of which they have been despoiled by the bad faith of our oppressors, maintain at any cost with arms in hand the mentioned possession; and the usurpers who consider themselves with a right to them [those properties] will deduce it before the special tribunals which will be established on the triumph of the revolution.

7. In virtue of the fact that the immense majority of Mexican pueblos and citizens are owners of no more than the land they walk on, suffering the horrors of poverty without being able to improve their social condition in any way or to dedicate themselves to Industry or Agriculture, because lands, timber, and water are monopolized in a few hands, for this cause there will be expropriated the third part of those monopolies from the powerful proprietors of them, with prior indemnization, in order that the pueblos and citizens of Mexico may obtain ejidos, colonies, and foundations for pueblos, or fields for sowing or laboring, and the Mexicans' lack of prosperity and well-being may improve in all and for all.

8. [Regarding] The landlords, científicos, or bosses who oppose the present plan directly or indirectly, their goods will be nationalized and the two-third parts which [otherwise would] belong to them will go for indemnizations of war, pensions for widows and orphans of the victims who succumb in the struggle for the present plan."

Document 4: Excerpt of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917

"*Article 27.* Ownership of the lands and waters within the boundaries of the national territory is vested originally in the Nation, which has had, and has, the right to transmit title thereof to private persons, thereby constituting private property.

Private property shall not be expropriated except for reasons of public use and subject to payment of indemnity.

The Nation shall at all times have the right to impose on private property such limitations as the public interest may demand, as well as the right to regulate the utilization of natural resources which are susceptible of appropriation, in order to conserve them and to ensure a more equitable distribution of public wealth. With this end in view, necessary measures shall be taken to divide up large landed estates; to develop small landed holdings in operation; to create new agricultural centers, with necessary lands and waters; to encourage agriculture in general and to prevent the destruction of natural resources, and to protect property from damage to the detriment of society. Centers of population which at present either have no lands or water or which do not possess them in sufficient quantities for the needs of their inhabitants, shall be entitled to grants thereof, which shall be taken from adjacent properties, the rights of small landed holdings in operation being respected at all times."

Document 5: Excerpts from Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917

"*Article 123.* The Congress of the Union, without contravening the following basic principles, shall formulate labor laws which shall apply to:

Workers, day laborers, domestic servants, artisans

(*obreros, jornaleros, empleados domésticos, artesanos*) and in a general way to all labor contracts:

1. The maximum duration of work for one day shall be eight hours.
2. The maximum duration of nightwork shall be seven hours. The following are prohibited: unhealthful or dangerous work by women and by minors under sixteen years of age; industrial nightwork by either of these classes; work by women in commercial establishments after ten o'clock at night and work (of any kind) by persons under sixteen after ten o'clock at night.
3. The use of labor of minors under fourteen years of age is prohibited. Persons above that age and less than sixteen shall have a maximum work day of six hours.
4. For every six days of work a worker must have at least one day of rest.
5. During the three months prior to childbirth, women shall not perform physical labor that requires excessive material effort. In the month following childbirth they shall necessarily enjoy the benefit of rest and shall receive their full wages and retain their employment and the rights acquired under their labor contract. During the nursing period they shall have two special rest periods each day, of a half hour each, for nursing their infants.
6. The minimum wage to be received by a worker shall be general or according to occupation...
7. Equal wages shall be paid for equal work, regardless of sex or nationality.
8. The minimum wage shall be exempt from attachment, compensation, or deduction.
9. Workers shall be entitled to a participation in the profits of enterprises...
11. Whenever, due to extraordinary circumstances, the regular working hours of a day must be increased, one hundred percent shall be added to the amount for normal hours of work as remuneration for the overtime. Overtime work may never exceed three hours a day nor three times consecutively. Persons under sixteen years of age and women of any age may not be admitted to this kind of labor.
16. Both employers and workers shall have the right to organize for the defense of their respective interests, by forming unions, professional associations, etc...

29. Enactment of a social security law shall be considered of public interest and it shall include insurance against disability, on life, against involuntary work stoppage, against sickness and accidents, and other forms for similar purposes;

30. Likewise, cooperative societies established for the construction of low-cost and hygienic houses to be purchased on installments by workers, shall be considered of social utility..."

Document 6: Image of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco (Pancho) Villa, with Villa seated in the presidential chair. Mexico City, 1914.



Source: [Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia](#)

Document Sources:

- [Plan de San Luis Potosí](#)
- [Plan de Ayala](#)
- [Constitution of 1917](#)

Organizer for Seminar Discussion/DBQ

Doc. #	Summary	Connections to other documents	New questions

Additional notes: