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PREVIEW

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE: CHILDREN DURING

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION, 1910-1920

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DEDICATION

To Cheryl Martin, for your guidance, optimism throughout the project and for the inspiration to become a historian.

To Emma Perez, for your enthusiasm and encouragement.

To Dennis Bixler-Marquez for your patience and understanding.

To my parents, Diana and Gilberto Garza, for your unswerving faith, love, and support.

Especially to my husband, Jaime Peña, for all the love, sleepless nights and sacrifice.

Also to my son, Nathan Garza, who loved me at my worst and always smiled.

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THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION, 1910-1920

by

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THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

Historians have written on many topics concerning the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. Traditional topics include the political maneuverings of key figures such as Francisco Madero and others, military strategy, foreign diplomacy and intervention of the United States.¹ Social history introduced newer issues of study. The works on class upheaval, social conditions for foreign residents and the effects of immigration to the United States contribute to the historiography and to the general knowledge of the many facets of this event.² The history of Mexico's children during this time period is a topic social historians have neglected. A few have mentioned children from Mexico in relation to the effects the numbers of them had on the

¹ Charles C. Cumberland, Mexican Revolution: Genesis under Madero (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1952); Friedrich Katz, The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, The United States, and The Mexican Revolution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, The Great Rebellion: Mexico 1905-1924 (New York: Norton, 1980).

² For immigration and labor see, Lawrence A. Cardoso, Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980); John Ramon Martinez, Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1910-1930 (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1971). For immigration and diplomacy see, Douglas W. Richmond, "Mexican Immigration and Border Strategy during the Revolution, 1910-1920," (New Mexico Historical Review, 1982 57(3): 269-288); Rodolfo Rocha, "The Influence of the Mexican Revolution on the Mexico-Texas Border 1910-1916" (Dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1981).

border regions of the United States. Others point out that children were involved in minute ways during the Revolution as ammunition smugglers, but no thorough study exists on this topic.³ A broad picture of the living conditions endured by these children will emerge with this thesis.

The study of children is not new. Philippe Aries made children's history a legitimate and important topic of study with his work, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life.⁴ His study of the physical artifacts, government and legal documents, and educational practices of Europe during the Middle Ages and beyond, has given historians a historical definition of childhood and family. He also demonstrated to many historians how items such as clothing, toys, games and such can be used as primary sources of research. Studies of children in military conflicts also exist. Published works on children during wars and revolutions give insight into the roles children are forced to play by their societies and cultures. They

³For education and effects on the border see, Don M. Coerver and Linda B. Hall, Revolution on the Border: The United States and Mexico, 1910-1920 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); Mario T. Garcia, Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920 (New Haven: Yale Press, 1981).

⁴Philippe Aries, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (New York: Vintage, 1962).

also document how these conflicts affected these children as adults.⁹ No such work exists for the children of Mexico during this revolutionary period.

This thesis deals with a silent but involved portion of the Mexican population. Areas of emphasis include the conditions under which children survived the war, the immigration of children to the United States and lives they led in this country, and the situation faced by children of foreign birth living on Mexican soil. A child will be defined as one who is under eighteen years of age. While it may be argued that this is a contemporary grouping under the term "children," it will allow for a common framework of reference for the reader.

Children in Mexico during the 1910-1920 revolution faced different challenges according to their economic class status. A child of an upper class family may have faced

⁹ For works on children in military conflict see: W. D. Halls, The Youth of Vichy France (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Robert Jungk, Children of the Ashes: The Story of a Rebirth (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959); Dorothy Legarreta, The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984). For works on social changes caused by military conflicts see: Deborah Dwork, War is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1898-1918 (London: Tavistock Publication, 1987); Jonathan Kozol, Children of the Revolution: A Yankee Teacher in Cuban Schools (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978).

relocation abroad while children of lower classes may have faced impressment into military service. Gender also played a role in determining reaction and responsibilities during the war. These are certainly not hard and fast categories, but all children faced adulthood and adult situations regardless of economic status or gender.

Children and their parents sought refuge from the fighting and economic hardship of the war in many places, especially the United States. Being a prosperous neighbor made the United States a haven for the political and socio-economic refugees. More than 500,000 people sought a safe haven in the United States during this period.⁶ There is no doubt that this influx of people had an impact on the United States' border regions. Many current works on immigration during this time period report the pull factors of the labor shortage in the United States or address the topic of immigration as a diplomatic question. Others discuss this immigration in community studies, but these works do not adequately approach the notion of immigration as a phenomenon done by individuals.⁷ There is no work

⁶ García, Desert Immigrants, 36.

⁷ For community studies see, Albert Camarillo, Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930 (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1979); Mario T. García, Desert

which specifically deals with the immigration of children and the lives they led in the United States. This work will concentrate on the immigration which centered around the cities of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. These sister cities make up one of the largest border communities in North America. There are strong economic and cultural ties between the two populations and also the railroad systems of Mexico made El Paso one of the major destinations for trade and population traffic.

A study of a special group of children will be included in the discussion of immigration to the United States. These children lived in El Paso, Texas, on the Fort Bliss military reservation in a detainment camp for a short time in 1914. These children came to this country with several thousand "captured" Federal soldiers, who became United States prisoners of war for breaking neutrality laws by crossing the border after suffering defeat. The camp detained the soldiers, the women who followed them providing services during the war, and their children. These children experienced "immigration" in a manner which others did not, and therefore they deserve attention.

Immigrants; Ricardo Romo, East Los Angeles: History of A Barrio (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

Children born in other countries yet residing in Mexico during this time period will also be studied. Many of these children were bilingual and straddled a precarious line. Dual citizenship granted strong ties to Mexico. Many knew of no other home, and yet because of their parents' nationality they became enemies of various military factions. Flight to safety became the only hope for most of these children, and yet upon reaching the United States most found the transition into American society very easy. However, many longed for the homes they left behind.

The primary sources employed in this study are newspapers, government documents, photograph collections, and oral interviews. The newspapers which will be used include the El Paso Times and the El Paso Herald. These two papers report not only local events but also national and international news concerning the Mexican Revolution. These papers will be examined for articles discussing children specifically, articles which may provide insight into living conditions in Mexico, and stories on the movement of refugees and their lives in the United States.

The records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910-1929, are another source found at the University library. These records report on

such topics as living conditions and political situations. These records will help determine how children lived in Mexico during the conflict. They will also be used as an important source for determining the status of those held in the detainment camp at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Photograph collections also provide valuable information. There are many photos which contain children as the subject and others which picture children as secondary subjects. A published photograph/postcard collection entitled Border Fury will be used.⁸ Another collection, referred to as the Aultman collection, housed at the El Paso Public Library, will also be included. Photographs will be examined to determine living conditions through comparative study of the physical surroundings. They will also help determine the social roles of children through dress and the tasks performed in the photographs.

Oral interviews, many of which belong to the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas at El Paso, comprise a major source for this work. The Institute of Oral History houses a large number of interviews given by

⁸ Paul J. Vanderwood and Frank N. Samponaro, Border Fury: A Picture Postcard Record of Mexico's Revolution and U.S. Preparedness, 1910-1917 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988).

people who survived the Mexican Revolution. Many of these people were children during the conflict and supply this project with their experiences. There are also a few published interviews which provide additional material for this theme.⁹ They will also be examined for events which may not be common but will demonstrate the roles which children played in their society during this time period. These roles may include that of soldier, camp follower or perhaps even an income earner for the family.

The issues surrounding the treatment of children in a war zone have come to the forefront during the recent military conflicts in Eastern Europe. The world society currently struggles to find ways to help these children and alleviate some of their suffering. How societies dealt with these issues in the past may give us clues on how to solve these problems now. Learning how children survived during war situations and what relief efforts were undertaken may provide society a model to follow.

This is a preliminary study on the living conditions of children during the Mexican Revolutionary period, 1910-1920.

⁹ Marilyn P. Davis, Mexican Voices, American Dreams: An Oral History of Mexican Immigration to the United States (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990); Oscar J. Martínez, Fragments of the Mexican Revolution: Personal Accounts from the Border (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

The historical narrative of the Mexican Revolution lacks a thorough study of children and how they grew up in this period. Works exist that study issues relating to children, such as education, or focus on particular events in which children play a major role¹⁰, but no works exist which attempt to study children in the broadest terms. This thesis is a first step to construct the larger picture of what it meant to grow up during the Mexican Revolution.

This is a difficult enterprise due to the nature and/or lack of sources. Children do not usually record the events in their lives in diaries. What is more often the case is adults writing their childhood recollections. This gives historians a view of the past which has been colored by the subjects' adult life. It is necessary to realize that the sources may not be totally accurate. These sources can be used, however, because they allow glimpses into events which can be useful in drawing broad conclusions about what conditions were for many.

¹⁰ See Don M. Coerver, and Linda B. Hall, Texas and the Mexican Revolution: A Study in State and National Border Policy 1910-1920 (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1984), 137-139. For a discussion of education of Mexican refugee children in San Antonio, TX. Also see García, Desert Immigrants, 172-179, for a discussion of the children of Mexican detainees in El Paso during the Mexican Revolution.

Other sources such as newspapers and government documents are useful in such studies, but much of the information which is retrieved from these sources must be inferred. The authors and recorders do not usually focus their attention on children except in very specific circumstances. Most focus on events or adult players. Historians must consider themselves fortunate if children are mentioned in passing. By examining these small comments about children one can come to some conclusions about how children lived and how they were or were not regarded as important to reporters and government officials at the time.

For studies such as this one, photographs become very important stockpiles of information. While most photographs record the war and its combatants, children appear in many. They are usually not the subjects of the photographs but the fact that they are there is significant. The historian must view the photograph for clues about environment and state of mind based on surroundings and facial expressions. Photographs, whether posed or action shots, need to be used in these types of studies to give more insight into actual scenes of everyday life.

The lack of more traditional and concrete sources gives this work a more anecdotal flavor than most. This is a

study which, as of yet, cannot solidify into a definitive body of knowledge with all the questions about the topic answered. This is a preliminary sketch into the lives of children and how they survived a military conflict. Further research may allow for a clearer picture of the history of children in this period.

Many topics will be addressed in this work. Chapter One will discuss children who actually participated in the revolution. The chapter focuses on boys who fought as soldiers and girls who served in other military capacities in various armies. Children directly effected by the destruction and the politics of the war round out this topic. Chapter Two examines the conditions found in Mexico by children who were not actively involved in the fighting. The issues of politics, banditry, famine, disease, and education are surveyed.

Chapter Three looks at children who were exiled to the United States. These children came from wealthy families who had political or economic power before the revolution. Most of these families were Mexican but others were of foreign descent, usually American but sometimes British or other nationality. These children were forced to flee with their parents. Chapter Four deals with children who were

economic refugees who came to the United States. A discussion of a group of children who were detained on a military installation in the United States is also included in this chapter.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE: COMING OF AGE UNDER FIRE DURING THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

Many children became involved in the conflicts of the Mexican Revolution. While large numbers of children lost their homes due to military campaigns, others participated in the fighting. Young boys fought with all groups involved in the conflict. They did not fight for ideological reasons so their loyalties often changed. All military factions used them as spies and regular soldiers.¹¹ They suffered the same fates as other soldiers if caught, namely death by firing squad. For example, Macedonio Manzano, age fifteen, participated as a defender of Matamoros during an attack in 1915. The Constitutionalist forces defeated the defenders and executed captured soldiers, including Macedonio.¹² A soldier was a soldier regardless of age and was treated accordingly. Macedonio simply fought on the losing side.

Another boy named Pedro Huerta participated in the military campaign of Chihuahua, led by Francisco Villa in 1913. At thirteen years of age, Pedro thus became a veteran of the Constitutionalist campaign. Pedro received a bullet wound in the shoulder while serving with the Villistas for eight months in a battle near Tierra Blanca. During the

¹¹ Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, 164.

¹² Ibid., 165.

period of hospitalization for his wound, Pedro heard that Villa planned to move his forces to Chihuahua City. Pedro wished to accompany Villa and approached him with the request. Pancho Villa told Pedro that he should stay in bed for about a week and then follow the troops. Villa gave Pedro ten dollars and spoke to doctors and nurses about his welfare. Villa told reporters of Pedro,

What a heart. He has been with us ever since the revolution started. He is a cavalry standard-bearer. I don't know where he came from but I do know that he will go anywhere we send him. He has been under fire as often as any of us and right where it was hottest. I have seen him at the very lead of a charging squadron with bullets flying thick as rain around him. And he never has faltered. . . . No wonder we win, when such hearts as his are with us.¹³

Even though the personal reasons why Pedro Huerta joined the military forces of Pancho Villa will never be known, reasons can be hypothesized. Orphans, particularly those in their early teens, joined the military because they lacked strong family ties which would keep them home. Military service served as a means to avenge the deaths of family members lost in the conflict. Serving in the military would provide a soldier with the basic necessities of food, some money (although soldiers received their pay

¹³ Edmond Behr, "Little Pedro Moves Villa to Tender Words," El Paso Herald, 12 Dec 1913, 2.

infrequently), and some means of shelter and companionship. The romantic nature that surrounded the Revolution also played a role in persuading youths to join the military. The media and individuals participating in the fighting tended to romanticize the whole experience of war.

Severo Márquez, of Coyachic, Chihuahua, describes the young men and boys that joined the fight as knowing nothing about the true political and theoretical ideals that supported the Revolution. Many revolutionaries would approach young men at their places of work with speeches about the unfairness of the present system and how they would be a part of the change. Ultimately they would join with very little understanding of the reasons for the war and the hardships they would face.¹⁴ Suppression of the realities of war and the romanticization of it motivated young people to fight.

Pedro González, a native of Guadalajara, is a classic example of the many roles that young boys played in this military system. He gave his reasons for joining the federal troops as curiosity and a lack of parental opposition. His parents had died in 1913, so at the age of

¹⁴ Severo Márquez, Interviewed by Oscar Martínez, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, Apr. 15, 1974. Hereafter cited as IOH.

fourteen he followed the army from Guadalajara to Torreón on their march to confront Villa.

I wandered around with them, just to see what was going on. I gave the officers shines and ran errands for them whenever they needed something, and they would give me a quarter, a dime, twenty cents. Then some other people gave me food to eat and that's how I earned my living.¹⁵

Pedro soon changed his loyalty and became a member of the revolutionaries. The revolutionaries gave him more food, a 30-30 rifle and a chance for more adventure and excitement. Eventually he fought for Pancho Villa as a member of his División del Norte in many battles because he enjoyed the fighting and the danger. On reflection he believes he did so because of his youth and lack of experience.¹⁶

Before being chosen to become a member of Villa's forces Pedro served as a spy for General Calixto Contreras. Pedro reported on the positions and strengths of the federal armies in certain regions while posing as a candy or cigarette vender. His information often helped General Contreras to plan attacks. Villa also benefited from this

¹⁵ Martínez, Fragments, 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., 22.

service.¹⁷ His small size and youth made him an improbable and unsuspected spy in the eyes of the enemy.

During the years between 1913 and 1917, Pedro González received a serious shoulder wound, recovered in El Paso, Texas, returned to service, was captured several times and forced to fight in various armies. He escaped death at the hands of a firing squad and was almost hung. War weary at the age of seventeen, he returned to El Paso, where he found a job at the YWCA.¹⁸ While his experiences were exemplary, he was by no means the only one to survive such hardships.

Photographic evidence suggests these boys lived harsh and uncertain lives. Many of the postcards in Vanderwood and Samponaro's Border Fury contain young soldiers as their subjects. One card entitled "Typical Mexican Soldiers" pictures two soldiers against a brick wall in their "uniforms." The older man seems determined in his stance. The young boy, who looks about ten or eleven years old, appears more apprehensive than his companion. The muzzle of his gun touches the boy at mid-torso and his ammunition belt is wrapped around his waist two times instead of worn slung over his shoulder like his counterpart's. The boy wears

¹⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹⁸ Ibid., 23-36.

clothes which appear either too small or too big.¹⁹ Another postcard labeled "Mexican Soldiers, Guaymas, Aug. 10, 1915" contains the portraits of two young soldiers named Maurilio Sánchez and José Monroy. While the ages of "fourteen and thirteen years" appear on the card, the boys look to be eleven years old. These boys wear adult-sized clothing rolled to their size. Their bare feet are visible underneath the rolled cuffs of the pants. José Monroy seems unsure and slightly haunted, while Maurilio Sánchez does not look into the camera but stares at a point above and to the left of it.²⁰ These young males were aged well beyond their years due to the horrors of war.

These boys did, however, retain a part of their youth throughout these often horrendous times. John Reed, an American reporter who followed the Villista army and wrote of his experiences with them, recalls small scenes such as two young boys being able to create a playful situation before a battle which allowed many soldiers to laugh and have fun. He reports seeing the two play tag with one another. Soon twenty grown men joined the game and "chased each other around in great glee."²¹

¹⁹ Vanderwood and Samponaro, Border Fury, 45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.