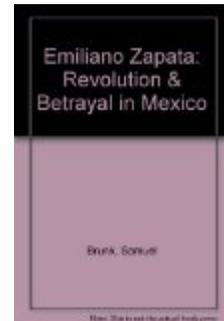


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Samuel Brunk. *Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. xvi + 360 pp. \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8263-1620-2; \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-1619-6.

Reviewed by Drew P. Halevy (University of Arkansas)
Published on H-LatAm (April, 1996)



Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico by Samuel Brunk gives a highly redefined view of Zapata and his revolutionary movement. Brunk approaches Zapata from a different perspective than seen in previous works, looking at Zapata the man, rather than Zapata the leader.

In his introduction, Brunk states that the “primary goal of this book, then, is to provide a much needed political biography of Zapata, and to demonstrate in the process that his choices and actions did have a historical impact” (p. xvi). By taking this approach, Brunk not only gives a background to Zapata’s political belief, but also greatly humanizes Zapata the historical figure.

Brunk starts his work by examining Zapata’s upbringing in the state of Morelos. The formative years are examined in some detail, and the reader gains an understanding of the political and social environment in which Zapata was raised. Throughout the work, this is the great strength of Brunk. The reader is given an understanding of the forces that helped to make Zapata what he was. The view of Zapata we are given is one of a man who rose to local prominence in his community. Zapata, as presented by Brunk, is a man whose worldview and political beliefs and development as a leader evolved slowly over time.

Brunk gives a fairly concise overview of the roots of the Mexican Revolution in the beginning of the work. The last two-thirds of the book deal with Zapata’s increasing role in the Mexican Revolution.

Zapata is presented objectively by Brunk in this work. Brunk does not shy away from dealing with the historical charges of brutality and banditry made against some

of those under Zapata’s banner. While acknowledging these actions, Brunk tends to downplay them, stating that other revolutionary groups were also guilty of atrocities.

Though the work is primarily a political biography of Zapata, Brunk also concisely outlines the political and ideological divisions within the Mexican Revolution. One element that stands out is the intellectual division between the urban elites and those, such as Zapata, who represent the demands of the rural masses.

In his conclusion, Brunk states that he seeks to place Zapata and his movement into the historiography of the Mexican Revolution. By and large, Brunk is successful in chronicling both Zapata’s political development and his importance to Mexican history.

The work is well researched, and Brunk has supported his thesis by referring to a large number of archival and primary source materials. The work is well written and is a fast-moving narrative of Zapata’s role in the Mexican Revolution. More important, Brunk has made Zapata human, showing both his successes and failures.

The real criticism, albeit a small one, is that Brunk does not take the opportunity to tie Zapata’s legacy to the uprising in the state of Chiapas in 1994. While Brunk does mention the revolt, he could have greatly expanded on the ideological legacy of Zapata in modern Mexican politics. That aside, this work is an excellent choice for a lecture or seminar class that deals with the Mexican Revolution.

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Author's Comments

Date: Wed., 3 April 1996 From: Samuel Brunk <sbrunk@unlinfo2.unl.edu> University of Nebraska, Lincoln

I would like to thank Drew Philip Halevy for his review of my book, *Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico*. I naturally agree with all the good things he has to say about it, and I am especially glad to see him note that the book is suitable for use in the classroom, which is one of the goals I had for it.

Although I am generally content with the review, I do have a few remarks to make. Halevy writes in the opening paragraph that the book looks "at Zapata the man, rather than Zapata the leader," but I believe that it does both, and my thesis directly concerns Zapata's leadership. Since Halevy goes on to note that I have examined the impact of Zapata's leadership (on his movement and on the larger revolution), I am simply not sure what he means to say here.

Secondly, Halevy contends that I have downplayed the brutality and banditry of the movement, a remark that I find ironic. One of the reasons that this book will be controversial is because of the attention I have given to the brutality and banditry that others (particularly John Womack, in his *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*) have tended to deemphasize. I am so far from downplaying Zapatista banditry, in fact, that I have an article on it coming out in the next issue of the *American Historical Review* (April 1996). What I attempted to do was to point the banditry out, but to do so without going overboard. When writing about a subject, like Zapatismo, about which much has already been written, it is necessary to guard against the tendency to exaggerate those issues that separate one's work from that of previous scholars, and I did try to do that with regard to banditry and Womack's treatment of it. In any event, I do not think that Zapatista banditry should be forgiven because other revolutionary groups also engaged in banditry; I do, however, think that it is naive to expect people involved in such a violent endeavor as revolution to behave. A historian who chooses to write about revolution should be prepared for some atrocities and should probably try to avoid moralizing unduly about them.

Finally, with regard to the ideological legacy of Zapata in modern Mexican politics and to the Chiapas re-

volt in particular, I agree wholeheartedly that this is an important and interesting question that my book covers only in passing. Part of the reason for that is that the manuscript was largely finished when the rebellion in Chiapas began on January 1, 1994. Of course, the EZLN is far from the first organization in modern Mexican life that has evoked Zapata's memory by using his name, and so I did not need the Chiapas revolt to call my attention to the issue. The problem I faced, though, is that Zapata's legacy (or his myth, if you will) is so large and so important that a single book of reasonable size could not cover both his life and his legacy in a meaningful way. I question, in other words, whether this is a fair criticism of the work at hand, because the legacy of Zapata clearly lies outside its scope. Halevy may be interested in knowing, though, that I am hard at work on a second book, which will deal with the use of Zapata's memory by both the Mexican state and the Mexican people. This book on the myth of Zapata is tentatively entitled, "From Chinameca to Chiapas: The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata, 1919-1994." I hope we can soon be doing an interactive review of it.

Date: Sat., 06 April 1996 From: Samuel Brunk <sbrunk@unlinfo.unl.edu>

I've been sitting back on this discussion a little bit in the hope that Halevy, or someone else, would jump in and answer some of the questions that have been raised (this is not particularly out of modesty, as Keith Haynes suggests, but I have the sense that I have done a lot of explaining of my project, and that perhaps this forum should be for others to react to my explanations). However, I certainly don't mind jumping in here again, because the questions that have been raised are good ones. I agree with Mary Kay Vaughan et al. that we are obviously going to have to go a bit deeper to make this discussion meaningful. (I took it to be my job, in responding to Halevy's review, to simply address what he wrote rather than broaden the discussion immediately, and I hope this hasn't unduly frustrated those of you following the discussion).

Let me begin by saying that I'm not sure it is fair to say that my work is a "devastating critical revision" of Womack's—I have never characterized it precisely that way, nor do I know the context of that remark (I've just been signed up on H-LatAm for this review). I do agree that it is impossible to discuss my work, as Halevy tries to do, without reference to Womack, because the question is, obviously, what does my book contain that Womack's does not.

Let me try to explain what I think my contributions are as clearly and briefly as possible. Womack's primary concern, I think it's fair to say, is the broader movement rather than Zapata himself, and in that sense his work is not particularly biographical—in fact, I think he really tends to lose track of Zapata as the work goes on. So one difference is that I try to keep the focus a bit closer on Zapata as a way of elucidating and evaluating his role within Zapatismo, and the ultimate impact of that role on the Mexican Revolution. That somewhat narrower focus leads to other differences between my work and Womack's, which are also based, in part, on some large archival collections that were not available to Womack in the 1960s, as well as a new, substantial, oral history collection and anthropological insights developed by people like Claudio Lomnitz, Guillermo de la Pena, and Arturo Warman since Womack wrote.

Most important, the new archival sources and the focus on Zapata have permitted me to disaggregate Zapatismo in a way that Womack did not do. It is true that Womack alludes to differences within the movement, both between various *jefes* and between Morelenses and urbanites who came to serve as Zapata's secretaries, but he is not particularly interested in those differences, and so does not analyze them. My focus on Zapata's leadership, and the challenges that he faced, on the other hand, lead me straight into those differences. As a result, my book includes much that is new on the dynamics of the relationship between Zapata and his urban advisors, who, I argue, did not always represent peasant interests as effectively as they might have done. It also includes a great deal of information about Zapatista infighting, the social, economic, and cultural conditions that generated it, and how Zapata tried (and ultimately failed) to deal with internal conflicts between *jefes* and between villages and Zapatista bands. Among other things, I discover that the Zapatista land reform process contained a great deal of intervillage conflict, and that the movement, by 1919, had virtually disintegrated under the stress of military failure and its attendant economic pressures. Much of this information works against assumptions of peasant communalism, and against the related notion that it was a largely homogeneous movement (to borrow terminology from Alan Knight, I think there are plenty of "serrano" rebels within this ostensibly "agrarista" movement, for instance). It makes Zapatismo more heterogeneous and conflicted, and perhaps thus a little bit more like the rest of the Mexican Revolution.

Whether this amounts to "a devastating critical revision" of Womack's work is for others to decide. But

it certainly bears pointing out that there are many areas in which I have not added appreciably to what Womack has to say. I am sorry to disappoint Bill Schell by indicating that I have not done much to revise Womack on the Porfirian roots of Zapatismo. I have incorporated the insights of others in some cases—people like Roberto Melville, Salvador Rueda, Alicia Hernandez, to name just a few, have added significantly to Womack's picture of the Porfiriato—but my focus was more biographical, and the new documentation on Zapata does not go back to the Porfiriato; in fact, Jesus Sotelo Inclan dug all that up long before Womack wrote. My account of Zapata's "formative youth" is also not particularly new, although there are some details and stories that are not found in Womack. I certainly hope that I have managed to humanize Zapata by keeping the focus more tightly on him and by telling the best stories that I could find, but I have not shed any significant new light on his personal reasons for getting into the fight—Womack's work is one of the great classics of Latin American history, and he covers this stuff wonderfully. In sum, I would say that my work complements Womack's as much as it revises it, so in the unlikely event that anyone out there is so rash as to be thinking of throwing their Womack out, they should certainly think again.

Date: Tue., 09 April 1996 From: Samuel Brunk
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I find it somewhat interesting that Bill Schell wants more specifics on my book on Zapata even though I wrote a long explanation on Saturday to which, I think, no one, including Schell, has responded to in any meaningful way—the discussion has largely bypassed my book to focus on Womack and Salinas, which is, I suppose, all right, though I certainly haven't felt the need to comment. Schell does, however, present what he has on his mind this time, and perhaps we can start with that.

I will again plead guilty to having agreed with Womack's account, for the most part, of the Porfirian origins of Zapatismo. The information that Schell presents is interesting, however, and by insisting on some of these relationships—with Ignacio Torre y Mier, with local *jefes politicos*, etc.—one can, I suppose, make a case for Zapata as some sort of Felicista, as Schell basically does here. But it is, more or less, a guilt by association argument (almost conspiracy theory, really) that I don't find especially compelling, especially given the fact that the nature of Zapata's relationships with these people is pretty murky. There just isn't a lot of information; there is, for instance, nothing trustworthy that suggests that Porfirio

Diaz and Zapata ever met, or, if I remember correctly, that he had anything to do with Jesus Flores Magon (this I think is just speculation on Womack's part that Schell is turning into fact).

I do not, however, completely agree with Womack with regard to Zapata's Felicista contacts. I make more of them than he does, especially later in the revolution, but I think those contacts existed because Zapata often needed the firepower that people with ties to the Felicista camp [had]. In other words, Zapata was not above working with people of "reactionary" stripe when it suited his purposes—this is something Womack recognizes; I merely think he sometimes worked a bit more closely with them than Womack reveals. From my point of view, though, what this does is simply break down some of the rigid ideological lines that have been built into the revolutionary historiography and are pretty silly. Zapata, of course, was the good revolutionary, the immaculate idealist, and the Felicistas were the "reactionaries"—it's very conve-

nient to put people into these narrow categories and then dismiss them, and it sounds like Schell is simply looking to put Zapata into a different category by associating him with *jefes politicos*. My view of the problem is that Zapata may have been an idealist to some extent, but that he was also a very practical revolutionary, and that he sometimes dealt with these unclean "reactionaries" who lived or operated near him in the south and with whom he shared a common enemy (the example I am thinking of here is the Felicistas who fought Carranza, but the argument could be extended to Porfirian officials with whom, as individuals, Zapata could sometimes deal). This doesn't make him a Felicista, but it does suggest that southerners sometimes unified their efforts against the incursions of the semi-foreign revolutionaries of the north.

Whoever else Zapata had contact or alliances with, he was clearly, in early 1911, an anti-porfirian revolutionary with ties to Francisco Madero.

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