

Will Fowler, ed.. *Malcontents, Rebels, and Pronunciados: The Politics of Insurrection in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. li + 299 pp. \$40.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8032-2542-8.



Reviewed by Irving Levinson

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Sometimes, Mexican *pronunciamentos* have been dismissed as little other than the announcement of a *golpe del estado*, or rebellion. At other times, particular pronunciamentos have been subjected to detailed analysis. However, Dr. Will Fowler of St. Andrews University and eleven colleagues decided to give the subject a very special sort of treatment: complete.

He and his fellow authors read more than 1,500 Mexican pronunciamentos, convened three major academic conferences at Fowler's campus to analyze them, and then placed this source material on line at <http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/<wbr>pronunciamentos>! This group then published three edited volumes and a monograph on different aspects of the subject. This extensive commitment of time and effort took place in large part thanks to a grant of some \$927,000 from Great Britain's Arts and Humanities Research Council.

To make the best use of such substantial funding and four years of research time, Fowler

brought together some of the most eminent scholars of Mexican history. The contributors, whose essays will be discussed, are established scholars familiar to students of Mexican history. Consequently, there are no weak essays in this book. But given the time and resources involved, readers should expect more than strong essays. They ought to expect a book that offers a new perspective, and they will not be disappointed.

Fowler sets out some critical arguments in the book's introduction. First, he reminds readers of the distinctions between revolutions, insurrections, and pronunciamentos. A revolution, Fowler concludes, must include the four criteria given by the late Frederick Katz. First among these are: "widespread dissatisfaction with political, economic and social conditions affecting, not just one segment or class of the population, but a wide variety of social classes and groups" (p. xix). The other three preconditions cited by Katz are "a widespread politicization of the people ... a sense by increasing numbers of people of the illegitimacy of the existing government ... and the appear-

ance of a clear alternative to the existing regime” (p. xx).

Having accepted Katz’s definition of revolution, Fowler then points out that “indigenous rebellions, caste wars, riots, coups, and pronunciamientos all belong to a repertoire of insurrection” rather than to revolution (p. xxii). In this framework, the pronunciamiento emerges not as a formality of revolt or revolution, but “a way of doing politics, in fact *the* [Fowler’s italics] way of doing politics at a time when the nation-state was still in the making, governments were weak and ineffectual, the constitution lacked legitimacy and authority, and the law was a matter of opinion, there to be disobeyed, contested, and challenged by the alternative revolutionary bureaucracy of the pronunciamiento.”

As defined by Fowler and a number of the contributors, the political process involves not merely announcing the cause of the uprising and the desired outcome, but subsequently employing that pronunciamiento as a basis for negotiating with declared foes as well as with potential allies. This process affected tactics. The *pronunciado* who found garrisons rallying to his cause could consider intensifying his demands while one who gained little support outside of his territory might moderate his demands or even withdraw them. Having set forth this framework in a thirty-five-page introduction, Fowler then turns the text over to his contributors.

Terry Rugeley argues that the pronunciamientos of southeastern Mexico can be divided into four categories: those issued in a different region and consequently viewed as a complaint of outsiders; those coming from within one’s region; those erupting from the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, and those emanating from the top tier of that same ladder. Rugeley then details the various forms that the pronunciamiento might take and concludes that the type most likely to succeed was one originating within the region and having a reasonable prospect of success. But

even these conditions did not guarantee nationwide attention, let alone involvement in the southeast’s discontents.

By contrast, notes Juan Ortiz Escamilla, Veracruz pronunciamientos almost invariably affected the entire nation because Mexico’s largest port, likely points of invasion, and largest tax revenues could be found within its borders. He argues that when considered in the context of the state’s ongoing failure to create stable and long-lasting institutions of self-government, the military officers acted as they pleased, with great harm to the state and nation.

Raymond Buve offers a third geographic perspective. After pointing out that local institutions were the only one to survive the tumult of the 1810-21 conflict, he concludes that the nation consequently became “an archipelago of local societies” (p. 126). Buve then examines a number of Tlaxcalan pronunciamientos and having so, deems the state typical of much of the nation.

Pronunciamientos also may be examined from an institutional perspective. In considering the conduct of the clergy during the mid-nineteenth century, Anne Staples concludes that the clerics were not monolithic in their support of the Conservative Party or the army. An argument for nuance in understanding institutional roles always is welcome.

Choosing to focus on the church in a specific region, Guy Thompson examines Puebla and argues, as does Staples, for a more nuanced view. He contends that the state’s image as a bastion of conservatism during the years of the Reforma is wrong. Instead, he says, a combination of “pragmatic bishops, assertive barrios and santanismo,” combined with the determination of closely intertwined local elites to defend state interests, created an inflammable situation (p. 136). Although the consequences of their actions antagonized Liberals to a greater extent than Conservatives, that antagonism does mean that the Poblanos ought to be typecast as incorrigible reactionaries.

Five of the remaining essays focus on individual actors. Catherine Andrews considers the efforts of Felipe de la Garza; Linda Arnold examines Jose Ramón García Ugarte's revolt; and Sergio A Cañedo Gamboa studies the affiliation of the peripatetic Poinciano Arriaga and Mariano Avila with the 1837 Plan of San Luis Potosi. To that formidable array of authors, we may add Josefina Zoraida Vasquez's exquisitely detailed study of Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga; Eduardo Flores's study of Julio López Chávez's 1868 uprising, and Fowler's examination of Antonio López de Santa Anna's repeated contributions to the genre.

In a broadly focused essay, Erica Pani concludes that while the pronunciamiento "was a defining element structuring national politics" from 1821 to 1854, subsequent events would consign them to a very peripheral role as constitutions became the fulcrum of disputes (p. 237). In particular, I recommend Fowler's lengthy introduction and chapter as well as the essays of Arnold and Zoraida.

Considered in its totality, the work of these scholars makes two important contributions. First, their research efforts and the cataloguing work of their staff have left the rest of us with a new and splendidly rich source of readily available primary source material. This should be of use not only to faculty but to students learning to work with primary source documents. For that alone, they have my gratitude. Also, they have given us a refreshing perspective. For while some pronunciamientos indeed were only the expression of a *golpista's* organized violence, these scholars prove we need to look to at these documents as the expression of the hopes, fears, and summations of the innumerable Mexicans who spoke through them.

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