Central Themes

State formation, the northern frontier

Suggested Reading


Related Sources

35. Address to the New Nation (1824)
36. Caudillo Rule (1874)
41. Mexico in Postwar Social Turmoil (1852)

40. The Mayas Make Their Caste War Demands (1850)*

The year 1848 was a bad one for Mexico. The same year that the country lost half of its territory to the United States (Source 39), Maya insurgents from southern and eastern Yucatán State rebelled against the Mexican government and the local white hacienda (agricultural estate) owners and took control over almost three-quarters of the entire peninsula. In the ensuing "Caste War" (1847–1901), Maya leaders Jacinto Pat, Cecilio Chi, and Venancio Pec led roughly 100,000 Mayas and significant numbers of poor non-Indians in a series of spectacular and shocking victories and came within thirty miles of invading the state capital of Mérida. When large numbers of Mayas left the front lines for planting season and the indigenous leadership subsequently dissolved into factionalism with the assassinations of Pat and Chi, the indigenous fighters were pushed back to the eastern quarter of the peninsula. They made the town of Chan Santa Cruz in Quintana Roo the capital of an autonomous Maya state. In 1850 stone crosses positioned in front of the town's cenote, a natural limestone well, and dressed in native women's shirts (bupali) miraculously began speaking to the Mayas. Claiming to belong to the Christian God, the voices urged them to continue the fight. The followers—called the Cruzob—raided westward and held off the Mexican army until it managed to capture Chan Santa Cruz in 1901 and Mexico City declared Quintana Roo an official territory.

Historians still debate the motivations of the Mayas who fought, but the larger causes of the war are known. The wealthy Yucatec planter class was divided, fighting over Liberal-Conservative, centralist-federalist politics. Victorious Liberals even declared Yucatec independence in 1845, but when the Mayas almost overran their haciendas in 1847, they pleaded with the United States of America to annex the state. In the end, Liberal Yucatec governor Miguel Barbanchano, whom the Mayas address in the following source, came to an agreement with Mexico: in exchange for money to outfit an army and defeat the Mayas, Yucatán would reunify with Mexico.

Many of the poor Mayas who fought had suffered from the rapid expansion of export-oriented henequen and sugarcane haciendas whose owners tried to ensnare their labor through debt peonage. The Yucatec Liberals had robbed many of them of subsistence farming land in 1841, when the government legally turned uncultivated public lands, or montes, into private real estate. Finally, the traditional Maya batab (governors of Maya towns) took leadership of the rebellion because successive civil governments had cut them out of their role as tax middlemen between local Maya communities and white institutions of power, especially the Church, which they had profited from since the colonial period. The Yucatec army's assassination of a prominent batab in 1847 was the final straw.

This source is a diplomatic letter from 1850 in which the Maya leaders address Governor Miguel Barbanchano and the Catholic Church and lay out their demands for peace. Leaders Venancio Pec and Florentino Chan were in control of the Mayas after killing their top commander, Jacinto Pat, in Belize, but they were feeling the pressure of fighting under siege, and they badly needed supplies for their army. Note how the letter is full of colonial terminology and concepts; the fight is conceived as occurring between Indians and Spaniards not as a civil war between different factions of nineteenth-century Mexicans. The missive is written in the colonial genre of Maya, Mixtec, and Nahuas petitions to higher Spanish authorities. Interestingly, the authorial voice of the letter slips between "we" and "I" in parts.

What were the specific demands of the Maya? A "caste" war means a race war. Were the rebels motivated by race? What was their opinion of the "Spaniards"? Judging from the kinds of demands the rebels made, what were the causes of the war and how had the conflict uprooted Maya society? What type of society did the Maya leadership hope to restore?

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*Ernesto de la Torre Villar et al., eds., Historia documental de México, vol. 2 (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1964), pp. 240–243. Translated by the editors. All footnotes have been added.
Letter Directed to Ecclesiastical Authorities and
the Governor of Yucatán, January 24, 1850

1. No one should take all the armaments of my troops and if they must be confiscated, no one should dare speak of it because they are truly our own. 2. We state that they should leave us this piece of land to live on because we do not believe it is correct to live among the Spaniards, until after there is a truce and there is no war anywhere, then we will be reunited with them, but only gradually and with careful consideration. 3. On account of the order of the señor [lord] governor that the Indians should be resettled in their pueblos [towns] as soon as the troops cease pursuing them, we are obliged to assemble them so they will settle themselves in their pueblos; since they are our subordinates, they will not run from us, and with gentleness we will restore them to their pueblos. We make this known to Your Honors so that you might inform the Señor President of Mexico, in keeping with his good name. 4. When we see that no harm is done to the Indians and we have returned to our pueblos, then we will name the elders who will become gobernadores [indigenous governors], and do justice for all that presents itself. 5. Concerning the matter that there should be honored curates or fathers among us to assist in the pueblos, this we will request of you, even hoping it will happen immediately because this would please me greatly because all Christians would be welcomed with love. 6. I declare once and for all, that as long as the troops pursue the Indians with malice, they will never surrender. It should be established here, as Your Honor says, that no Spaniards should be settled among the Indians and no Indians among the Spaniards. 7. No one will prohibit the Spaniards from coming to the pueblos de los indios to buy or sell anything; they must be received with respect and love[,] the same was done in the past before anything happenec when we lived here in peace.* 8. It is not necessary that I request montes for any pueblo in this paper signed by the lord governor, for each person knows his pueblo, and if some monte has been bought, it will be seized in order that any person whether Spaniard or Indian, even if he comes from among you, can make his milpa [corn plot] there, and in this way we will show our mutual friendship. 9. All of the king's montes in the north and east must remain restricted to the poor so that they can plant milpas there; neither can the montes in the hands of the Indians, nor those owned by the Spanish be sold. This is specified on the ancient map. 10. When the time comes for the governor to approve this paper, all of the Indians who are [in] jails in the principal towns where there are barracks should be released, and also all who have been captured. If they do not want to remain there,

*The pueblo de los indios was the legally designated indigenous community of the colonial period. Often this legal category was applied to places that had been city-states (Maya cal) in the Pre-Columbian times.
Central Themes
Indigenous people, state formation, race and ethnicity

Suggested Reading

Related Sources
8. The Urban Zoning of Maya Social Class in the Yucatán (1566)
39. Mexican Views of the Mexican-American War (1850)
72. The EZLN Views Mexico's Past and Future (1992)

Lucas Alamán, whose description of Miguel Hidalgo's 1810 sacking of Guanajuato is included in this reader (Source 32), is considered a founding father of Mexican conservative politics, along with Agustín Iturbide. Alamán fully supported the Plan de Iguala of 1821, a compromise plan that finally united fighting factions of Mexican Liberals and Conservatives and ended the independence war. The Plan called for the newly independent Mexico to constitutionally centralize power in a monarchy, although politicians eventually settled, with the Constitution of 1824 (Source 35), on a republic with a strong executive branch. It seems that much of Alamán's political philosophy was shaped by what he observed in Guanajuato in 1810: enraged mobs of poor people massacring Spaniards—called the derogatory name gachupines—and any person who appeared white. He saw clearly that Mexico could not survive as an independent nation without addressing the material concerns of its people, but the strong hand of a centralized state and shared sense of identity were required to contain class warfare and political fanaticism. A return to core values shared by all residents was required. Unlike most of Alamán's contemporaries, he did not express his patriotism through a complete and odious rejection of Spain. On the contrary, he was convinced that Spanish culture and values had civilized people and created harmony among the social classes when Mexico was part of the Spanish Empire and that nascent Mexican citizens had to choose this path if they wanted peace and prosperity in the nineteenth century.

The following excerpt is drawn from Alamán's voluminous History of Mexico from the First Independence Movements in 1808 Until the Present Day, published from 1849 to 1852. This work places him in the pantheon of great nineteenth-century intellectuals like Karl Marx who, with boundless authorial energy, synthesized huge sweeps of history and analyzed them sociologically. Like many of the great historians of the nineteenth century, Alamán believed that history is didactic and that readers of history should come away having learned moral and political lessons on how best to steer the direction of their own nation.

What aspects of Mexican society does Lucas Alamán criticize as causes of instability, and what aspects does he believe encourage progress? Alamán was one of the founders of Mexican conservative ideology. Yet he utilizes the concept of "progress" and seems to be calling for the removal of government intervention in the economy, ideas often attributed to Mexican Conservatives' Liberal rivals. How does his assessment of recent historical events complicate our understanding of early nineteenth-century "conservatives"?

*Lucas Alamán, Historia de Méjico desde los primeros movimientos que prepararon su independencia en el año de 1808, hasta la época presente (Mexico: Imp. de J. M. Lira, 1852), pp. 875-883, 914-919. Excerpt translated by the editors. Alamán's footnotes, when extraneous to the meaning of the text, have been eliminated. As indicated, new explanatory footnotes have been introduced.
It is not my intention to give a point-by-point history of what happened in Texas, which is, for the most part, so fresh in everyone's memory. It is well-known that the settlers intended to become independent, having common cause with Zavala, who, disloyal to his fatherland, died among its enemies. In order to contain the sedition, General Santa Anna marched to that province and, after he had gained important advantages, was captured and held prisoner. This was followed by the declaration of independence, which lasted a very short time with that republic subsequently uniting with the United States and declaring that its territory extended all the way to the left bank of the Bravo River. Resisting this usurpation, the Mexican Republic engaged the United States in an unfortunate war, which terminated with a peace treaty signed in the City of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (formerly the Villa of Guadalupe) on the second of February, 1848. With this, the secession was completed not only of Texas with the extended territory they tried to claim for it, but also New Mexico, Alta California in its entirety, and considerable parts of the States of Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas, making the total area of territory ceded 109,944 square leagues, which is equal to half of what the republic possessed at the time of independence, as well as 1,938 square leagues as indemnity, for which was received a sum of 15 million pesos.

The consequences of the secession of such a considerable portion of the republic did not have as much importance at the time as they would later have because the boundaries of the ceded territories were so little populated that they had been more a burden than an advantage to the government of Mexico. But it quickly became apparent what might come to fruition in these extensive lands in the energetic and enterprising hands in which they had fallen when surface deposits of gold and abundant veins of mercury were discovered there just after they had left Mexico's domain. The difficulty of controlling contraband is also apparent since the borderline has moved so much closer to Mexico's population center with only the desert between them. The gravest and most immediate consequence has been the frequency and depth of the incursions of wild Indians, who previously had been halted along the line of presidios [garrisons] on the frontier, but who in this past year, have penetrated all the way to the outskirts of Zacatecas, devastating the rich cattle-raising haciendas [agricultural estates] of that state as well as that of Durango and all other places on the frontier.

It would be unfair, however, to attribute these evils to Independence. They proceed from the growth of the population of the United States, the character of this population, animated with the invading spirit of the peoples of Northern Europe from whom they descend, and from the nature of the government of that republic maintains the pretext that it does not possess sufficient power to prevent its subjects from invading the territory of neighboring nations, even those with whom it lives in absolute peace. The rapid growth of the population in these states and the fact of the borderline's movement closer to Mexico's population center has meant that the barbarians, whose vagabond life-style and occupation of hunting necessitates access to a vast expanse of country, have been compressed on one side by the population of the United States who occupy and cultivate the lands they formerly inhabited. These, in turn, have been forced to invade those lands where they find the least resistance, which happen to be those of the Mexican frontier. Their destructive forays are even beginning to reach the heart of the republic from which they had been driven away more than two centuries ago. This grave scourge has no other remedy than the extermination of the tribes who refuse to be subject to a fixed home and to procure their sustenance through farming and cattle-raising, to which they display very little disposition. The missionaries managed to settle with religion and civilization the rest of the Indians who possessed some race—or clear evidence—of social life but they never made any progress with this race of savages.

The Spanish government would no doubt have put up a longer resistance and better defended the lost territory, being naturally more energetic because the army on which it depended was better organized; it could have reinforced itself with European troops and it could have had a squadron with which to protect the coast . . . although this support, which the Mexicans lacked, would not have assumed more than the form of notes and protocols from the other powers of Europe. But none of these measures would have stopped the effect of continuous invasion, not from the government of the United States, nor from all the residents on the frontier, which extends for countless leagues. This is clear with respect to the ceding of Florida and in the ongoing difficulty of impeding similar aggressions respecting those territories that it has held on to in the continent notwithstanding the fact that these should be easier to defend because of their insular position. Perhaps, if the Plan de Iguala had been executed as it was conceived, it would have succeeded in protecting the national territory against dismemberment, providing that European immigrants, who have been guided by their preference for the United States, had been redirected to the Mexican provinces under the influence of the governments from whence they came, and had maintained loyalty to the new fatherland they had adopted.

One of the particular effects of independence, exacerbated by the lack of compliance with the guarantees of the Plan de Iguala must have been that of the changes that the most important sectors of the Mexican population have experienced. This population is made up of the three principal races, which we have elsewhere described in all its elements: the Spaniards, divided into two branches, European and American, the Indians, and the mestizos [mixed-race people]. Our laws have attempted to erase these distinctions, but how little the laws of man can do against those of nature and against the influence of customs and inveterate preoccupations. The latter two races have kept themselves separate and distinct, differentiated themselves through language, dress, occupations, foods, and lifestyle. The European part of the Spanish race, because of the persecution it experienced, has been overpowered by the American part. All the occupations, cause of so many grievances, cause of such
ambition, and one of the principal stimuli of independence; large and small business; industry; the products of the haciendas of the tierra caliente [tropical lands], all this the European Spaniards lost; it was all left to the American Spaniards. And since the other two races are not fit to take part in public affairs, it is the Spanish Americans who have exclusively managed them.

There is no need to repeat here what we have already said elsewhere on the subject of the variation produced. It is easily seen that although the American Spaniards have been able to destroy their rivals, they have not filled the hole left by the ruin of these people. Disorder has crept into the debilitated civil service and, at the same time, it has lacked in individuals trained in the traditional way. Commerce and the haciendas of the tierra caliente have passed into the hands of foreigners, and the same with the business offices of the houses of even the wealthy Mexicans, which have become filled again with Spanish assistants, who then have opened the doors of the country. In the army, above all, has been noted the lack of bosses and officials of European origin, this being one of the things that produced its downfall, and this lack was also the reason why, when circumstances permitted it, they returned to employing those who remained from those who had previously been discharged.

In order to fill this vacuum, to provide for the revitalization of capitals and the replacement of individuals, the Spanish caste was welcomed by those of this nation and was given residence in the country in order to increase the size of the white race by means of promoting the settlement of foreigners from all of the Catholic countries. They had been invited through the laws in the most frank manner from the start and later in diverse forms. One must distinguish this introduction of foreigners into populated regions from what had happened in the unpopulated regions, which had been specifically called "colonization." The second of these has had the sad consequences that we have seen—that of being the cause of the loss of such a large portion of territory. One greatly fears that an attempt at secession will be made under similar conditions and that one cannot stop the same circumstances and the same results. Regarding the foreigners who have come to establish themselves in populated areas, the effects have varied according to the character of the nation from which they originate: the English, accustomed to circulating large amounts of capital, launched mining operations. They intended to form rural establishments buying haciendas, but they were impeded by an imprudent law, which declared that foreigners could not acquire real estate and in commerce, storehouses were established for wholesale businesses. The sad fate of the mining operations frightened everyone else off, and except for some who still persevere today, they have a greatly decreased business, which is exercised by commissioned agents, who after they have enriched themselves, take leave of the country. They leave without a trace in order to create a place for others who would come to do the same thing without benefit to anyone in the nation. The Germans and the North Americans who are established almost exclusively in the capital and in the sea ports do the same thing. There remain only the Spanish and the French who follow different paths. The former, with the advantages that language, the similarity of customs, and the historical records and reports give them, have returned to take up all the lines of work. The people, not yet accustomed to seeing them as foreigners, have already almost forgotten the term "gachupin," distinguish them from those of all other nations, never comprehending in their spirits the category in which they must be understood. The French, among whom are included the few Italians here, quickly learning the language, familiarizing themselves with all classes of the society, are easy of character, ridiculing and criticizing all that is not French, but accommodating themselves without distaste to everything in the country. Having passionately embraced the country's interests when it was at war with the United States, France is the nation that is most sympathetic to the Mexicans and that which practicing all the professions, has caused an immense advance in all the mechanical arts, improving all their procedures, introducing good taste in building construction, furniture and clothes, and providing all the comforts and pleasures of life from architecture and machinery to confectionary and cuisine, although giving way with this advance to unchecked debauchery of which evils we will speak elsewhere. All of the restrictions that a suspicious body politic have imposed on the acquisition of real estate have been removed, and although an effort was made to place them on the retail business and the practice of the mechanical arts, this has had no effect, and all these fields remain free to competition between foreigners and nationals.

This progress in the colonization of the interior, beneficial, in one way, for the country in general, has two serious drawbacks. Foreigners encounter great advantages in maintaining their status as such, because it exempts them from mandatory military service and other burdens that are reserved only for the people of this country. They form independent colonies and there are as many of these as there are nations having commercial relations with the republic, each one recognizing as chief its minister and expecting little from Mexican laws. Rarely naturalized, they form a separate society that will never be incorporated into the nation. Counting, in addition, on the protection of their ministers, they can be too demanding and boisterous, overwhelming the government with claims that are often unjust. Meanwhile the Mexicans, disheartened by this preferential treatment, are frustrated right from the beginning, or they may place their enterprises under the name of these foreigners, who enjoy greater protection, great sums of capital, and connections with Europe and who have in their favor more knowledge in business and the arts and an aptitude for matters of style. The owners of large-scale operations are mostly English and German, and owners of retail businesses are Spanish and French while few Mexicans remain in these businesses where they are reduced to a class of employees and lawyers for those who, for the most part, encouraged this form of government.

Amidst so many causes of underdevelopment, however, there has been notable progress, owing to the government initiatives, as to victories over the obstacles that institutions and political troubles have imposed. Even though foreign mining companies have not enjoyed the same victories, this domain has progressed extraordinarily and the treasures extracted from the Great Vein, Fresnillo, Rayas, and recently, from the mines of Nuestra Señora de la Luz in Guanajuato have been
elevated to the level of prosperity equal or superior to what it had before. The amounts minted annually are now a little less than what they had been before the insurrection,* and awaiting even further improvements due to the abundance of mercury, indispensable to the amalgamation process, which comes from California and whose price has fallen to one half what it was when the mines of Mexico were provisioned only with mercury from the Almaden mines in Spain. And the California mercury is leased to private parties and the mine owners buy it from them at almost the same price as the Spanish government offered before Independence. Agriculture has returned to a more productive state than it had in that epoch and harvests are sold at higher prices than they have fetched for many years. Great industrial establishments have been formed where products are manufactured that are far superior to those that have ever been made, and progress would have been even greater if the importation of raw cotton had not been prohibited. Well-being is apparent for all those who do not depend for their living on the salaries of the government: artisans find work and in the countryside there is work for people in all agricultural operations. The bargains available on all apparel mean that even common people go about not simply clothed, but adorned in luxury. In the capital and in other major cities there are abundant outlets for entertainment, supplied in the capital by various theatres and two bull rings when before there was only one. All of this was not directly caused by independence because it could have happened without it, without incurring the other effects of independence such as the loss of territory and other adversities. Neither should it be forgotten that such advances are also the result of the general advances of the civilized world, in which Mexico for the most part has calmly and under good government participated, nor should the luck brought by mining bonanzas and abundant harvests, independent of political matters, be overlooked.

Foreign debt, with its continuous output of money without any beneficial exchange, causes the greatest harm to the economy. The loans made to businesses on customs duties, and the monies received from the salt mines and the rest of the national and church estates despite having been so ruinous for the treasury, have produced the benefit of creating numerous great, and some middling, fortunes. These, united with those that have come from mining and with those formed by people who have taken advantage of abuses and weaknesses in government, have remained rooted in the country and have driven up the prices of rural properties considerably. They have contributed to the beautification of some cities, especially Mexico and Guanajuato with the construction of sumptuous buildings, having also built some public edifices at great cost, such as the Theatre of Santa Anna in Mexico and the custom house and the warehouses in Veracruz. This accumulation of wealth, the perfection which the various arts have achieved, and the occasion these present to purveyors of high fashion, tailors, and French chefs that they have also been responsible for introducing a luxury so excessive, that gambling and social breakdown have ru-

*Mexican independence [translator].

ined some fortunes, especially those enriched by mining before they had finished developing, and they have also caused frequent commercial bankruptcy. There is no city in Europe or the United States proportionate in population, where there are so many private coaches as there are in Mexico City and the number rented in public stands is three times greater than what it was before Independence.

Society has been affected by the vicissitudes of politics and the ups and downs of private fortunes. In the first period following independence, and especially after the fall of Iturbide, society in its entirety was politicized. Some women, addicted to insurrection, united in their social gatherings with people who had been following a certain party, while the leaders of the Scottish Rite Masons attended that of a lady who, because of her youth, beauty and talent, played the role for them of Madam Rolland of the Girondists in the French Revolution who also participated in the later ruin of the party.* The sad result of the Revolution of Tlacuilo was the dissolution of the public meetings of the Masons along with the closing of their lodges, and the departure of the United States Ambassador Ponisett [sic] in 1829, recalled by his government, deprived the York Rite Masons of the only person who with his courteous manner and modes of French gentlemanly behavior brought a distinct lustre to their social gatherings and dances. As a result, the gatherings with connections to particular political parties ceased, leaving in their place those of little curiosity. This was most apparent in the case of the former formality of English parties whose coarseness grew sometimes to resemble the dishevelment of a Spanish dinner table. Banquets formerly marked with the solemnity of state negotiations were reduced to gatherings of a very few houses and guests; because the line of demarcation created by the excessive inequality of fortunes sharply separated families. There are not many competent to join the opulent class without risking ruin, making efforts to demonstrate wealth far above their means in order to avoid a ridiculous inferiority. Friendly society, which makes commercial life more agreeable without becoming too intimate, is almost never found. A foreigner who has not succeeded in being received into the domestic confidence of some families cannot find anything to do to pass the time other than riding a horse or wasting time in a café if he is prudent enough not to look for other distractions.

The effect of the ideas that have prevailed since the last century has been the destruction of all heraldic or administrative hierarchy. When the marks of noble distinction or those that came from civil offices were prominent—an illustrious name, a cross on the chest, a toga, a nap before lunch, a colonel’s uniform, or a captain with a moderate fortune or salary—people respected those who possessed them as members of the most distinguished of classes in the state. Men toiled at great labors in order to acquire these honors, risking their lives in the countryside, or by the easier means of paying money for courtly pretenses. Now in Mexico, when all the rest have disappeared, only the army remains with a certain lustre. Some ranks within it are

*Madam Rolland’s intellectual gatherings inspired the radical Girondin party in its republican and anti-monarchist stance during the French Revolution [translator].
Central Themes
State formation, the northern frontier, land and labor, gender, race and ethnicity

Suggested Reading

Related Sources
19. The Silver Mining City of Zacatecas (1605)
32. Hidalgo’s Uprising (1849)
39. Mexican Views of the Mexican-American War (1850)
62. An Assessment of Mexico from the Right (1940)

PART 6
Liberalism, Conservatism, and the Porfiriato (1856–1911)

The mid-nineteenth century found the Mexican political elite working to resolve a series of issues that had emerged upon independence from Spain and persisted well after the Mexican-American War (1846–1848). Mexico lost half of its national territory in the war, and the conclusion of the conflict exposed the weaknesses of the economy and the regional factionalism that marked the country’s politics. Mexican leaders debated how to encourage economic development, the nature of the relationship between church and state, and the correct balance of power between the federal and state governments.

Within this context, a generation of Mexicans emerged whose members came from middling social groups. They were mainly composed of *mestizos* (people of Spanish and Indian parentage), a group whose socioeconomic power had first emerged during the rapid economic growth of the late-eighteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, this middling group included individuals who had risen to social, economic, and political prominence; many first attended religious schools and then went on to public institutions of learning. For example, Benito Juárez, a Zapotec Indian from Oaxaca, attended seminary in Oaxaca City and then went on to receive a law degree. He would eventually serve as governor of the state of Oaxaca and as minister of justice and president of the Republic, strongly advancing the Liberal cause in all of these positions.

Liberals sought to usher in new relations of private property and encourage economic development, challenge the economic and political power of the Catholic Church and its moral authority over the citizenry, increase the authority of civil government, and expand political participation and conceptions of equality under the law. Liberals were not a homogeneous group: *puros* (purists) held fast to secularization, the expansion of private property, and the strengthening of the central government, while *moderados* (moderates) worked pragmatically with Conservatives. Liberal achievements included a series of laws, each named after its author. Ley Juárez (1855) eliminated ecclesiastical and military *fueros* (legal privileges) that, for example, exempted soldiers and clerics from having to stand trial in civil courts. Examining another important piece of legislation, Ley Lerdo (1856), reveals the ways in which the Liberals sought to significantly alter the Church’s capacity to hold property (Source 42). This legislation also affected indigenous communities’ *ejido*