Zapata and the City Boys: In Search of a Piece of the Revolution

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Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata was not an educated man. With only a few, fragmentary years of the limited kind of primary schooling that a village like Aneucuilco, Morelos, could offer during the reign of Porfirio Díaz, Zapata rose to prominence on the Mexican political scene despite his education, not because of it. His national prominence, however, was

Thanks to Linda Hall, Aaron Mahr, Engracia Leyo, Luis González y González, Martín González de la Vara, Henry C. Schmidt, John Tutino, two anonymous referees, and the staff of the HAHR for suggestions that have dramatically improved this paper. This research was funded by a Fulbright grant from the United States Information Agency and three awards from the University of New Mexico: a Graduate Achievement Award from the Office of Graduate Studies, a field research grant from the Latin American Institute, and a grant from the Student Research Allocation Committee.

Citations in this article refer to the following archives: Archivo de la Defensa Nacional, Mexico City (ADN); Biblioteca Nacional, Mexico City, Centro de Estudios Sobre la Universidad, Archivo de Gildardo Magaña (BN-AGM); Centro de Estudios de Historia de México, Conchami, Mexico City, Archivo de Genaro Amézquita (C-AAG); Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City, Programa de Historia Oral (PHO); Universidad Panamericana, Mexico City, Archivo de Roque González Garza (UP-ARCC); U.S. Department of State, Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910–1929 (USDS-IAM). In the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City: Archivo de Alfredo Robles Domínguez (AGN-AARD); Archivo del Cuartel General del Sur (AGN-ACGS); Archivo de Genovevo de la O (AGN-ACGO); and Archivo de Zapata (AGN-ACZ).

1. The debate over Zapata’s literacy has been a long and unprofitable one. In general, authors who like him have argued that he was illiterate, and those who disdained him have responded that he was not. The most detailed work to date on Zapata’s education can be found in Jesús Sotoelo Inclán, La escuela de Aneucuilco, Cuadernos zapatistas (Cuernavaca: Gobierno del Estado de Morelos, 1979), and Sotoelo is correct in believing that his subject could read and write. The most direct evidence for Zapata’s ability to write can be found on a photograph he dedicated to Gildardo Magaña on Dec. 27, 1914, in ADN, Archivo Histórico y Cancelados, Gildardo Magaña, XI/III/1–195,496. The roughness of the hand, the informality of the note, and the apparent continuity between text and signature make it almost certain (at least here, for sure) is the handwriting of Zapata himself.
hardly accidental. As early as the fall of 1911, in the Plan of Ayala, Zapata began to seek that prominence by addressing himself to the nation. Later, as partners in the Convention government of 1914 and 1915, the Zapatistas labored to develop a legislative program that reflected their growing appreciation of Mexico's regional differences and national needs. Even after the disconcerting failure of this flawed experiment in national government, they did not completely return to their earlier regional orientation. Instead, they maintained an imitation Convention government in Morelos until 1916 and, in the years that followed, vigorously pursued a campaign of inter factional diplomacy designed to broaden and unite opposition to the revolutionary regime of Venustiano Carranza.

Zapata had clearly come to realize, soon after taking up arms in 1911, that in order to press demands that were regional or even local in conception, he had to have a national presence. He could not hope, however, to impose his will unilaterally in Mexico City. To see his program of land reform and municipal liberty enacted, he needed somehow to get a piece of a national revolution, a share of national power. But the quest for such power would entail a rather complicated political project, and Zapata's haphazard education, squeezed in between the many more pressing demands of rural life, was not designed to prepare him to oversee such an enterprise. Furthermore, he had never traveled beyond south-central Mexico and was therefore in no position to understand what the Mexican nation was all about. Like other leaders of peasant rebellions, he was going to need some help.2

The gap between Zapata's education and experience and the growing needs of his movement was gradually filled by a stream of relatively educated people from outside Morelos who passed, among the Zapatistas at least, for intellectuals. "City boys" because they came from an urban environment that was foreign to most of the Zapatistas, because they were almost exclusively male, and because most of them were quite young, they were hardly natural representatives of Zapatismo.3 But Zapata had nowhere else to turn. And so, drawn to the Zapatista world by sympathy, curiosity, necessity, or ambition, these city boys quickly made themselves indispensable. They presided over revolutionary justice, provided the guerrilleros with medical care, instructed the peasants in Zapatista ideology, engineered an official agrarian reform, and helped to rebuild village life after the destructive forays of government troops. They also assisted in the organization of Zapatista forces, and even on occasion led them into battle.

Despite this furious activity, many scholars downplay the significance of Zapata's intellectuals.4 Since most of the city boys arrived on the scene only after a well-defined rebellion was under way, their presence was clearly not critical, for instance, in inciting the peasants to action or in dispensing ideology. It was largely they, however, who conducted Zapata's inter factional diplomacy. They composed the manifestos, carried messages from Zapata across the country to other revolutionary leaders, and represented Zapatismo in the corridors of national power. And in this they were important, because the way they bridged the gap between Zapata and the national scene would be a significant variable in deciding the nature and the size of the piece of the revolution that the peasants of Morelos would ultimately secure. It is with the role of the city boys in carrying out Zapatista diplomacy— with the relationship between Zapata, his intellectuals, and national power—that this article will be concerned.

Local Intellectuals

From the start of his movement—indeed, even before he had a movement—Zapata relied on others better educated than he to lead the political charge. Whether simply out of distaste or because he felt inadequate, he always insisted that he was no politician. This was just as well, at least at the beginning of the revolution, because Porfirian politics had become rather exclusive over the years. True, the old caudillos who had helped bring Diaz to power often still had political positions, but otherwise politics was now largely the province of the científicos, the hacendados, and their relatively educated brethren. There was little room for people like Zapata, and perhaps even the villagers of Morelos had come to be a minor role in the events related here. For one discussion of the activities of Jiménez y Muro and Gutiérrez de Mendoza, see Anna Macias, "Women and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940," *The Americas* 37:1 (July 1980), 54-62. As a definition of intellectual, I will accept the villagers' use of the term, which included students, lawyers, and doctors from the city as well as rural schoolteachers.


3. There were, of course, exceptions to this rule. Dolores Jiménez y Muro, Juana Gutiérrez de Mendoza, and Paulina Maraver Cortés were among the city women with ties to the movement. But while their contributions were important, they served Zapata more as urban agents and spies than as close advisers and representatives, and therefore played only

4. For a general dismissal of the importance of such camp intellectuals see, for instance, Knight, *Mexican Revolution*, 2:255.
lieve that this was a game best left to the educated. At any rate, it was not Zapata but better-read locals like Villa de Ayala schoolteacher Pablo Torres Burgos who responded, in early 1909, to Díaz’s promise of free elections by organizing support in the Villa de Ayala-Aneneculco area for the people’s candidate for governor, Patricio Leyva. In fact, in the official act of formation of the local Melchor Ocampo Club that backed Leyva’s campaign, Zapata’s name appears far down on the list of signatures. While this proves that he, like many other inhabitants of Morelos, was involved in this election that offered some hope for change, it also proves that his role was small.5

When Aneneculco chose Zapata as the president of its council in the fall of that year, however, a different kind of politics was at work. The Leyva campaign had been a statewide affair that even included appearances by prominent Mexico City politicians, who came to Morelos either to test the new political waters or to help hold the line for official candidate Pablo Escandón. Zapata’s election, meanwhile, involved no campaign, no visiting dignitaries, and no crafty angling for support. The villagers simply got together and voted, and when they were done Zapata had a political place of his own, a place for which no education beyond perhaps a fundamental ability to read was required.6 Nor did Zapata need an education—or the educated—to expand his reputation in 1910 by seizing lands for nearby villages under cover of Francisco Madero’s revolt in the north.

Despite the power and popularity that thus accrued to Zapata, when it came time in late 1910 to consider joining the Maderista rebellion, it was Torres Burgos who went to Texas to speak with Madero, because by now he was a somewhat experienced practitioner of extralocal politics. Furthermore, sending Torres Burgos instead of Zapata was a logical decision because Madero, a sophisticated product of the Porfiriato, doubtless would look more favorably on a man of some schooling. In fact, the outcome of the trip was probably clear beforehand: Madero was destined to make Torres Burgos head of the Morelos revolt.

But neither Madero nor Torres Burgos fully understood the revolution they had begun. It soon became evident that revolutionary politics in Morelos would not be for the genteel. While he may have been well suited for diplomacy, Torres Burgos was unable to accept the brutality that was inevitable in the wake of the uprising of March 11, 1911. The fighting had hardly started when he quit the movement in disgust, and was shot the next day by a federal patrol. More realistic and less squeamish, Zapata took over.7

The next intellectual to play an important role among the Zapatistas had a more lasting presence. Like Torres Burgos, Octilio Montaño was a product of the local scene. In fact, he had virtually grown up with Zapata, and had become his compadre before the revolution, a status of which he was later extremely proud. Son of a campesino from Villa de Ayala but disinclined to spend his life working the land, Montaño taught school in various towns around the state. Though his formal education was limited, in the rural milieu this occupation was enough to earn him the title of professor, and with it the admiration of many of the villagers.8

Montaño, it was said—often with a mixture of wonderment and mirth—could talk from morning till sundown in a town square, and when he was done the people of the town would sign up with Zapata. In a similar wordy and repetitive way, he also explained Zapatismo to the nation. During the difficult summer of 1911, as relations between Madero and Zapata soured, it was often Montaño who was charged with trying to work out a compromise with the national leader.9 When efforts at compromise failed and, in late November of 1911, Zapata and Montaño retreated to the mountains of southwest Puebla to compose the Plan of Ayala, Montaño was essentially putting his recruiting pitch into writing and disseminating it to the country at large. Legend has it that Zapata provided the content and Montaño the form of this document, but of course content and form are not so easily separated. It is enough to say that this proclamation of Zapata’s intent was the product of a close collaboration between the leader of the movement and its top intellectual, two men who knew and understood each other well.10

7. See Womack, Zapata, 76–78. While some question remains about whether Torres Burgos actually made the trip north, like Womack I see no reason not to believe the story. Of course, whether or not he completed his trip is of little consequence for the present discussion.
8. For biographical information on Montaño see Miguel Angel Sedano E., Emiliano Zapata: revolucionarios suyhos y memorias de Quintín González (Mexico City: Editorial del Magisterio, 1970), 63–68. See also José Eduardo Pérez, Octilio Montaño, Cuadernos morelenses (Cuernavaca: Gobierno del Estado de Morelos, 1982), 25–27.
10. For the contention that Montaño merely gave the document its form, see Carlos Reyes Avilés, Cartones zapatistas (Mexico City: a.p., 1925), 34–35. Stylistic similarities between the Plan of Ayala and Montaño’s other work leave little doubt that he participated in the plan’s writing. See also Zapata’s appointment of Montaño to the rank of Brigadier General, Ayacastla, Puebla, Nov. 29, 1911, BN-AGM, 28:4:749. While this document was
Together they created a plan that reflected superbly the nature and the origins of Zapaturism. Awkwardly written and largely innocent of the allusions to European-born ideologies that eluded intellectuals might have included, the Plan of Ayala showed its country origins in every word. Zapata was thrilled. Indeed, compared to expressions of purpose composed in September, in which the Zapatistas had vaguely listed their goals and proclaimed themselves in counterrevolution, this was a work of art. It was also a tremendous moment of self-definition, one that even Zapata may have feared would not arrive. The Plan of Ayala presented Zapata’s demands for land, liberty, and justice in a fairly straightforward way. It took a burden off Zapata by defending him against the charge—emanating from Mexico City—that he was nothing more than a bandit, an accusation that cut him deeply. And it was a plan that the Zapatistas could live with. Despite the many changes that his movement underwent, for Zapata the Plan of Ayala would be gospel until the day he died.11

The villagers of Morelos had become Maderistas in the spring of 1911 because Madero’s crusade offered them hope for land reform and a claim to legitimacy. Zapata took this alliance seriously, and protected his loyalty again and again as tensions rose between himself and the national government. Thus the decision to break with Madero that became official in the Plan of Ayala was not taken lightly. In a sense, it was not taken at all. While it is true that Zapata stubbornly held out for land reform, it was only with the arrival of federal troops commanded by Victoriano Huerta that he returned to the hills in rebellion. Then, in the months between his revolt and the writing of the Plan of Ayala, he seems to have been hoping rather anxiously for a reasonable peace settlement. Obviously missing the automatic legitimacy that his alliance with Madero had given him, Zapata was somewhat intimidated by the prospect of going it alone.12

It is not surprising, then, that although the Plan of Ayala was a bid by the Zapatistas to recreate this missing legitimacy for themselves, it also contained a new attempt to forge an alliance that might make them members of a national revolution. They now turned their attention to the Maderista warrior from Chihuahua, Pascual Orozco, Jr., despite the fact that Orozco had not yet decided to abandon Madero. Though it proved fleeting and ineffective, the alliance with Orozco was clearly intended to be more than just a way to get the arms that a rebel near the U.S. border might secure. Zapata and Orozco communicated with one another occasionally in 1912, and when one of the northerner’s manifestos arrived in Morelos, Zapata took it seriously enough to correct it on such topics as labor legislation and how to construct a new government.13

The Zapaturists, in other words, still conceived of themselves as a regional movement that needed national ties. Without such ties they could not hope to effect change by winning a revolution; without such ties perhaps they were merely bandits after all. And so, while they may have preferred that any potentially powerful allies stay at a distance that would allow them no influence in Morelos, they continued to seek alliances. In 1912, this resulted not only in relations with Orozco but also in overtures to Emilio Vázquez Gómez, another disaffected Maderista who was now preaching revolution from the safety of the United States. Unfortunately, neither choice proved fortuitous. Orozco would make his peace with the Huerta government in 1913, and Vázquez Gómez would repeatedly demonstrate that he had little but ambition to offer.14

Barra, Acuña, Puebla, Sep. 26, 1911, BN.AGM, 20:1318; Womack, Zapata, 393-35; and Juan Andrew Almazán, “Memorias del General Juan Andrew Almazán,” extracted from El Universal (Mexico City), 1957, bound photocopy at the Colegio de México, Mexico City, chap. 29. While it is clear that Zapata was not completely on the defensive at this time, I think the lack of certainty comes through.

11. To Pascual Orozco, May 5, 1912, an undated Zapata interview with El Imparcial (Mexico City), and Zapata to Orozco, May 6, 1912, all in AGN-AARD, 8:431-43; 8:437-12, and 8:437-17, respectively. See also Michael C. Meyer, Mexican Rebel Pascual Orozco and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1915 (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1997). See also some Zapata letters that were also Oroquistas. See the manifesto of June 18, 1912, in Emilio Zapata: Antología, ed. Laura Espinol, Alicia Olivera, and Salvador Ruíz (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Historicos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1988). 120.

12. For Zapata’s desire to stay loyal, see his manifesto of Aug. 27, 1911, in Gildardo Magaña and José Paez Cuauhtemoc, Emilio Zapata y el agrarismo en Mexico, reprint ed., 5 vols. (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Historicos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1985). 1:262-265. In the same source, Madero’s negotiator in November 1911 claims to have received “excellent conditions” from Zapata. Ibid., 2:62. On Zapata’s position and predicaments in these difficult months, see also Agustín del Pozo to Francisco León de

Urban Recruits

Even during these early years, Zapata's political offerings to the nation were not products of the countryside alone. Because Morelos was close to Mexico City and because of its progressive, sugar-based economy, its inhabitants hardly lived in the same kind of isolation as those of Oaxaca or Chiapas. Zapata, Torres Burgos, and Montuori were all familiar, for instance, with the publications of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM). They had also consulted with lawyers in Mexico City about various land tenure cases. Moreover, city-bred intellectuals started to trickle into the Zapataista camp from almost the beginning of the revolution. A student from Puebla named Abraham Martínez was serving as one of Zapata's most important spokesmen by the spring of 1911. Gildardo Magaña and his brothers, meanwhile, also stayed in Zapata's territory that spring, or after their Complot de Tacubaya was exposed in the capital. Such other urbanites as Dolores Jiménez y Muro, Enrique Villa, Manuel Palafoux, and Genaro Amezcoa were adherents of Zapativismo by 1912.16

With the coup that brought General Huerta to power in February 1913, Zapativismo began to change. In response to the spreading rebellion against his profoundly unrevolutionary rule, Huerta reintroduced the levy—an old Porfirián means of recruiting troops—and in Zapata country this became a whole new reason for people to join the insurrection. Combined with the return to Morelos in April of General Juvencio Robles and the scorched-earth tactics he had practiced there for Madero in 1912, this policy of conscription led to considerable growth in Zapataista ranks. Zapata would become increasingly capable of moving an army on important cities and even the Federal District.17

One result of these changes was that Zapata faced new diplomatic challenges as his power to affect national politics began to rise toward its pinnacle in 1914 and 1915. Help, however, was on the way: the atmosphere of repression that Huerta was creating in Mexico City—which included the closing of the Casa del Obrero Mundial (COM)—was driving increasing numbers of urban intellectuals into the Zapataista camp.18

Any attempt to evaluate the role of these new advisers and aides in bridging the void between Zapativismo and the nation raises thorny questions about Zapata's relationship with his intellectuals, and specifically about the decision-making process within his organization. These issues are problematic because the documents available for the study of Zapativismo were nearly all composed by intellectuals. Few, if any, were written by Zapata himself. Furthermore, it was largely city-bred intellectuals—men like Gildardo Magaña and Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama—who wrote the first books about the movement when the revolution was done. Sometimes self-serving and often full of distortion and myth, these are nevertheless crucial sources, upon which the historian must somehow depend. From our perspective, in other words, Zapata is eneused and mummified by his secretaries. It is very hard to get him alone.

To begin to deal with these obstacles, it is necessary to examine the curious love-hate relationship that Zapata and his campesino followers had with their urban comrades. Many of the city boys seemed to enjoy almost immediate trust when they arrived in Morelos. Gustavo Baz, who had been a medical student in Mexico City, won his spurs by curing the daughter of jefe Francisco Pacheco, while Alfredo Serratos made a good impression simply by letting Zapata know that he spoke English. Although in these two cases the welcome was tied to skills that would be particularly useful to the movement, an urban recruit's practical talents did not have to be especially high to win acceptance. As a general rule, if you could read and write you were needed; beyond that there was not much discrimination among applicants for the secretarial pool.19

If much of this acceptance was based on need, other forces were also at play. The Zapatistas had considerable admiration for education and those who possessed it. In this largely illiterate society, which had guarded its colonial documents for centuries because it believed them to be the keys to eventual justice, the written word was invested with an almost magical quality. Thus it was not just knowledge that the peasants expected from

18. Womack, Zapata, 153-94.
19. For the premium placed on the ability to write, see Interview with Félix Vázquez Jiménez, San Juan Ixtayapan, D.F., Aug. 10, 1973, conducted by Laura Espejel, PHO-Z/1/9. See also Interview with Gustavo Baz Prada, Mexico City, Aug. 7, 1979, conducted by Alicia Olvera and Eugenia Meyer, PHO/4/6, and Interview with Enrique M. Zepeda, conducted by Eugenia Meyer, Mexico City, May 24, Apr. 3, and May 11, 1973, PHO/1/47. Womack contends that Serratos may have been a Víllasista agent, Zapata, 205. If this is true, his case suggests that when he arrived in 1914, incoming intellectuals were not as thoroughly scrutinized as were possible allies.
people who read and wrote but, at least at times, a certain kind of wisdom. It is said, for instance, that Zapata could not understand why an educated man would be a drunk. Apart from this, the city boys earned appreciation and acceptance; merely setting foot in this countryside afire with rebellion they demonstrated remarkable bravery.10

On the other hand, it was natural that the campesinos should harbor an underling lack of trust for these people who came from beyond the village structure, with its close ties of family and godparenthood and its peculiar material interests held in common. Indeed, when an unfamiliar intellectual arrived from Mexico City in his fancy city clothes, the villagers often threatened to shoot him for his dress alone. For them he was a catrín or, worse, a científico. The latter slur demonstrates that more than just a natural mistrust of outsiders was involved. It reveals that for the locals anyone dressed in the city way was implicated in the Porfirian system—that it was the city and all its inhabitants that the peasants understood themselves to be fighting against. In particular, now that things were beginning to go well, they feared that these newly arrived catrines would appropriate all the power the Zapatistas had won in years of fighting. Thus, though the educated quickly changed their clothes to try to fit into Zapata’s world, deep-seated distrust between local and outsider was rarely attained.11

Zapata’s own impatience with his educated help was frequently evident. He had never liked anything about the city, and even if the charge rings false that he once drunkenly threatened to have Díaz Soto y Gama and Montaño shot, he certainly recognized intellectual shortcomings. He apparently believed, for example, that the doctrines of anarchism and communism in which the city boys dabbled lacked common sense. He shook his head in amazement over the stubbornness with which his engineers, in 1915, sought straight lines where there were none as they marked out village lands. And he recognized that the impulsiveness of certain young diplomats limited their usefulness. These were not the kind of people one could trust without condition.22

These factors suggest some general conclusions about how Zapata interacted with his city boys. The contention of some of them that he made his decisions without their counsel is surely a twisting of fact. Especially when dealing with national political strategy, he certainly relied on their advice. He demonstrated that he considered national politics largely the realm of the educated, and an intellectual medium was almost always present at critical diplomatic meetings.23 But Zapata was too strong-minded and too cautious to give his advisers full sway over inter-factional relations. He wanted to maintain control, to lead his intellectual advisers rather than to be led by them. In fact, in a 1914 conversation with Pancho Villa he claimed that he could trust his intellectuals, but only because he had been carefully nurturing them for some time. The best guess, then, is that although Zapata delegated a fair amount of authority to various city boys at various times, he was usually in on the making of big decisions. The decision-making process was apparently a collaborative one, in which Zapata collected the advice of others and then chose the best course of action.24

The first city boy to become truly prominent in Zapatismo was Manuel Palafoux. Originally from Puebla, Palafoux was an ex-engineering student who went into sales. In this capacity he traveled extensively throughout Mexico and, in the last years of the Porfiriato, spent some time in Mexico City. In October 1911 he appeared among the Zapatistas as an employee of the hacienda of Tenango with a bid to buy protection. Though Zapata would soon see the benefits of such arrangements, at that time he might


21. A catrín was a citified dandy, and a científico one of Díaz’s government technocrats. See Luis Cajigal to Antonio Barrios, Cuautla, Aug. 21, 1911, BN-AGM, 31:2-4:275; Pánis, “Cuatro meses,” Mar. 25 and Apr. 27, 1911; and Marte Gómez, Las causas agrarias del sur (Mexico City: Manuel Forma, 1920), 107-4, 140. For one effort at adjustment, see the photograph of the bespectacled city boy Genaro Arroyo astride a horse in charro regalia, BN-AGM, 12:5:36.

22. For the threat against Montaño and Díaz Soto y Gama, see Alfonso Tanuema, La tragedia zapatista (Mexico City: Editorial Bolivar, 1931), 52. See also Interview with Enrique M. Zapata, PHO 15/4, and Sebastián M. Robles, “Lo que pensaba Zapata sobre el comunismo,” El Campeón, Oct. 1943, Magaña and Pérez Guerrero, Emiliano Zapata, 4:273; and Zapata to Cárdenas Magaña, June 9, 1917, AGN-AN, 15:1:6-45. On engineers seeking straight lines, see Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama, La revolución agraria del sur y Emiliano Zapata, su cabildo (Mexico City: Imprenta Policromía, 1960), 219.

23. For this kind of mythmaking see Díaz Soto y Gama, La revolución agraria, 288-289. Examples of the presence of Zapata intellectuals during the playing out of national diplomacy include Manuel Palafoux, for instance, made a third in Zapata’s private conversation with Pancho Villa at Xochimilco. See the record of the “Rività de Xochimilco” in Consulares Revistas, Planes políticos, 113-12; For another example, see the copy of an article from El Monitor (Mexico City), May 22, 1915, in AGN-ACGS, 1:1-3.

24. For the generalization that intellectuals did not manipulate their cabildos see Knight, Mexican Revolution, 2:294. For a view that insists on such manipulation see Mario Méndez, Zapata (Mexico City: Editorial Jos., 1936), 185. See also the “Jueg de Xochimilco,” González Ramírez, Flanes políticos, 119, and Interview with Cayetano Hidalgo Salazar, PHO 15/60.
have shot Palafax for suggesting the deal. But because Zapata needed the educated, he chose instead to forgive the new arrival and put him to work.\textsuperscript{25} Nervous and high-strung, Palafax was consumed by an ambition that eventually allowed him to overcome the disadvantageous way in which he joined the rebellion. Doing all he could to worm his way into Zapata’s heart, with the fall of Madero Manuel Palafax began to make his mark.\textsuperscript{26}

His key struggle for power was naturally with Montaño, and it came to a head in the spring and summer of 1913. Pascual Orozco, Sr., and several other representatives of Huerta had come to talk peace in the aftermath of Huerta’s coup and had instead been charged with treason. Chosen to serve as judge in the trials of these men, Montaño soon made it clear that he felt threatened by Palafax. He eagerly set about tormenting his foe—who was prototype perfectly as the prosecutor—by repeatedly criticizing his efforts to gather evidence. But Zapata hated Huerta passionately for past transgressions and was furious with Orozco and his son for supporting the new government. It was prosecution—revolutionary justice—that he was after, not the ponderous, bureaucratic justice of the Porfirianos, which had never helped the people of Morelos. Thus when Montaño betrayed Palafax for such perceived shortcomings as his inability to secure proof of the charges against Orozco and, worried about public opinion, insisted that such proof was necessary for a conviction, he began to aggravate Zapata. He then compounded this mistake by calling Orozco and his cohort “commissioners of peace,” a status Zapata did not recognize.\textsuperscript{27}

25. For Palafax’s birthplace, birthdate, and arrival in Morelos, see the biographical material compiled on Oct. 26, 1921, and Apr. 21, 1930, respectively, in ADN, Archivo Pensionistas, Manuel Palafax, VIII/2/40-54, 77-9. These two documents differ on the birthdates: 1875 or 1878. See also Gómez, “Los comisarios,” 50, and Enriqué Márquez de León, Palafax, Villa de Ayala, Dec. 3, 1938, BN-AGM, 21-131. Palafax’s own account of his opposition to Díaz can be found in Palafax to Flavio Díaz, as New World, Dec. 27, 1934, AGN-AGO, 3:1:3. Finally, see Womack, Zapata, 760-67.


27. Womack, Zapata, 684-85, gives an interpretation of Montaño’s fall from grace in which one of the key ingredients was a flirtation with the Huerta government, but evidence for this is sketchy. See also Octavio Paz Solórzano, Zapata, Tres revolucionarios, tres testimonios, nos. 2 (Mexico City, Editorial Offset, 1980). 1-26, Octavio Montaño to Manuel Palafax, Apr. 28, 1913, BN-AGM, 27:6:61; and 37:6:57. Montaño to Zapata, May 31, 1913, BN-AGM, 30:10:213; and Zapata to Montaño, in Magaña and Pérez Guevara, Emiliano Zapata, 3:175-73. At some point Montaño seems to have declared many of Huerta’s agents free because of a lack of evidence against them. See [Montaño], no.d., BN-AGM, 37:6:81. Eventually, however, Zapata dispensed with legal formalities and had Orozco shot.

Palafox, meanwhile, was in a position to benefit from Montaño’s errors. His star was already on the rise, and he had the advantage of being the prosecutor and of being less concerned than Montaño about judicial niceties. Nor was he loath to serve as Zapata’s yes-man. Finally, he had a wonderful foil. Throughout this episode Montaño’s silly self-importance, his tortured prose, and his muddled thinking were constantly on display. In contrast, the few responses Palafox made to Montaño’s taunts were remarkable for their clarity. They were also invidious, probably by design. While expressing his unhappiness with Montaño’s efforts to “offend and ridicule” him, Palafox made sure to note that it was the expansion of his workload as secretary at Zapata’s headquarters that made it difficult for him to complete the investigations for the trial in question. Farther than Palafox from Zapata’s side, Montaño was reduced, by May 1913, to pleading with Zapata that Palafox had a “systematic inclination” to thwart his efforts on behalf of the revolution.\textsuperscript{28}

So it was that Zapata began to discover and reward Palafox’s superior abilities just as the movement approached its peak. By the time Huerta departed under revolutionary pressure a year later, Palafox was securely ensconced in power, and thus in a position to preside over Zapata’s headquarters at the revolution’s most critical point.

Diplomacy and the Constitutionalists

The central diplomatic question as Huerta tottered and fell in mid-1914 was what to do about Venustiano Carranza, the leader of the broad Constitutionalist faction that had attacked Huerta from the north. A large landlord from Coahuila, in terms both of class and geography Carranza came from a very different part of Mexico than did Zapata. From the Zapataist standpoint he was merely a hacendado who had little concern for social reform and hoped to use the revolution to fulfill his own ambitions. About this they were not far wrong. While Carranza would eventually pay lip service to land reform for political purposes, he was hardly an ardent proponent of this project so dear to Zapataist hearts. In fact, after securing a full presidential term in 1917, he would start to overturn even the limited land distribution that certain of his generals had previously carried out more or less independently. His allegiance—sketched out in the purely political Plan of Guadaloupe (March 1913)—was largely to legalism, order, and power. There was little here to interest Zapata.\textsuperscript{29}


29. One key incident that fed Zapata’s anger with Carranza was the Treaty of Tomatlán of Aug. 13, 1914, which turned over to the Constitutionalists federal positions that
Still, the Zapatista rank and file were not dead-set against the Constitutionalists. Most of the Zapatistas were tired of fighting, and they had, after all, been fighting to topple Huerta. Now that Huerta was gone, they thought it somehow unfair that the warfare might continue, especially since—despite the lesson provided by Madero—it seemed only logical to many that all revolutionary factions were more or less the same. One prominent Zapatista jefe even went so far as to call his movement the “Constitutionalists of the South.” Furthermore, the villagers’ distrust of outsiders did not extend, for example, to the gente de Lucio Blanco when, in August 1914, Carrancistas met Zapatistas in the Federal District. Rather, the soldiers fraternized across factional lines as often as they shot across them. Though a northernmer, the average Constitutionalist soldier was, after all, something of a campesino too.

Whatever they thought about the Carrancistas, neither Zapata’s jefes nor his soldiers had much say in national politics. Village consensus—the means of decision making with which Zapataismo had begun—was no match for the complexities of revolution in 1914. Zapata had increasingly met the problems of growth in his files with efforts to centralize his movement. With the help of intellectuals acting as his agents in the field, he gradually created a crude command structure. Though Zapata still sometimes tried to conform to past practice by convoking juntas of local chieftains for group decision making, military exigencies usually made this impractical. Thus, though the ideal of consensus persisted, most decisions were made at Zapata’s general quarters, where there were many more mechanics than warriors.20

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Moreover, the average Zapatista jefe was not encouraged to think of himself as a diplomat. When Huerta sent his peace-makers south in the spring of 1913, for instance, Zapata was quick to discourage individual generals from engaging them in dialogue. Those who accepted Huerta’s offers, meanwhile, suffered public executions when they fell into Zapata’s hands. Executions clearly meant to dissuade others from following their example. Interfractional diplomacy, in other words, was a touchy thing: without steps to centralize decision making on national politics, the still rather loose unity of Zapataismo might be threatened. At least one powerful jefe, Genovevo de la O, sent his own representatives to visit Carranza, and of course if a clear majority of Zapatistas had favored serious talks with the Constitutionalists, Zapata would have been forced to listen. But few of the local chieftains were any better prepared than Zapata to understand the complexities of national politics, and most seemed confused by the situation. There is no evidence of any significant discussion among them of the new diplomatic challenge: from all appearances they were simply waiting for some sign from headquarters of where the struggle would lead.21

Thus the choice of diplomatic tack was largely in the hands of Zapata and his intellectual advisers. The two general strategies from which they had to choose—rapprochement with the northerners or intransigence—reflected two major tendencies at work within early Zapatismo. The specific diplomatic function of many of the intellectuals, both before and after Huerta came to power, was to help foster what the Zapatistas called “revolutionary unity.” In the effort to unify the revolution, first against Madero and then against Huerta, Zapata sent the Magaña brothers, Abraham Martinez, and even Palacios to the north of Mexico and into the United States between 1912 and early 1914. Contact was made in this way not only with Orozco Jr., but with such important revolutionaries as Pancho Villa and Carranza as well.22 On the other hand, Zapata had been disillusioned by what he considered his betrayal at the hands of Madero and Orozco. He had always been a cautious man at the head of a cautious people, and these disappointments had made him even less trusting of the leaders of other revolutionary factions. And so as the summer of 1914 approached, there was a rough balance between the old perception that


21 On the considerable diplomacy of these years, see, for instance, Zapata to Luis López, Oct. 21, 1913, AGN-AGO, 17:276; Zapata to Magaña, Oct. 10, 1913, AGN-AGO, 17:274; Zapata’s circular to various revolutionaries, Sept. 12, 1913, AGN-AGO, 15:89–92; and Magaña and Pérez Guerrero, Emiliano Zapata, 2:151–52, 239–36.
Zapataismo needed alliances on the national level, and the growing feeling that perhaps there were no allies worth having.

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that Zapata’s intellectuals, as a group, were undecided about which path to take. The case of Orozco, Sr., suggests that Montaño and Palafox may have had fundamental differences over how best to deal with other factions. A more compelling example of such differences can be found in an exchange between Palafox, Zapata, and Angel Barrios. An engineer from Oaxaca, Barrios had been among the revolution’s leaders in that state during the Maderista phase, but had subsequently rebelled against the modern administration. He joined Zapata in 1913, and in that year, despite excellent radical credentials, concluded that “the revolution is one everywhere in the Republic.” Camped, at Zapata’s orders, on the outskirts of Mexico City in July and early August 1914, he acted on that assumption by becoming involved in several diplomatic ventures, both with Carrancistas agents and with self-appointed mediators.

But Palafox, and through him Zapata, disapproved, scoffing Barrios for not being sufficiently suspicious of the peacemakers who struggled into his zone from Mexico City and points farther north. Though his impressive revolutionary career had immediately earned him the important assignment of organizing Zapata’s attack on Mexico City in May 1913, during the course of that year Barrios had been discredited by his failure to temper the difficult relations between jefes Francisco Pacheco and Genovevo de la O—perhaps the key part of his organizational task. He was thus in no position in the summer of 1914 to stand up to the criticism of Palafox and Zapata, and was visibly backing away from his pro-unidad posture by the middle of August. On August 16, for instance, he allowed that it was dangerous even to talk to the Carrancistas and that renewed warfare seemed inevitable. Still, he maintained that there were honorable men among the Constitutionalists who might join the Zapatistas should the fight continue.


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The letter to Zapata that offered this insight included a postscript in which Barrios indicated, with some resignation, that he knew his suggestions would not be heard. In another communication of the same day, in an angrier mood, he explained himself more thoroughly. As had Montaño, he accused Palafox of zealously undermining his work, adding that if Palafox continued to behave this way, “it will occasion grave evils for the Revolution, and in this case I predict a noisy failure for both the Revolution and for you [Zapata] yourself.” Having made this prophetic statement, Barrios concluded by threatening to leave the movement. What must have been freshest in his mind as he aired his grievances was the diplomatic direction that Zapataismo was taking. Though Barrios tried to place the blame solely on Palafox, it was apparent that Zapata himself was becoming increasingly intransigent with potential allies.

Before the month was out this new political orientation would have dramatic results. When three Carrancista agents—Antonio I. Villarreal, Luis Cabrera, and Juan Sarabia—came to Morclos in late August, they brought with them one of the most important diplomatic opportunities of the revolution. During a preliminary meeting with Sarabia, Zapata had invited Villarreal and Cabrera south because they, like Sarabia himself, had the kind of revolutionary credentials he appreciated. In one way or another, all three had been involved in land reform projects during the revolution’s early years, and Villarreal and Sarabia had been active members of the PLM. In fact, Zapata had just finished soliciting Villarreal’s support for the Plan of Ayala in a letter full of praise for its recipient.

In sending such a letter, Zapata demonstrated that he had not yet adopted a completely inflexible diplomatic position. Though he may already have written Carranza off, like Barrios he apparently still hoped to find Carrancistas who might sympathize with Zapataismo’s goals. Perhaps the fairly natural Zapatista rejection of Carranza did not have to mean the rejection as well of all who had been Constitutionalists. Indeed, in its conception the conference with Villarreal, Cabrera, and Sarabia may well have been a calculated effort to.htm
have been more about luring these men into the Zapataist fold than about courting Carranza himself.

If there was hope that these commissioners might be drawn to Zapataismo, it lay partly in the fact that they had friends among the city boys. Díaz Soto y Gama had also been a member of the PLM, and Sarabia knew Genaro Amezcua as well. But though Sarabia initially believed that these and other Zapataist intellectuals would work in favor of peace, neither Díaz Soto y Gama nor Amezcua was in any better position to do so than Montañi or Barrios. Sarabia later wrote that the atmosphere in the Zapataist camp was so tense that the normally opinionated Díaz Soto y Gama, a relative newcomer to the movement, "hardly dares to speak in front of his jefe." Nor did Zapata bring to the conference any hopes he may have held for diplomacy. Instead, relying on the responsibility of these momentous times and perhaps physically ill, he was not around when the commissioners arrived.37

Palafox was thus left to run the show with the help of new arrival Alfredo Serratos, whose own ambition—or Paño's Villa's orders—made him Palafox's temporary sickkick. While the other city boys looked on in silence, Palafox took the offensive. In recent months Zapata had drawn increasingly close to Villa—a nominal Constitutionalist from Chihuahua long on the outs with Carranza—and Palafox seems to have decided that Villa would be ally enough. "Despotico, domineering, and presumptuous" in Sarabia's eyes, Palafox demanded that the Carrancistas "submit" to the Plan of Ayala and, waving a letter from Villa in the air, argued that if war came they alone would suffer. There was no diplomacy in this. Still, the envoys tried to be patient. Though disappointed by Zapata's absence and offended by these harangues, when allowed to speak they expressed their willingness to recognize the principles of the Plan of Ayala. This offer would be accepted as sufficient proof of good faith when the Convention of Aguascalientes made it in October, but Palafox now responded that the mere recognition of principles was not enough. The Carrancistas would have to accept the plan "without changing a word or a comma."38

37. See Sarabia to Turner, Jan. 26, 1915, in Base de los Castillos Negros, Notas para la historia, 70-77, and Sarabia's report to Carranza on Díaz Soto y Gama, Aug. 25, 1914, AGN-ACO, 17:2-8. Palafox later contended—in an attempt to absolve himself of his share of the blame for this incident—that Zapata did not completely disappear but simply hid out nearby. See Manuel Palafox, "La paz que Carranza propuso a Zapata," El Universal, June 28, 1914. In other respects on Zapata's intrusiveness, for instance—Palafox's version supports Carrancista accounts of the meeting. For the possibility that Zapata was ill, see de la O to Zapata, Cuernavaca, Aug. 20, 1914, AGN-ACO, 17:2-8.

38. For the quotation see Sarabia to Turner, Jan. 26, 1915, in Base de los Castillos Negros, Notas para la historia, 70-71. For Villarreal and Cabrera's report to Carranza, Sept. 4, 1914, see Magaña and Pérez Guerrero, Emeliano Zapata, 5:82-90. For the contention that it did indeed look as though Villa's powerful army was strong enough to win the revolution with Zapata's help, see Knight, Mexican Revolution, 2:85-86. This perception surely helps explain Palafox's intrusiveness.

In the opinion of Carranza's messengers, when Zapata finally arrived on the third day of talks he was simply manipulated by Palafox and Serratos, who were visibly feeding his anger. Somewhat distant, as he often was when he was angry, Zapata may also have been plagued by the feeling that probably made him avoid the conference in the first place—that he was out of his depth and might make a crucial mistake. He was no mere lump of clay; the decision on this peace initiative was ultimately his to make, and he intended to make it. But in situations like this he had to rely on his advisers.

And so by appealing to the ache in the pit of Zapata's stomach that recalled the bitter fruits of other such conferences, Palafox seems to have taken advantage of his confusion and mistrust. At any rate, Zapata allowed Palafox to continue the process of alienating Carranza's spokesmen, saying little except when a military issue was raised. After more delays and more threats, the Zapataista conditions for peace were finally presented formally: Carranza must submit to the Plan of Ayala; Xochimilco, currently in Carrancista hands, was to be given to the Zapataistas; and any future talks were to be held in Zapata's headquarters. The delegation was then allowed to return to Mexico City. There the demands of increasingly rigid Zapataismo were quickly rejected by Carranza, and his representatives informed Zapata that they would not return to Morelos as long as Palafox was around.39

Only one Zapataista condition showed the spirit of compromise. Carranza could refuse to relinquish national power—as a strict reading of the Plan of Ayala would have required—if he were willing to accept a Zapataista representative at his side. There can be little doubt who Palafox envisioned in this position in the unlikely event that Carranza should agree. Palafox's ambition had been readily apparent as he crawled up through Zapataista ranks by doing all he could to curry Zapata's favor, a strategy that currently included appealing to Zapata's distrust of outsiders. Now he was beginning to eye power on the national level, perhaps even the presidency itself. If Carranza did not accept Zapataista demands, the second-best way for Palafox to obtain such power was to destroy the diplomatic initiative...
altogether. Men like Villarreal, Cabrera, and Sarabia already had national reputations; to them the upstart Palafax was a "mediocrity of the people in every sense." If they joined the emerging Zapatista-Villista coalition, with or without Carranza, Palafax's political prospects would be severely curtailed. The inscrutable posture of Manuel Palafax was not, in other words, completely at the service of some radical Zapatista agenda. Rather, he was clearly looking out for himself.40

This is not to say, of course, that none of the blame for this failed bid for peace can be attributed to Carranza's agents. Sarabia's initial report was as much that of a spy as of a peace commissioner, and in it he proved as callous as Palafax about the prospect of renewed fighting. He was also full of condescension for Zapata, an attitude he may not have been able to hide when they met. Villarreal, meanwhile, seemed to be alienating the Zapatistas intentionally when he claimed to have no knowledge of the Plan de Ayala. Finally, the commission lacked the authority to deal with Zapata and Palafax had expected.41

Still, the evidence of Zapata's bad faith is compelling. Nor was this the only case in which Palafax frustrated diplomacy during the summer and fall of 1914. When Gerardo Murillo (the painter Dr. Atl) contacted the Zapatistas in late July, for example, his initiative was promising because he too had friends among the city boys: Díaz Soto y Gama had helped him find the Casa del Obrero Mundial. Palafax, however, soon found reason to spurn Dr. Atl's advances, and in September Dr. Atl even got the impression that Palafax had ordered his assassination. Here was another opportunity rejected.42


42. Among other possible messengers of peace whom Palafax confronted at this time were Manuel N. Rojdes and Guillermo García Aragón. Difficulties also arose during Carmen Serrado's visit to Morelos. See Palafax to Zapata, Xuatepec, July 19, 1914. AGN-AGO, 15:1:83, and July 28, 1914. AGN-AGO, 15:1:150. To ascertain the degree of Dr. Atl's good faith, see Magaña and Férez Guerrero, Emiliano Zapata, 4:172 and 3:73-77; Dr. Atl to Zapata, Contreras, D.F., Aug. 16, 1914. AGN-AGO, 16:1:15-16; Dr. Atl to Carranza, July 29, 1914, CGS-IM, 14:927. But as Carranza learned, Palafax's actions were motivated more by fear of a Zapatista-Villista alliance, and so they were not fruitful. See, for example, the correspondence between Dr. Atl and Robert F. Quirk, March-September 1914. See Quirk, The Mexican Revolution, 1914-1915: The Convention at Aguascalientes, 1914-1915: The Convention at Aguascalientes (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1965), 186-87. For the Zapatast perception of the importance of winning the lower classes of the countryside and city, see Zapata to Obregón, Aug. 1914, in Brown, The Mexican Revolution, 1914-1915: The Convention at Aguascalientes, 1914-1915: The Convention at Aguascalientes (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1965), 186-87. Finally, see Knight, Mexico's Revolution, 1:387. I agree with Knight that probably not much could be gained from such an alliance.

Constitutional Politics

By the time an exploratory delegation of Zapatast intellectuals arrived at the convention in late October, the movement's insurrectionary hard
ened into policy. There was no longer the slightest possibility that the Zapatistas could deal with Carranza himself. Nevertheless, the convention was yet another opportunity to court individual Constitutionalists before the fighting started. It was also a chance to make a good impression on the Villistas.

The most important member of the Zapatista commission proved to be Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama. Though he was not the delegation's head, he had become Zapata's word man, taking over this facet of Montaner's early role as Palafox had assumed the role of main adviser. It was largely up to him to make the Zapatista case heard. Díaz Soto y Gama's big moment came on October 27, the first day of Zapatista attendance at Aguascalientes. If, back in August, he might secretly have preferred that Zapatismo be more conciliatory to his old city friends, he was not exactly a diplomat himself. In fact, he had always specialized in arousing strong passions. Now, coming face to face with men like Obregón, he seized the moment to reinforce the confrontational course already outlined by Palafox—to make sure the negative signals sent earlier were fully understood. Hanging near the podium where he gave his dramatic first speech was the Mexican flag that the Villistas and Carrancistas delegates had signed as a pledge of loyalty to the convention. This provided Díaz Soto y Gama with the vehicle he needed to discuss Mexico's failed promises to the disinfected. The flag, he proclaimed, symbolized Agustín de Iturbide's clerical reaction, not independence for Mexico's indigenous masses. He himself would never sign it.

This was a nice conceit, and it expressed Díaz Soto y Gama's own radicalism wonderfully. It also reflected a fair amount of bravery, because he might have been shot during the pandemonium that ensued. But what was it designed to accomplish? Like many other city boys, Díaz Soto y Gama now seemed prepared to milk the antidiplomatic stance of Zapatismo for all it was worth. If he had ever believed that now was the time to bargain from a position of strength for the biggest piece of the revolution Zapatismo could get, he apparently believed it no longer. He seemed to have lost track, like Zapata himself perhaps, of the movement's general goals. Obviously he did not intend to reach out to those who straddled the growing abyss between Carranza and the Zapatista-Villista alliance. And if he meant instead to bolster the alliance with Villa, his speech was also a failure. Villista Roque González Garza, soon to become acting president of the government that would emanate from the convention, described it as a "hysterical critique of the origins of the flag." Though he formally accepted the principles of the Plan of Ayala only moments after Díaz Soto y Gama spoke, he did so with a bad taste in his mouth. The stage was set for future confrontations that would rock the convention government.

Nor can this speech be justified as an indispensable expression of Zapatista principle. Apparently the product of Díaz Soto y Gama's momentary inspiration, it did not have Zapata's stamp of approval. In fact, had this speech been given to a meeting of Zapata's jefes, they too might have waved their guns threateningly in the air, recalling the day they held the flag overhead as they signed the Plan of Ayala. The precision of Díaz Soto y Gama was very different from the radicalism—if it can be called that—of the peasants of Morelos.

In other words, though in shaping Zapata's demands for a national audience the city boys were bound to distort them to some extent, the gap between what the Zapatistas were and how they were represented was widened by the proclivities and eccentricities of the intellectuals. Even when the ideas he communicated were of vital importance to his movement, the way Díaz Soto y Gama presented himself was more up-to-date in his assessment of whether Carranza and Villa than necessary. In fact, there was once a movement among his fellow conventionalists to have him examined by a doctor to determine whether he was insane or just a habitual drunk. Díaz Soto y Gama himself would later admit that he had been too provocative.

It must be conceded that a different and more peaceful solution to the inter factional disputes of 1914 would have been difficult to achieve. Because the Villistas shared Palafox's assumption that they would win a war against the Constitutionalists, they also made poor diplomats, and their role in estranging the Carrancistas was probably more important than that of the Zapatistas. Palafox was certainly not alone in believing that the revolution—and with it, power—could be won, and in feeling that power won was better than power negotiated and shared. Furthermore, as a group the leaders of Carrancismo were quite different from their Zapata's.

45. Díaz Soto y Gama, La revolución agraria, 182–83; Womack, Zapata, 135, 194; and Knight, Mexican Revolution, 3:259–60.
46. For the text of this speech, see Magna and Pérez Guerro, Emilio Zapata, 3:218–26. Iturbide led the revolt that finally achieved Mexico's independence, on a rather conservative footing, in 1811.
47. For the quotation see Roque González Garza to Pancho Villa, Aguascalientes, Oct. 27, 1914, UP-ABGC, 3:1178. For testimony to the reaction, see Leon Gama to Secretary of State, Oct. 25, 1914, USDS-IAM, 816.00/1350. See also Womack, Zapata, 317; and Francisco Ramírez Planas, La Ciudad de México durante la revolución constitucionalista, 2d ed. (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1941), 171–72.
48. For the use of the flag during the signing of the Plan of Ayala see Reyes Ayés, Cartositos, 35–36. For the same speech was conceived, see Díaz Soto y Gama, La revolución agraria, 185–86.
49. See ibid., 205; Quirk, Mexican Revolution, 1914–1915, 449. Interview with Enrique M. Zerpeda, PHO 1147, La Convención (Mexico City), May 22, 1915.
tista counterparts. Most came from the north, where social and economic conditions did not induce them to place a clear priority on land reform, but rather to see it as one of a number of political and social issues that needed to be addressed. Moreover, many took up such issues not from a sense of outraged justice but because they believed that the issues represented obstacles to progress and development—the preeminent goals in this more mobile, more urban, more commercial part of Mexico that bordered on that wonderland of progress, the United States. Many viewed private property as sacred—certainly an obstacle to thoroughgoing land reform. Many hated Catholicism, which many Zapatistas held dear. Many hoped to create a more efficient and centralized state that would inevitably intrude on the village liberties for which Zapata was fighting. Many held racist notions about the masses of brown-skinned villagers who resided in the south and composed Zapatismo.50

But while Constitutionalists and Zapatistas did, in general, have contrasting world views, they were not monolithic groups. At both the 1914 convention and the constitutional convention of 1915–17 it was apparent that constitutionalism was a loose bag of ambitions, factions, and ideologies. Many prominent Constitutionalists had serious reservations about Carranza’s program. Some had good credentials on land reform, and even Obregón was coming to understand the importance of this issue. Zapata, meanwhile, was neither anticapitalist nor antiprogress. Zapata himself was a somewhat upwardly mobile ranchero with a fairly strong belief in individual initiative and in property. He merely wanted progress to include all Mexicans, rather than just the privileged. While few Constitutionalists could fully embrace Zapata’s program, neither could the Villistas, with whom the Zapatistas at least attempted diplomacy for a time. In fact, a perfect ideological match was never a prerequisite for an alliance in the Mexican Revolution: a “logic of the revolution” brought together many practical revolutionaries—and counterrevolutionaries—in response to particular circumstances, and Zapatismo was not above such liaisons.

It is not plausible, of course, to argue that all the major players could have struck a peace in late 1914. But nothing in the fluid situation predetermined that the factions would split exactly as they did. By sowing the feeling that Zapata could be a trustworthy ally, therefore, a little diplomacy might have won over more Constitutionalists. A broader coalition within the convention of those who really sought social reform might have succeeded in forcing Carranza to step down, or at least made his position militarily untenable. In that case, provisions for social reform like those found in the 1917 Constitution might have been enacted sooner, with less bloodshed and, of crucial importance, with the Zapatistas in a position to help see that they were enforced. It would certainly have been worth a try.51

Instead, there was war with the Constitutionalists by the middle of November 1914. Shortly thereafter the convention moved to Mexico City, where it quickly bogged down in intransigent squabbles between Zapata and his city boys on the one hand and a succession of three non-Zapatista executives on the other. Contrarrevolucion also raged between convention delegates, as Villa’s representatives proved more conservative than their Zapata counterparts. Compromise was still a necessity that the city boys chose to ignore. While Díaz Soto y Gama ranted on the convention floor, Pafałox complained, from his perch in the Ministry of Agriculture, that Zapata’s representatives were not militant enough.52

As the partisans of both Zapata and Villa tore the convention apart—undermining the military effort in the process—Zapata tried to remain aloof. There is every indication, however, that his intellectuals had his full support for what they did in the capital. Having already decided the general lines of policy, Zapata was simply content to let them do the talking in the national arena while he attended to land reform and related matters in Morelos and surrounding states. National politics were primarily the intellectuals’ job, after all, and Zapata was happy to delegate such power when it meant he could stay away from Mexico City.53

Pafałox counseled that “it was better to return to the hills” than to compromise, and return to the hills they soon would. By late summer 1915 it was clear that the convention forces had lost the war, that Carranza had a firm hold on executive power, and that the Constitutionalists would soon be in a position to impose themselves on the villages of Morelos. Though the revolutionaries were suddenly more willing to talk to the Carrancistas—perhaps with the mediation of the United States—it was now too

50. For a summary of the ideology of the revolution’s northern victors, see Armando Córdova, La ideología de la revolución mexicana: la formación del nuevo régimen (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1973), 35–39. See also Knight, Mexican Revolution, 2:290, 261–62.

51. This is, of course, counterfactual history. For a lucid discussion of the uses and benefits of such an argument see Knight, Mexican Revolution, 1:449. For the “logic of the revolution” see ibid., 2:9, also ibid., 2:66, 254. Finally, see Hall, Alcaro Obregón, 94. Among Zapata’s less attractive allies, at one time or another, were both ex-federal soldiers and followers of Félix Díaz, Porfirio Díaz’s nephew, who had taken up arms at the head of a reactionary rebellion.

52. For Pafałox’s insistence that the Zapatistas were not militant enough, see Pafałox to Zapata, Mexico City, Apr. 6, 1915, AGN-AZ, 7:49–49. The partisan squabbles are abundantly documented in Quirk, Mexican Revolution, 1914–1915, Anaya C., La soberanía convencional, and Ramírez Flaccari, La Ciudad de México. For one of González Garza’s several pleas for more participation from Zapata in convention affairs, see Montaño to Zapata, Cuernavaca, Feb. 2, 1915, AGN-AZ, 4:356–47.
late. The diplomatic failures of 1914 condemned the Zapatistas to fight until 1920, when, dramatically diminished in power, they would settle for a small piece of the revolution indeed.44

The Diplomacy of Desperation

Despite its failure in both military and political terms, Zapata and the city boys did not part easily with the convention. Beginning in the summer of 1915, Constitutionalist forces chased the Convention government from Mexico City to Toluca and from there to Cuernavaca. In April 1916 it finished its days humbly in Jojutla, Morelos. As it descended into Morelos, the convention lost its Villista component, run by the Zapatistas alone, it became a national government only in theory. As such it was a striking illustration of the tensions within Zapatismo, embodying both Zapata’s residual desire to maintain a national presence and the inability of Zapatismo as presently oriented to do so. Zapata asked the convention to continue to produce legislation as if it were still a national government, because he hoped to prove that the Zapatistas were prepared to rule the nation. This was a dream. Even if they were perfectly capable of governing alone in Morelos, they had proven resoundingly that they could not govern nationally when they failed in the coalition building and the compromise that such a task required. With or without their imitation convention, Mexico would not give them another chance at power.45

In fact, nothing the Zapatistas did as they retreated into their mountain strongholds would have convinced any sane observer that they should rule Mexico. By the latter half of 1915 Zapatismo was in convulsion. Words like intrigue and betrayal, of increasingly common usage within the movement during the convention years, were now on every Zapatista’s lips. As less than fully loyal chieftains looked elsewhere for the winners of the revolution, defections plagued the ranks. Moreover, during the next two years several prominent Zapatistas—among them Eufemio Zapata, Lorenzo Vázquez, Francisco Pacheco, Domingo Arenas, and Antonio Barona—would die in internal disputes.46

Among the city boys, too, there was death and defection, and for those who survived and remained, there were years of intrigue as the movement struggled to rid itself of what Díaz Soto y Gama would call its “bad elements.” The most eminent casualty of this purification process was Otilio Montaño. In late April 1917 an anti-Zapatista rebellion broke out in the small town of Buenavista de Cuéllar, just across the state border in Guerrero. Longtime Zapatista chieftain Lorenzo Vázquez was the first big name to be implicated, but soon the city boys were collecting evidence that Montaño was the brains behind the movement. Apparently convinced of his old friend’s guilt, Zapata allowed them to put him on trial, with the instructions that Montaño be pardoned for any crime less serious than the betrayal of which he was accused. Zapata then fled the scene, and the author of the Plan of Ayala was executed on May 18.47

Although the nature of his participation in this insurrection remains unclear, Montaño was obviously unhappy, and much of this unhappiness had to do with his displacement by the better-educated intellectuals from the city. It was the city boys, of course, who were most conscious of what a ludicrous figure the round Montaño cut, with his many pretensions based on a reputation for nothing on their scale of achievement. Both during his lifetime and later in their books, the same men who now condemned him to death often ridiculed him and came between him and Zapata. He saw them not as his comrades-in-arms but as his enemies. Furthermore, he must have felt that these enemies had led the Zapatismo astray in 1914 and 1915. Though never especially consistent on the subject of diplomacy, Montaño had generally tended toward flexibility and compromise. Thus he probably did rebel, or at least express his anger and frustration in a way that inspired others to do so.48

There could have been no more alarming sign that Zapatismo had lost its way than this fatal clash between the movement and the author of its constitutional document. As Zapata sought solace in a box of good cigars,

54. For the quotation, see Palabra a Zapata, Mexico City, Apr. 6, 1915, ACN-AX, 4, 7:44-49. See also Quirk, Mexican Revolution, 1914-1915, 272, 281.
56. Weinack, Zapata, 244ff., covers this collapse in depth, but tends, I think, to downplay its extent and significance.
58. Unfortunately, the evidence that convicted Montaño no longer exists. It is quite clear, however, that no highly organized rebellion took place, despite certain conspiracy theories, because Montaño was not in the Buenavista area when the revolt broke out. For charges of conspiracy see the preamble to Zapata’s “Ley penal contra los traductores de la Revolución,” Tlaltizapán, Sept. 20, 1917; in José García Fariñas, “Zapata y su concepto sobre la lealtad,” in Ofrenda a la memoria de Emiliano Zapata (Mexico City: O.P., 1928), 25-29. Weinack writes that the rebels may have planned to cast their lot with Félix Díaz, but his evidence is weak, Zapata, 285. If Montaño invoked the Mexican Reform movement of the 1850s in rebelling, he had invited many times before as a loyal Zapatista. See also “El testamento político de Otilio Montaño,” in Salazar Pérez, Otílio Montaño, 8-15, and Díaz Soto y Gama, La revolución agraria, 282-283. For Montaño’s diplomatic bent see José Valero Silva, “El zapatismo ante la filosofía y ante la historia,” por Otílio Montaño,” Estudios de historia moderna y contemporánea de México 2 (1967), 81-86. For the aspirations of one city boy against Montaño see Paz Soldán, Zapata, 46, 84, 118.
perhaps he recognized the irony. At any rate, Zapatismo began to take a
new direction. Palfax soon followed Montañizo into disgrace. Though he
had permitted him to preside over Montañizo’s trial, Zapata had already
begun to tire of his latest chief of staff. He was as disappointed as anyone
with the results of the attitude Zapata had adopted in 1914–15, and
Palfax was easy to blame. Since Palfax had stepped on so many fellow
intellectuals and Zapatista jefes as he climbed through the ranks, many
were willing to help bring him down. By December 1917 his role was
strictly limited. 59

To replace Palfax as his main adviser, Zapata lit on a man of a very dif-
ferent type. Raised in Zamora, Michoacán, and educated in Mexico City
and Philadelphia, 26-year-old Gildardo Magaña was every bit a city boy.
Ever since he joined Zapata in June 1911, however, Magaña had been
a force for diplomacy; and as Zapatismo’s military capacity deteriorated,
diplomacy was becoming the only hope. Magaña became head of Zapata’s
general quarters in November 1917 because Zapata now recognized the
need to shift the movement’s emphasis from the old peasant stubbornness,
which Palfax had made his own, to the acceptance of the need for allies
on the national scene that had always been a part of Zapatismo as well. 60

Thus while Palfax drifted farther from power, the Zapatistas launched
a diplomatic campaign to try to bring those who opposed Carranza into
open, unified revolt. Zapatista ambassadors scoured Mexico in search of
other regional caudillos, semiretired revolutionary politicians, and dis-
gruntled Constitutionalists who might help them drive Carranza from the
presidency. Ironically, they even sent feelers to such old foes as Villarreal,
who had found it impossible to work with Carranza. As the pursuit of
revolutionary unity heated up, the letters and manifestos of Zapatismo no
longer always mentioned the Plan of Ayala, the cause of so much friction in
the past. 61 It seems fair to assume that the plan was sacrificed only for stra-
gategic reasons. Zapata had put aside his mistrust and committed himself
to the idea that practical considerations were more important than ideolog-
ical nuances. In fact, taking considerable interest in this new project, he
soon proved an even more daring diplomat than Magaña. On the subject
of allowing the ambitious Francisco Vázquez Gómez to represent Zapa-
tismo in the United States, he counseled, “to my way of thinking what
is important is to let various people do what they can, and then we will
decide what to give the matter.” 62

If this diplomatic onslaught was a sensible response to the conditions
that Zapatismo now faced, however, it was hardly characterized by high
realism. Despite the ineffectiveness of their military forces, Zapata and his
city boys continued to discuss taking Mexico City as if such a victory were
imminent. They also proclaimed, in manifesto after manifesto, that revolt
was sweeping the country, that the nation’s rebels were enthusiastically
embracing Zapatista proposals, and that Carranza was about to fall. While
such distortion could be partly explained as a way of resisting the centrip-
etal forces that threatened the movement, it also frequently appeared in
confidential reports that could not serve such a purpose. 63

A certain amount of unreality was also at play when, in Zapata’s last
major diplomatic enterprise, it was decided that Francisco Vázquez Gómez
should not merely represent the Zapatistas in Washington but should
serve as the head of their united revolution. Vázquez Gómez had a couple
of strikes against him. In the first place, his program for social change
was quite limited. Indeed, by supporting him the Zapatistas tacitly ad-
mitted their inability to guarantee the achievement of the land reform
for which they had fought. As they had done with Madero, they would

Aguilar, “Recitaciones históricas no. 1,” and “Boletín” of the Cuartel General, Tlalti-
zapán, May 30, 1917, BN-AGM, 50:10:574. For the limiting of Palfax’s power see Emilio
Zapata to Gerardo Ariza, Dec. 27, 1917, BN-AGM, 50:1.32. For the last Palfax had in-
spired along the way see Engracia Manuzale to Palfax, Villa de Ayala, Dec. 3, 1917,
BN-AGM, 50:19:310, Maurilio Mejía to Palfax, San Rafael, Morelos, Nov. 27, 1917,
BN-AGM, 50:1:557; and Interview with Manuel Sous Páen, Mexico City, Mar.–May 1973,
conducted by Eugenia Meyer, PHL:14/35.

60. See Magaña’s “Datos Inéditos” in ADN, Archivo Histórico y Cancelados, Gildar-
dardo Magaña, XIII:1–105/281–87. For his previous diplomatic work see Magaña to
Zapata, Cuautemaz, Aug. 26, 1914, BN-AGM, 27:17/359; Zapata to Pacheco Villa, Yautepex,
Aug. 25, 1914, BN-AGM, 27:17/404; Magaña; and Pérez Guerrero, Emiliano Zapata, 2:211–
21; and Womack, Zapata, 2:258–59. For the notion that Magaña’s ascendency was the result of
a struggle between a group of intellectuals led by Palfax and a group of agitators led
by Magaña and Díaz Soto y Gama, see Espejel, Oliva, and Barela, Emiliano Zapata: Antologie,
86. I have been unable to find evidence for such clear factionalism.

61. On the abandonment of the Plan of Ayala see Womack, Zapata, 393–4. The dip-
omatic barrage was broadly enough conceived to include many who had been enemies in 1914
and 1915. For examples see Magaña to Zapata, May 26, 1915, BN-AGM, 27:15/315; Zapata to
Manuel N. Robles, Tlaltizapán, Dec. 10, 1917, BN-AGM, 50:1:36; Zapata to [F.], [1917],
BN-AGM, 20:1:24, and Magaña to Alfredo Robles Domínguez, Tlaltizapán, Morelos, Oct. 2,
1918, BN-AGM, 30:25:441.

62. Francisco Vázquez Gómez was the brother of Emilio Vázquez Gómez, and Zapata
communicated with both throughout the revolutionary decade. For the quotation, see Zapata

63. On plans to take Mexico City see Zapata’s circular of Dec. 26, 1917, BN-AGM, 28:10/97;
and “Medidas de orden económico” (Jan 10, 1918, in CEHAP, El ejército campesino, 51–52.
See also Zapata to Magaña, San Rafael, Dec. 13, 1917, BN-AGM, 30:10/357; Octavio Paz Solorzáno to Zapata, Chantongo, Guerrero, Aug. 10, 1916, C-AGS,
VIII, 2, manuscritos, 2:265; and Paz Solorzáno to Zapata, Puebla, Sept. 27, 1915, BN-AGM,
28:2:440. It is not to say that Zapata was wholly incapable of perceiving diplomatic fail-
ures. See Francisco Mendoza to Arizcorza, Tepalcatepec, Morelos, Aug. 30, 1916, AGN-AGCS,
1:3:174–75.
have to bring Vázquez Gómez to power first and then see what happened. The second problem was that bringing Vázquez Gómez to power was a long shot. In allowing themselves to believe that this parlor revolutionary might somehow win the revolution, Zapata and Magaña showed how pathetic their movement had become. Between the lines of the manifesto that proclaims their hope in Vázquez Gómez, one can easily read their private desperation.

It was this mixture of hope and desperation that induced Zapata to meet the Constitutionalist colonel Jesús Guajardo at the hacienda of Chinameca on April 10, 1919, in a diplomatic initiative he hoped would revive his movement. Instead, he was ambushed and killed. Though the ensuing contest for power among the Zapatistas demonstrated that resentment of the intellectual brood still festered in the hearts of many of the local chieftains, in September most of them chose to support Magaña as the movement’s new leader. Zapataismo struggled on. Finally, in the spring of 1920, the Zapatistas got their piece of the revolution by subscribing to Obregón’s Plan of Agua Prieta.

This was not an alliance that Zapata himself would have shunned after 1917. In fact, the Zapatistas had known for years that Obregón was their best chance should he finally decide to rebel against Carranza. Still, the Zapatistas’ share of revolutionary power was minute; they would have to trust Obregón to give them the reforms they sought. Obregón, however, had his own ideas. He presided over the beginnings of a land reform project that would generally be more directly concerned with economic progress and national politics than with the welfare of the campesinos. And in the service of progress and politics what the villagers of Morelos had always feared came to pass: the city expropriated the revolution. During the following decades the increasingly powerful and centralized state favored urban areas in distributing resources, vividly demonstrating as it did so that the mere ownership of land was no guarantee of a livelihood. Furthermore, many of the city boys, knowingly or not, contributed to this process: in exchange for the few scraps of power and influence they were thrown, they helped create a myth of Zapata that would make him an innocuous member of the evolving revolutionary pantheon, a symbolic pillar of the new state.

Final Assessments

In late 1918 Manuel Palafox made his final blunder as a Zapatista. To escape the expected punishment he fled Morelos, then began efforts to persuade other Zapatistas to join him in separating from Zapata. Faced with this new threat of division, and with his jefes’ questions about how to answer these overtures, Zapata presented a fascinating account of Palafox’s career. Written at times in an almost confessional tone, the document containing this account begins by admitting that it was hard to evaluate the motives of such newcomers to the movement as Palafox had been in 1911. It then recounts the great efforts Palafox made to ingratiate himself and to force himself between Zapata and Montañó. But Montañó was too important, Zapata now claimed, for Palafox to succeed in displacing him. Thus when Carranza’s delegation arrived in August 1914, Palafox did not possess any great power. Nevertheless, he was somehow chosen to meet with the commission and, “aggressive and unyielding,” he made a ruinous impression “on people who, in a given moment, could have been our allies.” The damage Palafox did had recently become clear, the document concludes, and he had therefore been removed from his position at headquarters to start “curing the evil, though it was late.”

Composed just months before Zapata’s death, this rewriting of history might serve as his conclusions on the subject at hand. Casting his mind back over the years, he saw failure at precisely the place I have located


66. For Zapata’s hope for Obregón see Octavio Magaña Corda, Yo escucho a los responsables, el pueblo que nos juzga (Mexico City: B. Costa-Amé, 1941), 26–34. See also Womack, Zapata, 316–17. On Obregón’s agrarian policy as a political tool, see Linda B. Hall, “Alvaro Obregón and the Politics of Mexican Land Reform,” HAHR 60:2 (May 1980), 213–38.

67. Womack, Zapata, 306, implies that Palafox was homosexual—or at least bisexual—and that this had something to do with his disgrace. If so, it was only a minor factor. On his flight see Magaña’s circular, Tlahüzapan, June 30, 1915, BN-AGM, 30:245; Magaña to Zapata, Hueypoxtla, Nov. 3, 1918, BN-AGM, 30:211-2135; and Knight, Mexican Revolution, 2:356. For one example of Palafox’s intrigues, which lasted even after Zapata’s death, see Palafox to Josué Palma, Apr. 16, 1919, in Armando María y Campos, El zapatismo deshechado, El Mundo (Tampico), June 5, 1918.

68. For the document quoted here see Aguilar, "Rectificaciones históricas no. 1." This document cannot, of course, be taken purely as the confession of Emiliano Zapata—we have already established that he would have had intellectual help in creating it. Nevertheless, it seems fair to conclude that the final product would have needed his approval—who else could have accepted the responsibility for the tacit admissions made here?
it: in the intrinsigence of the period that encompassed August 1914. But whose failure was it? About this Zapata was disingenuous. The events of late 1914 now seemed so momentous to him that he skirted his own support for Palafox, and was willing only to plead guilty indirectly to the less serious crime of having failed to control his intellectuals.

Of course, it was patently untrue that the selection of Palafox to deal with Carranza's envoys was a casual one. As he assured Villa in Xochimilco, Zapata used his intellectuals as carefully as he could. The task of bringing regionalist Zapatismo to the national stage, however, was extremely complicated. Zapata needed his educated aides as mediators, to help him carry out his interfacial diplomacy and to give him the national perspective he lacked. But if the city boys were to intercede between Zapata and the politicians and intellectuals of other movements, then who was to intercede between the city boys and Zapata, to make sure he fully understood what they were doing in his name? Zapata's lack of education ultimately prevented him from controlling those who were better educated, and thus guaranteed that any bridge they might build between him and the nation would contain serious structural defects.

As a result, though many of the city boys were principled and well meaning and enriched the movement with their efforts, as a group they failed to serve Zapata at the revolution's most critical juncture. Peasant rebels often make alliances; they must make them if they hope to succeed. But instead of advocating serious diplomacy in 1914—when Zapatismo might have secured a large piece of the revolution by negotiating from a position of strength—Palafox, Serratos, Díaz Soto y Gama, and others like them sabotaged the diplomatic process by reinforcing Zapata's country isolationism. They did not give him the insight he sought from them; they did not help make him a serious player on the national scene.

Many historians have wrestled with the reasons for Zapatismo's failure in national politics and concluded, more or less, that it was inevitable. John Womack Jr., has argued that the xenophobia of rank-and-file Zapatismo and Zapata's own fear of national power were the underlying reasons for the cold reception of Carranza's commission in 1914, and that an accord with Carranza (or presumably with other Constitutionalists) would have been a fluke. According to Armando Córdova, the failure lay in the fact that Zapatismo was in essence a provincial movement. Despite its tendency to address itself to a national audience, Córdova maintains, it was fundamentally unable to comprehend the need for national power to secure local reforms. Finally, Alan Knight has noted a schizophrenia within Zapatismo as it embarked on the convention experiment, and has argued that, in general, rural rebellions cannot both remain true to their local roots and play a role on the national scene. The gap, in other words, was simply too big to be bridged.69

While each of these arguments contains much truth, only Womack examines the specifics of the case, and even he does not consider the fact that an alliance with Carranza himself was not the only diplomatic opening rejected in 1914—that the Zapatistas might also have appealed to individual Constitutionalists who were not especially loyal to their chief. Since Zapata and Magaña later tried to undermine Carranza in precisely this fashion, the movement was obviously not too isolated and naturally intransigent to pursue such a course. Clearly, no magical peasant consensus supported policy exactly as it was made. When Montañó rebelled in 1917, he demonstrated that even the two men who created the Plan of Ayala did not necessarily agree on the direction the movement should take. Rather, Zapata and his intellectuals constantly confronted choices about which their peasant constituency—which was not, at any rate, completely homogeneous—had no definite opinion. Choices about what Zapatismo would try to do on the national scene were often theirs to make.70 Of course, the posture of Zapatismo was not the only variable in the interfacial morass of 1914: no matter what the Zapatistas did, they were unlikely to overcome Villa's rash behavior. But the likelihood of diplomatic failure might have been tested if Palafox had not gathered so much power and thrown his weight against diplomacy. And in Palafox's career nothing was inevitable: he might simply have been shot in 1911.

Still, one might insist that Zapata was doomed to get intellectuals who failed to serve him, either because he desperate need for such help made him a relatively easy mark for the unscrupulous and ambitious or because, even if attempted, a bridge that communicated faithfully between Zapata and the nation was architecturally impossible. Perhaps Zapatismo was destined, after all, to fight until 1920 for a mere sliver of the revolution. But even if this point is granted, the movement failed to give diplomacy a chance when it counted most; and much of that failure must be attributed to the problematic relationship between Zapata and the city boys.

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69. See Womack, Zapata, 204–9, 210. Córdova, La ideología, 153, and Knight, Mexican Revolution, 1:387 and 2:259. In all fairness, neither Knight nor Womack makes a strict argument for inevitability—they merely lean in that direction.
70. My argument here is against the assumption that village solidarity in Morelos was so strong that all villagers fundamentally agreed, and that Zapata was always "perfectly representative of his people's feelings" (Womack, Zapata, 205). Much of the research following in the wake of Arturo Warran's "We Come to Object". The Peasants of Morelos and the National State, trans. Stephen K. Axt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976) has focused on the diversity within Zapatismo. As a result, it is no longer safe to contend that all the villagers involved were even fighting for the same thing. In fact, violence between Zapatistas—perhaps a good barometer of difference of opinion—has been underplayed.