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Mexican Intellectuals and the Indian Question, 1876-1911

T. G. POWELL*

IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE among students of Mexican history that during the era of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) the misery of the nation's large Indian population increased substantially. Pick up any recent scholarly work on modern Mexico, and you will probably find a documented account of the way in which Díaz' policies intensified the sufferings of an already oppressed people. Not so commonly known, however, is the response of Mexican intellectuals to this deterioration in the Indian's economic and social condition. Traditional accounts of the Porfiriato give the impression that almost all Mexican intellectuals accepted racist theories then in vogue and looked upon the "inferior" Indians with contempt.[1] An examination of the literature of the Indian question during Díaz' long rule indicates that this was not the case. Although some extreme racists denigrated the natives, pronounced them hopelessly inferior, and attempted to justify their exploitation, many important intellectuals defended them and advocated their integration into the national society.

Mexicans discussed the Indian question throughout the entire Díaz period, and racists by no means dominated this debate.[2] Those men who saw great potential in the native urged the government to take action to improve his condition. Although their arguments failed to convince Díaz, they found a better reception among the generation that made the Mexican Revolution. An important aspect of the Revo-

* The author is a graduate student in history at Indiana University.

[1] See, for example, Henry B. Parkes, *A History of Mexico* (3rd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 299-303; Frank Tannenbaum, "Some Reflections on the Mexican Revolution," in Stanley R. Ross (ed.), *Is the Mexican Revolution Dead?* (New York, 1966), 202-204; and Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964), 41. Except for a section on Justo Sierra, Leopoldo Zea ignores the Mexican positivists' discussion of the Indian question. His generalizations about the Científicos are derived from secondary sources and are very misleading. See Leopoldo Zea, *Apogeo y decadencia del positivismo en México* (México, 1944), 246-248 and *passim*.

[2] The word "racist" in this article refers to a person who believed in the innate inferiority of some human groups, and, in the context of Mexican society, that the indigenous peoples of Mexico constituted such an inferior group.

lution's ideology has been a commitment to integrate the Indian into Mexican society and an appreciation of Indian culture. A review of the debate on the indigenous race makes it clear that twentieth-century Mexican Indianism has at least some of its roots in the Porfiriato.

Soon after Porfirio Díaz came to power at the end of 1876, he showed a determination to modernize backward Mexico through economic development programs. Many influential men, both in and out of the government, agreed that only in this way could civil wars and foreign interventions be prevented. On the one hand, they argued, economic development along Western lines, as in Europe and the United States, would enable Mexico to achieve greatness. On the other hand, failure to modernize would mean the end of the Mexican nation and its absorption by the United States.[3] To some Porfiristas the Indian constituted a major obstacle in the path of national progress. In 1875 about forty percent of Mexico's 9½ million people were Indians.[4] Located for the most part in the central and southern sections of the country, they lived in rural areas. Subsistence agriculture outside the nation's economy condemned them to a life of poverty and malnutrition. During the 1850s the federal and state governments had begun to divide the Indians' communal lands (ejidos) into farms, but the Indians had always resisted these efforts. Mexican economic progress, reasoned the Díaz government, was being held back by the Indians' lack of individualism. Many Porfiristas also believed that Mexico's population was too small to cope with agricultural problems and that the nation possessed abundant fertile lands which needed only the hands of enterprising individuals to unlock vast agricultural wealth.[5]

[3] Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (rev. ed., New York, 1963), 52-53; and Justo Sierra, *Obras completas* (14 vols., Mexico, 1948-1950), VIII, 109.

[4] Matías Romero, *Mexico and the United States* (New York, 1898), 77. As far as I can determine, people were usually regarded as Indians if they spoke an indigenous tongue, wore native dress, and lived in an indigenous community. Writers also referred to hacienda peons as "natives." Some Mexicans even included lower-class mestizos in their definition of Indian. See Emilio Rabasa, *La evolución histórica de México* (Paris and México, 1920), 325; and E. Maqueo Castellanos, *Algunos problemas nacionales* (México, 1909), 67-126.

[5] Frederick Starr, *Notes upon the Ethnography of Southern Mexico* (Davenport, Iowa, 1900), 2; Moisés González Navarro, *El Porfiriato. La vida social* (México, 1957), 134, 138, 199-202; Alfonso Caso *et al.*, *Métodos y resultados de la política indigenista en México* (México, 1954), 128; Moisés González Navarro, *La colonización en México, 1877-1910* (México, 1960), 1; *Informes y manifiestos de los poderes ejecutivo y legislativo de 1821 a 1904* (3 vols., México, 1905), II, 264-265, III, 643. The Díaz regime's position in regard to Mexican agriculture as well as many of the arguments for and against the Indian have roots in the agrarian liberalism of the Reform era. See Luis González y González, "El agrarismo liberal," *Historia Mexicana*, VII (1958), 469-496.

Two solutions to the problem seemed possible: foreign immigration to colonize uncultivated lands, or the transformation of the Mexican Indian into a modern economic man spurred by the profit motive. Some Mexicans, however, doubted that the Indian could be so transformed. The works of philologist Francisco Pimentel and demographer Antonio García Cubas lent support to this view. Writing in the 1860s, Pimentel had stressed the difficulty of bringing the isolated, primitive natives into a unified Mexican nation. He called the Indian an "enemy" of the other inhabitants of Mexico and suggested European immigration and racial mixing as an answer to the problem of the indigenous peoples. The Indians must "forget their customs and even their language, if that were possible," so that Mexico would no longer be burdened by two diverse races.[6] García Cubas published a study of Mexico's Indian population in 1870. In it he stressed "the decadence and degeneration in general of the indigenous race and the few elements of vitality and vigor that it offers for the Republic's progress. . . ." Like Pimentel, García Cubas emphasized the difficulty of changing the Indian's character. He, too, saw European colonization and racial mixing as the best way to strengthen Mexico's human resources.[7]

Feeling that the need was urgent and that Mexico could not wait while the Indian was taught to be progressive, Díaz immediately began to promote immigration as a means of turning Mexican agriculture into a capitalist enterprise. Minister of Development Vicente Riva Palacio made the first efforts to attract immigrants in 1877. Since the government did not know exactly what land it owned, it commissioned private surveying companies to delimit "unoccupied" lands, offering the companies one-third of the territory surveyed. In this manner surveying and colonization began during the presidency of Manuel González (1880-1884).[8]

In 1885 Díaz informed congress that twenty million acres of land had been found which could be given to colonists. But immigrants never came to Mexico in large numbers. Those who did come often discovered that they had been settled on sterile soil. Consequently many foreign colonists soon left Mexico for the literally greener pas-

[6] Francisco Pimentel, *Obras completas* (5 vols., México, 1903-1904), III, 133-149.

[7] Antonio García Cubas, *Apuntes relativos a la población de la república mexicana* (México, 1870), 56, 86.

[8] González Navarro, *La colonización en México*, 1, 9; *Informes y manifestos*, II, 284-285; Chester L. Jones, *Mexico and its Reconstruction* (New York, 1921), 229-231.

tures of the United States.[9] In spite of repeated failures, however, Díaz continued to promote the colonization scheme as long as he was in power.

The Díaz regime supplemented its colonization program by permitting individuals to denounce any lands lacking a clear title and by taking over more Indian ejidos. Believing that the natives only impoverished their communal lands, Díaz partitioned the ejidos "with the object of converting into proprietors the Indians who were living in abjection and misery."[10] In this way Díaz divided over two million acres of communal land. Unfortunately, hacendados and land companies usually acquired the plots of the new Indian proprietors.[11]

In general, then, the Díaz government based its policies on the belief that the native could not be modernized *immediately*. As long as he remained "an Indian," the native would continue to block progress. Accordingly, Díaz tried to keep him in a servile, obedient state so that others might accomplish the economic development of Mexico. Some of the more vocal supporters of Díaz' agrarian legislation went further and expressed a desire to see this "inferior race" disappear from the Mexican scene.[12]

Many important thinkers, however, took exception to such a dim view of the Indian.[13] They argued that through education and contact with more advanced groups the indigenous peoples could be elevated to meet Western standards, and that eventually all but the wildest tribes would be absorbed into the higher culture of the mestizo. Many of these men suggested that autocolonization, the settlement of Indians on unoccupied lands, was the best solution to agricultural difficulties.

Participants in the long, fascinating debate concerning the place of the native in Mexican life were many and diverse: government officials, lawyers, educators, littérateurs, journalists, and clergymen. Men of various persuasions—liberals, positivists, Social Darwinists,

[9] *Informes y manifiestos*, II, 311; González Navarro, *La colonización en México*, 7; Jones, *Mexico and its Reconstruction*, 231; Salvador Quevedo y Zubieta, *Manuel González y su gobierno en México* (3rd ed., México, 1956), 179-197; Adolfo Duclós Salinas, *Méjico pacificado* (St. Louis, 1904), 34.

[10] *Informes y manifiestos*, III, 642.

[11] Helen Phipps, *Some Aspects of the Agrarian Question in Mexico* (Austin, 1925), 115.

[12] Jesús Romero Flores, *Anales históricos de la Revolución Mexicana*, vol. I: *Del porfirismo a la revolución constitucionalista* (México, 1960), 44-45; Phipps, *Agrarian Question in Mexico*, 105, fn. 38.

[13] For discussion of Indianist sentiment in Mexican literature see Martin S. Stabb, "Indigenism and Racism in Mexican Thought: 1857-1911," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, I (October 1959), 405-423; J. S. Brushwood, "La novela mexicana frente al porfirismo," *Historia mexicana*, VII (1958), 368-405.

Catholics—contributed to the discussion. Attention centered on the question of the Indian's capacity for Western civilization. Could the native be educated to accept the national culture and thus become a contributing member of Mexico's economic and political life?

One of the early public controversies regarding the Indians was touched off in 1883 by a proposed constitutional amendment that would provide for free, mandatory primary education. Three editors of the positivist daily newspaper *La Libertad* took part: Francisco G. Cosmes, Justo Sierra, and Ignacio M. Altamirano. Cosmes, a militant Hispanist, saw "neither justice nor utility" in obligatory instruction. The nation's Indians, being "impervious to all civilization," constituted an "insuperable obstacle" to universal education. Indians, he wrote, regarded their sons as beasts of burden and would resist all efforts to make them attend classes. What little the children learned in school, moreover, would soon be forgotten. Thus it was unjust to make Indian families suffer the loss of their sons' labor. The only educational effort worth making in native communities was to impart to the children some practical ideas about agriculture.[14]

Sierra quickly responded to this attack on a project which he had heartily endorsed as a federal deputy. Mexico, wrote Sierra, needed obligatory instruction to effect "the transformation of the indigenous class into a progressive class." Without this transformation Mexico could not maintain its "social personality" against the strong pressures coming from the United States. Education, by enabling the Indian to acquire "elements of science," would liberate him from a life of superstition and drunkenness. Primary instruction was to be the first step toward enlisting the Mexican native in the great work of national progress.[15]

These arguments, however, failed to convince Cosmes. Replying to Sierra, Cosmes denied that the Indians would be receptive to educational programs. With ill-concealed sarcasm he noted that after centuries of "degradation" the Indians were probably incapable of rising from their condition. In short, the proposal to educate Indians had little hope of success.[16] This article drew a reply from Altamirano, one of Mexico's foremost writers, a liberal like Sierra, and an Indian. Cosmes' assertions seemed absurd to him. He declared that Cosmes' reason must have "suffered an eclipse," for anyone should see that even the most miserable native groups were "susceptible of receiving the benefits of instruction."[17]

[14] *La Libertad*, February 16, 1883, 1.
[15] *Ibid.*, February 27, 1883, 2.
[16] *Ibid.*, March 1, 1883, 1.
[17] *Ibid.*, March 3, 1883, 2.

Sierra now added another essay in defense of the Indian's capacity for education. One of Cosmes' arguments had been that educational efforts would fail because the Indians did not speak Spanish. For Sierra this was a minor problem, for he proposed that instructors learn an indigenous tongue in the normal school, so as to use the native's own language as a basis for teaching him Spanish. When the Indians had learned Spanish, he said, a formidable barrier to national unity would have disappeared. Mexico must destroy the illiteracy that made it inferior to the United States, for the life of the nation was at stake.[18]

Although its policies frequently harmed the native, the Mexican government at least did not try to hide Mexico's Indian past. While Cosmes, Sierra, and Altamirano were debating education for Indians, the González administration erected a monument to the Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc on the Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City. Indian motifs adorned the statue's base, and the government dedicated it "to the memory of Cuauhtémoc and the warriors who fought heroically in defense of their country." *La Libertad* applauded this tribute to an outstanding "Mexican hero," a man who was "without rival in the pages of Mexican history."[19]

In 1883 the physician and novelist Salvador Quevedo y Zubieta published *México, recuerdos de un emigrado.* The book first appeared in Spain, where Quevedo was living in exile, for his sharp criticism of President González had made it dangerous for him to stay in Mexico. Quevedo's book contained a long section on the indigenous race, which he regarded as "the principal element of the Mexican nationality." Too many Europeans, he wrote, imagined the Mexican Indian as an indolent, abject character plodding back and forth between his hut and his cornfield. This was a false picture, he said. The Indians' "great deeds" and "men of light and vigor" such as Benito Juárez proved that the race still lived, and that it could rise out of its stagnation. After three centuries of slumber under Spanish rule, the Indians had at last awakened. Quevedo wrote of his "love" for the Indians and praised their physical endurance. Indian art, especially ceramics, he found both useful and beautiful. Náhuatl, the native language of the valley of Mexico, appealed to his aesthetic sense; when spoken by a woman, it sounded like the murmur of rain falling on foliage. He contemplated with sadness the "inconsiderate and brutal" hispanization of Náhuatl: It was an "unfortunate and sad modification, which has barbarously made *huaxolotl* into *guajolote*, which cor-

[18] *Ibid.*, March 6, 1883, 2.
[19] *Ibid.*, February 27, 1883, 3.

rupted and vulgarized into *Huichilobos* the sacred name of *Huitzilopoxtli,* and which with lamentable dullness converted into *Malinche* the sweet and poetic name of *Malintzin!*"[20] Quevedo is a good example of the appreciative romantic reaction to Indian culture during the Porfiriato.

Efforts to bring the native into Mexico's educational system continued throughout the 1880s. In 1888 at the request of Joaquín Baranda, Minister of Justice and Public Instruction, the Mexican congress made primary education mandatory in the federal district and in the territories. The following year Baranda organized the first National Congress of Public Instruction to promote a unified system of obligatory primary education for the whole country. At this assembly, delegates affirmed their faith in the Indian's capacity for education by approving a report of the committee on obligatory elementary instruction. The report flatly denied that Indians had no ability to learn and insisted that the intellectual faculties of white men and Indians were the same: "In regard to the indigenous race, which some people pretend is completely resistant to civilization and progress, we must not forget that this same race has given to the Mexican people some of its most eminent men. . . . The shades of Juárez, of Ramírez, of Mendoza protest against the unjust reproaches that are made against their race!" Integrate the Indian into a standard educational system, said the committee, and his alleged racial inferiority will soon be proved a myth. It is significant that Enrique C. Rébsamen, a leading positivist educator, helped prepare this report,[21] for Mexican positivism during the Porfiriato was not as contemptuous of the Indian as some historians have imagined.

To be sure, Díaz gave a little more than lip service to the problem of Indian education. In the 1880s he reminded Congress of the need to educate the indigenous people. In the 1890s he pointed with pride to the law of 1888 concerning obligatory instruction, calling it "a measure of great consequence" which would enable the natives to approach what he called "*la vida social.*" With gratification he noted that in a certain district over three hundred Indian children had been taught Spanish. This, he said, would permit them to study and thus become "part of a social nucleus of greater culture." In Tamaulipas and Chiapas, Díaz founded several schools designed to provide free education "principally for the Indian children." Such action was

[20] Salvador Quevedo y Zubieta, *México, recuerdos de un emigrado* (México, 1956), 37, 41-42, 133-134, 137-141, 143, 157-160.

[21] Leopoldo Zea, *Del liberalismo a la revolución en la educación mexicana* (México, 1956), 143-145, 149-151.

taken, he said, because of a desire to see the area prosper materially and morally.[22]

The Díaz government, however, never effectively carried out many proposals of Mexican educators. Primary education, especially in rural areas, was woefully neglected. Rural schools, when they operated at all, labored under primitive conditions. There was a chronic shortage of teachers and school buildings. Figures for 1900 show that Oaxaca, with just under sixty percent of its eligible children attending classes, had the highest primary school enrollment. In twenty-one states and one territory, enrollment was only twenty-five percent or less. The federal and state governments occasionally tried to stimulate primary education but never provided adequate financial support. Projects for the establishment of special Indian schools foundered for lack of funds. It must be admitted that some of the natives were not overly enthusiastic about attempts to educate them: in 1909, for example, Kickapoo Indians in San Luis Potosí burned down their new school before it could be opened.[23] The task may have been extremely difficult, but even warm admirers of the Porfiriato regretted and condemned its failure to educate the Mexican people.[24]

Justo Sierra, rapidly becoming one of Mexico's most eminent thinkers, again discussed the Indian question in 1889. Writing in the *Revista nacional de letras y ciencias*, he reminded Mexicans that the "social problem for the indigenous race is a problem of nutrition and education. . . ." The Indian's future, he felt, depended on the transformation of his economic condition. Malnutrition had prostrated the Indian; Mexico must get him back on his feet again. A better diet would enable Indians to catch up with the rest of the nation. Sierra censured the Catholic Church for keeping the natives in perpetual tutelage and for fostering "blind idolatry." The Church's treatment of the Indians was a prime cause of Mexico's "sad social inferiority." Rejecting the "false science" of racists, Sierra looked forward to the nation's racial integration, which would bring with it "force and greatness" for Mexico. He denounced the system, dating from the Spanish conquest, that had turned the Indian farmer into a serf. The Indians' wages were so low that they lacked "the basic necessities of a strong and hygienic life." To be transformed they needed higher wages and contact with groups from other, better-nourished races. Sierra regarded Díaz' colonization program as the best way to facilitate this contact. By mixing with the Indians, Europeans would add

[22] *Informes y manifiestos*, III, 765, 774.
[23] González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 594-599.
[24] Wallace Thompson, *The Mexican Mind* (Boston, 1922), 284-286.

new strength to the Mexican family—a family that was overwhelmingly mestizo. European colonists would change the "moral environment" of rural Mexico and thus help the school to educate the indigenous peoples.[25]

Sierra's essay by no means cleared the field of pessimists. Adolfo Duclós Salinas' *Riches of Mexico and its Institutions* appeared in 1893. Surveying Mexico's chances for progress, Duclós lamented the presence of so many Indians. The Indians, he alleged, were "content with their unpropitious circumstances," and contributed very little to the nation's wealth. Mexico was being held back because the natives "will not separate themselves from their tribal customs to join in the general movement of progress and civilization and the uniting of their races with the more intelligent one." In sharp contrast to Sierra's proposals, Duclós recommended that the "stupefied" natives be conscripted into the army, where association with "more active and intelligent elements" would give them a rudimentary education.[26]

Luis Siliceo, owner and editor of *El Colono*, a bimonthly newspaper published in Mexico City from 1895 to 1898, agreed that the Indians contributed but little to the nation's wealth. Siliceo, however, blamed Mexico's land system—latifundism, not the Indian, was blocking national progress. Break up the hacendados' land monopoly, he urged, and Europeans would come to Mexico, settle on the land, and teach the natives new agricultural techniques. An improvement in the economic and social condition of the peons would follow. Although a supporter of foreign colonization, Siliceo believed that the Mexican government's first duty was to create Indian colonies. "How humane and patriotic it would be to colonize first the millions of Indians who are living without bread and without shelter, instead of relying upon dozens of individuals of other nations . . . ," he wrote. Siliceo went on to denounce as "calumny" the denigration of natives by "vain egoists." He praised Vicente Villada, who as governor of the state of Mexico was trying to regenerate the Indians by organizing them into agricultural colonies. Other Mexican states, he wrote, should imitate Villada's example.[27]

Matías Romero, a veteran diplomat and cabinet member, shared Siliceo's concern for the Indians. Romero, however, opposed foreign colonization. In 1898 he wrote that if the government wanted to increase agricultural productivity, it should spend money on the In-

[25] Justo Sierra, "México social y político," *Revista nacional de letras y ciencias*, I (1889), 15-17, 178, 215-220, 328-329.

[26] Adolfo Duclós Salinas, *The Riches of Mexico and its Institutions* (St. Louis, 1893), 294-297.

[27] *El Colono*, October 25, 1895, 4; November 10, 1895, 2-3; April 10, 1897, 5-6.

dians' education rather than subsidizing immigration. He considered the indigenous people to be "a hard-working, sober, moral, and enduring race," who when educated "produce very distinguished men."[28]

When the United States destroyed the remnants of Spain's American empire in 1898, many Mexicans became alarmed, for their nation and the rest of Latin America seemed to be easy prey for the expanding power to the north. Francisco Bulnes, one of Mexico's most blatant Social Darwinists, grappled with this problem in 1899. Mexico was weak, he wrote, because of the racial inferiority of its Indians. Bulnes adduced various reasons for this alleged inferiority, among them the natives' corn diet. He believed that only the wheat-eating races were progressive and that the Mexican Indians were "dull" and "brutish" because they lacked phosphorus. He also cited the decrees of "ethnology, general history, and sociology" to prove his thesis. Since the Indians resisted racial mixing, and since the Mexicans were their own worst enemies anyway, only European immigration could save the republic.[29]

Bulnes' pessimism was more than offset in 1900 with the appearance of *México, su evolución social.* Edited by Justo Sierra and written by many prominent intellectuals, this three-volume work presented a panorama of Mexican history and culture. Volume I contained positivist Agustín Aragón's discussion of the Indians. Aragón considered them to have as much aptitude as mestizos for Western culture. In terms of "social force," the natives constituted the "principal mass" of Mexico's population. History demonstrated that racist doctrines were false; under favorable conditions Indians frequently became outstanding men. Those who scorned the native indicated their lack of judgment and morality, for Indian labor sustained Mexican society. Low wages, not racial inferiority, prevented the peon from improving his condition. If Mexico's wealthy, educated classes would treat the Indians more justly and provide them with a systematic education, Aragón wrote, the great potential of the indigenous race could be realized.[30]

Not all of the contributors to *México, su evolución social,* however, demonstrated such faith in the native. Carlos Díaz Dufóo, in his essay on Mexican industry, wrote that the Indian was too weak to be an

[28] Romero, *Mexico and the United States,* 74, 76.

[29] Francisco Bulnes, *El porvenir de las naciones hispano americanas* (México, 1899), 1-12, 71, 273-274, 281-282.

[30] Justo Sierra (ed.), *México, su evolución social* (3 vols., México, 1900-1902) I, 23, 26-27, 29-32.

efficient worker. The Indians were a degenerate race condemned by their long history of servitude to "atavistic somnolence."[31] Even harsher words came from Genaro Raigosa. In appraising Mexican agriculture, Raigosa cited as a major problem the "intellectual nullity of the Indian." Mexico's natives stubbornly refused to enter the mainstream of "modern progress." They were "automatons" whose "regressive evolution" made them apathetic and resistant to innovations.[32] Skeptics continued to question the Indian's capacity for civilization.

In 1900 the meeting of a national scientific assembly in Mexico City prompted further discussion of the native peoples. Emilio Pardo, representing the Law College of Mexico, advocated a Mexican homestead program to ameliorate the Indian's condition. To Pardo the solution of the Indian problem lay in making the native aware of his personality, stimulating his love of work, and enabling him to get beyond the level of bare subsistence. By creating new rural proprietors, Mexico would create new citizens. A homestead program, said Pardo, "will do as much for the progress and dignity of these people as the other educational and civilizing methods which we hear proclaimed every day." Dividing up the ejidos had ruined the Indians; after being condemned to "economic inferiority" for centuries, they were not prepared for the change and consequently lost their lands. A satisfactory homestead plan, therefore, must protect the new Indian proprietors against the greed of hacendados. Pardo concluded his address by asking Díaz, who was present at the session, to support his proposal.[33]

Assistance from Díaz, however, was not forthcoming. Although he frequently expressed concern for their welfare, serious efforts by his regime on behalf of the rural Indians are hard to discover. Under Díaz, Mexico had no agencies to protect the Indians or to help them in their commercial or legal transactions. Aragón thought that the Mexican congresses had done less for the natives than had the Spanish viceroys. Throughout the Porfiriato friends of Díaz or members of his official family enriched themselves at the Indians' expense. During the Díaz era more than one-third of Mexico's usable land was declared to be "deserted" and passed into the hands of speculators, hacendados, friends of the dictator, or the government itself. Included among these allegedly deserted lands were "great portions of the communal properties of the pueblos."[34]

[31] *Ibid.*, III, 106.

[32] *Ibid.*, III, 26, 38.

[33] Emilio Pardo, "La institución del Homestead," *Revista positiva*, I (February 1901), 33-48.

[34] Sierra, *México, su evolución social*, I, 30; Fernando González Roa and José

Although transfer of communal lands to individuals increased the Indians' suffering by giving a new impetus to latifundism, Porfiristas argued that Mexico had to accept latifundism because the country's physical and economic situation made change impossible. Despite his public expressions of concern about the "abjection and misery" of the natives, Díaz failed to initiate any measures which might have improved rural conditions. Persecution by the *jefe político* and an exploitation by the hacendado that amounted to "practical slavery" continued to be the lot of the landless Indian.[35]

If passion for progress caused Díaz to neglect the native, he at least occasionally demonstrated that he was not ashamed of Mexico's Indian heritage. Díaz told anthropologist Carl Lumholtz, whose study of indigenous cultures he had assisted, that the Indians were "good people," and he praised their record in the struggle against the French. When Spanish diplomats once commented that Mexico was of Spanish origin, Díaz replied that this was only partly true; Mexicans, although proud of their European parentage, did not deny their Indian ancestry.[36] In 1902 the Mexican government took possession of the ruins at Mitla; the site was to be made into a free monument so that the public could "admire the beauty of its notable architecture. . . ."[37] During the Porfiriato Leopoldo Batres did important if somewhat inept archaeological work at Teotihuacán, and Francisco del Paso y Troncoso began his study of ancient Mexico. It was in this period also that Manuel Orozco y Berra received government aid in editing his *Historia antigua de México*, that the Náhuatl Academy was founded, and that the National Museum established an archaeological section.[38]

Among the upper classes, however, a social bias in favor of light skin accompanied this interest in the Indian past. To be "white" was to be "decent"; those with darker skins were called "*pelado*," that is, boorish. Though the provincial elites mingled with Indians during evening strolls around the plaza, in Mexico City "respectable" people held themselves aloof from persons who wore native dress. Throughout Mexico, moreover, upper-class women used a "quarter of an inch of powder" to whiten their appearance. Porfirian high society con-

Covarrubias, *El problema rural de México* (México, 1917), 75-76, 86-87, 144-145.

[35] González Roa and Covarrubias, *El problema rural*, 87; Charles M. Flandrau, *Viva Mexico!* (New York, 1908), 17, 68-69.

[36] Carl Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico* (2 vols., New York, 1902), II, 457; Félix F. Palavicini, *México, historia de su evolución constructiva* (4 vols., México, 1945), II, 97; González Navarro, *La colonización en México*, 105.

[37] *El Imparcial*, January 17, 1902, 3.

[38] Palavicini, *México*, II, 97-98.

sidered the white race to be more beautiful than the natives, who were regarded by some as ugly "shrimps." Proponents of foreign colonization at times cited the need to beautify the Mexican people as one reason for bringing Europeans to Mexico.[39]

Lawyer Roberto Esteva Ruiz wanted to change such attitudes. Speaking at a session of the Society of Geography and Statistics in 1902, Esteva Ruiz made several proposals for the "regeneration" of the Indians. In addition to urging that "practical schools of agriculture" as well as primary and normal schools be established in the pueblos, he called on the federal and state governments to help improve the Indian's image. These governments should place in the nation's schools "pictures relative to glorious deeds of the indigenous race and portraits of its most notable men, seeing to it, at the same time, that lectures are given concerning the virtues of this same race and of the need for the rest of the country's population to regard them as brothers." Esteva Ruiz also suggested that the federal and state governments initiate sweeping welfare programs which would insure the Indian against accidents, old age, and bad harvests and protect him in his commercial transactions. He concluded by asking the Society to commission one of its members to write a pamphlet that would arouse sympathy for the long-suffering natives.[40]

In 1903 historians Genaro García and Carlos Pereyra answered certain attacks on the indigenous peoples. García published a pamphlet in response to assertions that the illiterate Indians were unfit to take part in elections. Such a view, wrote García, defamed the native, whose labor supported society and whose bravery had won and rewon Mexican independence. The Indians were illiterate, he said, because they had no schools. To survive in the modern world, Mexico had to educate its people. Indians, like all Mexicans, should be integrated into a truly national education system.[41] Pereyra, writing in Agustín Aragón's *Revista positiva*, objected to Genaro Raigosa's deprecation of the natives. Among other things, Raigosa had charged that the Indians were a national burden, because they contributed nothing to society. Pereyra countered by observing that the Indians, although uneducated, were not only useful but "necessary" to sustain Mexico's social life. Where would Mexico be, he asked rhetorically, without its native labor force? Raigosa erred when he said that the

[39] Flandrau, *Viva Mexico!*, 28, 278-279, 287-288; Jesús Silva Herzog, *El agrarismo mexicano y la reforma agraria* (México, 1959), 132; González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 153.

[40] *El Imparcial*, March 21, 1902, 2.

[41] Genaro García *La educación nacional en México* (México, 1903), 7-11.

peon's productivity was low, for low productivity stemmed from poor land and backward techniques, not from the Indian's character. Given this situation, indeed, the hacendado could not survive without his native laborers. Since Mexico had recently taken a big step forward by establishing obligatory primary instruction, he said, Raigosa's pessimism was unwarranted.[42]

The Mexican Church officially noted the "native problem" at its first Catholic Congress, organized by the bishop of Puebla in 1903. Individual clergymen had long been protesting against the social and economic degradation of the Indians, but not until 1903 did the Church make a major effort on their behalf.[43] During the Congress, the delegates endorsed a series of resolutions aimed at improving religious, intellectual, and economic conditions among hacienda Indians. Hacendados were urged to cooperate in a drive to make their peons better practicing Catholics by giving them time off to attend religious services and by paying for their marriages, baptisms, and burials. The delegates also asked landowners to establish with their own money schools for Indian children. In addition, they requested for the peons just wages, an opportunity to buy necessities at low prices, free medical care, and insurance at the hacendados' expense against accidents, sickness, and old age. A final resolution called on Church lawyers to defend the interests of the Indians and to attempt to secure adequate parcels of land for individual peons.[44]

Various Catholic agricultural congresses followed this initial meeting and produced similar resolutions. The first of these convened in 1904 at the request of José Mora y del Río, bishop of Tulancingo.[45] The Mexican Church, however, was attacking the problem much too late with too little. It was hopeless to seek reform from hacendados, the men most likely to resist projects beneficial to the Indians. But the Church needed Díaz to protect it from liberalism and dared not assault one of the strongest bases of his power. Avoiding the central question of latifundism (as did many of those who believed that the Indians should be helped), the Church limited itself to pious but ineffectual appeals for Christian charity.

Although the Church displayed remarkable reserve in approaching a serious social problem, some Catholic journalists stated their opinions more emphatically. When in 1884 the New York *Herald* alleged

[42] Carlos Pereyra, "La sociología abstracta y su aplicación á algunos problemas fundamentales de México," *Revista positiva*, II, (August 1903), 351-386.

[43] González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 265-266.

[44] *Primer Congreso Católico Mexicano. Acuerdos complementarios de la Junta Central Permanente del mismo. . . .* (Puebla, 1904), 18-22.

[45] González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 267-272.

that all Indians were "by nature incorrigible" and recommended that they be exterminated everywhere in the Americas, Victoriano Agüeros, editor of *El Tiempo*, penned an angry reply. Denouncing the *Herald*'s "barbarous theory," Agüeros noted that of Mexico's two races, the Indians were not necessarily the less governable. Genocide might be popular in the United States, but that was because the "Yankees" were more cruel and savage than the Indians.[46] After thus disposing of the gringos, Agüeros sharply criticized Díaz' colonization scheme. It was absurd, he wrote, to encourage foreign immigration when so many Mexicans—mainly the natives—were dying of hunger. If foreign colonists seemed to be more efficient than the Indians, it was because they had been given land and could work as free men. The Indians, since they owned no land, had no incentive to be efficient. The Mexican Indian was like a son whose father denied him food while at the same time inviting strangers in to dine.[47] Continuing his attack on Díaz' land policies, Agüeros condemned the injustice of permitting a few individuals to acquire Mexico's deserted lands. If the government wanted to increase agricultural production it should distribute these lands among the Indians.[48]

Some public officials during the Porfiriato translated Indianist sentiment into action. One of these was Enrique C. Creel, governor of Chihuahua. Creel believed that the Indians were "inferior" to white men, but his racism took the form of a paternalistic solicitude for the native's welfare. In 1906 he asked the state legislature to approve his plan for the "civilization and improvement" of the Tarahumara Indians. To survive in the modern world, Mexico must use all of its human resources. Mexicans, therefore, should cooperate in the task of "augmenting, reproducing, and improving the autochthonous element, which already has proved its aptitude for existence and its facile adaptation to the native soil." The need to act was urgent, for unscrupulous land speculators, prompted by a railroad boom, were pushing the defenseless Indians further up into the mountains. "Such a situation," said Creel, "should move all those persons who, having a kind heart, strongly feel the bond of solidarity which should unite all Mexicans with those unfortunate brothers of ours. . . ." Creel asked the legislature to set up a homestead system in Chihuahua so that the Tarahumaras could become individual proprietors. His program,

[46] *El Tiempo*, May 9, 1884, 2.
[47] *Ibid.*, July 12, 1887, 2.
[48] *Ibid.*, January 26, 1889, 3.

which also emphasized primary education for Indian children, was enacted into law in November 1906.[49]

No one better illustrates the complexity of the Mexican intellectual's attitude toward the Indian than novelist José López Portillo y Rojas. His essay "La raza indígena" appeared in the *Revista positiva* in 1906. López Portillo wrote that the Spanish conquest of the Indians was in accord with a "natural law," namely, "the triumph of the most fit." Mexico's natives were still backward because they had not combined with people who would have taken them out of their "stupor." López Portillo did not, however, regard the situation as hopeless. There were limits to his Social Darwinism. He saw the Indians as beginning to enter "modern life." This was due to Mexico's recent economic progress, which had provided the material bases for their regeneration. Indians could be westernized, he said, because "the true division that exists between men is not based on race but on culture." A civilized Indian ceased to be an Indian. The indigenous race, he noted, supplied Mexico with many of its lawyers, judges, doctors, businessmen, soldiers, and priests. López Portillo believed that Mexico's races were fusing physically and spiritually, and that in the future there would be a "total renascence" of the natives.[50]

López Portillo, like so many other Porfirian thinkers, did not succumb to racism, in spite of Social Darwinism's worldwide popularity. He could see that the native race had given Mexico some of its greatest men. If Indians were inferior, how could this fact be explained? Mexico's historical experience demonstrated the absurdity of the racist position. The lives of Juárez, Altamirano, Ramírez, and many others proved that Indians had the same capabilities as white men.[51]

Sociologist Andrés Molina Enríquez' *Los grandes problemas nacionales* appeared in 1909. This important book contained an appraisal of the Mexican Indian as well as sharp criticism of the Porfiriato. Molina Enríquez turned the tables on the racists. He wrote that in regard to environmental adaptation, the Indian seemed to be a superior organism: "In no other race [living] . . . in America can one find better conditions of adaptation to environment." If white men had experienced a "more advanced evolution," the Indians had better "resistance." The natives' energy of resistance, moreover, was su-

[49] Álvaro de la Helguera, *Enrique C. Creel. Apuntes biográficos* (Madrid, 1910), 158-192.

[50] José López Portillo y Rojas, "La raza indígena," *Revista positiva*, VI (1906), 252-253, 364-366, 369-370, 372.

[51] The racial liberalism of Porfirian intellectuals, however, did not extend to Negroes and Chinese. Even ardent Indianists regarded these two groups with suspicion and contempt.

perior to the white man's energy of action. More a spokesman for the mestizo than for the native, Molina Enríquez nevertheless had a high regard for the indigenous race. He believed that the mestizo owed his strength to his Indian blood. Contact with the native enabled the Mexican mestizo to renew his energies.[52]

During the last years of the Porfiriato various writers affirmed their faith in the Indian's capacity for education. In 1908 Abraham Castellanos, an Indian by birth, told his colleagues in the Society of Geography and Statistics that the educated native would one day be the base of Mexico's social institutions. In the past the Indians had shown themselves to be "superior beings," well equipped for the struggle for existence. They had preserved these qualities in spite of the "deadly blows of European civilization." Mexico need only liberate its native race through education to ensure its future greatness.[53]

In 1910 Francisco A. Flores called upon the national government to take over primary instruction so that the Indians' educational needs could be met. Such a step would, he believed, do much to effect "the redemption of our indigenous race."[54] Juan H. Cornyn, a professor of English at the National University, wrote in 1910 that Indians were usually "competent and progressive students." Mexico, he added, had known great orators, poets, statesmen, and artists before the Spaniards arrived. Cornyn, incidentally, admired Indian painting, which he considered to have an individuality and originality that other Mexican art lacked.[55]

Concern for the native culminated in 1910 when Francisco Belmar founded the Indianist Society of Mexico. Belmar, a member of Mexico's Supreme Court, had been a student of Indian language and culture for twenty years. His Society was organized to study the indigenous race in order to procure its "social redemption." *El Imparcial* regarded the Society as a "patriotic" organization and praised its efforts to redeem the Indian.[56]

The Society's first congress met on October 30, 1910. Díaz, his cabinet, and the diplomatic corps attended. Jesús Díaz de León, physician and linguist, opened the inaugural program with a conventional appeal for the development of a "moral and civic conscience" among the Indians to make them more progressive. The next speaker, Abra-

[52] Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (México, 1909), 257-258, 271.

[53] Abraham Castellanos, "La educación de la raza indígena," *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*, XXIX (1908), 78-85.

[54] *El Imparcial*, June 2, 1910, 5, 8.

[55] Juan H. Cornyn, *Díaz y México* (2 vols., México, 1910), II, 79, 87.

[56] *El Imparcial*, March 24, 1910, 5; July 12, 1910, 3.

ham Castellanos, was remarkably blunt, considering the presence of Díaz: "I come, gentlemen, to confirm that the indigenous race is abandoned, and that this is not just." Lawyer José L. Cossío followed Castellanos with an appeal to Díaz to do more about educating the Indians and to stop the operations of men who were "hooking" Indians and sending them off as laborers to Cuba.[57] On October 31 Francisco Salazar stressed the achievements of Oaxaca's Indians and noted that Díaz himself was "of the Mixtec race." Closing the final session on November 5, Castellanos spoke "in a most affectionate rapture of enthusiasm for the Indians." Mexico, he said, had neither poets nor painters. The Indians should be educated so that they could shape Mexico's "national art" and "save" the fatherland.[58]

Historians have justly reproached Porfirio Díaz for his regime's callous attitude toward Mexico's Indians. Even the pro-Díaz newspaper *El Imparcial* indicted the Porfiriato on this point: "We would not have viewed a leper with so much indifference, because fear of contagion would have alarmed us, as we have viewed until now the infirmities of . . . [that] miserable product of misfortune and slavery—the Indian."[59] It is an error, however, to assume that the nation's intellectuals also abandoned the native. The opinions of a few racists should not be taken as typical of Mexican thinkers in general. Francisco Bulnes was not, as one writer has alleged, the man "who best represented the spirit of the epoch."[60] Even Mexican positivism, the philosophy of order and progress used to rationalize the dictatorship, supplied the Porfiriato with a number of eloquent Indianists. The debate on the future of the Indian demonstrates that a strong undercurrent of liberalism and nationalism existed in Mexico throughout the Díaz years. Díaz neglected the indigenous race, but it was not because Mexico lacked prominent men to remind him of his duty. In taking up the Indian's cause after 1910, the men of the Mexican Revolution adopted not a new policy but one that had been persistently and forcefully advocated for a long time.

[57] *Ibid.*, October 31, 1910, 1, 10.
[58] *Ibid.*, November 1, 1910, 1, 4; November 6, 1910, 1, 13.
[59] *Ibid.*, October 31, 1910, 7.
[60] Parkes, *A History of Mexico*, 303.