

## Chapter 4: The Export Boom as Modernity

Chapter Four introduces an era often described as the *Golden Age of the Export Oligarchy*. While different regions experienced the economic boom of the late nineteenth century in different ways, for the most part Latin America experienced strong export growth, heavy foreign investment, and relative political stability during the latter third of the nineteenth century. Focusing largely on an analysis of economic transformations, this chapter explores the variegated experiences of export-led development.

Many also experienced this period as the arrival of *modernity* in Latin America. New technologies, new infrastructure, and new products arrived in the region, changing both the feel of life in Latin America and the ways that Latin Americans understood themselves. These changes are explored in this chapter through an examination of the ways that Latin Americans documented themselves and their worlds through the photograph during this era.

The document chosen for this chapter is an excerpt from an interview given by Porfirio Díaz to James Creelman in 1908 (for a full copy, use the link on the website). Inasmuch as the chapter really focuses on a specific way of seeing Latin America during the export boom, this interview represents an ideal means of conveying that view. Not only is it historically important (in it, Díaz suggests he will not run for re-election in 1910, an announcement that set off a flurry of political activity in Mexico and indirectly led to the outbreak of the 1910 Revolution), but in its details it is a fascinating example of what we might call the “logics of modernity.” The ways that certain views are privileged, that a progressive story is imposed on the nation, and that Díaz’ presidency is made into the culmination of a long and heroic struggle, impose clear understandings of what is good for Mexico. That these beliefs were so clearly repudiated by many of the participants in the Revolution only makes the story more fascinating.

### Questions to Consider when Reading the Documents

What do we gain, and what do we lose, by using economic indicators to understand the changes that characterized Latin America during the export boom?

What were the benefits and costs of relying on exports to fuel economic growth?

If development does not favor everyone, could it be said to be false, or simply uneven?

Would you characterize the economic boom as *development*?

How do you unpack the assumptions built into the Creelman interview?

Does the outbreak of revolution some months later undermine the significance of the Creelman interview, or just change the way we read it (or alternatively, should it change the way we read it at all)?