

[Digital Photohistory at the Getty](#)

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[Aztec Archeology to the Mexican Revolution: A Digital Photohistory at the Getty Research Institute by Jonathan Saxon](#)

by Gretchen Pierce

I am excited to continue our multi-post series on digital collections. Today [Jonathan Saxon](#) examines the Getty Research Institute's online portal, *A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico* and his subsequent post will cover the GRI's *Obsidian Mirror-Travels: Refracting Mexican Art and Archaeology*. He earned his M.A. in History from California State University, Los Angeles. Currently, he is an Adjunct Instructor of History at Antelope Valley College. His complete discussion of the Getty Research Institute's digital resources for Mexico, from which this post draws, was [published](#) in the Digital Resources section of the Oxford Research Encyclopedia for Latin American History.

Aztec Archeology to the Mexican Revolution: A Digital Photohistory at the Getty Research Institute

*"There are, in a sense, two histories here, a history of Mexico and another of photography: two histories that interact and reflect upon one another."*¹

The Getty Research Institute (GRI) has an extensive collection of online digital resources, with two portals that focus on Mexico, [A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico](#), and [Obsidian Mirror-Travels: Refracting Mexican Art and Archaeology](#), the latter of which will be discussed in a subsequent post.² These portals are the online versions of GRI exhibitions. Viewers of *Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico* will find numerous primary sources related to major historical events from 1857 to 1923. Most of the images are photographs, but visitors to the site will also find digitized maps, as well as information about the photographers that created the photographs (see Figure 1). This will serve as a useful resource for scholars and students interested in photohistory, archeology of Aztec and Maya ruins, the French invasion of Mexico, and the Porfiriato. Moreover, the site has a wide array of images covering the Mexican Revolution including all the major leaders, federal troops, rebel troops, women, children, soldaderas, and key battles such as the Decena Trágica.

[figure1-zapataenteringcuernavaca.jpg](#)



Figure 1: Entrance of Emiliano Zapata and his troops into Cuernavaca following the resignation of President Porfirio Díaz.

Hugo Brehme, *Entrada De Zapata En Cuernavaca*, [May 26, 1911], 1911, Gelatin, 8.7 x 13.7 cm.

From “*A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico - Views of the Mexican Revolution.*” Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, 98.R.5.01.

Although *Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico* contains superb resources, the site is difficult to navigate and can result in viewers missing much of what it offers. However, a [useful guide](#) to this portal is available online for free, courtesy of the Oxford Encyclopedia for Latin American History. The guide also features a brief discussion of the literature, methodology, and historiography of photohistory.

The *Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico* portal has eight sections: “Photographers,” “Chronology,” “Bibliography,” “Glossary,” “Related Holdings,” “Credits,” “En Español,” and “Mexico: From Empire to Revolution.” The first seven sections provide exhibition-related information in English and Spanish such as brief biographies of photographers, a timeline of the era covered in the exhibition, a glossary, and information about related GRI holdings. The last section contains the six hundred-some digitized images, mostly photographs from the GRI’s vast holdings. It is further divided into sub-sections titled “Preservation and Tourism,” “Daily Life,” and “Decena Trágica.” A brief two or three paragraph summary of the specific theme, or era, is included in each sub-section. In many ways, “Mexico: From Empire to Revolution” is the heart of the *Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico* portal.

Within the collection, viewers will find a wide range of images of indigenous landmarks (see Figures 2-3), the French invasion of Mexico (see Figure 4), the Porfiriato (see Figures 5-6), and the Mexican Revolution (see Figures 7-8). Many of these images address specific themes related to each of the above-mentioned historical periods. For example, notice how Figures 5-6 demonstrate the Porfiriato’s disparity between rich and poor. Figure 5 shows Porfirio Díaz’s attempt at convincing the world Mexico achieved modernity by lavishly decorating a Mexico City building in lights for a centennial celebration that mostly catered to elites. On the other hand, Figure 6 displays the reality of Mexico City for the majority of the population. During the Porfiriato, only about two percent of the Mexican population were landowners, while the majority of the population lived in sub-standard conditions and were subjected to labor exploitation as peones working for wealthy hacendados. In other words, these photographs can provide visual evidence to support arguments made by researchers.³

[figure2-eastsideoftempleofinscriptions.jpg](#)



Figure 2: East side of the Temple of the Inscriptions, Chichén Itzá.

Teobert Maler, "Chichén Ytzá: Palacio - Templo De Las Inscripciones [sic], Lado Este," [1891 or 1892], 1891, Gelatin, 15.4 x 20.6 cm.

From "A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico, History: Empire and Nation - Preservation and Tourism." Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute. 94.R.31.24.

[figure3-roomofmosaics.jpg](#)



Figure 3: C. B. Waite, "Room of the Mosaics, Mitla Ruins," Dic. 14, 1904, 1904, Gelatin silver, 12.6 x 19.8 cm.

From "A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico, History: Empire and Nation - Preservation and Tourism." Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute. 96.R.143.49.

[figure4-mesimpressions.jpg](#)



Figure 4: André-Toussaint Petitjean's view of life on the [French] military campaign trail sketched while on a journey through Chihuahua and Sonora. It depicts the daily routine of the soldiers, beginning with reveille.

André-Toussaint Petitjean, *Mes Impressions De Voyage*, 25 Novembre 1864, 1864, Ink on paper, 44.9 x 27.2 cm.

From "A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico, History: Empire and Nation - French Intervention and New Empire." Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, 93 R 3 25r 1.

[figure5-libertyprogresspeace-porfitiato.jpg](#)



Figure 5: The streets and buildings of Mexico City were decorated with flags, banners, and floral displays throughout the month-long centennial celebrations [Mexico's independence from Spain]. At night buildings and streets were illuminated with electric light displays, many with patriotic themes.

Anonymous, *1810 Liberty - 1910 Progress, Centenary Celebration, Mexico City* [Illuminated Metropolitan Cathedral, Mexico City], September 1910, Photographic postcard, 15.9 x 10.4 cm.

From "A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico, History: Empire and Nation - A Nation Undone," 95 r 104 9v 4.

[figure6-indigenousgirl-porfiriato.jpg](#)



Figure 6: "The Original Hole in the Wall. Calle Gante Num. 10, City of Mexico."

C. B. Waite, [Poor Child], [ca. 1901], 1901, Gelatin silver, 20.6 x 12.5 cm.

From "A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico, History: Empire and Nation - Daily Life." Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, 96 R 143 92.

[figure7-viewofmaderoenteringmexicocity.jpg](#)



Figure 7: View of Madero, accompanied by supporters Alfredo Robles and Francisco Cosío, riding by car into Cuernavaca, several days after Madero's jubilant entry into Mexico City, to rally support for his candidacy in the upcoming presidential election and to discharge Zapata's revolutionary troops that had gathered there.

Antonio Garduño, [Madero's Entry into Cuernavaca], [June 12, 1911], 1911, Gelatin silver, 8.7 x 13.7 cm.

From "A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico, History: Revolution - Madero's Return (1911)." Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, 95 R 104 20R 4.

[figure8-anit-huertapostcard.jpg](#)



Figure 8: Anti-Huerta postcard with portrait of Huerta as a devil above portraits of Madero, Benito

Juárez, and Pino Suárez. Caption and legend are also written in English on front of card. Card is addressed on verso to Mrs. G. R. Hackley from "Fritzzy" and contains a message unrelated to the image.

"Traidor, Asesino, Hipócrita," 1913, 1913, Silver gelatin, 8.7 x 13.7 cm.

From *"A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico, History: Revolution - Decena Trágica (1913)."* Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, 2000 R 15 23.

Basic catalog information is included with each image displayed throughout *Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico*. However, complete citation information, including image summaries, is only available by viewing each image through the GRI's free online [Library Catalog](#). Those displayed in this blog post include the summary information found in the GRI's online Library Catalog. This will provide readers with a sense of how helpful it is to have the summary information for a specific image. Anyone interested in downloading an image for use in a paper will have easy access to the necessary citation information. Users interested in using images for commercial publications should view the J. Paul Getty Trust's ["Terms of Use/Copyright" web page](#).

Tip: To find an image in the GRI's online Library Catalog, copy the title and accession number usually provided with images displayed on *Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico*, and paste it into the Library Catalog's search bar. If the image does not appear, simply experiment with the wording until your search is successful. Sometimes catalog information for these images is not identical on both sites.

In two weeks, I will discuss the GRI's *Obsidian Mirror-Travels: Refracting Mexican Art and Archaeology*, which offers a wealth of online digitized images related to Aztec art, culture, and archaeology.

¹ Beth Ann Gynn, "[Mexico: From Empire to Revolution](#)," Getty Research Institute, last modified 2010.

² The portal's title, *A Nation Emerges: Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico*, should not to be confused with the Getty Research Institute's 2010-2011 exhibition "*A Nation Emerges: The Mexican Revolution Revealed*." Many images were used in both the exhibition and in the section *Sixty-five Years of Photography in Mexico* portal.

³ For more on the epistemology of photographs, see John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution: Commitments, Testimonies, Icons* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).