

*Introduction: Rewriting Guatemala's
Nineteenth Century*

ON THE AFTERNOON OF MARCH 8, 1837, several thousand Mayan residents from the Mam towns of Quezaltenango gathered in San Juan Ostuncalco to demonstrate their opposition to newly appointed circuit judge Félix Morales. Initially the protesters amassed in front of the interim circuit courthouse, where they confronted Morales with their grievances. When the apprehensive judge attempted to excuse himself from the increasingly heated discussion, however, he was pursued into the nearby quarters of two appellate-level court officers—Justice Luís Cárdenas and Fiscal Manuel Rivera—who were visiting from Quezaltenango. There, despite the intervention of Ostuncalco's parish priest, the encircling crowd began to taunt and jab all three of the beleaguered judicial officials. Rivera and Cárdenas endeavored to flee the house on horseback, but in the process the latter was knocked from the saddle. As Rivera raced from the scene, Cárdenas fell to the ground, the force of the descent sending him into unconsciousness. Only the efforts of the parish priest kept the justice from further harm.

Judge Morales, meanwhile, barricaded himself inside Cárdenas' bedroom, where he remained until his pursuers broke through the door and dragged him to the town jail. The rebels freed the existing prisoners, and then shackled the judge. Not content to leave matters there, however, they returned "to inflict additional torture . . ." or at least that was how Morales saw it. According to the judge, "they removed the shackles and placed me in stocks, where I found myself sentenced to death each time that [my captors] felt compelled to make such a pronouncement, which occurred every minute over the course of the entire night. . . ."¹ Before the fatal sentence could be imposed, however, Morales was rescued by a force of about forty ladinos from San Marcos, who entered Ostuncalco early the following day. After

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much delicate negotiation the rescuers persuaded the rebels to release the captive judge into their custody so that he could be tried for his crimes before the proper authorities. The rescue force “conducted me with all the demonstrations of a dangerous criminal to deceive the [crowd],” recalled Morales. “But even so, the tumult accompanied the escort for nearly two leagues . . . , insulting them, and hurling stones furiously, from which many were injured.”²

So began the first of a wave of rebellions that swept “more than thirty [Guatemalan] Indian villages in mid-1837,” according to the count of historian Mario Rodríguez.³ The factors and perceived injustices that precipitated such a widely dispersed eruption of largely spontaneous and uncoordinated uprisings were legion, yet nearly all of them could be traced, in one way or another, back to the Liberal factions that had dominated Guatemala City and Guatemala’s incipient postcolonial state since the late 1820s. Under the activist administration of Mariano Gálvez in particular, the state implemented a series of dramatic reforms culminating with the notorious Livingston Codes. Few aspects of Guatemalan society were left untouched by Gálvez’s ambitious reform project. The Livingston Codes, for example, overhauled the entire judicial system, in the process completely redefining community–state relations. Local political autonomy was greatly diminished, and special legal channels that had privileged indigenous access to the courts were abolished. In addition, Liberal reformers discouraged various outward manifestations of Mayan culture, among other things eroding the legal foundations of corporate landholding—the predominant form among the indigenous majority. They also increased taxes and ceded vast expanses of national territory to foreign entrepreneurs in the name of fostering economic growth, promoting European immigration, and “modernizing” Guatemala’s purportedly backward populace.

Needless to say, the Liberal reform project alienated many in a land where the stability and continuity of Spanish colonialism remained a compelling memory. Although the uprising of Quezaltenango’s Mam communities, centered in San Juan Ostuncalco, was crushed less than three weeks after it had begun, subsequent rebellions were not so easily dispatched. Those that erupted to the east of the national capital—Guatemala City—coalesced into a sustained and effective popular insurgency in large part because the region’s history of mestizaje and hacienda formation made cross-ethnic and cross-class alliances much more possible than in the west, where regional ethnic antagonism prevented indigenous–ladino coalition building, and the lack of wealthy landowners with large, subservient labor forces inhibited the emergence of clientelistic, regionally based political and social movements. This eastern-based insurgency, which came to be known as the Carrera Revolt, eventually toppled the country’s postcolonial Liberal state, and established

peasant-turned-rebel leader Rafael Carrera as the kingpin of Guatemalan politics. Carrera instructed his allies to countermand the offending Liberal reforms and to restore the colonial-era laws that had protected the indigenous majority, beginning a thirty-year period of a nearly unbroken Conservative-popular rule.

Fast forward to June 30, 1871. On that day Liberal rebel Justo Rufino Barrios led his troops unopposed into Guatemala City after routing Conservative forces just west of the capital. His triumphal entrance marked not only the definitive defeat of Guatemalan Conservatives, but also the start of another round of sweeping Liberal reforms designed to revolutionize the nation's economy and society. These reforms included the "terrenos baldíos" laws of 1873 and 1874, which instructed Quezaltenango's *jefe político* to auction off the department's fertile coffee lands to the highest bidder while simultaneously refusing any special consideration for the large number of subsistence cultivators who already used the area.⁴ They also included the infamous decrees 170 and 177, which called for privatizing communally held property and press-ganging unindentured rural laborers, respectively.⁵ Surprisingly, this reform project did not break apart on the anvil of popular opposition as occurred in the late 1830s, nor was Barrios, or the Liberals more generally, driven from office by widespread, sustained insurrection. Instead, the Liberal Reforma—as it has come to be called—survived to leave its legacy for the twentieth century.⁶

But why? What had changed from the 1830s to the 1870s to make a repeat of the Carrera Revolt improbable in the face of such apparently similar reforms? Was it that the Reforma-era Liberal state possessed a much more formidable and effective repressive apparatus? Or did the same depth and breadth of popular outrage that had greeted, and ultimately shattered, the first generation of Liberal reforms simply fail to materialize during the 1870s and 1880s? Juxtaposing the Carrera Revolt with the Liberal Reforma demands that questions such as these be addressed because it points to the potential, rather than the impossibility, for popular mobilization to challenge effectively and offer alternatives to elite designs. Simultaneously, such a comparison denies presumptions of Liberalism's inevitability. Instead, it challenges us to explain the Liberal Reforma's success in light of how popular sectors had so thoroughly defeated the earlier reform project.

Unfortunately, most existing narratives of Guatemala's nineteenth century fail even to recognize, never mind address, the paradox or explanatory problem posed by the Liberal Reforma. Instead, their authors are lulled by the overwhelming preponderance of Liberal opinion into accepting the Reforma as a resumption of the country's fated historical trajectory after the aberrant detour represented by the Carrera Revolt and the Conservative interregnum. For much the same reason, few authors question the fundamental outline of

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Guatemala's nineteenth century sketched by Liberal intellectuals and ideologues. In this scenario, Liberalism was the progressive force that overcame much Conservative and popular foot-dragging to lead Guatemala down the road to North Atlantic-style development. Despite the initial setback of the 1830s, Liberal reformers returned with a vengeance in 1871, implementing sweeping changes in land tenure, labor relations, and the state.⁷

Recent revisionists have correctly disputed the meaning of the Reforma for Guatemala's social and economic development by challenging Liberal notions of progress—asking the question “Progress for whom?” for example. And although they have turned conventional wisdom on its head by inverting Liberal depictions of Barrios the hero and Carrera the barbarian, they still have not gone far enough in challenging the basic contours of the Liberal paradigm. Principally, revisionists continue to agree with Liberal partisans and commentators of years past who heralded 1871 as the start of a decade of unprecedented, even revolutionary, change. For good or bad, it seems, the Reforma was the watershed event of Guatemala's postcolonial nineteenth century.⁸

Perhaps the most significant achievement attributed to the Liberal reforms of the 1870s is that they established the necessary conditions for coffee to become the *produit moteur* of the Guatemalan economy. Indeed, in the minds of many authors, the Reforma is synonymous with a dramatic expansion of coffee production. Yet how accurate is such an association? Let us briefly review the details of coffee cultivation in Guatemala over the course of the nineteenth century. In particular, let us examine coffee's emergence as the country's economic mainstay and most important agricultural export.⁹

Coffee has been cultivated on a consistent basis in Guatemala from at least the mid-1830s. This early period is often neglected in terms of the magnitude of production because the first coffee exports were not recorded until 1853. Apart from the export data compiled by the state's Customs Administration, there is little additional evidence by which to calculate annual production. Yet the absence of such information in the early years does not mean that harvests were insignificant. Rather, annual production was directed toward meeting the growing demand for coffee that existed within the country itself. Even after Guatemala already had begun to ship coffee abroad, for instance, its domestic market consumed the lion's share of El Salvador's first exports, which amounted to nearly ninety thousand pounds in 1855–56.¹⁰ Still, given the difficulties associated with trying to determine the magnitude of Guatemalan coffee production prior to 1853, let us turn to the export figures that exist for the subsequent decades (see Table 1).

The export data demonstrate that coffee production grew consistently from the mid-1850s to the mid-1880s. In other words, expansion began well before 1871, and in this sense, the year of the so-called Liberal revolution

TABLE 1. Coffee Exports, 1853–1885

| Year | Pounds | Increase | % Increase |
|-------------|-------------------|------------|------------|
| 1853 | 5,000 | | |
| 1854 | 800 | -4,200 | -84.0 |
| 1855 | 9,500 | 8,700 | 1087.5 |
| 1856 | 14,500 | 5,000 | 52.6 |
| 1857 | 17,000 | 2,500 | 17.2 |
| 1858 | 10,400 | -6,600 | -38.8 |
| 1859 | 47,355 | 36,955 | 355.3 |
| 1860 | 155,689 | 108,334 | 228.8 |
| 1861 | 558,866 | 403,177 | 259.0 |
| 1862 | 1,207,415 | 648,549 | 116.0 |
| 1863 | 2,026,468 | 819,053 | 67.8 |
| 1864 | 1,628,979 | -397,489 | -19.6 |
| 1865 | 2,242,872 | 613,893 | 37.7 |
| 1866 | 3,253,064 | 1,010,192 | 45.0 |
| 1867 | 3,465,650 | 212,586 | 6.5 |
| 1868 | 7,505,102 | 4,039,452 | 116.6 |
| 1869 | 7,183,887 | -321,215 | -4.3 |
| 1870 | 11,322,982 | 4,139,095 | 57.6 |
| 1871 | 13,121,293 | 1,798,311 | 15.9 |
| 1872 | 13,913,779 | 792,486 | 6.0 |
| 1873 | 15,050,668 | 1,136,889 | 8.2 |
| 1874 | 16,158,381 | 1,107,713 | 7.4 |
| 1875 | 16,195,900 | 37,519 | 0.2 |
| 1876 | 20,740,017 | 4,544,117 | 28.1 |
| 1877 | 20,993,476 | 253,459 | 1.2 |
| 1878 | 20,935,877 | -57,599 | -0.3 |
| 1879 | 26,228,213 | 5,292,336 | 25.3 |
| 1880 | 28,976,267 | 2,748,054 | 10.5 |
| 1881 | 26,037,289 | -2,938,978 | -10.1 |
| 1882 | 31,327,156 | 5,289,867 | 20.3 |
| 1883 | 40,406,939 | 9,079,783 | 29.0 |
| 1884 | 37,130,600 | -3,276,339 | -8.1 |
| 1885 | 52,031,815 | 14,901,215 | 40.1 |

Sources (by year): 1853–56, 1867–74, 1876–83, and 1885, Manuel Rubio Sánchez, *Historia del comercio del café en Guatemala. Siglos XVIII–XIX*, parts 2 and 3, ASGHG 51 (1978): 124–204, and 52 (1979): 110–127; 1859–1866, Michael J. Biechler, *The Coffee Industry of Guatemala: A Geographic Analysis* (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1970), 265; 1875 and 1884, David J. McCreery, *Coffee and Class: The Structure of Development in Liberal Guatemala*, HAHR 56 (August 1976): 485. The years 1857–58 were estimated from export earnings reported by Ignacio Solís, *Memorias de la Casa de Moneda de Guatemala y del desarrollo económico del país* (Guatemala: Ministerio de Finanzas de Guatemala, 1979), 844, and an approximate price per pound of 0.10 pesos calculated from 1856 and 1859. I have highlighted 1870 to indicate the year that coffee surpassed cochineal as Guatemala's single most important export. On this point see Ralph Lee Woodward, *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821–1871* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1993), 379, 383.

hardly stands out. Indeed, by 1870, coffee already had become Guatemala's single largest export earner, surpassing even cochineal. Considered in terms of average annual growth rates, coffee exports increased at well over 100 percent per year between 1853 and 1871. They grew at little more than 10 percent per year from 1872 to 1885. Even in absolute rather than relative terms, annual growth by the end of the 1860s mirrored figures from the late 1870s and 1880s. In both 1868 and 1870, for example, exports grew by over four million pounds, a feat that was not repeated again until 1976 and 1979. If not for the military disruption of 1871, and the regime change that followed, it is quite likely that export figures would have continued to grow by several million pounds annually through the early 1870s as well as beyond. Thus, when viewed from the standpoint of coffee production, 1871 does not appear to have been much of a watershed event at all. The health of Guatemala's coffee industry would seem to have been assured well before it received all of the supposed benefits that most authors attribute to the Liberal Reforma.

The results of this cursory analysis of coffee export data are surprising because a central pillar of the "Reforma-as-revolution" perspective is the close association of Guatemala's Liberals with the period of rapid coffee growth. As we just saw, however, coffee export figures indicate that this pillar may be standing on shaky ground. Could the same be true for other pillars of the "Reforma-as-revolution" perspective? Might the dramatic rise in coffee production prior to 1871, for example, suggest a concomitant transformation of indigenous community land into privately held agricultural production units, and indigenous peasants into seasonal wage laborers? Perhaps the Liberal Revolution of 1871 was not such a revolution after all. Perhaps, if revolutionary change did mark Guatemalan society during the nineteenth century, and coffee was at the heart of it, "then the Liberal reforms were more capstone than cornerstone in the process."¹¹ If such a reinterpretation is accurate, then it was Conservatives, not Liberals, who presided over the most important transformations of the nineteenth century, even if they were not themselves the intellectual authors, and Guatemala thus joins a host of other Latin American nations and regions that implemented Liberal-oriented development policies under the direction of Conservative authorities.¹²

To assert that Rafael Carrera and his Conservative camarilla, rather than Reforma-era Liberals, dealt a fatal and irreversible blow to the indigenous communities of Guatemala's potential coffee zones is to challenge two inter-related interpretations of the nineteenth century that prevail in the historiography of Guatemala. First, such an assertion questions the work of revisionists, who, over the past two decades or so, have painted a more favorable portrait of Rafael Carrera. E. Bradford Burns is among the earliest and best-known proponents of Carrera as a champion of the underclass rather than a reactionary

despot.¹³ And although it is certainly true that various aspects of Carrera's rule needed to be recuperated from the weight of Liberal mischaracterizations, his purported sympathy for indigenous communities has been overstated greatly by Burns and other revisionists. Secondly, my take on Carrera and the Conservatives diminishes the importance of post-1871 Liberal legislation and disputes the notion that the Reforma constituted the key moment in nineteenth-century Guatemala. Supporters and detractors of Guatemalan Liberalism alike perhaps have been too quick to accept the triumphalism and greatly inflated claims of the contemporary Liberals themselves.¹⁴

Several revisionist works on the period have begun to recognize the need for a reconsideration of these issues. David McCreery suggested such a possibility as early as 1983 when he wrote that "[r]ural Guatemalan communities did not suffer the sweeping land confiscations that characterized some late nineteenth-century Liberal regimes."¹⁵ McCreery's argument, which he makes most forcefully in the more recently published *Rural Guatemala*, is that unlike countries such as El Salvador, where community lands were more successfully legislated out of existence, in Guatemala many indigenous towns were able to retain significant landholdings long after the Liberal Revolution.¹⁶ Indeed, in some cases Liberal authorities actually helped communities protect and even expand their land base.¹⁷ Although this challenge to traditional accounts of the Reforma period differs significantly from the one that I pose above, it provides a nuanced and necessary corrective to our understanding of Guatemala's post-1871 Liberals and the policies they pursued.

J. C. Cambranes is another of the revisionist pioneers whose work has helped to demystify Guatemala's nineteenth century. In particular, his 1985 study of land tenure during the Conservative years helps put the lie to Carrera's supposed bias in favor of the indigenous community. As Cambranes notes, "The Conservative Government permitted agrarian redistribution in Guatemala by fostering the handing over of land to private parties, which by law belonged to the peasant communities. . . . [T]he sympathy displayed by the Conservatives . . . with respect to the demands and complaints made by the rural population, was more apparent than real."¹⁸ By presenting a less romanticized view of Carrera, Cambranes helps to tear down the great divide between Conservative and Liberal rule that marks many other scholarly treatments of the period.

More recently, emerging in the early 1990s, a new wave of scholarship has begun to question seriously the Conservative/Liberal duality present in much of the existing literature. Examples include Ralph Lee Woodward's monumental social history of the Carrera years, Jorge González' dissertation on Central America's ephemeral Los Altos state, McCreery's *Rural Guatemala*, and Robert Williams' comparative investigation of state formation in the

five Central American republics.¹⁹ Two additional works—one by Wayne Clegern, another by Lowell Gudmundson and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes—issue particularly explicit challenges to the bipolar characterization of Guatemala’s Conservative and Liberal regimes.²⁰ The consensus of this new revisionism is that far from marking a 180-degree reversal, some important aspects of the Reforma were foreshadowed by trends in Conservative policy. Although most of the aforementioned revisionists still would assert that the Conservative period did not see a significant shift toward “Liberal” policies until after the death of Carrera in 1865, they acknowledge some telling prior exceptions, particularly in the case of land tenure.²¹ Woodward, for example, notes that “By the 1860s . . . and sometimes even earlier, we find the Ministry of Gobernación sometimes siding with Ladino coffee planters encroaching on Indian ejidos.”²² Clegern is even more emphatic: “It is well documented that from the early 1850s on the coffee revolution had unleashed massive encroachments on village lands. . . . It is also documented that in large measure both Carrera and Cerna turned a deaf ear to village complaints, both having committed themselves to developing the coffee culture.”²³ Only Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes, however, go so far as to argue that “the Liberal reforms only formalized a situation long in the making:”

[W]e downgrade the significance of the reform movement of the 1870s as a turning point in the economic, political, and social history of Central America, however great its historiographic and ideological significance for Liberal historians and statesmen thereafter. . . . [N]o longer can one seriously argue that coffee and Liberalism were synonymous in Central America. Coffee allowed for a second coming of Liberalism, to be sure, but proexport policies were anything but a Liberal monopoly.²⁴

As I will demonstrate in this study, the evidence from western Guatemala supports such a contentious assertion. The main difference between Liberals and Conservatives, particularly with regard to matters of economic development, was not fundamental beliefs but strategy. The core group of western Liberals that backed the insurgency of 1868–71 and the subsequent Liberal Reforma was motivated more by regionalist resentment—what Jorge González calls “situational” Liberalism—than a fundamental ideological or even programmatic disagreement with Guatemala City Conservatives.²⁵ The historiographical postulates that Conservatives desired to protect Mayan lands whereas Liberals coveted them, and that Conservatives desired to preserve the peasant status of the Mayan population whereas Liberals pushed for proletarianization are unfounded. Conservative authorities simply viewed a wholesale attack on Mayan society to be foolhardy. In contrast to Liberals, whether they hailed from Guatemala City or the western provinces, Conservatives were not as inclined to use the state in an activist manner. Instead they presided over a slower, piecemeal, but ultimately much more effective dismantling of

indigenous communities from the 1840s onward and with little deviation, at least when it came to Guatemala's fertile Pacific coast. McCreery's characterization of the Reforma in fact applies equally well to the Conservative interlude. The greater a region's commercial agricultural potential, and the more important the ladino who desired to exploit it, the more likely it was that the state would intervene to weaken or dismantle the autonomy of the respective region's indigenous communities.²⁶

This is not to say that Liberals and Conservatives were indistinguishable from one another. First and foremost, they deeply disagreed over the Catholic Church. Conservatives generally desired to maintain the Church as a significant cultural and social actor, whereas Liberals generally opposed any institutional competition with the state, hoping to replace important Church functions with an expanded state apparatus. To this disagreement, second-generation Liberals from the western highlands added their regionalist resentment of capital-city privileges, which they attributed to conservatism. As manifested by the failed separatist project of the 1830s and 1840s—the short-lived state of Los Altos—provincial Liberals desired to diminish the political prerogatives of the Guatemala City elite, prerogatives that allowed the latter to impose monopolies and other trade restrictions that funneled much of the region's commerce through one or two official ports and a handful of capitalino merchants and their allies.

Lastly, Conservatives and Liberals disagreed over how to conceptualize the country's indigenous majority. In essence, the conflict pitted Conservative caste-based hierarchalism against Liberal universality. Conservatives held a racialized or biologically deterministic view of society, in which the Maya were considered a distinct class of citizens because of their supposedly stunted intellect. Legally speaking, the Conservatives treated indigenous people as wards of the state. Liberals, by contrast, believed that the "Indian problem" was more cultural in nature. Mayan "failure" to conform to "modernity" had little to do with biology, and everything to do with their implacable resistance to change and a stubborn determination to retain their distinctive culture and identity. Caste hierarchy had to be ended, then, not simply because Liberalism demanded formal equality before the law, but also because caste-based legal distinctions were viewed as tantamount to helping the indigenous majority resist further ladinization (read: modernization). In sum, Conservatives preferred to usurp indigenous lands and exploit indigenous labor under the logic of caste hierarchy and paternalism, whereas Liberals used formal, legal equality as a mechanism to do the same. As we shall see, however, if the Liberal deployment of equality worked rather well to disenfranchise indigenous land, it raised questions when placed in the context of forced indigenous labor, and generated contradictions that doomed the process of Guatemalan state formation.

Indeed, it is probably a mistake to assume that western Liberals ever conceptualized state formation in ethnically inclusive terms. As the leaders of the new economic center of the country, they believed that they deserved direct access to the halls of government. As ladinos, the vehicle by which they would cement their hold on that government was the creation of a ladino national identity that would unite less privileged sectors of the non-indigenous population against the foil of Mayan backwardness.²⁷ Their goal was to establish a nation in which western ladinos would be on an equal footing with capitalino elites, many of them Creoles, and in which the state would be directly under their control as they dealt with the regional Mayan majority. Equality, for these provincial Liberals, meant equal access to the state by all political subjects. And just as was true in British North America at the time of the anticolonial struggle there, the category of political subject did not include indigenous Americans.

The big difference in Guatemala, however, was that the dividing line between indigenous and nonindigenous was cultural rather than biological. Acculturated Maya could be brought into the body politic by “becoming” ladinos. Those who refused, however, to shed their attachment to the community of their birth, to forfeit their corporate land rights, to acquiesce before the influx of ladino outsiders who had been entering the western region since the late eighteenth century, could not be citizens in Liberal Guatemala. Ladino nationalism had been forged on the anvil of Mayan resistance to the ladino presence in the west, and the antagonism toward indigenous insularity on which it was based had only grown stronger over the course of the nineteenth century. In 1821 Nicolas Juarez, an indigenous resident of Concepción Chiquirichapa, expressed the following sentiment, widespread throughout the Mam communities west of Quezaltenango: “We do not want a ladino to enter our area. Ladinos with ladinos, Indians with Indians.”²⁸ By 1871, as they readied to take state power, western Ladinos had developed an understanding of nationalism that was almost a mirror image: theirs was to be a Ladino nation, and Mayan peoples would not be allowed to enter unless they checked their cultural identities at the border.

This study represents a twofold reevaluation of Guatemala’s nineteenth century. At the broadest level it is an attempt to place Guatemala’s rural, subaltern majority firmly at the center of the country’s national-level political narrative by addressing the paradox posed earlier in this introduction. Why did popular sectors reject and destroy one Liberal reform project only to acquiesce to another? At a more concrete level, it is a bottom-up examination—in both social and geopolitical terms—of the meaning and impact of Liberalism and Conservatism in Guatemala. That is, the study’s focus is subaltern, but also regional. The region is southwestern Guatemala, centered in the political

district of San Juan Ostuncalco, as I will describe below, but also including significant segments of the K'iche' highlands and coast in the present-day departments of Quezaltenango, Totonicapán, Retalhuleu, and Suchitepéquez. Given the ethnic composition and political dynamics of western Guatemala during this period, such a regional focus implies that the subaltern subjects of the study are primarily Mayan. Unfortunately, however, it was not as easy as one might expect to uncover the voices of indigenous Guatemalans, never mind documents produced by their own hand. After several months "organizing" two of the region's municipal-cum-district archives, literally with a wheelbarrow and shovel, it became clear that ladinos had generated most of the documents at the subdepartmental level that had not completely turned to dust.²⁹ Even documents that contained oral testimony or petitions from the Mayan majority usually were written by a ladino scribe in one capacity or another. Nonetheless, despite the predominance of nonindigenous sources, it was frequently possible to find at least some record of the actions and opinions of indigenous community leaders as a body—the "municipalidad y principales del común," for example—if not of particular individuals.

Had Mayan-authored documents been more plentiful, it still would not be inconsistent to include ladino voices in an investigation of nineteenth-century subalterns in western Guatemala. First of all, acknowledging the ethnic divide that separated indigenous from nonindigenous, and that consistently subordinated the former to the latter, especially in the west, does not deny the existence of many poor, disenfranchised, and yes, subaltern, ladinos in the department of Quezaltenango during this time. Even some of San Juan Ostuncalco's nonindigenous political leaders arguably could have been considered subaltern from the standpoint of the departmental capital and regional elites, let alone Guatemala City.³⁰ Secondly, as practitioners of subaltern studies suggest, it is impossible to analyze subaltern groups in complete isolation from those that are dominant. The very category of subaltern is fundamentally relational, and cannot be understood without some consideration of its opposite, or at least, of the interactions and practices that link subalterns and elites together in their unequal embrace.³¹

In sum, then, this work employs a range of documentary perspectives to plumb subaltern experiences in western Guatemala over the course of the nineteenth century. My goal is to demonstrate in concrete ways how state policy, both Liberal and Conservative, challenged, limited, and was perceived by the rural folk who inhabited the region of study. In addition, I have attempted to uncover why rural subalterns chose to respond as they did, and how their responses, whether quotidian or extraordinary—including collaboration as well as indifference, "everyday forms of resistance" as well as rebellion—in turn challenged and shaped the state. As such, this book joins

a host of recent works on Mexico, Central America, and the Andes, that trace the connection between regional—often rural—tensions and movements and national-level political developments.³² In addition, like some of these works, this study uncovers the linkages between local ethnic identities and conflicts and the national-level policies and processes that defined citizenship and contributed to the formation of national identity. Not only has this focus on the subaltern–state nexus in a specific region allowed me to present a more accurate picture of what Liberals and Conservatives and their respective policies meant for rural dwellers nationwide, but it also has convinced me that the existing narrative of Guatemala’s national-level politics in the nineteenth century is fundamentally flawed. In many ways this book is an attempt to rewrite that flawed narrative based on the lived experiences of Mam Quezaltenango’s rural subalterns.

Chapter 1 establishes the cultural and political roots of the Mam region of the department of Quezaltenango—roughly equivalent to the nineteenth-century political district of San Juan Ostuncalco—from pre-Columbian times to independence. Whether San Juan Ostuncalco’s role as the region’s administrative seat preceded the Spanish conquest or not, the town acquired *cabecera*-status with the founding of a Mercedarian *doctrina* or missionary district in the midsixteenth century. The *doctrina* included the towns of Concepción Chiquirichapa, San Martín Sacatepéquez, and its namesake in the highlands, and Santa María Magdalena and Santa Catalina Retalhuleu on the coast.³³ Aside from the Mercedarian priests themselves, the area was entirely indigenous. By the end of the colonial period, however, the coastal towns had withered away, additional highland municipalities had been formed at San Miguel Sigüilá, Santa Cruz Cajolá, and San Cristóbal Cabricán and ladino populations had emerged in Ostuncalco proper, San Antonio Bobós (Sibilia), and additional outlying areas of the parish. Despite the questionable legality of the ladino presence in Mam Quezaltenango, the Crown granted municipal status to the nonindigenous settlers of Ostuncalco and San Antonio Bobós in 1806. And when the region was established as a political district following independence, it was Ostuncalco’s ladino municipal officials who initially were charged with the administrative responsibilities. Beginning in 1837, however, district-level executives and judicial appointees were named by the corregidores and judges of Quezaltenango.

Geographically, the political district of Ostuncalco comprised well over half the territory of the department of Quezaltenango. It stretched from San Cristóbal Cabricán in the north, southward through the present-day coffee towns of Flores Costa Cuca, Génova, El Asintal, and Nuevo San Carlos. Indeed, most of Quezaltenango’s potential coffee land fell within Ostuncalco’s administrative jurisdiction, in an area that came to be called the Costa Cuca sometime around the midnineteenth century. As property, however, almost

the entirety of the so-called Costa Cuca had been titled by San Martín Sacatepéquez in 1744. In Chapter 2, I trace the conversion of San Martín's municipal territory from indigenous ejido, utilized for subsistence cultivation by sanmartineros as well as the Mam residents of the district's other towns, to Guatemala's preeminent coffee zone. In addition, I compare this process with similar conversions that occurred in several nearby K'iche' towns of the present-day departments of Suchitepéquez and Retalhuleu. Contrary to existing narratives of the nineteenth century, in almost all cases this conversion did not occur during the Reforma, but rather under Rafael Carrera. For it was Conservative authorities, including Carrera himself, who from the very beginning of their rule refused to use state power to guarantee the legal sanctity of corporately held indigenous piedmont and coastal property before a growing wave of invading ladino agriculturists. Instead, the Conservative state strong-armed the affected towns into accepting the unwelcome usurpers as tenants. Never mind that these "tenants" rarely paid the rent stipulated by law, or that they treated their "rented" parcels as private property with the full blessing of the state. By the time that Barrios and company retook Guatemala City in late June 1871, private—nonindigenous—hands already controlled much of the *costa del sur's* best coffee land, and coffee plantations proliferated.

What did this transformation of the Costa Cuca mean for Quezaltenango's Mam subsistence farmers? The highland frontier had closed by the end of the colonial period, and with the expansion of cattle, sugar, and—after 1850—coffee estates, the lowland frontier became increasingly crowded as well. To make matters more difficult, the highland population had been growing apace since the beginning of the eighteenth century. How did aspiring peasants find sufficient land as their own numbers enlarged and as commercial agriculture engulfed more of the lowland frontier with each passing decade? The short answer is that they did not. It became more and more difficult for rural households to depend on milpa agriculture as their primary method of subsistence. Instead they were forced to rely more heavily on other activities to meet their needs, including petty commodity production and trade and working for a wage.

Chapter 3 explores the expansion of this last alternative—paid labor—in Mam Quezaltenango over the course of the nineteenth century, as well as its historic relationship to debt and credit since the days of the colonial *repartimientos*, and the ever-constant state policies that attempted to enforce debt-for-labor contracts while simultaneously enlarging the workforce through extraeconomic coercion. Although it is true, as the existing literature contends, that indebted labor and forced work brigades proliferated in the last decades of the nineteenth century, this proliferation did not begin with the Reforma, at least not in the Costa Cuca. Rather, indebted labor expanded alongside commercial agriculture in the wake of the state-sanctioned assault

on San Martín's community property that began in the 1830s and that continued through the 1870s, receiving an additional boost shortly after midcentury with the establishment of the first coffee plantations. More overtly coercive methods became commonplace when the Conservative state reintroduced conscripted labor drafts or *mandamientos* around 1858. Despite bold proclamations, then, Liberal policies resembled quite closely the coercive measures of their Conservative predecessors. The only saving grace for the region's Mam population was that the demand for labor on the coastal plantations remained extreme at a time when neither Conservative nor Liberal authorities were able to enforce debt contracts with much consistency. In the face of intense competition among finqueros to recruit and maintain a workforce, at least some of those who turned to plantation labor were able to defend their autonomy despite the openly coercive legal environment, and to demand additional wages regardless of how much they already owed and to whom.

Besides wage income, many of the households in Mam Quezaltenango relied on the manufacture and sale of petty commodities as part of a diversified subsistence strategy. Unfortunately, the true extent of these activities cannot be accurately gauged due to the inadequacies of the existing demographic record. Small-scale production and trade escaped the census-taker's eye, when it was not simply ignored outright, because it was conducted informally and frequently by women and children. Thus, for example, although some census data indicate that Mayan men produced wool and woolen textiles, we can only guess from our knowledge of the eighteenth-century *repartimientos* that indigenous women probably played an important role as well.

One surprising exception to the dearth of information on women's economic endeavors was the production and sale of illegal rum or *aguardiente clandestino*. Officials at all levels documented this activity with rare zeal precisely because of its proscribed status. Chapter 4 elaborates the conflict that emerged in western Quezaltenango as Conservative officials dedicated greater and greater resources to repressing this booming cottage industry. Women suffered most directly from the state's heavy-handedness because they were the primary distillers and vendors, regardless of their ethnicity. Male indigenous leaders, however, also came to harbor a special resentment toward the state's repressive alcohol policy because it authorized increased ladino intervention within their administrative jurisdictions. Hence, when Liberal rebels announced their intention to abolish all restrictions on the production and sale of *aguardiente*, women as well as men, Maya as well as ladino, probably nodded their heads in agreement. This, along with popular disillusionment at Conservative land and labor policies, may help explain why Barrios and his companions had such an easy time retaking Guatemala City in 1871. There was little popular mobilization on behalf of Vicente Cerna, Carrera's handpicked successor.

Once in power, Reforma-era Liberals pursued a multipronged strategy for keeping themselves there. Chapter 5 details how they aggressively cultivated their nonindigenous supporters in the west with land grants and other perks. In addition, they consolidated their power base throughout the country by celebrating ladinos as the bearers of national progress and, hence, the true citizens of Guatemala. Although this vision of the nation necessarily excluded the indigenous majority, it still implied a strengthening of the state's ties among a significant minority. Moreover, privileging subaltern ladinos over the Maya further damaged the potential for multiethnic popular opposition. At the same time, post-1870 Liberals were not opposed to eschewing the inflexibility that had served their ideological forebears so poorly in relations with indigenous communities. Taking a page from Conservative rulers, Barrios and company exhibited a remarkable pragmatism, discarding Liberal principles when expedient and doling out a combination of repression and rewards to divide Mayan loyalties while isolating unyielding opponents.

In the end, however, Reforma-era Liberals maintained their hold on power in no small part because they had taken control of the state at an extremely auspicious moment in the nineteenth century. Conservatives, and Rafael Carrera in particular, had restored a degree of legitimacy to Guatemala City that was sorely lacking in the immediate postcolonial years. State institutions, including the administrative and military apparatuses, were larger and stronger than ever before, and revenues had just begun a period of unprecedented growth. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Reforma did not loom in the popular imagination as a harbinger of impending disaster. Most of the disruptive changes in land tenure, labor relations, and local politics already were well underway, facilitated by Conservative authorities over the preceding three decades. Second-generation Liberals succeeded where Mariano Gálvez had failed precisely because they did not introduce radical reform so much as cement on Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes' metaphorical capstone.