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By DAVID J. HELLWIG

The Afro-American Press and Woodrow Wilson's Mexican Policy, 1913-1917

THE TURBULENCE unleashed by the Mexican Revolution of 1910 occupied a prominent place in the North American press in the years preceding United States entrance into World War I. The reactions of the American people to developments in Mexico and United States responses, especially during Woodrow Wilson's first term, have been the topic of numerous studies. But even after two decades of seemingly growing awareness of the diversity of the American people, such studies continue to ignore the views of a sizable sector of the public, Afro-Americans.¹

The lack of attention to the opinions of black Americans is not a consequence of scanty research materials. Most studies of popular reaction to past public policies are based largely on the content of the editorial pages of the press. For those who take the time to look, the pages of black newspapers and magazines offer ample and on occasion — as in the case of American policy in Mexico from 1913 to 1917 — abundant materials for analysis.²

The findings reported here are derived from an examination of approximately twenty journals, available for the most part on microfilm. The journals reflect a wide but not necessarily a representative cross section of black America. Most were published in Northern cities by middle-class, relatively well-educated men at a time when most blacks lived under Jim Crow in the rural South. The great majority of the editors, like Afro-Americans in general, identified with the party of Lincoln. Thus it is not surprising that they were quick to criticize the actions of the first Democratic president of the century. The questions raised in their editorials, however, often went beyond the realm of partisan politics.

A small group of articulate blacks — Bishop Alexander Walters, W.E.B. DuBois, and William Monroe Trotter of the *Boston Guardian* in particular — had supported Woodrow Wilson in 1912. They and a great many black Americans who remained loyal to the G.O.P. were disturbed by the growing indifference of the Republican Party to the concerns of Afro-Americans as symbolized in the infamous Brownsville episode of 1906,³ the support of a lily-white party in the South, and the silence of the 1912 platform on rights for blacks.

¹ See, for examples, the following dissertations: Robert H. Block, "Southern Opinion of Woodrow Wilson's Foreign Policies, 1913-1917" (Duke University, 1968); Darden A. Pyron, "Mexico as an Issue in American Politics, 1911-1916" (University of Virginia, 1975); Tommie G. Sessions, "American Reformers and the Mexican Revolution: Progressives and Woodrow Wilson's Policy in Mexico, 1913-1917" (American University, 1974).

² Comments about Mexican-American relations before Wilson took office were infrequent. For examples, see *New York Age*, November 24, 1910, April 27, June 1, 1911, May 16, 1912; *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 1, May 13, 1911; *Richmond Planet*, May 11, 1912.

³ In August 1906 a group of soldiers rioted in Brownsville, Texas, killing a bartender and wounding a policeman. President Roosevelt's subsequent dismissal of a whole battalion of Afro-American soldiers received widespread criticism from blacks. See Ann J. Lane, *The Brownsville Affair: National Crisis and Black Reaction* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1971).

But the efforts of black Democrats to secure support for Wilson achieved little success. The Democratic platform like that of the Republicans and Progressives ignored Afro-Americans, and Wilson refused to go beyond promising to refrain from "un-fair discrimination" in patronage⁴ as president. More important, however, was the fact that in addition to being a Democrat, he was Southern-born, and someone who as president of Princeton University and as governor of New Jersey consistently had failed to use his power or prestige to challenge the deteriorating status of blacks in the era described by Rayford Logan as "the Nadir of the Negro."⁵

It is not the place here to review in detail the racial policies of the Wilson presidency. Suffice it to say that his appointment practices, the stepped-up segregation of federal government employees in Washington, D.C., the introduction of the use of photographs on civil service applications, and his widely reported confrontation with the pugnacious William Monroe Trotter in 1913 quickly drove his few black supporters back to the Republican Party.⁶ Wilson's record on racial issues and the partisan nature of the Afro-American press did much to shape the reaction of the black press to his Mexican policy. As the *Indianapolis Freeman* correctly noted in May 1914, "The mix-up with Mexico has been the means of drawing out expressions from the Negroes in their attitudes towards the government."⁷

The story of American involvement in Mexico from the inauguration of Wilson in March of 1913 to United States entry into World War I in April 1917 is extremely complex. As the *Chicago Defender* commented in 1914, "It takes a lightening calculator to figure out just what is what in Mexico, also just who is who."⁸ The historian who seeks to unravel the sequence of events readily senses some of the difficulty and frustration the president and his advisors experienced in assessing and responding to the chaotic state of affairs in revolutionary Mexico. Likewise, one can quickly become engrossed in the efforts of diplomatic historians to explain Wilson's policies: was he genuinely interested in fostering the creation of democratic institutions and helping to bring stability to Mexico,⁹ or was he concerned primarily with protecting and extending United States economic interests?¹⁰

⁴ Woodrow Wilson to Oswald Garrison Villard, August 23, 1912, in Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton, 1966-), XXV, 53.

⁵ Arthur S. Link, "The Negro as a Factor in the Campaign of 1912," *Journal of Negro History*, 32 (January 1947): 81-99; August Meier, "The Negro and the Democratic Party, 1875-1915," *Phylon*, 17 (Summer 1956): 173-91; Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (new ed.; New York, 1965), pp. 359-70.

⁶ Kathleen L. Wolgemuth, "Woodrow Wilson and Federal Segregation," *Journal of Negro History*, 44 (April 1959): 158-73; Nancy J. Weiss, "The Negro and the New Freedom: Fighting Wilsonian Segregation," *Political Science Quarterly*, 84 (March 1969): 61-79; Henry Blumenthal, "Woodrow Wilson and the Race Question," *Journal of Negro History*, 48 (January 1963): 1-21.

⁷ *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 9, 1914.

⁸ June 27, 1914.

⁹ Works which view Wilson as an "idealist" include Clarence C. Clendenen, *The United States and Pancho Villa: A Study in Unconventional Diplomacy* (Ithaca, 1961); Kenneth J. Grieb, *The United States and Huerta* (Lincoln, Neb., 1969); P. Edward Haley, *Revolution and Intervention: The Diplomacy of Taft and Wilson with Mexico, 1910-1917* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

¹⁰ Examples of a "materialist" interpretation are Sidney Bell, *Righteous Conquest: Woodrow Wilson and the Evolution of the New Diplomacy* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1972); Robert Freeman Smith, *The United States and Revolutionary Nationalism in Mexico, 1916-1932* (Chicago, 1972).

To understand reactions of blacks it is not necessary to go into detail about the Mexican Revolution and the responses of the Wilson administration. It is sufficient to recall that Wilson often talked of helping the Mexican people gain control over their affairs through free elections and constitutional government. He is reported to have said, he would “teach the Latin American republics to elect good men.”¹¹ He sought to achieve this objective by refusing to recognize governments, most notably that of General Victoriano Huerta, the dominant political operative in Mexico when Wilson took office, which had in his view gained power through illegitimate means. And since Wilson sought to influence events in Mexico without overt, direct intervention — while hoping that time or the exhaustion of contending parties would bring stability and representative government — his policy is often referred to as one of “watchful waiting.”

Yet on two occasions the United States did intervene militarily in the affairs of Mexico: by sending Marines to Veracruz for several months in 1914 and by dispatching an expedition under General Pershing in March 1916 to capture Francisco (Pancho) Villa.¹² While the black press on occasion before and after these two military operations commented on Wilson’s policies regarding Mexico, the bulk of its observations focused on the Veracruz occupation and the hunt for Villa in northern Mexico.

Two features characterized editorials on the use of American armed forces in Mexico in 1914 and again in 1916-17: (1) the reactions were overwhelmingly critical, reflecting in part the Republican orientation of the black press, and (2) the assessments of the shortcomings in United States policy were remarkably diverse.

Much of the criticism in the Afro-American press regarding Wilson’s diplomacy from the occupation of Veracruz in April 1914 through the following year centered around three charges. The largest group of critics accused the United States of overreacting to developments in Mexico and of abusing its power. One important paper, the *Chicago Defender*, took the stance that the nation had not acted decisively enough in Mexico. Others catalogued a variety of negative consequences stemming from the inexperience of Wilson and the Democratic Party in foreign affairs and the president’s inconsistent approach to the Mexican situation.

Among the journals which viewed the United States as misusing its power across the border were the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the *Richmond Plant*, and the *New York Age*, all well edited and influential publications. The *Tribune* was by far the most vociferous. The president had a “visionary prejudice” against Huerta, it claimed, which led him to give indirect but nevertheless costly support to Venustiano Carranza and Villa by sending troops to Veracruz in response to a “trivial” insult to the American flag at Tampico. In so doing the administration had endangered Americans living in Mexico and helped to bring to power men who were less sympathetic to American interests than

¹¹ Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters* (8 vols., Garden City, 1927-1939), IV, 289; Burton J. Hendrick, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page* (3 vols., Garden City, 1922-1925), I, 204.

¹² For detailed accounts of these episodes see Robert E. Quirk, *An Affair of Honor: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Veracruz* (New York, 1964); Grieb, *op. cit.*; Clendenen, *op. cit.*

Huerta had been.¹³ The *Richmond Planet* raised questions about the possible implications of sending American troops to Mexico. Would not a declaration of war constitute recognition of the provisional government of General Huerta? And if the nation did not declare war, how could it account for its actions to other nations?¹⁴ The *New York Age* focused its criticism on what it viewed as unjust intervention in the internal affairs of Mexico. It was one thing to enforce the Monroe Doctrine to keep Europeans from meddling in the Americas; but in Mexico the United States was violating the sovereign right of the Mexican people to solve domestic disputes without foreign intervention. Furthermore, the actions of the Wilson administration were uniting Mexicans against a common enemy. Such heavy-handed, unilateral action as the occupation of Veracruz, it warned, also hurt the moral and economic posture of the United States throughout Latin America.¹⁵

In dissenting both from these views and the position of the national administration the *Chicago Defender* invoked the name of Theodore Roosevelt and his "big stick." Had the ex-president been returned to office in 1913 he would have avoided dealing with bandits and murderers and acted decisively in Mexico, the *Defender* predicted in April 1914. But with the forces commanded by Huerta outnumbering those of the United States by one hundred thousand there was little chance that the United States could influence events in Mexico.¹⁶ Although in late June 1914 the *Defender* urged the nation to stay out of the "family affair" in Mexico, a year later it urged the United States to apply a good spanking to Mexico, reject mediation of its disputes with Mexico, and apply there the solutions used effectively in the recent past in Haiti and Nicaragua.¹⁷

Other journals found still other deficiencies in Wilson's handling of Mexican-American relations. The *California Eagle*, for example, accused the administration of deceiving the American people about the nation's involvement in Mexico.¹⁸ The *Atlanta Independent* feared that the weakness manifest in first yielding to Great Britain on the issue of Panama Canal tolls¹⁹ and then withdrawing from Veracruz without achieving the goals of the mission threatened to make the country the laughing stock of the international community. And the *Richmond Planet* complained that the uncertainty of American policy in Mexico had harmed business and contributed to the overall weakness of the nation's economy. Without mentioning Wilson or Secretary of State Bryan directly it attributed the shortcomings in United States diplomacy to "little-men," "would-be statesmen," idealists, and demagogues.²⁰

¹³ *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 2, 9, 16, June 13, July 4, September 19, 26, December 5, 1914. The *Cleveland Gazette*, May 8, 1915, also accused Wilson of being anti-Huerta.

¹⁴ *Richmond Planet*, April 25, 1914. See also, May 2 and September 5, 1914.

¹⁵ *New York Age*, November 20, 1913, April 30, May 21, July 23, 1914. For similar views see *Tulsa Star*, April 25, June 20, 1914, March 13, 1915; *California Eagle* (Los Angeles), June 6, 1914; *Indianapolis Freeman*, July 25, 1914; *Baltimore Commonwealth*, August 21, 1915.

¹⁶ *Chicago Defender*, April 25, 1914.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, June 27, 1914, March 13, June 5, October 2, 1915.

¹⁸ *California Eagle*, June 6, 1914.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the controversy over the toll schedules for the canal see Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom* (Princeton, 1956), pp. 304-14.

²⁰ *Atlanta Independent*, January 2, 1915; *Richmond Planet*, September 25, 1915.

As suggested above, the black press was nearly unanimous in attacking Wilson's diplomacy in Mexico. Only rarely, such as with the decision to accept mediation by the ABC Powers to help settle tensions related to the United States control of Veracruz,²¹ did his policies receive more than isolated praise. The paper which gave the administration the most consistent support regarding Mexico was the *Indianapolis Freeman*, which, for example, in June 1914 lauded Wilson for taking a broad, humane, and disinterested view of affairs in Mexico while assuring the nation's preeminence in the Western Hemisphere.²² The *Tulsa Star*, one of very few papers to support the reelection of Wilson in 1916, also praised the president,²³ although it like the *Freeman* published materials critical of certain aspects of his policy.²⁴

Mexico continued to attract considerable attention from the American public and government until United States entrance into World War I. This was especially true in 1916 and early 1917 when the struggle between Villa and Carranza, rivals since the resignation of Huerta in the summer of 1914, began to affect the nation more directly as the increasingly desperate Villa attacked the lives and property of Americans in the Southwest in an effort to embarrass the Carranza regime. The raids and the dispatching of a punitive expedition under General Pershing to Mexico in the spring of 1916 were of great concern to black and white Americans.²⁵

Blacks, of course, deplored the banditry of Villa and others. They also saw the active participation of Afro-American soldiers in the maneuvers as an opportunity to reaffirm their dedication to the nation.²⁶ Pictures of the Tenth Calvary and reports of heroics by black soldiers frequently appeared on the front pages of the newspapers. Yet, the response of the press to Wilson's reaction to the raids was less than enthusiastic. While some defended the use of troops as a matter of national honor,²⁷ others viewed it as a foolish venture brought on by the ineptness of the administration over the past three years.²⁸ Once again, however, the Afro-American press could not agree on whether the United States had erred in not being forceful enough or by engaging in improper meddling in the affairs of a smaller, troubled nation. Some saw the continuing chaos in Mexico and in Mexican-American relations as the result of the partly American engineered downfall of General Victoriano Huerta, a man strong enough to provide the kind of rule Mexico seemed to need.²⁹ In any case, Wilson's policies had not succeeded in helping the Mexican people, in protecting American lives and property, or in enhancing the national image.

²¹ *Savannah Tribune*, May 9, 1914; *Richmond Planet*, May 2, 1914.

²² June 13, 1913. See also the February 17 and May 2, 1914 issues. On December 6, 1913 the *Richmond Planet* which was to become an outspoken critic of Wilson's Mexican policy had also applauded his handling of conflicts with Mexico.

²³ October 23, 1915.

²⁴ *Tulsa Star*, April 25, June 20, 1914, March 13, 1915; *Indianapolis Freeman*, July 25, 1914.

²⁵ For details on Villa's raids and the U.S. response see Clarence C. Clendenen, *Blood on the Border: The United States Army and the Mexican Irregulars* (New York, 1969); Michael L. Tate, "Pershing's Punitive Expedition: Pursuer of Bandits or Presidential Panacea?" *The Americas*, 32 (July 1975): 46-71.

²⁶ *Cleveland Gazette*, July 1, 1916; *Indianapolis Freeman*, July 8, 1916; *Savannah Tribune*, June 24, 1916.

²⁷ *Atlanta Independent*, June 24, 1916; *Indianapolis Freeman*, March 25, May 6, 1916.

²⁸ *Savannah Tribune*, March 18, April 22, 1916; *Indianapolis Recorder*, August 19, 1916.

²⁹ *New York Age*, January 20, March 16, 1916; *Indianapolis Recorder*, August 12, 1916; *California Eagle*, February 5, 1916; *Cleveland Gazette*, June 3, 1916.

Since 1916 was an election year the debate over United States actions in Mexico took on a more overt political tone than before. Not surprisingly, Wilson was accused of acting on the grounds of political expediency. The sending of the Pershing expedition into Mexico, wrote the *Richmond Planet*, was little more than "a plan to satisfy the public clamor," emanating from certain "extremists," notably rich Americans who owned valuable concessions south of the border. It was most unlikely that the troops would be withdrawn until after the November elections, the paper predicted. The *Philadelphia Tribune*, another persistent critic of the president, was if anything even more sure of Wilson's motives; the growing talk of war and the presence of American troops in Mexico and along the border were designed, it charged, not to influence Mexico but to "create National sentiment in favor of Democratic incompetency" and to secure the reelection of Woodrow Wilson.³⁰

Whatever the motives of the president may have been, it is clear that the Afro-American press, like its white Republican cohorts, was eager to exploit the long building frustration of the American people regarding Mexico to recapture the presidency for the G.O.P. Few were as direct as the *New York Age* in its assertion that the "humiliating and dangerous Mexican mess in which the United States is involved to its own detriment, as well as the detriment of Mexico, bears the brand 'Made by Woodrow Wilson,' " but most agreed with the sentiment. In the months before the election Wilson's blunders in Mexico were a popular subject on the editorial pages of the nation's black press.³¹

In many ways the black critics of Wilson's Mexican policy acted like his white Republican opponents in Congress and elsewhere. They deplored his actions, yet seldom advanced concrete alternatives.³² The reaction of blacks, however, was not identical to that of white critics since Afro-Americans looked at government policies at home and abroad from a perspective founded in their experience. In other words, their racial consciousness, honed by a steady decline in their position in the preceding generation and by the domestic policies of the Wilson administration, resulted in a unique response to American initiatives in Mexico.

Thus questions and remarks appeared in editorials by black Americans that were not found in the white press. Often there was no particular pattern and the ideas expressed were not well developed. For example, in April 1914 the *California Eagle* ran a one sentence statement suggesting that the Mexican war might interfere with the spread of segregation in federal government offices.³³ On rare occasion the possibility of black Americans finding opportunities in Mexico denied them in the United States was raised in comments

³⁰ *Richmond Planet*, March 18, 25, April 15, 1916; *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 24, July 1, 15, 1916.

³¹ *New York Age*, October 12, 1916. See also *ibid.*, March 16, 30, June 29, July 6, 1916; *Cleveland Gazette*, February 26, November 4, 1916; *California Eagle*, July 15, 1916; *Chicago Defender*, July 29, 1916; *Savannah Tribune*, April 22, 1916; *Indianapolis Recorder*, August 12, 1916; *Crisis*, 12 (May, August 1916), 31, 165.

³² For an analysis of Republican congressional criticism of the administration's actions in Mexico see Gerald D. McKnight, "Republican Leadership and the Mexican Question, 1913-1916: A Failed Bid for Party Resurgence," *Mid-America*, 62 (April-July 1980): 105-22. Also useful are Pyron, *op. cit.*, and Sessions, *op. cit.*

³³ April 24, 1914.

about American relations with its neighbor to the South.³⁴ And as has been the case with armed conflicts before and after the military actions in Mexico, Afro-Americans debated the role they should play. While most insisted that military service gave the race an opportunity to demonstrate its loyalty and devotion to the nation, thereby enhancing its claim to first-class citizenship, a few agreed with the *Washington Bee* that "Negroes have no grievance against the Mexicans."³⁵

By far the most distinctive feature of the black press's response was its emphasis on the discrepancy between Woodrow Wilson's eagerness to help the poor and establish democratic institutions in Mexico and his silence on the treatment of black Americans, especially the majority residing in the Southern states. They noted that if Wilson's standards for elections in Mexico were adhered to at home, he might not be president. As the *Washington Bee* said, Wilson was in no position to dictate to other countries regarding their selection of leaders unless he was prepared to resign on the grounds that millions of Negro voters in the South were barred from voting in 1912. While Wilson condemned the methods used by Huerta in Mexico, the *Baltimore Afro-American* observed in 1914, he welcomed the support and advice of the South's worst racists, "the Hoke Smith's [,] the Bleases, the Tillman's, *et al*, who represent a system as bloody, equally as repugnant to republican institutions." The *Philadelphia Tribune* tried to alert the president to the fact that although there was no overt war in this country as in Mexico, almost daily colored men and women were being lynched. Wilson had taken an oath to protect the lives and property of American citizens, not to bring peace in foreign lands.³⁶ If the administration was sincere in wanting to aid the oppressed peons of Mexico, it had plenty of opportunity to demonstrate its humanitarianism among Southern blacks who in many respects were treated similar to the poor Mexicans.³⁷ Indeed one could argue that Afro-Americans were more oppressed than the poorest Mexicans, as the *Philadelphia Tribune* did in July 1914:

In Mexico the peon class is not debarred from casting his vote for anyone that his fancy may dictate to him to vote for; he is not confronted with signs that he must not enter this place or that place, that his presence is undesirable as a customer, that he must take a circumscribed place in traveling from place to place. . . . The colored American has no rights, he is despoiled of his prosperity that he has secured through hard labor, when he seeks redress through the law-making power he finds he has no standing in the courts; if his despoiler is a white man, he has no vote in certain sections of this country; in some other sections he may vote, but his vote is not counted. He is compelled to accept the grossest indignities in traveling; in his efforts to protect the female members of his family from the lecherous white men they may come in contact with, if he asserts the right to protect them, he is summarily

³⁴ *Chicago Broad Ax*, April 24, 1914; *Tulsa Star*, October 17, 1914; *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 15, 1916. On February 27, 1915 the *Chicago Defender* took note of such talk but concluded that the future of the race was better in the U.S. than in Mexico.

³⁵ April 25, 1914.

³⁶ *Washington Bee*, January 17, 1914; *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 25, 1914; *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 17, 1914.

³⁷ *Atlanta Independent*, May 23, 1914; *Chicago Defender*, May 2, 1914, July 29, 1916; *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 22, 1913; *New York Age*, November 20, 1913, May 21, 1914; *Savannah Tribune*, March 18, 1916.

lynched, he is denied the liberty to enter places of entertainment to refresh himself or places of amusement for recreation. . . .

In seeking to explain his intervention in Mexico, Wilson inadvertently had exposed the injustices experienced by millions of his fellow citizens at home, the editor added.³⁸

Perhaps the sharpest and most effective commentary on the inconsistency in Wilson's response to events in Mexico and to domestic racial violence appeared in the editorial section of the *Crisis*, the voice of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), in August 1916. The editor, W.E.B. DuBois, had supported Wilson in 1912. But long before 1916 he had disassociated himself from Wilson, and now he used the Mexican situation to vent some of his disappointment with the president. He did so by running two letters in parallel columns: one actually sent by the American Secretary of State to the Mexican government; the other, an imaginary one, from the president to the governor of Georgia.

The letter to Mexico was one of many in which the United States expressed "deep concern" over the continuing bloodshed and disorders and resulting sacrifice of life and property in Mexico and, recently, in the southwestern United States. It ended with a warning that the nation would act to protect its interests if the Mexican government could or would not do so. The fictitious letter to Georgia, one that in DuBois' view ought to have been sent, expressed "deep concern" and disappointment at the state of affairs in Georgia: the general lawlessness, destruction of human lives through lynchings, and the loss of homes and other property. Entrusted with the responsibility to protect American citizens, the federal government would be compelled to intervene directly in the affairs of the state should it not act to check lynching and mob action, the letter concluded. According to DuBois, Carranza's behavior and Wilson's fear of sending such a letter to Georgia were rooted in similar desires: "Mr. Carranza needs the votes of certain murderous Mexicans in the Rotten Borough of Chihuahua;" "Mr. Wilson needs the votes of certain murderous Americans in the Rotten Borough of Georgia."³⁹

Several Afro-American papers also contrasted the United States response to the disorders in Haiti⁴⁰ and Mexico. As they viewed matters, the government under Wilson had been quick to intervene and establish a protectorate over the Black Republic even though American citizens had not been in danger there as was the case in Mexico. If the United States had acted in Haiti purely out of concern for the protection of life and property — as the administration claimed — did not events in Mexico warrant similar steps? The reason why

³⁸ July 25, 1914. Also see the June 6, 1914 issue of the *Tribune*.

³⁹ *Crisis*, 12 (August 1916): 163-65.

⁴⁰ Wilson's actions in Haiti are traced in Dana G. Monro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1912* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 269-386; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Struggle for Neutrality, 1914-1915* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 496-550; Brenda G. Plummer, "Black and White in the Caribbean: Haitian-American Relations, 1902-1934" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1981), pp. 300-414, 434-506.

not, suggested the *Philadelphia Tribune*, was that Mexico “is a bit sizzly and a bit white, or passes for white” while Haiti was little and black.⁴¹

It is difficult to determine just how aware black Americans were of the racial make-up of the Mexican people and what role, if any, such awareness played in their response to American policy. The press seldom directly referred to the racial composition of the Mexican people. Some viewed Mexico as a white nation. But many, like the *Philadelphia Tribune*, acknowledged the extensive racial mixture in Mexico, and they on occasion detected traces of racism in American policy. One such journal was the *Crisis*. The hesitancy of the nation to become involved in Mexico in 1914, it asserted, was rooted in apprehension about its “millions of brown peons.” In 1916 the *Crisis* referred to Mexico as “our sister . . . made up of people of mingled Spanish, Indian and Negro blood,” struggling to free itself from exploitation by American and European investors.⁴²

Black American assessments of the three key contenders for power in Mexico between 1913 and 1917, Huerta, Carranza, and Villa,⁴³ seems to have been influenced by the racial and perhaps class background of the men. Francisco Villa, in addition to being viewed as the underdog, was clearly not white and, indeed, rumors circulated in the Afro-American press that he was a Negro from the United States.⁴⁴ What we know about Victoriano Huerta indicates that he too would not have been classified as white by North American standards. Venustiano Carranza, on the other hand, was light-skinned — and a landlord, factors which the *Chicago Broad Ax* likely had in mind when it referred to his “Latin soul” and urged the United States to support Villa, a man backed by the great mass of Mexicans seeking social and economic reforms.⁴⁵ It is possible that the differing perceptions of the rivals accounted in part for the generally favorable reception of Huerta and later of Villa in the Afro-American press.

Responses of blacks to the Mexican people, their would-be leaders, and Woodrow Wilson’s policies, like those of other minority groups, had little if any impact on American decision-makers. For that reason, some may find an examination of Afro-American reactions worthless. Clearly, this writer does not. At the most basic level a consideration of the views expressed in the black press helps correct the implicit suggestion in most studies of public opinion regarding American foreign policy that black Americans were either indifferent to the role of the nation in the world or that they inevitably thought as white Americans. Furthermore, public opinion — as reflected in the press — tells us a great deal about the aspirations and frustrations of black Americans a half century after emancipation. The president and society that Afro-

⁴¹ *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 21, 1915; *Washington Bee*, January 22, 1916; *Chicago Defender*, October 2, 1915; *Atlanta Independent*, January 29, 1916; *Cleveland Gazette*, March 3, 1917. The *Savannah Tribune*, October 21, 1916, took a similar approach in comparing Wilson’s policies in the Dominican Republic and in Mexico.

⁴² *Crisis*, 8 (June 1914), 79; 13 (November 1916), 9.

⁴³ Emiliano Zapata and his group of peasants, a majority of whom had distinct Indian features, were virtually ignored in the Afro-American press.

⁴⁴ *Chicago Defender*, March 14, May 2, 1914; *Washington Bee*, October 3, 1914; *New York Age*, April 23, 1914; *Indianapolis Freeman*, March 25, 1916.

⁴⁵ October 3, 1914. The *Cleveland Gazette*, December 26, 1914, attributed the support for Villa among the Mexican masses to the emphasis he gave to land reform. The *New York Age*, April 23, 1914, was attracted to Villa because he, unlike Negro Americans, responded forcefully when he or his people were wronged.

Americans knew were not those known by white Americans. While not all blacks saw developments in Mexico or Wilson identically, they tended to react to Wilson's policies regarding Mexico with a skepticism shaped by their experiences in a land where constitutionalism and democracy often failed to protect their lives, liberty, or property.
