Dear Friends:

From late May through early August 2009, I embarked on an extensive trip retraceing the steps of the Mexican revolutionary intellectual Ricardo Flores Magón in the United States and Mexico. My trip was generously supported by the School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan, and in particular by the Office of International Engagement. With a few exceptions, it completes the journey I began in the summer of 2008 with the same purpose.

From 1904, when Ricardo escaped persecution in Mexico via Laredo, Texas, through his eventual death in 1922 as a political prisoner in Leavenworth, Kansas, he was a journalist, a publisher, an organizer, and perhaps the most instrumental individual in catapulting and organizing the wave of discontent that crystallized in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, even though, and in part because, he never set foot back in Mexico. Despite his centrality to the revolutionary movement, and his influence in the new Mexican Constitution that emerged afterwards, as well as his participation in the radical labor movement in the US, he is largely ignored in this country, and greatly misrepresented in Mexican history. During his lifetime, he was never satisfied with the outcome of the revolution and sharply criticized the individuals who filled the political vacuum created by the downfall of the previous regime. Living in the US during the first two decades of the twentieth century, he was swept up with other labor radicals during the WWI hysteria, and locked away in Leavenworth.

My journeys took me from the American Midwest through the Pacific Northwest, the Pacific Coast, the borderlands of Arizona and Texas, through the northern deserts of Mexico, the lively streets of Mexico City, and into the politically vibrant Southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, where the memory of the Magón is still very much alive. I found and photographed the exact addresses where Ricardo sought refuge in exile in the cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles in California, as well as in El Paso and San Antonio, Texas. I also visited the many sites of his imprisonment in McNeil Island, Washington, Los Angeles, California, and in the Arizona towns of Tucson, Florence, Tombstone, and Yuma. My research in these sites was complemented by my visits to the city of Saint Louis, Missouri, and the Federal Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas last summer. I broadened my search by following the movement of some of his supporters (the magonistas) and sympathizers in San Diego, California, in the Mexican border towns of Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, and in the northern cities of Everett, Washington, and Chicago. I replicated the posthumous journey by train of the body of Magón from Los Angeles to El Paso and to Mexico City. In Mexico, I visited his natal state of Oaxaca, and its neighbor, Chiapas, where the Zapatista movement has picked up the baton of his struggle. And finally, the irony of his lifetime marginalization from Mexican politics and his subsequent posthumous apotheosis became crystal clear when I visited his gravesite in the Rotunda of
Illustrious People, a highly selective pantheon of Mexico’s national heroes.

The 50+ addresses were difficult to locate, not only because he is largely marginalized in history, but because Magón and the magonistas took great pains to destroy their paper trials. Because of this, I spent a good deal of time in specialized archives, reading intercepted letters, and looking at old maps. It is one of the ironies of revolutionary movements that their stories can be reconstructed through the use of primary sources that were confiscated or intercepted by government or private spies and by military and police crackdowns.

Although I tried my hand at primary source research, my trip this summer would have been impossible without the extensive work of dedicated people’s historians who have come before me. They have bucked the normative trends of historical production that portray presidents and politicians as protagonists of history and promote a romantic idea of the 'common man'. Instead, they look at the struggles of radical women, people of color, and political outsiders who have transformed their oppressive living environments into more egalitarian, autonomist, and sustainable conditions without the support, and usually despite the repression, of the apparatuses of state power. By looking at people’s struggles rather than juridical battles and electoral campaigns, these historians have also been able to understand the permeability of borders in political movements.

I am particularly indebted to the Mexican historian Jacinto Barrera Bassols, who has gathered, transcribed, organized, and published the Complete Works of Ricardo Flores Magón, including his newspaper Regeneración, his literary works, and correspondence (much of which was written in code) in an impressive series composed at present of 6 volumes with more volumes to come. In addition to the printed copies of the Complete Works, Prof. Barrera has gone out of his way to make his work more accessible to the public by digitizing it and publishing it online. The online archive, which can be seen at http://archivomagon.net/index.html, was an invaluable asset in my travels, as it allowed me to travel and do research without lugging an encyclopedia in my backpack. The site contains over 400 newspapers published by Magón between 1900 an 1918, searchable and visible in pdf format, almost 50 plays and short stories, and about 400 transcribed and annotated letters.

I had the great fortune of meeting Prof. Barrera in Mexico City, and I am now hosting him at my Ann Arbor home while he does research at the Labadie Collection. He will be presenting some of his work in a talk I helped organize at 4PM on Monday, September 21 in the Gallery Room 100 in the Hatcher Graduate Library, and I will aid in translation. The title of the talk is "Digitation and Indexation of Regeneración: The Creation of a Source for the Study of North
Since our interests converge and our practices complement each other, we are in the process of planning a Spanish/English collaborative book with photos of the sites of Magón's voyage, accompanied by a detailed historical narrative. Our collaborative work promises a project of an unprecedented depth and scope in a relatively ignored corner of history. I will also assist in the English language writing, and in some of the primary source research on this side of the border. The exact details of our collaboration are still in the working.

My photographs attempt to document the underside of history; they portray people's history amongst everyday living spaces. These are not sites of national commemoration, but simple houses in poor neighborhoods, unremarkable parking lots, highway ramps, and empty lots. They reveal the politically normative nature of the standard historical production that is offered to us in textbooks, television, movies, and museums.

This last point was brought home to me in San Antonio, Texas, more than anywhere else. San Antonio is the first city where Magón's newspaper _Regeneración_ was published in exile. It is also a city full of currently recognized historical sites that celebrate the colonization of Native and Mexican lands and peoples, and tend to overlook or justify our country's history of slavery. A handful of token sites of non-white historical participants tend to underscore rather than disrupt the white normativity of the city's official history. There is no better example than the museum of the Casa Navarro historic site, house of the 19th century politician and landowner Jose Antonio Navarro, who was one of two San Antonians to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence. The museum portrays him as a lover of liberty, a revolutionary, and even as a sort of Mexican American civil rights leader. In reality, Navarro was a shrewd politician born into a wealthy family who served under Mexico, the Republic of Texas, and the US, and who expanded his landholdings and political might with each regime change. Given the understandable vexation of the majority Latino population with the uncritical celebration of sites like the Alamo, the city handpicked this site to mollify some of this discontent, and attempt to transform a historically dissident block into a submissively patriotic lobbying group. But the historic site's relevance to my project lies in its geographic location. As luck would have it, the parking lot next door that serves this museum is the location of the first printing house of _Regeneración_ in exile in 1904.

The printing house-cum-parking lot is a hugely important site in the study of Mexican and Chicano subaltern resistance. It was at this site that a small group
of young radicals headed by Ricardo broke with the old guard of Mexican liberalism, and where Magón first emerged as the clear leader of the burgeoning revolutionary movement in Mexico and the American Southwest. This schism was the seed of a political chasm in 20th century Mexican politics between old school state liberalism on the one hand, and the emergence of a new political formation on the other, a sort of organic hybrid of Russian-influenced anarchism and indigenous peasant movements, of which the current Zapatista movement is the most perceptible inheritor. In no small way, the Casa Navarro parking lot represents the early adolescence of autonomism in Mexican and Chicano movements, even as its neighbor the registered historic site, represents the birth of the normative tendencies of multicultural tokenism in American politics.

I am working on a blog with annotated photos of my summer travels at http://sites.google.com/site/magonistaorg/el-paso-1906-1907. I apologize for the "in progress" nature of the blog, as it spans two decades of Magón's life, and it will take some time before it is finished. I would gladly entertain any questions or comments regarding my ongoing work.

The study of Ricardo Flores Magón is as relevant now as ever, not only because we are approaching the centennial of the Mexican Revolution, but also because we now face many of the same challenges he confronted during his lifetime. After organizing and agitating for over a decade, he lived to see the eventual coming of a nation-wide revolutionary movement. But with success also came new challenges, as new rulers co-opted his vision and repressed his supporters. At a time when it was not only unpopular amongst his closest friends, but also physically dangerous to his person to voice criticism, he bravely challenged the politicians who filled the power vacuum created by the downfall of the old regime. He dismissed these ostensibly leftist politicos as wolves in sheep's clothing. Living in the United States in the nineteen-teens, he also voiced criticism of the jingoistic culture and profiteering of WWI, and died in Leavenworth prison for doing so. This irreverence can inform our response to our own times. The anti-war proponents of the candidate Obama who justified their support as 'strategic' might be surprised to find out that the net result of his election has been an expanded military campaign and a blunted anti-war movement. There is now official talk of a 15-year commitment in Afghanistan, and even liberals seem to be cheering it on. (if six weeks was the original commitment to Iraq, what are we supposed to make of official talk of 15 years?!!). And as the new administration debates the pros and cons of another military surge, a mercenary surge (under the euphemism of 'military contracting') is well underway. It is time to stop 'hoping' and get down and dirty with the real work of resistance. I like to think that a new or renewed look at Ricardo Flores Magón might teach us something about dealing with our own wolf in sheep's clothing.

sincerely,
--aaron

ps: A handful of photos can be viewed below. See my blog for more.

ps2: This is a very large email list, please do not 'reply all'.

Site of the first publication of *Regeneración* in Exile. San Antonio, Texas.
Secret office of the magonistas leading up to the failed revolution of 1906. El Paso, Texas.
Site of the escape of Ricardo Flores Magón during the 1906 binational crackdown. El Paso, Texas.
Hideout and site of the first arrest of Ricardo Flores Magón in the US. Los Angeles, California
One of the many offices of *Regeneración*. Los Angeles, California
Site of the Edendale Commune and Farm, where Magón and others attempted to live off the land and work collectively. Los Angeles, California.

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