

Institution: University of St Andrews



Unit of Assessment: 28 - Modern Languages and Linguistics

Title of case study: *Santa Anna of Mexico* and Mexico's changing perception of six-times president Antonio López de Santa Anna, 1794-1876**1. Summary of the impact** (indicative maximum 100 words)

Prof. Fowler's biography, *Santa Anna of Mexico*, has influenced current public discourse which has led Mexicans to revise their "official history" of six-times president Antonio López de Santa Anna, 1794-1876, by illuminating and challenging cultural values and social assumptions in the public domain. The work, which was translated into Spanish and published in Mexico as *Santa Anna* (2010; re-issued 2011), alongside other key outputs, including a TV programme, about Santa Anna and other Mexican presidents, was at the centre of several state-government-sponsored events in the build-up to, and as part of, the Bicentenary of the War of Independence in 2010. It has succeeded in improving the quality of evidence employed to enhance public understandings of Mexico's complex past.



Enhanced understanding has led to a revised interpretation of Santa Anna in Mexico's 'official history'.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Santa Anna of Mexico (2007; 501pp)¹, the key text in this case study, was published in the United States and Britain by the University of Nebraska Press (hbk) and by Bison Books (pbk), and in Mexico (in Spanish) by the Universidad Veracruzana. At the same time, in Mexico City, the Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, and the leading trade publishing house Fondo de Cultura Económica, published Fowler's *Presidentes mexicanos* (2004)², 2 vols, and *Gobernantes mexicanos* (2008)³, 2 vols, respectively. Other contemporaneous publications included articles in prestigious academic journals on different aspects of Santa Anna's political career⁴⁻⁶.

Research for these publications, undertaken in regional and national archives in Mexico, as well as in Britain, Spain, and the United States, was carried out by Prof. Will Fowler at the University of St Andrews from 1999 onwards. Prior to the dissemination of Fowler's findings, General Antonio López de Santa Anna (1794-1876) had been consistently depicted as a traitor, a turncoat and a tyrant in the U.S. to justify the Texan 1835-36 War of Independence and the U.S. military intervention of 1846-48, and in Mexico to explain and account for the country's traumatic defeat in the Mexican-American War. Since the late nineteenth century, he was therefore presented as the traitor who allegedly recognized the independence of Texas in captivity (1836), lost the Mexican-American War (1846-48) for a fistful of dollars, and shamelessly sold parts of Mexico to the United States in the Gadsden Purchase (1853). He was also consistently depicted as an opportunistic turncoat who changed sides whenever it suited him, without upholding any distinguishable political ideals. Last but not least, he was repeatedly portrayed as the despotic dictator who terrorized the country following independence: "a curse upon Mexico".

The importance of Fowler's biography lies in the way that this inaccurate, simplistic and Manichean view has since been significantly revised in the historiography and in Mexico more widely. It has challenged cultural values and assumptions in Mexican civil society which, until recently, had chosen not to think about the early republican period (because it was too painful), and, when it had, blamed Santa Anna for everything that went wrong after independence (including Mexico's defeat in 1848 – mistakenly claiming Santa Anna lost the conflict on purpose, - and the traumatic loss of half of the country's territory to the United States– erroneously [and deliberately] pretending he sold it). Fowler's research has forced Mexicans to revise such an interpretation. It has shown how Santa Anna was neither a traitor nor a turncoat. Nor was he always a tyrant. Instead, the Santa Anna that emerges from Fowler's work was a general, a landowner, and a nineteenth-century caudillo whose political ideas evolved with time and who tried to prosper personally and

help his country develop at a time of severe and repeated crises, as the colony that was New Spain gave way to a young, troubled, besieged and beleaguered Mexican nation.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. 2007 *Santa Anna of Mexico*, Fowler, W., Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, pp. xv + 501 [ISBN: 978-0-80232-1120-9 (hbk)/978-0-8032-2638-8 (pbk)]; 2010 *Santa Anna*. (Translation of *Santa Anna of Mexico*), Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana. pp. 534 [ISBN: 978-607-502-001-3].
2. 2004. (ed.) *Presidentes mexicanos*, Fowler, W., 2 vols. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana. (Re-issued 2005): *Presidentes mexicanos. Tomo I (1824-1911)*. Mexico City: INEHRM, pp. 376 [ISBN: 970-628-765-5]; *Presidentes mexicanos. Tomo II (1911-2000)*. Mexico City: INEHRM, pp. 530. 2000 [ISBN: 970-628-767-1].
3. 2008. (ed.), Fowler, W., *Gobernantes mexicanos*, 2 vols. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica: *Gobernantes mexicanos. Vol. 1 (1821-1910)*, Mexico City: FCE, pp. 488; *Gobernantes mexicanos, Vol. 2 (1911-2000)*, Mexico City: FCE, pp. 563. [ISBN: 978-968-16-8503-4]
4. 2000. 'Las propiedades veracruzanas de Santa Anna', Fowler, W. *Memorias de la Academia Mexicana de la Historia* XLIII, pp. 63-91.
5. 2002. 'Fiestas santanistas: la celebración de Santa Anna en la villa de Xalapa (1821-1855)', Fowler, W. *Historia Mexicana* LII:2 (206) (Oct-Dec), pp. 391-447.
6. 2005. 'All the President's Women: The Wives of General Antonio López de Santa Anna in 19th century Mexico,' *The Feminist Review* 79:1 (January), pp. 52-68.

Fowler benefited from significant external funding, including a British Academy Larger Research Grant (1999) [£5,500], a research travel grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (1999) [£1,800], and an Arts and Humanities Research Board Research Leave Award (2003) [£13,153]. The reviews *Santa Anna of Mexico* received in the leading academic journals in the field have consistently stressed the importance of this study. A selection of published review comments (with sources) follows: 'This superb monograph should go a long way toward stamping out the still-dominant perception of Santa Anna as the individual responsible for all the calamities that befell early republican Mexico. [...] Fowler has produced an elegantly-written and engaging study about one of Mexico's most notorious and misunderstood leaders. His evenhanded assessment of Santa Anna as more than just a power-hungry, opportunistic, and corrupt politician makes this biography a most welcome and valuable addition to Mexican historiography' (*The Journal of Military History* 72:3 [2008], 954); 'Fowler has written a revisionist, balanced, and excellent biography. [...] The source material is impressive; in addition to immersion in the Mexican sources, Fowler has consulted papers in Spain and the United States, and has extracted excellent detail from the documents of visiting Britons. The narrative is outstanding.' (*Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29:1 [2009], 112); 'Will Fowler's *Santa Anna of Mexico* is a [...] is a great book in all senses of the word: impeccably researched and beautifully written, it offers a highly detailed account of Santa Anna's life and in doing so provides an accessible study of Mexico's long, difficult, and painful transition from independence to the presidency of Porfirio Díaz.' (*Bulletin of Spanish Studies* LXXXVII [2010], 711-2).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Fowler has succeeded in improving the quality of evidence employed to enhance public understandings of Mexico's complex past. His research on Santa Anna has influenced current public discourse in Mexico, by offering a revised interpretation of Mexico's historical capital that has presented the country's cultural heritage in a new light, contributing, in so doing, to Mexico's processes of commemoration and memorialisation. The knowledge of individuals, groups of individuals, and relevant beneficiary communities of place and interest has thus been enriched, resulting in a measurable public questioning of Mexico's "official history." In the words of His Excellency the Mexican Ambassador in the UK, Fowler's work as a historian: "helps all of us understand the present and to clarify the past of our country." (31 May 2012) [S1].

The impact of Fowler's research on Santa Anna was evidenced mainly in the spheres of Mexican culture and society, and was articulated through the researcher's active interaction with a range of beneficiaries and users outside academia, including those members of the general public who

Impact case study (REF3b)

attended the state-government-sponsored events that were organized throughout Mexico, and which Fowler participated in, between 2008 and 2011, in the build-up to, and as part of, the Bicentenary of the War of Independence in 2010. The user feedback provided in questionnaires at the end of several of Fowler's public lectures confirmed that 81.3% of the 161 audience members who completed the forms agreed that Fowler's research was making Mexicans revise the way they viewed Santa Anna and their country's past, and that 71.1% believed that Fowler's research would result in changes in the way that history was taught in primary and secondary schools in Mexico [S9].

The evidence of impact was most obvious in the wealth of articles, interviews, and reviews that Fowler's findings generated in the media (press, radio, TV, and online blogs), which are listed below and in turn provide a particularly meaningful and resonant measure of the extent to which his research has resulted in a major mind-shift in the manner in which the Mexican public domain has come to regard Santa Anna.

Users belonging to the policy-making community such as the deputy and president of the Special Support Commission of the Celebrations of the Bicentenary of Independence and Centenary of the Revolution of the State Congress of Puebla also interacted with Fowler during his impact-generating public engagements, producing documents and statements that embraced the researcher's revisionist interpretation of this long misrepresented and misunderstood historical figure [S6].

Other beneficiaries have included a novelist, author of *Santa Anna, El Lencero y yo. Así me lo contó Antonio López de Santa Anna* (Mexico City: SITESA, 2010), in whose mind "the Mexican people's understanding of Santa Anna is beginning to change, in no small measure thanks to works such as Fowler's biography," [S3], and a playwright, author of *Santa Anna, la tentación del engaño*, who has gone as far as to state that "*Santa Anna of Mexico* is one of many worthy works that are paving a new road for democratic education in Mexico" [S3]. Both authors have acknowledged, moreover, that their creative activities and fictional portrayals of Santa Anna were significantly influenced by Fowler's biography. Santa Anna's descendants, who did not know of each other's existence until Fowler put them in touch with each other, because they were ashamed to let it be known that they were related to the general, have since actively participated in public engagements that have drawn on Fowler's research to vindicate their ancestor [S4, S5]. As noted by the descendant of Santa Anna's younger daughter, "Fowler's balanced account has allowed me to stand up for my ancestor in public, as his findings and interpretation of Mexico's past have started to significantly impact upon the manner in which the educated population of the country have come to understand his actions" [S5].

Fowler's interaction with his beneficiary communities of place and interest in Mexico arose, initially, organically and without a conscious impact-driven strategy. His research on Santa Anna had, in fact, started to make a cultural impact beyond academia as his findings were cited, reviewed, and reported outside academic literature in Mexican national newspapers such as *Crónica* (26/01/05), and in a series of TV and radio interviews which culminated in Fowler's appearance in the TV documentary film *Presidentes mexicanos*, shown on the weekly "Archivo Abierto" programme at 9.00 pm on Canal 11 TV (6/2/2005). However, it was in 2008, coinciding with the book launch of *Gobernantes mexicanos*³, which took place in the auditorium of the Fondo de Cultura Económica's Octavio Paz bookshop in Mexico City (24/11/08), that, building on the noted earlier interactions, Fowler's research started to receive significant national coverage in the media with interviews featuring in several leading national newspapers and cultural magazines (e.g., *El Universal*, 26/11/08 and *Metapolítica*, vol. 62 [November-December 2008] [S7]). The fact that he was one of three Mexicanist scholars invited to represent British academia at the State Banquet that was held in Buckingham Palace on 30 March 2009 in honour of the State visit of Mexican President Felipe Calderón is in itself evidence that his work on Santa Anna and Mexican presidents was beginning to have a cultural impact in Mexico.

Having said this, it was throughout 2010, following the publication of the translation of *Santa Anna*, and benefitting from the School of Modern Languages' impact strategy (see REF3a) that Fowler's interpretation of the man and his times really started to resonate in the public domain. The publication of *Santa Anna*, integrated as part of the Mexican state government-sponsored events organized to mark the Bicentenary of Mexico's independence from Spain, was carefully planned by

Impact case study (REF3b)

the author, publishers, and his allocated St-Andrews-based impact-team, in order to maximise the impact, making the most of the general interest in memorializing Mexico's past that was generated by the 2010 celebrations. Fowler gave a series of public lectures in high profile cultural locations, namely, the Cultural Centre IVEC (Veracruz), the Anthropology Museum of Xalapa, the State Congress of Puebla, the Universidad Iberoamericana in Puebla, and the Salón de Actos of the UNAM (Mexico City). The book presentations and lectures were covered in the media (press and radio) and generated widespread interest on the internet, inspiring several blogs as well as the creation of a Santa Anna Facebook page and group [S8]. By the time Fowler returned to Mexico in November 2011 to give a further series of nine public lectures in Mexico City, Morelia, Zamora, and San Luis Potosí, it was clear that his research was reshaping the Mexicans' understanding of Santa Anna's historical role. As may be appreciated from the newspaper headlines that appeared in 2010 and 2011, Fowler's view that Santa Anna was not the villain he had been made out to be resonated in the public domain, featuring prominently in an extensive range of regional and national newspapers: "Historian rehabilitates the image of Santa Anna," (*Plumas libres*, 18/10/10); "Santa Anna did not sell half of the country, states William Fowler" (*E-Consulta.com*, 19/10/10); "Santa Anna was not a traitor: Fowler" (*Milenio*, 22/10/10); "Santa Anna was no traitor, states Scottish Academic Will Fowler in controversial book" (*Azteca 21*, 22/10/10); "Neither a monster nor a saint" (*Mi espacio libre*, 25/10/10); "Interview with British historian Will Fowler. Santa Anna: 'Was no angel, but he wasn't a monster'" (*Universo. El periódico de los universitarios*, No. 418, 25/10/10); "Santa Anna, synthesis of the political class of the nineteenth century, says expert" (*Crónica*, 26/10/10). Two renowned publicists, the one writing for the cultural magazine *Performance* (16/9/10), and the other, in the *Zócalo de Saltillo* (8/03/11), influenced by Fowler's research, declared that the author had succeeded in shining light on one of the darker periods of Mexican history and, were inspired to ask whether the time had come for Mexicans to move beyond their official history of heroes and villains. [S7]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Independent citations attesting to the benefits of clarifying misinformation in historical understanding – in policymaker, creative writers, and descendants' testimonies/correspondence:

[S1] His Excellency the Mexican Ambassador in the UK;

[S2] novelist and author of *Santa Anna, El Lencero y yo. Así me lo contó Antonio López de Santa Anna* (Mexico City: SITESA, 2010);

[S3] playwright and author of *Santa Anna, la tentación del engaño*;

[S4] descendant of Santa Anna's eldest daughter;

[S5] descendant of Santa Anna's younger daughter.

[S6] Diputada and President of the Comisión Especial de Apoyo a los Festejos del Bicentenario de la Independencia y Centenario de la Revolución; corroborated that the work has shed new facts on Santa Anna to enable a better understanding of his actions.

[S7] Citations in reviews outside academic literature attesting mind-shift in public domain regarding Santa Anna's historical role - Mexican press 2008-2013: *El Universal*, 26/11/08; *Performance*, 16/9/10; *Proyecto Veracruz*, 12/10/10; *La Jornada de Veracruz*, 13/10/2010; *Diario de Xalapa*, 16/10/10; *Plumas libres*, 18/10/10; *E-Consulta.com*, 19/10/10; *Milenio*, 22/10/10; *Azteca 21*, 22/10/10; *Mi espacio libre*, 25/10/10; *Saber sin fin*, 25/10/10; *Universo. El periódico de los universitarios*, No. 418, 25/10/10; *Revista Digital Justa*, 25/10/10; *Crónica*, 26/10/10.

[S8] Reviews, blogs, and postings further attesting mind-shift – including Facebook groups, and pages <http://chequesjems.wordpress.com/2007/05/23/70/>, and <http://www.microplagio.com/articulos/antonio-lopez-de-santa-anna/>. <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Santa-Anna/313716068643348>

[S9] User feedback corroborating impact among audience members: 161 completed questionnaires handed out in November 2011, at the end of the lectures Fowler gave at the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la UNAM (15/11/11), the Instituto Mora (16/11/11), the Dirección de Estudios Históricos del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (16/11/11), El Colegio de México (17/11/11), the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo (18/11/11), El Colegio de Michoacán (21/11/11), El Colegio de San Luis (23/11/11), and the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí (24/11/11).